

It Belongs On Stage (And Not In My Bed)

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A short play  
By Gary Garrison

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**CHARACTERS:**

*DONNIE, 29 M.*

*Good-hearted, sweet, innocent; can be a lion when provoked.*

*TED, 32, M.*

*Not so innocent.*

**TIME:**

The present

**PLACE:**

Next door to where you live

*Shirley Bassey's "History Repeating" brings the house lights down.*

*Donnie and Ted stand at Donnie's front door. It's the end of the evening of their first date.*

DONNIE

Well, thanks . . . and, you know, Ted, it was great. Really great. One of the good ones. I'm going to remember this. So thanks, a lot.

TED

Sure. It was fun.

DONNIE

Oh, and sorry about your shoe.

TED

No problem.

DONNIE

Boy, who knew? Salsa really stains, huh?

TED

Well, you know . . . suede and all.

DONNIE

I thought I spilled, like, just a tiny drop but half your shoe is covered!

(brightly)

But it came out of your shirt!

TED

(trying to be nice)

Uh-huh. Almost.

DONNIE

Ted, if you want to step inside, I'm happy to, you know, spray something on it. Or wash it, or buff it. I excell in stain-removal. I have to. I live with me. They say hairspray works on everything and I have a big bottle of Aqua-Net -- that my good friend, who's a drag queen . . .

(Sees he's losing ground)

. . . but you know, he's not really THAT good of a friend. Not really. Well, he lives next door and we go to dinner a couple of nights a week, but other than that . . .

TED

Donnie, it's okay. Really. We had a great time, and it was nice to meet you, and soooooo, I think I'll just head on out.

DONNIE

Oh. Okay, then. Okay, uhm. Well . . .

*Donnie leans in for his kiss good-night. Ted leans in, and at the last mili-second, whips around and gives him a side to side shoulder hug. It's really awkward for both of them. Ted tries to break the moment.*

TED

Nothing like a good ol' hug, huh? Just good ol' shoulder to shoulder . . . connection. People don't do enough of that. But it feels good, doesn't it?

*Ted faces him and pats him on both shoulders, finalizing the moment.*

TED (continued)

Be good, guy. And I'll see you again.

*He starts to walk away. Donnie steps forward.*

DONNIE

We won't though, huh?

TED

Sorry?

DONNIE

We won't see each other again. Right? And that's okay, Ted. I mean, we're both pretty new to this, huh? So. . .

TED

You know, I should set that straight. I think, maybe, I exaggerated that a little . . . I'm not *that* new to it. I guess I was maybe thinking it just *feels* . . . *new* . . . with every new person. You know what I mean?

DONNIE

So you have dated a lot?

TED

Oh, no. Not a lot--a lot.

DONNIE

Like what? Five, seven, ten guys?

TED

In what, what length of time are we talking here?

DONNIE

I was thinking in, you know, ALL time. See I thought . . . I thought you said that . . . I remember you saying that you're . . . and your ad said "Almost a virgin," or was it "like a virgin," or . . .

TED

Oh, gosh, those ads . . . they. . .they're just so hard to write, aren't they?

DONNIE

Well, I'm really new to this and I can use some straight-up answers here. I mean, did I do something wrong, besides the salsa spill? Oh, and the big burp. But I swear I don't know where that came from. I'm not in the habit of just releasing, just gushing forth . . .

TED

Donnie, look, don't worry about it, okay. It's really late and I should be going. Big day tomorrow. Big Breakfast meeting tomorrow with, you know, Big Boss and, and, and Big Breakfast rolls...

*Ted drifts away, leaving Donnie alone, hurt.*

TED (continued)

(to himself)

Shit.

(turning to Donnie)

You know what? You're right. You're absolutely right. We spent some time together, shared some chips and really good salsa, half of which is on my shoe right now, so I should just be honest and say . . . That was great fuckin bean dip, didn't you think? I think that's the best fuckin' bean dip on the fuckin' planet! Really, I do. It was top notch. I grew up with a spanish au pere and she never made bean dip like that, and you'd think she would, wouldn't you? I mean, Spain beans dip. It all goes together.

(clears his throat)

. . . Alright. Uh, okay. I'm totally punting here. What would you like to know?

DONNIE

Why didn't we spark?

TED

Spark?

DONNIE

Yeah, spark. Ignite. Connect. Why didn't we, you know . . . why aren't we . . . why did you hug me like I hug the drag queen next door?

TED

Well, you know, Donnie, I don't always. . .

DONNIE

Oh, don't even say you don't kiss on the first date. New at this -- I am. Born in another century -- I'm not.

*Ted looks at him. How does he answer that?*

TED

Wow, this is hard. This is really awkward and, uhm . . . *not* what you think's going to happen on a first date, or any date, but okay, you asked. You're . . . well, you're not really. . .  
 (really searching)  
 . . . there's a lightness, a breezy-ness, a lighter than air kind of quality to, to, toooooooooooooooooo youuuuuuur . . . soul, and that . . . that, that isn't, uhm it's good, if you, you like . . .

DONNIE

Wind, I guess. You're saying I'm "breezy?" C'mon, just be straight with me.

TED

Okay, uhm, let's go about it this way. You know, my ad.

DONNIE

Right. *"Almost a virgin..."*

TED

There were more things than just that, but right, that ad. That's the one. Well, you know, further down, it says . . .

DONNIE

(reciting)

*". . . abs to die for, teeth to smile for, hair to . . ."*

TED

Further down. Keep going.

DONNIE

Uuuuuh, oh, "*An ass that is built for...*"

TED

(quickly)

Further down. "*Seeking.*" Seeking. The Seeking part.

DONNIE

Oh, right. Okay. "*Seeking Mr. Right, or Mr. Right Now. Let the fates decide. Looking for body, heart and soul.*" Well, I think I have all of that.

TED

Keep going.

DONNIE

Uhhmm, "*body, heart and soul.*" Uhm, I think you said, "*Tall would be good. Handsome would be good. Straight-acting a must.*"

TED

Right! That's it!

DONNIE

Oh, C'mon. I told you I was five feet, nine inches tall and if that was going to be a problem, then . . .

TED

No, no, no. That's not a problem.

DONNIE

(a beat, then)

So you don't think I'm handsome? You said I looked like my picture and when I sent you my picture you said I was handsome.

TED

Cute. I think I said you were "cute."

DONNIE

No, if you said "cute," we wouldn't be having this date. You absolutely said handsome.

TED

Yeah, come to think of it, I probably did.

DONNIE

Sooooooooooooo?

TED

C'mon, Donnie, this is crazy.

DONNIE

Well, that's it, huh? I mean, I fit the bill at least according to your ad. Heart, body, soul, handsome, almost tall.

TED

Well, no. You . . . you left something out, didn't you?

DONNIE

Did I? Wait, I have the ad right here. I've carried it my wallet all week ... I do things like that. It's corny, I know, but. . . I like to anyway.

*He whips it out and unfolds it. Scans down the column.*

TED

This was really, really bad idea. I thought I could help . . . I thought I could say something that would . . . but I think we're tanking here, so maybe I should go.

DONNIE

"*Straight-acting?*" Is that it? I'm not "*straight acting?*"

TED

Well, I . . . wouldn't . . . go quite . . . that far.

DONNIE

How far would you go? Tell me.

TED

(tired)

Look, Donnie. You're a sweet guy. But sometimes it just doesn't work out for, you know, a hundred fucked up reasons and . . .

DONNIE

No. No! There's a reason here. It's here in print. And then you said it. There's not a hundred reasons you're rejecting me. There's one. I'm not straight-acting. I mean, I have to be honest, when I read that I didn't even know what it meant. I just didn't think I had to worry about it. So you're telling me I should worry about it? And if I'm not straight-acting, does that mean I'm gay acting? And what does that mean?

DONNIE (continued)

And if I'm gay acting, does that mean that I have, like, Big Gay Boy written all over me. And I thought, if anything, I had Big Baptist Boy written all over me. Or, or, or at the worst, Big Minnesota Boy Who Graduated with a 2.2 GPA from Rutgers written all over me. But not Big Gay Boy! Damn.

TED

No, I didn't say that.

DONNIE

Well, then what are you saying? What the hell is straight-acting?

TED

C'mon, Donnie, it's late, and we're both tired . . .

DONNIE

No, I'm not. I took a nap before we went out so that I'd be fresh for the mid-night romp in the hay that's not going to happen because I'm not fuckin' walking and talking like Colin Farrell, or, or, Brad Pitt, or, or, Derek Jeter, or, or . . .

TED

Stop, stop, stop, Donnie. You know, I, I, I really hate Brad Pitt so he's not a good . . .

DONNIE

Okay, well, now I'm getting pissed.

TED

Oh, yeah? Well, frankly I'm here ten minutes longer that I should have been.

DONNIE

Oh, that's right. Because you have a Big meeting tomorrow with the Big Boss who'll you'll be sharing BIG breakfast rolls with! And he'll never know you were out on a date with Big Minnesota Boy Who Graduated with A 2.2 GPA from Rutgers, because around him, you're probably STRAIGHT-ACTING. Am I right?

TED

(a beat, then)

Yeah, pretty much.

DONNIE

And so I'm asking you, what the hell does that mean?

DONNIE (continued)

Because if you're going to turn me away, just because of that, I think I better know what it is.

TED

It's hard to describe.

DONNIE

Try.

TED

Okay, well, it's, uh. Uhmmm...

DONNIE

Just so the record's straight, I said my mother is a big fan of Shirley Bassey. Not me. I wouldn't recognize the woman if she ran me over in her car. But, yes, I know every word to *Goldfinger* because my mother played it a thousand times a week while she was turning into an alcoholic. And I would also like to say that there are plenty of straight men who have sung in choruses as tenors. And if you're going to take that remark that I made about Liza Minelli as any kind of basis for judgment, when all I meant was to share some harmless, vicious gossip . . .

TED

No, Donnie, it's not any of that. Okay, maybe the Liza Minelli thing, but even my brother talks about her and he's as straight as they come.

DONNIE

So what is it? Hairy chest? Big hands? Big shoulders.

TED

No, It's not really a physical thing.

DONNIE

A deep voice? Because I don't have a deep voice. I've never had a deep voice. I've tried. (*lowering his voice*) I've really tried. (*even lower*) Doesn't work for me. Sounds like I'm really sick or evil.

TED

No, it's not that. It's a quality. It's a manliness. A, uhm, a swagger . . .

DONNIE

A swagger? What's a swagger? You mean, like, a cowboy?

TED

No, no. This is painful. Look, you know, it's like when you have a crush on your best friend, but you know he's straight, and you'll never, ever have a chance to kiss him, not even when you've promised him everything in your secret box including your autographed Micky Mantel baseball . . . wait, this is going in the wrong direction.

DONNIE

Yeah, because if I was confused five minutes ago, you might as well be speaking Portugese to me now.

TED

Okay, look, we all have this ideal of what a man should be like. You know, a real man. A real beer-swigging, broad-shouldered, tough-talkin', rough walkin' guy. You know, a guy's guy. I mean, he could be a janitor or well, not a janitor, but a hot dog cart guy. Well, that's not a really good example either 'cause I don't think I could really be attracted to someone like that. But like, like a Wall Street broker type, maybe, that wears Armani suits, and suspenders, and classic ties with cuff links and neatly combed hair, but not too neat, not too fussy, not too studied. And he can talk about sports and war and the Dow Jones and hiking up some Japanese mountain with confidence, with a "I've been there, done that, and if I hadn't I could" kinda thing. There's a pride about him, like he's really aware of his own balls. Like they're really big. So big he can barely walk because of them. And he wears Old Spice no matter what the fuck anybody says because he'd just beat the shit out of them if they even thought of saying, "Hey, are you wearing your old man's Old Spice?" Or maybe he'd just beat the shit of them because he doesn't like the way they look. He's dangerous. He's volatile. He's, he's like a man. He's like a real man. He's a man that would . . . do something . . . tough . . . in an instant.

DONNIE

Stop. Okay, Ted, I think I understand.

TED

(relieved)

You do? God. Great. Because I didn't think I was making any sense.

DONNIE

You weren't. That's what I understand. You don't know what you want. So I'd never fit. I'd never be right.

TED

That's not true. I know what I want. I want someone who . . .

DONNIE

. . . who can make you forget that you're gay because he passes for someone who's straight. And what would a straight man be doing with you, unless you're straight? So to the world, you're just two straight men walking around the city, talking sports, adjusting those big balls of yours, maybe spitting on the sidewalk for special effect, then getting home, slamming the door quick, pull the shades down and then your pants and go at it like two Big Gay Boys With A Suction That Dare Not Speak Its Name.

(a beat, then)

Or, at least, that's what it seems like to me.

TED

I resent that.

DONNIE

I'd think you would.

TED

Because that's not what it means to me at all.

DONNIE

Okay.

TED

It means something entirely different.

DONNIE

Well, that's a relief then. I really didn't want to think that about you. I mean, I don't know you, really, but I'd like to think there was more to you than that.

TED

Well, there certainly is.

DONNIE

Good.

TED

Lot more.

DONNIE

I'm sure.

TED

So much more I see TWO therapists not one.

DONNIE

Wow. Well, that's good.

TED

No, it's not. It's just a lot of goddamn therapy. Ohhhhhhhhhhh, fuck.

*Ted sinks to the ground. Donnie joins him.*

TED (continued)

Ten minutes ago I thought, well, tonight was okay. Nothing bad happened. But I can't wait to get home to my banana bread, that my mother mailed me, that came in seven pieces. But . . . but then . . .

DONNIE

But then?

TED

Shit. You did something I don't let people do.

DONNIE

What's that?

TED

You talked to me in a way that I actually listened.

DONNIE

I just talked . . . you were ready to listen.

TED

Why do you say that?

DONNIE

'Cause I think you're trying to figure out why you go through one person like me after another. Let's look at your phrase: "Straight-acting." You're saying, "straight is the standard, and if you have to, act to do it." Do you really want someone acting their way through a relationship with you? That means they're never real. To me, a real man is someone who always dares to be himself, no matter what he is and who he's around. So, if I follow my own definition, I'd say I'm more man than you've seen in years.

TED

(smiling bright)

Yeah, maybe you are.

DONNIE

Maybe I'm not. But I do know what's right for me.

TED

Ohhhhhhhhhh, shit. My fuckin' therapists -- plural -- are going to have a field day with this.

DONNIE

Don't tell 'em.

TED

Yeah, right. They have a way of knowing when a kidney shifts inside you. Damn. You busted me.

DONNIE

What?

TED

You busted me. We do shit like that, we write things like that, and act a certain way, and wear certain clothes and talk a certain way because we think it looks good to other people. And we can even convince ourselves that we're really all those things. But we're not. We're so not. We're just each other's hand puppets. Damn you for making me think about this.

(smiles)

So, Big Boy From Minnesota with a 2.2 GPA from Rutgers, why'd you do so lousy in school?

DONNIE

I don't think that's lousy. I worked hard for that 2.2 GPA.

*They laugh. It turns to a tender moment.  
Donnie leans in for a kiss. Ted pulls gently  
away.*

TED

Donnie, I really don't kiss on the first date. It's just a thing I do. I don't know why, but I hold to it.

DONNIE

Okay.

*A long beat, then:*

TED

But I do on the second date.

DONNIE

Good to know . . . maybe I'll call you.

TED

(genuinely surprised)

Dammmmmmmmmmm.

*Lights fade out.*