

Tirade for Three

Tirade for Three was first produced by Oxblood Theater Collective at Glaxa, Los Angeles, 1997, under the direction of Guy Zimmerman, with the following cast:

Gary John Diehl

Chorus Shannon Holt

Chorus Hank Bunker

Tirade for Three was subsequently produced by Padua Playwrights at The Electric Lodge, Venice, CA, 2005, under the direction of Guy Zimmerman, with the following cast:

Gary Christopher Allport

Chorus Shawna Casey

Chorus Jack Kehler

Characters

Gary *An actor, middle-aged.*

The Chorus *One MAN, one WOMAN. They play all the other parts (MARCIA, TODD) and are otherwise delineated by italics.*

Scene

No set necessary. Perhaps a stool and a bench.

Act One.

The king is here. Here comes the king.

Bring in the king.

Come in king.

Gary Kiss my ass.

I don't think so.

Gary I'm done.

What's that?

Gary You heard me.

Kick his head.

Gary Finished.

I can't.

Gary Yeah, yeah.

On your knees.

Gary The king.

No.

Get down.

Gary I don't.

Cough it up.

You go to park?

Gary I went.

You fuck.

Gary Scuzz.

You run?

You run, or what?

Gary The king.

On your knees.

King.

On your knees.

Gary I heard you.

Down.

Gary I went.

Day by day.

By day.

Gary By fucking day.

Down.

Down.

Gary I'm here.

Shut up.

Gary To tell you.

Mouth.

You mouth.

You snitch.

The king.

Gary A word.

Say the word.

Gary Help.

Pause.

End Act One.

Act Two.

Wife left him, then his son is shot in park. What is that?

What could it mean? Wife and kids, gone. Son gunned down. What?

He's asking.

Gary Luck.

Is that luck?

Gary Bad luck.
Bad timing.

Gary Where'd they go?
Who?
Wife and kids. Where?

Gary Don't know.
Who cares?
Really brings a question.

Gary Question?
Life on earth.
Utter depravity.

Gary Can't get my fucking head around it.
Thinking his thoughts. Feeling his fear. Sensing his worthlessness.

Gary Thoughts?
This or that. Delusion and denial.
Goes into park. Knees weak. Breaths short.
And Dad? Where's Dad?
Down in Long Beach, what I heard.
Dumped.
Sure, so shoot his kid now.
Up in the valley.
Bang, bang.

Gary I'm trying to get the picture here.
So would I. So would I.

Gary You got this environment and it's crushing a person.
You got grudges.
Dad's in Long Beach in a trailer.

Gary I'll kill the motherfucker.

Boys.
Try for meaning.
Stay home.

Gary Right.
Forget the park.
There are signs.
Details.
Messages.
He lies awake. He can't move his back. He gets his legs up. Sleep will not save him. Pain embraces him. Time will kill him. He sees things in a brain. His own brain. Things he's never seen before. Could be anyone's brain. Can't be his brain. Things that haven't yet been lived. Torments yet to come. The images in a brain in his own head. Body fetal. A pain cable wired to his lower back. I am not loved. I am alone. He is an electrical apparatus with wires in his back and a screen in his head. Teeth in mouth. I am not loved. Images inconceivable, inhabited by strangers. Blacks in the throes of panicked laughter. A situation where everything counts. Every look counts. Every breath counts. Thoughts count. Face counts. Something could blow your face away. It's papier-mâché on bone.

Gary Papier-mâché?
Yeah.

Gary Bone?
It could be a word. Or a feeling.

Gary I know what feelings are.
Suddenly, no face.
Fucking incredible.

Gary But I avoid them. I don't like to be hurt and I don't like to hurt other people. But I understand something now.
I understand something about feelings.
You hate people.
Betrayal, rejection.

Gary It's fucking hard.
Because you're never safe.
Did you earn it?

Gary Earn what?
Security. Safe harbor.

Gary *(Aside)* Go jump in the lake.
Is there a cause?

Gary For what?
For pain.

Gary There must be a cause.
There's always a cause.
No, it's its own.

Gary It is its own cause. In the brain.
Why?

Gary I don't know why.
Don't ask why.
You can't tell from outside. What a person is feeling, what he's thinking.
Adrenaline high, maybe his eyes bulge or flicker.
He walks the same.
But quicker. (Smiles)
He doesn't know it's his moment of death. A few feet more to go. A few more breaths. (Smiles)

Gary Maybe he knew.
Then you get on a bus. You go somewhere.

Gary An ocean of shit is washing over America.
Thank you very much.

Gary I refuse to be tormented.
I don't know what he was doing in the park. Do you?

Gary Active waiting.
You wish.
I wish.

Gary For what?
For "I."

Gary I am the King. *(Pause)*

Act Three.
What was he looking for?
Who?
Gary's boy.

Gary The bullet that ends it all. Bang.
First your wife and kids leave you. And then your son is shot in the park, in the valley.

Gary The wife and kids didn't leave. The wife took the kids, so they left.
Snooty.
Are you mad?

Gary I am mad. I'm mad and I'm sad.
Difficult situation here.

Gary I know that.
Because I've had enough humiliation in my life.
You realize that nothing is going to happen. It's not going to get better. No breaks are coming your way.
Your venue has been established. You have been deluded. You have been asleep.

Gary Should I talk about Todd? Now that we have an audience?
Finally?
I don't think so.

Gary It would be a tremendous help to me, personally.
Would it?

Gary Yeah.
You're sure about that?

Gary No.
You're sure it's not part of the therapy racket? The twelve-step program?

Gary No.
Your vanity?

Gary Wait a minute.
This is about Gary. It's not about you. It's about Gary.
It's about humiliation.
You believed in things. Like talent. Like justice.
Money and sex.
What?
When he comes back. On the agenda.
Money and sex.
Money and sex.
Here he comes.
The King.
Hi, King.

Gary The dark bothers me.
The night.
Do you get lost?

Gary Yes.
So do I. You can't see a fucking thing. There are no signs.

And if there are signs, they're obscured. And you're in a car. And you can't just stop and pull yourself together.

Gary And the car keeps moving further into confusion.
It just keeps on going, and you end up, like, in Arcadia. I'm watching TV, you know, and I'm looking at the men and the women, and the boys and the girls, and I see bundles of matter. And flashes of light, and movement. We missed a beat there.

Gary I don't see people with lives, people with pasts, people as people, with meaning.
Gary?

Gary The psychology of confusion. You are grabbed by external circumstances and slammed against the night. And inside, where are you?
Stop there.

Act Four. Money and sex.
You could be falling and it's not far to the bottom. Your venue is an alley under a streetlight and there is an audience of three. You are sad and afraid. It's the human situation, where the alpha male gets the women.

Gary Well, that's my question.
What is?

Gary Is it true?
Is what true?
It's money, as everybody knows. What's the matter with you?

Gary I know that.
That's what I'm trying to say.

It's the human fucking condition. Where you have phenomena like movie stars.

Gary But is it true?
Come on.
There is no such thing as evolution. Things just happen. But there is momentum, which gives the illusion of direction, which is mostly down. Example? Aging. So have fun.
Tell us about Todd.
May God preserve me from further humiliation.
No money, no sex.

Gary I practically begged. I got down on my knees by way of the fax machine. Help, help. I'm right for it, Todd. I'm right, I tell you! Seven pages came back, all about him.
What are you thinking, Gary? Did you read my fax? You didn't read it. I know you. You crumpled it up. You crumpled up my fax and you threw it away. In the trash. You couldn't read it. You couldn't bear it. You don't want to hear about another person's problems.

Gary It's tough out there.
It's tough out there, Gary. There's competition. You couldn't read it. You're not right, Gary.

Gary I couldn't read his fucking fax.
You couldn't read it because you were wrong. Read the fucking fax.

Gary It's tough out there. I made efforts. I made sincere efforts, Gary. It's in the fax. What I said. My wife left soon after. Then my son was shot in park.
But the earth performs its regular routine. Exactly right. (Pause)

By a gun. Held and aimed by another human being. Who can't talk and listen at the same time.

Gary Stay in the present, one day at a time.
Watch out or be hammered.
Plan way in advance.
Know what you're up against.

Gary An ocean of shit washing across America like blind, animal stupidity, an implacable dumbness, inarticulate darkness.
You're superior?

Act Five.

Gary Because of cataracts. Turns out I can't see too good at night because of cataracts. I got cataracts. Cataracts.
Where you been? Where'd you go?

Gary I went to see a play, in a theatre, not like us, who perform in alleys.
What did ya see?

Gary I saw that I was in love. I'm in love. I saw what it means to be in love. I saw her there.
Like a boy, like a teenager. To be hugged and kissed.

Gary To be charmed. I thought, what a life, and now it's raining.
This is sad.

Gary I spent a lot of time in the lobby with my friends.
Accept the fact of cataracts.

Gary We spoke of the loss of culture and bygone days.
The loss of youth.

Gary I wanted to press her against the wall, embrace her, put my tongue in her mouth and make love to her against the wall.

But I just hung around and talked. How we performed in alleys, you two and I, for audiences of the homeless and disenfranchised, for the more than slightly mad.

And she?

Gary She was glad to avoid me and sit with someone else and watched the watching of the play like me, watching the terror.

I'm happy you made some contacts.

Gary Trying to be a somebody. They knew my name.

Gary.

Gary I showed pictures of my daughters and smiled and smiled. I saw the organic and the inorganic. And they looked the same.

And your eyes?

Gary I forgot my eyes. Cataracts are growing things.

You just pop for some surgery, get some new parts put in.

There you go.

Gary It's odd.

So.

Gary Faces. The only body I saw was hers. I loved it. Guy comes up to me, says, "Are you teaching acting?" Fuck, I'm not teaching anymore. I'm on the fucking street. My wife left me and took my daughters and then they shot my son. Bodies. What is a body? Walking around in passing time, withers on the bone. What is it? Faces with ideas and opinions, justifications, and attitudes.

It's hard.

Then what?

Gary I went back in and tried to catch her eye. I was pretending

to be engaged in watchful observation, interested speculation, concerned adulation, respectful adjudication of the merits.

And she countered?

Gary She averted my gaze. She sat up straight in an attitude of skeptical admiration, avoiding my erotic invitation, leaving me hanging on the railing like a dumb clown. And then I ran out into the night.

But I'd just like to throw in a practical note here, which is that everybody has to work for a living. They don't think about it. They're not existentialists. They want to eat and feed their families in a very competitive situation. And a lot of them are young. They don't think too much. Okay, he's waiting.

And what was it like to run out into the night?

Gary It was like having no knees. But there was life in the back of my neck. I looked out through the glare.

And saw?

Gary The dark of night and the glare of the city.

And felt?

Gary Fear. Concern about my existence. Anything can happen. There is an impulse to crash. Do you feel that?

Me? I don't know. You?

Gary Well, yeah, I sort of get a killer impulse, you know what I mean? A revenge thing, or hatred, you know, and I want to hit something. Is that it?

No.

What?

Gary The impulse to swerve.

Not crash?

Gary To swerve and thus crash. And then I was thinking of Her again, and the impulse passed, like everything else, into nothingness, into the darkness of night and thoughts.
And you thought?

Gary Excuses, mainly. Of how, after a night of passion, there are awkward glances, vulnerable feelings, an embarrassment, a sense of defeat.
And yet tenderness.

Gary And yet tenderness, for having shared in life's great necessity, for a moment, now past, together as one, in the physical pleasure of nature.
In your imagination.

Gary In my imagination, as an excuse, for not pressing her against the wall of the lobby, for not taking her captive as it were, in my responsibility, thinking, Once I was a married man, no, twice, and then of her organs, reproductive, digestive, respiratory, hormonal, and so on.
Thank you, Gary.
End Act Five.

Act Six.

*Something has to happen. A fulfillment of something.
A completion of something.
I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to participate.
I'm so touched by that I feel like crying.*

Gary?

Gary Something happens and then it is past. A person happens and then he is past.

*What happened, Gary?
Who knows about the human heart? The human mind?
The human instinct?*

Gary I'm not saying I do.
*I'd like to be absolutely straight with you.
I'd like to have a feeling of my own existence.*

Gary I feel naked, and it's not fun.
*Let's have a scene then. Do you have one? A scene?
Pause.*

Gary Marcia?

Marcia What is it, Gary?

Gary Are you joking? Is this some shallow joke?

Marcia Is that what you think?

Gary I can't, uh, say anything.

Marcia Then leave me alone.
Pause.

Gary Why?

Marcia It's because you're a liar. You lie about everything. You can't do anything but lie. That's why you're afraid of opening your mouth.
Pause.

Marcia Did you hear me?

Gary It's true. What you say is true.

Marcia Fine.

Gary What should I do?

Marcia Don't ask me what you should do.

Gary I don't know what to do.

Marcia Bullshit.

Gary I'm scared. I don't know how to live in the world.

Marcia Other people live, why can't you?

Gary I don't know why.
Marcia I'll tell you. It's because you're weak. You hate me, and you're weak.
Gary Weak?
Marcia Weak. Too weak to tell the truth and pay.
Gary Pay?
Marcia The consequences.
Gary Which are?
Marcia Don't ask me, Gary.
Gary All right, I know. I can't see.
Marcia What?
Gary No, I don't see. I start to see, and then I'm blinded by the glare. No. I don't want to see. I don't want to see, so I look away.
Marcia Fine.
Gary And things go on. They continue as they are.
Marcia That's for sure.
Gary And I don't notice.
Marcia Do something, Gary.
Gary What?
Marcia Don't ask me, just do it.
Gary I'm afraid of my feelings, because I don't know what they are.
Marcia Really?
Gary Because I don't look at them.
Marcia Take a look, Gary. Take a good look.
Stop there.

Act Seven.

Gary They stick you in the ground.
That's it.
A corpse.
Gary Forever.
Something has to be done.
Stop your filthy habits, for one thing.
Gary Doctors, they want to scrape my eye.
Scrape your eye?
Gary It's not cataracts. I went to the optometrist, Feigenbaum, I yelled at his receptionist. Actually, I couldn't see. I aroused disdain. I aroused disgust. I felt ashamed. I yelled. It wasn't her fault. I went to another guy, he says, "Bubbles on the cornea."
Bubbles on the cornea?
Gary Bubbles on the cornea and they got to be scraped off.
It's age.
Gary Sometimes it happens, they don't know why. I'm not insane, I just can't see. A woman, complaining, across the hall from me. "I'm not insane, I just can't see," she says. The doctor looked into my eyes with a machine.
Yeah, yeah.
Gary Was I in there?
That's enough.
Act Eight.
Gary?
Gary What?
We stood up.

We stood up?
We stood up so we can see.

Gary What?
Carcasses on the savannah.

Gary Carcasses on the savannah?
Yeah. We sucked the marrow and crushed the brain cases. So we could eat.

Gary That's not what I'm talking about.
So we could avoid predators.

Gary I'm talking about humans and lost faculties.
That's what I'm talking about.
Why don't we kill ourselves?
We want to have a nice time with our families.
Are you surprised? You're surprised. Things as they are.
Wise up.
Trust no one.

Gary There was no one in there. I was looking out at the light
but nobody was there as I, qua I.
Someone's lookin' for ya, Gary.
Hi, how are ya?
King?

Gary I'm the King.
Fuck you, King.
Yeah, yeah.
I'm here for you.

Gary For what?
I'll take care of it.

Gary I don't see people anymore. I see things.
I'll do her.

Gary Marcia?

I'll do her.
I'll do Todd.
We'll eat their brains.
I'll do you.

Gary Fuck, man.
Get the guys in the park.
It's more entertaining.

Gary Shoot the fucks.
If you could see the dark light in the darkness, the life if you could breathe if you only knew if you could stay with the light you would see like a child, like Bruno Schultz, like Rilke.
We perform is what we do.
We are actors.

Gary Marcia?

Marcia I don't want you hanging around here. You're depressed. We lived on hope and hope is gone. You have no more hope. Things are as they are. Reality is indifferent. There is only work and you have no work. There is only sustenance and you have no sustenance. I'm tired of seeing your grim face around here. It's not good for the children.

Gary All these years I never hit you.

Marcia Go on, hit. Go on.

Gary No.

Marcia Hit. Take it out on me. That's all you do, you take it out on me.

Gary You're arrogant.

Marcia I'm not arrogant. I stand on my own two legs. See? Bang. Two legs. Go on, see for yourself. Nothing will save you. Nothing will provide. Look at the struggle, look at the competition. Gary? The fuck just walks away from me.

Gary I said, Todd, I need a venue. There has to be a venue, with an audience, you know, society, an audience, not the street.

Todd Nothing is more real than a movie, Gary. Movies are real. Movies are more real than reality. Don't you understand that?

Gary I do. Reality just happens. Right, Todd?

Todd Right, Gary. Reality happens, but movies are intended. Movies are intended, and movie stars are more real than people. And bigger, they are bigger than life, Gary.

Gary Entertainment.

Todd It's a matter of entertainment. Entertainment is real. Entertainment has a value in life, a tremendous value, an indispensable value. And you have to know what to do with the fucking camera.

Gary And sound.

Todd And sound, and a story. Movies have a story. There is no story in life. Life has no stories. The only stories are in the movies. Movies are the stories of our life, Gary.

Gary Marcia?

Marcia Why don't you make things? Make things for the set. Make things to put on the set, like a table, like a lamp.

Gary I'm having trouble with my eyes.
Pause.

Act Nine.

Someone's comin' for ya, Gary.

He's on his way.

He's here.

Gary Who are you?

I am the advance guard of the Army of Righteousness.

Gary What the fuck is that?

I've come to tell ya.

Gary Yeah?

What?

They're on their way.

Gary Why can't this be real?

This is real.

Time is real.

I'm here to tell ya.

The Grapes of Wrath.

Gary The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

Spiritual uplift.

Gary We used to have houses and cars.

A nice life.

Gary A beginning, a middle, and an end.

That's what I'm trying to say.

Gary What's that, Todd?

Todd We had meaning. We could be examples, an ideal for the people.

Pause.

But I wasn't about to throw money at you, Gary.

Pause.

Let's straighten this out.

Gary I had a panic attack. I sent a fax. What could I say?
My wife is taking the kids to her mothers? Got to be a studio job. Save my ass. You got the juice.

Todd They don't make movies out of that, Gary. That's not what movies are made of. Movies are something else entirely and nobody ever heard of you.

Gary I apologize.

Todd Nobody ever heard of you. You have no existence outside your own imagination.
He's confused about reality. You got to put bread on the table before you start thinking about things.

Gary Marcia?

Marcia It's the same old shit. You want to be an actor you should sell insurance.

Todd Movies are made with cameras. That's a step up. To a higher level of reality.
The bill is due. Down you go, Gary. Down, down, down.
End Act Nine.

Act Ten. Where are we?

Gary So we're in the park.
You'll die like everybody else in the population.
The killer is a lying alcoholic.
This is very common in America.
And the bill's come due, the chickens are home to roost, the time's up.
The mind-set is television advertising. Do you get it?
Death in the street is not included.

Gary I said, Marcia, What do you want to me to do?

Marcia Get the fuck out, Gary.

Gary I'll talk to Todd.

Marcia You already did that.

Gary He'll help me.

Marcia He won't help you.

Gary Why not?

Marcia Why should he?

Gary You're right. That's right. I never should have called him. I never should have asked him.

Marcia People don't help each other, that's not how it works.

Todd Nobody ever heard of you.

Gary A job.

Marcia He could get somebody younger. He could get somebody smarter.

Gary I shouldn't have called.

Marcia Get your shopping cart, Gary.

Gary Question of fucking pride. Fucking confusion.

Todd What'd you do? You punched her out?

Gary All those fucking years. All those nonfucking years.

Todd You don't deserve to get laid, Gary. Only the healthy, only the strong.

Gary That's not right.

Marcia I supported you, but I wasn't going to fuck you.

Gary That's how you emasculate a person.

Todd That's why you punched her.

Gary They turn people into garbage.

Todd You got to pay, it's the law of life.

Gary Two-legged walker, with half his teeth and bubbles on his eyes. Banging into shit, afraid. Abandon all hope who

enter here. Now “I,” now nothing at all. Without sense, feeling, or thought.

Eyes hurt in the glare of light.

He walks out into the dangerous LA night. (Smiles)

Pause.

Gary

So, you know, I’m looking at the bitch, and suddenly I realize, again, this is all an illusion. And I feel, I don’t know what to call it, like a sense of grief, something familiar, something sad, because you can’t trust what’s going on in your head, because it’s false.

Is this your wife? Are you talking about your wife?

Gary

No. This was after, this was when I was trying to find the killer, you know, of my son, which I couldn’t do, and I was afflicted by desire.

Fucking punk, he just squeezes the trigger and vanishes into the dark. Your basic piece of shit running around in the night air.

He’s connected too, right? He’s got friends and relations.

He knows people. You got to find him through the people who know him. You start there. Who saw him?

Who knows him?

He disappears into the glaring, filthy night, eaten by mice.

He thinks he’s still alive, with plans.

Gary

That’s what I’m saying, I’m with this woman, and I realize, won’t be long now, she’ll be an old lady, she’s got all these experiences and it’s polluted her insides, only she doesn’t know it, she’s got a fantasy about her existence.

Car horn.

Gary

It’s an illusion.

Car horn.

Someone signaling from a passing car.

Gary

Who is it? Who’s there? Is it a friend? A good person? Is it all of us? Is there help?

Gunshot.

End here.

Gary

Wait a minute.

What is it, Gary?

Gary

I just want to say.

What?

What, Gary?

The King. He wants to be right.

Gary

I’m sorry.

Come on.

Shit starts to happen, it gets momentum.

Gary

We’ll build a big fire in an oil-drum.

That’s how you end up on the street.

We’ll imagine things.

Gary

What real love is. What feeling is.

Sit down.

Be quiet.

The End