

# Illinois Wesleyan University

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## Gym Rat

Jared Brown, *Illinois Wesleyan University*



SELECTEDWORKS™

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GYM RAT

a ten-minute play by

Jared Brown

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## GYM RAT

*Early December.*

*The setting is a locker room. There is a backless bench; if possible, there are several lockers behind the characters.*

*Ed, 48, is seated on the bench, finishing dressing, buttoning up his shirt. Tom, 29, enters in sweaty gym clothes.*

TOM

*(Apparently casual. It's not clear whether he expects a response or not)* How you doing?

ED

Not bad. Have a good workout?

TOM

Yeah. Cardio and weight work, mostly. Man, I needed that.

ED

Been a while?

TOM

Yeah. I was on a plane all day yesterday and felt cramped as hell.

ED

Great food, though, I bet.

TOM

*(chuckles)* Oh, yeah. One bag of pretzels and one soft drink. Who could ask for anything more?

ED

What a feast. Of course, I can remember the days they gave you two bags of pretzels.

*(Tom sits on the bench, buries his head in a towel)*

ED

*(after a momentary pause)* Where'd you fly from?

TOM

Texas. Austin.

ED

They have a great university down there. You affiliated with it?

TOM

Was. Until last week. I just finished up a degree.

ED

Ah. Sherlock Holmes says, "If you finish in December, it must have been a graduate degree." Has Holmes struck again?

TOM

PhD. Took me six damn years, but it's done, thank God. No more classes, no more exams, no more dissertation, no more defenses. Time to make a little money and pay back those loans. Well, get a start on it, anyway.

ED

Congratulations. I know the feeling.

TOM

Jesus, I've been going to school for – what? About twenty-four years, altogether. I mean, I enjoyed it – grade school, high school, college, masters degree, the doctorate – but too much of a good thing gets pretty old, you know.

ED

*(chuckling to himself)* Oh, you don't have to tell me. In fact . . .

TOM

The degree doesn't become official until June, but everything's signed and sealed. Well, anyway, I'd better get into a shower. Nice to meet you, though. *(He turns away, toward the [real or imaginary] locker and begins to turn the lock)*

ED

Likewise. Well, I'll see you around. *(He picks up his gym bag and starts for the exit)*

TOM

You wouldn't know anything about the college here, would you?

ED

*(turns back)* A little. What do you want to know?

TOM

Well, I know it's got a good reputation. For students, anyway. But I wonder what it'd be like to be on the faculty. You know any of the people over there?

ED

A few.

TOM

Any of them happen to be in the English department?

ED

As a matter of fact . . .

TOM

I'll be meeting some of them today and tomorrow. I've looked at their vitas, of course, but I'd like to know what sort of people they are.

ED

Well, I'd say . . .

TOM

I guess what I'm wondering is whether they're the sort of people you can be friendly with. I sure as hell don't want be stuck at a place without friends. And what about single women?

ED

That means you're not married, right?

TOM

I was. For a few years. But you know the way it is. She and I . . . Well, let's just say it didn't work out. So I'm hoping to meet some single women and maybe start the dating game again – although I'm probably more than a little rusty.

ED

You know, I don't think there's any woman in English who's both single and who might interest you.

TOM

How would you know that?

ED

That's not too hard to guess. How old are you?

TOM

Twenty-nine.

ED

Well, there you go. I think the only single woman in English is in her fifties.

TOM

Shit. I was afraid of that.

ED

But there are plenty of other departments – and some of them might have what you’re looking for. A couple of good-looking women in Biology, I’ve noticed.

TOM

Biology. Sure. If conversation slows down I could always express my profound belief in Intelligent Design.

ED

That’s the way to win over a Biology teacher, all right.

TOM

It goes over like gangbusters in Kansas, they tell me.

ED

So I take it you’re here to interview for a job at the college?

TOM

*(taking a towel out of his gym bag)* Yup. Later this afternoon.

ED

In the English department?

TOM

Yup.

ED

Well, that’s quite a coincidence . . .

TOM

I was thinking about California or New York, but, you know, the way house prices are out there, I’m not sure I’m interested.

ED

So . . . You know, I didn't even know the English Department here had any positions open.

TOM

Well, I suppose I shouldn't have mentioned the department. They told me it's still hush hush. So if you know anybody over there, it's probably a good idea not to say anything about it.

ED

I won't. But I'm interested. What's your specialty?

TOM

American lit. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ED

Really? That's a surprise.

TOM

And there's a magazine, a quarterly, that the department puts out. They said that whoever got the job would also be expected to edit the magazine.

ED

*The Wharton Review?*

TOM

Something like that. Yeah, I think that's it. You ever seen a copy?

ED

More than seen it, I'm . . .

TOM

The department head said it used to be pretty prestigious, but it's gone to hell in the last few years.



ED

That's pretty harsh. I mean, it may have slipped a little, but . . .

TOM

Well, you know how it is. The editor got tenure in '97 and they say he's just putting in time these days.

ED

Putting in time. What does that mean?

TOM

Oh, you know. The guy's been around for twenty years. Used to be a hotshot teacher, according to the department head. But then his classes started going downhill, he stopped coming in during his office hours, and, like I say, the journal he edits has become an embarrassment.

ED

According to whom?

TOM

The department head. He didn't pull any punches about it. The guy's a loser, from what he tells me.

ED

I'm not so sure I'd believe everything you hear.

TOM

Well, whatever the story is, the guy's on his way out.

ED

Out? What do you mean?

TOM

You know, if a guy's that unproductive . . .

ED

But I thought you said he had tenure.

TOM

Yeah, he does. But a guy who's getting lousy ratings from the students and not even observing office hours . . .

ED

They can't fire somebody with tenure.

TOM

No, not ordinarily. But I guess the department head's convinced the head of the faculty union and the college president that this guy just isn't pulling his weight, so they're going to dump him.

ED

Dump him? Jesus Christ! After twenty years.

TOM

Yeah, it's not that usual. Going to be pretty tough, I guess. And I don't know where he'll find another job at fifty or fifty-five, or whatever he is. And he sure as hell won't get a good recommendation from the English Department.

ED

I . . . I . . . Are you sure you've got all this straight?

TOM

Oh, yeah. Believe me, there was no ambiguity there. But the guy doesn't know about it yet. They're waiting to tell him until they find someone else to take the job.

ED

So – what? They just give him his walking papers?

TOM

Looks like it. Good luck to the guy, but I don't envy him. Not a bad break for me, though, I guess. The market's pretty tight. I've sent out about a hundred resumés and only heard back from a couple of schools. Well, listen, I'd better go take that shower. *(Picks up towel and begins to exit, then turns back)* We've been talking about me for the last ten minutes, but I never asked about you. What's your line of work?

ED

*(hesitates)* Uh – insurance.

TOM

Oh, yeah? What company?

ED

*(hesitates)* Oh, just a small company. You wouldn't have heard of it.

TOM

Been there a long time?

ED

Twenty – no, seventeen years.

TOM

You in charge of the place?

ED

No, I – uh – I'm a salesman. On the road most of the time.

TOM

You seem to know a lot about the college, though.

ED

Oh. You know, clients. They – uh – they tell you what's going on. Sometimes you find out the damndest things.

TOM

Uh-huh. *(He stands for a moment, but can't think of anything more to say)* Well, it's been good to meet you. Listen, are you okay? You look a little shaky.

ED

No, no. It was just a hard workout, that's all.

*(Ed is silent. Tom extends his hand and Ed shakes it.)*

TOM

Well, see you around. Next year, if I get the job. Maybe I'll call you about insurance.

*(After a moment, Tom turns and goes toward the showers. Ed sits, staring vacantly ahead. Lights.)*