

WHAT ARE
TUESDAYS
LIKE?

Victor Bumbalo

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Victor Bumbalo is an award-winning playwright whose plays have been produced world wide. He is the recipient of an Ingram Merrill Award for playwriting. Bumbalo was a finalist for the 2007 Lambda Literary Award for his play *QUESTA*, and a finalist for the award in 2008 for *NIAGARA FALLS*. *NIAGARA FALLS*, followed its Off-Broadway run with subsequent openings in over fifty cities throughout the United States, England, and Australia. *ADAM AND THE EXPERTS* opened to critical success Off-Broadway and has had numerous productions in the United States and Canada. *WHAT ARE TUESDAYS LIKE?* was featured at the Carnegie Mellon Showcase of New Plays and at the Contemporary American Theater Festival. Besides playing throughout the United States, *WHAT ARE TUESDAYS LIKE?* has had productions in Germany, Japan, England, Costa Rica, and Sweden. *QUESTA* premiered in Los Angeles starring Wendie Malick, Dan Lauria and Dorian Harewood.

A number of Bumbalo's plays are published, including *QUESTA*, *ADAM AND THE EXPERTS*, and *NIAGARA FALLS* by Broadway Play Publishing Inc. *TELL* appears in an anthology *Gay and Lesbian Plays Today*, published by Heinemann Educational Books Inc, and *SHOW* is included in *The Best American Short*

Plays 1992-1993, published by Applause Theater Book Publishers.

Bumbalo has written for several popular television series: *N Y P D Blue*, *American Gothic*, *Relativity*, and *H B O's Spawn*. He partnered with Ray Shenusay to write *Wow Wow Wubbzy* for Nickelodeon and a screenplay, *Road Crew*. With Dan Lauria he co-authored the screenplay, *The Book Of Joe*. Bumbalo has also written movies of the week and wrote and directed the short film, *Two Boys*.

Bumbalo is the founder and president of the Robert Chesley Foundation.

CHARACTERS & SETTING

HOWARD, *late forties*

JEFF, *thirties*

SCOTT, *late twenties*

GENE, *thirties*

DENISE, *thirties*

RANDY, *late twenties*

Place: New York City. The out-patient waiting room of a hospital

Time: The early 1990s

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for Robert and Tom

Scene One

(Tuesday afternoon)

(At this time every week only people with AIDS are scheduled for services. Four men are in the room. Two of the men, SCOTT and GENE, are seated close to each other. The other two, HOWARD and JEFF, sit apart from the couple and each other.)

(HOWARD is gregarious and commands authority. His chatty nature stems from a genuine interest in people. There is an inner calm to this man that people find attractive.)

(JEFF is obviously frail. Although he tries to hide it, the fear he lives with is evident.)

(SCOTT is attractive and intense. He holds on to his individuality by hiding his true nature from most people.)

(GENE likes to be in control.)

(At the moment no one is speaking. GENE has his arm around SCOTT. HOWARD is watching JEFF who is staring at a page of a magazine.)

HOWARD: Excuse me, may I ask, what is it you're reading?

JEFF: What?

HOWARD: I know it's none of my business, but you've been staring at the same page for over thirty-five minutes. I was just curious what was so fascinating.

JEFF: (*Showing him the magazine*) It's a picture of the Grand Canyon. I was meditating on it. Trying to put myself into the picture. (*Pointing to a specific spot in the picture*) I was standing there.

HOWARD: You weren't planning to jump in?

JEFF: Why? Do I look suicidal?

HOWARD: No. I was kidding.

SCOTT: (*From the other side of the room*) Just what we need in this room—a comic.

HOWARD: Excuse me?

SCOTT: (*From the other side of the room*) Nothing.

JEFF: I don't understand. I was scheduled fifteen minutes ago for my chemotherapy, and there's no one here to give it to me. I can't be waiting around here all day.

HOWARD: It's usually not like this on Tuesdays.

SCOTT: (*From the other side of the room*) I don't want to do this.

GENE: It won't be as bad as you think.

SCOTT: How do you know?

HOWARD: (*To JEFF*) Does it work?

JEFF: What?

HOWARD: Your meditation.

JEFF: No. Maybe. I don't know. It passes the time. I can't be waiting all day for them. If they don't take me in a few minutes, I'm going to have to go.

HOWARD: You shouldn't do that.

JEFF: I'm going to have to.

HOWARD: Why don't you go back to your picture.

JEFF: I can't concentrate anymore. (*Offering HOWARD the magazine*) Would you like to try?

HOWARD: No, thank you.

SCOTT: (*To JEFF*) Excuse me, what's it like, the chemotherapy?

JEFF: It probably isn't as bad as you imagine.

GENE: (*To SCOTT*) See.

SCOTT: But you've lost some hair.

JEFF: Not everyone does.

GENE: (*To SCOTT*) See.

JEFF: (*To HOWARD*) What are you here for?

HOWARD: To see Louise. She's a therapist.

JEFF: Is she nice?

HOWARD: Very non-directive. But she can use some help dressing.

JEFF: I used to see Don, the other therapist.

HOWARD: Was he nice?

JEFF: Wonderful. Very humane. Had these sparkling eyes. But he flipped out.

HOWARD: I can understand.

JEFF: One day I arrived here for my appointment and he wasn't here. He disappeared. Never even gave the hospital notice. My lover, Mack, tried to track him down, but he wasn't very successful. The last thing any of his friends heard was that he was getting in his car and just going. I hope he's all right.

HOWARD: He's probably at your Grand Canyon leading those donkey tours.

JEFF: That would be great, wouldn't it?

SCOTT: (*From the other side of the room*) Or maybe he jumped in.

GENE: Scott!

JEFF: I'm going to check to see how much longer I have to wait. This is not right. I told them I had to be taken on time. I called them twice and told them.

HOWARD: Try to relax. Let's find you another picture.

JEFF: I'm going to find out what's going on. (*He exits.*)

HOWARD: He's a nervous little thing, isn't he? (*No one responds.*) I'm sorry I'm disturbing you. I had nothing else to do this afternoon. So I got here early. That's why I'm waiting. That kid made me edgy. Sorry. I'm disturbing you.

GENE: It's all right.

SCOTT: (*To HOWARD*) Do you get chemo?

HOWARD: No, I'm sorry.

SCOTT: (*Sarcastically*) What do you have to be sorry about?

HOWARD: I'm sorry I can't tell you anything about it. You seem worried. I'm sure the nurse will answer all your questions. (*He picks up JEFF's magazine.*)

SCOTT: I bet she will. (*To GENE*) You're going to be late getting back to the office.

GENE: It's okay. I told them what I was doing.

SCOTT: You told them what I was coming here for?

GENE: Of course. What's the secret?

SCOTT: Goddamn it, Gene. I don't want people to know about my treatment.

GENE: Why not?

SCOTT: Because it's my treatment.

GENE: People want to know what's going on with you.

SCOTT: Why? They're not my close friends.

GENE: They're mine. And I need their support.

SCOTT: Your office friends are arrogant bastards.

GENE: You don't like anybody these days.

HOWARD: (*Putting down the magazine*) I wish I had my book with me. I forgot it at home. I'm reading *Middlemarch*. It's fat and glorious. I only read thick books now. I figure nothing bad can happen to you when you're in the middle of a long, long story. It's been working so far.

(JEFF enters.)

JEFF: They're going to start taking people in a minute. (*Referring to SCOTT*) They said you're ahead of me.

SCOTT: You can go first if you want.

JEFF: (*Suddenly*) I have to go. I've waited too long. You know, the pay phone is broken. I have to call home or get home. I better go.

HOWARD: Do you think you should?

JEFF: I have to. I told them they had to take me on time today. I told them.

HOWARD: What's the matter?

JEFF: I have to go. Maybe I'll see you next week. (*He exits.*)

GENE: That guy is setting himself up for a coronary.

HOWARD: I wonder how he's going to get home? Should somebody have gone with him?

GENE: Is he a friend?

HOWARD: No. I just met him today.

(*They are interrupted by a voice coming from the public address system.*)

VOICE: Mister Donnelly. Mister Donnelly, please report to room 4. Room 4.

SCOTT: (*Frightened*) I don't want to go!

GENE: Come on, you have to.

HOWARD: I should have helped him home.

VOICE: Mister Donnelly...room 4. Room 4.

SCOTT: I don't want to go!

(*Blackout*)

Scene Two

(*Another Tuesday*)

(JEFF is alone in the room. He is staring intently at the postcard he is holding. After a few seconds, HOWARD enters. He has been shopping. He is clutching several packages and his copy of *Middlemarch*.)

HOWARD: Well, hello. What's the picture this week?

JEFF: It's a painting. By Monet. (*Showing HOWARD the postcard*) Of his gardens at Giverny. Wouldn't you love to live in this painting?

HOWARD: Never. The pollen would kill me.

JEFF: That's too bad.

HOWARD: Did you get home all right last week?

JEFF: Yes, thank you. They promised they would take me exactly on time this week.

HOWARD: That's good.

JEFF: On Tuesday's I'm on a tight schedule. I have banking to do. I have to go to social services, get shopping done, come here. I can't afford to waste any time.

HOWARD: You sound busy.

JEFF: I don't like being away from my apartment too long. My lover's there. He's sick. Quite sick. I don't like being away from him. These are precious moments, right?

HOWARD: Right.

JEFF: At this point, he only likes me to take care of him. When he's up to it, sometimes we sit together, hold hands, and listen to music. Or maybe watch a movie on the V C R. Our friends chipped in and bought us one. That was good of them, wasn't it?

HOWARD: Yes.

JEFF: We know lovely people. On days when we both have a resurgence of energy, I play for him. He loves that. I used to be a concert pianist.

HOWARD: What a comfort your music must be.

JEFF: I love the very idea of it. Selecting sounds from the universe. Giving them an order. They apologized for last week. Did I tell you they said they might even take me early?

HOWARD: Great.

JEFF: You've been shopping.

HOWARD: I've been depressed. This morning I was paying bills. I used to make a good income, but now even the telephone bill terrifies me.

JEFF: May I ask what you do?

HOWARD: Right now, I'm bartending a few days a week. Off the books. But I used to be a therapist. Both occupations are frighteningly similar. All you have to do is listen, and people will throw money at you.

JEFF: Did you have fun shopping?

HOWARD: I should have done this a few weeks ago. I'm sure those T-cells of mine are dropping through

economic fear. I've been pinching pennies for too many months now. So this morning I gave myself a good talking to and then went out on a spree. I just handed the cashiers my credit card and never peeked at the bills. I figured I'll take a look while I'm in session with Louise. Let her deal with it.

JEFF: Let anybody else deal with it.

HOWARD: Wouldn't it be fabulous if you could wrap AIDS and all that comes with it in a box and hand it over to a friend? Just for a day. How about a week? A month?

JEFF: That would be mean.

HOWARD: I mean temporarily. It would give us a break. They would learn something. Know what it's really like. It would be fabulous. Maybe for a year.

(They are interrupted by a voice coming from the public address system.)

VOICE: Mister Ferris. Mister Ferris, please report to room 4. Room 4.

JEFF: See, they kept their word. They're taking me early.

HOWARD: So it's Ferris.

JEFF: Yes. Jeff Ferris.

HOWARD: Howard Salvo.

JEFF: Good meeting you. I've got to run. I don't want to keep them waiting. *(He begins to leave.)*

HOWARD: *(Calling after him)* When you gave concerts, did you specialize in anything?

JEFF: Yes. The French. I was known for my French repertoire.

(Blackout)

Scene Three

(Another Tuesday)

(When the lights come up, SCOTT and GENE are the only men in the room. They are in the middle of an argument.)

GENE: It was four-thirty. Four-thirty in the morning. An ACT-UP meeting my ass.

SCOTT: After the meeting, some of the guys took me out for a beer.

GENE: A beer? You smelled like a brewery. What kind of jerks do you hang out with? Don't they know you're sick?

SCOTT: They know.

GENE: Then they're fools.

SCOTT: Why don't you leave and go to work.

GENE: You shouldn't be drinking.

SCOTT: Gene, two beers.

GENE: You should be in bed early.

SCOTT: I had fun last night.

GENE: Doing what?

SCOTT: Go! Just leave!

GENE: You don't know how to take care of yourself. That's always been your problem.

SCOTT: What do you mean by that?

GENE: Just that I want you taking better care of yourself.

(HOWARD enters carrying a package and his Middlemarch.)

HOWARD: Well, how are my sweet ones?

SCOTT: We're not your sweet ones.

HOWARD: Missy is sour today.

SCOTT: God, what a tired queen.

HOWARD: I hope your chemo makes you bald.

SCOTT: Take that back!

HOWARD: Twirl on your own finger!

SCOTT: Take it back!

HOWARD: Bald!

(SCOTT leaps at HOWARD and grabs him by his shirt.)

GENE: *(Trying to separate the men)* Stop it!

SCOTT: *(Not letting go)* I'll clean this room with you if you don't take it back.

HOWARD: Little tough boys bore me. Move those hands.

SCOTT: Take it back. *(Beginning to break down)* Please. Please, take it back. *(He releases HOWARD. Breaking down)* Please.

HOWARD: *(Trying to calm SCOTT down)* I'm sorry. Really. I am.

SCOTT: Please.

HOWARD: I take it back.

(SCOTT is sobbing. HOWARD takes him into his arms.)

HOWARD: I take it back.

(Blackout)

Scene Four

(Another Tuesday)

(HOWARD is reading his book. DENISE is pacing back and forth. She is an attractive black woman who is trying to conceal her nerves.)

DENISE: You can't smoke here, can you?

HOWARD: No.

DENISE: That's too bad.

HOWARD: I don't think so.

DENISE: *(Suddenly)* You have AIDS don't you?

HOWARD: Why?

DENISE: I want to make sure I'm in the right place.

HOWARD: You're in the right place.

DENISE: Good. What kind of treatment do you get here?

HOWARD: I talk to a therapist.

DENISE: I like therapy. I'm in a group. It's a lot of fun.

HOWARD: Fun?

DENISE: All you do is talk and listen. It's fun. People are usually polite. They make you feel good. But I don't take it too seriously. I mean we all have to leave and go home. And these days, that definitely is not fun.

HOWARD: Where do you live?

DENISE: Out on Long Island. I had to take that goddamn train to get here. I've been selected to be in some study. Some experimental drug. My family is all excited. But to tell you the truth, if I had to win something, I would have preferred the lotto or a scholarship to Yale. Experiments make me nervous. My doctor said I should be delighted. But I can't help wondering, why me? Is it because I'm black? When I said that to my doctor, she said I was getting paranoid.

Perhaps. Then she told me that a lot of gay men were going on this drug. I asked her to show me one straight white man who would be participating. Then maybe I would show more enthusiasm.

HOWARD: You're too much.

DENISE: Denise.

HOWARD: Howard.

DENISE: I wish we were meeting somewhere else.

(SCOTT and GENE enter.)

SCOTT: Not one hair. Not one hair has fallen out.

HOWARD: Terrific.

(HOWARD and SCOTT embrace.)

SCOTT: I appreciated your call. It helped.

HOWARD: Don't isolate yourself.

GENE: He's not isolated.

HOWARD: (*Purposely leaving GENE out of the introductions*) Denise. Scott.

DENISE: Hi.

GENE: Gene.

DENISE: Hi. (*To SCOTT*) You're on the chemotherapy? You look terrific. You don't even look sick? (*To GENE*) What are you here for?

GENE: I'm not sick.

DENISE: Really?

GENE: What do you mean? Do I look sick?

DENISE: I was just wondering what you were doing here?

GENE: (*Indicating SCOTT*) I come with him.

DENISE: Aren't you kind.

GENE: But I'm not sick. As a matter of fact, I'm not even HIV positive. I test negative. Every time.

(SCOTT starts applauding.)

GENE: Stop that!

SCOTT: I'm proud of you. You refrained from mentioning that here for over a month. (To DENISE and HOWARD) Usually it's within an hour of meeting someone new that he makes his announcement.

GENE: That's unfair.

SCOTT: You practically carry a banner.

GENE: I'm leaving.

SCOTT: Fine.

GENE: To treat me like this in front of your friends.

DENISE: I just met him.

GENE: (Referring to HOWARD) I meant him.

SCOTT: Gene, go to work.

GENE: Aren't you relieved I'm negative?

SCOTT: Of course. But you advertise it the same way you advertise your condos. You're relentless.

HOWARD: You own condos?

SCOTT: He sells them.

DENISE: So does my sister-in-law. She loves it. Says it's a real cushy job.

GENE: I work hard.

DENISE: I'm sure you do. But she used to teach in a city school.

GENE: May I say something?

HOWARD: No.

GENE: Why not?

HOWARD: Because whenever someone starts a statement like that, they are about to tell you something you don't want to hear.

GENE: I'm going to say it anyway.

HOWARD: I knew you would.

GENE: You people can be pompous and self-righteous. There. I said it.

DENISE: What people does he mean?

HOWARD: Sick people.

GENE: I'm sorry, but I had to say it.

HOWARD: Bravo.

(GENE walks over to SCOTT and awkwardly gives him a kiss.)

GENE: I'll see you at home. *(He waits for SCOTT to respond.)* I said...

SCOTT: I heard you.

(GENE leaves.)

SCOTT: He didn't used to be like that.

HOWARD: It's the pressure.

DENISE: It's men. God, I'm glad I'm taking a break from them. *(To HOWARD)* You live with somebody?

HOWARD: I used to.

DENISE: *(To SCOTT)* What you need honey is a vacation from him.

SCOTT: Impossible. At the moment he's supporting me.

DENISE: That's a bitch.

HOWARD: *(To SCOTT)* Aren't you still working?

SCOTT: My employers forced an early retirement on me. I worked at Fairyland.

DENISE: Is that a dance club?

SCOTT: No, it's a pre-school. They told me they didn't want me deteriorating in front of the children's eyes. Forcing concepts on them that they weren't ready for. They said at my kids' ages only bunny rabbits should get sick and die. So I let them buy me off. They told the kids I was going on a trip. They gave me a bon voyage party and kept me on the payroll for six months. Maybe I should have fought them. I miss the kids.

DENISE: Anytime you want, you can take my two.

(They are interrupted by a voice from the public address system.)

VOICE: Mrs McMillan, report to room 3. Mrs McMillan to room 3.

DENISE: They better answer all my questions.

HOWARD: They'll try to rush you, but see to it that they don't.

DENISE: See you later.

HOWARD: Good luck.

(DENISE exits.)

SCOTT: *(After a moment)* How do you keep it together?

HOWARD: Linguini and clam sauce. Any time I want it.

(Blackout)