

DOES A TIGER WEAR A NECKTIE?

by Don Petersen

ACT II, SCENE 1

Winters is an English teacher in a rehabilitation center for juvenile narcotic addicts. He is an idealist in a concrete holding pen of violence and fear. Against hopelessness and selfishness he pits Shakespeare and Dickens, and his own honesty and concern. Bickham is an inmate on this island prison. He is a walking volcano of anger—always on the verge of eruption. He is also starving for some loving human contact; he had, in fact, spent years searching for the father that left him as a child. To Bickham, Winters represents both the good and evil of authority: the person who cares and the person who controls and must be overthrown.

It is a wintry evening in December. Winters is alone in the classroom working at the blackboard on a lighting plot for the upcoming Christmas production. Bickham, unnoticed, comes in behind Winters and grabs him. Toward the end of the scene Bickham reveals that he has written a composition that he wishes Winters to read.

BICKHAM: Gimme your wallet, lame, or I'll break your back! *Taken completely off guard, Winters struggles enough to get a glance at his unseen adversary.*

WINTERS: What the! Bickham!

BICKHAM, releasing him: Man, you gotta be on guard. Supposin' that was a real air-raid and not a drill.

WINTERS: Bickham. What the hell you doing up here?

BICKHAM, takes a seat at the class table: Saw your light . . . came up the fire escape. Didn't climb nobody's hair, neither.

WINTERS: What do you mean?

BICKHAM: The highwayman. That's *me*. He climbs this bitch's hair and rescues her from the tower. Don't you know the poem?

WINTERS: Yeah. Her name was Rapunzel, wasn't it?

BICKHAM: Yeah, that's it.

WINTERS, pause: Hey aren't you supposed to be in the hospital? It's almost eight o'clock.

BICKHAM: Breakin' the rules. Ever try it?

WINTERS: Yeah, when I can get away with it. *Sits at his desk. I missed you in class today.*

BICKHAM, disgustedly: Aw, man, I was busy.

WINTERS: Doing what?

BICKHAM: Tryin' to run down my shrink. Kike bastard's hiding. I think he's scared of me.

WINTERS: Whodya have?

BICKHAM: Werner . . . the creepin' sheenie.

WINTERS: Oh, Dr. Werner. Conrad has him, too. Is he doing you any good?

BICKHAM, with disgust: Man, it's like screwin' a dead whore. He don't even pretend no more. *Winters rises and doodles at the blackboard.*

WINTERS: Aw, you never know about psychiatrists. Some of them have got a lot under the cap.

BICKHAM: What he's got under his cap, I flushed down the toilet a thousand years ago. *Moves closer to blackboard and gestures to same.* Whatsa matter? Ain't ya got nothin' goin' for ya at home?

WINTERS, taken slightly off guard, he gestures to the board: Oh, this? I'm just trying to figure out the lights for the Christmas show.

BICKHAM: Ain't ya afraid your bitch will work overtime, too?

WINTERS, amused but with some loss of aplomb: I trust my bitch.

BICKHAM, flippantly: Sucker. *He walks calmly around the room.* You know, Winters, I think your old lady got her baskets switched. You're really Mr. Jesus in disguise.

WINTERS, wryly: Well, there was some talk in my home town for a while. Never did get it straightened out. *He makes some notation on the board.* You're exceptionally breezy tonight. What are you using? Or is that a personal question?

BICKHAM: Who, *me?* *(With no coyness, he takes a small tin from his jacket.)* Mace. Ya wanna try some?

WINTERS, turns to him: I didn't expect a straight answer. *Takes the tin and examines it.* Mace, huh?

BICKHAM, *pointing to it*: Two teaspoons in a glass of water . . . you can make it with Frankenstein.

WINTERS: Sounds like fun. *Looks closely at it*. Hey, you can buy this at the A & P.

BICKHAM: You better believe it.

WINTERS: It really works?

BICKHAM: It's a boss kick, man. *Grins widely*. Look at me. Can't ya tell?

WINTERS: How come you don't use it all the time? It's cheap.

BICKHAM: Six months on that, ya puke up your liver.

WINTERS: Wheredya get it out here?

BICKHAM, *coily*: A little old fagarolla flew over and dropped it in my lap.

WINTERS: A what?

BICKHAM: A queer, man. I got me a fag social worker over at the hospital. Shock ya, Petey-babe?

WINTERS: Everybody's selling something.

BICKHAM, *laughs with admiration*: Oh, great, cool Father. *Holds out hand for junkie handshake*: Gimme a pound.

WINTERS, *slaps Bickham's open palm with the back of his own hand*. *Pause*: What do you sell in return?

BICKHAM, *coolly*: Nothin'. Come discharge time, my little old social worker will be waitin' on the other side with his magic wand and his Japanese kimono.

WINTERS: And what'll you do?

BICKHAM, *suddenly ruthless*: I'll kick his spade-ass from here to the Congo.

WINTERS: A Negro? That narrows the field.

BICKHAM: How bout it, Pops? You want your junkie to marry a Negro?

WINTERS: Social worker? Professional man? You have my permission. *Then directly . . . seriously*: But don't jack him up, huh, Bickham?

BICKHAM: Why not?

WINTERS: He gave you a box of mace, didn't he? Besides, it's not nice.

BICKHAM: And who's nice? Is he nice, givin' mace to an addict, lickin' his faggot lips till I get discharged?

WINTERS, *sincerely*: What he is has nothing to do with you, Bickham. Right or wrong is just like death, buddy. You gotta work it out for yourself.

BICKHAM, *laughs disdainfully*: Sheeit! Where'd ya get that? . . . from a bubble-gum wrapper?

WINTERS, *slightly annoyed*: No, as a matter of fact, it took me a long time to figure that one out.

BICKHAM, *moves away*: Yeah? Me, too. What's right for Bickham . . . is right. What's wrong . . . ain't.

WINTERS: Till you meet somebody who thinks the same way. And he cracks your skull.

BICKHAM: If he can do it, let him try.

WINTERS: I think you're better equipped for this world than I am, Bickham.

BICKHAM: That's a fancy way of sayin' I'm a turd and you ain't.

WINTERS: No it isn't.

BICKHAM: You don't like me . . . it's as simple as that. Do ya, Daddy?

WINTERS: I haven't decided yet. And I'm not your daddy. Did he like you?

BICKHAM, *rises*: You wanna punch in the snotbox?

WINTERS: Not particularly.

BICKHAM: Don't try to psych me. If I want somebody to clean my skull, I'll go to a cab driver before I rap to a broken-down, chalk-pushin' schoolteacher like you!

WINTERS: Your point is well taken. I'm sorry.

BICKHAM: I mean, you may think your butt spits nickels, but you're wrong, man. You're gettin' down wrong.

WINTERS: I said I was sorry.

BICKHAM, *rises and starts to exit*: Squash it. I'm gonna get in the wind anyway.

WINTERS, *shoves the tin of mace down the table*: Don't forget your mace.

BICKHAM, *picks up mace and looks at it*: You got a glass?

WINTERS: Sure. Why?

BICKHAM: I wanna take a little.

WINTERS: Not here you're not.

BICKHAM, *laughs sarcastically*: Punkin' out on me, huh?

WINTERS: Yep. But not for the reasons you think. I got a wife and kid out there. I'm not gonna lose my job because you want a little mace.

BICKHAM: You'd lose it anyway, maybe, if a hack walked in and caught me high.

WINTERS: No I wouldn't. I'd just say you broke in on me, you were high . . . you threatened me. They'd believe me, not you. We lames stick together, didn't you know that?

BICKHAM: Yes . . . "Mr. Winters" that I know. First lesson I ever learned. But you blew your cool. If you could stuff it off now, you could stuff it off after I've had another glass. Right?

WINTERS, *pause. He considers it for a moment*: The glass is in the drawer.

BICKHAM: Thank you, Mr. Winters. (*takes glass from closet, goes to sink and draws water*) A little water. *Holds up glass and turns off water*. Not too much. And a little mace.

WINTERS: You really like that stuff, huh?

BICKHAM: Nope. But it's a high. *Holds up glass*. Rips the shit out of your liver, I'll tell ya that. *Holds glass toward Winters*. Want some?

WINTERS: No, thanks.

BICKHAM, *a toast*: Here's to you, Mr. Winters. Reo habilitator. *Drinks half of it and shudders*.

WINTERS: I'm not too sure of that.

BICKHAM, *downing more of it*: And here's to Daddy.

WINTERS: I'll drink to that.

BICKHAM: You will? *Holds out the glass of mace*: Here.

WINTERS: I meant it figuratively.

BICKHAM: Your heart's pumpin' Kool Aid. Little mace ain't gonna make you no junkie.

WINTERS, *takes glass and drinks a gulp*: Right. *Shudders*. Jesus. Tastes awful.

BICKHAM: Hey, ya know . . . you're all right. You gotta lot of heart.

WINTERS: You're wrong, Bickham. I'm afraid of everything.

BICKHAM: Don't disappoint me. You weren't afraid of me when I flipped in here the other day.

WINTERS: How do you know I wasn't?

BICKHAM: You didn't act like it, Daddy.

WINTERS: There's that "daddy" again.

BICKHAM: What's wrong with that? You're a daddy, ain't ya?

WINTERS, *nods*: A little girl.

BICKHAM: Got a picture?

WINTERS, *gives him his wallet*: Yeah. That was at the zoo.

BICKHAM: She's cute.

WINTERS: I think so.

BICKHAM: What would you do if a junkie put a knife to her throat and asked for your dough?

WINTERS: I'd give it to you. Then I'd hunt you down and kill you if I could.

BICKHAM: Wait a minute. I didn't say I'd do that. I know a spick named Valdes over on the east side. That's his speciality. He usually gets what he wants.

WINTERS: Some day he'll get what he *really* wants. What you *all* want.

BICKHAM: What's that?

WINTERS: Death.

BICKHAM: Dig yourself. That's not what I want.

WINTERS: What do you want?

BICKHAM, *abruptly*: If you met me on the street, would you have a beer with me?

WINTERS: Sure, why not?

BICKHAM, *shakes his head as if to clear it*: Where'd we go?

WINTERS: To a bar. Hey, is anything the matter?

BICKHAM: This stuff. It screws my head up.

WINTERS, *takes glass and tin of mace*: Do you mind if I get rid of this before we both get in trouble?

BICKHAM: Where would we go? For our beer.

WINTERS: Any place you'd like.

BICKHAM: You ain't kiddin' me?

WINTERS: No.

BICKHAM: What would we talk about?

WINTERS: How 'bout fishing?

BICKHAM: I ain't never been fishing.

WINTERS, *concerned about Bickham*: Hey, you sure you're feeling all right?

BICKHAM, *nods*: What else? Dames?

WINTERS: Sooner or later. Sure.

BICKHAM, *abruptly*: What kind of honeymoon did you have, Pete?

WINTERS, *taken by surprise*: Huh?

BICKHAM: Your honeymoon. Ya have fun?

WINTERS, *chuckles quietly*: Maybe we ought to take that up some other time.

BICKHAM: Why?

WINTERS, *withdraws just slightly*: Well, it's getting late. You should be in the hospital, and I should catch the next boat.

BICKHAM: Ya wanna know somethin', Pete?
WINTERS: Sure. What?
BICKHAM: Straight stuff. You're the nicest guy on this island.
WINTERS, genuinely moved: Well, thank you, Bickham. I really appreciate that . . . coming from you.
BICKHAM: There's only one thing wrong with you.
WINTERS: What's that?
BICKHAM: You're like a rich man . . . a very rich man.
WINTERS: Oh? In what way?
BICKHAM: I don't mean uh . . . *really*. I mean uh . . .
WINTERS: Figuratively.
BICKHAM: Yeah, that's right. Figuratively. And what it is, see, it's like this. You walk around with your pockets full of gold, see, and we're a bunch of apes. Every now and then you throw us a piece. It's great . . . and we love it . . . we need the gold *all* the time. Only catch is, lots of times you throw it only when *you* want to throw it. You hip to that, Pete?
WINTERS, with a touch of sadness: Maybe I'm not as rich as you think I am.
BICKHAM, slight pause: Yeah. Maybe you ain't.

A HATFUL OF RAIN

by Michael V. Gazzo

ACT II, SCENE 2

This is the story of the Pope family and the destruction of that family by drugs. Johnny Pope is a drug addict. He was a hero in the Korean War, a prisoner of war who would not reveal secrets. In an army hospital he was given addictive drugs to ease the pain of the wounds inflicted on him while a prisoner. Now he is living in a New York City apartment with his pregnant wife, Celia, his brother, Polo, and an expensive daily heroin habit. He has become increasingly inattentive to his wife (who only learns of his addiction toward the end of the play), and has

used up the life savings of his brother. The family gets an unexpected visit from Johnny and Polo's father. He has quit his job, invested all his money in a business, needs a few thousand dollars more for an outright purchase, and has come to collect on Polo's promise to loan him money. When he learns that Polo has no money to give him, he ignites old family feuds, accuses Polo of being ungrateful and irresponsible, and seeks an ally in his favorite son, Johnny.

Just prior to the following scene, Johnny has come home during the morning after being out all night looking for drugs. He has been given a deadline to pay off his debts and asks Polo for more money. Polo has none to give. The father enters and initiates a bitter exchange with Polo. Johnny, resolved to confess his addiction and to exonerate the brother who has protected him, asks Polo to leave him alone with their father.

FATHER: A good rain cleans the streets . . . huh?
JOHNNY: You're up early, Pop.
FATHER: I didn't get much sleep. I was wondering about something, Johnny. Is today your day off? I mean, how can you take in the ball game if you're working?
JOHNNY: I'm not working.
FATHER: You say you and your wife are getting along . . . ?
JOHNNY: Yeh . . .
FATHER: Last night, when I went back to the hotel, I kept thinking about what your wife said, about believing. About what ~~do~~ I believe in. She's right, I got you kids to believe in. Like I come up here—you got a wife, a little home, a kid on the way, you're making a home for your brother. You did a good job of bringing yourself up . . . but what the hell's your brother doing? Holing up in some dame's apartment? Twenty-five hundred is a—
JOHNNY: I don't know. . . .
FATHER: You talk in awful short phrases, Johnny. . . .
JOHNNY: I'm not used to talking to you, Pop.
FATHER: That's right, we don't talk very much, do we?
JOHNNY: No. . . .
FATHER: I like the letters you write me, Johnny. . . . Life plays funny tricks on people. Hello and Good-bye . . . and nothing in between, but I like the letters you write me.