

THE TENOR by Gary Young (excerpts)

©2007 Gary Young

It's about understanding and especially acceptance, and the gap between age and perception of age and mortality.

EMPTY STAGE, except for an overstuffed easy chair, timeworn, and an equally timeworn side table. On the table is a large glass ash tray, a lighter, circa 1940, a newspaper, folded into quarters. There is a bottle of fountain pen ink on the table.

As the Lights go up, we see Vincent, age 78, dressed in slacks, a white shirt, a 1950 vintage tie, sopen at the neck, sleeves rolled up, 1/2 cigar in his mouth. **HE is holding a diary and a fountain pen,** which requires filing once in a while.

HE is asleep. When the lights are up for two beats, he awakens with a snort, sighs, removes his glasses and rubs his eyes and the rest of his face. Another beat. He replaces the glasses, squints for a second, looks down to the diary and resumes...

Vincent

(Writing as he speaks) So much for the sibling rivalry when I grew up. The dog ended up sleeping on MY bed after all, and the chicken...was delicious. My brothers and sisters will probably have their own accounts of these events, but my hope is that no one reads this until my siblings are dead, and I hope that's soon, so they can't rebut anything. (Picks up LIGHTER, strikes a light, looks at diary, and returns to diary without lighting up) Actually, I don't know if anyone will find this interesting or not, with all of the mistakes that I made. If mistakes make you learn and grow, then why am I so short? Some mistakes are...mistakes. They can hurt. That seems to be the kind of mistake I do best. Since this will be read after I die, I don't want this to be seen as a plea for sympathy or martyrdom. I'm sure I hate myself as much after my death as I did before I died. I probably deserve the unhappiness that I put myself through. (Picks up LIGHTER again, strikes a light, looks at diary, and returns to diary without lighting up) On a happier note, my favorite memory was when my son came to me and asked my why my penis was so big. He was five, and to him, it was big. I never got that comment from anyone else, that's for sure. Typically, I became too inhibited from that moment on, to ever let him see my penis, for fear that the truth be revealed.

Picks up LIGHTER, strikes a light, looks at

it, strikes again, waves it around slowly in a circular motion as the rest of the living room, behind scrim comes into view, circa 1950. HE rocks on the chair once, twice, three times, and gets up from chair, strikes lighter several times as he exits. SCRIM raises and Vincent re-enters, now as a younger man, age 45, striking the light as he enters. Pat, his wife, is an attractive woman in her middle 40's.

Pat

(Entering energetically) If you light that thing in here, I'm going to take all your underpants and sew the flys shut.

Vincent

I'll go in my study. I don't use the flys anyway. I peek it out from under the leg. Saves time.

Pat

We've discussed your cigars ten hundred million times. I still smell the manure. It's bad enough that you come home from the office and card games smelling like a goddamn pile of burnt horse poop. I will not stand for any of that in my house. Not as long as I am living in it. Have I made myself clear? This time? You know, if it ever does get through to you, I may have to take up smoking to soften my shock.

Vincent

Can I smoke a cigarette? Mrs. Gengis Kahn?

Pat

In your study, with the windows open. Or off with your head. Cigarettes are not too bad. I may join you. The worst they can do is kill you.

Vincent

Do whatever you want.

Pat

If I'm Mrs. Gengis Kahn, what does that make you? I know, Dr Kahn, the ear, nose and throat man.

Vincent

That was "piss myself silly hysterical" the first three hundred times, but it's beginning to wear thin.

Pat

So are you. Except around the middle.

Vincent

Where's Mike? I told him he could play over what's his name's house for one hour. That was six days ago.

Pat

He's still over what's his name's house. I think. They may have gone to the thingamajig store. You know, what's its name. They said something about baseball cards and comic books. Also I think they wanted to get a drink from the drink dispenser machine that mixes whatever you want as you push the various buttons, and it comes out tasting like bubble gum.

Vincent

Haven't tried that yet.

Pat

You should. It might improve your disposition a little.

Vincent

Too late for that. I'm going in for a cigarette. Can I still just have the cigar in my mouth? Or is that completely verboten, Mrs. Hitler?

Vincent

Listen, why don't we have a little dinner one of these days, huh? What time is it? Five-thirty? I'm getting so hungry I could maybe eat one of those butts. Come to think of it, with a little Italian dressing it would taste like your meatloaf. What do we have tonight?

Pat

Meatloaf, the one with the chili sauce mixed in. The one you like. It's practically in the oven.

Vincent

How long does it take?

Pat

About an hour, maybe less. I think Mike's friend, what's his name, is coming over for dinner. He must be related to "what's his name." What is his name, anyway.

Vincent

They're all the same to me. Dirty, noisy, smelly, badly behaved, ugly, stupid, too hungry like I was, and much too young and much too talented as athletes, like I wasn't.

Pat

You were too. Smelly and all, but you were a great athlete. What about the baseball championships and quarterbacking at high school and college. You must have been a very exciting player, the way you tell it. You still beat the pants of all the neighbors when we play.



At the end, chair is lit, empty stage. A child comes up to it, sits in it, plays a little, picks up the book and begins to read silently, as...Curtain