

Permission (a ten minute play)

By Allison Whittenberg

CHARACTERS:

CHRISTIAN: Male. Maybe short or tall, physically taut.

Clean-shaven. His movements are economical. His eyes are alert, always scanning.

ARTURO: Male. Maybe short or tall, less physically grounded. He might slouch. Maybe glasses. He uses his hands when he talks, but the gestures are nervous.

SETTING: a humble, lived in walk up apartment.

(CHRISTIAN and ARTURO enter. CHRISTIAN takes off his jacket.

ARTURO removes his shoes.)

CHRISTIAN

Just forget about the whole thing.

ARTURO

How am I supposed to forget about something that just happened?

CHRISTIAN

Think about something else and you don't have to worry about what just happened. You want a drink? Here, I'll get a soda. Or do we have something stronger?

ARTURO

I don't want anything.

CHRISTIAN

Well, I'll fix dinner. Maybe that'll change your mind.

ARTURO

I can't believe I just stood there.and let it happen.

CHRISTIAN

Please forget about it, Arturo.

ARTURO

You spring right into action.

CHRISTIAN

(Holding his hands up as if to say "behold")

Yeah well.

ARTURO

Wish I had those types of instincts. I thought I did. And then it was right in front of me and I did nothing.

CHRISTIAN

You tried to hold me back.

ARTURO

Yes, I tried.

CHRISTIAN

It's over either way.

ARTURO

I should have done something.

CHRISTIAN

And I should have got something while we were out.

(CHRISTIAN looks about the cabinet)

CHRISTIAN (con't)

Worse than the old woman in the shoe, the cupboard is bare.

ARTURO

Old Mother Hubbard.

CHRISTIAN

What?

ARTURO

She's the one. In the nursery rhyme.

CHRISTIAN

Okay. How about some microwave popcorn?

ARTURO

I'm not gonna have anything.

CHRISTIAN

Listen. Forget it.

ARTURO

It's not that simple.

CHRISTIAN

Yes, it is. I'll turn on the television.

ARTURO

I don't wanna watch.

CHRISTIAN

Why don't you go lay down?

ARTURO

At 5:00?

CHRISTIAN

Okay, then stay up.

(looking in the cabinet)

What do we have here? A lot of popcorn. Cake mix. Looks like it's going to be a stoner dinner.

ARTURO

I should have done something.

CHRISTIAN

How many times do I have to say? Don't beat yourself up over it.

ARTURO

You really laid into that guy.

CHRISTIAN

I know.

ARTURO

I just wish I had that type of instinct.

CHRISTIAN

We can't go around and round about this.

(CHRISTIAN opens the microwave.)

ARTURO

Don't burn it this time.

CHRISTIAN

What is it? 3 minutes? 2 minutes?

ARTURO

I always put it on 1 1/2. Then I turned it around and did the other two. So it's over 3 minutes.

CHRISTIAN

Yeah, that's too much process.

(CHRISTIAN puts the popcorn in the microwave.)

ARTURO

No, it's not. It's simple. Cook it for almost 4 minutes, but stop it midway through.

CHRISTIAN

Yes, sir.

ARTURO

You're not going to listen to me. You're going to do it your way and burn it.

(CHRISTIAN punches in a time.)

ARTURO

Wash your hands.

CHRISTIAN

I washed it at the park.

ARTURO

Wash it again. Give it a real good wash.

CHRISTIAN

I know how to wash my hands.

(Reluctantly, CHRISTIAN goes to the sink and washes his hands.)

CHRISTIAN

Do you want me to sing "happy birthday"?

ARTURO

No, that's long enough.

(examining his right hand)

I wonder if it will be swollen tomorrow.

CHRISTIAN

I didn't hit him that hard.

ARTURO

Why did he get so worked up? Like he'd never seen two guys kiss before.

CHRISTIAN

There's bigots everywhere.

(The popcorn pops and the microwave bell rings.)

ARTURO

You sure he was a bigot?

CHRISTIAN

I don't know. I can't read his mind, but I would think if he got that offended by watching two men smooching yeah he's a bigot.

ARTURO

I don't know, Christian, something about him...

CHRISTIAN

What about him? I mean, for God's sake, he called us a slur.

ARTURO

Maybe we shouldn't make out in public.

CHRISTIAN

What is this 1950?

ARTURO

No, but there were kids around. There's a playground not too far from there.

CHRISTIAN

This is a major city.

ARTURO

Children have a right to their innocence.

CHRISTIAN

I think we are innocent.

ARTURO

Come on.

CHRISTIAN

We weren't rawdogging. I was clothed and you were clothed, for fuck's sake.

ARTURO

All I'm saying is, maybe we should have got a room.

CHRISTIAN

Or stayed in the closet.

ARTURO

I didn't say that.

CHRISTIAN

There's nothing inherently "un-innocent" about me or you. Or us together.

ARTURO

I'm not disagreeing with you.

CHRISTIAN

Yes, you are. If you don't act like you belong there, you're telling the world you don't.

ARTURO

That's one way of looking at it.

CHRISTIAN

We're not predators. We're not perverts. If a man and woman wanted to give each other a microsecond of affection -

ARTURO

It was longer than that -

CHRISTIAN

Okay, make it a minute. If a heterosexual couple -

ARTURO

We're not a heterosexual couple.

CHRISTIAN

We're also not obscene.

ARTURO

Maybe to him we are.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, come on, no PDA?

ARTURO

Yes, none. Children shouldn't be exposed to adult romantic displays of any kind... We shouldn't have. It's my mission in life to deny homophobes the ammunition.

CHRISTIAN

It would have made any difference to that goon.

ARTURO

If he wasn't offended, why did he start up with us?

(CHRISTIAN looks in the cupboard)

CHRISTIAN

I don't know or care. Where are the clean bowls?

ARTURO

He has a right to be homophobic, you know.

(CHRISTIAN takes the popcorn out of the microwave.)

CHRISTIAN

Sure, it's a free country.

ARTURO

No, I mean beyond that.

CHRISTIAN

Hide a kiss in 2026?

ARTURO

That's his best argument against us.

CHRISTIAN

He has a right to mouth off at anything he doesn't like. I have a right to pop him in his big ugly face.

ARTURO

That's where I think you're wrong.

CHRISTIAN

I'm a tax payer.

(CHRISTIAN opens the bag and begins eating.)

ARTURO

Christian.

CHRISTIAN

I am a tax-paying citizen. I have as much right to the "air" of the park as anyone else.

ARTURO

Air...

CHRISTIAN

My grandfather told me if you want to start a fight, throw the first punch. You're a virgin?

ARTURO

Huh?

CHRISTIAN

Pugilistically speaking?

ARTURO

I guess I am. I was taught to use my words.

CHRISTIAN

By your mom?

ARTURO

That's simplistic.

CHRISTIAN

Who else is going to fill your mind with that conciliatory nonsense.

ARTURO

You're a teacher, Christian.

CHRISTIAN

I'm a Phys Ed teacher, Arturo.

ARTURO

You're a PE teacher, that suggests patience and verbal skills.
You spend your days teaching children about "fair play" and
"physical boundaries."

(CHRISTIAN places his bruised though firm hand on Arturo's jaw
to turn his head toward the window.)

CHRISTIAN

Not after 3pm.

(Christian turns back to the popcorn, opens the bag. Takes a
kernel. Offers the bag to Arturo. Arturo hesitates, then takes
one. They eat in silence. Blackout.)