

An excerpt from

WHAT I DIDN'T LEARN IN COLLEGE

a comedy by Rich Orloff

Characters

HAL, early 20's, a recent liberal arts college graduate
BRAD, mid-20's, a slick, self-assured, commodities trader
JENNA, mid-20's, an attractive and cynical woman, Brad's girl friend
GARRY, 19, Jenna's younger brother, an aspiring Brad
WILBUR, mid-20's, a young Falstaff, coarse but charming
EUGENE, mid-20's, a laid-back guy with offbeat tastes
CLAIRE, early 20's, Wilbur's sister, smart and insecure

Setting

The very lived-in living room of a home in Evanston, Illinois.
September 1979 – May 1980

In September 1979, HAL, an introspective young man who just graduated from a small liberal arts college moves into a group house shared by a bunch of rowdy, irreverent, fraternity-types. In this scene from Act One, Hal has lived with the guys for two months. Hal strives to be a writer of essays, most of which harshly judge his generation's values. Easygoing EUGENE has thought of writing, too. But he's never gotten beyond the thinking stage.

In the previous scene, fun-loving WILBUR and the others talked Hal into attending a mud wrestling show with the guys. Meanwhile, GARRY's foolproof system of gambling on football games hasn't been working well.

It's an early evening in November. The doorbell rings. And rings again. And again. From upstairs we hear:

HAL (o.s.)
Am I the only one home?

The doorbell rings again. Hal runs downstairs, carrying a pad of paper. He opens the door. In the doorway is Wilbur's younger sister CLAIRE. Claire has a shy and awkward but intelligent look about her.

CLAIRE
Hello, is Wilbur –

HAL
Be with you in a second.

Hal writes something down, looks at it, and then crumples it.

CLAIRE

You must be Hal.

HAL

And you're –

CLAIRE

Claire.

HAL

Wilbur's sister.

CLAIRE

Is he home?

HAL

I think he's out playing football.

CLAIRE

When do you expect him back?

HAL

As soon as they run out of beer.
Would you like to come in?

CLAIRE

Thanks. So Wilbur's told me all about you.

HAL

Don't believe him.

CLAIRE

Don't worry; I haven't believed him since he
told me Santa Claus had orgies with his elves.
So you *like* living here?

HAL

It's not that bad.

CLAIRE

Can't find anyplace cheaper, huh?

HAL

Not a one. But what the hell, I'm applying to
grad schools for next fall, so it's only for a year.

CLAIRE

I can't imagine lasting here a week.

HAL

Well, it's not that easy living here, but, well, I really like living just a few blocks from Lake Michigan. I probably walk there two or three times a day, when life doesn't make sense, or when there are too many words in my head and they need a chance to settle. I climb on the rocks at the water's edge, and I love how I'm in a quiet, almost womb-like park, with skyscraper Chicago viewable in the distance, almost touchable but far enough away not to overwhelm me.

CLAIRE

You sound like a writer.

HAL

I've been working on that paragraph for two months.

CLAIRE

I like it.

HAL

Thanks.

CLAIRE

So what are you working on now?

HAL

An essay examining how mud wrestling is a barbaric tribal ritual of male domination responding to the threat of female equality.

CLAIRE

Neat. I'm glad *somebody's* pointing that out.

HAL

You really think so?

CLAIRE

I find the whole phenomenon disgusting.

HAL

Really?

CLAIRE

Yeah, and when I tried to talk to my brother about it, all he'd say was "oink, oink". Apparently, he had a great time.

HAL

Well, he had a few more beers than I had.

CLAIRE

That must've taken the edge off the coke.

HAL

They did coke, too?

CLAIRE

They didn't offer you any?

HAL

No, but that does explain why they kept going to the bathroom in groups.

Garry and Wilbur enter from outside. Both wear sweatshirts and shorts. Wilbur is particularly messy and muddy.

CLAIRE

Did you forget tonight's Dad's birthday?

WILBUR

No.

CLAIRE

We're supposed to be at the restaurant in ten minutes.

WILBUR

You want me to go like this?

CLAIRE

You want Dad to have an explosion?

WILBUR

I don't give a fuck if Dad has an explosion.

CLAIRE

It's his birthday, asshole.

WILBUR

It's not my fault he was born.

Eugene enters from the kitchen.

EUGENE
Hey, Claire.

CLAIRE
Hey, Eugene.

HAL
Eugene, did you hear the doorbell ring?

EUGENE
Yeah.

HAL
Why didn't you answer it?

EUGENE
I've learned not to react to
everything I hear in my head.

CLAIRE
(handing a card to Wilbur:)
Here's the address. Try not
to be *too* late, okay?

WILBUR
Yes, sir!

CLAIRE
It was nice meeting you, Hal.

HAL
It was nice meeting you, too.

CLAIRE
I'd love to read some of your writing someday.

HAL
I'd be glad to show it to you.

CLAIRE
Great. See ya.

Claire exits.

EUGENE
All right!

GARRY

I finally get why guys become writers.

HAL

What are you talking about?

GARRY

She wants you.

HAL

She wants to read my stuff.

EUGENE

That's because you don't have etchings.

HAL

You guys really think she likes me?

WILBUR

Hey, I think you'd be good together.

HAL

You think so?

WILBUR

Yeah. You both reek of sensitivity.

GARRY

If you want, when you bring her back here, we'll all hang out downstairs so you'll be forced to go to your bedroom.

HAL

I'd rather start in the living room, if you don't mind.

GARRY

Have it your way.

WILBUR

Well, I better rush or my old man might have a heart attack.

Wilbur exits upstairs, slowly.

GARRY

Either of you guys have five hundred bucks you can spare?... Shit.

Garry exits.

EUGENE

So what's hangin'?

HAL

Not much. And you?

EUGENE

Not much.

HAL

I read your essay.

EUGENE

Already? Thanks.

HAL

I made some notes if now's a good time.

EUGENE

If now's a good time for you.

HAL

I'll get my notes.

EUGENE

Great.

Hal exits upstairs. Eugene sits on the couch. He notices something wedged between two cushions. It's half a burger. He sniffs it and takes a bite. Hal returns.

HAL

I didn't want to ruin your only copy,
so I typed up my notes.

EUGENE

I really appreciate this, man.

HAL

My first page is general thoughts, and on
pages two through eight, the first column
refers to your page number and the
second to the line on the page.

EUGENE

Wow.

HAL

Overall, I think your essay shows talent, but –

EUGENE

It sucks.

HAL

I didn't say that.

EUGENE

You didn't have to. Your notes are longer than my essay.

HAL

It was a good exercise for me; it reminded me of all the rules I sometimes forget.

EUGENE

Looks to me like you didn't forget any of them.

HAL

My main concern is, I never knew what your primary thesis was, other than, well, you really like Shemp.

EUGENE

That's my primary thesis.

HAL

Besides the fact that I'm not sure there's a market for an appreciation of Shemp, well, just too much of your language is imprecise.

EUGENE

I just wrote like I think.

HAL

Yeah. Let me give an example. Like here. What does "Shemperrific" mean?

EUGENE

It means like totally Shemp.

HAL

But what does "totally Shemp" mean?

EUGENE

It means like 100% Shempalicious.

HAL

And what does "100% Shempalicious" mean?

EUGENE

As Shemp as you can get.

HAL

So you mean, "quintessential".

EUGENE

Yeah, like maximum Shempitude.

HAL

You might want to write that, and be very specific regarding how you define Shempitude.

EUGENE

Yeah, I'll think about that.

HAL

And this may seem minor to you, but in all the writer's manuals I read, they stress the importance of appearance: clean margins, things like that. Some of your pages go to the very bottom.

EUGENE

Well, you know, I got caught up in a thought.

HAL

It's not very professional.

EUGENE

Oh. Well, hey, I appreciate your input, man.

HAL

I hope it helps.

EUGENE

It does.

HAL

Did you uh have a chance to read my piece?

EUGENE

Yeah. Now where'd I put it. Oh, yeah.

Eugene takes out Hal's essay from his back pocket.

EUGENE (cont'd)

I see what you mean about presentation.
You really know how to hyphenate.

HAL

Thanks.

EUGENE

And I really liked your comparison between
mud wrestling and Roman circuses.

HAL

So you liked how I drew parallels
between two decaying civilizations?

EUGENE

Well, that and, mostly you reminded me
how much I like gladiator movies.

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