



BOY GETS GIRL **Study Guide**

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City Lights Theatre Company Presents

Boy Gets Girl

Written by Rebecca Gilman

Directed by Ross Nelson

January 17- February 17, 2008

I. The Play

A. Synopsis

Theresa Bedell, a respected magazine writer, goes on a blind date with the mysterious Tony. He seems nice enough at first, but she soon realizes he wants more than she is willing to give. Even after she tells him to leave her alone, he persists in his unwanted attentions. He becomes a stalker, following her to work and leaving her threatening notes. His pursuit of Theresa and her efforts to protect herself bring up issues of gender roles, privacy, and the true meaning of personal strength.

B. Setting & Characters

Setting

New York City. Present Day.

Characters

Theresa Bedell - A 30-something writer for the magazine *The World*. She is extremely involved in her work, and not interested in a serious romantic relationship. When asked, she describes herself as a feminist. She continuously attempts to show the men in her life, be they employees, friends, or people she interviews for the magazine, how to understand women without objectifying them.

Tony - A guy Theresa knows through several degrees of separation - he knows Theresa's best friend's younger sister. He first appears to be a nice, somewhat emotionally troubled, romantic guy. As the action develops, however, he is revealed to be obsessive and controlling.

Howard Siegel - Theresa's boss. By many standards, he is a failure in his emotional life: after his wife divorced him, he lived with his mother until her death. His closest relationships are with Mercer and Theresa, both of whom work for him. He is intelligent and kind, if somewhat unintentionally chauvinistic.

Mercer Stevens - "The new guy" in the office, Mercer is as much a proponent of women's rights as Theresa. Even when he acts in a sexist manner, he is the first to call himself on it. He is a good friend of both Howard and Theresa.

Harriet - Theresa's new secretary. Harriet is young, inexperienced, and sweet, if a little dim.

Madeleine Beck - A plainclothes police officer. Beck is assigned mainly to cases, like Theresa's, having to do with stalkers. She has her own history of attempting to be respected as a woman.

Les Kennkat - A filmmaker. Les appears extremely sexist; his films exist, as he himself says, to allow men to see women's breasts. However, he has a softer side. Despite his offensively chauvinistic career, Theresa is able to discover his vulnerabilities.

C. About the Playwright

Rebecca Gilman was born in Trussville, Alabama. She attended Middlebury College and is a graduate of Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama. She holds an MFA in playwriting from the University of Iowa. She is the recipient of the Roger L. Stevens Award from the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays (*Spinning into Butter*); the Osborn Award, given by the American Theatre Critic's Association, an After Dark Award (*The Glory of Living*), and four Joseph Jefferson Awards for Best New Play (*The Glory of Living*, *Spinning Into Butter*, *The Crime of the Century* and *Boy Gets Girl*), as well as numerous other awards.

D. Historical Context

One website (www.antistalking.com) classifies stalkers in three different ways: the intimate partner stalker, who refuses to believe a relationship is over; the delusional stalker, who has had little to no contact with their victim; and the vengeful stalker, who seeks revenge upon their victim for some real or imagined wrongdoing. Clearly, these three categories are not all-inclusive; it is possible for a stalker to fall under more than one of these rather restrictive definitions. It is also possible for stalkers to suffer from a disorder called erotomania – this is a psychological condition in which the sufferer believes a person of a higher social status (their doctor, teacher, lawyer, or a celebrity, for example) to be in love with them.

It is important to understand, in learning about stalkers and their victims, that it is possible for the stalker to need just as much help as the victim. Although the person being stalked is in more physical danger, the stalker requires emotional support. This should NOT be offered by the person being stalked – literature on stalking makes clear how vital it is for victims of stalking to break off all contact with the person following them. However, stalkers themselves, while dangerous, are rarely strong, self-confident individuals. Although they pose a very immediate threat, they cannot be expected to simply give up and go away; they need help just as much as their victims do.

William Dean Howells (who is mentioned in the play) was an American writer who lived from 1837-1920. He worked as a journalist, and also published several

novels, the best known of which is probably *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). In 1908, he was elected the first president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was extremely politically active; many of his stories and novels were concerned with issues of race, labor, and the professions available to women.

E. Production History

The World Premier of *Boy Gets Girl* was performed in the year 2000 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. Michael Maggio directed the production.

Theresa Bedell.....	Mary Beth Fisher
Tony.....	Ian Lithgow
Howard Siegel.....	Matt DeCaro
Mercer Stevens.....	David Adkins
Harriet.....	Shayna Ferm
Les Kennkat.....	Howard Witt

City Lights' production of *Boy Gets Girl* performed from January 17-February 17, 2008. It was directed by Ross Nelson, with scenery designed by Ron Gasparinetti, lighting by Brendan Bartholomew, and costumes by Amanda Folena. Performing in it were:

Theresa Bedell.....	ej Taylor
Tony.....	Jeff Clarke
Howard Siegel.....	Ken Boswell
Mercer Stevens.....	Jason Arias
Harriet.....	Melissa Quine
Madelein Beck.....	Rachel Bakker
Les Kennkat.....	James G. Mantell

II. The Production

A. The Director At Work, with responses from Director

1) What is it about this play that is important to you? Why is it important that the play be produced?

Boy Gets Girl is a play whose message is disturbing, real and relentless. It touches on a subject matter that most people would believe only happens to celebrities. It is so very topical that one can find reference to this type of behavior on a very regular basis in the news.

2) What is the message about stalking say to you? What do you want the audience to leave with?

The theme of Boy Gets Girl is one of constant abuse of personal space and freedom. Its nefarious infection affects everyone in the play and twists the lives of not only Theresa, but also those who surround her. Those attending should leave with a real respect for this kind of behavior that we believe only happens to others.

3) What is one of your favorite parts of the production, and why?

I think the playwright's ability to find humor in a very disturbing environment is critical to the success of the play. Life is surprising. It's the surprising moments of Boy Gets Girl that makes it a great play.

B. The Actors At Work

1) What are some of the ways in which you are like your character? How are you different? What must you do, as an actor, to bridge the gap between these differences?

Rachel Bakker (Beck): Beck and I are both doers and we like to help people. So I would share Beck's frustration about how hopeless some of her cases seem - never being able to catch the harassers, and watching her clients suffer.

However, I am allowed to be more of an open book than my character. Beck is a very feeling person, but this job forces her to keep emotions under check for the sake of her clients and herself. Getting too attached would be disabling. My personality is much more open when it comes to feelings and vulnerability, because I don't have to deal with harassment cases every day.

In order to bridge the gap between Beck and me I focus on the fact that Beck's public profile is all business. And since Beck and I both like helping people, I am able to understand her vulnerable side when she opens up to clients.

Jeff Clarke (Tony): I'm similar to Tony in the sense that I've wanted to be with a woman who didn't reciprocate. I think we've all dealt with unrequited feelings, and that germ of truth allows the audience to connect with Tony on a human level. I'm very different in most other ways, in that I've never stalked anyone, never threatened anyone, ect. To bridge the gap between my character and myself, I start with that universal germ of truth I spoke of earlier. Believable acting consists of taking a small truth, and shaping it to fit an fictional situation. We've all had a version of Tony's feelings. The difference is most of us don't take those feelings to violent or criminal ends.

James G. Mantell (Les Kennkat): Like: We're about the same age. Unlike: Everything else. Well, I appreciate female breasts, but not to the same degree. Bridging the gap is acting. I don't believe it's necessary for me to be like my character, or even sympathetic to him; only to imagine the kind of human being who acts and speaks like that character.

ej Taylor (Theresa): I'm a woman who wants to be happy in love and in career. I have that in common with my character. Like her, I'm also one who likes to have control in all situations – though I don't always manage it.

Unlike her, I'm not as confident or as in control as she is in her life and in her career at the start of the play so that takes some work.

2) What does this piece say to you about real life, specifically stalking?

Rachel Bakker (Beck): Aggressive behavior, like stalking, harassing, yelling, etc. is all about the stalker or yeller, not about the behavior of the person on the receiving end.

Before reading this script I understood it intellectually, but not emotionally. Now it's completely clear. Theresa did NOTHING to encourage Tony or make him pursue her. Everything was in Tony's mind. He made up a story that fit his emotional needs and played it out.

Jeff Clarke (Tony): This piece says to me that we all need to be conscious about our actions and how we see other people. Stereotypes are something we need to change, but also something we need to be aware of as we interact with others.

James G. Mantell (Les Kennkat): Stalking, per se? Not much. I read the play as a meditation on male and female sexuality; particularly the social limitations on masculine sexual aggressiveness, and feminine sexual passivity.

ej Taylor (Theresa): I met my husband online so the possibility of this happening to me was very real – I would have friends call me during the date – like she does, meet the guy in a public place, not give out my home info or even my real name until I felt comfortable. Since we've started work on this show, there have been a few women killed by a man stalking them – one in San Jose by her trainer. It's a very real possibility!

3) What do you most hope that the audience will take away from their experience in watching this production?

Rachel Bakker (Beck): We are all a little like Tony - we make up stories and perceive others' actions the way we want to perceive them according to our own inner drives. The only difference is that Tony's stories were dangerous.

Jeff Clarke (Tony): I hope our audience will walk away examining their own lives, and examine how they treat other people. All great theatre raises questions in the audience's minds. This is not so much a "stalking play" as it is a look at the less desirable aspects of the human condition. If we can get the audience to look at themselves in relation to the themes of this play, we've done our job.

James G. Mantell (Les Kennkat): That they saw a good performance of an interesting play.

ej Taylor (Theresa): We take a lot for granted in our lives; food, shelter, safety and it could all change so quickly. We're lucky in the USA in so many ways to not have overt threats when we walk out our door but they are there. So I would say, be sure to take a moment to appreciate all you have.

III. For Discussion

A. What to Look For as You Watch the Play

1. The characters in this play are present in many different ways – even when they are not physically present on stage, their presence in each other's lives can be important. Note how this production deals with the issue of physical vs. implied psychological presence.
2. Gender roles and rights are a prevalent issue in this piece. Do you think costumes are used to emphasize the various levels to which the characters fit gender stereotypes? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. How does the set contribute to the plot? The character development?
4. Note the many different forms of communication in this play; speech, written correspondence, and vandalism, to name a few. What do the different characters' chosen modes of communication say about them individually?
5. As the show progresses, Tony appears less and less sympathetic – but when we first meet him, he seems like a regular guy, possibly a romantic interest for Theresa. How does Gilman achieve this gradual progression?

B. Quiz

1. How do Theresa and Tony meet?
2. Is Theresa a feminist?
3. What does Tony keep sending to Theresa's office?
4. Over the course of the show, whom does Theresa interview?
5. Is Howard married?
6. What article does Mercer want to write?
7. Where does Theresa move when she leaves her apartment?
8. What sort of letter does Theresa receive while she is on the phone with a potential landlord?
9. Did Officer Beck go to college?
10. In the story Theresa tells Officer Beck, how does she feel about kissing the man at the bar?
11. How does Harriet lose her job?
12. What condition is Theresa's apartment in when Howard and Mercer go there to pack up her things?
13. What topic does the *Denver Free Press* hire Theresa to write about?
14. Where does Theresa eventually go to visit Les?
15. What is the name of the magazine where Theresa, Howard and Mercer work?

B. Quiz Answers

1. How do Theresa and Tony meet? *Linda, a mutual friend, sets them up on a blind date.*
2. Is Theresa a feminist? *Yes.*
3. What does Tony keep sending to Theresa's office? *Flowers.*
4. Over the course of the show, whom does Theresa interview? *Les Kennkat, who makes movies that focus on women's breasts.*
5. Is Howard married? *No; he is divorced.*
6. What article does Mercer want to write? *He wants to write an article about the implications of stalking, and on how men perceive women.*
7. Where does Theresa move when she leaves her apartment? *She moves in with Howard.*
8. What sort of letter does Theresa receive while she is on the phone with a potential landlord? *She receives an obscene, threatening letter from Tony.*
9. Did Officer Beck go to college? *Yes.*
10. In the story Theresa tells Officer Beck, how does she feel about kissing the man at the bar? *She feels sick. She lets him kiss her because she thinks it's what's expected of her.*
11. How does Harriet lose her job? *Theresa fires her.*
12. What condition is Theresa's apartment in when Howard and Mercer go there to pack up her things? *It has been trashed.*
13. What topic does the *Denver Free Press* hire Theresa to write about? *Sports.*
14. Where does Theresa eventually go to visit Les? *In the hospital.*
15. What is the name of the magazine where Theresa, Howard and Mercer work? *It is entitled The World.*

C. Study Questions

1. The implications of stalkers' actions have a great deal to do with the nature of privacy. Why, given this fact, do you think Gilman chose to express this story in the form of a play?
2. Are Howard and Mercer sexist? How so/how not? Why are they this way?
3. In your opinion, has Theresa "lost" by choosing to move and work under an assumed name? By the same token, has Tony "won"?
4. Why does Theresa ultimately treat Les as a friend? Is this a sign of weakness on her part, or greater understanding? Why? How?
5. Why does Tony stalk Theresa?

D. Further Reading/ Bibliography

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