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ISOLATION

Drama by
HAROLD J. HAYNES

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(ISOLATION)

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***The act of Isolation
is likened unto a great pendulum
swinging back and forth
across our lives and across our psychic—
always present, always there,
threatening to destroy our very being.
Unchecked, it holds sway over us.
Be it a jammed door or a darkened abyss,
it nevertheless opens
a great chasm within our soul,
into which we unwillingly descend—
and from which we sometimes find it
impossible to escape.
—Harold J. Haynes***

Dedication

To

***Janie, Harry, Jr., Pop,
Betty, Marcus, and Elizabeth;***

and to

***Shirley Moore, Billy Turner,
Melba Johnson, Betty T. Thompson,
Derrick Farrow, John Manley, Richard Nash,
Laura Arzola, Griselle Cano,
Martha Woods, Catherine Civello,
Michael P. Fosher, Professor C. Lee Turner,
and the Reverend and Mrs. C. Anderson Davis***

ABOUT THE PLAY

Harold J. Haynes, author of the gripping musical, **I JUST WANNA TELL SOMEBODY**, has written another enormously dramatic script in this non-musical tale of four high school boys who break into the school gym and accidentally lock themselves in. In their desperation to get out, their tempers begin to flare and their true natures are revealed.

Originally designed for performance by an all-black cast, the play may, of course, use actors of any race or a mixture of races.

John Manley, drama director at E. L. Furr Senior High School in Houston, wrote: "After reading the script, my students and I could tell right away that this would be a superb production. It was amazing to us how Mr. Haynes was able to capture the true dialogue of today's inner-city teens. I was impressed and so was our community and administration. In fact, we were asked to present the play for a faculty in-service that was aimed at getting teachers to understand inner feelings of our students. We had so much success with their production, we were asked to hold it over for two extra weeks. This play is both real and magical."

Playing time: 35-40 minutes

ISOLATION

Cast of Characters

TAD—a lover who's lonely
LOFTIN—a virgin who's not ashamed
CEDRICK—a thief who's mostly honest
CLOVIS—a bully who's afraid
MR. LENNOX—a local store owner
MRS. JOHNSON—Clovis's Mother
MONICA—a loose girl
TRINA—Monica's best friend

The Place: In a school gym
The Time: Today

ISOLATION was originally presented by Wheatley High School, Houston, Texas, with the following cast. The production was designed and directed by John Manley.

Tad	Donyail Lindsey
Loftin	Todd James
Cedrick	Douglas Gray
Clovis	Eric Dean
Mr. Lennox	Tommy Grant
Mrs. Johnson	Shelita Bean
Monica	Mattie Preston
Trina	Tonia Leggett

ISOLATION

[Late one evening. A high school gymnasium. At curtain, TAD, LOFTIN, CEDRICK, and CLOVIS are on stage. Each is isolated by a shaft of LIGHT. The actors should be indiscriminately placed, so as not to establish a definable pattern. Each begins his lines as though he is stepping from some remote, dream-like-place-in-time into the reality of the moment. At first, neither notices the others. But, eventually, they become keenly aware of each other's presence. An air of hostility slowly begins to develop. All four boys, born and nurtured on the lower side of a large urban society, are now in their middle and late teens. On the surface they appear to be proud and defiant. However, upon closer examination, the picture becomes clouded by paradox. Locked in the pride of mysticism of youth, they struggle to find a way out of the irony of their situations. At first, each boy fights himself. Then, they fight with each other. Eventually, the battle becomes much larger. As each character begins to speak, his voice takes on a dream-like quality]

TAD. Sometimes . . . I wish I could just fling my arms open wide...

LOFTIN. It's . . . it's really not so bad, you know. I mean, everyone doesn't have to . . .

CEDRICK. Not . . . everything I see do I really want or need . . .

CLOVIS. Me? . . . There ain't a thing in this mixed-up, crummy world I'm afraid of . . .

LOFTIN. I'm afraid—

CEDRICK—I'm afraid—

TAD. . . . But, I'm afraid my arms might not be large enough to hold everybody . . . to hold the one who could really make me happy. So, I just go from one girl to the next . . . loving them . . . then leaving them . . . Moving and running so fast that I never stop to consider—

LOFTIN. . . . To . . . You know . . . I mean . . . Look at me! I can't even say the words. I can't even whisper the filth that others openly joke about as they go up and down the halls at school . . . They make it all seem so . . . so cheap! . . . so unclean! Sometimes, I wish I could just rip this skin from my flesh! . . . when . . . you know . . . that need arises, but—

CEDRICK. . . . But, something inside of me, that's hard to control, urges me to . . . to take . . . and take . . . and take . . . until there ain't hardly anything left to take. Why do I feel such a need to possess? . . . to own things? . . . I'm afraid—

TAD. I'm afraid—

LOFTIN. I'm afraid—

CLOVIS. . . . I ain't afraid of nothing . . . and nobody! I hurt people. Sometimes, I hurt them real bad—even when they haven't done me a thing. Sometimes, I just pick them out of a crowd. And I just hurt them! Hurt them before they can hurt me. Hurt them when there is really no reason to . . . I mean . . . We all have our weaknesses . . . Don't we? . . . Me, I . . . I just hurt people. Maybe . . . sometimes it's just because I want them to . . . to hurt me back . . . But, they never do.

TAD, LOFTIN, CEDRICK. [*Turning to Clovis*] We all have our fears. No matter how young or how old—how weak or strong. We are all haunted, shaken, stalked by all kinds of fears—

CEDRICK. —Fears that creep into our minds—

LOFTIN. —Fears that live within the hidden spaces of our souls—

TAD. —Fears that crowd into the depths of our beings—

TAD, LOFTIN, CEDRICK. Fears . . . Fears that stretch the limits of our hearts—

[Stage LIGHTS come up to include the whole stage as the individuals become a group]

CLOVIS. [*Growling*] Say, man, let's cut the gab! I'm gonna try that stupid door again. [*He rushes toward the door off stage*]

TAD. [*Calling out to him*] What's the use, Clovis? We've tried that door ten times in the last hour. I'm telling you that door's not gonna open!

CEDRICK. Look, take it from a man who makes a living out of breaking through doors—

CLOVIS. [*Stomping back in*] —No! You look! I'm not staying shut up in this gym all night with you hard heads! I got a score to settle across town with some dudes from Riverside High. If I don't show, my buddies are gonna think I turned yellow. We're supposed to meet at Doc's at seven sharp. What time is it, anyway?

TAD. [*Annoyed*] It's *time* for you to shut up!

CLOVIS. What? . . . I hope I didn't hear you right, man.

CEDRICK. [*Hoping to nip a pending explosion*] Aw, he didn't mean nothing, Clovis.

TAD. [*Refusing to back down*] To heck I didn't! Every since we got into this mess you've done nothing but complain. If you're so tough, why

don't you knock down those steel doors or bust through these brick walls? Or better still . . . why don't you climb up to one of the windows and jump out? They're only twenty-five or thirty feet high. Or maybe you're not as tough as you pretend. Just maybe, under that tough skin of yours you're hiding a coward.

CEDRICK. [*Urging caution*] Tad—

TAD. [*Rubbing it in*] Coward? . . . Yeh . . . That's it! I think Mr. Bully—Mr. Big Man is really afraid.

CLOVIS. [*Rushing toward Tad*] I'll show you who's afraid!

CEDRICK. [*Restraining Clovis*] Calm down, Clovis! Man, you know Tad is all mouth. He didn't mean it.

TAD. To heck I didn't!

CEDRICK. Besides, he's too light weight for you. He ain't even in your league. Just think what the boys would say if they knew you lost your cool with Pretty Boy here. [*CLOVIS relaxes a bit*]

TAD. That's right! You better tell that chump something to calm him down. I might be a lover, but that ain't to say I'm not a fighter, when I take a mind to.

CLOVIS. [*Shaking Cedrick off*] Let me go, Cedrick! I wouldn't think of touching Pretty Boy here. Why I've beaten up girls that were tougher than Tad.

TAD. And I just bet that's how you *really* get your kicks. Me, I don't fight 'em. I make love to 'em. And believe me, they like that a whole lot better than a knock upside the head. [*LOFTIN breaks into laughter*] And just what's so funny?

LOFTIN. [*Killing the laugh immediately*] Nothing.

CLOVIS. Loftin, it's all your fault we're locked up in this stinking gym in the first place. I ought to take my tennis shoes and stuff them down your putrid little throat!

LOFTIN. It's not my fault! Don't go blaming it on me! It wasn't my idea to pry the door open. You're the one who jammed the lock. Cedrick tried to show you a better way, but you were too stubborn to listen. Besides, we could've played ball out on the court in Brewster Park.

CLOVIS. Man, nobody wanna play ball on concrete!

CEDRICK. Man, it's glass and rocks all over that court!

TAD. And what would the babes say if I came to school all scratched and cut up?

LOFTIN. I could care less about the babes!

CLOVIS, CEDRICK, TAD. Yeah . . . We know.

LOFTIN. —And what's that supposed to mean?

TAD. Well, Loftin, it ain't exactly a secret that you're the undisputed prude of East Kemp High.

CEDRICK. You're the only dude I know who hasn't had your official *initiation* yet.

CLOVIS. Man, what are you waiting for?

LOFTIN. See! See! There you go again. All you fools ever talk about is sex. That's not the only thing there is in the world, you know.

CLOVIS. No. But I don't see nobody signing a petition to eliminate it neither!

TAD. Like they say, "Try it. You might like it."

LOFTIN. I haven't tried it! And I'm not gonna try it 'til I'm good and ready! I can wait. I'm not as perverted as you guys are. I keep my mind on other things.

CLOVIS. Okay, virgin brain, why don't you fix your mind on a way to get us out of this joint. I don't get my kicks out of being locked in a creepy gym with three guys I don't care too much for.

TAD. *[To Clovis]* The feeling is mutual.

CEDRICK. *[Refereeing again]* Okay, let's not start that again. We need to put our heads together and find a way to get out of here. My mom has a place set at the supper table for me. I bet she's beginning to serve dinner right about now. If I don't show pretty soon, she'll really start to worry.

TAD. I thought breaking in was your specialty.

CEDRICK. *Breaking in* is my specialty. *Breaking out*—Now that's another matter altogether.

CLOVIS. Well that's just too bad because it looks like we're gonna be stuck here all night unless somebody comes up with some kind of a plan.

LOFTIN. Well, fellows, it isn't really that bad. We could use this as an opportunity to get to know each other better.

CLOVIS. Man, just shut up! While you might like to get to know these guys better, that ain't my idea of fun. Besides, it's your fault we're in this mess anyway! If you hadn't slammed the door when you came in, it wouldn't have jammed in the first place. I ought to ring your stupid little neck!

LOFTIN. As I recall, Clovis, you were the one who pried the door open. Perhaps you jammed the lock when you—

CLOVIS. *[Interrupting]*—Perhaps I ought to jam my fist down your throat!

CEDRICK. Now, it's not doing any good trying to lay the blame on each other. The fact is we're gonna stay locked up until Coach gets here in the morning.

TAD. At which time, we'll either be suspended or thrown into jail for trespassing, unlawful entry, and—

CLOVIS. Jail! Not jail! Naw, man! I can't be locked up in no jail! *[CLOVIS begins to pace the floor as the OTHERS look on quite baffled]* I can't stand being locked in no small places!

[The following lines are spoken in an overlapping fashion]

CLOVIS. When you're locked in a small place, something sucks at the air so's you can't breathe. Then, everything goes black. And . . . and it's so dark you can't even tell if there's someone in there with you. You can't even see your hand in front of your face. . . Naw, man! I don't wanna be locked up. I just couldn't take it! I just couldn't take it! I'd feel like the walls were closing in on me or something. And in the dark, there are all kinds of little crawling, creeping things just waiting to tear at your flesh . . . just waiting to suck up all your oxygen! Naw! . . . I gotta get outta here! I gotta get outta here! *[CLOVIS begins to act more and more disturbed. There are traces that he might even think he is the object of some unseen attack. Here, we see Clovis in his most vulnerable state]*

TAD. Say, man, Clovis is starting to act real strange. I wonder what's the matter with him?

CEDRICK. I don't know what's the problem, but he's starting to give me the creeps!

LOFTIN. Cedrick, man, keep your voice down, I've seen guys like him before. It's what you call a *phobia*.

CEDRICK. Phobia?

LOFTIN. Shhhh! Yeah, phobia. It's what they call a hidden fear. Sometimes it drives a person crazy.

CEDRICK. Say, Loftin, keep *your* voice down! You don't know what this dude might do if we pressure him.

LOFTIN. *[Snapping CLOVIS out of it]* Take it easy, Clovis! Take it easy! *[LOFTIN takes him by the shoulder]*

CLOVIS. *[Apparently back to normal]* Say, man! What are you doing? Take your hands off me! I don't like people touching me. *[LOFTIN backs away quietly as CLOVIS flares up again]* My bag? Where's my bag? Say, man, who took my bag?

CEDRICK. Take it easy, Clovis! *[Pointing]* Your bag is right over there. *[CLOVIS rushes over to the bag and clutches it as if his life depended on it]*

TAD. *[Realizing the seriousness of the situation]* Take it easy, Clovis.

CLOVIS. *[Shouting defensively]* Everybody just stop telling me to take it easy! Just stop it! You hear me! Just stop it! *[No one says anything. They just stare at him as he frantically searches through his bag for something. Finally, he pulls out a rusty old .38 revolver and begins examining it. (NOTE: Please read warning about handling guns, page 22.)]*

CEDRICK. *[Spying the gun]* Be careful, Clovis! That thing might be loaded!

CLOVIS. *[Smiling strangely]* It is loaded, man. You think I'd be carrying around an empty gun? Bad dudes don't carry around empty guns. I was gonna give this baby some use tonight in the rumble across town, until you fools messed up my plans! *[CLOVIS nearly drops the gun, causing everyone to jump]*

TAD. *[Alarmed]* That old rusty thing might have a hair trigger! It could go off any time.

CLOVIS. *[Stroking the gun softly, almost worshipping it]* That's right, man! It could go anytime . . . BOOM! *[Laughing hysterically to himself for nearly scaring the OTHERS to death. As he crosses away from them]* Haha! Haaaaaaaa!

TAD. *[Quietly to the Others]* Fellows, I hate to bring up a subject like this, at a time like this, but I think we're locked up with a bonified maniac.

CLOVIS. *[Noticing there seems to be a conversation going on without him]* Say! What are you guys whispering about? You talking about me?!!!!

CEDRICK. *[Nervously]* We aren't talking about you. We . . . we just think you should put the gun away. It doesn't look too safe.

LOFTIN. *[Oblivious to the danger]* Besides, it's against the law to conceal a firearm on a high school campus. You could be fined and go to jail for that.

CLOVIS. Jail—j-j-j-jail!!! [*The gun starts trembling in CLOVIS's hand as he turns his back and walks away from them*] Naw, man! I can't be locked up in no jail!

CEDRICK. [*Jerking Loftin around to speak privately to him*] Look, you little fool! If you don't keep your mouth shut, you gonna get somebody killed. We need to keep Clovis as calm as possible until we can think of a way to get the gun. Understand?

LOFTIN. [*Nodding his head, now realizing the gravity of the situation*] Yeah . . . Sorry. I just really wasn't thinking.

CLOVIS. [*Turning and waving the gun at them*] Stop all that whispering! It makes me nervous. I don't like it—I don't like it at all!

CEDRICK, LOFTIN. [*Ad lib*] Sure . . . Anything you say, Clovis.

CLOVIS. [*Puts the gun back in his gym bag. The OTHERS breathe a sigh of relief*] Look, I'm gonna try that door again. There's got to be a way to unjam it.

TAD. [*Trying to get rid of him for a few minutes*] Yeah. Yeah. That's a good idea. If anybody can get it unjammed, we know you can, Clovis. Go right ahead. [*CLOVIS exits, taking the gym bag with him*] Man! This guy is a lunatic!

CEDRICK. Naw! He's not just a lunatic. He's a lunatic AND a maniac!

LOFTIN. [*Naively*] Now, fellows, I don't think we should be calling the guy names behind his back. It just isn't right.

TAD. [*Sarcastically*] Okay, wise guy! When he comes back, you can stand in his face and call him a lunatic and a maniac. Would that make you feel better? . . . Would it?

LOFTIN. [*Retreating slightly*] Well, I don't . . . think . . . that's exactly the way to approach it either.

TAD. You darn right it isn't! Wise up, Loftin. We're dealing with a psycho!

CEDRICK. And if you don't put a bridle on those loose lips of yours, you're liable to send him right over the edge. [*A beat*] Look, I tell you what. When Clovis gets back, let's try to calm him down. You know, get his confidence.

TAD. And just how are we supposed to do that?

CEDRICK. Simple. We just come up with something to take his mind off the problem of getting out of here.

LOFTIN. *[Getting the idea]* Right! I see what you're saying. If we can do something to get him distracted, one of us might have a chance at sneaking the gun out of his bag.

CEDRICK. Now you're using your head! I'll tell you what. *[Turning to Tad]* Tad, when Clovis comes back, I want you to try to get him to loosen up and tell us something about himself.

TAD. *[Following the plan]* Right.

CEDRICK. If he is a little reluctant, then I'll jump in and break the ice by telling a story of my own. That ought to loosen him up.

LOFTIN. *[Eager to share in a piece of the action]* Then, I'll maneuver around and sneak the gun out of his bag and hide it.

CEDRICK. No. I don't think so. You'd better leave that up to me. I have a lot more experience at that sort of thing.

LOFTIN. *[Sarcastically]* Yeah, I guess you have. *[CEDRICK gives Loftin a mean look]*

TAD. *[Focusing everyone back on their immediate objective]* Let's not start that again. We don't need to start fighting among each other. Right now, we need to try to deal with the problem at hand.

CEDRICK. *[Spying CLOVIS coming back]* Let's break it up. Clovis is on his way back.

CLOVIS. *[Entering, apparently frustrated]* Man! I still can't get that stupid door unjammed!

CEDRICK. Don't sweat it, Clovis. I'll try again myself, in a little while.

LOFTIN. Look, Clovis, you had a right to jump all over me a minute ago. It was all my fault. If only I hadn't—

TAD. *[Cutting LOFTIN off before he can do any damage]* —That's all water under the bridge now. I'm sure, if we put our heads together, we'll get out of here in no time.

CLOVIS. I hope so, 'cause I'm starting to feel closed in.

TAD. Say! Why don' we pass the time by starting a rap session. *[TAD elbows Loftin to coax him into helping push the idea]*

LOFTIN. Sure . . . Why not? That sounds like a good idea to me. But, what do we talk about?

CEDRICK. Let's rap about things that bug us. You know, things we ain't never really been able to tell anybody before.

CLOVIS. *[Cutting in]* I'll tell you what bugs me. It's the thought of being locked up in this crummy gym all night while there's some action

going on across town. *[Hitting his fist in his hand]* Boy! I'd like to get my hands on—

CEDRICK. *[Deliberately cutting in]* Speaking of getting your hands on somebody, I'd love to get my hands around Mr. Lennox's neck.

CLOVIS. *[Laying his gym bag down]* You and Old Man Lennox still going at it? I thought you two would of settled your gripes long ago.

CEDRICK. *[Realizing that Clovis has started to take the bait]* Naw. The old man ain't never gonna change. Every time I walk into that good-for-nothing store of his, he bugs me. In fact, let me tell you what happened just a few days ago.

[Suddenly, through a flashback, the scene shifts to the INTERIOR of MR. LENNOX'S store. CEDRICK enters hurriedly and calls out Mr. Lennox's name]

CEDRICK. Mr. Lennox! . . . Mr. Lennox!! . . . Say, Mr. Lennox!!!!!!!

MR. LENNOX. *[Entering, wiping his hands on his white apron]* Boy, I hear you! I hear you! You ain't got to be yelling at the top of your lungs. I heard you the first time you called. I might be old, but I ain't lost my hearing yet.

CEDRICK. Sorry, Mr. Lennox. I just thought you might have been out back in the alley.

MR. LENNOX. Boy, I could have been clean across the moon, and I still would have heard you. Loud as you were yelling. It's a good thing there ain't nobody in the store or you would have chased them off by now. I don't know why you boys can't come in a place of business and act civilized. If you ain't yelling me deaf, you stealing me blind. Boy, I tell you, y'all gonna be the ruination of me yet—

CEDRICK. I said I was sorry! I don't know why you got to keep on chewing the fat. And why you got to always call me "boy"? I'm eighteen years old, Mr. Lennox. And I been coming into this store once or twice a day every since I was big enough to carry a loaf of bread. And you STILL don't know my name yet!

MR. LENNOX. *[Quite agitated]* Boy! I know your name! Your name's Cedrick. You're eighteen years old. Your mama's name is Pearl and your dad's name is Leroy. And you ain't seen him since you was old enough to carry that loaf of bread you so proud of. I don't care if you're eighteen or eighty! You still gonna be a BOY to me.

CEDRICK. That's just fine! That's just great! You're such a big man. You got this big, fine store with your name on it . . . Lennox's Grocery . . . Yeah . . . You drive that long, fancy shiny car that don't hardly get dirty before you trade it in on a new one. You wear Italian shoes and imported suits, and sit in a big, fancy church and send up empty prayers to a God who knows you better than I do. But you still ain't nothing. You ain't got nothing. And worst of all, you don't feel nothing.

MR. LENNOX. Listen, you two-bit street corner juvenile delinquent! I don't need your self-righteousness. I've had about all the self-righteousness I can stand in one lifetime from you street corner punks turned evangelists. Boy! I knew you when you was wet behind the ears. You looked a lot better then, and at least you had some manners. But, now . . . now, you done changed. You done changed a lot, boy. And I can't say it's for the better. But that's all right. That's okay. You can be whoever you want. Just don't come around here, come around me, pretending to be what both of us know you ain't. [*A beat*] What you are is a two-bit punk who tries to steal me blind every time I turn my back. By the way, you can put back whatever you stole out of my store while you were waiting for me to come from out back.

CEDRICK. I ain't stole nothing from you, man!

MR. LENNOX. Well, if you didn't it'll be the first time. [**CEDRICK** puts a surprised look on his face] That's right! . . . I been watching you steal from me for years. And the only reason I ain't had your behind arrested is because I thought you was just going through a stage.

CEDRICK. A stage?

MR. LENNOX. That's right—a stage. Most boys who grow up in ghetto neighborhoods like this one go through it. But, eventually, they end up growing out of it. But it's taking you longer than anyone I ever seen. Listen boy. I was young once. All hot-headed and fiery-eyed like you. There were things I wanted that I could not have. And I ain't gonna stand up here and lie to you. Sometimes I took things—

CEDRICK. Stole—

MR. LENNOX. —Stole things . . . things that dazzled my eyes or fired my spirits. But I soon come to realize that every time I took—stole—something, I was stealing what another man had worked hard for. And, then, a sickening feeling would come over me. Finally, I came to realize that what I was doing wasn't right. So, I went out and got myself a job. I saved bit by bit until I could have a place of my own. Earn a living. Be