

BRUTAL LOVE

A Play

STEVE GRAY

- *Brutal Love* -

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A play providing a stark examination of psychological and physical hostility between individuals.

Brutal Love

Characters:

- CHRIS: Driven, malevolent, and deranged. She moves with a jagged, awkward energy.
- TONY: Harsh, tormented, and guarding. He is the anchor to Chris's chaos, though his own ethics are fraying.

Setting: A minimalist kitchen.

CHRIS: Do you feel it? The rattling?

TONY: It's just the pipes, Chris.

CHRIS: No. It's the secrets Tony, they're seething. They are in a fitful rage today.

TONY: Secrets, in a rage, okay then. Next you will be throwing words at me, strange ones, jumbled ones. loaded with angst, horror and bad intent.

CHRIS: And the sarcasm. We're ghosts, Tony. Drifting, off on some weird angle, reconciling, robust, raging, turned, convoluted, entangled, words Tony, WORDS.

CHRIS: Catch this one! 'Hello,' It's a, 'How was your day? Type of word' Hear it shatter?

TONY: A shattering word? This level of disharmony could give me a migraine. Look, we love each other. That's the constant, the rest are just words that bounce off each other in some form of rickety distrust, or vague meaningless, 'hrumph.'.

CHRIS: Is it love? Or is it just the 'ever-controlling similarity'? We're the same monster in different clothes. It's just that we have words. I have the best words. You have 'hrumph.' What ever is that?

TONY: Yes, yes, you have words, we both do. Our 'friend' was asking about us on the phone the other day. He's looking for the fractures. He wants to see the framework crumble, He'd like that, sick bastard.

CHRIS: Let him look! I'll give him a fracture. I'll give him a crevice! Deep and painful.

TONY: I don't let it show. You know that. I keep my ethics tight, even though they might fray a little. I've always kept him in check, you know that.

CHRIS: BANG! Buttons pushed! Here comes the barrage! You're a wreckage, Tony! A heavy-weighted, caustic wreckage!

TONY: I hold this wreckage. I'm holding it in my hand right now. Ohh it's slippery...

CHRIS: Do you hate it?

TONY: No. I think I've come to understand the hurt. I think I love it. Look at the shadows, Chris. They're wracked or is that wrecked? Maybe we should stop here and make adjustments, do you think? Maybe not. Oh sometimes I don't get this level of abstraction, this feeling, maybe other people won't get it? But I will always remember what you said, that time at the gallery, 'What's there to

get.' Profound, simply profound. Then I just let the rest of the world wash over me, oh so cleansing.

CHRIS: I'm letting go of the reins. Go on. Take them. Lead us into the dark. I want to see where we head.

TONY: I'm sitting back. I'm listening.

CHRIS: My language is... dilly-dallying. I'm looking for the details.

TONY: Are you hoping for some common ground?

CHRIS: Low dissent. A groove. Come, hold me close.

TONY: No... but I love you.

CHRIS: I love you. But it's rather dark outside.

TONY: You know, there was a time I wanted to kill you... Grab that small sharp knife out of the second drawer in our decrepit kitchen, the knife that's a bit bigger than the paring knife, I was SO incensed at the time. I wanted your blood to spill, to ooze over the front of you, to ooze onto the floor and have you desperately trying to say, 'but why!'

I became afraid, what if the blood spurted, and I would be covered in it? What if the force of it was such that there was no ooze, just a violent scene that I wouldn't be able to control. I slapped you in my mind, BANG, you fell slightly, knocked back by the force. It was a better outcome, nothing physically to clean up, just a solid hit and a red mark. You were startled, in my mind and no wonder.

CHRIS: When was that, what had I done?

TONY: You retreated in your communication style from being nice to gaslighting, me, under the bus I went and you let it run over me. BANG. It hurt so much, but there you were dismissive, so casual and I was left crippled by your words, the statements, the questions, to your 'no room to move' approach. I was held hopeless by your grip, it seemed like the only way out.

CHRIS: Ah, Ah yes I have some recollection of that. Yes, Yes, it was harsh, but you deserved it, I think?

TONY: Take a look at the glass, that filthy window. The earlier words are floating. Like a cloud, then drifting slowly they head towards the window.

CHRIS: They're condensating. The angst... they're just a fine lace of moisture now. The words they don't bite anymore, they simply slide carelessly down the glass, then eventually spill onto the floor.

TONY: The cold open spaces are getting warm. The late-night lectures are ending. We're the same, aren't we?

CHRIS: We always were. Wait? Same?

TONY: How long for?

CHRIS: Who only knows.

TONY: This is brutal.

CHRIS: This is love.

TONY: I think we should add some humor...

CHRIS: What, a touch of reality, a smearing of 'oh did you hear the one about' to cause the audience to go, ah some reality now it makes sense.

TONY: Yeah, reality.

CHRIS: No Tony, simply no.

TONY: No reality? *(He lets out a dry, hacking laugh)* Then what do we look like from the outside, Chris? A punchline without a joke. Two ghosts arguing over who owns the shroud.

CHRIS: *(Her movements grow jagged again, snapping her fingers wildly)*

Don't invite them in! The audience, the 'friend,' the people with their small, tidy lives. They want a sitcom. They want us to bow, wipe the glass clean, and tell them it was all a metaphor.

TONY: *(Stepping closer, his voice dropping into a harsh, steady register)*

It isn't a metaphor. My mind still aches from the last time you left me behind. I can still feel the weight of those silences, Chris. BANG. Remember? You said I deserved it.

CHRIS: *(Shivering, wrapping her arms around herself)*

The room is shrinking. Or the words are taking up too much space. Look, there's another one. 'Hopeless.' It's crouching in the corner. It has your eyes.

TONY: *(Quietly)*

Let it crouch. I'm not keeping the ethics tight anymore. The framework is crumbling, just like our friend wanted. *(He reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out a small, mundane object—a silver kitchen timer. He sets it on the floor between them. It ticks loudly, a sharp, rhythmic mechanical sound.)*

CHRIS: *(Staring at the timer, her voice dropping to a whisper)*

What... whatever is that? That's not a word. That's a boundary. I don't like boundaries. They lack... vocabulary.

TONY: It's time, Chris. Five minutes. In five minutes, the lease is up, the room is gone, and the world outside comes inside. Do we walk out together, or do we finally stop talking?

CHRIS: *(She slowly drops to her knees, staring at the ticking timer. Her energy softens into something genuinely fragile)*

If we leave... Who will catch my words? Who will let them turn to moisture? The people out there... they use language to mean things, Tony. It's so... literal.

TONY: *(He kneels opposite her, the timer ticking sharply between them)*

Nobody will listen to you out there. They'll just think you're mad. But I... I know the grammar of your grief.

CHRIS: *(A silence hangs between them, heavier than any word)*

Brutal.

TONY: *(He leans in, pressing his forehead against hers, closing his eyes)*

Love.

(The ticking of the timer grows deafeningly loud. The minimalist overhead light begins to fade, casting massive, wracked shadows against the window. The rattling in the pipes returns, louder this time, sounding like a collective intake of breath.)

CHRIS: *(Whispering into the dark as the light dies)*

Hear it shatter?

*(A sharp, sudden **SNAP**, the sound of the timer hitting zero, instantly paired with total blackout.)*

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY