



# DON'T GO GENTLE

BY **STEPHEN BELBER**



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World Premiere at the MCC Theater, September 2012  
Artistic Directors: Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey, & William Cantler  
Executive Director: Blake West

Thanks to the writers' retreat at the Château de Lavigny

DON'T GO GENTLE was presented by MCC Theater (Robert Lupone, Bernard Telsey and William Cantler, Artistic Directors; Blake West, Executive Director) at the Lucille Lortel Theater in New York City, opening on October 14, 2012. It was directed by Lucie Tiberghien; the set design was by Robin Vest; the costume design was by Jenny Mannis; the lighting design was by Matthew Richards; the original music and sound design were by Fabian Obispo; and the production stage manager was Matthew Silver. The cast was as follows:

LAWRENCE .....Michael Cristofer  
TANYA..... Angela Lewis  
RASHEED ..... Maxx Brawer  
AMELIA .....Jennifer Mudge  
BEN.....David Wilson Barnes

## **CHARACTERS**

LAWRENCE

TANYA

RASHEED

AMELIA

BEN

## **SETTING**

The well-appointed living and dining room area of a turn-of-the-century house in the Elmwood Village neighborhood of Buffalo.

# DON'T GO GENTLE

*The well-appointed living and dining room area of a turn-of-the-century house in the Elmwood Village neighborhood of Buffalo. The furniture is a mix of grand and cozy but has definitely seen better days. There is a door to the kitchen, stairs to the second floor, a window and an arched entrance to the front door vestibule.*

*And yet the set should not be overly naturalistic; perhaps a sense of splintered reality is helpful, a suggestion of fragment. All scene changes should be smooth, quick and fluid, with as little disruption as possible.*

*On a large armchair is Lawrence Driver, 72, dressed casually but an intense and intimidating presence. Across from him on a couch are Tanya and Rasheed. Tanya, 30s, nine gold hoops in her left ear, with a hard and self-protective exterior. Rasheed, 16, proud, definitely a teenager. If Lawrence is feeling awkward, he covers it with an all-business demeanor.*

LAWRENCE. So. As I said on the phone, my name is Lawrence Driver, I'm a retired judge, western district of New York, and before that a district attorney; your number was provided by the Erie County Bar Association from a list they had of people needing counsel. In other words, legal representation.

TANYA. I understand what counsel means.

LAWRENCE. Splendid.

TANYA. (*A look, then.*) Who put my name on that list?

LAWRENCE. I assumed you did.

TANYA. I didn't.

LAWRENCE. Well then, I assume it was someone else.

TANYA. And that's why I'm asking who.

LAWRENCE. (*Impatient.*) Maybe someone at the ever-industrious Civil Liberties Union. (*Beat; and then.*) I should thank you for coming. It's easier for me to work from home these days.

TANYA. You said on the phone about compensation?

LAWRENCE. (*A nod, re: file.*) According to this you were incorrectly sentenced due to your court-appointed lawyer having not realized that the smuggling of prison contraband less than an ounce was under review for reclassification — from a felony to a misdemeanor. You understand the difference between those two charges?

TANYA. (*Deadpan.*) One's worse than the other.

LAWRENCE. That's right. So he should've been *aware* of that review and advised you to plead differently. (*She stares at him, he stares right back ...*)

RASHEED. (*To Tanya.*) Can I go?

TANYA. Where you gotta go?

RASHEED. (*Taking out his phone.*) I got a text.

TANYA. Put it away —

RASHEED. But Ma —

TANYA. *Put it away.* (*He sheepishly puts back the phone; beat.*)

LAWRENCE. (*To Rasheed.*) What did you say your name was?

RASHEED. Rasheed.

LAWRENCE. And what kind of name is that?

RASHEED. It's black.

LAWRENCE. (*A nod.*) I thought it might be Arabic.

TANYA. It's not.

LAWRENCE. (*Noting her tone.*) Signing up to do pro-bono counseling was my daughter's idea, meaning I am in no way obliged. Thus my suggestion would be to lead with a tone of gratitude.

TANYA. And my suggestion would be don't do it if you don't wanna.

LAWRENCE. I'll keep that in mind. (*To Rasheed.*) I need to know where you stayed when your mother was in jail.

RASHEED. At my cousin's.

LAWRENCE. (*Writing.*) And where is that?

RASHEED. West side.

LAWRENCE. And where are you living now?

TANYA. Why is that important?

LAWRENCE. (*Strong.*) Because "compensation" *includes* reimbursement for lost housing, Ms. — (*Off his chart.*)

TANYA. Jenkins.

LAWRENCE. — Ms. Jenkins, and so I need to understand your housing situation. Do you plan on giving me a hard time about every question I ask?

TANYA. (*Dead-eye.*) ... We're still at my sister's.

RASHEED. (*Pause.*) It smells like dead cat. (*Off Lawrence.*) My cousin's.

LAWRENCE. I thought maybe you meant here.

RASHEED. No, you're fine. (*Lawrence nods a little ...*)

LAWRENCE. And you're still at that residence because — ?

TANYA. 'Cause I couldn't afford to keep up my rent while I was incarcerated.

LAWRENCE. (*Off the file.*) According to this you also lost your job? At a nursing home?

TANYA. They said I didn't call 'em in a timely fashion.

LAWRENCE. And why is that?

TANYA. Because my first two calls were to my sister and my son.

LAWRENCE. (*Taking this in ...*) The reason I agreed to look into this is because your court-appointed lawyer has a history of alcoholism as well as, in my opinion, woeful mental *deficiency*, so it seems that due to the fact that he *didn't* advise you to plead differently, you *are* entitled to some form of compensation. (*Tanya and Rasheed wait for more.*)

TANYA. Does that include my job?

LAWRENCE. Well, you did smuggle marijuana into a federal prison.

TANYA. I know what I did.

LAWRENCE. I'm sure you do. (*Another stand-off. Off file.*) The marijuana in question — it was for your boyfriend?

TANYA. *Ex-boyfriend.*

LAWRENCE. (*Off file.*) "Tony Johnson"?

RASHEED. (*Mumbled.*) Talk about deficient ...

TANYA. That's enough, Rasheed —

RASHEED. What, you think he's *normal*? —

TANYA. I *said* stop talkin'.

LAWRENCE. (*To Rash.*) You're saying Tony is mentally deficient?

RASHEED. I'm just saying he's *crazy*. Like he shoots *birds* —

TANYA. No, he doesn't —

RASHEED. He shot a little baby pigeon, Mom! —

TANYA. He's *not* crazy —

RASHEED. He shot a *baby pigeon POINT BLANK IN THE FACE!* —

TANYA. (*To Lawrence.*) Can we keep going?

LAWRENCE. Of course. (*Rasheed's pants vibrate ...*) Is that another text message?

RASHEED. (*Taking out phone.*) Naw, I'm just happy.

TANYA. Who is it?

RASHEED. Abdul. (*To Lawrence.*) He's black.

LAWRENCE. ... What are you, about seventeen?

RASHEED. Sixteen-point-five.

LAWRENCE. I have a grandson who's thirteen. He's a punk.

RASHEED. Why?

LAWRENCE. He plays too many video games.

RASHEED. That's not what a punk is. (*Lawrence is still looking at Rasheed.*)

LAWRENCE. Where do you go to school, Rasheed?

RASHEED. East Side High.

LAWRENCE. That's a long commute.

TANYA. It's where we were living before all this happened.

LAWRENCE. It's nice over there.

RASHEED. No, it's not.

LAWRENCE. When I was a prosecutor I used to go there all the time, there's that nice park, I forget the name —

TANYA. Martin Luther King.

LAWRENCE. That's right, they renamed it. It's an Olmstead.

TANYA. It's not a nice park.

LAWRENCE. Well, it *used* to be. (*Beat; to Tanya.*) If he needs to make a call, it's fine with me.

TANYA. (*Pause; to Rasheed.*) Just stay right out front.

RASHEED. Thank you. (*He stands, to Lawrence.*) Was nice to meet you. (*Lawrence nods as Rasheed exits; beat; to Tanya.*)

LAWRENCE. So here's what I'm willing to do, Ms. Jenkins: I can file on your behalf under the Wrongful Imprisonment Statute, which I should warn you can take up to a year to be reviewed. But before proceeding, I *would* need to be assured that you are completely drug-free and that you won't attempt any further contact with your ex-boyfriend.

TANYA. ... How do I know *you're* gonna do what you say?

LAWRENCE. I was a judge for twenty-three years.

TANYA. *And...?*



LAWRENCE. Misapplication of the law offends me; to my *core*. (*She looks at him ... as suddenly a small beeping is heard; Lawrence looks at his watch and switches off its alarm —*) Pardon me. (*He looks up, annoyed.*) I have to take a pill. (*He regards her, then stands, takes a pill bottle from a shelf, places it on the dining table. Tanya looks around ... Lawrence takes a single tablet from the pill bottle on the dining table and attempts to split it in half.*)

TANYA. ... What is that?

LAWRENCE. Adrucil. They removed a tumor from my stomach.

TANYA. Why're you cutting it in half?

LAWRENCE. I dislike the side effects.

TANYA. But it makes you better.

LAWRENCE. So does Pilates. (*And then.*) I take the other half at night. (*She watches as Lawrence unsuccessfully attempts to cut the pill in half...*)

TANYA. Maybe you should get a pill cutter. (*He looks at her, then almost reluctantly offers her the knife.*)

LAWRENCE. Feel free. (*He watches as she cuts the pill with a degree of expertise, and hands him half.*) Thank you. (*She nods and watches as he places it in his mouth; she then quietly hands him the glass of water. He drinks.*)

TANYA. Did you also get lesions?

LAWRENCE. Yes. One. On the back.

TANYA. It's stomach cancer, right?

LAWRENCE. They don't know.

TANYA. You using the ointment? You're supposed to use it five times a day.

LAWRENCE. ... I'll do it later.

TANYA. I'm a nurse tech. I ain't gonna bite. (*He looks at her ... He takes the cream from the pocket of his jacket, hands it to her, then rather shyly lifts up the bottom of his shirt, revealing a quarter-sized lesion on the small of his back. She opens the ointment —*)

LAWRENCE. Can you...? (*She hands him the cream. As he dabs his fingers with it, she gently holds up his shirt so that he can more carefully apply it. It's almost accidentally a simple, quiet, intimate process — and then it's done. He puts the cap on the cream; she hands him a tissue to wipe his hands with.*) Thank you.

TANYA. You're welcome. (*Beat.*)

LAWRENCE. OK then. You'll let me know if you'd like me to proceed, and if you'll agree to the terms?

# DON'T GO GENTLE

by Stephen Belber

3M, 2W

By all accounts, Judge Lawrence Driver was a powerhouse on the bench but a failure at home. Now retired and widowed, Lawrence volunteers to help Tanya, a young African American single mother caught up in legal red tape — and the kind of woman he regularly put behind bars. But do-overs don't come easy for either Lawrence or Tanya, especially when race, class and the long-simmering resentments of Judge Driver's adult children boil to the surface in this searing and surprising family drama.

*"[A] tale of angst, dysfunction and guilt ... absorbing ... crackles with biting humor."*  
—**The New York Times**

*"Belber stacks the deck neatly ... [and creates] distinctly uncomfortable yet profoundly telling barbs ... fascinating and keenly poignant."*  
—**BackStage**

*"How refreshing — a dysfunctional family drama in which you actually give a damn who gets written out of the will."*  
—**Variety**

*"Four stars ... Belber is deft at dissecting the personal and political jumble ..."*  
—**Time Out New York**

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