



# RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN

BY GINA GIONFRIDDO



DRAMATISTS  
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RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN  
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Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, commissioned and produced the world premiere of RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN Off-Broadway in 2012.

The following acknowledgments must appear on the title page in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play:

RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons with funds provided by The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Commissioning Program.

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*For my mother.*

RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN was produced at Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director; Carol Fishman, General Manager) in New York City, opening on June 12, 2012. It was directed by Peter DuBois; the set design was by Alexander Dodge; the costume design was by Mimi O'Donnell; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter; the sound design was by M.L. Dagg; the production manager was Christopher Boll; and the production stage manager was Lisa Ann Chernoff. The cast was as follows:

CATHERINE..... Amy Brenneman  
ALICE .....Beth Dixon  
AVERY ..... Virginia Kull  
GWEN .....Kellie Overbey  
DON ..... Lee Tergesen

RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN was produced at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, California, opening on August 13, 2013. It was directed by Peter DuBois; the set design was by Alexander Dodge; the costume design was by Mimi O'Donnell; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter and Jake DeGroot; the sound design was by M.L. Dagg; the production manager was Christopher Boll; and the production stage manager was Lisa Ann Chernoff. The cast was as follows:

CATHERINE..... Amy Brenneman  
ALICE .....Beth Dixon  
AVERY ..... Virginia Kull  
GWEN .....Kellie Overbey  
DON ..... Lee Tergesen

## **CHARACTERS**

(in order of appearance)

CATHERINE CROLL, early 40s

ALICE CROLL, 70s

AVERY WILLARD, 21

GWEN HARPER, early 40s

DON HARPER, early 40s

## **TIME and PLACE**

A college town in New England, summer.

# RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*Don and Gwen Harper's backyard in a New England college town. Night. June. A long table with citronella candles and two hardback books written by Catherine, who has just arrived moments ago. Catherine and Don sip beers; Gwen sips a bottle of water. It's the awkward lull after the big hellos. What now?*

GWEN. I knew this wouldn't be weird. And you know what? I knew it that night you called.

CATHERINE. Really?

GWEN. Yes. That we were able to just chat like that after ten years ... That's true friendship — when a whole decade doesn't matter.

CATHERINE. It's more than a decade actually.

GWEN. Is it? Let's see. Julian was a baby when we went to New York for Christmas. He's thirteen, so ... You're right.

DON. That was a terrible day.

CATHERINE. Oh, good! Can we say that now?

DON. It was a terrible day and it was all her idea.

GWEN. It was my idea. You're crazy with the first kid. You think everybody has to meet the baby and ... not everybody does. Daddy's ex-girlfriend maybe didn't have to meet the baby.

CATHERINE. And maybe not at Christmas ...

GWEN. I was an idiot. But look at us! We're joking around like we're back in grad school. And it isn't weird!

DON. It's weird, Gwen. Just embrace it.

GWEN. (*After a beat.*) OK, Don told me not to say this, it'll make things weird ...

DON. Don't say it.

GWEN. I need to say that we're proud of you.

CATHERINE. Thank you.

GWEN. I quit drinking.

CATHERINE. You mentioned that.

GWEN. I had a problem. And part of my recovery is about, you know, expressing feelings, not drinking them down. So I need to say that I feel very proud of your achievements.

CATHERINE. Gwen, that means a lot to me. (*The doorbell rings — off.*)

GWEN. Babysitter! I'm gonna go get them settled. (*Gesturing.*) Oh! Don, make sure she signs our books.

DON. Yeah. (*Gwen runs inside to get the door. More silence. Then ...*) She sorta gave up drinking and took up talking.

CATHERINE. I can see that.

DON. But she really means it. And I do, too.

CATHERINE. Do you?

DON. Are you kidding? When you were on TV that time, we made Julian watch.

CATHERINE. Which time was that?

DON. It was the, uh, the late night show. On cable. You know ... where the comedian talks current events with a panel of mismatched experts —

CATHERINE. Bill Maher.

DON. Yeah, that one. When they introduced the panel, Julian was like, your friend is a senator? We said no. Then he's like, your friend is a rapper? I said no, she's the hot chick sitting between the senator and the rapper.

CATHERINE. Yep, that's me. My credibility falls somewhere between senator and rapper.

DON. What'd he call you ... the "hot doomsday chick"?

CATHERINE. Yeah ...

DON. That's ... You got the sexy scholar gig. We were proud as hell of you.

CATHERINE. That makes me really happy, Don. Thanks. (*Don opens his arms — a cautious invitation to a hug. They hug.*)

DON. I'm sorry about your mom. She doing OK?

CATHERINE. She's recovering. (*Gwen reenters.*)

GWEN. So we have a problem with our babysitter.

DON. What's that?

GWEN. She has a black eye.

DON. Oh, shit. What happened?

GWEN. Don't know, don't care. The problem is that she's upstairs with our three-year-old.

DON. Then we can go ...

GWEN. She has a black eye.

DON. You want me to find out what happened?

GWEN. I don't care what happened! Don, we can't just say bye-bye to Devon like this is normal, like someone punching out his babysitter is no big deal.

DON. Let me go see what's up ...

GWEN. Pay her and send her home.

DON. Then we can't go to dinner.

GWEN. Pay her and send her home. (*He leaves. Gwen joins Catherine. Her mood has changed.*) Did Don have you sign our books?

CATHERINE. No.

GWEN. Of course he didn't. Would you?

CATHERINE. Sure. To Don and Gwen?

GWEN. Yeah. Thanks. (*A beat, as Catherine signs.*) There's backstory here. Generally I care about people's injuries.

CATHERINE. What's the backstory?

GWEN. Let's see. Twelve years of backstory. Where to begin? Don doesn't teach anymore.

CATHERINE. You mentioned that.

GWEN. He's some sort of disciplinary dean. Isn't that crazy? He deals with kids who are drinking and failing, which ... I mean, it's Don. What does he know better than drinking and failing? So all these irresponsible children come through his office and what he does is he hires the most intriguing cases to "help" me. So I have a babysitter with a black eye and my lawn is ... Don hired some dopehead to mow it and he never shows.

CATHERINE. Nice he tries to help them.

GWEN. That's not why he does it. He just likes to surround himself with losers. (*Catherine hands Gwen the signed books. Gwen looks at them.*) Thanks. I guess the grass is always greener. It's just ... It's what you said, right? It's that forty-something thing where you start thinking about the life not lived.



CATHERINE. When did I say that?

GWEN. The night you called. You don't remember?

CATHERINE. I was sort of ... drunk.

GWEN. I know. We used to drink so much. The three of us.

CATHERINE. We were young.

GWEN. Don never really stopped. I guess you didn't either.

CATHERINE. I drink pretty modestly. Since my mom's heart attack, I've been hitting it kinda hard. What else did I say that night?

GWEN. You were hilarious. You just spat out all these needs, like ... "I'm drunk and my mom is dying and I'm coming home and I need a job." She's not really dying, is she?

CATHERINE. She had a heart attack. Both her sisters had heart attacks and died within the year, so ... I feel like a clock just started ticking.

GWEN. Oh, no.

CATHERINE. Thank you for ... I know you got Don to give me this teaching gig.

GWEN. Oh, please. He should get a promotion out of this. You're Miss New York Ivy League famous ...

CATHERINE. Well, it came together so fast; I just know you must have helped it along.

GWEN. Because Don's so lazy and slow? Yeah, I nudged, but that's what I do for him. I'm keeper of his to-do list.

CATHERINE. September's so far away. I wish I'd asked to teach summer school.

GWEN. Tell Don. And I'll put it on his list. If I put it on his list, it'll happen. *(They sit in silence for a beat.)*

CATHERINE. What else did I say that night? I'm not a blackout drunk. This is ... special circumstances. My mom.

GWEN. I know. You said you didn't want to be angry at us anymore. You forgave us.

CATHERINE. That was generous of me. *(Don enters.)*

GWEN. Is she gone?

DON. They're watching *Bob the Builder*.

GWEN. Why is she still here?

DON. Gwendolyn, I'm gonna tell you something about our little guy. You may not want to hear it ...

GWEN. I know what you're going to say.

DON. *(To Catherine.)* Julian, our older son? Very sensitive soul. Our little guy, Devon, he's just not that way.

GWEN. Stop.

DON. The fact you don't want to face is that Devon hasn't noticed the girl has a black eye.

GWEN. He hasn't said anything. That doesn't mean he hasn't noticed.

DON. He hasn't noticed. He's a narcissist.

GWEN. He's three!

DON. He's happy. And we have dinner reservations.

GWEN. What is going to become of him if we let him think his insensitivity is OK?

DON. What will become of him? All kinds of good things. He can be a billionaire CEO; he can be president ... (*Catherine and Don make eye contact, together in seeing humor in all this.*)

GWEN. It's not funny.

DON. We can't all be empathic. Nothing would ever get done.

GWEN. If we go to dinner, we are sending him a message that a girl with a black eye is no big deal.

DON. So you wanna throw her out, you wanna fire her —

GWEN. Yes.

DON. You wanna teach him battered women should be punished?

CATHERINE. He has a point.

GWEN. I said go ahead and pay her.

DON. I just don't like kicking her when she's down. Her boyfriend's a dick —

GWEN. It was her boyfriend?

DON. No, but it's his fault. He put her in harm's way.

CATHERINE. How'd he do that?

DON. Oh ... He's a rich kid from California, thinks he's a filmmaker ... They're over in Rocksboro filming people in line for lottery tickets. I'll deal with him next week. Let's go eat.

GWEN. Someone needs to tell Devon that a black eye is a bad thing.

DON. Not me. (*A beat. Is this a stand-off?*) He's got a lifetime to learn about human cruelty. Let him have his fucking magic years.

GWEN. OK, I'll talk to him. (*Gwen goes into the house.*)

DON. We could make a run for it. Skip dinner, go to a bar and get hammered ...

CATHERINE. That sounds wonderful.

DON. I saw your mother at the Stop n' Shop. She looks pretty good for a lady who just had a heart attack.

# RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN

by Gina Gionfriddo

1M, 4W

After grad school, Catherine and Gwen chose polar opposite paths. Catherine built a career as a rockstar academic, while Gwen built a home with her husband and children. Decades later, unfulfilled in polar opposite ways, each woman covets the other's life, commencing a dangerous game of musical chairs — the prize being Gwen's husband. With searing insight and trademark wit, this comedy is an unflinching look at gender politics in the wake of 20th-century feminist ideals.

*"... intensely smart, immensely funny ... What's exciting about [Gionfriddo's] writing here is the multiplicity of the ideas it engages. Heady with sharp-witted dialogue about the particularities of women's experience (there's a joke about pornography and Google maps — believe it or not — that's worth the ticket price alone), RAPTURE more largely illuminates how hard it can be to forge both a satisfying career and a fulfilling personal life in an era that seems to demand superhuman achievement from everyone."*

—The New York Times

*"If you are a feminist, are interested in feminism or are in a relationship with a feminist, you need to see the play RAPTURE, BLISTER, BURN by Gina Gionfriddo, because it is about you ... By embodying five different perspectives on love, work and women, Gionfriddo puts feminism into dialogue with its detractors and itself ... By creating three-dimensional people with real foibles, senses of humor and very personal needs, Gionfriddo manages to take academic feminism from the theoretical to the personal."*

—Ms. Magazine

*"A shrewd, incisive, thoroughly winning comedy. Sharp-eyed, big-hearted, and sure-footed, Gionfriddo ranges across the topography of the women's movement — and the lives that shaped that movement — while demonstrating the confidence to embrace contradictions of all kinds."*

—The Boston Globe

*"There's nothing more enjoyable than watching super-smart characters make exceedingly dumb decisions, and seeing beautiful, brilliant Cathy entangled with Internet-porn-addicted pothead Don sets off an almost unbelievable chain of sometimes comic, mostly tragic events ... Thoughtful, funny ... One of the top ten plays of 2012."*

—Entertainment Weekly

## Also by Gina Gianfriddo

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