

Albert Fried-Cassorla

Playwright

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Two Harolds

a short play

by Albert Fried-Cassorla

CHARACTERS

Harold Gilligan, a white, wealthy man in his 70's

Harold Porter, a black, lower middle-class man in his 70's

Pilot, an offstage voice

SETTING

The cabin of a jumbo airliner bound for Miami.

AT RISE:

*Both Harolds are seated. GILLIGAN reads a book,
PORTER gazes out the window.*

PILOT

We've reached our cruising altitude of thirty-two thousand feet. We've turned off the fasten-seatbelt warning, and you are free to walk about the plane if you wish. However, for your safety, we ask that when you are seated, you keep your seatbelt fastened at all times... We're anticipating smooth flying weather. Right now, we're off the coast of New Jersey, and we'll be staying close to the coastline for most of our flight.... In Miami right now, it's 86 degrees and sunny. If we can be of any service to you this morning, please let your flight attendant know. Have a pleasant flight, and thank you for flying American.

PORTER

Those low clouds sure are pretty....

*(GILLIGAN looks up from his book,
smiles, returns to his reading)*

Looks just like when I was in the Pacific.... Course you don't expect clouds to change much.

*(PORTER smiles at GILLIGAN, who
returns a fleeting smile and quickly
resumes reading, dour-faced.
PORTER's smile vanishes.)*

Not like *people*, anyway... Take Priscilla, for example. That's my sister.... The sourest old bat you'd ever meet, till one day, when she was about fifty-five, she heard the word of the lord. And now she's as sweet as blackstrap molasses.... Oh, shame on me! I forgot to introduce myself. The name's Porter, Harold Porter.

*(PORTER extends his hand.
GILLIGAN perfunctorily shakes it.)*

GILLIGAN

Hello. I'm Harold Gilligan. Pleased to meet you.

(GILLIGAN returns to his reading.)

PORTER

Ha! We're two Harolds. How d'ya like that?!!!

GILLIGAN

It's all quite adventitious, in my estimation.

PORTER

Huh?

GILLIGAN

Oh, it's just a coincidence.

PORTER

Hm. I'm not so sure of that. And neither would my sister Priscilla if she was here.....So goin' back to what I was sayin' about her... Of course *where* she heard the word of the lord was the thing. That's what everybody was talkin' about fer months -- and still talks about.

(GILLIGAN turns towards PORTER, curious, then plunges back into his reading.)

That it would happen *there!* Hm, hm, hm.

*(PORTER looks out the window.
GILLIGAN puts down his book.
Quietly:)*

GILLIGAN

Where?

(PORTER pretends not to hear.)

Where, Mister Porter?

PORTER

Oh you can call me Harold. May I do the same?

GILLIGAN

If it pleases you, certainly. Where did she hear it?

PORTER

On the Ferris wheel. Up tippy-top.

GILLIGAN

What do you mean? Am I to understand that while revolving in a motorized amusement emporium, she experienced a revelation?

PORTER

Where'd you get that? Harold, I might've confused you. Let me set you straight about Priscilla. She was on this really big Ferris Wheel. And it stopped at the top, see. She was with her niece, Wilhemina, who was clinging to her like Spanish Moss in a sweat storm. That's when it happened.

GILLIGAN

What happened?

PORTER

She felt the light streaming towards her, and she stood up to meet it, the car rocking all the while.

[PORTER stands, smiling, with a beatific light in his eyes, swaying.]

Lord, I'm ready for you! The voice it said, You are the bearer of my mission, Priscilla. My word to you is to love all and teach and show that love is the way. By this, you shall be judged.

GILLIGAN

My word!

PORTER

And you got *my* word that that's what happened -- my mouth to God's ear.

GILLIGAN

And that altered her existence irrevocably?

PORTER

No... But it changed her for life. Before, she was sour as a lime, and after, she came out a ripe plum -- and stayed that way. To this day, she is still the most lovin' woman you could hope to meet. Harold, can I esk you a poisanal question?

GILLIGAN

You may assay it.

PORTER

I'll take that as a yes -- you talk funny, but I don' mind. My question, it's this: have you ever been totally changed by somethin'? Changed forever?

(GILLIGAN is struck by this question and finds it very pleasing.)

GILLIGAN

It is so incalculably odd and yet surprisingly gratifying to be asked this by you. And honestly, I must confess, I wish to reply! Though I've barely made your acquaintance, I feel as though we met in a different passage in time ... perhaps in a former incarnation, when I was an antelope and you were a gazelle, we fled the lions together. Probably we were known as the two Harolds back even then by the wildebeests...

PORTER

Hm.... So tell me -- was you ever big-changed?

GILLIGAN

Yes, and I'll tell you something even my wife doesn't know about. It happened one day when I was in my father's study. I was a mere lad of nineteen, about to leave for my sophomore year at Princeton. It was the

summer of 1959. My father was a quite serious man, and never more so than on that day. He asked me to sit down. I did. Son, he said to me. It is your both your privilege and your solemn to be the caretaker of the enormous fortune which I am about to bequeath to you. I have arranged for you to inherit half of my fortune now, while you are still young... He placed his arm on my shoulder and said, Trust is the hallmark of greatness. Trust and steadfastness. Be a wise custodian of your patrimony.

PORTER

I havta know -- how much did he give you?

GILLIGAN

Four hundred.

PORTER

Four hundred! That's about what a top of the line TV cost back then.. I remember my first RCA, it was--

GILLIGAN

No, no. Four hundred *million*.

PORTER (*amazed*)

Harold, you are a rich man....

GILLIGAN

And so are you, Harold. You have your Priscilla, and I bet you have nieces and nephews and grandchildren by the score who adore you, now don't you.

PORTER

I sure do.

GILLIGAN

Well, I do want to hear about them. But first, I simply must use the rest room. If you'll pardon me....

PORTER

Oh sure.

*(PORTER lets GILLIGAN get by.
GILLIGAN exits to the rest room. PORTER
uses the sky phone.)*

These gadgets is amazing... (dials) Hello, Chantelle? Yes, it sure is your Uncle Harold. How d'ya like this, me callin' you from thirty-thousand feet up in the sky? ha-ha-ha!! ... No, not heaven, not yet anyway - ha!...

Hey, I'm so lookin' forward to your weddin'. How are you, and how's all the prep going?.....Mmm.....Mm.....

.... That's good, good. So, is Aunt Ida recovered from her hip replacement?... Yeah? That's great. I ain't seen her in a dog's age. ... Oh, I guess you're right, Thanksgiving wasn't that long ago-- so more like a chihuahua's age.... Listen, I want to tell you about this amazin' gentleman I've jes been getting know here on this plane. Got a minute? ... Good.... Well, he's real nice, oh maybe a bit touchy. And he talks like he's some kinda duke or earl or somethin'. He stepped away just now.... But I want to tell ya, we be gettin' along real good.... I feel like I'm makin' a friend. A new different friend. I thought I was done with that at my age but here it is... Yeah, oh I see he's comin' back now. So I'll wind this call up.... Listen, leave some decorating for your old Uncle Harold to take care of, okay? That's right. I'll see you soon. Thanks for picking me up. See you as soon as I get out. ... Yeah, I guess that's baggage claim. Whatever they call it. Yeah I look the same!! Whatchoo mean? I'll be the only guy out there with the hugest smile as big as the sun. That's right.... See you soon, darling. Bye.

=====

(GILLIGAN returns and takes his seat.)

GILLIGAN

So you were about to tell me about your family.

PORTER

Yessir. I'm headin' to the wedding of one of my nieces right now, in fact. My granddaughter Chantelle, she's the one who's getting hitched. It's going to be the nicest affair you'd ever want to see. I got nieces so pretty, they'd hurt your eyes.... How 'bout *your* relations?

GILLIGAN

Scattered like sand, blown to the many continents.

PORTER

That's sad. (softly) Hey, I don't want to be rude, but I'm getting real drowsy. So don't be mad if I fall asleep on you soon. I do that these days -- drop off like a possum.

GUILLIGAN

I promise not to be insulted. I know I can be quite soporific.

PORTER

What?

GILLIGAN

I'm so *terrific* -- at putting people to sleep.

PORTER

I don't think so..... But I'm about to take my nap now, so's I don't hit my head on that tray table. Your feelings won't be hurt, right?

GILLGAN

Not in the least. Now go rest your weary eyes, Harold.

(HAROLD puts on his blindfold and inserts his ear stopples.)

PORTER

Wake me if I snore. I usually take just quick cat-naps.

(PORTER dozes off. GILLIGAN takes out a pad and begins to write, speaking aloud as he does.)

GILLIGAN

My Dear Persephone,

(PORTER begins to snore; Gilligan notices but continues.)

As my closest cousin, you are my dearest relation. I hope the feeling is mutual. Although we rarely speak, I sense that over the years we have experienced some... shall I dare say?... commonality. I am writing to you to describe a most unusual encounter I am having with a man quite dissimilar from myself... although he has his own natural and uncultured charm....

(PORTER snores louder for a second, as if he has overheard this comment, but GILLIGAN looks over and is reassured that HAROLD is sleeping.)

His name is Harold, like mine. And although we are unlike in nature, he has a relaxed and friendly way about him that I find quite edifying. In short, if I were more like him, I would not be the nervous wreck that I generally am....I might even be more contented with life....I trust him, and then quickly I trust him no longer.... I might even reject him in a thrice for any small and mysterious reason.... Something always seems to get in the way of my truly connecting, with him or even with anybody, save you my dear

Persephone..... I wonder what it is.... and whether I can indeed learn from this uncouth soul....

(PORTER snores loudly for a second.)

... this warm, and utterly sincere... bumpkin...

(PORTER snores violently for a second)

...who nonetheless appears to have the proverbial heart of gold....
Wondering does seem to be my fate, does it not?

(PORTER smiles in his sleep. GILLIGAN write on.)

I remain your affectionate cousin, Harold Eustace Gilligan the third.

(PORTER wakes up and removes his blindfold and stopples)

PORTER

Like I told you, I only needed a tiny snooze...I feel so much better. Now where was we.... But like you was saying... Don't you have nobody?

GILLIGAN

Well, I have Anthony Herndon, in Florida. He manages my investments. In fact, I'm visiting him now. We're in constant contact via E-mail throughout the year.

PORTER

He like you?

GILLIGAN

No we're as different as can be. He's a conservative investor, and I often push for riskier overseas investments, and--

PORTER

I think you don't understand me, Harold. And it's probably my fault. What I'm askin' is, does he *like* you? You know, wanna be with you -- be your friend.

GILLIGAN

Mmmm, maybe.... I suppose not. But you *do* ask the most appallingly personal questions. I'm beginning to think I erred.... Excuse me.

(GILLIGAN returns to his book. PORTER is non-plussed by this break-down. He fidgets with his fingers for a short while.)

PORTER

I was only asking cause I think you *deserve* to have a friend. And you seemed lonely... and I care something about that.

GILLIGAN

A friend? And what is a friend? Someone who care more about you than they do themselves? Not likely! Not in this demented world of rats and back-stabbers in which we find ourselves, and I--.

(GILLIGAN reads on.)

PILOT

Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seatbelts. We are experiencing engine problems and may have to make an emergency landing. I am asking that flight assistants also return to their seats at this time.

(GILLIGAN becomes agitated.)

GILLIGAN

Oh God, I don't want to die in an airplane! Those are the words I hoped I'd never hear in my life!

PORTER

Now takes it easy, Harold. This plane's got two strong engines, and even one of 'em can get us down fine. I ain't been in a plane in maybe thirty years. Them old ones was noisy, shaky tubs. And this is one great strong machine we got here. You oughta relax!!

GILLIGAN

That's easy for *you* to say. *I'm* scared to death!!

(GILLIGAN shakes with fear.)

PORTER

I hate to see you feelin' that way. Come over here...

(PORTER gestures for GILLIGAN to come closer. GILLIGAN ignores him, but grows increasingly agitated.)

Come on, you'll feel better. Been through much worse than this in the service, so it ain't no big deal for me.

(GILLIGAN wraps his arm around PORTER, who cowers into his chest.)

GILLIGAN

God, I feel like such a child. Even my mother never did this for me.

PORTER

Maybe she ought to have.... Once in awhile.

PILOT

Your attention, please. I have some good news -- we've restarted the number one engine. But just the same, we're going to land in Atlanta, for some maintenance work. You'll be granted free transfers to continuing flights. Please accept my apology for this inconvenience.

(GILLIGAN straightens out.
He regains his composure.
After a long pause:)

GILLIGAN

I think I ought to repay you somehow.

PORTER

I think you ought not. I was just helpin' you out, same as you woulda helped me if you could, and I needed it.

GILLIGAN

No, I doubt it... Do you *need* any help?

PORTER (perplexed)

Well..... do you really mean that?

GILLIGAN

Of course I do. Life is too short not to help someone like you.

PORTER

My wife, Eloise, see, she broke her hip last September.

GILLIGAN

How is she faring now?

PORTER

Not too good. You see, it cost me twenty-five thousand a year for nursing care. I used up my life savings in two and a half years.

GILLIGAN

Then how can you even afford to be on this plane?

PORTER

My daughter was kind enough to take care of that.

GILLIGAN

Would you mind terribly if set up a trust fund for Eloise that covers her nursing home bills?

PORTER

Now that's an idea that gets my vote, yessir!

GILLIGAN

And may I also establish a trust fund for your well-being for the rest of your life.

PORTER

No, I couldn't let you do that. Helping someone else -- my wife -- that's one thing. But helping me, that's like freeloading. I couldn't get used to it. But I do have one favor to put to ya.

GILLIGAN

Say it, dear Harold.

PORTER (smiling)

Would you come to my granddaughter's wedding? I want them to meet ya, and for you to meet them. They's good people. You'll like 'em.

GILLIGAN

Ha, ha, ha, ha! I'd be delighted.

(GILLIGAN marches like the father
of the bride down the plane aisle. He sings
the tune from *My Fair Lady*.)

She's getting married in the morning! Ding dong the bells are gonna chime!
Let's pull out a rumpus, but don't love the compass. (*he whistles*)

PILOT

Please fasten your seatbelts, if you haven't done so already. We will be
landing in five minutes.

(*GILLIGAN hums the wedding march.*)

GILLIGAN

Tum, tum, te-tum, tum tum te-tum, (etc.)

PILOT

I have been informed that a passenger is dancing in the aisles. Will be
please take his seat!!

GILLIGAN

Tum-tum-te-tum! Ha ha, ha! Tum-tum te-tum! Ha ha ha!

(GILLIGAN keeps singing and
marching as the lights fade.
PORTER chuckles.)

END OF PLAY