

HOLD ME CLOSER - DAVID LEVITHAN. ACT I. SCENE I. DAYTIME.

Characters Lili and David enter the room. It is full of natural light and it takes a moment for both to adjust to its intensity. They both sit down, almost in unison, across from one another. Considering the coronavirus pandemic, they are decently far apart. Lili clears her throat as she begins to interrogate.

LILI

So, David, you wrote this book: *Hold Me Closer*. There's a lot of singing, homosexuality, and some down right drama. Would you care to tell us about our main character, the epitome of these words, Tiny Cooper?

As David begins to speak, Lili obnoxiously pulls out her typewriter (as if we aren't living in the 21st century; someone didn't get the memo) and begins typing. Every once and a while Lili will offer a nod or an "mhm" to let David know she is paying attention.

DAVID

(Keeping it professional) Pleasure to be here, Lili. So, as we know, we are first introduced to Tiny in me and John's tag team novel, *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Tiny is one of the Wills in that novel's best friend, and his main character traits are that he is big and he is gay. He often talks about how he wants to write and produce his own auto-biographical musical. So one day, I thought, "hey, what if we actually got to hear what Tiny's musical is all about?" And I am all for giving the people what they want, so alas, *Hold Me Closer* was born. You really get to dive into who Tiny is and what events in his life have led to this wonderfully entertaining unit of a man. He obviously isn't all just glitter and glitz, though. Tiny is a complex man who has faced some hardships, like the seemingly inevitable aspect of our society that doesn't always let people be who they are and love who they love. While the novel is generally light-hearted, Tiny is just one of those people who can

turn a horrible situation into an incredibly entertaining one. He's comic relief, you know? But while I still employed this aspect of him in writing the story, obviously, I didn't want to dismiss him as a purely comic relief character because I am so sick of the funny, flamboyant gay best friend trope.

LILI

I think that's a really good point you bring up, David. I was actually going to inquire about that because when I first began reading, the story reeked of that exact trope. However, going forward I came to realize how well you were able to convey both Tiny's complexities and his beloved personality. Props to you!

David laughs.

DAVID

Yeah, I can definitely see how it initially comes across that way, especially because in *Will Grayson*, *Will Grayson*, he is only a side character, so you only know him going into this book as such a trope. An example of when Tiny faces homophobia, he is so young, he is in PE class and Coach Frye refers to a few of the class as "pansies," and some bullies attack Tiny and Phil by calling them gay. A really important quote happens here, Phil says, "We're not gay. We're eight." I think this is an important one because it demonstrates the innocence at that age, and how potentially damaging it can be for someone to force an identity down your throat that you don't even understand. Obviously you can realize your sexual orientation at any age, but let someone figure that out for themselves, you know? Well, also, first of all, Coach Frye is saying that the bullies need to stop insulting the boys, and Phil, (oh insightful Phil), goes "It's not

an insult. It's just a thing.  
Like, some people are gay. Some  
people have blue eyes."

LILI

I love that quote from Phil! I can  
honestly relate that back to my  
peers because I still hear so many  
of them using that word as an  
insult. Like, what does that even  
mean? It always comes from  
straight, cisgendered men  
specifically. It's like there's  
some weird fascination, I don't  
even know. It makes me so sick,  
though. This is the 21st century,  
find a better "insult."

DAVID

Absolutely! It's ridiculous. Gay  
marriage was only legalized in the  
past decade, which is saddening in  
itself, but even then we still  
have so far to go in terms of  
LGBTQ+ rights and simply just  
treating marginalized groups  
fairly. Another big moment for  
Tiny is on page 58 of the eBook,  
his monologue about coming out.  
"The first person you have to come  
out to is yourself. So this scene  
is just me alone on a stage.  
Because that's how it was. Me  
alone, singing to myself, and  
finally hearing it." The "finally  
hearing it" line is so crucial,  
for both his character and for  
readers. I really want adolescents  
to read that and feel okay and at  
peace with themselves. Especially  
in middle school, there's a lot of  
identity crises happening, and I  
think you just need to lose that  
expectation of having to  
immediately scream out to the  
world who you are. Instead, be  
patient with yourself and  
experience that journey as an  
individual.

LILI

Another comment I want to make,  
David, is about Tiny as an  
unreliable narrator. Especially in  
the way you structured the novel

as a screenplay, with Tiny being the writer/director, he has to assume the role of the surrounding characters. He has to write them based on his own perceptions of them, and with that you can see his insecurities, for example. Especially with his parents, you see a lot of that because he can only imagine what they are actually thinking of him. You know they are so proud and loving towards him, but Tiny writes them and the songs they sing by the way he feels about them at the time, or what he believes they are thinking about him. I think that is so interesting. This form of writing really takes the narrator analysis to a whole other level. In this way, the form is extremely effective in conveying the message that is Tiny Cooper. It's almost like through his writing of the other characters, you only learn more about him as a person.

DAVID

That's a great perspective, Lili. My initial desire to write the book came from a superficial perspective of simply wanting to present Tiny's musical to the world. However, while writing, I fell more and more in love with his character and his emotional depth. I'm glad you can see what I wanted to accomplish with this book.

Lili checks her watch and realizes it is time to go.

LILI

Yeah of course, and it has been lovely speaking with you today. I hope to see you again soon!

David checks his watch as well and begins to stand up.

DAVID

It's been great talking to you too, Lili. I'll see you around.

They awkwardly do the motions of shaking hands from across the room, and salute each other off. Curtain falls.

TCH 236. ACT II. SCENE I. 4:00 PM.

To be continued...