

DUELING PHOBIAS

By Brenda Cohen and Jonathan Mayer

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TOM SHORT: a claustrophobic man

EDWARD WELLINGTON: a germophobic man

Lights rise on a doctor's waiting room. TOM SHORT, a tall, attractive, outgoing man in his late twenties sits in one of two chairs. HE is wearing a baseball jersey and jeans. The door to the waiting room opens slowly as EDWARD WELLINGTON hesitantly enters. HE is in his mid-twenties, clean-shaven, and well dressed. EDWARD signs in with the receptionist.

EDWARD: *(quietly)* Hello, my name is Edward Wellington. I have an appointment with Dr. Beelittle at 4:00.

(After signing in, EDWARD walks toward the available seat. HE pauses and then scoots the chair a few inches away from TOM before sitting. The noise causes TOM to look up from his magazine and glance toward EDWARD.)

(sensing TOM's gaze, awkwardly) Hi.

TOM: Hey, I'm Tom Short.

(TOM puts out his hand to shake EDWARD'S. Instead of shaking TOM's hand, EDWARD awkwardly waves.)

EDWARD: I'm Edward.

TOM: Would you like a magazine?

(TOM starts to pick up a magazine from the table in front of him. Meanwhile, EDWARD becomes visibly anxious.)

EDWARD: *(very nervous)* No! I mean . . . no that's alright. I don't want a magazine.

TOM: *(confused)* OK . . .

(TOM tries to resume a casual conversation.)

So, did you see the game?

EDWARD: What game?

TOM: You know . . .

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(Realizing that EDWARD truly has no idea about what game HE is referring to, TOM continues.)

The big baseball game.

EDWARD: *(trying to play it cool)* Oh no, I must have missed it.

TOM: I was there.

EDWARD: So who won?

TOM: Well, I actually don't know. I was hoping you could tell me.

EDWARD: You don't know who won? But you were at the game.
(waiting for TOM to reply) Right?

TOM: *(hesitantly)* Well . . . I didn't exactly see much of the game after the 7th inning stretch.

EDWARD: You just left in the middle?

(After some time, TOM responds.)

TOM: It's not that simple. *(pause)* Well, during the stretch, I got up to go to the bathroom and . . .

EDWARD: *(very nerdy)* Oh, I get it, you met a chick on the way. Way to go man.

(EDWARD laughs a bit and snorts. EDWARD gives TOM the thumbs up, but TOM just shakes his head and gives EDWARD a dirty look.)

TOM: No, that's not what happened. I was in the bathroom and . . .

EDWARD: *(acting it out; excited)* You ran into a crazy fan who was talking smack so you kicked his butt, but then security came and escorted you out of the stadium.

TOM: No, no, no! That's not what happened.

EDWARD: Then what happened in there?

(pause)

TOM: Well, I went into the stall and did my thing and then . . .

EDWARD: And then?

TOM: I tried to open the door to get out . . . but I couldn't. *(becoming increasingly tense and emotional as HE relives this traumatizing moment)* I was trapped in the smallest stall you've ever seen! I don't even know how I got in there in the first place. It was like the door was super glued shut. I tried using my body weight to push it over. I tried kicking it down. But no matter what I did, the door wouldn't even budge. I just couldn't get out on my own. I tried to scream for help, but I started hyperventilating, felt extremely dizzy and then

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passed out. When I woke up a few minutes later, I was still lying on the bathroom floor.

(EDWARD starts to cringe out of disgust.)

That's when I realized that I could crawl underneath the door. So I did and finally escaped from my entrapment. Even though I was still a little shook up from the whole thing, I staggered back to my seat. I sat down and I looked around. But then, for the first time, I realized everyone already left.

EDWARD: That stinks.

TOM: I came here straight after that. I never want to miss another game. So that's why I'm here.

EDWARD: But I don't understand how it could have taken you so long to realize that all you had to do was crawl under the door.

(TOM is now visibly angry and raises his tone.)

TOM: Well, it's not exactly easy to think clearly when your life is at stake. I bet you don't know what it feels like to have your life flash before your eyes.

EDWARD: Actually, I've seen the bright white light on quite a few occasions, thank you very much.

TOM: *(skeptical)* Oh yeah? I'd like to hear about your so-called "life threatening situations."

EDWARD: *(hesitantly)* Well, OK. *(pause)* I almost died two days ago.

TOM: How?

EDWARD: I was at Chuck E. Cheese for my nephew's birthday party.

TOM: *(sarcastic)* Chuck E. Cheese, huh? I hear that's where all the mass murderers hang out.

EDWARD: *(without detecting TOM'S sarcasm)* I know, but that's not even the worst part. The place was packed with dozens of drooling, crawling, thumb-sucking, nose-picking children. It was repulsive!

TOM: *(sarcastic)* Oh gosh!

EDWARD: I know! *(makes a face of absolute disgust)* So anyway, after lunch my four-year-old nephew was playing in the enormous, germ-infested, ball pit. I tried telling him how much bacteria were in there, but he didn't care. He just laughed and cannon-balled into the ball pit. After a few minutes, he called me over to watch him do a "trick," so I walked over. You're not gonna believe what that little rascal did next.

TOM: Did he pull you into the ball pit?

EDWARD: *(shocked)* Yeah . . . how did you know?

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TOM: That's the oldest trick in the book. My kids try to pull that kind of stuff all the time.

EDWARD: Yeah, well it's not funny! I had to run home and take a shower right away to get all the germs off me. I used four different kinds of soap, two loofahs, and a pumice stone.

TOM: A what?

EDWARD: You know, a pumice stone. To scrub the dirt off your feet.

TOM: But weren't you wearing shoes when you got pulled into the ball pit?

EDWARD: *(confused)* Yeah, what's your point? *(in a more dramatic, serious voice)* I'm so lucky that I got to the shower in time. If I lived just a few miles further away . . . I would have been a goner.

TOM: Man, listen to yourself. Have you ever heard of someone being murdered by bacteria? Or killed by a germ attack? Come on now, that kind of stuff can't really kill you.

EDWARD: *(defensive)* Don't you think you are being just a little hypocritical? It's not like small spaces can kill you. *(pause)* I wish my problem was as small as yours. Haha. Small. Get it?

TOM: That's not funny. *(fumbling for a good comeback)* I wish my problem was as . . . cleanable as yours.

EDWARD: Nice comeback, but my problem isn't something to joke about.

TOM: Yes it is. I bet I could cure it right now.

EDWARD: No you couldn't.

(TOM looks around. HE sees some dirt a few feet away. HE goes over, picks it up, and holds it.)

(severely frightened) What are you doing?

(TOM comes closer.)

(more frightened) What are you doing with that piece of dirt?

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