

# SHAVE 000

By Joseph Vitale

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

*Joseph Vitale's SHAVE swiftly moves the blade into high stakes territory and how. This is a gem for actors with conflicting objectives and an urgency that'll add to the knot in your neck. Directors will love the retro feel and the nuanced build. And you writers are going to appreciate a short play that's crafted with surgical skill (unless you're the jealous type and you really need to get a handle on that). Here we are social distancing (or just being anti-social), but this one gets right in our faces and nails us with all the intimacy of personal grooming with a stranger. It might make you think twice before you ask for that old-fashioned shave or bikini wax. Here's to a close shave and a close call (and watch out for those jealous types).*

BART

Tsk, tsk.

ALMERS

What?

BART

More telltale signs. Feel that?

ALMERS

Yes, as a matter of fact.

BART

An unfinished area right above the sternal notch. See, unless you're shaved by a professional, you're not really shaved. Come on, let me give you one. It'll be the best shave of your life. You won't forget it, I promise.

*(Spacing and format is playwright's own.)*



	Tall and handsome. Well dressed.
Customer	40-50. A Wall Street investment banker. Tall and handsome. Well dressed.
Time:	The present.
Setting:	A small barber shop in an out-of-the-way side street in the financial district of New York

### Synopsis

In tiny, out-of-the-way barber shop on a side street in New York's financial district, a barber prepares to give a Wall Street banker a shave. The two men could not be more different – one is a “Master of the Universe,” well-quaffed, smartly attired man in his bespoke suit and Italian shoes. The other is a nervous, paranoid little barber, down on his luck and with a sneaking suspicion that his young, sexy wife may be cheating on him. Are the barber's fears unfounded? Or are there things we don't know about his client and his wife? One thing is sure, by the end of the play, one of them will get more than a close shave.

*(In the darkness, the sounds of Figaro's aria, “Largo al factotum,” from The Barber of Seville. As lights come up, music fades. ALMERS is sitting in the chair. He wears an expensive tie and shirt with cufflinks. He has taken off his suit jacket, which hangs behind him on a coat tree, and loosened his collar. As the lights come up, BART unfurls the barber's cape with a flourish. He places the cape around ALMERS's shoulders, then fastens it snugly behind him. In addition to the chair and coat tree, there is a small work table containing a basin, and the various accoutrements of the barber – scissors, combs, hair dryer, lotions, after shaves, powders, etc.)*

So, what'll it be today?

BART

ALMERS  
*(Reacting to the cape around his neck)* A little tight, don't you think?

BART  
*(Adjusting it)* Oh, sorry.

ALMERS  
Just a trim. I'm in a hurry

BART  
I see. How about a shave?

ALMERS  
No thanks.

BART  
Really?

ALMERS  
Yes.

BART  
You need one. *(Running a finger around ALMERS's face.)*

ALMERS  
Don't think so. I shaved this morning.

BART  
Oh, you see, that's where most men are wrong. They think they've given themselves a good shave but they haven't done it properly. You use an electric razor don't you?

ALMERS  
Yes.

BART  
Rotary. Aluminum housing. Five-year-old blades.

ALMERS  
How do you know that?

BART  
I can tell.

ALMERS  
You can?

BART  
Oh, yes. You have all the telltale signs.

ALMERS  
I do?

BART  
Of course.

ALMERS  
And what are the telltale signs?

BART  
Well, for one thing, stubble residue. Here, on the philtrum.

ALMERS  
The what?

BART  
The philtrum, the flat part of your upper lip right below the nose.

ALMERS  
The philtrum?

BART  
That's right. Do you know some people believe the philtrum is a mark left by an angel?

ALMERS  
Really?

BART  
Yeah, they believe the angel touches a newborn baby right there and the baby forgets everything he knew as a soul. It's only a myth, though, so I wouldn't worry about it.

ALMERS  
I won't.

BART  
Know how I learned that? From one of my customers. It's amazing the things you learn from people sitting in that chair.

*(BART runs a finger along the ALMERS's throat, just above the collar.)*

Tsk, tsk.

BART

What?

ALMERS

More telltale signs. Feel that?

BART

Yes, as a matter of fact.

ALMERS

BART

An unfinished area right above the sternal notch. See, unless you're shaved by a professional, you're not really shaved. Come on, let me give you one. It'll be the best shave of your life. You won't forget it, I promise.

ALMERS

I don't have a lot of time.

BART

Of course, busy man like you. I'll be quick.

*(BART goes to his table and shows ALMERS his straight razor.)*

BART

Fastest blade in the West. You'll be finished before you know what hit you.

ALMERS

Well, OK.

*(BART begins preparing his lather in a shaving cup.)*

BART

Yeah, a man like you should always look his best. Good looking guy, beautiful suit. Beautiful shoes. What kind of shoes are they anyway?

ALMERS

Testoni's.

BART

Testoni's. Italian, right?

ALMERS

Yes.

BART

Beautiful. I can almost see my face in them.

*(Lather prepared, BART begins to strop the razor.)*

BART

Hey, you look familiar. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

ALMERS

I doubt it.

BART

That's funny. I swear I've seen you before.

ALMERS

I don't think so.

BART

So, what's your name?

ALMERS

Almers.

BART

What?

ALMERS

Almers.

BART

Oh. Is that your first name?

ALMERS

No.

BART

Of course not. I mean, how could it be? How could that be somebody's first name? Almery. I mean, who would give somebody a name like that? My name's Bart, by the way. First name. Actually it's Bartolo, but who wants to pronounce that?

ALMERS

Bartolo?

BART

Yeah. Hey, don't look at me. It was my father's idea. He named me after that character in the *Barber of Seville*. He liked opera.

ALMERS

Isn't that Figaro?

BART

You're right. Hey, you know your opera Mr. Almers. No, Figaro's the hero. My father didn't name me after the hero, though. He named me after the villain. See, that says a lot about my father doesn't it? I mean, what kind of man would name his son after the villain, right?

ALMERS

I wouldn't know.

BART

Of course you wouldn't. Do you like opera Mr. Almers?

ALMERS

Not really.

BART

I guess you wouldn't. Probably too busy for that kind of thing, right?

ALMERS

That's right.

BART

It's funny about names. You give a kid his destiny by the name you give him, right? I mean, depending on the name you give him, he's either gonna be one of the guys or have the crap beat out of him in the schoolyard.

ALMERS

I suppose so.

BART

You give him a name he's going to mumble under his breath when he's introduced to somebody or say right out loud, right? But parents don't think about things like that, do they? They never really think about the kid. They only think about themselves and the names *they* like, right?

ALMERS

If you say so.

BART

Anyway, some things you can't control. You gotta make the best of a bad situation, right? That's what my wife always says. *You gotta make the best.* Hey, she works where you do, Mr. Almers.

ALMERS

Where I do?

BART

Well, maybe not for your company. Where do you work?

ALMERS

Kimmelblatt Gardner

BART

No. That's not the one. But that's down on Wall Street, right?

ALMERS

Right.

BART

No. It's another company. It's only initials though. DDB and B...BBD and D. Something like that. Anyway, it's got a lot of D's and B's in it. Does that ring a bell?

ALMERS

No.

BART

All those names sound the same, don't they? I mean, they all do the same thing. Those firms. Stocks, bonds, stuff like that. She's a secretary.

ALMERS

Who?

BART

My wife. That's what she does. A secretary. She's not a stock broker. No, *she* wouldn't be a stock broker! She just sits around looking pretty all day, know what I mean? She's been there for a while. She makes good money, too. Better than me. I mean, who doesn't? A barber doesn't

BART (Cont.)

make much, you know? But sometimes I think she only got the job just because of the way she looks.

ALMERS

The way she looks?

BART

Yeah. She's good looking, you know what I mean?

ALMERS

Not really.

BART

Of course, you wouldn't. I mean, how would you know what she looks like, right? Yeah, she's a pretty good looking girl. Nice figure, know what I mean? She's...well, she's the kind of girl a man would notice right away. She's...how would you say? Built. You know what I mean? She's got a great body and she looks pretty sexy when she's all dressed up for work. You know, the nice dress, a little tight here and there. The neckline's a little too low sometimes. Yeah, we fight about that. High heels. And she's got this great little walk. Especially in the high heels. You know, she kind of swings her hips when she walks. Know what I mean?

ALMERS

How would I know? I've never seen your wife.

BART

Of course. How could you know? You've never seen her. *(Pause)* But, then again, maybe you have.

ALMERS

What does that mean?

BART

Well, I was just thinking. Maybe you've seen her down there on "the Street." That's what they call it, right? Where all you guys work. All those investment firms. All the stocks and bonds. "The Street," right?

ALMERS

Yes.

BART

Yeah, I wonder if you might have seen her.

ALMERS

I doubt that.

BART

Like in the afternoon, when you're running out to lunch with a client at one of those fancy restaurants. Maybe you've seen her at lunch time in that tight dress and the stiletto heels. Cute little brunette?

ALMERS

There are thousands of people on the street at lunch time.

BART

Of course, of course. But you wouldn't forget *her*, believe me. You'd notice. *(Pause)* Or maybe you've seen her when you go out for a smoke in the afternoon.

ALMERS

I don't smoke.

BART

Of course, you don't. A man like you wouldn't smoke. You're too healthy. You look like you work out a lot. Do you work out?

ALMERS

Yes.

BART

You probably belong to some private athletic club somewhere? Oh, what's the name of that....The New York Athletic Club, right? That's the name. You probably belong to the New York Athletic Club.

ALMERS

As a matter of fact, I do.

BART

Of course. I could tell. You look, great, Mr. Almers. You have a great...physique, is that what it's called? A great physique and Testoni shoes. You're the kind of guy who's probably never had a problem with women.

ALMERS

Problem?

BART

Not a *problem*. I don't mean a "problem". I mean, picking up women? Getting women?

ALMERS

I'm married.

BART

Are you? Now that's funny. There's no ring on your finger. Most married guys wear wedding rings, right? See, I have one.

ALMERS

I must have forgotten it this morning.

BART

Of course. (*Laughs*) "I must have forgotten it this morning." That's a good one! Hey, it's easy to forget a ring, right? Busy man like you. All those stocks and bonds to trade. All those clients giving you a hard time. And all those other things you must have on your mind.

ALMERS

That's right. Can we change the subject? Do you like sports?

BART

No. (*Pause*) It's funny. I used to know this guy. We used to go out for drinks once and a while

after work. And do you know what he used to do? He'd take his ring off whenever we went into a bar. He was married but he used to take his wedding ring off and put it into his pocket in case he met a girl at the bar. You know what I mean? He was a good looking guy like you and he never had trouble picking up girls in a bar.

ALMERS

He was married?

BART

Yeah, but that never made any difference, you know. That wedding ring would be safely in his pocket and as far as the girls knew, he was single. So, he'd just pick up a girl and she'd always have an apartment in the city so they could slip away for a couple of hours.

ALMERS

Really?

BART

Yeah. Of course, it would have been easier if he had his own little place in the city. Know what I mean? A *pied-à-terre*, is that what's it's called?

ALMERS

I'm not sure.

BART

Yeah. *Pied-a-terre*. Know where I learned that word? From someone sitting in that chair. Yeah, just his own little place that nobody knew about. So if he met a girl, he could just...

ALMERS

Slip away?

BART

Right.

ALMERS

Didn't his wife suspect?

BART

Who?

ALMERS

Your friend. In the bar.

BART

I don't know. I guess not. He worked in the city and sometimes he had to work "late." You know what I mean? I guess his wife believed him. She must have been the trusting type. She must have just thought, hey, my husband has to work late again, the poor bastard. He's working late at the office just to put food on the table.

ALMERS

I see.

BART

Yeah, once they trust you, you can get away with anything. See, trust is the key. Here's my friend's wife waiting for him at home, worried about him working late and all. And here he is with his wedding ring in his pocket laying a lot of linoleum in his *pied-a-terre*, you know what I mean? Anyway, my wife, Susanna...

*(ALMERS twitches in his seat.)*

BART

Hey, Mr. Almers, you shouldn't do that. I cut you a little bit.

*(BART dabs his face with the tip of his towel then places the tip against the cut, holding it there.)*

BART

You have to stay nice and still when you're being shaved. This razor can do a lot of damage. It's as sharp as a ...razor! That's funny, huh? They say everything is as sharp as a razor, right? "This knife is as sharp as a razor...the pleats in his pants were as sharp as a razor...he's smart; he's as sharp as a razor." But this really *is* a razor. And these razors today are really sharp. They're not like the old razors. High-carbon steel. Very strong. I can perform surgery with this. I could probably cut out somebody's heart and he wouldn't even feel it.

ALMERS

How much longer is this going to be?

BART

Oh, not long. Anyway, we were talking about my wife, Susanna. Remember?

ALMERS

Yes.

BART

She's got to work late once in a while too. Yeah, they really keep her busy down there on the Street. A lot of times she'll call and say, "Won't be home for dinner tonight. Got to work late again. Don't wait up." Yeah, you guys really work her hard.

ALMERS

No I don't.

BART

What? No. Of course *you* don't. Why would *you*? You don't even know her.

ALMERS

That's right.

BART

Of course. *(Pause)* Although, like I said, you could have met her. Especially if she didn't use her real name?

ALMERS

Why wouldn't she use her real name?

BART

I don't know. You'd have to ask her.

ALMERS

How could I, I don't even...

BART

You know, it wouldn't surprise me if you had run in to her. I know she likes to have a drink now and then after work with her friends. There's nothing wrong with that. Going out after work for a drink? There's nothing wrong with that, is there?

ALMERS

Of course not.

BART

Yeah, there's nothing wrong with going out with your friends to one of those nice bars where all the brokers and the bankers hang out. Not a joint, you know? Not a place where I would go. Not one of those places. But a place where you can sip wine and talk to Wall Street guys in nice suits. So, maybe you went out for a drink with your friends one night and you noticed a bunch of good looking girls down at the other end of the bar. And maybe one of the girls caught your eye. The one in the tight dress and the stiletto heels.

ALMERS

No, I don't think so. Look, I really need to...

*(ALMERS tries to get up but feels the razor against his throat.)*

BART

Careful, Mr. Almers. Remember what I told you about sudden movements. I mean, your carotid artery is right here. My god, if that got cut the blood would probably hit that wall over there. That's a good 10 feet. See, people think it's the jugular vein that sprays but it's really the carotid. There's more pressure in there. Yeah, you'd bleed out in less than a minute if that got severed. I mean, you could try running somewhere but you wouldn't make it to the end of the block.

*(ALMERS tries to get up again. BART grabs his hair and holds his head back, razor to his throat.)*

BART

Don't move. This is the most important part of the shave. Like I said, maybe one of the girls catches your eye and later, her friends leave but she stays at the bar. That's a sign, right? She's sending you a signal. And then your friends get ready to leave but you tell them you're staying for one last drink. And then, it's just you and her.

ALMERS

Please.

BART

Almost done. So you decide, what the hell? You're a good looking guy in a beautiful suit and a big pair of Testoni's. Who wouldn't want a man like you? You could offer a girl a lot, right? A lot more than she's got. And maybe, just maybe, if you're lucky, you and she could just...slip away.

ALMERS

I didn't do anything. I swear. It wasn't me.

BART

You didn't do anything? *(Suddenly becomes lost in thought)* Of course you didn't. I mean, what could you have done?

*(BART loosens his grip on ALMERS but still keeps the blade of the razor at his throat.)*

BART

It wasn't you? *(Scrutinizing ALMERS)*. No, it couldn't have been. Not you. You see, when it comes to taking that final step, some men can do it and some men can't. Some men just can't do what their supposed to do. Don't you just hate that, Mr. Almers? Not being able to do what you're supposed to do.

*(BART steps away from the chair and looks out into space, deep in reverie.)*

BART

Where does that come from anyway? Not being able to do what you want to do. Does that just get beaten into you over time, or is it something you're born with, like your name? Anyway, some things you can't control. You gotta make the best of a bad situation, right, Mr. Almers?

*(ALMERS bolts from the chair and runs out the door with the barber's cape still around his neck.)*

BART

Mr. Almers!

*(BART grabs ALMERS's jacket from the coat tree and runs after him. He exits the shop a few feet and is seen looking up the street.)*

BART

Hey, Mr. Almers, you forgot your...

*(BART shrugs, returns to the shop. He walks toward the coat tree but instead of hanging ALMERS' jacket back up he flings it across the room into a corner. He then begins tidying up. He sweeps the floor and begins cleaning his utensils. A MAN enters)*

MAN

Hey, are you open?

BART

Yes.

MAN

Can I get a haircut quick?

BART

Of course, of course. Come right this way.

*(MAN begins to take his suit jacket off. BART helps him off with the jacket, which he carefully hangs on the coat tree. BART then ceremoniously ushers man into the chair.)*

BART

Right over here, sir.

*(BART unfurls barber's cape with a flourish, places it around the MAN, and fastens the cape behind his neck.)*

BART

So, what'll it be?

MAN  
Just a little off the top I think.

Really?

*(BART runs a finger across the man's cheek and chin.)*

BART  
Hey, how about a shave?

MAN  
No. Don't have the time.

BART  
It would be on me. My pleasure.

MAN  
You mean it?

BART  
Sure.

MAN  
Well, in that case, why not? But it's got to be fast. I don't have a lot of time.

BART  
I figured that. Busy man like you.

*(BART raises the leather strop from the side of the chair and begins stropping his razor.)*

Hey, you look familiar. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

*(As BART continues to sharpen the blade, lights fade to black. End of play.)*

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *In one sense, "Shave" can be seen as a classic struggle between a have and a have-not. A Wall Street "master of the universe" against a down-on-his luck barber. But in this case the power alignment is ultimately reversed, with delicious consequences. The barber winds up getting the upper hand and in that hand is a sharpened razor. At the same time, I wanted to blend in the subtext of "The Marriage of Figaro," perhaps the greatest of all tales involving a barber. As in "Shave," Figaro gets the better of a powerful man. I love plays that seem to be about one thing, but point larger*

*themes. My playwrighting heroes are Pinter, Mamet, Stoppard, Shaffer and James Goldman, whose *The Lion in Winter* I would have given my eye teeth and several molars to have written.*

**AUTHOR’S BIO:** Joseph Vitale, a finalist for the 2020 Woodward-Newman drama prize and a semi-finalist for the 2012 Eugene O’Neill Theater/National Playwrights Conference, is the author of a number of plays, including *Dragons in the Crease*, which was performed at New York’s Hudson Guild Theater in 2019. *Murrow*, a one-man show about the life of Edward R. Murrow (called “a dramatic masterpiece” by the *Huffington Post*), was performed Off-Off Broadway in May 2016 at The Phoenix Theatre Ensemble. *Back Channel* premiered at The Theater Project in New Jersey in 2018. *The Fourth State of Matter* was performed in 2011 at the Theater for the New City in New York and was later nominated for the National Playwrights Conference. His one-acts have been produced at the Hudson Guild, Barrow Group and Manhattan Repertory theaters in New York and at theaters around the country. His one-act, *The Monster Under the Bed*, was voted “Best Play” at both the 2018 St. Paul (IN) Theater Festival and the 2019 One-Act Jamboree at the Rhino Theater, Pompton Lakes, NJ. He is a graduate of Rutgers, Columbia and the New School for Social Research and studied playwriting at the HB Studio in New York. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America and the Theater Project Playwrights Workshop. Visit: [www.josephvitale.net](http://www.josephvitale.net)