

Torch continued...

wanted to test Ed's attraction to men. When Arnold finds out, a row ensues. But they soon make up. One day, Arnold gets a message and visits Alan on the set. Alan has heard good news: they are going to be parents. He tells Arnold that it is time they were married. They make plans to find a new apartment because their son will need a room of his own. The night they move in, Alan goes out for some take-out Chinese while Arnold makes the bedroom habitable. In the distance, the sound of a siren screams. A sense of dread pervades the apartment and Arnold hurries out to the street. The paramedics are taking away a body on the stretcher. It is Alan, bludgeoned to death by gay-haters.

Three years later, a fight erupts in the schoolyard. In the principal's office, the teacher tells one of the fighters that she has called his mother. The audience roars with laughter as the camera chronicles feet clad in bunny slippers pounding up the stairs. Arnold in his housedress yanks David to his feet saying, "You are in trouble!" At the apartment, we get another surprise. Ed is getting a divorce from Laurel and is staying over, on the couch. Arnold reveals that his mother is coming to visit his father's grave and plans to stay with Arnold. She does not know that David is her grandson. Ed is told to stay out of the way for a few days. His mother arrives while Arnold is at the meeting for David's final adoption procedure. Mrs. Beckoff is shocked by David's youth and questions him because she thinks that he is Arnold's lover.

When Arnold returns, he

and Mrs. Beckoff pay a visit to the cemetery. Alan is buried in a plot left to Arnold by his father. As Mrs. Beckoff says the Khaddish (prayer of mourning) for her husband, Arnold takes out his piece of paper and begins his prayer. His mother accuses him of blasphemy, saying that he does not know what it is like to lose someone close. Finally, Arnold pours out all the grief and anger that he has suppressed. He shouts that gay people can feel agony and loss. He speaks of shopping for groceries for two and setting a dinner place for Alan even though he is gone. His mother cannot accept the similarity of their losses and runs away. When Mrs. Beckoff returns, Ed is still watching TV. When Arnold comes in a few minutes later. Ed guiltily and hopefully says, "Oops?" Still in a rage, Arnold yells, "OOPS is when you accidentally douche yourself with Drano."

Later that day Arnold disappears from work. Ed finds him drunk outside The Stud and takes him home. In the cab, he asks Arnold for a second chance but Arnold tells him why he could not: Ed has not even told his parents that he is gay. Back at the apartment, Arnold and his mother have another fight because she does not think that he could be a good parent to David. Finally, Arnold says sadly that if the people he loves do not respect his way of life, there is no place for them in his life. Mrs. Beckoff takes that to mean an order to leave.

The next morning, Ed tells Arnold it is time to tell the truth because he loves him. Mrs. Beckoff observes the scene. As she is leaving, she relents a little and asks him if he loves Ed. He

nods yes. "As much as the other one?" Ruefully, Arnold says no. "Does it ever stop?" he asks her, referring to the grief. Gently, she replies that it never does. The phone interrupts them. It is David. He wants Arnold to turn on the radio. Arnold fusses but turns it on as the announcer is saying, "I checked it with my producer and I'm not sure but here it goes: 'To Arnold, with all my love, David.'" Arnold looks up to find his mother gone. But they have shared a moment of understanding. As the song plays on, he rocks himself gently while huddled over a photograph of Alan and a pair of glasses his mother had left behind.

What makes *Torch Song Trilogy* a great movie is that it does not attempt to lecture its audience about how to treat gays. The scene where Alan is bludgeoned with a baseball bat does show senseless and brutal homophobia but its importance lies in the grief that Arnold suffers. The movie is a chronicle about one man's struggle to find love and peace. It is not a quest to change the world. Yes, Arnold must constantly fight against stigmas. But only, twice does he ever make an issue about being gay. The first time, was when he needed to break through his mother's blindness and the second when he wakes Ed to reality. Arnold is *human*. If we lost a loved one like he did, we would suffer too.

Haverly Fiersteinis Arnold mesmerizes the audience. His style of "show" rather than "tell" works very well. Note the subtlety of the episodes with the dedications on the radio. If you have not yet seen the movie, try calling around the local video rentals. If you want to read the play, UO library has it.