

ALL THE SAINTS

By

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ALL THE SAINTS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ALEX SPENCER	25	Circuit boy, escort, model
MARK DOUPHOL	41	Industrialist, entrepreneur. He has an “arrangement” with ALEX
GIL FLORES (FLORA)	26	Wealthy San Diego gay socialite. ALEX’s best friend.
AJ DUVAL	29	US Navy pilot, stationed in San Diego
DR. CARTER GRENVIL	42	Physician. Friend to ALEX.
JASON	19	FLORA’s houseboy. A non-speaking role.
JOE WILSON	58	Attorney and gay activist. Life-long friend and father-figure for AJ.
OTHERS		Various gym sluts, party-goers, circuit boys, rapists and dancers. Non-speaking roles.

PLACES AND TIMES

<u>Act One</u>	Scene One	A fashionable gym in San Diego. Fall, 2003.
	Scene Two	Dr. Carter Grenvil’s office. San Diego. The next morning.
	Scene Three	FLORA’s condo in La Jolla. That evening.
	Scene Four	ALEX’s apartment. An hour later.
	Scene Five	A restaurant in La Jolla. Lunch time. Two weeks later.
	Scene Six	Yosemite. Sentinel Dome. A few days later. Early afternoon.
	Scene Seven	Yosemite. Dewey Point. Six hours later. That evening.

	Scene Eight	FLORA's condo in La Jolla. Several weeks later.
	Scene Nine	The White Party in Miami. Three days later. Late evening through pre-dawn.
<u>Act Two</u>	Scene One	Beach-side bungalow, Bahia De Todos Los Santos, Mexico. Thirty hours later.
	Scene Two	Same. Two weeks later.
	Scene Three	Same. Four days later.
	Scene Four	Same. The next morning.
	Scene Five	FLORA's condo in La Jolla. A few days later.
	Scene Six	ALEX's apartment in San Francisco. A year and a half later.
	Scene Seven	San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. One month later.
	Scene Eight	ALEX's apartment. Six weeks later
	Scene Nine	Same. Hours later.
	Scene Ten	Yosemite. Sentinel Dome. A few days later.

ALL THE SAINTSACT ONEScene One

SETTING *After the prologue, it will be an upscale gym in San Diego, though most of the stage is in darkness, with characters coming out of the shadow into the central lighted area, as they are required for the scene. NOTE ON STAGING: Throughout, sets and props will be minimal, facilitating rapid shifts between scenes. Shifts may involve simply lighting a different part of the stage as the actors move to it.*

AT RISE *Stage is in darkness. MUSIC: Prologue from Verdi's opera, LA TRAVIATA begins, then light slowly comes up in narrow focus on the figure of ALEX sitting on the edge of what appears to be a narrow bed. He is shirtless; with long, white pants that would work both as pajama bottoms or as gym wear. ALEX is wrapping his arm with medical tubing. He knots the tubing and lifts a syringe from the bed beside him, injects himself with the syringe. He releases the tubing, withdraws the needle of the syringe. In a moment, his head begins to fall slowly back and his eyes close. He slowly collapses onto the bed.*

MUSIC fades, replaced by the background noises of a gym as the bed is quickly converted to a gym's weight bench, with a stand and barbell placed over ALEX's head. MARK enters to take the spotter's place at the head of the bench as ALEX lifts the weights off the stand and begins bench press reps.

MARK

...eight, nine, ten...come on...come on...two more. Eleven, twelve!

ALEX returns the barbell to stand without MARK's assistance.

ALEX

Too easy...time to go up...aren't you supposed to be pushing me?

ALEX stands, runs his hand down his chest, apparently examining himself in a mirror.

MARK

I'll be pushing you tonight...hard as you can take it, boy. *(Pause)* Damn! Do you have any idea how *hot* you are?

ALEX

Yes. *(Pause)* I'm getting fat...

MARK

No you're not.

MARK runs his fingertips around ALEX's left bicep.

But you do need to get a tattoo...just a band, maybe.... something tribal...here.

Run his fingertips around ALEX's right bicep.

...or here. Either would work for you.

As ALEX tries to move away, MARK grabs his arm for a moment, just above the elbow, then releases it. ALEX begins to add several large plates to the weights on the barbell.

ALEX

You want to brand me? How exotic. But you know I have to think about my market. Not every photo shoot needs the inked bad boy look...and not every...client.

MARK

You could be *my* inked bad boy...exclusive contract...

MARK notices the weights ALEX has loaded onto the bar.

...Jesus, are you trying to hurt me?

MARK begins his set.

ALEX

(ALEX begins to count) ...six...seven...push it, push it...eight...come on...nine...three more....ten...

ALEX begins to assist.

...eleven...one more, just one more....

MARK can't press the last rep and ALEX helps him ease the weights onto the rack.

(CONT'D)

You'll do it...next time.

MARK

*(Simultaneously)...*shit....fuck!

MARK's cell phone, attached to his gym shorts, vibrates. He answers. Responds to the unheard caller.

Yes. Yes. No. No! That is totally unacceptable. We've talked about this. It can't be an issue at this point. No. He has to be onboard right now and on the terms we discussed. No. Yeah. Let me take a look at it. I'm at the gym. Fax it to the car and I'll get right back to you. No, the Ferrari.

MARK closes the cell phone, stands.

I have to do this.

MARK leaves. ALEX shrugs and begins to take the additional plates from the bar, as FLORA enters.

FLORA

Mon cher...to where is the robber baron off with such *clouded* countenance?

ALEX

To buy a basketball team, I should think.

FLORA

Mais, non! I shall indeed be quite faint! All those tall, muscular, sweaty men...with such big...*hands*.

ALEX

It's a bad deal. He'll be lucky if he only loses ten million a year on it.

FLORA

Tragique! That means he will be...flat broke....in what? Sixty years? Perhaps a bit less?

ALEX

Oh, Flora, you *know* how new money always seems richer than it is. Real money, though... *(Pause)* He wants me to get a tattoo. "A band...something tribal..."

Indicating FLORA's biceps.

"Here. Or maybe here."

FLORA

(*Laughing*) Well, girlfriend. The next time he suggests it, you just say “totem, love”. Totem... Jaguar. *Your* tribal totem...but, (*quickly*) the eight-cylindereed kind, not the four-legged kind.

ALEX

You are just so *evil*! No, I won't be getting the ink, *cher*. I will get the Jaguar. I *do* think the Lexus is losing that “new car” smell.

FLORA

OK, tell me this, pretty Alex. Just *why* do you workout here? When you have a complete gym in the baron's “villa by the sea”? (*pause*) Slumming?

ALEX

Tell me *this*, my sexy Flora. Why do *you* workout here? There's a gym at the Encinal. I know. I live there too, remember?

FLORA

I'd forgotten, indeed, sometimes you *do*. (*Confidentially*) It's the *saleau*... all these *old* men there. I'd be afraid one of them would want to show me his *thang* in the sauna! I come here to cruise the hot college jocks.

ALEX

Mark brings me here to show me off...like that Ferrari...and help him score some of *your* hot college jocks. One is never enough for Mark.

FLORA

Oh, sweet Alexis...one *is* never enough! *Mais*, now, speaking of which...it would appear you have an admirer...a watcher, glancer, *inamorato*...can't keep his *eyes* away from you...

ALEX

Where?

FLORA

OK, just turn ever so casually...over by the cables...hunk in a white string tank, blue shorts... *hot* eagle tattoo on his chest.

ALEX

Hmmm. Yes. The chiseled, butch military look...and definite bedroom eyes. Also quite straight. The usual workout partner is the girlfriend. They're here a lot.

FLORA

She's not. Not for a while. And not so much straight, *je crois*.

ALEX

You *wish*, my dear. The usual gay fantasy...*every* hot man is gay...or could be, with just the right amount of *persuasion*...

FLORA

He *watches* you, Alessandra. Do you find a *lot* of straight men do that?

ALEX

How do you know he watches me?

FLORA

Mon *cher*, when I'm here I watch *everyone*. I watch who *they* watch...and, I *swear*, military hunk watches *you*, *honeychille*...

ALEX

You are so *bad*, Miss Flora. Go daydream over by the leg machines. I have to get back to my workout.

FLORA

(*As he leaves*) I'm right about that one, mon *cher*. I so *am*.

ALEX appears to look around for MARK. He lies down on the bench, under his weights. He gets up, adds several plates to the bar, returns to the bench and begins his set. After a while, he begins to struggle with the weight. AJ enters and goes quickly to the spotter position, grabs the bar and assists ALEX in lifting it onto the rack. AJ has a V-shaped tattoo of a diving eagle, its claws extended, on his chest.

ALEX

Thanks...

AJ

No problem. You really should have someone with you. When you go up weights like that.

Quickly, overeagerly extending his hand.

AJ. AJ Duval. Alfred Joseph, actually, but it's always AJ.

ALEX

Well, "always AJ", thank you again...I'm Alex Spencer...

They shake hands, then AJ seems reluctant to let go of ALEX's hand.

AJ

Yes, I know...

ALEX

We've met?

AJ

Yes. Actually no. I mean, I've seen you before.

ALEX

Here. I've seen you here before, too. With your girlfriend.

AJ

Ex-girlfriend. I meant outside the gym.

ALEX

Oh?

AJ

The HRC Black Tie dinner. At the Hotel Del Coronado.

ALEX

(Pause) Really? *(Pause)* Yes! You're Navy, right?

AJ

Pilot. S3B Strike Vikings with the Red Griffins at North Island. We're...

ALEX

I remember now. Your uniform was dazzling. With a sword. And a girlfriend.

AJ

Uhhh, yeah. It's required...

ALEX

The girlfriend?

AJ

Uhhh...no, the sword. Formal dress whites require the sword. And, ex-girlfriend...or, I mean, she *was* my girlfriend then.

ALEX

Not now?

AJ

Not now...no. Uh, we were Joe Wilson's guests. He got an award that night. Joe's a really close family friend.

ALEX

You've known him...?

AJ

...all my life. He's like an uncle...or father, really. It was his big night and I wanted to be there for him.

ALEX

That was nice of you. Did you enjoy the event?

AJ

Yes. It was great. Everyone looked ... *fabulous*...(pause, then meaning ALEX) ...*beautiful*.

ALEX

You know you had quite a few pulses racing that night. Every queen *there* wanted to get you out of your uniform. Some just so they could get into it themselves!

AJ

I...uhmm...

ALEX stands. Begins to massage his upper pecs and shoulders, stretching.

ALEX

Now I am just so *stiff*. Would you mind? I really tightened up on that set...

ALEX turns his back to AJ, extending his arms behind. AJ hesitates, unsure for a moment what to do, then takes ALEX's wrists, one in each hand, and raises them behind ALEX's back in an assisted stretch to "open up" ALEX's cramped pec and shoulder muscles. Slowly he brings the arms higher behind ALEX's back. Both seem to enjoy the contact. It has gone on for a bit longer than might be expected when FLORA abruptly enters the scene.

FLORA

Just you hold onto him, now! I'll get my *cuffs*!

AJ

Uh...uh....

ALEX

Oh, Flora! Don't be lewd. You're embarrassing AJ! I *know* you don't keep your toys here at the gym! (To AJ) AJ Duval, this is Gil Flores.

FLORA extends his hand, as if to be kissed.

FLORA

Flora to you, my dear and any man so *spectacularly* handsome....

AJ looks at the extended hand, puzzled, then reaches up to shake it, awkwardly.

AJ

Uhhh...good to meet you...Flora. Uhhh... Do you come here often?

FLORA

(Coyly) Yes, quite often.

ALEX

AJ was at the Del for the Black Tie. As Joe Wilson's guest. He's a Navy pilot.

FLORA

Oh, *yes!* Now I remember you. In white...with a sword...and your girlfriend.

AJ

Ex-girlfriend.

FLORA

Oh, *ex-girlfriend*. There *must* be a story there. *Mais*, I am so bad. I sometimes meet people I don't recognize as having seen before...when they were actually *dressed*, that is.

FLORA almost touches AJ's bare chest, above the tattoo, thinks better of it.

Cher, Alex....Mark isn't back yet? He's certainly taking a chance leaving you on your own in this musky, sweaty place.

ALEX looks in the direction of MARK's departure.

ALEX

He's probably still...

Apparently seeing MARK.

...flirting with that cute guy at the trainer's desk.

FLORA looks in the direction indicated.

FLORA

Oh, *my*...he is *yummy!* That's one area where the robber baron has good taste...and luck.

ALEX

He has me...he doesn't need luck. But never play poker with him...that's where he makes all his own luck.

MARK enters.

Mark, this is AJ Duval. He just rescued me after I had been just *totally* abandoned.

MARK

(*Nodding to FLORA*) Gil. (*To AJ*) Hey. Thanks, whatever you did. (*To ALEX*) Let's go. We'll finish up our workout at home.

AJ extends his hand.

AJ

A pleasure to meet you, sir. Your hydraulics keep me in the air.

MARK

What?

ALEX

AJ is a Navy pilot. He was at the Black Tie. Guest of Joe Wilson.

MARK

Wilson? Wilson. Oh, yes. I remember. (*pause*) Didn't you have a... (*indicating a sword with his hand.*)

AJ

(*Interrupting*) Douphol Industries. I fly Vikings. You make the hydraulics.

MARK

Oh? Yes, well...I guess someone does. Good to meet you. (*To ALEX*) I'll see you at the car.

MARK leaves.

ALEX

I have to go, apparently. (*To AJ*) So...thanks again for the rescue...and for looking out for me. (*To FLORA*) I'll call you, *cher*...lunch and some dead serious shopping tomorrow.

ALEX leaves.

AJ

Are they....?

FLORA

It's just so *tres complique'*. Dear Mark knows *owning* things. And perhaps he sees Alex as something he can afford. (*Pause*) Alex though (*pause*)...well, some things just...have no price, let's say. (*Long pause*) How would *you* like to come to a party? I'm having some friends over tomorrow night. Elegant buffet, champagne, *tons* of caviar...lots of great...*party favors*. Nothing elaborate....

AJ

I don't do drugs...

FLORA

Alex will be there...

AJ

Then I'm there.

FLORA

Merveilleux! Do you know the Encinal, in La Jolla?

AJ

Yes.

FLORA

8 PM. Tenth floor.

AJ

Thanks for the invitation...(hesitating at the name)...Flora. (*Pause*) What number?

FLORA

(*Puzzled*) Ummm...ten?

AJ

Ten? Apartment number?

FLORA

No...*floor*. All of it. (*pause*) The concierge will have your name.

BLACKOUT
SOUND OUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Two

TIME *Late the next morning.*

SETTING *Examining room in the office of Dr. Carter Grenvil. There is a small table appropriate to such a room and two chairs.*

AT RISE *CARTER is wearing a shirt and tie, no coat. He removes a stethoscope and places it on the table, sits and consults a clipboard. ALEX is in briefs and dresses during the scene.*

ALEX

X, of course...and Tina....Party!...G...mmm G! (Pause) Special K...

CARTER

Crack?

ALEX

Oh, please! Too ghetto. No C at all. (Pause) H.

CARTER

What?

ALEX laughs, shows CARTER his arms.

ALEX

Do you see tracks? I'm *teasing* you, Carter. I like to party...not *kill* myself.

CARTER

Pot?

ALEX

I don't smoke.

CARTER

You are a paragon of clean living. You're also losing weight. Six pounds.

ALEX

That's good.

CARTER

Not good. We'll need to watch if it continues. But my guess would be it's your alphabet soup of fun. Does Mark say anything about the drugs?

ALEX

“Here, try this...it’s awesome”. He likes me a little tweaked...or rolling.

CARTER

That’s not good.

ALEX

I can handle Mark...and the drugs.

CARTER

How often do you...party?

ALEX

Not that often. Sometimes. A couple of times a week.

CARTER

With clients?

ALEX

No. *(pause)* Well, mostly not. I have to stay in control there. Once in a while if I need to keep it going over a weekend I’ll invite Tina along.

CARTER

Is that what happened in New York?

ALEX

Not a client. Not exactly. I *told* you, the scene wasn’t meant to get that out of hand. The shoot was great; the guy was really hot...we drank a lot of Dom.

CARTER

You dodged a bullet. You’ve had two negative tests in six months. But I can’t say this firmly enough, crystal is evil. It’s addictive and you *will* lose control of the situation.

ALEX stands, leans over the table and kisses CARTER on the forehead.

ALEX

You are so sweet. You care. And you will always be there for me...you and your magic pills. So. Did you see the spread in *Details*?

CARTER

Yes. You were *fabulous*. What’d you get for it?

ALEX

\$30K. There’ll be an ad for Armani in next month’s *GQ*. And a shot at this *huge* contract with Ford!

CARTER

\$30K might buy you two years of meds. Not worth it. What they could do to your body isn't pretty. Ford wouldn't want you.

ALEX's cell phone, on his belt, vibrates during the above line.

ALEX

Oh, Carter you're just bringing me down. I *told* you that nothing like that would happen again. Just let it *go*. (*pause*) Now, please excuse me.

ALEX answers the phone, then, into the phone, pausing for responses.

Flora! *Cher!* Where are you? (*pause*) Good, *good*. I'm at Carter's office. He's been poking my asshole. And can you imagine this?! Now I have to pay *him!* (*pause*) Fabulous, darling, just pick me up here....tell your driver Tapenade for lunch and Sak's after...then why don't we cruise up to Gary's at Del Mar and do some *real* damage? (*pause*) Fantastic! (*pause*) Oh, I can't *wait* to tell you about the cute guy Mark picked up for us at the *gym* yesterday! (*pause*) Yes. (*To Carter*) Flora wants to know if you're coming tonight.

CARTER

Of course. Someone has to bring the money Mark will go home with.

ALEX

Yes, *cher*....Mark will be so pleased. (*pause*) Ten minutes. (*Closing the cell phone, then, to CARTER*) Why do you continue to play? Mark always wins.

CARTER is writing out a prescription.

CARTER

I keep hoping his luck will run out...

(CARTER hands the prescription to ALEX.)

...and praying yours won't.

Only if you need it, remember.

ALEX

(Hugging CARTER) You're so very *awesome!*

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Three

TIME *That evening.*

SETTING *FLORA's condo. A sofa and a few pieces of elegant modern furniture. The condo is very large, but we will only see part of it. SOUND: Muted party chatter, clinking glasses, etc. MUSIC: Soft South American contemporary. There will be a number of non-speaking partygoers, all male and one server to bring drinks and food...young, good-looking, FLORA's houseboy JASON. All the guests will be casually, but fashionably dressed. (The additional party guests may be "assumed", with principals possibly "speaking to the air".)*

AT RISE *ALEX, FLORA, MARK in conversation. Party chatter among the other guests. JASON serving.*

FLORA

It was *awful*. I usually *adore* Roland, but *honeychille* he might as well have just brought one of his CD's, put it on and then left. He wasn't *there*, my dears. Now if you can't connect with the crowd and the scene and build on the *moment*, why even bother?

ALEX

Remember Jose'? The Café del Mar in Ibiza? Sunset. There had been a shower earlier and the clouds were just clearing to the west...and his mix was just *perfect!* So romantic. So sexy. We had such a wonderful evening. Remember, Mark?

MARK

Hmm? I'm sure I do...when was it?

ALEX

July. On the way back from that week with Aldo and Tony in Bellagio.

MARK

All I remember is that Italy in July with no air conditioning is god damn miserable.

ALEX

I *loved* their villa on the lake.

MARK

Without air conditioning. It's not like he can't afford it. Isn't he a count or something?

ALEX

Prince, actually. And that's just Tony.

FLORA

No air conditioning? How dreadful! *Anyway...*I think the White Party in Palm Springs is so *over*. *Palm Springs* is so *over*. All those old queens with leather skin, wrinkles, horrible shoes and Manhattans.

CARTER has entered during FLORA's lines.

CARTER

I was in Palm Springs last weekend and I drank nothing but martinis. Dirty.

CARTER kisses FLORA.

How *are* you? How was the shopping?

FLORA

Oh, don't ask. I'm afraid we were *very* naughty. But the boy at Gary's was just such a *doll*! We bought *everything*!

MARK hugs ALEX from behind.

MARK

I can't wait to get the credit card statement. I expect you'll have to be very, *very* naughty when that one comes in.

CARTER

Come on Mark, you'll cover it in what you win tonight. I know you were just waiting for me to go join the game.

MARK

(*To FLORA*) Excuse us. I have money to make.

CARTER and MARK leave.

FLORA

(*Greeting two newly arrived guests.*) Josh! Scottie! So glad you could come...just chase down Jason for champagne, the buffet is in the large dining room...and party favors are in the solarium. (*To ALEX*)...and Mark will be occupied in the salon for the rest of the evening...*boring*. How *do* you put up with it?

ALEX

By enjoying *your* wonderful company, dear Flora and having my own blast. Did you say the solarium?

FLORA

Indeed, sweet Alexie. Chez Flora's party pharmacopoeia...

AJ enters during FLORA's line, stops...seems a bit unsure. He's dressed in khakis and pullover polo....he's carrying a single, white camellia. FLORA notices him.

Oh, my...

FLORA puts his hand on ALEX's shoulder, who had turned to go to the solarium.

Umm...my dear, I have a surprise for you. Your rescuer has just walked through my door.

AJ sees FLORA and ALEX. His eyes linger on ALEX, and then shift to FLORA as he walks over. Bowing slightly, he takes the hand FLORA has extended as if to shake, lifts it to his lips, then offers FLORA the camellia.

AJ

For you, Flora. Flower to flower. Beauty to beauty.

FLORA

(Genuinely surprised.) Oh, my! Un homme galant. You have quite taken my breath away, you gorgeous man! And such a lovely camellia. (Sniffs the flower, pauses.) Ahh...In the language of flowers, you know, it means "perfected beauty".

ALEX

I hate camellias.

AJ

I'm sorry. Why?

ALEX

My grandmother's funeral. There were acres of them.

FLORA

But girlfriend just *loves* dahlias. Can't get her *fill* of dahlias. In San Francisco last week, *where* did we have to go *every* day?

ALEX

Versace.

FLORA

The Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. To the dahlia garden. What *does* she see in dahlias?

ALEX

(Softly) Perfected love.

FLORA

“Instability”...in the language of flowers. A dahlia.

JASON passes with a tray of champagne. FLORA removes one glass and hands JASON the camellia.

Find an exquisite vase...that small Lalique, I think....put it in water and take it to my bedroom. *(To AJ)* Champagne?

AJ

No, I’m flying tomorrow. I can’t.

FLORA

Well, honey *chille*, I’ll be flying tonight. And I *can*.

FLORA drinks some champagne.

I am just so *glad* you could make it for my little *soiree*’. If you’ll excuse me, I *must* check on my other guests. Be a dear, Alex and show AJ around. The buffet, the solarium, the salon. Oh, well maybe not the solarium. Maybe not the salon, either.

FLORA leaves.

ALEX

That was well done. You have totally charmed Flora. Not easy at all.

AJ

I was so fuckin’ nervous... Oh...sorry. *(Smiles)* I rehearsed. A lot. *(Pause)* But now I know what flower to bring *you*...next time.

Several guests pass by, greet ALEX, he introduces AJ.

This is an awesome place. What does Flora do?

ALEX

About what?

AJ

I mean...

ALEX

Oh, I know. That's just Flora's response when anyone asks, "What do you do?". My dear Flora's the black sheep...or "lavender lamb"...of a family that's had *real* money since New Orleans was the capital of Spanish Louisiana. The money keeps him in style...and at a distance.

AJ

There must be a lot of that...family money...

ALEX

Quite. *(Pause)* You're doing it again.

AJ's expression is puzzled. JASON passes by with tray and ALEX retrieves champagne and, for AJ, a glass of water. ALEX indicates the sofa and they both sit

Turning heads. Like at the Del. Without the uniform, this time.

AJ

Sure it's not you turning their heads?

ALEX

This crowd sees me all the time. *You* are the interesting new face. You're flying tomorrow? What do you fly?

AJ

I usually fly an S3B Strike Viking...two man jet...carrier group support. Tomorrow, though, I'll be out at Miramar with the Marines, second seat in a Hornet...that's a tactical fighter.

ALEX

Yum. You get to play with Marines.

AJ

It's cross training. Since my unit is decommissioning, I mostly get to fly a desk at North Island. Lots of down time. Boring as hell.

ALEX

How long have you been in San Diego?

AJ

I was born here. Grew up here. But, the past year and a half is the first time I've been back any time since I left for the Academy.

ALEX

Family?

AJ

Joe Wilson's the closest I get to having family...now.

ALEX

...and your...*ex*-girlfriend, the one with the great legs, how long...

AJ

...a year...but we'd dated since high school...off and on. I finally got stationed here and we thought we'd see if a relationship would work. It didn't.

ALEX

Oh? The reason being...

AJ

I realized I like guys more than girls...

ALEX

Now, that's a reason. And the Navy...?

AJ

They don't ask...

ALEX

...and you don't tell.

FLORA enters.

FLORA

Cher bebe`, Colin insists we *must* do Mardi Gras in Sydney next year...he absolutely *insists!* It would be such fun! Oh, let's do!

FLORA slides onto the sofa, moving ALEX closer to AJ.

ALEX

I thought we agreed it would be Rio for Carnival, *precieux?* I'm not sure I'm up to all those skinny white boys with bad teeth. And the food! Horrible! Why *not* Rio, *cher?*

FLORA

It would just be too, too sad for Colin. All those boys with golden mocha skin and languid eyes...so soon after Luis. I could not *endure* the sighs and tragic poses.

ALEX

They were together a month when that giddy queen OD'ed. Colin should have *known* not to leave almost pure heroin around a boy he found actually *living* on Copa beach.

FLORA

It was so *triste!*

ALEX

When she went, that girl was so high she *still* doesn't know she's dead.

FLORA

Oh, Alex...Sydney...Sydney....*please!*

MARK enters.

Mark, convince Alex we should go to Sydney for Mardi Gras...

MARK

Alex does as he pleases. You know that. I most certainly do.

ALEX

Carter must not have brought much money, for the game to be over so soon.

MARK

He's still in the game. I'm not. I got a call from Shepherd. I have to meet him at the Parisi for a drink. I think he may be ready to deal.

MARK notices AJ for the first time.

You are....?

AJ stands.

AJ

AJ Duval, sir. We met at the gym yesterday.

MARK

Yes...the pilot. (*To FLORA*) How nice of you to invite him. Sailors always seem to butch up the mix at your parties, Gil. Only one tonight? (*To AJ*) Watch your back. This is a dangerous environment for a straight boy. (*To ALEX*) Don't stay too late. I want to get an early run on the beach tomorrow morning.

ALEX

I think I'll be staying at my place tonight. (*To FLORA, indicating the champagne*) This is a fabulous vintage, *cher*....I shall be wasted quite soon I'm afraid. (*To MARK*) *Far* too wasted to drive...

FLORA

My driver....

ALEX

Yes, off tonight, I know.

MARK

Call a cab, then. I want you back when I get in tonight. You know that.

ALEX

Don't be so *tedious*. I'll be fine at my place one night this week. And you'll get a full night's sleep, for once.

ALEX stands, hugs MARK.

Oh, go on. I would wish you luck but I know you don't need it...no Arizona hick stands a chance in any deal with you, guy.

MARK

Hmm. (*Reluctantly*) One night. Just remember we're having David and Carl over for dinner tomorrow. Make plans to be there.

ALEX

I wouldn't miss the opportunity to spend an evening with Mr. Geffen and this month's boyfriend for anything, my love.

MARK leaves. Several party guests enter, chat with FLORA. ALEX guides AJ away from the sofa.

Come on, sailor. Time to tour *palazzo Flora*. There is a most *fabulous* collection of paintings. All luscious male nudes, of course...

BLACKOUT
SOUND OUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Four

TIME *An hour later.*

SETTING *The living room of ALEX's apartment on the fifth floor of the Encinal. There are a few pieces of very stylish furniture, including a love seat and low table with books and one or two fashion magazines. There should be a wall where art photos are displayed. They might have been done by Diane Arbus. There is one striking photo of an old woman with limpid eyes, wisps of gray hair and wrinkled face.*

AT RISE *ALEX AND AJ have just entered the apartment.*

AJ

This is very nice.

ALEX

Compared to Flora's, it's a hovel. Good view, though.

AJ

My view is the parking lot of the neighborhood Lucky Store. (Pause) Mark's place must be something.

ALEX

It's what you'd expect. (Pause) I would have thought you lived in a barracks?

AJ

No. Kelly and I had a place on Coronado. I had to find something smaller when we split. I'm in Chula Vista. Are you here a lot?

ALEX

Mark would rather I not be here at all, or that he buy it for me. He's very much into acquisitions. Companies, houses, cars...tonight a basketball team. The place helps keep me from becoming one of his minor acquisitions.

AJ notices the magazines on the table.

AJ

I don't see the July issue of *Details*.

ALEX

No, it's not July.

AJ

Just thought you might have kept it.

ALEX
Did you?

AJ
Yes.

ALEX
I'm flattered. And surprised.

AJ
It was a great spread. Do they let you keep the clothes?

ALEX
Sometimes...but I have nicer in the closet.

AJ notices the photo art.

AJ
What, no sexy male nudes?

AJ examines the art more closely.

These are...different. Sorta like Diane Arbus. *(pause)* These two are...*(meaning, by Diane Arbus)*.

AJ notices the photo of the old woman.

You got it. How did you manage that?

ALEX
What?

AJ
The photo...from the silent auction at the Black Tie. You were *way* overbid.

ALEX
How do you know that?

AJ
I was bidding against you all night.

ALEX
That was you?

AJ
Yes.

ALEX

Now I *am* surprised. I wondered who it was. You were being most annoying...and persistent.

AJ

I was sure it was mine...I had the only bid for more than an hour. Didn't seem like something anyone else there that night would want. It wasn't...

ALEX

...pretty.

AJ

Yes. I watched to see who was bidding against me. That's when I asked Joe who *you* were.

ALEX

...and I was trying to see who thought he could outbid *me*. Never saw you at the table ...and you were spectacularly hard to miss that night.

AJ

You were spectacularly hard to miss...and I'm a pilot, remember? Tactical maneuvers are second nature. You shut me down, though. I couldn't go where you were going. At the end, someone bid three times your last bid. How do *you* have her?

ALEX

Guess...

AJ

Mark. He saw you were bidding.

ALEX

He intended it as a gift...and a lesson. I don't take lessons. Especially not from him.

AJ

The gift, though...

ALEX

Of course...

AJ

(*Long pause*) Why did you want her?

ALEX

Why? Well. It's a good piece. (Pause) The photographer has a great eye. He clearly has the trust of his subject. Made some sharp choices in lighting. Brilliant work in the darkroom...contrasts, especially in the lines and shadows of the face...

AJ

(Shaking his head "no") Hmm...

ALEX studies AJ for a long moment.

ALEX

I think she's beautiful.

AJ

Yes.

ALEX

She'll die soon.

AJ nods "yes".

She's happy.

AJ

Yes, she is.

ALEX

She's alone.

AJ

Yes.

ALEX again studies AJ...a long moment...looks at the photo.

ALEX

Interesting. (Pause) So... AJ. (pause) Why don't we give her a life? (pause) Tell her story? The one behind the photo? That maybe the photographer saw?

AJ

You first.

ALEX

(Studies the photo.) I think...I think she's always been alone...but never, ever lonely. As a girl...as a girl...she was...fresh and beautiful and...she danced.

AJ

A dancer. Good. What was she like? As a person?

ALEX

Passionate, very passionate. Demanding. She loved whatever was beautiful and fine and rare. She indulged herself with the exquisite and the perfect.

AJ

Where was she from?

ALEX

Doesn't matter at all. *(pause)* Nowhere at all.

AJ

So, a gypsy. *(long pause)* Was she ever in love?

There's just a hint of surprise at the question from ALEX.

ALEX

Hmm... *(Long pause)* No. *(Pause)* Love isn't perfect. She needed perfect. But the bodies she enjoyed would make angels weep.

AJ

And why wasn't she lonely?

ALEX

She was free...she was *always* free. Her life was...*brilliant*. See those lines there? *(Indicating)* Those are her paths of wisdom. She remembers their pleasure now as she faces death...and has no regrets...no fears.

AJ

I'm impressed. Very impressed. I can see why you wanted her. *(Pause)* You got the dancer part right. But, the rest...

ALEX

Why did *you* want her? What do you see? *(Pause)* Your turn.

AJ walks closer to the photo...studies it

AJ

At seventeen a boy smiled at her. *(Pause)* If you look, right *there*, behind her eyes, you can see that smile still. He touched her and they melted together and never, ever came apart. At night, for seventy years, as he would breathe out, she would breathe in. Where his skin was close, hers tingled...just...waiting. Together they were a world and all they needed they found in each other. Those lines...the lines of her face...they come from seventy years of laughing. She's proud of them. They are a map and lead her back to him. *(Pause)* You're right. She doesn't fear. Never has.

ALEX is silent for a long moment, studying AJ again.

ALEX
Do you know what I do?

AJ
About what?

ALEX smiles at the joke.

You have sex with men for money, sometimes. An escort.

ALEX
Joe?

AJ
I asked him about you.

ALEX
What do you think about that?

AJ
What do *you* think about that?

ALEX
It's a job. I'm very good at it. I've made quite a lot of money. Enough to live exactly as I please and have anything I want. Mark means I have to work less, now. He could support me entirely and *would* in a New York minute. My other Mark's couldn't do that. Even with him I keep working...one step ahead of being another of his...

AJ
...acquisitions. The modeling?

ALEX
It could work out...or not. Not a lot different from the escort thing, in any case. Same drugs. Same sex. Then you put on their clothes and fuck the camera. Escorting is so much less...stress. I just do weekenders, now. \$12K and first class airfare. For *that* the client gets his fantasy power-bottom or macho, aggressive top. Maybe even the sweet, understanding boy who will hold his hand and listen to his life story all weekend. I can cuddle all night or make him think he's gone to bed with a wildcat. That's me. That's my job. I'm not ashamed of it at all.

AJ studies ALEX for a long moment.

AJ

You do know I kill people for a living? *(pause)* It's all I've ever wanted to do with my life and the government's spent a shitload of money letting me perfect my skills. I can *wrap* my Viking around the flagpole of your compound and fly it up your ass while you're having tea. The finest months of my life were when I was deployed at the start of the war last March. First day I took out three tanks, five transport trucks...an artillery unit. My guess is I sent at least thirty guys to Paradise that day. I saw them. I saw them die. And I didn't fuckin' care. *(Pause)* It was my job to kill them and their job to kill me. They just weren't very good at their job. *(Long pause.)* We do what we do. *(Pause)* Alex, if you promise not to judge me, I promise not to judge you. All I know is that...you are so *beautiful...and...*

ALEX

...and?

AJ

...and....and I think I need to go.

AJ turns toward the door.

ALEX

Ah...you fly tomorrow....

ALEX follows, touches his shoulder, AJ turns around. They stand, face to face for a moment. ALEX pulls his shirt off over his head, leans forward....but AJ moves quickly, eagerly, to kiss him passionately. A long kiss. Unexpectedly, AJ pulls back...steps back...

AJ

If...if...I said "not now" ...would you see me again?

ALEX

No. Not ever.

AJ

(Anguished) But....

ALEX

(Caressing AJ's cheek) I think I *do* want to see you again.

AJ

Alex...

AJ stops, turns, begins to leave. He comes face to face with MARK entering, key in hand. There is an awkward moment.

(CONT'D)

Good evening, sir.

AJ leaves. MARK looks at ALEX for a long moment. He approaches ALEX, who is motionless. MARK circles ALEX slowly, predatorily, sniffing the back of his neck, then his throat, then his chest. He stands, looks at ALEX for a moment, then kisses him very roughly, forcing ALEX's head back. MARK walks away, his back to ALEX.

MARK

Losing your touch?

ALEX

(A long moment) You closed the deal?

MARK

Yeah. I thought I'd celebrate.

MARK tosses a small phial of drugs to ALEX, turns and begins to remove his shirt as he leaves, apparently to the bedroom. ALEX looks at the phial, then places it in his pocket. He goes to the photo of the old woman and pauses, then traces the lines of her face.

ALEX

How strange...

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Five

TIME *Two weeks later. Lunchtime.*

SETTING *A restaurant.*

AT RISE *ALEX, AJ, CARTER AND JOE are finishing lunch.*

AJ

...I was twelve, in the middle of nowhere, facing a bear and between us this insane man...singing, yelling, dancing, twirling, flapping a blanket and banging pans and I think I was more afraid of *him* than that damn bear!

ALEX

There are bears?

JOE

Yosemite's bears aren't really all that much of a problem. You never want to get between a bear and her cub, but ordinarily they're just scrounging for an easy meal. Give them a surprise and make a lot of noise. They'll go away. *Now*, mountain lions are another matter. A bear may mistake you for food. A mountain lion *knows* you are food.

ALEX

There are lions?

JOE

With a mountain lion, you back away...maintain eye contact. If it moves toward you, *attack*...rocks, sticks...spread your arms, try to make yourself appear as big as you can. If it goes for you, fight back...kick, punch, bite...no matter the pain. If not...well, you're the day's meal.

ALEX

AJ...

AJ

I love Yosemite. It's the most beautiful place on earth. You'll love it, Alex. I *want* you to see it.

CARTER

Joe, such talents. I had no idea.

CARTER's cell phone vibrates on his belt.

Excuse me...

CARTER steps away from the table to take the call.

JOE

(*To AJ*) But no dance clubs within three hundred miles. Won't Alex be bored?

ALEX

AJ! What have you been telling him about me?

AJ

(To JOE) That was just last weekend in LA. And I'd never danced until dawn...it was a blast!

JOE

Ah, well. Kelley always said you *were* the better dancer. Still, it may be a bit late for you to try to get the club kid punch on your gay card.

ALEX

He can have one of mine. I may have over-punched that one.

AJ

I'd never had such fun in LA! The Streisand party was just...fabulous. You know, she's really quite shy.

JOE

Oh?

ALEX

Double-punch, there...

JOE

You *have* been making the gay culture circuit. Streisand? That must have been...different for you.

ALEX

It was a great party!

AJ

(To ALEX) But there was...you know...the *thing*...

JOE

The thing?

AJ

Yeah, uh...that happened.

ALEX

Don't worry about it. You'll learn.

JOE

What?

ALEX

AJ was groped by this guy in the powder room.

AJ

(Embarrassed) I shoved him.

ALEX

It was OK...no hurt feelings, I'm sure. He's used to it. But, as we discussed, what you should have done is just smile sweetly, shake your head "no" and say, "I'm sorry, Senator..."

Everyone laughs.

JOE

Well, that's your new gay world, I'm afraid. So, what's on tap for this evening?

AJ

Another art opening?

ALEX

A new artist from Texas. He does these incredible works in collage with found materials. At Tasende Gallery. You should go.

JOE

Art openings aren't really my thing. Or collage, for that matter. I'm too traditional in my tastes, I guess. More the Eakins, or Hopper type.

ALEX

I love Edward Hopper...what he does with light...

CARTER returns to his seat.

CARTER

Sorry. Nurses!

JOE

Ah...well. *(Pause)* More shopping this afternoon, I understand. *(To ALEX)* You *would* be the expert there, I should think.

AJ

Not this time. I'm taking *him* to North Face for camping gear and clothes.

ALEX

Remember, no plaid. I do *not* wear plaid.

JOE hands AJ some keys across the table.

JOE

Now just don't crash it...and *no* stunts. I want it hangered at Modesto...no tie downs.

ALEX

Stunts?

AJ

Thanks Joe, you're great, as always. The Cessna is in good hands. *(To ALEX)* You ready?

ALEX

I am in *your* hands, sir! On to the North Face!

AJ stands, followed by ALEX.

AJ

Yes! And mountains of plaid! *(Laughs)* Good to see you again, Carter. I'll call you when we land, Joe.

ALEX

(To JOE) So good to actually meet you....and the bear story is something I won't soon forget, I'm sure.

ALEX and AJ leave.

CARTER

Do you think this might have been the "meet the parents" luncheon?

JOE

Unlikely. AJ's exploring his new gay world. It's probably good for him, up to a point.

CARTER

Did you know?

JOE

I could never be sure. He seemed to get crushes on both boys and girls. When he moved in with Kelley, I assumed he had settled the matter.

CARTER

His mother?

JOE

His mother. *(Pause)* She had too many issues of her own to have much time for AJ's. She was good, though. Just not lucky in love.

CARTER

Oh?

JOE

Well, she was a Navy widow in a Navy town. The usual string of abusive boyfriends. That was...*rough* on AJ. He was hurt...a lot. I tried to be there for him as much as I could.

CARTER

Joe Wilson, another surprise! A surrogate father all these years. Who would have guessed?

JOE

I grew up with AJ's father. He was my best friend. One of the last to die in a war I skipped out on. He never saw his son, but gave him my name. There was never a question.

CARTER

How do you feel about Alex?

JOE

Alex. Hmm... It will be good for AJ. A learning experience, I think. Seems nice enough, charming, intelligent...

CARTER

Not to mention beautiful.

JOE

Not to mention that. His story is...?

CARTER

Deeply conservative family. Came out at nineteen. Kicked out of the house, onto the street.

JOE

"Arrives in San Diego on a bus. Tricks on the street corner. Moves on up to 'escort'. Gets taken in by a series of rich, older 'gentlemen'. Hits pay dirt with Douphol." Speaking of whom, what does Mark think of his boy toy's new interest?

CARTER

He was furious about the Streisand party, but more because he had written the check for the benefit than anything else. Anyway, he's trapped at the New York place working on an airline deal. And Alex has refused to go out. (*Pause*) It wasn't a bus.

JOE

Pardon?

CARTER

Alex flew in. First class. I...I paid for the ticket.

JOE

Ah. I see. (*Pause, slightly embarrassed.*) Well, then....

CARTER

Don't assume you know his story and don't misjudge him, Joe. He's the most supremely self-assured boy I've ever met. He doesn't think he can fail in anything. A risk-taker. AJ might just find that attractive.

JOE

Hmm...No matter. AJ has a duty rotation coming up. Once his current squadron is wound down. Europe, probably. Then his current gay cultural "tour" will be done.

CARTER

I think you're wrong. (*Pause*) Sometimes life kicks you in the gut just to remind you what you've missed. It is my tragic fate that I have *never* and never *will* look into a face looking back at me with...*adoration*. (*Pause*) Joe. Surely you saw it. That's the way AJ looks at Alex. I noticed. Just now.

JOE

Adoration? What is this, Grenvil...*opera*? The handsome tenor gazes longingly at the beautiful, tragic diva in the first scene and in the second they're deeply in love and living in the country? *Please!* I love opera as much as anyone, but life doesn't work like that.

CARTER

Whatever. Have *you* ever been in a relationship?

JOE

One. Almost a year. It ended badly.

CARTER

However it ended, weren't there moments you still remember and think were worth what came later? Just to have had them? And you'd do it all over again...just to have those moments again?

JOE

(*Long pause*) Hmm. Possibly.

CARTER

Possibly. *(Pause)* Possibly for AJ and Alex, then.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Six

TIME *A few days later. Early afternoon.*

SETTING *Yosemite. Sentinel Dome.*

AT RISE *AJ, dressed in hiking clothes, with a large backpack, is standing on an elevated riser in the center of the stage, facing the audience. ALEX will enter from behind and below. He will be similarly dressed, with a backpack. He will be wearing a plaid shirt.*

AJ surveys the view for a moment, then turns to encourage ALEX.

AJ

Come on, Mister Frodo! You can do it! We've come so far! It's been such a long, hard journey and now we're so close! Oh, Mister Frodo, I know I can't carry your burden...and I sure as hell ain't gonna carry *you*!

Reaches back to assist ALEX up onto the riser. ALEX stops. He surveys the view in silence and awe, turning to take in the three-hundred sixty degree panorama. A long moment.

Isn't this awesome! That's Half Dome over there...Nevada and Vernal Falls to the right and below...and you can see...

Puts up his hand to silence AJ as he continues to take in the view.

ALEX

Sam, has anyone ever told you that you are...a particularly gabby hobbit? *(Long pause, then in awe)* I had no idea. AJ, I feel like a god!

AJ

There! See that long ridge of granite above Half Dome? That's Cloud's Rest. You wouldn't believe the view from there! The saw-tooth summit over there is Mt. Hoffman, the highest in Yosemite. Even in summer there's snow at the top. Now just over there...

ALEX kisses AJ...a long kiss. Then they stand silently for a moment, ALEX's arm around AJ's waist.

Wow. *That was awesome. (Long pause)* Look! The eagle. It's riding the updrafts from the valley floor, just soaring and banking. Watching. And maybe there'll be a mouse or squirrel...a chipmunk...darting out from the brush down there in the valley. Then you'll see the eagle fold its wings and stoop, claws extended, cutting through that three thousand feet of air in perfect silence...flap twice to brake and *swoosh!* Up! Mr. Chipmunk is dinner. *(Long pause)* It was right *here* I decided the only thing I could ever do was fly.

ALEX

Do you think Mr. Chipmunk knows? In that last second before the claws sink in, that he's dead? *(Almost to himself)* The Valkyrie...

AJ

Hmm?

ALEX

...soared above the battlefields, waiting to snatch up the souls of the bravest warriors at the moment of death to take them off to Valhalla to serve the gods. If you looked into the eyes of a Valkyrie on the battlefield you knew you would be dead in the next instant.

AJ

Valhalla...

ALEX

...would look like this. I see why you love it.

AJ

I've always wanted to be here with...to show it to...someone like you.

ALEX

Flying me here, like my very own Valkyrie.

AJ

Oh? Well, look into *my* eyes.

ALEX does. AJ kisses him.

(CONT'D)

See...not dead.

ALEX

No...not yet. *(pause)* Not at all!

AJ

Well, Mister Frodo...we'll be walking the next bit, I'm afraid. Its seven miles to Dewey Point where we can camp for the night. Now you be keepin' a sharp eye out for that sneaky Gollum. He could be lurkin' around. And I don't trust him one bit.

ALEX

Be you content, Sam. Gollum's in New York.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Seven

TIME *Several hours later. Evening.*

SETTING *Dewey Point, above Yosemite Valley. Lighting is in blue. There are the embers of a campfire. In the background a two man tent. In the foreground, a blanket on the ground.*

AT RISE *ALEX and AJ side by side, reclining on the blanket, looking up.*

AJ

People go through their whole lives and never know the *depth* of the star field. How densely packed with light the night sky is. All the colors. What a fuckin' waste...to live and never know that. Blind for life to the most goddamn awesome sight in the universe. The night sky isn't dark. It's bright. A diamond soup of stars.

Sitting up, looking in front of them.

ALEX

Look...those tiny lights....what's that?

AJ

Lanterns. Climbers spending the night on the face of El Capitan.

ALEX

My god! How do they do that?

AJ

They're on a ledge...or have a hammock secured with pitons. They'll sleep there tonight and continue the climb in the morning.

ALEX

What must that be like? To sleep with two thousand feet of air below you?
(Pause) Do you think they have sex?

AJ

Sure. *Carefully.* (Long pause) I saw.

ALEX

Them having sex?

AJ

No. When we stopped the car...where you get that first full view all the way down the valley. I...I saw you wipe your cheek.

ALEX

(Smiles. Long pause) I had no idea it would be like that. You were right. It is the most beautiful place on earth.

AJ

You know, I cried, too...the last time I was here.

ALEX

Really?

AJ

Well, not cried so much as had this full throttle, bawling fit...the chest heaving, sobbing, choking kind of thing. I couldn't even drive. Pulled off the road to let it happen.

ALEX

Wow. When?

AJ

May. Right after I got back.

AJ fiddles with the laces of his hiking boots. ALEX waits.

It'd been...years since my last visit. There had been some bad winter floods here...the big rockslides...you could still see...see the mess. *(Pause)* Driving into the valley, the windows down, just at the place where the road first gets close to the river, I thought, "We've both been through a lot since last I saw you." And at that *moment* the car filled with this warm, fresh breath of air from the woods and the river...and it felt like it went right...inside me...touched some deep place...*(pause)* hugged me...*(pause)* whispered, "it's OK"...and in a second I was crying as hard as I can remember, ever, in my life. *(Long pause)* When it was done, I felt something that had been wound up deep inside me was gone...and I was...this must sound so *lame* to you...that I was *healed*.

ALEX

What was there to heal?

AJ

Iraq. That was... *(Pause)* Then there was the other war.

ALEX

Another war?

AJ

Yeah. The one inside. For who I *am* and what I wanted...what I *needed*. What I need. *(pause)* Gay was so much tougher than Iraq. *(Long pause)* And my mother died last year.

ALEX

Your mother... *(pause)* I'm so sorry.

AJ

Lung cancer. But it was quick. From healthy to dead in three months. Must have seemed like an eternity of pain and dread to her, though. She never had it easy in her life, but that was... *(Pause, then intently)* Alex...you *know* people...you look into their eyes and you see...*them*. *(anguished)* To look into those eyes and find only the *fear* looking back...no one you even *know*. *(pause)* I hated that. To watch someone you love get smaller and weaker and *fade*...until what's there is only a shadow of this *huge* part of your life. Finally, when it's time to say goodbye...what's there to say goodbye *to*? A shadow? That's not fair.

There is a long moment.

ALEX

My mother...one moment she was there...next she wasn't. Trying to pass on a two-lane country road, late to her hair appointment.

AJ

Suddenly your world changes. When?

ALEX

Five years ago.

AJ

Before you left home?

ALEX

Her timing was awful. I had just come out to the family and she was wonderful and supportive and reassuring. And, you know, this total romantic. She said I was sure to find the "one great love" for me. *(Pause)* So beautiful...always ...always there for me. The others...

AJ

Your father?

ALEX

The Dark Lord? With her not around to argue him out of it, he gave me what to him seemed a reasonable choice: reparative therapy until I was "cured"...or the door.

AJ

You took the door.

ALEX

It's turned out to be the best choice I've ever made.

AJ

The rest of the family?

ALEX

Happy. She was the "second wife". My brothers, by the first, were overjoyed.

AJ

Since...no contact at all?

ALEX

None. Never. Fathers are much overrated. I'm cheerfully rid of mine.

AJ

How can a father just let his son go like that?

ALEX

You don't know my family. We breed for cold. Genetic.

AJ

You're not.

ALEX

Oh, but I am. Just not all the time. My mother's maverick gene.

AJ settles back against ALEX, who holds him.

AJ

My father couldn't have done that.

ALEX

You never knew him.

AJ

From who I am...I know him.

ALEX

Brave, daring...

AJ

I don't have his medals.

ALEX

Patient, tender and caring...

AJ

He loved my mother...that would not always have been easy.

ALEX

Beautiful...

AJ

(After a long pause) Do you remember, that first time, after Flora's party...when I said "not now"?

ALEX

Yes.

AJ

It's *now*...

ALEX
It's cold!

AJ
Not for long....

AJ stands, begins to take off his clothes.

This'll work. Trust me.

ALEX
(Beginning to undress) I'll trust you.

AJ
(Kisses ALEX...a long kiss)...and I, you.

They undress down to socks and quickly crawl into the tent.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Eight

TIME *Several weeks later.*

SETTING *Flora's condo.*

AT RISE *FLORA is on the phone. AJ is reading the current copy of GQ magazine.*

FLORA
Oh, I will, darling. (To AJ) Alex says I'm to keep you here at all costs.

JASON arrives with a glass of iced water on a tray for AJ.

(To ALEX) I'll just have Jason run get the restraints and I can assure you he won't be going anywhere for a while.

(CONT'D)

JASON looks inquiringly; FLORA shakes his head "no".

So sorry, *cher*, the Prada show...but you know that Milan in winter is simply *drear!* Then, the *show!* Such dreadful people. There's still Ferre' and Paris. (*Listens*) I will, I will dear Alessandra, I'm sure I can find *something* to occupy this gorgeous sailor until you get here. *Ciao.* (*To AJ*) Alex is on his way and prays you won't be cross with him for being late.

AJ

Not a problem. (*Indicating the magazine*) He's awesome.

FLORA

Apparently not awesome enough for Milan...I shall buy no more Prada. And how *have* you naughty boys been doing? Since your little romp in the woods, you've been something of an item. I do think the robber baron has begun to notice. You must be so very careful there, *cher*. Mark is...

AJ

Alex can handle him. Mark's lost his workout partner. In the gym, at least.

FLORA

...and elsewhere?

AJ

No. Alex does what he has to do.

FLORA

How terribly mature of you, dear boy. His weekend "work"?

AJ

His job. My job sends me off to spend weekends training Marines, currently. (*Indicating magazine*) Things might change, with this.

FLORA

Perhaps. (*pause*) Jason, love, would you do some chamomile tea, toast points and...oh, a bowl of those wonderful strawberries for Alex. I'm sure he will be *famished* from the shopping when he arrives.

JASON leaves.

You should know that Alex does what he has to do...to get what he wants. It's the *wanting* part you might want to attend to, *ma belle*.

AJ

He's got what he wants, doesn't he? His work, the modeling, someone like Mark...that has to be something for a guy kicked out onto the street at twenty. Isn't *this* pretty much the life guys dream about...max out their credit cards to get? Alex has it. He's come a long way.

FLORA

Alors pas! What "poor little match girl" stories *has* he been telling you? A long way? To *this*? Dear boy, his family is richer than *God!* They had one of the largest fortunes in the Western world when *my* family was barefoot and selling fish from a boat on the muddy banks of the goddamn Mississippi!

AJ

What?

FLORA

A hundred years ago *Coupland* was all over the deed records for *acres and acres* of Manhattan and big chunks of Hudson River valley land. Now that name has disappeared into this legal *gumbo* of corporations, trusts and partnerships...but it's still there. He *has* come a long way...*down*.

AJ

Alex Spencer...

FLORA

Coupland. Spencer is his mother's name. She was, by the way, one of that mob of Vanderbilt heirs. The *family* thought Alex's father was marrying beneath him.

AJ

He's never said a word. And I've never heard that name.

FLORA

You wouldn't. They are deeply, rabidly private. The Forbes' list has only heard rumors, I should think.

AJ

If he were that rich, wouldn't he have trusts or something? Isn't that how it works? Grandad dies and leaves it to the grandkids, in trust?

FLORA

Can you say, "*re-vo-ca-ble trust*"? He has some money, from his mother. He could live like a schoolteacher in Alabama on *that*. The Couplands, though...just graft icy Puritan onto stubborn Dutch stock, inbreed for three hundred fifty years, or so and you get hard, controlling people who have a death-grip on money. In a family like that, you choose...you live with your choice.

AJ

He chose...

FLORA

...freedom. As I said...Alex does what he has to do to get what he wants.

ALEX enters, with shopping bags and a suit bag. A moment later JASON enters with the tea and food.

ALEX

My *god!* What is going on with the traffic? It took *forever* to get here from Saks.

ALEX kisses FLORA, piles bags on a table, goes to the sofa and hugs AJ from behind.

Hmm...It's been hours. You still smell like the shower.

FLORA

Scandale! What *were* you boys doing, then?

ALEX

Our workout. (*Smiles*)

FLORA

Oh, girlfriend...sex always leaves me wanting to shop, too. What did you *buy*?

FLORA checks the bags.

Oh, *yum...more* Armani. I *love* Armani.

ALEX pours tea, tries the toast points and strawberries.

ALEX

...and D and G...but nothing for you, sweet Flora. All *this* is for AJ.

FLORA

(*To AJ*) You must have been *awesome* at your workout, dear boy.

AJ stands, surprised.

AJ

Uh...you're kidding. What...

ALEX pops a strawberry into AJ's open mouth, then goes to the table, and begins removing packages.

ALEX

If I can wear plaid for you...you can wear couture for me, love. All the sizes should be correct....model, you know....but if not, Flora has this person who can take care of alterations overnight. (*To Flora*) You still have Senora chained to her sewing machine in the laundry room, correct?

AJ

I can't...

ALEX

Of course you can. You are a total hunk in khakis, but you have to go a bit more up market for the White Party. (*To FLORA*) We're taking AJ to Miami for his *first* circuit party.

FLORA

Marveilleux!

AJ

I can't...

ALEX

Of course you *can*. Take some of that excess leave your captain was onto you about. You're not *doing* anything at the unit now. We fly tomorrow.

AJ

OK, but... Won't I need reservations? Tickets?

ALEX

Taken care of. We've borrowed a house...

FLORA

A very *large* house. It comes with a yacht.

ALEX

A very *large* yacht.

FLORA

To make an entrance at the Vizcaya party...all those pretentious Dallas queens with their limos will be simply *green*...

ALEX

Oh, lots of our friends will be there....Aldo and Tony from Florence, Richard will be there with...ah, whoever... from London, Perry and Carlos will be up from Sao Paulo, Cameron from Atlanta...there'll be *scads* of people for you to meet. Do say you'll come! For me.

AJ

For you, then. Whatever you want.

ALEX

Fabulous! Flora has booked us for *all* the parties...but we don't have to make them all...this is going to be such fun! You can't *imagine* what the White Party is like! It's beautiful and fabulous and wild and...

FLORA

Miss Alexis is gonna party her tushy off!

AJ

How do we...?

ALEX

Mark's jet. There will probably be nine, with you and the pilot. He said you could take the stick, if you wanted. It's a big Gulfstream something or other.

AJ

Will that work? How does Mark feel about me coming along?

ALEX

Looking forward to it, he said.

AJ

You're joking.

ALEX

Not at all. Of course, he may be under the terrible misapprehension there's to be a three-way on the party schedule.

AJ

That won't happen.

ALEX

Of course it won't. When he realizes that, he'll be surrounded by so many hot, blond twinkles looking for mister perfect sugar daddy that he'll have forgotten about your cute ass. Mine, too...if experience is any guide.

FLORA

Mark won't be a problem. We'll need *one* sober and responsible person in the group...these parties can be intensely *dangerous*! Throbbing, intoxicating music! So many *fabulous* bodies! Ah! The *clothes*! The *party favors*! Who knows, I might even lose my *precious* virginity! Again. And again!

AJ

OK. I guess this could be fun.

ALEX begins to open bags and boxes.

ALEX

It will! Now, a fashion show! Strip.

AJ

Here? Now?

ALEX

Yes. Here. Now. I have to know if something doesn't fit.

FLORA

Oh, don't be tedious. There's only *family* here. Jason! Come *chille*. AJ's going to show us his booty!

FLORA settles onto the sofa, Jason enters and AJ begins to remove his shirt.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Nine

TIME *Late evening through pre-dawn, three days later.*

SETTING *Miami, The White Party.*

AT RISE *ALEX and AJ in narrow spot in the center of a dark stage, facing each other. They are shirtless, wearing stylish white pants. They lean toward each other, kiss. At the moment they kiss, the scene explodes with pounding, exuberant club dance music and a stage-wide fall of glitter. There are rotating colored lights, lasers and streamers fountaining down and up. From every direction, including up from the audience, men whirl and dance onto the stage. These include MARK, FLORA, JASON and others. All are bare-chested, mostly in white. The dancing and music is exuberant and wildly energetic. Dancing may spill out into theatre aisles. (Video media representation may be used for party effect.)*

Gradually, ALEX and AJ will drift, dancing, into different groups and it will be clear that a number of dancers are beginning to sniff “party favors” on the dance floor, as dancing continues.

The music changes, becoming somewhat sinister and the dancing becomes more intensely sexual. In his group, AJ begins to search for ALEX. In his group, which includes MARK, ALEX is the center of attention and is caressing and being caressed by all. The sexuality becomes more explicit and wilder. From across the stage, AJ notices ALEX in his group. AJ exits abruptly. ALEX is handed a drink by MARK, which he downs quickly, still dancing.

ALEX is becoming visibly wilder and more intoxicated. He is beginning to have problems of coordination. His eyes close, he is sweaty, though he continues dancing, euphoric. MARK and three other dancers move to isolate ALEX from the dance floor. This is now a different location at the party, though the music and dancing continue in the background.

ALEX is clearly not in control of his body. His eyes are closed, his expression still euphoric. MARK and three others strip off ALEX’s pants. Naked, ALEX is eased down to the stage on his back as MARK and the others also strip and move in to kiss and caress ALEX. MARK moves in above and behind ALEX’s head and grabs his wrists as three others move in on ALEX from all sides, clearly intending to have sex. ALEX begins to resist and tries to move away, his eyes still closed. MARK holds him more strongly. After a while, one man grabs ALEX’s legs, raises them and moves in from the front, apparently beginning to mount him. ALEX resists more strenuously, but is not in control of his body.

AJ moves in quickly from a darkened portion of the stage. In a fury, he attacks the group. He flings the man between ALEX’s legs away and launches kicks and punches at him and the two on either side. They retreat and leave the stage quickly and he turns on MARK, who appears at first willing to resist, then quickly leaves the stage, as well. ALEX, eyes still closed, reaches out for AJ and grasps his ankles and legs, seeking protection. AJ kneels to comfort and hug ALEX, then begins to lift ALEX up from the stage.

BLACKOUT
SOUND OUT
END OF SCENE

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One

TIME *Mid-morning, thirty hours later.*

SETTING *JOE's beachside bungalow at Bahia de Todos los Santos, near Ensenada, in Baja California. There is a bed. Other furniture, including a table and chairs, will suggest the setting. There is a small stereo system with a CD player. The lighting will suggest an ocean view. On one wall there is painting in the manner of Chagall...."Lovers in a Blue Sky". A dark-haired, female figure, in a white skirt, naked from the waist up, embraced by a male figure behind and above her. They are floating in a blue sky above a barely sketched village.*

AT RISE *ALEX is sleeping, naked. AJ is alongside and behind, embracing him, watching him sleep.*

ALEX

(Stretching) Hmm...

AJ

(Kissing ALEX's forehead) Resurrection.

ALEX

Oh, my. Such...interesting dreams...

ALEX slowly wakens, takes in his surroundings.

Where are we?

AJ

Mexico. Bahia de Todos los Santos. Ensenada's just over there a bit. The Pacific is that way.

ALEX

How...? Oh...oh!

AJ

(Hugging ALEX) You've had a good, long sleep. It was beautiful to watch.

ALEX

The White Party...something...then you were there...the plane.

ALEX sits up in alarm.

You stole Mark's jet!

AJ

Borrowed.

ALEX

We were...there wasn't anyone else. How will they get back?

AJ

Steal a jet? Call American? I don't really care.

ALEX

You can't do that! Why... *(Disturbed)* Wait...wait. *(Pause)* There was something else...it's really foggy...but it was...bad. Bad. *(Pause)* Tell me.

AJ

You were drugged. It was a gangbang. You were being raped. Mark and some others. I knew I had to get you out of there. They weren't...protecting you.

ALEX

How...how far did it go?

AJ

No one had...I ...*(embarrassed)* checked. I had to get you back to Carter...in case, though...in case things needed to be done.

ALEX hunches his shoulders, visibly upset. AJ hugs him. A long moment. Then, stroking ALEX's hair.

It's OK....it's OK....

ALEX

(After a long pause, quietly) I remember. *(Pause)* I remember now. It was... I was...I was afraid. I wasn't sure what was happening, but... *(Long pause)* I've never been afraid.

AJ

Afraid's good. Helps you survive. World's full of threats...and mostly dangerous.

ALEX

Mostly?

AJ
Oh, yes.

ALEX
(After a long pause) Oh my god!

AJ
What?

ALEX
That's absolutely the most romantic image! "Rescued from mortal danger, flying off into the sunset in a stolen jet..."

AJ
Borrowed...and it was dawn...

ALEX
I can't even imagine how angry Mark must be.

AJ
Fuck Mark.

ALEX
The jet, though. You really did steal it. There could be a problem.

AJ
Not likely, considering.

Stands, retrieves a sheet of paper from a nearby table. Hands it to ALEX.

ALEX
(Reading) "Alex, I am so very sorry. Mark."

AJ
From the onboard fax. It came in just before we landed.

ALEX
Wait. I remember...I remember we...

AJ
You woke up over Shreveport. I'd strapped in this sleeping angel...who became a naked, horny wildcat in the cockpit...wouldn't take no for an answer. We fucked across Texas.

ALEX
How...

AJ

Autopilot.

ALEX

I *love* modern technology.

AJ

You conked out over Midland. Been pretty much out of it for twenty-four hours now.

ALEX stretches. Yawns. Looks around, then out into the audience.

ALEX

Nice beach. Is this yours?

AJ

Joe's. But...ours for as long as we want it. Effective oh-seven hundred hours this morning, I am on leave for three weeks. So...

ALEX

I accept the offer. I... I need to be away from...San Diego...and...all of that... for a while.

ALEX kisses AJ. After a moment, gets up, begins to examine the bungalow.

Simple. Comfortable. Joe had a good decorator. Does he own or lease?

AJ

Lease. From the local drug lord, actually. No security problems at all. You could leave the door unlocked. When you got back everything would be here...with the laundry done and folded, the floors swept and windows washed.

ALEX

This place is...perfect.

AJ

Except your cell phone won't work here. There's a public phone at the little market two miles up the road. No internet...no email. No television, only local radio. There's a cantina down toward Ensenada that's a blast. Small beachside restaurant about a mile west. Fresh everything available there and at the market. Our kitchen is fully stocked...Joe's quite a cook.

Notices the painting. Goes to examine it.

ALEX

Beautiful! *(Pause)* But...this can't be an *original* Chagall. Not here. Not Joe's.

AJ

It's been at his place in San Diego since my grandmother's estate was finally settled last month. I wanted it down here with us, so I brought it along last night. It's an original. That and their place in the Catskills were my inheritance.

ALEX

This is stunning...one of his best. How did...?

AJ

A gift. From Chagall to my grandparents. 1948, I think. My mother and I lived with my grandparents until I was four. *(Rolling onto his back)* One of my very earliest memories is napping on the sofa and waking up to that blue sky and those flying people. I wondered how they could fly. My grandmother said, "because they're in love".

ALEX

The Chagall connection?

AJ

My grandparents emigrated from France at the start of the war to go to school in New York. They became friends with Chagall and his wife. When Bella died suddenly, he stayed with them for a while at the place in the Catskills. They helped him through a rough time.

ALEX

(Indicating the painting) That's Bella....and Chagall. He was intensely in love with her for thirty-five years. Painted her into many of his works. There's one I remember, "Promenade"...Chagall with this goofy grin and Bella floating above him, like a balloon he's hanging onto. I liked the grin. Love making people goofy.

AJ

My grandparents were just totally in love. I think Chagall saw that...saw they understood what he and Bella had. When I asked Grandmother about the people in the painting, she would say, "Love is like that". You find the one...and go through life together..."like that".

ALEX

Really? Perhaps. *(Pause)* If life were art. *(Pause)* Usually we lose the ones we love. Chagall did.

AJ

Pessimist.

ALEX

Realist. *(Pause)* Mother had a half-dozen Chagalls. She kept them at the South Carolina place. Father thought art ended with Monet and didn't want them around.

AJ

He bought Monet?

ALEX

He didn't buy art. Someone in the family had. Monet, Degas, Seurat, Renoir...all the Impressionists. Sargent, Whistler. Some fabulous Turners. And various Old Masters. With *us*, nothing *ever* went to museums. Even if we didn't like it, we held onto it. That's the secret...hold onto everything.

AJ

Except sons.

ALEX

Except sons.

ALEX returns to the bed.

AJ

You know something about art.

ALEX

Yale. Art and art history. Until I dropped out.

AJ

OK, used-to-be-rich boy...explain this to me. What were you planning to *do* with that degree? If you never, ever had to actually work, what's the point?

ALEX

I love art. I thought someone in the family should go after all the works that would be masterpieces in fifty years.

AJ

So, you were going to be a major art collector? Now that's a job you don't find out about from your high school career counselor.

ALEX

A job? Hmm. *(Pause)* What I remember...with *us*...money was like air. It was just *there*. I could do anything I wanted. My father didn't care. He just didn't share my taste in art.

AJ

OK, imagine yourself in the *real* world and doing what you wanted to do when you were at Yale. What would you be?

ALEX

I'd be spending someone else's money, that's for sure. Maybe...curator at an art museum? Not the same thing, though. You have to worry about boards and benefactors and what the public may want to see. There's no freedom.

AJ

Poor Alex. *That* is the real world.

ALEX

Kindly remember I have some experience of the *real* world in my other "career".

AJ

Ouch! Yes. You do. How did you get into...?

ALEX

You are so *full* of questions!

AJ

I'll stop.

ALEX

Came out. Kicked out. Cut off. It was...pretty gruesome. Weekend in New York, visiting friends, ran into one of my father's business associates. He'd been drooling over me since I was twelve. Knew the story. Offered me a thousand dollars to spend the night with him. I said yes...if he would make a video and let me have it. I took the thousand and the videotape. I mailed the tape to my father.

AJ

No shit!

ALEX

I would love to have seen the expression on his face as he watched it. After that, the escort thing just happened. Soon there was some money again.

AJ

Have you ever thought about going back? To school. Finishing the degree?

ALEX

...and the point of that would be?

AJ

To do what you want.

ALEX

I *am* doing what I want. I'm doing exactly what I want. I'm spending three weeks in a beautiful place with a gallant, brave and gorgeous man. We're going to walk on the beach, cook wonderful dinners, read poetry to each other and fuck all night under a great work of post-impressionist art. That sounds like *exactly* what I want.

ALEX slides in behind AJ on the bed. AJ leans back against ALEX's chest.

AJ

That's quite a schedule. Maybe we should...get started?

ALEX begins to run his hands over AJ's chest.

ALEX

My thought exactly...

ALEX kisses AJ's forehead, eyes, lips, then stops. He focuses on the painting.

AJ...

AJ

Yes?

ALEX

Do you really think love is like that?

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Two

TIME *Two weeks later.*

SETTING *Same.*

AT RISE *FLORA is standing, examining CD's. ALEX is seated at a table with the remains of a tea or light snack.*

FLORA
These must be Joe's.

ALEX
No, they're AJ's. He brought them down.

FLORA
How sad. Oh...

FLORA removes a set of car keys from his pocket.
Lest I forget. Mark has sent a peace offering and "humbly begs your forgiveness".

FLORA hands the keys to ALEX, who examines them briefly.

ALEX
Jaguar. Which one?

FLORA
XKR. Convertible. Silver.

ALEX
He must *really* be sorry. Not my color.

ALEX tosses the keys to FLORA.

FLORA
Are you sure about this, girlfriend?

ALEX nods "yes".

Well, then...that's done.

FLORA looks around the bungalow.
This is... (*doubtful*) charming. And, my dearest Alexie...you are positively *glowing*...and not just from your *gorgeous* tan. Clearly you boys are having a *wonderful* time...while I positively *languish* in San Diego...bereft of a friendly face...knitting.

ALEX
You don't knit.

FLORA

I'll take it up, then. *Something* to fill all my *lonely* hours.

ALEX

Lonely? When was your last party?

FLORA

Last night.

ALEX

And the one before that?

FLORA

The night before that. But *girlfriend*, it's so not *fun* without you! I'm *alone*!

ALEX

Jason, Gabe, Carlos, Terence, Jose'...

FLORA

Stop, cruel boy. You *know* what I mean. When *are* you coming back from...from *Elba*?

ALEX

...from paradise. (*Long pause*) Maybe never.

FLORA

You can't be...

ALEX

(*Interrupting*) I am. I like paradise. I like being here. With him. It's safe.

FLORA

It's a rental.

ALEX

But I'm not a rental. Not with him. (*pause*) For the first time.

FLORA

But what do you *do*...besides fuck your brains out? There's nothing *here*.

ALEX

Do? (*pause*) Do. (*pause*) Well, we read. Sometimes we just listen to the ocean. There's the beach and our walks. We have boards and wetsuits and AJ is teaching me to surf. There's this perfect café near the water where we go for lunch and for dinner sometimes. If not, AJ cooks, or I cook. (*pause*) Oh, don't look so *shocked*. I am *learning*. (*Smiling*) We went to a cantina near Ensenada

(CONT'D)

one night and got totally wasted on tequila. A few days ago we rented a plane and AJ flew it down to Cabo. We danced all night...got drunk and slept on the beach. That was...*oh my god!*

FLORA

Sacre' mere de Jesu, chille, you frighten me! Might it...could it...possibly be...that you're in *love*?

ALEX is silent for a long moment. He looks away from FLORA, toward the ocean.

ALEX

I don't know. (*pause*) How would I know?

FLORA

I don't know that you *would*. Forgive my speaking bluntly, *cher*...but you have *never* been with a man who was less than a dozen years older and where a commercial exchange was not directly or indirectly involved. Add to that AJ's obvious gay virgin syndrome. You have the ingredients for such *drama*. But, my dearest, dearest friend...*love*?

ALEX

How can I be sure it's *not*? (*pause*) This...isn't a place I've *ever* been to. If you had told me six months ago that I would be *here*, with *him*...and never want to leave...I'd have laughed until I had hiccups.

FLORA

(*Hugging ALEX*) Dear Alexie...it could be...now it just could *be*...

AJ enters with a market bag.

AJ

Hey, you boys...cut that out!

AJ sets down the bag...hugs FLORA.

You are so *late*. We expected you for lunch. We were going to take you to this little café on the beach...

FLORA

(*Grimaces*) That would have been...*charming*, I'm sure. But I got away from San Diego so *late*, then Jose' took a wrong turn...and, *of course*, you *must* live in this...*Siberia* where cell phones refuse to work...thus, I couldn't call. (*Pause*) So *good* to see you again, our handsome plane thief. I shall never forgive you for making me fly back from Miami *commercial*.

ALEX

First class is so *tedious*...

FLORA

(*To ALEX*) Bitch. And AJ, you are looking quite...hot. It must be all the salt air...that and keeping up with your workout schedule...

AJ

(*Guiltily*) We've sorta let that slip for a few weeks.

FLORA

Not what *I've* heard, dear boy. (*Looks at watch.*) Oh, well, I simply *must* be going. Curtis, that outrageous opera queen is having a *soiree'* and *insists* I attend.

FLORA hugs AJ, then ALEX.

ALEX

(*Quietly, to ALEX*).Thank you so much, my friend.

FLORA starts toward the door.

FLORA

You naughty boys *must* be at my party next Friday. It will be so *glamorous*. The Parsons company will be dropping by after their last performance. It will be so *gay!* I do so *love* dancer butts.

ALEX

We'll talk about it. I'll let you know.

FLORA

No excuses, you children can stop screwing for *one* evening for your dear, abandoned Flora. I must go...I'm sure Jose' will have to shoo all those dusty barefoot urchins away from the Maybach to get us out of here. You'd think I was the *Queen* for all the attention.

ALEX

Oh, but you *are* the Queen, my dear!

FLORA leaves.

I don't want to go to the party.

AJ

Then we won't.

(CONT'D)

AJ begins to remove items from the shopping bag.

Let's see what we have. Vino! An unpretentious Chilean red. Vintage...well, maybe not so much...

ALEX

(Hugging AJ from behind) Surely at least a 70 from the Wine Spectator.

AJ

Some truly gourmet pasta in a box. Grated Parmesan cheese, in a can. Pasta sauce imported all the way from San Diego. Tequila, of course! Ah! This...is special.

AJ removes a CD from the bag.

You'll love it. From the shop where all the CD's have white labels. I asked him to rip and burn it especially for us.

ALEX examines the CD.

ALEX

Is it danceable?

AJ

Oh yes.

ALEX

I don't want this to end.

AJ turns in ALEX's embrace, to face him.

AJ

It doesn't have to. This doesn't have to end...ever at all.

ALEX

(Releasing AJ) Cabo. You were too drunk...and so was I. In the real world, how could it work?

AJ

It *would* work. It would. OK. Here's the plan. I made some calls when I was in Ensenada. Visited the new internet café. There's a college. Have you ever heard of St. Mary's in Maryland?

ALEX

It's a small liberal arts school?

AJ

A *public* school...a lot cheaper than Yale. With a very good art department.

ALEX

...and?

AJ

Patuxent River Naval Air Station. Patuxent River...Maryland. With an air test and evaluation squadron that does a lot of anti-submarine warfare systems work. A good berth for me...what Naval personnel would want for an officer in my career path.

ALEX

OK...that's...interesting. But I remember you saying your next orders would probably be for overseas?

AJ

I play a card I've only used once before...to get into the Academy. My father. The base commander trained with him as a Seal. This would *work*. On the beach at Cabo it was just...dreaming. This is a real world plan.

ALEX

I don't know. It would be...so different.

AJ

We could get a place together in Maryland. With my pay, rent from my grandparent's place and what you get from your mother's estate, we could make it work. In two year's I've completed my obligation to the Navy and you've got your degree. I sign on with an airline. You get a job...maybe cataloging prints at some museum. Work on a master's. Even if I were based out of another city, I could live wherever you were. In ten years you're a museum curator and I'm a senior pilot.

ALEX

You've really thought this out.

AJ

It would *work*. A *real world* plan. (*Pause*) But it would be a *big* change for you. A very different kind of life. The clothes, vacations, parties...the clients....

ALEX

AJ, I'm tired...so tired of that. (*Pause*) You can't know. (*Pause*) Four years! Where I never, *ever* thought I'd be! (*Pause*) God... (*Long pause*) The thought of these past weeks forever...you...forever...

AJ

Is *this* what you want...what we have here? Am I?

ALEX turns away, a long moment, then turns back to AJ.

ALEX

Just help me. Tell me something...something about your grandparents...*now*.

AJ

OK. (*Long pause*) My grandmother said that when she and my grandfather were twenty they would pick wild strawberries in summer, then spread a blanket in the woods and strip naked. They would eat strawberries and make love all afternoon. They would smash the strawberries against each other's skin and lick up the juice and pulp...and make love again.

ALEX

Your *grandmother* told you that?

AJ

What can I say...they were French. (*Pause*) When my grandparents were sixty they still lived for the summer and the woods and the strawberries. At seventy they bought the strawberries from the supermarket and spread plastic over the bed.

ALEX

Oh, *my!*

AJ

The point is this: At seventeen they *found* each other. They *knew*. That they belonged together forever. Alex, she *blessed* him...and he, her. How fuckin' rare is that? (*Long pause*) I found you. I love you. I can't imagine my life without you in it. I want you to be there every day of my life and I want us to be *here*, at seventy, making *coq au vin* for dinner.

ALEX

We're having *coq au vin*?

AJ kisses ALEX.

How do you *know* that we can be them? How do you *know* that our love can be *like that*? You want *forever*...I would *die* for *forever*. It's all I've ever, ever wanted. But how can you *know*?

AJ

Do you love me? Say "yes" and it's all possible. That's all it takes.

ALEX

I've loved you since Yosemite...since that goddamn freezing tent in Yosemite. The thought of being here with you in fifty years...who would need heaven? I could never...ever...be away from you, my...love.

AJ

Alex...

They kiss...long and passionate. AJ pulls away. Walks to the CD player, inserts the CD he bought in Ensenada. MUSIC: "Let it Be Me", performed by Collin Raye or a similar cover of this song. AJ extends his hand to ALEX.

It's danceable.

They slowly dance as the scene ends. MUSIC continues during scene change.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Three

TIME *Four days later.*

SETTING *The bungalow at Bahia de Todos los Santos.*

AT RISE *ALEX is seated, reading.*

JOE's voice is heard from offstage.

JOE

Hello? Alex?

ALEX stands and goes to the door, inviting JOE in.

ALEX

Yes? Joe! Come in! This is quite a surprise! AJ is in San Diego today, taking care of some Navy business. If you can stay until dinner, he'll be back, we could...

JOE

Alex, I know where AJ is. I wanted to talk with you. Alone.

ALEX

Well, sure. Of course. Sit down...this is your place. It was so *good* of you to lend it to us. I haven't had a chance to thank you.

JOE

I have to talk with you about a very serious matter, I'm afraid. It will not be pleasant.

ALEX

Alright...?

JOE

Straight to it, then. (*pause*) And there's no easy way to say this. (*pause*) You have to leave AJ. He can't be with you.

ALEX

...can't be...? (*Long pause*) You've got to be joking. And what business is it of yours *who* he's with?

JOE

It is my business. AJ has always been my business. I will not let him ruin his life over someone like you.

ALEX

What the *fuck* are you talking about? How dare you? Ruin his life? We're...

JOE

You are not. Not quite yet. But, if you were...what would you do for him?

ALEX

Not that it's any of your business, but...anything. I love him.

JOE

His response. Do you know what he's going to do for you? He's planning to ruin his life. How does that make you feel?

ALEX

What a stupid question.

JOE

You have this fantasy about living a simple life in Maryland, finishing school, AJ flying at Pax River.

ALEX

How...

JOE

He told me. Well, it's not going to happen. AJ got early orders a few days ago. To Aviano Air Base in Italy. For two years. He has to report in ten days. The orders can't be changed. Pax River won't happen.

ALEX

Uh... He didn't say *anything*...

JOE

Because he refuses to go. He won't leave you...no matter what it costs him. And it will cost him...much more than you're worth.

ALEX

Why, you pretentious asshole!

JOE

Charming language. I'm only telling you the truth, something you know yourself. If you are honest. Do you have any idea what he plans to do?

ALEX

No. But it's *his* life we're talking about here.

JOE

He's going to come out to his commanding officer, inform him that he's involved in a relationship with another man.

ALEX

Bravo! If every gay man in the world did that tomorrow, prejudice would end tomorrow.

JOE

But every gay man won't tomorrow...and AJ's going to be out there on his own.

ALEX

With more courage than *you* could show until you were so old it didn't matter anymore. Good for him!

JOE

Oh, he's courageous. More than you could know. The moment he does that, they will kick him out of the Navy. He will give up his career for you.

ALEX

There are ways...

JOE

No ways. It will happen. Nothing will stop it. For you he will give up something he has loved and wanted since he was twelve. Do you know how he feels about flying? Has he told you?

ALEX

Yes...yes...he...

JOE

He will give that up for you. He will.

ALEX

He can still fly. The airlines...

JOE

Pay shit and aren't hiring. He will have other worries by then, though. Getting a job will pale in comparison to what comes next for AJ.

ALEX

What do you mean?

JOE

He has two years left in the commitment he assumed on graduating from the Academy and being commissioned. He will be in default of that commitment...willfully so. If the Navy establishes that AJ knew he was gay when he made his commitment, they can sue to recover the cost of his training...something over a million dollars. If they can establish that he was gay when he entered the Academy...they can sue to recover the cost of his four years of college.

ALEX

They can't do that!

JOE

Oh, yes they can. Knowing the Navy, they would be eager to.

ALEX

They can't *prove* he knew he was gay when he...when he...

JOE

They won't need to prove a thing. They would only have to ask him. He would tell the truth...or what he thinks is the truth now. The truth...after you.

ALEX

He would tell them? Just like that?

JOE

Yes.

ALEX

This *cannot* be happening. He *knows* this? He knows what's going to happen?

JOE

Yes. He's getting ready for it.

ALEX

What do you mean?

JOE

He asked me to sell his grandparents house. It's a lousy market in rural New York, he won't get what it's worth and he'll give up a lifetime's income from the property. But that's the only way he can see to have the life he promised you.

ALEX

Promised *me*? It was our life...we promised each other!

JOE

He thinks he can still manage it...he's working on that. Today.

ALEX

What do you mean?

JOE

A lunch. He's going after a management position at Triton Corp. Good job, great pay and benefits. He can work out of their DC office...so you can go to school. Not a bad career choice...if you don't love flying and don't mind spending your life behind a desk.

ALEX

He would hate that.

JOE

Yes, he would definitely hate that. Which is why I guess it's good that he won't get the job.

ALEX

How do you know?

JOE

Bill Forrest is the guy he's having lunch with. President of Triton. Knew AJ's father. But when it comes out that AJ has left the Navy, discharged for being gay, there won't be a job offer.

ALEX

He's homophobic?

JOE

Oh, indeed he is. Deeply closeted queers are positively the *worst* homophobes. Forrest couldn't *possibly* take the chance.

ALEX

How do you know that?

JOE

I used to fuck him on a regular basis. Until I came out.

ALEX

This isn't happening! Poor AJ!

JOE

It will be painful beyond belief for him. Because the worst will be to come.

ALEX

Don't. Please *don't*...

JOE

The handsome, daring war hero, Navy pilot son of a Medal of Honor winner...comes out and is kicked out of the Navy. That is so newsworthy. There will be lots and lots of stories decrying the unfairness of it all and condemning the Navy's backwardness. *But*...there will be lots and lots of news stories. How do you think AJ will feel about that?

ALEX

He can stay in the Navy...go to Italy...it's only two years...

JOE

Two years...it would be a hundred to him. He has something he has always wanted *now* and he won't take a chance on losing it over those two years. He knows Mark's standing in the wings. He won't leave you.

ALEX

Then I'll go with him...we...

JOE

No you won't. It's a secure base. You'd never see him. And, what would you do? Spend two years giving blowjobs in the Via Veneto?

ALEX

Why are you doing this to me? Why?

JOE

Because he loves you and will do anything for you. I just thought I'd find out if you love him. (*pause*) I'd say it's an open question right now.

ALEX reacts with fury.

ALEX

You! How *dare* you...you self-loathing, disgusting old queen. You've never *once* loved or been loved. You can't *know* what we have...what I would *do* for him! He gave me my life back when I thought it was gone! He gave me love when I thought I'd never feel it! He rescued me and made me feel safe when I thought I would never feel safe again! He is my future or I don't have one at all.

JOE

He won't leave you...even if it destroys *his* life. You can save him...if you leave him. Do you love him enough to do that?

ALEX

I...

JOE

Yes...difficult question. We know the depth of AJ's love...yours is...?

ALEX

All of this...if *all* of this...happens. Who's to say we couldn't be happy together? How can you *know*?

JOE

Oh, just ask yourself. You *know*. You *do* know. Would it work? Would you be worth the risk it wouldn't? Can you be sure? Your life has been so...varied...so many "clients". The parties, drugs...indulgence...would that *really* be all in the past? It wouldn't be the fantasy...the one here or the one in Maryland. It would be rough. In time, AJ might not...see you the way he sees you today. What you *could* be...what you *want* to be. Maybe he'd see you...as you are...as you *fear* you are...right now...

ALEX

You are a cruel man. I do pity you.

JOE

Some things have to be done. It wouldn't be all bad, though. You can go back to Mark...to an exciting, lavish, brilliant life. As much money as you could ever spend...parties, vacations, planes, cars. You can have that. It's surely more than you could ever have hoped for when you started out.

ALEX

Started out?

JOE

As, uh...uh...in your *business*. You've come a long way.

ALEX

You are a fool.

JOE

I'm honest. Can you be? For once?

ALEX reacts in fury, seems close to punching JOE.

ALEX

Once?

ALEX relents, seems to crumple, emotionally, turns away...goes to the door...stops...then slams both fists into the door jambs.

No! Not now!

Almost sobbing, turning his back on the door, leaning back against the door jamb.

Not...now...

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Four

TIME *The next morning.*

SETTING *Same.*

AT RISE *ALEX is dressed, writing at the table. AJ, naked, is asleep in bed.*

ALEX completes his letter, signs it, puts it in an envelope, writes "AJ" on the outside, leaves it in a conspicuous place on the table. For a moment he puts his elbows on the desk and his head in his hands. Then he turns, watches AJ sleeping. ALEX goes to the bed and stands by AJ.

ALEX

(Softly, passionately) I love you. *(Pause, then louder, with voice breaking)*
My God I love you!

As AJ, still sleeping, stirs slightly, ALEX bends to kiss him once, then again and then again with increasing passion. ALEX crawls into bed with AJ and begins to smother him with kisses, hugs him with some force. AJ awakens.

AJ

(Playfully, seriously) Not again...I'm still sore!

AJ begins to return the passion. The kisses continue for a moment, then ALEX sits up and moves back on the bed, away from AJ, watching him. Then he leaves the bed and walks a few steps away, turning his back to AJ.

ALEX

There's no time.

AJ

There's always time. *(sitting up)* I just don't see why I can't take you in for your appointment...why Flora has to send Jose' to drive you to the dentist.

ALEX

It's fine. You can have the morning to yourself. You've already had to make two trips up to San Diego this week. You can skip this one.

Looks outside...waves.

Jose' is here...

ALEX leans down...kisses AJ again. A long and passionate kiss. Pulls back. Turns and leaves quickly.

AJ stays for a while in bed. He stretches, gets up and pulls on shorts from beside the bed. Walks to the window and looks out at the sea. He moves about the bungalow, assembling a simple breakfast. He notices the letter on the table, holds it up. He is about to open it when he hears JOE's voice from outside.

JOE

Hello?

AJ goes to the door, invites JOE inside.

AJ

Joe! Come in. You just missed Alex. He...

JOE

I saw Flora's car leaving. What's going on? I got the oddest phone message from Flora. He said to get here just past eight this morning...you would...need me. What's all this about?

AJ

I really don't have...

He goes back to the letter he had left on the table....pauses...then opens it quickly. Reads.

This isn't possible. This is just...crazy! He's going back to Mark! This is *not* fuckin' happening!

JOE takes the offered letter, reads silently for a while, then aloud.

JOE

"...as wonderful as our time has been, as sweet as you are, I have to be honest. We would never work..."

AJ

No! No! Alex, you can't do this! I *love* you! I *know* you love me! There is no *way*...!

AJ rushes to put on shoes and shirt.

I can catch him. There's something wrong. I know it. This isn't Alex at all.

JOE moves to stop him from leaving.

JOE

Are you sure? He says he made a mistake, got carried away by the romance of one place. Are you sure *this* isn't the real Alex? *You* certainly know how it goes.

AJ

What do you mean?

JOE

Your mother's boyfriends...they all left her. That should have taught you *something*. The romance wears off...

AJ

Alex isn't like that! He isn't like them at all!

JOE

They left. He left. Maybe you got lucky...early.

AJ

That's just fucked, Joe. I know the difference. She never looked beyond a smile that reminded her of my dad. She never waited...to know...

JOE

She always knew. And she always got it wrong.

AJ

I didn't get him wrong! Damn you! I know what you're doing and I don't need it! I'm not the kid anymore!

JOE

No, you're not. You can get hurt worse now than any kid could.

AJ

Fuck you! I know what can hurt me. A SAM missile...a mortar...a cynical old man. Not Alex!

JOE

(Holding up the letter) No? How do you feel right now?

AJ

Joe, Joe, I know you want to help, but... *(Pause, then intently)* You can't know what he means to me. You can't. He's...he is the world and everything to me. I *live* for him! When he touches me it's like drowning in love...*his* love. It's like...a riptide that takes you and won't give you up and you keep rolling and rolling and can't *breathe*. All my goddamn life that's the only thing I've ever wanted to feel from someone. I *knew* it would be that way. My mother never found it, but I knew I *would*! Then there he was! When the world was shit and I was drowning in it! Alex...it was Alex and we *promised* this would be *forever*. It *can't* be gone! Not just like that. Not out of nowhere. Not in a moment!

JOE

(Holding up the letter again) I'm so sorry...but at least you got a letter...not a black eye.

AJ

He *loves* me! I *know* he does!

AJ takes the letter from JOE, scans it.

(CONT'D)

It's not there! He doesn't say it. "I don't love you." He doesn't say it! Look!

AJ holds the letter out to JOE, who dismisses it with a wave of his hand.

JOE

He's gone back to Mark. Some things go without saying, I should think.

AJ

This is bullshit! (*Tossing the letter away*) You can lie with words, people do it all the time...*you can't lie with your body!* You can't lie with your breath, your kiss, your touch. Joe, you can't *imagine* what it's like to be with him...how...*incredible!*

AJ again moves to leave, JOE again stops him.

JOE

Isn't that his job?

AJ

What? What the fuck do you mean?

JOE

Lying with his body. Isn't that why he's so...successful?

AJ

Go to hell!

AJ continues to the door...stops. Begins to sob. Collapses onto his knees.

(*Shouting*) Alex!

AJ crumples, then rises.

I'm going to be sick...

AJ rushes off to the bathroom. JOE retrieves and idly re-reads the letter. After a while, AJ re-enters, pale. Sits on the edge of the bed. He lies back on the bed, then rolls onto his side, away from JOE. Almost a fetal position. He's crying, very quietly.

AJ

Alex...no...oh, no...don't...

JOE moves to the bed, sits beside AJ, who rolls over toward JOE, clutching him. JOE hugs AJ.

JOE

There...there....it's OK.....it's OK...

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Five

TIME *That next evening.*

SETTING *The salon of FLORA's condo. There is a poker table and four chairs to the rear of the scene and in the foreground a sofa, perhaps a small table...some chairs.*

AT RISE *AJ, CARTER and two other men are playing poker. There is a good amount of money on the table. AJ is drinking. There are other partygoers present, in conversation. MUSIC: Soft, vaguely Latin, somewhat techno. FLORA is chatting with party guests. JASON, with a tray of drinks, is moving around the room. (The additional party guests may be "assumed", with principals possibly "speaking to the air".)*

AJ

(As Jason passes the poker table) I'll take another.

FLORA

(To a party guest) It's simply *awful*. I feel so *sorry* for both the dears. Just so *sad*.

A number of new guests arrive.

Ah! Wonderful! The dancers are here!

Several dancers pirouette and quickly mingle with the guests.

(To the new guests) Lovely! Jason, champagne. There is a *scrumptious* buffet in the large dining room. The run is over...tonight the dancers may *eat*!

ALEX and MARK arrive. FLORA rushes over.

(CONT'D)

Alex, AJ is here. I don't know *why!* He walked in like nothing had even happened! I would never have thought... He's drinking! A lot...playing poker....over there.

ALEX

Mark, let's go. I can't see him.

CARTER leaves the poker table and walks over to MARK and ALEX.

CARTER

(*To MARK*) Well, I'm terribly sorry old chap, but there's nothing left for you tonight...AJ has quite cleaned me out. I thought *you* were lucky. He's got this most incredible streak going. Be careful.

AJ notices ALEX and MARK, leaves the table and comes over.

AJ

Douphol! Good to see you! You brought your...

ALEX

AJ, don't...

AJ

...your money, I hope. You'll need it. Why don't we just see if you're as good as everyone says you are...at, uh, poker.

MARK

I think we'll be leaving, Gil...

AJ

No, stay! Please do! Enjoy the party...the dancers will perform later, I hear. Perhaps you can pick up a few...new steps. You need some, I hear.

MARK

(*Moving closer to AJ*) Careful, flyboy...

AJ

OK. It's just too bad you don't have the balls to test your luck tonight. I was so looking forward to that.

ALEX

Mark, he's...

MARK

You should probably go crawl back to your Wal-Mart world, now, sailor. This game's much too rich for you. It's always been too rich for you.

AJ moves threateningly close to MARK.

AJ

It's not a game. And I'm not playing. But I'll take you on. Whenever I want. Believe it.

MARK

Better men have...

AJ moves closer to MARK, fists clenched.

AJ

No better man.

FLORA slides between MARK and AJ.

FLORA

My dears! How drear! This is a party. I have this most *wonderful* new sushi chef...

MARK

Later, Gil. This redneck and I seem to have a matter to settle. *(To AJ)* I would be so happy to go home with all your money tonight. Among other things. Gil, I think your guest here needs another drink.

MARK and AJ go to the table, begin playing. Another guest takes CARTER's place at the table.

FLORA

This is so very bad. I called Joe Wilson. Alex, what is going on? Are you all right? What happened? You two were so...

ALEX

I can't. I just can't talk about it...not even with you, *cher*. Later...not now...but very soon. I promise.

FLORA

I will always be here for you. You know that.

ALEX

Yes, I do.

Several guests come to chat with FLORA. ALEX takes a drink from JASON's tray and sits down on the sofa. A few moments later, JOE enters.

FLORA

Joe, I'm so glad you could get here. AJ's a complete *mess* tonight. He's acting so *strangely*. I'm afraid...

AJ

Alriiight! Douphol crashes and burns!

JOE

(*To FLORA*) Alex is here?

FLORA indicates ALEX on the sofa.

This is not good. AJ has been a wreck since Alex left him. I can't believe he would come here tonight. Has he been drinking?

FLORA

I should *say*..and *most* immoderately.

ALEX gets up from the sofa, notices JOE and crosses the room away from him, but closer to the poker table. AJ notices JOE.

AJ

Joe! Come watch this! I'm getting ready to clean out the robber baron...oops, sorry, Mark...that just slipped out. Joe, come on over.

JOE shakes his head no. At the table the other two players fold their cards, stand up.

Come on, Mark. We're playing for big stakes now...right up there where you like them. You can't fold on me now. Bet it all!

AJ notices ALEX nearer the poker table.

OK, here's a bet you'll like. Everything I've got here against...

AJ stands, faces ALEX.

...night with your butt boy.

MARK

(*Standing*) You've gone too far now, you dumb white trash shit.

AJ starts toward MARK, knocking over his chair.

AJ

Oh, no...not far enough, asshole.

AJ stops. Regains his composure, rights the chair. Looks around the room and sees JOE.

Well, then, OK...not your boy...something else, just as good. I know...your Ferrari! I want that fuckin' ostentatious car!

MARK

You're out of your mind, Duval. You can't even remotely match that bet. Not in your wildest dreams.

AJ

Oh, but I can. More than match. Flora, dear...could you have Jason bring more drinks...but first, do you have a pen and a piece of paper handy by chance?

The poker table is the focus of the room's attention and all conversation has ceased. FLORA opens a table drawer and removes paper and pen, hands it to AJ. AJ writes quickly, signs.

Joe, come over here. Take a look at this. Will it work?

JOE comes to the table, takes the paper and reads.

JOE

You can't do this!

AJ

Will it *work*?

JOE

You're drunk. Look, let's go. This is ridiculous.

AJ

Will it *work*? No other answer...just yes or no, counselor.

JOE

Yes.

AJ

Sign it.

JOE signs the paper.

(To MARK) The Ferrari...against this.

AJ hands the paper to MARK, who reads aloud.

MARK

“I hereby convey to the bearer ownership of my painting, ‘Lovers in a Blue Sky’, an original oil by Marc Chagall.” You must be joking.

ALEX

AJ, you can’t!

AJ

Serious as death. It’s witnessed. (*Indicating the room*) And witnessed.

MARK

This is legitimate? We’re talking about an Enzo Ferrari, here. How is it a fair bet? What’s it worth?

JOE

Your Enzo...and toss in a Bentley. AJ, think about this. You know what it means...

AJ

I know what it *meant*. Now it means shit to me. Come on, Douphol. Show you have some real balls.

MARK takes a key from his pocket. Tosses it on the table, with the cash of the pot.

MARK

I’m in, fucker.

AJ tosses the paper on the pile.

AJ

Done.

They sit and begin to play as the room watches. The playing continues for a while, then AJ shouts.

Yes!

AJ rakes in the money, paper and key. MARK stands.

Get the title to Joe in the morning.

AJ stands, then notices ALEX.

(CONT'D)

Oh, but wait! I forgot this one little debt I still owe...and really need to take care of before I leave San Diego.

Holding all his winnings, AJ walks over to ALEX.

ALEX

AJ, please...

AJ

Alex, my old love...I know you don't rent cheap...

AJ tosses the money, the key and paper at ALEX.

There. Paid in full!

ALEX is stunned...slowly goes to his knees amid the pile. AJ stands over him. MARK starts toward AJ. JOE blocks his way. JOE walks over to AJ, looks at him for a moment, slaps him across the face.

JOE

You are a cruel and stupid boy. Get out of here.

AJ steps back, puts a hand to his face, smarting back tears. He leaves. The room is silent, unmoving. FLORA goes to ALEX, bends down. ALEX pushes him back gently. ALEX looks amid the pile, finds and retrieves the key. He stands and takes it over to MARK, who puts it back in his pocket. ALEX then retrieves the paper from the floor, takes it to JOE. JOE raises his hands, refusing.

BLACKOUT
SOUND OUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Six

TIME *A year and a half later.*

SETTING *ALEX's small apartment in San Francisco, in "The Avenues", near Golden Gate Park, one block from the Pacific Ocean. There is a*

bed, table, chairs, but they are drab and utilitarian, as is the apartment. The Chagall is on the wall and the photograph of the old woman, as well.

AT RISE *ALEX is seated in a chair, with CARTER standing. ALEX appears to be thinner and not in good health.*

CARTER

Remember to give me a call at the hospital if you need anything.

ALEX

I will. Thanks. Working this weekend?

CARTER

Yes, afraid so. This will be a long one.

ALEX

How that *must* cut into your social life. You should definitely get out more or you'll never meet Mr. Right...or even Mr. Right Now. You need to *play*, Carter. San Francisco is just *full* of interesting, great-looking guys.

CARTER

All of them looking for each other, not me. My social life here is even more boring than it was in San Diego, if that's possible. Without Flora and his "mercy invites", this old man has fallen on hard times in the gray north.

ALEX

"Old"? Hardly. Your work, though...

CARTER

Challenging, at least. So, that's good, in spite of the not getting laid thing.

ALEX

I don't know what I would do without you, here.

CARTER

I'm just glad I can help. You know I'll be here for you.

ALEX

I do. You always have.

CARTER

But not when...

FLORA's voice is heard from off stage.

FLORA

Helloooo! Alessandra...*pauvre cher, c'est moi*, your Florissima!

ALEX

(Laughing) Please let him in before he frightens my uptight neighbors.

CARTER goes off stage briefly, then returns with FLORA, who has shopping bags)

CARTER

(Kissing FLORA) You are stunning, as ever, Flora. Well, I'm off. Duty calls. You boys have fun, now. Alex...call me? For anything?

CARTER leaves.

FLORA

Carter is such a dear...and your *oldest* admirer.

ALEX

(Kissing FLORA) And you, *precieux*, are my most *fabulous*! What outrageous things have you bought today?

FLORA

Far too much...you know how I am in San Francisco.

Looking around the apartment.

You simply *must* redecorate, *cher*. It's a bit...seventies. With *shag*. And is it always so *drear* out here? The Castro was positively *sunny*. All these lovely boys with their shirts off. Then I get here and...nothing but *fog*...and *cold*. How do you endure? Is it always like this?

ALEX

Sometimes. Most of the time. But, Flora there are days...bright, sunny and just *glorious*! With the ocean across the street *that way*...and Golden Gate park a block *that way*. *(Indicating)* I rather like this area.

FLORA

...and the Dahlia Garden *just over there!* *(indicating)* I know you, girlfriend.

Returning to the survey of the apartment. Sees the Chagall.

Still, you have an *awesome* art collection. *(Pause)* Why do you keep it? Selling would make such a difference for you.

ALEX

It's not mine. He'll have it back...in time.

FLORA

You are so *tedious*...get *over* that one. He certainly got over you.

ALEX

I'm easily gotten over, it seems. Heard anything of Mark?

FLORA

Tanning at the beach place in Maui, the bitch. He's seems to be rather unwelcome in San Diego this season. I can't *imagine* why.

ALEX

Of course, the social arbiter of California A-list queens could not *possibly* know why the robber baron is no longer *received* anywhere.

FLORA

And his *dreadful* merger fiasco...such a *surprise* to everyone!

ALEX

Flora, you are *evil*!

FLORA

Moi? Mais non! 'Twas just my *horrible* family! You *know* how vicious they can be about putting new money in its place.

ALEX

Yes, if you ask them to be. (*Long pause*) I heard he found something better.

FLORA

Two somethings, actually my dear. Twenty-year old twins. They are said to be *gorgeous*!

ALEX

Twins? Amazing. The older Mark gets the younger his boys get. I can't imagine where he'll be at fifty.

FLORA

San Quentin. (*Pause*) Forget that piece of bad news, girlfriend. I have *this* for you! You will simply *adore* it!

FLORA removes a box from one shopping bag. Hands it to ALEX.

I was at Versace and it *screamed* Alex! I had *no* choice.

ALEX opens the box, removes a beautiful, expensive pull over.

ALEX

It's lovely. But, you *can't*...

FLORA

Indeed I *can*, dearest Alexie. You simply *must* have something that's *this* season.

ALEX

Thank you. You are kind. And gentle and my best friend.

FLORA

Then, honey, why don't you let me *really* help? This (*indicating the apartment*) is so not *you*...

ALEX

Clearly Vanderbilt money isn't what it used to be. What *would* the Commodore say?

FLORA

Then, let me help. It would be *nothing* for me to...

ALEX

I can't. I won't. You know that. "Made my bed", et cetera. Anyway, there's *some* work.

FLORA

Ah...such as?

ALEX

Well, you know...what I'm good at. And last week I had several days at Macy's men's store. The runway they set up near the entrance for the end of summer sale. I felt almost *old* with those other boys...and positively *naked* without a single piercing. Fortunately, they wanted the gaunt look.

FLORA

Do you ever hear from him?

ALEX

I wouldn't. He's still in Italy, at that air base. According to Carter, he's been back to Iraq.

FLORA

(*Long pause*) You and that boy...

ALEX

I still love him.

FLORA

(Hugging ALEX) I know, baby...I know. And I think I've seen the greatest tragedy I'm likely to see in my life.

ALEX

Then, you're blessed. It seems like comedy to me. *But!* Life goes on! Or should. Carter's doing good work at San Francisco General. It was worth moving up here to have him still looking out for me.

FLORA

That man would make someone an awesome husband, if he were just ten years younger.

ALEX

(Laughing) Oh, Flora! You vicious queen! If he could get over his crush on me and stop being such a worker drone he could *still* be husband material!

FLORA

Whatever...

ALEX

(Checking his watch) Flora, you simply *must* run...

FLORA

Oh? Is there something...or *someone* I should know?

ALEX

As always...a girl has to work.

FLORA

Oh. I *see*. I *do* hope you are being careful.

ALEX

More than you can know, cher.

FLORA

Good. I should be so *harsh* with you, if not. Now I will be back at 7 to pick you up. I have reservations at Masa and we're going to have the most *glorious* repas this evening. I intend to stuff you so full of caviar you will be simply *compelled* to swim upstream should you even get *near* a river!

FLORA kisses and hugs ALEX and leaves. ALEX moves around the apartment, straightening up, including the bed. He appears to check his appearance in a mirror, smoothes his shirt. He pulls his shirt off and puts on the shirt FLORA had given him, checks his appearance again. There is a knock at the door of the apartment. ALEX goes to the door. A

man walks in, stands silently looking at ALEX for a time. The man turns and leaves.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Seven

TIME *One month later. Mid-summer.*

SETTING *The Dahlia Garden at the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers, in Golden Gate Park. A park bench.*

AT RISE *ALEX and JOE are sitting on the bench.*

ALEX

I love dahlias. I do think they are the most beautiful flower there is. And this the most beautiful spot in San Francisco.

JOE

Itself "...a place of unspeakable beauty". San Francisco...from *Angels in America*.

ALEX

Yes. *(Pause)* My mother grew dahlias at our place in South Carolina. We had acres. She could do absolute magic with them. She produced one variety...pure white, ball shape...a tiny touch of lavender at the center. It was... *(emotional)* Our place was called Bellwood...she named the variety "Bellwood's Alexander". *(Pause)* I wonder if it's available anywhere? Perhaps I should see.

JOE

I had no idea.

ALEX

Volunteers from the local clubs take care of the garden. Each has responsibility for certain plants. It looks like this mass of flowers. But, there are boundaries. Just...*there*...that's where Mr. Ando and Mrs. Gomes have their frontier. They never speak to each other. There have been...issues. Mr. Ando is rather strict...a

(CONT'D)

perfectionist. Should a bloom just *begin* to show a bit of wilt....*snip*. Gone. Now, Mrs. Gomes, on the other hand...she's tolerance itself. She'll baby and coax a bloom...sometimes far beyond reason. (*Confidentially*) I happen to know that Mr. Ando has, on occasion, transgressed his border and snipped one of Mrs. Gomes' nursed invalids. I think she knows it too. There are looks.

JOE

I think I like Mrs. Gomes.

ALEX

I *thought* I did, too. Lately, I'm not sure. Mr. Ando...his austerity has...a *purity* to it. I think he knows something about the world Mrs. Gomes doesn't...or doesn't want to know.

JOE

Alex...I'm...just so glad you would see me.

ALEX

Not a problem. I hope you don't mind meeting here. My place is...being redecorated.

JOE

No...no. This is fine. Lovely. Alex...I was just so devastated when Carter told me...about...

ALEX

Yes. I do seem to have the most perfectly rotten luck. And we've come so *far* from *Angels in America*. The virus is rather manageable, all in all. One gets it, goes on the cocktail, keeps working out at the gym, has a fabulous body, fabulous sex, fabulous boyfriends. In a few years you might have to tweak the meds a bit, but still, things are manageable. A few more years and you give the meds more attention. Five years pass, ten years, fifteen. You challenge the virus with different, stronger meds and then relax. Maybe your body fat begins to migrate to odd places. You catch people glancing at you twice. But...no wasting...none of the opportunistic diseases. *Well, that wasn't such a bad plague after all, now was it!* What no one talks about is the little colloquy going on in your body between the virus and the meds. Year after year...the meds teaching, the virus learning...slowly, relentlessly. Such a poor student, though. So hit and miss at its studies.

JOE

Alex...

ALEX

From time to time, though, a really *clever* virus appears. One that's been through kindergarten, elementary school, high school...college. Now we have one *smart* virus. The drugs begin...not to work. Not all of them...most, though. We get new drugs; the virus backs off but learns a new lesson...tucks it away in the spiral notebook of its DNA.

JOE

Alex...

ALEX

Congratulations, Alex Spencer! You are one in a million. You get *the* PhD of HIV...the smartest goddamn virus twenty years of forced evolution has yet to produce. First in its class *your* first time out! Go *straight* to the head of the line, Alex...skip over all those fifteen years of having to school some stupid, Neanderthal virus in your sexy body. Fifteen years you *might* have had.

JOE

I'm so very, very sorry...

ALEX

Virulent and perfectly drug resistant. Against which not a goddamn thing works. *Voila!* Time warp...we're back in the early 80's...or, at least...I am.

JOE

What does Carter say?

ALEX

He frowns a lot, if he thinks I'm not watching. I think I'm why he took the position at General. His department is rather proud of me. They simply *love* my blood. Careers will be made.

JOE

Have you been ill?

ALEX

Yes. You don't want to know.

JOE

Any drugs that look...?

ALEX

...promising? The experimental one that required twice a day injections. My arms looked like a junkie's before we gave up on it.

JOE

How...?

ALEX

Well, there I'm uniquely blessed. I know precisely *how*. I know within an hour or so *when*. I just don't know *who*.

JOE

Pardon?

ALEX

Remember your plane thief? My rescuer? This time there was no handsome Navy pilot. Mark got his gangbang.

JOE

He drugged you?

ALEX

Not at all! I drugged me. This time I wouldn't have missed the show for the *world!* No *way!* I was with Tina...*crystaal!* Yo! It was *fine!* I had a *blast!* Mark, the other guys, then Mark again...and I was *pissed* they weren't up for another go at my ass. I've got the video. It's hotter than shit. I watch it. Trying to figure out *which* one charged me up with such a fucking *brilliant* virus.

JOE

Mark should be shot.

ALEX

Joe...Joe. I *wanted* it. Or, I wanted Tina and *she* wanted it. Mark was just the occasion.

JOE

That doesn't matter...he's responsible...

ALEX

Responsible? I wouldn't go there if I were you. (*Pause*) He was...upset when he found out. Even teared up a bit. It was...charming. Now I never see him and I take nothing from him. Except medical. He covers everything there. Carter saw to that. (*Long pause*) Joe. Why are you here?

JOE

I wanted to see you. I'm keeping the promise I made to you at Todos Santos. AJ is taking a four-day leave at Ibiza in a couple of weeks. Carter and I are going to meet him there. We *each* have something to tell him.

ALEX is silent for a long moment.

ALEX

(*To himself*) Oh, AJ...you have such a big hurt coming, baby. (*Pause*) Thank you, Joe.

JOE

I wish you could understand. Since he was born, I've protected him. He was a son to me. I was the one who was always there for him, the one he could depend on, no matter what. There were more times than you could ever know or he ever remember when I had to step in to shield him from his mother or one of her abusive boyfriends. He was in my life every day. There were times I had to be tough for him...so tough it hurt me. So tough I cried. (*Pause*) But...he became a strong boy and an even stronger man and there was less and less I had to protect him from. Then there was you.

ALEX

Lucky me.

JOE

I've done an unforgivable thing. Because of me he's lost what he may never find again. (*pause*) Alex, I am so in awe of your love for him. I manipulated your love for AJ to protect him. I am more ashamed than you can know to have done that to you.

ALEX

Joe...Joe. Still pretentious and still clueless. Don't flatter yourself. *We both* manipulated him. I did it by letting him believe a lie. You did it by telling me the truth. He's the one wronged, here. Not me.

JOE

Alex...

ALEX

What I did, I did for him...not because you *manipulated* me. The lie I let him believe has hurt me more deeply than this...thing I did to my body. He won't forgive you...you've lost him. So have I.

JOE

How did this get so fucked up? Trying to do what's right? For someone you love?

ALEX

I don't know. Maybe Flora could tell you.

JOE

What?

ALEX

One of my favorite Flora sayings: "In this world, *honeychille*, they be lives not *all* the saints working together cane protec'."

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Eight

TIME *Six weeks later.*

SETTING *Alex's apartment in San Francisco.*

AT RISE *ALEX is seated with CARTER standing beside a table. CARTER is removing medicine from a bag.*

CARTER

There. Resupplied. You know the drill.

ALEX

I won't go back to the hospital. You have to promise me that, no matter what happens, you won't take me back there.

CARTER

We've been through this. You can get the care you need there if...something happens again.

ALEX

A month. Christ...it was almost a month this time!

CARTER

It was a particularly mean infection. Next time...

ALEX

I won't go back to that place. It's black. It's death. (*Long pause*) I'll take it here. Even here. I want to be alive when I die.

CARTER

That's no way to talk. Look, Joe sent this.

(CONT'D)

CARTER removes a package from the bag, hands it to ALEX.

He said to tell you it was for Mrs. Gomes and that it was “Bellwood’s Alexander”.
(Pause) What ever does *that* mean?

ALEX opens the package, removing cellulose packaging and a number of dahlia bulbs.

ALEX

My god. Dahlias. (*Choking with emotion*) Very special ones. They will be just awesome!

CARTER

(*Long pause*) I should tell you about Ibiza, now.

ALEX

Yes. How did it go?

CARTER

Very badly. AJ was...distraught...no...he was in absolute agony. I thought I’d seen pain, but...

ALEX

(*To himself*) Oh, love...AJ...

CARTER

He slugged Joe. I thought he’d go after me, but...then he cried. He was going to go AWOL and fly here that day. Just crazy. It took me hours to talk him out of it. Promised I would do something. Then...the call came about you going into the hospital. We decided I’d come back here immediately and get something arranged when we...knew...

ALEX

Yes. If I’d make it this time. Good plan.

CARTER

No. If you’d know him if he came...what drugs you’d be on.

ALEX

Sorry. Ignore “Cynical Alex”. You are sweet.

CARTER

So, what I arranged was that Joe is dying...as near as AJ has to “next of kin”...and he has a week’s emergency leave to attend Joe’s bedside. After a week I’ll cure Joe and AJ goes back to Italy.

ALEX

Good...then would you mind curing me while you're at it?

CARTER

He's outside.

ALEX stands abruptly, turns to the door. CARTER leaves, then AJ enters. He's wearing his Navy dress white uniform. He takes one step toward ALEX as ALEX does the same. They both stop. There is a long moment.

AJ

How could you let me go?

ALEX

I love you.

AJ

But how could you make that choice...for me...for us?

ALEX

I love you.

AJ

How could you let me think you'd betrayed me? For all this time?

ALEX

I love you.

AJ

It cost you...

ALEX

...everything.

AJ rushes to ALEX, goes to his knees, wrapping his arms around ALEX's waist.

AJ

But not my love! You'll always have that...forever and forever!

ALEX kneels, hugging AJ in return.

ALEX

I know. I've always known that.

AJ

My god! I was such an asshole. When I think of Flora's and how awful I was to you then, I just want to curl up and die! The hurt I gave you makes me crazy. I'm so sorry! I'm so ashamed!

ALEX

Oh, baby...hurting *you* was hardest thing I've ever done...I wanted to die watching you in all that pain and I can never stop saying I'm sorry. How can *you* forgive *me* for what I did? Making you believe I didn't love you, when I did? Making you believe I didn't want to live the rest of my life with you, when I did? Making you...all this time...live with the thought that my love for you was a lie...when it was *huge* and permanent and the most incredible thing that's ever happened to me? Can you ever forgive *me*?

AJ

Yes. *Now*. Always.

ALEX

I love you so!

They kiss, passionately and long.

AJ

I want to be with you. We've lost so much time! In three months I'm done with the Navy. Then it will be only *you*...who I will be with, and love and care for...you will be my life. We can do it, this time we can do it!

ALEX

You can't imagine what it's been like being here, hurting, without you. I will not be without you again...I love you...God I love you! A life with you has been all I've ever wanted since the first night we made love. I am so happy, you can't know!

AJ

I know, baby. I do know. (*Quickly*) Let's go back to Todos Santos. Our paradise! Let's just go back...let's go back tomorrow!

ALEX

(*Pause*) It's far. (*Pause*) Very far, now.

AJ

Then Yosemite! It's a few hours away. We can drive. Camp out on top of a mountain...make love under an ocean of stars...tomorrow!

ALEX

Yes...that is your healing place. Yes! We can do that! But...you know how very careful we have to be...now...don't you?

AJ

We can be...we will be. I just want you so!

ALEX

I know...and I so want you. We can do it. We'll talk to Carter...let him approve every kiss (*kisses AJ*), bite (*nibbles AJ's ear*), and grope (*grope AJ's crotch*).

AJ giggles at the grope, begins to kiss ALEX passionately, begins to remove ALEX's shirt, ALEX fumbles with the buttons of AJ's uniform tunic.

AJ

If Carter has to watch and blow a whistle at any move he doesn't like, that's fine with me. Wait...let me...

AJ unbuttons the tunic, removes it and the t-shirt he is wearing. We see AJ's eagle tattoo, diving, with claws extended.

There!

ALEX looks into AJ's eyes for a long moment, then distances himself a bit from AJ.

ALEX

If...I said....not now...would you hate me?

AJ

Yes. *No!* Of course not! When you are ready. When you feel safe. I can wait.

The light comes up dramatically. AJ notices.

Look! The fog has cleared. Damn, that's fucking incredible!

ALEX

Yes! It's a blessing. On us! This will be one *glorious* day!

AJ

Let's enjoy it, then! We'll walk on the beach again. You can show me the park and the dahlias I've heard so much about. We have so much *time!* Alex, please!

ALEX

Of course! We can stop at the Italian market up the street and get some cheap wine...and do *coq au vin!* And strawberries! They should still be in season...

AJ

We don't have to have sex...but tonight...tonight I want to sleep with you...naked...feel your body along every inch of mine! Touching you in my

(CONT'D)

dreams! Breathing your breath with every breath of mine. Alex....Alex....I've wanted that so much... for so *very* long!

ALEX

Yes...that would be...my heaven.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Nine

TIME *Hours later. Late night.*

SETTING *The bedroom of ALEX's apartment.*

AT RISE *Narrow spotlight on ALEX, on the floor, potting one of the dahlia bulbs, the package of bulbs on the floor near him. There is also a container of pills and a bottle of vodka. He takes a handful of the pills and washes them down by drinking from the bottle. He will do this several times during the first part of the scene. ALEX finishes, waters the soil in the pot. He is shirtless, with long, white pajama type pants, the same as he was wearing in the Prologue to Act One. He closes the package of bulbs, puts it on a desk at the side as the full scene becomes visible. In the center rear is a bed, AJ sleeping, naked. This is the same bed in the same position as in the Prelude to Act One. ALEX writes a note, places it under the package on the desk. ALEX looks at a much longer letter on the desk, signs it. For a moment he puts his elbows on the desk and his head in his hands. ALEX then goes to the bed, kisses the sleeping AJ. Stands watching him. He returns to the desk, removes a syringe and other drug items from a drawer of the desk. He prepares a massive dose of heroin. He goes to the bed, sits beside the sleeping AJ. ALEX wraps his arm with medical tubing. He knots the tubing, injects himself with the syringe. He releases the tubing, withdraws the needle of the syringe. In a moment, his head begins to fall slowly back and his eyes close. He slowly collapses onto the bed, beside AJ. The scene goes to black.*

AJ

Alex?

After an expectant silence, in the darkness, recorded, amplified, in darkness, during the transition between scenes and into Scene Ten.

ALEX

“My dearest AJ, my love. Baby...I’ve hurt you again and I’m more sorry for this than you will ever know. I’ve made the most selfish choice I could ever make...but I could not bear to be parted from you again. Tonight is my forever and my always with you and I would not have it any other way. Just for a while today I could hope. But now three months is a very long time in my life. Very long. AJ, it’s so strange, but at this moment I feel more alive than I have felt at any time since Todos Santos. What better time, then? Close to you, feeling the warmth of your body. I would rather die than be parted from you. I would rather die than have you watch *me* die, as I *would*...slowly, ugly, without dignity, frightened, not knowing my love, my life, my other. I could not endure the thought of you looking into my eyes and seeing only the fear looking back. Please forgive me for doing this to you, but it is what I must do...now...for *me*. Never doubt that you came into my life and gave me what I had not expected and what few will ever have...perfect love. I return to you the Chagall and I give to you the old woman...she brought us together. Take me to Yosemite...your healing place and I will stay there. One day you will again find the love who completes you and will be *your* now and forever. Make love to him under the Chagall and promise him “love is like that”. Bring him to Yosemite. Kiss him on Sentinel Dome, make love, as we did, under that diamond ocean of stars...and I will bless you both. AJ...I love you and loving you has brought me such joy! Alex.”

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Ten

TIME *Several days later.*

SETTING *When lights come up, it will be Sentinel Dome in Yosemite. As in Act One, Scene Seven, there will be an elevated riser in the center of the stage.*

AJ comes up onto the riser from the rear, wearing the hiking clothes and backpack from Act One, Scene Seven. He will stand, and then look behind him, as he did in that scene. He turns back to face the audience...a long moment. He removes his backpack, places it on the riser. He kneels, places his hand tenderly on the backpack.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT TWO

END OF PLAY