

DARE

by

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DARE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>JACK</u>	82	male
<u>JOSH</u>	28	male
<u>YOUNGER JACK</u>	42 to 59	male
<u>DAVID</u>	19 to 36	male
<u>NURSE ASSISTANT</u>	30's	male

DARE

SETTING *A nursing home in the Central Valley of California, August, 2013.*

AT RISE *A room in the nursing home. There is a hospital bed stage left. The bed is adjustable and the upper part of the bed is raised a bit. Next to the bed and stage right from it is a small side cabinet with a drawer and a single bookshelf below. There will be books on the bookshelf and stacked atop the cabinet. Next to the cabinet and further stage right is a large reclining chair and next to the chair a small table with a top that can pivot to provide meals to someone seated in the chair. There is a trashcan near the table. Very near the table and stage right of it is a chair. All this will occupy half of the stage, stage left. The stage right half of the stage may mirror stage left, without the hospital bed and small table. This area will be where the play's flashbacks occur and the set will adjust to accommodate them. Alternatively, the described set may move to center stage, with the flashbacks taking place at various locations on the stage around it.*

When the lights come up, JACK will be struggling to sit up in bed. The Nurse Assistant will be downstage left, watching. He does not move to assist JACK. Finally sitting up, JACK begins to move his legs to the right side of the bed, which he does with some difficulty. He is finally able to move his legs over the right side of the bed and almost to the floor. He is wearing a hospital gown, open in the back, exposing his naked back and buttocks. The NURSE ASSISTANT remains still. JACK moves his feet to the floor, slips them into house shoes, and begins to stand, but is unable to do so, sitting back awkwardly onto the edge of the bed. He glares at the NURSE ASSISTANT. After a long moment, the NURSE ASSISTANT reluctantly moves to assist JACK to stand beside the bed. With one hand steadying himself on the bed's headboard, with a wave of the other hand JACK indicates offstage, where the NURSE ASSISTANT goes to retrieve a once elegant, but now well worn robe. Almost to the bed, the NURSE ASSISTANT holds out the robe to JACK, and then lets it fall to the floor as JACK reaches for it and almost loses his balance. JACK glares at him. This is clearly a game they have played before. After a moment, the NURSE ASSISTANT picks up the robe, moves to the bed and roughly assists JACK to put it on. Without much care, the NURSE ASSISTANT helps JACK to move to the reclining chair, where JACK sits. JACK then arranges the robe to cover the hospital gown. JACK glares again at the NURSE ASSISTANT, who snickers and leaves.

JACK opens the top drawer of the chest between the chair and the bed and removes a long, elegant, colorful, very fine and well-worn, but rather beautiful scarf, which he loosely drapes around his neck and shoulders and fusses with, carefully. He has gotten the drape just right when the NURSE ASSISTANT re-enters, with a tray. On the tray is a large container of water with a cover and straw, a plate of food with a cover, a napkin and utensils. The NURSE ASSISTANT slams the covered plate, water container, napkin and utensils onto the table.

JACK, annoyed, waves the NURSE ASSISTANT away. When he has left, JACK picks up the covered plate and drops it into the trashcan, along with the napkin and utensils. He takes a sip of water. He will continue to take sips throughout the play.

JOSH enters from stage right, wearing slacks and a button down shirt, carrying a thick medical file, a legal pad and a peach. He nods to JACK and places the peach on the table, which had until recently, held JACK's lunch.

JOSH

Good afternoon, Mr. Miller.

JACK

And a good afternoon to you, Dr. Sloan.

JOSH

Josh, please.

JACK

Then I must be Jack, please.

JOSH

Jack. *(He sits in the chair, then, indicating the vacant area stage right.)* You appear to have lost your roommate.

JACK

Mr. Abernathy. Yes, they wheeled him out last week.

JOSH

Deceased?

JACK

Not that anyone could tell. No, he just didn't care for my taste in movies. Nor I, his, for that matter. I think the breaking point was *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*?

JOSH

You don't care for *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*?

JACK

(Pause.) Clever boy. (Smiles. Pause. Indicating the peach.) And what is that?

JOSH

A peach.

JACK

Indeed. And a very lovely peach it is. But why is it here?

JOSH

My husband and I were at his family's farm in Sonoma over the weekend. It's harvest. We brought back a basket full. I thought I'd bring you one.

JACK

(Delighted.) Husband! Thought so! (Open hand to the heart.) Oh, how this fairy's bells did tinkle when last we met! (Pause, then with feigned sorrow.) But, married? Tragic! I've come late to the party again, it seems. (Another pause, then seriously.) Though you might want to be a bit less...forward...with that sort of talk around here. Not everyone here at Buena Vista is...hum...progressive, you see.

JOSH

Oh? Have you had... problems? With that sort of thing?

JACK

Moi? Far be it from me to complain about "that sort of thing". It's just the neighborhood, shall we say?

JOSH

We're only an hour from the Castro.

JACK

We're only an hour from Modesto.

JOSH

If you do...

JACK

(Interrupting.) You know, I didn't expect a return visit from our new consulting...gerontologist?... quite so soon. Now, I wonder what might be the occasion?

JOSH

I got a call...

JACK

(Interrupting.) And, "gerontologist"? Aren't you far too young to be a "gerontologist"? To be obsessed with aging? Oh, wait. Our young are *always* obsessed with aging. Or, is it, *not* aging? Not with... *the* aging? How have you managed that?

JOSH

The field is actually...

JACK

(Interrupting.) And, my boy, I don't really think I need a "gerontologist". That's for someone who's to be getting older. *(Pause.)* I'm not going to be getting older. As you clearly have heard.

JOSH

I got a call from your physician, Dr. Clark...

JACK

(Interrupting.) Who I rarely see and hardly know...

JOSH

(Continuing, firmly.) ... and from the facility administrator....

JACK

(Interrupting.) A bitch I know far too well and see far too often.

JOSH

(Continuing, firmly.) They asked me to visit with you. It seems you've stopped eating.

JACK

My *dear* boy, I stopped eating the day I arrived at this place. Eating involves food. There's no food here. There's swill. I've stopped consuming swill, if you will.

JOSH

You've stopped consuming... anything.

JACK lifts the glass, tips it toward JOSH, then takes a sip.

(CONT'D)

Why do you drink water? It will take longer.

JACK

Good point. But I hate bad breath and it makes talking easier.

JOSH

Soon enough your breath will reek of ketones. The water won't help. Anyway, from what I see (*Indicating the container.*) you're drinking from thirst.

JACK

Je suis desole! I'm truly *devastated*. Have to fix that. But for now, the conversation goes on!

JOSH

And you are now at...

JACK

Four days. Hunger pangs are gone. The adventure begins!

JOSH

And you are feeling light. Cleansed. Energized. Particularly lucid.

JACK

Yes! Correct! Again... smart boy!

JOSH

It won't last. The feeling.

JACK

But, while it does! (*He gestures with both hands, fingers spread, exuberant.*)

JOSH

(*Pause.*) Could we get back to my question?

JACK

Which was?

JOSH

Why?

JACK

Why not?

JOSH

Why are you...

JACK
(*Interrupting.*) I did mention the swill?

JOSH
Why are you doing this?

JACK
My dog died.

JOSH
I'm so sorry to hear that, but...

JACK
Luna and I were together for fifteen years. I got her as a puppy. She was smart, sweet, devoted and she loved me fully, completely and without reservation.

JOSH
When did she...

JACK
Five years ago.

JOSH
(*After a long pause.*) Why do you want to starve yourself to death?

JACK
Because, in this place, it's the only method I can get away with. The only way I *can...* get *away*.

JOSH
How long have you been feeling...

JACK
(*Interrupting.*) But that's not quite right. It's not that I want to *be* away from here. The *be* that's *me* doesn't want to *be elsewhere*. It wants to *not*. (*Pause.*) Not *be*. Do you follow?

JOSH
Why do you want to... *not be*?

JACK
Why did your last uttered string of words want to come crashing into your question mark? It didn't. '*Want*' misses the point. It wouldn't have been a sentence had it not...done the crashing bit. I wouldn't be alive were I not to be going to be dead. I hate run on sentences. I don't want to be one. I'm done. (*Pause.*) Simply.

JOSH

Ah. (*Long pause.*) Why do you think you're... done?

JACK

Principle of elegance. I'm complete. Nothing else I *can* do. Nothing else I want to do. More time is... superfluous. And terribly, terribly ugly. I hate ugly. Always have. I would have added "always will", but that would have betrayed my intentions here. Won't be no "will" for me.

JOSH

I'm not sure I...

JACK

(*Interrupting.*) Every good guest knows when it's time to leave the party. The best actor knows, instinctively, when his role is done. The most *fabulous* diva knows when to take her bow and leave the stage. I've watched the waves crash onto the shore and sweep away everything good and beautiful and sweet in my life and I will not be left standing on the shore... alone.

JOSH

I'm afraid that's the lamest string of metaphors I've heard in quite a long time. Could we start this conversation over? From my "Why do you want to starve yourself to death?"

JACK

Well. Indeed. (*Pause.*) I'm eighty-two years old. I have osteo-arthritis and a fractured hip that pins haven't helped and for which replacement is out of the question. All my other bones are a spider-web of fractures biding their time. I have to be helped out of bed and can only take about three steps on my own. My heart is congestive failure waiting to happen. Alzheimer's has just begun to tickle my memory as it did my mother's and my uncle's. There've been moments. When I look at the world through *Alzheimer's* eyes. Seeing perfectly, but perfectly...*blank*...as to what I was seeing. I will not go that way.

JOSH

Has Dr. Clark...

JACK

(*Interrupting.*) I am out of money. I am out of friends. And it won't get better. Five years ago I was directing plays. Five years ago I hiked the entire Pohono Trail in Yosemite. Alone. Five years ago I had a dog. Today I'm *here*. I'm looking at ugly and I won't have it. Any of it. And those were perfectly good metaphors, thank you very much.

JOSH

I'm familiar with your medical records. From Dr. Clark. *(Pause.)* I didn't know you were in theatre.

JACK

My dear, we are *all of us* in theatre. My onstage roles have been as bounteous as the stars in the skies. Petrified young Central Valley gayboy in cowboy boots and crushes. College kid hiding from sex in books and the library. The living-two-lives denizen of the corporate closet and tragic, soul-mangled victim of the inner closet. *Scandalous* sexual libertine. Lover. Non-lover. The found. The lost. Bibliophile and activist. Caregiver and tragically re-closeted. Every performance Tony award worthy. *(pause)* But, you meant the other sort of theatre. With stages. And paying audiences.

JOSH

Yes.

JACK

Indeed, indeed. Lousy actor. Incompetent playwright. More than competent director. Particularly good with gay playwrights and plays.

JOSH

It's been quite a while since I've had time for the theatre. And I don't think I've ever seen a gay play.

JACK

Oh, dear boy. You've seen one if you've seen *any*. They're *all* gay plays.

JOSH

They are?

JACK

They are. A well-known fact. Among the *cognoscenti*. *(Long pause. Indicating the peach on the table.)* But what, I wonder, is this clever prop you've furnished the set for *our* play with? *(Pause.)* "Do I dare..."

JOSH

"...to eat a peach?" *(Long pause.)* Do you dare?

JACK

No. I don't. I won't. I now "measure out my life" in trips to the toilet, not "...in coffee spoons." The trips will soon become fewer.

JOSH

(After a pause.) It's a love song, you know. *Prufrock*.

JACK

Indeed it is. But my taste in T. S. Eliot has always run to *The Wasteland*. Especially now. Since "... the mermaids no longer sing to me."

JOSH

Ah. (pause) "... no longer"? (Long pause. JOSH is thinking). But they *did* sing to you... once?

JACK

(After a very long pause.) Yes.

JACK says nothing further. There is another long silence that becomes uncomfortable, after a while.

JOSH

Jack. (Pause.) Jack. (Pause.) We'll go only where you're comfortable, of course. Not beyond. But, it is your metaphor... of your *play* and the decision that has brought the... *plot*... to this crisis point. Like any... audience member... I want to understand. *You*. Who you *are* in the drama. The... *character* you are. And especially why you feel the play's *over*. Especially that. We have lots of time. So... why don't we just go with it? (Pause, then with a shrug.) Couldn't hurt.

JACK

Oh, cursed metaphor. Trapped, it would seem. Ah, well.

There is a long pause. JACK's tone changes. He is now much more serious.

Why would you think it's *my* play?

DAVID

Jack!

JACK's head snaps to the right, as if hearing the call. The half-light that had slowly and imperceptibly covered stage right comes up to full as the light stage left goes to half, then black. DAVID enters from stage right during this transition. He is beautiful, young and dressed fashionably, but rather flamboyantly for gay San Francisco in the early '70s. The time is June, 1973.

It's cocktail hour! We can't be too late! Everyone will have a head start on us!

The younger JACK enters from stage left, crossing in front of the old JACK and JOSH, who will remain still throughout the following. Younger JACK (41 at this point) is casually but conservatively dressed.

JACK

Since when does cocktail hour start at 2 in the afternoon? I don't think Emily Post would approve, at all.

DAVID

We'll call it tea, then, if it makes you feel better. But it *will* be cocktails.

Noticing JACK's clothes.

Oh, love. We *must* do something about that look.

DAVID rummages in a drawer of the stand and removes a long, elegant, colorful, and rather beautiful scarf, which he loosely drapes around JACK's neck and shoulders. It's a double for the scarf the older JACK is wearing.

There! Stunning!

JACK is unsure. He moves and appears to examine himself in a mirror, touching the scarf.

JACK

It's beautiful. But I'd feel a bit...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) Flamboyant!

JACK

... strange. It's not really my style.

DAVID

Oh, it is *very much* your style!

JACK

Well, I guess we'd look more like we were... I don't know... together?

DAVID

We *are* together!

He poses with JACK, his arms over JACK's shoulder, facing the unseen mirror.

We are so *terribly* together!

JACK

I'll be the oldest person there. Again. With your friends. Almost twice as old as most of them.

DAVID

We'll keep you young! None of us will ever be old! That's the magic! But there *will* be people your age there. Kendall's new friend. He's a banker, I think. And this guy from New York who just opened a camera shop on Castro Street. Walt says he's quite interesting.

JACK

So there will be...

DAVID

Yes! People your age to gossip with and talk about opera, your record collections and *Mildred Pierce* and be just ever *so very* witty with!

JACK

Don't be cruel, David. I'm not the least bit into camping it up. Never have been.

DAVID

Oh, I was *teasing!* I *know* that. (*Pause.*) But have you ever thought... that perhaps you *should* be? Into camping it up? Maybe just a bit?

JACK

No. It's silly. *They're* silly. And too obvious.

DAVID

Obvious?

JACK

You know what I mean.

DAVID

Silly can be a weapon, you know. It can protect. (*Pause.*) Are you afraid it dates you? Makes you seem *last generation?*

JACK

I am last generation. Just not *that* one.

DAVID

Ah. (*long pause*) Still... it's a *fun* generation, and we *owe* them! They taught us the *joy* of gay! And *camp* is fun! (*Pause.*) Though not as much as Boy Scout camp, I have to admit.

JACK

I never went to Boy Scout camp.

DAVID

Oh, love... I did... I *did!* (*Pause.*) Such a scandal. I got kicked out. But I learned so *much!*

JACK

(*Laughing.*) I'm sure you did.

DAVID

(*More serious.*) Just be *yourself*, Jack. My sweet, strong, deep and comforting *love*, my love. That's all you ever have to be. For me, or for anyone.

JACK

(*A bit taken aback by the seriousness, then lightening the mood.*) But, I guess I could try to loosen up a bit. Be a bit... wittier?

DAVID

Whatever feels right to you. No one expects Oscar Wilde to show up for one of these things. (*Pause.*) But, now they do say Kendall's banker is quite an incredible wit, and can be...

JACK

(*Interrupting, concerned.*) A banker? Where does he work?

DAVID

Oh, well. Nowhere you do, I'm sure. So, don't get nervous. But wouldn't it be *fun* if he did? "Surprise, surprise! Guess what I know! Guess what you know!"

JACK

Come on, David. You know I just like to keep my work life and private life separate. Nothing wrong with that.

DAVID

Well, of course not, dearest! But doesn't it get... oh, I don't know... *complicated* to be the Jack for work, the Jack for socializing with the people from work, the Jack with your neighbors, the Jack with your family, the Jack in the baths and the Jack with me? How do you keep them all *straight*? (*Pauses, grins.*) So to speak.

JACK

I'm just not comfortable...

DAVID

(*Interrupting.*) Wouldn't it be *far* easier to be just *one* Jack? One beautiful, wonderful, incredibly sexy and *fabulous* Jack! Everywhere?

JACK

Indeed, it would. But I'd also be one out of work, out of family, kicked out of my apartment, one arrested and one beat up in the streets Jack. Not so fabulous then.

DAVID

Don't be such a pessimist!

JACK

(*Hugging DAVID.*) My beautiful boy. I wish I *could* be one Jack. Really, though, I wish I could be more like you.

DAVID

Hmm. (*Pause.*) Then... go to the Gay Freedom Day Parade and Fair with me next weekend! No. (*Pause.*) You *will* go!

JACK

I will? (*Pause.*) I don't know. (*Pause.*) That would be... a big step. They put the last one on the news.

DAVID

There will be *thousands* there. But, if you're worried, just duck when you see a camera. Or, you could go in drag!

JACK

What?!

DAVID

Teasing. But you'd be fabulous in drag!

JACK

I would not. What about if I skip the parade and meet you at the Fair at Lafayette Park?

DAVID

Why?

JACK

These things can get just so... outrageous... these new... *parades*. I don't want to parade myself. I don't want to be outrageous. What's the point of that?

DAVID

To show who we *are!* Who they *aren't!* They need to know the difference!

JACK

I know the difference. Isn't that enough?

DAVID

No. It's not enough. You *will* march, Jack! You *will* be outrageous! And we'll dance at the fair! Naked! (*Notices JACK's alarmed reaction.*) OK, maybe not naked.

JACK

Dance?

DAVID

Of course! We'll all dance! Thousands will dance! Millions! We'll be fabulous! We'll be daring! We'll wake them up! In this world we are the light! We are the lightning! We are the goddamn thunder! Jack, my love, we are gods! Launching our thunderbolts from Olympus! We are, by all the fucking gods, their *Jove*!

DAVID feigns throwing thunderbolts.

Crash! Your walls! Crash! Your rules! Crash! Your stupidity! Crash! Your poor taste and boring conversation! You will know us, lowly mortals!

DAVID spins twice, his right arm raised and hand fanned, then spins into JACK's arms, where, his back to and supported by JACK, he opens his arms wide, in a blessing.

Let there be... *beauty*!

JACK

You, my love, are an Apollo.

DAVID

And you, my love, a Titan!

JACK

Of course. That makes me one of the *old* gods. Probably Kronos.

DAVID

One of the gods at the foundation! And you are *my* Titan! In bed. *Now*!

He kisses JACK and pulls the scarf from around his neck.

We can be a bit late for tea.

The lights go to black stage right as the younger JACK and DAVID exit and come up to full, stage left, on JOSH and old JACK.

JOSH

Where did you meet?

JACK

At the baths, of course. The hottest boy I'd ever seen there, or anywhere. And he wanted me.

JOSH

The bathhouses?

JACK

Of course. Until I was in my thirties I didn't have sex. Period. Then, for years, only with guys I thought... or could pretend... were straight. So deadly deep was my closet. (*Pause.*) The bathhouses, though... when I finally worked up the courage to go... were a godsend. I blossomed. I'd spend my nights there. Then go home, sleep a few hours, shower, put on my suit, and head to the Financial District. Closing one door. Opening another. Until evening. Then back. It worked for me. The most incredible sex you can imagine.

JOSH

But the bathhouses were dangerous, weren't they?

JACK

Not then. Not in the early '70s. The dangerous was outside. In the daylight. Arrests. Beatings. Losing your job. Your family. I'd never brought that part of me out into the daylight. I'd never met anyone like *me* in the daylight. That was what was so frightening about David... and thrilling. He was the same, daylight or night. He would have been just as happy to have sex with a dozen guys in the middle of Union Square at noon as in a bathhouse or with just me in our bed. And he would have been... *was*... just as happy to spend a sexless hour arguing modern art or fashion or politics in the middle of a wild bathhouse orgy.

JOSH

And his friends?

JACK

Many like me, even the young ones... shuttling between two worlds. Some not, though. Some were... as out and outrageous as David. *That* was a revelation. They saved my life, I think. David saved my life... *I know*.

JOSH

So, you were a couple?

JACK

Dear boy, dear *boy*! We were each the most important person in the other's life and would always be... but we were *not* a "couple". We were not "monogamous", whatever that means. "Gay" hadn't yet become an "orthodoxy" and a safe and

(CONT'D)

boring reflection of straight values. It was still wild. "Marriage"... not to be insensitive to your current condition... would have been a ludicrous situation for us. "So many beautiful men! So little *time!*"

JOSH

I think a lot of straight men would say that about women. Today.

JACK

(Angry.) But those straight men don't live their youth being told they can't touch a woman or ever have one. They know that, by default, they will always have, at least, one. If you've lived your life being told you can't have the one thing you absolutely *must* have, rebellion comes easy. You want to rip the rules apart and throw it in their faces. And we did. In the bathhouses. I came late to the rebellion. David was born into it.

JOSH

Then... you *weren't* a couple. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry, but I'm trying to think how that would work?

JACK

Quite well, my boy. *Quite* well.

JOSH

But...

JACK

We each gave the other our *lives*. Our *freedom*. What finer, more treasured gift can love give?

JOSH

Excuse me?

The lights go to half and then black, stage left as they go to full, stage right. DAVID is making cocktails. JACK is relaxing in the reclining chair. Both are dressed casually for the shore. The time is May, 1978, The Pines of Fire Island.

DAVID

These will tide us over until tea.

JACK

Is your playwright coming? Was it... Harvey Fierstein, you said?

DAVID

On his way from the city. He'll join us at the Pavilion.

JACK

How's his new play going?

DAVID

It's going quite well. We open in two weeks. Did I tell you he's got notes for two more short plays, with the same characters? If this one's a success.

JACK

So, a trilogy, then. The boy's ambitious. Would he keep you on for costume design?

DAVID

I think so. He likes what I've done, so far. As well he should!

JACK

Dressing a drag queen as a drag queen. That must be quite a challenge.

DAVID

It's been a delight! After we got over the first hurdle. When I told him none of his outfits worked. He was bereft. Don't tell him I told you. (*He hands JACK the cocktail.*) Cheers!

JACK

I trust your taste. He should, too. Cheers!

DAVID

Oh, Jack, I know you hated me for abandoning you for Parsons, but the school was incredible and now I'm having such *fun*!

JACK

Abandoned, indeed. For three years I've been adrift and alone amid the fog and swarming chaos of hot boys yearning and learning to be gay on the Bay. (*Pauses, smiles.*) I've managed. (*Pause.*) Them.

DAVID

Of course! And I would expect no less of you! You know... you *really* need to get involved in theatre once you move out here. There's just so much incredible stuff going on in New York City right now. I think it's what you were made for, my dear.

JACK

If I'm not careful, I'll be going to the theatre every night.

DAVID

You will, but I meant *in* theatre, love. Behind the stage. Onstage. Writing. You might find you have a gift. I did.

JACK

You certainly *do*! And I am so proud of you! What a success!

DAVID

Thank you, but don't change the subject. *Theatre*. For *you*. You *must* try it.

JACK

Perhaps I will. Might be fun. (*Pause.*) But, you know, I've always thought it'd be great to run a bookstore. A secret nerdy fantasy of mine. Since I was a kid.

DAVID

Bookstore? Like a Times Square book store? Porn and back rooms and glory holes and nasty old men in raincoats?

JACK

No. A *real* bookstore. Tiny. Lovely smell. Looks cluttered but everything's in its place and I know every book and can help you find wonderful adventures among the rows of shelves and stacks of books. *That* kind of bookstore.

DAVID

And *that* would be so *you*! One whole section would be copies of all the books you've given *me*!

JACK

That you've read?

DAVID

And loved! (*Pause.*) In the Village, then! That's where it should be! (*Pause.*) But, aren't you supposed to be grinding out deals for the East Coast office? Why they're transferring you?

JACK

They're transferring me because they've figured me out. After twenty-three years, it's so much easier to toss the faggot into someone else's lap than deal with him. Even when it costs them, big time.

DAVID

What happened? You've always been so careful.

JACK

My "gay life" has been bleeding into my "straight life", I guess. A bit too much lavender, I think. White dress shirts and blue ties are just so *boring*! And getting

(CONT'D)

careless about the gender of my pronouns. Some remarks, perhaps too *Castro* for the Financial District. A bit too much... *wit*.

DAVID

How wonderful! You're coming along, then!

JACK

So, I'll just get out here, twiddle my thumbs on Wall Street for a year or so, score a huge bonus... cash out my retirement, then take the money and run. For the Village, you say?

DAVID

Yes! A great place for bookstores. And for us to live. (*Pause.*) Jack, I've so missed you! It's been fabulous, the run in the city and at Parsons. But having the one who keeps me sane a continent away, well... (*Stops.*)

JACK

I'll be here, David. (*Pause.*) Soon.

DAVID

(*Pause.*) Jack... I think we should spend every summer here at the Pines! Yes, we *will!*

JACK

Can we afford it?

DAVID

Maybe not a place like this, but with some *scandalously* fun housemates, we could get something really nice.

JACK

So, how'd you come by this producer and his incredible "see through" house on Fire Island?

DAVID

And his Park Avenue duplex and the place in Malibu? How I always come by my "producers", of course. (*Smiles.*) Oh, but don't worry. We've made it through the wild and constant sex stage to the calm seas and gracious harbor of friendship. Always the best part.

JACK

Will he be here?

DAVID

No. He's either with the current lover in Malibu or the current young, sexy "thing on the side" at the Park Avenue place..or, the other way around. I forget. It's just you, me, Harvey and his boy toy Eddie... or Freddie... Teddy... or something. And the three or four dozen friends we'll invite back from the tea dance, of course.

JACK

Really? Is there enough liquor?

DAVID

There's always enough liquor. They run boatloads out here every day.

JACK

So, why? What's special? About Fire Island?

DAVID

Other than the beach and being twenty degrees cooler than the city and the fact that all the hot, rich, creative and famous queens in Manhattan come out here to relax, dress down, let their hair down and drop their pants in the dunes for whoever might happen their way? Not much, I guess.

JACK

But that's...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) This is *our* place, Jack. We've carved out a sanctuary where...we don't have to *pretend*. New York is wonderful, but it's not entirely *safe*, yet. Out here we can pretend all the world's gay... even though it's not and won't be. All the *brilliance* those poor sods in Manhattan and the rest of the country depend on is *incubated* out here at the beach. Here we can be *ourselves*. And on Labor Day we take it all back to them in the city and the wasteland beyond... and the country thanks us for our gifts... for our *magic*... or should. But we need a place like this to do that.

JACK

There's San Francisco.

DAVID

At its heart, a small town with no art, no theatre and maybe a dozen "old money" power queens socializing only with themselves behind the locked gates of their Pacific Heights mansions. Whose idea of letting their hair down...such as there is left of it... is to quietly jet off to Mykonos or Portofino to get together under assumed names in villas, also with locked gates.

JACK

You speak from experience?

DAVID

Oh, Jack. Those sad, right wing queens may *own* Twin Peaks and all its real estate, but would never go *near* Twin Peaks, the Castro bar. We're not "their kind of people".

JACK

I thought you loved San Francisco.

DAVID

I do, but it's not the same as here. It's not safe. Whatever you may think. It's not. You're still hiding in plain sight among the straights out there.

JACK

Not so much anymore. You've been away for a while. Things are changing. We have people like Harvey Milk now.

DAVID

Historic, of course. But he's one supervisor on one board of supervisors in one city in one state in the whole country. You can't turn a society around with that. You don't create a wave of change with that.

JACK

Have you ever heard him speak? To a crowd?

DAVID

Yes. "Turn over boys, let's try that again!" That is, if *orgies* count as a crowd. (*Pause.*) Oh, Jack! We *make* our safe places. And in them we do what we want, be who we want and fuck the rest of them! They depend on us. They've always depended on us for all the beauty they have or ever will have in their lives. But we can't depend on them to protect us. They won't. In the end, they won't.

JACK

Aren't closets "safe places", too? I remember a boy who lured me out of mine... for the most part.

DAVID

In a closet you believe the ones outside are right. And you need them. *Here* you know they're wrong. And you don't... fuckin'... need them. *We* are all we need out here.

JACK

That's...

DAVID

(*Interrupting.*) But do they ever need *us*. Jack, Jack, Jack! There's not going to be a "wave of change" that will bless us and make everyone accept us. I thank Harvey Milk for everything he's done. But politics changes nothing. Art changes

(CONT'D)

everything. In time we will win. We just need to keep tossing our creative thunderbolts down from our safe Olympus! Beauty! Crash! Style! Crash! Wit! Crash! Insight! Crash! The theatre! Crash!

JACK

The Pines is our safe Olympus?

DAVID

Yes! With more money and power and beauty and *lots* more sex! You would not *believe* who comes here. I couldn't believe it. Not just the arts and fashion. Washington! Wall Street! *Power* street!

JACK

So, the "gay golden age" is upon us?

DAVID

It is! Indeed it is! It starts *here*. In San Francisco we were the weird and the weak and the silly. *Here* we run the world. "Masters of the Universe"! And now you will be part of it! We are beginning to *fly*!

JACK

I just hope you are right.

DAVID

Truth and beauty are always right!

DAVID leans in to kiss JACK. The light goes to black stage right and back up to full stage left.

JACK

Then people started dying.

JOSH

Of course.

JACK is taken aback.

JACK

"Of course." Of *course*? What does that mean, "*of course*"? (*Shouting.*) "*Of course.*"?!

JACK is angry.

(CONT'D)

How dare you!

JOSH

I just...

JACK

(Interrupting.) What? Do you think AIDS was some inevitable consequence of the unbridled hedonism of a broken, immoral sub-culture of society? The fated outcome of Dionysian passions unbridled... run wild? We're not doing Greek tragedy here. Sexual hubris does not bring its damning blight from the gods. Dante is not our playwright! Carnal sin does not bring its ineluctable damnation. It was an accident. A fucking *accident!* A biogenetic snake eyes roll of the dice. You know better. Or should. So please, please spare me.

JOSH is speechless for a time, struggling for words.

JOSH

I just meant that... I... I know... know the history. I meant that...

JACK

(Interrupting.) History is not inevitability. It happened. It. Just. Happened. Don't give it a moral spin.

JOSH regains his balance.

JOSH

I wasn't giving it a moral spin. I don't think I was, at least. But... *(Hesitates.)*

JACK

But?

JOSH

What about all the gays who were furious when they closed the bathhouses in San Francisco? Who were furious at Larry Kramer when he said they were "fucking themselves to death"? When the best evidence suggested sexual transmission and they thought it was a conspiracy to interfere with the fun they were having on Saturday night? Wasn't that... wrong?

JACK

It was a mistake. Understandable, but a mistake. Imagine: The thing you have been denied all your life is now to be taken away from you... this "golden thing" *(JACK picks up the peach, examines it during the following.)* you now have in your grasp... literally... *gone*, for no reason you can understand? Hell, the best scientists couldn't understand it then. It was this swarm of unrelated diseases with no commonality but "gay" and immune system collapse. Who knew where it

(CONT'D)

came from and how it was spread? Before the virus? Before the test? How was the twenty-year-old, hot and horny on Saturday night, supposed to understand it? Maybe it was just how “they” were going to stop gay sex. And gays, as well. A government plot. Conspiracy’s always an easy fallback for someone in denial. Still is. (*JACK returns the peach to the table.*)

JOSH

You weren’t a twenty-year-old.

JACK

No. (*Pause.*) No. I wasn’t. But that doesn’t mean I wasn’t devastated to see that beautiful, impossible thing slipping away from my grasp. It had me taken so long to find it.

JOSH

Not to be unkind and perhaps more than a bit unprofessional here, but just how “beautiful” is the freedom to have frequent, non-committal, casual and recreational sex at the drop of...your trousers? Isn’t that a bit... adolescent? I’m sorry, but ‘beauty’ isn’t the first word that would come to mind, for me.

JACK

For two thousand years religion had locked our human nature within a prison that reduced the most basic, intimate and valuable of human interactions to something spiritually ugly...destroyed it, made it offensive. We took sledge hammers to that prison. We threw it in their faces, the sex they didn’t want us to have, *ever...* and in doing so, were free. With our freedom we tore down those rusted iron walls of a morality that, essentially, hated and denied sex. We may have done so by harnessing the energy of an adolescence we never got to have at the proper time. But if it had not been for our outrageous indulgences, our wild and liberating sex, you wouldn’t be where you are now. In a committed relationship. Legally *married*.

There is a long pause.

JOSH

Promiscuity...

JACK

(*Interrupting*) ... is a loaded word. Try another.

JOSH

How did that...*freedom...* affect your relationship with David?

JACK

Also loaded, but I like it. (*Pause.*) It was difficult. It was always difficult. But what does “relationship” mean? Even today? There are so many varieties. And we most certainly explored them. Our explorations were... sometimes dangerous and unstable, but sometimes so magnificently rewarding. (*Pause.*) I do have to admit, though: *commitment* wasn’t the engine that drove the train.

JOSH

It’s hard to get a feel for...

JACK

(*Interrupting.*) But there *was* beauty in that freedom and all those lovely, lovely boys. You just can’t see it from this side of the plague years. We will *never* know what might have been, what might have come out of that beauty... but for the plague. David glimpsed it in that moment before the darkness. When thousands and thousands of artists and poets, writers and designers, scientists and teachers and the most beautiful people the world had yet seen... stood on the brink of their brilliance. Waiting. (*Pause.*) Think about that. *What might have been.* Had they lived. Had that *beauty* not left us. Had *they* not left us. What the world might be like now. (*Pause.*) History is not inevitability. It’s accident.

JOSH

(*After a long and thoughtful pause.*) In college, I used to wonder what the world would be like today if the Library of Alexandria had not burned. If we had *all* the Greek tragedies, instead of only a few dozen. All the poems of Sappho, instead of scattered bits of lovely lines. Other masterpieces we will *never* know. (*Pause.*) Our permanent, unfathomable loss.

JACK

Yes. (*He pauses. JOSH has just surprised him. Then, in a softer tone.*) Think of the *love* that might have been, had they lived. Ten hundred thousand lovers, coupled into old age *today*, that might have been. A million silent, sad, lonely old men, *today* who might have had their one, their love, their *other*... now *with them*. Had they lived! That is what would have been... but for an accident.

JOSH

That’s...t hat’s... (*He is speechless.*)

JACK

Well, they didn’t live. They didn’t. (*Long pause.*) I left San Francisco in ’78, before the worst of it hit. Just after Harvey Milk was killed. There were two good years before the plague began to spread. But it did. And you could feel the fear growing in the Village. Even Olympus... Fire Island... was afraid. Our summers there were nervous. And the “Masters of the Universe” began disappearing.

JOSH

What about David?

The lights go to black stage left and up to full stage right. The younger JACK is sitting on the chair, with a clipboard and pen and there is a stack of books at his feet and another on the side table. He picks up a book, opens it to the frontispiece, reads briefly, makes a note on his clipboard and moves the book to the side table. He does this several times. DAVID enters in a rush. The time is March, 1987, New York City.

DAVID

We're going to do it!

JACK

What?

DAVID

Tomorrow morning! In front of Trinity Church! 7 AM! ACT UP! Our first demonstration! Here's the flyer.

JACK takes the white on black flyer and reads.

JACK

7 AM? They've got to be kidding.

DAVID

Oh, you old fart! Drag that ass out of bed early for a change.

JACK

The company has a rehearsal tonight.

DAVID

And we've got a performance tomorrow! Everyone will be there!

JACK continues to read the flyer.

JACK

Well, this is silly. The FDA is not going to release a bunch of drugs still in trials on the off chance they might help someone. It just doesn't work that way. That's why they have trials. To see what *does* work.

DAVID

And in the meantime, people die who don't need to. And they do double blind tests where some get to live and some get to die. That's bullshit. Typical Reagan bullshit. This man who hasn't even said the word "AIDS". Who hasn't even said the word "gay", though he wouldn't be president or an actor without gays. Look, Jack. Unless we get out there and shake up the assholes...make some noise and

(CONT'D)

be “out” and obnoxious, people will continue to die. I’m seeing too much of that around here. You are, too.

JACK

Do you think stuff like this will do any good? Make any difference?

DAVID

We are the only ones who *can* make a difference. This is our fight! Unless we take it on, no one else will and people will die and die and die.

JACK

Why is this what we should be doing? Protests? What does that get us?

DAVID

Attention. From our gay mayor. From the FDA. From Reagan. From Congress. From our friends who are too closeted to do anything to keep themselves from dying. We have to lead.

JACK

I prefer leading from behind, thank you very much. Me yelling and getting arrested won’t make a bit of difference.

DAVID

Jack! Be the optimist for once! Of course, you will make a difference! It’s your chance to make a difference!

JACK

Well, I think I do already. Without being a public spectacle. Half this store is devoted to gay literature, gay history, gay health and every book on AIDS ever written. I have copies of every gay play by every gay playwright. And any gay social or political group who asks gets the upstairs room for their meetings.

DAVID

Scads of gay playwrights writing stories about straight people. Why don’t they write stories about the world *we* live in? There are, maybe, what...like three gay plays? With gay characters?

JACK

More. A few more.

DAVID

Well, why do you think that is? Your upstairs room? The drag queens hate the drapes. The leather guys want some red lights. Both groups want more mirrors.

(CONT'D)

And the gay Republicans want to use the fire escape in the alley so they can get in and out without being seen.

JACK

They do?

DAVID

Jack! This place is a wonderful resource but it's time for us...*us*...to stand up. Act up. Make noise. Get arrested!

JACK

And what would Calvin Klein think about his newest and hottest young designer getting arrested?

DAVID

I'm dumping Calvin. Life's too short. I'm going back to Broadway. Or maybe start my own fashion line. Or both.

JACK

Indeed? This is news. When did you decide that?

DAVID

Today.

JACK

And when do you tell CK?

DAVID

Did tell. Today.

JACK

Are you sure about this?

DAVID

Perfectly. I want to make a difference. Or else, why am I here?

JACK

But can't you...

DAVID

No. I gave it a year. That's enough. *(Pause.)* Oh, Jack! We may not *have* another year! Let's remember that. Today. Tomorrow. Always. *(Long pause.)* So, you *will* be in front of Trinity Church tomorrow morning at 7 AM with your bail bondsman on call or I will haunt you for the rest of your life!

The lights go to black stage right and come back up to full stage left.

JACK

He had another year. He had three.

JOSH

I'm so sorry.

JACK

And we *were* arrested. Twice that week. And later. He didn't launch his own fashion line but he did win a Tony. So, he was blessed. Twice blessed.

JOSH

Twice?

JACK

He did not grow old. He will always be young. *(Pause.)* Unlike me.

JOSH

Did you love him?

JACK

Yes.

JOSH

Did you love anyone else?

JACK

No. No one before and no one after. Ever after. *(Pause.)* But we say, "love" so easily. "Love" doesn't capture it. I can't imagine my life without him in it. It would have been *darkness*. That's what he meant to me...what he *means* to me.

JOSH

I had no idea. *(Pause. JOSH is moved.)* I wish... *(Pause.)* I wish I could have known him.

JACK

Yes. *(Pause.)* I wish so many today could have known him. *(Pause.)* Could know him.

There is a long silence.

JOSH

What was your life like... after he was gone?

JACK

Well...well. (*Pause.*) David had been so determined to get me into theatre and I went there. Not good as an actor or playwright. Damned good backstage. He got me several assistant stage manager gigs and after a while I got them myself. It was as a *director* that I came into my own. Off-off Broadway. Off Broadway. Not quite Broadway. But there is *wonderful* stuff in that city that never comes close to the big houses. Brilliant, brilliant work. And I had a... knack for discovering the brilliance.

JOSH

Gay playwrights?

JACK

Yes. I think I started a trend, in that respect. (*Smiles.*)

JOSH

And the bookstore?

JACK

It became a completely *gay* bookstore. Everything I could find written by or about our community: history, literature, biography, poetry... plays and playwrights... art, fashion, politics. And AIDS, of course. Even some “artistic” soft porn! I was amazed at the wealth of resources I could accumulate on those shelves!

JOSH

The bookstore was successful?

JACK

Very. And it became a community center. ACT UP central in those days. The gay Republicans left. I don't know where they went. They said we were becoming too...*open*. We were well done with them. We were fighting a war... against hate. Against indifference. Against them. It was a heady time.

JOSH

David turned you into an activist.

JACK

Another gift from him. My muse. He would have been so proud.

JOSH

And you've been an activist ever since.

JACK

No. (*Long pause.*) Sadly... no. (*Pause... JACK is remembering.*) Well! No good play spins on without its complications, now does it? It's reversals? How boring would that be?

JOSH

What happened?

JACK

The early '90's. *(Pause.)* Oh, those were the worst of the AIDS years. When none of the drugs seemed to be working and there was no hope. Then a miracle. Along came a play. An amazing, wonderful play. "Angels in America". And I was to be stage manager for the Broadway production. It was the most incredible thing I'd ever been involved with and it moved me as nothing ever has. It was my dream.

JOSH

And... ?

JACK

My father died. *(Pause.)* He had been taking care of my mother. And I was the only one she had left.

JOSH

What did you do?

JACK

Quit the production. Just before it opened. Sold the bookstore. Moved back to California. Tracy, not far from here, actually. It's where I grew up. I was sixty-one years old and sleeping in my old bed. Where I slept as a child. An age and three thousand miles from the life I knew.

JOSH

That must have been... different.

JACK

The bed? No, very much the same. The life, though... Now it had to revolve around her because she needed me and I was all she had. For five years. In her last few months I had to transfer her to a nursing home... a place quite eerily like this one, actually. Then she was gone. Though, truth be told, she had been gone for quite a while by then.

JOSH

I know. I'm so very sorry. *(Pause.)* But you... came back.

JACK

Indeed. To San Francisco. Bought a bookstore... a *gay* bookstore in the Castro. I was sixty-six years old. Time for new beginnings. With the cocktail, AIDS had changed. We were caring for the living... not those waiting to die. There was finally... hope.

JOSH

And you returned to the theatre.

JACK

Yes! With a mission! To support *gay* theatre! We so much need to see *our* stories onstage without watching some tale from the straight world and “extrapolating”. And our gay playwrights need to stop taking our stories and “translating” them into “*straight*”, *Mr. Albee!* (*Shouting the last, towards offstage.*) (*Pause.*) San Francisco was a good place to do that.

JOSH

How did it go?

JACK

We made a good beginning. I think it’s gone well, since. Or, I hope it has.

JOSH

And the bookstore? Was it like the one in New York City?

JACK

To start with, exactly like. Over the years though... So much competition from the big chains and then the internet. It was tough. And the Castro was changing. Gentrification. More straight families. San Francisco was changing... and the gay community. It was less what I remembered from the 70s. There was less need for a... community center. Our community stopped having a “center”.

JOSH

Because it was everywhere in the city? Wouldn’t that be a good thing? To have whatever “center” the community at large has?

JACK

You might think that, of course. (*Smiles.*) But, are you sure?

JOSH

In a gated community a minority locks everyone else out. In a ghetto, everyone else locks a minority in. Can either situation be very... healthy? Wouldn’t it be better for there to be just... *one* community?

There is a long pause.

JACK

Where were you born?

JOSH

Marin. Where I grew up, too.

JACK

And my guess is you've been in the Bay Area all your life. School, jobs, everything.

JOSH

Yes.

JACK

And you've always been out.

JOSH

Yes.

JACK

Comfortable in who you are? Always accepted in who you are? Wherever you are?

JOSH

Yes. *(Pause.)* I guess.

JACK

"How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't!"

JOSH

What?

JACK

A line from a favorite playwright. *(Pause.)* Oh, Josh, I'm seeing something beautiful before me and something I've always wanted to see and I'm also worried by what I see. Because I desperately hope that you do not think you are like everyone else, except that you just happen to be gay.

JOSH

Actually, that's pretty much what I do think.

JACK

Dear, *dear* child. You never, ever want to be just like the people who hate you. That is what being gay has *always* been about... *not* being like the people who hate you.

JOSH

Of course I know there are people who hate gays. Some. Still. But that's changing every day. And it will get better. It's so much different today than in... *(Stops.)*

JACK

My day? *My day?* Today is far more like *my day* than yours, Josh. Your day stops just over those hills to the west of us and *mine* runs about three thousand miles east to New York City... with, in between, tens of millions of smiling faces that accept your marriage if they don't have to actually think about what you *do* in bed. Then there are tens of millions more, silent, sullen, who would rather not have to think about you at all. And among those, many who loathe you and some with a furious, dangerous hate that you *exist* at all. Waiting to express it. Waiting for permission to express it. (*Long pause.*) There are oases of acceptance between here and there... but, Josh, the springs that nurture them may be shallower than you think. You are not safe.

JOSH

Isn't that a bit... yesterday? And terribly cynical? How do you explain that polls show that today most Americans are in favor of gay marriage? That most Americans are in favor of gays in the military? Gay adoption? I would say, sixty, seventy, eighty percent is a pretty deep spring of acceptance. We're in a new age of acceptance.

JACK

My dear boy! Just how difficult is it to accept what is *exactly like you*? Married? In the military? Being parents? We've ridden those issues into a warm and cuddly place of normalcy and acceptance and some impressive political wins. We've used them to defuse some of the moral loathing we've always faced...put it in abeyance... made it impotent for the moment. But, it's still *there*. It's the "just be like us and we won't have to think about how you're not" response we depend on. Makes us safe. For the moment.

JOSH

I don't think...

JACK

(*Interrupting.*) But it doesn't work! They *know* how you're not like them. *That* fuels their hate.

JOSH

But we are...

JACK

(*Interrupting.*) No! They are *right!* You are *not* like them! Never... *never* forget how *you're not*. Like them. It is the source of your power! (*Pause.*) David showed me that. And changed my life.

JOSH

How... ?

Lights go to dark, stage left and come up to full, stage right. DAVID is leading an awkward JACK through the steps of DAVID's choreography of Madonna's "Vogue" for their drag performance. This continues for a while, with DAVID correcting JACK's missteps and encouraging him. The time is June, 1990, New York City.

DAVID

And then, stop! "Strike the pose. *Vogue!*" Hand in the air! Finish!

DAVID, followed by JACK, stops, hip thrust to the side, right hand thrust into the air, fingers fanned. DAVID looks fabulous. JACK is awkward and uncomfortable.

JACK

I can't do this. I'm sorry.

DAVID

You can! You will! You'll be fabulous!

JACK

I'm not a diva. I don't do drag. I can't dance and I can't sing.

DAVID

We're lip-synching. "Sing" is not an issue.

JACK

And I'm older than the hills. Why do I have to do this?

DAVID

Because it's Pride! Stonewall twenty-one! All of New York will be celebrating!

JACK

Well, I wasn't here for Stonewall. I was in San Francisco, with very little Pride, thank you very much, and you were fourteen.

DAVID

And a hornier little shit you would not have been able to find on either coast. But, if I'd been here I'd have been screaming and throwing rocks and rioting with the drag queens. This is what we have to do for them! This is what *you* have to do for them. You owe it.

JACK collapses into the reclining chair.

JACK

And why drag? I've never been comfortable with drag queens. What's the point? I don't want to be female. I'm very much into being male. And none of them pull

(*CONT'D*)

it off very well, anyway. It's more like a joke they're playing on women. Making fun of them. They come dangerously close to misogyny, I think.

DAVID

Many of them *are* misogynists, and I hate that. As much as I hate the fashion designers who make women look ridiculous. They're vicious, pretentious queens who quietly laugh at the women who would wear their designs. But you can tell the difference. Just watching you can tell the difference. The designer who makes a woman... a goddess. The drag queen who *adores* the woman he becomes.

JACK

You have a more discerning eye than I do.

DAVID

They make you uncomfortable. The drag queens.

JACK

Yes. They do.

DAVID

Well, Jack, old man. That's what they're supposed to be doing. Making the "straight" in you uncomfortable.

JACK

There's "straight" in me? *Moi?* Where? (*Looks down at his body in mock alarm.*)

DAVID

Oh, yes. In spite of everything. It's still there. (*Touching JACK's forehead.*) Right *there*.

JACK

(*Annoyed, pushing DAVID's hand away.*) You can't mean that.

DAVID

I do, love. I do. (*Returning his hand to JACK's forehead. JACK allows it for the moment.*) Where they put the rule-making machine. Where the last rule sits.

JACK

(*Gently shrugs away from DAVID's hand.*) OK. Explain.

DAVID

It's ancient. Primordial. It's the rule that says, "Be a *man!*". Of all the rules, it's the most dangerous. The most destructive. The one that folds, warps and implodes gayness into self-loathing and generates its own "inner closet", even for those who have escaped the outer closet society has imposed on us.

JACK

I'm so very *out* of...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) Not while the rule works! None of us is! It's what sends us to the gym, not just to look at those hot *men* but to be able to *look* like *those* hot men. Hello, Narcissus!

JACK

I'm not...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) It's why guys ask for "*masculine, straight-acting*" in their personal ads and quietly laugh at the more feminine gays in the bars.

JACK

I don't...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) The rule shames us with the *feminine* that is a powerful part of us! Makes us avoid it! Hate it! *(Long pause.)* Oh, Jack... the rule is what stands between us and love! By not loving ourselves... our *full* selves... not being able to love another! Tragically, it's what makes some of us the worst of homophobes and the most dangerous! It's what sends young, closeted gay men out on Saturday night, with their straight friends, looking for *fags* to beat up! It's the rule working! "*I'll show them! I am! I am a man!*"

JACK

But, aren't some rules...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) Not *that* one.

He goes to his knees beside JACK, touching him, now imploring.

Jack, you break that one and you break the machine. You break the machine and you realize *you* control the rules and there's no machine. Never was. Then you can *fly!*

JACK

I don't...

DAVID

(Interrupting.) That's the magic! There's the thunderbolt! There's our *power!*

DAVID stands, feigns crashing a thunderbolt into JACK.

Crash! Gender roles! Be gone, foul beast! Look on me and be bewitched, cursed, cast out! I, the most beautiful, sexy, scintillating, glamorous woman you have ever seen, the sexiest woman you might ever have, lust for or dream of, am, in fact, *male!* And like Samson in the temple, I bring down your whole edifice of patriarchal culture. If I can be female, then so can you! Where then, foul beast, is your power? How, then, your dominance? Over women? Over *me*, a gay man? Challenge me, with your godly texts, for "lying with men as with women"... as if that distinction matters at all? I give you *this!*

DAVID spins, voguing and strikes a pose. Without the clothes, wig or makeup, he's voluptuous, feminine and sexy.

JACK sits for a long moment, then, slowly, reluctantly, gets up and steps back up beside DAVID. He's ready to rehearse.

JACK

(Struggling with his decision, then...). I want one damn *beautiful* wig!

DAVID

Of course! Now, from the top, with the music!

The music starts and they resume the choreography as lights go to black stage right and come up again stage left.

JOSH

How did it go?

JACK

Imagine! A fifty-nine year old drag queen lip-synching Madonna's "Vogue" in a Village club on Saturday night during Pride Week! I thought I was hideous! David, however, was drop dead gorgeous and the crowd forgave me a lot for having him and those other incredible divas as backup singers. David was always beautiful, whatever gender he chose. And, I was... they said, actually *fabulous*. David was very proud of me. But he was dead before Pride the next year and I didn't feel like trying drag again. Not without him.

JOSH

That must have been a difficult time for you.

JACK

Actually, not. As with everything else, David did dying quite well. In that, as in everything, he is my inspiration.

There is a long pause. Lights come up to half on DAVID, nearby, with the younger JACK standing behind and to the side, further upstage, watching him. DAVID strikes the "Vogue" pose, then bows a deep, graceful stage bow during the following.

He went quickly. Over a weekend. Pneumonia. And he was not alone. I was there. And the divas... our angels. (*Pause.*) We surrounded him... as they would surround and comfort me in those years after.

JOSH

How lovely.

The lights go out on DAVID and JACK.

JACK

His friends... *my* friends. (*JACK pauses, wipes his eyes.*) You know... I never donned a wig again... but I began to help them with their shows. Directing. Managing. Taking them up quite a notch, if I do say so myself! I was even asked to judge some of their contests... those amazing drag balls! Oh... (*Wistfully.*) I do hope they still have them there.

There is a long silence.

JOSH

Do you have to love drag queens to be gay? Do you have to love opera? Or Bette Davis? Or fashion? Do you have to lust for, even if only in your heart, the hottest young boy you've seen today, to be gay? Do... (*Pause.*) you have to be queer to be gay?

JACK

No. You don't. But you have to remember you're different. *Always* remember you're different.

JOSH

Even if you don't *feel* different? Not... *categorically* different?

JACK

Categories! Categories! Damn "categories"! Break them! Destroy them! They are the problem! You don't find "truth" by interrogating nature's "categories"! Nature doesn't *have* categories. Only man does. The most egregious philosophical sin ever committed was Aristotle's writing of the *Categories!* Two and a half millennia of evil visited upon us by that old Greek!

JOSH

I'm not sure...

JACK

(Interrupting.) Do you know what we've lost with "categories"? What came before? Plato's drinking party... his *Symposium*... with the divine "Ladder of Love" leading us upward, through our pursuit of Beauty, to Truth... and the gorgeous Alcibiades, lounging, drunk, on his couch! There... *there*... is Truth!

JOSH is speechless. There is a long silence. JACK is thinking.

When did you come out to your parents?

JOSH

When I was twelve. I told them I really liked this boy at school. More than liked, really. They said I should spend more time with him. That I should invite him over. And that however I felt about boys was perfectly fine and beautiful and being gay was fine and beautiful and they wouldn't want me to be any other way than I am.

JACK

Did you believe them?

JOSH

Of course.

JACK

(Long pause.) Then, here's a question: Did you always want to be *the best* at whatever you did?

JOSH

Yes. Definitely.

JACK

Did you always want to be "the best little boy in the world"?

JOSH

I'm not sure I'd put it like that.

JACK

Did you?

JOSH

Yes.

JACK

Why?

JOSH

Why? (*He's at a loss for words.*)

JACK

Because you knew the way you were different was looked down upon by others, even if not by your parents, though you might have suspected they would have wished you otherwise. So, you took what the others prized... knowledge... whether of science, or opera... history or fashion... literature or baseball stats... social skills... sports... "honor"... being "a good boy"... and became the best you could ever be... better than the ones who would wish you to be different than nature made you. That was how you coped.

There is a long pause. JOSH is clearly uncomfortable. He begins to say something, then stops. Another pause. He is thinking, then decides.

JOSH

I'm afraid I've been somewhat unprofessional. How did we manage to switch roles, here? I'm supposed to be the doctor.

JACK

Because you trapped me in a metaphor and now I've slowly trapped *you* in it. Because there's no "doctor" in my play... only a young, gay man. And because you asked me what the "magic" was in being gay.

JOSH

I did?

JACK

Implicitly... but, yes. The "magic" is in your wonderful, innate and *defensive* ability to use the power of your standing as "different", as "the outsider", to "surf" the waves of your culture, command them, morph them into something new, unique and beautiful. Challenging the rules... bending the rules... shattering the rules... you create a new reality and make those who threaten us fall in love with your creation. You give them... *beauty*.

JOSH

And you know this... how?

JACK

By having lived our history. By being old. By being on the cusp of death. By enjoying my very last lucid moment on this long and important afternoon.

There is a long silence.

JOSH

Why have you decided to die? You do not have a terminal illness and...

JACK

(Interrupting.) Life is a terminal illness! *(Pause, regains his composure.)* Well, the doctor is clearly back in. *(Pause)* .I did mention the “last act of the play”, “not wanting to be the last guest at the party”, not wanting to be “left standing alone on the shore” stuff?

JOSH

Indeed, you did.

JACK

Well, then. *(Pause)*. Having been “blessed” with Alzheimer’s on both sides of my family and having seen it up close with my mother, I do not want to be in the position of forgetting that I never intended to go out that way. I saw her in a place like this. Like *that*. I will not be *here*... that way.

JOSH

You may have some time before...

JACK

No. It would be empty time. *(Pause.)* But there’s another scourge... another “wave” sweeping the beach, compared to which the others are as nothing. By far the worst of all. Inevitably and unexpectedly, unimaginably, incredibly... the worst of all. *(Pause.)* Can you guess?

JOSH

Old age.

JACK

Yes. *(Pause.)* My friends, the ones not taken by the monster wave or any of the others, are dead and dying. The last of my family died years ago. There’s a great quiet, now, where once there were many, many wonderful voices. The quiet is deafening.

JOSH

I understand.

JACK

Then, of course, there’s the principle of “dramatic arc”.

JOSH

The way a play begins, develops and ends.

JACK

(Surprised.) Indeed. How...?

JOSH

Mt. Tam High School. Drama 1. Section: Intro.

JACK

(Smiles.) Of course! *(Pause.)* Josh, it was not just a metaphor when I said I know when the actor should leave the stage. There's nothing more to be done with *(Indicating himself.)* *this* role. It's complete. And well played, too, if I may say so. So *this* *(Waving his hand vaguely, indicating his condition and place.)* is what I will do. It's the director in me and directors must always be in control. That's what I am here. In control. So, *this* is what I will do to bring down my curtain. I will die.

JOSH

I...

JACK

(Interrupting.) "I". *(Pause.)* Yes, Josh. "I". This "I" you just referenced. Do you know what it is?

JOSH

It's, of course...

JACK

(Interrupting again.) *I am my life.* Nothing more. *I am my history.* I refuse to annex... to append... ugliness to this "I" that I am. What comes next would be ugly. I will have nothing of it. *(Pause.)* My *character* in this play will have nothing of it.

JOSH

That's a lot of work for a metaphor to do.

JACK

(After a long pause.) Forget about our "play". I release you from the metaphor. I'm not waiting for the sniveling excuse of a "terminal illness". This life is *done*. There's nothing more I want from it. What I've had... is perfect. *Perfected*. If I go beyond this point I betray that perfection. I betray my experience. My history. I betray my only love. I refuse that. I refuse the indignity. Will not have it. Any of it. We all meet death and what I will have is the least worst death. Possible for me. Now. *(Pause.)* *The least worst death.* I will have that. Can you understand?

There is a long silence.

JOSH

Yes. *(Pause.)* I believe I do. Now.

JOSH, for a moment, puts his head into his hands, elbows on knees, thinking. Then he sits up, resolved. Finally he makes a notation on his pad, then begins paging through JACK's medical record during the following. His tone has changed.

You've chosen a mode of suicide that is physically, usually fairly benign... relatively painless. And it has a particular advantage over the others. Once you've set the process in motion you still have the option to change your mind. Each day. With hydration, you're looking at three to six weeks. Without... a week... maybe a bit longer. At some point, however, organ failure sets in and then coma and your options are closed.

It appears that JOSH is searching for something in the medical file that he is not finding.

At that point it will be important for your... *(Stops, he's puzzled.)* Jack, have you ever executed a medical power of attorney, advance directives, living will, health care proxy designation? Any of that?

JACK

Yes, all of that. Years ago. Should be in my file.

JOSH

Who did you designate as your health care proxy? The person who can make decisions about treatment when you are unable to? That will be very important.

JACK

My health care proxy is... *(Stops, hesitant.)* My health care proxy is... dead. I think. I forget. It's been so long.

JOSH

Ah. Well. We need to know. Before we can talk about anything else. *(Pause.)* I hate to do this but I need to step out to the administrator's office and see if those documents might have been misplaced. It shouldn't take long. Will you excuse me?

JACK

(Still a bit confused.) Of course. Of course. *(To himself.)* How could I forget that?

JOSH stands and exits upstage center as the lights go to black stage left and the lights go to full stage right to reveal the NURSE ASSISTANT, downstage right, talking on his cell phone. JOSH immediately re-enters center stage as DAVID enters upstage right. They come face to face and stop, though JOSH takes no notice of DAVID. DAVID has, effectively, stopped him. DAVID turns toward the NURSE ASSISTANT and begins to

listen. JOSH turns, as well, to listen. Neither JOSH nor the NURSE ASSISTANT ever notice DAVID.

NURSE ASSISTANT

...God, I hate that old faggot. He's been a fuckin' arrogant piece of shit since he got here. *(Listens.)* Yeah, I remember. That was a great trick! I thought the old fruit was gonna cry! *(Listens.)* Hey, it was only what the old fart deserved. Queers give me the creeps. And I'm fuckin' tired of wiping his shit covered ass, knowing what's been going up that ass for about like, the last hundred years. *(Listens.)* Yeah, that one. He's with him now. He's got a wedding ring, but I think he's one, too. You never know, these days. Maybe he's married to his dog! Heard that's what they want to do next. *(Listens. Laughs.)* I'll bet! *(Listens.)* I thought so, too, but he's still refusing food. *(Listens.)* Not a chance. You know we can't let that happen here. Bad for our numbers with the State. That useless pile of papers from his dead fag attorney has mysteriously gone missing. If he keeps it up, as soon as he's immobile, we're going pack his dainty faggot bag and his one little box of personal crap, load him in the van and drop him at the front door of County General. They'll pump him full of sedatives and have a feeding tube stuffed down his scrawny throat quicker than shit. I know those guys. They don't take crap from queers. Not out here. In real America. *(Listens. Laughs.)* Yeah! I'm sure he's had *lots* of stuff crammed down his throat! *(Laughs. Listens.)* I should... I really should!

During the last of the above, JOSH, followed by DAVID, approaches the NURSE ASSISTANT from behind, to stand near him. The NURSE ASSISTANT seems to sense his presence and turns, interrupting his conversation. After a pause, into his phone...

Uh... uhm... I have to go.

JOSH glares, face to face, at the NURSE ASSISTANT for a long moment, then turns and exits in a fury. DAVID watches him exit, then turns to smile maliciously at the NURSE ASSISTANT. DAVID then crosses behind the NURSE ASSISTANT as lights go to black, stage right and come up to half, stage left. DAVID approaches JACK, stops by the chair, still smiling.

DAVID

Something's happening.

JACK

What? *(Looks around, without seeing DAVID.)*

DAVID

Our boy's finding his inner diva.

JACK

David? (*Still without seeing DAVID*)

DAVID kisses JACK on the head.

DAVID

Don't be long, love.

DAVID exits, stage left, as the lights come up to full. After a long moment, JOSH enters from upstage center. He is flushed and excited and continues to be so.

JACK

(*Noticing JOSH, then a bit confused.*) I must have drifted off. (*Pause*) Well, you've been gone for quite a while. I was simply bereft! Thought I'd been deserted. Did you find my papers?

JOSH

Yes, I did. Or, the administrator found them, when I inquired.

JACK

She is something of a bitch, as you might have discovered.

JOSH

(*He laughs.*) We did get off to a rather rocky start, I'm afraid. I may have been... a bit abrupt. After a while, though, things settled down and we actually parted somewhat amicably. We'll see how it goes tomorrow when Dr. Clark, my husband Clay and I come in to see her again.

JACK

Your husband's coming, too?

JOSH

Yes. He's an attorney and looks forward to meeting you. He's going to help with the paperwork problem we've discovered in your record. And other issues.

JACK

So, what exactly is going on?

JOSH

You were right. We *are* too close to Modesto, here.

JACK

Pardon me?

JOSH

It's been a rather interesting hour, to say the least. I've made a number of calls. Had some... *challenging* discussions. Did a bit of persuading. Exercised a bit of... charm. And not. *(Pause.)* You know, there's a very nice nursing home in the hills above Berkeley. You can actually see the Golden Gate from there. It's not part of a chain, like this one and is rather unique, in that it's a blended nursing home and hospice. A bit experimental, but still Medicaid eligible. I consult there. A very good friend and my long-time med school mentor was behind its design and is on the board of the non-profit that runs it. And, my husband, to his recent surprise, will quite soon be doing *pro bono* legal work for that non-profit. It seems, I've been told at tedious length, we're being incredibly creative with the rules and approvals, but... unless you have a sentimental attachment to Buena Vista, we can transfer you tomorrow.

JACK

(Stunned.) I'm...I'm... *(Now JACK's at a loss for words.)*

JOSH

We need to get you back across those mountains to the west. I want *you* to direct the ending of your play, not the stagehands. You'll be able to do that there.

JACK

Of course, of course, of course...

JACK quickly wipes tears from his eyes, then looks appraisingly at JOSH.

My boy, my boy. You've been flinging thunderbolts, I surmise. In this hour past.

JOSH smiles. He pauses. Thinking. He now switches into a faux theatrical presence and character that is very unlike his character to this point. He sets his clipboard and files on the floor and drops to his knees beside JACK's chair, assuming the pose of a penitent in confession, head bowed. He crosses himself.

JOSH

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been forever since my last confession. In this past hour I have broken many rules, committed many administrative transgressions. Caused anguish and hardship for several people amply deserving thereof, but in that I have sinned, nonetheless.

At this JACK recoils in alarm. JOSH seems to have gone mad in front of him.

I may have shouted once. Maybe cursed. I did throw a book. No. I confess. I did curse.

JACK is squirming and shocked, not knowing what to do, looking around, as if for an escape route.

I confess my faults and sins, though in service of good, which are yet still faults and sins. And I confess an enjoyment of them and a terrible propensity to... maybe... repeat them. At some point in the future. Should I feel like it.

JACK

(Still taken aback.) I... I...

JOSH

Please have mercy on me, Father, and prescribe my penance. Should *you* feel like it. *(Pause.)* Just make it light. *(He bows his head.)*

During the above, JACK is getting into the game and beginning to enjoy it. He smiles broadly. After a moment, he looks down at the scarf around his neck. He takes the scarf from around his neck, holds it in front of him, kisses it and returns it to his neck. He is mimicking the manner of a priest at confession

JACK

I have heard your confession, my son, and noted your somewhat contrition and prescribe, as your penance, three hours of reflection, via YouTube, on the sacred works of our lady Madonna, three lattes, two cosmos and a pilgrimage, by Metro, cab or on foot, to Harvey's on Castro Street. *(Making the sign of the cross.)* I absolve you of your sins in the name of Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein and the transcendent RuPaul. Go hence, my boy, and sin some more! *(He laughs.)*

JOSH

(Crossing himself.) Indeed, Father, I will.

JOSH stands and retrieves his clipboard and files and tries to reassume his medical mien and dignity, not entirely successfully. He laughs and returns to his chair.

JACK

Where...?

JOSH

Mt. Tam High School. Drama 2. Section: Improv.

JACK

(Laughs.) Didn't I tell you? It's in your genes.

JOSH

It is, I think. Just takes a bit of prodding to help me find it. Thanks.

JOSH settles down. He becomes serious again. Again the doctor.

Ah, but Jack, there is one thing you will need to do.

JACK

Which is?

JOSH

Your health care proxy, Mr. Meacham, is, indeed, deceased. You will need another. I would be honored should you give me that designation and I swear I will insure your wishes are carried out when you become unable to make them clear.

JACK

You can do that?

JOSH

By California law, only your GP is excluded, legally, from being your proxy and that's Dr. Clark... not me. I understand what you want. And I understand why. Most *importantly*, I understand why. *Now. (Long pause.)* I've read your advance directives. So, there will be no hydration against your wishes. No feeding tubes. And a new "Do Not Resuscitate" order. No CPR... nothing. Palliative care, only. Though starvation is usually a very benign way to take your exit, there can be complications that would make it... fairly ugly. It ends with a cascade of organ failure. Depending on which organ fails first. *(Pause.)* You have my word that it will *not* be ugly for you. At the new place you will have *all* the pain medication you need, whatever the situation. We can work to adjust your blood chemistry to keep you as lucid as possible for as long as possible. Whatever happens. You have my word on that, as well. *(Pause.)* I will be there as often as I can. Even though you may not realize it, I will be there. You won't be alone. I promise.

JACK is overwhelmed with emotion. He muffles a sob. After a while he regains control. His next lines are a new JACK. Softer. Vulnerable. Open.

JACK

Not alone. *(Pause.)* Alone... was my one fear. *(Long pause.)* Thank you, thank you... so very, very much. You've blessed me. This old man. You've blessed me. *(Another long pause.)* But, can I ask of you something else? Something in addition? It would mean quite a lot to me.

JOSH

Anything.

JACK

Could you send the doctor away again? Just for a while? I've told you so much about me. I want to know about *you*. I want to know about the new and beautiful creature this old world has finally produced. *(Pause.)* I will begin to fade quite soon... and I may not be able to understand things *(Pause.)* that well.

JOSH

Yes. *(Pause.)* The doctor is out. Ask anything.

JACK

Lovely. All right, then. *(Pause.)* Where did you meet your husband? Where did you meet... Clay?

JOSH

We met in high school. *(Laughs.)* In the gym shower, actually.

JACK

My boy! My heart is simply aflutter! *And...?*

JOSH

We were sophomores. We nodded and said "hi". Beginning of the semester and we were both on the lacrosse team. We started talking after practice. And we've never stopped talking.

JACK

When did you...?

JOSH

When did we...?

JACK

Ah... hum... when did you...

JOSH

Have sex or know we were both gay? The gay thing we knew from the beginning. Everyone did. The have sex thing... that took a while.

JACK

More than a day? More than a week? More than a month?

JOSH

More than a year.

JACK

I am stunned! Truly.

JOSH

But, we were “paired” from our first “hi”. We went to the senior prom together. He went to Stanford, undergraduate and law school. I went to Berkeley, then SF.

JACK

He’s an attorney. Where does he work?

JOSH

In Oakland. A small firm that does work for some non-profit environmental and heritage groups. *Very* non-profit... for everyone involved.

JACK

Amazing. And, of course. Where do you live?

JOSH

Hayward. We have a two-bedroom frame in a sweet, slightly weird, very walkable neighborhood near the hills. I have a large kitchen. Clay has a garden.

JACK

Lovely! Hayward is not far. Almost Central Valley.

JOSH

Don’t tell Clay that! (*Pause.*) Some day, when we can afford it, we want to move back up to Marin. Closer to the redwoods.

JACK

Oh, I so love Marin. The little cafes on the harbor in Sausalito. Muir Woods. Like a temple of redwoods to me. And I’d always warm up for my Yosemite treks by hiking up Mt. Tam. The hard way.

JOSH

Yes. Up the creek! I’ve done that! The fire roads take forever.

JACK

And when did you marry?

JOSH

Five years ago. When it first became legal here.

JACK

Before Prop 8. Lucky. (*Pause.*) Where?

JOSH

The farm in Sonoma. On a hillside, above the valley. Our families and a few close friends. It was...

JACK
Beautiful?

JOSH
Beautiful.

JACK
Will you have children?

JOSH
Yes. Just not yet. I want to adopt. He wants a surrogate. Still a matter for discussion.

JACK
(After a long pause.) You said I could ask anything.

JOSH
Anything.

JACK
(After a silence.) Clay. *(Pause.)* What do you love *most* about him?

JOSH
(Quickly.) His eyes.

JACK
Why?

JOSH
They are beautiful. They are kind. They see me. Totally. They fill my heart. They make me feel safe. And loved. Without touching, he *touches* me. *Holds* me. With his eyes.

For a long moment, JACK is at a loss for words and clearly moved.

JACK
I don't... *(Long pause. He wipes away a tear.)* Until the last, those will be the words I remember. And they will be a comfort.

There is a long silence between the two. It is complete, sustaining, unimpatient, unforced, and full.

JOSH
I'll never forget you, Jack. We owe you so much.

Again, the silence. Comfortable. Finally, JACK breaks it. Reaching to touch JOSH.

JACK

“How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in’t!”

JOSH

(Laughing.) You’re repeating yourself. Or... you’re repeating Shakespeare.

JACK

Oh, Josh. But this time I mean it. Sweet, *sweet* boy. You are what I could not have imagined at your age. And you are my hope. *(Pause.)* Thank you.

There is a long moment. Then JACK motions JOSH to come close. Then closer. JACK lifts the scarf from his shoulders with both hands and nods to JOSH. JOSH leans closer and JACK drapes the scarf over his shoulders. JOSH straightens, then, after another long moment, ties the scarf loosely in the front. JOSH notices the peach on the table. He picks up the peach, examines it, then takes a big bite. He savors the taste and swallows. He examines the peach again, then tosses it into the trash. He leans down to JACK and kisses him quickly on the lips. JOSH stands, retrieves his clipboard and files and exits stage right.

JACK is motionless for a long moment, then purses his lips, tasting the peach on his lips, enjoying the taste. After a long moment, he notices the container from which he has been sipping water throughout. He lifts and examines it for a long moment.. .then drops it into the trash, as well. It makes a loud thud.

For another long moment JACK is still. Then, slowly and with great difficulty he gets up from the chair. Obviously struggling, he takes three slow steps downstage, away from the chair. As he does this, lights go to half and JACK steps into a spotlight, center stage. Struggling no longer, he thrusts his arm into the air, fanning out his hand, assuming the “Vogue” profile from earlier. He holds the pose for a moment as the lights fade to black around him and he remains in the central spot. Then JACK bows deeply; his arms open out graciously and gracefully on either side... a deep stage bow. He straightens up from the bow, looks into the audience and smiles.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF PLAY