

SUMMER'S END

By Allan Baker

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CHARACTERS

MICHAEL: White, gay male. Mid 30s. Architectural historian, writer, and historic preservationist.

JACOB: Black, gay male. Early 20s. Graduate playwriting student and MICHAEL's boyfriend.

JULES: White, straight female. Mid 30s. Teacher. Very long-time friend of MICHAEL's. Recently ended a relationship.

ALEX: Cuban American, gay male. Mid 30s. Gallerist and art dealer. Long-time friend of MICHAEL's.

JONATHAN: White, gay male. Mid 30s. Very successful corporate attorney. Long-time friend of Michael's. Married to ANDREW.

ANDREW: White, gay male. Mid 30s. Realtor for high end properties. Long-time friend of MICHAEL's.

QUINN: White, gay male. Mid 30s. Broadway producer. Long-time friend of MICHAEL's.

SCENE

A large, historic estate in Long Island's Hamptons, near Sag Harbor. MICHAEL inherited it from his grandparents, along with several trusts. When at NYU together and after, he and his friends would often visit here, as a get-away from New York City. Labor Day weekend has been a regular get-together for them.

TIME

A Labor Day weekend, in the near future.

SUMMER'S END

Scene 1:

SETTING: Afternoon in the Great Room of MICHAEL's house. It is beautifully decorated, with period furniture and art. There are chairs, settees, sofas, tables and a well-stocked bar, almost discretely out of the way. There is a "partners desk", upstage center, with facing chairs. There is a desktop computer monitor facing one chair and a laptop computer on the desk across from it, in front of the other chair.

AT RISE: MICHAEL is seated near the desktop computer, at the partner's desk, carefully writing on cards. JACOB is seated across from him, working at the laptop.

JACOB: Quinn is amazing!

MICHAEL: Indeed... unfortunately.

JACOB: You said he was a drag queen?

MICHAEL: "Miss Lotta Chanel". When he was at Tisch. Now, I think he just has rather eccentric tastes in dress. (*Smiling and looking up at JACOB.*) You must have found his Met Gala photos.

JACOB: Does he *dress* like that all the time?

MICHAEL: No. That's his "special occasion" look. But... one might say... you wouldn't mistake him for anyone else on a street corner. As successful as he's become, much is allowed. (*Smiles.*) You will have to chat with him. I told him you're a playwright.

JACOB: They call us "emerging" playwrights. Or just "students". A long way from his Broadway. Off-Off-Broadway would be a stretch.

MICHAEL: Bay Street Theater is a Regional. And produced your play.

JACOB: In readings.

MICHAEL: It's a good play.

JACOB: (*Smiles.*) I know.

MICHAEL passes some cards across the desk. JACOB takes them, then caresses MICHAEL's hand, briefly. MICHAEL smiles and lets his hand linger in the embrace.

MICHAEL: You write the plays that engage your passion. The audiences will come.

JACOB: What are these?

MICHAEL: Placards. Room assignments. For our guests. Five gay gentlemen and a lovely straight lady.

JACOB: You do this? Why?

MICHAEL: Too many bedrooms. Too little time. Don't want them wandering the halls, testing the beds. Though they've slept in all the bedrooms over the years. Except at the Bay House, which had only two. There they slept wherever they could find space.

JACOB: How long have you been doing these weekends?

MICHAEL: We started in college, continued in grad school. Off and on, after that. *(Pause.)* Three years since the last one.

JACOB: And this will be...

MICHAEL: The last one.

There is a long pause.

JACOB: Yes. *(There is a pause, then JACOB picks up a card and examines it.)* "Quinn." *(Flips over the placard.)* "Wyeth." And that means...?

MICHAEL: The Andrew Wyeth bedroom. With the painting you love.

JACOB: Ah. *(Pause.)* Ah.... He's lucky.

JACOB pulls up another card and examines it.

"Alex." "The Commodore".

Not...

MICHAEL: Yes. The scary one. My great, great, great, great, great grandfather.

JACOB: You want him to sleep...

MICHAEL: ...with that stern and forbidding old man looking down on his bed. *(Smiles.)* Oh, yes. Though I thought that ancient, intimidating gaze would have fallen on him and his current young gym god.

JACOB: ... and...

MICHAEL: ... the current gym god has forsaken him for Southern Decadence in New Orleans. The gay Mardi Gras. Tragic. *(Smiles.)* I thought the Commodore might have somewhat quietened the usual ruckus in their bedroom while they were there.

JACOB: And what does Alex do?

MICHAEL: He runs an art gallery. Trying to find the next Basquiat. In the secondary market, buying art from owners who don't know its worth and selling to buyers who don't know its worth. Arbitrage. *(Pause, then smiling.)* He's been after several paintings in the house. I doubt he's ever noticed the Commodore.

JACOB: Really, though. Who *was* the Commodore.

MICHAEL: He's the founder and origin of all I have and enjoy here! Where the money came from.

JACOB: My aunties said shipping.

MICHAEL: Your aunties are kind. It was slaughter. The merciless slaughter of thousands and thousands of the smartest, gentlest and most compassionate creatures ever to have graced our planet.

JACOB: Whaling.

MICHAEL: This house is *built* on whale oil! Thus, endless songs of a thousand tribes were extinguished; unheard, unshared, unlearned. *(Long pause.)* Had the world found oil in Pennsylvania just a hundred years earlier, who knows what joy and what wisdom those lords of our oceans might now be sharing with us? *That* was the Commodore. His guilt curses his face.

JACOB: Not shipping?

MICHAEL: Pennsylvania happened, and his great, great grandson fitted the ships with nets and hauled in thousands of tons of cod to feed Europe and keep the money coming in. *His* son had new ships to take the new oil barons to Europe on shopping trips and bring back land-poor dukes looking for rich American wives and penniless Italians, in steerage, looking for... anything. Now the ships are gone and only the money and houses remain. It all ends with me. I preserve what I can of the houses and the stories. And give generously to Greenpeace.

JACOB: My aunties's house on the shore was built on shoe stores, land speculation and the stock market. They've given me a room and I make up the stories.

MICHAEL: My family was quite perturbed when the wealthy Black families from the city began establishing those neighborhoods east of town decades ago. Later, my grandfather, the traditional Republican, was never happy that grandmother and your aunties worked as such tireless Democrats together.

JACOB: They still speak fondly of her.

There is a pause, then JACOB picks up another card.

"Jonathan and Andrew." "Dr. Seuss." What...?

MICHAEL: The nursery. Way up on the third floor. Hasn't been used in forever. Unfortunate mortality rate for the cousins, I'm afraid. Still, some good Dr. Seuss originals there. They'll hate it.

JACOB: Why...?

MICHAEL: Oh, there's this... there's that. And all the other. The one... brilliant attorney to corporate greed. The other; the fantastically successful realtor who helps the billionaires who are buying up blocks of Hamptons historic homes to bulldoze and build their secret palaces, behind high walls of hedge and limestone.

JACOB: I've seen those going up. Pretty terrible. People have been prowling around our families' neighborhood. Two miles of beachfront with nothing older than the '50s is quite a lure. Our Black families have been hanging tough. Only a few have sold, so far. My aunties never will.

MICHAEL: With the largest house. A bit too modern for my taste, but impressive. The Black Hamptons. Who knew?

JACOB: Everyone, now.

JACOB picks up the last card.

"Monet." (*Turning the card over.*) "Jules." Your grandmother's room. Jules must be special.

MICHAEL: My best friend since kindergarten. Our mothers were good friends and traded off baby-sitting duties for years. (*Pause.*) Yes, she is very special. Quite recently back home from Texas after an abrupt renunciation of teaching position, boyfriend and adopted state.

JACOB: So, we have something in common. I look forward to meeting her.

MICHAEL: (*Looking at his phone.*) No sooner said. Let me get these posted before the crew arrives. Please welcome her, my dear. (*Pauses.*) Oh, and no one knocks.

MICHAEL collects the cards and leaves for the hallway and the stairs. JACOB continues scrolling through pages on his computer. After a while, there is the sound of the front door opening and then, from offstage.

JULES: Michael! I'm here! What crappy traffic! I think half of Manhattan has decided to spend Labor Day in the Hamptons!

JULES sets down a carry-on as she enters from the hallway. JACOB stands and turns toward her.

...so, the others won't be here for a while. (*She pauses, seeing JACOB.*)

JACOB: The others are taking helicopters from Manhattan, I'm told.

JULES: (*Approaching JACOB.*) You have to be...

JACOB: Jacob.

JULES: *(As she comes toward JACOB, to hug him.)* Well Jacob, I'm Jules. The only woman Michael has ever slept with. *(Hugging and laughing.)*

JACOB: And I'm the only man he's currently sleeping with. *(They laugh, finishing the embrace.)*

JULES: *(Smiling.)* So, he scored with you, handsome man. *(Pause.)* Scores, of course. *(Looking around the room.)* So, where's the lover?

JACOB: Setting up room assignments.

JULES: I hope he's put Alex and his current in the attic. I want to be able to sleep.

JACOB: I think the "current" is doing a lot of "not sleeping" down in New Orleans for Decadence. Michael said Alex will be solo.

JULES: Thank the gods almighty! But you really need to be careful, young man. I give him no more than ten minutes before he makes a pass at you.

JULES heads to a sofa and motions JACOB to join her. She sits and stretches out her legs. JACOB sits.

Oh, I needed that! You can't know how bad the Long Island Expressway can be on a holiday weekend.

JACOB: I can.

JULES: Oh, *right!* You're not really *from* Texas. Your family...the Hamptons...

JACOB: Here for a good while.

JULES: I've only been allowed the Hamptons... when invited. Thank you so much, Michael. *(Pause.)* But....

JACOB: But...?

JULES: Texas...

JACOB: *(Sighing.)* Holy Texas.

JULES: God's bastion against sin and liberals. Keeper of the faith and the sacred oil. I was cast out for being a rude and nasty woman. Deported with the other illegal aliens in the roundup. I got to skip the concentration camps. To come home. *(Pause.)* But why did you...

JACOB: *(Interrupting.)* To come home.

MICHAEL rushes into the room.

MICHAEL: Jules! My first love! Always my counselor and hero! Welcome back to our sane place!

JULES stands and rushes to MICHAEL. They embrace and kiss.

JULES: It's damn good to be here! I need peace and the quiet, so much!

MICHAEL: I dare say. We were all resigned to our last Labor Day weekend without you. And then. The miracle! Your Dallas explosion!

JULES: Frisco. Where the *rich* from Dallas move to get away from "those kind of people".

JACOB looks inquiringly at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL: It was scandal! Jules stormed a school board meeting, launched a fusillade of left-wing invective, slammed a stack of banned books on their sacred dais and resigned! Then she broke up with her boyfriend, in front of his family... and in his church!

JACOB: No way!

JULES: Scott is a chameleon. Blue when on blue. Red when surrounded by red. Back to home, family, culture and church, it took over a year for me to notice the change. Like that frog in heating water. But I jumped! He said I'd embarrassed him and his family when my school board thing hit the internet.

MICHAEL: She was doxed. And branded a "groomer". Despite the handsome surgeon boyfriend. He took umbrage. At you. Not them.

JULES: Online they said we worked together. Middle school boys for him. Girls for me. And sometimes we mixed it up.

JACOB: You quit because of banned books?

JULES: And because of their new teaching guidelines. That I only got when I went in for our pre-opening teacher training sessions. A fucking right-wing wish list of what to say and what not to say so we wouldn't "indoctrinate" the kids. In Frisco the right-wing Christian nationalists have taken over the school board and the city government. They've always had the churches.

JACOB: Wasn't that where the El Paso Walmart shooter was from?

JULES: No, that was Allen. A few miles away. A sister city, though. In so many ways. You're lucky you had lovely Austin... a blue dot of sanity in an ocean of brilliant, blood red.

JACOB: Which Texas hates and envies. They want to make it a "Capital District", run by the

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governor and legislature.

MICHAEL: Can they do that?

JACOB: Yes. There was talk of making it the Duchy of Tesla. *(Pause.)* But there's still resistance to monarchy, in some quarters.

JULES: And now tax dollars fund fucking church schools! So, no resistance to theocracy.

JACOB: None. *(Pause.)* And the theocracy needs its armies. Churches are developing their own "warriors for Christ", with mixed martial arts training for kids.

JULES: Michael, you wouldn't believe the size of those churches. Like football stadiums. With no theology other than making money and hating gays. Filling the pews and collection plates by hating gays and the trans threat.

JACOB: "Congregation, be sure to send your boys and young men to our martial arts training once a week and we'll prepare them to go out into the world prepared to battle evil for Christ."

MICHAEL: Really? How very strange. Now you are making me quite uneasy. *(Pause.)* Don't worry. Here we are all well away from that insanity. You don't have to go back.

JACOB: *(Quickly.)* I'm not going back.

There is a long pause, broken by a commotion in the hall.

ALEX: Hello? Is anyone home in the museum? Alex has *arrived!*

ALEX rushes in, dropping his bag in the hall, then moves to hug and kiss MICHAEL, then JULES, whom he takes on a quick dance twirl, then comes face to face with JACOB and stops, surprised.

Oh, my!

JACOB: *(Extending his hand.)* I'm...

ALEX: *(Ignoring the hand, rushing to hug JACOB.)* Jacob! Michael told me you were good-looking. Oh, indeed you are! I'm Alex!

JACOB: *(A bit taken aback.)* Humm.... Thank you, Alex. *(Smiling.)*

ALEX: And you clearly spend time at the gym. Good for you, Jacob!

JACOB: I try to get to the gym, when there's time. There's a small one, a few blocks from the

(CONT'D)

bookstore.

ALEX: Should you ever find yourself stuck in the city, I'd be ever so happy to get you into mine. *(Pause.)* For a workout.

JACOB: Thank you, again, Alex

Surprised, JULES glances at her watch, shakes her head, and smiles at JACOB, who returns the smile.

MICHAEL: Alex, how *have* you been? It's been almost a year, you know.

ALEX: I'm so *sorry!* The new gallery has been a trial to get opened and such a challenge to fill the walls with works people actually want to *buy*. New artists are not so starving as they used to be. Sad. But you haven't exactly been burning up the rails into Manhattan, yourself, my dear.

MICHAEL: Editing the galleys for the Newport book has been painful. Researching the new book has been a joy, though. Let's work harder at being friends, my friend.

ALEX: And Jules... two years! Did Dr. Hotbody take away your passport and chain you to an oil derrick? *I know* people who could have infiltrated the Red Lands and tucked you away in the trunk of their Bentley to get you back to the Sane Lands, had you asked.

JULES: *(Laughing.)* I managed to get myself deported from Christ's Chosen. Now I'm back in Port Chester with my mother and back to teaching privileged middle school brats in Greenwich next week. The more things change... but more likely not.

ALEX: I was so happy when Michael said you'd be here. You'll have to fill me in on *all* your adventures. Those brats in Greenwich have rich parents to buttress their privilege... and lots of undervalued art I'd love to find buyers for. Let me know if you hear any of your students dropping artist's names in class.

JULES: Of course. As long as I get a finder's fee. *(Smiles.)*

ALEX: So, how is your mother?

MICHAEL: My favorite baby-sitter.

JULES: And yours, mine. *(To ALEX.)* She's still at Greenwich Hospital, ten years from retirement. She's regretting ever introducing me to that sleeper agent for the Christian Reich.

ALEX: But he was so cute!

JULES: A cute *ass*. I hate it when I fall for one of those.

ALEX: I've fallen for quite a few of those. Cute asses. *(Smiles.)*

JULES: *(Laughing.)* You're terrible, Alex! Speaking of the Red Lands. Have you been spending much time in Florida? I think you are the only gay I know who was actually *born* to a sugar daddy.

ALEX: I try to avoid the descent into Mordor. "The eye! The eye of Sauron!". They come to New York, from time to time, bringing their own security, of course. Some of which are quite exceptionally hot!

JACOB: Pardon?

MICHAEL: The family. Cuban American, with half the sugar in North America. Palm Beach.

JACOB: Ahh.... Mordor, indeed.

MICHAEL: *(Checks his phone.)* The helicopter from Manhattan has just landed. Ten minutes away.

ALEX: The couple, of course. They couldn't manage to fly with me, for some reason.

JACOB: Andrew and Jonathan?

ALEX: A testament to the durability, banality and boredom of gay marriage.

MICHAEL: Their ceremony was right out there in the garden, Jacob. Grandmother was so happy.

JULES: Come on Alex, let's get our stuff to the rooms and come back down to greet the straightest gays Jacob will ever meet.

MICHAEL: Some bedrooms are being worked on. A bit of restoration, I'm afraid. So, there's been some reshuffling from the last time you were here. I posted cards.

ALEX: Nothing in this grand house ever disappoints. Perhaps Jacob could help me find my room?

MICHAEL: Your name is on the door. You won't get lost.

ALEX and JULES go to the hallway and head upstairs.

JACOB: Has ALEX seen...

MICHAEL: The Commodore? I don't know. It's always been in the library. Not a place where he's ever spent much time. *(Pause.)* Now let us prepare the battlefield! For Jonathan, Andrew and their nemesis, the ever-fabulous Quinn!

They busy themselves for a while with re-stocking the bar, bringing ice from the pantry, arranging chairs, et cetera. Suddenly, there's a muffled scream from upstairs.

JACOB: What...?

MICHAEL: *(Smiling.)* Alex has found his room.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene 2:

Just a bit later. MICHAEL, JACOB, JULES, ALEX, JONATHAN and ANDREW are relaxing comfortably around the Great Room, enjoying their drinks and chatting.

ANDREW: So, Alex, you're solo for the weekend?

ALEX: Scott had committed to Southern Decadence with a few dozen friends. They're crowding into a little Airbnb that was previously the nun's quarters for a church, I think. *We...* got together after the plans had been finalized.

JONATHAN: A nunnery? I can't think of a more perfect place to hide out from three hundred thousand horny gays run riot in New Orleans' gay *Mardi Gras*.

ANDREW: Southern Decadence has always been an embarrassment. No one we know has ever gone. According to the internet, they're having sex in the streets and molesting young boys in the back rooms of the bars, even as we speak

ALEX: According to the internet, the earth is flat and gay marriage is an abomination in the eyes of God, dear Andrew.

MICHAEL: *(Dismissively.)* "All gays are an abomination in the eyes of god." For the crazies of this country. The dying gasp of the culture warrior. *We* won the war. *(Long pause.)* And what of the war for the historic Hamptons? Any news from that front, Andrew?

ANDREW: Ah. I wondered about the attic and Dr. Seuss.

JONATHAN: Our son would love the Dr. Seuss!

JULES: How *is* Brooks! He must be starting...

JONATHAN: ...Dalton next week! He grows so fast. He's with my parents this weekend and... *(He trails off, noticing MICHAEL's stare.)*

MICHAEL: We had the old Peabody estate well on the way to historic designation.

ANDREW: Your pending historic designation was one part of their reasoning. The greater was wanting to be rid of New York. "Along with San Francisco, guideposts to the moral abyss that's destroying this country!", according to Armstrong. They want to escape the impending moral catastrophe.

JULES: All those gays! *(Pause.)* They *do* know you're gay, right?

JONATHAN: They know he's *good*. Armstrong has never put moral scruples before money.

MICHAEL: I was unaware Armstrong was that far out on the right wing.

JULES: It's getting damn crowded out there. Someone warn the pilot.

ALEX: What about their triplex on East 79th?

ANDREW: We have a contract on that as well. Their winter place will be in Florida.

ALEX: That's a bit of a comedown.

ANDREW: *An island* in Florida.

JULES: Summer?

ANDREW: A ranch in Montana.

JACOB: Mountains, wilderness and guns between them and the evil hordes.

ALEX: What of the art? Florida is most unkind to the Impressionists. As my father discovered.

ANDREW: I will certainly make a recommendation. Though I think Armstrong has a Swiss freeport in mind. Great art, locked away in the dark. Again.

MICHAEL: So, the Peabody estate. And the Sprague House next door. Who's the buyer? And what will they do? Demolition?

ANDREW: The buyer? Can't say until we close. But both will be pulled down. The new place will be rather large. On the scale of the mega-yacht he anchored in the Bay last week.

JACOB: My aunties said the crew were rather rude. They were careless with the wakes of their boats. Aunt Esther called the harbor master.

ANDREW: I've met your Aunt Esther. I don't know who the harbor master would be more intimidated by... my client or your aunt.

JACOB and MICHAEL: *(Together.)* Aunt Esther. *(Laughs.)*

JONATHAN: Jacob. Michael said your aunts have invited us for a swim and brunch tomorrow. I look forward to that. Great house and such a nice beach.

JACOB: Always my favorite part of summer when I was growing up. Where I spent my summers, even after we moved to Houston.

ALEX: Were there no beaches in Houston?

JACOB: A long drive from our west side and pretty dreary, when you got to Galveston or Port Aransas. *(Pause.)* And people weren't always nice to us.

ALEX: Oh. *(Pause.)* I understand. *(Pause.)* Like Florida. My father could buy them and everything they own a thousand times over, but they thought he should be washing dishes or mowing their lawns.

There is a long pause.

JACOB: Texas. My family... Free since 1780. Still not equal.

JONATHAN: 1780?

JACOB: Fought for the Redcoats and freed by them. Confirmed by Congress in 1780.

Another long pause.

JULES: Michael, what do you think Jacob's aunts will make of Quinn?

JACOB: I think they'll love him.

MICHAEL: Another flamboyantly theatrical gay person. They've become accustomed to Jacob's friends. I know I have.

JULES: *(Indicating the group.)* Oh, really? Look how we started!

MICHAEL: You're not gay.

JONATHAN: I'm not flamboyant.

ALEX: I'm not theatrical. *(Pause.)* Well, maybe a little bit. "Madam, I saw this painting and it *crushed* me with its raw, primal *emotion!* I *wept!* And I *knew* only *you* should have it! Only *you* would discern the sheer *power* of the first, brilliant *eruption* of youthful *genius* thrusting itself into the art world of New York! It must *live* with you! You are *coupled* at such a sublime level!"

JONATHAN: Sold!

JACOB: Bravo!

The group laugh and applaud. ALEX takes a bow.

JONATHAN: Welcome to the crew, Jacob. NYU's notorious gay friends who never touched an oar.

ANDREW: I rowed at Groton.

JONATHAN: Your rower's build was the first thing I noticed. But prep school doesn't count.

JACOB: And Jules...?

JONATHAN: She and Michael were a package deal. He had the houses for our Hamptons escapes from Manhattan. And Jules had the “take no bullshit attitude” that endeared us all. Our Labor Day weekends, were when we got together and summed it all up for the year. A three day “truth-telling colloquy”, where “take no bullshit” was centered. Jules was centered. Glad they’re back! Overjoyed she’s back!

ALEX: Oh, but the Bay House was like a very crowded camp out. And we made it very messy. At least the piles of exquisite carpets were quite soft.

MICHAEL: Then grandmother allowed us the big house. And Quinn was *always* “camping”. Even here.

ALEX: We were such a scandal. All those “I came out!” gays, thinking they were so *liberated*. We showed them what “out” really means. It so helps to be *born* “out”.

JULES: And it doesn’t hurt to be born rich, does it?

MICHAEL: See? “Take no bullshit.” That’s why I love her. (*Smiles.*)

JACOB: And after NYU?

MICHAEL: You grow up. And you do the hard things you love. But you never lose the sense of empowerment. Success becomes easier. Because of that.

JONATHAN: These get togethers are when we pay respect to the crew and what it gave us.

ANDREW: But now Michael’s giving it *all* away.

MICHAEL: This *house* away. We’ll always have the Bay House.

ANDREW: I don’t like sleeping on the floor.

MICHAEL: I had it renovated. There are now *four* bedrooms. And quite a nice deck.

ANDREW: *Renovated?* Isn’t that a preservationist sin?

MICHAEL: It’s not historical.

JONATHAN: There were *historic* parties on our weekends, as I remember.

ANDREW: You’re giving this house away. And *you* pay for the maintenance. I told you how much I could get you for it.

MICHAEL: One of my trusts pays the maintenance. (*Pause.*) I don’t need more money. The Bay House is comfortable and all I need. My grandmother *loved* this place. Sharing what she loved about it is how I honor her and my family.

ANDREW: You're honoring the old money. A compulsion of its heirs. Like your book about Newport.

MICHAEL: Well, Andrew the heir, "Secret Hallways" is about the lives of the wonderful people who kept the grand houses of Newport running. They had to move in secret hallways, so the owners would not have to be discomfited by their presence.

JULES: *(Dramatically.)* Upstairs, downstairs, crammed into the attic, creeping behind the walls.

ANDREW: *(To MICHAEL.)* Aren't your trusts like that? Working in the background to keep your life running? And your museum? Will they last?

MICHAEL: Jonathan says they will.

ANDREW casts a quick glance at JONATHAN, who mumbles and looks down, a bit embarrassed.

ANDREW: I don't understand you. Change happens. You can't turn the world into a museum. The new can be exciting and brilliant.

MICHAEL: Or ugly, shallow and cruel.

ANDREW: You can't live in a museum forever. *(Pause.)* In amber.

MICHAEL: I'm aware of that. So, I won't. But I can save a bit of it for others. To know how it was. Before change.

There is a long and uncomfortable silence.

ALEX: *(Breaking the silence.)* Michael, I would be happy to volunteer as a docent. "Now after the Monet and that sweet Wyeth, in *this* bedroom is a perfectly *horrid* portrait of the Commodore... known as *Attila of the seas* to all the whales he slaughtered."

JULES: "Now, in *this* bedroom your learned docent did conduct *countless* and *rampant* sexual campaigns that would have made *Attila* blush."

There is general laughter. In the quiet moment after, MICHAEL checks his smartphone.

MICHAEL: Alexa. *(Pause.)* Play Quinn's music.

Alexa replies, "Playing Quinn's music." The very good audio system begins music with a marimba/latin pop sound, much as in "Sway", as sung by Dean Martin or Michael Buble'. There is the sound of a door opening into the hallway. Then QUINN enters dancing seductively to the music. He's reprising his drag moves as Miss Lotta Chanel, though he is not in drag. Rather, he is dressed in his unique style... masculine, but defying the rules with whatever he has found to be beautiful of the feminine. He is

wearing an elegant cape, which he will throw onto a chair during his dance. He may have several beautiful rings, bracelets and a jeweled brooch. He dances around the room. He is quite good. At some point, he goes to the bar to make a quick drink, while moving to the music. Drink in hand, he dances to MICHAEL, who rises, and they kiss. He wants to lure MICHAEL into the dance, but MICHAEL declines, and sits. He dances to JULES. She rises and they kiss, then she dances with him for a few steps, then sits. He dances to ALEX, who rises and embraces QUINN, who then hands ALEX his drink. QUINN dances toward JONATHAN and ANDREW, who shake their heads. QUINN then dances toward JACOB, who rises and bows. JACOB then begins his own, quite accomplished dance to the music. He is very good. QUINN stops, surprised. QUINN then joins JACOB, and they execute a brilliant pas de deux of dancing, each trying to outdo the other. When the music eventually stops, they bow to the applause of the others.

QUINN: How fun! Brilliant moves! Thank you, sir.

QUINN curtsies. JACOB bows. Without looking, QUINN reaches toward ALEX, who returns QUINN's drink.

MICHAEL: Of his many talents, that is *not* one of which I was aware. Bravo, Jacob!

JACOB: Thank you. *(Smiles.)*

ANDREW: *(Unconvincingly.)* We have so missed Miss Lotta Chanel.

QUINN: *(Without looking at him.)* Of course you have, dear Andrew. *(Pause.)* Michael, so good of you to invite her back for our last Labor Day weekend. Sadly, Miss Chanel was unable to assemble the *accoutrements* of her persona, now lost in storage somewhere. I hope these modest “day to days” don’t disappoint. *(QUINN touches the brooch on his exotic shirt with a bejeweled hand.)*

MICHAEL: You never disappoint, Quinn.

QUINN: And Jules! You are positively glowing! I know it’s not pregnancy. Surely breathing the free air of sanity and the Hamptons again?

JULES: *(Hugs Quinn.)* You make me sane and always have, my friend.

QUINN: How did you manage all that time... in Texas?

JULES: With margaritas, good sex... and a stubborn unwillingness to admit a mistake. One I won’t make again.

QUINN: I’m sure you won’t. For, if you do, Miss Lotta Chanel, resurrected, will march down the aisle and drag you from the altar. Even should that entail a trip to... Texas.

JONATHAN: it’s been far too long, Quinn! But I’ve been keeping with your rather accelerating

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career. Two Tony nominations in two years. Quite amazing. Broadway has been good to you.

QUINN: My principal producer and our group have been good to me. I've been lucky finding the opportunities and helping them make it work.

JONATHAN: You were born to it. Hollywood and Malibu and a movie producer as a father. How could you fail? But those terrible Off-Off Broadway productions you took us to. Then afterwards, at Joe Allen's, you'd take them apart and put them back together for us, over too many drinks, too late at night.

ALEX: Speaking of drinks... *(He heads to the bar. ANDREW follows him.)*

QUINN: I learned as much from those bad plays as I did at Tisch or Yale. We also saw beautiful plays that would never have made it past the gatekeepers at Tisch or Yale, or those trained at Tisch or Yale. Plays that died there. Off Broadway. Off-Off Broadway. Sadly.

JONATHAN: You're a gatekeeper now, aren't you?

QUINN: Yes. *(There is a long pause.)* But I try to remember those sweet Juliets... in their crypts.

JULES: Thank you. I'm flattered. Though I renounced *my* Romeo and escaped his family and its Texas crypt.

QUINN: *(To JACOB.)* Michael tells me you're leaving your MFA program in Austin. Why is that?

JACOB: Hmm... *(Pause.)* I want to write plays. I've written stories and plays since high school. Now it's a kind of... blazing *compulsion* for me. The more I *study* writing... the weaker the blaze. That's scary. Being home. Here with my aunts. Away from... *academia.* *(Pause.)* I can write. *(Pause.)* Maybe the *crazy* will come back.

QUINN: *Crazy* is a good thing.

JACOB: And I can't stay in Texas.

QUINN: Why?

JACOB: *(Pause.)* Jules?

JULES: You're up. I'll wait my turn.

JACOB: It's racist. Deep down, irredeemably *racist*. Oil money, the right wing and Christian nationalists run everything, including schools and the universities. "Gay" is a forbidden term and gays don't exist... or shouldn't. You're not a man if you don't own a gun. You're not a

(CONT'D)

man if you don't want to prove it by beating someone up. *Misogyny* colors everything. *Fascism* oozes from the pores of every baseball cap-wearing, pickup driving jerk from Amarillo to Beaumont. Nothing I would write would ever be produced there. Nothing *you* would produce could, legally, find a stage. In the summer it's hotter than shit and the power goes off. In the winter there's either no snow or it turns into Antarctica and the power goes off. (Long pause.) Jules?

JULES: That about covers it. (Pause.) Michael, we're not having tacos, are we? Or barbeque?

MICHAEL: (A bit speechless.) Uh.... Uhm... No, actually...

QUINN: I saw the caterers setting up in the garden when I arrived. Dinner is lobster and crab-something.

JULES: Delightful! I'm home!

There is a long pause, then various people head to the bar and engage in indistinguishable chat among themselves, examine the art, et cetera. Across the room, QUINN and MICHAEL have a quiet conversation.

QUINN: I admire your taste, Michael, my friend. He's interesting. And he's staying. Lucky you.

MICHAEL: He'll be working at the bookstore and interning with Bay Street Theater. Writing. Helping with their classes. He's brilliant. I've read his plays. He was the premier student in their MFA program.

QUINN: He left, though.

MICHAEL: Indeed. Several of their best did. In these times, one seeks a safe place. This is home, for him.

QUINN: We are all seeking our safe place. (Pause.) He's right about Texas. Jordan's trying to take his latest revival of "Kinky Boots" on the road and they can't book anywhere in Texas, because of the law. Or Atlanta! Can you imagine the problems "Priscilla, Queen of the Desert" would have? My father's friends in the industry now get pushback when they try to greenlight projects with characters who are "too gay". (Pause.) My friends at Tisch have lost Federal funding. State is still strong. (Pause.) We live in strange times for the arts.

MICHAEL: For the country. (Pause.) There's always New York and Broadway. And you, my friend.

The group gradually reassembles, well supplied with drinks.

QUINN: Alex, where is the charming young Scott, of the significant abs?

ALEX: At Decadence, with friends. Something they'd arranged before...

QUINN: ... before you accosted him at our gym. I was witness, remember.

ALEX: ... before I met someone who hates Brice Marden as much as I love Brice Marden. Opposite tastes in art may sometime attract.

QUINN: You should be careful with him. He has a mind as ripped as his abs. He may detain your adventures for more than the usual six months.

ALEX: You've...

QUINN: Quite innocent. He loved the revival of "Kimberly Akimbo". We had lunch. You've had the full six courses... and brunch.

ALEX: He didn't mention that. But I suppose he's having all kinds of Cajun delectables in New Orleans right now. Good for him.

MICHAEL: What does Scott do?

ALEX: He's a trainer at the gym. And interning at a non-profit that works on climate change issues. He studied environmental science at City College.

JONATHAN: Again, good for him.

ANDREW: I hope he's not one of our "save the wetlands" zealots. They just cost me a sale near Georgica Pond. What will people do when you keep finding reasons not to build on perfectly good land?

JULES: In *New York*. They now have all the wetlands from Florida to Pennsylvania to build on. Cast your client's nets beyond the northeastern dissenting states.

ALEX: Dear Andrew, wetlands are what keep the houses you *do* sell here from being flooded by our annual tropical storms. You should be paying for those wetlands and creating more.

ANDREW: I am. In taxes.

ALEX: Jonathan, find your husband a better tax lawyer, won't you?

There is a long pause.

JULES: Someone did mention lobster and crab-something?

MICHAEL: (*Checking his phone.*) Indeed. The caterers are ready for us, I've just been informed. Shall we head for the gardens? We have beautiful weather, so let us enjoy it. There will be excellent food, and some quite stellar wines. This will be our long and most lovely first evening, so please abandon your phones, as usual. (*Pause.*) Alexa, garden lights and music!

Alexa replies, "Garden lights and music." They casually finish their drinks and stand,

then head to the hallway and the garden. As the door opens to the garden, there is, from offstage, music and twinkling lights.

There will be a long moment with the stage in darkness. In New Orleans, a mass shooting has been taking place at Southern Decadence, the annual gay version of Mardi Gras. Screens, of a size or sizes to be determined by the resources of the production, are positioned above and around the stage and the walls of the theatre space, on which the representations of text communications and messages on smart phones, will be shown. They may surround the audience. These texts proliferate and grow. Below are only a few of many and others may be generated by use of AI. They go on and on and finally come with such speed and in such numbers they become indistinguishable. They should overwhelm the audience. Each is accompanied by a notification ping and there is, finally, a cacophony of pings. Throughout, there should be a slow, low, very deep electronic "pulse" that audience members should be able to feel in their chests. (For a reading, actors may read lines in order of seating, from stage right and repeating. A text line is indicated by an asterisk. Response to that line, from the next actor, is indicated by two asterisks. If there is a third line, go back to the first actor in that set of lines. Since these would be texts in production, the actor may simply read them without emphasis.)

*Alex, I love you. I'm sorry..

*Oh, fuck! What is this shit? Where are you?

**The corner. At Royal...think I'm hit. Can you find me?

*Lorie, I love you sweet girl! Remember!

*...shooting, shooting, shooting! Stay down!

**What?

*It's in the bar... outside too!

*Where are the fuckin' cops?!

**Don't know...don't know...

*God I'm bleeding...god I'm...

*Call my mom...tell her I'm OK.

*Where the fuck is this shit coming from?!!!

**Everywhere...

*Oh god, he's dead! Matt's dead!!

**Shit! You stay down! I'll get to you.

*No. It's too late. I love you.

*Get off the street! Anywhere!

*Not fireworks! Not fireworks! Stay away from Royal! Go to our place!

*What?

?

?

*I'm OK. I crawled out on my balcony. Bodies everywhere, though.

**Where are the cops?

*Lots of sirens. No cops. Typical. Still shooting. May be more than one.

**Fuck.

*In the bar. Hiding in the toilet. A guy's walking through the bar, shooting!

*Blood on the floor, coming under the door!

*Help me! Please! Help me!

*Sirens! The cops are here!

**Stay down! Stay down!

*Still shooting! Still shooting! Stop it!

*Call Sara, please. Can't get through. Tell her I...

*All dead! Everybody around me in the street! Where is...

*Craig, where are you?

*I'm hurt! It's bad! 911 don't work.

*Goodbye. I love you so much so much so much so...

*Remember Yosemite... always... take me there. Please...

**I will. We'll go together.

*I love you. I'm sorry.

The texts suddenly disappear from the screens and the notification pings stop as the stage goes to black. In the darkness the slow, deep tolling repeats twice.

SOUND OUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Three:

Several hours later. Everyone is back in the Great Room of the house. MICHAEL is at his desktop and JACOB at his laptop at the partner's desk. The others are focused on their smartphones. JONATHAN is talking on his at the side of the stage.

JONATHAN: He needs to *stay* asleep and away from his tablet and television or computer when he wakes up. When he's up and has had breakfast, let me know and I'll call him. I'll explain, but let's keep all this very low key. He doesn't need to worry about anything. Everything just normal. Try to minimize his exposure to this story for the weekend. We'll have a longer talk when we get back. *(Listens.)* Yes, we're OK. And I'm sure no one we *knew*... know... was... down there. Bye... bye. Love you.

ANDREW: How are your parents?

JONATHAN: Shocked and worried about Brooks.

JULES: Watch his friends. They'll tease him. Gay dads.

ANDREW: He's not around people like that.

JULES: He's around young boys. They'll tease about anything. Like being left-handed.

ANDREW sets his drink down with his left hand.

MICHAEL: *(Looking up from his desktop.)* Ninety-seven confirmed dead. Twice that wounded. Dozens critical.

JACOB: *(Looking up from his laptop.)* Two men. The cops finally got them twenty minutes after the first shot. Together. In their hotel room.

JULES: That must have been a long twenty minutes. *(Pause.)* Infinitely long.

ANDREW: How could they do that much damage in that length of time?

QUINN: Oh, dear Andrew. Haven't you been keeping up with the Guns & Ammo website online? With their products, it would be a breeze for any barely competent mass killer.

JULES: The autopsy will find those boys had cum in their pants half a dozen times in those twenty minutes.

JACOB: They'd brought boxes of ammo. Used bump stocks on their AR-15s. Body armor. Backpacks for extra magazines. One fired from the balcony of their room. The other walked through two bars with a backpack of extra magazines, then through the street back to their hotel. Firing all the way.

ANDREW: Well, what *do* you expect? Three hundred thousand gays in New Orleans for a weekend of alcohol, drugs and sex? A “target rich environment”. Like that Las Vegas incident.

JULES: *Incident?* It wasn't an *incident!* It was fifty killed at a concert!

MICHAEL: You're blaming the victims?

JULES: *(To ANDREW.)* Stop it, you shit!

QUINN: So, dear Andrew. You've never had weekends of “wild and carefree sex” like that? Or is my memory failing me?

ANDREW: Not in public. And one grows up.

QUINN: Fire Island. Back in the dunes?

ANDREW frowns.

JONATHAN: What?

JACOB: You know that's urban legend. The public sex at Decadence.

QUINN: It's not.

JACOB: *(Pause.)* For the most part.

JULES: “What do you expect?” “What do you expect?” That is a shitty response, Andrew! Blood in the streets and people die in the worst mass shooting in US history and you come up with “what do you expect?” I expect compassion! I expect love! And Quinn, I don't expect tittering about your silly sex histories!

There is a long pause.

MICHAEL: They've said nothing about the shooters, except “two young men”; who are now deceased.

JULES: Of course: “young men”. *(With a biting irony.)* What do you expect? What do we *all* expect.?

There is another long pause.

MICHAEL: It may take a few days for a list of victims. Because of the number, they...

MICHAEL stops, looks toward ALEX, who is still intent on his smartphone. JULES goes over to ALEX.

JULES: *(Softly.)* Any news?

ALEX: *(Looking up.)* He sent me a text. “Alex, I love you. I’m sorry.” During dinner, while we were in the garden. I didn’t see it. *(Pause.)* Nothing else. Nothing from his friends, either.

JULES: It’s got to be so crazy there.

ALEX: I know. I know. *(Pause.)* Why did he say, “I’m sorry”?

JULES: Ask him. When you see him.

JULES tries to hug ALEX, who breaks away and stands.

ALEX: No hugs! Hugs aren’t enough! This is beyond hugging! *Imagine* what happened! Can you? Can anyone! *Imagine* it right outside, there in the garden! Where we were oh, so happy while it was happening! *Imagine* the blood oozing through the grass! Soaking the flower beds! Running down the walks! The air you breathe is *fear*! The pain spreading up into the treetops! Birds in death agony dropping around you! *Imagine* all that and bring it here! Bring it *here*! *Then* hug me! So it *means* something!

ANDREW: It’s not here, Alex. Won’t be. We’re not them.

ALEX turns threateningly on ANDREW. JULES steps in front of ALEX, facing ANDREW.

JULES: Charming as ever, Andrew. I’ve so missed your wit. *(Pause, then quietly.)* The half of it.

ANDREW: Admit it. We have these shootings, from time to time.

JULES: These “mass shootings.” These slaughters.

ANDREW: Some twisted individual goes off the rails and lets loose on targets of convenience.

JULES: Targets of choice, here. And *two* young *men*. Not one “twisted individual”. Two. “Going off the rails”, in tandem?

MICHAEL: Oh, Jules. Indeed, something has needed to be done about semi-automatic weapons for a long time. *(Pause.)* But *this*! It’s *huge*. It’s beyond the pale. Beyond imagining. *Where* did this... monstrous *evil* come from?

JACOB: Texas. They found the car. Texas plates.

There is a very long pause. JULES shakes her head in frustration and heads to the bar to make herself a drink. ALEX sits down, continues checking his smartphone. QUINN joins JULES at the bar and makes himself a drink.

JONATHAN: We’re all so safe. Distant. We’ll see the video from CNN, read the stories in the

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New York Times, but we won't really *know*. Will we? How horrible it was for those people? It won't touch us. It won't. Not like it was. To be there. That's good... and so very, very sad. You should want to *feel*, not just *know*. You should *hate* it. That it was *happening*. While we were having a long and lovely dinner in a rather perfect garden in the Hamptons. Kind of a curse, don't you think? That we'll have those two memories? Linked.

There is a long moment.

QUINN: Empathy. The soul of theatre. *(Pause.)* I've seen truer trues on stage than I've ever seen on CNN. *(Pause.)* I know. I've put them there, myself. *(Long pause.)* Alex is right. Jonathan is right. This is a moment we need to *understand*. *Feel*. *(Long pause.)* What we need is a poet. *(Pause.)* Then, again... we have one. Don't we? *(Raising his glass to JACOB.)* Jacob. Write the screenplay. Tell us what happened. *(Pause.)* Texas was recently your world. You *know* it. Tell us how this *could* happen.

JACOB: I can't do that.

QUINN: You tell stories. Tell one. I know you had to do it in school and on the fly. But this will not be a school exercise. It will be important. *(Pause, then gently.)* Pitch me your screenplay.

JACOB: How can I do that? I wasn't there.

JULES: You were in their world. The one of the killers.

QUINN: You're writing plays all the time. In your mind. It's your *compulsion*. *(Pause.)* Dining alone, noticing the body language of a couple across the room. You can't hear what they're saying. You're writing their dialogue. Their story. Overhearing half a cell phone conversation on the subway, you're writing the other half. In the park, there's an old woman on a bench near yours. She's silent, but you're writing her story from her face, her clothes and her large purse. Asleep, an errant shout from the street, a bump in the apartment upstairs, a dog bark... is dropped, by your sleeping mind, into a fully scripted dream you wish would never end or struggle to escape... and forget ten minutes after you wake. You've been silently writing the conversation Jonathan and Andrew will have with their son about this tragedy, haven't you? *(Long pause.)* *Compulsion*. *(Pause.)* You can do this. *(Pause. Then smiling.)* You've already started.

ANDREW: Quinn, you can't be serious.

MICHAEL: Ignore Andrew. *(To JACOB.)* Could you try, my love?

There is a long pause.

JACOB: That's a terrible place to go. A scary place to have to go. For me.

JULES: I know. *(Pause.)* Try?

ANDREW: I don't see what...

JULES: *(Interrupting.)* Oh, shush...

JACOB is confused. Reluctant. Then thinks. This is a long moment. JULES raises her glass to JACOB. JACOB closes his eyes. There is another long silence. Finally, JACOB begins.

JACOB: I hear Wagner. *(Pause.)* We hear Wagner. *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*. Coming up under and replacing it, the sounds of an online war game and two young boys are playing the game with unseen others online. One boy is a warrior. The other is devoted. The setting is a large, upper-class home in... Jules?

JULES: Allen.

JACOB: Allen, Texas. *(Pause.)* From the older boy there are shouts of "Die, faggot!" "Take that, queer!" "Go to hell, now!" and so on. The younger boy laughs and chimes in, from time to time.

Scene shift. Time passes and the boys are older. At church. A huge church. Everyone is white. There is a long sermon from the preacher. He's wearing a gun. He's thundering against "the vile, corrupting forces that are working to destroy America! Destroy the Christian nation founded by the men God chose for His monumental task! As they would, we must cast out those forces of Satan! Those socialists, communists, illegal immigrants, black drug addicts and demon gays, who groom our young to their disgusting lifestyle! Vermin, in the eyes of God!". *(Pause.)* This goes on for a while.

JULES: Your warriors for Christ?

JACOB: Scene shift. We see the young men, wearing karate gear, fighting, in a church mixed martial arts class... The church's "Warriors for Christ" program. One boy, the bigger, becomes vicious. His opponent is smaller and a bit effeminate. The fight goes on until it's stopped by the coach. The boy's friend has been watching from the sidelines.

JULES: Home life?

JACOB: Scene shift. We are in the bigger boy's home. His father is railing against the "faggot chink" who's pulled funding for a huge development project. He rants that "chinks and faggots are destroying this country" and that they "want to replace all people like us, true Americans!" The older boy is listening.

JULES: Is there a political rally?

JACOB: Yes. There should be. A big, thundering "Rally for America!". It's a traveling show. Funded by some radical Christian billionaires. At a mammoth high school football stadium. There's Christian pop music and flags and a charismatic figure leading a pledge of allegiance, then bewailing "the moral catastrophe toward which the country is headed". And the threat of demonic drag queens and the "the gay, trans mafia and their fellow travelers in the media and

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arts!”

JULES: So, maybe one boy's artistic?

JACOB: We're in an art class with the smaller boy. He's finished his assignment... a watercolor. His handsome, young teacher is commending him for his work and, leaving the boy's desk, touches the boy's shoulder. The boy recoils. Later we see him tearing up his watercolor. Tossing his paints and brushes into the trash.

ALEX has been listening to JACOB's story.

ALEX: Are there guns?

JULES: Of course. This is Texas.

JACOB: Scene shift. We see the two boys at a firing range. Through a number of days. They are getting better and working with several types of weapons. The older boy is examining the younger boy's target with approval. Then hugs him. The older boy begins to pull away from the embrace, but the other boy pulls him back. The embrace becomes a little awkward, then they both pull away.

JONATHAN: Are they lovers?

JACOB: No. *(Pause.)* Probably not. Or maybe not yet? *(There's a long pause.)* The setting is the older boy's home. Evening. Just the two boys. There's an argument. We don't know what the argument is about. It finally seems to resolve, and the older boy hugs the other boy... a long hug. The older boy then raises an automatic handgun into the air, triumphantly. The younger boy seems frightened. The scene ends.

There is a very long pause. JACOB is upset and silent. The others wait. Nothing.

JULES: Jacob?

JACOB: I can't do this. I don't want to be there.

ALEX: Neither did they. Those who died.

QUINN: Tell their story, Jacob.

ALEX: So we can *know*.

JACOB: There's something else.

JULES: What?

JACOB: It's more than the slaughter. I think it's... *Kristallnacht*. Again.

ALEX: What?

JACOB: Quinn?

QUINN: It's your story.

JACOB: Maybe *our* story, now?

QUINN: (*Gently.*) Jacob.

JACOB: The scene will be a street in New Orleans, two bars in New Orleans and the balcony of a hotel just above the street. The *only* sound will be Wagner's *Liebestod... Love death*. We see the larger boy, in black and in full tactical gear, with a backpack, carrying an AR-15 and an automatic handgun as he calmly walks through the bar, firing on everyone in sight. The wounds will be realistic and explicit. We will cut to the smaller boy, similarly attired, on the balcony of their hotel room, firing into the festive crowd below. A rain squall of bullets. There will be round casings beside him on the balcony. At first the firing will be in sustained fusillades. Then, as the crowd below seeks cover, in single, carefully aimed shots. We will cut back and forth between the boy on the balcony and the victims in the street. We will cut back to the larger boy, who is in another bar, firing and then walking through the street, seeking out victims in hiding. We cut back to the boy on the balcony. We can see... but not hear... the flashing lights of arriving police cars.

JACOB stops. He is silent.

QUINN: (*Gently.*) Jacob.

JACOB: There is still no sound but *Liebestod*. The larger boy has reached the entrance to the hotel. We see him running up the stairs. He bursts into their room as the other boy comes in from the balcony. We see the lights of the police cars in the street below. The larger boy runs to his partner and embraces him. They both turn to the door as the police burst through. The boys raise their weapons. They die in a cascade of gunfire from the police, crowding through the door. We've reached the finale of *Liebestod*.

There is a long moment of silence.

Blackout.

There is a very long silence. Finally, JACOB stands and walks to ALEX, who also stands.

I brought it. I brought it *here*, Alex. So we would know. And I'm so very sorry I did.

JACOB hugs ALEX. The rest of the group is quiet. As JACOB returns to his seat, JULES stops him and hugs him.

QUINN: Bravo, Jacob. (*Pause.*) Indeed... brave.

There is a long silence.

ANDREW: Quinn. *Kristallnacht* didn't bother you? Holocaust... Decadence. Not really the same scale.

QUINN: *Kristallnacht* was the *signal*. A public *permission*. For what followed. The official death toll was around one hundred, as well.

There is another long silence.

MICHAEL: I've always wondered what it would have been like, to be a Wittgenstein (*Pronounced, "Vittgenstein"*), in Vienna. In 1930. Hugely rich. Karl, the patriarch, was the richest man in the world, it was said. Vast houses, filled with art and artists. Supremely brilliant and cultured. Hardly aware of Hitler. I doubt they even noticed when von Hindenburg appointed him, Chancellor. The Nazis were a political minority, but the aristocrats needed them to govern and thought they could control Hitler. The Wittgensteins didn't care. They were unassailable. (*Pause.*) Until they weren't.

ALEX: They were Klimt's most important patrons. There's a beautiful wedding portrait of one of the Wittgenstein daughters. Like his "Woman in Gold"... but in white lace.

JONATHAN: Are *we* the Wittgensteins? Happy. Privileged. Confident. With all the warnings, we didn't notice *our* Hitler until he took over. Even when he ran and won, partly, on hatred for us? Tried to ignore him, after he did. Comfortable, here. Safe, here. In what they call the "dissenting states": the Northeast, the West Coast. Now, could New Orleans be *our*...

JACOB: (*Interrupting.*) *Kristallnacht*.

JONATHAN: What are *we* missing now? Cases on the Supreme Court's docket? That will finally allow them to do what they've signaled they *will* do... send gay marriage and sodomy back to the states to regulate? Like they did with abortion? Allow any discrimination against us if it's based on religious or moral concerns? Override all the DEI rules of the states, cities and companies that still have them?

ANDREW: That won't happen.

JONATHAN: The good Christians of the Federalist Society spent *decades* oh so *carefully* guiding cases through the judicial system to get one to the Supreme Court that would allow *those* justices to overturn Roe. Such a *surprise* to the pro-choice supporters when it finally happened. They thought Roe was "settled law". You can be *very sure* that the cases that will surprise *us* are now on their way to that Trump court by the same path.

ANDREW: That *won't* happen.

MICHAEL: Said the Wittgensteins.

ALEX: *This has happened!* And we're talking about the Supreme Court! And the Wittgensteins! That's fucked!

JACOB: Maybe *we're* fucked? Or have been and refuse to notice?

There is a long silence. ALEX is looking at his phone, reading a text.

ALEX: It's Scott. *(Pause.)* He's OK. He was in the bar with three friends. One friend... didn't make it. He's at the hospital with the other two. They're going to release one but need to keep the other for a few days. Trying to find the rest of his group. Will get back to me when it's not crazy.

JACOB: *(Softly.)* When will it *not* be crazy, now?

MICHAEL: Semi-automatic weapons should be banned.

QUINN: "*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?*"

JONATHAN: Gun makers control Congress. Have for years.

MICHAEL: Come Tuesday, their stocks will soar. They always do, after these events.

JACOB: It's not the gun makers. It's the gun lovers. They won, remember?

ANDREW: What we need is better mental health care. A system that would identify potential...

JULES: *(Interrupting.)* *Mental health care?* Such bullshit! The response from people who don't actually want to *do* anything to stop this from happening again. Who don't know *how*! From people blind to what's already happened in this country. Do you think mental health care... or health care of any kind, is a priority for this country now?

ANDREW: We have to keep the crazies away from those kinds of weapons. I'm in favor of that. A lot of people are.

JULES: A lot of people aren't. Remember?

JACOB: And not the Supreme Court.

JULES: This was not the spur of the moment psychotic episode of one individual. It was a targeted operation. *You* were the target.

ANDREW: Well, then they missed. By a thousand miles, or so.

JULES: This time.

There is a long pause.

JONATHAN: Do they really hate us that much?

There is another long pause.

JACOB: Yes. To them, we're *immoral*. To them, our existence threatens all goodness, godliness and the future of the country. We are a demonic *rot* at its center. This can never be the country God intends it to be while *we* exist. They are in holy war against us. All tactics are allowed.

JULES: My "ex" and his friends would complain that "masculinity" was being undermined by the "soft" values the country was embracing. Liberalism, gender confusion, "gentleness", empathy. We needed to go back to the strong, masculine values the country was built on. We needed to make sure boys become strong men. Straight men. They really admire Holy Russia.

ALEX: I told you that gorgeous man was not for you.

MICHAEL: Their goal is Holy Russia?

QUINN: Well, yes and no. "Yes" to no gays. "No" to all those Orthodox priests in jewels and crowns and embroidered dresses. *(Pause.)* A pity, that part.

JACOB: Putin rejected the West and all its values because it had become infected with *gay*. *That* made it weak and would make Russia weak, as well. He could reject democracy because it was infected with *gay*. He encouraged the hate of *gay* and rode that hate to Holy Russia... an authoritarian, theocratic state whose mission is to eradicate the West, democracy and *gay* everywhere.

JULES: Preachers in Texas love Putin. "Boy, that fella's got some good ideas." Guess which ideas? Our evangelicals *really* love Uganda. The next step.

MICHAEL: The threat of those "immoral gays" has always been a weapon in the political armory of the right wing. They use it to energize the religious right minority and win elections. The "faithful" are their pawns.

ANDREW: The pawns are irrelevant. Most people now know that we are just like them; that they know many gay people and don't see them as threatening or outrageous. The tired old weapon doesn't work. That's why Decadence is such a problem for us. It's *too* outrageous. We're beyond that; *and* those old Pride parades.

QUINN: And old drag queens?

JACOB: It's not about how *normal* we *look*. It's what we do in bed. Makes us loathsome.

ALEX: No one believes that, anymore.

JULES: Maybe not *here*. *(Pause.)* Go to the red states.

JACOB: One of my buddies in Houston had a big family that I loved hanging out with. One time his great-grandmother told a funny story. When she was a kid, her family lived in west Texas. One day two of her cousins... some wild boys, she said. They crashed the "whites only" pool and

(CONT'D)

jumped in for a swim. It was west Texas hot. Everyone went crazy. They cleared the pool, arrested the boys. Drained the pool. They fucking *drained* the pool!

MICHAEL: Why?

JACOB: Because everyone *knew* what loathsome, disgusting things, *sexual* things blacks did at night. The diseases they carried because of that. The pool had to be sanitized.

ANDREW: And your point?

JULES: You're not usually this dense, Andrew.

JACOB: It wasn't how they *looked*. It was who they *were*. What everyone who looked like them, *did*. *That* freaked out the people who were in the pool with them.

ALEX: You're comparing being gay to being Black? Do you really want to go there, Jacob?

JACOB: As a kid here in the Hamptons I never understood what the color of my skin had to do with anything. It never did, for me. In Texas, it did. I understood.

JULES: In Frisco... God's country. Blacks in a pool are as rare as sharks.

JACOB: Imagine how those white people in the pool in that little town in Texas in 1959 *felt* about being in the pool with two Blacks. That... *aversion*... is how they feel about gays, today.

JULES: That feeling powers a lot of what's been going on in undermining gay rights across the country. That feeling of *aversion* is what makes the epithet "groomer" so effective.

MICHAEL: We are not Russia. We are never going to be Uganda. Mega-churches in Texas... or Louisiana, or Tennessee, or Kentucky...

JULES: (*Interrupting.*) ...or Indiana, or Illinois, or Pennsylvania...

MICHAEL: (*Interrupting.*) ...are pawns of the right wing.

JULES: The "faithful" *are* the right wing. The pawns have run the fuckin' board. While you were exploring the hidden hallways of the Breakers and saving our historic homes.

MICHAEL: Unfair.

JULES: Unkind. (*Pause.*) But true. (*Pause.*) The Hamptons are on an island. And you. In so many ways. Look beyond the island, Michael, dearest friend. Look at the country. Outside our safe places.

ANDREW: My Manhattan is also an island, Jules; but I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about.

JACOB: You don't see it. Jules and I have seen the monster up close in Texas. Thousands saw the monster up close in New Orleans.

JULES: It's a *tribe*. With its own temples: mega-churches, football stadiums, state capitols, shopping malls, shooting ranges. It has totems: flags, guns, crosses, pickup trucks, Harleys, camo gear.

JACOB: They don't base their beliefs on scripture or theology. Just resentment and hate. Ask them what they believe, and they say they believe in "The Holy Spirit" and it tells them to fight against Christ's enemies. Against demons. They worship power and authority. The religious language is a façade. They want an authoritarian *theocracy*. And they're making "gay" *immoral* again. *(Pause.) This...fucking nightmare... was the result.*

There is a long silence. Then ANDREW begins a derisive, slow clapping. Finally...

ANDREW: Our screenwriters have done it again. Bravo. I thoroughly enjoyed that and eagerly await the movie. Quinn, perhaps your father can make it his next blockbuster. Will it open in... Austin?

JONATHAN: Andrew!

ALEX: Don't be rude!

QUINN: After all this time, we should all know that 'rude' is Andrew's most comfortable place to be.

JACOB: I'm really sorry. I was just trying to...

JULES: *(Interrupting.)* Don't you dare apologize. Andrew is being a jerk. And he knows it.

JONATHAN: We've talked about...

ANDREW: *(Interrupting.)* No, we haven't. We won't. *(Pause.)* I'm going to get another drink.

ANDREW heads to the bar and makes himself another drink. The rest are silent for a long time. Then, drink in hand, he turns to them.

Why the *hell* do I have to care about what the congenitally stupid minority thinks in places I have no interest in visiting? People who are trying to fight a culture war they lost years ago? People with no power because they have no money? Jules, you can assemble every member of those Texas "tribes" and all the sheep of their mega-churches, gun ranges and biker gangs and I can give a cocktail party, the guests of which have wealth greater than the total of all your tribes' wealth by a multiple of ten. *(Pause.)* I don't worry about sheep.

JULES: The wealth of many of your guests is protected and grown by the politicians elected by those tribes. Politicians they support. And one young boy with an AR15 can take out all those guests in ten seconds.

ANDREW: They can't get to us.

ALEX: Who is this "us" you're talking about? They almost got to Scott.

QUINN: Andrew didn't mean "gay". He meant the rich. The privileged. Comfortably ensconced in the power structure. Wielding that power. Obeying the rules. Who would never go to Decadence. Or dare dress "oddly". Andrew often forgets he's actually... you know... *gay*.

ANDREW: Quinn never forgets he's gay. Or let's anyone else.

There is a long pause.

QUINN: Why, I *do* think Andrew's done a bit of a "self-reveal", my friends.

ANDREW: What does that mean?

QUINN goes to the bar, to make himself a drink. ANDREW leaves the bar to cross the room. QUINN passes unusually close to ANDREW on his way to the bar. ANDREW recoils a bit from QUINN's closeness. QUINN smiles, makes his drink and addresses ANDREW.

QUINN: I make you uncomfortable, don't I? A bit too effeminate? My taste in clothes too... unique? Rather too many jewels for good taste?

ANDREW does not reply. There is a long moment.

It does. Miss Lotta Chanel never made you uncomfortable. The Quinn she became, over the years, does; as does the conservative, ever so straight-acting Andrew *you've* become make *me* uncomfortable. Miss Chanel was female. Quinn is male. *(Pause.)* Not trans. Not non-binary. Not an actor playing a part. *Male*.

ANDREW: You are, whoever you are. I don't care.

MICHAEL: What is your point, Quinn? There's been a monstrous tragedy. Whether you make Andrew uncomfortable is a silly sideshow.

QUINN: No. It's not. Thank you, Andrew, for stumbling onto the main stage.

ANDREW: *(Quietly.)* Sideshow.

QUINN: Those boys were killers, taking out the enemy of their country and their god. Because that's what men do. That's what *real* men do. They were warriors. What our country wants and recruits to our military, police departments and our many valiant citizen militias who are protecting their God-given rights and their God-given country.

JULES: Trained to fight in their God-given churches and by said God-given country.

QUINN: Those boys in New Orleans had no compassion. No empathy. No concern for the vulnerable. You can be sure they did not weep for the dying and maimed. Compassion, empathy, concern... *tears*... are for women. Would shame them. Make *them* women. Rage, guns and body armor are for men. Kindness, gentleness, jewels and nurture are for women. (*Long pause.*) They were obeying the foundational rule of the patriarchy: "Be a man!"

JULES: Fuck the goddamned patriarchy!

ANDREW: Not that again, Jules. Give us a break.

QUINN: Jonathan asked, "Why do they hate us so much?" You only got part of it, Jacob. The gay sex part. There's something much deeper to the hate. (*Pause.*) *Misogyny*. It's the true original sin; because of which men are *shamed* by the feminine. "Be a man!" drummed into them from birth. Don't be a sissy. Don't wear pink. Don't play with dolls. Or, with the girls. Play football. Play baseball. Don't cry. Show strength. Be a *winner*, not a *loser*. Be *angry!* (*Pause.*) I could go on. But it's the same master rule: Be a man!

ANDREW: I had no urge to play with dolls.

QUINN: Of course, you didn't. (*Pause.*) And you and your father and his father and grandfather before him had read Aristotle at Groton. (*Pause.*) In the dreaded Classics tutorial. (*Pause.*) And learned. The Aristotle who wrote the works that guided science, art, drama, history and, basically, all Western culture and much of that of the Middle East. Through Thomas Aquinas, his thought guided the formulation of the tenets of Western theology. And *Aristotle believed women were deformed men*. Birth defects. Sorry, Jules.

JULES: I've heard worse.

ANDREW: This is ridiculous, Quinn. What a rabbit hole you've fallen into.

QUINN: The logic is much older than that old Greek. If two things are alike, but different; the difference makes one "better" than the other. (*Pause.*) Men have dicks and balls... down *there*. (*Indicating.*) *Down there*... women have... *nothing*. A void made to be filled. Completed. To generate sons and heirs. And warriors. Should there be daughters... more deformed men... they may be given away or made slaves. Property. Should there be daughters and not sons... perhaps the male is deformed himself... in some way.

JONATHAN: That's crude, Quinn.

QUINN: It's a crude logic. Ancient and widespread. Burned *into* our culture.

JACOB: *Misogyny* is at the foundation of the patriarchy. They can't let the deformed things have power. Sorry again, Jules.

JULES: Sorry, Kamala. (*Pause.*) Sorry, country.

There is a long pause. ANDREW starts to say something, but JONATHAN raises his hand and ANDREW stops.

QUINN: Straight men are shamed by any *hint* of the feminine. Any doubt of their full masculinity. Makes them “less than a man.” Threatens their place in the patriarchy. Castrates them. And gay men have more than a hint of the feminine, but “presume” to the place of straight men in the patriarchy. Crudely, we do not function as they do. We are not innately drawn by *passion* to women and what straight men see as their own function in the “natural order”: procreation. We obliterate what they understand as “male” and are thus, “unnatural”. Even “demonic”, to many.

JULES: The “natural order” is God’s creation. Demons war against God and God’s creation and must be fought, by all good Christians. Demons are getting more mention in political rallies in the red lands.

QUINN: The patriarchy is threatened by us and all those *feminine* characteristics: empathy, sympathy, tenderness, patience, caring, creativity, aesthetic sensibility, concern for others... a love of the beautiful. Those worry the right wing. They want strength and aggression, not love. “Be a warrior! Be a man!”. They really mean, “Defend us! Defend the patriarchy. Your power depends on it. You’re *right* depends on it!”

JACOB: Quinn... Why talk about feminine characteristics? Masculine characteristics? Who decides? We’re *human*. We have a huge range of characteristics available to us. Why split them up like that? Why give them adjectives? Our chromosomes and hormones don’t determine which we can express and which we *must* not.

MICHAEL: Who decides, Jacob? Story tellers. Legend makers. Writers. Playwrights. It’s part of the tool kit. When they tell stories. When *we* tell stories.

JACOB: Then we must tell different stories. This one has betrayed us. We must tell better stories. Human stories.

QUINN smiles and bows slightly toward JACOB. There is a long silence.

ANDREW: Well Jacob, you’d better get started. Rewriting the canon of Western literature to save the world from homophobia is a pretty heavy lift.

MICHAEL: Would that the *gay* storytellers in the canon had had Jacob’s courage. To stand against society and be themselves.

There is a long pause. QUINN touches a lovely brooch he is wearing.

QUINN: I told my father I wanted to wear my great-grandmothers’ Cartier brooch at my *bar mitzvah*. He said, “*That just isn’t done, Quinn.*” I challenged. “*Why is it that only girls can wear pretty things?*” He didn’t say anything. The next day he gave me the brooch. I wore it. I got compliments. (*Long pause.*) *We* are able to pick and choose, Andrew. From all that range of *human* characteristics, as is called for or we need. *We* choose how we want to be. That’s *our* talent, gift and genius. That’s why we’re a threat. From our corrupting influence on their world and its natural order.

MICHAEL: So, our country's "going to hell in a hand basket"... or Birkin bag, so to speak. *(Pause.)* And it's all the faeries' fault? *(Pause.)* Those sweet, lovely, bewitching faeries. The men who flit about like women. Grooming innocent children to be their new faeries?

ANDREW: I don't really care *what* worries the right wing. They're Neanderthals.

MICHAEL: You insult the Neanderthals. They were, actually, rather smart. Social, artistic, craftsmen, good hunters. When *homo neanderthalensis* was discovered, 19th Century Christians had to relegate them to a lower rank of intelligence; make them a synonym for stupid. For theological reasons. To keep *homo sapiens* as the evolved summit of God's creation and the natural world.

ANDREW: My apologies, then. I had intended to relegate *our* current Christians to a lower rank of intelligence.

QUINN: The thunder of our *current* Christians now echoes from the pulpits and from politicians country wide. It's received faith. And it reverberated in the minds of two young men. "Be a man! Be a man!" and they responded: "I am! I am! I am a man! I'll show you!" And with body armor and long guns... they did.

JULES: They will be heroes... online. In school yards. Biker bars. Gun ranges. Barracks. Church socials. You know that.

There is a long moment of silence.

ALEX: They'll be hated. *(Pause.)* I hate them.

ANDREW: So, what does all this have to do with *us*?

QUINN: In this night for truth, I'll tell you. *(Long pause. QUINN surveys the group, then addresses MICHAEL.)* We've had such a wonderful time, since Harvey Milk yanked us out of the closet, haven't we, Michael? Challenging us to "just be out" to everyone. Then all our enemies would realize that they *all* knew a gay person, had one in the family, or had married one. Then their enmity would melt away, like gelato in an Amalfi summer's sun. All we had to do was show them we "were just like them" and, *miraculously*, the gay era would be born.

QUINN again surveys the group.

All this was before our time, of course. *We* were *born* into the bright times of gay liberation and treatable plague. The time of light. Acceptance. Legal victories. We were *born* the darlings of the media and the arts. We were *born* gay into a gay age. *(Pause.)* And it helps to have been born well off and on one of the coasts.

QUINN turns abruptly to ANDREW.

You are an example of how we got Harvey Milk *wrong*. *Come out... yes!* To show everyone they know a gay person. *Not* to show them someone exactly like *them*. There's a *huge* segment of our gay community that wants to be "just like everyone else". Not wanting to offend by being "too

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weird”, “too outrageous”, “*too* gay”. “*See... we can get married or be in the military! Or even be cops! Look at us... we’re parents! Aren’t we just (Pause.) normal?*”

They know we’re not. They know who we are. They know we aren’t like them. Those people between the coasts. We haven’t fooled them with our camouflage. They’ve taken the tiller while we were enjoying our “gay deck party” and have steered us toward the abyss. They want to erase us from their sight. From their god’s sight. We are the abomination. The threat.

ALEX: That’s bleak, Quinn.

ANDREW: And paranoid.

JULES: Name-calling, Andrew?

ANDREW: So, what if you’re right, Quinn? They say even the paranoid are sometimes right. You have the tiller. Steer away. Thoughts?

QUINN: *We must be male on our own terms. Not theirs. (Pause.) We must not buy into the lie. We can be masculine and unshamed by the feminine. (Pause.) We can wear “pretty things”.*

There is a long silence.

JONATHAN: Andrew can be a trial, but I’m comfortable with who I am. Who we are. I know you joke that we’re the straightest gay couple you’ve ever met. But, that’s how we live. And having a son is a treasure to us both. How is that... *wrong?*

QUINN: It’s not. But we must be careful not to be so much “like them” that we inherit the evil seed of their misogyny... try to “be a man” in a way we cannot be without hating ourselves as much as they hate us. That way lies self-loathing and the “inner closet”, even for those who have escaped the outer closet society can impose on us. Tries to impose on us.

JACOB: So many times, I’ve heard gay guys say they’re more comfortable around “straight acting” gays than around “femmes”. When they look for sex or for friends. They’ve bought the ancient story about women, haven’t they?

QUINN: Yes, they have. They’re gay but hide out among the straight-acting. *(Pause.)* Well, straight is always an act... even for the straight.

ANDREW: Gay has never been a very large part of who I am. I leave that to the old activists... and to you, Quinn.

JONATHAN: That’s unkind, Andrew.

There is a long silence.

MICHAEL: Jules, do you remember Colin?

JULES: I do. I thought he was very nice. Very sharp. A good match for you.

MICHAEL: He wasn't. He couldn't commit. There was an emotional distance, I couldn't understand. Until I did. Quinn's "inner closet". Ultimately, he hated himself for being gay. He thought he was damaged goods. *(Pause.)* With me, Colin violated Quinn's "most basic rule" and he couldn't forgive himself that. Couldn't love *me*... for that. If he didn't love himself, how could he love me?

JACOB: Sounds like a character in "*Boys in the Band*". At the end. After the catastrophe of a birthday party. The one who asks, "Why do we hate ourselves so very much?" He hated himself "so very much" because then, *everyone* hated gays "so very much."

ANDREW: That was another age, Jacob.

JACOB: Was it?.

ANDREW: I love myself. And I love Jonathan. The only closets we have hold our clothes.

JACOB reaches across the partner's desk and takes MICHAEL's hand. There is a long silence in the group. MICHAEL notices something on the screen of his computer and reacts with surprise, then reads. The others are drawn to their smart phones, react with surprise and read intently. There is a long silence as they scroll and read.

MICHAEL: Oh, my god!

JONATHAN: That is *not* possible!

ALEX seems to crumple and hugs himself, shaking his head. QUINN focuses on his smartphone.

QUINN: Jacob, you may have to rewrite your screenplay.

MICHAEL: *(Reading from his desktop.)* "The FBI announced six suspects had been arrested in connection with the New Orleans attack. Part of a militia they had been watching online. The men were arrested when they arrived in New Orleans. No other information has been made available by officials at this time."

JACOB: They missed two.

ALEX: As bad as it was. It was to have been... Armageddon.

There is a long pause.

MICHAEL: All the lives...

There is a long pause.

JULES: *(Angrily.)* If the FBI knew this was planned, why didn't they shut down Decadence? What were they thinking?

ALEX: It's a lot of money. For New Orleans.

JONATHAN: Then why didn't they cover the streets with cops? Call out the national guard?

JACOB: *That mayor? That governor? (Pause.)* An FBI that has never been on our side? That's been ordered not to offend the Christian right in any way? And can't tell the difference between free speech and terrorism until the very last minute? *(Pause.)* Then, again, for them, it's only gays. A huge bunch of faeries flitting around New Orleans. Maybe the queers would be getting what they deserved.

ANDREW stands, then seems to collapse back into his chair. He is upset. There is a long moment.

JULES: *(Angrily.)* I told you! You guys have not understood what's happened *between* the coasts... outside your privileged bubble. The *power* the right has now. To *erase* you. *(Pause.)* Quietly, totally *erase*. Gay life. Gay lives. *(Pause.)* My kids in Texas have no examples of themselves. Their stories are gone from the library. From the classroom. What's left is... jokes and chuckles in school breezeways, between classes. The little clusters of middle school boys. Seeing a boy, helplessly, naturally feminine, pass by. Mean girls, even meaner when it's *that* girl in work boots. Tragic, quiet despair of children in search of themselves... searching *anywhere* and finding nothing. *Being* nothing. *Feeling* nothing but the hate. All those churning pockets of hate. *(Pause.)* Tonight. Distilled. Focused. Unleashed. *(Pause.)* I loved my gay students. I can't imagine what they're feeling, now.

MICHAEL: What eight young men intended them to be feeling. Terror.

QUINN: "Cue sound of closet doors slamming, all across the country."

ALEX: Surely this... slaughter will make a difference! The *evil* of it! How could anyone not be *moved* by what happened tonight? Not a random act. A plan. A *new* terrorism. *(Pause.)* This will be *our* generation's 9/11 moment.

JACOB: No, it won't.

MICHAEL: I must agree, Jacob. We were one country on 9/11. Today we're not.

There is a long pause.

QUINN: Broadway will go dark... for a while. Talking heads will bloviate and gnash their teeth on screen. Not all, though. Flags will go to half-staff... but not everywhere, of course. Ministers will bemoan the tragedy... to their dry-eyed flocks in the pews. Not all ministers, of course.

JACOB: I give forty-eight hours before the conspiracists and right-wing commentators say the boys arrested are the innocent victims of a leftist conspiracy to discredit righteous efforts to defend and protect our great, God-fearing, white nation; founded by slaveholders who were the saviors and teachers of the heathen they rescued from darkest Africa. "Poor, sweet boys. Innocent victims of a conspiracy to take away our freedoms and Second Amendment rights. And it was all staged by left-wing, Hollywood queers."

QUINN: Cue Fox News banners: “Outrage against left-wing, Hollywood queers! The President speaks, live!”

MICHAEL: There’ll be some hand wringing and calls for a Congressional investigation or some kind of commission. But it will never manage to be arranged. Somehow. The dead were, after all...

JONATHAN: *(Interrupting and with sorrow.)* Faeries. *(Pause.)* Just... faeries.

ANDREW reaches out to JONATHAN, but JONATHAN shrinks from his touch

And Brooks? What do I tell him tomorrow? How do I explain what happened in New Orleans? What might happen here? To us? To him? He’s six... just six. He might be gay... so he’s in danger. He might be trans or non-binary... so he’s in danger. He might be straight... so he’s in the other kind of danger... of becoming one of... *them*.

ANDREW: Jonathan...

JONATHAN: “Gay has never been a very large part of who I am.” That’s what you said. What if it *is* a large part of who he becomes? When too many people want to *erase* him? And us? Call us *evil*? Should *we* buy a ranch in Montana to protect us from them?

ANDREW: Jonathan... Quinn is...

JONATHAN: *(Interrupting.)* ... Right. Jules is right. Jacob is right! A hundred are dead. Soon more. This was just a beginning. Our “position” and “money” won’t protect us, or him, anymore. *(Pause.)* How do I tell Brooks that? *(Bitterly.)* Shall we, Andrew, alert the other coast?

ANDREW is silent for the following, but his emotional distress is clear. His silence until the end of the play should be riveting. The others, too, are silent for a long moment. Then there is the ping of a notification from JACOB’s phone. Then another. He checks his phone.

JACOB: Bay Street Theater will be putting together a memorial tomorrow afternoon. For New Orleans. A lot of people going. *(Checking his phone again.)* My aunties have invited everyone over for a covered dish supper, after. A tradition after funerals. All their neighbors are bringing dishes and dropping by. Food from friends and neighbors. To help repair a broken family. *(Pause.)* Michael?

MICHAEL: Of course. We’ll come up with something, so long as it takes lobster. We have a lot.

ALEX: A bit last minute, isn’t it? And rather late?

JACOB: The neighbors have been awakened and summoned. That’s all my aunties need to do.

JANOTHAN: I’ll go, but I must get back to Manhattan, right after. For Brooks.

MICHAEL: I know.

There is a long silence.

ALEX: How strange a night this has been. *(Long pause.)* Tomorrow morning. Tomorrow and every day after... will be made *ugly* by this... *disaster*. By this shocking, unfathomable cruelty and *hate*. *(Pause.)* I grieve for the dead. I grieve for us. Our grief should be endless.

JONATHAN: Not the joyful summer's end we all wanted. *(Pause.)* We all expected.

There is another long moment of quiet contemplation.

MICHAEL: Indeed.

There is a long pause. MICHAEL appears surprised, incredulous, then visibly upset. He is thinking.

Indeed.

MICHAEL stands and looks to the others.

A moment.

MICHAEL goes to the bar and makes a drink. The others are silent and puzzled, watching him. Finally, he turns to the others.

Our summer ends with Labor Day. When one spends a last warm, sunny weekend before heading back to the city... from the Maine coast, the Cape Cod cottage, Fire Island rental or the summer place in the Hamptons. Fun's over. Back to work. If you must work.

MICHAEL walks to the middle of the room.

“Summer's End”, in Gaelic, is translated as “samhain” *(Pronounced “so win”.) (Long pause.)* “Samhain.” *(Long pause.)* A fraught word in Ireland, for thousands of years. It means the end of the bright times and the beginning of the dark. The end of the warm season and beginning of the cold. Winter. October 31st to November 1st.

JONATHAN: Halloween?

ALEX: The Day of the Dead.

JULES: Tragically appropriate. Tonight.

MICHAEL: One of the pagan *sabbats*. Celebrated from neolithic times. Barrow tombs in Britain and Ireland were aligned with the sun's position on “Samhain”. It's that old. The Catholic Church moved All Saints Day from May to November to take advantage of the ancient power of that day to help them convert the Irish. Trick them into believing the new religion was just like the old. Rather as they did with Christmas and Saturnalia for the Roman Empire.

QUINN: Summer's End. *(Pause.)* The end of our “bright, shining moment”?

JONATHAN: Is this the end of the gay “time of light” and the beginning of *our* “darkness”?

ALEX: We won't be alone. They won't come just for us, now. In this country.

There is a long silence.

QUINN: The drag queens of Stonewall would have been *so* disappointed. For their summer to have ended thus and so soon.

JONATHAN: It will linger in twilight for a moment. Until the Supreme Court tolls its end.

There is a long silence. MICHAEL breaks it with intensity.

MICHAEL: *Ah!* “Summer's End” is also when the barrier that separates the human world from the spiritual world is thinnest. In Mexico, when departed family members are honored, because they are closest to us... and to their homes. It is also very much a time of magic. *Incredible* magic. When that thinning of the barrier allows the Fae Folk... the Good Folk... the Gentry... *faeries*... to leave the faerie hills and roam the land... for good, evil... or simply mischief.

QUINN: Faeries! Delightful!

MICHAEL: One had to be careful passing by the faerie hills. There would be strange lights and exotic music wafting on the evening's air. You didn't want to come closer... and had to be careful of anyone you encountered on the path during that time. And should never wander into their palaces or accept food or drink from the Fae Folk during Samhain. You could be trapped in their power forever.

ALEX: Lovely!

MICHAEL: They are on the other side of the veil. Always. Even when there appears darkness and cold and pain *here*. *There* is magic and beauty and such joy! At Samhain they delight in reminding us of what *we* are missing... the *magic*. And they can be viciously mischievous!

JONATHAN: We need your *Fae Folk*, Michael. It's rather dark, just about now.

QUINN stands.

QUINN: Damn their darkness! Beauty always brings light! *We* are the faeries! Our power, our brilliance, our *genius* as gay, is to know *both* the masculine and the feminine! To access, *use* both! To manipulate, challenge, explode and *create*! As gay, that's our magic! We create *beauty* and make them fall in love with it!

JACOB: No, Quinn. Let's rewrite that story. Our *magic* comes because we escape the implicit *misogyny* of the masculine/feminine distinction and realize our *humanity*. And give to every gender its full *human* power. That is what makes us frightening. When we come “out”, without the distinction, we dissolve the patriarchy, rather than buy into it. That's how the faeries will split the darkness and create beauty.

MICHAEL: Then write us something, Jacob.

JACOB: An *incantation*. Perhaps a *curse*?

QUINN: Bring me your incantation! Bring me your curse! We need an *epic* for *this*, our plague year!

JACOB: We must give them better stories. The currently ascendant have written a loose, clattering, thrown together and dangerous story; one based on misogyny, revenge and hate. It's a myopic, mediocre and shallow reality they inhabit. It will not stand against the threats this country and humanity now face. But humanity is resilient, when it expresses its full power, rather than only the half the ascendant express. We must give them full *human* stories and set before them a new reality. When catastrophe comes... as it will... our *human* stories will heal and repair its damage.

QUINN: My father and I know a thousand ways to tell those stories!

MICHAEL: And my publishers, as well!

JONATHAN: And my clients, the quiet faerie masters of social media!

ALEX: Their dangerous new "state church"? We'll bewitch and transform it. Ensorcel the congregants in their pews! As those pagans in Ireland and indigenous America did the old European state church they absorbed and changed! (*Raising his glass.*) *Viva, Dia de los Muertos!* (*Pause.*) *Los Muertos...* those of New Orleans... we salute you! We honor you! Come to us! Always stay near and protect us! Give us the power you have now been granted!

JACOB: We need an *ofrenda*! An alter to honor the dead.

ALEX: This house *is* an *ofrenda*!

QUINN: Their new "state church" worships only the garishly golden calf. Our old rabbi said his god was a jealous god and his tribes would suffer should they worship any other. After the horror of this night, *los Muertos...* the faeries of New Orleans... will become angels of divine correction! And their stories will be power, itself! Against which, the godless will not stand!

MICHAEL: This is a huge country. Jacob's "currently ascendant" are far fewer than they think and far fewer than they seem. They will make mistakes, misled by their arrogance and convictions; and we will be there to take the advantage, in any and every way. As things fall apart in this country... as they will... we will be there to save it!

JONATHAN: The faeries always knew they had the power... *they* had the magic and the joy!

JULES: (*Raising her glass.*) To the faeries! To samhain! To their magic time!

QUINN: And yours, Jules!! Let us crack the veil... in all and every way, again and again and again! We'll blast away their misogyny and give women their full power! The ascendant cannot prevail when they deny half of what makes them human to preserve their place in the patriarchy!

(CONT'D)

We'll show them a *new* masculine, *our* new masculine, our *human*, and give it honor and respect! With that power we'll write, act, create, inspire, teach and govern! We'll not be stopped! We've been raising our faerie hills amid their red wastelands for generations! Alert the faeries of the other dissenting states and the red! We'll not be denied!

JACOB: And *mischief*! We'll spread it in any way we can! We'll scatter from our faerie hills to trip up and *laugh down* their pompous structures of hate! Toss the sands of laughter into the gears of their ponderous machinery of power!

ALEX: Tomorrow and every day after, we will make *beautiful* in so many ways. We will make *joyful*, in so many ways. We are, after all, *faeries*!

MICHAEL: There must be hope, *always*. The dark times never last. However long they seem at the beginning. (*Pause.*) The Wheel of the Year turns and there is another sabbat... for the returning of the light. It is *Beltane*. The celebration of the end of the dark time and return of the light. (*Pause.*) May 1st! In Ireland they *knew* it would come! Even in the cold and the darkness!

JONATHAN: There should be another celebration, then. We must summon the crew!

QUINN: May Day! Next year! I will host! You are all invited! Back to the Hamptons! At my father's new place on Georgica Pond! The owners accepted my... or rather my *father's* rather generous offer, this afternoon. And we'll leave the wetlands as they are, Andrew.

MICHAEL: Well, tonight *this* faerie hill is *open*! Let all in the Hamptons countryside be well warned. (*Pause.*) So, now, let each faerie, hence to the garden, "take their gait" for our incantations, celebrations and toasts!

Alexa... Mendelsohn, in the garden!

Alexa replies, in an Irish accented, female voice: "Suite from A Midsummer Night's Dream, in the garden." The music begins to play.

Alexa... faerie lights in the garden!

Alexa replies, in that Irish accented, female voice: "Faerie lights in the garden."

Alexa... champagne in the garden!

Alexa replies "Champagne is, in this moment, delivered to the garden."

ALEX: Marigolds, *por los Muertos*.

MICHAEL: Alexa, marigolds in the garden.

Alexa replies, "Marigolds now bloom in the garden."

All but ANDREW stand and turn toward the hallway and door. When the door is opened, silver light floods in from the garden. As they exit, ANDREW sits alone. After a long moment, he stands, then looks about the room to find the elegant cape QUINN had dropped during his dance earlier. He lifts the cape, examines it, then puts it on, brushes it with his hands, lovingly. He turns, executes a quick whirl and heads to the garden to join the others. As he exits, Alexa continues: "May we all tonight now celebrate this, our Samhain!" The lights begin to dim to brief darkness. The screens used at the end of Scene 2 begin to be filled by twinkling stars, until they make a diamond soup of stars. Alexa's voice, doubled many times over, continues... "On to Beltane! On to the bright times! Let the work begin!" The twinkling stars and music continue for a while, then go out and to darkness and silence.

END OF PLAY