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A play by Roger Degennaro

PRESSURES OF THE FLESH

Characters

TOM. A small-time academician, late twenties.

DAVID. His former room mate, an artist, a year younger.

ROBERT. His new room mate, twenty-two or three.

KEVIN. A young waiter.

MICHAEL. A man from Tom's past, about thirty.

New York. Spring.

An apartment in an old building in the Lower East Side. Its walls a dim white, its floors dark-stained or painted wood.

Set back at center a rectangular table with metal legs and wooden top. Four wooden chairs. On top of the table a phone and rudimentary answering machine. The table rests two feet from the upstage wall. Above the table an air shaft window is set into the wall. The window reveals joined brick walls, giving an illusion of depth. The left brick wall holds a thin window above.

Stage left of the air shaft a length of wall. On it a simple calendar reveals the month as May. The first Saturday is the fourth, fifth or sixth of the month. The entry door, with viewing portal and two solid locks, intersects at a wide (135 degree) angle to the plane of the upstage wall. Two other walls lie parallel to this plane. When opened, the entrance door reveals a small part of the building's hallway and next flight of stairs.

Down from the entrance a bathroom door at a 90 to 110 angle to the plane of the upstage wall. The door obscures the inside wall; a patch of floor tiles is visible. Down left of this door is a kitchen alcove. Facing out a refrigerator and small gas stove. At an angle a double sink. Above the sink another air shaft window with a glimpse of brick outside. Above the sink hangs an overgrown philodendron. It reaches out in all directions, clinging to any hold it can get. Stage right of the center window, a length of wall, another door almost mirroring the angle of the entrance. This is the door to Tom's bedroom. A small writing desk jammed with books and papers may be visible when this door is opened, or bookshelves. On the far right a cut-away wall, complete frame and door to a small bedroom. Just right of the space for the door to swing open, the a bed is set the wall lengthwise. At the head of the bed a closet comes out from the wall. It faces out, doorless, empty, its hinges painted over. The right wall holds one window that faces the back of the building. Below the window is a low set of drawers. All doors open into their rooms. During the daytime scenes a diffuse light pours through the windows. This is Tom's apartment on its best day. The feel is that of a deceptive stasis, a type of order that naturally gives rise to chaos.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Saturday morning.

Tom's apartment on its best day. Thin Saturday Times is on the table, and one envelope. Tom enters with the mail - an oversized magazine wrapped in brown paper.

Tom glances at the paper for a moment, puts it down and rips the paper cover of the magazine. The magazine should have an entirely white cover, with the front simply the blown-up typewritten word THEM. He opens it and twenty blank white subscription cards fall out. He scrambles to pick them up. The phone rings. He answers, and converses while picking up the cards.

TOM. Hello. Hi there, Dave. What's up? I can't hear what you're saying. Your mail? Yes, I've got some. I suppose you could pick it up. It's just that I'm doing laundry now and I might not be in when you get here.

I didn't get that. (Authoritative, deep-voiced.) David, are you at one of those pay phones that talk back? You know you're not supposed to use those. Yes, I know the synthetic voice reminds you of an aunt of yours. Those phones are owned by the CIA. Consequently they don't work, and the profits go straight to nasty covert operations. It's a conspiracy.

(Repeating.) But what isn't? Isn't the point here! Take this city. Once corruption built great public works. Now those same roads and bridges are in a state of collapse. Subway tunnels cave in, while above rise gleaming offices buildings the workforce can't even get to. I mean, what is the point?

Excuse me? Yes. The new guy is moving in today, or at least part of him is. You would ask that! You'll have to see for yourself. He doesn't shake the coconuts out of my palm tree. Just as well.

He's from somewhere midwest of here. Some state that begins and ends with a vowel. Just moved here. Seems bright, misinformed. I don't know. Either he gets used to it or he moves out to whatever suburb they're colonizing in the wilds of New Jersey. Where are you, anyway? You are? Then come on up. Use your key, by all means. Of course, keep it. A week gone and I miss your dubious presence around here, you dangerous miscreant.

Look, I've gotta go. My wash is on centrifugado. I have to get to it before someone else does. (Drops voice.) You know, there are people who spend their lives in laundromats. Unsightly people who take up 5 dryers with ten items of pink clothing. Hell on earth. I'm getting my own semiautomatic weapon. See you later.

Tom throws out little cards, rolls up magazine and exits.

The apartment is unoccupied for a moment.

David lets himself in, goes to the refrigerator, opens it, kneels before it, reaches in amidst foodstuffs, and

extracts a beer, smiles, opens it and drinks. His clothes are paint-splattered here, although this sign need not persist throughout.

Buzzer sounds. Loud, even obnoxious. David buzzes back. David notices something, goes to table picks up section of paper, sits against back of chair, one foot on the seat, one on the floor. Looks at an article. Catches sight of envelope on the table. Opens it and takes out four new keys on a ring. Smiles.

Door buzzer rings. David stands up and gets the door.

DAVID. Oh there you are. Come on in.
ROBERT. Thank you.

He has a large soft case over one shoulder, another much smaller case in other hand.

DAVID. I believe you know where your room is.
ROBERT. I do. That one. (Indicates.)
DAVID. Right. All right, here are your keys.

Holds hand up, snaps them in front of Robert. Robert sets down the large case, extends dominant hand, which David drops them into.

DAVID. This is for the front door. (Drops one key into Robert's palm.) These two are for the apartment. The top lock, and the bottom. And this little key is for the mailbox.

Places key in his hand deftly before withdrawing a step.

Robert looks at keys. David smiles, drinks beer, sets bottle on table. Robert stares at him.

DAVID. (Noticing). Would you like anything? Beer, carbonated beverage, plutonium contaminated water?

ROBERT. Not right now, thanks. I...

DAVID. Yes? (Smiling, betraying no hint of anything wrong.) ROBERT. Who are you?

DAVID. I'm David. Or Dave if you prefer. And you?

ROBERT. Robert.

DAVID. Robert! A strong name. What do your friends call you?

ROBERT. Robert.

DAVID. Really! Then so good to meet you, Robert.

David reaches out, Robert quickly pockets keys. David grasps his hand.

ROBERT. Are you? I mean.

DAVID. Yes?

ROBERT. Do you live here?

DAVID. (Pauses, as if to remember.) No. I used to, but then I stopped.

ROBERT. (Shakes off the grip.) And Tom?

DAVID. Tom lives here. It's his lease after all.

ROBERT. He's not at home.

DAVID. I like an observant man.

Their eyes meet in recognition of mutual attraction.

ROBERT. Where did he go? (Not deeply interested in the answer.)

DAVID. Tom? He's out bombing laundromats.

ROBERT. What?

DAVID. You didn't know you had a terrorist roommate?

ROBERT. Be serious!

DAVID. He left me here to welcome you.

He stands up, knocks over chair, steps over it. Walks directly to Robert. Stares intently into his eyes.

Drops his voice.

DAVID. Welcome.

Kisses Robert on the lips, briefly. Robert drops other case.

ROBERT. Wait a minute.

DAVID. What for?

David tries it again. Robert presses against tight grasp. A moment passes.

Tom opens the front door and enters quickly with two large bags of laundry, smiles and slams the door with his foot.

David looks up and smiles in return. Robert, shaken, wheels around to face Tom.

TOM. Hello boys. I'm back. My whites are whiter, my colors are brighter and my whole wash smells like a field of spring wildflowers kissed by the morning dew. Chemical freshness is so much more real than the actual thing, don't you think? In the future, nature will only come in cans.

Tom sets the laundry bags down very gently. Robert stares at him as if he'd kicked a sacred cow.

TOM. Hello Robert. I see that you've made yourself quite at home.

ROBERT. I didn't expect.

TOM. I'm sure you didn't. You must forgive David. He's a bit forward.

ROBERT. Forward!

TOM. All right, pushy and horny. Dave. I can't imagine what's taken hold of you. You've become a man possessed. I haven't seen you like this in weeks!

DAVID. I'm trying to take my mind off things. It's been the worst week of my life.

TOM. Tell me all about it.

DAVID. On Monday I had another fight with the gallery people. They didn't want to put up one of the works in my new show. I screamed censorship and they backed down.

control myself in the presence of such beauty?

DAVID. (Deliberate.) - body. How long would you have me

TOM. David!

his perfectly formed lips? To caress his wondrous -

DAVID. What for? For being possessed by a passion to kiss

TOM. First apologize to Robert.

DAVID. Tom. I need my mail.

TOM. Better it than us.

DAVID. My art will suffer.

TOM. You'll have to tough it out.

medications?

DAVID. How will I live? Where will I get my multicolored

resting on one shoulder.) You can't let this set you back.

TOM. And you were making such progress. (Now one hand

time.

Nothing! Actually, he'd been talking about it for a long

DAVID. Nothing, Tom! I - (wiggles out of the hold.)

did you do to this one!

TOM. (Goes to him, holds him by his shoulders.) Dave. What

have waited. I had some things to go over with him.

DAVID. The day before my session, too. You think he could

ROBERT. Oh my God!

DAVID. Then on Wednesday my therapist committed suicide.

TOM. Good. Make a scene whenever possible.

TOM. Five minutes might set a record.

DAVID. Come on, Tom. Go get the mail. And take your time

about it.

Tom picks up the bags and stalks away to his room.

Walks around the two, notes the knocked over chair.

TOM. Try at least not to break the furniture.

Opens his door and tosses bags of laundry in. Each in
turn lands with an unexpectedly solid thud. The other
two react, look at him in the doorway.

TOM. I've done the fluffing and folding already, you see.

DAVID. You fluff and fold so well. I'm sure you'll busy

yourself at something else for a moment.

TOM. I can't think of what.

DAVID. Go clip your toe nails.

Tom smiles tauntingly and slams the door.

DAVID. Let me help you with your bags.

ROBERT. Okay.

DAVID. (David picks up small case. It is much lighter than he expects.) Why do you think I kissed you, Robert?

ROBERT. I imagine that you were overwhelmed by me. I have that effect on some people.

DAVID. Of course you do. You don't mind, then?

ROBERT. Not overly.

DAVID. Not overly! Sounds good. Let's get you into your

room.

Picks up large case, which is much heavier than he expects, and enters his room. Robert follows. He puts smaller case on dresser. Stands the larger case at base of bed. David sits on the bed. Robert, at the dresser below the window, opens small case, top dresser drawer, and starts to unpack socks in neatly bundled pairs. David looks on bewildered as an endless supply goes by.

ROBERT. I must get more socks. (Opens a small book and

makes a notation.)

DAVID. That's one commodity we have in abundance here. In fact this neighborhood has the highest agglomeration on earth of socks, magic crystals, and kinky lingerie.

Tom says I'm a slave to my hormonal secretions, but so is everyone.

ROBERT. I don't think I am.

DAVID. You want to find out?

ROBERT. Not this instant.

DAVID. Come on. You've lived in this consumer's paradise

all your life. You're a seething mass of ungratified

desires. The more you get, the more you want. Nothing can

satisfy your hunger. Advertisers have us all down perfectly.

We're nothing but a nation of orifices. Two and a half

billion openings to cram products into.

Wouldn't you rather choose what's being done to your body, and who's doing it?

ROBERT. You make it sound almost too romantic.

DAVID. I knew you'd see it my way.

ROBERT. Did I ask you to lie on my bed that way?

DAVID. What way would you like?

ROBERT. You're insane.

DAVID. You think I'm bad? You'll lose your mind living with

Tom. He's an accomplished eccentric.

ROBERT. I didn't think they had those any more.

DAVID. Not in the classic sense. He's a cynical romantic.

ROBERT. I don't get it.

DAVID. Neither does he. I mean never. You see, he's given up on sex with even partial strangers. Says he'd rather be alone until that perfect love arrives. I'm surprised he hasn't moved to a stone tower.

ROBERT. He's afraid?

DAVID. No more than any of us. We take the necessary precautions, conquer fear's dark territory. I don't think that's it with him. The first year I lived here, he was almost too social. Then a year ago, after his last heated affair, he gave up looking entirely. Couldn't stand another rejection I guess.

ROBERT. (Taken with the thought.) How noble of him to embrace such loneliness. The poor guy.

DAVID. (He sits up in the bed.) Poor guy nothing! It's like living with an analytical saint. A martyr to the lost libido, avoiding the society of like-minded gentlemen. (As he starts talking, he stands on the bed, delivering his position with authority.) He's running away from our historic mission: to uphold the doctrine of sex. The safest sex imaginable, yet sex nonetheless.

Sex is still our right under the sun. While we have breath to fight against the supreme law of the land, we must pursue our pleasure as we choose. Damn the laws. If love isn't a human right, nothing is!

Robert goes on unpacking. This time underwear in a remarkable variety of shapes and hues.

ROBERT. Uh, could you not stand on my bed?

David jumps down, faces Robert.

DAVID. What do you think?

ROBERT. I guess if you feel that strongly about it. I try not to get involved in anything too heavily.

DAVID. You like things the way they are?

ROBERT. Yeah. I think so.

DAVID. I've never known anyone who said that before.

ROBERT. I've never known anyone who didn't. I may not like some things, but they don't affect my life that much.

Everyone just has to stop being so dissatisfied with

everything. All that yelling and screaming. It makes us all look psychologically maladjusted.

DAVID. (Leans his head as if in disbelief.) Are you serious? You think this is a world to be well-adjusted to? (Quizzically, not harshly.) Then what the fuck are you doing living in this neighborhood?

ROBERT. You mean all those angry outsider-types. They're just playing a role. No one can resist change forever. I like it here. The sense of play, of style. Things are always happening.

DAVID. Sure. If you get off on police riots.

ROBERT. Uh. What about Tom? What courses does he teach at the university.

DAVID. I don't know anymore. Intro stuff, one weird course in European diatribes he dreamed up. I'm afraid he's not very big there yet. He's happy taking his notes and grading his papers. (Lowers his voice.) But, you know what? He's independently wealthy. Don't tell him I told you. He'd deny it anyway. Doesn't think he deserves it, since he won it all.

ROBERT. Won it?

DAVID. Oh, right, you'd never have heard, that far from civilization. It was on the front page of the Post. Tom is the only man alive who's both won lotto and been struck by lightning.

ROBERT. At the same time?

DAVID. No. Don't be ridiculous! That's impossible. First the lightning, then lotto.

ROBERT. I guess it's possible.

DAVID. The odds are nineteen trillion to one. They

calculated it. Now Tom pays for everything at the bodega in subway tokens. Old people come up and touch him as if he had some magic power.

Hey, are you going to keep on unpacking?

ROBERT. Look, uh, David?

DAVID. David, right.

ROBERT. David, I just met you. You catch me at a weak

moment and expect me to fall to the floor unconscious.

DAVID. What fun would that be? Okay. You want foreplay,

we'll go to a movie.

ROBERT. Tonight?

DAVID. Right now. I'm known for my foreplay at movies.

I've even got strawberry flavored condoms somewhere on my

person.

ROBERT. You're disturbed. Don't you have a lower gear?

DAVID. Not that I'm aware of.

ROBERT. I want to unpack, take a nap.

DAVID. I can help you with both of those things.

ROBERT. Especially the nap?

DAVID. Not if you want any sleep.

ROBERT. No thanks. I can handle myself.

DAVID. Can I watch?

ROBERT. No! Look, I don't even know anything about you.

David reaches into a pocket. Takes out photocopied

piece of paper, folded flat. Unfolds and gives it to

Robert.

DAVID. Read this.

ROBERT. What is it?

DAVID. My bio. Read it.

ROBERT. (Reads.) David D. is an up and coming Young East

Village visual artist who shows his work exclusively in Soho.

DAVID. Uh, skip down a bit.

ROBERT. Having made his name and reputation several years

ago with his first show, entitled Objects That Cause Bodily

Harm to the Viewer, he later went out one night and dressed

up a statue of George Washington with a floral print dress

and big blonde wig he purchased on 14th Street. The

resulting photograph became a popular postcard, poster and

tee shirt. Largely because of this, Congress is considering

a constitutional amendment against cross-dressing national monuments.

You did that one? Someone mailed that card to me.

DAVID. It got me into my new apartment. Did you like the makeover? The eyeliner ran a bit.

ROBERT. What's this amendment about?

DAVID. Basically it grants everyone complete freedom of

speech as long as it doesn't disturb anyone. I'd like to see an amendment requiring Jesse Helms to get a fire hose enema.

Jump to the last paragraph.

ROBERT. His current work explores the modern workspace as a behaviorist update of the Medieval torture chamber, examining the implications for post-industrial society.

DAVID. I wrote that. Right now I don't know what I'm

exploring. Although I know what I'd like to explore.

ROBERT. I'm sure you do. You know, this is impressive, even assuming half of everything is a lie.

DAVID. Half of everything is a lie. The trick is knowing

which half. Like the bottle-cap game they play on the

street. The little marble of truth may never be there.

ROBERT. But your lies seem so ... so genuine. Were you

always an artist?

DAVID. I've never told anyone this. Once I worked at a formica factory.

ROBERT. What was that like?

DAVID. Frankly, I found it counter-productive. But enough about me. What about you? Tell me about your first sexual experience.

Robert draws a breath.

ROBERT. It was the first month of the first year of college. I was having trouble with an English composition course, so I hired a grad student from the department to help me out. DAVID. You've got to watch them. They jump on anything that doesn't run away first. You should have seen some of Tom's friends. Real birds of prey with a taste for domestic

poultry, if you get my drift.

ROBERT. You've got the wrong idea. This fellow taught me

everything I know about syntax.

DAVID. Yeah, and I'm sure your principles weren't dangling

after that.

ROBERT. (Smiles.) Not for a while. Anything else?

DAVID. Yeah. What are your feelings about the all-powerful?

I mean, do you believe in Science?

ROBERT. Yes, but not on the first date. Look, let's just see what develops between us.

DAVID. That's what I'm waiting for.

ROBERT. Stop twisting everything I say around.

DAVID. Not until I get to twist you around.

ROBERT. You think a lot of yourself.

DAVID. I have to. I'm an artist. (Goes over and kisses

Robert again. No resistance.) I'll call you later.

He walks out of the door. Robert hesitates, then

follows.

ROBERT. Let me show you out the door.

Tom emerges at that moment.

TOM. Why? He's been through it a thousand times.

Don't forget your mail, David. You'll excuse the appearance.

A few came unglued.

David holds up one very obviously ripped apart missive.

DAVID. And you've come unhinged.

ROBERT. I've got to unpack some accessories. Call me,
David.

DAVID. I'll give you two hours.

Robert closes door. David starts to go.

TOM. David?

DAVID. Yeah?

TOM. (Lowers his voice.) He's not ready for you. Leave him
alone.

DAVID. (Loudly.) What for? I'm talking about true love.
TOM. (Loudly.) Hah! All you know is the logic of the

genitalia.

DAVID. What do you know? You've forgotten what sex is like.
Your penis is shriveling from disuse. Your semen is rubber
cement oozing through fossilized testicles. The last time
you brought a guy home, you exchanged phone numbers in

cuneiform.

TOM. It's all true. (Choked sob. Hand to his head.) I
haven't only forgotten about sex, I've forgotten about the
lack of it.

DAVID. Tom, I believe in two things. True love, and true
sex. Not necessarily together, and almost never in that
order.

Your problem is you just don't want to see love flourish. If you can't get it, no one else will. You won't even look for it. Why? Because you're a dedicated depressive.

TOM. I am not depressive! I've just been in a bad mood for a few years.

Look, Robert needs protection. Since I'm his roommate, I've got to rescue him from your voracious and unseemly lust.

DAVID. Jump down off it, Tom. Remember: all is gloom and decay without tactile stimulation conducted by another willing, attractive adult leading to mutually satisfying rubber-clad orgasm.

TOM. Yes. I seem to have heard that everywhere.

Fade to black.

SCENE 2

Later that afternoon.

Tom is setting down a teapot on the table next to

mugs. Leaves it.

Lights come up on Robert lying on the bed, suitcases open and empty, the small one on the dresser, the large one in front of the bed. The closet is jammed with clothes. After this scene a bar and curtain made of blue-gold fabric will cover the closet. A full-length mirror on the back of the room's door.

Tom crosses and knocks on Robert's door.

ROBERT. Come in.

Tom opens door and enters. Dim lights in kitchen.

TOM. You okay?

ROBERT. I'm fine. I'm not so sure about David.

TOM. Dave uses his body before his brain can object. Robert, you've got to make him prove he's not just after you for a momentary thrill. Don't wake up and find him gone before dawn. Think of the despair you'll feel, tossed aside like a spent condom on the roof. Lying there, an empty bag of latex floating in a puddle of acid rain. It's too frightening to contemplate.

ROBERT. (Pause.) Is he that bad?

TOM. Once I looked up Revolving Door Installation in the Yellow pages. It wasn't in there.

ROBERT. He is safe?

TOM. I know he takes every precaution. Can I pour you some comforting tea?

ROBERT. Tea? That's a warm thought.

Tom moves to the table, Robert follows and sits down first. Tom pours the tea while talking, with Robert stretching a bit to feel part of the place. They stand or sit, walk around as the mood moves them, returning to their tea or taking a cup with them.

TOM. I wouldn't be surprised if David drove his therapist to suicide, just to see if he could do it.

Robert recoils in horror.

TOM. You needn't recoil in horror. Just a theory. His last one ran away to South America directly after a session with him. I believe he was eaten by piranhas somewhere in the Amazon Basin. (Pause.) Or was that the one before? No, I remember. They locked him away after he climbed on top of a roof and started shooting at people. But these are

coincidences. Nothing to do with Dave.

(Holds up cup.) It's only tea, but to your being here.

ROBERT. And to your choosing me as your roommate.

They drink.

TOM. It was an easy decision. I hope you enjoy our fair city. Meander through its streets and find all that your heart or any other organ longs for.

ROBERT. My desires keep changing.

TOM. Refrigerate yourself. People aren't doing what they're doing because a voice arose in the darkness and said: Go forth and become a cog in the machinery of corporate

takeovers. MERGE! ACQUIRE! DISMANTLE! SELL BUILDINGS TO FOREIGN PEOPLE! No. People do what they do because they do it. Millions of adrenalin addicts, strung out on stress, clogging the busy arteries of our city like their own much-feared bad cholesterol.

ROBERT. Don't medical studies warn us of the dangers of stress?

TOM. They warn us of everything except industrial pollution. Ever notice?

ROBERT. But we're living in a post-industrial society. On the way over, I saw a building with a tree growing out of its roof.

TOM. Exactly. In America we don't have any real ruins of our own, so we've speeded up the process. Now I feel at home among broken buildings.

ROBERT. So much life here. So many people.

TOM. Yes. Overcrowding is some kind of fun.

Tom lifts cup to his mouth.

ROBERT. Why don't you move to the suburbs?

Tom swallows tea, chokes, clears his throat.

Phone rings. Tom motions for Robert to answer.

ROBERT. Hello. Oh hi Dave. I was just getting the big picture from Tom. Yes, bleak is the word. I had an image of a barren earth where only giant mushrooms grew. The sky glowed with pink clouds. Huge mutant pigeons stalked me down the broken streets, pecking holes in the asphalt.

Dinner, yes. Roast pigeon with mushrooms sounds perfect. Should we kill them ourselves? Where? No, I don't know

where that is. I just got to this neighborhood. Okay, I'll ask him. See you there. (Hangs up.)

ROBERT. Where is Taste?

TOM. Nowhere I know. No, Taste is a cafe. I'll take you there, but I won't stay.

ROBERT. You have to protect me.

TOM. I am not your Dating Game chaperon.

ROBERT. We've got to celebrate.

TOM. (Pause.) I could stand that.

They exit quickly. Go to black.

SCENE 3

At the table of a restaurant.

Saturday evening.

The restaurant scenes are accomplished with the same

table and chairs moved up and on a slight diagonal,

with a corner set up either with two new walls, or

using the back wall abutting another that covers the

air shaft window. The word TASTE in odd lettering may

appear on a wall. There may be a few pictures of the

neighborhood framed on the walls, or nothing at all.

The walls should be lit in dramatic violet and red.

There are two glasses of water on the table.

The two enter left, the other side of the set now

blocked.

TOM. We're here.

DAVID. Hello, Robert. So nice of you to join us, Tom.

TOM. Pleasure's all mine.

DAVID. I'm sure it is. (They smile sarcastically).

ROBERT. (Clasps David's hand, who is charmed.) Hello David.

TOM. (Motions to someone out of view.) Excuse me. We need menus.
DAVID. Don't be obnoxious, Tom. They're supposed to be slow here. You have to get that sense of being ignored, or the food won't seem such an issue.
ROBERT. Everything's so political here.

Tom and David exchange looks.

Kevin, our waiter, enters from right, with shorts and a turned around baseball cap or some other jaunty headgear. Other cute affixtures, like suspenders, would be appropriate. Hands out menus.

TOM. Thanks, love. Could I trouble you for some nice cold water?

KEVIN. Water.

TOM. What's your name?

KEVIN. Kevin.

TOM. Kevin. How pleasant.

Kevin smiles and departs. David registers surprise, then joins in watching waiter go.

ROBERT. David?

DAVID. Huh? (Turns back.) Hi Robert. (Pause. Nothing to say. Robert drinks his water.) So, when are we going to

fuck?

Robert sets glass down and looks around, embarrassed.

TOM. David!

DAVID. Unless it's tonight I'll have to work you into my schedule.

ROBERT. Not in front of Tom.

DAVID. No. I thought we'd close the door first.

ROBERT. (Smiles and shakes his head. Looks around him.)

David?

DAVID. Yes?

ROBERT. Why is everyone in here speaking a different

language?

Tom and David laugh.

TOM. Forget the people sipping iced capuccino. They're only

in town for the Eurotrash Day Parade.

ROBERT. When's that?

TOM and DAVID. All summer long.

DAVID. You see, many people with pony tails wash up on our fair shore - the fashionable flotsam and jetsam of distant lands. They flock to your new environs, make horrendous noise, complain tirelessly, and do all those nasty things they'd never dare do at home. You'd think they'd all been let loose from the asylum, except that you can somehow tell the difference.

Kevin swings back, places water in front of Tom.

KEVIN. Have you decided?

TOM. Yes. I've decided to leave you my phone number.

Kevin gives a slight smirk, generally nonplussed.

DAVID. Uh. Another minute. Can we have more water?

KEVIN. Water, sure. (Disappears.)

DAVID. Tom, you scared him off. That's the last we'll see of him.

TOM. Oh, he's just waiting to finish his shift and bounce on over to the bar of boys.

DAVID. Thrill to cramped conditions and watered down draft beer.

TOM. Dance downstairs in our sumptuous Dungeon Room.
DAVID. They closed the basement.

TOM. They did? Where will my little house mouse dance?
ROBERT. I know what I want.

DAVID. So do I. (Giving intent flash, reaching under table.)

ROBERT. (Repulsing gesture.) Control yourself?

DAVID. Why should I start now?

TOM. I can't take you kids anywhere without a fight.

Close your menus and perhaps he'll deign to notice us.

DAVID. No, Tom. Let's light them on fire and wave them in the air.

TOM. That's a great idea! I've got some matches. (Digs into pocket, pulls them out.) Ah, yes, here they are.

David holds up his menu. Opens book of matches, takes one out and moves to strike it. Lights down, then back up.

KEVIN. Everything all right?

TOM. Yes. Sorry about the menus.

KEVIN. That's okay, we're thinking of doing all of them like that. Is there anything else?

TOM. I have two questions. What time do you get off, and what time would you like to?

KEVIN. (Smiles slyly.) I'll get you your check.

DAVID. (Blurts out.) Coffee! I'd like coffee.

TOM. Yes, coffee.

Kevin nods and departs.

TOM. Excuse me a minute.

Goes off in same direction.

ROBERT. I thought you said -

DAVID. Pure pretence. Tom will get us thrown out of this place and banned from the premises.

Long starey pause.

DAVID. So, what about you? What do you hope to achieve on

this earth before mortality renders all of it meaningless?

ROBERT. (Wistful.) I don't know. Grow wealthy. Live on an

island six months of the year. Visit my far flung estates

and apartments around the globe.

ROBERT. And keep that economy in motion!

ROBERT. What else is there?

DAVID. (Stares.) You do find art important?

ROBERT. Of course. You don't want bare walls in your condo. Unless you're going for a barren look. Personally, I think

minimalism's been overdone. You can only have so much of so

little. What do you think?

DAVID. (His jaw has dropped.) I think I'll go live in a

cave. Don't you care deeply about anything?

ROBERT. I try not to.

DAVID. Doesn't love mean anything to you?

ROBERT. Sure. Love is no score in tennis.

DAVID. And passion?

ROBERT. A fruit juice.

DAVID. And dreams?

ROBERT. Dreams are music videos while you sleep.

DAVID. And desire?

ROBERT. Desire is something to get you out of the house on a

weekend night.

DAVID. To keep the economy moving.

ROBERT. (Exuberant.) Exactly!

DAVID. You simplify matters so adroitly.

Tom returns.

TOM. Hate to bust in.

ROBERT. We're getting along so well.

DAVID. Right brain, left brain, march.

Kevin arrives with coffee and the check.

TOM. Thank you so much. You've been most accommodating.

KEVIN. (Smiles and nods.) Thanks.

Tom takes out a pen and writes in one of the

matchbooks.

DAVID. What are you doing?

TOM. Writing my number.

DAVID. Tom. You know you never sleep with anyone.

TOM. Dave, please.

DAVID. You only hunt what you can't capture.

TOM. (Gentle mocking of Robert's earlier statement, in low

tones.) And we were all getting along so well.

DAVID. (Low voice.) Until you showed up.

TOM. You no longer appreciate me.

DAVID. I've had about all I can stand of you for one

lifetime.

TOM. That's it! I'm getting out of here.

ROGER DEGENNARO

DAVID. (Hands him a five dollar bill.) Good! Here's cab fare home.

TOM. You think you can buy me off with a mere cab ride? (Takes the bill, standing up.) Let me tell you something. I've got integrity. It'll take a lot more than this to buy me off!

DAVID. Will threats of violence work?

TOM. Usually. Let me see the check, David.

DAVID. I don't have it! (Robert has taken it.)

ROBERT. Don't worry. I'll get this one. (The other two

register mild shock, then look at each other. They smile.)

TOM. I think I'm going to like this living arrangement.

Have fun, kids. (Exits right.)

Fade.

SCENE 4

Sunday morning. In the apartment.

Tom, in shorts and a tee shirt, reads sections of the Times at the table. He looks at one, reads quickly, scans the first column of the story, thumbs to the middle page, opens paper, scans some more, then stops, peruses deeply until the end of the piece.

From now on there will be a stack of New York Times growing somewhere in the apartment. Whether under the kitchen table or in several places, it must lurk visibly. Other daily papers may be there, but the sheer volume of Times pages overwhelms the competition.

Robert gets up, looks out of the window, then at David. He smiles and throws on a robe. He comes out of his room, closes the door behind him. Finishing the story, Tom looks at him.

ROBERT. (Hesitant.) Good morning, Tom.

TOM. Hello, Robert. You and David were the perfect date. Of course I did wonder what was going on under the table during dinner. How was the rest of the evening?

ROBERT. (In bad shape.) Strange. Even other-worldly.

There were these clubs - huge dark rooms and caverns deep beneath the earth. Rooms filled with people. Warm,

pulsating music. Dancers frozen in ridiculous strobelight poses. I felt the constant press of hot, sweaty bodies all around. The rhythms, the base lines pounded in my brain. It was the steamiest night of my life.

TOM. You have been deprived. In time, you'll find that the charm of being sweated on wears off. When did you get in?

ROBERT. Six something.

TOM. I didn't wake up. You want coffee?

ROBERT. In a minute.

Walks into bathroom. Tom goes back to the paper.

David emerges from Robert's bedroom. Tom doesn't hear. David slams the door, stretches deeply, roaring

contentment.

Tom registers shock.

DAVID. Good morning, Tom! A big bright yellow good morning to you!

TOM. Just when I thought I'd got rid of you, you come back as Joni Mitchell.

DAVID. Jealous?

TOM. Dave! You seduced my roommate before I find out his middle name. Did you expect aplomb?

DAVID. I'll settle for a grapefruit.

TOM. I'll have you know that I'm taken aback by this

affront!

DAVID. Tom. Just chill before serving! I didn't seduce

him.

TOM. You mean?

DAVID. It was all just good fun, and we slept together without sleeping together.

TOM. How extremely post-modern of you!

DAVID. I thought so. It means we're serious.

TOM. You've never been serious in your life.

DAVID. Is that him in the shower?

TOM. You're not going in!

DAVID. Why not?

TOM. It's so juvenile, fooling around in showers.

DAVID. Is it? I didn't know.

David steps toward the door, gives Tom a smile.

TOM. Take it from me, it is.

DAVID. By the way. Where do you keep your love balloons?

TOM. There are some in the medicine cabinet. You'll have

to...

David opens the door, jumps in and closes the door.

Tom throws the magazine section he's holding on the

table.

TOM. ...open the box.

Robert shrieks, in fright and delight.

The phone rings.

TOM. Hello. Yes. Yes this is. Uh-huh. Of course I do.

You think I'd forget this soon? No. Not much of anything.

No, I know you can't. I don't know if I can. I have a lot

to do. I -

Laughter from shower.

TOM. I'd love to meet you. Where, when? Yeah? All right.
See you inside of fifteen minutes. Bye.

Hangs up phone.

Readies himself quickly. Runs into room, combs hair,
throws on clothes, steps into shoes, grabs a pen and
goes.

Lights to black.

SCENE 5

Monday morning.

Robert, in a Dad-looking pajama top and fine underwear
in bright rose or mauve, gets up to alarm. Checks
time, walks to window, opens it. Loud noise of
construction. Jackhammers. The machine that pounds
the earth. Robert shuts the window. Noise stops.
Opens it again, like a fool. Noise starts again.

Police sirens wail. Cataclysm. Massive dust clouds would be a nice effect.

Shuts window.

Pounding starts again. Robert runs into the kitchen. Tom is there in simple non-brand named cotton gym shorts, black. He plays with an etch-a-sketch.

ROBERT. (Shouts.) Tom, what's going on out there? (Noise stops.)

TOM. Oh, just some minor construction. (Takes him back to the window.) Construction, and (ominously) renovation.

ROBERT. Construction and renovation of what?

TOM. Luxury condos and prime retail space. You might want to move onto that block. It has crack and rats. Luxury and decay - the total urban effect.

ROBERT. You could have told me before I moved in.

TOM. Why do you think you got the room? No one I know

wanted it. (Opens window.) There's something about pure

noise.

ROBERT. Yeah, pure pain. (Slams window shut.)

TOM. Oh, come now. Don't worry. Both projects will be done in a few weeks. I checked it out. I wouldn't force someone to cope with intensive building for too long.

ROBERT. Is it like this all the time?

TOM. Only from dawn to noon. By then the guys are too drunk to work any longer. They start throwing beer cans and

pissing off the scaffolds. The men aren't even good looking. I'm talking about the lowering of construction standards!

Seriously!

ROBERT. I can't sleep under these conditions.

TOM. You're an early riser. You'll adjust. You start your job today?

ROBERT. In a week, but I have to go in on Friday and fill out some forms.

TOM. Forms are the backbone of civilization, young man.

What was this place again? Investment banking? Insurance? Nerve gas manufacturer?

ROBERT. Computer software publisher.

TOM. Seems harmless. You program?

ROBERT. Some. This isn't exactly that, but I want to. What does anyone know about what they do before they learn to do

it?

TOM. Brain Surgery Training Institute. Think I'll print matchbooks. Become a neurosurgeon in twelve short weeks. Study at home.

ROBERT. I don't know if it's what I want.

TOM. Watch out, Robert. If you don't know what you want,

how will you know when you don't get it? (He draws breath.)

I hate to disillusion you, but I feel it my duty. Workplaces in New York are like leaky canoes going over the rapids.

People jump in, paddle until the water reaches a certain

height, then jump out and swim to the next.

ROBERT. It can't be like that!

TOM. It might not be, if suburbanites didn't run everything.

Byzantine cults of personality everywhere! People with their retinues, trying to prove they'll never die. We're struggling under the weight of centuries, and we're starting

a new millennium? Clocks have been running backwards for

twenty years. By 2000 we'll have reached the Iron Age.

ROBERT. Do I detect a note of bitterness?

TOM. You detect an entire score of bitterness. And let me

put words to the music.

Face it, you've moved to a colony of these United States.

Your city services those fine and decent colonials who live

as far outside of it as they can possibly get. Daily the

generals enter to occupy the citadels, and their troops follow. Every night they go home to their picture perfect bedroom communities.

The police, the gun toters in the occupied zones, impose the values of their own weird little hamlets on us. Standing like toy soldiers on an alien world, they tense as we walk by, their upper lips twisting into pit-bull snarls.

Don't complain that your garbage isn't picked up, that sidewalks are crumbling underfoot. Ignore the huddled forms of half-dead human beings on the streetcorners. As long as they're here, the Upper East Side doesn't have to look at them. Don't expect to get junkies off your block. If you don't live in the poshest of neighborhoods, it's your own damn fault. You pay taxes, while from AT&T to Zeckendorf, the colonial powers do not. What do men who ride stretch limos care about the subways? Let them fall apart. The homeless? We don't have any in my town, they grumble. Terrible problems they have in the city! I'm glad I don't live here! But they do, for half their waking lives.

America is becoming a Third World nation. It's that simple. starting here and spreading outward.

ROBERT. Is that your analysis?

TOM. No. Urinalysis is where they make you piss into a cup so they can find out what drugs you're doing.

ROBERT. Tom. Seriously, I don't think it's that simple. And I majored in political science.

TOM. Isn't that where they put lab rats into voting booths and give them electric shocks if they pull the wrong lever? ROBERT. At least we've got a law against anti-gay discrimination.

TOM. That just makes them sneakier. You notice anyone in charge following any laws lately? Only the little people go to jail. Orange juice?

Tom gets up to get the container and a glass.

ROBERT. Juice, sure. Tom. You're too cynical.

TOM. Nonsense! I'm cynical to the appropriate degree.

ROBERT. Don't you think if we project a positive gay image, people will stop hating us?

TOM. I grow weary of the Tyranny of the Positive Gay Image. If that's some guy carrying a snazzy briefcase down Wall Street wearing pink underwear, I'm not impressed.

Robert glances down, suddenly self conscious.

TOM. Am I supposed to lift cars, ride mean horses, wear gold, vote conservative? Where does it stop? Do I erase my personality completely?

Turns etch-a-sketch over and shakes it. Sets it down sharply.

TOM. Robert, I am different and I've worked hard to stay different. I can't make myself into whatever least threatens mainstream America this viewing season. People think gay men want to invade the Midwest, carry off their sons, force them to smoke crack and blow up national monuments. It's their own towns forcing their kids to flee to the cities, not me. Most of us knew who we were before we knew how to be it. We found out on our own, and we were not dragged kicking and screaming. No skid marks on my ass, if you care to check.

Pause. Robert is agitated. He jumps up and stalks into the bathroom.

ROBERT. (Pulls himself out. Now has shirt off, holds towel. Water runs.) People shouldn't care what I do in bed.

TOM. But they do! They care a great deal about where you put your penis. Why do you think there are laws in half the states against you inserting it where they say it shouldn't go, condoms notwithstanding? Did you move here just because you like big buildings?

Water stops running. Robert marches out. Draws breath. He stands straight, gestures forcefully.

ROBERT. Tom, I know it's a tough time to be gay, but people haven't all gone crazy against us.

TOM. Authorities have condemned our pleasure, our love for a thousand years. If you so much as look at the genitalia of someone of the same sex, this culture tends to hold it against you.

ROBERT. You can't condemn civilization!

TOM. If stupid people tell me that my whole existence is wrong, that I must renounce my desire to serve some twisted

notion of morality, then I've got to prevent them from enforcing their hatred.

ROBERT. We have to educate people.

TOM. It seems to me that in twenty years those that were

going to change their minds have changed their minds. The

rest don't care, or worse! Wake up and smell the capuccino.

Americans don't even care whether we live or die! That's

what the survey says.

ROBERT. But so many of them have gay kids.

TOM. Yeah, you should know. That means that everyone likes

us now, that we get to climb the corporate ladder if we're

good boys and girls? Oh joy! What happens when the guys

start talking about their girlfriends, their wives? What do

you say? Do you visit do company functions with your

boyfriend? Move to the suburbs? Golf? Is that the

acceptance you want?

If you don't think the creaking straight white guys who still

run this world won't be cackling at you behind your back,

you're fooling yourself.

ROBERT. Okay. What do you want? More ostracism? Our lives

have to get better. Look at women.

Fast fade.

Begins to turn the knobs on the etch-a-sketch.

paranoid that the world is nothing like it appears to be.
TOM. (Calming himself.) I hope you're right. I hope I'm so

of us to turn back now.

ROBERT. Tom, you're over the edge. There are just too many

screamed out in the darkness. Never! Never!
not deny myself. I heard they wanted to take it all away. I
sex? I became a wild beast, deranged with pleasures I could
terrain might I discover in the embrace of my own forbidden
monstrous sanitized nuclear family? What wild and unknown
wondered? How far could I run from the stranglehold of the
Oh how far from the bright sun of morning might I go, I

my dearest lover.

boundaries only I could cross. Knowing the shadowy other as
different touch. The heady thrill of defying taboo, crossing
TOM. That's what my parents said. I tried, but I wanted a

SCENE 6

Friday afternoon of the same week.

The New York Times stack has grown.

Robert enters with two white plastic bags. He is attired, but his tie may be loosened, or simply draped around his neck, under the collar, to demonstrate a contrived casualness.

ROBERT. You're boiling water. Can I try this tea I bought at the Green Awning? (Green blank box.)

TOM. Green Awning? (Inspects box, hands it back.)

ROBERT. A grocery store on First Avenue. You know it?

(Opens box, takes out tea bag and sets it in a cup that Tom provides.)

TOM. Child, I've been to so many Korean groceries, I've

forgotten how to spell most common vegetables.

ROBERT. I went to fill out those forms today. The men at

the office seemed of a mind.

TOM. (Smiles.) How wonderful!

ROBERT. A few kept looking at me. Looking where they

shouldn't look.

TOM. (Pours.) There you go. (Indicates bag.) What else

did you buy?

ROBERT. (Opens bag and dumps contents on the table.) Socks!

Do you like them?

TOM. (Stares.) I haven't seen this many colors since my

friend's lab got closed down by the FBI. (The colors are

muted but varied. Argyles, and so on.)

ROBERT. Did they throw him in prison?

TOM. No, a government lab. Why waste talent? I suppose he

invents formulas for socks now.

ROBERT. (Notices that Tom is working on the MS.) You're

writing something.

TOM. I am? (Looks down, acts surprised.)

ROBERT. (Sly glance.) What is it?

TOM. It's a paper I've been asked to give at this conference

of theorists next month.

ROBERT. What do you do at a conference of theorists?

TOM. (Rapidly.) Theorize. Eat. Drink heavily. Go for

each other on occasion. That's the most practice we get.

(Leans back.) I'm leading a discussion of how sexualities

have changed.

ROBERT. All of them?

TOM. As many as there are in the room. And who can't talk about autoeroticism?

ROBERT. Autoeroticism? (Draws breath. Slowly.)

You know I never really liked having sex in cars.

TOM. Oh no?

ROBERT. I mean, I tried it.

TOM. An automatic?

ROBERT. No, standard.

TOM. There's your problem right there. Never know what

shift your pulling.

ROBERT. Oh.

TOM. What about this title: Whither Male Sexuality?

ROBERT. Uh, fine. Gotta get ready. I'm going out with Dave

tonight.

TOM. Speaking of withering male sexuality. Don't forget

your tea and socks.

ROBERT. Thank you. (Gathers socks into bag.) You're really

okay, you know.

TOM. No, I'm not.

Robert goes into his room. Puts down socks, tea.

Turns, reaches for zipper. Not where he expects it to

be, he cries out in alarm. Tom smiles, goes back to

editing text. Fade.

SCENE 7

Later that evening.

In the dark Tom comes in with Kevin, a young-ish man.

They cross stealthily to Tom's room. A click of a

light reveals that the section of the upstage wall

covering Tom's room is in fact a screen or double

screen. His bed is alongside this stretch of wall. A

table and lamp by the bed. This lamp is the seeming

cause of the illumination in the scene. A show of

silhouettes begins.

The two embrace, kiss. Cavoring silhouettes. They

struggle passionately to remove each other's clothing,

which is a frustrating, difficult effort. Zippers are

stuck and unstuck. Buttons won't unbutton. A shirt rips.

Shoes fly and land with thuds. When they are finally

disrobed, they begin to embrace. Again an awkwardness; a

fumbling. Tom gets poked in the chest by Kevin's elbow.

Recovers, resumes. Tom has a problem unwrapping a condom

and unrolling it a bit. Angles of legs and arms flailing. Loud sound of footfall on the stairs or in the hall. Tom freezes, sits up. Kevin laughs.

TOM. Quiet. I hear something.

He reaches to the lamp and turns switch and dark returns. In the total darkness Robert and David come in, make noise.

DAVID. Oh, uh, I think Tom's home.
ROBERT. Why?

They creep in and Robert bangs into the table.

DAVID. I just know. Another early night for Tom.

They stalk into Robert's room. Robert turns on the small light on the dresser. They sit on the bed, hold hands, and have their free arms over one another's shoulders. A silent moment passes. Then the creaking of Tom's bedsprings. Puzzlement crosses Robert's features.

ROBERT. What's that? (Not alarmed. Noise stops.)
DAVID. What's what?

ROBERT. I heard something. (The two listen.)
ROBERT. It's stopped.

Creaking again, building. A quiet, pleased sound
issues forth.

ROBERT. There it is. That creaking.

Louder monosyllable.

DAVID. Oh, that! That's Tom's bed. He's probably jerking
off.

Noise gets louder. A true commotion.

ROBERT. You mean, Tom's practicing self-abuse in the next
room?

DAVID. Tom doesn't have to practice, he's an expert.
ROBERT. Don't make fun. Things are hard for him.

DAVID. I hope so by now. Otherwise this could last all
night.

Noise goes on.

ROBERT. Wow. (Pause.) Does this happen a lot?

DAVID. It seems to get worse on weekends.

ROBERT. I'll have to get a tape player.

They shift uncomfortably as it reaches a prolonged

climax. They sit as the climaxes, joined, seem to go

on and on.

ROBERT. He doesn't stop, does he?

DAVID. I'll go close the door. (Gets up, walks toward the

door.)

Tom comes out in a robe.

TOM. Oh, Hello. (Not embarrassed, sly.) I didn't know you

two were home. And what a tableau of romance you are.

Closes his own door behind himself.

DAVID. Hi, Tom.

TOM. Hello Dave. I was just on my way to... Would you mind if I shut your door? I'd rather leave you two alone in

lasting bliss.

DAVID. And you know all about lasting bliss. We were saying how early it was for a weekend night.

TOM. Yes, but think of the delights of the city waiting for you when you get up tomorrow morning. The crowded museums; the bustling streets jammed with unsightly adolescents,

cracking their gum and snarling at each other; the long sidewalk brunches - ummm ... I can almost savor the aroma of French toast and diesel exhaust now. I'll let you get that beauty sleep right away.

Closes door. Quickly, stealthily, opens his door, lets out Kevin, who runs into bathroom, closes door but does not turn on light.

DAVID. (Gets up.) What the hell is up with him? (Opens door as bathroom door shuts.) Hey, come on Tom. Be social. TOM. Later.

Runs to the bathroom, opens and slips in, shuts it. Light on. Sound of shower. David closes door. Walks back to the bed.

ROBERT. Does he always act strange after he gets off?

DAVID. Don't we all? He just needs sex. A sad case, Tom.

You see, our sexuality gets no sustenance from the culture we live in. No nourishment. No vitamins, no minerals, no

essential enzymes. We're villified in movies, television

shows, all the popular media. That stock figure, the evil

repressed homosexual, leers out at us from every screen.

We don't have a public realm to dwell in. We're shoved to

the outside of the crowd. Asked to bow our heads toward the

altar of heterosexual primacy.

Just imagine. If all gay artists and artisans refused to

work on another movie, video show or record about

heteroerotic love: we'd have dead air, darkened cinemas,

empty record shops. American industrial culture would come

screaming to a halt.

We create the fantasies that straight people find themselves

in! We help them grow up, find love and dream dreams.

Our love is not sung. Our love not celebrated. Is it any

wonder we have a hard time finding each other?

We only have the freedom we take. I want to demonstrate my love in defiance of it all.

ROBERT. I'm here, I'm ready. Demonstrate. Defy!

DAVID. You mean now? Here? With Tom breathing down our necks?

ROBERT. David, we've slept together without sleeping together two nights this week. You're the one raving about sex. Why don't you put your mouth where your mouth is?

DAVID. I can't, I can't. I have got to get home and work out what I'm feeling in images.

ROBERT. But what about me?

DAVID. Sorry. I don't do likenesses. Robert, I've got to express my love however I chose. Tonight I want to make love to the canvas.

ROBERT. You what? What about us?

DAVID. Look, uh, the planets are all wrong tonight. I think someone told me Mars is semisexiting Uranus.

ROBERT. I beg your pardon!

Tom comes out to see if it's clear. Runs back in, and during David's next line, motions Kevin to come out. Both drape wet towels about themselves.

DAVID. Robert. I'm not drawn to you tonight.

ROBERT. (Gets up, holds door closed, thinking David's not serious.) You can't leave me now that I'm consumed by the flames of desire.

DAVID. I'm sure you can hold your own without me.

Stalks toward the door. Tom and Kevin cross quickly, making a run for the bedroom.

DAVID. Perhaps another night, Robert.

Robert moves out of the way. David opens door, but still look's in Robert's direction. Steps half out of the door, almost backwards. Robert moves to him, opens his mouth to stop him, but can say nothing. Caught running, Tom and Kevin halt. Kevin's towel drops. Following Robert's gaze, David whirls around, gives a gut-deep yell, runs in and slams the door shut. Pounds fist on the door, three beats, then immediately opens it again.

TOM. Leaving so soon, David?

DAVID. (Stammers, life in the apartment flashing before his eyes, realizing he's been fooled for a while.) I -uh. I -uh.
Puts his hand to his mouth, gives up. Kevin laughs while tying towel around himself.

ROBERT. (Out loud.) You told me Tom never has sex!
DAVID. He doesn't! I mean -
KEVIN. You don't?

TOM. (Turns.) David. What have you been telling Robert?
DAVID. Nothing. I.
TOM. And not that lotto and lightning story again!
ROBERT. You lied about that too?

Kevin loses grip and towel again. Picks it up, laughs again.

TOM. I can see we're dispensing with all formality. Kevin, I'd like you to meet my roommates, past and present, Dave and Robert. Dave and Robert, Kevin.
ROBERT. Hello.

David glares at Tom.

David stands still. Robert pushes by him to shake his hand. This time the towel stays up.

TOM. (Softly.) That's a relief.

Takes David's extended hand, grasps it tightly. David draws back, off balance.

KEVIN. David, right?

DAVID. (Surly.) Yes. Been fucking Tom long?

ROBERT. David!

KEVIN. (Smiles.) Only about half an hour.

DAVID. Tom, I demand to know what you're doing with this man.

TOM. If you want to find out, call the real confessions line. As you see, Robert, David lives in a world of delusion. It started with his childhood in Southern California.

DAVID. (Defiant.) We moved to New York when I was ten. TOM. You see? No hope of reality gaining a foothold.

DAVID. Where did your little Kevin come from?

TOM. (Confessional pose.) I'm surprised you don't recognize him.

KEVIN. I served you at the restaurant last Saturday night.
Remember?

ROBERT. That's it.

TOM. I left my number. He called it.

KEVIN. I don't normally. He seemed so wise. (Walks over
and holds Tom around the waist.)

DAVID. You concealed this from me.

TOM. You mean, my weakness for younger men? (Draws a

breath.)

DAVID. Stop twisting my twinkle, Tom. You've been having

sex all along.

TOM. Kevin, Dave's just escaped from prison.

KEVIN. Is he dangerous?

TOM. Only to himself.

KEVIN. Do you really have a weakness for younger men?

TOM. Only you. Sorry you had to see the spectacle of a man
falling apart.

KEVIN. I've seen it before.

TOM. He's just uncomfortable around casual sex.

DAVID. Tom. You're making fun of my ignorance.

TOM. Nonsense! I take your ignorance quite seriously.

DAVID. That's it! I'm getting out of here.

TOM. Right, you were leaving. Is Robert kicking you out?

DAVID. No. I have to do my act.

TOM. Oh. That one.

DAVID. (Stares at Tom.) Why don't you keep out of this?

TOM. You'd never know it, but Dave's going for you in a big way. He's got to cancel your stamp so he can feel miserable about it. Otherwise he'd cease to produce those tortured sculptures you may have viewed in his loft.

ROBERT. (Gasps.) David? Is this true?

DAVID. (Turns to Robert.) You believe what you want to believe. I'll see you later.

(To Tom.) You had to ruin it. The one good thing. What is it? Afraid you're friend will find someone else to play in his sandbox?

That stops conversation. Strides over to the front

door.

TOM. Goodnight, David. Do stop by again soon.

DAVID. Goodnight.

ROBERT. (Sadly.) Goodnight, David.

KEVIN. Nice meeting you.

Everyone glares at him. David exits, slamming door.

Robert turns, enters his room and slams the door.

END OF ACT 1

Blackout.

Pulls the towel off him, casts it on the floor. Kevin laughs coyly and runs into the bedroom. Tom pursues, and closes the door firmly.

TOM. Then allow me to be distracted.

KEVIN. I thought I was the distraction.

I'm sorry about that distraction.

TOM. No. (Rests hands on his shoulders.)

KEVIN. Did I say something?

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Friday. One week later.

The New York Times stack has doubled. It is

disorderly, as is the apartment.

Tom is scribbling on a pad, a thesaurus on the table

next to him, and several pens. Robert enters abruptly

from his room. Looks around him.

TOM. (Whistles.) Don't you look nice.

ROBERT. Tom. I can't take it. How can you live like this?

TOM. (Takes a long scan around the place.) Like what?

ROBERT. (Badgering.) Like what? I'm talking about the

decline of civilization as we know it. Newspapers, crumpled

notes all over the floor. Dishes in the sink from the stone

age. What are we coming to?

TOM. (Rises quickly, runs to the sink.) Dishes? Watch me

make them disappear.

Runs to the sink. Grabs big bottle of white
Dishwashing liquid and holds the bottle against his
loins, stroking madly, squeezing the bottle as fluid
squirts out.

ROBERT. (Jumps to feet.) Tom! Stop it! You're squirting
all over the philodendron!

TOM. I can't stop. (Puts down product.) I've tried to, but
it feels too good. (Fake sobs, if desired.)

ROBERT. I can't talk to you. And tonight I won't have to.
TOM. Oh? (Puts down the bottle and turns abruptly.) Where
are you going?

ROBERT. Out.

TOM. Out where?

ROBERT. Just out.

TOM. May I ask with whom?

ROBERT. Just someone.

TOM. Wait a minute. I demand to know who you're seeing and
where you're going.

ROBERT. You're not my parent.

TOM. I'm acting in loco parentis here.

ROBERT. You said it.

Phone rings.

TOM. Hello. Who's calling? What? (Hands over, while saying loud enough for a caller to hear.) Someone named Jeffrey just ordered me to put you on the line. I've never been so insulted.

ROBERT. Hello, Jeffrey.

Listens. Starts to speak a couple of times, but is cut off.

ROBERT. I'll be right down. See you then. (Hangs up.) That was Jeffrey.

TOM. Deep, masculine voice. (He says imitating.) ROBERT. Isn't it? And so commanding.

TOM. Oo that voice of authority. Sends chills. What is he, FBI?

ROBERT. I don't know what he does. Jeffrey lives on the Upper East Side.

TOM. Figures. Running late?

ROBERT. He's down the street.

TOM. Calling from the corner?

ROBERT. He's in his car, on a cellular phone.

TOM. You mean they're growing them now? Gene splicing has gone too far.

ROBERT. No, it's...

TOM. (Glances.) I know!

ROBERT. Jeffrey will be waiting for me downstairs.

TOM. Imagine the luxury. Leather seats caress your butt,

squeaking as you climb in. You feel the pull of green

traffic signals far ahead. Everywhere, revealed in the

yellow streetlights, groups of blind drunk young toughs

menace clubgoers. You turn, reach out. Touch his hand. He

smiles that faint, confident smile. You check the glove

compartment. It's jammed with condoms and spermicidal

lubricant. You know the evening is full of promise.

ROBERT. Jeffrey told me to hurry. Jeffrey won't park the

car in the neighborhood and he won't go into buildings that

don't have doormen.

TOM. Then Jeffrey must own a few himself.

ROBERT. He can't stand this neighborhood.

TOM. It was good enough for his grandparents. Who is this

man? He sounds like a prison warden.

ROBERT. A friend of someone at work. The three of us had

lunch and Jeffrey and I just hit it off.

TOM. Hit what off? What about Dave? You don't return his

phone calls.

ROBERT. I decided that David doesn't have as much to offer as Jeffrey.

TOM. If you can't get a hard-on get a gold card.

ROBERT. This man's got both.

TOM. How would you know?

ROBERT. I sat next to him at lunch! He paid the check.

TOM. You slattern! You trollop! You yanked his yo-yo under

a power lunch.

ROBERT. It was just a brief caress at a friendly meeting.

TOM. Ah, yes. The art of the feel. I know it well.

ROBERT. Anything that gets me out of this roach motel for

the night.

TOM. All right, Robert. If this man leaves you in the

gutter tonight, don't call me collect. I'm leaving the

answering machine on.

ROBERT. Think of it. A night without subways and kamikaze

cab rides. Elegant dining in restaurants with no decor at

all. I could get used to it.

TOM. Oh God! A monster is born.

ROBERT. So long, Tom.

Opens door. Jumps back. Screams. David enters.

ROBERT. David! (Trying to recover.) How did you get in?

DAVID. (Improvising.) A neighbor. You didn't call me. Where are you going?

ROBERT. I - uh. Nowhere. I can't talk to you now, Dave.

DAVID. There's some serious-looking car outside the building. Watch out. Looks like a drug deal or a developer. TOM. Or both!

Phone rings. Robert answers it.

ROBERT. Hello. Sorry. No, I wouldn't want you to do that. Okay. (Hangs up, turns, zombie-like.) David, I thought it over, and I can't see you anymore. You've got to realize; we're just two different people.

DAVID. Were you expecting to find a lost identical twin? ROBERT. David, I'd love to argue, but I've got to go.

Gathers himself and starts to stalk out.

TOM. Remember, Robert. No sex in cars without your retreads!

Robert freezes, continues out, slams door.

DAVID. Do you mean?

TOM. David. He's under the spell of some sinister man named Jeffrey, and his illusion-mongering world of high gloss and fast living.

Pulls up a chair backwards, sits.

DAVID. How could I ever hope to seduce Robert away from such glamor? I don't stand a chance.

TOM. You got that right! Give him up. He's lost to us. Rip up those streets and find someone new.

DAVID. But there's no one out there like him. TOM. Are you serious?

Fade, and then return to scene.

Two shot glasses and two beer bottles have appeared. A bottle of something half-empty. A short time has elapsed. Tom has his papers in a folder on the table.

TOM. Let me read you a bit of my paper, Dave. DAVID. Could you spare me?

TOM. I want to prove something.

DAVID. Go ahead.

David produces a tiny paper bag from a pocket. In it are peanuts which he will eat during the talk.

TOM. Male sexuality is vastly informed by gender-defined behavior.

DAVID. Not this shit again.

TOM. Men are supposed to be rational beings - scientists,

accountants and diplomats. They must control their emotions.

David cracks a nut.

TOM. Where did you get those?

DAVID. Stole them from a bar.

TOM. No shame.

DAVID. None.

TOM. Where was I? Oh yes. Men must be in control their

emotions. Of course they never are. You see, sex is fraught

with unruly desires, absurd betrayals, vicissitudes on every

hand. Lest we succumb, we have to transcribe sex into a

series of acts. Sensation takes over emotion, performance

overrides real contact. We inscribe ledgers itemizing gains

and losses. This one was obtained, that one missed. This

action reciprocated, that was not. The sexual record is kept

carefully.

Love is a sign of weakness, sexual conquest a proof of strength. We reduce the fertility of the garden to the sterility of the laboratory. We strip away all mystery. Refine our pleasure through an industrial process.

We become shadows of ourselves. Fade into an oblivion of our own design. Never knowing ourselves, we never find each other. Why? Because we're scared.

David cracks another nut.

DAVID. Why don't you come out and say that men are not to be trusted?

TOM. Because it wouldn't have the same (Raises a fist and quickly slams the bag of nuts.) Impact.

DAVID. Hey. You smashed my nuts.

TOM. I had to. I'm saving you from the quicksand of love. (Gets up.) Don't let it pull you under. You can't change

Robert. In six months he'll be subscribing to New York Magazine and touring condos: Note the spacious modern

kitchen. Every convenience at your fingertips. Microwave, garbage disposal, conscience disposal. Here we have the

bathroom. Comes equipped with shower massage and ego

message. Robert wants a boyfriend he can bring the newspaper and baguettes home to on Sunday morning. And that ain't you. DAVID. All I know is that I've lost him utterly, and now I live in debasement.

TOM. No. The super lives in debasement. We live on the fourth floor. Robert doesn't have the tortured inner lives we cultivate. Find some nice hostile artist. Carry on an affair devoid of sentimentality, and the fights over upholstery and carpeting cohabitation brings. You'll buy an old warehouse in some decaying city and move in.

DAVID. I feel wrung out and hung up to dry. I wanted someone different. I want Robert.

TOM. You think Robert's hidden self will emerge like a butterfly from its chrysalis and float to the clouds? That boy's shoes are nailed to the floor. His body walks among us, but his soul is in a mall - somewhere in Suburbia.

Pause.

DAVID. Suburbia?

TOM. Yes, suburbia!

They start banging on things, low, then settle into a rhythm.

TOM and DAVID. (Chanting, building). Suh Suh Burbia.

Continue to bang, speeding the rhythm, begin to recite.

TOM and DAVID. (Together.) Oh Suburbia.

DAVID. Oh nation of sleepwalkers.

TOM. Oh land of a billion medicine cabinets.

DAVID. Where pretty pills fill the void behind the mirror!

TOM. Where news replaces nightmare.

DAVID. Where men ride lawn mowers like cowboys on the range.

TOM. And children are thrown into fluorescent dungeons,

never to see the light of day.

DAVID and TOM. Oh Suburbia. Split-level Utopia. Great

wonder of the Western World.

They go back to the chant, finish with some improvised

Central Park rhythms.

DAVID. Why can't I just have fun, Tom?

TOM. You have nothing in common.

DAVID. Aside from that?

TOM. Can't you see that you're brainwashed by the love

ethic? Look around you:

You Are the Absolute Onliest One songs ooze like goo from every radio. Magazines explode from the racks in a hail of rice, cake icing and lace from The Wedding. Romance is the fly paper we're all stuck on. Our little legs flail about helplessly.

DAVID. What about that little Kevin fellow? Aren't you seeing him?

TOM. He's got some lover in California.

DAVID. Don't they all?

TOM. AT&T couldn't be happier.

DAVID. Why do all the single men in New York say they have lovers in California?

TOM. Because they're so much more convenient than real ones. They can't wake you up snoring. No stress about which

restaurant to go to. When friends question your commitment, you show them the phone bill. Another sky, another ocean. A man of mythic stature wedged between the two. Like old

radio, imagination clouds your brain. Why do you think phone sex ads fill pages? You say you're blond-haired, blue-eyed, six and a half feet tall with a ten-inch cock and suddenly

you are. You know, at the rates they charge, you could buy sex cheaper!

DAVID. Then how do you have a love affair in the same city?
TOM. It's just like riding a unicycle. Once you learn, you
never forget.

DAVID. But I can't ride a unicycle.

TOM. Tough break.

DAVID. What's wrong with wanting commitment?

TOM. Nothing, if you're criminally insane. (Pause.) Dave,
it's easier to reveal your soul to someone you'll never see
again. (Long pause.)

DAVID. But isn't it more mature to love one person?

TOM. No, but if it makes you feel better, lie to yourself.
Find your dream man. Stop time, while outside the globe
warms, the ice caps melt and the Atlantic Ocean sweeps across
the streets.

If some people want to be together should the rest of us have
to feel lonely, scared, somehow less human? The issue is

not supposed to be with whom, but how safely. At first I had
trouble equating rules with fun. Some bad High School
experiences, you know.

DAVID. Robert told me he's only known safe sex.

TOM. Sex always changes - who with, what with, how and how often. We're more in control of the changes this time. We have to be. You and I adapt. We kick the unwanted third party out of our beds.

When I was a kid, I loved nature programs. I loved the world beneath the ocean. I admired the peaceful oysters.

DAVID. I liked the giant squid.

TOM. You would. I sometimes think we are like them, the

oysters.

DAVID. You're losing your mind, Tom.

You know, studies show that even in small doses academia destroys brain cells and may cause genetic damage.

TOM. Genetic damage? I'll try not to pass that along.

Dave, imagine with me: The tiny tireless oyster strives perpetually to take the sand and grit from the nethermost of reaches and create lustrous, gleaming orbs of wonder.

DAVID. Only to give its life for that talent.

TOM. As a people we have created such beauty against the

anguish of a world that punished our love. Now it seems the

world simply gathers our works, our words, our songs and

dances. Strings them together like beads for its own

adornment. Hoards our works as treasure, denying us our

history, our culture. Then we ourselves are cast aside, used and broken in mind and body. (Cups his hand, extends it during the next sentence.) We are left scattered along a rocky shore, shells forever holding the radiance of the great mother of pearl.

Long pause. Phone rings.

TOM. Hello. Yes it is. No. I couldn't forget you if I tried. And I have tried. What are you calling for? I thought we settled all that. You are? You did. When? Where are you living? Where are you calling from? There, now? I don't know if I can.

(Hand over the mouthpiece.) What am I doing? What am I doing?

What? Yeah. Dave's here. You remember Dave. No he doesn't still live here. It's complicated. A half hour? Make it 45. See you then. Bye.

DAVID. What was that about?
TOM. You remember Michael?
DAVID. Not the Married Man?

TOM. No. The Separated Man.

DAVID. Sounds like a horror movie. The Separated Man. See it in 3-D.

TOM. Now he's divorced.

DAVID. And back in one piece, I hope. (Tom glares at him.) You dropped him, don't forget.

TOM. I had to. He was perplexed about which sex he preferred.

DAVID. Oh that!

TOM. Tossed about on unsteady seas of desire, he tacked this way and that in the changing winds. You know, I've never known a bisexual man that didn't hide behind that hetero mask when it served the purpose.

DAVID. He sure served your purpose. Is he now what the papers would call an admitted homosexual?

TOM. Yes, and I can't wait to see the difference. I loved Michael. His lover in California just turned out to be a wife in New Jersey.

DAVID. If you've got to draw the line somewhere, it might as well be New Jersey.

SCENE 2

Late Friday night.

Tom and Michael against plain black wall. The two have

drinks.

TOM. Hello Michael.

MICHAEL. Oh, hi, Tom. (Hugs him around the shoulders,

pulling him in.)

TOM. Do you come here often?

MICHAEL. No. Never. In fact I'm not here now.

TOM. Have you decided on a sexuality, sir, or would you like another minute?

MICHAEL. I've decided to have one.

TOM. Why in the world would you go for boys now?

MICHAEL. (Head back.) Like I had a choice. They just do

things to me I can't put my finger on.

TOM. You might put it that way.

MICHAEL. And I don't care who knows it. I tried substitutes

but they just didn't hit my G spot.

TOM. Michael, snap out of it.

MICHAEL. The rolling ocean of pleasure swept me out to sea.

Now I want everything!

TOM. (Raising himself to full height.) Then look no

further.

MICHAEL. My hero has come home to his man.

TOM. (Deep voice) Yes, but I've left part of myself behind

on the battlefield.

MICHAEL. You don't mean?

TOM. Yes. I don't know how to tell you this. I - (Sobs,

looking down.) I broke a nail in combat.

MICHAEL. That's all right. I'll go on loving you even if

you're not a whole man. We'll fix you up with some press-ons

and no one will ever know our secret.

TOM. (Another voice.) Michael? Is that you? It's been

years!

Tom embraces him.

MICHAEL. (Gravel voice.) What are you doing salivating all

over me? You disgusting queer. Can't you see I'm a man? A

real man? I've drove more trucks and pumped more women than

you can imagine. I've brawled and spat and cheated at poker

with the meanest of them. Some mornings I wake up under pool

tables in saloons. Never know how I got there. You think

I'd leave that life of action to go skipping through some

daisy field with the likes of you?

TOM. Would you?

MICHAEL. Hell, why not!

They kiss briefly.

TOM. What am I doing going back to you?

MICHAEL. I'll break your heart.

TOM. At least I'd know it was there.

MICHAEL. You've got something else going?

TOM. Nothing I can't cancel.

MICHAEL. Then let's try it out again.

TOM. No deposit, no return?

MICHAEL. There's nowhere to return to. I've blown up the

bridge.

TOM. The George Washington?

MICHAEL. Right. I'm in a Nueva York state of mind.

TOM. And you come running to me, the only guy you know in

town. You think I don't know what you're up to?

MICHAEL. I'll be straight with you.

TOM. Don't. Please don't.

MICHAEL. Listen. I'm not ready for another marriage of any

sort. Not yet anyway. I want to get to know you.

TOM. Don't forget I told you to get lost.

MICHAEL. I'd never be the happily divorced man you see before you if it wasn't for that act of kind brutality. For months after that I stared deep into the yawning void. TOM. That void doesn't get much sleep. What if I throw you back into it?

MICHAEL. Then I'll pick you up. (Does so.) And shake you till you come to your senses. (Does, then puts him on his feet.)

TOM. You're not afraid this time?

MICHAEL. I'm scared as hell. What do you think?

TOM. You were fun to be with.

MICHAEL. I'll be even better.

TOM. I'll believe it when I see it.

MICHAEL. You didn't believe it when you saw it the first time.

TOM. Really? I've forgotten.

MICHAEL. Then let's go refresh our memories.

TOM. You must go home alone a lot from here.

SCENE 3

Still later that night.

Robert enters the apartment, tries to make his way in the dark. Bumps into table. He enters his room, without turning on the light. He starts to undress, neatly placing pants and shirt on a chair. Gets into bed. Shouts out. Jumps up. Turns on lamp.

ROBERT. Dave. Hey, wake up.

DAVID. (Groggy.) Robert.

ROBERT. What are you doing here?

DAVID. Sleeping. What are you doing here?

ROBERT. This is my room. I live here.

DAVID. Robert. Get used to it. I'm in your life.

ROBERT. You're in my bed and I want you out.

DAVID. You can't turn me on and off like television.

ROBERT. Dave. Get out of my bed, get out of my room, get out of my life.

David sits up, draws back covers. Robert reacts, checks himself.

DAVID. (Coyly.) If you want. Would you just hand me my little underthing? It's hanging on your doorknob.

ROBERT. Get your slimy jock yourself.

Coolly, David gets up, moves slowly, deliberately past Robert, picks up garment and during the following will put it on, casually, unhurriedly. Robert watches, pretending not to watch.

DAVID. Robert, roll down the smoke gray window of your stretch limo and listen. I miss you. I love you.

ROBERT. You walked out.

DAVID. I was scared. I don't usually not sleep with someone the first night, let alone twice. I wasn't prepared for that depth of intimacy.

ROBERT. Dave. Go home and fuck your art. Spurt your sperm on canvas, not on me.

DAVID. How graphic of you! (Quick reflection.) Does this mean you won't come to my art opening tomorrow night? ROBERT. You can't be serious. The only art is on the price tag. Who cares what anything looks like?

DAVID. (Feelings hurt.) Were you born this stupid or did you have to take a course?

ROBERT. I can't talk to you.

DAVID. You don't have to feel anything for me. I'm on this earth to amuse you. I become smaller and smaller until I fade away - a dot on a screen. You slide through with nothing to hold you, like some giant neutrino. You don't fool me. I know your charge and I know what excites it. ROBERT. If this is all magnetism, then imagine I'm no longer drawn to your pole, however opposite it may seem. DAVID. You're afraid of being possessed by spirits like passion and love. You stand there and pretend you can ignore the moonlight caressing my shadowy form. Deny your desire to do the same. ROBERT. David. I'm not in love with you. DAVID. I don't want forever. I just want you. ROBERT. I'm seeing someone else. DAVID. I can take a little infidelity. What do I care if you jack your date's body in his luxury car? He's got people to clean the leather of your climactic residue. ROBERT. We never got that far. His deeper went off. DAVID. I'm sure it did. The hazards of dating significant men. I wonder if his dick's as big as his bankroll. ROBERT. I wouldn't know. I haven't seen both. DAVID. Robert. You've become as cold as freon. ROBERT. Perhaps I always was. It just took you to bring it out.

David places Robert on the bed, releasing him. He stands over him. The two are motionless. Then David moves to pin him almost as in fake wrestling. Holds him by the shoulders, pushes against him, sitting up. The bed should be extremely bouncy. Robert easily frees himself, David giving in against pressure, trying another hold. The wrestling turns into a grappling for holds that are broken until the situation reverses,

DAVID. Cartoon time.

ROBERT. David! (David is assertive, but not violent. There is a sense of resolve.) What do you think you're doing?

picks him up.)

DAVID. Is it? (Holds Robert with both arms below the waist,

ROBERT. That's what growing up is all about.

DAVID. Robert. How can you abandon love and fun?

ROBERT. Huh?

drag you into the depths of moral turpentine.

DAVID. You treat me like some depraved painter trying to

clothes on.

demands and suck your tumescent, throbbing cock? Get your

ROBERT. You think I care? That I'll give in to your lustful

Robert pushes him back.)

DAVID. Stop. Robert, I - . (Reaches out to hold him,

Robert at last pinning David. This all should be exaggerated, playful.

ROBERT. (Spits out.) You're pathological.

DAVID. Big words, I'm scared.

ROBERT. (Lets out an angst-ridden cry.) David. Please take your moonlit body and its obsessive desires out of here!

DAVID. Whatever you say. I think that I can feel your steel resolve, and I don't think I have the power to soften it.

Grasps gently, yet firmly. Robert gasps primally. Grasps back.

ROBERT. David. You realize. This doesn't mean - DAVID. - I know.

They kiss. They hold each other tight, passionately.

Lights to black.

SCENE 4

Saturday, early light of morning.

David sits at the kitchen table. He has a candle lit. He takes and opens a condom package, gradually unrolls it and looks at it. Then he blows it up like a

balloon, as large as possible. Ties it, bats it about the room, pursuing it. Finally, it hits the candle, where it pops.

He smiles.

Lights down.

SCENE 5

That night.

Tom and Michael enter. The dishes are done. The papers are gone. Things are in relatively good order.

MICHAEL. Are we alone?

TOM. Yes. It's Dave's art opening. Then they have a party at a very bored young woman's house. I'm avoiding it.

MICHAEL. Can we play?

TOM. Why not?

MICHAEL. Are you ready for it?

TOM. I'm ready. (Starts to unbutton his shirt, it will remain open.) Come on. Right here. Right now.

MICHAEL. Okay. Come on baby.

Tom, moving dancer-like, lies back on kitchen table. The floor may substitute if the table is not solidly built. In mock porn poses, Michael moves to him, holds Tom's legs in the air and moves them up and down in those spasmodic motions so common to the genre, if not real life. They remain fully clothed.

TOM. UH UH OH OH. Give it to me. Faster. More. Harder. Oh. Oh.

MICHAEL. Oh yeah. Yeah. You like that, don't you?

TOM. Oh. Oh. Oh. Let me think about it.

Just then enter David and Robert, unnoticed, while the action progresses. David slams the door. The moment

broken, Michael and Tom look up. Tom quizzically
enjoying it, Michael deeply embarrassed. David leers.
Strikingly, Robert's hair is spiked haphazardly. He
sports disheveled oversized clothing -- apparently
David's.

DAVID. Hi Tom.

TOM. Oh hi David.

DAVID. Trying out for the Olympics?

TOM. Yeah. A new demonstration sport. I believe you know

Michael. Michael, my former and present roommates, who seem
to be here all the time, Dave and Robert.

MICHAEL. (Adjusting his clothes.) Hi. (Extends hand.)
ROBERT. (Grasps hand.) Hi.

Michael looks down at his hand, feels residue on his
fingers, instinctively shakes it off. Bewildered.
Tom gets up.

DAVID. Hi, Michael. How's the wife?

ROBERT. Tasteless, Dave.

TOM. (Sensing something is wrong.) Uh. Let's leave you two
love primates alone. Come on, Michael, I think we've
practiced enough. (To David.) The table's free. (Or floor.)

They run inside.

Robert stalks into the bathroom and gets a towel.

David goes to refrigerator, gets out jar drinks from it without a thought, caps it, returns it to refrigerator.

Robert walks out toweling off his hair. David paces

into Robert's room. Robert gets jar of water out of

refrigerator. Looks furtively, drinks from the jar,

caps it and returns it to refrigerator. David comes

back.

DAVID. So. Robert. What did you think of my show?

Important, wasn't it?

ROBERT. Are you crazy?

DAVID. No. Come on. What did you think?

ROBERT. (Furious, through clenched teeth.) The people were

different.

DAVID. I mean the works themselves! Did they move you?

ROBERT. Oh. Let me see. You mean the curved stone altar

with the heart-shaped box of candy?

DAVID. Aztec Valentine?

ROBERT. You dare compare love with human sacrifice!

DAVID. Is there a difference? The Aztecs cut live hearts out of people and offered them, still beating, to the sun god. What could be more romantic? The English of the same age used to hack off people's heads and stick them on posts. Call me a sentimental fool, but I'd rather make my exit on the top of a pyramid.

ROBERT. It just isn't humane.

DAVID. The electric chair is?

ROBERT. That's not a religion.

DAVID. Oh no?

ROBERT. And it doesn't happen every day.

DAVID. I suppose we are tapering off.

ROBERT. And what about the life size wedding cake figures?

DAVID. Keith and Suzy?

ROBERT. Why were their heads missing? Were you making fun of marriage?

DAVID. No, cake decoration. Stop reading into things.

Can't we be superficial for one evening?

ROBERT. Oh yeah? What was I supposed to not read into the

old bathtub filled with sand?

DAVID. Bath time? What about it?

ROBERT. Why the bronze feet sticking out of the sand?

DAVID. Why the feet? You might as well ask: Why the toy

boat? Why the syringes? Who knows where it comes from?

Maybe a headline on a check out rack at the supermarket. Why question inspiration?

ROBERT. You're so morbid!

DAVID. Morbid! The country builds hydrogen bombs and you call me morbid! You've got no sense of proportion.

ROBERT. David. I mean I just had no idea. When you said you were an artist I thought, I don't know what I thought.

Form, shape, splashes of nonrepresentational color. I wasn't ready for a machine shooting golf balls at me when I walked in the door.

DAVID. There's a plexiglass wall. You jump, then you laugh. All right, Robert. You can stop now. I know what this is all about. You're still angry about the trap door.

ROBERT. I fell through it! You want me to thank you? DAVID. There were signs posted.

ROBERT. I couldn't see them, I was walking backwards for a photograph.

DAVID. It's not like your fall wasn't cushioned. There was a kid's pool five feet below.

ROBERT. It was filled with jello!

DAVID. I thought you liked strawberry.

ROBERT. You're out of your mind. You could have killed me. What kind of art is that supposed to be?

DAVID. Surprise art! That was only there for one night. We had to get it catered. I hoped someone would find it. I was so proud of you.

ROBERT. Hold on! Your friend Armando told me to back up. DAVID. How else was he going to get your picture?

ROBERT. In a pink pool of congealed chemicals?

DAVID. Can he help it? He wants to go into advertising.

That shot will look great in his portfolio. Sign his

release.

ROBERT. I will not.

DAVID. Armando was right. I should have used toothpaste.

ROBERT. I'm not talking about the medium!

DAVID. I had towels ready to rub your slippery body dry.

ROBERT. You set me up for that. Didn't you?

DAVID. You've been so sad lately.

ROBERT. (Enraged.) I was mortified.

DAVID. Robert, you've got to let go a little. It's all part

of the creative process.

ROBERT. (Grabs him by the shoulders and shakes him.)

I don't need your creative process. I don't need anyone's

creative process. You get that?

DAVID. (Puts hands together, raises arms and pushes away

against Robert's forearms. Robert drops his arms.) You

needed something to pull you out of your smug little

attitude.

ROBERT. I needed someone to pull me out of the jello.

DAVID. Wasn't I right there with the umbrella?

ROBERT. It broke!

DAVID. Right. Hold me responsible for a three dollar

umbrella.

ROBERT. David, I just think it might be better if we stopped

seeing each other for a while. You're not serious enough.

DAVID. Not serious? How can you say that? I turned you

into Art for a Night. Now everyone wants to know who you

are. Come on, let's go to the party.

ROBERT. David, we met each other by coincidence.

DAVID. You'd rather find someone in the personals?

How would yours read? Don't tell me. I've got it.

Gay male early 20's. Likes music, theater, travel and ball

twisting. Seeks other for fatuous chatter and possible long

term insipid relationship. Send photo, phone and copy of

latest bank statement. No one out of the ordinary, please.

ROBERT. And yours?

Gay artist, late twenties. Seeks other for all night parties, after hours clubs, deep conversations about nothing, and mutual alienation. Substance abuse encouraged.

DAVID. That's hitting above the neckline!

ROBERT. David, we're just so wrong for each other.

DAVID. How can you say that! We go together like tornadoes and trailer parks! Like virgins and volcanoes!

ROBERT. Can't you see? It's a destiny of disaster.

DAVID. I tried to make an appointment with destiny, but they were booked solid. Robert, whoever said that love was

supposed to feel good? It's sweet and sticky, like

strawberry gelatin. Once you fall in, it's hard to get out.

ROBERT. David, I'm not one of your art objects, and I'm not

a fly in amber. I don't want to be twisted, broken, or glued

into an assemblage.

DAVID. You already are. In my work, you see a mirror you'd

rather not look into. My art is to be felt, not understood.

ROBERT. My life has nothing to do with art.

DAVID. So I've noticed.

ROBERT. I don't see what you're doing.

DAVID. That from a man who fell off the soy bean truck from God's Country?

ROBERT. You're so damned elitist. No one's any good unless they've lived the same life you have - gone to the right parties, talked with the same people. You make all the rules and you play by none yourself.

DAVID. You never cared about what I create, about who I am. ROBERT. I thought, since your work was profitable, it must be of some value. I was so wrong.

DAVID. Is that all you care about?

ROBERT. That's all that I am required to care about. No

one's going to care about me. Why do I have to waste my time on you? I'm better off alone.

DAVID. Is that the way it is? You don't give a fuck about anyone but yourself?

ROBERT. You're so much better?

DAVID. Yes I am! You make me chase you down. Think men

will always want you. Let me tell you something. Real love in this city is harder to find than a spare token on Friday. ROBERT. Then why don't you leave and go back to the party?

People want you there.

The two freeze.

DAVID. Is that it?

ROBERT. David, I'm not saying I never want to see you again.

only almost never.

DAVID. I never let people get this close. Now I remember why.

David turns and walks out the door. Robert pursues.

ROBERT. David! Come back.

David slams the door. Robert waits a long moment, frantic, then runs out after him.

Fade.

The sound of gentle creaking from Tom's room.

TOM. Ah, these pressures of the flesh.

Thunder, lightning. Rain.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

SCENE 1

Continuation of time from the Second Act.

A white wall lit in colors. House rife of some sort
plays endlessly, to comic effect.

ROBERT. Hello.

DAVID. Hello.

ROBERT. Why did you come here?

DAVID. Why does anyone come here? We lose ourselves to find

each other. Hold up walls gracefully. Stalk down broken

streets. Our eyes meet, glimmer and fade into the night.

ROBERT. And if the eyes peer too deep into your soul, you

run?

DAVID. I run all the time. No one ever followed me before.

Or if they did they never found me.

ROBERT. You run out on a guy before he has the chance to do it first.

DAVID. You can't hold onto me. No man has, and no man will.

ROBERT. No man's tried. Right?

DAVID. They've tried. The guys I come across here, and

wherever else, I let go after nights of passion and sweat.

What more could they expect? What else do you want?

ROBERT. Something like the truth.

DAVID. The truth? What decade are you thinking in? What

century? I don't let anyone know enough to do damage. I

disarm anyone who tries, penetrate his inner thoughts, then

let him fall from me into the depths, clutching his genitalia

in despair.

ROBERT. Listen, Dave. The city dump's on Staten Island. I

don't need your refuse.

DAVID. You don't believe me?

ROBERT. Not a word. Get over here.

DAVID. But you're wet.

ROBERT. So are you. That's the point.

They embrace timidly. They laugh, hold each other

closer, then tightly, desperately.

DAVID. Then you don't hate my work!

ROBERT. Uh. I definitely don't hate you.

DAVID. I'll settle for that.

They stare into each others eyes. Smile ironically.

DAVID. I never wanted to lose you.

ROBERT. I never wanted to be found.

DAVID. Never thought of that. (Grasps his hand.)

You can't escape me now.

ROBERT. I could if I wanted to. I just don't want to, yet.

DAVID. I feel rainwater trickling down my back. So cold.

ROBERT. You'll feel more than that when I get through with

You.

Pause. Robert seems to draw back without recoiling.

DAVID. Robert. We can do so many things together.

Everyone will look and say: there they go - the creative and the pragmatic walking arm in arm. The millennium is at hand.

ROBERT. Don't register the china pattern.

DAVID. Come on. I'm not that serious.

ROBERT. I'm moving out of Tom's next weekend.

DAVID. What?

ROBERT. I arranged it all last week. I wasn't talking to you. Tom was crittiquing me hourly. It's like I'm a case study to him.

DAVID. He loves you, really. And so do I.

They entwine legs and arms a bit. A dangerous in public look.

DAVID. Robert, stay with Tom. Don't leave us.

ROBERT. (Confused.) With the noise in back? And Tom in general? I like a sense of order.

DAVID. Uh oh. That means a new boyfriend.

ROBERT. I'm not leaving the neighborhood. I'm getting to like it. It grows on you.

DAVID. Like moss on a rock.

ROBERT. Come on, Dave. Don't be like this. Let's skip this place, go back and fuck our brains loose.

DAVID. Oo yeah. Oo baby. If you're going, I want to get all the passion I can cram in right now.

ROBERT. (Smiles.) You do?

DAVID. I will. After the party.

ROBERT. Fuck the party.

DAVID. I have to go. Right after that, anything you want.

ROBERT. I don't know if we have time.

DAVID. We've got all the time we need.

They move off quickly.

SCENE 2

Late morning.

A different color of wall, perhaps brick, but same
restaurant look as in Act 1.

TOM. (Drawing on a napkin.) I feel groggy and satisfied.
MICHAEL. A beautiful day.

DAVID. Yeah. We all fucked wildly.
TOM. Two nights in a row.

MICHAEL. We made more noise.

DAVID. We didn't stop 'till sunrise.
MICHAEL. Oh yeah? We reached simultaneous orgasm!

DAVID. We do that all the time.

TOM. Gentlemen. Put away the tape measures. How can we
compare bananas and tangerines? Sex is a deep personal

experience one person shares with another, and another, and

another.

DAVID. Sure Tom.

TOM. Do we all want coffee?

MICHAEL. They have decaf here?

TOM. (Shudders.) Coffee without caffeine is an oxymoron.

ROBERT. All I want is a menu.

TOM. Ah brunch. Gay man's greatest contribution to Western

civilization, ranking above the steam engine.

DAVID. Yes. I believe this is a day observed with prayer

and athletic sweat in many places. Right, Michael, our

ambassador from Lawn Land?

MICHAEL. In the county I used to live in in New Jersey, they

just built a church around a huge indoor track, for jog-

through worship.

DAVID. Oh yeah? What denomination?

MICHAEL. They're multidenominational. Tens, twenties,

fifties, hundreds. They'll take any denomination you got.

David smiles, now won over.

ROBERT. Did they paint this place?

DAVID. No, dear. We're in a different restaurant.

ROBERT. Then how come we have the same waiter?

TOM. We do? Oh no, not today! I have to run. I have to
hide. (Out loud, throwing his pen under the table.) I think
I dropped my pen. Order for me, Mike. (Ducks under the
table.)
DAVID. (David, enjoying the situation, grabs him by the
collar and drags him back to his seat. Under his breath.)
Pull yourself together, Tom! It's only one of the most
awkward moments of your life.

KEVIN. (Strides to table.) Hi Tom. Good to see you again.
TOM. Smile frozen. Oh hi there Kevin. How are you?

Grips his hand, shakes leadenly.

KEVIN. I'm really good. You know, I'm moving to California.
TOM. Yeah, it's a race to see which city crumbles first. At
least if a bridge falls on you out there, there's a natural
cause.

KEVIN. I figure they'll never solve the subway problem,
here.

DAVID. Pour cement. I'll mix it.

TOM. So good to run into you before you go.

KEVIN. I was wondering what happened to you. I left a
couple of messages on your machine. (Looks at Michael.)
I'll be back again. Does everyone want coffee?

DAVID and ROBERT. (In turns.) Yeah.

MICHAEL. Decaf.

KEVIN. We don't have decaf.

TOM. Coffee for everyone I guess.

DAVID. Look out for yourself.

KEVIN. I try to. (He exits.)

MICHAEL. (Puzzled, not angry.) Excuse me a moment. (Goes.)

ROBERT. Tom, you dropped him like that?

TOM. I had to let him drift off, you know.

ROBERT. You cad. He liked you.

TOM. People are drawn together for a while, then break like

balls on a pool table.

DAVID. You are a problem child. Go talk to him.

TOM. You think I should?

DAVID. Yeah. He deserves some kind word.

Tom goes over, Kevin moves in and the two meet, stroll

off together. David takes out a dollar bill and uncaps

Tom's pen. David leans over, scribbles in the margins

of the bill, rounding corners while talking.

ROBERT. What are you doing?

DAVID. Leaving a tip.

ROBERT. We haven't eaten yet.

DAVID. It isn't that kind of tip.

ROBERT. Dear Kevin. Don't move out to chase some guy. If this is where you should be, stay and find what you need around you. - David.

I can't help thinking that note's for me.

David turns to him and smiles, folding the bill neatly in quarters.

SCENE 3

Moving day, the next Sunday.

DAVID. It's his last day. I might never see him again. I had to say goodbye. Is the mover here?

TOM. (Takes a packet of tissues from a pocket. Hands David one, and pockets the packet.) They did all that last night. That mover could move me anytime. There wasn't much.

Robert's inside packing his tiny little valise. It's a pathetic sight. Spare yourself.

DAVID. I'm still so sad.

TOM. He's not leaving you. Only me.

DAVID. Don't bet on it. Once he's gone, he's gone. You know, Tom, you're an extremely difficult man.

TOM. You sure that's all it is?

DAVID. What else?

TOM. That's a relief. I thought there was something wrong with me.

DAVID. Get this Michael fellow to move in.

TOM. We're nowhere near that! Problem with you Dave, is you want results. Slap paint on it. Glue one thing to another. Artists!

Tom has some glasses out. Opens a bottle of seltzer too fast, so that it foams over.

MICHAEL. (Enters. Looks around.) Hey Tom, you came too soon.

TOM. Oh yeah?

Shakes the bottle and aims it at Michael. Michael, protesting, runs into the bathroom. Turns sharply and pours for Dave. The phone rings. Michael and David listen in.

TOM. Hello? Yes, this is gay academician seeking roommate. What? Will I live with snakes? I have in the past. What type? Are anacondas quiet? Aren't they dangerous? Aren't they liable to sneak up on you while you're asleep, strangle you and swallow you whole? Uh-huh. Do the mice have to be white, or can they be any color? Uh-huh! Yes, I agree. Male erotic dance is gaining in respectability. Does the snake like performing? Where do you work? Oh. That's too bad. And they think it was arson? I see. Since then, how have you been keeping the snake in mice, so to speak? ... Uh. Hello? Hello? Are you there? Hello? (Turns to David.) I think he hung up.

DAVID. Too bad, he sounded amusing.

TOM. I see you're bouncing back!

DAVID. Why not? Either this works out, or it doesn't. Who knows how long we ever have each other. Only perfume bottles can speak in absolutes. We humans ride a twisting sine wave rollercoaster. Hold on as tight as we can through the curves. Scream when we have to.

Door opens and Robert steps out. His room, now illuminated, is bare. As he found it. David, playing at cheeriness, lets his expression fall a bit.

ROBERT. Hi, David.

DAVID. Hello, Robert. (Long pause. David indicates his case.) Going?

ROBERT. You didn't have to come.

DAVID. I had to.

ROBERT. I'll keep in touch.

DAVID. Don't promise anything.

ROBERT. I mean it. Why wouldn't I?

Awkward silence. Michael goes back into bedroom.

TOM. Are you going or aren't you?

DAVID. Tom!

TOM. I can't stand needless sentiment.

ROBERT. Yeah. I have to go. Hey, we'll go out to eat during the week. Wait, no. I think I'm booked.

Next weekend, though.

DAVID. Yeah, next weekend. Give us a call.

ROBERT. I will. I - .

Drops his suitcase. Moves over and hugs David. David and Robert kiss for a while then break.

DAVID. I'll miss you.

ROBERT. I will too.

DAVID. Tom, get over here.

Tom smirks, throws down his paper and the three hug for a moment. They break all at once. Robert picks up his case, slings a strap over a shoulder.

ROBERT. Good bye.

DAVID. Goodbye Robert.

Robert walks to and opens front door.

TOM. Watch out for yourself.

ROBERT. Thanks. I will.

Eye contact with David, then closes the door. David collapses in the chair across from Tom. The two drink seltzer.

DAVID. So, you get the guy and I hit the canvas.

TOM. Give it time.

DAVID. I wish I could believe in time.

TOM. Start looking for another therapist to send over the

edge.

DAVID. I left a few messages, but none of them called me back.

TOM. Word like that gets around.

DAVID. You think so?

TOM. I'm surprised Oprah hasn't done you as a topic.

The phone rings.

TOM. Hello? Yes, this is gay academician seeking agreeable, politically aware roommate.

Michael runs out of the bathroom, back into the

bedroom.

Uh-huh? You could tell me about yourself. Your dreams, your aspirations, how much you're willing to pay. Yes...

The buzzer sounds.

DAVID. (Jumps up.) I'll get it.

Opens the front door.

DAVID. (Sees it's Robert.) Oh hi! Come on in. Did you forget something?

Robert re-enters.

ROBERT. Yeah. This is Apartment 4D?

DAVID. It is.

ROBERT. I heard you were looking for a roommate.

DAVID. Ah, yes. You'll have to speak to the man over there.

TOM. (On the phone.) Uh, um... (Looks up, sees the two

looking deeply into each others eyes.) Hold on! I think the

room has just been taken.

Tom hangs up the phone assertively.

Robert and David embrace in a big way. They kiss.

Michael comes out again. Tom puts his arms up and

encircles him around the waist. Michael reaches to

return the embrace.

CURTAIN