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Echoes of the Past: A New Play

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Echoes of the Past: A New Play

by

Cayson Miles

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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ABSTRACT

My project is a new play titled *Echoes of the Past*. In this two-act full length play, two different diseases are explored: the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The show follows a trio of characters from each time period, and as the play progresses, the time periods begin to intersect, and the characters begin to interact with one another. I chose to write this play because as a member of the LGBT community, when I watched the response to the coronavirus pandemic unfold, I could not help but see the parallels to the AIDS epidemic. For inspiration, I looked to other plays about the AIDS epidemic such as *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner and *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer; I also researched the AIDS epidemic. The resulting play deals with many different themes, such as gender identity, community, the Black Lives Matter movement, and sexual health.

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Keywords: HIV, LGBTQ+, Playwriting, COVID-19, AIDS, Drama

DEDICATION

To my family, friends, and all of the incredible support you have given me.

And to the countless victims of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19, whose stories we have lost.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the expertise and advice from my advisor Dr. Alexandra Valint, and to the endless support and knowledge from the faculty and staff of the Honors College.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CDC	Center for Disease Control
FDA	Food and Drug Association
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
USM	The University of Southern Mississippi
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER I: SUMMARY OF ECHOES OF THE PAST

For my Honors thesis, I created an original full-length play called *Echoes of the Past*. This critical introduction will explain the historical context for my play, the literary influences on my play, and my process of drafting, revising and finalizing the play. *Echoes of the Past* includes two time periods, 1990 and 2020, and is set in the same apartment in New York City. In 1990, three AIDS activists are dealing with the overwhelming loss present during the crisis. Henry and Peter are the leaders of their activist group which gains a new member, Lux, a transwoman. Lux's brother is suffering from the disease, and Henry and Peter both know many people who have been affected. Henry's partner dies from it, and Henry struggles to cope with the loss. In 2020, two twenty-somethings are in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic when they let someone move in for the duration of the pandemic. Eric, a gay man, and Laila, a transwoman, allow Taylor, a nonbinary individual, to move in due to Taylor's landlord evicting them. Meanwhile, Eric sneaks out to hook up with other men in the city. Taylor is at a higher risk if they contract COVID due to being HIV/AIDS positive.

As the two timelines begin to play out, they also begin to intersect. Peter and Henry exist in the apartment in 2020 as ghost-like figures—they have died but can continue to interact with the current residents. Peter strikes up conversation with Eric, while Henry talks to Taylor. In the 1990 plotline, Henry knows he has HIV, but has sex with Peter without informing him of his new status. In the 2020 plotline, Laila discovers that Eric has a fever and rushes him to the hospital, worried that he has contracted COVID-19. Taylor urges Henry to tell Peter what he has done when Laila and Eric arrive back from the hospital. Eric does not have COVID-19, but HIV.

After they have sex, Henry moves in with Peter, which Lux disapproves of, because she takes issue with the fact that Henry had infected Peter. Eric tries to come to terms with his new health status. Peter's health continually declines, so he makes arrangements for one final protest before his death, which he plans to do outside of City Hall, dying on the steps in front of the building. Henry and Lux intervene to stop him, though he passes shortly after they intervene. In the 2020 plotline, Laila struggles with staying inside during the Black Lives Matter protests. Eric and Taylor reassure her that they understand the risk and encourage her to join the protests. While at the protest, Laila meets Lux, who is still alive. Lux stops by the apartment where her own activism started when she joined Henry and Peter's group. Henry and Peter discuss the state of their relationship with one another for the first time since they passed. They leave a note for Taylor and Eric, and the play ends as Laila finds the note, giving it to Taylor and Eric to read.

CHAPTER II: CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF AIDS/COVID

Of the six characters in my play, four have or acquire HIV. Human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, was first identified in 1981. It is a virus that is transmitted through bodily fluids and attacks the immune system, making the body less able to fight infections. When left untreated, HIV leads to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) lists fever, chills, sore throat, and other flu-like symptoms as symptoms of a possible HIV infection. There are three stages of infection. The first stage is Acute HIV Infection, then Chronic HIV Infection, and then Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). There is no cure, though medication exists in order to help infected individuals live fuller lives. In my play, the characters of Eric and Taylor are both on this medication. Medication that has been approved by the F.D.A. includes Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NRTIs), Non-Nucleoside Reverse Transcriptase Inhibitors (NNRTIs), Protease Inhibitors (PIs), among others. The CDC states that “treatment reduces the amount of HIV in the blood... Treatment helps prevent transmission to others” (“HIV Treatment”). According to the United States government’s HIV website, “without HIV medicine, people with AIDS typically survive about three years. Once someone has a dangerous opportunistic illness, life expectancy without treatment falls to about one year” (“What Are HIV and AIDS?”).

The LGBTQ community, which my play focuses on, has been and continues to be heavily affected by HIV/AIDS. HIV.gov confirms that “in the United States, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men are the population most affected by HIV... Also, transgender women who have sex with men are among the groups at highest risk for HIV infection” (“Who Is at Risk for HIV?”). Part of the reason that HIV spread

so quickly throughout the LGBTQ community, particularly with gay men, was the lack of sexual protection used among the population, as condoms were infrequently used. The highly criticized government response, which didn't effectively support those affected and was slow to grant research funding, led to the founding of multiple activist groups. One of the most famous groups was ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which protested the government's slow response and inactivity to combat the virus, as well as the stigma that came with living with HIV and AIDS. The LGBT community was, at the time, already stigmatized, and when the virus seemed to mostly affect gay populations, the disease itself became stigmatized in a similar fashion. ACT UP's archival website lists worldwide actions the group took against the virus, such as "PROTESTING the illegal denial of emergency HOUSING to people with AIDS by NYC's Division of AIDS Services" and a "Fight AIDS in Africa and Worldwide Rally" in Washington D.C. ("ACT UP Action Reports"). ACT UP was also responsible for the very popular mantra "Silence = Death," which refers to the government's and general public's aversion to discussing the disease and its effects, a silence which leads to more death from the disease.

In the book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, Randy Shilts details many different responses to the AIDS epidemic, from the highly personal street level to the higher governmental areas. Shilts notes that the "...federal government viewed AIDS as a budget problem, local public health officials saw it as a political problem, gay leaders considered AIDS a public relations problem, and the news media regarded it as a homosexual problem that wouldn't interest anybody else" (xxiii). AIDS activist Joe Wright states in an interview with NPR in 2006 that AIDS was

considered a “gay” disease, and in the early stages of the epidemic was even referred to as “gay cancer” (Black and Wright). In an op-ed for *The New York Times* in November of 1987, Edward Koch (then mayor of New York City) criticized Senator Jesse Helms’s proposed amendment to the 1998 appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Helms’s proposed amendment would prohibit the CDC from funding AIDS programs because Helms thought such programs “promote, encourage, or condone homosexual behavior.” Koch quotes a speech of Helms, in which Helms refers to gay men as “perverted”: “We have got to call a spade a spade and a perverted human being a perverted human being” (qtd. in Koch). Helms tried to deny critical funding to programs dedicated to treating the AIDS epidemic simply because those programs were also treating homosexual patients. Koch criticizes Helms by stating that “...lousy politics overwhelmed good public health policy.” AIDS activists were constantly fighting against the viewpoints that Helms represented and spoke about. The reason AIDS activist groups proliferated was because they had to fight both the stigma of the disease and the inadequate governmental response to the disease.

COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory disease that became prominent in the United States starting in March 2020, and as a respiratory disease, people with pre-existing conditions or auto-immune disorders (such as HIV or AIDS) are at a high risk of having a debilitating case. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (“WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19”), and some parts of the United States took various measures (including shutdowns and shelter-in-place orders) to slow the spread of the virus. The CDC lists symptoms of the coronavirus as “fever or chills, cough... new loss of taste or

smell...” and emergency warning signs as “trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest...” (“Symptoms of Coronavirus”). The CDC also lists people at an increased risk for a more severe illness as “Older adults, pregnant people, and people with medical conditions” (“People at Increased Risk”). In the play, the character of Taylor is at an increased risk because they have a preexisting medical condition. My play is set in New York City, which, in March and early April of 2020, quickly became the epicenter of the pandemic for the United States. In order to ground my play in real events, I created a coronavirus timeline in order to track when in the pandemic the characters in the present day would be. New York City closed schools, bars, and restaurants on March 15. Dr. Anthony Fauci, a member of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, began giving press briefings in March (Cohen). The show’s first scene starts around roughly April 17th, and the final few scenes happen after May 28th. The shutdowns continue throughout this entire timeline of the events in the show. All of the characters in the 2020 plotline have lost their jobs because of the shutdowns, and they do not know when they will be able to return to work in the future. The reason for the May 28th date is due to the prominence of the Black Lives Matter protests, which began in New York City on March 28th as reported by a local CBS channel in New York (Bauman). The protests began as a response to the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, and included protests in nearly all major US cities, all 50 states, as well as different locations around the globe. They were mostly comprised of marches or peaceful demonstrations against police violence and were often met with extreme reactions from local police force. The public response to the protests was a mixture of public support and condemnation. In my play, Laila yearns to join these protests, but due to the still ongoing pandemic, she

initially does not due to living with two immune-compromised individuals, though Taylor and Eric eventually encourage her to join the protests, which leads Laila to meet Lux.

The governmental response to the coronavirus featured many different strategies at the federal level and state level. An October 2020 article in *USA Today* describes the relationship between President Donald Trump and Dr. Anthony Fauci, the leader of the White House Coronavirus taskforce. Fauci was appointed to the task force on January 29th, nine days after the first case of COVID-19 was documented in Washington state. The two began giving conflicting information to the public. For example, Trump touted the use of hydroxychloroquine to combat the virus, while Fauci was more cautious about its efficiency. Fauci has been documented in this article as saying that “top health officials faced ‘a lot of pushback about shutting things down’ ” (Behrmann and Santucci). By July 2020, Fauci was saying that “the U.S.’ handle on the coronavirus is ‘really not good,’” and pointed to the “divisiveness” that had begun to occur across the nation in response to the virus (Behrmann and Santucci). The use of facial coverings such as masks became politicized, and the governmental mandates about travel and social gatherings were followed by some and viewed as unnecessary by others. Fauci made efforts to maintain an “apolitical” view on the virus and the governmental response, a sentiment that was not returned by the Trump administration, especially as the election cycle became more of a focus in the latter half of 2020 (Behrmann and Santucci). Trump, in particular, was not apolitical, often not wearing a mask and not encouraging mask-wearing at his election rallies. Due in part to Trump’s and the government’s actions, the COVID-19 pandemic as a whole became highly politicized in a similar manner to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which led to my inclusion of it as a topic in my play. In the 2020

plotline, the characters make frequent references to masks, both wearing them and reminding each other to have them when they leave the quarantine of the apartment. They also comment on watching the White House COVID-19 briefings, specifically mentioning Dr. Fauci.

CHAPTER III: OTHER PLAYS ABOUT AIDS

While preparing to write a play about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, I looked to preexisting plays and musicals that addressed the topic. I read these plays to discover the common plotlines and ideas explored in these shows. Even while covering HIV/AIDS, I wanted to approach it in an original manner. *The Normal Heart* (1985) by Larry Kramer is an influential play about AIDS. *The Normal Heart* deals with an AIDS activist, Ned, who is trying to get other people, including fellow gay men, to take the AIDS crisis seriously. I read *The Normal Heart* while I was still in the conceptualization phase of my writing, and I found Kramer's view of activism to be very interesting. The main character of *The Normal Heart* is very passionate, sometimes almost too passionate, which at times is even detrimental to his movement. As Ned himself says, "This isn't something that can be force-fed gently" (Kramer 35). The play emphasizes how important activism work is, which aligns with the playwright's personal history, as he was a very well-known activist during the epidemic. In Kramer's play, the characters do different forms of activism work, such as establishing a telephone hotline, fundraising, and providing counseling to those suffering from the disease. In *The Normal Heart*, Larry Kramer examines the different facets of AIDS activism work through the character of Ned, and also the character of Emma, a doctor who is doing her best to take care of her patients. In a scene near the end of the play, Emma is in a meeting with another doctor, who has rejected her application for funding. Emma explodes at the doctor, yelling at him to "Just do something for them!" (81). The "them" she references is the hundreds of thousands of AIDS victims. Kramer's play crackles with a curiosity about the inaction faced by

victims of the epidemic. Kramer himself was a gay AIDS activist who had contracted the disease (though he did not discover this until after the premiere of the play).

I read *The Normal Heart* around the same time that I began to watch season two of FX show *Pose*, created by Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, and Steven Canals. Even though *Pose* premiered in 2018, decades after *The Normal Heart* did, both shows focus on approximately the same time period. *Pose* spotlights the ball culture in the 80s and 90s, detailing the stories of many of the attendants and competitors of the LGBT balls that took place during this time, with an emphasis on the black and transgender women attendees. The balls, which are a driving force in the show, were events in the gay community, particularly in the gay people of color community, where different “houses” competed for trophies across various categories, such as fashion, voguing, lip-syncing, and so on. A “house” was a found family that competed in the balls as a team made up of other LGBT people. The AIDS epidemic is a major storyline, as several main characters either contract the disease or have it at the beginning of the show. The show follows these characters dealing with the effects of the virus. Pray Tell and Ricky’s plotline is about the two of them beginning a relationship as HIV-positive individuals, and Blanca’s storyline is about her wanting to build a legacy for herself with what she believes to be a shortened amount of time to do so due to her diagnosis. In season two especially, many of the characters become AIDS activists themselves, with plotlines including a die-in (lying down as if participants had died to disrupt the space around them) and fundraising. Viewing *Pose* and reading *The Normal Heart* in very close proximity definitely inspired me to highlight AIDS activism as an important part of my own script. My character Peter’s final protest echoed a similar thought voiced by David Wojnarowicz, a painter

and photographer, who was photographed wearing a jacket with the saying, “If I die of AIDS – forget burial – just drop my body on the steps of the F.D.A.” (Laing). The F.D.A. that Wojnarowicz mentions is the Food and Drug Association, which many activists blamed for the amount of AIDS-related deaths due to the lack of work being done on AIDS research. I believe activism is important to represent because, in the scope of HIV/AIDS activism, it represents a community who refuses to sit idly by as a deadly disease ravages their lives, a disease that the government seemed to not care about. AIDS activists represent the spirit of the LGBTQ community and the strength and fire that the LGBTQ community possesses.

Another play that influenced me was Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1992). I was familiar with *Angels in America* before deciding on my thesis topic, as I had read it previously and had seen the National Theatre Live version starring Andrew Garfield as the protagonist Prior. The play, which is broken up into two parts (*Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*) follows a multitude of characters during the AIDS crisis from 1985 to 1990. Prior, a gay man with a recent HIV diagnosis, struggles with his partner Louis as Louis tries to come to terms with Prior being sick. Joe, another gay man, is struggling with living with his wife, Harper, who suffers from agoraphobia. During the show, Prior is visited by an Angel, who tells him that he is a prophet. As the Angel continues to visit Prior, he begins to believe that his diagnosis of AIDS is the physical manifestation of the prophecy. Once I decided on the topic of my thesis (the AIDS epidemic), I went back to reread and reevaluate my feelings on the play. When I read it the first time, I definitely enjoyed it, both as a piece of art and as a well-written piece of American drama. The ambitious nature of the script also impressed me because of the

numerous moving parts involved and the ease with which Kushner makes them work together. The easiest way to describe the show is that it concerns itself with people who are suffering from the effects of the AIDS epidemic. It blends many themes, such as love, religion, homosexuality, and death, among many others. *Angels in America* showed me that theatre and playwriting could really be limitless. The scope of *Angels in America* is quite large, with its many characters and themes and plotlines. Kushner manages to weave these themes and characters into a cohesive plot, one that spans two different parts that are each two acts long. Reading *Angels in America* helped unlock the idea in my mind that I could explore anything I wanted to in my playwriting. The approach that *Angels in America* takes to many of its theatrical elements, even the ones that seem impossible (such as the appearance of the Angel or even some of the scene transitions), is to simply do them anyway, because that is what the story needs in order to be appropriately absorbed by the audience. The first part of *Angels in America* ends unexpectedly, with the Angel breaking through Prior's ceiling. Though heavily foreshadowed, the Angel still takes the role of a massive disrupter in this moment, and its appearance drastically changes the course of the show, but does so in such a way that makes complete sense for the world that Kushner has created. Kushner's play influenced the concept of different timelines intersecting in my play. Though *Angels in America* does not feature intersecting plotlines, the idea of the 2020 characters talking to the other characters from the past still feels related to Kushner's play because Prior talks to different versions of his ancestors in *Angels in America*. Kushner's play goes past the bounds of realism in the play with the character of the Angel and Prior's storyline. I also

went past the boundaries of realism in my own play, as Henry and Peter can communicate with characters in the present day long after their deaths.

Even though my show is not a musical, I still wanted to examine popular musicals that feature AIDS as a subject. For this, I examined *Rent* by Jonathan Larson (1994) and *Falsettos* by William Finn and James Lapine (1992). Of the two, I found that *Falsettos* was much more helpful in examining the trope of AIDS in a theatrical setting. *Falsettos* follows a young Jewish boy, Jason, as his family begins to plan his Bar Mitzvah. His father, Marvin, has left his mother, Trina, to be with his love Whizzer. Trina begins to see Marvin's psychiatrist, Mendel, and the two begin a relationship. Marvin's neighbor, Dr. Charlotte, begins to notice a disease that seems to affect gay men. Whizzer becomes sick with this illness, which is AIDS. *Falsettos*, especially the second act, feels nuanced and grounded, and has a more melancholic tone throughout. This was helpful when writing my show, as I looked to the tone of some scenes in *Falsettos* to help figure out the tone I wanted in my own show. An example of this would be the scenes when Whizzer is in the hospital near the end of *Falsettos*, particularly the song "Unlikely Lovers." In the song, there is a line that Marvin sings to Whizzer: "I'm staying here in this spot / Whether you want me to or not / I'm staying. / Here by your side" (*Falsettos* 139). This line about loyalty is reflective of the rest of the song, and loyalty as a theme is something that I wished to portray in my own show. Peter and Henry not only remain friends after their diagnosis, but they enter a romantic relationship, and Henry is there for Peter until his last protest.

While *Falsettos* feels more realistic, *Rent*, on the other hand, feels more melodramatic. *Rent* follows a group of friends as they struggle with living as artists in

New York City, detailing their interpersonal and relationship conflicts with one another. While *Rent* was groundbreaking when it premiered in 1996, it has not aged well due to its limited depictions of activist work and problematic portrayal of LGBT characters. One of the main characters, Angel, seems to be gender nonconforming; however, their identity as a character is never made explicitly clear. In an article for Out.com, “Angel’s Gender Identity is *Rent*’s Most Enduring Mystery,” Charlene Incarnate notes that “Angel is written by composer Jonathan Larson into the libretto as a drag queen... However, as queer identity politics has become more complex, so has the general perception of Angel being a drag queen... Angel was written at a time in which less language existed... Angel’s daily experience looks very little like a drag queen’s.” Angel seems to be somewhere between a drag queen and a trans woman. Four characters in *Rent* have AIDS: Roger, his sometimes girlfriend Mimi, Angel, and his boyfriend, Collins. The gay couple suffers a loss, with Angel dying, while Roger and Mimi, the straight couple, survive. As Incarnate asserts, “...the group’s only gender-nonconforming individual is incidentally the play’s only casualty to AIDS.” Of the characters who do have AIDS, only Collins (and Angel in more oblique references) mention doing serious activism work, an example being that he programs a virtual reality program to say, “Actual Reality – Act Up – Fight AIDS,” as detailed in the musical number “La Vie Boheme” (Larson). I think *Rent* is an important dramatic work and it accomplished a lot for LGBTQ representation in the late 90s and early 00s, but as more and more representation became common place, it is harder for me to look past the failings of *Rent* when it comes to its gay characters.

I made the decision to center gay characters and relationships in my play, unlike how they are sidelined in *Rent*. I also wanted my AIDS activist characters to actually do activism work and have it be a major component of their plot lines. Some examples of activism in my play are Peter and Lux beginning a campaign to bring hospitalized AIDS patients homecooked meals, Lux participating in a die-in, and Laila marching in a Black Lives Matter protest. Activism work, particularly AIDS activism work, is the reason so much progress was made in the epidemic in spite of the United States government's slow response and in spite of the stigma the disease carried in the public sphere. I wanted my show to reflect the centrality and essentialness of this work. Activism work was a crucial aspect of life for LGBT individuals in that time period. In the modern-day sections of the script, I wanted the activism through-line to continue. The summer that I started writing the script, the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 became national news. To me, a logical connection was to have the modern-day characters participate in the Black Lives Matter protests. Both protests revolve around minority groups (the LGBT community and the Black American community), highlighting and bringing attention to systematic failings within the government.

CHAPTER IV: CONCEPTUALIZING AND WRITING ECHOES OF THE PAST

As an LGBT individual, learning the history of my community has always been a personal interest. As an artist and storyteller, I tend to write about my experience as a queer person and the community as a whole. This comes from a personal desire to see myself and the story of my community represented in an authentic manner, and that those stories are told by other LGBT individuals. To have this authentic representation in media is crucial because for some queer people, the representation they see in media could be the only form of representation they have. They may live in rural areas with limited access to information on different sexualities and gender identities, or they could live in households where that subject is taboo to discuss, so they turn to media for the visualization and the exposure they need. It is important that this representation is authentic and created by LGBT individuals so that we as a community are in charge of our own stories and depictions. There have been great stories written by straight, cisgender writers, but there also have been far too many that rely on stereotypes or surface level characterization, which can be harmful to see, especially if it is the only type of LGBT stories that you are seeing. Having people from the LGBT community playing these LGBT characters is also critical to this idea of authentic representation, which is the reason for the director's note I included at the beginning of the script, which calls for the trans and nonbinary characters to be played by actors of the same gender identity. The documentary on trans representation in media, *Disclosure* directed by Sam Feder, discusses the idea that when you have cisgender actors playing trans or nonbinary

characters that do not match their own gender identity, it can leave actual trans and nonbinary people vulnerable to violence due to the depiction of the characters. One of the commenters in the documentary, Jen Richards, shared her perspective: "...In my mind, part of the reason that men end up killing trans women out of fear that other men will think that they're gay for having been with trans women is that the friends, the men whose judgment they fear of, only know trans women from media, and the people who are playing trans women are the men that they know." I included this director's note, not just to make sure that trans and nonbinary actors would have an opportunity to perform and work, but also to do my part in accurately depicting this side of the community.

I know for me personally that growing up as a queer person, I was constantly looking for any form of entertainment that I could see myself in, be it movies, television shows, books, video games, and of course, theatre. When looking for this representation, a majority of it was written by people not inside the community, even if they were allies. Some of my earliest experiences with representation were mostly gay male secondary characters, mostly in the genre of young adult fantasy, like *The Mortal Instruments* series by Cassandra Clare (Alec and Magnus Bane), or side characters in popular television shows like *Doctor Who* (Captain Jack Harkness), *American Horror Story* (Liz Taylor, Ramona Royale, Xavier Plympton), and *Glee* (Kurt and Blaine). Most, if not all, of these characters consist entirely of popular stereotypes of LGBT people at the time they were made, such as gay men being effeminate and obsessed with fashion or that gay people are promiscuous. One of the first pieces of entertainment that I saw that dealt with the topic of AIDS was Chris Columbus's 2005 film version of *Rent*, based on the musical of the same name by Jonathan Larson. I had, of course, known that AIDS and HIV were

beforehand, but *Rent* was the first time I saw it portrayed in a way that affected the characters' lives and relationships, which is ironic considering that Larson was, as far as we know, not a member of the LGBT community. As I became more confident in my identity as a queer person when I was in middle school, I began to do research into the LGBT community so I could understand more of the history behind it and understand my place in the community. At the time, this mostly consisted of Googling different terms or historical events, such as the riots at Stonewall, Pride Parades, and prominent figures in history. This very early research is where I truly began to understand just how devastating the HIV/AIDS epidemic was for the community. So much personal history was lost due to the disease. So many queer people were dead and dying. Almost an entire generation of people were gone.

In deciding the direction for my Honors thesis play, I knew I wanted to explore this feeling of loss. My strongest instinct was to examine my current generation's views on the AIDS epidemic, and how the advancement of treatments, knowledge, and response to the disease has shifted the atmosphere around those who have it and the risk of contracting it. I began to look into the way AIDS and HIV are discussed in sex education courses at different ages, and how those courses affect not just the views on the disease itself, but the LGBT community as a whole. This was very early on in the research process, and mostly consisted of me asking other LGBT people that I know what sex education courses were like for them, or if they were even offered. The consensus from these discussions was that almost all of these school courses were focused on heterosexual couples. While that information is also important to communicate to students, it is just as crucial for LGBT students in the room to receive sex education as

well. Safe sex and sexual health are intrinsically different for LGBT people than for straight people. Along with this disparity in information, many of the sex education courses have a heavy focus on abstinence instead of an actual education in sexual health. Using my background of growing up in Mississippi, I also began to explore articles and reports about the attitudes of those living in the American South about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and how it affected those living in more rural areas. This research revealed that there is still a lot of stigma around the disease.

I felt like I was on a very solid path in developing my play and was beginning to think seriously about developing the plot and characters of the show, as well as the setting and tone of what I wanted to write about. The initial idea was to explore a younger gay couple's experience with AIDS in the present day deep south. However, in March of 2020, just as I was about to develop these ideas more concretely, the United States went into lockdown over the developing COVID-19 pandemic.

To say my plans drastically changed was an understatement. I had already done research on the AIDS epidemic, and as the situation around COVID-19, an infectious respiratory disease, began to worsen, I could not help but see different parallels developing around the response between the two diseases. For example, Dr. Fauci, who became a household name in 2020, was a key figure in the HIV/AIDS crisis as well. As a playwright, and a theatre artist, something that comes up whenever there are talks about new shows, or even producing classics, is the question, "Why this play now?" Theatre as an art form is highly collaborative. It is one of the few that takes place live in front of an audience and is unique in that it has a definite end. Each performance is different, even from night to night, and as a result, the experience of each audience member is going to

be unique. As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, I felt like the COVID-19 pandemic would inevitably work its way into the show in some form or fashion. I decided that my play would confront the pandemic head on alongside the AIDS epidemic, and would feature a dialogue between these two different health crises.

Once I decided to explore both diseases, the next step was to figure out how the people affected by these diseases would interact with each other. I had done so much research into the AIDS epidemic, specifically the period of AIDS activism in the late 80s and early 90s, that I knew I had to incorporate my research into the show somehow, as I did not wish to discard all the work I had done. I decided to have two different periods of time that are covered in the show, once that is set in 1990 during the AIDS epidemic, and the other in 2020. These two “timelines,” as I called them, initially started off as two separate plots, with very minimal crossover between the two of them. The characters for the 1990 section came first. I knew I wanted them to be activists, and I took a lot of inspiration from Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart*, especially when it came to the characterization of Peter and Henry, two cisgender gay males. Next came the character of Lux, a transwoman. Lux initially came about so that there would be a disruption to Peter and Henry’s lives, as she is new to both of them. Since I had a trio of characters for the 1990s, I wanted to have the same number of characters in the 2020 timeline as well; that way the show felt more balanced between the two time periods. This was where the decision to have the show take place in the same apartment across different time periods came in. Since Lux was introduced in the 1990 timeline, a new person coming into the apartment, I wanted to have parallel that in the 2020 timeline. The character of Taylor was where I started for the 2020 timeline. I decided to make them nonbinary, to keep the

theme of gender diversity and identity present. From there came the people living in the apartment, Eric and Laila. Eric, a cis gay man, and Laila, a transwoman, would let Taylor stay with them for the course of the pandemic.

Now that I had a concept of each character, I started the first draft in late July/early August. The COVID-19 pandemic was still very much ongoing, so I set the 2020 timeline in early March, so I could cover events that had already taken place in real life. At the time I was writing, a majority of businesses were closed in Mississippi, which is where I was living while writing the play, and those that were open were operating at a much lower capacity. Theaters were also closed nationwide, and many theater artists took their work online through virtual productions, which included Zoom and prerecorded shows. The confirmed case numbers continued to rise during this early stage of the development process, and the presidential election cycle of 2020 began to dominate headlines. While drafting, I mainly followed my established writing process, which starts with the concept of the characters, and then, as I get more of a feel for who they are, I look for a dramatic “moment” or “picture” that I try to work towards. For *Echoes of the Past*, this moment was the end of Act One, where Eric is revealed to be sick, and Henry has infected Peter.

The moment of Eric being sick hit me first, especially the image of Laila taking him to the hospital. I knew he would have HIV/AIDS, as part of Eric’s character concept was that he was sexually active while quarantine was going on as a form of coping with the stress of the situation, as well as finally having the free time to explore his sexual identity due to his work being paused as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Taylor, who is in the apartment with Eric, is also HIV positive, which also means they are in the

high-risk category of having a severe case of COVID-19 if they catch the disease. One of the conflicts within Act One is Eric hiding his activities from Laila and Taylor; his secret activities led to the strong dramatic event of Laila discovering that he was sick and that he had hidden his activities from her.

About halfway through Act One, the plot element of Henry infecting Peter with HIV became crucial to this strong dramatic moment at the end of the Act. The mirrors of two different people—Eric and Peter—discovering their health status at the same time was a very strong stage image for me, which solidified my decision of the plotlines for both time periods. Using this moment as sort of a center, I went back to the beginning to sow the seeds of the Act One ending, and once I knew how Act One was going to end, it was easy to naturally follow the effects of this plot development into Act Two, such as Eric coming to terms with his diagnosis which leads to bonding with Taylor, and Henry and Peter having to figure out their relationship and their activism with their new diagnoses.

The idea of the two timelines interacting had been around since the initial concept of the script. As I began to introduce this element, the instances began to grow and develop into entire conversations and scenes, and for me, this is when I really began to finalize a big question I had while in the early stages of the first draft, which was “Why this play? Why this play now?” This is a question that directors in theatre ask before deciding on a show to work on. It is meant to spark a discussion on how a certain show is relevant to our current time, and what purpose do we have for performing a certain show to our audience. With the element of the two timelines interacting, I was able to answer that question for myself, which became an anchor of sorts that I could latch onto if I

began to get lost while writing. For me, this play is about the LGBTQ community's response to two different diseases (HIV/AIDS and COVID-19), and what it means to be living through a health crisis. It is about the choices we make in those times of crisis, and how those choices affect those around us. For the LGBT community, the experience of a health crisis is not new, and neither is the lack of government response that we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the first draft was finished, my thesis advisor Dr. Alexandra Valint and I began to discuss various aspects of the script and things that we thought needed to be improved. These resulted in various minor and major changes. The minor changes mainly consisted of continuity fixes, line edits to make dialogue more naturalistic, and clarification on the timeline of events. The major changes mostly revolved around two key aspects: the character of Taylor and the ending.

Echoes of the Past is an ensemble-centric show, which means that the play focused on the group of characters as a whole and not on one central protagonist. In discussions with Dr. Valint about whether all characters were equally developed, it became clear that one character was not. The character of Taylor, an HIV-positive nonbinary individual who moves into Laila and Eric's apartment, is set up as a foil/parallel to Henry in the 1990s segments. However, in early drafts, Taylor's personal motivations and background were unclear. Taylor was clearly important to the story, but they did not seem to have a strong "want." They simply seemed to be there to have a dialogue with Henry. I returned to the earlier sections of the script and began to look at Taylor more closely, using what I had already written into the script as a springboard to deepen their characterization. I had already written that Taylor was recently evicted from

their apartment, which to me indicated that they had lived by themselves for quite some time. I also had already written in a hobby that they enjoyed, which was photography, and had a scene begin with Taylor taking pictures of Eric. Since Taylor is the new element in the apartment, and they did not know Eric very well, I thought having a more substantial scene dedicated to the two of them would be beneficial, especially since Taylor and Eric are the two who interact with the past timeline the most. Knowing that Taylor had recently moved out of their old apartment, and that they had nowhere else to go, I decided to explore this feeling of isolation with the character. In the show, Taylor says, “Is it bad that I want that? To have roots somewhere?... I want to exist to someone.” This idea of roots, of having a connection to the world around you, to me fit very well with the overarching themes of the show already present, and also served to have a more concrete reason for Taylor to be such a major character.

The aspect of the script that underwent the most changes was the ending. Originally, the ending was very cut and dry. Henry and Peter leave through the door to the apartment and “move on,” as they describe it. Even while writing this version of the ending, it felt disconnected from the rest of the script, like everything was trying to wrap up too neatly. It was similar to the instinctual feeling I had regarding Taylor’s development as a character. Something with the ending was just not working, and while I knew that, it was difficult for me to pinpoint what exactly the ending of the show needed. Dr. Valint and I discussed how endings that include some ambiguity can be stronger. She referenced the ending of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. The story ends with a sense of closure (Blanche being kicked out of the apartment/being sent to an asylum) but also with a hint of uncertainty (we’re unsure of the stability of Stella and

Stanley's relationship, particularly because Blanche has told Stella that Stanley assaulted her). I believe I wrote about five different endings trying to find the right note for the show to end on. Each ending focused on Peter and Henry, but I struggled to find an ending that matched the rest of the script. Dr. Valint brought up that the two timelines needed to have closure with one another. From there, we explored a few options, such as Laila encountering Peter and Henry, Lux calling the apartment, and so on, but these still did not hit the tone I was trying to achieve. I also couldn't pinpoint what tone I wanted to create. Dr. Valint and I looked at all the endings I had written, and we decided that a common theme running through them was a melancholy feeling of acceptance. Henry, in all the endings, struggles to accept what he did when he was alive, which was having sex with Peter while knowing he had HIV. In one ending I explored, he says, "There is no magical absolving of sins and mistakes. Not for me." This line revealed to me what the ending truly needed, and was included in the current ending. In most of these failed endings, I was trying to wrap up this acceptance of himself too easily, which is not what the show, or Henry, needed. What was needed was a sense of closure for the interactions between the two timelines, specifically the relationships that Peter and Henry had with Taylor and Eric. Throughout the play, Peter and Henry experience the modern-day LGBTQ community and learn that the community does not get wiped out from HIV/AIDS. Taylor and Eric gain a deeper knowledge of what they represent by living with the disease, mainly that there are many others who came before them that did not have a chance to survive. There also needed to be a moment where Laila has some type of observance of the two different timelines interacting, because she alone had not encountered Peter and Henry, which is why it is her who finds their note at the end. It

was important that we do not know if Peter and Henry “move on” or not, or if Henry manages to move past his actions. They choose to write a note saying goodbye to Taylor and Eric, but we do not learn the contents of the note. What is important is that the characters have changed as a result of their meetings, both in the past and present.

After I finish a draft, my process includes actors reading the script out loud. This reading does not have to be formal. Having actors read the parts allows me to see if the characters feel natural and if their dialogue and speech patterns seem organic. It also gives me a sense of the show’s pacing. In February of 2021, I invited six actors from the USM’s Theatre Department to read *Echoes of the Past* on Zoom; I read the stage directions. I took notes during the reading, not of the actors’ performances, but about flow of language. I paid close attention to the monologues (long speeches delivered by a single character). I also jotted down issues of pacing—when scenes or dialogue dragged—and obsolete or unnecessary lines. In a play, every line of dialogue means time spent for the audience and for the actors. You do not want to waste any time on things that are not important or unnecessary. For example, here is one of my notes: “Pg. 36 ‘I really hate bad weather’ Lux does not work.” During the reading, the line felt awkward and out of place. After reviewing its place in the script and what its inclusion added to the scene, I decided to cut this line. During the monologues, what mattered to me was if they felt like they were urgent, that there was a need for the character to have these speeches. During the read through, I found all of the monologues had this sense of urgency that I wanted. I also timed the reading. The read through started at 6:00 pm and ended at 8:15, including a five-minute break. The reading took two hours and ten minutes, and my play therefore constitutes a full-length play (as opposed to shorter plays such as one-acts).

Overall, for the first read through, I took around one notebook page full of notes. Most of these were dialogue or individual lines that I felt needed to be examined, though there were more general notes made as well, usually about how the tone of a certain scene felt and if that tone worked or not.

Writing this show has been a deeply personal process. At times, it felt like I was not writing it just for me, but for those who will never get a chance to voice their thoughts and stories because they were victims of an uncaring disease and an uncaring government. Stories like Peter and Henry's are important because there are hundreds of thousands of them that will never be told. Even as we move forward in the future, and HIV/AIDS becomes more treatable, there will be times where a new disease will rear its head, and more voices will be silenced, a silencing that could have been prevented. Eric, Taylor, and Laila, in some ways, get very lucky in terms of staying healthy during the coronavirus, as none of them contract the disease, though we know that outside their apartment, many others are not so lucky and are suffering, even dying. In thirty years, someone may write a show about people in 2020 living through COVID-19 as a new disease once again takes hold, and there will be plenty of stories to choose from of people who are no longer with us to tell it themselves.

CHAPTER V: ECHOES OF THE PAST

CHARACTERS:

LAILA – mid-twenties trans woman.

ERIC – mid-twenties male.

TAYLOR – mid-twenties nonbinary individual.

HENRY – late twenties male.

PETER – late twenties male.

LUX – late twenties trans woman.

Casting should have a substantial effort to be as diverse as possible. Actual trans and nonbinary actors should be cast to play the trans and nonbinary characters.

(The stage is divided. Two halves. One half is completely in darkness. Nothing can be made out. The other half seems to be the living room/kitchen area of a smallish modern-day apartment. The front door to the apartment is on the back wall. There is a fancy flat-screen TV, a coffee table, a few chairs. Laila, a twenty-something transgender woman, is in the kitchen area, pouring a cup of coffee. Her roommate, Eric, enters.)

LAILA

I didn't know you were out.

(Eric does not answer.)

...You want to tell me what you were doing?

(Eric gets the TV remote and clicks it. The TV does not come on. He tries again.)

ERIC

Do we have anymore batteries?

LAILA

In one of the drawers, probably.

(Eric goes and begins to look through some of the drawers.)

LAILA

Fauci is supposed to talk today. Another briefing. Then Cuomo is supposed to have one later—

ERIC

Okay?

LAILA

Don't you think we should be watching those? And not—whatever it is you put on?

ERIC

They just say the same thing over and over again. I don't really see the point, Laila.

LAILA

Right... I just—I like to know what's going on.

(Eric finds batteries and puts them in the remote. He clicks the TV on and settles into the couch. He places the remote on the coffee table. Laila picks it up and turns the TV off.)

ERIC

Hey—

LAILA

I need to talk to you about something—

ERIC

I've had a long night. Can it wait until I wake up later?

LAILA

A long night of being out when we're supposed to be staying inside—

ERIC

I know, I know. It wasn't anything major. Don't worry.

(A pause.)

LAILA

My friend, Taylor—You've met them—

ERIC

I have?

LAILA

Yeah. They were over for my birthday.

ERIC

Were they the one with the—the uh—

LAILA

The green jacket.

ERIC

Yeah!! I think they tried to flirt with me?

LAILA

I doubt that. They need somewhere to stay. Their landlord—they got kicked out. Taylor was an usher, and everything's closed—

ERIC

That's illegal. There was like an eviction freeze. Remember, we got that letter from our landlord?

LAILA

I know. It's still on the fridge.

ERIC

They should sue. I would sue.

LAILA

I know. Their landlord is an asshole. But they still need somewhere to stay.

ERIC

...We've only got a two bedroom—

LAILA

It'll be in my room.

ERIC

They don't have any other options?

LAILA

They're high risk.

ERIC

Oh.

LAILA

And we're both being careful...

ERIC

I don't think you're really asking for like—my permission here or anything, are you?

(There is a knock on the door. Eric and Laila stare at each other.)

You going to get that?

(Laila goes and answers the door. It is Taylor. They are wearing a face mask and holding a few bags.)

TAYLOR

Hey!

LAILA

Hey!

(Taylor comes into the apartment. Laila shuts the door behind them.)

LAILA

Eric, this is—

ERIC

Taylor?

TAYLOR

Oh! I think we've met before!

ERIC

That's what Laila was telling me.

LAILA

We're gonna be sharing a room, Taylor, so if you want to bring your bags there...?

TAYLOR

Sure thing! I remember where it is from the party.

(Taylor disappears further into the apartment.)

ERIC

I didn't realize they were like, moving in today.

LAILA

Sorry.

ERIC

It's—it's fine.

LAILA

Promise?

ERIC

Promise.

(Taylor comes back to the living room, sans baggage and face mask.)

TAYLOR

So, uh... How have you guys been holding up?

(A small pause.)

ERIC

I've definitely been better.

TAYLOR

I hear that.

LAILA

It's weird how much I miss just like, normal shit.

TAYLOR

Right? Like, it's just—

ERIC

So crazy.

TAYLOR

Yeah! Crazy!

(A small pause.)

LAILA

I've got some coffee made if you want some—

TAYLOR

Oh, no thank you! I don't really like coffee that much!

LAILA

Oh, right! Sorry. Habit. Eric drinks at least a gallon a day.

ERIC

I would say something to defend myself, but that would just be walking into a trap.

LAILA

A good eighty-five percent of the mugs in the cabinet are his.

TAYLOR

Nice. I love a good mug. All cups should have handles.

ERIC

They really should.

TAYLOR

...I'm sorry, I know this was probably really sudden—

ERIC

Yeah, well—

TAYLOR

But it's just until things smooth back out.

LAILA

Which shouldn't take long!

ERIC

Here's hoping.

(A pause.)

But, uh, it's nice to have you here. Something different.

TAYLOR

I always think something different is a good thing. Every now and then.

(The lights slowly begin to come up on the second half of the stage. It's another apartment. But it is entirely different. It's almost bare. There's a table, a few chairs. A very old TV, circa 1989 or 1990. A large banner is tacked on the wall. It reads "QUEER

AMERICA” in big, bold, in your face fashion. Peter is currently sitting in a chair at the table. Henry is on his feet, pacing. This half of the stage is set in 1990.)

HENRY

It’s just until things smooth out.

PETER

Things aren’t smoothing out, Henry, that’s the problem.

HENRY

I—I don’t have any other options, Peter. Honest. It’s either this or the new position at work, and this doesn’t pay any bills. And it doesn’t have a tenth-floor office. Or a secretary.

PETER

It’s not about paying your bills. It’s about keeping each other alive.

HENRY

A great fucking job we’ve done of that.

(Too far.)

I mean, it’s just—nothing works.

PETER

If we keep pushing for funding—more media attention—

HENRY

I'm sorry, Peter. I am.

PETER

When you're in a fucking hospital bed I'm sure you'll be even more sorry.

HENRY

Jesus. Alright. That's—I'm done.

(Henry goes to the door.)

PETER

Wait, Henry—

(Henry opens the door. Lux, a transwoman, is at the door. Henry jumps at the surprise.)

LUX

...Sorry, am I too late?

(Henry and Peter look at each other. Henry almost has a look of amusement.)

I— I saw a flyer—for an activist meeting?

(Lux gets a flyer out of her purse. She shows it to Henry.)

This is the right place, yeah?

HENRY

Oh, yeah, you're in the right place.

LUX

It doesn't look like much of a meeting. No offense.

HENRY

None taken.

PETER

You can come in, uh—

LUX

Lux.

PETER

Lux. Please, come in.

(Lux enters the apartment. Henry closes the door behind her but doesn't leave. He wants to see what happens next.)

LUX

I like your banner.

PETER

Thanks. One of our members made it.

LUX

Is he late too?

HENRY

He's dead.

LUX

Oh. I'm—sorry.

PETER

Don't be. We all know someone who's not here anymore.

(An uneasy pause.)

So, uh, Lux... You're here to help?

LUX

Yeah!

HENRY

Why not go to Act Up?

LUX

I—Uh...

(Lux looks at Peter and Henry.)

I was hoping for something more... underground.

PETER

We're a bunch of faggots fighting against government silence and media bias. Anywhere you go is going to be underground.

HENRY

Peter's exaggerating. Act Up is fighting against those things, but we just sit here in Peter's apartment and argue.

LUX

Just the two of you?

PETER

There's uh, a few more members, but—

HENRY

They've either left, or got checked into a hospital, or they're dead.

LUX

You were about to leave too, weren't you?

(Henry is quiet. Peter smirks.)

HENRY

No—I...

LUX

So, does that mean it's just me and—I'm guessing you're Peter?

PETER

That would be me, yes.

HENRY

I haven't left yet.

PETER

No one's stopping you.

HENRY

Oh, happy you and your new drag queen can press on in the fight?

LUX

I'm not a drag queen.

(Henry and Peter both look at her.)

If I was, I wouldn't get all dressed up to come to some shitty apartment.

HENRY

Then what are you?

LUX

I'm a woman.

HENRY

Right, and I'm straighter than Ronald Reagan.

PETER

Henry.

HENRY

We're really gonna show those fuckers whose boss now, aren't we?

PETER

Henry.

(Henry goes silent.)

LUX

Do you two have any plans? Like, protests planned, or flyers to hand out, shit like that?

HENRY

Jack was the idea person.

PETER

We've been trying, but—

LUX

But what?

PETER

It's been difficult.

LUX

What's been so hard?

HENRY

You can only throw so many small-ass benefit dances before people start going to the bigger ones.

PETER

And no one is throwing dances anymore either.

LUX

Okay—so—we do something else then. They've been doing these die ins; you go in and lay down like you're dead—I've been seeing them on the TV.

HENRY

Why don't you just go and join those, then.

LUX

I've always swam a different direction from everyone else.

HENRY

Oh, great, you're joining just to be unique and different. Or, more than you already are.

LUX

If you'll have me, yes.

PETER

Yes.

HENRY

Yes?

PETER

We'll have you.

HENRY

Lots of talk for someone with no plan.

LUX

Then let's make a plan.

(A pause.)

What? Why not? The three of us, we're bound to come up with something.

PETER

If it is the three of us.

HENRY

...I'll stay. I guess. For now.

PETER

Thanks, Henry. Really.

HENRY

Yeah, sure.

(Lux sits down at the table. Henry, somewhat reluctantly, comes over and joins.)

LUX

Where do we want to start?

(Lights down on 1990. Lights back up on 2020. A week or two later. Taylor has a camera. Eric is being posed by them, in a somewhat nice outfit.)

TAYLOR

Can you bring your arm more like... up?

(Eric brings his arm up.)

ERIC

This?

TAYLOR

Yeah, why not.

(Laila enters from her bedroom.)

LAILA

Didn't know you modeled, Eric.

ERIC

This was all Taylor's idea.

TAYLOR

Incorrect.

ERIC

How is that incorrect?

TAYLOR

It was a mutual decision. You told me you modeled in college and I mentioned that I do photography as a hobby and you insisted that I get my camera.

ERIC

I did?

TAYLOR

Yes! The outfit was your idea.

(Laila gets a bottle of liquor from the cabinet. Eric notices.)

ERIC

You're drinking?

LAILA

...Yeah?

ERIC

It's like, eight in the morning.

LAILA

And? My job hasn't been calling me back, so I'm obviously not doing anything today.

TAYLOR

Do you still work at that like, boutique place? You were working the register, right?

LAILA

It's not a boutique. It's a second-hand clothing store. And I'm actually co-manager.

TAYLOR

Really? Hell yeah! When did that happen?

LAILA

End of February.

ERIC

Right before... well. All of this.

TAYLOR

What about you, Eric? You don't still model, do you?

ERIC

No. I wouldn't have time even if I wanted to. And that was just to get me through school.

TAYLOR

What would you be doing if everything was normal?

LAILA

Eric's a personal assistant to some business guy.

TAYLOR

So, like, a secretary?

ERIC

No. I just—keep him on track. It's really not a big deal. Just takes up a lot of time.

LAILA

I'm surprised he still doesn't have you working.

ERIC

He took his wife and booked it out of the city as soon as it looked like it was getting bad.
I think they're in Ohio or something. I don't know, he said I'm not fired, just that he
wouldn't need me until he got back.

LAILA

Sounds like a good time to drink for no reason then!

ERIC

...Okay, fine.

(Eric goes to Laila. Laila fixes drinks.)

LAILA

Taylor?

TAYLOR

...What the hell, why not?

(Laila fixes them a drink.)

LAILA

To day drinking!

TAYLOR & ERIC

To day drinking.

(They all drink.)

TAYLOR

Oh, shit, Laila—

ERIC

This stuff tastes lethal.

LAILA

I enjoy it.

TAYLOR

You enjoy tasting death itself?

LAILA

It doesn't taste that bad!

ERIC

If this doesn't taste bad, I'd hate to know what does to you.

LAILA

Oh, I HATE cranberries.

TAYLOR

Fun.

(Eric tries to take another drink.)

ERIC

Nope. No. Still tastes bad.

LAILA

It'll get you feeling good really quick. Power through.

ERIC

I feel like you're overestimating my ability to power through things.

LAILA

Are you kidding me? We have a transgirl, a gay guy, and a nonbinary individual in this apartment. We can power through anything.

TAYLOR

I am certainly glad you think so.

(A dim light slowly rises on the other half. Peter is by himself.)

...Do you ever think about like. The people that came before you?

LAILA

What do you mean?

TAYLOR

I don't know. I guess... Even the people who lived here before you. The people that came before them. Just—All these people.

LAILA

I really don't know what you're talking about.

(Eric has made eye contact with Peter. Across time. Decades. Eric is completely tuned out of the conversation. He takes another drink.)

TAYLOR

There was like—marches in the street and protests and we're sitting here drinking at eight am.

LAILA

We protest. We march.

TAYLOR

I know, I know, but—it's like—I can't stop thinking about these pictures I see from the eighties. Seventies. I feel like I see the people in those pictures everywhere.

LAILA

I don't ever see ghosts or anything if this is your very roundabout way of asking.

TAYLOR

Eric, do you ever think about this kind of stuff?

(A pause.)

Eric?

(Eric looks back to Laila and Taylor.)

ERIC

I'm, uh, going to drink more—

(Eric downs the rest of the drink in his glass.)

LAILA

--Easy there--

ERIC

I'm—Going to take a walk.

(Eric begins to leave.)

TAYLOR

In the middle of a pandemic?

LAILA

Don't forget your mask!

ERIC

It's in my pocket.

(Eric exits. The light on Peter is still up.)

LAILA

...You know, I don't think it was in his pocket.

TAYLOR

I'm not even sure if those pants had pockets.

LAILA

...Want to watch a movie in our room?

TAYLOR

Can I pick?

LAILA

First person to the room picks.

(Laila takes her drink and exits to the hallway quickly.)

TAYLOR

Unfair!

(Taylor grabs their drink and turns around, almost running into Henry, who is suddenly there. Taylor lets out a small scream and spills a bit of their drink.)

LAILA

(Offstage.)

What happened?

(Taylor kneels to try and mop up some of the drink. They look up and Henry is gone.)

TAYLOR

I just—Spilled some of my drink—

LAILA

Hurry up, I'm putting on *Scream*.

TAYLOR

Again?

(Taylor exits down the hallway with their drink. The lights come up fully on Peter and Henry, and fade on the present.)

PETER

She's been helpful.

HENRY

You keep telling me.

PETER

Because I keep feeling like you're going to try and tell me the opposite one day.

HENRY

If it helps the cause, who cares.

(Lux enters.)

You could knock!

LUX

Sorry! Sorry, I just—I—I just got interviewed.

PETER

What?

HENRY

By who?

LUX

I don't know! She said she was a reporter, she recognized me from the chapel, from the die-in—

PETER

No way.

LUX

I know! I know, it sounds crazy!

HENRY

What did she ask?

LUX

She wanted to know what we were going to do next!

HENRY

What did you tell her?

LUX

I told her it was a secret, of course! I'm not about to just give it away!

HENRY

Lux, we don't have anything planned.

PETER

Well, we do now. This is good! People are interested!

LUX

Exactly!

HENRY

Are you two coming to the funeral Saturday?

PETER

...Which one?

HENRY

Jeremy's.

PETER

Oh. Oh. I—I thought he was...

HENRY

Yeah. I did too.

LUX

Your friend from work?

(Henry is silent.)

I'm sorry, I know—we've talked about him before, it's just—I've never met him—

HENRY

It doesn't matter if you met him or not.

LUX

It does. I won't—The only time I've seen you smile is when you talked about him.

(Henry walks away but does not leave.)

PETER

What time is the service?

(A pause.)

Henry?

HENRY

They—They only gave us thirty minutes. They couldn't give us any longer than that.

PETER

What time?

HENRY

2:30.

LUX

Could we like, filibuster that shit or something?

HENRY

What good would that do?

LUX

It could give you more time—

HENRY

I don't need any more time. Time already ran out.

(A crash from the present-day apartment. Eric flips the lights on. He is clearly intoxicated. It is much, much later in the day for him.)

LUX

What was that?

PETER

Neighbors. It happens all the time.

HENRY

I bet they have plenty of fucking time, don't they?

(Henry kicks the wall.)

Fuckers!

PETER

Hey—The landlord already doesn't like us—

HENRY

I don't give a fuck what the landlord thinks—I just—I want to see him again—

(Henry sits on the floor. Peter goes to him and sits next to him, trying to comfort Henry.)

PETER

I—I wish I could tell you that you will—

HENRY

You know I don't buy all of that shit, Peter.

PETER

I know. I know, I just—

HENRY

Just what? You haven't lost a fucking boyfriend, have you? When's the last time you even had one?

LUX

We've all lost people. Too many people.

HENRY

It's different when it's just—just a face you saw in a bar or at the club and when it's someone you'd roll over in bed and see sleeping. It's—

LUX

I know how it feels, Henry.

HENRY

And who did you lose to the Grim Reaper?

LUX

My brother. He's not gone yet, but—I mean—I try to be hopeful but it's only a matter of time, right?

(A small pause.)

HENRY

Well.

LUX

Don't fucking talk to me about losing people.

HENRY

Can you—can you just leave, and plan whatever next bullshit stunt you have planned?

LUX

...Fine.

(Lux heads to the door.)

I'll be there for you. Saturday. 2:30.

(Lux exits.)

PETER

I'm—I'm gonna make sure she gets home—

HENRY

Go. Follow her. Whatever.

(Peter exits, leaving Henry alone. In the present-day, Eric has been pouring himself another drink. Laila and Taylor enter from the hallway.)

ERIC

Hey! Hey!

LAILA

Hi, Eric.

ERIC

I know you're not going to believe me, but I went on like, the longest walk ever.

LAILA

Right.

ERIC

Like, seriously.

TAYLOR

You were gone all day.

ERIC

I know, right? Felt like I couldn't even come back to my own apartment!

LAILA

Alright, we're going to get you in bed—

ERIC

But it's so early—

LAILA

It's really not, anymore.

(Eric spills a bottle.)

ERIC

Aw, shit.

(Laila crosses and begins to guide Eric away.)

The drink....

LAILA

Will be waiting for you tomorrow. You need to sleep the ones you've had today off first.

(To Taylor.)

Can you clean this up? Please? Getting him to bed is a battle.

TAYLOR

Yeah, of course.

LAILA

Thanks.

(Laila and Eric exit down the hallway. Taylor begins to clean up. Henry turns and looks. Taylor does not notice.)

HENRY

...Did all of it spill?

(Taylor jumps, then slowly turns and sees Henry. Time is ruptured.)

TAYLOR

Uh—Uh—No—There's plenty more in the cabinet—

HENRY

...Can I have some?

TAYLOR

Don't you have any?

HENRY

No. Peter doesn't drink.

TAYLOR

Who's Peter?

(Henry pauses at this.)

HENRY

He uh—he lives here.

TAYLOR

Something really fucking weird is going on.

HENRY

Yeah? I try not to think too hard when that happens.

TAYLOR

I live here—technically—for the past two weeks— There is definitely no Peter.

HENRY

As sad as it is to know that you have never met the sixty-ninth wonder of the world that is Peter, I really just want a drink right now.

TAYLOR

Right...

(Taylor fixes Henry a quick drink, then pauses.)

Do I—come over there to you, or—

HENRY

It doesn't fucking matter.

TAYLOR

Right, right—

(Taylor crosses over. Hands Henry the drink. Looks around.)

It's the—the same— apartment.

HENRY

Good to hear.

(Taylor sees the banner.)

TAYLOR

That's cool.

HENRY

Peter will be delighted.

TAYLOR

Did he make it?

HENRY

He did indeed.

TAYLOR

...What year is it?

HENRY

For me? Or for you?

TAYLOR

...For you. I think I'd know what year it was for me.

HENRY

1990. Start of a new decade.

TAYLOR

Oh. Oh, wow—

HENRY

You?

TAYLOR

2020.

HENRY

Damn. We're still around?

TAYLOR

What do you mean?

HENRY

Us. You know. Homosexuals.

TAYLOR

Oh! Yes, we—yes!

HENRY

That's—good.

(A pause.)

TAYLOR

I've got to be honest, I'm very confused.

HENRY

I'm sure. It'll all even out. Maybe. Probably.

TAYLOR

So, is this some type of—of uh...

HENRY

Type of what?

TAYLOR

Just—Wow. 1990. And I'm in Laila's—Peter's—Apartment.

HENRY

This drink is pretty good, by the way.

TAYLOR

Uh. Thanks. I just—poured it into a glass.

HENRY

Do they know?

TAYLOR

Who?

HENRY

The boy that just stumbled in. And your friend. Do they know?

TAYLOR

Do they know what?

HENRY

That you're...

(Taylor is not following.)

You know. Positive. Sick.

TAYLOR

...I'm not sick.

HENRY

But you have it, right? I've seen you taking medicine.

TAYLOR

I have HIV. That doesn't mean I'm sick. And— Laila knows—but—Eric just, never asked.

HENRY

I don't mean to be intrusive or anything, it's just—I'm kind of stuck seeing the shitshow, you know? And seeing when he's been coming and going. I know you have your own... health crisis going on.

TAYLOR

That's one way to put it.

HENRY

Isn't that shitty? It's like—kick us while we're down, you know? Like, oh. You're positive? Here's a disease that will fully fuck you up.

TAYLOR

Are you positive?

(A pause.)

HENRY

Let's not get too ahead of ourselves here, yeah?

TAYLOR

...What's your name, at least?

HENRY

Henry.

TAYLOR

Taylor.

HENRY

I know.

TAYLOR

Right.

(A pause.)

Are you like—a ghost, or something?

HENRY

I don't know what I am anymore. It feels like I'm—still here. But I know I'm not? And everything is—I can't remember what happens next for me. And it's a struggle to remember things. But sometimes I feel like I've done it all before.

TAYLOR

Am I dead?

HENRY

No. No, you're alive, and fine. I mean, fine—with all things considered. You're living with HIV in the middle of another health crisis, so...

(Laila enters back into the modern-day apartment. She is looking for Taylor.)

LAILA

Taylor?

TAYLOR

(To Henry.)

Did you hear something?

HENRY

Your friend is looking for you.

TAYLOR

Why do they sound so far away?

HENRY

I don't know. You're acting like I know everything.

TAYLOR

Sorry.

HENRY

It's fine. You might want to get back to your friend.

TAYLOR

How do I...?

HENRY

Just. Go back.

TAYLOR

Does anything get back to normal?

HENRY

Please. Go.

TAYLOR

...I'll see you again, I'm guessing.

HENRY

Probably.

(Taylor crosses back over. The lights fade on the past.)

LAILA

Oh! Hey. Where were you?

TAYLOR

Uh—The bathroom.

LAILA

...Okay. Eric's in bed.

TAYLOR

Good.

(A pause.)

What do you think he was doing today?

LAILA

...I don't know.

TAYLOR

All the bars are closed. I don't think he could like, just sit in one and drink right now.

We're barely able to leave the apartment.

LAILA

I'm sure he found a way. I can talk to him if you're worried.

TAYLOR

I just—Want to make sure we're all being safe. I don't think that he uh, knows.

LAILA

I told him you were high risk.

TAYLOR

You did?

LAILA

Yeah, like, right before you came. I didn't say why or anything. That's your business, not mine.

TAYLOR

Thanks.

LAILA

Of course.

TAYLOR

Do you ever hear, like, weird things here? Or see things?

LAILA

What do you mean?

TAYLOR

I don't know like—other people.

LAILA

Sounds like we watched too many horror movies today.

TAYLOR

Ha, yeah. Maybe.

LAILA

...For real though, are you okay? Something's got you shook up.

TAYLOR

I'm fine! It's just—there's just so much going on, you know? I want it all to just settle down for a while.

LAILA

Good luck with that. I don't think anything has been settled for a long time. Like, even before all of this corona shit.

TAYLOR

Yeah...

LAILA

We can only take it one day at a time.

(A pause.)

Come on, we'll go watch like, *Hercules* or something. Take your mind off of things.

TAYLOR

...Can we watch *Groundhog Day* instead?

LAILA

Of course.

(Taylor and Laila exit down the hallway. The lights go down on the present and come up in the past. Peter and Lux are sitting at the table, dressed for a funeral.)

LUX

It—it was a nice service.

PETER

Yeah.

LUX

Some of the other ones I've been too—you know? Some of them all start too—to merge together in my head.

PETER

I know what you mean.

LUX

...Did Henry pick out the outfit he was wearing? In the casket?

PETER

I don't know.

LUX

I hope not.

(Peter laughs.)

PETER

That's not funny.

LUX

I know. I would hate to be buried in a suit that color.

(They both laugh. Then stop.)

PETER

How's your brother?

LUX

Fine. It's a hill and valley situation sometimes.

PETER

Yeah.

LUX

Do you think Henry will stop by?

PETER

I told him we'd be here if he needs us. I think he's trying to figure out what to do. They shared an apartment.

LUX

Oh.

PETER

He doesn't know if he can handle the rent by himself now.

LUX

Has, uh. Has Henry been tested?

(A pause.)

PETER

I don't know. I don't think so. I asked him when Jeremy—when he first got sick. He told me they had been playing it really safe lately. I mean, it'd be stupid if they haven't.

LUX

I feel so stupid. I didn't know they were together. The way he talked about him, I really thought they were just friends.

PETER

It's not your fault. Henry's... a private person. That's just his nature.

LUX

Did Jeremy ever come to the meetings?

PETER

Yeah. He came. He was one of the first ones. Then he brought Henry to one. And they kept coming back. Then Henry came by himself and told me that Jeremy was sick. In the

hospital. We've never been a huge group, but a lot of people went and joined other places. I can't blame them for that of course. I was busy trying to help Henry and Henry was busy trying to help Jeremy. I'm the leader. I should have—Jeremy told us to keep the group going.

LUX

You were going to let it end?

PETER

I didn't want to. Henry was going to leave. And at that point it was basically just the two of us. Hard to call a one man show a group.

(A pause.)

And then you showed up.

(Lux is quiet.)

...I just hope Henry is okay.

LUX

I'm—I'm sure he is.

PETER

We should do something. For your brother.

(Lux lets out a small laugh.)

LUX

My brother doesn't let anyone do anything for him. Trust me.

PETER

Are you close?

LUX

...I—I got kicked out of the house. Mom found makeup in my room. I didn't have any clothes or anything, not even a pair of heels. It was eyeliner. Lipstick. I feel like if it was just the eyeliner I might have slid by. But the lipstick—that was damning, to them. Dad came home and they were yelling, just asking over and over again if I was gay, a queer, whatever. I told them I didn't know, which was the wrong answer. But I didn't know. And they—they didn't want me to stick around and find out. My brother, he said if I'm leaving, then he was leaving too. And they let us. And we never went back. I didn't even know he was gay too. Not until later, anyway. And. Then I started transitioning and he was right there with me.

PETER

We can do something for him. Even if he hates it.

LUX

He doesn't even like the nurses helping him. Tries to get around all by himself.

PETER

...What does he like to eat?

LUX

Eat?

PETER

Hospital food sucks.

LUX

I mean—he'll eat anything. He's like a vacuum cleaner.

PETER

I can cook something. You can help, of course. Nothing crazy, but—I used to cook all the time. I mean I still do, not like I did, but—

LUX

I think he'd appreciate it.

(In the present day, the lights come up as Laila enters through the front door, carrying takeout. She sets it on the counter.)

PETER

I—I just realized, I don't know where you live.

LUX

Just a tiny little place. It's nothing special.

PETER

Well, you're welcome here anytime.

LUX

Thanks, Peter.

(A loud clap of thunder. Everyone gets up and looks out the window.)

LAILA

Shit. Made it back just in time.

LUX

Didn't know it was supposed to rain today.

PETER

I didn't either.

LUX

I hate rain.

PETER

I don't mind it. I like to sit out on the balcony sometimes and watch it. Listen to it.

LUX

Thunder. It's thunder that I really don't like.

(More thunder. Lux jumps. Taylor and Eric enter into the kitchen with Laila.)

TAYLOR

You could have told us the food was here.

LAILA

Sorry. Got distracted.

ERIC

You didn't get rained on, did you?

LAILA

Nope. All dry.

(Taylor and Eric begin to get their food.)

PETER

Really? You're scared of thunder?

LUX

Everyone has to be afraid of something.

TAYLOR

Hey! We could all watch a movie together or something.

ERIC

Nah, I'm okay. Trying to power through *Tiger King*.

TAYLOR

Come on, you never watch movies with us.

ERIC

All you watch is horror movies. Or like, kid's movies.

TAYLOR

Well, what kind of movies do you watch then?

ERIC

Not those.

LAILA

Eric likes comedies. And not the good ones.

TAYLOR

What do you mean?

LAILA

His favorite movie is *Talladega Nights*.

ERIC

That is not true. It's *Groundhog Day*.

TAYLOR

You know, I always kind of thought of *Groundhog Day* as a horror movie.

(More thunder. The power goes out in both apartments.)

LAILA

Aw, shit. Guess no one is watching a movie tonight.

(Laila, Eric, and Taylor use the flashlights on their phone. Lux is scared.)

PETER

I've got a flashlight somewhere—and candles— Lux? Are you okay?

LUX

Yeah, I just—this weather—it makes me anxious.

PETER

It's okay. It's just a storm.

TAYLOR

Do you guys have any board games?

LAILA

...We have Uno.

ERIC

Oh, God, no. The last time we played that there was almost a fight. Our friendship was hanging on by tatters.

TAYLOR

It couldn't be that bad.

(A pause.)

Okay. Maybe it could. How about we promise to be civil about it?

LAILA

...Fine. I'd have to look for them.

TAYLOR

I'll help.

LAILA

The deck is in my room somewhere.

(Laila exits. Down the hallway. Taylor follows.)

ERIC

Hey! Guys, your food...

(Peter is looking for candles and flashlights. Lux is still looking out the window.)

PETER

Lux? Can you help? Maybe it will take your mind off the storm.

LUX

I—I think I’m going to go home, actually.

PETER

In this weather?

LUX

Yeah.

PETER

You’d get soaked.

LUX

It’ll—it’ll be okay.

PETER

I’m not about to just let you leave with the weather like this. You’re staying.

LUX

Peter—

PETER

I mean it, Lux.

LUX

...Okay. I'm— Where do you want me to look?

PETER

The flashlight might be in my bedroom.

LUX

Got it.

(Lux exits. Peter continues to look in the living room area. A flash of lightening illuminates the stage. Peter and Eric see each other.)

ERIC

Uh—

PETER

Hey.

ERIC

What the fuck—

PETER

Storm took out your power too, huh?

ERIC

Y-yeah. Uh. Who are you?

PETER

Peter.

ERIC

Hi, Peter.

PETER

Hello.

ERIC

What is happening?

PETER

We're talking.

ERIC

Yeah. I—got that.

PETER

It's funny, who we see ourselves in, isn't it?

ERIC

What?

PETER

It's—I mean—I can see you making the same mistakes.

ERIC

I really don't know what's happening.

(Peter crosses over into the modern day. Eric backs up.)

PETER

You'll know soon.

(Peter looks around.)

Hm. I like it, still. It's different, but— it feels the same. Still feels like home.

ERIC

...What mistakes am I making?

PETER

I think you know the answer.

ERIC

If it's about going out—I wear my mask. I stay six feet away from other people.

PETER

Until you get to where you're going.

ERIC

And how would you know? Are you following me?

PETER

I just know. I know what it's like to leave late at night to chase something. Something you think makes you feel... wanted.

ERIC

You don't know what you're talking about.

PETER

Listen, Eric. Things aren't—going to get any easier. Trust me.

ERIC

What, you can see the future now, too?

PETER

No. But I can see the writing on the wall.

(Eric looks behind Peter, into the past. He sees the banner on the wall.)

I didn't mean it quite that literally, but sure.

ERIC

You're gay?

PETER

Yes.

ERIC

What kind of Tony Kushner shit—

LUX

(Offstage.)

Hey, Peter, I found the flashlight!

PETER

I've got to go.

ERIC

What? Why?

PETER

Don't worry, I'll talk to you later.

(Peter pats Eric on the shoulder, and then begins to walk away.)

ERIC

Was—was it the Kushner joke?

PETER

You're in your life and I'm in mine.

ERIC

What?

(The past and the present become separated again. Lux enters with a flashlight.)

LUX

Look, it works!

(She flashes Peter in the face with it.)

PETER

Ah, Jesus—

LUX

Did you find the candles?

PETER

...I'll think we'll be okay without them.

LUX

What? Are you sure?

PETER

Yeah.

(Peter opens the balcony door. He sits at the edge of it.)

LUX

What are you doing?

PETER

Just sitting. Breathing.

(A pause. Lux walks over and sits next to him. She leans over and puts her head on his shoulder. They watch the rain. Laila and Taylor reenter.)

TAYLOR

We found the Uno cards, and just a regular deck of playing cards.

LAILA

Do you guys know how to play poker?

ERIC

No—No, I don't—

(Eric is distracted.)

LAILA

Taylor doesn't either. I can teach you!

TAYLOR

We can play while we eat.

LAILA

If you're interested, of course?

(A pause.)

Eric?

ERIC

Yeah—Yeah. I'll play.

TAYLOR

Let's do Uno first.

LAILA

I'll shuffle.

(Taylor, Laila, and Eric relax. The lights slowly fade on both the past, and the present.)

(The lights come up. Taylor is looking through photos on their camera. Eric enters from the hallway.)

ERIC

How did they turn out?

TAYLOR

They look really good! Do you want to see?

(Taylor makes space on the couch for Eric to sit next to them. Eric comes over and looks at the photos.)

I still have to edit them of course, but—they're really strong. You're very photogenic.

ERIC

Oh! Uh, thanks.

TAYLOR

I mean it!

ERIC

Do you usually like, use models? Or...?

TAYLOR

I like trying new things. When I first started, I did a lot of... Not really nature shots, but landscapes, street photography, that type of stuff. I had a coworker at the theatre—she had this idea for a photoshoot she wanted to do, vey monochromatic, and I wanted to try and branch out... It just kind of grew from there.

ERIC

Is photography what you like, want to do? I don't know, seeing your pictures in a gallery or something?

TAYLOR

...I don't know. It doesn't exactly bring in money. Sometimes I'll do cheap headshots for a friend at the theatre but that's about it.

ERIC

I mean, I don't think you want to be an usher the rest of your life, yeah?

TAYLOR

Yeah, no, I don't.

(A pause.)

Looks like that might not even be an option anyway for a while.

ERIC

Yeah...

(A pause.)

Do you remember Laila's party?

TAYLOR

Which one?

ERIC

The one we met at.

TAYLOR

I do. You kind of stayed off to the side.

ERIC

You flirted with me.

TAYLOR

I did?

ERIC

Yeah.

TAYLOR

... Yeah, probably. I get flirty when I drink.

ERIC

Did you mean it?

TAYLOR

What?

ERIC

Were you really interested?

(A pause.)

TAYLOR

I mean— We weren't like, living together then, you know?

ERIC

Right.

TAYLOR

I mean you're—you're definitely—attractive, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying you aren't, it's just—it's different now.

ERIC

You aren't living here forever though, right? Just until this whole pandemic thing is over.

TAYLOR

We don't know when it's going to end.

ERIC

Exactly. So why not try something?

TAYLOR

What if it ends up really shitty and passive aggressive, and then the pandemic just keeps on going and we're stuck in the same apartment until like, 2021. Don't you think that'd be a bit awkward? Especially for Laila?

ERIC

It doesn't have to mean anything.

TAYLOR

Oh. Okay. Uh. I kind of—I usually want it to mean something.

ERIC

You never just... you know. Do it?

TAYLOR

No? Sex is—it's different when you're—I mean, no offense. But you're cis. You don't have to worry about—how you're presenting or what your partner thinks when you pull down your pants. You can just—go at it. Some days I can't even look at myself without seeing the things I'd want to change.

ERIC

What would you change?

(A pause. Taylor does not answer. They are uncomfortable.)

Sorry.

TAYLOR

It's fine.

ERIC

I've never really... thought about it, I guess. What sex is like when you're...

TAYLOR

Nonbinary? Or just trans in general?

ERIC

Both?

TAYLOR

...You live with a transwoman.

ERIC

Yeah, but we don't talk about that kind of stuff! She's like—like a sister. Really.

TAYLOR

How long have you two lived together?

ERIC

Almost two years, I think.

TAYLOR

Wow.

ERIC

Yeah.

TAYLOR

I don't think I've ever lived with someone that long.

ERIC

Why not?

TAYLOR

It was just me at my old place. Not that it would fit another person even if I wanted a roommate. I know I haven't been here very long, but it's nice, being around other people. I don't think I realized how... solitary it was over there. Or how I... I guess how I didn't really have any roots.

(A pause.)

Is it bad that I want that? To have roots somewhere. I cleaned out my entire apartment in less than a day. Most of it fit in my bags—I got a cheap ass storage unit for everything else—but it was like I never lived there. Like I never even existed. I don't think I knew the name of a single person who lived in that building. And you're over here, saying you

and Laila are like siblings, and—I want that. I want to... to exist to someone. Or at least have a place where I feel like I do.

(Eric leans over and kisses Taylor. They part. Taylor lets out a small laugh.)

ERIC

What?

TAYLOR

Sorry! Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh—

ERIC

...Am I that bad at kissing?

TAYLOR

No! I mean—it's not that—I just. I'm sorry if this comes out rude but I didn't feel anything at all.

ERIC

Oh.

TAYLOR

Like, obviously I felt you kissing me, but there was... no emotion behind it. Or like. Desire. It was just... your lips on mine.

ERIC

Right.

TAYLOR

Sorry.

ERIC

No, it's okay. I can't—force you to feel a certain way or anything.

(A pause. It has gotten a tad awkward.)

Sorry if I—Came on too strong or—

TAYLOR

It's fine, really. I'm sorry I can't—return the favor or anything.

ERIC

Thanks for the photoshoot. I'm glad it turned out nice.

(Eric pulls out his phone, checking messages. Replying. Setting up something.)

TAYLOR

Yeah, once I edit them, they're going to look really good. We could totally take more pictures later too. I've got some photoshoot ideas—I thought about like, putting some static on the TV or something and seeing if I can get the light to do something really cool with it—

(Eric stands and begins to head to the door.)

ERIC

Yeah, yeah, sounds cool!

TAYLOR

Hey, where are you going?

ERIC

Picking up some stuff.

TAYLOR

Laila already got the groceries—and you're forgetting your mask—

ERIC

Pocket. And getting some stuff she forgot.

TAYLOR

Oh—Okay—

(Eric exits out the front door. Taylor is left alone.)

(Time passes. The lights fade on the present. The lights come up on the past. Peter is at the table, reading. There is a knock on the door. He answers it. It is Henry.)

HENRY

Hey, Peter.

PETER

Henry! I didn't know you were coming over! I would have cooked you dinner or something—

HENRY

It's fine. Can I come in?

PETER

Yeah, of course.

(Peter lets Henry in. The door closes behind him. There's a pause.)

HENRY

Sorry. I know it's been a—a long time.

PETER

It's okay. Just a few weeks.

HENRY

I got your—phone calls and messages. I just—didn't—couldn't respond.

PETER

That's okay, Henry. I know you've... I know you needed some time.

HENRY

I—Thanks.

PETER

...How are you feeling?

HENRY

I'm. It's...

(A pause.)

PETER

... Yeah. I understand.

HENRY

How's the group? Have you been up to anything?

PETER

Lux and I, we've been making some food and bringing it to some of the patients. We started with her brother, and it's just kind of... been steadily going from there.

HENRY

That's nice. That sounds—really nice.

(A pause.)

PETER

Are you alright?

HENRY

No. I—I was with Jeremy for so long. And now it's all...

(Henry trails off.)

PETER

You've always got me, Henry. And Lux. We're here for you.

(Henry stares at Peter.)

HENRY

I know—I know and that—really means a lot.

PETER

It's the truth.

HENRY

This whole thing must be easy for you. It's not like you've lost a lover or anything.

(A pause.)

PETER

I can't—even count all the friends I've lost. Not on both hands, not on both feet. It's—
it's like loss is running through me at this point.

HENRY

It's different when it's someone you love.

PETER

And who says I didn't love any of them?

HENRY

You get what I'm trying to say—

PETER

No, I don't. I mean, I do, but—I know you're hurting. But that doesn't mean I'm going to sit and let you tell me that I haven't lost anything to this plague too.

HENRY

You're such a spitfire sometimes.

PETER

Have you been drinking?

HENRY

Every day.

PETER

Henry—

HENRY

Don't! Don't give me a—an intervention or lecture or whatever right now. Because I know. I know it's a problem. I just don't care.

PETER

You should be taking care of yourself.

HENRY

Why? So I can waste away in a hospital bed a few months from now?

PETER

Are you--?

HENRY

No. No, I'm not positive.

PETER

Did you get tested?

HENRY

Yes.

(A pause. Peter lets it go.)

PETER

You should still be looking after yourself. Brushing your teeth, showering...

HENRY

I shower. I don't smell.

PETER

Thank god for that.

HENRY

Can we leave God out of it? I think he's done enough for us at this point.

PETER

What has he done for us?

HENRY

Gave us this fucking disease. I'm sure all the fundamentalists are orgasming every time they see an AIDS death in the paper. Less of us around.

PETER

I fucking hate when you drink. I fucking hate it.

HENRY

Aw don't be like that, Pete.

PETER

Please don't call me Pete.

HENRY

You don't like nicknames now?

PETER

Not when you're drunk off your ass.

HENRY

I bet you like it when Lux calls you Pete.

PETER

She doesn't call me Pete.

HENRY

Does someone have a crush?

PETER

I'm gay. Lux is a woman. Why would I ever have a crush on her?

HENRY

I don't know. People surprise me all the time. You surprise me all the time.

PETER

I'm going to believe that's a compliment for my own sake.

HENRY

It was a compliment.

(Peter glares at Henry.)

Aw Pete, don't get all mad at me.

(Henry hugs Peter. Peter sighs and hugs Henry back.)

This is nice. We should hug more often.

PETER

We would if you weren't such a hardass all the time.

HENRY

I've got the softest ass in existence. Ask Jeremy.

(Peter laughs. Henry looks at Peter, then instinctively kisses him. Peter freezes.)

PETER

Uh—

HENRY

Sorry—I—

PETER

I don't—I don't think that I uh—

HENRY

I'm sorry—I just—

(Henry becomes upset.)

I don't know why I did that.

PETER

Hey, it's okay—It's okay... Henry...

(Peter comforts Henry.)

It's alright. I know—I know things are just—really tough—

HENRY

I really miss someone holding me at night, Peter. Not even their arms around me, or their breath on the back of my neck. But the way my mattress would dip when we were in the middle of it. The way I had to try and take the sheets back from him because he would wrap himself up in them every night.

PETER

I know. I know.

HENRY

I—I forgot how it felt to hold his hands already. I realized I already forgot. One day I'm going to forget what he sounded like. Or what his favorite food was. Or how he bit his lip when he was nervous. And that's if I fucking live long enough to forget those things.

PETER

It's going to be okay.

(Henry kisses Peter again. They part.)

HENRY

Please, Pete. Peter. Please.

PETER

Henry... I don't think—

(Henry kisses Peter again. And again.)

HENRY

Please.

(Peter kisses Henry. It begins to become intense. The lights go down as lights come up on the present. Eric is on the couch, wrapped up in a blanket, watching TV. Laila enters.)

LAILA

Hey, Eric. You're up late.

ERIC

Can't sleep.

LAILA

Yeah, me neither.

ERIC

Why?

LAILA

I don't know. Just one of them nights, I guess. You?

ERIC

Same.

(Laila goes over to the couch.)

LAILA

Mind if I join you?

(Eric slides over to the end of the couch. Laila sits at the other end.)

ERIC

Where's Taylor?

LAILA

Asleep. They have no problem with it.

ERIC

Lucky.

LAILA

I know.

(Laila stares at Eric.)

You okay?

ERIC

Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay.

LAILA

Are you sure?

ERIC

Just a shitty day.

LAILA

What happened?

ERIC

Stuff. Too much stuff.

LAILA

Does this stuff have anything to do with where you go every other day?

ERIC

I don't know what you mean.

LAILA

I'm not stupid. I know you come and go this time of night. I don't know what you do. All the clubs and bars are still closed.

ERIC

I just walk.

LAILA

Right. When there's been a curfew.

ERIC

I walk carefully.

LAILA

And where do you walk carefully to?

ERIC

...Other apartments.

LAILA

Eric—

ERIC

What? I'm—I get lonely, okay? I'm like everybody else in the world.

LAILA

If you need to fucking hang out with someone, Taylor and I are right here. You've been wearing a mask and shit, right?

ERIC

It's hard to make out with someone when you're wearing a mask.

LAILA

...Eric, oh my god.

ERIC

Now you're glad I wasn't here trying to do that with you and Taylor, aren't you?

LAILA

Do you realize how fucking stupid that is?

ERIC

I didn't exactly have time before to hook up and meet people—

LAILA

--You meet people when you go and get lunch with them or go on a date. I don't think it counts as meeting someone when you have sex with them on their mattress that's just on the floor with no bed spring at three in the morning and then leave right when you're done!

ERIC

I knew I didn't want to tell you. I knew you'd be fucking mad at me—

LAILA

Of course I'm mad! If any of the guys you've hooked up with had this thing, you've exposed me to it, you've exposed Taylor to it—

ERIC

And we haven't gotten it, have we?

LAILA

We don't know that.

ERIC

I just love how you assume it's a different guy each time, like I've just been throwing myself at every guy in the city who messages me back—

LAILA

Is it? Is it the same guy?

ERIC

There's been some repeats—

LAILA

Jesus—

(Laila gets up to leave. Eric grabs her arm.)

ERIC

Laila—wait—I'm sorry—

(Laila stops.)

LAILA

Jesus, Eric—

ERIC

I know—I know I’ve been stupid—

LAILA

--You’re burning up—

ERIC

What?

(Laila brings a hand to Eric’s forehead.)

What do you mean burning up? Like—like I have a fever or something?

(Laila goes to the kitchen and gets a thermometer.)

I—I was feeling weird when I woke up—

LAILA

How weird?

ERIC

I threw up, but—I just thought—maybe it was something I ate—

LAILA

Open your mouth.

(Eric opens his mouth. Laila puts the thermometer in. Eric closes his mouth.)

ERIC

Do you—do you think it's—it's corona, or—

(Laila sees that Eric is scared.)

LAILA

I don't know.

(The thermometer beeps. Laila takes it out of Eric's mouth and checks it.)

ERIC

What does it say?

LAILA

...It's 102.

(A pause.)

ERIC

Laila...

LAILA

I'm going to take you to the hospital, okay?

ERIC

Laila, I—

LAILA

We're going to go right now—

ERIC

What if they won't test me, or—

LAILA

They have to test you. I'm not going to let you leave until they do.

ERIC

I—I'm sorry—I'm so sorry, I—

(Eric starts to cry.)

LAILA

...It's okay. It's—What's done is done. Now all we can do is make sure you're okay.

(Eric nods.)

Are you okay to leave now?

ERIC

Right now?

(Laila nods and grabs her mask. She puts it on.)

What about Taylor?

LAILA

I'll text them. If we're still gone when they wake up, they'll see it.

ERIC

...Okay.

LAILA

Get your mask. Let's go.

(Eric grabs his mask. Laila and Eric exit. Time passes in the present. It is now morning. The lights come back up in the past. Henry and Peter are both laying on the couch. It is clear that they have been intimate. Henry gets up, hungover, and realizes.)

HENRY

...Shit. Fuck. Shit.

(Henry gets up and walks away from the couch.)

Holy shit.

(Taylor enters in the present. Henry looks and sees them.)

Taylor—

(Taylor jumps and turns.)

TAYLOR

Not right now, please—

HENRY

I—I think I just—

TAYLOR

I'm in the middle of something—

HENRY

I think I just killed my friend.

(A long pause. Taylor laughs.)

Why—Why are you laughing?

TAYLOR

Because—you're—you're like a hallucination or something—that supposed to be in the past—why does it matter to me if your friend is dead?

HENRY

What?

TAYLOR

It really doesn't affect me—

(Henry suddenly crosses over and grabs Taylor by the shoulders. Taylor is suddenly scared of Henry.)

HENRY

You don't fucking understand—I may—I may have just killed him and it's my fault—it's my fault, and I—I was so stupid—

TAYLOR

Hey—Hey, could you let—could you please let go of me?

(Henry does not let go.)

HENRY

How am I supposed to tell him?

TAYLOR

Tell him? How can you tell him something if you killed him?

HENRY

Because he's not dead yet!

(Taylor is confused.)

TAYLOR

Okay...? Then I don't see what the problem is—

HENRY

He's going to wake up—and I—I have to tell him that he needs to get tested.

TAYLOR

You—you slept with him? And you're—

HENRY

I was diagnosed yesterday—

TAYLOR

What the fuck is wrong with you?

HENRY

I was drinking—I didn't—

TAYLOR

You should—You should be fucking ashamed of yourself—

HENRY

I am! I fucking am! What do you want me to say?

TAYLOR

What do you want me to say? You're the one in the past. What am I supposed to do about it?

HENRY

I don't—I don't know, I—

TAYLOR

I have to go now. I have to meet my friends at the hospital. We've got our own health crisis going on, I don't need to worry about one that's almost thirty years old.

HENRY

Wait—

(Taylor begins to leave. Henry goes back to the past. Laila and Eric open the door before Taylor can get there. They both look tired.)

TAYLOR

I was just about to go and find you—I was about to call—

LAILA

It's fine.

TAYLOR

(To Eric.)

Do you—do you have it? What did the test say?

ERIC

I don't know. It doesn't come back instantly.

TAYLOR

They sent you home? They must think it's not COVID if they sent you home—

LAILA

It, uh—They said it probably wasn't, but—

TAYLOR

But what?

ERIC

I—I have HIV. I was seroconverting. My immune system, it was producing antibodies—

TAYLOR

I know what seroconverting is.

ERIC

Right. They did bloodwork. Along with a COVID test. Which I'll hear back from later.
But the blood test—It did come back positive. I—I didn't know I—

(Peter has woken up and is staring at Eric. Henry is watching Peter anxiously.)

TAYLOR

Eric—I—

ERIC

I'm going to try and sleep.

(Eric exits down the hallway, but before he does, locks eyes with Peter. Peter looks shocked. Taylor looks at Laila, confused.)

TAYLOR

I don't understand.

LAILA

I'll fill you in later. It's been a long night.

TAYLOR

Right... You should—you should get some rest.

(Laila hugs Taylor.)

What's that about?

LAILA

Nothing—I just...

(Laila sighs and then exits down the hallway. Taylor looks to the past. Peter is staring down the hallway after Eric. Taylor sees Henry.)

TAYLOR

Henry.

(Henry is still staring at Peter.)

Henry?

(Peter turns to Henry.)

PETER

I—Is someone calling your name?

TAYLOR

He needs to know, Henry. He needs to know.

HENRY

...Pete—Peter. I—

PETER

What?

HENRY

...I need to tell you something.

(Blackout. End of Act One.)

ACT TWO:

(Lights come up on the past. It has been roughly a month. Peter is in the kitchen, cooking. Lux enters through the front door. She has a few groceries.)

LUX

Hey. I got what you asked for.

PETER

Thanks. You're a lifesaver.

LUX

Don't mention it.

(Lux places the groceries on the table.)

Anything else I can help with?

PETER

Uh, at the moment? I don't think—

(Henry enters from the hallway.)

LUX

Hi, Henry.

HENRY

Hey.

(Henry comes up behind Peter and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek.)

Dinner? Already?

PETER

I was getting hungry.

HENRY

Are you staying for dinner, Lux?

LUX

Uh, sure. If it's fine with—

PETER

Of course it's fine. I wouldn't have invited you over if we did.

LUX

...How are the two of you feeling?

(A pause.)

HENRY

I feel fine.

PETER

No complaints. You know, considering. How's your brother?

LUX

He's good. He's doing good.

PETER

We'd love to have him over one day.

LUX

He's not really into the whole activism thing...

HENRY

He's got AIDS, how could he not be into it?

LUX

Some people just aren't... built for it.

HENRY

Let's hope we never have to rely on those type of people.

LUX

Big words for someone who almost quit.

(A pause. Henry smiles. Lux smiles.)

HENRY

Very true.

PETER

Speaking of activism, any updates?

LUX

Did a few more interviews. Apparently, people like the way I talk.

HENRY

Even though you're...

LUX

I'm sure that's the only reason they want to interview me.

PETER

Don't discredit yourself.

LUX

It's a unique perspective.

PETER

I just wish we could do something... louder. You know?

LUX

We're being as loud as we can right now.

PETER

We always have to aim higher.

HENRY

No matter how much you scream, some people just aren't going to listen. That's just something we have to live with.

LUX

Until we get those people to listen, the government, the people in power—until we get them to hear us people are going to keep dying. You could—both of you. Just because you feel fine today—

PETER

Doesn't mean we'll feel fine tomorrow, I know.

HENRY

We both know. You don't have to act like our mother.

(A pause.)

I'm just saying.

(Lux is seething.)

LUX

Well. I'm sorry that I care.

PETER

It's, uh, it's fine! It means a lot that—that you're looking out for us—

LUX

Someone has to, apparently. Considering, you know, you're still with the guy who gave you HIV only a few weeks after the funeral of his last lover—

(The following dialogue overlaps, with everyone trying to talk over one another.)

HENRY

--It was not a few weeks later—

LUX

--Don't fucking interrupt me—

HENRY

--I'm not going to sit here and listen to you attack our relationship—

LUX

--Oh, fuck off, what relationship—

PETER

--Stop—

HENRY

--Just because you've never—

LUX

What? I've never what? I fucking dare you to finish that sentence.

PETER

Please don't do this right now. Please.

LUX

No, I've let it fucking go for almost a month—I've never been one to—to sit by and let things happen. But I don't understand how you can just—just live with what he did to you. And not just live with it, you invited him in and now you're—you're together?

PETER

Lux—Can we talk about this, just you and I, some other time?

LUX

(To Henry.)

Your last boyfriend fucking died because of this disease, you knew you had it, Henry, you knew, and you came here and—

HENRY

I don't need you to sit and tell me things I already know! What are you trying to accomplish, bringing this up anyway? Do you want him to just smile and nod and agree with you so you can watch him kick me out on the streets? Maybe help him throw my shit out after me? What's the fucking goal, Lux?

LUX

The goal is to help my friend realize that he's with the most selfish person I think I've ever met in my life.

HENRY

And your words affect me so much.

LUX

Because the only way they matter is if they affect you, right? We're not the only person in the room right now.

(Lux looks at Peter. Henry turns and looks at Peter. The lights come up in the present. Eric is in the kitchen. He has medicine in his hand. He takes it with some water.)

PETER

...I've—I—can we talk about this later—

LUX

Or we can do it right now.

PETER

I think that we just—

HENRY

(To Lux.)

Or you can just go back to whatever hole you crawled out of—

PETER

CAN YOU LET ME TALK, PLEASE?

(Lux and Henry go quiet. Eric jumps, and almost spills the glass of water. Eric looks to Peter. Peter sees Eric.)

...I think— I want both of you to go, please.

LUX

Peter—

PETER

Just—please—I really need to be alone right now.

HENRY

If you need me to get you something, Pete—

PETER

Get out! Both of you!

(A pause.)

Now!

(Lux goes to the door and exits without another word. Henry waits until she's gone.)

HENRY

Pete, baby—

PETER

My mind did not change just because she left.

HENRY

...Right. Okay.

(Henry goes to the door.)

I'll uh. Be back later?

(Peter says nothing. He is looking at Eric.)

Okay.

(Henry exits.)

ERIC

...Is uh—everything okay over there?

(Peter doesn't answer.)

It's been a while. I don't—I thought maybe I had made you up or something.

PETER

Great. My life could just be the fucking imagination of some random ass person.

ERIC

I'm pretty sure you're real. Or were? I think?

(Peter sits at the table.)

PETER

...That makes as much sense as the last month of my life.

(Peter puts his head down on the table.)

ERIC

I'm guessing you've had a rough time lately.

PETER

Really? What gave it away?

(Eric crosses into the past. He lays a gentle hand on Peter's shoulder.)

ERIC

I'm sorry that uh—you're going through whatever's happening.

PETER

Thanks. Noted.

ERIC

I haven't exactly had a stellar month either.

PETER

I'm sure it can't be worse than mine.

ERIC

...I'm living through a global health crisis, got diagnosed with a disease from a prior health crisis that puts me at high risk for the current one, the economy is practically non-existent because no one can go to work, there's been mass protests breaking out across the country because of systemic racism, and I can't even go and support the cause because there's a chance I could catch covid from the crowd and then I'm doubly fucked and risk spreading it to my roommate who also has HIV. And my other roommate has recently been baking bread, but she burns it every time and that doesn't sound nearly as

bad as the other things, but our apartment smells like burned bread constantly now and it's getting to be too much and—I miss when everything was normal.

(A long pause. Peter sits up.)

PETER

My best friend's boyfriend died from AIDS, and then my best friend fucked me and gave me it himself. And then he moved in and we're dating now, I think. I don't know, it's just—I've been letting it happen.

ERIC

Why?

PETER

Because we might be dead in a few months, so I might as well let him. And it's nice to have someone there.

(A pause.)

I miss when things were normal too.

ERIC

I get the feeling our normals are a lot different.

PETER

Yeah? What's something normal for you that you miss?

ERIC

...Movie theaters. Vacations. Sitting in a corner booth with my friends and sharing a big order of chips and salsa.

(A pause.)

Being so busy with work that I didn't care that I was alone in my room every night.

PETER

What about your roommates?

ERIC

We're friends. And I love them. But I mean—it's different. Just, intrinsically different.

PETER

Is it?

ERIC

I think so.

PETER

...What happened to movie theaters? Or restaurants?

ERIC

Oh. Our health crisis—it's like—a super flu? Is what they say. It's highly contagious so we can't be close to other people.

PETER

Doesn't sound too different from ours.

ERIC

...AIDS, right?

PETER

Telling gay people to stop having sex is like telling a river to stop running. Even when you tell them to just use protection—

ERIC

Things happen. And you don't.

PETER

...And you don't.

(A pause.)

I can't believe it's still around for you. Did—did we really not do anything to stop it?

ERIC

It's still around but—it's manageable, is what the doctor told me. It's not a death sentence.

(Eric pauses.)

Sorry—that sounded—so shitty.

PETER

It's the truth.

ERIC

There's medicine now. Makes it where you can't pass it on.

PETER

But you still have it.

ERIC

...Yeah.

PETER

Do you think your other disease you've got going on, whatever you called it, the super flu, do you think in twenty, thirty years it'll still be around?

ERIC

...I don't know.

PETER

So, the medicine, you just take it once now or—

ERIC

No, I have to be on it for the rest of my life, basically.

PETER

Better than having no life at all.

ERIC

There are people still around who—who caught it back in the—back where you are, who are still around.

(Laila enters the kitchen in the present and opens the oven. A cloud of smoke comes out.)

LAILA

Oh, no, no no no...

PETER

I just wish I knew what to do.

ERIC

About your friend?

PETER

I just—my life needs to have some sort of meaning. And helping him—it feels like it does. But—I mean—

ERIC

You want more.

PETER

Yes!

ERIC

Then go and get more.

(A pause. There is a knock on the door in the past. Laila looks towards the door in the present.)

Is that him?

PETER

Probably.

ERIC

Just... tell him what you need.

PETER

I don't know what I need.

ERIC

I don't know what I need either. But that doesn't stop us from trying to get it.

(There's another knock on the door. Laila goes to answer the door in the present.)

I'll let you get that.

(Eric crosses back to the present. Laila opens the door in the present. There is no one there.)

ERIC

Hey. I see that take thirty-seven didn't go well.

(Laila turns to Eric.)

LAILA

None of them have gone well.

(Laila closes the door.)

ERIC

...Can I help with the next one?

(Laila is a bit surprised.)

LAILA

Uh, yeah! Sure!

ERIC

Let's get started then.

LAILA

Now?

ERIC

Why not?

(A pause. Laila laughs and shrugs. Laila and Eric go to the kitchen as the lights go down in the present. In the past, Peter opens the door. Henry is there.)

HENRY

Pete—

PETER

Can we talk?

HENRY

I just want to—

PETER

--There's something I need to say, Henry.

HENRY

...Okay.

PETER

Thank you.

HENRY

Can I come in at least?

PETER

Yeah, you can—you can come in.

(Henry goes into the apartment.)

HENRY

So, what did you—want to talk about?

PETER

Can we sit down?

(The lights slowly fade on the past. In the present, Laila and Taylor are sitting on the couch, watching the news. Taylor is comforting Laila.)

LAILA

I just wish I could be out there with them.

TAYLOR

I know.

LAILA

But if I catch it and bring it home to you and Eric and you get sick I—I couldn't live with myself.

TAYLOR

You've been donating, you've been sharing posts, you've been helping, Laila.

LAILA

I'm not out there helping, though. I mean look how massive these protests have gotten. All over the country, every single state—and I'm just here.

TAYLOR

You can go. Eric and I can self-isolate or something—

LAILA

No, no it's too big of a risk.

(The lights come up on the past. Henry is sitting at the table, writing a note. He has a duffel bag with him, about to leave.)

TAYLOR

The fact that you want to be out there so bad, I think that says enough, you know?

(Laila sighs.)

LAILA

Yeah...

(Henry finishes the note and leaves it on the table. He looks out towards the balcony and walks over that way. He opens the balcony door and goes out and stands. Taylor turns to look.)

TAYLOR

I'll be right back.

(Taylor gets up and goes to the balcony of the present. They stand next to Henry, but they are both years and years apart. They stand in silence for a moment.)

TAYLOR

It's a pretty morning.

HENRY

Is it?

TAYLOR

From where I'm standing.

HENRY

What does it look like to you?

TAYLOR

A little bit overcast. Some clouds here and there, but the sun peeks out every now and then. It's hot. Summer. The clouds moving in front of the sun, the shade moving... it feels nice.

HENRY

It's just blue for me. Like the ocean, but... boring. The ocean's at least got waves. This is just big, open, blue sky. I'd rather have clouds. Something interesting to look at.

TAYLOR

Where are you going?

HENRY

Nowhere. I mean, not really. I forget sometimes, but I'm more—I know what's going on more than Peter does. Sometimes I get too wrapped up and forget it's all—in the past.

Peter, I think forgets. I'm still going to be here though. Can't stray too far.

TAYLOR

I still can't decide if you're a ghost or not.

HENRY

I don't think that's ever mattered.

TAYLOR

You seem pretty upset about something that's already happened.

HENRY

Yeah, well. I've still got emotions. And shit still hurts.

TAYLOR

Do you love him? Peter?

HENRY

...Yeah. But I don't know if it's as a friend or as something more. I've never been able to decide. Do you ever feel that way about your friends?

(Henry looks into the present. Taylor follows his gaze.)

TAYLOR

No.

HENRY

You sure?

TAYLOR

Yes.

HENRY

Just asking.

(A pause.)

I do wonder why we're so—linked.

TAYLOR

You mean why I'm the one to talk to you?

HENRY

No. I could talk to the others if I wanted to. But I've only really wanted to talk to you.

TAYLOR

You don't have feelings for me too, do you?

HENRY

Please. Don't kid yourself. You know I'm out of your league.

(Taylor laughs. Henry smiles. Taylor stops. A pause.)

TAYLOR

...I can't stop thinking about what you did to him. Peter.

(Henry doesn't say anything.)

Eric. He tested positive for HIV. Which is awful, but at the time I—I was happy it wasn't corona. But he's going to have it for life now. HIV, not corona. And I keep thinking that I could—talk to him—or could have helped him or even help him now, but I—I just let us pass each other in the hallway, or talk about nothing over dinner. Even though we both have this thing about us now that's—a part of us. And I know how it feels to go through coming to terms with it alone. And I'm just letting him sit there, making him have to do that—and I don't know what that says about me.

And I think about how you gave it to Peter, drunk or not, but—I've never talked to Peter. But I heard him crying. I knew it was him, deep, deep in my gut. One of those base feelings you know, like kids being scared of the dark. I don't know where you were. If you were with him or not.

Part of me is scared that I might be just like you.

(A pause.)

I heard him say to Laila, late at night, after everything had settled a little bit. He said to her, "I wish things could go back to normal."

I just keep thinking about that. Going back to normal. How normal for him is just a few months ago, but normal for me—I couldn't even tell you the last time I felt normal.

HENRY

Every time I close my eyes, I see his face when I told him he needed to get tested. Because of me. Every time he held my hand, or hugged me, or kissed me, I... I just thought, my God. I killed him. For you it's different, you've got medicine and—but for me. For Peter. We have medicine too, but it's not effective, or it fucks you over just as much, or just doesn't work at all.

TAYLOR

And you made Peter have to deal with that.

HENRY

I did. And I don't care if he forgives me or not, or if Lux forgives me or not—not that I—I care if they do but I—at the same time, I know I won't ever forgive myself. I don't know if we're stuck in this apartment forever or what, but even if we aren't, whatever's next I just... I'll never forgive myself. Do you think that's my normal, now?

TAYLOR

I don't know.

(A pause.)

Who's Lux?

HENRY

A friend. Well, a friend of Peter's. I don't think she really considers me a friend.

TAYLOR

Oh.

(A pause.)

The clouds are filling up the sky now.

HENRY

Yeah?

TAYLOR

Yeah. Just about blocking everything else out.

HENRY

...I feel like I can almost see them.

(The lights fade on the past and the present.)

(The lights come up on the past. Peter is on the phone. The note is on the table still, though all of Henry's things are gone. Peter is leaving a message.)

PETER

Hey, Lux, it's Peter again. Just uh, letting you know you can swing by whenever you want to. I'd love to have you over.

(There is a knock on the door.)

Someone's at the door, uh, call me back when you can.

(Peter puts the phone down and goes and opens the door. It is Lux.)

Oh! Hey! I just tried calling you—

LUX

Really? Again?

PETER

I just—wanted to talk to you.

LUX

If this is about that night—

PETER

It isn't. I mean—it is, but—

LUX

--Because I'm not mad at you, I swear—

PETER

--You aren't?

LUX

No! I mean—I was worried. Really worried. And I didn't think I could do anything.

PETER

You could have answered my calls...

LUX

I know I—I know. You can be mad at me.

PETER

...I'm not.

LUX

Promise?

PETER

Promise.

(A pause.)

So, why did you come over?

LUX

...I wanted to see how you were doing. You're still my friend even if we weren't talking.

PETER

Have you been to any marches lately?

LUX

As many as I can go to.

PETER

How are they?

LUX

Getting bigger.

PETER

Good. That's—that's good.

LUX

...Is Henry here?

PETER

No. No, he—I asked him to stay somewhere else, for a little while.

LUX

...If that's because of me, I'm—

PETER

No. It was—I made that decision myself.

LUX

Do you talk to him?

PETER

Of course. I just had to—have to—be by myself for a little bit.

LUX

Is he alright?

PETER

Do you care?

LUX

Yes, actually. He fucked up. And did something incredibly, impossibly stupid, but—I mean. I can't just wish ill on someone like that. Not someone I'm friends with. Or was. We never exactly got along.

PETER

He was just intimidated by you.

LUX

Intimidated? By me?

PETER

You go and get shit done. Henry tries, but... He wishes he could go out and just make the world bend to him instead of the other way around.

LUX

...Do we want to try and get the group going again?

PETER

About that. I had an idea.

LUX

What was it?

(A pause. Peter moves the sleeve of his shirt up his arm, revealing a deep, purple stain on his wrist. Lux gently takes his hand and looks at it closer.)

Peter—but—it hasn't been that long—

PETER

Long enough, apparently.

LUX

But you've been taking the medicine—and—and eating right, and exercising—

PETER

I was.

LUX

What do you mean you were?

PETER

I'm still eating right and everything but—I don't want to just—end up in a hospital and die anyway.

LUX

You don't know if that will happen. My brother, he's doing really well, he's out of the hospital now—

PETER

That's good!

LUX

--Just because you—it doesn't mean you're going to die.

PETER

I know. But I've got a plan—if it gets worse instead of better.

LUX

It's going to get worse if you don't do what the doctors say—

PETER

Just let me tell you the plan—

LUX

I'm not going to let you die just because you don't want to take any medicine, Peter. You have to be around to fight.

PETER

I am going to fight. If... when it gets bad. Like, very bad. I want to march. And I want it to be the last march I ever do.

LUX

I don't understand.

PETER

A march with a die-in at the end. But one that's not a bunch of sweaty people laying on the ground. One that actually shows them how this disease kills people.

LUX

You're fucking kidding me.

PETER

No. I'm not.

LUX

I'm not going to let you do that.

PETER

You have to.

LUX

I don't have to do shit.

PETER

Think of how much attention it'll get.

LUX

I don't care how much attention it gets. Not if you have to die to make that happen.

PETER

I'm going to die, Lux. I might as well—I might as well make something come out of it.

LUX

You—you're talking like you don't have any hope left at all.

(Peter is quiet.)

You don't know if you're going to die, Peter. You don't know that. No one knows that.

It's not—it's not a fact, it's not etched in stone—Why do you think it is?

PETER

Because that's all there is left. I'm going to die eventually. Everyone does. And it's more than likely going to be because of this disease. Or related to it.

LUX

If that's true, then my brother he doesn't have a chance, either, right? That's what you're saying—

PETER

--Lux, listen. I'm not going to be in a rush dying. If it doesn't happen, if I somehow get blessed by angels with trumpets up their ass or something and live to be ninety, then that's just as fine with me. But if I die in the next year, I don't want to be connected to tubes and wires being pumped full of drugs. That's not for me. I hope your brother lives a long, long time. Maybe he will. Maybe I will. Maybe Henry will, too. But if I don't, then... then I want to march right to the governor's office or the mayor's or even the fucking White House and I want them to see me go, I want them to see that my blood, the blood of everyone who's died of this, is on their fucking hands. And that blood isn't going to wash off. And God or whoever they believe in, He's going to see how fucking filthy their hands are with it.

LUX

Why can't I make you listen to me? What do I have to do for that to happen?

PETER

I do listen to you. I am. I hear what you're saying, and I know you're worried, but I've made up my mind.

(Peter hugs Lux.)

LUX

I don't want to watch it happen, Peter. I'm not about to just—leave you out to dry, but—
if that time ever comes, I'm not—I'm not going to be a part of it. I can't help someone
kill themselves.

PETER

I... Okay.

*(In the present, Taylor and Eric are waiting in the living room. The lights slowly
fade on the past.)*

TAYLOR

So, uh... How are you feeling?

ERIC

Fine. I mean, I guess—I feel fine. All things considered.

TAYLOR

It's a lot.

ERIC

Yeah. Especially with—everything going on.

TAYLOR

Eric—

ERIC

I'm sorry I kissed you, by the way. A few weeks ago. I—I don't know what I was thinking.

TAYLOR

...It's—It's okay—

ERIC

It's not. You were trying to be nice and I—I really fucked things up—

TAYLOR

You're fine, Eric. I promise.

ERIC

...I don't know what to do anymore. I messaged the guys I uh... saw. The ones that we didn't—use protection. Told them to get tested. None of them ever got back to me.

TAYLOR

Are you trying to find out which one it was?

ERIC

No. I don't really want to know. But I... I kept thinking about one of them maybe getting it from me, and then getting sick from it like I did, and then getting corona... I mean, who knows how long I had it before I found out, right? I mean, I hadn't had an STD test in like, forever, and I wasn't about to go to the hospital in all this mess and try and get one. And I was just being so fucking stupid. But it's like I—I finally had time to—to go out and meet people. And—and do things, you know?

(A pause.)

TAYLOR

I know.

(A pause.)

You haven't had any side effects from the medicine, have you?

ERIC

Nothing crazy, I guess. Or, nothing I've gotten super worried about.

TAYLOR

Just, uh, keep an eye on it, I guess.

ERIC

I am.

(A pause.)

TAYLOR

Sorry— I'm trying to be helpful—

ERIC

You are!

TAYLOR

--I just—I've never really had to uh, help anyone through this— No one was there for me, so I—I know how it feels—

ERIC

It means a lot that you want to help, Taylor, but really, I've got it under control.

TAYLOR

Okay.

(A pause.)

Laila should be back soon with the food—so—

ERIC

Do you remember what you were talking about? The roots thing? How you wanted to—to really exist to someone?

TAYLOR

Yeah.

ERIC

Do you feel like you'll ever have that?

(A pause.)

Do you think I'll ever have that?

(A pause.)

TAYLOR

I think you already do. Remember? I told you, you and Laila— Those are roots. You exist to her. She cares about you. I mean, she took you to a hospital, stayed there all night to make sure you were okay. She loves you. Not in a—you know—you said it yourself. She's like your sister. That's—Those are roots.

ERIC

Then what was I doing? Going out and—

TAYLOR

I don't know, Eric. I can't answer that for you.

ERIC

Right.

(A pause.)

I know you haven't been living here very long—and I don't know what'll happen when—if— this all is over. If you'll stay here or not, or if you and Laila have talked about it, but— Maybe you'll stay? We can fix the living room up and—I don't know— But you could get roots.

TAYLOR

I...

ERIC

And if you're—if it's me that—that you don't want to be around because I—I understand! I do! I just thought—well I know Laila wouldn't mind you staying longer—and I know we've been trying to do more stuff, with all three of us together—

TAYLOR

I'll think about it, okay?

ERIC

Okay! I just thought that I'd—let you know that was an option.

TAYLOR

...When I asked Laila if I could move in, just until things opened back up— I didn't know how long things would stay closed. I mean, none of us knew, right? But I didn't think she'd say yes. I thought I'd have to... I don't know. Beg my mother to let me move back in, where she calls me by the wrong name and gets mad when I try to correct her and—and it wouldn't have been good. And I didn't—don't—really have many other friends. I don't know how or why Laila and I—hit it off so well but—we just did. And it was completely random the way we met, I mean—She was talking to this actor guy we know and we both went to the same party—not that I'd call that a party—but we started talking and— It all feels so... fragile? Like if something happened, all the roots I've been trying to grow would just... shrivel up and die, you know? And maybe that's why I don't have any to begin with, because I—I'm too scared to let them grow past a certain point. Because what if I lose them?

ERIC

...I guess it's just a risk you have to take.

TAYLOR

Yeah... I guess so. It's a weird time to be taking risks. When you really just see the same three people every day.

ERIC

Three? It's just Laila and me.

TAYLOR

Two, sorry. Was thinking of myself.

ERIC

...It does feel like there's more people here than there actually is sometimes.

(Taylor looks at Eric.)

TAYLOR

What do you mean?

ERIC

I don't know. It's a big apartment. Or—big compared to others.

TAYLOR

Yeah.

ERIC

I guess it's just like, sometimes you expect to see more people here than there is. Like, back when shit was normal, Laila would always have these like, huge parties. Like massive. Not like—ragers or anything—not like a college frat party—just a bunch of people over and having a good time. I'm kind of used to there being more people here usually.

TAYLOR

I know, I've been to some of them.

ERIC

Sometimes I never even knew the names of people she had over... I—I had a nightmare once where she didn't know who she had over either and we were both trying to figure it out. Just this one guy out on the balcony, watching.

TAYLOR

What did he look like?

ERIC

I don't know. Just—an average guy.

(*A pause.*)

It was just a dream though.

TAYLOR

Right. Just a dream.

ERIC

The whole like, past three months have felt like a dream. Like it's the same day every day. Complete *Groundhog Day* bullshit.

TAYLOR

Time loop.

ERIC

Exactly. I can look out the window and see people down on the street and sometimes every now and then people will walk by without a mask on or anything and it's like...

Oh, yeah, we used to not have to do that.

TAYLOR

I mean, they should be wearing their mask though—

ERIC

--Oh, totally, but—It's just a weird thing how normal it is now. Just another thing you have to do before you leave the house. Like—phone, wallet, keys, mask.

TAYLOR

...Have you noticed? That everyone is like, so worried about getting back to normal, but not about the people who are getting sick or anything. It's just—everyone wants to go back to something that like... might not have ever existed.

ERIC

What? Things not feeling like the end of the world?

TAYLOR

People have thought the world was going to end before. You know, the Cold War nuclear apocalypse, or the bubonic plague, or just 2012. They all had a normal before that. And then it changed. And that became normal.

ERIC

I don't think 2012 changed a whole lot for anyone.

TAYLOR

You know what I mean though.

ERIC

You think we're entering like... the next stage of normal or something?

TAYLOR

I guess.

ERIC

You know what I've been thinking about?

TAYLOR

What?

ERIC

Remember like—God, it feels like forever ago, but you asked Laila and me about like, the people who came before us?

TAYLOR

Yeah.

ERIC

I've been thinking about them.

TAYLOR

As a whole or—

ERIC

No. People like us. Gay, or trans, or queer.... And just. Having to come to terms with that. Like I thought it was hard for me, but God. Back then? And then you have like, HIV and AIDS and fucking Raegan in the White House... I never thought about it before, but my grandpa, he would always bring up Raegan if someone mentioned the president at all. Like, as an example of a good president! I never thought about it before but just, how many of us Raegan just... let die. I never really thought about it before. I mean, I knew about it but... If I got diagnosed even like, twenty years ago... how much different it would have been.

TAYLOR

It feels a lot closer than twenty, thirty years ago.

ERIC

Yeah.

TAYLOR

Like I could just stumble into it.

ERIC

It feels like I have.

(Taylor and Eric look at each other. Both are close to just saying what they've seen. Laila comes in through the front door. She puts some food on the table and takes off her mask.)

LAILA

Food is here.

TAYLOR

Hey, Laila? Can we talk really quick?

(Laila looks and see Eric and Taylor in the living room.)

LAILA

...What's going on?

ERIC

We were talking earlier—

TAYLOR

We know you really want to be out protesting. And I know you don't want to put Eric and I at risk. But—We want you to go out and do it anyway.

LAILA

...But if I get sick—

ERIC

You've got your mask. You've got hand sanitizer. The protests are outside...

LAILA

It's too risky—

TAYLOR

It's a risk we're willing to take. It's not like risking it so we can all go to a party or something. It'd be a risk that means something.

LAILA

Are you sure?

ERIC

If you're okay with going alone.

TAYLOR

Eric and I are going to still stay here.

LAILA

I've got some friends I can go with— But—

ERIC

It'll be fine, Laila. Promise.

TAYLOR

And if you do get sick, or Eric and I get sick, then we've done what we've been planning to do—handle it.

ERIC

We know how important this is for you.

LAILA

I—I don't know what to say.

(Eric hugs her. Taylor joins.)

I can sleep in the living room or something—we can be extra careful—

TAYLOR

If that's what makes you feel better!

LAILA

My friend knows a group that's going to one tomorrow—I'll let them know I can come—
but first, I'm hungry as fuck.

ERIC

Just happy we don't have to eat burned bread tonight.

(Taylor laughs and then stops themselves. Laila glares at Eric. Eric clears his throat.)

I mean, you should keep practicing, I'm sure you'll get it right.

(Taylor laughs. The lights fade on the present.)

(In the past, time passes. Eventually, it settles. Winter. Henry enters from the bedroom, supporting a very ill Peter. They are both dressed for a march in the cold.)

HENRY

It's not too late. I can get you to a hospital.

PETER

I know.

HENRY

...You're still going to do it?

PETER

I have to.

HENRY

You don't—

PETER

Hey, hey... I told you, I heard it from Lux for months. You said you wouldn't try and talk me out of it.

HENRY

Now it's happening, and I—

(Peter takes Henry's hands.)

PETER

Listen, Henry... I—You—I know the last... the last few months, they've been hard, and... and before that when we were—when you moved back in—I don't want you to blame yourself anymore.

HENRY

...You know I can't do that, Peter.

PETER

Now look who's talking about things they have to do.

HENRY

I've got to—I have to live with the fact that I did this to you.

PETER

And I'm telling you it's okay.

HENRY

That's easy for you to say. In the next couple of hours, you're going—to....

PETER

I know.

HENRY

It's cold outside. You should—should be wearing another jacket or something—a scarf
or—

PETER

It won't matter.

HENRY

If you want your stupid plan to work, you've got to actually make it to the end, you know. If you kneel over five blocks away it won't exactly be the same.

PETER

Is it going to be just me and you?

HENRY

I don't think a lot of other people wanted to march with someone to their death, Pete.

PETER

Right...

HENRY

But who knows, there might be people waiting for us.

PETER

That would be nice. But I don't mind if it's just you and me.

HENRY

Hey—wait a second—

(Henry goes over to the QUEER AMERICA banner, and takes it down.)

PETER

What are you—

(Henry drapes it around Peter's shoulders, and then has Peter hold it in the front.)

HENRY

Do you have a safety pin or—something that we can hold it in the front--?

PETER

There might be one in the junk drawer.

(Henry looks and finds one. He then pins it in place.)

HENRY

... You ready, Pete?

(A long pause. Peter is looking down at the banner, at himself.)

Peter?

PETER

Huh?

HENRY

I asked if you were ready.

PETER

Oh. I—Yeah. I am.

HENRY

Okay.

(Henry goes and opens the door. He leads Peter through it, then stops.)

Ah—Wait—my wallet—

PETER

Do I need to wait?

HENRY

I'll meet you downstairs?

PETER

Okay...

(Peter exits. Henry waits for a moment, then goes to the phone and calls someone.)

HENRY

...Lux? It's—yeah—No, it's—it's happening. Just—make sure there's an ambulance there when we—okay. Okay. Thank you—No, really, thank you. I've got to go— Okay. Make sure it's there.

(Henry hangs up and exits through the front door. The lights come up on the present. Peter is standing in the apartment, no longer wearing the banner draped around him. Eric enters from the hallway and stops once he sees Peter.)

ERIC

Oh. Uh. Hi.

(Peter does not answer.)

...Are you okay?

PETER

I hate how much this place has changed.

ERIC

...The apartment?

PETER

Yeah. It doesn't feel like home anymore.

ERIC

No offense, but I think it's been a while since you've lived here.

PETER

Thanks, I noticed.

ERIC

Sorry.

PETER

When was the last time we talked?

ERIC

Uh, for me or for you?

(Peter lets out a small laugh.)

PETER

Fair enough. Let's go with for you.

ERIC

...For you meaning the last time I talked to you or—

PETER

--Yes, that one—

ERIC

Uh... I—I think you were talking about your friend.

PETER

Friends.

ERIC

Yeah.

PETER

I don't have any friends.

ERIC

Because you're—

PETER

Because they went behind my back.

ERIC

Oh.

PETER

I had—I had one last request, and they—they worked together to make sure I didn't get it.

ERIC

What was it? Your last request?

PETER

I wanted to die at the end of this march we were doing, an AIDS march, but I got there and—they took me to a hospital. Didn't last much longer after that.

ERIC

I'm... I'm sorry?

PETER

It's in the past. I think.

(A pause.)

No. It is. It's all in the past.

ERIC

...If it's in the past, and you're, you know, dead... why do you care?

PETER

I'm supposed to just be okay with it, huh? Do you know how many patients I saw just... completely decay inside those hospitals? Tied up with tubes and cords and beeping machines, nurses giving you god knows what... I didn't want that for me.

ERIC

They were trying to take care of you.

(A pause.)

Are they, uh... dead too?

PETER

I don't know.

ERIC

You haven't tried to find out?

PETER

I don't know how long it's been.

ERIC

Oh.

PETER

Are you sick?

ERIC

No.

PETER

But you have it.

ERIC

Yes.

PETER

...I wish I could give you some advice. Some... great, big statement that makes it—not okay, but... I don't know, brings you some peace.

ERIC

I feel like I'm the one who should be bringing you peace.

PETER

Isn't that funny.

ERIC

I tried asking the landlord who lived here before us, but they didn't know. Or didn't want to say.

PETER

My name was on the lease. Once I was gone, I don't know what happened. I don't know if Henry moved out or not.

ERIC

Was that your friend?

PETER

...More than that. Sometimes.

ERIC

Everything you say just doubles down on the idea that I should be helping you, not the other way around.

PETER

I don't think you can, Eric.

ERIC

Why not?

PETER

How can you?

ERIC

I could try to come up with some big statement.

PETER

Good luck.

ERIC

...You haven't seen him since you died, have you? Henry?

PETER

No. I haven't.

ERIC

Avoiding him?

PETER

I don't know if he's even here.

ERIC

...Would you want to talk to him?

PETER

Maybe? I—

(A pause.)

...I...

(Peter tears up.)

I don't know what I'd say. Talking to you—I see myself— But it's... it's... God, I can't even talk now. It's all so different. You've got your friends, you're—you're healthy, even with... and I don't know if somewhere I did something wrong—

(Eric hugs Peter.)

ERIC

We all do the best we can. That's—that's all we can do. I think you did the best you could.

PETER

I don't know if that makes me feel better or not.

ERIC

Give it time, maybe.

PETER

...Can you get me some water?

ERIC

Can you drink it?

PETER

Maybe.

(Eric goes to the kitchen and begins to get a glass of water. Taylor enters.)

TAYLOR

Hey, Eric.

(Eric turns. Peter is gone.)

ERIC

Hey—

(Eric stops.)

TAYLOR

Something wrong?

ERIC

No—Yes—I was talking to someone—

TAYLOR

Who?

ERIC

...Okay—I'm just—Going to lay it all out...

TAYLOR

Okay...?

ERIC

For the past couple months, I'm pretty sure I've been talking to a... a ghost? I think?

TAYLOR

...Holy shit—

ERIC

--I know, I know it's—

TAYLOR

He talks to you too?

ERIC

You've seen him?

TAYLOR

Yes!

ERIC

Oh my god!

TAYLOR

I've been talking to him since like—God, since March—

ERIC

Me too!

TAYLOR

I didn't know what the fuck was going on, I just went with it—I mean, why not, right?

ERIC

Did he tell you that he died?

TAYLOR

What? No.

ERIC

Yeah—he—he had AIDS, back in the day when it was—really bad.

TAYLOR

It's still bad—

ERIC

You know what I mean.

TAYLOR

Damn. I mean, I didn't think that he was like, still around—but—

ERIC

Yeah...

TAYLOR

...Do you think Laila sees him?

ERIC

I don't know. She's at the protest—

TAYLOR

I can't believe we've been seeing the same ghost this whole time and we just—never talked about it.

ERIC

I know! It's like—what the hell!

(Eric laughs.)

TAYLOR

Henry told me I was the only one he talked too. I can't believe he was lying—

(Eric freezes.)

ERIC

Henry?

TAYLOR

Yeah. That's who you saw, right?

ERIC

No—No, no—I've been talking to Peter.

TAYLOR

...Oh.

ERIC

So, Henry's—dead?

TAYLOR

I think so.

ERIC

Peter—He was—talking about him. He said he didn't know.

TAYLOR

What? Like, they haven't seen each other?

ERIC

Apparently not.

TAYLOR

They don't really... act like ghosts.

ERIC

Yeah... I don't know what else to call them, though.

TAYLOR

...We need to ask Laila if she's talked to either one of them.

ERIC

You think she has?

TAYLOR

I don't know. I didn't know you had.

ERIC

That's fair.

TAYLOR

I can try and call her—

ERIC

Why don't we wait until she gets back?

TAYLOR

Are you sure?

ERIC

Yeah. If we call, she's going to think somethings wrong.

TAYLOR

Yeah...

ERIC

...Can you tell me everything Henry's talked to you about?

TAYLOR

Only if you tell me what Peter said.

ERIC

Deal.

(The lights go down. They come up on the present. It is a few hours later. Taylor and Eric are asleep in the living room, having talked all night. Laila creeps in through the front door and sees them. She gets a blanket and drapes it over them, goes to the kitchen, gets some water, maybe a snack. It could even be breakfast. She's just about to sit down when there's a knock at the door. She goes and answers. It's Lux, with a bag, wearing a face mask.)

LAILA

Uh, hi.

LUX

Hi. Sorry, I know it's—late—or early, I guess— It's Laila, right?

LAILA

It's fine, I haven't... been asleep or anything. And that's me, yeah.

LUX

You were at the protest, right? The Black Lives Matter one.

LAILA

Yeah. I was.

LUX

You were with Katie's group?

LAILA

Yeah! Do you know her?

LUX

I marched with you. I was near the back. Can't march as fast as I used too.

LAILA

Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't—recognize you... You were talking with Matthew, right?

LUX

Yes! My brother and him go way back... My brother would have been there, but we've been being extra careful because of the whole Covid mess... Can I come in? I'll keep my mask on—keep my distance—I just need to give you something—if that's alright?

LAILA

Yeah, yeah, sure. My roommates are sleeping...

LUX

I won't be long.

(Laila lets Lux in and closes the door. Lux looks around, seeing the same apartment she had been in before. She knows this.)

Katie gave me your address. I hope you don't mind.

LAILA

No, no I don't.

LUX

Was that your first march?

LAILA

...Yeah. I—should have been to more—

LUX

Hey, we all start somewhere. The fact that you came out, that's enough.

LAILA

I'm guessing it wasn't yours?

LUX

Oh, I've been doing it a long time. For a lot of different causes.

(A pause.)

I uh, I actually joined my first group right here. In this apartment.

LAILA

What? Really?

LUX

Yeah. Back in the nineties. Shit was a lot different back then.

LAILA

God, I can only imagine... How did you know I lived here, if Katie gave you my address? Why did you want to talk to me?

LUX

I—I don't know. It was a gut feeling. Instinct. Like... I just had to. I saw you marching and I—I had to meet you.

LAILA

Did you live here?

LUX

No. I mean, it felt like I did sometimes, but...

(A dim light comes up in the past. Henry is on the couch. Peter is standing by the table. Lux can almost see them. Almost, but not quite.)

But I never officially moved in or anything. This was my friends place.

LAILA

Oh.

LUX

He was a big activist. Like... It was his group I joined first. Him and his friend.

LAILA

What group was it?

LUX

It was an AIDS activist group. That was back when it was just... tearing its way through anyone and everyone. My brother, he caught it, and I... I had to do something.

LAILA

Your brother, is he...?

LUX

He's still around. We've both gotten older of course, but... yeah. One of the few who made it.

LAILA

Your friend, the one who lived here—

LUX

He didn't. Neither of them did.

LAILA

I'm sorry...

LUX

It's been—it's been years. But sometimes I'll remember and—and it feels like it just happened.

LAILA

...You can look around, if you want. I don't know how similar it was to when you were here, but I doubt it's changed that much.

LUX

You'd be surprised. It looks... a lot nicer than Peter ever had it. He was a lot of things, but an interior decorator, he was not.

(A pause.)

Actually... I uh, came to bring something back. Back in the day, Peter—he handmade this really, really nice—I'll just show you.

(Lux reaches into her bag and pulls out the QUEER AMERICA banner, now older, but still just as vibrant, still just as powerful. She unfolds it so Laila can read it.)

LAILA

Oh, wow...

LUX

I uh. I want you to have it.

LAILA

Me?

LUX

...The fact that you live here, and you... you march and... Yeah. I want you to have it.

LAILA

...I don't know if I can take this... I don't even know your name.

LUX

It's Lux.

(The light gets just a little brighter in the past.)

LAILA

It's nice to meet you.

LUX

Good to meet you too.

(She hands Laila the banner, then points to a spot on the wall.)

It was—it was there, when Peter and Henry, when they—they were here. They never took it down, not until Peter... Henry couldn't hang it back up, so he gave it to me. I've brought it to a few marches here and there. Always felt like they were there when I did, in a way.

LAILA

Are you sure you want me to have it?

LUX

Absolutely positive.

LAILA

Thank you...I—I don't know what to say.

LUX

...You and me, we're—we're the type of people others look to, Laila. We fly the flags; we hold up the signs and banners and yell the loudest. Because we have to. To make people hear us. To make people hear the ones that can't be marching with us. That's our job—our duty. Make the people who ignore us finally look and listen. To let them know we're not going anywhere. No matter what they try and do. We're—We're America, Laila. Not them.

(Laila nods.)

I don't want to overstay my welcome—or wake up your roommates...

LAILA

You can come back over. Anytime you want.

LUX

I might have to take you up on that.

LAILA

Here, I'll give you my number—

(Laila gives Lux her number.)

Just call me if you want to come over—I can—can cook something— I know with all the covid mess—but I can drop it off at your door or—

LUX

Thanks, Laila.

(Lux goes to the door, then stops and looks back at the apartment. Then, she slowly starts to look at the past, and sees Peter and Henry.)

...Sorry—It's—Just, all the memories, you know?

(Laila says nothing. Neither does Peter. Or Henry. Lux fights back tears.)

See you around sometime, yeah?

LAILA

Yeah.

PETER

The door's always open.

HENRY

It'll always be open for you, Lux.

(Lux smiles. Cries.)

LUX

Oh—I—

(Lux looks one last time, then leaves. The door closes behind her. Eric and Taylor begin to stir. Taylor lifts their head up.)

TAYLOR

(Groggily.)

Oh, hey, Laila...

(Taylor nudges Eric.)

Eric, wake up. She's home.

LAILA

Were you guys waiting for me?

TAYLOR

Kind of, yeah.

(Eric sits up and sees Laila holding the banner.)

ERIC

What's that?

LAILA

Oh. Someone I protested with—they came and dropped it off. She said it belonged to someone who used to live here. She marched with them back in the day.

(Taylor and Eric look at each other.)

TAYLOR

Where is she?

LAILA

She just left.

ERIC

And you talked to her?

LAILA

Yeah...?

ERIC

(To Taylor.)

Do you think...?

TAYLOR

I don't know, if she marched with her...

LAILA

Mind telling me what you're talking about?

ERIC

The apartment's haunted—

(Taylor hits Eric with a pillow.)

LAILA

--It's what?

TAYLOR

...Eric and I, we think we talked to the people who used to live here. The one your friend knew.

ERIC

Peter and Henry.

(A pause.)

LAILA

...If this is some kind of prank, it's really fucking rude—that's not—something you joke about—

TAYLOR

We aren't joking!

ERIC

Really! We've been talking to them since March!

LAILA

...Right.

ERIC

Peter—He lived here—he ran a group and then he got AIDS and—and he—he wanted to really leave his mark on the world, right? So, he tried to do one last protest where he would—he would die at the end, because he had gotten really sick—but his friends called an ambulance before he could—

TAYLOR

And his friend Henry, he's the one who gave it to Peter, but he's never really forgiven himself, and—and he helped take care of Peter, right, and just because he fucked up that doesn't make him a bad person—

LAILA

--Okay, okay I don't know what the fuck you are talking about.

ERIC

We're telling the truth!

LAILA

Okay! And I just marched like—I don't even know how many blocks—and I'm just going to hang this up and go to bed, and you can tell me whatever in the morning. How's that?

ERIC

But—

TAYLOR

That sounds good.

ERIC

Taylor—

TAYLOR

We can tell her in the morning. We're not going anywhere.

ERIC

...Okay. Where do you want to hang it up at?

LAILA

I was thinking here.

(Laila indicates where Lux pointed earlier.)

TAYLOR

I don't know... What about like...

(Taylor takes the banner from Laila. Eric sees what Taylor is doing and goes to help. They each hold one side of the banner and place it up on the wall. It bridges the past and the present. Maybe blurs them together a little bit. Laila looks into the past, just for a brief moment.)

ERIC

What do you think?

LAILA

I—I think that looks good. Let me—get some pins—

(Laila gets some thumbtacks and hangs the banner up. Taylor and Eric step away and look. Laila, Eric, and Taylor look at the banner, together. Eric puts his arms around Taylor and Laila.)

ERIC

...I'm glad that—that we're here together.

LAILA

Eric—

ERIC

I am. And like—I mean who the hell knows what’s going to happen, with everything going on. But I’m glad that—that we’ve got each other, that we’ve had each other through it so far.

(A pause. Laila looks into the past again. Maybe she sees Peter and Henry. She looks to the banner. Then into the future.)

LAILA

I wouldn’t want to have anyone else. But I’m literally about to pass out if I don’t get to bed right now.

(They laugh.)

Goodnight, y’all.

(Laila begins to exit down the hallway.)

ERIC

I might go back to sleep too.

TAYLOR

I could definitely sleep more.

ERIC

Hey, Laila, wait up, we could bring my blankets and stuff into your room, listen to some music—

TAYLOR

Maybe a movie?

LAILA

Sounds good. I know for a fact I'll sleep through it though.

ERIC

Hell yeah. Movie night. Or. Morning.

(Taylor laughs. Eric, Taylor, and Laila exit down the hallway together. Peter stands in front of the banner, half of him in the present, half of him in the past. Henry stays at a distance, watching him.)

HENRY

She— She looked so much older. Lux.

(A pause.)

And—Happy. Did you see her?

PETER

I did.

(Henry jumps in surprise.)

HENRY

You—Answered me—

PETER

Hi, Henry.

HENRY

Hi? You don't talk to me for—for however long it's been—and we've both been—stuck here and you say hi?

PETER

You could say hello back.

HENRY

Hello. Happy?

PETER

...I think so. I've been so—so fucking angry. At you. And Lux. I knew you were here, and I just avoided you. Just the thought of you made me so—so—

(A pause.)

I died in some cramped, noisy hospital bed. I wanted to die outside. With the air and the sounds and the sky above me and—I didn't. But that doesn't matter. I thought you and Lux—you just did it to spite me or something. Throw things back in my face. But seeing her—old—and happy—that's what you all wanted for me and... I don't know. It was like this... wind blowing through me. And I understood. And then the anger was gone.

(A pause.)

Has that happened to you?

HENRY

I don't—I don't think I was ever angry, Peter. Not about—

PETER

You know, for a long time I didn't know if I actually loved you or if I just wanted to take care of you.

HENRY

Oh.

PETER

Thinking it over, they're kind of the same thing though, right? They go hand in hand.

HENRY

I'm sorry for—for everything—

PETER

Henry.

HENRY

What?

PETER

You've got to learn to let things pass.

HENRY

...Because it's so easy for you, right?

PETER

That's not what I meant. If you ever want to—get out of here and—you have to—

HENRY

There is no getting out of here. There's no—no magical absolving of sins and mistakes.

Not for me. Not for me.

(A pause.)

At the service... at *your* service... I told her. I told her that I could never forgive myself.

For anything. And she... She looked at me and said—That shouldn't be true. That was...

the last time we spoke. I didn't—I wasn't around for much longer.

PETER

...I'm leaving.

HENRY

What? Can that—Can we even do that?

PETER

I'm not sure. I think so. Would you want to try and come with me?

HENRY

And go where?

PETER

I don't know.

HENRY

...It's my fault we're both here—

PETER

Don't start that again—

HENRY

It's true—

PETER

You can try and come with me or be here, watching people come and go forever, sitting in your own misery.

HENRY

What if that's what I deserve?

PETER

I'm telling you, it's not.

(A pause.)

We could probably run into anyone once we leave, you know. Anyone at all. Everyone who didn't make it.

HENRY

...Jeremy?

PETER

Maybe.

HENRY

...I don't—

PETER

You'll never know if you don't try.

HENRY

...What about Taylor? Or Eric? What if they need us?

(A pause.)

I mean—we've been—talking to them. I know you have.

PETER

I don't think they ever needed us. I think we needed them.

HENRY

No. I think you're wrong. I think they have needed us too. To make sense of things. We didn't make it. And they—

(A pause.)

You're just going to leave?

PETER

...It's something I have to—No—Need to do. For myself.

HENRY

You know, the last time I saw you—you fell down onto the sidewalk. Couldn't stand back up. You—you could barely breathe and—you were so pale. The ambulance came just in time, they got you into the back and—Lux was there. We both went to the hospital to see you and—at first, we thought they weren't letting us in because of—some protocol or something. And you know how Lux is. She was fighting to get back there, and they finally told us that—that you didn't want to see anybody. No one at all. We knew you'd be angry; I mean—But we came back day after day. Every day until you... Until they told us you were gone. And not once did you want us to see you. The first time I see you after all that is right now and—and you're about to leave.

(There is a long moment of silence.)

PETER

We could leave them something. To let them know. A note, maybe.

HENRY

We?

PETER

Yeah. From the both of us.

HENRY

...What would it say?

(Henry gets a piece of paper. And a pen.)

PETER

Whatever we want it to.

HENRY

...From the both of us.

PETER

That's what I said.

HENRY

Why?

PETER

...I've got things I need to figure out. And I know that you do too. Two birds with one stone. Or, uh, note.

HENRY

Oh.

PETER

We can do them separately. Or—you don't have to write one at all. I just thought, if it was from the both of us, it might... help them, somehow.

HENRY

...Right.

(Peter starts writing. The lights fade. Laila enters as they come back up. She sees the note on the counter and walks over to it, picking it up, reading it.)

LAILA

Taylor? Eric?

(Taylor and Eric enter from the hallway.)

Are you guys trying to prank me or something?

TAYLOR

What?

LAILA

Yesterday you were both talking about seeing something in the apartment, and now this note—addressed to the two of you—

ERIC

The two of us?

(Eric and Taylor go over to Laila and look at the note.)

TAYLOR

Eric. It's from—

ERIC

I know.

LAILA

It says it's from a Peter and Henry. Do you know them?

(It's quiet as Taylor and Eric read the note. Eric slowly sits down. Taylor takes the note and rereads it a few more times.)

How did they get into the apartment?

(Taylor and Eric are both quiet.)

Are you two okay?

(A pause.)

Taylor?

TAYLOR

It's—it's fine.

LAILA

...If this is a prank, I—

ERIC

It's not a prank, Laila.

LAILA

Then how did it get into the apartment?

TAYLOR

Don't worry about it.

LAILA

That's just going to make me worry about it more.

TAYLOR

Really, Laila. Don't worry.

LAILA

If someone could tell me what's going on, I'd really appreciate it.

ERIC

(To Taylor.)

They're gone? Both of them?

TAYLOR

...That's what it says.

(A moment of quiet.)

ERIC

He didn't say goodbye.

TAYLOR

This is them saying goodbye, Eric.

ERIC

I feel like we had so much more to talk about.

LAILA

I'm—I'm sorry.

TAYLOR

There's nothing to apologize for.

LAILA

Do—do either of you want a hug? I know with Covid and everything that—

(Taylor hugs Laila. Maybe Taylor is crying. Maybe not.)

It's—it's okay.

(Laila looks at Eric, who is watching Laila and Taylor.)

It'll be okay.

(Eric stands and hugs Laila and Taylor. The lights fade. End of play.)

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