BELIZE / LOUIS

BELIZE: I'm sitting here, thinking, eventually he's *got* to run out of steam, so I let you rattle on and on saying about maybe seven or eight things I find really offensive—

LOUIS: What?

BELIZE: But I know you, Louis, and I know the guilt fueling this peculiar tirade is obviously already swollen bigger than your hemorrhoids—

LOUIS: I don't have hemorrhoids.

BELIZE: I hear different. May I finish?

LOUIS: Yes, but I don't have hemorrhoids.

BELIZE: So finally, when I—

LOUIS: Prior told you— He's an asshole, he shouldn't have—

BELIZE: You promised, Louis. Prior is not a subject.

LOUIS: You brought him up.

BELIZE: I brought up hemorrhoids.

LOUIS: So it's indirect. Passive-aggressive.

BELIZE: Unlike, I suppose, banging me over the head with your theory that America doesn't have a race problem.

LOUIS: Oh be fair I never said that.

BELIZE: Not exactly, but—

LOUIS: I said—

BELIZE: —but it was close enough, because if it'd been that blunt I'd've just walked out and—

LOUIS: You deliberately misinterpreted! I—

BELIZE: Stop interrupting! I haven't been able to—

LOUIS: Just let me—

BELIZE: NO! What, talk? You've been running your mouth nonstop since I got here, yaddadda yaddadda blah blah blah, up the hill, down the hill, playing with your MONOLITH— *(Continue below:)*

LOUIS: Well, you could have joined in at any time instead of—

BELIZE *(Continuous from above)*: —and, girlfriend, it is truly an *awesome* spectacle but I got better things to do with my time than sit here listening to this racist bullshit just because I feel sorry for you that—

LOUIS: I am not a racist!

BELIZE: Oh come on!

LOUIS: So maybe I am a racist but—

BELIZE: Oh I really hate that! It's no fun picking on you Louis; you're so guilty, it's like throwing darts at a glob of jello, there's no satisfying hits, just quivering, the darts just blop in and vanish.

LOUIS: I just think when you are discussing lines of oppression it gets very complicated and—

BELIZE: Oh is that a fact? You know, we black drag queens have a rather intimate knowledge of the complexity of the lines of—

LOUIS: *Ex*-black drag queen.

BELIZE: Actually ex-ex.

LOUIS: You're doing drag again?

BELIZE: I don't— Maybe. I don't have to tell you. *Maybe.*

LOUIS: I think it's sexist.

BELIZE: I didn't ask you.

LOUIS: Well it is. The gay community, I think, has to adopt the same attitude towards drag as black women have to take towards black women blues singers.

BELIZE: Oh my we *are* walking dangerous tonight . . .

LOUIS: Well, it's all internalized oppression, right, I mean the masochism, the stereotypes, the—

BELIZE: Louis, are you deliberately trying to make me hate you?

LOUIS: No, I—

JOE/ HANNAH #1

JOE: Mom?
HANNAH: Joe?
JOE: Hi.
HANNAH: You're calling from the street. It's . . . it must be four in the morning. What's happened?
JOE: Nothing, nothing, I—
HANNAH: It's Harper. Is Harper—
Joe?
Joe?
JOE: Yeah, hi. No, Harper's fine. Well, no, she's . . . *(He finds this slightly funny)* not fine.
(With a grin) How are you, Mom?
HANNAH: What's happened?
JOE: I just wanted to talk to you. I, uh, wanted to try something out on you.
HANNAH: Joe, you haven't— Have you been drinking, Joe?
JOE *(A bigger grin)*: Yes, ma'am. I'm drunk.

JOE / HANNAH P2

HANNAH: That isn't like you.

JOE: No. I mean— *(Again, finding this a little funny)* Who's to say?

HANNAH: Why are you out on the street at four A.M.? In that crazy city. It's dangerous.

JOE: Actually, Mom, I'm not on the street. I'm near the boathouse in the park.

HANNAH: What park?

JOE: Central Park.

HANNAH: CENTRAL PARK! Oh my Lord. What on earth are you doing in Central Park at this time of night? Are you—

(Very stern) Joe, I think you ought to go home right now. Call me from home.

(Little pause.)

HANNAH: Joe?

JOE: I come here to watch, Mom. Sometimes. Just to watch.

HANNAH: Watch what? What's there to watch at four in the—

JOE: Mom, did Dad love me?

HANNAH: What?

JOE: Did he?

HANNAH: You ought to go home and call from there.

JOE: Answer.

HANNAH: Oh now really. This is maudlin. I don't like this conversation.

JOE: Yeah, well, it gets worse from here on.

(Pause.)

HANNAH: Joe?

JOE: Mom. Momma. I'm a homosexual, Momma.

(He lowers the receiver and laughs quietly to himself)

Boy, did that come out awkward.

(He lifts the receiver to his ear)

Hello? Hello?

I'm a homosexual.

(Pause)

Please, Momma. Say something.

HANNAH: You're old enough to understand that your father didn't love you without being ridiculous about it.

JOE: What?

HANNAH: You're ridiculous. You're being ridiculous.

JOE: I'm— *What?*

HANNAH: You really ought to go home now to your wife. I need to go to bed. This phone call— We will just forget this phone call.

JOE: Mom.

HANNAH: No more talk. Tonight. This . . .

(Suddenly very angry) Drinking is a sin! A sin! I raised you better than that. *(She hangs up)*

Scene 9

The following morning, early. Split scene: Harper and Joe at home; Louis and Prior in Prior's hospital room. Joe and Louis have each just entered. This should be fast. No freezing; even when one of the couples isn't talking, they remain furiously alive.

HARPER: Oh God. Home. The moment of truth has arrived.

JOE: Harper.

LOUIS: I'm going to move out.

BELIZE/PRIOR P1

MAN: It . . .
LOUIS: What?
MAN: I think it must've . . . It broke, or slipped off, you didn't put it on right, or— You want me to keep going?
Pull out? Should I—
LOUIS: Keep going.
Infect me.
I don't care. I don't care.

(The Man pulls out.)

MAN: I . . . um, look, I'm sorry, but I think I want to go.
LOUIS: Yeah.
Give my best to Mom and Dad.

(The Man slaps him.)

LOUIS: Ow!

(They stare at each other.)

LOUIS: It was a joke.

(The Man leaves.)

ROY: How long have we known each other?
JOE: Since 1986.
ROY: Right. A long time. I feel close to you, Joe. Do I advise you well?
JOE: You've been an incredible friend, Roy. I'm—
ROY: I want to be family. *Famiglia*, as my Italian friends call it. *La Famiglia*. A lovely word. It's important for me to help you, like I was helped.
JOE: I owe practically everything to you, Roy.

ROY: I'm dying, Joe. Cancer.
JOE: Oh my God.
ROY: Please. Let me finish.

Few people know this and I'm telling you this only because . . . I'm not afraid of death. What can death bring that I haven't faced? I've lived; life is the worst. *(Gently mocking himself)* Listen to me, I'm a philosopher.

Joe. You must do this. You must must must. Love; that's a trap. Responsibility; that's a trap, too. Like a father to a son I tell you this. Life is full of horror; nobody escapes, nobody; save yourself. Whatever pulls on you, whatever needs from you, threatens you. Don't be afraid; people are so afraid; don't be afraid to live in the raw wind, naked, alone . . . Learn at least this. What you are capable of. Let nothing stand in your way.

Scene 5

Several days later. Prior and Belize in Prior's hospital room. Prior is very sick but improving. Belize has just arrived, stopping on his way to work to check up on Prior, with little time to spare.

PRIOR: Miss Thing.
BELIZE: Ma cherie bichette.
PRIOR: Stella.
BELIZE: Stella for star. Let me see. *(Scrutinizing Prior)* You look like shit, why yes indeed you do, comme la merde!
PRIOR: Merci.
BELIZE: Not to despair, Belle Reeve. Lookie!
(Taking a little plastic bottle from his bag)
Magic goop!

BELIZE / PRIOR P2

(Belize hands the bottle to Prior, who opens it and sniffs it suspiciously, as Belize looks over the IV bags feeding meds to Prior.)

PRIOR *(Reacting to the smell from the bottle with alarm)*: Pooh! What kinda crap is that?

BELIZE: Beats me. Let's rub it on your poor blistered body and see what it does.

PRIOR: This is not Western medicine, this bottle . . .

BELIZE: Voodoo cream. From the botanica 'round the block.

PRIOR: And you a registered nurse.

(Belize takes the bottle back and sniffs it.)

BELIZE: Beeswax and cheap perfume. Cut with Jergen's lotion. Full of good vibes and love from some little black Cubana witch in Miami.

(He pours some in his hands, ready to give Prior a backrub.)

PRIOR *(Frightened)*: Get that trash away from me, I am immune-suppressed.

BELIZE *(Firm, slightly offended)*: I *am* a health professional. I *know* what I'm doing.

(Prior hesitates, then reluctantly offers his back to be rubbed. Belize gets on the bed and rubs, gently.)

PRIOR: It stinks.
Any word from Louis?

(Little pause; Belize rubs Prior's back.)

PRIOR: Gone.

BELIZE: He'll be back. I know the type. Likes to keep a girl on edge.

PRIOR: It's been . . .

(Pause.)

BELIZE *(Trying to jog Prior's memory)*: How long?

PRIOR: I don't remember.

BELIZE: How long have you been here?

PRIOR *(Suddenly upset)*: I don't remember, I don't give a fuck. I want Louis. I want my fucking boyfriend, where the fuck is he? I'm dying, I'm dying, where's Louis?

(Prior is crying, hard. Belize cradles him.)

BELIZE: Ssssh, sssh . . .

PRIOR: This is a very strange drug, this drug. Emotional lability, for starters.

BELIZE: Save a tab or two for me.

PRIOR: Oh no, not this drug, ce n'est pas pour la joyeux noël et la bonne année, this drug she is serious poisonous chemistry, ma pauvre bichette.
And not just disorienting. I hear things.
Voices.

BELIZE *(Covering, but alarmed)*: Voices.

PRIOR: A voice.

BELIZE: Saying what?

(Pause.)

PRIOR: I'm not supposed to tell.

BELIZE *(Earnest)*: You better tell the doctor. Or I will.

BELIZE / PRIOR p. 3

PRIOR: No no don't. Please. I want the voice; it's wonderful. It's all that's keeping me alive. I don't want to talk to some intern about it.

You know what happens? When I hear it, I get hard.

BELIZE: Oh my.

PRIOR: Comme ça. *(He uses his arm to demonstrate)* And you know I am slow to rise.

BELIZE: My jaw aches at the memory.

PRIOR *(Pleading)*: And would you deny me this little solace? Betray my concupiscence to Florence Nightingale's storm troopers?

BELIZE: Perish the thought, ma bébé.

PRIOR: They'd change the drug just to spoil the fun.

BELIZE: You and your boner can depend on me.

PRIOR: Je t'adore, ma belle nègre.

BELIZE *(With an edge)*: All this girl-talk shit is politically incorrect, you know. We should have dropped it back when we gave up drag.

PRIOR *(Indignant)*: I'm sick, I get to be politically incorrect if it makes me feel better. You sound like Lou.

(Little pause)

Well, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing he's in anguish somewhere. I loved his anguish. Watching him stick his head up his asshole and eat his guts out over some relatively minor moral conundrum—it was the best show in town. But Mother warned me: if they get overwhelmed by the little things—

BELIZE: —they'll be belly-up bustville when something big comes along.

PRIOR: Mother warned me.

BELIZE: And they do come along.

PRIOR: But I didn't listen.

BELIZE: No. *(Doing Katharine Hepburn)* Men are beasts.

PRIOR *(Also Hepburn)*: The absolute lowest.

BELIZE: I have to go. If I want to spend my whole lonely life looking after white people I can get underpaid to do it.

PRIOR: You're just a Christian martyr.

BELIZE: Whatever happens, baby, I will be here for you.

PRIOR: Je t'aime.

BELIZE: Je t'aime. Don't go crazy on me, girlfriend, I already got enough crazy queens for one lifetime. For two. I can't be bothering with dementia.

PRIOR: I promise.

BELIZE *(Touching him with his forefinger; softly, doing E.T.)*: Ouch.

PRIOR: Ouch. Indeed.

BELIZE: Why'd they have to pick on you?

And eat more, girlfriend, you really do look like shit.

(He leaves.)

PRIOR *(A beat, then)*: He's gone.

Are you still—

A VOICE: I can't stay. I will return.

PRIOR: Are you one of those "Follow me to the other side" voices?

A VOICE: No. I am no nightbird. I am a messenger . . .

PRIOR: You have a beautiful voice, it sounds . . . like a viola, like a perfectly tuned, tight string, balanced, the truth . . . Stay with me.

A VOICE: Not now. Soon I will return, I will reveal myself to you; I am glorious, glorious; my heart, my countenance and my message. You must prepare.

PRIOR *(Afraid again)*: For what? I don't want to—

A VOICE: No death, no:

PRIOR 1
HARPER

PRIOR *(His makeup complete, he examines its perfection in the mirror; then he turns to the audience)*: I'm ready for my closeup, Mr. DeMille.

One wants to move through life with elegance and grace, blossoming infrequently but with exquisite taste, and perfect timing, like a rare bloom, a zebra orchid . . . One wants . . .

But one so seldom gets what one wants, does one?

No. One does not. *(Sorrow and anger well up, overwhelming the grand manner)* One gets fucked. Over. One . . . dies at thirty, robbed of . . . decades of majesty . . .

(Angry) Fuck this shit. Fuck this shit.

(He consults the mirror, attempting to resume the pose)

I look like a corpse. A . . . *corpsette*!

(It doesn't work. Commiserating with his reflection)

Oh my queen; you know you've hit rock-bottom when even drag is a drag.

(Harper appears. Prior is surprised!)

HARPER: Are you . . . Who are you?
PRIOR: Who are you?
HARPER: What are you doing in my hallucination?
PRIOR: I'm not in your hallucination. You're in my dream.
HARPER: You're wearing makeup.
PRIOR: So are you.
HARPER: But you're a man.
PRIOR *(He looks in his mirror, SCREAMS!, mimes slashing his throat with his lipstick and dies, fabulously tragic. Then)*: The hands and feet give it away.
HARPER: There must be some mistake here. I don't recognize you. You're not— Are you my . . . some sort of imaginary friend?
PRIOR: No. Aren't you too old to have imaginary friends?
HARPER: I have emotional problems. I took too many pills. Why are you wearing makeup?
PRIOR: I was in the process of applying the face, trying to make myself feel better—I swiped the new fall colors at the Clinique counter at Macy's.

(He shows her.)

HARPER: You stole these?
PRIOR: I was out of cash; it was an emotional emergency!
HARPER: Joe will be so angry. I promised him. No more pills.
PRIOR: These pills you keep alluding to?
HARPER: Valium. I take Valium. Lots of Valium.
PRIOR: And you're dancing as fast as you can.
HARPER: I'm not *addicted*. I don't believe in addiction, and I never— Well, I *never* drink. And I *never* take drugs.
PRIOR: Well, smell *you*, Nancy Drew.
HARPER: Except Valium.
PRIOR: Except Valium; in wee fistfuls.
HARPER: It's terrible. Mormons are not supposed to be addicted to anything. I'm a Mormon.
PRIOR: I'm a homosexual.
HARPER: Oh! In my church we don't believe in homosexuals.
PRIOR: In my church we don't believe in Mormons.
HARPER: What church do . . . Oh! *(She laughs)* I get it.

JOE / LOUIS

HARPER: Mormons can give blowjobs.
JOE: *Harper*
HARPER *(Imitating his tone)*: *Joe.*
It was a little Jewish lady with a German accent. This is a good time. For me to make a baby.

(Little pause. Joe turns away from her, then leaves the living room.)

HARPER: Then they went on to a program about holes in the ozone layer. Over Antarctica. Skin burns, birds go blind, icebergs melt. The world's coming to an end.

Scene 6

First week of November. In the men's room of the offices of the Brooklyn Federal Court of Appeals. Louis is crying over the sink; Joe enters.

JOE: Oh, um . . . Morning.
LOUIS: Good morning, Counselor.
JOE *(He watches Louis cry)*: Sorry, I . . . I don't know your name.
LOUIS: Don't bother. Word processor. The lowest of the low.
JOE *(Holding out his hand)*: Joe Pitt. I'm with Justice Wilson.
LOUIS: Oh, I know that. Counselor Pitt. Chief Clerk.
JOE: Were you . . . Are you OK?
LOUIS: Oh, yeah. Thanks. What a nice man.
JOE: Not so nice.
LOUIS: What?
JOE: Not so nice. Nothing. You sure you're—
LOUIS: Life sucks shit. Life . . . just sucks shit.

JOE: What's wrong?
LOUIS: Run in my nylons.
JOE: Sorry . . . ?
LOUIS: Forget it. Look, thanks for asking.
JOE: Well . . .
LOUIS: I mean it really is nice of you.
(He starts crying again)
Sorry, sorry. Sick friend . . .
JOE: Oh, I'm sorry.
LOUIS: Yeah, yeah, well, that's sweet.
Three of your colleagues have preceded you to this baleful sight and you're the first one to ask. The others just opened the door, saw me, and fled. I hope they had to pee real bad.
JOE *(Handing him a wad of toilet paper)*: They just didn't want to intrude.
LOUIS: Hah. Reaganite heartless macho asshole lawyers.
JOE: Oh, that's unfair.
LOUIS: What is? Heartless? Macho? Reaganite? Lawyer?
JOE: I voted for Reagan.
LOUIS: You did?
JOE: Twice.
LOUIS: Twice? Well, oh boy. A Gay Republican.
JOE: Excuse me?
LOUIS: Nothing.
JOE: I'm not—
Forget it.
LOUIS: Republican? Not Republican? Or . . .
JOE: What?
LOUIS: What?
JOE: Not gay. I'm not gay.
LOUIS: Oh. Sorry.
(Blows his nose loudly) It's just—

PRIOR / LOUIS

LOUIS: My grandmother actually saw Emma Goldman speak. In Yiddish. But all Grandma could remember was that she spoke well and wore a hat.

What a weird service. That rabbi.

PRIOR: A definite find. Get his number when you go to the graveyard. I want him to bury me.

LOUIS: Better head out there. Everyone gets to put dirt on the coffin once it's lowered in.

PRIOR: Oooh. Cemetery fun. Don't want to miss that.

LOUIS: It's an old Jewish custom to express love. Here, Grandma, have a shovelful. Latecomers run the risk of finding the grave completely filled.

She was pretty crazy. She was up there in that home for ten years, talking to herself. I never visited. She looked too much like my mother.

PRIOR *(Hugs him)*: Poor Louis. I'm sorry your grandma is dead.

LOUIS: Tiny little coffin, huh?

Sorry I didn't introduce you to— I always get so closety at these family things.

PRIOR: Butch. You get butch. *(Imitating)* "Hi, Cousin Doris, you don't remember me I'm Lou, Rachel's boy." Lou, not Louis, because if you say Louis they'll hear the sibilant S.

LOUIS: I don't have a—

PRIOR: I don't blame you, hiding. Bloodlines. Jewish curses are the worst. I personally would dissolve if anyone ever looked me in the eye and said "Feh." Fortunately WASPs don't say "Feh." Oh and by the way, darling, Cousin Doris is a dyke.

LOUIS: No.

Really?

PRIOR: You don't notice anything. If I hadn't spent the last four years fellating you I'd swear you were straight.

LOUIS: You're in a pissy mood. Cat still missing?

(Little pause.)

PRIOR: Not a furball in sight. It's your fault.

LOUIS: It is?

PRIOR: I warned you, Louis. Names are important. Call an animal Little Sheba and you can't expect it to stick around. Besides, it's a dog's name.

LOUIS: I wanted a dog in the first place, not a cat. He sprayed my books.

PRIOR: He was a female cat.

LOUIS: Cats are stupid, high-strung predators. Babylonians sealed them up in bricks. Dogs have brains.

PRIOR: Cats have intuition.

LOUIS: A sharp dog is as smart as a really dull two-year-old child.

PRIOR: Cats know when something's wrong.

LOUIS: Only if you stop feeding them.

PRIOR: They know. That's why Sheba left, because she knew.

LOUIS: Knew what?

ANGEL / HANNAH p1

doesn't get chilly. And if it gets really cold, she'll have a pouch I can crawl into. Like a marsupial. We'll mend together. That's what we'll do; we'll mend.

Scene 4

Same day as Scene 2. Snowfall. An abandoned lot in the South Bronx. Trash around. A Homeless Woman is standing near an oil drum in which a fire is burning; she's sipping soup from a cloudy plastic container.

Hannah enters, frightened, angry and cold, dragging two heavy suitcases.

HANNAH: Excuse me? I said excuse me? Can you tell me where I am? Is this Brooklyn? Do you know a Pineapple Street? Is there some sort of bus or train or . . . ?

(The Homeless Woman looks at Hannah but doesn't respond. Hannah continues, trying to get through to her.)

HANNAH: I'm lost, I just arrived from Salt Lake. City. Utah?

(The Homeless Woman sips some soup. Hannah tries again.)

HANNAH: I took the bus that I was told to take and I got off—Well it was the very last stop, so I had to get off, and I *asked* the driver was this Brooklyn, and he nodded yes but he was from one of those foreign countries where they think it's good manners to nod at everything even if you have no idea what it is you're nodding at, and in truth I think he spoke no English at all, which I think would

make him ineligible for employment on public transportation. The public being English-speaking, mostly. Do you speak English?

(The Homeless Woman nods. Hannah, realizing that the woman is crazy, looks around; seeing no one else in the desolate vicinity, she forges ahead.)

HANNAH: I was supposed to be met at the airport by my son. He didn't show and I don't wait more than three and three-quarters hours for *anyone*. I should have been patient, I guess, I . . . Is this—

HOMELESS WOMAN: Bronx.

HANNAH: Is that—The *Bronx*? Well how in the name of Heaven did I get to the Bronx when the bus driver said—

(The Homeless Woman turns to the empty air beside her and begins to berate it.)

HOMELESS WOMAN: Slurp slurp slurp will you STOP that disgusting slurping! YOU DISGUSTING SLURPING FEEDING ANIMAL! Feeding yourself, just feeding yourself, what would it matter, to you or to ANYONE, if you just stopped. Feeding. And DIED?

(Pause.)

HANNAH: Can you just tell me where I—

HOMELESS WOMAN *(To Hannah)*: Why was the Kosciuszko Bridge named after a Polack?

HANNAH: I don't know what you're—

HOMELESS WOMAN: That was a joke.

HANNAH: Well what's the punchline?

ANGEL / HANNAH P2

HOMELESS WOMAN: I don't know.

HANNAH *(Looking around desperately)*: Oh for pete's sake, is there anyone else who—

(The Homeless Woman turns again to the person she's hallucinating:)

HOMELESS WOMAN: Stand further off you fat loathsome whore! You can't have any more of this soup, slurp slurp slurp you animal, and the—I know you'll just go pee it all away and where will you do that? Behind what bush? It's FUCKING COLD out here and I—

Oh that's right, because it was supposed to have been a tunnel!

That's not very funny.

Have you read the prophecies of Nostradamus?

HANNAH: Who?

HOMELESS WOMAN: Some guy I went out with once somewhere, Nostradamus. Prophet, outcast, eyes like— Scary shit, he—

HANNAH: *Shut up.* Please! *(Taking a step closer to the Homeless Woman)* Now I want you to stop jabbering for a minute and pull your wits together and tell me how to get to Brooklyn. Because you know! And you are going to tell me! Because there is no one else around to tell me and I am wet and cold and I am very angry! So I am sorry you're psychotic but just make the effort. *(Another step closer)* Take a deep breath. DO IT!

(Hannah and the Homeless Woman breathe together.)

HANNAH: That's good. Now exhale.

(They do.)

HANNAH: Good. Now how do I get to Brooklyn?

HOMELESS WOMAN: Don't know. Never been. Sorry. Want some soup?

HANNAH: Manhattan? Maybe you know . . . *(Giving up: hopelessly)* I don't suppose you know the location of the Mormon Visitors'—

HOMELESS WOMAN: 65th and Broadway.

HANNAH: How do you—

HOMELESS WOMAN: Go there all the time. Free movies. Boring, but you can stay all day.

HANNAH: Well . . . So how do I—

HOMELESS WOMAN: Take the D train. Next block make a right.

HANNAH: Thank you.

(Hannah hoists her suitcases and starts to leave.)

HOMELESS WOMAN: Oh yeah.

In the new century I think we will all be insane.

Scene 5

Same day. Joe and Roy in the living room of Roy's brownstone. Joe has just come in and is still in his coat. Roy wears an elegant bathrobe.

JOE: I can't. The answer's no. I'm sorry.

ROY: Oh, well, apologies.

I can't see that there's anyone asking for apologies.

(Pause.)

ANGEL / PRIOR

(Prior puts his underwear back on.)

EMILY: Looking good. What else?

PRIOR: Ankles sore and swollen, but the leg's better. The nausea's mostly gone with the little orange pills. BM's pure liquid but not bloody anymore, for now, my eye doctor says everything's OK, for now, my dentist says, "Yuck!" when he sees my fuzzy tongue, and now he wears little condoms on his thumb and forefinger. And a mask. So what? My dermatologist is in Hawaii and my mother . . . well leave my mother out of it. Which is usually where my mother is, out of it. My glands are like walnuts, my weight's holding steady for week two, and a friend died two days ago of bird tuberculosis; bird tuberculosis; that scared me and I didn't go to the funeral today because he was an Irish Catholic and it's probably open casket and I'm afraid of . . . something, the bird TB or seeing him or . . . So I guess I'm doing OK. Except for of course I'm going nuts.

EMILY: We ran the toxoplasmosis series and there's no indication—

PRIOR: I know, I know, but I feel like something terrifying is on its way, you know, like a missile from outer space, and it's plummeting down towards the earth, and I'm ground zero, and . . . I am generally known where I am known as one cool, collected queen. And I am ruffled.

EMILY: There's really nothing to worry about. I think that shochen bamromim hamtzeh menucho nechono al kanfey haschino.

PRIOR: What?

EMILY: Everything's fine. Bemaalos k'doshim ut'horim kezohar horokeea mazhirim.

PRIOR: Oh I don't understand what you're—

EMILY: Es nishmas Prior sheholoch leolomoh, baavur shenodvoo z'dokoh b'ad hazkoras nishmosoh—

PRIOR: WHY ARE YOU DOING THAT! Stop it! Stop it!

EMILY *(Shocked)*: Stop what?

PRIOR: You were just— Weren't you just speaking in Hebrew or something.

EMILY: *Hebrew? (Laughs)* I'm basically Italian-American. No. I didn't speak in Hebrew.

PRIOR: Oh no, oh God please I really think I—

EMILY: Look, I'm sorry, I have a waiting room full of—

(Prior starts dressing, frantic, terrified.)

EMILY: I think you're one of the lucky ones, you'll live for years, probably—you're pretty healthy for someone with no immune system. Are you seeing someone? Loneliness is a danger. A therapist?

PRIOR: No, I don't need to see anyone, I just—

EMILY: Well think about it. You aren't going crazy. You're just under a lot of stress. No wonder. *(She starts to write in his chart)*

(Suddenly there is an astonishing blaze of light and a menacing subterranean rumble; then, a huge chord is sounded by a gigantic choir, and a great book with steel pages mounted atop a molten-red pillar bursts through the floor! In rapid succession: The book flies open! Instantly a large Aleph, inscribed on the right-hand page, glows red and bursts into flames, whereupon the book immediately slams shut, and with the molten-red pillar it disappears in an eye blink under the floor, as the lights restore to reveal the floor perfectly unmarred, not a trace of its having been torn asunder. All of this occurs in

PRIORS P1

ACT THREE:

Not-Yet-Conscious, Forward Dawning

December 1985

Scene 1

Late night, several days after the end of Act Two. Prior's bedroom, completely dark. Prior is in bed, having a nightmare. He wakes up, sits up in bed, and switches on a lamp. He looks at his clock. Seated by the table near the bed is a man, fierce and gloomy, dressed in the clothing of a thirteenth-century British farmer/squire, carrying a scythe. Prior is terrified.

PRIOR: Who are you?!
PRIOR 1: My name is Prior Walter.

(Little pause.)

PRIOR: My name is Prior Walter.
PRIOR 1: I know that.
PRIOR: Explain.
PRIOR 1: You're alive. I'm not. We have the same name. What do you want me to explain?
PRIOR: A ghost?
PRIOR 1: An ancestor.
PRIOR: Not *the* Prior Walter? The Bayeux tapestry Prior Walter?
PRIOR 1: His great-great-grandson. The fifth of the name.
PRIOR: I'm the thirty-fourth, I think.
PRIOR 1: Actually the thirty-second.
PRIOR: Not according to Mother.
PRIOR 1 *(Angry!)*: She's including the two bastards, then; I say leave them out. I say no room for bastards! The little things you swallow . . .

(The ghost snatches up a plastic pill bottle from Prior's night-stand.)

PRIOR: Pills.
PRIOR 1: Pills. For the pestilence. *(He struggles to open the bottle but can't get past the safety cap)* I too— *(He throws the bottle aside)*
PRIOR: Pestilence . . . You too what?
PRIOR 1: The pestilence in my time was much worse than now. Whole villages of empty houses. You could look outdoors and see Death walking in the morning, dew dampening the ragged hem of his black robe. Plain as I see you now.
PRIOR: You died of the plague.
PRIOR 1: The spotty monster. Like you, alone.
PRIOR: I'm not alone.

PRIOR 1: You have no wife, no children.
PRIOR: I'm gay.
PRIOR 1: So? Be gay, dance in your altogether for all I care, what's that to do with not having children?
PRIOR: Gay homosexual, not bonny, blithe and—never mind.
PRIOR 1: I had twelve. When I died.

(A second ghost appears, this one dressed in the clothing of an elegant seventeenth-century Londoner.)

PRIOR 1 *(Pointing to the new ghost)*: And I was three years younger than him.

(Prior sees the new ghost and screams!)

PRIOR: Oh God another one.
PRIOR 2: Prior Walter. Prior to you by some seventeen others.
PRIOR 1: He's counting the bastards.
PRIOR: Are we having a convention?
PRIOR 2: We've been sent to declare Her fabulous incipience. They love a well-paved entrance with lots of heralds, and—
PRIOR 1: The messenger come. Prepare the way. The infinite descent, a breath in air—
PRIOR 2: They chose us, I suspect, because of the mortal affinities. In a family as long-descended as the Walters there are bound to be a few carried off by plague.
PRIOR 1: The spotty monster.
PRIOR 2: Black Jack. Came from a water pump, half the city of London, can you imagine? His came from fleas. Yours, I understand, is the lamentable consequence of venery—
PRIOR 1: Fleas on rats, but who knew that?
PRIOR: Am I going to die?

ANGEL / LOUIS

One A.M., the next morning. A hospital room. Prior is in a bed, oxygen mask on his face, IV tubes draining bags of fluids into his veins. Emily, a nurse, finishes checking the tubes, the machines. Louis watches Emily; he avoids looking at Prior.

EMILY: He'll be all right now.

LOUIS: No he won't.

EMILY: No. I guess not. I gave him something that makes him sleep.

LOUIS: Deep asleep?

EMILY: Orbiting the moons of Jupiter.

LOUIS: A good place to be.

EMILY: Anyplace better than here. You his . . . uh . . . ?

LOUIS: Yes. I'm his uh.

EMILY: This must be hell for you.

LOUIS: It is. Hell. The After Life. Which is not at all like a rainy afternoon in March, by the way, Prior. A lot more vivid than I'd expected. Dead leaves, but the crunchy kind. Sharp, dry air. The kind of long, luxurious dying feeling that breaks your heart.

EMILY *(Not following, exactly)*: Yeah, well. We all get to break our hearts on this one.

He seems like a nice guy. Cute.

LOUIS: Not like this.

Yes, he is. Was. Whatever.

EMILY: Weird name. Prior Walter. Like, "The Walter before this one."

LOUIS: Lots of Walters before this one. Prior is an old old family name in an old old family. The Walters go back to the Mayflower and beyond. Back to the Norman Conquests. He says there's a Prior Walter stitched into the Bayeux tapestry.

EMILY: Is that impressive?

LOUIS: Well, it's old. Very old. Which in some circles equals impressive.

EMILY: Not in my circle. What's the name of the tapestry?

LOUIS: The Bayeux tapestry. Embroidered by La Reine Mathilde.

EMILY: I'll tell my mother. She embroiders. Drives me nuts.

LOUIS: Manual therapy for anxious hands.

EMILY: Maybe you should try it.

(Louis looks at her, then finally looks directly at Prior. Then he looks away.)

LOUIS: Mathilde stitched while William the Conqueror was off to war. She was capable of . . . more than loyalty. Devotion.

She waited for him, she stitched for years. And if he had come back broken and defeated from war, she would have loved him even more. And if he had returned mutilated, ugly, full of infection and horror, she would still have loved him; fed by pity, by a sharing of pain, she would love him even more, and even more, and she would never, never have prayed to God, please let him die if he can't return to me whole and healthy and able to live a normal life . . . If he had died, she would have buried her heart with him.

So what the fuck is the matter with me?

(Little pause)

Will he sleep through the night?

EMILY: At least.

LOUIS: I'm going.

HENRY / ROY p1

Scene 9

A week later. Roy and Henry, his doctor, in Henry's office.

HENRY: Nobody knows what causes it. And nobody knows how to cure it. The best theory is that we blame a retrovirus, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Its presence is made known to us by the useless antibodies which appear in reaction to its entrance into the bloodstream through a cut, or an orifice. The antibodies are powerless to protect the body against it. Why, we don't know. The body's immune system ceases to function. Sometimes the body even attacks itself. At any rate it's left open to a whole horror house of infections from microbes which it usually defends against.

Like Kaposi's sarcomas. These lesions. Or your throat problem. Or the glands.

We think it may also be able to slip past the blood-brain barrier into the brain. Which is of course very bad news.

And it's fatal in we don't know what percent of people with suppressed immune responses.

HENRY / ROY 12

(Pause. Roy sits, brooding. Henry waits. Then:)

ROY: This is very interesting, Mr. Wizard, but why the fuck are you telling me this?

HENRY *(Hesitating, confused, then)*: Well, I have just removed one of three lesions which biopsy results will probably tell us is a Kaposi's sarcoma lesion. And you have a pronounced swelling of glands in your neck, groin, and armpits—lymphadenopathy is another sign. And you have oral candidiasis and maybe a little more fungus under the fingernails of two digits on your right hand. So that's why—

ROY: This disease.

HENRY: Syndrome.

ROY: *Whatever.* It afflicts mostly homosexuals and drug addicts.

HENRY: Mostly. Hemophiliacs are also at risk.

ROY: Homosexuals and drug addicts. So why are you implying that I . . .

(Roy stares hard at Henry, who begins to feel nervous.)

ROY: What are you implying, Henry?

HENRY: I don't . . .

ROY: I'm not a drug addict.

HENRY: Oh come on Roy.

ROY: What, what, come on Roy what? Do you think I'm a junkie, Henry, do you see tracks?

HENRY: This is absurd.

ROY: Say it.

HENRY: Say what?

ROY: Say: "Roy Cohn, you are a . . ."

HENRY: Roy? I don't—

ROY: "You are a . . ." Go on. Not "Roy Cohn you are a drug fiend." "Roy Marcus Cohn, you are a . . ."

Go on, Henry. It starts with an "H."

HENRY: Oh I'm not going to—

ROY: *With an "H,"* Henry, and it isn't "hemophiliac." Come on . . .

HENRY: What are you doing, Roy?

ROY: No, say it. I mean it. Say: "Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual."

(With deadly seriousness)

And I will proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State, Henry. Which you know I can do.

(Pause. Henry summons his courage.)

HENRY: Roy, you have been seeing me since 1958. Apart from the facelifts I have treated you for everything from syphilis—

ROY: From a whore in Dallas.

HENRY: From syphilis to venereal warts. In your rectum. Which you may have gotten from a whore in Dallas, but it wasn't a female whore.

(A standoff. Then:)

ROY: So say it.

HENRY: Roy Cohn, you are . . .

(Roy's too scary. He tries a different approach)

You have had sex with men, many many times, Roy, and one of them, or any number of them, has made you very sick. You have AIDS.

ROY / JOE

ROY: No, please. Heart to heart. Want another . . . What is that, seltzer?

JOE: The failure to measure up hits people very hard. From such a strong desire to be good they feel very far from goodness when they fail.

What scares me is that maybe what I really love in her is the part of her that's farthest from the light, from God's love; maybe I was drawn to that in the first place. And I'm keeping it alive because I need it.

ROY: Why would you need it?

JOE: There are things . . . I don't know how well we know ourselves. I mean, what if? I know I married her because she . . . because I loved it that she was always wrong, always doing something wrong, like one step out of step. In Salt Lake City that stands out. I never stood out, on the outside, but inside, it was hard for me. To pass.

ROY: Pass?

JOE: Yeah.

ROY: Pass as what?

JOE: Oh. Well . . . As someone cheerful and strong. Those who love God with an open heart unclouded by secrets and struggles are cheerful; God's easy simple love for them shows in how strong and happy they are. The saints.

ROY: But you had secrets? Secret struggles . . .

JOE: I wanted to be one of the elect, one of the Blessed. You feel you ought to be, that the blemishes are yours by choice, which of course they aren't. Harper's sorrow, that really deep sorrow, she didn't choose that. But it's there.

ROY: You didn't put it there.

JOE: No.

ROY: You sound like you think you did.

JOE: I am responsible for her.

ROY: Because she's your wife.

JOE: That. And I do love her.

ROY: Whatever. She's your wife. And so there are obligations. To her. But also to yourself.

JOE: She'd fall apart in Washington.

ROY: Then let her stay here.

JOE: She'll fall apart if I leave her.

ROY: Then bring her to Washington.

JOE: I just can't, Roy. She needs me.

ROY: Listen, Joe. I'm the best divorce lawyer in the business.

(Little pause.)

JOE: Can't Washington wait?

ROY: You do what you need to do, Joe. What *you* need. *You.* Let her life go where it wants to go. You'll both be better for that. *Somebody* should get what they want.

MAN: What do you want?

LOUIS: I want you to fuck me, hurt me, make me bleed.

MAN: I want to.

LOUIS: Yeah?

MAN: I want to hurt you.

LOUIS: Fuck me.

MAN: Yeah?

LOUIS: Hard.

MAN: Yeah? You been a bad boy?

(Pause. Louis laughs, softly.)

LOUIS: Very bad. Very bad.

MAN: You need to be punished, boy?

LOUIS: Yes. I do.

MAN: Yes what?

(Little pause.)

HARPER /BELIZE

(Mr. Lies, a travel agent, appears, carrying a briefcase.)

HARPER: Oh! You startled me!

MR. LIES: Cash, check or credit card?

HARPER: I remember you. You're from Salt Lake. You sold us the plane tickets when we flew here. What are you doing in Brooklyn?

MR. LIES: You said you wanted to travel . . .

HARPER: And here you are. How thoughtful.

MR. LIES: Mr. Lies. Of the International Order of Travel Agents. We mobilize the globe, we set people adrift, we stir the populace and send nomads eddying across the planet. We are adepts of motion, acolytes of the flux. Cash, check or credit card. Name your destination.

HARPER: Antarctica, maybe. I want to see the hole in the ozone. I heard on the radio—

(He opens his briefcase. Inside it, there is a computer terminal.)

MR. LIES *(His hands poised over the keyboard)*: I can arrange a guided tour. Now?

HARPER: Soon. Maybe soon. I'm not safe here you see. Things aren't right with me. Weird stuff happens.

MR. LIES: Like?

HARPER: Well, like you, for instance. Just appearing. Or last week . . . well never mind.

People are like planets, you need a thick skin. Things get to me, Joe stays away and now . . . Well look. My dreams are talking back to me.

MR. LIES: It's the price of rootlessness. Motion sickness. The only cure: to keep moving.

HARPER: I'm undecided. I feel . . . that something's going to give. It's 1985. Fifteen years till the third millennium. Maybe Christ will come again. Maybe seeds will be planted, maybe there'll be harvests then, maybe early figs to eat, maybe new life, maybe fresh blood, maybe companionship and love and protection, safety from what's outside, maybe the door will hold, or maybe . . . Maybe the troubles will come, and the end will come, and the sky will collapse and there will be terrible rains and showers of poison light, or maybe my life is really fine, maybe Joe loves me and I'm only crazy thinking otherwise, or maybe not, maybe it's even worse than I know, maybe . . . I want to know, maybe I don't. The suspense, Mr. Lies, it's killing me.

MR. LIES: I suggest a vacation.

HARPER *(Hearing something)*: That was the elevator. Oh God, I should fix myself up, I— You have to go, you shouldn't be here, you aren't even real.

MR. LIES: Call me when you decide.

HARPER: Go!

HARPER / JOE

HARPER: I don't want to move to Washington.

JOE: Well I do.

HARPER: It's a giant cemetery, huge white graves and mausoleums everywhere.

JOE: We could live in Maryland. Or Georgetown.

HARPER: We're happy here.

JOE: That's not really true, buddy, we—

HARPER: Well happy enough! Pretend-happy. That's better than nothing.

JOE: It's time to make some changes, Harper.

HARPER: No changes. Why?

JOE: I've been chief clerk for four years. I make twenty-nine-thousand dollars a year. That's ridiculous. I graduated fourth in my class and I make less than anyone I know. And I'm . . . I'm tired of being a clerk, I want to go where something good is happening.

HARPER: Nothing good happens in Washington. We'll forget church teachings and buy furniture at, at, *Conran's* and become yuppies. I have too much to do here.

JOE: Like what?

HARPER: I *do* have things.

JOE: What things?

HARPER: I have to finish painting the bedroom.

JOE: You've been painting in there for over a year.

HARPER: I know, I— It just isn't done because I never get time to finish it.

JOE: Oh that's . . . That doesn't make sense. You have all the time in the world. You could finish it when I'm at work.

HARPER: I'm afraid to go in there alone.

JOE: Afraid of what?

HARPER: I heard someone in there. Metal scraping on the wall. A man with a knife, maybe.

JOE: There's no one in the bedroom, Harper.

HARPER: Not now.

JOE: Not this morning either.

HARPER: How do you know? You were at work this morning. There's something creepy about this place. Remember *Rosemary's Baby*?

JOE: *Rosemary's Baby?*

HARPER: Our apartment looks like that one. Wasn't that apartment in Brooklyn?

JOE: No, it was—

HARPER: Well, it looked like this. It did.

JOE: Then let's move.

HARPER: Georgetown's worse. *The Exorcist* was in Georgetown.

JOE: The devil, everywhere you turn, huh, buddy.

HARPER: Yeah. Everywhere.

JOE: How many pills today, buddy?

HARPER: None. One. Three. Only three.

HARPER/JOE 2

(The Rabbi stops, looks down into the grave, then at Louis:)

RABBI ISIDOR CHEMELWITZ: Don't worry, mister. The life she had, she'll stay put. She's better off.

(The Rabbi exits. Louis looks into the grave, one last, quick glance, then follows.)

JOE: Look, I know this is scary for you. But try to understand what it means to me. Will you try?

HARPER: Yes.

JOE: Good. Really try.

I think things are starting to change in the world.

HARPER: But I don't want—

JOE: Wait. For the good. Change for the good. America has rediscovered itself. Its sacred position among nations. And people aren't ashamed of that like they used to be. This is a great thing. The truth restored. Law restored. That's what President Reagan's done, Harper. He says: "Truth exists and can be spoken proudly." And the country responds to him. We become better. More good. I need to be a part of that, I need something big to lift me up. I mean, six years ago the world seemed in decline, horrible, hopeless, full of unsolvable problems and crime and confusion and hunger and—

HARPER: But it still seems that way. More now than before. They say the ozone layer is—

JOE: Harper . . .

HARPER: And today out the window on Atlantic Avenue there was a schizophrenic traffic cop who was making these—

JOE: Stop it! I'm trying to make a point.

HARPER: So am I.

JOE: You aren't even making sense, you—

HARPER: My point is the world seems just as—

JOE: It only seems that way to you because you never go out in the world, Harper, and you have emotional problems.

HARPER: I do so get out in the world.

JOE: You don't. You stay in all day, fretting about imaginary—

HARPER: I get out. I do. You don't know what I do.

JOE: You don't stay in all day.

HARPER: No.

JOE: Well . . . Yes you do.

HARPER: That's what you think.

JOE: Where do you go?

HARPER: Where do *you* go? When you walk.

(Pause, then very angry) And I DO NOT have emotional problems.

JOE: I'm sorry.

HARPER: And if I do have emotional problems it's from living with you. Or—

JOE: I'm sorry, buddy, I didn't mean to—

HARPER: Or if you do think I do then you should never have married me. You have all these secrets and lies.

JOE: I want to be married to you, Harper.

HARPER: You shouldn't. You never should.

(Pause)

Hey, buddy. Hey, buddy.

JOE: Buddy kiss.

(They kiss.)

HARPER: I heard on the radio how to give a blowjob.

JOE: What?

HARPER: You want to try?

JOE: You really shouldn't listen to stuff like that.