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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

in the crowding darkness

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

by

Jeff Augustin

Committee in charge:

Naomi Iizuka, Chair
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2014

The thesis of Jeff Augustin is approved and it is acceptable
in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

DEDICATION

To my mom, for carrying me through life.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

in the crowding darkness

by

Jeff Augustin

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair

Gabriel, an Afghanistan War Vet, returns to the comfortable life he built with his partner of eight years Vaughn. When they're asked to become the black gay poster couple for a same-sex marriage campaign, issues in their past and present are unearthed threatening their seemingly happy reunion. How do we create our own dreams when our community and loved ones want us to live out their own?

in the crowding darkness

by Jeff Augustin

Characters

Vaughn – Mid/Late 20s African American man
 Gabriel – Mid/Late 20s Haitian American man
 Clara –Early/Mid 30s Haitian American woman
 Derek – Mid/Late 20s White American man
 Jean –Mid 30s Haitian American man
 Ali – Early 30s African American man
 Julian – 20 year old Mexican American man

Setting

Fall 2013
 Loft Apartment in Lincoln Park and a Kitchenette Apartment in Bronzeville in Chicago, IL

Notes:

——— A silent moment when a character reveals or holds back a truth. A time when language is too much or not enough

The play should be performed without an intermission.

Overlapping Dialogue:

Gabriel’s line begins on Vaughn’s “or”

VAUGHN

You’re not having nightmares
 or -

GABRIEL
 No, I’m fine

A special thanks to Darryl Baskerville, Yamil Jaiman, and Joshua Reed for sharing their experiences serving our country including their time before enlisting and their return home.

Scene One

(Lincoln Park Loft Apartment. VAUGHN sits in the windowsill, it is a large and expansive window. Sounds from the street drift up and echo through the apartment. Rays from the setting sun hit him, keeping the darkness away. He takes a deep slow drag of his cigarette, savoring each nicotine filled breath. A long beat. He exits to the back. The front door creeps open, GABRIEL enters. He is a large man, his muscles barely contained in his t-shirt. He wears Army issued boots and has an Army back pack slung over his shoulder. He shuts the door. He moves with a familiar unease, checking out the space. A long beat. VAUGHN reenters. He stops, like he's seen a ghost.)

VAUGHN
—

GABRIEL
—

VAUGHN
—

GABRIEL
—

(A beat)

GABRIEL

It's not safe to keep your door unlocked.

VAUGHN

Usually the creeps and people I don't like have to be buzzed up.

GABRIEL

The front door was propped open

VAUGHN

Bad neighbors, I guess

(They watch each other)

GABRIEL

So which one am I?

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

Creep or person you don't like?

VAUGHN

You choose.

(They smile at each other. A beat. GABRIEL moves towards him, but VAUGHN remains still. GABRIEL stops.)

GABRIEL

I ain't going to hurt you.

VAUGHN

I know.

(VAUGHN goes to him. They hug. It's long and deep. A beat. The hug is over, but GABRIEL won't let go. A moment.)

VAUGHN

Sorry I didn't get you. I thought your flight was –
Shit, my phone died.
Sorry.
I got over eager and kept checking it in class.
It was stupid of me. I should've –

GABRIEL

Sorry I tried calling –

No, no it's not your fault.
I should've called earlier.
I didn't even think I was going to be able to get on an earlier flight, but some guy at JFK heard me trying to get on standby and just volunteered his seat.

VAUGHN

And here I thought Patriotism was the thing the beginning of wars were made of. But Americans are always surprising me

GABRIEL

Me too.

(A beat)

So you're a smoker now?

(Remembering the cigarette...)

VAUGHN

Shit. Busted

(He throws it out the window)

GABRIEL

The street can't be your ashtray when you live on the ninth floor.

VAUGHN

That was my last one. I've quit.

GABRIEL

You don't have to for me

VAUGHN

Two years of slowly killing myself was enough

(A slight beat)

You must be tired.

(He takes off GABRIEL'S bag)

Sit.

(Leading him to the couch...)

Put your feet up.

GABRIEL

On your coffee table?

VAUGHN

This one time.

(GABRIEL sits, puts his feet up. A beat)

GABRIEL

It's strange

VAUGHN

You've put your feet up before

GABRIEL

No, being here.

VAUGHN

Two years is a long time.

GABRIEL

It all looks the same. I didn't expect it to look the same.

VAUGHN

It's a good thing right? It looks the way it should.

GABRIEL

I guess.

VAUGHN

And home décor was always your thing anyways. My taste is too tacky. Left to my own devices, I'd replace our gay ass art with something even gayer

GABRIEL

The art's not that gay

VAUGHN

Really?

(VAUGHN points to a black and white photograph of two men in an embrace)

GABRIEL

Okay.

VAUGHN

It's less gay than the poster of *Scandal* I would've put up.

GABRIEL

Scandal?

VAUGHN

Grey's Anatomy but smarter.

(GABRIEL laughs)

GABRIEL

Just as sexy?

VAUGHN

Sexier.

(A beat)

Sorry, you got to be hungry. That was a very long trip. I'll go get us some food.

Wait
GABRIEL

Fuck
VAUGHN

What?
GABRIEL

VAUGHN
Clara insisted on making you dinner tonight.
But I can call her –

GABRIEL
Wait. Wait.
My sister cooks
now?

VAUGHN
I mean, she tries. It's not very edible.

(A slight beat)

In fact we should probably just get take out.

(GABRIEL laughs)

But you got to call her and let her know

Why me?
GABRIEL

VAUGHN
Cause she'll rip me a new asshole.

GABRIEL
We can't have that. The one you have is already so cute.

VAUGHN
I think so too.

(A beat)

There's this great new Thai place that –

(Catching himself...)

You hate Thai

GABRIEL

It's fine.

VAUGHN

No, we got tons of other menus. It's been hard cooking for one.

GABRIEL

(Grabbing his arm)

I'm not hungry.

(A slight beat)

Not for that.

(He pulls VAUGHN in)

You look good. Real good.

VAUGHN

It's the beard.

(GABRIEL smiles)

GABRIEL

That is new.

VAUGHN

I'm still getting used to it. I've only had it for the past six months now. I started growing it after Magic died. I went into a mourning. I couldn't have him cremated, it felt wrong. So I buried him in the back, in that patch of dirt. Created a tombstone from an arrow shaped rock. There were lots of tears, lots of long loose black clothing draped around my body. I thought I could hear him crying from under the earth. It was all very tragic. Very Grecian. Very Orpheus and Eurydice.

I didn't even fucking like the dog. I mean it was your dog, but I always secretly hoped it would die. And it did. And it was all so sad. So I didn't shave, didn't get a haircut. Didn't leave the apartment for like a week. But when I finally did, I got all these compliments. So I kept it.

GABRIEL

And the hair on the rest of your body is that the same?

VAUGHN

I've stopped shaving my chest, my pubes, my ass. I'm a forest. Everywhere. I know, hair not what you like. But –

That's fine
GABRIEL

And you?
VAUGHN

The way you like it. Hairy
GABRIEL

Two hairy men.
VAUGHN

(A slight beat)

Can that work?

I hope so.
GABRIEL

(GABRIEL pulls him in towards him)

I need you.

(A slight beat)

I'm here.
VAUGHN

(GABRIEL holds him)

You smell good, like I remember.
GABRIEL

(He runs his hands on VAUGHN'S torso, the way a child does an object they are just discovering.)

And you feel the same too

(GABRIEL kisses VAUGHN. It's long and deep. A beat. He bites VAUGHN'S lip hard.)

Shit.
VAUGHN
(Touching his lip)

(He's bleeding)

GABRIEL

You're still sweet. A little smoky, but sweet.

(He kisses him again)

GABRIEL

I love you.

(And again)

Do you love me?

(VAUGHN nods. He slips his hand down VAUGHN'S pants. Kissing him, groping him as lights fade.)

Scene Two

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN'S Apartment. A week later. VAUGHN, GABRIEL, CLARA, JEAN and DEREK are having dinner. Although no one's really devoured the meal, GABRIEL'S plate is pretty full)

CLARA

After dinner I thought we'd play monopoly. Y'all have monopoly?

GABRIEL

(Nothing in his soul wants to play...)

We don't

CLARA

Cranium?

VAUGHN

I'd have to look for it

GABRIEL

Nope

JEAN

Clara, I don't think it's a game kind of night

CLARA

It's a dinner party. What will we do after dinner?

DEREK

Watch a movie

VAUGHN

That's a lovely idea.

CLARA

That's boring

JEAN

Not if we pick an exciting one. That way no ones leaves bruised, physically or mentally

CLARA

What does that mean?

GABRIEL

That game of taboo we played the night before I left, Vaughn slapped Derek

JEAN

And you cried yourself to sleep. And y'all were on the same team.

CLARA

It was a very emotional night. This is a happy night

JEAN

It is, but it's Gabe's night. And he wants it to be a friendly one

GABRIEL

I do

CLARA

Fine.

(A slight beat)

But I get to pick the movie

VAUGHN

We'd love you to.

CLARA

Mmmhmm.

(They all return to their food. A beat. She notices GABRIEL'S nearly full plate.)

You ain't eating my food. You don't like it?

GABRIEL

No, no, I like it. It's –

CLARA

It's fine if you don't, I can make you something else.

(Shade to VAUGHN)

I don't know how though, it's not like you got anything in your fridge

VAUGHN

Sorry, it's been hectic week. I haven't had a chance to make it to the grocery store

CLARA

It's fine. I'm sure I can make him a sandwich. You got bread right? Everybody's got bread.

VAUGHN

We do, we do. A sandwich is a great idea. We even have eggplant and goat cheese –

CLARA

I know how to make a sandwich.

GABRIEL

You don't have to make anything else

CLARA

You don't have to eat something you don't like.

JEAN

Clara, leave the man alone

CLARA

He's not eating my food

GABRIEL

It's good. I like it

CLARA

You don't have to pretend –

VAUGHN

It's your mom. She came over and fed him. He tried to stop her, but you –

CLARA

I swear to –

(Stops herself)

If she wasn't my mama, I would –

(Biting her tongue)

She kept calling me, kept nagging me in her thick ass Haitian accent

(in an exaggerated Haitian dialect)

“I cook. Your food so nasty pig won't eat. Let me cook.”

GABRIEL

The food is good

VAUGHN

And I made sure he saved room for dessert

CLARA

Shit, I was supposed to put'em back in the oven fifteen minutes ago

VAUGHN

Let me help you

CLARA

Stay

DEREK

What's for dessert?

CLARA

It's a surprise

(She exits into the kitchen)

DEREK

(Referring to the food)

This is unfortunate

GABRIEL

It's not that bad

(He lifts up an unidentifiable burnt piece of meat)

DEREK

What am I eating? This is like burnt corn wrapped in a dirty diaper.

VAUGHN

Don't be a jackass

DEREK

It's making me nauseous

JEAN

No, he's right. This is bad. Sometimes it's fine, but this is just God awful

DEREK

You could've stopped this tragedy from happening.

JEAN

She started cooking cause I was tired of doing it all the time. I can't stop her now.

DEREK

We should just skip dessert and go straight to a movie.

VAUGHN

She can't fuck up dessert

DEREK

She's fucked everything else up, why stop now

GABRIEL

He might be right

(A slight beat)

DEREK

Do you have *The Way We Were*?

GABRIEL

Oh God

VAUGHN

I can't. Not tonight.

JEAN

What?

VAUGHN

Derek made us watch that movie like twenty times in college

GABRIEL

During his infamous break up with Anthony Year.

VAUGHN

The reason he believes fucking closeted twenty-year-old Mexican boys will save him any pain.

(To DEREK)

Don't be such a white homo, Barbara Streisand is not the be all end all

DEREK

I thought you'd appreciate *The Way We Were*. It's about a love that blossoms after a man comes back from war

VAUGHN

That relationship didn't end well Derek

DEREK

But you guys are stronger than they were, right? His deployment has brought you closer together

GABRIEL

It has.

DEREK

And I'm sure you've been fucking non-stop. Just a week of pure cock devouring.

GABRIEL

Devouring?

VAUGHN

Derek

JEAN

Yeah, come on man

DEREK

What?

VAUGHN

That's not suitable dinner conversation

DEREK

We're all done suffering through Clara's cooking right?

(CLARA enters)

CLARA

What about my cooking?

JEAN

It's delicious babe

DEREK

Not more delicious than Gabe's –

Don't
VAUGHN

What are you talking about?
CLARA

Unfortunately, Vaughn and Gabriel's sex life
JEAN

No. I don't want to hear about my brother sticking his –
CLARA

(searching for the word...can't say penis or any version)

his *thing* in places it shouldn't be.

Shouldn't be?
VAUGHN

You know what I mean. I don't want to picture my brother having sex.
CLARA

You tell him about all the nasty things you and Jean do
VAUGHN

First of all none of it's nasty
CLARA

It's pretty boring actually
JEAN

And secondly it's more natural
CLARA

Natural?
VAUGHN

To picture I mean, visually. Being gay is natural too, I'm not saying that it isn't. I know you can find it in nature.
CLARA

We understand.
GABRIEL

CLARA

I wasn't trying to be -. I didn't mean anything by it

VAUGHN

You never seem to

CLARA

What does that mean?

VAUGHN

Nothing

CLARA

No, go ahead

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Okay -

GABRIEL

Vaughn

VAUGHN

What?

CLARA

No, it's okay

GABRIEL

No, no, he just needs some coffee

VAUGHN

I don't need coffee

GABRIEL

You get cranky after dinner when you don't have it

VAUGHN

I get cranky when you tell me what I need.

GABRIEL

I wasn't trying to -

VAUGHN

You were

CLARA

Say what you got to say

(He want to, but he looks at GABRIEL. A slight beat)

VAUGHN

I was going to ask if anyone wanted more wine

(He goes to pour himself more wine.)

JEAN

(To CLARA)

Maybe it's getting late

CLARA

We haven't watched the movie yet

DEREK

So do you have it?

GABRIEL

What?

DEREK

The Way We Were

VAUGHN

Let it go

DEREK

Why can't we watch it?

CLARA

Cause I get to choose the movie.

VAUGHN

Yeah, she gets to choose the movie

DEREK

But it's so relevant to why we're here

VAUGHN
It's not actually

DEREK
(To VAUGHN)
It's about war

VAUGHN
Derek

(During the next exchange, GABRIEL tries to chime in, but they roll over him, as if he's not there.)

DEREK
What? We're not allowed to talk about Afghanistan?

VAUGHN
It's a party.

DEREK
To celebrate his return. How can we celebrate what we don't know about

VAUGHN
Use your imagination

DEREK
Imagining is worse. We should know everything he's seen and experienced.

VAUGHN
You don't want to know. You don't like mess. If it can get in the way of your comfort, your happiness, you don't want to know about it.

DEREK
He's my best friend. I want to support him

VAUGHN
Is that why this is the first time you've seen him since he's been back.

DEREK
I called.

VAUGHN
Once all week. Then yesterday non-stop, left like six voicemails.

DEREK

What you don't like voicemails?

VAUGHN

No, *you* don't. So why the sudden need to know?

DEREK

Wars eat countries from the inside, imagine what it does to a man.

VAUGHN

Look at him, he's fine.

DEREK

You don't know that

VAUGHN

I do, I live with him.

DEREK

Then why not let him tell us

VAUGHN

Cause he doesn't want to talk about it.

(Breaking in...)

GABRIEL

It's the normalcy that gets to you.

(A slight beat)

There's a frightening amount of normalcy in war. Followed by these out of body experiences.

There was this one mission. We were transporting a dentist to this little clay hut of a school in the middle of nowhere. We have this one translator for thirty kids, three schoolteachers, and us. So we spend half of the time trying not to offend each other – just like I do with y'all. And the other half we spent playing soccer with the kids. And they could've been any group of kids in any schoolyard here. But on our way back to the base, an IED goes off. Goes off too early, just a few yards in front of us. And that's mostly what it was like. One moment feeling like you could be home and the next realizing you're so far from it.

(A beat)

DEREK

Are you okay? Emotionally?

GABRIEL

If you're asking if I'm going to go crazy and shoot you, I'm not. There are things I will never be able to bury deep enough, but that's what therapists are for, right?

(A beat)

JEAN

I respect what you've done

CLARA

We all do.

DEREK

What the fuck? We haven't toasted the man of the night.

(They lift their glasses)

To Gabe, glad you're not fucked up

VAUGHN

So eloquent

(They drink. A beat)

DEREK

Still going to try to save the world?

GABRIEL

What?

DEREK

Since I've known you, you've been talking about doing something big with your life.

VAUGHN

He joined the Army

DEREK

Now he's back. Still interested in that?

GABRIEL

Yeah.

DEREK
(To VAUGHN)

And you still support him?

VAUGHN

Of course

DEREK

So what's the big plan then?

GABRIEL

Don't know yet. Got to get a job. Can't live off of Vaughn's trust fund forever.

VAUGHN

Don't worry about that right now.

CLARA

We were taught to work for our money.

VAUGHN

I'm working on my dissertation. You wouldn't know this, but getting a higher degree takes time.

GABRIEL

And he's almost done. Unfortunately he won't be the sugar daddy I was hoping for. An adjunct salary will barely be able to feed him.

JEAN

They're hiring at the construction site

GABRIEL

We'll see.

(Changing the subject)

Movie?

VAUGHN

Let's get it over with.

DEREK

Actually I got to cut out

GABRIEL

The movie was your idea

CLARA

Could've played a game.

DEREK

Got an agonizing day of work tomorrow. A marathon of interviews.

GABRIEL

Sorry to hear that. Wish you could stay longer.

DEREK

You're not going to ask me to?

GABRIEL

You said you had to go.

DEREK

Sometimes a boy just wants to feel loved

GABRIEL

So you want me to beg?

DEREK

Yes

GABRIEL

Alright,

(A slight beat)

Sit your little bitch ass down, I just got back from war fool. Let's get drunk. Let's sing some *Mama Mia*

VAUGHN

Don't be such a stereotype

DEREK

Really wish I could –

GABRIEL

Don't leave me baby

DEREK

I'm sorry, I got all these damn interviews tomorrow

GABRIEL

What's so fucking important about these interviews?

DEREK

Everything.

Equality America is starting a campaign. Trying to get some steam for the State Senate vote on gay marriage that's happening in a few months. We're trying to highlight a few loving and morally rich gay couples around the country. Going to show voters that we are like them.

The problem is our initial vetting process was done by an idiot. We started these interviews yesterday and it was a disaster. One couple had been together for two years and hadn't met each other's parents. Another admitted to having a very open relationship. And one came in looking like they spent the entire weekend strung out. We had college drop-outs, self-haters, sugar daddies and their twinkly boyfriends. And there are a surprising amount of couples together out of convenience and loneliness.

(A slight beat)

Wish we could clone you guys.

GABRIEL

You'd have to work with a Vaughn

DEREK

Vaughn and I would work well together

VAUGHN

Would we?

DEREK

Who doesn't like to work with someone who challenges them?

VAUGHN

Me.

DEREK

Seriously though. You guys should meet with us.

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

Absolutely, not.

DEREK

This could be what Gabriel's been looking to do his entire life. If we're successful at getting this bill passed, it will bring happiness and fullness to thousand of couples.

(To GABRIEL)

You could be synonymous with gay marriage

GABRIEL

You really think we could do it?

VAUGHN

Gabriel

DEREK

You'd be perfect

CLARA

(Don't know if I'd say...)

Perfect?

DEREK

Yes, Perfect. College sweethearts hold off starting their life, so one can go off to war and find his purpose. While the other waits faithfully, building a home, a life, for them. It's a timeless story. I have no doubt voters will be able to see themselves in you. That you'll be able to reach a community we never have before. And I'm not the only person who thinks so.

GABRIEL

You talked about us?

DEREK

Of course

VAUGHN

You had no right to do that.

DEREK

You just came up yesterday

VAUGHN

That's why you kept calling

DEREK

I was just trying to explain to folk what we're looking for and my boss ran with it. He'll kill me if you guys don't come in.

GABRIEL

I don't know

VAUGHN

You're going to have to lose your job

JEAN

I think he's on to something. I know I shouldn't feel this way cause y'all have opened up my world. But I was down in Boystown the other day working on a site when these two guys came up to us asking for directions. The way they were dressed, the way they spoke and moved it was like men trying to be women. It was uncomfortable. And to us that's what gay is – uncomfortable. If people could see you, then they'll realize you all aren't the same, that some of you are comfortable with being men.

CLARA

I'm with Gabe. It doesn't seem right. Putting yourself out like that, your personal life out like that.

GABRIEL

I'm not saying no. I just want to think about it.

CLARA

About what? You don't want to get married. You "ain't that gay." That's what you told mama and papa.

VAUGHN

You did?

GABRIEL

I never said it like that.

CLARA

You must've lost your memory in the war.

VAUGHN

How did you say it?

GABRIEL

She's not explaining the full situation.

VAUGHN
(To GABRIEL)

Go ahead

CLARA
There was no situation. Papa asked if you wanted to build a home with a man, get married, and you said “I ain’t that gay.”

GABRIEL
I was coming out. That was eight years ago.

CLARA
Feels like you felt the same way two years ago.

VAUGHN
He did.

JEAN
Clara you should keep
your thoughts to yourself

VAUGHN
——

GABRIEL
——

CLARA
I’m just trying to watch out for my little brother’s safety. You don’t know what this campaign will be – commercials, interviews, posters, his face plastered all over the place. Is that safe?

JEAN
Man was in Afghanistan, I think he can take care of himself

CLARA
People are crazy. There aren’t rules of war here

GABRIEL
You don’t have to worry about me

CLARA
Don’t I?

JEAN
You need to chill more, worry less. This isn’t the 1960s, we’ve jumped Jim Crow

CLARA
What the hell does that mean?

JEAN

That things are different, we got a black president.

CLARA

Ain't nothing's change fool

JEAN

I'd appreciate it, if you didn't call me a fool.

CLARA

Their people always talking about how it's like the Civil Rights Movement. You know how many of our people died for our freedom.

DEREK

"Their people?" "Our People?"

CLARA

Derek don't. I've heard you referred to blacks as lazy, Hennessy guzzling feigns

DEREK

It was a joke.

CLARA

Joke about it again, see what happens.

GABRIEL

Alright, let's all just take a breath. Okay?

JEAN

Yeah, I think that's a good idea.

VAUGHN

What community?

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

Earlier Derek said reach a community they never have before

DEREK

You know, the right wing conservative community

VAUGHN

And Black?

DEREK

—

VAUGHN

And Black community. People who can “see themselves in us”

GABRIEL

I don’t understand

VAUGHN

What better way to get more support in the black community than to have us, two educated black men who are not offensively flaming, Gabriel definitely not. Me, I can suppress it. I’m a queen only when I want to be. But even then, I’m not too much.

DEREK

That’s not why

VAUGHN

Really? Cause after Prop 8 you joined the “blame the niggas” band-wagon that

DEREK

Whoa, I never said it like

VAUGHN

I’m paraphrasing.

DEREK

And you set me straight on the issue.

VAUGHN

Apparently not. So let me break it down to you again. We are not monkeys –

DEREK

That’s ignorant.

VAUGHN

You’re fucking ignorant. We’re not monkeys you can lynch and push aside one minute then call upon to do a little jig and smile all happy like the next

DEREK

That is not what I’m doing

VAUGHN

Then tell me what you’re doing?

DEREK

I shouldn't have to explain. You know me, you know –

VAUGHN

That you're a liar.

DEREK

Don't call me a liar, I'm not a liar

VAUGHN

Then tell the fucking truth.

DEREK

I am.

VAUGHN

You're such a fucking little punk.

DEREK

And you're a such fucking asshole. I'm not some stupid liberal cracker. Yes, you're black and non-threatening or flaming and that helps. But you're the strongest fucking couple I know, gay or straight. And it makes me feel worthless that you two can't get married. That's why I want to do this campaign. To give you that. Not the universal you, but *you*. So stop calling me a fucking liar and think about it. And if the answer is no, then it's no. But please fucking think about it.

(A beat)

Is something fucking burning?

CLARA

Goddamn it.

(To God)

Sorry Lord.

(She heads for the door)

The fucking pies

(She exits. They fall into a silence.)

GABRIEL

We will

DEREK

What?

GABRIEL

Think about it.

(A beat. Lights fade.)

Scene Three

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN'S Apartment. An hour or so later. GABRIEL is finishing a nightcap. He's looking out the window, lost in the thought. The night sounds of the city pour in. A beat. CLARA enters from the kitchen. She watches him for a moment.)

CLARA

The kitchen is all cleaned up.

GABRIEL

Thanks

(A beat)

CLARA

I'm sorry about earlier

GABRIEL

I know

CLARA

I got a little carried away.

GABRIEL

We all did. It's okay.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Dinner was delicious

CLARA

No it wasn't. But thank you.

(They smile at each other)

GABRIEL

CLARA

CLARA

You know I love you

GABRIEL

I know. And I love you.

(They hug.)

CLARA

I haven't gotten the chance to tell you, but you look good, whole.

GABRIEL

And you looking fine these days too big sis. All in shape and shit.

CLARA

Yeah?

GABRIEL

Yeah

(He grabs her, twirls her, dips her)

CLARA

I'm trying a new diet

GABRIEL

It's working.

(He lifts her back up)

But don't lose too much weight, a black girl's got to be nice and thick

(CLARA laughs)

CLARA

You are still a silly mother beep

(They smile together. They fall into a silence)

GABRIEL

Do I seem different to you?

CLARA

Bigger

GABRIEL

More than physically...like I don't know. Spiritually or something

CLARA

Umm

(A slight beat)

CLARA

No, I don't think so. Why?

GABRIEL

I don't know. It's just – if I haven't changed at all, then the past two years have been a waste

CLARA

A waste? Boy, you just spent two years putting your life in danger –

GABRIEL

I didn't see much action. Most of our time was spent patrolling areas with no real insurgent presence

CLARA

You were still defending your country while liberating another. It's not always about you golden boy

GABRIEL

I'm not golden, don't call me that

CLARA

You are, embrace it. You've done one wrong thing your entire life. Being a homo. In any other Haitian household, you'd be disowned. But in ours you are treasured.

GABRIEL

They love us both

CLARA

One more than the other

GABRIEL

Equally

CLARA

Getting married at, as mama put it, "not stupid age" is the only smart thing I've done with my life. But then again I haven't given her grandchildren, so not good enough

GABRIEL

You will

CLARA

I hope so.

GABRIEL

And you're going to be great at it. Better than mom was

(She smiles)

CLARA

And Jean would be a better father than dad

(They both smile)

GABRIEL

Have you and Jean gotten better?

CLARA

Nope. We're the same. If it makes you feel better, we're all the same. Jean and I are still going to counseling every week. Ironically, our biggest stressor is that we're broke. Mama's and papa's love is where it was when we were children, non-existent. We're all the same, worn yet satisfied.

GABRIEL

Maybe change was the wrong word. Clarity, you know. You've always worked, so you've always had an idea of who are and what you wanted to do. Me, all I know is school and the Army. I thought once I got back and breathed this air that immediately it would click. I'd know what to do, who I wanted to be.

(A beat)

CLARA

So you're actually thinking about doing the campaign?

GABRIEL

Let's not talk about that.

CLARA

What would mama and papa say? They wouldn't want their life on blast

GABRIEL

Their life wouldn't be on blast. And I'm a grown ass man. I can do whatever I want.

CLARA

Really think about it. You've only been here for a week. Two years is a lot to process. And change, change isn't always a good thing.

(Entering...)

VAUGHN

Is she gone –

(Noticing her...)

CLARA

She's leaving now.

(Turning back to GABRIEL)

Glad you're back.

(She kisses him on the cheek. She heads for the door.)

GABRIEL

(Telling her to say bye to VAUGHN...)

Clara

GABRIEL
(Say it)

CLARA
(Do I have to?)

(Without looking at VAUGHN...)

CLARA

Bye.

(She exits.)

GABRIEL

You got to try harder

VAUGHN

So does she.

GABRIEL

It's not her fault. It's the culture we were raised in.

VAUGHN

Being Haitian is not an excuse.

GABRIEL

She's getting used to it. They're all getting used to it.

VAUGHN

Eight years, Gabriel. You've been out for eight years.

GABRIEL

And in a relationship all eight. They had no time to get used to just me being gay. They don't know how to talk about it.

VAUGHN

Teach them. You're going to have to stick up for us eventually.

GABRIEL

They way you do with your parents?

VAUGHN

My parents like you.

GABRIEL

You never notice how they look at me. My genes aren't good enough. I'm just some poor first generation nigga.

VAUGHN

My family is not ignorant

GABRIEL

Oh, and mine is?

VAUGHN

That's not what I'm saying.

GABRIEL

It sounds like you are.

(A beat)

VAUGHN

Tell her I'm sorry. Blame the wine

GABRIEL

You're not drunk

VAUGHN

She doesn't know that.

(A beat)

VAUGHN

And while you're at it, tell her she only does potlucks. We'll do dinner parties and she potlucks. I've brushed twice and gargled until my cheeks were sore and I still have burnt crust stuck in my teeth. Tonight was just –

(catching himself...)

Sorry.

(But not being able to control himself...)

But Derek, Derek was in top form. That text he got at the end, that wasn't about work. I looked, it was from

(boy's name said with an exaggerated Spanish dialect)

“Julián at Roscoe's.” I'm sure “Julián at Roscoe's” is a go-go dancer there. Fucker hasn't been in a relationship his entire adult life, but believes he can be the savior of equal marriage. It was so rude of him bringing it up like that tonight

GABRIEL

I'm sure he's in a crunch

VAUGHN

He could've waited, found a time when he could speak to us alone

GABRIEL

Give him a break

VAUGHN

Be on my side on this one

GABRIEL

I'm always on your side.

VAUGHN

It doesn't feel like it right now

GABRIEL

You're right. I'm sorry.

(A slight beat)

He could've found a better time.

VAUGHN

Thank you.

(He kisses him.)

GABRIEL

Would you like a drink?

VAUGHN

Hell yeah

(He goes to pour him wine)

No, whiskey. The good shit.

GABRIEL

Alright.

(He pours him some whiskey)

Here you go.

VAUGHN

Thanks.

(GABRIEL sits next to him. GABRIEL goes somewhere. A beat)

GABRIEL

You want to get married right?

VAUGHN

—
I did.

GABRIEL

You don't anymore?

VAUGHN

You didn't

GABRIEL

But that's what you wanted?

VAUGHN

It was.

(A beat)

We should do it	GABRIEL
What?	VAUGHN
Get married.	GABRIEL
You're asking me to marry you?	VAUGHN
Yes	GABRIEL
Why?	VAUGHN
Cause I love you	GABRIEL
Did you not love me before?	VAUGHN
I've always loved you	GABRIEL
What's changed?	VAUGHN
Nothing	GABRIEL
Nothing?	VAUGHN
I just want to spend my life with you	GABRIEL
Is it cause you want to be the gay Barack and Michelle?	VAUGHN

GABRIEL

No.

VAUGHN

It seems a little convenient doesn't it?

GABRIEL

No. Coincidental, maybe. But as much as Derek can be an ass, he's right. We'd be a smart fucking choice.

VAUGHN

And there it is

GABRIEL

But that's not why I'm asking. I'm asking cause I just spent two years away from you and being away made me realize how much you're inside of me. How I'm barely a person without you. It's that simple. Why can't it be that simple?

VAUGHN

Cause two years ago I was happy. In a world of pure fucking happiness. Where Chicago winters are charming and a toddler having a tantrum in the middle of the market makes you want to have a litter of kids. But then the man I wanted to commit my life to needed to go off to war to find himself. You know what that does to someone? To know that you're not enough.

GABRIEL

It had nothing to do with us. I was happy with us.

VAUGHN

Then you shouldn't have left.

GABRIEL

My whole life I've done everything I was supposed to. Got straight A's, played football, went to a good college, stayed close to home, still I was unhappy. You saw that.

VAUGHN

I was doing all I could to make you happy.

GABRIEL

But it wasn't enough. You, Derek, everyone we knew was doing something with their life. I was just wandering like a Lost Boy. I felt myself slipping from you. I thought leaving would bring us closer.

VAUGHN
It didn't

GABRIEL
We don't know that yet

VAUGHN
I do. My only connection to you for two years were memories and emails. And since you wanted to be treated like one of the guys, those emails could never be intimate, possess anything personal. I couldn't say I love you cause you never knew who was reading along. And memories fade.

GABRIEL
Do you still love me?

VAUGHN
Did you think that maybe when you were gone, searching for your happiness, that I would find something I wasn't looking for?

GABRIEL
Did you?

VAUGHN

GABRIEL
Did you?

VAUGHN

(A beat. Something in GABRIEL breaks)

GABRIEL
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

(He continues to break)

I worked hard to be a good soldier. Pushed myself, but it didn't work. I'm still lost. But now I'm lost without you.

(GABRIEL breaks down further. To see such a large man breakdown is alarming and uneasy.)

GABRIEL

I'm sorry I ruined it. I ruined us. I just wanted to be a man worth your love. To give you what you've given me. To take care of you, to be strong for you.

(VAUGHN goes to him, holds him.)

VAUGHN

You already were. When we met I was a mess, I was nothing, but you loved me. You took care of me. And when you left I lost that. That safety, that comfort.

(A beat)

I'm sorry.

I was angry then lonely. And –

(A beat)

You didn't ruin us. We're not ruined. We're going to be fine. We're going to be fine.

(He holds GABRIEL tighter. A moment. GABRIEL kisses him, begins groping him passionately, ferociously. A beat. He pulls away)

GABRIEL

Can I do this?

VAUGHN

Yes.

(GABRIEL continues, they begin to undress. We knew they were fit, but now more exposed, we see that their bodies compliment one another, one's weakness, is the other's strength.)

GABRIEL

I love you. I love you so much. Do you love me?

(VAUGHN nods)

GABRIEL

Say it

VAUGHN

I love you

(GABRIEL gets on top of him, turns him around. It's passionate and rough. They begin to have sex. There's a violence in it. Sound and light from the street pour in, adding to the violence.)

Scene Four

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN's Apartment. Later that night. VAUGHN is in his sweats. He takes a final puff then throws his cigarette out the window. He puts the pack in a book that has the middle cut out of it. He then places the book in the middle of a pile on his desk. He blows out the scented candles and sprays some Febreze. He goes to his computer. He stares at the screen for a few beats. He's having serious writer's block. A beat. GABRIEL enters. He watches him for a moment.)

GABRIEL

Are you okay?

VAUGHN

Yeah, yeah I'm fine. Did I wake you?

GABRIEL

No, no. I had to pee. I was out like a rock. Haven't slept that well, in a long time.

(GABRIEL smiles)

VAUGHN

Good. You should go back to bed

(Extending his hand)

GABRIEL

Why don't you join me?

VAUGHN

I'm a little sore right now.

GABRIEL

No, I didn't mean -. Not like that.

(A slight beat)

GABRIEL

Did I hurt you?

I'm sorry if -

VAUGHN

No, no. You didn't

GABRIEL

I know I got a little carried away

VAUGHN

No, no really. You were good. Great.

GABRIEL

VAUGHN

(A beat)

GABRIEL

What's keeping you up?

VAUGHN

Work on my dissertation.

GABRIEL

It's late.

VAUGHN

I had an epiphany. Want to get it down before I lose it.

GABRIEL

What is it?

VAUGHN

It'll bore you

GABRIEL

Langston could never bore me

VAUGHN

Oh Langston, Langston was a long time ago. He is an exhausted topic. His gayness, his blackness, his politics, his biracial-ness and any combination you could possibly think of is exhausted. There is nothing original to be said about the great, confused Langston Hughes. I was forced to move on. It was rough at first. But now, I'm writing about Miss Gwendolyn Brooks

GABRIEL

I don't know Brooks

VAUGHN

She was very sassy

GABRIEL

What is it about her poetry?

VAUGHN

Do I need any other reason?

GABRIEL

You know what I've missed most? The sound of your voice when you get excited. It turns into an endless shrill. Very different than that fake base you usually put. You sound so gay, it's nice.

(A slight beat)

Tell me and to bed I'll go.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Have you heard of Bronzeville?

GABRIEL

Yeah, it's on the South Side.

VAUGHN

Gwendolyn's first collection,

(He throws the book to GABRIEL)

A Street in Bronzeville, takes place there. When I first read it, I thought it was all over the place in technique and form. I mean the last eleven poems are sonnets off rhyme, which pisses me off. So I moved on. Started reading other writers. But I couldn't get *Bronzeville* out of my head. So I read it again and again trying to figure out what made it so haunting. But I couldn't. So I decided to go there.

GABRIEL

You went to the South Side?

VAUGHN

Yeah

GABRIEL

Alone?

VAUGHN

Yeah

GABRIEL

You wouldn't come over my place in Wicker Park, unless I walked you from the El. And the worst thing that could've happened to you is some drunk hipster wanting to give you a hug

VAUGHN

I developed a nerve.

GABRIEL

And you felt safe?

VAUGHN

I had to transform a bit. I went to the thrift store bought a pair of loose jeans, a large Miles Davis t-shirt and a non-descript winter coat. I looked nothing like me. And when I got to Bronzeville –

GABRIEL

No, I want the shrill, you're not giving me the shrill. Paint it for me.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

It took me a while to get there. Brown line to Red line. The hardest part was pretending that I knew where I was going, so no one could smell the fear in my blood. My mom used to say that thugs could do that. Actually, that's a lie. The hardest part was controlling the attitude in my walk. I thought a lot about you. How this pilgrimage would've been easier for you.

Anyway, I'm walking through this neighborhood, avoiding eye contact, but walking with my head up, and I reach this block. And it's bustling. For midday on a Wednesday it's filled with people. And it's like I'm on the street. The street Gwendolyn wrote about. And the people, the people are the same. And I know them, all of them. I have a sort of understanding of who they are.

And then I get it. She can't use white western rules of form. The folks she's writing about can't dream the same way – their dreams are confined by race and class. So by subverting the form she asks us, how do we create our own dreams?

(GABRIEL points to the book near VAUGHN)

GABRIEL

Can you read me a poem?

VAUGHN

I should get back to work

GABRIEL

Right, sorry.

(GABRIEL gives him back the book)

How much longer do you think you'll be?

(A slight beat)

I don't want to sleep alone

VAUGHN

You won't. I won't be too long.

GABRIEL

Okay

(GABRIEL starts heading back. He stops.)

GABRIEL

It's not the campaign, keeping you up?

VAUGHN

It's what we need, right?

GABRIEL

It is. It'll be good for us. Doing something like this will bring us closer.

VAUGHN

Then I'm on board, let's do it.

GABRIEL

Good.

(A beat)

It's going to have to be just us from now on.

VAUGHN

It will

GABRIEL

We need to be –

VAUGHN

Like we were. He and I were done before you even got back.

GABRIEL

Okay.

(A beat)

Oh, we should make it official.

VAUGHN

What?

(GABRIEL walks back to VAUGHN. He removes a ring from his finger)

GABRIEL

It's just my pinky ring.

VAUGHN

No, no, it's sweet.

(He goes down on one knee)

GABRIEL

Vaughn Maurice Scott, will you be my husband, my greater half?

VAUGHN

I do.

(corrects himself)

I will. No one ever tells you what you're supposed to say when this happens.

(He laughs/smiles at himself)

Yes, I'll marry you.

(They smiles. He slips it on VAUGHN'S finger. They kiss.)

You can be baby spoon

GABRIEL

I wouldn't sleep any other way

(He kisses him again and exits. VAUGHN goes back to his laptop. He stares at the screen. A moment. VAUGHN goes to get another cigarette. Stops himself. Looks at his ring)

VAUGHN

—————
(A beat. He knows what he has to do. He shuts his laptop. He grabs the book of poetry, his jacket then quietly exits the apartment.)

Scene Five

(A Kitchenette building in Bronzeville. The apartment is dingy and well lived in by it's past tenants, a little too well lived in. The furnishing is sparse, just a little less than the essentials. There's a knock on the front door. ALI enters. He is a large strikingly handsome man, with rough edges. He looks in the peephole. A beat. He scans the apartment making sure everything is in place. It is. He scans himself. He is. He answers the door.)

Hey. ALI

Hey. VAUGHN

VAUGHN ALI

Do you want to come in? ALI

Only for a minute VAUGHN

(VAUGHN enters. ALI shuts the door.)

I just needed to give you this.

(He pulls the book from his jacket pocket)

What is it? ALI

A Street in Bronzeville. You can have it VAUGHN

Don't you need it for your studies? I just wanted to borrow it. ALI

I've memorized them. VAUGHN

You've memorized all these poems? ALI

VAUGHN

My favorites. The others I can find online or something.

ALI

Are you okay?

VAUGHN

Yeah, yeah. I'm good.

(ALI reaches for the book, but VAUGHN doesn't give it to him. A beat.)

ALI

Do you want something to drink. All I really have is water and Hawaiian Punch.

VAUGHN

I can't stay

ALI

You sure?

ALI

VAUGHN

VAUGHN

Some Hawaiian Punch, thanks.

ALI

I wish I had something stronger to offer you, but you know.

VAUGHN

It's fine. Fructose corn syrup works just as well as alcohol.

(During the following exchange, ALI grabs a bottle of Hawaiian Punch from his mini fridge in the corner of the room designated as the "kitchen." He grabs two glasses off the side table, rinses them out and fills them with juice.)

VAUGHN

How have you been?

ALI

Same shit, different day. Staying out of jail and trying to keep these kids out too. I need to start hitting the gym though. Getting soft

VAUGHN

You look good

ALI

Thanks, but these kids are stronger these days. Don't know if interrupting gang fights is a lifetime work.

VAUGHN

Those boys really respond to you though

ALI

Maybe, but it's exhausting. Having to deal with all their stuff, it's a lot. And just when you think you're finally getting to them, shit goes wrong. Did you know that short runt, Peter at all?

VAUGHN

Yeah. I like him a lot. He was the only one to take my sessions seriously. He has the heart of a poet. Not the skills, but the heart. And I think he has a little crush on me. It's cute.

ALI

He killed a kid today.

VAUGHN

What?

ALI

The kid caught Peter jerking to the cover of some men's underwear wrapper. You know to the picture of the model. Kid kept saying Peter was a special kind of faggot, cause he must have gotten the wrapper out of someone's trash, cause they don't get Hanes at the group home.

So Peter just started wailing on him. Kept yelling at him "I ain't no faggot. I ain't no dirty faggot." I kept trying to pull him off the kid, but it was like I was Goliath and he was David. He just conquered me somehow. It took three of us to pull him off. And you could see in his eyes the pure terror, an animal about to be swallowed by it's predator. Not cause of what he did, but cause maybe he was caught.

VAUGHN

What's going to happen to him?

ALI

Cook County.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

I'm sorry

ALI

Makes me want to drink. But if you can't have alcohol Hawaiian Punch will do.

(ALI hands VAUGHN his glass. They lift to toast, ALI notices the ring)

Congratulations.

VAUGHN

For what?

ALI

The ring.

(A slight beat)

I guess, I've been worried about you for nothing.

VAUGHN

You've been worried?

ALI

Yeah, we went from talking and seeing each other everyday for six months to complete silence for two weeks.

VAUGHN

My boyfriend just –

(Realizing...)

I haven't called him my boyfriend since college. It feels weird. Feels like young giddy love. I guess I should say fiancé. But that sounds show-offy.

My partner, I'll say my partner. He just got back from serving in Afghanistan last week.

ALI

I guess you have a thing for soldiers

VAUGHN

I guess I do.

(A beat)

VAUGHN
But, he just proposed. Tonight.

ALI
Tonight?

VAUGHN
Yeah, tonight.

(A slight beat)

ALI
If you're here –

VAUGHN
You got Hawaiian starch

ALI
What?

(VAUGHN walks over and runs his finger just above ALI's lips, wiping off the stain.)

ALI
—

VAUGHN
—

ALI
If you came here, for me to save you from –. This is just supposed to be fun. I can't –

VAUGHN
I know. I'm not here to be saved. I don't need it.

(He kisses ALI. It's bitter and sweet. A goodbye.)

VAUGHN
I should get going

(VAUGHN hand him the book, this time ALI doesn't take it.)

ALI
You don't have to go yet.

VAUGHN
I do

ALI

At least let me walk you to the station. It's late.

VAUGHN

I got a cab waiting.

ALI

You got a cab to drive you here past sunset?

VAUGHN

I promised him a big tip.

ALI

Will I see you at the center at least? The boys really enjoy your class.

VAUGHN

I doubt they do.

ALI

Naw, just the other day Caleb and Jorge came up to me and said "Where's Mr. Vaughn? We got some deep feelings that need to be poeticized"

VAUGHN

Poeticized?

ALI

They may not have said poeticized.

(VAUGHN smiles lightly.)

VAUGHN

Take care of yourself Ali.

(He hands him the book. ALI takes it.)

ALI

You too.

(VAUGHN exits. ALI is left alone with *A Street in Bronzeville*.)

Scene Six

(During the transition we see GABRIEL switch out some of the “gayer” pieces of art for pieces that are more conservative and abstract. He removes some books and anything else that could be seen as “too gay.” This could take some time. A beat. Lights rise. GABRIEL and VAUGHN’S apartment. A month later. The apartment has been transformed. Even GABRIEL looks different, more put together, more staged. GABRIEL moves through the space making sure everything looks just right. DEREK is scanning the bookshelves.)

GABRIEL

I got all the books.

(Pulls from a shelf...)

DEREK

Larry Kramer’s *Faggots*?

GABRIEL

Sorry, I missed that

DEREK

How? The word *Faggots* is printed in all caps on the spine. You guys shouldn’t even own this. It’s self-hating.

GABRIEL

Vaughn doesn’t read self-hate

DEREK

There are a lot of negative gay stereotypes in here.

GABRIEL

It’s not like you’re here to talk about our taste in fiction.

DEREK

We’re here to talk about everything.

(A slight beat)

This is just the first in a series of videos we’ll be releasing for the campaign. The purpose is to get people to know you. Yes some of it will be about how much you love each other and how great it would be to get married – blah, blah, blah. But the heart of it, will be how you love spending your Sundays watching Law and Order SVU marathons, keeping up with Oprah’s Book Club, going to church

GABRIEL

Church?

DEREK

Yes, this is America. One of you has to believe in God

(A slight beat)

We're interested in the boring shit that everyone else does.

(He hands GABRIEL the book. Unsure of where to put it, GABRIEL throws it into the bar cabinet.)

GABRIEL

Alright, is the place perfect now?

DEREK

Almost. You're just missing one thing

GABRIEL

What's that?

DEREK

Vaughn. Where the hell is he?

GABRIEL

He'll be here soon.

DEREK

I need the two of you to answer the door together. To be standing in the threshold like you're at an altar, holding hands very Connecticut. It'll put my coworkers at ease.

GABRIEL

They need to be put at ease?

DEREK

Yes. We've just invested a lot in you guys. We're taking a big risk here.

GABRIEL

We know. He just needed to grab something.

DEREK

What?

(GABRIEL pulls out his phone)

GABRIEL

I don't know. A book from school, I think.

DEREK

He went all the way to Evanston? That's like an hour away

GABRIEL

Or maybe he was able to get it from the library at DePaul or –

DEREK

You don't know where he is?

GABRIEL

He says he'll be here soon.

(VAUGHN enters. There's a difference in his appearance as well. The beard is gone.)

He's here

VAUGHN

Wow. This place looks –

GABRIEL

Good?

VAUGHN

Different. But good.

(He kisses GABRIEL)

DEREK

Where have you been? They'll be here any minute.

VAUGHN

Sorry, I lost my copy of a *Street in Bronzeville* a few weeks ago and I could only find it in anthologies and I hate carrying around more than I need to. The library was finally able to find a lost copy. And then on my way back I realized that I needed mango to go with the warm brie for the engagement dinner tomorrow night

DEREK

You should have found a better time to run your errands.

VAUGHN

I'm here, no harm done right?

DEREK

If you're having second thoughts now is the time to express them.

GABRIEL

Derek

VAUGHN

I'm not. After all the interviews and hoops we jumped through to get this, I'm fully committed. Don't worry.

DEREK

My ass is on the line here too. If this first video doesn't go well, then that's it, no more campaign. And no more job for Derek.

GABRIEL

We know and we appreciate all you've done.

VAUGHN

Derek, chill out, it's going to be fine.

(Noticing GABRIEL'S tie, pointing)

What is that?

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

You're wearing a bowtie

GABRIEL

So?

VAUGHN

You don't look good in bowties.

GABRIEL

I don't?

VAUGHN

No, you don't.

(He starts untying)

DEREK

We don't have time for this

VAUGHN

I got it

(VAUGHN exits to the bedroom)

DEREK

Are you guys ready for this?

GABRIEL

Of course we are. We spent the entire past month prepping. We matched up all of our stories and inside jokes, what getting married would mean to us, how we just want a quiet life with a house & dog. We're better than Connecticut, we're fucking Texas.

DEREK

I'm not asking just about the campaign

GABRIEL

We're fine.

(A beat)

DEREK

You know I've been thinking a lot.

GABRIEL

About what?

DEREK

Relationships and how they work. Being a fairy in Sound Bend, Indiana you spend a lot of time alone. So much you convince yourself that you're meant to be alone. But when you announced your engagement my entire body started to shake. It was really odd. I tried pushing it down, but I couldn't. So after a few weeks and with the help of my therapist, I realized that I envied your happiness, that I want to find your happiness for myself.

So I know I'm a novice when it comes to relationships. But contrary to my usual state of being, I can be quite empathetic. I'm not asking cause of the campaign. I'm asking cause I care about your happiness.

GABRIEL

I know and I really appreciate the care, but everything is fine. Vaughn and I are happy, happy for the first time in a long time. Working on this campaign has really settled us.

DEREK

That's good. Really good to hear.

(A slight beat)

Vaughn has always had a grounding effect on you.

GABRIEL

So I'm emotionally unbalanced

DEREK

We both are. That's why our romance didn't last more than six months. Two unhappy persons do not a relationship make.

(VAUGHN enters. Holding up a tie.)

VAUGHN

This is the one.

(He goes to GABRIEL) During the following he undoes GABRIEL'S bowtie and ties the tie for him.)

So do we pass the inspection?

DEREK

Now that you're here, yes.

VAUGHN

Is there anything else we need to know?

DEREK

Just be yourselves. Be cute, be funny –

GABRIEL

Be generous and show some humility. We can do that.

VAUGHN

And here I thought my stressor of the week was planning an engagement party your parent's would be willing to attend. Not figuring out how to be humble.

(The buzzer goes off)

DEREK

That's them.

(DEREK buzzes them up. A beat)

By the way, how intimate is this engagement dinner?

VAUGHN

Why?

DEREK

I was thinking about bringing a friend?

GABRIEL

A friend?

DEREK

A guy

GABRIEL

You've never introduced us to a guy

DEREK

I've introduced you to men I'm seeing

VAUGHN

You've introduced us to men you're fucking

DEREK

It's just some guy I met a month ago at Roscoe's. His name is Julian, very sweet, very sexy. He's a young Mexican model.

VAUGHN

Have you ever dated a white guy?

DEREK

They're not as much fun.

GABRIEL

Bring him along. I'd love to meet a man you're dating.

VAUGHN

Yeah, the more gays, the less his parents will want to stay.

(The doorbell rings.)

DEREK

Ready?

GABRIEL

Absolutely

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Yes

(It rings again. DEREK leads them to the door. GABRIEL grabs VAUGHN'S hand, placing them perfectly center, and kisses it. DEREK opens the door. A pool of light falls onto VAUGHN AND GABRIEL. They're perfectly framed as if they're in a portrait. They stand there smiling. We watch them like that for a moment. There's something unnatural about it.)

Scene Seven

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN'S Apartment. A few hours later. VAUGHN, like a trapped animal, stares at the book where his cigarettes are hidden. A beat. He grabs the book, removes the pack of cigarettes. It's empty. He's smoked them all. GABRIEL enters. VAUGHN quickly shuts the book.)

GABRIEL

What are you doing?

VAUGHN

Just pacing. That was pretty intense wasn't it?

GABRIEL

It was a little bit.

VAUGHN

A prostate exam is less invasive.

GABRIEL

I thought the vetting process was more aggressive. That felt like we were on trial facing death.

VAUGHN

But at least that felt like they wanted to get to know us. This felt like something else.

GABRIEL

It was more personal

VAUGHN

Was it?

GABRIEL

What would you call it?

VAUGHN

Not that.

(VAUGHN pours himself a drink)

GABRIEL

Don't worry. Derek thinks it went well. They think people are going to really like you. You come off really funny, smart and very warm. They thought I was a little stiff and timid. But they dug that about us. It'll make us seem more natural.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

It's funny when you think about it. It's usually you people have to warm up to. Me they tend to like right away.

VAUGHN

I don't know how to take that

GABRIEL

You can't help it, it's your face.

VAUGHN

My face?

GABRIEL

Your neutral face, it's bitchy. It reads "I hate you and your parents for making you"

(GABRIEL does an impression. VAUGHN is not amused)

Come on. You know it does.

(He playfully goes to VAUGHN.)

It doesn't mean people don't like you.

VAUGHN

Yours isn't better.

GABRIEL

My face at rest is a smile

VAUGHN

A minstrel smile

(He does a grotesque/hurtful impression. It's like a minstrel character.

He

even uses a dialect associated with slaves.)

"I'll smile wide"

(He smiles wide)

"I'll jive"

(He does a little jig)

VAUGHN

“I’ll even eat a watermelon if it means you’ll like me master sir”

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Are you okay?

VAUGHN

I’m fine

GABRIEL

Something’s obviously bothering you

VAUGHN

It’s nothing

GABRIEL

Then why are you acting all uppity?

VAUGHN

Uppity?

GABRIEL

Yes

(A beat)

VAUGHN

You. You and the ease in which you become whatever people want

GABRIEL

I don’t do that

VAUGHN

Bullshit Gabriel. You don’t touch me around your parents cause you think it’s too gay.

GABRIEL

You don’t like PDA

VAUGHN

It didn’t stop you this afternoon.

GABRIEL

Is that what this is about? I was myself, a slight exaggeration maybe –

VAUGHN

More than an exaggeration.

(A slight beat)

Since when have you wanted kids?

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

You told them you have these dreams of taking your children to church.

GABRIEL

So?

VAUGHN

We hate kids. Always said we'd make horrible parents.

GABRIEL

We're young. We don't know.

VAUGHN

I know I'd fuck kids up.

(A slight beat)

And church? The idea of God angers you.

GABRIEL

I started talking to Him in Afghanistan. He saved me a couple of times

VAUGHN

I'm glad you found something in war.

GABRIEL

And being a cold bitch is better? Having a family who prefers not dealing with you and having no friends is better?

VAUGHN

At least my family knows who I am. It must be maddening having to find the right words, the right smile. Having to pretend to be happy all the time. I could barely do it for one afternoon.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Are you not happy?

VAUGHN

What does happy even mean?

GABRIEL

Don't do that, don't get fucking existential. Are you happy?

VAUGHN

Are you?

GABRIEL

Yes, I'm happy. Cause you make me happy. Don't I make you happy?

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

Answer me. Cause if you don't answer me

(He tries to hold himself together)

My life will break.

VAUGHN

Yes. Yes you make me happy.

GABRIEL

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

VAUGHN

VAUGHN

Sorry. I've just been under a lot of stress. Trying to finish my dissertation, this campaign thing. It's been a lot.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Do you not want to do this anymore? Cause I thought it was doing something for us.

VAUGHN

No, no I want to do it.

(A beat)

It's good that it went well. I'm glad it went well.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Go for it

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

Your cigarettes

VAUGHN

You know?

GABRIEL

You're not that clever. It's the same book you hid your weed in in college.

(A beat)

Go ahead. I know it's what you want.

VAUGHN

I'm out.

(They stare at each other. The darkness crowds in.)

Scene Eight

(ALI'S Apartment. The next day. ALI and VAUGHN stand watching each other.)

ALI

You look – I've never seen you dressed like this

VAUGHN

Too much?

ALI

No, it's different. I miss the beard.

VAUGHN

I know.

ALI

But you do look nice

VAUGHN

Thanks. But I guess I'm not really passing today

ALI

Have you ever?

VAUGHN

What?

ALI

You think you can pass for straight?

VAUGHN

Yeah, when I come around here, I usually – at least the way I present myself, I think I come off straighter

ALI

Maybe if you've never seen a homosexual

VAUGHN

I've had women on the El hit on me on my way here.

ALI

Were these women white?

VAUGHN
What?

ALI
Were they white?

VAUGHN
I don't know

(A slight beat)

I guess. Why?

ALI
Whites detect gays very differently than blacks do

VAUGHN
I don't think that's true

ALI
If you're flamboyant it's obvious to everyone. But for people a little less so, blacks spot gay black men faster than whites. We notice the little details. You're too aware of your body, so you try too much swag. You lower your voice in ways that aren't natural. And in general, you try to disappear. And around here, you need to be seen. Your survival depends on you proving your superiority, your dominance over other men. It's primitive. If you're gay then you don't want to get in that challenge. So you try to disappear, but that only makes you more visible.

VAUGHN
Well, I can't disappear today. The only thing more flaming than me is a fucking Phoenix.

(ALI laughs, allowing VAUGHN to smile)

ALI
It's good to see you

VAUGHN
You too

ALI
I thought last month was going to be it. The end

VAUGHN
It was supposed to be.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Then yesterday my partner and I were sitting in our living room shooting this video for a – It doesn't matter what for. But we're there laughing, smiling when that thing happened to me. You know, when you slip out of time and you can watch yourself, a fake version of your life go by. And you wonder how you got there. What choices you didn't make.

(A beat. Referring to them...)

How do you know you can't do this?

(A beat)

ALI

Do you know how you got my interest?

VAUGHN

Ali –

ALI

Your smile

(A slight beat)

You're not the kind of man I'm usually into. I used to go to these parties. And there are all these men, super masculine and thugged out, looking for a quick fuck in a dark room of a club. And that's all I wanted too. But you, you I wanted to bring home. I wanted to kiss

(A beat)

I miss the warmth of your skin against mine. I want to hear that giddy laugh as I nibble on your ear, your neck. I want to make you moan and tremble. And afterwards I want to hold you, protect you

VAUGHN

But you don't love me?

ALI

Does it matter?

VAUGHN

Yes

ALI
I want you.

VAUGHN
Why can't you love me?

ALI
We live in the world differently. I'm not meant to love a man.

VAUGHN
You could

ALI
I'm not gay. I can't build a life with you.

VAUGHN
You haven't tried.

ALI
I haven't tried heroin and I know it's not good for me.

VAUGHN
I'm good for you. Try me. Imagine what our life would be like.

ALI
I have. And maybe in another universe I'm living it. But this is the life we have

VAUGHN
I can't accept that.

ALI
You got to. You have no choice.

(A beat)

I'm sorry.

VAUGHN

ALI

VAUGHN

ALI

(A silence. VAUGHN gathers himself and heads for the exit.)

ALI

I finished *A Street in Bronzeville*.

VAUGHN

Yeah? What'd you think?

ALI

It was good. A little righteous at times, but good.

VAUGHN

What was your favorite poem?

ALI

The first one. What's it called?

VAUGHN

The old-marrieds.

(A slight beat. They watch each other for a moment. A beat. VAUGHN exits.)

Scene Nine

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN'S Apartment. The Next Night. Remnants of a dinner party: a few trays with bits of food, empty plates and glasses, a banner that reads "Congratulations", a few empty and half empty bottles of champagne and wine. VAUGHN and JULIAN are cleaning up. JEAN is the corner devouring a small plate of food)

VAUGHN

You don't have to help

JULIAN

No, I need to. I really appreciate you having me. I didn't realize it was going to be so intimate. Derek didn't say it was just family and close friends. I thought this was going to be a holiday party or something.

VAUGHN

We're glad to have you

JULIAN

I just had the quarter from hell and just really needed to have some fun. I feel so embarrassed now.

VAUGHN

Don't be. Really, it's fine.

JULIAN

I would've gotten you a gift. I don't want you to think I'm rude.

VAUGHN

Occupying Derek's time is gift enough.

(A beat)

JULIAN

You don't remember me do you?

VAUGHN

Sorry, have we met before?

JULIAN

I was in the course you TA'ed in the spring, *The Spirit of the Harlem Renaissance*

VAUGHN

Oh God, I'm sorry. I'm so embarrassed now. It was such a large class, it was hard to get to know everyone. But you do look familiar

JULIAN

I really loved the course. It made me pick up an English minor

VAUGHN

Oh, that's great. I'm glad. I never really know how those classes are going. Classes that fulfill core credit, always make me feel uneasy. I feel like I'm not supposed to care as much cause my students are forced to be there. So I spend most of my time trying to be cool. But I guess a diversity credit is different than Freshmen English. There's only one freshman English course, but you can take many courses to diversify yourself.

JULIAN

No, not really. There's like only a handful.

(GABRIEL, DEREK and CLARA enter. GABRIEL and DEREK are tipsy)

GABRIEL

My parents are gone.

(Grabbing a bottle of whiskey)

Time to get Helen Keller up in here!

(He starts pouring whiskey in glasses)

JULIAN

Your parents don't seem very happy. They don't even look like they're friends

DEREK

Julian

JULIAN

I believe in speaking the truth

GABRIEL

It's cool. They're not friends. Not sure they ever were

JULIAN

Why stay together? Divorce is so vogue

CLARA

They believe in the vows they've made

GABRIEL

It's really cause my father kept getting my mom pregnant. And my mom knew my dad would never pay child support

(To VAUGHN)

But, babe they told me to thank you for a wonderful evening.

VAUGHN

Lies

GABRIEL

They had a great time.

VAUGHN

More Lies. But if by some miracle they did, it's cause they got to catch up with Derek – the son-in-law they've always wanted

JEAN

Hey

VAUGHN

Sorry, forgot you were here.

JEAN

I'm a great son-in-law

GABRIEL

Why are you sitting in the corner?

CLARA

Are you licking that plate?

JEAN

No

CLARA

You never lick the plate when I cook

JEAN

I don't let you see me doing it.

CLARA

Mmmhmmmm

(He kisses her)

GABRIEL
(To VAUGHN)

My mom did say you were a great cook

JULIAN

You cooked all of this?

VAUGHN

Yeah

JULIAN

I would've just catered. That seems like too much work

VAUGHN

Cooking relaxes me

JULIAN

There are better ways to relax

(He kisses DEREK while caressing his crotch)

GABRIEL

So Julian what are you studying?

JULIAN

Poli-sci with a minor in English

GABRIEL

I majored in Poli-Sci too. And Vaughn's getting his PhD –

VAUGHN

He knows. He took a class I taught like seven, eight months ago and like an asshole I don't remember him

JULIAN

It's fine, you seemed like you were going through a rough patch or something.

VAUGHN

Did I?

JULIAN

Well, you seemed distracted

VAUGHN

I thought I made you want to minor in English

JULIAN

The course material was really interesting

(Before VAUGHN can retort, GABRIEL jumps in)

GABRIEL

So what year are you?

JULIAN

A sophomore

CLARA

You're a young one

JULIAN

I don't think I am emotionally

DEREK

It's true, he's not

VAUGHN

And you're a great judge of that

GABRIEL

You must've taken Concepts of Politics Two with Dr. Woodsworth

JULIAN

Yeah, he's weird

GABRIEL

Fucking nuts. He's this super white and super old – like death and dying old – Texan dude. And he just says like the craziest shit. One day this girl, mind you we're in one of those 300 person lecture halls, this girl raises her hand and asks "Can you explain the cons to Affirmative Action?" and he takes a moment, like he's got something profound to say and he then he just utters

(with an exaggerated Texan accent/demeanor)

"Do NOT be white bread with may-o-naise"

GABRIEL

What the fuck does that mean?

JULIAN

I'm pretty sure he wishes he were black. Every time the House tries to block some Obama initiative, he's hostile towards the white kids for a week.

JEAN

Good for him

VAUGHN

(Referring to JEAN'S plate...)

Are you done licking that?

(He licks it one last time)

JEAN

Now I am

(He hands the plate to VAUGHN)

GABRIEL

(To VAUGHN)

No, no, no.

(Knocking the plate down to the ground...)

No more cleaning tonight. Tonight we get wasted and gay.

CLARA

(To JEAN)

It's getting late we should go

JEAN

No, I want to drink and...

(Slipping into song without a missing a beat)

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES, COME ON! Let's Celebrate'em!

CLARA

You're not the one who has to drive

GABRIEL

No one's going anywhere, the party is just getting started

JEAN

You heard the man

VAUGHN
(To GABRIEL)

Don't hold anyone hostage

(GABRIEL grabs VAUGHN by the waist and starts dancing with him)

Stop. I need to clean

(GABRIEL pulls him into a waltz)

JEAN

This is so gay

CLARA

Jean

DEREK

No it's pretty gay

JEAN

Not cause they're gay.

JULIAN
(To DEREK)

Do you want to dance?

DEREK

The last time we danced you laughed at me

JULIAN

That was grinding. White boys don't know how to grind. This is waltzing. I've never waltzed

CLARA

You're not old enough to have done a lot of things

VAUGHN

Okay, that's enough dancing

GABRIEL

No wait. Look, a full moon.

(They all look out the window)

GABRIEL

Everyone knows full moons are when good things happen

VAUGHN

Only you think that

GABRIEL

It was a full moon the night we moved in

VAUGHN

I try to block out that tragedy of a day

GABRIEL

It turned into a good night

VAUGHN

We spent the entire night moving. Cause someone thought they could order a U-Haul the morning of

GABRIEL

I've never had problems before

VAUGHN

You've never moved on September first before. Who isn't aware that it's the biggest moving day of the year

GABRIEL

We got the truck.

VAUGHN

At like 3pm. But we couldn't start until seven-thirty cause you thought you left the keys in your old apartment, when you actually packed it in one of the boxes.

GABRIEL

But when we finally got up here it was magical. The room was so empty and the walls so white, that the colors of the setting sun filled the room. We stood by the window, me holding you, just like this. And we watched the city being swallowed by the night. We stood here until it was all black and quiet. So quiet all we could hear was the sound of the other person breathing.

VAUGHN

I forgot about that.

(A beat)

VAUGHN

We got so energetic after that

GABRIEL

Yeah we did. Slept until 2pm. Our bodies wrapped around each other, right here on the floor.

VAUGHN

It was a really good night

GABRIEL

It was the perfect beginning to our new life together.

(A moment)

JULIAN

Ugh, I want that

DEREK

You do?

JULIAN

Yes! I've been wanting that since I was fourteen

DEREK

Fourteen?

CLARA

How could you know you were gay at fourteen?

JULIAN

I just did

JEAN

Different generation

JULIAN

I think we're the same generation

JEAN

These days every four years is a different generation.

VAUGHN

The world is ever evolving

DEREK
That's our next video

CLARA
Video?

GABRIEL
What is?

DEREK
That story. We'll come up here, stage it as if you're moving in. Get a voiceover going with the two of you going back and forth telling the story. End with you by the window. Catch the moon in the background. It'll feel like the end of a Katherine Heigl movie. Is she still relevant?

JULIAN
No

GABRIEL
So they liked our first one?

CLARA
What are these videos?

DEREK
Are you kidding? Love it. Going live in week. The video, the campaign, it's all a go.

GABRIEL
It's a go?

DEREK
Yeah, no turning back now

GABRIEL
(To VAUGHN)
It's a go!

DEREK
Congratulations

GABRIEL
Excited?

VAUGHN
Of course, it's the life we've chosen for ourselves.

CLARA

Wait, wait. You're doing the campaign?

GABRIEL

Yes

VAUGHN

You haven't told your family?

GABRIEL

I was waiting for it to go live. I didn't want to jinx it.

VAUGHN

Gabriel

CLARA

Do mama and papa know?

GABRIEL

Not yet

CLARA

Are you stupid?

JEAN

Clara

CLARA

You said you were thinking about it

GABRIEL

And we did. And we decided it was a good thing to do

JEAN

It is

CLARA

You should've talked to us first. This affects us

GABRIEL

It shouldn't

DEREK

It won't

CLARA
(To VAUGHN)

And you? You're letting him do this?

VAUGHN

Let? We both want to do it.

CLARA

And here I thought you had sense. Enough sense to know that your union should be private and not a political act

VAUGHN

I am a gay black man, everything I do is a political act

CLARA

And there goes the few shards of respect I had for you

VAUGHN

Excuse me?

JEAN

Clara please stop

GABRIEL

She didn't mean it like that

VAUGHN

How did she mean it?

JULIAN

That a lot of people get married for the wrong reasons.

VAUGHN

That's not what she meant.

JULIAN

And she's got a point. It's why I don't believe in gay marriage.

(A beat)

DEREK

What?

JULIAN

What?

VAUGHN

It's not a religion it doesn't require faith. It exists.

GABRIEL

I thought you said you wanted what we have?

JULIAN

To be in a good relationship, yes. But I don't *support* gay marriage

DEREK

What kind of homo are you?

JULIAN

I just think that we spent too much time fighting for sexual freedom to –

DEREK

You weren't alive to fight for any sexual freedom, you don't even know what it means

JULIAN

It meant fighting against hetero-normative ideas like monogamy and –

DEREK

So you just want to fuck everything with a penis

JULIAN

No I don't. But what they fought for in the 70s and 80s was about the acceptance of an alternative lifestyle to be accepted as a gay man and defining what that means for ourselves. I feel like this sudden desire to get married stems from this increasing desire to be seen as normal, which we already are

DEREK

This is a fight, you're either with us or hurting us

GABRIEL

That's not why we're getting married

CLARA

Well it feels like that's the purpose of this union

VAUGHN

Why do you keep saying it like that?

CLARA

Like what?

VAUGHN

“Union.” Like it’s a plague or something.

CLARA

Frankly –

JEAN

Clara stop. Whatever you’re thinking about saying, don’t.

CLARA

He’s my brother. I should be able to tell him how I feel

JEAN

Not when you’re going to be ignorant. Not when you’re going to say something you’ll regret.

CLARA

(To GABRIEL)

You shouldn’t get married

VAUGHN

I’m sorry did you –

GABRIEL

Gays? Or me and Vaughn?

CLARA

Tell me why you deserve to

GABRIEL

Deserve to? We have the right.

CLARA

Not gays. You. I’m talking about you.

GABRIEL

Cause I love him

CLARA

Bullshit.

GABRIEL

I’m not listening to a woman whose marriage is a joke.

JEAN

Whoa –

CLARA

You don't understand the word marriage. You don't know what it means, what it requires. You don't get married to find yourself. You can't flee or go to war when you get scared, when shit gets tough. Marriage is a commitment, not some cause.

GABRIEL

Cause you got married for fucked up reasons, doesn't mean everyone else does.

CLARA

I got married cause I was *actually* in love.

GABRIEL

You got married so mama and papa would love you.

CLARA

And you're getting married cause you're tired of being nothing.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

Mama and papa thought you were a fucking idiot. They told all their friends not to congratulate their "little imbecile". That's what they called you, their "little imbecile." They still do.

CLARA

And you think you'll be golden? I want to be there when you tell them about the campaign. I want to see their faces when they finally realize that you are nothing but a little faggot. A little faggot that ain't worth the shit he eats.

GABRIEL

Get out. Get the fuck out of my apartment.

CLARA

Happily.

(She exits. He grabs their coats. A beat.)

JEAN

You're going to need her. Marriage is hard. It's your family who gets you through it.

(A beat. He exits. A silence as the darkness crowds in.)

Scene Ten

(GABRIEL and VAUGHN'S Apartment. One Week Later. VAUGHN enters from the kitchen with a plate of strawberries and brie cheese. He places it on the coffee table between two glasses of wine.)

GABRIEL
(Off-Stage)

Vaughn

VAUGHN

Just one more minute.

(He lights two candles then dims the lights. He looks around. It's ready.)

Alright

(He goes upstairs into the bedroom. A beat. He enters with a blindfolded GABRIEL)

Watch your step

(He lead him down)

There you go.

GABRIEL

You know I hate the dark

VAUGHN

We're almost there. Last step

(He takes him to the couch)

Sit.

(GABRIEL does. VAUGHN takes off the blindfold)

Tada!

(GABRIEL takes it in.)

I thought we should make an event of it.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

It's been a while since we've made an event of anything.

VAUGHN

I know.

(A slight beat)

I thought since the campaign is officially going live tonight that we should do more of this, more of what we used to. Get into our groove. And this – these quiet evenings alone were always my favorite. A little candlelight, some wine, some delectable deserts, and good TV – I mean we're about to watch a video of ourselves so I don't know how good it'll be

GABRIEL

Derek said it's real good

VAUGHN

I'm pretty sure he has to say that.

(A slight beat)

But anyway, I thought it might be good to try to be more like we were.

GABRIEL

That'd be nice

(A beat)

I love you.

(GABRIEL kisses him.)

Okay shall we

(He goes and grabs VAUGHN'S laptop off the desk)

Derek has been texting me non-stop. Apparently everyone there is loving it. In the past two hours it's already got over a thousand views. He's sure it'll be all over Facebook by the morning.

VAUGHN

Can we take a moment to toast or celebrate or just be?

GABRIEL

Yeah, of course, sorry. Just excited

(He lifts his glass, VAUGHN follows)

Would you like to do the honors beautiful?

VAUGHN

To us

GABRIEL

To us

(They clink glasses)

And to the campaign

(They drink)

Ready?

VAUGHN

I guess

GABRIEL

You nervous?

VAUGHN

A little bit

GABRIEL

Don't be. We're going to be great.

(As he loads the video...)

GABRIEL

Did I tell you that Derek joined Match.com

VAUGHN

So it didn't work out with *Julián*? Tragic.

GABRIEL

He's decided it's time to date men his age

VAUGHN

It's sad he didn't figure that out earlier.

GABRIEL

Okay, it's loaded.

VAUGHN

Let's do this.

(GABRIEL clicks the video. Their voices ring out. Light from the laptop flickers against their skin. They watch silently. At first it's a shared experience. Maybe the closest we've ever seen them. But then slowly, inevitably, they pull away. What one sees the other does not.)

VAUGHN

We look so happy

GABRIEL

We are

(They pull further and further apart. This can take as long as it needs. When VAUGHN reaches a place where can no longer take it. He moves away. Never taking his eyes or attention off the screen)

GABRIEL

Come back, you're missing the best part.

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

Vaughn

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

Vaughn?

(A slight beat)

Are you okay?

VAUGHN

No.

(A beat)

I don't see it. VAUGHN

What? GABRIEL

What everyone else does. VAUGHN

What are you talking about? GABRIEL

But what they see is an idea VAUGHN

Vaughn GABRIEL

We shouldn't get married VAUGHN

What? GABRIEL

We shouldn't be together. VAUGHN

What is happening? GABRIEL

Tell me why we should. VAUGHN

Cause we love each other GABRIEL

But in what way? You love Derek, but you're not going to marry him VAUGHN

Is that what this is about? You don't have to be jealous – GABRIEL

VAUGHN

No, that's not what I'm saying

DEREK

He and I are wrong for each other

VAUGHN

And so are we

GABRIEL

Let's just stop and –

VAUGHN

Aren't you tired?

GABRIEL

Of what?

VAUGHN

Pretending.

GABRIEL

I'm not pretending

VAUGHN

That's all we've been doing. We're not the same boys who fell love, we don't want the same things

GABRIEL

All I want is you in my life

VAUGHN

That's not enough

GABRIEL

There's nothing wrong with us

VAUGHN

Everything is wrong with us.

GABRIEL

We need more time.

VAUGHN

Time was what we had two years ago. Time is what we had before you left.

GABRIEL

You're not trying hard enough

VAUGHN

That's all I've been doing. Trying to be some ideal. And it's suffocating. You're suffocating.

GABRIEL

All I've been doing –

VAUGHN

Is trying to make us something we're not.

GABRIEL

(Pointing to the video)

Look at us. We're happy

VAUGHN

That's a lie

GABRIEL

It doesn't have to be

VAUGHN

We can't go back. We can't erase the past two years.

GABRIEL

So this is about him

VAUGHN

Who?

GABRIEL

The guy you were fucking

VAUGHN

You're not listening

GABRIEL

Or still fucking

VAUGHN

We're broken

GABRIEL

Cause you broke us. Cause you want the taste of a different dick

VAUGHN

Cause fucking you hurts. You came back with shit. You take every ounce of your violence out on my body. You pound away until I bleed

GABRIEL

It's what a whore deserves

VAUGHN

If you hadn't left me –

GABRIEL

I wouldn't have left if you knew how to love me

VAUGHN

Well I don't fucking love you anymore, you fucking idiot.

(GABRIEL moves to strike him, but their laughter from the video rings out, stopping him. A stillness)

I can't.

(The video plays as the men stare at each other.)

Scene Eleven

(Lincoln Park Apartment. One Year Later. The apartment is empty. It's near dusk. The colors from the setting sun fill the room. The space has been transformed, it's majestic. GABRIEL is standing looking out the window. A beat. VAUGHN enters carrying a box. He watches GABRIEL for a moment. A beat.)

VAUGHN

Here it is

(VAUGHN puts down the box)

GABRIEL

Thanks so much. I thought I took all my stuff with me a year ago

VAUGHN

Just a few things tucked away here and there. Anyone would've miss them.

(A beat)

GABRIEL

So, how have you been –

VAUGHN

What are you looking at?

GABRIEL

Just the view. I've forgotten how beautiful it is.

(A beat)

VAUGHN

Do you mind if I –

(Pointing to join him)

GABRIEL

No, not at all

(VAUGHN joins him by the window. A beat)

You look good

VAUGHN
Yeah?

GABRIEL
Yeah

VAUGHN
Thanks. Grew the beard back.

(A beat)

You look good too.

GABRIEL
Thanks. Lost some of the mass.

(They stare out the window. As the scene marches towards it's end and as the sun sets, the colors around them begin to fade and darkness slowly crowds in)

VAUGHN
It is beautiful.

(VAUGHN pulls out a pack of cigarettes)

Do you mind if I?

GABRIEL
No, not at all. In fact, I never minded

VAUGHN
You didn't?

GABRIEL
No. Don't know why you ever thought I did. Don't know why I never corrected you.

(VAUGHN lights the cigarette. He opens the window. The familiar/trusted sounds from the street swirl and hum around the room. A beat.)

GABRIEL
I'm glad, I got a chance to see you again

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

—

—

VAUGHN
You seem happy

GABRIEL
Do I?

VAUGHN
Yeah.

GABRIEL
Thanks. I started a new job like four months ago, working with vets. Only thing I'm qualified to do it seems. But I like it.

(A slight beat)

And I've met someone. He's real blunt, but in a good sort of way

VAUGHN
Good. You've always needed someone who could tell you like it was.

(A beat)

GABRIEL
And you?

(A slight beat)

Are you –

VAUGHN
Seeing anyone? God, no. I'm actually heading back to DC, moving back in with the rents. It's going to be fucking horrible. But I'm done with my dissertation and – I don't know.

(A slight beat)

I guess like every great ingénue at the end of every great film

(He flips, very gracefully, the fake scarf around his neck over his shoulder)

I need a change of scenery.

(GABRIEL smiles)

GABRIEL
It'll be good for you

VAUGHN
It'll be something.

(A beat)

GABRIEL
Derek says hello by the way

VAUGHN
Really?

GABRIEL
Yeah, he always really liked you

VAUGHN
Even after I killed his campaign?

GABRIEL
Maybe he likes you a little less now

(VAUGHN smiles/laughs lightly)

VAUGHN
Can't say I blame him. How's he doing?

GABRIEL
Good. He's been dating the same guy for just about a year now. They're moving in.
Wouldn't be surprised if I got a wedding invitation.

VAUGHN
Wow

GABRIEL
But he's really happy. Like legit

(VAUGHN smiles.)

VAUGHN
Good

(A beat.)

GABRIEL

Earlier, I meant are you – are you happy?

VAUGHN

No. Probably not.

(They return to staring out the window. A long beat.)

GABRIEL

Can I ask you something?

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

I won't be able to trust myself with this guy I'm dating if –

VAUGHN

Go ahead

(A slight beat)

GABRIEL

We were really happy together once, right? I didn't make that up.

VAUGHN

No, no you didn't.

(At this point the entire stage around them is dark. Just a pinpoint of light remain on them. All the sounds from the street have faded away and all we hear are the two men breathing. A beat. They are swallowed by the dark. A beat. Silence. End of Play.)