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I,metaboy

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I,METABOY

A Thesis

by

MARIO LEAL JR.

Submitted to the Graduated School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2013

Major Subject: Creative Writing

I,METABOY

A Thesis
by
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December 2013

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ABSTRACT

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I,metaboy is a stage play about a young homosexual couple, one a soldier and the other a writer, during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s and the struggles they encounter in their relationship when the soldier marries a woman to pass in the military.

The story follows in the tradition of other Queer literatures that explore the state of the trope of the homosexual male within his given historical period. This historically places the identity. *I,metaboy* is based on an amalgamation of imagery from a variety of media (theatre, literature, TV, film, social policy, historical texts, myths, etc.) of the homosexual male from Plato up until the repeal of the military policy, “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in 2012.

DEDICATION

To all of those in the Queer community who have documented their perspectives, thank you for sending out messages of hope and for exploring a small sliver of the human experience that has often been oppressed, warped, destroyed and, worst of all, forgotten.

To the boy who knows who he is: To you I owe everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Marci McMahon, you have been more than just a mentor. Thank you for the encouragement and all of the work you do on campus. Dr. Braithwaite, thank you for not accepting mediocrity and raising the caliber of my writing. Dr. Eric Wiley, thank you for incorporating me into the amazing work you do, and showing me ways to properly break rules. To all of my educators, friends, family, and peers: I thank you for the constant support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Queer culture—the terminology and understanding surrounding, values and perceptions towards, and representations of gay identities—has experienced a radical flourishing since the homophobic days of E.M. Forster tucking away his manuscript for *Maurice* in the first decades of the twentieth century; the novel was only published posthumously, along with a collection of short stories, *The Life to Come*, in 1971 and 1972, respectively (Forster, 1972). The canon of non-heterosexual gender identities, for Forster, was then generically defined as those who practiced “Greek love,” whether that is Platonic or Sapphic. Today, the gender identity spectrum seems to constantly add another letter (“P” for pansexual/polyamorous, “O” for omnisexual, etc.) to the ever increasing acronym (LGBTQIA) of gender identities. The debate over extending the acronym for full representation (a naming of all the identities)—LGBTQTQIAA—continues and has extended to even rupturing the established acronym. FABGLITTER—fetish, asexual/ally, bisexual, gay, lesbian, intersex, two-spirited, transsexual engendering revolutionary—calls for even more inclusivity (with the inclusion of fetish as a way to represent the, presumed, heterosexual) and further expanding the canon of grouping social groups, bound through sexual performance, together. It can be exhausting keeping informed, redefining, and establishing a new language for this discourse. This is no longer the era of “the love that dare not speak its name.” (Wilde) This piece, *I,metaboy*, seeks to explore the era of instability (given much of the social progression and the few conservative institutions holding out) where the homosexual identity is

both celebrated and still, in some circles, reviled. Because of the very circumstances that allow me to openly discuss homosexual topics, I seek to explore in this work gay identities that are not forcibly queered (the identities of and the nature of the homosexual relationship is open, directly stated without the need of the reader to infer.)

In “Generation LGBTQIA,” an article by Michael Shulman in the *New York Times*, Shulman exposes the burgeoning online culture of, not just the open discourse about the established gender identities (LGBTQ), but of the creation of gender identities as a whole and how we approach the discourse and study of them. Some universities even offer sex affirmation surgery in their students’ medical insurance plans. (Shulman) The radical notions of identity politics now fits in your pocket. It has a hashtag. We can quantify the trend. It is a meme. A culture.

The representations of Queer culture—gay male culture in particular to this creative work—are no longer relegated to the stereotypical, flat characterization of sexual deviants, degenerates, dandies or sissies. The identity and image is no longer forced to hide in between the lines of historical texts or literature. There is no longer the forced queering of the same-sex relationship two people had, by the reader—whether they actually identify as a “Queer” person (however anachronistic it may be to their era)—just to find representations that fit the reader. Historians and scholars in a variety of fields now take same-sex relationships seriously, instead of only considering them as slander. The Queer image is no longer edited out (at least not entirely) of history. Even I have had to personally queer—force a queer perspective—on a character to find an identity that, most often vaguely, resonates with me; a chief motivation for this work.

On the contrary, the queer identity is actually flourishing. There are: magazines, television networks, film festivals, cafés, shops, bars, cruises, bookstores, options on websites, even applications for smart devices showing the distance of other homosexuals (males) with the intent of “hooking up”: entirely devoted to the Queer community. It should be mentioned that these are still problematic because they often almost always favor the privileged, American/European, male, homosexual of at least some means. And Queer people of color, women and the Trans- community in particular, are often marginalized, generic or nonexistent in their representations or services offered to them. The successful American version of the British show *Queer As Folk*, that premiered in 2000, had no person of color in their main cast. *GLAAD*’s annual report of “Where We Are on TV” reported only 28 percent were people of color (POC) and 61 percent of the characters were gay, males. (GLAAD) The Queer movement has even had policy shift in its favor—the decision yielded by the Supreme Court in 2003 with *Lawrence v. Texas* (Lawrence v. Texas), the expansion of adoption laws to protect Queer parents, establishing anti-hate crime laws, the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” and the most recent state (Hawaii) legalizing same-sex marriage—has shown the level of social progress the American Queer community, as a whole, has achieved.

These social advances, my personal experience dealing with (Queer culture as an openly homosexual man that identifies as politically Queer and oriented as gay), and the saturation of contemporary media (TV, films, print, web, fashion, radio, etc.) surrounding the Queer image birthed this work unto me. The process in which I followed this work, *I, metaboy*, was the compulsion to document and rationalize the world around me. To qualify the changes, not only in myself, but in the psyche of the culture of today in regards to the Queer community. To plot the new territory we, the Queer community, have gained.

The main characters in *I,metaboy* both gain and lose something in their own way. Devan loses and, possibly regains, Marcus. Marcus loses his career in the military after outing himself, and loses Devan because of the way he handled it. Devan serves as the abstract representations of these changes; Marcus, the physical.

Although we have made these progresses, the outcome is often disproportionate and unfair. Location (place)— both in the physical and abstract idea of proximity to empowerment—the chief tool of establishing a hold upon a society, is key. An openly gay man in Texas (and twelve other states) in 2002 would not have had the same rights before the *Lawrence* ruling by virtue of experiencing certain sexual acts with another person of his sex. Were he to perform those acts on a woman, issues of legality would be laughed at. The case is the same for those who live in areas without access to education or even the most basic of infrastructure (clean water, food security, adequate housing, etc.), and live in a state of survival. Gender identity is not even thought of when put into the context of finding sustenance for indigent (poor or needy) populations. A population I try to represent here by setting the play partially in McAllen, Texas. The manner in which those with limited resources communicate their Queerness is most often than not told through stereotypical, negative myths passed generation to generation. Queer is perverted—by the heterosexually privileged community or Queer people themselves through their internalized homophobia or unrefined gender identity language—into an identity that is forced to combat issues of space, time (as is the case for those who have more modern sensibilities of Queer culture than their community or vice versa), and ability to communicate. And often, when a person is able to speak openly about Queer culture, their terminology and manner in which they speak of the culture is heteronormative or only perpetuates negative images of the culture. For example, “top/bottom” labels perpetuated within the gay male

community, and explored in *I,metaboy*, only further ingrain a heteronormative reality. The very nature of this piece, a work of Theatre, allows me to explore the intersections of these tropes I feel continue to represent the gay identity in relation to matter of space. Foucault's work on heterotopias—places of “otherness” both in their abstract and physical representation—serves as the groundwork for this.

Tropes of Gay Lovers

Because those in the Queer community were forced to hide, they were forced to code themselves, hide themselves and learn to find themselves in all manners of media: myths, literature and paintings initially, but later into realms of larger mass communication. There was no one place of open, unoppressed expression. To fully understand the coding of those tropes and how the gay identity, particularly in its representation of a homosexual couple, has shifted and presents itself we shall explore a general layout of the homosexual identity as it has been represented throughout history and literature. We will then go into the tropes of homosexual couples and how they each relate to *I,metaboy*.

Historical Representations

Understanding and reception of homosexuality has fluctuated so much that a grounding (a definite example or image) of a homosexual (or other Queer) identity has been difficult. Often, the only vehicle—given the time, social forces or access to documenting the Queer experience—has been through literature or historical records; the latter mostly falling into the musings of a biographer regarding the odd idiosyncrasies of their subject, told through other parties and their correspondences, or the correspondences—from the very person—that have survived.

Jim Loewen's answer to Andrew Sullivan's cover story, "The First Gay President," in *Newsweek's* May 21, 2012 issue, highlights this point. In a letter to a Mrs. Roosevelt, President James Buchanan wrote: "I am now 'solitary and alone,' having no companion in the house with me. I have gone a wooing to several gentlemen, but have not succeeded with any one of them. (Buchanan)" Loewen's critique of Sullivan assigning President Obama the moniker illustrates the point of how easily it is to write out the gay identity entirely and the need to document it. He states:

Remembering that James Buchanan was homosexual complexifies our national narrative, to be sure, but it is a complexity that we need. It prompts us to remember that terrible era, the Nadir, when we all moved backward, not just the South... Forgetting Buchanan's sexual orientation helps us forget all the other national secrets we have packed into that closet with him. Ultimately, it prompts us to succumb to chronological ethnocentrism. If, however, we can rid ourselves of the fantasy that we are already always getting better, then maybe we can create a nation that actually becomes more tolerant. Then we might -- again -- elect a real gay president. (Loewen)

Even though most historians agree of Buchanan's homosexuality, all of his letters were destroyed upon his death; upon his request. We see his homosexuality through the nicknames others assigned President Buchanan and Senator William Rufus King from Alabama in a few surviving letters. There is but a fraction of an image of the first homosexual president of the United States.

But this record of a “homosexual” president is anachronistic to 1844 when President Buchanan wrote the letter; and his death in 1868. (The word homosexual [*homosexualitat*—coined on May 6, 1868 in a letter to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs—was first publically used in 1869 in a pamphlet, *The Social Harm Caused by Paragraph 143 of the Prussian Legal Code* (criminalizing homosexuality), published anonymously by Karoly Maria Kertbeny. (Fone)) And this has been the problem of isolating an identity in flux. The identity morphs because of the complexities of the era the individual lived in; and the individual’s location. The identity itself is loaded to carry the weight of its history. And given the privilege we, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, have when understanding what the gay identity is we often forget that history of the gay identity in flux, because of how easy it is to consume information now in the saturation of “Gay America.”

The gay identity for the main two characters of the piece, Devan and Marcus, change significantly over the course of the play. For Marcus, the most obvious is the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” For Devan, the change is more subtle than a policy change and relies on an internal shift within the character to redefine his gay identity. These institutional changes and personal changes reflect the larger fluctuation of society in regards to the gay identity. This fluctuation of identity directly relates to the abstract nature of heterotopias (discussed later) as both heterotopias and gay identities carry often contradicting histories within itself.

Before the boom of gay images arising with film and television (however problematic they may or may not be), the gay identity lived in text. Given the ease of consuming the image (and the evolution of media), in comparison to text, the identity paralleled itself with its fleeting representations to that of literature; visual media only reinforced the problematic nature of the

gay image that have been in literature. As Jan Oxenberg, the filmmaker, puts it in *The Celluloid Closet*:

We are pathetically starved for images of ourselves. So much so that, you know, a friend will call you up and say, "Oh, there's this movie you must see." This happened to me. "This movie you've got to see, there's this incredible lesbian relationship in it, and there's this great love scene, and, alright, they're vampires. But you got to see it. It's great!" (Oxenberg)

The saturation and the mode in which the gay identity was presented evolved, but not its message.

In literature, going back to the earliest of texts, the homosexual image has been forcibly queered. ("Forcibly queered" because there is no one line that either *explicitly* states a sexual/emotional bond with mutual homosexual intentions or gives proof of a matrimonial/sexual/emotional homosexual pairing.) In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the exploits and relationship of Enkidu and Gilgamesh are explored, but any sexual interaction is not explicitly stated. And upon the death of Enkidu, Gilgamesh laments. "I weep for Enkidu, my friend,/Bitterly moaning like a woman moaning/I weep for my brother. O Enkidu, my brother,/You were the axe at my side,/My hand's strength, the sword in my belt,/The shield before me,/A glorious robe, my fairest ornament;/An evil Fate has robbed me" (Anonymous). This forced queering, or reading between the lines to find a gay image, does not just show up in ancient Mesopotamia (third millennium B.C.E.). In a tradition of celebrating intimate friendships amongst men, that would later largely influence "Greek love," we see these relationships amongst other texts. In the Old Testament of the Bible, Samuel 1 and 2 both speak of the

friendship of David and Jonathan, but historically (or at least from a Christian perspective), it is understood as a platonic relationship rather than a sexualized one. David laments upon Jonathan's death:

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!...How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou was slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant has though been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! (The Holy Bible, King James Version)

Whether their relationship was strictly platonic, or whether it was sexual as it seems in 1 Samuel, "And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle, (The Holy Bible, King James Version)" this relationship is still only a glimpse of a presumed same-sex relationship; there are but two sections within the Old Testament to David and Jonathan; both are roughly ten verses long. Yet, the glorification of David and Jonathan as an idealized pair (either through the retellings, throughout history, of their story or the deification of David as the supreme form of masculinity), would make the couple seem as if they canonized image of the gay identity; an accepted image. Yet, theirs is only one story (roughly 1000 B.C.E.) that has managed to become a trope persisting until today.

In the *Symposium* by Plato, in a speech by Phaedrus, it is asserted that an army entirely made up of lovers (meaning an army of same-sex lovers) would "overcome the world" because of their ferocity in protecting each other and their honor in front of their lover (Plato). The

Greeks however, hypothesized this existence, and abided by a strict caste system of status through sexual performance; older, free, men sexually dominated the system and initiated young men into their adulthood by making them their passive partners. This, of course, is problematic as the identity of the homosexual is anachronistic to explaining “Greek love,” but also because this is a system of further ingraining patriarchy. Very much like the myth of Zeus and Ganymede; Zeus, the father and ruler, and Ganymede, forever his dutiful water bearer; forever his servant plastered in the stars as Aquarius.

Tropes of Partnered Homosexuals

When thinking of the manner in which we understand the “gay” identity and how the homosexual lives their life, the success of their relationships with those around—in particular those they are partnered with—is indicative of the full realization of that identity. Full realization being that, they are not constricted by society in a manner that is ultimately detrimental to their relationship or the parameters of the world they live in allows for them to have equal opportunity for success. They, the gay couple, has a chance for success, and happiness; regardless of whatever hardships they must overcome, it is still possible for them to succeed.

I will use the following tropes hope to create a construct in which we understand the partnered homosexual and the manner in which their individual trope, or myth, manifest:

Ill-fated lovers. In this trope, neither lover is allowed to succeed, or even survive. Patroclus and Achilles are perfect examples of this. In the height of the Trojan War, the hubris of both lovers—their internalized and specified flaws—is their downfall. These are often seen as glorified epics or stories of demonizing the gay identity. In *I, metaboy*, we see—within the reality presented on stage—Marcus and Devan represent this. At the end of the play, we are left with two people who

may no longer live in their initial reality. They constantly speak of either finding or losing themselves. Although they, Marcus and Devan, do not cease to exist, the question of them belonging within this reality arises. And, up until the final moments of the play, the image of the pair no longer exists; at least not in its original form. In their respective worlds, at the end of the play, neither can exist in each other's world any longer.

Ill-fated “other.” In this trope we see that whichever of the partners is seen as more of an “other,”—or is categorized as someone who is too Queer (most often deemed as feminine) or cannot assimilate into a heteronormative culture as easily as the other partner (most often the more masculine)—is ultimately the downfall of relationship. Often these “others” cannot continue to exist in their world. The death of Jack Twist in *Brokeback Mountain* by Annie Proulx is an example of this (Proulx, 1997). These often serve as cautionary tales (the gay must die mentality), or are seen as relationships of transition (it was only a passing phase mentality). In this work, Devan and Marcus both fall into the state of ill-fated “other”, given the perspective. If we assume that, because Devan has always been out and has lived his life as such, Marcus is the “other.” Marcus then, cannot exist in Devan's reality and is detrimental to Devan's very existence. If we were to flip the perspective and view it from Marcus's point of view, given that Marcus has assimilated and (whether you believe he has achieved transcendence through his failure living up to) failed within a heteronormative paradigm; the logic here being that, because of Devan's refusal to assimilate into a heteronormative world, he and Marcus cannot exist within the same world. The more obvious example of the “ill-fated ‘other,’ trope is that of the Marcus and his wife—who never appears save through photos projected on the back wall—because she is never seen or heard from. Her identity—within the reality of the homosexual male world—

cannot exist and is at the very heart of the cautionary tale mentality; for homosexual males in this instance.

Unconsummated pairs. Here, homoeroticism is king as many of the representations are stories of friendship, as that of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament, or *A Poem of Friendship* by D.H. Lawrence (Lawrence, 1994). These tropes only seen in a sexless and generic light. These tropes are not fully formed and seek to neutralize any Queerness. These tropes are often the result of “forced queerings,” because of the lack of textual evidence. In *I,metaboy*, the relationship that Greg and Devan share serves as such. Ultimately, although not stated, Greg and Devan remain sexless and unconsummated. The relationship that they share is often queered by those around them; chiefly by the character of Christopher. Although, these tropes seek to neutralize any real Queer—gay identity—they, I suspect, most often arise from a lack of representation within the given media and hope for a “happy ending.” Greg’s and Devan’s relationship also serves as a foil to Marcus’s and Devan’s relationship as Marcus and Devan are based in physical realities, whereas Devan and Greg only live within an abstract incapable of existing.

Relationships of Hierarchy. This trope falls into the classic understand of “Greek love,” where the relationship is represented as a homosexual pair—usually with an older male and younger male—in which it is a relationship of unequals. This trope (and their endless examples), like that of the ill-fated “other,” relies heavily on heteronormative language and imagery to perpetuate itself. This trope is problematic because it ingrains heteronormativity and perverts the Queer identity by. Christopher and Walt’s relationship in the first act of *I,metaboy* serves as this. Because Walt, presumably, is without as many resources as Christopher he is disadvantaged.

The “Happy” Homosexuals. This is the rarest of tropes in comparison to the others. Here, the relationship has the most—and usually only—chance of success. The relationship is not predicated on status (class, race, social status, etc.) of any kind—other than claiming their same-sex orientation—and does not seek to ingrain any heteronormativity. In this trope, the couple is allowed to overcome their obstacles, and can even use their “other” status as empowerment. In the beginning of *I,metaboy*, Marcus and Devan serve as this. They are working through their issues, given the external forces pressing on their relationship, and are genuinely happy. Their marriage serves as an example of this. The culmination, and true expression of their “happy homosexual” trope, is their—presumed—joining in the final act. This however, is meant to be present in the audience extending that trope beyond the temporality of the stage. If it is understood, by the audience, that they go on to live in the clichéd land of “happily ever after,” then they have succeeded. If they do not, then they have not and their trope of a “happy” homosexual only lies within the first, initial example of happiness.

Heterotopias

Heterotopias are real physical spaces that also create an abstract reality where the same space is represented in all of its forms and can contest, represent and invert any or all of its forms. Foucault uses a boat as the perfect example of a heterotopia as it:

“a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will

understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination.”

(Foucault, 1984)

Heterotopias force us to analyze a space and experience the space. The function of the space is both to include and exclude us.

The theatre, with its small stage that is a physical space, but also a metaphorical space that allows for the passage of time and of different places as we witness. The function of these spaces, heterotopias, actualizes reality for abstract concepts like the image of yourself in a mirror. The mirror is a physical object, but the image of you is only an abstract space. The image and metaphor of a mirror is strewn throughout *I,metaboy*: the chalkboard has a haiku devoted to mirrors, there are several mentions of lacking an image or having a warped image, a pantomimed mirror (the character of Christopher check himself out in the mirror at the beginning of the play):and serves as a larger reflection of society. This occurs because there are no mirrors on stage, and the image reflected back is that of the one presented by the space of the theatre itself.

These spaces, and the function of space in general allow for the manifestation of identities in a more fully realized way to occur. In regards to homosexual identities, a gay bar is a heterotopia as it becomes a physical space, but also is abstractly indicative of what we believe and realize as the space of the gay bar. A gay bar—war zone, home, a hotel room (all heterotopias)—is present within *I,metaboy* several times throughout the work. This is done to

work with the metaphor of the mirror and add depth and contradiction to that of this heterotopic world.

This layering, and the fact of the physical space of the theatre, allows for a “place” for the homosexual identity to exist outside of literature; a topic that Devan speaks of during “The Articles of War.” This place forces the audience to readily accept the identity and only allows the audience a certain parameter to witness the gay identity in. This also allows the identity to not be beholden to outside factors—historical forces anachronistic to the space and time of the performance, the audience’s presumptions, etc.—and I would argue, a “safe space.”

This is important when tying this to history of the gay identity. Given that hiding, and coding, were the only modes of expression for the gay identity, a physical space where the identity can exist is essential to the survival of the identity. Not because of a fear of censorship—although entirely possible—but because in the physical realm and not the abstract realm of identities does progress and evolution occur. The abstractions of gay identities, the tropes that we’ve explored, have not changed significantly since the time of Plato.

However, given that the gay identity in the physical reality of it is performed, and subsequently tied to an instant and individual, the mode in which we identify the gay identity is through the abstract. Almost all of which, as aforementioned, are problematic. This is what attracted me most to heterotopias, as I feel I, personally, extend the gay identity itself into the realm of a heterotopia. It is a physical space—encompassed in the entirety of an individual—and an abstract as it resides in an understanding, and often contradiction, of assigned traits to that identity.

And here is the very point of *I,metaboy*. In the time span of the piece (2002-2012), we see a change in understanding of, and contradiction of, the initial gay identity set-up at the beginning of *I,metaboy*. The play then explores, and revisits several of, a series of physical heterotopias to parallel internal understandings and contradictions of the gay identity. I would move the argument then into the realm of the unification –merging the physical and abstract aspects of heterotopias—of these heterotopias; not solely in the culmination of the piece as a whole, but more importantly the stand alone factors within that piece. To me, these are Marcus and Devan, given the arch of their narrative and manner in which I have tied them to these heterotopic worlds. They serve as the positive and negative of the gay identity as well as the landscape that lies in between those extremes. And yet, they encompass the whole identity, not just a single aspect of it.

But that is yet to be seen, and can only occur in the audience. *I,metaboy* seeks to raise the following questions in the finale of the play. Where does the gay community go from here? What is home? What does happiness look like? What do the tropes of unconsummated love/ill-fated “others”/etc. ultimately serve? Can we deconstruct those to create a more accurately and fully realized homosexual image? Who is responsible for the happiness of these two (Marcus and Devan) characters?

These answers should not be easy. And they lie exclusively in the audience. If the audience walks away assuming that Marcus and Devan do not end up together, then gay identity of a “happy homosexual,” has failed. It has failed because the physical representation of the identity does not occur in the individual audience member. The identity remains an abstract on the page, or only housed within a theatre.

The audience should leave imagining a world of the homosexual in their eyes, not mine, the author's. The reader is to be left with the work of constructing happiness for a couple that will never exist. And that's the point; the construction of new "happy" homosexuals.

I, METABOY

February 9, 2003.

The back patio of a gay bar in McAllen, Texas.

The doorway (UC) that opens to the patio has an "EXIT" sign on it. On the same wall (made of cinder block), a window (URC) serves as a bar. A neon sign hangs above it. (It should be a generic neon sign signifying alcohol--like a martini glass or wine bottle--rather than a brand name.) A wall (UR) extends out only halfway, with a door rigged with a crude temporary lock, creating an alley (with ominous red lighting like that of a darkroom) and another exit; it should only be lit towards the end (offstage) portion of the alley. A chalkboard (UL) hangs on the back wall with "Mirror, Mirror (haiku):/The Magic Mirror/"How are you doing' Mr.?" /PBDs tonight," and "...where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up...". The chalkboard should be initialed, "M.F.," in ostentatious, cursive, letters. (This should all be large enough to read from the audience, but still give room for the actors to improvise doodles on the board during performances.) A dartboard is hanging on the wall between the bench and chalkboard with an abandoned game (marked on the chalkboard). Fliers (HIV awareness, condom advertisements, drag performances, various changes in "happy hour" days and times, bowling leagues signup sheets and league schedules, etc.) and photos wallpaper everything and seem to have collected over time. (The fliers and photos should reflect an obvious passage of time and changes in people. Photos, like that of a bowling league, should reflect the same group with fewer and alternating members each year. Fliers should also promote drag queens'--and other individuals'--first performances and later benefit, going away and remembrance shows. They should reflect subtle story lines within their own realities. None of the characters presented in this work should show up on those advertisements or photographs.) A table with three chairs (DR) and a bench (L)--facing stage right--are on stage. A wooden privacy fence runs behind the bench--where the dart board hangs--and is only high enough for the actors to just peek over. (There are unlit Christmas lights strung along the top.) The lighting should have the neon glow of the smoking stoop of a dive bar, soft and bright with a tone of cool melancholy.

Marcus, 24, dressed in a tuxedo with one button undone, sits (with his back to the audience) at the table smoking in the chair furthest DR. He is physically fit, has broad shoulders, with a crew cut. All of his gestures are decisive.

Devan, 24, dressed in a disheveled tuxedo, explodes through the door (UC). He is the same height as Marcus, but slightly thinner and less bulky. There are strobe and multicolored lasers and lights blasting through the door. The first few lines of The Muppet Show's opening should play beginning at, "It's the Muppet Show." He is clearly drunk but isn't entirely messy yet, and can still manage speaking and walking. He views everything as if it's the first time he's seen it.

DEVAN

There you are. How long have you been out here?
(He slams the door and takes a large drink falling back onto the door.)
I thought I'd lost you. It's so smoky in there. A real roach motel.
Why are you out here?

The theme song continues faintly and muffled. When over, it becomes indistinct speaking and then generic circuit music.

MARCUS

Too crowded. People kept dropping their drinks on me. My shoes are wet. You too?

Marcus signals to Devan's shirt.

DEVAN

(With exasperation in his voice.)

All over my pants; it was a big drag queen. She was rushing to get to her place. That show is gonna last forever. We should sneak out before last call to avoid all that mess. And I hate fluorescent lighting.

MARCUS

You ready to go already? It's early.

Devan crosses to Marcus and sits on his lap.

DEVAN

Go? I still have a whole drink. I meant later. Plus I wanted to dance more.

MARCUS

Why do you only dance when you're drunk?

DEVAN

It moves me. Makes the joints loose.

He makes a funny face to Marcus.

MARCUS

Loose? You mean brave. You get brave when you're drunk.

DEVAN

Brave? I'd say...

(Taking a drink.)

...drunk. Let's stay to dance, but we have to wait for the show to finish. We can cruise the bar then; maybe they'll get us free shots again.

(He says with a beginner's Spanish.)

Dos más tequilas por el par de caballeros.

Devan leaves his drink on the table, and begins to pull Marcus towards the "Exit" door and back into the gay bar.

MARCUS

I've reached my limit, and you've had enough.

Marcus drops his cigarette and abruptly lifts Devan up, spinning him around the patio. He sings Mendelssohn's "Wedding March".

There, we've danced. Maybe we should sneak away.

DEVAN

Enough? Never. And now you wanna go? You're just trying to runaway already aren't you? Let's just make this night last a little bit longer.

MARCUS

No, not run away. I wanna go home and get to bed. And I got a plan for you. A surprise.

Marcus rocks Devan a little and kisses him.

I've only got two weeks with you, and I'm...

DEVAN

Don't tell me. Shh!

Devan covers his mouth and kisses him silent.

And plans? How ominous.

MARCUS

(In an deep, ominous voice that goes into a sportscaster's)
Why yes, I plan on ravaging you for days. There'll be a hogtie, gag ball, rip roaring good time. The sword fight to end all sword fights. The wrestling match to end all wrestling matches. He shoots. He scores. And in this corner, at five foot eleven, the beast with the biggest piece, Marcus. Touchdown. Gooooooooooooooooaaaaalllllll!

(Makes crowd noises.)

The crowd goes wild.

Marcus continues to make crowd noises and spins Devan again a few times.

DEVAN

Why, you know just what to say to a boy.

(Beat)

Oh, my God, put me down. Everything was already spinning.

MARCUS

Yeah, I better. You're putting on some weight.

Marcus seems to weight Devan.

DEVAN

I'm *what*?

Marcus kisses Devan silent.

Whoa. You can get away with anything with those lips.

MARCUS

Here's hoping.

(Beat)

Well it's not a surprise if you're expecting it. I was gonna wait until we got home, but reach into my pocket.

DEVAN

Why, I do declare. How forward of you, sir.

MARCUS

My jacket pocket I mean.

DEVAN

Oh.

(Reaching in, he pulls out an envelope and begins to open it.)

What is it? Is this a prenup? You have to do that before.

Greg, Christopher and Walt burst through the door. Greg and Christopher are wearing tuxedos as well, equally disheveled as Devan's. Greg has a drink spilled all over the front of his shirt; Christopher has only a few stains. A drag queen is heard saying, "Which unless it's prescribed to you, don't take it... (Beat)...without a martini," over the PA system, and lights again spew out.

Walt is wearing a pearl snap short sleeve button down (gingham or flannel), blue jeans and boots. He vaguely looks like a little boy playing dress-up as a cowboy. Christopher is leaning on him, trying to get into his pants.

WALT

That drag queen is huge.

CHRISTOPHER

The higher the hair the closer to God.

GREG

She didn't even know the words to the song.

CHRISTOPHER

(He acts this out.)

She never does. Nothing but "rabbit, rubble," point, kick and the dab away the sweat.

(Seeing Devan and Marcus.)

Oh, how perfectly disgusting. The newlyweds.

Marcus puts Devan down. Devan is going through the contents of the envelope and crosses towards the bench. Greg, Christopher and Walt cross to the table.

DEVAN

You had these?

MARCUS

Yes. Do you like them?

DEVAN

(Turns and kisses Marcus.)

I love them. I love you.

CHRISTOPHER

Ugh. Enough.

(To Walt.)

Don't you just hate the gays and their PDA?

Christopher kisses Walt. Marcus and Devan continue to speak, ignoring Christopher.

MARCUS

But you like them?

DEVAN

Yes. Why were you hiding them from me?

CHRISTOPHER

(To Greg who is beginning to look a bit pale.)

They don't even hear us. Watch. PENIS!

Christopher stifles his laugh.

MARCUS

Well, they mean a lot to me. They're yours.

DEVAN

But I was looking for them.

MARCUS

I know. But I wanted something of yours. And when you left it on the bar I tucked it into my pocket. And I stole the poem from your notebook on the bus ride home when you fell asleep.

DEVAN

I knew I didn't leave them behind.

CHRISTOPHER

PENIS!

DEVAN

Shut up. We can hear you. We're just ignoring you.

CHRISTOPHER

Well excuuuuuse me.

GREG

I think I'm going to be sick.

Greg runs towards the alley exit and disappears offstage.

CHRISTOPHER

She's a mess.

DEVAN

She knocked my drink over.

CHRISTOPHER

I think you did that yourself.

Christopher gets up and paces the room looking around.

MARCUS

(Grabbing Devan's face and bringing his attention back to him.)
I can't take them with me anyway. They search our stuff. I had to hide them in lining of my boots in a plastic baggie.

You carry them?

DEVAN

Always.

MARCUS

What are they?

WALT

It's a poem.

MARCUS

And a letter.

DEVAN

A poem? Oh, you're a writer.

WALT

Not really, I just write for the newspaper. Nothing big. But I wrote and read a poem for him.

DEVAN

And I knew you were the one at that moment.

MARCUS

I love you.

DEVAN
(Kissing him.)

Read it.

WALT

Oh, no.

DEVAN

Yeah, read it.

MARCUS

Greg enters adjusting himself and sits at the table.

No. It's too long.

DEVAN

Come on. Please?

MARCUS

CHRISTOPHER

Just read it, because if *I* start reading none of us are gonna like each other.

Christopher is facing the audience, checking his teeth, as if looking into a mirror. He pretends to clean the mirror and adjust his hair.

DEVAN

You can't read; you're illiterate.

CHRISTOPHER

Was that a read? Slut. Just read it. Come on. It's better than the show in there.

MARCUS

(Rubbing up against Devan.)

Do it. You know you want to.

DEVAN

Ha ha. Yeah, I do. Okay. So you're gonna have to bear with me because I haven't read this in a while. I don't know if I remember it.

Marcus sits with Walt and Greg at the table. Christopher sits on the bench. Devan centers himself.

The light begin to dim now and continues throughout the first stanza ending with a spotlight on Devan by "golden arch curbside sunrise kisses." The faint sound of club music fades away too. Stars twinkle faintly above.

And it only makes sense if you know when I read it.

CHRISTOPHER

Just read the damn thing already.

DEVAN

Okay, okay, okay. November 17, 2001. *I*,metaboy.

imetaboy with a cappuccino mustache smile, wipes down tables like surfer boys wax board, hanging ten inches, five feet always in matching superman boxers and strawberry pb&j setting remote control between beer, lube and value menu like friday this is our first date ever, with dinner reservations "8. this french restaurant." free bottles of pretense served with 25 dollar salads before we dined and dashed and danced all night to catch mickey d burgers framed by golden arch curbside sunrise kisses

imetaboy who took root instead of hopping off after coming out, or into me, or the next town riding a motorcycle into my james dean looking ddf, 420 friendly, masc, no fem, ltr, vers, cut wet dream advertisement of a boy, dropping acronym like genetic code, "bb" does not mean body builder, nor does it mean this boy's bare soul has any value in the hyper inflated microcosm markets of the ingrained banal stories of back alley tricking or ephebotitic loving philosophers scaring christians into frenzied witch hunts still raiding small town gay bars

imetaboy lulled by the real real real beats, fighting the cold, the five 'oh, for some eats honest dreams speeches between pillow and body sandwiches drunk on my bad poetic phrases from threshold to every tantric surface cloroxed before company shows and kisses his slurred secrets like his parents gave him the boot or you smell like almonds babe or kiss kiss kiss I snuck into kiss the restroom and kiss heard you kiss singing

i,metaboy met a boy, so i scribbled down a number, 555, i'll let you get back to work, and this is the tenth time we've seen this movie, or three hours and twenty seven minutes to kiss and make up; 11 months for two boys of 19; 10 am continental gate six, and be sure to be there two hours early because this is the first time i'm taking a boy home this december and work on that handshake because big daddy hates a pansy and i know that i'm heteronormalizing but you love me right?

i,metaboy knew i had to grow so i grabbed lassos to knit souls and rode away from cowboys and indians kegger costume parties and adult glances over letter of recommendation dinners with professors breaking sacred teacher and student relationship behind the science build and learning how to whisper, deeper than all roses, that make men quiver and whimper but that's how you get that a

i,metaboy found myself next to a boy who hugged me in the lobby when i was crying, "no, dad, being gay isn't like just some hobby. it's not just some phase." or formulated phrase wriggling on a pin crafting new identities because you're some liberal arts major milking daddy's money to pay off your dealer instead of books learning the recipe to chemical reactions of two parts chaucer, one part kushner, and "i knew that school would put nothing but bullshit in your head" barking his brand of hard love cause, "the only thing you find in texas is steers and queers" both branded; one by fists the other by a million indecisions for politicians to reverse

imetaboy who said, "come back to bed. give him time, babe." time for you and me and and coffee spoons and a pathetic dad and gay son on bad sitcom plotted nine month dance: the sneaking out the window and down the tree shimmy, or the two and a half minute hypnosis samba around super bowl levi's commercials, and fosse choreographed realization of apathetic silence permeating the air

i,metaboy tossed, turned waking to the internal city of my life ablaze with no patriarch, no agamemnon, no george driven mad by the turmoil of circumstantial evidence accrued over a lifetime of remembering the wince of everything i think i heard in between all the words that were never spoken and slept to nightmarish landscape of flaming paper buildings raining like the confetti of falling men on fire flailing helpless like fish slapping a dock

imetaboy who woke me to a glass of water with two ice cubes, both floating along--like that summer night in june when we drifted on a lake in some greenwood (under the stars) with our tucked away in a tent--forgetting all but a boy with a cappuccino mustache smile that likes my bad karaoke singing and the decade of old photos with terrible haircuts and 90s acid wash and wipes away sweat soaked ramblings and soothes ice in mouth kisses into whispered lyrics down my neck, "i'll stop the world and melt with you"

i,metaboy prepared breakfast while scrambling eggs and shoes and online quiz deadlines into the morning ritual of pancakes with maple syrup heart tattoos and surfed the wave of good morning talk show hosts of tossing to the other side of the world where see two burning matchstick buildings crumble

imetaboy who answered after fifteen missed calls, "son. please answer. i need to know you're ok. i'm sorry."
it's for you.

i,metaboy thought of all the silent passings in hallways, and lies we convinced ourselves about each other in our personal space, office space, violate my space, terrorize my space, "you're under my roof and this is my place,": at dinner table conversations, held together by fear, love, death, mashed potato rubble, twisted metal forking meat loaf, jutting from the ground floor, glue gunned down, stapler, paper, pencil, keyboards, high heels, lipstick, wallet, watch, bagel, lunch pail, all the things in a day forgotten written on a napkin with the "i 'heart' you," "are not the father of this baby," channel surfing, commuter crowd into a taxi: to nowhere, to somewhere, to anywhere: but hearing bodies hitting cement with

that cartoon splat and the only thing you wish for is that you can correct your last words from "i hate," to "i love you, dad." but not even god can wash away the blood of smoke from the sky
i, devan, i, marcus, i, david, i, wilde, i, forster, i, burroughs, i,
albee, i, plato, i, crowley, i, maurice, i, milk, i, ganymedes, i,
jonathan, i, whitman, i, hughes, i, kramer, i, da vinci, i, warhol, i,
waugh, i, i, i, i, imetaboy

The bar's patio lighting, and faint club music, comes back up. Everyone begins to clap and whistle. Devan does a small bow. He rushes to his drink and begins to dance about the room with it.

CHRISTOPHER

Let's hear it for her God dammit!

WALT

Wow.

DEVAN

Category is "Ginsberg Realness."

Marcus moves in and kisses Devan. Greg gets up again and rushes towards the alley.

MARCUS

This is why I love you.

DEVAN

Thank you. Thank you.

Christopher gets up and crosses towards the alley and peeks in.

CHRISTOPHER

Maybe we should check on him. Or take him home.

DEVAN

If he doesn't come back in a few minutes we'll go round the alley and pick him up when we're leaving.

(To Marcus)

Ha ha, stop it.

Marcus begins to tickle him.

You're gonna make me pee.

MARCUS

Don't be mean. We should check on him.

DEVAN

I'm only kidding. He'll be fine; he's been in a mood all night. He's probably just letting it all out and that's a good thing. He won't feel it as bad in the morning.

Christopher crosses to the table and sits.

CHRISTOPHER

I told her to quit after the shots but she kept at it. And you know when I say, "Cut her off," it's a situation. I loves me a cocktail. Or just some cock and tail.

DEVAN

Look at you turn a phrase instead of a trick.

CHRISTOPHER

(Feigning shock)

Bitch. You, just speaking the word of God. I thought you were about to stigmata there for a second. I was gonna use my drink as holy water, but there are sober children in Africa.

DEVAN

You're such a humanitarian. Can you even find Africa on a map? You know it's not just Mexico and Texas?

MARCUS

Hey, hey, hey. Let's keep this a clean fight.

CHRISTOPHER

We're not being shady, just fierce. And look at you Mr. Border relations. Is that what they teach you in the army?

WALT

You're in the army? I've thought about joining.

MARCUS

Yeah? I deploy in two weeks or sooner if they need us. Who's your recruiter?

WALT

Oh, I was only thinking about it.

CHRISTOPHER

In the army? Why would you do something stupid like that?

DEVAN

Preach.

MARCUS

You should talk to a recruiter.

(To Devan)

And how is it stupid?

DEVAN

I didn't say it was stupid.

MARCUS

But you agreed with him.

DEVAN

I hate this conversation. Why are we having it?

Devan turns around and covers Marcus's mouth and kisses him over his hand.

I'm not doing this until I have to. And it's not tonight. We promised to talk about only fun things tonight.

Devan turns to Walt and crosses to him.

Look at my ring. We were married today.

CHRISTOPHER

(In a sing-song way.)

Deniaaaaaaaaaaal.

Devan glares at him; Marcus smiles at him.

WALT

That's why you're in penguin suits.

CHRISTOPHER

Their wedding babe. I told you.

GREG

(Entering.)

Commitment ceremony.

He crosses towards the bench and stands on it, peaking his head over the fence for air.

WALT

I didn't hear you. It's too loud in there. You have to yell to be heard.

CHRISTOPHER

It was cute. Quaint. Tasteful. Chic. Everything from Elegant Bride. Bit of a cliché sunset but a beautiful wedding. One for the ages.

GREG

It was a commitment ceremony.

CHRISTOPHER

Thank you, Mr. Obvious.

WALT

In a church?

GREG

In a field.

DEVAN

It was not in a field. It was a botanical garden.

GREG

Well it had kind of a field.

CHRISTOPHER

(To Greg with protest)

It was not a field.

(To Walt with reassurance)

It was not a field.

WALT

The gardens south of here?

GREG

Yup.

WALT

People cruise that place all that time.

GREG

Yup.

(Beat)

I think I can see into that house over there. Looks like they're dancing or something.

Devan runs to check too.

DEVAN

You can only see their shadows, they're too far; but I wonder what they see happen here.

GREG

Just a bunch of drunken gays and the occasional three hundred pound, six foot six drag queen in pasties and a tiara.

CHRISTOPHER

That subdivision didn't used to be there. It used to be a big field but it's slowly growing around here. I bet those people see a lot of fights. And hear lots of terrible gay music.

Devan jumps off and crosses to Marcus. Marcus begins to slow dance with and kiss him. Greg sits down and avoids making eye contact with anyone. He just looks around the walls instead.

DEVAN

And this bar?

MARCUS

Oh, this bar's always been here.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah, I've always seen it. I don't know if it's always been a gay bar.

WALT

Yeah, it has. The owner's had it for about 18 years or something like that.

DEVAN

You know the owner?

WALT

Yeah. I dance here.

CHRISTOPHER

You're a go-go dancer?

WALT

Yeah. I told you inside.

CHRISTOPHER

I heard, "cattle rancher." You're dressed like a cowboy.

GREG

Ha.

WALT

It's my outfit. I got on at two as the final act.

DEVAN

How old are you? You look twelve.

WALT

I just turned 18.

MARCUS

Fresh meat.

CHRISTOPHER

New car smell and everything.

DEVAN

It's a twenty-one and older bar, you've been drinking.

WALT

Well, they don't mind.

DEVAN

I bet.

(In a hushed tone to Christopher.)

He is a decade younger than you are. Let this one go.

CHRISTOPHER

Are you a stripper?

WALT

Does it matter?

CHRISTOPHER

Of course it matters. It matters a great deal.

WALT

Why would it matter? Oh, you think because I'm some eighteen year old I'm dumb, and don't know anything, and just party, and do drugs, and have sex, and dance. And I'm not a stripper by the way; I am a go-go dancer...

Christopher slowly covers Walt's mouth with his hand.

CHRISTOPHER

Norma Rae, get off the table.

GREG

Ha.

CHRISTOPHER

(Kissing Walt)

It matters a great deal because you do exactly that. You're eighteen. You party, and do drugs, and have sex and dance. And I love it all. And I love you more for it. I mean, don't get me wrong I was digging the farmhand look and was already fantasizing about rolling around in the hay, but this is even better, because you probably have a bunch of costumes. And who doesn't a costume change for a little bit of role play?

WALT

(Counting on his fingers)

Well, I only got this one, an Indian one, a construction one, a police one, and a doctor.

CHRISTOPHER

Y-M-C-Yay. And I have the gag ball and whip. It's a match made in heaven, no?

Both couples are kissing. Greg looks at them and sighs.

GREG

We should get out of here.

MARCUS

You feeling it?

GREG

Well, I'm definitely feeling something.

DEVAN

Yeah, screw the dancing. We should go swimming.

WALT

After party?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, after party. Woo!

DEVAN

Don't you have work tomorrow?

CHRISTOPHER

So? I'll just call in.

DEVAN

A responsible adult everybody.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't you have work?

DEVAN

Took the week off.

MARCUS

Gonna honeymoon.

WALT

Where are you going for your honeymoon?

GREG

They're only going to the beach.

DEVAN

Only?

CHRISTOPHER

Ooooh.

DEVAN

We're spending the whole week there and then moving up some of our stuff into storage next week before driving up to Fort Bliss.

WALT

Where's that at?

MARCUS

El Paso.

WALT

You're going to war?

MARCUS

Yup.

WALT

Where to?

MARCUS

Even if I knew, I couldn't say. Maybe Iraq.

DEVAN

Let's just talk about our week long honeymoon. All that other stuff is just work. I don't want to deal with it until then.

CHRISTOPHER

You going to El Paso?

DEVAN

I can't go to the departure, obviously, but I got them to give me an assignment about soldiers from around here. I told my editor I was looking for a new angle to the Iraq story. He looked around our meeting and said, "You see here. First job out of college and full of energy. You guys need that." I don't know how well liked I am around the newsroom.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know how well liked you are here.

DEVAN

Suffer. You're just mad that work and play are the same thing for me.

GREG

We should go already.

DEVAN

(Curtly)

In a minute. We have to close out and everything.

WALT

You guys leaving already? I have to stay until two.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, they can go. I'll stay behind. We can meet them up later.

GREG

This night will never end.

DEVAN

You know what?

Devan reaches into Marcus's pants and pulls out keys. A car horn is heard honking once towards the alley.

(In a serene voice)

The car's unlocked. You can go lay down. We'll be there in a minute. I'll close you out.

Greg gets up and exits through the alleyway.

CHRISTOPHER

Ooooooh, drama.

GREG
(Offstage)

I heard that.

CHRISTOPHER

Good.

(To Devan)

Well, whatever. You think we can borrow some trunks when we get there or should I swing by my place?

MARCUS

You can use mine, we'll be skinny dipping.

DEVAN

My favorite.

CHRISTOPHER

This is gonna turn into a porn shoot. *The Grooms and their Groomsmen.*

DEVAN

Part two.

CHRISTOPHER

Starring Devan "Deep Throat" Johnson, Marcus "Fist of Fury" Stryker, Walt "Save a Horse Ride a Cowboy" St. Croix, Greg "Stick Up His Ass" Phoenixxx, and Christopher "Power Top" Sanchez.

MARCUS
(Feigning a cough)

Bottom.

CHRISTOPHER

Biiii.....

(Beat)

I can't be mean to you. You're leaving soon.

(Beat)

Bitch.

MARCUS

I love you, too.

DEVAN

Hey! Hands off. You have that plaything there.

A car alarm goes off.

MARCUS

Is that ours?

DEVAN

Yes. That's Greg. We better go. You ready to battle the crowd?

MARCUS

Always.

Devan and Marcus grab their things off the table and begin to exit through the door UC.

CHRISTOPHER

We'll see you in a bit then.

Marcus stops Devan before the door and picks him up.

MARCUS

I carried you in, and I'm gonna carry you out.

CHRISTOPHER

Stop trying so hard you already bought the cow.

They all exit through the door and the club music gets louder. Lasers shoot out again and the lights begin to fade.

THE ARTICLES OF WAR

A curtain falls over the chalkboard making it look like a white dry erase board with dates, phone numbers and the words: "deadline," "vacation," "furlough," "Germany," etc.: on it. The curtain should not cover the right portion of the chalkboard containing the half-finished darts game or

the bottom of the chalkboard with the phrase, "...where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up..." or the initials.

The neon bar sign is off only the chalkboard is lit on the back wall. The exit (R) should still have the red lighting towards the far end of the exit, but it is on a slow blink. (Unless otherwise indicated.) The door UC should have the EXIT sign removed.

A voice mail comes on. Marcus's voice is played. "Hey babe, sorry we cut it short. I'll write to you soon. We're leaving in the morning. I just wanted to say that I love you. (Indistinct sound in the background.) What? (Beat) We have to go. I'll write soon. Love you."

News coverage of the initial "Shock and Awe" bombing of Iraq (March 19, 2003) plays against the back wall. Video should show for no longer than a minute but the audio can play for a few more minutes only very faintly.

When lights come up, Devan is standing center stage already. He is dressed in professionally casual clothes. (Khakis, with V-neck shirt and cardigan.) He is holding a newspaper. He crosses towards DL while reading.

DEVAN

May 1, 2003. Front page. El Paso, Texas -- Fort Bliss, tucked away just north of the neighborhoods filled with adobe houses with clay colored tile roofs within earshot of hustle and bustle of Ciudad Juarez, has the distinct feeling that only border creatures know. After the earthquake in Colima earlier this year, a series of military drills were put on hiatus until equipment could be repaired, giving meaning to affects another country could have on another.

Marcus is lit center stage now. He is dressed in a marine's combat gear. He crosses DR.

To see a reflection of your society and understand that language skills are essential to communicate with a different people. Valley natives awaiting deployment with the 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division know this all too well...

MARCUS

April 1, 2003. D, I've been thinking about you and missing you. We've been moving a lot. In our first week here we lost two men. A real SNAFU, but forever forward.

One of them was just a kid. Got attached with us right before we left. I think he'd just turned 18. He was kind of a military brat groomed from the beginning, but he was still the FNG. His mother wept and his dad gave him the stiff handshake at the goodbye. I'm sorry you couldn't go. It would have been nice to have someone there though. I'll write when I can. -M.

The lights continue to alternate on Marcus and Devan while they are speaking unless otherwise indicated.

Video of the fall of Saddam Hussein's bronze statue (April 12, 2003) is playing. Indistinct audio from actual event, politicians and news commentators is heard. It should last only about midway of Devan's monologue.

DEVAN

April 15, 2003. M, I think I filed my taxes correctly. "Single." Blegh. I had to go around asking for a "Person on the Street" perspective today. No one's filed it yet. They're all waiting. Seems ridiculous to be waiting around. And then they complain when they have to wait in line. The photographer sent the camera back with me because he needed to get in line. Everything I've been writing lately is just bullshit anyway. I'm supposed to make give it that "glimpse of hope" as they say. If I had stayed in the Entertainment section I could have written any damn thing. Now I have to tow a line. Whatever, I can't focus. I'm trying to keep my mind off the war, but I check the wires daily for your name. I even went to the restroom and prayed the other day when I heard my editor say, "We lost another boy from Texas." I've never done that before. And when I was in there I realized that no one would call me or tell me if something...

(Beat)

...had happened to you. I don't know how to get around that. I thought of the impersonal nature of the news. How distant and abstract. It makes war acceptable. It's the coldness of a bunch of little black markings on a page, or a screen, that spell out a soldier's name. But he was a person. A real person. Someone's son. Someone's lover. He had a life. He had fear. And love. Maybe a pet. But you don't get that from those cold black markings on the page; or the screen.

But it was good to know you've taken the city. -D.

June 30, 2003. A voice mail tone is heard again. The connection is filled with static and cuts out occasionally. The door is trying to be opened.

MARCUS

Hello? Hello? Devan? Hello?

(Beat)

I guess you're back in the world.

(Beat)

Things are getting crazy over here. Been losing a lot of people in...

(Static cuts off)

Well, I just wanted to say that I loved you. Don't know when we'll get to call again.

The phone abruptly cuts out and a dial tone is heard until the operator comes on. It slowly fades out.

It is now Devan's apartment. Devan bursts through carrying a bag of groceries. A man follows behind him also carrying groceries. The red light in exit R is now white.

DEVAN

I'm coming!

He goes straight for the voice mail recorder.

Damn it. I missed it. You think I can star-69 him? Does that work over there?

EDWARD

69? Don't get graphic.

DEVAN

Graphic? Dad, you're the one who asked, "how do we know who does what?" Star-6-9 is the way you get phones to return the call. I doubt it'll work.

He picks up the phone and tries it. He hands his groceries to his dad.

And for your information, I always tell a boy that if he's unwilling to do something that he wants to do to me, and then he can just go fuck himself.

(Beat)

Damn it. I won't go through. I'm supposed to be home by noon every day in case he calls.

EDWARD

(Placing the groceries, defeated, on the table.)

Sorry. I guess this is my fault. I just thought you needed groceries. I know we haven't been all that alright lately.

Devan stands by the window (UR) where the phone is and turns to his father.

DEVAN

(After a long pause)

No, it's not your fault. You meant well. It's my fault really; I should have told you. And I did need them. Check the kitchen; the fridge is empty.

EDWARD

Why? You need to eat.

He exits R to take the groceries to the fridge.

(Offstage the sound of bottles and groceries are heard.)

Jesus, no kidding. Nothing but booze.

DEVAN

I work at night so I can be home at noon. Just in case. The only things open are convenient stores and bars.

Marcus is squatting on the ground against the bench. The red light is back on and the lighting begins to alternate again.

MARCUS

September 1, 2003. D, We've already claimed victory and it doesn't feel like it. Don't know when you'll get this but today we started another operation. Took out the Mad Mortar Men. Finally got those fuckers.

I was crouched down behind a barricade around a hot LZ and suddenly a mortar hit the building I was next to. Three ragheads came running out. The big one fell to the ground and was coughing up blood. I think part of his face was hanging off. The second one, a tall thin man ran directly into the line of another mortar and he rained down everywhere. Everywhere. I was covered in him and debris. I must have been 100, 120 yards away. The third one ran directly my way and stopped and stared at me for a second. He started to fumble for his gun so I shot him. And when I opened my eyes, he was laying on the ground looking up at me. And then everything went silent.

He wasn't the first man I killed, but he was the first one I looked in the eyes. And oddly it was familiar, and it was like looking right back at myself. But it was cold, and distant and different.

We've finished heavy combat they say. But I don't want to talk about war anymore. I've been wearing the sweater you sent me even though I've been burning up. It smells like you.

I love you, M.

Devan is sitting at the table with a small carry-on bag. An internet dial-tone is heard.

DEVAN

November 7, 2003. M, I couldn't get a refund on my tickets so I came to Germany anyway on a whim. I couldn't bear to be at home. Hopefully this doesn't happen again in three months. I bought a laptop with my spending money. I'm going to start taking classes with Gregory in computer programming. HTML is the language for the twenty first century they say. Always something new to speak. And he's right, it'll get me out of the house. He says,

Greg enters from the kitchen are now lit in white.

GREG

We haven't done anything in months. We need to get out of the house.

Greg paces the room. Devan looks like he's daydreaming.

DEVAN

Hm?

GREG

Are you listening to me? I said we should get out of the house. Maybe we can take a trip or something.

DEVAN

Hm?

Greg snaps his fingers in front of Devan.

Oh, no thank you. I don't want another drink.

GREG

That's not what I was saying.

Greg storms into the kitchen. It reverts back to Devan at the desk alone and the light in exit R goes back to red.

DEVAN

But he's always around, and although I know he means well, I can't think with him around. Or at work. Or anywhere. I stopped looking at the wires, but now they come to my e-mail. I think Greg may have been a little bit upset about me not asking him to come along, but oh well. Quiet can be nice.

I miss you. I love you. Be safe. -D

December 25, 2003. Christmas music plays. The Christmas lights are now lit. A bit of snow blows sporadically through the opened area above the fence.

Marcus is seated on the bench. He has a phone, with a long chord, that seems to go come from nowhere.

The phone rings and Devan enters. There is a bit of confusion at first given the length it takes for the other to receive the message.

MARCUS

Hello?

DEVAN

Hello? Dad?

MARCUS

Hello?

DEVAN

Hello? Hell... Marcus. Oh, my God. What are you doing? Are you okay?

MARCUS

No, it's me, babe.

(Beat)

Yeah. I'm good. I just snuck away for a second to call you. Merry Christmas.

(Beat)

DEVAN

Aw. I miss you. Merry Christmas. How long do you have?

(Beat)

MARCUS

Just a second. Don't know who's around.

(Beat)

DEVAN

Well, I love you. And be safe. Did you get dinner? Do you need any more sweaters? It's supposed to be cold right? Should I take you more sweaters in February? Are you coming home in February or is it Germany again?

(Beat)

MARCUS

I love you, too. And yes, we did. Yeah it's cold but I'm good. We got our coats. I don't know how to say it without ruining your Christmas, but February isn't looking good either. It's looking more like April or even May. But we'll get a long stay at home station.

(Beat)

DEVAN

Oh. Well, you let me know. And it's ok. I'm just glad I got to hear from you. *May*? That so long away. What?

MARCUS

(To someone offstage)

What?

(Beat)

Oh, Merry Christmas!

DEVAN

Is everything okay?

(Beat)

MARCUS

Yeah. It was just someone saying Merry Christmas. How are you? What are you doing?

Marcus begins to pace and look off into the distance.

(Beat)

DEVAN

(Relieved)

Oh, ok. Oh, I'm good. I'm waiting for my dad to call to go pick him up at the airport. He's impossible. I told him to leave a day earlier but he didn't listen and now he's stuck either in Indiana or Antarctica. His phone kept cutting out. He apparently has become a bit of an outspoken ally. He even joined his local PFLAG. But when he got back from his first meeting he did ask what the difference between a drag queen and transsexual was. So I told him that if he should think about it this way, if you're going to root around for berries you're bound to find some, but if he must...

MARCUS

(Reacting late to "drag queen")

Hey. I don't know if they're listening right now or not.

(Beat)

DEVAN

Oh. Sorry. Well... I just told him to look it up.
(Beat)

MARCUS
Ha-ha. Well... that's good I guess. I...
(Reacts to a noise.)

Hey, I better go.
(Beat)

You there?
(Beat)

DEVAN
Yeah, I'm here. I love you, be safe.

MARCUS
(Simultaneously with Devan)
I love you.

Lights out on Marcus. The phone dial comes on and Devan hangs up the phone.

Devan walks DC and is spot lit. The red light is pulsating again.

January 1, 2004. A photograph of an open package is projected on the screen with a watch on top, tied with a note. The watch should have two time zones set nine hours apart from each other. A second and third photograph details the note and the time zones.

DEVAN
Resolution (haiku):
Dreamt of you today
And made my resolution
To not waste a sec.
P.S. My dad says hi.

Devan exits.

February 14, 2004

Marcus enters and stands DC and is spot lit. He is carrying a bunch of roses, with a Valentine's Day card and is dressed in boxers with hearts on them and is wearing his helmet. A flash occurs. A photo of him then wearing that outfit with that expression projects on the wall. The haiku (not a haiku) is written on the card.

MARCUS
Valentine's Day (haiku):
One dozen roses for you
I wish I were there

And covered in chocolate.
Love, Marcus. P.S. I love the watch. Now we're both ticking down
until we see each other.

Marcus exits stage R.

April 30, 2004

Devan enters, led by Christopher, with blindfold on. They cross to the table. Greg is sitting at the table already. The lights are dim and slowly come up. The "EXIT" sign on the door UC is on again. The curtain covering the chalkboard is lifted.

Marcus is peeking through the alleyway.

DEVAN

This better not be a stripper. Because that last one was rubbish.

CHRISTOPHER

Shut up. I happened to have loved him greatly.

GREG

For all of thirty minutes.

CHRISTOPHER

It's one of the longest relationships I've ever had.

DEVAN

Way to go living up to those stereotypes.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't snipe at me while you're blindfolded. I'll lead over a cliff.
Here, sit.

DEVAN

Can I take off the blindfold?

CHRISTOPHER

(Looking towards Marcus who gives a thumbs up.)
Yes. But slowly. It is the big reveal.

Devan takes off the blindfold and looks around.

DEVAN

Well? What is it? Why are we here? I can't get trashed tonight. I
have a long flight tomorrow.

GREG

I told you it wasn't going to be that exciting.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, it is my great pleasure to announce the arrival of the man of your dreams!

DEVAN

Oh, God it is a stripper.

CHRISTOPHER

It is not a stripper. Hold up, we got the timing wrong. Close your eyes again.

DEVAN

I am not. What is it?

CHRISTOPHER

Just listen to me and put on the blindfold.

DEVAN

I already know it's a stripper just send him on out here.

MARCUS

Just put on the damn blindfold.

Devan jumps up. Marcus enters from the alley. Devan and Marcus embrace and kiss. Christopher throws confetti and glitter and blows a party favor. Greg seems disinterested.

CHRISTOPHER

Damn it, Greg. You're supposed to take the photo. Take the photo. Take the photo.

Greg takes a quick photo without much effort and not giving Marcus or Devan time to smile and turn towards the camera. Christopher leans over and takes the camera away from Greg. He begins to take photographs.

DEVAN

What are you doing here? My flight's in the morning.

MARCUS

I didn't want you to feel left out since you couldn't go to the arrival, so I lied about the day. I didn't want you to be left out, so I surprised you.

DEVAN

Oh, I love you.

CHRISTOPHER

Here, smile.

They pose.

Don't move. One more.

Christopher puts the camera down.

DEVAN

But what about my flight?

MARCUS

I called them an hour ago and cancelled them. We've had this planned for a month.

DEVAN

You guys knew about this? Thanks. Here, take a photo for my blog.

MARCUS

For your blog?

DEVAN

Yeah, I wrote you about it. I started one about us. I didn't say anything about what division or anything just that you were in Iraq and what it's like to have a soldier husband.

MARCUS

You can't do that.

DEVAN

But I didn't use your name.

MARCUS

You still can't do that. They're really getting aggressive with that. I already told you to be careful about what you say and write.

DEVAN

I *am* careful.

MARCUS

I'm serious. You need to take this seriously.

DEVAN

I do.

MARCUS

Not if you're writing a journal online for the world to see. Are you a 17 year old girl? I'm having a bad day so let me write my feelings down.

DEVAN

You don't have to be mean about it. I'm just expressing myself. My frustrations. I don't think it's fair for you to accuse me of being irresponsible.

MARCUS

Well it seems like it when you're exposing my life like that. And you know full well what can happen.

(To himself.)

Jesus, civilians don't know what the world's like do they?

DEVAN

I don't know why we're fighting about this. It's just a blog. You can see it when we get home. I'll delete whatever you don't want on there.

MARCUS

You should have told me first.

DEVAN

I did.

MARCUS

Yeah, in a letter. I told you, you need to be careful about what you're writing and saying. They check everything.

DEVAN

Ok, I'm sorry. I didn't think...

MARCUS

(Cutting him off.)

No, you didn't think.

Greg stands up with the camera.

GREG

Say, "cheese!"

The photo is projected on the back wall. Marcus looks displeased and Devan looks hurt. Christopher is glaring at Greg. The photo dissolves into a blog post being written. Everyone exits except Devan who walks to DC. An internet dial-up tone is heard.

DEVAN

EDIT: August 15, 2004.

I went for a walk today. I got as far as the park and turned around because I was lost. I couldn't remember where I was going or where I was and even, for a moment, who I was. *I* was lost. And then I thought I saw him. I followed until lost him.

He's here for a few months at home station (his base). He could leave any day. Wars follow no schedule. And both of ours seem out of sync now. I'm in Texas and he's in _____. And all I want to do is see him.

Sometimes I think I do see him. All over the place. Like the constant ringing of phantom phone calls. And every time I hear the phone I run to it. And it always feels out of reach. I just wish I got to speak to him more. I know it's not easy to get to a phone.

Let me know if you need anything, my love.

I love you, -D

P.S. I'm getting better at hiding.

Devan exits.

November 3, 2004

Marcus enters and carries pink elephant stuffed animal. He has a birthday hat on. He sits at the table and places the elephant across from him. A voice mail message comes on. He is drunk.

MARCUS

Hey... Hey. Hey.

(Beat)

You're probably asleep already. Listen, I'm, ugh, sorry I yelled at you earlier. The guys were breathing down my neck a bit. We've been inseparable since we got back.

A photograph of Marcus and other marines are at a bar is projected on the wall.

I didn't mean to call you fag, it's just what we say. I told you about this. But, I'm sorry.

(Beat)

They took me out for my birthday tonight. We got sh-wasted. They took me to a strip club first and then a few bars.

Photographs of Marcus and the marines drinking pitchers, with strippers, and playing drinking games circulate.

All the guys were chasing tail.

In the photographs, Marcus is seen cruising a guy at a bar and a restroom.

Some fag...

(Beat)

...some gay guy came up to us and hit on me at one of the bars.

Photographs of the guy hitting on him in front of the marines appear. He touches Marcus's forearm.

He grabbed my dick and my buddies jumped in.

Several photographs of Marcus punching the guy and the marines restraining Marcus appear.

I had to pull my buddies back. It was just a punch of two.

A photograph of the guy, badly beaten on the floor, is shown.

We left before the cops came and ditched through a carnival.

Photographs of the marines re-enacting the incident and walking through a carnival are shown.

I won a prize for you. I'll mail it to you.

A photograph of Marcus and a girl talking, with his marine buddies making crude gestures behind the girl, appears.

It got late, so I stayed at a hotel. I didn't think I'd make it to my place.

A photograph (from the perspective of a submissive sexual partner in missionary position looking up) shows Marcus's face contorted and in pain. The hands pulling his hair have fingernails on.

Well, I just got back home and I wanted to say I was sorry. That I wish I could take it back. And that I love you.

(Beat)

In other news, they said we're probably shipping out as early as February. But I'll let you know I guess. So... yeah.

(Beat)

Goodnight.

Marcus exits. He leaves the pink elephant behind.

Devan enters and carries the pink elephant to the center.

DEVAN

January 18, 2005.

He leaves in a few weeks and I won't see him for the next one.
Yesterday we bought a couch...

A photograph of the couch is shown.

...and gave our old one to one of his friends who just got married.
God, if they only knew all of the dirty things we've done on that
couch. I don't mind though, I was kind of glad to be rid of it.
Maybe if the newlyweds have a place filled with furniture with a
past, their future will be clear for them. Maybe they won't have to
live up to all those established traditions or notions. Well that's me
on my soapbox.

_____ nearly cleared out all of our storage. Maybe it's a good
thing. I can be a packrat. That is a benefit of living with a
serviceman, the military establishes order.
Well, goodbye old couch. You have served me well.

DEVAN

Devan begins to exit but the phone rings.

March 30, 2005.

Devan is getting ready to go out for the evening. Marcus stumbles to the opposite side of the
stage and sits. He grabs a phone and dials. Phone rings.

DEVAN

Greg, I'm gonna run a little late. I decided I'd shower after all.

MARCUS

Heeeeyyyyyy.

DEVAN

Marcus?

MARCUS

Bull's eye. Pew!

(Uses fingers as gun.)

DEVAN

Oh, thank God. How are you doing babe? I waited for your call on Saturday. I was worried.

MARCUS

Worried? About me? Fuck that. I am inpenetrable. Penetrable. Impenetrable.

DEVAN

Marcus? Are you drunk?

MARCUS

Another bull's eye. You sir, are on a roll.

DEVAN

Where are you?

MARCUS

Hm... you know I can't say that. I'm... in this dirty ass bar in town. My friend, Ahmed, Abdul, something, was nice enough to let me use the phone. He already took most of my money.

DEVAN

You're alone?

MARCUS

Yup.

DEVAN

You should get back to base.

MARCUS

No. I think I'm fine right here.

DEVAN

I think... you may not be the best judge of that right now.

MARCUS

Shut up. What are you doing?

DEVAN

I was getting ready. Greg and the rest of us are gonna grab dinner and go downtown. Christopher's in town.

MARCUS

Must be nice to be back in the world.

DEVAN

Yeah, I guess.

MARCUS

Well, maybe I shouldn't keep you.

DEVAN

No. It's fine. They can wait. I'll... What are you doing there?

MARCUS

I'm drunk.

DEVAN

Why?

MARCUS

Today, was not a good day. I saw three of my buddies die today. Just like that. Just one, two, three. Some guy in a sedan. Just, boom. Last week, I saw this kid, probably like twelve, lose a leg in front of me. Down the street. This guy with a vest in the middle of a market place. Today was like, fuck man. When can someone get a break? And I just needed a drink. You know when you just wanna get hammered? Go out get laid. Not give a fuck about anything.

DEVAN

That sounds familiar. I'm sorry you're going through that. Have you thought about talking to anyone?

MARCUS

I can't do that. They'll treat me like a leper. They slowly faze you out. People look at you like they can't trust you. You know, one of those guys was the only person I've told I was gay. And now he's gone. Just like that. Just, boom. Just one, two, three.

DEVAN

I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.

MARCUS

Don't say shit. You can't tell anybody anything. You can't ask me shit. You know what's fucked about this whole situation? This whole don't asking and don't telling and don't fucking shit and whatever. The worst part is going back into that damn closet and feeling like you just handed your balls back. And then you're out here, and you're like this spineless mother fucker in the back of the room that doesn't speak up when you're in the middle of an official briefing and they're going over the rules and what kind of behavior is acceptable and military cohesion and all that bull shit. And that meant someone was busted for being a fag. And you're like don't look worried, keep calm, watch how the others are acting to it. Remember to laugh if someone cracks a joke, but not too hard. And then you're at another *official* briefing and it's about syphilis or herpes or some shit, and you know they're only giving this talk because someone's got it now. Or, my favorite is how to deal with your relationships at home, and then they tell you that at least half of them will cheat on you. And you're standing there against the wall thinking the world's falling apart outside and kids are exploding and fucking herpes and I'm worrying if you're fucking someone and trying not to laugh too hard and you're thinking why the fuck did I sign up for this?

And then you come back. And it's all so familiar. Like an old coat. And that's the scary part. How familiar war is. How all of this is all the same.

DEVAN

It can be a lot.

MARCUS

It's everything. I'm sorry I just needed to talk to someone. Someone who knew me.

(Beat)

Oh, fuck me how am I gonna get back?

DEVAN

Can you take a taxi?

MARCUS

I can't just show up in a taxi. I'll walk back. I gotta sneak in. I'll be fine.

DEVAN

I love you. And I'm not cheating. But I do miss the sex. And internet porn just doesn't hack it. Please come visit.

MARCUS

I'll come so we can both come.

DEVAN

(Feigning shock)

Ah, oh you're terrible. But that's why I love you. Get back safe.

MARCUS

I love you.

Dial tone. Marcus exits. Devan exits. The "EXIT" sign on the door is removed.

June 20, 2005

Devan and Marcus enter the apartment abruptly. Marcus is in civilian clothes. Devan is beside himself and all over Marcus. Marcus looks rather sheepish.

The red light begins to pulsate faster and longer until it consumes the stage.

DEVAN

Why didn't you tell me you were coming? You were just waiting downstairs. How long is your stay?

MARCUS

I'm not sure.

DEVAN

Oh, whatever, I don't care. You're home. When did you get back in?

MARCUS

Last week.

DEVAN

(Confused)

Last week? What do you mean?

MARCUS

Devan, we gotta talk about something. Two things. You should sit down.

Marcus and Devan sit at the table.

So, I'm going to be direct and just lay it all out.

(Beat)

Honestly, I was hoping you wouldn't be here. I was waiting outside because I wanted you to be gone. I feel like such an asshole.

(Beat)

Last month, our Gunnery Sgt., Sgt. Dominguez and I were out on patrol in a tank. And he and I started to talk about just... shit. The weather, his mother, a fight I had back in boot camp. Just shit. And I thought that I'd turned off my coms when he did his, cause we were literally parked, in the middle of a desert. A whole fucking desert. And we just talked. He even told me about the petty crime stuff he did back home. And suddenly I just blurted it out. "I'm gay." And when I did, I felt amazing. Absolutely amazing. I felt like me for the first time in months.

DEVAN

And?

MARCUS

And he looked at me and said, "I know." And then they said, "Repeat that again," on the com.

DEVAN

You outed yourself?

MARCUS

I didn't mean to. I just needed to say it right there. In that moment. I needed to tell him what it was like to not say, "he." Cause we were talking about the truth. I always thought it would be you. I thought, they'd see me with you, or you'd say something, or they'd find something you'd written and then it was me.

DEVAN

So what's gonna happen?

MARCUS

I'm done. "Involuntary honorable discharge." That's what they give those with mental disorders. They'll never have me again. I don't even get my full separation pay. Just like that. Wiped clean.

DEVAN

I'm sorry.

MARCUS

You're sorry? What did you do? You're probably enjoying this.

DEVAN

I'm just sorry about the situation; you don't need to be mean. I'm sorry that this happened to you, but yes, I am happy that you're here.

MARCUS

Isn't it convenient for you.

DEVAN

Listen, just...

(Beat)

...I'm sure we can figure this out. I mean this isn't the end of the world. You just have to come home again. You'll have to start over but...

MARCUS

Exactly. After all of that. After all of that death, you just start over. Just like that. Just wipe all it all clean and forget.

DEVAN

I don't mean that. I mean, you'll have to readjust. That's true for everyone. You'll rest at home for a few weeks, maybe even a few months and then you can look for a job. They're always hiring veterans.

MARCUS

You make it sound so easy.

DEVAN

Well, it's not, but I can help.

MARCUS

Not with everything.

DEVAN

I can try.

MARCUS

Again, not with everything.

(Beat)

On my birthday, when we fought and you went back to your hotel room, I went out with guys and forgot where I was for a second. I thought I was back with you and Greg and Christopher, so I cruised a guy. God I was trashed. I think I kissed him in the restroom. And then I remember being at the bar and talking to Dominguez and the guy came up to me and grabbed me and I

thought it was you. So, I kissed back. And when I saw who it was I freaked. And Dominguez was laughing. And I realized where I was. And I almost killed that guy.

DEVAN

You said they beat him.

MARCUS

I lied. But that night something else happened. I, went home with someone from the carnival. All the guys kept egging me on after the fight and when I saw her I thought, "Go for it. Do it. Prove it."

DEVAN

Why are you telling me these things?

MARCUS

Because I married her.

DEVAN

You married her?

MARCUS

Yes.

DEVAN

When?

MARCUS

The day you left back home. That's why I didn't see you the day before and I told you I was needed on the base. We were getting everything ready. It was so easy.

DEVAN

To marry her? To fuck her?

MARCUS

To lie.

(Beat)

Devan...

DEVAN

(Cutting him off)

So what you're telling me is...

(Counting on his fingers)

...what you're telling me is that you've been married for eight months, to a woman. Since November. You didn't deploy until

February and I you didn't let me take that job in Kansas. You played house for four months, right? I saw you one weekend in January when you came to clean out the storage. And you were playing house.

MARCUS

We needed furniture.

Devan slaps Marcus.

Let's not argue, we just need to talk this through. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. It just spiraled.

DEVAN

Talk? You wanna talk now? For the past two years, I've been chasing every phone call, checking every e-mail, the mailbox every day just to hear from you. Just to get a glimpse of you for a moment. For one moment. Once, I sat by the phone for a whole day. A whole day because I thought if I willed it hard enough, you'd come to me. You'd call me. Whatever force in the universe would give whatever reprieve it could for just a moment. I couldn't get out of bed for a whole week once.

MARCUS

I couldn't just call you when I'm out in a desert.

DEVAN

I'm talking about when you were home. When you were at Fort Riley. When you were playing house. I've been with you since I was 19 and she's probably spent more time with you in the past three years than I have. All because she has a pussy.

MARCUS

Oh.

DEVAN

And how would I know? How would I have found all of this out? If I hadn't seen you. I'm not allowed within miles of that place. You made me stay in Abilene. I'm so stupid. I've never seen you on a fort. I've never been to one. I've never seen your friends. For years, I've heard all of these stories about all these phantom figures and I've never seen a face. I've never seen a face. I researched when you laughed at me when I didn't know what a lance corporal was, or a staff sergeant was. I've been pulling at these scraps of all of these miniscule pieces of information just to get a glimpse of

you. Wading through all of our history. Because so much of who I am is you. And I didn't know why I was so lost until right now.

Devan stands up.

Until right now. In this moment of clarity. I'm only a half creature. I've been looking for my body. I was staring myself in the mirror and I thought, "Who is that person staring at me? That's not me. He looks so sad."

(Beat)

Marcus moves in to touch Devan's wrist.

Don't touch me. Get away from me.

MARCUS

What?

DEVAN

Get away from me. Get out of here.

MARCUS

We have to talk. I'm not leaving.

DEVAN

Well you can talk to wifey.

MARCUS

That's not fair.

DEVAN

Fair?! I have been waiting for you!

Devan begins to sob and hyperventilate. Marcus moves in to comfort.

Oh, my heart. Don't touch me. Get out! GET OUT! GET OUT!
GEEEEEEEEEEEEET OUUUUUUT!

Marcus grabs his coat and heads for the door. He doesn't look back. The room is filled with the red light now.

KABOOM IN KABUL

September 5, 2007

At rise, Marcus is sitting at the table with one of the marines, Dominguez, (wearing a Marines shirt) from the photos. They are drinking beers. Red light consumes the entire stage. They're in a bar. The neon bar sign is on again. Another marine, Williams, from the photo is playing darts in the corner. The "EXIT" sign is not on the door.

MARCUS

I just wanted to thank you for coming out again.

DOMINGUEZ

No problem. Hadn't heard from you in a while. None of us had.

WILLIAMS

You just fell off the earth.

MARCUS

They kicked me off the earth. Sent me back into the world.

DOMINGUEZ

Ain't a big thing. We all knew. Just waiting around until you told us. But you know, shit happens. But we missed you. Williams cried himself to sleep every night. Isn't that right Williams?

WILLIAMS

I beat off to ya every night.

MARCUS

(Laughing, and punching Dominguez in the arm)

Knock it off.

DOMINGUEZ

You telling me, *now*, you don't like it? Could have saved me the trip had you kept your mouth shut in the first place.

MARCUS

I know.

WILLIAMS

We're just fucking with yah. It's good to see you. 'Bout one of the only ones left from the original crew.

MARCUS

Who else?

DOMINGUEZ

Shorty and Naqs.

MARCUS

When?

WILLIAMS

Naqs last year in Swat. Sniper.

MARCUS

Shorty?

DOMINGUEZ

Last month with a shot gun in his garage.

WILLIAMS

His baby girl found him.

MARCUS

Damn. I have been gone.

DOMINGUEZ

Straight up disappeared.

MARCUS

Well, you know.

WILLIAMS

Yeah, man. No sweat.

MARCUS

And I didn't want to implicate anyone.

DOMINGUEZ

Nah, we were fine. To be honest, the only silver lining, not that there is one, but it was that since you just said it, it ended right there. There was no witch hunt.

WILLIAMS

Not like when they chased after all those privates when we first got in.

DOMINGUEZ

Chasing privates? God damn, Williams you going homo on me?

MARCUS
(Laughing)

Don't tell. Don't tell.

WILLIAMS

Well, now that you mention it, I do get a little in my crotch when I see you Dominguez. Damn near burns.

DOMINGUEZ

Get that shit checked.

MARCUS

Ha ha. Like when Torres picked up gonorrhea from that hooker.

WILLIAMS

Oh, yeah. I forgot about that.

MARCUS

What's he up to?

(Beat)

DOMINGUEZ

He's gone.

MARCUS

Gone? How?

WILLIAMS

Week before his last tour ended and boom.

Williams throws a dart.

His Humvee went five feet in the air. By the time we got to him there wasn't much left.

MARCUS

Damn. They're all disappearing.

DOMINGUEZ

You know this war, these wars, are our plague. They'll be the end of us.

WILLIAMS

A whole generation of men gone. And there's no end in sight.

Williams throws another dart.

DOMINGUEZ

I was walking down the block and there was a whole sidewalk lined with wheelchairs. It looked like hundreds of them. And there were all these partial bodies with purpled faced. Their limbs had atrophied like all those malnourished kids we'd throw candies to.

WILLIAMS

And when you're out there, you feel them. All those eyes looking on you. You remember that feeling?

MARCUS

Yes.

DOMINGUEZ

These wars are our plague. And we never learned from the last one. There's a wound gushing. And you see it every day. Every day. You see it on the streets, in the news, you have it for breakfast. You see it in combat. You see it in the corporal pissing himself out of fear.

WILLIAMS

You see it in the mirror.

DOMINGUEZ/MARCUS

You see it in the mirror.

(Beat)

DOMINGUEZ

This war is our plague. It'll end us.

MARCUS

You know what that sounds like? It sounds like AIDS.

WILLIAMS

God damn. What the hell are you smoking?

MARCUS

I'm serious. It sounds like when AIDS first hit. It took a whole generation of men with it. And there is no end in sight.

(Beat)

I've been reading all of this gay shit. It's funny how much they don't teach you. How much you have to look for. You think, my God, it's just a blow job, or a fuck, but it's so much more.

DOMINGUEZ

Got a lot of free time?

MARCUS

Yeah, and nowhere to go. Work sucks. You can only sell so many office supplies. Devan left me all of these books and I've read them all. It's the only thing I have of his now.

WILLIAMS

Who's Devan?

MARCUS

Devan's the guy I was with when I enlisted. Before Sarah.

DOMINGUEZ

He the guy that send you all those packages?

MARCUS

Yeah.

WILLIAMS

All those candies?

MARCUS

Yeah.

DOMINGUEZ

Damn, homes. You fucked it up.

MARCUS

Yeah, I did.

WILLIAMS

You tried fixing it?

MARCUS

There's nothing left to fix. That's not how wars work.

DOMINGUEZ

Yeah, man, but, he's got to understand.

MARCUS

Understanding isn't the problem. I think I just beat him down. Silence does that to people.

WILLIAMS

You didn't call us. What made you do it after so long? What was it? Two years?

MARCUS

Almost.

(Beat)

I don't know. I just needed to know.

DOMINGUEZ

Know what?

MARCUS

Whether we were still who we were.

Marcus, Dominguez and Williams exit. The red light pulsates once, very slowly.

October 31, 2008 The "EXIT" sign is back on the door UC.

Devan, Christopher and Greg enter. They are wearing masks. They cross towards the table cautiously. Greg is clinging to Devan.

CHRISTOPHER

Boo!

DEVAN

Ah! Don't do that.

GREG

Oh, shit. You dropped your drink on me. Or is that blood. Is there blood dripping?

Greg tastes the liquid.

Never mind. It's vodka.

They sit.

DEVAN

This place is ridiculous. Why is it so dark? It's like the foyer or Hell. All we need is a drag queen to run by and possess us.

A noise is heard.

DEVAN/GREG/CHRISTOPHER

What was that? Ah!

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, that was my chair. Ha ha.

DEVAN

God. All I need is to die in the haunted house of a gay bar to add that little extra bit of tragedy. It's so tragic it's absurd.

GREG

What's absurd are these drink prices.

CHRISTOPHER

Amen sister man.

DEVAN

Well you snuck in those reserves right?

GREG

Right here.

CHRISTOPHER

Reserves?

DEVAN

Yeah. Greg packed some flasks before bed last night. We didn't know what our plans were.

CHRISTOPHER

Our plans? Just fucking admit it. You two are shaking up.

DEVAN

No. We're just friends.

CHRISTOPHER

Friends?

DEVAN

Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER

Uh huh. I bet.

DEVAN

You see sex everywhere.

CHRISTOPHER

In a perfect world.

DEVAN

That's incest. We're brothers.

CHRISTOPHER

Brothers? Uh huh. Well this must be Phillie.

DEVAN

Stop it.

(To Greg)

Would you get me a drink? I guess I dropped mine.

GREG

Yeah, on me. Okay. I'll be right back.

Greg gets up and heads into the bar. There is soft circuit music playing again.

DEVAN

Why are you being such a bitch?

CHRISTOPHER

I'm being a bitch? Miss Thang, *you* are the bitch. He's following you like a puppy waiting for scraps and you're stringing him along. And I'm the bitch?

DEVAN

I am not.

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, you are.

(Imitating Devan)

"Would you get me a drink?" I bet he's paying for it, too.

DEVAN

We're alternating rounds.

CHRISTOPHER

Uh huh.

DEVAN

Stop it already. The devil everywhere you look.

CHRISTOPHER

No, not the devil, just heartbreak. Greg's in love with you. He has been for years. My God, I thought he would pop a boner right there when you told us about Marcus. And for two years...

(Beat)

...no, three years. Yeah, three years and you're still stringing him along. Have you two even fucked?

DEVAN

Stop it. It's not like that.

CHRISTOPHER

Because you don't want it or he doesn't it?

DEVAN

Because we're not like that.

CHRISTOPHER

Just answer me this, you do know he loves you right?

(Beat)

Right?

DEVAN

Stop it.

CHRISTOPHER

Right?

DEVAN

(Angrily)

Yes. Yes. Yes, I know he's in love with me.

CHRISTOPHER

And do you love him?

(Beat)

DEVAN

No.

CHRISTOPHER

Then why are you stringing him along?

DEVAN

I am not.

(Beat)

CHRISTOPHER

Listen, I don't mean to piss you off, my God you can't even look at me, but come on. You're not fooling anyone. Much less yourself. When I look at you two, all I see is heartbreak. You're breaking his heart because someone broke yours.

DEVAN

I never told him we were together.

CHRISTOPHER

You didn't have to. You let him in.

DEVAN

We're friends.

CHRISTOPHER

But heartbreak goes beyond brotherhood. It's been three years since Marcus and you're hanging on to brotherhood. Honey, let it go. Let go of all of that. All of that stuff that binds us together. Let go of all that past. All of who we were once.

DEVAN

I can't.

CHRISTOPHER

Yes, you can.

DEVAN

No, I can't.

CHRISTOPHER

And why not?

DEVAN

Because I don't want to.

CHRISTOPHER

Want and can't are two different things.

DEVAN

Yeah, but I can't. Because, then, who am I? Where did all of that work go? Where did we go? Where did I go?

CHRISTOPHER

Honey, I need you to listen to me very carefully. You are holding on to an identity that no longer exists. You're a new person. A whole new identity. Devan of yesteryear exists no more. Unless you want him to. But you need to take a long hard look at yourself in the mirror and think about what you're doing and who you've become.

The door UC opens and Greg stands in the doorway holding drinks.

FLIGHT

January 29, 2012. The "EXIT" sign is removed from the door UC. The lighting is that of an airport through the day. The red light is no longer flashing. A curtain (with flight arrivals) covers the chalkboard the same way the other did.

Devan is sitting at the table. He is looking into the distance. Marcus walks up with a bag.

DEVAN
(Not surprised)

What are you doing here?

MARCUS
You've been running. I came to find you.

DEVAN
How did you know I'd be here?

MARCUS
Your dad told me.

DEVAN
Judas. You give him a little bit of leeway and he's all in your business. It's too much sometimes. He even asked me to crochet.

MARCUS
Crochet? That's a bit much.

DEVAN
I'm telling you.
(Beat)
So why did you find me?

MARCUS
Because I still wanted to know.

DEVAN
Know what? If I still loved you? Are you going to get on your knees?

MARCUS
No. None of that And, I know you do.
(Beat)
I wanted to know if we were the same people.

DEVAN

Marcus, I don't have time for this.

Devan begins to gather his things as if to exit.

MARCUS

Don't. Please. Just listen.

Devan looks around and gestures for him to sit.

First, because I want to know that you've heard it, I'm sorry. I am.

DEVAN

(Beat)

Thank you.

MARCUS

Second, I know how angry you are at me. I'm angry at me. I know how terrible things have been for you. They've been the same for me. I woke up one day and looked at myself in the mirror and thought, "Who are you?"

DEVAN

This can't turn into a therapy session.

MARCUS

I know, I know. Just listen. I know we can't go back, but at least we can get closure. I mean, I also wanted to tell you how... well how I know we can't go back, but I know there's a part of you that wants us to work. I want us to work. The way we ended things was terrible. And I know that's my fault. I know that what I did was wrong. I should have never expected you to just accept all of that. And whatever I can do to make any of it better I will. Anything. Anything I can do so I can go back home with you...

Devan begins to pace.

DEVAN

Go back home? Where's home? I don't live in that apartment anymore. All my stuff's in boxes. I'm leaving. I'm leaving all of that behind me. Whatever we were is done. I think we've done enough damage on each other. I've done enough damage to everyone. I don't have any friends. Greg won't speak to me. Christopher's only up for a drink. So where's home? Is it where my heart's at? Because you took that with you a long time ago.

MARCUS

What I mean is we can start over.

DEVAN

And be what?

MARCUS

We're married, Devan. We can start over.

DEVAN

You're married.

(Beat)

You think that because a few states now let us get married, now that you can scream, "I'm a fag out loud in the army," we can just jump right back in? Is our love only viable if it's legal?

MARCUS

You're not being fair.

DEVAN

Maybe I'm not, but what do you want me to say?

MARCUS

Just think about it.

DEVAN

I think...

Devan says "I think..." very loud, but then takes a breath and sits. He looks off into the distance for a bit.

I think those two are fucked.

MARCUS

What?

DEVAN

(Pointing offstage)

Them. Those young gays over there.

MARCUS

How do you know they're gay?

DEVAN

Oh, they're gay. Look at his hair.

MARCUS

I can't tell.

DEVAN

I can. And they're on their first date.

MARCUS

How can you tell that?

DEVAN

They're trying too hard. And that one's laughing at everything he says. No one's that funny.

MARCUS

He's probably drinking a green tea with honey. That one's you right?

DEVAN

I doubt it. No one drinks those anymore. Everyone does espressos.

MARCUS

Everyone?

DEVAN

(Lifting his cup)

Everyone.

MARCUS

Well I see green tea with honey.

DEVAN

You're only seeing what you want to see.

MARCUS

So are you.

DEVAN

I think you're gonna be disappointed.

MARCUS

I'm used to it.

(Beat)

When I was out there, at war, I always saw what I wanted to see. I saw you. I had this habit of talking to you.

DEVAN

Me? Why not a camel?

MARCUS

It was a mirage. You see them everywhere. You see what you want to see. Water. Buildings. The enemy. Women. Food. You.

(Beat)

And the desert goes on forever. And it's so hot, and you see water everywhere, and you feel like this boat just floating. You're this one thing, stuck in this place that goes on forever.

DEVAN

A heterotopia.

MARCUS

What?

DEVAN

A heterotopia. A boat floating on the ocean. An entity all onto itself that means so many things, but also sits on this expanse that goes on eternally. A place that's neither here nor there, but is also physical.

MARCUS

You lost me.

DEVAN

Think of... think of a mirror. That moment when you see yourself. That instance. It's a place of otherness. You're both there and not there. You physically see yourself in the mirror, for that instant and then the reality of it is gone. It's some highbrow philosophy stuff. This guy name Foucault. I'm getting back into lit again.

MARCUS

You gave it up?

DEVAN

I gave everything up.

MARCUS

Well, it's good you're getting back into it. Didn't know there was highbrow mirror philosophy though.

DEVAN

No. It's just the idea he uses.

MARCUS

So, if that's in mirrors, is it like a mirage?

DEVAN

No, I don't think so. I think it has to be looking back. It has to be the same thing everywhere, but nowhere, or it becomes something else. I'm just getting into it.

MARCUS

How is a boat looking back?

DEVAN

The boat is both physical and abstract. The boat is actually a place, but it's not limited to that one place as it can forever float. But it's an abstract that makes us think about all of the places a boat is and can be.

Marcus is obviously not getting it.

(Pointing to the gay couple again)

It... It would be like them over there. If they were somehow us.

MARCUS

Which one's you?

DEVAN

The cute one.

MARCUS

But wouldn't he have to look back?

DEVAN

I guess you're right.

MARCUS

Oh, there he goes. Maybe he felt you staring.

Marcus waves.

DEVAN

What are you doing? Don't do that.

MARCUS

He seems nice. Now they're both staring. Wave.

DEVAN

Jesus.

MARCUS

Just wave.

Devan waves.

DEVAN

You happy now?

MARCUS

I'd be happy if you'd take me back?

DEVAN

Oh, Marcus it's not that easy.

MARCUS

It can be. And I remember you being pretty easy.

DEVAN

(Smiling)

You need to stop. You're not gonna win.

MARCUS

I knew I could get you to smile. And I think I am.

DEVAN

Marcus... I.

(Beat)

I want to go back. I do. I see you here and you're charming and I think: my God, I feel good. But...

MARCUS

But?

Devan stands and crosses to CL and stares out as if looking through a window.

DEVAN

We're not those people anymore. I just don't know. I mean... I'm trying to shut all that behind.

MARCUS

But you know you can't do that. It follows you. Everywhere. I'll follow you everywhere, because you followed me everywhere.

Until you didn't. But I'll forgive, because you'll forgive me. I mean, you did hurt me, too. Remember that?

DEVAN

I remember.

MARCUS

(Beat)

Looks like they're going. Wonder where to.

DEVAN

Maybe the moon. I hear it's nice this time of year.

MARCUS

(Waving)

Wave to them.

DEVAN

(Waving)

Oh, God.

MARCUS

I think they're going to a movie, and then they'll make wild passionate love. In their care, because they won't want to wait. Sound familiar?

DEVAN

They're... going to the clinic because he suspects he's cheating. Already.

MARCUS

Come on. Low blow. Try again.

DEVAN

They're going... to their car.

MARCUS

Weak.

DEVAN

They're going, home.

MARCUS

Home? And?

DEVAN

They're going to make dinner...

MARCUS

And?

DEVAN

They'll put on some light classical. No. Nina Simone.

MARCUS

Marvin Gaye.

DEVAN

Yeah. And then, after dinner, they'll go for a walk. Just to look around. They'll hold hands. And when the grocer at the corner sneers they'll kiss in front of him.

MARCUS

I've always hated that grocer.

DEVAN

He overcharges on peaches.

MARCUS

And?

DEVAN

And...

(Beat)

...when they get home, they dance until they find themselves in bed.

MARCUS

And in the morning I'll make breakfast.

DEVAN

No. Brunch. No one wakes up that early.

MARCUS

Okay, okay. Brunch. And us?

DEVAN

And us?

MARCUS

Where do we go?

(Beat)

DEVAN

Home.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

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