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in the crowding darkness

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

in

Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

by

Jeff Augustin

Committee in charge:
Naomi Iizuka, Chair
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Manuel Rotenberg

2014
The thesis of Jeff Augustin is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014
DEDICATION

To my mom, for carrying me through life.
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I am extremely grateful to all who have supported me throughout my training and thesis process. I would like to thank Dr. Clara Diaz and Carol Cecil for pushing me to pursue the arts. Dr. Luke Jorgensen and Dr. John Houchin for giving me the tools to be a well-rounded theatre artist. Dr. Scott Cummings for giving me a voice and literally telling me I should be a writer. For their constant support I would like to thank my colleagues Joshua Brody, David Bruin, Jenna Carino, Matthew Cullinan, Tom Dugdale, Meghan Hart, Dominique Hill, Kate Jopson, Sarah Lunnie, Michael Moran, Andrew Meuhlhausen, Patricia Noonan, and Daniel Maurice O’Brien.

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in the crowding darkness

by

Jeff Augustin

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Playwriting)

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Naomi Iizuka, Chair

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

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

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

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

The play should be performed without an intermission.

**Overlapping Dialogue:**
Gabriel’s line begins on Vaughn’s “or”

VAUGHN
You’re not having nightmares
or -

GABRIEL
No, I’m fine

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

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

VAUGHN

——

GABRIEL

——

VAUGHN

——

GABRIEL

——

(A beat)

GABRIEL

It’s not safe to keep your door unlocked.

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL

The front door was propped open

VAUGHN

Bad neighbors, I guess

(They watch each other)

GABRIEL

So which one am I?

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

Creep or person you don’t like?
VAUGHN

You choose.

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

GABRIEL

I ain’t going to hurt you.

VAUGHN

I know.

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

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL

Me too.

(A beat)

So you’re a smoker now?

(Remembering the cigarette…)

VAUGHN

Shit. Busted
(He throws it out the window)

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

VAUGHN
That was my last one. I’ve quit.

GABRIEL
You don’t have to for me

VAUGHN
Two years of slowly killing myself was enough

(A slight beat)
You must be tired.

(He takes off GABRIEL’s’ bag)

Sit.

(Leading him to the couch…)

Put your feet up.

GABRIEL
On your coffee table?

VAUGHN
This one time.

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

It’s strange

GABRIEL
You’ve put your feet up before

NO, being here.

VAUGHN
Two years is a long time.
GABRIEL
It all looks the same. I didn’t expect it to look the same.

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

GABRIEL
I guess.

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

GABRIEL
The art’s not that gay

VAUGHN
Really?

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

GABRIEL
Okay.

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

*Scandal?*

GABRIEL

VAUGHN
*Grey’s Anatomy* but smarter.

(GABRIEL laughs)

GABRIEL
Just as sexy?

VAUGHN
Sexier.

(A beat)

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

Wait

VAUGHN

Fuck

GABRIEL

What?

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

GABRIEL
Wait. Wait.
My sister cooks now?

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

(A slight beat)

In fact we should probably just get take out.

(GABRIEL laughs)

But you got to call her and let her know

GABRIEL
Why me?

VAUGHN
Cause she’ll rip me a new asshole.

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

VAUGHN
I think so too.

(A beat)

There’s this great new Thai place that –

(Catching himself…)

You hate Thai
GABRIEL
It’s fine.

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

GABRIEL
(Grabbing his arm)
I’m not hungry.

(A slight beat)
Not for that.

(He pulls VAUGHN in)
You look good. Real good.

VAUGHN
It’s the beard.

(GABRIEL smiles)
That is new.

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

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

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

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

That’s fine

VAUGHN

And you?

GABRIEL

The way you like it. Hairy

VAUGHN

Two hairy men.

(A slight beat)

Can that work?

GABRIEL

I hope so.

(A GABRIEL pulls him in towards him)

I need you.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

I’m here.

(GABRIEL holds him)

GABRIEL

You smell good, like I remember.

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

And you feel the same too

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

VAUGHN

(Touching his lip)

Shit.
(He’s bleeding)

GABRIEL
You’re still sweet. A little smoky, but sweet.

(He kisses him again)

GABRIEL
I love you.

(And again)

Do you love me?

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

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

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

GABRIEL
(Nothing in his soul wants to play…)
We don’t

CLARA
Cranium?

VAUGHN
I’d have to look for it

GABRIEL
Nope

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

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

DEREK
Watch a movie

VAUGHN
That’s a lovely idea.

CLARA
That’s boring

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

CLARA
What does that mean?

GABRIEL
That game of taboo we played the night before I left, Vaughn slapped Derek
JEAN
And you cried yourself to sleep. And y’all were on the same team.

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

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

GABRIEL
I do

CLARA
Fine.

(A slight beat)

But I get to pick the movie

VAUGHN
We’d love you to.

CLARA
Mmmmmmm.

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

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

GABRIEL
No, no, I like it. It’s –

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

(Shade to VAUGHN)

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

VAUGHN
Sorry, it’s been hectic week. I haven’t had a chance to make it to the grocery store
CLARA
It’s fine. I’m sure I can make him a sandwich. You got bread right? Everybody’s got bread.

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

CLARA
I know how to make a sandwich.

GABRIEL
You don’t have to make anything else

CLARA
You don’t have to eat something you don’t like.

JEAN
Clara, leave the man alone

CLARA
He’s not eating my food

GABRIEL
It’s good. I like it

CLARA
You don’t have to pretend –

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

CLARA
I swear to –

(Stops herself)

If she wasn’t my mama, I would –

(Biting her tongue)

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

(in an exaggerated Haitian dialect)

“I cook. Your food so nasty pig won’t eat. Let me cook.”
GABRIEL
The food is good

VAUGHN
And I made sure he saved room for dessert

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

Let me help you

Stay

DEREK
What’s for dessert?

CLARA
It’s a surprise

(She exits into the kitchen)

DEREK
(Referring to the food)
This is unfortunate

GABRIEL
It’s not that bad

(He lifts up an unidentifiable burnt piece of meat)

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

VAUGHN
Don’t be a jackass

DEREK
It’s making me nauseous

JEAN
No, he’s right. This is bad. Sometimes it’s fine, but this is just God awful
DEREK
You could’ve stopped this tragedy from happening.

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

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

VAUGHN
She can’t fuck up dessert

DEREK
She’s fucked everything else up, why stop now

GABRIEL
He might be right

(A slight beat)

DEREK
Do you have *The Way We Were*?

GABRIEL
Oh God

VAUGHN
I can’t. Not tonight.

JEAN
What?

VAUGHN
Derek made us watch that movie like twenty times in college

GABRIEL
During his infamous break up with Anthony Year.

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

(To DEREK)
Don’t be such a white homo, Barbara Streisand is not the be all end all
DEREK
I thought you’d appreciate *The Way We Were*. It’s about a love that blossoms after a man comes back from war

VAUGHN
That relationship didn’t end well Derek

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

GABRIEL
It has.

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

GABRIEL
Devouring?

VAUGHN
Derek

JEAN
Yeah, come on man

DEREK
What?

VAUGHN
That’s not suitable dinner conversation

DEREK
We’re all done suffering through Clara’s cooking right?

(CLARA enters)

CLARA
What about my cooking?

JEAN
It’s delicious babe

DEREK
Not more delicious than Gabe’s –
VAUGHN
Don’t

CLARA
What are you talking about?

JEAN
Unfortunately, Vaughn and Gabriel’s sex life

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

(searching for the word…can’t say penis or any version)

his thing in places it shouldn’t be.

VAUGHN
Shouldn’t be?

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

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

CLARA
First of all none of it’s nasty

JEAN
It’s pretty boring actually

CLARA
And secondly it’s more natural

Natural?

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL
We understand.
CLARA
I wasn’t trying to be —. I didn’t mean anything by it

VAUGHN
You never seem to

CLARA
What does that mean?

VAUGHN
Nothing

CLARA
No, go ahead

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN
Okay —

GABRIEL
Vaughn

VAUGHN
What?

CLARA
No, it’s okay

GABRIEL
No, no, he just needs some coffee

VAUGHN
I don’t need coffee

GABRIEL
You get cranky after dinner when you don’t have it

VAUGHN
I get cranky when you tell me what I need.

GABRIEL
I wasn’t trying to —
VAUGHN
You were

CLARA
Say what you got to say

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

VAUGHN
I was going to ask if anyone wanted more wine

(He goes to pour himself more wine.)

JEAN
(To CLARA)
Maybe it’s getting late

CLARA
We haven’t watched the movie yet

So do you have it?

DEREK
What?

GABRIEL

DEREK
The Way We Were

Let it go

VAUGHN

DEREK
Why can’t we watch it?

CLARA
Cause I get to choose the movie.

VAUGHN
Yeah, she gets to choose the movie

DEREK
But it’s so relevant to why we’re here
VAUGHN

It’s not actually

DEREK
(To VAUGHN)

It’s about war

Derek

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

DEREK

What? We’re not allowed to talk about Afghanistan?

VAUGHN

It’s a party.

DEREK

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

VAUGHN

Use your imagination

DEREK

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

VAUGHN

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

DEREK

He’s my best friend. I want to support him

VAUGHN

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

DEREK

I called.

VAUGHN

Once all week. Then yesterday non-stop, left like six voicemails.
DEREK
What you don’t like voicemails?

VAUGHN
No, you don’t. So why the sudden need to know?

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

VAUGHN
Look at him, he’s fine.

You don’t know that

VAUGHN
I do, I live with him.

DEREK
Then why not let him tell us

VAUGHN
Cause he doesn’t want to talk about it.

(Breaking in…)

GABRIEL
It’s the normalcy that gets to you.

(A slight beat)

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

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

(A beat)
DEREK
Are you okay? Emotionally?

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

(A beat)

JEAN
I respect what you’ve done

CLARA
We all do.

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

(They lift their glasses)

To Gabe, glad you’re not fucked up

VAUGHN
So eloquent

(They drink. A beat)

DEREK
Still going to try to save the world?

GABRIEL
What?

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

VAUGHN
He joined the Army

DEREK
Now he’s back. Still interested in that?

GABRIEL
Yeah.
DEREK
(To VAUGHN)
And you still support him?

VAUGHN

Of course

DEREK
So what’s the big plan then?

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

VAUGHN
Don’t worry about that right now.

CLARA
We were taught to work for our money.

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

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

JEAN
They’re hiring at the construction site

GABRIEL
We’ll see.

(Changing the subject)

Movie?

VAUGHN

Let’s get it over with.

DEREK
Actually I got to cut out

GABRIEL

The movie was your idea
CLARA
Could’ve played a game.

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

GABRIEL
Sorry to hear that. Wish you could stay longer.

DEREK
You’re not going to ask me to?

GABRIEL
You said you had to go.

DEREK
Sometimes a boy just wants to feel loved

GABRIEL
So you want me to beg?

DEREK
Yes

GABRIEL
Alright,

(A slight beat)

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

VAUGHN
Don’t be such a stereotype

DEREK
Really wish I could –

GABRIEL
Don’t leave me baby

DEREK
I’m sorry, I got all these damn interviews tomorrow
GABRIEL
What’s so fucking important about these interviews?

DEREK
Everything.

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

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

(A slight beat)

Wish we could clone you guys.

GABRIEL
You’d have to work with a Vaughn

DEREK
Vaughn and I would work well together

VAUGHN
Would we?

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

VAUGHN
Me.

DEREK
Seriously though. You guys should meet with us.

What?

GABRIEL
Absolutely, not.

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

(To GABRIEL)

You could be synonymous with gay marriage

GABRIEL
You really think we could do it?

VAUGHN

Gabriel

DEREK
You’d be perfect

CLARA
(Don’t know if I’d say…)
Perfect?

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

GABRIEL
You talked about us?

DEREK
Of course

VAUGHN
You had no right to do that.

DEREK
You just came up yesterday

VAUGHN
That’s why you kept calling
DEREK
I was just trying to explain to folk what we’re looking for and my boss ran with it. He’ll kill me if you guys don’t come in.

GABRIEL
I don’t know

VAUGHN
You’re going to have to lose your job

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

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

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

CLARA
About what? You don’t want to get married. You “ain’t that gay.” That’s what you told mama and papa.

VAUGHN
You did?

GABRIEL
I never said it like that.

CLARA
You must’ve lost your memory in the war.

VAUGHN
How did you say it?

GABRIEL
She’s not explaining the full situation.
VAUGHN
(To GABRIEL)
Go ahead

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

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

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

VAUGHN
He did.

JEAN
VAUGHN
GABRIEL
Clara you should keep —— ——
your thoughts to yourself

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

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

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

GABRIEL
You don’t have to worry about me

CLARA
Don’t I?

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

CLARA
What the hell does that mean?
JEAN
That things are different, we got a black president.

CLARA
Ain’t nothing’s change fool

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

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

DEREK
“Their people?” “Our People?”

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

DEREK
It was a joke.

CLARA
Joke about it again, see what happens.

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

JEAN
Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.

VAUGHN
What community?

GABRIEL
What?

VAUGHN
Earlier Derek said reach a community they never have before

DEREK
You know, the right wing conservative community

VAUGHN
And Black?
DEREK

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

GABRIEL
I don’t understand

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

DEREK
That’s not why

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

DEREK
Whoa, I never said it like that

VAUGHN
I’m paraphrasing.

DEREK
And you set me straight on the issue.

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

DEREK
That’s ignorant.

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

DEREK
That is not what I’m doing

VAUGHN
Then tell me what you’re doing?
DEREK
I shouldn’t have to explain. You know me, you know –

VAUGHN
That you’re a liar.

DEREK
Don’t call me a liar, I’m not a liar

VAUGHN
Then tell the fucking truth.

DEREK
I am.

VAUGHN
You’re such a fucking little punk.

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

(A beat)

Is something fucking burning?

CLARA
Goddamn it.

(To God)

Sorry Lord.

(To God)

Sorry Lord.

(She heads for the door)

The fucking pies

(She exits. They fall into a silence.)

GABRIEL
We will
DEREK

What?

GABRIEL

Think about it.

(A beat. Lights fade.)
Scene Three

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

CLARA
The kitchen is all cleaned up.

GABRIEL
Thanks

(A beat)

CLARA
I’m sorry about earlier

GABRIEL
I know

CLARA
I got a little carried away.

GABRIEL
We all did. It’s okay.

(A beat)

CLARA
Dinner was delicious

GABRIEL
No it wasn’t. But thank you.

(CLARA and GABRIEL smile at each other)

GABRIEL
You know I love you

CLARA
I know. And I love you.
They hug.)

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

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

CLARA
Yeah?

GABRIEL
Yeah

(He grabs her, twirls her, dips her)

CLARA
I’m trying a new diet

GABRIEL
It’s working.

(He lifts her back up)

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

(CLARA laughs)

CLARA
You are still a silly mother beep

(They smile together. They fall into a silence)

GABRIEL
Do I seem different to you?

CLARA
Bigger

GABRIEL
More than physically…like I don’t know. Spiritually or something

CLARA
Umm

(A slight beat)
CLARA
No, I don’t think so. Why?

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

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

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

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

GABRIEL
I’m not golden, don’t call me that

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

GABRIEL
They love us both

CLARA
One more than the other

GABRIEL
Equally

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

GABRIEL
You will

CLARA
I hope so.
GABRIEL
And you’re going to be great at it. Better than mom was

(She smiles)

CLARA
And Jean would be a better father than dad

(They both smile)

GABRIEL
Have you and Jean gotten better?

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

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

(A beat)

CLARA
So you’re actually thinking about doing the campaign?

GABRIEL
Let’s not talk about that.

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

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

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

(Entering...)
VAUGHN
Is she gone –

(Noticing her…)

CLARA
She’s leaving now.

(Turning back to GABRIEL)

Glad you’re back.

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

GABRIEL
(Telling her to say bye to VAUGHN…)

Clara

GABRIEL
(Say it)

CLARA
(Do I have to?)

(Without looking at VAUGHN…)

CLARA
Bye.

(She exits.)

GABRIEL
You got to try harder

VAUGHN
So does she.

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

VAUGHN
Being Haitian is not an excuse.

GABRIEL
She’s getting used to it. They’re all getting used to it.
VAUGHN
Eight years, Gabriel. You’ve been out for eight years.

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

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

GABRIEL
They way you do with your parents?

VAUGHN
My parents like you.

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

VAUGHN
My family is not ignorant

GABRIEL
Oh, and mine is?

VAUGHN
That’s not what I’m saying.

GABRIEL
It sounds like you are.

(A beat)

VAUGHN
Tell her I’m sorry. Blame the wine

GABRIEL
You’re not drunk

VAUGHN
She doesn’t know that.

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

(catching himself…)

Sorry.

(But not being able to control himself…)

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

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

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

GABRIEL
I’m sure he’s in a crunch

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

GABRIEL
Give him a break

VAUGHN
Be on my side on this one

GABRIEL
I’m always on your side.

VAUGHN
It doesn’t feel like it right now

GABRIEL
You’re right. I’m sorry.

(A slight beat)

He could’ve found a better time.
VAUGHN
Thank you.

(He kisses him.)

GABRIEL
Would you like a drink?

VAUGHN
Hell yeah

(He goes to pour him wine)

No, whiskey. The good shit.

GABRIEL
Alright.

(He pours him some whiskey)

Here you go.

VAUGHN
Thanks.

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

GABRIEL
You want to get married right?

VAUGHN
I did.

GABRIEL
You don’t anymore?

VAUGHN
You didn’t

GABRIEL
But that’s what you wanted?

VAUGHN
It was.
(A beat)

GABRIEL
We should do it

VAUGHN
What?

GABRIEL
Get married.

VAUGHN
You’re asking me to marry you?

GABRIEL
Yes

VAUGHN
Why?

GABRIEL
Cause I love you

VAUGHN
Did you not love me before?

GABRIEL
I’ve always loved you

VAUGHN
What’s changed?

GABRIEL
Nothing

VAUGHN
Nothing?

GABRIEL
I just want to spend my life with you

VAUGHN
Is it cause you want to be the gay Barack and Michelle?
GABRIEL
No.

VAUGHN
It seems a little convenient doesn’t it?

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

VAUGHN
And there it is

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

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

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

VAUGHN
Then you shouldn’t have left.

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

VAUGHN
I was doing all I could to make you happy.

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

We don’t know that yet

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

Do you still love me?

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

Did you?

____

Did you?

____

(A beat. Something in GABRIEL breaks)

I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

(He continues to break)

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

(GABRIEL breaks down further. To see such a large man breakdown is alarming and uneasy.)
GABRIEL
I’m sorry I ruined it. I ruined us. I just wanted to be a man worth your love. To give you what you’ve given me. To take care of you, to be strong for you.

(VAUGHN goes to him, holds him.)

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

(A beat)
I’m sorry.

I was angry then lonely. And –

(A beat)
You didn’t ruin us. We’re not ruined. We’re going to be fine. We’re going to be fine.

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

GABRIEL
Can I do this?

VAUGHN
Yes.

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

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

(VAUGHN nods)

GABRIEL
Say it

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

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

GABRIEL

Are you okay?

VAUGHN

Yeah, yeah I’m fine. Did I wake you?

GABRIEL

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

(GABRIEL smiles)

VAUGHN

Good. You should go back to bed

(Extending his hand)

GABRIEL

Why don’t you join me?

VAUGHN

I’m a little sore right now.

GABRIEL

No, I didn’t mean –. Not like that.

(A slight beat)

GABRIEL

Did I hurt you?

VAUGHN

I’m sorry if –

No, no. You didn’t

GABRIEL

I know I got a little carried away
VAUGHN
No, no really. You were good. Great.

GABRIEL

(A beat)

GABRIEL
What’s keeping you up?

VAUGHN
Work on my dissertation.

GABRIEL
It’s late.

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

GABRIEL
What is it?

VAUGHN
It’ll bore you

GABRIEL
Langston could never bore me

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

GABRIEL
I don’t know Brooks

VAUGHN
She was very sassy

GABRIEL
What is it about her poetry?
VAUGHN

Do I need any other reason?

GABRIEL

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

(A slight beat)

Tell me and to bed I’ll go.

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Have you heard of Bronzeville?

GABRIEL

Yeah, it’s on the South Side.

VAUGHN

Gwendolyn’s first collection,

(He throws the book to GABRIEL)

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

GABRIEL

You went to the South Side?

Yeah

VAUGHN

Alone?

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN
I developed a nerve.

GABRIEL
And you felt safe?

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

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

(A slight beat)

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

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

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

(GABRIEL points to the book near VAUGHN)

GABRIEL
Can you read me a poem?
VAUGHN
I should get back to work

GABRIEL
Right, sorry.

(GABRIEL gives him back the book)

How much longer do you think you’ll be?

(A slight beat)

I don’t want to sleep alone

VAUGHN
You won’t. I won’t be too long.

GABRIEL
Okay

(GABRIEL starts heading back. He stops.)

GABRIEL
It’s not the campaign, keeping you up?

VAUGHN
It’s what we need, right?

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

VAUGHN
Then I’m on board, let’s do it.

GABRIEL
Good.

(A beat)

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

VAUGHN
It will
GABRIEL

We need to be –

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL

Okay.

(A beat)

Oh, we should make it official.

VAUGHN

What?

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

GABRIEL

It’s just my pinky ring.

VAUGHN

No, no, it’s sweet.

(He goes down on one knee)

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN

I do.

(corrects himself)

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

(He laughs/smiles at himself)

Yes, I’ll marry you.

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

You can be baby spoon
GABRIEL
I wouldn’t sleep any other way

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

VAUGHN

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

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

ALI

Hey.

VAUGHN

Hey.

VAUGHN

ALI

Do you want to come in?

VAUGHN

Only for a minute

(VAUGHN enters. ALI shuts the door.)

I just needed to give you this.

(He pulls the book from his jacket pocket)

ALI

What is it?

VAUGHN

_A Street in Bronzeville._ You can have it

ALI

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

VAUGHN

I’ve memorized them.

ALI

You’ve memorized all these poems?
VAUGHN
My favorites. The others I can find online or something.

ALI
Are you okay?

VAUGHN
Yeah, yeah. I’m good.

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

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

VAUGHN
I can’t stay

ALI
You sure?

ALI
VAUGHN

VAUGHN
Some Hawaiian Punch, thanks.

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

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

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

VAUGHN
How have you been?

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

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

VAUGHN
Those boys really respond to you though

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

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

ALI
He killed a kid today.

VAUGHN
What?

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

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

VAUGHN
What’s going to happen to him?

ALI
Cook County.

(A slight beat)
VAUGHN
I’m sorry

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

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

Congratulations.

VAUGHN
For what?

ALI
The ring.

(A slight beat)

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

VAUGHN
You’ve been worried?

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

VAUGHN
My boyfriend just –

(Realizing…)

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

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

ALI
I guess you have a thing for soldiers

VAUGHN
I guess I do.

(A beat)
VAUGHN
But, he just proposed. Tonight.

ALI
Tonight?

VAUGHN
Yeah, tonight.

(A slight beat)

ALI
If you’re here –

VAUGHN
You got Hawaiian stach

ALI
What?

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

ALI
——

VAUGHN
——

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

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

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

VAUGHN
I should get going

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

ALI
You don’t have to go yet.

VAUGHN
I do
ALI
At least let me walk you to the station. It’s late.

VAUGHN
I got a cab waiting.

ALI
You got a cab to drive you here past sunset?

VAUGHN
I promised him a big tip.

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

VAUGHN
I doubt they do.

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

VAUGHN
Poeticized?

ALI
They may not have said poeticized.

(VAUGHN smiles lightly.)

VAUGHN
Take care of yourself Ali.

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

ALI
You too.

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

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

GABRIEL

I got all the books.

(Pulls from a shelf…)

DEREK

Larry Kramer’s Faggots?

GABRIEL

Sorry, I missed that

DEREK

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

GABRIEL

Vaughn doesn’t read self-hate

DEREK

There are a lot of negative gay stereotypes in here.

GABRIEL

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

DEREK

We’re here to talk about everything.

(A slight beat)

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

Church?

DEREK

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

(A slight beat)

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

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

GABRIEL

Alright, is the place perfect now?

DEREK

Almost. You’re just missing one thing

GABRIEL

What’s that?

DEREK

Vaughn. Where the hell is he?

GABRIEL

He’ll be here soon.

DEREK

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

GABRIEL

They need to be put at ease?

DEREK

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

GABRIEL

We know. He just needed to grab something.

DEREK

What?

(GABRIEL pulls out his phone)
GABRIEL
I don’t know. A book from school, I think.

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

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

DEREK
You don’t know where he is?

GABRIEL
He says he’ll be here soon.

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

He’s here

VAUGHN
Wow. This place looks –

GABRIEL
Good?

VAUGHN
Different. But good.

(He kisses GABRIEL)

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

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

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

VAUGHN
I’m here, no harm done right?
DEREK
If you’re having second thoughts now is the time to express them.

GABRIEL
Derek

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

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

GABRIEL
We know and we appreciate all you’ve done.

VAUGHN
Derek, chill out, it’s going to be fine.

(Noticing GABRIEL’S tie, pointing)
What is that?

GABRIEL
What?

VAUGHN
You’re wearing a bowtie

GABRIEL
So?

VAUGHN
You don’t look good in bowties.

GABRIEL
I don’t?

VAUGHN
No, you don’t.

(He starts untying)
DEREK
We don’t have time for this

VAUGHN
I got it

(VAUGHN exits to the bedroom)

DEREK
Are you guys ready for this?

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

DEREK
I’m not asking just about the campaign

We’re fine.

(A beat)

DEREK
You know I’ve been thinking a lot.

About what?

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

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

GABRIEL
I know and I really appreciate the care, but everything is fine. Vaughn and I are happy, happy for the first time in a long time. Working on this campaign has really settled us.
DEREK
That’s good. Really good to hear.

(A slight beat)
Vaughn has always had a grounding effect on you.

GABRIEL
So I’m emotionally unbalanced

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

(VAUGHN enters. Holding up a tie.)
VAUGHN
This is the one.

(He goes to GABRIEL) During the following he undoes GABRIEL’S bowtie and ties the tie for him.)
So do we pass the inspection?

DEREK
Now that you’re here, yes.

VAUGHN
Is there anything else we need to know?

DEREK
Just be yourselves. Be cute, be funny –

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

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

(The buzzer goes off)

DEREK
That’s them.
(DEREK buzzes them up. A beat)

By the way, how intimate is this engagement dinner?

   VAUGHN
Why?

   DEREK
I was thinking about bringing a friend?

   GABRIEL
A friend?

   DEREK
A guy

   GABRIEL
You’ve never introduced us to a guy

   DEREK
I’ve introduced you to men I’m seeing

   VAUGHN
You’ve introduced us to men you’re fucking

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

   VAUGHN
Have you ever dated a white guy?

   DEREK
They’re not as much fun.

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

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

   (The doorbell rings.)

   DEREK
Ready?
GABRIEL

Absolutely

(A slight beat)

VAUGHN

Yes

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

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

GABRIEL
What are you doing?

VAUGHN
Just pacing. That was pretty intense wasn’t it?

GABRIEL
It was a little bit.

VAUGHN
A prostate exam is less invasive.

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

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

GABRIEL
It was more personal

VAUGHN
Was it?

GABRIEL
What would you call it?

VAUGHN
Not that.

(VAUGHN pours himself a drink)

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

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

VAUGHN
I don’t know how to take that

GABRIEL
You can’t help it, it’s your face.

VAUGHN
My face?

GABRIEL
Your neutral face, it’s bitchy. It reads “I hate you and your parents for making you”

(GABRIEL does an impression. VAUGHN is not amused)

Come on. You know it does.

(He playfully goes to VAUGHN.)

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

VAUGHN
Yours isn’t better.

GABRIEL
My face at rest is a smile

VAUGHN
A minstrel smile

(He does a grotesque/hurtful impression. It’s like a minstrel character. He even uses a dialect associated with slaves.)

“I’ll smile wide”

(He smiles wide)

“I’ll jive”
(He does a little jig)

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

(A beat)

GABRIEL
Are you okay?

VAUGHN
I’m fine

GABRIEL
Something’s obviously bothering you

VAUGHN
It’s nothing

GABRIEL
Then why are you acting all uppity?

VAUGHN
Uppity?

GABRIEL
Yes

(A beat)

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

GABRIEL
I don’t do that

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

GABRIEL
You don’t like PDA

VAUGHN
It didn’t stop you this afternoon.
GABRIEL
Is that what this is about? I was myself, a slight exaggeration maybe –

VAUGHN
More than an exaggeration.

(A slight beat)

Since when have you wanted kids?

GABRIEL
What?

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

GABRIEL
So?

VAUGHN
We hate kids. Always said we’d make horrible parents.

GABRIEL
We’re young. We don’t know.

VAUGHN
I know I’d fuck kids up.

(A slight beat)

And church? The idea of God angers you.

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

VAUGHN
I’m glad you found something in war.

GABRIEL
And being a cold bitch is better? Having a family who prefers not dealing with you and having no friends is better?
VAUGHN
At least my family knows who I am. It must be maddening having to find the right words, the right smile. Having to pretend to be happy all the time. I could barely do it for one afternoon.

(A beat)

GABRIEL
Are you not happy?

VAUGHN
What does happy even mean?

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

Are you?

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

VAUGHN
——

GABRIEL
Answer me. Cause if you don’t answer me

(He tries to hold himself together)

My life will break.

VAUGHN
Yes. Yes you make me happy.

GABRIEL
——

VAUGHN
——

GABRIEL
——

VAUGHN
——

Sorry. I’ve just been under a lot of stress. Trying to finish my dissertation, this campaign thing. It’s been a lot.
(A beat)

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

VAUGHN
No, no I want to do it.

(A beat)

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

(A beat)

GABRIEL
Go for it

VAUGHN
What?

GABRIEL
Your cigarettes

VAUGHN
You know?

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

(A beat)

Go ahead. I know it’s what you want.

VAUGHN
I’m out.

(They stare at each other. The darkness crowds in.)
Scene Eight
(ALI’S Apartment. The next day. ALI and VAUGHN stand watching each other.)

ALI
You look – I’ve never seen you dressed like this

VAUGHN
Too much?

ALI
No, it’s different. I miss the beard.

VAUGHN
I know.

ALI
But you do look nice

VAUGHN
Thanks. But I guess I’m not really passing today

ALI
Have you ever?

VAUGHN
What?

ALI
You think you can pass for straight?

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

ALI
Maybe if you’ve never seen a homosexual

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

ALI
Were these women white?
VAUGHN
What?

ALI
Were they white?

VAUGHN
I don’t know

(A slight beat)
I guess. Why?

ALI
Whites detect gays very differently than blacks do

VAUGHN
I don’t think that’s true

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

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

(ALI laughs, allowing VAUGHN to smile)

ALI
It’s good to see you

VAUGHN
You too

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

VAUGHN
It was supposed to be.
(A slight beat)

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

(A beat. Referring to them…)

How do you know you can’t do this?

(A beat)

ALI
Do you know how you got my interest?

VAUGHN
Ali –

ALI
Your smile

(A slight beat)

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

(A beat)

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

VAUGHN
But you don’t love me?

ALI
Does it matter?

VAUGHN
Yes
I want you.

VAUGHN

Why can’t you love me?

ALI

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

VAUGHN

You could

ALI

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

VAUGHN

You haven’t tried.

ALI

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

VAUGHN

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

ALI

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

VAUGHN

I can’t accept that.

ALI

You got to. You have no choice.

(A beat)

I’m sorry.

VAUGHN

___

ALI

___

VAUGHN

___

ALI

___

(A silence. VAUGHN gathers himself and heads for the exit.)
ALI
I finished *A Street in Bronzeville*.

VAUGHN
Yeah? What’d you think?

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

VAUGHN
What was your favorite poem?

ALI
The first one. What’s it called?

VAUGHN
The old-marrieds.

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

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

VAUGHN

You don’t have to help

JULIAN

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

VAUGHN

We’re glad to have you

JULIAN

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

VAUGHN

Don’t be. Really, it’s fine.

JULIAN

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

VAUGHN

Occupying Derek’s time is gift enough.

(A beat)

JULIAN

You don’t remember me do you?

VAUGHN

Sorry, have we met before?

JULIAN

I was in the course you TA’ed in the spring, The Spirit of the Harlem Renaissance
VAUGHN
Oh God, I’m sorry. I’m so embarrassed now. It was such a large class, it was hard to
get to know everyone. But you do look familiar

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

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

JULIAN
No, not really. There’s like only a handful.

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

GABRIEL
My parents are gone.

(Grabbing a bottle of whiskey) 

Time to get Helen Keller up in here!

(He starts pouring whiskey in glasses)

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

DEREK
Julian

JULIAN
I believe in speaking the truth

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

JULIAN
Why stay together? Divorce is so vogue
CLARA
They believe in the vows they’ve made

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

(To VAUGHN)
But, babe they told me to thank you for a wonderful evening.

Lies

VAUGHN

GABRIEL
They had a great time.

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

JEAN
Hey

VAUGHN
Sorry, forgot you were here.

JEAN
I’m a great son-in-law

GABRIEL
Why are you sitting in the corner?

CLARA
Are you licking that plate?

JEAN
No

CLARA
You never lick the plate when I cook

JEAN
I don’t let you see me doing it.
CLARA

Mmmmmmmmm

(He kisses her)

GABRIEL
(To VAUGHN)

My mom did say you were a great cook

JULIAN

You cooked all of this?

VAUGHN

Yeah

JULIAN

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

VAUGHN

Cooking relaxes me

JULIAN

There are better ways to relax

(He kisses DEREK while caressing his crotch)

GABRIEL

So Julian what are you studying?

JULIAN

Poli-sci with a minor in English

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN

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

JULIAN

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

VAUGHN

Did I?
JULIAN
Well, you seemed distracted

VAUGHN
I thought I made you want to minor in English

JULIAN
The course material was really interesting

(Before VAUGHN can retort, GABRIEL jumps in)

GABRIEL
So what year are you?

JULIAN
A sophomore

CLARA
You’re a young one

JULIAN
I don’t think I am emotionally

DEREK
It’s true, he’s not

VAUGHN
And you’re a great judge of that

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

JULIAN
Yeah, he’s weird

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

(with an exaggerated Texan accent/demeanor)

“Do NOT be white bread with may-o-naise”
GABRIEL
What the fuck does that mean?

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

JEAN
Good for him

VAUGHN
(Referring to JEAN’S plate…)
Are you done licking that?

(He licks it one last time)

JEAN
Now I am

(He hands the plate to VAUGHN)

GABRIEL
(To VAUGHN)
No, no, no.

(Knocking the plate down to the ground…)

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

CLARA
(To JEAN)
It’s getting late we should go

JEAN
No, I want to drink and…

(Slipping into song without a missing a beat)

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

CLARA
You’re not the one who has to drive

GABRIEL
No one’s going anywhere, the party is just getting started
JEAN
You heard the man

VAUGHN
(To GABRIEL)
Don’t hold anyone hostage

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

Stop. I need to clean

(GABRIEL pulls him into a waltz)

JEAN
This is so gay

CLARA
Jean

DEREK
No it’s pretty gay

JEAN
Not cause they’re gay.

JULIAN
(To DEREK)
Do you want to dance?

DEREK
The last time we danced you laughed at me

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

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

VAUGHN
Okay, that’s enough dancing

GABRIEL
No wait. Look, a full moon.
(They all look out the window)

GABRIEL
Everyone knows full moons are when good things happen

VAUGHN
Only you think that

GABRIEL
It was a full moon the night we moved in

VAUGHN
I try to block out that tragedy of a day

GABRIEL
It turned into a good night

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

GABRIEL
I’ve never had problems before

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

GABRIEL
We got the truck.

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

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

VAUGHN
I forgot about that.
(A beat)

VAUGHN
We got so energetic after that

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

VAUGHN
It was a really good night

GABRIEL
It was the perfect beginning to our new life together.

(A moment)

JULIAN
Ugh, I want that

DEREK
You do?

JULIAN
Yes! I’ve been wanting that since I was fourteen

DEREK
Fourteen?

CLARA
How could you know you were gay at fourteen?

JULIAN
I just did

JEAN
Different generation

JULIAN
I think we’re the same generation

JEAN
These days every four years is a different generation.

VAUGHN
The world is ever evolving
DEREK
That’s our next video

CLARA
Video?

GABRIEL
What is?

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

JULIAN
No

GABRIEL
So they liked our first one?

CLARA
What are these videos?

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

GABRIEL
It’s a go?

DEREK
Yeah, no turning back now

GABRIEL
(To VAUGHN)
It’s a go!

Congratulations

GABRIEL
Excited?

VAUGHN
Of course, it’s the life we’ve chosen for ourselves.
CLARA
Wait, wait. You’re doing the campaign?

GABRIEL
Yes

VAUGHN
You haven’t told your family?

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

Vaughn

CLARA
Do mama and papa know?

GABRIEL
Not yet

CLARA
Are you stupid?

JEAN
Clara

CLARA
You said you were thinking about it

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

JEAN
It is

CLARA
You should’ve talked to us first. This affects us

GABRIEL
It shouldn’t

DEREK
It won’t
CLARA (To VAUGHN)
And you? You’re letting him do this?

VAUGHN
Let? We both want to do it.

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

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

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

VAUGHN
Excuse me?

JEAN
Clara please stop

GABRIEL
She didn’t mean it like that

VAUGHN
How did she mean it?

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

VAUGHN
That’s not what she meant.

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

(A beat)

DEREK
What?

JULIAN
What?
VAUGHN
It’s not a religion it doesn’t require faith. It exists.

GABRIEL
I thought you said you wanted what we have?

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

DEREK
What kind of homo are you?

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

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

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

DEREK
So you just want to fuck everything with a penis

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

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

GABRIEL
That’s not why we’re getting married

CLARA
Well it feels like that’s the purpose of this union

VAUGHN
Why do you keep saying it like that?

CLARA
Like what?
VAUGHN
“Union.” Like it’s a plague or something.

CLARA
Frankly –

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

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

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

CLARA
(To GABRIEL)
You shouldn’t get married

VAUGHN
I’m sorry did you –

GABRIEL
Gays? Or me and Vaughn?

CLARA
Tell me why you deserve to

GABRIEL
Deserve to? We have the right.

CLARA
Not gays. You. I’m talking about you.

GABRIEL
Cause I love him

CLARA
Bullshit.

GABRIEL
I’m not listening to a woman whose marriage is a joke.
JEAN
Whoa –

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

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

CLARA
I got married cause I was actually in love.

GABRIEL
You got married so mama and papa would love you.

CLARA
And you’re getting married cause you’re tired of being nothing.

(A beat)

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

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

GABRIEL
Get out. Get the fuck out of my apartment.

CLARA
Happily.

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

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

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

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

GABRIEL
(Off-Stage)

VAUGHN

Just one more minute.

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

Alright

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

Watch your step

(He lead him down)

There you go.

GABRIEL

You know I hate the dark

VAUGHN

We’re almost there. Last step

(He takes him to the couch)

Sit.

(GABRIEL does. VAUGHN takes off the blindfold)

Tada!

(GABRIEL takes it in.)

I thought we should make an event of it.

(A beat)
GABRIEL
It’s been a while since we’ve made an event of anything.

VAUGHN
I know.

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

GABRIEL
Derek said it’s real good

VAUGHN
I’m pretty sure he has to say that.

(A slight beat)
But anyway, I thought it might be good to try to be more like we were.

GABRIEL
That’d be nice

(A beat)
I love you.

(GABRIEL kisses him.)

Okay shall we

(He goes and grabs VAUGHN’S laptop off the desk)
Derek has been texting me non-stop. Apparently everyone there is loving it. In the past two hours it’s already got over a thousand views. He’s sure it’ll be all over Facebook by the morning.

VAUGHN
Can we take a moment to toast or celebrate or just be?
GABRIEL
Yeah, of course, sorry. Just excited

(He lifts his glass, VAUGHN follows)

Would you like to do the honors beautiful?

VAUGHN
To us

GABRIEL
To us

(They clink glasses)

And to the campaign

(They drink)

Ready?

VAUGHN
I guess

GABRIEL
You nervous?

VAUGHN
A little bit

GABRIEL
Don’t be. We’re going to be great.

(As he loads the video…)

GABRIEL
Did I tell you that Derek joined Match.com

VAUGHN
So it didn’t work out with Julián? Tragic.

GABRIEL
He’s decided it’s time to date men his age
VAUGHN
It’s sad he didn’t figure that out earlier.

GABRIEL
Okay, it’s loaded.

VAUGHN
Let’s do this.

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

VAUGHN
We look so happy

GABRIEL
We are

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

GABRIEL
Come back, you’re missing the best part.

VAUGHN

GABRIEL
Vaughn

VAUGHN

GABRIEL
Vaughn?

(A slight beat)

Are you okay?

VAUGHN
No.
(A beat)

VAUGHN

I don’t see it.

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

What everyone else does.

GABRIEL

What are you talking about?

VAUGHN

But what they see is an idea

GABRIEL

Vaughn

VAUGHN

We shouldn’t get married

GABRIEL

What?

VAUGHN

We shouldn’t be together.

GABRIEL

What is happening?

VAUGHN

Tell me why we should.

GABRIEL

Cause we love each other

VAUGHN

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

GABRIEL

Is that what this is about? You don’t have to be jealous –
VAUGHN
No, that’s not what I’m saying

DEREK
He and I are wrong for each other

VAUGHN
And so are we

GABRIEL
Let’s just stop and –

VAUGHN
Aren’t you tired?

GABRIEL
Of what?

VAUGHN
Pretending.

GABRIEL
I’m not pretending

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

GABRIEL
All I want is you in my life

VAUGHN
That’s not enough

GABRIEL
There’s nothing wrong with us

VAUGHN
Everything is wrong with us.

GABRIEL
We need more time.

VAUGHN
Time was what we had two years ago. Time is what we had before you left.
GABRIEL
You’re not trying hard enough

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

GABRIEL
All I’ve been doing –

VAUGHN
Is trying to make us something we’re not.

GABRIEL
(Pointing to the video)
Look at us. We’re happy

VAUGHN
That’s a lie

GABRIEL
It doesn’t have to be

VAUGHN
We can’t go back. We can’t erase the past two years.

GABRIEL
So this is about him

VAUGHN
Who?

GABRIEL
The guy you were fucking

VAUGHN
You’re not listening

GABRIEL
Or still fucking

VAUGHN
We’re broken

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

Cause you left for war

GABRIEL

This has nothing to do with the fucking war. This about you, this about him

This is about us

VAUGHN

Bullshit

GABRIEL

I’ve changed

VAUGHN

He must be good

GABRIEL

You’ve changed

VAUGHN

Better than me

GABRIEL

Stop and fucking listen

VAUGHN

I am. You want to be with him

VAUGHN

No, I’m not saying –

GABRIEL

Are you there when you fuck him?

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

You don’t think I’ve noticed how you’re not here when we have sex. It’s like fucking a corpse.
VAUGHN
Cause fucking you hurts. You came back with shit. You take every ounce of your violence out on my body. You pound away until I bleed

GABRIEL
It’s what a whore deserves

VAUGHN
If you hadn’t left me –

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

VAUGHN
Well I don’t fucking love you anymore, you fucking idiot.

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

I can’t.

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

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

VAUGHN

Here it is

(VAUGHN puts down the box)

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN

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

(A beat)

GABRIEL

So, how have you been –

VAUGHN

What are you looking at?

GABRIEL

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

(A beat)

VAUGHN

Do you mind if I –

(Pointing to join him)

GABRIEL

No, not at all

(VAUGHN joins him by the window. A beat)

You look good
VAUGHN

Yeah?

GABRIEL

Yeah

VAUGHN

Thanks. Grew the beard back.

(A beat)

You look good too.

GABRIEL

Thanks. Lost some of the mass.

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

VAUGHN

It is beautiful.

(VAUGHN pulls out a pack of cigarettes)

Do you mind if I?

GABRIEL

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

VAUGHN

You didn’t?

GABRIEL

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

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

GABRIEL

I’m glad, I got a chance to see you again

VAUGHN

GABRIEL
VAUGHN
You seem happy

GABRIEL
Do I?

VAUGHN
Yeah.

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

(A slight beat)

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

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

(A beat)

GABRIEL
And you?

(A slight beat)

Are you –

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

(A slight beat)

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

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

I need a change of scenery.

(GABRIEL smiles)
GABRIEL
It’ll be good for you

VAUGHN
It’ll be something.

(A beat)

GABRIEL
Derek says hello by the way

VAUGHN
Really?

GABRIEL
Yeah, he always really liked you

VAUGHN
Even after I killed his campaign?

GABRIEL
Maybe he likes you a little less now

(VAUGHN smiles/laughs lightly)

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

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

VAUGHN
Wow

GABRIEL
But he’s really happy. Like legit

(VAUGHN smiles. )

VAUGHN
Good

(A beat.)
GABRIEL
Earlier, I meant are you – are you happy?

VAUGHN
____
No. Probably not.

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

GABRIEL
Can I ask you something?

VAUGHN
What?

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

VAUGHN
Go ahead

(A slight beat)

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

VAUGHN
No, no you didn’t.

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