

LOOK BOTH WAYS

A Play by
Chuck Blasius

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SYNOPSIS

The play is set in a church meeting room in New York City's West Village during the blackout of 1977. A small group of gay activists have gathered to brainstorm about upcoming "zaps" - theatrical protest events designed to bring attention to acts of injustice and homophobia. But the group is in flux; some members are feeling that after the work initiated in the wake of the Stonewall riots eight years prior, the gay rights movement has achieved visibility, notoriety and a sufficient degree of acceptance that there's little left to fight.

However, the blackout seems to occasion a tear in the fabric of time and space and the group is visited by three strangers: a man who seems to be looking for a bar that no longer exists and who seems firmly entrenched in his closet; a man who, until moments prior, had been dying in a bed in St. Vincent's Hospital and a woman who bears a striking resemblance to Anita Bryant, whose anti-gay activity was then at its zenith.

The events of the play cause the group to re-assess itself and its goals and to begin to lay the foundation for the terrible storm they're going to have to weather in the upcoming years.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

"The Regulars"

MAUREEN
OAK
BARRY
RITA
VICTOR

"The Guests"

TEE
WALTER
ANITA

TIME

July 13, 1977
9:30 PM

PLACE

A church basement meeting room
Greenwich Village, New York City

(Lights up. A community room in the basement of a church in New York City. July 13, 1977. 9:30 PM. A semi-circle of chairs facing a white sheet taped to the wall. A Super8 movie projector faces the screen. In the chairs: OAK, BARRY and VICTOR. MAUREEN stands front and center)

MAUREEN

Stop talking! Sit down.
(A pause)
You ready?

BARRY

Oh, shit. Sorry.

(HE stands and goes over to the light switch)

MAUREEN

OAK? Projector?

OAK

Oy.
(HE goes to the projector)
And... action!

(OAK starts the projector. The movie starts; a bit of the pride parade. Maybe we see MAUREEN with a sign: "Anita Sucks Oranges")

MAUREEN

Lights! Lights!

(BARRY clicks off the lights and the entire room goes black, including the projector. A pause)

VICTOR

I smell Oscar.

MAUREEN

I didn't mean ALL the lights.

OAK

I think the bulb in this relic burnt out.

MAUREEN

Great. Turn on the lights.
(A pause)
I said turn on the lights!

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BARRY
Do you NOT hear that clicking sound? That's me, trying to
turn on the lights.

MAUREEN
Well... what?

BARRY
We must've blown a fuse.

OAK
Victor must've plugged in his vibrator and the circuits
overloaded.

MAUREEN
Just great. Well, who knows where the fusebox is in this
place?

OAK
Did Victor just plug in his vibrator?

BARRY
Are we the only ones in the building?

MAUREEN
I think the chorus rehearsal ended an hour ago. Wait. I
think I can find some candles.

OAK
What happened, Victor? Did you plug in your vibrator?

VICTOR
First of all, when no one laughed the first time, that
should've been your cue.

(BARRY clicks on a penlight)

MAUREEN
Jesus, what's that?

BARRY
So I can put the key in the lock when I get home.

MAUREEN
The one time I'm glad you're a little old lady.

VICTOR
Second, who has a vibrator that plugs in?

OAK
I thought you had the first one that ever rolled off an
assembly line.

MAUREEN
Over here.

BARRY
How did you know there were candles in there?

MAUREEN

The Friday night Double Winners meeting sometimes uses them.

OAK

What, you hold séances to contact your dead dignity?

VICTOR

Alright, THAT was funny.

MAUREEN

No, we... gimme your matches.

OAK

How do you know I have matches?

MAUREEN

Because of the joint I saw you smoking out on the street?

VICTOR

Oooh, Barry! Were you just waiting for this chance to goose me?

BARRY

I'm over here.

VICTOR

Then who the hell is this?

(SHE starts to light votive candles,
which SHE places liberally around the
room)

MAUREEN

No, the last Wednesday of every month, we have a party. "A Night In Paris." We put out checkered tablecloths with candles and drink sparkling grape juice. One of our members plays an accordion. We sing French songs.

OAK

Jesus, as if a twelve step meeting wasn't sad enough.

VICTOR

"The Night They Resented Champagne"?

MAUREEN

No! Once a month we get to act out our drunken behavior in a safe way.

VICTOR

"La Vie Sans Rosé"?

(The candlelight has revealed TEE, who
is sitting in a chair next to VICTOR)
Jesus Christ! Where the hell did YOU come from?

TEE

Sorry. I'm just... here to observe.

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MAUREEN

Nice welcoming committee, Victor. Hi. I'm Maureen. You can call me Mo.

OAK

Among other things.

TEE

Seriously? Mo?

MAUREEN

First meeting? Don't think I've seen you before, but my memory's not what it used to be. Well, welcome. Sorry your first meeting has to turn out like this. But, well... we've been meeting once a month, usually the second Wednesday of every month. And we try to start at nine, but as you see... once we deal with the latecomers and the schmoozing starts... Anyway, as I said, I'm Mo, this is Oak, Victor, Barry. We usually have about five or six more, but July... everyone's on Fire Island. Are you friends with anyone in the group?

TEE

Oh. Probably.

MAUREEN

Is there a particular area of interest... um, issue... that interests you?

TEE

I think I'd just like to sit back and... observe for my first time. I thought I'd just like to give you a dose of me and you let me know if you think I'm in the right place. If that's okay.

MAUREEN

Oh, sure, of course, we're easy. And feel free to chime in when the spirit moves you.

TEE

Thank you, Mo. I will. I'm Tee, by the way.

OAK

Tea? As in "and crumpets"?

MAUREEN

You leave his crumpet alone, Oak.

TEE

Just "T." Initial.

OAK

Twenty questions for what it stands for?

TEE

Not worth it, really.

BARRY

Surely we're not going to continue the meeting in pitch blackness.

OAK

No offense, Victor.

MAUREEN

What are you talking about? We've got candles. And after Tee's schlepped all the way down here, the least we can do is... Make yourself useful and look for the fusebox.

BARRY

Fusebox? It's probably a couple of nuns rubbing sticks together.

OAK

This is nothing. In 'Nam, we had to learn to do everything in the dark.

(MAUREEN moves closer to BARRY, sotto voce:)

MAUREEN

When's the last time we had a new member? You're gonna chase him into the street?

TEE

So what is it that we're... you're doing? Are we overthrowing the government?

VICTOR

Hardly.

TEE

How does this usually go?

MAUREEN

Well, usually we have electricity. Other than that... well, usually, it starts with Oak telling us about who he fucked last night. Then, who he fucked this morning. And then, who he plans to fuck later tonight.

OAK

I can make my own bad first impressions, fuck you very much.

BARRY

No fuse box, but I found a flashlight.

MAUREEN

Then Barry cries about not having a boyfriend.

BARRY

Oh, shut up.

MAUREEN

Then I complain about having to do all the work around here.

OAK
You got that right.

BARRY
Amen.

MAUREEN
While Victor tries and fails to keep us all on track.

VICTOR
Aww, sad but true.

MAUREEN
So if all that hasn't made you want to run screaming into the night, welcome.

VICTOR
And if you DON'T go screaming into the night, you're certifiable.

MAUREEN
Well, shit. So tonight, we were gonna start with the film we made at this year's parade. We had some great footage of burning Anita in effigy.

BARRY
Did you have great footage of me trying to put out that smoldering mess while the cops were trying to arrest me? And burning myself on the tuchis? I hope you caught that.

VICTOR
Waaah, waaah...

BARRY
Oh, Victor, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

VICTOR
Please. Save it.

(A crash in the doorway)

RITA
(off:) Motherfucker! Oh, dios mio!
(BARRY shines the flashlight on the entranceway, revealing RITA)
Oooh, I didn't expect a follow-spot, but merci beaucoup! Ay coño, if I break my ass, I'm suing this fucking church for a million dollars. Make back some of the money I should've gotten for blowing all those priests at Catholic school. I'm surprised you're all still here.

MAUREEN
We can't find the fuse box.

RITA
Wouldn't do you any good, anyway. The whole street is out. Maybe even the whole city for all I know.

MAUREEN

Seriously?

RITA

It's fuckin' New Years' Eve out there. David's Pot Belly is giving out all their ice cream for free. And it looked like someone was gonna throw a brick through the window of The Leather Man, so if you want a free ball gag, now's yer chance.

OAK

What, you running on PRPT?

RITA

Huh?

OAK

Puerto Rican People's Time? It's almost ten. We start at nine.

RITA

First of all, Mary Motherfucker, I'm Spanish.

OAK

Oh yeah? What part of Spain?

RITA

Okay, Cuban, asshole. And I spent the past hour at the Sixth Precinct. Just 'cause I stop to talk to a friend in his car, suddenly I'm soliciting. But when I'm being chased down the street by some mook with a baseball bat, where the fuck are the cops then? I'm sure this is cold by now.

(SHE holds up a shopping bag)

BARRY

Don't tell me: Connie Casserole.

RITA

Huh?

BARRY

Never mind. Literary reference. You wouldn't understand.

RITA

Eat me. Actually, I think the casserole's colder than it is in here. Isn't the air conditioner working either?

BARRY

Well, how do you think the air conditioner works? With a hamster wheel?

MAUREEN

See, look, doesn't that look nice?

(SHE gestures to the candlelit room)

VICTOR

Like Paris. I feel like James Baldwin on the Rue De La Blah Blah Blah.

(HE lights a cigarette)

OAK

Don't you wanna check out what's going on out there? Christopher Street must be like one giant back room.

MAUREEN

Is there any sense in trying to have this meeting? You can't even see to write the minutes.

RITA

Oh, baby, what I've learned to do in the dark.
(Takes out a pen and notepad)
Fire away.

MAUREEN

Well, you don't need to take detailed minutes; just so's we can get the gist.

OAK

This is ridiculous. Is there anything THAT important that needs to be resolved? Tonight? And since the air isn't working, can we at least call a moratorium on smoking? Or, at least, can you go stand in the hallway so the smoke has someplace to go? I find that constant smell offensive.

VICTOR

Well, I find your refusal to deodorize your armpits offensive, but I don't make YOU stand in the hall.

OAK

Some people find my body odor a turn-on.

VICTOR

Who? Who? Anyone? In this room?

OAK

Besides, my B.O. doesn't cause cancer.

BARRY

Says who?

VICTOR

(Laughs:) Well, thank you, dear, for being on MY side for once.

OAK

Aren't your lungs charred enough already?

VICTOR

Black is beautiful, baby. And I'm black inside AND out.

OAK

Right back.

(HE exits)

BARRY

Seriously, are we really going to keep going? I feel like I need to go. I'm worried about my cats.

MAUREEN

We're planning a revolution and you're worried about cats?

BARRY

They're not used to the dark. And silence.

MAUREEN

They're animals! They'll adapt!

BARRY

They're not mountain lions, they're housecats. I leave the radio on for them; it keeps them calm.

RITA

Do you find them dancing when you get home?

BARRY

Also, it makes it seem like someone's home. I've been broken into five times.

RITA

Well, you live on fucking Avenue A. You're probably the only person for blocks that doesn't have a needle sticking out of their arm.

BARRY

What, they don't break into apartments in Spanish Harlem?

RITA

Oh, Mary, nothin' to steal. We go downtown.

(MAUREEN is giggling)

BARRY

What? What's funny?

MAUREEN

(Shrugs:) I'm picturing dancing cats.

BARRY

You know, we could get some more light in here if we used the fireplace.

MAUREEN

What are we gonna do, break up all the furniture?

BARRY

There's probably a hundred hymnals and bibles in that storage closet.

RITA

It's like a hundred DEGREES in here. You start burning bibles, you're not only going to hell, you're making the rest of us live in it.

(OAK re-enters)

OAK

It's fucking insane out there! Cops. Some black guy's getting arrested for throwing a trashcan through the window of Prudential Savings.

VICTOR

Why, oh why is it always the black guy?

OAK

Obviously no subway service. Looks like Christopher is cordoned off at Seventh Avenue. So everyone's wandering around like "Night of the Living Dead." I'd advise staying put for the time being. I tried calling Jimmy and he's not home. The whore.

BARRY

So sweet that your open relationship has a door that you only let swing one way.

OAK

He can do whatever with whoever the hell he wants. But I still reserve the right to call him a whore.

MAUREEN

Well, then, let's get down to business. Now after the movie I was planning...

OAK

(Overlapping:) Well, if we're staying, then I wanted...

MAUREEN

What, you got something?

OAK

No, you go. I can wait.

MAUREEN

I've got two items; one short one and one longer one. Sure you wanna wait?

OAK

Well, since I'm stuck here...

RITA

Ooh, I see Barry's brought his famous ratatouille.

BARRY

Why are you saying it like that?

RITA

Don't you ever notice that you go home with the same amount that you came with? That doesn't tell you something?

BARRY

That no one's hungry?

RITA

Oh, Barbara. Look at this shit. It looks like it's already been digested. The only thing that looks MORE disgusting than your ratatouille is that... what's that stuff your people make, Mo? Where they chop up the guts and stick it inside more guts?

MAUREEN

Haggis. And I'm Irish. That's Scottish.

RITA

Well, now you feel MY burden. Who the fuck brought pizza?

MAUREEN

I did.

RITA

You lazy slut.

MAUREEN

I had three million things I had to do today including prepping for this meeting, I didn't have time to spend three hours in the kitchen. Besides, you've had my cooking; be grateful. At least I brought something, right Oak?

OAK

Those five bottles of vodka are from me.

MAUREEN

Oh, you mean these that you stole from the bar? That you're just gonna wind up bringing home since both me and Barry are sober?

RITA

Well, I'm opening one up. Victoria? Who's the new guy?

VICTOR

Yes, please. A double. No mixer.

MAUREEN

Tee, just for your information, we do a kind of pot luck at these meetings. We try to coordinate so we don't wind up with five desserts.

TEE

Oh. Well, I guess that's what... Here. I brought this.

(HE hands MAUREEN a pie tin covered in foil)

MAUREEN

Well, would you look at that, Oak? Never been here before and brings a plate.

OAK

I brought something!

MAUREEN

Ooh, this looks beautiful! Did you make this yourself?

TEE

Hmm. Well, I suppose I did.

MAUREEN

What is it?

TEE

A pie. I assume.

MAUREEN

Yeah, I can see that. What kind?

TEE

Lemon meringue, it looks like.

MAUREEN

Yum!

TEE

I guess we'll find out. I don't know that I've ever baked a pie in my life.

MAUREEN

Okay, so: first order of business. I found out there's a bar on the Upper East Side. Second Avenue and Eighty-sixth. A straight bar, kind of a "Looking For Mr. Goodbar", singles pick-up fern bar. Above the bar, the owner hung an axe. And under the axe, a sign: "Fairy Swatter." Now the word I'm getting is that the Gay Activists Alliance is planning a protest out on the street. But I'm thinking we turn it up a notch and take it INSIDE the bar.

OAK

Disorderly conduct. We'll be thrown out and arrested. During the 'Nam protests we tried that, but you can't disrupt business in a business establishment.

MAUREEN

No, no, we're not gonna disrupt business; we're gonna be regular customers. We'll order drinks. Food. The difference is: we're gonna be dressed like literal fairies. Magic wands. Wings. We'll flit around the room. Maybe saying "Don't swat me!"

RITA

Yeah, I think that's fabulous, but surely we can come up with a better line than "Don't swat me." Barbara, you're the writer: come up with something.

BARRY

Ummm...

OAK

Wait, wait, we dress up? I mean, if there were more of us, we might make a statement. But six tired faggots and a dyke in fairy costumes?

MAUREEN

That's just it. ONE makes a statement. More than fifty out on the sidewalk. We make up for our numbers with content. With context. With humor, even. The people passing on the street could care less. But if we get just one person INSIDE the bar to leave, THAT'S the statement.

OAK

Oh, who cares? Who goes to the Upper East Side anymore? What is this, Nineteen FIFTY-Seven? And anyway, I'm not going out in public dressed as a fairy.

VICTOR

Oh, 'cause you're such a fucking butch.

OAK

What do you care? You're always dressed as a fairy.

TEE

I don't know that name calling is the way to go here.

MAUREEN

You and your macho bullshit, Oak. You're part of the problem, not the cure. God forbid somebody sees you as just a teeny bit feminine.

OAK

Said the diesel dyke.

TEE

Oh, come on, don't do that.

OAK

Who the hell are YOU, first-time-here? I thought you said you wanted to observe. So? Observe.

TEE

I'm only saying...

MAUREEN

(Overlapping:) There's more to being feminine than just... oh, go fuck yourself.

OAK

Actually, this is perfect. This brings me around to what I wanted to talk about. And since y'all think I'm such a detriment to the cause...

MAUREEN

You know that's not what we're saying.

OAK

Listen, I'm going out to the Pines this weekend and I'm thinking that I'll probably stay for the rest of the month. If not longer.

MAUREEN

Oh.

(A pause)

Well, my Dad wanted to take the family to Ireland this summer. But I turned him down because I want to talk about doing a zap in August. And that's more important to me. As it should be to all of you, too.

OAK

No, no, let me talk. I'm thinking that even in the fall I don't know if I'm coming back. To the group.

(A pause)

MAUREEN

What?

OAK

Hear me out. I mean, I'm thinking: I moved to New York in July of '63, and that August I was at my first civil rights protest in D.C. Summer of '64: Mississippi, registering voters. Drafted that September. Back from 'Nam October of '67 and immediately marching on the Pentagon. The next three years: Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco. Protests at Columbia. In Catonsville. Then I join Mattachine. Stonewall, and I join the Gay Liberation Front. I join the Gay Activists Alliance. Anything with "gay" in the name, I join it. I start this group. I'm wiped, burned out.

MAUREEN

So I guess this isn't the perfect time to tell you that NOW needs bodies for their upcoming E.R.A. march.

OAK

Funny.

BARRY

Okay, let me get this straight.

VICTOR

No pun intended.

BARRY

You think you're... we're... done? What, 'cause you can walk through the ghetto holding hands with some trick, that's... what? Acceptance? Equality? Take the subway to the first stop in Queens and try it. Drive over the George Washington Bridge into Jersey. Hell, just walk one block north of Fourteenth Street. They still hate us.

TEE

They're always going to hate us.

OAK

That's the spirit!

TEE

It's true. Wait and see.

MAUREEN

Have you seen the posters, the buttons going around for the mayoral election? "Vote for Cuomo, Not The Homo"! This is New York Fucking City. And I hope you're boycotting Coors at your bar. Have you seen that they're making all job applicants take lie detector tests? And they ask them if they've had homosexual experiences? We're barely scratching the surface.

OAK

I'll tell you what the problem is. Look around this room. See anybody under thirty?

MAUREEN

Hell, try under forty.

RITA

Do I hear fifty?

VICTOR

Fuck you, Abuela.

OAK

I mean, do we need lines of blow at the entrance to get young people into this group?

RITA

Couldn't hurt.

MAUREEN

Shit, we barely have enough money to print flyers.

OAK

I mean, where are they? I'm exhausted and I'm tired of waiting for the next generation to pick up the slack.

MAUREEN

But don't you see: that's all the more reason we need you. You see kids at the bar all the time. Come on, when we started the group we both had a vision for doing something no one else was doing. Are you just going to let that die?

OAK

Oh, yeah. What was that vision again?

MAUREEN

Quit it. The kids are jaded enough.

OAK

What about that gal you brought in a few months back? What happened to her?

MAUREEN

Maybe she didn't like being called a gal. Seriously, I don't know. I think she thought she might find a girlfriend.

OAK

Yeah, see? They don't wanna be in a room with a bunch of old fogeys. They want to enjoy the gay Eden we helped create for them. And I have absolutely no bitterness about that; I don't blame them. I want to enjoy it too. While my knees still work.

MAUREEN

Okay, well, let's scrap my agenda. Let's talk about recruitment.

BARRY

Didn't we just? We're dinosaurs and nobody wants anything to do with us.

MAUREEN

Not helpful, Barry. Victor, maybe it would help if you tried reaching out to your community.

VICTOR

My community? You mean disfigured black opera queens over forty? I'll call the other one when I get home, I promise. I know you're not one of those white women that think we all talk to each other, are you?

MAUREEN

No, no, I'm just thinking about all those kids that hang out by the piers. It feels like an untapped resource.

VICTOR

I have as much in common with them as I do with my family in Louisiana. Ask Rita.

MAUREEN

Rita?

RITA

Well, sure, I always assumed you'd turn up your nose... a buncha black and Spanish queens...

(A commotion on the stairs. WALTER stumbles in. OAK picks up the flashlight, shines it in his face. HE immediately turns his back, holds up his hands)

WALTER

Officer, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm lost and I didn't know... I didn't... Please. Just let me... Please...

OAK

Hey, hey, take it easy, man. We're not cops.

But I... so you... I'm... where am I?

WALTER

St. John's.

OAK

The hospital?

WALTER

Church.

OAK

On East 53rd?

WALTER

Christopher Street.

OAK

I was... I thought... I always get so nervous, walking around the Village, I get turned around, all these little side streets... And of course, that somebody might see me.

WALTER

Well, calm down. Nobody can see anybody; there's a blackout.

OAK

All over the city?

WALTER

Looks that way. If you're lost, you might want to hang out here. Least 'til the lights come back.

OAK

I'm... well, yes, I guess so. I was going to... you all are... you boys are... confirmed bachelors, am I right?

WALTER

Isn't he adorable?

VICTOR

So who would see you?

OAK

Well, somebody from work. Hard to explain my being HERE, since I live on East 55th Street.

WALTER

Well, you're welcome to stay as long as you like... um...?

MAUREEN

Um. Don.

WALTER

MAUREEN

Don. I'm Maureen. And feel free to throw in whatever pops into your head. We're not running the meeting according to Robert's Rules of Order. Especially not tonight. Tee over here is new, too. So... maybe the two of you can... I don't know.

(SHE moves to VICTOR)

OAK

Hey, Don. I'm Oak.

WALTER

Oak? Like the tree?

OAK

Well, I'm from Oklahoma. A nickname I picked up along the way.

WALTER

Tulsa?

OAK

Stillwater.

WALTER

Hmm. Do still waters run deep?

OAK

Well, GO deep. (THEY laugh)

WALTER

So this is like a... party?

OAK

No, we're activists. Gay rights.

WALTER

Ooooh, clandestine. Like Mattachine?

OAK

Huh. Quaint.

WALTER

I was trying to find Lenny's Hideaway. I always walk right past it.

TEE

Lenny's...?

OAK

On Tenth? Honey, that's been gone for... How long, Barry?

BARRY

Don't look at me. Maureen's the cultural historian on the Village.

MAUREEN
How ya doin'? Any leakage?

VICTOR
Not that I can feel.

(SHE inspects his bandages)

MAUREEN
When did you last change this?

VICTOR
This morning.

MAUREEN
I don't think you're using enough ointment. We can stop at my place after the meeting, I'll fix you up. How's the pain? Need a pill?

VICTOR
You know I never say no to a pill. No, better not. I think I've got like five to last the rest of the month.

MAUREEN
No, here. I called my doctor and told him I burnt my hand on the stove. Luckily, he doesn't know how little I cook.

VICTOR
He doesn't make you come in for the scrip?

MAUREEN
Ach, I've been seeing him since I left my pediatrician. He'd give me morphine if I asked for it.

VICTOR
Ask for it! What do I owe you?

MAUREEN
Squat. My insurance picked it up. Three refills.

VICTOR
Blessings upon you.

OAK
Help yourself to a drink, Don, before all the ice melts. There's vodka and... well, there's vodka.

WALTER
You have a... what is that, a tattoo?
(HE points to OAK's forearm)
Is that a ruler?

OAK
Uh-huh. People lie. When they say twelve inches, I wanna make sure they're not pulling my leg. Or they ain't gonna be pulling anything else, if you get me.

WALTER

My God. Well, I suppose you wear long-sleeved shirts at work.

OAK

I work in a bar.

WALTER

Even so! What if you're in an accident? How do you explain THAT?

OAK

I say I'm a carpenter. Like Jesus.

WALTER

Yeah, I think I WILL take that drink.

(HE moves to the table

MAUREEN

Look, if we're staying, can we make some attempt to get this meeting back on track? Especially since we want to make a good impression on our two newbies? Now, Tee and Don, we're a homosexual rights group that meets on a bi-monthly basis. Although in the summers, we sometimes...

BARRY

Can I make a motion, as I always do, that we refer to ourselves as a homophile organization? To take the emphasis off of sex?

OAK

Oh, Barry, you're so... It is about sex. Homophiles makes us sound like a fan club. We're gay men.

MAUREEN

And women.

OAK

(Overlapping:) We have sex.

WALTER

Well, if I may. That's all people think we do is have sex all day long. If we ever expect any kind of acceptance...

OAK

Excuse me, person who's never been here before. Maybe you should just listen and learn your first time out.

BARRY

No, he makes a point.

OAK

Which is?

BARRY

Your priorities are fucked up.

OAK

Oh, they are?

BARRY

(Sarcastic:) Well, not everyone is as forward-thinking as you and Jimmy. You realize that there are issues on the table other than you getting your dick sucked? We need to show the Bible thumpers we're not just about sucking and fucking. We can lead decent, respectable lives.

VICTOR

So is that why we threw bricks through the windows at Stonewall? So you could put on an apron and make a meatloaf?

BARRY

Well, first of all, YOU weren't at Stonewall; you were probably at that cashmere sweater bar on East 53rd.

OAK

I want to have sex the way gay men have sex. I want the many kinds of relationships gay men have. I don't want to imitate some phony version of hetero romance. The way we have sex is what makes us different from the breeders.

VICTOR

I suppose he's right. I don't imagine the receptionist at my office goes home at night and fists her husband.

BARRY

I'm saying we need to start learning how to love each other, not just fucking each other. I think this is a conversation for another day.

OAK

Why can't we do both? I love Jimmy and I go home to him almost every night. But every once in a while I like to mess around. And why shouldn't I?

BARRY

Yes, Oak, we know. Anybody is yours for the asking. 'Cause you're so hot. Hot. H.O.T. Hot, hot, hot. Jesus, it's pathetic. Your need to constantly prove how irresistible you are.

OAK

You think? D'ya think it's as pathetic as spending Saturday night alone in your apartment with your cats, jerking off to the International Male catalogue? Ya think?

VICTOR

Jesus, what is this, a road company of "No Exit"?

BARRY

And what are you doing that's so fucking avant garde? Splitting the rent and leaving a necktie on the doorknob when one of you has a trick for the night? Maybe jerking each other off once a month? Frat boys have been doing that since time began.

VICTOR

I'm not sure there were frat boys during the Paleolithic Era.

MAUREEN

Children, children! Let's take it down a notch. We don't want our guests to think we're a bunch of vicious queens. Let's... somebody help me set up the table and we'll eat. You. Barry. Get over here.

OAK

(To RITA:) You know Danny's mad as fuck at you for your no-show on Saturday. What, were you out with your uptown friends?

RITA

Fuck Danny with what he pays me. And no, I was avoiding some downtown fiends. I was chased down Christopher by five assholes from Jersey City. With baseball bats. Five of them and one of me. In heels. Must've made them feel really tough.

OAK

How did you know they were from Jersey City?

RITA

Bay Ridge, Bayonne, what the fuck's the difference? They're hanging out in front of Badlands and said something snotty. So I say, "Five boys without dates on a Saturday night? I bet one of you's is gonna be grabbing his ankles before the night is through." That's when they chased me.

OAK

Doesn't look like you got hurt.

RITA

Nah, I jumped in the river.

OAK

Jesus. And you survived?

RITA

Oh, sure. Mami taught me two things: how to cook and how to swim. Otherwise, she was a cunt.

OAK

No, I assumed that anything that went into the Hudson dissolved on entry.

RITA

I'm screaming for help and eventually one lone cop shows up. Fishes me out, then wants to write me up for illegal swimming. Christ, these cops. I could walk into the precinct with my throat slit and they'd cite me for messing up the floor.

OAK

Shit. I gotcha. When I was in 'Nam, I had a sergeant - I could carry him out of a burning jungle on my back and he'd give me hell 'cause my helmet was crooked.

RITA

Baby, you know I love you, but whenever you start a sentence with "when I was in 'Nam" I just glaze over.

OAK

Yeah, kinda like I do when you start a sentence with "Andy said the funniest thing at Studio last night." 'Cause I know it's bullshit. I've met Andy. He's about as funny as a toddler's funeral.

TEE

Did you have sarcomas removed?

VICTOR

Sorry, what?

TEE

Sorry, just being nosy. Lesions?

VICTOR

Oh, my face. Skin grafts. The sauna was a little too hot at the Ever-hard that night.

TEE

The baths...?

VICTOR

Right place, wrong time. You ever go to the Ever-hard?

TEE

No, I was more of a St. Marks' Baths boy. I kept thinking I'd meet the next Keith Haring. All I met were junkies.

VICTOR

Well, the Ever-hard isn't any classier, but it was my first. And you know what they say about your first. And I love to go there after a performance.

TEE

You're an actor?

VICTOR

Well... no. Not really. I do super work. At the Met.

TEE

The museum?

VICTOR
The opera.

TEE
You're the superintendent?

VICTOR
Supernumerary. (Laughs) Is this your first night as a gay?

TEE
Sorry, I've never heard...

VICTOR
Looks like I'll be out of commission for all of next season. I was last a Philistine. "Samson et Delila." It was a fabulous performance. Cossotto was in amazing voice, believe it or not. And the crowd was insane. Every opera queen in town was in the house and then on the subway downtown. Half the train got off at Twenty-Eighth Street to go to the baths. I always leave just a touch of my stage make-up on. Not because I'm so femme, thank you very much, but so that... those in the know... will know. I'm always more popular on a performance night. Or maybe it's just what I'm ... radiating.

TEE
So was that the night...?

VICTOR
No, no, that was the next month. That was just a regular old Wednesday night. I was in my usual cubicle - third floor, west hall, fifth door down. Pants off. Face down. Door open. Waiting. Always waiting. But showing my strongest asset. As it were. I hear screaming, but I figure it's just some queen acting the fool in the orgy room. Then I smell smoke. But not like yule log, ski lodge smoke, it's toxic burning tires and Styrofoam. Then I hear the pitter-patter of eighty barefoot faggots trying to get down a steep and very narrow stairway. I throw on a towel and I join the parade. But then this... pillar... of smoke comes sweeping up the stairs, like we're inside some giant vacuum cleaner. Can't go that way! Some run to where the windows are supposed to be, but they're boarded up. Nailed shut. Hmmm. What to do?

(BARRY walks over to OAK)

BARRY
What did you bring to the table? Anything?

OAK
Those five bottles of vodka you've been eyeing all evening.

BARRY
Oh, of course. So four of them can go home with you. And so you can torture those of us trying to abstain.
(A pause)
So why are you being such a dick to me tonight?

OAK

Me? You?

BARRY

Four phone messages I left.

OAK

What can I say? It's been a busy week.

BARRY

I'll bet.

OAK

I met a guy at the Ramrod on Monday. Kinda humpy, but you know how I hate it when somebody gets uppity with the bartender.

BARRY

While Jimmy was behind the bar?

OAK

You think I go there to cruise while my lover's behind the bar? He's off Mondays. This was a new guy. It was like his second shift. And this guy's complaining about his pour. "No, do it THIS way, that's too much vermouth, no you stir it; only James Bond likes them shaken, not olives; a twist." Acting all butch, but in the most unattractive way. Mr. Take-charge, but you know the minute you get him in the sack, his ankles fly behind his ears. An amazing ass, however. Some flaws can be overlooked. But he's meeting friends, so we exchange numbers and make a date to meet Tuesday afternoon at the pier. The pier. So I'm waiting and I'm waiting and the little bitch stands me up. I wasn't gonna let that little pissant get away unscathed. So next day I call him. And HE says, "Where were YOU? I waited for two hours at the bar at the Pierre." Ka-ween.

VICTOR

Next thing I know, I'm on the pavement, my arm twisted over my head at an impossible angle. I smell my burning hair and suddenly I'm thinking about my mother coming at me with a hot iron before school. I can't open my left eye, it feels like it's been glued shut. I hear the voices of policemen, firemen. There's a fireman doing triage on the sidewalk and he comes over to me and bends down as if he's going to resuscitate me. Gorgeous. All of my orifices open simultaneously. But then I guess he sees that under my blackened skin, I actually AM black, and suddenly remembers someplace else he needs to be. He goes over to the ambulance. I guess they figure out that it's a gay bathhouse that's on fire, 'cause suddenly the ambulance gets very shy. No siren. No lights. The driver takes the time to parallel park. I guess he was hoping I'd croak in the meantime so the coroner would have to pick me up instead.

BARRY

The message I wanted to leave... I thought maybe after the meeting, we could... hang out. My place. Or just go have a drink somewhere.

OAK

You're drinking? Can't. I'm out of commission for the next two weeks. Antibiotic regimen. No booze. No sex.

BARRY

Oh, no. Gonorrhea?

OAK

Amoebas.

BARRY

Ugh. So maybe the Port Authority toilet isn't the best place to pick up a date.

TEE

You could always go out for the first National Tour of "Phantom."

VICTOR

I'm sorry?

TEE

No, I'M sorry. That was mean.

VICTOR

I don't understand.

TEE

Because of the mask, I meant.

VICTOR

I still don't get you.

TEE

I'm sorry, I don't get me either. You'll have to forgive me. I've got brain lesions. It's sometimes difficult for me to determine what's real and what isn't. I was in a hospital bed in St. Vincent's. I blinked, and now I'm here. With my clothes on. Are you a part of my dream? Or am I your nightmare? Or have I died and gone to... whatever this place is?

BARRY

So is that all I'm good for? A quick fuck every once in a while?

OAK

What's wrong with that? Maybe that's all our relationship should be. Maybe that's what we need from each other. And maybe nothing more. Should we quit if that's all you are to me? And me to you? I don't get rid of my doctor because he doesn't know how to fill a cavity.

BARRY

I guess I'm tired of being the other woman, is what I'm saying.

OAK

You're not the other woman. If anything, you're just another woman. Maybe you should stop thinking of yourself as the woman. Learn how to fuck instead of just getting fucked. Might do you a world of good.

WALTER

Is there a telephone nearby?

MAUREEN

There's one on the corner.

WALTER

Do they work during a blackout?

MAUREEN

I think Oak made a phone call before.

WALTER

I should call my wife so she doesn't worry.

MAUREEN

Your wife?

OAK

Your wife?

VICTOR

(Simultaneously:) Your WIFE?

RITA

Wife? Did he say "wife"?

WALTER

She sometimes waits up for me.
 (Takes out a wallet. Shows MAUREEN a photo)
 That's Ruth.

MAUREEN

Well, isn't she a treasure. And in an apron, no less. And she has no idea about...?

WALTER

Of course not. I'm discreet.

RITA

So he married Helen Keller.

MAUREEN

And these little darlings?

WALTER

That's Caroline. And that's Walter Junior.

MAUREEN

Didn't you say your name was Don?

WALTER

Oh. Well, you... I... I mean, you're a roomful of strangers. Now that I know you're all simpatico... I mean, this could've been a set-up. I hear the gossip about me at the office. I know there's a couple of bitches would love to see me fired if they could get the ammunition. But I do my job. And I do it well.

MAUREEN

That poor kid must get a lot of grief with that crewcut.

RITA

Kids, too? Oh, Mary, that's just cruel.

MAUREEN

Why do you do that?

RITA

Do what, darling?

MAUREEN

Call everyone by women's names? Are you thinking that you'll put someone down by calling them a woman?

RITA

No, it's just... something we do.

MAUREEN

Well do you ever think about the things you do? Or do you just do them?

OAK

Jesus, Mo. Can I take a tweezer to that hair you've got stuck up your ass tonight?

MAUREEN

Where do you come off telling me you're leaving the group during the middle of a meeting? We've been running this group now for what, six years? And you don't show me the respect to... fucking forget it.

BARRY

Mo, Mo... Take a breath. He's not saying that he's never coming back...

MAUREEN

I mean, I don't know what the fuck HE'S complaining about. If anyone should be over all this, it's me. Why the hell am I still here? Anyone care what the dyke has to say? No.

BARRY

(Shrugs:) It IS a gay men's group.

MAUREEN

What the fuck are you talking about? We're the Gay Pride Patrol. Doesn't say anything about men or women.

WALTER

Well, maybe you should.

VICTOR

It also says "Pride." If Rita had any pride, she'd never leave the house in that blouse.

RITA

May I respond?

BARRY

And as long as I've known you, I've never even seen you with another woman. How do we know you're even gay?

MAUREEN

Whip out your tired old pussy and I'll show you.

BARRY

Awww, are you flirting?

MAUREEN

Ugh. I'm just tired of being the token lesbian.

WALTER

(To TEE:) I'll put a token in her turnstile so she can subway the hell away from here.

BARRY

Well, I feel disenfranchised too. I feel like whatever issues may be important to me have to take a back seat if they don't also represent your... feminist agenda.

MAUREEN

You're joking. Oh. Okay. So to be in the group, you can only be... what? Male? White, 'cause you don't want to have to address anything that might be important to Victor. Butch? So ignore anything Rita has to say. Pumped? Hung?

OAK

Well then, count Barry out.

MAUREEN

Everyone else goes out with the trash?

BARRY

Okay, calm down. I didn't mean... I mean, this group started because the Gay Activists' Alliance wasn't doing it for us. So we splintered off. I mean, Rita. You must understand what I'm saying. Do you feel like this group is... meeting your needs? Don't you feel like if you want to have your issues addressed, you're gonna have to splinter off? Maybe you need to find... or start!... a group that better meets your needs.

MAUREEN

Wait a minute. I started this group! YOU splinter off. And then Victor splinters off from that, and Rita splinters off from that, and all you've got are splinters and nothing happens.

(A pause)

RITA

You get enough splinters together, you can make a life raft.

MAUREEN

But with that analogy, you'd need... so much glue to put the splinters together, it'd be... I mean, you might as well go looking for a new piece of wood... No, the thing about splinters is... You can't put them together! They're splinters! I'm not even going any further with this.

RITA

Just trying to make some lemonade out of your big pile of lemons, Mami.

MAUREEN

We don't even have lemons! We've got shit!

BARRY

Shit-ade?

MAUREEN

I left Gay Activists' Alliance because they were all too namby-paby for me. They all wanted to be Martin Luther King and I wanted to be Angela Davis.

RITA

The maid from "The Brady Bunch"?

TEE

That's Ann B. Davis.

VICTOR

Who was also on... that other show.

TEE

Which one?

VICTOR

You remember. She was "Schultzie".

WALTER

The Bob Cummings Show.

MAUREEN

Jesus Christ, we're planning a revolution and you three queens are playing "Hollywood Squares."

WALTER

I have to say, if this group wants to be taken seriously, you've got an uphill battle.

TEE

Why do you say that?

WALTER

I mean, is this the way you all show up to protest? Dungarees and t-shirts? That's not someone who wants to be taken seriously. They all think of us as weirdos, we can't fight them if we LOOK like weirdos. I mean, would it kill that bull dagger to put on a dress? And that thing: (HE points to RITA) Needs a pair of slacks and a haircut. No lipstick! No nail polish! He'll be arrested, for one thing. It just plays into their hand that we should stay in the shadows where we belong.

(Offstage, a WOMAN's voice)

ANITA

Bonnie? Dottie? Are y'all down here somewhere? Sweet Jesus, let there be light!

(ANITA enters. Perfect hair, impeccable make-up, nicely dressed, pearls at her throat. SHE holds a Neiman-Marcus shopping bag)

My goodness! Hello! Is this...? Why no, it can't be, you're all men! I must have the wrong room.

MAUREEN

Listen, Lady...

ANITA

Are the lights out all over?

BARRY

My God. Oak, shine the flashlight this way.

(HE does)

No. On her.

(HE shines it in ANITA's face. SHE squints)

ANITA

I'm sorry to be a bother; clearly I'm in the wrong place. Where is the meeting of the Ladies' Auxiliary? Hi. I'm Anita.

BARRY

Oh, believe me, I know who you are. How could YOU possibly have the... the chutzpah... to come to New York City?

ANITA

New York City? That's not possible. Isn't this the Lutheran Church?

BARRY

It is.

ANITA

St. Paul's Lutheran in Hialeah?

BARRY
St. John's in Manhattan. You must've made a wrong turn at Alabama.

MAUREEN
You don't think she's...

BARRY
Who can forget that face? Get her the fuck out.

ANITA
Your language.

BARRY
Oh, for you? I've got worse.

ANITA
I'm confused... But this is... a church?

BARRY
It is.

ANITA
And you... you're all... homosexuals?

MAUREEN
We are.

BARRY
And you're here all by yourself? No bodyguard? No husband?

ANITA
I'm here for the Ladies' Auxiliary... the Elks... I don't understand. Dreaming? Is this a nightmare? A meeting of homosexuals? IN A CHURCH?

BARRY
Did you bring your children with you? We want to turn them.

ANITA
How absolutely... It figures: the Lutherans. I told Dottie to hold the meeting at the Baptists'. How do I get out of here?

MAUREEN
The streets are... you might want to... there's a blackout.

ANITA
Please don't touch me, Sir. How do I get back to the street?

BARRY
Oh, let her go. Serve her right. Go back the way you came.

ANITA
(As SHE runs out the door:) I'll be praying for you anyway.

RITA

And us for you.
 (A pause)
 That couldn't possibly have been...

VICTOR

I thought she looked out of place. There isn't a Neiman-Marcus for hundreds of miles.

RITA

You really think that...?

OAK

What kind of death wish would prompt her to come to New York? The West Village? CHRISTOPHER STREET?

MAUREEN

No, it's something more. Something's going on. Something strange tonight. Blackout aside.

VICTOR

Why is tonight different from all other nights?

BARRY

Well, she's no Elijah, so don't keep the door ajar. Bolt it from the inside.

WALTER

But very pretty, for a lesbian.

VICTOR

No, don't you know... who that is? Was?

MAUREEN

(Overlapping:) We can't let her go back on the streets. They'll rip her to shreds.

BARRY

God willing.

TEE

She's right. Something's happening tonight. A tear in the fabric... of time... place... something.

WALTER

Is that why I'm so confused? I was walking down Christopher Street. Towards the river. And I don't know how or why...

(Sudden pounding on the door)

ANITA

(Off:) Oh dear God, please, PLEASE let me in. They're trying to... they want to kill me! Please!

BARRY

Don't! (Shouting off:) There's no room at the inn!

MAUREEN

You know, if I remember my catechism correctly... Barry, you know that the real sin of Sodom wasn't pussy-licking or butt-fucking. It was inhospitality.

(SHE unlocks the door)

You can come in. But you have to respect our faith, please.

(ANITA steps warily into the room.
SHE's skinned her knees, torn her stockings, her hair's a mess, there's mud on her dress)

ANITA

They... they wanted to kill me. They SPIT at me. Somebody pushed me down in the street. I promise I won't bother you, just let me wait here 'til... (SHE prays:) "Father, we want to thank you for giving us shelter and we ask you, Father, to forgive them and that we love them and that we're praying for them to be delivered from their deviant lifestyle, Father... (SHE sobs)

BARRY

"And, Father, if you don't shut her up, I'm going to sew her lips closed."

ANITA

I didn't even say or do anything; I just was. I just... and they...

(SHE clutches her throat)

My pearls!

VICTOR

Oh, thank you. I've always wanted to see someone do that in real life.

ANITA

Thieves, too. Thieves and Sodomites. And a blackout. And a heatwave. Oh Lord Jesus, what is this new trial you have set before me?

RITA

And with you here too, it feels kinda like hell, don't it?

MAUREEN

You know, Anita, I'd like to save you some grief. You might want to... I think it'd be best if we just rode this out in silence. I mean, the air conditioner isn't working and there's precious little oxygen in the room. You could help by... keeping your mouth shut.

BARRY

Or, preferably, stop breathing entirely.

ANITA

It seems clear to me at least that I've been put here for a reason. I think I have a purpose here. Think about it. After all, God works in mysterious ways.

MAUREEN

Does she?

ANITA

I'm not an idiot.

(BARRY snorts)

I know how you all feel about me. Probably understandably. But I'm going to look at... this situation... as a test of sorts. It puts me in mind of the story of the three little Jew boys and the fiery furnace. Do you know it? King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to test their faith in God and so he threw 'em in the furnace. But he made it, like, seven times hotter than normal. And those three little Jews believed and believed and they were joined by an angel and the four of them just danced around in that furnace like nothing! They didn't get so much as a suntan. So that's how I'm gonna look at this... little episode. God's just giving me a test of my faith. But I believe. I won't surrender.

BARRY

Can we locate the nearest working furnace?

ANITA

So all of you are...

MAUREEN

'Fraid so.

ANITA

(To WALTER:) Well now, YOU don't look like a homosexual.

WALTER

Well, thank you very much.

ANITA

Oh, no, now I see it. We can make this work. We can find a common ground. We're sensible people. You know what comes to mind? Samuel 22: "You, Lord, are my lamp. The Lord turns my darkness into light." Or, like my mommy used to say, "Throw me to the wolves and I will return leading the pack"!

MAUREEN

Gee, you sure like to natter away about nothing, dontcha?

RITA

I like it; it lulls me, like falling asleep with the television on.

ANITA

It's only to take my mind off being a room full of pederasts and... Sappho... Sapphonists.

MAUREEN

Aw, darn, I never learn to play the Sapph.

VICTOR

It's a cinch; just put your mouth on the hole and blow.

(THEY laugh)

ANITA

And you've really got me all wrong. I have no objection to you per se. I have many friends that I'm sure are homosexual. But they have a little... tact. They keep private matters private. But nowadays it seems like the love that dare not speak its name won't shut the hell up. And by constantly talking about something, you encourage it.

BARRY

Great. Let's talk about hitting you with a shovel.

ANITA

What I'm trying to get you to realize is that this can be a teaching moment for all of us, myself included. I'll take the time to try to understand you, but you should show me the same courtesy. You can make me out to be a clown, if that makes you feel better about yourself. But let me tell you: there are a lot more clowns like me out there. Probably a lot more clowns than fairies, I'll say that.

VICTOR

"Isn't it rich?"

MAUREEN

Maybe it'd be best if we tabled the politics and skipped to the refreshments.

VICTOR

Yes, we've got all this food. And I skipped lunch.

RITA

Well, I skipped breakfast AND lunch. And dinner last night was a packet of peanut butter crackers. So... yeah.

MAUREEN

Can I fix you a drink, Anita?

ANITA

You mean alcohol? Oh, I don't cotton to that.

VICTOR

"Cotton"? Where you from, Miss Thing?

ANITA

Oh, right here in Florida. Oh, wait, this isn't Florida, is it? By way of Oklahoma, actually.

BARRY

Oooh, look at that, Oak. A sister.

OAK

Yeah, me too. What part?

ANITA

Are you an Okie too? I was born in Barnsdall, but I went to high school in Tulsa. The big city. Huh. And you?

OAK

Stillwater.

BARRY

Runs deep. In most cases.

ANITA

(Overlapping:) Oooh, I almost went to Oklahoma State. But I got sidetracked.

RITA

This is all fascinating, but can we eat now and catch up later, motherfuckers?

ANITA

Oh! My. This is all... Can we please not...?

VICTOR

Rita, my dear, there's an expression in English: "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

RITA

Well, first thing, fuck you, I know English expressions; I was born in the Bronx, not the rain forest.

VICTOR

I was going to say that you don't even use vinegar. You use formaldehyde. I mean sure, maybe you kill a couple of flies, but everyone else around you is dead too.

RITA

Well, maybe I should use a fuckin' nuclear bomb. How many flies will I get with a nuclear bomb?

VICTOR

Nuclear.

RITA

And the first one is aimed right at YOUR ass. Muh. Ther. Fuck. Er.

ANITA

Well, well, well! I'm happy to say I can at least add to your feast. I had brought a dish for the Ladies' Auxiliary, but y'all might as well have it. Have you tried ambrosia? It's a Southern thing.

VICTOR

Yes, and whoever decided to combine mayonnaise and maraschino cherries is way more perverse than anyone you'll meet at the Anvil on a Saturday night.

ANITA

Ambrosia. "Food of the Gods," it means. And like the hippies say, "You are what you eat."

BARRY

That must be why Oak eats so many assholes.

OAK

Oh, you must've been thrilled when that joke went into the public domain.

ANITA

Look at this lovely pie! Whose is this?

TEE

I did the pie.

ANITA

What kind?

TEE

Lemon meringue, I assume.

ANITA

Well, at least it's a fruit pie. (SHE snorts) Get it?

(A pause)

Did you get it?

BARRY

We did. As will you.

ANITA

Did you use condensed milk?

TEE

Good question. Um... who cares?

ANITA

My mother always used condensed milk. Not me. It doesn't taste like real custard if you don't make it from scratch. No shortcuts for me. I'm old-fashioned that way.

RITA

Oh, I bet you're old fashioned in a whole buncha ways.

(BARRY crosses to TEE)

BARRY

Do you believe this bullshit?

TEE

I've been waiting all night to see if you'd recognize me.

BARRY

Recognize you? Should I? Are you famous?

TEE

No, no... You live on East Fifth between A and B, right? Fourth floor walk-up?

BARRY

Yeah, yeah. Remind me...?

TEE

You have two cats: Stella and Blanche. And a Murphy bed.

BARRY

I'm sorry, this is so totally embarrassing. I'm afraid I can't remember...

TEE

No, it's okay. I was younger. Fatter. Happy.

BARRY

Still, I'm not usually so...

TEE

You know, I suppose it's possible we haven't met yet.

BARRY

I don't understand.

TEE

Neither do I, really. But it's like Mo said: it's a weird night. Weirder than a total New York City blackout. You write screenplays.

BARRY

Well... that's probably what I told you. I wrote one that sold. Once. Now I teach screenwriting. We met at the bar at Phebe's, right?

TEE

The baths.

BARRY

Oh. And I took you home? I must've really liked you. I'm really sorry. Usually I'm the one that everyone forgets.

TEE

You said your boyfriend was out of town.

BARRY

Oh, so it's been a few years.

TEE

You mean he's still out of town?

BARRY

No, he's dead.

TEE

Oh. Um. Sorry. Was he sick for long?

BARRY

He drowned. He was an Olympic swimmer. And he drowned in a calm sea. Make of that what you will. Maybe when the lights come back on we can grab some coffee. Or something.

TEE

I'm not sure I'm even capable of leaving this room. I think I'm dreaming you.

ANITA

So are all of you... practicing homosexuals?

MAUREEN

Oh, no, we're perfect.

OAK

Yeah, we're ready for the gay Carnegie Hall.

ANITA

(To OAK:) How long have you been homosexual?

OAK

How long? Geez...

RITA

From birth! Not a choice! Jesus.

ANITA

What does that mean? Are you saying that being a homosexual is like me not being able to choose... what? That I have red hair?

MAUREEN

I think we can find a better example.

RITA

Let's not bring this into the realm of absurdity.

ANITA

(Back to OAK:) But obviously you hadn't... you know... had... RELATIONS. When you were a little kid. At some point you chose to... act. Somebody must've come along and... perverted you.

OAK

Are you kidding? By the time I was fourteen, I was flirting at anything in pants. I only wish one of my teachers had tried to jump me. Mr. Brecht, my high school gym teacher. Yum. I was throwing myself at him. Practically had to chase me off with a stick.

ANITA

Well, I simply don't believe it. The influence must've been earlier then. Were you a Momma's boy? Did she hold you too close?

RITA

Oh, please with your tired Psychology 101. My mother was an ice cold bitch and look how I turned out.

ANITA

(To OAK:) I just think you haven't found the right woman yet. I'll bet I could...

(The room erupts in laughter)

What?

MAUREEN

You see, Anita, that's why you... why people think... You need to educate yourself.

ANITA

Oh, yes, that's right, that's always the answer, isn't it? I'm just an ignorant, redneck hick. Read your bible, then we'll talk.

RITA

Mo, it's no use. Really. When I was a kid, my mother's English skills were... well, she saw a picture of a lemon on a bottle of dishwashing liquid, so she put it in her tea. I've never laughed so hard in my life, especially when she took that first sip. When she found out I was laughing AT her, she spanked my coulo 'til it bled.

OAK

Aww, I bet you liked it.

RITA

Well, sure, NOW. But back then, not so much. My mother's arrogance was in direct inverse ratio to her ignorance. The moral of my story: Never let an ignorant person know that YOU know how ignorant they are.

BARRY

I don't like being alone. I don't want to be that person that nobody cares about until the neighbors complain about the smell coming from my apartment.

TEE

Well, I don't think looking for love at the Baths is the answer. That's like trying to buy a sirloin steak at the hardware store.

BARRY

Is an isolated person still gay? I mean, a black person is black no matter where they go or who they're with. But a gay man without a community or a partner. Still gay? If a gay man falls in the forest...

TEE

If he's lying on the forest floor thinking about cock? Or Liza Minnelli? Still gay.

RITA

This is what gets me, Miss Bible Study. Everyone in my family, every single aunt, every single uncle has committed adultery in one form or another. And that's a fucking commandment! Not some little "tsk, tsk" buried in Leviticus along with the "Don't eat pork or lobster." They eat pork, too, by the way. And wear polyester blend dresses. But my mother still rolls out the red carpet for them at Christmas dinner and I get treated like shit she stepped on in her flip-flops.

WALTER

(To VICTOR:) Do you mind my asking...?

VICTOR

Hmmm?

WALTER

A little too much Sadie Maisie?

VICTOR

Sorry?

WALTER

You know. A little slap and tickle?

VICTOR

What? Oh. No, it's a burn, not a bruise.

WALTER

Not that I'm making any judgements...

VICTOR

Sadie Maisie? Aren't you quaint?

WALTER

I mean, I'm always up for little rough trade now and then. I'm quite... well, I don't know if it's impressed, or... shocked... by how... Catholic? Your little group is?

VICTOR

How do you mean?

WALTER

Well, there's a little bit of everything, isn't there? I mean, all the groups I've ever heard of were just men. Don't the bulldaggers have their own group? "Daughters of Clitoris," or something like that? And no disrespect intended, but good for them for including a colored pansy!

VICTOR

Quainter and quainter.

WALTER

But that one. (Indicates RITA) I'm sorry, but the minute I see someone like him...

VICTOR

Her.

WALTER

...coming towards me, I have to move to the other side of the room. Like I'm Captain Hook, and he's...

VICTOR

She's.

WALTER

...the crocodile. I mean Mary, rein it in.

VICTOR

So you hate drag queens. And dykes. And promiscuous gay men. You're painting yourself into a corner, Sugar. You may not want to look at yourself as a minority. Like me. Like Rita. Butcha are, Blanche, ya are.

WALTER

Sorry, who's Blanche?

MAUREEN

Were you a virgin on your wedding night? In not, we'll have to stone you. The bible says so.

ANITA

Well, not that it's any of your business, but of course I was.

MAUREEN

Can you prove it? If not...

BARRY

I know where I can get some cinderblocks.

ANITA

And if I had, I'd ask God to forgive my sin. You can become an ex-homosexual, you know. Just like there are ex-alcoholics and ex-murderers.

BARRY

First, let me tell you how much I appreciate you comparing me to a murderer, just 'cause I like kissing guys.

ANITA

Well, it goes beyond kissing, I assume.

BARRY

And you really can't be an ex-murderer, can you? I mean, once you've murdered someone, you're a murderer. You idiot.

MAUREEN

Well, you can't be an ex-alcoholic, either. Take my word for it.

OAK

So that's all there is to it? I can go suck his cock (Points to BARRY) and then ask for forgiveness and I'm good to go?

ANITA

That's it! That's the, excuse me, damn problem. It all comes back around to sex to you, doesn't it? Why can't you just... do what you do without having to announce it? Why do you have to shove it down my throat?

BARRY

If I shoved it down your throat, I'd be straight.

VICTOR

Ba-dum-bum.

BARRY

We've kept our mouths shut for the first half of the twentieth century! We're done! Al Jolson can't sing "Mammy" in blackface anymore, either.

VICTOR

'Cause he's dead.

BARRY

It's called progress. Our truth goes marching on.

ANITA

Sex is for procreation. That's God's will. What you do is just... well, sinning aside, it's just meaningless.

BARRY

Has she already slept with you, Oak?

OAK

Well, if that was God's intention, why'd he make it feel so good? He should've made it like sneezing. Or farting. Sex is like... food. Do you only eat to nourish yourself? Or do you have dessert every once in a while? (Points to BARRY:) Well, his asshole is my dessert.

ANITA

Oh, dear God!

RITA

Sorry, but that one even made ME a little nauseous.

ANITA

He expects us to be fruitful, no pun intended, and multiply. You can't have children. So you're coming after mine.

MAUREEN

Well, yes, that's true. You CAN have children. Though you probably shouldn't. You remind me of the nuns that used to smash my knuckles with a ruler.

ANITA

And you probably deserved it.

MAUREEN

(Forcefully:) No. No matter my sin, a nine year old doesn't deserve to be terrorized.

BARRY

I don't know if I can jump on that bandwagon. By age nine, some kids can be pretty ghastly. I remember being on my way to school as a kid, couldn't have been more than five or six. It was a beautiful spring day and I guess I was feeling particularly pleased with myself, because I was doing the Yellow Brick Road skip to school. Literally skipping. And I got to the crosswalk and the crossing guard pushed the button for the light and another little boy, probably NINE, got to the light and the same time. He looks at me, flaps his wrists and says, "Oooh, look, Miss Nancy skipping to school!" And I knew that I'd done something horrible. Shameful. An abomination, as you would say. Of course the crossing guard did nothing. How does a nine year old know to be such a cunt at such a young age? Oh, I wish I could be that little boy again. So I could wring his fucking scrawny little neck.

OAK

Jesus, Barry, you might think about letting that one go.

ANITA

Do you even believe in God?

BARRY

I don't know. Does he believe in me?

ANITA

Of course. We're all his children.

BARRY

Then why do you think you have the right to treat his children like some schoolyard bully?

VICTOR

Which god are you talking about?

ANITA

Excuse me?

VICTOR

Well, there are so many. Hinduism alone has millions.

ANITA

Huh. There's only one true God. Read your commandments.

VICTOR

YOUR commandments.

BARRY

What if my religion doesn't happen to believe in Jesus? Does that immediately guarantee me a one way ticket to H.E. double toothpicks?

ANITA

Okay, so you're hopeless. (To MAUREEN:) What about you. You mentioned nuns. Do you still go to church?

MAUREEN

Ugh, I'll go back to church when they stop referring to God as "he." That's YOUR God, not mine and I've stopped buying into that horseshit. Your God is male, created by men for the sole purpose of creating laws that benefitted them and oppressed women. I pray to the goddess of the moon, the great mother who gives nothing but love to the living. And she thinks you're a stupid cunt. Sorry, no, she would never be cruel. She thinks you're... miseducated.

ANITA

Well, fine, I'm not about to discuss the Bible with a Jew and a... witch, or whatever YOU are.

MAUREEN

No matter how many times you may scream "Oh, God!" while you're getting fucked, I don't believe God has a dick.

OAK

Well, if I was made in God's image, as they say, he has a beautiful dick.

MAUREEN

Blech. God didn't literally fuck Mary. Immaculate conception. Basically, we're talking heavenly turkey baster. No dicks involved.

ANITA

This conversation has taken a truly unpleasant turn.

MAUREEN

Souls don't have a sex! After we're dead, you think our souls still wander around, obsessed with our penises and vaginas? Gay? Straight? Doesn't mean anything anymore. There's only love. Or its absence.

VICTOR

What really kills me about you people is your arrogance that you can sit down and pray and you think that it goes straight up into the ear of God. Like calling the switchboard at Columbia Records thinking they're gonna immediately connect you to Barbra Streisand. My people, we pray, we talk to our dead. We're at least humble enough to know we need some kind of a go-between. We love them, they love us, they'll take our messages to God if they see fit.

ANITA

What, are you talking about some kind of voodoo ritual where you read the entrails of a sacrificed goat? This is real church. Real God.

VICTOR

You mean the God that was forced down our throats by some slave master? Yeah, he doesn't work for me. And thanks for reminding me: pick up pins on my way home. And could I have some of your fingernail clippings?

TEE

Yeah, that's something I can get behind. I talk to the dead every day. Probably because they're all I've got left. They were all I had here on earth and I trust them to show me the way more than some invisible godhead who's never figured in my life.

ANITA

We're going off the rails here. What are y'all pickin' on little ole me for? We Baptists aren't the only...

VICTOR

Southern Baptists.

ANITA

...the only folks that think y'all are an abomination. Tell you what. You give me a list of all the organized religions that think homosexuals are just fabulous and I'll keep my mouth shut from now on.

(A pause)

I'm listening. Go ahead.

(A pause)

There ya go.

BARRY

Oh, please. The gods that were around long before your little upstart Jesus showed up. The Greeks. The Druids.

ANITA

Excuse me, but the last time I went to a Greek church, and believe me, I've been to a few, they weren't all making sacrifices to Zeus. What was the other one? Druids, right. Well, in a big city like this one, there must be just hundreds of Druid temples around. Take me to one, and we can all do the "Gay is Great" dance.

(A pause)

Exactly.

(A pause)

OAK

Have you ever been to a Vietnamese cemetery? Sorry, Rita, I know this irritates you, but I've got a point.

RITA

Preach, Daddy.

ANITA

Of course I have. Do you have any idea how many USO tours I've done? The first time Bob Hope asked me...

OAK

So you know. Each grave has a little... sandbox, I guess you'd call it. And they burn incense. That's their prayer. And the smoke doesn't go in a straight line directly to heaven. It wafts, it hovers, it mingles with all the other incense. And it becomes like one great prayer. That's what I think prayer does. It creates a climate. A communal spirit. And you - your prayers are spoiling the air.

MAUREEN

Yes, yes, yes, exactly! Thank you, Oak. You, you and your... tribe, spitting out prayers of hate and intolerance, polluting whatever good will and understanding the rest of us are trying to put out into the universe, to God. Victor's right. Y'all think you have some direct line to the almighty. Why? 'Cause you say so? You say God speaks to you. How do you know that's God? And which god? How do I know that you're receiving some divine message? Take your word for it? Your word's worth shit. How do I know it's not just mental illness?

You throw yourself around and speak in tongues, and even YOU don't know what you're saying. You just assume it's holy because it's coming out of you. Bullshit. How do I know because you're speaking to? Sounds like something out of "The Exorcist" to me. Do you know how dangerous you are, what kind of evil you might be unleashing into the world? How do you know it's not a direct line into Lucifer's ear?

You think you speak to the heavens. How do you know that exists? We don't even know what exists here on earth. All the unexplored places, the deepest trenches of the deepest oceans, the caves in the Ukraine, the mines in South Africa that go down for miles and miles, never ending, bottomless. Under the deepest ancient ice in the Antarctic. Who knows what demons may lurk? Who knows what living embodiment of hatred and destruction you may be calling forth? Maybe you'll bring Cthulhu out of the oceans depths, maybe you're bringing Chuchumaquic out of the Mayan caves where he's been sleeping for thousands of years.

Something is happening tonight, beyond this blackout. Tectonic plates are shifting. How did YOU get here? Why is Tee here? And Walter? Why tonight? Weren't you just in Florida an hour ago? Why have you been delivered unto us?

ANITA

Say whatever you want to me, if it makes you feel better. But I have faith. What do you have? I have Jesus. Who do you have?

MAUREEN

Get her away from me. Or me from her. Something, before I...

(VICTOR pulls MAUREEN away from ANITA)

VICTOR
Come on, baby. You have us. You have us.

(A long silence)

ANITA
(To OAK:) Thank you for your service.

(A long pause)

OAK
You're actually the first civilian who's ever said that to me. You're welcome.

ANITA
Why did you go?

OAK
Why?

ANITA
When you could've gotten out of it so easily? I mean, you could've just flapped a wrist and gotten a deferment, right?

OAK
Oh, I guess I still had a shred of patriotism left. And I didn't want my Dad to go to the Coachman Bar in downtown Stillwater and have his friends call him the father of a coward and a sissy. Also, I was still kind of finding myself. I mean, I'd maybe fooled around a little in high school, but I still wasn't really sure.

ANITA
Aha! You see, it IS a choice. You made a decision.

OAK
No, no. Funnily enough, the army made it clear. Once I fell in love... I had more sex in my first six months in the army than I did in the six YEARS after I got home. Now I'm just making up for lost time.

ANITA
I still think that if the right woman came along...

OAK
When I was a teenager, I had my palm read by a fortune teller at the state fair.

ANITA
Tulsa?

OAK
Yep.

ANITA
I might've sung at that one.

OAK

No, I'd remember. But she told me that I had the shortest lifeline she'd ever seen.

(HE holds out his palm)

See? It ends right here. And so I got to living every day like it's probably gonna be my last. I figured when I went to 'Nam, that was gonna be it. But no, I'm still here. Over there, I never saw anything that would lead me to believe in any kind of god. Or gods. Goddesses. Anything remotely transcendent. Just a lot of boys my age, lying face down in the mud. Friends, tricks, lovers, all trod in the mud.

VICTOR

Eliza Doolittle's violets.

OAK

You can't imagine the waste; so many beautiful young bodies, white, black, yellow. Stretching out forever. And none of it mattered anymore. Never want to have to see that again. And it never seemed to matter how many of us got killed, long as the generals could report back that the kill ratio was in our favor. Ten of them for every one of us. But when you're looking out over a field of dead children, doesn't really matter anymore if they're Americans or gooks. That sounds offensive, but it's not just the Vietnamese that were called gooks. The soldiers in the Korean war called 'em that. And it wasn't only people with almond-shaped eyes. When we invaded Haiti, the Haitians were gooks. In Nicaragua, the Nicaraguans. Just a name for the enemy. So don't be too hard on old Maureen. To her, you're just a gook.

MAUREEN

Jeez, Oak.

ANITA

Well, if it makes y'all feel any better, I've completely lost my career. Thanks to you.

BARRY

Good. Serves you right. You wanted hundreds of teachers to lose THEIR jobs. Who cares about one has-been songbird?

VICTOR

Where I come from, if you wish ill will on someone too strongly, it can become a boomerang. Be careful what curses you send out into the world.

ANITA

Be whoever, whatever you want to be. I just don't want you teaching my children. I don't make this public knowledge, but you see, I was abused. Sexually. As a girl.

MAUREEN

By a woman?

ANITA

Oh dear God, no!

MAUREEN

By a teacher.

ANITA

A relative.

MAUREEN

So what the fuck's your problem with teachers? Your arguments don't track, Anita.

ANITA

I hope you know I don't have the same kind of problem with you. You're not like these men. You don't want to have sex all the time and talk about it all the time.

MAUREEN

Oh, really? Well, for your information, I'm horny as hell right now and all I can think about is putting my tongue deep into a big, wet, pink, juicy pussy.

OAK

Whoa, Mo! Good for you, sister.

ANITA

Oh, I see. So you ARE all alike.

MAUREEN

Why shouldn't I be able to want to fuck? Should I just be satisfied that I can no longer be arrested for wearing pants with a zippered fly? Why is it that Oak, if he wants to, can walk down the street in a gold lame g-string if he wants to, but I get arrested for doing this?

(SHE pulls off her t-shirt)

ANITA

Sweet Jesus. Thank you, thank you for proving my point. Please cover up.

WALTER

Yes, please.

MAUREEN

Stay out of it, Newbie.

WALTER

We can't let them think about us having sex. It disgusts them. It frightens them. If we want to fit into society, we'll have to... it's like the Negro. You have to give up some of your language, some of your customs. If you want to belong. If you want a place at the table.

BARRY

Really? You want a place at the table? No matter what's being served? No thanks. I'll open my own restaurant.

ANITA

(To MAUREEN:) I'm just trying to understand you. Believe me, in my life, I've been confused. I've been troubled by feelings of worthlessness. But then I know I have God's love.

MAUREEN

Well, I don't know you very well. Maybe you are worthless.

VICTOR

And in my experience, it seems to me that the people I've known who always have to talk about how much they love God do so because no one else will love them.

ANITA

That's it. You all deserve each other. If you could send my ambrosia bowl to me, I'd appreciate it. I can write down my... oh, never mind. Keep it.

(SHE goes to the door. A pause)

Um. If one of you would have the decency to show me to a taxi, it would be greatly appreciated. I'm sure the hoodlums outside won't stop at attacking me verbally.

RITA

Oh, I'll take you. I'm losing money sitting here. This blackout'll be good for business. Don't worry, dear, if you're with me, they'll just think you're another drag queen. Only with bad taste.

(THEY exit)

TEE

You're right, Mo. Something happened tonight; the world is... different. And I feel like it's time for me to leave. But I'm afraid if I walk out the door, it's all gonna go away. Still, I just want to walk those streets in total innocence and ignorance. Okay. Victor, it's been a pleasure.

VICTOR

Careful out there. The streets are dangerous tonight.

TEE

Don't worry about me. (Southern accent:) I shall die from eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean.

VICTOR

Heh. Yeah, you can't just stick any old grape in your mouth, baby. Make sure them grapes is washed goooood.

TEE

You miss my point.

(A pause)

Hmm. Or maybe not.

(HE goes to MAUREEN, puts his arm around her. To the room:)

This woman is a treasure. Keep her close. You're gonna need her. (To MAUREEN:) Please don't give up on us. On them. You probably don't realize how desperately they need you, but they do. They will. Let me reassure you: it gets worse. I know men can be jerks. Queer boys especially. A lot like children sometimes. Taking you for granted. Running to the next playtime, they run into the street, only looking left not knowing they're about to be hit by a Mack truck coming from the right. You never know what's coming. Not that you have to be their mother, but they need guidance. In the end, you'll be glad you did. You'll be a heroine.

MAUREEN

I don't like feminine diminutives. Slather on the mustard. I'm a hero.

TEE

Suddenly I'm put in mind of Chekhov's Gun Theory.

BARRY

What's that?

TEE

Russian playwright.

BARRY

Yes, I know who Chekhov is.

TEE

He said that if you bring out a gun in the first act, you better shoot it in Act Two.

BARRY

And that's pertinent how?

TEE

Well, if you bring Anita Bryant and a lemon meringue pie into the room at the same time...

(HE picks up the pie)

God, I hope I don't wake up.

(HE exits)

VICTOR

I could do with a couple of those painkillers.

MAUREEN

Oh, honey, I don't have them with me.

VICTOR

Well, let me help you clean up so we can get the hell outta here.

MAUREEN

No, Vic, take my keys. I can handle this. I'll meet you back at my place.

VICTOR

You're sure?

MAUREEN

Sure I'm sure. Kisses.

VICTOR

Saint Maureen. I'll have a big pitcher of... warm lemonade waiting for you.

(HE exits)

WALTER

Um. You were right. Something happened tonight, but I'm not sure what. I lied. I wasn't going to Lenny's Hideaway.

MAUREEN

I figured. It went out of business like ten years ago.

WALTER

Huh? No, I was walking down Christopher Street. I was gonna get a drink. This morning, my doctor called to tell me I have to start taking treatments for gonorrhea. Then this afternoon, I was arrested. In the men's room at the 59th Street subway station. I bailed myself out, but my name's gonna be in the papers tomorrow. I'm gonna lose my job. Family too, probably. There's semen on my pants. No, I was gonna get a drink and then walk down to the Hudson river. And... curtain.

BARRY

Don't be ridiculous. Darkest before the dawn and all that. Come on, I'll take you down to the Hudson, but I think we'll find something better for you to do on the piers. You want help, Mo?

MAUREEN

Please stop asking me that. I'm fine. I need to be alone for a bit. Call me tomorrow.

(BARRY and WALTER exit. MAUREEN and OAK are alone)

MAUREEN

Well, that was... Oh, no, don't bother getting up, I can handle this all myself. You'll be glad to know there are four and a half bottles of vodka left.

(A pause)

Okay, so let's take the summer off. I'll go to Ireland with my folks and you can go to Fire Island and fuck your brains out. Maybe I'll have my relatives teach me about violent protest, since non-violence isn't working as well as I'd like it to. But then in September, we'll come back all refreshed, ready to start anew. Like the first day of school. But please, Oak, don't give up on this. We've worked this shit for a long time and maybe things have slowed down and you're bored, I know. But don't leave me alone with this. I don't think I can do it alone. Not by myself. I need you. Okay? Hard as it is for me to say, I need you. We'll build it up again. We'll reach out. The ranks have dwindled, but I know we can build an army again. Viva la revolucion!

(A pause)

Oak? Are you sleeping? I'm talking revolution and you're sleeping?

OAK

What? No. I'm awake.

(A pause)

I am. I'm awake.

(A pause)

BLACKOUT

THE PLAY IS OVER.