

The Gay Century 13



1984: Quarantine -

A panic in 18 scenes

A Chamber Opera

Music by Robert Ely

Libretto by Peter Scott-Presland

From an original idea by Louise Parker Kelley



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CAST

Four singers play multiple roles; these are not necessarily as I have allocated them at this stage, but they must work so that singers have time to transition to the next role.

Mezzo: Vita, Ruth, Judge, Ellie, Kitty, Barfly 1, Nicola, Anna

Countertenor: Sebastian, Burgess, Ryan, David, Richard, Barfly 2,

Tenor: Ian, Stuart, Max, Inspector, Barfly 3, Nick

Baritone: Interrogation voice, Fowler, Clive, Bar Raider, Gary Northgate, Andrew, Scientist

Instruments

Three saxophones???

SCENE

Multiple settings, light furniture – a chair as needed. For The Island, a bunk bed, which can be covered up for other scenes.

Quarantine: ACT ONE

Prologue

[All Four Actors face the audience in a row.]

QUARTET: This is not the way it was
 It is the way we felt it was
 This is not what happened
 This is what we felt might happen
 And it did
 In our nightmares

Blackout

Scene One

[A harsh siren. A searchlight. A running figure, caught in the searchlight, freezes.]

VOICE: Name, age, address
 Names of all sexual contacts
 In the last five years.
 And their addresses too.
 Did any have any symptoms?

IAN: I'm not sick

VOICE: Name, age, address
 Names of all sexual contacts
 In the last five years
 Their addresses and their symptoms

IAN: You know my name and address
 Ian Lucas
 I filled out the forms
 In triplicate
 How am I meant to remember
 Everyone I've known?
 Every pick-up at a party
 Every chat-up in a bar
 This was the seventies, remember,

'Sex and drugs and rock and roll
Is all my brain and body needs'

VOICE: Please try and remember

IAN: I told you, I'm not sick

VOICE: Your test was positive

IAN: Impossible
What is this?
I came to get a check-up
Like everyone must
I filled out all the forms
You take the blood
You make me wait
And now some voice is talking to me
Asking the impossible
Come and talk face to face

VOICE: *[Patient]* The liquid turned red
Positive
You have HTLV-3
And now you must be kept apart
From others who are healthy
To protect the general public
From AIDS

IAN: I'm not going *there*

VOICE: You must obey the law
All those in contact with the virus
Must agree to seek treatment
At the treatment centre
On the Isle of Man

IAN: Queer Island! I'm not going. *[Pause]*
I can't have it. *[Pause]*
I'm not gay

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

[An illegal gay bar run in someone's private house. Gay disco music – Village People? – quietly in the background. Three shallow bar flies stare glumly into their drinks.]

BARFLY 1: I used to love to dance to this

BARFLY 2: So did I. Remember at Heaven

BARFLY 3: There'd be hundreds on the floor

ALL: Those were the days

[The disco music has faded]

BARFLY 1: It was the biggest disco in Europe

BARFLY 2: I went to the leather bar

BARFLY 3: I went to the backroom

ALL: Those were the days

BARFLY 3: And now there's nowhere

BARFLY 2: All closed down

BARFLY 1: For women and for men
It's not as if the lesbians are at risk
Lesbians don't get AIDS

ALL: Or so they say
Who knows?

BARFLY 3: Who knows anything anymore?
There's nothing on the news

BARFLY 2: If they still had lesbian bars
Perhaps they'd let the gay boys in

BARFLY 3: Perhaps they'd sneak in, in drag

BARFLY 1: I'll drink to that. To you, fellahs.
[Grimaces] This gin is piss

BARFLY 2: Of course it's watered

BARFLY 3: At these prices? That's outrageous
It's ten times what it used to be
When gay bars were still legal

ALL: Those were the days

BARFLY 1: There aren't even measures any more
Barry slops it in, as little as he feels like

BARFLY 2: Sometimes it barely covers
The bottom of the glass

BARFLY 3: You can't blame Barry
For wanting to make money while he can
The risks he runs

BARFLY 1: It's not so risky
A basement in a private house
Nobody will notice
We're very quiet
And looking at you
No-one would suspect
You were queer

BARFLY 3: Anyone could tell on us
A nosey neighbour
Smelling a rat

BARFLY 2: A little queer rat – eek, doll, eek

[They laugh, sudden melancholy silence]

BARFLY 2: Remember when there were real measures –
Optics – you always got the same amount
By law

ALL: Those were the days

ALL: You could see

BARFLY 1: a girl

BARFLIES 2 & 3: a guy

ALL: across the room

You could ask them for a dance

You could buy them a drink

You could spin them a line

BARFLY 1: What's a nice girl like you
Doing in a place like this?

BARFLY 2: Do you come here often?

BARFLY 3: Has anyone ever told you
You have beautiful eyes?

ALL: Those were the days
All gone now, all shut down

[There is a siren in the distance]

BARFLY 1: Is that coming this way?

BARFLY 2: I can't tell

BARFLY 3: I think it's going into the square

[It gets louder]

BARFLY 1: It's getting closer

BARFLY 3: It won't be coming here
No-one knows about us

BARFLY 2: We've been very discreet

BARFLY 3: The door is locked

The blinds are drawn

BARFLY 2: There's nothing to show from outside

[The siren is now very loud indeed]

BARFLY 1: Hey Barry, we've got to get out of here

BARFLY 2: There's a little window in the toilet
We could go over the garden wall

BARFLY 3: You'd never get your fat arse through the window

BARFLY 2: Bitch!

BARFLY 1: Barry, let us out of here
It's a raid. Where is the man?
[To others] Pretend it's just a private party
I'll be your wife, if anyone asks

BARFLY 2: Yes, dear

BARFLY 3: Homosexual, moi?

[The door bursts open and a policeman in full biological suit, wearing rubber gloves, with a machine gun, stands in the doorway. The scene freezes.]

BLACKOUT

Scene Three

[Spotlight again. RUTH, a tired young woman, is caught in it. She is dressed in a dress which is designed to allure, which has seen better days.]

RUTH: God give me strength
 There's not much longer

VOICE: I have to ask you again
 Names of your sexual contacts

RUTH: Fuck you! I'm a whore!
 You think I ask their names?
 You think they tell me?

VOICE: You're going to intensive care
 In the Isle of Man

RUTH: Man! Ha!
 It was men who got me here
 Could have been any of them

VOICE: Names –

RUTH: In any case, I don't care
 I'll die before I get there

VOICE: Your condition is not far advanced

RUTH: What do you know?
 D'you know how long I've lived with this?
 D'you know how long I've kept this hidden?
 Passing out in toilets
 Throat like sandpaper
 People cross the street
 Cos they know you've got it
 And won't breathe the same air
 Weight falling so fast
 Like you're ice cream melting in the sun
 And you just say 'I'm on a diet'
 Well, now I'm dying
 And you can't stop me

VOICE: Sexual contacts in the last ten years

RUTH: I'll cheat you yet

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

[A BBC Studio. VITA VAN DYKE is a TV Anchor. FOWLER and SEBASTIAN enter; FOWLER is Minister of Health, SEBASTIAN his PA. SEBASTIAN ushers him to a seat.]

SEB: Minister...

FOWLER: How do I look?

SEB: *[Surveys him critically, brushes his sleeve]* Fine, minister. Authoritative. *[To unseen crew]* We're ready now

[Lights become brighter for transmission]

VITA: For ten years now
The AIDS virus
Has been spreading at a frightening rate
It's been called the gay plague
Gay Related Immune Deficiency
GRID.
Though others get it,
Homosexual men predominate.
Now that the cases number
In the tens of thousands
Hospitals, doctors,
Hospices, clinics
Have been unable to cope
Despite the use of private medical suppliers
And the new compulsory insurance.
For five years now
The government has experimented
To combat the epidemic
With internment of the infected
I have with me
The Minister of Health
And Disease Prevention
Sir Norman Fowler

FOWLER: I must take issue with you
This is not internment.
The Man Community

Had the full support
Of many of the caring charities
Working with AIDS victims
It was an altruistic enterprise
And homosexuals could see that.
They would have set it up
If we had not

VITA: But not all have co-operated
And not all victims are gay

FOWLER: But homosexuals form the majority

VITA: Still, many people resist a screening
And many hide that they are gay
In case they're sent to Man

FOWLER: This is a public health issue.
There will always be selfish people
Who think they are above the law
But fears are groundless
Only the sick are sent
No need to send the healthy

VITA: But what about the healthy
Who tend the sick?
The healthy gays with medical skills
We have reports that they are sent

FOWLER: There are some volunteers
Who want to help,
In this humanitarian crisis.
We welcome every effort
We don't enquire their sexual orientation
Clergy, counsellors and nurses
All are needed urgently

VITA: They don't have any choice

FOWLER: That's not true

VITA: How can we know that?

The media aren't allowed to see for themselves

FOWLER: Surely you can see, Vita
That we must preserve the privacy
Of the infected victims.
We're very strict about data protection
And rightly so

VITA: So what is life like there?

FOWLER: I haven't actually visited, of course
AIDS is infectious, after all.
But I can assure you
And the British public
Victims have the finest care available
And everybody else is being protected
Thank you

[The lights become slightly less intense. FOWLER and SEBASTIAN move to the edge of the stage.]

FOWLER: *[To SEB]* How was I?

SEB: Excellent. In control as usual. *[He exits]*

VITA: *[Still at the presenter's desk, over those two lines]*
That was the Minister for Health
And Disease Prevention.

And finally, some late news.
The death has been announced
Of the Earl of Eden,
Till recently a junior minister
At the Department of Health
And government spokesman on health
In the House of Lords.

FOWLER: Good God. Boofie?

VITA: The Earl, who was fifty-three,
Had been suffering from pneumonia
And died of complications

FOWLER: I was working with him
Only two weeks ago.
I was at school with him
He was my fag in his first year
He warmed my slippers
He made my toast

VITA: He was probably best known
For appearing on Tango Fandango
Two years ago, when his cheerful
Energy combined with two left feet
Endeared him to viewers everywhere.
The weather will be mild and cloudy
Clearing for a cold but sunny morning.
That is the end of the news.
Good night.

FOWLER: Always thought it was a shame
[over VITA] He never married.

[A look of horror on his face, as a penny drops]

You don't think - ?
He couldn't possibly be –
He didn't look as if he was –
He looked perfectly normal
Just like anyone else.
Well I'll be –
I would never have guessed.

[SEBASTIAN reappears.]

SEBASTIAN: Julian Sharpe from Sky News
Would like a word with you
About the death of the Earl of Eden.

FOWLER: I just heard. So sad.

SEBASTIAN: The news said fifty-three.

FOWLER: Three years younger than me.

What a waste!
Wheel young Julian in.

Damn fine chap. Hard worker.
Loyal friend. Great company.
Poor old Boofie
We had some great times.

BLACKOUT

Scene Five

[The spotlight. ELLIE. She has Kaposi's lesions on her face.]

VOICE: How long have you concealed this?

ELLIE: I don't know. Three months, perhaps.
Can I have some dope now?

VOICE: We do not supply intravenous drugs

ELLIE: They promised me if I came in
And told about the others that I knew
I could shoot up for free

VOICE: They told you wrong

ELLIE: I gave you all the names of my friends
Addresses where I had them
For those not on the streets

VOICE: What about your sexual partners?

ELLIE: You think I have sex with a face like this?

VOICE: You needed money for drugs

ELLIE: No

VOICE: Any money. From anyone
There's people just don't care

ELLIE: No

VOICE: We'll make you take a lie detector test

ELLIE: Do it. What the fuck do I care?
Just let me have a hit
I hurt so much

VOICE: The receptionist will find someone to take you.
Officially we don't supply methadone

ELLIE: But it's a well-known secret

VOICE: And afterwards you will come back. *[Pause]*
You will come back to tell us more

BLACKOUT

Scene Six

[The office of the Campaign for Gay Equality (CGE). A filing cabinet. ANNA and NICK.]

ANNA: I've had a sub poena
To appear at the Old Bailey
It's a kind of test case
About data protection.
I've been ordered to hand over
The records of all members
And addresses of supporters
Plus all the correspondence
Which the Campaign for Gay Equality
Has on file; letters from other gay groups
Around the country and from abroad
Letters asking for advice
From frightened teenagers
People going to be arrested
Wanting legal advice

The police came,
Demanded I hand them over
I asked to see a search warrant
They scratched their heads and went away
No-one asks to see a warrant these days

They came back later with their warrant
By then I'd got a lot of information
Away from the office

NICK: Really? Where?

ANNA: You can't expect me to tell you that

NICK: But I'm the Campaign Legal Officer

ANNA: And that's precisely why my lips are sealed
You're fatally respectful of the law
They'd whistle and you'd have to run.
So now they're hauling me to court

NICK: If you don't trust me, how can I help?

ANNA: I need advice.
I don't want anyone with me
In case they trump up charges of abetting
Or maybe a conspiracy
I'll defend myself okay,
But the law has got me all confused
We're meant to have our privacy protected
We've had data protection
These several years
And yet this recent CDA

NICK: Communicable Diseases Act, yes

ANNA: Makes it an offence
To withhold information
Which might help prevent
The spread of disease
Which one will the court uphold?

NICK: You can always argue your address lists
Will not help the fight against infection
Whether that will wash I can't predict
Judges these days are as panicked
As everybody else
The government could argue
It needs to know
The people most at risk
The people to be tested
The people that they need to check
Whether they *have* been tested
A question of management
A question of priorities

[A siren in the distance]

"Of course we'd love to recognise
Your civil liberties
But this is an emergency
A national emergency"

ANNA: Nick, sometimes you're terrifying
No chance then?

NICK: Not a snowball's chance in hell
Not with the *Daily Mail* on their backs
Demanding that we're all locked up

ANNA: "For our own protection"

[The siren getting closer.]

NICK: You hear that?

ANNA: Perhaps it's someone else

NICK: Perhaps it's not

ANNA: It's going to court next week, it can't be us

NICK: Perhaps they prefer not to wait
Perhaps they don't want the publicity
Perhaps it's 'out of sight, so out of mind'

[A policeman in a biological suit appears in the doorway, the one who raided the bar. They can't help giggling at the sight – they have not seen this before]

POLICEMAN: Anna Duncan? Anna Matilda Duncan?

NICK: Matilda?

ANNA: Shut up

POLICEMAN: This is serious

ANNA: You look ridiculous
Out of some crappy sci-fi B-movie

POLICEMAN: Anna Matilda Duncan
You are under arrest
For concealing the whereabouts
Of infected persons

ANNA: I don't know any infected persons

POLICEMAN: Oh really?

ANNA: None that haven't been rounded up for treatment

POLICEMAN: Darling, how many members do you have?

ANNA: About ten thousand
And don't you 'darling' me

POLICEMAN: And do you seriously think, darling,
Not one in ten thousand has been infected?
Not one?
And we'll find him – or her – or them
Now testing is compulsory

[He starts looking through the filing cabinet]

ANNA: *[A touch of triumph]* There's no use looking there
There's nothing in it

NICK: I am Ms Duncan's solicitor
And a UN Human Rights observer
Where are you taking her?

POLICEMAN: Your name? Your ID card?
Have you been tested?

NICK: Nick Sherringham and yes I have
Where are you taking her?

POLICEMAN: I think I'd better take you in as well

NICK: For what?

POLICEMAN: Conspiracy to obstruct the prevention of disease
A very serious crime
Under the Contagious Diseases Act

BLACKOUT

Scene Seven

[The TV studio again. SEBASTIAN and MINISTER. No presenter.]

SEB: I have your notes here.

MINISTER: I won't need notes
I'll keep it simple and direct
Look them in the eye
You stand by the director
And tell them when to cut

SEB: Yes, minister

[Lights bright for broadcasting.]

FOWLER: Good evening.
My name is Norman Fowler
Broadcasting on the
National TV Channel
On behalf of the National Government
There has been a great deal of nonsense
Talked about safe sex
People seem to think
They can protect themselves
'Have fewer partners
Have healthy partners
Don't sleep with Americans'
That's what they say,
The permissive voices
The irresponsible voices.
Let us be quite clear
There is no such thing as safe sex
Except within the stable loving bond
Of Marriage. Man and woman.
The government believes in
Victorian values
Procreation of children
Responsibility
Self-control
Just say no
It's as simple as that

Whether you're a teenage girl
Who might get pregnant
Or a young boy
Approached by an older man
And offered glamour and excitement
Oscar Wilde said,
'I can resist everything except temptation',
And we all know what happened
To Oscar Wilde
Let that be an awful warning to you
Just say no

[Lights change]

How was that, Sebastian?

SEB: Very strong, minister
You left the viewer in no doubt at all

FOWLER: Are you all right, Sebastian?
You look a little tired
You've been overworking
Get away for the weekend
Brighton or somewhere
Fresh air'd do you good

SEB: I was thinking of Amsterdam

FOWLER: See the Rembrandts? Excellent

[They exit]

FADE TO BLACKOUT

Scene Eight

[The single spotlight. RYAN, a boy of about seven in it.]

RYAN: I want to go to Queer Island

VOICE: It's not called Queer Island
It's the Man Health Facility

RYAN: Everyone calls it Queer Island

VOICE: Why do you want to go there?

RYAN: Cos I'm queer

VOICE: No you're not

RYAN: How do you know?

VOICE: If you were homosexual, we would know

RYAN: They think I'm queer at school
When they have swimming lessons
They won't let me in the pool
In case they catch AIDS from me
When I started at the new school
Parents kept their kids away

VOICE: You were tested. You don't have AIDS

RYAN: My mum has AIDS, she took drugs

VOICE: And now she's being treated

RYAN: I miss my Mum
I want to go to Queer Island

VOICE: We don't want you to be at risk
You could catch something there
We don't think she can cope with you
She allowed herself to be infected
She can't be a good mother

There's thousands of gay men
You could be exposed to – brutalisation

You have a nice new Christian foster mum

RYAN: I want my real mum

BLACKOUT

Scene Nine

[The Isle of Man camp. CLIVE and DAVID being shown round by KITTY, an old hand. CLIVE has a suitcase. A bunk bed.]

KITTY: These will be yours
 And that's your lockers

CLIVE: Top or bottom?

DAVID: I'll toss you for it

CLIVE: Any excuse....

DAVID: I don't need an excuse *[Moves closer sexily.]*

KITTY: I wouldn't if I were you. *[Points]*
 Hidden cameras. They're everywhere.
 Inmates get split up
 If they start to get fresh.
 Just in case

CLIVE: Inmates, are we?

KITTY: What would you prefer?
 Patients?
 There are no medicines
 A disease without a cure
 And half the 'inmates' don't have it anyway
 Do you have it?
 I ask because this ward
 Is for the well
 For those who wouldn't take
 The government directives;
 Who fought and protested
 Or sheltered someone with the virus

DAVID: That's me

CLIVE: He sheltered me

KITTY: Excuse me? You must be in the wrong place

CLIVE: Except I wasn't. The test was wrong
 It was a false positive

DAVID: The doctors wouldn't believe it
 They thought he had disguised it

CLIVE: After three months I was still in the clear

DAVID: But I was still guilty of hiding an infected person.
 Even though he wasn't,
 I hid him cos I thought he was.

CLIVE: Already they had given me
 The tattoo that proved it

[He rolls up his sleeve and shows a number tattooed on his arm.]

I'll never wear short sleeves again.

KITTY: That's totally crazy.

CLIVE: So what are we now we're not patients? Prisoners?

KITTY: *[Ironic]* You can leave at any time.
 You just can't find a boat off the island
 And if you try to swim away
 There's patrols that fire warning shots
 That happen to be fatal

DAVID: I'll take the top

CLIVE: Of course you'll take a top
 Why change the habit of a lifetime?

KITTY: You know what I really miss
 On the Island?
 No pets
 No dogs, no cats, no parakeets
 Not even a fucking goldfish
 You didn't have pets, did you?

CLIVE: No – David has allergies

DAVID: Blame it on me!

KITTY: Well if you did, you don't have now
They all get put down
In case they're infected
Don't even bother to test them
They're only animals.
We had a Labrador bitch, Trudy. *[She trails off sadly]*
[outburst] To think I volunteered!
A health colony! And I believed it!
I had a partner, Stephen
He's a haemophiliac
And he was diagnosed.
Poisoned by government-issue blood
I had a test, negative, but
I couldn't bear to be apart
So I came with him.
I thought, "It's not for long
He'll die, for sure,
But with me by his bed.
I've tested negative
So when it's over
I can leave when I want to."
How stupid can you get?
"Perhaps you've been infected here
You need another six months quarantine"
And then another
Then another

CLIVE: I'm sorry – what's your name?

KITTY: Kitty

CLIVE: Clive. My partner David.

KITTY: The bathroom is at the far end
The toilet is next to it
One shower and two toilets
For twenty-four inmates
Three with severe incontinence

CLIVE: Isn't there a hospital?

KITTY: What for? A hospice, not a hospital.
I'm sorry, I'm not cheering you up
We had another suicide this morning

DAVID: Was it a relief? A blessing in disguise?

CLIVE: Since there's no cure

KITTY: There were no symptoms!
No infection, no swollen glands
No Kaposi's. Not even a sore throat
Or a yeast infection

DAVID: Perhaps he was taking back control

KITTY: She. She not he. She.

CLIVE: Suicide demonstrates free will

KITTY: She was just depressed
She was sure she'd die of it one day

DAVID: We'll all die one day

CLIVE: You're all heart

KITTY: You'll learn
It's very depressing to be with
Ill people all the time

DAVID: When do we get the rest of our things?

KITTY: What things?

CLIVE: We had to leave our trunk at reception

KITTY: Forget it
It's been nicked by now
Or ransacked

Shoes are pretty popular round here
But everything can be sold or swapped
Did you have any jeans?
Or toothpaste or shampoo
Or pills or books?
If so, you don't have any more.
Stuff's in short supply in Man –
Clothes and hope -
It's why we have to guard the crematorium
So no-one robs the dead.
You should try to barter for a lock
For that locker
Or soon you won't have even what you've got

DAVID: I'm starting to get hungry

KITTY: Supper is at five
Lights out at nine
They've cut the rations yet again
500 grams of bread
50 grams of fat
200 grams of soya

DAVID: That's absurd. They've got to feed us

KITTY: They don't *have* to do anything
Some clever boffin
Worked out scientifically
How many calories we need
And how much protein
They make it as cheaply as they can
And most of the vegetables are rotten
Of course you get more if you work
The best gig is the crematorium
Laying out the bodies
Taking out the teeth,
The eyes and so on
For medical research

CLIVE: And making sure no-one else
Gets to pillage corpses

KITTY: Exactly. Well, you know we all
Want more research

DAVID: I won't do it. I refuse to work

KITTY: Then you will starve
And by degrees, you'll die
Like so many have before you
And so many more will soon
Welcome to the death camp

BLACKOUT – INTERVAL

Quarantine: ACT TWO

Scene Ten

[RICHARD is in a wheelchair; NICOLA pushes him. She is wearing a mask and rubber gloves.]

RICHARD: I want to go to the treatment centre

NICOLA: Calm down. We're arranging it for you.

RICHARD: But how long will it take?
I can't stand this hospital any more
Everyone in masks and gloves
Whenever they come near me

NICOLA: You are infectious
It's simple health and safety

RICHARD: But I'm a human being
Everyone behaves as if I didn't count
I have feelings too
This loneliness is killing me
Even the porters won't come near me
They leave my meals outside the door
Then knock and run away

NICOLA: They're afraid, you can't blame them

RICHARD: This is a hospital, they should know better
The cleaning staff will only clean my room
In biological suits and masks -
They're made with asbestos, for fuck's sake

NICOLA: No need for language

RICHARD: They're for nuclear fallout, not a virus

NICOLA: They use them when there's a plague

RICHARD: Oh yes, I was forgetting
This is the gay plague
I thought when I came in

There'd be some respite
From all the headlines
"Gay plague threatens babies"
"My son's gay plague agony"
"Gay plague spreads – innocent victims"
But of course, I'm one of the guilty ones
I'm gay, and I deserve to die.
And thanks to my tattoo [*He indicates his forearm*]
Everyone can know.

NICOLA: Of course you don't. No-one does

RICHARD: Tell that to the lads
Who daubed the words on my front door
AIDS and POUF
In blood-red letters two feet high
Tell that to the mob
That came and smashed my windows
They would have done me over,
Till I pointed out they'd spill my blood
Then I'd give AIDS to them.
They couldn't cope with that

NICOLA: Stop dwelling on the past
You'll have a new life soon
In the Isle of Man

RICHARD: They call it isolation
I couldn't feel more isolated
Than I am now
And I'll be with my own kind

NICOLA: You will. As soon as your papers come through

RICHARD: I will be able to take my dog, won't I?

NICOLA: Of course you will

BLACKOUT

Scene Eleven

[A court. JUDGE, STUART the defendant, Mr BURGESS for the Defence. STUART is wearing a lovely flowery dress, a picture hat and matching shoes.]

JUDGE: Let me be clear
 The defendant broke the law
 That is the only issue in this trial
 The reasons do not matter

[He finally notices what STUART is wearing. Goggles a bit.]

JUDGE: *[incredulous]* Do you always dress like this?

STUART: Not always, your majesty.

JUDGE: You will address me as Your Honour.
 Why are you dressed like this?

STUART: I like to look nice when I go out.

JUDGE: Well, remove the hat at least.

STUART: No, I couldn't possibly do that.

JUDGE: I say remove it.

STUART: No, never. I'd rather die.

JUDGE: Why on earth not?

STUART: It goes with the shoes.
 Do you want to ruin the ensemble?

JUDGE: Are you showing contempt of court?

STUART: *[Mae West]* No, your honour.
 I'm doin' my best to hide it.
 [To BURGESS] He's the perfect straight man.

JUDGE: Order in court!

BURGESS: *[To STUART]* Behave yourself.
 [To JUDGE] Your honour
 The defendant does not deny the charge
 He trespassed on government property
 To sabotage computers
 He admits criminal damage
 But he pleads justification
 Or mitigation

STUART: I want to tell you why

BURGESS: The case is being heard in camera
 Under the Contagious Diseases Act 1990
 There are no reporters

JUDGE: In that case I have no objection
 If he wants to tell us how he broke the law

STUART: A jury would understand

JUDGE: Under the CDA there are no juries
 Proceed

DEFENCE: Tell the judge what happened on June 28th, 1994

STUART: We were tired of waiting for justice
 It was the twenty-fifth anniversary
 Of the Stonewall Riots
 Not that you'd know from the papers
 When we read of the new database
 All the police records
 All those who had ever
 Been to clubs
 To gay demonstrations
 To clap clinics
 On mailing lists
 We had to do something
 But nobody cared

 We wanted to fight back,
 And I was chosen

We knew where it was held, the database
In Newcastle, at the Ministry of Health
And Disease Prevention

All we needed was the codes
To get into the building
And to the computer room
And a sympathetic night guard.
I dressed as a painter
With caustic soda in a paint pot
The rest you know
They couldn't arrest me
Before I had destroyed
At least half the files they had
Maybe they have copies somewhere else
But it was a symbolic protest
Against the systematic persecution
Of lesbians and gays
Of PWAs

JUDGE: The access to the codes was top secret
Restricted to most senior personnel.
You still refuse to name your accomplices?

STUART: I do. You can torture me if you like

JUDGE: Mr Feather, the British state
Does not torture people.

STUART: Ha!

BURGESS: The defence was not suggesting that it did

STUART: Only the sick

JUDGE: In view of the testimony of the defendant
I find him guilty
He is sentenced to preventive detention
On the Isle of Man
Indefinitely

BURGESS: My lord, there is no evidence of infection

JUDGE: And your point is?
 He is clearly a threat to the security of the State

STUART: Fascism is more contagious than AIDS
 [To BURGESS] At least we've got the story on the record

JUDGE: The defendant's testimony will be stricken
 From the record
 Take him down

BLACKOUT

Scene Twelve

[The sound of a football crowd. GARY NORTHGATE giving his team a last minute pep-talk before they go on the field. SHAUN, one of the players, appears onstage as soon as he can, in kit, and with the ball.]

GARY: Lads, it won't be easy
City are the tops
And we're way down the league
The bookies say it's five-to-one against us
To take the cup.
But the crowd is on your side
Let's give them a good show
You've watched the City games
You know their weaknesses
Billy you must stick to Hahn like glue.
Their backs are weak, so split them up
Go straight in, all out, from the start.
I know that you can do it.
And you must know it too.

Just one other thing
We've had this note from the FA
I've got to pass to you.
It's about AIDS, and what we've got to do
Or what we must stop doing.
You must stop hugging when you score a goal.
Of course, no kissing either
I know you've got to celebrate
And let off steam.
But punch the air alone
That's an order.

If we win – of course we'll win –
There'll be no drinking bubbly
From the cup. No sharing glasses,
No more sharing baths

SHAUN: Aw, skipper. We all look forward to that.
Relaxing in the steam,
A bit of larking around

GARY: We cannot be too careful
At a time like this.

Separate showers only.
And don't swap shirts with the other team
After the game

SHAUN: That's not fair. I was collecting them.

GARY: The coaches will have mouthpieces
To give the kiss of life
And rubber gloves
For treating any wounds
After, they'll destroy
All buckets and all sponges.

SHAUN: The game will never be the same again.
Why are we doing all this, boss?

GARY: The FA has a duty to protect you

SHAUN: I don't see the point.
Everybody knows
Footballers aren't queer.

BLACKOUT

Scene Thirteen

[The sound of waves on a shore. KITTY, CLIVE sitting on the edge of a cliff.]

KITTY: There's planes fly over all the time
One of them must see us
If we can get a fire going

CLIVE: I hope this works

KITTY: I don't see why it shouldn't
If David can get hold of ethanol

CLIVE: Clever for him to volunteer
For the medical supplies

KITTY: Medical supplies! It's just to sterilise
Stuff the staff use
And their little accomplices
So they don't catch anything

CLIVE: I wonder if he'll get enough

[Enter DAVID with a large flagon, the size of one you'd mount on an office water cooler.]

DAVID: No-one saw me.
I sneaked in while the orderlies
Were watching the cup final

CLIVE: Is this going to catch fire OK?

DAVID: The burning point is eighty, no problem
But it burns blue, so not very visible
It doesn't last very long

KITTY: It's only to set fire to the straw

DAVID: Thank God for a long hot summer

CLIVE: Let's hope they can read the words

DAVID: Planes fly low from Liverpool
From Dublin and Belfast

KITTY: Let's hope they pick it up
There's still a free press
In Europe and the States

CLIVE: Someone got word to Amsterdam
Exactly what was happening
NPO got interested, and sent a microlight
With telephoto lenses

KITTY: I saw a plane with RTF
Must have been from France

DAVID: There's still the United Nations

[A plane is heard approaching in the distance. It grows in volume]

KITTY: It's still quite low
I think it's Dublin
Quick – go pour that stuff
On the grass
Set fire to it

[DAVID and CLIVE run offstage and do so. KITTY unfolds a large sheet, and as he does so we can read the words "MURDER HERE" in large home-made letters. He lays it out on the ground. He waves at the plane]

KITTY: Murder here!

[DAVID and CLIVE join him. A flickering orange light indicates the straw has ignited.]

ALL: *(ad lib)* Murder here! Murder here!

They wave, jump up and down, and point to the banner, as the lights fade to

BLACKOUT

Scene Fourteen

[ANDREW is holding the hand of his dead partner, who is laid out.]

ANDREW: Well, we did it, mate.
Got you to the end
And nobody found out.
Maybe we were lucky
We didn't realise till late
That you had AIDS

Two short months
To live with you dying
I am so glad I stayed with you
I am so glad I shared with you
I never knew how much I loved you
Until I knew it could not last

Holding you in my arms
Listening to your rasp of breath
You weighed nothing
When I lifted you to the loo
Turned you over in the bed
Washed your bed sores
Wiped your arse
Changed the sheets

When you were in pain
I massaged you with oils
Tea tree for the skin
And emu oil for your poor joints
You were in so much pain
And all we had was aspirin

At first I wanted you
To seek some treatment
But no, you said, dying is private
There is no cure
There is no real help
And this is just between us

And you were right

I only wish that you had let me kiss you

Lying there beside you at the end
You didn't fight, you said yes to Death
As you said yes to Life
You thought of Krishna
Lord of both
And when the time was ripe
You were ready to unloose the chains
And come

You taught me how to live
You taught me how to die

Now give me strength to bury you

The undertakers will not touch you
For fear that they will catch it
They'll cremate you on your own
At the end of the day
In case you spread disease
To the other corpses

[He tenderly takes the body and tries to carry/drag it off. We don't know what he is intending to do with it – dump it in a river? Bury it in a wood? Feed it to animals? He is not thinking clearly. He is weak. The lights change, and he is in a harsh spotlight.]

VOICE OFF: *[gently]* We'll take care of that
You're not strong enough
You don't know what to do

ANDREW: You can take me now
I don't care
I don't regret any of it
I'm proud of what I did
What we did
I'm proud of being gay
And of our love

VOICE OFF: Of course you'll have to go
To the treatment centre

ANDREW: You think I give a flying fuck
What happens now?

VOICE OFF: We'll deal with the deceased
Are you the next of kin?

ANDREW: His family disowned him
I was all he had left

[Into a walkie talkie] Is there a bin lorry in Islington?
Another stiff on Hemingford Estate

ANDREW: Gerry's not a stiff!
He was a person
Is a person still
Living in my mind
Treat him with respect
Make sure he's buried
On consecrated ground

VOICEOVER: That will not be happening
Cremation only
And covering with quicklime after
In a communal pit
There are too many now

ANDREW: But he must have consecrated ground
He was a priest

BLACKOUT

Scene Fifteen

[FOWLER's office. A police inspector. SEBASTIAN, now thin and haggard, sitting opposite. He has a small red spot on the end of his nose.]

INSPECTOR: We've interviewed the staff
At the Newcastle headquarters
And we're sure that none of them
Gave away the codes
To those gay activists

FOWLER: Can you be sure?

INSPECTOR: They've taken lie detector tests
And that leaves only here
The Ministerial office

FOWLER: I have the codes of course
They're locked up in my safe

INSPECTOR: And who has access to your safe?

FOWLER: Sebastian of course,
My personal assistant
And Sir George,
My permanent secretary

SEBASTIAN: Excuse me, I'm feeling rather faint
Would you mind if I opened a window?

FOWLER: Not at all

[SEBASTIAN gets up unsteadily, and keels over.]

SEBASTIAN: I don't know what's come over me.
My sense of balance has gone all to pot
I think it must be some ear infection

[He gets to his feet and immediately collapses again. Gasps for breath. INSPECTOR and FOWLER kneel over him.]

FOWLER: Loosen his clothes

Undo his shirt so he can breathe

INSPECTOR: Can you take his tie, sir?

[Hands it to FOWLER, who puts it on a chair. INSPECTOR undoes SEBASTIAN's shirt and opens it. When FOWLER turns back he sees a chest covered with lesions.]

FOWLER: Good God! Have you got measles?
You should see a doctor

SEBASTIAN: I have seen a doctor
I've seen several doctors
They're not in any doubt
And yes, I'm gay too

INSPECTOR: Stand back sir, don't get too close
We can't take risks

SEBASTIAN: I'm sorry, Dad.

[FOWLER is torn between fear, horror, anger and simple parental love.]

FOWLER: How long have you had –

SEBASTIAN: About a year, I think
You remember that fact-finding trip
To Washington DC?
I think I found more than facts

FOWLER: For god's sake, boy
Why didn't you tell me?
I'm your father

SEBASTIAN: How could I?
What would you have done with me?
Off into quarantine?
I know what happens there

FOWLER: Of course not
I'd protect you

SEBASTIAN: One law for the politicians
And one for everyone else
Think what the press would make of that

FOWLER: You stupid, selfish child
You've been putting everyone
At risk
You've been putting me at risk

SEBASTIAN: Nobody has been at risk
Don't you know anything?
You don't see what is going on
Under your nose
I came to join you as your PA
"To get some work experience"
I felt so lucky and excited
I've had experience all right
Groping, pinching, stroking
Hand on the thigh
Hand down the trousers
From your esteemed colleagues
Have you any idea how many
Of them are queer?

FOWLER: Well, one or two I imagine

SEBASTIAN: Think again
At least a hundred,
With the House of Lords
At least one minister has died from AIDS
But you don't know
Doctors collude, the conspiracy of silence
Call it pneumonia or heart disease.
And what about the heterosexual men
Carriers with no symptoms?
How do you think the prostitutes have got it?
You think they infected themselves?
I'll bet there's carriers in Westminster
But most of all it's honourable members
Honourable diseased members
Who have the power
Who have the money

Who lie to their wives
Even as they infect them
They have their careers to think of.
When I started here, I was in awe
Of the excitement and the glamour
But I have watched the cavalcade of cheats
And hypocrites, who sound off in debates
'Bout family values, moral standards
And awful promiscuity,
While they walk round led by their cocks
And can't keep it zipped up,
Or have the basic decency
To use a condom
While we're the scapegoats
For the whole damn thing
They can go scot free

Don't you understand, Dad
You're throwing petrol on the fire
You punish honesty, reward deceit,
You're wasting money on this quarantine
It's costing tens of millions
Which could go to research

INSPECTOR: You'd better come with me, sir
Conspiracy's a very serious charge
So is giving information
Relating to security and intelligence
Resulting in commission of a crime

SEBASTIAN: And then the Isle of Man, I suppose?

INSPECTOR: The judge will decide
But it's built into the sentence

FOWLER: No

INSPECTOR: It's the law

SEBASTIAN: The law you piloted through the House
In the teeth of protests
No evidence at all that it would work

A sop to the tabloids and your own feral pack
You have brought us all to this, Dad

[Pause as the enormity of what he has done hits FOWLER]

FOWLER: What must I do?

SEBASTIAN: Change.
 To change the world,
 first you must change yourself

[He puts out his hand for help in getting up. FOWLER overcomes his instinctive fear and pulls him up. They hug closely.]

BLACKOUT

Scene Sixteen

[The TV studio again. SEBASTIAN and FOWLER]

FOWLER: *[reads]* "Fucking can never be one hundred percent safe,
And fucking up the arse is particularly risky, especially for
the one getting fucked" – I can't say this, I'm a government
minister.

SEBASTIAN: That's why you have to say it.
If you can talk about it, anyone can.

FOWLER: I can't see Margaret saying it.
She wanted no mention of gay sex.
She thought it would encourage some to do it,
Who'd never even heard of it before.

SEBASTIAN: They used that argument in the House of Lords
About lesbians, in 1921.

FOWLER: Margaret is a child of Queen Victoria
In many many ways.
Though I may talk of it
Margaret never would.
It would not be ladylike.

SEBASTIAN: Well, almost anyone can mention it.

FOWLER: *[Looks through leaflet again]* "Oral sex is not so risky"
Funny how I used to think
Oral sex was whispering obscenities.
"Taking someone's cock in your mouth" –
Do men really do this?

SEBASTIAN: Women too

FOWLER: How many men?

SEBASTIAN: All the gay men I know

FOWLER: I never knew any of this

SEBASTIAN: Well, now you do. *[Lights brighten. Cameras are ready. SEBASTIAN straightens his father's tie.]*
Good luck.

FOWLER: You need it more.
[To camera]

I would like to thank the BBC
For giving me this opportunity
To say something deeply felt.

Though I am a government minister
This is not a government announcement
There have been too many of those
In recent years
All based on ignorance
And I was as ignorant as any.

I want to introduce you
To someone very close and dear to me
I love him more than anyone in the world
Since my wife died of cancer.
His name is Sebastian, he is my son,
And he has AIDS

[He beckons SEBASTIAN on. They hug intensely. FOWLER ruffles his hair and kisses him on the neck.]

There is as yet no cure for AIDS
Although I have tripled the budget for research
But you can minimise your chances
Of being infected by HTLV-3
By having protected sex
If you want to fuck.
Yes, I said 'fuck'
I know it's prime time television
Before the watershed
I know I'm in the government
But I need you all to understand

Some things are more important
Than your sensibilities
You'd best get used to it
You're going to be hearing it a lot.
This is not only for homosexuals
Everyone should know
A virus doesn't know who's gay or straight
So together now my lovely son and I
Are going to show you how to use a condom

[SEBASTIAN produces a banana.]

I want you to imagine that this is a man's prick
Hasn't he got a big one?

SEBASTIAN: Dad! Stop it!

FOWLER: I'm starting to enjoy being frank
[To TV audience] You could find it very liberating

SEBASTIAN: And now Dad is going to put a rubber on it

FOWLER: Condom, rubber, johnny, sheath, French letter

[He produces condom. Tries to tear it with difficulty; opens it with his teeth]

Don't worry it will get a lot easier with practice

[He takes the condom out]

Always pinch the end; expel the air
And roll it gently down the shaft
Until it covers the cock completely

SEBASTIAN: Of course you can do it
Together with your partner

FOWLER: And if you have any queries
Ring the new NHS AIDS helpline
Which is opening after this broadcast
And will be a twenty-four hour service
From now on and indefinitely

SEBASTIAN: And if you're thinking of complaining
 To the BBC about this broadcast

BOTH: YOU CAN BUGGER OFF!

[They laugh and hug again]

BLACKOUT

Scene Seventeen

[SEBASTIAN and FOWLER. SEBASTIAN is blind. FOWLER leads him in.]

SEBASTIAN: Remember now
I want a party
A proper Irish wake
No long faces
And lots of dancing
I've given you the playlist

FOWLER: I can't believe you're being so calm

SEBASTIAN: One of us must be
And you're a gibbering wreck

FOWLER: It's all so sudden

SEBASTIAN: Oh no it's not
That brain tumour
Was squatting like a toad
Waiting
And now it's spat its poison

FOWLER: But to go blind within a week
If you'd been seen earlier
We could have spotted it
Maybe arrested it
I drove you underground
I killed you

SEBASTIAN: Stop this maudlin self-pity
If I'm not blaming you
You should not blame yourself
I've had the time to get used to it
It's been a good life
Rich in fun and friends.
I've seen so many die
And now I'm going to join them
Not long now
Get used to it

FOWLER: A parent should die before his child
This is unnatural

SEBASTIAN: Unnatural? How many times have you said that?

FOWLER: I know, and now it's ashes in my mouth

SEBASTIAN: I take that back.
No more guilt! Begone dull care!
I'd ask for champagne
If I could still swallow

FOWLER: You'll have the best of treatment
That I promise you

SEBASTIAN: There is no treatment
I'm resigned to that

FOWLER: No! Never resigned!
We have to fight this thing.
I owe it to you
I owe it to poor old Boofy.
The treatment centre
Will become just that
The best of medical attention
Nutrition, comfort, and respect
And anyone can leave who wishes to
We will help them

SEBASTIAN: *[Ironic]* Really? We the government?
There have been too many promises and lies

FOWLER: How can I not do this?
I'll make it my life's work
I have to do it for you.

BLACKOUT

Scene Eighteen

[A ferry hooter; seagulls. On the dock of Douglas, IoM. KITTY and DAVID are waiting.]

KITTY: Look, the ferry's coming
 It's been a constant to-and-fro
 All week, and still there's more
 To rehabilitate
 It will be strange to go home

DAVID: If we can still call it home
 All the people who spat at us
 Who shouted for us to be put away,
 Who painted 'Pouf' and 'AIDS' on our front doors,
 The oh-so-helpful neighbours,
 Who turned their backs on us in the street.

KITTY: There are laws now to protect us

DAVID: Yes, I know. And grants to compensate us
 I know people whose houses were burnt down
 By mobs with flaming torches.
 Do you think they're going to change
 Because the government tells them to?

KITTY: They will change in time

DAVID: And more will die in time

KITTY: There is no magic wand
 We must have time

[Split stage. FOWLER enters with SCIENTIST. They study a print-out]

SCIENTIST: As you can see, this chart shows
 That when the drug is given to rats
 It inhibits the enzyme reverse transcriptase

FOWLER: In English, please

SCIENTIST: It appears to stabilise the t-cells

FOWLER: Which help the other white blood cells
To boost immunity

SCIENTIST: Correct. The upshot is
The rats that took the drug
On average lived some months more
Than other rats with the infection

FOWLER: But still they died

SCIENTIST: Yes, but it's a start
Perhaps in combination
With other drugs

FOWLER: What is this drug called?

SCIENTIST: Zidovudine. It was intended to prevent
Mothers passing viruses to babies
At the moment it's the best we have
And in time -

FOWLER: There is no time
My son is dead
We have no time

KITTY/DAVID: We have no time

SCIENTIST: At the moment time is all we have

FOWLER: We have wasted so much time

KITTY/DAVID: We have waited far too long

FOWLER/KITTY/DAVID:
So many died who didn't have to
For apathy and bigotry
And ignorance and fear

SCIENTIST: We need time
Trust in us
Trust in science

KITTY/DAVID: No, trust ourselves
To make connections

FOWLER: To work together

KITTY/DAVID: To help each other

FOWLER: For the sake of the dead

KITTY/DAVID: To organise ourselves

FOWLER/SCIENTIST: To tell the truth

FOWLER: To calm the fears

KITTY/DAVID: By being ourselves

ALL: To calm the fears

SCIENTIST: To find a cure
We need time

ALL: Though there is no time
We yet need time
Time
Time

BLACKOUT

THE END