

ANTI BODY

a play by Louise Parker Kelley

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

WILLIAM DAVIS	a gay man, 30 years old
ANNIE	a nurse
DR WALL	a Junior Doctor
DAVID	a Black gay man
DOTTIE	a nurse
DR ARTHUR HELBING	a gay consultant physician
ELISABETH DAVIS	William's mother
STEVE DAVIS	William's brother
BECKY SWEENEY	a lesbian friend of William's
JOHN COOK	a gay man
MALCOLM	editor of the local gay newspaper
DAN	William's ex
VANESSA	a lesbian, Becky's lover
JEANNIE	a friend

TIME

1982

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ACT ONE

Scene 1

[A hospital room in the Royal Free, Hampstead. There is a hospital bed, a chair, a bedside table with a glass of water, a door to one side to the bathroom, a television and hospital equipment near one wall. WILLIAM enters, in a hospital gown, walking slowly. He gets to the bed and leans on it a minute, and gets into it slowly. He drinks some water, leans back. ANNIE, a nurse, enters. She picks up his chart on the clipboard at the end of bed.]

ANNIE: Here I am to check up on you again. How are you?

WILLIAM: Tired. I just feel worn out. It feels strange, too, Having a room to myself. Under the NHS, even people who are dying don't get a room to themselves. You're lucky to get some screens as you pop your clogs.

ANNIE: It's just a precaution.

WILLIAM: A precaution against what?

ANNIE: Ah! The sixty-four thousand dollar question!

WILLIAM: I'm not dying, am I?

ANNIE: Not yet that I can see.

WILLIAM: Good. I'd hate to go before Little Shop of Horrors opens.

ANNIE: Well, let's make sure you do. Let's get your blood pressure and your temperature.

[She takes his temperature, records it, then wraps his arm with the blood

pressure cuff and records that.]

And then a blood sample.

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WILLIAM: Another one? Really? My right arm has been Punctured so many times, it could be a needlepoint sampler.

[Rubs his right arm]

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat, but -

ANNIE: But you will never surrender! Good for you.

WILLIAM: Have you got bottles for the tears and sweat too? Well if you must, then you must, go ahead, pick an arm, any arm; pick a vein, any vein. What do you fancy, Nurse Annie?

ANNIE: Left, then.

[She prepares to take blood; tourniquet, etc. He reaches for one of the newspapers, holding it with one hand as she takes blood from the other arm. It is quickly done.]

There. You've made your donation for the day.

WILLIAM: Can I claim it against tax? *[She shakes her head.]* Well, you can just give it back, then.

ANNIE: Too late! *[She laughs.]* You're too much.

WILLIAM: Like me, do you, Annie?

ANNIE: All the nurses love you to pieces, William.

WILLIAM: Not quite all. What about little Miss Dottie? I hear she's asked for a transfer to another ward to avoid me.

ANNIE: Only been here a few days, and already you've broken one heart.

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WILLIAM: I don't think that was it.

ANNIE: Not exactly, no. It's because she found out that...

WILLIAM: Yes, and how did she find out? Did Dr. Wall tell her?

ANNIE: Oh, no, he wouldn't do that. It has nothing to do with your treatment plan, after all. No, apparently she saw your newspaper collection, and asked the charge nurse what was Capital Gay? [Pointing to the newspaper William is holding] She went into a real tailspin when told what it was! I think she imagined it was about florists. She's led a sheltered life.

WILLIAM: But why? Why such a big deal?

ANNIE: *[Sighs.]* Your medical history lists your old football injuries from college, and you mentioned to her that you run five miles every day. You look masculine, and you don't seem unhappy, or crazy, or nasty, so according to Dottie it is just impossible to believe that you're –

WILLIAM: *[Softly but distinct]* A wee pouf. *[Annie shrugs.]* I see. I can't be an athlete and Gay. Good of her to let me know.

ANNIE: Her transfer may take a while.

WILLIAM: I'll lurk in the hall and try to look effeminate just to cheer her up. How come you're so tough, Annie? How come you don't mind nursing a deviant?

ANNIE: *[Abruptly]* I started nursing in Northern Ireland. After that much blood and death, you don't really care how

anybody gets laid. Well, I can't go on chatting to the likes of you. Got to get this down to the lab. *[Leaving]*
Your doctor is due soon.

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WILLIAM: *[Falsetto]* Oh no! Whatever did I do with my lipstick?

[ANNIE shakes her head again. WILLIAM gathers the newspapers off the bed, folds them up and puts them in the drawer of the night table. Laughs at himself, mutters "Who cares now?" and puts them underneath the stack of books--which then falls over. He goes as if to pick them up, changes his mind and sits back in his chair. The effort has exhausted him.]

WILLIAM: I really hate hospitals.

DR WALL: *[off]* I heard that. *[He enters]*

WILLIAM: I don't care. I hate them. I hate hospitals!

DR WALL: Welcome to the club. Why do you hate them?

WILLIAM: *[Glancing towards Capital Gay]* Not enough closet space.

DR WALL: Pardon?

WILLIAM: Forget it. Well, Doctor, do you bring tidings of comfort and joy? What's the good word? Is there a good word?

DR WALL: Yes, actually. There is some good news. We've ruled out leukemia.

WILLIAM: I didn't even know it had been nominated.

DR WALL: There are some other possibilities. You do have borderline anaemia, brought on by the diarrhoea, but the cause is unknown. *[Clears his throat]* I've been doing some reading lately, and I've decided that the best thing would be to bring in a specialist. I'd like Dr.

Helbing from the Chelsea and Westminster as a consultant. He's published some very good things on

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gastro-intestinal complications, and also seems to have some experience in treating, uh, homosexuals.

WILLIAM: You think that has something to do with what's wrong with me?

DR WALL: I don't know. All tests for venereal disease are negative.

WILLIAM: I should bloody well hope so!

DR WALL: I'm not a specialist in G.I., but Helbing is. Frankly, I know very little about your lifestyle, Mr. Davis.

WILLIAM: Lifestyle? Is that what it's called? I thought it was simply having a life. Do heterosexuals have lifestyles?

DR WALL: Please stop this. The reading I've done indicates that someone who does know something about – uh – homosexuals should be treating you... When I first saw you a year ago, I gave you a complete physical and you were fine except for an allergy to feathers.

WILLIAM: I could never keep racing pigeons, such a tragedy.

DR WALL: *[Ploughing on]* Seven months ago you came in and asked for medication for occasional migraine headaches. Four months ago you came in to see me complaining of fatigue, more headaches, stomach aches which were probably really intestinal cramps, and chronic diarrhoea.

[He checks his notes and looks at the chart he has with him.]

A week ago you were brought to the emergency room suffering from dehydration, brought on by the

diarrhoea. You've lost ten pounds in the past two

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weeks. You yourself told me that you've been in excellent health for the past ten years at least.

WILLIAM: Well, I have! Why would I lie to you?

DR WALL: Suddenly you're a very sick man, and frankly I don't understand it.

WILLIAM: Neither do I.

DR WALL: You've been here for four days but we still can't work out what's going on. You're quite certain you've never had anything like this before?

WILLIAM: Never. I hardly even get colds. The last time I was in the hospital was when I was in a motorcycle accident when I was nineteen. The football stuff was the usual sprains, nothing broken. I got food poisoning once in India. I'm the healthiest man I know.

DR WALL: You haven't been traveling in the tropics recently, have you?

WILLIAM: Are you kidding? I may work for Thomas Cook, but they're not that generous. I had a week in San Francisco at New Year, that's all. What's that got to do with anything?

DR WALL: Believe it or not, your symptoms so far bear a certain resemblance to rare tropical diseases! *[He chuckles.]* I know that sounds somewhat unlikely.

[WILLIAM is stonily silent.]

At any rate, we should know what's up quite soon, especially with Helbing's expertise. I'm ordering iron

supplements for you, to be taken with meals.

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WILLIAM: Oh, yes, this wonderful gourmet NHS food. Everything looks like wallpaper paste. Tastes like it too.

DR WALL: I'm sorry, a bland diet is necessary to clear up the diarrhoea.

WILLIAM: To look at the food you can hardly tell the difference. You know what, when I get out of here, I'm going to Pizza Express in Dean Street. I'm going to scoff four different toppings – spicy ones; hot toppings with some cool jazz.

DR WALL: Have you still got the abdominal pain?

WILLIAM: It doesn't hurt so much as ache.

DR WALL: *[Looking at chart]* Fever again last night.

WILLIAM: Wasn't so bad this time, hardly broke a sweat.

DR WALL: Keep drinking all the liquids you can. I don't want to prescribe anything stronger as medication until I know what's wrong. A wrong antibiotic could make it worse.

WILLIAM: I'm not that uncomfortable. I just wish I could stop dreaming of pepperoni.

DR WALL: Stay calm. Relax as much as you can.

WILLIAM: I'm hardly going anywhere, am I?

DR WALL: I'll bring Dr Helbing to see you as soon as I can.

[He starts to leave.]

WILLIAM: Very well, Watson, bring Sherlock in. Hopefully he'll find it elementary. Until then -

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DR WALL: Always kidding, aren't you? It's good you're being so cheerful. *[Exits]*

FAST BLACKOUT

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Scene Two

[William's room again. The light is a bit brighter. He is in bed, eating lunch. Enter DAVID, a tall, self-assured, preferably Black, man.]

WILLIAM: Dave! What are you doing here?

DAVID: I decided to take a long lunch and come see you. The Council can survive without me for a little while.

WILLIAM: But it's not visiting hours. I'm surprised they let you in.

DAVID: They didn't. They said at the reception desk to come back later, so I just went round to the A & E, grabbed a wheelchair and headed for the Staff elevator. If you act like you belong, brother, you can get away with anything. The key to integration.

WILLIAM: How cool is that?!

DAVID: The wheelchair definitely helped. I left it outside. You want to go for a ride? Do wheelies down the hall and upset the heart patients?

WILLIAM: *[Laughing]* No thanks. I'm not that bored yet.

DAVID: How come you don't have a TV? All hospitals have TVs these days, they keep the patients sedated better than Valium.

WILLIAM: I told them to take it out, I didn't want it. I'd rather read.

DAVID: And, of course, receive visits from such highly entertaining visitors such as – ME!

WILLIAM: Exactement.

[A pause, wherein they just smile happily at one another; intense eye contact for a serene moment.]

DAVID: *[Clearing his throat]* So, William, ol' buddy, what the hell you been up to, to end up in hospital? Haemorrhoids playing up again? I told you to go easy on the -

WILLIAM: *[Cuts in wearily]* They don't know yet.

DAVID: Don't know yet? What are they playing at? How long have you been in here, anyway?

WILLIAM: Five days. Five days of tests, and now I've got two doctors, - the all-purpose junior drudge and some shit hot specialist.

DAVID: Specialist in what?

WILLIAM: His name's Helbing. Mean anything to you?

[DAVID shrugs]

WILLIAM: Apparently this Helbing knows all there is to know about the gut.

DAVID: Wait a minute, that's ringing a bell. Wouldn't be Dr Arthur Helbing, would it?

WILLIAM: That's the one. Do you know him?

DAVID: Know him? I fucked him!

WILLIAM: You're kidding!

[He coughs several times. DAVID waits patiently.]

DAVID: We went out together about four years ago. Didn't work out. He was more interested in his work than in

- DAVID: *[cont.]* me. I was really sorry, he was a sweet man. He's found someone else now who doesn't mind playing second fiddle to gastro-intestinal disorders. Good luck to them both. You must have realised he was gay?
- WILLIAM: I've only seen him once, and he was with my other doctor then. Hardly the time or place. Anyway, maybe he's in the closet at work, like the rest of us.
- DAVID: If he's in the closet then I'm Diana Ross.
- WILLIAM: Might not be the same one.
- DAVID: There can't be more than one Dr. Helbing who specialises in gay diseases in this town.
- WILLIAM: What do you mean, gay diseases? There's no such thing as a gay disease. You ever seen a virus wearing a little pink triangle?
- DAVID: I meant, fathead, that he seems to have an awful lot of nellies on his books. Let me check - light brown hair, brown eyes, little moustache, deep voice?¹
- WILLIAM: So, it is your Helbing. Apart from being an offcut from the Village People, is he any good?
- DAVID: He's good at kissing and heavy breathing.
- WILLIAM: I meant as a doctor, Dave!
- DAVID: Sorry. I couldn't resist it. Yes, he's good – he's got all kinds of certificates in his office, does a drop-in clinic at the Vauxhall, gets quoted in *Gay Times* and *Capital Gay* all the time about STDs. I went to him myself when I thought I'd caught a dose, that's how I met him!

¹Change to fit the look of the actor playing Helbing.

- WILLIAM: How romantic! "Their eyes met over a swab..."
- DAVID: It turned out to be a false alarm. That reminds me, we're having a group meeting about STDs, maybe I should ask him to come in and speak.
- WILLIAM: I forget exactly what STD stands for. Sexually... what?
- DAVID: Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Billy boy, how could You forget a euphonious name like that?
- WILLIAM: "Euphonious" – hark at her! How's the group going?
- DAVID: Driving me crazy, as usual. Spent our last meeting arguing for an hour and a half about whether we should change the name. You see, there's three women that want to join now, so Phil said we shouldn't call it Black and White MEN Together anymore. Then we went round and round about whether it should be Black and White Men and Women, or Women and Men, or just call it Black and White Together in case any transsexuals want to join later on, and if we say Women and Men are people going to think we're heterosexual, and if we change the name, then we have to change the name on the bank account, and new stationery and a new cheque book. Et cetera et cetera.
- WILLIAM: So what did you decide?
- DAVID: Not me. Leave me out of it. They voted to table it and discuss it again at the next meeting – of course. I bet the women were so disgusted with all that silly nit-picking that they never come back. No wonder they form separate organisations. We must have looked pretty silly.

WILLIAM: Women have some pretty silly arguments too.
Separatist feminists – lesbian feminists – feminist
lesbians – separatist feminist lesbians -

[He coughs again.]

DAVID: Oh no! And there was me thinking women were
perfect!

WILLIAM: They argue all the time!

DAVID: I refuse to believe it.

WILLIAM: In fact, if you got to know one or two, you might
discover that women are human!

DAVID: Never!

WILLIAM: Faults and all.

DAVID: Say it isn't true!

[He moans theatrically, head in hands.]

WILLIAM: I'm sorry I said anything. A man is entitled to his
illusions. Forget I ever spoke. Of course women
always agree, they never raise their voices to one
another, and they are never ever bitchy behind
anyone's 's back. Better?

[DAVID peeks through his hands at WILLIAM. They laugh, relax.]

WILLIAM: I'd never say anything to upset you.

DAVID: Are you sure you're sick? You're remarkably cheerful.

[As if to give the lie to that, WILLIAM has another coughing jag.]

Now you're just being a drama queen.

[WILLIAM signals this is serious between coughs.]

DAVID: *[Serious]* That's a seriously bad cough you've got there. Easy, brother, easy.

[He rubs WILLIAM's back and shoulders till the fit subsides.]

DAVID: I almost forgot. We got you a card and everybody signed it, except the hyper-efficient Mr. Geoffrey Hardy. He beat us to it and bought his very own card first. Typical. Also typical, he didn't tell anyone that he had. He says he'll be in to visit soon.

[DAVID hands over two get-well cards in envelopes, and chats while WILLIAM opens them and reads them.]

Actually, everybody from the Gay Centre said they were going to visit, but don't count on it. Some people asked for the Ward number, or your home number, and I gave them both out. I hope you don't mind.

[WILLIAM laughs.]

What?

WILLIAM: It's from Bill. *[Reading]* "Get well before I get violently sick with boredom. Love and long yawns, Bill." *[He opens the other card. Reads:]* "Please don't die, that would be really inconvenient." That's the Gay Centre crowd. "Hurry on back in time for Pride. We need you to scare the Police." It's signed by Becky, Malcolm, Dan, Vanessa – even John Cook. Bill did come and see me, actually. Wanted my opinion about who should be in charge of the entertainment for Pride.

DAVID: Typical Bill. Has to have an ulterior motive even for doing something nice. Why should he be asking you about that?

WILLIAM: I did it two years ago. I think they're rather hoping I'll do it again.

DAVID: Not until you're better you won't.

WILLIAM: I wouldn't do it even if I was better. The shit I had to put up with. You try to please everyone, and you end up pleasing no-one. It's a celebration, for God's sake, not a war zone. I told Bill as much, so he asked me to think of someone else. I wanted to tell him to do his own dirty work, but I didn't feel up to it. Actually, I can't think of anyone I hate enough to offer the job to.

[WILLIAM takes a glass of water.]

DAVID: How about John Cook?

WILLIAM: *[Choking on his water]* Boring John? You're joking. "The Ego has Landed" – a three-hour one-man show by John Cook about the incredible talents of John Cook, written by John Cook, performed by John Cook, directed by John Cook –

DAVID: Security by John Cook.

WILLIAM: *[Serious, a bit]* Insecurity by John Cook. That's what it is really. Underneath. *[Pause.]* It must be possible to find somebody. It's not that hard. All they really want is a couple of singers and some Gay Lib speeches to break up the High N'R'G. Eric Presland will sing whether you ask him to or not. There's plenty of rent-a-gob out there too – no, wait, what about Ken Livingstone? He's very pro-gay, breath of fresh air in County Hall.

DAVID: You see? You're getting caught up in it again. Stop it.

WILLIAM: Why don't you do it?

DAVID: Me? Leave it out. I thought we were friends.

WILLIAM: You like challenges.

DAVID: Why else would I chase after you for two months?

[There is a silent, serious moment between them.]

WILLIAM: I'm sorry. Wrong time. I was set on Dan, as I told you. You can't say I wasn't honest...

DAVID: And you're still carrying a torch for him, admit it. You had him for five years – that's a lifetime in gay relationship years, almost the same as doggy years. Be grateful for what you had.

WILLIAM: I am, honestly.

DAVID: So why are you retreating into your ivory tower? Celibacy isn't healthy. It's proven scientifically. The heart needs exercise. I couldn't stand being abstinent.

WILLIAM: You'll meet some great men working on Pride...

DAVID: No

WILLIAM: You have a great set of contacts...

DAVID: No.

WILLIAM: A lot of your friends are performers.

DAVID: *[Relenting a bit]* I know a woman who can juggle.

WILLIAM: All women can juggle, it's called multi-tasking.

DAVID: And a guy who's a mime artist.

WILLIAM: That's perfect for Pride, a mime artist. Nobody can hear themselves speak anyway.

[WILLIAM suddenly lies back exhausted.]

Say you'll do it, please. Your refusals are exhausting.

DAVID: What is it?

WILLIAM: Nothing in particular. I'm always tired, that's all. I don't even have the energy to run in the morning any more.

DAVID: Getting fat and lazy, are we?

WILLIAM: Are you crazy? Look at me.

DAVID: *[Realising]* Yeah, you are thinner. Your face is much thinner. It didn't really register cos you're lying down.

WILLIAM: It's a good job I don't have to go out. My jeans would fall down.

DAVID: As bad as that?

WILLIAM: I've lost a lot of weight. A lot of weight.

DAVID: You're very pale too. You need some sun.

WILLIAM: *[Exploding]* For Christ's sake, David. I'm in hospital and I'm sick. Of course I look lousy.

DAVID: I didn't say you looked lousy, I said you needed some sun. A trip to Brighton, perhaps. You're a bit pale, that's all. *[Pause.]* At least you have the energy to get mad at me, that's something. *[Pause]* Did you know that when you're mad at me, you call me David?

WILLIAM: Do I?

DAVID: Only when you're mad. Otherwise it's Dave.

WILLIAM: *[Pause]* I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm just cranky... I don't know what's wrong with me.

DAVID: I'll let you rest. I have to get back, anyway. We don't get that long for lunch.

[DAVID crosses to the bed and removes the tray. They are awkward in the space.]

Do I get a hug? I promise I won't take advantage of you.

[They hug, which turns into a light kiss. NURSE DOTTIE enters with a urine collection bottle. She sees the two men hugging, drops the plastic bottle which then bounces merrily as she exits. She leaves so quickly they barely see her to register.]

DAVID: What was that?

WILLIAM: The Ghost of Christmas Past?

DAVID: *[Picking up the bottle]* Pretty clumsy ghost. At least it wasn't full.

WILLIAM: Soon will be. Time for me to make my contribution to medical science. *[DAVID tosses him the bottle.]* Thanks. Er – you wouldn't like to piss in this for me, would you?

DAVID: God knows what they'd find...

WILLIAM: So tired of doing this ...

DAVID: I'll leave you to it. Do you need anything?
Newspapers, radio, sweets, fruits, books, cannabis,
porn, personalised bedpan?

WILLIAM: It sounds wonderful. Bring it all on. *[Thought]*
Actually, I'm quite happy with you and your
stimulating conversation.

DAVID: You'd rather have my stimulating conversation than a
personalised bedpan. You must be out of your tiny
mind.

WILLIAM: Idiot!

DAVID: Bye-ee!

*[He exits. Slow fade on WILLIAM looking in disgust at the cold remains of
his lunch.]*

Scene Three

[WILLIAM in bed again. He is playing with a squash ball, from one hand to another. He drops it. DR HELBING enters and catches it. Hands it back.]

WILLIAM: You have good reflexes.

HELBING: I play squash. The hospital has a couple of courts in the new wing. Hello. I'm Dr. Helbing. I thought I should introduce myself. And how are we today?

WILLIAM: We are absolutely spiffing. That is why we are in hospital, because our health is so very good.

HELBING: I think we have some news on that.

WILLIAM: Ah! Another 'we'! And who is this 'we'? Is that the royal We? Or do you mean you and Dr. Wall?
[HELBING nods.] Well, why isn't he here now? *[He coughs.]*

DR HELBING: He was just called out on an emergency. You might find this hard to believe, but there are other patients in this hospital.

WILLIAM: Ouch! Sorry.

DR HELBING: So rather than keep you waiting until tomorrow, I thought I'd just come in myself.

WILLIAM: So what is it? I can tell by your face you know something. Please don't give me some long Latin name.

DR HELBING: We do have a name for it, yes. That doesn't mean we know much about it. You have what is known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. What that means is that your body's natural immunity to infection is breaking down. AIDS used to be very rare,

but recently there have been a number of cases reported, particularly, I'm sorry to say, among Gay men.

WILLIAM: Terrific. Just my luck, to get some exotic Gay disease. And not even an exotic holiday to catch it on. So now what, surgery?

DR HELBING: No. AIDS can't be treated with surgery.

WILLIAM: So what is the treatment, then?

DR HELBING: There is no treatment. There is no cure.

[A stunned pause]

I have to tell you, it could be terminal.

WILLIAM: You mean, as in fatal?

DR HELBING: Yes.

WILLIAM: This is a joke, right? Tell me, you're having me on.

DR HELBING: There's no way to soften it. I mean fatal. I'm sorry.

[WILLIAM runs his fingers through his hair. He stares blankly for a few moments, trying to take it in.]

DR HELBING: I'm sorry.

WILLIAM: You're sorry! I don't believe this. Shit!

DR HELBING: I am sorry, William. Desperately sorry.

WILLIAM: Nice of you to take some time out of your busy schedule to let me know I might be dying. I – AM – THIRTY – YEARS – OLD! *[Another long pause]* Thirty... Why? Why? Why me? What have I done to deserve this? *[Pause]* What next? How bad is it going to get?

- DR HELBING: I don't know. It depends on a number of things. You see, the main thing is that your body can no longer fight off infection. At present you have a G.I. infection –
- WILLIAM: English, please...
- DR HELBING: I beg your pardon?
- WILLIAM: G.I.?
- DR HELBING: Gastro-intestinal. The infection is known as Ulcerative Colitis. That's the reason for the chronic diarrhoea. The iron supplements appear to have the anaemia under control. You're also developing PCP, a form of pneumonia which is causing the fever and the dry cough. We're treating these things.
- WILLIAM: Can't you do anything about this - AIDS?
- DR HELBING: I'm going to try... Not enough is known about it... It's a complex disease... You could survive for some time. There's new research being done all the time. They could find a treatment that works at any moment.
- WILLIAM: Are you sure I've got AIDS?
- DR HELBING: I've checked and re-checked the test results. I've confirmed the diagnosis with Dr Wall and the epidemiologist here.
- WILLIAM: How the hell did this happen?
- DR HELBING: You tell me. [*WILLIAM is about to protest.*] I'm serious. There's some questions I have to ask you. Quite personal questions. You see, it's pretty certain that this is an infectious disease. We're not sure how it's transmitted, but evidence points to sex being one

strong possibility. So I'd like to have you make a list of all your sexual partners for the last couple of months. They should have themselves tested as well, because they may have caught the virus.

WILLIAM: What's the point of knowing when you can't offer a cure?

DR HELBING: We can offer care. And they should know if they're infectious. Maybe then they'd start to be more careful.

WILLIAM: Okay, okay. You want me to write you a list of partners? Have you got a postage stamp I can write on?

DR HELBING: There must be some incident –

WILLIAM: "Incident" – what a nice cold clinical word! Look, I broke up with my lover Dan six months ago. Since then I've been celibate. *[A sudden memory]* Well, there was this one time... I got lonely around Christmas... I answered a personal ad. He sounded like a nice guy. We had an "incident". Twice. I haven't seen him since.

DR HELBING: And he's the only one? Are you sure?

WILLIAM: I think I'd remember. *[A realisation]* Uh-oh, Uh-oh!

DR HELBING: *[Gently]* Yes?

WILLIAM: I went to San Francisco on holiday. Sometimes I get cheap travel from work.

DR HELBING: Yes?

WILLIAM: I'd never been to America. I'd always wanted to go to the West Coast, I'd heard so much about it.

DR HELBING: I know what you mean.

WILLIAM: I went to the Castro Station –

DR HELBING: The way you do –

WILLIAM: - and – well – I got invited to a party.

DR HELBING: *[Prompting]* You had sex with someone at this party?

WILLIAM: I had sex with several someones at this party.

DR HELBING: How many?

WILLIAM: How do I know? I was off my trolley. Someone offered me a joint, then a line of coke. Somewhere in there were some funny blue pills. I was on holiday! The dope there was far stronger than here... Everybody was off their faces, you could do whatever you wanted or whoever you wanted. And I did. It was one of those parties, you know?

DR HELBING: An orgy, you mean?

WILLIAM: Stop sounding like The News of the World. I don't need your disapproval.

DR HELBING: But it was, wasn't it? Not as a matter of judgement, as a matter of fact?

WILLIAM: I'd never been to one. But I was a little drunk and this guy in the bar was inviting all and sundry, so I went. I wouldn't go to another one. All I got was a really bad hangover the next day; it lasted a couple of days as a matter of fact.

DR HELBING: Maybe that wasn't all you got. San Francisco has a number of reported cases of AIDS. Was this party/

/before or after you met the guy through the personal ad?

WILLIAM: After. I remember telling him I was going to San Francisco soon. I was excited about it.

DR HELBING: He should get himself checked, just in case. So should your ex.

WILLIAM: Could Danny really have it?

DR HELBING: It's possible.

WILLIAM: We were together for seven years. Together. Just that. There was no-one else.

DR HELBING: Are you absolutely sure?

WILLIAM: Well, I know –

DR HELBING: Err on the side of caution. Tell him to get checked.

WILLIAM: That'll be some conversation. *[He bursts into tears.]*
Why me? Why Dan?

[DR HELBING puts his hand round WILLIAM's shoulders as he cries himself out.]

DR HELBING: He's probably out of it, with any luck.

WILLIAM: Luck! Not much of that around here.

DR HELBING: I mean, it seems your symptoms showed up after this party. But we still don't know for sure. This – Dan? - might be an asymptomatic carrier of some kind.

WILLIAM: A what?

DR HELBING: He could have it and not know it.

WILLIAM: Oh no. That is the last straw. *[Pause]* This is just the shittiest... *[Pause]* What are my chances?

DR HELBING: *[Gently]* There's about a forty percent mortality rate.

WILLIAM: What did you say?

DR HELBING: Two in every five patients have died. So far. It may turn out to be more, maybe less.

WILLIAM: Shit. *[Long pause]*

DR HELBING: Do you, by any chance, remember where this party took place?

WILLIAM: *[Dully]* What?

DR HELBING: The party in San Francisco, what was the address?

WILLIAM: Who cares?

DR HELBING: I do. Please try to remember the address.

WILLIAM: What difference can that make now? Anyway, I don't see that it's any of your damned business.

DR HELBING: It's my business to keep this damn thing from spreading. If you can remember the address I can contact the health authorities there, and give them the information. They can notify whoever held the party and maybe he can get those that attended to a clinic.

WILLIAM: And maybe they can get the poor bastards arrested for drugs offences too. I don't know the California laws on orgies.

DR HELBING: *[Sharp]* That won't be happening. Some things are more important than that.

WILLIAM: Not according to Nancy Reagan.

DR HELBING: I'm glad you can still joke. If it was me, I'd be tearing the walls down.

WILLIAM: No, you wouldn't. You'd be sitting down to write a list of everyone you'd been to bed with in the last six months, complete with names, addresses, age and star sign.

DR HELBING: I don't believe in astrology.

WILLIAM: OK. OK. Take a letter, Miss Helbing. "My love life, or what I did on my holidays" by William Davis, aged 30. Number one: my lover Dan MacCrae, with whom I was completely monogamous for seven years and who still lives at our old address – he got the flat, I got the cat. Two – Harold, whose surname I don't know, who in his personal ad sounded a lot like Dan and who lives a short walk from The Black Cap but don't ask me the name of the street. It was number 69, I remember, because we joked about that. Finally, a bunch of strangers in San Francisco who live God knows where but they party at a place on Castro Street.

DR HELBING: Where on Castro Street?

WILLIAM: I think it was Castro Street. It was near there, anyway, right next door to a launderette, and there was a Chinese restaurant on the corner. The Golden Temple. I think. It was a long time ago and I was drunk.

DR HELBING: It's all right. I'll send what information we have, like the date and the general area, to the Gay Men's Clinic and the AIDS group in San Francisco.

WILLIAM: They have an AIDS group?

DR HELBING: It's very new. We'll have one here soon too, I'm sure. But maybe they can work out where the party was from what you've said. Maybe someone there even went to the party. In the meantime, contact Dan and Harold.

WILLIAM: *[Sighs]* Great.

DR HELBING: William... I hope you realise... even if we manage to get these infections under control, you'll still have AIDS. You may start feeling much better, but you'll still have it in your system... and it's infectious, so you should... try to... refrain... from sexual activity.

WILLIAM: You think I want to pass this on?

DR HELBING: *[Quietly]* It's been known to happen. Some men are selfish and ruled by their penises. *[At William's shocked look]* Besides, we can't be sure this is transmitted only through sex... Not every group affected is sexually promiscuous, because AIDS also affects Haitians and drug users and haemophiliacs - except the haemophiliacs are blaming it on blood they got from Gay donors. We still think it might be sex, but we only think it. Some people seize on that uncertainty and decide to do whatever they want anyway; one heroin addict is supposed to have said, "I'm going to screw anything I can get my hands on before I die." Doctors can't force people to be celibate, though maybe they can ask them to think before they have sex.

WILLIAM: I don't feel very attractive right now. As a matter of fact I feel like Typhoid Mary. Shouldn't I be in isolation?

DR HELBING: No, that's not necessary. Just limit yourself to kisses on the cheek. *[Pause]* Haven't you read about AIDS? It's been in *Capital Gay* several times. And people buy American papers here too.

- WILLIAM: I hardly ever read the health stuff. Boring. I've been to the clap clinic every so often but I never really thought I had anything to worry about, with Dan. I did mean to go again after I got back from the States, but I was busy and forgot. Anyway, what's the point of scaring yourself unnecessarily?
- DR HELBING: Early detection always increases your survival chances.
- WILLIAM: Well, I haven't been sick very long.
- DR HELBING: That's what you think... As far as I can tell, based on when you got this acute colitis, you've had it for about five months. We may get that under control if you respond to the sulphasalazine, but we also have to treat the incipient pneumonia. If we could have spotted the colitis earlier... the problem with AIDS is that everything in the body can go haywire at once.
- WILLIAM: I went to my GP for treatment months ago!
- DR HELBING: And he gave you medication for diarrhoea, which was your primary symptom. You didn't tell him you had blood in your stool, and he didn't take samples because nothing suggested he needed to. You said you had stomach pains, not intestinal cramps. You didn't tell him about the night sweats, you never mentioned you were running a fever, and you didn't have one when he examined you in his surgery.
- WILLIAM: I didn't know I was running a fever. I thought the sweats at night were from nightmares or anxiety. How the hell was I to know I had this – Deficiency thing?
- DR HELBING: How was he to know? You're lucky Dr Wall called me in. Otherwise he might have simply diagnosed Ulcerative Colitis, and later on possibly he would have spotted PCP – that's pneumonia caused by yeast in the lungs – and maybe finally recognised AIDS...

- WILLIAM: And if they didn't – well, there was always the autopsy.
- DR HELBING: It's a very rare disease... among heterosexuals. No reason a Junior Registrar would recognise it. Unless they were gay, of course. Is your GP gay?
- WILLIAM: Far from it.
- DR HELBING: So they won't even know what questions to ask.
- WILLIAM: But now I'm lucky enough to have the all-powerful Dr. Arthur 'know-all' Helbing on my side.
- DR HELBING: Don't kid yourself. I'm a doctor, not a witch-doctor. But I'll give it my best shot. For the moment, I've done all I can.
- WILLIAM: I think I may have a little trouble sleeping this evening.
- DR HELBING: You can have a sleeping pill if you want. The nurses quite like that, you'll give them less trouble.
- WILLIAM: It's a tranquiliser I'll need. My mother and brother are due to visit tonight. They're coming down by train from Yorkshire, staying overnight at some pokey overpriced little guest house in Finsbury. [*Pause*] Whatever you do, don't tell them.
- DR HELBING: Not my job, that sort of thing. But I really do think you should tell them. They'll find out anyway, sooner or later. It's up to you.
- WILLIAM: Later rather than sooner. I think.
- DR HELBING: Of course, you may not be so well equipped to deal with it by then.
- WILLIAM: You have a point. I'll think about it.

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DR HELBING: I'll leave you to it. You seem to have calmed down now. You're taking the news much more calmly.

WILLIAM: There's only one small problem...

DR HELBING: What's that?

WILLIAM: I'm going to throw up. *[He exits hastily]*

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

[William's room. As the lights come up, we see ELISABETH DAVIS sitting in the chair next to the bed. She looks impatient. She is alone.]

ELISABETH: *[Calling]* Are you all right?

WILLIAM: *[off]* Don't fuss, Mum. Just give me a minute, o.k.?

[She glances through the books and magazines. She finds nothing of interest except a manila folder, which she starts to open, and then stops herself. She sighs with boredom. WILLIAM enters.]

WILLIAM: I don't know why they bothered to give me a room. They should have just stuck me in the bathroom, since I spend most of my time there.

ELISABETH: Where would you sleep, in the bathtub?

WILLIAM: Not a bad idea. When I wanted a shower in the morning, I'd only have to stand up. Where's Steve?

ELISABETH: He bought a present to bring you, the new Le Carré, the drummer girl one. Then he left it on the train.

WILLIAM: Typical!

ELISABETH: He said he'd just pop into the hospital shop and see if they had it.

WILLIAM: We won't see him for an hour then. *[He climbs into Bed.]* I'd better wait till he gets here before I tell you what the doctors have found out.

ELISABETH: Like hell you will. You'll tell me right now, William Davis. You can tell him separately when he gets here. If he gets here.

WILLIAM: *[Sighs, looking away.]* Brace yourself, Mum. It's not what you'd call good news.

ELISABETH: *[A whisper]* Oh no... Cancer?

[WILLIAM shakes his head. She relaxes in relief, but immediately tenses again as other possibilities flash through her mind.]

What, then? What? Tell me.

WILLIAM: Can't it wait till Steve's here?

ELISABETH: Oh, no you don't. You've already worried me silly. What do you mean, "not what I'd call good news"?

WILLIAM: Well... It's something very new. They don't know that much about it. But I've got a great doctor –

ELISABETH: Stop trying to sweeten the pill. Give it to me straight.

WILLIAM: It's called AIDS...

[ELISABETH looks blank.]

It's an immune deficiency. You get sick quicker, and you don't recover too well. Gay men seem to get it more than most.

ELISABETH: I knew being gay would end in tears.

WILLIAM: Mother! You ought to be over that by now.

ELISABETH: I'm sorry. That just slipped out. I am over it, really. But – how serious is it?

WILLIAM: Sixty percent survival rate. Not bad...

ELISABETH: You mean two in five die?

WILLIAM: I can't fault your maths.

ELISABETH: Don't make light of it. You're really sick, aren't you?

WILLIAM: And likely to get sicker... Till they come up with something, that is.

ELISABETH: So what do you want me to say from now on when people call? Tell them you're really sick with a homosexual disease. I don't know how your Auntie Ivy and Uncle Claud would take that.

WILLIAM: Just tell them the truth, it doesn't matter.

[Enter STEVE]

STEVE: They didn't have it, so I got you this.

[Hands him a copy of Muriel Spark's "Loitering With Intent".]

WILLIAM: "Loitering with Intent" – are you trying to make a point?

STEVE: No!

WILLIAM: *[Examining the book]* It's a bit short, isn't it?

STEVE: Why? Are you planning to stay long? Hey, big brother, how are you doing? Bunking off in hospital again, you lazy drongo?

ELISABETH: Drongo?

WILLIAM: His new girlfriend is Australian.

ELISABETH: You can learn so much from children. I knew there must be a reason to have them.

STEVE: Don't look now, Mum, but we're all grown-ups now.

ELISABETH: Not from where I'm standing.

[A long pause.]

STEVE: I seem to have come in half way through the movie.
So what is it then? Leprosy?

[WILLIAM laughs hysterically at this, a laugh that could be a cry of pain. STEVE and ELISABETH exchange glances, worried. WILLIAM's laugh is cut off by a severe coughing fit. STEVE holds out a glass of water for him. WILLIAM waves it away till the coughing subsides. He takes a long sip, partly to gain time.]

WILLIAM: Oh, Steve. You have no idea how funny you are.
Thank you. I needed a good laugh. William Davis,
leper to the gentry. It would look good on a business
card, don't you think? So, Stevie boy, you want to
know what's wrong with me. Well, that's for me to
know and you to find out...

ELISABETH: *[Sharp, to break through his hysterics]* William,
you're being a thoroughly obnoxious little boy.

WILLIAM: Sorry. It seemed funny at the time. *[To STEVE:]* You
really want to know? Well... I have colitis and
something known as PCP pneumonia; but that's not
all, you'll be delighted to know, it's not the main
feature. No, that's called Acquired Immune Deficiency
Syndrome, AIDS for short.

[Everyone starts talking at the same time.]

STEVE: The Gay Plague?!

[WILLIAM starts to talk, coughs instead.]

ELISABETH: A plague? Are you crazy? There aren't any plagues any more.

STEVE: Jesus, I don't believe it. *[Dazed.]* That stuff is deadly. I've got this gay mate who says people who get it lose all their hair and get covered in -

WILLIAM: Such a famous disease, even my straight brother knows about it. Figures. That's what comes from reading the *Daily Mail*, the papers are such experts -

STEVE: Are you sure? AIDS is worse than cancer, almost.

ELISABETH: *[Exploding]* Will someone please tell me what the hell is going on!

[WILLIAM starts to hand her the folder as he says:]

WILLIAM: You can read all about it, Dr. Helbing gave me all this stuff. I didn't know anything about it either.

ELISABETH: I want to hear it from you. You tell me. I think I'm entitled to that.

WILLIAM: *[Mechanical, like a teacher]* My body no longer has much resistance to infection. My antibodies are on strike. Any little germ that comes along can carry me off. AIDS itself won't kill, but eventually one of the infections will. I could get cancer. I could get anything. There's no way to predict how long I could last, and there's no known cure. About four out of every ten people who get it, die. So far, 75% of the victims are gay or bisexual men.

STEVE: Stop it!

WILLIAM: They think it's transmitted by sexual activity, because even the non-gay victims have had sexual partners who had the disease.

STEVE: I don't want to know.

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WILLIAM: Except maybe the poor haemophiliacs, who got the disease without even having the fun. *[To STEVE]* They think I got it on my American trip.

STEVE: So you brought it on yourself? Is that what you're saying? You stupid, STUPID cretin.

ELISABETH: That's enough.

STEVE: I feel sick.

WILLIAM: You too? Funny that, that's exactly how I felt when I was told. Would you like one of my anti-nausea pills?

STEVE: *[Abruptly]* I'm going downstairs to get some chewing gum.

ELISABETH: Oh, Stevie. Don't sulk.

STEVE: I'm not sulking. I just need a walk.

ELISABETH: You're running away. That's annoying me.

STEVE: Tough. I don't see why we should be careful of your feelings when he's the one who's dying.

[STEVE exits. A Pause.]

ELISABETH: He used to take it out on me when his father was dying. I think he finds it easier to show anger than grief.

WILLIAM: Big boys don't cry. That's what Dad used to say. I suppose I'm the one who should be crying if anyone's going to. But I can't. I just feel empty.

- ELISABETH: I feel in limbo. It hasn't sunk in yet, and anyway we don't know what's going to happen. They might find a cure tomorrow.... I hate waiting. *[A sudden explosion]* God in heaven, William, why couldn't you have been more careful?
- WILLIAM: I didn't know then.
- ELISABETH: If it's caught through sex, why did you go fooling around? You had Danny, and he was the sweetest, loveliest boy. Wasn't that enough for you?
- WILLIAM: We'd split up already. I was in grief.
- ELISABETH: I suppose in a way it's my fault. I mothered you too much.
- WILLIAM: I had a wonderful childhood –
- ELISABETH: I should have remarried. You needed a father. If – if – you hadn't turned out like – none of this need never have happened.
- WILLIAM: Mother – if you made me a homosexual – then thank you. I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.
- ELISABETH: *[Laughs briefly]* I know I'm saying all the wrong things. I keep putting my foot in it. I wish... I wish I wasn't so helpless.
- WILLIAM: Want to kiss it better?
- ELISABETH: Something like that.
- WILLIAM: Well, too bad. I'm not even allowed to kiss properly. Only something called 'dry kissing', which is basically a peck on the cheek, not really a kiss at all.
- ELISABETH: You mean, like one of Gran's kisses?

WILLIAM: Gran! I'd forgotten about her. What the heck is she going to say?

ELISABETH: It's God's judgement on you for being a homosexual. Obviously.

WILLIAM: I thought my motor-bike accident was God's judgement on me for being a homosexual.

ELISABETH: Everything is God's judgement on you for being a homosexual. You're directly responsible for the Mount St Helen eruption, didn't you know?

WILLIAM: On second thoughts, you'd better not tell her. Or anyone else, come to that.

ELISABETH: What can I say if anyone asks?

WILLIAM: Say I've got – hepatitis.

ELISABETH: That's not very nice.

WILLIAM: In the league table of popular fatal illnesses, Hep B is way above this one, believe me.

ELISABETH: It's going to be very lonely.

WILLIAM: We've got each other. And I've got good friends.

ELISABETH: Not sure I have.

WILLIAM: Oh, come here.

ELISABETH: Is it safe?

WILLIAM: I'm not going to bite you! And hugs are OK.

[They hug.]

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WILLIAM: You silly old moo. What are you?

ELISABETH: A silly old moo.

WILLIAM: I hate hospitals.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One

[WILLIAM's room once more. He is sitting up in bed now, and at the foot of the bed a small table is holding the growing pile of books. WILLIAM is on the phone. REBECCA SWEENEY is sitting in the chair, crocheting. JOHN COOK is leaning against the wall, reading a copy of Jeffrey Weeks' 'Coming Out'. Lights up slowly, with WILLIAM's call already in progress. At this moment he is listening, nodding.]

BECKY: *[Whispering]* Nice of them to let William have a phone.

JOHN: It's how they reward the long-term inmates for good behaviour. *[He looks at his watch.]* How long is he going to be?

WILLIAM: *[On the phone]* Danny, I mean it. Congratulations. You've been waiting a long time to get to be a manager. You deserve it. *[Pause]* Envious? Not a bit of it. In fact, I'll crack open a bottle of champagne with you as soon as I'm out of here. And my stomach can stand it. It was good of you to call. I'd been meaning to, but you know how it is... I've been so busy since... As a matter of fact I did call you, the night I had to get to A & E, but you weren't in. I just wondered if you were out of town. *[Pause]* Oh of course, Gay Alliance, third Thursday. How quickly I forget things... So, have you found anyone to do the entertainment for Pride Day yet?

[JOHN listens intently at this, but tries not to show it.]

No?

[JOHN ducks back into reading the magazine. BECKY smiles; she hasn't missed any of this, although JOHN is unaware she's observing him.]

You'll find someone, I'm sure. *[Pause]* Thanks, Danny, it's good to hear your voice too. *[Coughs.]* Look, I'd love to keep nattering, but I've got two visitors demanding my attention.

[Mock outrage from BECKY]

[Pause] Oh, and, uh, there's something else... You should, uh, go get a checkup at the clinic yourself. My doctor said it would be a good idea. I don't think he quite believes me when I say we haven't done anything for six months! I can't say I blame him, it seems quite unlikely with someone as dishy as you. No, nothing! I wasn't coming on to you, honest. It's over, I know it's over. Don't be so prickly. *[Pause]* Seriously, get yourself checked out. You see, the diagnosis is – oh, you heard? You mean the news is out all ready? I swear, the Gay Community is just a tiny village, really. Who'd you hear it from? Oh well, I told him myself when he visited this morning. I mean, David had a right to know, didn't he? He's my oldest friend. *[Pause]* Yes, dear, you do too, I know. I was just about to tell you, wasn't I? *[Pause]* Nobody knows how long. To tell you the truth, I can hardly believe it myself. *[Pause. He laughs.]* Yes, that's just what I said, it sucks.

[A long pause]

[Softly] Of course I'd love to see you. My door is always open. Ex-lovers have rights too. In fact, we should stick together. Not in that way, idiot. Okay? So get your arse in gear and get over here some time soon. *[Pause.]* Good. I'll see you then. 'Bye.

[Pause, then he hangs up.]

- BECKY: Are you back with us?
- JOHN: We appreciate that exes who shafted you have priority over people who still love you.
- WILLIAM: He did not shaft me! That's outrageous. What brings you here anyway?
- BECKY: Gossip. What else would draw any self-respecting deviant? First things first. Vanessa said to tell you that she'll be in to see you the minute she gets back from New York. Also how dare you get sick when she's gone abroad, that I am to call her and tell her exactly what's wrong with you so that we can decide exactly how many witches we need for a healing circle.
- WILLIAM: Tell her to get on the next flight, cos I'm fading faster than Camille. I don't believe in witchcraft any more, not since I saw *The Exorcist*, but the sight of her fierce dyke face will probably scare me back to health.
- BECKY: She doesn't have a fierce dyke face, she has great cheekbones and a stubborn chin and sexy green Irish eyes – I don't know why you don't believe in witchcraft, I certainly believe in fairies, even nasty bitchy fairies who insult my darling Van.
- WILLIAM: *[Mock deep voice]* Who you calling fairy?
- JOHN: I hate to interrupt –
- BECKY: Then don't. As I was saying –
- WILLIAM: No, wait! I think my illness must be affecting my hearing. I could have sworn I heard the voice of the famous John Cook. Am I hallucinating? Becky, Becky, /

/tell me the truth. Is that really the legendary John Cook, star of stage, screen and dole office? Standing right there in all his thespian glory?

BECKY: Try not to faint, dear, but it is indeed, the famous actor, John Cook. Your tired old eyes do not deceive you.

JOHN: Ha! After that last review in Capital Gay, I'm not an actor, I'm a joke!

WILLIAM: *[Aside]* So what's new? *[To JOHN]* Review? I don't remember reading about you in a review....

JOHN: You didn't! That's the whole point. It said nothing. One of my best performances ever and hardly a word. Just a name check in the supporting cast, while that wanker Eric Presland gets a whole paragraph when he couldn't act his way out of a paper bag.

WILLIAM: Well, he was the lead.

JOHN: He thought he was the lead. As usual. He tried to play the lead. But in spite of all the advice I gave him, he just isn't lead material. The ego of the man! I'll never work with him again, not even if he begs me. When I think about what I could have done with that part. I said I couldn't do "Private Lives" because of prior commitments, but I should have just gone for it, for the sake of the show. *[To BECKY]* The problem, you see, was I'd just been made acting deputy assistant manager of the Vauxhall, and once you get an important position of authority like that, well – need I say more?

BECKY: No, I think you've said quite enough about your public life. I don't care to hear about your private life.

WILLIAM: I heard it sold out for the last week. So the public must have –

JOHN: The public! What do they know?

WILLIAM: You're right, they're just ignorant. It's a shame you have to put on plays in front of an audience really. They don't deserve it and they just spoil it.

JOHN: Now you're making fun of me.

BECKY: As if we would!

WILLIAM: Have you auditioned for anything else yet?

[He coughs badly.]

JOHN: No, I think it's time for a little re-evaluation. I need to think more about my career goals. I thought I would have been closer to achieving them by now, but somehow I seem to have come to a standstill.

WILLIAM: You can't come to a standstill behind a bar – you'd get the sack.

JOHN: I'm not talking about that grubby dive. I'm talking about my real Career.

BECKY: Think of it this way John, you're ideally placed.

JOHN: Really?

BECKY: Yes. Poised... If you were at the peak of the profession, you wouldn't have anywhere to go.

JOHN: That's true. The problem is, I haven't got a high enough profile. I need more name recognition. I suggested to Malcolm that he should do an interview/

/with me for the paper. It's a fascinating life story and I've got some pretty controversial opinions.
[Confidential] Just between ourselves, I think Dorothy Squires is a better singer than Judy Garland.

WILLIAM: What did Malcolm say?

JOHN: He's thinking about it. I told him, culture is part of the liberation movement. There's room for another gay theatre company apart from Sweatshop. I might start one. I mean, not just gay plays, that's getting to be a bit passé, but Shakespeare, Wilde, Tennessee Williams –

WILLIAM: Who didn't write gay plays at all!

JOHN: We should set our sights higher – aspire to the mainstream! I could talk about all that in the interview. You'd be surprised how many people would be interested.

BECKY: I would indeed!

JOHN: When's the next Pride meeting? Are they still looking for an Entertainments Manager?

WILLIAM: They don't like the word Manager.

JOHN: But it is management, in all but name. I might be willing to put my skills at their service.

BECKY: And of course they'd have to interview the Entertainments Manager of Gay Pride Day in all the Gay Press, wouldn't they? How very convenient!

JOHN: You're beginning to get on my tits, Becky.

BECKY: You're such a contortionist, you can get on my tits and up your own arse at the same time! You know, /

/John, I have this strange idea that when I go to visit friends in hospital I might just be more concerned with what's wrong with them than with whatever petty problems are plaguing my piffling little progress. Maybe you don't give a damn about why William's here, but would you mind shutting up for just long enough for me to find out. Or is that too much to ask?

JOHN: Well, pardon me for breathing!

WILLIAM: Fight! Fight! I'll give you odds on the bulldyke!

BECKY: William, your nasty streak is showing.

JOHN: His nasty streak?!

WILLIAM: My nasty streak is barely peeking out. Why, you've been sitting there with your knitting –

BECKY: Crochet –

WILLIAM: Whatever. You've been sitting there, hooking away, you old hooker, and frankly it's plain weird. You look like Madame Defarge.

JOHN: Who's Madame Defarge?

WILLIAM: Don't worry. It's not your part. Men lost their heads over her.

[He chuckles, and coughs.]

Like Mary Queen of Scots lost her head over Queen Elizabeth.

JOHN: *[Confused]* Oh.

BECKY: *[Patient, matter-of-fact]* She was a creepy fictional character who sat and knitted names of those who/

/were destined to die by the guillotine in the French Revolution. You can read all about it in *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

JOHN: Wasn't Dirk Bogarde in that? I saw it, I think. So dishy –

BECKY: And I am going to sit here and crochet a fucking quilt until you tell me what is wrong with you, William.

WILLIAM: I don't feel like talking about it.

BECKY: Vanessa is going to want to know.

WILLIAM: Tell her to call me. It's easier on the phone, when I don't have to see people's faces.

BECKY: So I've come all this way for nothing? I wouldn't mind knowing myself.

JOHN: Neither would I.

BECKY: Neither would he, now he comes to think of it.

WILLIAM: I suppose I might as well tell you, since you've made the effort to come here. Everyone is going to hear about it sooner or later, in any case.

JOHN: Is it Hepatitis B? I thought I had Hep B once, but –

WILLIAM: *[Cutting in]* I have AIDS.

[JOHN is impressed with WILLIAM's calm. He whistles. Ponders.]

JOHN: What a bummer!

BECKY: What does that mean, exactly?

WILLIAM: *[Muttering]* I'm not going through all that again. I'm sick of explaining.

[WILLIAM reaches into the folder for a Xerox.]

WILLIAM: Here. Read this. *[She takes it and starts reading]*
Everything you always wanted to know about the
Immune Syndrome, and then some. You'll wish you
never asked.

JOHN: What can they do about it?

WILLIAM: *[Coughs]* Nothing.

JOHN: A real bummer.

WILLIAM: You already said that.

JOHN: I don't know what else to say. Except it's awful.

WILLIAM: And a bummer.

JOHN: Well – yes.

BECKY: *[Still reading, her voice shaky]* John's right, this is
awful.

WILLIAM: You could say that.

JOHN: There's only one thing to do.

[They look at him expectantly.]

Call Malcolm. I'm sure he'd go for a feature. An
interview, a centre spread with pictures. I'm sure
they'd send a photographer – Gordon or Richard –
we've got two days before they go to press –

[BECKY and WILLIAM start to laugh]

What? Look, I wouldn't even mind interviewing
William myself. What are you laughing at?

[Lights start to fade]

JOHN: I think it's a good idea. I mean, people ought to know, isn't that right? In fact, people have a right to know. I don't know why you think it's so funny, it's tragic.

[JOHN is still talking as the lights fade to blackout.]

It'll crack everyone up. It's the saddest thing I ever heard of, and an interview would - stop laughing, you two. An interview would be a terrific legacy, don't you see? Wouldn't it? Wouldn't it?

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

[The hospital cafeteria. MALCOLM, DAVID, and WILLIAM are seated around a white plastic table. WILLIAM is dressed in pyjamas and robe. A large sign on the back wall states: "Please Help Our Staff Keep This Café Clean." They have various – empty - cans of Coke, etc. There is rubbish around from previous customers.]

WILLIAM: I'm so grateful to you guys for taking me out like this. I get out of the house so rarely. I have never been to this bar before. Is it what they call a drag bar?

MALCOLM: It's certainly a hell of a drag. Hospitals make me want to kill myself. Look at all this rubbish.

DAVID: That's no way to talk about the patients.

WILLIAM: Still, it's better than staring at the same four walls. I get out so rarely.

[Enter DANIEL, with several more cans.]

DAN: Here we go, Round Two. Did you talk about me while I was gone? I do hope so.

MALCOLM: *[Gloomily]* No, we couldn't think of anything else Bitchy to say about you. It had all been said before.

[Everyone pops open their cans open, except MALCOLM, who doesn't have one.]

I want to know which idiot gave John Cook my home phone number. Own up.

DAN: I did. He said he had to talk to you, it was an emergency, a matter of life and death.

- MALCOLM: Thanks a bunch. You ought to know better than that. Newspaper editors attract all sorts of weirdos. Why didn't you ask what he wanted first?
- DAN: He wouldn't say. You know the way he makes a drama out of a crisis. He loves being mysterious.
- MALCOLM: Well, he took up nearly an hour – on Press Day too! – trying to persuade me to do an interview with William.
- WILLIAM: Oh, no. Did he really call you about that ridiculous idea?
- MALCOLM: He had the nerve to tell me that our coverage of AIDS was very poor. Can you believe it?
- DAVID: You haven't exactly made it front page news, Malcolm.
- MALCOLM: It isn't front page news, for Christ's sake. It's a health problem so we put it in the Health News section, along with Karposi's sarcoma and Hepatitis and everything else. We print everything we can get from the hospitals, we talk to doctors, and whatever we pick up from the American gay press. We're thinking of doing a regular column. Tony Whitehead's offered. What more are we supposed to do? I'll be damned if I'll print what John wants. I can just see it: A long sappy interview under the banner: "AIDS Victim Speaks Out" - and a picture of William looking sexily wasted.
- DAVID: You don't need a scary headline with it, but John could have a point. Give it a human face. So many people don't even know of anyone who's been diagnosed yet. How many cases do we have? A dozen.
- MALCOLM: *[Pointed]* That we know of.

- DAVID: People still think it has nothing to do with them, and somehow it'll all go away.
- MALCOLM: Please don't go sticking up for that clown, Dave, I shall run screaming from the room – like I did from his last performance.
- DAN: Aren't we all leaving something out?
- MALCOLM: What?
- DAN: Don't you think the victim should –
- WILLIAM: Don't use that word, I can't stand it.
- DAN: – think that William should have some say in it? You're talking like the tabloids.
- WILLIAM: Thank you, my dear. [*They all look at him.*] Since you're kind enough to ask, I'd rather stick pins in my eyes.
- DAVID: Rightly handled, it could be a public service.
- WILLIAM: Not you too? I thought you were my friend. I don't want to be interviewed, and that's that. Can we please not argue? Everybody who comes to visit me argues.
- DAN: Well, you certainly hit the party jackpot tonight. Four visitors at once! Four times the arguments, aren't you lucky?
- MALCOLM: I don't see why we couldn't have stayed in your room. This place is depressing.
- WILLIAM: I'm sick of my room. The trouble with you, Malcolm, if you didn't have something to complain about, you wouldn't know what to do with yourself. That's why/

/you're such a good campaigning journalist, you never run out of things to moan about. You'd be so upset if we actually got equal rights, you'd have to pick a fight about someone else.

MALCOLM: *[Joking]* You – *[whispers]* you can stuff your insights where the sun don't shine.

WILLIAM: *[Coy]* Oh, you sweet-talking fucker.

DAVID: Girls, girls!

MALCOLM: We always have a go at each other. Since when were you the Voice of Reason? *[Before DAVID can retort]* I know, I know, he's got this serious disease, but does that mean we all have to creep around him and make inane small talk and pretend we're all hap-hap-happy? He doesn't need kid gloves, or any of that shit.

WILLIAM: Anyone says I do, I'll punch him out.

DAN: That's what I love about my gay brothers – their sophistication.

MALCOLM: You can shove it, too, Daniel. *[Rubbing his eyes]* I'm sorry. I didn't get back from the studio till 2:30 this morning. Why can't advertisers respect deadlines? It plays havoc with the production schedule, but we can't just say No, we need the money.

DAVID: Is it a good edition?

MALCOLM: *[Deadpan]* It's always a good edition. *[Pause; looks at DAVID]* Apart from certain gaps in the coverage, it seems.

WILLIAM: *[Quietly]* I didn't know anything at all about it 'til I got it.

MALCOLM: Really? But we've had things in the paper... Didn't you see them?

WILLIAM: *[Shrugging]* I wasn't paying attention.

DAN: I remember seeing a full page ad about Hepatitis B. Dave knew more about AIDS than I did, I mean, I didn't realize how deadly it is.

MALCOLM: But it's not fatal, is it? I mean, it's the other stuff that kills you, like Karposi's cancer, right?

DAVID: KA-posi's sarcoma. K-A-P-

MALCOLM: What?

DAVID: It's Kaposi's, no "r."

MALCOLM: Isn't that what I said?

DAVID: *[Coldly]* You can't pronounce it; you – *[pointing to DAN]* you're not sure what it is, and you *[pointing to WILLIAM]* - you never heard of it until you caught it, and I wouldn't know much more, except we've got a forum coming up so I had to bone up on it. *[To MALCOLM]* Still think you've given it enough publicity?

MALCOLM: *[Shouting]* You've made your point.

DAN: Sssh! Calm down. There's people here with pacemakers.

MALCOLM: You've talked yourself into an assignment.

DAVID: Who, me?

MALCOLM: You're the expert. You're the one with the complaint. If you don't like the paper, help to make it better.

[Enter NURSE ANNIE. She beckons WILLIAM.]

ANNIE: Time for your medication, Mr Davis. Visiting hours are almost over, gentlemen.

DAN: She called us gentlemen. I'm so flattered to be given the benefit of the doubt.

WILLIAM: *[Softly, just to DAN]* I have never known you to be anything but a Gentle Man, Mister O'Neill. *[DAN blushes.]* Good night, all. *[Dramatic]* It's – Pill-Popping Time, also known as "It's a Knockout".

BLACKOUT

Scene Three

[Three weeks later; WILLIAM's room again. He is standing in a corner of the room, half-turned away from his three visitors. BECKY and DAVID, each tense, are seated in chairs on either side of the bed; VANESSA MEDCALF is perched on the end of the bed. 2 travel posters now adorn the walls.]

WILLIAM: It's the stupidest idea I ever heard.

BECKY: Dave didn't say you had to do it.

DAVID: It was merely a suggestion.

VANESSA: You're not going to get anywhere by pushing him. You're better off just letting him think about it for a bit.

WILLIAM: I can speak for myself, Vanessa. If you don't mind.

[She shrugs in reply and is silent. A pause.]

DAVID: You're the one that said you were sick of being stuck in the hospital. This would be a chance to get out for a night. I'm sure that Arthur would agree.

WILLIAM: Arthur, is it now? Of course he'd agree. "Dr. Helbing and his prize exhibit." Bring on the acrobats!

BECKY: That's not it at all!

WILLIAM: How the hell would you know? Don't you think I know what's really going on?

[He coughs. It is worse.]

VANESSA: *[Wearily, looking at the floor]* What's on your mind? There's something going on up there in the fog. Tell us what's really worrying you.

- WILLIAM: My old friend David comes to visit me in the hospital again. Two of my best women friends are already here to see me, but he doesn't let that stop him barging in and coming straight to the point – his point: how would I like to come and speak at the Black and White Men Together Forum? How would I like to appear with my famous physician and tell all my brothers about the heartbreak of AIDS, because I've been in the hospital with it all on my lonesome for three whole weeks?
- DAVID: What the hell is wrong with that?
- WILLIAM: I will not be used! You think Helbing won't draw a nice big crowd? You think maybe the paper won't cover it properly? But if William Davis is there, the notorious AIDS Victim, well, everybody will want to come and pack the place to get a peek at him before he drops dead. After all, it isn't every day you get to see a plague zombie. And by a strange coincidence Black and White Men Together will be charging on the door.
- DAVID: We're not charging. Where on earth did you get that idea?
- WILLIAM: *[Thrown for a moment]* You're not? *[Pause]* What about Helbing's fee?
- DAVID: He's not charging either. If he did, we couldn't afford him. He knows that.
- WILLIAM: I'm surprised.
- DAVID: Maybe he just wants to save a few lives, have you thought of that?
- WILLIAM: Oh, yes, he's a knight in shining armour.

DAVID: *[Exploding]* I've had enough of all this self-pitying crap. What makes you think you're so famous that everyone is going to give a shit that you've got it?

VANESSA: That wasn't necessary.

DAVID: If the place is packed – please God! – it won't be because of you or Helbing. It'll be because people are at last waking up to the reality. They're starting to get scared, as well they should be. I only asked you because I thought you might still care about other gays. But I must have been wrong. Sorry I brought the subject up.

[DAVID slams out. A pause.]

WILLIAM: I think I screwed that up. *[Pause]* The least you could do is disagree with me.

VANESSA: Call him later.

BECKY: Just tell him you've changed your mind. He'll get over it if he knows you're going to do it after all.

WILLIAM: But I really don't want to do it. I'm not a public speaker, Becky.

BECKY: Don't be modest. I've heard you on Gay Rights platforms. After marches, all that stuff.

WILLIAM: This isn't political. This is personal. I'd feel really odd talking about it. I just don't want to do it, isn't that enough?

VANESSA: Then don't. But call him anyway and apologize.

WILLIAM: *[Andy Hardy/Mickey Rooney]* Gosh, Judy, that's a great idea! Gee, why didn't I think of that?

VANESSA: You're really spoiling for a fight today, aren't you?

WILLIAM: *[Startled]* I suppose I am.

BECKY: It rained this morning. We could go outside and mud-wrestle.

WILLIAM: I'm a sick man, remember? You wouldn't pick a fight with a cripple, would you?

BECKY: Actually, you look much better today...

WILLIAM: My condition is considered "good." The pneumonia and the colitis are both slowly surrendering to treatment. I may be discharged soon.

VANESSA: *[To herself]* While what's really the matter can't be cured at all.

WILLIAM: Must you be so blooming perceptive, Vanessa? It's a very annoying habit. *[Pause]* Guess what I did today. Anybody? *[Pause]* I made my will. Doesn't that sound like fun? You can't imagine how much fun that was.

[Pause]

BECKY: I made my will three years ago, Everybody ought to make a will.

WILLIAM: What did you do? Leave it all to the Battersea Dogs Home?

BECKY: Of course not, stupid. I left it to Vanessa, naturally.

VANESSA: Which, considering the number of pets we have, is the same as leaving it to the Battersea Dogs Home.

WILLIAM: How's Tiger, by the way?

- VANESSA: Oh, he's settled in, no problem. I thought the dogs might not take to a cat, but they seem to ignore him.
- BECKY: He does seem a bit confused by Captain Birdseye. He'll stalk up, very slowly, then the parrot lets out a great shriek, and he runs away and hides under the bed for a couple of hours.
- WILLIAM: I do miss him.
- VANESSA: He misses you too, I think. You can never tell with cats.
- WILLIAM: I've left you £300, which should keep him in cat food for the rest of his life.
- VANESSA: You didn't need to –
- WILLIAM: I was going to leave it all to Mum, but now she gets the car, Tiger gets his annuity, and GAA gets the rest – which is not much. I never was one for saving for a rainy day.
- BECKY: So when are you getting out?
- WILLIAM: I don't know. If I keep improving at this rate, soon. I don't really care.
- VANESSA: I don't believe you. You're always moaning you're sick of hospital.
- WILLIAM: I'm sick of being sick! Every day I look out of that window and there's all the hospital grounds laid out so tidily - shrubs, flower beds, lawns, paths. And it feels like they're laughing at me, almost, because I'll never be able to run through them again, I'm too weak. I have to be careful of catching anything, not to eat rich food, not to drink – and of course any kind of romance is out of the question.

BECKY: You know, if I were in your shoes, I'd go to the bank, take out some of those miserable savings, and go and sit in the sun in Mykonos or Corfu or somewhere. Order everything on the menu, go dancing every night, and to hell with doctor's orders. Eat, drink, and be merry –

WILLIAM: - for tomorrow we die. Thanks.

BECKY: At least you'll have lived.

WILLIAM: I was living already, thank you very much.

BECKY: Look, you don't know how long you've got, but if you carry on like this you'll go bloody miserable to the grave, and it'll be your own fault. And that's the truth. You have a choice. Do you want to make your life last, or do you want to make it count?

WILLIAM: [*Singing softly*]

Let's not have a snivel
Let's have a bloody good cry,
And always remember the longer you live
The sooner you bloody well die.

VANESSA: [*Harsh*] Now cut that out. That's quite enough self-pity for one day.

WILLIAM: [*Any pretence collapsing*] I don't want to die, Vanessa. I really don't want to. I think of all the things I haven't done, all the people I need to make peace with, Mum –

VANESSA: I know.

WILLIAM: [*Pulling himself together*] Shit, I don't want to cry either. Where's the tissues?

[*Enter DOTTIE*]

- DOTTIE: What's all this? We can't be doing with crying, we have to take your blood pressure, Mr Davis. If you keep sobbing you'll completely ruin the readings.
- WILLIAM: This is the house dragon. Her name is Dottie Lyons. Like me, she hates being here. Unlike me, she can apply for a transfer. Any luck so far, Dottie?
- DOTTIE: *[Tight-lipped]* No.
- WILLIAM: Poor Dottie. She thinks there are far too many homosexuals around here. Isn't that right, Dottie?
- DOTTIE: Just give me your arm please, Mr Davis.
- BECKY: He's a little upset at the moment. Couldn't you come back later?
- DOTTIE: If your visitors are upsetting you, I shall have to ask them to leave.
- WILLIAM: No!
- VANESSA: Get that bitch out of here!
- DOTTIE: I am a nurse, and whatever my private opinions, Mr. Davis is my patient. You can't order me about.
- VANESSA: No, but I can give you a good slapping.
- BECKY: I really think you'd better go.
- DOTTIE: I'll get the Sister.
- VANESSA: You'll get your arse kicked.
- WILLIAM: Fight! Fight! Ten quid on the lesbian!

DOTTIE: Oh, God! Not another one! They're everywhere!

VANESSA: Show some respect.

DOTTIE: You show some respect.

VANESSA: I'll show you some respect all right. If you're not out of this room in ten seconds, we shall leap on you, Becky and I, and have your knickers down round your ankles before you can say Rita Mae Brown -

[DOTTIE gives a shriek and runs out.]

WILLIAM: But you're beautiful when you're angry.

VANESSA: Shut up, chauvinist.

WILLIAM: Thank you. Both of you. I feel much better.

VANESSA: In that case, can I have my hand back? You've squeezed it half to death.

WILLIAM: Sorry.

[He gives VANESSA her hand back. She shakes it, massages it.]

VANESSA: There's no circulation. I can't feel a thing. I'll never be able to use it again...

BECKY: *[Suggestive]* We'll see about that.

[She places VANESSA's hand between her thighs. They kiss. DOTTIE returns. She starts speaking before she's in the room...]

DOTTIE: Sister's on her way, she'll soon put a stop to – That's quite enough of that. Put that woman down! Out! Both of you!

VANESSA: We were just going anyway.

BECKY: You're not our type.

[They exit]

DOTTIE: Really!

[WILLIAM rolls up his sleeve and waves his arm at her to draw her attention. DOTTIE is incandescent with rage, and has half a mind to pursue them. She almost paws the ground.]

WILLIAM: Blood pressure? Dottie? You look like you should take your own while you're about it.

DOTTIE: What?

WILLIAM: I can't spend all day hanging round with my arm out for the likes of you...

DOTTIE: Oh, of course.

[Her buried professionalism reasserts itself and she gets the cuff ready as slow fade to:]

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

[WILLIAM's Room. WILLIAM is snoring gently, DAN is watching him – almost watching over him. It is late evening. WILLIAM wakes up, aware of someone in the room. He is rather scared.]

WILLIAM: What? Who is it? [Surprised] Dan! How did you get in? What time is it? Visiting hours finished ages ago.

DAN: You can thank your sexy charge nurse. I told him I was your ex, and he made me promise to keep it short

WILLIAM: What time is it?

DAN: About eleven. I've been here about half an hour.

WILLIAM: You should have woken me up. Now you're going to have to go almost as soon as you got here.

DAN: You looked so peaceful, cherub, I didn't like to disturb you. Besides, I had lots to think about. Memories...

WILLIAM: They're going to discharge me soon.

DAN: Fantabulosa!

WILLIAM: *[After a pause]* Good to see you.

DAN: I've been wanting to visit you for ages.

WILLIAM: Why didn't you?

DAN: We hardly parted on friendly terms.

WILLIAM: Stop looking at me like that!

DAN: Like what?

WILLIAM: Like I'm going to drop dead any second.

DAN: I'm just looking. [Pause] I wish we hadn't. I mean, I've been thinking. About us.

WILLIAM: There is no us. There's you over there and me over here, and some misty memories floating round in between. And that's all there is.

DAN: Except I still love you.

WILLIAM: You say that now. The last time I saw you, you threw an extremely pretty art deco lamp at my head, tore up my entire collection of Dorothy L Sayers, and ripped the needle right across my favourite Nina Simone record which was deleted from the catalogue twelve years ago. You also told me what you really thought about my looks, my sexual performance, my bourgeois attitudes, my lifestyle and my friends. Then you shut the front door with such force on your way out that the glass pane fell out and smashed the six accumulated milk bottles on the front step. You've gone out of your way to avoid me since, so much so that if I walk into a pub, you leave by the other door, you keep away from the hospital for all of a month and more. And now you still love me? Pardon me if I doubt that.

DAN: That was different. You deserved it then.

WILLIAM: So everything was my fault and you were punishing me. Change the record, Dan.

DAN: Why are you always so self-righteous? It was just the same when we lived together. "Why don't you get a job?" – "I'm trying to get a job" – "Obviously you're not trying hard enough." "There aren't that many jobs around" – "I don't understand it, I got a job easily enough". And I quote.

WILLIAM: That was years ago. When there were jobs.

DAN: Yeah. Dishwashing in grotty hotels. Great.

WILLIAM: Instead of which I had to keep you in the lifestyle to which you would like to be accustomed, to protect your precious principles.

DAN: I got the dole. I contributed.

WILLIAM: A bit. Not enough. Do you think my job was wonderful? It was damn hard sometimes.

DAN: If you hated it so much, why did you do all that overtime? I hardly ever saw you.

WILLIAM: Maybe that's why I did the overtime.

DAN: I didn't come to start a fight.

WILLIAM: Yeah? Why did you come?

DAN: The others came... I couldn't not come. And now you're trying to drive me away, but it's not going to work. I know the way you are. You've got more pride than is decent, and you really don't want people to see you when you're sick - but you still want everybody to fuss over you!

WILLIAM: How would you know? I was never sick when we lived together.

DAN: The food poisoning?

WILLIAM: Oh.

DAN: The time you pulled a tendon when you went running?

WILLIAM: That too, yeah.

- DAN: The migraine headaches those last few months?
- WILLIAM: What have you been doing? Keeping a diary? *[Gives in]* All right already. *[Pause]* What the hell happened to us, anyway?
- DAN: *[Shrugs]* Money. Habit. Growing pains.
- WILLIAM: That doesn't explain it at all.
- DAN: Your damn pride again.
- WILLIAM: What pride? I'm really modest! I'm the most modest person I know! *[DAN acknowledges the joke.]*
- DAN: I got more money when I finally got a job. Then I got promoted, you didn't. It got on your nerves. Now I could do things that you couldn't. Your stinking pride wouldn't let you share what I had...
- WILLIAM: You didn't always want to share it.
- DAN: True. And then you got so involved in politics and Pride Day too, and we had less time together. So instead of our friends, there were your friends and my friends.
- WILLIAM: "Your friends", Ha! You seem to be doing pretty well with Your Friends.
- DAN: You spying on me?
- WILLIAM: I get reports. People see you in Heaven or at Bang. Seems you always leave with an attractive young man in tow.
- DAN: They never mean anything to me.

WILLIAM: You say that now... Now I'll never get the chance to find out. You lose your social skills in a couple. I got rusty in the art of the pick-up, so it hardly ever seemed worth it. Now, of course, the question won't arise.

DAN: That's tough.

WILLIAM: It's kissing I miss the most. Big sloppy wet kisses. And lying in bed with your arms around someone.

DAN: You can still do that.

WILLIAM: If I ever meet someone – which I doubt. Who'd want to bed a leper?

DAN: You're still very attractive...

WILLIAM: Forget it.

DAN: You are to me.

WILLIAM: Cut it out. I couldn't even if I wanted to.

DAN: What makes you think I want –

WILLIAM: I know you.

DAN: I just want to cheer you up.

WILLIAM: Infecting you isn't going to cheer me.

DAN: My choice, my risk?

WILLIAM: What do you think I am?

DAN: Oh come on. The doctors don't know for sure... One quick one wouldn't hurt. It'll help you to relax. You'll sleep better. The chances aren't that great. And I still love you.

WILLIAM: You feel sorry for me, and you feel guilty.

DAN: Why should I feel guilty?

WILLIAM: Because if you hadn't stormed out, we might still be together and if we were together, I wouldn't have this.

DAN: [Very hesitant and halting] It's not quite as simple as that... I came here to see you and But also because I had something to tell you. You see, when we were together... I wasn't entirely faithful to you. Oh, I was most of the time, don't worry. But once or twice there were tempting offers that were too good to turn down.

Remember when you went to that ABTA conference in Edinburgh? We'd had a row, didn't have time to make it up before you caught the train. I was seething, he was – well, more than dishy. It was a fancy dress party. He wore a cute sailor suit. I asked him if he'd show me his hornpipe, and he promised to shiver me timbers. Pathetic. I don't remember his name, or anything else about it. When you got back, I felt too ashamed to tell you. After all the promises – fidelity – monogamy – what a hypocrite, eh? So – you see – I might have given it to you. Years ago.

WILLIAM: I must tell Helbing. That'll put the cat among the pigeons.

DAN: Helbing?

WILLIAM: My gay consultant. He's almost as prissy as a straight doctor. I told him I got it at orgy in San Francisco – after we broke up. The exception proving the rule.

DAN: What are you talking about?

WILLIAM: When a body met an antibody coming through the Rye. Or was it bourbon? Anyway, I was on holiday, I was drunk, I was invited by a nice man. You know how it is... *[Pause]* I had thought we'd grow old together. *[Abrupt]* Have you had a check-up?

DAN: There's nothing wrong with me.

WILLIAM: One minute you may be a carrier, next minute you're fit as a fiddle. Make up your mind.

DAN: I'm not seeing a doctor, see? It wouldn't tell me anything. No test. If I have got it, I'll know in good time.

WILLIAM: I didn't! I didn't for months. If it's any help, my old dear, I don't care where I caught it. I'm past all that now. I'll forgive you in advance if you want, though I don't really do forgiveness. Never wanted to be Pope, the frocks are so tacky.

[They both smile]

DAN: Thanks. That's a weight off my mind.

WILLIAM: I should be thanking you. Thanks for coming. Thanks for cheering me up. Thanks for being honest.

DAN: I should have been honest before.

WILLIAM: No regrets, as the song says. *[He gives a big yawn.]*

DAN: I can take a hint, Sleepyhead. Give me that big, wet, sloppy kiss.

WILLIAM: *[Exasperated]* C'mon. Haven't you been listening?

DAN: But for me... I'm probably immune or something. It takes years to develop, you probably had it when you were with me anyway. I'll take my chances.

WILLIAM: I know it's hard.

DAN: Not the only thing that's hard.

WILLIAM: I can't believe you said that. Go away.

DAN: I thought you were Sleepy, turns out you're Grumpy.

WILLIAM: Don't get me wrong. I am sooo tempted. Now be off, before I change my mind. Here –

[He beckons DAN over. There is a hug and a peck on the cheek. DAN rubs his cheek, star-struck.]

DAN: I'll never wash again. Goodnight, cherub.

WILLIAM: Goodnight, love.

BLACKOUT

ACT THREE

Scene One

[It is now two months later. Yet another hospital room. There is a screen which indicates this is a shared room. WILLIAM enters in a wheelchair with ELISABETH pushing. He has a suitcase in his lap, and looks gaunt and ill.]

WILLIAM: Here we go again. Another suitcase in another – .
[Indicates the screen] Looks like I've got a room mate this time. Wonder if we're in the same boat. Village of the Damned... *[The phone rings.]* FUCK IT! That fucking phone ALREADY! Don't answer it, Mum, it will stop. *[It doesn't]* I'm not back for five minutes before the phone rings. Well the hell with it! I mean it, Mum. I don't want to talk to ANYBODY. Last time I was in this hellhole I had a sodding parade going through my room every five minutes, for Chrissake. I get discharged and go home, and hardly anybody calls, but the minute I get re-admitted...

[The phone stops ringing.]

Good. With any luck they'll think I'm dead.

ELISABETH: Give me your suitcase, I'll unpack it.

WILLIAM: I'll do it. You don't have to do anything for me. I can do it. I want to do it.

ELISABETH: William, I have been taking care of you for the past two months, ever since you got over that pneumonia and – thingy -

WILLIAM: Colitis.

ELISABETH: Thank you. I have taken care of you, and so have several of your friends, especially Vanessa and David, and tonight I've driven you here to the hospital and/

/as a matter of fact I packed your suitcase in the first place. So if you want to unpack it that's just fine, get out of that bed and do it. But please drop this pretence of lonely independence. It's wearing a bit thin – and frankly it's insulting.

WILLIAM: *[Arms folded]* I don't want to be here. Not again.

ELISABETH: You're getting worse. You're losing weight again. And that skin rash on your arms -

WILLIAM: I am NOT getting worse. I have good days and bad days. It's just today's one of the bad days. I went back to work, didn't I? I'm going to be fine. Doctors just panic, especially Helbing. Well, the hell with Helbing. He can't cure me, so the hell with him.

[DR HELBING enters, in 'civvies'.]

HELBING: Getting settled, are we?

[WILLIAM glares, HELBING remembers.]

I mean, are you making yourself comfortable?

WILLIAM: Hello, Doctor Kildare. I didn't recognise you out of drag.

HELBING: *[Seriously]* I don't recall ever wearing drag.

WILLIAM: You might have enjoyed it. Anyway I meant the white coat.

HELBING: Oh, that! I've been giving a talk – Streatham Area Gays.

WILLIAM: 'SAG' – unfortunate name.

HELBING: Hence the jeans.

- WILLIAM: You know, you look almost gay tonight.
- HELBING: I wanted to look at that rash.
- WILLIAM: You came all that way, just to look at my arm? I knew it – you only love me for my rash.
- HELBING: It's something new.
- WILLIAM: Oh goody! How exciting for you. Yes, I have a rash on my arms. Yes I have lost weight. Yes I feel like shit and I probably look like shit too. That is the end of the news.
- HELBING: I'd like to examine your arms.
- ELISABETH: I think I'll be going now.
- WILLIAM: Wait, mum, please... Uh, could you ask the nurse to bring me some water? I'm really thirsty. Or a coke, even.
- ELISABETH: *[Realizing how scared he is]* I'll go to the café and get you a soda. Don't worry, I'll be right back.
- [ELISABETH exits]*
- WILLIAM: *[As he rolls up his shirt sleeve.]* See for yourselves, folks; nothing in my hands, nothing up my sleeves...
- [HELBING examines the rash.]*
- HELBING: I'm glad to see you haven't lost your sense of humour.
- WILLIAM: Oh yes, the famous British sense of humour. Keep smiling through the Blitz. That's what won the war, /

/guv. [Serious] I keep thinking, if I laugh at it hard enough, it'll go away.

[A long pause, while HELBING examines the arm.]

What's the verdict? Kaposi's? See, I've done my research. I'm turning into a real expert.

HELBING: I can't tell what it is, to be honest. It does bear a certain resemblance – we'll have to take some tests.

WILLIAM: Be my guest by all means. What would life be without tests, after all. Personally I always look forward to pissing in a bottle and having blood sucked out of me by a needle. Contraptions probing my every orifice? Fun! Fun! Fun! *[Pause.]* And soon all my friends will come pouring through the door with all their problems and their - SHIT.

HELBING: If you like, I can have visitors limited to immediate family only. I only have to tell the nurses.

WILLIAM: NO - I mean, no thank you, that won't be necessary. *[Pause]* After all, there are different kinds of family, know what I mean? I might get lonely. *[Pause.]* Different room this time. *[He indicates the other set of screens]* Who's my new neighbour?

HELBING: *[Looking around the curtain]* No one, at the moment. The locker's empty.

WILLIAM: An empty bed? What's wrong with this hospital? Won't Norman Fowler have something to say about that? No value for money in an empty bed.

HELBING: It is the Department of Health's policy to maintain spare capacity. We're probably going to need it.

WILLIAM: *[Yawning]* Really?

- HELBING: Am I boring you?
- WILLIAM: I can think of more interesting subjects. You for instance.
- HELBING: *[Startled]* Me?
- WILLIAM: What bars do you go to?
- HELBING: *[Startled.]* Depends. Different ones. I don't go out much.
- WILLIAM: That's right, you've got a nice lover waiting at home. Lucky old you. *[Pause.]* Didn't like me asking you a personal question, did you?
- HELBING: Not particularly, no.
- WILLIAM: Yet you know everything about me, down to my last bowel movement. Hardly fair, is it? Sorry, I'm impatient because I haven't got much time. I know you need your professional detachment.
- HELBING: I'm not very detached about this case, I'm afraid. I think you know that. If you were just another patient, I wouldn't be here right now.
- WILLIAM: I know, you relish the challenge.
- HELBING: In your case, the challenge is more than the disease, it's the patient too. And no, I'm not detached on either count.
- WILLIAM: *[Quietly.]* I know. You were hoping it was just a bad case of poison ivy, weren't you?
- HELBING: It's not that. We don't know what it is yet.

WILLIAM: *[Sighs.]* I don't think I want to know. *[Pause. Sad:]* I missed the Gay Pride March. I wasn't up to it. First I've missed in six years. *[Pause]* I heard your speech was very good.

HELBING: I just spoke from a bit of paper. I was too nervous to ad lib. But I did a Q & A at the Student Union later. And I was better with David's Black and White group.

WILLIAM: Careful, Doctor Helbing. You're beginning to sound like an activist.

HELBING: Somebody should be. Somebody should be taking responsibility.

[Re-enter ELISABETH]

ELISABETH: Can I come in?

WILLIAM: I have no secrets from you.

ELISABETH: I got you a 7-Up and a Yorkie.

HELBING: Sorry, no chocolate. Tests tomorrow.

ELISABETH: I'll put the Yorkie in your cupboard for later.

WILLIAM: I'm so thirsty.

HELBING: How's your water jug?

WILLIAM: Empty.

HELBING: That's too bad. *[To ELISABETH]* Could you – ? I have to be going. It's a long way back to Harrow-on-the-Hill.

[HELBING exits]

WILLIAM: Bye.

ELISABETH: What a nice man. No Yorkie – you poor boy.

[WILLIAM is obviously in some discomfort.]

 They'll be bringing your painkillers soon. There'll be water with them.

[Long pause]

WILLIAM: Mum...

ELISABETH: Yes?

WILLIAM: I hate hospitals.

ELISABETH: Me too.

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

[WILLIAM's hospital room. An excited buzz from WILLIAM, BECKY, VANESSA, JEANNIE, JOHN COOK, MALCOLM and DAN.]

WILLIAM: Why won't anybody tell me? Becky, please... I've got to know, this isn't fair. *[As Kenneth Williams]* Ooh, stop messing about.

BECKY: If we tell you, it won't be a surprise.

WILLIAM: Malcolm...

MALCOLM: You will find out in due course. Patience is a virtue, you know.

WILLIAM: It's not my birthday, I know that.

MALCOLM: What a perceptive child it is!

DAN: Should be on Mastermind.

VANESSA: Next thing he'll work out today's Tuesday.

WILLIAM: Oh stop it, all of you. Stop being so infuriating! Becky – what are you doing here?

BECKY: *[Airily]* Oh, just happened to be passing...

[She whistles infuriatingly]

WILLIAM: Rubbish, Becky.

MALCOLM: Quiet, everyone. Somebody's coming.

[Footsteps in the silence build the tension. Enter DAVID, theatrically.]

DAVID: Da-Da!

MALCOLM: You certainly took your time.

DAVID: It wasn't ready yet. I had to wait. Honestly, I go all that way just to -

[VANESSA and BECKY shush him.]

BECKY: Can we please get on with it?

WILLIAM: On with what? The suspense is killing me.

DAVID: All right, let's have a bit of hush then. *[Posh voice]*
Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking...

DAN: Liar!

DAVID: Shut up, Dan. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I am but the one who comes before.

MALCOLM: Premature ejaculation is such a dreadful affliction.

[WILLIAM screams with frustration]

DAVID: Okay, okay. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you – Desperate Dan.

DAN: And I give you – Delicious David.

DAVID: You're too kind. And I give you – Desperate Dan.

WILLIAM: That's enough. Do you want to kill me?

[They are shocked into seriousness.]

DAN: Actually, I'm the one who is meant to be doing this.

DAVID: We were just prating around. Dan –

- DAN: *[Clears his throat]* My dear Mister Davis.
- WILLIAM: *[Enjoying himself hugely now]* Try not to laugh when you call me that.
- DAN: *[Lugubrious, like a horror movie:]* My dear Mr Davis.
- WILLIAM: Forget I said it, that's terrifying. Smile, for God's sake.
- DAN: Stop mucking about. I've learnt it, and I don't want to forget it.
- JOHN: *[To MALCOLM:]* I thought you said this was going to be a short speech.
- MALCOLM: That's right. We wanted it short and sweet – which is why you're not giving it.

[JOHN sniffs and sulks. DAN starts over:]

- DAN: My dear Mister Davis. We of the Gay Alliance have had the pleasure of –
- DAVE: You're the only one here that's had the pleasure!
- DAN: – of working beside you in our struggle for liberation for – lo! – these many years. You have never hesitated to give your all –
- JOHN: Oooh!
- DAN: – whenever there was a task to be done, and you have spent many long and thankless hours arranging events, and doing all the little things that must be done so that everything can go smoothly.
- WILLIAM: Are you sure you're not making this up?

DAN: *[Pretending anger.]* Look, do you want to hear this or not? I'm sure John would be delighted to deliver it...

[He gets instant silence.]

Thank you. You, William Davis, have volunteered so much of your time and your energy, and have even contributed your hard-earned money towards our fund raising efforts. All this you have done, without thought of reward, so that some day our people, lesbians and gays, might live in freedom, dignity, and the more fashionable parts of town.

VANESSA: *[Aside to BECKY]* Who writes his material?

[BECKY shushes her.]

DAN: Ahem! And so, Mister Davis, in order to express to you, however inadequately, our deepest and most heartfelt thanks for all you have done, we, the assembled members of the Gay Alliance do hereby present you with this small token of our esteem, the GAA Certificate of Merit.

[DAN hands it to WILLIAM, who takes the certificate. Everyone crowds around the bed to see it; ad lib admiration, curiosity, etc., while WILLIAM just looks and looks at it with shining eyes]

JOHN: Speech! Speech!

BECKY: Yes – speech!

MALCOLM: Come on, Willy, say something. Never known you at a loss for words.

WILLIAM: *[Choked up]* Thanks. *[Pause.]* I can't... it's great.

[Pause]

JEANNIE: He's choked – isn't that sweet?

DAN: We should give him certificates more often if we want to shut him up.

JEANNIE: That certificate is just wonderful, and so is the frame.

DAVID: That's all hand-lettering too. David Shenton was working on it still when I went to pick it up. He wanted to be here but he has a deadline for a comic strip.

WILLIAM: I'll give him a ring. It's – gorgeous.

DAN: You can always tell the work of a true artist.

MALCOLM: How would you know?

JEANNIE: Let's all be nice to each other tonight, just for once. I'm so glad you like it.

WILLIAM: I've never been so proud of anything in my life. I love it. Shame I have to be dying to get it – like a lifetime achievement award.

MALCOLM: Whoa! Whoa!

WILLIAM: You're right. That was uncalled-for. It is a wonderful surprise. I couldn't work out what was going on, all of you showing up at once, when I've only been back in the hospital a few days.

JOHN: They even kept it a secret from me. I only found out about it at the last minute. I overheard Malcolm talking about your blood, and I sort of gatecrashed.

WILLIAM: *[Stiff]* It's quite simple. For some reason, I've got septicaemia. Poisoned blood. I'll probably be dead in a couple of days.

[Stunned silence]

- MALCOLM: You certainly know how to put your foot in it, John Cook. We weren't going to talk about it.
- JOHN: How was I to know? Nobody tells me anything.
- BECKY: *[Gentle]* Can't they do anything?
- WILLIAM: Not a thing. *[An awkward pause]* Come on everybody, let's try a retake. How about some music? I've only got headphones here – anyone bring a radio? No? Shame. Can't have any booze either. Or crisps. Or peanuts. Not much of a party so far, I'm afraid. We could make a stilted attempt at small talk. *[Pause]* Or we could do the sensible thing. Give up. Leave me to enjoy my pretty present in peace, and go home.
- DAVID: I don't want to go home.
- MALCOLM: Anyone want to drink me under the table? Becky? Vanessa?
- DAN: I feel like getting laid.
- WILLIAM: Those both sound like good ideas to me. Better than being trapped in some dreary hospital. Seriously, why don't you? Do it for me, since I can't. Drink toasts to me, tell funny stories about me, pick up a nice man for me. The William Davis Memorial Screw.
- VANESSA: You're not serious?
- WILLIAM: But you must come and tell me all the gory details tomorrow.
- DAN: You're on.
- VANESSA: Well, I'll be damned. You are serious.

- WILLIAM: The trouble with having a wake is that the person who it's for is never around to enjoy it. I'm having my own wake in advance.
- VANESSA: Yours and Dan's and who else's? You silly queen. Don't you even have the sense God gave a goose? What the hell do you think you're doing?
- WILLIAM: Hey, wait a minute –
- VANESSA: No, you wait. You just have to be the biggest fool ever. You're the one lying there with your whole system poisoned because you were out behaving like a mink on heat. And now you're the one who has just told your friends to go out and pick someone up – hey, maybe they won't be as lucky as you. Maybe they'll have to settle for herpes, or a simple case of crabs. Why not?
- BECKY: After all, we all know it's vital for a man to have sex, don't we, or he isn't a real man. And then he's got to show everyone what a man he is by getting drunk and bragging about it...
- VANESSA: William, are you out of your mind?
- DAN: Well who rattled her cage?
- WILLIAM: The Gospel According to the Saintly Sisters! Have you quite finished?
- VANESSA: That's right, make a joke.
- WILLIAM: In the first place, there's no proof that promiscuity – as you and Mary Whitehouse would both call it – is a contributing factor. Secondly I have not been like a mink on heat. I was with Dan for over five years. Apart from him, I only played around twice in all that time. Hardly a world record.

- BECKY: I just assumed you must have – I thought –
- WILLIAM: You didn't think, you assumed. You jumped to conclusions like every bigot. And let us not forget your record with the London Supper Club maidens, what a score you –
- BECKY: William, please, I'm sorry, it's just the risk to Dan –
- DAN: Even if it is a bit risky, so what? Smoking's risky, drinking's risky, air travel is risky, crossing the road is risky. I've got a right to take risks if I want to. People have spent fifteen years fighting so we can have a few basic human rights to live the way we want. And this queer isn't going to give all that up for – for some – some germ.
- DAVID: Stuff it, Dan. You don't know what you're talking about.
- VANESSA: You mean, you are still screwing around.
- DAN: My choice. And if I run risks I have as much right to be taken care of as anyone, if the cards fall the wrong way.
- BECKY: You do not have the right to infect someone else. Go on, kill yourself if you must – if you want to commit suicide because you love William and you feel guilty because he got it and you didn't, go ahead. But what about any poor bastard stuck on the end of your dick?
- DAN: That's his choice too.
- BECKY: Men are such spoiled brats. You don't want to change the way you behave so of course the doctors must be wrong, and you're going to carry on screwing to prove them wrong – even if it kills you.

- MALCOLM: The William Davis Memorial Screw, Becky. Screw, singular. It's hardly likely anyone will catch anything from a single encounter.
- VANESSA: Epidemics spread, Malcolm! That's why they're called epidemics. Why is sex so important? I just don't understand.
- BECKY: What's so difficult to understand, darling? Men think with their cocks.
- WILLIAM: Now the lesbian prude comes out. Though many women, collectively, are fine. You don't really like men, do you, Becky? You don't like the thought of them with their clothes off, doing 'it' especially with each other. All that hard male flesh – pass the smelling salts.
- BECKY: Do you really believe that stale crap? The man-hating dyke! Listen, if I hated men, you'd think I'd be glad they're killing each other and keep quiet, wouldn't you?
- VANESSA: It's hopeless. They don't want to hear. They're frightened of commitment.
- MALCOLM: That's it, generalise. Put us all in the same little box and slam the lid shut.
- DAVID: Gays aren't killing each other. It's a disease, damn it, a disease which is killing people – and not just gays either.
- VANESSA: All right, then. Do what you like. I'll be damned if I care any more.
- BECKY: I wish I could turn my heart off. I wish I didn't care
[She points at Dan.] if you're the next to die.
[Anguished] I do so wish I could just blame you and other gay men so I didn't feel such dread. Dan, /

/please don't go play in traffic, sooner or later you'll get run over.

WILLIAM: Calm down, everyone. You're all over-reacting.

VANESSA: *[To BECKY]* Our friend is lying there dying, and he says we're over-reacting!

BECKY: It's so unfair. If it was heterosexuals getting it, they'd find a cure in a year. A vaccine at least.

WILLIAM: SHUT UP! Leave me alone! Just SHUT UP! *[Pause]* I don't care what any of you do, just get out of here. It's all over. See you at the funeral. Especially you damn dykes! All of you, out, I'm sick of your faces. *[To the men.]* You too! Go home, go to a bar, go to hell! SHUT UP AND GET OUT! *[They all start to exit in confusion.]* Hurry up.

JEANNIE: I want you to know you're being very rude.

WILLIAM: GET OUT. *[Most of them are gone.]* Keep moving, fuck right off. What a lousy goddamn wake. NURSE! I want a pill! I need some Valium. HEEE-ELPP!

BLACKOUT

Scene Three

[A radio is playing classical music as the lights come up on WILLIAM in bed, writing something intently. He erases what he's just written and pauses, chewing on his pencil. He re-reads something in an inaudible murmur, then writes once more; around him are screwed-up pieces of paper on the floor, bed, etc. His face has a yellowish cast, and his eyes are sunken. There is a short knock, and STEVE enters without waiting for permission.]

STEVE: Hello, big brother.

[He puts down the black case he is carrying.]

WILLIAM: Getting smaller every day. Hello, Steve.

[He turns off the radio.]

Mom brought me the radio, she said music might boost my morale. I can just about face Radio Three when it's not too daring.

STEVE: Mum's the one who needs a morale boost. I called her this morning and she burst into tears.

WILLIAM: She's waiting for the call to tell her I'm dead, Steve.

STEVE: Surely there's still hope – what about a blood transfusion?

WILLIAM: Not for septicaemia. It would only reinfect. What's in the bag?

STEVE: Video cables, microphone. The camera is still down in the car, and the tripod. Professional video gear weighs a ton. I have to go get it.

WILLIAM: It must be killing you, the price of hospital parking.

STEVE: For you, it's worth it. I was lucky to get a space.

WILLIAM: It's very nice of you to help.

STEVE: Do you really care what I think?

WILLIAM: It may surprise you, but I do. I can't work out exactly how to do it. It's really for Arthur, but I don't know what he wants.

STEVE: Arthur?

WILLIAM: Arthur Helbing. He wants to use it with his talks. Visual aids, ha ha.

STEVE: Don't!

WILLIAM: I can't work out exactly how to do it. I've got one script which is funny, and one that's serious, and this one is sort of scientific and stuffy. I don't know which one to use. I don't know how to start either.

STEVE: Pretend you're just talking to one person. Forget the camera.

WILLIAM: Easier said than done.

STEVE: Try it.

WILLIAM: *[Obviously reading]* Good evening. I'm here to talk about a very serious health hazard which is threatening the gay community. It is important that everyone should be aware... Oh, this stinks. I can't do it.

STEVE: Don't read from the paper. I can't see your face.

WILLIAM: Oh, let's just forget it. It was a stupid idea. I just thought, after what Becky said, and I'd been such a prick to people – So I came up with this idea. I want them all to know that I do care, in spite of what I said./

/ Even if I'm too sick to get out of this room and tell people. Nobody should have to go through what I've been through with this.

STEVE: So you drag me down from Glasgow to make you a movie star.

WILLIAM: Exactly. *[Pause.]* Well, you do work for Scottish Television. But I can't do it. It's too late. I'm too tired. Sorry, Steve, I've dragged you here for nothing. *[Pause. Deep breath.]* No, I've got to do it. I've chickened out for too long. Being so rude to everyone who cared for me, not speaking... I've got to do something, this is the only thing I can think of.

STEVE: OK, calm down. We're going to do it. For all your friends, if nothing else.

WILLIAM: *[To himself]* And then maybe they won't forget me when I've gone.

STEVE: *[Embarrassed]* Yeah, that too. *[Quick]* Now, let's try again. Just talk to me. Go on.

[WILLIAM pauses to compose himself. He fiddles with the pages he has been writing, trying to put them in order.]

STEVE: Forget that paper. I told you. Just talk to me. Tell me who you are and what's the matter with you. Remember I'm your stupid brother and I don't understand any of this. You'll have to tell me. Make me understand. Take a deep breath, relax, breathe out... and talk to me.

[WILLIAM takes a moment to think about it. He forces himself to relax, and when he speaks this time it is much more natural, calm but charged, and instead of looking at Steve he looks out towards the audience.]

WILLIAM: Hello. My name is William Davis, and I'm dying. I'm dying because I have the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. I had it for months before I knew what was the matter with me. You could have it too, though I hope not. But don't go around thinking it'll only happen to someone else. If you have any reason at all to think you might have it, see your doctor and get yourself tested. If you don't trust your doctor, you can go to a hospital GU clinic. Genito-urinary. There, I can hardly say it!

[Pause]

There is no cure, but if they catch it early, your chances are much better. It's important that you take responsibility for your own health. If gay men don't take responsibility, then sooner or later we will be forced to seek treatment. Local health authorities could force gay venues to close – bars, clubs, saunas, the works. I don't have to tell you how few rights we have and how fragile they are. Many people still despise and fear homosexuals. If we start to be seen as a major source of infection, it's possible that a devastating hate campaign would follow. Already the American Red Cross has rejected gay men as blood donors, and AIDS-infected blood is being blamed for the deaths of haemophiliacs.

[Pause]

AIDS has only – only! – killed twenty people in the UK so far, but there have been several hundred deaths in the US and Canada. Don't tell me it won't happen here. It's already happening, though people don't know it. It may well have spread elsewhere too, I don't know.

Now, it's not always diagnosed properly, so you should seek out a clinic that knows the symptoms and what to look for. When you do, you must be honest /

/about your sexual contacts, so they can get help too. If our society was less uptight about sex than it wouldn't matter that sex seems to spread this.

[Pause] But the evidence is that it does matter, plus you can't afford to ignore the fact that you're more at risk. Think twice about whether you want to continue to cruise the Heath, or go to the Subway or sex parties or get your rocks off in cottages. I probably got this at a sex party. I'm not proud of that, but I don't think everyone should go out and buy a chastity belt either. Sex is the greatest, right? But if I'd known what was going to happen to me, I would have run like hell in the other direction on the night I was invited to that party.

[Pause]

Well, there's no use crying over spilt body fluids. Not a damn thing I can do about it now. But even if it's too late for me, it's not too late for you. I suppose I must have some kind of Messiah complex, but I would like to think that some of you who see this will pay attention, and maybe save yourself from what I've been going through.

Look at me! Yes, take a good long hard look. Do you want to look like this? I'm thirty-one years old, but you'd never know it. I have a lot of friends, gay and straight, and I'm close to my family, and I don't want to die, and they don't want me to, and I have this cute doctor called Helbing who's doing his best but –

[He pauses. Exhausted.]

Oh, to hell with me. Yes, indeed to hell with me, I don't matter. But you matter, so let's get back to you. You have to take responsibility for yourself; for your own health, for the health of those around you. We don't know what the hell's going on, but there is such a thing as protection. If it's raining, you get an umbrella. You can still have other kinds of sex apart

from shagging - do I have to spell it out? Use your imagination. And if you still want to screw, why not use a condom? We know they work against other STDs, why not this one? Try it. What have you got to lose?

Please listen to me. And then tell your friends about me. I hope everybody who's queer in the whole bloody world hears about William and the totally stupid, senseless way he died, so nobody else has to die... like this... any more. That's all I wanted to say... Get checked before you get killed. *[Pause]* I'm so tired...

Was that OK, Steve? I hope I can remember all that again.

STEVE: It was... okay... I remember it. I can prompt you. It'll be fine.

WILLIAM: Hey, bruv, are you crying?

STEVE: Must have something in my eye.

WILLIAM: Bollocks.

STEVE: OK, I'm crying. So what?

WILLIAM: Nothing. I'm sorry.

STEVE: What the hell are you sorry about?

WILLIAM: I don't know... Everything? Want a hug?

STEVE: No, I want to get the goddamn camera.

[Pause, then he exits.]

[WILLIAM is left alone. He starts tossing the wads of paper into the trash can from the bed. He misses a lot. Pause, then -]

AntiBody by Louise Parker Kelley

WILLIAM: Big boys don't cry... Poor Steve...

[Slow fade.]

BLACKOUT

Scene Four

[A spotlight to one side. HELBING in the spotlight, on the phone.]

HELBING: I'm sorry to have to call so late, Mrs Davis, but you did ask me to. *[Pause]* No, he didn't come out of the coma. He slipped away during the night. The Night Nurse found him. *[Pause]* I'm very sorry. *[Pause]* I wish I could have done something more for him. *[Pause]* No, the nurse wasn't there, she'd gone on her rounds. Neither was I. He died alone. *[Pause]* I'm so very sorry, Mrs. Davis. So very sorry.

BLACKOUT

THE END

