

POISON TREE

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk

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Synopsis

Tyler, a struggling actor with no financial or emotional resources available to draw upon, finds himself trapped in a seemingly loveless relationship with Nathan, an affluent and calculating man with a mysterious past and an even more mysterious friend, David. When Tyler reaches his breaking point, he calls upon his colorfully wicked friend, Olivia, to assist him in hiring a hit man to eliminate Nathan. Caught in the middle of the chaos is Nathan's sister, Nora, an emotionally wrecked individual whose addiction to prescription medications might likely be the cause of her wild imaginings. Rounding out this bizarre cast of characters is Ed, the man hired to take Nathan out. Alliances shift as the story unfolds and not until the astonishing finale do we discover who has the upper hand.

Characters

NORA (Mid 30s) Female

NATHAN (Late 30s) Male

TYLER (Late 20s) Male

OLIVIA (Mid 40s) Female

DAVID (Mid 40s) Male

ED (Late 30s) Male

Setting

Brooklyn Heights. A loft apartment. An open space including a living and kitchen area with an island. Nathan's bedroom is visible to the audience. Nora's bedroom is indicated by a door that leads off. A garden deck is visible upstage through large windows. A set of imposing metal doors open onto the garden. The entrance to the loft can be situated stage left or right. The set will flip for act two in which the garden deck will be the main playing area with the loft upstage.

Time

Present.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(April 2nd. 2:37 AM. Nathan's loft apartment. A long quiet moment passes before Nora comes out of her bedroom. Shaken, she races to Nathan's bedroom door and begins to knock quietly, but urgently.)

NORA. Nathan? Nathan, are you in there? Are you okay? I heard something. It sounded like a gunshot. But I'm thinking that's ridiculous, right? I mean, not in this neighborhood. *(Nora tries to open the door, but it's locked.)* Why does he lock the door? *(She knocks again.)* Nathan? Can you open the door please? Nathan? Are you dying? Are you dead? How do you expect me to help you if you keep your fucking door locked? Fine. Fine. Do you know how selfish you're being right now? Is this entertaining for you? Okay. Don't answer. I don't care. I'm going back to bed. So, no more loud noises. You hear me? *(She starts towards her bedroom, but then returns to Nathan's door.)* You know, this might not be a suitable time to mention this, but I can honestly say that I'm in no mood to be scrubbing vomit and blood out of the hardwoods. Do you hear me? I'll just have it all torn up and thrown out. I'll have your entire room stripped bare and there will be nothing left to remind me of you. Is that clear? I hope you're still breathing. I hope you can hear me, you selfish, son of a--

(Towards the end of the previous, Nathan comes out of his bathroom, crosses to, and opens his bedroom door. He wears a robe.)

NATHAN. What the hell's the matter with you?

NORA. You didn't hear me knocking?

NATHAN. I was in the shower.

NORA. Why do you lock your door?

NATHAN. Because I don't want you in here.

NORA. What if something bad happens to you? How would I get to you?

NATHAN. Nothing bad is gonna happen to me. It's all in your head.

NORA. I thought I heard a gunshot.

NATHAN. What're you talking about? Where?

NORA. Here. In the apartment. It came from your room.

NATHAN. What? When?

NORA. A few minutes ago. I was asleep--

NATHAN. You had a nightmare.

NORA. I did not have a nightmare. I was dreaming, but I did not have a nightmare.

NATHAN. Jesus, Nora. Now, listen to me. If a gun went off, don't you think the neighbors would've called the police? There'd be a crowd out front right now. *(He crosses to a window and looks out onto the street.)* Come here.

NORA. No.

NATHAN. Yes. Come here. I want you to look out the window.

NORA. I'm frightened.

NATHAN. Oh, for-- There's no one out there. Okay?

NORA. There isn't?

NATHAN. Come see for yourself.

NORA. I'll take your word for it.

NATHAN. Fine. So, that's settled then?

NORA. I suppose so. *(A moment.)* You look pale. Did you eat today?

NATHAN. I'm sure I did.

NORA. Eat something. I had groceries delivered.

NATHAN. I'm not hungry.

NORA. I'll make something for you.

NATHAN. I'm not eating.

NORA. Why not?

NATHAN. Because it's nearly three in the fucking morning, that's why not.

NORA. Okay. Fine. I'm going back to bed. *(She starts off.)*

NATHAN. Nora, wait. *(She stops.)* Stay up with me.

NORA. I'm tired.

NATHAN. You sleep too much.

NORA. Did you go out tonight?

NATHAN. I did. I may go out again.

NORA. I don't understand. Where would you go?

NATHAN. I'll stay in if you stay up with me.

NORA. Did you take something?

NATHAN. Yes.

NORA. Was that a good idea?

NATHAN. It's never a good idea. But I did. And it's done. So, why should I suffer alone when I have you to share in my regret?

NORA. I'm going to bed. *(She starts off.)*

NATHAN. *(Following her out of his bedroom.)* Nora, please. *(Nora stops. Nathan crosses to and sits on the couch.)* Come on. Come here. Tell me about your dream.

(Nora hesitates but then relents. She sits next to Nathan on the couch. A moment.)

NORA. I dreamt I was flying again. Almost the same as usual, except this time, I didn't have any trouble getting off the ground. Usually, I have to struggle a bit. You know, get a running start, and actually move my arms up and down like a bird. But not this time. I just relaxed, closed my eyes, and off I went. Weaving in and out of trees, pulling leaves from the branches as I went. Over the row of buildings on our street. Up over the skyscrapers downtown. And I just kept on going. Higher and higher, passing jetliners on the way, until... Well, the oxygen... The air got thin. And I had a little trouble breathing. But I wasn't afraid. I wasn't worried. I just kept flying higher. I remember how cold it was. But I didn't close myself off. I opened my arms wider. I was taking shallow breaths at that point. But I didn't turn back--

NATHAN. You see, it was a nightmare.

NORA. No, it wasn't. Nightmares are designed to frighten people, to expose them to their worst fears. I wasn't scared at all. In fact, I felt... Well, I have to admit, Nathan... I felt liberated in a way and, well... a little aroused, I guess.

NATHAN. Nora--

NORA. I mean, my head was so light. I wasn't entirely sure that it was still attached to the rest of me. And then suddenly, I was completely aware of every inch of my body. But none of it was connected, you know? From one moment to the next, I was my ankle. And then my arm. And then my little toe. And then my belly button...

NATHAN. Nora--

NORA. ...And then my breasts. My nipples...

NATHAN. Ok, Nora--

NORA. ...But I wasn't my vagina...

NATHAN. That's enough--

NORA. ...I wanted to be my vagina. But I wasn't. And do you want to know why...?

NATHAN. No--

NORA. ...Because I heard a gunshot! I heard a gunshot, gravity took hold, and I was hurled back to earth. To my bed.

NATHAN. *(Rising.)* There was no gunshot, Nora. There is no gun in this apartment.

NORA. I know what I heard. I didn't dream it. I can't explain it, but it was real. And it came from your room.

NATHAN. Jesus Christ, Nora. I can't do this. I cannot do this right now. Just... just go back to bed.

NORA. Oh, so now you want to get rid of me?

NATHAN. Go! *(Beat. Nora starts off. Quietly.)* Fucking lunatic.

(Nora stops.)

NORA. Now that... that was just mean.

NATHAN. Sometimes the truth is mean.

NORA. Maybe I'm not interested in the truth.

NATHAN. Maybe not. But do you know what I'm not gonna do. I'm not gonna edit myself for you, Nora. I'm your brother. I'm not some stranger. I'm not some casual acquaintance--

NORA. You're the strangest, most casual person I've ever known.

(Nora exits into her room, closing the door behind her. Nathan stands quietly for a moment. His cell phone buzzes. He looks at it and then goes to his bedroom and begins to get dressed as lights fade to black.)

(End of Scene.)

SCENE 2

(April 2nd. 1:00 PM. Nathan's loft apartment. Nathan is asleep on the sofa. Tyler enters through the front door. He doesn't see Nathan. He moves to Nora's door and knocks quietly.)

TYLER. Nora? Nora, it's Tyler. I didn't want to startle you. I just wanted to let you know I was here. Nora?

(No response. Nathan stirs. Tyler crosses to Nathan's bedroom. He knocks. No answer. He pushes the door open and peers in. Nathan's cell phone rings. Tyler turns to see Nathan on the sofa. Nathan stirs again. Tyler stands quietly on the landing. The cell phone continues to ring. Nathan answers it.)

NATHAN. Hello...? Yeah... Yeah, who is this...? No, no, no, you got the wrong number... Whoa, hold on... Hey, slow down... Look... No, look, I don't know how you got it, but... No, I did not give it to you. I don't give out my number. Maybe you misdialed... Listen, just do me a favor and delete it. Okay? And don't fucking call again. *(He ends the call.)* Fuck. *(He sits for a moment, trying to rouse and focus. He turns to see Tyler.)* Morning.

TYLER. It's afternoon.

NATHAN. How long have you been standing there?

TYLER. I just got here.

NATHAN. What's with the face? You look like a Francis Bacon portrait. Come here.

(Tyler sits next to Nathan on the sofa. They kiss. Nathan wants more.)

TYLER. Why don't you go to bed...?

NATHAN. You gonna join me?

TYLER. ...And get some sleep.

NATHAN. Right. Well, you let me know when's a good time. *(He rises.)*

TYLER. Nathan, I--

NATHAN. Don't worry about it. I have some things I need to take care of today anyway.

(Nathan crosses into his bedroom and drops his cell phone on the bed. Tyler follows him. Nathan retrieves a laptop and a vial of coke from the nightstand.)

TYLER. I'm hungry. You want something?

NATHAN. No.

(Nathan heads back to the couch.)

TYLER. You should eat.

NATHAN. You and Nora in cahoots?

TYLER. What do you mean?

NATHAN. Never mind.

TYLER. Where is she?

NATHAN. In in her room, I assume.

TYLER. I knocked. She didn't answer.

NATHAN. Maybe she's out on the deck.

(Tyler opens one of the doors to the deck and looks out.)

TYLER. She's not out there.

NATHAN. Then maybe she went for a walk. I don't know.

TYLER. It's not like her to go out.

NATHAN. And so, what if she did. She could use some fresh air. To clear her mind a bit.

TYLER. She shouldn't be out alone. And, you know, maybe you should spend more time with her.

NATHAN. Are you serious? She fuckin' lives with me. *(He does a bump.)*

TYLER. You know what I mean.

NATHAN. Give me a break, Tyler. And anyway, this isn't about Nora. This is about you. Am I right? *(He sits on the couch and begins working on his laptop.)*

TYLER. No. Well, yeah maybe. I mean, yes, it is about Nora. And about me. And about us. You and me.

NATHAN. I've had a tough week. Okay? *(He continues working on his laptop.)*

(Tyler starts for the kitchen.)

TYLER. What do you want?

NATHAN. You want to start that again?

TYLER. Well, I'm hungry.

NATHAN. So, get something. And then leave me the fuck out of it. *(Tyler begins to prepare his lunch. Nathan continues with his laptop. A moment.)* You have anything coming up?

TYLER. Uh, yeah. I, uh... I have an audition next week.

NATHAN. Oh yeah? For what?

TYLER. I'm sorry?

NATHAN. For what? You have an audition for what?

TYLER. Well, it's--

NATHAN. Can you get me some water? The sparkling in the fridge. Not from the tap.

TYLER. Sure. *(He retrieves the water.)*

NATHAN. So?

TYLER. So, it's a film. An original screenplay.

NATHAN. Uh huh.

TYLER. They're pretty new on the independent film circuit. They've done mostly shorts. This'll be their first feature length. *(He hands Nathan the water.)*

NATHAN. Supporting?

TYLER. Lead.

NATHAN. Lead? Wow. Well, there's some good news. Your agent is finally making some progress.

TYLER. Yeah.

(Tyler starts to say something else but hesitates and then returns to the kitchen.)

NATHAN. Hey.

TYLER. What?

NATHAN. You were about to say something.

TYLER. No, I wasn't.

NATHAN. I'm not an idiot. What're you not telling me?

TYLER. It's not important.

NATHAN. How about you let me decide what's important?

(A moment.)

TYLER. Ok. So... if I'm offered the role... If I accept the role... it's possible that--

NATHAN. They're not paying you, are they?

TYLER. No, they are.

NATHAN. How much?

TYLER. Twenty-five hundred.

NATHAN. Flat?

TYLER. Yes.

NATHAN. Are you serious? Any residuals?

TYLER. Three percent. If any.

NATHAN. So, if it doesn't go into distribution, you what...? You walk away with a measly twenty-five hundred bucks? Are you fuckin' kidding me?

TYLER. It's a fourteen-week shoot starting mid-May--

NATHAN. Whoa, hold on. Fourteen weeks?

TYLER. Yes.

NATHAN. No. No fucking way, Tyler. I'm gonna give your agent a call first thing Monday morning. That's total bullshit.

TYLER. They'll cover travel and meals, I'll get a copy of the film, they'll send it out to festivals--

NATHAN. What about your landscaping work?

TYLER. I'd risk losing some of my regular clients this year.

NATHAN. Fucking brilliant. No. It's not happening. I'm sorry but there's no way in hell you're gonna spend three and a half months busting your balls for a goddamn film that won't make a fucking penny.

TYLER. It's not your decision to--

(Nathan rises and crosses to Tyler.)

NATHAN. Listen to me, Tyler. You've got real talent. Okay? I mean it. But you need to find work that'll bring in some cash. I can't be paying for everything all the time. Your headshots, your resume, acting classes, your fucking clown agent... What am I forgetting? Your rent. Your clothes--

TYLER. I'll pay you back, Nathan.

NATHAN. I don't want the money, Tyler. I want you to be successful. Okay? I want to know that what I've invested in your career is gonna pay off. You understand? *(Tyler does not respond.)* I want to hear you say that you understand.

TYLER. I understand.

NATHAN. Good. Now, I gotta go. *(He starts off.)*

TYLER. Nathan--

NATHAN. I gotta go.

(Nathan crosses into his room, removes his shirt and tosses it on to the bed. He then crosses into the bathroom. Tyler follows and sits on the bed. A moment.)

TYLER. Last night was our anniversary.

NATHAN. *(Off.)* What's that?

TYLER. Our anniversary. It was yesterday.

NATHAN. *(Off.)* Oh, shit. I'm sorry, Tyler. I forgot.

TYLER. It's fine.

(Nathan appears in the bathroom doorway.)

NATHAN. Of course, it's not fine. Why would you bring it up otherwise? Listen, I'll take you out for a really nice dinner tonight. What do you say?

TYLER. Don't worry about it.

NATHAN. I'm really sorry, Tyler. David and I went out for a drink after work yesterday. And then, you know, one thing led to another--

TYLER. I said it was fine.

NATHAN. *(Resolute.)* We'll have dinner tonight. Just you and me. I promise.

(Nathan exits into the bathroom. A beat. Nathan's cell phone rings. And rings.)

TYLER. You gonna get that?

NATHAN. *(Off.)* I'm not expecting a call.

TYLER. You sure?

NATHAN. *(Off.)* Just leave it. I gotta get ready.

(Nathan pushes the bathroom door closed. Tyler sits quietly on the bed as the phone continues to ring.)

(End of Scene.)

SCENE 3

(April 2nd. 3:51 PM. Nathan's loft apartment. Nathan is nearly finished changing clothes. Tyler sits on the sofa reading the screenplay. The remainder of his lunch sits on the coffee table. The door is ajar. A knock. Olivia pokes her head in. She's very British.)

OLIVIA. Hello?

TYLER. Hey, Olivia. Come on in.

(Olivia enters and crosses to Tyler. He rises to meet her.)

OLIVIA. Hi sweetheart. *(They kiss/embrace.)* How are you?

TYLER. I'm doing okay.

OLIVIA. Good. Is the asshole home?

TYLER. Stop. I mean it. Promise me you're gonna behave.

OLIVIA. You know I can't do that.

TYLER. I'm serious. I don't want any trouble.

(Nathan enters from his room. He has not yet put on pants. He sees Olivia.)

NATHAN. *(Quietly.)* Oh, for fuck's sake.

(He crosses to the coffee table.)

OLIVIA. Hello, Nathan.

NATHAN. Good to see you, Olivia.

OLIVIA. I was hoping to see less of you. (*Nathan grabs the vial of coke from the coffee table and starts for his room.*) Not in a sharing mood today?

NATHAN. No.

OLIVIA. You know, it'd be interesting if, for a change, you tried to tackle life without all that shit in your system.

NATHAN. It makes you bearable.

OLIVIA. I wonder if it doesn't make you bearable. (*Nathan exits into his room.*) Where he's off to?

TYLER. I don't know.

OLIVIA. Well, wherever he's going, I hope to God he'll be putting on trousers.

TYLER. He's meeting David, I guess. At least that's what he said.

OLIVIA. Those two are way too cozy for my taste.

TYLER. I don't want to think about it. (*Beat.*) Do you want a drink?

OLIVIA. Yes, but only to keep this buzz going. (*Tyler makes Olivia a drink at the kitchen island.*) You missed one hell of a brunch today.

TYLER. I wasn't up for it.

OLIVIA. You haven't been up for much of anything lately.

(*Nathan returns to the living room fully dressed.*)

NATHAN. Okay. I'm outta here. (*He crosses to Tyler and gives him a kiss.*)

TYLER. I'll see you at seven.

NATHAN. Seven?

TYLER. Seven o'clock. Dinner. At that new Japanese restaurant over on Montague.

(*Beat.*)

NATHAN. Oh, shit. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck. I'm sorry, Tyler. I won't be back in time.

TYLER. Nathan--

NATHAN. I know. But you gotta understand. David is moving into his new place. And his furniture's still in storage because the movers had to reschedule last minute. So of course, he's threatening to take the entire unit to the dump unless I help him empty it and get everything into his apartment.

OLIVIA. Oh, for Christ's sake, Nathan. Are you serious? I'm sure it can wait. And do you really think it's more important than dinner with your boyfriend? I mean, it's not going to kill you to spend an evening with Tyler, now, is it? And if it does kill you... Well, I think we all know where I stand on that scintillating little topic.

NATHAN. Fuck off, Olivia. *(To Tyler.)* I'll make it up to you. I promise.

(Nathan kisses Tyler again and then exits out the front door. Tyler hands Olivia her drink and then sits on the sofa. Olivia joins him.)

OLIVIA. What's the matter, sweetheart? What's going on here?

TYLER. I don't know. Nathan is just... one huge... emotional void is all. He always so... practical.

OLIVIA. Obviously. And what did you expect?

TYLER. What do you mean?

OLIVIA. Tyler. Darling. Where did you and Nathan meet?

TYLER. You know damn well where we met.

OLIVIA. Yes, and that's my point. I mean, seriously. Think about it. Did you really believe you'd just stroll into some nightclub, toss back a few drinks, take some mood-altering drug, and then find the man of your dreams? Did you really imagine you'd find love in a sea of plastic tank tops and rubber hot pants? We know all too well how rubber and plastic do not breathe. And relationships that are cultivated in bars can be as suffocating as the clothing you wear. *(Beat.)* Listen to me. Everything that goes on in your relationship with Nathan... Every heated discussion, every misunderstanding, every meaningless quarrel... It's hurting you. Do you understand? It's time to put an end to it, Tyler. It's over. You need to take control of your own life. You can't depend on Nathan for everything. So, all you need now is closure.

TYLER. And what do you suggest I do?

OLIVIA. We've had this discussion.

TYLER. No. No, that's not the answer--

OLIVIA. Tyler. Either you completely remove yourself from the relationship and learn to take care of yourself or-- *(The front door buzzes.)* Do you want me to get that?

TYLER. Do you mind?

OLIVIA. No. Of course not. *(Olivia crosses to the front door and presses the button on the intercom.)* Hello?

DAVID. *(Voice.)* Olivia?

OLIVIA. David?

DAVID. *(Voice.)* How are you?

OLIVIA. I'm fine. And you?

DAVID. *(Voice.)* Doing all right.

(Awkward beat.)

OLIVIA. I'm here with Tyler. Nathan's on his way to meet you. He just left.

DAVID. *(Voice.)* I told him I'd meet him here.

OLIVIA. Well, there's hardly anything I can do about that. You've just missed him.

DAVID. *(Voice.)* So, you've said. Listen, can you buzz me in please? My fucking cell phone just shit the bed. I need to borrow a phone.

OLIVIA. Tyler?

TYLER. He's full of shit. He has a key. He can let himself in.

(The door buzzes again. Olivia presses the button on the intercom.)

OLIVIA. Hello?

DAVID. *(Voice.)* I'm still here.

OLIVIA. Just our luck. All right then. I'm buzzing you in. *(Olivia buzzes David in. She leaves the door ajar. To Tyler)* Are you all right?

TYLER. I'm fine.

OLIVIA. And you're not upset with me?

TYLER. Of course not.

OLIVIA. I'm going to make myself another drink. Do you want anything?

TYLER. No. Thanks.

(Olivia crosses to the kitchen island.)

OLIVIA. And since Nathan is such an absolute wanker all the time, I think I'll help myself to the good stuff.

TYLER. Go for it.

(Olivia starts to make a drink. There's a knock at the door. David enters.)

OLIVIA. Hi, David.

DAVID. Every day if possible.

OLIVIA. Clever. It's suddenly gotten chilly in here.

DAVID. How goes it, Tyler?

TYLER. Oh, I'm just peachy, thanks for asking.

(David crosses to Olivia and extends his hand.)

DAVID. Your phone? *(Olivia doesn't move.)* Come on, Olivia. Give me your fucking phone.

OLIVIA. Give me your fucking phone... please.

DAVID. Seriously?

OLIVIA. You're incorrigible.

(Olivia relents and hands David her cell phone. He takes the phone and dials. Olivia continues making her drink.)

DAVID. Hey, Nathan. It's David... What do you mean, where the hell am I? Where the hell are you? I told you I'd meet you at your place... No... No... Look, just stay where you are. I'll come to you... You're where...? Fuck. Okay, well, just have the driver bring you back here... Yeah, I'll wait here... See you in a few. *(David ends the call and hands the phone back to Olivia.)* Jesus, he's a mess. Sounds like maybe he had a rough night last night.

TYLER. You two weren't out together?

DAVID. No. I flew in on a red eye this morning. I had business out in Chicago.

OLIVIA. How's the new place, David?

DAVID. Empty. All my fucking furniture is still in storage. Family-owned business and the owner's goddamn mother had to have an aneurysm the same day they were scheduled to move my things into the penthouse.

OLIVIA. What an inconvenience for you.

DAVID. Anyway, she's dead now. Which has delayed things further. So, now I gotta take care of getting my things out of storage myself.

OLIVIA. Well, I'm sure you're happy to know that Nathan has committed his entire day to assisting you with your little ordeal.

DAVID. Yeah, he's a good guy. I don't know what I'd do without him. *(David crosses into Nathan's room and removes the vial of coke from the nightstand. He returns to the living room and will do a bump or two during this scene.)* So, Tyler. Have you booked any work lately?

TYLER. No.

OLIVIA. He has an audition next week.

TYLER. It's nothing.

OLIVIA. Yes, it is something. It's a feature film.

DAVID. Oh yeah? Wow. Well, that's great.

TYLER. I appreciate it, David. I really do. But you know, we don't really have to talk about it.

DAVID. What? Of course, we do. I'm excited for you, buddy. That's great news. You should be celebrating.

TYLER. It's just an audition.

DAVID. Right. Okay, I get it. You don't want to jinx it. Fair enough. I'll say no more.

TYLER. Thank you.

(Beat.)

DAVID. You know, you're very lucky to have Nathan...

TYLER. I never said otherwise.

DAVID. ...He takes pretty good care of you. Doesn't he? Safe and sound in your little studio apartment. Where are you now? Still over in the West Village?

TYLER. Yes.

DAVID. You know, most struggling actors don't have it so good.

OLIVIA. Why don't you just go wait for Nathan on the street, David? What do you think? Hm? He'll be here soon, I'm sure.

DAVID. Actually, I could use a drink. Would you mind, Tyler? Could you help me out with a drink?

TYLER. Sure.

DAVID. A vodka Gibson, up, very dry.

TYLER. Okay.

OLIVIA. I'll make it.

TYLER. No, I've got it. Olivia, do you want another?

(She quickly finishes her current drink.)

OLIVIA. Yes.

(Tyler makes Olivia and David a drink.)

DAVID. So, listen, Tyler. I know you don't want to talk about it. But you know, I really do hope this film thing works out for you. Finally, an opportunity for you to contribute around here.

OLIVIA. David--

DAVID. I mean, otherwise, we all know you're at least good for a proper fuck, right?

OLIVIA. Stop.

DAVID. Or are you? I mean, fill us in here. Hunh? When was the last time you and Nathan had a good fuck...?

OLIVIA. What the hell's the matter with you?

DAVID. ...This morning? Last week? A month ago? A year? Where was the last place you two really went at it? Here on the sofa?

OLIVIA. That's enough, David!

TYLER. It's fine, Olivia. Leave it alone.

DAVID. I mean, the least you could do is put out once in a while. What do you think? You're so damned cute, there's no denying that. Fuckable for sure. Hell, I'd even fuck you if you didn't belong to Nathan.

TYLER. I don't belong to anyone! *(Beat. He calms himself.)* And Nathan manages just fine without me. Here's your fucking drink.

(Tyler offers the drink to David. Olivia's phone rings. She answers it.)

OLIVIA. Hello...? Yes, Alan. I'll let him know. *(She disconnects the call.)* Apparently, there's a limo out front.

(David does not take the drink.)

DAVID. Hey listen, Tyler. Forget about what I said. Okay? I'm high. And I'm a little pissed off right now. I mean, it's not every day some old lady has an aneurysm and fucks up your whole week.

(David exits out the front door. Tyler stands for a moment, a little distracted, still holding David's drink.)

TYLER. Did you say you wanted another?

OLIVIA. I did. And this one will do just fine.

(Olivia takes the drink from Tyler. Tyler sits on the sofa.)

TYLER. Olivia...

OLIVIA. I'm here. *(She joins him.)*

(A moment.)

TYLER. I'm ready.

OLIVIA. Are you? Because I need you to be certain.

TYLER. Yes.

OLIVIA. Absolutely certain, Tyler. Otherwise, this conversation ends here and now. And we'll never speak of it again. Do you understand?

TYLER. I understand.

OLIVIA. So?

TYLER. So, I'm ready.

OLIVIA. I'm going to ask you one more time and I want you to look directly into my eyes when you answer me. Are you sure this is what you want?

(Tyler looks at Olivia.)

TYLER. Yes.

OLIVIA. Good. First step. Money. Ten thousand dollars. Do you have it?

TYLER. Nathan gives me an allowance each month. I've been setting aside some of that for a while.

OLIVIA. Do you have all ten?

TYLER. I have just under eight.

OLIVIA. That's a start. And the rest?

TYLER. Uh... Well, both Nora and I are listed as beneficiaries on Nathan's life insurance. The portion I get should more than cover the difference. Except I don't know the exact terms of the policy. I mean, it could be months before I see a check.

OLIVIA. Do you stand to inherit anything?

TYLER. I don't know. I only know about the life insurance. I've never seen a will. I assume Nora gets everything.

OLIVIA. Life insurance policies can be tricky. Any ambiguous detail could set off an investigation. And with Nora involved... I don't know. You need to find out if Nathan has a will. And if Nora is the sole beneficiary, then... well... Maybe we should think about--

TYLER What? No! What is wrong with you?

OLIVIA. We need to see the will.

TYLER. Nathan told me that money was tight.

OLIVIA. Did he really say that?

TYLER. In so many words, yes. *(Olivia laughs.)* Why is that funny to you?

OLIVIA. Nathan has a lot of things to worry about, Tyler. But believe me, money is not one of them.

TYLER. What do you mean?

OLIVIA. You really don't know?

TYLER. No.

OLIVIA. Nathan's father left him a massive amount of cash when he died. The man owned apartment complexes and commercial property all over New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. He was essentially a slum lord. Nathan was barely a teenager at the time, so his father's business partners bought him out, leaving Nathan with a huge fortune. Everything he had went directly to Nathan when he turned eighteen.

TYLER. What about Nora?

OLIVIA. He had no interest in Nora.

TYLER. How do you know all this?

OLIVIA. His death was all over the news, sweetheart. The trial, the verdict... Anyway, and in the meantime, we'll have to work with what we have. Eight thousand should be more than enough to secure a hit. How soon can you get it to me?

TYLER. I, uh... I suppose I can get it to you in the next day or two.

OLIVIA. Perfect.

(Olivia drinks. A moment.)

TYLER. What's going on between you and David?

OLIVIA. What're you talking about? Nothing's going on. He repulses me.

TYLER. Really? That's the truth?

OLIVIA. The man nauseates me, Tyler.

TYLER. I've known you a long time, Olivia--

OLIVIA. I'm sorry, Tyler, but the notion that David and I have had any kind of intimate relationship is utterly ridiculous.

TYLER. I didn't say anything about an intimate relationship.

OLIVIA. Why are you asking me this? *(Tyler stares intently at Olivia.)* Stop staring at me like that. *(Tyler remains steadfast.)* Well, what difference would it make anyway? *(Tyler does not relent.)* Okay fine! David and I had an affair. But, I mean, for God's sake, it was fifteen years ago.

(Tyler rises and moves away from Olivia.)

TYLER. I knew it. I knew it! Unbelievable!

OLIVIA. Look, Tyler. It's long over. And that's why I don't talk about it.

TYLER. Does Nathan know?

OLIVIA. It was a long time ago.

TYLER. (*Nearly in hysterics.*) Okay. Okay. Now explain to me the insanity of this situation. So, Nathan and David knew each other before I met Nathan. And you and I have been friends longer than Nathan and I have been together. So, what are the odds that you, my closest friend, were, almost fifteen years ago, fucking a man that I now loathe who also happens to be my boyfriend's best friend?

OLIVIA. There's no need to get upset.

TYLER. Upset!? Upset doesn't even begin to describe how I'm feeling right now!

OLIVIA. You need to relax, sweetheart.

TYLER. Oh. Right. What a fantastic idea. Relax. Sure. No problem. Maybe a little fucking yoga will clear my mind right now. A little downward fucking dog. Perfect position for a man who's just been dry fucked up the ass by his best friend.

OLIVIA. David and I met under extreme circumstances--

TYLER. Olivia, you were married fifteen years ago.

OLIVIA. Yes.

TYLER. And apparently having an affair as well.

OLIVIA. That's right. Now if you'll just listen to me--

TYLER. Olivia-- (*Olivia slaps Tyler.*) What? The fuck?

OLIVIA. Are you listening!? Now, not another word until I'm through talking. All right? Yes, I was married fifteen years ago. But what you don't know is that I was also widowed fifteen years ago--

TYLER. Divorced. You were divorced. You told me you left your husband--

OLIVIA. I thought we had an agreement. I talk. You listen. Tom... my husband... died--

TYLER. (*Quietly.*) Olivia--

OLIVIA. Shhhhhh... Died unexpectedly one night. I was on a buying trip in Europe. One additional trip not originally on my schedule for the year. My only regret was the expense. I came back with a second line of women's clothing for the spring that we did not need. I was up to my tits in cotton twills. I nearly lost my job.

TYLER. Olivia, I've seen Tom. I've talked to him.

OLIVIA. That's impossible. He's dead. He's been dead for years.

TYLER. You pointed him out to me one night at dinner. He was sitting alone, about five tables over from us. I remember distinctly.

(*A moment.*)

OLIVIA. Oh dear.

TYLER. What?

OLIVIA. Tyler. Sweetheart. I unceremoniously selected a man and told you he was my ex-husband.

TYLER. You selected a man?

OLIVIA. I never meant to tell you that I was married in the first place. It slipped out. And then I panicked. I thought if I told you I was divorced you'd be less curious about the details than if I told you my husband had died.

TYLER. Why would you then point out a complete stranger to me at dinner and then tell me he was your ex-husband?

OLIVIA. I don't know. I was drunk. And feeling a little ballsy, I suppose. And anyway, the real Tom was unattractive and insipid. The guy at the other table was handsome and... Well, he looked interesting.

TYLER. There's something genuinely wrong with you.

OLIVIA. Listen to me carefully. Tom died. All right? During a break-in at our home. Someone tried to burgle the place. Tom intervened and he was shot. But I was away. In Europe. There was nothing I could do. And absolutely no way I could've been involved. Do you understand?

(A moment.)

TYLER. You failed to mention to me that you had firsthand experience when you initially recommended that I have Nathan... exterminated.

OLIVIA. You rejected the suggestion immediately. So, I didn't feel compelled to share the particulars with you. But... Well, now that we've gotten this far, there's one more thing you should know. I hired David to do it.

TYLER. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. I can't hear anymore.

OLIVIA. Tyler--

TYLER. Am I the only sane person left?

OLIVIA. If you are, it speaks volumes about everyone else's mental health.

TYLER. Get out.

OLIVIA. I will not get out. I'm not going anywhere. Everything I've just told you; you cannot repeat to anyone. Everything we've discussed stays between you and me. I asked if you were certain. You looked me in the eye, Tyler. You gave me your word.

TYLER. I said I was ready. I never gave you my word. And you've done nothing but lie to me since the day we met.

OLIVIA. I have always been and will always be there for you.

TYLER. Fuck you. You lied to me.

OLIVIA. It's all out in the open now. No more lies. We can't just ignore what's happened here.

TYLER. I'm not sure I can trust you, Olivia. I'm not sure I can even see you again.

OLIVIA. We move forward as discussed.

TYLER. No. We don't. I mean, do you honestly believe that David would actually agree to... This is too fucking crazy. I never imagined, for a minute, for as much as I hate that man, I never expected that David could... And certainly not his best friend. He would never hurt Nathan.

OLIVIA. Of course, David would never hurt Nathan. But he would hire someone else to do it.

(A moment.)

TYLER. This is over. All of it. Please go.

OLIVIA. You can't back out now, Tyler. That's not how it works.

TYLER. Are you threatening me?

OLIVIA. I'm the least of your worries.

TYLER. What do you have to gain from any of this, Olivia? Tell me. *(Olivia does not respond.)* I have been trapped in this relationship for five years. Too broke to leave, too scared to walk away. And once in a while, I take a long look into Nathan's eyes, and I almost believe that he's in love with me. And then I remember how frightened and alone I feel. And now, I discover that you, my closest friend, who I've never questioned once in all the years I've known you... Well, imagine my comfort level at this point. So, what's to stop me from walking away from all of it? What could you possibly do to me that I haven't already done to myself?

OLIVIA. I'll have you killed.

TYLER. You'd be saving me the trouble.

(A standoff. Tyler and Olivia stare intently at one another. Olivia finally relents and then exits out the front door. Tyler stands alone for a moment. The door to Nora's bedroom opens. Nora peers out and then crosses into the living room.)

NORA. Tyler.

TYLER. Nora.

NORA. I heard everything.

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

NORA. You don't have to say anything. Sounds like you need two thousand dollars. I think I have at least that much cash wrapped in tin foil in the freezer. Nathan thinks it's frozen ground beef. He should eat more.

(Lights to black. End of Act I.)

WORK IN PROGRESS. MORE TO COME.