

(DRAFT: 7 Sep 2019)

RADIATOR

A play in one act
By Craig Houk



© 2019 by Craig Houk
1711 11th Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
617-515-1838
hok1969@gmail.com

RADIATOR by Craig Houk

CHARACTERS

LOU BRUNAZZI (Age 53) Italian American. He is not a curmudgeon or an irritable old man, though that's likely what he will grow into. He's frank, forward & comical. His emotions are always just on the surface.

ANDRÉ COOPER (Age 46) African American. He's analytical, earnest, but also has a good sense of humor. He has a big heart, but has trouble connecting with others.

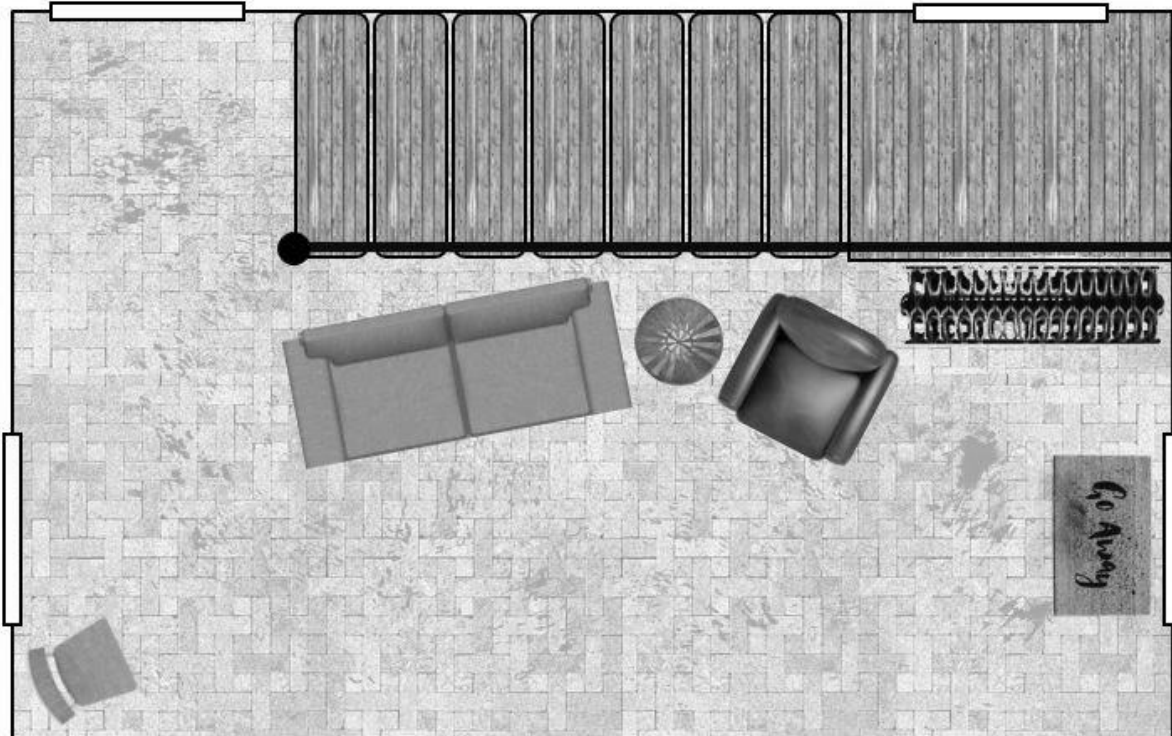
CHARACTER NOTES: André & Lou never overtly flirt with one another. Their affection, as it develops, however it develops, is genuine & easy. The Italian that Lou speaks is optional, though preferred.

TIME

Present.

SETTING

Hunts Point neighborhood, NY (South Bronx). An old, shabby apartment building. Basement landing. Lou's apartment door entrance is situated downstage left. André's apartment door entrance is situated downstage right. A door to the building equipment room is situated at the foot of the stairs. There is an archway at the top of the stairs.



SCENE 1

(Early September. Early evening. The stage is empty, except for some moving boxes near André's apartment door. The radiator, situated near Lou's apartment door, is hissing softly. Lou comes through the entry way at the top of the stairs. He shuffles through a batch of letters, some of which are marked FINAL NOTICE and/or CANCELLATION NOTICE. André emerges from his apartment at the foot of the stairs. Both men are distracted, André in a hurry. They bump into one another on the stairs.)

ANDRÉ

Shit. Sorry, man...

LOU

...Attento [Watch out]! Jesus Christ...

(He trails off. Turns his attention again to the mail.)

ANDRÉ

(At the top of the stairs.)

...Careful of those boxes there...

LOU

(Almost to himself as he passes near the boxes.)

...Fuckin' boxes...

ANDRÉ

...I'll have 'em out of the way in a couple of hours...

LOU

(Almost to himself as he continues toward his apartment.)

...If the world ain't ended by then...

ANDRÉ

...I'm just moving into the apartment...

LOU

...Ain't none of my business.

(Lou exits into his apartment and closes the door behind him. André lingers briefly at the top of the stairs and then exits through the archway. The hissing and whistling continue. After a moment, Lou emerges from his apartment. He goes to the radiator and puts his hand on it. It's warm to the touch. As he turns back, he sees a thermostat on the wall. He examines it, and then turns it up. Satisfied, he exits into his apartment, leaving the door open.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 2

(Mid-October. Very late, after midnight. The boxes are gone. A love seat, chair and end table are out on the landing but are tucked neatly out of the way. The radiator is now whistling and hissing loudly. André, exhausted, emerges from his apartment and crosses tiredly to the radiator. He studies it for a moment and then turns his attention to the thermostat on the wall. He turns it off. The whistling and hissing gradually wane and then stop. André sees that Lou's apartment door is open. He gently pulls the door closed and then exits into his apartment.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 3

(An hour or so later. Lou, wrapped in blankets, emerges from his apartment. He moves to the radiator and puts his hands on it. It's cool to the touch. He goes to the thermostat, looks closely

at it, and turns it up. He moves back into his apartment, leaving the door open. After a moment, the whistling and hissing begin again, slowly and unobtrusively at first, but then increasingly in volume and speed. This time, a banging noise comes with it. The sounds get louder and louder until André emerges from his apartment. He moves to the thermostat and extends his hand toward it, prepared to turn it off.)

LOU

(He appears in his apartment doorway.)

You put your hands on that thermostat and I swear to you I will come out there and put my hands on you. Capisc' [Understand]?

ANDRÉ

Mr. Brunazzi...

LOU

...Mr. Brunazzi's my father. Okay? And my father was a nice guy. Not the sorta guy who'd go around puttin' his hands on people. So, there ain't no need to call me Mr. Brunazzi, if you get my drift.

ANDRÉ

Okay, so how do you want me to call you?

LOU

Name's Lou. But we ain't friends.

ANDRÉ

Okay, well listen, Lou... That hissing and whistling noise... it's coming from this radiator right here. And now there's a banging noise too. Which makes me think the boiler it's connected to is on its last legs.

(Beat.)

LOU

You're in the apartment across the way, right?

ANDRÉ

For almost two months now.

LOU

And you can hear this from all the way over there?

ANDRÉ

Okay well, that's maybe twenty feet, if that.

LOU

So, what do you want me to do about it?

ANDRÉ

I don't need you to do anything. I'll call management in the morning.

(He starts back to his apartment.)

LOU

They ain't gonna do un cazzo [nothing].

ANDRÉ

(He turns back, curious, pointing to the radiator.)

Is this connected to the heat in your apartment?

LOU

What? No. I don't think so. Why?

ANDRÉ

Well, if it is, it means you're paying to heat this space out here.

LOU

No. No. That ain't how it works.

ANDRÉ

Okay, well, all I'm saying is, if that is the case, that's fucked up. And probably illegal.

LOU

(Discreet like.)

Hey, look... management don't complain much when I'm late with the rent. Okay? And because of that, I try to keep my head down and my mouth shut. So, maybe we can just forget about this radiator nonsense. Whatta ya say?

ANDRÉ

(He gets an idea.)

Hang on a second.

(André heads up the stairs and exits through the archway.)

LOU

(He crosses to the foot of the stairs.)

What the f...? Where are you goin'?

(To himself.)

Impiccione [Nuisance].

(Lou makes himself comfortable on the love seat. The whistling, hissing, and banging noises continue. After a moment, André reappears and comes down the stairs.)

ANDRÉ

I got some good news.

LOU

Oh yeah?

ANDRÉ

You're not paying extra for heat...

LOU

Didn't I say that already?

ANDRÉ

...Bad news is, same shit's happening on all the upper floors. All these exterior radiators must be connected to the same boiler...

LOU

...Which means management is gonna have a lot of other tenants breathin' down their necks about this. So, they don't need to hear it from me. And I can keep my nose clean.

ANDRÉ

Yeah, well, in the meantime, I'm shutting this thing down. I can't sleep with all this noise...

(He starts for the thermostat.)

LOU

(He gets up from the love seat.)

Come on. Leave it alone. It's still puttin' out heat.

ANDRÉ

...And maybe you should keep your door closed, huh? This isn't the Upper East Side.

(André turns the thermostat off. The noises gradually wane and then stop.)

LOU

I ain't got nothin' worth stealin'.

ANDRÉ

Maybe not, Lou. But anyone could go in there and kill you if they wanted to.

(Lou shrugs.)

All right, well, leave your door open then. No skin off my nose. But until that boiler gets fixed, I'm gonna have to ask you to leave that thermostat alone.

(André heads for his apartment.)

LOU

This stuff belong to you?

ANDRÉ

What stuff?

LOU

This furniture.

ANDRÉ

It's what's left from my old apartment. Turns out, I don't have room for it in there.

(Indicates his apartment.)

Look, if it's in the way, I have a storage unit...

LOU

...No. No. It's nice. And it looks good out here. Makes it kinda homey.

ANDRÉ

Okay. Well, as long as it's here, you're free to use it. Just don't go messing it up or anything.

LOU

Aw, too bad. I was thinkin' about jerkin' off out here.

ANDRÉ

(Maybe a little too aggressive.)

The fuck you will.

LOU

Jesus Christ, I was kiddin'. Relax.

(A long beat.)

ANDRÉ

Okay. Okay. I see what's going on here.

LOU

Oh, you do, do you?

ANDRÉ

Yeah. I mean, I get it. Times are tough. Money's tight. But you can't be doing that, man.

LOU

Doin' what?

ANDRÉ

You're using this radiator right here to heat your apartment. Am I right? And I suppose you got the heat turned off in your place. That's why you keep your door open, isn't it?

LOU

And what if it is?

ANDRÉ

You think that's a good idea? You think management isn't gonna figure out you been stealing heat from 'em?

LOU

You think you're gonna mind your own damn business?

(Long beat.)

ANDRÉ

All right. I got you. But if you turn that thermostat on again, it's me who'll be putting hands on you. And you can call me Mr. Cooper. Capisc'?

(Beat.)

You have a good night. Okay Lou?

(André exits into his apartment, closes and locks his door.)

LOU

(Quietly.)

Eat shit, Mr. Cooper.

(Lou stands quietly for a moment. He then turns up the thermostat and exits into his apartment, leaving the door open.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 4

(Early November. Early evening. The equipment room door is open. We hear sounds of a maintenance man working off. The furniture has been repositioned in a more formal, more inviting way. Lou sits in the chair

drinking a cocktail. A cocktail shaker and an extra glass sit on the end table. André emerges from his apartment. He is dressed casually, but nicely for an evening out. He carries his shoes with him.)

ANDRÉ

I see you're enjoying our cozy little sitting room.

(He sits in a small side chair near his door, puts his shoes on.)

LOU

I am indeed.

(Lou drinks. André continues with his shoes.)

ANDRÉ

Hey, I got a question for you.

LOU

Oh yeah?

ANDRÉ

Do you own pants?

LOU

Whatta you mean, do I own pants? 'Course, I own pants.

ANDRÉ

You sure? Cause I don't ever see you wearing any. Like maybe you had a traumatic experience once involving a pair of Sansabelts.

LOU

Well, at least I'm wearin' undies, right? I mean, yeah, they got some holes in 'em and they ain't the whitest. But, you know, Tony and the twins are still mostly buckled in.

ANDRÉ

Yeah, well it looks like one of the twins may have slipped out of its car seat.

LOU

(He adjusts himself.)

Hey. When I'm home, I like to be comfortable.

ANDRÉ

Seems like you're home a lot.

LOU

So, what's your point?

ANDRÉ

My point is... maybe you should get out more.

LOU

Oh yeah? How do you mean? Like on a date?

ANDRÉ

No. Not necessarily. Maybe something a little less complicated to start. You know, like a stroll to the park... to feed the pigeons, read a newspaper, shout at random people, sit on a bench in your own filth...

(He's finished with his shoes and has moved towards Lou.)

LOU

...Ha, ha. There you go, makin' jokes about my age. I ain't as old as I look, you know. And I clean up okay. A haircut, shave, a shirt that fits, some pants, a nice pair of shoes, and I look all right. Maybe I look as good as you. Maybe better. Whatta you know, huh?

(Beat.)

ANDRÉ

You saying I look good, Lou?

(Long beat.)

LOU

I can see you're headin' out. So maybe I'm sayin' you look nice.

ANDRÉ

You think so?

LOU

You're a good lookin' man, Mr. Cooper. And you know it.

ANDRÉ

You can call me André. And thanks. You too.

LOU

Cazzate [Bullshit].

(A moment.)

ANDRÉ

Hey, listen... I'm not in a hurry. I mean, I got time. I was just gonna go sit at a bar somewhere and have a few drinks to - I don't know - to muster up a personality.

LOU

You got someone you need to impress tonight?

ANDRÉ

Maybe I do.

(André sits on the loveseat. Lou continues drinking his cocktail.)

Wow. This is kinda nice. I should spend more time out here.

LOU

Well, it's your furniture. And I don't mind the company.

(Beat.)

Hey. Do you like gin?

ANDRÉ

I do.

LOU

Good. I'll go get the cards.

(Lou smiles broadly.)

ANDRÉ

That is a terrible joke, man. I mean, really, really bad. Awful in fact. Maybe it's best you stay indoors. I don't think the outside world's ready you.

LOU

Naw. Seriously. I got gin here. You want some?

ANDRÉ

Yeah.

(Lou pours André a drink.)

That repair guy's been back there a while now.

LOU

Since midafternoon.

(Beat.)

ANDRÉ

You get a look at him?

LOU

What do you mean? Get a look at him how?

ANDRÉ

Did you see what he looks like?

LOU

I got two eyes, don't I?

ANDRÉ

One of 'em looks lazy, but yeah.

(Lou hands André a drink.)

So... describe him to me.

(Beat.)

LOU

A fanabla [Go to hell].

ANDRÉ

What?

LOU

I ain't doin' that.

ANDRÉ

Come on.

(Beat.)

LOU

(Suspicious.)

Vaffanculo. [Fuck off.]

(André's eyes are trained on Lou.)

You're serious? You want me to describe the repair guy to you?

ANDRÉ

Yeah.

LOU

Why?

ANDRÉ

I want to get your take on him.

(Beat.)

LOU

(Suspicious.)

Yeah, no, you can just fuck right off with that bullshit. Stronzo [Asshole]. Maybe you should get outta here.

ANDRÉ

I'm gonna finish my drink first if that's okay with you.

LOU

Suit yourself.

(They sit quietly for a moment.)

ANDRÉ

(Rapid fire.)

I'd say he's about 5'8", 190 pounds, medium length dark brown hair --a little gray--, a full beard --nicely groomed--, solid build --broad shoulders, big arms, and a sizeable ass and legs.

(Long beat.)

LOU

I hadn't noticed.

ANDRÉ

Sure, you had.

LOU

Look, I ain't got the patience for this kinda bullshit. Okay? So, if you got something you wanna ask me, just come out with it.

(Beat.)

Come on. Let's hear it.

ANDRÉ

(André sets his drink down and heads to the equipment room doorway. He calls off to the repairman.)

Hey... Yeah, hi... Look, I'm sorry to bother you. I just wanted to say... you got a really nice ass, man...

(We hear the repairman grunt as he bangs his head against a pipe.)

Watch your head... Oh, and we're just out here having drinks if you'd like to join us... You like gin?

(André returns to the love seat.)

He's never coming out of that room.

LOU

I hope he does. If only to kick the livin' shit outta you.

(They continue to drink.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 5

(Late December. Near Christmas time. Mid to late morning. There may be a wreath on Lou's door, small decorations about, little indications of the season. Lou is sitting in the chair. He has set up a folding tray table and is having breakfast. A coffee setup sits on the end table. André emerges from his apartment.)

ANDRÉ

Morning.

LOU

Mornin'.

ANDRÉ

Something smells real good out here.

LOU

Oh, just some eggs and bacon. And toast. Got some fresh coffee too. Want some?

ANDRÉ

No. Thanks. You look settled in there.

LOU

It ain't no problem. Plenty leftover, still warm in the pan. I'll get some for you.

(He rises and heads for his apartment.)

ANDRÉ

Lou...

LOU

...Zittati [Shut up]. And sit down. I'll be right back.

(Lou exits into his apartment.)

ANDRÉ

(Following him a bit and calling after him.)

Come on, Lou, you don't have to do that.

LOU

(Off.)

I'm already doin' it.

(Lou re-enters with a tray table for André.)

Here you go.

ANDRÉ

I got it. Thanks.

(André takes the tray table from Lou. Lou exits again. André sets the table up, pours himself a cup of coffee, and makes himself comfortable on the love seat.)

LOU

(Off.)

That's one hell of a storm comin' through, huh?

ANDRÉ

They're saying between eighteen and twenty inches, I think.

LOU

(Off.)

Oh... Well, not too bad then.

ANDRÉ

I suppose not. I mean, that blizzard a few years back. Something like three feet of snow, right?

LOU

(Off.)

Who the hell knows? It was a lot of fuckin' snow, I remember that.

(Beat.)

You workin' today?

ANDRÉ

I cancelled my lunch meeting. Got a few things to take care of otherwise, but I can handle those from here. Nothing urgent.

(Lou enters with a plate for André. He sets it on the tray table.)

Okay. Here you go.

ANDRÉ

Thanks. This is very nice.

LOU

Forget about it. I'm always cookin' too much food. Too much for one person, anyway.

(Lou sits. They both eat. A moment.)

Hey, André...

ANDRÉ

Uh-huh?

LOU

I got somethin' I need to clear up with you.

ANDRÉ

Oh yeah? What's that?

LOU

The heat in my apartment... It's not off by choice. Okay? I ain't cheap. I'm broke.

ANDRÉ

(Regretful.)

Aw, shit, Lou...

LOU

...Gas company shut it down a few months ago. And the electric company's been on my ass too. So, right now, I'm just focusin' on my rent 'cause I need a roof over my head, you know?

ANDRÉ

I'm sorry, man.

LOU

Sorry for what? I'm the one who should be sorry. I'm sorry you gotta live across the hall from a hooligan.

ANDRÉ

You're not a hooligan.

(A moment. They continue to eat.)

You need help?

LOU

See, that right there is why I prefer to keep to myself. Do I need help? 'Course, I need help. But I don't want help. And I ain't askin' for it. I just wanted you to know why I was doin' what I was doin'... Bogartin' heat from this radiator over here.

ANDRÉ

Okay. Understood.

(Beat.)

You know, but there's no shame in...

LOU

(As if to say, "Enough!")

...I'm sorry I brought it up.

(Beat, less aggressive.)

Just enjoy your breakfast. All right? Looks like we're gonna be stuck inside for a while anyways, so how about we find somethin' else to talk about, huh...? Like why you're always wearin' a weddin' ring? Except when you go out on dates.

(Lou has cleared his plate and exits into his apartment. André is caught off guard.)

ANDRÉ

You noticed that, huh?

LOU

(Off.)

Not right away, no. What with my lazy eye and all.

(A beat. Lou re-enters and pours André and himself some more coffee. He settles in. A moment.)

ANDRÉ

I'm going through a divorce right now. Okay? And my wife, she's...

LOU

...Whoa, hang on a second. You got a wife?

ANDRÉ

Does that surprise you?

LOU

That you married a woman? As a matter of fact, yeah, it does surprise me.

ANDRÉ

Why?

LOU

Because about a month ago, you told the maintenance guy he had a nice ass, that's why.

ANDRÉ

So?

LOU

Are you fuckin' serious right now?

ANDRÉ

Do you want to hear about my divorce or not?

(Beat.)

LOU

I guess I ain't got nothin' else going on.

(Beat.)

ANDRÉ

Anyway, my wife... she's, uh... well, she's been taking it all in stride. I mean, there ain't much that can ruffle that woman's feathers. She's always been hard to read. And I get the sense, that for her, our divorce is really just a business transaction.

(Beat.)

I'm having a tough time with it, though. And I'm not ready to move on. You know? But it's what she wants and I'm not one to put up a fight.

LOU

That's rough. I'm sorry to hear.

(A moment.)

ANDRÉ

When I was about, I don't know, twelve, thirteen maybe, my parents moved me and my little sister, Fannie, to a small town in Western, PA. Mostly made up of Italian families. The main street stretched about, oh I'd say, two miles east to west. Couple of hole-in-the-wall restaurants, a few really good pizza joints, a fucking amazing hot dog shop, gas station, barbershop, flower shop, grocer... you know, all the usual shit you'd find in a small town. And extending out from there were several neighborhoods to the north and to the south. Mostly ordinary craftsman style homes and a church on almost every corner. And then beyond that... miles and miles of farmland and forest. On any given day, the town'd either smell like pine sap or cow shit. Or pine scented cow shit.

We were one of only three black families in the area - three affluent, well-educated, prominent black families. My dad was an ophthalmologist - a damned good one, one of the best - and my mom was a professor and head of the history department at Carnegie Mellon. Fannie and I never wanted for anything. And my folks wanted to make sure the two of us were taken care of long after we grew up and moved away. So, that's why they settled there, in that grubby little town, forty miles north of Pittsburgh. Cost of living was low and the money my parents made... well, they set most of that aside for Fannie and me, for our future.

Fannie got a full ride at the University of Chicago and me... well, I stuck around and went to CMU. So, the two of us were pretty much set after we graduated and went our separate ways. Fannie married a white dude, her high school sweetheart - a fucking band nerd - and the nicest guy you'd ever meet. They

live in Colorado now. And I got two of the most beautiful nieces running around Denver, wreaking havoc and breaking hearts left and right. Both of 'em sharp as a tack, like their mother.

(Long beat.)

LOU

You got kids?

ANDRÉ

No. And not because I didn't want 'em.

LOU

So, what are you doin' livin' in this shithole?

ANDRÉ

My lawyer suggested it. Told me to move out of Manhattan. Said it made sense for me to lay low for a while. Not spend money. And I really shouldn't be going out on dates. But a man's got needs, you know.

(André begins to clear his plate.)

LOU

(Lou starts to rise.)

Sit down. Ci penso io [I got it].

ANDRÉ

Relax, Lou. I can clear my own plate.

(Lou sits. André points to Lou's apartment.)

You mind?

LOU

No. It's fine. Kitchen's on the left there.

(André exits into Lou's apartment.)

And the place is filthy. So, you know, just don't pay no attention to that.

(While André is off, Lou makes himself busy, maybe looks at his device, maybe puts up a tray table. André reappears.)

ANDRÉ

There's a picture in there...

LOU

So? I got lots of pictures.

ANDRÉ

Yeah, well, there's one in particular... hanging on the wall, just above that hideous orange corduroy couch. Of you and some guy. Arabic maybe?

(Long beat.)

LOU

His name's Ziad. Most people just call him Z.

ANDRÉ

Oh yeah? So, what's the deal with that, huh?

LOU

It ain't up for discussion.

ANDRÉ

Come on. Nothing's up for discussion with you. I just shared my entire life story with you, and you can't tell me about a picture on your wall?

LOU

(Pointedly.)

Just leave it alone, okay?

ANDRÉ

Hey, all I'm gonna say is, you two look pretty damned cozy in that photo.

(Without much fanfare, Lou crosses and exits into his apartment. He closes the door and locks it behind him.)

Shit.

(André goes to the door and knocks quietly.)

Lou... Come on, man. Open the door. I didn't mean anything by it...
Lou.

(He knocks again.)

Seriously, Lou. I don't care. Whatever you got going on with this Ziad guy, it doesn't matter to me. I'm not judging you. It came out wrong... Yeah, okay, what I said sounded insensitive, but I didn't mean for it to come out that way. I'm sorry.

Hey, listen, I get it. Okay? I do. I'm lonely too. And I'm a little lost... just fucking hanging out here in limbo, stuck... and waiting for my life to start up again. You know? And I don't even have a fucking clue what that's gonna look like.

And I can tell that whatever it is you're going through right now... I can tell it's a million times worse than anything I've ever gone through. I can see it. I can feel it. And I'm here if you need someone to talk to. Okay...? Lou?

(André gives up and starts toward his apartment. Lou unlocks his door and appears. André turns. Lou goes to André and kisses him. André is surprised at first, but then settles into it. A long kiss, impassioned, but not sexual. Lou finally breaks away and exits into his apartment, closes and locks the door behind him. André stands quietly, a bit dumbfounded. After a moment, the radiator begins to hiss and whistle, followed by a banging sound.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 6

(Mid-January. Mid-morning. The equipment room door is open. We hear sounds of the same maintenance man working off. Lou is sitting in the chair and has progressed to wearing sweatpants. He drinks coffee and is looking at/reading his device. A moment passes before a paper airplane flies through the equipment room doorway.)

LOU

Che cavolo [What the]...?

(Lou rises, crosses to, and picks up the paper airplane. He peeks into the equipment room. After a beat, he turns his attention to the paper.)

And whatta we got here?

(Lou unfolds the paper as he heads back to the chair. He sits and reads the contents. A moment. He smiles.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 7

(Late January. After midnight. André appears in the archway at the top of the stairs. He's drunk. He clumsily makes his way down the stairs. As he reaches the landing, he begins to search his pockets for his keys. He eventually finds them, but as he attempts to open his apartment door, he drops the keys. As he bends down to retrieve them, he becomes dizzy and stumbles backwards, but ultimately finds his way to the loveseat where he's able to steady himself. As he tries to focus, André turns to Lou's apartment and sees that the door is open. Unable to get into his own apartment, André decides to make his way to Lou's door, pushes it open further and then disappears into the darkness. A moment.)

LOU

(Off.)

Che cazzo [What the fuck]!? Get the fuck outta my apartment, strunz [piece of shit]!

(We hear sounds of a struggle off. The actors perhaps improvise some muffled dialogue. We hear Lou punch André. André yelps and stumbles out to the landing. Lou follows him out with his fists up.)

Hey! What the hell's the matter with you, huh?

(He moves close to André, fists still up.)

ANDRÉ

Enough! Back off! I'm not gonna fight you!

(He puts his hand to his nose, which is bleeding.)

Ow! Fuck! My nose.

(He finds his way to a seated position, either in the chair or on the loveseat.)

LOU

I hope it's busted. Gagootz [Squash for brains].

ANDRÉ

You think you could help me out here? Huh? Before I bleed all over everything?

(Lou exits into his apartment and returns fairly quickly with a dishtowel. He tosses it to André.)

Thanks.

(André presses the towel to his nose.)

LOU

What the hell were you thinkin' comin' into my apartment like that?

ANDRÉ

I couldn't get into my place and I thought maybe I could crash on your couch. Fuck. This really hurts.

LOU

Good.

ANDRÉ

Maybe I should go to a hospital...

LOU

...Are you gay?

(Long beat.)

ANDRÉ

What?

LOU

You heard me. Are you gay? Are you bi? What's the deal with you, huh?

ANDRÉ

I'm hemorrhaging from my nose here, Lou...

LOU

...You're lucky I didn't kill you. Now, I asked you a question, didn't I?

(A moment.)

ANDRÉ

(André has sobered a bit from the punch.)

I don't know. I guess I like to think of myself as... heteroflexible.

(Beat.)

LOU

Are you fuckin' kiddin' me right now? Heteroflexible?

(Long beat.)

ANDRÉ

I mostly prefer women. And by that, I mean I'm generally attracted to what's been programmed into my brain as a traditionally feminine woman. You know, like curves and a soft voice and long hair and smooth legs and nice tits...

And yeah, sometimes I'm attracted to men. And I've been with a few. But with men, it doesn't matter to me what they look like. You know? It's different. With men, I need to feel like we can connect on a level that's more than just two dudes getting together to talk about last night's game or about scoring pussy.

You understand? As long as we have an emotional connection. An intellectual connection. Does that make sense?

LOU

(He sits.)

Nothin' makes sense no more. Everything's so fuckin' exact now. All these categories. And categories inside categories. Jesus, we've spent so much time analyzin' the shit out of everything that nothin' means anything no more.

(Long beat.)

You want some ice?

ANDRÉ

Yes. Please.

LOU

I'll be right back.

(Lou exits into his apartment. André moans as he continues to press the towel to his nose. A moment before Lou reappears with a bowl of ice. He hands it to André and then sits. Another moment.)

About a year ago, me and Ziad... We were at the Vertex Theater in Dallas. And we were out front after a show. Hangin' out on the sidewalk. Just standin' there, talkin' with a group of friends, when this van pulls up outta nowhere. Nearly comes up over the curb, tires squealin'. And out pops what turns out to be a bunch of fuckin' ICE agents.

And they just take Z away. They cuffed him, pushed him into the van, and then they hauled ass outta there. And do you wanna know what this tough talkin', cocky paesano did to stop 'em...? Nothin'. I mean, what could I do, huh? Except just stand there like a gutless idiot.

ANDRÉ

Shit, Lou. I'm sorry.

LOU

That ain't the worst of it.

Z's a writer. And I don't mean he just mucks around with it. I mean he's really good at it, you know. He's won some pretty big awards. And we were there that night in Dallas to see one of his plays. You see, Z likes to write about politics and social stuff, and race, human rights, all that really heavy shit.

Anyways, he's back in Syria now. That's where they sent him. That's where he was born, where he grew up. And I gotta tell you straight up, he's not very popular there. And I'm scared. I ain't heard from him in a long time and I got no idea what they're gonna do to him. But I do know whatever it is, it ain't gonna be good.

ANDRÉ

Fuck, Lou, that's awful. I don't know what to say.

LOU

Z has this, um... agent, nice lady over in Manhattan that manages his plays. And I don't know how she did it, but somehow, she made it so his checks come straight to me. Any cash he makes on a production of any of his work, I get. And that's how I been payin' my rent. That's why I got a roof over my head and a bed to sleep in. That's how I'm feedin' myself. That little furbetto [sly fox, cutie] is almost seven thousand miles away, barely able to look after *himself*, and he's still takin' care of *my* miserable ass.

(Long beat.)

Let me see that nose.

(André moves the dishtowel out of the way. Lou takes a look.)

Shit. I really did a number on it.

(Lou carefully grips André's nose. André winces and moans.)

Yup. It's busted. Let's get you to the ER, huh? But first, I guess maybe I should put on some pants.

(Lou heads for his apartment. André returns the dishtowel to his nose and moans.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 8

(Early February. Midday. André sits in a chair in his apartment. The lights are narrowed on him. He wears a splint on his nose. If time allows, his eyes may be blackened. He is on his mobile phone.)

ANDRÉ

I miss you too, sweetheart... Hey, listen. Before you put your mother back on, I need you to do me a favor, okay...? When your sister gets home from soccer practice, I want you to give her a big hug and kiss from me. You got it...? No. No it is not gross. And then I want you to ask her to give you a big hug and kiss back. That way you both get some love from your Uncle DreDre. What do you say...? Yeah, well your sister smells funny because she's a teenager. One day you're gonna smell funny too. So, are you gonna do what I asked...? That's a good girl. Now, put your mom back on, okay...? I love you too...

Hey, Fannie... Yeah, so um, my lawyer's starting to wrap things up. And I'm looking for a new place, something with a little more space, nothing too fancy. And unless I run into any problems, I should be able to come out to Denver for a visit in about, oh I don't know, six months maybe... Yeah, of course. I'm looking forward to it. It's been way too long...

Hey, how's that nerd, Stewart, doing...? You know, I never understood what you saw in that guy. Except that there were rumors going around high school about how big his dick was... Oh yeah? Well, he's got no ass to speak of, so it's nice to know he wasn't cursed with a small dick too...

Who do you mean, the guy who punched me...? Yeah, yeah. That's my neighbor. Lives across the hall from me. Fiery little Italian dude... No, I'm not gonna press charges. He's harmless... Well, yeah, I know he broke my nose, but he's still a good guy... Yeah, well men are stupid. We like to beat each other up and then go out for a beer after to celebrate the fact that we're not dead...

I'm doing okay. I guess. Who the fuck knows really? And you know me, I'm a rational guy. It's not like I'm having delusions about the two of us getting back together.

But I just can't help replaying that moment over and over in my head. I mean there I was, sitting in my chair, watching the game, a minute left on the clock. And all of a sudden, there she was. Standing over me. Frowning down at me. Voicing her

disappointment. And I couldn't move. I just sat there... cowering... confused, with no fucking clue of what I had done wrong.

And then the other day, it dawned on me. I mean, that's been my problem all along. I've just been skimming through life with my head up my ass. And that's why she's leaving me. Not because of what I've done wrong. But because of what I haven't yet done right...

No truer words have ever been spoken, Fannie. I mean, you're right. It's exactly what I need... purpose. I've gotta contribute in some way, to find a way to give back. And I guess maybe I owe that to mom and pop. And I guess maybe I owe that to myself.

I love you, sis. And I'm proud of you. You know that, right...? I gotta say, though, it still stings a little that you got all the brains *and* the good looks. I mean, I still got a good four inches on you, but that's all I got... Yeah, well give Stewart a punch in the arm for me. And a noogie on the head for good measure... See you soon... Bye.

(He disconnects the call.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 9

(Same day and time as previous scene. Lou is seated in a chair. He is meeting with an unseen shrink. He holds a Residual Functional Capacity Form in his hand. The lights are narrowed on him.)

LOU

Hey, I got an idea. Let's mix things up a bit today. Whatta you think, huh? How about we skip the part where I gotta answer all of your stupid boring questions and then just move ahead to the part where you fill out this here RFC form? And then put your fancy little signature at the bottom of it here? Okay? And, you know, just let the SSA know that I'm still a fuckin' nut-job and that my prognosis ain't changed one fuckin' iota! And then I'll be on my merry way to collect my disability. Thoughts? Suggestions? Suck my dick?

(He awaits a response from his shrink. None comes, except for maybe a look that says, "You're not going anywhere until your fifty minutes is up.")

Aw, for fucksakes, doc. Why do you gotta put me through this every goddam time? Nothin's changed. I'm the same guy I was a month ago. And the month before that. And the month before that. I ain't sleepin' right. I'm puttin' on more and more weight. I'm angry most of the time. And I just wanna get the fuck outta here so's I can go mill around my apartment for hours on end like a regular depressed person oughtta do. So, like I said, "Nothin's changed." Well, okay, except that maybe I punched my neighbor in the face a coupla weeks ago. And busted his nose. Other than that, though, it's been business as usual.

So, I guess you're just gonna sit there, huh...? All right. How much time we got left here...?

(Looks at his watch or a clock on the wall.)

Looks like forty-five minutes maybe, give or take... Okay, well then let me regale you with a little anecdote. Whatta you say? Huh? A literary analogy if you will...

(He again waits for a response. None comes. Almost to himself.)

Jesus Christ...

Okay, here we go... The other day, I was sittin' at home thinkin' long and hard about Peanut M&Ms. I mean, I fuckin' love Peanut M&Ms. Who don't, right? Peanut M&Ms first, followed by Peanut Butter M&Ms and then by the always trusty Milk Chocolate M&Ms. All o' them other M&Ms - you know the ones I'm talkin' about - them crispy ones, the pretzel ones, caramel, mint... they're all bullshit. They're awful. Fuck those M&Ms. Am I right?

Anyways, so I finally decided to get up off my ass and go to the corner store to get some. And since I don't get out much - what with my life bein' a never-endin' flow of emotional sewage - I settled on the Family Size bag of M&Ms. So, I got five of those and then I hightailed it outta there. And wouldn't you know it? I just get through the front door of my apartment buildin', and who do you guess is shufflin' in right behind me...? Mrs. Ostrovsky... the chatty, old Russian widow who lives in the apartment above me.

So, I'm doin' my best to get away from her. You know? I mean, all I gotta do really, is to make it to the stairwell, which is about fifteen feet from the front door. And I'm thinkin', "There ain't no way she can outrun me. She's old. And she ain't that nimble." But fuck me if she didn't keep up with me the whole way.

So, there we both were. Standin' there at the top of the stairs. And her mouth's goin' a mile a minute and I can hardly understand a fuckin' word she's sayin'. And I'm thinkin' I got only one option here. Right...? I gotta push this bitch down the steps, and then just tell the cops she fell. But I can't do that, now can I? I mean the only prison I really wanna be in is the one of my own makin'. You see? So, I just hung out there, quiet and resigned. And I let the old widow ramble on and on until she felt like she got everything she needed to get off her chest that day.

But you know, the whole time... all I kept thinkin' about was them Peanut M&Ms. And about how I just wanted to go back to my apartment, away from Mrs. Ostrovsky, away from the entire fuckin' world. And just sit there, alone, with nobody tellin' me what to do, or where to go, or how to feel... how to grieve. And just fuckin' eat as much of that candy as I damn well pleased. Because at that moment, it was the only thing that was gonna bring me some joy. It's all I had.

(A moment. He extends his hand, offering the form.)

So, are you gonna sign this or what?

(End of scene.)

SCENE 10

(Mid-February. Early morning. The radiator begins to hiss, whistle and bang again. Not as loud as in previous times, but loud enough to wake André, who has emerged from his apartment. He crosses to the thermostat and shuts it off. He sees that Lou's door is closed. He gently grips the knob. It's locked. He presses his ear against the door. He hears nothing. There's a strange odor. Something is wrong.)

ANDRÉ

(He knocks reluctantly.)

Lou...? Lou, you in there...? Lou...? Listen, man, I smell something. Smells like, I don't know, oil, maybe...?

(He sniffs the air. He knocks again.)

Hey, look, I'm not trying to piss you off. I'm just getting a little worried out here. Okay? Thinking maybe your gas is back on? Maybe there's a leak...? Lou...?

(To himself.)

Fuck...

(He paces a little, deciding what to do. He goes back to the door. Knocks more loudly and urgently.)

Lou. You gotta answer the door, man. Or at least let me know you're in there. And that you're okay... Lou...

(To himself.)

Son of a...

(He moves away from the door a bit.)

Okay, look. I'm coming in. You hear me? And I'm telling you right now... if you punch me in the face, I swear to you I will light your ass up...! I'm serious. I will fuck you up!

(No response. André clears further from the door and readies himself to bust it open. Just as he's set to move, the door opens, and Lou appears. He is distracted and a bit hazy. André goes to him.)

Lou... You okay?

LOU

Sto per vomitare [I'm gonna puke].

(Lou collapses. André catches him with difficulty.)

ANDRÉ

Shit...

(André helps Lou to the loveseat and sits him down carefully. He tries to rouse Lou who is half-conscious, maybe with a series of gentle slaps to the face and/or by repeating his name over and over. Lou moans a bit, disoriented. André runs into Lou's apartment.)

What the hell is this? Damn it, Lou! What were you thinking bringing this in here?

(André is referring to a kerosene space heater. We hear him moving about the apartment.)

Oh, come on...! I can't get this fucking window open...! Fuck!

(There is a commotion off. After a moment, we hear the sound of glass breaking. André reappears. He is unwrapping a dishtowel from around his hand - he's broken the window. André then runs into his own apartment and returns quickly with his cell phone. He dials 911.)

Uh, yeah... I need an ambulance, please. It's urgent... Shit, yeah, the address. It's uh... Coster Street. Five, uh... Five... Damn it...!

LOU

...Five Three Nine...

ANDRÉ

Right. Five Three Nine Coster.

LOU

...Between Randall and Oak Point...

ANDRÉ

Between Randall and Oak Point.

LOU

...Closer to Randall...

ANDRÉ

Closer to Randall.

(To Lou.)

You okay, Lou?

(Back to the phone.)

Yeah, my neighbor... he's, uh, he's not doing so good... I don't know exactly. Except he's got this rickety fucking space heater

in his apartment - Sorry about my language... Yeah, well, I turned it off. And I, uh... I opened a window to let some air in... Yeah, I think it's one of those kerosene heaters... I don't know. He seems to be breathing okay.

(To Lou.)

You breathing okay, Lou?

LOU

Un' son' morto, almeno questo [I'm not dead, at least there's that].

ANDRÉ

(Back to the phone.)

He's breathing fine. Said he thought he might throw up, though. And he keeps passing out... Carbon Monoxide. That's what I was thinking... Yeah, of course. I can stay with him... How much longer before they get here...? No. No, you don't have to stay on the line. I've got him... I will. Thank you.

(He disconnects the call.)

There's an ambulance on its way, Lou. Aw shit, we need to get you outside for some air. Okay? What do you say, huh? Can you make it?

(Lou moans at the thought of moving.)

Fuck.

(André attempts to move Lou. Lou resists.)

Goddamit, Lou. There's no way I'm gonna be able to carry you up those stairs. Now, come on. You gotta get up.

(André attempts to move Lou again. He's dead weight.)

Shit. Fine. All right. Just stay where you are. I'm gonna go open the window in my apartment to get some air flowing through here. Okay? I'll be right back. And keep breathing.

(André starts off, but then turns back.)

Damn it. Um... Do you need water? Never mind. I'm just gonna get you a glass of water. Fuck.

(André exits into his apartment. After a moment, Lou stirs, rises and begins moving sluggishly toward his apartment. He is almost to his door when André reappears with a glass of water.)

What the hell are you doing?

(André puts the glass down on the end table and crosses to Lou, guiding him back to the love seat. They both sit. He hands Lou the water. A moment.)

What's going on, Lou? Huh? What's going through your head, man? You scared the shit out of me, do you know that?

(Lou does not respond. He barely looks at André.)

You could've died in there. I mean, I was ready to bust through that door. You know? And then I find out you made some dumbass decision to put a piece-of-shit space heater in your apartment? Have you lost your fucking mind? Do you want to die? Is that what you want?

(A moment. Lou begins to regain his senses during the following.)

This is it, Lou. This is all we have. And, if we're lucky, we're only just halfway there. Because once we're gone... we're gone. That's it. There's nothing after this. There's no reward waiting for us on the other side. So, suck it up, man... Do you hear me? Because it's not gonna end here. And it's not gonna end like this.

(Long Beat. André begins to have a panic attack, something he has never experienced before. He rises.)

Fuck... Woah... Oh shit... Listen, Lou, I swear to you I'm not trying to steal your thunder here, but... damn it... Holy shit, I can't feel my fingers, man... Maybe it's the carbon monoxide, huh? Or maybe I'm having a heart attack...?

(He sits back down, maybe next to Lou, maybe in the chair and lowers his head. He tries to temper his breathing. After a moment, he raises his head.)

Okay... Well maybe this is *exactly* how things are gonna end. Right? They're gonna find us *both* dead. A black dude. A white dude. Two fucking corpses sitting on overpriced furniture in the basement of a run-down apartment building in the South Bronx. Cause of death...?

(He points to the radiator.)

...This fucking RADIATOR right here!

(He sits dejected, breathing deeply. A moment.)

LOU

(Lou extends his hand, offering André the glass of water. He mostly has his wits about him now.)

You're a goddam moron, you know that?

(André takes the glass and chugs the water.)

ANDRÉ

You got a point to make?

LOU

Two of 'em actually... First, I wasn't tryin' to off myself, ya dumb shit. I bought that space heater off Craigslist for fifteen bucks. I was just tryin' to keep warm and I was tired of hearin' you complain all the time about the noise this here radiator's been makin'. Okay? Second point... You were havin' a goddam panic attack. Not a heart attack. Which, I gotta admit, was kinda sweet in a way.

ANDRÉ

Me thinking I was dying was "sweet" to you, was it?

LOU

Yeah. So, I'm thinkin' maybe you got feelins' for me. Huh? Am I right? I mean, you got yourself pretty worked up there over just little old me, didn't ya?

(A moment.)

ANDRÉ

So, I was the reason you got that space heater?

LOU

What? No, that ain't what I meant at all. Vattene [Get outta here].

(A moment.)

ANDRÉ

Fannie and me. We missed out. You know...?

LOU

Che cazzo dici [What the fuck are you saying]?

ANDRÉ

I don't know. I was just thinking. Two black kids dropped in the middle of rural PA. Hemmed in by a bunch of corn-fed white kids. And not too young to understand what it meant to *be* black at that time and under those conditions. Fannie was scared. I was a little scared too, but mostly just sad. Sad that Mom and Pop took us away from where we belonged. Northview Heights had its share of problems, yeah. But it was home. You know? And at least there, we knew what the dangers were. We knew how to stay out of trouble. And if we did get into trouble... well, we knew our limits. We were good kids. And no amount of money was ever gonna give me and Fannie what we really needed... community. We needed community way more than we ever needed security. We lost that. And then somewhere along the way, we lost a part of ourselves.

(Long beat.)

How're you feeling?

LOU

I'm doin' okay. You, on the other hand, though...

ANDRÉ

...No, I'm all right. I'm gonna live.

LOU

Good to hear.

(Long beat.)

ANDRÉ

That ambulance is never gonna get here, is it?

LOU

Not in this fuckin' neighborhood, no.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 11

(Late March/early April. Early evening. The basement landing is clear of all furniture, except the chair. The equipment room door is open. We hear sounds of the same maintenance man working off. André emerges from his apartment. His face shows just remnants of the broken nose, the splint is gone. He takes one last look in, closes the door and locks it. As he turns, Lou comes down the stairs. Lou is cleaned up, put together, and neatly dressed.)

ANDRÉ

There he is. The working stiff.

LOU

If by stiff you mean my neck, my shoulders, my back, my lower back, my legs and my feet, then you hit the fuckin' nail on the head, my friend.

ANDRÉ

I was gonna ask how it was going, but I think I just got my answer.

LOU

Maybe I gave you the wrong impression. Naw, it's a good job. And so what? I'm baggin' groceries and stockin' shelves. But at least my heat's back on and I ain't stealin' Wi-Fi from Mrs. Ostrovsky no more.

ANDRÉ

(Admonishingly.)

Lou...

LOU

...Come on. I helped her connect the modem to the router. Not my problem if she don't know how to set up a password.

(Lou looks around. He sees the chair still there.)

You leavin' this for me?

ANDRÉ

Not by choice, no. Can't quite get the stink of you out of it, so I thought it best to leave it where it is.

(Beat.)

LOU

So, this is it, huh? You're just gonna fuck right off outta here today?

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Everything's cleared out and on its way to Queens.

LOU

Queens? That's practically skid row for a guy of your means. My condolences.

(Beat.)

ANDRÉ

(Self-conscious, modest.)

I'm, uh... I'm starting a foundation out there...

LOU

Oh yeah...?

ANDRÉ

...Yeah. For, uh... For underprivileged kids. Mentorship programs, community service. Maybe an arts curriculum. I'm still working through the details.

LOU

Well, look at you. That's amazin'. I mean it.

ANDRÉ

And, you know, I got no kids of my own to support and my wife - my ex-wife - well, she makes pretty good money on her own, so I should get through this divorce in one piece and without a huge hit to my wallet. And, hey... moving in here in the short term was the smartest thing I could've done.

(Beat.)

LOU

Yeah. Well... thanks for passin' through, pal.

(Beat.)

ANDRÉ

We're all just passing through, Lou. Even when we're feeling stuck, we're still moving forward. And it really doesn't much matter what happens along the way. It's not like we have any choice. Because we're all gonna end up in the same place anyway.

(Beat.)

LOU

What a jamook [idiot].

(Long beat.)

ANDRÉ

Any word?

LOU

No. Don't make no difference, though. Because I know. I know he's gone. I mean, Z was never one to keep his mouth shut. Or to stand down. So, I expect the next time I see him, it'll be at the gates of heaven, with him on the other side and me lookin' in... right before God sends me straight to hell. So, I'm just gonna call bullshit on your little theory that we all end up in the same place. And that there ain't no reward for bein' a decent human bein'. You know, because some of us deserve better. Z deserves better.

(A long beat.)

ANDRÉ

I see the repair guy's back.

LOU

Yeah. That fuckin' boiler, huh?

ANDRÉ

I don't know why they don't just replace it.

LOU

I gotta tell you... That noise never bothered me. It still don't. I got used to it. So much so that when that thing was actually workin' right, and the sounds stopped, I worried that somethin' was wrong. It was too quiet. Spooky. It was like someone threw a heavy blanket over the whole place. That hissin' and whistlin' and bangin' made me feel alive, you know? And I could breathe. And I really needed to breathe. Capisc' [Understand]?

ANDRÉ

Capisc'.

(Beat.)

I gotta go. So, bring it in.

(They hug. André puts his hands to Lou's face, and they kiss.)

I love you, Lou.

LOU

Get the fuck outta here.

(Beat. André heads up the stairs and off. Lou stands quietly for a moment and then heads to the equipment room doorway. He looks in.)

Hey...

(We hear the repairman grunt as he bangs his head against a pipe.)

Shit. Sorry. Hey, listen... I got your note a while back... So, you got a gay cousin up in Bedford Park you wanna introduce me to, huh? That's kinda homophobic, in case you didn't know. I mean, just because you got a gay relative and I'm gay don't mean the two of us are gonna automatically hit it off. So, you know, that's a little offensive, if you catch my drift.

(Beat. Lou starts toward his apartment but then returns to the equipment room doorway.)

Random question for you, though... This cousin of yours. What does he look like?

(End of play.)