

RADIATOR

A play
By Craig Houk

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Synopsis

Lou Brunazzi & André Cooper live across the hall from each other in the basement of a shabby apartment building in the Bronx. On the landing between their units stands a noisy radiator, which is connected to a deteriorating boiler. Determined to stop the whistling, hissing & banging that's keeping him awake at night, André endeavors to turn the radiator off, but is cut short by Lou who is determined to keep it running at all costs. What begins as a battlefield between two headstrong men slowly evolves into a makeshift sitting room where the pair begin to form a unique and lasting bond.

Characters

LOU BRUNAZZI (Age 53) Italian American. He is not a curmudgeon or an irritable old man, though that's possibly 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.

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.

Time

Present.

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. A sign above the radiator reads:

*DO NOT TOUCH
Management*

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--

LOU. Watch yourself!

Lou turns his attention again to the mail.

ANDRÉ. *(At the top of the stairs.)* Careful of those boxes--

LOU. *(Mostly to himself as he passes the boxes.)* Fuckin' boxes.

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

LOU. *(Mostly 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. He examines it further, finds the valve, and opens it further to allow for more heat. 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/stacked 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, finds the valve, and closes it completely.

The whistling and hissing will 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 more 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 opens the valve and then exits into his apartment, leaving the door open.

After a moment, the whistling and hissing begin again, slowly, and unremarkably 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 radiator and bends down to close the valve.

Lou appears in his apartment doorway.

LOU. You put your hands on that doohickey and I swear to you I will come out there and put my hands on you. You 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' 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, which makes me think that the boiler needs to be replaced or that maybe the pipes need to be secured. Also, it doesn't look level, so that might be a problem as well.

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. It's maybe twenty feet, if that.

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

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ANDRÉ. I don't want you to do anything. I'll call the landlord in the morning.

André starts back to his apartment.

LOU. He ain't gonna do nothin'.

André turns back, curious, pointing to the radiator.

ANDRÉ. Is this connected to the heat in your place?

LOU. What? No.

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

LOU. 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. (*Discreetly.*) Hey, look. The landlord 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 crosses to the foot of the stairs.

LOU. What the f...? Where are you goin'? (*To himself.*) Aw, Jesus. This guy.

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 the two upper floors. All these exterior radiators must be connected to the same boiler.

LOU. Ah! Which means the landlord is gonna have the other tenants breathin' down his neck about this, so he 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 that noise.

André starts for the valve.

Lou rises from the love seat.

LOU. 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 closes the valve. The noises will gradually wane and then stop.

LOU. I ain't got nothin' worth stealin'.

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

Lou shrugs.

ANDRÉ. All right, well, leave your door open then. No skin off my nose. But until the problem's fixed, I don't want you touching that radiator.

André heads for his apartment.

LOU. This stuff belong to you?

ANDRÉ. The furniture?

LOU. What the hell else would I be talkin' about?

ANDRÉ. It's what's left from my old apartment. *(Indicating his apartment.)* Turns out, I don't have room for it in there. 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 moment. André takes the situation in.

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 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?

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ANDRÉ. You think that's a good idea? You think the landlord isn't gonna figure out you've been stealing heat from him?

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

Beat.

ANDRÉ. All right. I got you. But if you touch that – it's called a valve by the way – if you touch it again, it's me who'll be putting hands on you. And you can call me Mr. Cooper. *(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 opens the valve 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.

André sits in a small side chair near his door and puts his shoes on.

LOU. I am indeed. *(He drinks.)*

ANDRÉ. 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? And clean ones at that. I mean, yeah, they got holes in 'em and they ain't the whitest, but, you know, Tony and the twins are still mostly buckled in.

ANDRÉ. Uh huh. Well, it looks like one of the twins may have slipped out of its car seat.

LOU. (*Adjusting himself.*) Aw, shit. Sorry. When I'm home, I like to be comfortable.

ANDRÉ. Seems like you're home a lot.

LOU. 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--

André has 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?

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. 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 as Lou continues drinking his cocktail.

ANDRÉ. 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.*) Do you like gin?

ANDRÉ. I do.

LOU. Good. I'll get the cards. (*He 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 for you.

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

ANDRÉ. Yeah.

Lou pours André a drink.

ANDRÉ. 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.

ANDRÉ. So, describe him to me.

LOU. Go to hell.

ANDRÉ. What?

LOU. I ain't doin' that.

ANDRÉ. Come on.

LOU. (*Suspicious.*) Vaffanculo [Fuck off].

André's eyes are trained on Lou.

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.

LOU. (*Suspicious.*) Yeah, no, you can just fuck right off with that bullshit. Asshole. Maybe you should get outta here.

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

LOU. Suit yourself.

A moment.

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

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

ANDRÉ. 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.

ANDRÉ. 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.

ANDRÉ. 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. Just some eggs and bacon. And toast. You want some?

ANDRÉ. No. Thanks. I--

LOU. Right. You gotta get to work, huh?

ANDRÉ. I was just about to jump in the shower.

LOU. I made coffee too. Fresh ground. How about a cup to go?

ANDRÉ. No. No, I appreciate it, Lou, but it's too much. Anyway, you're all settled in there.

LOU. What're you talking about? It's just coffee. It'll take less than a minute. So, go get yourself cleaned up and I'll have it ready for you when you head out.

André lingers. A moment.

LOU. What the hell are you doing?

ANDRÉ. Thinking.

LOU. Thinking about what?

ANDRÉ. Thinking maybe I'll work from here today.

LOU. Oh yeah?

ANDRÉ. Yeah.

LOU. Okay. So, I guess that means you got time for breakfast after all.

ANDRÉ. I guess so.

LOU. Good. There's plenty leftover, still warm in the pan. I'll get some for you.

Lou rises and heads for his apartment.

ANDRÉ. Lou--

LOU. Sit down. I'll be right back.

Lou exits into his apartment. André follows Lou, calling after him.

ANDRÉ. You sure it's no trouble?

LOU. *(Off.)* Didn't I say so already?

Lou re-enters with a tray table for André.

LOU. 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.*) Looks like we're gonna get a storm this weekend.

ANDRÉ. They're saying between eighteen and twenty inches.

LOU. (*Off.*) Oh. Well, that's 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.

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

LOU. 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.

LOU. 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. Aw, shit, Lou--

LOU. Gas company shut it down a few months ago.

ANDRÉ. What? No--

LOU. Or the landlord did. I don't know. I didn't ask.

ANDRÉ. They can't do that, Lou--

LOU. They can do whatever the hell they want. 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 as they continue to eat.

ANDRÉ. You need help?

LOU. You 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. 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? And 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.

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. 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 just 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?

LOU. I guess I ain't got nothin' else goin' on.

Beat.

ANDRÉ. Anyway, Rebekah – that's my wife – She's, uh... well, she's been taking it all in stride. There ain't much that can ruffle her feathers. She's always been hard to read. And I get the sense that for her, our divorce is just a business transaction. (*Beat.*) I've been 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.

ANDRÉ. Fuck it. I shouldn't have mentioned it.

LOU. Pfft! Women! Am I right?

ANDRÉ. You an expert on women, Lou?

LOU. I might be. *(Beat.)* 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. But a man's got needs, you know.

LOU. Right.

André begins to clear his plate.

Lou rises.

LOU. Sit down. I got it.

ANDRÉ. Relax, Lou. I can clear my own plate.

Lou sits.

André points to Lou's apartment.

ANDRÉ. You mind?

LOU. No, it's fine. Kitchen's on the left there.

André exits into Lou's apartment.

LOU. 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?

A moment.

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. I just shared some very personal information with you, and you can't tell me about a picture on your wall?

LOU. (*Pointedly.*) Just leave it alone, okay?

ANDRÉ. All right. Okay. (*Beat.*) 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.

ANDRÉ. Shit.

André goes to the door and knocks quietly.

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

He knocks again. A moment.

ANDRÉ. Hey listen, Lou. Whatever you got going on with this Ziad guy, it doesn't matter to me. I'm not judging you. (*Beat.*) I didn't mean for it to come out the way it did. I'm sorry. (*A moment.*) I get it. I do. 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. (*Beat.*) 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. So, 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 in the doorway.

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 and lands on the floor.

LOU. What the...?

Lou rises, crosses to, and picks up the paper airplane. He peeks into the equipment room and then turns his attention to the paper.

LOU. 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 long, quiet moment. And then suddenly...

LOU. *(Off.)* Hey! Who's in here? *(Beat.)* What the f...!? Get the fuck outta here, ubriaco [drunkard]!

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.

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

Lou moves close to André, fists still up.

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

André puts his hand to his nose, which is bleeding.

ANDRÉ. Ow. Fuck. My nose.

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

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

ANDRÉ. Thanks.

André presses the towel to his nose.

LOU. What 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?

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

A moment.

ANDRÉ. *(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? What the hell is that?

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 big tits. *(Beat.)* 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 sits.

LOU. 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. *(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.

LOU. 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. *(Beat.)* And they just take Z away. They cuffed him, pushed him into the van, and then hauled ass outta there. *(Beat.)* 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.

(Beat.)

LOU. 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. *(Beat.)* Z likes to write about politics and social stuff, and race, human rights, all that really heavy shit. *(A moment.)* 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 well-liked 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.

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 to me. Royalties, they call 'em. 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. He's almost seven thousand miles away, barely able to look after himself, and he's still takin' care of my miserable ass.

A moment.

ANDRÉ. Why'd you kiss me?

LOU. What difference does it make?

ANDRÉ. I'm thinking maybe we ought to get that sorted out because I don't want there to be a misunderstanding between us.

(Beat.)

LOU. You think I'm in love with you? Is that what you think? I ain't desperate. *(Beat.)* It was a test, okay?

ANDRÉ. A test?

LOU. Yeah. And you failed. You got no idea how to properly kiss a man, let me tell you. So, I kinda figured you weren't gay, but I wanted to hear it from you.

ANDRÉ. Fuck you. I'm a good kisser.

LOU. If you say so. *(Beat.)* Let me see that nose.

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

LOU. Shit. I really did a number on it.

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

LOU. Yup. It's busted. Let's get you to the ER, huh? *(Beat.)* Don't go anywhere yet, though. I think maybe I should first put on some pants.

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

End of scene.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE FULL PLAY, PLEASE CONTACT
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