RADIATOR

A play
By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

© 2023 by Craig Houk
1325 Taylor Street NW, APT 2
Washington, DC 20011
617-515-1838
houk1969@gmail.com

Synopsis

In the basement of a worn-down Bronx apartment building, two very different neighbors, volatile and financially struggling Lou Brunazzi and analytical, newly separated André Cooper, clash over a perpetually hissing radiator on the landing between their apartments. What begins as a turf war over noise and heat gradually shifts into something far more layered, as late-night arguments give way to shared drinks, uneasy humor, and deep personal revelations. Beneath Lou's bluster lies a complicated past tied to a partner thousands of miles away, while André wrestles with divorce, identity, and a longing for purpose. As the seasons change, the landing transforms from battleground to refuge, and the stubborn radiator, by turns aggravating and essential, becomes a symbol of survival, pride, and the fragile warmth that can grow between two people who never expected to need each other.

Characters

LOU BRUNAZZI (Mid to Late 50s) 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 (Mid 40s) 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 for one another, 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.

PERUSAL

SCENE 1

Early September. Early evening. The stage is empty except for several moving boxes near André's apartment door. The radiator, situated near Lou's apartment door, hisses softly. A sign above the radiator reads:

DO NOT TOUCH
Management

(Lou enters through the archway at the top of the stairs, shuffling through a stack of letters, several stamped FINAL NOTICE and CANCELLATION NOTICE. He inadvertently drops an envelope. André emerges from his apartment at the foot of the stairs. Both men are distracted, André in a hurry. They bump into one another.)

ANDRÉ

Shit. / Sorry, man.

LOU

/ Hey, watch yourself!

(Lou goes back to sorting through his mail.)

ANDRÉ

(At the top of the stairs.)

Careful of those boxes / there.

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 keeps moving toward his apartment.)

If the world ain't ended by then.

ANDRÉ

I'm just moving into the / apartment across the way.

PERUSAL

LOU

/ Ain't none of my business, fella!

ANDRÉ

(He notices the envelope on the ground.)

Hey!

LOU

Jesus! What do you want? Can't you see I'm tryin' to get away from you here?

ANDRÉ

(He picks up the envelope.)

Yeah, well, looks like you dropped a piece of mail…

LOU

Aw, damn.

ANDRÉ

… From the Ackermann Agency. Addressed to a Mr. L. Brunazzi, care of a Mr. Z. Rafiq.

LOU

Oh. Yeah. Well, that's, uh… that's important. I need that.

ANDRÉ

I'm guessing you're the Brunazzi of the group.

LOU

What gave me away? Look, why don't you just toss it down here?

ANDRÉ

Yeah, okay. You ready?

LOU

Ready for what? Who do you think you're talkin' to? Odell Beckham Jr.? Just drop it on the ground. I'll pick it up.

ANDRÉ

Alright, here you go.

PERUSAL

(He drops the envelope. Lou picks it up, then exits into his apartment, closing the door behind him.)

You're welcome.

(André lingers a moment at the top of the stairs, then exits through the archway. The radiator continues its soft hissing. After a beat, Lou re-emerges from his apartment. He crosses to the radiator and puts his hand on it. It's warm. He studies it, finds the valve, and opens it further to allow more heat. Satisfied, he exits into his apartment, leaving the door open. End of scene.)

SCENE 2

Early October. Very late. After midnight. The boxes are gone. A loveseat, chair, and end table now sit on the landing, stacked neatly out of the way.

(The radiator is 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 gradually fade and then stop. André notices Lou's apartment door is open. He gently pulls it closed, then exits into his apartment. End of scene.)

SCENE 3

An hour or more later.

(Lou, wrapped in blankets, emerges from his apartment. He crosses to the radiator and places his hands on it. It's cold. He opens the valve, then exits into his apartment, leaving the door open. A quiet moment passes. The radiator begins hissing and whistling again. Slowly at first, then building in volume. This time there's a banging noise with it. Louder and louder… until André emerges from his apartment. He moves to the radiator and bends down to close the valve. Lou appears in his 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.

ANDRÉ

Mr. Brunazzi–

PERUSAL

LOU

Mr. Brunazzi was my father. 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

Alright. 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 the boiler might need replacing. Or maybe the pipes need to be secured. Also, it doesn't look level, so that might be part of the problem.

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

For almost two months now.

LOU

And you can hear this all the way over there?

ANDRÉ

It's maybe twenty feet if that.

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

You don't have to do anything. I'll call management in the morning.

(André starts toward his apartment.)

LOU

They ain't gonna do nothin'.

(André turns back, curious. He gestures toward the radiator.)

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Is this connected to the heat in your place?

LOU

What? No.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Okay. Well, if it is the case, that's pretty screwed up. Probably illegal too. You might want to check into that.

LOU

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 just forget about this radiator nonsense. Hunh? Whatta ya say?

ANDRÉ

(Gets an idea.)

Hang on a second.

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

LOU

What the f–? Where are you goin'?

(To himself.)

Aw, Jesus. This guy.

(Lou settles onto the loveseat. The radiator continues hissing, whistling, and banging. André reappears and comes down the stairs.)

ANDRÉ

I got some good news.

LOU

Oh, yeah?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

You're not paying extra for heat.

LOU

Pretty sure I said that already.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Aha! Which means management's gonna have the other tenants breathin' down their neck about this. So, they don't need to hear it from me. And I get to keep my nose clean.

ANDRÉ

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

(André moves toward the valve. Lou rises from the loveseat.)

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

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

(André closes the valve. The noise gradually fades.)

LOU

I ain't got nothin' worth stealin'.

ANDRÉ

Maybe not. But anyone could walk in there and kill you if they wanted.

(Lou shrugs.)

Alright, fine. Leave your door open. No skin off my nose. But until it's fixed, I don't want you touching that radiator.

(André starts for his apartment.)

LOU

This stuff belong to you?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

The furniture?

LOU

What the hell else would I be talkin' about?

ANDRÉ

It's what's left from my previous apartment. Turns out, I don't have room for it here. Look, if it's in the way, I have a storage unit–

LOU

No, no. It's nice. 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

The fuck you will.

LOU

Jesus Christ. I was kiddin'. Relax.

(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?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

And what if it is?

ANDRÉ

You think that's a good idea? You think management's not gonna figure out you've been stealing heat from them?

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Alright. Alright, I got you. But if you touch that – it's called a valve by the way – if you touch it again, it'll be me putting hands on you. You understand? And you can call me Mr. Cooper.

LOU

Oh, I can, can I?

ANDRÉ

Yeah, you can. Now have yourself a good night, Lou.

(André exits into his apartment, closing and locking the door. Lou stands there quietly for a moment.)

LOU

Eat shit, Mr. Cooper.

(He opens the radiator valve and exits into his apartment, leaving the door open. End of scene.)

SCENE 4

Late October. Early evening.

(A quiet moment passes before André appears in the archway at the top of the stairs. He's in a good mood and carrying a Halloween bag filled with candy. He heads down the stairs and starts toward his apartment, then stops and glances toward Lou's door. After a beat, he crosses to it and sets the bag on the ground outside. He turns and heads back toward his own door. Lou suddenly appears in his doorway.)

PERUSAL

LOU

What the hell's this?

ANDRÉ

Sorry, what?

LOU

What's with the bag here?

ANDRÉ

It's candy. Halloween candy.

LOU

Okay. And what the hell am I supposed to do with it?

ANDRÉ

You can eat it if you want. Or you can throw it out. Doesn't matter to me.

LOU

So, what're you doin' then, huh? You just leavin' trash outside my door now?

ANDRÉ

(Coming back toward him.)

Oh, for Chr– just… just give it to me, okay? I'll take care of it.

LOU

No, no, no. Hang on a second. Let me have a look here first.

(Lou digs through the bag.)

ANDRÉ

I was just trying to be nice, you know.

LOU

Yeah, I know. And I'm tryin' to be grateful. 'Cept I ain't too happy with what I'm seein' in here.

(He continues digging.)

What're you doin' with a bag of Halloween candy anyway?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Oh. I, uh… I was helping out at a community block party. Not too far from here. Games, raffle prizes, costume contest… mostly a fundraiser for low-income residents in the area.

LOU

Ah. So, you're one of them good guys then.

ANDRÉ

I wouldn't go that far. Just trying to keep busy. And maybe pitch in a little.

LOU

You know, I'm a very picky man.

ANDRÉ

How do you mean?

LOU

With candy. I got very specific tastes.

ANDRÉ

Oh. Well… if I'd known–

LOU

'Cept you didn't.

ANDRÉ

No. You're right. I did not.

LOU

But you know what? It's fine. Because at the very bottom of this bag here, I've found one or two items that might be acceptable.

ANDRÉ

Well, that's good to hear. Why don't you take what you want and give me back the rest.

LOU

I'll keep the whole bag if you don't mind.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

(Laughing, slightly exasperated.)

No. No, I don't mind.

LOU

Good.

(André starts toward his apartment, then turns back.)

ANDRÉ

Oh, hey. I met one of the neighbors on my way in tonight.

LOU

Oh, yeah?

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Little lady with a funny accent…

LOU

Oh, boy.

ANDRÉ

…. She's a real piece of work. Seems to be a theme around here.

LOU

Uh huh. Yeah, that's Mrs. Ostrovsky. Chatty old Russian widow. Lives in the apartment above mine.

ANDRÉ

She didn't seem that old. And she was nice enough.

LOU

Says you. Be careful, though. She's only talkin' to you to get intel.

ANDRÉ

Intel?

LOU

She's a troublemaker, Mr. Cooper. Just steer clear, that's all I'm sayin'.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

The only intel that lady was after was whether I was old enough and rich enough to take her never-married, middle-aged daughter out on a date.

LOU

You mean spinster.

ANDRÉ

That's not a very nice word, Lou.

LOU

Sorry, you're right. Lesbian. Anyway, Mrs. Ostrovsky's got plenty of her own money and intends to take it with her. Makes sense she'd want her daughter married off to some rich guy so she can spend his money instead.

ANDRÉ

Sounds like maybe you're the one with the intel.

LOU

I ain't nosy, I'm smart.

ANDRÉ

If you say so.

LOU

It ain't up for debate.

ANDRÉ

Alright then. Looks like we're all done here, so I'm gonna head in for the / night.

LOU

/ Woah, woah, hang on a second. Before you go…

ANDRÉ

What is it?

LOU

Maybe you can help me with the furniture here. I'd do it myself but my back ain't so great, and I never been any good at arrangin' things.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Yeah, sure. Happy to help.

LOU

Be nice to hang out here once in a while, you know? Little more space. Anyway, it gets stuffy in my apartment. Only got the one window and it's to the point where I can hardly get it open anymore.

ANDRÉ

Yeah, well I've got one window myself. Works fine though. I've got a direct view of the trash in the alleyway, so the air isn't exactly fresh.

LOU

Lucky you. I got a used condom stuck to a pile of dried dog shit on my side.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 5

Early November. Early evening. The equipment room door is open. We hear the sounds of a maintenance man working offstage. The furniture has been rearranged into a more inviting seating area.

(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's dressed casually but nicely for an evening out and carries his shoes.)

ANDRÉ

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

(He sits in a small side chair near his door and begins putting on his shoes.)

LOU

I am indeed.

(He drinks.)

ANDRÉ

I got a question for you.

LOU

What is it?

PERUSAL

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.

LOU

Fair enough. But 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 Tony and the twins are still mostly buckled in.

ANDRÉ

Uh huh. Well, it looks like one of the twins 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? Like how? Like on a date?

ANDRÉ

No. Not necessarily. Maybe start with something less complicated. Like a stroll to the park. Feed the pigeons. Read a newspaper. Shout at random people. Sit on a bench in your own filth–

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. Haircut, shave, shirt that fits, some pants, nice pair of shoes… I might even look as good as you. Maybe better. Whatta you know, huh?

PERUSAL

(André has finished with his shoes and moves closer to Lou.)

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.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Oh, yeah? You got someone you need to impress tonight?

ANDRÉ

I might.

LOU

You might? You smell like you've been bobbin' for apples in a barrel of cologne.

ANDRÉ

Oh, Jesus. That bad?

LOU

Like a nightclub in Dubai, pal.

ANDRÉ

Okay, okay. I may have overdone it a little.

PERUSAL

LOU

A little? You're gonna put the smellin' salts industry out of business.

ANDRÉ

You've made your point.

LOU

Hey, what do I know? Maybe whoever you're tryin' to impress has a very small nose.

ANDRÉ

Are you finished?

LOU

I'll keep you posted.

ANDRÉ

You do that.

(André sits on the loveseat as Lou continues drinking.)

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. Do you like gin?

ANDRÉ

I do.

LOU

Good. I'll get the cards.

(Lou laughs a little too hard at his own joke.)

ANDRÉ

That's terrible, man. Really terrible. Awful, in fact. On second thought maybe it's best you stay indoors. I don't think the outside world is ready for you.

LOU

No, seriously. I got gin. You want some?

ANDRÉ

Sure.

PERUSAL

(Lou pours André a drink.)

You know that repair guy's been back there a while now.

LOU

Since mid-afternoon. What about it?

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 him the drink.)

So, describe him to me.

LOU

Go to hell.

ANDRÉ

What?

LOU

I ain't doin' that.

ANDRÉ

Come on.

LOU

(Suspicious.)

Vaffanculo.

(André watches him carefully.)

PERUSAL

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

ANDRÉ

Yeah.

LOU

Why?

ANDRÉ

I want your take on him.

LOU

Yeah, no. You can fuck right off with that nonsense. Asshole. Maybe you should get outta here.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Suit yourself.

ANDRÉ

(Rapid fire.)

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

LOU

I hadn't noticed.

ANDRÉ

Sure, you had.

LOU

Look, I ain't got the patience for this kinda bullshit, okay? If you got somethin' you wanna ask me, just come out with it. Come on. Let's hear it.

(André sets down his drink, crosses to the equipment room doorway, and calls offstage.)

ANDRÉ

Hey. Yeah, hi. Look, 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.)

PERUSAL

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.

(End of scene.)

SCENE 6

Late December. Near Christmas time. Mid-to-late morning. There may be a wreath on Lou's door, small decorations about. Subtle indications of the season.

(Lou sits in the chair. A folding tray table is set up in front of him and he's 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. You want some?

ANDRÉ

No, thanks. I–

LOU

Right, right. You gotta get to work.

ANDRÉ

Yeah. I mean, I was just about to jump in the shower.

PERUSAL

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 talkin' about? It's just coffee. Takes less than a minute. Go get yourself cleaned up and I'll have it ready when you head out.

(André lingers.)

What the hell are you doin'?

ANDRÉ

I'm thinking.

LOU

About what?

ANDRÉ

Thinking maybe I'll work from here today.

LOU

Oh, yeah?

ANDRÉ

Yeah.

LOU

Okay. So, I guess maybe you got time for breakfast after all?

ANDRÉ

I guess maybe I do.

LOU

Good. There's plenty. I'll get some for you.

(Lou rises and heads for his apartment.)

ANDRÉ

Lou–

PERUSAL

LOU

Sit down. I'll be right back.

(Lou exits into his apartment. André follows him a few steps, calling after him.)

ANDRÉ

You sure it's no trouble?

LOU

(Off.)

Didn't I say so already?

(Lou re-enters carrying another tray table.)

Here you go.

ANDRÉ

I got it. Thanks.

(André takes the tray table and sets it up near the loveseat. Lou exits again. André pours himself coffee and settles in.)

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. That blizzard a few years back? Something like three feet, right?

LOU

(Off.)

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

PERUSAL

(Lou enters carrying a plate and sets it on André's tray.)

Alright, 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 eat.)

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…

ANDRÉ

What about it?

LOU

… It's not off by choice, okay? I ain't cheap. I'm broke.

ANDRÉ

Aw, shit, Lou–

LOU

So, I been doin' what I can to save some dough. Right now I gotta focus on my rent. I mean there's things I can do without but not havin' a roof over my head ain't one of 'em.

ANDRÉ

I'm sorry, man.

PERUSAL

LOU

No, I'm the one who should be sorry. Sorry you gotta live across the hall from a hooligan.

ANDRÉ

You're not a hooligan.

(They continue to eat.)

You need help?

LOU

See, that right there is why I prefer to keep to myself. Do I need help? Of 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 that radiator.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

I'm sorry I brought it up.

(Less aggressive.)

Just enjoy your breakfast, alright? And maybe we find somethin' else to talk about? Like why you're always wearin' a weddin' ring, except when you go out on dates.

(Lou clears his plate and exits briefly into his apartment.)

ANDRÉ

You noticed that, huh?

LOU

(Off.)

Not right away. What with my lazy eye and all.

(Lou re-enters, pours more coffee, and sits.)

ANDRÉ

I'm going through a divorce right now.

LOU

Sorry to hear that.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

My wife, Rebekah, she's–

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Does that surprise you?

LOU

That you married a woman? Yeah, as a matter of fact it does.

ANDRÉ

Why?

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

So?

LOU

Are you 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. But Jesus.

ANDRÉ

Anyway… Rebekah's been taking it all in stride. Not much ruffles that woman's feathers. She's always been hard to read, but in this case I get the sense that, for her, our divorce is just… I don't know… a business transaction. I've been having a tough time with it though. I'm not ready to move on. But it's what she wants, and I'm not one to put up a fight.

LOU

That's rough.

ANDRÉ

It is what it is.

PERUSAL

LOU

You got kids?

ANDRÉ

No. Not because I didn't want 'em. I love kids. I love working with them. Back in college I did some mentoring and it was… incredible. One of the few times in my life I really felt like I was making a difference.

LOU

Well, it ain't too late. You're still relatively young, right?

ANDRÉ

Yeah… I don't know. I don't think it's in the cards for me.

LOU

That's too bad. So, what're you doin' livin' in this shithole?

ANDRÉ

My lawyer suggested it. Told me to move out of Manhattan for a while. Said it made sense to lay low and not spend money. And I really shouldn't be going out… but a man's got needs.

LOU

Right. So, where you from originally? You're not from around here, that's for sure. Not the way you talk.

ANDRÉ

Oh, okay. "The way I talk".

LOU

No, no, you know what I'm sayin'.

ANDRÉ

Oh, I know exactly what you're saying. An articulate Black guy with better-than-average intelligence throwing you for a loop, is that / it, Lou?

LOU

Oh, now come on, that ain't what I / meant

ANDRÉ

/ That's exactly what you meant. And you better watch yourself; you hear me? Because I'm not gonna let shit like that slide. Not with you.

PERUSAL

LOU

You're right. I should know better. I wasn't usin' my head. I'm really sorry, André.

ANDRÉ

It's okay. We're good. Doesn't mean I'm not gonna keep callin' you out on your bullshit though.

LOU

Fair enough.

ANDRÉ

Anyway… so, I, uh… I grew up about thirty miles northwest of Pittsburgh. Grubby little town. Poor to middle-class folks. Mostly white. A lot of 'em Italian, actually.

LOU

Italian, huh?

ANDRÉ

Yeah. But it wasn't easy, let me tell you. I stood out. And people there had… opinions about a Black kid trying to mix in where he didn't belong.

LOU

Aw, Jesus.

ANDRÉ

This was back in the early eighties. Steel industry was on the verge of collapse, so most everyone was already anxious and generally pissed off. And before long people were losing their jobs left and right.

LOU

Includin' your Dad?

ANDRÉ

Oh, no. No, not my dad. We were one of only three Black families in that area. Three affluent, well-educated, prominent Black families. My dad was an ophthalmologist, one of the best, and my mom was head of the history department at Carnegie Mellon. I never wanted for anything. I think I was maybe eight or nine when we moved there. My folks wanted to make sure I was taken care of long after I grew up and moved away. That's why we settled there. Cost of living was low, and the money they made… well, they set most of that aside for me. For my future.

LOU

You were lucky.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Was I?

LOU

Are you kiddin' me? Sounds like you got more money than you know what to do with.

ANDRÉ

Yeah. I kind of figured you wouldn't understand.

LOU

What're you talkin' about? What's to understand? Most people'd kill to be in your position.

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Yeah, I guess maybe they would.

(André suddenly moves to clear his plate. Lou rises.)

LOU

Whoa, whoa. Hold on a second. What're you doin?

ANDRÉ

Clearing my plate.

LOU

No, no, no. You sit down. I'll take care of it.

ANDRÉ

Relax, Lou. You made a nice breakfast. Least I can do is clear my own plate.

(André gestures toward Lou's apartment.)

You mind?

LOU

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

(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 offstage, Lou waits anxiously, glancing toward the apartment. André reappears.)

PERUSAL

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?

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 pretty personal stuff with you, and you can't tell me about a picture on your wall?

LOU

(Pointedly.)

Just leave it alone. Okay?

ANDRÉ

Alright. Okay. All I'm saying is… you two look pretty damn cozy in that photo.

(Without much fanfare, Lou crosses into his apartment and shuts the door. The lock clicks.)

Shit.

(He crosses to the door and knocks quietly.)

Lou. Come on, man, open the door. Lou?

(He knocks again.)

Hey, listen. Whatever you got going on with this Ziad guy, it doesn't matter to me. I'm not judging you. I didn't mean for it to come out the way it did. I'm sorry. I get it. I do. I'm a little lost myself. Just hanging out here in limbo… waiting for my life to start up again. And I don't

PERUSAL

even have a goddam clue what that's gonna look like. But whatever it is you're going through right now… I can tell it's a million times worse than anything I've ever been through. So… I'm here if you need someone to talk to. Okay, Lou?

(André gives up and starts toward his apartment. The door unlocks. Lou appears in the doorway. André turns. Lou crosses to him and kisses him. André is surprised at first but doesn't resist. It's an extended kiss, but not sexual. Lou breaks away, returns to his apartment, and shuts the door. The lock clicks again. André stands there, stunned. The radiator begins to hiss and whistle… followed by a banging sound. End of scene.)

SCENE 7

Mid-January. Mid-morning. The equipment room door is open. We hear the maintenance man working offstage.

(Lou sits in the chair drinking coffee and scrolling through his device. After a moment, a paper airplane flies through the equipment room doorway and lands on the floor.)

LOU

What the–?

(He rises, crosses to the airplane, and picks it up. He peeks into the equipment room, then looks back at the paper.)

And whatta we got here?

(Lou unfolds the paper as he returns to the chair. He sits, reads it… and smiles. End of scene.)

SCENE 8

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. On the landing, he searches his pockets for his keys. He eventually finds them, but as he tries to unlock his door, he drops them. As he bends to retrieve them, he gets dizzy and stumbles backward, catching himself on the loveseat. He tries to focus. Then he notices Lou's apartment door standing open. Unable to get into his own apartment, André staggers toward Lou's door, pushes it open further, and disappears inside the dark apartment.)

PERUSAL

LOU

(Off.)

Hey! Who's in here? What the fuck are you– Get the fuck outta here, ubriaco!

(Sounds of a struggle offstage. Muffled shouting. A punch lands. André yelps and stumbles out onto the landing. Lou follows, fists raised.)

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

(He advances, fists still up.)

ANDRÉ

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

(André touches his nose. There's blood.)

Ow, fuck! My nose.

(He collapses onto the chair or loveseat.)

LOU

I hope it's busted, Gagootz!

ANDRÉ

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

(Lou exits into his apartment and returns with a dishtowel, tossing it to André.)

Thanks.

(He presses it to his nose.)

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Good.

ANDRÉ

Maybe I should go to a hospital.

PERUSAL

LOU

Are you gay?

ANDRÉ

What?

LOU

You heard me. Are you gay? Bi? What's the deal with you?

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?

ANDRÉ

(Sobered slightly from the punch.)

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

LOU

Are you fuckin' kiddin' me right now? Heteroflexible? What the hell is that?

ANDRÉ

I mostly prefer women. By that I mean I'm usually attracted to what's been programmed into my brain as a traditionally feminine woman. You know, curves, soft voice, long hair, smooth legs, big tits. And yeah… sometimes I'm attracted to men. I've been with a few. But with men it's different. It doesn't matter as much what they look like. I just need to feel like we connect. Something more than just two guys talking about last night's game or scoring pussy. You understand? As long as there's an emotional connection. An intellectual connection. Does that make sense.

(Lou sits.)

LOU

Nothin' makes sense no more. Everything's so fuckin' exact now. Categories… and categories inside categories. Jesus. We've spent so much time analyzin' the shit outta everything that nothin' means anything anymore. You want some ice?

ANDRÉ

Yes, please.

PERUSAL

LOU

I'll be right back.

(Lou exits. André groans while holding the towel to his nose. Lou returns with a bowl of ice, hands it to him, then sits.)

Okay. So, about a year ago, me and Ziad… we're at the Vertex Theater in Dallas. Out front after a show. Just standin' on the sidewalk talkin' with some friends. Then this van pulls up outta nowhere. Nearly hops the curb. Tires squealin'. And out jumps what turns out to be a bunch of fuckin' ICE agents. They grab Z. Cuff him. Throw him in the van. Then they're gone. Just like that. And you wanna know what this tough-talkin', cocky paesano did to stop 'em? Nothin'. What the hell could I do? Just stood there like a gutless idiot.

ANDRÉ

Shit, Lou.

LOU

Z's a writer. And I don't mean he just messes around with it, I mean he's really good. Won some big awards. We were there that night to see one of his plays. Z writes about politics… race… human rights… heavy stuff. Anyway… he's back in Syria now. That's where they sent him. Where he was born. Where he grew up. And let me tell you, he ain't exactly popular there. And I'm scared. I ain't heard from him in a long time. I got no idea what they're gonna do to him. But whatever it is… it ain't gonna be good.

ANDRÉ

That's awful.

LOU

Z's got this agent. Sheila Ackerman. Nice lady over in Manhattan who manages his plays. And somehow she arranged it so his royalty checks come to me. That's how I've been paying my rent. Keeping a roof over my head. Food on the table. He's almost seven thousand miles away, barely able to look after himself, and he's still takin' care of my miserable ass.

ANDRÉ

Why'd you kiss me?

LOU

What difference does it make?

ANDRÉ

I think maybe we should get that sorted out. I don't want there to be a misunderstanding between us.

PERUSAL

LOU

You think I'm in love with you? That what you think? Relax. I ain't desperate. It was a test.

ANDRÉ

A test?

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Screw you. I'm a good kisser.

LOU

If you say so.

(Lou examines André's nose.)

Let me see that.

(André lowers the towel. Lou studies the damage.)

Shit. I really did a number on it.

(He carefully grips André's nose. André winces.)

Yep. It's busted. We should get you to the ER. Except let's not go anywhere just yet though.

ANDRÉ

Why not?

LOU

Because I think maybe I should put on some pants first.

(Lou heads into his apartment. André presses the towel back to his nose and groans. End of scene.)

SCENE 9

Early February. Early evening.

(Lou appears in the archway at the top of the stairs. He's crankier than usual. He makes his way down the stairs and enters his apartment, slamming the door behind him. The door opens again. Lou peers out, then disappears inside and slams it again. Lou opens the door again and steps

PERUSAL

onto the landing. He slams it shut once more, but this time stays outside. André emerges from his apartment. His nose is splinted.)

ANDRÉ

Hey!

LOU

What!?

ANDRÉ

What the hell are you doing?

LOU

Why do you ask?

ANDRÉ

I'm surprised to see your door still on its hinges, that's why.

LOU

Oh, yeah. It seems to be stickin' a little.

(Lou fiddles with the door, swinging it open and shut.)

ANDRÉ

You done?

LOU

I guess maybe I am.

ANDRÉ

Okay, well I'm gonna to get back to–

LOU

You got a minute?

ANDRÉ

Now's not a good time, Lou. My attorney sent over some papers, so I should really–

LOU

Right. 'Course. Go ahead.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Divorce settlement stuff.

LOU

Yeah, yeah. That's important. No worries.

ANDRÉ

What's the matter?

LOU

If I tell you, you promise not to jump in and try to be a hero?

ANDRÉ

I promise.

LOU

So… I met with my shrink today. I needed her to sign my RFC form.

ANDRÉ

I don't know what the hell that is.

LOU

It's for my disability benefits.

ANDRÉ

Oh. Okay.

LOU

Technically she ain't really my shrink. She's assigned to me. So, she's not exactly lookin' out for my best interests, if you get what I'm sayin'.

ANDRÉ

Right.

LOU

So, I walk into her office this afternoon and I says, "Hey doc, how about today we skip the part where I gotta answer all your dumb questions and just move straight to the part where you fill out this here form, sign your fancy little name at the bottom, and let the SSA know I'm still a nut-job and my prognosis ain't changed one fuckin' iota. Then I'll be on my merry way to collect my disability."

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Aw, Jesus.

LOU

And then… I may or may not have followed that up by suggesting she suck my dick.

ANDRÉ

Lou…

LOU

I just don't understand why they gotta put me through the same shit every goddam time. You know, because 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 weight. I'm pissed off most of the time. And all I wanna do is mill around my apartment for hours on end like a regular depressed person oughta do. Is that too much to ask?

ANDRÉ

So, what happened?

LOU

I'm gonna lose my benefits.

ANDRÉ

I don't know why you gotta be such a hothead.

LOU

Just to be clear… I ain't askin' you for nothin'.

ANDRÉ

I know.

LOU

You got your own problems.

ANDRÉ

I do indeed.

LOU

You ain't gonna sue me, are you?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

What? No. No. For what?

LOU

For bustin' your nose.

ANDRÉ

No. Of course, I'm not gonna sue you. And, you know, maybe… maybe I provoked you. I mean, it's possible I overstepped my boundaries a bit.

LOU

You broke into my apartment.

ANDRÉ

Your door was wide open.

LOU

It was not wide open, it was ajar.

ANDRÉ

Wide open, ajar… what difference does it make? It was unlocked. And I told you to keep your door locked.

LOU

Yeah, well when you said that I didn't expect to see your drunk ass come stumblin' in.

ANDRÉ

Enough. It's done. Anyway… it was stupid.

LOU

Well, as far as mammals go, we men are generally a stupid bunch. We beat the shit outta each other and then go out for a beer afterward to celebrate the fact we're still alive.

ANDRÉ

Maybe I ought to be grateful for that punch to the face. I think maybe it knocked some sense into me. Otherwise, what the hell have I been doing? Just skimming through life with my head up my ass.

LOU

You wanna hear what I think?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Why not?

LOU

You sure? Cause I don't think you're gonna like it.

ANDRÉ

I'll hear it anyway.

LOU

I don't think Rebekah's leavin' you because of anything you did wrong. I think she's leavin' because of what you ain't done right yet. What you don't need in your life right now are distractions. And in that sense… she's doin' you a favor. You understand?

ANDRÉ

Huh. Sage thoughts from a spicy meatball.

LOU

Holy Christ. Spicy meatball? Whoa, whoa, whoa. That ain't nice. It's accurate. But it ain't nice.

(They laugh.)

The other day I'm sittin' in my apartment thinkin' long and hard about Peanut M&Ms. I mean, I fuckin' love Peanut M&Ms. Who doesn't, right? Peanut M&Ms first, then Peanut Butter M&Ms, and then the always reliable Milk Chocolate ones. All them other M&Ms – you know the ones I'm talkin' about – the crispy ones, pretzel, caramel, mint… they're all bullshit. Awful. Fuck those M&Ms. Am I right? Anyway, I finally decide to get up off my ass and go to the corner store to get some. M&Ms. And since I don't get out much, what with my life bein' a never-endin' stream of emotional sewage, I figure, why not treat myself? So, I grab the Family Size bag. Five of 'em, actually. Then I hightail it outta there. And wouldn't you know it… I just get through the front door of this buildin', and who comes shufflin' in right behind me? Mrs. Ostrovsky. Now I'm thinkin', okay, no problem. All I gotta do is make it to the stairwell. Fifteen feet, tops. And I'm tellin' myself there's no way she can outrun me. She's tiny. Not exactly nimble. But fuck me if she didn't keep pace with me the whole way. So, now we're both standin' at the top of the stairs. Her mouth's goin' a mile a minute and I can hardly understand a word she's sayin'. And I'm thinkin' I got only one option here, right? I gotta push this woman down the steps and 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 one of my own makin'. You see? So, I just stand there. Quiet. Resigned. And I let the old widow ramble on and on until she's said everything she needs to say that day. But the whole time… all I'm thinkin' about is those M&Ms. About how I just wanna get back to my apartment. Away from Mrs. Ostrovsky. Away from the whole goddam 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 eat as much of that candy as I damn well please. Because at that moment… that was the only thing in the world that was gonna bring me any joy. It's all I had.

PERUSAL

(End of scene.)

SCENE 10

Mid-February. Early morning.

(The radiator hisses, whistles, and bangs again. Not as loud as before, but enough to wake André. He emerges from his apartment, crosses to the radiator, and shuts the valve. He notices Lou's door is closed. He tries the knob but it's locked. He leans in, listening. Nothing. A strange odor. He knocks again.)

ANDRÉ

Lou? Lou, you in there? Lou. Hey, man, I smell something. Smells like… What the hell is that? Oil?

(He sniffs the air, knocks again.)

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

(He paces, deciding. Then back to the door.)

Lou, you gotta answer the door, man. Or at least let me know you're in there. And that you're okay. Lou! Son of a–

(He steps back, bracing himself.)

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

(No response. He backs up, ready to break the door down when it suddenly opens. Lou stands there, hazy, unfocused.)

You okay, Lou?

LOU

I'm gonna puke.

(Lou collapses. André catches him.)

ANDRÉ

Shit.

(He helps Lou to the loveseat, easing him down. Lou groans, disoriented. André rushes into Lou's apartment. Off.)

What the hell is this!?

PERUSAL

(He reappears in the doorway.)

Jesus, Lou. What were you thinking bringing that goddam thing in there? Are you out of your mind?

(He disappears again. Off.)

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

(A struggle. Then glass shattering. André reappears, unwrapping a dishtowel from his hand. He rushes into his own apartment, returns with his phone, and dials.)

Yeah, hi. I need an ambulance. It's urgent… Shit, the address. It's uh… Coster Street… 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?

(Back to phone.)

Yeah. My neighbor, he's not doing so good… I don't know exactly. He's got this rickety space heater… Yeah, I shut it off, I opened a window… I think it's gas, I don't know… Yeah, yeah, he's breathing.

(To Lou.)

You breathing okay?

PERUSAL

LOU

I'm not dead, so there's that.

ANDRÉ

(Back to the phone.)

He's breathing fine. Says he might throw up. He keeps passing out… Right. Carbon monoxide, that's what I'm thinking… Yeah, I'll stay with him. How long? Hello? Hello? Goddam it.

(Call drops.)

Okay. Alright, Lou. Listen. Ambulance is on the way. We gotta get you some air. Think you can make it up the stairs?

(Lou groans at the thought.)

Fuck.

(André tries to lift him. Lou resists.)

Come on, Lou. I can't carry you. You gotta help me here.

(Another attempt. He's dead weight.)

Shit. Fine. Okay. Just stay put. I'm gonna open the window in my place, get some air moving through here. I'll be right back. Just… keep breathing.

(He starts off but then turns back.)

Wait. Water. You need water. I'll get water.

(He exits. Lou stirs, slowly gets up, and drifts toward his apartment. André re-enters with a glass)

What the hell are you doing?

(He sets the glass down, hurries to Lou, and guides him back to the loveseat. Hands him the water. They sit.)

What's going on, Lou? Huh? What's going through your head? You scared the shit out of me, you know that? You could've died in there. I was ready to bust that door down. You want to die? Is that it?

(Lou slowly regains awareness as André continues…)

This is it, Lou. This is all we got. And if we're lucky, we're only halfway through. Because once we're gone… we're gone. That's it. Nothing after this. No reward waiting on the other side. So, suck it up, man. You hear me? This is not how it ends.

(André starts to spiral. He rises.)

PERUSAL

Fuck. Whoa. Oh, shit. Lou, I swear I'm not trying to steal your thunder here but… Jesus… my hands… I can't feel my fingers. Maybe it's the carbon monoxide? Or maybe I'm having a heart attack?

(He sits again, trying to control his breathing. Head down. Then looks up.)

Okay. Or maybe this is it. Maybe this is exactly how it ends. They find us both dead. A Black guy. A white guy. Two goddam corpses sitting on overpriced furniture in the basement of a rundown apartment building in the South Bronx. Cause of death?

(He points at the radiator.)

This fucking radiator!

(He collapses inward, breathing hard. Lou, clearer now, offers him the glass of water)

LOU

You're a goddam moron, you know that?

(André takes the glass, drinks.)

ANDRÉ

You got a point to make?

LOU

Two of 'em. First: I wasn't tryin' to off myself, ya dumb shit. I bought that space heater off Craigslist for fifteen bucks. Just tryin' to keep warm. And yeah, I was tired of hearin' you bitch about that radiator. Second: you weren't havin' a heart attack. You were havin' a panic attack. Which, I gotta say… was kinda sweet

ANDRÉ

Me thinking I was dying was sweet to you?

LOU

Yeah. I'm thinkin' maybe you got feelings for me, huh? Got yourself pretty worked up over little old me?

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

What? No. That ain't what I meant. Get outta here.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

I missed out. You know?

LOU

What're you talkin' about?

ANDRÉ

I don't know. I was just thinking. A black kid 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. I was a little scared but mostly just sad. Sad that my folks took me away from where I belonged. Northview Heights had its share of problems, yeah, but it was home, you know? And at least there, I knew what the dangers were. I knew how to stay out of trouble. And if I did get into trouble… Well, I knew my limits. I was a good kid. And no amount of money was ever gonna give me what I really needed: community. I needed community way more than I ever needed security. I lost that. And then somewhere along the way, I lost a part of myself.

(Silence.)

How are you feeling?

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

No, I'm alright. I'm gonna live.

LOU

Good to hear.

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 cleared of all furniture except the chair. The equipment room door is open. We hear the maintenance man working offstage.

PERUSAL

(André emerges from his apartment. His nose has healed; only faint traces remain. He takes one last look inside, then closes and locks the door. As he turns, Lou comes down the stairs. He's cleaned up, put together, 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 yeah… Nail on the head, my friend.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Lou…

LOU

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

(Lou glances around, spots the chair.)

You leavin' this for me?

ANDRÉ

Not by choice. Can't quite get the stink of you out of it, so I figured it should stay here.

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

Yeah. Everything's packed up. On its way to Queens.

LOU

Queens? That's practically skid row for a guy like you. My condolences.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

(Modest, a little self-conscious.)

Yeah, well… I'm starting a foundation out there.

LOU

A foundation?

ANDRÉ

Yeah. For underprivileged kids. Mentorship programs, community service, maybe an arts curriculum. I'm still working through it.

LOU

Well, look at you. That's amazin'. I mean it. That's a big fuckin' deal, André. I'm proud of you.

ANDRÉ

I appreciate that. And, you know… I've got no kids to support, and my wife… my ex-wife… she does alright for herself, so… I should get through the divorce without too much damage. And honestly? Coming here? Even short-term? It was the smartest thing I could've done.

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

We're all just passing through, Lou. Even when we feel stuck, we're still moving forward. And what happens along the way doesn't really matter. Because we all end up in the same place.

LOU

What a jamook.

ANDRÉ

Any word?

LOU

No. Don't make no difference, though. I know he's gone. Z was never one to keep his mouth shut. Never one to stand down. So, the next time I see him… it'll be at the pearly gates. Him on the inside. Me on the outside. Right before God shot-puts my ass straight to hell. So, yeah. I'm gonna go ahead and call bullshit on your little theory about us all endin' up in the same place. About there bein' no reward for bein' a decent human being. Because some people deserve better. Z deserved better.

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

I see the repair guy's back.

LOU

Yeah. That fuckin' boiler.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

I'll tell you something. That noise never really bothered me. Still doesn't. I got used to it. So much so that when it actually worked, when it went quiet, I thought maybe something was wrong. It was too quiet. Spooky. Like somebody threw a heavy blanket over the whole place. That hissin' and whistlin' and bangin'? It made me feel alive. Like I could breathe. And I really needed to breathe. You understand?

ANDRÉ

I do.

(Lou chuckles.)

What?

LOU

One night… almost five years ago now… I was makin' my way over to this bar over in the East Village. Old hole-in-the-wall. The Boiler Room.

(He chuckles again.)

The fuckin' Boiler Room. Anyway, I'm sittin' there, a little drunk, when this guy bumps into me, spills my beer. Normally I'd get pissed. But I don't know, maybe I was in a good mood. Maybe I was feelin'… small. So, I laugh it off. He laughs too. We start talkin'. Hit it off. He offers to buy me another beer. I say no. He insists. So, I figure, what the hell. He comes back from the bar, hands me the drink, we're talkin' again, and then I notice some guy across the room starin' at me. Hard. Like my Ma used to look at me when I'd make fart noises in church. And I'm thinkin, aw shit, that's gotta be this guy's boyfriend. And sure enough, it is. And here he comes. Steam comin' outta his ears. Movin' like a locomotive. Gets right up in my face: "How about we take this outside." I say, "Take what outside? There ain't nothin' goin' on here." But this coglione won't let it go. So, I say, "Alright. I'll meet you outside. But first I gotta take a piss."

ANDRÉ

Smart move.

PERUSAL

LOU

Whatta you mean, smart move?

ANDRÉ

The men's room. To get away from him.

LOU

No. I was plannin' on kickin' his ass all the way to Washington Square Park. I just really had to piss. So, I'm at the urinal, takin' one of those long ones, you know? Stops, starts again, goes on forever. And right as I'm finishing up… I feel somebody's breath on the back of my neck. I got one hand on my dick, a beer in the other… I'm a sittin' duck. Then this guy leans in… whispers in my ear: "Do you like gin?" Weird accent. Never heard nothin' like it. I freeze. Then he says, "There's a place nearby has the best martinis in Lower Manhattan." I don't say a word. What am I supposed to say? Then he takes the beer outta my hand… real slow… sets it on the shelf. And he says, "I'm taking you there now." So, I turn around. And who do you think I see?

ANDRÉ

Ziad.

LOU

That's right. Z. Most beautiful guy I ever laid eyes on.

ANDRÉ

What happened then?

LOU

Z reminds me my dick's still hangin' out, so I zip up. And the two of us just… walk out.

ANDRÉ

What about the guy who wanted to fight you?

LOU

Oh, yeah. Him. Well, before we hit the sidewalk, Z grabs my hand. Holds on real tight. And I guess that was enough to untwist that guy's panties.

ANDRÉ

That's a beautiful story.

LOU

Ain't it, though?

PERUSAL

ANDRÉ

Hey. I gotta go. So, bring it in.

(They hug.)

I love you, Lou.

LOU

Get the fuck outta here.

(André exits up the stairs. Lou stands there a moment. Then crosses to the equipment room doorway and looks in.)

Hey…

(The repairman bangs his head. A grunt.)

Shit, sorry. Hey, listen. I got your little airplane note. So, you got a gay cousin up in Bedford Park you wanna introduce me to, huh? That's a little homophobic, in case you didn't know. I mean, just because you got a gay relative and I'm gay don't mean we're automatically gonna hit it off. So, yeah… it's a little offensive.

(He starts to leave then stops. Turns back.)

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

(End of play.)

PERUSAL