

RADIATOR

A play
By Craig Houk

SAMPLE

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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 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 (Early 50s) 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.

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, / man.

LOU

/ Hey, watch yourself!

(Lou turns his attention again to the 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 continues toward his apartment.)

If the world ain't ended by then.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

/ Ain't none of my concern, fella!

(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. A quiet moment passes before 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, 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. A quiet moment passes before 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.

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 then how do you want me to call you?

LOU

Name's Lou, but we ain't friends.

ANDRÉ

All right, so, 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?

ANDRÉ

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

(André starts for his apartment.)

LOU

They 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

Because 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. Maybe you should 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 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

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. 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

I believe I said that already.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Ah! Which means management is gonna have the other tenants breathin' down their neck 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 that racquet.

(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, hunh? 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.

(Lou shrugs.)

All right, well, leave your door open then. No skin off my nose. But until it'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. Turns out, I don't have room for it in there.

(Indicating his new 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

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?

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?

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

All right. 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. You understand? And you can call me Mr. Cooper.

LOU

Oh, I can, can I?

ANDRÉ

You have a good night, Lou.

(André exits into his apartment, closes, and locks his door. Lou stands quietly for a moment. He then opens the valve on the radiator.)

LOU

Eat shit, Mr. Cooper.

(He 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.

LOU

Fair enough. At least I'm wearin' undies, though, 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 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—

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, hunh?

(André has finished with his shoes and has moved towards 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 go sit at a bar somewhere and have a few drinks to – I don't know – to 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, hunh?

LOU

Like a nightclub in Dubai, pal.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

You've made your point.

LOU

But what the fuck 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 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. Do you like gin?

ANDRÉ

I do.

LOU

Good. I'll get the cards.

(He laughs a little too hard at this.)

ANDRÉ

That's terrible, man. I mean, really, really bad. 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

Naw, come on. Seriously. I got gin here. You want some?

ANDRÉ

Sure.

(Lou pours André a drink.)

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

LOU

Since midafternoon. What of 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 André a drink.)

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.)

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

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.

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.

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. Come on. Let's hear it.

(André sets his drink down, heads to the equipment room doorway and 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.)

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 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. 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.

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.)

What the hell are you doing?

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 that means 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—

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.)

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.)

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.)

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

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

ANDRÉ

What? No—

LOU

...Or management 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 power 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

No, 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.

(They continue to eat.)

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. You know, but there's no shame in—

LOU

I'm sorry I brought it up.

(Less aggressive.)

Just enjoy your breakfast, all right? And how about we find somethin' else to talk about, hunh? 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

You noticed that, hunh?

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.)

ANDRÉ

I'm going through a divorce right now...

LOU

Sorry to hear.

ANDRÉ

...And my wife, Rebekah, she's—

LOU

Whoa, whoa, 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.

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.

ANDRÉ

Anyway, Rebekah, she's, uh... well, I got to say, 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 but, in this case, I get the sense that, for her, our divorce is just a business transaction. 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.

ANDRÉ

It is what it is, as they say.

LOU

You got kids?

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Right. Hey, so where are you from originally, hunh? I mean, 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, no. You know what I'm sayin'.

ANDRÉ

Oh, yeah, 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 know, you better watch yourself, you hear me? Because I'm not gonna let shit like that slide. Not with you.

LOU

You're right. I try not to be that guy. And by that, I mean I should know better but I wasn't using my head. I'm sorry.

ANDRÉ

It's all right, Lou. We're good. 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 them Italian actually.

LOU

Italian, hunh?

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Aw, Jesus.

ANDRÉ

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

LOU

Includin' your Dad?

ANDRÉ

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 maybe I was eight or nine when we moved there. You see, my folks wanted to make sure I was taken care of long after I grew up and moved away. So, that's why we settled there. Cost of living was low and the money my parents made... Well, they set most of that aside for me. For my future.

Not very exciting, I know, but there it is.

(André makes a sudden move to clear his plate. Lou rises.)

LOU

Hold on a second. What're you doin' there?

ANDRÉ

I'm clearing my plate.

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

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

(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 waits anxiously, occasionally looking off, waiting on André. 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?

LOU

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

ANDRÉ

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

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. All I'm gonna say is, you two look pretty damn 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. 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. Look, 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 too. 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. 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 decides not to fight it. An extended kiss but not sexual. Lou breaks away and exits into his apartment, closes, and locks the door behind him. André stands quietly, a bit dumbfounded. 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. 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.)

And whatta we got here?

(Lou unfolds the paper as he heads back to the chair. He sits and reads the contents. 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. And then suddenly...)

LOU

(Off.)

Hey! Who's in here? What the fuck are you...!? 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.)

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

(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.)

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? Hunh? Before I bleed all over everything?

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

ANDRÉ

What?

LOU

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

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 a bit 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. 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. 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. 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. Lou reappears with a bowl of ice. He hands it to André and then sits.)

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 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, hunh? Except just stand there like a gutless idiot.

ANDRÉ

Shit, Lou.

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. Z writes 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 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

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.

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.

LOU

You think I'm in love with you, is that what you think? I ain't desperate. 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. 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.)

Yup. It's busted. We should get you to the ER, hunh? 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 for his apartment as André returns the dishtowel to his nose and moans. End of scene.)