W A Y N E

by
James McCallum

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
WAYNE PARKER	35, Caucasian, Male, Educated and Logical
THERAPIST/ Chloe	35, Voice of God, Patient, Compassionate
JASON RAMIREZ	29, Hispanic, Male, Passionate, Wayne's Lover
SAMANTHA PARKER	35, Wayne's Wife, Friend of Chloe, Sarcastic, False Confidence
JACKY / J.J	40, Jason's friend
MONSE RAMIREZ	Jason's younger sister
LIBRARIAN	Librarian
SARAH	Therapist's secretary
MALLORY FLETCHER	Woman on News
BRIANNA FLETCHER	Sister on News
MAMÁ	Jason's Mom
PAPÁ	Papa
NEWS ANCHOR 1	News Anchor
NEWS ANCHOR 2	News Anchor
ENSEMBLE	Ensemble

SETTING

Therapist office in New York City

TIME

Late March, 1989

NOTES

// - Indicate overlapping conversation. Accept "//" as the cue.

(A moment) - Pauses should be poignant. Moments of silence are just as important, if not more important than the lines themselves.

THERAPIST - The therapist should always speak with confidence and purpose. She speaks carefully with clear intention. She is never seen, only heard, until her final scene. When speaking the her, actors should look up above the front audience.

STAGING - This script was written with the intention to perform in a black box theater. In the center of the stage is a couch on a square raised platform making the "Therapist Office". The actors walk around the platform forming various locations. (NYC Streets, Hallway, Sidewalk, etc.) The audience sits in three sections, one facing the front of the couch, one left, one right. Two pathways cut in between each section (L Pathway & R Pathway). At the end of each pathway are bookshelves filled with books. Back left, behind the couch is a cabinet. Back right is a fridge coat rack. A coat and purse hangs there. A small rectangular box lives in front of the couch.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(In darkness, the actors enter the stage. They line up behind the couch. The Ensemble mixed together, Jason towards the left, J.J. in the center, and Samantha far right. Wayne and the Therapist are not with them. A dim blue light backlights the line of people. An audio compilation of news reporters, politicians, health workers, and common citizens, discussing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The voices pile up on one another, growing louder and more chaotic by the second. Several words are said in unison such as, "Gay Plague", "Homosexual", "Death", "Epidemic". Music builds with the cacophony of voices. Wayne slowly walks onstage carrying a briefcase. He makes his way center and faces "the Therapist". Suddenly, the audio ends.)

WAYNE

Please, just wait one second.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne, I have another client // coming in.

WAYNE

I know. But I really need to talk to you *now*.

THERAPIST (OFF)

He will be here in 45 -- no 35 minutes. I'm really sorry, but there is a schedule -- a system put in place for a reason. // If I broke the rules for you...

WAYNE

I understand that, but please. You have to... This... this is important.

(beat)

I'll be quick. Honest.

(beat)

I'll-I'll try to be at least.

(A moment. The Therapist lets out a heavy sigh.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Fine. 35 minutes.

(Wayne makes his way to the couch and sits. Lights up. on Wayne wearing a suit with a loosened tie, visibly upset, sitting at the couch. Those behind the couch observe him. The stage is silent for what feels like years until a voice is heard.)

Whenever you're ready.

(A pregnant pause. Wayne nods and inhales deeply. He opens his mouth to speak, but he can't form the words.)

Wayne. What's // going on?

WAYNE

Let me just start... let me just start by saying... that...

(long pause, tearful)

That I'm really sorry. I'm so, so terribly sorry for everything I've done. If I could take it all back, I would. In a heartbeat. No question about it. I've hurt more people than I can count -- those closest to me, those whose names I never bothered to remember, those I've made the most promises to, those who trust me beyond reason...

(pause)

I've been lying to you. I *have* lied to you -- many, many times over the years, and I apologize for that. There's so much you don't know. There's so much I haven't told you. It's a mess! It's all a mess from head to fucking toe, and I'm not sure any of it's fixable.

(pause)

You know, I sit and I think and I wonder... when did this happen? How did I let myself get to this point? Who is this person -- this man that I've become?

(beat)

And then I realize... this is just how I've always been. I wish I wasn't sober, because then I could at least blame the alcohol or the pills.

(beat)

Since the day I learned to lie I never told a full truth. Never. Not once. And I don't expect to stop any time soon either.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne... //

WAYNE

I'm not going to stop lying. I won't. It's against my nature. But unfortunately some truths demand to be told and I need your help to do that. And so... here I am.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
I'm unsure how I'll be able to properly help you if you're just going to lie to me.

WAYNE
Fine. But one truth at a time.
(long pause)
I don't know where to start.

(Lights change. Jason steps up on the platform, bookbag on his back. He crosses in front of Wayne and stands behind the couch, looking around.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
Why don't we start at the beginning.

WAYNE
There are several beginnings.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
Have a seat, Mr. Ramirez.

JASON
You know what, I'm good. I think better when I move around anyways so... Thank you though.

THERAPIST (OFF)
It's okay to be nervous.

JASON
Not nervous. You really read all these books?

THERAPIST (OFF)
Why don't we start?

JASON
Just curious. I read a lot too actually.
(beat, nods)
Sure, yeah. I'm ready. Fire away.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Do you consent to a recording of this session?

JASON

What for?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Helps me remember. And some people like to look back at their progress.

JASON

Maybe another time? I don't know how I feel about a permanent record right now.

THERAPIST (OFF)

That's okay. Now this is something I say to all my clients. I want to create a space of trust, safety and openness here. During your time here, the outside world remains that -- outside. Everything stays in this room. Nothing said within these four walls will cross outside these four walls. So I encourage you to be honest with me, and forthcoming.

WAYNE

Ok.

JASON

Alright.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Did you find it?

WAYNE

Yeah. Valentine's Day.

(Lights change. Music plays. "Eternity" by Greydon Park Band. A News Anchor moves up center. As they talk, the ensemble exits, leaving only Wayne and Jason on stage.)

NEWS ANCHOR 1

Good Evening New York City, and Happy Valentine's Day. I'm _____ with your weather report. We're not out of the Winter woods yet, so make sure you bundle up, as we are sure to have a snowy afternoon // here in the city.

(A traffic officer blows their whistle, directing traffic. A man pushes through a crowd of people. A woman shouts.)

MAN

Excuse me. Coming through. Excuse me! Coming through!

WOMAN

Taxi! Taxi!

WAYNE

A few weeks ago I was late for a date. I had just gotten out of work and I was in a hurry to grab a last minute gift. I needed flowers. Of course it wasn't the main gift. I already had something special planned for that.

(beat)

You know, I had never been very... expressive before. About anything, really. I mean you remember how I was. It was almost impossible to get anything out of me during our sessions. And with my wife, you know... I was never very affectionate. But sometimes you meet someone, and they bring the best parts out of you. The parts you once thought had died a long time ago are now alive and active in your every day life and it's because of them you get that second chance. That drive to be better.

(Wayne exits. Lights change. Music fades.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

So, Mr. Ramirez, I // know this is...

JASON

You can just call me Jason. No need to act all official.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason. I know this is your first session with me, but have you ever been subjected to any form of therapy in the past?

JASON

Nah, this is a first time thing for me. Unless you count confession.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And what made you decide to seek out a therapist in the first place?

JASON

Well, I'm an addict. Been one practically my whole life. And addiction is your specialty so...

(Jason picks up a book lying on the coffee table.)

Freud. Didn't he fuck his moms or something?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Can we focus? Please?

(Jason surrenders, setting the book down.)

JASON

Sorry. My bad.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Your vice?

JASON

Alcohol. Heroin. A bit of pot every now and again. Started using when I was like... 14? 15 years old?

THERAPIST (OFF)

That's very young.

JASON

Nah, not really. I know guys that started younger. But hey. That's what it is out there. Everybody around ya's using. Sooner or later, *you* get thrown in the mix.

(Lights change. Music plays. Wayne enters. A store bell rings.)

WAYNE

I always loved the smell of flowers. And the flower shop seemed like another world. I mean, flowers growing in the middle of Winter -- almost makes you forget the winter cold like a bad memory.

(The florist enters, holding a bouquet of lavender roses.)

And then... a miracle. They were perfect. Roses. Lavender roses. Do you know how rare? The sight of them felt like a sign. Like a message from the universe saying that in the end it'll all work out. That everything will be just... fine.

(Music fades. Wayne walks up to the florist and hands her money. She gives him the bouquet and he starts to leave. Then, he stops in his tracks. The florist exits. The store bell rings.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

What is it?

WAYNE

The flower girl. When I paid for the flowers she mentioned my wife. She was just being nice, but she didn't realize what she was saying.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What did she say?

WAYNE

She said, “I hope she loves them.”

THERAPIST (OFF)

What’s so wrong about that?

WAYNE

The flowers aren’t for her.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

You’ve been having an affair.

WAYNE

Yes. And...

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

There’s more.

WAYNE

(nods)

One truth at a time.

(Wayne checks the time on his watch.)

I’m late.

(Music plays. The ensemble sparsely walk along the path around the couch to represent pedestrians.)

I needed to get from Manhattan to the Bronx and then be back home at a time that wouldn’t arouse suspicion. Although I wasn’t too worried about getting caught. I told Samantha that her father’s been riding my ass at the firm -- which *is* true. At a certain point, homes just sell themselves, but he still keeps me around even when he doesn’t need me. I think it helps create an excuse for his own wife, for why he’s never home. I guess he and I have that in common. Besides, Samantha and I haven’t celebrated Valentine’s day in years, so I figured I was in the clear.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You’re not at all ashamed?

(Lights change. Music fades. Wayne exits.)

JASON

(offended)

Ashamed?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I don't mean to offend you. You speak so freely about your drug usage. So matter of fact. Normally my clients try to hide behind their words.

JASON

What's the point in hiding? Secrets take too much effort. Besides, you supposed to be my therapist right? I say things to you, you write it all down on your little pad there, and you make me feel better.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Well that is the agreement. More or less.

(Lights change. Music plays. Wayne enters. It begins to snow. Wayne stops to put on his gloves.)

WAYNE

I sometimes feel guilty about how good I've become at lying to my wife. And then at times I impress myself. It's almost a sport -- a sort of game I play. How many secrets can I keep from her at once? How long can she stay in the dark? Is she ever going to ask where I go after work? Does she even care?

(beat)

I try not to dwell on it.

(beat)

I wasn't prepared for the snow. I thought I had more time before it got really bad, but it's was falling quickly and was starting to stick. I tried to hail a cab, but there wasn't one to be found. So I walked. I walked for maybe a mile -- a mile and a half -- and nothing. It felt maybe an hour had gone by when finally...

(beat)

Taxi!

(Wayne flags down the cab. He approaches and opens the cab door. Music fades.)

I opened the cab door and I paused.

(beat)

I didn't have any cash. And I know -- I'm an adult -- that's an easy fix. Just head around the corner to the nearest bank and cash-out. But I do that I risk Samantha's father seeing the charge on the account. He'll tell Sam and she'll ask me a bunch of questions and I'll have to lie. Samantha has this fear that I'll relapse one day.

That one day, out of the blue, for seemingly no reason at all, I'll suddenly start drinking again. So lying about where money is going... big red flag. I can't take the cab. I have to walk.

(Wayne exits. Lights change.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

So how are you doing now?

JASON

Well I *was* clean for about 3 years. Recently I've had a few um... I guess you'd call 'em "setbacks".

(beat)

My boyfriend... recommended therapy. It really worked well for him, and he's been clean like 7-8 years now so... I thought I'd give it a shot.

THERAPIST (OFF)

He referred you to me?

JASON

(beat)

No. I saw your ad hanging up at St. Ritas I called a bunch of shrinks, but you were the first to call back.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Well I'm glad you called.

(Lights change. Music plays. Wayne enters.)

WAYNE

I walked for three hours in the snow. For three hours I froze, holding my soon-to-be-dead flowers in one hand and my briefcase in the other. My coat was wet and it was starting to weigh me down. At a certain point the snow began to ease up, but it didn't help all too much.

(beat)

Samantha once told me how snow is a romantic element. She says that no two snowflakes -- like no two thoughts of love, are alike. I never quite understood what she meant by that, but I think I'm starting to. I guess you know it when you feel it, right?

(A man and woman enter, hand in hand. The man gets down on one knee and proposes. She says "Yes", they embrace, then exit off together. Wayne watches the interaction as he speaks.)

Isn't it a little scary? That one person can have that much control over you? That much power to the point that you would put yourself at risk in order for them to feel happy?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Love can be a very intense emotion.

WAYNE

Yes, it is.

(pause)

It does, however, come with it's negatives. Depending on *who* you love. For me... the worst part were the stares.

(Wayne walks around the stage, staring at the audience.)

It felt like they could all read my mind. As if they all knew who I was... Or what I am... What I've come to understand and accept about myself. I stick out like a sore thumb in the Bronx so of course they would all stare. And of course they would try to hide it -- try and pretend that it's not me they're all looking at but...

(Wayne quickly turns around.)

I can always tell.

(Wayne exits. Lights change.)

JASON

Are you a lesbian?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I'm sorry?

JASON

No, I didn't think you were. Unless... Sorry. Is that inappropriate to ask?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I... yes, // it is.

JASON

Shit. I really didn't mean anything by it. I figured, you know -- therapist and client -- there should be a certain level of... transparency.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Well, yes. I mean, no. Not about that. Not about me.

(beat)

Why... Is there a reason you're asking?

JASON

If you're asking if you give that impression, no I couldn't sense that. It's just you didn't even flinch before. I said "my boyfriend". And you ain't even react.

THERAPIST (OFF)

How am I supposed to react?

JASON

I don't know. Repulsed, uncomfortable -- the usual response.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Well. That attitude is starting to become a thing of the past now, don't you think? These are ever-changing times we live in.

JASON

Ever-changing? Sure. Still more of the same.

(beat)

You know, they're calling the 80s the start of the quote-unquote "Information Age"? Yeah yeah, and that today, in this modern post-watergate era, we live in what's called an "Information Society". All the knowledge there is to be known right where we can find it, yet still people are running around, out their damn minds, clueless as ever.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Stay with that.

JASON

With what?

THERAPIST (OFF)

You said people are clueless. Clueless about what?

(A moment.)

JASON

About the real world. About what's been happening to the real people on the ground level. You know the poor people living in abandoned buildings and sleeping on park benches -- the ones Reagan and every other dick politician casts to the side -- those are my people. Hell that's my family. I seen it all firsthand. There are good people suffering in our own backyard just tryna make it to tomorrow. But the one's with their heads in the clouds -- thinking they're flying -- have already made up their minds about the kind of people that they are. The kind of people WE are.

THERAPIST (OFF)
I hear you. I've been watching the news. There's a movement forming out there. People are angry.

JASON
Fuck yeah we're angry! And I wanna be there to help -- I *should* be there to help, but honestly there's not much I can do about it now.

THERAPIST (OFF)
What do you mean?

JASON
(off guard)
Huh?

THERAPIST (OFF)
You said that there's nothing you can do about it now. Now that what?

(A moment. Jason catches himself.)

JASON
Oh. Um. Well I um... no I... I didn't mean... that...

(J.J. enters, slowing moving around the platform, watching Jason. Jason, in a trance, tries not to make eye contact.)
Can we talk about something else please? I just... I don't really feel...

THERAPIST (OFF)
That's completely fine Jason. We can talk about whatever it is you want to talk about.

(A moment. Jason grabs his bag and leaves.)

JASON
I'm sorry. // Excuse me.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Hey. It's okay.

(Lights change. Wayne enters. He walks around, looking lost. J.J. spots him.)

J.J
You lost Mista Man?

WAYNE

Sorry, I don't have anything.

J.J

Wayne.

WAYNE

(pause)

Oh J.J! Hi! I-I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you. I mean, I didn't-I didn't see you... standing there.

J.J

(beat)

You didn't see me.

WAYNE

Honest.

J.J

(beat)

Hm. So how you been Wayne?

WAYNE

Good.

J.J

Good. How's the firm?

WAYNE

Good. Job's good.

J.J

Good.

(A moment.)

What are ya doing Wayne?

WAYNE

I'm just walking. Can't a man walk?

J.J

What are ya doing *here?* What ya doing way down in the slums? Cab make a left when he shoulda turned right?

WAYNE

I'm not lost. Listen I have to go. I'm late // for my...

J.J

For what?

(A moment.)

WAYNE

My cousin. He lives around here. He's throwing a birthday party. Now it's been real nice talking with you, but I'm really late so if you // don't mind...

J.J

You don't gotta lie to me, Wayne. It's fine. I already don't like you.

WAYNE

Excuse me? Who do you // think...

J.J

Nice flowers. Jay'll love those.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

He-he told you? When did // he...?

J.J

He didn't have to tell me. I have eyes. Beside, secrets don't stay secrets forever. Do they?

(Wayne begins to panic.)

WAYNE

J.J. Listen to me.

J.J

Are you so ashamed to love him?

WAYNE

You know that's not what this is. You know that.

J.J

Do I?

(beat)

No I get it, it's Samantha.

(beat)

You know, you don't deserve either one of them.

WAYNE

J.J. I am begging you.

J.J

Relax, Wayne. I'm not gon' tell nobody.

(A moment. J.J. pulls out a cigarette and a lighter. She holds the cigarette in her mouth while she talks.)

Who you think I am? Tellin' everybody y'all business. That ain't me. You know what a drag that'd be? All that drama? Ha! But shit I ain't scared to. If need be, I might let it slip once or twice. Maybe three or four times if I'm feeling messy. Hear this Mista Man. Don't fuck around with my boy, and I won't have any reason to. Comprehend?

WAYNE

Comprehend.

J.J

Happy Valentine's Day!

(Wayne exits. She flicks the lighter three times. The third time -- Blackout. A single piano note played repeatedly, picking up haste. It builds. It stops. Lights up. We're back in the therapist office. Wayne is frantic, pacing around the couch.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne. It's okay. Calm down.

WAYNE

(frantic)

She knew. And if she knew, others could know too. Then it's only a matter of time before // *everyone*... and Samantha... her father...

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne you're going a mile a minute. You need to breathe. Breathe.

WAYNE

I can't.

THERAPIST (OFF)

(comforting)

Breathe, Wayne. Look at me.

(A moment. Wayne looks up. He inhales deeply, then exhales. Then again. Then again. He's calm now.)

You're okay. Just talk to me.

(Wayne collects himself.)

Tell me how you're feeling right now.

WAYNE

I want to run.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Run where?

WAYNE

Nowhere. Anywhere.

THERAPIST (OFF)

When we allow other people's words to dictate our thoughts, we open ourselves up to pains that could otherwise have been avoided. Running is one of many solutions, however, it is only a temporary hold. Sooner or later, what we run from will catch up. And we won't be prepared to handle the issue that presents itself, because we've spent too much of our time running.

WAYNE

What if it's all painful? Painful to stay and painful to run.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Either way, we must endure. Push through with the pain.

(A moment.)

Now, Wayne. I have a few questions. And you can answer however you please -- I can't force you to tell the truth. But for your sake, if you truly want my help... please, try and remain honest.

(Wayne nods.)

Firstly, the affair. When did this happen?

WAYNE

It's a bit hard to say. It kind of just... happened. Maybe two years ago? Yeah, around that time.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Right. You consider this a romantic relationship.

WAYNE

Yes, I do.

(beat)

What is... what is this? // What is this face? This tone?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I... I'm processing all of this still, Wayne. It's a lot to take // in.

WAYNE

You disapprove.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I mean, of course, Wayne. I would never support a client's infidelity.

WAYNE

That's not what this is. I'm talking about love. Not infidelity. Not just sex. There's a difference.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You're married, Wayne. By definition this is exactly that. Now granted, there is emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity, however it is quite easy to confuse the two. It's very possible you initially intended to purify a moments sexual desire, but along the way misconstrued an inherently sexual relationship for a romantic one.

WAYNE

Hey, I'm not confused.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne, I asked you to be honest with me. See what I see.

WAYNE

And what is that? What do you see?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I see someone who is afraid. Afraid of people and their thoughts and their potential to cause pain. It's a fear I noticed the first day I met you and it's a fear I still see within // you today.

WAYNE

What does this have to do with anything that I'm telling you?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Your fears are at the root of your addiction. I need you to remember why we started meeting in the first place.

Remember when you were only three weeks sober -- with no job, no money, thousands of dollars in debt. You could barely keep still in that couch -- a ball of nerves and anxiety. And all you wanted was another drink. You're an addict, Wayne. I'm sorry to offend you, but questioning your judgement is something I just have to do.

(A moment. Wayne goes into his pocket and pulls out a coin.)

WAYNE

See this?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Your sobriety chip.

WAYNE

Yes. My first year. For one year I was sober and for 7 more years after that, I stayed sober. Of course I wouldn't have even started getting better if not for you, or Samantha and her father -- and I'm eternally grateful for that. Truly. But my point is... I got better. And I stayed that way.

(beat, puts it away)

My mind is clear. Honest.

THERAPIST (OFF)

How can I trust you?

WAYNE

Because I'm trustworthy. Because I pay you to.

(beat)

I don't know how to prove it to you other than just to say it.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Alright, fine. So you're in love. When did your feelings change toward Samantha?

WAYNE

(beat)

They never exactly changed.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What do you mean?

(A moment.)

WAYNE

I feel like I still do. Love her, I mean.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What about losing Henry? Do you think maybe that had some affect of your feelings for your wife?

WAYNE

I don't want to talk about Henry.

THERAPIST (OFF)

It would explain some // things.

WAYNE

It's not that.

(deep inhale, long pause)

Samantha and I are not happy. We haven't been for... a very long time.

(Samantha enters. She sits next to Wayne, uncomfortable. A New Years countdown plays distantly.)

We celebrated New Years together. Sam's parent's couldn't make dinner so it was just us, alone in the house together, for the turning of the year. I'm sitting at the dinner table... Sam is sat next to me... and I can feel how uncomfortable she is -- how uncomfortable we both are with just being alone with each other. This is my wife. And I can't even speak to her.

(beat)

She's better than me -- she breaks the ice and we begin to talk. And we talk. And we talk. And our food is getting cold. And it felt like how it used to be.

(Samantha begins to talk with Wayne. She laughs. Wayne smiles.)

Before, when we were just friends and the weight of marriage hadn't fallen on us yet. We talked about... our son. About what could've been. She cried. I held her. I cried. And then we went to bed.

(Samantha stands, then turns to Wayne.)

And as we were dosing off she whispered to me...

SAMANTHA

I love you.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

I love you, too.

(She smiles, then exits.)

But I knew I meant it differently.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Different how?

WAYNE

I realized I couldn't do it anymore. I knew I couldn't give Sam the life that she wanted. Sam has this image in her mind -- she told me this -- of the perfect family. And I'm in that picture. But I don't want to be. I don't want what she wants anymore.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And what is it that you want?

WAYNE

I don't think I know, really. I thought I did but... I do know I don't want *that.* I don't want to be a father. I don't want to be "the husband". I do want Samantha. I want her to love me still. //

THERAPIST (OFF)

Why am I just learning all of this today?

WAYNE

A lot has changed within the last few months.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

She suspects something. Doesn't she.

WAYNE

She does. Yes.

THERAPIST (OFF)

So how do you plan to resolve this? Have you considered divorce?

WAYNE

I have, yes. I spoke to a lawyer friend of mine just to figure out logistics -- expenses. However I've held off on the actual telling her part. I've found the longer I wait, the harder it is to tell her.

THERAPIST (OFF)

It's a lot that you'll have to admit. Because it's not just that you're having an affair. Or that you're leaving her. But who you're leaving her for.

(A moment. Wayne looks away.)

The woman you spoke to. She mentioned Samantha by name.

(pause)

She threatened to tell her the truth about the affair. And the love that you have... For *him*.

(pause)

Wayne.

(Wayne looks up to Chloe. There are tears in his eyes. He wipes them away.)

WAYNE

I'm sorry.

THERAPIST (OFF)

It's okay. I understand now.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

I'm not a good man. I can't be. Eight years ago I was at my lowest. I was in the darkest of places, but my wife... she brought me out of it. She brought me to you and you brought me out of it and now here I am *again* at another all time low and it's still my fault. I just don't learn, do I?

(long pause)

I am having an affair with a man. A man whom I have fallen in love with. A man who has just tested positive for HIV. I just got my report back this morning. And as of today... I am a number.

(beat)

I never thought I...

(beat)

I'll understand if you feel the need to burn this couch after I leave. I promise you it won't hurt me anymore than I've hurt myself already.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I'm so sorry, Wayne.

WAYNE

You know you turn on the television and it's nothing but fear. Chaos. The world is ending and before today I was sure I could make it out alive. I'm one of them now. I'm the sick. I'm the dying. It never even occurred to me that I could *be* one of them.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne. What about Sam? She need to know.

WAYNE

Why do you think I'm here? This is going to destroy her.

(beat)

I will tell her. I will.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Soon. Preferably today.

WAYNE

I don't know if I have the strength for it.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Why don't we call her?

WAYNE

And tell her over the phone? Yeah, that's a wonderful idea actually. She can't kill me over the phone.

THERAPIST (OFF)

No. Use my phone. Call home and tell her to come down here. We can tell her together.

(A stool with a telephone sitting on it appears. Spotlight on it. Wayne looks at it.)

I've been trying to get her in here with you, for a while now, and I think now might be the perfect time.

WAYNE

No, no... no *I* have to tell her. Just me.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I might be able to help ease the tension. I know Samantha very well. Her and I don't talk as much as we used to, but I still consider her a dear friend.

WAYNE

Which is why it just has to be me. I'd rather her come to you as her friend than her therapist.

(Phone spotlight goes out.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Alright. But it has to be soon.

(beat)

And how are you? I understand how difficult it must have been processing all this alone.

WAYNE

I'm fantastic actually.

(beat)

I'll be okay.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And your... lover. What was his name again?

WAYNE

Jason. Jason Ramirez.

(A moment.)

What is it?

THERAPIST (OFF)

(beat)

Nothing. It's just... I don't recall you ever mentioning a Jason before today.

WAYNE

Affairs are usually secret.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Tell me about him.

WAYNE

You want to know about Jason?

(Jason enters in frenzy. He's frantic, muttering to himself. He paces back and forth far behind the couch, trying to calm himself down.)

Jason... Jason is probably the single sweetest human being I have ever met. He's a poet -- going to be famous someday -- so everything he says... sounds like magic.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason?

(Jason turns his head to where he entered.)

JASON

I’m sorry I just... can I have a second.

WAYNE

He’s romantic. And immensely thoughtful. Adorably funny. The pure joy that just radiates out of him... it fills a room.

JASON

Fuck... shit... okay. You’re okay. You’re okay.

WAYNE

And it’s not just that.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason.

WAYNE

He understands, you know?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I can help.

(Jason exits.)

WAYNE

He gets me in a way that no one ever could. In a way that... even Samantha never could. Honestly, I don’t know if she can.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You don’t think Samantha has the capacity to understand you?

WAYNE

Not fully, no.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What don’t you think she’ll be able to understand?

WAYNE

Well my sobriety for one. Samantha doesn’t want anything to do with who I was before. She just writes it off like some awful, distant memory that we should all just agree to ignore. And I don’t want to ignore it. It’s a piece of who I am fundamentally -- healthy or not -- but she doesn’t get that.

THERAPIST (OFF)
I'm sure you can understand that those years must have been a traumatic time for Samantha.

(A moment.)

WAYNE
Traumatic for *her*?

THERAPIST (OFF)
Yes.

(A moment.)

WAYNE
I never hurt her. No matter how drunk I was -- I would never lay a hand on Samantha.

THERAPIST (OFF)
That's not the kind of trauma I'm talking about.

WAYNE
It sounds like you're saying I hurt her.

THERAPIST (OFF)
I'm not saying that you did. I'm saying that you should consider her side of the issue.

WAYNE
I have considered her side, but she doesn't get it. We're just too different.

THERAPIST (OFF)
You two grew up together. You lived in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools. How different from each other could you two be?

WAYNE
She's not an addict.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
Jason has battled with substance abuse as well?

WAYNE
Yeah. When he was young, he ran away from home. Got mixed with the wrong crowd. Absent dad. Dead mom. He's been through a lot.

But somehow he's still the city's brightest beacon of hope. He listens to my stories and he understands. He's supportive. Even now. I've been sober 7 years, going on 8, and he recognizes those years because he is just as familiar with -- and you've said this before. These are your words. The continuous present nature of my urges, habits and thoughts. He didn't even know me back then, and he's capable of things Samantha could never be capable of.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Such as?

WAYNE

Very simple things like attentiveness. Assurance. Sympathy. Sometimes -- and not all the time. I get it more from her parents than her nowadays. But sometimes... I feel like a charity case. You know, the poor kid from down the block she saved from unfortunate circumstances. So now that I'm better now... "before" doesn't exist. She won't even acknowledge it. If I bring up AA or NA or alcohol or drugs of any kind, she'll change the subject. Or just leave the room. She gets so uncomfortable so quickly... It's just nice to finally be able to share myself with someone where I don't have to tip-toe around the gruesome and awful. I don't have to do that with Jason.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

How did you two meet?

WAYNE

Samantha and I?

THERAPIST (OFF)

No. Jason.

WAYNE

(hesitation)

Oh. Um... well okay. You're not gonna like this, but it's really not as bad as it looks.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne...

(A moment.)

WAYNE

We met at an AA meeting.

(beat)

I'm his sponsor.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Oh that is *much* worse than what I was hoping for.

WAYNE

Listen. // Listen

THERAPIST (OFF)

// Wayne! //

WAYNE

Listen, I'm fine. I'm perfectly healthy. I've been going to meetings every week -- I haven't touched a bottle in years.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You're missing the point. What about Jason?

WAYNE

(beat)

What about Jason?

THERAPIST (OFF)

You are his sponsor. The relationship between the two of you is meant to strictly be about working through your addictions. That is the most important goal here. There are rules put in place about this, and you and I both know that sex introduces a lot of unnecessary complications // in-

WAYNE

Jason is not just sex!

THERAPIST (OFF)

I know. I know, Wayne. You have made that perfectly clear. But I'm having trouble actually believing that. You say the two of you are in love, but did you for one second think about how this relationship would affect Jason? Did you?

WAYNE

I...

THERAPIST (OFF)

Let me ask you a question, Wayne. How is Jason's Sobriety?

WAYNE

What?

THERAPIST (OFF)

His sobriety. For how long has he been sober? A year? Two years? More?

WAYNE

He was 3 years sober.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And now?

(A moment.)

WAYNE

He had a bit of a setback late last year. It was a mistake. We all make mistakes. That's not... it wasn't my fault. He was going through a lot. Anybody // could've...

THERAPIST (OFF)

What happened, Wayne?

(A moment. Wayne sighs.)

WAYNE

Jason had a rough year. It was like week after week, it was something else. Some asshole bought his building and he got evicted so he was moving around from couch to couch. And then he was losing friends left and right. Almost every day he was at the hospital visiting someone else, just watching them die. And then his Aunt was diagnosed with cancer. I mean he had just found her again, after years and years of desperately trying to reconnect with his relatives, and all of a sudden she was dying. And then it was December, and he was really hoping he wouldn't have to spend Christmas alone *again* last year so... He made a stupid decision and he relapsed. He went to a party, got drunk, and blacked out. But after he realized what he had done, he called me. He called me immediately and apologized for everything. We met up, we talked, we went to a meeting, he called a new therapist and set up an early session, and now he's back just like he was before. *Better* than before even.

(beat)

I'm a good sponsor. Okay? I take the steps very seriously. I take Jason's sobriety very seriously. Loving him doesn't change anything. Loving him doesn't compromise that.

(beat, scoff)

And of course you still don't get it.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Wayne, I work with addicts and the mentally ill. I get it. I've loved before. I've laughed before. I'm a human being with a heart just like everyone else. I get it. I feel for Jason and I feel for you, but you're the one who isn't understanding. AIDS isn't the only incurable disease. So is addiction. You and Jason are addicts. And the two of you will *always* struggle with that. You say you're a good sponsor, so you should know that any new stressors in life can cause an addict to // relapse.

WAYNE
// Yes I know all of this. //

THERAPIST (OFF)
And you have a responsibility, as Jason's sponsor, to help him through the stressors that life will throw at him.

WAYNE
Yes, but I'm not supposed to be his therapist.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Even still. He calls you. When he feels an urge coming on -- He. Calls. You. Before anyone else. So where were you the night Jason went out to that party?

(RING RING! The phone rings. A spotlight comes on. On stage is Jason inside a phone booth. He looks like he's been crying. It rings again.)

You wanna get that?

(RING RING! Wayne turns his head behind him. A spotlight comes on shining on the telephone sitting on a stool. Samantha enters, still getting ready for the dinner.)

SAMANTHA
Wayne, honey! Can you pick up the phone? I think that's them.

(Wayne stands.)

WAYNE
Yeah hun, I'll get it!

(Samantha exits. Wayne walks over to the phone. Pulling out a small towel, he wipes his hands and steps into the spotlight. He throws the towel over his shoulder and picks up the phone.)

Yellow?

JASON

(frantic)

Wayne, baby? Is that you? It's Jason. I'm at the hospital // right now and...

WAYNE

(whisper yelling)

Jason? What are you -- I told you not to call me at home. Samantha could have picked up.

JASON

I know, I know, but I already called your office and I just kept getting your machine and I-I... listen I really need you right now. The doctors are saying she don't have more than a week and I... I'm-I'm-I'm panicking. I feel like my whole world is falling apart and-and I just need you to help me. Just come down to // the hospital by...

WAYNE

No. I can't Jason. I can't. I'm in the middle of cooking Christmas dinner. Sam's parents will be here any minute. I can't just leave.

JASON

I don't know what else to do. Please, I'm begging you. I think... // I think I need a meeting.

(The doorbell rings.)

WAYNE

That's them. Okay. Jason. I hear you and I'm really sorry, but I can't go anywhere tonight. But listen. Tomorrow morning we can go get breakfast and we'll talk then. I'll buy you all the pancakes you want. Alright?

(The doorbell rings again.)

(to the door)

I'll be right there!

(to Jason)

I gotta go Jay. I'll see you tomorrow. I'm sorry.

(Wayne hangs up the phone. Jason is frozen. The distant dial tone can be heard.)

JASON

Wayne?

(pause)

Wayne?

(Jason's spotlight goes out. Wayne stands at the phone a moment. He then picks it up and dials a number. It rings. And rings. And rings. Wayne sucks his teeth.)

WAYNE

Come on... Come on...

(Suddenly a voice.)

J.J (OFF)

This is J.J... Baby, say something.

LENNY (OFF)

Uhhhh... Lenny. What's happenin'?

J.J (OFF)

We don't feel like picking up right now so leave a message at the tone. If we care to remember, we'll get right back to ya. Don't call again. Mwah!

(Voice-box tone.)

WAYNE

J.J. It's me. Look, Jason needs help and I can't get to him. I think he's at a hospital. I don't know which one. Find out where he is and make sure he doesn't do anything stupid.

(beat)

Please. Thank you.

(He hangs up. Samantha enters putting on earrings.)

SAMANTHA

Is that them?

WAYNE

They... uh... It was a sales call. I think they're at the door.

(Samantha smiles and exits. We hear Samantha greet her parents off stage. Lights change. Wayne sits down on the couch. A moment.)

I did everything I could that night.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Plenty.

WAYNE

Excuse me?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Wayne, this was never a relationship that should have began in the first place.

WAYNE

That night wasn't my fault. I wanted to help but my hands were tied. I couldn't // just leave.

THERAPIST (OFF)

No, your hands were not tied, Wayne. You chose not to go.

WAYNE

Are you kidding me?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Are you? Do you see how incredibly irresponsible your actions are? You had a relationship with your newcomer -- breaking the number one rule of Sponsorship -- all while you were married to Samantha. // The woman you've been with for nearly 10 years.

WAYNE

// I know. I know. I know! I know! //

THERAPIST (OFF)

And handing the issue off to J.J. so she can come and clean up your mess, I mean... Wayne. Do you see what I'm trying to put together for you? I need you to see it for yourself. I can't just tell you outright.

WAYNE

Whatever becomes of Samantha and our marriage I take full responsibility for. But with Jason... you have to understand. I could not leave that dinner.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I admit, you've dug yourself a hole. Quite a deep one at that. But ask yourself, Wayne. Why should Jason be punished for that?

(A moment.)

You have a life with Sam. And a responsibility to her family. And I get that you no longer want that responsibility weighting on your shoulders... but it's yours. It's not for anyone else to claim. There's no handing it off. There's no forgetting about it.

(beat)

I want you to really sit with yourself and feel the weight of your actions. *Your* actions. And then, once you've done that... talk to Samantha.

(A moment.)

I'm sorry, Wayne. I can't absolve you of any guilt you feel at the moment or any sins you've made in your life. I'm not God. I'm not a saint. I don't have all the answers either. But I can, however, point you toward the problem and a probable solution.

WAYNE

And what might that be?

THERAPIST (OFF)

You.

(beat)

You are both your problem and your solution. You've made this mess and now you have to live in it. You've reached a point where there is no going back to the way things were.

(beat)

But you knew that already. You knew that before you walked through that door.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

I really do love them both.

THERAPIST (OFF)

That just might be true. But I don't think this is a relationship that should continue any longer than it already has. At least not while Jason is still combatting his addiction. And certainly not while you're married.

WAYNE

What am I going to tell Samantha?

THERAPIST (OFF)

The truth. I think she deserves that.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

Can a person truly have two great loves in one lifetime?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I don't know. What is love to you?

WAYNE

(shrug)

I mean what do people usually say? Love is strong. Love is passion. Love is more than words. It's action.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Love is a lot of things. But it's not about what others say love is. I think love is something you need to find out for yourself. And find out exactly what it is you want love to do for you.

(beat)

Talk to your wife, Wayne. And I feel I must be frank about this. This is going to hurt. Bad. What you have to tell her... It's going to ruin her. And I'm unsure if you're marriage will survive the impact.

(Wayne nods.)

Alright. Well I'm glad you came to me. It took a lot of courage for you to admit the things that you've said today. View this moment as turning point. A new beginning.

WAYNE

Okay. Thank you.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I'll see you at our next session.

(Blackout. Wayne exits in the darkness.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on the Parker home. A woman walks on stage. It's Samantha.)

SAMANTHA

Wayne? Wayne, are you home?

(She takes off her jacket and kicks off her heels. She then clicks the remote to the TV. The news plays. Spotlight on a man and woman sitting at a table. They are news reporters greeting the early morning NYC citizens. While they speak, Bystanders set up the stage for upcoming scenes.)

NEWS ANCHOR 1

Good Morning NYC! My name is _____.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

And I am _____. We come to you live with a special report for all you watching on here today.

NEWS ANCHOR 1

Spring is here!

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Finally, yes! We've been cursed with a long winter, thanks to some groundhog in Pennsylvania. But I'm hearing we've got some early "April showers" this morning, is that right?

NEWS ANCHOR 1

(laughing)

Yes, you've heard correctly. The Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, became emotional today -- weeping while admitting to the nation of his marital infidelity. Hawke was faced with many accusations of being a womanizer during this weeks press conference, to which he replied, quote, "Yes." Hawke apologized profusely and then went on to describe his wife, Hazel, as a strong, beautiful and incredible woman, who he says, quote, "understood it was part of a pretty exuberant, volatile character." So far, the identity of this mystery mistress remains hidden as Bob Hawke refused to comment and no woman has stepped forward. But I assure you, we will update you as this story develops.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Now for your daily AIDS update. The concern of adequate care for AIDS patients has become the subject of a new plan by the State Department of Health. The DOH plans to designate certain hospitals as AIDS hospitals which in turn will provide comprehensive treatment to their AIDS patients. The first hospitals assigned to the effort will be based here in New York City with no facilities named as of yet. These hospitals will be financially compensated by the state.

NEWS ANCHOR 1

In more AIDS news, // the case of Prego vs the City of New York...

(Suddenly Wayne enters. Samantha turns off the TV.)

WAYNE

Samantha?

SAMANTHA

Yes, hun?

(Samantha turns toward Wayne. A moment. Blackout.)

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on an empty couch. Jason enters slowly.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Hi.

JASON

Hi. I'm sorry. I just needed... a moment.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I understand.

(beat)

Would you like to sit down? There's still plenty time in the day.

(A moment. Jason nods and walks over to the couch. He sits, setting his bookbag down.)

Are you okay?

(Jason nods.)

I fear that maybe we got along too strong. Moving a bit too quickly. So why don't we start this over, okay? That sound alright?

JASON

(nods, softly)

Yeah. Yeah that sounds good.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Hello, Jason. My name is Chloe.

JASON

Hi, Chloe.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You are completely safe here. This space is for you and for you only. I cast no judgement here.

(A moment. Jason nods.)

Okay. Now we can move on. Fresh beginning. But I don't think we should ignore your reaction. I promise I only want to help. You don't have to explain anything to me right now, but I do want to circle back to this later, when you feel more comfortable to do so. Okay?

JASON

(nods, quiet)

Sure, yeah.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Okay.

(beat)

So, this is your first ever therapy session, correct?

JASON

Yes.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And it's my understanding that you want to get your addiction under control.

JASON

Yes. Well... when I first set up this meeting, yeah. I did. But now I don't know if this is something I even wanna get control of anymore.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Really? Why's that?

JASON

(shrugs)

Life is short? People die every day. I wanna experience the best parts of life.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And you can't do that without drugs and alcohol.

JASON

No, you can't actually.

(A pause.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Well you could have cancelled. I had lunch plans.

JASON

(smiling)

Oh, well I'm sorry for the inconvenience.

THERAPIST (OFF)

It's a nice day. I'm sure there's far more entertaining things you could be doing right now. So why come see me?

(A moment.)

JASON

Thought maybe you could help?

(tapping his head)

My head. It's pretty fucked up in there. I feel like it'll explode sometimes -- all the shit I think about.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Are you having suicidal thoughts?

JASON

Don't we all?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Would you like to share some of those thoughts with me?

(A moment. Jason adjusts himself.)

JASON

I've been thinking about my past life a lot. About how I coulda done better -- how I coulda been better. I've made a lot of mistakes and I'm dealing with that shit now. I'm tryna make it right, but I don't think I deserve much sympathy. I'm self-centered and self-destructive... I've always been the optimist, but lately... I don't know. I can feel this dense, dark, cloud perched above me. It leers at me... and wishes harm to everyone I love.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Sounds like you're afraid of something.

JASON

I'm a very cowardly man, you'll learn. Every choice I've ever made I only made because I was afraid. And choices... Well choices are the things that get you killed. They're the things that get you hurt.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Every action has it's consequence.

JASON

Exactly.

(beat)

I think about that a lot. About cause and effect.

Time wasted and time given -- the little actions we all take every day, that collect and form the bigger, monumental moments of life. How a well timed smile... or well crafted compliment... or a single cup of coffee can do irreversible damage.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Do you often overanalyze the choices you make?

JASON
Well I often fuck up. So maybe not often enough.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Let's try being more specific. Talk to me. Any particular situation plaguing your mind recently?

(Lights change. Music plays. "El Último Café Juntos" by Orquesta Juvenil Universitaria Eduardo Mata. A single piano note. Tía Maribel enters, standing behind Jason.)

JASON
Yeah.

(Another piano note. Jason's parents enter.)

A few.

(Another piano note. Wayne enters with Samantha. Another piano note. J.J enters. Another piano note. Monse enters. Another Piano note. A Doctor enters. They all circle around Jason. He stands, looking around at the group of memories.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
Where would you like to begin?

(Jason's eyes move from person to person. His gaze lands on his parents.)

JASON
Okay.

(Everyone but Jason and his parents exit.)

I grew up pretty lonely. See my parents left home with a dream and a single suitcase of clothes.

(Papá carries a suitcase. He packs a few things. Mamá, pregnant, carries Papá's guitar. Papá takes the guitar, kisses Mamá, they smile and exit hand in hand.)

They were very spontaneous people. Young love, you know? Tía Maribel would say, Mamá was naive and optimistic, and Papá was an idiot. So together they gave me blind delight. See Mamá got pregnant with me young and left home with Papá to start life on their own. And they had no money. No money, no plan, and no where to go, but they did it. Somehow, they made it to the next day. And then again the day after that. And suddenly they had a life here, in one small apartment with a new baby boy.

(Mamá enters holding a baby. The baby cries.)

From what Tía told me -- for a long time -- it was a very happy time.

(Mamá exits. Music fades. A moment.)

I sometimes think that God forgot to filter the good and bad days for us. Instead of a healthy mix of both good and bad steadily sprinkled throughout our lifetimes, he just tacked all the bad at the end -- laid it all out one after the other to crash into us like waves. And that's just the way it needed to be.

(beat)

We made due with what we had. Papá was a hard worker.

(Papá enters from the right and sits on the couch. Mamá, from left, enters and rubs his shoulders. They smile, he kisses her hand, and the two exits left.)

He got a job in Manhattan. Maintenance. You know, cleaning windows, fixing shit people broke, that kind of stuff. I remember he'd come home at night, exhausted. He'd smile and crack a few jokes. He'd play music and dance with Mamá in the kitchen. He did his best to hide it, but I could tell how tired he was. It's funny now, looking back. I admired him. I loved what he did for us.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What changed?

JASON

My sister was born.

(Music plays. Mamá enters, left, holding baby Monse. She hands her to Jason, then slowly moves toward the right exit.)

When Monse was born I was maybe 4 years old -- I can't remember. She was a summer baby. Good and bright like the sun. Me and Mamá would take her out to the park.

She was still so small, but that only made it easier to take her everywhere I wanted. Mamá would play with us too, but sometimes it was hard, getting her off the bench. Soon, it got hard for her to get out of bed at all. It was December when the ambulance came to our door. I watched 'em as they carried her out, the snow dancing around her. She died with the first snowfall that year.

(The music stops. Mamá walks off. Jason holds baby monse. We hear the baby fussing. Tía Maribel enters with white flowers, laying them down on the box in front.)

I remember at the funeral how empty the church was. Only family that showed was Maribel, Monse and me. Papá wasn't there. Said he couldn't get out of work, but I think it was just too hard for him. And I get it to an extent. I mean the love of his life gave him a daughter and within a few months she was in the ground. How do you wrap your mind around that? You don't even have time to grieve. You just -- you just gotta keep movin'. Keep workin'.

(beat)

At that church they had this massive painting of Jesus behind where the Priest stood, and in the painting He's smiling.

(beat)

I'm holding baby Monse in my arms. Mamá was dead in a box in front of me. And there He was smiling down like it was some special fucking occasion. That was the first time I stopped believing in God.

(beat)

"How could He do this?" I thought. "How could He just take Mamá away from us like that?" We moved in with Tía Maribel that same day. She was more than happy to help us. Papá said it was only temporary, us living together. Fast forward a few years... and we're still with Tía Maribel.

(Jason hands baby Monse to Tía Maribel. She walks off with the baby.)

Papá... well he wasn't too thrilled about our new living situation.

(Papá enters with Tía Maribel, arguing. Their argument is inaudible.)

Tía was Mamá's side of the family and they weren't exactly cool with him knocking her up at 16. He never really had much of a family before us, so he wasn't leaving much behind coming to New York. Mamá, however... she gave up so much to be with him. And Tía resented him for that.

(Papá exits right. Tía, left. She re-enters holding a framed photo of Mamá and replaces the flowers on the box with the frame. She exits)

She was a lot like Mamá. Or Mamá was a lot like her. She didn't want her little sister to get stuck in NY like she did, chasing a dream that would never come. She was older so it was her job to look out for Mamá. And when Mamá died she took it pretty hard. I know she blamed herself. But she blamed Papá more.

(beat)

Tía was overprotective of us.

(Tía Maribel enters from the left, dragging an older Monse behind her. She adjusts Monse's clothes and hair, making her presentable. Papá enters, left, without saying a word, and exits to the right. Monse breaks away and chases after him.)

I mean that's just how she was with family, but she felt that we needed protection from Papá. I think she was afraid that he would get up one day and run off again. Take Monse and me away, 'cross the country.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Did you share that fear?

JASON

It was more of a longing than a fear.

TIA MARIBEL

(en Español)

Jason! We're leaving!

THERAPIST (OFF)

You wanted to leave the state?

JASON

I just wanted to leave. It didn't have to be the state. Just out of that apartment.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What was home like?

JASON

It was small. And clean. And it never felt like mine.

THERAPIST (OFF)

How so?

JASON

There was always something wrong with her around.

(Tía Maribel enters. She grabs a book from one shelf, crosses in front of Jason, slams down a book on the box, then moves to the other book shelf and repeats the process.)

She hovered over us like we were her little army. She was controlling and demeaning. She encouraged reading but never anything fun. Always history. Always White American unseasoned scholarly articles. She planned out my whole future for me. Graduate High School. Graduate college. Be a doctor. Cure disease. And I didn't want any of that.

(Tía Maribel hands the last book to Jason, who takes it unwillingly.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

What did you want?

JASON

I wanted my father. I missed him so much and I didn't understand why I couldn't see him. He worked late nights and left home early. He barely lived at the apartment. But I would stay up waiting for him. I fought sleep staring down the hallway, burning holes through our front door, just to catch him coming back from work. Sleep often won, and I would wake up in my bed, wondering if it was Papá that tucked me in.

(beat)

Eventually, I started waking up in the hallway. Papá never came home.

(beat)

I-I didn't know what to think. I thought maybe he was hurt, or lost, or... Something bad had happened. Enough time passed where I knew it wasn't good. Then one night... Papá comes home stumbling through the door and passes out on our kitchen floor.

(Jason's father walks on stage holding a bottle. He lies on the couch.)

He lost his job about a month before and was spending the rest of what we had left, at the bar. And all of a sudden... I was the man of the house. I just turned 13. Happy Birthday to me.

(Lights change. We are back in the therapist office.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

That's an unbelievable amount of weight for such a young boy to carry. Your Aunt. Did she work?

JASON

She did. She still made me get a job at the library. I didn't even get to keep any of the money. My entire paycheck went to her. And I hated her for it.

(beat)

She stopped fighting with Papá. Only ever because he was too drunk to respond or he just simply wasn't there. There was never a day that I didn't see him drunk. There were entire weeks that would go by where we wouldn't see him at all. There used to be so much love there between us. We'd make up songs on his guitar and sing 'em together -- I wrote my first poems with him. And Papá had a gorgeous voice -- I mean Sinatra had nothing on him. It was a gift... and he threw it away.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Addiction is a powerful beast. You must understand that.

(A moment.)

JASON

What are you saying? You're saying... I'm like my father?

THERAPIST (OFF)

I'm saying, to a certain extent, you can understand the kind of battle he was facing.

JASON

It's not the same battle. Not even close

THERAPIST (OFF)

How do you figure?

JASON

I didn't have two kids to look after. He did though. And I didn't lose my gift neither. I kept writing, reading, practicing. He gave up.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

I do want to point out that acknowledging parallels between a father and his son... all that is, is acknowledgement. It does not damn you, nor is the acknowledgement meant to shame you. It only is what you make of it.

(A moment.)

Okay. What did you spend most of your time doing when you were young? You said you longed to leave the apartment. Where did you go?

JASON

Mostly the library. You know, in retrospect, I really didn't mind working there.

(Jason grabs the books on the table, putting them back on the shelf. He also grabs the photo of Mamá and sits it on a shelf.)

I liked looking through the shelves, finding books I've never read before. I even made a few friends there. I started taking poetry seriously. I'd challenge myself and try to write one for every day of the month. On Sundays I wrote 3. The library became a second home for me. I stayed there for hours writing down just whatever I was feeling. There, I could forget.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Did you share your work at all then?

(Papá enters drunkenly.)

JASON

I had some friends that were into it, yeah.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Not your family?

JASON

No, most definitely not. Tía would not approve. And Papá...

(Papá collapses onto the couch.)

Uninterested.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Your sister?

(A moment. Monse enters from the right and sees Papá on the couch. She takes care of him, cleaning him up, giving him water to drink, and carrying him off.)

JASON

She was busy.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Did she also work?

JASON

Unofficially. Yes. She was a caretaker. For Papá. Honestly... I don't know what it was, but somehow she could see passed all the shit that was my Papá and she took care of him. She'd ash his cigarettes when he fell asleep with one still lit.

She washed his clothes for him and would walk him to the shower every night to get clean. Made him dinner -- all against Tía's wishes of course -- every single night. She was a saint. More mature than he was. Maybe more than me.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Often as children, our love for our parents is unconditional.

JASON
I don't know how she could do it. Take care of him like *he* was *her* child. As if he deserved any help at all. I don't know how anyone could survive.

THERAPIST (OFF)
How did Monse feel about your feelings toward your Dad?

JASON
I don't think she really knew. We got less close as I got older. We were both still kids, but I looked at her like she needed my protecting. Tía did the same thing. We kept her in the dark for the more "adult" issues. She didn't need to grow up so fast, you know? We wanted her to stay a kid for as long as possible. She had other plans.

(Jason and Monse make eye contact. A moment. Monse then walks off with Papá leaning on her.)

THERAPIST (OFF)
Are you closer with your sister now?

JASON
I haven't seen Monse in years.

THERAPIST (OFF)
Why is that?

JASON
She lives somewhere out West with her husband. Tía gave me a number to call her on. I haven't made the call yet.

THERAPIST (OFF)
I'm sure she'd love to hear from you.

(Jason is silent a moment.)

Is there any reason why she wouldn't?

(A moment. Jason rolls up his sleeves to reveal several markings on both his arms.)

JASON

I'm bad with time. I can barely tell how much time has passed in a day and I couldn't tell you a birthday if you stuck a gun to my head. So I write 'em down. I'll take a pen or a marker and write it down somewhere on my arm or my thigh so I won't forget. It's a bad habit, I know, but it works. They're mostly coffee dates with friends. Shifts I need to cover at the library. But there's one date I want to remember more than anything. I saved up and got it tattooed.

(Jason lifts his arm in the air. A few KS sores are visible. He points at one date on his bicep.)

This one. September 8th, 1977. The day I left home.

(beat)

It all kinda happened so fast. I had a friend I met at the library, Vick Diaz. He was in this gang moving H all through Harlem and he asked me to move some for him a few times. And I did -- just a bit of extra cash to help out where I could -- that's all it was supposed to be. Then it was more than a few times. And Chloe, I had never seen so much money. I hid most of what I earned in my mattress, where Tía wouldn't find it. I felt like I was set, you know? Like I was king or something. Untouchable. Eventually... curiosity got the best of me.

THERAPIST (OFF)

How did that feel? Your first time using?

JASON

Terrifying. Enlightening. I fell in love with the feeling. I miss it every day.

(beat)

Soon I was moving more H than books, spending half of what I earned on my own shit. Got jumped in the gang. Sold more. Used more. Got shot at a few times. Never busted though. I didn't write as much then, but what I did write I loved. Some of my favorite work is from that period of my life. Of course the high didn't last for long. I don't know how she knew, but I walked into the apartment and Tía was in my face screaming like I've never heard her scream before.

(Tía Maribel enters screaming at Jason in both English and Spanish.)

JASON

And she gave me an ultimatum. I either had to leave the apartment and live amongst the sinful world... or... I stop shooting up. A simple choice really. And I didn't hesitate.

(Tía Maribel exits. Mamá walks across the stage and gives Jason clothes. He packs them in his bookbag.

He doesn't see that it's her, but she sees him. Jason's father lies on the couch, an empty bottle in his hand.)

Looking back at myself at this period of my life feels like viewing memories that don't belong to me. I don't recognize the person that left home. I don't understand how I justified it. I was proud and conceited. I didn't even stop to think about what I was leaving behind...

(Jason walks across the stage. Monse enters. They both stop and look at each other. They then circle around the couch, not breaking eye contact. Jason says all of Monse's line in unison with her.)

And suddenly, I was afraid. I thought she had gone to sleep. I remember the look in her eyes. Her anger. There was a fire in her I had never seen before.

MONSE
You're leaving?

JASON
"You're leaving?" She said.

JASON
Yes.

MONSE
Why? ... Did I do something wrong?

JASON
"Why?" she said. "Did I do something wrong?"

JASON
No sis. This has nothing to do with you.

MONSE
So why are you leaving?

JASON
"So why are you leaving?"

JASON
Monse.

MONSE
Where are you going?

JASON
"Where are you going?"

JASON
Monse! Shhh!

MONSE
No, screw you! Were you even gonna say goodbye?

JASON
"No, screw you! Were you even gonna say goodbye?"

JASON

Quiet!

MONSE

Where are you going?!

JASON

"Where are you going?!"

JASON

I'll still be around.

MONSE

Can I come visit you?

JASON

"Can I come visit you?

JASON

NO.

MONSE

Why?!

JASON

"Why?!"

JASON

You just can't! I'll come back. I promise I'll be back.

MONSE

No you won't. Jason don't go. Please don't go! I don't know how to be a grown-up!

JASON

"No you won't. Jason don't go. Please don't go! I don't know how to be a grown-up!"

(Jason leaves. The sound of a door slam. Monse yells after him. A moment. She then angrily wakes up her father. He stands and puts his arm around Monse, leaning on her for support. Jason enters, watching Monse take their father off stage. They exit.)

JASON

But I never went back. And I never saw her again. I don't think I can ever forgive myself.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason, you are not unforgivable.

JASON

But I left her. I left her to fend for herself.

THERAPIST (OFF)

// I understand. //

JASON

I'm responsible for her pain. That's just a fact I'm going to have to live with.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Yes, you should accept that when you were younger you made mistakes, // however...

JASON

This wasn't just some mistake. I abandoned her.

THERAPIST (OFF)

I hear you. And I promise you, I am not trying to make light of the issue. It saddens me to hear what you *and* your sister went through. Truly. That day you made a choice. And although now you hold regret and self-loathing along with that memory, I understand that choice. And I sympathize. Because in all these emotions -- your guilt, your pain, your sadness -- all muddled together, I can see there is also a great deal of love there as well.

JASON

I'm sorry. I can't see it that way.

THERAPIST (OFF)

No? What other emotion is fueling this fire?

JASON

Rage.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Is that all?

(A moment.)

JASON

Resolution.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Good. Resolute towards what?

(A moment. Monse walks onstage.)

JASON

I'm tryna make it up to her. Prove to her that I didn't just fuck off just to stick needles in my arm. I wanna show her that I made myself an opportunity and I did something with it. It hurts to say, but leaving finally gave me room to breathe and I was able to grow, not just as person, but as an artist. Vick once told me that being a poet is being touched by grace. An undeserving and mysterious grace. But I know where my grace comes from.

(Monse stands opposite Jason. They stare at each other.)

Monse. *She* is my Grace. And I need her to be proud of me.

(beat)

I think of her every second of my life. With every breath that I breathe she gives it purpose. She's not here, but I feel her next to me. I see her smile in the lavender hued sunset. I hear her voice in the breeze that blows through central park. I exalt her life in my poetry. When I write I dedicate every single line to Monse. Every single line.

(Monse leaves.)

My guilt... my rage... her grace... *that's* what drives me.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

One of my clients today came in with a crisis. He had been struggling to come to grips with his idea of love, trying so hard to fit his love inside the box this world had given him -- a kind of love with a certain structure and likeness. I asked him to define what love was for *him*. He wasn't too sure. Honestly, I wasn't quite sure either. I couldn't give you much of an answer if you asked. Love is one of those emotions that's often best described as indescribable. Charismatically vague and deceivingly solid. Interesting enough, however, your story -- your feelings toward your family, your sister and your leaving -- all that you claim to not be fueled by love, might be the most wonderful displayed example of love I have ever known.

JASON

I don't... I don't understand.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Think of your childhood.

(Jason's parents appear. Aquellos Ojos Verdes by Ibrahim Ferrer plays softly.)

Think of those happy years your Aunt told you about. Think of your parents.

(Jason's parents begin to dance together.)

They came to this country with love in their hearts. With love for you and love for each other. Their hard work is what allowed them to survive here, yes, but it was their love that allowed them to *live* here.

(Jason watches as his parents dance. He smiles.)

And with an abundance of love, comes an abundance of joy. Your sister.

(Monse appears. She's smiling. She begins dancing with her father. Her mother smiles and walks away towards Jason. She kisses him on the cheek before walking offstage.)

Even when you lost your mother, there was still plenty of love in your heart. Because love doesn't just disappear.

(The music fades. Monse and Papá leave the stage. Jason sits down on the couch.)

JASON

I hear you. It's just hard, you know? It's hard to see it that way. How can I just treat Monse like she didn't matter, but then turn around and call it love?

THERAPIST (OFF)

We are not our mistakes. You are not evil and you are not unforgivable.

(beat)

I'd like you to consider giving your sister a call. When you feel like you're ready. There could be something there in that conversation that you both might need.

(A moment. Jason nods.)

JASON

I'll think about it.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Are you okay?

JASON

Yeah, I'm alright. Thank you.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Okay.

(A moment.)

JASON

What's the matter?

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

(slowly, nervous)

I have a question for you. And please tell me if I'm crossing over a line here. I want to establish trust between us and I want this space to be a comfortable place for you. But I also want us to be able to talk about the more... difficult aspects of your life journey.

(Jason nods.)

Ok. Earlier in the session we were discussing this country's social and political climate. You expressed your outrage towards those with their "heads in the clouds" judging the people down closer to the ground. We acknowledged the movement that's forming before our very eyes, and you also expressed your disappointment in not being able to join arms in that movement. And when I asked why... you ran.

(beat)

Is your HIV diagnosis the reason why you feel you can't be of service?

JASON

(pause, stunned)

H-how did you // know...

THERAPIST (OFF)

Your arm. When you pulled up your sleeves I saw lesions. Kaposi Sarcoma -- it's a symptom of HIV. I've seen plenty examples.

(beat)

I understand your reluctance to tell me. And I assure you, I do not think any differently of you. I do not think any less of you. I only bring this up now because of your aversion to staying clean. Or more accurately your decision not to. As your therapist, I need to make sure that any big decision that you make... is carefully and thoroughly thought out.

JASON

I have given it plenty of thought. Promise.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Are you seeing a doctor?

JASON

I was, yeah.

THERAPIST (OFF)

You *were* seeing a doctor?

JASON

Yeah, but then I stopped going.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason // you...

JASON

Chloe, I'm gonna die. That's a fact. So why go see a doctor just so he could tell me I'm doing worse every week?

THERAPIST (OFF)

You can at least buy yourself more time under their supervision.

JASON

(angry)

Lying in a hospital bed and being experimented on by a bunch of lab coats is not how I wanna spend my time.

(beat)

I'm sorry, I just... I've accepted it. And I'm fine now. Really. I took the news pretty hard initially, but... I wanna live for as long as I have left to live.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

How did your boyfriend react to the news?

JASON

I don't know actually. He won't return any of my calls, hasn't stopped by my work. In all fairness, I don't really fault him for not calling. I didn't even have the guts to say it to his face so how could he say anything to mine?

THERAPIST (OFF)

It wasn't you who told him?

(Jason shakes his head "no".)

JASON

I wrote him a note. I'm a bitch. I know. I wrote it on my hospital report and snuck the paper into his wallet for him to find later. But then, he left the fucking wallet at my place so I had to deliver it to him. But then I was in the hospital so I couldn't do it myself and -- it was a mess all around. But now he's not talking to me. Honestly, I don't think he's even worried about me at all.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What makes you say that?

JASON

Well there is the unhappy wife factor.

(Wayne and Samantha enter mid argument. Samantha searches for her keys while Wayne tries to calm her down, speak to her, etc. They exit together.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

(pause)

It's certainly not uncommon for married men to engage in extramarital affairs. Less common, however, an affair between the same sex. What's sad is that in either scenario the outcome is never a happy one. No one wins, everyone gets hurt, and the man almost always goes back to the wife.

JASON

He doesn't even love her.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Did he tell you that?

JASON

No. Not exactly. But the way he talks about her...

THERAPIST (OFF)

How does he talk about her?

JASON

Like she's more of a job than a wife. Like an obligation. I'm sorry, but that don't sound like love to me.

THERAPIST (OFF)

And what you two have, does that feel like love?

(A pause.)

JASON

There was a time where it did, yeah. Now it's... now it's just confusing. There's so much I feel for him, you know? It hurts to carry. When we first got together, I tried so hard to keep at a safe distance. I measured our talks by the seconds and counted the number of times he said my name. I didn't want him to become too much to lose. Guess I knew. Love is a drag, ain't it.

THERAPIST (OFF)

What is love to you?

JASON

(laughs)

What is love to me? How much time we got left?

THERAPIST (OFF)

(chuckles)

Well said poet.

(beat)

So, when did you meet Wayne?

JASON

How'd you know my boyfriend's name?

THERAPIST (OFF)

(flustered)

I... you said his name. You said his name before -- earlier.

JASON

Did I?

THERAPIST (OFF)

Of course you did. How else would I have known?

(A moment.)

JASON

Okay. Um... Wayne and I met about 2-3 years ago? We actually met in AA. They hold meetings over at St. Rita's. You know of it? No of course you do. Your flyers are posted there.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Yes, I know it very well.

JASON

Yeah, well I hated it. The coffee was shit. Some of the old guys were creepy. And they make you speak in front of everyone. The day I first met Wayne I went up to the stand and um... told my story. Unbearable. I hate the whole stand-in-front-of-a-room-of-complete-strangers bit. Reopening all my old wounds. I even wrote a poem about it. Called it "Endless Crucifixion". I didn't quite get it yet. Anyways, I went up and I spoke. Talked about my habit. My sister. Lied a little, obviously. And then after I was done and the meeting was over... Wayne came up to me.

(A single piano note. Flourish. A spotlight. Wayne appears, holding a cup of coffee. Jason stands.)

I thought he was cute. I remember he was very sweet.

WAYNE

Hey, Jason. I'm Wayne. Wayne Parker. I gotta tell you, I was really moved by your story. I can't even imagine... the hurt you've gone through to get to this point... That takes real courage. You should be proud of yourself.

JASON

(to Therapist)

I tried playing it cool.

(to Wayne)

Nah, I mean it's just talking. Sis always said I love to hear myself talk.

WAYNE

(chuckle)

Well, whether you spoke selfishly or not, it's a good thing you did. It really resonated with me. You know in some ways... I could relate. What you said, you know, you said you started using, not only as an escape, but as a way to better understand your reality. First time I've ever heard anyone talk about it in that kind of way.

JASON

What kinda way do you mean?

WAYNE

Like an answer. Like you're running *towards* something instead of running away.

JASON

That's what it was for you?

WAYNE

A bit of both. Running towards. Running away. Just...

JASON

Running.

WAYNE

Running.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

You write poetry.

JASON

(beat)

Yeah?

WAYNE

Well I'd love to read some of your poems sometime. If that's okay with you, of course. If they're anything like what you shared today... Hey, I'll even buy you coffee. Good coffee. Much better than the shit they give out here.

(A slow smile creeps on Jason's face.)

JASON

Yeah. Yeah that could be fun.

(Wayne smiles. Jason takes a small book out of his pocket and hands it to Wayne as he talks. Wayne reads it to himself, smiling, nodding.)

That's all it was, at first. Just me sharing my poems and him absolutely loving to read 'em. I mean the man was kind of obsessed.

(Wayne walks up holding Jason's book.)

WAYNE

This is my favorite one. No really, I know I say that every time but this one is just amazing.

(pointing at the page)

I love this line. "Assembled with the wrong parts, mind flooded with the wrong thoughts." How'd you come up with that?

JASON

(embarrassed)

Yeah... I wasn't in the best frame of mind when I wrote that.

WAYNE

Well I love it. I think your words are beautiful.

(Jason smiles. Wayne walks off. A Diner table appears. Wayne and Jason sit and talk facing each other.)

JASON

We'd meet up at the Diner and he'd buy me pancakes, his favorite, and we'd read my poems. We'd meet there just about every week. I'd see him during meetings and we'd talk, share stories and laugh at our old selves. He told me about his job, about how much he hated it. But you know what he *really* wants to do?

WAYNE

(passionate)

I wanna own a diner. I think that's such a fulfilling way to live life.

Flipping pancakes and burgers all day. Feeding people breakfast at 2AM. I mean what's better than 2AM pancakes -- whether you're serving or eating 'em?

JASON

Why don't you do it then? Open up shop somewhere.

WAYNE

Ahh... No, I can't. // Never.

JASON

Why not?

WAYNE

Some dreams just die, you know?

JASON

But they shouldn't, Wayne. Dreams deserve to live. They deserve to live long happy lives -- well into their old age.

WAYNE

Okay, but what about you? Huh? When are you publishing your poems?

JASON

Don't turn this back on me. // No, I told you. I'll publish when I'm ready.

WAYNE

Yes, I'm turning this back to you -- Come on, you say that all the time but the day // never comes.

JASON

It's expensive. Library don't pay me *that* much. I need // to budget...

WAYNE

How much do you need? I'll give it to you.

JASON

(beat)

What? // No...

WAYNE

How much?

JASON

No, Wayne I'm not taking your money.

WAYNE

What happened to not letting my dreams die?

JASON

Your dreams.

WAYNE

Yes, my dreams. I wanna see your name in the bestsellers section of the library. That's a big dream of mine.

(beat)

Tell me how much.

(Jason smiles and looks out into the audience.)

JASON

You know I just couldn't tell. I didn't know if he was just being nice or if there was something more... The way he would look at me sometimes... but then other times...

WAITRESS

Coffee?

JASON

// Sure... //

WAYNE

Yes. I mean no. I have to -- can we get the check? I've got to head back.

(The waitress leaves. Wayne shifts awkwardly in his seat. A moment. Then they both stand and begin walking. Jason carries a bunch of books.)

Soon he started visiting me at my job. I'd walk around putting away books and he'd follow me asking questions like --

WAYNE

You've really read all of these?

JASON

Not *all* of 'em. Just like... this wall and on.

WAYNE

That's like 10 times more than what I've read my entire life. You have a favorite?

(Jason takes a moment to think. Then he walks over to the shelf, grabs a book and hands it to Wayne.)

JASON

This one. It's a collection of poetry from some poets who just happen to be my favorites. Eduardo Chirinos... R. Wade Vliet... Langston Hughes... Cesar Vellejo.

WAYNE

There's a lot in here.

(Wayne holds out the book.)

Read one to me.

JASON

(chuckle)

You forget how?

WAYNE

I want to hear *you* read it.

(Jason grabs the book and flips through the pages. He stops on one.)

JASON

This one. I love this one.

(As Jason reads, Wayne begins moving closer.)

For our own private reasons we live in each other for an hour. Stranger, I take your body and its seasons, aware the moon has gone a little sour for us. The moon hangs up there like a stone shaken out of its proper setting. We lie down in each other. We lie down alone and watch the moon's flawed marble getting out of hand. What are the dead doing tonight? The padlocks of their tongues embrace the black, each syllable locked in place, tucked out of sight. Even this moon could never pull them back, even if it held them in its arms and weighed them down with stones, took them entirely on their own terms and piled the orchard's blossom on their bones. I am aware of your body... and its dangers. I spread my cloak for you in leafy weather where other fugitives and other strangers will put their mouths together.

(Jason looks up at Wayne. A moment. Jason kisses Wayne. Wayne suddenly pulls away, looking around in case anybody saw. A beat.)

JASON

Wayne, I'm // sorry...

WAYNE

No, it's okay. I just... I mean I-I'm not...

(Wayne twists his wedding ring. A moment. He checks his watch.)

I've gotta get going.

(Wayne leaves. A moment)

JASON

(to Therapist)

I shouldn't have kissed him.

(The librarian walks up to Jason and tosses him keys.)

LIBRARIAN

Jason? Lock up once you're done please.

JASON

Yes ma'am.

(Lightning strikes. The sound of rain. Jason finishes putting the books away. He then walks across the stage. He grabs a jacket.)

I didn't know he was married when I kissed him. I didn't see the ring -- on my mother I didn't see it. I wouldn't have done that if I knew.

(beat)

But when I was reading the poem to him... I don't know I thought I felt somethin'. Maybe. So I kiss him, and I regret it, and I prepare to never show myself in AA ever again when...

(Spotlight on Wayne standing with an umbrella, staring at Jason.)

There he was. Standing in the rain.

(Jason walks over to Wayne. Jason stands under the umbrella with Wayne a moment.)

WAYNE

Which way are you headed?

(They then walk off stage together. Blackout.)

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

(The sounds of police sirens ring and the sounds of rain falling. Lights up on Jason walking on with Wayne following him.)

JASON

It's alright. There's no one that'll recognize you around here.

(Wayne nods, clearly shaken. Jason uses his key to unlock his apartment.)

Wait one second.

(yelling through the apartment)

J.J? J.J?!

(to Wayne)

Okay, she's not here. Come in, come in.

(Wayne walks inside. Jason takes off his coat and takes Wayne's umbrella. He puts both items away. Wayne begins to look around the apartment.)

Sorry for the mess. I don't usually have people over.

(beat)

Take a seat. Anywhere, really.

(Wayne sits on the couch quietly. He appears anxious. Jason tries to tidy up the place.)

Can I get you anything?

WAYNE

Got any Scotch?

JASON

Wow. Near 7 years dry and straight to the hard stuff? Well, if you're saying "to hell" with it, might as well dive right on in, huh?

(awkward laugh, pause)

I have tea.

WAYNE

I'm okay. Thank you. That wasn't an actual request... I was really just... talking.

(Jason smiles, walks over to the couch, and sits down. Wayne quickly stands up.)

Wait.

JASON

Okay. I'm just // sitting down.

WAYNE

Just *wait*. Just...

(beat)

I'm not used to this.

JASON

As far as I know, *this* isn't anything yet. We're just // sitting.

WAYNE

Ok, don't play stupid, okay? You kissed me at the library in // front of all those people.

JASON

And I shouldn't have. I shouldn't've done that. Okay? I'm sorry. I should not have kissed you.

(beat)

Come. Come sit. Let's just talk. Like we usually do. Please?

(A moment. Wayne makes his way over to the couch and sits down far from Jason. Another long moment.)

So how long have you been married?

WAYNE

(beat)

Awhile.

JASON

Right. Right. Just... you never mentioned her. However many months we been talking and you never said a thing.

WAYNE

You never asked.

JASON

Oh. Okay.

(long beat)

What's her name?

WAYNE

Can we not talk about my wife tonight, please?

JASON

Fine.

(Jason crosses his arms. The two sit in silence for what feels like years. Jason then stands.)

You know what? It's not fine.

(checks time)

It's getting kinda late and I have shit to do in the morning so maybe you should // just go.

WAYNE

No, I want to stay. I // wanna talk.

JASON

Do you? It's a little hard to tell, Wayne.

WAYNE

It wasn't the kiss that was the problem.

(beat)

I... liked the kiss.

(A moment. Wayne walks up to Jason and kisses him. Their moment is interrupted by loud knocking. J.J is at Jason's door.)

J.J

Jason! Jason! Open up!

WAYNE

Who is // that?

JASON

(to Wayne)

It's okay. Just sit here. She's a friend. I'll get her to go away.

(Lights dim in Jason's apartment. Light up at Jason's door. He makes his way over to the door and opens it, greeting J.J)

Hey, what's up?

J.J

(beat, confused)

Nigga, what's up witchu? You called me?

JASON

No I didn't.

J.J

(pointing next door)

Yeah. Lenny said you did.

JASON

Lenny said that?

J.J

Yeah. Said you came home hollerin', screaming my name, "J.J! J.J". Well I'm here now so what's up? What do you need?

JASON

Nothin'. Your boyfriend's hearing things.

(fake yawn)

I'm kinda tired so I'm gonna head to bed now 'kay? Love you. See // you in the mornin'.

J.J

(looking over Jason)

Wait, wait, wait, wait.

(beat)

Someone in there?

JASON

In where?

J.J

Oh you got company.

JASON

(head shaking no)

Mm-mmm. No. // I don't know what you're talking about.

J.J

(gasp, teasing)

My bad. I didn't know you had somebody special over.

JASON

T-there's nobody. Nobody special.

J.J

Oh, so if I walk in right now // I won't find...

JASON

(blocking the doorway)

No!

J.J

(beat)
Why so jumpy? I've met all your other // boyfriends.

JASON

J.J. I'm going to bed. Please leave.

(A moment. J.J scoffs and exits. Jason closes the door. Her light goes out. Jason walks back into the apartment.)

Alright, she's gone. She didn't suspect a thing.

(Wayne is standing, wearing his coat and reading Jason's bible.)

WAYNE

I didn't know you were religious.

JASON

I'm not, really.

WAYNE

You've marked this up pretty good for someone who doesn't believe.

JASON

It's not that I don't believe. Me and God are just fighting at the moment.

(Wayne smiles and puts down the book.)

You?

WAYNE

Do I believe?

(pause, shakes head)

For me, the idea of a higher power was always difficult to wrap my head around.

JASON

It's not easy, no. But it does help. It helped me.

WAYNE

(beat, nod)

I um... I think I should go.

JASON

Yeah?

WAYNE

Samantha she... I've already been gone too long.

JASON

I understand. Lemme get the door for you.

(Wayne walks over to the door. Jason holds it open. They stand outside the door a moment.)

WAYNE

Hey. Can I see you tomorrow?

JASON

Yeah. Definitely.

(Wayne smiles and walks off. J.J enters as he leaves, pointing at him.)

J.J

I know him.

JASON

(startled)

Jesus! J.J! Why are you still out here?

J.J

No, I know him. I seen him in AA. You're fucking *him*?

JASON

J.J. Please stay out of this one.

(Jason goes back into his apartment. J.J follows.)

J.J

Jay he's married. Did you know that?

JASON

How'd you know he was married?

J.J

Oh so you knew? And you're just OK with // home-wreckage.

JASON

How did you know he was married?!

J.J

What -- besides the fat metal band on his finger? Jay, he talks about his wife all the time.

JASON

I never saw a ring and I never heard him // mention her.

J.J

And of all people, another addict. I mean do you even wanna get clean?

JASON

Not really, no.

(beat)

No, yes. I do. I wanna get clean.

J.J

We had a plan. You go to meetings, you find a sponsor, and you stay off the fucking H.

JASON

Nothing even happened.

J.J

Yeah? What was he here for then?

JASON

He's my sponsor. I was feeling... you know -- and I needed to talk, so he came over and we talked. We just talked. That's all.

(A moment. J.J. realizes.)

J.J

Wow. No Jay, really?

JASON

What?

(beat)

What?!

(beat)

Okay so I kissed him. What's so wrong with that? He likes me -- He likes // *me.*

J.J

No he doesn't, Jay. // Not in the way you think.

JASON

No he does. I know he does. I can feel it. You know he's gonna give me the money to publish my poems. He thinks I can be a bestselling poet.

J.J

I'm sure Monse would be so proud.

(A moment.)

JASON

No, you don't get to do that. You don't get to throw my sister in my face like that.

J.J

Jay, use your head for once, please.

(beat, sigh)

You hopeless, romantic, delusional boy. Jay, I love you. And I know you. So I know once your mind's made up on something it's near impossible to change it, so I won't waste my time arguing with you. But I promise you that *this*... does not end well. Believe me.

(J.J leaves. Jason sits on the couch. We're back in the Therapist office.)

JASON

And like always, she was right. I should've ended things before they even started.

(beat)

You know people talk about "the end" *a lot*. "It'll all get better in the *end*." "In the *end*, we'll see who wins." "This won't end well for you." The end, the end, the end. What even is that? "The end." The end of today? The end of the week? The month? The year? *How* does it end? Like a tragedy? A horror? When does *my* story end? When did it start? Did it start when I was born or when I realized I was alive? Does my story end when I die, or the last time someone says my name aloud?

(beat)

It's an interesting perspective that I have now -- now that I can see the end. And *in* the end... I'm in my bed. I'm freezing cold. And I'm completely alone.

(Blackout.)

SCENE TWO

(A single spotlight on a man in a suit holding a microphone. He holds his hand up to his ear as if listening intently, then speaks in a stereotypical News Anchor voice.)

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Good Afternoon, Breaking News. New updates on the virus making it's way across the states at an alarming rate. HIV/AIDS, colloquially referred to as the "Gay Plague", has claimed over 100,000 lives this past decade. And with no cure in sight, Scientists expect that number to rise significantly in the coming years. The majority of infected persons are in fact Homosexual men from ages 25 to 40, however, in certain rare instances the virus has managed to infiltrate the homes of Heterosexual couples. In this everyday, seemingly normal home you see behind me, hides a dark secret. A secret sexual affair with a woman's husband and his gay lover. His lover contracting the virus from one of his many sexual partners, passing it on to him, and unfortunately, the unsuspecting wife. Now this woman has asked to remain anonymous, and we will respect her wishes, but we have a neighbor and friend of the couple here, Brianna Fletcher, to share her side of the story.

(Spotlight on Brianna.)

BRIANNA FLETCHER

I've known her for many, many years. Far back as High School. Poor, poor girl. You would never suspect it. You hear this kind of thing on the news all the time -- about husbands bringing home AIDS, but you never expect it to hit so close to home. I mean I've known her for *years*.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Do you believe there's any way she could have known of her husbands double life?

BRIANNA FLETCHER

Sometimes it's hard to tell. They hide so well now these days.

(Sudden spotlight on Mallory.)

MALLORY FLETCHER

Oh no, she knew.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

And you are?

BRIANNA FLETCHER

This is my sister. Mallory.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Miss. Fletcher. You have something to add?

MALLORY FLETCHER

She knew. She was sleeping with him -- I know she knew.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

She told you?

MALLORY FLETCHER

No, she didn't say that exactly, but come on? You can't tell the difference between a man and a homo in bed? There's no way she didn't know.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

There has been talk in congress about making it a criminal offense to work while infected with the virus. If this bill is passed, doctors, social workers, teachers, counselors and journalists alike -- that are infected with the virus -- will all be at risk of losing their licenses and their jobs. Where do you stand on this bill?

BRIANNA FLETCHER

Well // I mean...

MALLORY FLETCHER

Ab-so-lutely. It is unbelievably irresponsible for those people to be operating while infected with a deadly virus. They could be spreading it to more and more people all over.

BRIANNA FLETCHER

I mean that's how this thing spreads right? From stranger to stranger? There's still so much we don't know. If we can limit the amount of exposure -- if we can contain it, less and less people will wake up to find the devil knocking on their door.

NEWS ANCHOR 2

Very well said. Now again we would like to reiterate to all homosexual men watching on here tonight. This is the advice of our congressman and our top scientists on the case. Please, for the sake of those around you. Put an end to your homosexual activities, and surely this virus will go away in time. This has been your daily plague update. Chloe, back to you.

(Blackout.)

SCENE THREE

(Jason, in dim lighting, is still sitting on the couch, talking to the Therapist. His words are inaudible.)

(Lights up on Samantha with her coat and purse and Wayne as they enter off to the side. Samantha confronts the Therapist's secretary, Sarah, who is sitting behind a desk.)

WAYNE

Sam. Please. Let's just go home and finish talking // about this.

SAMANTHA

We have finished our conversation. Now, I need answers.

WAYNE

Sam, wait.

SAMANTHA

(to Sarah)

Where is she? Is she in there?

SARAH

Yes, but she's with a client at the // moment... You can't...

SAMANTHA

I don't care.

(Samantha begins to walk towards the office, when Wayne grabs her arm.)

WAYNE

Samantha, no!

SARAH

Ma'am you can't go in there.

SAMANTHA

Let go of me.

WAYNE

I understand you're angry with me.

SAMANTHA

Oh, you understand? Thank the universe for such an understanding husband. // Let go! Let me go!

WAYNE

Yes. I understand. I messed up. But running in there screaming and hollering is not // going to help, Samantha.

SAMANTHA

// Wayne, I swear to God... //

WAYNE

Do not go in there!

(Samantha turns toward Wayne.)

SAMANTHA

(snapping)

What exactly are you going to do, Wayne? Huh? You followed me all the way up here, I assume to make some grand gesture in the hopes of saving our marriage, so go ahead.

(beat)

Go ahead! Come on, Wayne, don't leave us in suspense. What do you plan to say -- what do you plan to do that's going to fix this?

(A moment. Wayne can't think of anything to say.)

Let me go.

SARAH

The hour's almost up. If you could just wait...

(Samantha rips away from Wayne and storms into the office. Lights down on Wayne.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lights up on Jason in the Therapist office. Samantha walks in, ignoring Jason, and begins yelling at the Therapist.)

SAMANTHA

I don't want to be here any longer than I have to, so I'm not going to ask you more than once.

THERAPIST (OFF)

Samantha. I'm with a client. You can't // just...

SAMANTHA

I don't give a shit what's going on over here. My marriage is destroyed and you may very well have played a part. So answer this for me. Did you know?

THERAPIST (OFF)

(hesitant)

I... Samantha--

SAMANTHA

(shock)

You did know. You knew?

(A moment.)

JASON

I can leave.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Jason, I apologize for the disturbance. We can finish this on another day. I do sincerely apologize.

JASON

Don't worry about it Doc. See you next week.

(Jason grabs his things and leaves.)

THERAPIST (OFF)

Samantha... I need you to understand.//

SAMANTHA

No, this is not how we solve this. You are not going to disrespect me any further. Stop hiding behind that desk. Come around and face me. I am not your client, do not treat me like one.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST

Fine.

(A moment. Footsteps are heard. Chloe enters the stage, arms crossed, facing Samantha.)

(Lights up on Wayne outside the office. Jason enters. He sees Wayne.)

JASON

Wayne?

(Wayne turns around.)

WAYNE

Jason. Wha... what are you doing here?

THERAPIST

Sam, you can't be here.

WAYNE

You can't be here.

SAMANTHA

Why didn't you tell me?

JASON

Excuse me?

THERAPIST

Samantha, first and foremost, I need you to understand that my priority is my job. And my job's priority are my clients. I work for them. Not for their spouses.

SAMANTHA

No, that's right. But you do work for their whores.

JASON

I go where I want, thank you. What are *you* doing here? You following me or something?

WAYNE

No, I'm not following you. I'm -- You know what? Forget it. I can't deal with your mess right now. I have more important things to do.

THERAPIST

I'm not going to do this back and forth with you.

JASON

My mess?

SAMANTHA

Are you serious?

JASON

My mess?

THERAPIST **WAYNE**

Yes! Yes!

WAYNE

None of this would have happened if it weren't for you. It was you that started this. Not me.

JASON

Well you had plenty of opportunity to stop, but you ain't wanna stop did you? You were all for it // from the very beginning.

THERAPIST

From the very beginning, when I agreed to be his therapist, I told you. We're still friends, but my job comes first. I'm not breaking my oath to out your husband to you. And you *did* cause trouble -- you interrupted a session with a client.

SAMANTHA

Whatever drugs he's addicted to -- whatever suicidal thoughts he's having -- he'll survive missing the last 10 minutes of his therapy session.

THERAPIST

Wow. You haven't even the slightest idea what he's going through and you can't possibly think his problems are bigger than yours. Why must your issues always take center stage?

SAMANTHA

He screwed someone else! Does that not matter?

WAYNE

You fucked some guy and gave me the plague. Am I wrong to be upset about that?

JASON

First off, you are not the one to be giving me shit about cheating. You got a wife at home right now that's probably dealing with the same plague that *you* gave *her*. Second, I already told you, I ain't fucking cheat on you.

WAYNE

Oh you didn't screw somebody else // at that Christmas party?

JASON

No, Wayne. I didn't.

WAYNE

I don't believe you.

JASON

There's more than one way to get the virus Wayne. It's not all sexual.

SAMANTHA

Who was it?

WAYNE

What's his name?

JASON

What?

THERAPIST

What?

SAMANTHA

Who was it? Who did he cheat on me with?

WAYNE

His name. What was his name?

JASON

Wayne, come on now.

THERAPIST

Samantha, please.

SAMANTHA

(tearful)

No! Fuck your therapist hippocratic oath bullshit. I want to know. You've been keeping secrets for God knows how long. That's over now. So you tell me her name. Now! Who is she?

(A moment.)

THERAPIST

Oh my gosh. He didn't tell you.

SAMANTHA

No, he didn't tell me. He couldn't get it out. He said he was having an affair and that you said it would be best to tell me sooner rather than later. So since *you* know, I'd like to hear *you* say it. What's her name? Is she from the office? Do they work together?

SAMANTHA

Tell me.

WAYNE

Tell me!

JASON

What should I do, lie? I told you the truth, but you don't wanna hear it. You want me to be in the wrong so bad, when really I'm not the one with the problem. That was all you baby. You can't accept yourself so now you gotta push me away. Like all the gay is gonna leave with me when you can't see me no more. You know what? Fuck you.

(Jason walks toward Wayne.)

Wake the fuck up Wayne. You need to figure out what you want. Fast.

(Jason begins to walk away.)

WAYNE

Jason, wait.

THERAPIST

You need to talk to your husband.

WAYNE

I'm sorry!

SAMANTHA

That is not the answer I want to hear.

JASON

It's a little too late for sorry.

THERAPIST

It's the only answer I can give.

WAYNE

Wait, just wait.

(Jason stops.)

Just let me say this.

(pause)

There are very few things that I know for sure. I know that I love you. I know that I hate to see you hurt. I know that I'm the one that hurt you, and for that I am so, so sorry.

SAMANTHA

You know, I expected you to just be forward with me.

WAYNE

It's scary for me to love you. It's terrifying. And I'm still trying to figure out how to be okay with my fear because one thing I do know is that I'm going to need you. I-I do. I need you to still be around.

SAMANTHA

After everything we've been through.

WAYNE

And with everything we're going to face, I wanna do it with you around.

SAMANTHA

We were friends.

WAYNE

Before all of this got so complicated, we were really good friends. I just hope... maybe...

(Wayne takes a hold of Jason's hand.)

THERAPIST

We still can be.

WAYNE

Just that. Just friends.

(A moment. Samantha takes a moment to think. Jason and Wayne gaze at each other, Wayne giving a half smile.)

SAMANTHA

No.

(Lights down on Samantha as she walks out.)

JASON

No.

(Samantha walks out of the office to see Jason kissing Wayne. Wayne's back is to her. Jason pulls away. He doesn't react to Samantha coming out of the office.)

Goodbye, Wayne.

(Jason exits. A moment. Wayne turns to see Samantha. He's in shock. Before he can say anything, she turns back into the office. Wayne follows her.)

WAYNE

Sam.

(Samantha sits down on the couch. She is silent, thinking to herself. Wayne kneels in front of the couch, begging.)

No, no no no. Sam, please listen to me. Samantha, it's not... // that wasn't what you saw... we weren't... I can explain. Just let me explain. Just hear me out, and this will all be-- look at me. Samantha. Please, will you look at me? Can you look at me?

THERAPIST

// Wayne, what are you... Sam? //

(Wayne grabs Samantha's hands. She rips away from him.)

WAYNE

I'm sorry. Okay? I know I fucked up, I know. But we can figure this out.

(beat)

Samantha please talk to me.

SAMANTHA

Get away from me.

THERAPIST

Wayne... Sam...

(Samantha stands and walks away. Wayne follows.)

WAYNE

No, I wanna stay. I can stay and we can talk about all of this. Sam, I promise we can work through this. I can figure this out. I can fix this. Sam, I love--

(Suddenly she turns around and slaps him. Chloe gasps. Wayne holds his face. A moment. Samantha stands still, turned away from him. She will not look at him. Wayne then silently grabs his things and leaves. Chloe walks over to Samantha and attempts to put her hand on her shoulder. Samantha flinches and walks away. She sits on the couch. A moment.)

SAMANTHA

How long did you know?

THERAPIST

(sigh, hesitation)

Not that long. I can quite literally count the hours I've known on one hand.

(A moment.)

What did he say exactly?

SAMANTHA

I don't even know, he was blubbering and crying like a toddler for most of it. He said that he had fallen in love with someone else. That he had been having an affair... For the past 2 years... and his heart had simply gotten the better of him. Said it like a real romantic -- like it was a goddamn poem. There was more effort there than in our wedding vows.

THERAPIST

And that's all? Just that he was having an affair.

SAMANTHA

Yup. I think he wanted to skip over the whole "you married a fag" part.

(Samantha stands, pacing. She winces in pain and begins to take off her heels.)

THERAPIST

(snapping)

Samantha.

SAMANTHA

What? Oh please. Should I apologize? I'm sorry, I left my manners at home. They're in the trash next to my reputation, my marriage, and my flat fucking shoes!

(Samantha kicks off her heels. It slides across the floor as she resumes pacing.)

THERAPIST

Why don't we take some deep breaths?

SAMANTHA

Do not therapize me right now. I have a right to be angry.

THERAPIST

I don't disagree. You have plenty to be upset about.

(A moment.)

You really had no idea? I know you must have sensed something.

SAMANTHA

(sigh, shakes head)

I thought he might've relapsed. I noticed he started lying a lot. I'd catch him in a lie and he'd do cartwheels trying to cover his tracks. He started buying me flowers -- completely unprovoked. Made me breakfast in the mornings. Showered me with compliments. All the things a guiltless husband normally wouldn't do.

THERAPIST

If you thought he might've started drinking again, why not say something? Get him help.

SAMANTHA

I thought he was taking care of it. He started seeing you *twice* a week. He was going to meetings every other day -- I thought he was getting control over the situation.

THERAPIST

He told you he saw me twice a week?

(A moment. Samantha slowly realizes.)

SAMANTHA

You two don't meet twice a week?

(A moment.)

So when he says he's coming here... he's really going to see his...

(A moment. Samantha falls back into the couch.)

God, I'm an idiot.

THERAPIST

Samantha--

SAMANTHA

How did I not piece it together?

THERAPIST

// Don't put the blame on yourself. //

SAMANTHA

(tearful)

I'm his wife. I felt it. I knew something was off but I didn't push. I should've pushed...

THERAPIST

// You're not the one at fault here. //

SAMANTHA

(tearful)

I thought things were getting better between us. I thought we had finally figured it out.

THERAPIST

Samantha. You two have been married for 5 years. Together for nearly 10. Don't you think... I mean... how long do you think it's supposed to take married couples to "figure it out"?

SAMANTHA

It's complicated.

THERAPIST

No kidding.

SAMANTHA

Marriage isn't a "Happily Ever After". It's not like in books and movies. It takes work and-and-and sacrifice.

THERAPIST

How much work? How much sacrifice?

SAMANTHA

(snapping)

As much as is necessary.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST

Okay.

SAMANTHA

"Okay...", what?

THERAPIST

Just, “Okay”.

(A moment.)

Can I ask you a question?

SAMANTHA

Is it a therapist question or...?

THERAPIST

Why didn’t you push?

SAMANTHA

I told you. I thought he was handling it.

THERAPIST

But you said you should’ve pushed.

SAMANTHA

Yes, I see that *now*. But I didn’t before.

THERAPIST

So why didn’t you before?

SAMANTHA

Because I thought he was handling -- are you not listening to what I’m saying?

THERAPIST

(sigh, annoyed)

Samantha, I’m leading to something here.

SAMANTHA

Then lead to it. I don’t understand what you want me to say.

THERAPIST

Fine. Wayne has told me that he’s feeling... unaccepted... and dismissed by you.

SAMANTHA

(scoffs, laughs)

Oh poor baby.

THERAPIST

Samantha, please. An ounce of compassion. It’s all I ask.

(A moment. Samantha crosses her arms.)

SAMANTHA

Go ahead.

THERAPIST

Wayne can feel the shame you cast toward him in a glance. He feels your silent judgement to the point where he no longer feels comfortable sharing his personal with you. And it all goes back to his addiction. Your refusal to acknowledge his past makes Wayne feel as though you don't fully // accept him.

SAMANTHA

Acknowledge his past? What the hell // does that even mean?

THERAPIST

Let me finish, please. Do you think it's normal to be uncomfortable in a room alone with your husband? Did you once think that maybe there some kind of giant, elephant-shaped beast in the room that needed addressing?

SAMANTHA

Honestly, even if I knew what it is you were talking about, I still don't think I could answer your question. What -- is he blaming *me*? Is Wayne saying this is all my fault?

THERAPIST

That is not what he's saying.

SAMANTHA

It's what *you're* saying.

THERAPIST

I'm trying to make sense of your refusal to recognize who your husband is. Samantha, I see that you've been hurting, but it's not just from the news today. It's a deep pain that you've been feeling for a long, long time. It's there and I'm not sure if you even know that it's there.

SAMANTHA

Chloe, I don't need my brain to be picked apart right now.

THERAPIST

I think you do. Whatever that pain is, it is preventing you from seeing the issue as a whole.

SAMANTHA

Which issue? There are several!

THERAPIST

The issue of understanding that Wayne was just as much an addict before, as he is now. That part of him never went away.

SAMANTHA

No, Wayne is nothing like how he was before.

THERAPIST

You're not understanding // me.

SAMANTHA

No, *you're* not understanding *me*. You weren't there. You weren't around to see how bad it got. I was. You know, when he finally gave it all up... The withdrawal nearly killed him. He was in detox for what felt like months. He was having seizures, hallucinating -- whispering to a dead relative no one else could see. The entire time I didn't eat. I couldn't sleep. All I did was worry for him. The nurses told me at some point I fainted and they had to give me a cookie from the vending machine, and fluids in an IV, but honestly I don't even remember falling. It took him six days to come back to me. Six days. But I was there every step of the way. *I* was there. Not you. Not... *him*.

(beat)

And I don't think he ever fully recovered. It's been 8 years and he's just never quite been the same. He used to walk with a bit of tilt. He'd lean a little to his left -- drunk or sober. Now, he's fully balanced. Sometimes when greeting people, he puts out his left hand instead of his right, even though he's always been right handed. He doesn't talk as loud anymore. But he's not just quiet in the sense of volume but presence, like his spirit is... not broken... but just... smaller. But I love him for him because he got better for me. I love the new sober man that I married. And you can't convince me that that's a bad thing to love him for.

THERAPIST

Don't you think he should be able to discuss his process with his wife?

SAMANTHA

Why? Why should he?

THERAPIST

(looking for an answer)

Because... he loves you.

(Samantha scoffs, chuckles.)

Because you're his wife. Your words have weight to them.

SAMANTHA

He had an affair, Chloe. No matter how you spin it, that's not love. No, he ruined that. So I'm sorry, but I don't have any sympathy or compassion for that man at the moment. Not an ounce.

(A moment.)

THERAPIST

Are you going to divorce him?

(long pause.)

I understand it will take some time.

(pause)

Out of curiosity... what do you plan to say? You know eventually, you two will need to speak to one another. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But soon. And I'm not a messenger. I'm not going to get involved in whatever decision you two make for your future. So is there anything you want to say to him?

(A moment.)

SAMANTHA

What's he like? Jason.

THERAPIST

That's what you plan to ask him?

SAMANTHA

No, I'm asking *you*.

THERAPIST

(sigh, slightly annoyed)

Why?

SAMANTHA

I want to get to know the man my husband risked everything for. I want to see if he was worth it. Is he nice? Is he funny? What does he do? Does he have a job -- A good job?

THERAPIST

Of course he has a job. You know Sam, I don't think this is very healthy.

SAMANTHA

You think I care about "healthy" right now?

(A pause.)

THERAPIST

He's a librarian. And a poet. They met at an AA meeting when eventually Jason began sharing his poetry with Wayne. One thing led to another... and now you're in my office.

SAMANTHA

Just like that? That easy.

THERAPIST

That was the short version. And I'm not trying to make excuses for Wayne, but it wasn't exactly // "easy" for him.

SAMANTHA

So what did Wayne tell you exactly? Is my husband a queer now?

THERAPIST

He never explicitly stated that, no.

SAMANTHA

But he does sleep with men.

THERAPIST

As far as I know, Jason was the only one.

SAMANTHA

Really...?

THERAPIST

Really.

(Samantha pauses for a moment, thinking.)

SAMANTHA

He never mentioned a woman?

THERAPIST

No... Why?

(Spotlight on stage. No one stands there.)

SAMANTHA

Just remembering something.

(A woman slowly walks on stage towards the spotlight.)

Towards the end of February, I ran into a woman standing at my door as I was coming home from running errands. She knew Wayne so I thought... maybe... but it was explained away later, so I chose to forget about it. But I remember it was a strange interaction.

(Chloe exits. J.J. walks into the spotlight and knocks on the door. She's facing away from the audience. She calls out to Wayne.)

J.J

C'mon, Wayne.

(under her breath)

Open up you cheating bastard.

(She bangs again. Samantha steps into her spotlight, wearing a coat, and carrying several bags of groceries.)

C'mon, Wayne! Wayne!

SAMANTHA

Um... Hello!

(J.J. turns. A moment.)

J.J

Hi.

SAMANTHA

Are you looking for my husband?

J.J

Samantha?

SAMANTHA

Yes. That is me. Who are you?

J.J

Jacky. I'm a friend of Wayne's. I have his wallet.

(She holds up the wallet. Awkward silence.)

Is he home?

SAMANTHA

Well I guess not if he hasn't come to the door.
(checking watch)
He should be on his way home now, however.

J.J

Alright. Well... give this to him? Tell him J.J. dropped it off for him.

SAMANTHA

Sure.

(Samantha reaches out to grab the wallet when she drops a bag.)

Shit. Um...

J.J

You need some help with that?

SAMANTHA

No, I'm alright, thank you. I just // have to... Shit.

J.J

You sure? I can carry something.

(Samantha drops another bag. She gives in.)

SAMANTHA

You don't mind?

(J.J. grabs a few bags and the two head inside.)

Thank you so much. You're very kind. Let me get the door.

(Once inside, they place down the bags. They talk as Samantha puts groceries away. J.J. helps.)

J.J

Where should I...?

SAMANTHA

Over there is fine, thank you.

J.J

(holding up a can of food)
Mind if I...? I can help I mean. I don't got nowhere to be.

SAMANTHA
Sure... sure. Cans go in the cabinet to your right.

(Long pause as the two put items away.)
So um... what department are you in? Are you with Wayne's? Or are you the new secretary -- Wayne told me they were looking for somebody new.

J.J
I'm sorry?

SAMANTHA
You... I assumed you knew my husband from work. You two don't work together?

J.J
(laughs)
Do I look like Wall Street to you?

SAMANTHA
(awkward laugh)
No, not exactly. But where else would you two have met?

J.J
We met in AA actually.

SAMANTHA
Oh. You're an addict.

(A moment.)

J.J
I promise I don't bite.

SAMANTHA
No! I wasn't... I um... I'm sorry -- I've never met any of um... Wayne's... friends... from his meetings.

(A moment. Samantha turns and continues unpacking grocery bags.)

J.J
Sum'm wrong?

SAMANTHA
(looking at her watch)
Wayne's not back yet. I wonder what's keeping him.

J.J

I'm talking 'bout me here. I'm making you uncomfortable or sum'm? // Cause I'll leave...

SAMANTHA

No. No. No. No, you're fine. Really, I could use the help.

(J.J. doesn't say anything. She just stares. Samantha stares back, and caves.)

I'm not judging you. I'm not. I just... I don't know -- ever since Wayne stopped drinking, I don't know how it happened, but the very mention of alcohol or addiction of any kind just makes me anxious. I mean I haven't held a glass of wine in almost 10 years. I can't even go down the liquor aisle without my fight or flight kicking in, // so...

J.J

// Okay. //

SAMANTHA

I'm not judging you. I promise.

J.J

Okay.

SAMANTHA

Okay. Glad we cleared that up.

(They continue with groceries. J.J. reaches inside a bag and pulls out baby clothes and a pacifier.)

J.J

Oh? Um... I'm sorry. Are you pregnant?

(A moment.)

SAMANTHA

Oh. Um... no. No, I'm not pregnant. But we're trying again -- Wayne and I. I was just walking about the store today...

(taking the baby shirt)

...and I saw this hanging up. On sale. I saw it and I just felt like I needed to have it. It's a little silly, I know. Buying baby clothes before I'm even pregnant.

J.J

No it's not. Really. It's not silly at all.

(Samantha smiles and steps away.)

Wayne spoke about your first kid at a meeting once. Only once, but I remember. He knew how badly you wanted to be a mom. I'm sorry for your loss. I know it was years ago, but that kinda pain -- that shit lingers, I know.

SAMANTHA

Thank you. I appreciate it. I have a lot of hope about it. I'm a pretty pessimistic person, but something just... feels a little different this time? I don't know how to explain it.

(beat)

Do you have children?

J.J

No. I don't.

SAMANTHA

Do you want children?

J.J

(hesitation)

I don't know. I gotta get my shit together first. Then I'll give a little parasite some thought.

(beat)

How does Wayne feel about it?

SAMANTHA

Oh he's -- he's excited. I know he is. Wayne's always wanted a family.

J.J

Right. Well I wish you two luck.

(A long moment. J.J. is clearly battling with herself internally. She hold the pacifier in her hand, staring at it. Then she makes a decision.)

Samantha, I need // to tell you...

(Wayne enters in a hurry. Samantha hides the baby shirt and pacifier.)

WAYNE

So sorry I'm late. I had to walk... And...

(sees J.J.)

Hi.

J.J

Hi Wayne.

(Samantha kisses Wayne "hello".)

SAMANTHA

Hi honey.

WAYNE

(to J.J.)

What are you doing here?

J.J

Left your wallet. At *AA*.

WAYNE

(realizing)

Right! Thank you. I've been looking all over for this actually. Thank you.

J.J

No problem.

(beat)

Well I'm gonna get goin'. Y'all have a good one.

SAMANTHA

Thanks again for the help Jacky.

(J.J. doesn't say anything, and walks off stage. Wayne exits as well. We are back in the Therapist Office.)

(to Therapist)

And then she left. And that was it. Never saw or heard from her again.

(beat)

I wonder if she knew. About my husband... and Jason.

THERAPIST

Would you have wanted her to tell you if she did?

SAMANTHA

I would want to know. I'm not exactly picky about who gets to tell me earth-shattering news. I'd rather not be the clueless wife, thank you.

THERAPIST

So there's no difference between Wayne telling you versus J.J?

SAMANTHA
Only difference is that she would've actually been able to tell me.

THERAPIST
Are you talking about me now or your husband?

SAMANTHA
Oh don't tell me you're playing victim too.

THERAPIST
Be honest with me Sam. Are you going to tell me that our friendship is perfectly in tact -- with everything that I am telling you // right now?

SAMANTHA
You were keeping secrets.

THERAPIST
I was following the law. I'm sorry I don't hold our long-drawn friendship above my license for psychiatric // treatment.

SAMANTHA
(offended)
Long-drawn? What are // you saying?

THERAPIST
Yes! You know, I'm really thinking about it... I don't remember the last time we spoke. Like really spoke -- how friends normally do. Sure, we send each other Christmas cards and sing "Happy Birthday" to each other's answering machines, but I don't think we have had one genuine conversation in years.

SAMANTHA
That's not true.

THERAPIST
It isn't? The last time I saw you in person was at your 30th birthday.

SAMANTHA
Yeah, that you organized.

THERAPIST
No. Your mother organized that. She invited me as an afterthought. You spent the whole night with Wayne and your family so I just left early. And I'm not trying to make you choose between friends and family. I know family will always comes first for // you...

SAMANTHA

Then why are you angry?

THERAPIST

I'm not.

(beat)

I'm really not. I'm just making a point.

SAMANTHA

And that is?

THERAPIST

Maybe it's not my fault. Maybe your marriage and Wayne's affair has nothing to do with me. Maybe our friendship was already over before today.

(A moment.)

SAMANTHA

You are so selfish.

(Samantha begins to grab her things.)

THERAPIST

No, I'm just tired. I'm so tired, Samantha. I'm sick of playing tug-of-war with you and your husband. I should have never taken him on as my client because I knew this would happen. I knew one day I'd get caught in the crossfire and I knew you'd blame me for it. You know, I took him on my service for *you*?

(Samantha stops.)

You were ruining yourself for him. He needed help and he didn't want it. But you gave it to him anyway. You love blindly. Undeservingly. You turned down opportunities, jobs, pushed away your friends for him. Ask any one of our friends. We all watched you self destruct.

(beat)

Wayne tells me you went back to school. That's *amazing*, Sam. I'm *so* happy that you're finally finishing your degree.

SAMANTHA

I had every intention to come back.

THERAPIST

But leaving made it all that much harder didn't it? You realized too late -- you can't just jump back into the work like you haven't been absent for 10 years. You derailed yourself to get Wayne back on track.

SAMANTHA

// I'm done with this. //

THERAPIST

Making sure *he* was taken care of, you forgot to care for yourself.

SAMANTHA

I'm going home.

(Samantha begins to leave.)

THERAPIST

Have you figured out what you plan to say to him yet?

(Samantha stops. Lights on Wayne in the background holding flowers.)

He's probably waiting for you at the dinner table. He's probably stopped by a florist on his way back and bought a bouquet. He knows flowers won't solve anything, but he genuinely can't think of a better gesture than flowers. He's probably practicing his speech right now, about how you should forgive him, and how the three of you can make it work. And you know his memory is shit, so he's probably writing it all down on a piece of paper. He'll mess up and start over, again and again, trying so hard to get the words right -- for you. Because he loves you.

(Wayne walks off with the flowers.)

But Samantha... a dozen roses cannot match 10 years of sacrifice. He has done far too little and treated you far too poorly for you to love him as much as you do.

(A moment. Samantha turns to Chloe.)

SAMANTHA

I don't expect you to understand how love feels when there's no one waiting for you at home.

THERAPIST

Is this what love is for you? Blind loyalty?

(A moment. Samantha leaves. Chloe holds back tears. She collects herself and begins to walk off when suddenly Samantha comes back. Samantha walks straight to the couch and sits. Chloe then walks over to Samantha and they embrace on the couch. They cry together.)

SAMANTHA

I'm sorry.

THERAPIST

Don't apologize. *None* of this is your fault.

(beat)

I'm sorry this has happened to you. The world is an unlucky place to land. The worst news is delivered to the best people. The best people often don't have a happy ending. I know how badly you wanted yours. I know how badly you wanted a life with Wayne.

(beat)

Too often love brings pain. Too often love is shot down where she stands. Love is the strongest thing in the world, yet holding her makes us fragile. Love often breaks. People often hurt us. But every day we must still choose to love. People are soft and violent. Passionate and frightened.

(Chloe cups Samantha's face.)

Remember what I'm saying. Find the love you deserve. Find it and cherish it.

(Samantha nods. Chloe hugs her again. A moment. Chloe then stands and walks over to her desk. Samantha holds her stomach.)

SAMANTHA

Would it be alright if I stayed with you for a few days?

THERAPIST

Of course. Let me get my things.

(beat)

I'll have to tell Sarah to clear my schedule for the rest of the day. Then I can take you home.

(Chloe moves around, cleaning up.)

SAMANTHA

I still don't know what I'm going to say to him.

THERAPIST

You don't have know now.

(A moment.)

SAMANTHA

Wayne doesn't want to be a father, does he?

(A moment.)

THERAPIST

No. No, he does not.

(A moment.)

SAMANTHA

My father didn't want me either. He and my mother fought over it for years -- whether or not I really belonged to him. He said Mother wasn't always faithful. He was an awful man and an awful father. But my father nonetheless. He didn't have much of a choice.

(beat)

Do you think Wayne will make a good father?

(Blackout.)

SCENE FIVE

(Lights up on Jason in his apartment at his phone. He stares at it for a second, then picks up the phone. He rolls up his sleeve and dials a number written on his arm. The dial tone rings. It rings again. And again. And again. Then an older Monse enters. She picks up the phone)

MONSE

Hello?

(Jason hangs up. He stands, freaking out, and take a moment to calm down. Monse exits. After a moment, Jason dials the number again. The phone rings and rings. Monse enters again and answers the phone.)

...Hello?

JASON

(hesitation)

H-hello?

MONSE

Hi.

(beat)

Can I help you?

JASON

(flustered)

I um... Excuse me.

(beat)

I'm looking for... I'm looking for... someone.

MONSE

Does this someone have a name?

JASON

Um... yes.

(beat)

I... I...

MONSE

Are you sure you have the correct number?

(Monse's husband enters and takes the phone.)

HUSBAND

Mon, let me talk to them.

(beat)

Hello, who is this?

JASON

It's um...

(long beat)

You know what? I think I do have the wrong number. Have a nice day.

(Jason hangs up the phone. Lights go out on Monse and her husband. A moment. Jason pulls out his doctors report, staring at it. He wipes tears away. Suddenly, a knock at the door. Jason quickly puts the report in his pocket and makes his way over to the door. He opens the door. Lights on Wayne in the doorway holding Jason's flowers.)

WAYNE

Happy Valentines Day, my love.

(Jason hugs Wayne before he can finish his sentence. Wayne laughs.)

This is a nice // greeting.

JASON

You're soaked. Did you walk through the snow?

WAYNE

I did. I couldn't // get a taxi. But I'm alright.

JASON

Oh my God, baby, you're freezing.

WAYNE

I'm fine. Really. Don't worry about it.

(beat)

Did you miss me?

JASON

Of course.

(They kiss. Wayne offers the flowers.)

They're gorgeous. Thank you.

(Jason takes the flowers and moves to put them away. Wayne follows.)

But I told you, you don't have to get me anything.

WAYNE

They're just flowers. You won't accept flowers?

JASON

Fine. I'll accept these, but nothing more.

WAYNE

You sure? I think you're gonna like this one.

(Jason turns around. Wayne holds a small box in his hand. A moment.)

JASON

// Wayne. //

WAYNE

Wait, I'm sorry. I'm doing this out of order. Sit down.

(Wayne puts the box in his pocket. Jason makes his way over to the couch. Wayne stands, clearly nervous, but vibrating with excitement.)

Okay. Jason.

(A long moment.)

JASON

Wayne.

(beat)

Wayne, what's // going on?

WAYNE

Hold on um... Sorry. It's so weird. My mouth won't move. I-I've practiced this like a million times, and I've done // it before I just...

JASON

Hey, you know what? Why don't I go first?

WAYNE

You got me something?

(Jason stands and walks offstage. He reenters holding a plate of pancakes.)

JASON

For you.

WAYNE

Pancakes?

JASON

They're your favorite, right?
(beat, worried)
Right??

WAYNE

Yes! // They are.

JASON

Okay, good! I thought you might be hungry when you got here, so I figured... They're probably cold by now but...

WAYNE

Why are they...?

JASON

They're heart shaped.

(Wayne tilts his head.)

WAYNE

Oh! I see.

JASON

They're red velvet.

WAYNE

Okay. I wasn't going to ask about the color, but I'm glad you said something.

(They laugh.)

JASON

J.J. gave me a recipe.

WAYNE

Well tell her I said thank you. And thank *you*.

(Wayne kisses Jason's cheek.)

Now it's your turn.

(Jason sits down, setting the pancakes to the side. A moment, as Wayne gathers up the courage.)

Okay. So I've broken this up into 3 parts.

JASON

(laughing)

You're giving me my gift in parts?

WAYNE

It's the best way I can remember all of it.

(beat)

Okay, okay. First part. Flowers and a speech.

(beat)

Jason. I've never been more happy to be alive my entire life. Being with you has shifted my whole world axis in a way that I truly believe was necessary for me to be happy. I smile when I think of you. I count the days by the second until I can see you again. I don't see you as often as you might like. And this gift won't make up for lost time, I know. I know these past few years have been hard on us. More so on you than I, and I wish I could somehow take that hurt away from you... but I can't. I've fallen short a few more times than I'd like to admit, but today marks a change. When New Years came I gained a new perspective. And I think now I finally know what it is I want from my life.

(beat)

It's you. I want you. More than anything in this world.

(beat)

Part 2: The poem.

JASON

You didn't.

(Wayne pulls a paper out of his pocket smiling. Jason can barely hide his excitement.)

WAYNE

It's not much. It's very short and I... I'm just gonna read it.

(clears throat)

I met him where Pain and Hope coexist.

The defining piece of our love.
Like a barefoot waltz on colorful broken glass,
He thrills and excites me.
My Love.

(Wayne puts away the paper.)

JASON

Wayne... that was beautiful.

WAYNE

And last but not least, Part 3.

JASON

Wayne, wait.

(A moment. Jason reaches for the paper in his pocket.)

WAYNE

What is it?

(long beat, concerned)

What is it?

(Wayne moves over to Jason and sits with him on the couch. Jason wipes tears from his eyes.)

JASON

(tearful)

Um... you know what? It can wait. I don't wanna lose this -- this moment.

(Jason holds his hand over his heart.)

I'm just so happy. I don't wanna lose this feeling.

WAYNE

Is it too much? I knew it might be overkill. All of this is overwhelming isn't it? Part 3 can // wait.

JASON

(happy tears)

No! You worked so hard trying to get this right. And I'm ruining it with my tears. I'm sorry. Go. Finish.

(A moment.)

WAYNE

Okay, well... this is the big one. So brace yourself. And close your eyes.

(Jason closes his eyes. A long pause. Wayne walks around the couch and stands behind Jason. He pulls a necklace out of the small box and puts it around Jason's neck.)

I know that legally we can't actually get married... but I'm hoping this can be our own version of that.

(Jason's eyes shoot open. He turns to face Wayne, then looks down at the necklace.)

I'm leaving Samantha. I haven't told her yet, but my mind is set. Like I said. I know what I want. I want you.

(A long moment.)

All done. No other parts to the gift.

(A long moment.)

Jason. Can you please say something?

(A moment. Jason silently stands and hugs Wayne.)

JASON

Thank you. For everything.

(Music plays. "Fools Rush In" by Frank Sinatra play softly. Wayne and Jason begin to sway back and forth to the music. We watch them dance as the lights fade to Blackout.)

THE END