

**WARM WIND IN CHINA**

a play in two acts

by

KENT STETSON

Charlottetown Draft  
(revised)

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## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

When Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Lester B. Pearson slammed bedroom doors on the noses of the nation, Canadian Gay Men came out of the closet in a celebration of pride and newly found self-worth. We had hardly drawn our first breath of fresh air when we found we'd moved out of the closet into a ghetto. With political determination and help from increasing numbers of enlightened individuals we began to dismantle the ghetto walls. AIDS struck and stronger, higher walls rose around us with alarming speed. Stone by stone, rumour by rumour, death by bone chilling death we found ourselves encircled. Terrible social cruelties emerged; teachers lost jobs, men too weak to care for themselves lost friends, relatives, apartments - basic human needs were snatched away without a second thought. The virus became more important than the humanity it destroyed. We were on our own. This time we knew who we were. We rallied, and informed more by compassion than fear, we began again. Stories of heroism emerged from behind viral ghetto walls. WARM WIND IN CHINA is dedicated to friends and lovers and those who seek to understand.

KS, 07/01/1988

WARM WIND IN CHINA is the first in a trilogy of two act plays called THE SURVIVOR CYCLE. QUEEN OF THE CADILLAC and SWEET MAGDALENA complete the trilogy.

THE SURVIVOR CYCLE is dedicated, with love, to the memory of

ERIC STEINER

SPECIAL THANKS: Dennis Lee, Susan Perly, Bill Glassco, Arthur Motyer, Robert Doyle, Joan Orenstein, Michael Corkum, Beverly Mills-Stetson, Copthorne MacDonald, Flora Buchan, Carl Drew, Leigha Lee-Browne, Wanda Graham, John Dartt, Cindy Cowan, Scott Burke, Larry LeClair, Roy Cameron, Bill Carr, Dr. Bob Frederickson, Father Bob Petit, Dr. Joanne Langley, John Dunsworth, Rand Gaynor, Niki Lipman, Tom Kerr, Richard Ouzounian and others whose friendship and generosity helped.

PLAYWRIGHT'S WORKSHOP MONTREAL and NEPTUNE THEATRE:

WARM WIND IN CHINA benefited from PLAYWRIGHT'S WORKSHOP MONTREAL's script development program. Michael Springate, PWM's Artistic Director, served as dramaturg. I am indebted to Michael. He gave WWIC its first real break. I am equally grateful to Eric Steiner. Subsequent to PWM, they challenged me to up the ante when pressure was applied to pull back. Eric directed the following cast in staged readings at PWM, November 21/22, 1986: Slater, Timothy Webber; Davis, Phillip Prettin; Elna Slater, Sheena Larkin; Jack Slater, Sam LaMarquand. I am grateful for their generosity, and the generosity of the cast members of Neptune Theatre's January 15, 1988 world premiere production at the Sir James Dunne Theatre, Dalhousie Arts Centre, in Halifax Nova Scotia; Timothy Webber (Slater) , Joan Gregson (Elna Slater) , David Renton (Jack Slater) and Peter Krantz (Davis) . Eric Steiner directed, Wanda Graham assisted him, Jane Butler stage managed and Peter Perina designed the sets. Bob Rineholt designed the lighting.

### CHARACTERS:

Davis	Early thirties
Slater	Mid-thirties
Elna Slater	His mother
Jack Slater	His father

TIME AND PLACE: Summer/Autumn 1988. The first Act takes place on a Nova Scotia beach. Act two is set in the intensive care unit of a modern hospital.

ACT 1

*THE BEACH IS BRILLIANT WITH MID-DAY, EARLY JULY SUN. SLATER DIGS A PIT. HE IS LITHE AND MASCULINE, WEARS A LOOSE WHITE COTTON SHORT-SLEEVED SHIRT AND WHITE COTTON PANTS - NO HAT OR CAP, NO SUNGLASSES. HE LOOKS SEAWARD, WATCHES A SWIMMER. HE SMILES, CONSIDERS, THEN MOVES UPSTAGE. HE REMOVES A WALKMAN RECORDER FROM A KNAPSACK, RETURNS TO THE PIT AND RECORDS THE FOLLOWING ENTRY.*

SLATER        Dear Folks; The sun is bright and hot, the sky cloudless. Last winter seems like a bad dream. It is beautiful here; sun, rocks, sea birds - the North Atlantic spreading to the east as far as the eye can see. I'm sorry to have been out of touch for so long.

*HE CONSIDERS, REWINDS AND BEGINS AGAIN.*

SLATER        Dear Folks: I'm sorry to have been out of touch for so long. You've been on my mind lately, so I thought I'd say hello. I have no excuse, really. When you sent Matt this recorder for Christmas, I bet you didn't think I'd commandeer it and make it my own. Well, fortunately for me, unfortunately for Matt, that's exactly what happened. Of course I had to fight him for it. I guess what I'm saying in my round about way is thanks for the walkman. I'm not nuts about recorded announcements of any kind, but it is beautiful here, and I thought you might like some Nova Scotia ambience.

*HE HOLDS THE WALKMAN UP TO THE GULLS.*

SLATER        Nice, eh?

DAVIS         *(off)* Get your ass in here Slater. It's great.

SLATER        Keep it down hot shot. I'm writing a letter. That's my buddy Davis. Remember him? Matt's into rock videos. I caught him sneaking the portable TV to school the other day - trying to make an impression on a girl named Jenny. Likely the same Jenny he said he hated all last term. Now he's driving us nuts. . . me nuts. . . trying to find 'the ultimate present' for her birthday. Ah, the mysteries of youth. I think he's in love. Mom, you wouldn't believe the ocean today. The surface is like glass. Not a ripple. Wow. That was Davis. He must've pushed off from the bottom. He looked like a porpoise smashing through from behind a mirror.

*HE REMOVES TWO SMALL PHOTOS FROM A KNAPSACK, LIGHTS A SMOKE AND LOOKS OUT TO SEA. HE BECOMES CONCERNED, PACES.*

SLATER        Davis? Davis!

DAVIS         *(off - breaks the surface)* Whaaa! This is fantastic, Slater.

*SLATER RE-WINDS.*

SLATER        Dear Dad: Remember me. Remember your love for a small boy before the world fell apart?

*DAVIS APPEARS AND TOWELS OFF. LIKE SLATER, HE IS STRONG AND MASCULINE. SLATER STRETCHES OUT IN THE PIT.*

DAVIS        You can hardly see beneath the surface. Bits of this and that, mostly sea plants. Just pulverized. Buddy at the tavern says these summer storms push warm water in from the Gulf Stream. The east wind'll bite off this huge spiral of murky water, hundreds of miles

across, and pile it on Nova Scotia beaches. Full of life. (*in the midst of several brisk push-ups*) What're you doing smoking?

SLATER           Piss off.

DAVIS            You gotta give the kid a break. He's only ten years old, for Christ's sake.

SLATER           Old enough to know better.

DAVIS            He does know better. It was an accident.

SLATER           You treated it like a joke.

DAVIS            It was a fifteen dollar wind chime, Slater. He felt bad enough as it was.

SLATER           Nobody gives a shit how I feel.

DAVIS            Nobody knows how you feel. I wonder if it's this calm in China.

SLATER           What?

DAVIS            According to Matt, when you feel a breeze someone in China felt the exact same breeze at that exact same moment. He says, "there's only one atmosphere so it's gotta be the same breeze. "

SLATER           Yeah. So?

DAVIS            Don't you like it? I thought you'd like it. I wonder if it's this calm in China. We should have brought him.

SLATER           Yeah, well maybe next time.

DAVIS            It's like glass.

SLATER           He's started shoplifting.

DAVIS            Shoplifting?

SLATER           As in stealing.

DAVIS            Says who?

SLATER           The guy at the corner store.

DAVIS            So what are we going to do about it?

SLATER           Make him pay it back.

DAVIS            Good. I was shaving this morning and this face popped up behind me. He asked me why I didn't look like him. We've got to have another serious talk with that boy. Then he asked if he looks like his mother. He doesn't any more, does he?

SLATER No. He's getting to look more like his dad's side of the family.

DAVIS I told him he was lucky he didn't look like his father.

SLATER Always the smart ass.

DAVIS Beats acting like three out of seven dwarfs. This party is at six, and we gotta be home by four to feed him because "Jenny's mother is a terrible cook and you guys gotta pick up that tape." You ever hear of 'Broken Heads'?

SLATER No.

DAVIS We're dead if we come home without it. I wonder if they're decent. Jesus. The things they push at ten year olds. Shoplifting.

SLATER Yep.

DAVIS No big deal. I went through that. What a rush. The best part was running once you got outside the store.

SLATER You've been running ever since.

DAVIS At least I'm moving. Where have you been for the last six months? What are you doing in that pit? Shoplifting. Maybe I'll give it a try. Appears to be the only way to get your attention lately, short of smashing things. Did you save me a beer? No, no please. Don't get up. I'll help myself.

*DAVIS MOVES TOWARD THE KNAPSACK. SLATER TACKLES HIM, PINS HIM FACE DOWN ON THE SAND.*

SLATER Say Uncle.

DAVIS Uncle! I'll break your face if you twist any fur. . .

SLATER (*twist*) Apologize.

DAVIS C'mon, Slater. Let me up. I said I was sorry.

SLATER Say it again.

DAVIS What do you want, for Christ's sake. Blood?

SLATER Maybe. Say it. Say it, or I'll rip it off and make you eat it.

DAVIS What's got into you?

SLATER Who's got into you?

DAVIS I told you I was sorry. I thought you said you were over it.

SLATER I am over it. I was over it. I will be over it.

DAVIS           Are you finished?

SLATER          Wha. . . ?

DAVIS           How was it for you?

SLATER          I thought you were someone else. . .

*SLATER FALLS BACK ON THE SAND.*

DAVIS           Terrific. Should I close my eyes and think of Springsteen?

*DAVIS COVERS HIM. THEY ARE NOSE TO NOSE.*

DAVIS           Was it something I said?

SLATER          No. Someone else.

DAVIS           I'm sorry.

*HE MOVES TO KISS SLATER. AT THE LAST MOMENT SLATER TURNS AWAY. DAVIS RISES, TAKES SLATER'S EXTENDED HAND, HELPS HIM UP.*

SLATER          Thank you.

DAVIS           You're welcome.

SLATER          You know how long it's been since we were out here?

DAVIS           Two years this month.

SLATER          We used to come every weekend.

DAVIS           Till the fruits took over.

SLATER          Till the fruits took over? Who the hell are you? Arnold fuckin' Schwarzenegger?

DAVIS           *(striking a muscle man pose)* Jah. I sink perhaps I am.

*DAVIS CRUSHES HIS CAN. BEER SPURTS IN A GUSH OF WHITE FOAM. SCHWARZENEGGAR SEGUES INTO SOME DEMENTED EVANGELIST. HE PRESENTS A NEW STRONG MAN POSE ON EACH 'AGAIN' THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING*

DAVIS           I believe. I believe ye must be born again -

SLATER          Praise Jesus.

*SLATER ADJUSTS THE PIT. SAND FLIES TO PUNCTUATE.*

DAVIS           - and again -

SLATER Yes. Yes, Lord.

DAVIS - and again and again and again -

SLATER Yea-ess, oh yea-ess. Praise Jesus.

DAVIS I believe in the second coming. I believe in Andrew David Slater.

SLATER Thank you, thank you.

DAVIS I believe that he will come again. It's been months, Dear Lord in heaven, since this man came. What can it be? A conflagration? A reign of blood? Maybe the clap -

SLATER If it's the clap, I'll know where to look.

DAVIS If it's the clap he will know where to look. Good. Maybe you'll find your 'on' switch when you're rootin' around down there.

*SLATER TWIRLS TWO LENGTHS OF ROPE.*

SLATER So. Who ties up who?

DAVIS I don't know. We never got into this.

SLATER Tell you what. I'll flip you for it.

DAVIS I bet you will. Then what?

SLATER I don't know. We'll let mother nature call the shots.

DAVIS All right!

*DAVIS MANOEUVRES SLATER FOR A HIP TOSS, WHICH HE EXECUTES. SLATER LANDS HARD, CRIES OUT.*

DAVIS What's the matter?

SLATER I'll be all right. . . give me a minute. . . I just. . . I took it too hard this time.

*SLATER RISES BRISKLY.*

DAVIS Took what too hard?

SLATER Nothing Davis. The fall.

DAVIS That wasn't hard. You've taken harder falls than that.

*DAVIS OFFERS TOKEN RESISTANCE WHEN SLATER TIES HIS HANDS BEHIND HIS BACK. DAVIS IS INTRIGUED, PURPOSEFULLY MISLED TO ANTICIPATE SOME KIND OF SEX.*

DAVIS What'cha got in mind tiger?

*SLATER BINDS DAVIS' FEET.*

DAVIS            This is weird. Promising but weird.

*SLATER SMILES, SILENT, DETERMINED*

DAVIS            I don't know what those leather guys get out of this kinky stuff.  
*SLATER TAKES HIM DOWN.*

DAVIS            Untie me, Slater. I've had enough fun. I'm not getting off on this. Are you?

*SLATER DRAGS HIM INTO THE PIT, BEGINS TO BURY HIM.*

DAVIS            You're not going weird on me I hope. C'mon, Slater. A joke is a joke.

SLATER           The bad news is your son is homosexual. The good news is he's dying.

DAVIS            That sucks.

SLATER           Can't have everything.

DAVIS            You're a real fun guy lately.

SLATER           Fun guys run deep.

DAVIS            You never did know the difference between scratching your ass and tearing the skin off.

*SLATER MOVES A SAND FILLED SCOOP INTO DAVIS' RANGE OF VISION.*

DAVIS            Oh, Christ.

*SLATER KISSES DAVIS WITH GREAT PASSION. DAVIS LIES BACK, RECEPTIVE, SEDUCED. THE KISS LINGERS AS SLATER'S FREE HAND CARESSES DAVIS' CHEST, CRUISES HIS STOMACH. WHEN HE REACHES THE WAIST BAND OF DAVIS' SPEEDO, HE RAISES IT. THEY BOTH PEER IN. DAVIS IS EXPECTANT, PLEASED UNTIL WITH ONE SWIFT MOVEMENT SLATER DUMPS THE SAND IN DAVIS' CROTCH.*

DAVIS            That's dirty pool.

*SLATER COVERS DAVIS RAPIDLY.*

SLATER           It's gonna get a lot dirtier.

DAVIS            What's goin on?

SLATER           Relax. You'll get to enjoy this.

DAVIS            I've never seen you like this before.

SLATER           I've never been like this before.

*SLATER STOPS ABRUPTLY. A TRICKLE OF SAND ESCAPES HIS RAISED FIST.*

DAVIS           Lose something?

SLATER          Not entirely. I'll know exactly where you are. For a change.

*HE MOVES THE TRICKLE DIRECTLY OVER DAVIS FACE.*

DAVIS           *(spitting)* Cut it out or so help me God I'll fuckin' kill you.

*SLATER PILES SAND FURIOUSLY.*

SLATER          You fuckin' killed me already.

DAVIS           You bastard.

SLATER          You slut.

DAVIS           One slip in the last three years, Slater. One.

SLATER          One too many, my man. One too many.

DAVIS           Don't give me that holier than thou bullshit.

SLATER          Right now, I'm a hell of a lot holier than thou, Champ.

DAVIS           One lousy weekend six months ago. You forgave me. Like I forgave you.

SLATER          You forgave me four years ago. You've had no reason to forgive me since. I swear to God, Davis. You're it.

DAVIS           I'm what?

SLATER          You're it. I looked in the mirror this morning too. Only by my-self. You know how I've been feeling a little tired lately? Losing things, like my strength? Well, I organized this picnic to let you in on a little secret.

DAVIS           Slater.

SLATER          Shut up. Just shut up and listen. When I met you, I thought the sun shone outa your asshole. You treated me like a king and I had no trouble returning the favour. Two kings beat a pair of queens, you used to say, and you were right. I loved before, but never like this.

DAVIS           Stop it. Let me out of here.

SLATER          I don't mind my son loving you more than he loves me. I love you both so much, I can't tell who is who anymore.

DAVIS           Don't start that stuff.

SLATER I'm you, you're my son, Matt's my father. When I see you together, I think they'll be okay.

DAVIS You're scaring me.

SLATER Don't be afraid. Be strong. And patient. You've got to be patient. You got Matt going in track and field and hockey. That's good, but that's enough sports. The kid can draw. Get him drawing. If anyone can perk his interest, you can. I never saw a boy love anyone like my boy loves you. He's got the musical ability of an army boot, so forget music. And don't let him lose that sense of wonder. You've got to be tougher with him Davis. You've got to be tougher.

DAVIS Slater.

SLATER I'll lose my hair. I'll begin to rot inside and watch myself disappear. (*exposes his calf*) See that? Look like an ordinary bruise? Like the ones we sometimes laid on each other? In the natural course of things? When the moon was full? They were more delicate. Nicer colour too. It appeared last week. If a fifth horseman was sent to purge the world of male love he'd wear one these.

DAVIS No.

SLATER 'Fraid so, Champ. The lingering colds, the confusion. All part of the same package. Hurry, hurry! Step right up! See the greatest show on earth, where nature bat-tles nature, where nature wins and nature loses. "All at once, nothing first, like a bubble when it bursts." Come on folks. It's all happening on the inside. Bring the wife and kids. It's not his life you'll want to see, it's his death. By the looks of things I have you to thank. Breathe, Davis. You're losing your breath.

*HE CHECKS BELOW DAVIS' JAWLINE.*

SLATER Clean so far. You got the constitution of a horse.

*SLATER RISES TOO QUICKLY, EXPERIENCES A SUDDEN, OVERWHELMING FAINTNESS. HE COVERS.*

SLATER I got you set up at the clinic just in case. First thing Monday.

DAVIS Where are you going?

*SLATER STANDS AT SOME DISTANCE, STARING OUT TO SEA.*

DAVIS What about me?

SLATER You looked great out there.

DAVIS You selfish son of a bitch. You're going to pile it all on me.

SLATER Exactly. There are some things we'll have to attend to immediately. Others will take a few months. Trouble is, we may not hwetave a few months.

DAVIS Let me out of this pit.

SLATER Will you get with it? We've got a lot of shit to sort through.

DAVIS I'm starting to suffocate.

SLATER Ah, you're all right. I've made arrangements about the house.

DAVIS Fuck the house. What about me?

SLATER You can handle the mortgage yourself until my insurance is processed. You and Matthew are beneficiaries, as you know, his share in trust to you until age of legal majority, etc, etc.

DAVIS Oh Christ. . .

SLATER It's gonna be a year before you can collect. Those sons of bitches, eh? Miss a payment and see how long they take to pay their respects. Your wagon's got another couple of years in it. Matt's healthy. Thank God for straight teeth, eh? Then there's the question of Mom and Dad. You're going to have a hey day with my father. Shit. I wish I could be here to see that. Did you ever see that picture of Saturn - I think it's Saturn. Anyway Saturn's on his knees, his weight resting on the knuckles of his left hand, which is planted like an ape's directly beneath his shoulder. (*takes the position*) He's looking straight out at you. There's blood on Saturn's chin.

DAVIS Stop it.

SLATER And a terrible rage in his eyes. He's all agony and surprise, like he's been caught doing something foul, unspeakable - something he's beginning to enjoy. In his right hand is the bloody torso of an infant boy, freshly decapitated. Did you ever feel like that, Davis?

DAVIS Like what?

SLATER Freshly decapitated.

DAVIS I don't know what you're talking about.

SLATER Devouring children.

DAVIS Stop it.

SLATER It's his son, see. The caption is "Saturn Devouring his Son." I think. You'll like my Dad. No. I've got it confused. It's Nebuchadnezzar on his knees, long beard, Howard Hughes toe nails dug into the rock. Saturn is just standing there, chompin' away.

DAVIS What do you want from me?

SLATER Maybe its not dad. Maybe it is Uncle Ed. (*laughs*) Good old Ed. Me and Ed were just like that. God we were funny together. The Ed and Andy show. Dad loved us. I was fast but Ed was amazing. Sometimes I'd beat him to a good one and he'd pretend he was sore. He'd hold me down and make me say uncle. I loved that man.

DAVIS If there's something you want, just tell me.

SLATER You're right. There was a point to all this. Oh, yeah. The Wrath of God. A little specialty designed, according to the least generous among us, for the likes of you and me. Jerry Falwell's finest hour. Hitler would have loved it. Saturn. Right. Ah, yes. Thymus glands. They tried some weird shit. They'd remove most of the thymus gland from around a child's heart, which they do in the course of open heart surgery anyway. They'd pulverize it, see, and inject it into the guy's liver. Might give him an extra six months. The kid is fine, right? I mean the gland grows back real fast. They used to just chuck it in the garbage anyway. For a while it seemed useful for prolonging the lives of men like me. Nice. Love and innocence. Sex and death. "And a little child shall lead them. . ."

DAVIS Why don't you trust me?

SLATER Who says I don't trust you?

DAVIS You'd have told me.

SLATER I used to trust you. I don't know. You got a shaky track record.

DAVIS You don't trust me.

SLATER Commitment is not your longest suit. Never was.

DAVIS I'm only human.

SLATER You're going to have to be more than human. You've finally started taking yourself seriously, but I don't know about all three.

DAVIS All three?

SLATER Yeah. You and Matt. And me on my way out.

DAVIS Jesus -

SLATER - will look after himself.

DAVIS How can you sit there telling me you're gonna -

SLATER - die?

DAVIS How am I supposed to -

SLATER - cope?

DAVIS Why are you doing this to me, Slater?

SLATER Relax. I'll die, you'll cope.

*HE REMOVES A BOOK FROM THE 'SACK.*

DAVIS Right. Matthew and I will ride off into the sunset together, while your parents take pictures for the family album.

SLATER            Yeah. That's it, more or less. I came across this the other day. Might help you out. It made me feel, I don't know, sort of connected to the larger question. It's a poem.

DAVIS             *(groans)*

SLATER            Relax. I didn't write this one. Anyway, you've gotten fond of poems. You told me so yourself. My good influence, no doubt.

DAVIS             Yeah. Right.

SLATER            A guy at the tavern was talking about this plague victim who wrote it on his way out. Of course I pricked up my ears. Just a young guy. Died in 1601. Thirty four years old. Richard's age. My age. Wanna hear it?

DAVIS             Do I want to hear it? No. Yes. Do I have a choice? Let me outa here. If you really are ill -

SLATER            You've got to understand something. I am worse than ill. You know the scenario as well as I do. I could run around, ruin everything we've got looking for miracles. Or I can do everything in my power to help you and Matt carry on without me.

DAVIS             I don't know who you are anymore.

SLATER            Save us both a lot of grief. Find out fast.

DAVIS             And if I don't?

SLATER            You will.

DAVIS             No, God damn you. I won't. Why should I? You've treated Matt and me like shit for months and didn't have the guts to tell me why.

SLATER            If you could turn around, you'd notice the high water mark about four feet up the slope behind you. Now I estimate that from the nape of your neck to the top of your head is. . . maybe ten inches.

DAVIS             My feet are getting wet.

SLATER            See this shell? Mathematic miracle. I'll put it right here where you can keep an eye on it. *(on Davis' chest)*

DAVIS             Dig me up.

SLATER            From what I remember of geometry, which is mercifully little, I'd say by high tide, which is soon, there'll be a good two feet of water between this deceased gastropod and the air you breathe.

DAVIS             You haven't got the guts to sit there and watch me drown.

SLATER            Who says I'm going to watch? I need you, Davis. This time you won't run away. Believe me. Where was I? Ah, yes. Thomas Nashe, bubonic poet. You'll like this.

DAVIS My arms are aching. Slater. Please.

SLATER Adieu, farewell earth's bliss,  
This world uncertain. . . is(s?) ; Hmm.  
Fond are life's lustful joys,  
Death proves them all but toys  
None from his darts can fly  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us.

How do you like it so far?

*DAVIS STARES OUT TO SEA, HIS FACE IMPASSIVE*

SLATER You're right. It's a bit dry, but hang on.  
Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
Physic himself must fade,  
All things to end are made.  
The plague full swift goes by.  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us.

I diddled around with part of this next verse. I'll tell you why when I get there. How does it go? Oh yeah.

Beauty is but a flower  
which wrinkles will devour;  
brightness falls from air,  
love dies young and fair. . .

That's one of the lines I changed. He wrote 'Queens die young and fair.' I couldn't quite stomach that, for obvious reasons. Then I changed the next line from - Dust hath closed Helen's eye to -

Dust hath closed Eros' eye.  
I am sick, I must die,  
Lord have mercy on us.

*HE BEGINS TO FEEL THE FEAR IN IT, MOVES CLOSE TO DAVIS.*

SLATER Strength stoops unto the grave  
worms feed on heroes brave,  
Swords may not fight with fate  
Earth still holds ope' her gate.  
Come! Come! The Bells do cry.  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us!

DAVIS Please. No more.

SLATER I'm sorry. I have to finish.

Wit with his wantonness -  
 Jesus, Davis. I can't remember the rest.  
 Wit with his wantonness. . . tasteth death's -  
 tasteth death's. . . bitterness!  
 Hell's executioner hath no ears to hear  
 what vain art can reply.  
 I am sick, I must die.  
 Lord have mercy on us.

Haste, therefore, each degree,  
 to welcome destiny.  
 Earth is but a player's stage,  
 Heaven is our heritage.  
 Mount we unto the sky.  
 I am sick, I must die,  
 Lord have mercy. . .

DAVIS (*barely heard*) . . . on us.

*SLATER MOVES FROM HIM.*

DAVIS Come back, Slater.

SLATER I can't. All destinations are cancelled. I'm bound elsewhere. Toward the light.

*UPSTAGE, WELL BEHIND DAVIS*

SLATER Watch me, Davis. I've been working up a new trick for you. You gotta watch carefully. I'm going to split myself in two. Think cell division.

DAVIS Get me a beer.

SLATER (*he does*) As I split you'll see a blue light form above me. It will be my shape, but not like me. It will be beautiful.

*SLATER SETS AN UNOPENED CAN ON THE MOUND IN FRONT OF DAVIS, THEN MOVES ON.  
 DAVIS PEERS AT IT.*

SLATER This light will hover over my two halves. There will be a moment when you think I will stand like this forever. You'll want to run to me and lose yourself in my light, like I ran to you when we met. Don't. Don't run to me. Don't run away. If you do, my two halves will dissolve into the darkness behind me. I will disappear. Stand and watch. Because I will suddenly expand in a burst of pure fire - it will be amazing - connected to . . . all things bright and beautiful. . . all great creatures. . . all creatures great. . . all. . . Underneath, where my two halves stand absolutely still, what you see will frighten you. One will become dark, fearful, bitter and alone. The other will be strong and light and beautiful. You have to split these halves into quarters. There'll be a quarter for you, one for Matt, one for mom and one for my father. Here comes the hard part. Are you with me?

DAVIS           Just barely.

SLATER          You decide who gets which quarter. I have only one request. Give Matthew a light portion. The other three you'll have to divide amongst my mother, my father and yourself. Two dark, one light. Got it?

DAVIS           What ever you say.

SLATER          You can't break it down any further - no eighths. You have to deal in quarters. Those are the rules. Are there any questions?

DAVIS           Could you open my beer?

*SLATER DOES, MOVES UPSTAGE.*

SLATER          Watch carefully. Here goes.

*SLATER STANDS WITH HIS LEGS APART AND HIS ARMS EXTENDED IN THE MANNER OF WILLIAM BLAKE'S ENGRAVED GLAD DAY. HE ATTEMPTS TO BECOME BEATIFIC.*

DAVIS           Slater.

SLATER          Quiet.

DAVIS           Slater.

SLATER          I'm concentrating.

DAVIS           If you stay there, I'm gonna miss the big event. I can't see you Slater.

SLATER          Oh.

*SLATER MOVES DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF DAVIS AND RESUMES THE POSITION, THIS TIME WITH HIS BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. DAVIS LOOKS UP, FRAMED THROUGH SLATER'S LEGS. HE LAUGHS.*

DAVIS           Look at you. You're not splitting in half. You not even turning blue, you half-assed excuse for a miracle. You're getting a hard on. You dog. All pumped up and nowhere to go.

SLATER          You wanna come with me? Huh? Wanna come for the big ride to the great beyond?

*SLATER DROPS HIS PANTS. HE FALLS TO HIS KNEES, BARE ASS TO THE AUDIENCE.*

SLATER          Here's your ticket, hot shot.

*HE THRUSTS HIS CROTCH INTO DAVIS' FACE.*

SLATER          Whatsa matter? Don't want it? Scared you might catch something? Eh?

DAVIS           You bastard.

SLATER Come on. Let's exchange a few precious bodily fluids.

DAVIS No.

SLATER No? What's the matter. Don't want me anymore? Time was you couldn't get enough. Come on. *(he uses force)* Everything I got is yours, Davis. You know that. You told me so yourself.

DAVIS No. God damn you.

*SLATER SITS BACK. AFTER A MOMENT HE REPLACES HIS PANTS, MOVES UP THE SLOPE WHERE HE SQUATS, BACK TO AUDIENCE.*

DAVIS Slater?

SLATER What.

DAVIS Come here.

SLATER No.

DAVIS Come on.

SLATER No.

DAVIS I changed my mind.

SLATER So did I. Davis?

DAVIS What.

SLATER I'm scared.

DAVIS So am I.

*DAVIS STARES AT THE RISING TIDE. HE STIRS BENEATH THE MOUND. IT SHIFTS SLIGHTLY*

DAVIS How much longer?

SLATER No one knows. A few weeks. A few years.

DAVIS *(momentarily shamed into silence)* No, Slater. I meant how long before high tide. Christ.

*SLATER LAUGHS, TUMBLES BACKWARD DOWN THE SLOPE, LIES OPEN, SPLAYED.*

SLATER I had to try and make some peace with myself before I told you.

DAVIS Did you?

SLATER No. Opportunity knocked. I opened the door and was given a message. You will die a shameful death.

DAVIS How can you say that?

SLATER Because I haven't got time to dick around with nice-ties. Remember Richard and that fucking respirator?

DAVIS Oh God.

SLATER Afraid so. And that, my friend, is nothing. When my father finds out what you mean to me, you are going to be in it up to your ears.

DAVIS I'm in it up to my ears already.

SLATER I'm not sure you can keep going without me. I have no one else. I don't want anyone else, Davis. You're it.

DAVIS Let's talk about this eye to eye.

SLATER I'll let you up when you promise.

DAVIS This is no way to strike a bargain.

SLATER Listen, whatever happens, and no matter how it happens, you have to promise me one thing.

DAVIS It's getting wet under my back and shoulders. Damn you, it's cold in here.

SLATER Easy Mate. You don't want to piss off you captor.

DAVIS I'm a God damned hostage.

SLATER Exactly. And you'd better get a little captor/hostage simpatico happening pronto, amigo.

DAVIS (*stares at the ocean*) What choice have I got?

SLATER Now we're cookin'. You have to promise me that you will raise Matthew.

DAVIS That's it? Who else in their right mind would take on the little monster.

SLATER Don't fuck around.

DAVIS He's as much mine as he is yours now.

SLATER He may love you more than he loves me, but he is still my son. Not that I'm jealous. You're just too damn easy to love.

DAVIS You are jealous.

SLATER I am his father. If any harm comes to that boy, I swear to God I'll come back, and I will destroy whoever is responsible.

DAVIS Calm down.

SLATER Promise me you will raise my boy.

DAVIS You know I will.

SLATER I do not. Promise.

DAVIS No.

SLATER Promise.

DAVIS No, God damn you. Take you Gestapo tactics and go to hell.

SLATER You have no idea what you're up against. My father will do everything in his power to claim Matthew.

DAVIS We'll make some sort of deal.

SLATER No deals.

DAVIS We'll share custody.

SLATER No. If this goes to court, you will lose. Guaranteed.

DAVIS All right. We just won't tell them.

SLATER Don't be an asshole. You will tell them at the right time.

DAVIS Why should I tell them?

SLATER I can't.

DAVIS Haven't got the guts?

SLATER That's not fair.

DAVIS Fair? What's fair got to do with what you've done to me here? Eh? You should have told them years ago.

SLATER I wasn't up against the wall years ago. What I did with my dick was my own damn business - until now.

DAVIS The love that dare not hide in shame.

SLATER Something like that.

DAVIS I was trying to be clever. All right. We'll tell them.

SLATER        No, Davis. When we are ready, you will tell them.

DAVIS         Why me?

SLATER        Because if I do it now, we'll open a whole damn can of worms and we will lose Matthew.

DAVIS         You have no idea how close you're coming to losing me right now, mate.

SLATER        This was a stupid idea. You don't give a shit, and I'm losing my mind.

DAVIS         You are sick. Dig me up.

SLATER        No. First the promise.

DAVIS         If you could promise anything to save your hide right now you'd do it. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you?

SLATER        I don't know.

DAVIS         If you force this on me, you'll never be sure. Let me stand face to face and look you in the eye. I will swear to you, on our love, that I will keep Matthew from harm.

SLATER        There's something else.

DAVIS         What!

SLATER        Don't leave me.

DAVIS         Leave you?

SLATER        Like that bastard left Richard.

DAVIS         No Slater. I won't leave you.

*SLATER HELPS DAVIS DRINK.*

DAVIS         Good man. Now. Let's put this thing together. Begin at the beginning.

SLATER        (*uncovering Davis' shoulders*) My father.

DAVIS         What will he do?

SLATER        What they all do.

DAVIS         What?

SLATER        He pulls you under and holds you till you suffocate.

DAVIS         Hold it. No more double talk. Take your time. Tell me exactly what to expect.

SLATER I'm telling you. (*stops digging*) He grabs me by the throat and pulls me in. Then he tears my heart out.

DAVIS Slater.

SLATER He takes a mirror. He holds it up to me. Then just as I'm getting a sense of who I am, his fist smashes through from behind, he grabs me by the throat and squeezes until I'm out of breath. He'll pull you in.

DAVIS Slater!

SLATER He tells me to put the broken mirror back together. But he grinds it with his heel. See? Thousands of grains of glass. I don't know why he'd do that. Then he tells me to put it back the way I found it. The way I found it. I do my best. I can't. I'm just a kid. Dad won't look at me. I stare at the ground. Can't talk to him. Can't talk to Mom. Can't talk to anyone. Then Uncle Edwin comes back from Boston or Toronto and it starts all over. It happens again, and again and again. It hurts and it makes me sick. I loved him. Now he calls me the little faggot in front of Dad. And Dad doesn't do a god damned thing about it. (*a cri de coeur escapes slater. It is primal*)

DAVIS Slater. Slater!

*DAVIS STRAINS TOWARD SLATER WHO LIES OUT OF REACH, DRAINED, DISORIENTED.*

SLATER (*after a long beat*) Davis?

DAVIS Yes.

SLATER Davis. Where are you?

DAVIS Behind you. Over here.

SLATER Can you hear me?

DAVIS Yes. Are you all right?

SLATER After everything you've done for me. God, Davis. I've treated you so badly.

DAVIS It's all in the past.

SLATER I was losing Matthew. I could feel it. You brought him back to me.

DAVIS You never lost his love.

SLATER No. You're right. I almost lost my soul, I thought I'd lost you, but I never lost his love.

DAVIS He loves you so much.

SLATER God. All those years. Anything that walked and the more the better.

DAVIS That is past.

SLATER        Yeah, well the past has caught up with me. I could have been carrying this thing inside me for years.

DAVIS         Or months.

SLATER        I don't know what to believe anymore.

DAVIS         Believe our love.

SLATER        Love is not enough.

DAVIS         It's all we got.

SLATER        I'm sorry about what I did back there.

DAVIS         What?

SLATER        Offering. . . offering! Forcing. . . trying to take you along for the ride.

DAVIS         I would have done it, you know.

SLATER        That's what I always hated about you. You're such an obliging guy.

DAVIS         Fun guys run deep.

SLATER        We always talked best when we didn't concentrate too hard on what we were saying.

DAVIS         That's not true.

SLATER        I know. I heard it on Doctor Ruth.

DAVIS         You dink. Let me outa here and I'll show you a trick or two.

SLATER        I think I'm all tricked out, pal.

DAVIS         Sorry.

SLATER        Don't be.

DAVIS         I just didn't think.

SLATER        Forget it.

DAVIS         I may as well have pumped you full of arsenic.

SLATER        Don't ever think that.

DAVIS         What should I think?

SLATER        You're asking the wrong guy.

DAVIS            You're the man with all the answers.

SLATER          What do you want me to say? That I forgive you? Why should I? If it was you it doesn't matter. You are a link in a chain.

DAVIS            I feel awful.

SLATER          When you and Shit Head went south at Thanksgiving I got involved with a guy at the tavern.

DAVIS            Why didn't you tell me this before?

SLATER          No idea.

DAVIS            You've never been a particularly good liar.

SLATER          No lie.

DAVIS            I can see right through you.

SLATER          Not this time you can't.

DAVIS            What pisses me off is that you'd even try something so stupid. What do you take me for? I can read you like a book, Slater. Always could. I'd have known the minute I saw your face. The way you knew when you picked Jim and me up at the airport.

SLATER          Whaoo. Wait a minute. Whatever you and Shithead did in Florida - and please spare me the details - meant something to you. Mine was an old fashioned, dark of the moon, graveyard quickie.

DAVIS            First the tavern, now the graveyard.

SLATER          He was about forty, your height, better build -

DAVIS            Stop it.

SLATER          Better looking, obviously an out of town guy, lotsa money -

DAVIS            Stop it or so help me god I will clam up and let the tide blot out this whole lousy mess.

SLATER          That didn't work the way I planned.

DAVIS            Good. I'd hate to think you were treating me like shit on purpose. We're in trouble and you're lying to me. You don't love me. You're using me.

SLATER          Davis.

DAVIS            Forget it.

*SLATER TOUCHES DAVIS' FACE.*

DAVIS I said forget it. Go home.

*SLATER UNCOVERS DAVIS' TORSO, HELPS HIM SIT, UNTIES HIS HANDS. DAVIS DRAGS HIMSELF AS FOR FROM SLATER AS QUICKLY AS HE CAN, THEN UNTIES HIS FEET.*

SLATER I knew it. I knew you'd turn your back on me. There you go. Over the hill in a cloud of dust with a hearty 'Hi-Ho Silver. Away. '

DAVIS I should, you know. I should just pack it in.

SLATER I never lie to you.

DAVIS *(rising, clearing sand from crotch)* You lied like a son of a bitch for six months by keeping your mouth shut. Then you stole.

SLATER No.

DAVIS You took my right to love and protect you and ran like a thief in the night.

SLATER I was afraid you'd leave.

DAVIS I don't give a shit what you were afraid of. You should have come to me the minute you thought you might be sick.

*DAVIS CROSSES TO THE 'SACK, BEGINS TO DRESS.*

SLATER I was ashamed.

DAVIS I am in this too.

SLATER I know.

DAVIS You made decisions that are going to affect me for the rest of my life and never even consulted me. You just stewed and fumed then took it out on Matt. Look what you've done to me. If this is the best I can expect, why shouldn't I turn tail and run?

SLATER Because I love you.

DAVIS Cut the crap. You were willing to sit there and watch me drown. No one can go through what you have got to go through but yourself. If you think that gives you the right to stomp all over people, go right ahead. But by Christ, Slater, you won't stomp all over me. You owe me, you son of a bitch.

SLATER I owe you?

DAVIS You owe me everything you've got.

SLATER I owe you sweet fuck all.

DAVIS You owe me respect. If you want me to protect Matt, you give me what I need.

SLATER I'm giving you the finest thing I have. I'm giving you my son.

DAVIS I need you, Slater, to forgive me, Davis. (*silence*) We are screwed.

*DAVIS EXITS.*

SLATER It stinks. The whole thing stinks.

*A LONG MOMENT. SLATER CURLS IN A TIGHT BALL.*

SLATER Davis. Please. Help me.

*DAVIS RE-ENTERS, CONSIDERS.*

DAVIS Slater look at me. (*firm*) Look at me.

*SLATER CAN'T.*

DAVIS I promise I won't leave you.

SLATER Davis. . .

DAVIS What.

SLATER Promise you won't leave me. . .

DAVIS What?

SLATER Promise you won't leave me.

DAVIS I promise.

SLATER (*still coiled*) Say it.

*DAVIS ATTEMPTS TO UNCOIL HIM. SLATER FIGHTS HIM.*

DAVIS I promise I won't leave you.

SLATER Say it.

*SLATER MOVES TO SIT UP, STOPS HALF WAY, SUPPORTS HIMSELF ON AN ELBOW.*

SLATER Say it Davis say it say you promise you won't leave me.

*TIME HANGS. SLATER IS INERT, LOST, WEAK. HE STRUGGLES TO TAKE OFF HIS SHIRT. DAVIS HELPS, THEN ATTEMPTS TO HOLD HIM. SLATER PUSHES HIM AWAY.*

DAVIS I promise I won't leave you.

SLATER Say you won't leave me. . .

DAVIS           Sweetheart. Come here.

SLATER         Say it. . .

*SLATER LIES DOWN.*

DAVIS           No. Don't.

*SLATER CRAWLS TO THE PIT. BRACED, ON ONE KNEE AND EQUALLY DETERMINED, DAVIS' ATTEMPT TO RESTRAIN SLATER RESULTS IN A SLOW, UNGAINLY TANGLING AND UNTANGLING OF LIMBS AND TORSOS.*

DAVIS           Don't lie down. Come here.

SLATER         Say it. . .

DAVIS           I promise I won't leave you.

SLATER         No. Not that. The other part.

DAVIS           What other part?

SLATER         Say it.

DAVIS           I don't know what you want me to say.

SLATER         You do so.

DAVIS           I love you.

SLATER         I know that.

DAVIS           Well what?

SLATER         The part about Matthew. Say it.

DAVIS           Matthew. . . ?

SLATER         Say it. . .

DAVIS           I promise to look after Matthew?

SLATER         Yeah. That's it. Say it.

DAVIS           I promise to look after Matthew.

SLATER         You won't leave me, will you?

DAVIS           No Slater. I won't leave you.

*DAVIS HOLDS SLATER. A MOMENT OF PEACE.*

SLATER I'm tired, Davis.

DAVIS I know love. So am I.

SLATER And stubborn.

DAVIS We were never great at compromise.

SLATER You're the one that said "Stick to your guns or bit by bit you'll compromise your life away. " I used to believe that, until I got compromised myself. (*silence*) It's warm.

DAVIS Yes. It's warm.

SLATER I like it.

DAVIS Like what?

SLATER The warm. I just like it. I bet it's a warm day in China.

DAVIS Yes. The poor little guy. He thinks you hate him.

SLATER What makes you say that?

DAVIS He told me.

SLATER I've got my work cut out for me.

DAVIS I'll give you everything I've got. We'll fight this thing together.

SLATER We can't win.

DAVIS We can't give up. The longer we fight the better our chances. We'll go to Paris -

SLATER We'll sell the house, the cars, the furniture. Then burn my clothes.

*SLATER COVERS DAVIS.*

SLATER We'll put all our possessions in three back packs and move to France, you and Matt and I. Between visits to the clinic, we'll bum around Europe. The great Canadian hippie trip re-visited. We'll go to Lourdes for smart drinks. That'll be fun, eh? We'll walk the Siene, hear the accordion players, stand in the light of the Rose Window in Notre Dame. A family portrait. In red.

DAVIS It's mostly blue.

SLATER What's mostly blue?

DAVIS The rose window.

SLATER Why do they call it rose?

DAVIS           The shape.

*DAVIS WRAPS HIS LEGS AROUND SLATER'S HIPS, PULLS HIM VERY CLOSE.*

SLATER          Oh. One day we'll go to the Louvre. You can park me on crutches in front of Blake. Or Goya. That's where you'll leave me. You'll come home and sell the tavern, meet someone else.

*SLATER MOVES TO KISS DAVIS. AT THE LAST MOMENT, DAVIS TURNS AWAY.*

SLATER          Then you'll send Matt to his grandparents on the Island where my name hangs in the air like dust in the attic. And that will be that.

*SLATER RETRIEVES THE TWO SMALL PHOTOS.*

SLATER          Here we are on the side lawn beneath the lindens. Dad, me, and Uncle Edwin. Father, son and son of a bitch. That's Ed with his arm around me. See the rope? One end of the hammock. Summer evenings Dad'd roll in after a days' work in the fields and I'd crawl in with him. Snuggle up. Soon we'd be asleep under the lindens, warm in the evening breeze. "Like the fella says. There's always a breeze on the Island. Yeah. " The smell of his sweat made me feel safe. I remember the day it became the scent of yearning. It's that boy, Davis. Not some Medieval poet, not your pal the tavern keeper. It's me. Andrew David Slater. Thirty four years old, educated beyond use, lost in my prime. I finally started to feel good about myself. Stopped blaming. Regretting. One regret. You weren't the first man - the only man - to look back. Don't let me die by myself.

*SLATER RESTS HIS HEAD ON DAVIS' SHOULDER.*

DAVIS           I fell in love with you the minute you said my name. It was your voice. It came right from your soul. And those eyes. Your eyes. Remember the farm? I never forgot the things you told me that day. I swore I'd never leave you. You didn't believe me. But I'm still here, Slater. I'm still here.

*SLATER SETTLES DAVIS' LAP.*

DAVIS           Oh god. I don't want you to die. Slater? How are we going to tell Matthew? I found a dead man once. I was just a boy, on my way to school. It took me along time to figure out what I'd found. And when I did I swore I'd never die. I was ten years old. Matt's age. Funny how a boy's mind works. Isn't it? Slater? Slater.

SLATER          Hum? (*stirs*) What time is it?

DAVIS           I don't know. Three thirty. Four.

SLATER          Oh. He's got that party.

DAVIS           There's lots of time.

*THEY KISS. SLATER RISES.*

SLATER          What a mess. Who did this?

DAVIS I don't know. Some asshole.

SLATER (*rises*) Fun guys will do anything for kicks.

*THEY GATHER THEIR GEAR.*

DAVIS Fun times don't come cheap.

SLATER Too many cooks spoil the broth.

DAVIS Virtue is its own reward.

SLATER A stitch in time. . .

DAVIS . . . is worth two in the bush.

SLATER (*at some distance, his focus the distant sea*) I dreamed you gave me everything I need.  
It's beautiful here.

DAVIS Yes. Come on sweetheart. Let's go home.

*GULLS, SURF.*

*ACT ONE CURTAIN.*

## ACT II

*AN INTENSIVE CARE UNIT WITH BED, COMFORTABLE BEDSIDE CHAIR, A SITTING AREA WITH COUCH, MAGAZINES, LOW TABLES, SMALL EXTENSION TELEPHONE. AT RISE, A CURTAIN IS SO ARRANGED THAT THE BED IS VISIBLE FROM THE AUDIENCE BUT NOT THE SITTING AREA.*

*IN THE BED, A CLEAR PLASTIC OXYGEN MASK COVERS SLATER'S NOSE AND MOUTH. DAVIS TENDS HIM.*

*JACK AND ELNA SLATER ENTER, TENTATIVELY. SHE CARRIES A BOUQUET OF GLADIOLUS.*

JACK            Maybe we should come back later.

ELNA            He said he'd meet us here.

JACK            Let's try the house.

*DAVIS EMERGES.*

ELNA            Mr Davis?

DAVIS           Yes. Hello.

ELNA            Hello.

JACK            Hello.

DAVIS           How was your trip?

JACK            Oh good. We were late getting away.

ELNA            No line-up to speak of.

JACK            No.

DAVIS           That's good.

ELNA            I wish my glads were better. These lasted not bad in the car for all.

DAVIS           They're lovely.

ELNA            Thank you.

DAVIS           Well. I'm glad you're here.

ELNA            Is he asleep?

DAVIS           He's resting.

ELNA            Jack?

JACK            You go ahead dear.

ELNA            Jack.

JACK            Tell him I'll be right there. I just want a word with Mr Davis here.

*ELNA MOVES TO THE BED.*

JACK            How long has he been here?

DAVIS           Two weeks.

JACK            Why weren't we called earlier?

DAVIS           He asked me not to.

JACK            He did, did he? Where's Matthew?

DAVIS           I have him.

JACK            Do you now.

DAVIS           We have a few details to sort out. . .

JACK            No doubt. But first things first, eh? (*trapped between Slater's bed and Davis' details*)  
You're at his house?

DAVIS           Our house. Yes.

JACK            Listen, we were wondering if there's room.

DAVIS           We're expecting you.

JACK            We?

DAVIS           Matt's all excited. . .

JACK            Is he now? Well that's just great. See, now that Elna and I are retired we're being a little careful with our budget. Not that we're suffering. We've been lolly gagging all over the world having a grand old time, but things are tightening up. I guess my son's pretty sick.

DAVIS           Yes. I'm afraid he is.

JACK            Well. It's awful good of you to have us for a night or two. Who's his doctor?

DAVIS           Ah, Dr Michaelson now. Mostly.

JACK            Is he well enough to travel by car?

DAVIS           He can't be moved.

JACK I'll get an ambulance.

ELNA Jack.

*SLATER BECOMES VISIBLY DISTRESSED.*

JACK Yes dear?

*JACK MOVES BEHIND THE CURTAIN, DAVIS PUSHES PAST.*

JACK Get your hands off me.

DAVIS Sssh, love. I'm here. Sssh. Everything will be all right.

JACK What's wrong with him?

DAVIS He's just anxious.

JACK Elna. You look after him.

DAVIS Maybe it would be best if you both wait over there.

*THEY RETURN TO THE SITTING AREA. DAVIS REASSURES SLATER PHYSICALLY AND WITH HIS VOICE.*

ELNA Mr Davis?

DAVIS What.

ELNA I think you owe us an explanation.

JACK What the hell's wrong with my son?

*DAVIS PULLS BACK THE CURTAIN, OPENING THE SITTING ROOM TO THE BED.*

DAVIS Right now? The biggest threat is PCP.

JACK PCP?

DAVIS Pneumocystis pneumonia. It's his second bout. I hope to god he makes it.

JACK Of course he'll make it. He's only thirty two years old, for Christ's sake.

DAVIS Thirty four.

JACK It looks a hell of a lot worse than pneumonia.

DAVIS It's not just pneumonia. He's also fighting a yeast infection. You'd know it as thrush.

ELNA Thrush? Children get thrush.

DAVIS Yes. When their immune systems are developing.

ELNA Oh dear God.

DAVIS I'm afraid so. The thrush is all through his mouth and throat. Probably in his intestines now too. He developed Kaposi's Sarcoma three months ago. It's a rare form of skin cancer.

JACK Cancer.

DAVIS He responded well to chemotherapy. He gained a few pounds when we started the AZT. Now he has diarrhoea. That's been hardest on him.

ELNA I should have been here.

DAVIS He's had constant pain from the parasitic lesions on his anus, which is raw. The diarrhoea is agony. He'd scream and curse the pain.

JACK Stop it.

DAVIS He said I shouldn't mind. The screaming I mean. It made him feel better. Tore the guts out of me.

JACK That is enough.

ELNA I want to speak to his doctor.

DAVIS Sometimes he couldn't get to the toilet fast enough or onto the bed pan in time and he's mess the floor or the sheets.

ELNA Mr Davis.

DAVIS Then he got too weak to clean up after himself. The humiliation nearly killed him.

ELNA It is taking every ounce of my strength not to cross this floor and slap his face.

JACK Where's his doctor?

DAVIS I think that's what broke his spirit.

JACK We want you out of here.

DAVIS Now something's triggering seizures. Toxoplasmosis, maybe. Or the yeast infecting his brain. He slipped into a coma yesterday.

ELNA Just tell me where to find his doctor.

DAVIS I take care of him now.

JACK Well. Thank you Mr Davis. We appreciate everything you've done. We'll handle it now.

DAVIS It's not that simple.

JACK            We will handle it.

DAVIS           Not without me you won't.

JACK            You don't hear so good, do you.

DAVIS           I hear fine. We agreed that I wouldn't call until I had finished making arrangements.

ELNA            What kind of arrangements?

DAVIS           The house. The business.

JACK            You some kind of business manager?

DAVIS           I'm the executor of his estate.

JACK            You've got yourself wormed in here right good, haven't you?

DAVIS           I am Matthew's guardian.

JACK            Who the hell are you?

ELNA            Jack. He's Andrew's friend.

JACK            So what?

DAVIS           I'm his lover.

JACK            His 'lover'.

DAVIS           Don't laugh at me.

JACK            We don't want you around here.

DAVIS           You don't have a choice.

JACK            We'll see about that.

DAVIS           They needed the name of his spouse, for signing authority. He automatically indicated me. The woman on the desk laughed in my face. Then she asked for the names of his parents. He said he lost them.

ELNA            What?

DAVIS           He said he lost them. Six years we've been together, six of the best years of our lives and that woman laughed in my face.

*JACK MOVES TO THE DOOR.*

JACK            I'm getting Matthew and we're going home.

DAVIS           No you're not. When he came out of that first seizure, his first intelligible word was Matthew. The second was dad.

JACK            You're trying to get at me.

DAVIS           I was number three.

*HE MOVES TO EXIT.*

DAVIS           We have got to work this out. . .

ELNA            Jack. . . Wait. . .

*SLATER ENTERS SPASM. HIS BACK ARCHES UNNATURALLY - STOMACH, CHEST AND BACK CURVE UPWARD, HEAD THRUST BACK. HIS ARMS EXTEND, RIGID. HE ROLLS TOWARD THE EDGE OF THE BED. HIS BODY RELAXES SUDDENLY, HE FALLS BACK, THEN ARCHES IN SPASM AGAIN.*

ELNA            Oh merciful God. . . Andrew, please. . . Andrew. . . Oh God. . . Mr Davis. . .

*DAVIS CLIMBS ONTO THE BED, COVERS SLATER, HIS BODY WEIGHT SLOWLY FORCING THE ARCH FROM SLATER'S BODY.*

JACK            Get a Doctor.

DAVIS           There's nothing they can do.

JACK            Get a god damned doctor.

DAVIS           Please. Just leave us alone. Pull the curtain.

*THEY DON'T MOVE.*

DAVIS           Pull the curtain!

*ELNA DOES. THE BED IS COMPLETELY CONCEALED.*

DAVIS           Shssh, love. It'll be all right. Shssh. . . shssh. . .

JACK            Well?

ELNA            Well what, Jack?

DAVIS           I'm here. It's all right. Sssh. . .

JACK            Don't be dense, Elna. Are you coming with me or not?

ELNA            Just where do you intend to go?

JACK            We're going home.

ELNA            If you think I'm leaving Andrew like this you are out of your mind.

DAVIS           Sssh, love. It's all right.

JACK            We're obviously not wanted here.

ELNA            You go now and you go by yourself. And you'll stay by yourself. I won't be back. I will see Andrew through this with or without you.

JACK            Well good luck. You'll need dynamite to get anywhere near the bed.  
*JACK EXITS.*

ELNA            Jack.

*SHE MOVES TO THE CURTAIN.*

DAVIS           It's all right love. It's all right. Shsssh. . .

*A HEART RATE MONITOR, AMPLIFIED, CARRIES THROUGH THE BLACKOUT.*

*ELNA IS SEATED. DAVIS OPENS THE CURTAIN. THE HEART RATE MONITOR TONE FADES UNDER DIALOGUE. ITS LIGHT FLASHES THROUGH-OUT.*

ELNA            I have been sitting here listening to you comfort my son, Mr Davis, and I don't mind telling you that I am mad as hell. I am furious. What you did to us was brutal and cruel.

DAVIS           It was our decision, not mine.

ELNA            I don't care whose decision it was. It was wrong. How long has he been like this?

DAVIS           He told me three months ago.

ELNA            You should have taken him home to us.

DAVIS           We discussed it. He wouldn't go.

ELNA            What if he doesn't come out of this coma?

DAVIS           I think he will.

ELNA            What if he doesn't? I will never be able to speak to my son again

DAVIS           He didn't want to see his father.

ELNA            He told that woman at the desk I was dead.

DAVIS           He's afraid. . .

ELNA            I know what he's afraid of. They're both afraid of the same damn thing. They'd fight and wrangle each other into the grave rather than talk about it.

DAVIS           Mrs Slater. I'm well prepared.

ELNA            You sound as though you've armed yourself for war. We are his parents, Mr Davis, his family.

DAVIS           Matt and I are his family.

ELNA            He is my son. I bore him.

DAVIS           I love him. I am losing him.

ELNA            I have no taste for games.

DAVIS           Either do I.

ELNA            Then why do you insist on playing this one?

DAVIS           This is no game. I have a commitment to your son. And grandson.

ELNA            You think I have no place here Mr Davis?

DAVIS           That is not for me to say.

ELNA            I'm no stranger to loss.

DAVIS           You've never lost a mate.

ELNA            Have you lost a son? (*crosses to bed*) Mr Davis, how old are you?

DAVIS           Thirty.

ELNA            You were never married.

DAVIS           No.

ELNA            Have you got something against women?

DAVIS           Of course not.

ELNA            Or are they just out of reach?

DAVIS           I fell in love with your son. And he fell in love with me.

ELNA            Have you notified his wife?

DAVIS           We have no idea where she is.

ELNA            Well. I find this all very odd. Two men and a boy.

DAVIS           I don't know how things are in Morrell, P. E. I. , Mrs Slater. I thought people were a little different here.

ELNA People are pretty much the same no matter where you find them.

DAVIS So it seems. Matt was accepted as the kid with two fathers, we dealt with the nasty stuff, which wasn't often. We made sure of that. You taught school for years. You know the politics.

ELNA Eighteen years of grade ten english. I know the politics all right.

DAVIS They called a special PTA meeting. A week early. Slater had rallied. We never gave it a second thought. So we went.

ELNA You went together?

DAVIS We are a couple. We go everywhere together, especially where Matt's welfare is concerned. Slater does committee work, I coach little league. People admired us - all very broad-minded and upwardly mobile. People began to arrive. People who partied at our house, people whose homes we'd visit. Friends. I thought he looked great. I guess it was only by comparison. They'd come over and say hello and you could see it happen in their faces. Soon we were alone in a room full of strangers. Empty chairs all around us. They started talking about kids biting each other and being infected. I lost it. The last thing I remember is Slater herding me out, me yelling "Matthew is not a dangerous child." Now Matt's in a new school, I'm fighting for my job, and Slater's breathing oxygen so pure it destroys the tissues that absorb it.

*ELNA MOVES TO THE BED.*

ELNA Where are you in your family?

DAVIS What?

ELNA Oldest, youngest. . . ?

DAVIS I'm the youngest of three.

ELNA The youngest is the sweetest. Where are your folks?

DAVIS Bridgetown. In the valley.

ELNA Do you see them?

DAVIS Yes. We go down wherever we can. Holidays mostly.

ELNA And how do they feel about you?

DAVIS They love me. They love us all. Especially Matt. My folks treat him like. . .

ELNA Like a grandson?

DAVIS Like one of the family.

ELNA Do you have a first name?

DAVIS Carlyle. I prefer Davis.

ELNA I thought I heard him call. Now I don't want to touch him.

DAVIS You're perfectly safe.

ELNA I am his mother.

DAVIS Go on. Take his hand.

*SHE DOES.*

DAVIS You think this is happening because of me.

ELNA It certainly isn't my fault.

DAVIS There was infidelity. We aren't certain.

ELNA I see. Well. That's one thing we don't have to worry about. Normal couples don't die of infidelity.

DAVIS There's always murder.

ELNA I mean in natural circumstances.

DAVIS So do I. You think Slater and I aren't natural?

ELNA Davis don't jump on me. I am not small minded. I am simply trying to understand. Men. You're hard on us but by God you're brutal with each other. He began treating me like an ornament - fragile, too delicate to handle. And his father started treating him, I don't know. Cold. Kept us both at a distance.

DAVIS Mrs Slater, he doesn't blame you for anything.

ELNA Bearing children is nothing. Raising them is having living strips of flesh torn from your back. Nobody knows how to be a parent. You pour your dreams into them until you're damn near empty. They become strangers and skulk through the house as though there were land mines beneath the broadloom.

DAVIS Sorry. That's exactly the kind of thing Slater'd say.

ELNA What?

DAVIS Land mines beneath the broadloom.

ELNA Really? I wish I could share your pleasure. Just now I'm afraid I can't. What about Matthew?

DAVIS He's doing his best. He's a fine boy.

ELNA Yes. His letters are wonderful.

DAVIS Like his grandmother's.

ELNA You've read my letters?

DAVIS I help Matt answer them. I guess we've had a secret correspondence going for years.

ELNA Did you read what I wrote Andrew?

DAVIS He read bits to me. I feel as though I have an unfair advantage.

ELNA How's that?

DAVIS I know you better than you know me.

ELNA Did you read Andrew's replies?

DAVIS No.

ELNA Then we are even.

DAVIS Slater wrote about me?

ELNA Not directly. You were more of a presence. Someone other than Matthew he. . . of whom he was fond.

*THE TELEPHONE RINGS.*

DAVIS Hello? Yes, it's me. What? I can't understand you. Slow down. No, no. You don't have to go with him. Matthew, don't cry. Matt, I told you. You're staying with me. You know I do. More than the universe. What? No, Matt. The universe is bigger than the solar system. Well Mr Grady is wrong. Matt I haven't got time for this. Of course I won't let him take you. Is he still there? Let me talk to Arnold. I love you too. Arnold. What the hell's going on there? Slow down. Okay. Yeah. Oh shit. You're kidding. Against the fridge? I wish Slater could have seen that. I wish I could have seen that. You're a saint. He does? Hold on, I'll get her. Yes. I'll be right there.

ELNA Who is it?

DAVIS Mr Slater.

ELNA Hello? Jack, what's going on? No Jack. No Jack don't. Jack, I'm warning you. You have no right. None whatsoever. You do what you want but leave my bags there. Well I'm not so sure. All right!

*SHE SLAMS DOWN THE RECEIVER.*

ELNA What's the matter with you?

DAVIS I'm sorry. Is Mr Slater Okay?

ELNA I guess so. You realize what he tried to do?

DAVIS Yes.

ELNA I don't see anything funny in that.

DAVIS I thought Matt was upset. You shoulda' heard Arnold.

ELNA What is the matter with you?

DAVIS You gotta meet Arnold. He's this six-foot-four, two hundred and ten pound Adonis who's got this brand new line backer body but can't dump the old cliches. He walks funny, talks funny and does dogs. . .

ELNA He does dogs?

DAVIS Yeah. He clips and trims dogs. Your husband gets there, right, and Arnold's doing this standard poodle - moonlighting on our kitchen table. It's all very civil until Mr Slater tries to talk Matthew into going for a little trip, to the island, right? Immediately. Matt gets upset and Arnold, whose protective instincts are incredible to behold, goes after Mr Slater with nail clippers and a hair dryer.

ELNA Davis, stop it.

DAVIS Had him pinned up against the fridge when Matt called. I thought he was upset for himself. It turns out he was more concerned about Arnold and his grandfather, scared shitless of each other, Arnold yelling and screaming, Mr Slater trying to calm him down, the poodle going nuts.

ELNA Oh dear. Jack hates poodles.

DAVIS Matthew didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So he did both.

ELNA A hair dryer. Poor Jack.

DAVIS Well. I better get home. Slater woulda loved it.

ELNA Yes. He would, wouldn't he.

DAVIS You don't mind staying for a while?

ELNA Heavens no. I'll appreciate the time. Is there anything I should know?

DAVIS The nurses' station is right across the hall. They say he can't hear, but I think he can. Mrs Slater?

ELNA Elna.

DAVIS Elna. I'm sorry.

ELNA I know Davis. So am I.

*THEY ARE DRAWN TO EACH OTHER, NEITHER ABLE TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.*

DAVIS I almost forgot. He left you this.

*HE EXTRACTS AN ENVELOPE FROM THE 'SACK.*

ELNA What is it?

DAVIS A message.

*SHE EXTRACTS AN AUDIO CASSETTE.*

ELNA What does it say?

DAVIS I don't know. I didn't listen.

*HE GIVES HER THE WALKMAN, MOVES TO LEAVE.*

ELNA Davis?

DAVIS Yes?

ELNA How does this one work?

*HE PLACES THE EARPHONES, PRESSES PLAY. HE EXITS. FADE. THE AMPLIFIED HEART RATE MONITOR TONE BRIDGES THE SCENES.*

*MORNING. DAVIS TIES A CLEAN JOHNNY SHIRT, ROLLS SLATER TO ONE SIDE. HE ARRANGES THE BED LINEN.*

DAVIS I really have no idea how to call this one. Your father's scared shitless and your mother's very wary. She's at our house and he's at the Lord Nelson. Not a happy story. I'm fine, right. Getting along. Then suddenly I'm back in the pit. Only this time there's no one there to save me. I hope to God I can carry this off.

*JACK ENTERS. HE LISTENS.*

DAVIS Right now I'd like to crawl in beside you and hold you and love you and sleep the rest of our lives away.

JACK How is he?

DAVIS We had a quiet night. How's the hotel?

JACK Not the best. I'm not much of a hand at being on my own

DAVIS (collecting gear) Well. Thanks for spelling me off.

JACK Oh fine, fine.

*DAVIS ATTEMPTS TO LEAVE.*

JACK I'm no fan of this heat. I thought you fellas had it cool over here - cool and wet.

DAVIS            This is unusual all right.

JACK            Yeah. There's no place like the Island. We get a breeze at night of course. Like the fella says, there's always a breeze on the Island. Yeah. You can't beat the Island for sleeping. Some people might think it's too slow but one good thing is nothing much goes wrong on the Island.

*DAVIS MAKES ANOTHER MOVE TO LEAVE.*

JACK            Bit dry this year, mind you, but the crops aren't bad for all. That's good for me. Or was. Well, still is. Yeah. I got outa the farming business years ago. Never was much of a hand at killing things. The place used to get blocked up with livestock. I couldn't bear to part with them. Yessiree. They had to send me to town days the stock was being sold. That's why I moved into potatoes.

DAVIS            Kennebecs, Irish Cobblers, Green Mountains and. . .

JACK            Sebagoes.

DAVIS            Right, Sebagoes.

JACK            I see you know your tubers.

DAVIS            Picked up in passing, you might say.

JACK            Oh?

DAVIS            Slater loves the names.

JACK            But hates the potatoes. He was useless as tits on a bull around the farm. Moonin' around. Lookin' for ways to get outa work. Always up to some sort of devilment or other. God he was a funny kid. Yeah. Me and Ed went into business and made our fortune. Shippers.

DAVIS            Ah. . . "You grow 'em, we roll 'em. "

JACK            That's right. You catch on right fast, don't you?

DAVIS            I do my best.

JACK            Don't we all. Ed's getting into meat now, so I said fare-well, do- well -

DAVIS/JACK - toodle-looo.

*DAVIS MOVES TOWARD THE DOOR.*

JACK            That Arnold's quite the lad.

DAVIS            Yeah. Arnold's one of a kind all right.

JACK            Is he now? I'd 'a thought there'd be a lot of his kind here on the mainland. You remind me of somebody but I'll be damned if I can put a face on whoever it is.

DAVIS           We met briefly. . .

JACK            Yes, yes, yes, now I remember. You're the fly man.

DAVIS           That's right. Did you ever get set up?

JACK            As a matter of fact, I did. I never thanked you for sending the book.

DAVIS           That's all right.

JACK            I've been tying my own for six years now. Trout flies mostly. Just the basics, you know - Royal Coachman, Muddler Minnows, Black Gnats. I'd like to talk to you about salmon though. There's no salmon on the Island to speak of and I'd love to try my hand at it. I bet it's great fun.

DAVIS           The best. Come over next summer and we'll take you up the Margaree.

JACK            That'd be lovely. Matt fish?

DAVIS           Oh yeah.

JACK            Tie his own flies yet?

DAVIS           He just finished a great Thunder and Lightning. He's having trouble with his first Rat-Faced MacDougal though. Act surprised when you get it.

JACK            He told me all about it that afternoon years ago. Four years old. I couldn't get over it.

DAVIS           Yeah. The kids a real cracker jack. He's ten now.

JACK            Yeah. Hard to believe.

DAVIS           He's a mean little sucker with a fly rod.

JACK            You taught him, did you? To tie flies?

DAVIS           Yes.

JACK            I was hoping to teach him myself.

DAVIS           He's very patient. Not like his father.

JACK            I dare say. What was it? Six - yes it was six years ago Andrew brought you to the Island. Funny, eh? We had all the room in the world and he wouldn't stay the night. Off to the woods and away you went. You were gone most of the afternoon.

DAVIS           We had a great time.

JACK            Did you, now? Wouldn't even stay for supper. We thought he was ashamed of us. No. You remind me of someone else. . . isn't that a queer damn thing? You got people on the Island?

DAVIS           No.

JACK            Then you're likely all right.

DAVIS           What?

JACK            I mean you're not related. That was a joke.

DAVIS           Oh.

JACK            All our people are Islanders from away back. Davis I don't usually get so worked up. I mean about flying off the handle there the other night.

DAVIS           Don't give it another thought.

JACK            Thank you.

DAVIS           This is hard on all of us.

JACK            Yes. It is.

DAVIS           Well. You know where everything is?

JACK            Yes. I'll be fine.

DAVIS           Jack, we'd all like you to come back to the house.

JACK            Oh?

DAVIS           There's no need for you to be alone.

JACK            That's between me and the wife.

DAVIS           She wants you back. And so does Matthew. Well. I'd better get to work.

JACK            Funny they didn't give you some time off.

DAVIS           I'm barely hanging on there by the skin of my teeth.

JACK            So I hear.

DAVIS           The offer stands. Whatever you decide.

*DAVIS EXITS. FADE. IN THE DARKNESS THE AMPLIFIED HEART RATE MONITOR IS OVER-RIDDEN BY THE INFLATE/DEFLATE CYCLE OF A MERCILESSLY REGULAR RESPIRATOR.*

*THE CLEAR PLASTIC MASK HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A RESPIRATOR HOSE AND MASK. THE MACHINE IS CONCEALED FROM THE AUDIENCE. ITS SOUND FADES AS LIGHT BUILDS, THEN DISAPPEARS UNDER THE SCENE. DAVIS LEANS FROM THE BEDSIDE CHAIR, HIS*

*ARMS CROSSED ON THE BED, HIS HEAD RESTING ON HIS ARMS. HE SLEEPS. ELNA ENTERS, WAKES HIM.*

ELNA            Davis what happened?

DAVIS            His lungs failed at four o'clock this morning. This thing is doing his breathing. I couldn't let go.

ELNA            Of course not.

DAVIS            *I promised. No respirator.*

*ELNA TOUCHES HIS SHOULDER. DAVIS WEEPS, EMBRACES HER.*

ELNA            You did the right thing.

*DAVIS STRENGTHENS. ELNA WASHES SLATER. DAVIS MOVES FROM THE BED, WASHES SLEEP FROM HIS FACE.*

ELNA            Have you been here all night?

DAVIS            Yes. What time is it?

ELNA            Eight thirty.

DAVIS            I had to change the linen.

ELNA            Matt's on his way to school. Jack's dropping him off.

DAVIS            Good.

ELNA            I can't believe Jack and Arnold. They've become thick as thieves.

DAVIS            Arnold has been a good friend.

ELNA            Yes. You mustn't exhaust yourself.

DAVIS            I slept some.

ELNA            Good. I'm full of questions.

DAVIS            Shoot.

ELNA            How did you boys meet?

DAVIS            I was at Crystal Crescent Beach one day - the infamous nude beach, third one up from the parking lot. Near Sambro. A bunch of us were clowning around. Slater walked past, grabbed the frisbee, chucked it back and went on his way. Ten mouths fell open, mine among them. He always parked himself on this flat rock ten or fifteen feet above the water. He was sprawled there asleep when the wind came up. A hot wind out of the east. Weird. A wave picked him off the rock and the current carried him out to sea. Next stop China,

right? And this is cold North Atlantic water. Frigid. Not like Brackley or Cavendish Beach on the Island.

ELNA Warmest water north of Florida. And?

DAVIS We thought he was a goner. We all stood there cheering him in. Well, he swam through waves that would drown anyone else. Then he hopped through the surf waving and smiling, his pecker all shrivelled from the cold. Clown. He stopped clowning when he saw me. Suddenly his smile was for me alone. I'd give anything to be back there lost in that wet salty grin.

ELNA How did you know he was gay?

DAVIS He told me.

ELNA Oh. What do you boys do?

DAVIS I beg your pardon?

ELNA You know - oh dear. Forget it, Davis. I can't believe I asked.

DAVIS You mean how do we make love?

ELNA Yes.

DAVIS Are you. . . titillated?

ELNA No. Yes.

DAVIS May I ask why?

ELNA It's all so. . . exotic.

DAVIS Exotic is not the first word that springs to mind. I find this stuff hard to talk about. Slater would have told you.

ELNA Yes. Whether I wanted to hear it or not.

DAVIS He didn't have the time of day for me. I can understand why. I was such an arrogant asshole.

ELNA He said you were a pretty cold fish. Originally, I mean.

DAVIS He did, did he? Well, he was right. I've been wanting to ask. About Slater's message.

ELNA Well. He loves you very much. I guess you know that. He believes in you.

DAVIS Yes.

ELNA He told me things that broke my heart. And he's worried about you, Davis.

*DAVIS HANDS HER A LEGAL DOCUMENT.*

DAVIS            These are Slater's instructions. It's time to set him free.

*JACK ENTERS.*

JACK            What's this?

ELNA            He can't breathe on his own anymore.

DAVIS            Excuse me. I think I'll grab a bite.

*DAVIS EXITS.*

JACK            I dreamed about him last night. He's Matt's age - nine, ten. He asks me what I think he should be when he grows up. I say 'anything you want.' Jesus.

ELNA            I wish we could start again.

JACK            That's just it Elna. No judge in the world is going to put up with this arrangement.

ELNA            Davis is a fine young man.

JACK            Davis is a homosexual high school gym teacher.

ELNA            We're doing exactly what Andrew expected.

JACK            Well good for him. Matthew belongs with family.

ELNA            Yes Jack.

JACK            Don't "Yes Jack" me. You want your grandson to go the same way? Growing up to be a . . . a misfit, dying of some god forsaken plague?

ELNA            How can you say such a thing. Our own son -

JACK            I'm fond of that boy.

ELNA            We've lost him.

JACK            Lost who?

ELNA            This man lying here drowning in his own blood.

JACK            Don't be dramatic, Elna.

ELNA            What happened to Andrew will not happen to Matthew.

JACK            Nothing happened to Andrew.

ELNA Andrew is twelve years old. He is standing in front of me. Right there. Look at me Jack. Right there. He's desperately trying to tell me something. But he can't. There's something in his eyes I've never seen before. Some awful terror. The more I try to calm him, the more upset he becomes. Then this male hand appears out of nowhere and snatches him away from me.

JACK Jesus Elna. You always were half that boy's problem.

ELNA I try to run after him, but I'm rooted to the spot. I say his name over and over. He disappears into the darkness behind him forever. And I am all alone. You see, dear. I dream about him too.

JACK I don't know what in the name of Jesus you're talking about.

ELNA I don't want my boy to die. I want to talk to him. Now. Here. I want you and Davis to disappear and never come near me, never come near him again as long as you live. I want you to tell him not to worry. I want to comb his hair and tell him everything is going to be okay.

JACK Elna. . .

ELNA I want you to love him and I want him to know you love him before it's too late. I want my son to live.

*JACK OFFERS COMFORT.*

ELNA Don't touch me. Don't even come near me.

*HE PERSISTS. SHE FINDS HERSELF WEeping IN HIS EMBRACE.*

ELNA You didn't lift a finger. I would have torn the son of a bitch limb from limb.

*SHE BREAKS FREE.*

ELNA Our own son. A twelve year old boy. . . And you, big strong Jack, you kept it all to yourself. I could have helped him. I could have helped you. Why didn't you tell me? I hate you for that.

JACK Hate me? For what?

ELNA Finally one of you had the decency to tell me.

*DAVIS ENTERS WITH BREAKFAST.*

DAVIS There's something that looks like scrambled eggs, toast and coffee for one and all. . . Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

ELNA No, Davis. It's very thoughtful.

DAVIS There's another beautiful day on it's way. Some cool Atlantic air.

JACK            Good.

DAVIS           I sorted out a few things at the beach yesterday.

JACK            There's not a whole hell of a lot to talk about.

ELNA            Drink your coffee.

JACK            It's amazing how simple it is. Dealing with someone's life in legal terms, I mean.

DAVIS           The law isn't long on heart.

JACK            There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything. The law takes sides.

DAVIS           Slater and I agree on every point right down the line.

JACK            I can see that Matthew is fond of you. And you care for him. That's obvious. We'd be happy to have you visit him. On the Island.

ELNA            Jack. We haven't discussed this.

JACK            You see, Davis, no judge in the world is going to leave a ten year old boy in the hands of a man of questionable character.

DAVIS           Questionable character.

JACK            That's how you're seen in the eyes of the law. You are not a blood relative.

ELNA            I want a word with you.

JACK            I talked to a lawyer yesterday.

DAVIS           I thought you were taking care of Matt.

JACK            He was in the car.

DAVIS           You left him alone in the car? Jesus, Jack. This isn't Charlottetown.

JACK            I think we can cut a good deal. First off, we all agree to keep this thing quiet. If this gets around the Island we'll be ruined

ELNA            You're ashamed of him.

JACK            We have to live there.

DAVIS           You make him sound like a criminal.

JACK            We can't take him home.

ELNA            I will not leave him here in Nova Scotia.

JACK All right, all right. Davis, you keep the house, we take Matthew home to the Island.

DAVIS Then what?

JACK Sell the tavern, get your fair return. The rest of the money goes into a trust fund for Matthew, which we administer. His natural mother has no claim on him. It's a clear case of desertion because no one has heard from her in eight years and no one took her seriously in the first place, least of all herself. You haven't heard from her, have you?

DAVIS No.

JACK Good. That makes it easier.

DAVIS Easier for who?

JACK He wasn't the only friend you had in the world.

ELNA Jack that's despicable.

JACK I'm only repeating what I was told.

DAVIS By whom?

JACK By Arnold.

*DAVIS MOVES TO SLATER.*

JACK What we're worried about is what's going to happen a couple of months from now when you start to get a little lonely or whatever. I mean someone used to being with someone gets to need that sort of thing and we'd like to know if you intend to stay by yourself or not.

DAVIS I'm not too good at being on my own either, Jack.

JACK We have no guarantee that you'll raise him the way he should be raised.

DAVIS Which is?

JACK In a normal home.

DAVIS He's in a normal home.

ELNA He means a home with a father and mother.

DAVIS I know what he means.

JACK He belongs with family.

DAVIS And you're prepared to raise another child?

JACK If we have to.

ELNA            Speak for yourself.

JACK            We have no guarantee about the kind of people he will be exposed to.

DAVIS           I haven't thought past the next half hour in three weeks.

JACK            We need an answer sooner than later.

DAVIS           You're replacing Slater.

JACK            You'll do that soon enough yourself.

DAVIS           The best I can hope for is his equal because I'll never find anyone better.

JACK            That's no answer at all.

DAVIS           I may be free and clear. Maybe I won't make it. Who knows? I intend to live forever.

JACK            What about your new buddies?

DAVIS           What new buddies?

JACK            Someone like Arnold. I mean you guys and kids. If Matt was a girl it'd be different.

DAVIS           Arnold is into men, not boys. We leave that to married men and straight relatives.

JACK            You're treading on dangerous ground.

DAVIS           You're calling me a pederast. Your brother Edwin still live next door? You're terrified of me.

JACK            Scared of a bloody faggot? Not too god-damned likely.

DAVIS           You don't mind a bit of lisp and swish. But if a guy looks you in the eye and says I love your son the way he needs to be loved, it all goes to rat shit.

JACK            What Andrew did with his life is his own business.

DAVIS           When I met Slater he was throwing himself at every man that came along.

JACK            That's none of my affair.

DAVIS           He was looking for you.

JACK            He knew where to find me.

DAVIS           So he thought. That party at the farm? The whole family gathered under the lindens on a Sunday afternoon in July?

JACK            You watch your step.

DAVIS            You went looking for your brother. You found him, all right. In your brand new warehouse, on a pile of burlap bags with your twelve year old son.

JACK            I went to your tavern. Men dancing, handling each other, kissing. Drunk as lords.

DAVIS            It's a gay bar Jack.

JACK            I may be just an ordinary guy, but I got some rights left too, you know.

DAVIS            So do I. And in spite of what you seem to think of him, so does your son.

JACK            I love my boy.

DAVIS            You told him he could be anything he wanted.

JACK            He turned queer.

DAVIS            He was born gay.

JACK            Don't try and pawn this off on us.

DAVIS            Slater was a perfectly normal gay kid until you turned your back on him.

JACK            Gay gay gay. I'll be damned if you'll ruin my grandson.

DAVIS            I'm not taking anymore shit, Jack.

JACK            Then we'll see you in court.

DAVIS            You let Edwin go and took it out on Slater.

JACK            That's a lie.

DAVIS            I heard this story in his nightmares for years. I believe every word.

JACK            What kind of man are you?

ELNA            I never could fathom your affection for that man.

JACK            He is my brother.

ELNA            He is our son.

JACK            You stay out of this.

ELNA            What did you say?

JACK            I sad stay out of this.

ELNA            Andrew says you beat him.

JACK I never hit that boy. I may have given him a shake, but I swear to God I never beat my kids.

ELNA Why would he lie?

JACK He wouldn't talk to me. What was I supposed to do? Staring at the ground, wouldn't look his own father in the eye. You got it all bugged up boy-o. I was afraid he was hiding something from me that I couldn't handle and it turns out I was right.

DAVIS Hiding something that you were afraid you couldn't handle?

JACK That's not what I said.

DAVIS That's what I heard.

JACK I said he was hiding something he couldn't handle.

DAVIS No. You couldn't handle.

ELNA That's what you said Jack.

JACK Where were you when he was staring at the ground?

ELNA In the house wondering why we couldn't talk to each other anymore

JACK Christ Almighty. Poor Ed.

ELNA Poor Ed?

JACK Yes poor Ed. A grown man with a wife and kids. Jesus. I put Ed on the road and that was the end of that. Then Andrew decides he's going to make a career out of it.

*DAVIS REACTS.*

JACK I'm not blind. I knew what was going on the day you and him took off for the woods.

DAVIS We made love.

JACK I don't care what you fellahs do, just don't cram it down my throat.

DAVIS He asked me to take him, there on the farm. It had to be there. And I did. I took off his clothes, he lay on his back on the moss -

JACK I don't want to hear this.

ELNA Davis don't.

DAVIS You asked.

ELNA Not in front of Jack.

DAVIS He put his feet on my shoulders and I leaned over, my hands on either side of his head and I kissed him.

ELNA Davis.

DAVIS You've had people you love inside you - your children, your husband. Soon we were moving, lost in each other. I watched a cloud lift from behind his eyes. He told me he loved me. And I knew I loved him. We were perfect. I love your son the way he needs to be loved.

JACK I tried to respect that boy after what happened. He was ashamed and I was ashamed for him. Besides, he was getting too close.

DAVIS He got too close to the back of your hand.

JACK He was smothering me.

ELNA He worshipped the ground you walked on.

JACK He tore the heart right outa me. I asked him about what happened. He told me all right. He told me he liked it. He liked it. Yes I hit him. I hit him once in my life with the back of my hand and that was that. And don't you come unto me with that holier-than-thou bullshit.

DAVIS You deserted him when he needed you the most.

JACK I never betrayed him. I never filled him full of disease.

DAVIS He may have been carrying it when we met.

JACK That's the way. Worm your way out of it. Next you'll try to blame Elna here. Or the god damn Tories. Why not pawn it off on the church, or coke bottles or god knows what else. Face up to it. You're your own worst enemy. You and your kind.

DAVIS Have you ever sat through a custody battle? The object is to determine who's sick and who's well. Matt will go through a barrage of psychological tests. Then he'll be asked who he wants to live with. We already know the answer to that.

JACK Don't be too sure.

DAVIS The judge will want to know why you haven't seen your grandson in six years. You'll all be subpoenaed. You Jack. And you Elna. I don't know if Matt'll have to listen to Uncle Edwin's testimony. I'll do everything in my power to see that he doesn't. If you press this, I will see that every skeleton is dragged out of the closet in the most damaging way possible.

JACK You haven't got the guts to see this through like a man.

DAVIS This will get as dirty as you choose to make it. And if it does get dirty we might all lose Matthew. If none of us is judged fit guardian, Matt will be sent to live with strangers.

JACK We'll see who's fit and who isn't.

DAVIS I don't know what Uncle Ed did on his trips to Boston and Toronto, but I know what he did to Slater when he got back. If Slater liked it the first time around, he sure as hell got to hate it. It went on and it got cruel. He was terrified. He was too ashamed to talk to his mother. Then Ed started calling him the little faggot. In front of you, Jack.

JACK Elna -

DAVIS There are land mines beneath the broadloom all right.

ELNA There are no saints here Davis.

DAVIS You threw him to the wolves.

ELNA And no villains either.

JACK I did the best I could with my children.

ELNA We were in love when that child was born.

JACK Some queer old bachelor living off by himself, dying alone? Him and the rest of us a laughing stock all over the county? No thank you sir.

ELNA He was bright and good-hearted. He was everything I hoped he'd be.

JACK I never felt such shame in my life. I saw fear in my boy. I saw shame in my brother and I felt it in me. All I wanted was to destroy it, to blast shame and everything associated with it to hell and gone forever.

ELNA Shame cost us our son.

JACK I swear, Elna. I never in God's name thought it would bring me here.

DAVIS You know where Slater got this? He got it searching for the things you and your kind couldn't beat out of him - the ability to love and the strength to accept himself for who he is. We didn't invent this, Jack. It just passed through us first on its ugly way to God knows where. There's so much he wanted to tell you.

ELNA He asked us to take care of you if you get sick.

*DAVIS SITS ON THE BED.*

DAVIS I can talk to Matthew about his father without shame. We hope one day you'll be able to do the same.

JACK I'd like to believe that.

*ELNA MOVES TO SLATER. JACK FOLLOWS.*

ELNA What do you see?

JACK A foreigner. A man who was my son.

ELNA Is our son. What else? Jack, what else.

JACK A stranger. Someone I loved. I see my boy dying. What does he want from me?

ELNA He wants Davis to raise his son.

JACK I'll have nothing.

*DAVIS HANDS ELNA SLATER'S WILL. JACK GLANCES THROUGH IT.*

JACK This isn't about Matthew.

*ELNA INDICATES A LINE IN THE DOCUMENT.*

ELNA 'In the presence of my family. '

JACK Why is he doing this to me?

ELNA He's offering us his life.

*AFTER A SILENT CONFIRMATION WITH ELNA JACK NODS, HANDS DAVIS THE DOCUMENT.*

JACK We'd like to be here. When?

DAVIS This afternoon.

*BLACKOUT. THE HEART RATE IS STEADY. THE RESPIRATOR VOLUME RISES, CUTS OUT.*

*ELNA AND JACK SIT ON THE COUCH IN A POOL OF LIGHT. DAVIS IS SEATED ON THE BED, SLATER IN HIS ARMS. THE HOSE AND MASK HAVE BEEN REMOVED. THE HEART RATE GRADUALLY SPEEDS.*

DAVIS I took Matthew to the beach. It was warm, the water still. A perfect mirror. He felt a breeze. He said it was you. Was it you Slater? Or just a warm wind in China. We had fun, Slater. For the first time since you got sick, Matt and I had fun. He's a fine boy. I'm proud of him.

*HE LISTENS TO THE CHANGING SOUND, HOLDS SLATER CLOSE.*

DAVIS Your father took him shopping this morning. He wanted a new suit. And a white shirt. And a tie. *(he buries his head in Slater's shoulder)* Dear God. My heart is breaking and mending itself at the same time. It's coming too soon. You're gonna fly right out of this room, Slater. Bound elsewhere. Toward the light. I'm sticking with you. I'm sticking with you till the end. Till the beginning. Till. . .

*THE HEART RATE MONITOR SPEEDS TO SILENCE.*

DAVIS Oh Jesus. I love you, Slater. I always will.

**CD**

*DAVIS LOOKS IN HIS LOVER'S FACE AND SEES THAT IT IS FINISHED. HE LOWERS SLATER GENTLY TO THE BED. A LIGHT KISS.*

DAVIS            Go to the light.

*A WIND CHIME SOUNDS IN THE FAR DISTANCE.*

*CURTAIN*