

Samuel French Acting Edition

The Boys in the Band

by Mart Crowley

With an Introduction by Tony Kushner

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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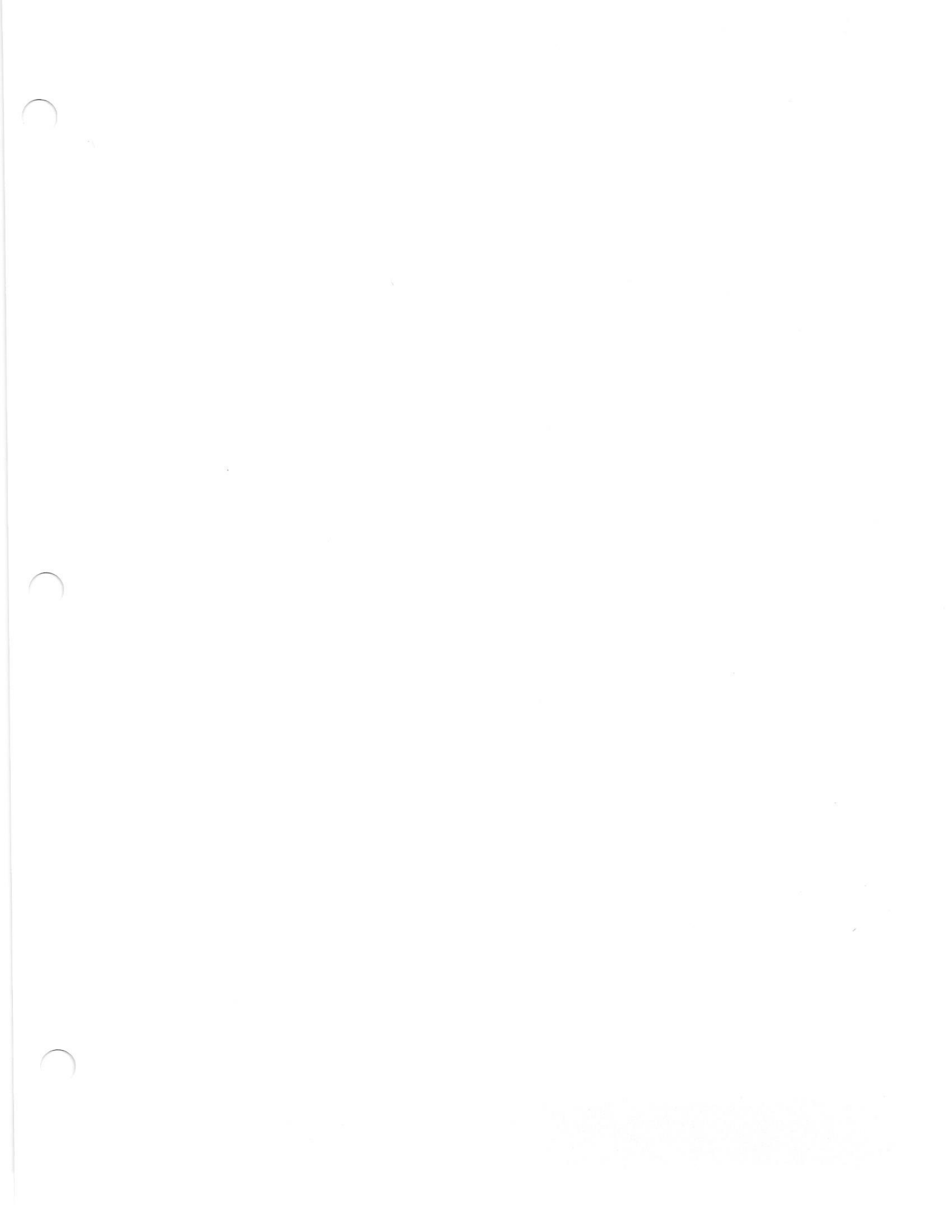
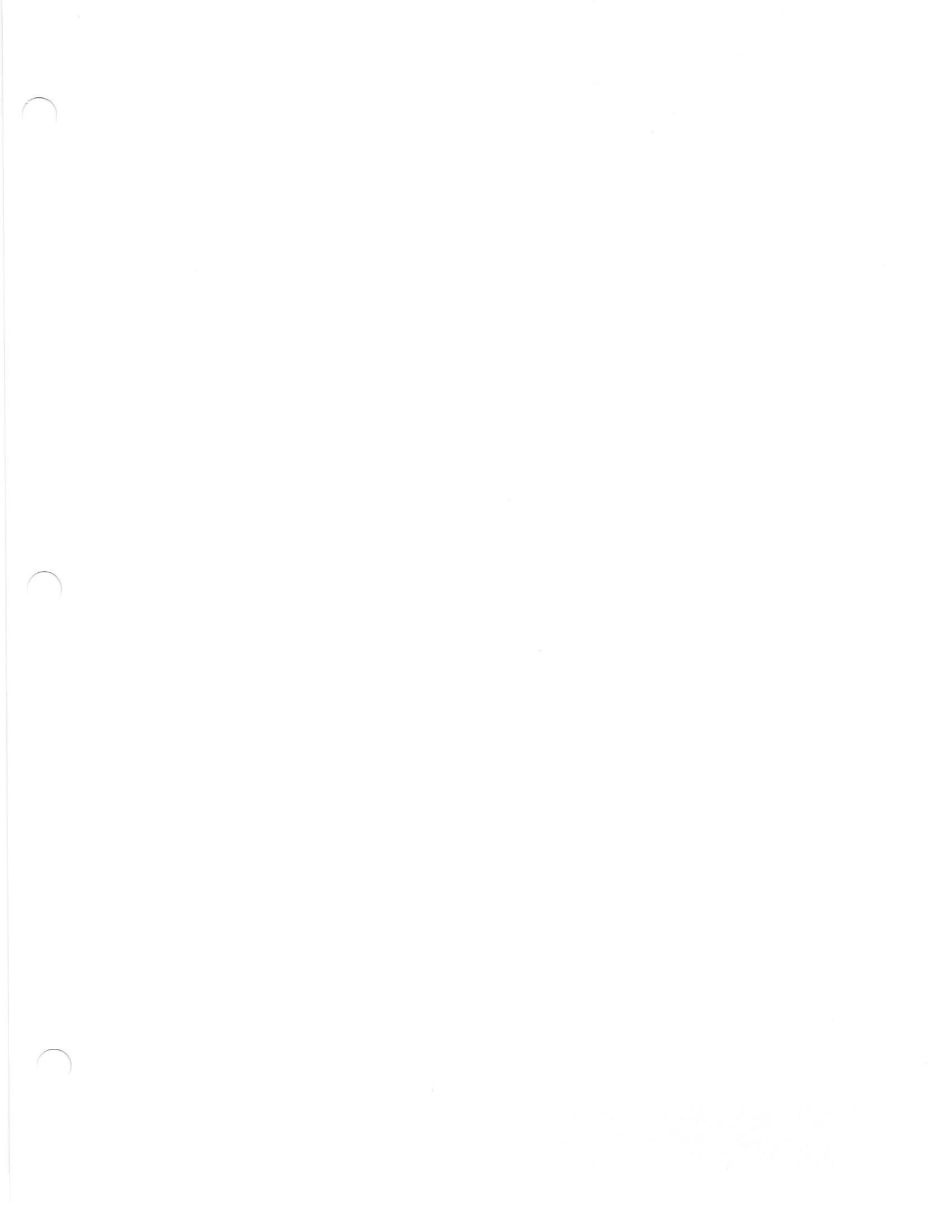


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INTRODUCTION

by Tony Kushner

Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* is a famous and notorious play. Its notoriety is certainly in decline: Ben Brantley began his review of its first New York revival, in 1996, with the semi-ironic announcement that it is, "apparently, O.K. to like *The Boys in the Band* again." In *The Gay Metropolis*, which offers the best account I've read of the play's creation, production, and reception, Charles Kaiser writes of the reactions of gay men of various ages at a 1993 screening of the 1970 film version. "Those in their forties [said], 'We're not like that anymore.' The thirty-year-olds said, 'We're more like that than we'd like to admit.' And the twenty-year-olds said, 'We're just like that.'" For the older men at that 1993 screening, *The Boys in the Band* seemed dated, at best. I think it's reasonable to discern, in their temporal distancing of the film (which features the entire, superb original cast of the play and much of its text) and in what I infer to be their subsequent dismissal of its value as a work of art, echoes of the controversy that once enveloped, if not entombed the play.

When it opened, in April 1968, *The Boys in the Band* electrified gay and straight theatergoers, receiving admiring and, for the time, rather sensitive reviews from mainstream critics. It ran for 1,000 performances and was a commercial hit. That a corner had been turned, that the play offered something never seen before, something that could not have been seen before April 1968, was expressed in Clive Barnes's review in *The New York Times*:

"The point is that this is not a play about a homosexual, but a play that takes the homosexual milieu, and the homosexual way of life, totally for granted and uses this as a valid basis of human experience. Thus it is a homosexual play, not a play about homosexuality."

By the time of the film's release two years later, some in the gay community were denouncing *The Boys in the Band* as a pernicious and pandering offering-up of stereotypical self-hating queens and closet cases to a nearly universally homophobic public. Passionate antipathy galvanized public action, culminating in what Vito Russo, in an interview in Eric Marcus's *Making History*, called "probably the first time gay people protested against a Hollywood movie." The world for gay people in 1970 was markedly different than it had been in 1968. It became different midway through the play's run. *The Boys in the Band* was still drawing large,

though largely straight, audiences to its Off-Broadway home on the night of June 27, 1969, when, fifty blocks away, gay liberation exploded out the front door of the Stonewall Inn, into the streets and ultimately all over the planet. In the immediate aftershock, and for many reverberations to come, the play looked, especially to those engaged actively in the struggle for our freedom, like a scabby relic of an unmourned, unliberated, unenlightened time. Mart Crowley was given grudging credit for writing a play that "publicized" the existence of homosexuals at a time when we were almost entirely invisible, but for little else. *The Boys in the Band*, when not denounced as destructive, was condescendingly described, as it still often is, as belonging to that depressing aesthetic subcategory, the period piece.

The younger gay men at the 1993 screening who'd said "we're just like that" recognized, apparently without reservations, their post-Stonewall, AIDS-era, ACT UP-era selves in the film. One could argue that the twenty-year-olds were more glib than their sadder and wiser elders, less aware of the film's complete exclusion of positive, happy, ego-syntonic gay characters, less aware of history and hence less apprehensively attuned to the malevolent uses to which such a picture of so much gay misery could be put by those who, in 1968, 1993, and today seek to oppress us. Or one could argue that the twenty-year-olds were more accustomed to and hence more secure in the hard-fought-for and hard-won coherence and burgeoning political power of our community than the forty-year-olds with whom they were watching the film. In 1993, those forty-year-old men would have been of a generation among the first to enter that difficult fray, bearing scars from lonely, against-the-odds battles successive generations were spared. And so perhaps, for the younger members of the screening audience, the passage of twenty-five eventful, fraught, triumphant, and tragic years of history was superseded by the pleasures of recognition and truth that art can provide.

But it would be wrong to contend that *The Boys in the Band* had to outlive the political passions of its day, to wait for its nonpolitical, personal moment to be appreciated. The men who gather in Michael's apartment have their individual pathologies, and to the extent that the play's characters and their agonies are movingly, engrossingly, entertainingly representative of human foibles and virtues which, while not necessarily eternal, have remained constant in the human psyche for a long, long time, the play is personal, rather than political - to the extent that these distinctions of personal and political have meaning. They don't have much

meaning, especially when applied to good plays, which is what *The Boys in the Band* is: a wonderful, and wonderfully strange play. For all that it revels and roots around in the interpersonal and the psychoanalytic, it displays its political ambitions proudly, even aggressively, without apology. The playwright's intent to use the stage to compel and re-shape public discussion couldn't have been clearer. Nor could it have been otherwise. A homosexual play in 1968 was political by definition, and this was the first homosexual play intended for general audiences. *The Boys in the Band* had to clear a space and build a stage so that its unprecedented actions and its unprecedented characters could appear.

The forces that bind Crowley's queer characters together also isolate them from one another. It's part of the disturbing power of the play that these forces are experienced simultaneously as centrifugal and centripetal, it's part of what makes that party, and the lives of the characters, so *unbearable*. Crowley wrote so that his audiences could understand these forces as cultural and political as well as personal. Interior feelings, sexual desires, even loves, are meant to be understood by the audience, and however fitfully, are understood by the characters themselves, as inseparable from, continuous with their suffering as gay men in a society that despises, abuses, and erases them. So unbearable is their condition of being slowly crushed and torn asunder, compressed and pulled apart, that the audiences of 1968, laughing and squirming, were made to understand, to *get it*: something's absolutely got to change.

This is a play about the hideous costs of stagnation, and also a play about change, from a historical moment when stagnation and change were locked in a struggle, progress grappling with reaction, a pitched battle the winner of which was as yet undecided. Trapped in their lives by habit, and also by choices, self-images, and vistas beyond that are severely circumscribed by oppression. Crowley's eight gay men, placed under terrible stress and duress during the course of the stage action, survive their Walpurgisnacht intact, prepared to repeat the same behaviors, patterns, lines, in the same company, again and again, like...well, they're like actors trapped in a play. Stefan Brecht, describing the actors in Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company in his book *Queer Theatre*, writes that Ludlam asks his actors to "shed the reticence of irony, abandon the poetic refuge of indefinable style, bear up under the vanity of their wish to be beautiful..." These tropes that Ludlam is rejecting are precisely those that have trapped Michael and his friends, who are precisely previous to the kind of Ludlamite transgressions

made possible, made imaginable, by even the barest beginnings of liberation.

The first critics to write about *The Boys in the Band* were unanimous about the play's opening act – it's very funny! About what follows, when the fun is drowned out by drunken nastiness, revelation, and self-immolation, critical opinion was, and I suspect remains, divided. Some accept the second act's change in tone, while for others the play becomes an imitation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. No one fails to notice the change, and no one ever calls it elegant. Among admirers and detractors, there's a consensus: *The Boys in the Band* has its ungainly imperfections. Like most plays that matter, this one is a flawed piece of work. Like most plays that matter, its flaws are an essential ingredient of its strength, of what makes it matter. What's compelling to me, and always a surprise each time I read or watch *The Boys in the Band*, apart from how much fun it is, is how upsettingly off-balance it is as well. It's the dialectical engine of stasis and physis that makes it so, I think. The play is like an egg about to hatch: there's a gleaming surface; there are sudden small cracks; there's a wobbling motion and a rolling about; there's a life-or-death struggle going on, under the shell. The thing inside wants out. Birth moments aren't pretty; birth is hard, and birth is bloody.

This is, crucially, a play about birth. That's announced moments after the curtain rises by Michael, the play's... Lead? Protagonist? Antagonist? Resident Hobgoblin? Anyway; early in the play, Michael introduces himself: "What you see before you is a thirty-year-old infant." By the end of the play, famously, notoriously, Michael says, "You show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse." But this isn't the last line of the play, nor is it in any sense the play's verdict. It is, in fact, an ambivalent joke. The laughter's effect is partly to discredit, if not to disown the hypothesis; it's an expression of a fear, not a certainty. A few lines later, after Michael asks his long-suffering, invincibly, incurably loyal and enduring ex, Donald, what time it is, he answers himself: "It's early." The ending of *The Boys in the Band* is entirely indeterminate. The infant hasn't grown, but neither is it stillborn. It's early yet.

After the party we've witnessed, we who have been watching have a right to think it would be better if the band disbanded. Each version of Harold's parting "Call you tomorrow" must provoke a "Please don't!" or a "WHY?" in the minds of the audience. But in the appallingly durable connective threads stretching from gay heart to gay heart there is a solidarity, a kinship, maybe even

love. Their toxic self-hatred isn't the whole story. Out of all the wounding and wickedness and vomit of self-hatred, truths emerge, and, crucially, in the pre-Stonewall world of *The Boys in the Band*, there are moments when patterns break, behavior shifts, and the men articulate a commitment to change themselves. They exist at a point in time before it's possible to articulate what it is, exactly, they will change into, and this situates the play in time, in history, but its specificity doesn't mean that having outlived its minute, its dramatic and political power has expired. Its specificity doesn't make the play a period piece, if by that term we mean a historical artifact, a harmless curio, suitable for display in a glass casket. *The Boys in the Band* is of value not as a catalogue of antiquated outrageous behavior, but as a sharp description of a kind of moment: right before the explosion, right before the spark that ignites the revolution, the moment that the clawing and pecking and scrabbling inside the egg begins, but before the shell begins to shatter. What the play captures is how disconcerting, how weird, how awkward and uncomfortable these pre-explosion moments are, when brooding rage and potent but as yet inchoate violence deranges and paralyzes those who have not yet found agency, whose souls and psyches are straining with abrasive, enervating tension toward release.

Here's another famous, notorious moment in the play – and it's amusing, how many lines from the play are described as “the play's most famous line.” Bernard, African-American, best girlfriends with Emory, a flaming queen, explains to Michael why he allows Emory to make racist remarks but won't allow Michael to do the same:

BERNARD: I don't like it from him and I don't like it from me – but I do it to myself and I let him do it. I let him do it because it's the only thing that, to him, makes him my equal. We both got the short end of the stick – but I got a hell of a lot more than he did and he knows it. I let him Uncle Tom me just so he can tell himself he's not a complete loser.

Bernard has just been goaded by Michael, and permitted by inebriation, to make a phone call declaring his love to the son of his mother's white, wealthy employer. He's spent the entire play not responding while Michael, a Southerner, becomes more and more disgustingly, overtly racist. And after the “I don't like it” speech, which is more analytic than outraged, Bernard spends the rest of the play getting drunker and drunker, his remaining words fragments of regret at having made the call. These moments, and that character, speak to us from a time now mercifully gone.

Bernard's passive acceptance of racism, and Emory's masochism, are repellent to us, and we wish Bernard and Emory were different. We know, from our vantage point, that they could have been other than the way they are in these moments, and if our compassion for them has been successfully enlisted, we hope they may yet be, we hope they will change. The mistake, I think, is to ascribe our distaste, discomfiture, and frustration to a failure of the play. For, among other things, it might make us miss the chain of quiet transformations set in motion by Bernard's response to Michael.

After hearing Bernard's speech, Emory makes a phone call of his own, and in the process he writes a phone number on Michael's telephone. Michael berates him: "I can do without your goddamn spit all over my telephone, you nelly coward." To which Emory replies, "I may be nelly, but I'm no coward." This is followed immediately by Emory saying, before dialing the phone, "Bernard, forgive me. I'm sorry. I won't ever say those things to you again."

This is a tiny evolutionary advance in consciousness. Bernard, having exposed the machinery and identified the fuel of Emory and Michael's racism, has taught Emory something, not only about Bernard but about himself.

It's risky for a playwright to show a character learning something, riskier when the instruction is gentle, rational, not dramatic, not a screaming fight or a brawl or a shocking revelation, and riskier still to have the character articulate what he's learned. But *The Boys in the Band* is a brave play, written by a brave playwright. *Learning* is, unavoidably, one of the first steps after infancy, one of the initial stages of change. And so, at the end of the play, risking accusations of pedantry, transparency, and artlessness for the sake of another imperative, of cracking the eggshell, Crowley has Michael utter another of the play's "most famous" lines: "...If we... If we could just...not hate ourselves so much. That's it, you know. If we could just *learn* not to hate ourselves quite so very much." The italics are the playwright's. *Learn*.

This was Mart Crowley's first play, and yes, it is a novice's play. The playwright is learning, but he's learning fast. Yes, he borrowed heavily from the most famous American play of the decade, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. But in the process of borrowing, Crowley in a sense outed Albee's masterpiece, long before outing was a verb. Yes, *The Boys in the Band* is unshapely. According to *The Gay Metropolis*, Crowley and the director cut it down from an original draft twice as long. But in the course of the play a great deal of business among nine characters is transacted with

an entirely playable efficiency and grace, and nothing is given short shrift. Critics complain that the Hank and Larry plot takes up too much time and gives the second act a meandering, or as one might more charitably call it, an *O'Neillian* quality. But the Hank and Larry plot is, it should be pointed out, a rather lovely love story, answer and antidote to the games of sour, monadic Michael. By asking us to stick with the lovers' story, to follow it to its conclusion, Crowley manages to end the play with two overlapping events: onstage, Michael melts down, dissolves in water like the wicked witch he is, and then, with Donald's help, regroups; and offstage, up in Michael's bedroom, Larry and Hank are having sex. We know that this is what they're doing because we aren't children, and in case any of us are, we know it because Michael tells Alan, the ostensibly heterosexual interloper, that that's what they're doing. As the savage denouement plays out downstairs in the living room, upstairs, two men are making love, and it's as if an invisible, unspoken, powerful benediction is descending from above, descending to the tormented souls below like a vision of paradise. Okay, maybe that's a little much. But it's a beautiful, moving effect that Crowley has arranged: against all the onstage unhappiness, two men offstage are making love to one another, and sitting in the audience, in the dark, we're aware of them, subliminally, subcutaneously, we sense their heat, till the play ends.

Yes, it's sort of odd that Alan, the ostensibly heterosexual interloper, hangs around for so long, which can be blamed on the booze, or attributed to his sexual hunger. The way that he lingers is not especially deft, vanishing for stretches of the second act only to reappear and re-force the question, "Why hasn't he gone?" But there's something deeply strange about Alan's sudden loss of will after he beats up Emory. He seems robbed of his powers of speech and motion, of his effectivity. He becomes helpless, defenseless. Something in the queerness of the room and its inhabitants transfixes and mesmerizes him, like a child in a fairy tale, caught in a spell. The power arrangement of the world has gone awry. It's now filled with and run by fags, and the straight guy is reduced to lurking around the margins.

After Michael reveals Alan's dalliance with a college friend, Alan makes his telephoned declaration of love – to his wife. What follows is a silence. In the script, it's a silence after Alan departs. In the film, and since the play's cast was kept intact for the film one assumes it was played this way onstage, the silence occurs right after Alan hangs up the phone. It's an immensely interesting,

meaningful, ambiguous but grieving silence. We don't know if Alan's mostly straight or mostly a liar. We leave the theater not knowing which. None of the characters knows the answer either – maybe not even Alan. Michael's fierce need or desire for Alan to be gay is not sated. The audience must wonder: Are these gay men silent because they're demoralized and abashed in the face of triumphant heterosexual love; or are they silenced by Alan's defeat, by the spectacle of a closet door being slammed shut? Reaction asserts itself in the first possibility, progress in the second, and it's an accomplishment of the play that, when that silence settles in, the audience can feel the dragons battling.

And yes, the play begins a little clumsily, with those loooooong monologues of Michael's and Donald's about their parents! But even here, an important change is being signaled. Michael sneers at Donald's analysis. "Christ," he says, "how sick analysts must get of hearing how Mommy and Daddy made their darlin' into a fairy." Donald answers him:

DONALD: It's beyond that just now. Today I finally begin to see how some of the other pieces of the puzzle relate to them. – Like why I never finished anything I started in my life...my neurotic compulsion to not succeed... Failure is the only thing with which I feel at home.

It's easy to assume, and many have, that these self-hating gay men must be in analysis to be cured, to become heterosexual. But that's not the case, or for Donald, it's not the case any longer. Donald, at least, is finally beginning to see beyond.

Michael's friends are moving past waiting for an analyst's, or indeed any, cure for their sexual desires. This critical, radical shift in consciousness is identified by Harold, with an unanswerable finality that makes this, for my money, the play's most deservedly "most famous" line:

HAROLD: You are a sad and pathetic man. You're a homosexual and you don't want to be. But there is nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God, not all the analysis you can buy in all the years you've got left to live. You may very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life if you want it desperately enough – if you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate – but you will always be homosexual as well. Always, Michael. Always. Until the day you die.

Harold is the play's *deus ex machina*. He is its Socrates, and he's late, like Socrates was, to the Symposium. He is, in fact and also within the world of the play, a character, an artifice, carefully

assembled, clockwork precision speech, coiled springs. He is an ice skater; he glides. Pockmarked, burnt by battles but above them now, looking down on travails like an Oberon, coated with some enameling that protects him from friction, he's Crowley's most original creation, and he seems to come from another world – perhaps the future.

(Leonard Frey's magnificent performance, immortalized on film, is the stuff of dreams and nightmares. In the 1996 New York revival, the part was played by the great David Greenspan, who worked gloriously funny and strange variations on Frey's Harold. Greenspan's quoting of a filmed performance of a stage performance of the character he was playing had the effect of almost entirely de-naturalizing Harold, which in turn illuminated the play's referential naturalism, according to which every character is performing and posing, everyone is quoting performances seen on stage and screen, seeking poetic refuge in style.)

"Always, Michael. Always." A creature of consummate artifice, Harold's great weapon is, paradoxically, reality. His "always" is a predecessor to "We're here, we're queer, get used to it." What's reality in this instance, what's nonnegotiable, the bottom line, is this: the irreducible, ineradicable fact of same-sex desire. Desire cannot be torn out of the person who's desiring, because the desire is, in fact, the person who's desiring. We aren't essences, but we are relationships: We are who we love. And the desire to alter that, to eradicate that, as Harold makes all but explicit, is the desire to annihilate, to kill or to die.

It is a paradox that an insistence on immutability, on permanence, may be the catalyst for mutation, for change; not unlike the paradox that desperation catalyzes hope in the form of action, or that freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. "Always." With that word, Harold kills Michael's hope, his secret, false hope; with "always," real hope, meaningful hope, may arise. Grumblers point out that Michael leaves at the end of the play to attend mass, burrowing deeper into self-hatred, for what else might a gay man expect to find in a Catholic church? But grumblers and critics miss details while building their cases, and there are churches and churches, and Michael is off to St. Malachy's, "where all the show people go..." where he will find... Who knows what?

Most plays don't last a minute. Will this one last always? Who knows? Who knows how long always will be? Mart Crowley's play courageously answered the call of a historical moment, and drew into itself not only the truths specific to that single fleeting

moment, but the ferocious, off-kilter, half-awake half-dreaming, scary, and hopeful truths of all such moments of Pre-Dawn Possibility. So here we are, decades later, still scrutinizing, still thinking about it. Happy 50th Anniversary, *Boys in the Band*!

**THE BROADWAY
VERSION**

The 50th Anniversary Broadway production of *THE BOYS IN THE BAND* opened at the Booth Theatre on May 31, 2018 and was produced by David Stone, Scott Rudin, Patrick Catullo, Aaron Glick, and Ryan Murphy. The production was directed by Joe Mantello, with scenic and costume design by David Zinn, lighting design by Hugh Vanstone, and sound design by Leon Rothenberg. The production stage manager was James Fitzsimmons. The cast was as follows (in order of appearance):

MICHAELJim Parsons
DONALD.....Matt Bomer
EMORY Robin DeJésus
HANK Tuc Watkins
LARRY Andrew Rannells
BERNARD..... Michael Benjamin Washington
ALANBrian Hutchison
COWBOYCharlie Carver
HAROLD Zachary Quinto

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL

DONALD

EMORY

HANK

LARRY

BERNARD

ALAN

COWBOY

HAROLD

(There is no curtain. The lights come up on a smartly-appointed duplex apartment in the East Fifties, New York, consisting of a living room and, on a higher level, a bedroom. Bossa nova music blasts from a phonograph. MICHAEL, wearing a robe, enters from the kitchen, carrying a scotch liquor bottle and one red rose in a vase. He crosses to set scotch on the bar, moves to the left table to place vase. He crosses to sofa, sits, and starts ribbon on package. The front-door buzzer sounds. MICHAEL stops tying package, goes to door, pushes button to release outside building door, opens apartment door, and turns off phonograph as DONALD enters. DONALD is dressed in khakis and a Lacoste shirt, carrying an airline zipper bag and a stack of books. He drops his books on sofa.)*

MICHAEL. Donald! You're about a day and a half early!

DONALD. The doctor cancelled!

(Puts the zipper bag on top of stairs.)

MICHAEL. Cancelled! How'd you get inside?

(Looks out front door.)

DONALD. The street door was open.

(As he comes back to sofa to pick up books and MICHAEL closes door.)

MICHAEL. You wanna drink?

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DONALD. (*Deposits his books on bar and sits on the end of the sofa.*) Not until I've had my shower. I want something to work out today – I want to try to relax and enjoy *something*.

MICHAEL. You in a blue funk because of the doctor?

DONALD. Christ, no. I was depressed long before I got *there*.

MICHAEL. Why'd the prick cancel?

DONALD. A virus or something. He looked awful.

MICHAEL. (*Goes to desk for shopping bag and returns to sofa.*) Well, this'll pick you up. I went shopping today and bought all kind of goodies – Sandalwood soap...

DONALD. (*Removing his socks and shoes.*) I feel better already.

MICHAEL. – Your very own toothbrush because I'm sick to death of you using mine.

DONALD. How do you think *I* feel.

MICHAEL. You've had worse things in your mouth. And, also for you...something called "Control." Notice nowhere is it called hair spray – just simply, "Control." And the words, "For Men," are written about thirty-seven times all over the goddamn can!

DONALD. It's called Butch Assurance.

MICHAEL. Well, it's *still* hair spray – no matter if they call it "Balls"!

(Goes above sofa, picks up bag, and goes to step landing.)

It's all going on your very own shelf which is to be labeled: Donald's Saturday Night Douche Kit.

(Shouting over shoulder as he takes bag to bathroom on second level.)

By the way, are you spending the night?

DONALD. Nope. I'm driving back. I still get very itchy when I'm in this town too long.

MICHAEL. I'll never know how you can tank up on martinis and make it back to the Hamptons in one piece.

DONALD. Believe me, it's easier than getting here. Ever had an anxiety attack at sixty miles an hour?

(DONALD goes to the bedroom, drops his shoes and socks. MICHAEL follows.)

MICHAEL. Why didn't the prick call you and cancel. Suppose you'd driven all this way for nothing.

DONALD. *(Removing his shirt.)* Why do you keep calling him a prick?

MICHAEL. Whoever heard of an analyst having a session with a patient for two hours on Saturday evening.

DONALD. He simply prefers to take Mondays off.

MICHAEL. Works late on Saturday and takes Monday off – what is he, a psychiatrist or a hairdresser?

DONALD. Actually, he's both. He shrinks my head and combs me out.

(Lies on the bed.)

Besides, I had to come in town to a birthday party anyway. Right?

MICHAEL. You had to remind me. If there's one thing I'm not ready for, it's five screaming queens singing "Happy Birthday."

DONALD. Who's coming?

MICHAEL. They're really all Harold's friends. It's *his* birthday, and I want everything to be just the way he'd want it. I don't want to have to listen to him kvetch about how nobody ever does anything for anybody but themselves.

DONALD. Himself.

MICHAEL. Himself. I think you know everybody anyway – they're the same old tired fairies you've seen around since the day one. Actually, there'll be seven, counting Harold and you and me.

DONALD. Are you calling me a screaming queen or a tired fairy?

MICHAEL. Oh, I beg your pardon – six tired, screaming fairy queens and one anxious queer.

DONALD. You don't think Harold'll mind my being here, do you?

MICHAEL. If she doesn't like it, she can twirl on it. Listen, I'll be out of your way in just a second. I've only got one more thing to do.

DONALD. Surgery, so early in the evening?

MICHAEL. Sunt! That's French, with a cedilla.

(He gives him a crooked third finger and goes to the mirror.)

I've got to comb my hair for the thirty-seventh time. Hair – that's singular. My hair, without exaggeration, is clearly falling on the floor. And *fast*, baby!

DONALD. You're totally paranoid. You've got plenty of hair.

MICHAEL. What you see before you is a masterpiece of deception. My hairline starts about here.

(Indicates crown.)

All this is just tortured forward.

DONALD. Well, I hope, for your sake, no strong wind comes up.

MICHAEL. If one does, I'll be in terrible trouble. I will then have a bald head and shoulder-length fringe.

(Runs his fingers through his hair, holds it away from his scalp, dips the top of his head so that DONALD can see. DONALD is silent.)

Not good, huh?

DONALD. Not the greatest.

MICHAEL. It's called, "getting old."

(Turns to study himself in mirror, sighs.)

Well, one thing you have to say for masturbation...you certainly don't have to look your best.

(He slips out of robe, flings it at DONALD. DONALD laughs, takes the robe, and exits to the bath. MICHAEL takes a sweater out of a chest, pulls it on.)

What are you so depressed about? I mean, other than the usual *everything*.

(*A beat.*)

DONALD. (*Reluctantly.*) I really don't want to get into it.

MICHAEL. Well, if you're not going to tell me, how can we have a conversation *in depth* – a warm, rewarding, meaningful friendship?

DONALD. Up yours!

MICHAEL. (*Southern accent.*) Why, Cap'n Butler, how you talk!

(*Pause. DONALD appears in the doorway, holding a glass of water and a small bottle of pills. MICHAEL looks up.*)

DONALD. It's just that today I finally realized I was *raised* to be a failure. I was *groomed* for it. Naturally, it all goes back to Evelyn and Walt.

MICHAEL. Christ, how sick analysts must get of hearing how Mommy and Daddy made their darlin' into a fairy.

DONALD. It's beyond just that now. Today I finally began to see how some of the other pieces of the puzzle relate to them. – Like why I never finished anything I started in my life...my neurotic compulsion to not succeed.

MICHAEL. Oh, Donald, you're so serious tonight!

"FORGET YOUR TROUBLES, C'MON, GET HAPPY!"

(*Sees DONALD isn't buying it.*)

– What's more boring than a queen doing a Judy Garland imitation?

DONALD. A queen doing a Bette Davis imitation.

MICHAEL. Meanwhile – back at the Evelyn and Walt Syndrome.

DONALD. I've realized that it was always when I failed that Evelyn loved me the most – because it displeased Walt, who wanted perfection. And I began to fail on purpose to get love. Failure is the only thing with which I feel at home. Because it's what I was taught at home.

MICHAEL. Killer whales is what they are. Killer whales.

(Pause. MICHAEL suddenly tears off his sweater, throws it in the air, letting it land where it may. He whips out another and pulls it on as he starts down the stairs for the living room. DONALD follows.)

DONALD. Where'd you get *that* sweater?

MICHAEL. This clever little shop on the right bank called Hermés.

DONALD. I work my ass off for forty-five lousy dollars a week *scrubbing* floors, and you waltz around throwing cashmere sweaters on them.

MICHAEL. The one on the floor in the bedroom is vicuña.

DONALD. I *beg* your pardon.

MICHAEL. You could get a job doing something else. Nobody holds a gun to your head to be a charwoman. That is, how you say, your neurosis.

DONALD. Gee, and I thought it's why I was born.

MICHAEL. Besides, just because I *wear* expensive clothes doesn't necessarily mean they're paid for.

DONALD. That is, how you say, *your* neurosis.

MICHAEL. I'm a spoiled brat, so what do I know about being mature. The only thing mature means to me is *Victor* Mature.

DONALD. I can understand people having an affinity for the stage – but movies are such garbage, who can take them seriously?

MICHAEL. Well, I'm sorry if your sense of art is offended. Odd as it may seem, there wasn't any Shubert Theatre in Hot Coffee, Mississippi!

DONALD. However – thanks to the silver screen, your neurosis has got style. It takes a certain flair to squander one's unemployment check at Joe Allen's.

MICHAEL. What's so snappy about being over heels in debt. The only thing smart about it is the ingenious ways I dodge the bill collectors.

DONALD. Yeah. Come to think of it, you're the type that gives faggots a bad name.

MICHAEL. And you, Donald, *you* are a credit to the homosexual. A reliable, hardworking, floor-scrubbing, bill-paying fag who don't own nothin' to nobody.

DONALD. *I am a model fairy.*

(MICHAEL has taken some ribbon and paper and has begun to wrap Harold's birthday gift.)

MICHAEL. You think it's just nifty how I've always flitted from Beverly Hills to Rome to Acapulco to Amsterdam, picking up a lot of one-night stands and a lot of custom-made duds along the trail, but I'm here to tell you that the only place in all those miles – the only place I've ever been *happy* – was on the goddamn plane.

(He puffs up the bow on the package. A beat.)

Run, charge, run, buy, borrow, make, spend, run, squander, beg, run, run, run, waste, waste, *waste!*

(A beat.)

And why? And why? Finis. Applause.

(DONALD hesitates, walks over to MICHAEL, puts his arms around him, and holds him. It is a totally warm and caring gesture.)

There's nothing quite as good as feeling sorry for yourself, is there?

DONALD. Nothing.

MICHAEL. *(A la Bette Davis.)* I adore cheap sentiment.

(Breaks away.)

Okay, I'm taking orders for drinks. What'll it be?

DONALD. An extra-dry Beefeater-martini-on-the-rocks-with-a-twist.

MICHAEL. Coming up!

(DONALD exits up the stairs into the bath; MICHAEL into the kitchen. Momentarily,

MICHAEL returns, carrying an ice bucket in one hand and a silver tray of cracked crab in the other, singing another forgotten Grable tune. *(The telephone rings.)*

MICHAEL. Backstage, *New Moon*.

(A beat.)

Alan? My God, I don't believe it. How *are* you? *Where* are you? In town! Great! When'd you get in? Is Fran with you? Oh. What? No. No, I'm tied up tonight. No, tonight's no good for me. – You mean, *now*? Well, Alan, ole boy, it's a friend's birthday and I'm having a few people. – No, you wouldn't exactly call it a birthday party – well, yes, actually I guess you would. I mean, what else would you call it? A *wake*, maybe. I'm sorry I can't ask you to join us – but – well kiddo, it just wouldn't work out. – No it's not place cards or anything. It's just that – well, I'd hate to just see you for ten minutes and... Alan? Alan? What's the matter? – Are you – are you crying? – Oh, Alan, what's wrong? – Alan, listen, come on over. No, no, it's perfectly all right. Well, just hurry up. I mean, come on by and have a drink, okay? Alan...are you all right? Okay. Yeah. Same old address. Yeah. Bye.

(Slowly hangs up, stares blankly into space.
DONALD appears, bathed and changed. *He strikes a pose.)*

DONALD. Well. Am I stunning?

(MICHAEL looks up.)

MICHAEL. *(Tonelessly.)* You're absolutely stunning. – You *look* like shit, but I'm absolutely stunned.

DONALD. *(Crestfallen.)* Your grapes are, how you say, sour.

MICHAEL. Listen, you won't believe what just happened.

DONALD. Where's my drink?

MICHAEL. I didn't make it.

(DONALD goes to bar, makes himself a martini.)

My old roommate from Georgetown just called.

DONALD. Alan what's-his-name?

MICHAEL. McCarthy. He's up here from Washington on business or something, and he's on his way over here.

DONALD. Well, I hope he knows the lyrics to "Happy Birthday."

MICHAEL. Listen, asshole, what am I going to do? He's *straight*. And *Square City*!

("Top Drawer" accent through clenched teeth:)

I mean, he's rally vury proper. Auffully good family.

DONALD. *(Same accent.)* That's *so* important.

MICHAEL. *(Regular speech.)* I mean, they look down on people in the *theater* – so whatta you think he'll feel about this *freak show* I've got booked for dinner?

DONALD. *(Sipping his drink.)* Christ, is that good.

MICHAEL. Want some cracked crab?

DONALD. Not just yet. Why'd you invite him over?

MICHAEL. He invited himself. He said he had to see me tonight. *Immediately*. He absolutely lost his spring on the phone – he started crying – and that's not his style at all. I mean, he's so pulled-together he wouldn't show any emotion if he were in a plane crash. What am I going to do?

DONALD. Are you suddenly ashamed of your friends?

MICHAEL. Donald, *you* are the only person I know of whom I am truly ashamed. Some people *do* have different standards from yours and mine, you know. And if we don't acknowledge them, we're just as narrow-minded and backward as we think they are.

DONALD. You know what you are, Michael? You're a *real* person.

MICHAEL. Thank you and fuck you.

(MICHAEL crosses to take a piece of crab and nibble on it.)

Want some?

DONALD. No, thanks. How could you ever have been friends with a bore like that?

MICHAEL. Believe it or not, there was a time in my life when I didn't go around *announcing* that I was a faggot.

DONALD. That must have been before speech replaced sign language.

MICHAEL. Don't give me any static on that score. I didn't come out until I left college.

DONALD. It seems to me that the first time we tricked, we met in a gay bar on Third Avenue during your *junior* year.

MICHAEL. Cunt.

DONALD. I thought you'd never say it.

MICHAEL. Sure you don't want any cracked crab?

DONALD. *Not yet! If you don't mind!* Do you want more club soda?

MICHAEL. What?

DONALD. There's nothing but club soda in that glass. I've been watching you for several Saturdays now. You've actually stopped drinking, haven't you?

MICHAEL. And smoking, too.

DONALD. And smoking, too. How long's it been?

MICHAEL. Five weeks.

DONALD. That's amazing.

MICHAEL. I've found God.

DONALD. It *is* amazing – for you.

MICHAEL. Or is God dead?

DONALD. Yes, thank God. I could always tell when you were getting high – one way.

MICHAEL. I'd get hostile.

DONALD. What made you stop – the analyst?

MICHAEL. He certainly had a lot do with it. Mainly, I just didn't think I could survive another hangover, that's all. I don't think I could get through that morning-after ick attack.

DONALD. Morning-after what?

MICHAEL. Icks! Anxiety! Guilt! Unfathomable guilt – either real or imagined – from that split second your eyes

pop open and you say, "Oh, my God, what did I do last night!" and ZAP, total recall!

DONALD. Tell me about it!

MICHAEL. And then that struggle to live till lunch, when you have a double Bloody Mary – that is, if you've *waited* until lunch – and then you're half-pissed again and useless for the rest of the afternoon. And the only sure cure is to go to bed for about thirty-seven hours, but who ever does that?

Instead, you hang on till cocktail time, and by then you're ready for what the night holds – which hopefully is another party, where the whole goddamn cycle starts over!

(A beat.)

Well, I've been on that merry-go-round long enough, and I either had to get off or die of centrifugal force.

(The wall-panel buzzer sounds.)

DONALD. Joe College has finally arrived.

MICHAEL. Suddenly, I have such an ick!

(Pressing the wall-panel button.)

Now listen, Donald...

DONALD. *(Quick.)* Michael, don't insult me by giving me any lecture on acceptable social behavior. I promise to sit with my legs spread apart and keep my voice in a deep register.

MICHAEL. Donald, you are a real *card-carrying cunt*.

(The apartment door buzzes several times.

MICHAEL goes to it, pauses briefly before it, and tears it open to reveal **EMORY, LARRY, and HANK**. **EMORY** is in Bermuda shorts and a sweater. **LARRY** has on a turtleneck and sandals. **HANK** is in a dark Ivy League suit with a vest and has on cordovan shoes. **LARRY and HANK** carry birthday gifts. **EMORY** carries a large, covered dish.)

EMORY. (*Bursting in.*) ALL RIGHT THIS IS A RAID!
EVERYBODY'S UNDER ARREST!

(This entrance is followed by a loud, raucous laugh as EMORY throws his arms around MICHAEL and gives him a big kiss on the cheek.)

(Referring to dish.)

Hello, darlin'! Connie Casserole. Oh, Mary, don't ask.

MICHAEL. (*Weary already.*) Hello, Emory. Put it in the kitchen.

(EMORY spots DONALD.)

EMORY. Who is this exotic woman over here?

MICHAEL. Hi, Hank. Larry.

(They say, "Hi," shake hands, enter. MICHAEL looks out in the hall, comes back into the room, and closes the door.)

DONALD. Hi, Emory.

EMORY. My dear, I thought you had perished! Where have you been hiding your classically chiseled features?

DONALD. I don't live in the city anymore.

MICHAEL. (*To LARRY and HANK, referring to the gifts.*) Here, I'll take those. Where's yours, Emory?

EMORY. It's arriving later.

(EMORY exits to the kitchen. LARRY and DONALD's eyes have met. HANK has handed MICHAEL his gift - LARRY is too preoccupied.)

HANK. Larry! - Larry!

LARRY. What!

HANK. Give Michael the gift!

LARRY. Oh. Here.

(To HANK.) Louder. So my mother in Philadelphia can hear you.

HANK. Well, you were just standing there in a trance.

MICHAEL. (*To LARRY and HANK, as EMORY re-enters.*) You both know Donald, don't you?

DONALD. Sure. Nice to see you.

(*To HANK.*) Hi.

HANK. (*Shaking hands.*) Nice to meet you.

MICHAEL. Oh, I thought you'd met.

DONALD. Well...

LARRY. We haven't exactly met but we've... Hi.

DONALD. Hi.

HANK. But you've what?

LARRY. ...*Seen*...each other before.

MICHAEL. Well, *that* sounds murky.

HANK. You've never met but you've seen each other.

LARRY. What was wrong with the way *I* said it?

HANK. Where?

EMORY. (*Loud aside to MICHAEL.*) I think they're going to have their first fight.

LARRY. The first one since we got out of the taxi.

MICHAEL. (*Referring to EMORY.*) Where'd you find this trash?

LARRY. Downstairs leaning against a lamppost.

EMORY. With an orchid behind my ear and big wet lips painted over the lipline.

MICHAEL. Just like Maria Montez.

DONALD. Oh, *please!*

EMORY. (*To DONALD.*) What have you got against Maria – she was a good woman.

MICHAEL. Listen, everybody, this old college friend of mine is in town and he's stopping by for a fast drink on his way to dinner somewhere. But, listen, he's *straight*, so...

LARRY. *Straight!* If it's the one I met, he's about as straight as the Yellow Brick Road.

MICHAEL. No, you met Justin Stuart.

HANK. I don't remember anybody named Justin Stuart.

LARRY. Of course you don't, dope, *I* met him.

MICHAEL. Well, this is someone else.

DONALD. Alan McCarthy. A very close total stranger.

MICHAEL. It's not that I care what he would think of me, really – it's just that *he's* not ready for it. And he never will be. You understand that don't you, Hank?

HANK. Oh, sure.

LARRY. You honestly think he doesn't know about you?

MICHAEL. If there's the slightest suspicion, he's never let on one bit.

EMORY. What's he had, a lobotomy?

(He exits up the stairs into the bath.)

MICHAEL. I was super-careful when I was in college, and I still am whenever I see him. I don't know why, but I am.

DONALD. Tilt.

MICHAEL. You may think it was a crock of shit, Donald, but to him I'm sure we were close friends. The closest. To pop that balloon now just wouldn't be fair to him. And if that's phony of me, Donald, then that's phony of me and make something of it.

DONALD. I pass.

MICHAEL. Well, even you have to admit it's much simpler to deal with the world according to its rules and then go right ahead and do what you damn well please. You do understand *that*, don't you?

DONALD. Now that you've put it in layman's terms.

MICHAEL. I was just like Alan when I was in college. Very large in the dating department. Wore nothing but those constipated Ivy League clothes and those ten-pound cordovan shoes.

(To HANK.) No offense.

HANK. Quite all right.

MICHAEL. I butched it up quite a bit. And I didn't think I was lying to myself. I really thought I was straight.

EMORY. *(Coming downstairs, tucking a Kleenex into his sleeve.)* Who do you have to fuck to get a drink around here?

MICHAEL. Will you *light* somewhere?

(**EMORY** *sits on steps.*)

Or I thought I was straight. I know I didn't come out till after I'd graduated.

DONALD. What about all those weekends up from school?

MICHAEL. I still wasn't out. I was still in the "Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome."

LARRY. The *what?*

MICHAEL. The Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome. You know, when you made it with some guy in school, and the next day when you had to face each other there was always a lot of shit-kicking crap about, "Man, was I drunk last night! Christ, I don't remember a thing!"

(*Everyone laughs.*)

DONALD. You were just guilty because you were Catholic, that's all.

MICHAEL. That's not true. The Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome knows no religion. It has to do with immaturity. Although, I will admit there's a high percentage of it among Mormons.

EMORY. Trollop.

MICHAEL. We all somehow managed to justify our actions in those days. I later found out that even Justin Stuart, my closest friend...

DONALD. Other than Alan McCarthy.

MICHAEL. (*A look to DONALD.*) ...Was doing the same thing. Only Justin was going to Boston on weekends.

(**EMORY** and **LARRY** *laugh.*)

LARRY. (*To HANK.*) Sound familiar?

MICHAEL. You see, in the Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome, you really *are* drunk. That part of it is true. It's just that you also do *remember everything*.

(*General laughter.*)

Oh, God, I used to have to get loaded to go in a gay bar!

DONALD. Well, times certainly have changed.

MICHAEL. They *have*. Lately I've gotten to despise the bars. Everybody just standing around and standing around – it's like one eternal intermission.

HANK. (To **LARRY**.) Sound familiar?

EMORY. I can't stand the bars either. All that cat-and-mouse business – you hang around *staring* at each other all night and wind up going home alone.

MICHAEL. And pissed.

LARRY. A lot of guys have to get loaded to have sex.

(*Quick look to HANK, who is unamused.*)

So I've been told.

MICHAEL. If you remember, Donald, the first time we made it I was so drunk I could hardly stand up.

DONALD. You were so drunk you could hardly *get* it up.

MICHAEL. (*Mock innocence.*) Christ, I was so drunk I don't remember.

DONALD. Bullshit, you remember.

MICHAEL. (*Sings to DONALD.*)

“JUST FRIENDS, LOVERS NO MORE...”

EMORY. You may as well be. Everybody thinks you are anyway.

DONALD. We never *were* – *really*.

MICHAEL. We didn't have time to be – we got to know each other too fast.

(*Door buzzer sounds.*)

Oh, Jesus, it's Alan! Now, please, everybody, do me a favor and cool it for the few minutes he's here.

EMORY. Anything for a sis, Mary.

MICHAEL. That's *exactly* what I'm talking about, Emory. *No camping!*

EMORY. Sorry.

(*Deep, deep voice to DONALD.*)

Think the Giants are gonna win the pennant this year?

DONALD. (*Deep, deep voice.*) Fuckin' A, Mac.

(**MICHAEL** goes to the door, opens it to reveal **BERNARD**, dressed in a shirt and tie and sport jacket. He carries a birthday gift and two bottles of red wine.)

EMORY. (*Big scream.*) Oh, it's only another queen!

BERNARD. And it ain't the red one, either.

EMORY. It's the queen of spades!

(**BERNARD** enters. **MICHAEL** looks out in the hall.)

MICHAEL. Bernard, is the downstairs door open?

BERNARD. It was, but I closed it.

MICHAEL. Good.

(*Referring to the two bottles of red wine.*)

I'll take those. You can put your present with the others.

(*The phone rings.*)

BERNARD. Hi, Larry. Hi, Hank.

MICHAEL. *Christ of the Andes!* Donald, will you bartend, please?

(**MICHAEL** gives **DONALD** the wine bottles, goes to the phone.)

BERNARD. (*Extending his hand to DONALD.*) Hello, Donald. Good to see you.

DONALD. Bernard.

MICHAEL. (*Answers phone.*) Hello? Alan?

EMORY. Hi, Bernadette. Anybody ever tell you you'd look divine in a hammock, surrounded by louvres and ceiling fans and lots and lots of lush tropical ferns?

BERNARD. (*To EMORY.*) You're *such* a fag. You take the cake.

EMORY. Oh, what *about* the cake – whose job was that?

LARRY. Mine. I ordered one to be delivered.

EMORY. How many candles did you say to put on it – eighty?

MICHAEL. ...What? Wait a minute. There's too much noise. Let me go to another phone.

(He presses the hold button, hangs up, dashes toward stairs.)

LARRY. Michael, did the cake come?

MICHAEL. No.

DONALD. *(To MICHAEL, as he passes.)* What's up?

MICHAEL. Do I know?

LARRY. Jesus, I'd better call. Okay if I use the private line?

MICHAEL. *(Going upstairs.)* Sure.

(He stops dead on stairs, turns.)

Listen, everybody, there's some cracked crab there. Help yourselves.

(DONALD shakes his head. MICHAEL continues up the stairs to the bedroom. LARRY crosses to the phone, presses the free-line button, picks up receiver, dials information.)

DONALD. Is everybody ready for a drink?

(HANK and BERNARD say, "Yeah.")

EMORY. *(Flipping up his sweater.)* Ready! I'll be your topless cocktail waitress.

BERNARD. Please spare us the sight of your sagging tits.

EMORY. *(To HANK, LARRY.)* What're you having, kids?

MICHAEL. *(On the phone.)* ...Yes, Alan...

LARRY. Vodka and tonic.

(Into phone.) Could I have the number for the Marseilles Bakery in Manhattan?

EMORY. A vod and ton and a...

HANK. Is there any beer?

EMORY. Beer! Who drinks beer before dinner?

BERNARD. Beer drinkers.

DONALD. That's telling him.

MICHAEL. ...No, Alan, don't be silly. What's there to apologize for?

EMORY. Truck drivers do. Or...or wallpaperers. Not schoolteachers. They have sherry.

HANK. This one has beer.

EMORY. Well, maybe schoolteachers in public schools.

(To LARRY.) How can a sensitive artist like you live with an insensitive bull like that?

LARRY. *(Hanging up the phone and redialing.)* I can't.

MICHAEL. Alan, don't be ridiculous.

DONALD. Here you go, Hank.

HANK. Thanks.

LARRY. Shit. They don't answer.

DONALD. What're you having, Emory?

BERNARD. A Pink Lady.

EMORY. A vodka martini on the rocks, please.

LARRY. *(Hangs up.)* Well, let's just hope.

(DONALD hands LARRY his drink - their eyes meet again. A faint smile crosses LARRY's lips. DONALD returns to the bar to make Emory's drink.)

MICHAEL. Lunch tomorrow will be great. One o'clock - the Oak Room at the Plaza okay? Fine.

BERNARD. *(To DONALD.)* Donald, read any new libraries lately?

DONALD. One or three. I did the complete works of Doris Lessing this week. I've been depressed.

MICHAEL. Alan, forget it, will you? Right. Bye.

(He hangs up, start to leave the room - stops. Quickly pulls off the sweater he is wearing, takes out another, crosses to the stairs.)

DONALD. You must not work on the lending desk anymore.

BERNARD. Oh, I'm still there - every day.

DONALD. Well, since I moved, I only come in Saturday evenings.

(He moves his stack of books off the bar.)

HANK. Looks like you stock up for the week.

(MICHAEL rises and crosses to the landing.)

BERNARD. Are you kidding? – That'll last him two days.

EMORY. It would last *me* two years. I still haven't finished
Atlas Shrugged, which I started in 1912.

MICHAEL. (*To DONALD.*) Well, he's not coming.

DONALD. It's just as well now.

BERNARD. Some people eat, some people drink, some take
dope...

DONALD. I read.

MICHAEL. And read and read and read. It's a wonder your
eyes don't turn back in your head at the sight of a dust
jacket.

HANK. Well, at least he's a constructive escapist.

MICHAEL. Yeah, what do I do? – Take planes. No, I don't
do that anymore. Because I don't have the *money* to do
that anymore. I go to the baths. That's about it.

EMORY. I'm about to do both. I'm flying to the West Coast –

BERNARD. You still have that act with a donkey in Tijuana?

EMORY. I'm going to *San Francisco* on a well-earned vacation.

LARRY. No shopping?

EMORY. Oh, I'll look for a few things for a couple of clients,
but I've been so busy lately, I really couldn't care less if
I never saw another piece of fabric or another stick of
furniture as long as I live. I'm going to the Club Baths,
and I'm not out till they announce the departure of
TWA one week later.

BERNARD. (*To EMORY.*) You'll never learn to stay out of the
baths, will you? The last time Emily was taking the
vapors, this big hairy number strolled in. Emory said,
"I'm just resting," and the big hairy number said, "I'm
just arresting!" It was the vice!

(Everybody laughs.)

EMORY. You have to tell everything, don't you!

(DONALD crosses to give EMORY his drink.)

Thanks, sonny. You live with your parents?

DONALD. Yeah. But it's all right – they're gay.

(**EMORY** roars, slaps **HANK** on the knee. **HANK** gets up, moves away. **DONALD** turns to **MICHAEL**.)

What happened to Alan?

MICHAEL. He suddenly got terrible icks about having broken down on the phone. Kept apologizing over and over. Did a big about-face and reverted to the Old Alan right before my very eyes.

DONALD. Ears.

MICHAEL. Ears. Well, the cracked crab obviously did not work out.

EMORY. Just put that down if you don't want your hand slapped. I'm about to have some.

MICHAEL. It's really very good.

(*Gives DONALD a look.*)

I don't know why everyone has such an aversion to it.

DONALD. Sometimes you remind me of the Chinese water torture. I take that back. Sometimes you remind me of the *relentless* Chinese water torture.

MICHAEL. Bitch.

(*HANK has put on some music.**)

BERNARD. Yeah, baby, let's hear that sound.

EMORY. A drumbeat and their eyes sparkle like Cartier's.

(*BERNARD starts to snap his fingers and move in time with the music. MICHAEL joins in.*)

HANK. I wonder where Harold is.

EMORY. Yeah, where *is* the frozen fruit?

MICHAEL. (*To DONALD.*) Emory refers to Harold as the frozen fruit because of his former profession as an ice skater.

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EMORY. She used to be the Sonja Henie of the Borscht Circuit.

(MICHAEL and BERNARD are now dancing freely.)

BERNARD. *(To MICHAEL.)* If your mother could see you now, she'd have a stroke.

MICHAEL. Got a camera on you?

(The door panel buzzes. EMORY lets out a yelp.)

EMORY. Oh, my God, it's Lily Law! Everybody three feet apart!

(MICHAEL goes to the panel, presses the button. HANK turns down the music. MICHAEL opens the door a short way, pokes his head out.)

BERNARD. It's probably Harold now.

(MICHAEL leans back in the room.)

MICHAEL. No, it's the delivery boy from the bakery.

LARRY. Thank God.

(MICHAEL goes into the hall, pulling the door almost closed behind him.)

EMORY. *(Loudly.)* Ask him if he's got any hot cross buns!

HANK. Come on, Emory, knock it off.

BERNARD. You can take her anywhere but out.

EMORY. *(To HANK.)* You remind me of an old-maid schoolteacher.

HANK. You remind me of a chicken wing.

EMORY. I'm sure you meant that as a compliment.

(HANK turns the music back up.)

MICHAEL. *(In hall.)* Thank you. Good night.

(MICHAEL returns with a cake box, closes the door, and takes the cake into the kitchen.)

LARRY. Hey, Bernard, you remember that thing we used to do on Fire Island?

(LARRY starts to do a kind of Madison.)

BERNARD. That was "in" so far back I think I've forgotten.

EMORY. I remember.

(He pops up - starts doing the steps. LARRY and BERNARD start to follow.)

LARRY. Yeah. That's it.

(MICHAEL enters from the kitchen, falls in line with them.)

MICHAEL. Well, if it isn't the Geriatrics Rockettes.

(Now they all are doing practically a precision routine. DONALD comes to sit on the arm of a chair, sip his drink, and watch in fascination. HANK goes to the bar to get another beer. The door buzzer sounds. No one seems to hear it. It buzzes again. HANK turns toward the door, hesitates. Looks toward MICHAEL, who is now deeply involved in the intricacies of the dance. No one, it seems, has heard the buzzer but HANK, who goes to the door, opens it wide to reveal ALAN. He is dressed in black tie. The dancers continue, turning and slapping their knees and heels and laughing with abandon. Suddenly, MICHAEL looks up, stops dead. DONALD sees this and turns to see what MICHAEL has seen. Slowly, he stands up. MICHAEL goes to the record player, turns it off abruptly. EMORY, LARRY, and BERNARD come to out-of-step halts, look to see what's happened.)

I thought you said you weren't coming.

ALAN. I...well, I'm sorry...

MICHAEL. *(Forced lightly.)* We were just - acting silly...

ALAN. Actually, when I called I was in a phone booth around the corner. My dinner party is not far from here. And...

MICHAEL. Emory was just showing us this...silly dance.

ALAN. Well, then I walked past and your downstairs door was open and...

MICHAEL. This is Emory.

(EMORY curtsies. MICHAEL glares at him.)

Everybody, this is Alan McCarthy. Counterclockwise, Alan: Larry, Emory, Bernard, Donald, and Hank.

(They all mumble "Hello," "Hi.")

Would you like a drink?

ALAN. Thanks, no. I... I can't stay...long...really.

MICHAEL. Well, you're here now, so stay. What would you like? You'll have to settle for gin or scotch or vodka.

DONALD. Or beer.

ALAN. Scotch, please.

(MICHAEL starts for the bar.)

DONALD. I'll get it.

(He goes to the bar.)

HANK. *(Forced laugh.)* Guess I'm the only beer drinker.

ALAN. *(Looking around group.)* Whose...birthday...is it?

LARRY. Harold's.

ALAN. *(Looking from face to face.)* Harold?

BERNARD. He's not here yet.

EMORY. She's never been on time...

(MICHAEL shoots EMORY a withering glance.)

He's never been on time in his...

MICHAEL. Alan's from Washington. We went to college together. Georgetown.

(A beat. Silence.)

EMORY. Well, isn't that fascinating.

(DONALD hands ALAN his drink.)

DONALD. If that's too strong, I'll put some water in it.

ALAN. *(Takes a quick gulp.)* It's fine. Thanks. Fine.

HANK. Are you in the government?

ALAN. No. I'm a lawyer. What...what do you do?

HANK. I teach school.

ALAN. Oh. I would have taken you for an athlete of some sort. You look like you might play sports...of some sort.

HANK. Well, I'm no professional, but I was on the basketball team in college and I play quite a bit of tennis.

ALAN. I play tennis, too.

HANK. Great game.

ALAN. Yes. Great.

(A beat. Silence.)

What...do you teach?

HANK. Math.

ALAN. Math?

HANK. Yes.

ALAN. Math. Well.

EMORY. Kinda makes you want to rush out and buy a slide rule, doesn't it?

MICHAEL. Emory. I'm going to need some help with dinner, and you're elected. Come on!

EMORY. I'm *always* elected.

BERNARD. You're a natural-born domestic.

EMORY. Said the African queen! You come on, too - you can fan me while I make the salad dressing.

MICHAEL. *(Glaring. Phony smile.)* RIGHT THIS WAY, EMORY!

(MICHAEL pushes the swinging door aside for EMORY and BERNARD to enter. They do, and he follows. The door swings closed, and the muffled sound of MICHAEL's voice can be heard.)

(Offstage.) You son of a bitch!

EMORY. *(Offstage.)* What the hell do you want from me?

HANK. Why don't we all sit down?

ALAN. ...Sure.

(HANK and ALAN sit on the couch. LARRY crosses to the bar, refills his drink. DONALD comes over to refill his.)

LARRY. Hi.

DONALD. ...Hi.

ALAN. I really feel terrible – barging in on you fellows this way.

LARRY. *(To DONALD.)* How've you been?

DONALD. Fine, thanks.

HANK. *(To ALAN.)* ...Oh, that's okay.

DONALD. *(To LARRY.)* ...And you?

LARRY. Oh...just fine.

ALAN. *(To HANK.)* You're married?

(LARRY hears this, turns to look in the direction of the couch. MICHAEL enters from the kitchen.)

HANK. What?

(Watching LARRY and DONALD.)

ALAN. *(Points to HANK's wedding band.)* I see you're married.

HANK. Oh.

MICHAEL. Yes. Hank's married.

(MICHAEL glares at DONALD.)

ALAN. You have any kids?

HANK. Yes. Two. A boy, nine, and a girl, seven. You should see my boy play tennis – really puts his dad to shame.

DONALD. *(Avoiding MICHAEL's eyes.)* I better get some ice.

(He exits to the kitchen.)

ALAN. *(To HANK.)* I have two kids, too. Both girls.

HANK. Great.

MICHAEL. How are the girls, Alan?

ALAN. Oh, just sensational.

(Shakes his head.)

They're something, those kids. God, I'm nuts about them.

HANK. How long have you been married?

ALAN. Nine years. Can you believe it, Mickey?

MICHAEL. No.

ALAN. Mickey used to go with my wife when we were all in school.

MICHAEL. Can you believe that?

ALAN. *(To HANK.)* You live in the city?

LARRY. Yes, we do.

(LARRY comes over to couch next to HANK.)

ALAN. Oh.

HANK. I'm in the process of getting a divorce. Larry and I are - roommates.

MICHAEL. Yes.

ALAN. Oh. I'm sorry. Oh, I mean...

HANK. I understand.

ALAN. *(Gets up.)* I... I... I think I'd like another drink...if I may.

MICHAEL. Of course. What was it?

ALAN. I'll do it...if I may.

(He gets up, starts for the bar. Suddenly, there is a loud crash offstage. ALAN jumps, looks toward swinging door.)

What was that?

(DONALD enters with the ice bucket.)

MICHAEL. Excuse me. Testy temperament out in the kitch!

(MICHAEL exits through the swinging door. ALAN continues to the bar - starts nervously picking up and putting down bottles, searching for the scotch.)

HANK. *(To LARRY.)* Larry, where do you know that guy from?

LARRY. What guy?

HANK. *That* guy.

LARRY. I don't know. Around. The bars.

DONALD. Can I help you, Alan?

ALAN. I... I can't seem to find the scotch.

DONALD. You've got it in your hand.

ALAN. Oh. Of course. How...stupid of me.

(DONALD watches ALAN fumble with the scotch bottle and glass.)

DONALD. Why don't you let me do that?

ALAN. *(Gratefully hands him both.)* Thanks.

DONALD. Was it water or soda?

ALAN. Just make it straight – over ice.

(MICHAEL enters.)

MICHAEL. You see, Alan, I told you it wasn't a good time to talk. But we...

ALAN. It doesn't matter. I'll just finish this and go...

(He takes a long swallow.)

LARRY. Where can Harold be?

MICHAEL. Oh, he's always late. You know how neurotic he is about going out in public. It takes him hours to get ready.

LARRY. Why *is* that?

(EMORY breezes in with an apron tied around his waist, carrying a stack of plates, which he places on a drop-leaf table. MICHAEL does an eye-roll.)

EMORY. Why is what?

LARRY. Why does Harold spend hours getting ready before he can go out?

EMORY. Because she's a sick lady, that's why.

(He exits to the kitchen. ALAN finishes his drink.)

MICHAEL. Alan, as I was about to say, we can go upstairs and talk.

ALAN. It really doesn't matter.

MICHAEL. Come on. Bring your drink.

ALAN. I... I've finished it.

MICHAEL. Well, make another and bring it upstairs.

(DONALD picks up the scotch bottle and pours into the glass ALAN has in his hand. MICHAEL has started for the stairs.)

ALAN. *(To DONALD.)* Thanks.

DONALD. Don't mention it.

ALAN. *(To HANK.)* Excuse me. We'll be down in a minute.

LARRY. He'll still be here.

(A beat.)

MICHAEL. *(On the stairs.)* Go ahead, Alan. I'll be right there.

(ALAN turns awkwardly away, exits to the bedroom. MICHAEL goes into the kitchen. A beat.)

HANK. *(To LARRY.)* What was *that* supposed to mean?

LARRY. What was what supposed to mean?

HANK. You know.

LARRY. You want another beer?

HANK. No. You're jealous, aren't you?

(HANK starts to laugh. LARRY doesn't like it.)

LARRY. I'm Larry. You're jealous.

(Crosses to DONALD.)

Hey, Donald, where've you been hanging out these days? I haven't seen you in a long time.

(MICHAEL enters to witness this disapprovingly. He turns, goes up the stairs. In the bedroom, ALAN is sitting on the edge of the bed. MICHAEL enters, pauses at the mirror to adjust his hair. Downstairs, HANK gets up, exits into

the kitchen. DONALD and LARRY move to a corner of the room, sit facing upstage, and talk quietly.)

ALAN. (To **MICHAEL**.) This is a marvelous apartment.

MICHAEL. It's too expensive. I work to pay rent.

ALAN. What are you doing these days?

MICHAEL. Nothing.

ALAN. Aren't you writing anymore?

MICHAEL. I haven't looked at a typewriter since I sold the very, very wonderful, very, very marvelous *screenplay*, which never got produced.

ALAN. That's right. The last time I saw you, you were on your way to California. Or was it Europe?

MICHAEL. Hollywood. Which is not in Europe, nor does it have anything whatsoever to do with California.

ALAN. I've never been there, but I would imagine it's awful. Everyone must be terribly cheap.

MICHAEL. No, not everyone.

(ALAN laughs. A beat. MICHAEL sits on the bed.)

Alan, I want to try to explain this evening...

ALAN. What's there to explain? Sometimes you just can't invite everybody to every party, and some people take it personally. But I'm not one of them. I should apologize for inviting myself.

MICHAEL. That's not exactly what I meant.

ALAN. Your friends all seem like very nice guys. That Hank is really a very attractive fellow.

MICHAEL. ...Yes. He is.

ALAN. We have a lot in common. What's his roommate's name?

MICHAEL. Larry.

ALAN. What does *he* do?

MICHAEL. He's a commercial artist.

ALAN. I liked Donald, too. The only one I didn't care too much for was - what's his name - Emory?

MICHAEL. Yes. Emory.

ALAN. I just can't stand that kind of talk. It just grates on me.

MICHAEL. What kind of talk, Alan?

ALAN. Oh, you know. His brand of humor, I guess.

MICHAEL. He can be really quite funny sometimes.

ALAN. I suppose so. If you find that sort of thing amusing. He just seems like such a goddamn little pansy.

(Silence. A pause.)

I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean to say that. That's such an awful thing to say about *anyone*. But you know what I mean, Michael – you have to admit that he *is* effeminate.

MICHAEL. He is a bit.

ALAN. A bit! He's like a...butterfly in heat! I mean, there's no wonder he was trying to teach you all to dance. He *probably* wanted to dance *with* you!

(Pause.)

Oh, come on, man, you know me – you know how I feel – your private life is your own affair.

MICHAEL. *(Icy.)* No. I *don't* know that about you.

ALAN. I couldn't care less what people do – as long as they don't do it in public – or – or try to force their ways on the whole damned world.

MICHAEL. Alan, what was it you were crying about on the telephone?

ALAN. Oh, I feel like such a fool about that. I could shoot myself for letting myself act that way. I'm so embarrassed I could die.

MICHAEL. But, Alan, if you were genuinely upset – that's nothing to be embarrassed about.

ALAN. All I can say is – please accept my apology for making such an ass of myself.

MICHAEL. You must have been upset, or you wouldn't have said you were and that you wanted to see me – *had* to see me and had to talk to me.

ALAN. Can you forget it? Just pretend it never happened. I know *I* have. Okay?

MICHAEL. Is something wrong between you and Fran?

ALAN. Listen, I've really go to go.

MICHAEL. Why are you in New York?

ALAN. I'm dreadfully late for this dinner.

MICHAEL. *Whose* dinner? Where are you going?

ALAN. Is this the loo?

MICHAEL. Yes.

ALAN. Excuse me.

(Quickly goes into the bathroom, closes the door. MICHAEL remains silent - sits on the bed, stares into space. Downstairs, EMORY pops in from the kitchen to discover DONALD and LARRY in quiet, intimate conversation.)

EMORY. What's-going-on-in-here-oh-Mary-don't-ask!

(Puts a salt cellar and pepper mill on the table. HANK enters, carrying a bottle of red wine and a corkscrew. Looks toward LARRY and DONALD. DONALD sees him, stands up.)

DONALD. Hank, why don't you come and join us?

HANK. That's an interesting suggestion. Whose idea is that?

DONALD. Mine.

LARRY. *(To HANK.)* He means in a conversation.

(BERNARD enters from the kitchen, carrying four wine glasses.)

EMORY. *(To BERNARD.)* Where're the rest of the wine glasses?

BERNARD. Ahz workin' as fas' as ah can!

EMORY. They have to be told everything. Can't let 'em out of your sight.

(Breezes out to the kitchen. DONALD leaves LARRY's side and goes to the coffee table, helps himself to the cracked crab. HANK opens the wine, puts it on the table. MICHAEL gets

*up from the bed and goes down the stairs.
Downstairs, HANK crosses to LARRY.)*

HANK. I thought maybe you were abiding by the agreement.

LARRY. We have no agreement.

HANK. We *did*.

LARRY. *You did*. I never agreed to anything!

*(DONALD looks up to see MICHAEL, raises a
crab claw toward him.)*

DONALD. To your health.

MICHAEL. Up yours.

DONALD. Up my health?

BERNARD. Where's the gent?

MICHAEL. In the gent's room. If you can all hang on five more minutes, he's about to leave.

(The door buzzes. MICHAEL crosses to it.)

LARRY. Well, at last!

*(MICHAEL opens the door to reveal a muscle-
bound young man wearing boots, tights
Levi's, a calico neckerchief, and a cowboy hat.
Around his wrist there is a large card tied
with a ribbon.)*

COWBOY. *(Singing fast.)*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU,
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU,
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAR HAROLD.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU.

*(And with that, he throws his arms around
MICHAEL and gives him a big kiss on the lips.
Everyone stands in stunned silence.)*

MICHAEL. Who the hell are you?

(EMORY swings in from the kitchen.)

EMORY. She's Harold's present from me, and she's *early*!

(Quick, to COWBOY.) And that's not even Harold, you idiot!

COWBOY. You said whoever answered the door.

EMORY. (*Quickly, to group.*) But *not until midnight!* He's supposed to be a *midnight cowboy!*

DONALD. He *is* a midnight cowboy.

MICHAEL. He looks right out of the chorus of a bus-and-truck *Oklahoma!*

EMORY. (*To COWBOY.*) ...Not until midnight and you're supposed to sing to the right person, for Chrissake! I *told* you Harold has very tight, tight, black curly hair.

(*Referring to MICHAEL.*)

This number's practically bald!

MICHAEL. Thank you, and fuck you.

BERNARD. It's a good thing *I* didn't open the door.

EMORY. Not that tight and not that black.

COWBOY. I forgot. Besides, I wanted to get to the bars by midnight.

MICHAEL. He's a class act all the way around.

EMORY. What do you mean – get to the bars! Sweetie, I paid you for the whole night, remember?

COWBOY. I hurt my back doing my exercises, and I wanted to get to bed early tonight.

BERNARD. Are you ready for this one?

LARRY. (*To COWBOY.*) That's too bad, what happened?

COWBOY. I lost my grip doing my chin-ups, and I fell on my heels and I twisted my back.

EMORY. You shouldn't *wear* heels when you do chin-ups.

COWBOY. (*Oblivious.*) I shouldn't do chin-ups – I got a weak grip to begin with.

EMORY. A weak grip. In my day it used to be called a limp wrist.

BERNARD. Who can remember that far back?

MICHAEL. Who was it that always used to say, "You show me Oscar Wilde in a cowboy suit, and I'll show you a gay caballero."