

DEX & ABBY

by

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DEX & ABBYCAST OF CHARACTERS

DEX	Male. Dog. 13. Played by a male human, late 50s.
ABBY	Female. Dog. 5. Played by a female human, mid 20s.
JIM	Male. Human. Late 20s.
SEAN	Male. Human. Late 20s.
KATY	Female. Human. Late 20s.

DEX & ABBYACT ONEScene One*

SETTING *A comfortable home in a new, upscale neighborhood. This is the family room. There is a long, very nice sofa, with tasteful throws and pillows, facing the audience. There is also a counter/bar with two high bar chairs, dividing the family room from the open kitchen behind it. There are French doors, stage right, to an enclosed outside garden area; a closed door upstage center leads to a central hallway to the master bedroom and the front door of the house. Stage left, downstage, there is a window, with long, floor length drapes. In front of the window and drapes there is a large dog bed for DEX. There is also a potted plant, with tall, drooping fronds downstage right. This plant will grow larger to indicate the passage of time in the play. Stage right there is another dog bed for ABBY.*

AT RISE *ABBY sits, stage right, in front of the sofa, watching DEX, stage left at the window. DEX, on all fours, faces the audience, with the lower edge of the upstage curtain draped over his forehead, partially covering his head. He creeps, very slowly, forward and the lower edge of the curtain slides over his head and back over his body as DEX, intent, focused, moves forward, toward the downstage runner of the curtain. He noses into the curtain. He moves slowly, intently forward, as the curtain first covers his face, then, as he slowly stalks forward, slides upward, revealing his face, then, as the other curtain had done, slides back over his head and back. DEX moves toward the audience until he is clear of the curtain, his eyes fixed. He stops, seems to awaken and shakes his head. His fantasy done, he looks toward ABBY, then toward the sofa. He bounds across the stage on all fours, then leaps onto the sofa. Landing, he immediately yelps and tumbles from the sofa, surprised. Back on all fours, he shakes his head and body, then turns to ABBY, who has calmly observed the scene.*

**Note on human actors playing dogs: No special “dog costumes” required. Actors wear casual, monochrome workout clothing. Kneepads will be used, but actors do not actually have to be on all fours, except where indicated. Moving bipedally is perfectly acceptable. We will depend on the expressive skill of the actors and the ample imagination of the audience.*

DEX

What the fuck?!

ABBY

The shockers. I watched Yours turn them on before he left.

DEX

What the fuck?!

ABBY

We're not supposed to be on the new sofa unless they invite us. You know that.

DEX

Why didn't you say something?

ABBY

(Smiling) You should have remembered, old man.

ABBY rolls once, then comes back to her sitting position.

You were doing it again.

DEX

Doing what?

ABBY

The thing. The creeping thing.

DEX

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

ABBY

Creeping through the curtains.

DEX

I did not.

ABBY

Yes you did. You're really weird, you know.

DEX

Did not. Am not.

ABBY

You always do it. Yesterday, on walkies...

DEX

*(Excited)...*on walkies!

ABBY

...Mine took us down to the lake, in the reeds and the nice, beautiful muddy part with water and I smelled the duck shit and looked back and there you were...creeping through the reeds...like some...I don't know what...some kind of *hunter*. You were *gone*, old man. *Lost*. Then you came out of it, shook your head and took off and you missed the duck. Which I could have got. Except for the leash. And your weirdness. Mine puts up with a lot taking you on walkies. How did you not smell the duck! Some hunter you are.

DEX lurches into ABBY and pins her down with his body.

DEX

I'm a good hunter. Better than you, runt bitch.

ABBY rolls away from him, teasing, a distance away.

ABBY

Faster than you, old man! I...

ABBY is distracted by something she sees under the sofa. She bends to look more closely.

No!

She paws under the sofa and retrieves a colorful piece of a stuffed animal...part of a stuffed animal dog toy that has been chewed apart.

No! My rabbit! My pink rabbit! My little friend!

She cuddles the piece, pets it and is clearly distraught.

You bastard! You did this! You! *(Crying)* You killed my friend. My little one!

DEX

Oh, please. It's a toy.

ABBY

I loved him!

DEX

A chew toy. *Chew* toy. Made to be *chewed*. *Chewed*.

ABBY
It kept me...

DEX
(*Interrupting*) So I did.

ABBY
(*continuing*) ...company! When I was lonely. During the days before Mine brought me here. My baby!

DEX
You can't have babies.

ABBY
And you can't make them, ball-less.

DEX
Get over it. You never had babies. Never will.

ABBY
Shut up, monster. You don't know anything.

DEX
I know you're a pain in the ass and I'm sorry you're here.

ABBY
I'm sorry I'm here. I'm sorry we came here. This place smells funny. And not in a good way. And where are my babies? My little friends? They should be everywhere! It's you! You destroyed them all! They're gone! And I'm...

DEX
(*Interrupting*) They're in a box in the top of the hall closet...

ABBY
...lonely. They kept me...

DEX
(*Interrupting*)...and talk about smelling funny...

ABBY
...company. When I was alone.

DEX
They smell weird. I can smell them in the hall. They need *chewing*!

(CONT'D)

DEX galumphs to the doorway leading to the hall, stops, seemingly perplexed by the closed door. Forgets what he was going to do. Sits, scratches his neck. Thinks.

Where are they? The boys?

ABBY

Probably out buying you more food. You eat like a horse. You crap like a horse.

DEX

And what do you know about horses? Mine has two. He rides them. Does yours have horses?

ABBY

If Yours rides horses, why doesn't he ever smell like horse?

DEX

Oh. Well. There *were* horses...before. Before... I don't remember when it was...but I used to run with them! It was fun!

ABBY

You made that all up. (*Glancing at the French doors.*) Oh, look! There's a squirrel!

DEX

Squirrel! Squirrel!

DEX runs toward the French doors, excited, crashes into them.

ABBY

Stupid old man. There's no squirrel. There's no trees around here. Where would they live? Our old place had squirrels to chase.

DEX

(*Chagrined*) So did ours. The one before this one. (*Reasserting his dignity, walking stiffly back from the French doors.*) And, there *are* trees in the park, by the lake. *Some* trees.

ABBY

But no damn squirrels. I hate this place.

DEX

They like it.

ABBY

(Sighs, rubs her back against the arm of the sofa. After a moment.) What was your place before like?

DEX

Big. Cold. Cold floors. That was at the end. But before...warm and always people coming in and going out and good smells and good food and noise and people to pet me and I slept in their bedroom with the fireplace and it was... It was... *(stops)*.

ABBY

It was...?

DEX

Then they didn't sleep in the same room and no one came and there were no smells and his other one was never there and Mine was...really, really sad. For a long time. Mine hugged me a lot...but it was a sad hug. I cried.

ABBY

Oh. *(pause)* Oh. For a long time?

DEX

For a long time. But...then he was *happy!* And he would come back late at night smelling like...*Yours*. And...

ABBY

And?

DEX

...and we came here. And *Yours* came here. And *you*. *(Shivers and shakes his head.)*

ABBY

They're here.

DEX

What?

ABBY

You're losing your hearing, old man.

DEX

My hearing is... *(pause)* Oh, yes! And I'll bet they have food! Yeah!

DEX and ABBY run to the door and wait expectantly. Offstage there is the sound of the front door opening and we hear SEAN

and JIM entering and talking, but we can't make out what they are saying. Then they enter. SEAN has several grocery bags and JIM is carrying two large bags of dry dog food. One is clearly labeled for "mature dogs". They put the bags on the counter of the bar.

Doggies! SEAN

Doggies! Dexto! JIM

Abby-dog! SEAN

Both SEAN and JIM hug and pet DEX and ABBY and the dogs respond affectionately and excitedly.

Such good doggies! JIM

You guys been having a good time? SEAN

Yeah, they've been having a good time. Doggies always have a good time, don't you Dexto? (Hugging DEX). JIM

(Hugging ABBY) My sweet girl! SEAN

(JIM goes back to the groceries.) OK, I'll get this stuff put up and you get out the cheese and crackers and start a salad. I'll get the water going for the pasta and start heating up the sauce. JIM

Mexican martini! SEAN

Don't you wanna wait for Katy? JIM

Hell, no. Who knows how long that wait would be? Now, sir...now! SEAN

JIM and SEAN are puttering around the kitchen behind the bar. ABBY watches for a moment, then retrieves the part of the stuffed

(CONT'D)

toy she had found under the sofa earlier and, with a sniffle and sad face, holds it out to SEAN.

What, Abby girl. What've you got?

SEAN takes the toy part and looks at it.

JIM

What's that?

SEAN

The pink rabbit. I thought we had all that stuff cleaned up. (*He takes the part and shows it to DEX.*) Dex! Bad dog, bad dog!

DEX

(*To ABBY*) What's he saying?

ABBY

That you're a bad dog. And you *are*. You killed my rabbit.

DEX

It's not a rabbit and it wasn't alive and I didn't kill it. It's a chew toy. Or was.

JIM

Bad dog, Dex. Leave Abby's stuff alone.

ABBY

What's he saying?

DEX

That I'm a great dog and he loves me and I'm going to get two treats tonight!

ABBY

You're full of shit, old man. (*pause*) I'll race you to the couch!

ABBY starts toward the sofa, followed by DEX. ABBY stops, then just before he reaches the sofa, DEX stops.

DEX

Awww...

SEAN

Damn, I need to turn that off.

SEAN goes to the sofa, puts the toy part on the arm of the sofa and turns off and removes the shocking pad.

ABBY

She's here.

DEX

Who?

ABBY

My friend! It's her car. My friend! (*ABBY races to the door, then short, clipped, yelps, here as in later instances. These are barks.*) Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

The front doorbell rings.

DEX

(*Racing to the door and through it, followed by ABBY*) Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

SEAN

It's Katy.

JIM

She's early. (*Calling offstage.*) Come in! Don't mind the dogs! (*To SEAN*) I'll get on the Mexican martinis.

KATY enters, with a small grocery bag. She's wearing a long, nice, casual summer shift. She hugs ABBY, who is very excited. DEX watches.

KATY

Abby, girl! I've missed you so much! How have you been, my favorite doggie!

SEAN

Don't I get a hug?

KATY hugs SEAN, tightly.

KATY

Hey, Sean! Love you! And I have dessert! Gelato!

JIM

And me?

KATY hugs JIM, though less enthusiastically and a bit awkwardly.

KATY

Hey, guy...how've you been?

(CONT'D)

DEX has moved a bit closer to the group, expectantly. Noticing, KATY strokes DEX's head a few times.

Hey, Dexter. Good boy, Dexter.

KATY sets her bag on the counter, then looks around the room.

Nice! Everything's coming together, I see. With a gay couple, who needs a decorator?

SEAN

A bit different than when you and Emma helped me move in, I'd guess. Thanks again, for that.

KATY

Not a problem. What are best friends for?

JIM

Yeah, really...much thanks.

KATY

And I've been swinging by your old place. Looks like your renters are all moved in, now. Even got their rainbow flag up.

SEAN

Keeping it in the family. I just hope they pay their rent on time.

KATY

That's the problem with being a landlord. Still sure you don't want to sell it?

SEAN

This isn't the right market for a sale. I'm fine with leasing it for the moment.

JIM

Actually, the condo market in that area...

SEAN

(Interrupting) And Emma couldn't come? That's too bad.

KATY

Yeah, she's up in Dallas for a presentation that wasn't supposed to happen 'til next week. Sucks.

JIM

I'm really looking forward to meeting her. Now that things are settled here we need to get together with you guys. Maybe next week we can all...

During the last three lines, ABBY has retrieved the toy part and now holds it out to KATY, as she had done to SEAN moments earlier.

KATY

(Interrupting JIM, addressing ABBY) What's this? *(Takes the part.)* Oh, no! Your rabbit! What happened to it?

SEAN

Dex happened to it. *(Takes the toy part.)*

JIM

He thought it was a chew toy. *(To DEX)* Bad boy, Dex!

ABBY

What'd he say?

DEX

He said your friend likes me.

SEAN

Yeah, I should have thought about that. But I've got the rest of them in a box in the closet.

KATY

Abby loved those toys. When I'd come to walk her in the afternoon at your old place, she would always bring me one to show when I let myself in. And the rest were all piled up on the bed in her room. Is the green frog OK?

SEAN

Yeah, your Christmas present is safe.

KATY

That's her favorite and the one she usually brought me. It would be sad if Dexter got that one. Does she miss it?

JIM

Dex won't get it. And now she has another dog to keep her company all day. They have fun. *(To the dogs)* Don't you guys?

The dogs don't respond at all.

KATY

I miss walking Abby every day while you were at work, you know. We got tight, after a year and a half of that.

SEAN

You can come over any day you want and walk the doggies. They'd like it.

KATY

It's not seven minutes away, now and, anyway, I'm not sure about trying to walk Dexter. He's a pretty big dog.

JIM

(Working on the drinks.) Dex is a sweetheart. *(To DEX)* Aren't you Dex? You're a sweetheart!

ABBY

(To DEX) What'd he say?

DEX

He says I'm a sweetheart.

JIM has finished and poured the martinis and hands them out to SEAN and KATY.

JIM

(Raising his glass.) To friends!

SEAN

Friends!

KATY

And doggies!

They lift their glasses and take a drink.

This is good. You're a damn good bartender, Jim.

SEAN

(Hugging JIM) That's why I love him...or one of the reasons.

KATY sits on the stool.

KATY

Now what kind of dog is Dexter?

JIM

I'm not sure. Mostly English pointer, with some Boxer, maybe some Lab and just a bit of Pit Bull. He's a genetic gumbo. *(To DEX)* Aren't you, guy? You're a genetic gumbo!

ABBY

What'd he say?

DEX

He said I'm a genetic gumbo.

ABBY

What is a...?

DEX

I have no idea.

KATY

And how old is he?

JIM

Thirteen years. He was a pound rescue. Got him in Houston when he was a puppy.

KATY

That's old...in dog years, that's...

JIM

...really old. But, he's gonna live forever. Aren't you, Dex?

DEX does not respond.

KATY

So you guys have been together since...

JIM

...I was in high school.

SEAN

Then you've lied to me sir! I thought you *just* graduated from high school! *(Laughing)* You know I only go with younger guys!

JIM

Well, get over it, boy! This time *I* get the younger guy! Because I'm so *over* older guys! *(Laughing)*

KATY

Yeah, I guess that didn't work out so well. Last time for you.

JIM

(Not laughing) It was fine. Until it wasn't.

KATY

He was...how much...?

JIM

(Interrupting) Older.

KATY

And now you're...

JIM

...a year older.

KATY

Not much.

JIM

Actually, I don't think it matters. Really.

KATY

Yes, well. *(Pause, then clearly changing the subject.)* Sean, did I tell you I found out what Abby is? What kind of dog?

SEAN

They didn't know at the animal shelter. So, do tell, what is she?

KATY

I was at the dog play area at Auditorium Shores last weekend and I saw Abby's perfect double...except she was twice as big as Abby.

SEAN

Oh?

KATY

Yeah. So I asked the guy what kind of dog it was and he said a Rhodesian Ridgeback.

JIM

But, Abby doesn't have...

SEAN

...a ridge.

KATY

Neither did this one, until you looked really, really close, then you could barely see it. So he said, that was the original breed and they selected for the ridge and now they all have ridges. Almost. But sometimes one of the ridgeless ones pops up. It's rare.

SEAN

I've never seen one.

KATY

They don't allow them to breed. Breeders hate the imperfection. Need to "protect the brand". So they...

JIM

Spay them...

KATY

No. Too expensive. And who'd want a ridgeless Ridgeback? No market. So they... *(does not complete the sentence)*

SEAN

Ah.

JIM

Well, now *that's* harsh.

SEAN

Yeah. *(pause)* So, my Abby's a throwback runt. *(to ABBY)* But I love my throwback runt! I love me my Abby! You're perfect just as you are, girl. Hear me, perfect!

DEX

What did he say?

ABBY

He said I'm perfect.

DEX

Yeah, sure. *Not.*

JIM

So, why don't we get together next week for dinner and some barhopping? It'd be a chance for me to finally meet Emma.

KATY

Dinner would be nice. Not sure about the barhopping. Do you do a lot of that?

JIM

Only on weekends, usually, and we always cab it home after.

SEAN

It'll be fun! And I happen to know from personal experience how much *you* like barhopping, my friend! Last Memorial Day? Our marathon pub-crawl?

KATY

Don't remind me! (*laughs*) But Emma may not be so ready for that.

JIM

Whatever she's comfortable with will be fine with us. Just let us know.

KATY

Will do. (*Looking around the room, then, to JIM*) So, do you like your new neighborhood? Not exactly the exclusive, rolling hills of Westlake. And a much smaller place, I assume.

JIM

It's *my* place, though. *Our* place...now that Sean is here. With lots of potential...why I bought it, in fact. And being close in is a great plus.

SEAN

I *really* like it. And the dogs *love* it...don't you Abby? You guys really love your new home!

DEX

What'd he say?

ABBY

He says we love our new home.

DEX

Not.

ABBY

(*Almost simultaneously*) Totally not.

SEAN

And I've got some ideas for landscaping and maybe a deck and water feature...

JIM

...and the master bath.

SEAN

...and the master bath.

JIM

...and the study....and the guest room...

SEAN

(interrupting) Stop teasing. I get carried away sometimes. Maybe a function of my gay gene. A born interior designer.

During the following few lines DEX will look idly around the room, then notice KATY's long, flowing shift, go up to it and then, as he had with the curtains earlier, tuck his head under the hem of the dress and, pushing slightly against KATY, allow the edge of the dress to flow up and over his head as he creeps forward on all fours.

JIM

If staying within a budget is also in your version of our gay gene, we'll be good to go on all of it. Over time.

KATY

Let me know if you need any referrals. I know several good home and landscape contractors.

SEAN

Cool! We will.

JIM

So, what night would work for a gays and lesbians night out next week?

KATY

I'll check with Emma when she gets back. We had... *(Notices DEX)* What is he doing?

JIM

It's a fantasy game he plays. The "great hunter, creeping through the swamp, stalking his prey...alert and relentless." He has to have something that brushes over his head. Swamp grass, bushes, the willows down by the lake, the curtains. Never seen him do it with a dress, though. That's funny. I don't think he even realizes he's doing it.

DEX is now through with his fantasy and moves off, avoiding ABBY, to sniff the sofa suspiciously.

KATY

Dexter, you are weird.

SEAN

We love him, though. He's a big, old sweetheart doggie.

KATY

How does Abby get along with him?

SEAN

You mean, except for his chewing up her stuffed animals?

JIM

They're great together.

SEAN

They don't fight, just sort of scuffle. I think it's a territorial thing. This was Dex's place.

KATY

Then Abby arrived and...

JIM

They'll work it out. And if I love Abby, then Dex has to love Abby. (To ABBY) And, I love you Abby!

ABBY

(To DEX) What'd he say?

DEX

That you're smelly. And need a bath.

ABBY

(Concerned) A bath? A bath? (ABBY runs behind the sofa.)

JIM

Anyone ready for another one?

KATY

Twist my arm!

SEAN

Yeah! Mas tequila! Mucho mas!

BLACKOUT
ENDS OF SCENE ONE

Scene Two

SETTING: *Same.*

TIME: *Later that evening.*

AT RISE: *SEAN and JIM are on the sofa, each with their backs to one of the arms, facing each other, their legs intertwined. They are ready for bed, wearing t-shirts and sweat pants. They each have iPads, in which they are intently absorbed. ABBY is dozing on the floor in front of the sofa. DEX is also in front of the sofa, gazing intently at JIM and will continue to do so throughout the scene. There is a long, quiet moment to begin the scene.*

JIM

(Reading his iPad.) Gay marriage got shot down in Kansas. Fuck.

SEAN

(Not looking up from his iPad.) Ya think?

JIM

Yeah, well. Still disappointing. “OK, Toto. Looks like we’re *not* going back to Kansas after all.”

SEAN

Looks like you’ll just have to hang around in the Emerald City, with all your friends, Dorothy.

JIM

It’s legal in San Francisco, again?

SEAN

(Laughs) “We’ll always have P-town, my dear.”

JIM

“I’m shocked, shocked that” gay matrimony is going on here on Cape Cod!

SEAN

(Gives JIM an affectionate kick.) Stop it. The only thing worse to get me started on than puns is old movie quotes.

JIM

Yeah...we’d have to “fasten our seatbelts because”...

SEAN

(Kicks him again)...we'd "be in for a bumpy night". *(Smiles)*

JIM

(After a pause) What are you reading?

SEAN

Financial markets. Derivatives. New York Times article Katy sent me. Did you know that...

JIM

Stop. It's way too late for that and I've had too much to drink. *(pause)* So, do you think she had fun?

SEAN

Of course. She loves your Mexican martinis and my fabulous spaghetti sauce.

JIM

It was a pretty nice night with her. Not like our first dinner, over at her place. Before she and Emma got together. Remember that?

SEAN

Sure. She's a great cook. Always brings out the good wines.

JIM

No, I mean the dinner table. She was on one side and we were on the other. I felt like I was at a job interview.

SEAN

You were, sir. Indeed, you were. And you were great.

JIM

Still, it was...awkward. And there was some more of that tonight. So, was tonight my "callback"?

SEAN

(Puts down his iPad.) She's my best friend. She's always looked out for me. She had to check you out.

JIM

...and still checking me out?

SEAN

Maybe she was. A bit. *(pause)* Actually, do you want to know what she said?

JIM

Sure.

SEAN works with his iPad for a moment, to find his email.

SEAN

Got this email ten minutes ago. From her iPhone. "This is the one. The one I'd always hoped you'd find. Congrats, my friend. Love, Katy." Looks like you got the job. (*SEAN nudges JIM with his foot.*)

JIM

Then she is your best friend.

There is a long, comfortable moment.

SEAN

(*Indicating DEX*) He always does that. Watches you. Like there's nothing else in the world he would hold in his gaze but you.

JIM

(*Returns DEX's gaze for a long moment.*) Yeah. I know.

SEAN

He adores you.

JIM

Dogs adore. That's what they do. With those big eyes, watching....Dex makes me feel safe. Always has.

SEAN

Abby's sweet and lives to cuddle with me and needs to be close. She makes me want to protect her. I love that. It was what I saw at the shelter, when I picked her out. Or, I mean, when she picked *me* out. Weird. I haven't had her nearly as long as you and Dex have been together. Maybe in thirteen years...

JIM

When we're old and gay...

SEAN

She'll look at me like that.

JIM

I will. Now. (*Long pause as he gazes at SEAN.*) Have you ever thought about getting married?

SEAN

Are you proposing, sir?

JIM

(Smiles) Without asking your father first? That just so isn't *done*, sir.

SEAN

My father really likes you. And he *loves* your margaritas. You know, we should do Thanksgiving here. It would be great! The whole family. Maybe *both* families.

JIM

Sure. We have plenty of room. And you've just changed the subject.

SEAN

Ah. Well. *(pause)* I'm not totally sure what I think about gay *marriage*. Sorta seems like sleeping with the enemy. Adopting their values.

JIM

Or stealing one of their weapons?

SEAN

(Smiles) You have a point, there. So, to answer your question...which doesn't seem to have been a proposal, I assume: it's something I'd like to think about for a while and consider. Maybe get Katy to send me opinion pieces from the Times about it. She's good at that.

JIM

Did you notice how when she talked about Emma? How she got?

SEAN

You mean the whole, glowing, happy, misty-eyed, melting sorta giddy, babbling schoolgirl thingy? Nope, didn't notice it at all.

JIM

(Smiling) You shit. She ever done that before?

SEAN

Uh...no, actually. Not. But...

JIM

(Interrupting) My guess is that she'll be sending out invitations to her P-town wedding before you get any opinion pieces from the New York Times, my boy. That woman's in love. And so ready to commit.

SEAN

You're *good*. *(Long, thoughtful pause.)* Well, then it had better be a summer wedding. Winter in Massachusetts is a bitch. It would need to warm up.

During the above lines, JIM has been lightly rubbing his foot against SEAN's leg and into his crotch.

JIM

Things are getting warmer already, feels like to me.

SEAN

Hmm. *(Smiles)* Now I think it's *you* that would be changing the subject, sir.

JIM

You noticed...as I can tell *(rubbing SEAN's crotch with his foot.)*

SEAN

(Shutting down his iPad.) Bedtime, doggies! Abby girl, bed.

JIM

Night, night, Dex. Bedtime.

JIM shuts down his iPad as the dogs rouse themselves and stretch. JIM and SEAN leave the sofas, place their iPads on the counter, then hug the dogs and lead them each to their respective beds and settle them in. JIM and SEAN embrace in the center of the room, then head for the door leading to the bedroom.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Three

SETTING: *Same.*

TIME: *Later that night.*

AT RISE: *A single light, with a slight blue hue, illuminates ABBY's dog bed. ABBY is in her bed and SEAN, dressed only in boxers, sits on the floor behind the bed, petting her.*

SEAN

So, Abby girl, do you like it here?

ABBY

It smells strange and the old dog is annoying and stupid and I miss my little friends. But there's more to do and look into here, during the day, when you're gone. I used to get lonely.

SEAN

I know what you mean. I'm sorry you were lonely. But Katy was nice, wasn't she?

ABBY

I love your friend! She took me for walks! And we chased squirrels. Or, I chased squirrels. She never liked chasing squirrels, I think. And we played every day. But it was only for a little while. Then I was lonely again. Until you came home.

SEAN

So, now you have something to do all day! Isn't that better?

ABBY

Yes. Except for the big, stupid one.

SEAN

And what do you think of Jim?

ABBY

He pets me. I like that. And he's good at walkies. I think he'd chase squirrels, if there *were* any squirrels. He won't let me close enough to the ducks, though. And he needs to get a better dog.

SEAN

He loves Dex like I love you. And they've been together longer than we have. Much longer.

ABBY

Do you like him? Not the stupid one. The one who pets me.

SEAN

A lot. A whole lot. With him I'm not lonely. Like you're not lonely now.

ABBY

Will we stay here? Or go back to the other place?

SEAN

We won't go back to the other place. We'll stay here. I think we'll stay here a long time.

ABBY

Can you get some squirrels?

SEAN

(Laughs) There'll be squirrels. In time. When there are more trees and they get bigger.

ABBY

Can I come get in bed with you?

SEAN

Nah, you and I have to stay asleep. In the morning, after you guys pee, you can both come get in bed with us for a while.

ABBY

I like that. That always feels nice. And really smells nice.

SEAN

Sweet dreams, Abby.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Four

SETTING: *Same.*

TIME: *Later that night.*

AT RISE: *A single light, with a slight blue hue, illuminates DEX's dog bed. DEX is in his bed and JIM, dressed only in boxers, sits on the floor behind the bed, petting him.*

JIM

So, is this the one, Dex? The one who'll stay?

DEX

Does the runt bitch have to stay, too?

JIM

(Smiles) You're going to love Abby, old guy. You've just never had another dog around all the time.

DEX

I wish I'd chewed up all her "little friends". She doesn't like me.

JIM

She will. Everyone *loves* you. I love you. *(Hugging DEX.)*

DEX

Do you love this one? I mean him...not the runt bitch.

JIM

Oh, yes. Oh, very much so. He makes me laugh. And he's the sweetest person I've ever met. The most interesting and surprising and the very kindest.

DEX

What about the one before?

JIM

I was young. He wasn't. I didn't understand what he wanted. When I was older, it wasn't me.

DEX

He hurt you. And I didn't protect you. So, I'm *bad*. I should have bit him while I could.

JIM

(Hugs DEX) Oh my brave watcher dog! Some things even you can't protect me from. But I know you'll always try.

DEX

I will always watch. I will protect you. Always.

JIM

Then make this one stay with me, Dex. Don't let him leave. He's always been on his own and I'm afraid of that in him. And I'm afraid to let him know that I'm afraid of that. Really, really sucks, you know.

DEX

He won't leave you. This one won't leave you because he knows *you* and he wants to be with you. The other one didn't know you and didn't care. He never *really* looked at you. This one does. He always does.

JIM

You saw that? You see that? I'm young and stupid. I miss things.

DEX

I will watch for you.

JIM

I love you, Dex. You make me safe. You've always made me safe.

DEX

We did have horses, didn't we?

JIM

Yes. On the ranch in West Texas. Just after college. You liked to run with them.

DEX

I *knew* I remembered that! Sometimes I forget things, though. Why is that?

JIM

Because the more things you have to remember, the more there is to get lost in the crowd. It's good to have lots to remember, though.

DEX

I guess. If you say it. (*pause*) Can I get in the bed?

JIM

In the morning. When we wake up. We'll all be together there. Our family.

DEX

The runt bitch might just get crowded off the bed again, though.

JIM

Be kind, Dex. (*Hugging him*) Sweet dreams, tough guy.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Five

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *A month later.*

AT RISE *DEX is in front of the counter and ABBY is hiding behind it in the kitchen area. Only ABBY's voice is heard until she comes out from behind the counter.*

DEX

You can't stay in the kitchen forever. You'll be in the way.

ABBY

I can't come out. Maybe I can crawl under the sink.

DEX

You'd get stuck again. And you *really* can't crawl under the sink now.

ABBY

And whose fault is this?

DEX

I'm sorry I bit your ear. (*pause, quietly*) Sorta.

ABBY

It hurt. And it bled.

DEX

You were eating my food.

ABBY

I was hungry.

DEX

And I wasn't? Besides, you said Yours told you were too fat.

ABBY

You misremembered again, old man. I would never say that. *He* would never say that about me.

DEX

Sure. If you say so. And I thought you didn't even like my food?

ABBY

I don't. But it was there.

DEX

And so was I. Big mistake. *(pause)* You have to come out. You'll get stepped on.

ABBY

As if you care.

Slowly, on all fours, rear first, ABBY comes out from behind the counter. She turns and walks, still on all fours, to the front. She is wearing a protection cone around her neck, that extends out to just beyond her head. One ear is bandaged. With an obvious attempt at dignity, she walks to her bed.

DEX

If you didn't scratch your ear, you wouldn't need that. You were getting blood everywhere.

ABBY

It itches. Have *you ever not* scratched an itch?

DEX

Yes.

ABBY

(Dubious) Hmmph. Well.

DEX

They're here.

ABBY

They are?

DEX

(Smiling) Some hearing you have, old girl.

ABBY

You just try...*(stops, as SEAN and JIM enter through the door from the front of the house.)*

JIM

Dex! Abby! Doggies!

SEAN

Hey, guys! You been having fun?

They both pet DEX, who responds appreciatively, then turn to ABBY, who has been hanging back, head down. Each awkwardly tries to pet ABBY, but it is difficult with the cone.

JIM

Think we can take the cone off now?

SEAN

Yeah, her ear has probably healed enough.

SEAN unsnaps the cone and ABBY responds happily. He pets her.

Now, don't scratch your ear, Abby. Or we'll have to put the cone back on you and you don't want that again.

DEX

What?

ABBY

He said I'm a sweet dog and the thing looks lovely on me but he'd really like to see what you look like in it!

As SEAN goes by DEX to put the cone away, DEX misunderstands and runs behind the sofa. SEAN does not notice and takes the cone through the door, then quickly returns. JIM has noticed DEX.

JIM

Dex?

SEAN

(Returning) So, you're wearing boots?

JIM

I always wear boots. You know that.

SEAN

With a tux? That's a bit...

JIM

...Austin. Totally Austin, in fact. Boots with a tux are perfectly fine here. Like jeans to a nice restaurant. Like, who really cares in this town?

SEAN

I don't have boots.

JIM

You don't have a tux, either, mister.

SEAN

There's that. (*pause*) So, a trip to Nordies?

JIM

Nordies. Absolutely. I love shopping there.

SEAN

I do, too. My budget...not so much.

JIM

You're going to look beautiful, guy. We'll be a completely knockout couple on the red carpet!

SEAN

So, we're going to be an "and" for this thing. Our first outing as an "and". Major.

JIM

"HRC Austin Black Tie. Sponsored by, among others, James Craig and Sean Garret"!

SEAN

"Sean Michael Garrett".

JIM

Of course, "Sean *Michael* Garrett". I wouldn't want to piss off your Uncle Mike.

SEAN

I don't think he's going to be seeing the program. (*laughs*) So, how can we be an "and" as sponsors when I'm not paying anything?

JIM

This is on me. You have to buy a tux.

SEAN

No. I think that if we're going to be an "and", I need to take care of my part. That's what being an "and" means.

JIM

Whatever you want, sir. You can write me a check. But you still pay for the tux.

SEAN

Uhhh... Any possibility we could drop down one level on the sponsorship?

JIM

(Laughing) Not a chance.

DEX has come out from behind the sofa during these lines and both he and ABBY are watching the other two. Absently, ABBY raises her hand as if to scratch her ear, but SEAN notices.

SEAN

Abby, don't scratch!

ABBY looks abashed and lowers her hand. DEX had noticed and smiles maliciously at her.

This is gonna be my first big time gay social function in Austin. You may have to coach me on what to do.

JIM

Just smile, be your sexy, charming, gracious self...and hit the bar early.

SEAN

I will follow your lead there. You may have to hold my hand, though. I could get nervous.

SEAN hugs JIM, they kiss.

JIM

Not a problem. The first time I went, I was so nervous that, after we got there, I hid in the restroom for fifteen minutes. Bill thought I'd fallen in, or something.

SEAN

Oh, yeah?

JIM

My first big Austin gay event. That's when I learned the "hit the bar early" rule.

SEAN

How many of these tux and boots events have you been to?

JIM

This will be my seventh.

SEAN

And you and Bill were always "ands"?

JIM

Me and Bill? We were never "ands". Even later, when I could afford to be an "and". He didn't want to share the spotlight. Always their biggest non-corporate

(CONT'D)

sponsor. I think I was always considered an “asterisk”. Not “William Atkinson and James Craig”. It was “William Atkinson, asterisk”.

ABBY begins to raise her hand toward her ear, glances toward DEX, who is watching her. DEX smiles. ABBY lowers her hand.

SEAN

That was pretty sucky.

JIM

I sorta got even. The last two years I would bid on the most extravagant item in the live auction, until I got it. Stole his thunder. He hated that.

SEAN

What did you get last year?

JIM

A week in a villa in Costa Rica for eight.

SEAN

Wow.

JIM

Lousy time. All his friends. Not mine. By then.

SEAN

Will he be at the black tie?

JIM

I don't know. Probably. I haven't thought about it.

SEAN

No?

JIM

No. *(pause)* I haven't thought about him.

SEAN

Because that was...

JIM

...another life. And not a good one.

SEAN

We don't talk about it.

JIM

Because it *was* another life. And it's done. We don't talk about the dentist, either.

SEAN

You did spend six years with Bill, though. Sometimes...

JIM

(Interrupting) You want to talk about your last trip to the dentist?

SEAN

No. You know how I feel about pain. Mine or anyone else's.

JIM

Yeah, I do know, Mr. Total Empath. *(smiles)* So, be empathetic here.

SEAN

Still, it must have hurt when the new boy showed up...and you started looking.

JIM

You know it was over before the new boy showed up. When I realized he was looking for the "new boy".

SEAN

Then *you* started looking...and found me...?

JIM

No, actually. I wasn't looking. And you, I might remind you, guy, found *me*.

SEAN

Ah, well. Something like that. And I thought you were going to be just another of my many one-night stands when I saw your pic online that night. *(smiles)*

ABBY begins to raise her hand toward her ear, glances toward DEX, who is watching her. DEX smiles. ABBY lowers her hand.

JIM

And now we're going to be an "and"! At this year's HRC Austin Black Tie! That will be totally fabulous!

SEAN

In my expensive new tux.

JIM
And my old tux and boots.

SEAN
We're going to look hot, guy!

JIM
Just remember the rule.

SEAN
Hit the bar early and...

JIM
...don't bid on anything during the live auction.

SEAN
Not a problem. After Nordies and my part of our sponsorship, I'll be fuckin' broke!

JIM
(*To the dogs.*) So, doggies! Walkies!

SEAN
Yeah! Walkies!

ABBY and DEX are excited. They run to JIM and SEAN.

ABBY
Walkies! The lake! I'll chase a duck! I'll chase...anything!

DEX
Oh, please. You couldn't catch cold, let alone a duck.

ABBY
You're full of shit, old man.

DEX, ABBY, JIM and SEAN leave through the door to the front of the house. A moment later, from backstage we hear SEAN's voice.

SEAN
Abby! Don't scratch!

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Six

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Several months later. Evening.*

AT RISE *ABBY sits downstage center, staring into the audience, morose. DEX reclines on the sofa, watching her.*

ABBY

They're gone. They've abandoned us. They won't ever be back. We're alone.
(*pause*) I'm alone. Mine's left me.

DEX

(*Dismissive*) Oh, please...

ABBY

(*Looking up, dramatically, into the light, diva-like.*) Forgotten! Bereft!
Unloved!

DEX

You are really pretty silly, you know.

ABBY

(*Not "dramatically" and genuinely upset, turning to DEX.*) They're gone!
They're gone! They're gone! You saw them! They packed all their clothes! They
went through the door! They haven't come back! They won't come back!

DEX

The closet is full of clothes. And they didn't take their golf clubs. They'll be
back.

ABBY

They don't like their golf clubs. They don't like those clothes. They don't like us!

DEX

They love us. Or me, at least.

ABBY reacts with shock

Kidding. Get a grip.

ABBY

How can you be so calm? What will we do? When we get hungry? I'm hungry now. Aren't you hungry now? And they aren't here? So that means they won't come back! I'm hungry. They're not here.

DEX

Just...

ABBY

...and what happens when I need to pee? With no one to take me out? What will I do? I can't pee on the floor!

DEX

Didn't stop you last time it rained.

ABBY

I don't know what you're talking about. I would never do that. Never.

DEX

Did. Will.

ABBY

Won't. *(Panicked)* Oh, but what if I *do*?! Where are they? Why did Mine leave me? With *you*?!

ABBY runs to the French doors, then around the counter to the door leading to the front of the house, then back to her bed, then to the sofa. DEX watches this display calmly.

DEX

Has yours left you before? Packed his clothes and left? And not come back?

ABBY

No. *(pause)* Well, no. Uhhh. Of course not, you fool! If he had left before and not come back he couldn't have left *now* and won't come back. Could he? Uhhh...

DEX

Mine has packed his clothes, walked out the door and come back. He always does. He always will.

ABBY

He will? He did? Did you get hungry? Did you pee on the floor?

DEX

Yes. Yes. Yes. No.

But...
 ABBY

DEX
 Someone always comes. To take care of me. And there'll be...

ABBY
 No, there won't...

DEX
 Yes, there will and furthermore...

ABBY
(Interrupting) Yes, there will! She's here! My friend is here!

DEX
 What?

ABBY
 You deaf old man. My friend is here! That's her car! She's come to take me away!

DEX
 Oh?

ABBY
 I'm saved! Now we'll go away and find Mine and we'll find a wonderful new place to live and be happy and everything will be just...wonderful!

ABBY runs to the door leading to the front of the house.

DEX
 Yeah, right. Whatever you say.

KATY enters through the door and hugs ABBY, who is excited.

KATY
 Abby, girl! So good to see you! Did you miss me? My girl, my little girl! I missed you!

KATY walks around the counter to center stage. ABBY is hanging onto her, still excited.

Did you think you'd been abandoned? How are you, Abby?

KATY notices DEX.

(CONT'D)

Dex, old boy. How have you been, guy?

DEX moves closer to KATY. KATY, somewhat reservedly, pats his head.

Have you been taking good care of my little girl?

DEX

What is she saying?

ABBY

I have no idea. But what she *means* is, she *loves* me.

DEX

Oh, well...

ABBY

But I don't think she likes you at all.

DEX

You're a bitch. But you do know that, don't you?

KATY

OK, you guys! You hungry? Let's get something to eat! Food!

KATY heads back through the door to the front of the house.

ABBY

That means food!

DEX

Food! Yay!

The dogs follow her through the door. The stage is empty as KATY fills food and water bowls offstage. After a while, KATY re-enters, without the dogs. She goes to the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of beer which she opens and takes a long drink from.

KATY

(Satisfied) Ah! Dos Equis...I've so missed you!

KATY's cellphone rings. She removes it from her pocket and answers.

Hey, babe. What's up? *(KATY listens.)* Yep, Abby was real happy to see me. I'm sure she thought she was being abandoned when the boys left. That's just so her.

(CONT'D)

The doggies are chowing down big time right now. *(Listens)* Of course I miss you, too. I'm just going to spend some cuddle time with the kids, take 'em out to walk, pee and poop, then settle them in for the evening and be right back to you, my lady. *(Listens)* Sure, I can stop. What do you need? *(Listens)* Mint chocolate ice cream? Not a problem. But, I thought you liked butter pecan? *(Listens)*. OK, mint chocolate it is. It's on the way. *(Listens)* Sure, I can pick up some chocolate sauce for the ice cream. Not a problem. *(Listens)* OK. Love you, too.

KATY closes her cellphone and returns it to her pocket. She continues drinking the beer, then sits down on the sofa. DEX and ABBY return and ABBY joins KATY on the sofa and leans against her. DEX starts toward the sofa, but stops, hesitant. He watches KATY and ABBY.

Abby, girl! *(Hugging ABBY)* Did you miss me? You happy to see me, sweet thing?

ABBY

(To DEX) She gave me extra. Did you notice? She didn't give you extra. She always gives me extra.

DEX

So? That just means you'll be getting extra fat.

ABBY

I will not!

DEX

Sure you...

KATY

(Interrupting) How are you liking your new home, girl? Lot bigger than the other place. And Sean's happier? He seems happier. I hope he is. You know, I was getting so tired of worrying about him and all his running around. Just worried about that boy. Time for him to settle down, that's for sure. Hope he's made the right choice.

ABBY

She really likes me, you know.

DEX

I believe you've already said that.

KATY

(Looking at DEX) And you, old guy. How have you been? *(pause)* Damn, you're a big dog. The kind that always used to scare the shit out of me when I was a kid. I'd never want to get you mad at me. But, you're really a sweetie, aren't you? That's your secret, isn't it? What Jim loves about you? *(pause)* You've been with him a hell of a long time, in dog years. So, what do you know? What could you tell me about him? You know Jim better than anyone else. Is he good? So, Dex...is he good?

DEX gives a little wriggle at the mention of his name and starts to move closer to the sofa, then stops.

Dex, Dex, Dex. Those big old eyes. What sweet, big old eyes. What have you seen? What have those calm, soulful...comforting eyes seen?

DEX moves a bit closer to the sofa.

Is he as strong as you are? As calm? As wise? That's what my boy Sean needs. He really, fuckin' needs that. *(pause)* 'Cause, love him...he's not any of that.

KATY's cellphone rings again. She pulls it from her pocket, answers.

Hey, babe. *(Listens)* Sushi? Are you kidding? We already had dinner. OK, OK. You really want sushi? No. Not at all. Not a problem at all. I'm sure they have some takeout still left at the store. Is that OK? *(Listens)* You, bet. It's on the way.

KATY closes and returns the phone to her pocket, then drinks more of her beer. She watches DEX for a moment, then pats the sofa beside her, opposite ABBY.

Come on, guy. Get up here. You need some cuddle time, too.

DEX wriggles and moves toward the empty spot on the sofa. ABBY notices and crosses over KATY on the sofa to occupy the spot, blocking DEX. KATY pats the space on the sofa ABBY has just abandoned.

Over here, Dex.

DEX moves toward that spot on the sofa and again, ABBY crosses over KATY to block DEX. DEX gets onto the sofa, but ABBY is between him and KATY.

Oh, Abby. Don't be a bitch.

KATY forcefully moves ABBY back to her former spot and DEX moves to cuddle beside KATY on the sofa, with KATY between the two. KATY forcefully keeps ABBY in her place.

DEX

She likes me.

ABBY

Shut up.

KATY

There! Now we're just one happy family and we'll just stay here for a bit and then we'll go out and see what the neighbors are doing and you guys will take care of your business. Then I'll come back here and put you to bed and get back to *my* happy family. Then tomorrow I'll be over to wake you up and we'll go checking on the neighbors again. Maybe head to the park and sniff some doggie butts. Meanwhile those boys will be having a really late brunch before getting back to the beach in Key West. What a life. And I'll be back dealing with you guys and a wife whose getting weirder by the day.

DEX

She really likes me.

ABBY

I said shut up.

There is a long moment. KATY hugs both dogs and turns to stare at DEX for a while.

KATY

So, guy. Big guy. I think we're going to be friends. You feel...good. I don't think you'd be such a sweetie if Jim weren't. He's lucky to have had you around all these years. I hope he's like you. A sweetie. I really, really do. *(Pause)* If he's not... *(pause)* Well, he'll be more like you than he'd *ever* want to be. Ever. 'Cause...*(pause)* If he hurts my Sean...if he ever does...I'll take the fucker's balls. *(pause)* I really will.

KATY's phone rings again and she removes it from her pocket and answers.

Hey. *(listens)* Pork rinds? *(pause)* *Pork rinds?!*

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE

Scene Seven

SETTING *Same, although some things have changed to indicate the passage of time. There are new pillows and throws on the sofa and perhaps some new vases or canisters on the counter.*

TIME *A few weeks later.*

AT RISE *With the stage dark there is a huge crash of thunder and the sound of a torrential downpour. A flash of lightning illuminates the stage, showing DEX in his bed and ABBY's bed empty. There is darkness again, then another crash of thunder and lights come up to evening dim. ABBY enters in a panic, running across the room, ducking momentarily behind the sofa, then running out as there is another crash of thunder. She scurries around the room, around DEX in his bed, around the counter, then slams through the door leading to the bedroom, which was left slightly ajar. Moments later, SEAN returns, pushing ABBY back into the room and taking her to her dog bed. He tries to settle her in her bed, but she is shivering and clearly in panic. The sound of the downpour abates to a light rain during the beginning of this scene and the lightning and thunder stop.*

SEAN

Abby, you've got to stop this. It's only rain. Nothing's going to get you. Just settle down. You're safe. Look, Dex is right here and he won't let anything happen. So, go to sleep. You can't sleep with us every time it rains. You know that.

ABBY whimpers and shivers. DEX eyes the situation disinterestedly for a moment, then goes back to sleep. SEAN continues to pet ABBY, but keeps her held firmly in her bed. SEAN continues to pet her for a while, then yawns.

I've got to get back to sleep, girl. I have a big day and lots of work tomorrow. You'll be fine. You'll be just fine. Dex will protect you.

SEAN pokes DEX to wake him up.

Now, go back to sleep, Abby.

SEAN goes back to the bedroom and ABBY remains, shivering and whimpering in her bed.

ABBY

(Quietly) Help. Help. Help. *(pause)* Help.

DEX

(Yawning) At least you didn't get yourself stuck under the bed, like last time. Then you really needed help. They had to take the bed apart to get you out.

ABBY

It hurt. *(Pause, then quietly again)* Help. *(Pause)* Mine said you'd protect me.

DEX

He did?

ABBY

Will you protect me?

DEX

Protect you?

ABBY

Mine always says true. And he said you'd protect me.

DEX

From what?

ABBY

What's in the dark and the rain. It wants to hurt me.

DEX

So, what wants to hurt you?

ABBY

I don't know. But it's there. It was there then. And she couldn't protect me.

DEX

(Yawning) Who?

ABBY

She. My mother.

DEX

Oh? You remember your mother?

ABBY

It came in the dark and then everything was dark and it hurt and I was alone and my mother wasn't there and my sisters weren't there and I was alone. *(pause)* I was alone.

DEX

Why...

ABBY

(Interrupting) Then I was outside in the night and it was cold and raining and there was thunder and the bright light and there was water...lots of water and I was in the water and under the water and it was moving and taking me...

DEX

Where...

ABBY

(Interrupting) Then it was muddy and there were scary smells and I was cold and by myself for a long time and there was thunder and rain...just rain and rain and...

DEX

(Waiting) ...and?

ABBY

And...I don't remember.

ABBY curls up into her bed and continues to shiver and whimpers a bit. The rain continues. DEX watches her for a time then gets up and moves to sit behind ABBY's bed. After a long moment, he puts his hand on her shoulder.

DEX

Go to sleep. He said I'd protect you. *(pause)* And I will. *(pause)* It will never get you. *(pause)* Never.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE
END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOScene One

SETTING *Same. There will again be changes to indicate the passage of time. DEX and ABBY's beds will be closer together. The potted plant will be larger. The sofa will be in a slightly different place, with new pillows and throws. Items on the counter will have changed.*

TIME *Late afternoon. A year later.*

AT RISE *ABBY is sitting on the sofa. DEX is in his "hunter fantasy", on all fours, slowly approaching the large potted plant from behind, then poking his head into its fronds. He moves forward slowly, so that the fronds cover his face. As DEX advances toward the audience, the fronds brush up from his face, across the back of his head, then down his back. DEX's expression is fixed and he is clearly in another place. As DEX is lost in his fantasy, ABBY describes it.*

ABBY

"The lone, powerful, great hunter moves through the swamp, stealthily stalking his prey, his sharp and penetrating vision, brilliantly sensitive sense of smell and extraordinary hearing alert to every living thing in the swamp. Not even an ant can escape his notice and keen, hunterly judgment. There has never been and will never be a hunter as incredible as this magnificent and noble being."

Finishing his fantasy, DEX "comes out of it" and shakes his head, looks around the room then galumphs toward the sofa and takes his place in front of it as JIM enters from the bedroom. JIM begins to mix cocktails. Moments later, Sean enters and takes his place at the counter and begins looking at a magazine on the counter.

JIM

Cocktail?

SEAN

Don't mind if I do, sir.

SEAN flips through the magazine, apparently looking at the ads.

So, what do you get the daughter of a lesbian couple for her christening?

JIM
Work booties and a tool kit?

SEAN
Don't be mean.

JIM
And what gift would you get the daughter of a gay couple for her christening?

SEAN holds up the magazine: "Architectural Digest".

SEAN
A subscription to *Architectural Digest*?

JIM
(*Laughing, hands SEAN his cocktail.*) Toast! To the proud parents and their new baby!

SEAN
(*Raising his glass*) To Katy, Mommie Emma and Sylvie! Salud!

JIM
And to the godfathers!

SEAN
The godfathers! Yeah, gay mafia!

JIM
Those girls must have set a record on the settling down, buying the house, starting a family thing.

SEAN
They *had* to get married, you know. When Emma found out she was pregnant. (*smiles*)

JIM
(*Laughs*) You goose! Their *in vitro* cost them a bundle.

SEAN
I know. They were lucky with that. First try. Yeah, Emma!

JIM
(*Pause, then indicating the magazine.*) So, any interesting ideas for our re-do?

SEAN
Sure. But nothing we can afford. This stuff is just interior design porn. "Look at that *sexy, taut*, elegant window treatment! And check out that *hot*, rock-hard,

(CONT'D)

granite flooring just waiting for you in the master bath! Man, how I'd love to slide into that *deep, black, welcoming* marble tub! And those knockers! On the front door! I think I'm getting a hard on!"

JIM

"Knockers"?

SEAN

(Rolls the magazine and swats JIM with it, laughing.) Fucker! *(pause, flattens the magazine again)* This stuff's just too expensive.

JIM

Adapt! Adapt! Adapt to a budget. That's the creative part.

SEAN

Maybe. *(Pause)* But I could be a lot more creative with a bigger budget. That's for sure.

JIM

Anyone can be creative with a bigger...*(pause)*...budget. *(Smiles)*
(Pause) So, you sorry you didn't go sperm donor for Emma?

SEAN

No. I'm keeping all my little swimmers to myself.

JIM affects a surprised reaction, then smiles.

Well, sort of. *(Smiles)* When Katy gets an idea, she can be pretty damn persistent. Some of her ideas can be just really off the wall, you know.

JIM

Like, uhmm, the double wedding thing?

SEAN

Like the double wedding thing. She had to settle for double "best men" ...and, now, godfathers.

JIM

You have to admit it would have been pretty efficient. Could have saved a bit by doubling up...on the wedding thing. Since we had to go to P-town, anyway.

SEAN

We used our miles and got a great deal on the B&B. We saved money, anyway. And, by the way. Are we going to have the conversation again?

JIM

No. Maybe. Yes.

SEAN

Why does it make a difference to you?

JIM

Why does it make a difference to *you*?

SEAN

Because I wouldn't love you any more if we were married. And I don't see the point of it.

JIM

Your parents?

SEAN

Are married and it would be the same if they weren't.

JIM

You'd be a bastard.

SEAN

But we're not having kids.

JIM doesn't respond. The silence becomes uncomfortable.

Ah. Well. I don't want to have *that* conversation, either.

JIM

You never wanted to...

SEAN

(Interrupting) I spent years of my life trying to be comfortable in being different and now you want us to be all alike?

JIM

I don't want us to be all alike. We can't be all alike. *Us?* Like that's even gonna happen? But in a society where the highest proof of commitment is marriage, I don't want to stand back from it. Not with you. *(pause)* Not with you.

SEAN

It's too easy to handle that one. Britney Spears? Newt Gingrich? This society? We're different. Let's stay different.

JIM

Different's not always...

SEAN

Yes, it is. It's who I am. And you're trying really, really hard *not* to be different.

JIM

That's not...

SEAN

(Interrupting) Yes, it is. Isn't that just having a different kind of closet? Being like the rest? Getting married? Kids?

JIM

That's not fair. I'd say two guys getting married is about as far out of the closet as you can get.

SEAN

Man, where's the "spirit of Stonewall"? Drag queens starting a riot? Being outrageous and not apologizing for it? Not hiding it?

JIM

I never knew you wanted to wear a wig. Or start a riot.

SEAN

I'm serious. Sometimes we forget who we are. Our last gay pride festival looked like a church picnic, it was so wholesome. Stonewall wasn't "family day in Greenwich Village", you know.

JIM

Oh, but it was. Our "family". And our "family" are having families now...only with each other and not with the ones society assigned us to. We can *still* be outrageous and queer. It's just not something you have to *do* in one particular, prescribed way. Do we really need to be telling people *how* to be queer? Judging when they're not queer enough? Can't we be ourselves?

SEAN

That's not what I meant. Of course I want us to be ourselves.

JIM

Then, what? What did you mean?

SEAN

I don't know. *(pause)* Jim, maybe this marriage thing...it's like something you just *do*. Because it's expected. Something you want to do because all of your brothers and sisters are married, even the gay ones.

JIM

But that's a good thing, like...

SEAN

Having matching towels in the bathrooms? Like shopping together at Costco on Saturday morning and doing the neighborhood potluck?

JIM

You like shopping with me at Costco. And you look forward to the neighborhood stuff. You told me. And you picked out the towels. You're usually better at this stuff, Sean. Your heart's not in this one, I think. So, what's going on here? Again?

SEAN

I never thought I'd become my parents. I was happy to be the weird and queer son.

JIM

I'm happy you're their gay son. We have a great family. You make it sound...

SEAN

...boring. *(pause)* Everyday. Boring. Expected. When it should be...

JIM

What?

SEAN

When it...*(stops)* This conversation is over.

JIM

(Reaches out, but SEAN pulls away.) Sean...

SEAN

I'm going to the gym.

JIM

Sean...

SEAN

You can walk the dogs.

SEAN leaves and in a few moments we hear the front door slam.

JIM

Fuck.

JIM leaves through the door to the bedroom. DEX and ABBY have been watching the conversation attentively. After a long moment...

ABBY

That was an argument.

DEX

Yeah, I think they had an argument.

ABBY

So, we should have an argument, too.

DEX

What? Why?

ABBY

They're Ours. We're Theirs. So now we have to have an argument, too.

DEX

I don't know...

ABBY

We need to. Come on.

DEX

Oh. OK...so, what do we argue about?

ABBY

Your pee smells funny.

DEX

I noticed that. What do you think...

ABBY

You're supposed to say, "No it doesn't".

DEX

But it does, so...

ABBY

You snore.

DEX

No, I don't. I don't snore. I know that.

ABBY

You do snore. (*puzzled*) But you're *asleep* and you wouldn't know that you were snoring, so this is not going to be much of an argument. So...

DEX

I get really upset when you try to get between me and Mine on the bed every morning. Whichever side I try to get up on, you get there.

ABBY

Great! That's a good argument.

DEX

And if I try to get next to Yours, you get between us, too.

ABBY

Now, this is going somewhere! OK! Yeah, well, that's what I *do*. They both want *me* to be next to them, not you.

DEX

Then why does Mine move you over to his other side and cuddle up with me?

ABBY

He feels sorry for you?

DEX

He does not.

ABBY

He does.

DEX

He does not.

ABBY

He does. He told me so.

DEX

He did? (*pause*) No. You can't understand anything he says to you, unless I translate. That's how it works.

ABBY

Oh. Yeah, well... (*pause*) Look! There's a squirrel!

DEX

(*Steadily*) No. There's. Not.

ABBY

(*Running to the French doors.*) Yes! There is!

DEX

(Following) Well, I'll be damned! That is a squirrel! You! You! You! You!

ABBY

You! You! You! You! Crazy squirrel! If I get out I'll rip you apart! You nasty animal! Get off my fence!

DEX

Get off my fence! You! You! You! You! Come down here and I'll smash you! You! You!

ABBY

You! *(pause)* You?

DEX

Oh, now it ran away. *(pause)* Where did it come from?

ABBY

I asked for squirrels. Mine brought them.

DEX

Silly. The trees are getting bigger. *(yawns)* Nap time.

DEX gets up on the sofa.

What were we doing? Before the squirrel?

ABBY

(Joining him on the sofa) I have no idea.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Two

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Night. Some time later.*

SEAN
No. I can't talk about that.

ABBY
But you argue.

SEAN
When he gets too close to the dangerous thing, I *find* an argument. It's safer.

ABBY
That's silly.

SEAN
I know. I just can't talk about what scares me.

ABBY
Why not?

SEAN
Oh, Abby. It's my last door. The one I'm afraid to open to him. I open it and I'm exposed. Totally. I could get hurt. Really bad. (*pause*) He could...tell me I'm right. Then I would lose everything. Everything. I couldn't stand that. So, I keep it closed.

ABBY
You have to tell what scares you. And open the door. I like open doors. They mean I'll be free.

SEAN
I know, but...

ABBY
...you're afraid.

SEAN
Yes.

ABBY
Don't be afraid. That's what you tell me. Don't be afraid.

SEAN
(*Almost to himself*) "Don't be afraid."

ABBY
You should talk. About what scares you. Open doors are good.

SEAN

(After a long pause) Yeah...they are. They are. *(pause)* I love you, Abby. When we wake up, we'll go to the dog park.

ABBY

I like the dog park! There are such weird and smelly dogs there!

SEAN

Sweet dreams, Abby.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Three

SETTING *SEAN and JIM's bedroom.*

TIME *Later that night.*

AT RISE *A single light, with a slight blue hue, illuminates JIM and SEAN's bed, though only a futon, comforter, sheets and pillows on a low platform will be seen. DEX is lying down and JIM is on a comforter, cross-legged behind him, dressed only in boxers.*

JIM

Why can't it be easy? Shouldn't it be easy?

DEX

What you think is easy, is hard for me. Like opening the thing where you keep my food. What I think is easy is hard for you. Like finding your stinky blue sock that's behind the dresser.

JIM

(Smiles and strokes DEX's head.) I was wondering where that one got to.
(Pause) No, I mean being together. Love.

DEX

You and your sock were together...once. But it wasn't very important to you, or it wouldn't be behind the dresser now. And you don't really miss it. But, it smells like you. Wants to smell like you. It misses you.

JIM

(Long pause) He's not a sock and I haven't misplaced him.

DEX

You have lots of socks. You've misplaced lots of socks. There's the one in the back of the closet, in your hiking boot. And the one in the garage, under your old golf bag. You keep losing them.

JIM

What are you...? *(long pause)* Oh. *(pause)* Oh.

DEX

It shouldn't be easy. Then it's important. Doesn't get lost. He needs to know you won't lose him. No matter how stinky.

JIM

So I should tell him that?

DEX

Well, maybe not the stinky part. But, yes.

JIM

How do I do that?

DEX

Not a clue. I'm a dog. I can't talk.

JIM

(Laughs) But, you are wise, Dex. What would I ever do without you?

DEX

You'd be buying new socks all the time. *(pause)* Can you open the food thing for me? I'm hungry.

JIM

When we wake up I'll open the food thing and I'll give you two extra treats.
(pause) I love you, Dex. Sweet dreams, old friend.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Four

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Later that night.*

AT RISE *JIM is asleep in bed alone. The blue hue of the light from the previous scene is no longer in evidence. SEAN enters with his blanket and pillow and gets into bed, waking JIM.*

JIM

(Yawning) What...?

SEAN

(Settling into bed.) Dex. Woke me up. Licking my face. Wouldn't leave me alone. I gave up.

JIM

He's...

SEAN

He's got the sofa now.

JIM

Abby?

SEAN

On the sofa, too. *(pause, then rolling over, away from JIM.)* G'night.

JIM

(Sitting up.) I won't lose you.

SEAN

What?

JIM

That's what you're afraid of. That I'll lose you. That I'll go away.

There is a long pause. Finally SEAN sits up, beside JIM. They are both facing the audience, rather than each other.

I won't. I won't do that.

SEAN

(After a long pause.) I don't know that. You don't know that. You've... *(stops)*

JIM

...done it before? Not really. Not...really. Both guys. I wasn't in love.

SEAN

You thought you were.

JIM

I was a kid. The first time. What do kids know?

SEAN

...and Bill?

JIM

He knew way too much. Lot more than me.

SEAN

But you still...

JIM

No, I didn't. I was just...comfortable. With him. It's not the same. I learned that. He taught me that. Comfortable is not love.

SEAN

How could you be wrong? How could you get it wrong twice?

JIM

I'm stupid. But I learn. And I've learned love. With you.

SEAN

Think so?

JIM

It's not a matter of *thinking*. It's *knowing*.

SEAN

Ah. Well. (*pause*) This will be a new conversation.

JIM

Yeah.

SEAN

OK. (*Long pause.*) Here's the thing. I've never been in a relationship. You've never been out of one. So, is it just...what you *do*? What you have to have? Like breathing? "Lost that one...where's the next?" sort of thing?

JIM

No. This is my first relationship. My first. And my last.

SEAN

It's just too *easy* for you. Too fuckin' easy. How can something so hard be so easy for anyone? You know, I used to hate having a guy stay over. Couldn't stand to have someone else in my bed when I slept. Freaked me out. Now I can't stand to be in bed when you're not beside me. When I can't reach out and touch you. When I can't hear your breathing. I can't sleep when you're not here.

JIM

It's the same for me. With you.

SEAN

I think of where I am, with you and I can't imagine it ever happening like this to me again. How could it? How could I ever feel like this with someone again? I would never want to. But I look at you and think...he's done this before. He's been here before. How could you do this more than once? Be in this place, with someone else, more than once?

JIM

I've only done this once. With you. I will only be in this place once. With you.

SEAN

I've always slept alone. You've never slept alone. Never.

JIM

I was always alone. Whoever was here. It wasn't you. So I was alone.

SEAN

(*Pause*) Do you really feel what I feel here? Now? I keep wondering what this is like from *your* side. Can it possibly be like it is for me? Like this huge, wonderful, crushing, sweet...*joy*...to be with you? To be near you? To just *live* to

(CONT'D)

touch you...smell you...breathe in the air you breathe out? To have nothing else that is important in my life but you? Nothing else I look forward to but seeing you? To be only quiet, to be only happy, to be only *me*...when I'm with you? Is it like that for you?

JIM

Yes.

SEAN

Was it like that with Bill?

JIM

No.

SEAN

Or with...

JIM

(Interrupting) No.

SEAN

So...

JIM

No one. Ever before. Never before. And never again. Ever again.

SEAN

(Clutching his pillow, head tilted back) Oh. *(Long pause)* I've been so afraid. That this meant more to me than to you. Was just too easy for you. When it seemed like the hardest, most difficult and most impossible thing in the world for me. That it could happen. That it has happened. Would ever happen for me...

JIM

(Interrupting) Don't be afraid.

SEAN

We've said a thousand '*I love you's*' but I've always been afraid we didn't mean the same thing every time we said them. Every time.

JIM

Don't be afraid.

SEAN

(A quizzical look and a pause) I am. *(pause)* I'll need help. Being with...anyone...like this. It may take...

JIM

...all the time you need.

SEAN

(Long pause) You know, I'm feeling sorta exposed here. *(Looking down and indicating his boxers.)* And I'm not.

JIM

(Turning to SEAN, moving closer) Here. Right here. Now. The one place in the world...in the whole world...in the whole universe...in the whole infinity of multi-verses. *This* is the place you can be totally, completely, absolutely exposed...and totally, completely, absolutely...protected. *(pause)* Always.

SEAN

Wow. *(pause)* Wow. *(long pause)* I've wanted to tell *you* that. So many times. But I was...

JIM

...afraid. Yeah...I know. At least...*now*, I do.

SEAN

(Long pause) Uhhh...do you want to, uh...?

JIM

(Smiles) We need to sleep, I think. Tomorrow's gonna be...

SEAN

...busy, yeah, I know.

SEAN leans forward to kiss JIM, then pulls him back down to the bed, hugging him from behind, as they prepare to sleep. After a moment SEAN sits up and retrieves a single hiking sock from the bed, where he had been lying on it. SEAN goes up on his elbow, holding the sock up.

Why do you have one of your hiking socks in bed?

JIM

(Looks briefly at the sock, then lies down to sleep.) Dex.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Five

SETTING *The family room.*

TIME *Daytime. A few weeks later.*

AT RISE *DEX is curled up on his bed and moaning. From time to time he will clench his body in a spasm. He is in agony. ABBY is careening around the room, from DEX to the window to the French doors to the rear door to the bedroom and back to DEX, in a panic.*

DEX

Ohhh....ohhh... It hurts! It hurts!

ABBY

Water! Come drink some water! Get up, drink some water!

DEX

I can't. I can't walk. Ohhh... It hurts. It hurts!

ABBY

Your chew toy! I'll get your chew toy!

ABBY slams through the rear door, then returns with a thick, heavily gnawed leather chew toy and drops it in front of DEX.

There! Chew on it. Play! You'll feel better!

DEX

I won't feel better. This (*clenches again*) hurts! Mine. Please get Mine! Where is he? It...

ABBY

They're not here! Where are they? They're not here! We need them!

DEX

Mine. Where...

ABBY

(Interrupting) They're here. *(ABBY runs to the rear door and through it.)*
Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!

From offstage we hear the front door opening as ABBY's "helps" continue then we hear SEAN's voice.

SEAN

Abby! Settle down, girl! What's going on? What's the matter?

SEAN enters, dressed for the office, with a briefcase.

DEX

Ohhh... Ohhh... It hurts!

SEAN sees and hears DEX, drops the briefcase on the floor and goes to kneel behind DEX's bed.

ABBY

Mine's here! Mine's here! Now you will be better! Stop hurting! Please!

SEAN

Dex, what is it boy? What's going on?

SEAN begins to pet DEX, but also to examine DEX with his hands. DEX clenches and writhes in agony and continues to moan.

Oh, Dex. You hurt, boy. What's hurting? What is it? Abby, girl, did Dex get into something? Dex, did you eat something you shouldn't have?

ABBY

He asked if you got into something. Did you eat something bad?

DEX

Nooo... I didn't eat anything. Nothing. Ohhh...

SEAN

Let's get up Dex. Let's go drink some water.

SEAN tries to make DEX sit up, but DEX pulls back, clenching in agony again.

Come on. You can walk to the laundry room. Come on, Dex! You're too big to carry! Please, Dex!

SEAN gives up and sits back.

Damn, Jim! Your dog's sick and you're not here and you need to be here!

SEAN pulls out his cell-phone and punches speed dial and waits for an answer.

(CONT'D)

Jim, call me as soon as the plane lands. Dex is in bad shape. I need to take him to the vet. Call me.

SEAN puts the phone away.

Oh, shit. This is serious. I'm here. I'm not going to let your dog die, Jim. I'm not. It ain't gonna happen. Not on my watch.

SEAN strokes DEX, trying to comfort him. After a moment, he pulls out the cell-phone again. Hits speed dial again and waits. There is an answer.

Katy, I've got a big problem. Is Emma there with the baby?

Waits for the answer.

Good! I need you over here right now. Jim is on the plane to Chicago and Dex is really, seriously sick and I need to get him to the vet and he's too big to lift and I'm afraid I'll hurt him if I try to drag him to the car. Please, please, please, I need you now.

Waits for the answer.

I love you. I love you, Katy. Be safe...but fly!

SEAN puts away the phone, then leans over DEX to hug him gently, then continues to pet him, soothingly. DEX continues to moan, quietly.

You're going to be OK, Dex. I'm not going to let anything happen to you. We'll get to the vet and she'll fix you up and you'll be healthy and the hurting will go away. I'm here. You're safe with me. I'm going to protect you.

ABBY

What did...?

DEX

He said he's not going to let anything happen to me. That the hurting will go away. That I'm safe with him. That he's going to protect me.

ABBY

But how, you can't...?

DEX

That's what Yours said. That's what he said to me. He's going to protect me.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Five

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Daytime. A few weeks later.*

AT RISE *SEAN, JIM and KATY are at the counter, nibbling on cheese and crackers and each have a glass of white wine. DEX is on his bed and ABBY on the sofa.*

KATY

I never knew dogs got kidney stones.

JIM

I had one once. It hurt like hell. But it passed and they didn't have to do any of that litho...litho...sonic smashing stuff. Dex was OK after his passed. Hasn't seemed to bother him since.

KATY

Any symptoms from the other thing? That they found?

JIM

Not yet. He's taking some pills and he seems healthier than he was before, but he gets tired and sleeps a lot more and sometimes refuses to go as far on walks.

SEAN

He's more like, "I peed, I pooped, now I want to go home."

JIM

Old Dex is fourteen, now. That's a lot in dog years. Especially for a big dog. So, it's hard to tell what's just from old age and what the cancer might be causing.

KATY

How long...

SEAN

Six months. Maybe a year.

JIM

The most common cause of death in older dogs.

KATY

Dex is such a sweetie. I hate to think of that. Are there any other treatment options?

JIM

None that wouldn't hurt him and would make much difference, anyway. Dogs are not like people. They don't have the concept that "this hurts but it will make you better". They just know that you're hurting them and they can't understand why. It's like a betrayal. I won't do that to Dex. Not my old boy.

SEAN

We'll love him as long as we can and he'll be happy as long as he can.

KATY

That's all I want with my life. What's so great about "lifespan"? Every one goes on and on about "lifespan". They're missing the point. If you're not happy and you're so sick you don't enjoy anything? What's the point of that? What I want is...healthspan.

JIM

You'll have that. You and Emma and Sylvie. And, when you don't...

KATY

When my health's done, I'm done. No "extraordinary measures". No bullshit procedures to make money for the hospital and no end of grief and pain for me. Emma will be there. She knows what I want. And she has the authority.

JIM

What?

KATY

Medical power of attorney.

JIM

That's major. Your parents?

KATY

Will just have to deal with it. We had a good attorney.

JIM

I hope so.

SEAN

(To JIM) I could get hit by a truck, crossing the street. What then?

JIM

Probably a fuckin' Dodge pickup. I hate Chrysler products. For me, I'd insist on a big Bentley.

SEAN

Yeah, but...what then?

JIM

So, that's...something to talk about?

SEAN

Yeah...something to talk about. Among others.

JIM

(Smiles) I'll add it to our list. (To KATY) Email me your attorney's contact info. We may have some work for her.

SEAN

And don't forget your realtor info.

KATY

I'll put that in the email, too. She's good. She got Emma a great price for her place. She'll get you a good price for your condo.

SEAN

She'd better. Our re-do's gonna be major.

KATY

So...attorneys, realtors...interior designers next. No, wait...I forget. You got that covered. (Pause) Maybe travel agents? Event planners? Possibly?

JIM

Things are moving along. (smiles)

SEAN

(Kissing JIM) I love you.

KATY

You guys, stop it. You're making me jealous.

SEAN

Come on. It's you girls that make *us* jealous.

JIM

And Emma's back from her parents tomorrow, with Sylvie. You'll get lots of lovin' then.

KATY

I'd better, is all I can say. *(pause)* So, where're we going for dinner?

SEAN

Buenos Aires, the Argentine place on the east side. Perfect cold weather food.

JIM

Yeah, empanadas!

SEAN

Pastel de papas!

KATY

What?

SEAN

You'll love it.

JIM

Gnocchi!

JIM

And malbec!

KATY

Lots of malbec, I hope!

They toast and finish their wine and get ready to leave. JIM, SEAN and KATY go over to each of the dogs and pet them, then head for the door to the hall and front of the house.

SEAN

(To the dogs) OK, doggies. You stay here and guard the house. We'll be back in a while.

JIM

Dex, Abby-dog, we love you guys!

After they've left, DEX leaves his bed and comes over to join ABBY on the sofa. They each give out a dog sigh.

ABBY

We're supposed to guard the house.

DEX

Yeah, right. They turned on the alarm. I heard it. I don't think they were serious about us guarding the house.

ABBY

The squirrel might come back and get in through the roof.

DEX

Then that would be one dead squirrel. Better than a chew toy. Much!

ABBY

Want to go look for the squirrel?

DEX

No. Let's just sit here for a while.

ABBY

They should leave the TV on. I like watching the TV. I like Animal Planet.

DEX

Food Channel.

ABBY

Yeah, Mine always makes stuff after he watches the Food Channel.

DEX

And good stuff gets dropped on the floor.

ABBY

He can be sloppy.

DEX

That's a good thing.

ABBY

American Idol?

DEX

Stupid show. I don't know why they punish those people like that. *(pause)*
Quiet's better.

ABBY

(After a long silence) No arguments. Ours. No more arguments. You notice?

DEX

Yeah. It's good. I was running out of arguments for us to have when they did.

ABBY

Yes. *(Pause)* I wish my friend would bring her friend and their little crying thing back. It smelled...good.

DEX

It smelled like shit. But they clean it up quick. Then it smells good. The crying is annoying.

ABBY

Ours didn't seem to mind the crying.

DEX

I hope they don't get one.

ABBY

I hope they get one.

They look at each other.

DEX

This is not...

ABBY

...an argument. *(Long pause)* Want to tell me about running with the horses again?

DEX

Horses?

ABBY

Yes. With Yours. In the desert. The crazy black one and the red one that would lick you and... *(trails off, uncertain)*

DEX

Horses. *(pause)* Horses. *(pause)* Maybe later.

ABBY

Or any other story. You have great stories. I like them.

DEX

You do?

ABBY

It helps me go to sleep. But not...boring...go to sleep. *Safe...go to sleep.*

DEX

I'll try to remember one.

ABBY

Please do.

DEX

(After a long pause) Want to go see if they left any food in the bowls?

ABBY

They never leave food in the bowls. Besides, if they had, you'd have already eaten it.

DEX

No. I'm not so hungry. Not like I used to be. But they've been giving me extra, so maybe...

ABBY

Possibly...

DEX

There might be food!

The dogs bound off the sofa and race around the counter and through the door to the bedroom.

ABBY

I'll beat you, old man!

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Six

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Night. Sometime later.*

AT RISE *There is a single spot, with a slight blue hue, focused on DEX's bed. DEX is sitting on his bed. JIM is sitting on his left and SEAN on DEX's right. Both SEAN and JIM are wearing only boxer shorts.*

DEX

This is nice.

JIM

I love you, Dex. I love you so much. You have been my friend and my companion and my strong and courageous protector for half my life. You've kept me from being lonely when I was alone and you were my center and safe place when I wasn't alone, but should have been. There were ten thousand times when I should have told you, I love you, but didn't and the times I did were not nearly enough by ten thousand. I'm sorry for that.

DEX

Why would I do anything else? You are Mine. No one else was Mine. That's all there is. It's a simple thing.

JIM

So many times, when it was quiet and late and maybe things hadn't gone well, I would look up and there you were, with your big eyes...watching me. Not wanting anything. Not asking for anything. Just watching. That settled me...made me quiet, too.

DEX

When you looked back. Just looked. Looked at me. I loved that.

JIM

But, even when I didn't look back, I felt you there and it was...comfortable. I knew nothing could hurt me with you there.

DEX

You are Mine. Nothing will hurt you while I am here. It better not! I'll tear it up!

JIM

I know, old boy. I know. (*Smiles*) But you've been my protector for a long time. A really long time. Longer than possible, really. You have been fierce and strong and loyal and I would understand if you are tired, now. And need rest. You can be...a little less strong...less fierce, if you need.

DEX

I *am* tired. And that makes me feel...sad. What will you do?

SEAN

Dex, I love you. You are sweet and gentle and strong and fierce. And I love Yours. As you need more rest...as you need to become a bit less strong and fierce, I want to make him Mine, as well. I can do this. With your permission.

DEX

You would do this?

SEAN

Yes, I would.

DEX

You will be his protector? Always his protector?

SEAN

Yes.

DEX

Will you watch him and keep him safe?

SEAN

I will.

DEX

And nothing will hurt him or make him afraid or make him cry while you are there?

SEAN

Nothing.

DEX

And you will never leave him?

SEAN

Never. I love him.

DEX

(*To JIM*) His runt bitch is pretty OK, but she needs help. You're going to need to pitch in.

JIM

I'll help Abby.

DEX

You have to be *his* protector. You can never leave him.

JIM

I will never leave him. I love him.

DEX

And don't argue. It's disturbing.

JIM

We'll try not to argue.

DEX

I feel better.

JIM

There is one thing. One thing I have to ask. Another permission. (*pause*) It may be that one day you will feel very tired...very, very tired. And it will be hard to be happy or feel good about anything. Sadly, the bit of pain you have now may grow much greater and may be more than even my strong, fierce protector will have patience for. When that day comes, I can stop it and make it go away. All go away. But, sadly, you will go away, as well. Should I do that? And how will I know when to do that?

DEX

(*After a long silence*) When we can't talk like this anymore. When I'm too tired and no longer watch you...when you see you no longer fill my gaze...then you'll know. I'll already be gone.

There is a long moment.

JIM

I understand.

DEX

You won't forget me? (*Pause*) You are all I have.

JIM

Never.

SEAN

We love you.

JIM

I love you, Dex.

DEX

(Long pause.) Can we go for walkies down by the lake? I think that's where that squirrel is hiding. The one who runs on my fence.

JIM

Tomorrow morning, when we wake up, we'll all cuddle in bed for a while then we'll head down to the lake and make that squirrel wish he'd never been born.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

Scene Seven

SETTING *Same.*

TIME *Afternoon. Six months later.*

AT RISE *The room will be relatively unchanged, but the potted plant will be appreciably bigger, again. And DEX and ABBY's beds will be side by side. DEX is lying in his bed, with his back to the sofa and to JIM. He will be unresponsive throughout the scene and we will not see his face at any time. SEAN and JIM will be dressed in Saturday casual. They will now be wearing matching wedding bands. As the scene opens, JIM will be sitting on the sofa, watching DEX. JIM appears to have been crying. SEAN enters through the French doors. He has been working in the garden.*

SEAN

OK, the new rose bushes are in. I can start on the impatiens next. We're gonna have one beautiful garden this year! Katy and Emma...

SEAN stops. He has noticed JIM's tears.

JIM

It's time.

SEAN looks toward DEX for a long moment, then back toward JIM. There is another long moment.

SEAN

Let me go clean up and change my shirt. I'll make the call.

SEAN goes through the door to the bedroom. JIM watches DEX for a long moment. ABBY enters in a rush through the door to the bedroom and goes to DEX's bed.

ABBY

Oh, you are in such trouble! You made a huge mess in the laundry room again! Really awful! Worse than last time! If they find it they'll be so pissed! But I knocked over the towel basket and kicked them around over it, so I don't think they'll notice. You shouldn't...

ABBY stops. Looks more closely at DEX.

Hey! Your bowl is full! I just saw it. It's all that squishy stuff, so I didn't eat any of it. But there's lots to eat! It will be good! Come on, lets go eat some of it!

ABBY is now worried and strokes DEX.

Come on, old man. You need to eat something. What if the squirrels come back? You have to be strong. Come on guy, you can get strong.

She strokes DEX a few more times, worried, then slowly joins JIM on the sofa. They both watch DEX for a long moment. After a while, SEAN returns and goes to the sofa. JIM stands and they hug for a long moment. Then they go to DEX and each hug him, but he is unresponsive. They lift DEX and the three of them make their way slowly through the door leading to the front of the house. ABBY watches this, then watches the closed door for a long moment. Offstage, the sound of the front door opening and closing. ABBY lies on the sofa. She watches DEX's bed. After a while, SEAN enters, carrying a large cardboard box. It's the box containing ABBY's stuffed toys. He goes to the sofa and removes the colorful, stuffed toys and places them around ABBY on the sofa. He removes a green frog, with extended legs and hands it to ABBY.

(CONT'D)

My frog! My green frog! Oh, I love you!

SEAN hugs ABBY, then leaves through the door.

(Arranging the toys around her on the sofa.) My little friends! All my little friends! My babies! I've missed you so much! Oh, I love you! I love you all! We always had such fun together! You would just always keep me company when I was lonely. You were there for me and...

ABBY stops and looks to DEX's empty bed again. After a long moment, she moves slowly toward the bed, then bends and sniffs the bed in several places. Then she sits back on the floor. After a long moment, with a sound very much like a plaintive, despairing, soul-crushing howl...

Nooo! Oh, noooo! *(pause)* Nooo!

ABBY is silent for a long moment. She then rolls in DEX's bed, to cover herself with his scent. For a while, she just lies there. Eventually, she creeps on all fours back to the sofa, where she sits in the middle, among the stuffed toys and clutches her green frog.

A light stays up on ABBY, but goes to black on the rest of the stage. In the black, the potted plant is moved downstage, center.

On the sofa, ABBY faces the audience.

Go on, old man. My friend. My good friend. Go to the place you were always dreaming about. In your fantasy. Go and be happy there. You've done a good job here and been the fierce, strong guardian and vigilant protector of a life more important to you than your own or any other. I will miss you. I will miss you so. *(Pause)* You were loved. You *are* loved. You always will be loved.

During the following the lights will come up to full on the potted plant, downstage center, with DEX behind it, repeating his "hunter" fantasy. DEX's costuming will have changed...brighter colors. He should look younger. Then ABBY, very slowly...

"The lone, powerful, great hunter moves through the swamp, stealthily stalking his prey, his sharp and penetrating vision, brilliantly sensitive sense of smell and extraordinary hearing alert to every living thing in the swamp. Not even an ant can escape his notice and keen, hunterly judgment. There has never been and will never be a hunter as incredible as this magnificent and noble being. *(pause)* This noble, noble being."

As ABBY concludes her lines, the fronds of the plant will have cleared DEX's face and he will look directly into the audience and smile...an ecstatic, beautiful, wonderful smile.

Lights go out on ABBY, leaving DEX alone in the light for a moment.

BLACKOUT
END OF SCENE

END OF PLAY