

A MIDWINTER NIGHT'S CONVERSATION

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JAMIE 28 Male

WILL 37 Male

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SETTING *Co-op apartment, upper west side, Manhattan.*

TIME *Nighttime, midwinter.*

AT RISE *There is a large bed center stage, with carpets on each side. Sheets, pillows and a comforter are tossed about the bed and onto the floor. JAMIE, stands naked, stage right, apparently looking out onto the nighttime city through the window of the bedroom. Behind him WILL, stirs in the bed and seems to be waking from a brief, post-sex drowsiness. JAMIE hears him and turns toward the bed, smiling.*

JAMIE

As Romeo:

“Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiops ear! Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!

WILL

Jamie...

JAMIE goes half-way to the bed, then to his knees, with his hands clutched over his heart, then extended toward WILL.

JAMIE

“Did my heart love ‘til now? Forswear it, sight! For I ne’er saw true beauty till this night!”

JAMIE flings himself into the bed as WILL pulls a sheet over WILL’s lower body.

WILL

In bed with an actor...again.

JAMIE moves to WILL, pulls the sheet away, exposing him. Then indicating WILL’s groin with a graceful wave.

JAMIE

But "...if I profane with my unworthy hand this holy shrine, the gentle fine is this, my lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough force with tender...(pauses, smiling)...kiss!"

JAMIE briefly starts to move his head to WILL's groin. WILL covers himself with the sheet again.

WILL

No acting!

JAMIE looks at WILL, pulls back, goes to the edge of the bed, stands and pulls away the sheet, roughly. Then back on the bed, grabbing WILL roughly, now as Stanley, in "Streetcar Named Desire".

JAMIE

Oh, no, Blanche...hey!...miss prissy fuckin' DuBois..."we've had this date coming from the beginning."

WILL

(Taken aback by the intensity.) Not that one. *(Pause)* Give it a break! You're not onstage!

JAMIE

(Opening his arms and expanding his chest a bit.) But I am! We are!

WILL retrieves the sheet and covers himself.

WILL

We're not. And it's been a long time between dates, Stanley.

JAMIE is momentarily taken aback by WILL's tone, then recovering, watching WILL for a moment: then moving, crouching, onto the bed, as Heath Ledger's Joker, in "The Dark Knight".

JAMIE

"Why so serious?"

WILL

(Again, taken aback by JAMIE's intensity.) You are now, seriously, creeping me out.

JAMIE

(Losing the role and in a normal but concerned voice.) Why...so serious? Why...tonight...so...serious?

WILL

I'm not...

JAMIE

You are. I can read you. Totally. Remember?

WILL

Just let it go, for now. Our first night together in...

JAMIE

(Starting again as the Joker) "Why so..."

WILL

(Interrupting)...I missed you. *(Pause)* I'll miss you. *(Almost to himself)* I miss you.

JAMIE

(Off the last of the line.) I'm here...

WILL

You *are*! And I'm happy for that. And for *you*! This has been...*will be*...a great year for you! A great *two* years! Quite a run!

JAMIE

(Signals with his hand.) Stop. Go back. That never works. "I miss you."?

WILL

An actor's ear...

JAMIE

A lover's...

WILL

...hears what it wants...or fears...

JAMIE

A friend's. *(Pause)* Tell me?

WILL

There's nothing...

JAMIE

(Interrupting)...tell me, Will. Truth.

WILL

Ah, truth. *(After a long pause.)* Things are different now, aren't they? With you out there...

(CONT'D)

JAMIE wants to interrupt...

(Off JAMIE) ...and you have to be there, I know, and it's good and what I want for you and hoped for you and dreamed for you and I wouldn't have it any other way...but still...

JAMIE

...but still...

WILL

(Smiles) Still...

JAMIE flops onto his back on the bed, beside WILL, slides in beside him under the sheet.

JAMIE

You want the scruffy, way-Off-Broadway, acting-school boy back. *(Smiles)*.

WILL

...and the surprising young Village theatre discovery and the Off-Broadway sensation and the serious, committed actor who ran his lines in my arms and cried in his sleep as he lived his character for the weeks of a run and...

JAMIE

I'm here...

WILL

...and the amazing perfect empath who lived theatre and bonded with his audience...his *live* audience.

JAMIE

He's still here...

WILL

But will he be? Two weeks from now? Maybe he won't come back.

JAMIE

(Caresses WILL's cheek.) Why? Why would you say that? Why wouldn't I come back? This is home. *(WILL takes JAMIE's hand and kisses it.)* It's been tough, I know. Difficult schedule, re-shooting and starting the other one so quickly. Then there's been so much to do with all the events and Gilda's commitments for me out there...

WILL

Ah, Gilda. Your "wicked witch of West Hollywood" agent...

JAMIE

...But I'm coming *back*. Here's where I want to be. Here with you.

WILL

It's just been...so *different*. You know, I used to see you every *day*. We talked...every *day*. For years. Even before we ever did the couple thing. But it was always...here. You were always...here.

JAMIE

OK...this is now *way* serious. For a first night back. (*Pause*) Why should it be any different now? I love you. You're the one who was always there for me...the one I've always depended on. In my life...the stuff with my parents. Coming out...I could never have done that without you. Getting started here. An actor in a city with too many actors and way too many waiters. No matter what I was doing, no matter how good or bad the production was, *you* were the one I wanted to come home to.

WILL

New York is one thing...

JAMIE

New York is *home*...

WILL

...Hollywood's another. You aren't four Metro stops away every night. It's a different world.

JAMIE

Theatre's home. Here's the only real place for theatre. Film's more challenging than I thought it would be and a hell of a lot better paying, but...

WILL

(*Interrupting*) It's not *theatre*. It's an *industry* and requires more from its...product. It doesn't have an audience...it has consumers. You've taken off like a skyrocket and everything has changed for you. In a huge and irreversible way. You need to realize that. (*Pause, turning away.*) I have.

JAMIE

Stop. (*Watches WILL for a long time.*) Don't do this.

WILL

(*Surprised, turning back.*) What...?

JAMIE

Disengage. That is what you're doing, isn't it? A pre-emptive *disconnect*? Months with you here...me there...and only some weekends together. You haven't found someone else. You know I haven't. So, it's...

WILL

...Jamie...

JAMIE

...self-protective. Like...

JAMIE lifts the sheet slightly, lets it drop back onto WILL.

Don't do it. Not to me.

WILL

I'm not...

JAMIE

(Interrupting) Don't say, "I miss you" when I'm *here*. Don't wall me out, now, when I need you the most. I *love* you. I would never hurt you. Nothing will change. *(Smiling)* Except maybe we'll be able to move over to the east side!

WILL

(Long pause.) Walls. "Something there is that loves a wall". That should have been Frost's line, you know.

(Beat)

Did you know that you were the first person ever to say, "I love you" to me?

JAMIE

You never told me...but, yes...I knew that.

WILL motions him close and JAMIE snuggles into his arms.

WILL

I remember that I couldn't understand *why* you would say that. I loved you, I knew that, but...

JAMIE

I said it because it was true and because you loved me. That *I* knew.

WILL

I'd loved guys before...really just horny crushes...but it never seemed *necessary* that they love me back. I couldn't even imagine what that would feel like...for someone to love *me*. How weird is that? So, *you* were a complete surprise.

JAMIE

They were straight and you were gay and closeted and before that you didn't know what the fuck gay meant, even, except that it was horrible. Old story.

WILL

We've talked about this?

JAMIE

No. You talked about *me*. Your extended "coming out" seminars. I worked it out. Later, when reading you became as easy as *this* (*brushes WILL's chest*), I *knew*.

WILL

Walls can protect you from getting hurt.

JAMIE

So can casual sex. It's a great wall. Keeps all the emotions away.

WILL

We...?

JAMIE

No. This Fringe play I did once. About two gay guys trying to hookup online on Saturday night. It really hit home for a lot of my friends. You know I missed that punch in my gay card, thanks to you...and holding down two jobs and going to acting school at the same time.

WILL

An innocent in the big city...

JAMIE

Emotionally seduced by an older man. But celibate.

WILL

For a while. (*Smiling*)

JAMIE

That was another one of your walls. The sex. Lots, but not with anyone you might actually *care* about.

WILL

Yes.

JAMIE

You were open about that. Just not about the "why" of it. You know I used you in the play? I'd figured out the "why" of it.

WILL

I wondered about that one.

JAMIE moves away from WILL, to kneel on the bed, sit on his heels.

JAMIE

So, here's my question, counselor. How did I get through? The walls?

WILL

Truth?

JAMIE

Truth.

WILL

You had no walls. I didn't want you to build any. A kid straight out of Maine who hadn't had the time or the environment to need them. The straightest gay guy I'd ever met. And the sweetest.

JAMIE

And I thought you just wanted to fuck me.

WILL

Wanted to, but didn't.

JAMIE

No, you didn't. That was strange.

WILL

It took a while.

JAMIE

A challenge for me. To get you to. Because...

WILL

Because?

JAMIE

Because I'd fallen in love. Took you a while to figure that out, though.

WILL

I didn't have the vaguest idea what having someone in love with me...felt like.

JAMIE

Then it just happened and we didn't even talk about the change. Like...

WILL

(Interrupting)...talking about it would make it go away. We tiptoed around the subject...

JAMIE

(Interrupting)...and I moved in and we started shopping together and re-decorating and having friends over and...such *domesticity!*

WILL

As much domesticity as living with an actor...

JAMIE

...or a tax lawyer...

WILL

...allows.

JAMIE

The loving thing, though...that's been like...hmmm. *(Pause)* ...a fireplace on a cold winter night. In the corner of the room...quiet...not making a great thing of itself. Reassuring. Everything in the room ignores it...but there's the glow it casts, flickering through the shadows with its warmth.

WILL

What play is that from?

JAMIE

Somewhere. Don't remember now. *(Pause)* But now I'd set it in...*Maine!* Or...how about the upper east side and add heated marble floors in the bathroom...and heated towel racks!

*WILL smiles and reaches out to JAMIE to pull him back into his arms.
JAMIE resists.*

(Beat)

There's another question, counselor. Or...the original question. "I miss you"? Will, what's going on?

WILL

Ah...so I guess my little diversion into back-story didn't work?

JAMIE

Nope...

WILL

Well, damn. Caught again.

*WILL sits up in bed, back against the headboard, pats the bed beside him.
JAMIE joins him, back to the bed's headboard.*

You got really good while I wasn't looking.

JAMIE

What?

WILL

Your movie.

JAMIE

You said you liked my job, that I was great, why...

WILL

(Interrupting)...you're not great, you're fuckin' brilliant. The best acting I've ever seen, anywhere. Incredible. Stunning.

JAMIE

That sir, is absolute bullshit. I was good and I was lucky...with the part and with my director. And you were around for some of it. You *were*...looking.

WILL

Not like for what you've done *here*, in New York. Not like for all the plays. Now I realize I'd missed where you were getting to, even here.

JAMIE

You've seen almost every play I've ever done, from the beginning. And you've been in on them...from the audition to the script to running my lines, for hours...

WILL

...and hours and hours. *(Smiles)* But even there, I'd missed it. *(pause)* Even when you brought home that little gold tchotchke over there *(indicating offstage)*. I was too close. Just seemed the natural order of things, like walks in the park, Sunday brunch, stopping for take-out on the way home. "Yeah, Ludwig, the Ninth was pretty good. Did you remember the bratwurst?"

JAMIE

Oh, come on, Will. That's how it's supposed to be. What you do. Where you go with it. Having you here for me...bringing home take-out...made it *(pause)* comfortable. Possible. There's nothing different with the movie.

WILL

It's not how it's supposed to be. I wasn't watching out. For you. Seeing where it was going with you and what might be down the road, for you. I was comfortable...with us.

JAMIE

Hey, mister. *I'm* comfortable with us.

WILL

Jamie, as much as I love our comfortable life, I love you more. I need to think about you and what you need. What your...*art* needs...

JAMIE

(Laughs) I *hate* that term...*art!* So fuckin' pretentious! You will *never* use it again!

WILL

OK...*career*, then.

JAMIE

My career's going just fine, thank you very much. Besides, my career depends on my *life* and that (*indicating WILL, the room, the city*) is going even better!

WILL

Jamie...

JAMIE

Stop. Just stop. (*pause*). Please. And tell me what this is all about? What it's been about? Since that first "I miss you"?

(Beat)

WILL

OK. Here's something we have to talk about. I've been thinking about. (*Pause*) So, this is the problem. (*Pause*) New York and New York theatre...small world. Even when you include the eastern annex...also known as London's West End. Total audience...a few million...at most. And not really much of a business. Hell, no one makes money in theatre...I *know*. I do their taxes. I don't think they really intend to make money, not really, once you get beyond the few Broadway producers at the very top. And, the very top isn't where the...*art* is. It's where the tourists are.

JAMIE

Such a cynic, Mr. Tax Attorney.

WILL

That's your world, Jamie. Or, has been your world. Almost...a family. Although a *very* dysfunctional one. But it does allow for...differences. Casually tolerant. *(Pause)* Film, though...

JAMIE

A different world. You said that.

WILL

It's a *real* business. An industry that has no other purpose than making money. *Now* the audience is hundreds of millions and the industry...not *people*, but an *industry*...has to be very, very careful of its...product. Success or failure is measured in a margin of a percentage point or two. And...nothing...*nothing*...can be allowed to shave that margin, even a fraction of a point. *You* are the product now with hundreds of millions of customers, all watching and this industry has to be very, *very* careful...of *you*. *You* have to be careful. Not New York, now. A different world.

JAMIE

I know where this is going...

WILL

So far, you and Gilda have managed, but in two weeks...

JAMIE

(Interrupting)...When did she talk to you?

WILL

Oh, we've chatted from time...

JAMIE

(Interrupting)...bullshit, Will. When?

WILL

Wednesday. And Monday before that.

JAMIE tosses back the sheet and stands in the bed.

JAMIE

(Laughing) Fuck 'em! Fuck all of them! And fuck her!

WILL

Jamie...

JAMIE

(Smiles) Is *that* what you were worried about? *That!* With all the "I'll miss you. I miss you" crap? *(Lightheartedly)* I'm shocked...*shocked* sir! That you would

think I would even *care*! That you would think I would come within even three thousand *miles* of that closet you so lovingly helped me leave. (*Pause*) Not a chance.

WILL

You need to think about...

JAMIE

Yes...what I love to do...act. And the person I love...you.

JAMIE goes to his knees beside WILL.

I intend to have both. Openly. Fully. As who I *am*. My...*art*...depends on that.

WILL

Jamie...

JAMIE

...and my *life* (*kissing WILL's hand*) depends on you, my love.

WILL

Think about it. This is a big step. Gilda...

JAMIE

I have. Gilda and I have had "the conversation". Yesterday. And quite a conversation it was! At the end of which I tossed water on her and she (*with the pose and voice of the Wicked Witch of the West from Wizard of Oz*) just *melted, melted* right away! (*Normal voice.*) Miraculous!

WILL

(*Laughing*) ...and?

JAMIE

My agent will have to find another date for the evening. And another seat at the Kodak. If she can't do that in Hollywood, then she's not worth her ten percent.

WILL

But...

JAMIE

And you, my love...will need a new tux. I want you to be *gorgeous* on the red carpet!

WILL

Jamie, think about this...

JAMIE

Oh, I *have* sir. That was what our just recently completed outrageously fantastic fuck was all about! My dear, my love, my Will...two weeks from tomorrow night I will hold your hand on TV, with the whole world watching, as we sit amongst the glittering crowd. And if...*if* they open the envelope and call my name...I will kiss you, right there in front of God, Oscar and the ghost of Louis-fuckin' B. Mayer! And if they *don't* call my name...*you* will kiss *me*...because otherwise I'm just gonna cry!

WILL pulls JAMIE to him and they embrace and kiss. After a moment, JAMIE pulls back, then kneels again on the bed.

“With this field dew consecrate, every fairy take his gait, and each several chamber bless, through this palace, sweet with peace, and the owners of it blest, ever shall in safety rest...(To WILL) ...Sleep, thou...oh sleep...and I will wind thee in my arms! (*Pause, turning and dismissing the audience with a wave of his hand*) Fairies begone, and be all ways away!”

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY