

ARTISTIC TENDENCIES - A NEW QUEER PLAY
An original mystery by Anthony Scott

ARTISTIC TENDENCIES
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SETTING

A photographer's home studio within the Loring Park neighborhood of Minneapolis in present day.

CHARACTERS

NATALIE LARSON - Work-From-Home photographer with a Loring Park studio, in her late twenties. She's notoriously described as an aspiring photographer from a wealthy family. She grew up in a conservative area of rural Minnesota and moved to Minneapolis shortly after high school to go to college and start her career. She is fascinated by queer culture, being queer herself, and has been fascinated by queer 20th century aesthetics her whole life.

TAYLA MASTERS - Natalie's ex-girlfriend turned best friend, roommate and assistant, similar in age. Grew up outside of Minnesota, met Natalie in college. They broke up after moving in together, and she never really got over their relationship like Natalie did. She still loves Natalie and although she paints on the side, her main focus has always been protecting and helping her. She's also in school, enrolled in a course on queer history, and wants to become a historian or librarian. She handles all the reservations for Natalie's studio.

JULIAN BONAVERD - a brand new client of Natalie's, an aspiring model claiming to be new to town. Beautiful, quiet, reserved, and extremely kind yet mysterious. He doesn't speak much, but things he says signal he may be more complicated than the girls imagine.

CAMERON JACOBSEN - Julian's boyfriend. Nerdy, booksmart guy, intellectual, stylish. A wise yet anxious soul, lover of queer history.

SYNOPSIS

Photographer Natalie Larson finds herself thrown off after meeting with her most interesting client yet - gay actor/model/dancer Julian Bonavard. When she tells her ex-girlfriend and studio assistant Tayla Masters about her photoshoot with Julian, they both discover something about Julian that no one could have expected, not even Julian himself. The girls delve into what their unsettling discovery about Julian could mean. A major part of the mystery lies within the details of Julian's relationship with his boyfriend, Cameron. Julian and Cameron's connection and love ends up forcing Tayla and Natalie, two ex-lovers, to reconsider their relationship.

ACT I

SCENE I

(Lights up to reveal a bohemian-style photographer's studio lit in red light. Decor references the local art and music scene of Minneapolis, featuring dozens of polaroids and other photography studio essentials. Entering from the red-lit upstairs comes NATALIE with a polaroid camera around her neck. She goes to place some Polaroids on a clothing line hanging from the wall nearest to the stairs. She makes her way down the stairs and over to a record player. She finds a record to put on – an old Donna Summer record that hasn't been opened yet. Surprised, she takes out the record and puts it on. I Feel Love by Donna Summer starts playing. Soon, she hears a knock at the door.)

NATALIE

It's open!

(JULIAN enters the room slowly. Soon after he walks in, NATALIE adjusts her posture to indicate she hasn't seen him before.)

NATALIE

Welcome, come on in!

JULIAN

Hey! I noticed a sign outside stating this is a photography studio? My name is Julian Bonavard. Are you taking new clients? I'd love to be fitted in, if you can.

NATALIE

(Half-heartedly) Oh, yes well lucky you! I have some time right now, actually. Since I'm new, I like to keep slots open for walk-ins...Supposedly it's good for business to...

JULIAN

Oh. I'm sorry if—

NATALIE

Oh no, I'm just kidding! I'm not prestigious enough yet to have a full book of clients, it's more about the earned experience at this point in my career.

JULIAN

(He turns towards the polaroids all over the walls.)
Well, you clearly have some experience. *(Listens to the music playing)* Is that Donna Summer?

NATALIE

It is. My roommate must've bought one of her records recently, I didn't even know we had Donna on vinyl! I found it next to the record player and thought I'd put it on.

JULIAN

I Feel Love - how euphoric. This is one of my favorite songs.

NATALIE

Well if your modeling is as good as your taste in music, this will be easy. We'll start with just a consultation today. We'll do a few poses, I'll take a few Polaroids, and then we'll schedule your actual shoot date. The day of the shoot, we'll look through the shots we take today to decide what exactly we want to do for the shoot. Sound good?

JULIAN

Sounds great. Do you shoot everything in here?

NATALIE

In the living room? Oh, god no! Just the consultation — my full studio is upstairs.

JULIAN

I see — do you live here too?

NATALIE

Yep, upstairs as well.

JULIAN

(Walks into the studio more)

That's so cool, living where you work. You know, this place seems so familiar to me somehow... you can work from home?

NATALIE

Of course, most people do nowadays...

JULIAN

Really?

NATALIE

Yeah, with the pandemic and all... it's easier and cheaper.

JULIAN

Ah, so we're actually calling it a pandemic now... I didn't know people were being so cautious. I guess that's good. *(A beat)* There are so many polaroids here, they're amazing! Did you take all of these?

NATALIE

I did, yeah! Thanks, they're some of my favorites.

(She looks at him more analytically)

Stand right over here, in front of the backdrop. I might have to get you better lighting, you're much taller than my other clients.

JULIAN

Oh, well, I can sit, if that's–

NATALIE

(Interrupting him) Oh no, well, maybe, but I also want to get some standing shots of you if possible, even if we don't show your entire body.

(JULIAN moves to stand in front of the backdrop, NATALIE works on adjusting the lighting throughout the dialogue.)

NATALIE

So tell me about yourself. Where are you from?

JULIAN

Okay, um... well, I'm Julian Bonavard. I just turned 21 and I've been in Minneapolis since I turned 18. I grew up in Iowa – I'm from the middle of nowhere. Back where I'm from, I'm no one. I didn't really know who I was, not until I came to Minneapolis – which I did against the wishes of a family that swore they would reject me if I ever moved to the city. They said moving here would enable my 'artistic tendencies' – which is the term they would use to politely call me a fag. I had nothing when I first arrived in Loring Park – just a faded picture of James Dean in my back pocket and a dream. Ever since I was a kid I knew what I was destined for. All I've ever wanted to do was entertain. You know, dance. Or model. Be the movie star all of America would fall for. I always wanted to be everything my sisters could be and my family loathed – Glamorous. Feminine. Gorgeous. While they built houses with the Lincoln logs I got for my birthday, I came up with the stories of grandeur, the plots of dramatic lives of the people who would live in the houses my sisters built. I've always been a storyteller. I guess I'm still deciding what stories I want to tell, and more importantly, how to tell them.

NATALIE

Wow, how well spoken. I'm happy to hear you've found a home in Minneapolis.

JULIAN

It's far from perfect, but it's way better than Iowa.

NATALIE

I can only imagine.

JULIAN

Mhmm. *(He starts to pose)* Alright, your turn.

NATALIE

(She completes setting the light up)
My turn? Oh. Of course...

JULIAN

Yep, I shared all you could ever know about me. Now, tell me. Who is the woman behind the

camera?

NATALIE

(Perhaps she laughs, gets ready to start taking photos)

The woman behind the camera? You make me sound so mysterious. Uh, *(A beat)* I'm Natalie. Natalie Larson. Twenty... something, graduated with a useless degree – like 5 years ago – just to mask how little I actually know about myself. Or, at least, knew about myself at the time. I'm more aware of who I am now, now that I'm a bit – slightly older than before. I love Minneapolis - moved here from way up north shortly after college to do a deep dive into my dream of becoming a photographer. I've always loved capturing the essence of a moment with a single click or the press of a finger. You never really know how many moments you miss until you start taking the time to try to capture the best of them. I guess I want to capture as many as I can, for as long as I can.

JULIAN

Huh, and you said I was well spoken.

NATALIE

You are. I was just... rambling. It was nonsense.

JULIAN

You should give yourself more credit. You are doing exactly what you want to be doing with your life, aren't you?

NATALIE

(A beat) Yeah, I guess I am.

JULIAN

That doesn't sound like nonsense to me.

NATALIE

Well that's kind of you to say. So, are you looking for anything specific with your photoshoot? In need of some headshots?

JULIAN

Yeah, sure. The ones I have are horrid. Maybe some body shots too, something to add to my resumes at auditions?

NATALIE

Oh, you're auditioning? What kind of auditions?

JULIAN

Anything and everything, really.

NATALIE

(Non-judgemental) Anything?

JULIAN

Okay no, not *anything*. I guess I'm looking for photos that could help me get in as a dancer at the nightclubs here. Or help me get into shows at one of the theaters around town. There's so many shows I've always wanted to audition for. But, I never have had any nice photos to use, so...

NATALIE

Say no more. I can get you the perfect audition photos! Hopefully it's okay that we're only doing the consultation today.

JULIAN

As long as we get around to the shoot soon, I'll be fine. My auditions aren't for a month or so.

NATALIE

This is perfect timing then! You'll discover that Minneapolis has such a great theater community. And for our size, we have a pretty great scene for gay nightlife too. I'm sure you know that already, though.

(She hesitates, she doesn't like how she's sounding)

God, I'm sorry, I shouldn't assume.

JULIAN

You're fine, truly. And oh yeah, I know. I've been to every pride celebration in Minneapolis since I was 16. My favorite was last year - it was the 20th anniversary of Stonewall...

NATALIE

The 20th anniversary? Didn't Stonewall happen like 50 years ago?

JULIAN

Nope, just last year was the 20th anniversary. It was huge, so much fun. All the parties, the boys. The booze...

NATALIE

(Confused) I'm pretty sure—

JULIAN

(Interrupting her) Have you ever been to one?

NATALIE

(Distractedly) Been to one what?

JULIAN

Pride, of course! I mean I know gays are usually the partiers, but there's still something for everyone, lesbians included!

NATALIE

(Sarcastically) Ah yes, my roommate is actually on the rotation of lesbians that drive the U-Haul in the parade, she likes to fill it with sapphic sex toys and candy to pass out every year.

JULIAN

I didn't know that lesbians drove a U-Haul in the parade, that's hilarious! And I thought I'd seen everything.

NATALIE

(laughing) I'm kidding, we usually just go to the festival and then go home. *(A beat)* You're right, gays are the partiers.

JULIAN

Somebody's got to be the irresponsible one.

NATALIE

Alright, I think we're all good with lighting. You look like you're all set too.

JULIAN

I try.

NATALIE

Alright – well - let's start with you standing. Just pose naturally, I'm an advocate for natural beauty.

JULIAN

You got it.

NATALIE

Chin down a bit, look right at me. *(A beat)* Perfect.

(Holds up camera, takes a picture, puts it away.)

There you go. I like to use old-school photography – hence why I'm doing polaroids today. Thank god for Amazon.

JULIAN

Amazon? Like the lesbian bookstore? I love that place - my boyfriend actually–

NATALIE

(Interrupting) No, Amazon, like online?

JULIAN

Oh...

(He gets quiet, acting as if he knows what she's talking about)

NATALIE

You're interesting, Julian. You know that? You have this look, this...

(takes a picture, puts it away)

JULIAN

Beauty, I hope?

NATALIE

Oh yeah, of course. Like nothing I've ever seen before. Turn your head, toward the door, slightly. Like that, exactly, now stay...

(takes a picture, puts it away)

Good, good.

(takes a picture, puts it away)

Some people judge me for starting my new clients off with a polaroid consultation – they say it's a waste of time. They also like to say I'm trying too hard to be old school by using polaroids, that it's amateur and a bad trend. I just love the vintage feel of it, and as you can see, I think they make for great decor.

JULIAN

Vintage? Since when are polaroids vintage?

NATALIE

Shh, the more you talk the less you pose.

JULIAN

Alright, alright.

NATALIE

Sorry, *(takes a picture, puts it away)* I didn't mean to silence you.

JULIAN

You're fine, so–

NATALIE

Shh!

JULIAN

Shit, sorry.

NATALIE

(takes a picture, puts it away)

Alright – I think we're good with this pose. Now, hmm, let's see...

JULIAN

I could sit on the stool here, lean back with my legs out maybe?

NATALIE

Sure, let's try that.

(JULIAN changes poses, NATALIE adjusts her angles, gets closer to JULIAN. Takes a photo, puts it away. She gets much closer, another photo. She puts it away. She gestures to JULIAN to move as she sees fit. Eventually she stands with one leg on either side of JULIAN. She gets pretty close. A few more photos, she puts them away.)

JULIAN

You're coming pretty close now. *(Jokingly)* I don't have to remind you that I'm gayer than Elton John, right?

NATALIE

Ha! Don't worry, so am...I mean, we're very queer-friendly here. My roommate is as out and proud as Sarah Paulson!

(Takes a picture, puts it away. JULIAN laughs.)

Or maybe more like Lily Tomlin...

JULIAN

Sarah Paulson?

NATALIE

Oh come on, gay boy! You don't know who Sarah Paulson is?

JULIAN

No, I only really know of Lily Tomlin. She's fierce.

NATALIE

(Interrupts) You need to watch some interviews with Sarah Paulson, you'd love her.

JULIAN

(Dumbfounded) Sarah Paulson couldn't hold a light to Lily Tomlin.

NATALIE

I love Lily Tomlin, but you have a lot to learn if you don't know who Sarah Paulson is. Like, come on!

(Takes a picture, puts it away)

Now get up,

(She offers her hand, he takes it)

I think we'll be all set for today if we get one more pose. Any requests?

JULIAN

Uh, maybe a close up? But not too close? Like actually a headshot?

NATALIE

Sure, that's easy enough. Just stand where you were before.

(JULIAN stands where he was before, NATALIE approaches and goes to take a photo. She pauses and is suddenly taken aback.)

JULIAN

What is it?

NATALIE

Sorry, again, you're just like no one I've ever photographed before. *(takes a picture, puts it away)*

JULIAN

Okay, now you're making me nervous...

NATALIE

I'm sorry, it's just, like... *(takes a picture, puts it away)*

JULIAN

Just like what?

NATALIE

Your look. It's – uh – it's like haunting, but in an innocent and attractive way...

JULIAN

Are you saying I'm pale? Do I need to get a tan or something?

NATALIE

No, no, no, that's not what I meant, sorry, you're one of the most beautiful people I've ever photographed. Ever. *(takes a picture, puts it away)* I mean that.

JULIAN

(Disengaging) Well, thank you.

NATALIE

Of course. *(A beat, she gets quieter)* Are you okay?

JULIAN

Yeah. Well, no. What did you mean by haunting?

NATALIE

I'm sorry, I-

JULIAN

Nevermind, it's fine. *(A beat)* How long till they're ready?

NATALIE

(Dazed) Wha- what?

JULIAN

(Suddenly slightly rushed) The photos, the polaroids – how long till they're ready?

NATALIE

Oh, oh– the photos, they’ll be ready within a few hours. When would you like to do your full shoot? I have availability next week.

JULIAN

(Interrupting) Perfect, I can come back later. Next week, same time? *(Heads quickly for the door)*

NATALIE

Sure, yeah. *(A beat, JULIAN’s halfway out the door)*

JULIAN

Play some Donna Summer then too, it’s great background music.

NATALIE

You got it. Thank you.

JULIAN

See you then. *(JULIAN leaves)*

(NATALIE watches as Julian leaves. She looks down at the collection of photos she took. A beat. She looks back at the door, goes to the record player to turn it down/off, and heads up the stairs again.)

(Lights fade.)

SCENE II

(CAMERON enters in the dark with a moving box. CAMERON and JULIAN have just started moving in. CAMERON picks up a box labeled with a big red X in hand and he brings it over to the record player. He sets the box down again, and puts on Donna Summer.)

CAMERON

Thank God for Donna Summer, she makes the summer heat bearable.

(CAMERON then places his box down and starts to unpack its belongings. He begins to organize blankets, pillows, and books amongst the space. He pauses once he picks up an envelope full of pictures. JULIAN enters from the Haus door with his own box as CAMERON looks through the pictures. JULIAN flips the main stage lights on.)

JULIAN

Why are you unpacking in the dark?

(A beat, he sees the photos CAMERON has and flips on the main stage lights)

What's that? I'm

CAMERON

Looks like some shots of you... headshots, actually.

JULIAN

Oh yeah. I was wondering if I remembered to pack those.

(He walks over to CAMERON, who passes the photos along to him.)

God, yikes. What do you think?

CAMERON

I think they're great, as always.

JULIAN

(He walks closer to look himself)

Oh god no, these are my school photos. These don't count. I look so miserable!

CAMERON

How was the shoot today, baby?

JULIAN

It went well, I think! I'm hoping these ones will eventually get me signed somewhere, hopefully.

CAMERON

Don't worry babe, you'll get signed. I know it. And by then, I will have written a screenplay for you to star in. Hollywood won't know what hit them. It could be the story of a generation, where you play a character on the brink of an existential shift. Imagine it, you starring in an Oscar nominated role – capturing the moment a boy becomes a man. It would be a story for the ages. You would win the hearts of anyone who sees it, all while playing the role of a prodigy who

loses their star-power, who tries and tries to reach their potential, but never does. The audience would be speechless as you perfectly showcase the journey of a hero who loses their innocence at the hands of a broken, desolate world. *(A beat)* You know, so many have tried to tell that story in one way or another. Edith Warton tried with the Age of Innocence, Oscar Wilde with the Picture of Dorian Grey. Oscar Wilde - he was close. So close. But I could write it better than him, even. I could write it better than anyone. Simply because I would know you would be the one bringing my words to life.

JULIAN

I don't know if I've ever loved you as much as I do right now. We have the whole world before us, now that we're out of bum-fuck Iowa! We've made it! We're in Minneapolis! We're living out our dreams!

CAMERON

Yeah, and our front yard is where they have Pride every year... our lives are about to get so much gayer.

JULIAN

Oh god. Gayer than it is already?

CAMERON

Yeah, you might as well ask the church to excommunicate you now, before it gets worse.

JULIAN

Ha! I could recreate the Like a Prayer music video. Go all out in drag as Madonna to the church down the street, burn some crosses, confess my sins.

CAMERON

Mhmm, you would have to beg them to forgive you.

JULIAN

Beg? You want me to beg? Would you forgive me?

CAMERON

(A beat) I'm not sure. To be determined.

JULIAN

Oh yeah? And what's that supposed to mean?

CAMERON

(Anticipates some type of response, but hesitates.)
I don't know. Sorry, I'm exhausted.

JULIAN

You and me both. I say we get some Chinese, test out the bath, and then—

CAMERON

In this heat? A bath? Hell no.

JULIAN

Fine, we skip the bath.

CAMERON

Plus, I'm way too tired.

JULIAN

Okay, we can just relax.

CAMERON

Thanks. I guess I'm just in my head.

JULIAN

In your head? About what?

CAMERON

It's nothing, really. I mean, we can actually be ourselves here, unlike back in Iowa. Yeah, we have nothing to worry about.

JULIAN

Right.

CAMERON

And we have so many queer friends here, and none of the assholes that bullied us growing up are anywhere close.

JULIAN

Exactly.

CAMERON

We're so much better off here, with each other.

JULIAN

You're right, but tell me why it seems like you're trying to convince yourself you have nothing to worry about rather than actually believing it?

CAMERON

I—

JULIAN

(Interrupting) Cameron, look – we're in Minneapolis, our front yard is the cruising capital of Minnesota, and the home of Minnesota pride! Des Moines has nothing on Minneapolis.

CAMERON

I know, I know.

JULIAN

Then what is it?

CAMERON

Remember pride last week? Those people that were protesting outside? One sign said “JESUS HATES FAGS AND THEIR ARTISTIC TENDENCIES”

JULIAN

Oh yeah, just like my family would say to insinuate judgment. I thought we’d never hear that term here. What does it really mean, anyway?

CAMERON

Well, I think it’s rooted in the fact that so many people hate queer literary icons, like Oscar Wilde – and how their work practically worshiped the virtues of youth, the aesthetics of physical beauty and...

JULIAN

(Interrupting) Whatever, we looked fierce, those Jane Fonda ab workouts really paid off! We had so much fun that night–

CAMERON

(Interrupting) Yes, we did, and yes, we looked fantastic... but I can’t get what they were saying out of my head.

JULIAN

Babe, it’s okay. I know you love Oscar Wilde. He was great. That one Dorian Gray character is iconic. But, the protestors, they’re just bigots. We’re way better than they are,

CAMERON

I know we’re better, but ... it seemed like they were seconds away from actually physically coming at us.

JULIAN

They’re assholes, but they aren’t that stupid. Unless they want a fag to beat them up or a drag queen’s heel in their eye, they know not to actually try us at Pride.

CAMERON

What about when Pride is over?

JULIAN

Babe, we’re in Loring Park! Here, Pride is all the time!

CAMERON

We are surrounded by gays.

JULIAN

Yes, and we know at least three drag queens in this building alone that would love to beat up any homophobe for us.

CAMERON

You're right, we are honestly safer here than back home – I mean, back in Iowa.

JULIAN

Yes, we are. We can be fearless here. Hell, there's probably a few fags fucking in the bathroom stalls across the street right now!

CAMERON

Right now? It's like 5 o'clock.

JULIAN

I know, it's awesome!

CAMERON

We need to be careful though, people are getting sick.

JULIAN

Oh, I know. I don't want to fuck in the park, or fuck anyone else really. I just want to know that where we live people are okay with the fact that some people do want that.

CAMERON

I know. I just worry about the community, outside the city I feel everyone hates us. And the more people get sick, the more I feel the need to help, to counteract their judgments.

JULIAN

That's why we moved to the city! To protect ourselves, to protect each other! To help when needed.

CAMERON

If anything ever happened to you, I don't-

JULIAN

Shh! Everything will be fine.

CAMERON

Okay, okay. We just have to—

JULIAN

(Interrupting) Cameron! Shh! Stop worrying for a second and appreciate all we've accomplished – we've moved! We made it! No more long drives all the way back to Iowa after Saloon and 19. We can walk home now!

CAMERON

You're right, you're right.

JULIAN

I know I'm right! And we're about to take this city by storm.

CAMERON

Oh yeah?

JULIAN

Hell yeah!

(JULIAN jumps over to box labeled 'KITCHEN' or 'BOOZE' and opens it up)
Once I get a gig as a gogo boy, and you start cashiering at that feminist bookstore you love, the – the –

CAMERON

Amazon Bookstore Cooperative?

JULIAN

Yes! That bookstore! Once you start working there, with all the dykes you met at Pride, we'll be the new "it" couple!

CAMERON

I am excited to start at the bookstore. A little nervous, and anxious, but mostly excited. I go in tomorrow to start orientation.

JULIAN

I'm excited for you!

(Takes wine out of a box, reveals it to CAMERON.)

CAMERON

(A beat) Hell, we're in Loring Park. Let's celebrate, even if it is with room temperature wine.

JULIAN

I heard it's better for you when it's warm.

CAMERON

No, babe. No, it's not.

JULIAN

Well, whatever. I'm drinking it anyway. Here's to God's supposed hatred of fags, and to our so called 'Artistic Tendencies'!

(He takes a swig of wine from the bottle.)

CAMERON

You are my Dorian Gray, Julian.

(He grabs the bottle from JULIAN and takes his own swig of wine)

Here's to Oscar Wilde, to Minneapolis, and yes, to our Artistic Tendencies

(He continues with another swig)

JULIAN

Alright babe, alright! God, don't drink too much yet. I booked us dinner in the park with that lesbian couple we met at 19 – the ones that connected you with the bookstore?

CAMERON

Oh yeah, shit.

JULIAN

Now come on, I'm hungry and they insisted we eat out together.

CAMERON

Wait, the lesbians insist we eat out? Together?

JULIAN

Yes, they made a point to say they wanted to eat out in the park with us. *(A beat)* Eat out... with us... Oh, oh my god, gross. Should we go?

CAMERON

We'll stick around for the appetizer and then leave. They can be alone for dessert.

JULIAN

Sounds good. And people say fags are the raunchiest.

(They both exit out the Haus door and turn off the stage lights.)

SCENE III

(Lights up to reveal TAYLA and NATALIE in the studio a few days later. TAYLA is sitting reading a textbook entitled 'ARTISTIC TENDENCIES'.)

TAYLA

(Speaking to NATALIE, who's offstage upstairs.)
And get this – 19 was originally a fucking dyke bar! It's like we can't keep anything for ourselves. The gays have to take everything eventually.

NATALIE

(Offstage) Well, that is how it usually goes. Hey, have you seen–

TAYLA

(Interrupting) And there used to be a lesbian bookstore too - I mean like come on! I can't help but feel like we've been slacking in comparison to lesbians of older generations. My textbook says it closed because of poor management in the 90's.

NATALIE

Are we slacking or did the world just gain the internet? Anyway, I'm looking for—

TAYLA

(Interrupting) There used to be rural societies of lesbians too across the state – societies that rejected the patriarchal structure of everything, and they left the cities in droves, so that–

NATALIE

(NATALIE enters from upstairs and looks down to TAYLA.)
Tayla. You know I love you and all, but please - could stop your sapphic crusade for a second and help me look for those consultation photos? I can't find them anywhere. I thought I hung them over there, but I only found blanks. Why would I hang blanks?

TAYLA

I have no idea where you left them. And who really cares, it was just a consultation. Not even an actual shoot. Just some polaroids. I say just tell them tough luck and offer to start over with the full shoot.

NATALIE

No, the client was fantastic, like no one I've ever worked with. He had this darker, mysterious look in his eyes. He had something I've never seen before.

TAYLA

Woah, woah, woah. I know it's been a while since we broke up, but damn. Desperate much? Pick up a playboy. I have a huge selection in my room, if you wanna–

NATALIE

Tayla – please.

TAYLA

Natalie – please.

NATALIE

You know what, fine. Just keep reading, I'll keep looking.

TAYLA

Your wish is my command.

NATALIE

Whatever.

(She disengages and starts looking through the photos)

God, he's coming tomorrow. I need to find them before then, ugh!

(Continues looking)

What if I can't find them and he tells everyone that I lost his photos? I'll look so unreliable. Oh god...

(Continues to look, manically)

TAYLA

Nat.

NATALIE

Yeah?

TAYLA

If you don't want me helping, please keep it down. Let me study. This queer history textbook isn't going to read itself.

NATALIE

Fine.

(Begrudgingly continues searching. She stops. A beat)

Wait, no, you didn't want to help anyway! No. I won't be quiet. You could go to your room upstairs if you want quiet.

TAYLA

Oh my god. Okay, okay.

(She shuts her textbook and gets up to help searching)

I just don't know why you care so much about someone you barely know...

NATALIE

I don't know. There was something fascinating about him, or maybe it was just his look...

TAYLA

What do you mean?

NATALIE

I guess it was some of the things he said, like he said he went to the 20th anniversary of Stonewall, last year – mind you this guy looks young! And I looked it up – Stonewall was in 1969. My assumptions were right. Stonewall happened over 50 years ago. None of us were even born then.

TAYLA

So what, he has a great plastic surgeon? He probably knows of that clinic downtown every gay over 30 frequents.

NATALIE

Very funny. He also had no idea who Sarah Paulson was, but he mentioned Elton John, and did know Lily Tomlin.

TAYLA

So he's a classic gay, so what? Why is that so strange? He probably loves Liza and Cher and Madonna too.

NATALIE

I don't know, maybe I just think he's cool and so I don't want to disappoint him. Plus I think I kinda scared him away toward the end of the shoot, I kept complimenting him.

TAYLA

(Looks a bit more.)

Okay, I'm not finding anything. I'm sure you just loaded the blank polaroids incorrectly. You've done it before. Just offer him another shoot.

NATALIE

We'll see if he's even up for that - I feel like I creeped him out.

TAYLA

You gotta work on client relations, Natalie, not good for business, remember? *(A beat)*

NATALIE

Are you trying to bring up what I think you're trying to bring up? Cuz if you are, not funny Tay. You know I'm respectful of all my clients.

TAYLA

Well, I mean...

(NATALIE shoots her a glare.)

Okay, I'm sorry! I'm just kidding. Sorry I mentioned it. And you know me, I prefer artistic mediums that don't require the use of models. Too many variables.

NATALIE

Painting does require models though – for portraits and still life – that's what it's called right? I'm sure you'll have to use models eventually if you're actually serious about getting your fine

arts degree.

TAYLA

Doesn't mean I'm not going to try to avoid it at all costs. Plus, as you know, I usually paint off of photographs.

NATALIE

Another reason for painters like you to support photographers like me.

TAYLA

As if I don't support you enough as is—

NATALIE

And you know I appreciate everything you do for me.

TAYLA

Mhmm.

NATALIE

(A beat) I'm sorry, I guess I'm just trying to make a good impression on him, I have a feeling he was getting skeptical of me by the end. I guess I was too, only because he was so strangely beautiful...

TAYLA

It is weird that he said he went to the 20th anniversary of Stonewall...

NATALIE

I know right!

TAYLA

Most gays try to hide their age.

NATALIE

Exactly. And he did NOT look like he was old enough for that to be true...

(Starts giving up the search)

...and he implied that he thought polaroids weren't vintage or old school, and that his favorite song was I Feel Love by Donna Summer.

TAYLA

(A beat) Okay, yeah, something's not adding up. That's a great song, but still.

NATALIE

Right? I never realized how much I know by Donna until I played the record you bought.

TAYLA

What? What record? I haven't bought—

NATALIE

(Interrupting) The Donna Summer record you bought, I think it's her greatest hits? It starts with I Feel Love.

(She goes over to the record player and picks up the record.)

TAYLA

I haven't bought new records in months...

(She gets up to take a closer look at the record.)

Woah, this looks like an original! It's gotta be worth way more than I could ever afford to spend on vinyl.

NATALIE

If you didn't get this, then—

TAYLA

You said your client came in when this started playing?

NATALIE

Yeah,

TAYLA

And neither of us know where it came from?

NATALIE

If you didn't get it, no. I have no idea.

TAYLA

Okay, this is sketchy. A random classic vinyl shows up in our apartment and a strange client walks in right as you start to play it and makes note of it?

NATALIE

Do you think someone broke in and left it? That makes no sense.

TAYLA

It makes total sense. He could've broken in and planted it himself. We have to remember to lock the door more.

NATALIE

No, no, no. He would never. And, even if he did, why would he?

TAYLA

Hell if I know. What time tomorrow is he coming by?

NATALIE

I believe 2. That's when he came in last week.

TAYLA

Okay, well I'll be home when he comes by. I don't want you to be alone when he's here.

NATALIE

I don't need your protection, I'm not frightened at all by him at all. He was really kind despite his weirdness...but I do want to know what you think of him.

TAYLA

Sounds good. I'll be here. Probably painting, but here nonetheless. Maybe I shouldn't have the studio sign in the hallway of the building. Brings in all sorts of weird talent, clearly.

NATALIE

I don't know, I mean he was a great model.

TAYLA

Yeah, a great model that potentially broke into our loft and was confused about what decade it was.

NATALIE

Well, maybe you were right, maybe he's just a classic gay.

TAYLA

Or maybe the weed dealers in Loring Park have started to lace what they're selling with something stronger again. It's happened before.

NATALIE

Very funny.

TAYLA

I heard that in Chicago they've started to send out free fentanyl test kits to anyone who wants one.

NATALIE

Alright, alright, calm down. He wasn't on fentanyl.

TAYLA

Sometimes it's hard to tell! You never really know.

NATALIE

(Dismissively) Anyway...

TAYLA

Fine, I'll just make sure I'm home tomorrow and judge for myself.

NATALIE

You do that. I gotta start thinking of what I'm going to say if I never find the polaroids.

TAYLA

Natalie, it doesn't— say whatever you want, I'm not going to try to bud in anymore. I have an exam to study for.

NATALIE

I hope he doesn't get mad that I lost the originals...

TAYLA

Must I remind you again that you're offering this consultation for free? You should give yourself more grace. And we both should be more cautious.

NATALIE

You're right, you're right. What are you learning about, anyway? A brief history of lesbian lore?

TAYLA

Not just that, but yes. Believe it or not, Minneapolis actually has a long history of gay culture.

NATALIE

I figured there's always been something queer about this town. I bet you love learning all about it.

TAYLA

I do! Like, did you know that at the University of Minnesota the first ever gay student body president in the country was elected in the early 70's? Also, at the U there was a queer student group that predates Stonewall.

NATALIE

(Sarcastically) You mean to tell me gay people existed before Stonewall?!

TAYLA

And that gay student body president found a loophole in the marriage law of some rural county. He managed to get a marriage certificate with his now husband back in the 70's! It was later deemed null until marriage equality passed the state legislature. They're both still alive too. They live in St. Paul.

NATALIE

Okay, that's kind of cool. I knew Minnesota was historically tolerant of queers, but I never would've assumed that.

TAYLA

Well, it wasn't always tolerant. The AIDS epidemic seemed to flare up homophobic violence.

NATALIE

Here and everywhere else.

TAYLA

I just read a chapter about queer experiences here in the 1990's. Loring Park had been established as the cruising spot for gay men. Then AIDS hit and suddenly a lot of violence cropped up in and around the park. A lot of it was fatal too.

NATALIE

And now it hosts the pride festival every summer. We've come a long way.

TAYLA

There's still a lot of work to do, but yeah.

NATALIE

Alright, well I have to go upstairs and keep looking, and you have to study before dinner. We really should eat some of the food we got at Target yesterday. We could have a stir fry or spaghetti... I don't know though, I'm too tired to make anything.

TAYLA

You're right. The world is always telling women like us to stop eating out so much.

(A beat, TAYLA smiles. NATALIE isn't amused)

Seriously though, yeah. My bank account is tired, almost as tired as I am.

(Opens up textbook)

NATALIE

Same. We have to stop eating –

(A beat, she rethinks her next words)

ordering fast food.

(She heads up the stairs, but stops halfway. TAYLA clocks this. A beat.)

TAYLA

You want Taco Bell?

NATALIE

Can we Doordash?

TAYLA

Yep.

NATALIE

This will be the last time.

TAYLA

Mhmm. *(Unfazed)* We said that last time.

NATALIE

Damn it, don't remind me.

TAYLA

What can I say? I mean we do love eating – (*a beat*) ordering fast food. Text me what you want and I'll send the venmo request.

NATALIE

Thanks! (*She heads upstairs*)

(*Lights fade.*)

SCENE IV

(Lights up to reveal TAYLA entering the studio from the lower entrance in a painting apron with her textbook, ARTISTIC TENDENCIES, and paint in hand. She walks over to the easel, which is set up to face away from the audience and places a nearby canvas onto the easel. Perhaps she puts her textbook on a stand of its own, if she has it with her. She then goes to start playing another record. Once the record starts, she begins painting. TAYLA hums along to the music, and seems rather calm.)

NATALIE

Alright, fine. I give up! Damn it.

TAYLA

No luck?

NATALIE

No luck. He'll be here any minute and I haven't found anything. God, I feel so bad.

TAYLA

Just be real with him and offer him a reshoot.

NATALIE

Ugh, I have to make up for it somehow. What time is it?

TAYLA

Last I checked, like 2:05?

NATALIE

Okay, okay. He's probably on his way. Uh...

(She scrambles a bit, looks at the record player, and runs over. She takes off TAYLA's record and begins reaching for another.)

TAYLA

Hey!

NATALIE

You'll be fine.

(She pulls out the same Donna Summer record as before.)

The least I can do is play one of his favorites while I break the news that I lost his photos.

(She places it down on the player.)

TAYLA

Ugh, fine. Play the record that neither of us bought. Which still freaks me out, by the way. Even if it is a vintage Donna record. You're lucky I like her.

NATALIE

Who doesn't? *(A beat)* What are you working on anyway?
(She attempts look at TAYLA's painting)

TAYLA

(Holds up her hand as if to stop NATALIE)
Hey, no. I'm not done. I'll show you when it's finished. I have a lot left to do.

NATALIE

Ugh, why don't you ever show me your work while you're making it? I let you see all the reels of the shoots I'm doing all the time, even the bad ones!

TAYLA

You say this as if I want to see them. I can't help it, they're all over the walls upstairs.

NATALIE

I like other people to comment on my work so I can find the –

TAYLA

(Interrupting) - the best of the best without bias. I know, I know.

NATALIE

So why can't I see your paintings while you're actually working on them?

TAYLA

Not everyone works like you, Natalie. I want to make sure the work I show others is per–

(JULIAN knocks at the door as I Feel Love starts. The girls disengage from their conversation and NATALIE goes over to open the door, letting in JULIAN. TAYLA is seen turning her attention back to the painting. TAYLA doesn't yet see JULIAN.)

NATALIE

Julian! Hi, welcome back! Come on in.

JULIAN

(He enters the room, but stays in a place so that TAYLA can't easily see him.)
Thanks, so nice to see you again.

NATALIE

You as well.

JULIAN

And Donna Summer? Again? I love it – it makes your studio space feel even more homey than it already is to me.

NATALIE

Just like you requested. Was in another Summer mood this morning, anyway...

(TAYLA rolls her eyes from behind the easel. She doesn't avert her gaze, however.)

JULIAN

I see. Well, how did the consultation pictures turn out?

NATALIE

Well, about that...

JULIAN

Oh god, were they that bad? I'm sorry,

NATALIE

(Off-guardedly) S- sorry? Why would you be sorry?

JULIAN

God, I bet I looked terrible. I'm rusty I guess. *(Quieter)* Haven't modeled since my last shoot in the fall of '88...

(TAYLA clocks this line, and raises an eyebrow. She still has yet to avert her gaze far from the painting, but she's more distracted now.)

... I knew I needed to start doing more shoots, even if they're a bit pricey. Hey – would you be able to give me a second chance with another consultation? We can raincheck on the full shoot. If money is an issue, I can find a way to pay this time, at least eventually, for sure.

NATALIE

Oh, uh, of course. We can definitely do another consultation and raincheck the shoot. Don't worry about paying me though, you get the shoot for free. It'll be – it'll be my treat.

JULIAN

Oh my god, that's so kind of you. Thank you. Thank you.

TAYLA

(From behind the easel) What she means to say is that she's willing to do another consultation and raincheck the photoshoot because she lost the original polaroids.

JULIAN

Lost them? What? Who was that?

NATALIE

(Sighs) My roommate –

TAYLA

(She steps away from the easel.)

I'm Tayla.

(She looks up finally at JULIAN and does a very small double take. She looks slightly shocked. Her voice slowly changes to concern as she delivers her next line.)

So you're the famous Julian? Julian Bonavard.

NATALIE

(Awkwardly) Yes, this is Julian, the model I did the consultation with last week. How did you –

JULIAN

(Interrupts) Nice to meet you, Tayla.

TAYLA

Likewise.

(She looks suddenly uneasy. JULIAN clocks this more than NATALIE.)

NATALIE

So, anyway... about the polaroids... I'm sorry I misplaced them, I – actually, let me do one more lap around the studio upstairs – if you don't mind? I'd hate to find them after you leave...

JULIAN

Uh, sure! I'm not in too much of a rush.

NATALIE

Great. I'll just be a minute. Tay, entertain him while I look, okay?

(NATALIE leaves upstairs, TAYLA is growing more uncomfortable.)

TAYLA

What? Natalie!

JULIAN

(A beat) So, uh, how did you two meet?

TAYLA

Natalie and I? Um, we met at 19 actually.

JULIAN

Oh, my boyfriend and I love that place!

(JULIAN goes to look at some of the pictures around. He is especially interested in a few in particular.)

TAYLA

Yeah, we usually go every weekend. We haven't really gone much since we...

JULIAN

Broke up? I can't imagine what it'd be like to live with an ex.

TAYLA

What? How did you know we were together?

JULIAN

It was just a feeling I had, maybe more of a guess. I'm not sure...why do you live with her still? I mean, isn't that less than ideal?

TAYLA

It's a long story. A lot of lesbians are still friends with their exes. I guess we make it work.

JULIAN

(Distracted by the pictures) Who is this? She's beautiful.

TAYLA

Who?

JULIAN

Her.

(JULIAN points to a picture of a very attractive woman)

TAYLA

Oh, her. That's Ashleigh Hanson.

JULIAN

Yeah... *(a beat)* something tells me you don't think she's that beautiful.

TAYLA

(Sarcastically) Oh, she's beautiful alright. She was one of Natalie's favorite clients.

JULIAN

(He understands this is a tough spot for TAYLA somehow.)

I see...

TAYLA

Yeah, the keyword there is 'was'. She 'was' one of Natalie's favorites.

JULIAN

Ah. Did they date?

TAYLA

I don't think they would've called it that. It was more like a situationship from my understanding.

JULIAN

Really? I always thought that gay men were the least committal and that lesbians were the ones to pair up fast.

TAYLA

(She loosens up ever-so-slightly)

Not when you throw internalized homophobia into the mix. Then it gets more complicated.

JULIAN

Oh. I see...

TAYLA

Yeah. She had her little thing with Natalie and became a huge star thanks to the photos Natalie took. Ashleigh called her once the photos blew up, and demanded that she never claim ownership of the photos, or ever acknowledge their relationship or that they knew each other at all - otherwise she'd sue for defamation and ruin her career. This all happened right as I was getting to know Natalie. It still pisses me off because if the world knew Natalie took those photos, she'd be so much further in her career.

JULIAN

Oh god, I'm – sorry. Ashleigh reminds me of some of the self-loathing queers I knew back in Iowa.

TAYLA

Yeah. Natalie and I hit it off relatively quickly in spite of the Ashleigh situation. Within a month, we were dating. Everything was great, but Natalie had one requirement for me – to keep our relationship on the DL. She was afraid Ashleigh could spoil it and jeopardize her career. But I couldn't live in denial forever. I hated not being able to hold her hand in public, you know? We ended up breaking up, but I still live here, obviously. Whenever I question why I'm here, I just remember that all I've ever wanted to do was protect Natalie and help build her career and business. It's easier to do that as her roommate.

JULIAN

So Ashleigh is the reason Natalie isn't bigger than she is? That's why she has so many openings.

TAYLA

Exactly.

JULIAN

Well it may be selfish but I'm thankful she has the availability for me.

TAYLA

Appreciate it while you can. She's gaining popularity fast, and I won't let Ashleigh jeopardize that.

JULIAN

You must really care about her, even now.

TAYLA

Yep. I never stopped loving her. And I think she still loves me.

(NATALIE is seen at the top of the stairs, she pauses and listens while remaining unseen.)

JULIAN

I mean, you're still here aren't you? *(He grows more sincere)* I say wait it out. If Natalie really loves you, like I think she does, I'm sure one day she'll be okay with making your love for each other public. Ashleigh can't scare her forever.

TAYLA

Don't get my hopes up, model boy.

JULIAN

Don't sell yourself short. My boyfriend and I actually went through something similar back in Iowa. I wasn't as comfortable coming out at first when we started dating in high school. Imagine it, me – a flaming homosexual – not as comfortable as my admittedly more masculine boyfriend in broadcasting that we're gay and love each other. He was frustrated with me at first and we almost broke up because of it, but then he promised we'd move to Minneapolis, where we both could be unapologetically who we truly are, without the fear of getting jumped by the kids who used to bully us in elementary school. And now here I am! *(A beat)* I guess all I'm trying to say is keep your options open with her. Give her time.

TAYLA

It's not all up to me, but I appreciate what you've said. Thanks.

JULIAN

No problem.

(NATALIE enters from the upstairs studio. TAYLA and JULIAN see her and reset.)

NATALIE

No luck!

JULIAN

That's fine, they were probably rough, like I said they would be.

NATALIE

Oh, well I doubt—

TAYLA

(A beat, she's certainty NOT alright)

Natalie. Stop beating yourself up! You don't know how the photos turned out. Stop assuming the worst. You're more talented than you think.

NATALIE

Oh, really? That's funny, coming from you, the star painter who never lets anyone see her work.

JULIAN

Oh really? You're a painter.

NATALIE

Amongst other things, yes. We're not the only ones with creative energy here. She's actually pretty talented too. It's one of my favorite things about her. So talented, yet so humble. Maybe I'll get to see what she's been working on all morning since you're here now. Tayla?

(She gestures toward TAYLA's painting, TAYLA reacts negatively)

TAYLA

Oh, oh no!

(She moves as if to block the painting again, this time more assertively)

I'm still working on it. It's a work in progress.

NATALIE

I'm just kidding, God. We don't have to see it. It's okay.

JULIAN

Hey, no worries. Maybe it will be finished when I return for the shoot. We can see it then. That is, if you want us to.

TAYLA

Maybe.

NATALIE

So you will do another? Fantastic! Thanks.

JULIAN

Yeah! Sorry, I know we scheduled today for the full shoot, but I've been running around all day. I'm definitely not presentable right now.

NATALIE

Of course. We could do it anytime. Just come by whenever during normal business hours, I'm always home. If I have another client you may have to wait, but I'm sure they won't mind.

JULIAN

Alright, maybe next week? Same time? I'm pretty booked with other things. I have a few more auditions tomorrow and this weekend.

NATALIE

That's fantastic! Yeah, no rush.

JULIAN

Wonderful, thank you. And you're sure you don't need me to pay?

NATALIE

I'm sure, it's the least I can do after losing the original polaroids.

JULIAN

Well I'll make sure to look my best then, even better than last week.

NATALIE

Sounds like a plan. I have a few more clients coming soon, so I'll see you then? Next week? 2 o'clock, Thursday?

JULIAN

Great. Yeah, 2 o'clock next Thursday. I'll make sure to put it in my pager. *(A beat)* Thank you, again. *(Another beat)* It was nice to meet you, Tayla.

TAYLA

You as well.

(She turns and heads over to her painting)

JULIAN

I'll see you next week Natalie. Best of luck with your other clients!

(He leaves)

NATALIE

(Once he has left)

Something is always off with that boy. I mean, he's so polite and all—

TAYLA

Nat...

NATALIE

Wait, did he just say he has a pager? I don't know anyone with one of those.

TAYLA

Natalie.

NATALIE

And did you hear him say his last photoshoot was in '88? Like 1988? Or did I mishear him?

TAYLA

Natalie!

NATALIE

What? Do you think he was coked out or something? He didn't seem like it to me. Also, how did you know his last name? Why were you acting so put off?

TAYLA

Because Julian Bonavard is the name of the first victim of the Loring Park Gay Bashings. The bashings started in 1990. He's dead.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE I

(CAMERON enters from the Haus door, clearly distraught... He has a bag in hand, inside it holds a record. He takes out a brand new record by Donna Summer, similar to the one he played before.)

CAMERON

(Delivered toward the audience)

Your record scratched the other night. And no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stand to play our song with so many skips in it. Everytime it would skip, I thought of how many days had passed. How many nights I had spent, scared and alone. How many calls I had made, to no avail. How many suspects were named, but later deemed innocent because there wasn't enough evidence. I wish I would've walked with you that day. I wish I would've been there - with you. I wish it would've been me, not you. You would be handling this so much better than I am. Then I've been.

I almost didn't get this, this record. I passed by it several times at Electric Fetus before I finally bought it. I want you to know it took me so long - so long to buy - because, well... I guess I didn't know what it would mean if I replaced the record you got me for my birthday. What would it mean if I replaced the record with our song on it, the record I scratched after you left - no, after you were taken? It would mean I would've replaced something of ours. I never wanted to do that. But I guess now, I have. I'm sorry.

I hope you're proud of me, I hope you won't be mad when I tell you I had to leave the loft. I had to get another place. I couldn't live here, where our dreams almost came true. No, without you here, Loring Park is just another neighborhood. I need to start somewhere fresh, even if it's just across the Mississippi.

I got the keys today. To a studio in Northeast. The girls from the bookstore helped me find it. They've been my lifeline. They've been a lifeline to all the gays during this - this - epidemic. In a way, I'm happy you're not here anymore, because I think it's only getting worse, and people are only getting sicker. But I'm healthy, and I intend to stay that way. I'll be safe.

Now, before I leave the loft, before I turn in the keys, I want to leave the record I bought here. No one will ever understand why some random Donna Summer record was left here, but for some reason I feel the need to leave it. No one will ever understand what could go through someone's mind to take you from this world, but I will never not wonder why, every night for the rest of my life.

(He leans the record down on the ground, takes a moment.)

I love you Julian, I'll always love you.

(He places his keys down and leaves.)

(The scene moves to many years later.)

TAYLA

Because Julian Bonavard is the name of the first victim of the Loring Park Gay Bashings. The bashings started in 1990. He's dead.

NATALIE

What?

TAYLA

I read about him for class. In this textbook.

(She picks up her textbook, locates the page with JULIAN's picture, walks over to NATALIE, and hands it to her.)

Look, there.

(She points to a page that's bookmarked.)

NATALIE

(She opens the book to the bookmarked page)

Oh my god. *(A beat)* There he is.

TAYLA

Yeah, and this book was published in 2005. That photo was taken in 1988. Maybe during the shoot he mentioned.

NATALIE

Are you trying to scare me? Is this one of your pranks? Not funny, Tayla.

TAYLA

No. There's no prank.

NATALIE

This makes no sense.

TAYLA

You're telling me.

(She takes a beat, and then goes over to the painting and flips it around for NATALIE and the audience to see. It's a nearly finished painting of JULIAN.)

This is why I was acting weird.. He was doing a modeling shoot in Loring Park one day in the summer of 1990 and was jumped by homophobes. I've been painting Julian these past few days because he was the only victim whose death is still a mystery. His murder was never avenged like the others. One of the biggest unsolved murders in Minneapolis history.

NATALIE

No, no, no, that's impossible. He was just standing in front of us. I took pictures of him last week.

TAYLA

I know. (*A beat*) This would explain all the weird, dated references – and the oblivion to anything contemporary.

NATALIE

There has to be another explanation. This can't be real.

TAYLA

It seems pretty fucking real to me.

NATALIE

So what? You think he's a ghost? Why would he come here?

TAYLA

I don't know! It doesn't make much sense. But, I do know that the guy who was just in here is the guy I've been studying. And that he's been dead for over 30 years. Just think about it, he shows up once you play his favorite song on a mystery vinyl that somehow showed up here. He appears, unannounced, unscheduled — for a photoshoot where the polaroids strangely never develop. Maybe he's the type of spirit that can't be photographed. (*A beat*) He was late to pick up his polaroids today, but he came back once you played his favorite song... again. This all sounds classically paranormal to me.

NATALIE

Oh my god. (*A long beat*) I did a photoshoot with a ghost!

TAYLA

Yeah. You did. Add that to your resume.

NATALIE

He seems so harmless though. God, that's so sad. Do you think he knows?

TAYLA

Knows what?

NATALIE

Do you think he knows he's dead?

TAYLA

Probably not. From the little I know, most benevolent spirits have no idea they're dead until told so. A lot, especially the most tragic ones, seem to repress their deaths until reminded of it. He's probably just lost.

NATALIE

Well shit, I feel like we need to help him. You said his murder was never solved?

TAYLA

Nope, his case is the only investigation still open.

NATALIE

Well, then, let's solve it.

TAYLA

And how would we do that?

NATALIE

I don't know, I mean think about it. He's probably lost because part of him is not at peace with his murder being unsolved.

TAYLA

I mean, maybe, but again, how do we solve a murder that has been open for 30 years?

NATALIE

We investigate it, obviously. Compare it to other, similar cases, that's a start. Let's go to the library.

(NATALIE starts getting ready to leave.)

TAYLA

I doubt we would find anything at the library. What we should do is go to the police. Though, they probably have looked through the evidence countless times. If they haven't found anything by now, it's hopeless. But maybe they would be willing to work with us?

(Both girls take a moment, NATALIE gives TAYLA a look.)

Yeah, no, fuck that – we have to figure this out ourselves.

NATALIE

I can't believe this is my life right now.

TAYLA

Well, honey, it is. Wake up and smell the homophobia. It's time to buckle up and solve a murder.

NATALIE

Does your book say how he died?

TAYLA

Yeah. I'll tell you everything I know. It's not a pretty story.

(NATALIE and TAYLA leave out the downstage exit. Lights out.)

SCENE II

(Lights up to reveal the loft as NATALIE and TAYLA are initially moving in.)

NATALIE

(Offstage) Babe, I told you that I marked all the boxes meant for upstairs with a red ‘X’ and I asked you to group them together outside. I specifically said not to mix them with blue ‘X’ boxes. This one was mixed up – it’s meant for the bathroom upstairs.

TAYLA

(Shortly, sarcastically) Sorry. Heaven forbid I accidentally put one box out of dozens somewhere other than where it should go. How could I do something so foolish? My bad.

NATALIE

(She enters from the downstage entrance)
Hey, it’s no big deal, everything’s okay.

TAYLA

Mhmm.

NATALIE

Right?

TAYLA

Sure.

NATALIE

Tay–

TAYLA

What?

NATALIE

You have the worst poker face. What’s wrong? You’ve been off all day. We moved in! We live in Loring Park! The gay mecca of Minnesota! Everywhere you look there are dykes on bikes.

TAYLA

Yeah, at least they can be so open about it.

NATALIE

Oh. So that’s why.

TAYLA

Of course it is, Natalie. Why would you even want to move here if you’re trying to hide our love from the world? Do you want to go back in the closet?

NATALIE

You know it's not that simple. I can't explain it, I just... ugh. It's just this feeling in my gut – I –

TAYLA

No, actually, it's not as complicated as you think.

NATALIE

Tay, you know I'd – if things were different...

TAYLA

But things aren't. I've been with you over a year and you still refuse to hold my hand in public. I thought moving in with you would make it better, but will it? As if everyone you work with doesn't already assume—

NATALIE

No, they don't. And you of all people know why I have to be on the downlow about my sexuality. Ashleigh –

TAYLA

(Interrupting) —oh my god, when will you move on from her? It's like you thought being a lesbian would be smooth sailing after you came out. No, Natalie. It's a constant struggle. You're using your situation with Ashleigh to shield your own internalized homophobia. Her self-loathing will haunt her till the day she dies – will it haunt you as well? Why are you so afraid of her, anyway?

NATALIE

You know she was instrumental in me coming out to myself...but I'm sorry that when I'm threatened with a lawsuit that I feel the need to dial everything back a bit. I just can't be as open about it anymore. I mean, must I remind you what Ashleigh could do to me? To my career? *(A beat)* If news comes out about us, she could ruin me. Defamation lawsuits are pretty damning, Tay.

TAYLA

God. She should be thanking you for those photographs, not threatening to ruin your life and our relationship because she can't stand that she likes women. We should be able to share our love with the world if we want to!

NATALIE

But if this is what can happen...

TAYLA

(Interrupting) You know what? No. I should have never agreed to this. *(A beat)*

NATALIE

What do you mean?

TAYLA

Look where it's left me. I feel like a fool. To think it would get better once we moved in together, how could I – how could I agree to hide who I truly am because some model passed her own internalized homophobia onto my girlfriend? I have to hide how much I love you just because she's scared you into hiding how much you love me. No matter what I do, Natalie, I'm fucked.

NATALIE

I admit it's far from an ideal arrangement. You know how much I appreciate it, and how much I love you. But why are we talking about this right now anyway? We just got here. We've barely unpacked anything.

TAYLA

Oh, we're unpacking alright. How long were you going to let this model dictate your life and our relationship?

NATALIE

You know I can't answer that.

TAYLA

And I'm left wondering again, why are you so afraid?

NATALIE

You know why.

TAYLA

You tell me that it's because you want to protect your career, but there has to be more to it to force our relationship into the closet as collateral damage. There's no going back Natalie. We're out. We have to own it.

NATALIE

We have to be calculated! This is to protect my career...my entire life! What's the problem that I don't want to flaunt this part of me?

TAYLA

What's the problem? The problem is I can't take you out to nice restaurants. I can't kiss you on the Stone Arch. Hell, I'm sure people barely know we're dating!

NATALIE

We've told our close friends, your family, isn't that enough?

TAYLA

No. It's not. What you had with Ashleigh was real, Natalie. And when she broke it off she fucking shamed you back into the closet again without you even realizing! I doubt she even gives a shit about you anymore. I think you're too paranoid.

NATALIE

I'm too paranoid? That's funny to hear coming from the painter that hides everything she's ever painted from me..

TAYLA

What does that have to do with anything? Don't change the subject.

NATALIE

I'm not changing the subject! You're just being inconsiderate.

TAYLA

I'm being inconsiderate?!

NATALIE

Yes! You are!

TAYLA

No I'm not. Natalie, I can't believe—

NATALIE

What?

TAYLA

I – I can't do this.

NATALIE

What?

TAYLA

I can't live like this. We can't date like this. I, I -

NATALIE

(On the verge of tears, interrupting)
Since when was this such an issue?

TAYLA

It *always* was. But I let my love for you cloud my judgment as to what's right for me. I can't do it any longer. I'm sorry.

NATALIE

You're sorry?!

TAYLA

I don't know how to be with someone who asks me—

NATALIE

(Interrupting) You don't know?! We just moved in together, and now you're saying you don't know how to be with me?! What the fuck, Tayla?

TAYLA

I—

NATALIE

(Interrupting) Where was all of this concern before? Where were these concerns when we signed the fucking lease together?

TAYLA

Shit. *(A beat)* I'm sorry. You know I never would want to do anything to jeopardize you or your happiness. I love you.

NATALIE

Funny you say that now, cuz you're about to ruin everything. We signed a lease, Tay!

TAYLA

I know, I know. *(A beat)* We can get around this, somehow.

NATALIE

Really? Well. I'm all ears.

TAYLA

I refuse to hide how much I love my girlfriend from the world. I – I cannot date you like this.

(A beat, NATALIE remains speechless)

But, we did sign a lease. And I can be your roommate.

NATALIE

Now you're asking me to live with you after breaking up with me. How does that make any sense?

TAYLA

It doesn't, really. But a lot of lesbians are friends with their exes, right? We can't be the only ones to go through this.

NATALIE

I can't believe you right now.

TAYLA

Natalie, please. I know this is the last thing you wanted to hear today, but this is where we're at now. I'm so sorry. I thought I could do it, but I can't.

NATALIE

So, you don't want to date me, but you do want to live with me.

TAYLA

We don't have much of a choice, at least not for the time being. So yes, I want to be your roommate and ex-lover. Unless you have a better idea, we're going to be stuck together for a while.

NATALIE

I – I can't believe this. How–

TAYLA

If you want me to leave and come back later, I will.

NATALIE

I – (*A beat*) No. I – I need you to stay, as my roommate, if not as my girlfriend. I can't afford this place without you.

TAYLA

Exactly, and I can't afford my own place either. We'll have to make it work. We can do this, right?

NATALIE

Yeah, (*a beat*) I guess so..

(Lights out.)

SCENE III

(Lights up to reveal the loft in the present day once again. Sitting on the ground is NATALIE, occupied by the old books and articles surrounding her. TAYLA is nearby on the phone. They look like they've been there for a while.)

TAYLA

(On the phone) Yes, I was wondering if your department had any literature covering the violence against queer Minnesotans throughout the 1990's? ... Mhmm, mhmm ... yes, I know, very specific, my professor wouldn't allow anything broader ... yep, it's for a final project, yes ... *(clearly annoyed)* yes, I am a student...? How- ... mhmm, thank you.

NATALIE

God, it's like you're speaking a language they don't understand.

TAYLA

Can you get me some paper? I think they're about to read off some titles for me.

NATALIE

Sure.

(She quickly looks around, locates some paper and a pen, hands it to TAYLA.)
I have gathered the mug shots of most of the killers. There's just a few from early and later on in the decade I haven't been able to find photos of yet.

TAYLA

(On the phone) Go ahead. ... Sure, anything covering the late 80's and 90's ... okay, *(begins writing)* 'How to Survive a Plague', yep, heard of that one ... of course, it makes sense that most of the selection covers the AIDS epidemic ... oh, okay ... *(continues writing)*

NATALIE

Hmm,

(Hears door knock, checks watch)

Shit.

(Looks at phone)

I don't have any other clients today.

(Begins to maniacally clean up, shouts over towards the door) One second!

TAYLA

(Holds a hand up to the phone, holds another hand to get the attention of NATALIE)
That's probably the mugshots I had printed and delivered-

NATALIE

(Interrupting, genuinely surprised)
Mugshots? Printed and delivered? How did you -

TAYLA

(Over the phone, hushed) One of my college friends interns at the precinct downtown, he hooked us up. He got me connected to the Minnesota Historical Society – turns out they have copies of all the murderers' mugshots.

NATALIE

You couldn't have told me this before I spent all night looking myself? Do you know the sites I had to go to, the things I had to read? Ugh. Whatever happened to not going to the police?

TAYLA

Shh!

(She gestures NATALIE toward the door and continues to write down more titles.)
Mhmm, yes ... great, thank you.

(Another knock is heard at the door)

NATALIE

(Sighs) God, and to think –
(She finishes tidying up.)
Uh, okay, come in!

(CAMERON opens the door with a large envelope in hand.)

CAMERON

Hey, I found this outside the building, addressed to this apartment.

NATALIE

Oh, they just left it outside?

CAMERON

Yeah, beside the front door of the building. You're lucky I found it before someone else did.

NATALIE

Thank you, we really appreciate it.

CAMERON

No worries. By the weight of this thing, it seems important. I'd hate for you to not get whatever's inside.

(He extends the envelope over toward NATALIE)

NATALIE

(She takes the envelope from CAMERON)
Thank you, it is really important. We're trying to–

TAYLA

(Overhears NATALIE about to explain their situation while still on the phone,

interrupts)
- complete a school project. It's full of old photographs that I'm using for a school project, that's all.

NATALIE

Right.

CAMERON

Oh, really? What school project?

NATALIE

It's a historical project, of sorts... we're solving an age-old mystery.

CAMERON

Oh. I see.

TAYLA

(Changes subject) So, do you live in the building?

CAMERON

Well, I actually used to live here – in this loft. Years ago.

NATALIE

Oh, really? We just moved in.

CAMERON

Oh, you did?

NATALIE

Yeah, we love it!

CAMERON

You moved in, together? So are you two...?

TAYLA

Yes.

NATALIE

No.

(A beat, TAYLA hangs up the phone and gets up.)

CAMERON

I see, I'm sorry I asked.

TAYLA

Well, thank you. I would've been screwed if I never got these.

(She takes the envelope from NATALIE.)

CAMERON

Happy to help. And I hope your – school project – goes well.

(He notices the Donna Summer record on the record player)

Oh, Donna Summer? That record is vintage. You two must have great taste. *(beat)* Take care of each other. I should probably go.

(He turns toward the door)

NATALIE

Uh, wait, I'm sorry I never asked – what was your name?

TAYLA

Natalie...

NATALIE

What?

CAMERON

(He turns back to the girls)

Before I leave – I wanted to say, please be careful. If you're using old photographs to solve an age-old mystery, you better be doing your research to cross-reference what you find. Be open minded to that fact history is told by the oppressors, not the oppressed. Pictures can be doctored. The truth can be altered, or even worse, ignored. Get creative with finding your answers. Every small detail matters. The timing of everything. The dates. I know today of all days is an important one, at least for me. And maybe for you too. Sometimes it's up to us to recall the things lost to time, and to ignorance. The only thing worse than an unsolved mystery is a mystery solved incorrectly. I have to go. Best of luck.

(CAMERON leaves)

NATALIE

Uh– what just happened?

TAYLA

I have no idea.

NATALIE

It's like he knows exactly what we're doing.

TAYLA

He might. I don't know how, but yeah. He might.

NATALIE

Do you think he looked at the mugshots?

TAYLA

No, the envelope is still sealed shut.

NATALIE

God, what the hell are we getting ourselves into?

TAYLA

I don't know.

NATALIE

You said you asked a college friend to get us these mugshots? Could they have told more people? Is word getting out?

TAYLA

Word getting out? That we're trying to solve an unsolved murder?

NATALIE

(Her eyes grow big)

Oh my god, is his murderer still alive? Should we really be looking into this?

TAYLA

His death was over 30 years ago. Calm down. Everything is okay. What we're doing is a good thing.

NATALIE

Alright, alright. But, this is the last time we go to the authorities for anything, okay?

TAYLA

Oh, don't worry. We don't need them for anything else.

NATALIE

Thank God.

TAYLA

I'm sorry I didn't tell you I reached out to the precinct.

NATALIE

It's fine. Just no more secrets. Solving recent murders – or recentish – can be dangerous, clearly.

TAYLA

Right, right.

NATALIE

So no more secrets, promise?

TAYLA

I promise.

NATALIE

Okay, okay. Good. (*A beat*) What did you have to do to get these anyway? Buy the police donuts?

TAYLA

No, I wish it was that easy.

NATALIE

That easy? What did you do?

TAYLA

I had to testify in favor of a guilty officer.

NATALIE

Oh my god, really?

TAYLA

Kidding!

NATALIE

Okay, not funny.

TAYLA

Yeah, no. I would never do that.

NATALIE

Right, right. So?

TAYLA

So?

NATALIE

Tay! What did you have to do?

TAYLA

Nothing major. It's fine.

NATALIE

Thank God...

TAYLA

I just had to testify against an innocent teenager.

NATALIE

What?

TAYLA

Again, kidding!

NATALIE

Tay! Still not funny!

TAYLA

If you could see your face right now, you would disagree.

NATALIE

Ugh! This is why we broke up, Tay. God, you're insufferable.

TAYLA

You can't tell me you don't miss it sometimes.

(NATALIE shoots her a glare)

Okay, okay. I'm sorry. I'll stop.

NATALIE

Okay, good. So how did you actually get these?

TAYLA

It's really not that complicated.

NATALIE

What, did your friend just give them to you?

TAYLA

Essentially. Well, he owed me for helping him study last semester.

NATALIE

Oh. Well...that was less exciting than I thought it was going to be.

TAYLA

Yep.

NATALIE

I just assumed that there would need to be some mystery involved to get them, given everything that's going on.

TAYLA

Right? *(beat)* So, the librarian I was on the phone with just now listed off titles I've already read. Looks like these mugshots are the only other thing we have to go off of.

NATALIE

Alright, well, we can try to ease Julian into agreeing to look at them tomorrow.

TAYLA

And you still think we should tell him what happened before we show him the mugshots? I don't know, might that scare him?

NATALIE

Yes, Tayla. He'll be scared, he's a freaking ghost! But, I like to think that being told that you were killed and then agreeing to help solve your murder by potentially seeing your killer's face is way better than the alternative.

TAYLA

And what is the alternative?

NATALIE

The alternative would be us intentionally traumatizing him to remember he was killed by showing him a mugshot of his murderer first.

TAYLA

Well, I say either way is traumatizing. But, when you put it like that...

NATALIE

Yeah, we have to tell him.

TAYLA

I'm just afraid he'll run as soon as we tell him he's dead.

NATALIE

Maybe he will. But we know how to conjure him.

TAYLA

True. Another instance where Donna Summer saves the day.

NATALIE

Let's try to narrow down who our main suspects are. Walk me through the details of what is known about his death, again, please.

TAYLA

So he was doing a photoshoot in Loring Park. Supposedly he was modeling new attire for some local gay clothing line.

NATALIE

Okay,

TAYLA

He decided to go to the men's bathroom in between shots. As he approached the bathroom, he was jumped by an unidentifiable man near the east side of the pond.

NATALIE

God, okay.

TAYLA

The man beat him, cracked several ribs, and gave him a concussion. The blunt force ended up knocking Julian unconscious, and then he was thrown in the pond. The coroner's report listed the cause of death as drowning.

NATALIE

Oh my god. And it was summertime, right?

TAYLA

Yes, June, I believe.

NATALIE

June? Wait, we're in June. June what? What date exactly?

TAYLA

Let me look...

(Grabs one of the books, opens up to a bookmarked page, reads, and then pauses.)

TAYLA

Today. He died today in 1990.

(A discordant version of Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' begins to play as a loud door knock is heard suddenly, abruptly.)

NATALIE

(Reactionary) Hello?

TAYLA

That guy who gave us our envelope – he told us today was an important day... he knew...

JULIAN

(From the other side of the door)

Natalie?!

NATALIE

(Quietly) Oh my god.

(She runs over to the door, opening it. JULIAN runs in as soon as it opens, passing by NATALIE quickly)

Julian!

JULIAN

(Obviously out of breath)
Lock the door. Call 9-1-1.
(NATALIE locks the door)

TAYLA

(Looks from NATALIE to JULIAN then slowly back to NATALIE.)
Hey, hey what happened?

JULIAN

(Shaking, in crisis mode) This huge man, this horrible man, attacked me. Over in the park. I- I was doing a photoshoot for a friend of mine – and this man, he just came up, and started kicking and beating me... he threw me in – in the pond. And I – I can't swim very well. All I remember are his green eyes, those bloodshot eyes, and how he said I was the first but not the last...

(NATALIE and TAYLA exchange glances. They look back to JULIAN.)

NATALIE

Hey, hey, hey... you're safe here. *(She slowly approaches him)* You can rest. He won't get you here.

JULIAN

No, no, he will. He– he tried to kill me. We have to call 9-1-1.

TAYLA

Breathe, Julian. Just breathe. Deep breaths.

NATALIE

(Sits beside him) You said he threw you in the pond?

JULIAN

(Starting to get anxiously angry, starts to cry)
Yes, yes he threw me in the pond! He's still out there, and he said he would target more of us after me! Why aren't you calling 9-1-1?!

NATALIE

Hey, hey, hey, one thing at a time. You said he threw you into a pond,

JULIAN

Yes. Why does that—

TAYLA

(Interrupting him) Julian, but you're dry.
(She approaches him too)

JULIAN

Wh-what? No, no, I'm, I'm –
(*he looks at himself, confused*)

NATALIE

You're safe, Julian.

JULIAN

I, I don't understand what's going on. I thought I was going to die.

TAYLA

We know, we know.
(*She sits beside him*)

NATALIE

Julian, we need to tell you something that may be hard to hear.

JULIAN

(*Exhaustedly*) What? I'm just so confused.

NATALIE

The man, the man that threw you into the pond, he did something horrible to you. (*A beat*) That man beat you unconscious, and you were thrown into the pond...

JULIAN

No he didn't. I mean he did beat me, but I'm not unconscious, I'm talking to you right now.

TAYLA

Julian, you drowned in that pond.

JULIAN

What?? No. What are you talking about? I'm right here!

NATALIE

You drowned in that pond over 30 years ago, Julian.

TAYLA

We think your spirit is trapped here, because your murder was never solved. Here, look at this book. You're in it. It was published long after you died.
(*She hands over the book, JULIAN reluctantly grabs it and begins reading, gradually getting more uneasy.*)

NATALIE

We're trying to figure out who killed you.

JULIAN

(*A long pause, his face loses all color*)
No, no, no. What the fuck is wrong with you? This is sick, telling me I died? As if I wouldn't

know?! Fuck you. Fuck you both.
(He gets up and heads over to the door.)

NATALIE

Julian, please.

TAYLA

We're only trying to help.

JULIAN

You want to help? Oh, you wanna help. You won't call the police but you want to fucking help. Fine. How about you help by taking my name off your fucking calendar, forget your stupid consultations and photoshoots!
(He unlocks the door and runs out)

NATALIE

Wait, no!
(She chases after him)
We only want to help you!! Julian!

TAYLA

(Stands up, but doesn't chase after him.)
Natalie...

NATALIE

Julian, wait!
(She gets to the door, finding no one – she speaks to nothing)
I'm sorry, I'm sorry.
(She turns to face TAYLA and walks back into the room)
What have we done?

TAYLA

I- I don't know.

NATALIE

Oh my god, what happens now? He'll never come back. Should we try to conjure him?
(She runs to the record player)
Maybe if we restart the song–

TAYLA

Natalie...

NATALIE

(Frantically) Are you going to help me?!

TAYLA

Natalie,

NATALIE

For fucks sake, Tayla, what?!

TAYLA

Don't conjure him yet. Give it a second.

NATALIE

Why? We don't know what he's doing, where he's going, if he's okay...

TAYLA

He told us more about his killer. Let's look through the mugshots and then we can bring him back.

NATALIE

No, we have to bring him back now.

TAYLA

And then what? We ask him more questions about his death and scare him more? Let's look through the mugshots again first. Maybe we'll be able to solve the murder.

NATALIE

And how are we going to do that?

TAYLA

Like I said, he told us more about the killer.

NATALIE

What do you mean he told us more?

TAYLA

He said he was a bigger man, with green eyes. And he said that the killer claimed he was going to hurt more people.

NATALIE

(Slows down, exhales. A beat) Oh yeah, that's right. Okay, um, I have a few things I've been meaning to prep upstairs for a shoot tomorrow, but then we should look into the mugshots.

TAYLA

Sounds good. I'll make us some dinner and we can look through them after.

NATALIE

We're not eating out tonight?

TAYLA

I mean we can, if you want –

NATALIE

(A beat) Tayla! I mean, are we making dinner here.

TAYLA

Mhmm. You want me to make you a plate?

NATALIE

You're the best.

TAYLA

Mhmm.

(NATALIE exits upstairs, TAYLA exits downstage.)

(Lights out.)

SCENE IV

(Lights up to reveal NATALIE getting up from the ground to hang mugshots beside the hanging polaroids the same day after dinner. TAYLA is nearby, reading off a page of her 'ARTISTIC TENDENCIES' textbook.)

TAYLA

(Reading)

Throughout each death, a string of commonalities was found regarding every murderer's distaste of queerness. Many confessed proudly to their crimes, citing that the way of life of their victims was a direct threat to modern society, a threat they viewed as punishable by death. One murderer, Zachary Farmington, was convicted shortly after giving a confessional blaming the so-called 'artistic tendencies' of gay men and their choice of clothing as an offensive take on feminine beauty. Artistic tendencies, a common homophobic critique, is based in the belief that the best artists in history were known for their queer tendencies. Farmington, like many critics before him, claimed homosexuals were simply too artistically deviant to exist in American society. He went on further to claim the HIV crisis of the 80s and 90s was evidence they were morally corrupt, as the disease seemed to target them more than anyone else. He was sentenced to life after the beating and murder of Matthew Gilford, a 20 year old university student, in 1993.

NATALIE

I can't listen to that anymore.

TAYLA

Julian's murderer has to be one of these men. He told us yesterday that the man who killed him said he was going to hurt more people.

NATALIE

I just get so uncomfortable trying to get into the mindset of a killer.

TAYLA

Me too.

NATALIE

Let's just focus on Julian. Figure out who killed him. Then we can move on from this.

TAYLA

Agreed. So, Julian's murderer – he's a bigger man, with green eyes, and he's potentially guilty of killing others throughout the 90's.

NATALIE

Right, and we know all the other murders have been solved. So, chances are, his killer was convicted after getting caught for the death of one of his later victims.

TAYLA

Exactly. Of the mugshots we have, three have green eyes.

NATALIE

So do we conjure Julian back and show him all three?

TAYLA

Well, maybe. But one of the three was convicted in 1999, and he was only 25 when he was convicted.

NATALIE

Meaning he would've been (*She pauses to calculate*) 16 when Julian died?

TAYLA

Exactly. I don't think that's him. Julian wasn't describing a teenager.

NATALIE

So we show him the other two with green eyes.

TAYLA

Yeah, the other two were convicted in the early 90's. Gregory Manors, 39, convicted in '92 for the murder of Cameron Jacobsen; and Xavier Klaufton, 49, convicted in '94 for the murder of James Brookfield. Wait, weird.

NATALIE

What?

TAYLA

This says Gregory Manors killed his victim, Cameron Jacobsen, exactly two years after Julian died. He was jumped and killed at a vigil in remembrance of Julian.

NATALIE

He was killed at a vigil dedicated to Julian?

TAYLA

Yes, supposedly the vigil was an attempt for the community to bring attention to the case the police had closed, which hadn't been solved two years later.

NATALIE

Oh god, and it's still unsolved.

TAYLA

Cameron's murder occurred as he was going home. Many in the community swore that the two murders were related. But that assumption died when no evidence came up linking the two deaths. Cameron's murderer was found guilty, and reports say that he had never been to Minneapolis until the night of Cameron's death.

NATALIE

Which is probably why the authorities shot down the claims that the murders were related.

TAYLA

Who knows. God this is so upsetting, and I'm genuinely pissed we're only now learning that any of this ever happened. You know, they would've never closed the case if the victims were straight.

NATALIE

I wonder if Julian knew any of the other victims. I wonder if he knew Cameron.

TAYLA

Chances are he might have. Minneapolis was smaller back then. Julian was young, so he probably was familiar with the victims of the early part of the decade. I read that most the victims were rebellious kids who used Loring Park as a cruising spot despite the developing AIDS epidemic and older gays warning them of the danger in doing so.

NATALIE

Julian wasn't trying to fuck though, he doing a photoshoot.

TAYLA

I know.

NATALIE

And who knows why the other victims were in the park when they died. They could've been meeting a boyfriend, heading to work, feeding the birds, hell — holding a vigil for a member of their fucking community, but of course textbooks will say they were irresponsible. We'll never really know much of what led to their deaths, that's part of the tragedy.

TAYLA

That's true, I mean I doubt this book was written by queer people. It was published in 2005.

NATALIE

Exactly. Queer people aren't the only ones claiming to tell queer stories.

TAYLA

True. Do you think we should get Julian here now? So he can try to solve his own death?

NATALIE

Yeah, I already have Donna Summer ready to go. Maybe we should ask if he knows either of the victims you mentioned earlier? I'm nervous to ask him about them, because then he'll know they were murdered too, but what can we do? We need to give him some sort of peace. Peace they all deserved when they were alive.

(She goes over to the record player, puts Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' on)

TAYLA

(While NATALIE starts the record, the song starts)
Hopefully Donna Summer can lessen the blow.

NATALIE

It's almost ironic.

TAYLA

What?

NATALIE

This song is so blissful and romantic, and yet it's how we attract a victim of a crime that's anything but that.

TAYLA

Yeah. It's a reflection of who Julian actually was, not the crime that ended his life.

(JULIAN knocks, quietly)

NATALIE

Julian? Come in!

(JULIAN enters the room slowly.)

JULIAN

Natalie, Tayla.

NATALIE

Hey, I'm sorry about yesterday... the last time we spoke.

JULIAN

No, it's fine. I understand now, you're right.

NATALIE

We are?

JULIAN

Yes. It all came back to me. I never actually swam out of that pond. I was just confused, and terrified.

TAYLA

That's understandable. Much of this makes no sense.

JULIAN

What year is it?

NATALIE

2023.

JULIAN

Oh my god. How?

TAYLA

We have no idea... absolutely no idea... why or how you've been brought to us, but you're here. We can't imagine what it was like to be queer back when you lived here.

JULIAN

What happened to me? What happened to Minneapolis? You said there were more deaths?

NATALIE

Yes. You were the first of several gay victims who were targeted in Loring Park.

JULIAN

How, though? Loring Park is where all the gays here live.

NATALIE

Exactly, it's a great place for homophobes to attack us. But it's gotten better in recent years.

JULIAN

It has?

TAYLA

Oh yeah. Not until after the 90's and after the initial stigmas against HIV calmed down, but yeah. It has.

NATALIE

We were wondering, did you know any of the other gays in town?

JULIAN

Yes, we all knew each other. We had to watch out for one another... back then. Everyone either hated us or were scared of us because they thought we were sick and morally corrupt.

TAYLA

That's what we figured. Did you happen to know a guy named James Brookfield? (*A beat*) Or a Cameron Jacob-

JULIAN

Jacobsen? Cameron Jacobsen? (*A beat*) Yeah, I knew him. (*He suddenly starts tearing up*) Did he...?

NATALIE

How did you know Cameron?

JULIAN

God,

NATALIE

Hey, hey, it's okay.

JULIAN

(Through tears) He was my boyfriend. We moved to Minneapolis together, from Iowa.

NATALIE

Oh, oh my god.

TAYLA

You two were dating? Oh, Julian...

JULIAN

For over a year, yes. *(A beat, he listens to the music)* This was our song, I'm remembering now. We would sing it as we got ready for nights out on the weekends, on trips out of town, back to Iowa. I got the record for his birthday when we...moved into the loft here. Did I tell you that?

NATALIE

No, you didn't mention...

JULIAN

We used to live here together. I knew it felt familiar when I walked in. Felt like home. I just didn't remember fully until you...until you...

(He falls emotionally deeper into the song, but suddenly breaks out of the distraction.)

What happened to him? How do you know his name?

(A beat, suddenly despaired)

Was he—

TAYLA

He —

NATALIE

(Interrupting) He really, really loved you, Julian.

JULIAN

Oh my god. *(Another beat)* This is too much...

NATALIE

I'm sorry, so sorry, Julian.

JULIAN

God, he wanted to come to the photoshoot in the park that day too. Damn it. He probably was

worried for me. I told him not to–

NATALIE

(Interrupting) What? He knew about the photoshoot, where you died?

JULIAN

Yes, I mean I don't remember much beyond that, but I remember telling him not to come.

TAYLA

Well, after that day, he tried so hard to find your killer. He held a vigil when the police closed your case two years after you died.

JULIAN

(Lost in thought) And who killed me? Did they figure out who killed me?

TAYLA

No, your murder was the only murder that was never solved.

JULIAN

What about Cameron? What happened to him? How did he–

TAYLA

(Interrupting) I don't know if...

JULIAN

Tell me.

NATALIE

I'm not sure we should...

JULIAN

Tell me!

TAYLA

(A beat) He was killed too, walking home from the vigil he organized for you.

JULIAN

(A beat) That doesn't surprise me, I should've listened to him and not gone... *(Another beat)* If I never went, he would've never had the vigil, he would've been saved... we both would've been saved. Our lives wouldn't have ended, we would've actually had a shot together, here, in this loft. In this city that we loved.. God, it's all my fault...

NATALIE

Hey, hey, it's not your fault. You can't be blamed for the acts of a murderer.

JULIAN

You said my death was the only one that wasn't solved, right?

TAYLA

Right.

JULIAN

So then someone was convicted for killing Cameron?

NATALIE

Right.

JULIAN

Well, who was convicted? I can try to verify if he was the one who killed me too.

TAYLA

We have a mugshot. Accusations were made against Cameron's killer being your killer too, but they all were dropped. Who knows if those charges should've been dropped, though. It was a really dark time for the gay community. I can show you, but only if you really want to.

JULIAN

Please, yes, show me.

NATALIE

Are you sure?

JULIAN

Yes.

TAYLA

Alright.

(TAYLA hands NATALIE the mugshot, who pauses for a moment before handing it to JULIAN. He takes it and looks at the image. His tears stop. His expression turns neutral, then conflicted. He exhales. He looks up.)

JULIAN

(A beat) That's him.

NATALIE

We thought it might be.

TAYLA

His name was—

JULIAN

(Interrupting) I don't care. I don't need to know his name. It was him.

NATALIE

Should we call the authorities and tell–

JULIAN

No, it's okay. I don't think that's necessary.

TAYLA

From what I read, he died about 15 years ago in jail. He's gone.

(JULIAN hands the mugshot back to NATALIE. He looks over to the Donna Summer record on the record player. He looks back.)

JULIAN

He went to jail?

TAYLA

Yes, he did. Luckily, he didn't get away with Cameron's death. He was arrested and sentenced to life. Died of a stroke in 2007.

JULIAN

(Suddenly distantly, he turns again to the record player. He walks toward it, with his focus remaining on the record)

Can I take this to Cameron? I want to listen to it with him.

NATALIE

(A beat) Of course, of course. Here,

(She walks over and removes the record from the player, slides it into its sleeve, and hands it to JULIAN)

TAYLA

I hope we didn't hurt you further. I hope this all helped.

JULIAN

(While holding the record, turns to address TAYLA. He smiles)

It did. I don't know how, but it did. Thank you, both of you. Thank you.

NATALIE

I hope you can find peace now.

JULIAN

I have. Finally, I'm no longer confused. Or hurt. Or lost.

(CAMERON knocks at the door; an acoustic version of 'I Feel Love' starts to play. Everyone looks over to the door.)

JULIAN

I think I know who that is.

(CAMERON opens the door, smiling.)

CAMERON

You did it, babe. I'm so proud of you. Let's go.

NATALIE

Uh, Tay?

TAYLA

Yeah?

NATALIE

Did you just see –

TAYLA

The door open on its own?

NATALIE

Uh huh.

JULIAN

It's Cameron,

NATALIE AND TAYLA

What?

CAMERON

They can't see or hear me. It's just you and I now.

JULIAN

You can't see him, but he's there. I have to go.

(He walks toward the door.)

NATALIE

Julian, wait! I'm sorry I never got you those polaroids. I'm sorry we never did a full shoot.

JULIAN

Don't worry. You've given me more than I could've asked for. You've given me peace. You've given me rest. I hope you two find that as well. It's all Cameron and I ever wanted. *(A beat)* Maybe you'll find it – in each other.

(TAYLA and NATALIE glance at each other, then back to JULIAN. He turns around)

and smiles one last time)

JULIAN

Good bye, I hope to see you again someday.

(JULIAN and CAMERON leave)

TAYLA

Well, we did it.

NATALIE

We sure did.

TAYLA

And yet, if I tell anyone about this, they'll think I'm crazy.

NATALIE

I wouldn't.

TAYLA

Oh shut up, yes you would.

NATALIE

Okay, *(A beat)* Maybe, I would.

TAYLA

Mhmm.

NATALIE

(Sighs)

You can tell Julian really loved Cameron. It was beautiful, really.

TAYLA

We called it. My textbook saying there wasn't a connection between them was wrong, surprise surprise. Yeah, Julian loved Cameron. And I'm sure Cameron really loved Julian.

NATALIE

He did, and *(A beat)* I — I really love you.

TAYLA

(Surprised)

What?

NATALIE

I'm so sorry, Tayla. For everything between us. For not loving you in the way that you deserve to be loved. For not loving that part of myself — my own artistic tendencies — as I should.

TAYLA

Natalie...I...

NATALIE

I'm just so glad you remained in my life. Something about seeing Julian's hopes and dreams of a life with Cameron come back to him made me think. It made me think about what's really important. About what a future could actually look like with a woman I love.

TAYLA

You don't have to—

NATALIE

(Interrupting)

No, I do. You have gone through hell because of me. Because you care so much about me.

TAYLA

Hmm. *(A beat)* Guilty as charged.

NATALIE

And yet, here I am, hurting the one who loves me, and who I love as well. All because of a model—

TAYLA

Ah—

TAYLA AND NATALIE

(Together, with cringe-worthy voices)

Ashleigh Hanson.

NATALIE

Yeah. *(A beat)* I don't want to live in fear anymore. I don't want to ask you to live like that anymore. Not for me. Not for anyone.

TAYLA

Well, damn. *(A beat)* It took you almost a year, and a gay ghost, to realize you shouldn't live in fear?

NATALIE

Yeah, I— I guess so.

(They kiss, lights out)

END OF SHOW