Act Two

Scene Eight

EMMA's apartment. EMMA and NED are having brunch.

NED: You look very pretty.

EMMA: Thank you.

NED: Where's your cat?

EMMA: Under my bed. She's afraid of you.

NED: Do you think being Jewish makes you always hungry?

EMMA: I'm not Jewish.

NED: You're not?

EMMA: I'm German.

NED: Everyone thinks you're Jewish.

EMMA: I know. In medicine that helps.

NED: How many of us do you think already have the virus in our system?

EMMA: In this city—easily over half of all gay men.

NED: So we're just walking time bombs—waiting for whatever it is that sets us off.

EMMA: Yes. And before a vaccine can be discovered almost every gay man will have been exposed. Ned, your organization is worthless! I went up and down Christopher Street last night and all I saw was guys going in the bars alone and coming out with somebody. And outside the baths, all I saw was lines of guys going in. And what is this stupid publication you finally put out? (She holds up a pamphlet.) After all we've talked about? You leave too much margin for intelligence. Why aren't you telling them, bluntly, stop! Every day you don't tell them, more people infect each other.

NED: Don't lecture me. I'm on your side. Remember?

EMMA: Don't be on my side! I don't need you on my side. Make your side shape up. I've seen two hundred and thirty-eight cases—me: one doctor. You make it sound like there's nothing worse going around than measles.

NED: They wouldn't print what I wrote. Again.

EMMA: What do you mean "they"? Who's they? Thought you and Bruce were the leaders.

NED: Now we've got a board. You need a board of directors when you become tax-exempt. It was a pain in the ass finding anyone to serve on it at all! I called every prominent gay man I could get to. Forget it! Finally, what we put together turns out to be a bunch as timid as Bruce. And every time Bruce doesn't agree with me, he puts it to a board vote.

EMMA: And you lose.

NED: (Nods.) Bruce is in the closet; Mickey works for the Health Department; he starts shaking every time I criticize them—they
won't even put out leaflets listing all the symptoms; Richard, Dick, and Lennie owe their jobs somehow to the mayor; Dan is a schoolteacher; we're not allowed to say his last name out loud; the rest are just a bunch of disco dummies. I warned you this was not a community that has its best interests at heart.

EMMA: But this is death.

NED: And the board doesn't want any sex recommendations at all. No passing along anything that isn't a hundred percent certain.

EMMA: You must tell them that's wrong! Nothing is a hundred percent certain in science, so you won't be saying anything.

NED: I think that's the general idea.

EMMA: Then why did you bother to start an organization at all?

NED: Now they've decided they only want to take care of patients—crisis counseling, support groups, home attendants... I know that's important, too. But I thought I was starting with a bunch of Ralph Naders and Green Berets, and the first instant they have to take a stand on a political issue and fight, almost in front of my eyes they turn into a bunch of nurses' aides.

EMMA: You've got to warn the living, protect the healthy, help them keep on living. I'll take care of the dying.

NED: They keep yelling at me that I can't expect an entire world to suddenly stop making love. And now I've got to tell them there's absolutely no such thing as safe sex...

EMMA: I don't consider going to the baths and promiscuous sex making love. I consider it the equivalent of eating junk food, and you can lay off it for a while. And, yes, I do expect it, and you get them to come sit in my office any day of the week and they'd expect it, too. Get a VCR, rent a porn film, and use your hands!

NED: Why are you yelling at me for what I'm not doing? What the fuck is your side doing? Where's the goddamned AMA in all of this? The government has not started one single test tube of research. Where's the board of directors of your very own hospital? You have so many patients you haven't got rooms for them, and you've got to make Felix well... So what am I yelling at you for?

EMMA: Who's Felix? Who is Felix?

NED: I introduced you to him at that Health Forum you spoke at.

EMMA: You've taken a lover?

NED: We live together. Emma, I've never been so much in love in my life. I've never been in love. Late Friday night he showed me this purple spot on the bottom of his foot. Maybe it isn't it. Maybe it's some sort of something else. It could be, couldn't it? Maybe I'm overreacting. There's so much death around. Can you see him tomorrow? I know you're booked up for weeks. But could you?

EMMA: Tell him to call me first thing tomorrow. Seven-thirty. I'll fit him in.

NED: Thank you.

EMMA: God damn you!

NED: I know I should have told you.
EMMA: What's done is done.

NED: What are we supposed to do—be with nobody ever? Well, it's not as easy as you might think. (Realizing what he's said.) Oh, Emma, I'm so sorry.

EMMA: Don't be. Polio is a virus, too. I caught it three months before the Salk vaccine was announced. Nobody gets polio anymore. By college I had my first braces. I don't walk so good anymore but that's because I'm too busy to practice.

NED: You must practice! Right now! Come on, right now. No, I mean it. Come on.

(He goes to the little stereo and puts on a record.)

NED: May I have this dance?

EMMA: Okay, you asked for it.

(Emma gets her braces. She has trouble reaching and Ned comes in even more intimate contact.)

EMMA: Get my crutches.

(He gives Emma the crutches. She pulls herself out of the wheelchair. She bobs forward clumsily, putting her feet in front of each other more or less satisfactorily. But then she makes a misstep and tries to get her balance. She cannot and falls into his arms. The intimacy of this moment is thrilling to Ned, to both of them. They dance.)

NED: I'm afraid to leave him alone now. I'm afraid the cure won't come in time. I'm afraid of my anger. I'm a terrible leader and a useless lover and . . .

EMMA: And a lousy dancer. Put me back.

(Ned bolds on to her very tightly. She embraces him back tightly too.)

NED: We finally have a meeting at City Hall tomorrow.

EMMA: Good. You take care of the city—I'll take care of Felix.

(He kisses her, grabs his coat, leaves. She looks after him. She's alone. Her cat jumps into her lap.)

Scene Nine

A meeting room in City Hall. It's in a basement, windowless, dusty, a room that's hardly ever used. Ned and Bruce wait impatiently; they have been fighting. Bruce wears a suit, having come from his office, with his attaché case. Both wear overcoats.

NED: How dare they do this to us?

BRUCE: It's one thirty. Maybe he's not going to show up. Why don't we just leave?

NED: Keeping us down here in some basement room that hasn't been used in years. What contempt!

BRUCE: I'm sorry I let you talk me into coming here. It's not the city's responsibility to take care of us. That's why New York went broke.

NED: What we're asking for doesn't cost the city a dime: let us meet with the mayor; let him declare an emergency; have him put pressure on Washington for money for research; have him get the Times to write about us.

BRUCE: The mayor's not going to help. Besides, if we get too political, we'll lose our tax-exempt status. That's what the lawyer in your brother's office said.
ned: You don't think the American Cancer Society, the Salvation Army, any charity you can think of, isn't somehow political, isn't putting pressure on somebody somewhere? The Catholic Church? We should be riding herd on the CDC in Atlanta—they deny it's happening in straight people, when it is. We could organize boycotts . . .

bruce: Boycotts? What in the world is there to boycott?

ned: Have you been following this Tylenol scare? In three months there have been seven deaths, and the Times has written fifty-four articles. The month of October alone they ran one article every single day. Four of them were on the front page. For us—in seventeen months they've written seven puny inside articles. And we have a thousand cases!

bruce: So?

ned: So the Times won't write about us, why should we read it?

bruce: I read it every morning. The next thing you'll say is we should stop shopping at Bloomingdale's.

ned: We should picket the White House!

bruce: Brilliant.

ned: Don't you have any vision of what we could become? A powerful national organization effecting change! Bruce, you must have been a fighter once. When you were a Green Beret, did you kill people?

bruce: A couple of times.

ned: Did you like being a soldier?

bruce: I loved it.

ned: Then why did you quit?

bruce: I didn't quit! I just don't like being earmarked gay.

ned: Bruce, what are you doing in this organization?

bruce: There are a lot of sick people out there that need our help.

ned: There are going to be a lot more sick people out there if we don't get our act together. Did you give up combat completely?

bruce: Don't you fucking talk to me about combat! I just fight different from you.

ned: I haven't seen your way yet.

bruce: Oh, you haven't? Where have you been?

ned: Bruce, Albert may be dying. Why doesn't that alone make you want to fight harder?

bruce: Get off my back!

ned: Get off your ass!

(tommy enters.)

tommy: Wonderful—we finally get a meeting with the mayor's assistant and you two are having another fight.

bruce: I didn't have the fight, he had the fight. It's always Ned who has the fight.

tommy: Where the hell are we? What kind of tomb is this they put us in? Don't they want us to be seen above ground? Where is he? I'm an hour late.

ned: An hour and a half. And where's Mickey?
TOMMY: Not with me, lambchop. I’ve been up at Bellevue. I put a sweet dying child together with his momma. They hadn’t seen each other for fifteen years and he’d never told her he was gay, so he didn’t want to see her now. He’s been refusing to see her for weeks and he was furious with me when I waltzed in with her and . . . It was a real weeper, Momma holding her son, and he’s dead now. There are going to be a lot of mommas flying into town not understanding why their sons have suddenly upped and died from “pneumonia.” You two've been barking at each other for an hour and a half? My, my.

BRUCE: Tommy, he makes me so mad.

NED: CBS called. They want our president to go on Dan Rather. He won’t do it. They don’t want anybody else.

BRUCE: I can’t go on national television!

NED: Then you shouldn’t be our president! Tommy, look at that. Imagine what a fantastic impression he would make on the whole country, speaking out for something gay. You’re the kind of role model we need.

BRUCE: You want to pay me my salary and my pension and my health insurance, I’ll go on TV.

TOMMY: Both of you, stop it. Can’t you see we need both your points of view? Ned plays the bad cop and Bruce plays the good cop; every successful corporation works that way. You’re both our leaders and we need you both desperately.

NED: Tommy, how is not going on national TV playing good cop?

(MICKEY enters.)

MICKEY: I couldn’t get out of work. I was afraid you’d be finished by now.

BRUCE: (To MICKEY.) Did you see his latest Native article?

MICKEY: Another one?

NED: What’s so awful about what I said? It’s the truth.

BRUCE: But it’s how you say it!

MICKEY: What’d you say?

NED: I said we’re all cowards! I said rich gays will give thousands to straight charities before they’ll give us a dime. I said it is appalling that some twenty million men and women don’t have one single lobbyist in Washington. How do we expect to achieve anything, ever, at all, by immaculate conception? I said the gay leaders who created this sexual-liberation philosophy in the first place have been the death of us. Mickey, why didn’t you guys fight for the right to get married instead of the right to legitimize promiscuity?

MICKEY: We did!

TOMMY: I get your drift.

MICKEY: Sure you didn’t leave anybody out?

NED: I said it’s all our fault, every one of us . . .

(hiram keebler, the mayor’s assistant, enters, and ned carries on without a break.)

. . . and you are an hour and forty-five minutes late, so why’d you bother to come at all?
BRUCE: Ned!

HIRAM: I presume I am at last having the pleasure of meeting Mr. Weeks’s lilting telephone voice face to face. (*Shaking bands all around.*) I’m truly sorry I’m late.

MICKEY: (*Shaking bands.*) Michael Marcus.

HIRAM: I’m Hiram Keebler.

TOMMY: Are you related to the folks who make the crackers? Tommy Boatwright.

BRUCE: Bruce Niles.

HIRAM: The mayor wants you to know how much he cares and how impressed he is with your superb efforts to shoulder your own responsibility.

BRUCE: Thank you.

NED: Our responsibility? Everything we’re doing is stuff you should be doing. And we need help.

TOMMY: What Mr. Weeks is trying to say, sir, is that, well, we are truly swamped. We’re now fielding over five hundred calls a week on our emergency hotline, people everywhere are desperate for information, which, quite frankly, the city should be providing, but isn’t. We’re visiting over one hundred patients each week in hospitals and homes and . . .

BRUCE: Sir, one thing you could help us with is office space. We’re presently in one small room, and at least one hundred people come in and out every day and . . . no one will rent to us because of what we do and who we are.

HIRAM: That’s illegal discrimination.

TOMMY: We believe we know that to be true, sir.

MICKEY: (*Nervously speaking up.*) Mr. Keebler, sir, it is not illegal to discriminate against homosexuals.

NED: We have been trying to see the mayor for fourteen months. It has taken us one year just to get this meeting with you and you are an hour and forty-five minutes late. Have you told the mayor there’s an epidemic going on?

HIRAM: I can’t tell him that!

NED: Why not?

HIRAM: Because it isn’t true.

BRUCE: Yes, sir, it is.

HIRAM: Who said so?

TOMMY: The government.

HIRAM: Which government? Our government?

NED: No! Russia’s government!

HIRAM: Since when?

MICKEY: The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta declared it.

TOMMY: Seventeen months ago.

NED: How could you not know that?

HIRAM: Well, you can’t expect us to concern ourselves with every little outbreak those boys come up with. And could you please reduce the level of your hysteria?

NED: Certainly. San Francisco, LA, Miami, Boston, Chicago,
Washington, Denver, Houston, Seattle, Dallas—all now report cases. It’s cropping up in Paris, London, Germany, Canada. But New York City, our home, the city you are pledged to protect, has over half of everything: half the one thousand cases, half the dead. Two hundred and fifty-six dead. And I know forty of them. And I don’t want to know any more. And you can’t not know any of this! Now—when can we see the mayor? Fourteen months is a long time to be out to lunch!

HIRAM: Now wait a minute!

NED: No, you wait a minute. We can’t. Time is not on our side. If you won’t take word to the mayor, what do we do? How do we get it to him? Hire a hunkly hustler and send him up to Gracie Mansion with our plea tattooed on his cock?

HIRAM: Mayor Koch is not gay!

TOMMY: Oh, come on, Blanche!

BRUCE: Tommy!

HIRAM: Now you listen to me! Of course we’re aware of those figures. And before you open your big mouth again, I would like to offer you a little piece of advice. Badmouthing the mayor is the best way I know to not get his attention.

NED: We’re not getting it now, so what have we got to lose?

BRUCE: Ned!

NED: Bruce, you just heard him. Hiram here just said they’re aware of the figures. And they’re still not doing anything. I was worried before that they were just stupid and blind. Great! Now we get to worry about them being repressive and downright dangerous.
BRUCE: Ned! Let me take it. Sir—
HIRAM: Hiram, please. You are?
BRUCE: I'm Bruce Niles. I'm the president.
HIRAM: You're the president? What does that make Mr. Weeks here?
BRUCE: He's one of the founders.
NED: But we work together jointly.
HIRAM: Oh, you do?
NED: Yes, we do.
HIRAM: Carry on, Mr. Niles. *(He slips him his card.)*
BRUCE: Look, we realize things are tricky, but—
HIRAM: *(Cutting him off.)* That's right. And the mayor feels there is no need to declare any kind of emergency. That only gets people excited. And we simply can't give you office space. We're not in the free-giveaway business.
BRUCE: We don't want it for free. We will pay for it.
HIRAM: I repeat, I think—that is, the mayor thinks you guys are overreacting.
NED: You tell that cocksucker that he's a selfish, heartless, son of a bitch!
HIRAM: You are now heading for real trouble! Do you think you can barge in here and call us names? *(To Mickey.)* You are Michael L. Marcus. You hold an unsecured job with the City Department of Health. I'd watch my step if I were you. You got yourself quite a handful here. You might consider putting him in a cage in the zoo. That I think I can arrange with the mayor. I'd watch out for my friends here if I were you. The mayor won't have it. *(Exits.)*
MICKEY: I don't believe this just happened.
NED: Mickey, I'm on the *Today* show tomorrow and I'm going to say the mayor is threatening your job if we don't shut up.
MICKEY: The *Today* show! You're going to do what?!
BRUCE: You can't do that!
NED: Of course I can: he just did.
BRUCE: God damn it, Ned!
NED: We're being treated like shit. *(He yells after them as they pick up their things and leave.)* And we're allowing it. And until we force them to treat us otherwise, we get exactly what we deserve. Politicians understand only one thing—pressure! You heard him—him and his three thousand West Side phone calls. We're not yelling loud enough! Bruce, for a Green Beret, you're an awful sissy! *(He is all alone.)*

**Scene Ten**

EMMA'S office. FELIX sits on the examining table, wearing a white hospital gown. EMMA sits facing him.

FELIX: So it is... it.

EMMA: Yes.
FELIX: There's not a little bit of doubt in your mind? You don't want to call in Christian Barnard?

EMMA: I'm sorry. I still don't know how to tell people. They don't teach acting in medical school.

FELIX: Aren't you worried about contagion? I mean, I assume I am about to become a leper.

EMMA: Well, I'm still here.

FELIX: Do you think they'll find a cure before I... How strange that sounds when you say it out loud for the first time.

EMMA: We're trying. But we're poor. Uncle Sam is the only place these days that can afford the kind of research that's needed, and so far we've not even had the courtesy of a reply from our numerous requests to him. You guys are still not making enough noise.

FELIX: That's Ned's department in our family. I'm not feeling too political at the moment.

EMMA: I'd like to try a treatment of several chemotherapies used together. It's milder than others. You're an early case.

FELIX: I assume that's hopeful.

EMMA: It's always better early.

FELIX: It also takes longer until you die.

EMMA: Yes. You can look at it that way.

FELIX: Do you want a second opinion?

EMMA: Feel free. But I'll say this about my fellow hospitals, you won't get particularly good care anywhere, maybe not even here. At... I'll call it Hospital A, you'll come under a group of mad scientists, research fanatics, who will try almost anything and if you die you die. You'll rarely see the same doctor twice; you'll just be a statistic for their computer—which they won't share with anyone else, by the way; there's not much sharing going on, never is. At Hospital B, they decided they really didn't want to get involved with this, it's too messy, and they're right, so you'll be overlooked by the least informed of doctors. C is like the New York Times and our friends everywhere: square, righteous, superior, and embarrassed by this disease and this entire epidemic. D is Catholic. E is Jewish. F is... Why am I telling you this? I must be insane. But the situation is insane.

FELIX: I guess we better get started.

EMMA: We have. You'll come to me once a week. There are going to be a lot of tests, a lot of blood tests, a lot of waiting. My secretary will give you a long list of dos and don'ts. Now, Felix, you understand your body no longer has any effective mechanism for fighting off anything?

FELIX: I'm going to be all right, you know.

EMMA: Good. That's the right attitude.

FELIX: No, I'm going to be the one who kicks it. I've always been lucky.

EMMA: Good.

FELIX: I guess everyone says that. Well, I'm going to be the one. I wanted a job on the Times, I got it. I wanted Ned... Have I given it to Ned?

EMMA: I don't know.
FELIX: Can he catch it from me now?
EMMA: We just don’t know.
FELIX: Did he give it to me?
EMMA: I don’t know. Only one out of a hundred adults infected with the polio virus gets it; virtually everybody infected with rabies dies. One person has a cold, hepatitis—sometimes the partner catches it, sometimes not.
FELIX: No more making love?
EMMA: Right.
FELIX: Some gay doctors are saying it’s okay if you use rubbers.
EMMA: I know they are.
FELIX: Can we kiss?
EMMA: I don’t know.
FELIX: (After a long pause.) I want my mother.
EMMA: Where is she?
FELIX: She’s dead. We never got along anyway.
EMMA: I’m going to do my damnedest, Felix. (She starts to leave.)
FELIX: Hey, doc . . . I’ll bet you say that to all the boys.

Scene Eleven
A small, crowded office. Many phones are ringing. Tommy is on two at once; Mickey, going crazy, is on another, trying to understand and bear in
the din; and Grady, a volunteer, also on a phone, is trying to pass papers and information to either.


GRADY: Whose asshole you talking about, Mickey?

MICKEY: Grady!

TOMMY: (To Grady.) I thought your friend, little Vinnie, was going to show up today.

GRADY: He had to go to the gym.

MICKEY: (Reading into the phone what he’s written.) “Mystical electromagnetic fields ruled by the planet Uranus?” Yes, well, we’ll certainly keep that in mind. Thank you for calling and sharing that with us.

GRADY: Harry’s in a payphone at the post office.

MICKEY: Get a number, we’ll call him back.

GRADY: (Into phone.) Give me the number, I’ll call you back.

TOMMY: (Into one phone.) Philip, can you hold on? (Into second phone.) Graciella, you tell Señor Hiram I’ve been holding for diez minutos and he called me. Sí, sí! (Into first phone.) You know where St. Vincent’s is? You get your ass there fast! I’ll send you a crisis counselor later today. I know you’re scared, honey, but just get there.

(Grady hands Mickey Harry’s number. Tommy has hung up one phone.)

MICKEY: Well, call him back!
(BRUCE comes in, dressed as from the office, with his attaché case.)

TOMMY: Mickey, do we have a crisis counselor we can send to St. V's around six o'clock?

MICKEY: (Consulting a chart on a wall.) No.

TOMMY: Shit. (To BRUCE.) Hi, Bossman.

BRUCE: (Answering a ringing phone.) Hello. How ya doin'? (To the room.) It's Kessler in San Francisco.

GRADY: (Into his phone.) Louder, Harry! It's a madhouse. None of the volunteers showed up.

MICKEY: (Busying himself with paperwork.) Mystical?!

GRADY: (On his phone.) Oh, dear.

BRUCE: (On his.) No kidding.

GRADY: Oh, dear!

TOMMY: (Picking up a ringing phone.) Ned's not here yet.

BRUCE: (To the room.) San Francisco's mayor is giving four million dollars to their organization. (Into phone.) Well, we still haven't met our mayor. We met with his assistant about four months ago.

TOMMY: (To BRUCE.) Hiram called three days ago and left a message he found some money for us. Try and get him back.

MICKEY: We need to train some more crisis counselors.

GRADY: What about me, Mick?

TOMMY: (Standing up.) Okay, get this! The Times is finally writing a big story. Twenty months after the epidemic has been declared, the Times is finally writing a big story. Word is that Craig Claiborne took someone high up out to lunch and told them they really had to write something, anything.

MICKEY: Who's writing it?

TOMMY: Some lady in Baltimore.

MICKEY: Makes sense. (His phone rings.) Hello.

GRADY: (Still on his phone.) Oh, dear.

TOMMY: Grady, darling, what the fuck are you oh-dearing about?

GRADY: (Dropping his bombshell to BRUCE.) Bruce—Harry says the post office won't accept our mailing.

BRUCE: What! (Into phone.) Got to go. (Slams phone down and grabs GRADY's.) Harry, what's the problem?

MICKEY: (Into his phone.) That's awful.

BRUCE: (Into his phone.) They can't do that to us!

TOMMY: (Who hadn't heard GRADY.) What is it now?

GRADY: Harry went to the post office with the fifty-seven cartons of our new newsletters—

TOMMY: Sugar, I sent him there!

GRADY: Well, they're not going anywhere.

BRUCE: (To TOMMY.) The post office won't accept them because we just used our initials.

TOMMY: So what?
BRUCE: In order to get tax-exemption we have to use our full name.

TOMMY: There is a certain amount of irony in all this, though not right now.

GRADY: He's double-parked and his volunteers had to go home.

TOMMY: Grady, dear, would you go help him out.

GRADY: No.

TOMMY and MICKEY: Grady!

GRADY: No! Why do I always have to do the garbage stuff?

MICKEY: Grady!

GRADY: Give me the phone. *(Into phone.)* Hold on, Harry, I'm coming to help you. *(To TOMMY.)* Give me cab fare.

TOMMY: Ride the rail, boy.

BRUCE: *(Into the phone.)* Harry, someone's coming. *(Whispering to TOMMY.)* What's his name?

TOMMY and MICKEY: Grady.

*(GRADY exits.)*

BRUCE: *(Into phone.)* Harry, bring them back. I want to fight this further somewhere. I'm sorry, I know it's a schlepp.

TOMMY: So this means we either pay full rate or embarrass their mailmen. Sorry, honey, I couldn't resist. *(Into phone.)* Graciella! *(To the room.)* How do you say I've been holding twenty minutes in Spanish? *(Into phone.)* City Hall is an equal-opportunity employer, doesn't that mean you all have to learn English? *(He hangs up.)*

MICKEY: *(hanging up.)* That was Atlanta. They're reporting thirty cases a week now nationally.

BRUCE: Thirty?

TOMMY: The CDC are filthy liars. What's wrong with those boys? We log forty cases a week in this office alone.

BRUCE: Forty?

TOMMY: Forty.

MICKEY: Thirty.

BRUCE: *(Trying to decide how to enter this on the wall chart.)* So that's thirty nationally, forty in this office alone.

TOMMY: You heard what I said. *(Dialing, then into phone.)* Hi. Pick up for us, will you, dears? We need a little rest. Thank you. *(Hangs up.)* *(There is a long moment of silence, strange now without the ringing phones. TOMMY lights a cigarette and sits back. MICKEY tries to concentrate on some paperwork. BRUCE is at the wall entering figures on charts.)*

BRUCE: Mickey ... aren't you supposed to be in Rio?

MICKEY: Where's Ned?

TOMMY: He should be here by now.

BRUCE: I don't want to see him.

MICKEY: I need to talk to him. I don't want to lose my job because Ned doesn't like sex very much. He's coming on like Jesus Christ, as if he never took a lover himself.
BRUCE: Rio. Why aren't you in Rio?

MICKEY: I was in Rio. I'm tired. I need a rest.

BRUCE: We're all exhausted.

TOMMY: You're the president; you can't have a rest.

MICKEY: I work all day for the city writing stuff on breastfeeding versus formula and how to stay calm if you have herpes and I work all night on our newsletter and my health columns for the Native and I can't take it anymore. Now this . . .

TOMMY: Take it slowly.

BRUCE: Now what?

MICKEY: I was in Rio, Gregory and I are in Rio, we just got there, day before yesterday, I get a phone call, from Hiram's office.

BRUCE: In Rio?

MICKEY: I'm told to be at a meeting at his office right away, this morning.

BRUCE: What kind of meeting? Why didn't you call me and I could have checked it out?

MICKEY: Because, unfortunately, you are not my boss.

BRUCE: What kind of meeting?

MICKEY: I don't know. I get to City Hall, he keeps me waiting forever; finally the commissioner comes, my boss, and he said I hope you had a nice vacation, and went inside, into Hiram's office; and I waited some more, and the commissioner comes out and says, Hiram doesn't want to see you anymore. I said, please, sir, then why did he make me come all the way back from Rio? He said, your vacation isn't over? I said, no sir, I was just there one day. I wanted to scream I haven't slept in two days, you dumb fuck! but I didn't. What I said was, sir, does this mean I'm fired? And the commissioner said, no, I don't think he means that, and he left.

(NED enters, unnoticed.)

Ned's article in the Native attacking Hiram came out last week. I love sex! I worship men! I don't think Ned does. I don't think Ned likes himself. I—

NED: What are you trying to say, Mickey?

MICKEY: You keep trying to make us say things that we don't want to say! And I don't think we can afford to make so many enemies before we have enough friends.

NED: We'll never have enough friends. We have to accept that. And why does what I say mean I don't like myself? Why is anything I'm saying compared to anything but common sense? When are we going to have this out once and for all? How many cases a week now?

MICKEY: Thirty ... forty . . .

NED: Reinhard dead, Craig dead, Albert sick, Felix not getting any better . . . Richie Faro just died.

MICKEY: Richie!

NED: That guy Ray Schwartz just committed suicide. Terry's calling all his friends from under his oxygen tent to say goodbye. Soon we're going to be blamed for not doing anything to help ourselves. When are we going to admit we might be spreading this? We have simply fucked ourselves silly for
years and years, and sometimes we've done it in the filthiest places.

TOMMY: Some of us have never been to places like that, Ned.

NED: Well, good for you, Tommy. Maybe you haven't, but others you've been with have, so what's the difference?

TOMMY: (Holding up his cigarette.) It's my right to kill myself.

NED: But it is not your right to kill me. This is not a civil-rights issue, this is a contagion issue.

BRUCE: We don't know that yet, and until they discover the virus, we're not certain where this is coming from.

NED: We know enough to cool it for a while! And save lives while we do. All it takes is one wrong fuck. That's not promiscuity—that's bad luck.

TOMMY: All right, so it's back to kissing and cuddling and waiting around for Mr. Right—who could be Mr. Wrong. Maybe if they'd let us get married to begin with none of this would have happened at all. I think I'll call Dr. Ruth.

MICKEY: Will you please stop!

TOMMY: Mick, are you all right?

MICKEY: I don't think so.


MICKEY: Why can't they find the virus?

TOMMY: It takes time.

MICKEY: I can't take any more theories. I've written a column about every single one of them. Repeated infection by a virus, new appearance by a dormant virus, single virus, new virus, old virus, multivirus, partial virus, latent virus, mutant virus, retrovirus . . .

TOMMY: Take it easy, honey.

MICKEY: And we mustn't forget fucking, sucking, kissing, blood, voodoo, drugs, poppers, needles, Africa, Haiti, Cuba, blacks, amebas, pigs, mosquitoes, monkeys, Uranus! . . . What if it isn't any of them?

TOMMY: I don't know.

MICKEY: What if it's something out of the blue? The Great Plague of London was caused by polluted drinking water from a pump nobody noticed. Maybe it's a genetic predisposition, or the theory of the herd—only so many of us will get it and then the pool's used up. What if it's monogamy? Bruce, you and I could actually be worse off because of constant bombardment of the virus from a single source—our own lovers! Maybe guys who go to the baths regularly have built up the best immunity! I don't know what to tell anybody. And everybody asks me. I don't know—who's right? I don't know—who's wrong? I feel so inadequate! How can we tell people to stop when it might turn out to be caused by—I don't know!

BRUCE: That's exactly how I feel.

MICKEY: And Ned keeps calling the mayor a prick and Hiram a prick and the commissioner a prick and the president and the New York Times, and that's the entire political structure of
the entire United States! When are you going to stop your eternal name-calling at every person you see?

**BRUCE:** That's exactly how I feel.

**MICKEY:** But maybe he's right! And that scares me, too. Neddie, you scare me.

**TOMMY:** If I were you, I'd get back on that plane to Gregory and Rio immediately.

**MICKEY:** Who's going to pay my fare? And now my job. I don't make much, but it's enough to let me help out here. Where are all the gay Rockefellers? Do you think the president really wants this to happen? Do you think the CIA really has unleashed germ warfare to kill all the queers Jerry Falwell doesn't want? Why should they help us; we're actually cooperating with them by dying?

**NED:** Mickey, try and hold on.

**MICKEY:** To what? I used to love my country. The *Native* received an anonymous letter describing top-secret Defense Department experiments at Fort Detrick, Maryland, that have produced a virus that can destroy the immune system. Its code name is Firm Hand. They started testing in 1978—on a group of gays. I never used to believe shit like this before. They are going to persecute us! Cancel our health insurance. Test our blood to see if we're pure. Lock us up. Stone us in the streets. (*To Ned.*) And you think I am killing people?

**NED:** Mickey, that is not what I—

**MICKEY:** Yes, you do! I know you do! I've spent fifteen years of my life fighting for our right to be free and make love whenever, wherever... And you're telling me that all those years of what being gay stood for is wrong... and I'm a murderer. We have been so oppressed! Don't you remember how it was? Can't you see how important it is for us to love openly, without hiding and without guilt? We were a bunch of funny-looking fellows who grew up in sheer misery and one day we fell into the orgy rooms and we thought we'd found heaven. And we would teach the world how wonderful heaven can be. We would lead the way. We would be good for something new. Can't you see that? Can't you?

**TOMMY:** I see that. I do, Mickey. Come on—I'm taking you home now.

**MICKEY:** When I left Hiram's office I went to the top of the Empire State Building to jump off.

**TOMMY:** (*Going to get Mickey's coat.*) Mickey, I'm taking you home right now! Let's go.

**MICKEY:** You can jump off from there if no one is looking. Ned, I'm not a murderer. All my life I've been hated. For one reason or another. For being short. For being Jewish. Jerry Falwell mails out millions of pictures of two men kissing as if that was the most awful sight you could see. Tell everybody we were wrong. And I'm sorry. Someday someone will come along and put the knife in you and say everything you fought for all this time is... shit!

(*He has made a furious, running lunge for Ned, but Tommy catches him and cradles him in his arms.*)

**BRUCE:** Need any help?
TOMMY: Get my coat. (To Mickey.) You're just a little tired, that's all, a little bit yelled out. We've got a lot of different styles that don't quite mesh. We've got ourselves a lot of bereavement overload. Tommy's taking you home.

MICKEY: No, don't take me home. I'm afraid I might do something. Take me to St. Vincent's. I'm just afraid.

TOMMY: I'll take you wherever you want to go. (To Bruce and Ned.) Okay, you two, no more apologizing and no more fucking excuses. You two better start accommodating and talking to each other now. Or we're in big trouble.

MICKEY: We're the fighters, aren't we?

TOMMY: You bet, sweetness. And you're a hero. Whether you know it or not. You're our first hero.

(TOMMY and MICKEY leave. There is a long moment of silence.)

NED: We're all going to go crazy, living this epidemic every minute, while the rest of the world goes on out there, all around us, as if nothing is happening, going on with their own lives and not knowing what it's like, what we're going through. We're living through war, but where they're living it's peace-time, and we're all in the same country.

BRUCE: Do you want to be president?

NED: I just want Felix to live.

(A phone on Tommy's desk rings.)

Hello. Hiram, old buddy, how they hanging? I want to talk to you, too. (He listens, then hangs up softly.) Tommy's right. All yelled out. You ready?

BRUCE: Yes.

NED: The mayor has found a secret little fund for giving away money. But we're not allowed to tell anyone where we got it. If word gets out we've told, we won't get it.

BRUCE: How much?

NED: Nine thousand dollars.

BRUCE: Ned, Albert is dead.

NED: Oh, no.

BRUCE: What's today?

NED: Wednesday.

BRUCE: He's been dead a week.

NED: I didn't know he was so close.

BRUCE: No one did. He wouldn't tell anyone. Do you know why? Because of me. Because he knows I'm so scared I'm some sort of carrier. This makes three people I've been with who are dead. I went to Emma and I begged her: please test me somehow, please test me if I'm giving this to people. And she said she couldn't, there isn't any way they can find out anything because they still don't know what they're looking for. Albert, I think I loved him best of all, and he went so fast. His mother wanted him back in Phoenix before he died, this was last week when it was obvious, so I get permission from Emma and bundle him all up and take him to the plane in an ambulance. The pilot wouldn't take off and I refused to leave the plane—you would have been proud of me—so finally they get another pilot. Then, after we take off, Albert
loses his mind, not recognizing me, not knowing where he is or that he's going home, and then, right there, on the plane, he becomes . . . incontinent. He starts doing it in his pants and all over the seat; shit, piss, everything. I pulled down my suitcase and yanked out whatever clothes were in there and I start mopping him up as best I can, and all these people are staring at us and moving away in droves and . . . I ram all these clothes back in the suitcase and I sit there holding his hand, saying, "Albert, please, no more, hold it in, man, I beg you, just for us, for Bruce and Albert." And when we got to Phoenix, there's a police van waiting for us and all the police are in complete protective rubber clothing, they looked like fucking astronauts, and by the time we got to the hospital where his mother had fixed up his room real nice, Albert was dead.

(NED starts toward him.)

Wait. It gets worse. The hospital doctors refused to examine him to put a cause of death on the death certificate, and without a death certificate the undertakers wouldn't take him away, and neither would the police. Finally, some orderly comes in and stuffs Albert in a heavy-duty Glad Bag and motions us with his finger to follow and he puts him out in the back alley with the garbage. He says, hey, man. See what a big favor I've done for you, I got him out, I want fifty bucks I paid him and then his mother and I carried the bag to her car and we finally found an undertaker who cremated him for a thousand dollars, no questions asked.

(NED crosses to BRUCE and embraces him; BRUCE puts his arm around NED.)

Would you and Felix mind if I spent the night on your sofa? Just one night. I don't want to go home.

Scene Twelve

EMMA sits alone in a spotlight, facing a doctor who stands at a distance, perhaps in the audience. She holds a number of files on her lap, or they are placed in a carrier attached to her wheelchair.

EXAMINING DOCTOR: Dr. Brookner, the government's position is this. There are several million dollars in the pipeline, five to be exact, for which we have received some fifty-five million dollars' worth of requests—all the way from a doctor in North Dakota who desires to study the semen of pigs to the health reporter on Long Island who is convinced this is being transmitted by dogs and the reason so many gay men are contracting it is because they have so many dogs.

EMMA: Five million dollars doesn't seem quite right for some two thousand cases. The government spent twenty million investigating seven deaths from Tylenol. We are now almost into the third year of this epidemic.

EXAMINING DOCTOR: Unfortunately President Reagan has threatened to veto. As you know, he's gone on record as being unalterably and irrevocably opposed to anything that might be construed as an endorsement of homosexuality. Naturally, this has slowed things down.

EMMA: Naturally. It looks like we've got a pretty successful stalemate going on here.

EXAMINING DOCTOR: Well, that's not what we're here to discuss today, is it?

EMMA: I don't think I'm going to enjoy hearing what I think I'm about to hear. But go ahead. At your own peril.
EXAMINING DOCTOR: We have decided to reject your application for funding.

EMMA: Oh? I would like to hear your reasons.

EXAMINING DOCTOR: We felt the direction of your thinking was imprecise and unfocused.

EMMA: Could you be a little more precise?

EXAMINING DOCTOR: I beg your pardon?

EMMA: You don't know what's going on any more than I do. My guess is as good as anybody's. Why are you blocking my efforts?

EXAMINING DOCTOR: Dr. Brookner, since you first became involved with this—and we pay tribute to you as a pioneer, one of the few courageous pioneers—there have been other investigators... Quite frankly, it's no longer just your disease, though you seem to think it is.

EMMA: Oh, I do, do I? And you're here to take it away from me, is that it? Well, I'll let you in on a little secret, doctor. You can have it. I didn't want it in the first place. You think it's my good fortune to have the privilege of watching young men die? Oh, what's the use! What am I arguing with you for? You don't know enough medicine to treat a mouse. You don't know enough science to study boiled water. How dare you come and judge me?

EXAMINING DOCTOR: We only serve on this panel at the behest of Dr. Joost.

EMMA: Another idiot. And, by the way, a closeted homosexual who is doing everything in his power to sweep this under the rug, and I vowed I'd never say that in public. How does it always happen that all the idiots are always on your team? You guys have all the money, call the shots, shut everybody out, and then operate behind closed doors. I am taking care of more victims of this epidemic than anyone in the world. We have more accumulated test results, more data, more frozen blood samples, more experience! How can you not fund my research or invite me to participate in yours? A promising virus has already been discovered—in France. Why are we being told not to cooperate with the French? Why are you refusing to cooperate with the French? Just so you can steal a Nobel Prize? Your National Institutes of Health received my first request for research money two years ago. It took you one year just to print up application forms. It's taken you two and a half years from my first reported case just to show up here to take a look. The paltry amount of money you are making us beg for—from the four billion dollars you are given each and every year—won't come to anyone until only God knows when. Any way you add all this up, it is an unconscionable delay and has never, never existed in any other health emergency during this entire century. While something is being passed around that causes death. We are enduring an epidemic of death. Women have been discovered to have it in Africa—where it is clearly transmitted heterosexually. It is only a question of time. We could all be dead before you do anything. You want my patients? Take them! TAKE THEM! (She starts hurling her folders and papers at him, out into space.) Just do something for them! You're fucking right I'm imprecise and unfocused. And you are all idiots!
Scene Thirteen

A big empty room, which will be the organization's new offices. Bruce is walking around by himself. Ned comes in from upstairs.

Ned: This is perfect for our new offices. The room upstairs is just as big. And it's cheap.

Bruce: How come, do you think?

Ned: Didn't Tommy tell you? After he found it, he ran into the owner in a gay bar who confessed, after a few beers, his best friend is sick. Did you see us on TV picketing the mayor yesterday in all that rain?

Bruce: Yes.

Ned: How'd we look?

Bruce: All wet.

Ned: He's got four more hours to go. Our letter threatened if he didn't meet with us by the end of the day we'd escalate the civil disobedience. Mel found this huge straight black guy who trained with Martin Luther King. He's teaching us how to tie up the bridge and tunnel traffic. Don't worry—a bunch of us are doing this on our own.

Bruce: Tommy got the call.

Ned: Tommy? Why didn't you tell me? When did they call?

Bruce: This morning.

Ned: When's the meeting?

Bruce: Tomorrow.

Ned: You see. It works! What time?

Bruce: Eight a.m.

Ned: For the mayor I'll get up early.

Bruce: We can only bring ten people. Hiram's orders.

Ned: Who's going?

Bruce: The Community Council sends two, the Network sends two, the Task Force sends two, we send two, and two patients.

Ned: I'll pick you up at seven thirty and we can share a cab.

Bruce: You remember we elected Tommy executive director.

Ned: I'm going.

Bruce: We can only bring two.

Ned: You just call Hiram and tell him we're bringing three.

Bruce: The list of names has already been phoned in. It's too late.

Ned: So I'll just go. What are they going to do? Kick me out? Already phoned in? Too late? Why is everything so final? Why is all this being done behind my back? How dare you make this decision without consulting me?

Bruce: Ned...

Ned: I wrote that letter, I got sixty gay organizations to sign it, I organized the picketing when the mayor wouldn't respond, that meeting is mine! It's happening because of me! It took me twenty-one months to arrange it and, God damn it, I'm going to go!

Bruce: You're not the whole organization.
NED: What does that mean? Why didn't Tommy tell me?

BRUCE: I told him not to.

NED: You what?

BRUCE: I wanted to poll the board.

NED: Behind my back—what kind of betrayal is going on behind my back? I'm on the board, you didn't poll me. I am going to that meeting representing this organization that I have spent every minute of my life fighting for and that was started in my living room, or I quit!

BRUCE: I told them I didn't think you'd accept their decision.

NED: (As it sinks in.) You would let me quit? You didn't have to poll the board. If you wanted to take me, you'd take me. I embarrass you.

BRUCE: Yes, you do. The mayor's finally meeting with us and we all feel we now have a chance to—

NED: A chance to kiss his ass?

BRUCE: We want to work from the inside now that we have the contact.

NED: It won't work. Did you get this meeting by kissing his ass? He's the one person most responsible for letting this epidemic get so out of control. If he'd responded with one ounce of compassion when we first tried to reach him, we'd have saved two years. You'll see ... We have over half a million dollars. The Times is finally writing about us. Why are you willing to let me go when I've been so effective? When you need me most?

BRUCE: You ... you're a bully. If the board doesn't agree with you, you always threaten to leave. You never listen to us. I can't work with you anymore.

NED: And you're strangling this organization with your fear and your conservatism. The organization I promised everyone would fight for them isn't fighting at all.

BRUCE: Maybe it's become what it wanted to become. Maybe that's all it could become. You can't turn something into something it doesn't want to become. We just feel you can't tell people how to live.

NED: Drop that! Just drop it! The cases are still doubling every six months. Of course we have to tell people how to live. Or else there won't be any people left! Did you ever consider it could get so bad they'll quarantine us or put us in camps?

BRUCE: Oh, they will not.

NED: It's happened before. It's all happened before. History is worth shit. I swear to God I now understand ... Is this how so many people just walked into gas chambers? But at least they identified themselves to each other and to the world.

BRUCE: You can't call people gay who don't want to be.

NED: Bruce—after you're dead, it doesn't make any difference.

BRUCE: (Takes a letter out of his pocket.) The board wanted me to read you this letter. "We are circulating this letter widely among people of judgment and good sense in our community. We take this action to try to combat your damage, wrought, so far as we can see, by your having no scruples whatever. You are on a colossal ego trip we must curtail. To manipulate fear,
as you have done repeatedly in your ‘merchandising’ of this epidemic, is to us the gesture of barbarism. To exploit the deaths of gay men, as you have done in publications all over America, is to us an act of inexcusable vandalism. And to attempt to justify your bursts of outrageous temper as ‘part of what it means to be Jewish’ is past our comprehending. And, after years of liberation, you have helped make sex dirty again for us—terrible and forbidden. We are more angry at you than ever in our lives toward anyone. We think you want to lead us all. Well, we do not want you to. In accordance with our by-laws as drawn up by Weeks, Frankel, Levinstein, Mr. Ned Weeks is hereby removed as a director. We beg that you leave us quietly and not destroy us and what good work we manage despite your disapproval. In closing, please know we always welcome your input, advice, and help.”

(bruce tries to band ned the letter. ned won’t take it. bruce tries to put it in ned’s breast pocket. ned deflects bruce’s band.)

ned: I belong to a culture that includes Proust, Henry James, Tchaikovsky, Cole Porter, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Marlowe, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Tennessee Williams, Byron, E. M. Forster, Lorca, Auden, Francis Bacon, James Baldwin, Harry Stack Sullivan, John Maynard Keynes, Dag Hammarskjöld … These are not invisible men. Poor Bruce. Poor frightened Bruce. Once upon a time you wanted to be a soldier. Bruce, did you know that an openly gay Englishman was as responsible as any man for winning the Second World War? His name was Alan Turing and he cracked the Germans’ Enigma code so the Allies knew in advance what the Nazis were going to do—and when the war was over he committed suicide he was so hounded for being gay. Why don’t they teach any of this in the schools? If they did, maybe he wouldn’t have killed himself and maybe you wouldn’t be so terrified of who you are. The only way we’ll have real pride is when we demand recognition of a culture that isn’t just sexual. It’s all there—all through history we’ve been there; but we have to claim it, and identify who was in it, and articulate what’s in our minds and hearts and all our creative contributions to this earth. And until we do that, and until we organize ourselves block by neighborhood by city by state into a united visible community that fights back, we’re doomed. That’s how I want to be defined: as one of the men who fought the war. Being defined by our cocks is literally killing us. Must we all be reduced to becoming our own murderers? Why couldn’t you and I, Bruce Niles and Ned Weeks, have been leaders in creating a new definition of what it means to be gay? I blame myself as much as you. Bruce, I know I’m an asshole. But, please, I beg you, don’t shut me out.

(bruce starts to leave then stops and comes to ned. he puts his band on his cheek, perhaps kisses him, and then leaves him standing alone.)

Scene Fourteen

ned’s apartment. felix is sitting on the floor. he has been eating junk food. ned comes in carrying a bag of groceries.

ned: Why are you sitting on the floor?

felix: I fell down trying to get from there to here.

ned: Let’s put you to bed.
FELIX: Don't touch me! I'm so ugly. I cannot stand it when you look at my body.

NED: Did you go to chemo today?

FELIX: Yes. I threw it all up. You don't have to let me stay here with you. This is horrible for you.


FELIX: Emma says a cure won't come until the next century. Emma says it's years till a vaccine, which won't do me any good anyway. Emma says the incubation period might be up to three, ten, twenty years.

NED: Emma says you've got to eat.

FELIX: I looked at all my datebooks and no one else I slept with is sick. That I know of. Maybe it was you. Maybe you've been a carrier for twenty years. Or maybe now you only have three years to go.

NED: Felix, we don't need to do this again to each other.

FELIX: Whoever thought you'd die from having sex?

NED: Did Emma also tell you that research at the NIH has finally started. That something is now possible. We have to hope.

FELIX: Oh, do we?

NED: Yes, we do.

FELIX: And how am I supposed to do that? You Jewish boys who think you can always make everything right—that the world can always be a better place. Did I tell you the Times is running an editorial this Sunday entitled “The Slow Response”? And you're right: I didn't have anything to do with it.

NED: Why are you doing this? Why are you eating this shit? Twinkies, potato chips... You know how important it is to watch your nutrition. You're supposed to eat right.

FELIX: I have a life expectancy of ten more minutes I'm going to eat what I want to eat. Ned, it's going to get messier any day now and I don't want to make you see it.

NED: Nobody makes me do anything; you should know that better than anybody else by now. What are you going to do? Sit on the floor for the rest of your life? We have a bed in the other room. You could listen to those relaxation tapes we bought you three months ago. You haven't used them at all. Do you hear me?

FELIX: Yes, I hear you. That guy David who sold you the pig on Bleecker Street finally died. He took forever. They say he looked like someone out of Auschwitz. Do you hear me?

NED: No. Are you ready to get up yet? And eat something?

FELIX: No!—I've had over forty treatments. No! I've had three, no four different types of chemo. No!—I've had interferon, a couple kinds. I've had two different experimentalists. Emma has spent more time on me than anyone else. None of it has done a thing. I've had to go into the hospital four times—and please God don't make me go back into the hospital until I die. My illness has cost my—no! The New York Times's insurance company over $300,000. Eighty-five percent of us are dead after two years, Alexander; it gets higher after three.
Emma has lost so many patients they call her Dr. Death. You cannot force the goddamn sun to come out.

**NED:** Felix, I am so sick of statistics, and numbers, and body counts, and how-manys, and Emma; and every day, Felix, there are only more numbers, and fights—I am so sick of fighting, and bragging about fighting, and everybody’s stupidity, and blindness, and intransigence, and guilt trips. You can’t eat the food? Don’t eat the food. Take your poison. I don’t care. You can’t get up off the floor—fine, stay there. I don’t care. Fish—fish is good for you; we don’t want any of that, do we? *(Item by item, he throws the food on the floor.)* No green salad. No broccoli; we don’t want any of that, no, sir. No bread with seven grains. Who would ever want any milk? You might get some calcium in your bones. *(The carton of milk explodes when it hits the floor.)* You want to die, Felix? Die!

*(Ned retreats to a far corner. After a moment, Felix crawls through the milk, and with extreme effort makes his way across to Ned. They fall into each other’s arms.)*

Felix, please don’t leave me.

**Scene Fifteen**

**BEN’S office. Felix, with great effort, walks toward him. Though he looks terrible, felix has a bit of his old twinkle.**

**FELIX:** Thank you for seeing me. Your brother and I are lovers. I’m dying and I need to make a will. Oh, I know Neddie hasn’t been talking to you; our excuse is we’ve sort of been preoccupied. It’s a little hard on us, isn’t it, his kind of love, because we disappoint him so. But it is love. I hope you know that.

I haven’t very much time left. I want to leave everything to Ned. I’ve written it all down.

**BEN:** *(Taking the piece of paper from felix and studying it.)* Do you have any family, Felix?

**FELIX:** My parents are dead. I had a wife.

**BEN:** You had a wife?

**FELIX:** Yes. Here’s the divorce. *(He hands ben another piece of paper.)* And I have a son. Here’s . . . She has custody. *(He hands over yet another piece of paper.)*

**BEN:** Does she know you’re ill?

**FELIX:** Yes. I called and we’ve said our goodbyes. She says she doesn’t want anything from me. She was actually rather pleasant. Although she wouldn’t let me talk to my boy.

**BEN:** How is my brother?

**FELIX:** Well, he blames himself, of course, for everything from my dying to the state of the entire world. But he’s not talking so much these days, believe it or not. You must be as stubborn as he is—not to have called.

**BEN:** I think of doing it every day. I’m sorry I didn’t know you were ill. I’ll call him right away.

**FELIX:** He’s up at Yale for Gay Week. He says he can’t believe it.

**BEN:** He tried to kill himself there when he was a freshman.

**FELIX:** He just said he was very unhappy because he thought he was the only gay man in the world. He’s been thrown out of his organization.
BEN: Felix, I wish we could have met sooner.

FELIX: I haven’t much, except a beautiful piece of land on the Cape in Wellfleet on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Ned doesn’t know about it. It was to have been a surprise, we’d live there together in the house he always wanted. I also have an insurance policy with the Times. I’m a reporter for the New York Times.

BEN: You work for the Times?

FELIX: Yes. Fashion. La-de-da. It’s meant to come to my next of kin. I’ve specified Ned. I’m afraid they might not give it to him.

BEN: If he is listed as the beneficiary, they must.

FELIX: But what if they don’t?

BEN: I assure you I will fight to see that he gets it.

FELIX: I was hoping you’d say that. Can I sign my will now, please, in case I don’t have time to see you again?

BEN: This will be quite legal. We can stop by one of my associates’ offices and get it properly witnessed as you sign it.

FELIX: My little piece of paper is legal? Then why did you go to law school?

BEN: I sometimes wonder. You know, Felix, I think of leaving here, too, because I don’t think anybody is listening to me either. And I set all this up as well. I understand that the virus has finally been discovered in Washington.

FELIX: The story is they couldn’t find it, so after fifteen months they stole it from the French and renamed it. With who knows how many millions of us now exposed . . . Oh, there is not a good word to be said for anybody’s behavior in this whole mess. Then could you help me get a taxi, please? I have to get to the airport.

BEN: The airport?

FELIX: I’m going to Rumania to see their famous woman doctor. A desperation tactic, Tommy would call it. Does flying Bucharest Airlines inspire you with any confidence?

Scene Sixteen

FELIX’S hospital room. FELIX lies in bed. NED enters.

FELIX: I should be wearing something white.

NED: You are.

FELIX: It should be something Perry Ellis ran up for me personally.

NED: (As Felix presses a piece of rock into his hand.) What’s this?

FELIX: From my trip. I forgot to give it to you. This is a piece of rock from Dracula’s castle.

NED: Reminded you of me, did it?

FELIX: To remind you of me. Please learn to fight again.

NED: I went to a meeting at the bishop’s. All the gay leaders were there, including Bruce and Tommy. I wasn’t allowed in. I went into the men’s room of the rectory and the bishop came in and as we stood there peeing side by side I screamed at him, “What kind of house of God are we in?”
FELIX: Don't lose that anger. Just have a little more patience and forgiveness. For yourself as well.

NED: What am I ever going to do without you?

FELIX: Finish writing something. Okay?

NED: Okay.

FELIX: Promise?

NED: I promise.

FELIX: Okay. It better be good.

(BEN enters the scene.)

Hello, Ben.

BEN: Hello, Felix.

(Before NED can do more than register his surprise at seeing BEN, EMMA enters and comes to the side of the bed.)

FELIX: Emma, could we start, please.

EMMA: We are gathered here in the sight of God to join together these two men. They love each other very much and want to be married in the presence of their family before Felix dies. I can see no objection. This is my hospital, my church. Do you, Felix Turner, take Ned Weeks—

FELIX: Alexander.

EMMA: ... to be your ...

FELIX: My lover. My lover. I do.

NED: I do.

(FELIX is dead. EMMA, who has been holding FELIX's hand and monitoring his pulse, places his hand on his body. She leaves. Two orderlies enter and push the hospital bed, through all the accumulated mess, offstage.)

He always wanted me to take him to your new house in the country. Just the four of us.

BEN: Ned, I'm sorry. For Felix... and for other things.

NED: Why didn't I fight harder! Why didn't I picket the White House, all by myself if nobody would come. Or go on a hunger strike. I forgot to tell him something. Felix, when they invited me to Gay Week at Yale, they had a dance... In my old college dining hall, just across the campus from that tiny freshman room where I tried to kill myself because I thought I was the only gay man in the world—they had a dance. Felix, there were six hundred young men and women there. Smart, exceptional young men and women.

(Pause.)

Thank you, Felix.

(After a moment, BEN crosses to NED, and somehow they manage to kiss and embrace and hold on to each other.)

THE END
Afterword

A copy of this letter was given to every member of the audience as they left the theater after the 2011 Broadway revival.

A Letter from Larry Kramer

PLEASE KNOW

Thank you for coming to see our play.

Please know that everything in The Normal Heart happened. These were and are real people who lived and spoke and died, and are presented here as best I could. Several more have died since, including Bruce, whose name was Paul Popham, and Tommy, whose name was Rodger McFarlane and who became my best friend, and Emma, whose name was Dr. Linda Laubenstein of New York University Medical Center. She died after a return bout of polio and another trip to an iron lung. Rodger, after building three gay/AIDS agencies from the ground up, committed suicide in despair. On his deathbed at Memorial, Paul called me (we’d not spoken since our last fight in this play) and told me to never stop fighting.

Four members of the original cast died as well, including my dear sweet friend Brad Davis, the original Ned, whom I knew from practically the moment he got off the bus from Florida, a shy kid intent on becoming a fine actor, which he did.

Please know that AIDS is a worldwide plague.

Please know that no country in the world, including this one, especially this one, has ever called it a plague, or dealt with it as a plague.

Please know that there is no cure.

Please know that after all this time the amount of money being spent to find a cure is still miniscule, still almost invisible, still impossible to locate in any national health budget, and still totally uncoordinated.

Please know that here in America case numbers continue to rise in every category. In much of the rest of the world, like Russia, India, Southeast Asia, and in Africa, the numbers of the infected and the dying are so grotesquely high they are rarely acknowledged.

Please know that all efforts at prevention and education continue their unending record of abject failure.

Please know that there is no one in charge of this plague. This is a war for which there is no general and for which there has never been a general. How can you win a war with no one in charge?

Please know that beginning with Ronald Reagan (who would not say the word “AIDS” publicly for seven years), every single president has said nothing and done nothing, or in the case of the current president, says the right things and then doesn’t do them.

Please know that most medications for HIV/AIDS are inhumanly expensive and that government funding for the poor to obtain them is dwindling and often unavailable.

Please know that pharmaceutical companies are among the most evil and greedy nightmares ever loosed on humankind. What “research” they embark upon is calculated only toward finding newer drugs to keep us, just barely, from dying, but not to make us better or, God forbid, cured.

Please know that an awful lot of people have needlessly died and will continue to needlessly die because of any and all of the above.
Please know that as I write this the world has suffered at the very least some seventy-five million infections and thirty-five million deaths. When the action of the play that you have just seen begins, there were forty-one.

I have never seen such wrongs as this plague, in all its guises, represents, and continues to say about us all.

—Larry Kramer

New York, July 2011