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Night of the Cure

TUCKER, late 20s.

ELI, mid-40s.

CHRIS, mid-30s

Setting: A heavy door. Above, a flickering neon sign that reads “Touche” or “Sidetrack.” Something not nearly clever enough.

Time: Six months from now, 12:23 am.

*Note: Though this play features gay people, the actors shouldn’t “look” gay, by whatever standards you have in your head. In fact, the less “gay-seeming,” the better: overweight, untucked, uncertain, etc. Sweet in their way. This is the future.

LIGHTS RISE on the door. Painted black, dead bolt. This door has been around for decades. This door has seen things. Loud music—*buckets! buckets! buckets!*—thumps from inside.

Two street-lamps make two pools of light on either side of the stage. Night above, field of stars.

TUCKER stands in front of the door. Oddly he lays his HAND on the door. Like feeling a pulse.

ELI approaches.

ELI: You the line?

TUCKER: Gotta be hundreds of guys inside. A thousand maybe. Every bar around here’s the same way.

ELI: Big night.

TUCKER: The biggest.

ELI: I remember when this place was the only place. It was like Jiffy Lube. You could be in and out in 20 minutes.

TUCKER: They’ve got the drug, you know. The cure. All the bars do.

ELI: Another pill. Lovely.

TUCKER: Get everybody in one night. So the virus can't mutate. Just doesn't seem safe.

ELI: "Safe."

TUCKER: Guys go in, nobody comes out. It'll be the 1970s all over again.

ELI: And you were how old?

TUCKER: I've seen pictures.

ELI: I was in the pictures.

TUCKER: I thought I recognized you.

ELI: Back when we had sequins. You do remember sequins?

TUCKER: I have a bedazzler.

ELI: Good because for a moment I doubted. (beat, heading to open the door) No use putting it off. This is supposed to be a celebration. I bet there are fireworks.

TUCKER: (reluctant, unmoving) I can't.

ELI: Why not?

TUCKER: I've been standing out here for hours.

ELI: Nobody bites. Hard.

TUCKER: This is where we met. This was his place.

ELI: Oh, I see. Ghosts. Well, if he's here, he'll be happy to see you. He won't even remember what you did to him.

TUCKER: What if he feels nothing?

ELI: Then you don't even have to see him. (going to open the door again) Now. Come on. You're young enough to be my inner-child. I'll lead.

TUCKER: What if he's not even here? What if he's...

ELI: We'll find him. What was his name?

CHRIS kicks open the door and ENTERS, carrying two drinks in red plastic cups. He walks up to Tucker. (Chris does not see Eli. Eli does not see Chris.)

TUCKER: Chris.

CHRIS: (to Tucker) Hey I was wondering where you went.

ELI: (spooked) "Chris."

CHRIS: (to Tucker) I thought you vanished.

TUCKER: (to Chris) I didn't move.

ELI: You coming kid?

Tucker is silent, seeing only this memory.

CHRIS: Tucker, right? Tuck? That OK?

Eli: Suit yourself.

Eli EXITS through the door.

Chris and Tucker on stage. The music raises in volume. The street-lamp light skitters about, like a club mirrorball. We're now INSIDE in the club. Chris and Tucker kinda shout at each other to be heard.

TUCKER: I wasn't sure you were coming back. When people tell me they're "getting a drink", they mean, "You have weird teeth and spit when you talk and goodbye."

CHRIS: You were wrong.

TUCKER: (avoiding his gaze, looking up) So... cargo netting.

CHRIS: Do you typically come into bars and look up?

TUCKER: I work at the planetarium. I'm better with up. (beat) Jerry Garcia's face lasered across the universe. That's me. I hate it actually.

CHRIS: I used to think stars were lonely. Out in the space, so far apart, some of them already gone. Just light, streaming out.

TUCKER: —oh yeah, they exhaust their hydrogen, we had a thing on that—

CHRIS: When I was a kid, I used to climb on the roof of our house to make sure each star got seen. One by one. Before they went dark.

TUCKER: That's beautiful.

CHRIS: "Beautiful." Nobody I know says that.

TUCKER: So what happened? On the roof, did you get to all of them?

CHRIS: No. I fell. 24 feet to pavement. My forearm was a bright white splinter. Wanna see?

TUCKER: I'm goosy around blood n stuff.

CHRIS: I'm an EMT—my whole day is splinters.

TUCKER: I've been doing these fucking star-shows for two years.

CHRIS: So what have you learned?

TUCKER: Just because everybody's looking up doesn't mean you can have sex in a planetarium. People do, you know.

CHRIS: That's it? Two years?

TUCKER: More than half of stars are bound to other stars. By gravity. So they're not alone. Millions of miles of space between them, they still feel a pull.

CHRIS: See, now that's beautiful.

Chris LAYS his hand on Tucker's chest. (This should echo the hand motion we saw from Tucker in at the start.) This tenderness Tucker did not expect. The music vanishes. The lights CENTER on them.

TUCKER: That feels...amazing.

CHRIS (CONT'D): Can we just skip the getting to know you part?

TUCKER: And the me-buying-you-a-book-and-spending-two-hours-trying-to-write-the-inscription part?

Chris untucks Tucker's shirt.

CHRIS: What about the three-date minimum-before-reckless-touching part?

TUCKER: That was a part?

CHRIS: I don't feel like I have a lot of time.

TUCKER: I have weird teeth and I spit when I talk and you didn't say anything.

CHRIS: There's something you need to know.

TUCKER: (unbuttoning Chris's shirt) You have problems with intimacy. You have to have a piece of leather somewhere in the room at all times. I don't care. I'll work around. It's been a long time since I met someone, I mean someone I liked, like astronomically, and—

CHRIS: I'm positive.

Tucker FLINCHES.

Chris registers this, re-buttons his shirt. Total shift of mood.

TUCKER: I'm sorry. I didn't...

CHRIS: I see where this is going.

Chris slowly BACKS away from Tucker, heading off-stage, fading out...

TUCKER: You didn't give me a chance. Four years ago, you saw my fear and left, like light streaming away.

The street-lights RETURN to position. Music returns behind the door. It's present time again.

TUCKER (CONT'D): I felt a pull then that I haven't felt since. There's time now, isn't there. More time.

Tucker goes to lay his hand on the door, except he GRABS the knobs and opens it. He enters.

As soon as it shuts, Eli RE-ENTERS the stage through the door. Two pills in hand.

ELI: OK kid, it took some legwork but I got us two of them. They're giant horse pills actually—

(sees Tucker is missing. Disappointment.)

Chris ENTERS, stage-left.

ELI (CONT'D): ...You.

CHRIS: You can't get rid of me.

ELI: You look just like the last time I saw you.

CHRIS: I only ever had one good outfit. What do you have?

ELI: (removing two gleaming, white PILLS) They're giving them out. In bowls. Like dinner mints.

CHRIS: You got two.

ELI: For me...and a friend.

CHRIS: (heading to the door) Good for you.

ELI: Chris. I haven't been with anyone since. Us.

CHRIS: Stop punishing yourself. It's boring.

ELI: I felt like poison.

CHRIS: You were poison. That's how the disease worked. Except you were lucky. You never got sick.

ELI: But I couldn't touch anyone. I was a plate of glass, walking around. Every step sent up a crack.

CHRIS: And now?

ELI: Like an uncomfortable old chair no one uses. The last of a set.

CHRIS: Do you interior decorate all your feelings?

ELI: I came tonight to find you.

CHRIS: Our old place. Can't believe it's still standing.

ELI: To tell you I'm sorry.

CHRIS: But I'm not here, kiddo. I'm not anywhere. I didn't make it. T-cells dropped to zero and hung out. You know what got me? Liver disease. Like my *grandfather*. (beat) So your little apology? Beam it out there... (point into the night)

ELI: Were you alone when it happened? Did you have anybody?

CHRIS: Look—take your little cure and do me the favor of forgetting all about me. Erase your guilt, the ghosts, erase me.

ELI: If I start to erase where does it stop?

CHRIS: It doesn't.

Bang: Tucker RE-ENTERS through the door, back outside. Sweaty. He carries two sparklers.

This time, Tucker doesn't see Chris.

TUCKER: You were right. They've got fireworks. Major fire hazard, but whatever.

ELI: Did you find who you were looking for?

TUCKER: I went through and looked. At everybody, one by one.

CHRIS: That was my line.

TUCKER: He wasn't there. Then I realized everybody else was looking too. But they weren't looking to see who didn't make it. They were looking to see who did. It's like: you don't really see night when you look up. You see stars.

Tucker gives Eli one of the sparklers. He takes out a lighter.

ELI: Don't be nice to me. I'm a bad person.

TUCKER: You're a person.

Eli LAYS his hand on Tucker's chest. The move strikes Tucker: a recognition.

ELI: You have no idea.

TUCKER: This isn't nice. This is company. Come on, this is your inner child speaking.

Tucker lights the sparklers. Lights start to fade on Chris at the door.

CHRIS: Night boys.

The two pools of light from the street-lamps INCH toward each other.

ELI: Look at that.

Just sparklers: two stars and their gravities. The two men swallow their pills.