

THE SONS OF TANTALUS,
POST 'PSYCOPATHIA SEXUALIS'
DEC 2007

CHARACTERS.

ETHAN, a young, college-aged musician.

BISHOP FARNES, a middle-aged Mormon ecclesiastical leader.

ISAAC, the son of a Mormon general authority.

MIKE, a Navy SEAL, and a convert to Mormonism.

ASHLEY, an actress; friend of Ethan's.

TANTALUS, a Greek demigod.

COLBY, Isaac and Ethan's "home teacher."

ACT I

SCENE I

The Present Era.

The set is simple. There's a formal-looking table on the left side of the stage, with three chairs around it, and a lamp on a stand just left of it. Behind the desk, there's a free-standing chalkboard at an angle. Ideally, behind them is a large, white screen, which should be utilized to enhance the context of each scene (i.e., a picture of the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City might be appropriate—or Isaac's cabin, etc.)

Ethan stands. He's meant to be someone that most people might relate to, especially gay men of a religious background. He's a clean-cut, good-looking man with short hair, a slight five-o'clock shadow, and a smart, Mormon smile. There is a certain naivety to him that is almost uncomfortable. He's about twenty-five years old, and a student at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, whence the story takes place.

Ethan. *(To the audience.)* I want to make sure you know before we begin here: there isn't any sex or nudity. I think I swear once, but it's only because I'm really upset. Mormons don't swear. We never get naked in front of other people, unless we're married, or it's in a locker room, or at the doctor's. We don't drink coffee, tea, or alcohol; we don't smoke. We're not even supposed to masturbate. *(A beat.)* A lot of us kill

ourselves, though. Not a huge percentage, but—

A light shines on the other side of the stage. Bishop Farnes is standing at a chalkboard. He is a tall, white gentleman, dressed in a conservative suit—grays, blues, or blacks, and pinstriped. He has no facial hair, and is balding. He's about fifty-five years old. The kind of guy that is educated, married, with six kids, and living in the suburbs: a statuesque and safe neighborhood on the hills of the Wasatch front, within walking distance from one of the handful of Mormon temples in the area. He is Ethan's ecclesiastical leader, in charge of over-seeing the spiritual welfare of about two-hundred single men and women Ethan's age in what is called a "ward"—a medium-sized unit of the LDS Church.

There is a large picture of Jesus above him, pictures of current Mormon prophets under the picture of Jesus, and an imaginary circle of eager students in front of him—he's teaching Sunday school. This movement from Ethan is abrupt—almost as if to suggest that Ethan is in his class.

Bishop Farnes. For our lesson today, I have decided to talk a little on the love of God. *(He writes it on the board.)* The Greek word agape is translated as the "pure love of Christ"; it is charity. C.S. Lewis writes that it is different than philo or eros, which the Greeks often used to describe other forms of love—filial or erotic love. *(He writes these words on the board as well.)* When Jesus questions Peter at the end of John's account, he asks Peter twice if he loves him with this word: agape. "Do you love me?" He asks. "Do you love me?" Agape.

Lights up. We see Ethan, Mike and Isaac in the "living room" of Isaac's family cabin in the Uintah Mountains of Utah. Isaac is the same age as Ethan. He's handsome. He comes from a very privileged background. Mike is about thirty-one years old. He is a very attractive, Navy SEAL, with the physique to show for it.

Ethan and Isaac are facing each other, sitting at the table. Isaac has an LDS "quad" in front of him, as if he had just read the story of David and Jonathan from the Old Testament. Mike is behind them at a small portable counter, making a bowl of pasta.

Ethan. Isaac, I don't think that David and Jonathan were gay.

Isaac. Do you want me to read it to you again?

Ethan. They kissed each other, but—

Isaac. They kissed each other, and held each other, and fell on each other's necks—

Ethan. David was happy—Jonathan saved his life.

Isaac. And then later it says— (*Flipping through the chapters.*) Hold up, it's right here. (*Still looking.*) Give me a sec. Here it is! Chapter one of Second Samuel. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women!"

Ethan. Okay. Why does it have to mean they're gay?

Isaac. "...thy love was wonderful... passing the love of women"!

Mike. (*In search.*) Ethan, where's your pasta sauce? Cause, I can't find it anywhere.

Ethan. Nothing in the passage you just read suggests that they were gay.

Isaac. I'm not following—everything in this passage suggests that.

Mike. (*Again.*) Still looking; where oh where could it be?

Ethan. (*To Mike.*) It's not in the cupboards—

Mike. (*To himself—barely audible.*) Not in the cupboards, okay.

Ethan. (*To Isaac.*) So, they may have loved each other very much. (*A pause.*) Why do you always have to assume that they were gay?

Isaac. Well—

Ethan. (*Interrupting him.*) It's like you're saying that anytime a man feels a bond with another man—that he's gay, right? You can't believe that,

can you?

Isaac. Fine, Jonathan's gay.

We see Bishop Farnes.

Bishop Farnes. We might also note that there is a sense of redemption for Peter in Jesus' question to him. The third time, he asks Peter "Do you love me?" the word *phileo* is used. *Phileo*. It's a different kind of love. In many ways, *phileo* and *agape* seem the same—their meanings often overlap. But, *phileo* and *agape* differ in their contexts. *Agape* is the command to love all people. But, *phileo* personalizes things. It is different. It is a love that binds one person to another person.

We move back to the circumstances of the previous conversation.

Ethan. (*Somewhat indignant.*) I think we live in this stupid box, where every man has to keep to himself—keep guarded with his affections—when men in Tonga are holding hands on the street, or hugging, or touching noses, or whatever. No one will grant men any grey area—at least, not like they have for women, right? I mean, you see them in church all the time: they tickle each other's backs during sacrament meeting. And they hug, and say kind things to each other—but we never, for a second, think that they are lesbians. Now, why not? Why can they hug and kiss and cry with each other, and when two men do it, they're fags?

There is silence for a moment, then,

Mike. When I was in the Philippines last year on duty with the SEALs, there were some Filipino Marines that we were debriefing on some maneuver, and a few of them were sitting on each other's laps—one on top of the other—the guy on the seat was holding the guy on his lap across his chest. They didn't think anything of it.

Ethan. I wonder how much more healthy the world would be if we were allowed to sit on each other's laps a little more.

Lights go down on everything but Ethan.

SCENE II

Outside the Temple.

Ethan. *(To the audience. Affectionately.)* So, this is Mike. *(A pause.)* We became close very fast. There are about six temples in the Salt Lake area. Mormons are encouraged to go to the temple often, in addition to Sunday worship at a regular church house—he and I started going once a week. I so looked forward to those trips to the temple. *(He collects himself.)* “And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul... Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul... Then Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul... and David fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded... And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord.

We move to Temple Square, Salt Lake City, Utah. Ethan and Mike are just leaving from a session at the temple, dressed nicely and holding temple bags with their special clothes and scriptures. It's a beautiful, autumn day—we hear sacred Choral music playing in the background.

Ethan. *(In mid-conversation.)* Well, we could get together on Saturday morning, if you want, and look it over. But, I wouldn't worry. Professor James is usually good about turning things in late, right? *(The music changes. He stops.)* Oh, hold up! *(He listens until the chord changes and he's certain. He relaxes.)* Oh, it's the Lord's Prayer! By Nikolai Kedrov. *(A pause—taking it in.)* I sang it in high school when I was in the madrigals. *(Ethan sits. He is very quiet for a moment; contemplative.)* I had this, this really good friend named Rick Jacobsen my senior year. We sang tenor together. I always looked forward to choir practice, just because I knew he'd be there—I knew we'd get to make jokes about Mr. Taylor. Mr. Taylor was kind of a jerk, but he took us to state. First place against a bunch of really good schools. *(He looks at Mike who is standing with the sun behind him. Then, with admiration,)* I really love you, Mike. *(Mike looks down at him.)* Does that make you nervous—the I love you's, the hugs? *(Looking away.)* I know I like to hug a lot. *(A pause. Mike is a little*

astonished.) I don't want to freak you out.

Mike. Nah, I'm not freaked out. I've never really been freaked out.

Ethan. Good. Because in talking with Isaac the other night—

Mike. Except once.

Ethan. Except once? When?

Mike. It's not a big deal, Ethan.

Ethan. Tell me, when?

Mike. It was a couple of nights ago, when you were over at my house. (*He struggles, and then,*) You're not going to like this question, but I have to ask you. (*Ethan cringes. Mike sits beside him.*) Why do you tell me you love me all the time? (*A bullet has just hit Ethan's heart.*) Is it that—

Ethan. No, I'm not gay.

Mike. You're not? Well, then why?

Ethan. I don't know, Mike. Why does it have to bother you?

Mike. I just want you to be my friend, you know? Maybe, without all the hugs, the emotion, the feelings.

Ethan. How? (*A pause.*) Like, seriously. Because, I can't trust myself on this one.

Mike. What do you mean?

Ethan. You'll have to be more specific on what you mean by "be your friend."

Mike. Just, be my friend.

Ethan. Michael. Look at me. (*Mike complies.*) Can you imagine how

frustrating it is—

Mike. What is?

Ethan. And how totally alone I feel when you say that?

Mike. Say what?

Ethan. Do you honestly not know?

Mike. That I want you to be my friend?

Ethan. No. That you want me to do it on your terms. You told me a few weeks ago that you have always wanted a good friend that would let you into their heart—remember?

Mike. Yes.

Ethan. So, you've got it.

Mike. All right. I appreciate that, Ethan. (*A pause.*) So, what did I say that makes you feel alone?

Ethan. It's not what you're saying, it's what I know you mean by what you're saying. (*They look at each other. Mike is clueless. He gives a 'you-got-me' grin.*) I want to hug you—I, I, want you to know that I love you. But, you just prove it to me in actions what Isaac was saying the other night in words—that we can't be friends if it looks like it's a gay thing. I don't think that's fair. (*Facing the audience.*) Besides, who's looking anyway? It's not like the world is watching us right now and thinking: "what a bunch of fags." Okay? (*Mike nods.*) Plus, I can tell that you get excited when we're around each other, too, Mike. (*He recalls a good memory; he grins.*) It actually reminds me a little of Elder Snow; we were an extremely effective companionship; people responded to us. (*Looking at him affirmingly.*) They could tell we loved each other, and they wanted in on it.

Mike. (*Still not quite convinced.*) Okay.

Ethan. Mike, it's not a sexual thing. When I hug you, in that place, there's nothing sexual about it. (*He thinks.*) And even if there was, I'm not trying to get you to—you know?—I'm not coming on to you. Elder Snow and I were effective missionaries because we loved each other so much, and we weren't afraid to show it to other people. (*Looking down, with shy hope.*) I always thought that it gave us more power to be a force for good.

Mike. I guess I felt used. Like you were getting off on it or something.

Ethan. You mean the other night? (*He studies him. He is stunned.*) Really?

Mike. Yes.

Ethan. You felt like I was getting off on it?

Mike. Yes, Ethan. (*Ethan pulls back and is quiet—he is genuinely embarrassed, in deep thought over the implications. Then, after a few moments,*) It's okay. It just freaked me out a little.

Ethan. (*Almost in tears; he is horrified at what this might suggest about himself—more specifically to Mike, but also in general. For Ethan, within himself, the possibility of his homosexuality is not revelatory anymore.*) Mike, I am so embarrassed. Whatever signal I gave—I didn't mean it to—

Mike. It's okay. (*A pause.*) Look, I'm over it.

Ethan. (*Collecting himself.*) Why don't we make a compromise?

Mike. What's that?

Ethan. (*Being purposely facetious.*) Where two people reach an agreement.

Mike. (*He smiles.*) No, what's the compromise?

Ethan. If we're both uncomfortable, it's going to be hard for both of us to be good friends—especially for me. And that's what you want, right? To be good friends? (*A pause.*) Because how fair is that, that I have to hold

back how I feel all the time?

Mike. (*A side thought.*) I think if you had a girlfriend or something.

Ethan. Just think of it like David and Jonathan.

Mike. Maybe. But, I don't think I can do it anymore.

Ethan. Why?

Mike. To be honest, Denise and I haven't been doing very well lately. We've had a few fights. (*A pause.*) Part of the reason is you. She doesn't like that we're spending so much time together. She didn't even want me to come with you to the temple this morning. So, we're probably going to have to stop going together, at least for a while.

Ethan. (*Devastated.*) How long?

Mike. Well, I think we need to down it to once a month, maybe less.

Ethan. (*Even more devastated.*) Mike, please don't take that away.

Mike. Ethan—

Ethan. Why is she upset with me because we're going to the temple?

Mike. She's upset with me because I'm not spending enough time with her. You're just in the middle of it. She doesn't like me to go out with friends when there's so much to take care of at home—I mean, you're single. I'm a full time student, I'm in the military, I've got three kids.

Ethan. Mike, I'm so sorry.

Mike. Don't say you're sorry.

Ethan. How bad is it—at home?

Mike. Just normal marriage stuff, I guess—I don't want to talk about it, really.

Ethan. (*After a few moments.*) Can I ask you...?

Mike. What?

Ethan. (*He struggles, thinking for a moment. This is very hard for Ethan, in the sense that he feels duty-bound to extend to Mike the 'best' answer, even though it will lead to a stronger sense of their separation—a kind which Ethan has come to appreciate and find helpful.*) Well, I mean... are you... are you reading the scriptures together?

Mike. Sometimes.

Ethan. How often?

Mike. I don't know, once a week.

Ethan. Well, why don't you try reading the scriptures with her every night? And saying a prayer together before you go to bed? The family that prays together, right? My mission president used to tell me that it is better to be one with your companion than to be right. (*Mike is skeptical, but Ethan continues, gaining confidence and momentum as he advances this very common, Mormon prescription.*) Look, Mike, will you just try it? I promise, you'll notice a difference in your life and in your marriage. Just read the scriptures every day and pray with her. In fact, pray for her so she can hear it. If it doesn't work, I'll take your whole family out to dinner at Baci's. (*A pause.*) I'm serious, if you don't start noticing an improvement in the general sense of your household within two weeks.

Mike. Okay.

SCENE III

With Confidence.

Ethan. (*To the audience.*) I believe I can communicate with God when I pray. And I believe that God responds. We're taught to pray often, even over the little things. It has convinced me that, at least, there's something out there responding to me—call it what you like. That night, I started to pray for Mike and Denise, and for their family. But, we never

went again after that morning.

Ashley enters with energy, almost interrupting Ethan. He joins her at the table. She is in her early twenties—an African-American friend of Ethan’s, and a full-time student in the Actors’ Training Program at the University of Utah. She’s spunky, energetic, compassionate, and honest—full of energy and wise to ways of the world.

Ashley. So, what’s the matter? Is it about Mike?

Ethan. We bumped into each other.

Ashley. What happened?

Ethan. We skipped our morning classes—he never skips his morning classes. *(A pause.)* He told me that he has been feeling a spiritual change in his life, since he started reading the scriptures and praying with his wife. He started to cry. *(A pause.)* I came home this afternoon and said a prayer, the longest one I think I’ve ever said. My nose started to bleed.

Ashley. Your nose started to bleed?

Ethan. I was praying pretty hard.

Ashley. *(After a moment.)* Well, what’s the problem?

We move to see Bishop Farnes in his usual place, teaching Sunday school.

Bishop Farnes. I have found—especially since I have been a Bishop—that it’s quite a challenge to convince people of your love for them. It takes help from heaven to know what to do or say to get into people’s hearts. And even when I say that, it sounds like it’s making room for a “program”—the perfect “program” for love—but I can’t even begin to offer that. Except to say what my experience has taught me—and this is my testimony—that God knows how to reach people. And if we want people to know the love of God, we have to be very proactive, while at the same time, very sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit—setting Jesus as the ultimate standard. *(He is touched.)* Do we realize how radical He was for his time? Think about it—we’ve had two thousand years to

adapt to, not only His teaching, but the way He conducted Himself in public—the way He moved in to depraved circumstances and turned the worlds of other people upside down and over to God. It must have been very radical for the people around Him—but at the same time, they who were ready—they knew it was of God, because they were sensitive to the Spirit. In the same way that we must be sensitive to the Spirit, if we want to affect other people’s lives. Because, I think most people don’t know how to accept the love of God.

We move to see Ethan and Mike on campus—the same location as the scene we saw earlier with Ethan and Ashley. Ethan is giving Mike a hug.

Ethan. I love you, Mike. *(Mike pulls away.)*

Mike. *(Hesitating.)* Right back at you, Ethan.

Ethan. What? *(Making light of it.)* Because I said, “I love you” in front of all these people? *(He smiles.)* Everyone’s looking at us, Mike. What if they think we’re gay? Oh—my—holy—hell! *(Mike is amused, which inspires Ethan more.)* What if the papers get a hold of it?

Mike. You’re, uh, being kinda silly, aren’t you?

Ethan. *(Ethan interrupts him. He gets up on the bench.)* Excuse me, world? I’d like to make an announcement. *(Shouting to the silence—nobody.)* I love Mike! This Mike! Right here! Political Science major! Navy SEAL! He’s an incredible father, an amazing student, and he’s my hero! *(He looks down at him.)* Shall I even say your last name? *(Shouting.)* That’s Wilcox! W-i-l-c-o-x! *(Mike is moved. Lights out.)*

SCENE IV

Possible Roots.

We move back to Ethan and Ashley. During this moment, we might see on the screen behind them a montage or water-color sketches (something of this sort) depicting the events of which Ethan is speaking—i.e., kids at school, Greg Louganis, etc.

Ethan. On the first day of school, after we moved to Arizona, I went to

impress everyone by doing flips on the monkey bars during recess. All the girls loved it. I was a bit of a gymnast, you know. Inspired by the 1988 Olympics. You remember that?

Ashley. I was four years old.

Ethan. Well, in diving Greg Louganis got the gold, even after hitting his head on the diving board, and totally made a comeback. (*A beat.*) So, after that, the boys in my school labeled me as a “faggot,” and it stuck. But that was just a bunch of close-minded jocks, right? It was just my reputation. I was very feminine when I was a boy.

Ashley. Ethan—

Ethan. And I heard it every day it was pounded into my head, this idea about myself: something I didn’t even know about when I first heard it.

Ashley. Ethan, listen—

Ethan. A “fag.” I didn’t know what it was. I had an idea, at least, that it wasn’t a good thing to be. It followed me all the way through high school; even when I was a missionary, I heard it again. But, “pounded”—this is the best word I can use: “pounded.” It was pounded into my head. I heard it at least once a day. At least. I’ve even calculated it. (*At this point, the images discontinue. Ethan pulls out a piece of paper and shows her the figures.*) That’s about eight-thousand times I would have heard it through growing up. Eight-thousand times I heard it from my classmates, from the kids in my church. Even my teachers.

Ashley. Are you gay, Ethan?

Ethan. (*Referring to the calculation.*) Can you not see this?

Ashley. (*She looks at it again.*) Of course, but, are you gay?

Ethan. What does that mean? I don’t know how to respond to that.

Ashley. Do you like other guys?

Ethan. I don't know. I don't know what's normal. It hurts to say "yes."

Ashley. But, do you like men? Do you want to have sex with men?

Ethan. Why do you think that?

Ashley. I'm in the Actors' Training Program. I can count on one hand my guy friends who are straight. You start to notice the signs, if you get me.

Ethan. So, you think it's true then?

Ashley. I—

Ethan. Because, what if they convinced me by pounding it into my head eight-thousand times—"you're a fag"! If everyone told you eight-thousand times something like you're special or smart, or that you'll never make it to heaven because you're black—you'd start to believe me, wouldn't you—especially if you were at a young and impressionable age?

Ashley. (*She's listening.*) Yeah?

Ethan. You know the Church used to tell black members that they couldn't receive the priesthood because they didn't have enough faith in the pre-existence, right?

Ashley. (*Annoyed.*) Ethan, come on. Of course I do. My dad was a convert before the 1978 revelation, and it was one of the hardest things for him to reconcile.

Ethan. (*Caught; a little stunned.*) Okay, I'm sorry Ash.

Ashley. It's okay, we're in Utah; I'm used to it—I guess. (*A beat.*) So, have you tried to kiss a guy before, or anything like that? Or a girl?

Ethan. The first time I ever kissed another person was prom night, senior year. Anala.

Ashley. And?

Ethan. And what? It felt wrong. We didn't even really kiss.

Ashley. Well, doesn't that clue you in?

Ethan. (*It hits him in contemplation.*) Then, there was this time when I came out of the bathroom, and Elder Cranney was lying on his stomach, icing his lower back. I almost fell over. (*She is quiet.*) I wanted to get on the floor with him, I wanted to hold him.

Ashley. (*With sensitivity.*) So, you are gay then?

Ethan. Why—Ashley—does that have to mean I'm a homosexual? (*A pause.*) It's all so silly. Everyone has a category, and I don't know what the hell to think.

Ashley. Ethan, you asked me and I'm telling you—it sounds a lot like you're gay. I mean, what else is it? You talk about Mike all the time in a way that's very—

Ethan. (*Determined.*) No. I'm not going to submit to this. This is my battle. They can call me a "faggot" all they want. The Lord has said that he will make it possible for anyone to do the thing that he has commanded, right? That's what I have to hold on to! The power of the priesthood—the power of promises from heaven—the power of modern-day prophets.

Ashley. I love you.

Ethan. You do?

Ashley. I'm having trouble getting inside your mind right now, but it's true. I love you very much. (*A pause. She gets up.*) I have to go to rehearsal.

Ethan. Wait.

He gets up and faces her. He kisses her somewhat clumsily.

Ashley. Ethan!

He kisses her again—determined to get it right. She allows it more because of shock than anything else.

Lights out on everyone but Ashley.

During this moment, we see images in dark, blue shadows of what she’s describing—particularly, the figure of Tantalus tied to a tree and the reality of his predicament. Note: I imagine that this moment will be most effective if it is played live. The actor playing Colby may play this moment well. I imagine that he would be half-naked with a “titanic” sort of look, and a very pitiful disposition that encourages our sympathy. In a sense, it is okay for this moment to be a little over the top in its sense of mystery and intrigue.

Ashley. (To the audience.) So, surprise! I get the pleasure of telling you about the story of Tantalus. It’s where we get the word “tantalize.” Zeus invites all the other Gods to a special dinner on Mount Olympus, and Tantalus takes some of the food and gives it to the humans. Well, of course, this pisses Zeus off so much that he punishes Tantalus by tying to him to a tree. His hands are bound behind him. Above him, the fruits of the gods dangle; below him, fresh water. And every time he reaches for the fruit or bends his head to take a drink, they recede. He never gets either of them. For all eternity. (A pause.) Kind of a drag, huh?

SCENE V

About Isaac.

Ethan is seen in the shadows. He is remembering a conversation that he overheard between Colby, his “home-teacher” and Bishop Farnes. Colby is a muscular, not so bright, rugby player who can be obnoxious, trendy, and a little too in to girls at times. He is a pre-med student, and very active in the Church.

They are sitting at the table, across from each other.

Colby. What do you do when you’re home teaching a gay guy?

Bishop Farnes. What did you just say?

Colby. Isaac Broden. You assigned me to be his home teacher. I was hoping you could switch it.

Bishop Farnes. He's not gay, is he?

Colby. Yeah, he is.

Bishop Farnes. His dad is a general authority.

Colby. Yeah, but he is Bishop.

Bishop Farnes. How do you know that he's gay?

Colby. He wrote me an email last week and he told me. (*He's embarrassed.*) He said that I should know if we're going to be friends.

Bishop Farnes. Did you write him back?

Colby. Yes I did. I told him whatever, as long as he respects my boundaries. (*A moment.*) But, if you want to know the truth, Bishop, if he would have been there, I probably would have floored him.

Bishop Farnes. Well, I guess it makes sense. He always got kind of uncomfortable when we'd talk about eternal marriage.

We see Ethan again.

Ethan. Eternal marriage! How it presents an enormous amount of pressure for us Mormon gay folk! Marriage—to a woman, that is—is the most important part of salvation. (*The mood changes. We see images on the screen behind him that illustrate what he's talking about in charts and graphs, arrows, and silly characters and music with a bit of a 'Leave it to Beaver' flair. He pulls out a pointer and extends it, as if to 'present' the 'material' for the audience.*) Now, according to Mormon belief, everyone in the world receives what's called a "degree of glory," after death, depending on one's faithfulness. You can achieve the "highest" degree of glory through marriage to someone of the opposite sex: the most significant act of faith in Mormonism. When we speak of humanity as children of God, we mean it literally. God's glory is His offspring. And when you die, if

you've been "sealed" together in the temples, your relationships as families: parents to children, and couples to each other—they last for eternity, but only if all in the circle keep the commandments and live faithfully. Nothing is more antithetical to the grand scheme in Mormonism than homosexuality. (*He sits down, thinking deeply for a few moments.*) My dad died six months ago. We were reminded of the eternal nature of our family at his funeral. It was supposed to be comforting.

We move abruptly back to Bishop Farnes and Colby talking about Isaac.

Bishop Farnes. Well, Colby, he hasn't been to church in three months and someone has still got to home teach him.

Ethan puts his head in his hands in despair. Then the lights come up on the scene, and we see Isaac. They are on footsteps of the Salt Lake Temple. This is meant to imply that Ethan has just finished telling Isaac the story about the conversation he overheard between Bishop Farnes and Colby. During this whole first beat, Ethan is struggling—feeling a little hopeless.

Isaac. (*To Ethan.*) It's such a beautiful temple, isn't it? My great-great grandfather helped build it. He even did some of the interior design. (*He chuckles.*) And they wonder why I'm gay. (*A pause. Looking down at him.*) You okay Ethan?

Ethan. Yeah. I'm okay. Your great-great grandfather, eh?

Isaac. Yep. Jacob Broden. His grandfather served with President Snow, and his father came out west with Brigham Young, part of the Martin handcart company.

Ethan. It goes way back, doesn't it?

Isaac. It's in my blood. And my mothers' side is from the Ricks line. Like Ricks College, now BYU-Idaho?

Ethan. I know BYU-Idaho.

Isaac. (*He sits beside Ethan.*) Guess how many come from his line? (*A*

pause.) Go on, guess.

Ethan. Six-hundred?

Isaac. Ten thousand.

Ethan. Ten thousand?

Isaac. There are ten-thousand descendants of ol' grandpa Ricks: the blessings of polygamy!

Ethan. If you want to jump-start a church.

Isaac. Most of them are serving as bishops, branch presidents, stake presidents—all over the world. I mean, a few lost sheep here and there, but all apart of this glorious dynasty!

Ethan. (*With intent.*) So, is it true? (*A pause.*) Have you decided to go with it, then? (*Isaac looks at him, not entirely sure what he's talking about.*) With boys?

Isaac. With boys what?

Ethan. To be gay.

Isaac. (*A pause—he's a little unsure how to respond. Then, he chuckles, as he tries to make light of it.*) Well, you've seen him playing rugby haven't you? (*Ethan is not laughing.*)

Ethan. Why? (*A pause.*) Do you have a boyfriend?

Isaac. No.

Ethan. Are you having sex?

Isaac. Not really. (*Ethan gives him a "not buying it" look.*) Last summer for a few weeks when I was in California. His name was Spencer.

Ethan. Oh, I knew it! (*He gets up, then faces him.*) I remember you were

being so mysterious about it, and I thought—no, he wouldn't do that, not that. He'd at least tell me!

Isaac. (*Gently.*) Ethan, that's just the beginning.

Ethan. I thought we were friends.

Isaac. I figured you didn't want to know. And, I'm right, aren't I?

Ethan. (*Another pause.*) So, have you talked to your Bishop?

Isaac. No.

Ethan. Are you going to?

Isaac. Talking to my dad was hard enough. (*A pause.*) Have you read the interview he gave for the Salt Lake Tribune?

Ethan. No.

Isaac. I wanted to kill myself. (*He looks at him.*) I wanted to put a gun to my head and blow it off.

Ethan. Are you being serious?

Isaac. I've got the interview right here. (*He goes into his bag and pulls it out.*) I keep it with me, lest I forget. (*He hands it to him.*) It's on page five. Highlighted. (*Ethan is reading. He stands up and continues, facing the audience.*) "The interviewer asked him what advice he'd give to parents who have gay children who want to bring home a partner for a weekend or a holiday." "Elder Broden asked parents with gay children to discourage them from putting their families in this awkward position." (*Ethan puts the paper down. Isaac sits beside him.*) So, what's the message, here? (*A pause.*) He's started a campaign against gay marriage. He's encouraging Mormon lobbyists to push the votes against it. He's even trying to get it on Utah's books that gay and lesbian couples will never be able to adopt children.

Ethan. I didn't know they could.

Isaac. (*Looking back at him.*) The law says that no unmarried couples are allowed to adopt. And since gay couples can't get married, they can't adopt, by default. My dad is trying to push it so that it says specifically "no gay couples"—that sort of thing.

Ethan. You can't let that get to you.

Isaac. (*He chuckles.*) Ethan, look. The Church doesn't want people like me in it—I mean, not really. Not even if we're celibate. We're an anomaly.

Ethan. That's not true, Isaac. You can be gay in the Church, you just have to keep the commandments.

Isaac. Do you know any men who are serving in the Church who aren't married—like anyone in authority? (*A pause.*) Exactly. There aren't any. So, what's the point? (*A pause.*) I could never really serve in the Church. And even if I did—like, teach Sunday School or something, sooner or later they'd figure out why I'm not married. The only place I'd have on Sundays is to come to church and smile a lot at everyone. And watch everyone with their families, and see all the women tickling the backs of their husbands during sacrament meeting or watch the men play with their kids in the hallways during Sunday school. I mean, I can't even go into this temple!

Ethan. You could go if you were celibate.

Isaac. (*He sits down and gestures with his hands.*) I had a gun in my hands. (*He hesitates, but continues with force.*) I had it in my hands, I put it in my mouth, and I pulled the trigger.

Ethan. Isaac, I can't take you seriously if you're going to joke around like this.

Isaac. (*Scooting so as to sit right beside him.*) I had a gun in my mouth, and I pulled the trigger.

Ethan. (*Looks at him intently, then realizes he's telling the truth. He slumps*

over in surrendered despair, placing his head in his hands.) Oh, Isaac.

Isaac. The safety was on.

Ethan. Why didn't you tell me?!

Isaac. I'm sorry. *(A pause.)* After the gun didn't go off, I realized how stupid and absurd this whole thing was. I started laughing. I got on the internet, downloaded a copy of my dad's interview, and started studying it. I went into his library and looked through some of the books and journals he has on Church history, and began to read all about our little dubious moments in the Church: polygamy, statements about women, the Adam-god prophecy, the priesthood ban, excommunications for feminists—you name it. When you read about some of the things the brethren said about black people—trying to understand this absurd ban—it's ludicrous. It's silly. It's human. *(A pause.)* The Church, Ethan—it's human. It's just trying to figure things out like everyone else, even my dad. *(A pause.)* So, as I sat there in my cabin, reading all of this—this hits me.

Ethan. What?

Isaac. I felt an overwhelming sense of peace—close to God for the first time in a very long time. A very, very long time. Ethan, I felt warm, supported. Everything made sense—the whole, grand picture. *(A pause.)* So, that's why I keep this with me, to remember that.

Ethan. *(After a pause.)* So, what do you mean when you say it made sense? I mean, I think I know that you mean, but—

Isaac. Everything I've just been saying. It all fit. I could breathe. No more mental gymnastics to try and force it to be perfect. I felt like I could accept the Church for the first time on its own terms, and appreciate it for what it is, without pretending.

Ethan. Yeah.

Isaac. I really don't think, Ethan, that a man can be gay—truly gay—and be a member of the Church at the same time, without doing a lot of

something that's very unhealthy for the soul, you know?

Lights off on Isaac. Ethan comes forward. We see Colby again, speaking to each other, but inaudibly.

Ethan. (Referring to the two of them.) Colby said something else that I didn't tell Isaac.

Back to Colby and Bishop Farnes.

Colby. Every time I go over there, he always wants to hug me.

Bishop Farnes. Didn't you ever hug your companions?

Colby. Yeah, but there's something different about him, too. He really freaks me out.

Back to Ethan.

Ethan. He wasn't referring to Isaac here, he was referring to me. (A pause. Then, as regards the obvious quandary this puts him in,) So, where am I supposed to go, then? The alternative to this is an eternity separated from the presence of a God I had come to love more dearly than anything else. (A beat.) At the time, it seemed to me there was no other choice.

SCENE VI

The Contrast.

We begin to hear rhythmic club music. The scene quickly changes and Ethan is in a gay bar. He is noticed by a Bartender, who nods to him as if to ask him what he'd like to drink.

Ethan. Just a coke, please.

While he's drinking his coke, he meets someone and leaves with him.

The music stops, it's quiet and dark.

The lights come up halfway, and Ethan is seen exiting the house of the guy he left

with, closing the door behind him. He puts his jacket on and zips it up tightly and walks away quickly. The lights go out again.

We hear the sounds of a shower running, followed by the sounds of tough and adamant cleaning. The shower turns off. We hear him brushing his teeth rather violently, then drying himself off and putting his clothes on. It's dark for a few more moments, and then we hear him crying.

Ethan. *(Very quietly.) Heavenly Father! (A pause.) I am so sorry.*

It is still dark. We continue to hear him, sobbing now.

Ethan. *Heavenly Father!*

Lights come on again, half-way. Mike enters, only this time, he's in full, white Navy uniform. Ethan dries his face and stares at him for a moment. Mike begins to leave, but Ethan stops him.

Ethan. *Wait. (Mike stops and we enter into "real time.")*

Mike. *What's up?*

Ethan. *(Carefully.) Can I hold you for a minute?*

Mike. *Are you okay?*

Ethan. *(Seriously thinking.) I just need it, you know?*

They hug in a full embrace. We hear the sound of a floor heater in the background. There's a long pause. It is important that they do not break precipitously, by any means. They must hold each other for an extended period of time, and it should make the audience uncomfortable (when it feels like it's been long enough—it hasn't; the actors should double it).

The lights go on and off to suggest time is passing, each time catching them having shifted a bit. During the hug, all sorts of things may happen—Mike places his head on Ethan's shoulder. Ethan holds him tighter—maybe even kisses his cheek or his neck in such a way that we, as the audience, are unable to determine whether it should be pegged sexual or not.

Mike. (*Pulling slightly back.*) I'm sweating.

Ethan pulls back a little, while they remain in the embrace. He wipes the sweat off of Mike's cheek. They go back into a full embrace. Then, after a few moments, and with sincerity,

Ethan. Let's just stay here for a few more minutes, okay? I want to take this in.

Mike. (*Almost immediately.*) Yeah, me too. (*He loses his balance for a moment, and they shift a bit, Ethan holding him up.*) I love you, Ethan.

The lights go out, and there is silence for a few moments. Then, we see Ethan center stage, facing the audience.

Ethan. When I was growing up in young men's and women's programs of the Church, they taught us about the purpose of sex: that God meant it for married couples almost as an act of service. (*A pause.*) My whole body came alive when I was there. Right there, at that moment. Everything. My heart started beating faster, my hands got sweaty. (*A beat. He sits down.*) When I held him, I felt like I was holding God.

SCENE VII

To: My Huckleberry Friend.

Lights up on Bishop Farnes. He is seen at his usual place, teaching his Sunday school class.

Bishop Farnes. I don't think there's anything more important in this world than the love of God. We understand the notion of love because of His very proactive example. Sometimes, it takes an enormous amount of energy to convince someone that you love them—you practically have to force it into their experience, because they don't believe you at first. I believe Jesus' success with the people was his ability to get inside their hearts by convincing them of their worth before God.

Lights back on Ethan.

Ethan. But, I didn't feel the need to take care of it—so to speak: no masturbating or anything. I just felt really happy. And there was nothing wrong with it. It was exactly what it's supposed to be. (*A beat.*) As wonderful as it was, however, I was left in a bind. Within those twenty little minutes, my world had changed. I knew what I was capable of, and it made me happy. (*A beat.*) So, I put on my best Sunday clothes. I emptied my savings account, and hurried over to see Ashley. In a way, it was an answer to a prayer.

Ashley appears, sitting on the same table as before. Ethan enters the scene with her, and sits down.

Ashley. I have to be at stage call in a few minutes.

Ethan. I just need to ask you something.

Ashley. Okay.

Ethan. And there's no easy way to do this, so I'm just going to plunge in. (*He pauses for a moment. Then, very decidedly, he empties his pocket and places a black ring box on the table.*) Open it.

Ashley. What is it?

Ethan. Just open it. (*She opens it. Inside is a beautiful, sparkly diamond ring.*) It's the safe kind; it's not a blood diamond or anything. I thought you'd like that.

Ashley. Wow, Ethan. It's beautiful. What's it for?

Ethan. It's an engagement ring.

Ashley. (*She laughs.*) Are you serious?

Ethan. Yeah. I'm totally serious. It's an engagement ring. But, it's not a blood diamond.

Ashley. Yeah, so you said. So, are you asking me to marry you?

Ethan. You're my best friend and I love you very much. I can't imagine spending my life with anyone else.

Ashley. Uh huh.

Ethan. And I've never enjoyed the company of another woman more. (*He takes her hand.*) Ashley, say 'yes.' It's really an easy word.

Ashley. (*She looks at him for a moment, then,*) I don't think it's an easy word, Ethan.

Ethan. When you were in that one-act play last year, there was this line where the guy playing your husband says something like: 'And when I saw her for the first time, I felt like time had stopped. And I knew I had met the love of my life.'

Ashley. Okay?

Ethan. I could identify with what he said. I was moved by it—I think by the Spirit. I think you are the one, Ashley. (*A pause.*) And, ever since then I've been trying to figure out how to own up to it.

Ashley. Yeah, but, Ethan, you've grown into something that you haven't given me any time to grow in to with you. You haven't brought me there with you. (*A pause.*) How can you expect me to say 'yes'?

Ethan. Well, take the weekend if you want.

Ashley. Ethan—

Ethan. When I was serving tables at the Garden freshman year, there was this couple there—they had just been married. The bride and her parents were with the groom and his brother or something, maybe his parents. The point is: the look on his face. He was glowing. It was right for both of them. (*A pause.*) Ashley, I want that. It comes from living a good life—from keeping God's commandments—from service and charity. There's no question that they were blessed by God.

Ashley. Okay.

Ethan. Their choices. That's my point, sweetheart. Let's just do it and make good choices.

Ashley. (*Silence.*) Ethan, I really appreciate that. (*She takes the ring back and looks at it—it's on fire.*) I don't want to tell you "no." I don't—I think that if I say "no," you will lose faith and change your lifestyle.

Ethan gets up. Lights on out everyone but him.

Ethan. (*To the audience.*) I think she was on to me more than I realized. She's really a very beautiful person; I regret having put her in that position. (*A beat. We see images again behind him—same silly music.*) This happens all the time. Gay men marry good Christian girls, hoping that something will change in the process. And good Christian girls marry outstanding gay men, because everyone reasons, somewhere, perhaps even in the subconscious, that if anything, hell would be worse. Especially Mormons. We marry each other as a means to an end far too often. (*The images quickly cease for dramatic effect.*) The only good part—at least as I see it—is they get to have kids. (*It hits him.*) And I'll admit: I was hoping that something would click in the process too. I even prayed for it. And my nose started bleeding. (*A beat. Count to "five."*) Time passed, and I needed answers.

SCENE VIII

The Authorities

The lights come up on Bishop Farnes, who is sitting in his office, Ethan across from him.

Ethan. I need to confess something.

Bishop Farnes. Okay. Shoot.

Ethan. A few weeks ago I kinda fooled around with someone. (*A pause.*) With another man.

Bishop Farnes. Who? Anyone in this ward?

Ethan. No. (*Farnes is relieved.*)

Bishop Farnes. Okay.

Ethan. (*Looking down.*) We didn't have sex or anything. We just touched each other a little, and kissed a little.

Bishop Farnes. Did you have oral sex?

Ethan. No. Yes. Sort of.

Bishop Farnes. What do you mean?

Ethan. We started to. I couldn't do it. I left.

Bishop Farnes. How did you meet him?

Ethan. We met at a gay club.

Bishop Farnes. Why did you do it?

Ethan. I wanted to see if I was gay, Bishop.

Bishop Farnes. Are you gay?

Ethan. (*He is quiet for a moment. Then,*) I think I am.

Bishop Farnes. Do you masturbate?

Ethan. Sometimes.

Bishop Farnes. When was the last time?

Ethan. A few weeks ago.

Bishop Farnes. Do you think that has something to do with it?

Ethan. I don't know. Maybe.

Bishop Farnes. What about pornography?

Ethan. No.

Bishop Farnes. Have you been taking the sacrament?

Ethan. No. I stopped after this encounter with this guy.

Bishop Farnes. Do you want to start taking the sacrament again?

Ethan. Yes.

Bishop Farnes. Well, then let's work on it. Let's get you back there.

Ethan. I thought to myself what might happen in this interview—will I get excommunicated? What kind of trouble am I in? And, to be honest Bishop, when I thought that it was possible, I was relieved. (*A beat.*) I have to tell you more. I fell in love with my best friend. I mean, in every way that we understand what it means for one person to be in love with another person—that's how I felt for him. That's how we feel for each other. And he's married. (*A pause.*) I might have hurt him and his family—especially his marriage. You see, she's not very—she doesn't forgive.

Bishop Farnes. Did you do anything with him?

Ethan. No. We never compromised his marriage. (*Recalling with fondness.*) We started to go to the temple every week with each other. If you knew what kind of a situation it is, Bishop—it's not a bad thing. We grew to love each other very much because we were going every week.

Bishop Farnes. Well why hasn't he been going with his wife?

Ethan. She had just had a baby, and it kept her at home for a few months.

Bishop Farnes. Well, there's your problem. The kind of love you're talking about is not intended to be between two men, especially if we're dealing with a marriage here. It is intended for men and women who are

committed to each other.

Ethan. Is there any chance that the Church will overturn its policy on homosexuality?

Bishop Farnes. (*With sympathy, but authority.*) I doubt it.

Ethan. Then, really Bishop—where am I supposed to go?

Bishop Farnes. What do you mean? You stay faithful.

Ethan. Look, I can't have—(*An intense pause. Ethan is very frustrated right now, but he's trying to make it clear with patience, because he knows that Farnes does not understand the real implications of the Church's insistence.*) I really don't think, Bishop—and you have to hear me here—I really don't think that I can have what you're talking about—that love that's only intended to be between a man and woman. I can't have that with a woman.

Bishop Farnes. There are these attractions, **Ethan.** We all have them. And we all have the same responsibility to control them. Keep the commandments. Do what God has asked us to do. We don't have the authority to change what God tells us to do or not to do.

Ethan. But why, Bishop, does the Church keep insisting that the kind of love that I have for him is wrong? Nothing about it feels wrong. And it's presented here to me in such a way that it gives me hope and makes me happy—makes me feel alive.

Bishop Farnes. Ethan, I want to be sensitive to your situation. I'll admit, I don't understand it—and that it's a very difficult problem to reconcile. (*A beat.*) How is it different than someone like me, who has to turn my head every time I see a woman that I'm attracted to?

Ethan. Well, because, you still have the option.

Bishop Farnes. Because, I'm married?

Ethan. And there's nothing categorically wrong with you: you're in a privileged situation. I've never been attracted to another woman before,

Bishop. Not like other guys are. And even when I've felt a spiritual connection with another girl, it takes an enormous amount of energy to call up a fraction of what I'd expect one would need to pursue it with confidence. At least, in the way I imagine you feel, when you say that about your attractions. I've always been interested in boys. I can't ever remember a time when it was otherwise. And I'm tired of waiting for it to change.

Bishop Farnes. The Church isn't asking homosexuals to pretend they're straight. But, it is asking you to struggle: to fight the good fight for the sake of the Lord and your covenants with him.

Ethan. And there are thoughts of suicide. (*A pause.*) Often.

Bishop Farnes. You're thinking of killing yourself? Why would you want to do that?

Ethan. (*Tired.*) I can't explain it to you. Maybe you could imagine being told that if you didn't find a man sexually appealing and emotionally satisfying, you know, and that your salvation depends on it being so—perhaps, you'd understand.

Bishop Farnes. (*Very delicately.*) What can I do, Ethan? Should we set you up with a counselor?

Ethan. I've already done that. (*A pause.*) Look, Bishop—I've gone to Church counselors before—ad nauseum. They tell me to do things—and I do them. Nothing changes.

Bishop Farnes. You have to have faith, Ethan. People who suffer from homosexuality in this life won't suffer from it in the next—it's not forever. And everyone who desires it will have the full blessings of the gospel and salvation.

Ethan. (*He puts his head in his hands—a pause, while he thinks it through.*) Do you remember when my dad died?

Bishop Farnes. Yes.

Ethan. I came into your office to talk to you.

Bishop Farnes. I remember.

Ethan. You told me that I could find comfort in the doctrine of eternal family.

Bishop Farnes. Yes, of course—you're sealed to your parents forever.

Ethan. Unless I break my covenants. (*A pause.*) Haven't I—?

Bishop Farnes. We can fix it, Ethan.

Ethan. But, there's more to it than that. I have to be completely honest with you, Bishop.

Bishop Farnes. What is it?

Ethan. You have to believe me when I say that I want to do the right thing. You've seen me express how much I—how often I feel love for God. I've learned that because of my membership in the Church. (*A pause. He starts to cry.*) There's nothing like the comfort I feel when I'm here.

Bishop Farnes. I know, me too.

Ethan. But, with Mike—I've never been so happy! I'd give anything in the world to be with him—for it to be right to be with him. You have to believe me when I say that—I'd give anything. Just hearing someone talk about the concept of a "soulmate," cuts my heart in half, and I want to blow my head off. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Bishop Farnes. (*Not really.*) I think so.

Ethan. Don't you think I'd be foolish if I didn't seek after something like it with someone that I could have it with? The alternative is torture!

Bishop Farnes. (*With sensitivity, even still.*) Ethan, this is exactly how I would imagine the pioneers felt when they trekked across the plains.

When their fingers and toes were falling off from frostbite, or when their infants were dying from exposure. Some even said that they wouldn't have traded it in for anything in the world, because it was the price that they paid to come to know God.

Ethan. (*A moment.*) But this fight, I don't think it is real. It doesn't have the same nobility attached to it. I mean, if I could see it going somewhere—arriving at something productive, then I think I could do it. But it's not. There aren't any mountains ahead—no real ones anyway.

Bishop Farnes. (*He sits up in his chair.*) You know I can't change the way things are. Unless the Brethren told us in a new revelation that homosexuality is okay, I have to follow the standards of the Church. There's no question it is a very serious matter of faith. I don't think that anyone could say otherwise. (*A pause.*) But, I want you to know, Ethan, that I have faith in you. I've never met anyone with such a bright, loving countenance—and with the testimony that you share with us so often. And I can't tell you how proud I am of you, and how glad I am to know you. Please don't ever take the Lord out of your choices, and don't throw away what you do know to be true, for what you don't.

Ethan gets up and faces the audience.

Ethan. So, there it is. (*A beat.*) In the article that Isaac gave me, where his father spoke on homosexuality for the Salt Lake Tribune, he justifies the Church's position with the reminder that all people in the world have something to struggle against. It's all for the sake of soul-making and spiritual growth. (*He thinks for a moment. He sits down.*) He points out how Isaac's sister was born with cerebral palsy. She's incapacitated in many ways. But, she can see the brides on temple square, especially in the spring, when literally several dozens of them are married on any given Saturday morning. He says that she watches them longingly, because she wants to be a bride, but that she also knows it will never happen—because of her condition—something she's born with. Mind you, he's making a point here about gay people. (*He puts his head in his hands for a moment—then looks back up.*) I often wonder if I leave the Church, will I be walking away from the chance to work with God—to work out my salvation with Him in “fear and trembling”? (*A beat.*) There are too many dubious moments in the history of our Church for

me to trust that this present stand isn't like the others it has taken in the past, which have a similar tone, but have been overturned. And, even if I was wrong—I wonder: can God not work with my choices? (*A beat.*) I don't have cerebral palsy, and there's no one in my family who has it either. But, why does he think that she will never find love? I believe that if you can imagine something, especially something that fills your soul with joy and longing, then God will help you to find it. (*A beat. He stands up.*) To be honest, I just keep remembering how when we held each other, I could feel his heart pressing against my own, and we'd catch each other's breathing so that he would stop when I'd begin. It all came together in an experience that represents the most important time of my life. I have tried to present it for you, but even then it doesn't seem like I've given it justice. But, when I'm sitting in the Bishop's office or watching recent developments unfold in this very political, very earthly battle over gay marriage or whatever—its something I hold on to with tremendous force; it's a "pearl of great price" in a time where everything seems so absurd, and where the battles we are fighting in the name of something so viciously absolute, are merely battles for the battle's sake alone, while the most genuine—most significant aspects of our lives are hidden between them in entirely unquantifiable realms. But I think that is what makes all the difference.

END OF ACT I