

FROM THE TOP

By

Scott C. Sickles

FROM THE TOP

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For Lori Faiella

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Cast of Characters

- CALVIN** Calvin Tripp-Flannery. Mid to late 40s/early 50s. Playwright and Irene's significant other. Calvin is a gregarious, outspoken charmer who means well but does not always do well.
- IRENE** Irene Sellars. Actress who still passes for early 30s, making the truth of her age irrelevant to anyone... but herself. Calvin's significant other. Irene is no-nonsense but loving; means well, does well, and expects well of others whether she has a right to or not. Not a great liar.
- EDMUND** Edmund Holder. Early to almost-mid-20s. Paddy's boyfriend. Boyishly and/or quirkily handsome, Edmund is charismatic, confident, and charming, projecting a grounded innocence, yet seems mature for his years.
- PADDY** Paddy Dunleavy. Early 20s. Edmund's boyfriend. Irish and therefore both adorable and sexy, Paddy is outwardly relaxed and confident, despite being somewhat ill at ease in more cosmopolitan environs.
- BRANDON** Brandon Clements. Mid to late 40s/early 50s, "a bit on the stocky side." A theatre director. Usually bright, self-sufficient, and capable, Brandon is having an off day. He is the significant other of no one.

Diversity in casting is strongly encouraged.

Scene: Brandon's small but well-appointed one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan.

Time: A Sunday evening in June, present day.

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Playwright's Notes

I normally don't include parentheticals to actors about what tone they should give their lines, but in this play, scenes are repeated and, depending on whose perspective we're seeing at that moment, the intention/intonation will be perceived differently. Use them as guidelines. Exploration is encouraged.

It's important to note that no matter how much pain or anguish the characters are in, they never whine. *Ever*.

Thanks to Sean Patrick Palmer for translating the Google Scots Gaelic into Irish and for providing the translations for the original productions... translations now lost to time.

Regarding the set. The second production had a realistic apartment built on a turntable. It was gorgeous yet cumbersome, and the sightlines were a challenge. The first production used furniture on wheels: a cot for the bedroom, a sofa for the living room, a bar cart for the kitchen, and for the bathroom we taped a plastic bowl to a barstool and called it "the bishop" because it looked like the chess piece. And we didn't have doors. It worked great! My point is: I highly recommend keeping the staging as simple as humanly possible, unless you have a fantastic budget and clear sightlines. With imagination, this play can be staged nearly anywhere.

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FROM THE TOP was presented as a Play in Progress developmental production at the 42nd Street Workshop (Tony Sportiello, artistic director; Riley Jones-Cohen, executive director) in March 2002. Mike Voytko was the lighting designer. Ryan Clark and Nicholas Pelczar were the stage managers. It was directed by Max Montel with the following cast:

Calvin Tripp-Flannery	Gregory Sims
Irene Sellars	Lori Faiella
Edmund Holder	Joshua Knapp
Paddy Dunleavy	Jamie Carmichael
Brandon Clements	Peter Farrell

FROM THE TOP was presented as a Main Stage Production by the WorkShop Theater Company (Tony Sportiello, artistic director; Riley Jones-Cohen, executive director) in January 2003. Mike Voytko was the lighting designer. Allie Tepper was the set designer. Clifford Capone was the costume designer and consultant. Richard Kent Green was the production director. Erin Carrero was the assistant director. Publicity was provided by Brett Singer & Associates LLC. Avi Soroka was the production stage manager. It was directed by Max Montel with the following cast:

Calvin Tripp-Flannery	Stephen Zinnato
Irene Sellars	Lori Faiella
Edmund Holder	Rob Cameron
Paddy Dunleavy	Christopher Burke
Brandon Clements	Roger Dale Stude

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ACT I

“The Debutante Ball”

Brandon’s apartment; a Sunday evening in June.

The apartment is divided into five separate areas: a living room opposite a bedroom, connected by a hallway, which divides the kitchen from the bathroom. The set should be very portable or on a turntable. There should also be a door to the living room and a neutral space for the “hallway.”

In this act, the living room area is prominent.

THE LIGHTS ARE SURREAL AND LOW AS MUSIC PLAYS: something youthful, popular, and contemporary. Characters pose in tableau: in the bedroom, BRANDON stands half-dressed; in the living room, CALVIN and IRENE – respectively in tux and evening gown – stand face-to-face; in the “hallway,” PADDY and EDMUND, each in a jacket and slacks, stand nervously as Paddy fixes Edmund’s collar or tie.

The lights will follow the character from whose perspective the act is being told. Characters in other rooms will stand in tableau or move accordingly. In this act, the point of view belongs to Edmund: he is sweet, confident, and perceptive; Calvin and Irene are grand and gregarious but are obviously [though not ridiculously obviously] hiding something from him; Paddy is mildly nervous; Brandon is the picture of sophistication and maturity despite the oddness of his appearance.

(THE MUSIC IS INTERRUPTED BY A DOORBELL. LIGHTS UP on the living room as Calvin opens the door and lets Edmund and Paddy into the apartment. Edmund is pleasantly surprised to see Calvin and Irene. They are pleasantly surprised to see him and Paddy.)

CALVIN. Edmund, my boy! Come in, come in!

EDMUND. Cal! Hello, Irene! You’re even lovelier than usual.

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IRENE. Oh, you.

EDMUND. Irene, Calvin, I'd like you to meet my boyfriend: Paddy.

PADDY. Hi.

EDMUND. Paddy, I'd like you to meet Irene Sellars.

PADDY. It's an honor, ma'am.

IRENE. Please, call me Irene.

PADDY. I couldn't.

IRENE. And yet somehow you will.

EDMUND. And this is—

CALVIN. Calvin Tripp-Flannery, a pleasure.

PADDY. Good to meet you, sir.

CALVIN. It's Cal; call me Cal. So, why is it an honor to meet her and only good to meet me?

PADDY. Uh...

IRENE. Gentlemen, make yourselves comfortable.

EDMUND. Thanks. And where is the Master of the House?

IRENE. Still changing.

EDMUND. Of course.

IRENE. I'll let him know you're— (*Brandon rushes in wearing only his T-shirt, boxers, and socks. As he does:*)

BRANDON. Hi! Sorry I'm running late. (*Brandon and Edmund embrace.*) It's good to see you.

EDMUND. You, too. Brandon, I'd like you to meet my—

BRANDON. Paddy, right?

PADDY. Yes, sir.

BRANDON. Sir? He's knighted me. And your last name would be...

PADDY. Dunleavy, sir.

BRANDON. I like this "sir" business. We'd better put a stop to it before I get used to it.

EDMUND. (*To Paddy:*) Just call him —

BRANDON. They call me MISTER TIBBS!

EDMUND. Tibbs?

BRANDON. You know...

PADDY. Sidney Poitier. *In the Heat of the Night.*

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BRANDON. Well done. Ed, I thought you'd get that. Anyway, it was nice meeting you, Paddy. I should get dressed.

IRENE. Yes, we have to be there in half an hour.

CALVIN. Which means "be there" not "leave here."

BRANDON. You've officially become part of the problem. I'll be ready in a few.
(*Brandon exits to bedroom.*)

CALVIN. Would anyone like something to drink?

IRENE. Cal, it's not our apartment.

CALVIN. I think he'll be okay with it.

EDMUND. If I know Brandon, he's probably out of everything.

PADDY. I could use a glass of water if that's okay.

CALVIN. Of course it's okay. I'll get it.

IRENE. I'll get it. You entertain; you're clearly in the mood. Water all around?

EDMUND. Thanks.

CALVIN. That would be wonderful. Use the glasses we gave him. I have the receipt somewhere, so technically they're still ours.

IRENE. I'll be back. (*Irene crosses to bedroom, knocks, goes in.*)

CALVIN. So, you guys met in Europe?

EDMUND. In France.

CALVIN. At a disco? A café? Public restroom?

EDMUND. Yes, and in that very order.

PADDY. The beach, actually.

CALVIN. Normandy? Omaha?

EDMUND. Cal, is everything okay? Everybody seems a little—

PADDY. If we're imposing—

CALVIN. Nonsense. Don't be silly. We're just a little nervous about tonight, is all.

EDMUND. Calvin, it's me. You can tell me.

CALVIN. (*Pause.*) Okay. Here it is. Irene... How do I say this? Irene and I...

EDMUND. Is something wrong?

CALVIN. What? Oh, no, no, no. It's this play. I've got this play we're workshopping downtown—

PADDY. What's it called?

CALVIN. *The Better Part of Valor.*

PADDY. Cool.

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CALVIN. Thank you. Well, of course I want Irene to play the role that I not only wrote for her but, you know, was in many ways based on her.

PADDY. Like Neil Simon and Marsha Mason.

EDMUND. He doesn't like Neil Simon.

PADDY. Oh. Sorry.

CALVIN. Well, her character is an ingenue naively involved with a pseudointellectual foreign director in some concept-driven Strindberg play—

PADDY. I thought I read the two of you met doing an Ibsen play.

CALVIN. Strindberg is funnier. It's true, we were doing *Ghosts: The Musical*.

Anyway, my play tells how an actress and her playwright husband – in the play, we're... they're married – and they find themselves looking back on how they first met and first fell in love, which are two very separate events. During the rehearsals for the Strindberg, the actress character based on Irene spurns the bad actor – who is hopelessly in love with her and therefore behaves foolishly – but then, years later ends up falling madly in love with him when he becomes a successful playwright—

PADDY. Which happened while you were doing your play *Another Novena to St. Jude*, right?

CALVIN. Yes?

PADDY. You were just profiled in *Playbill*.

CALVIN. Ah! Of course!

PADDY. *Novena's* a great play.

CALVIN. You are clearly a man of refined tastes. Anyway, when we did *Novena* Off-Broadway, Brandon reintroduced Irene to me, and we've been together ever since.

EDMUND. Aw.

CALVIN. Well, the character I wrote for her naturally requires the wistful sophistication and wit that is Irene's trademark, and well... the producer wanted to go with... an older actress.

PADDY. Oh, no! Wait. Isn't that almost flattering?

CALVIN. The older actress is also the producer's girlfriend.

EDMUND. What did you do?

CALVIN. I did what any fiercely loyal boyfriend-slash-playwright would do. I walked right up to that producer, looked him straight in the eye, and said, "See here, man! Irene must play this character! Irene is this character!" And he said, "The character is like, what, almost forty? The actress looks like she's nineteen," and I

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said, “Nineteen? Give me a break!” and he said “Okay, twenty-five,” and I said, “Look, pal. I wrote this role for a beautiful, mature actress who exudes youth. It’s perfect for Irene because she seems young when she’s really—” and out of nowhere her thermos hit me in the head.

EDMUND. Oh.

CALVIN. We all agreed to disagree. (*Irene emerges from the bedroom and crosses to the kitchen. Edmund notices.*)

EDMUND. I’ll be right back. Cal, tell Paddy about the time—

CALVIN. I can think of a topic.

EDMUND. Of course you can. (*Edmund crosses to kitchen.*)

CALVIN. (*To Paddy:*) So, are you a Catholic or a Protestant? (*Edmund enters the kitchen where Irene prepares four glasses of water. There is a fifth glass on the counter she does not fill. When the topic turns to Brandon, Edmund appears mature and concerned while Irene appears a bit strict.*)

EDMUND. Need a hand?

IRENE. Uh, no. Thanks.

EDMUND. How ya’ doin’?

IRENE. All right, I guess.

EDMUND. Nervous about tonight?

IRENE. No. Not yet.

EDMUND. Big night. Cal’s a bit exuberant.

IRENE. Well. Cal’s Cal.

EDMUND. That he is. How’s Brandon?

IRENE. Fine. Nervous.

EDMUND. Yeah?

IRENE. Big night.

EDMUND. Yeah. Is that all it is?

IRENE. All what is?

EDMUND. He’s not sick or anything, is he?

IRENE. No.

EDMUND. Is he upset about something?

IRENE. What makes you think he’s upset?

EDMUND. He ran into the living room without his pants.

IRENE. Oh, that.

EDMUND. Don’t you find it odd?

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IRENE. He was just multitasking. I'm sure he didn't mean to embarrass you.

EDMUND. Wha... He could never. I'm just gonna pop my head in for a moment. Say hello.

IRENE. You've said hello.

EDMUND. I just want to talk to him for a minute.

IRENE. Edmund, look. It's clear that you have a lot to talk about with him, a lot of important stuff, right?

EDMUND. Yeah?

IRENE. But it's a big night and he's got a lot on his mind already. Trust me, it'll be much better to wait until the end of the evening. Can you hold out until eleven o'clock?

EDMUND. Sure.

IRENE. Thank you.

EDMUND. So long as nothing's wrong—

IRENE. (*Fed up:*) Like I said! He's just really nervous. That's all it is.

EDMUND. Okay, no problem. (*Supportive:*) By the way, um... Cal... told me about... That sucks. I'm sorry.

IRENE. Did he? Well. It's very sweet of you to be concerned.

EDMUND. No problem. Hey, there will be others.

IRENE. Yeah?

EDMUND. Better ones.

IRENE. ... Could you ask Calvin to come in here?

EDMUND. I can help you with those.

IRENE. You're the guests.

EDMUND. It's no problem.

IRENE. We're the hosts.

EDMUND. Well, actually, as you pointed out before—

IRENE. Edmund.

EDMUND. Right (*As he turns to go:*) Cal! (*Edmund crosses into the hallway; cross fade to hallway and living room with Calvin and Paddy, who dances an impromptu jig.*) Did Paddy tell you? He toured with *Riverdance*!

PADDY. I was a wardrobe assistant.

CALVIN. There are worse jobs, am I right?

EDMUND. Irene needs you in the kitchen.

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CALVIN. She must need help fusing the hydrogen and oxygen atoms; be back in a jiff. (*Calvin exits into kitchen.*)

PADDY. Is it just me or do you think we should go?

EDMUND. No, no. They're just... You know. Besides, I want to be there for them.

PADDY. Maybe we can meet up with them after.

EDMUND. Especially Brandon.

PADDY. Or some other night.

EDMUND. (*Amused by the possibility:*) Are you nervous?

PADDY. (*Sincere:*) No, I'm not... Cal seems very nice.

EDMUND. Cal's great. So's Irene... in her own... way.

PADDY. And I'm sure your friend... Brandon...

EDMUND. Oh, he's the best.

PADDY. You've said. He really likes his movie quotes. (*No response.*) What?

EDMUND. You are so cute when you're nervous. Don't worry.

PADDY. I'm not worried.

EDMUND. They're gonna—

PADDY. I know, I know: they're gonna love me.

EDMUND. How could they not? (*Calvin enters from the kitchen with three glasses of water and hands them out. They speak in Irish, which is mistakenly referred to later as Gaelic.*)

CALVIN. Seo dhuit. [Here you go.]

PADDY. Go raibh maith agat. [Thank you.]

CALVIN. Fáilte romhat. [You're welcome.]

PADDY. Na labhraíonn tú Gaeilge? [You speak Irish?]

CALVIN. Bhí mé i mo chónaí in Éirinn ar feadh cúpla bliain. I ndáiríre, tá me cinnte go bhféadfadh a bheith tar éis éirí go maith gan é, ach is teanga álainn í. [I lived in Ireland for a few years. Actually, I'm sure I could have gotten along fine without it, but it's such a beautiful language.]

PADDY. Ceart go leor. Labhraíonn tú go han-mhaith é. [It really is. You speak it very well.]

CALVIN. Tá mé beagán as cleachtadh. [I'm a bit out of practice.]

PADDY. Níl agat ach an blas is lú. [You just have the slightest accent.] (*Brandon comes out of the bathroom; he stops and listens, a bit stunned.*)

EDMUND. Ag tosú díreach le fhoghlaim tá mé! [Starting just to learn I am!]

PADDY. Tá blas uafásach aige. [He has a terrible accent.]

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CALVIN. Ceart go leor. Meiriceánaigh... [He does. Americans...]
(Calvin, Paddy, and Edmund laugh. Brandon just stares at them. EDMUND notices him.)

EDMUND. Hey.

BRANDON. Hi?

EDMUND. It's Gaelic.

PADDY. Irish, actually.

EDMUND. Sorry. Irish.

BRANDON. Ah. *(Pause.)* Okay, then. I'll just finish... yeah.

EDMUND. Are you all right?

BRANDON. I'm fine. I'll be ready in um... *(Brandon sticks his head in the kitchen area where Irene is for a moment; no visible interaction takes place; he comes back out.)* ...in a minute. *(Brandon returns to his room and sits. Irene comes out of the kitchen and joins the others.)*

IRENE. How's everybody doing?

EDMUND. We all appear to be fine.

PADDY. I'm fine.

CALVIN. They're fine.

IRENE. Great. We should go soon.

CALVIN. As soon as Brandon's ready.

IRENE. Right.

CALVIN. Good.

PADDY. So...

EDMUND. So... *(During the awkward pause, the three men all drink down the rest of their water and "ahh.")*

IRENE. I'll take those.

CALVIN. I'll give you a hand. *(Irene and Calvin take the glasses and retire into the kitchen, where they stand facing each other. Edmund and Paddy are again left alone.)*

PADDY. Are you sure everything's okay? *(No response.)* Eddie?

EDMUND. Hm?

PADDY. What's wrong?

EDMUND. I, uh... If I knew, I'd tell you. But since no one's telling me...

PADDY. I'm sure if it were important, they'd—

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EDMUND. If it's not important, why would they keep it from me? Whatever "it" is. I mean... We're all supposed to be friends, you know.

PADDY. Yeah, I understand. If they were really your good friends, they'd invite you to come with them on important occasions. Oh, wait, they did that. Well, if they really liked you, they'd at least have the decency to ask you to bring your new boyfriend along, so they could meet him. But... Oh, wait...

EDMUND. That's not it.

PADDY. And if they cared about you, they might keep potentially bad news from you until there was a better time to tell you. Especially when there's already a big event on everyone's mind. Pity they're so apathetic, the shits. *(Pause.)* You may now begrudgingly admit that I'm right.

EDMUND. Yeah. I'm sure they'd tell me if there was something I needed to know right away.

PADDY. Or maybe they know you've got a big feckin' mouth.

EDMUND. *(Smiles.)* That's probably it. *(Paddy and Edmund kiss, briefly but with passion. Beat.)* I'll ask Brandon what's up.

PADDY. Great. *(As Edmund takes a step toward the bedroom, Calvin and Irene emerge from the kitchen: Calvin going right to the bedroom door, knocking and entering; Irene intercepting Edmund and joining him and Paddy.)*

IRENE. Sorry that took so long. We didn't mean for you to fend for yourselves.

EDMUND. We managed. I'm going to see what's taking Brandon so long.

IRENE. Don't bother. Calvin just went in to give him a nudge. Probably a cummerbund crisis of some sort. I'm sure they'll be out in a minute. So, tell me, what countries did you visit in Europe?

PADDY. I have been following your career since I was a kid!

EDMUND. Paddy!

PADDY. I loved your Beatrice.

IRENE. My God, that was—

PADDY. Fifteen years ago.

IRENE. Oh.

PADDY. I was eight.

IRENE. What a memory you have.

EDMUND. I'll see what's keeping Cal and Brandon.

IRENE. I'm sure they'll be out soon.

EDMUND. Must be one complicated tuxedo.

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IRENE. Yes, well. Yes. When Cal and I arrived, shortly before you guys, Brandon had just discovered that the alterations he had done on the tuxedo didn't turn out right.

PADDY. Too tight?

IRENE. Too loose, actually.

EDMUND. And how exactly is Calvin helping with a loose suit?

IRENE. He's probably fixing it. He's good with tools.

EDMUND. So, he's in there with a lathe and a jigsaw making alterations to Brandon's tux?

IRENE. What a witty child you are. No. I'm sure they've gone at it with a seam ripper and one of those handheld sewing devices.

EDMUND. Well, this I've got to—

IRENE. Calvin's quite the seamstress. Or is that a seamster? I don't know what you'd call it for men. Paddy, you're a boy. Do you know?

PADDY. Well, the root form of a word being feminine is somewhat rare—

EDMUND. Tailor.

IRENE. Who?

EDMUND. A male seamstress is a tailor.

IRENE. Oh, of course. I have a niece named Taylor. You met her once.

EDMUND. I think I remember her. Locks and locks of—

IRENE. — Locks and locks of auburn hair; she's the one. She was quite taken with you. Of course, she was six then; she's seven now and doesn't sew yet, but Calvin does. One time right before a wedding scene, my dress tore, and he was right there with a needle and thread and just sewed it up. No one was the wiser. Of course, he was the reason the dress got torn in the first place, not that you need to know that. But yeah, Calvin is very handy.

EDMUND. Are you okay?

IRENE. Was I just speaking with a Southern accent?

EDMUND. No?

IRENE. Then, I'm fine. Jitters. I think they've started. And that's all that's really wrong with Brandon right now. Nothing else.

EDMUND. That's all?

IRENE. That's all.

EDMUND. That's not all.

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IRENE. You're right. I'm transparent. This is so silly. Brandon wanted to make a good impression; especially with you bringing Paddy.

PADDY. *He was worried about meeting me?*

IRENE. And tonight, well, we were all nervous enough to begin with and now... coming out half-dressed and all... I think he feels just a little embarrassed.

EDMUND. Embarrassed. He shouldn't feel—

IRENE. Oh, he'll get over it. *(Calvin emerges from the bedroom.)*

EDMUND. Excuse me. *(Edmund crosses to Calvin at the closed bedroom door; Lights cross fade to a spotlight on Edmund and Calvin; the others stand in half-light and tableau.)*

CALVIN. Oh, hey Eddie.

EDMUND. Hey. You guys need a hand?

CALVIN. No, no. We're um... we'd better get going.

EDMUND. So, he's ready?

CALVIN. We're going to go ahead without him.

EDMUND. Isn't he coming? I mean, he can't not come. This is—

CALVIN. Okay, Eddie, look... We didn't want to worry you, but now... I don't know what Irene's told you, but... the truth of the matter is Brandon's been feeling a little under the weather lately. Nothing life-threatening or anything like that. Just these migraines.

EDMUND. He's never had migraines before.

CALVIN. Yeah, I know. We were worried it might be a brain tumor.

EDMUND. What???

CALVIN. But they ruled it out. It's probably just tension. He just needs some rest. He'll catch up with us later if he feels better.

EDMUND. Oh, that poor guy. At least let me tell him good-bye.

CALVIN. I don't think he wants you to see him like this.

EDMUND. I haven't seen him in months, Calvin.

CALVIN. You can call him later.

EDMUND. *(Beat.)* Okay, I don't want to call him later, Cal.

CALVIN. After the—

EDMUND. I need him, Cal! *(Pause. Calvin looks to Irene and Paddy, who look back.)* I need him, Cal.

CALVIN. *(Beat.)* You know... you're right. I'm sorry. Of course, you should see him. *(Edmund knocks on the door.)*

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EDMUND. Brandon. Brandon, it's me. Can I come in?

BRANDON. *(In half-light; pause.)* Just a second.

EDMUND. *(To Calvin:)* Thank you. *(Calvin pats him on the shoulder.)*

BRANDON. *(In half-light.)* Okay. *(Edmund enters the bedroom; Brandon is in bed, reclining with his hand dramatically on his forehead.)*

EDMUND. Brandon?

BRANDON. Edmund...? Edmund, is that you...?

EDMUND. *(Smiles at this.)* How you doing?

BRANDON. Not so good, I'm afraid. I can't talk too long. It hurts...

EDMUND. Where's the pain?

BRANDON. Kinda all over.

EDMUND. I get those, too.

BRANDON. I'm so, so sorry.

EDMUND. Here, let me. This will help. *(Edmund reaches for Brandon's head.)*

BRANDON. What? What are you doing? Don't touch my head. *(Edmund holds Brandon's forehead in one hand and massages his neck with the other.)* Ed, stop it. Ed... um... *(Edmund massages for a moment, then grabs Brandon's head.)*

EDMUND. This is going to hurt. *(Edmund squeezes Brandon's head.)*

BRANDON. OW! GOD DAMN IT! LET GO OF... *(Edmund lets go. Pause.)* Oh, my God.

EDMUND. Better?

BRANDON. That was amazing. You even cleared my sinuses. Thank you.

EDMUND. You can thank Paddy; he taught me how to do that.

BRANDON. He's one handy feller, isn't he?

EDMUND. Yeah, he's pretty special. And I um... I owe it all to you.

BRANDON. *(Pleasantly surprised.)* How so?

EDMUND. If it weren't for you getting fed up with how poorly traveled, I was, I never would have even heard of Biarritz, much less have gone there.

BRANDON. You went to Biarritz?

EDMUND. In the south of France!

BRANDON. I know where Biarritz is.

EDMUND. That's where I met Paddy; I told you that.

BRANDON. No, I'd have remembered.

EDMUND. Oh. I thought I had. Anyway, he loves to surf there. He even got me to try it.

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BRANDON. You hate the water.

EDMUND. I know! But Paddy just held my hand and coaxed me in a little bit and then a little bit more until... I don't know, the next thing I knew, we were surfing.

BRANDON. Wow.

EDMUND. Yeah, he's really amazing. He guided me through the nightlife there and in Paris and Amsterdam; all over the place. He got us into some pretty exclusive clubs. Of course, they were all crowded, noisy, and smoky; you'd have hated it.

BRANDON. You seem to have had a good time.

EDMUND. You know how it is: when you're with someone and everything around you just... you know...

BRANDON. Yeah.

EDMUND. What's funny is, the first few times he asked me out, I said no.

BRANDON. Really?

EDMUND. I was... I don't know; afraid, I guess. I mean, I had done, you know, a little... "experimenting" in Amsterdam—

BRANDON. Uh huh yeah got it.

EDMUND. But I never thought... I mean he clearly wanted something... more and so did I, but I didn't think I was ready. And then I remembered that thing you always say. "What is life without adventure?" So, the next time he asked—

BRANDON. That's not mine. I mean, it's a saying but... I took it from David Mamet. *House of Games*.

EDMUND. I'm glad you did. I mean, I've had crushes before and I thought I was in love, but... This is so corny but... I always thought when they called it "making love," it was just some sort of flowery euphemism, but... That's really what happens. You actually end up with more that you started out with. There's nothing like it.

BRANDON. (*Beat.*) Sounds great.

EDMUND. Actually, it's more than a little terrifying.

BRANDON. Why's that?

EDMUND. For one thing, I can't seem to bring myself to tell him that I love him. It's so stupid.

BRANDON. You're afraid he might not feel the same way about you?

EDMUND. (*A neurotic crescendo.*) Kind of. I mean, again, he seems to, but you know he's Irish and they always look like they're in love with something. And what

FROM THE TOP

if I say it and he doesn't say it back, or worse he says something like, "Ah." Then I've made entirely too much of all this and he'll see that, and it'll all be over! Or what if he does say it back, but doesn't mean it? Or what if he does mean it; then what? What if we start saying it to each other on some sort of "regular basis" and then I won't be able to stop saying it; then he'll stop saying it and I'll just say it more and more to get him to say it again, which he never will because I'll have become, like, this... verbal octopus... or – or – some... emotional giant squid, you know with the claw like hooks around the suction cups on my tentacles and – and... what?

BRANDON. (*Amused:*) Nothing; I'm just enthralled by your vim.

EDMUND. I know, I'm a lunatic. Still, I've got this... amazing, wonderful guy and I don't know what I'm doing and I'm going to screw it up. (*Beat*) Help?

BRANDON. So... you love him.

EDMUND. Oh, yeah.

BRANDON. And you think he loves you?

EDMUND. (*Beat.*) Yeah, I think so. I hope.

BRANDON. (*Beat.*) Then, don't worry about it so much. The next time you feel like saying it, just say it.

EDMUND. And if he doesn't–

BRANDON. No, no. Don't worry about "and if he." There is no "and if he." He'll say whatever he says. Good or bad, nothing you do or say or think now will prepare you for it anyway. Just relax. Trust it. Have a little faith.

EDMUND. I'll do my best.

BRANDON. That's all anyone can expect of us. (*Beat.*) Well, young man... I am very, very happy for you. (*Edmund and Brandon embrace.*)

EDMUND. I love you.

BRANDON. (*Beat.*) I love you, too. (*The hug ends.*)

EDMUND. It's a big night; are you sure you want to miss it? I mean, I got all dressed up and everything.

BRANDON. Okay. Fine. I'll go.

EDMUND. Cool. I'll let them know. Oh, and don't tell him I told you, but Paddy's really nervous about meeting you. He's a huge fan.

BRANDON. He's clearly got great taste. Get out of my room; I need to change. (*Edmund crosses into the hallway; Paddy is alone in the living room; Irene and Calvin are in the kitchen. Calvin enters the hallway simultaneously with Edmund.*)

FROM THE TOP

CALVIN. Irene'll just be a second.

EDMUND. Good news: so will Brandon.

CALVIN. Oh, great. Uh... just a second. (*Calvin reenters the kitchen and Edmund enters the living room. He watches Paddy, who does not notice him. After a moment, Brandon is heard from the bedroom.*)

BRANDON. (*From half-light:*) Fuck!

EDMUND. You okay?

BRANDON. (*From half-light:*) Yeah, I just... I'll be right there. (*Edmund returns to Paddy.*)

EDMUND. Hey.

PADDY. Hey. How's he doing?

EDMUND. He's fine. He'll be right out.

PADDY. Oh. Okay. Good.

EDMUND. Yeah. Sorry, I didn't mean for that to take so long.

PADDY. No problem. (*Pause.*) You know, there's something – What?

EDMUND. (*Overlapping:*) I love you. No, I interrupted you; you were saying?

PADDY. No, no. You go.

EDMUND. I love you.

PADDY. (*Beat.*) Ah.

EDMUND. (*Beat.*) Okay, just so you know, my world is slowly slipping away from me during this pause.

PADDY. Oh, no-no-no. I'm uh... I was just about to tell you the same thing.

EDMUND. Oh. Really?

PADDY. Yeah.

EDMUND. Oh. Well, you probably should because I'm already two up on you.

PADDY. I love you, too.

EDMUND. Ah. Well, I'm glad we got that out of the way.

PADDY. Yeah. About time. (*Irene and Calvin emerge from the kitchen, clearly in a better mood, following Brandon who has changed into his tux, who crosses directly to Paddy.*)

BRANDON. I am so sorry.

PADDY. Oh. It's no problem.

BRANDON. It really is lovely to meet you.

PADDY. Well... yeah... me, too... I mean... That's a nice tux.

BRANDON. Thanks. I like your sneakers. Very utilitarian.

FROM THE TOP

IRENE. All right, everybody. We're running late.

(Irene pecks Paddy on the cheek, surprising both Paddy and Brandon.)

CALVIN. *(To Paddy:)* Watch your step there, laddy; that's my woman.

PADDY. Yes, sir? *(Calvin laughs and guides people to the door. Brandon and Edmund lag behind.)*

EDMUND. You really do look great in that tux.

BRANDON. It's a big hit with everybody. *(Edmund smiles at Brandon.)* What?

EDMUND. You were right. It worked. Thank you.

BRANDON. No problem.

EDMUND. I hope we can spend some time together soon. I think you and Paddy'll get along great. *(Edmund joins the others in the outside hall waiting for the elevator. Paddy, Calvin, and Irene are singing a traditional Irish good-luck song, possibly "I Like to Rise When the Sun She Rises." The song ends. The elevator dings.)*

CALVIN. Brandon, the elevator's here. *(Brandon emerges, smiling, with one hand stuffed in his pocket. He shuts the door behind him. Lights fade to half. All stand in tableau. Music resumes.)*

END OF ACT I

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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