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Infectious Opportunity
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More Great Plays Available From OWP

Mercury

by Charles Messina

Genre: Drama

1 Male

Synopsis: Farook Bulsara was a boy of Persian heritage who never quite fit in to his skin or his teeth. It wasn't until he became a young man that he discovered his talent and true nature, and was reborn as Freddie Mercury. After a brilliant career, with the arenas empty and the lights out, on the night of November 24, 1991, Freddie is forced to surrender his celebrity and face the frailty of his own humanity. As he succumbs to AIDS, the worldwide icon seeks redemption before a God unimpressed with celebrity. In his ultimate struggle to make sense of his grim fate, Mercury realizes that his fame, fortune, and talents are no longer enough to sustain him; that beyond the darkness of his fears, shines a light far brighter than the star he was on Earth.

Terminus Americana

by Matt Pelfrey

5 Males, 3 Females with double casting

Synopsis: After barely surviving an office rampage, Mac Winchell is thrust into a nightmare landscape populated by lost Marlboro Men, psychotic vagabonds, sinister corporate thugs and a strange cult known as a "The Church of Christ, Office Shooter". Mac attempts to escape this twisted reality by undertaking a quest that ultimately leads him into the darkest corners of the American Dream. Terminus Americana is a surreal, visceral and challenging examination of our violence-saturated culture.

Infectious Opportunity

a play by

James Comtois

Infectious Opportunity was first presented by Nosedive Productions (Pete Boisvert and James Comtois, Artistic Directors) in association with the Brick Theater in June and July 2009 as part of the Brick's Antidepressant Festival, New York City, with the following cast and credits:

Interviewer / Dianne / Student #3 /

Amanda / Professor Hale	Ronica Reddick
Wes	David Ian Lee
Josie	Andrea Marie Smith
Brent / Student #1	Daryl Lathon
Professor Franklin / Dude	Matthew Trumbull
Jenny / Student #2 / Moira	Rebecca Comtois
Mark / Rob	DR Mann Hanson

Understudy for Ms. Reddick Stephanie Cox-Williams

Directed by: Pete Boisvert

Stage Manager: Stephanie Cox-Williams

Set Designers: Ben VandenBoom & Rebecca Comtois

Lighting Designer: Ian W. Hill

Sound Designer: Patrick Shearer

Makeup Designer: Leslie E. Hughes

Prop & Costume Designer: Stephanie Cox-Williams

Original music by: Itai Sol

Producers: Pete Boisvert, James Comtois, Patrick Shearer, Stephanie Cox-Williams, Rebecca Comtois

Associate Producers: Marc Landers, Ben VandenBoom

CHARACTERS:

INTERVIEWER

WES

JOSIE

BRENT

PROFESSOR FRANKLIN

DIANNE

JENNY

MARK

ROB

DUDE

STUDENT #1

STUDENT #2

STUDENT #3

AMANDA

PROFESSOR HALE

MOIRA

TIME:

Present day & various points up to 10 years prior.

SETTING:

Various locations.

INFECTIOUS OPPORTUNITY

*WES sits opposite a female INTERVIEWER.
JOSIE stands behind Wes, looking like his press
rep or handler.*

INTERVIEWER. We're here with Wes Farley, writer of such films as "Positive Light," "Hope Springs Internal," and the recent critically acclaimed film, "A Shoulder For The World to Cry On," which chronicles a tender romance between two people living with AIDS. Thanks for visiting with us today, Wes.

WES. Well, thanks for having me.

INTERVIEWER. Critics are calling "A Shoulder For The World to Cry On" a masterpiece. It's easily the most talked about film of the past month. How are you handling all this attention? It must be overwhelming!

WES. Well, it's very exciting, but I'm just trying to keep everything in perspective.

INTERVIEWER. Fabulous. Now, where did you get the idea for this script?

WES. Well, I got the inspiration from my hospital visits and group sessions. I met—

INTERVIEWER. —Group sessions?

WES. Oh, yes. Sorry. When I first discovered I was HIV-positive I went to a support group.

INTERVIEWER. Do you still go?

WES. Oh, not anymore, no. Sadly, there were too many people I became close with that I lost, so it became too painful for me.

INTERVIEWER. Oh, I'm so sorry.

WES. It's quite all right. In fact, it brings me to answering your question. At these places I met such strong and brave people, so close to death, and refusing to blink. It reminded me just how cowardly I was in contrast. I thought about how sorry for myself I would feel and just how pathetic I was being. So I think that the part of Alan was very much how I saw myself and the part of Josie was based on the people I met.

INTERVIEWER. So Josie's based on someone you knew?

WES. Well, she's really a composite of a few people I knew. But no one specific. This isn't a true story.

INTERVIEWER. Right. *(Pause.)* One of the things that's so amazing about this film is that it deals with such heavy and sensitive issues, but it wouldn't be fair to call it an "issues" film.

WES. Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that, because I didn't set out to write an "issues" film. I mean, yes, it deals with AIDS and HIV, but I really wanted to write a film about people, not issues.

INTERVIEWER. And it's interesting that even some of the most contemptible characters, such as the young man who sells his infected blood to men seeking to get sick, is portrayed with sympathy.

WES. Well, yes, exactly. I didn't want to create a movie that solely consisted of angels or demons. I really don't know any of either. So even when you have someone in the film who does horrible things, you see some of the very human things he does.

INTERVIEWER. Exactly. So, it's clear that having HIV has shaped your writing.

WES. Well, not just my writing. It's shaped every facet of my life. For good or for bad, I'm a person with HIV. Not a moment goes by where I don't acknowledge that. I guess I'm just trying to make the most of it. And let me just add that I couldn't get to where I am today without the help of so many people, not least of whom the film's director, Toby Curtis, and the film's immensely dedicated cast.

INTERVIEWER. Right, I was just going to say that Ellen Savini is just heartbreaking as Josie.

WES. Isn't she great?

INTERVIEWER. She really is. So's Peter Coleman as Alan. They all are.

WES. I agree.

INTERVIEWER. And you've even donated much of your income to several AIDS-related causes.

WES. Oh, yes. I donate a third of my income to a number of charities, including AmFar, Bridges of Hope, and the Children with AIDS Project.

INTERVIEWER. That's amazing.

WES. Oh, well thank you, but it's really something I feel I have to do.

Josie checks her watch and gives Wes a "we need to wrap this up" gesture.

INTERVIEWER. Well, "A Shoulder For the World to Cry On" is clearly the most talked about film of the year...

WES. The year? I thought you just said the month.

INTERVIEWER. Oh, come now, Wes. Don't be modest. People are talking about this.

WES. Okay, sure.

INTERVIEWER. There's already even some Oscar buzz about your screenplay...

WES. Oh, I can't even begin to think about those things right now. It's just nice for the support.

The interviewer exits.

JOSIE. (*Incredulous.*) "It's just nice for the support." You actually said that.

WES. Not now...

JOSIE. Gotta say, Wes. I'm amazed that you of all people can feign humility...

WES. Josie...

JOSIE. Well, hey. That reporter lady ate it up. So did her viewers, apparently. You think she wanted to fuck you? I mean, obviously you'd be a risky date and all, but I got the impression that—

BRENT. (*Off.*) Wes!

BRENT, Wes's publicist, enters.

BRENT. Wes, good to see you, buddy.

WES. Hi, Brent.

BRENT. Great interview, man. Just great.

WES. Oh yeah?

BRENT. Definitely. You're not going to believe this, but Oprah, Letterman and Bill Maher want to book you.

WES. Oh, Brent. Are you shitting me?

JOSIE. You see?

BRENT. I shit you not, buddy. You've hit the big time. And it only took your third movie.

WES. But why—

BRENT. —People love your story! They want to know how much is real, how much is fiction, you've got the whole AIDS angle—

WES. —HIV.

BRENT. Whatever. People want in! And we need to strike while the irons are hot because I gotta be honest, buddy, this shit won't last forever.

WES. Well, I'm in. You can take care of...?

BRENT. I'll take care of scheduling, that's fine. And keep up with not commenting on the Oscar, just be polite, humble and ignorant.

WES. I am ignorant.

JOSIE. He really is.

Wes waves her away, annoyed.

BRENT. (*Laughs.*) Perfect, buddy. Perfect. And that was a good move about talking about the charity but not being the one to bring it up. Make them bring it up. If they don't, don't mention it.

WES. Sure.

BRENT. Now, we're also gonna need to raise your profile a bit, take you to some parties, openings, shit like that.

WES. I hope I'm all up for that.

BRENT. What do you mean?

WES. I mean...health-wise.

BRENT. Oh. Right. Don't want you keeling over at one of these things.

WES. Right. But I'll do it, I'll do it.

BRENT. Perfect. I'll be in touch about the shows. Meanwhile we're still on for lunch with Toby tomorrow?

WES. Cancel that. Need to go to the doctor's.

BRENT. Okay, you bet, buddy. You're the best!

WES. No, Brent. You're the best.

Brent smiles and exits.

JOSIE. How the fuck do you stand him?

WES. He gets the job done.

JOSIE. Oh, I forget. Birds of a feather...

WES. What is that supposed to mean?

JOSIE. (*Shrugs.*) You're both opportunists. Now. You sure you're up for all the schmoozing and partying?

WES. Oh, stop it.

JOSIE. No, I mean it! I'm with Brent. I wouldn't want you to keel over before finding out about Mr. Oscar.

WES. I'll be fine.

JOSIE. Oh, I'm sure you'll be better than fine. Hell, you may even find some cute little D-list starfucker you can take home and... oh...right. Sorry.

WES. I'm sure you are.

JOSIE. Again with the indignation! Really, Wes. Of all people...

WES. Shut up! I think Professor Franklin is coming.

JOSIE. Oh, right. You've got to get ready for class. Whatever, I'm not even here...

Josie exits. PROFESSOR FRANKLIN enters.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Wes?

WES. Oh, hey, Professor Franklin.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Am I interrupting anything?

WES. Oh, no. Just...gearing up for class. Come on in.

PROF. FRANKLIN. My husband and I saw you on Letterman last night.

WES. Oh yeah?

PROF. FRANKLIN. Yeah, you were great.

WES. Oh, thank you, sir!

PROF. FRANKLIN. Haven't had a chance to see the movie yet but I hear it's excellent. Hoping to catch it this weekend.

WES. Cool, cool. Good to see something good came out of all this.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Um...yes. Well...

WES. What do you need?

PROF. FRANKLIN. Oh, I just wanted to run this by you. I know you're super busy, but in two weeks when you're back on campus there's going to be a screening of "Philadelphia" at the Shuster Auditorium. We were hoping to get Jonathan Demme himself to speak, but it's looking to be a real long shot.

WES. That's too bad.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Yes. Well. I was going to say, if you're free, would you be at all willing to speak a little bit before and after?

WES. I...yeah, I think I can do that, provided I'm feeling okay. *(Checks planner.)* Yeah, sure, let's do it. If I can't, I'll let you know as soon as possible.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Really? Okay, great. Thanks, Wes.

WES. You bet.

PROF. FRANKLIN. And I'll let you know what I think about the movie. I can't wait to see it.

WES. Great.

Professor Franklin exits.

Wes pulls out a small leather case and looks at it. A funny sort of look falls on his face. He puts it away and takes out his carton of medicine and begins taking the contents. His students, MARK, JENNY, and DIANNE, enter and sit down around him.

WES. Hey, come on in, come on in. I won't be a moment. *(Finishes taking his medicine.)* Well. Here we are again. Ready to make writing history. *(Everyone laughs.)*

MARK. Congratulations! *(Everyone applauds.)*

WES. Oh, thank you, Mark. Thank you, everybody. Thank you. It's...yeah. It's pretty nuts, isn't it?

JENNY. You were hilarious on Letterman, Mr. Farley!

WES. Oh, thank you, Jenny.

JENNY. What's he like?

WES. Who, Dave?

JENNY. Yeah.

WES. Honestly? Kind of a dick. *(Everyone laughs.)* But yeah, it was fun. A lot of fun. Glad to hear I didn't come across as an incoherent idiot.

JENNY. Oh, not at all. You were really funny. You seemed natural.

WES. Well, thank you, Jenny. Now, then. We could talk about my performance on Letterman all day, or that I'll apparently be on "Real Time" this Friday...

MARK. Really?

WES. Yes. In fact, that reminds me, I won't have my office hours after class today like normal, since I have to catch a six-o'clock flight to L.A., so I hope that doesn't mess too many people up. Anyway, we could spend all class talking about my meteoric rise to stardom, but that would deprive us the pleasure of reading and assessing your work. So then. Mark. Let's start with your piece. Last week, we had all read a scene from Mark's script, "Silent Heartbreak," where Mark's protagonist, Rick, just slept with the love of his life, Tina, and she was making scrambled eggs for him the morning after. But it seems that Rick was itching to get the hell out of Tina's house. As always, we'll hear what you guys think before Mark gets a chance to defend himself. *(Everyone laughs.)* Anyone? *(Jenny raises her hand.)* Jenny?

JENNY. Well...I liked it. It's good. But...well...I don't know. From what we've read so far, it seems like too abrupt a change for Rick. I mean, he's been pining for this girl for how long? And now that he has her, he's immediately done with her? I don't know. It usually doesn't work that way.

WES. It usually takes about a week before people get sick of each other. *(Everyone laughs.)*

DIANNE. Right. I thought the same thing. There hasn't been any indication in the other scenes we've read that Rick's commitment-phobic, you know?

JENNY. Right, exactly.

DIANNE. We haven't really been led to believe he's a jerk at all. I mean, maybe he is, and maybe we'll find out later why he's being so skittish, but for now, it seems out of left field. Kind of too...

WES. Too plot-driven.

DIANNE. Yes, exactly!

WES. It's that old line from Chekhov, isn't it? "If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired." I mean, Jenny and Dianne, I think you're right. But it's a really powerful scene, Mark. It's very moving. But it hasn't been earned, I don't think. You may need to have some sense of foreshadowing when we meet Rick, something to indicate to us that...well, whatever you'd like. We're really not trying to pick on you, Mark.

DIANNE. Oh, no. Really, Mark. It's a great scene.

JENNY. Yeah, definitely.

MARK. Okay, cool. Thanks.

WES. But I think Jenny and Dianne are onto something. It's true that we humans often do weird, awful, inexplicable things with no rhyme or reason. And we want to capture that aspect of humanity in our work. But we also need to find a way to convey it coherently to an audience that's not privy to the innermost contents of our brains.

MARK. Right.

WES. Just look over the first few scenes where we meet Rick. Hey. Maybe it could be something as simple as an off-hand remark about a bad breakup and Tina says something that reminds him of his ex-girlfriend. It's your call.

MARK. Okay, thanks.

WES. Now then. Jenny. I can see you bouncing up and down in your seat, so that leads me to believe it's time to read from your latest opus.

JENNY. Okay, yay!

Jenny passes out copies of her script to the other classmates, mumbling to everyone who's reading what. She then hands Wes a copy.

WES. Everybody ready? Okay. Begin.

Everyone pantomimes reading the script aloud as Wes leans back in his seat, looking sad and bored. Josie enters.

JOSIE. Sorry. Forgot my keys. *(Stops and looks at Wes.)* Are you serious? Really?

WES. What?

JOSIE. You have the easiest workload on the entire campus...what is it, three classes of three students each? And you have the nerve to feel overwhelmed?

WES. Josie, leave me alone.

JOSIE. You're only on campus one day a week! And you've even got a devoted fan base here hanging onto your every word, treating you like some sort of oracle. *(Pause.)* You know Jenny wants to fuck you, right?

WES. Josie...

JOSIE. I really don't get it. Coming out as having HIV has made you a pussy magnet. How the hell does that work?

WES. I'm not having sex with Jenny.

JOSIE. Oh, I know that.

WES. I'm busy.

JOSIE. Right. Pretending to listen to these kids. Must take a lot of work.

WES. Well, come on. Mark actually has a lot of potential.

JOSIE. A lot?

WES. *(Pause.)* There's...something...there.

JOSIE. And Jenny here?

WES. She's sweet.

JOSIE. Now, there's been something I've been meaning to ask you. What is your preference, exactly? Are you gay or straight? What's, what's up with that? Not that it matters, really. You haven't been laid in quite some time. But not for lack of opportunity. I mean, how many people—dudes and chicks alike—have thrown themselves at you in the past year? Are neither your thing? You just asexual? Or a eunuch? Or just...*(Snickers.)*... really considerate and responsible?

WES. You got your keys. I have a class. Do you mind?

JOSIE. Oh, not at all. By all means. Continue inspiring your little followers. (*Pointing to Jenny. Stage whispers.*) But watch out for this one.

WES. Good, good. Very good. So. Tune in next week, same bat-time, same bat-channel? And again, sorry I can't be around for office hours today, but remember to record "Real Time" tomorrow night. (*Everyone laughs and begins to exit.*) Jenny. Can I talk to you for just a second?

JENNY. Sure. What's up?

Dianne and Mark exit.

WES. First of all, thanks again for participating this week. Very nicely done.

JENNY. Oh, thank you, Mr. Farley.

WES. Please. Wes.

JENNY. Okay. Wes.

WES. And it's very good. I'm looking forward to our discussion on it next week.

JENNY. Really? Great!

JOSIE. Don't toy with the girl.

WES. But before I head out, I just wanted to say...

JOSIE. You're not gonna fuck her, you might as well be up front about it.

WES. I was wondering about your subject material.

JOSIE. You learned that lesson the hard way.

JENNY. Oh?

JOSIE. Just tell her she sucks!

WES. Are you...I mean...your character is a high school teacher with AIDS.

JENNY. Right.

WES. I mean...

JOSIE. She. Is. Smitten.

WES. ...you don't have to write about this to impress me, you know.

JENNY. Well...

WES. In fact, it's probably better if you wrote about things you wanted to write about, not about things you think your professor wants you to write about.

JENNY. What are you saying?

WES. Oh, nothing. Just that...I wanted to make sure you weren't writing just to impress me.

JENNY. So I've impressed you?

JOSIE. Oh, bitch is good!

WES. Uh, well...yeah, sure, of course. I just...we'll talk about it next week.

JENNY. I'm looking forward to it, Wes.

WES. Same here, Jenny.

JENNY. Can't wait to see you on "Real Time."

Jenny squeezes Wes's arm then exits.

JOSIE. You handled that well. And I think so did she. But hey. You could tell her the script doesn't have to be any good. Just as long as it uses some loaded issue as its trump card, it'll sell. You learned that lesson the easy way.

WES. I've got a plane to catch. You coming, or...?

JOSIE. I'm coming, hang on, I'm coming.

Wes sits down in his seat on the plane, which is clearly first class. We hear the flight attendant's typical innocuous in-flight announcements, though nothing too clear. Brent sits next to him and Josie is nearby, drinking.

BRENT. Now the thing you gotta pay attention to, buddy, is that Bill likes to fuck with his guests.

WES. Right.

BRENT. He's not as bad to the people who are on the set with him as the folks he interviews via satellite, but he's not gonna let you rest on your laurels.

WES. I had a hunch.

BRENT. Now, nobody is expecting you to be an expert, so don't try to overreach. Don't act smarter than you are, don't act more worldly than you need to be, don't feel the need to compete with the other panelists.

WES. Who are they?

BRENT. What?

WES. The other panelists. Who are they?

BRENT. I think it's whatshisname, that conservative congressman who's always on, and that NPR DJ.

WES. Okay.

BRENT. I'll get you their names when we get to the hotel.

WES. That's fine.

BRENT. Now, you're also not thinking of heading back right away, are you?

WES. What do you mean?

BRENT. We need you to stick around L.A. for a couple of days. You can take time off from the college, right?

WES. I'm only on campus one day a week.

BRENT. Good. Now, I need to talk to you about something.

WES. What?

JOSIE. He knows.

BRENT. I should have told you.

WES. What?

JOSIE. The jig is up.

BRENT. When we get to the hotel...

JOSIE. You've been found out.

WES. Oh God DAMMIT!

BRENT. What? What is it?

WES. I just realized I forgot to bring my students' scripts with me.

BRENT. Oh, shit. Sorry, dude. That really bad?

WES. No, it's just...means I have to go back to my office when we get back. Fuck.

BRENT. Oh. O...kay...

WES. What are we doing at the hotel?

JOSIE. Outing you.

BRENT. You have an interview with the "L.A. Times."

WES. Oh. Oh! Okay.

BRENT. I'm really sorry. I should have told you before.

WES. No, it's fine. I'm looking forward to this.

BRENT. Great, great.

WES. Though...can we do it over the phone? Not sure how I'll be feeling after we land...

BRENT. Um, yeah, sure, I can make that happen.

WES. Great.

BRENT. I gotta say, Wes. You're handling all this really well. I'm impressed. I've had a lot of clients who've snapped when dealing with any sort of overnight success.

JOSIE. Oh, he's got bigger fish to fry.

WES. Well, this is what I've always wanted. I can't go crying off now, can I?

BRENT. That's the spirit!

WES. And besides, it takes my mind off being sick.

Josie does a spit-take.

BRENT. Uh, yeah, right.

JOSIE. Holy fucking shit, dude!

BRENT. Well good, man! Glad to hear your spirits are up.

WES. Speaking of spirits, where's our stewardess? I need me a drink.

BRENT. No kidding. (*Presses the summoning button.*) So you're cool with a phone interview?

WES. Yeah, sure.

BRENT. We have about 10 minutes to prep, but don't worry. We're only giving them 30 minutes anyway. This isn't gonna be an in-depth profile piece. *(Pause.)* I'm gonna go fuck our stewardess. You want anything?

WES. Jack and Coke if you see her.

BRENT. Right on. *(Exits.)*

WES. *(To Josie.)* Now, I've been meaning to ask you: how come you're the only character of mine to bother me? How come Alan or the support group leader, Carol, doesn't show up to harass me? Or anyone from "Positive Light?" Why just you?

JOSIE. You'd rather be nagged by multiple voices instead of just one? *(Pause.)* I don't know. Maybe Alan and Carol just aren't that assertive or interesting enough to stop by. But how the fuck should I know? I don't have time to worry about this shit. Now stop dicking around. We've gotta focus.

As Josie says the following, the scene around them shifts to Wes's hotel room in L.A.; Wes can even stay seated, just as long as a small table with a telephone is now near him.

JOSIE. Now they're obviously going to start off easy, throw you some softball questions that you've answered a bunch of times before. You've got those down and you're actually pretty good at tweaking the tone to fit the scenario. You can be casual and funny, but if they get the impression that you're not taking this seriously they'll interpret it as arrogance and a sign of disrespect. So make jokes, be informal, sure. But answer their questions directly and...well, I was going to say "openly," but we know that's not an option. So I'll give you a bunch of practice questions and we'll see how you do.

WES. Fine...

JOSIE. Okay, then. *(Adopts sycophantic voice.)* Well, Wes. Although Toby Curtis is credited as the director of the instant classic, "A Shoulder For the World to Cry On," you're the one that people are talking about. Is it rare for the screenwriter to be the center of attention?

WES. It is rare, and I think it may be untrue. Toby did a tremendous job on this film, it's really his film, and I think people need to be aware of that. He gave me incredible access to the set, almost unprecedented with a Hollywood film, so he shouldn't be punished for that.

JOSIE. Hmm...don't say, "punished," you sound a bit confrontational and presuming that people aren't giving Toby the proper attention.

WES. But you just asked...

JOSIE. I was testing you.

WES. Okay, fine. *(Sighs.)* How about I just leave it with, "Toby was very generous in receiving my input on the set, and I'm very grateful for that?"

JOSIE. Not bad. Now, do you hope to spread awareness and compassion about this disease?

WES. In a way, yes. I wanted to create a compelling story about interesting and sympathetic characters having to deal with a horrible reality, but to show audiences that there's more to these people than their T-cell counts. Then again, I didn't set out to make an instructional film.

JOSIE. You're a natural. Now. They're obviously going to ask you about coping with being HIV-positive, so let's try a question about that. *(Pause.)* How do you fucking live with yourself? *(Silence.)* Too cryptic? Hmm, okay, you're right. More specific. How about: how long do you think it'll be before people figure out you're not HIV-positive, but rather have been faking being sick to kick-start your career? *(Silence.)* Too hardball? Too soon? Want a few seconds to think about it? *(Silence. The phone rings.)* You should get that. It'll probably be for you.

The phone rings a couple of times before Wes, not taking his eyes off Josie, puts it on speaker.

WES. Hello...?

VOICE ON PHONE. Yes, hello, Wes?

WES. Yes. Hello?

VOICE. Yes, hello! This is Candie Newman from the "Los Angeles Times," how are you?

WES. Good, good!

VOICE. Great. You just get into L.A.?

WES. Not thirty minutes ago.

VOICE. Oh, wow. You must be wiped!

WES. Oh, not at all.

VOICE. Well, thanks so much for agreeing to speak with me today.

WES. Well, thank you for letting me do this over the phone. Right now I kind of need to be near a bed and toilet.

VOICE. Oh, I'm so sorry if you're—

WES. —Think nothing of it!

VOICE. Okay, then. So let's just kick things off, shall we?

WES. Why not?

VOICE. Okay. First of all, congratulations on the success of your movie. It must be very gratifying.

WES. Thank you! It's very nice. It's a huge relief, honestly.

VOICE. Super. Well, Wes. Although Toby Curtis directed "A Shoulder For the World to Cry On," you're the one that people are talking about. Is it rare for the screenwriter to be the center of attention?

WES. Well, Candie. Toby did a tremendous job on this film, and was very generous in receiving my input on the set, and I'm very grateful for that.

VOICE. Do you hope to spread awareness and compassion about this disease?

WES. In a way. I wanted to create a story about people, not T-cells. I didn't set out to make an instructional film.

VOICE. Fair point. But you do also do a lot of work with AIDS-related charities.

WES. I do, I do. That's really the part of my life where I feel I can be somewhat didactic in a way I don't think would be appropriate in my art.

JOSIE. Your "art." Wow.

Through the following, Josie doesn't bother waiting for Candie to ask her questions or Wes to give his answers, so she'll most likely be overlapping both of them. If she does, just be sure that her voice is the most dominant.

VOICE. Now, was this story based on your real life experiences?

JOSIE. Do you justify faking your illness because it's not really hurting anybody?

WES. Of course. On the personal level, it started as an apology for feeling so sorry for myself when I found out I was HIV-positive. But as I continued writing, I realized that everyone's experiences with this are different. Alan's methods of coping with his illness are about 180 degrees from how Josie deals with hers.

VOICE. So it's all about how different people deal with this illness. Have other people you've met with AIDS inspire you to look at your illness in a different light?

JOSIE. What sort of fucked up sociopath fakes having HIV for over ten years?

WES. Absolutely. The people I met at the outpatient center at the hospital and when I attended support groups totally opened up my eyes.

VOICE. In what way?

JOSIE. Is it just because you've been lying about it for so long it's too late to take it back?

WES. Well, I wanted to show that duality between feeling both heroic and humbled because of being sick.

VOICE. In addition to screenwriting, you also teach. What do you get from teaching that you don't get from writing?

JOSIE. Or do you actually have no qualms about it whatsoever?

WES. Although seeing your name on the big screen is certainly rewarding, it's also very fulfilling to educate a future generation of aspiring filmmakers. There's something rewarding about watching students mature into gifted artists. Also, teaching prevents me from being complacent. That old cliché about the teacher learning just as much as the students is actually true.

VOICE. Any aspirations to direct?

JOSIE. When the time comes, are you going to fake having full-blown AIDS, or just ride out the HIV gravy train forever?

WES. Oh, we'll just have to wait and see about that you know what, Candie? Brent is trying desperately to get my attention and...oh, we need to go. That's what he's telling me.

VOICE. Okay, well thanks so much for helping me out on this, I really appreciate it.

WES. You bet.

VOICE. And I have to just tell you I absolutely loved “A Shoulder For the World to Cry On.” It’s really just wonderful.

JOSIE. A wonderful work of fiction from a two-faced fraud!

WES. Oh, great. Thank you!

VOICE. Bye now.

WES. Bye-bye. (*Hangs up. Sighs. To Josie.*) You feel better now?

JOSIE. A little, actually. Yeah. (*Pause.*) Oh, don’t mope. You did well with that, by the way.

WES. With what?

JOSIE. The “L.A. Times” girl. Think she wants to fuck you?

WES. Jesus what’s with you?

JOSIE. I just know it bothers you. But, seriously. Unless Brent’s scheduled something else between now and “Real Time,” let’s paint the town brown! I’m kind of in the mood to go dancing. C’mon. Let’s go to Winston’s. I’ve never been. (*Pause.*) Guess tonight’s gonna be a “Stay in and Order Room Service” kinda night. Lame. (*Sighs.*) Well, if we’re staying in, why don’t we tell each other fun stories? You do have fun stories, don’t you? You are, after all, a screenwriter. (*Pause. Sighs.*) Fine. I’ll tell one. Let’s go down memory lane. What do you screenwriters write? Interior. College Dorm Room. Night.

A college dorm. Wes sits with Josie and two other students, one of them ROB.

JOSIE. Three college students, WES, ROB and DUDE, lounge around in Rob’s dorm room, chatting and drinking beers.

DUDE. I just hate it when people feel the need to indicate every single thing, you know?

WES. Right.

DUDE. I mean, what made “Citizen Kane” so good is that he actually used a lot of elements from theatre, from comics, and he didn’t feel the need to cut to a close-up all the time.

JOSIE. Your school days. How cute. This is, what, your senior year as an undergrad?

WES. Yeah.

DUDE. I mean, I dig “Graveyard Blues,” don’t get me wrong, man. But when you cut to a close-up of the girl, I can’t remember her name, her stifling the urge to cry? You didn’t need that. If you just have her getting choked up in the background, it would be real powerful, real subtle. Plus, it would make it so people would need to see it a few times before they noticed it.

JOSIE. Oh, God. Pretentious film student shoptalk.

WES. Well, don’t hold back, dude. Lemme know what you really think.

DUDE. Oh, sorry man. I’m not trying to be a dick.

ROB. You’re just a natural at it.

DUDE. Oh, hey man, I just...

ROB. No, I’m just fucking with you. I know what you mean, though. Not that I agree. I really liked Wes’s film.

WES. Yeah?

ROB. Oh yeah. Really funny.

DUDE. Funny? I thought it was sad.

WES. Well, I guess it’s supposed to be both...

JOSIE. Yeah, this is insufferable. I’m sorry, I can’t listen to this. I thought I could, but I just can’t... *(Exits.)*

ROB. I mean, it’s called “Graveyard Blues!” That’s funny!

DUDE. I think it’s morbid.

ROB. You’re just...a douche.

DUDE. You fucker! *(Laughs.)*

ROB. Works every time.

DUDE. Whatever, homo.

ROB. That’s right! *(They all laugh.)*

DUDE. Ah, fuck. It’s late.

ROB. Oh?

DUDE. Yeah. Almost three.

ROB. Holy shit.

DUDE. I gotta get going. Got class in the morning.

ROB. Totally don't get why you take classes in the morning at this stage of the game, man.

DUDE. It's because I'm stupid, apparently.

ROB. Guess so. You taking off too, Wes?

WES. I'll be taking off in a little bit, but I'll have one more beer, if that's cool.

ROB. Totally. Well, all right, dude. Thanks for coming by.

DUDE. Sure, man. And Wes. Sorry if I sounded like a dick.

WES. Oh, don't worry about it.

DUDE. Seriously, man. "Graveyard Blues" is great. I loved it.

WES. Cool, thanks.

DUDE. All right, guys. Later.

ROB. See ya.

WES. Bye.

The dude exits.

ROB. So. You're sticking around...?

WES. I...yeah. I mean. If that's okay.

ROB. No man, it's cool.

WES. I don't have class tomorrow.

ROB. Hot.

WES. Do you?

ROB. Just one, but it's at three.

WES. Got a full 12 hours.

ROB. And I'll still probably be late.

WES. Right. So. How's it going?

ROB. How's it...?

WES. I mean...you doing okay?

ROB. Yeah, sure, I guess. I mean, that's kind of a relative term, isn't it?

WES. I guess. *(Pause.)* So. Um...when did you...?

ROB. Yes?

WES. I mean...well...I know this isn't any of my business, but...I mean, if you don't want to tell me, it's cool. But...

ROB. From my boyfriend at the time about three years ago. I found out last year.

WES. Oh, shit.

ROB. Yeah.

Josie re-enters.

JOSIE. I thought I lived in filth. You seen his bathroom? I swear, you college kids...

ROB. So, I heard about that...thing...that happened last year.

WES. Oh. Yeah.

ROB. What happened?

WES. I think it was just homesickness.

ROB. Really?

WES. I think so.

JOSIE. I have other theories.

ROB. But...I mean...you were in the hospital, right? I mean, that's what I heard.

WES. Oh. My girlfriend at the time just panicked. She called campus security.

ROB. Oh. So I take it you two...?

WES. *(Shakes head.)* Haven't seen her since. She called once, but I didn't call her back.

ROB. Sorry. It's not really any of my business.

WES. No, it's fine. I mean, it was the talk of the campus. But I'm fine now.

JOSIE. Again, I beg to differ.

WES. I loved your movie.

ROB. Yeah?

WES. Yeah. Thought it was great.

ROB. Thanks, man.

WES. Made me cry.

ROB. Oh, shit man. Seriously?

WES. No joke.

ROB. Well, damn. That's...good, I guess.

WES. *(Pause.)* You know, I'm hoping to catch the new Jarmusch movie tomorrow night. You wanna come with?

JOSIE. So you're gay now? Really? We're playing this game?

ROB. Yeah? *(Pause.)* What time?

JOSIE. You just said you had a girlfriend last year!

WES. Whenever.

JOSIE. Well, if you're gay now, why don't you just kiss him?
(Pause.)

ROB. I could go check that out.

JOSIE. Are you telling me that even back then you couldn't be cool?

WES. Okay, cool.

JOSIE. Dude, he's having you stay in his room at three in the morning.

ROB. Gimme a call with some times.

JOSIE. He won't slap you if you make a pass at him.

WES. I will.

JOSIE. Were you just worried about catching something? No, it's probably not that.

WES. And... *(Pause.)* Well...I know this isn't really much, but...if you need anything, I mean. You can count on me. If you need to.

ROB. You're sweet. Thanks, Wes. That means a lot.

JOSIE. Just fuckin' kiss him, dude!

WES. 'Cuz...uh...I mean...this is just between us, but...I know what you're going through.

JOSIE. Or...do that.

ROB. What do you mean?

JOSIE. Why the hell did you say that?

WES. I mean...I just know what it's like to...

ROB. Wes. What are you saying?

JOSIE. Just tell him you have a friend who's sick!

WES. (*Shakes his head.*) Forget it. I'll just talk to you tomorrow about the movie.

ROB. No Wes wait wait wait. Hold up. What are you trying to tell me, man?

JOSIE. Now's the time to back out.

ROB. You got...?

WES. Just...don't worry about it. Forget I said anything.

ROB. Wes...

WES. I really loved your film.

ROB. Thanks.

They kiss briefly.

JOSIE. The plot thins. To be fair, I once told a guy I liked that I was a fan of Phish to impress him, even though I had never heard a single song of theirs. The band, not the...fish. Anyway. Had to rush out and buy all their albums and listen to them before he came over one night. God, I hate that band. But the point is, okay, we say stupid shit to get laid, it's cool.

Rob exits. The dorm disappears.

JOSIE. But there's really something more to it, isn't there? It wasn't just a white lie to get close to him. You had lied to him about that incident your junior year. It wasn't a coincidence the breakdown happened the day after Rob screened his autobiographical short and it became the biggest thing in the department. You were jealous. Rob was the Golden Boy of the department. Everyone loved him. Everyone sympathized with him. Even you. (*Pause.*) Any of this ring any bells?

WES. I was just homesick.

JOSIE. Oh, Jesus Christ. No one takes that many pills and drinks that much Jack because they're homesick! You went "crazier than a brick shithouse," as your father would say. *(Pause.)* You're still sticking to that story, and sticking to this just being a white lie to get close to Rob. Fine. Guess we're gonna need to continue reminiscing. Interior. Hallway. Afternoon.

Wes walks down a hall.

JOSIE. I guess you didn't think much of it at the time. You probably also didn't catch on two days later in the hallway when...

A STUDENT passes by Wes.

STUDENT #1. *(Really concerned.)* Hey, Wes. Everything okay?

WES. Uh...yeah. I'm fine.

STUDENT #1. That's...that's good. Listen, man, if you ever need anything, you know where to turn.

WES. Uh, ok...kay...

The student exits.

JOSIE. What was that about?

Another STUDENT enters.

STUDENT #2. *(Ultra sympathetic.)* Hey, Wes.

WES. Hey.

STUDENT #2. Everything going okay?

WES. Yeah.

STUDENT #2. Good, good. *(Massages his arm.)* We need to hang out this weekend.

WES. Sure.

STUDENT #2. It's been too long.

WES. Yeah.

STUDENT #2. Well, take care.

WES. You...too...

Student #2 exits.

JOSIE. And still no red flags, no alarm bells? Nothing? Oh, Wesley, Wesley, Wesley...

A THIRD STUDENT simply runs up to him and gives him a big hug, then exits.

JOSIE. Subtle. Yeah, you didn't even register any of this until...

WES. *(Sighs.)* Interior. Classroom. Continuous...?

JOSIE. See? I knew you'd get into this!

Wes enters his class with Professor Franklin and a few other STUDENTS.

JOSIE. Ah, Professor Franklin. I see he had a bit more hair back then.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Hello, class. Oh, Wes. Can I talk to you outside for a minute?

WES. Uh, sure, Professor Franklin.

They step off to the side.

PROF. FRANKLIN. *(In a slightly hushed tone.)* Hi.

WES. Hi.

PROF. FRANKLIN. How is everything?

WES. Fine.

PROF. FRANKLIN. Now, listen. Wes. Uh...I know this isn't any of my business, but I just had a pretty upsetting conversation with Rob.

WES. Oh?

PROF. FRANKLIN. Now, believe me. I've actually had a lot of experience with this. I work with the hospice center, I've just lost someone very close to me...

WES. Oh dear God...

PROF. FRANKLIN. *(Misinterpreting.)* Yes, I know, it was a really dark time for everyone in my family and his. But, the point is, if you need anything, I am here for you.

WES. Okay.