

Lost In Paradise

by Howard Meyer

Act I

Scene 1

The lights rise on a bedroom, living room, dining area and kitchen in a conservative condominium apartment in Queens, NY. Porn magazines, take-out containers, half-empty Budweiser bottles litter the apartment. Despite the mess, the décor of the living area is that of an elderly person, while the bedroom reflects the tastes of a teenager: porn/pinup beauties, rock-n-roll, and NY Mets posters hanging from the walls. PHILIP RATNER is at his writing table in his bedroom wrestling with writer's block. In his frustration, he gets side-tracked by various obsessions: smoking marijuana from his bong, watching porn, and listening to rock music. When his housemate, JEREMY WEISS, enters with a huge bouquet of flowers, PHIL is in a convulsive self-absorptive fantasy, almost a trance-like state, early Aerosmith playing in the background; JEREMY creeps near PHIL's room and sees PHIL completely entranced. This is not an unfamiliar picture. JEREMY moves to the kitchen, puts the flowers in a bucket of water, and then moves to the bathroom to clean up. The song ends and the sounds of a porn video and running water from the bathroom are heard. PHIL knows JEREMY is home and that he has been "caught." He turns the video off moves out of his room into the living area and feverishly attempts cleaning up the huge mess he has made. JEREMY emerges from the bathroom and steps into the living room.

PHIL

Hello, honey...

JEREMY does not respond.

PHIL (Cont'd)

Taking a break...You know I do my best work with the music---

JEREMY

Loud, I know. Hey Phil, that trance thing. I know it's supposed to be like some conduit to the other side, but books, books don't get written in comas. They get written at tables. Pen in hand, hands on keyboard.

PHIL

I've got pages and pages.

JEREMY

Where?

PHIL

(PHIL points to his head) Right here Jeremy. Right here.

JEREMY

But you've got to get them down, Phil. Down on the page so someone can read it.

PHIL

I'm still gestating.

JEREMY

A book is not a baby Phil. It's a book.

PHIL

Its days away Jeremy, hours away. A massive 350 page baby.

JEREMY

Phil, please.

PHIL

Last night my usual 3AM shower. I go into the bathroom and close the door like I always do, respectful, so as to not wake you. And I go to pull the light cord, but I don't have to you see because the light is already on.

JEREMY

You left it on again?

PHIL

No. That's just it, it wasn't on at all, really. It was off, but on. I pulled the cord like 5 times but it just stayed like that. Glowing. So, I figure fuck it, there's enough light for a shower, so I climb in. And as I'm standing there, I can't take my eyes off that glowing fluorescent circle and the eerie glow in the room. And it was kind of fucking me up, and I couldn't get why. And then it hit me. This was the exact light that was in my grandmother's hospital room when she died.

JEREMY

Fuck Phil---

PHIL

---No. No. You remember. I could never recreate that light. How many times did I try? Fifty, a hundred times? But I could never do it. And last night as I'm soaping up the fucking loofa, it hit me. Holy shit, this is it. This is that light.

JEREMY

A power surge, something.

PHIL

This is way beyond logic Jeremy. Way beyond everything.

JEREMY

You have to get over her Phil. Your grandma. She's been dead four years?

PHIL

I looked up at that circular bulb and I thought. That light, that bulb. It's like a halo... Just like in all those pictures of Jesus.

JEREMY

So you're saying that Jesus was visiting you? That your grandma was visiting you?

PHIL

Maybe not her as we knew her.

JEREMY

Delusional. Drifting away.

PHIL

Right here Jeremy. That's where I am.

JEREMY

But now suddenly you're not an author anymore. You're a fucking medium contacting spirits. And let me tell you something. If she ever knew you were talking about Jesus she'd come back from the dead and kill you... And that, that music thing. I thought you said you were over that.

PHIL

I thought I was, but then I thought about the light, that glow, and all that electricity shooting through me. Like it had done all those other times. Then I thought maybe it was OK to glow like that. Like I was being given permission.

JEREMY

It's convulsive, like you're an epileptic or something.

PHIL moves to the kitchen and returns with two frosted mugs and

two beers. He pours creating a nice head on both.

PHIL

Here Jeremy. Here. Have one of these. I'll have one too.

JEREMY

Frosty mugs. That was thoughtful Phil.

PHIL

I could say the same about those flowers.

JEREMY

But going to the trouble of frosting them. That takes forethought. Volition.

PHIL

So does the selection of just the right varieties.

JEREMY

But I didn't buy them. The client left them.

PHIL

Oh. Well, you still brought them.

JEREMY

It's a shame how many flowers go to waste in the service of artifice.

PHIL

More Victoria's Secret models?

JEREMY

Today it was tires. Firestone steel-belted radials. A husband giving his wife---

PHIL

The gift of a safe ride.

JEREMY

Flowers in front, a tire behind his back. Pretty jerky, hey?

PHIL

That's why they come to you Jeremy. You take the otherwise moronic and turn it into something fresh.

JEREMY

But most of the time it's the same theme.

PHIL

“Nocturnes in Flesh.” When are you going to bring some of that flesh home for me?

JEREMY

Patience my lad, patience.

PHIL

Just because you’ve decided to torture yourself with not getting any---

JEREMY

--- Restraint is one of the highest spiritual attainments there is, Phil. If I can capture the substance beneath the facade, really see it, appreciate it, my whole life is bound to transform.

PHIL

Sounds more like masochism.

JEREMY

Well you haven’t made it any easier. Coming home everyday to your non-stop soundtrack of pornography and 70’s hair bands.

PHIL

How am I supposed to write a murder mystery set in the porn world if I don’t know the element, the atmosphere, the sights, the smells?

JEREMY

I think you’ve got it by now.

PHIL

I’m a normal heterosexual celebrating his penis. Remember penis Jeremy?

JEREMY

Yes. Yes I do. I still urinate. I still masturbate.

PHIL

Wait, isn’t that cheating?

JEREMY

This is not about becoming a monk. It’s about how I relate to women.

PHIL

What do you think about, when you’re doing it?

JEREMY

Nothing.

PHIL

Nothing at all?

JEREMY

My mind isn't blank, but I purposely try not to objectify the woman in that way.

PHIL

How do you, you know...?

JEREMY

It's even better this way. Longer lasting. I find out what I like, what my body really needs. It's unbelievable Phil. Thirty years of life, fifteen years of sex, I'm finally learning how to really pleasure myself.

PHIL

I don't want to hear this.

JEREMY

You should try it. You spend enough time pulling on yourself. Consider it an experiment.

PHIL

Pornography is an ancient sex art. It's time-honored.

JEREMY

You try something new, the book could write itself.

PHIL

No... *(getting up, referring to the flowers)* So, you brought them home...

JEREMY

Yes. Yes I did.

PHIL

If you were really thinking, you'd have brought home the tires.

JEREMY

But you just got brand new--- Oh, hey, if you really want the tires---

PHIL

No, no, the flowers are beautiful. Come on, drink your beer.

JEREMY

OK. OK. But then I have to get ready.

PHIL

We've still got time. The first pitch isn't until 7:05. If we left in a half hour we'd still make batting practice.

First pitch?
JEREMY

Yeah...Oh no.
PHIL

Fuck Phil.
JEREMY

You didn't forget. He fucking forgot.
PHIL

I've got a date.
JEREMY

A date? What about the "year of celibacy" thing.
PHIL

That's just it. Tonight's the night. The end. Finito. I did it pal. A full year.
JEREMY

But Jeremy. You know how hard I worked to get these tickets.
PHIL

Come on, Philly.
JEREMY

Come on yourself. Doc's on the mound again. Doc Gooden. The good doctor. The K corner. Like old times. You're just going to have to cancel.
PHIL

I can't do that.
JEREMY

Who is she? Miss New York City. Reschedule. Tell her you have pressing business. She'll understand.
PHIL

For a ball game. I don't think so.
JEREMY

PHIL

Jeremy, this is like a national holiday. No. No, it's like a religious holiday. What woman would knowingly stand between you and your religion?

JEREMY

The Firestone girl...

PHIL

Who?

JEREMY

We had a very nice exchange Phil. Two real people having a real conversation.

PHIL

The Firestone girl? From the ad?

JEREMY

She played the wife. It was touching. To witness a couple celebrate their anniversary all morning long.

PHIL

Those were actors Jeremy. Not even actors, models.

JEREMY

But she was so convincing. The way she looked at him.

PHIL

You actually bought the pitch. Your own pitch.

JEREMY

It was a touching moment. Even the lighting guys were touched.

PHIL

So let me get this straight. You're picking Miss Firestone over box seats to see Doc Gooden on the mound. Ninety-five-mile-an-hour fast balls. Curve balls dropping off the table.

JEREMY

I forgot, Phil.

PHIL

Well. Unforget!!

JEREMY

An entire year Phil. C'mon admit it. You never thought I could actually pull it off. And on the last day, the very last day, I'm rewarded with a perfectly lovely, perfectly simple human being.

PHIL

Do you have any idea what else this day is?

JEREMY

What? I don't know. It's not your grandmother's---

PHIL

The day you moved in. One year ago today.

JEREMY

Really?

PHIL

Well maybe not today, but definitely this week... And I come out of my room and I see those corny beautiful sentimental flowers and I think for sure they were for--
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JEREMY

--- We're friends Philip. We've always been friends. I mean if we're counting anniversaries, we probably need to recalibrate a little.

PHIL

Are you going to come...?

JEREMY doesn't answer. He goes to his room, starts getting dressed.

PHIL (Cont'd)

Go. Go spend our anniversary with the average looking housewife.

PHIL moves to his room. JEREMY emerges and follows PHIL into his room.