

ASCORBIC ACID FREAK

A Play in One Act by Grant Sutor Vuille

CHARACTERS

Mark

He is in his mid-thirties, has had a twenty-year career as an actor in semiprofessional show business, and is supposed to be dying of the incurable disease AIDS. The HIV virus had just been discovered.

Stephan

He is in his twenties and is Mark's live in companion, lover and friend. He is very good looking and somewhat immature.

Julie Mofit

She is an adorable young actress in her early to mid-twenties who adores Mark and wants him to return to the stage with her and raise funds to save the local Playhouse.

Wanda

She is the Manish sidekick to her actress friend, Julie. She is older and perhaps about thirty or so and is a gruff, in your face, overly protective lesbian.

Doctor Purgess, M.D.

He is Mark's personal physician and friend. He is determined to treat his patient, Mark with standard drugs and therapies of the times but is a bit quackish with conflicting ideas on how to treat this mysterious incurable illness that a cure has yet to be discovered.

Zebulon

Given the nickname, Zeb, he is in his twenties and is a very sexy and handsome younger man close to both Mark and Stephan.

SETTING

Smallville, U.S.A in 1988, at Mark's modest little home near a rural college community.

SCENE ONE

(It is early Sunday morning and Stephan is up and around in his pajamas. He is making breakfast in a kitchenette in the corner of the living room.

(He is preparing Mark's special health drink in a blender with protein powder, egg, and milk. He also adds in Vitamin C tablets. After pouring this concoction into Mark's glass he fills his own glass halfway and tops it off with a few shots of vodka from a bottle)

(Mark is heard offstage shouting commands from their bedroom)

Mark

Be sure to put at least ten thousand milligrams of Vitamin C, Stephan, I am not feeling quite myself today.

Stephan

Does that mean your needing a little hand action in there?

Mark

(Entering the living area from the bedroom, also in pajamas) Ha ha! You attempting comedy? Nice try, don't use it in the act. I'm feeling a little congested. Don't forget the two raw eggs.

Stephan

I know the routine Melanie, save the eulogy for Scarlett, she can use some of that kind of action in the sequel when she's trying to win back Rhett Butler. But it is no 1939 anymore and Scarlett, Melanie, Rhett, and Ashley are "Gone With The Wind" and not coming back in bustling 1988, Smallville, U.S.A.

Mark

Yes, but a sequel is being planned, so I'm looking forward to that! (Sadly, reflecting) I wish Hattie McDaniel was here to protect us. Mamie would take good care of us. Stephan, It's been sucking forever and going on two years that I've been sick with this AIDS crap. Doctor Purgess, M.D. wants to do a special case study on me at the University Hospital.

Stephan

Well hooray for our dear Doctor Purgess, M.D. I think we can all breathe a little easier, now. Bully for him, the old fag.

Mark

Not to worry, I don't need him, just give me plenty of Vitamin C and I will be fine. Hospitals FREAK me out. You go in for a routine hemorrhoid exam and they cut off your balls instead.

Stephan

It's your friend Doctor Purgess, M.D. who freaks me out. Personally, I think it's the raw eggs in your breakfast drink that sticks you together...and a splash of vodka.

Mark

Raw eggs BIND you together, like in pancakes...not stick, I'm not stuck together am I, Stephan? And stop with the vodka, already, it's too early for that.

Stephan

Don't knock it till you try it...maybe a little spirits can help wipe out the HIV retrovirus, ever think of that?

Mark

People with AIDS will try anything...vitamins, yoga, voodoo... whatever it takes, whatever the cure, they'll try anything. Save that medicine show elixer for yourself. I don't need any mood elevation or enhancement.

Stephan

Could have fooled me, Mr. Poppers...a little sniff is all it takes, honey-bunch.

Mark

Give me my drink, lover boy, and go make the bed.

Stephan

I'm not your nurse maid. I made your drink so come get it. Hey, Mark, aren't you the guy I saw last night on televisions "Name That Cure"? (He gives him his drink)

Mark

Spare me your sarcasm, you skeptic pessimist. (He drinks his breakfast) Doctor Purgess, M.D. says he'll cure me if it kills him... or if it doesn't kill me first.

(As Mark crosses by him Stephan takes his vodka drink, picks up the morning paper and settles comfortably on the sofa)

Stephan

What's in the news today, any medical breakthroughs coming for my nerves? (As Mark enters the bathroom with the door open the conversation continues) You know, Mark, maybe your not sick at all...maybe it's all in your head.

Mark

Yeah maybe...maybe it's all a plot to kill of homosexuals. But they test for HIV like last year when I got my positive reading. Then you got it and the test was negative....so maybe you are immune or something.... (He goes into the bathroom to freshen up, gargle, and wash his face, turning on the water in the sink)

Stephan

It's all a plot, Mark, a scheme to make millions for the pharmaceutical industry.

Mark

I can't hear you, the water's running!

Stephan

(Shouting) I said the whole thing is a plot to kill gay people! The public is scared of us and the government is in a state of moral anarchy as the infected are ostracized and eliminated by the non-infected bureaucracy! Christians say it God's punishment for queers!

Mark

Stop shouting, I'll be out in a second.

Stephan

Forget it, I'm just bull-shitting! Don't pay any attention. (Mark comes out from the bathroom)

Mark

What was that you said again, Stephan?

Stephan

Never mind, Mark, it's not worth repeating...sit down beside me and relax, buddy.

Mark

That's what I thought. (He drinks) Sure there's enough Vitamin C in this?

Stephan

(Concentrating on his newspaper) Of course there's enough.

Mark

There better be or your ass is all mine tonight.

Stephan

(Pondering an article about unjust wars and military expansionist American values) Why is it men kill each other in bloody wars but freak out over one man loving another man and expressing that love sexually. Freedom to love whoever we want regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation seems to me to be the whole point of this freedom shit...since when is freedom isn't free a requirement for basic human rights? Why the conditional approach?

Mark

(He plops onto the sofa)

You airhead!

Stephan

If freedom isn't free then what is it? We can't be talking about freedom, can we?

Mark

An Olympic competition perhaps. Winners are set free and the losers become Christian republicans...slaves to Christ and guardians of Heaven's gate. Give me some that paper...Give me the comics....

Stephan

(They tussle over the newspaper) Answer me first, Mark, then you'll get the funny papers. Well, which is it?

Mark

What? Which is what?

Stephan

Freedom...is it free if you have to pay for it?

Mark

There's a price on everything in life. Every second we exist we're paying our way by working, scheming, and sacrifice.

Stephan

What about human rights? Where's our freedom of choice if we're living in a free society that penalizes our choices...and discriminates against races, and religions, and gender and orientation? The United States Constitution is a myth.

Mark

We live by rules and laws based on promises made in that mythical constitution. Give me the comics, Stephan, you're hoarding them.

Stephan

I'm trying to focus on important political matters. LGBTQ citizens are treated like terrorists. We just want the basic human rights like the majority of society enjoys.

Mark

My basic human right is to what form of discipline I'm planning for you at bedtime.

Stephan

All God's creatures deserve a piece of the pie, don't they?

Mark

It's a fight to the death in order to survive. I'm fighting for my life every day, and so are we all.

Stephan

How can your will to live overcome an incurable disease? Can your will to fight HIV cure AIDS?

Mark

If my will to live is stronger than a viruses will to devour me then I shall be victorious.

Stephan

You certainly are sure of yourself. You don't think you need Doctor Purgess, M.D. hovering over you like the virgin Mary.

Mark

No, but he's my friend and I like to humor him. As long as I can hang in there and cheat death he will think he's the greatest doctor in all of God's green Earth.

(The phone on the end table by the sofa rings, they wrangle on who should take it, effectively lightening the moment)

Stephan

(Picking up, he answers the call) Hello? This is Stephan. Who's there, please?

Mark

(Not wanting to engage he whispers harshly) if it's for me, tell them I'm still in bed asleep.

Stephan

(Sweetly) Hey, Julie, what's happening, babe? ...Ummm, Mark's still asleep. Should I wake him? (Mark shakes his head no) Oooh, Miss Mofit, on second thought why don't you tell me instead. I'll give him a message...uh, huh...yes...well, yeah...but I don't know, I can ask him.... (Mark waves and shakes his head no) ...sounds interesting, Julie, but you know how he is about going out these days. (Mark shrugs, nods his head and rolls his eyes) You want to come over? Noon-ish? Around lunchtime? ...before one o'clock this afternoon? (Sarcastically, glancing at Mark) Okay, he ought to be up by then...you, know, when you're not feeling your best, you need all the rest you can get! (Mark looks a little wary and unsure) ...Oh, I think he's well enough to have visitors...uh, huh...see you no. later than one p.m. Thanks, honeybunch.... (Mark glares at Stephan) Bye, bye, Miss Julie.... (He hangs up)

Mark

So my favorite leading lady is paying us a call. I'm honored and touched. What's the occasion...what's she up to?

Stephan

The Smallville Playhouse wants to award you a lifetime membership.

Mark

I haven't performed there in over two years...what's the catch?

Stephan

It's the playhouses 25th anniversary. They want you and Julie to perform in a musical variety show to raise money.

Mark

They want me to jump through the hoop to save the theatre? Sounds like their usual tactic to fleece the town hall and build back their audience. Has-been variety acts is their go to fund raising grift.

Stephan

You're too cynical. The theatre needs you, Mark. They're cash poor and trying to revive the Playhouse. You did your best stage performances there, both you and Julie...you met me there as well. Remember, Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and how the three of us met at their workshop? It was some years back but I remember it as if it was yesterday.

Mark

(Wistfully recalling) How could I forget...how happy I was back then after meeting you...and Julie, of course.... I'm not sure I'd be up to it....

Stephan

You should be glad they still care...you know you still do, too. I think it would be good for you.

Mark

I'd rather receive a gift certificate to Hamburger Heaven than a lifetime membership for has-been starlets. If it wasn't for AIDS we could have moved to New York City and been on Broadway.

Stephan

You have a bad attitude. You said you have a fighting spirit? An opportunity like this will boost your metabolism and get your juices flowing. Be a champion for life, Mark, or go sit in the corner and sulk. Mind, body, and spirit...the very key to life, Liberty, and happiness...and freedom...free to be well, healthy, and on your way to recovery.

Mark

(Sadly apologetic, but hopeful) Jesus Christ, Stephan...you make it seem like a miracle...nearly twenty years of amateur theatricals has led to a crucifixion by burn-out. Sorry, Sir Lawrence of Lamentia, our dreams burst and we've been laid to rest...a bummer for sure, my friend.... You could go to New York without me, Stephan, I'm holding you back....

Stephan

I can take care myself. I choose to be with you. I'm comfortable here and I do care what happens to you with all my heart.

Mark

The bright lights of Broadway are a long way from Smallville.

Stephan

Things aren't so bad here. You made a little money doing regional theatre and local television commercials. In a way you probably had more experience than you ever could've in that Broadway fish-bowl of broken dreams.

Mark

To be sure there are drawbacks and challenges everywhere. People are people, we're all vulnerable in the eyes of God. Audience members on Broadway cough, wheeze, and snort same as they do at the Smallville Playhouse.

Stephan

Some great artists aren't recognized until after they're dead. (Embarrassed) Oops, sorry, Mark...I didn't mean it I swear!

Mark

Truth is truth...that's okay, I'm realistic. My six volumes of scrapbooks might still impress someone somewhere...and I'm not planning on dying just yet....

Stephan

Auction them off, publish them, they might be worth something. You have old recordings and video, too.

Mark

The Smithsonian has warehouses full of archaic memorabilia that hasn't made it into the museum yet. I don't expect they'll be knocking at my door anytime soon. Why on Earth do we collect so much stuff in our lives?

Stephan

So thrift stores and the Salvation Army can support their communities.

Mark

I need to raise money for myself so I can pay the doctor bills. Maybe some of our old pictures of Julie and I performing are worth something. Wonder if they'd give me a cut of the profits. A few sympathy bucks my way might be helpful, much more than my wretched health insurance.

Stephan

Let's get them out of the closet and sort through them when Julie gets here.

Mark

Ah, a nostalgia festival...the lethal antidote to the cruelest form of revenge imaginable...showing off a has-been's press clippings.

Stephan

Cut it out, don't be depressing. Let's get out of the house and go for a ride. It's a beautiful Sunday morning. Come on, get dressed, we have all morning before company arrives.

Mark

Good idea, sexy, let's go for a spin. The past is a refuge for losers!

Stephan

(Jumping up and pulling Mark up off the sofa) We can get out the scrapbooks when we get back. (He takes their glasses to the kitchenette sink, then goes to make himself a vodka drink) You know, maybe the Smallville Historical Society would give you something for all that memorabilia. They've got funding for collecting stuff like that, don't they? It's proof of a life well lived, your life, Mark.

Mark

Yeah, good old Smallville Hysterical Society! (Laughing pitifully at his own joke, hesitating, he becomes concerned) Go easy on that drink. Wait till this evening, Stephan. Julie will be here in a few hours. You don't want to be tipsy when she gets here, do you?

Stephan

Just a little pick me up for the road...you hysterical man-beast, you....

Mark

Then we're not driving. We can go for a walk instead.

Stephan

Awww...you drive us, then, stud-muffin.

Mark

Come to think of it, why don't we rest. Julie's coming over but so might Doctor Purgess, M.D. Let's relax now, finish the morning paper and just rest up. I feel a little weak.

Stephan

What are you talking about, you got a little fever so Doctor Purgess, M.D. is coming over to stick a thermometer up your butt? Get real, man, we're going for a drive.

Mark

This is like your second drink already. You can't drive.

Stephan

Yes, I can...I've barely got a buzz on.

Mark

No you don't, forget about it, no way man.

Stephan

(Tossing Mark the car keys) So, you're not helpless, you take the wheel.

Mark

(Feeling his throat) I think my glands are swollen.

Stephan

They're always swollen. You're okay, don't be a sissy, come on get ready. Hurry up, I'm suffocating in here!

Mark

I think I need to lie down. Sorry, Stephan. (He goes to the bedroom)

Stephan

Awww, come on, Mark, this isn't like you...you need the fresh air... and it's so nice out today.

Mark

Wake me up when Julie gets here.... (He enters the bedroom)

Stephan

(Going after him) I don't understand you, man, one minute your ready to conquer the world, and the next minute you're willing to give up without a fight! (Mark turns around just inside the bedroom

and tosses him the keys. Stephan catches them) Thanks a lot, Mark, you're a real pal.... (The doorbell rings, followed by knocking)

See if I take you anywhere again. I'm tired of your shit. I'm getting the door.

Mark

Whoever it is, I'm sound--- [asleep]

Stephan

(Going to the front door) ---I know, I know, you're sound asleep and dead to the world.... (Mark shuts the bedroom door)

(Stephan opens the front door and there stands a very attractive young man named Zebulon, a sexual heartthrob)

Zebulon

Hey, Stephan, dude...what's up good-looking? How are you and Mark doing?

Stephan

Hey, Zebulon...we're fine...Marks still in bed....

Zebulon

So late? Get that hot ass up and make us some coffee!

Stephan

He's under the weather. I can make coffee or how about a real drink, Zebulon?

Zebulon

(Noticing Stephans car keys, he points) Going out? Where? To church?

Stephan

No, the bar to get sloshed.

Zebulon

Bars are closed till brunch. Hope to go out later myself. So how is Mark?

Stephan

(Gesturing for him to enter, leading the way to the kitchenette)
Okay...Feeling poorly...we were going out but he's still tired. Do you want me to make coffee or do you want a man's drink? (He freshness his own drink with the vodka)

Zebulon

The Lord would strike me dead with a lightening bolt from above!

Stephan

(Making him a quick drink he offers it to him) In that case, Zeb, drink up, fella, the master's asleep and the church mice have come out to play...cheers!

Zebulon

Sure why not, the Lord works in mysterious ways, down the hatch! (He drinks)

Stephan

God would've zapped us long ago for living a deviant lifestyle, and he hasn't, so here's to God, our protector and savior, (They drink together) praise, Jesus!

Zebulon

Amen to that! That's are boy upstairs!

Stephan

I'm glad you dropped by, we had wanted to go out, but Mark changed his mind. It's good to see you, we don't get out much these

days. Zebulon, that's from the holy Bible, you're a Christian scholar aren't you?

Zebulon

Maybe somewhat...it helps to believe in something. But just call me, Zeb...it's not so in your face as Christian fanaticism goes. I'm more comfortable just being a low key Jesus freak...no collars, no crosses around the neck, etcetera....

Stephan

(Leading him to the sofa) Come on, Zeb, have a seat. If we make enough noise we'll awake Sleeping Beauty.

Zebulon

I don't want to disturb him while he's sleeping.

Stephan

(Patting the sofa to encourage Zebulon to sit) Sit down, Zeb, darling...sure you don't want me to call you Zeb-U-Lon? It's curls the tongue...kind of sexy.... We won't disturb him, we'll be quite as those church mice.... (Loudly for Mark's benefit)

Zebulon

(Getting uncomfortable, he sits next to Stephan) No, really, let's not wake him, I worry when he's not feeling well. Honest, let's not disturb him.

Stephan

I know, I know, but the guy needs a little stimulation to keep the blood boiling. It's good for him, even the doctors tell him to keep active.

Zebulon

It must be tough taking care of him.

Stephan

(A moment, a sigh) ...Yes, it can be.... (Shaking it off, and the subject) Man, it's soon great to see you! You look great...and hot as a pistol...are you really wrapped up in spiritual things? I'm a bit afraid of far right Christian's...Christ seems to be used as a weapon by them...sinners beware, you're bound for hell and all that.

Zebulon

My parents were faith healers in a traveling revivalist sideshow...I played the poor orphan crippled kid with crutches who magically could walk again after the power of Jesus was summoned.

Stephan

Weird, man, I don't remember you telling us that.

Zebulon

Yeah...I try not to think about those days.

Stephan

You're not ashamed of your past are you?

Zebulon

No...I just don't mention it for personal reasons. People get all concerned or crazy...and so I keep it to myself.

Stephan

That's cool. So you and your mom and dad were entertainers or actors spreading the Gospel.

Zebulon

That's putting it nicely. But it's not Shakespeare...theatre perhaps...or Sunday school for suckers.

Stephan

For sure. Where are your parents now? Are they still out there saving people for Jesus?

Zebulon

Probably, but I don't know, I've not seen them for years. I ran off when I realized how fake it all was...and soon after they caught me with another boy.

Stephan

Oh...I see...so how does Jesus feel about you being gay?

Zebulon

Well, I still struggle with that question. You believe in Him, he saves you...as for forgiveness, I say what's there to forgive if you love someone? Love only counts if it's unconditional. So I think Jesus has to be okay with it.

Stephan

Now that's freedom personified...loving whomever you want without judgment or condition...bye, bye, Hell, and hello, Heaven on Earth....

Zebulon

So I'm careful to keep my Christian friends in the dark about my sexuality, but only because it generates so much hostility.

Stephan

And you skipped church today to come see Mark and me... naughty boy!

Zebulon

Jesus is with me wherever I go, so He's cool with it.

Stephan

That is cool. Are you a Presbyterian?

Zebulon

Yes and no, but I've been attending the Fifth Avenue Baptist church for years even through our reverend frowns upon the LGBTQ community...and so do a lot of the parishioners where I go to worship.

Stephan

Time to switch churches...maybe a Unitarian Universalist association would be a better choice. They're cool with our LGBTQ friends....

Zebulon

Too far to go...not here in Smallville, otherwise I would. I'm used to my Baptist brethren, I understand them, and there's a few closeted ones in the mix to make me comfortable there.

Stephan

Hell-fire! Let's start our own congregation of LGBTQ spiritualist souls. Come on, Zeb, let's blow this joint and go find some recruits! The Gay Spirits of Smallville out cruising for Jesus! (Jumping up, they meander towards the door, drinks in hand)

Zebulon

(They begin to finish their drinks) Hey, wait, what about Mark? We can't leave him behind. He might want to come.

Stephan

(Putting his arms around Zebulon, he fains confidentiality)
Between you and me he can take care of himself when he makes up his mind to. We'll be back soon enough; he'll never notice we left.

Zebulon

You sure, Stephan, he's been so...I don't know...I worry about him....

Stephan

You're so sweet, he'd appreciate that, now let's get out of here...stop worrying, this disease is propaganda, a political tool to suppress our rights. Some people have it for a long time and never get sick. (He takes their empty glasses and puts them down on the end table)

Zebulon

And a lot die, too. Aren't you afraid of catching it?

Stephan

Now, I've been tested for HIV. We're safe, I don't worry like his doctor does when he's wanting to inject Mark with antibiotics and antiviral medications. If I were in Mark's shoes I wouldn't fancy being a guinea pig for overzealous quacks. Let's take a drive down to the river and park.

Zebulon

Okay, but check to see if Mark's okay.

Stephan

He's out like a light, believe me. (He tosses Zebulon the car keys) You drive, I'm three sheets to the wind.... (Leading Zebulon out the front door) Did anyone ever tell you what beautiful eyes you have?

(They shut the front door behind them. We hear the car doors open and shut. The car engine starts and the sound of it pulling out fades away. Mark enters from the bedroom in his pajamas, a thermometer in his mouth, and carrying a cold water bag. He goes to the window and peers out to see if they've gone. He goes to the kitchenette and makes a fresh vodka drink. He puts ice in his drink, and in the cold water bag for his headache. He goes over and pulls a couple of scrapbooks off the bookshelf then plops down on the sofa with them, comfortably settling into place. He checks the thermometer,

shakes it, then stirs his drink with it before putting it in his pajama pocket. He takes a drink and begins rifling through the scrapbooks, talking to himself with amusement)

Mark

(Enjoying the solitude) You son of a gun, what a brilliant career you've had...so many memories.... (He lifts out an old program) My first starring role when I was sweet sixteen, maybe it is time for a comeback.... (He holds up an old photograph) My first 8 x 10.... Lovely, I was so adorably handsome, Julie will be impressed! I can't wait till she gets here...a triple threat onstage...we were a fantastic team! Move over Ginger and Fred, Miss Mofit and Mr. Mark have passed you by! ...Amazing, what incredible memories.... She'll be so impressed when she gets here. Little Miss Julie Mofit, sat on my big juicy tofit, eating my.... (He stops to reflect remorsefully) ...Must've slipped my mind, lovely girl, if only I could have given back the love you have me....

(The stage fades to black as soft show tunes play)

SCENE TWO

(The lights come up, the show tune music fades as Mark sleeps comfortably on the sofa, scrapbooks strewn around him. The doorbell rings and there are knocks at the front door. Mark is startled as he wakes, remembering where he is, getting up as scrapbooks spill to the floor along with pictures and old programs)

Mark

Oh, my God, what time is it? (Sleepy-eyed, forgetting his lover Stephan had left he cries out for him) Stephan! Julie is here I think! (Adjusting himself in his pajama pants, he gets to his feet and goes to the door to open it, but checks out the window first to see who it is and then opens the door) Julie, it's you, dear, come on in my love!

(Julie Mofit enters with her friend, Wanda. Julie radiates youth, beauty, charm, and glamour. Wanda on the other hand is gruff,

mannishly overprotective, as Julie's somewhat defensive, lesbian companion)

Julie

Mark, it is so good to see you again! This is my friend, Wanda. I wanted you to meet her because she stage manages all our shows now.

Mark

(He shakes Wanda's hand, it hurts him) Ouch! Jesus, nice to meet you, Wanda! (Welcoming them) So really glad to see both of you... sit down and make yourselves comfortable...drinks, anyone?

Julie

Not for me, thanks...Wanda?

Wanda

(Gruffly demanding, she moves past Mark) Where's the bar?

Mark

(Taken aback) By the kitchen sink, dear...help yourself, Wanda... uh...you probably know what you like....

Julie

Don't mind Wanda, she always takes charge. Where's Stephan?

Mark

Sowing wild oats I suppose...off with a friend of ours...they should be getting back soon from wherever they have...uh...gotten off to....

Julie

That sounds ominous...you look well. Feeling stronger these days? We all miss you at the theatre.