

# *Rats!*



a play by  
*Gordon Blitz*

### Summary:

Into the townhouse of lovers, Mitch and Jaxon, come invasions of rats! We watch as the men try to cope with these “visitors” and also cope with the highs and lows of their own relationship. Over the course of twenty-five years, 1998-2023, the lives of the rodents seem to symbolically parallel the peaks and valleys that Mitch and Jaxon experience together.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS:**

Mitch – stick-thin gay man in his seventies

Jaxon -- burly gay man in his fifties.

*Other characters played by the same actor:*

Narrator

Exterminator

Doctor

Therapist

## SCENE 1

*Stage is split in half. The right side has a bed and a desk; the left side has three chairs. A scratching sound is heard. Lights come up on stage left. A NARRATOR is standing at stage left.*

NARRATOR

There are these creatures, “rats”, that creatively endure because they use ingenious techniques to survive. They are able to thrive anywhere. They are intelligent beings, and they have great abilities to navigate through highly intricate mazes.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right. MITCH (late 50’s, receding hairline and creases between his eyes) and JAXON (early 40’s, brown hair, burly with a face that likes to smile) are wearing boxer shorts and t-shirts and are sitting up in bed. It is morning.*

MITCH

What's that noise? Sounds like it's coming from the attic.

JAXON

I don't hear anything.

MITCH

That's because you haven't put in your hearing aids. I wear mine all the time!

*JAXON puts in his hearing aids.*

JAXON

It's a scurrying sound. Maybe a bird got stuck in the chimney.

MITCH

No. That's not a bird. I'm going to check outside.

JAXON

I'm going back to sleep...

*(slight stammer)*

I need my rest. I want to be fully alert for my tennis practice this afternoon. There's a tournament in Palm Springs next weekend.

*MITCH leaves the room. JAXON tries to go back to sleep. Within moments, MITCH returns.*

MITCH

Oh, god! I think we have rats. There are droppings all over the living room. It looks like they've eaten through the window screen. I bet they're nesting in the chimney. We need an exterminator. Call them.

JAXON

What's the rush?

MITCH

Are you kidding? We're getting invaded by rats!

JAXON

You don't know that for certain. Stop with the hysterics.

MITCH

I hope you're right. But even though it feels like we're in a standalone town house; remember, one of our walls connects with our neighbor. The neighbor told me when she walked into her kitchen, there was a whoosh of fleeing mice. I'd forgotten all about that until just now.

JAXON

I'm the one who lived in Manhattan, and I don't have an inner-city phobia about vermin. It was a selling point when I was dating. The minute I said my place was rodent-free, I had guys lining up to be roommates.

MITCH

You also offered them free rent, too!

JAXON

Oh, god! I never should have told you that. You know why I did that? I was doing a lot of traveling, and I didn't want my place vacant.

MITCH

Somehow, I could never picture you  
as a flight attendant.

JAXON

I know. My ears kept getting clogged,  
and I was tired of passengers treating  
me like a piece of meat. I could swear  
that's when I started losing my  
hearing. Now that I'm a TSA agent,  
it's much more civilized!

*Both MITCH and JAXON get out of bed.*

MITCH

I want to start making the bed every  
day. We *used* to make it together  
every day. Why did we stop?

JAXON

You insisted that we tie down the  
cover sheet into the box spring. It felt  
so restrictive.

MITCH

I do that so that you don't hog the  
sheet while we're sleeping.

JAXON

Oh, all right. Let's do it together.

*They proceed to make the bed putting down a stuffed bear as the final  
touch.*

MITCH

Now, doesn't that look better? More  
inviting. You know I was reading  
about the meaning behind making a  
bed daily. Hold on a second while I  
find it online.

*MITCH fidgets with his phone.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

*(reading from his phone)*

'Making your bed each morning can  
be viewed as simplistic, but hiding  
behind that ritual is a spiritual

significance. By tidying up the sleeping space, it can set the tone for your entire day and nurture your spiritual well-being.'

JAXON

You really believe that? The only reason it's inviting is because of that bear.

*MITCH laughs.*

MITCH

Thank goodness we're having our ten-year anniversary party in the rec room. Can you imagine if the event was here in our townhouse and someone saw a mouse?

JAXON

Did you ever think we would still be together after ten years?

MITCH

I hoped. I know we don't have that much in common, but we're both Jewish, we have good work ethics, and we know the value of a dollar.

JAXON

And don't forget we love each other. We've never had a problem professing that.

MITCH

That's important. No one in my family said 'I love you.' You changed me.

JAXON

And you were worth changing!

*MITCH pushes JAXON jokingly.*

MITCH

The exterminator better have a guarantee or a warranty. Like a sign that says that this townhouse is rat-free!

JAXON

You're such a drama queen. Stop being so negative! Talking about the party, I have an idea for the entertainment.

MITCH

Oh no! Are you planning on getting dressed up as Judy Garland and lip synching?

JAXON

Of course! That'll be the highlight of the evening, and we must do our duet of "Somewhere Over The Rain-bow". And my friend, Catherine, is giving me a satin dress and a wig; that one she needed when she went through chemotherapy. I was thinking of doing the Prince song, "1999". It's appropriate since at midnight, it will be the year, 1999.

MITCH

I just hope my mom will be okay. Everyone loves her. She is such a staple; the mother everyone wishes they had. Okay, I've got to shower and shave. I'm going to meet with Fred Lockheart from Lockheart Industries. I want to pin him down about that million-dollar endowment he pledged to the hospital.

JAXON

You're amazing. Such a knack for fund raising. I have no instincts for that. I hate asking people for money.

MITCH

I don't ask them for money. I just get them to feel that by donating they'll feel better.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 2

*Lights come up on stage left. MITCH (wearing lounge pants, t-shirt and flip-flops) and an EXTERMINATOR (wearing a flannel shirt jacket and hard hat) are sitting in chairs talking.*

EXTERMINATOR

You definitely have rats. We're going to have to clean out the crawl space, set up traps, repair window screens and set up more traps. I see you have a piano in your living room. They might be nesting in there. We'll check that out, too. It's not cheap. But it's guaranteed for five years.

MITCH

So, you'll come out here if they come back.

EXTERMINATOR

These are smart guys. Resourceful. Despite getting blamed for plagues, they display remarkable social skills.

MITCH

What?

EXTERMINATOR

They share food, care for each other, even show empathy.

MITCH

You sound like a spokesperson for the rodents. Save the rats!

EXTERMINATOR

This is what I don't get...there are all these animal lovers, yet when it comes to rodents, they don't give a damn!

MITCH

It gives us the willies, hearing that sound, and I don't think the droppings are healthy.



*The EXTERMINATOR'S iPhone rings.*

EXTERMINATOR

*(talking in his phone)*

Honey, I can't talk right now; I'm with a client. Yes, yes. What happened to Edna's caregiver? She was supposed to be watching your mother. I gotta' go.

MITCH

Everyone okay?

EXTERMINATOR

It's my mother-in-law. She has early onset Alzheimer's and finds a way to sneak out of the house. Don't get old. It's not fun.

MITCH

I hear you. Both my grandparents had dementia, and my mom is showing signs. We've been thinking about having her move in. She shouldn't be living alone, and I don't want her living in some awful nursing home.

EXTERMINATOR

I'm warning you guys. Don't have her move in with you. It's a big mistake. Once they get used to living in a space, moving them will kill them. Get them into an assisted living facility. That's what we should have done with Edna. And another thing. It can ruin a marriage. My wife and I ended up in therapy and temporarily separating. Anyway, let me get a complete estimate for you so we can start this project.

*Lights dim.*

### SCENE 3

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

In the symbolism of relationships, rats can often hint at the brain power and inventiveness that are needed to navigate love's complex mazes. They teach us about survival, adaptability, and the importance of a strong bond to weather oncoming storms together.

*Lights dim on stage left and come up on stage right. MITCH enters. JAXON is heard offstage.*

JAXON

Let's rehearse for the party. You do your spiel while I'm getting dressed.

MITCH

'So, we have a special guest tonight. Judy Garland is saluting the happy couple. Don't worry, you Streisand fanatics, Barbra will be here for the grand finale. Oh, here comes Judy now!'

*JAXON enters the stage in drag regalia. He is lip-synching You Made Me Love You.*

JAXON

You made me love you. I didn't want to do it; I didn't want to do it. You made me want you. And all the time you knew it; I guess you always knew it. You made me happy sometimes, You made me glad. But there were times, Dear, You made me feel so bad. You made me sigh for; I didn't want to tell you, I didn't want to tell you. I want some love that's true; yes, I do, 'deed I do, you know I do. Give me, give me, give me what I cry for. You know you got the brand of kisses that I'd die for. You know you made me love you.

*When JAXON finishes the song, MITCH and JAXON start a duet of an a capella version of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow."*

JAXON AND MITCH

*Both sing the first line of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" as lights dim.*

#### SCENE 4

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

Since the beginning of time, wherever humans lived, rats have established themselves as residents. Throughout history, rats have been kept either as treasured pets or an animal to be hated. It's no surprise that these rodents show up in mythology in different cultures.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right. MITCH and JAXON are sitting up in bed. JAXON has his arm in a sling and a bandage on his forehead.*

JAXON

Mitch, thank you for letting me wait until now before I tell you exactly what happened. As you can imagine, I was upset. I just wanted to get out of the ER.

MITCH

I can see you're shaken up. Look, whenever you want to tell me, that's okay. I understand.

JAXON

I better do it now. I know how you get. You probably won't sleep tonight if I don't give you all the details.

MITCH

Is your arm okay? I saw you wincing a few times.

JAXON

It's fine. I lucked out. Could have been worse. You know how I've been complaining about my TSA job. Ever since 9/11. Thousands of passengers

JAXON (CONT'D)

are passing through security every day.

MITCH

And they bitch and complain about taking off their shoes and belts.

JAXON

Yes. Yes. But I haven't been telling you what else has been going on. I just didn't want you worrying about me. It makes me feel like a child sometimes. I can look out for myself.

MITCH

So, what happened today?

JAXON

I first need to tell you something that happened a month ago. I almost lost my job. So this burly guy was going through the x-ray screening process, and right behind him another super-sized man came running up behind him and started hitting him. This was a physical assault! I had to stop them, so I separated the two guys. Passengers behind me started clapping. I felt good about it until the director called me into his office after my shift was over. He said, 'You cannot ever touch a passenger. I'm going to write you up for doing this. It's a warning. Don't let it happen again.'

MITCH

What an asshole! Even if that was the regulation, this had to count as an exception.

JAXON

He just issued the warning and dismissed me out of his office.

MITCH

I would have reported him to personnel.

JAXON

So, back to today. I was doing a pat down. This is one of the few times where it's acceptable to touch a passenger. I knew that this guy was going to be trouble. He looked like a skinhead. He had tattoos all over his body.

MITCH

Oh, my god!

JAXON

Well, I thought things were going to be okay. I warned the man what I was going to do, and he mumbled something like 'Whatever.' I did my best not to touch the genital area, but while I was checking his back, the idiot turned around quickly without telling me, and my hands touched his cock. I swear he had an erection, or he was hiding something in his underwear. In a flash, he grabbed my arm and threw me to the ground so violently that I hit my head and smashed my arm.

MITCH

That's horrible! I'm so sorry you went through this. God almighty! I don't think I'd be able to go back to work after something like that happened.

JAXON

And my boss just told me, 'Oh, you're not that badly hurt. Just take one sick day. I expect you back on the job the day after tomorrow.'

MITCH

So, what are you going to do?

JAXON

No clue. If I quit, it's going to look bad on my record. And I need five more years before I qualify for a pension.

MITCH

I would at least try to switch to a different department within the TSA and stay away from that boss from hell.

JAXON

I just want to go to sleep.

MITCH

Oh, I thought we were going to have wild and crazy sex.

JAXON

*Sheesh*, you're incorrigible!

*MITCH kisses JAXON good night.*

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 5

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

It's 2003. Having a rat spirit gives you the skill to survive and even thrive. It showcases a remarkable level of intelligence and caution. This spirit guide encourages you to have faith in your instincts and tap into psychic powers that let you sense either prospects or perils ahead.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right. MITCH and JAXON are in bed. JAXON is holding a Celebration of Life program in his hand. MITCH is reading from his kindle. JAXON takes the kindle away from him.*

JAXON

You're always reading. I wanted to talk to you this morning.

MITCH

Don't just grab my kindle. I was right in the middle of a chapter. I wish you would read a book. It would be nice to discuss a book sometimes that we've both read.

JAXON

Sorry! I don't read as fast as you, and our tastes are so different. I'm only interested in non-fiction, and you're a fiction addict.

*(stammering)*

Now you've made me lose my train of thought. Oh right, what did you think about the ceremony yesterday? Not too saccharine?

MITCH

I'm just so glad this isn't like the 1990s when we were going to one of these Celebration of Life ceremonies weekly.



JAXON

I'm not usually into poetry, but I loved what they chose to read. It's a poem by Walt Whitman.

*(stammering)*

I had to read it a few times before I fully understood the meaning.

*'Dark mother, always gliding near  
with soft feet, Footsteps gently  
ascending, mystical breezes wafted  
soft and low, Have none chanted for  
thee a chant of fullest welcome? Then  
I chant it for thee. I glorify thee above  
all--not life alone--death, many  
deaths, I'll sing.'*

MITCH

I can't believe how many friends we've lost to AIDS. All of our peers are gone. And just when I think I've gotten over grieving for my mother, someone else dies. At least, it's less frequent. Thank goodness we have our synagogue. Otherwise, there would be no community left.

JAXON

And for me, I have tennis. It makes such a difference having that comradeship with the other guys. I wish you had that kind of outlet. The physicality helps me mentally, too. I see how stressed out you get. I see it in your face. Every time we think that AIDS is a manageable disease like diabetes, there's another death.

MITCH

And this fund-raising campaign I'm running is a nightmare. It's the rich that are stingy. They're the ones who could afford it. Ever since 9/11, my job is no longer fun. Charitable giving is in the crapper. How's the interviewing going?

JAXON

Okay, I guess. I hate working for someone else. I wish I could be my own boss.

MITCH

I don't think that's possible as a TSA agent.

JAXON

I . . .  
(stammers)

MITCH

You know it seems like your stammering is getting worse. Are you nervous about something?

JAXON

No. I'm fine. Stop worrying about me! Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that I got offered a job as a security guard at the Getty Museum, but it's at half the pay I was making.

MITCH

You should take it. It would be less stressful. I'm making enough for us to get by.

JAXON

But I thought you wanted to be able to move because of the rats.

MITCH

Well, here it is 2003, and for five years we haven't seen a rat. Nothing since 1998-- the year we had our anniversary party and celebrated New Year's.

*MITCH gets up from bed and goes to the desk. He picks up an envelope.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Hey, this is for jury duty. Weren't you supposed to mail this back?

JAXON

I wondered what happened to it. And have you seen my car registration? I don't know where it is.

MITCH

I bet that's late, too. You'll have to pay a penalty. God, you need to keep track of these things. I don't want to feel responsible.

JAXON

I never said that that was your job. Come back to bed. I'm in the mood.

MITCH

We just did it last night. I thought we were going to switch times.

JAXON

But you know I really do like it in the mornings. It wakes me up. Gives me energy for the day. It's invigorating.

MITCH

Damn! I wish we could talk about sex with another couple. Just as long as you don't discuss my fetish.

JAXON

Well, if it was a regular fetish--like feet or wrestling; that would be something I could relate to. But come on; you really want me to dress up in some animal costume?

MITCH

It's called *furries*. I looked it up. Yes, it's unusual, but it has a name.

JAXON

Please! It would just feel too weird.

MITCH

If *you* had a fetish, I would be happy to recreate it for you.

JAXON

But I don't. I'm afraid to ask what you're thinking about when we have sex. With me, I am totally present. You turn me on.

MITCH

I *do* get turned on by you. I just need a little extra help.

JAXON

You're impossible . . . and special. That's why I love you. Well, if we're not going to do the deed this morning, then I'm going to try to get an early tennis court appointment. I think I know where I put my car registration.

*JAXON gets up from bed and walks over to the desk. He lets out a scream after opening the bottom drawer.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

Oh, my god!

MITCH

What's wrong?

JAXON

Look what's in the drawer!

*MITCH screams out.*

MITCH

It's a dead rat! How did it get in there? Shit!

JAXON

We hardly ever use that drawer. It could have been there for a while.

MITCH

And you didn't smell it? I haven't been able to smell anything since I was five years old, so I have an excuse. But I thought you were so sensitive. You're always noticing smells--good and bad. And you complain about my breath.

JAXON

That reminds me. It's pretty bad this morning. You should brush your teeth.

MITCH

But I thought you wanted to have sex in the morning. Maybe that's your fetish. Bad breath... Anyway, I need to call the exterminator before he gets booked up.

JAXON

You know I'm amazed that the rat infestation has

JAXON (CONT'D)

come back. Think of all the impediments the exterminator put in-- between the fencing and the traps and the poison --yet these rats found a way back into our house.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 6

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

People with the rat totem possess amazing survival skills showing adaptability in various situations. They traverse through life's challenges with nimbleness and intelligence much like rats finding their way through complex obstacles.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right.*

*Morning sun is seeping through. JAXON is sitting at the bedroom desk in his boxer shorts staring at his laptop, sexually aroused, beginning to masturbate. As he moans, MITCH is shouting from off stage.*

MITCH

Breakfast is ready.

JAXON quickly shuts off the laptop, uses a towel to wipe up sperm, pulls up his shorts and turns around and sees MITCH.

MITCH (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JAXON

(stammering)

I was...

MITCH

I think I know what you were doing. I was wondering why we weren't having sex as often. It used to be at least once a week and now it's more like once a month.

Obviously, you get more out of looking at porn then having sex with me.

JAXON

You never seem to be in the mood, and you know how I like it . . .

MITCH  
... in the morning. Yeah, I know.  
You're like a broken record about that.

JAXON  
Well, you seem unwilling to  
compromise.

*MITCH is holding his neck.*

MITCH  
It feels like my neck is swollen. I've  
never had swollen glands. And it hurts  
when I swallow. Can you feel  
anything?

*JAXON feels MITCH's neck and starts massaging MITCH.*

MITCH (CONT'D)  
Ah, that feels good, but did you feel  
something like a lump?

JAXON  
Well, your muscles are tight, but I'm  
not a doctor, so I couldn't tell you if  
you have swollen glands. Maybe  
you're coming down with a sore  
throat?

MITCH  
I've got a bad taste in my mouth.

JAXON  
That's why I keep telling you to brush  
your teeth. Your breath stinks!

MITCH  
For your information, I brush my teeth  
every morning before I eat breakfast.  
You're making me nervous. Like  
something is wrong. I better make an  
appointment to see my doctor.

JAXON  
Yes, Mr. Hypochondriac.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 7

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

People who have a rat's power are specialists at seeking opportunities where they can triumph and make fortunes; go-getters who aren't timid about pursuing risky projects. As enterprising power animals, these people tire of repetitive or dull work. Only by seeing projects through to completion will they be satisfied.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right.*

*MITCH is sitting at the bedroom desk looking at his laptop. He stops and starts screaming.*

MITCH

Oh my god! Jaxon, come here. Come here now! Oh my god!

JAXON rushes into the bedroom.

JAXON

What's wrong? I thought you were getting murdered the way you were screaming, or maybe you saw a rat.

MITCH

Look at this.

JAXON

What is it?

MITCH

Remember, I told you about that metallic taste in my mouth, and I tried using a mouth wash, and then the Physician's Assistant had me do tests and blood work? Now I'm looking at the results from the CAT scan. Read it to me. Maybe I'm overreacting.



*JAXON begins reading it out loud, pausing and stammering.*

JAXON

‘Poorly defined mass lesion in the left  
base of tongue and gloss tonsillar  
sulcus extend inferiorly to the  
vallecula distended with a primary  
SCC with bilateral pathologic cervical  
lymphadenopathy most consistent  
with metastatic disease.’

MITCH

This doesn't sound good. Oh, my god,  
I've got cancer!

JAXON

You don't know that. Did a doctor  
look at this?

MITCH

I don't think so. It showed up on my  
hospital link. Must be before a doctor  
reviewed the results.

JAXON

You should call the office. Maybe  
they know something.

*MITCH reaches for his phone and calls the doctor's office.*

MITCH

I'm a patient of Doctor Blair. I just  
saw my CAT scan results.

*There is a pause as Mitch listens before speaking again.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Okay, I understand. Yes, that  
appointment time is fine for the end of  
the week. Thank you.

JAXON

So, what did they say?

MITCH

Not to worry about it. There are  
doctors looking at it, and we've got an  
appointment with the ENT surgeon.

*Lights dim on stage right. Lights come up on stage left. MITCH and JAXON are sitting holding each other's hand tightly and facing a DOCTOR who is wearing a white lab coat.*

DOCTOR

I looked at your scans and the needle aspiration, and just as we suspected, you have throat cancer. It's HPV-related. We're seeing a lot of these cases from people who've never smoked. Most people who get HPV have their body

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

fight it off, but you are one of the unlucky ones. However, the good news is that it's curable. A combination of radiation and chemo over a couple months should rid the body of any cancer. Do you have any questions?

*MITCH and JAXON look at each other and look numb from the doctor's words.*

MITCH

I can't say that this is a shock since I saw the results of the scan probably before you looked at them.

DOCTOR

Sorry about that, but with these HIPPA rules, the patient has the right to see the results as soon as they're available. Before you leave, I'll give you some literature about the treatment. This is a very slow-progressing cancer. Still, we need to start treatment sooner rather than later. There are a lot of preliminary steps before treatment starts.

MITCH

Thank you for being honest with me.

*MITCH and JAXON leave the doctor's office. They are both hugging each other and crying. Lights dim.*

*Lights come up on stage right. MITCH is on the computer periodically looking over at JAXON.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Thank goodness I took an early retirement even though it wasn't really my choice.

JAXON

See, you were so worried that you were almost sixty, and that the job defined your life. You've been thriving. You're taking classes, volunteering at the soup kitchen, and doing peer counseling at the LGBTQ Center.

MITCH

I'm still mad at my company. They eliminated my job. I was let go, but I told the whole world that it was my decision to retire early. But you're right, I *am* keeping myself busy. The doctor *did* say it was curable, right?

JAXON

Yes. Michael Douglas survived the same sort of throat cancer.

MITCH

I just keep telling myself that I'm going to be okay. And they say that Doctor Blair is the best in the field, and that if they got the same diagnosis, they would want him for their doctor. Lots of great reviews on Yelp.

JAXON

Is nothing sacred? Do they have reviews on rabbis too?

*The phone rings.*

MITCH

Who could possibly be calling this late?

*MITCH picks up the phone.*

MITCH

Oh my god! Thank you. We'll come over right away and pick it up.

*MITCH hangs up and looks at JAXON.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Did you realize that you lost your wallet at the doctor's office?

JAXON

You were driving, so I don't even remember bringing my wallet with me.

MITCH

Well, luckily, they found it and are holding it for us. You have to be careful. What's going to happen when I'm having chemo and radiation. I'm going to need your help. I want to be able to count on you.

JAXON

Don't worry. If worse comes to worse, you can always hire someone. And besides, the doctor said you might not have any side effects.

MITCH

I hope so.

*Lights dim. Lights come back up on stage right.*

*MITCH is at the desk searching for something.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Where is it?

JAXON

What?

MITCH

The lubricant. The last time I used it, I left it in the desk.

JAXON

I have no idea. I thought you never masturbated.

MITCH

Why should *you* have all the fun? I can't remember the last time we made love.

JAXON

Actually, I think it's been over a year, and I just realized something. This bed needs to be anointed.

MITCH

Sounds so Christian. Do we have a substitute for lube?

JAXON

No, but I have an idea.

*Lights dim. Lights come back up on stage right. JAXON is standing by the bedroom's ensuite bathroom door. We hear the sound of MITCH vomiting offstage.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

MITCH

No! Do I sound okay?

JAXON

You're such a grouch.

MITCH

Well, you would be too if you were throwing up all day.

JAXON

I'm going out to the store. Do you want me to get you anything?

MITCH

No. I told you; nothing tastes good. Just leave me alone.

JAXON

Come on. I'm trying to help.

MITCH

If you really wanted to help me, you would get a wash cloth to clean me up or get me some ice cubes to suck on.

JAXON

You should have asked me.

*MITCH comes in from offstage bathroom.*

MITCH

You should know this stuff. Didn't you ever throw up when you were a kid, and your mother helped you?

JAXON

If she did help, then I don't remember what she did. I don't understand why you expect me to know all this stuff about taking care of you. Look, you're retired, and I'm still working.

MITCH

Do you hear yourself? You're my lover.

JAXON

This is new for me. I never thought I would have to take care of you.

MITCH

Is that why you didn't want to get married? You didn't want to do the 'in sickness and health' bit?

JAXON

That's not fair.

MITCH

What's not fair is me getting cancer!

JAXON

Didn't you tell me that when your first lover was dying, you never took off work?

MITCH

I was a young immature 28-year-old.  
That's very different from you. You're  
45 years old!

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 8

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

Five years have passed. For a brief period in 2008, same-sex marriages were legal. In relationships, a rat can symbolize both the good and the bad. It might point to an increase in riches or prosperity coming your way mirroring how rats are seen in Chinese mythology as carriers of treasures and luck. But on the flip side, rats are linked to treachery and dishonesty; hidden truths in a relationship, blind loyalty and protection against hardships and any potential menace from those you least expect it from.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights come up on stage right.*

*JAXON and MITCH are in bed.*

JAXON

Are you sure you don't want to come with me to Palm Springs for the Dinah Shore Tennis Tournament? You always have a good time.

MITCH

No, I don't feel like it. I'm not interested in tennis, and that's all

MITCH (CONT'D)

the guys on your team ever talk about. That's *your* thing.

JAXON

I thought it would be something fun that we could do together.

MITCH

Then how come you didn't come with me to the Theater Fringe Festival or to Sundance. I ended up going alone-- just like I almost always go to the theater and movies by myself. I don't



mind, but it doesn't seem fair that you keep insisting I come with you to your tennis events.

JAXON

I go to the movies with you.

MITCH

Sure! Once or twice a year when it's a film that's going to be nominated. It's frustrating. And when I suggest a play, you don't give me a straight answer. As if you're waiting to get a consensus as to whether it's worth it.

JAXON

Look, this conversation isn't going anywhere. Let's drop it. Obviously, I'm not going to be able to convince you to go to Palm Springs.

*JAXON gets up from bed and starts looking for his iPhone.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

Do you know where I put my iPhone?  
Call me on yours.

*MITCH reaches for his iPhone and uses it to call JAXON. The sound of the iPhone is heard from another room.*

MITCH

It must be in the kitchen. I really wish you would go to a neurologist. Your memory keeps getting worse. That's how it was with my mother.

JAXON

Please stop harping at me about that. I'll do it. Remember, I'm still working, and you're retired. You have time to go to doctors. I don't. I'm sick of you telling me all the time.

MITCH

Okay. I'm just trying to help. Doesn't it frustrate you when you misplace something?

JAXON

But I always end up finding it.

*JAXON goes back to bed and snuggles with MITCH*

MITCH

That reminds me; this is my five-year anniversary of being cancer free. We should have a party to celebrate. And we can combine it with our own twentieth anniversary.

JAXON

Do you regret that we never got married when it was legal?

MITCH

Not really. If we both really wanted to, it would have happened. Plus, it doesn't make sense to get married as some sort of political statement.

JAXON

I guess you're right. It just seems like professing our love to one another among our friends and family would have changed our relationship in a good way.

MITCH

You don't know that. It doesn't change anything--the piece of paper and the ring. Let's make the bed, and this time I want to turn the mattress over and change the sheets. I need a strong man to do that.

*They strip the bed and JAXON turns over the mattress. As they work together, they sing "You Made Me Love You."*

JAXON

We should wash the mat- tress cover and vacuum.  
That's what my mother used to do.

MITCH

That's overkill. Let's just remake the bed.

*They put on the bottom and top sheet followed by the pillows and bedspread. They continue singing.*

JAXON

Where's your furry friend?

MITCH

I realized those stuffed animals are filled with germs and dirt.

JAXON

Does that mean . . . ?

MITCH

No, don't get your hopes up.

JAXON

*Sheesh!* Oh, we should buy a lottery ticket. I feel like good luck is right around the corner. Didn't you tell me you had a windfall on one of your investments?

MITCH

Yes, I just received a check from that partner-ship I invested in when I was working.

JAXON

You know what else is happening in 2008? It's the year of the *rat*.

MITCH

God, don't mention rats. We've been rat-free for five years.

JAXON

Maybe they're hibernating. Just waiting to pop up *this* year.

MITCH

If you really think that's true, then I'm going to call the exterminator and have him check out the chimney. I want to be proactive.

JAXON

God, I'm so tired. I think I'll take a shower to wake myself up.

*MITCH begins calling the exterminator, while JAXON gets up out of bed and walks toward the bathroom. He suddenly collapses. MITCH rushes over and bends over JAXON and starts to scream.*

MITCH

Jaxon! Jaxon!

*JAXON slowly regains consciousness and sits up. He dramatically points toward the floor and screams.*

JAXON

I just saw a rat!

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 9

*Lights go up on stage left. The EXTERMINATOR and MITCH are sitting in chairs talking.*

EXTERMINATOR

So, let me get this straight. Your partner, Jaxon, passed out when he saw a rat scurrying by?

MITCH

We think that's what happened. It may have just been a coincidence.

EXTERMINATOR

Is Jaxon okay?

MITCH

Apparently, his pacemaker was faulty, but the doctor isn't sure if Jaxon saw the rat and then fainted. Thank goodness he didn't hurt himself when he fell. Just bruised his nose and sprained a rib.

EXTERMINATOR

And you said this was the first time you actually saw a live rat.

MITCH

Yes, before it was just damage and droppings. And, of course, we found that dead rat in the drawer that time. It doesn't matter. We need to get this place fumigated.

EXTERMINATOR

This is very strange to have recurrence. Usually the rats are smart enough to stay away once they realize the space is a death trap for them. Look, I *have* been getting calls about more rat sightings lately. The density of the neighbor-hoods seems to be the culprit, and people just aren't being careful about their garbage. But that's not a problem with you guys. My

goodness, your townhouse hardly looks lived in.

MITCH

Everything has its place. Both of our parents were borderline hoarders, so we make it a point to constantly declutter.

EXTERMINATOR

Have you thought about getting a cat? I'm probably shooting myself in the foot by suggesting that. I would be out of business if I told all my clients that a cat would solve their rat infestation problems.

MITCH

No, we're both allergic, so that's not an option.

EXTERMINATOR

Well, I'll start the process.

*Lights dim on stage left, and lights go up on stage right. MITCH and JAXON are in bed.*

MITCH

Thank goodness they discovered why you passed out. I was worried it was some sort of underlying condition, but it's just a faulty pacemaker. Unfortunately, we'll never know if it was the shock of seeing the rodent that caused your heart to stop.

JAXON

Are you planning on speaking at Harry's unveiling.

MITCH

Yes, but I've been struggling as to what to say.

JAXON

Why don't you share it with me? Maybe I can help.

*MITCH goes to the bedroom desk and finds the eulogy and begins reading it to JAXON.*

MITCH

'I hate playing the "what if" game; what if a vaccine or cure existed for HIV or dementia or cancer; then my friend, Harry, would be alive today. Harry suffered from all three of those catastrophic illnesses. I like being haunted by him though. I can show off my knowledge of bel canto opera with the best of the remaining queens on the planet; an imprint that Harry left on me. And it's not just about Harry who died. All of those deaths from AIDS in the 1990s did not prepare me for losing my friends in these last couple of years to colon and pancreatic and brain and lung cancer in the present. I feel isolated. That there is no one who understands me. I need to keep repeating the lyrics to the song from *Wicked* about 'all the ways I've been changed for the good.' Recreating their talents through me, I don't need to mourn these deaths. I just need to be possessed by them in a sweet way.'

*JAXON cries at the end of MITCH's speech.*

JAXON

I wouldn't change a thing, although I wondered why you didn't bring up anything about *your* cancer.

MITCH

I didn't want it to be about me. It's obvious that I survived.

JAXON

And I suppose you didn't want to explain how Harry helped you find a therapist and made you feel comfortable about taking antidepressants.

MITCH

Yes, too personal. I wish I hadn't been resistant to drugs and even therapy. It's been good for me and our relationship. Would you ever consider couples therapy?

JAXON

Why? There's nothing wrong with us. If it ain't broke, why fix it?

MITCH

I was thinking just something like a tune-up. I had a real break-through in my last session. Just think about it.

*Lights dim on stage right, and lights come up on stage left.*

*MITCH is sitting across from a THERAPIST (wearing a cardigan sweater).*

THERAPIST

In our last session, you said you felt like we were at a standstill. We've never talked about your early life. Maybe that will help us get over the hurdle. All you've told me was that you were lonely.

MITCH

I had no friends growing up. I had to compensate by listening to music. The transistor radio became my only friend. I became infatuated with the Top Ten. I prayed for the Motown groups to have a smash once a year; The Supremes, The Four Tops, The Temptations. That ability to listen was the starting point of being a good listener later in life. Taking note of the way people spoke--their cadences, inflections, melodic rhythms. This expertise helped me when I was working as a fund raiser.



THERAPIST

Sounds like you would have made a great therapist!

MITCH

Surprisingly, I hated listening to my own voice because it sounded weak and feminine to me and something to be made fun of. I hardly talked. Only the bare minimum. I was ashamed that I didn't sound masculine enough. Now, I love my voice, and I write and present all kinds of things; going away speeches, birthday celebration wishes, eulogies, and sermons at my LGBTQ synagogue. And those years of being friendless turned me into an expert at having long term friendships; ones that have spanned close to fifty years. I cry less, but those gushing moments are vigorously cathartic.

THERAPIST

Wow! You are really in a good space. Maybe you don't need any more therapy, and that's why you feel like nothing is getting accomplished.

MITCH

After I retired, I tried to use all of those skills.

THERAPIST

Bravo! I wish I had other patients like you. Amazing. The only thing is, you don't ever mention your lover, Jaxon.

MITCH

Boy, I thought you wouldn't notice. I think we need couples therapy. There are issues that I'm afraid to talk to him about.

THERAPIST

What kinds of things are you having difficulty with.

MITCH

I know he did the best he could during my cancer treatment, but he never took off work, and it seemed like playing tennis was more important than taking care of *me*. He kept saying that whacking those tennis balls with his racket—that's what kept him sane.

THERAPIST

I understand where you're coming from. Anything else you would want to work on?

*MITCH pulls out some papers from his shoulder bag.*

MITCH

Is it okay if I read this?

THERAPIST

Go ahead.

MITCH

‘Going through cancer made me think about having daily closure--a protection from having any regrets. In the future, I want to stabilize. I hate that my body is deteriorating, but I’m learning to live with my hearing loss and my mental and physical decline. Even having double vision can be corrected by prisms. I want to make my own story every day and not be filled with “what ifs.” I want to stop catastrophizing.’

*MITCH stops.*

THERAPIST

Are you okay?

MITCH

Yes. It just feels so strange saying these words out loud. I still have some more that I want to share with you.

THERAPIST

I don't have another patient today, so that's fine if we go a little over our time.

MITCH

I've been panicking about all the political turmoil with homophobia and antisemitism on the rise. I wish I believed that love would save us if doomsday occurred. I like curling up with Jaxon, feeling his heat, knowing that he'll be there when the crows are fighting in the morning and the sun finds its way into our bedroom. I want this to be enough to feel a little bit sheltered. But since I don't feel that, I'm worried that some-thing has changed in our relationship.

THERAPIST

Interesting. I'm definitely open to doing couples therapy.

MITCH

Okay. Let me talk to Jaxon and set up an appointment. Oh, before we end the session, do you have opinions about dreams? How to interpret them? The reason I'm asking is because I've been having these recurring dreams.

THERAPIST

I'm not an expert on dreams, so I can't help you there. But I can suggest books that might give you a clue.

*Lights dim. Lights come up hazy blue on stage right. MITCH and JAXON are in bed. The lights reflect a dream state.*

MITCH

I'm so glad we met. Here we are in bed already, and you're so attentive. I

loved the way you kept asking me what I wanted to do in bed. I mean no one does that. I had a lover for fifteen years and we never ever talked about sex.

JAXON

Why not? After fifteen years? I just can't imagine doing the most intimate thing with another person and not discussing it.

MITCH

We were afraid it wasn't romantic. Maybe I didn't want to hear I was doing something wrong.

JAXON

Well get used to me and I expect you to be straight with me.

MITCH

Please don't be straight!

*JAXON laughs and tickles MITCH. When MITCH doesn't laugh, JAXON stops.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Can you believe it? I'm not ticklish.

JAXON

I don't believe it. This will be a challenge to find your secret spot.

*JAXON takes a stuffed animal from under the bed and starts rubbing it against MITCH's body. JAXON grunts like a bear. MITCH responds with sexual moans.*

MITCH

I can't believe you created my fantasy. How did you know?

JAXON

I remember you casually mentioned it when we got a little drunk. You said something about *furries*, so I looked it up, and it's a fairly common fetish. I thought you'd like it.

MITCH

Oh yes! I never did this with another person before. Thank you. You know what else I'd like to do? Go to the revival movie theater and see *Rosemary's Baby*. I can watch that film over and over again. Never get tired of it. I hate to admit it, but another film I can rewatch multiple times is *The Sound of Music*. Just don't tell anyone.

JAXON

Okay; your secret is safe with me. But I like to do physical things. You know I love tennis, but hiking is my second passion. We could go to the Santa Monica Mountains.

MITCH

You're full of surprises. That's why I already love you. You would make such a...

*JAXON stops MITCH from talking by using his hand to cover MITCH's lips.*

JAXON

I know what you are going to say. Look, I'm not into relationships. I don't want to live with you. And even if I did love you, I just can't say the words. Because one day I might not love you, so I'd rather not tell you. I don't want to lie.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 10

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

It's 2013, five years have passed and MITCH periodically dreams about rats. Rats appear frequently in dreams as a symbol of one's bottled-up, negative feelings. In the waking state, emotions like envy, regret, and dislike could be hidden, but they come to light in rat-dreams.

*Lights come up hazy blue on stage right. The lights reflect a dream state. MITCH is on his phone.*

MITCH

Where are you, Jaxon? You've been gone all day. You didn't leave any kind of note. Never called me. It's almost midnight. I thought something had happened to you. I was going to call the police. Shit! Jaxon. I'm really pissed off at you. Just come home.

*The sound of a rat is suddenly heard getting caught in a trap. It is squeaking piteously. MITCH screams.*

MITCH

Jaxon! Jaxon! Jaxon!

*Lights dim, and lights come up again on stage right. Lights reflect that the dream is over.*

*MITCH is panting and sobbing uncontrollably.*

*JAXON runs into the bedroom. MITCH is in tears. He throws his arms around JAXON.*

MITCH

Oh, my god! I had a horrible nightmare. A rat was caught in a trap, and I could hear it screaming. I didn't know what to do. I was shouting your name for help. You weren't there, and then I thought something terrible had happened to you. I was waiting for

you to come home, and I finally called you. Now I don't know what's real and what's not.

JAXON

I am so sorry. Time just got away from me. And there wasn't any cell phone coverage. I thought I told you about the tennis tournament, and the guys went out to eat afterwards. And there was this bar-disco. We were dancing. You said you didn't want to come.

MITCH

Please, please try to communicate with me. You can be so scattered, sometimes. Damn!

JAXON

What can I do to make it up to you?

MITCH

You really want to know? I want you to hear me out before you say anything.

JAXON

Oh, boy! What are you planning?

MITCH

Couples Therapy.

JAXON

What?

MITCH

Look, we've been together for twenty-five years.

JAXON

Oh, god! This is just like the song in *Fiddler on the Roof* where Tevye questions Golda if she loves him. Is that what's wrong? You don't think I love you anymore?

MITCH

No, I didn't say that. I just think it would be healthy to go for therapy. Get an objective voice. Sort of like a tune-up. I mentioned this to you a long time ago.

JAXON

If you did, I don't remember. What are we going to talk about? We don't hold anything back. Sounds like a waste of time.

MITCH

There are things going on that I'm afraid to bring up.

JAXON

Like what?

MITCH

Well, like today. You were missing in action.

JAXON

But I explained what happened.

*MITCH's eyes are wide open and he looks down at the floor and points.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

What is it?

MITCH

Oh, god! It's that rat I dreamed about! It didn't get caught! But this one is beautiful. It has a calico coloring. You know, I've actually been reading about them on the Internet. They're called rusted. They start out with a sort of mottled color pattern, and then it spreads throughout as they age, and they finally get *rusted* all over their body.

JAXON

You make it sound like we should have it as a pet.



MITCH

Oh, no! I wouldn't go *that* far. I guess  
it's time to call the  
exterminator. It's like clockwork. They  
show up every five years.

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 11

*Lights come up on stage left. The EXTERMINATOR and MITCH are sitting in chairs and talking.*

EXTERMINATOR

I figured I would stop by. It's been five years. I wanted to be proactive. Not only that, but I'm retiring, and I wanted to say goodbye. My goodness it's 2018. I've been coming here for twenty years. You're my longest running customer.

MITCH

Well, I hope you've trained someone.

EXTERMINATOR

Actually, no. The company has ideas about what makes a good exterminator. They think I'm too old-school. But if you have any problems, you can call me personally. Where's Jaxon?

MITCH

Oh, he's out playing pickleball.

EXTERMINATOR

I thought he was into tennis.

MITCH

Oh he is, but he thinks he'll have a better chance of competing in the USA Pickleball Association Tournament. He keeps telling me that I should try it because it's easier to learn than tennis.

EXTERMINATOR

I can tell by your face that you're not into sports and that you feel left out.

MITCH

Correct. With Jaxon's obsession with tennis and pickleball, it seems like we're living separate lives. It seems like he spends every waking minute

either watching or playing tennis and now pickle-ball.

EXTERMINATOR

That may not be a bad thing. Sometimes I think that my ex and I had too many things in common. We did everything together. We'd shop Costco, only listen to jazz, only watch *Law and Order*, and only read autobiographies'. And yet we still ended up divorcing. I don't even know why. She said she was bored. That she didn't want to spend the rest of her life with me.

MITCH

Boy, that is harsh. Funny, when Jaxon and I first got together, we would sort of compromise. I would go to tournaments with him while he'd see the latest Sondheim musical with me.

EXTERMINATOR

I can tell you guys still love each other. Things will work out. Look, I've got another appointment to say my good byes to other customers.

*Lights dim on stage left and stage right is almost completely dark.*

*MITCH and JAXON are sleeping. MITCH is mumbling and talking in his sleep becoming distraught and caught up in a nightmare.*

MITCH

I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

*JAXON shakes MITCH as lights come up. MITCH comes slowly awake confused and panting.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

What's going on? Oh god! Oh, god! I was having this horrible dream.

JAXON

You were talking in your sleep and thrashing around. I was afraid you

were going to hurt me. That's why I woke you up.

MITCH

Thank you. What a nightmare. It felt so very real to me; not like I was dreaming.

JAXON

What was it about?

MITCH

You remember when I used to have those rat dreams?

JAXON

Yes. You said they were pretty vivid.

MITCH

Yes, and *this* time, it was....

*Lights dim and come up hazy blue on stage right. The lights reflect a dream state.*

*MITCH jumps out of bed and starts hollering at JAXON.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

Are you trying to kill me? It felt like you were strangling me.

JAXON

It was just some wrestling moves.

MITCH

This is so unfair. You won't do *furries*, yet you expect me to participate in a chokehold to get you excited?

*JAXON looks confused.*

JAXON

Who are you?

MITCH

What does that mean?

JAXON

What day is it?

MITCH

It's Saturday.

JAXON

Oh. Why are you staring at me like something is wrong?

MITCH

Because you just asked me, 'Who are you?'

JAXON

I did? I don't remember that.

MITCH

You just asked me! Jaxon, your memory keeps getting worse. We have to do something about that!

JAXON

Stop! I'm so tired of this. It's toxic living with you! You're impatient with me, or you talk down to me like I'm a child. You're depressed all the time. I hate it!

MITCH

That's why we should be in therapy.

JAXON

There you go again. Trying to control my life. I don't even recognize you anymore.

*JAXON gets out of bed and tries to leave the bedroom, but MITCH barricades the door.*

JAXON

Move away!

MITCH

No! Make me!

*JAXON pushes past MITCH. Both crumble to the floor. Both begin wrestling with one another. This time MITCH is trying to put a chokehold on JAXON.*

JAXON

Stop! You don't know what you're  
doing.

*MITCH keeps squeezing JAXON's throat until JAXON breaks free.*

MITCH  
You've ruined my life.

JAXON  
Fuck you!

MITCH  
I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 12

*Lights come up on stage left. MITCH and JAXON are sitting facing the seated THERAPIST.*

THERAPIST

When I meet couples for the first time,  
I find it helpful for them to give a  
short history of their life and what  
they plan to get out of Couples  
Therapy.

JAXON

I'll start since Mitch has been seeing  
you already. Somehow, I think that's  
unfair. I don't know if Mitch has said  
anything about my not wanting to  
come here today. There's nothing in  
our relationship that needs to be fixed  
with anyone else's help.

THERAPIST

That may be true but Mitch feels like  
this would be helpful. Tell me a little  
about yourself.

JAXON

I'm a TSA agent, and I love tennis.

THERAPIST

Could you elaborate a little more?  
Like when you came out, how did  
your parents react?

JAXON

(stammering)

I was eighteen. It was a non-event  
with my parents. My father had ten  
brothers and sisters and three of them  
were gay, so me coming out wasn't a  
shock. My mother even joked, 'I  
wondered when you were going to  
figure it out.' They were thrilled that I  
had taken up tennis. Worried that I  
wouldn't have any interest in sports.

MITCH

Is that supposed to be a dig at me  
because I hate sports.

JAXON

No. I'm just answering the therapist.  
You are *so* paranoid.

THERAPIST

Let's try to talk about ourselves and  
not our partners.

*JAXON tries to hold MITCH's hand, but, at first, MITCH pulls away, but  
since JAXON is persistent, they eventually do hold hands.*

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Thanks Jaxon. I think I have a bit of  
an inkling about your family  
dynamics. Plus, I have an advantage  
with Mitch being one of my patients. I  
have a pretty good idea what you guys  
are looking for; at least from his  
perspective.

JAXON

I still don't understand why we're here.

THERAPIST

Now, I have a few ideas that I want  
you to consider. First of all, have  
either of you considered having an  
open relationship? Jaxon, it might be a  
way to jump start your relationship  
with Mitch. And Mitch, it might give  
you a different perspective. Bring in a  
little spice.

MITCH

But we've been monogamous the  
whole time we've been together. Don't  
they say that if it's not broke, don't try  
to fix it.

JAXON

Hey, that was my line.



THERAPIST

That's different. And in some ways  
your relationship *is* broken.

JAXON

I don't see it that way.

MITCH

You're impossible. I guess this really  
was a mistake.

*JAXON stops holding hands with MITCH, gets up from the chair and  
starts to leave until the THERAPIST stops him.*

THERAPIST

Look, we're just starting. How about I  
ask you, go back thirty years, and if  
you had a choice to pick a partner,  
would you have chosen one another?

JAXON

That's a loaded question. I don't think  
it's fair to ask that.

*JAXON sits back down and he and MITCH again hold hands.*

MITCH

I agree.

THERAPIST

Okay. How about, what is it that keeps  
you together?

JAXON

Well it sure isn't sex.

*JAXON laughs.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

And we don't have anything in  
common except that we're both  
Jewish.

MITCH

And we're both cheap.

JAXON

Thrifty.

THERAPIST

What about living separately; you know, a temporary separation.

MITCH

I don't know about that. I've seen too many movies and plays that involve couples living apart, and it ends up leading to divorce.

*JAXON pushes MITCH away.*

JAXON

There you go again with your doomsday scenario. I think *I'd* be open to that suggestion.

MITCH

You would? Really? Neither of us have ever lived alone. I went directly from living in a dorm in college to moving in with my first lover. And even after he died, I had a roommate. Jaxon, isn't that true for you, too? You've never lived alone.

JAXON

Well . . . you know, I guess you're right.

THERAPIST

I don't want to push you into a separation, but think about it. Whether it makes sense. Is there anything else you wanted to discuss and get out of these sessions?

MITCH

The whole time I was going through cancer treatment, I felt like Jaxon wasn't stepping up to the plate in taking care of me. And now with Jaxon having serious memory problems, I feel like I'm going to be responsible to take care of *him*.

JAXON

There you go again. Blowing things out of proportion. I have a slight memory loss.

MITCH

That's not what the neurologist said. She specifically said you have *MCI--Mild Cognitive Impairment*.

JAXON

But that doesn't mean I have dementia or Alzheimer's.

MITCH

But it could develop.

*MITCH directs his next sentence toward the THERAPIST.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

See what I have to put up with.

THERAPIST

Listen, guys. This is getting out of hand. Let's just calm down. Try not to be accusatory with one another. That's not helpful.

*JAXON gets up and pushes his chair away roughly.*

JAXON

*You're* not helpful. I'm outta' here.

MITCH

Hold on, Jaxon. We're not finished.

*MITCH tries to stop JAXON from leaving.*

*Lights dim.*

## SCENE 13

*Lights come up on stage left. The NARRATOR addresses the audience.*

NARRATOR

It's 2023, and we're finally crawling out of the COVID years. Before the pandemic, rodents had near-constant access to food, thanks to restaurant and commercial property garbage bins. And of course, all the goodwill and any favorable symbolism surrounding rats was destroyed by COVID. Just like in George Orwell's novel, 1984, rats are not just small scurrying creatures. They symbolize the kind of panic that stabs at the soul and exposes one's deepest fears. Have they taught survival techniques to Mitch and Jaxon? Rodents have been part of their lives since 1998, twenty-five years ago.

*The lights dim on stage left and come up on stage right.*

*MITCH and JAXON are sitting on their bed with greeting cards strewn across the bedspread.*

MITCH

I feel so overwhelmed right now.

JAXON

Same with me. Good thing we waited to do this. I'm exhausted. How about we take a nap before we look at these.

*JAXON points to the cards. MITCH kisses JAXON.*

MITCH

Sweet dreams.

*Lights dim on stage right, and lights come up hazy blue. The entire stage is lit. The lights reflect a dream state. MITCH is lying in bed while JAXON is standing in the middle of the stage and speaks to the audience.*

JAXON

I found this yesterday. It's a story that Mitch wrote. I call it a story because it

never happened, or, at least, I can't remember it happening. I do have a rotten memory, but you'd think I would remember *this*.

*JAXON picks up two pieces of paper from the desk and begins reading.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

Would you ever consider getting married? I imagine the rabbi would be telling us, 'Please promise me that if things fall apart and you need to divorce, you'll both be kind to each other.' And we would need a restaurant that has room and a place to put up a Chuppah. Would they even know what that was? I didn't even know until the rabbi told me. 'It's supposed to represent God hovering over the ceremony.'

*JAXON stops and looks up at the audience.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

This story is about us--*if* we had gotten married in 2008. And how we would have rushed to get married worrying about Proposition 8. Mitch even has his vows written out.

*JAXON resumes reading.*

'Jaxon, when I first met you, it was impossible for you to say "*I love you*" but now in front of a hundred and twenty of our friends and relatives you can legally profess love. You make me giddy like a child. I knew nothing about tennis before I met you, and now I can almost tolerate watching tournaments.'

*JAXON stops and wipes his eyes and continues.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

He even included this interesting detail: 'We suddenly noticed a

collapse. The chuppah that covered us began to descend. Our breath was stilled as we saw our friend fall to the ground. The humidity had caused him to faint after holding up his corner of the chuppah for forty minutes. Three of our wedding guests were doctors, and they dashed to help. He easily recovered and we continued. This will make for a memorable story one day.'

Oh, and he wrote one other thing--a poem:

*How could we sleep?  
The dewy morning awakened us to an  
Italian grove.  
Rabbi blessing what our souls knew.  
Soaking in Jaxon's presence.  
Warmth, sweat, nerves blasting  
through hands.  
Sun sneaking through trees.  
Singing praise that keeps sanity.  
A dream fantasy that I hardly knew  
existed.  
Dancing to a man.  
Quiet time to explore eyes and the  
freedom.  
The last time God was in this place  
I open the blaring crest of my desire  
and greet people that I'll never belong  
to again.  
Laugh and choke.  
Cry the anger that is only days away;  
Hold the crescent moon.  
To rock my universe.*

*JAXON puts the paper down and cries as the lights dim. When the light come back up hazy blue on the entire stage, JAXON is in bed and MITCH is standing in the middle of the stage and speaks to the audience.*

MITCH

I keep thinking about the saying that opposites attract. With Jaxon, we had little in common, and I kept trying to convince myself that those differences are what kept our relationship

interesting. Oh, we would talk about what we *did* share--religion, belief or not belief in God, the value of money. Notice how I didn't say *cheap* or *thrifty*. Those terms have become obsolete or politically incorrect. I often wondered about the sexual component. Were we each other's type? I had never dated or even slept with someone like Jaxon. Burly and super masculine. And what did he see in me--no muscles and stick thin. Oh, and Jaxon would say that we loved one another. Of course, that's true. And that year that we lived apart moved our relationship to a higher level. I used to regret us not getting married--that we were missing out on something to bond us together. But you know what really cemented our love? The rats. Those little creatures that we so despised. Showing up every five years and then . . .

*Lights dim. When the light come back up hazy blue on the entire stage, MITCH and JAXON are standing in the middle of the stage talking to one another. Lighting still reflects a dream state.*

MITCH (CONT'D)

You know it's coming up to our 35th anniversary, and you know what that means.

JAXON

No, don't tell me. Oh, god! That's usually when we see rats.

MITCH

I've been dreading this because we no longer have our favorite exterminator. What are we going to do?

JAXON

I actually was thinking about getting a pet rat. Like it would be a good

omen. If we treated the rodent nicely, then he or she could tell their friends to stop bothering us.

MITCH

What do you mean? Sort of a pet project?

JAXON

Exactly! I've been reading all this stuff about how they make great pets and that they're super clean.

*Lights dim. Lights come back up hazy blue on the entire stage. MITCH and JAXON continue talking.*

MITCH

You know the maze we built? Well, our rat ran through it, easily finding his cheese reward. And I could swear he knows my voice when I call his name--Harvey.

JAXON

And his cage is spotless. And you won't believe this, but I taught Harvey how to play fetch and catch a tiny Nerf ball. Maybe he can learn how to play tennis!

MITCH

Remember when we had COVID? The way Harvey looked at us, it was like he could tell we were distressed.

JAXON

You make it seem like he was showing compassion. Maybe more compassion than some humans.

MITCH

And he loves cuddling with me. I feel like I am part of a rat pack.

JAXON

You mean like Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and Sammy Davis Jr.



MITCH

No, it's almost as if he thinks of me as another rat.

JAXON

And you know, that little critter has helped me with my memory issues. I went back to the neurologist, and she said I had stabilized. That my memory hadn't gotten worse.

MITCH

And I've noticed you aren't stammering either.

JAXON

I'm cured!

MITCH

I wouldn't go that far.

JAXON

I want to make love to you now, and I'll do that furry play-acting thing too, but you have to let me wrestle with you the next time.

*They kiss. Lights dim.*

*Lights come up on stage right. Lights reflect that the dream is over.*

*MITCH and JAXON are sitting up in bed with cards strewn on the bedspread.*

JAXON (CONT'D)

Well, that nap was refreshing and of course making love was an added plus.

MITCH

God, yes. I started dreaming, and my dreams were crazy--all over the map. You were in some of them.

JAXON

What do you know! I did too, and I'm afraid to tell you what I dreamed about.

MITCH

Couldn't be worse than mine. Part  
nightmare and part fantasy.

JAXON

But this here is not a fantasy. It's real!  
*(shouting with his hands up in the air)*  
We just got married!

MITCH

Oh, did we? I want to touch you and  
make sure.

*MITCH touches JAXON and then pinches him.*

JAXON

Ouch!

MITCH

Just needed a little reassurance.

JAXON

And look at our ring fingers.

*Each hold out their left hands to admire.*

MITCH

So we finally did it, eh? Two gay old  
men finally tied the knot.

JAXON

It took us thirty-five years, but hey,  
wasn't it worth the wait?

MITCH

We worked out all the kinks.

JAXON

Who could have imagined that  
COVID would save our relationship?  
So many of our friends got divorced or  
split up during the pandemic.

MITCH

Ending up being forced to spend  
twenty-four hours a day together  
sheltering in place did the trick. And

each of us almost died because of  
COVID.

JAXON

Don't remind me!

MITCH

We were each other's savior.

JAXON

And let's not forget our little friend.  
Where is Harvey?

MITCH

Oh, he has a girlfriend now. And that  
means little mice are on their way.

JAXON AND MITCH

(looking directly out at the audience  
and waiting a beat)  
Oh, rats!

THE END