

VERA SIDES #2

Reader reads PAULINE, MARJORIE

Andre: You weren't.

Marjorie: Honey, you should have waited-

Andre: What difference would that have made?

Marjorie: You wouldn't have been alone.

Andre: I am alone. I've known you for a week.

(long pause)

Andre: Is this what you were hoping would happen?

Marjorie: What do you mean?

Andre: When you forced me to call her?

Marjorie: You *wanted* to call her.

(beat.)

Marjorie: I... No. Andre.

(beat. No answer)

Marjorie: Jesus. I'm just trying to help.

Andre: Who's helping who?

(Andre starts to wheel himself out of the room. Marjorie goes to help push him.)

Andre: I didn't ask.

(Marjorie takes a step back. Andre exits, leaving Marjorie alone on stage. Shift)

SCENE 10 - Ficus

The same night.

(Vera is at the nursing station, working. Pauline enters)

Pauline: Is he any better?

Vera: I thought you left.

Pauline: No.

Vera: He's resting.

Pauline: Can I just said goodnight?

Vera: I don't think that's a good idea.

Pauline: I need to speak to someone about his room.

Vera: What about his room?

Pauline: I don't understand why he has to share. How is that decided?

Vera: There are considerations.

Pauline: Well I want to speak to someone about it.

Vera: Alright.

Pauline: And I have a few other concerns.

Vera: Fine. I'll have someone call you.

(Marjorie enters)

Pauline: I want to know, if someone is still here- alive and walking- five months later, why were they admitted in the first place?

Marjorie: *(to Vera)* I'm just getting my coat.

Pauline: Are you listening to me?

Vera: Yes.

Pauline: He's in a dark, tiny room with a stranger, eating in his bed and sharing a bathroom. How does any of that lead to getting him better?

Vera: It doesn't.

Pauline: Oh so you admit it.

(Vera goes to leave)

Vera: Someone will call you.

Pauline: How can you be so cold? I'm talking to you.

Marjorie: I'd save your breath.

Pauline: Honestly, it's inhumane the way she-

(Vera stops in her tracks)

Vera: Jesus. I'm just trying to do my fucking job.

Marjorie: Apparently feelings aren't part of the job description.

(beat)

Vera: *(to Marjorie)* You never answered the question.

Marjorie: What question?

Pauline: I think I want to file a formal complaint.

Vera: Please do. I'll lick the envelope. Marjorie, why do you want to volunteer here? It's not a trick. Just tell me why.

Marjorie: To help men with AIDS.

Vera: To help them what?

Marjorie: I know why I came here.

Pauline: Is she like this with everyone?

Vera: To help them what?

Marjorie: You may feel special because you work here but I have been very connected to this community for a long time, dear.

Vera: Thomas always jokes that Jacob was my favourite. *(To Pauline)* That was his last roommate. Marjorie knew him for a bit, but that was actually his second admission. He was here for longer before, just over three months. It was impossible not to like him. He completely disarmed me. In about two seconds it was three months later and we were very close. And he was doing a lot better. Night and day. I thought... maybe he's one of the few that gets out and lives for a few more years. So he got discharged, and he got a place and I went to visit him a couple times a week and he was doing great. I bought him a houseplant. Now, any guesses what happened next?

Marjorie: He died. I was there.

Vera: Before that. One day I showed up at his place and he was on the ground, where he'd been, alone, for five hours. I got him an ambulance and brought him back here. But it wasn't like before. The disappointment was worse than any pain. And I became his sworn enemy. He called me every name you can think of, but when he said "I hate you..."

Marjorie: He didn't actually hate you.

Vera: He hated that he'd been allowed to think that there was any sort of escape. And I facilitated that. I bought him a stupid plant. As if he could outlive a ficus. And then he was disappointed, and then he was dead. And I... had four more hours left in my shift.

Marjorie: You have to think about what you contributed-

Vera: We are here to help men with AIDS. We are here to help them die. It is a huge gift to give, and it is enough. Any confusion about that- trust me, trust me- will only cause pain. **END**

Marjorie: I think you can help someone die and help them live at the same time.

Vera: Yeah. Once in your lifetime, maybe. Twice if you're really, really strong.

Marjorie: I need to talk to Andre.

(Marjorie exits towards the room. beat)

Pauline: Do you think my brother hates me?

Vera: I think he's a lot more scared than he lets on.

Pauline: Because he's going to die.

Vera: Yes.

Pauline: So what can I do?

Vera: Help him die.

Pauline: I don't know how to do that.

Vera: You will.

(Marjorie rushes back onstage)