

Cabana Boy

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

Contact:

Philip Middleton Williams

16600 SW 77th Avenue

Palmetto Bay, FL 33157

pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com

www.pmwplaywright.com

CHARACTERS:

MITCH: Twenties. Athletic build; reserved and observant.
BEN: Twenties. Mitch’s co-worker. Outgoing, eager to please.
ALEX: Mid-forties. A guest at the resort.
MIRIAM: Mid-forties. ALEX’s wife.

PLACE and TIME:

The Silver Spray, an exclusive resort in the Florida Keys. Summer.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

The breaks between scenes should not be hard breaks; just enough to change the props and give the impression of the passing of time. There is no act break, but if an interval is needed, take it between Scene 4 and Scene 5.

The song, “Shine On, Harvest Moon,” was written by Nora Bayes and Jack Norworth for the Ziegfeld Follies of 1908. It is in the public domain, and the sheet music is available.

Cabana Boy was first presented in an on-line reading on August 1, 2023, produced by Fenton Productions. The cast was as follows:

MITCH.....Peter Fenton
BEN.....Michael De Los Angeles
ALEX.....Len Scattereggia
MIRIAM.....Avery Kellington

Stage Instructions by Darrin J. Friedman.

Copyright © 2023 by Philip Middleton Williams
No part of this play may be produced or reproduced in whole or in part unless permission is granted by the playwright or his designated agents.

Cabana Boy

Scene 1

The setting is the pool patio of the Silver Spray, an exclusive high-end resort in the Florida Keys. There is a small tiki hut off to one side where guests can get towels, order from the bar or restaurant, and where the attendants keep watch. It has a desk, a couple of chairs, a house phone, a laundry hamper, and a computer monitor. There are shelves with stacks of beach towels and small bottles of sunscreen and other beach amenities. There is a loudspeaker hanging from one corner of the hut. The rest of the stage is the patio with loungers, small tables, and an umbrella table with room to seat four around it, and a trash bin. There are tiki torches along the back that can light up at night. The pool itself is off-stage, as is the access to the beach. The background is the sky and perhaps a palm tree or two to confirm that we are in the tropics.

At rise, it is morning. The stage is empty, the loungers somewhat askew, some litter and cups on the table, a towel or two on the chairs. Calypso/steel band music is coming out of the loudspeaker at a moderate volume. After a moment, MITCH and BEN enter, each carrying daypacks. They are the pool attendants. They are both college age: early twenties. MITCH is well-built and gives the outward impression that he is a jock, but he is reserved and observant. BEN is the same age as MITCH. He has a lean build. He is outgoing and eager to please, a bit of a nerd but not overly so. Both are wearing the same outfit: polo shirts with nametags, shorts, and flip-flops. They go to the hut to open up for the day, dropping their daypacks. BEN surveys the patio.

BEN: Rory didn't clean up. Again. Another day in Paradise.

MITCH: I'll get it.

(BEN clicks on the computer monitor, looks at it, then begins to tidy up the hut. MITCH goes to straighten up the loungers, pick up the trash and towels.)

BEN: So, how late did you stay last night?

MITCH: At the meet-and-greet? I dunno, there was hardly anyone there. Grabbed a burger in the bistro, went back to the room and read myself to sleep.

BEN: You're a real party animal, Mitch. You were completely zonked when I got back to the room. I mean, dead to the world.

MITCH: What time was that?

BEN: Around midnight. A bunch of us went into town and hung out at that little bar on the bay side. Mirna and Cici were challenging Toby and Todd to do shots and it got a little boisterous.

MITCH: I can imagine: the yoga instructors versus the lifeguards.

BEN: Yeah, I did some shots to try to keep up, then played the trivia machine and then got an Uber. Still... *(Points to the loudspeaker.)* Wish they would play some Jimmy Buffett or Bob Marley. And not so loud.

(BEN turns down the volume on the music to an almost subliminal level.)

MITCH: Feeling a little overhung?

BEN (*shrug*): Nah, no worse than a night at a frat. You know what that's like.

MITCH: Yeah, I remember.

BEN: Which house are you?

MITCH: I wasn't. Just saw it on campus. And now....

BEN: Yeah, grad students don't do that shit.

MITCH: Nope.

(*BEN is consulting the computer monitor.*)

BEN: Wow.

MITCH: What?

BEN: Twelve percent.

MITCH: Twelve percent?

BEN: Occupancy. The place is a ghost town.

MITCH: Well, it's June in the Florida Keys. Not exactly the first place that comes to mind for a summer vacation.

BEN: Unless you're from Argentina and it's the middle of winter. How's your Spanish?

MITCH: Took it in high school. Know enough to order a combo platter.

BEN: Maybe that's why they booked a literary conference. (*Looks at the monitor.*) The Arthur Ransome Society. (*Reading off the screen.*) "Seminars and panels on the works of Arthur Ransome (1884-1967). He is best known for writing and illustrating the 'Swallows and Amazons' series of children's books about the school-holiday adventures of children, mostly in the Lake District and the Norfolk Broads." (*Dryly.*) Sounds fascinating.

MITCH: I've heard of him.

BEN: Seriously?

MITCH: Yeah, I took a course in English lit for children and young adults. Authors like E. Nesbit, A.A. Milne, Kenneth Grahame, Robert Louis Stevenson. Ransome was in there, too.

BEN: So, maybe you should hang out with them and share your wisdom.

MITCH (*chuckling*): I don't think so. Nothing to tell.

(*MITCH has finished tidying up. He comes to the hut and dumps the dirty towels in the hamper.*)

MITCH (*cont'd*): It's your turn to go get the coffee.

BEN: Right. Cream no sugar. Want a donut?

MITCH: Nah.

BEN: You're buff; you can afford a few empty calories.

MITCH: No thanks.

BEN: Back in a bit.

(BEN exits and MITCH goes behind the hut to bring out a broom to sweep the deck. As he does, ALEX enters. He is in his mid-forties, in good shape, wearing an oversized t-shirt, knee-length shorts, sneakers without socks, a Detroit Tigers baseball cap, and sunglasses. He is carrying a cloth tote bag. He looks around, sees MITCH, who at the moment has his back to him. He watches him with a smile. Then MITCH sees ALEX.)

MITCH: Good morning, sir.

ALEX: Good morning. Sit anywhere?

MITCH: Yessir, anywhere you like.

ALEX: Thank you.

(ALEX goes to one of the loungers, sets his bag down. MITCH puts the broom away, then comes back.)

MITCH: Can I get you anything, sir?

ALEX: No, I'm good for now... *(Reads the nametag.)* Mitch.

MITCH: Let me know if you do, sir.

ALEX: I will, thanks.

(MITCH goes back to the hut, ALEX watching him discreetly. He then reaches into the tote bag and pulls out a binder. He opens it and begins to read. A moment later, MIRIAM enters. She is in her mid-forties, very attractive and meticulously dressed in fashionable beachwear including a jacket, a large sun hat, sandals, and sunglasses. She is carrying a stylish tote. She stops and smiles at MITCH, then goes over to ALEX and puts her things on the next lounge.)

MIRIAM: Did you order anything?

ALEX *(not looking up)*: Not yet. It's not even ten.

(MIRIAM settles onto a lounge and leans back. BEN enters carrying two Starbucks-style coffee cups, hands one to MITCH.)

BEN: Guests already?

MITCH: Yep.

BEN: I'll say hi.

MITCH: You do that.

(BEN starts to go over to ALEX and MIRIAM. As he approaches, he stops for a second, does a slight double-take, then continues, all smiles.)

BEN: Good morning! Is there anything I can get for you?

(MIRIAM looks up at him, smiles brilliantly.)

MIRIAM: Is it too early to order something from the bar?

BEN: Not at all, ma'am.

(BEN takes out an order pad and prepares to write.)

MIRIAM: I'll have a Bloody Mary, light on the lemon juice, heavy on the Tabasco, and skip the garnish. *(To ALEX.)* You?

ALEX *(not looking up)*: Cranberry juice, please. No ice.

BEN *(writing)*: Yessir, yes ma'am. And your room number?

MIRIAM: Um...

ALEX *(not looking up)*: Suite Twelve.

MIRIAM: Suite Twelve.

BEN: Got it. Thank you.

MIRIAM: You're very welcome.

(BEN goes back to the hut, glancing over his shoulder, then exits. MITCH picks up a small plastic bottle, crosses in front of ALEX and MIRIAM. They discreetly watch him. MITCH exits briefly, then comes back with the bottle filled with water and goes back to the hut. ALEX goes back to reading.)

MIRIAM: Where's the sunscreen?

(ALEX silently reaches into his tote and pulls out a bottle, handing it to MIRIAM without looking up. MIRIAM begins to put on sunscreen.)

MIRIAM: So, how is it?

ALEX: It sucks.

MIRIAM: Really?

(ALEX slaps the binder closed and leans back.)

ALEX: Yeah. Another summer blockbuster. Shit.

MIRIAM: If it sells like the last one, so what?

ALEX: It's the same crap: a cocky hero with a sarcastic girlfriend and a best friend fighting the bad guys. The best friend gets killed off by page fifty-seven, and the hero spends the rest of it seeking vengeance until the final battle and he ends up boning the girlfriend to a top ten hit. The last one was a virus let loose by the Russians. This one is... I dunno, weaponized squirrels. *(Beat.)* How many of these have I done? I told Gary to find me a rom com, anything; something where I can do some real acting, not just...crap.

(ALEX puts the binder back in his tote.)

MIRIAM: Relax. You're on vacation. Two weeks of no press, no cameras, no pressure.

ALEX: As opposed to you chairing a panel discussion at the *(faux English accent)* "Arthur Ransome" conference.

MIRIAM: Oh, yes, truly fascinating recollections of making a movie of one of the books when I was ten. All I really remember is that it was cold as hell on Lake Windermere. *(Beat.)* Where the fuck is my drink?

(MITCH has been testing the water sample and is recording the results on the computer. BEN enters carrying the drinks on a tray. He stops in the hut.)

BEN *(stage whisper)*: You know who that is?

MITCH: Who who is?

BEN *(still sotto voce)*: The guy on the lounge. The people in Suite Twelve.

(MITCH looks at ALEX, then types something into the computer.)

MITCH: Mr. and Mrs. Joseph A. Forrester of Frankfort, Michigan. Who'd you think it is?

BEN: Alex Hunter.

MITCH: You're kidding.

BEN: I'm not. I've seen every movie, including the one that just came out: "Close Cover Before Striking." It's huge. And that's him.

MITCH: What the hell would Alex Hunter be doing at a resort in the Keys?

BEN: Exactly. The perfect getaway; no press, no paparazzi...

MITCH: You're goofy. It's not him.

BEN: I looked at him up close. He's got that scar on his chin from when he made his first movie "Force Field."

MITCH: You're thinking of Harrison Ford.

BEN: No, it's him. Here, take them their drinks. See for yourself.

(MITCH snorts, then picks up the tray.)

MITCH: Okay, but I'm not gonna ask him if he's Alex Hunter. You know the rules. Yessir and yes ma'am, and that's it.

BEN: All you gotta do is just look at him. You'll see.

MITCH: Okay. Who had what?

BEN: She gets the Bloody Mary; he gets the cranberry juice.

MITCH: All right.

(MITCH goes to ALEX and MIRIAM.)

MITCH: Here you are, ma'am, your Bloody Mary, and sir, your cranberry juice.

MIRIAM *(taking a long sip)*: Mm, thank you so much.

MITCH: You're welcome. Can I get you anything else?

MIRIAM: Not right now, thank you.

MITCH: Yes, ma'am, you're welcome.

(MITCH turns to leave.)

ALEX: So, Mitch, where're you from?

MITCH: Outside Chicago, sir. Hinsdale.

ALEX: Oh. Cubs fan?

MITCH: Uh, yessir.

ALEX: Tigers fan here. Not having their best year.

MITCH: No sir.

ALEX: You're in college?

MITCH: Grad school.

ALEX: Then what?

MITCH: Look for a teaching job, maybe a professorship.

ALEX: Hmm. Impressive.

MITCH: Thank you.

(MITCH starts to go.)

MIRIAM: Actually, could we get some towels? I think I'm going to go down to the beach for a swim.

MITCH: Yes, ma'am. I'll be right back with them.

MIRIAM: You're a dear.

(MITCH goes to the hut, puts the tray down, gets the towels.)

BEN: Well?

MITCH: Okay, it looks like him. Sounds like him, I guess.

BEN: I knew it. What'd he say?

MITCH: He asked me where I was from and if I was a Cubs fan.

BEN: That is so cool.

MITCH: Here, you wanna see him, take them the towels they asked for.

BEN: All right.

MITCH: But be cool. We're here to make sure they have a nice time, not get all... involved. And no selfies. Pull that shit and you'll be back in Albuquerque before nightfall.

BEN *(picking up the towels)*: I know.

(BEN goes to ALEX and MIRIAM.)

BEN: Your towels, sir, and ma'am.

MIRIAM: Thank you so much.

(BEN hands them the towels.)

BEN: Is there anything else?

MIRIAM: Not right now, thanks.

BEN: Well, if you need anything, anything at all, I'm at your service.

ALEX: Thank you. So, where're you from, Ben?

BEN: Albuquerque, sir. New Mexico.

ALEX: I know it well. I was on... Uh, I did some work out there several years ago. Great town. Great food.

BEN: Oh, yes sir, nothing like good green chile enchiladas...

ALEX: Right. Well, thanks again.

BEN: Yessir, at your service.

(BEN bows a little, then goes back to the hut.)

BEN *(to MITCH, sotto voce)*: It's him. I knew it.

MITCH *(unimpressed)*: Well, whaddaya know.

BEN: He said he's been to Albuquerque. He almost said he was on location there. I'll bet that was when he was making that western, "Silver Star." And that's Miriam Blake. They've been married for like ten years. She used to be in the movies, but now I guess...

MITCH: Not everyone's cut out for it.

BEN: Damn. Alex Hunter. Right here.

(MIRIAM sets the glass on the table. ALEX reaches into his tote and pulls out a paperback, starts to read. Beat.)

MIRIAM: So, which one do you want, the muscle boy or the eager beaver?

ALEX *(without looking up)*: Oh, I'm sure either one would be just fine.

MIRIAM nods, then leans back on the lounge and pushes her hat down over her face to block the sun.

End of Scene 1.

Scene 2

Later that day, getting on towards evening. The patio is empty. The loungers have been rearranged by previous occupants; there are used towels draped over some of them, and paper cups, newspapers, and other assorted litter on them. The table has paper plates and cups left over from someone's lunch or snack. The music is playing at a moderate volume.

At rise BEN is in the hut on the computer. MITCH enters from the pool access. He is carrying several used towels. He goes to the hut and drops them in the hamper, then goes to start to collect the other towels from the loungers.

MITCH: How'd we do today?

BEN: Pretty good. Ph and chlorine levels are normal, and nobody drowned.

MITCH: Great.

(MITCH brings the rest of the used towels to the hut and dumps them in the hamper.)

BEN: Tell you what; I'll take the towels if you'll do the rest.

MITCH: Sure, no problem. You got plans for tonight?

BEN: I told Toby I'd hang out with him. Grab a beer or something.

MITCH: Got something going with him?

BEN: No, not really. I mean, he's nice to look at, but....you know. Summer romances are not worth it.

MITCH: Hey, you never know. Could be the start of something.

BEN: He's from New Jersey. I'm from New Mexico. Never the twain.

MITCH: Okay, never mind.

(MITCH begins to straighten up the loungers and collect the litter. BEN picks up the bag of laundry, starts to exit.)

BEN: See you back in the room?

MITCH: Yeah, I'll be there in a bit.

(BEN exits. MITCH continues to clean up, dumping the litter in the trash bin, then generally tidying up. After a moment, ALEX enters. He has put on slacks and a Jimmy Buffett-style short-sleeved shirt. At first MITCH does not see him. ALEX watches him for a moment, and then MITCH sees him.)

MITCH: Can I help you, sir?

ALEX: Yeah, hi, Mitch. My wife thinks she left her other pair of glasses here. Did you find them?

MITCH: Let me look.

(MITCH goes to the hut, looks on the desk, picks up a glasses case.)

MITCH: These them, sir?

ALEX: Oh, great, thank you.

(ALEX pockets the glasses case. MITCH goes back to cleaning up.)

ALEX: So, grad school, huh?

MITCH: Yessir.

ALEX: What're you studying?

MITCH: Twentieth Century literature, sir.

ALEX: Hm. I remember that course. I enjoyed it a lot. Wish I'd stuck with it.

MITCH: Yessir.

ALEX: Yeah, it would have helped if I hadn't dropped out halfway through my junior year.

MITCH: Yessir.

ALEX: So, Mitch, who's your favorite author?

MITCH: Well, sir, I like a lot of them. Kinda hard to pick just one.

ALEX: Hemingway? Steinbeck? Fitzgerald? Stephen King?

MITCH *(soft chuckle)*: Well, sir, I don't know if I'd lump them all together like that. I like them for different reasons. I mean, Stephen King writes good scary stuff, but –

ALEX: Well, so did Edgar Allan Poe.

MITCH: That's true, sir, and so did Hemingway and even Fitzgerald, but scary in a different way, if you know what I mean.

ALEX: I do. *(Puts out his hand for a handshake.)* I'm Alex, by the way.

(They shake hands, ALEX holding on for a moment.)

MITCH: Yessir, nice to meet you, Mr. Forrester.

ALEX: Thank you. But you can call me Alex.

MITCH: Sir, we're not supposed to –

ALEX: Relax, I won't tell your boss. It'll be our little secret.

MITCH: Sir –

ALEX: Mitch, if we don't get past you calling me "sir" with every breath, we'll never get past the weather.

(Beat. ALEX takes a step closer to MITCH. MITCH does not move.)

MITCH: Okay...

ALEX *(prompting)*: Alex.

MITCH *(quietly)*: Alex. As in Alex...Hunter.

(ALEX grins shyly.)

ALEX: Yeah, you caught me. I think your partner....

MITCH: Ben.

ALEX: Yeah, Ben. He recognized me.

MITCH: Right off. But don't worry. He won't say anything. We're under strict orders not to disclose anything we find out about the guests. It's part of our employment contract.

ALEX: A non-disclosure agreement.

MITCH: Yeah. We're not even allowed to –

ALEX: I'm familiar with the concept. But with this crowd of Brit-Lit bookworms, they wouldn't know me from Alex Trebek, and he's dead. I'm just here as my wife's escort and to relax for a little while.

MITCH: Well, that's good. We're happy to have you here, sir.

ALEX: Alex.

MITCH: Alex.

ALEX: There you go. So, Mitch, Mims is going to be working on her presentation to the conference through dinner. Care to join me so we can keep up this conversation about great American literature?

MITCH: Staff isn't allowed to eat in the dining room.

ALEX: Understood. *(Looks around the pool patio.)* Well, why don't we meet back here? Just sit around and chat about the collected works of Ernest Hemingway. Or Amanda Longington.

MITCH: Sir?

ALEX: Never mind; I'm pretty sure her work wouldn't show up in a graduate-level course unless you're studying the paperback romance novels you pick up at the airport.

MITCH: Yessir, I don't think so.

ALEX: Good. So, how about it? Meet you back here sometime after dinner, then?

MITCH: Yessir.

ALEX: All right. See you then. Looking forward to it.

MITCH: Me too, sir.

ALEX: Alex.

MITCH: Alex.

(ALEX pats MITCH on the shoulder, then exits. MITCH watches him go, then shakes his head and goes back to work.)

BEN *(off)*: Good afternoon, Mr. Forrester!

ALEX *(off)*: Good afternoon.

(BEN enters.)

BEN: Still here, huh?

MITCH: It's that obvious, huh?

BEN: Yeah. So, what did Alex Hunter want?

MITCH: His wife left her glasses here. Why'd you come back?

(BEN goes into the hut, picks up his daypack.)

BEN: I forgot this. So, did you talk to him?

MITCH: To who?

BEN: Alex Hunter.

MITCH: Oh! Yeah, a little.

BEN: What about?

MITCH: Uh, nothing, really. He asked what I was studying in school, and I told him, and we... you know. He invited me to dinner to talk about literature.

BEN: No shit.

MITCH: Yeah. His wife is working on her presentation or something.

BEN: Are you gonna?

MITCH: We can't.

BEN: Yeah, but you can always go to the bistro or the snack bar.

MITCH: We're gonna meet back here after dinner.

BEN: Wow, sounds great. So, I'm gonna grab a shower.

MITCH: Get ready for your date with Toby?

BEN: It's not really a date. Just two guys having a beer.

MITCH: I've seen him in his Speedo. Go for it. Get those twains to meet.

BEN (*chuckling*): Yeah, well... You coming?

MITCH: In a bit. Got some stuff to put away.

(*BEN starts to exit.*)

MITCH: Hey, Ben...

BEN: Yeah?

MITCH: Don't say anything to anyone about me meeting up with ... Mr. Forrester.

BEN: Secret's safe with me. But it's not like it's a big deal or anything. Making the guest feel welcome is part of the job, right?

MITCH: Exactly.

BEN: Okay.

MITCH: Yeah.

BEN exits. MITCH watches him go, then finishes tidying up. He exits and the lights fade to suggest the onset of evening. The tiki lights and the light in the hut come on, the music plays a mellower version of island tunes, and we can hear the distant sound of waves on the beach. After a moment, ALEX enters. He looks around casually, then wanders over to the far end, looking out over the water, listening. A beat or two, then MITCH enters. He has changed out of his uniform into a Chicago Cubs t-shirt and his own shorts.

MITCH: Hi... uh, Alex.

ALEX: Hi, Mitch.

(*ALEX continues to look out over the water, then turns and looks at MITCH.*)

ALEX (*chuckling*): Y'know, I live less than a mile from Malibu Beach, but I've never been to it. The only time I see the ocean is when I'm going into or out of town. (*Beat.*) Love that sound; it's kinda soothing.

MITCH: It's nice.

(*They listen for a moment more, then ALEX pulls out a chair from the umbrella table and sits. MITCH does as well so that they are facing each other a few feet apart.*)

ALEX: So. Going to be a professor?

MITCH: I hope so. I have another year or so to go.

ALEX: You're a better man than me, Mitch.

MITCH: Why'd you say that?

ALEX: You stuck it out. Got your degree. Going for another.

MITCH: So, why'd you drop out?

ALEX: It wasn't like I was flunking out or anything. I was majoring in mechanical engineering, and thinking, y'know, maybe I'd go work in Detroit or something. But the theatre department was doing "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." Y'know, the play?

MITCH: I've read the book by Ken Kesey.

ALEX: Right. Well, they were having auditions and I thought, hey, that sounds like fun, so I went, and I got cast as McMurphy. The part Nicholson played in the movie. I had a great time, got good reviews, and the director gave me the name of a buddy who was a casting director in L.A. I figured what the hell, so over Christmas break, I went out there, met with the guy and...wham.

MITCH: Really?

ALEX: Really. Joe Forrester of Frankfort, Michigan is suddenly the Next Big Thing. Couldn't believe it, but...

MITCH: So, where does "Alex Hunter" come from?

ALEX: My middle name is Alex. Not Alexander, just Alex. Hunter because it sounds, I dunno, butch.

(Beat.)

MITCH: Yeah, it does.

ALEX *(chuckling)*: So, what about you? What's the Mitch story?

MITCH: Not much to tell. Grew up outside Chicago, went to college, ski bummed out in Colorado, then decided to go to grad school.

ALEX: Put off real life for a little while.

MITCH: Yeah, I guess. 'Cept I gotta pay for it now. That's why I'm working here.

ALEX: So... Mitch. Mitch what?

MITCH: I'm sorry?

ALEX: What's your last name?

MITCH: Oh. Wilcox.

ALEX *(savoring it)*: Wilcox. *(Laughs softly.)*

MITCH: What?

ALEX: Nothing.

MITCH: C'mon.

ALEX: Mitch Wilcox sounds like a male stripper.

(MITCH gazes at ALEX, long enough for ALEX to fidget a little, then MITCH laughs.)

MITCH: Yeah, it does, doesn't it.

(Long pause as they look at each other, tentative grins maybe, then ALEX leans forward.)

ALEX: So, Professor Wilcox, did you ever read "Death in Venice"?

MITCH: By Thomas Mann¹. Yeah, senior year of high school.

ALEX: Right. About an older guy obsessed with a beautiful boy.

MITCH: Aschenbach and Tadzio. You read it?

ALEX: Yes, it's on my Kindle. *(Beat.)* Before I left L.A., my agent Gary handed me another one of those stupid summer-blockbuster bombs-and-boobs popcorn sellers. I don't want those anymore, where all I do is blow up shit with my shirt off. I want something where I can actually, y'know, do some acting. So, I called this writer buddy of mine, Jeff, and asked him for something with a little more intelligence. He e-mailed me his treatment for a remake of "Death in Venice."

MITCH: Seriously?

ALEX: Yeah, but it's not gonna be like the one they did before –

MITCH: The one with Dirk Bogarde in 1971.

ALEX: You've seen it?

MITCH: Yeah, in a literature-to-film studies class. It's pretty close to the book.

ALEX: This'll be different. For one thing, it's gonna be modern, like today, and second, it won't be Venice, Italy.

MITCH: What, Venice, Florida?

ALEX: Venice Beach. As in L.A.

MITCH: Oh, god.

ALEX: No, wait; it's gonna be done respectfully. Aschenbach is now Asher, and Tadzio is now Tony. Asher is a lifeguard in his thirties, he's married, he's loving his job and his wife until one day he sees this stunning hunk, Tony, who's eighteen and a surfer. Asher becomes obsessed with

¹ Pronounced with a long A: MAHN.

him; can't stop thinking about him and has these really wild dreams about him, made all the more intense by seeing Tony making out with another guy on the beach one night. But they never meet, they barely even have eye contact, until Tony gets in a fight with another surfer and Asher breaks it up. All Tony says is "thanks, dude," and that's it. Then one day Tony goes out in this really heavy surf and gets pulled under. Asher goes in to rescue him but gets caught in a rip current and...

MITCH: He drowns.

ALEX: Yeah. The EMT's bring him on shore, and Tony sees his body, says "Whoa, gnarly," and... roll credits.

MITCH: "Gnarly"?

ALEX (*laughing*): Yeah. So, what do you think?

MITCH: You mean....

ALEX: Doesn't that sound better than blowing shit up?

MITCH: I guess, but....

ALEX: But what?

MITCH: Look, I don't know anything about how the movies work.

ALEX: Nobody does, Mitch. I'm not asking you about that. I'm asking you as an intelligent guy whose opinion I respect, and I want to hear your honest reaction about this script idea.

(*Beat.*)

MITCH: Okay.

(*MITCH gets up and looks around as he thinks, ALEX watching him intently.*)

MITCH: The thing that made Mann's novella so important was that there was no implication that Aschenbach's obsession with Tadzio was sexual. It's about the contrast between the purity of innocence personified by a beautiful boy, and the harsh reality that we all grow old and wish we could hang on to our innocence. Tadzio is like one of those statues of Greek gods, this Adonis, but he's an ideal; not real. (*Beat.*) The way you're describing it sounds like Asher is just this guy with the hots for some surfer dude named Tony who says "gnarly."

ALEX: I'm sure the script is better than that. Jeff was nominated for an Oscar a while back. (*Beat.*) Go on, professor.

MITCH: Well, that's pretty much it. It's a dumbed-down version of Mann's story for an audience that doesn't know shit about what he was really saying. For all they know, it's another Alex Hunter action adventure, this time on the beach.

ALEX: That's what I'm trying to get away from.

MITCH: So, how would you play him?

ALEX: What do you mean?

MITCH: I mean, are you gonna play Asher as gay but in the closet, or as a straight guy who suddenly realizes he's obsessed with some teenage boy?

ALEX: He's eighteen.

MITCH: Okay, but all I'm saying is that to really make it work as a story that's true to the original, Asher has to have some kind of dramatic realization about himself, doesn't he?

ALEX: I guess he does.

MITCH: So, what's the realization? Does he figure it out? Is he willing to give up the life he's had to pursue for someone he doesn't even know, and in the end, sacrifice his life to save him from drowning just so he can hold him in his arms? *(Beat.)* What about you?

ALEX: What about me.

MITCH: Is the world ready to accept Alex Hunter playing a gay character? I mean –

ALEX *(sharply)*: I don't know.

MITCH: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to –

(ALEX gets up from the chair and goes to look out over the ocean for a moment, MITCH watching him. Finally, ALEX turns and looks at MITCH.)

ALEX: No, it's okay. It's a good question. For one thing, Gary would never allow it. He still sees me – and sells me – as Alex Hunter the Action Figure. Not sure he's ready for Alex Hunter the Actor, and sure as hell not the... Y'see, it's not just me. I'm a corporation with a product to sell. Literally. Alex Hunter Productions, Incorporated, with offices in Beverly Hills and New York. There are people who work for it, managing all the aspects of how that product gets marketed and keeping a very close eye on who's buying it and what the press is saying about it. If it suddenly became some other product, I'd be putting a lot of people's jobs in jeopardy.

(ALEX gets up goes over to MITCH, standing close, face to face.)

ALEX *(cont'd)*: I envy you, Mitch.

MITCH: Why?

ALEX: Because you're just you. A smart, and may I say, a very good-looking young man who is just... Mitch. You're free to be whoever you are without wondering if the decisions you make are gonna change anyone else's lives. You're a lucky man.

(ALEX pats MITCH on the shoulder, keeps his hand there. On cue, the music in the background stops and the tiki lights go out, leaving MITCH and ALEX nearly in silhouette, the only light coming from the hut.)

ALEX: Lights out?

MITCH: They're on a timer.

ALEX: Okay. Well, I'd really like to continue this... conversation. Would it break any rules if I were to get us a couple of drinks and go someplace nice and quiet... other than here?

MITCH: Yeah, sure. I just gotta close up. I'll meet you over by the bistro.

(Beat as they look at each other, reading the signals.)

ALEX: I'll see you over there, Mitch. Wilcox.

MITCH: Okay.

(One more look, then ALEX exits. MITCH goes over to the hut, makes sure he's alone, then takes out his cell phone and hits a number.)

MITCH *(on phone)*: Hey, it's me. You still hanging with Toby? Cool. Listen, um... I may need the room tonight, okay? *(Beat.)* Thanks. See you in the morning.

MITCH ends the call, pockets his phone, exits.

End of Scene 2.

The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com.