BEIRUT, Alan Bowne's stunner about love in the plague years.

It's 'the near future,' we're in a dump of a room on the Lower East Side, where a young man named Torch has been quarantined after testing positive for a nameless disease that sounds like AIDS. His girlfriend, Blue, who has not been infected, makes the dangerous journey across the quarantine line to be with him. He tries to keep her at room's length. For the next hour, they argue lovingly, kiddingly, fearfully, bravely, desperately about sex and death. Torch pleads with Blue to leave before his resistance fails and he infects her. She chooses the possibility of infection: 'I can live without love and feel dead or risk death and feel alive.'

The marvel of Mr. Bowne's work is the richly raunchy language, tuned to the gritty rhythms of the street. It's crude yet lyrical, even at its most scatological, the dialogue sings.

Outside, bodies of the victims of 'it' are piled in Tompkins Square. Blue reports that 'Hollywood is toast.' Sex has been made a capital crime, with violators hung from lamp posts. A soldier comes by to check Torch for lesions. 'Oh, what a job I got,' he grumbles. Blue tries to pass as a 'plaguey' so she can stay with Torch.

It's love in the vernacular... there's purity in their prurience. In this dim, dingy basement, they rise high above anything they have known outside, even as their gutter expressions are lifted toward poetry on their passion. The plague has upped the ante on love and introduced them to sacrifice. They are a Romeo and Juliet of the boroughs, an East Side story.

Walter Goodman THE NEW YORK TIMES 4 April 1987

...it is Bowne's latest play, BEIRUT, that is the most controversial of his career. Set in the near future, its subject matter is a plague much like AIDS that has caused quarantining and torturing of its victims. The two heterosexual characters are barely clothed throughout its 59-minute running time, and the pus of sexuality, erotic as well as toxic, oozes from the work's exposed pores. BEIRUT has caused the critics to rail. Clyve Barnes bellowed against it; the Village Voice labeled it 'dangerous.'

"The Village Voice? What's that?" Bowne bellows back. "It's the left-wing National Enquirer. I don't read it."

On Actors' Equity Association:
"We're doing SNAKE IN THE VEIN down at the Limbo Lounge before those Stalinists at Equity shut us down. They drew up all these official-looking papers and said they were going to close us if we didn't contribute to some sort of slush fund with an official-sounding name. We'd already paid the actors. What else do they want? Actors' Equity is run by a bunch of dopes who go after people who are powerless. Like playwrights. Then they cave in to the ones in real power."

Kevin Sessums INTERVIEW August 1987
Alan Bowne
Beirut

ORANGE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
BEIRUT

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For
Michael D'Apice,
Brooklyn Boy

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About the Author

In addition to Beirut, Alan Bowne is the author of several plays that have been produced in New York and regional theatres, including: Sharon and Billy (Magic Theatre, San Francisco, 1986, 1987); A Snake in the Vein (Off-off Broadway, Limbo Theatre, 1985); and Forty-Deuce (Off-Broadway, Perry St. Theatre, 1981). Mr. Bowne has authored two screenplays for filmmaker Paul Morrissey: Mixed Blood (1984) and Throwback (1988). He received the Arthur Foundation Prize in 1986, and is a member of New Dramatists.
Beirut originally was workshoped at the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Mill Valley, CA, in August 1986. Alma Becker directed the production.

Beirut received its first Off-off Broadway production by the Manhattan Class Company at the Nat Horne Theatre in New York City on March 23, 1987, with the following cast:

TORCH ................ Michael David Morrison
BLUE ...................... Marisa Tomei
GUARD ...................... Terry Rabine

Jimmy Bohr directed this production. Elizabeth Doyle designed the set; John Hastings, the lighting. Georgette Lewis was the Stage Manager.

Beirut's premiere Off-Broadway production, by Barbara Darwal, Peter von Mayrhauser, Maggie Lear, Janet Robinson, and Harold Thau, was presented at the Westside Arts Theater in New York City. It opened June 9, 1987, with the following cast under the direction of Jimmy Bohr:

TORCH ................ Michael David Morrison
BLUE ..................... Laura San Giacomo
GUARD ..................... Terry Rabine

Elizabeth Doyle designed the set; John Hastings, the lighting. Walker Hicklin created the costumes. Laura Kravets was the Stage Manager.
Characters
TORCH, a good-looking streety male in his early 20s
BLUE, a bright, pretty, sensuous female in her early 20s
GUARD with flashlight

Time
The near future. Night.

Setting

NOTE: The style of orthography employed throughout is intentional. So are the bad grammar and odd punctuation. The idiom employed is New York City street. Periods within lines do not indicate full stops but serve, rather, as rhythmic breathing notes. Absence of punctuation indicates that the line should be read in one breath.
Beirut
(Darkness)

(Lights dimly up on a human form wadded among the dirty sheets on the mattress.)

(Clock radio snaps on; lighting up.)

Radio DJ: (Voiceover) . . . and this is so old it has hair on it! It's for Skull and his pals out in Flatbush. This one's for you, Skull!

(The refrain of the song, We Are the World, blasts forth.)

(A man's hand rises from the wadded sheets and slams down onto the radio, cutting it off.)

(Groggily, Torch sits up edge of bed, covering his nakedness with a sheet. He lights a candle next to bed.)

(Lights up)

(Torch, in sheet, crosses to sink. Drops sheet, revealing a large "P" tattooed on his left buttock. Throws water on his face.)

(Turning from sink, he rummages in trash for undershorts and slips them on. Squatting, he searches for a can in debris. Can opener. Punches hole in concentrated milk can, drinks. Removes lid from can of tuna and eats hungrily, licking fingers.)

(A siren sounds. Torch leaps to window, lifts shade, looks out. A flashing light beam stabs him in eyes. Turning from window, he retrieves sheet and huddles on mattress. Hears something. Springs to feet. Stealthily crosses to stairs.)

Torch: (In a loud whisper, directed up stairs at entrance door.) Blue? That ain't you, is it?

(No response)
(Despairingly, he crosses back to mattress. Plops down. Flicks on radio, twiddling dial: Strauss' Zarathustra.)
(As the music plays:)
(The young man begins to caress his body, staring up at the ceiling. Gradually his hands work down to his privates, which he fondles in his shorts. Rolls onto stomach. Slowly begins humping mattress. Suddenly:)
(A quick rapping at entrance door. TORCH sits up at once, snapping off radio.)
TORCH: Blue?
(Repeat rapping. TORCH, excited, apprehensive, springs across room and up the stairs to the entrance door. Yanks open door, admits BLUE. They stare for an instant. She is wearing a drab, shapeless dress over soiled sneakers, and is carrying a large purse. Delightedly she dashes down steps as TORCH, after a quick look at landing, closes door and turns to look dazedly at girl.)
BLUE: So lock it.
TORCH: You can't lock it.
BLUE: When's the next patrol?
TORCH: Three A.M.
BLUE: O.K., we got a few hours.
TORCH: Suckhead! Comin here. (Goes down stairs, crosses to window, peers out.) The whole Lower East's a quarantine zone for doofuses who test positive. And you, a negative, send me this fuckfanny underground message that says, "I'm comin in." Get it through your head, Blue. I'm in quarantine. That's K-U-
BLUE: (Cutting him off; dropping purse on floor.) Don't I get a kiss?
TORCH: Fuckin you know I can't kiss you.
BLUE: (Approaching him) A hug at least?
(He looks into her eyes for a beat. Then grasps her head
in his hands, fearful of too much contact, but passionately, touching her forehead to his chest. Abruptly pushes her away.)
TORCH: O.K. So there it is. (Plops onto mattress, wrapping himself in sheet.) That was worth risking your life, or what?
BLUE: It was worth it.
TORCH: How'd you the fuck get in here?
BLUE: FDR Drive. Overpass at East Sixth.
TORCH: When?
BLUE: Early this morning. I holed up in that abandoned building across the street until dark. All day I kept peeking out to see if you'd come to the window.
TORCH: What'd you do, bribe somebody to find me? That's dangerous!
BLUE: Bribes? Your muthah takes bribes. (Looking around.) You know, I think I liked it better in that bomb site across the street. They put you in here?
TORCH: They're runnin outa places. Least I'm alone here.
BLUE: How long they gonna keep you?
TORCH: Til I get... lesions.
BLUE: And then what?
TORCH: Then I dunno. Once you got symptoms, they put you someplace else.
BLUE: You got any?
TORCH: I dunno.
BLUE: Can I look?
TORCH: No! (Wraps sheet tighter about himself.) Wasn't so cocksuclin hot I would be covered wit' clothes. Hate to be naked even. Fraid of what I'll see.
BLUE: Torch, I wanna look.
TORCH: Hey! They got a Lesion Patrol for this. They'll be here at three. I'll send you a medical report, O.K.?
BLUE: (Stirring cans on floor with foot.) You eating right?
(No response)
BLUE: Hey! Blood-positive does not mean! You'll come down with it.
TORCH: Chances are I will. Tomorrow. Next year. I could be here. A long time. Waitin.
BLUE: You look good.
(Beat)
TORCH: So do you.
BLUE: (Indicating dress.) In this? They got everybody in burlap bags out there. (Starts picking up trash.) You can go to prison for being provocative.” Calvin Klein’s got a reprise of the moo-moo, are you ready?
(Looks up at ceiling.) It’s weird. No sex detectors. God, I am so sick of those little cameras everywhere.
(Twirls) It’s like you’re free!
TORCH: They don’t care if positives fuck! If you’re good as dead, you can fuck like a Sicilian.
BLUE: Shut up. You’re not dead.
TORCH: I get notes under my door. Girls, guys. “P is for positive, we’re both P’s, so what the hell?”
BLUE: You must want to.
(Torch rises from mattress and, swathed in the sheet, crosses to window. Peeks out.)
TORCH: They say! That repeated reinfectionals* by this thing? Could bring it on. And just yesterday, I

*Pronounce as written.

look out in that shitty lot over there? And there’s this P-guy. Fuckin some P-slut! Onna broken wall. Broad daylight.
BLUE: (Shrugging) She was probably a prostitute. Every hooker in New York’s in here.
TORCH: And negatives sneak in here and fuck ‘em too!
BLUE: Well, they can’t fuck out there. Sex is a capital crime!
TORCH: (Turning from window.) Good! If they stop people boffin, this’ll stop. I can’t believe these stupids, comin in here and getting infected. This neighborhood’s called Beirut for a good reason!
BLUE: I came to Beirut. Am I a stupid?
(Beat)
TORCH: But you. Ain’t gettin. Infected.
BLUE: What’s the difference? If I’m caught in here, they’ll shoot me.
TORCH: (Anxious) But you can get out again?
BLUE: Sure, same way I got in. (Sits on haunches on bed.) There’s six guys. Hung from lampposts. On 14th Street.
TORCH: There’s what?
BLUE: Six blood-negatives. Who were caught in here. Hung by their necks. As a warning.
TORCH: But that’s unsanitary!
BLUE: They mean business.
TORCH: (Stunned) Jesus. (Turns away, quickly turns back.) Good! Crime does not pay! (Suddenly worried) You can’t stay long. Blue. Give yourself pleney time to get out.
BLUE: I won’t get stretched, even if I’m caught. God, it
is so shitting hot. (She pulls dress over head. She is in bra and panties.)

Torch: (Staring) The fuck are you doin?
(Blue sprawls across bed, on her stomach, hugging pillow, twining legs seductively.)

Blue: Check it out.
Torch: I ast you a question!
Blue: Cost me plenty, Torch!
Torch: Get dressed!
Blue: I wanna show you! I spent a week's salary on this. For Miss Keypunch? This represents an investment.
Torch: What does?
Blue: My black market street deal counterfeit decal.
Torch: This. Is gobbedegok."*  
Blue: Lower my panties.
Torch: You tryin to torture me?
Blue: O.K. So I'll do it. (She lowers her panties, revealing a large "P" very like Torch's on her left buttock.) See? "P" for positive.
(Torch, shocked, drops sheet and slowly approaches bed.)

Torch: You fuckin. Stupid—
Blue: So even if I'm caught? I'll just flash 'em my fanny.
Torch: Dumb shit! You got it onna left cheek! Boy P's got it onna left. Girl P's got it onna right!
Blue: Oh. So peel it off. Put it on the other cheek.
Torch: How could you do this?

*Torch's version of "gobbledegok."

Blue: No problem. It peels off.
Torch: Then a squad guy could peel it off!
Blue: Those paranoids? They might get their fingers infected.
Torch: Don't joke about it!
Blue: So would you please peel it off? In case I'm caught?
(Beat. Reluctantly, hungrily, Torch descends to bed. Starts carefully peeling off counterfeit tattoo.)
(Blue murmurs with pleasure.)
Torch: I don't wanna tear it.
Blue: (Turned on, but trying to maintain composure.) Does it. Look. Like yours? I never saw one before.
Torch: When I was waitin my turn? To get mine? I saw lots of guys get... get labelled, they call it. (Peels it off; snaps her panties back in place.) It's off. ( Regards decal.) It's pretty good, I think.
Blue: I should check it against yours.
Torch: (Intent on decal) The official tattoo got a very simple design, only they needled these tiny little squiggles in. Before they laid down the color? So it should pick up the light. For the sex detectors. (Showing her the decal.) See? They got some shine in this too.
Blue: (Crouching beside him, very close, looking at decal.) Oh yeah.
Torch: This is very excellent.
Blue: Squiggles.
Torch: Yeah, like little spermoids*, see? It would make a very good graphic. Like for a album cover—?

*Pronounce as written.
BLUE: It's very sixties I like it. But Torch, I better check it against yours. Just to be sure it's a good copy.

TORCH: *(Handing it back to her.)* Don't gotta bother. It's good.

BLUE: Better safe than sorry. Stand up and turn around.

*(TORCH looks away.)*

BLUE: You want I should end up hanging from a lamppost? On 14th Street?

*(Reluctantly, he stands, his back to her. Crouching, she pulls down the back of his shorts. Holds decal up to tattoo on his left buttock.)*

BLUE: I dunno, Torch, Yours is like. More detailed.

*(Lightly caresses his buttock.)* It's not so. Standard. It's got, I dunno. More character. *(She licks the tattoo.)*

*(TORCH spins around and grabs her hand; they struggle for decal)*

TORCH: *(Starting to laugh.)* You slut! Gimme that!

BLUE: *(Holding decal away from him; giggling.)* Right cheek is for girls, left cheek is for boys, right cheek is for girls, left cheek is for-

*(He retrieves decal, flips her over, exposes her right buttock, and spanks it on with the broad flat of his hand.)*

TORCH: *(As he spanks, laughing.)* I'm! Gonna teach you! To! Behave!

BLUE: *(Giggling wildly; mock-fear.)* Stop it you're hurting me!

*(They wrestle, laughing, across mattress. Suddenly they quiet and gaze at each other. As their lips start to meet, TORCH pushes her away and springs to his feet.)*

TORCH: You're a negative and I'm a positive!

*(Beat, as he crouches on floor, back to her, and she slumps in despair onto mattress.)*

BLUE: I know that.

TORCH: Just lickin me on my butt like that. This shit is in all the excretals* of the body. In my spit? In my sweat? Which is why even a Trojan won't protect you! One little abrasion on your skin? And it gets inside of you, No! Intimate! Contact! It's not just smart, it's the law. I got nothin to do over here but read up on this and I'm tellin you. You shouldn't even be touchin me.

*(Beat)*

BLUE: Remember when we first met?

TORCH: So?

BLUE: Remember?

TORCH: Yeah, I remember! *(Beat)* The Sphinx.

BLUE: The Club Pyramid. And how we joked about it? Should we fuck, maybe we shouldn't, and we'd go out and play around and debate this? Places we might do it? When it was safest to try? Like a coupla kids playing with fire. Laughing. Feeling each other up. And then they started those quarantine blood tests and you tested positive and they shoved you in here and it was. Over. Just like that. Most girls? Would of felt lucky they didn't fuck you. All my friends, they said, you should feel relieved, you were lucky you didn't fuck him. That Torch was a P. Didn't even have a job. *(Beat)* Torch? I didn't feel lucky. *(Beat)* I just felt. Dead.

TORCH: Blue? You gonna live a natural long life. You gonna die in your sleep, with no pain. Or maybe. In a

*Pronounce as written.*
accident. Quick. Clean. No lesions, Blue, are gonna come onto you. And eat you alive.

BLUE: I dream about you. I lay on my bed and I finger myself right into that sex detector. I leave all the lights on, too. Believe it, some computer is getting a scannerful.

TORCH: (Snickering) Yeah.

BLUE: I just dream about you.

TORCH: Jerking off is legal. You should use your VCR.

BLUE: (Disdainfully) I tried.

TORCH: They got some good porno on there!

BLUE: You're not in any of 'em!

TORCH: A dick is a dick is a cock is a penis!

BLUE: Yours is special!

TORCH: Fuckin you only saw it that once!

(Beat)

BLUE: (With a chuckle) We came close that time, huh?

TORCH: Did we ever. And right the next day! They closed off Central Park.

BLUE: What was they gonna do? Put detectors in all the bushes?

TORCH: (Laughing, rummaging in cans.) You want some can grapefruit? It ain't cold but—(Finds can, opens it.) You know the thing I could never stand? About them pornos? (Drinks from can.) Was that you knew that everybody on there? All those pretty bodies? Was like already dead. Or 65 pounds and cackling.*

---

*East Coast slang for “dying.”

BLUE: (Stretching out on mattress.) You think, back in the old days? I coulda been a porno star?

(He pauses, staring at her.)

TORCH: Yeah.

BLUE: (Reaching out for can.) Sure, I'll have some.

(Starts to move her hand. She smiles at his fixed gaze and starts to drink.)

(Suddenly he slaps can out of her hand.)

TORCH: Don't do that!

BLUE: Do what??

TORCH: Jesus, I almost forgot.

BLUE: What's wrong?

TORCH: I told you! It's in my spit!

(He turns away, crouching on floor.)

(Beat)

BLUE: Torch, I don't care anymore.

TORCH: (Disdain) Oh. You don't care.

BLUE: There's no life out there!


BLUE: It's my risk!

TORCH: (Abruptly standing; facing her.) Oh right! And I? Got nothin to say about it! If I infect you? And you die? And I'm left here? A carrier? With insects in my blood like fuckin bullets I shot into you? Then I would find a way, Blue. To off myself. As slow. And as ugly. As the way I offered you.

(Beat, as he turns away again.)

BLUE: (Eagerly) The first thing is to get you outta here. I got in. We can get out. Out to Jersey!

(He reacts with disdain.)
BLUE: I mean, where it's nice New Jersey.
TORCH: Checkpoints at all the bridges! I got no N-card. They'll make me pull down my pants, take one look at my ass, and shoot it.
BLUE: They got N-cards you can buy. Cost a lot, but—
TORCH: I coul'tnt even take a shit out there wit'out some detector flashin on my ass! At some point. In every day of your life? You gotta drop your pants. So save your money.
(Beat)
BLUE: So. This is it. We're stuck here.
TORCH: No. I'm stuck here. You can go wherever.
BLUE: (Lies back, languidly.) Do you dream about me? Torch?
TORCH: The fuck does that matter?
BLUE: We could be this VCR for each other. We could just. Touch ourselves. And look.
TORCH: No.
BLUE: You can't die from looking!
TORCH: I don't trust myself! I might—
BLUE: Trust me! (She rises and approaches him.) Don't worry. I'll keep it safe.
(He crosses away, sits at foot of bed. She pursues, crouching before him, caressing his knee.)
TORCH: If only —
BLUE: What?
TORCH: If only you could shoot into me. Fill me fulla yourself.
BLUE: (Fingers lightly straying up his leg.) Till I spill out of you?
TORCH: I never said this. To no girl ever. In my whole life. I can't shake you, Blue. I can't even whack off unless I—(Hesitates, as her fingers stray further.) I think about myself hurting you. Makin you. Cry.
BLUE: That's nice. I like that.
TORCH: But I mean good pain, you get me? To just blow all this away—
BLUE: With a scream.
TORCH: Yeah.
(Her hand has wandered into his shorts. He grabs it in hammerlock, turning it over, searching it.)
BLUE: What are you doing?
TORCH: Lookin for breaks in your skin! You can get infected touchin me there!
(She yanks hand away and leaps to her feet, crossing away from bed.)
BLUE: Jesus! (Beat) I gotta go. (She rummages on floor for dress.)
TORCH: No, don't go. We got time.
BLUE: (Picking up dress; struggling with it, enraged.) Time for what?
TORCH: To talk. To be wit' you—
BLUE: What's the point?
TORCH: I just wanna look at you!
BLUE: I'll send you a snap.
(He crosses to her; rips away dress and grabs her.)
TORCH: You know what I hate about bitches???
BLUE: (Struggling against him.) Take your hands off me!
TORCH: They hang out wit' you and go I am totally more than my cooz, so fuck off and relate to my beautiful brainpan and then—
BLUE: Lemme go!
TORCH: (Shaking her.) If you just wanna talk and be
heady and responsible? She spits on you and does
birdcalls! Wit' her coo! In your face!
(He deposits her on a pile of pamphlets; then he turns
away; squats; eats out of a can.)
(Beat)
BLUE: (Glumly) That. Is a projection. Of your own in-
ability. Of communication.
TORCH: (Stuffing his face.) You come here to torture
me. You? Are twat-average.
BLUE: (Springing to her feet.) I am not! Like these
other girls you been with.
TORCH: (Rising to face her.) Bitches? Are torture-
chamber jokes of some sicko Godhead?
BLUE: Sure, those girls you hung out with. But I Am
a cut above this.
TORCH: You are basically! The same bitch.
BLUE: I am very. Very! Distinct!
TORCH: Your mothah!
BLUE: From these sluts you dicked—
TORCH: Yeah?
BLUE: And are now gonna die from!
(Beat)
TORCH: Oh. Thanks.
(He turns away, kicking his way through debris to win-
dow. BLUE raises, then drops, her hands, crestfallen.)
(Beat)
BLUE: You want I should cook you something? They
got a stove in here?
TORCH: (Peering out window; flat.) No. They give you
cans only.
BLUE: Shoulda let me know. I coulda brung you a hot
plate.
TORCH: They ration the electricity. You get one minor
appliance and a light bulb. They gimme that clock
radio and they are short on light bulbs.
BLUE: Jesus, what a hemmeroid* this is.
TORCH: It matters? Like you said, I'm gonna die
anyway.
BLUE: (Trying to make a joke.) You're such a bastard,
probly you're only a carrier.
TORCH: Oh great. I can stay here the rest of my life.
Waitin for it to show up on me.
BLUE: They'll discover a cure.
TORCH: No, they won't.
BLUE: Oh! So now you're this scientist!
TORCH: It's like the common cold, Blue. Or some flu
bugs. It's a kinda virus that changes, as it goes from
body to body. You can't vaccinate its ass, you can't
cure its ass.
BLUE: Fucking how would you know???
TORCH: I been readin! (Picks up stuff on floor; flings
it overhead.) The government been crankin out so
much shit on this, you could paper the Bronx. Gas
and electric they don't got much of. But shit? About
how you're gonna die? Is free! They deliver it. Like
junk mail around here. I guess it saves 'em on
toilet paper.
BLUE: Torch, they are spending millions of bucks on
this, and a breakthrough is emanating.* There's no
doubt in my mind.

*Pronounce as written.
TORCH: Blue, half of this city? Is cacked. Or cacking.
BLUE: (Picking up stray publication from floor.) And anyway it's good you keep up. You never used to read. I would say like. Iranian? And you would think it was this sandwich.
TORCH: (Pointing to publication in her hand.) There's pictures in that one. Of lesions. In full color.
BLUE: (Quickly dropping publication.) So? I've seen 'em. They got 'em on posters all over the subways.
TORCH: You mean, like alongside the movie ads?
BLUE: Movies? Torch, Hollywood is toast. They got no stars left. And the ones that are still around? Are very. Heavily. Into make-up.
TORCH: No movies? Where do people go?
BLUE: All the rock clubs are closed. People got too excited they would sweat like pigs it was a health hazard.
TORCH: Don't matter, you should still go out, Blue. Wit' some negative guy.
BLUE: What for?
TORCH: Yeah, I guess you're right. You can't screw him.
BLUE: I don't wanna screw nobody.
TORCH: You know, this is the thing I don't get.
BLUE: Nobody but you.
TORCH: About this fuckin quarantine.
BLUE: You hear what I said?
TORCH: If they was so sure. That this bug I'm carryin? Is the thing. That lesionates* you. Then why? Won't they let you negatives, who have none of this cootie in your blood. Have at it wit' each other?

*Pronounce as written.
shoulders with a professional air.) You say there's more to it than this virus you got. So tell me.
TORCH: Feels good.
BLUE: Come on! I wanna hear this.
TORCH: O.K. Virus. They say virus. You know what that is?
BLUE: No.
TORCH: It's like when you don't feel good, you go to some doctor, and he can't figure the fuck from what you got. So instead of saying, I'm this stupid ignorant doctor putz-head? He says. It's a virus!
BLUE: (With professionally interested tones and hands) I know, it's a disgrace. But you will be happy to hear, Torch, that nobody is going to doctors anymore. Nobody wants to know shit about what's going on in their bodies.
TORCH: Sure! Cause what can they do?
BLUE: Lay down.
(He stretches out on his back. She begins working his legs.)
BLUE: Jack shit is about all. So unless they are employed by the government on this plague? All the doctors are going out of business.
TORCH: (Incredulous) You mean. Like even those manicure doctor snots wit' those. Those fuckin' chickey brownstone offices onna Upper East?
BLUE: Closing up shop. Anyway, their rich patients left New York months ago. For the French Riviera or some place.
TORCH: Oh sure. This lowlife virus would never go to the French Riviera.
BLUE: (Straddling him; professionally working his pecs.) Yeah, I guess they think that.
TORCH: This scarlegged virus would not fit in onna Riviera. Can you just see it? Stretched out onna beach?
BLUE: Tryin' to get a tan?
TORCH: Wit' sunglasses? A big cigar?
BLUE: And a frozen daquiri!
(They embrace, giggling.)
(Suddenly, she pulls back; professional again, as she massages him.)
BLUE: So. If they say it's a virus, this means they don't know what the hell it is and they are just fucking with us.
TORCH: Right!
BLUE: (Massaging his stomach.) I suspected this.
TORCH: Viruses are the stars. Of the Howdy Doody Show. Which is so popular all over the medical world today. Now, you got your parvo- and you got your retro-viruses.
BLUE: (Massaging deeper; impressed.) Yeah?
TORCH: And the retros invert your T-cell ratio.
BLUE: Jesus.
TORCH: They invert and revert and pervert, all up and down your— (Enjoying massage.) That's nice, Blue. All up and down your cellular organization. Replicating! Like the dancing dead! In some old 1980s monster movie.
BLUE: (Massaging lightly around his basket.) It's frightening.
TORCH: But to go lookin' for one virus only, is a stupid. You know what I think?
BLUE: Tell me, I wanna know.
TORCH: I think— (Squeezing his legs together.) Don't do that.
BLUE: It's your tension spot. I went to massage school, and I know. Some people, all your stress is concentrated here.
TORCH: In my balls?
BLUE: (Crisp and professional; spreading his legs.) Spread your legs. Just under your balls. It's a neurovascular nexus of tension. Stress is bad for you, Torch.
TORCH: (Relaxing) Yeah. They say that you shouldn't get stressed. Is that funny? They quarantine you onna Lower East Side and say, Don't get nervous.
BLUE: It's very important you stay calm. (Working his gentials through underwear.) I'll be real gentle here. Now what's your idea on this virus?
TORCH: It's a Piggy-back. Virus.
BLUE: (After a quick, confused beat.) It's what?
TORCH: For this bug I got? To be operational? (As she straddles him, working his pecs, he reaches up and tentatively fondles her breasts.) It gotta combine. It gotta sorta—(Fondling her hungrily.) Get humped. Dog-style. By a parvo-virus. See?
BLUE: So you gotta have both kinds of virus in your system?
TORCH: Right. Lemme just smell you, Blue.
BLUE: (As he buries his nose in her breasts.) So why. Don't they test for this?
TORCH: Lemme taste you.
BLUE: (As he licks at her breasts.) You should tell these people. To start. Testing on this.
TORCH: I dream about you, Blue.
(She cradles his head and begins slowly, lovingly, grinding her crotch into his.)
BLUE: (Undulent, lost in pleasure) They can grow babies in testubes now. So why can't they locate. A coupla viruses. Committing sodomy. In your veins?
TORCH: Blue! Don't. Do that.
BLUE: Baby, we got our underwear on.
TORCH: That's pretty thin fabric down there, Blue.
BLUE: I'll pull away in time. We can dry-kiss, too.
TORCH: (Startled) Fuck is that?
TORCH: I don't wanna.
BLUE: Like this. (She brushes her lips against his.)
TORCH: I don't like it.
BLUE: Try it again!
(She grabs his chin and brushes his lips with hers. Then they rub faces all over, slowly, sensuously, as they grind their hips together.)
TORCH: (Very, very tenderly) I could. Rip off your tits. Wit' my teeth.
BLUE: (Also) I'm gonna. Squeeze your balls. Til they pop.
TORCH: I'm gonna. Gang-bang you. All by myself.
BLUE: I'm gonna rape. Your tush.
TORCH: I'm gonna love you. Til I die.
(Beat)
(Their open lips begin hungrily to meet.)
(A loud pounding at entrance door)
GUARD: (Offstage) Lesion Squad!
(TORCH and BLUE scramble to their feet.)
TORCH: Ace the candle!
(Blue blows out candle. Darkness.)
BLUE: (Quick) Three dash six dash sixty!
GUARD: Show me your label.
TORCH: Sure. She got one.
(TORCH turns BLUE around, yanks at her panties, showing the decal, the beam following all this.)
TORCH: See?
(She does so, adjusting panties. Beam plays slowly over her body. Stops.)
GUARD: What’s that?
BLUE: Where I bumped myself just now.
GUARD: (Puts beam in TORCH’s face.) Show me her tits.
TORCH: What?
GUARD: I have to check everybody. Now show me her tits.
BLUE: I’ll show you.
GUARD: Him! I want him to do it.
(Their backs to audience, TORCH lowers her bra, the beam following.)
GUARD: Oh man. Rub them.
TORCH: Mister? What is this—?
GUARD: (Beam shooting back and forth from TORCH’s face to hers.) You guys got no symptoms yet. I hardly ever see that. She’s not on my list. It’s after curfew. Now rub her tits, butthole.
(TORCH hastily begins to do so.)
(Loud zipping sound)
TORCH: So Mister. Is this O.K.?
GUARD: Show me.

TORCH: Show you what?
GUARD: Show me her bush!
(Beat. TORCH, with immense tenderness, begins peeling away her panties.)
(Heavy breathing sound from GUARD.)
(Sound of a siren)
GUARD: Shit! A break-in!
(Muttered curses as GUARD struggles with zipper, the light making crazy patterns on floor and ceiling.)
(Siren out. Beat.)
(Final zipping sound)
(Beam of light shoots to their faces.)
GUARD: I’ll see you two. In the morning.
(Beam disappears. Door slams.)
(Darkness)
(Beat)
BLUE: (Exhaling) Jesus, Torch.
(Sounds of stumbling in the dark.)
(TORCH finds and lights candle.)
(Lights up)
TORCH: Get dressed. You gotta get outa here.
BLUE: (Angry) I’m gonna be sick!
TORCH: Oh! But me? I feel like a David’s cookie!
(He rummages on floor for her dress; hands it to her.)
BLUE: Torch? You got a little sympathy here?
TORCH: You ain’t gettin dressed!
BLUE: What’s wrong with you?
TORCH: Wanna stick around? Be a Barbie doll? For soldiers?
BLUE: Why the bum’s rush? You got a kind word for me maybe?
TORCH: Yeah: Go back to Flushing!
BLUE: (Casting away dress.) When I’m good and ready!
(Beat)
TORCH: I get it. You liked it.
BLUE: Liked what?
TORCH: Watchin me crawl for that United States scumhole of a National Guard masturbator!
BLUE: That’s a lie!
TORCH: Sure, this is a revenge thing for you.
BLUE: Did it ever cross your brainpan. That we could face this shit together?
TORCH: So fuck it, let’s just hang my balls! Over the door! So he should know when we’re ready!
BLUE: Torch, we’ll be stronger the next time!
TORCH: Maybe he’ll make you go down on me. And I could stand there and whistle like. Zippidy-do-dah!
BLUE: I am so sick of you.
TORCH: You! Got your head! Up your cakes!
BLUE: (Striking him.) You rat bastard!
(He grabs her by wrists, slams her against wall.)
(Beat)
(He slaps his forehead and turns away.)
TORCH: I need some drugs.
(Beat)
BLUE: (Verge of tears) If I wanna stick it out here? Then I’ll stick it out here!

Beirut

(He turns, stares at her.)
TORCH: Oh yeah? (Beat) Let’s play a game!
BLUE: (Same) You’re on.
TORCH: It’s kinna scary, Blue.
BLUE: (Turning sarcastic.) Oh. Hey. A change of pace.
BLUE: And which. Are you?
TORCH: (Cold) Get on your knees, honey.
BLUE: (Smirking) I’m gonna win this game. Lootenant.
TORCH: I gave you a order!
(Beat)
BLUE: (Defiant) O.K. I’m woman enough for whatever you wanna play, Torch. (Sinking to knees.) Are you man enough?
TORCH: Crawl.
(On all fours, she crawls to him. Reaches up to pull at his shorts.)
(He whacks away her hand.)
BLUE: (Stung) Hey! Nipplehead! That hurt!
TORCH: Naughty naughty. You shouldn’t make a move I don’t tell you. Now beg me to fuck you.
BLUE: Torch. This is me. Your girlfriend. From Queens.
TORCH: You want it? So beg me for it.
BLUE: I am not! Quaking with fear here.
TORCH: (Turning ugly.) I told you to beg!
BLUE: Come on, Torch—
TORCH: (Grabbing her by chin.) Beg me for it!
BLUE: (Struggling to free herself from his grip.) Get off!
(He has her by throat.)

TORCH: And in every drop of me? Gonna be a trillion tiny cockroaches that gonna float around inside of you and poop out their shit! Real slow! Into your body. For like a year? Five years? Maybe longer. And all this time you're worryin about a freckle that wasn't there before. Feelin in your pits for lumps! Havin cold sweats every time you cough! Checkin yourself out every hour of every day till this body you got? This body you think is so hot?
BLUE: (Gasping) You're choking me!

TORCH: Starts to look like what it really is! A wax-paper bag fulla livers and turds that puts coffee stains on your underpants and snot in your water glass! I hate my body! (Thrusts her to floor.) And I hate yours too, bitch. (He steps over her, crosses to her purse. Crouches, rummages in it.) You bring me any cigarettes?
(Blue is panting painfully on the floor, grasping her throat.)

(Torch finds a cigarette pack in the purse; starts to rip it open, stops.)

TORCH: You believe this? They still got that sucky warning onna pack. "The Surgeon General..." Is dead! Of the plague. (Rips out a cigarette, rummages for match.) Fuckin asshole. Prob'ly thought, I'm healthy. I never smoke. I have nice clean sex too. We're very responsible up here. I never muffed my wife. Mainly? I jog! I eat alfalfa sprouts I avoid salt I— (Exploding; casting purse away.) Where's a fuckin match???
(Beat)

BLUE: (Flat) Use the candle.

TORCH: Oh, right. (He crosses to candle; lights up from it.) (Inhaling) Unfiltered Camels? Are the greatest invention. Of American history. (Exhaling) Is what I think.

(Torch throws himself onto mattress.)

(Blue manages to rise to her feet. Looking away from him, massaging throat, she crosses to sink; wets lips.)

TORCH: Any good?
BLUE: Coupla cuts.
TORCH: They only play that one cut on the radio.
BLUE: Which one?
TORCH: "Beep. Beep. You're Dead."

BLUE: (Towelling her face with stray rag.) There's a hotter one. "Pneumocystis Carinii Killed My Dog." Heavily metallic, but with a jazz riff double-tracked.

TORCH: I miss my stereo. I miss my earphones.
(She crosses to purse, crouches, extracts cigarette, easily finds a match, lights up.)
(Beat)

BLUE: (Eagerly) Maybe I got it too!
TORCH: Maybe you do. But far as they can tell? From blood tests? You don't. So far you're safe.
BLUE: Safe from what?
TORCH: Don't be a asshole.
TORCH: They got some pretty horny guards here, you may have noticed.
BLUE: I know how to handle him!
TORCH: You was scared shitless of him!
BLUE: Don't worry about it! I got a plan for that guard. The thing is, I like it here. It's a hole, but we could fix it up. We could requisition some curtains. There's an old armchair in that lot over there—
TORCH: (Sarcastic) Hey! Let's set up house and have a baby!
BLUE: So fucking why not??
TORCH: Who at six months of life? Gonna start gettin these. Purple scabs—
BLUE: It's not a hundred percent infection!
TORCH: Almost!
BLUE: You'd make a shitty father anyway.
TORCH: Blue! I'm a major risk category!
BLUE: (Flipping cigarette into sink.) You were always a risk! Even before this plague.
BLUE: And what?
TORCH: I dunno! Whatever. You get into somethin!
BLUE: Macrame?
TORCH: This is not my problem.
BLUE: My job! I could get into my job. Last week? We tabulated accounts. For a Filipino dry cleaners. Torch! I never saw the beauty in this before—
TORCH: You live, that's all! Whatever that means, you live.
BLUE: You can't live! Without love. You just. Can't.
TORCH: Lotsa people! They live. Wit'out once! Lovin

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one shitty fuck on this planet—
BLUE: So? They are walkin' around dead!
TORCH: Priests, what about them? Never once can they fuck—
BLUE: Priests love God!
TORCH: So love God!
BLUE: I love you! (Beat; as she kneels on bed.) You can't live without it, Torch.
(Torch springs from mattress; flips cigarette into sink and strides about room as:)
TORCH: This? Is a canary! Before I met you? I didn't love nothin'. And I was O.K. I could take it or leave it. I walked around, hadda coupla beers, hung around at OTB, told funny stories to the unemployment, and then. At night? I would go to some club and lissen! To this cunt over here? Or that cunt over there? Drool at me about this love intestine! And I would laugh. And then fuck her. Or not fuck her. It didn't matter. I was happy.
BLUE: You were dead.
TORCH: (Ignoring her; lifting shade at window.) Jesus! If I was blood-negative? I would be out there, breathin' so free. Who needs sex? I would go. To a ball game. I would flash my N-card so casual and get on that subway take the BMT over the Manhattan Bridge to Brooklyn. The city looks great from that bridge. Or maybe I would go to like Bensonhurst? You're Queens, you don't know. But me, I'm Brooklyn Italian and Bensonhurst? Is great! These old Italian guys? Hangin' out in front of gelati cafes and watchin' the girls—
BLUE: In shapeless sacks.
TORCH: Don't matter! Cugines?* Got X-ray vision! And the goomadas** and the baby carriages—
BLUE: Babies? Torch, they kill you out there if you get pregnant.
TORCH: So who needs kids? Fuckin brats, they can raise 'em in testtubes now! I heard it onna radio! Big breakthrough. Culture the race in jars or some shit. No exchange of virulous*** fluids!
BLUE: So who wants to be born in a petri dish?
TORCH: So there's baseball and stickball and 86th Street Brooklyn! Everybody on that street, boppin around, flirtin, eatin take-out—
BLUE: Right. My body is this bladder sack with turds floatin around in it. I heard you. Now if you don't get over here. And fuck the stuff outa me? Within the next say twelve minutes? I. Am gonna pee. On your mattress.
(Beat)
TORCH: What if you die from it, Blue? And I gotta live with that?
BLUE: Come over here.
TORCH: Answer me!
BLUE: Come over here and I'll tell you.

*T Meaning buddies or regular guys of the Brooklyn streets. Based on Italian, pronounced "koo-sjeems."
** Phonetic Italian for grandmothers; accent on second syllable.
*** Pronounce as written.
BLUE: That life was over here, and death was way over there. That they don't mix. But now? They're joined at the hip.
TORCH: What we need here! Is some adult maturity!
BLUE: It's a lovely thing you're feelin' for me. How you don't wanna infect me and all? But stick it up your ass, all right?
TORCH: I ain't listenin' no more!
BLUE: Because I got two choices. First, I can live without risk and feel dead. Or second? I can risk death and feel alive. I would not be the bitch that fell for a prick like you if I would choose the first!
TORCH: I never liked your tits! Very seldom. Do you find a decent pair of tits.
BLUE: Yeah? Well, testicles? Are a turn-off!
TORCH: Either they got cow udders or pimples!
BLUE: And I bet that you! Got the kinna testes that flap against a girl's ass when you fuck her! Whap! Whap!
TORCH: Tits that are nice and firm and just the right size—?
BLUE: It drives you crazy! Cold wet dog balls beatin' time on your ass—
TORCH: Suicide! Is a sin! It's anti-nature. Un-Italian! And non-American!
(He crosses to sink, grips it, not looking at her. During following, she rises from mattress and approaches him; finally, she begins caressing his back.)
BLUE: You had a choice about gettin' this disease? Or you had one word to say about one thing that has happened to you in your whole life, including you got born? No. It was always other people or god or some shit that made your choices. You ain't owned one

minute of your life, Torch. But that moment you die? You can choose it. You can choose when, you can choose how. You own it, Torch. You don't wanna give me a baby? O.K. Then give me that moment. That moment when we die. It will belong to us, Torch, and to nobody else.
(Beat, as he feels her body on his back. He breaks away, crossing to radio.)
TORCH: You wanna lissen to some music? (Twirls dial) Popular? Classical? Jazz?
BLUE: All I'm sayin', is it don't have to be a sin!
TORCH: (Abandoning radio.) You end up in hell?
BLUE: Oh my god! (Looking about in mock-terror at sleazy room.) How will we handle it?
TORCH: Shut up! (Grab sheet, covers himself with it.) And go home. (Huddles on bed under sheet.)
BLUE: (Sitting on mattress.) So. That's settled. I'm gonna get curtains for in here. And as for that guard? I know what to do about him. Got the idea from this TV program they showed the other night, NBC, coast to coast, about plagues like in Europe hundreds of years ago? This was supposed to make us. Feel better? I dunno. Anyway, they told how the people who got the Black Death? A more Christian disease than what we got now, I mean you died in a matter of mere days. How these people who caught it got very pissed off about the ones who didn't catch it. So the sick ones would sit by their front windows until well persons passed by on the street? And then suddenly reach out! Grab them! And breathe into their faces! People. Never. Change. (Beat; chuckling) So that's what I'll do to that guard. When he's good and hot, I'll ask him to come closer. And then breathe on him!
TORCH: (Under sheet) This thing here is not airborne! It's a fluid transmission only!
BLUE: Thank you, doctor. So I'll spit on him! We can
always scare him off, scare him so bad he'll stop bothering us. There's power in being sick, Torch.

(Beat)
TORCH: Blue?
BLUE: Yeah?
TORCH: I got a hard-on.

(Beat)
BLUE: Me too.
TORCH: But the thing is, you can't have it.
BLUE: Come out from under there. I want you to look. In the candlelight? There's these little specks floatin in the air. Little animals just waiting. To kill off the things that get weak. They float and turn and dance in the light. Come on. Look.
TORCH: (Still under sheet) No.
BLUE: O.K., so here comes a microbe!

(She gets under sheet with him; we see only their forms under it, rolling about.)
TORCH: Stop it!
BLUE: I'm a germ! I'm gonna kill you!
TORCH: You can't do this!
BLUE: Call out the National Guard!
TORCH: You gonna haveta do this, Blue, all by yourself. (Big, emphatic) It ain't. My. Responsibility!

(Beat, as their forms freeze beneath sheet.)
BLUE: You dickless dink. Of a cop-out.
TORCH: Huh?

(BLUE whips away the sheet and stands up over him, enraged.)
BLUE: I bet you been tellin that to girls. Your whole life!

TORCH: (Sitting up.) The fuck is that suppose to mean?
BLUE: Men? Are pussies!
TORCH: Who?
BLUE: Always like—(Sarcastic macho mimicry) She begged me for it! Wadn't my fault if she got hurt! The stupid cooz!

(TORCH grabs her and pulls her down onto mattress; rolls her onto her back; into her face:)
TORCH: Hey. Bitch! You wanna get lucky, or what???
BLUE: (Struggling beneath him.) I can just see you! If I come down with this? You gonna be crawlin around here goin. It wadn't me. She asked for it. I was just this. Innocent bystander!
TORCH: Jesus, I never met such a fuckhead! So we won't do it! So get outa here!

(She flips him over; into his face:)
BLUE: You say it.
TORCH: Say what?
BLUE: That you wanna be inside me! (Beat) That what you feel, I gotta feel. That what I gotta face, you gotta face.

(Beat)
TORCH: You are some kinna fazool. Some kinna magazine. Like Modern Romance, like Teenage Love, like—How'd I ever fall in love wit' you? In the middle! Of a disease???
BLUE: Piss on this love you got! I don't want excuses here, Torch.
TORCH: So what do you want?
BLUE: I want you to climb inside me. And never leave.
(Beat)
TORCH: I get it. You want my soul, right?
BLUE: That's right.
TORCH: Typical bitch.
BLUE: That's right.
TORCH: Eight inches of dick ain't enough for you, hey?
BLUE: (Contemptuously) What eight inches?
TORCH: Give or take a centimeter!
BLUE: Good-bye. (She angrily rummages in debris for her dress.)
TORCH: Fuckin how can this be? You love somebody and don't wanna give 'em a disease? And that makes you this. Sonofabitch?
BLUE: (Pulling dress over her head.) Pre-plague? You woulda said, Hey you! Wit' the face! You gettin all hung-up and hurt here? So it's your own fuckin fault, you chee-chee*!
TORCH: It's not the same!
BLUE: (Smoothing dress; grabbing up purse; rummaging in it.) It's the same.
TORCH: Bitches in a plague? Are sows in shit!
BLUE: (Throwing packs of cigarettes at him.) Here's some extra cigarettes. (Again rummages in purse.) And somewhere. In here. I brung you a Mars bar.
TORCH: Under your thumb, that's where you want us. In a fuckin cage which only you got the key! Well, lemme tell you, wit' a guy? It's different! He wants a good time, a nice fuck, a few laughs, and then. He wants. To go out. And play some pool!

*Slang for cheap girl.

(Beat, as she pauses, looking at him.)
BLUE: What. Are you talking about?
TORCH: We'd be trapped here! Lookin for spots on each other alla time. I can't live inside of you, Blue, in some kinna romantic magazine. Even if I forget and drink outta the same glass as you? Much less fuck you? I would hate myself.
BLUE: Guys always do.
TORCH: Do what?
BLUE: Hate themselves after fucking. You guys can have this 4th of July experience up a woman's vage and still feel like total shit afterwards. Why is that?
TORCH: You keep changin'! The subject!
BLUE: The subject! Is you got no balls!
TORCH: Fuckin what? I don't wanna murder you! Is that O.K.?
BLUE: No, I won't eat that.
TORCH: It's the truth!
BLUE: I gotta go.
TORCH: What, I'm some kinna limp! wimp! Cause I don't wanna fill you fulla parvoviroids*?
BLUE: Shit on this virus mumbo! What you don't want. Is me. A human being on your hands who might feel pain. Or make a demand. Or need you in her guts when there's nothing left.

(Beat)
TORCH: That! Is totally. And complete. Bullshit!
BLUE: Torch, I didn't risk my life to come here for a visit! I came to live with you, maybe even to die with you. I didn't know what I'd find. Would your skin be

*Pronounce as written.
smooth and white, like before, or would you be covered with sores? I didn't know. And I didn't care.

(Beat)

TORCH: (Pleading) Blue—

BLUE: I know. It's like I said. (Turns to ascend stairs to entrance door.) You're a pussy.

TORCH: (Springing to his feet.) You eat that!

BLUE: Die alone.

(He crosses quickly and grabs her;)

(A significant beat as he looks into her face, makes his decision, then flings her back onto mattress.)

TORCH: All right. Take off your dress.

BLUE: You take it off.

(He rips the dress from her body and grabs her between the legs.)

TORCH: You talk pretty hot for such a dry hole!

BLUE: You man enough to get it wet?

TORCH: Maybe I don't care if it's wet.

BLUE: Hey! Use the palm of your hand! What am I, a video game?

TORCH: Oh, so now you're gonna tell me how to give satisfaction!

BLUE: You gotta tell men everything!

TORCH: There ain't gonna be no love in this, Blue!

BLUE: Love? You hide behind it, anyway.

TORCH: I'm a loaded gun, Blue!

BLUE: So shoot me!

TORCH: I got poison fangs, Blue!

BLUE: So bite me!

TORCH: There's death in this, Blue!

(Beat, as they stare into each other's eyes.)

(She grasps him by the back of the neck and draws him down to her for a long, deep kiss. They begin making love as;)

(The lights dim.)

Curtain