in the crowding darkness
by Jeff Augustin
Characters
Vaughn – Mid/Late 20s African American man
Gabriel – Mid/Late 20s Haitian American man
Clara – Early/Mid 30s Haitian American woman
Derek – Late 20s White American man
Jean – Mid 30s Haitian American man
Ali – Early 30s African American man
Julian – 20 year old Mexican American man

Setting
Present Day, Chicago, IL

Notes:
—— A silent moment when a character reveals or holds back a truth. A time when language is too much or not enough

Overlapping Dialogue:
Gabriel’s line begins on Vaughn’s “or”

VAUGHN
You’re not having nightmares or -

GABRIEL
No, I’m fine

A special thanks to Darryl Baskerville, Yamil Jaiman, and Joshua Reed for sharing their experiences serving our country, including their time before enlisting and return home.
Scene One

(Lincoln Park Apartment. VAUGHN sits in the window sill, it is a large and expansive window. Sounds from the street drift up and echo through the apartment. Rays from the setting sun hit him, keeping the darkness away. He takes a deep slow drag of his cigarette, savoring every nicotine filled breath. A long beat. He exits to the back. The front door creeps open, GABRIEL enters. He is a large man, his muscles barely contained in his t-shirt. He wears Army issued boots and has an Army back pack slung over his shoulder. He shuts the door. He moves with a familiar unease. A long beat. VAUGHN reenters. He stops, like he’s seen a ghost.)

VAUGHN

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GABRIEL

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(A beat)

GABRIEL

It’s not safe to keep your door unlocked. Haven’t your parent’s ever taught you that.

VAUGHN

Usually the creeps and people I don’t like have to be buzzed up.

GABRIEL

The front door was propped open

VAUGHN

Bad neighbors, I guess

(A beat)

GABRIEL

So which one am I?

VAUGHN

What?

GABRIEL

Creep or person you don’t like?

VAUGHN

You know what you are.
GABRIEL

I ain’t going to hurt you.

VAUGHN

I know.

(VAUGHN goes to him, they hug. A beat. VAUGHN tries to pull away, but GABRIEL won’t let go. A beat.)

VAUGHN

(Pulling away)
Sorry I didn’t get you. I thought your flight was coming in –

GABRIEL

I tried calling

VAUGHN

Sorry my phone died. Got over eager, kept checking it all day in class and –. It was stupid of me, sorry.

GABRIEL

It’s not your fault, I should’ve called earlier. I was able to get on an earlier flight out of New York. Didn’t expect to, but some guy heard me trying to get on standby and just volunteered his seat. I thought Patriotism was the thing the beginning of wars were made of, but Americans always surprise me

VAUGHN

They amaze me everyday

(A beat)

GABRIEL

So you’re a smoker now?

(Remembering he had the cigarette…)

VAUGHN

Shit. Buusstted

(He throws it out the window)

GABRIEL

The street can’t be your ashtray when you live on the ninth floor.
VAUGHN
That was my last one. I’ve quit.

GABRIEL
You don’t have to for me

VAUGHN
Two years of slowly killing myself was enough

(A beat)

You must be tired.

(He takes off GABRIELS’ bag)

Sit.

(Leading him to the couch…)

Put your feet up.

GABRIEL
On your coffee table

VAUGHN
Only this one time.

(A slight beat)

GABRIEL
It’s strange

VAUGHNH
What?

GABRIEL
Being here.

VAUGHN
Two years is a long time.

GABRIEL
Everything looks the same. I didn’t expect it to look the same.
VAUGHN
Home décor was always your thing. My taste is too tacky. Left to my own devices, I’d have a *Scandal* poster up or something.

GABRIEL
*Scandal*?

VAUGHN
*Grey’s Anatomy* but smarter.

(GABRIEL smiles)

GABRIEL
But just as sexy?

VAUGHN
Sexier.

(GABRIEL pulls VAUGHN towards him)

GABRIEL
Sexier, huh?

(A beat)

VAUGHN
Hungry? You got to be hungry. I’ll get us some food.

(He turns to go)

GABRIEL
Hold on

VAUGHN
Fuck

GABRIEL
What?

VAUGHN
Clara insisted on making you dinner tonight. But I can call her –

GABRIEL
Wait. Wait. My sister cooks now?

VAUGHN
I mean, she tries. It’s not very edible.
(A slight beat)

VAUGHN
In fact we should probably just order delivery.

(GABRIEL laughs)
But you got to call her and let her know

GABRIEL
Why me?

VAUGHN
Cause she’ll cuss me out.

(GABRIEL laughs)
There’s this great new Thai place that –

(Catching himself…)

You hate Thai

GABRIEL
It’s fine.

VAUGHN
No, we got tons of other menus. It’s been hard cooking for one.

GABRIEL
Wait, hold on.

(Grabbing his arm)

I’m not hungry.

(A slight beat)

Not for that.

VAUGHN

GABRIEL

GABRIEL
You look good. Real good.
VAUGHN

It’s the beard.

(GABRIEL smiles)

GABRIEL

That is new.

VAUGHN

I’m still getting used to it. I’ve only had it for the past six months now. I started growing it after Magic died. I went into a mourning. I couldn’t have him cremated, it felt wrong. So I buried him in the back, in that patch of dirt. Created a tombstone from an arrow shaped rock. There were lots of tears, lots of long loose black clothing draped around my body. I thought I could hear him crying from under the earth. It was all very tragic. Very Grecian. Very Orpheus and Eurydice.

I didn’t even fucking like the dog. I mean it was your dog, but I always secretly hoped it would die. And it did. And it was all so sad. So I didn’t shave, didn’t get a haircut. Didn’t leave the apartment for like a week. But when I finally did, I got all these compliments. So I kept it.

GABRIEL

And the hair on the rest of your body is that the same?

VAUGHN

I’ve stopped shaving my chest, my pubes, my ass. I’m a forest. Everywhere. I know, hair not what you like. But –

GABRIEL

That’s fine

And you?

VAUGHN

The way you like it. Hairy

GABRIEL

Two hairy men.

(A slight beat)

Can that work?

VAUGHN

I hope so.
(GABRIEL pulls him in towards him)

GABRIEL
I’ve missed you.

VAUGHN
Me too.

(A beat)

GABRIEL
You okay?

VAUGHN
Yeah, yeah. You’re back.

(A slight beat)

You?

GABRIEL
I think so.

(He holds him)

You smell good, like I remember.

(He runs his hands on VAUGHN’S torso, the way a child does an object they are just discovering.)

You feel the same too

(GABRIEL kisses VAUGHN. It’s long and deep. A beat. He bites VAUGHN’S lip hard.)

VAUGHN
(Touching his lip)

Shit.

(He’s bleeding)

GABRIEL
You’re still sweet. A little smoky, but sweet.

(He kisses him again)
GABRIEL

I love you.

(And again)

Do you love me?

(VAUGHN nods. And again, slipping his hands down VAUGHN’S pants as light fade.)