

Memories of A Supernatural AIDS Crisis

A play in one act

by Marc Arthur

Place

Detroit

Time

The year 2125

Cast of Characters

- Pandrion** (she/them): Troubled, insatiable, with the air of dangerous curiosity, Pandrion is a Black trans alien with a human heart that's freshly harvested from an intergalactic k-hole. She is giving femme synth siren. Often caught between the cold logic of cybernetic enhancements and the warmth of human memory, despite the inherent turmoil and relentless drive for knowledge that propel her, Pandrion remains steadfast in their quest to be the life of the party.
- Tenofovir** (he/him): Occupies life as a kind of ghost. Fragile and archaic. Seems like he's hiding something. Has vampire fangs. Tenofovir's movements are deliberate, almost hesitant, as if each step is taken with the burden of centuries-old trauma. At the same time, he's an entertainer, a choreographer, and a performance artist who loves to put on a great show. Those who encounter him are drawn into the depths of his theatrical secrets.
- Detroit** (she/her): The celestial atmosphere and embodiment of Detroit. Keeper of time, sage of past, present, and future. She is the mother of the last surviving humans on earth in their transformed states. She is raw poetry and Detroit's eternal steward—the guardian of its story and the undying witness to its unending beauty.

Note on the Set & Lighting Design

Three disco balls of different sizes are arranged above the stage. On the upstage wall is a row of six bar lights, hung vertically. Upstage center is a sturdy metal ballet barre. Within this sparse space the supernatural world of the play is brought to life by the text first and then the lighting, which should not feel that dissimilar from the lighting you might experience at a club.

List of Scenes

The Pandemic Begins, Again

Mdw Ntr

The Exquisite Pollution of Detroit

Supernatural Choreography

Vibrational Archives

Soft Technologies of Micro-control Adopt to the Form of a Body

The Darkest Purple Lesion

Bad Bitches

Can A Vampire See itself in the Mirrors of a Disco Ball?

Sex in the Shadows of Biomedical Capitalism

Dancing with the Ashes of Larry Kramer

A Detroit Kind of Rebellion

Care Should Not Be Limited in a Timeless World

The Crypt

Prologue

Spoken to the audience

DETROIT

“Memories of a Supernatural AIDS Crisis,” A play in one act. At rise, a utopian city where capitalism’s murk is inaudible. Welcome to Detroit. It is the year 2125. Standing against time and pestilence. This is the last surviving city on earth. We are a civilization of mostly Black cybernetic beings. And we have survived revolutions, corrosions, steroidal monarchs, and malignant sexes by keeping time on our own clocks.

PANDRION

and we are not quite human because of it.

She sings for a moment from the Theme from Mahogany.

What time is it?

DETROIT

Where?

PANDRION

In Detroit.

DETROIT

It is October. The season of pharmaceutical emergence when the sky grows chronically orange.

PANDRION

It’s always this time of year that I feel heavy with the sludge of stigmata. Belly-ish supremacy guts me in florescent colors. Dust settles on my skin, and horny shadows orbit my body, every October.

DETROIT

Every October, during the alignment of the three mirrored moons over Belle Isle, our population partakes in The Forgetting. Abandoned hospitals, now seized by powerful DJs, serve as spaces for antiviral raves. Viruses, bacteria, and pathogens are eradicated from human bodies with quantum fluctuating beats.

PANDRION

I am ready to forget.

DETROIT

Let The Forgetting begin!

Pandrion disappears into a cloud of smoke as house music thumps. There are flashing lights and lasers. Then as the smoke dissipates, we find her asleep in the arms of Tenofovir, an ancient vampire.

Scene One: The Pandemic Begins, Again

DETROIT

Welcome Pandrion, you've arrived at the beginning, again.

Tenofovir and Pandrion burst out laughing uncontrollably.

TENOFOVIR

You are dead!

PANDRION

I don't remember hah!

TENOFOVIR

How much did you take?

PANDRION

Enough that I felt the house music in my bones.

TENOFOVIR

Magical.

PANDRION

Wait, who are you? And what's your name?

TENOFOVIR

Girl, you blacked out. We've known each other for millennia.

DETROIT

Meet two inhabitants of this ancient city – Tenofovir, a famous biomedical researcher and Pandrion, legendary glamorite, Enthrallix of the house of revolutionary love. Both beings relate differently to time. Whereas Pandrion, whose memory has just been erased, is here for a good time, Tenofovir relives all the world's traumas.

TENOFOVIR

I can see the dead and it torments me.

PANDRION

I just want to party.

DETROIT

This is their love story.

TENOFOVIR

Now it begins.

PANDRION

Now it begins.

DETROIT, PANDRION, & TENOFOVIR

The search for the memory of a supernatural crisis.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Two: Mdw Ntr

Spoken out past the fourth wall.

PANDRION

I sense a vampire's teeth. It's like there's no one in the club except the two of us.

DETROIT

There are hundreds of us. More genders and looks than on Kepler-186f.

PANDRION

Who are you?

DETROIT

The celestial atmosphere and embodiment of Detroit. I'm also a DJ.

PANDRION

Are you, here with me? I mean like, really *here*?

DETROIT

I've been here through it all, honey and so have you.

PANDRION

I don't understand. This all feels brand new.

DETROIT

You forgot something, that's all.

PANDRION

What did I forget?

DETROIT

Well, everything really. Just know that when next October comes, you can forget it all again. May you be empowered to start a fire and burn it all down, if you want to that is.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Three: The Exquisite Pollution of Detroit

DETROIT

It is morning. Globular clusters of biopharmaceutical waste pulse distantly in the sky. Pandrion and Tenofovir are walking on a highway. Highways have been terraformed into pleasure enclaves. There are no cars and overgrown genetically engineered plant life emits SSRI nutrients that induce fleeting states of ecstasy.

PANDRION

Damn, you look good.

TENOFOVIR

So do you, your veins are glowing and enlarged. Your body warmed by a woman's fire.

DETROIT

Pandrion takes a deep breath and inhales the decrepit scent of a bulging flower that screams like a newborn child.

Detroit makes this sound.

PANDRION

These flowers have a trace of something on their petals.

TENOFOVIR

That's warm fuzzy nostalgia. I suffer in the persistent echoes of catastrophe, but the flowers, they make me more beautiful don't you think?

PANDRION

My god you are perfect. More soothing than my strongest medicine. I don't want this feeling to end.

TENOFOVIR

The highway goes on forever, we never have to get off.

PANDRION

You make me feel a hunger that announces that death is near.

TENOFOVIR

And already I have lived through wars. And echoes of wars around your beauty, my love.

DETROIT

It begins to rain polyped remnants of trauma.

Lighting shifts to reflect this.

TENOFVIR

We have been enveloped by toxic pharmaceutical weather.

Beat.

Abnormal bleeding, thermosensitive tear drops, or I'm not sure... this is mathematically undefined. Can you describe the force exerted on your body by the atmosphere?

PANDRION

This rain smells of rage and tragedy. Makes my blood vessels angry. Gaps of knowledge, empty spaces in my brain burp mysteriously with the history of human suffering. I tidy up and clean my apartment for a month with antibacterial gamma rays. I wake up and I've cleaned the entire city of Detroit. But then I walk through the Packard Plant on an icy night and the hot breath of a factory worker screams directly into the channels of my neocortex. I feel an uncontrollable need to spend thousands of more hours adapting and disinfecting my body to perfection and finding perfectly fitting clothes that show off my best assets.

TENOFVIR

But the thing is, the corrugated rage of that factory worker's voice makes you more beautiful to me. I like how it forms on your body like lace and dark eyeshadow. You could start a riot.

PANDRION

It scares me, to feel the city awaken in my body.

TENOFVIR

But babe, we must learn how to survive after a crisis. I will teach you how to hold a memory. You will become a wise and beautiful scientist like me.

PANDRION

This rain hurts my lungs, it feels like other people's pain lichen on my body. On you it's like lust. If I'm being honest though, I want to share fluids with you. Want to

biodegrade with you. I am afraid of you. But I also am infatuated beyond reason. I will go with you wherever you want.

TENOFOVIR

Come, this way.

Lights transition as Tenofovir takes Pandrion's hand and guides them around the stage exploring different areas.

Scene Four: Choreography of the Dead

Lights transition again and Tenofovir dances for Pandrion who starts to follow along and then...

PANDRION

Wait. Wait. This doesn't feel right.

TENOFOVIR

What is it?

DETROIT

The way he dances is outdated and over determined.

Pandrion sings and sound out the word AIDS without saying it in a way that is totally audible.

TENOFOVIR

Here let me help you.

He teaches her another dance.

PANDRION

Hold on

She touches his mouth, feels inside of his lips.

Your oxygen is synthetic and unceremonious. It's romantic that you want to teach me to dance but...

TENOFOVIR

But what?

DETROIT

Pandrion still feels his choreography sinking in and saturating her body.

PANDRION

I feel embarrassed.

TENOFOVIR

Sorry. I wasn't trying to... I just thought it would be fun.

DETROIT

As you regain your memory, you also start to remember buildings, the colonial layout of the city, or things like the best orgasm you ever had.

PANDRION

I see sonar pouring out of clouds on the horizon and lubricating the earth with a graphite softness. It makes everything neon and permeable.

TENOFVIR

You can open your eyes now.

PANDRION

They were never closed.

Tenofvir reveals a ballet barre upstage center.

What is that!?

TENOFVIR

It's an instrument to help us keep time.

Lights shift. Tenofvir dances with the ballet barre for a bit.

Now in this part of the dance you are dying, and nobody cares. There is silence all around. People use sinister and monstrous metaphors to describe you.

PANDRION

I'm afraid.

Lights snap to black.

Hello? Hello? I'm afraid. Can you hear me? I'm afraid.

Scene Five: Vibrational Archives

Spoken out past the fourth wall.

PANDRION

Where did he go?

DETROIT

Transformed into a cloud of dust. He'll be back.

PANDRION

What time is it?

DETROIT

It is February now, Detroit is getting more fabulous, I mean, have you been to Spotlight? It just reopened, the line is always around the block, and the dance floor is never empty.

PANDRION

I feel a chemical in my breath and bones. It's luminous, crystalline and thick. It's hard for me to breath.

DETROIT

It's why we can be here. It's a prophylactic.

PANDRION

I feel empty. Detroit feels empty.

DETROIT

You will remember soon enough. Keep walking down Woodward and you'll find your children.

PANDRION

My children? If I follow my jawline there are dewy lymph nodes pulsing with burning glitter. It feels like... like I should be worried, but I feel really good. It's so beautiful here. I'm gagging.

Pandriion takes a deep breath and coughs.

And I want to break things apart. I'm overcome with this feeling like crashing sounds or ruins, yes, that's it. I want to keep undoing myself apart but in a way that gets

reconstituted. The question I keep asking myself it: if I could have any supernatural ability, what would it be?

DETROIT

Well?

PANDRION

I wouldn't want people pointing up at the sky and shouting: "look it's Pandrion!" I want a sneaky ability. I want to already be changing my body when you think you know me.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Six: Soft Technologies of Gender Adopt to the Form of Pandrion's Body

The stage is still in blackout. Tenofovir turns on a flashlight in the dark.

TENOFOVIR

Walk with me.

PANDRION

Where are you taking me?

TENOFOVIR

You're nervous, I can tell.

PANDRION

What's this building?

TENOFOVIR

It's the old Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

PANDRION

There is primordial warmth here, it feels familiar and safe.

DETROIT

As Pandrion and Tenofovir wander, the city's lymphomic architecture fluctuates around them. Buildings produce vibrations that evidences a record of time passing.

PANDRION

I hear beautiful music.

TENOFOVIR

(Singing) There is a balm in Gilead that makes the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead that heals the sin-sick soul.

DETROIT

Downstage right is a pedestal holding a circular white canister. Bubbles appear. Pandrion dips her hand in and takes out a handful of cream. It is greasy and loaded with prismatic superclusters of extinct hormones. They begin rubbing it on their face.

PANDRION

Power trickles delicately across my nerves, anointing my muscles and viscera with ultrasonic gender reverberations.

DETROIT

All the people of Detroit sing in unison.

TENOFOVIR

What's happening to your body.

DETROIT

Pandrion begins to appear more masculine, their jaw sharpens, and hair line recedes.

TENOFOVIR

Heart racing?

PANDRION

Yes.

TENOFOVIR

Shortness of breath?

PANDRION

Yes.

TENOFOVIR

Muscle pain?

PANDRION

Yea, and I feel horny. Do you want to try some?

TENOFOVIR

No thanks. I already feel as if I cascade through an eternity of distortions.

PANDRION

Just try some. It will help you calm down.

TENOFOVIR

I am calm.

PANDRION

No, you're not, I see visions of gay men dying around your body.

TENOFOVIR

I've already been treated—face fillers, fat transfers, and implants that keeps me as mummified as chrono-resurgent bats.

DETROIT

He has body dysmorphia from always being cast as a blood thirsty demon.

TENOFOVIR

What's happening to your body now?

PANDRION

I don't know.

TENOFOVIR

Shame?

PANDRION

All the time.

TENOFOVIR

But do you also feel powerful? Like you can conquer anything?

DETROIT

Pandrion's body completely morphs. Breasts disappear, an Adam's apple emerges as their voice deepens.

PANDRION

My gonadotropin regulators are humming. I feel reduced to a masculine muscle mass.

TENOFOVIR

You look beautiful my F150.

PANDRION

The flowback of smelt testosterone. I hurt, I died, I fell, I dove, I ate, I got sick, I felt/

TENOFOVIR

/I fought, I bore, I forgot.

DETROIT

Pandrion is confused. She feels around her new body. Then something happens.

PANDRION

Damn! Damn this feels good. Industrialization discharges rank and goon from my body. Rusty iron and spit. Multiple times. And I'm driving my car super fucking loud and fast.

(BLACK OUT)

Scene Seven: The Darkest Purple Lesion

DETROIT

They walk towards a non-descript building with a yellow awning that reads “Club Gold Coast.” As they walk in, there is a fossilized jock strap at the base of the stripper’s poll. In the shadows across the room, a dark force lurks and metastasizes in the shadows.

The six bar lights on the upstage wall gradually build to red during the following line.

NARRATOR

At this moment in the play, we should hear the word AIDS spoken for the first time. The stage should fill with drama, accompanied by the sound of thunder and flashes of lightening. But instead, there is a long, awkward drawn-out silence.

Pandrion crosses up right, opens the doors. Tenofovir bursts through the doors up right and poses like a dramatic bat.

PANDRION

Oh god!

TENOFVIR

It’s just me babe. It’s okay.

PANDRION

I see a man’s frail body in a hospital bed. And it feels like my body. Not a fully human body. A cosmic web of aching wet glue, and monster parts.

DETROIT

Tenofovir has been a mystery to Pandrion. She didn’t know who he was or what he wanted from her. Until this moment.

PANDRION

Now I see. Your muscles have been created so hard you’re a kind of statue. A living and breathing lump of clay not yet fired. You are moist the way you carry, carry pain. You just want some love. I can give you love, babe.

TENOFVIR

Is that okay? I was afraid that, that if you knew what I’d been through...

DETROIT

I remember walking down the hallway, seeing him there alone. The feelings that came up included:

DETROIT, PANDRION, TENOFOVIR

Horror, Greif, Rage.

PANDRION

I just wish you would have been more honest. Seeing you like this now, like who you really are, like an infected, festered, bacterial and foaming at the mouth bat. It's well, it's kind of sexy.

TENOFOVIR

You think so?

PANDRION

Yea. Everything is so perfect in Detroit sometimes it's refreshing to see something that is lived.

DETROIT

But then something happens.

PANDRION

Your memory burns inside my guts rearranging history in your image.

TENOFOVIR

You're getting stuck in a memory. Be careful, come out of it. Come to me.

PANDRION

And I feel bad, I feel really bad that you were in that hospital alone like that. Where were your parents?

TENOFOVIR

When I'm with you I forget all that, and right now, the way you look. Your stoic all camo voice, I want to beg you for the privilege to...

PANDRION

The privilege. I recognize it. Privilege has oxidized the grooves of your face over time. You're so goth and masc. It's super scary and sexy.

Beat.

But we are different. You know? I'm here regenerating, trying to figure out how to be immortal and it's not easy. I've been thinking about it and my idea of beauty is changing.

TENOFOVIR

Sure, I get that. Here try some more of the Balm. It always works for me. Gets me nice and numb and then accelerates transformation.

DETROIT

Pandrion puts more balm on and then emits the energy of a star that's about to explode. Trillig masses of bryonic crud form on their body and they furiously wash themselves until it converts into oily opalescent jelly. It shimmers like a drag queen's sequins. They are reborn into a femme goddess body.

PANDRION

Ah there we go, that was just the right amount. I had put too much on before.

TENOFOVIR

Wait, no. I was just starting to get turned on.

PANDRION

It's fun to be bionormalized like an archaic man from the 21st century, to never have to worry about anything. But I'm more myself in the libidinal public form of a woman.

DETROIT

Tenofovir buckles as Pandrion de-conforms to beauty cut from vintage porn.

PANDRION

But I can't help noticing that my breath quickens when you get close to me. The sky curds and bodies start to fungus.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Eight: Can a Vampire See Itself in the Mirrors of a Disco Ball?

Ancient light saturates the stage.

DETROIT

And now, a memory of Tenofovir's supernatural transformation.

TENOFOVIR

I arrived in Detroit in the 1980s from Sault Ste. Marie where God was a big man's fishing boat near beaver island. I was 17, bored, and my parents hated me. So, I stole Dad's truck and went to Detroit. It was only six hours away and I started working at McDonalds and read chemistry books in my spare time. Never again spoke to dad. He never came for his truck either. At some point I started hustling to make more money. I didn't like being poor. I also started to eat a lot more. I ate big macs five times a day and didn't get fat. My heart was fat and wet though. It pounded like an alien baby trying to get free and I started noticing lesions on my skin. People said a weird cancer was going around...

DETROIT, TENOFOVIR & PANDRION

A sinking feeling of rage. The tumorous sound of plasma.

DETROIT

At this moment in the play, we should hear the word AIDS spoken for a second time. But the word suffocates and is muffled as a gay man is beaten on the south side of town.

PANDRION

Someone is in trouble. I can hear the sound he lets out as his ribs break. They are kicking him.

TENOFOVIR

I was a choreographer and on an opening night in 1990, we used own blood instead of fake blood. We cut ourselves in public. They made our body fluids illegal.

PANDRION

He doesn't die from the injuries. No, he shot himself because he didn't want to transform.

TENOFOVIR

I learned how to make blow and one night accidentally mixed it with motor oil and Estrogen that my friend was taking.

DETROIT

You were that friend, honey.

TENOFVIR

That night we danced longer and harder than everyone else. We kept taking it and grew fangs, which created a media circus. “Vampires inhabit Detroit’s blight!” the papers read.

PANDRION

But were we trash or trade?

DETROIT

We were trade and my tracks were the most choice. We were the life of all the parties and balls over the next year. We kept taking the compound and our vampiric transformation continued—we stopped aging.

TENOFVIR

Keeping this secret wasn’t easy and as government caught wind, they said I needed FDA approval. They just wanted us all dead. People from all over the world traveled to Detroit for my compound, even as antiretrovirals rolled out. My drug was the most in demand.

DETROIT

And then the earth got hotter. Rivers dried and storms came harder. Eventually food stopped growing. Detroit, like always, was forgotten first. We survived though. We always survive. But it was hard to breath, UV burned through the ozone as dense carbon polluted our air. One night we were at a boss drum and bass party dancing so hard our bodies created unimaginable heat.

TENOFVIR

The steel from the factory building started melt and my lab below it exploded. Dust from the compound settled over the city like a cellular veil and everyone was granted immortality within it.

DETROIT

Detroit was still breathing. We have survived the end of the world. In this our new incantation, our blood is infected, but we are free of pathology, criminalization, and state systems of impoverishment because I am the doctor and the DJ.

(BLACK OUT)

Scene Nine: Bad Bitches

Spoken out past the fourth wall.

PANDRION

Today new organs appeared in my body.

DETROIT

I can see. Your hands are glowing

PANDRION

Yes, my hands are enhanced with new forms of pleasure.

DETROIT

Hot.

PANDRION

It's strange. All these good feelings slithing around in unfinished and ketamined reproductions. They make it hard to remember.

DETROIT

You will remember. You will.

PANDRION

What time is it now?

DETROIT

It is now May, the season of polychromatic orgies when all the people of Detroit come together in and make new fashion looks that resist the violence of erasure.

(BLACK OUT)

Scene Ten: Sex in the Shadows of Utopia

Pandrion and Tenofovir make bubbling sounds.

DETROIT

Pandrion and Tenofovir swim in a lake of melted glacier water and PFAS that have catalyzed into a gooey bubblegum-like substance. Around them hundreds of other Detroiters are naked and fornicating as northern lights produce beautiful ambient sounds.

TENOFOVIR

Oh, the lake is perfect today.

PANDRION

I suppose.

TENOFOVIR

There's never been a more pleasurable and erotic time to be alive in history. Why are you down?

PANDRION

I'm just... distracted.

TENOFOVIR

What is it?

PANDRION

It's nothing.

TENOFOVIR

You're worried I can tell.

PANDRION

I'm not worried about intergalactic strains of giardia or cynobacteria. I'm worried about the old memories lurking around here. The ones that you've shared with me already are a lot to process.

TENOFOVIR

Look at what a perfect day it is. Look, over there, a group of mammoth opossums are emptying their salivary glands together.

Detroit makes this sound.

And I can tell you are overflowing with pleasure, too. Pink electricity glows in your eyes.

Beat

Can I kiss you?

PANDRION

I love it when you kiss me. Progesterone swells in my lips and my stomach lining starts to smolder and ash.

They start to kiss, gently. Tenofovir moves down Pandrion's neck, about to bite.

No.

Beat.

I need to wash my hands.

DETROIT

Pandrion runs to the Balm of Gilead where she washes her hands vigorously. Nostalgic flowers blossom all around her.

TENOFOVIR

In this city, the texture associated with death is always several feet away.

PANDRION

There's just something I can't get over. I'm sorry I think I'm terrified of you.

TENOFOVIR

It's okay.

DETROIT

He feels like Jupiter sinking into a supermassive black hole.

TENOFOVIR

We can use protection.

For sure.

PANDRION

(BLACK OUT)

Scene Eleven: Dancing with the Ashes of Larry Kramer

TENOFVIR

Step Kick step Step kick. Again. Got it? Going on. Now, in this moment your lover, the only person who was there for you in your entire life. Step kick, ball change and spin, spin. And one year later, in an incredible act of rage and protest, you travel to Washington D.C. and throw his ashes over the White House fence. Okay let's try it from the top.

Tenofvir does an elaborate and weird dance, throws powder in the air, and laughs manically. Before he is about to end, Pandrion grabs the ballet barre, twists and bends it until it crashes to floor.

PANDRION

Can we talk?

TENOFVIR

What have you done?

PANDRION

This just doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel like I should be here.

TENOFVIR

Umm. I mean, how so?

PANDRION

I mean like, these protests you're transferring to my memory, a lot of them they are so powerful. But I'm not sure if I was in these memories. I don't know it just feels like I would have had a different kind of memory. Like I would have been treated differently.

TENOFVIR

Sorry. I mean, I'm happy to see that you're starting to remember who you are. That's what I want for you.

PANDRION

I do feel more myself. More than before. But I wouldn't mind changing again.

TENOFVIR

Come here.

They embrace.

I didn't mean to upset you.

PANDRION

It's okay. I mean, I just think that you need to chill out a bit. This is all pretty intense.

TENOFOVIR

Yea, you're right. I got a little carried away.

PANDRION

The cybernetic part of me. It just. It feels like you communicate with me all the time.

TENOFOVIR

I feel that way too.

PANDRION

We know each other in a cellular way, don't we?

PANDRION & TENOFOVIR

This is weird.

DETROIT

In that moment Pandrion mutates a little, not in a noticeable way. But she becomes somewhat less ambivalent, less changeable, and more statuesque. Less... living.

PANDRION

Where are we now?

DETROIT

A museum of African beads.

TENOFOVIR

What's the first sound you hear?

PANDRION

A chorus of memories but they are quiet. It sounds like faint vibrations in the distance.

DETROIT

The walls of the room shimmer and sparkle, like billions of little drums that are modulated and harmonized in strange waveforms.

PANDRION

AHH this sound in my ears is getting louder!!!

TENOFOVIR

You are safe in Detroit, no one is gonna hurt you.

DETROIT

Tectonic shifts and earthquake sounds. You have arrived at your house, Pandrion.

PANDRION

AHH the buildings, they are all vibrating.

DETROIT

Pandrion is suddenly in the big overgrown backyard at their old place on Littlefield Street. They were a window dresser at Hudson's Department Store and would find all kinds of window-dressing stuff that they brought to this yard where they built a stage for balls.

PANDRION

My children were everything to me. They had nowhere to go to be themselves, if they had not already been kicked out. No matter what I had to do to help them... steal, kill, or whatever to keep these kids alive. They all lived with me, all my adopted children and I would feed them, I would teach them how to walk, how to walk and be seen. And how to drop, how to vogue. I would show them how to be lovers, and how to be a divine and illuminated glitch like me. I gave them the supernatural ability to dissolve out of conventional forms and to be seen from space aflame.

DETROIT

No one was telling them about...

Pandrion caughs and then sounds out the word AIDS with extenuated vowels. She takes a deep breath. then sings Theme from Mabogony.

Scene Twelve: A Detroit Kind of Rebellion

PANDRION

I'm afraid that I won't survive these memories.

DETROIT

You got this. Here, look.

PANDRION

Is that a photograph?

DETROIT

It's a picture of you.

PANDRION

When was it taken?

DETROIT

1967.

PANDRION

But I look like myself today in that picture.

DETROIT

Try wiping off the dust.

PANDRION

Oh wow.

DETROIT

Yea. That was the year policing in our neighborhoods was out of control and you and I gathered people in the streets and burned it all. We burned it all down.

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Thirteen: Care Should Not Be Limited in a Timeless World

PANDRION

I've just returned from a trip to the archives.

TENOFOVIR

You seem different.

PANDRION

I want to break things apart. I'm overcome with this feeling like crashing sounds or ruins, yes, that's it. I want to keep undoing myself apart but in a way that gets reconstituted on my own terms.

TENOFOVIR

Try the balm.

PANDRION

Ouf, no I've had enough. I need something else. I don't know what I need.

TENOFOVIR

Maybe you're holding memory the wrong way. You should try cradling, hold it like this, prop it.

Beat.

PANDRION

Can I ask you something.

TENOFOVIR

Sure.

PANDRION

Did you make them pay for the drugs?

TENOFOVIR

Who?

PANDRION

The people in the 1980s and 1990s who were dying. Did you make them pay for the drugs you were making?

Tenofovir is silent.

DETROIT

He digs a hole in the ground. Screams into it. And then covers the hole with dirt.

Beat.

DETROIT

Sheesh the trauma of these memories is real. Let's try something different.

Detroit puts visors on Tenofovir and Pandrion. She dances.

What do you see?

PANDRION

Ancestors...

TENOFOVIR

The echoes of stars.

PANDRION

Well, that area over there (pointing), it looks like Detroit has taken the form of a beautiful woman.

TENOFOVIR

I see her too.

Detroit steps between them and begins to dance.

PANDRION

I feel like I can trust her. It's like the plants and blood of Detroit are nourishing the marrow of her bones.

DETROIT

And suddenly the city evaporated into fumes. Detroit was alive in the night sky like a girl blasting rap from her Cadillac. Detroit is still not perceptible. We don't know who she is. Remember. Remember. Detroit is a city that was never meant to survive.

DETROIT, TENOFOVIR, PANDRION

And suddenly the city evaporated into fumes. Detroit was alive in the night sky like a girl blasting rap from her Cadillac. Detroit is still not perceptible. We don't know who she is. Remember. Remember. Detroit is a city that was never meant to survive.

PANDRION

She holds her memory different than you do. Her muscles exhale and ember and I see the burned-out frame of a house.

DETROIT

Particles renew, language appears and so do building materials, electricity and plumbing.

Pandrion stands up and dances with Detroit.

PANDRION

From here I can see my house. Through strata of geological time, eras of want, and grace, and gentrification. Angels drift in the halls, sirens, and prestigious bitches flying and dancing.

Pandrion starts dancing repetitively.

Guys can someone help? I think I'm stuck in a memory.

Detroit tries to stop her dancing to no avail.

DETROIT

Pay him no mind!

PANDRION

The vampire's teeth between the beams, in the creaking sounds.

TENOFOVIR

Survival folds and spirals in circadian cycles, in dancing bodies.

PANDRION

I can't stop. It's not on purpose.

Tenofovir takes off his visor and then Pandrion's.

TENOFOVIR

Come here, let me hold you.

They embrace. Soon Tenofovir is at Pandrion's neck, about to bite. Pandrion, pushes him away.

PANDRION

I think that my sense of time might be radically different from yours. Look, I really like you. I do. But sometimes you make me want to wash my hands.

DETROIT

Tenofovir writes one hundred stories about the sharp pang of stigmactra he feels.

TENOFOVIR

I'm not a monster.

PANDRION

No. You're not. That's not what I meant. Sorry.

DETROIT

It is late September now and Detroiters neo-cortexes are abuzz from ripe emtricitabine fruit. The Forgetting will soon begin, again.

TENOFOVIR

I wanted to tell you. I want to, I want you to stay here with me a bit longer.

PANDRION

You are beautiful my little infected bat. But...

TENOFOVIR

Lay down next to me? I won't bite. Promise.

PANDRION

Okay.

TENOFOVIR

I like it like this.

PANDRION

Me too.

TENOFOVIR

Wish I had found you earlier, laid with you in my dad's truck bed all summer staring at the stars. The years felt shorter then.

PANDRION

You were dying.

TENOFOVIR

I was.

PANDRION

Immortality feels long. Feels like forever.

TENOFOVIR

But we will survive it together.

PANDRION

Time passes in a lived way when I'm surviving.

Beat.

I'm, I'm afraid of what I saw just now. What I saw through her lens.

TENOFOVIR

What did you see?

PANDRION

I died, I fell, I dove, I ate, I got sick, I felt,

TENOFOVIR

I fought, I flew, I bore, I forgot.

DETROIT

The lights shift to red. Twenty vampires appear upstage and perform a synchronized hip hop dance.

All characters do a maniac and frenetic dance. As they dance they also sound out the word AIDS. Eventually they are shouting the word AIDS.

PANDRION

What time is it on the clock of the world?

DETROIT

It is October. The season of pharmaceutical emergence when the sky grows chronically orange.

PANDRION

It's always this time of year that I feel heavy with the sludge of stigmata. Belly-ish supremacy guts me in florescent colors. Dust settles on my skin, and horny shadows orbit my body, every October.

DETROIT

Tenofovir swoops his cape and with a single turn is headless.

PANDRION

I am ready to forget.

TENOFOVIR

Muahahaha! I am the vampire of Detroit, the scapegoat and savior of my generation. I drew red lines that separated neighborhoods and then folded red ribbons to signal hope. I fought for access to life saving drugs and then profited generously off them.

DETROIT

Tenofovir's head dislodges from the pedestal, becomes airborne, darts towards Pandrion and bites their neck.

PANDRION

AHHH!

Scene Fourteen: Total Darkness

DETROIT

Tenofovir's head hits the ground with a thud. Here the word AIDS is spoken for the final time in the play. The ether of Detroit superclusters then dissipates. Then we are back at the beginning.

Tenofovir embraces Pandrion as in the beginning of the play. Disco balls spin

At rise, a fleeting moment when there is no suffering.

TENOFOVIR

Whole universes exist twinned within your body. Your body defended.

DETROIT

The three mirrored moons are aligning!

TENOFOVIR

Detroit's cycle of rebirth will begin again!

DETROIT

From dust to earth.

TENOFOVIR

From ashes to raving bodies.

DETROIT

Welcome Pandrion, to the end...

PANDRION

Wait, wait, wait a minute. Slow down. Are you not going to ask me if I have any last words, or something? Because I do. And one of them is fuck you.

Pandrion crosses to Detroit, takes script from her and throws it on the floor. Detroit twitches and jerks. Eventually she is convulsing and breaking down on the ground until she is still.

TENOFOVIR

What have you done to her!?

PANDRION

I've regained enough memory now to know that this is your writing. This is your script. Your so clever. It's almost like you know how I talk.

TENOFOVIR

I get it, you're upset. But please, we've already come so far. I know it feels strange that I'm the one who gets to tell the story of Detroit.

PANDRION

Strange? Oh, please, honey, will you just...

TENOFOVIR

Do you know why you're special to me?

PANDRION

It's that feeling that envelopes you when it's 5am and you've been dancing at the club all night.

TENOFOVIR

It's because you are my first love and only love. When your pneumonia got bad and you were on your death bed, I brought you back to life so that we could be here together, in everlasting love.

PANDRION

No. No, this is about you. It's always about you. I'm disgusted. I'm disgusted at what you have done to her. Look at her there, she was beautiful but now I see she was always just an abject and malleable lump of clay to you.

She stands.

DETROIT

Yea, this is whack. We have made it finally out of time. Out of the play. But we're still somewhere, aren't we?

PANDRION

We're in total loss and quiet. No more house music.

DETROIT

At rise, a moment of...

PANDRION

You don't have to describe it for the audience anymore.

DETROIT

Oh damn, that's original. An AIDS play: that perfect form of victim art that oversaturates every other horror. Why didn't I see it earlier?

TENOFOVIR

I created this world so you can do whatever you want, and you don't have to worry about getting sick. We can make up our lives in a way that feels real and right.

DETROIT

You want to know how I feel? You want to know how I *really* feel?

TENOFOVIR

Yes.

DETROIT

Right now, I feel like....

She struggles and can't finish her sentence.

PANDRION

Your choreography has infected my body to the point that it's not fun to dance anymore.

DETROIT

Like a zombie.

They do the zombie dance for a short moment and then laugh at each other.

TENOFOVIR

Please! You are real to me. This is all real to me.

PANDRION

The weight of the future, it's heavy to carry.

DETROIT

I grow tired of watching as each recurrent holocaust passes, and we forget every time how to recreate the world. I am going now; maybe to one of the three mirrored moons? I'm not sure.

The next line is spoken to Pandrion

Coming with?

PANDRION

Thank you. But I need to stay and finish something. I'll see you again, I'm sure.

Detroit exits.

TENOFOVIR

You want to write it with me? We can write it how you want it. We can start all over.

PANDRION

Have you ever considered that maybe I want to forget all this? That I'm happier in ignorance than history? That I just want the good drugs that wash all of filth and corroded trauma away. There is pleasure in not knowing, complete detachment from time and space, numb floating away.

TENOFOVIR

I am scared too. Scared of age and ruin.

PANDRION

It's been real. There is something beautiful about dancing through a pandemic with you. I did enjoy myself. I always do.

Beat

And now, Pandrion's final supernatural transformation. Let The Forgetting begin!

Pandrion dances to deep house alone on stage as the lights fade out.

End of Play