

Lights up on DANNY standing in an art-deco apartment.

He takes it all in: a vanity and mirror (without glass), a chaise longue, gold records, images of Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn ... and lots of phones (which may be placed on the floor, the furniture or hung from the ceiling.

DANNY

...Well, why don't we just put this little red wagon on the road ...
(shifting into reporter mode)

I've already spoken with Martha Wash, and Jeanie, and Terri Hinte over at Fantasy Records, and sifted through the archives at the —

SYLVESTER

Archives. You make me sound so old.

DANNY

No, no. I, I don't mean it that way —

SYLVESTER

Who do you work for?

DANNY

I, I've worked for everybody. The Times, L.A. not N.Y., the Oakland Tribune. I'm freelance. Right now. This article is for the Chronicle.

SYLVESTER

That's newsworthy in itself.

DANNY

How, how's that?

SYLVESTER

The Chronicle hasn't printed a word about me since 'the death of disco'.

DANNY

Ah. The one word associated with your music.

SYLVESTER & DANNY

Disco.

DANNY

And you, your music is so much more than that.

SYLVESTER

Thank you.

DANNY

Disco is really such a small part of what you've done.

SYLVESTER

Thank you for saying that.

DANNY

Of where you've been.

SYLVESTER

But where would we all be without 'Mighty Ill'?

DANNY

'Mighty Ill'. I like that.

SYLVESTER

Trust me, after ten thousand times, it fits.

DANNY

Ten thousand ... really?

SYLVESTER

(reclining on his chaise longue)

I may be exaggerating. But not much.

DANNY

(turning on his recorder)

Where do you find the inspiration to sing something ten thousand times?

SYLVESTER

I've been blessed. I've been blessed in many, many ways, but especially with my music. I've always found ... inspiration.

DANNY

You seem like someone with a lot of faith.

SYLVESTER

(seductively)

And it's getting stronger by the minute.

DANNY

I, I'm really interested in the questions they don't ask. Or answers to the questions they don't ask. I mean, what have been some of your favorite experiences, and —

SYLVESTER

(more seductively)

I assume you're talking about my career?

DANNY

Well, yeah. I mean ... whatever.

SYLVESTER

The European tours. I can still sell out there any day of the week. London, Paris ... Berlin. Fans aren't as fickle as they are here. They love you genuinely ...

(laughing to himself)

I had one girl follow me from Berlin to Venice, vow to marry me and bear my babies.

DANNY

What did you do?

SYLVESTER

I told her the truth. I said, 'I have scattered my seed all over the world. I couldn't possibly pay another dime of child support ...'

(little pause, and then they laugh.)

There are ways to let people down gently without crushing them.

DANNY

I'm sure ... unwittingly, you've crushed many hearts.

SYLVESTER

Mmm.

DANNY

What part of your success do you owe to the fact that you're gay?

SYLVESTER

None ... I mean, okay. I'm not stupid. I know that to many people I'm a hero. But I never set out to be. For me it's always been about the music. The music and the glamour. Or the illusion of it. I'd flip through fashion magazines as a kid and put myself into all the pictures. I was Billie, Bessie, Lena —

DANNY

All the greats.

SYLVESTER

All the greats: Sarah, Dinah ... Washington, not Shore.

DANNY

Though I've seen pictures, and you are stunning as a blonde.

SYLVESTER

Mmm. Flattery as they say.

DANNY

Well. Here, here's hoping —

SYLVESTER

One name I'd have to add to that list is Julia Morgan.

DANNY

Your grandmother.

SYLVESTER

(overlapping on "grandmother")
My grandmother. You've done your homework.

DANNY

She sang gospel, right?

SYLVESTER

Gospel, jazz, blues, all of it. But she was a tremendous influence on me as a person as well as a singer.

DANNY

She was the first person you came out to, right?

SYLVESTER

Whoa. You *have* done your homework. But the real read is: Miss Julia told *me* that I was gay, honey.

DANNY

How's that?

SYLVESTER

Miss Julia told *me*. And I denied it.

DANNY

Denied it —?

SYLVESTER

I have always been, and will always be too many things to fit into one box.

DANNY

Now, there's a quote.

SYLVESTER

(chuckling to himself)

You know, one of my greatest wishes when I was just starting out was to meet Josephine Baker. And I was fortunate enough to meet her. In Paris. In the early seventies, and I was actually able to sit and talk with her. And I mean, even just sitting there in the Champs Elyses she was so ... grand. Such presence. And she said, 'the separation between the stage and the audience is very important. Not for the performer, *per se*, but for the audience. For the illusion that you create. People', she said, 'pay for the fantasy.' For the illusion of the fantasy that you create from the stage.

DANNY

Do you think your audience knows who you really are?

SYLVESTER

To a certain extent. And honey, what they don't know they make up.

(Sound of "You Will Be The One", an upbeat nineties house tune.)

(DANNY exits.)

(Video images of SYLVESTER as a kid in Los Angeles.)

(BERNADETTE and BERNADINE enter as the video images fade. They are giggly five year olds chasing each other around their big brother's chase longue.)

(SYLVESTER watches as if it's a distant memory.)

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

Bernadette? Bernadine? Ya'll out of that bathroom yet? I'm sending Doonie in to brush your hair in one minute. You hear me?

BERNADETTE & BERNADINE

Yes, ma'm.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

Alright. Ya'll hurry up now. Ain't no sense in being late each and every Sunday.

BERNADETTE

I just love your fur, darling? Where ever did you get it?

BERNADINE

(wearing a towel around her shoulders.)

The latest from Paris. Everybody's wearing them.

BERNADETTE

May I ... touch it?

BERNADINE

Are your hands clean?

BERNADETTE

Yes, of course.

BERNADINE

Are you sure?

BERNADETTE

Cross my heart, and hope to die.

BERNADINE

Alright. But just once.

(BERNADETTE strokes the towel around BERNADINE'S neck.)

BERNADETTE

Oooh.

BERNADETTE & BERNADINE

Awww ...

(They giggle).

SYLVESTER

(as an adolescent, from his chaise longue)

What did I tell ya'll about getting in my things?!

BERNADETTE

Bernadine started it.

BERNADINE

I did not.

Doonie? BERNADETTE

What, girl? SYLVESTER

Sing us a song. BERNADETTE

Yeah. BERNADINE

Sing us a song. BERNADINE & BERNADETTE

Maybe later — SYLVESTER

Please. BERNADINE

Pretty please. BERNADETTE

With sugar on top. BERNADETTE & BERNADINE

Sing “Lover Man”. BERNADETTE

“Lover Man”? SYLVESTER
(surprised by the suggestion)

Grandma Morgan sings it. BERNADINE

Not in Mama’s house, she don’t. Bernadine, if you don’t sit still your head is gone look like Barbie’s! SYLVESTER

Doonie? BERNADETTE

Bernadette if you call my name one more time — SYLVESTER

BERNADETTE

(singing melody of "Lover Man" with her own lyrics)

I don't know why
 And that is no lie
 He won't sing us one song
 You know he so wrong ...

SYLVESTER

Giiiiirl.

BERNADETTE & BERNADINE

Pleeeeeeeze.

(Little pause.)

SYLVESTER

(standing up, and singing)

I don't know why but I'm feeling so sad
 I long to try something I've never had
 Never had no kissing, ooh what I been missing
 Lover Man, oh where can you be?

The night is cold and I'm so all alone
 I'd give my soul just to call you my own
 Got a moon above me with no one to love me
 Lover man, oh where can you be?

I've heard it said —

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

I know ya'll ain't singing that low-down-bump-and-grind-honky-tonk music in my house on a Sunday morning. Not on the Lord's day. I just know you ain't. My ears must be deceiving me. Doonie?! Doonie?! I know you hear me boy!

(SYLVESTER, back in present time, lights a cigarette.)

(DANNY enters.)

DANNY

So ... that was it?

SYLVESTER

Pretty much.

DANNY

You left. At fourteen you left home —

SYLVESTER

Thirteen. I was tired of my mama telling me what I could and couldn't do. I never liked my father. Don't know where he is to this day.

DANNY

Where did you go —?

BERNADETTE & BERNADINE

(chanting)

Down by the river where the green grass grows
There stands Doonie without no clothes
Along comes Johnny skipping a rope
His zipper's all down and his thing pops out

(BERNADETTE and BERNADINE chant softly under the scene.)

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

Doonie? Did you finish combing the twin's hair? Or are ya'll still singing that foolishness? Doonie!? You hear me talking to you, boy?

SYLVESTER

(to DANNY)

It was nonstop. Between the twins, my baby brothers ...

(to MAMA)

I hear you Mama.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

You the oldest, now. I need you to help me keep things in order around here. Lord knows them other three little hoodlums ain't no help.

SYLVESTER

(to DANNY)

I was living two lives essentially. One in the streets and ... eventually I just told her.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

I need you to make a list of things to pick up at the store after church.

SYLVESTER

(to MAMA)

I like boys, Mama.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

I need some buttermilk, some eggs and some more corn meal.

SYLVESTER

I always have. Liked boys.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

And put something nice on for church.

SYLVESTER

Grandma Morgan knew it before I did. She told me I was a ... told me I liked boys when I was five.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

You used to dress so nice. Used to be sharp. Sharp as a tack.

SYLVESTER

Mama.

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

You better pick up some more butter too.

SYLVESTER

Mama!

(BERNADETTE and BERNADINE stop chanting.)

MAMA'S VOICE OVER

If you don't like what's going on in my house you can leave, Doonie! You hear me? You can just leave!

(BERNADETTE and BERNADINE exit.)

SYLVESTER

(to DANNY)

So I did.

(Sound of "Mighty Real", a slow, gospel version of the song.)

(Lost in memory, SYLVESTER walks the stage as a teenage hustler.)

DANNY

Where did you go?

SYLVESTER

I lived with friends. Strangers. Doing whatever I had to do, wherever I had to do it.

DANNY

What, what did you —

(SYLVESTER starts unbuttoning DANNY'S shirt.)

Wait, wait, wait —
DANNY

Wait for what?
SYLVESTER

I, I'm not —
DANNY

Whatever I had to do, wherever I had to do it.
SYLVESTER

(SYLVESTER drops to his knees, and begins to undo DANNY'S belt.)

Is it ... true?
DANNY
(trying to regain composure)

You tell *me* —
SYLVESTER

True you, you started singing in the church —?
DANNY

Yes.
SYLVESTER

Palm Lane Church of —
DANNY

Church of God and Christ.
SYLVESTER
(overlapping on "Church of")

God. Christ. Yes.
DANNY

In the city of angels —
SYLVESTER

Is it true about the, the —
DANNY

I was born and raised in the city of angels —
SYLVESTER

DANNY

The choir director? Th, that he molested you?

(Music out.)

SYLVESTER

(stopping abruptly)

Where did you hear that?

DANNY

You, you mentioned him earlier —

SYLVESTER

Even if I mentioned him, which I'm sure I didn't —

DANNY

You, you said that he was —

SYLVESTER

I've never mentioned him. Publicly. To anybody.

DANNY

I, I read it. I, I must have.

SYLVESTER

Right.

DANNY

I must have ... I'm sorry.

(SYLVESTER starts to exit.)

DANNY

Really. I, I just confuse things, facts sometimes, forget where this one or that one comes from —

SYLVESTER

You remember where the door is, right?

DANNY

Please. Syl, I apologize —

SYLVESTER

The name is Sylvester.

(SYLVESTER exits...)