

# TheWayTheyAre thewaytheyare THEWAYTHEYARE

By Dillon Feldman

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...Julian needs to have a frank face to face conversation with Alex about taking their relationship to the next level, and it's now or never. The trouble is he's facing the wrath of some bad sushi, so this talk is going to have to take place through the bathroom door. In The Way They Are, Dillon Feldman has created two flesh and blood three-dimensional young men coming to terms with their relationship during a visit from Julian while Alex is serving in the marines. Julian, an artist, is in the bathroom the whole time, yet we effectively have a mental picture of him as the driving force of the play, along with his stomach cramps. Maybe Alex isn't ready to be out in a relationship. Or maybe he doesn't want to – with Julian. What transpires is a conversation that raises questions about the costs of keeping secrets from each other and from ourselves. The potential for heartbreak is as clear as the pictures Alex is painting on himself through the play, an action that connects him to Julian – who is at the same time giving him directions on finishing a collaborative painting from the other side of the door. What is it going to take for Alex to get honest about his feelings? When is it too late? I love this play.*

JULIAN

I'm just being hyperbolic...

ALEX

--I've told you repeatedly why I don't want to be in a long term relationship at this point in my life, Jules. I have no idea where I'm going to be two years from now, let alone-

JULIAN

I know. I know I know I know I know I know I know...

*Five Broken Hearts. Whoops. I mean FIVE STARS. Spacing is author's own. Please scroll down.*



The Way They Are  
A Short Play  
By Dillon Feldman

CHARACTERS

Alex (25 he/his), marine

Julian (24 he/his), artist/actor

TIME: 11:30PM, Mid-October

PLACE: A Small Marine dormitory inside US Military Base Somewhere

*(AT RISE: ALEX is in a pair of pajama bottoms and no shirt, slowly pacing outside the bathroom door. JULIAN is unseen through all of this, inside the bathroom.)*



ALEX

Uh huh. I feel like we should be more worried if nothing is happening.

JULIAN

Well, lucky for you I'm very resilient.

ALEX

I'm aware.

ALEX

...So--

JULIAN

...So--

ALEX

Oh, no, I--

JULIAN

No, go ahead.

ALEX

I was just going to ask if you want anything, for real. ...A magazine or something?

JULIAN

...You don't have any magazines.

ALEX

I was just being polite.

JULIAN

I've never even seen you read a magazine before. Which one would it be? Sports Illustrated? For the big marine man?

ALEX

Dick.

JULIAN

Get the painting we were working on.

ALEX

Now?!

JULIAN

Yes now, I have two weeks with you, I'm gonna make the most of them.

*(ALEX crosses off to pick up the canvas.)*

...Do you have it?

ALEX (O.S.)

I'm getting it!

JULIAN

Remember the ruler!

*(ALEX re-enters with supplies. Sits against the door and starts working.)*

ALEX

How could I forget?

JULIAN

Okay, okay.

*(In pain.)*

Nnngh...So I feel like we got the big square basically done, right?

ALEX

Yeah we just didn't do the...shading--Jules, are you sure you don't wanna go to the--

JULIAN

*(sing-songy voice to cover the pain)*

~Yes I'm sure, I'm so sure!!~ I don't want to throw a wrench in the whole night. The hospital's thirty minutes away, I looked it up. Okay, take the darker green and start going around the edge like I showed you.

ALEX

I mean, you dying would be a pretty big wrench.

JULIAN

I'm not dying. I just won't be playing receiver tonight... I mean it'd be one thing if I could just pop into the doctor *heeere*, but...

ALEX

You know I can't take you to--

JULIAN

Right, I know, 'cause we're not married... blah blah blah.

ALEX

But we can just go to the hospital. It's really not/ a problem.

JULIAN

/No no no no no no no no, I don't want you to have to do that. Not for your friend.

*(ALEX lays the brush down.)*

...Oops.

ALEX

*(frustrated)*

Are we really gonna do this? Right now?

JULIAN

Wow, not a good time to paint, not a good time to discuss...whatever you call it these days.

ALEX

Jules, I really don't want to fight. You're not feeling well, can we just...?

JULIAN

Yes, yes sir. Sir yes sir.

ALEX

Now you're just being mean.

JULIAN

I'm in pain, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

ALEX

I'm really worried about you.

JULIAN

I'm just being dramatic. Okay. Are you holding the brush?

*(ALEX picks the brush back up.)*

ALEX

Yes.

JULIAN

Perfect. How's the shading?

ALEX

It looks...kinda dirty.

JULIAN

Okay...I'm just gonna trust your vision.

ALEX

I want it to look good on the wall though!

JULIAN

Well don't fuck it up then.

ALEX

Sir yes sir.

JULIAN

Don't be cute with me, soldier.

ALEX

Do I start painting the circle now?

JULIAN

Fuck, I forgot there was more--I think we went out of order.

ALEX

What do you mean?

JULIAN

Always do shading last, didn't you pay attention in art class?

ALEX

Oh nooooooo! Is it doomed?

JULIAN

Me?

ALEX

The painting.

JULIAN

Ah, probably. Just gives us an excuse to start over. That's been my plan all along. Paint the same picture over and over again until you fall madly in love with me.

(No response.)

Why, you ask? Because I'm a very sexy teacher.

ALEX

What are we doing here, Jules?

JULIAN

Well we were painting, badly, until about a minute ago--go back to that.

*(ALEX starts absent-mindedly painting on his upstage arm while having this conversation.)*

ALEX

You know what I mean.

JULIAN

No, I don't. That's not something your--fuck--that's not something \*I\* want to hear when I'm visiting you in a foreign country, Alex.

ALEX

Well, I thought--

JULIAN

What did you think?

ALEX

Can you stop yelling?

JULIAN

This isn't yelling, I'm talking, with care!

ALEX

Well, I need you to care less!

*(Realizing what he just said)*

That's not what I--I'm sorry. But I can't be having this conversation every day, it's exhausting.

JULIAN

Sorry I'm exhausting you.

ALEX

I have to work here too, you know?

JULIAN

I do know! That's why I've been making dinner for you every night and re-decorating your apartment and trying to help you relax at night, Alex, because--and here I go, getting struck down by lightning--but that's what a partner does! Sorry, boyfriend! Sorry, the random guy that you flew halfway across the world to spend two weeks with you.

ALEX

It was your decision to come here. You know how I feel about you.

JULIAN

Of course I know, Alex, otherwise I wouldn't have come! It's just-- it's 2019, Alex, it's not like there's not a single other soldier with a husband!--

*(ALEX sets the brush down again)*

ALEX

Husband, what are you talking about?!--

JULIAN

I'm just being hyperbolic...

ALEX

--I've told you repeatedly why I don't want to be in a long term relationship at this point in my life, Jules. I have no idea where I'm going to be two years from now, let alone-

JULIAN

I know. I know I know I know I know I know I know...

JULIAN

I'm not asking for a lifetime! I'm asking--never mind./

*(Under breath)*

I really don't feel well.

ALEX

/Well, you keep putting pressure on me like I'm gonna wake up and change my mind about something. I'm not! And I won't! And you make it sound like I'm ashamed or something, you know all the guys know who you are...

JULIAN

I know, Alex.

ALEX

And my family, they know you.

JULIAN

I know, Alex.

ALEX

So what else do you want from me right now?

*(No response.)*

I guess I just wanted to spend time with you. To see you. I wanted to be near you.

JULIAN

I know, Alex.

ALEX

But that's not enough?

JULIAN

*(after a bit, calmly)*

I've faceted you a hundred times from Florida. More than a hundred. I've been here through training, and placement in Tampa, placement in Virginia, placement in Japan. We've talked about what color suits we would wear. You told me how your older sister would be your maid of honor because she's the most likely to kill you if you don't choose her. You told me that you'd love to have a ceremony on the beach but knowing our luck it'd be a hurricane, and I said we can get those cool umbrellas that go all the way down to your feet.

*(A beat.)*

I'm not even asking to get married, Alex. I'm just asking you to call me what I am.

ALEX

I hear you.

*(He picks up the brush again, continues painting on himself, on his upstage arm, upstage side of his torso, on the upstage side of his face.)*

It's just... not that easy for me, Jules.

*(He makes a deliberate mark on himself.)*

My brain keeps telling me that I can't hold you back. From your life. I mean, you're doing so many amazing things, with your art... And...

*(He makes another deliberate mark.)*

I mean, what we have is incredible, but I can't promise anything to you. I'm not in a place to promise anything.

*(Again.)*

I don't know where my life is going to take me. And I'm trying--I'm really trying to be careful, because--

*(And again.)*

--Because I don't want to hurt you in the end. Honest.

*(And again.)*

So it's better for both of us...

*(And finally.)*

If we just keep things the way they are.

*(He lays the paintbrush down.)*

You understand, don't you?

*(There is no response. Lights shift slowly to a dim blue.)*

Jules?

*(Still no response. ALEX leaps to his feet and turns to face the door, exposing the painted side of his body is covered with hearts, all shapes and sizes. Up and down his torso, his arm, the side of his face. He stands there, knowing Julian is ignoring him but teetering on over-reaction anyway.)*

Julian??

(He knocks on the door.)

Julian, come on, this isn't funny. Can you answer me? Please?

(Lights fade. Sound fades.)

Jules, open the door. Jules, come on. Julian.

(End of play.)

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *I've never wanted to write about myself. I think there are pieces of me in plays and music that I write, but this is a pretty literal translation of a friend's life. A goal of mine is for queer stories to get to a place where their identities \*don't have to\* be the focal points of the stories. Where a queer protagonist \*doesn't have to\* be limited to or wrangled by that identity. Obviously, if that's what you're called to write, write it. It's probably burning in your spirit for a reason! But I think there is so much more humanity and nuance in the queer community than we're often afforded the opportunity to present. And I only represent a fraction of that community. There is an indefinitely large wealth of stories waiting for the "mystique" of queerness to fade away, and to just live in the bold-faced honesty of the human condition. And that's said without discounting the very hard and significant work of those who laid the route before us. We are all and were all and will all be a part of the journey.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Dillon Feldman is a composer and writer living in NYC. He has written for Halflight Productions on indie films *e.ro.sion(noun)*, *Deus Meus Adiuva Me*, and more. He is a resident composer for Bookworm Theatrics, based out of NY/NJ. Recently, he has written for theatrical productions at Out Front Theatre Company, and designed original music for a podcast series with RYCO Theatricals. He also worked with award-winning playwright, Ty Autry, to write and record new music for his play, *Southern Fairytale*. Dillon's original musical, *Siren*, is currently in development in association with the Shubert Organization in NYC.