Angels in America
by Tony Kushner

The Play: Subtitled a “Gay Fantasia on National Themes” and divided in two parts, “Millennium Approaches” and “Perestroika”, Kushner’s epic work probes politics, religion, sex, and human relationships in a manner that resonates throughout the universe.


The Scene: Harper Pitt, an agoraphobic young Mormon woman with a Valium addiction, sits alone talking to herself. She is the wife of Joe Pitt, a young chief clerk for the Justice Department, who is struggling with his sexual identity.

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(Harp at home, alone. She is listening to the radio and talking to herself as she often does. She speaks to the audience.)

HARPER: People who are lonely, people left alone, sit talking nonsense to the air, imagining...beautiful systems dying, old fixed orders spiraling apart... When you look at the ozone layer, from outside, from a spaceship, it looks like a pale blue halo, a gentle, shimmering aureole encircling the atmosphere encircling the earth. Thirty miles above our heads, a thin layer of three-atom oxygen molecules, product of photosynthesis, which explains the fussy vegetable preference for visible light, its rejection of darker rays and emanations. Danger from without. It's a kind of gift, from God, the crowning touch to the creation of the world: Guardian angels, hands linked, make a spherical net, a blue-green nesting orb, a shell of safety for life itself. But everywhere, things are collapsing, lies surfacing, systems of defense giving way... This is why, Joe, this is why I shouldn't be left alone. (Little pause.) I'd like to go traveling. Leave you behind to worry. I'll send postcards with strange stamps and tantalizing messages on the back. “Later maybe.” “Nevermore...”

The Scene: In the second speech from part two of the play. Harper is on a plane headed for San Francisco.

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(Night. Harper appears. She is in a window seat on board a jumbo jet, airborne.)

HARPER: Night flight to San Francisco. Chase the moon across America. God! It's been years since I was on a plane! When we hit thirty-five thousand feet, we'll have reached the tropopause. The great belt of calm air. As close as I'll ever get to the ozone. I dreamed we were there. The plane leapt the tropopause, the safe air, and attained the outer rim, the ozone, which was ragged and torn, patches of it threadbare as old cheesecloth, and that was frightening... But I saw something only I could see, because of my astonishing ability to see such things: Souls were rising, from the earth far below, souls of the dead, of people who had perished, from famine, from war, from the plague, and they floated up, like skydivers in reverse, limbs all akimbo, wheeling and spinning. And the souls of these departed joined hands, clasped ankles, and formed a web, a great net of souls, and the souls were three-atom oxygen molecules, of the stuff of ozone, and the outer rim absorbed them, and was repaired. Nothing’s lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we’ve left behind, and dreaming ahead. At least I think that’s so.