

Six months later. A recessed area inside of a nightclub. There is a single table and two chairs. It is very dark except for a bright light spotlighting the table area. The effect of strobe lights can be seen from the dance floor, off R. There is extremely loud, thudding, hyper-frenetic dance music filling the theatre, typical of that played in gay clubs.

WARREN, gin and tonic in hand, walks despondently in from the dance floor. He sits in the chair R. and holds his head in his hands, looking utterly bored. After a moment a figure appears from the darkness, L. and stands a short distance from WARREN. The stranger's face is obscured by the darkness. WARREN quickly affects a more composed, worldly demeanour, occasionally turning his head directly and deliberately in the direction of the mysterious stranger, both to express interest in what he sees, as well as a genuine attempt to get a clearer picture of the person in the half-light.

Presently, the figure, clutching a bottled beer, moves forward into the light emanating from the table area. It is ALDOUS. The music abruptly stops.

WARREN

Oh, for God's sake, not you.

ALDOUS

Hello, Warren. I thought you'd be pleased to see me.

(Indicating the other chair.)

Is this seat taken?

WARREN

(Sighing.)

No, and it's not likely to, the way this night's going. Go ahead – be my guest.

(ALDOUS sits and places his beer bottle on the table.)

ALDOUS

Thanks, my legs are killing me. I've been standing up half the night.

WARREN

Better than being stood up.

ALDOUS

Oh, were you?

WARREN

(Defensively.)

No.

ALDOUS

Oh.

(Pause)

WARREN

What the hell are you doing here, anyway? I wouldn't have thought the scene was your scene?

ALDOUS

It's not. I mean, I'm not...what's this place called?

WARREN

Pay Dirt.

ALDOUS

Pay Dirt, yeah. Well, I'm not a Pay Dirt regular, in case you're wondering.

WARREN

I wasn't. And anyway, I know you're not a Pay Dirt regular. I'm a Pay Dirt regular. That's how I know you're not a Pay Dirt regular.

ALDOUS

Actually, this is my first time.

WARREN

(With a look of irony.)

Now, there's a line seldom uttered within these walls – at least, not without lightning bolts crashing through the ceiling at the same time.

(WARREN stares quizzically at ALDOUS.)

ALDOUS

What? What are you staring at?

WARREN

Hmm?...Oh, sorry. I was just trying to remember the first time I—
(Catching himself.)

I mean, the *only* time...the unique, very special, and deeply cherished moment when I, myself, whispered those very words. I was...seventeen, I think...unless I'm missing someone out? He must've been at least forty-five – which made it all the more of a turn on for him, naturally. He was from Ireland, working here as a schoolteacher. I was convinced it was all a front, of course, and he was actually an undercover I.R.A. operative scheming some hideous act of terrorism against the government – which made it all the more of a turn on for me...perhaps not quite so naturally. I felt like Kim Philby, selling out his country for the sake of a hard-on.

ALDOUS

Nice.

(Pause)

WARREN

So...your first time at Pay Dirt?

ALDOUS

My first time in a gay club.

WARREN

Give over! I don't believe you! Actually, come to think of it, I do believe you.
(Stupefied.)
And you chose this place?

ALDOUS

Yeah...well, no. It was recommended.

WARREN

(Aghast.)
By who?

ALDOUS

I called this number, some...informational...help-line thing... I don't know what it was. It was in the back of the paper. Anyway, I asked them where the hot, happening places were.

WARREN

And they suggested here?

(Laughs.)

Christ Almighty! They must be well staffed with a bunch of flatulent old queens. You poor bastard.

ALDOUS

Seems alright. Anyway, I thought you said you were a regular?

WARREN

(Sidestepping.)

Yeah, well...they're all the same.

(Pause. ALDOUS takes a swig from his beer.)

WARREN

You really had me going there for a minute, you know.

ALDOUS

What do you mean?

WARREN

Sidling up in the dark like that. I thought the tide was turning. Why didn't you just walk up and say hello?

ALDOUS

Yeah, well I was going to, but it's all that fucking dry ice, or whatever it is, they keep pumping on the dance floor – it fucks up my contacts. I wasn't sure it was you.

WARREN

I didn't know you wore contacts?

(Sighing.)

Oh, well...it was nice while it lasted.

ALDOUS

Sorry to disappoint you. Who did you think it was, anyway – Mel Gibson?

WARREN

Well, let's just say I didn't think it was Aldous Huxley.

(Taking a sip from his drink.)

Besides, he hates queers, or didn't you know?

ALDOUS

Who – Aldous Huxley?

WARREN

No, you twerp – Mel Gibson.

ALDOUS

Does he? How do you know?

WARREN

I dunno. I suppose I must've read it somewhere.

ALDOUS

That should be "hates fags", then.

WARREN

Why?

ALDOUS

'Cause he's American.

WARREN

No he's not, he's Australian.

ALDOUS

No he's not.

WARREN

Yes he is.

ALDOUS

(Emphatically.)

No he's not.

WARREN

(Insistent.)

Yes he is. Haven't you ever heard him interviewed?

ALDOUS

(With assurance.)

He grew up in Australia, but he was born in...New Jersey, or somewhere like that.

WARREN

Are you sure?

ALDOUS

Yeah, I'm sure I read it somewhere.

WARREN

Doesn't he have, like...twenty kids, or something?

ALDOUS

Yeah, imagine his poor wife. She must have stretch marks from here to—

(Suddenly distracted by something he's seen on the dance floor.)

Bloody 'ell!

WARREN

What?

ALDOUS

Those two – look!

(WARREN turns and looks in the direction of the dance floor.)

ALDOUS

They're dancing on bloody roller-skates.

WARREN

That's rollerblades, luvvie. And I wouldn't stare too long if I were you – they might think you're interested.

ALDOUS

How do you know I'm not? They look alright from here.

WARREN

Then take your pick, Cinderella. But if your contact lenses are as fucked up as you make out, then from this distance you couldn't tell if they were the Tom Cruise twins or the ugly fuckin' sisters.

ALDOUS

I can see all I need to see.

WARREN

Alright, go ahead and stare. But I feel it's my duty, as a seasoned veteran of this particular field of operations to inform you that those two have quite a reputation around here. Not that the rest don't – but that pair in particular.

ALDOUS

In what way?

WARREN

Let's just say the locals refer to them as "meals-on-wheels".

ALDOUS

Ah.

(ALDOUS reverts his attention back to the table. Pause.)

WARREN

So...what do you think of it so far – you're first little frolic among the fairies?

ALDOUS

Interesting.

WARREN

What you expected?

ALDOUS

I don't know what I expected. Yeah, I s'pose – in a way. Except...Well, it's a bit...I don't know, really...it's just a bit...you know...I don't know...Do you know what I mean?

WARREN

(Annoyed.)

No.

ALDOUS

It's very...well, it's a bit intense, wouldn't you say? I mean...it's a bit heavy; a bit...well...bit of a meat market, I'd say?

WARREN

It's a nightclub. What did you think went on down here – wine and cheese parties?

ALDOUS

(A little irked.)

Yeah, I know it's a nightclub, but...well, I've been in places like this before – not the same, but you know – girls with tits hangin' out everywhere, lots of leather and wiggling arses, all the blokes lining the walls with the same “Come and get your lips ‘round this” smirk on their face, but–

WARREN

“Fuck-me” clubs?

ALDOUS

Well, yeah, exactly – not a place you go lookin' for love; you go lookin' for someone who wants to get fucked stupid as much as you.

WARREN

Welcome to Pay Dirt!

ALDOUS

Hmm...well, it stands to reason, I suppose.

WARREN

What does?

ALDOUS

That you'd have the same places. The same – but different.

(Pause)

Is that why you come here?

WARREN

What?

ALDOUS

To get fucked stupid?

WARREN

Well, of course. We all do. I already have – twice tonight.

ALDOUS

(Stunned.)

No way!

WARREN

Yeah, in the back room.

ALDOUS

(Looking toward the dance floor, apprehensively.)
Bloody hell!

WARREN

(Rolling his eyes.)
I'm joking. I see your sense of humour's lost none of its razor-like edge.

ALDOUS

Well, I don't know, do I? I'm the new kid in town, remember?

WARREN

Yeah, well I'd use that word loosely, if I were you. And no, I don't come here to get fucked stupid. Well, maybe once upon a time I did...not anymore.

ALDOUS

So why are you here?

WARREN

The ambience, the conversation, the elegant strains of the fifty-beats-per-second music...No, alright, Warren, knock it off.

(After a sigh.)

Well, where else am I gonna go? I've got to ply my wares somewhere, haven't I. I'm offering love for sale, you see. Not like in the old days, of course – this is love that's fresh and still unspoiled, love that's only slightly soiled. Well, okay, maybe a bit more than slightly.

(Taking another sip from his drink.)

See, I'm looking for the man that got away.

ALDOUS

I thought that was me?

WARREN

(Smiling.)

That's a laugh. No, if you recall, you're the man that was told to fuck off.

ALDOUS

Right. No, I mean why here – why this place?

WARREN

Like I said, they're all the same...give or take the odd ball bouncer.

ALDOUS

The odd what?

WARREN

Erotic dancer. Oh, that's right, they don't tonight, do they? Well, you see, a number of places employ former or aspiring porn stars, and the like, to do a little striptease – if you can call the removal of a thong bikini a striptease – and wiggle their goods around at the assembled throng, often in a cage or on some sort of podium. I think it mainly satiates the 'uglier than fuck' crowd who aren't likely to be hitting the jackpot that night...except with each other, of course. Makes them feel like they got their money's worth. Not quite the dinner-and-dance your parents met at, I shouldn't wonder?

ALDOUS

Dunno if it was a dinner-and-dance, but I'm fairly certain it wasn't a strip club. That's a bit hard-core, isn't it?

WARREN

Oh, it's *very* hard-core. And I'm looking for hard-core love and romance, which, as you might imagine, in one of our steamy little fleshpots is a hard-core challenge.

ALDOUS

Well, good luck.

WARREN

Why, thank you, Mr. Huxley – I believe I will need it.

(Pause)

Where's Mrs. Huxley this evening, by the way? I take it you didn't bring her with you?

ALDOUS

Very witty.

WARREN

I'm assuming, of course, you're still together.

ALDOUS

By legal definition, yes – we're not separated. She's out with her 'friends'.

WARREN

I see.

(Brightly.)

Well, like you really.

ALDOUS
Are we friends?

WARREN
I think so...aren't we?

ALDOUS
(Genuinely.)
I don't know.

WARREN
Now I don't know, either. Let me mull it over for a second.
(A beat or two while he contemplates, then decisively.)
Yes. Yes, I think we must be...in a two-very-different-people-trapped-in-the-same-burning-building sort of way.

ALDOUS
(Not entirely convinced.)
Hmm...

WARREN
Look, I really don't think we have much option at this point, do you?

ALDOUS
(After a moment.)
Hard to say, really.
(His expression suddenly changes as he notices something in the direction of the dance floor.)
Oh-my-God!

WARREN
(Excitedly.)
What?

ALDOUS
What in God's...What the hell is *that*?

WARREN
What?
(Craning his neck around to see what ALDOUS is staring at. A little disappointed.)
Oh, that. That's Veronica.

ALDOUS

What?

WARREN

Ve-ron-i-ca!

ALDOUS

I heard what you said. *What* is Veronica?

WARREN

Not *what* – *who*. Veronica is, like me, a Pay Dirt regular.

ALDOUS

But it's a bloke for God's sake...isn't it?

WARREN

Not *it* – *she*. And no, you are incorrect – Veronica is not a bloke. Veronica is, from whenever she stumbles in here until around 2:00am, or so – assuming she doesn't get kicked out for drunken behaviour beforehand – a very vital, very sensual woman, and should be treated as such.

ALDOUS

I'd swear that was a bloke.

WARREN

(Impatiently.)

Oh, for God's sake, Aldous, of course it's a–

(Recovering himself.)

Of course he's a he – just not down here. Down here she's a she...it's not that complicated.

ALDOUS

Still looks weird.

WARREN

(With an air of condescension.)

That is because Veronica is a transvestite, and like most transvestites she looks a bit weird. That does not make her any less of a woman, however – at least not in here. Christ, what are you – the boy in the bubble? Anyone would think you'd never seen a transvestite before.

ALDOUS

(Earnestly.)
I haven't.

WARREN

(Surprised.)
Oh.
(Waving his hand dismissively in the direction of the dance floor.)
Well...there's one.

(Pause)

ALDOUS

He...She must have it pretty rough, don't you think? Does she walk about like that?
In the daytime, I mean?

WARREN

God, no, you must be joking! She'd have seven shades of shit beat out of her – at least in this neck of the woods she would. No, up there I...I think his name's...Julian? Something like that. He waits tables at the Golden Egg. Have you been there? Probably not. It's a greasy spoon café type-of-thing. It's alright. Pays his rent, anyway – with a little left over to buy more frightening wigs and frocks to disarm us with.

ALDOUS

Poor sod. He looks like Diana Ross with a massive hangover.

WARREN

Yes, I'd have to agree with you there, unfortunately. She doesn't quite equal the sum of her parts – at least, the visible ones.

ALDOUS

It's a bit sad when you come to think of it.

WARREN

Why? She's happy enough when she's down here – especially after a few glasses of barley wine.

ALDOUS

Of what?

WARREN

Don't ask.

ALDOUS

Yeah, but how often is she down here?

WARREN

Oh, every night.

ALDOUS

I don't mean that...I mean what about when she's not down here? It's like she's Jeckle and Hyde – living two lives.

WARREN

(With a look of irony.)

Well, so are you. And I don't feel sorry for you. No offense.

ALDOUS

That's different and you know it is.

WARREN

I don't see why. I mean if you really think about it, the only tangible difference between the two of you is a strapless top and a few fake pearls.

ALDOUS

(Deadpan.)

Ha, ha, ha. Look, I already know what you think about me – about how I live my life – so you don't have to keep going on about it. I don't need your approval – yours or anyone else's.

WARREN

That's just as well.

ALDOUS

And anyway, if we're talking about living double lives then there's not *that* much difference between you and me, either.

WARREN

Ha! That's the kinkiest proposal I've heard all night – and in Pay Dirt that should earn you some sort of medal.

(Indicating the beer bottle.)

How many of those have you had? I think you must've sozzled your noggin.

ALDOUS

How so?

WARREN

Because! Because I'm completely honest about who I am. Because I live freely and openly as a gay man for all the world to gawk at. I'm out. I'm outer than out, I'm...beyond! I'm so out I'm almost back in again.

ALDOUS

(Choosing his words with care.)

Alright...so you're telling me that you're free to live, and *do* live, every aspect, every single part and parcel of your day-to-day existence as an open, admitted homosexual – without any fear or hesitation?

WARREN

(Hesitantly.)

Yes.

(Beat.)

Well...perhaps not *every single* aspect. But that's not the point–

ALDOUS

That's exactly the point! My life might be a pack of lies, but if that's what it is it's 'cause I've made it that way. I lie to others and I lie to myself...and that's about as honest as I can get. But if you – in all your flag-waving sincerity – if you have to hesitate once during your day; if you obscure an answer, or dodge a question, lower your voice, or equivocate or change the subject altogether, then you are, like it or not, living a double life – just like your friend Veronica, and just like me. It's just a question of degree.

WARREN

(Disgruntled.)

Well, yes, but...

(Taking a sip from his drink.)

What *do* you do exactly, anyway? I know it's law or politics, I just don't know which.

ALDOUS

Getting back to my original point, I was just saying that I'm not so bound up in my own fucked up life that I can't look at someone like that and see...I don't know, the...well, the fuckin' hard time she must have, that's all. I mean, If my relationship with this world is ugly and disfigured it's 'cause I've carved it up with my own hand, but I can't imagine anyone chooses to live like that – or look like that – not in their right mind, at least.

WARREN

Mmm...I must confess I feel a bit sorry for her myself from time to time. Still, she gets by. Like most of us she lives for the weekend – a chance to escape. Then, of

WARREN (Cont'd.)

course, you pay your cover charge, skip through the doors and it all comes crashing down on top of you, and you wonder what you got so excited about in the first place.

ALDOUS

Yeah, I was noticing that: there's not a lot of gay people in here, is there?

WARREN

What are you talking about? Everyone here's gay – barring one or two curious best friends and the odd lost tourist.

(Catching himself. Smiling.)

Oh – and you, of course.

ALDOUS

Oh, I didn't tell you, did I? I'm bisexual.

WARREN

What?

ALDOUS

I'm bisexual.

WARREN

I see...um...congratulations.

ALDOUS

Yeah, I just decided last month. See, I realized, when I thought about it, that since I've had sex with men and I've had sex with women I must be bisexual. And bisexual's alright. Lots of people are bisexual. It just means you've got a big libido, right?

WARREN

(Shrugs.)

Right, John – whatever gets you through the night.

ALDOUS

Anyway, that's not what I meant. I was trying to be quick with words, but you missed it.

WARREN

Oh...sorry. What did you mean?

ALDOUS

I mean no one looks very happy to be here. They all look ultra-serious or pissed off. Except those two on the skates, that is. And come to think of it, I'm not sure they should be dancing as much as they are if they're asthmatic – it's dangerous, isn't it?

WARREN

(Puzzled.)

How do you know they're asthmatic?

ALDOUS

You probably can't see it from there, but every now and then one of them passes the other one an inhaler.

WARREN

(Laughing.)

Dear, sweet Aldous – that's not an inhaler...that's poppers.

ALDOUS

What?

WARREN

Amyl nitrate.

ALDOUS

What the hell's that?

WARREN

I don't know – some chemical. It makes your heart beat faster. I wouldn't try it though – your head'll feel like shit after.

(Beat.)

You poor boy – so much to learn. Anyway, you're missing the whole point. You don't come here to look happy. Act chirpy and approachable and no one'll be interested. They'll think you're an idiot...or desperate. You have to linger in the background looking sullen and predatory...and a little bit dangerous. Actually, dangerous is good – dangerous is very good. Remember, you're stalking your prey, looking for fresh meat. 'Course, if you go up and talk to half of them they're about as butch and threatening as Liberace – but that's beside the point.

ALDOUS

And what if you just wanna relax and have a laugh?

WARREN

(Extending his arms outward.)

Willkommen! Benvenue! Welcome! Leave the outside world...outside! So – life is disappointing? So, forget it! We need no outside in here. Outside it's cold, but in here we're all so hot it's a struggle every night just to keep our clothes on! You see, here life is beautiful...the girls, like Veronica, are beautiful...even those old slags on wheels – are beautiful!

(Reprovingly.)

No dykes allowed, of course – except on Tuesday nights.

(Benevolently.)

And on Tuesday nights, yes...we are family.

(With feigned enthusiasm.)

So do like Sister says and get up everybody and dance, and let your body move to the rhythm, 'cause rhythm is a dancer, you can feel it in the air, and everybody's free to feel good, 'cause the beat goes on, and the beat goes on, and the beat goes on, and on, and on, and on, and on.

(With a sigh.)

Just like my love – everlasting.

ALDOUS

Are you alright? I think it's you that's sozzled their noggin.

WARREN

'Course, there are places with a bit more finesse than the Pay Dirts of this world – places a bit more human friendly – but not by much. You'll still find most of it banging away into the night – musically, physically, and just about every position in between. It blocks it out for a while, you see: the condemnation, the jokes you're supposed to laugh along with, the mockery, the outside world, the self-hatred we can't *quite* escape, try as we might. Don't think, just shut your eyes and let it bang away inside you. We dance and Rome burns and some old queen says, "Let them eat cock!" It's hedonism on a grand scale, shoddily disguised as emancipation. It's a cheap Halloween costume and we've all been tricked. It's our world and we love it. We love it 'cause it's ours and we made it. But it's a very ugly baby that only a mother could love. We love it 'cause we've got to – 'cause we're not that welcome elsewhere, and this is all we have.

(Looking around him.)

This...

(Beat.)

This is our Promised Land. *This* is our Israel. *This*, Aldous, is our brave new no-cover-charge-before-10:00pm world. Here we crap in our own cages and we do it with our arses held high. We dance and drink and laugh and tell ourselves how happy and proud and glad we all are, because here we're free to bang our own drum,

WARREN (Cont'd.)

and bang it we do, and my, oh my, what a tuneless, crude and hollow fucking noise we make.

(Pause.)

Expect much more than that and I'm afraid you'll be pissing in the wind, my friend.

ALDOUS

Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that – where's the toilet?