

LAST CALL

CHARACTERS:

BARTENDER, male, fairly good-looking.
HERB, an older man, or an odd-looking man
DAVID, an attractive younger man.
3 BAR PATRONS, possibly cut-outs

SETTING: A gay bar, 1:30 a.m. on a Friday night. The bar counter itself should have two sections, more or less at right angles. A pinball machine on the side.

(As the play begins, Herb is sitting on a barstool with a Bloody Mary in his hand. He is somewhat drunk. David enters and, with an air of self confidence, says to the Bartender:

DAVID A beer, please!

HERB (To audience) Give me a beer please, and make it free. I'm so handsome I shouldn't be expected to pay.

(David pays for his beer, sits at a section of the bar so that he and Herb face each other.)

DAVID (To Bartender) Slow night, huh?

BAR'ER (Washing some glasses) Yeah.

HERB (To audience) What do you mean slow? I'm here! But, Jesus, who'd want that one over there with (The actor should insert some unattractive detail about himself.) God, what a toad he is!

DAVID (To audience) Don't see anybody I know. The beer's good, though. Wonder if that guy's cruising me. Not exactly my type.

HERB (Not hearing the previous remark) I don't suppose anybody's his type. Certainly not us trolls! But I can't help being unattractive. Don't you love that word? Unattractive, it's so much nicer sounding than repulsive.

DAVID He doesn't seem to do anything to make himself look better. He could lose some weight or go to the gym or at least grow some facial hair.

HERB All gay men care about is appearance, you must realize. They're hung up on looks, looks, looks! Physicality — thy name is homosexual! Does he care that I'm a clarinetist of some note. Did you get the pun? Clarinetist! Note! Wouldn't you want to have sex with someone as clever as me? No? If I were straight, I'd have tons of women after me. I know that for a fact. Women — good-looking women — come up all the time and want to make love to me, because I'm such a fucking good clarinetist! But, alas, I like men. Well, I don't really *like* men. But I want to participate in their flesh, shall we say. But, sigh, very few of them want to participate in mine. Isn't that enough to break your heart?

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DAVID Wonder if he's got an interesting personality. Sometimes homely guys do. Of course if I speak first, he'll think I want to make it with him. So I'd better not say anything. Maybe he'll leave soon.

HERB (Not hearing DAVID, of course) I'm not leaving. I was here first. Perhaps I ought to mark my spot. If I'm a dog, I might as well act like one. (Lifts his leg.) This is mine. Do not approach. Do not cross. I'm staying here until I catch me a trick for the night. I've made up my mind!

DAVID I must say drunks really turn me off. I can't figure them out. I think I'd work twice as hard at developing my best qualities instead of sitting in a bar pouring drinks into myself, getting sloshed, loud, and obnoxious on top of everything else.

HERB Barkeep! Another Mickey Finn, please! (As the drink is being fixed) I'm feeling good! How are you feeling?

BAR'ER (Dully) Great. Here's your Bloody Mary.

HERB (Toasting) To charm! Here's a tip. (Takes out some change.) Here's a tip for talking to me all night long in my deep loneliness.

BAR'ER Sure, thanks.

HERB Think nothing of it, as I'm sure you will. Hey, send my friend over there a drink, too. (Indicates David.) But don't tell him who sent it.

BAR'ER (Gets a beer as he places the beer in front of David.) From a secret admirer.

DAVID Hey, thanks!

HERB (To audience) I just want everyone in this bar to be happy. There is so little happiness in bars. Laughter, yes, but little happiness. Have you noticed? Well, I've noticed. Perhaps that's because I'm more perceptive than you. It couldn't possibly be because I'm more unhappy, could it?

DAVID I wonder who sent me this.

HERB (To the audience) Yoo-hoo, guess who sent you that!

DAVID It's really nice of whoever did it.

HERB Me, me, me! Look over here! Our eyes will lock and we'll go home together!

DAVID (Looking around, but not at Herb) Maybe it was that cute guy in the back there, leaning against the wall. I think I caught his eye a few times.

HERB Me, me, me! But — stop! — I don't want you to go home with me just because I bought you a drink. Not even two drinks — never! I want you to go home with me because I turn you on. I couldn't, of course, touch you unless it was absolutely mutual!

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DAVID (Goes to pinball machine.) Oh, I hope it wasn't that guy at the bar. I don't want to hurt his feelings. Really I don't, but he seems like a loser.

HERB I bet he's got a brain this small, though.(Gestures.) Maybe even this small.
(Makes tiny gesture.) Someone that good-looking obviously has neglected his intelligence. Just look at him, I bet he doesn't even know Mahler's Fifth! (Hums.) You don't know Mahler's Fifth, do you? See, what did I tell you! I bet you don't even know Mahler's First!

DAVID I think they rig these things so the balls race right through. (Bangs on pinball machine.) Magnets — they've got magnets to make the games go faster!

HERB What did I tell you! A pinball jock! I think that's immoral. All that energy wasted on a toy! He could be using his hands on something else, like my — How about a little action there, big boy? It doesn't have to be love. What do you say?

DAVID Hey, I got a free game!

HERB Wow! You put some steel balls in those little holes! Why, it ought to be in the sports pages!

DAVID Hey, this machine's great!

HERB Some people have athletic ability. You deserve no credit for it. It's hereditary. The same goes for looks, by the way. You either have 'em or you don't. You happen to have 'em. I don't. But you didn't earn them! I suppose my musical ability is hereditary too. But I have practiced — for hours and hours! Have you practiced being handsome? Huh? Have you?

DAVID (To audience) God, I'm having a good time tonight! This is the fourth bar I've been to. It's what I needed — to relax. I thought I'd never get through the day at the bank. Everybody was crabby today. And the construction work outside gave me a splitting headache. And that damn construction is scheduled to go on for five more months!

(He returns to his stool.)

HERB He's turned his back on me. But do I care? I'm strong, I'm mature. But you, Hot Stuff, you're . . . (Fumbles for words.)

DAVID (Looking around) Uh-oh, that guy's still looking at me. Usually I like older men, but he's . . . he's . . .

HERB (Still to audience) Youth, youth, that's all they care about! Shallow! Shallow! Shallow!

DAVID (Looking at Herb again) I wonder if I know him from somewhere is that why he keeps staring over here?

HERB He's looking at me! He's looking at me! Oh, my god, maybe he's interested after all! I knew he was a nice guy I could tell right off. Didn't I say that! (Still to

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audience.) Hi, my name's Herb (David turns away for some other reason.) Hey, don't look away! (David looks back, not hearing him, uncertain whether he knows Herb.) Maybe he'd go home with me if he thought I was special. What can I be? Something pitiful? That's it! Something pitiful, but not downright revolting. How about it if I were . . . blind? That's it! (Herb gets up, pretends to be blind, walks into the pinball machine.) Excuse me, sir. (Feels the machine.) I don't see . . . you see.

DAVID I bet he's on drugs.

HERB Is he cruising me yet? (Looks out the corner of his eye) Must be hell to cruise when you're blind. (David stops paying attention.) Maybe if I were lame. That turns some people on, you know. (Starts to limp past David.)

DAVID I guess that guy's leg went to sleep.

HERB (Trying to be sexy as he limps around) Come and get it, buddy. It's all yours! You like my style?

DAVID I wonder if he picks up much in here. If I were him, I'd try some other method of meeting people — join a club or something. Maybe he's got a lover and doesn't need to meet people. I wish I had one. I admit it! I cannot find a lover.

HERB I bet he's got a hot lover. I know the type, Greedy. A hot lover and all the tricks he wants. But I don't begrudge him anything. He deserves what he gets because he's so gorgeous. Got any leftovers?

DAVID (Tiring of the pinball machine) This thing is no fun! (Looks around deciding whether to stay.)

HERB Don't go! We've only just met!

DAVID (Looks around) Where did that cute guy go?

HERB I wonder if he'd take money. Some people don't mind paying — they even get off on it. Me, I mind. Makes me feel terrible.

DAVID Tonight doesn't really seem to be my night. Maybe I should try some other bar. (Looks at his watch.) Although it's almost closing time.

HERB If you leave this bar, I swear I'll never talk to you again! (David goes toward exit, carrying his beer, looking as if he might leave.) I mean it! You're not walking out on me again! What does our relationship mean to you if you come and go anytime you please! Do you ever consider my feelings? Of course not! You can't even stay and have a drink with me, can you? Have to be gallivanting somewhere else! What is it? Do I bore you? Is that it? Are we getting tired of each other after all this time? Go on, tell me. I want to hear you say it. No, don't tell me! I know — I've become predictable. We've known each other all this time and now there's nothing I do or say that you don't already know. I knew it had to end this way. Goodbye! (He turns away.)

DAVID I'd really just sort of like to talk to somebody nice tonight. Just cuddle. I'm not very horny.

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- HERB I bet you're cutting out on me, aren't you? I've smelled lubricant on your breath. And it wasn't ours! How do you explain that, wise guy? Don't say a word to me, you crud!
- DAVID Maybe I should have one more drink here. Who knows. Something might happen with that cute number back there. (Signals to bartender.)
- HERB Oh, so you've come back, huh? What makes you think I'll take you back? I'm not easy! Don't you ever think you can just sneak back any old time you feel like it! Don't you forget that I've got feelings too!
- DAVID (To bartender) Thanks.
- BAR'ER Sure thing.
- HERB Are you drinking again? I thought you were over that. Me — I haven't touched a drop in months. (Takes a drink of his Bloody Mary.) But you, you're incorrigible. No wonder I left you!
- DAVID (To audience) My problem is that people always relate to me physically. It's not that I expect powerful human interaction every time I meet somebody. I mean, I am beyond that kind of utopian bullshit. But it might be nice if, just once, somebody didn't check out my crotch before they looked in my eyes.
- HERB Bartender! Another drink for a thirsty man, if you would be so kind!
- DAVID Like that guy over there, for instance. What do you want from me, pal? Let me guess. Right? Right! I'm not being vain about it. It just is. But I'm very tired of it. And then you get mad at me because I don't fall all over you because you want me!
- HERB (Toasting) To alcohol!
- DAVID And if I say something about your attitude, then I'm called egotistical. I'm too concerned with my looks. No, friend, it's *you* who are too concerned with my looks!
- HERB Would I like to dance? No, thank you. I'm sitting this one out. Don't bother me. We hunks only go with other hunks.
- DAVID People put too much emphasis on sex. It doesn't matter that much. Really. It's a habit. Like drinking. We all have far more sex than we need.
- HERB No, no. I don't want you to buy me a drink either! I want to be aloof!
- DAVID (Pretending to be Herb) "Hiya, pal? Whatcha doing here tonight? I was noticing you from across the room. You're just what the MD ordered! You live near here? My car's right outside."
- HERB (Still turned away from Dave.) Don't try to make up with me. I've had it with you!
- DAVID "What do you mean you don't want to go? My car's right outside! I think you're a doll. Why don't you want to come home with me? How about your place then? I've

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got some good grass on me. How about a Quaalude? We'll both look better after one or two of these, don't you think? Come on! Come on! What more do you want? Do you think I'm ugly or something? Well, you're not so hot yourself, fuckface!"

HERB (Turning around, but speaking so that David can't hear.) You really are wonderful to look at, do you know that? Beauty is so rare in this world, no wonder we worship it.

DAVID (Being himself, to audience.) Sorry if I sound bitter. But I've been through that so many times I . . . it's flattering the first few hundred times. Then it gets old. Real old.

HERB I wonder if you ever had plastic surgery? Did you? I haven't had it. You find that hard to believe, don't you? Well, it's true. This face is exactly the way God made it.

DAVID Maybe I ought to go home and listen to records. I have a new Beethoven that's a knockout.

HERB I wonder if you would rush over here and kiss me if I had something done to my face. A tuck here, a tuck there. Here a tuck. There a tuck. Everywhere a tuck-tuck. Oh, fuck!

DAVID Sometimes I think I ought to disfigure myself. At least then I'd know if people liked me, not just the outside of me. Maybe I should put some scars . . . here and here . . . and here. A twisted lip perhaps?

HERB I wonder how much a body overhaul costs. I hear there are these magician-surgeons who tighten and trim and redesign your entire body from scratch. And when they're finished, you are irresistible. Irresistible!

DAVID Maybe if I had some loathsome skin disease. You know, it's not really very satisfying to know that my body inspires — orgasms! I mean, what does that amount to when you actually think about it?

HERB Are my arms too long? I'll have them shortened at once. Well, how do they look now? Oh, you liked them longer?

DAVID All I really want is one person that I can love and that loves me!

HERB All I really want is one trick that doesn't throw up when I kiss him!

DAVID I'm going to stop working out at the gym. I've got to take part of the blame for the way I'm treated. I've worked too hard on — (Indicates a part of his body.)

HERB I've always been ugly of course. Ever since I was a child. I remember my mother's first words to my father: "Let's send it back, dear." But I was a stubborn child. I wouldn't go back. I snarled at them and they ran out of the nursery. And naturally I never saw them again. I vowed then that I would not be like most people. If I was ugly okay, I would be the ugliest ugly person in the whole world!

DAVID (Takes a card out of his wallet.) Here is the root of most of my problems — The Hunky Gym and Workout Room.

(Tears up the card.)

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HERB And because I was unfit for human intercourse, so to speak, I devoted my energies to my clarinet. It was obviously phallic, but did I care? I practiced in the bathtub. I practiced with the other orphans. I practiced alone . . . a lot. Every time I didn't have sex I got better at my clarinet. Soon I was in demand all over the country. "Play for us!" they cried. And play I did — madly, passionately. "Oh, don't stop!" they yelled. "Don't ever, ever stop!"

DAVID Time I took control of my life and made it into what I want — not what others want!

HERB And now I have the most musical fingers of all the clarinetists of all the symphony orchestras of all the nations of all the planets of all the solar systems in the universe! And am I happy? Damn right, I'm happy!

DAVID There must be more to life than sex! Four out of five tricks end in divorce!

HERB (Loudly) I play like an angel because I can't get laid!

DAVID (Loudly) Isn't there anybody here that I can love?

BAR'ER (Louder still) Last call!

HERB Is it really? I only just got here!

BAR'ER Afraid so.

HERB Well, one more Bloody Mary then! What the hell! And another beer for my friend over there.

BAR'ER (As he serves the drinks) Another one from your secret admirer.

DAVID Thanks, but I think I've had enough. Why don't you have it? (Bartender shrugs, pours the beer into a glass, takes a sip.)

HERB My gift spurned? Given away? Doesn't bother me. I have other things to think about! For instance, I haven't played the pinball machine all night! The Mafia that owns it will be incensed. (Goes to the machine.) Look at those lines. Feel that wood, that plastic. I could go for you, baby!

DAVID (To bartender) That guy's pretty drunk, isn't he?

BAR'ER Yeah, I guess. He's been in here a few times before. Business is slow tonight or I would have thrown him out.

DAVID Oh, he's not hurting anybody.

BAR'ER (To Herb, who is hugging the pinball machine) Hey, buddy, you have to pay for any damage to the machine!

HERB (Looking at him) I wouldn't hurt this machine. I love this machine. And this machine is . . . taken with me. (Softer) It doesn't hurt anything to love it . . . (To Bartender) We're inseparable.

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BAR'ER (Under his breath) You're insufferable.

HERB (To the machine) Do you come here often? Oh, you're a regular? Funny, I've never noticed you before. But then I don't come here that often. Do you live nearby? I live just a dozen blocks away. You're from out of town, huh? Staying in a hotel? That can be pretty expensive. I know, because I travel. I play in a symphony. Yes, that's right. Do you like classical music? You do! Isn't that a coincidence! Well, it looks like we have something in common.

BAR'ER (Calling to Herb) We close in ten minutes!

HERB (To machine) You hear that doll? We'd better be on our way before they kick us out. But — no — you probably don't go out with customers, do you? Could you make an exception for little old me? What do you say? Pretty please. I couldn't help noticing your pretty lights. And your balls are terrific! I could really go for you. (Starts to hump the pinball machine.) Oh, baby! Hey, you've got it!

BAR'ER (Noticing Herb) Christ! (He goes over and pulls the plug on the pinball machine. The lights go out.) Night's over, buddy! Better head on home.

HERB (Still hugging the machine) But this machine and I have fallen for each other. I am asking for its hand in marriage.

BAR'ER Yeah, yeah. Closing up, pal. Finish up your drink now.

HERB Can I take this machine home with me.

BAR'ER (Patronizing him) Yeah, yeah. (He starts to clean up, turns on the bar lights.)

HERB (Tries to lift machine.) We're going home together! Don't try to stop us! We know it's against the law, but we defy you!

BAR'ER Want some coffee, pal?

HERB I do not! I want this machine! How much will you take for it?

BAR'ER It's not for sale.

HERB Please!

BAR'ER Hey, buddy!

HERB Okay, okay! I get your message. (Looks at the machine again, tenderly.) Well, I guess this is goodbye . . . Will you wait for me? I'll come back, I promise. I do promise! (Kisses the machine.) Thank you for a wonderful, wonderful time . . . Good night. (Walks away, looking back longingly, his voice breaking sincerely.) I love you!

DAVID (Finishing his beer, getting up as Herb goes past him, to the bartender) Well, I guess I better call it a night.

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(Leaves a tip on the bar.)

BAR'ER Thanks!

HERB (To machine) Goodbye! (Bumps into David.) Excuse me.

DAVID Sure thing. (They are finally standing face to face; they look directly at each other for the very first time.)

HERB (Suddenly grabbing David's arm) I like you! I want you to come home with me.

DAVID Hey! Hey! (Tries to pull free.) Let go of my arm!

HERB I'm not going to let go until you come with me!

DAVID Hey, you're drunk!

HERB You have a gift for the obvious.

DAVID Would you mind letting go of my arm?

HERB Why don't you come home with me?

DAVID I'm trying to be polite now!

HERB You think I'm ugly, don't you? Just because you're good-looking you think you can get anybody you want and the rest of us can go home alone!

DAVID (Angrily) Let go of my arm!

HERB (Letting go) Take your fucking arm. I don't want it!

DAVID (Rubs his arm.) Goddamn!

HERB Show a little interest in someone and this is what you get.

DAVID You have no right to touch me.

HERB It's the only affection I've had all night.

DAVID I'm sorry about your problems. But you can't take them out on me.

HERB You think you're hot shit, don't you?

DAVID Hey, I don't need this. I've got my own problems.

BAR'ER (Noticing) You better be leaving, pal.

HERB I'll leave when I'm good and ready. I've been kicked out of better places than this!

BAR'ER (Moving towards Herb) Good night, buddy!

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HERB Wait! I have one thing to say. And only one thing. (Turns to bartender.) How about you? Do you want to come home with me?

BAR'ER Come on, pal! Come on! (As he escorts Herb to the door, he calls out to the room in general) Okay, everybody! We're closing!

HERB (Turning back to David) I hate handsome men!

DAVID You ugly guys make me sick! You only want the good-looking ones, too! If you're so frustrated, why don't you have sex with people who look like *you*!

HERB (Obviously hurt by the remark) That wasn't nice.

BAR'ER (Forcing him out the door) Goodnight, buddy!

HERB That wasn't nice at all. (Herb exits.)

BAR'ER (Calling after Herb) And don't come back here either! You're 86ed!

(Pause.)

DAVID Why do things have to be like that?

BAR'ER I have stuff like that all the time.

DAVID How do you put up with it?

BAR'ER That's the way it is.

DAVID I felt sorry for him. . . I didn't just want to make it with him. Maybe if he could get someone to massage his back . . . to hold him, he'd be . . .

BAR'ER Yeah, I suppose. (The bartender and David look at each other.) You live around here?

DAVID Not too far. How about you?

BAR'ER I live upstairs.

DAVID Pretty close, huh?

BAR'ER I got a new stereo. Great sound.

DAVID You live alone?

BAR'ER At the moment, yes. How about you?

DAVID The same.

BAR'ER Got plans for the rest of the night?

DAVID Not really.

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BAR'ER How would you like to see my new stereo? I've got the new (Name of the latest pop singer.) album.

DAVID That sounds interesting. (David smiles.)

BAR'ER (Smiles too, leans over and kisses David.) I'll try to make it interesting . . .
(He takes David's beer bottle; their hands touch briefly. The Bartender goes around to make sure everyone has left.) Okay, everybody! Out! Out! Out!
(He comes back, straightens out the bar stools, gives the bar a final wipe. David is waiting for him near the exit. The Bartender gives a last look around, turns back to David, eyeing him.) You're very attractive, you know that?

DAVID (Sort of sadly) Yeah . . . so I've been told.

(The Bartender turns off the lights.)

Slow Fade.

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