

The Twentieth-Century Way

by
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BROWN sits, waiting. He is dressed in slightly flashy lower middle class clothes circa 1914. After a moment, WARREN comes in, dressed identically. They study each other from a distance. WARREN walks up to BROWN, too close, a challenge. BROWN does not move, refusing to be intimidated. WARREN picks lint off of BROWN'S suit.

WARREN
(New York accent.)

Sharp.

BROWN
(Shrugs, Chicago accent.)
They said dress up.

WARREN
City slicker.

BROWN
I'm from--

WARREN
The job. City Slicker?

BROWN
I guess.

WARREN
You haven't prepared?

BROWN
I was only told--is this the right place? I've been waiting--

WARREN
How long?

BROWN
You're the only other--are you?--is this normal?

WARREN
You took the time to dress up but didn't bother to research?

BROWN
He's a confidence man.

WARREN
You might as well go home now.

BROWN

You prepared? Researched--?

WARREN

He's a very particular confidence man, a product of his time, his environment, a victim of circumstance, like the Progressives say.

BROWN

The Progressives? C'mon!

WARREN

For instance, this confidence man would know what happened June 28, 1914.

BROWN

The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. Everybody knows that.

WARREN

You'd be surprised by common ignorance. June 6, 1914.

BROWN

First airplane flight from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

WARREN

You keep up.

BROWN

I live in Los Angeles. Who is widely regarded as the last castrato?

WARREN

How can you imagine I'd know that?

BROWN

So you don't?

WARREN

Alessandro Moreschi. You should hear the *Ave Maria* he recorded--

BROWN

--In 1905.

BOTH

Unearthly.

WARREN

Your grasp of history is nearly as impressive as mine.

BROWN

Perhaps we are the same person.

WARREN

That smacks of vanity, sir.

BROWN

In my character or yours? You're not *that* good-looking.

WARREN

One's looks are less compelling than knowledge, craft and keen observation. I perceive such a glimmer in you, my friend. You are avid for...connection. What do you know of Marie Dressler?

BROWN

Born November 9, 1868 in Ontario, Canada, Marie Dressler made her debut on Broadway in 1892 and by 1900 was a vaudeville star. She started her motion picture career with Mack Sennett--

WARREN

(Halting him with a gesture.)

Tell me about *Tillie's Punctured Romance*.

BROWN

It's supposed to be a comedy, but it's not a very funny script.

WARREN

Why not?

BROWN

A cad deceiving a woman. That's more mean than funny.

WARREN

We're not really meant to empathize with Tillie, just laugh at her from a distance. Comedy engages the mind, tragedy the emotions.

BROWN

So cruelty is funny?

WARREN knocks him down. BROWN is stunned.

BROWN

That's not funny! Shit!

WARREN

But they're laughing--

(Refers to audience.)

-Out there. At least in their hearts.

BROWN picks himself up, now more wary of WARREN.

BROWN

Your approach is decidedly low-brow.

WARREN

On the contrary, I've studied the Delsarte System of Expression.

BROWN

What's that?

WARREN

(Demonstrates.)

Certain physical movements are tied to emotions--

BROWN

How nineteenth century! All that ridiculous--

(Poses melodramatically.)

--Posing!

WARREN

Outer expressiveness leads to true characterization.

BROWN

I'd rather work outward from inner truth--

WARREN

Ah, Stanislavsky--*feelings*--

BROWN

--Than flail about--

(Flails.)

--With Monsieur Delsarte.

WARREN

We have a fundamental difference of opinion, sir.

BROWN

Indeed.

WARREN

In which motion pictures have you appeared?

BROWN

I most recently played Othello--

WARREN

Othello? Really? On stage?

(BROWN nods.)

Where--?

(BROWN starts to say.)

No--I can guess.

(With an exaggerated Chicago accent.)

Chicago.

BROWN

Thank you, Henry Higgins.

WARREN

You should work on that. Develop a neutral accent so people don't type you.

BROWN

What about you, with that Bronx--?

WARREN

It's Brooklyn--

(Drops the accent.)

And I can drop it whenever I want. I'm not one of those actors who can only play himself.

BROWN

(English accent.)

Now by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion, having my best judgments collid,
Assays to lead the way. Tis monstrous, Iago.

WARREN

(English.)

Hah! I like not that.

BROWN

What dost thou say?

WARREN

Nothing, my lord; or if--I know not what.

BROWN

Is he not honest?

WARREN

Honest, my lord?

BROWN

Honest? Ay, honest.

WARREN

My lord, for aught I know.

BROWN

What dost thou think?

WARREN

Think, my lord?

BROWN

Think, my lord? By heaven, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought

Too hideous to be shown!

WARREN

Who in the world cast you as Othello?

BROWN

Impressive Iago. But you skipped almost an entire page.

BROWN looks smug.

WARREN

Might I recognize your name?

BROWN

It's--

WARREN

Don't tell me. Whatever it is, I hope it's more neutral than your voice.

BROWN

It's--

WARREN

No! You need a nice, general-sounding American name that qualifies you to play any role. Nothing too foreign that could type you by country like Costello, Bergman, Kaczmarek--

BROWN

It's--

WARREN

Brown.

BROWN

Brown?

WARREN

Resolutely uninflected, bland, even as a color. Beige is more neutral, and taupe practically disappears, but both sound too French. Brown it is.

BROWN

You peeked at the sign-in. And who are you, sir?

WARREN

Not important.

BROWN

Know thy...competition.

WARREN

My name is Warren.

(Offers his hand.)

BROWN
(Shaking.)

Brown.

WARREN
You're not going to get the role, you know.

BROWN
Why not?

WARREN
Neither am I.

BROWN
I'm sure we're both qualified.

WARREN
I'm too ruggedly handsome.
(BROWN reacts.)
And you're too--
(Looks him up and down.)
Pretty.

BROWN
Pretty?!

WARREN
Surely you've heard that before. No one hesitates to tell
actors what's wrong with them.

BROWN
Pretty--all the time.

WARREN
Use it! Use what you've got. There are lots of roles for
pretty actors. Just not this one.

BROWN
He could be a pretty city slicker.

WARREN
Confidence men are neither pretty nor ruggedly handsome.
They are charming but disappear with the loot. They are
taupe, beige--

BROWN
Brown.

WARREN
Too pretty, just the same. It's all about the look.

BROWN
Surface.

WARREN nods. Neither moves.

BROWN

We're supposed to wait.

WARREN

How long have you been here?

BROWN

Not too long.

WARREN

Minutes?

BROWN

Um--

WARREN

Hours?

BROWN

Two. And a half. Is that typical?

WARREN

This is your first movie audition, isn't it?

BROWN

Yes. Yours?

WARREN

You wanna get a drink?

BROWN

Um--

WARREN

I've got a new bottle of Chartreuse at my apartment.

BROWN

What's that?

WARREN

I'm astonished, Mr. Brown, student of history--

BROWN

I'm not a student of history--if I hear something once, I have it memorized. I can't help it.

WARREN

Then I'm even more astonished that you're unfamiliar with the famed liqueur developed by the Carthusian monks--

WARREN
A contest. A friendly wager.

BROWN
(Smiling.)
That's a bet I can make.

WARREN
Bed?

BROWN
Bet!

WARREN offers BROWN his hand. BROWN
shakes.

WARREN
First, we must set some limits. Our time is 1914.

BROWN
(Not quite understanding.)
Very well...

WARREN
The early years of the 20th century. That way we can keep
wearing what we've got. Social change is sweeping the nation--
-

BROWN
The world!

WARREN
Exactly. But let me set the scene, if you please. We also
need a problem.

BROWN
A problem?

WARREN
The heart of improvisation is solving a problem. Sometimes
it's simply that your fellow thespian has dropped a line and
you must improvise dialogue to get the scene back on track.
But our problem is: vice!

BROWN
Vice?

WARREN
At the dawn of the 20th century, vice swept the nation--

BROWN
The world!

WARREN

Health and cleanliness increased, thanks to Progressive reforms--

BROWN

This led to vice?

WARREN

Tell me about your grandfather's dick.

BROWN

Beg pardon?

WARREN

Your grandfather's dick. Did you ever see it?

BROWN

No! Why would I see that?

WARREN

You'll get nowhere as an actor with the imagination of a school marm. Improvise!

BROWN

Wrinkly. And pale. But really, really big! It runs in the family.

WARREN

Did you ever see him clean it?

BROWN

(Horrorified.)

No!

WARREN

Exactly! But as public hygiene improved in the 20th century, smegma went into retreat. The aforementioned Progressives fought for public bathing facilities to tidy the unwashed masses streaming through Ellis Island. Widespread residential plumbing followed.

BROWN

People got cleaner. What's that to do with vice?

WARREN

Everything, Mr. Brown! Cleaner bodies meant cleaner dicks. Clean enough to eat off of.

BROWN

You possess irrepressible style, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

While fellatio was only christened with a formal Latin name in 1893, the practice was well-known throughout recorded history. But with the demise of the cheesy dick, new life was breathed into old vice.

BROWN

What are you after, sir?

WARREN

In crowded cities full of men rushing between sweatshop and home, a quick oral satisfaction is distinctly more convenient than anal penetration.

BROWN

Anal penetration! I suspect you are no longer speaking of men and women.

WARREN

I never was. The vice of fellatio is sodomy as a snack.

BROWN

Repulsive.

WARREN

Vile. Hazardous as well.

BROWN

How so?

WARREN

(Audibly clicks his teeth in a scary way.)

Danger is part of the attraction.

BROWN

And this problem will be solved by improvisation?

WARREN

We are in California, are we not?

BROWN

Indeed.

WARREN

Where, in 1914, fellatio is not a felony, while sodomy is.

BROWN

But it's prosecuted, is it not?

WARREN

Rarely, and only as "social vagrancy."

BROWN
What's that to do with us and our improvisation?

WARREN
You are not wealthy, I presume.

BROWN
(Shrugs.)
I'm an actor.

WARREN
You'd do anything for money.

BROWN
Well, now, not absolutely--

WARREN
Fearlessness is the actor's sharpest tool, Mr. Brown. If you are impecunious--

BROWN
I'm not afraid to reveal myself, especially to one similarly afflicted. I need this role. I am well nigh desperate.

WARREN
My sympathies. And yet one of us will not get the part.

BROWN
So what have we to offer each other?

WARREN
In the long term, that remains to be seen. In the short term, I have a proposition for you.

BROWN
Beg pardon?

WARREN
A business proposition. Don't be disgusting.

BROWN
My mistake.

WARREN
Business is identifying a need and fulfilling it.

BROWN
You see a need in vice?

WARREN
In its eradication. As the Progressives rail against prostitution, the public revulsion for the new old vice of oral sodomy grows daily.

BROWN

How may an actor root out vice?

WARREN

With skills the common man does not possess.

BROWN

This is beginning to feel unwholesome.

WARREN

We're merely improvising. But for cash.

BROWN

Cash?

WARREN

I wasn't always an actor. I was once an investigative reporter for the New York Times.

BROWN

Now you are most assuredly improvising. Show me a by-line, sir.

WARREN

Much of what I wrote was not fit to print. I knew every pestilent tavern in Manhattan, every noisome watering hole where vice grew like mold on cheese.

BROWN

You mix a vulgar metaphor, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

One particular establishment, The Slide, was notorious, with queer shows and boys for sale in bulk like chickens. I learned their habits. And turned them to my advantage.

BROWN

In a lucrative manner, I presume?

WARREN

Then you have an interest, Mr. Brown?

BROWN

Not in white slavery, if that's your meaning. But, like you, I am not, at the moment, a wealthy man.

WARREN

Is blackmail beneath your station?

BROWN

Are we--improvising--now?

WARREN

If I say we are, then we're not.

BROWN

Because it sounds mean.

WARREN

Mean? Stamping out sin? Liquidating lasciviousness? Why, Mr. Brown, it's nothing less than a public service. A moral duty!

BROWN

Am I to understand that you--in some fashion--ape the vice in order to attract it?

WARREN

Then spring my trap--before defilement.

BROWN

Why, Mr. Warren, that's deceit!

WARREN

(Triumphant.)

No--acting!

BROWN

If that's acting, I'm not at all certain the craft is a worthy enterprise. Clearly not a significant contribution to society, and not what I'd want to do with the rest of my life.

WARREN

It's terribly significant! Urgent! To act is to take action!

BROWN

And definitely not at all fun.

WARREN

I guarantee fun.

BROWN

I could never do anything like that. It's immoral in every possible way.

WARREN

But that's your advantage as an actor. You're not immoral--you're playing the role of the person who's immoral.

(BROWN contemplates.)

Just follow my lead.

WARREN goes to the costume rack and selects some pieces.

BROWN

What?

WARREN

We're merely improvising, Mr. Brown. You will not be compromised.

(Puts a police cap on BROWN'S head.)

BROWN

I can't--I'm not ready--

WARREN

Don't tempt me to doubt your skills, sir. I win by default.

BROWN

But--who--?

WARREN

If you knew everything in advance, it wouldn't be improvisation, would it?

BROWN

But the rules--?

WARREN

Just play along!

BROWN

But I--

WARREN

Chief Cole, my name is Warren, and I have a business proposition for you.

BROWN

Pardon?

WARREN

(Sotto voce.)

Find him in a gesture.

(Demonstrates.)

BROWN

What? No!

WARREN

A community policing model tested on the rough and tumble streets of New York City.

BROWN

(Struggling to find his character without gesture.)

You don't say?

WARREN

Why would this be of interest, you might ask.

BROWN

(After a moment, in a "Chief Cole" voice.)

Why would this be of interest? To me, sir?

WARREN

To the Long Beach Police Department? Well, let me tell you.

BROWN/COLE

(Fully invested in the character.)

Proceed, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

As a former vice reporter for the New York Times, I've observed our urban areas blighted by crimes repellent in the extreme.

BROWN/COLE

Crimes against nature?

WARREN

Precisely, sir! Then the problem is as prevalent in this fair western city as in the metropolis of the east?

BROWN/COLE

It is a concern, sir, much to my discredit.

WARREN

I have a solution, Chief Cole, that will rid Long Beach of public vice in one year or less.

BROWN/COLE

I am on tenterhooks.

WARREN

My partner, Mr. Brown, and I--

BROWN/COLE

Where is your partner, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

Researching, sir, the dens of vice in your city, the low taverns, the shady parks, the bathing houses, the public pissairs--

BROWN/COLE

Yes, the problem is pervasive. What is your solution, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

I'm delighted you agree. My partner and I have studied this population, men given to this sort of thing, and we not only know where they gather, like vultures around carrion, but also how to apprehend them.

BROWN/COLE

We try, but they flee, sir. These gentlemen are a wary lot.

WARREN

They are skilled at escape, Houdinis of abomination, and have learnt a new method of conducting their debauches.

BROWN/COLE

What might that be, sir?

WARREN

First, a demonstration--
(Reaches for his crotch.)

BROWN/COLE

Mr. Warren, that's quite unnecessary.

WARREN

I'll wager it's something you've not seen before.

BROWN/COLE

That does not mean I'm anxious to see it.

WARREN

Be not faint-hearted, sir!

BROWN/COLE

I'm not faint-hearted, I'm a police chief.

WARREN

Then--behold!

WARREN unzips his zipper. BROWN/Cole just stares. WARREN zips it back up, pauses, then zips it down again with great flair.

BROWN/COLE

What are you showing me, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

It's a "separable fastener," invented just last year by a man named Gideon Sundback.

(Zips up, then down.)

Zip, zip, zip! A gentle purring sound. And much faster than trouser buttons.

BROWN/COLE

It is indeed a convenience.

WARREN

I can see in your eye you recognize the implications.

BROWN/COLE

The device offers quick--

WARREN

Access--to the genital region. Exactly, sir, you have grasped it! Practitioners of vice are already rushing to purchase this technological wonder to abet their wickedness. If they are caught *in flagrante*, they simply--

(Zips up.)

Zip up--and off they run. A tidal wave of perversion is poised to crash upon your shores.

BROWN/COLE

Have you dramatic training, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

My training has been of the moral variety. Do you suspect me of exaggeration?

BROWN/COLE

You've escalated your crotch to a national crisis.

WARREN

They're already calling it "The Twentieth Century Way."

BROWN/COLE

Calling what?

WARREN

Oral vice.

(Zips a few times.)

BROWN/COLE

That is sufficient, Mr. Warren. I'm developing vertigo.

WARREN

But I have the solution! This little marking pen--indelible ink--

(Pulls out a marking pen.)

BROWN/COLE

What's that for? No, don't tell me. Please go. You've wasted enough of my day.

WARREN

I propose a pilot program.

(BROWN/COLE just stares.)

You needn't pay us a penny until my partner and I have brought ten of these reprobates to justice. And then--only fifteen dollars a head.

BROWN/COLE

If this got out--

WARREN

Absolutely clandestine, you have my word.

BROWN/COLE

I can't officially--

WARREN

Once you've cleaned the streets, imagine the approbation. Especially if Long Beach is the first city in the nation--

BROWN/COLE

Very well, Mr. Warren. On a trial basis only.

WARREN is stupefied for a moment with joy, then rips the police cap off BROWN and drags him into a celebratory dance.

WARREN

Fifteen dollars a head! Fifteen dollars!

BROWN

That's a fortune!

WARREN

The easiest money you'll ever make!

BROWN

(Pulling away from WARREN.)

I haven't said I'll do it.

WARREN

Look, he even gave us these--

(Shows two badges. BROWN takes one.)

I had them engraved.

BROWN

(Reading.)

"Special Vice Officer."

(Pins it on himself.)

How very official.

WARREN

Inside, Mr. Brown--

(Pins the badge to the inside of BROWN'S jacket.)

Inside.

You flash it only after you've obtained the evidence and captured the criminal.

(Demonstrates.)

Special Vice Officer--

BROWN

(Flashing similarly.)

You're under arrest.

They laugh.

BROWN

(Wary.)

But it's only a role.

WARREN

Like any other. Othello, Iago, Special Vice Officer Brown. Now we must pursue our quarry.

BROWN

Where? Public pissoirs?

WARREN

Eventually. But first you must be trained.

BROWN

To do what?

WARREN

To seduce.

BROWN

Oh, no--

WARREN

Acting!

WARREN goes to the costume rack.

BROWN

Even so, Mr. Warren--

WARREN comes back with a dandyish costume piece or accessory.

WARREN

Let your costume inspire!

WARREN adds the costume piece to a reluctant BROWN.

BROWN

You're turning me into one of those queer fellows!

WARREN

Yes, but we mustn't go too far. Ambiguity must be maintained. It attracts 'em. Most importantly, you can't tip 'em off you're a cop.

BROWN

(Realizing.)

I'm a cop!

WARREN

So you drop hints. Hairpins, they call 'em.

BROWN

Such as what?

WARREN

Something only that kind would know.

BROWN

Well, I don't know that, then.

WARREN

Ask me about Frederick Purssord.

BROWN

Who's that?

WARREN

Someone only that kind would know.

BROWN

How should I ask it?

WARREN

As one of them. Insinuatingly.

BROWN

(Without flair.)

You ever heard of Frederick Purssord?

WARREN

Oh, no, Mr. Brown, where is your lilt, your flair, your cadence? You know how they speak!

(Demonstrates.)

And gesture!

BROWN

I don't. I never met a one.

WARREN

(Astonished.)

And you're an actor?

BROWN

Not for certain, anyways.

WARREN

For any role--this or the Chief of Police--you must find in yourself a mannerism, a posture, an accent to externalize the character.

BROWN

Not that character I can't.

WARREN

Your Mr. Stanislavsky would call it empathy.

BROWN

Even if you disapprove of the character and his actions? How can you feel for someone--

WARREN

You don't have to feel, just act like you do. If you surrender to your own feelings, all is lost. That's the trick, making your audience feel when you don't.

BROWN

And who's my audience, you?

WARREN

Me? Feel?!

BROWN

But feelings make us human.

WARREN

Is *that* all you aspire to? Humanity? Ask me again about Purssord in that unconvincing way of yours.

BROWN

(A bit better.)

So...by the way...do you happen to know Frederick Purssord?

WARREN

(Suddenly campy.)

Know? You mean *knew*!

BROWN

(Adopting a bit of WARREN'S tone.)

Knew, of course.

WARREN

So sad.

BROWN

Terrible, terrible.

WARREN

One day practicing his nude electric therapy, the next--

BROWN

Oh, I know!

WARREN

--Hung himself in jail!

BROWN

Poor fellow.

WARREN

Did you ever visit that hotel he owned?

BROWN

Which is that?

WARREN

The Merced. All male residents.

BROWN

Oh, yes, I believe I did. A lively establishment.

WARREN

They do all the latest dances. So romantic!

BROWN

If you want to stay *au courant*--

WARREN AND BROWN

Visit the Merced!

WARREN

That's where I learned the foxtrot.

BROWN

What's that?

WARREN

Oh, just the latest! A dance invented by Mr. Harry Fox in New York City at the New Amsterdam Roof Garden on the night of July 28, 1914.

BROWN

You don't say!

WARREN

(Sotto voce, coaching.)

Ask me how it goes.

BROWN

How does that one go?

WARREN

(Manipulating BROWN.)

The lady puts her right hand here, and her left here. Then the gentleman holds her firmly, thus--

BROWN

(Trying to pull away.)

Ah--Mister--

WARREN

(Leading.)

Then, with the lady going backward--

BROWN

Must I be the lady?

WARREN

--And the man forward, we make a box: 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4--

BROWN

(Following awkwardly.)

It's quite a simple one, isn't it?

WARREN

Four-four time, very easy. Are you enjoying it?

BROWN

It has a rhythm that's graspable.

WARREN

(Pulling BROWN closer.)

Much nicer than those decadent Viennese waltzes.

BROWN

Decadent, yes, indeed. Terrible.

WARREN

A clean American dance, for a clean, new American century.

BROWN

Clean, yes.

WARREN

(Gropes BROWN'S crotch.)

Respectable. And yet romantic.

BROWN

Sir!

(Pulling away.)

WARREN

Stay in character, or I win!

BROWN

(After a moment.)

More romantic would be a kiss.

WARREN

A kiss?

BROWN

Before--anything else--

WARREN

(Suddenly butch and hostile.)

What makes you think I want a kiss?

BROWN

(Losing camp.)

Nothing, sir. Nothing at all. I have no interest in such things.

WARREN

Nor I. But how did you know Frederick Purssord?

BROWN

(Suddenly detached.)

I never knew him personally, but his degeneracy was featured in all the papers--"The most indecent man I ever met," said one of his neighbors.

WARREN

The papers, sir?

BROWN

It is my profession.

WARREN

A reporter?

BROWN

Yes, of vice. The things I've seen...!

WARREN

What are you doing?

BROWN

(Dropping character.)

Improvising!

WARREN

Who's this reporter?

BROWN

(Vigorously shaking hands.)

Fisher's the name, Eugene Fisher. With *The Sacramento Bee*. I'm here on special assignment.

WARREN

Attired thus?

BROWN

Catch up!

BROWN/FISHER

My paper's owner, Charles Kenny McClatchy, sent me undercover to uncover--

With the addition of a hand prop or costume piece, perhaps a green eyeshade, BROWN turns WARREN into CHARLES KENNY MCCLATCHY. WARREN seems slightly stunned.

BROWN/FISHER

Mr. McClatchy, you sent me to uncover--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

(Coarse voice.)

--A giant fucking scandal in Long Beach!

BROWN/FISHER

You were never so right, Mr. McClatchy! There in Long Beach, the town touting itself as the religious capital of the West, depravity is growing and spreading like a hideous ulcer.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

(Overly delighted.)

It is the way of the hypocrites: pray louder to drown out the wet and painful moans of lust!

BROWN/FISHER

At one unseemly gathering, a dinner party, next to everyone's plate perched a candy representation of a man's privates, which was sucked and enjoyed by each guest to the evident amusement of all.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Disgusting! More!

BROWN/FISHER

In order to lure these lewd and dissolute persons into revealing their perversities so they may be brought, writhing, into the light of the law, the Long Beach Police Department has hired two actors to impersonate these degenerates.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Surely that's on the Q.T.?

BROWN/FISHER

From the horse's mouth. I encountered Mr. Warren, one of the special officers, patrolling a disreputable establishment.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Was it a sailor bar?

BROWN/FISHER

No...but Long Beach has many of those, too. And sailors, used to life at sea in an exclusive, masculine society, prefer the embrace--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

--Or at least the mouth--

BROWN/FISHER AND WARREN/
MCCLATCHEY

Of other sailors!

BROWN

Are they our quarry, as you call them?

WARREN

No, it's easier than that. In a sailor bar, full of men in navy, who stands out?

BROWN

The civilian male.

WARREN

Exactly! Mr. Brown, you are a quick study! If you are not a sailor--

BROWN

I'm not!

WARREN

If you are not a sailor, why patronize one of these establishments?

BROWN

To meet sailors?

WARREN

Like a whore her trick. Our quarry is easily spotted. Look, there's one now!

When BROWN turns to look, WARREN adds a dandyish costume piece, becomes HERBERT LOWE, 40, and steps in front of BROWN.

WARREN/LOWE
(Minnesota accent.)

Good evening.

LOWE is more gentle than effeminate,
dignified but easy-going.

BROWN
(Nervous.)

Good evening.

WARREN/LOWE
You're not from Long Beach.

BROWN
My accent?

WARREN/LOWE
No, I just know everyone in Long Beach.
(Offers to shake hands.)
Herbert Lowe.

BROWN
You're not from Long Beach either.

WARREN/LOWE
My accent? No, I'm from Lake City, Minnesota.

WARREN
(Turning back to himself.)
Good, good. Draw him out.

BROWN
Why are you here?

WARREN/LOWE
In this bar?

WARREN
(Back to himself.)
No, no! That's threatening! Too direct!

BROWN
Here in Long Beach. Why'd you leave Minnesota?

WARREN/LOWE
Family. We have a nursery business. In California we can
grow year-round.

BROWN
Cold in Minnesota.

WARREN/LOWE
Much warmer here.

WARREN
There's an opening. Carefully--!

BROWN
Warmer than Chicago, where I'm from.

WARREN/LOWE
Why are you here?

WARREN
He's probing you. Exactly what you want. Go a step farther.

BROWN
In this bar?

WARREN
Brilliant! Use his locutions!

WARREN/LOWE
In California.

BROWN
I'm an actor.

WARREN/LOWE
Ah, motion pictures. Might I have--?

BROWN
Not yet.

WARREN/LOWE
And your name, sir?

BROWN
Uh...Brown.

WARREN
Not your real name! Jesus!

BROWN
Jesus! Jesus Brown.

WARREN
Oh, good God.

WARREN/LOWE
Is your mother Spanish?

WARREN
You have to go with it now.

BROWN/JESUS
Yes, that's right. From Mexico.

WARREN/LOWE

May I call you--
 (Pronounced in Spanish.)
Jesus?

BROWN/JESUS

Of course.
 (Quickly.)
 But I don't speak Spanish!

WARREN/LOWE

Your mother didn't want you to get an accent.

BROWN/JESUS

That's right. Very perceptive, Mr. Lowe.

WARREN/LOWE

And please call me Herbert.

WARREN

He's getting personal. Take it further!

BROWN/JESUS

Did you happen to know Fred Prussord?

WARREN/LOWE

Purssord, and he always went by Frederick. Very formal fellow.

BROWN/JESUS

So you did know him?

WARREN/LOWE

Yes, why?

BROWN/JESUS

Terrible what happened to him.

WARREN/LOWE

Very intimate funeral. I donated the flowers, of course.

BROWN/JESUS

Really?

WARREN/LOWE

I'm a florist. And he was a friend. Don't know what's going to happen to all his businesses.

BROWN/JESUS

I was only aware of the Merced Hotel.

WARREN/LOWE

He had Turkish baths as well.

WARREN

Push him on that!

BROWN/JESUS

Were they nice?

WARREN/LOWE

They still are. I met Bothwell Browne at one of them.

BROWN/JESUS

At a Turkish bath?

(To WARREN.)

Who the hell is that?

WARREN

Ask *him*.

BROWN/JESUS

I don't know Bothwell Browne.

WARREN/LOWE

You never saw him perform the suicide of Cleopatra?

BROWN/JESUS

He performs Cleopatra?

WARREN/LOWE

Why he's only the most daring female impersonator in the world. Not a hypocrite like Julian Eltinge running around punching anybody who calls him a fairy. Bothwell's Cleopatra made her encounter with the deadly asp a triumph of eroticism yet well within the bounds of tasteful entertainment.

BROWN/JESUS

The things you know, Mr. Lowe!

WARREN/LOWE

The Los Angeles Examiner said, "Cleopatra, fondling the reptile, then holding it from her in horrible fascination of fear, determined upon death, finally crushes the venomous head to her bosom and expires in ecstatic agony!"

BROWN/JESUS

I don't think we have such people in Chicago.

WARREN/LOWE

Both Browne and Eltinge perform there.

BROWN/JESUS

I have heard of Julian Eltinge. He has a theatre named after him in New York.

(Leaning in, almost as if for a
kiss.)

But what of those Turkish baths?

WARREN

No, too obvious! Commiserate! He's about to confide in you, I'm sure.

BROWN

Maybe you should meet up with him!

WARREN

I think he likes your type.

BROWN

Pretty?

WARREN

He follows drag performers around the country. An easy catch, but he's slipping through your fingers.

BROWN

All you've been able catch so far is one newspaper reporter who was in fact trying to catch you!

WARREN

I've got one in the works, and Fisher's been a great help.

BROWN

How?

WARREN

First he sent us to Long Beach, then he sent me to church.

BROWN

Church?

WARREN

(Putting FISHER'S costume piece
back on BROWN.)

Right to the holy ones.

BROWN/FISHER

To the hypocrites!

WARREN

Which church?

BROWN/FISHER

St. Luke's Episcopal. Got a lead on a Mr. John Lamb, a druggist and a director at the Long Beach Savings Bank and Trust Company.

Rich?

WARREN

BROWN/FISHER
(Nods.)
But more importantly: prominent.

WARREN
(Suspicious and perhaps
envious.)
Where do you get these leads?

BROWN/FISHER
A young man. L.L. Rollins. Mincing little fellow.

WARREN
Really, Mr. Fisher?

BROWN/FISHER
Brought up in Long Beach for social vagrancy a year ago, he
seemed, well, lonely, and anxious to be of help.

WARREN takes the cue and transforms,
with the help of a costume piece, into
ROLLINS.

WARREN/ROLLINS
Oh, Mr. Fisher, you wouldn't believe it! At this party--
given by two Venice millionaires--really, millionaires!--

WARREN/ROLLINS finds a kimono on the
costume rack and shows it to
BROWN/FISHER.

WARREN/ROLLINS
--Each guest got a silk kimono, a wig and slippers. This was
just before I got--you know--arrested. Fourteen of us
chickens got invited cause they said we could meet some
prominent queers. By the end of the night all manner of--
I'll be delicate--unnatural practices were...practiced. Two
of us got up in girl's clothes and entertained with music and
song.

BROWN/FISHER
He's been invaluable.

WARREN
No doubt.

BROWN/FISHER
Apparently he had some kind of liaison with Mr. Lamb, who
later wanted nothing to do with him. I've been able to
exploit Mr. Rollin's injured dignity.

WARREN/ROLLINS

Seemed like a genuine fellow except for that English--Irish--Scotch--whatever-it-is accent which made him a trifle hard to fathom, if you know what I mean. But cut me off like I was some grasping doxy and turned out he ain't what he was cracked up to be.

BROWN/FISHER

St. Luke's is at the corner of Locust and Fifth. Just listen for someone speaking Scottish.

BROWN puts on something vaguely Scottish. Probably not a kilt. But maybe. Or possibly just a fancy Sunday hat to show he's upper crust.

WARREN

Excuse me, I couldn't help but overhear your burr.

BROWN/LAMB

(Scottish accent.)

And who might you be, sir?

BROWN/FISHER

Use an accent on him, too. For sympathy. German.

WARREN

(German accent.)

Ach, one also new to America.

BROWN/LAMB

Not that new myself, sir. I came from Scotland in eighty-eight.

WARREN

Just don't believe it. You must have come as an infant!

BROWN/LAMB

(Laughs.)

You flatter me, sir. What's your name?

WARREN/LAMB

Johan Lamm.

BROWN/LAMB

What an extraordinary coincidence!

WARREN/LAMB

What is that?

BROWN/LAMB

My name's the same, but in English: John Lamb.

WARREN/LAMM

My twin! No, worse still--*mein Doppelganger!*

BROWN/LAMB

Astonished to make your acquaintance, Herr Lamm! *Guten morgen!*

WARREN/LAMM

(Sotto voce.)

Ach, *bitte*, not so loud. It's not a good year to be German in America.

BROWN/LAMB

Pardon me, Mr. Lamm. I understand how an alien feels. After twelve years, I'm only beginning to feel part of Long Beach society.

WARREN/LAMM

But you are well regarded at St. Luke's, on the vestry?

BROWN/LAMB

The Lord has been good to me. Tis only right I give back some of my blessings through service to God and man.

WARREN/LAMM

You are also quite generous to your maiden sister, if I am not mistaken.

BROWN/LAMB

You truly are my doppelganger, Johan Lamm. Is there anything about me you don't know?

WARREN/LAMM

I wish to know more about you, John Lamb, and about Long Beach. I haven't even been in the water yet!

BROWN/LAMB

Now's the only time to go, end of summer when the water's tolerable warm. Cold as bathing off the Orkney's the rest of the year!

WARREN/LAMM

What beach do you recommend, sir? Is there one with a public changing house?

BROWN/LAMB

(Suddenly wary.)

There is one, Mr. Lamm, in Pacific Park.

WARREN/LAMM

Have you been there, Mr. Lamb?

BROWN/LAMB

(Intrigued but cautious.)

On occasion, aye.

BROWN

(Suddenly breaking character.)

Mr. Warren, I've grown increasingly uncomfortable with this scheme. It's all very well and good in the abstract, combatting vice and everything, but this Mr. John Lamb seems a perfectly nice fellow, no caterwauling fairy.

WARREN

Mr. Brown, your Herbert Lowe is no less likeable, yet you've no qualm leading him on.

BROWN

I do have qualms! That's my point!

WARREN

Why, you've a soft spot for Mr. Lowe, haven't you?

BROWN

I do not!

WARREN

You've taken a shine to him!

BROWN

No, it's just not decent--deceiving such an honest and open gent--and Mr. Lamb, too--

WARREN

You're falling in love with your own creation!

BROWN

Whatever do you mean?

WARREN

Your Mr. Lamb is so well done, so effectively rendered in a few strokes, tender and vulnerable--

BROWN

I'm not in love with him, but it sounds like you are!

WARREN

I've given you but mannerisms, and you've swallowed them as truth, let your emotions run away with you! Where lie your loyalties, Mr. Brown? With society or with--?

BROWN

I've gone this far with you--

WARREN

But not all the way--

BROWN
 Be fair, sir--

WARREN
 All's fair, Mr. Brown. Just ask Mr. Lowe.

BROWN
 Ask him what?

WARREN
 Ask him about love!

BROWN
 Love?

WARREN
 Probe his heart like a good Russian actor!

WARREN/LOWE
 (Suddenly LOWE again.)
 Love, *Jesus*? What a fraught topic!

BROWN/JESUS
 Do you...believe in it, Mr. Lowe?

WARREN/LOWE
 Herbert!

BROWN/JESUS
 Herbert. Do you...believe?

WARREN/LOWE
 Well, we have to, don't we? Or what's the point of living? Nothing lasts, even mountains crumble to dust and some day the ocean will be a desert. And what we do in our lives, no matter how many stunning floral tributes I arrange, no matter how many motion pictures you star in, the flowers quickly wither and celluloid deteriorates--I've heard it can even spontaneously combust! So all we have is the moment, and the moment does not last. All we can do is fill that moment with love.

BROWN/JESUS
 Mr. Lowe--

WARREN/LOWE AND BROWN/JESUS
 Herbert!

BROWN/JESUS
 I believe you are...quite correct.

WARREN/LOWE
 So what can we do about that? In this moment?

WARREN

He's giving you the opening. Take it!

BROWN

What of your Mr. Lamb? You seem a bit taken with him as well.

WARREN

Johan Lamm seems taken, without a doubt. Tis my job to act that part!

BROWN

You urge me to the game, but you're no closer to an arrest than I.

WARREN

I'll beat you to it, Mr. Brown. I'm years ahead of you on the stage. Slink away--you've lost already!

BROWN

I'll bag my Lowe before you slaughter your Lamb!

WARREN

Do your best, sir!

BROWN/LAMB

You've not yet used our Long Beach public bathing house, Mr. Lamm?

WARREN/LAMB

No, sir. Although I've heard a bit about it.

BROWN/LAMB

Have you, now?

WARREN/LOWE

Jesus, have you heard of the 96 Club?

BROWN/JESUS

No, what's that?

WARREN/LOWE

It's a safe place. A refuge, even, for, well, gentlemen such as ourselves, if I may presume.

BROWN/JESUS

You...may.

WARREN/LOWE

We need such sanctuaries, to let our hair down, so to speak. I don't believe in hiding, all of Long Beach knows who I am, but a florist must sell, and a salesman mustn't offend.

On the street one must maintain one's--ambiguity--is probably the proper word. But in the 96 Club--you understand the name, don't you, a little joke?

BROWN/JESUS

Does it have to do with The Twentieth-Century Way?

WARREN/LOWE

(Beaming.)

Indeed, *Jesus*, indeed it does!

BROWN/FISHER

The Sacramento Bee is losing patience Mr. Warren. Don't waste my lead!

WARREN

If I push, Mr. Lamb will become suspicious. He's already wary.

BROWN/FISHER

Don't tempt me to doubt your skills, sir.

WARREN/LAMB

Would you take me to the bathing house sometime, Mr. Lamb?

BROWN/LAMB

I can certainly give you directions. It's right--

WARREN/LAMB

No, no. *Take me.*

BROWN/JESUS

Herbert--

WARREN/LOWE

Yes?

BROWN/JESUS

We've only just met but you've already been kinder to me than anyone in California.

WARREN/LOWE

I know how it feels to be an outsider. Actors are always outsiders, aren't they?

BROWN/JESUS

I am so lonely sometimes, Herbert.

WARREN/LOWE

It's a lonely life, acting, because you are most yourself when playing someone else. No one gets to know you except through your characters, isn't that so?

BROWN/JESUS

I feel you've just revealed my character this very moment!

WARREN/LOWE

The real you! I am honored to know you, *Jesus*.

BROWN/JESUS

Then I hope you'll not be offended--

WARREN/LOWE

Never!

BROWN/JESUS

I've another favor to ask. I'll have to leave my rooming house soon--

WARREN/LOWE

Oh, *Jesus*, not another word! I've a guest cottage on my property standing vacant at this very moment!

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Fisher! What's the pissant hesitation?

BROWN/FISHER

The hook is baited, sir.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Then where's your goddam report?

BROWN/FISHER

I sense...our agents confronting a moral ambiguity.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Ambiguity! Then pay them, goddamnit! That always eliminates ambiguity!

BROWN

Mr. Warren, can you not sympathize with my uncertainty? Mr. Lowe has been most generous with me, and I'm about to deal him an awful blow.

WARREN

This is your test, Mr. Brown. And tests are built with such hurdles on purpose--to try your mettle! Don't trip over your heart!

BROWN

Surely this is life or death for Mr. Lowe. Everything he has built, his business, his social standing--

WARREN

Tis life and death for us as well. Have you eaten today? I require the fifteen dollars per arrest!

I need whatever Fisher will pay for the story! Is your situation less dire than mine?

BROWN

No. But morally--

WARREN

Morals are expensive--

BROWN

He keeps calling me Jesus!

WARREN

--And we cannot afford them, sir!

BROWN

Your Mr. Lamb has more to lose than anyone. A churchman! Surely you sympathize with him!

WARREN

With a rich man?

BROWN

An arrest would kill him, as surely as starvation kills us, and quicker, too! Can you turn your back so cruelly on his kindness?

WARREN

Crumbs from his table!

BROWN/LAMB

Mr. Lamm, you said you're an actor?

WARREN/LAMB

Yes, indeed Mr. Lamb. Of stage in Germany and--*mit viel gluck!*--on the screen in America as well.

BROWN/LAMB

I know a few people in the industry.

WARREN/LAMB

You do, sir?

BROWN/LAMB

Not that I wish to presume--

WARREN/LAMB

No, no--I would be most grateful--

BROWN/LAMB

Introductions are easily made.

WARREN/LOWE

(Overlapping.)

Introductions are easily made.

The 96 Club is more exclusive, more hermetic than the Elks, the Moose, the Masons. We meet in private homes, a different house each month. We are quiet, discreet, but never furtive! There's a strange and liberating joy in it!

WARREN

Ask him how many.

BROWN

How many what?

WARREN

How many members!

BROWN/JESUS

Is it a large club, Mr. Lowe--?

BROWN/JESUS AND WARREN/LOWE

Herbert!

WARREN/LOWE

There are no written rolls, for obvious reasons, but close to fifty come each evening, more than a hundred involved over the course of a year.

BROWN/JESUS

One hundred!

WARREN

Times fifteen--that's fifteen hundred dollars--within reach! He's just one cockroach, but don't stomp him till he leads you back to the nest! Get names!

BROWN

Mr. Warren, this is quite enough. What an unsavory and unsatisfying enterprise! I've been here now a good three hours.

WARREN

Actors wait. That's our life.

BROWN

They're never going to audition either of us.

(WARREN just grins.)

Your Chesshire grin is not a comfort, sir.

WARREN

This is it.

BROWN

This is what?

WARREN

This is your audition.

BROWN
Someone's watching us?

WARREN
I'm watching.

BROWN
You are?

WARREN
I'm with the motion picture company. I'm auditioning you.

BROWN
Is *this* how they audition in Hollywood?

WARREN
You're being judged on how you perform right now. Are you imaginative? Quick on your feet? Can you break my heart without surrendering your own?

BROWN stares for a moment, then laughs in disbelief.

BROWN
You're trying to spoil my audition. You *want* me to leave so you can get the part!

WARREN
If you believe that, you're free to go.

BROWN
(After a moment.)
Or continue this charade? Bewildered by what you want, who you are? Inspiring emotions without having any?

WARREN
An actor's life.

BROWN
Not trusting--anyone, doubting reality itself? Never getting to be yourself?

WARREN
Who gets to be themselves, *really*? Leave the audition if you think it's wise, if you're not up to it.

(Shrugs.)
Leave life.

(BROWN starts to leave.)
But you've given a terrific performance thus far.

BROWN
I have?

WARREN

Not every actor improvises so inventively. Maybe there is something to be said for your method.

BROWN

Thank you.

WARREN

You very nearly have the part. 'Twould be a pity to lose out now. Impress me.

BROWN

Whyever should I wish to impress you?

WARREN

Perhaps you want more than just a part in a motion picture. Surely there's something else you desire, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

What could I possibly desire so passionately, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

(Smiles.)

To beat me.

BROWN/FISHER

(After a moment.)

We have our story, Mr. McClatchy!

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Our boys come through?

BROWN/FISHER

They've been heroic, sir.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Gotta love those sons of bitches!

BROWN/FISHER

(Reading from notes.)

None of this is announced yet--I've got an exclusive on it so far, but they're panting to go to the LA Times--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Pay the fuckers!

BROWN/FISHER

The activities of Special Vice Officers Warren and Brown have thus far resulted in sixteen arrests, most at the public bathing house in Long Beach. Brown and Warren take turns loitering in the changing area and toilet stalls, many with walls already perforated for immoral purposes--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

What a foul practice!

BROWN/FISHER

When they spy a gentleman given to such things--and they've become quite expert at it, I must say--one of them sits in an adjacent stall and puts a finger through the hole--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Glory holes, I think they call 'em.

BROWN/FISHER

Yes, glory holes, I believe they do. This garners the attention of the fellow next door, and if he peers through the hole he will see an open mouth, waiting--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

I'm nauseated, please proceed.

BROWN/FISHER

The gentleman then, more often than not, puts his erect penis through the hole--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Dear God, Fisher, we can't say penis in *The Sacramento Bee*!

BROWN/FISHER

These are just my notes, sir, not a finished story--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

And what of the churchgoers? The pious hypocrites of Long Beach? That's the real story, Fisher! Garden variety queers poking their dicks through toilet partitions--we've got them aplenty here in Sacramento!

BROWN/FISHER

I'm getting to that, Mr. McClatchy.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

I want an arrest with controversy! Someone with social standing!

BROWN/FISHER

Mr. Brown has been invited to a meeting of the 96 Club, a private gathering of the well-to-do--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

That's more like it, Fisher. When is Brown attending this debauch?

BROWN

I'm not going.

WARREN

What?

BROWN

Our purpose is to raid the party and arrest all present, yes?

WARREN

Just as we've done in toilet after toilet, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

With strangers! Men I only know--God help me--by their--members! Not even by face!

WARREN

This will be even easier. You'll see their faces.

BROWN

I'll meet them. Have conversations. Smile and laugh. Then clamp handcuffs on 'em!

WARREN

Do you feel it's rude?

BROWN

I can't.

WARREN

Mr. Brown, you've done outstanding groundwork, detective work, really, getting the address and invitation to the party. Your cockroach has led us to the nest!

BROWN

That's just it. Herbert will be there.

WARREN

And you can't--?

BROWN

(Overlapping.)

I can't arrest him.

WARREN

Then I'll do it.

BROWN

Good. You go.

WARREN

You have to go, too!

BROWN

He said I could bring a friend if I wanted. Just tell him I sent you.

WARREN

He'll be suspicious!

BROWN

Surely, Mr. Warren, you have sufficient skill to put him at ease.

WARREN

Don't be a pussy!

BROWN

Are you afraid to go without me? Are your emotions getting the better of you? So far we've nabbed these fellows one-by-one in public. Is the idea of an entire house crawling with them too much for you?

WARREN

You little shit.

BROWN

You don't want the address?

WARREN

Give it to me.

BROWN

I wouldn't want you to feel uncomfortable.

WARREN

Shut up, you ninny!

(BROWN shuts up. After a moment.)

And give me the address.

BROWN

Number 1406 Alamos Avenue.

BROWN goes to the rack to get costume changes.

WARREN

Number 1406 Alamos Avenue.

BROWN transforms into ALBERT, the party host. Slight Scandinavian accent.

BROWN/ALBERT

Hello.

WARREN/LAMM

My name is Johan Lamm.

BROWN/ALBERT

Are you a spy?

WARREN/LAMM

I beg your pardon?

BROWN/ALBERT

A German spy?

(Laughs.)

Just joking, Mr. Lamm. But this is a private party.

WARREN/LAMM

Jesus Brown sent me. He's a friend of Herbert Lowe.

BROWN/ALBERT

Oh, Herbie, ja sure! Come on in. Welcome to the 96 Club!
I'm Albert--let me introduce you round--

WARREN/LAMM

(Shaking BROWN/ALBERT'S hand.)

Pleasure.

BROWN/ALBERT

This is Roy.

WARREN/LAMM

Very nice to meet you, sir.

BROWN/ROY

(Southern accent.)

Now, Johan, we're dispensing with such formality this evening! Are you new to Long Beach? Haven't seen you at the 96 Club afore this.

WARREN/LAMM

Ja, I am new. To this country a little bit as well!

BROWN/ROY

You're gonna love it, son. California can't be beat. You meet the nicest folks.

BROWN quickly becomes ALBERT again.

BROWN/ALBERT

Nice folks such as Aref, also new to America! He is from Turkey.

WARREN/LAMM

You don't say!

BROWN turns into AREF, who brings a kimono and puts it on WARREN.

BROWN/AREF

You must dress proper, Johan. No need for face paint, though, for you are pretty enough already.

WARREN/LAMM
(Almost breaking character.)

Pretty!?

BROWN/AREF
(Giggles.)

Pretty sensitive! You'll fit right in! George, come meet Johan. I think he is just your type--excitable and German!

WARREN/LAMM
But I am American now! Might even enlist in the army!

BROWN dons his own kimono to become
GEORGE.

BROWN/GEORGE
Oooo!

(With a major lisp or
sibilance.)

A soldier boy! Fascinating! I don't suppose you could do a Prussian goosestep for me?

(Goosesteps awkwardly in his
kimono.)

WARREN/LAMM
Is Herbert Lowe here yet?

BROWN/GEORGE
She's always late, the socialite biddy! But don't worry, she wouldn't miss you for the world! I'm sure she's looking forward to it.

WARREN/LAMM
I am looking forward to some sucking and fucking!

BROWN/GEORGE
Sucking and fucking! Johan, you are certainly direct. A man after my own heart. But first a little song and dance, some wine, or maybe something stronger!

BROWN gets out of the kimono.

BROWN/JOSEPH
(Italian accent.)
Now, Georgie, leave-a him alone. You gotta grab alla the nice boys fora yourself?

WARREN/LAMM
I can't wait much longer for Mr. Lowe.

BROWN/ALBERT
(Handing WARREN a drink.)
Don't you worry, Johan, Herbie almost always makes it eventually.

WARREN/LAMM

I came specifically to meet him.

BROWN/AREF

Oh, you're not a friend of his?

WARREN/LAMM

No, a friend of a friend. Jesus Brown.

BROWN/ROY

Who's that, now? Jesus Brown? Do we know him?

WARREN/LAMM

I don't think so. He was going to meet me here tonight as well.

BROWN/ROY

Awful lot of strangers this evening.

WARREN/LAMM

No, just me. Jesus said he might not make it anyways.

BROWN transforms into a new party guest, CC.

BROWN/CC

(New York accent just like
WARREN'S own.)

He's gonna meet you, but now he might not make it?

WARREN/LAMM

Ja, that's perfectly understandable, isn't it? Silly little queen. Flighty, you know!

BROWN/CC

And who names their kid Jesus?

WARREN/LAMM

It's Spanish, I think.
(Spanish pronunciation.)
Hay-zoos.

BROWN/ROY

Sounds kinda made-up to me. Like a fake name.

BROWN/ALBERT

We've all used fake names now and again, Roy!

BROWN/CC

But not at the 96 Club. And there's something funny about your accent, Johan. *Sprechen zie Deutsch?*

WARREN/LAMM

Ja, ja!

BROWN/CC

Me, too. My ma came from Silesia, near Poland. *Wer sind Sie wirklich?* [Who are you really?]

WARREN/LAMM

I am sorry, sir, I think your dialect is not--

BROWN/CC

It's High German, Herr Lamm. Ma was very proud of that.

WARREN/LAMM

Then perhaps your accent--?

BROWN/CC

Your accent's the one in question--

WARREN/LAMM

Perhaps I've been in America too long--

BROWN/ALBERT

CC, that's not very hospitable!

WARREN/LAMM

I forget my German, maybe!

BROWN/JOSEPH

Have you done-a something with Herbie? Why'sa he not here-a!

WARREN/LAMM

Gentlemen, please! I was told the 96 Club welcomed the stranger!

BROWN/AREF

Impostor! Impostor! Throw him out!

BROWN/GEORGE

(Wildly sibilant or lisping.)

There's something suspicious about you, sir!

Panicked, WARREN pulls out a police whistle and blows it. BROWN dashes about, simulating the party-goers fleeing a police raid all by himself.

BROWN/ALBERT

Everybody out! Back door! Back door!

WARREN

Come and get 'em boys!

BROWN/CC

I told you--that bastard!

WARREN

Round 'em up! They've been talking that fairy talk all night.

BROWN/ROY

It's always the cute ones betray you!

Taking off the kimono, WARREN makes the sound of a police siren.

BROWN/AREF

(Grabbing a kimono.)

I spent a fortune on these kimonos! They're real silk!

BROWN/JOSEPH

Drop-a that, Aref, and run! Here-a they come-a!

BROWN/GEORGE

Get your hands off me, motherfucker! I am fierce! Fear me!

WARREN

Get that one in the Japanesy
dress-thing!

BROWN/ALBERT

Officer, this is my house.
Do you have a warrant?

WARREN pulls out handcuffs.

WARREN

This party's over, fellows!

BROWN/CC

You son of a bitch!

WARREN

You're under arrest, pansy!

BROWN/ROY

You can't arrest me! Who the
hell are you?

WARREN puts BROWN/ROY in handcuffs.

WARREN

I'm Special Vice Officer
Warren of the Long Beach
Police Department!

BROWN/ROY

You tricked us! You lied!

WARREN

I only lied to expose the truth. The hideous truth!

WARREN and BROWN stand there a moment,
catching their breath.

BROWN

You can...take these off now.

WARREN

Maybe I should leave 'em on a bit. Show you who's boss.

BROWN

You always bring handcuffs to auditions?

WARREN

I bring 'em everywhere.

BROWN

Too bad you don't speak German.

WARREN

And since when do you?

BROWN
My ma's from Silesia.

WARREN
Really?

BROWN
Use what you got, like you said. Now take these off.

WARREN
What we didn't get was Herbert Lowe.

BROWN
Can I help it he didn't show?

WARREN
I don't know. Can you?

BROWN
What do you mean?

WARREN
Did you help it? Help him? Warn him not to go?

BROWN
No, you're crazy. Most likely he just got suspicious.

WARREN
Don't hold out on me.

BROWN
I'm not.

WARREN
This might not be an audition.

BROWN
What?

WARREN
This might be an arrest. A real one.

BROWN
(Frightened.)
Who the fuck are you? I mean it--tell me!
(WARREN just stares, smiling.)
I'm not holding out on you! Take 'em off!

WARREN unlocks the handcuffs.

WARREN
You held out on the German.

BROWN

Keeping you on your toes.

WARREN

For that I'm making you nab Lowe on your own.

BROWN

You think I can't?

WARREN

Not long ago you were whining about betrayal.

BROWN

I never used that word. I'll nab Lowe after you nab Lamb.

WARREN

No, huh-uh.

BROWN

You been putting it off.

WARREN

Not true.

BROWN

You're uncomfortable with it, I can tell. Betrayal--your word. Maybe you're a nicer fellow than you make out to be.

WARREN

It's a job!

BROWN

Then do it.

WARREN

All right. But it's a dirty job. And you're the one afraid of getting your hands dirty, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

Afraid?!

WARREN/LAMB

Beautiful day!

BROWN

What?

WARREN/LAMB

Beautiful September day for a swim, Mr. Lamb.

BROWN/LAMB

Please call me John.

WARREN/LAMM

Thanks for bringing me to the bathing house, John. Do we change into swimming attire in these stalls?

BROWN/LAMB

That's correct, Johan. See how progressive we are in Long Beach?

WARREN/LAMM

Will the water be terribly cold?

BROWN/LAMB

It's never tropical--think of it as invigorating.

WARREN/LAMM

The temperature change might shock my system. I believe I'll relieve myself first.

BROWN/LAMB

Excellent thought, Johan. I'll do the same.

They move chairs to either side of an empty section of the costume rack, creating toilet stalls. They may pull down their pants to sit on the toilets.

BROWN/LAMB

Kälte ist gesund!

WARREN/LAMM

I beg your pardon?

BROWN/LAMB

Cold is healthy! Did I say it proper?

WARREN/LAMM

Ja, ja. Kälte ist gesund! Cold is indeed healthy!

WARREN/LAMM is touching himself.
BROWN/LAMB may do the same.

BROWN/LAMB

And health is important.

WARREN/LAMM

I can tell you understand health, John.

BROWN/LAMB

I exercise a bit. Swimming keeps me vigorous.

WARREN puts his finger through an imaginary hole between the stalls. BROWN/LAMB notices.

WARREN/LAMB

Indeed.

BROWN/LAMB

You are a healthy young man as well, Johan, but too thin. I hope I'm not being too personal--

WARREN/LAMB

Not at all, John.

BROWN/LAMB

Permit me to take you to a marvelous place, the best beefsteak you'll ever taste--

WARREN/LAMB

You whet my appetite, John. I'm not worthy of it--

BROWN/LAMB

You mustn't think so little of yourself, Johan. You're a good man, deserving--

WARREN/LAMB

Actors are not always highly regarded.

BROWN/LAMB leans forward to peer in the "hole." WARREN/LAMB leans forward, positioning his open mouth near the hole so BROWN/LAMB sees it. BROWN/LAMB sits back, excited and nervous.

BROWN/LAMB

What has been your favorite role?

WARREN/LAMB

In Germany we love Shakespeare.

BROWN/LAMB maneuvers cautiously toward the hole, trying to decide whether to put his penis through it.

BROWN/LAMB

In Scotland we enjoy *Macbeth*.

WARREN/LAMB

Ach! You mustn't speak the name out loud, John.

Sensing BROWN/LAMB'S hesitation, WARREN/LAMB puts his finger through the hole again.

BROWN/LAMB

I thought that was just in theatres.

WARREN/LAMB

There are some things you should never speak at all.

BROWN/LAMB puts his penis through the hole.

BROWN/LAMB

Don't I know it, Johan! Some things not spoken are simply understood.

WARREN/LAMB takes out his black marking pen, hesitates. BROWN/LAMB starts getting nervous with his dick through a glory hole not getting sucked immediately as expected.

BROWN/LAMB

Isn't that so, Johan?

(No response.)

Johan?

BROWN/LAMB starts to withdraw his penis, but WARREN/LAMB quickly grabs it. BROWN/LAMB relaxes in relief: his offer has been accepted.

WARREN/LAMB

That's so, John. Nothing could be truer.

WARREN/LAMB quickly makes a mark on BROWN/LAMB'S penis.

BROWN/LAMB

Johan, what--?

WARREN

(Dropping LAMB'S accent.)

Mr. John Lamb--

BROWN/LAMB pulls away from the hole.

BROWN/LAMB

What have you done?

WARREN

--Of Long Beach, California--

WARREN

You're under arrest!

In a panic, BROWN/LAMB pulls up his pants and dashes out of the stall.

BROWN/LAMB

You bastard! Deceiver!

While BROWN/LAMB dashes about, WARREN remains in the stall, calmly adjusting his clothes.

WARREN

You can't escape, Mr. Lamb. As fast as you may sprint through Pacific Park, my fellow officers will hunt you down. And the mark of your guilt is indelible, the mark of Cain, the mark of the beast. You've been acting as much as I, Mr. Lamb, all meek and mild, when you're in fact a wolf, a predator, a ravenous despoiler of nature. But all predators may be baited and trapped--by their appetites.

WARREN steps out of the stall and easily captures the now thoroughly disheveled BROWN/LAMB.

BROWN/LAMB

Let me go, Johan. For the love of God!

WARREN puts the handcuffs on BROWN/LAMB.

WARREN

Invoking God, are you, my Scottish hypocrite? He won't hear your plea--tell it to the judge.

BROWN/LAMB

Johan, please!

WARREN

Johan's but an alias, sir, to play upon your perverse vanity. To lure you into fucking yourself.

BROWN/LAMB

You're destroying me, is what you're doing.

WARREN

I'm destroying vice, is all, and that's what you represent.

BROWN/LAMB

You--represent--too! I know who you are. We're the same! We're the same man!

WARREN

(Positioning BROWN/LAMB with his back to the audience.)

We're no such thing, sir.

(To an imaginary policeman.)

Caught another fairy with his pants down, Officer Cervantes.

Stepping to the other side of
BROWN/LAMB, WARREN becomes CERVANTES,
perhaps with the addition of the police
cap.

WARREN/CERVANTES

(Spanish accent.)

Where do you dig 'em up?

WARREN

(Stepping back to the other
side.)

The comfort station in Pacific Park is rife with 'em. A gold
mine of depravity.

WARREN/CERVANTES

(Stepping to the other side.)

Let's see the evidence.

WARREN fumbles with BROWN/LAMB'S pants.

BROWN/LAMB

No, officers, please. This is a mistake. I never went to
that park.

WARREN

Behold!

WARREN rips BROWN/LAMB'S pants and
underwear down to his knees, leaving
BROWN/LAMB facing upstage, bare-assed
and shivering.

WARREN/CERVANTES

(Inspecting.)

Sure enough. There's the black cross.

WARREN

It's not a cross--it's an X.

WARREN/CERVANTES

Cross, X, same thing.

WARREN

The cross has entirely different symbolism, Officer
Cervantes. An X is a deletion, an erasure, a correction.

WARREN/CERVANTES

Well, I can hardly see it he's so shrunk with cold.

WARREN

(Recalling LAMB.)

Kälte ist gesund, Officer Cervantes, cold is healthy.

I think it's fear that's shrunk him up. Look, the reprobate's in tears.

BROWN/LAMB

(Crying.)

I beg of you--! I never--!

WARREN

You begged me in the bathing house, Mr. Lamb, but you'll not see me on my knees again.

BROWN/LAMB

I pray God shows you the mercy you've not shown me, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

What? I never told you my real--

BROWN suddenly becomes himself again.

BROWN

Well done, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

Thank you kindly, Mr. Brown.

BROWN proffers handcuffs for WARREN to release him.

BROWN

You humiliated him, stripped him, smote him.

WARREN ignores the handcuffs, instead pulling up and fastening BROWN'S trousers. Slowly.

WARREN

I smote him right proper. Twas very nearly Biblical.

BROWN

The Lamb went uncomplaining forth.

WARREN

Oh, he complained plenty.

BROWN

And what of your feelings, Mr. Warren?

WARREN

My feelings? Incidental!

BROWN

Not at all. You're an actor. Emotions are your meat, empathy your bread and butter.

WARREN

Not mine. Others. What of *your* feelings, Mr. Brown?

BROWN

I wasn't present for the arrest.

(Trying to squirm away as

WARREN dresses him.)

Now, if you'd kindly--

WARREN

But now you're in the limelight. I butchered my Lamb. Tis time to harvest your nurseryman.

BROWN

I'm observing him at close quarters from his guest cottage.

WARREN

What observation is necessary? The man's a deviate. Reel him in.

BROWN

I'm not so cold-hearted as you. Or at least as you pretend to be.

WARREN

Mr. Brown, I'm winning our contest.

BROWN begins to display annoyance with WARREN'S attentions.

BROWN

Which contest?

WARREN

Any time two men meet, it's a contest. You lag by one upper crust pansy. Can you even the score?

BROWN

Perhaps if you'd unlock these goddamn handcuffs!

WARREN

(Removing the handcuffs.)

Certainly, Mr. Brown. I'm all for a fair fight.

BROWN

I may lack the talent.

WARREN

Nonsense. You've demonstrated great skill at mimicry. If your portrayal lacks depth, it's only because you've not yet achieved your climax. Your emotional climax.

BROWN

I don't feel like myself.

WARREN

Then you've truly assumed the role. The outer has transformed the inner.

BROWN

This isn't about acting!

WARREN

Everything is about acting.

BROWN

Not for normal people.

WARREN

For everyone. Your naivete astounds. Everyone's acting *all the time*. Every job is a role. Every relationship a masquerade.

BROWN

Can't we strip away the mask to reveal the truth?

WARREN

The naked truth--as we've seen--is often unpleasant. You'll find Herbert Lowe's a man like any other.

BROWN

I...can't.

WARREN

Your assignment just got easier. Thanks to the raid on the 96 Club, your Mr. Lowe will be brimming with trepidation.

BROWN

Making my task all the harder.

WARREN

Now you have a new ally--fear. In his mind, *mutual* fear, for you assured him you were a gentleman like himself. Twine your souls. Mimic his affectations. Get him to tell you he loves you--then you've won.

BROWN

Or a kiss.

WARREN

Either way--evidence.

BROWN

Truth.

WARREN

Chief Cole will be outside the window, and I'll hide in the attic so you won't be compromised.

I don't feel--

BROWN

Good evening, *Jesus*.

WARREN/LOWE

I'm not ready!

BROWN

Ready for what?

WARREN/LOWE

Herbert, you startled me!

BROWN

My apologies. I imagine you're jumpy, too, these days.

WARREN/LOWE

Twas fortunate we missed the 96 Club meeting.

BROWN/JESUS

I wish I'd been there. I dare them to arrest me.

WARREN/LOWE

You're not trepidatious?

BROWN/JESUS

I'm sensibly wary, no more. What are you reading?

WARREN/LOWE

Shakespeare.

BROWN/JESUS

Which play?

WARREN/LOWE

Macbeth.

BROWN/JESUS

Oh, that's a disturbing one, isn't it?
(Sits down next to
BROWN/JESUS.)

May I?
(BROWN/JESUS nods.)

So awful how hospitality is repaid with betrayal, affection with deception, all in the name of ambition. I played Duncan in college.

BROWN/JESUS

You were an actor?

WARREN/LOWE

We're all actors in our youth. Seeking the role we'll play the rest of our lives. I'm sorry--that was awfully pretentious!

BROWN/JESUS

Not nearly as pretentious as my friend.

WARREN/LOWE

Your friend?

BROWN/JESUS

An actor friend.

WARREN/LOWE

Ah.

BROWN/JESUS

Do you like your...role, Herbert?

WARREN/LOWE

My role in life? I certainly do. I live well within limits. When you're my age, you will, too.

BROWN/JESUS

I'm not a kid!

WARREN/LOWE

But younger than I.

BROWN/JESUS

I guess. And you're right--there's so much I don't know.

WARREN/LOWE

What luck! I'm a frustrated Socrates. How may I inculcate you?

BROWN/JESUS

Well, except on stage, I've never kissed anyone in my life.

WARREN/LOWE

Surely not!

BROWN/JESUS

Not everyone likes it.

WARREN/LOWE

Who doesn't like kissing?

BROWN/JESUS

My actor friend.

WARREN/LOWE

Perhaps he only acts like he doesn't like it.

BROWN/JESUS

That is his job. In more ways than one.

WARREN/LOWE

Kissing reveals the soul. Utter vulnerability. I adore it.

BROWN/JESUS

Really? You like being revealed?

WARREN/LOWE

(Nods.)

I'm a dreadful actor. I blush, I blanch--you can read my soul in my face. Study me and you can ignore everything Mr. Stanislavsky says!

BROWN/JESUS

Me, too. I mean, I can't help but show how I feel. It just bursts out. I get embarrassed.

WARREN/LOWE

(Hand on BROWN/JESUS'S
shoulder.)

No need for embarrassment here.

BROWN/JESUS

It's...a refuge.

WARREN/LOWE

(Taking his hand away.)

That's right. Our private sanctuary.

BROWN/JESUS

(Putting his hand on
WARREN/LOWE'S thigh.)

I never realized--until today...this is the role I've been seeking. I want to *act it*.

WARREN/LOWE

Then you must audition without delay.

They lean in for a kiss. LOWE kicks the chair or makes some other kind of noise.

WARREN/LOWE

What was that?

BROWN/JESUS

I'll see.

WARREN/LOWE

Someone's in the attic!

BROWN/JESUS gets up, steps away, grabs the police cap and turns back to WARREN/LOWE as CHIEF COLE.

BROWN/COLE

Mr. Herbert Lowe, you're under arrest for social vagrancy.

WARREN/LOWE

Who are you? What are you doing on my property?

BROWN/COLE

My name's Cole. I'm the Chief of Police in Long Beach.

WARREN/LOWE

You can't just burst in here! What've you done with my tenant?!

BROWN/COLE

Don't worry about Brown, Mr. Lowe. You're the one going to jail.

WARREN/LOWE

For what, sir? What is social vagrancy?

BROWN/COLE

I know it when I see it. And looking in your window I just saw it.

WARREN/LOWE

You saw nothing, sir. As a citizen of Long Beach I pay your salary, and I won't be intimidated!

BROWN/COLE

I don't care whether you're intimidated--you're arrested.

WARREN abandons his LOWE impersonation and whips the police cap from BROWN'S head.

WARREN

Success, Mr. Brown!

BROWN

Congratulations, Mr. Warren.

WARREN

No, no--Herbert Lowe was your collar, not mine. In fact, I very nearly scotched our chances when I slipped in the attic and made a noise.

BROWN

Was that what I heard? At the critical moment, you slipped?

WARREN

Fascinated by your compelling performance, I leaned too close to the spy hole and overbalanced.

BROWN

Twass not a slip out of jealousy?

WARREN

Jealousy?

BROWN

As Lowe leaned in for a kiss?

WARREN

I fail to understand you, sir. Do you mean envy of your acting?

BROWN

Or was it simply fear? Of the naked truth?

WARREN

Enough of this nonsense, Mr. Brown. We must prepare for the trial.

BROWN

As you wish, Mr. Warren. But I admire Herbert for fighting the charge instead of paying a fine or going to jail like all the rest.

WARREN

Admire him? Now you've surely taken empathy too far.

BROWN

Must we proceed with prosecution?

WARREN

Tis no longer within our hands. The public demands our appearance upon the stage. Have you never had your name in the newspaper?

BROWN

Not yet.

WARREN

Now's your chance! We'll be called as witnesses for certain.

BROWN

I'll have to testify against Herbert?

WARREN

Twill be the performance of a lifetime.

BROWN

Mr. Warren, our little improvisation has mushroomed into madness, the whole town's hysterical, and your only thought is publicity?

WARREN

I'm an actor.

BROWN

Surely actors care for their fellow man.

(WARREN can't answer.)

At least a little? No empathy at all?

WARREN

Only as required to play the scene.

BROWN

Well played, my friend. Your Herbert Lowe is your finest work--such heart, such *joi de vivre*, such kindness. I envy your acting. Looking into Lowe's eyes I saw your beautiful, frightened soul.

WARREN

You saw no such thing!

BROWN

Then who are you, Mr. Warren? Truly?

(Waits for an answer. WARREN can't respond.)

Nothing but a soulless imitator of a human being?

WARREN

I've told you--

BROWN

You've told me lies. It takes little investigation--

WARREN

My dear Mr. Brown--you are obsessed with me!

BROWN

--To reveal you never reported for the New York Times, your Brooklyn accent's as fraudulent as your German--

WARREN

That's very funny as I was born in Flatbush--

BROWN

Even your name is a fabrication!

WARREN

Of course it is! I'd never get a job as Menachem Mendel Schneerson!

BROWN

That's your real name?

WARREN

No, just an example. Satoshi Nakamoto.

BROWN

You don't look Japanese.

WARREN

But I can *play* Japanese! I'm an actor! Why should my real name matter?

BROWN

It matters to me.

WARREN

Only my roles matter. I don't exist. I'm born in the mind of the audience.

BROWN

And I'm your audience. I see you.

WARREN

Strip away my mask and you'll see nothing. Pour over the U.S. census record--you will not find me.

BROWN

What role will you play on the witness stand?

WARREN

Special Vice Officer Warren.

BROWN

You'll be perjuring yourself the moment you state your name.

WARREN

No, I'll be playing the role of the person perjuring himself.

BROWN

Why, Mr. Warren, you've just declared yourself exempt from life!

Without warning, WARREN becomes the Long Beach Deputy District Attorney ONG and pushes BROWN into the witness chair.

WARREN/ONG

Special Vice Officer Brown, describe for me your relationship with Mr. Herbert N. Lowe.

BROWN

Our relationship?

WARREN/ONG

You are under oath, Officer Brown. And as Deputy District Attorney I'm cordially requesting the truth.

BROWN

I knew that Lowe had a house to rent in the rear of his residence at the corner of Broadway and Junipero streets. With the connivance of the Police Chief I rented his cottage.

WARREN/ONG

When Mr. Lowe visited you on the evening of September 26 were there any officers present?

BROWN

Yes, I put Warren in the attic before Lowe came in, while I read a book. Chief Cole was hidden outside the window.

WARREN/ONG

What book?

BROWN

(After a puzzled moment.)

Shakespeare.

WARREN/ONG

What happened when Lowe arrived?

BROWN

He came in about 8 o'clock, asked me how my bathing suit fit, and began to get familiar, as usual.

WARREN/ONG

And what did you do all this time?

BROWN

I did not like it, and, moving a little farther away, kept on reading my magazine.

WARREN/ONG

Book.

BROWN

Yes, Shakespeare, sorry.

WARREN

Well, that was terrible.

BROWN

It's what we rehearsed--

WARREN

Book? Magazine? Fucking Shakespeare?

BROWN

That part was true. It was *Macbeth*--

WARREN

What good is the truth if it's not convincing?

BROWN

Now there's a philosophy for the twentieth century! Perjury isn't a role I'm familiar with!

WARREN

Doesn't matter.

BROWN

Why not?

WARREN

(Produces a newspaper.)

We're famous.

BROWN

(Grabbing the paper.)

Let me see!

WARREN

Los Angeles Times, November 13, 1914--your first review!

BROWN

(Reading.)

The reports of Special Officers Warren and Brown and Judge Hart reveal a surprising array of convictions and fines of citizens on the same "social vagrancy" charge. Two prominent church men, John E. Lamb and J. A. Hoyden, were fined \$500 each. Other men who paid fines ranging from \$100 to \$200 were: C.C. Espey, L.E. Arnold, J.F. Storey--

WARREN

We've got it made, Mr. Brown!
As actors, as vice officers!
Everybody knows our names!
After we're done with Long
Beach, we'll be in great
demand all up and down the
coast! And studios who never
gave us a second thought will
be calling us in again and
again. Bet we won't even
have to audition! Notoriety
at last!

BROWN

--W.S. Austin, John Lain,
Joseph Carrao, George Grimes,
Roy Lyburger, Aref Said,
Albert Leidstrom, and W. J.
McCandless. Those who
received six months'
sentences in the County Jail
are: Arthur Clarke, Robert
Forbes, C. F. Edwards,, P. L.
Flaherty, W. L. Mead, Nels
Berglund, H. C. Kerlin,
George Grahm, W. R. Berry and
Fred Long. Many people think
political vengeance is at the
bottom of it. But what a
holy city Long Beach is!

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Goddamnit, Mr. Fisher! The *LA Times* scooped us! You've been following this story for months! How'd they get in ahead of us?!

BROWN/FISHER

We'll do a feature, Mr. McClatchy, an in-depth article--a series! No one has more notes--

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

Notes mean crap unless they turn into stories! Get back down to Los Angeles and stick to the case like shit on a shoe! Play up the religious angle! How's Long Beach liking its churchmen now?

BROWN/LAMB

My darling sister: God knows, and will have mercy through Christ. I am crazed by reading the paper this morning. I never knew of such a place or of such orgies. I am innocent, but the victim of a situation. I could not endure this publicity as I had not a chance to deny it. Go to the office and Mr. Tucker will act as your advisor. The Third Street property is yours by deed. Have it recorded. How I love you, but it is best. Be brave. Believe me innocent. John.

WARREN turns into LOWE in conversation with his attorney, ROLAND SWAFFIELD.

WARREN/LOWE

Mr. Swaffield, your legal expertise notwithstanding, I'm a florist!

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

(Michigan accent.)

That doesn't mean you're guilty. As your attorney, I must remind you that you never confessed.

WARREN/LOWE

Not guilty, of what he said. All that talk of his bathing costume! I never pulled back any blankets or kissed him all over. They arrested me before anything happened!

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

But he asked you to kiss him?

WARREN/LOWE

Must I speak of that?

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

So we can discredit the witness.

WARREN/LOWE

He said he'd never kissed anyone before.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

He wanted that kiss as much as you did!

WARREN/LOWE

But I am...what they say I am. Everyone in Long Beach knows it's true.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

You can't be tried for being something, only for doing something.

WARREN/LOWE

Would that that were true.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

We'll change the world and make it true.

BROWN

(Glancing at the newspaper in his hand.)

Oh, my God.

WARREN

What?

BROWN

(Reading the newspaper.)

John A. Lamb, banker and prominent churchman, ended his life this morning on the rocks near Point Fermin, as a result of the expose of a clique of "social vagrants" that has shaken this city to its very foundations.

BROWN hands the paper to WARREN who continues reading.

WARREN

(Reading.)

The body of Lamb was found on the rocky beach at a point about half a mile east of Point Fermin by Mrs. F. E. Grossley and sister, Mrs. Dunbar. Horrified by their find, and recognizing Lamb...

Overwhelmed, WARREN hands the paper back to BROWN.

BROWN

Horrified by their find, and recognizing Lamb, they notified the police of San Pedro. A small package containing cyanide of potassium was found beside the body.

BROWN turns to look at WARREN, who has turned away.

BROWN
 (After a moment.)
 It was his choice.

WARREN
 (Too quickly.)
 I know.

BROWN
 He could have moved--back to Scotland. Or someplace where
 nobody knew him.

WARREN
 Quiet.

BROWN
 I'm trying--
 (Touches WARREN almost
 tenderly. WARREN recoils.)

WARREN
 I don't need your comfort!

WARREN quietly sheds a tear. It's not
 feigned. In fact, he may tried to hide
 it from BROWN.

BROWN
 Very well. Then let me remind you it was our choice too,
 pursuing him so avidly. Surely you acknowledge that, Mr.
 Warren.

(No reponse, so BROWN becomes
 SWAFFIELD.)

BROWN/SWAFFIELD
 Officer Warren.
 (No response.)
 Officer Warren?

WARREN
 (Recovering.)
 Oh, yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Swaffield.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD
 When Lowe visited Brown on the morning of September 26, were
 there any officers present?

WARREN
 (After a moment.)
 There were. Officer Hitsman was in the attic with his eye to
 a hole in the wallpaper.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

Then your testimony is worthless, for you said earlier that Hitsman was not present on September 26.

WARREN

I did not!

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

What a poor performance, Officer Warren. We all see right through you.

WARREN

Mr. Brown, you are overplaying your part so badly, you've made it impossible for me to play mine.

BROWN/SWAFFIELD

Gentlemen of the jury, you don't know these stool pigeons who came here to get our citizens. You do know Herbert Lowe, who has been here for ten years. It seems obvious Mr. Warren is nothing more nor less than a blackmailer. Whereas Mr. Lowe is a pillar of our community, trusted, relied upon, familiar. Does Mr. Lowe look like a degenerate capable of horrible enormity? Let me then direct your gaze to "Officer" Warren. Look at the man who asks you to believe his testimony. See the puffs beneath the eyes, the sallow complexion, the sleek-combed and oiled hair, the pink-manicured finger nails--there is the degenerate. You will recall from testimony that one man was arrested while attempting to go down on Officer Warren. I hesitate to sully your imaginations with this image, but in order to bring a gentleman to his knees, how much "acting" would Officer Warren resort to? Was he not, instead, a willing participant in the crime, an abettor, an instigator? In short, honored jurors, these men, Warren and Brown, are not to be believed by you. Their fingers are dripping with the blood of John Lamb.

BROWN/FISHER

(Reading.)

Jury acquits?! Long Beach florist freed of hideous charge?! Mr. McClatchy, look!

WARREN

What?

BROWN/FISHER

(Reading.)

Although five witnesses testified that he was guilty, and four swore that he confessed to the charge in their presence, Herbert N. Lowe was acquitted of the charge of vagrancy today in Police Court.

WARREN

No, wait--

BROWN/FISHER
Los Angeles Times, December 10, 1914.
 (No reaction from WARREN.)

BROWN
 (After a moment.)
 Exonerated!

WARREN
 (Stunned.)
 Not guilty!

BROWN
 We were wrong to do it, Mr. Warren.

WARREN
 I can't believe it.

BROWN
 What now? What's your next scheme?

WARREN
 Let me think--

BROWN/SWAFFIELD
 I told you I'd get you off, Herbert! Floral tributes
 everywhere!

WARREN
 Let me think--!

BROWN/SWAFFIELD
 Herbert? We're celebrating your bravery fighting the charge.

WARREN
 Let me think!

BROWN/FISHER
 Mr. Lowe, I'm Eugene Fisher from *The Sacramento Bee*--

WARREN
 What? Who?

BROWN/FISHER
 Mr. Lowe, the *Sacramento Bee* congratulates you on your
 acquittal.

WARREN/LOWE
 Of course. *The Sacramento Bee*.

BROWN/FISHER
 The jury reached its verdict in less than half an hour.

WARREN/LOWE

It is a great relief.

BROWN/FISHER

What do you think convinced them so quickly of your innocence?

WARREN/LOWE

We're all guilty of something, Mr.--?

BROWN/FISHER

Fisher. But you may call me Eugene.

WARREN/LOWE

Very well, Eugene. Surely you yourself are guilty of *somesuch*?

BROWN/FISHER

I beg your pardon? I was asking about--

WARREN/LOWE

Most reporters I know have their secrets, too.

BROWN/FISHER

Our readers are interested in *your* story, Mr. Lowe.

WARREN/LOWE

Oh, Eugene, please call me Herbert. By the way, you don't seem like a Eugene to me.

BROWN/FISHER

What?

WARREN/LOWE

Not at all. A Julian, an Oscar, an Algernon, but never Eugene.

BROWN/FISHER

In any case--

WARREN/LOWE

You look very familiar to me. Surely I know you from somewhere--

BROWN/FISHER

That's highly unlikely. I'm based in Sacramento.

WARREN/LOWE

Ah. But I do get up there for nursery business on occasion. Some of our best growers are in the delta.

WARREN/LOWE smiles pleasantly but dangerously.

BROWN/FISHER

Now, Mr. Lowe--

WARREN/LOWE

Herbert!

BROWN/FISHER

You are evading the question, sir!

WARREN/LOWE

I'm the one should be questioning you, Mr. Brown.

BROWN/FISHER

Brown--no, I'm Fisher, Eugene Fisher--

WARREN/LOWE

What have you to say for yourself, *Jesus* Brown?

BROWN/FISHER

I'm interviewing you for the *Sacramento Bee*--an exclusive--

WARREN/LOWE

Is that correct? Is *Jesus* your Christian name?

(BROWN can't answer.)

Mr. Brown? Officer Brown? Do you still retain the title, or are you once again merely a thespian? My, I'm full of questions, aren't I? None of them important, in the long run. Except...love. Do actors feel love, Mr. Eugene *Jesus* Fisher Brown? For anyone other than themselves, I mean. Isn't this a question you in fact ask yourself?

BROWN/JESUS

Yes.

WARREN/LOWE

How difficult it must be to fall in love when who you are changes day to day, hour to hour, conversation by conversation! How impossible to be loved by--or to love--an actor!

BROWN/JESUS

It's possible.

WARREN/LOWE

But you wouldn't know--you've never loved an actor, have you, *Jesus*?

BROWN/JESUS

No--I--I didn't have to come here.

WARREN/LOWE

No, you did not.

BROWN/JESUS

I wanted--

(WARREN/LOWE just stares.)

It wasn't--

WARREN/LOWE

It wasn't your idea, *Jesus*? Of course not. That's not who you are. But Mr. Warren--Officer Warren--

BROWN/JESUS

It's not what you think!

WARREN/LOWE

Think, my lord? Is he not honest?

BROWN/JESUS

Honest, my lord?

WARREN/LOWE

Honest? Ay, honest.

BROWN/JESUS

My lord, for aught I know.

WARREN/LOWE

By heaven, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown!

BROWN/JESUS

He's not a monster!

WARREN/LOWE

What is he then?

BROWN/JESUS

Like mercury, always taking new shapes, you squeeze him and he's gone--

WARREN/LOWE

How can you love quicksilver?

BROWN/JESUS

I don't love--!

WARREN/LOWE

It's poison.

BROWN/JESUS

He doesn't just act--he *acts*.

WARREN/LOWE

Takes action?

BROWN/JESUS

He makes things--

WARREN/LOWE

Out of nothing.

BROWN/JESUS

He makes things happen. Monstrous things, sometimes, yes, out of nothing but accent and gesture. He seems in love with surfaces, but I think they betray him--in aping kindness he lays bare his own hidden heart.

WARREN/LOWE

(After a moment.)

Don't ever tell him that.

BROWN/JESUS

He needs to know he's better than he thinks.

WARREN/LOWE

Why, I do believe--

BROWN/JESUS

And he's wrought great change in me. I'm a different person because of him!

WARREN/LOWE

I do believe you're in love with me!

BROWN/JESUS

What, no, of course not--!

WARREN

You are. You as much as said so, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

Herbert?

WARREN

Warren.

Silence. WARREN grins, triumphant.

BROWN

Oh, Mr. Warren. I didn't realize it was you.

WARREN

Perhaps it's me. How would you ever know, I'm so quicksilver?

BROWN

I didn't mean--

WARREN

It's not what you meant, it's what you felt. What I made you feel.

BROWN

You haven't won--what I said to Lowe--you made me--!

WARREN

Exactly! Grace in defeat, sir. Then onto the next battle.

BROWN

Next battle? Isn't our contest over?

WARREN

Over? What's the fun in that?

BROWN

Is that all you wanted? Fun?

WARREN

You'll never know.

BROWN

You'll never be known.

WARREN

Which is why I've won. Now--

BROWN

Mr. Warren--

WARREN

I've made appointments for us with the police departments of Venice--

(BROWN is silent.)

The police department of Venice, Mr. Brown--

BROWN

(Sales pitch.)

As Chief of Police, you're undoubtedly well aware--

WARREN

Santa Monica--

BROWN

My partner, Mr. Warren, and I have almost single-handedly wiped out vice in the city of Long Beach--

WARREN

Portland--

BROWN

Our method is simple, but effective, and the perversity we've uncovered there would astonish you--

WARREN

And San Francisco--

BROWN

But your own city is certainly the same, for such is the nature of men.

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

We've won, Fisher! We've goddamnn won at last!

BROWN/FISHER

What've we won, sir?

WARREN/MCCLATCHY

(Handing BROWN/FISHER a piece of paper.)

Our campaign over filth has triumphed! The Twentieth Century War is at last a crime in the State of California.

BROWN/FISHER

(Reading.)

The acts technically known as fellatio and cunnilingus are hereby declared to be felonies and any person convicted of the commission of either thereof shall be punished by imprisonment in the state prison for not more than fifteen years. California Penal Code number 288a. Added by the State, 1915.

WARREN

Mr. Brown, we've changed the world!

BROWN

California, anyways.

WARREN

Imagine it--*actors* changed the world!

BROWN

Someday we could be President.

WARREN

You could indeed, Mr. Brown. You have all the attributes. I've seen your talents grow before my eyes.

BROWN

But have we acted properly, Mr. Warren? Morally?

WARREN

Our actions have become law. Society is in complete accord.

BROWN

On the surface. But does this feel right to you?

WARREN

(Taking off his shirt.)

My dear Mr. Brown, if everyone went around acting on their feelings, we'd have murder and madness. It's oftentimes proper to enact the opposite of our feelings for society's sake!

BROWN

But is society always right? Is the majority always right?

WARREN

The majority always *wins*. Now, with The Twentieth Century Way officially illegal, our services will be in great demand. But our technique needs honing.

BROWN

It's worked reasonably well so far.

WARREN

(Taking off shoes and socks.)

A percentage of our prey escapes--

BROWN

Prey--?

WARREN

And with the change in law, they'll be ever more wary. We'll need to completely embody the role in order to win their trust.

BROWN

What more can we do?

WARREN

Repulsive as it may sound, we must progress further down the path of seduction.

BROWN

Further than The Twentieth Century Way?

WARREN

I try to stay a century ahead.

WARREN starts caressing BROWN.

BROWN

What are you doing, sir?

WARREN

An exercise.

BROWN

Acting.

WARREN

We'll never achieve optimal performance without rehearsal.
If you can maintain a professional demeanor, sir, unclouded
by emotion, your fear of--

WARREN intensifies his physical
exploration of BROWN, starting to take
off BROWN'S clothes as well as his own.

BROWN

Mr. Warren--!

WARREN

You're the one who wanted to strip down to the naked truth.

BROWN

That isn't what I meant--!

WARREN

Your words, Mr. Brown!

BROWN

As I pass each test, you concoct another more absurd!

WARREN

Do I detect uncertainty, apprehension, dread?

BROWN

Real emotions--yes!

WARREN

Roused by my performance, yet here unmoved I stand.

(Pause.)

Who are you, Mr. Brown? What is it you want?

BROWN

Very well, Mr. Warren, I will proceed. But we must meld your
external technique with my inner method.

WARREN

How, Mr. Brown? They are the opposite.

BROWN

Blend them into a new, unified style.

WARREN

Improve improvisation? Impossible!

BROWN

A simple kiss might break down resistance.

WARREN

Oh, no.

BROWN

It's a gesture, but intimate, face to face, profoundly and uniquely human--

WARREN

No kissing, Mr. Brown! That's the one thing that will distinguish us from them.

BROWN

Distinguish you from Herbert Lowe?

BROWN begins to respond physically to WARREN, gradually taking the lead in the seduction. More clothes come off.

WARREN

Exactly! I created the kissing trait for him to show my range, how far I could go from myself--

BROWN

You both knew kissing reveals the soul. Herbert Lowe came from within you.

WARREN

Nonsense--he was but a flamboyant--gesture.

BROWN

He was unashamed and unafraid. He would have kissed me, but you stopped him with your slip. He is the best of you.

WARREN

Flattery or insult, Mr. Brown?

BROWN

I saw your soul, Herbert--

WARREN

I'm not he!

BROWN

I saw your heart when you shed a tear for John Lamb.

WARREN

He was most...sympathetic.

BROWN

Destroying him destroyed you.

WARREN

He deserved--

BROWN

And you'd bring him back if you could.

WARREN

He's dead--I can't--

BROWN

The line between actor and role blurs and turns hazardous. Have we become our parts? Are we emotionally involved?

WARREN

(Recovering.)

Certainly not!

BROWN

Have we been acting too long?

WARREN

We're keeping the performance fresh by introducing new elements.

BROWN

Improvising.

WARREN starts pushing BROWN'S face toward his crotch. They are by now both naked.

WARREN

Sharpening the edge.

BROWN

We've played so many roles.

WARREN

And so admirably.

BROWN

With such commitment.

WARREN

Admirable commitment, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

But it's still just an audition, isn't it?

WARREN

Life is an audition, Mr. Brown.

BROWN

And we'll do anything to get the part?

WARREN

You know how casting works.

BROWN

I'm learning.

Unseen by WARREN, BROWN takes out the black marking pen.

WARREN

A quick study.

BROWN

Indeed I am.

BROWN quickly marks an X on WARREN'S penis.

WARREN

You--fucker!

BROWN

(Shrugs.)

Improvisation.

WARREN

This--you--went too far.

BROWN

To the end.

WARREN

You think it's funny? That ink's indelible.

BROWN

Evidence.

WARREN

Sharp. You got the part.

BROWN

Which part?

WARREN

The confidence man.

BROWN

I want more than that, Mr. [real name of the actor playing WARREN].

WARREN

That's my--

BROWN

Real name, yeah. And please call me [real name of the actor playing BROWN].

WARREN

What the hell are you doing?

I want--

BROWN

What?

WARREN

What everyone wants. What Herbert Lowe wants.

BROWN

Love?

WARREN

No. But this masquerade--this lie has to end, this--

BROWN
(Laughing.)

Acting?

WARREN

I want the truth.

BROWN

The truth?

WARREN

I want a kiss.

BROWN

A kiss?

WARREN

From [real name of actor playing WARREN].

BROWN

If I give you a kiss--in front of all these people who know our real names--

WARREN

We'd no longer be acting.

BROWN

It would be pornography!

WARREN

Unashamed. Naked. Truth.

BROWN

Sure that's what you want?

WARREN

Scared?

BROWN

(WARREN hesitates)

If we knew everything in advance, it wouldn't be improvisation, would it?

WARREN

You win, Mr. [real name of actor playing BROWN].

BROWN

No, Mr. [real name of actor playing WARREN], you do.

After a moment, WARREN nods. They kiss. It's passionate and unfeigned, raw. Lights fade.

END OF PLAY