

Soliciting

Cast: Rupert
Patricia
Gay Man 1 & 2
Lesbian

[A park at lunchtime. Two benches. One occupied by GAY MAN 1. RUPERT sitting on the other. PATRICIA sits on the far end of RUPERT's bench. They try to keep their distance. GAY MAN 2 enters, sees the heterosexual bench. Shock, scandal, goes to GAY MAN 1 and joins him on the bench.]

GAY MAN 2: Did you see that?

GAY MAN 1: What?

GAY MAN 2: Those two, there. Man and woman. Would you credit it?

GAY MAN 1: So what, two singles. Maybe nothing. Just having lunch. Coincidence.

GAY MAN 2: On the same bench? Unbelievable. They have no shame.

GAY MAN 1: They're not doing anything.

GAY MAN 2: He may look like a normal man, but I'm telling you...

GAY MAN 1: Telling me what?

GAY MAN 2: You can see all the signs. Little giveaways. Paisley socks... Corduroys. A black leather briefcase, for heaven's sake. Has he no shame? These people are everywhere.

PATRICIA: I've seen you coming here before. You come out of the Lloyd's building. Do you work at Lloyd's?

RUPERT: Yes. In Actuarial. That's seventh floor. Well, seventh and eighth.

PATRICIA: Big department. I'm in procurement.

RUPERT: Tenth.

PATRICIA: Oh, you know it.

GAY MAN 2: You see? They're talking about work. Thirty seconds and not a single mention of Ru Paul's Drag Race.

PATRICIA: I know I shouldn't say this but – *[whisper]* Do you come here often?

RUPERT: Don't say that. People will start to think –

PATRICIA: Think what?

RUPERT: You know... That you're... that we're... you know...

GAY MAN 2: Did you hear that? And in broad daylight? Flaunting it. It's disgusting.

GAY MAN 1: I don't see it's any of our business really. I feel rather sorry for them. Where are they going to meet otherwise? Some sordid bar or other?

GAY MAN 2: It's the thin end of the wedge, Gary. Give them an inch and they'll take a mortgage.

[RUPERT opens his little lunch box.]

GAY MAN 2: You see. It's importuning. It's the pick-up. They have rituals, you know. So they can know each other. A kind of code.

[RUPERT offers half a sandwich to PATRICIA, in a paper napkin.]

RUPERT: They're cheese and beetroot. My mother made them.

PATRICIA: I love cheese and beetroot.

GAY MAN 2: You see? Even their sandwich filling is straight.

GAY MAN 1: How come you know so much about it?

GAY MAN 2: I saw a magazine once. At Gordon's. Hidden under his copy of *Butch Boys with Big'Uns*.

GAY MAN 1: A magazine?

GAY MAN 2: Family Circle.

GAY MAN 1: He isn't...!

GAY MAN 2: *[Whispers]* Bisexual...

GAY MAN 1: Not Gordon...

GAY MAN 2: I'm sure it's only a phase. He'll grow out of it. After all, he's only forty-three.

GAY MAN 1: Did you confront him?

GAY MAN 2: Of course I did. He said he wanted to research a new garden shed. But I couldn't help noticing he served a Hot Pot for dinner that night ...

[GAY MAN 1 makes a face.]

GAY MAN 2: At least it's delivered in a plain brown wrapper, so none of the neighbours know.

GAY MAN 1: Look, I think he's about to proposition her.

RUPERT: Another piece of sandwich?

PATRICIA: No, thanks. I'm on a diet.

GAY MAN 2: The women are always on a diet. The men are flabby as shit. The only exercise they get is lifting a pint. They never go down to the gym.

GAY MAN 1: And their idea of a decent deodoriser is *Lynx!!!*

GAY MAN 2: Lynx! That's napalm for the armpits.

[They both barf]

PATRICIA: I will just have a couple of those grapes, though, if I may...

RUPERT: Of course. *[He breaks them off. Pops one into PATRICIA's mouth.]*

GAY MAN 1: Will you look at that?

GAY MAN 2: What did I tell you? Shameless! Brazen!

GAY MAN 1: You're convincing me... *[Whispers]* We've had a couple moved in to a flat on the floor below.

GAY MAN 2: How can breeders afford it? They can't pay the rents here and have children as well.

GAY MAN 1: Prices have come down a lot since Covid. Shoreditch is not what it was. I mean, we put in all the hard work, converted the lofts and the warehouses, opened up all the antique shops and specialist delis, restored the old slums, doubled the property values – and here they are undoing all our good work.

GAY MAN 2: I hear them in the lift sometimes. They've never even heard of Maria Callas. All they can talk about is the quality of local schools.

GAY MAN 1: I don't understand it. They have a perfectly good straight ghetto in Ealing and Acton. Why do they have to come here?

PATRICIA: My name is Patricia.

RUPERT: Hi. Rupert.

[Patricia drops her napkin and Rupert picks it up and hands it to her.]

GAY MAN 1: That is too much. Let's just go. It's making me sick just to watch it. It's put me right off my roast rump ciabatta with blueberries and juniper.

GAY MAN 2: Nigella?

GAY MAN 1: Nigel. But it would stick in my throat, after that.

GAY MAN 2: Come on then.

[They exit, shooting RUPERT and PATRICIA dirty looks.]

GAY MAN 2: *[Loudly as they pass]* Some people should learn to be discreet and keep it in their pants. *[He ogles RUPERT, who is oblivious]* What a waste!

RUPERT: Time to get back to work.

PATRICIA: Can't you stay, just five minutes more? You know how hard it is for people like us to meet.

RUPERT: You're telling me. I'm having to be particularly careful at work. I think my manager suspects something. He tried to invite me out for a drink, and I'm afraid I didn't have a very convincing excuse to say no. Since then he's been watching me like a hawk.

PATRICIA: Poor you.

[A lesbian walks on stage, eyeing Rupert and Patricia and looking menacing.]

RUPERT: I think we'd better go. I've heard this park can be dangerous. Especially at lunchtime.

PATRICIA: We have just as much right to be here as they do.

RUPERT: You are so naïve. They can run us in at any time on any trumped up charge. Just for looking. If it happens again, I'll lose my job.

PATRICIA: I've never had that.

RUPERT: Of course not. Everyone assumes all women are queer.

LESBIAN: Hoi! Bleeding hets!

PATRICIA: Ignore them, Rupert. Sticks and stones...

LESBIAN: Hey. Het! I'm talking to you. Think you're a big man? Think you're going to stick it in, do ya!

[She does a thrust to imitate straight intercourse. RUPERT runs off, PATRICIA runs after him.]

PATRICIA: Rupert! Rupert, don't leave me here!

LESBIAN: Want to have a little yodelling in the canyon? Hey, hettie girl, come here. Want to get a taste of the real thing? After fish you'll never go back to meat. Trouble is, you've never met the right girl...

PATRICIA: Aagh!

[The LESBIAN roars with laughter. BLACKOUT.]