

EXTRACT

# ALMOST FACE TO FACE

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Stephen House

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# **Almost Face to Face**

**By Stephen House**

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**An Australian guy - about 55**

**A single black chair - in an empty black box**

**Music / Sound - as suggested**

**Lighting - is the main design component**

## Scene 1

MUSIC (EDGY/ CONTEMPORARY / RELEVANT)

LIGHTS FADE UP SLOWLY

HE IS SITTING ON A SEAT, ON A PLANE, EYES CLOSED LISTENING TO LOUD MUSIC

HE LISTENS THROUGH SMALL EARPHONES

HE SCRIBBLES SOMETHING IN HIS NOTE BOOK – FROM HIS BACK POCKET

HE TAKES OUT EAR PIECE (MUSIC SNAPS OUT) AND PUTS IN HIS POCKET

PUTS HIS NOTEBOOK AWAY AND LOOKS AROUND

The plane is actually quite empty... for a plane. It is small and old and empty; and I'm not too sure if that's a good sign for this new adventure, or not.

FLIGHT SOUNDS / HE STANDS

And lately I've been wondering about signs to certain things, and the emptiness... on this plane, no matter way I look at it, is not such a good sign at all. Yes, I'm going to sit down... Cheers.

And in this emptiness the voices around me seem loud and invasive; they seem to echo; but I have to remind myself that maybe they aren't; that like my sensitivity to certain signs, it's probably just another result of being sober again... after so long of being not. The looks from the ten people on this plane seem invasive too; of how I'm feeling in this very moment. Am I doing something that causes them to look? Am I? Yes, mm? Sorry... I'm Ok... I will sit down... right now... Cheers.

HE SITS

My head is whirring and my stomach is churning and I'm hoping that I won't vomit, but just in case I do, I take the brown bag from the rack in front of me, and rest it very nicely on my knee.

HE NOTICES HER

Mm? Sorry? Are you Ok sir? She asks me that. Too close for comfort; almost face to face. Yes, I'm fine... I think. I ate a bit much before I got on here. It's quite old, isn't it? This plane, I mean. She's staring; I stare back; and then I do a serious self-check as I do now, every time things get weird; a check on what's normal. Romano said that I looked pretty normal again... when he dropped me at the airport in Amsterdam, just before, in the car that he'd stolen in Paris. And after all the rest that we'd

had in the room of the rat, in Paris; after the big bender that I was on with him for God knows how long; after finally getting off the drink together... in the rat's room, I do know that I must be looking relatively normal again. Romano's Ok actually, though no longer my current admirer. In fact, right up to getting on this thing he still thought that he was. But I know better... I should. I've got twenty five years on that crazy kid... almost a lifetime of working out who is, and who isn't... a real admirer. And it was only the drink that led me into all that shit with him; only the drink that ever pushes me into places so unreal that they actually became the real; only ever the fucking drink that spins me round and round... and never lets me go. But I've got to give that black eyed boy the credit that he deserves for contributing hugely to me getting sober again... and to where I am now. Thanks Romano. Much appreciated man.

A FLIGHT ANNOUNCEMENT / TURBULENCE - FASTEN SEATBELTS ETC

The woman sitting across the aisle from me, who's been staring at me, leans over to me and says that I look familiar. Ok. Self-check; seriously. No... I don't think so. And she says, yes... so familiar. Ok. And then there's a big pause, another stare, and she pipes up and asks me - if I'm an Australian... an actor... from something that she and her sister saw... in Dublin Fringe Festival last year - at Andrews Lane Studio. We really loved it! Thank you; yes, it was me. And then she says a bit more, and a bit more after that. And in the air-born silence she waits for my response...anything... but here and now I can't manage it... nothing. I can only avoid her looking in to my ongoing oddness - as she waits for my words and wit. I'm about to muster up the energy to trumpet on a bit about myself... but then flat and blank, and with my nerves jumping all over the shop, I'm too worn out to speak; so I just glance back, sort of smile and then turn away; and she slides back into her space and murmurs something softly to man next to her; and he looks, and looks. Ok! And I just gaze back out the window into the clouds and allow the strange surrounding blabber to become only a humming blur, like the old engine in this old plane. I am smack bang in the thick of it. What was I thinking; what am I doing. Fuck. Here we go!

HE PUT BACK THE EAR PIECE / SAME MUSIC - LOUD AGAIN

LIGHTS CHANGE / MUSIC BLURS INTO LOUD SOUNDS OF A PLANE LANDING

BLENDS INTO AIRPORT SOUNDS / DISTORTS AND SLOWLY FADES INTO SCENE 2

## Scene 2

HE STANDS / MOVING INTO A CUSTOMS QUEUE

I'm sweating and my heart beats with a deep, hard fear as I move into the stupid line for foreigners.

IRISH AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENT

The customs guy asks me why I've come back to Ireland again as he stares at my passport. And I spout out in fragile, semi-rehearsed words...that - I love Ireland... and I'm a writer and an actor, and I have a strong connection with the theatre here. Do you know Andrews Lane Studio? And I'm heading back to a beautiful blue lake, where I lived once... in an arts center... on an arts residency... Yes, I was writing a play, near a village called, Newbliss... not too far from the lake. And he says how he once knew a man from Belfast, who wrote a play for the BBC; and he goes on for a while about another man who was a repertory actor and who bred pigs. Pigs hey? Wow! Well there's good money in pigs. In a place that could've even been Newbliss! Small world, isn't it? And then there's a big pause as he flicks through my passport. Self-check; stay cool. Be normal. There's a policeman not too far from us, with a fucking dog. There were no dogs here before! There are two customs guys only meters away... looking me over as I melt and tremble. And then, like a sudden gift from God... he stamps my passport with a beautiful thud, and wishes me well with my writing and theatre and trip to the lake. Thank-you sir; thank you very much! And I walk.

HE MOVES OFF

And as I exit and feel the Irish air, I try to sense if the dogs and the law of this funny land are coming up behind me; but they're not. I am through... into Dublin. I'm clear and calm and so alive, again. I am free!

MUSIC BUILDS, BLURS AND THEN BECOMES MORE TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC /

LIGHTS FADE OUT

### Scene 3

LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE UP / IRISH MUSIC PLAYS AND SLOWLY FADES AS HE SPEAKS

Her name is Miss Pig, but no one calls her that... to her face. Her real name is Miss Elly May O'Grady. Everyone calls her Miss Elly, to her face, and Miss Pig, behind her back; but she kind of knows this, as it's her name out there on the street, and like me, but in her own way from up here in her small room, Miss Pig knows the street very well indeed. I accidentally call her Miss Pig for the first time today. You want another cup of coffee, Miss Pig? Whoops! And on her mattress on the floor she rolls over from her massive back, on to her massive side, sighs out a big breath and stares at the picture pasted wall. I'm sorry. I'll try not to call you that ever again; I promise. I know how it hurts your feelings; and as I say that she looks at me with her smile; and Miss Pig has a dam nice smile and a top notch sense of humor too. You have a beautiful smile Miss Elly May, I say with a plum in my mouth, and then bow... and she erupts into her little girl laugh which is quite beautiful too. I am not that removed from any form of empathy. She of course knows this now, and plays it like a fiddle.

IRISH FIDDLE MUSIC / THEN SLOWLY FADES AS HE SPEAKS AND MOVES FORWARD

Miss Pig is big... very big... In fact I think she's probably the biggest woman I've ever seen in my life, but one of the prettiest too; rosy cheeks and large, clear, green, sparkling eyes. She pulls herself up with the help of the rope that hangs from the ceiling. It's attached to a very strong beam in the roof (I asked her about it yesterday); then she rolls off of the mattress, gathers her layered finery around herself, fiddles with her long strings of pearls, and shuffles her bulk to the window. I watch her as she stands at the small window of her small room looking down to the big street and river below, and then I look at the door and then back to her again. She knows that I'm doing this. Miss Pig doesn't miss a trick; and she turns back to me, looks me in the eye with just the slightest of smile and says, yes, I can fit through the bloody door and down the bloody stairs, glares... then looks back down to the street. Ok! But I'm not so sure if I believe her about the door and stairs, for in the days that I've been sharing her tiny room, I've yet to see her leave.

THE SOUND OF WHISTLE

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