

SIDE 1

James
Gus

GUS. *(Into phone)* I've seen this one somewhere, too.
(To James) The guest bathroom is across the hall.

JAMES. I'm taking a phone call. I couldn't hear a thing in that mob down there.

GUS. Someone needs this, Mr. Piper, I gotta go. *(He hangs up)*

JAMES. That's all right, take your time.

GUS. It's all yours, sir.

JAMES. Thank you. *(Into phone)* Hello? Hello?

GUS. Push the button.

JAMES. The button, of course! I'd almost forgotten how these things work. I dropped my cell phone getting out of the limo and it went completely dead on me. I haven't felt this cut off since I was in rehab. That was a joke.

GUS. Yes, sir. Were you in the play tonight?

JAMES. I don't think so. That was another joke. No, I'm just a guest.

GUS. Yes, sir.

JAMES. *(Into phone)* Hello! This is Jimmy Wicker again, Kylie ... Terrible weather, just terrible. We're having a blizzard. To think I used to put up with this! ... How long has she been on with him? Yes, I'll hold. *(To Gus)* California. They're all dying to know how the play went tonight.

GUS. Everyone is. Mrs. Budder is calling this the party of the year for the play of the season.

JAMES. That's our Julia.

GUS. What did you think?

JAMES. Wonderful, just wonderful.

GUS. Too bad you're not a critic.

JAMES. Tonight everyone's a critic. You haven't seen the play?

GUS. I'm temporary help. This is a one-night-stand for me.

JAMES. Tonight is a one-night-stand for a lot of people. That was my last joke.

GUS. That's okay, sir, one of these days I'll get one. Hi, I'm Gus.

JAMES. James Wicker, but everyone calls me Jimmy. *(Into phone)* Hello! Hello! *(To Gus)* False alarm. Are you in the business, Gus?

GUS. No, sir, I'm an actor.

JAMES. I didn't mean to pry.

GUS. I'm an interdisciplinary theatre artist.

JAMES. So you're an unemployed actor.

GUS. I'm an actor-slash-singer-slash-dancer-slash-comedian-slash-performance-artist-slash-mime. I have a black belt in karate and can operate heavy farm equipment. Other skills, on request. Favorite role to date: Konstantin in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*.

JAMES. I'm still with the heavy farm equipment.

GUS. Tractors, threshers, reapers, sowers...!

JAMES. That must come in handy.

GUS. Not so far.

SIDE 2

James
Virginia

VIRGINIA. Who are you?

JAMES. I'm James Wicker.

VIRGINIA. James Wicker.

JAMES. We did a film together.

VIRGINIA. When?

JAMES. *Elegy for Myself*

VIRGINIA. Were you in that?

JAMES. I was your psychotherapist.

VIRGINIA. They had one on the set for me?

JAMES. I was in the movie.

VIRGINIA. James Wicker! Of course! We had to do all those re-takes because I was coming off Percocet.

JAMES. You kept falling asleep on my couch.

VIRGINIA. Hello, hello, how the hell are you? I love your work. I love it, I love it, I love it.

JAMES. Back at you.

VIRGINIA. You son of a bitch! When they sent me Peter's play, they told me you were doing Jack's part. You were one of the reasons I signed.

JAMES. There was some talk about it, they wanted me desperately, actually, but with my series...

VIRGINIA. You've got a series?

JAMES. Nine years now. *Out on a Limb*.

VIRGINIA. I do a lot of self-destructive things but I draw the line at television.

JAMES. I just take the money and run.

VIRGINIA. But are you happy?

JAMES. I was going to ask you the same question.

VIRGINIA. I am fan-freaking-tastic. Living in L.A. so long, you forget what being on a real stage is like.

There's nothing like it. No place to run, no place to hide, no retakes. Just you in a pool of light and Him.

JAMES. Him?

VIRGINIA. God.

JAMES. Oh, that him.

VIRGINIA. The thing about theatre is this: It's actually happening at the very moment it is.

JAMES. You just figured that out?

VIRGINIA. It blew my mind. I was in a play tonight. My performance didn't walk out the door with the dailies. It was there, not for all time, but just for the moment. You had to be there to see it. Talk about existential. Bite me, Jean-Paul Sartre, bite me. I bet you miss all this.

JAMES. Not really. I'm too old, too rich, and too famous. Eight shows a week is a lot of work.

VIRGINIA. I'm only doing six. I don't even get the concept of a matinee. My agents said I was crazy to do a play.

JAMES. A lot of people would agree. Wild horses couldn't get me up there again.

VIRGINIA. Well, my loins are girded. Come on, I'll buy you a drink.

SIDE 3

Peter

PETER. The lights flicked on and off. Everyone went in for the second act. That's when I began to take it all in. I was on Broadway. I was part of something bigger than myself, I was where I'd dreamed of being all my life. I started walking around the theatre district. So many memories of shows, actors, great productions. As of tonight, I was now a part of them. I saw that plaque to Eugene O'Neill, October 16, 1888 - November 27, 1953. "America's greatest playwright was born on this site then called Barrett House. Presented by Circle in the Square" - and I knew there would never be such a plaque for any American playwright again, no matter how great a writer he was, unless we did something about it. We've let Broadway stop mattering and handed it over to the Brits and the movie-to-musical franchises lock, stock, and barrel. It's our fault, not theirs. Nature abhors a vacuum and they rushed right in. We all got so greedy. The theatre became a business to make a million when it should be a place to talk to one another in a mutual dialogue between stage and audience about what it means to be alive in this country in the first decades of the New Century. I walked to Shubert Alley, what's left of it, and stood looking at the three-sheets. When a British revival of *Grease* and the Kardashians in *Three Sisters* are the best we can offer, it's time to weep. With tears in my eyes I looked at the Marriott. They tore down three theatres to put up a hotel. Who let this happen? There's no more where they came from. Tear down a theatre and it's forever. You don't get a *Salesman* or an *Oklahoma!* when you tear down a theatre, you get a Marriott. When I finally turned back up 47th Street, our play was over and everyone was gone, but our marquee was still lit. *The Golden Egg*, a new play by Peter Austin. I looked at it and thought of Williams and O'Neill and Miller and Albee and I thought, we can turn back the tide. We can make a change. But this time it's entirely up to us. And then someone turned the lights off and we went dark. End of speech. Sorry, I somehow got back up on it again.

SIDE 4

Peter
Julia
James

JULIA. Next play I promise you that turntable.

PETER. Next play I'm going to want two turntables.

JULIA. Now can I tell you something and you'll promise not to laugh? One of the reasons I produced your play - other than it's brilliant and it gave me goosebumps - is that it doesn't have any four-letter words in it.

PETER. I think I got all my four-letter words out of my system in my first play.

JAMES. The things he had me saying, Julia!

JULIA. I'm sorry, but I think the theatre should be a place of elegance. Elegant people in elegant clothes in elegant settings speaking elegant language.

JAMES. So much for David Mamet.

JULIA. The last play I saw every other word was the "f" word or the "k" word. I was appalled.

JAMES. The "k" word? What's the "k" word?

JULIA. You know: the "k" word.

PETER. Any word on the reviews?

JULIA. Just New York One and their "good solid theatre."

JAMES. Kangaroo? Kumquat?

JULIA. Buzz says he'll have the Times a good half-hour before they post it online. *(They are both in very good spirits)*

JAMES. Ketchup? Kaleidoscope?

PETER. What about the chat rooms?

JULIA. FiddlerFanatic liked the first act.

JAMES. Kennebunkport? Knick-knack? This is driving me crazy, Julia. Is there a dictionary in here? *(She whispers in his ear)* What? The "k" word is what? Say it again! I still can't - Oh, that's spelled with "C", dear.

JULIA. I'm going to powder my nose before we all go down there.

JAMES. You look gorgeous.

JULIA. I won't be a moment. Talk amongst yourselves. *(She goes into the bathroom)*

SIDE 5

Ira
Virginia
Peter
Julia
James (1 line)

JAMES. What happened to you down there?

IRA. The plate of lasagna was Patti LuPone, the split lip was the president of the Dramatists Guild.

VIRGINIA. He took a swing at you?

IRA. She took several swings at me. The next thing I knew I was on the floor and Alec Baldwin was kicking me. *(Julia comes out of the bathroom)*

JULIA. I don't understand. He's never turned on anyone before tonight.

VIRGINIA. He smells blood like everyone else.

JULIA. I hope this won't affect your review of Peter's play.

IRA. Critics can't afford to hold petty grudges. Besides, waiting for Ben Brantley and the New York Times is what tonight is all about. Who cares what a non-entity like me thinks?

JULIA. You're not a non-entity and you're very well thought of.

VIRGINIA. You're also the most vicious critic in New York.

IRA. Throw that in my face.

VIRGINIA. "She reminds me of nothing so much as a female impersonator in search of a female to impersonate."

JULIA. What a dreadful thing to say about anyone, even a female impersonator.

IRA. I said that about the Baby June in the Cape May Playhouse production of *Gypsy* years ago. It's curious you should remember it.

VIRGINIA. I was the Baby June in the Cape May Playhouse production of *Gypsy*.

IRA. You changed your name?

VIRGINIA. After your review, I changed my face. Cosmetic surgery for a fourteen-year-old.

PETER. The stakes are so high for a new American play on Broadway, I think we're all a little over the top tonight. Hi, I'm Peter Austin.

IRA. I haven't written my review yet. *(Peter puts his hand out and shakes hands with Ira)*

PETER. Just as I'm entitled to writing my plays, you're entitled to your opinion of them.

IRA. *(As they shake hands)* Fair enough.

PETER. Fortunately for me, my parents didn't take your advice and smother me in my crib.

IRA. I'm very glad they didn't. I love the theatre; it's what people are doing to it I can't stand.

PETER. It's not on purpose, Mr. Drew.

IRA. It's Ira, please.

JULIA. I'm so glad to see you two getting along.

IRA. It's the funniest thing, I like you personally.

JAMES. We all do.

IRA. It's just your work I can't stand.

SIDE 6

Frank (British)
Julia
James
Peter (1 line)

FRANK. If one more person calls me I'm a genius, I'll punch them, Julia!

JULIA. But you are a genius, darling, that's why we hired you.

FRANK. You hired me because I always get good reviews.

JAMES. That's a pretty good reason.

FRANK. I don't know what I'm doing but you wait and see: I'll win a Tony for this.

JULIA. I certainly hope so.

FRANK. I've had fourteen hits in a row in London, I've won twelve Olivier and four Evening Standard awards. I want a flop. I need a flop. Somebody, tell me: When is it my turn to fail? I can't go on like this - the critics' darling.

JULIA. Try to hold on just one more night.

FRANK. I am in despair, people. The emperor isn't wearing any clothes! I'm a fake. My work is a fake. I make this shit up as I go along. I don't know what I'm doing half the time and when I do, it terrifies me it's so bad. I'm no good. You've got to believe me, I'm no good.

JAMES. I believe you. Can we go down now, Julia?

JULIA. We can't leave him like this.

FRANK. The only flops I've ever had were at drama school. Nobody liked my production of anything. My space-age *Oedipus Rex*. My spoken *La Boheme*. My gay *Waiting for Godot*. But what got me expelled was my *Titus Andronicus*. I did the whole thing in mime. No dialogue. No poetry. No Shakespeare.

VIRGINIA. What did it have?

FRANK. Blood bags. Every time somebody walked on stage: splat! They got hit with a big blood bag. God, it was gross.

VIRGINIA. It sounds fantastic.

FRANK. It was terrible. But at least everyone said it was terrible. I'm pulling the same stunts in New York and everybody says it's brilliant.

VIRGINIA. It is brilliant.

FRANK. I hate it! God I miss RADA.

JULIA. *(Always helpful)* The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

JAMES. I'm sure RADA misses you. Does anybody remember what food tastes like? Julia, I'll die if I don't eat something.

FRANK. *(Emptying his pockets)* I don't want these things. Please don't leave them around.

JULIA. Sir Frank, that's my sterling silver pepper shaker. My priceless bud vase. Little Elliot's bronzed baby shoes! *(Everyone is amazed at the size and diversity of Frank's haul)*

JAMES. You don't happen to have a sandwich in there, do you?

JULIA. *(Reading an engraving)* "To Mildred Sturgeon from Mandy Patinkin." Who's Mildred Sturgeon?

FRANK. My therapist. She's supposed to be helping me! You know what she tells me? "Put it back, Frank."

JULIA. She's right! Put it back, Frank.

FRANK. Three hundred dollars an hour and that's all I get? "Put it back, Frank!" I want to know why I pick it up in the first place.

VIRGINIA. You shouldn't be alone tonight, baby.

PETER. None of us should. We'll order up, James. Here we go, people! Everybody, shush! *(Peter quickly turns up the sound on the muted television)*

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