

~~Mr. Piper, this could be the break I needed. I got the talent, sir. All I need is the opportunity to show it. (James Wicker comes into the room, speaking to someone on the stairs in the hallway just outside. The sounds of the party below swell as the door opens.)~~

~~JAMES. Wasn't it wonderful? Yes! I'll be right down. Thank you! (He closes the door behind him. Party sounds fade.)~~

~~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.~~

START 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.

JAMES. I was thinking ahead: *The Cherry Orchard*.

GUS. Once you've done Chekhov, you don't want to do anything else.

JAMES. That's what Madonna said. I've never done any Chekhov myself.

GUS. Are you an actor?

JAMES. I am.

GUS. Are you Equity?

JAMES. Equity, SAG-AFTRA, AGVA. ASPCA.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I'm on a series, *Out on a Limb*.

GUS. Wow. A television series?

JAMES. ABC. Wednesday at nine.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We just wrapped our ninth season.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I play a man who has a way with small children and animals. It takes place on a farm for orphans. It's funny and touching. I'm very proud of it.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. And here I am, five Best Actor Emmy Award nominations later, eagerly awaiting the reception of my best friend's play.

GUS. You're Mr. Austin's best friend?

JAMES. We were like Romulus and Remus: hungry young theatre wannabes suckling at the fecund breast of the not-for-profits — Playwrights Horizons, Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage, the Public. Those were the days, Gus. I went West, young man, but we've stayed best friends.

GUS. Wow. That's a beautiful story. I love playwrights.

JAMES. Wait till you work with one. *(Into phone.)* Yes, I'm still here, Kylie! Where else would I be? *(To Gus.)* My agent calls and puts me on hold. She's on with Ryan Seacrest.

GUS. Ryan Seacrest, wow!

JAMES. He's one of my best friends.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We're in the same Pilates class.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. We both dated Ellen DeGeneres.

GUS. Wow.

JAMES. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you stop saying "Wow." END

~~*(Into phone.)* Hello? Hello! *(To Gus.)* She's just finishing up. Is this is your first big Broadway opening?~~

~~GUS. My first anything. I just got here. There I was, wandering around Times Square, looking pretty green with my suitcase, when a total stranger approached me: a producer-slash-agent-slash-photographer. He could have approached anyone but he approached me.~~

~~JAMES. Wow. That's a real New York story.~~

~~GUS. He got me this job tonight and he's going to take some pictures of me when I get back.~~

~~JAMES. When you get back?~~

~~GUS. I'm staying with him. He keeps a spare room for people like me. Maybe you know him, Peter Piper?~~

~~JAMES. No, but I know the type. Mr. Piper sounds too good to be true, or maybe in your case: too true to be good. This town's going to eat you alive. *(Into phone.)* Hello? There you are, Suzi, finally! ... I know, Ryan is very needy. Give him my love. "How did the play go tonight?" Wonderful, just wonderful. *(He holds his empty glass up to Gus.)* I'm drinking bourbon, three fingers, neat. Oh, what the hell: Bring a bottle, save yourself a trip.~~

~~GUS. Right away, sir. *(Torch, the Budders' dog, is heard rampaging in the bathroom. It is a terrible sound to hear.)*~~

~~JAMES. What in God's name is that?~~

~~GUS. The dog.~~

~~JAMES. What dog?~~

~~GUS. Mrs. Budder's dog, Torch. He got out and bit that woman who's on TV all the time.~~

~~JAMES. Not Oprah?~~

~~GUS. No, the other one.~~

~~JAMES. Torch bit Kelly Ripa?~~