

START IRA. Gordon Small, of course. Wonderful actor. I know, Wendy Wasserstein's *Uncommon Women*?

JAMES. That's an all-female cast.

IRA. You're right but you never know these days! (*No one laughs at his own jokes more than Ira and no one has a more annoying laugh.*) I was having some fun with you. I know who you are. (*Quoting his own review.*) "James Wacker is a consummate actor. His guilt-ridden veterinarian is a master class of thespianism." I never forget what I write about an actor.

JAMES. Wicker.

IRA. Hmm?

JAMES. James Wicker.

IRA. I know that.

JAMES. You said "Wacker."

IRA. No! (*Starting to laugh.*) Wacker! (*It's growing.*) That's terrible. Wacker! (*He makes an appropriate gesture.*) You could have a lot of fun with that one. (*It's out of control already.*) Wacker! You say Wicker and I say Wacker. Wicker, Wacker, let's call the whole thing off!

JAMES. And you are?

IRA. I'm sorry. Ira Drew.

JAMES. *The Ira Drew?*

IRA. There's another? (*More laughter from Ira. When it subsides, James offers the bowl of Torch's Yummies to Ira.*) You know what they say about actors and free food? Critics are worse. (*He takes one.*)

JAMES. Wasn't the play tonight wonderful?

IRA. You can stop right now, Mr. Wicker. I'm a critic of the old school. I don't know what I'm going to write about a play until I sit down to write it. I can't be had for one of Mrs. Budder's pastry puffs, as tasty as they may be. I'm still processing what I saw this evening and I have to keep an open mind. They put me behind Chris Christie. I could hardly see. I admit I have an agenda. There's too many revivals and not enough Brecht. Celebrity wattage does not impress. A play should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Plots are important, too, along with interesting characters. Attractive actors with trained voices are always welcome. In the right context, full-frontal nudity has its place. I'd love to see Cate Blanchett starkers. That's about it.

JAMES. It was a simple question.

IRA. Thanks to the anti-Christ, Bill Gates, I'll soon be a critic without a place to publish. Serious theatre criticism has become an endangered species. People read us to find out what they thought

of a play. Now they have opinions of their own and put them on the internet. What we are witnessing is the collapse of Western civilization.

JAMES. I certainly hope not.

IRA. I call them as I see them. The League of Producers barred me from their press list after my review of the revival of the revival of the revival of *Les Miz*. I was ousted from the Critics' Circle — they said I was "too vicious," even for that den of sadists and invert.

JAMES. You were always very good to me.

IRA. You were wonderful. There was no actor of your generation with more promise. Whatever happened to you?

JAMES. A little invention called television.

IRA. Ah, well, that would explain it. **END**

JULIA. *(Still on phone.)* I love you, too. Stop, you're making me blush ... I said stop, you're making me blush!

JAMES. Her husband. He invented something. Richer than God.

JULIA. *(Now the house phone is buzzing her.)* They're calling me from downstairs, El. *(She hangs up.)* That man! *(It's clear she adores him.)*

JAMES. Julia, this is Ira Drew.

JULIA. Hello.

JAMES. Ira Drew, The Eviscerator!

JULIA. That Ira Drew! *(Into the house phone.)* No, I didn't invite *The Book of Mormon*. *(She hangs up.)* I'm sorry, Mr. Drew.

IRA. I'll come right to the point.

JAMES. Excuse me, Julia, I'll be downstairs.

IRA. No, stay, this concerns you, too, Mr. Wicker. Mrs. Budder has been sent a new play to consider, a certain *Bluestocking*.

JULIA. It came this morning.

JAMES. I was just leafing through it.

IRA. *Bluestocking* is the best American play I've come across in a long time. It has humor, depth, wit, wisdom, love, valor, compassion, one set and a cast of two. The chief theatre critic for the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley, told me on the QT that he loves it.

JULIA. It sounds like a producer's dream, Mr. Drew.

IRA. It is, Mrs. Budder.

JAMES. Next thing you'll be telling us you wrote it.

IRA. Caroline Comstock wrote *Bluestocking*. Caroline is only my protégée, nothing more and nothing less. I'm merely Svengali to her Trilby, Pygmalion to her Galatea.

JULIA. Why are you telling us this?