

START

PETER. What are you doing?

JAMES. *(Already dialing.)* There are other things in the world besides your play.

PETER. Not tonight there are not.

JAMES. *(Into phone.)* Hello, ABC? I want to protest the cancellation of — *(Peter breaks the connection.)*

PETER. You're not going to make my opening about you. I need that phone.

JAMES. You could stuff an elephant with the egos in this room.

PETER. *(As he dials a number.)* Do they know the financial sacrifices I made to write this play? Pilots, movies of the week. A mini-series on the life of Anthony Weiner. *(Into phone.)* Hello. Did I wake you? Good! This is James Wicker.

JAMES. What are you doing?

PETER. I just read your review of the new Peter Austin play and I think you're a pretentious, diva-worshipping, British-ass-kissing twat and no wonder no one likes you. *(He hangs up.)* That's telling him.

JAMES. Who was that?

PETER. Ben Brantley.

JAMES. Ben Brantley?

PETER. You see what this business is driving me to?

JAMES. Ben Brantley?! How did you get his number?

PETER. I have all the critics' numbers.

JAMES. You listen to me. You call him right back and tell him that wasn't me. Dial. Dial!

PETER. Where's your famous sense of humor?

JAMES. Dial! *(To anyone who will listen.)* He called Ben Brantley a pretentious, diva-worshipping, British-ass-kissing twat and no wonder no one likes him and said it was me!

PETER. *(Into phone.)* Hello, Mr. Brantley? That wasn't James Wicker who just woke you up and said you were a pretentious, diva-worshipping, British-ass-kissing twat and no wonder no one likes you.

JAMES. Thank you, Peter, now give me that. *(Takes phone.)* It was me, Harvey Fierstein. *(He hangs up. They are both exhausted from all this.)*

JULIA. ~~Shame on you both.~~

IRA. ~~Mrs. Budder, about *Bluestocking* ...~~

JULIA. ~~Not now, Mr. Drew.~~

JAMES. Grow up, Peter, face facts. Your play is a flop. *(Realizes what he's said.)* I mean — !

PETER. You've been waiting to use the "f" word all evening.
JAMES. That's not true.
PETER. You're frothing at the mouth. There's foam on your lips.
JAMES. This is ridiculous.
PETER. Say it again, say "flop."
JAMES. I don't have to.
PETER. What does that mean?
JAMES. A lot of other people are saying it for me.
PETER. Who? Name one.
JAMES. Ben Brantley for openers.
PETER. "Flop," if that isn't the ugliest word in the English language, I'd like to know what is.
JAMES. How about wishing someone and his fucking series a sudden and violent death?
PETER. It would be the best thing that ever happened to you.
JAMES. I'll be the judge of that.
PETER. You can do theatre again.
JAMES. You've turned into a theatre snob.
PETER. Proud of it! To see your best friend, a great actor, making a fool of himself week after week, year after year...!
JAMES. I knew you never liked my series.
PETER. After the pilot, I never watched it.
JAMES. I wish I could say the same thing about your play.
PETER. You told me you loved it.
JAMES. I turned it down. When do I ever turn anything down? I did *Dancing with the Stars*. Do the math!
PETER. To think I made you a star!
JAMES. Made me a what?
PETER. You were on a streetcar named oblivion before my play.
JAMES. Funny, the first thing people talk about is my performance.
PETER. I think you should revive it and salvage what's left of your reputation.
~~JULIA. Grown men!~~
JAMES. Revive it with someone with a more masculine presence who cuts deeper.
PETER. You know something? Harvey did.
JAMES. Funny how it closed three weeks after I left and Harvey went in.
PETER. It wasn't Harvey's fault, there was a big strike on at the time.

JAMES. UPS, for Christ's sake. Next thing you'll be telling us is this one failed because it opened on Flag Day. You wrote a turkey, Peter. A big fat turkey. Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble. (*He does his flapping wings imitation. Peter remembers it all now: the intermission, Bernadette Peters' laughter.*)

PETER. This is a wrap for our friendship.

JAMES. Total.

PETER. It should have happened five years ago.

JAMES. Ten.

JULIA. I'd rather not have produced this play than to see this. (*The phone rings. Peter darts for it.*)

PETER. Buzz?

JULIA. If I had a best friend, I'd treasure him.

PETER. (*Handing the phone to Julia.*) It's the Shuberts, those vultures. Close this play, Julia — !

JULIA. Who said anything about closing?

PETER. It's crossed your mind, don't deny it.

JULIA. Well of course it has. No one's that stupid. (*Taking phone.*) I dread this. (*Into the phone.*) Hello, Mr. Shubert ... Well if your name isn't Shubert why does everyone call you "the Shuberts"? ... Don't raise your voice to me, Mr. Wankel, I produced this play and I can close it ...

PETER. That's my Julia.

JULIA. That's a little more like it. Listen, darling, whoever you are, we're in an absolute state of shock about the *Times* but I haven't thrown in the towel. I'm a fighter. I'd like to find a way to lower our weekly operating costs. Do we need all those stagehands? Our set doesn't move. We don't even have a curtain to raise and lower. I know that's a good question: I thought you might be able to answer it. And what about those men playing poker in the basement? I know they're musicians — but we're not a musical.

JAMES. You don't want to go messing with the unions.

JULIA. Well, if your hands are tied, what about mine? ... I see ... I see ... I see. Of course I don't want that on my conscience. (*She hangs up.*) If we close tonight, they'll give the Barrymore to *Riverdance 11*.

PETER. I'd hate to be in your shoes tonight, Julia.

JULIA. They're your shoes, too, Peter, they're everyone's. (*Gus, Virginia, and Frank return. Gus has a new armful of coats.*)

VIRGINIA. Are we gonna run?

PETER. We're still waiting for the rest of the reviews.