

PETER

Spielberg asked me if I wanted to write a screenplay for him. "Sure," I said, "What about?" "Good point," he said and walked away.

JAMES. There he is: America's oldest-living most promising young playwright. Hello, Peter.

PETER. Jimmy, you came?

JAMES. On the goddamn red-eye. Of course I came!

PETER. Maybe I can get through all this with my best friend here. Do you know who this is, Julia?

JULIA. Well of course I do.

PETER. I love this man. I don't care who knows it. I love this person. I love him, I love him, I love him.

JULIA. I wish I had a camera.

PETER. From the bottom of my heart, thank you, Jimmy-Jim-Jimbo.

JAMES. Now where the hell have you been?

JULIA. You had us both so worried.

PETER. You promise not to laugh?

JULIA. Of course not.

PETER. I've been walking the streets thinking about what it means to be a playwright.

JULIA. That's so dear.

PETER. No, I mean it.

JULIA. So do I. That's a wonderful thing to be thinking about. I wish more playwrights did.

START PETER. *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened at the same theatre we did tonight. December 3, 1947. Tennessee Williams paced nervously at the back of our orchestra, just like I did. I could feel him. Elia Kazan paced with him. I felt them both. I bet they held hands and squealed like schoolgirls when that curtain went up. It's from our stage where Marlon Brando first yelled "Stella" and Blanche DuBois told the world that she had always depended on the kindness of strangers. We have a lot to live up to tonight. It depends on us to remind this city that there is more to Broadway than guest appearances or special effects and revivals, or another play from London, or another Disney movie made live. We are an original American play. We must make that count for something.

JULIA. Amen.

JAMES. That was beautifully stated, Peter.

PETER. I'll get off my soapbox now. Before I knew it, the first act was over and everybody was on the sidewalk. I saw you, Jimmy, talking to Bernadette Peters. She was bent over double at something you were

saying. It looked like you were imitating a giant chicken. God, you are a funny man.

~~JAMES. Too funny by half. —~~

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. **END**

~~JAMES. (Who has teared up.) And I was telling your leading lady I didn't miss all this.~~

~~JULIA. It's all right, James!.~~

~~JAMES. (Blowing his nose.) I cry at food displays.~~

~~JULIA. Next play I promise you that turntable.~~

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