

CAR. I don't want to be onstage.  
 IRENE. Many are called, but few are called back.  
 MARIA. How's he going to know who to go listen to, Irene?  
 IRENE. Everyone—when you get close to your scene with the butler just tap on your leg like this—  
 MARIA. Got it. Tap leg, avoid down left.  
 IRENE. Wyomissing—  
 CAR. My name is Car. I'm more than just a kid from Wyomissing.  
 IRENE. Not yet you aren't. Now. You go to whosoever is tapping.  
 CAR. I don't want to do this, I'm not gonna.  
 IRENE. And what? Spend your life wondering what it would've been like? Some life.  
 SID. No Irene, he's leaving, he's got a bus to catch at 8:15. He's just here killing time.  
 IRENE. He thought I stabbed myself after he himself had played with the prop and knew it was phony baloney. This one's a keeper. Wait. I thought the buses only—  
 SID. Yeah. *(The women look at one another and smile.)* Clive go through the hole and make up a dressing room, it could use a woman's touch. Reenie and I are gonna officially say goodbye to Car.  
 IRENE. Sorry you won't be staying. Even though you say you're just killing time waiting for your bus—but we all know there aren't any buses going IN to Wyomissing at 8:15 are there? No, only out.  
 SID. The buses take the black ladies that stand on the corners at dusk, they take them out of the suburbs—Black people, going into the suburbs? At night? Not on your nelly.  
 IRENE. You wanna stay here. Admit it.  
 CAR. I—uh—I don't.  
 SID. Suit yourself. *(She goes off to change.)*  
 IRENE. Call yourself a cab. Get yourself five bucks from my purse. *(She hands him the money behind her back and dials. He reaches for the money; she grabs his hand and stares forward, away from him.)* I know where you're from, Car. Wyomissing? And I know you're screaming to get out. I know it because I've been where you are. My Wyomissing was called Larchmont. And there was Greenwich Village and Caffe Cino and Joe and Lance Wilson and Harry and Jean-Claude. But. I didn't. Have the nerve for it. So I got married and moved here to Berks County. And you know I'm telling the truth because if I made it up I would make it so much more tragic and not so mediocre. I was a good wife till I couldn't stand it and then did anything I could in

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summer stock and when summer stock went away—I—I've created my own little version of what I was afraid of here, right here. And you want it too—Gevalt, how many times did you stare at that stage? You want out of your life and onto that eight-foot by twelve-foot raised platform from hunger that we call a stage. Right now, right here. This is destiny pissing on your leg. What do you wanna do about it? (*Irene walks off, lights change. The others take off the furniture. Car, in his older self, picks up a new color of tape and begins to unroll it on the floor. Let's have this be orange tape.*)

**STOP**

CAR. So I stayed. Who wouldn't? This next place is going to be later that same night. The Crystal Restaurant. That's the purple tape. 537 Penn Street. On Penn Square. In Reading. And, as is the case with all great American restaurants, founded by Greek immigrants. It burned down in 1981. I had already left Reading by then. (*Cast members sit.*) Welsh rarebit and cheesepuffs are the appetizers. The spaghetti and meatballs is a good entrée. Good. Like, still I remember it and can taste it good. The specialty cocktail is the black Russian. Served in a tiny tin coffee pot which the customer gets to keep afterwards. (*All cheer. Damien, a waiter, drops about twenty small silver pitchers on the table.*) And it's after the performance. (*Car is a kid with the others. They all laugh.*)

IRENE. My darlings. Thespis was served this evening.

CAR. Who?

SID. Just smile and go with it, kid.

IRENE. When I gave my curtain speech before our show, I felt it was a good house. When I gave my curtain speech at intermission, still an amazing house. But when I gave my curtain speech at the end of the show. Well my dears—we had them! (*Applause, cries of "hear hear!" Damien walks by.*) And that fills me with such nachas—

CAR. What?

SID. Silent witness, be a silent witness.

CLIVE. (*Over the cries, to Damien.*) Damien, another round!

IRENE. This is something I learned when I was in New York. Working for Hal Prince and George Abbott. Always start the next project before the first one ends. I have—

CAR. (*An adult and host again.*) And she handed out plays.

IRENE. An evening of—

CAR and IRENE. Tennessee Williams one-acts.

IRENE. I have gotten everyone a copy and—written a little note and, of course, highlighted the roles you shall be playing.

MARIA. What is she even saying?

IRENE. *(To herself.)* I can hear Ellen Stewart's little bell. Ting-a-ling-along-along! I hear Joe calling, "Magic time." Al is banging on the upright at Judson.

SID. Irene, what are you saying, dear?

CAR. It's ringing.

IRENE. *(Suddenly brightly to Sid.)* I'm saying you can have the worst luck but the best career and I should know 'cause I got both in spades.

CAR. Hold for Irene Sampson Keller, please. *(Irene walks with great grandeur to the phone.)*

**START**

IRENE. *(Under her breath.)* Jo Jo is being a prick, why is Jo Jo being a prick, let's see why Jo Jo is being a prick. *(She takes a breath to speak. A BLAM from the wrecking ball, more dust. All fall to the ground. The explosion causes Irene to buckle a bit. She stops, looks in the direction of the wrecking ball. Into phone, brightly.)* Jo Jo?! Why are you being a prick? *(He must be pleading ignorance on the other end.)* You know very well that there are wrecking balls swinging away right now, you insult my intelligence, but mostly you just look foolish. Foolish. Like the time I saw you fucking your sister-in-law in the Crystal Restaurant coatroom. Oops that just slipped out, I don't know when it will slip out again. Or what else will slip out of this suddenly very open mouth. *(BLAM, another explosion. Dust and everyone holds on for dear life. To the room.)* JO JO'S MOTHER ISN'T REALLY ITALIAN, SHE'S MEXICAN!! How many more hits you got? 'Cause I have not even scratched the surface here. Oh you're calling them off— *(BLAM, another explosion.)* You want me to bring up the midnight runs to NY?? Mr. Right-to-Life? What? Quiet now? One more is all I need. Nothing. Now. Now, Jo Jo. Why are you being such a prick. Because what? *(She listens for a bit.)* You saw one of our little queers walking in and out of a building we didn't rent?

**SKIP**

CAR. I'm not queer. I was getting dry ice.

IRENE. I'll have you know that boy is completely undecided at this point. This demolition is off—you hear me? We are putting on our season—No. NO. You can tear down this block but not this building. No. No. Okay. One month. Well thanks for the warning Jo Jo, you rat bastard! *(Slams the phone down.)* I think that went well. **STOP**

SID. Irene, no lies, no sugarcoat—what's going on?

IRENE. This whole block is coming down, they want us out by the end of next month.

IRENE. Who was the spy for Kurt? Who cares? What I want to talk about is the curse of the bottom line, the disease of popularity, the death that's in respectability.

SID. Oh my God.

IRENE. We once stood for something, something dangerous. Something frightening something...something...wild, provocative—where are my words right now?

SID. Oh my Goddamned God, of course.

IRENE. And what happened—a little bit of acceptance and I'm on my back like a Wyomissing Boulevard schnauzer—love me love me. RUB MY BELLY!!!

SID. I should have known. It was you. You talked to Kurt.

CLIVE. Oh, shut up, Sid.

MARIA. Don't make excuses.

SID. Irene, answer me. You talked to Kurt.

IRENE. Of course I talked to Kurt.

MARIA. What?

CLIVE. Huh?

DAMIEN. Shit.

IRENE. What had I let us become?

SID. Goddamnit Irene, we were on our way to—

IRENE. To what? Not-good theater? To what then?

SID. We were making money!

**START**

IRENE. Oh and that's it—that's the only reason there's theater? To make money? Then why the fuck bother? Just do a fucking movie or a circus act! Just go put on a bank. We once could have been something—something truly great. And look at us now.

SID. You destroyed everything.

**SKIP**

IRENE. I wanted a different everything! I want to go back to what we were. We need to get the teeth back in our bite. We need to do theater that may scare the hell out of people, but at least they'll remember it for the rest of their lives. My arm is tingling—Clive, honey when all this is said and done, I gotta get my medicine right, can you drive me to St. Joe's? *(The whirl of a police-car siren and recurring flash of red lights. All stop and look at one another.)* You were right, Car. I sold out. And when you get around to reading the Greeks you'll know the messenger with the bad news is often slain. *(Damien takes Car to the door. Car stops to look at Irene. She looks in the other direction. Damien and Car exit.)* Is he gone? **STOP**

CLIVE. He's talking to the policeman. His father is hugging him.