

# IT'S ONLY A PLAY

## ACT ONE

*The bedroom in Julia Budder's townhouse. It is a large room with a king-sized bed, a chaise, several armchairs, a television set with a remote control, a bookcase, and a desk with several telephones all with buttons to access different lines.*

*There are two doors: One leads to the bathroom and dressing area; the other to the hallway and stairs. Thus, we can see people on the stairs before they enter the room itself. There are two windows, drapes drawn, fronting the street.*

*At rise: There is a party in progress downstairs. Although the bedroom is empty, we can hear voices, laughter, and piano music drifting up from the living room one floor below. It sounds like a lot of people. Also, the bed is heaped with winter coats, some of them fur, all of them expensive. Gus Head is seen coming up the stairs. He is dressed in a dinner jacket. He is carrying a load of men's and women's coats. He comes into the bedroom and closes the door. The party sounds grow fainter. He tosses the coats onto the pile and crosses to the desk, picks up the phone, and excitedly punch-dials a number.*

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GUS. *(Into phone.)* Mr. Piper? It's me again. Guess who just walked in down there and handed me his coat? Al Pacino! Can you believe it? This place is crawling with famous people. Donald Trump looked right at me and asked me for a glass of Dom Perignon. I told him I was taking coats. My first night in New York and I'm high-fiving Denzel Washington. I'm pretty sure I saw Rosie O'Donnell talking to the Pope. Thank you for this opportunity,

at me and asked me for a drink. There's one man down there talking to Shirley MacLaine I'm pretty sure is the Pope. I just wish I'd brought an autograph book and my Instamatic. Fresh off the bus and I'm rubbing shoulders with Lena Horne. They'll never believe me back in Kansas. This could be my big break, Mr. Piper. Thank you. 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.)*

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

GUS. I've seen this one somewhere, too. Good evening, sir.

JAMES. Hello.

GUS. Are you looking for the bathroom? It's across the hall.

JAMES. The telephone. I couldn't hear a thing down there.

GUS. Someone needs the phone. I gotta go.

JAMES. That's perfectly all right.

GUS. It's all yours.

JAMES. Thank you. Hello? Hello?

GUS. Push the button.

JAMES. The button! Thank you. Hello, operator? This is Mr. Wicker again. Thank you. *(To Gus.)* California. They're all dying to know how the play went tonight.

GUS. How did it go?

JAMES. Wonderful, just wonderful.

GUS. Mrs. Budder will be pleased. Too bad you're not a critic.

JAMES. We're all critics.

GUS. They're calling this the party of the year for the play of the season!

JAMES. Are they?

GUS. I would have given anything to be there. Mrs. Budder is giving us all tickets for tomorrow night.

JAMES. Are you in the business?

GUS. No, I'm an actor. This party is just a one-night stand for me.

JAMES. This party is a one-night stand for a lot of people.

GUS. I don't do this for a living. I'm Gus P. Head. Actor-

slash-singer-slash-dancer-slash-comedian-slash-performance artist-slash mime, period. I have a black belt in karate, roller skate and can operate heavy farm equipment. Most English dialects and some Welsh. Other skills, on request. Favorite role to date: the Button Moulder in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*.

JAMES. Oh! (*Into phone.*) Hello? Hello?

GUS. Who says New Yorkers are unfriendly? I don't. There I was this morning, wandering around Times Square with a suitcase, looking pretty green, I admit, when who, of all people, should befriend me? A producer-slash-agent-slash-photographer with a spare room. Is that a coincidence. He could have befriended anyone but he befriended me! Peter Piper, do you know him?

JAMES. I certainly know the type.

GUS. My Dad always said "Don't talk to strangers" but my dad didn't know just how friendly you New Yorkers could be. Mr. Piper is going to take some pictures of me.

JAMES. Where are you from, Gus?

GUS. Kansas.

JAMES. You're not in Kansas anymore.

GUS. That's what Mr. Piper keeps saying.

JAMES. (*Back into phone.*) Yes, I'm still here, operator! Where else would I be? I didn't place this call. (*To Gus.*) My agent calls me and then puts me on hold. She wouldn't do this to McCauley Caulkin.

GUS. Have I seen you some place, sir?

JAMES. It's very likely.

GUS. Where?

JAMES. It all depends. The Broadway stage?

GUS. No.

JAMES. Motion pictures maybe?

GUS. No.

JAMES. Then it must be television.

GUS. No.

JAMES. No? What do you mean no?

GUS. I hate television.

JAMES. What do you mean you hate television?

GUS. Were you ever in Spaulding, Kansas?

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