

Peter James
Julia

"The American theatre would be a better place today if Peter Austin's parents had smothered him in his crib."

JULIA. What a horrible thing to say about anyone, even a playwright.

JAMES. Ira Drew's review of *Flashes*.

JULIA. I don't know how you people stand it. Thank God I'm only a producer. *(Peter Austin runs into the bedroom. He is in evening tails and outer coat.)*

PETER. I just hope the next young American playwright who has a play open on Broadway doesn't have the misfortune of walking into his opening night party with Arthur Miller right behind him.

JULIA. Peter, what happened?

PETER. All my life I dreamed they'd yell "Author, Author!" when I got there. Instead, what I got was "Arthur, Arthur!" He just won another Nobel Prize or something. They don't have a clue who I am down there.

JAMES. Hello, Judas.

PETER. Is that who I think it is? You made it. You actually came.

JAMES. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

PETER. Do you know who this is, Julia?

JULIA. Well of course I do.

JAMES. Then you're the first one this evening who does.

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

JAMES. Even though you wish him and his television series —

JULIA. James!

PETER. Maybe I can get through all this now. This means everything. Thanks, James. *(He hugs him.)*

JULIA. I wish I had my camera.

PETER. You look marvelous.

JAMES. Thank you.

PETER. Guess how many times I threw up today?

JAMES. I couldn't.

PETER. Actually leaned over the bowl and heaved my guts up?

JULIA. Is this a game?

PETER. Seven. Seven whole times. That's what this night means to me. Well ask James, Jimmy, Jim, Jimbo.

JAMES. Just be careful. This is a new tux.

PETER. Where are you staying?

JAMES. The Sherry.

JULIA. Peter, you had us all worried. Where have you been?

PETER. You promise not to laugh?

JULIA. Of course not.

PETER. I've been out there growing up.

JULIA. I'm going to cry.

PETER. No, I mean it.

JULIA. So do I. That's wonderful.

PETER. You know where I spent our opening? In that bar across the street.

JULIA. I didn't know there was a bar across the street.

PETER. From the theatre.

JULIA. For a moment...! My heart.

PETER. It felt like I'd written the longest first act in theatre history.

JAMES. I know.

PETER. The place was empty except for this older woman. You know the type: blonde hair, too blonde; too much lipstick; too many cigarettes; too much booze. A showgirl probably, one of a rapidly vanishing breed, probably living still in one of those hotels named for an Indian. The Mohawk or the Iroquois or the Chippequa, only the neon sign is burnt out now.

JAMES. There but for the grace of God!

PETER. We started talking. I told her I had a play opening across the street. "Welcome to the theatre, kid. What's your play about?" I told her. She said it didn't sound like her cup of tea but good luck anyway and she'd try to catch the matinee. That's two comps for "Dolores Guber," Julia. Then it was intermission and everybody was on the sidewalk. I saw you, Jimmy, talking to Gene Saks. He 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. When the second act began and everybody went back in, I walked around the theatre district. So many dark theatres. Marquees left up from plays that opened and closed two years ago because they haven't had another booking since. The Biltmore in ruins. The Hellinger a church. The Longacre a courthouse. This all goes and that's the ball game. There's no more where it came from. And then I saw that goddamn Marriot Hotel. I'm sorry, Julia.

JULIA. I've said worse about it under my breath.

JAMES. I can't even look at it.

PETER. They tore down three magnificent, historic theatres to put up another hotel with another revolving restaurant and more glass elevators?

JAMES. Terrible, just terrible.

JULIA. Who wants a restaurant that spins? I certainly don't!

PETER. I feel such a responsibility that we hold back the tide. *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened at the same theatre we did tonight. December 3, 1947. Tennessee Williams and I must have paced in the same place at the back of the orchestra. It's where Marlon Brando first said "Stella" and Blanche Du Bois first told the world that all her life she had depended on the kindness of strangers. A city — a society — that tears that down deserves everything it gets.

JAMES. Amen.

PETER. End of speech. I'm sorry. and

JULIA. Bravo, darling.

PETER. When I finally turned back up 48th Street, our play was over and everyone was gone, but our marquee was still lit. It's a beautiful marquee, Julia. Downtown we never had anything like that. *The Golden Egg*, a new play by Peter Austin. And then someone inside turned the lights off and we went dark. It was as if we never happened. It's not only a play, Julia. It's everything that means anything to me.

JAMES. I was just telling your leading lady I didn't miss all this.

JULIA. James!

JAMES. I cry at food displays. (*He blows his nose.*)