

JULIA. You're not a non-entity and you're very well thought of.

IRA. What am I? The Invisible Man?

VIRGINIA. You're the most vicious critic in New York.

IRA. Throw that in my face. I love the theatre; it's what people are doing to it I can't stand.

JULIA. It's not on purpose.

VIRGINIA. "She reminds me of nothing so much as a female impersonator in search of a female to impersonate."

JULIA. What a dreadful thing to say about anyone, even a female impersonator.

IRA. I said that about Norma Bird in *The Sea Gull* at the Provincetown playhouse in 1968. It's curious you should remember that review, Miss Noyes.

VIRGINIA. I was Norma Bird in *The Sea Gull* at the Provincetown Playhouse in 1968.

IRA. You changed your name?

VIRGINIA. After your review, I changed my face. (*Peter enters.*)

PETER. I can't find him. I — There you are!

IRA. Get away from me! I'll shoot! (*He reaches for his pistol; it isn't there.*)

PETER. I'm sorry, Mr. Drew. Deeply and truly sorry. The stakes are so high, opening a new American play on Broadway nowadays, I think we're all a little over the top, even playwrights.

IRA. Just as your entitled to writing your plays, I'm entitled to my opinion of them. It's a free country.

PETER. ~~Enough.~~ (*He drops down to his knees.*) Hear a playwright's prayer, Oh Lord. Listen to the humble plea of thy humble servant, Peter, descendent of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill, and Pinter.

FRANK. What the hell is he doing?

PETER. Bless me and my meagre skills with which I've only tried to amuse, intrigue, provoke, stimulate, and move You and an audience while creating believable characters in true-to-life situations which somehow illuminate the human expe-

Peter
Julia / Frank /
Virginia /
IRA

rience.

JULIA. (*Touched.*) Oh, Peter!

PETER. Bless thy humble producer-servant Julia.

JULIA. (*Sinking to her knees.*) How lovely!

PETER. Bless all producers who put our plays on and keep them running, even when it means enormous financial sacrifice.

JULIA. I don't care about that, Peter, you know I don't.

PETER. Bless her and forgive her her choice of Press agent.

VIRGINIA. You hear that, Julia?

PETER. Bless thy humble actress servant, Virginia, who gave the performance of a lifetime tonight.

JULIA. Get down, Virginia!

PETER. Bless her unique timing, her wonderful voice, her way with a prop.

VIRGINIA. It slipped, Peter.

PETER. Bless her for being almost letter perfect in her part.

VIRGINIA. Will you lay off?

PETER. Bless thy humble director servant, Frank.

FRANK. (*Self-conscious.*) Oh, Christ.

PETER. Bless him for returning my raincoat, which so mysteriously vanished the second day of rehearsal. Bless him for his unbroken string of successes. Bless all directors with an unbroken string of successes. (*James enters.*)

JAMES. The food is wonderful.

PETER. Bless my best friend, James, thy humble television series star-servant, who had to turn my play down and so we came up with Jack, for whom everyone says there is a definite Tony nomination, if not award, in this. Bless Jack and his Tony nomination, if not award.

JAMES. Oh, please.

PETER. Also bless James' series which is rumored to be going off the air.

JAMES. Where did you hear that?

VIRGINIA. Liz Smith, *Live at Five*.

JULIA. Quiet! (*James has gotten to his knees during this. Only Ira is still standing. He is clearly opposed to joining the others on the*

floor but Peter is really putting him on the spot.)

JAMES. Bless thy humble critic-servant Ira. Bless all critics who mean well and are only trying to uphold the standards of the theatre without knowing how truly hard it is to write a play. Shower them with the same mercy they deny others. And bless the theatre in which we all serve. Bless this ancient art form which is so superior to the movies. *(At some point during this Ira will put on his yarmulka.)*

JULIA. The theatre, yes! *(Gus has come upstairs and entered the bedroom.)*

GUS. Mrs. Budder.

JULIA. Get down, Gus!

GUS. *(Kneeling.)* I'm supposed to be getting Lauren Bacall her coat.

PETER. Bless thy humble servant-servant ... what's your name love?

GUS. Gus.

PETER. Gus, who is bringing Betty Bacall's coat down to her. Bless Betty. Bless all those people down there whose happiness and approval means so much to me. Bless Hal and Judy, Betty and Adolph, Anne and Eli, and poor Sylvia.

IRA. Who is Sylvia? Darn it, I fell for it.

PETER. And finally, Lord, bless the taxi driver who dropped me off here and who this very minute is waiting at the *Times* with the meter running, ready to race back here with their review... *(An audible shiver of excitement runs through the kneeling group.)* Bless this driver. Bless their review.

JULIA. Amen!

PETER. *(Just as the others are about to get up.)* Lord! In our hour of greatest need, give us ... you who have given me the greatest gift of all, the gift to realize that no matter what happens tonight, it's only a play ... give us just one more thing. It's not much. When you consider the problems you've unleashed on this world: wars and famines and jet plane crashes, surely you can give us a hit tonight. If you can't give us unanimous raves, we'll settle for the *Times*. The rest are negotiable. That is my prayer to you, Lord. That is every

*playwright's
prayer.*