

What Price? What Glory?

draft 11-4-2018

Characters

WANDA, an actress

BENJY, an actor

VOICE #1, male, plays MARCUS, KENNETH, and EMAIL #3. *

VOICE #2, male, plays HARRY, VICTOR, GEORGE, SHEP, EMAIL #1 and EMAIL #4.

VOICE #3, female, plays ALEX, MATRON, SECURITY GUARD, JILL, MOM, MOTHER, CHRISTINE, and EMAIL #2. *
*
*

Notes on Staging

As the playwright, my priority was to get the words down on the page. I encourage any director of this piece to be as flexible and theatrical with the staging as possible. Feel free to use multi-media, soundscape, videos, etc. Or just a bare stage. That works too. :)

In the center of the stage, a spotlight begins to flicker, the flickering that comes with a silent film. Gradually, we see WANDA come into being in the light.

*
*
*

WANDA looks at a picture of Clara Bow. This picture can either be projected, or can be held by the actress playing Wanda.

*

WANDA

They call her the "It Girl" now. Clara Bow. And I can see why. The hair, the eyebrows, the lipstick, everything about her is... glorious. She looks at you like she knows something that you desperately want to know. Possesses something that you desperately want. I look at her and I think, If I know and possess all that Clara Bow knows and possesses, then all my life will have been worthwhile.

I decide to not be just some girl from St. Louis who had to learn about the facts of life from books because her mother wouldn't tell them to her. Why stay when I could have millions looking up at me on a giant screen?

*
*

Of course my mother warns me against going to Los Angeles. Saying that it's dangerous, but for reasons she can't say. But I go anyway. I'm a grown woman. She can't stop me. When I settle into my rooms, I send her a letter to prove that I had survived the train ride to Los Angeles unscathed. She replies telling me not to consort with any of those "cheap actresses". If it's not one thing with my mother, it's another.

*

There are other girls in the boarding house trying to be actresses. Some are on the stage. Others are contract players at the studios. They tell me they'll get me a screen test, but of course they don't. Instead, I slave my days away in a soda fountain.

*

One day, I'm cleaning the counter when a man comes in.

*

MARCUS

*

"Root beer float."

*

WANDA

*

As I make it for him, he buries his face in his palms and sighs heavily.

*

"Long day, sir?"

MARCUS

"You have no fucking idea."

WANDA

I know the source of his frustration, having read the magazines. This was Marcus Bayer, head of Bayer Studios. The magazines have stories about how difficult Jill O'Hara was being on his latest production. Delaying work by being late, or having fits about her costume, or drinking all night and showing up not having entirely recovered from the night before. Of course I don't let on that I know any of this. I just tell him, "I'm sure I don't. But hopefully this root beer float will cool you down a bit."

I push the root beer float across the counter to him. He then looks at me for a good long while, and the weariness, the exhaustion, vanishes. I want to look away. But his eyes...

*

MARCUS

"You ever thought about acting?"

WANDA

"What, like in the pictures?"

MARCUS

"Yeah. Like in the pictures."

WANDA

"Well..."

MARCUS

"Because you look like an actress."

*

*

WANDA

"Thank you."

MARCUS

"You got those eyes."

WANDA

"Thank you."

MARCUS

"Yeah, and the lips, too. The nose, well..."

"Turn your head for me."

WANDA

"Excuse me?"

MARCUS

“Turn your head. Show me your profile.”

WANDA shows a profile.

MARCUS

“Other side.”

WANDA shows the other side of her profile.

MARCUS

“I see...”

HARRY

“What is this, a screen test or a soda fountain!?”

*

WANDA

My boss, Harry.

MARCUS

“You got a real actress working here. I hope you know what to do with her.

“I expect we’ll see each other again, Miss...”

WANDA

“Wanda. Wanda Glimmelstein.”

MARCUS

"Wanda Glimmelstein..."

WANDA

And he leaves, taking the root beer float with him.

SHIFT. We see BENJY. He speaks.

*

BENJY

My call time is 3:00. I check my cell phone. 2:58. I would’ve gotten there earlier had my co-worker not called out. I was originally scheduled to work until 1:00, but then I had to stay until 2:30, which gave me exactly half an hour to go from midtown to Tribeca.

I got through the first round of auditions for this show. Then the callback. Then the second callback. Then the dance call.

Then *another* callback.

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT'D)

This was the final round, my agent told me. Even if I don't get this show, I made it this far.

But if I was late... 2:59.

The audition is in the building across the street, so of course the sign says "Don't Walk". *

When it changes to "Walk," I book it, almost knocking a little old lady over. *

VOICE #3

"You bettah watch where ya're goin', young man!"

BENJY

Had Elaine Stritch not died the month before, I would've thought it was her.

I open the door. I don't even wait for the elevator. I take the stairs two steps at a time.

The appointment was on the tenth floor. I already went to the gym this morning, but I figure, what's a little more cardio?

When I get to the tenth floor, it's 3:03. There are a few other people waiting, people who had the foresight to get there early. I take my headshot and resume out from my backpack and say to the guy with the clipboard, "Kohen. Benjy Kohen." I don't know why I said it like that. I'm not auditioning for James Bond. *

VOICE #2

"Oh, yes. They're waiting for you in there."

BENJY

I go into the room. There are ten men at the table. One of them is Kenneth Tallis. I mean, *the* Kenneth Tallis. *

The first Broadway show I ever saw, on my first ever visit to New York, was his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I still remember to this day how the actors came out into the audience to educate them on a few Shakespearean phrases that would be used in the play. When he asked for a volunteer, he picked me, and he made me recite the line, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind." *

The actor then gave me a little pat on the back and told me I would have done Shakespeare proud! *

And the rest of the show, it was... Magical. And wonderful, and... glorious.

So when my agent called me to say that I made it to the final round for this show, I jumped up and down in my apartment so much that I accidentally knocked over my roommate's bookshelf. *

But I was late.

I smile, apologize, and give my headshot and resume to the casting director.

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT 'D)

The casting director hands them to Kenneth. Kenneth glances at my resume for a second, then takes a look at me. He smiles, and says,

KENNETH

“It’s OK. Being late happens to all of us. In fact, we’re running a bit behind schedule ourselves.”

BENJY

“That's a relief. Not that you're running behind schedule, but... You know what I mean. I think.”

KENNETH

“Let’s see what you got.”

BENJY

I sing my sixteen bars. I don’t think I suck too badly. When I finish, every one in the casting room is either nodding or looking at their cell phones. Kenneth is nodding, and smiling, and I’m pretty sure I’ve impressed him, I hope...

KENNETH

“Okay... Okay.”

BENJY

I brace myself for the “thank you” and “goodbye” when he says,

KENNETH

“For this show, we will be requiring that some of the male actors take their shirts off. Are you comfortable with that?”

BENJY

“Yes. Of course. I go to the gym like, every day, so...”

KENNETH

“Do you mind taking off your shirt for us?”

BENJY

“Not at all.”

BENJY takes his shirt off.

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT'D)

"I know I'm not in the best shape, but if you need me to lose any weight or tone up or anything, I can do that in no time." *

Everyone looks at me for what I'm pretty sure is longer than it took me to sing my sixteen bars.

KENNETH

"Turn around and flex your muscles."

BENJY does. He turns back around and faces the audience.

KENNETH

"Thank you. You can put your shirt back on."

BENJY puts his shirt back on.

BENJY

"Mr. Tallis, it's been an honor and a privilege to audition for you, whether I book this or not."

KENNETH

"Call me Kenneth."

BENJY gets really excited. To the audience:

BENJY

He asked me to call him Kenneth!!! He asked me to call him Kenneth! *

That basically means you've gotten a role! *

Or at least *a* role. *

I walk out of the building and into the smelly, sweaty oven that is August in Tribeca. But I'm walking above all of it. It was almost official. I almost got my first Broadway gig! And in a musical I've been hearing about and waiting for for years.

Land of Tinsel: The Rise and Disappearance of Moira Johnson, AKA Wanda Glimmelstein.

SHIFT.

WANDA

When the man leaves, Harry takes me to the back room.

HARRY

“How long has he been in here?”

WANDA

“Oh, about... five or ten minutes?”

HARRY

“Did he make you feel uncomfortable in any way?”

WANDA

“No. He was very kind.”

HARRY

“I’m assuming you know who that was?”

WANDA

“Yes...”

HARRY

“Well he comes in here from time to time. Gives ‘screen tests’ to some of the girls, getting their hopes up, giving the same spiel.

“Guys like that seem nice and all, but they don’t intend on following through on any promises.

“You understand, Wanda?”

WANDA

“Yes sir.”

HARRY

“All right. Now get back to work. And the next time he comes in here, don’t you give him the time of day.”

WANDA

But for the rest of the day, I secretly hope that he comes back. He doesn’t. Nor does he come in the next day. Or the next.

I think it's my name that keeps him away. *Wanda Glimmelstein*. It's not... glamorous like Clara Bow, or Marion Davies. Who would want to see a picture starring a leading lady named Wanda Glimmelstein? *

The next week, on Friday, I wake up and my alarm clock reads ten-thirty five. I was supposed to be at work at ten! I jump out of my bed, throw my uniform on, and out the door I go. Just when I'm reaching the soda fountain, I trip and fall forward onto the sidewalk. *

WANDA falls. We hear a small scraping sound.

"Ow..."

MARCUS

"Are you alright?"

WANDA

It's Marcus Bayer!

"I just fell. I'm so embarrassed..."

MARCUS

"Here, let me help..."

WANDA gets back up from the ground. She looks at her hands.

WANDA

"Oh, my hands are bleeding..."

MARCUS

"So are your legs, Miss Glimmelstein." *

WANDA looks down at her legs.

WANDA

"Oh dear... My only good stockings!"

MARCUS

"That needs to get taken care of right away. Why don't I take you back to my office?"

WANDA

"No. The soda fountain is right there. I can—" *

MARCUS

"I'll hail a cab."

WANDA

He goes to the curb, and a cab appears as if by magic.

In the cab, he takes his handkerchief and presses it into my palm.

MARCUS

"Pressure. It'll stop the bleeding."

WANDA

We arrive at a studio gate,. We go through, and the cab stops.
 Marcus takes me out of the cab and up to his office.
 My hands and legs are still bleeding.

SHIFT.

BENJY

My agent Alex calls.

ALEX

"Benjy. I just heard from Kenneth Tallis' people."

BENJY

I sit on my bed. My heart rate revs up.

ALEX

"They would like to offer you a spot in the ensemble for the Moira Johnson project—

BENJY

"YES! YES YES YES YES YES!!!"

BENJY jumps up and down in excitement.

ALEX

"Yes, I thought you'd be excited. But listen, Benjy, I gotta tell you something..."

BENJY

"What?"

ALEX

"I've known Kenneth for a very long time. He's always very nice to talk to. And it goes
 without saying that he always puts together great shows. But on pretty much every
 project he's worked on, there have been some... not-so-nice reports coming out of his
 rehearsal room."

*
 *

BENJY

"What do you mean?"

ALEX

"I just mean that Kenneth can get a little... handsy with his chorus boys."

*

BENJY

"OK..."

ALEX

"There have been multiple men, clients of mine in fact, who have told me that he could get a bit inappropriate with them. And it hasn't exactly created a safe working environment.

BENJY

"OK..."

ALEX

"I know that the prospect of making your Broadway debut is exciting, and to have Kenneth Tallis on your resumé is really impressive. But I'm just saying, there will be other projects. There will be other shows you can make your debut in. Even if you have to wait a little while.

"I'm not trying to be a downer here. It's not every day I represent someone who makes their Broadway debut. But I want you to know what you're getting yourself into."

BENJY

"I'll be careful. I deal with creepy old men at the restaurant on an almost nightly basis. I can handle him."

ALEX

"You say that now, but depending on how you 'handle' him, you could get blackballed in the industry. That's happened to more than a few of my clients. Been blackballed because they didn't want to play ball. No pun intended."

BENJY

"So... are you telling me I shouldn't do the show?"

ALEX

"I'm just telling you to consider your options. If there's a problem, you could always take it to the union, but Equity hasn't exactly been known for..."

*

BENJY

"I understand, Alex. But it's either this or keep working at the restaurant and barely making my rent and hoping I get another opportunity like this."

*

ALEX

“I get that. But I'm not sure if it'll be worth-

BENJY

“Thank you for telling me all this. But I've made up my mind. I'll come to your office and sign the contracts now.”

ALEX

(“It's your funeral”)

“It's your debut. Come on by any time this afternoon.”

BENJY

I go to Alex's office, sign the contract, and make it official. This day, August 31, 2014, is the day I find out that I will make my Broadway debut!

SHIFT.

MARCUS

“Sit down right here.”

WANDA

I sit on a plush chaise lounge and look at the framed photographs that line the walls. Theda Bara. Harold Lloyd. William Haines. Marion Davies. Lillian Gish! Rudolph Valentino!

And Clara Bow!

“Do you know all these people?”

MARCUS

“Yep. Do you want a drink?”

WANDA

“Oh, no thank you, I—

MARCUS

“I can pour you a brandy if you'd like. Or a whiskey? Scotch? Cognac? Anything you like. Just say the word, and it's yours.”

WANDA

I knew my father drank whiskey. So I ask for a whiskey. I take a sip and nearly retch.

MARCUS

“Cigarette?”

WANDA

"I've never smoked a cigarette in my life, Mr. Bayer... Alright!"

WANDA takes out a cigarette. She inhales it, and coughs like mad. The coughing goes down.

MARCUS

“Take your stockings off. You don't want the blood to congeal. *

“I'm afraid I don't have an extra pair, which should be of no surprise to you. But it's important to let the wound breathe. Trust me. I was an orderly in a medical ward during the war.”

WANDA

“Could I do it somewhere... private?”

MARCUS

“Sure. In here...”

WANDA

He takes me to a door that leads to his own private bathroom. I peel off the blood-soaked stockings. Unsalvageable. I wash my hands and legs, then come out of the bathroom, and Marcus tells me to- *

MARCUS

“Sit down. Have another sip.”

WANDA

I don't want to be rude, so I endure another sip of whiskey. Marcus then sits next to me. He puts his hand on mine. *

MARCUS

“Today is fate. It really is. I went to the soda fountain today just to look for you.”

WANDA

“You did?”

MARCUS

“I did. When I asked if you were an actress, I meant it. If you'll pardon me, you have the look that we're looking for.”

WANDA

“And what look is that?”

MARCUS

“Today. You look like *today*.”

WANDA

I have no idea what this means, but I’m so flattered I can’t help but let him go on. *

MARCUS

“So many of our older stars, they’re yesterday’s news. It’s our responsibility to show the world what it looks like today. And we need girls who can do that for us. I can’t quite explain how, but your eyes, they just... encapsulate what it is to be a young woman in America today. To have seen so little, yet so much. I have a feeling, right this moment, that when people see you on the screen, they aren’t gonna be able to take their eyes off of you. People are going to remember you as The Girl with the Eyes like they remember Mary Pickford as the Girl with the Curls. Like they’ll remember Clara Bow as the It Girl. *

WANDA

"Clara Bow...!"

MARCUS

“Yes, Clara Bow.

“Now, I have to set you up with a screen test and see how you look on film, but I would like nothing more than to skip that nonsense and put you right to work. I gotta convince the other guys here that you got it. I don’t think I’ll have a hard time.

“I want you to work with us. Hell, I’ll be melodramatic. I *need* you to work with us.”

WANDA

He moves closer. His blue eyes look into mine. I can’t move. His sour breath brushes my face. Suddenly, he stands up, and I see the bulge in his trousers.

He takes my hand and places it on his...

Those few moments, he keeps eye contact with me.

MARCUS

“If no one got to see those eyes... what a sad world it would be.”

WANDA

But to be remembered, by the whole world. And to be needed, by this man, who could make the whole world remember me... *

Me! Wanda Glimmelstein! From St. Louis! *

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

Whose mother never told her about men, except to tell her to avoid them at all costs. *

"Yes, Mr. Bayer. I'll do the screen test."

He takes my hand off of him.

SHIFT.

BENJY

Two weeks after I sign the contract, we start rehearsals for *Land of Tinsel*. I make it a point to be there ten minutes early.

When I get to the studio, Kenneth sees me and smiles at me. I take a seat at the table that had been set up in the middle of the room. The stage manager gives me my script, and I sit down.

I feel a hand on my shoulder. I turn around and it's Kenneth. *

KENNETH

"Really glad you came aboard."

BENJY

He pats me on the shoulder, then leaves to take his seat at the edge of the table. I don't know what to respond with, and by the time I think of something to say, he's already talking to another cast member. *

When the entire cast shows up, the stage manager quiets the room, and Kenneth speaks.

KENNETH

"Alright, everyone.

"Welcome to the start of a new adventure.

"I just want to say here and now how honored I am to be sharing this experience with all of you. I can already tell, just by being in here with you all, that this is going to be an exceptional experience. If any of you listen to industry talk, and I'm sure all of you do, you'll know that this is going to be my final musical. As you can imagine, I want this to be the most successful production it can be. But a production can't be successful without the right people. And I am confident that I have gathered the right people for this project. We have both stage veterans and "newbies," as the young folk say." *

BENJY

When he says this, he glances my way.

KENNETH

"But whether you're a stage veteran or a newbie, I am ecstatic to be working with you. I know that you are all going to bring something special to the mysterious, and nearly forgotten story of Moira Johnson.

"Getting a little personal, Moira Johnson has been a long-time fascination of mine. When I was growing up in St. Louis, which I know at least one of you is from...

*

BENJY

Me, by the way! St. Louis *represent!*

KENNETH

"Every year, in June, there would be a screening of the only film she made in Hollywood: *It Happens at Parties*, starring Norma Shearer."

BENJY

I had been to these screenings growing up, too. My mother told me she knew I was gay when she caught me imitating Moira's silent star mannerisms.

Perhaps BENJY strikes a silent star-esque pose here?

*

KENNETH

"After she made this film, Moira Johnson disappeared forever. And when Marcus Bayer died in 1957, his last words were "Moira... Moira..." Who knows why? Did they have an affair? Did he rape her? Did they have a child out of wedlock?

*

"We don't know.

*

"Did she have an abortion? Did the abortion go horribly wrong, leaving Moira Johnson dead and with a potential scandal for Marcus Bayer to cover up?

*

"We don't know.

*

"Did Moira Johnson possibly take her own life?

"We don't know.

"When her parents in St. Louis were asked what happened to her, all they said was that their daughter went to Los Angeles for adventure, and never came back.

"Today, we only have scraps of information, but those scraps paint multiple narratives, spawn theories, and fabricate stories. So many that we don't even know where the truth lies anymore. But that doesn't mean we can't speculate. And here, I want to speculate about how this incident became a Hollywood legend. I want to speculate about what brought this young, fresh-faced woman to Hollywood. I want to speculate about what led her to leave what could have been a brilliant career. And finally I want to speculate about how she has become so ingrained in our entertainment lore and mythology.

*

*

*

"Our writers Frank Miko and Tony Bella have spent years developing this show, and the result is a gorgeous, spellbinding, and endlessly fascinating piece that I'm excited to really dive into.

(MORE)

KENNETH (CONT'D)

"Now, since this piece is still a work in progress, there may be, in fact there almost definitely, will be changes made throughout the rehearsal process, so bear with them. But for today, we are going to focus on the table read and have a discussion. So let's open our scripts and dive in!"

BENJY

We read through the script, and... it's a good start. Could use some work. A lot of work. But I didn't notice any scenes I would need to take my shirt off. So when Kenneth asks if we had any questions, I raise my hand.

*

KENNETH

"Yes, Benjy."

BENJY

"Sooo I was wondering if there were going to be any scenes where the guys take their shirts off?"

Painfully awkward silence.

KENNETH

"There is no nudity in this show. I'm afraid this isn't a revival of *Oh, Calcutta!*"

*

VOICES #2 and #3 let out uncomfortable chuckles.
BENJY looks terribly embarrassed.

BENJY

When he lets us all go at the end of the day, Kenneth pulls me aside into a corner of the rehearsal room.

KENNETH

"This is your first show, right?"

BENJY

"It's my first Broadway show, but not my first show ever, obviously."

KENNETH

"So this is your Broadway debut, then?"

BENJY

"Yes..."

KENNETH

“So it’s a very big step for you.”

BENJY

“Yeah.”

KENNETH

“I will never forget my first Broadway show. You never forget your first.”

BENJY

“Uh huh...”

KENNETH

“The first Broadway show is not only a big first step for an actor, but it’s also a big responsibility.”

BENJY

“Oh sure, I can definitely imagine.”

KENNETH

“The first show often determines an actor’s entire career. I’m not talking about the show itself, or how long it runs, or whether it makes back its investment. I’m talking about how they... conduct themselves in the rehearsal space. How they work with their fellow cast and crew members. How they... take direction.”

BENJY

“Uh huh...”

KENNETH

“I’m not the kind of person who beats around the bush, so I do have to say here, that your question about shirtlessness was extremely inappropriate. It’s certainly OK to ask questions during rehearsal—that’s what rehearsal is all about, asking questions so that you can develop a stronger understanding of the material. But asking questions like that makes things... awkward in the rehearsal room, you understand?”

*

BENJY

He then put his hand on my shoulder and squeezes it.
And leaves it there.
For a very, very, very long time.

*

KENNETH

“Obviously, you’re a talented kid. And I wanted to give you a chance. So I would chalk this up to being a newbie. But under no circumstances can you ask a question like that ever again.”

BENJY

“Understood, Mr. Tallis.”
He keeps his hand on me.

KENNETH

“Excellent. I just want to make sure you understand. I’d hate to see someone like you lose their career over stupid mistakes.”

BENJY

He squeezes my shoulder. Almost too hard.

KENNETH

“See you tomorrow.”

BENJY

And then he lets go.

I go home ashamed that I had embarrassed Kenneth. But more ashamed that I had embarrassed myself. *

Who asks if they need to be shirtless during a show, except body builders?

What does the cast think of me now?

Do they think I was yet another body-obsessed, superficial, ditzy Broadway twink with nothing more on his mind than singing, dancing, sex, and Instagram?

I imagine the conversations going on among the company members who commute together, or are getting post-rehearsal drinks. *

VOICE #3 *

“Who was that boy?”

VOICE #2

“What is his deal?”

VOICE #1 *

“Does he understand what he’s doing?”

VOICE #3 *

“Oh, he’s a newbie, he’ll learn.”

VOICE #2

“You know that type, though. They never learn.”

VOICE #3

“And they never last.”

BENJY

When I wake up for rehearsal the next morning, I resolve to not embarrass Kenneth, or myself, again.

SHIFT.

WANDA

I wake up the next morning thinking that the day before had been a dream. The matron knocks on my door.

*

MATRON

"There's a gentleman on the phone for ya."

*

*

WANDA

I think it is Harry asking me to come into work, but when I answer it-

*

*

MARCUS

“We want you to come in for a screen test at eleven o’clock today.”

WANDA

“Mr. Bayer! How did you get this number?”

MARCUS

“I have my ways. Screen test. Eleven today. See you then.”

MARCUS hangs up.

WANDA

I throw on a dress and jump the trolley to the studio. Marcus waits for me outside the gates.

MARCUS

“Glad you could make it.”

WANDA

He takes me through the gates to one of the studios where stylists immediately start painting my face and curling my hair.

When they finish, they send me to where the lights and cameras are set up.

*

MARCUS

“Sit there.”

WANDA sits on a chair.

WANDA

“What do you want me to do, Mr. Bayer?”

MARCUS

“Just be you.”

WANDA

The marker comes between me and the camera.

The sound of a marker clapping down.

MARCUS

“Relax.”

WANDA

“Yes, sorry ...”

WANDA tries to relax. Pause.

WANDA

“Should I say anything, or...?”

MARCUS

“It’s not as if we’d hear you.”

WANDA

...

MARCUS

“Look around a little bit. Give us different sides of your face.”

WANDA looks around her.

WANDA

“Awfully warm in here.”

MARCUS

“It’s the lights.”

WANDA

“Oh I see...”

*

“How long do these things usually last?”

*

MARCUS

“Couple minutes or so.”

WANDA

“How long has it been?”

MARCUS

“Two minutes.”

WANDA

“Do you think you’ve got enough?”

MARCUS

“Just a little more... Give us a smile.”

WANDA smiles. It is iconic. It is beautiful.

MARCUS

“And give us a laugh. A nice, natural laugh. Laugh like you love nothing more than life itself.”

WANDA laughs.

MARCUS

“Just a little more... OK. Cut.”

Sound of a marker clapping down.

*

WANDA

“So what happens now?”

MARCUS

“A few of the other higher-ups look at it, then we decide if we can use you.”

WANDA

“When will I know?”

MARCUS

“As soon as we know.

“But I’ll say this: You’re not gonna need the soda fountain much longer.”

WANDA

A week later, the matron knocks on my door. *

MATRON *

"There's a gentleman on the phone for ya." *

MARCUS

“They liked your test, Wanda. They wanna offer you a six-month player contract at three hundred dollars a week.” *

Pause.

MARCUS

“Hello?”

WANDA

“I’m sorry, Mr. Bayer. I just... I can’t believe it! Three hundred dollars a week!?” *

MARCUS

“There's more where that came from, if you stick with us.”

WANDA

"Oh..!"

MARCUS

“They wanna meet you too, so you can sign the contracts and everything.”

WANDA

“When?”

MARCUS

“Today. As soon as possible. Go to that goddam soda fountain and tell your boss you quit!”

WANDA

As soon as I hang up the phone, I rush to the soda fountain and spill the news to Harry.

HARRY

“It’s your funeral, Wanda. Nothin’ I can do to stop you.”

*

WANDA

I then hop on the trolley to the studio and tell the security guard that I’m there to see Marcus Bayer.

SECURITY GUARD

“Oh, are you his latest?”

WANDA

“His latest... actress? Yes. I was offered a six-month contract with him.”

SECURITY GUARD

“Oh, one of *those*... Name?”

WANDA

“Wanda Glimmelstein.”

SECURITY GUARD

“Alright. Go on in.”

*

WANDA

I walk onto the studio lot and make my way to Marcus Bayer’s office. I’m expecting other men to be there, but when I reach the office, it’s just him at his desk.
The contract is already on the table. I sign it.

*

*

MARCUS

“Now that that’s over with, there are a few matters we have to discuss.”

WANDA

“Like what?”

MARCUS

“Your name.”

WANDA

“What about my name?”

MARCUS

“Wanda Glimmelstein... Sounds too, too... Too ethnic. We need something more...
sexier. Something more... seductive. But not too seductive that it wouldn't appeal to
Middle America. Those fuckers want accessibility. Someone they can relate to. Someone
those wives would be comfortable with their husband hanging out with. Someone parents
would want their daughters to be best friends with. Someone they'd want their son to
date.

*
*
*

“But not too modest. Modesty does not do in this business. You are special. You
wouldn't be here if you weren't.

“I'm feeling that you're an M type. Someone who starts with an M...”

WANDA

“My grandmother's first name was Moira.”

MARCUS

“Moira... That's a start. Moira. Moira is a fancy enough name. Old world, but not too
out of touch. Innocent, yet experienced.

Fine. Just fine.

“Now that last name... Moira Tillers...? No.”

WANDA

“My mother's maiden name was Johnson.”

MARCUS

“Moira Johnson... Moira Johnson. Moira... Johnson... Alright. It'll do.

“Now. Next order of business. There's a part we want to give you. It's not a big part, but
it'll get you seen. It's in the new Norma Shearer picture. Don't ask us how we got MGM
to loan her out... It's called *It Happens at Parties*.

*

WANDA

"You want to put me in a picture with Norma Shearer!?"

*

MARCUS

“Absolutely. But before we move forward, you should know that for this part, there will
be a lot of dancing and smiling. But we'll also need a girl with... fire, and passion, and
drive, and... Someone who's willing to do what it takes.

*

Are you willing to do what it takes?”

WANDA

“Of course I am.”

MARCUS

“You are?”

WANDA

He steps around his desk. I look behind me and the door to his office is closed.

MARCUS

“You’d do *anything*?”

WANDA

And again, he stares at me with those blue eyes. They aren’t commanding or domineering, but... pleading. And begging.

I look down, and see his...

*

MARCUS

“Go on.”

WANDA

He unzips his...

MARCUS

“Go on...”

WANDA

He takes it out...

MARCUS

“Come on... Wrap your hand around it...”

WANDA

I do.

MARCUS

“Come on. You know what you’re doing...”

WANDA

I stroke him. He shudders.

*

MARCUS

“Yes... That’s it...”

WANDA

He starts to get larger, harder in my hand.

MARCUS

“That’s it... You’re doing great...”

WANDA

He wants this. That’s what I keep telling myself. He wants this. And I want it. Don't I...?

MARCUS

“Feels so good...”

WANDA

He’s the one who needs to feel good. And I’m the one who needs a job.

MARCUS

“That’s it... Now use your mouth.”

WANDA

And then slowly, he slips himself into my mouth. The smell of sweat and must.

MARCUS

“Yes... Yes!”

WANDA

Then he thrusts himself deep in my throat. I almost choke. My eyes begin to tear. I can’t breathe. I try to pull away for air but he wraps his hands around the back of my head and pushes me into him.

MARCUS

“Yes... Yes!”

WANDA

I think of what this will get me. This is what it takes. This is what I have to do. I have what it takes!

Did Mary Pickford have to do this? Did Theda Bara? Clara Bow?

Was this what Clara Bow secretly knew?

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

How many mouths had been on Marcus Bayer?
Were there men who had to do this? Or did they skip right past this part?

MARCUS

“Almost there... Almost...! Ahhh!”

WANDA

A warm, bitter taste overwhelms my mouth. I want to spit it out, but my mouth is still pressed against him.

I swallow.

Finally he takes himself out of me.

We're both sweating. Panting.

MARCUS panting. Then:

MARCUS

“I'm going to have a brandy. Want some whiskey?”

WANDA

“Yes.”

The whiskey washes some of the taste from my mouth.

*

MARCUS

“God, I needed that.”

WANDA

“Do I have the part?”

MARCUS

“Hm? Oh. Right. Yes. Part's all yours.”

WANDA

“I need to go home now, Mr. Bayer.”

MARCUS

“Marcus. Call me Marcus.

“Get some rest before tonight. I'm taking you to a party at George Taylor's house. He'll be your director, so it's best you get to know him now.”

WANDA

“I fear I'll be tired...”

MARCUS

“You won’t be too tired for George Taylor.
“I’ll send the car round for you at seven. Be ready then.”

WANDA

I tell him I will, and leave the room.
As I walk down the hall and out of the building and onto the studio lot, I pass by actors, directors, and others, going to their film shoots.
Would they find out? Surely, they talked. What would they say?

VOICE #3

“Oh, her. Marcus just saw her one day when he needed his cock sucked and offered her a contract to do it.”

VOICE #2

“Yet another six-month player who will do nothing but sit around waiting for the men to come. And come again!”

VOICE #3

“Guess I gotta improve my skills in that department!”

VOICE #1

“Worthless, talentless, slut. After her first abortion, she’ll be gone from Hollywood for good.”

VOICE #2

“You know that kind. They never learn.”

VOICE #3

“And they never last.”

SHIFT.

BENJY

Back at rehearsal, we start choreographing the dance numbers.
Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Again!
Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Again!
Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Ag—

KENNETH

“STOP! STOP! STOP!”

BENJY

The rehearsal pianist stops playing. The dancers stop dancing. Everything stops.

KENNETH

“Benjy. What are you doing?”

BENJY

“Um...”

KENNETH

“Don’t ‘um’ me like a retard. What are you doing!?”

BENJY

“I... uh...”

KENNETH

“You don’t know. Exactly. You’re missing steps, you dance like a cripple, you’re not focusing.”

BENJY

"Kenneth, I'm-

KENNETH

“Everyone, take note. This is what happens when we don’t focus.”

BENJY

I look around at my fellow cast members, hoping someone will speak up.
No one does.

KENNETH

“Let’s do it again. And this time, Benjy, please focus.”

BENJY

We run through the number again.

Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Again!

Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Again!

Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn—

*
*
*

KENNETH

“STOP IT! STOP IT! HOLD PLEASE!”

BENJY

Again, everything stops.

KENNETH

“Benjy. Now you’re trying too hard. I can see the work. I can see the gears turning in your head for the next move.”

BENJY

“With all due respect, Mr. Tallis, we’re just learning the choreography.”

KENNETH

“Oh really. Mira next to you is ‘just learning the choreography’ and she’s doing great. Taylor behind you is ‘just learning the choreography’ and he’s doing a fantastic job. You’re gonna have to step up on learning the choreography.”

*

BENJY

“I apologize. I’ll try better next time.”

KENNETH

“OK. From the top of the number.”

BENJY

Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn.

We finish the number. Kenneth nods approvingly.

KENNETH

“Coming along very nicely. Alright, take ten everyone.”

VICTOR

“Benjy, right?”

BENJY

“Yeah.”

VICTOR

“I’m Victor. The stage manager.”

BENJY

“Yes. I know.”

VICTOR

“I just wanted to ask if you were OK?”

BENJY

“No, I’m fine. Just... kinda still getting into the groove of this, you know?”

VICTOR

“I understand.

“For what it’s worth, I think you’re doing great.”

BENJY

“Really?”

VICTOR

“Kenneth can be a bit of a perfectionist, which is why he comes down very hard on his dancers. It’s nothing new for him.”

BENJY

“Well that’s good to know.”

VICTOR

“I just want to tell you to keep practicing the routine, keep going, and you’ll be fine.”

BENJY

“Thanks for the encouragement.”

VICTOR

“No problem. If you need anything, or if Kenneth is getting to you—seriously, let me know.

“I’m here for you.”

BENJY

“Glad to know someone’s on my side.”

VICTOR

“That’s my job, to look out for my actors.”

BENJY

The rest of the rehearsal continues without incident. But I still feel bad that I wasn’t able to perform up to Kenneth’s standards.

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT'D)

He had cast me in this show under the impression that I was able to handle the choreography. And I was getting paid to be able to handle it. Shouldn't I be able to handle it?
At the end of the rehearsal, I approach Kenneth.

KENNETH

"Yes, Benjy?"

BENJY

"I just wanted to apologize for my lack of focus. It was inconsiderate and unprofessional."

KENNETH

"You're fine. I apologize if I was harsh."

BENJY

"OK. I just wanted you to know that I was sorry. I keep thinking about what you said with the first Broadway show being the most important one, and I want to make as good an impression as possible."

KENNETH

"Victor, can you and the team give us the room?"

BENJY

Victor nods at the production team, and they all leave.
Now, it's just Kenneth and I.

KENNETH

"You're definitely improving. You're hitting the marks with more sharpness. But I'll be honest with you. You're still pretty stiff."

BENJY

"Oh..."

KENNETH

"Back when I was starting out as a dancer, I had the same problem. Stiffness. It came out of wanting to impress people."

BENJY

"I know you've danced for Bob Fosse and Gower Champion, so I can totally get that."

KENNETH

“Yes. And those two were, for lack of a better term, sons-of-bitches. But that’s because they wanted the absolute best out of their dancers. And they wanted the best out of their dancers because they wanted the show to be the best it could possibly be.

"And they wanted *me* to be the best I could possibly be.

"You have something special, Benjy. I don’t know what it is, but you have a special, unique quality about you. I want *you* to be the best *you* could possibly be.”

BENJY

(Almost in tears of relief)

“Thank you, Kenneth.”

KENNETH

“Let me ask you. When was the last time you had a good fuck?”

BENJY

“Uh...”

KENNETH

“Has it really been that long?”

BENJY

“I... it was a couple months ago, I think? Just some guy on Grindr.”

KENNETH

“Well go back on Grindr, find a guy you’re at least semi-attracted to, and fuck him. Or be fucked. It’ll help relieve all the tension in your body.”

BENJY

...

KENNETH

“Actually, here. Let me show you a technique that’s made me more relaxed.”

BENJY

His hand goes for my crotch. It lays there. Then he strokes it. Up and down. Up and down.

KENNETH

“Breathe... Breathe... You gotta breathe, or die. Breathe or die.”

BENJY

I don't know what's happening. I don't feel anything. I don't want to feel anything. I...

KENNETH

"Now do the same to me."

BENJY

For the first time, I notice Kenneth's breath. It smells of rotten eggs and years of cigarettes.

My hands stay by my side.

*

KENNETH

"Do the same to me."

BENJY

He continues stroking me.

KENNETH

"When I tell you to do something, you do it. I'm your director. Now do the same to me!"

*

BENJY

I reach out to his crotch and close my eyes.

KENNETH

"Keep your eyes open."

BENJY

I feel his erection. I stroke him up and down. He throws his head back.

KENNETH

"There you go... Now take it out."

BENJY

Somehow, I'm hard. I do what he says.

KENNETH

"Nice... Nice..."

BENJY

He takes his out too.

We stroke each other.

KENNETH

“I’m almost there... Almost... Put your hand out...”

BENJY

He comes all over my hand. He strokes me faster, trying to get me to do the same.

I tell him that I’ll do it myself.

I jack myself off in front of him, thinking about the first time I had sex with someone who loved me, and I come.

Pause. Panting.

KENNETH

“Feeling more relaxed?”

BENJY nods.

KENNETH

“Do that before every rehearsal. You’ll be more relaxed. I promise.”

BENJY

He takes out a napkin from his pocket and cleans the floor around us.

KENNETH

“I’m doing this to help you. I’m doing this because I care.

I’m doing this because I want the absolute best performance out of you. Now. Go home, and get some rest. Good night.”

BENJY

I leave the room.

I get on the subway.

Back to my apartment.

I try to sleep. But I can't.

Kenneth's words keep looping through my head.

*

KENNETH

“I’m doing this to help you. I’m doing this because I care.

I’m doing this because I want the absolute best performance out of you.

“Don't you want to be the best, Benjy? Don't you want to be the best?”

SHIFT.

WANDA

Marcus sends a car to pick me up from the boarding house at seven.

Earlier that day, his secretary had sent me a silk white dress and a mink stole to wear to the party.

My neighbor Alice, who lives in the room next door, helps to put it on, and asks me who I'm living off of now. I laugh it off, telling her that it's just a friend. I hadn't told her how I had been cast in a Hollywood film. Or about what happened with Marcus. She'd never believe me...

When I walk out of the boarding house and reach the car, Marcus sits in the back.

There's a woman next to him.

MARCUS

"Moira, this is my wife. Dorothy."

WANDA

I shake her hand. She smiles but says nothing. *

We reach George Taylor's mansion. Cars are lined all along the driveway. I can hear a jazz band and people laughing. Lights blaze from the house. It's like something out of that new F. Scott Fitzgerald book! *

When we're inside, Marcus directs me to a short, gruff man with horn-rimmed glasses.

MARCUS

"George, this is Moira Johnson."

GEORGE

"Moira Johnson... You'll do."

WANDA

And then he walks away.

MARCUS

"Don't worry. He's a man of few words. You actually got lucky. When he met Joan Crawford, he asked her if there was any way she could make her eyes smaller."

WANDA

A waiter comes by with a tray stocked with champagne flutes. Marcus takes two and hands one to me.

MARCUS

"To you, Ms. Johnson!"

WANDA

We clink, and I drink. It's the first time I've ever drank champagne. I like it better than the whiskey.

Marcus then takes me around the room, introducing me to people. Actors, directors. He then introduces me to Norma Shearer. I can hardly breathe!

"I'll be in the picture with you, Ms. Shearer!"

*

*

VOICE #3

(Ice queen.)

"How charming."

WANDA

Marcus guides me through the night, handing me champagne glasses as we go along.

At one point, he excuses himself. I lean against the wall with my latest glass of champagne, watching the reveling in front of me.

Just then, a brunette woman I recognized as Jill O'Hara approaches me.

JILL

"So. You're Marcus Bayer's latest."

WANDA

"Excuse me?"

JILL

"I see you being escorted around here by Marcus Bayer. You're his latest, aren't ya?"

WANDA

"His wife is here too."

JILL

"Oh, please. She ain't an idiot. She knows everything her husband does. Or rather, every *one* her husband does."

WANDA

"I don't under..."

JILL

"Oh, come on. We all know what he does in his office with his new actresses."

WANDA

"Oh..."

JILL

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of, dear. You do it with him every once in a while, you don’t tell nobody, you keep your contract. Simple as that.”

WANDA

I sip the rest of my champagne. I tell her I had been cast in the new Shearer picture with George Taylor directing.

JILL

“Oh. George Taylor. He’s a good guy. A bit of an ass, but a good guy overall. Shearer, however... that bitch...”

WANDA

“Don’t disrespect a great star like Norma Shearer.”

JILL

“Honey, when you’re in this business long enough, if you’re in this business long enough, you’ll learn that no one is worth your respect. Myself included.”

JILL hiccups.

*

WANDA

She walks away.

I drink another glass of champagne. I start to feel a bit dizzy. When Marcus finds me, he grabs my hand.

*

MARCUS

“Come into this room and lie down.”

WANDA

Marcus guides me to a door off the main entrance to the house and takes me into a room. I think it’s a study. Or maybe it’s a sitting room. I can’t tell. Marcus sits me down on a chaise lounge.

MARCUS

“You should eat something. I’ll get you some water too.”

WANDA

He leaves the room. The drunken laughter from the main hall filters in from behind the walls. When Marcus returns, he brings some bread and water. I eat and drink, then ask, “Am I your latest?”

MARCUS

“What do you mean, my latest?”

*

WANDA

“Someone said you do what you did with me to all the new actresses...”

MARCUS

(Gently laughs.)

“That must’ve been Jill O’Hara. Don’t put any stock into what she says. She’s so far gone with the booze and dope that all she has is gossip and talk. We’re planning to oust her and bring in fresh new talent. Like you!”

*

WANDA

He pats me on the head. I remember the last time we were together, when he made me...

*

MARCUS

“You’ll find a lot of jealous actresses talk down the accomplishments of better actresses. If you want my advice, you would stay away from actresses in general. All they have on their minds is the next role they want to play, and most of them will stop at nothing to get it. I’ve always been of the mindset that actresses should support one another. Especially new ones like you...”

WANDA

I fall asleep as he says this, comforted by the tenderness in his voice.

I drift off.

When I wake up, Marcus sits across from me.

*

MARCUS

“It’s four in the morning. Time for you to go home.”

WANDA

My mouth feels dry, and there’s a bitter taste at the back of it.

Marcus takes me out of the room and out of the house and into a car.

He takes my hand.

MARCUS

“You’re going to be a star, Moira Johnson.”

WANDA

And... I smile.

SHIFT.

BENJY

I'm almost scared to go into rehearsal the next day. Perhaps Kenneth had told someone about our encounter, and word had spread? Would my cast mates think I started sleeping with Kenneth? Would Kenneth go easier, or harder on me during rehearsal?

When I get to the rehearsal studio, nothing's different. The dancers are warming up, Kenneth is talking with the stage manager, and the music director is going over some of the music with a singer. No one is looking at me funny, or avoiding me. So I figure everything is good.

*

I finish warming up just as Kenneth calls everyone to the center of the room.

KENNETH

"Good morning, everyone. Hope you all had a good night's sleep, because we have a lot to get through today. But first, I wanted to apologize to anyone who may have felt I was being a bit short or brusque with them. As I'm sure we all know, opening a new musical on Broadway can be a very exciting, yet very stressful event. Obviously, I want you all to be as great as possible, because your success is my success. I don't think it's a goal for any of us to have this show flop. So if any of you ever feel uncomfortable, or that I'm coming down too hard on you, please let me personally know. Or, if I'm not available, please tell Victor. I want to ensure that this is a safe rehearsal environment for everybody, and I can't do that if I don't know there's a problem.

"So the next time you don't feel either safe or comfortable, please let me know. OK?"

BENJY

The entire cast nods their heads and say "OK". I do too.

*

KENNETH

"Excellent. So let's go through the number from yesterday again."

BENJY

Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn. Step, kick, kick, step, Charleston, turn.

I'm still a bit rusty, but Kenneth doesn't yell at me. There are a few other dancers whom he gives notes to, but he leaves me alone.

Mostly.

At one point, while we're all supposed to be standing still, Kenneth adjusts my posture. His hands *definitely* graze my butt.

At another point, during a break, he whispers to me,

KENNETH

"You're a bit tense today. You need to relax. See me after rehearsal."

BENJY

I do. And he clears the room. And we jerk each other off again.

KENNETH

"This'll allow you to do your best, Benjy. I'm only trying to help you reach your full potential. No other director would care this much about cultivating your performance."

BENJY

Over the next few rehearsals, Kenneth continues blocking the rest of the show. There comes a point where someone needs to do an intense jump rope sequence. I have years of gymnastics training, so I'm chosen.

There's a tango between two ensemble members. I'm chosen. There's a point where someone needs to lift the actress playing Moira into the air and spin her around.

Two guesses who was chosen for that.

It's flattering to be trusted with so much of the show, but in a fairly large cast, wouldn't it make more sense to distribute the responsibilities more... evenly? What right do I have to complain, though? If I'm going to be trusted with this responsibility, I have to take it.

*

*

KENNETH

"Come see me after rehearsal, Benjy."

BENJY

"I'm meeting up with some friends."

KENNETH

"You want to keep your job, don't you?"

BENJY

I see him after rehearsal. He strokes me. I stroke him. He sometimes reaches into the back of my pants and fingers me.

He demands I do the same to him. And I do.

I ignore how disgusted I am. With myself. And with Kenneth. I want to call Alex and tell her what's been happening. But she had warned me. Maybe I should have listened to her.

It'll be worth it for my Broadway debut, I keep telling myself. When I'm on the stage, all fitted in my costume, the lights beaming down, the audience applauding, it'll all be-

*

KENNETH

"God, you're so fucking sexy... You're gonna go far, I can tell. You're already taking me...
Aaaahhh!"

BENJY

We continue rehearsing the show for the rest of the week. The writers add new pages and songs to the show every day. It's coming along, but it's still... Kenneth is doing his best with it, and he knows what he's doing, and I'm sure he'll pull together something great. The show goes like this: It opens with the actor playing Marcus Bayer uttering the final words that the real man spoke before his death. *

VOICE #2

"Moira... Moira..." *

BENJY

Then, we go into a song taking place in the modern day with a bunch of people at their computers. They're doing research on Moira Johnson, trying to figure out why she would have been Marcus Bayer's last words after all these years. At the end of the opening number, Moira comes out. But it isn't Moira herself- this Moira is a product of all the information these people have learned about her. *

WANDA

"I am everything I was, and everything you heard!" *

BENJY

Does that make sense?
She then narrates her arrival in Hollywood-

WANDA

"One day, I'll stop being a mere waitress in this greasy spoon and my face will be on the big silver screen! Just you all wait!" *

BENJY

Her meeting Marcus Bayer-

WANDA

"I've never met a man I've fallen so quickly for!" *

BENJY

The filming of *It Happens at Parties*-

WANDA

"Norma? I demand you give me the same amount of respect you would to any of your other co-stars!"

BENJY

-and then the forbidden romance between her and Bayer.
The two of them are about to kiss, when one of the modern-day people say that-

VOICE #1

"Moirra and Marcus Bayer didn't have an affair- he raped her!"

BENJY

Another pipes in to support that theory.

VOICE #2

"Yes, God knows Marcus Bayer wasn't the most chaste man in Hollywood!"

BENJY

During one rehearsal, one of the actresses asks

VOICE #3

How come it's all men who are speculating about Moira Johnson's story?

KENNETH

"I'm sure there are plenty of women who do want to take part in Moira's story. But this choice speaks to how men have always controlled her narrative, even in death and in entertainment at large."

BENJY

Apparently that answers her question.

So the characters onstage argue about whether the romance between Marcus and Moira was love or rape, when one of them points out that either way, it was still likely she left Hollywood due to her pregnancy.

WANDA does a silent star gasp, then covers her stomach.

Everything's at stake for her: *It Happens at Parties* is about to be released, and the studio already wants her to do a second film with them.

WANDA

"Whatever will I do? I have two roads ahead of me, and it seems I can only pick one."

*

BENJY

She sings a beautiful song about whether to continue her film career or to have her baby and lead the life of a single mother. Marcus says he can arrange an abortion, but she ultimately decides against it, and decides not to do the second film. The studio demands that she pay them before they release her for breach of contract, but she leaves anyway.

WANDA

"You can't make these demands on me! Not for all the money in the world! It's my life, too!"

*

BENJY

So she leaves the studio, but doesn't say where she's going. When she's about to leave the stage, the men ask her several questions.

*

*

VOICE #2

"What was the nature of the relationship between you and Marcus Bayer?"

*

WANDA

"That's for me to know, and for you to find out."

*

VOICE #1

"Was Norma Shearer really as much of a bitch as people said she was?"

WANDA

"That's for me to know, and for you to find out!"

*

BENJY

"Were you going to make a second film?"

WANDA

"That's for me to know, and for you to find out."

*

BENJY

"Where did you go after leaving Hollywood?"

WANDA

"That's for me to know, and for you to find out."

*

BENJY

“What did you do after leaving Hollywood?”

WANDA

“That’s for me to know, and for you to find out.”

BENJY

She then sings about how her life is hers to know, and not for us to find out. She speaks the final line:

WANDA

“My story is my story. And whatever I could tell, I’ve already told. But whatever I couldn’t...”

BENJY

And she disappears into the wings, never to reveal what really happened to her.

KENNETH

"Benjy, come see me. Everyone else, you can go home. Thank you."

BENJY

Moira Johnson only made one film. And yet we still talk about her. Sometimes, in my darker moments, like when Kenneth and I are... I wonder what would happen if I disappeared after I made my Broadway debut. Would people remember me as the chorus boy who disappeared after doing one show, and regret a career that was cut too short? Would they think about all the roles I could have played? Would they call me the male Moira Johnson? We were both from St. Louis, after all...

SHIFT

WANDA

The first day of shooting, makeup can barely put my face together, I’m shaking so hard. When we start shooting, I’m already exhausted. George imposes next to the camera, calling

GEORGE

"Action!"

WANDA

And

GEORGE

"Cut!"

WANDA

My first shot, I'm supposed to come down a staircase to greet Norma Shearer at a party. First take. I'm halfway down the stairs before George yells,

GEORGE

"Cut!"

WANDA

"Is anything the matter?"

GEORGE

"You're too stiff coming down the stairs, Moira. You need to be fun, energetic, looser, livelier. Do it again."

WANDA

On the second take, I try to be livelier. *

WANDA makes a fairly pitiful attempt at being livelier. *

GEORGE

"Cut! Moira. What the hell are you doing with your arms? You look like a twelve-year-old. How old are you?"

WANDA

"Nineteen."

GEORGE

"You're nineteen, you're moving like you're nine. Let's do it again!" *

Once again, WANDA tries to appear livelier. She tries to control her arms, her legs, her face. It's not working. *

GEORGE *

"Don't act so self-conscious. Let's do it one more time."

WANDA

‘One more time’ turned into eight more times. But finally, he said he was satisfied. I heaved a massive sigh of relief, only to realize that there were still several scenes to shoot. Somehow, I manage to get through it even with George Taylor constantly yelling

*

GEORGE

CUT!

*

*

WANDA

-during my scenes.

After sixteen hours of shooting, I ride the trolley back to the boarding house. A letter is waiting for me. It's from mother.

*

*

*

*

MOTHER

“Dear Wanda,

Wanted to write and say that we miss you very much. Your sister had her baby. She was christened Georgia Lily. She and Robert are doing very well. Father wishes you well too. We were wondering when you were going to come home.

Sincerely, Mother”

WANDA

I sit on the bed. I feel tears in my eyes. To Mother, I’m still Wanda.

A name, now a beacon of... No, not a beacon. An anchor. To something I thought was swept away by change. But was still there. Somehow. My name, Wanda Glimmelstein, was still there.

I think about what to write Mother back with. There’s so much to tell. Do I tell her about the soda fountain job? Do I tell her I got into the movies? Do I tell her about Marcus?

*

Do I tell her that I miss everyone, and that I desperately want to meet my niece?

A knock on my door.

MATRON

"There's a gentleman on the phone for ya."

*

*

MARCUS

“I saw the rushes today, kid.”

WANDA

“Oh...?”

MARCUS

“They look fine, just fine.”

WANDA

“Thank Goodness... I had to take that scene going down the staircase I don't remember how many times!”

MARCUS

“George was telling me. I understand he was a bit hard on you today.”

WANDA

“It wasn't for no reason. I was just trying too hard, I guess.”

MARCUS

“Right, right. George can be a bit of a fuck. But he means well, and only wants the best out of his actresses. As do I.”

WANDA

“Yes...”

MARCUS

“If George ever gives you trouble, or anything like that, I expect you to tell me.”

WANDA

“What do you mean?”

MARCUS

“I'm sure you've heard it from other actresses, but George can be a bit of a ladies' man, if you know what I mean.”

WANDA

"Oh?"

MARCUS

“He has a wife who barely tolerates his behavior, but some of what he does to those actresses, especially the new ones, is just shameful.”

WANDA

“I don't think my work from today would entice him...”

MARCUS

“Ah, but that's his trick. He treats you poorly on set, then is nice to you off set, which takes you by surprise. Once he has you, he takes you.”

WANDA

"I see..."

MARCUS

"So take this as a warning. Got it?"

WANDA

"OK."

MARCUS

"Fine. And if you need anything, I want you to come to me."

WANDA

"...sure."

MARCUS

"You don't sound sure."

WANDA

"Sorry, I'm tired."

MARCUS

"Of course. The first day of a shoot is tough for anyone. Now get some rest, and come tomorrow prepared to work."

WANDA

He hangs up, and I return to my room. I'm asleep in the next ten minutes.

I forget about the letter my mother sent me.

Shooting continues for the next few weeks. Norma Shearer keeps to herself. George berates me for moving too quickly, or too slowly, or too stiffly.

When I get back from shooting, Marcus calls me. He does that every day. It becomes such a routine that after a week, I don't even go back up to my room. I stay downstairs, waiting for the phone to ring.

When he doesn't talk about shooting, he talks about other things.

MARCUS

"My wife and I have been married for fifteen years now. We used to live back east, but then I wanted to come out west and make movies. She wanted to stay in New York and raise our children there. I promised her that I wouldn't dedicate too much time to the studio, that she and the children would always be my first priority. I never told you I had children, did I?"

(MORE)

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I have a thirteen-year-old, Margaret, and an eleven-year-old Billy, and a nine-year-old named Josephine. They're all beautiful children, and my wife does a beautiful job taking care of them. But there's another part of me that's unfulfilled by that. My wife and I have talked about this. She understands that sometimes, to stay in, you gotta step out. Because you can't spend the rest of your life wondering what if. You have to get to know yourself, because in a marriage, you're always growing, always changing, always discovering new facts about yourself and your spouse..."

WANDA

One day, he asks me to go away with him for the weekend.

MARCUS

"Just to my little cottage by the beach. You'll be done with shooting, so you'll be less tired, and I need a weekend getaway..."

WANDA

"I'm afraid I can't. I have to rest."

MARCUS

"You can rest with me at my cottage."

WANDA

"Why doesn't your wife go with you?"

MARCUS

"She has business in town. You know how those society ladies are. Going to this meeting, and that gathering, where they gab, gab, gab..."

WANDA

"Maybe she needs a break too."

MARCUS

"No. If she wants to get away, she can have a nanny look after the children and go to some gigolo's apartment."

WANDA

"Oh... I didn't know that..."

MARCUS

"Yes. I can have the car pick you up on Friday evening."

WANDA

“No. I need rest.”

MARCUS

“Just one weekend. I won’t do anything untoward, I swear—

WANDA

“I said NO!”

Long silence.

MARCUS

“Suit yourself.”

MARCUS hangs up.

SHIFT

BENJY

Mom sends me an email.

MOM

“Dear Benjamin,

“Hi! We wanted to quickly write to you and say how proud we are of you. We already booked our plane tickets to come to New York for your show! Let us know if you can get us in for cheap. We love you, but we can’t break our budget with \$300 seats.

“We ran into your old drama teacher, Mr. Fuglehart. We told him that you moved to New York, that you were currently rehearsing for a musical with Kenneth Tallis. He put his hand on his heart and said, ‘I’ve made it, even if vicariously through one of my former students.’ He was always such a funny man. He sends you his best, and says he will try to come to New York during one of the school breaks to see you.

“Admittedly, I enjoy telling everyone that my son is making his Broadway debut! It almost makes up for the years of being taunted by Bobby Gorgon’s mother that her son was a bigger football star than mine. Now I get to tell her that your gymnastics, dancing, acting, and singing lessons have all paid off! And that I’m sure Bobby is having a blast coasting on unemployment after being fired from the supermarket six months ago...

“Snarkiness aside, we’re all really excited to come and see you! And let us know about tickets. If we have to pay \$300 to see you, then we’ll just take out a second mortgage. Love, hugs, and kisses from all of us, Mom.”

KENNETH

"Benjy! Come see me after rehearsal."

BENJY

My parents were so excited for me. I couldn't destroy that.

SHIFT.

WANDA

I hear laughs and whispers around the studio now.

VOICE #2

"She blew Marcus Bayer for the role."

*

VOICE #3

"She doesn't have any talent.

"She's not an actress. She's a whore who likes to act on camera."

*

*

VOICE #1

"I wonder how many abortions she's had to have."

WANDA

I keep quiet, thinking that if I don't acknowledge the comments, they'll go away.
But they don't.

VOICE #2

"She's Marcus Bayer's latest."

VOICE #3

"No, I heard she turned him down."

VOICE #1

"Well she's an idiot if she did."

VOICE #2

"She's a cold-hearted bitch."

VOICE #3

"She's not even that talented. You know that part belonged to me! You know what I had to do for it!?"

VOICE #1

"Look on the bright side, you might replace her."

VOICE #3

“What, are they doing that?”

VOICE #1

“I heard George was looking for someone to replace her.”

VOICE #2

“Makes sense. He would if he was smart.”

VOICE #1

“They’d have to reshoot all those scenes, though.”

VOICE #2

“Marcus has money. He could afford it.”

VOICE #1

“Norma’s not gonna like that.”

VOICE #3

“Oh that cunt will live. And she’s gonna make a ton of dough off this movie. Hell, she’ll probably get a bonus for reshooting while the rest of us get nothing! Why did I even bother coming to Hollywood? I should’ve kept my dignity and stayed in Buffalo.”

VOICE #2

“I should’ve stayed in Tallahassee.”

*

WANDA

I should’ve stayed in St. Louis.

The thought comes across my mind multiple times, but I don't give it any credence. I try not to believe the rumors. Not, of course, until I know for sure they're true.

*

I decide to talk to Marcus about it. To make him aware. Perhaps he can stop them.

*

When I call his office, his secretary says he's out to lunch.

I ask her to tell him to please call me as soon as he can. Two days later, I haven't heard from him.

*

I call his office again. Leave a message with his secretary. He finally approaches me while I'm eating lunch in the canteen. He asks me to come up to his office.

*

When we get there, he locks the door behind him.

MARCUS

“Want some brandy? Whiskey? Water?”

WANDA

“No thank you.”

MARCUS

“So what did you want to see me about?”

WANDA

I tell him what I’ve been hearing around the studio, the rumors, the whispers, the laughs.

MARCUS

“Oh, I wouldn’t pay regard to those. Actors talk. They laugh. They get jealous.”

WANDA

“But... what they’re saying...”

MARCUS

“Whatever they’re accusing you of, most of them have done themselves. If they were in your position, they’d be talked about too.

“You think they didn’t say these things about Norma Shearer? People used to say she couldn’t act, that all she did was fuck Thalberg. And look where she is now.”

WANDA

“That’s not the point—

MARCUS

“Look, you’re bothered by something you did, now you’re fearing the consequences. And this fear is manifesting itself in what other people are saying.”

WANDA

“But can’t you please just—

*

MARCUS

“I’m assuming you haven’t told anyone about us, have you?”

WANDA

“No, of course not. But people suspect, and—

MARCUS

“People are going to suspect whatever they want to suspect. But they don’t know the truth. Right?”

WANDA

“...no...”

MARCUS

“Good. So you have nothing to worry about! It’s all just other actors being jealous that you got where you are so quickly.

“Believe me, I don’t just give any little actress who comes into my office a role without some regard for their talent. On the screen and... elsewhere...”

WANDA

His eyes narrow, his lips creep upwards into a grin, he puts his drink down. He begins to stroke his... *

MARCUS

“Lots of actresses have talent... but not a lot of actresses have *talent*... You have talent. I go to bed with my wife wishing she were that talented.”

WANDA

Somehow, I’m able to stand.

Somehow, I’m able to start walking away.

Somehow, Marcus grabs me and forces me back into the chair.

He unzips his pants. Must and sweat leak into my nostrils. *

I try to scream, but he assaults my mouth, in and out, in and out, in and out... *

MARCUS

“Yes... oh yes...”

WANDA

His hands tighten against my shoulders. His face is turned upwards so he can’t see the tears coming out of my eyes. *

MARCUS

(Smiling, laughing) *

“So talented...”

WANDA

I close my eyes, trying to get outside of myself. I think of my sister and I running through the sheets that had been hung out to dry. I think of her wedding and how beautiful it was. I think of my niece, and if she’s sleeping OK. I think of mother, and how I haven’t written her back yet. I think of my grandmother. My grandfather. I think... I think... I... Taste the bitter liquid as it shoots into my mouth, more and more. *

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

Marcus breathes. He zips himself up. He goes to his drawer, takes out a handkerchief, and drops it in my lap.

MARCUS

“Clean yourself up.”

WANDA

I dab the handkerchief around my mouth. I get up to leave. He then grabs the handkerchief from me.

MARCUS

“I’ll wash this.”

WANDA

And I leave his office.

SHIFT.

BENJY

Whenever we’re on break, I go to a corner and drink from my water bottle. No one talks to me. They look at me with a side-eye. They whisper things in their groups that I don’t want to know.

VOICE #3

“I wonder what Kenneth has been seeing him about...”

*

VOICE #2

“He’s probably his latest fuckboy.”

VOICE #3

“So *that’s* why he got cast!”

*

VOICE #1

“He’s kind of stuck up, isn’t he?”

VOICE #2

“Ugh, totally.”

VOICE #3

“Fear not. Soon Kenneth will move onto some other hot young thing, and we’ll never have to watch Benjy fuck up the choreography again.”

VOICE #1

“Here, here!”

BENJY

I try not to let it bother me. I just keep my mind on the show. It's my Broadway debut. Broadway debut. *Broadway. Debut.*

VICTOR

“Everything OK, Benjy?”

BENJY

“Yeah. I'm fine, Victor.”

VICTOR

“You haven't been yourself lately. Usually you're so sharp and focused, but today you've been kinda sloppy. No offense.”

BENJY

“I know. I know. I've just had a lot on my mind.”

VICTOR

“If you're having a problem with anyone in the cast or anything about the production, you know you can tell me, right?”

BENJY

“What's that supposed to mean?”

VICTOR

“Exactly what I mean it to. You have a problem, I'll do my best to help out with it.”

BENJY

Victor and I go into the hallway, to a corner where no one can hear us. I tell him about the encounters I've been having with Kenneth. And how much pressure he's putting on me. And how the cast seems to hate me because I'm getting special treatment. Which all leads to how uncomfortable I am during rehearsals. Which leads to why I am telling him all of this now.

*

*

VICTOR

“I see.”

BENJY

"...is that all you have to say?"

VICTOR

"I'm glad you told me all of this. I'll have a talk with Kenneth and the cast."

BENJY

"...that's it? You're not going to report any of this to Equity? At least about Kenneth?"

VICTOR

"If you want me to, I could. Or you could do it yourself."

BENJY

"I have no problem doing that."

VICTOR

"I mean, it wouldn't be the first time Equity has heard an accusation like this against Kenneth."

BENJY

"OK..."

VICTOR

"Having worked with Kenneth for a while, I can tell you that most of those people who reported were fired, mainly for being incompetent, or simply not up to the task at hand."

BENJY

"What task at hand?"

VICTOR

"Doing what the director says."

BENJY

"...what does that mean?"

VICTOR

"Look, you're clearly a smart guy. You went to... where did you go again?"

BENJY

"NYU."

VICTOR

“OK, so you’re not completely stupid. And you wouldn’t do anything so stupid that you would completely jeopardize your fellow performers' jobs, right?”

BENJY

“But...”

VICTOR

“It would kind of suck for these people, who have been no doubt struggling to find performing jobs, especially performing jobs on Broadway, to lose work because you couldn't keep your mouth shut about Kenneth.”

BENJY

"But Kenneth shouldn't be treating-

VICTOR

"Kenneth is a longstanding member of the Broadway community, as well as the theatre community at large, and has been for decades. He's employed several people, made stars out of many performers, and knows a lot more than you or I about this business."

BENJY

"This isn't about the business, though. This is about basic respect for other people."

VICTOR

"What would you be doing if you didn't get this gig, Benjy? Would you have gotten another performing job? Or would you still be waiting tables at whatever high-end shithole you were serving at?"

BENJY

"I... I..."

VICTOR

"You? You? Are you retarded, like Kenneth says?"

BENJY

"Don't call me that!"

VICTOR

“Shhhh! Not too loud!”

BENJY

"I can't believe this! You're the stage manager! You're supposed to be helping me!"

VICTOR

"My job is to ensure that this whole process goes smoothly. And if there's something that threatens that, I need to take care of it. For the sake of the whole company, and for Kenneth. And right now, you're a threat, unless you stay in line, do what Kenneth says, and shut up. Unless you want to be replaced by someone more willing to comply with the needs of the production. Who sees the bigger picture. Who knows that art is art is art."

Pause.

VICTOR

"Tell you what. You're clearly very stressed out by the production. We all are." *

BENJY *

He places his hands on my shoulders. I smell the coffee and cigarettes on his breath. *

VICTOR

"You know, I'm *very good* at massages... And I can tell you could really, *really* use one... Why don't we go back to my place, and I can give you one. And then I'll consider reporting your claim to Equity. How does that sound?" *

Pause.

BENJY

I shove him off of me and tell him to FUCK OFF.

I storm away from him.

I run down the hallway. Ride the elevator to the ground floor. Run onto the street.

I think, he's gonna tell Kenneth.

I think, Kenneth is going to fire me.

I think, I'm gonna have to go back to my old job at the restaurant. *

I think, I'm gonna be blacklisted. *

I think, I think, I think— *

SHIFT.

GEORGE

"I hear what they've been saying about you, Moira."

WANDA

"...oh?"

GEORGE

"Are you OK?"

WANDA

"Please don't make me talk about it, Mr. Taylor."

GEORGE

"Alright. Not gonna make you talk about things you don't want to. But answer me something."

WANDA

"OK..."

GEORGE

"Why did you want to be an actress?"

WANDA

"I... saw Clara Bow in a magazine, and thought she looked so glamorous, so happy. And I guess I thought I could be that happy, if I was an actress? I don't know now."

GEORGE

"You got seduced. They all get seduced. There's no shame in it. I certainly don't blame you. But you got seduced like the rest of them."

WANDA

"I... suppose. I don't... I don't know."

GEORGE

"I'll be frank. What I'm about to say to you is not gonna sound kind. But I only say it because I've been in this industry for years, and I have hunches, and I'm rarely wrong about them.

"I don't think you're gonna make it as an actress."

WANDA begins to cry softly.

GEORGE

"Now before you soak the studio lot with your tears, listen to me. This is a rotten industry with rotten people doing rotten things to one another.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT 'D)

For a part with a few speaking lines, for name placement on some poster. People forget about things like that. The public just wants to see the stars, and the stars themselves... some of them are good people. But most of them are just as rotten as the rest. It's one of the few industries where to survive, you have to be willing to be a backstabbing, nasty, cold-hearted son of a bitch. You gotta be willing to screw the saddest, most miserable man to get any attention, no matter who gets hurt. If you'll pardon my bluntness, their brains are in their cocks, no matter what they throw up on screen.

WANDA

"Marcus told me that you sometimes do those things with your actresses."

GEORGE

"Well... Never said I wasn't rotten myself. But you're not. That's what I wanted to tell you. You're willing. And you're motivated. But you're not rotten. You got a good heart, Moira. It's too good for this industry. Take it where it's appreciated. Because these people? They don't care what you got inside you."

*
*

Pause.

GEORGE

"You got a six-month contract, right?"

WANDA

"Yes."

GEORGE

"Do the six months. Get your money. Then get the hell out. That's my advice."

*

WANDA

"...thank you."

GEORGE

"See you on set."

WANDA

And he walks away. Without touching me once.

*

SHIFT.

BENJY

I go to Alex's office and tell her about Kenneth.

*

ALEX

“Oh God, Benjy. Not you too.”

BENJY

I also tell her about Victor.

*

ALEX

“I never liked that guy. He is a creep.”

BENJY

We discuss my options, none of which look great.

ALEX

“Obviously, you could quit the show. But that wouldn’t stop Kenneth, or Victor for that matter, from saying things about you, like that you’re difficult to work with, or that you were consistently late for rehearsals.

*

*

“Your second option would be to report it to Equity. There’s some rule in there about protocol for sexual harassment, but nobody uses it. And to be honest, I’m not sure if Equity would want to get involved with this.”

BENJY

“Haven’t other actors reported their issues with Kenneth to Equity?”

ALEX

“A few have. But they only ended up getting fired, and blacklisted. I don’t want that to happen to you, Benjy.”

*

BENJY

“Do I have a third option?”

ALEX

“Sadly, the third option would be in my opinion, the best option: Just stay in the show and don’t say anything.”

BENJY

“So no matter what, I lose.”

*

*

ALEX

“Don’t think about it that—

BENJY

"How else can I think about it!?"

*

ALEX

"I gave you your options. Take 'em or leave 'em.

*

"I did warn you, Benjy. I'm not saying I blame you, but I knew something like this would happen to you. But you didn't listen to me."

*

*

BENJY

"This isn't my fault!"

*

ALEX

"I told you about what you were getting yourself into. But you wanted *nothing more* than to be in a Kenneth Tallis production. Well now you know what it's like to be in one."

*

*

*

BENJY

"You're my agent! Can't you do something about-

*

*

ALEX

"I can't do anything except wait for the phone call saying that you're fired.

*

*

"And frankly, it will serve you right.

*

"Because people like you are the reason that Kenneth Tallis keeps working, and I'm tired of dealing with you all."

*

*

BENJY

"How fucking dare you!"

*

ALEX

"People like *you*. And people like *me*, who have to deal with people like *you* who just *have* to work with Kenneth because he's *such* a fucking legend. Because if we don't allow you to work with Kenneth, then we get blamed for preventing you from a *wonderful* opportunity." "I want to barf whenever I find out that Kenneth has another show coming to town. Because that means *more* people are going to work with him. And *more* people are going to pay and see it. And *more* theatre critics are going to cream themselves at whatever he throws up onstage. And because of that, no one does anything. I've lived with this for *years*, Benjy. And I'm sick and tired of it. But that's just the way it is."

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

BENJY

"It doesn't have to be.

*

*

ALEX *
It doesn't. But it is. *

Long, long pause. *

BENJY *
"Well. What do I have to lose, then?" *

ALEX *
"What do you mean?" *

BENJY *
"I'm going to do something about it." *

ALEX *
"Benjy, let's think about this a little more." *

BENJY *
"You just said no one does anything about it. Well I'm going to!" *

ALEX *
"What are you gonna do? Benjy!" *

BENJY
I run back to the rehearsal room. They're running through a dance number, the one where I have to toss Moira Johnson up in the air. Another one of the chorus members is tossing her up now.
I walk into the middle of the dance floor, not caring that I'm getting in the way of the dancers. I reach the middle of the room. And I sit.

BENJY sits.

And say nothing.

KENNETH
"Benjy, you're not allowed in this rehearsal now."

BENJY
...

KENNETH
"Benjy, please stand up and leave."

BENJY

...

KENNETH

“Benjy.”

BENJY

...

KENNETH

“Benjy, this is extremely unprofessional.”

VOICE #3

“Oh come on!

“Just pick him up or something!”

*
*
*

KENNETH

“Benjy, I’m not going to ask you again. Please stand up.”

VICTOR

"I'll take care of this."

BENJY

"Not until you tell everyone what we've been doing after rehearsals, Kenneth."

KENNETH

“What are you talking about? You're insane.”

BENJY

“To me. And others.”

VICTOR

“Benjy, we are trying to run a rehearsal—

BENJY

“Let Kenneth answer.”

KENNETH

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. But we don’t have time to discuss it. We have a show to rehearse.”

BENJY

“What about how you taught me to "relax" after rehearsals?”

VICTOR

“I'm calling security.”

BENJY

“I know I wasn't the only one. I know there were others. Some have tried to say something, but you stopped them. You're not going to stop me. You're not going to continue this behavior, not while I still have a voice.”

KENNETH

“You may have a voice, but you're not going to have a job.”

BENJY

“So the fuck what? If your treatment of me is what I have to put up with, then I don't want this job.

"And if no one's going to say anything, even though we all know, and have known for years how you've treated actors who just wanted to work in this industry, then I don't want to be a part of it. And if standing up for myself makes me unprofessional, then I'm going to be the least professional performer in this whole goddam city.”

KENNETH

“THAT’S ENOUGH!”

BENJY

“Yes. It is.”

And with that, I stand up and walk out. The next day, Alex calls me.

*

ALEX

"What the hell happened?"

*

*

BENJY

I tell her.

*

*

ALEX

“You’re the stupidest and bravest client I’ve ever had. It was nice knowing you.”

BENJY

One of the cast members films the incident and puts it on their Instagram. Needless to say, it goes viral. I start getting emails, saying that I am a liar. That I am crazy. That I am disrespectful to an industry that brings happiness to millions of people. It makes the news on Broadway World. Kenneth goes on the record denying that any accusations are true. There are rumors that the show will be cancelled. But Kenneth assures everyone that it would indeed go on.

*

*

*

*

KENNETH

"This actor, whom we have let go from our production, has been suffering from serious mental health issues. We felt it best for both his well-being and the production to take the time needed to recuperate. We wish him nothing but the best, and that he gets the help he needs. In the meantime, *Land of Tinsel* will go on as scheduled."

*

BENJY

It did.

SHIFT.

WANDA

After the last day of shooting, I finally sit down to write home when the matron knocks on my door.

*

*

MATRON

"There's a gentleman on the phone for ya."

*

*

MARCUS

“Now that you’ve wrapped this picture, the real work has gotta start. We gotta schedule photoshoots and interviews with you, and we gotta talk to figure out what your story is, what you’re gonna say, how you’re gonna say it. I’m gonna have a meeting with our publicist today to figure all that out... You there?”

WANDA

“Yes I’m... I’m here.”

MARCUS

“Well why didn’t you say something?”

WANDA

“I...”

MARCUS

“If it’s about publicity, don’t worry. We got some of the best guys for that job here.”

WANDA

“I’m sure they’re great.”

MARCUS

“It’s also fine to say that you’re from St. Louis. A lot of fine people come from St. Louis. We’ve come a long way from the days of telling people that movie stars are exotic, lost princesses from the Sahara when in reality they’re bookish gals from Ohio or wherever. They’re gonna want the real you, and the real you is a charmer.

*

*

“Of course you can say if anything doesn’t feel natural to you, but the studio has a damn good method of finding what works for different actors.

“But you gotta do your part. You gotta give them a show, even off the screen. You gotta convince them that you’re Moira Johnson. And that you’re the new happy-go-lucky star every woman in America will want to be.”

WANDA

The next few months blur for me. Makeup. Cameras. Smiling. Makeup. Smiling. Cameras. Questions. Where did I come from. Who did I admire. Makeup. Smiling. Cameras. How was I discovered. Everyone was looking forward to the new picture. It was lovely to meet you, Ms. Johnson. Introducing Moira Johnson, that sparkling new starlet you’ve read about.

I remember the Grauman’s Chinese theatre. I remember the crowds. I remember Norma waving to fans. I remember my escort, another actor named Andrew Roscoe.

*

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT 'D)

Sitting in my seat, my heart began to pound. Marcus sat a few rows in front of me with his wife. He gave me a thumbs up. The lights went down. The film began. And I watched.

We see some "clips" from *It Happens at Parties* featuring Wanda/Moira.

The close-up of me after I made my entrance down the staircase. The glimmering eyes. The pearly-white smile. The lacquered hair. The lilting piano that played as I made my entrance. The audience disappeared. The theater disappeared. Hollywood disappeared. There was just me, Wanda Glimmelstein, and her, Moira Johnson. A jolt of lightning pierced me as I realized everyone was watching Moira. Everyone was going to watch Moira. In the future, people would remember watching Moira. But they wouldn't remember watching me. Would they remember me, Wanda Glimmelstein, from St. Louis? Or would they only remember Moira Johnson, the starlet who was discovered by the benevolent Marcus Bayer? Would they ever know about the events in his office? Him in my mouth? Him throwing his head back in pleasure as I choked on him? The tears that came out of my eyes as I...? Or would they only care about the tears I shed onscreen?

The "film" cuts out.

The film ends. The audience applauds. Marcus makes a speech about how proud he is of the film. He then calls up Moira Johnson to the stage. As the audience applauds, I expect someone to come out from behind the curtain and join him. But Andrew Roscoe leans over to me and says,

VOICE #2

"That's you."

WANDA

I walk up the aisle. Everyone is clapping, smiling. I join Marcus onstage. The audience applauds, then hushes.

MARCUS

"It takes a great many people to make a film, both old talent and new talent. I am blessed to have the opportunity to discover new talent every day. Every picture is an opportunity to bring a fresh face to the motion picture-going public, and tonight, I am especially pleased to have brought to you, Moira Johnson!"

We hear applause.

WANDA
 Marcus whispers to me, *

MARCUS
 "Take a bow." *

WANDA takes a bow. *

MARCUS
 "Say a few words." *

Applause dies down. WANDA steps up to a microphone
 (real or imaginary, your choice). *

WANDA
 "Thank you. You've all made me so... so..." *

I step away from the microphone, unable to speak anymore. The audience applauds.
 Marcus takes me into his arms and kisses me on the head.

MARCUS
 "I'll see you at the party later."

WANDA
 At the party, everyone I've recognized from the screen is there. They all congratulate me
 on a brilliant debut.
 Including Clara Bow.

VOICE #3
 "You were wonderful, my dear."

WANDA
 I want to tell her everything that happened to me. I want to ask if it happened to her. I
 want to ask her if she still had to do it.
 But she leaves to join a group in the corner.
 George comes up to me and whispers,

GEORGE
 "You really had something up there, Moira. Maybe you should reconsider what I said." *

WANDA

Marcus approaches me with two glasses filled with champagne. He hands me one, and raises the other.

MARCUS

“To the new star!”

WANDA

We clink and drink.

The champagne doesn't taste like the last champagne I had.

I begin to feel dizzy and woozy. I faint.

When I come to, I ask a waiter for a glass of water, which they promptly bring me.

Marcus asks me if I'm feeling OK.

MARCUS

"The excitement can be too much for some starlets."

*

*

WANDA

I tell him I'm a bit tired, that perhaps I ought to go home. He agrees.

I begin to apologize, for wanting to go home so early in the evening.

He says it's OK.

He says he would take me home.

I don't remember saying yes or no.

But I remember being in the car with him. Him taking my keys from me.

Opening the door.

Giving the matron some money. The matron taking it.

Taking me back up to my room.

*

MARCUS

“I'm gonna stay here, make sure you get to sleep alright.”

*

WANDA

“I'll be fine.”

*

MARCUS

“You sure you don't want a little company?”

WANDA

He sits on the bed. “No, I'll be fine.”

MARCUS

“We have a lot to discuss.”

WANDA

“Nothing that can’t wait until the morning, I’m sure.”

MARCUS

“You were sensational tonight. Truly. People will remember this night forever. But the next step is to make sure they don't forget *you*.”

WANDA

“We can talk about this later—

MARCUS

“And the way to make sure they don’t forget you is to stay in good with the people who run things.”

WANDA

“I look forward to making more films.”

MARCUS

“Films, charities, various events... We’re gonna be able to use you a lot.”

WANDA

He takes my face in both of his hands. And he shoves his face into mine. *

MARCUS

“Yeah... We’re gonna be able to use you a lot...”

WANDA

He cups his hand over my mouth. I try to scream.

MARCUS

“Shhhh. Shhhh...”

WANDA

Shoving me back onto the bed. Removing my dress.
 Removing his trousers. Climbing on top of me. Sharp pain, below...
 Him above me.
 His hot, sour breath slamming against my face.
 In and out... In and out... In and out...
 Wanting him to stay out. To not do anymore.
 Trying to tell him he was... he was...
 Then he finishes.

(MORE)

WANDA (CONT'D)

He gets up.

Puts his trousers on. And then he leaves.

...

I can't fall asleep. I spend the night staring at the ceiling.

Years ahead of me, of me and Marcus. Of me and the pictures.

Me and Marcus.

He and his wife and his children. And George Taylor and Norma Shearer

And the other starlets. And the other stars

And the public adoring me. Wanting more of me

Wanting me to do everything, everything,

Everything For Them! *For them.*

Who don't care what I got...

*

...

*

"I'm not rotten."

The morning sunlight slants through my window.

*

I go to the washroom to wash the disgusting, *disgusting* off of me.

"I'm not rotten."

I take a scissor. I cut my hair.

Clumps fall to the floor.

I don't give a damn how it looks!

"I'm not rotten!"

I take my suitcase.

*

Pack a few dresses and stockings into it. Put on my flats.

I don't turn around to look back at the room. The matron isn't up yet.

I don't need to tell her where I'm going.

I leave my key at the front desk. I open the door.

I take the trolley to the train station. And I ask for a train ticket.

A ticket to St. Louis, Missouri.

SHIFT.

BENJY

*

When *Land of Tinsel* opens, the New York Times calls it a "gorgeously staged, consistently intriguing, and thought-provoking examination of myth and legend that no controversy could stop."

*

*

*

I'm already back in St. Louis. My parents, who aren't huge internet users, find out what happened through good ol' Mr. Fuglehart.

*

*

MOM

*

"But it was gonna be your Broadway debut! How could you mess that up!?"

*

BENJY

I say nothing.

*

SHIFT.

WANDA

Finally, the whistle blows, the wheels start churning, and I'm on my way back east. I want to lay back in my seat and tell myself I had escaped. I want to feel there is some sort of peace I could have.

And perhaps, I would find that peace when I reach home. Wouldn't mother and father be surprised to see me. And my sister. And to meet Georgia Lily!

*

*

My contract stipulated that I would still earn money if I didn't work. I haven't thought about whether I would still get it.

If I still have it, I'll use it to spoil darling Georgia Lily. But if not...

SHIFT.

BENJY

The poster from Kenneth Tallis' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* faces me from the wall opposite my bed. I stare at it every night before I go to sleep.

I tell my parents not to bother me. Not even for meals. I'll take care of that myself, I say. They shouldn't have to worry about that.

My mom leaves me a plate from dinner by my door every night at six thirty. My dad asks if I want to go to the movies. I say no.

I start looking for jobs online. Server jobs, office jobs, temp agencies. I wait to see if anything would come up. While I wait, I take down all the Broadway posters from my bedroom wall. One by one, I burn them in the fire pit in the backyard.

*

I burn the one from Kenneth's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* last.

*

SHIFT.

WANDA

"Hollywood Starlet Missing".

The headline blares across the newspaper in the newsstand. A photograph is plastered across the front page of the paper. I didn't think it was me at first. The woman in the photograph was smiling with not a care in the world.

I don't remember looking that happy.

Marcus Bayer is offering a \$50,000 reward to anyone who has any information. And he hopes for my safe delivery back to the studio.

*

SHIFT.

BENJY

I send out a couple of applications online a day to some restaurants around the area. But you know how that is. They get so many online applications that the odds are a million to one that they'll actually call you back. My parents want me to go out there and apply for jobs in person. That would show initiative! Dad even offers to let me borrow his car. I said I would drive around to look for jobs on Saturday.

I have no intention of doing so.

One day, my phone rings.

It's Shep, from Burger King.

He wants to see if I could come in for an interview.

So I go in, and I bring a resume that has none of my acting credits on it. Just my service experience, working as a server, among other jobs.

SHEP

"New York, very impressive."

BENJY

"Yes, I used to live there."

SHEP

"Must've been expensive."

BENJY

"Yes, it was. But I was a dedicated server who never showed up late for work. Unless I had an audition. But I always told my manager when I'd have one of those."

SHEP

"Oh, you're an actor?"

BENJY

"Was. I actually just got out of the business."

SHEP

"I see... Couldn't quite make it?"

BENJY

"I almost did. But, you know. Life happens."

SHEP

“I see...”

BENJY

At the end of the interview, Shep says he’s going to hire me. I start training two days later.

I actually went to high school with one of my co-workers. She and I did the musicals together. She heard that I had gone to New York to make it as an actor. She had also seen the video, and had recognized me. One day, we're talking after work and I told her everything that happened, and how the video came about. She says,

VOICE #3

"Good for you, Benjy!"

BENJY

And I'd never been more glad to be home.

SHIFT.

WANDA

When we reach the train station at St. Louis, I’m able to hitch a ride back home.

The driver, an older gentleman, tells me that I look an awful lot like that actress that went missing.

I tell him that I’m flattered, but I’m just a young woman visiting her family.

When I reach my old house, I see that nothing has changed about it. The shutters are still green. The roof still slanted.

The gentleman drives away. I knock on the door.

And my mother opens it.

We just look at each other.

The gentleman may not have recognized me, but my mother did.

We stare.

And stare.

And stare.

And then she says:

MOTHER

“Come inside, Wanda.”

SHIFT.

BENJY

Three months in, I actually like working at Burger King! I don't have to worry that I'm making the wrong dance move, or singing off key. I just have to worry about getting someone's order right.

I stop checking my Facebook. Having a lot of industry friends posting about what's going on in New York makes me feel... I don't know. *

On one hand, I miss New York. I miss the energy, I miss the culture, I miss the random events that can make a whole day amazing. But then I remember Kenneth, and Victor, and the cast of *Land of Tinsel*, and I realize why I left.

SHIFT.

WANDA

Three months I've been back with mother and father. I've asked mother to write my sister, tell her I've returned, so I can meet Georgia Lily. Mother complies, but tells me it might not be for a long time. They live miles away, and have other obligations. *

I've asked them to tell no one else about my return. *

I've also told them to not ask me about my time in Los Angeles. And to not let anyone disturb me. I don't want to see anyone. *

I don't go out. Not even for fresh air.

It's peaceful, having a whole room to yourself. It's less peaceful when the sickness starts. You fear it's the flu, but it keeps happening. You get more tired, more grumpy. *

MOTHER

"What's the matter?"

WANDA

"I don't know."

But Mother knows.

I start showing, she asks

MOTHER

"What are you gonna do with it?"

WANDA

"I don't know."

MOTHER

"Do you know who the father is?"

WANDA

"Yes."

MOTHER

"You think you can get him to pay a little something, or...?"

*

WANDA

"I don't know."

*

Mother then goes to my closet and takes away all the coat hangers.

*

MOTHER

*

"Only horrible, selfish women do things like that."

WANDA

"I didn't ask for this!"

MOTHER

"Then you should've kept your legs shut!"

WANDA

I try to find the coat hangers, in the attic, in the cellar, but mother was always so clever at hiding things.

*

Days, weeks, months.

*

Hating what was growing inside me.

Wanting to fling myself out the window so I wouldn't have to deal with it.

So the world wouldn't have to...

If my mother just hadn't taken the coat hangers.

*

When the time comes to deliver the baby, mother delivers it, ever the midwife.

It doesn't cry.

Mother pats it all over.

It doesn't cry.

She cuts the umbilical cord.

It still doesn't cry.

*

MOTHER

"I'm so sorry... Do you want to hold it at least?"

WANDA

"Just bury the little fuck."

Mother takes it away.

I don't know where she buries it.

SHIFT.

BENJY

One day, work is slow, so I go to the back and check my phone. I have an email from someone named Christine Miller. She says she's doing an expose about Kenneth's record of sexual harassment, and is wondering if I'd be up for an interview.

Phone ringing.

BENJY

"Hello?"

CHRISTINE

"Yes, I'm looking for Benjy Kohen?"

BENJY

"That's me."

CHRISTINE

"Great. This is Christine Miller from the New York Times, how are you today?"

BENJY

"I'm fine. How are you?"

CHRISTINE

"Fine, thanks. So I'm sure you saw my email."

BENJY

"Yes."

CHRISTINE

"So you know about the article I'm writing. I just wanted to give you some more details about that, then we can get started."

BENJY

She tells me that a few other men had come forward with accusations against Kenneth. There was one who was in his production of *Into the Woods* who said Kenneth constantly commented on his bulge. There was another who said Kenneth tore apart his acting skills, then said if he lost a little weight, he would "tap that".

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT'D)

And there was another who was in his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* who said that Kenneth groped him backstage multiple times.

CHRISTINE

"Did you know about any of these?"

BENJY

"Not specifics, no."

CHRISTINE

"So what made you decide to speak out?"

BENJY

"I just didn't think it was right that I was being treated like that. And I didn't want others to be treated the same."

CHRISTINE

"Did you know of any other harassment going on during *Land of Tinsel*?"

BENJY

"Yes."

I tell her about Victor.

*

CHRISTINE

"Did your fellow cast members try to stop you from saying anything?"

BENJY

"I never told them any details, so I don't know."

CHRISTINE

"*Land of Tinsel* has become the hit of the season. Does it bother you that the show has been such a success?"

BENJY

"...I... I don't know. To be honest, I don't really think about it anymore. At least, I try not to."

*

*

CHRISTINE

"Fair enough. So what are you doing now, for work?"

*

*

BENJY

“Working at a Burger King. Flippin’ burgers, as it were.”

CHRISTINE

“That’s quite a trajectory. Making your Broadway debut to flipping burgers.”

BENJY

“It’s a living.”

CHRISTINE

“Yes, as long as you can pay the bills... Do you have anything you’d like to say to Kenneth?”

Long pause.

BENJY

“No.”

CHRISTINE

“Thank you so much for your time. I’ll contact you if I have any follow-up questions.”

BENJY

“Thank you so much for speaking to me, Christine.”

CHRISTINE

“It’s my pleasure. You’re a much braver person than I would have been in that situation.”

BENJY

“It’s not about me being brave. Call it my Midwestern upbringing, but it’s about knowing when to do the right thing.”

CHRISTINE

“So many of my friends are actors, and some of the stories they have are just... So thank you. Thank you for speaking out. And know that there are people who are on your side.
And that

*
*

WANDA/CHRISTINE

"You *have a voice*."

*
*

CHRISTINE

Don't forget that.”

*
*

BENJY looks at WANDA.

*

BENJY

“Thank you.”

*

Phones hang up.

BENJY

The exposé runs in the New York Times a week later. In it, myself, along with several other men who had been in Kenneth Tallis productions, discuss some of his behavior towards us.

That actor who said Kenneth groped him during *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Turns out it was the same actor who told me I would have done Shakespeare proud.

Kenneth, of course, denies all of it. But he doesn't for long.

A week after the article comes out, Playbill.com announces that Kenneth Tallis is dead. Apparent suicide.

*

SHIFT.

WANDA

Mother tries to get me to eat chicken noodle soup. But I have no appetite.

She leaves a glass of water by my bedside.

I'm not thirsty.

One day, she knocks on the door and tells me there are some people to see me.

My sister. And Georgia Lily. I smile.

I ask if I could hold her.

My sister puts Georgia Lily in my arms.

And the warmth of love that I should've felt with my child surges through my heart.

At one year, she couldn't quite walk yet, but she looked at me with eyes that wanted to know everything, not knowing what 'everything' actually means.

I hold her for ten minutes, but it only feels like two. I ask my sister if she could bring her around more. She says yes.

*

I then ask mother for more chicken noodle soup.

She nods, goes downstairs, and brings some up.

And I wolf it all down.

SHIFT.

BENJY

*

Playbill.com has a photographic tribute to the productions of Kenneth Tallis. Broadway theaters dim their lights for him.

*

*

(MORE)

BENJY (CONT 'D)

Directors, playwrights, actors, producers, and designers discuss how much of an influence Kenneth had on their lives and careers. *

There's a call to take the exposé down, but the New York Times refuses.

CHRISTINE

"While we acknowledge the great artistic contributions Mr. Tallis has made to the American theatre, it would be unfair and downright wrong to silence the voices of those he has harmed during his career." *

BENJY

I thought I would feel vindicated, or relieved, or maybe even happy. But I feel nothing. One day, I get an email.

EMAIL #1

Dear Benjy:

You don't know me. My name is Johnny Blackhurst. I used to be an actor in New York back in the day. I'm now based on Phoenix, AZ. When I was living in New York, I was cast in a few Kenneth Tallis productions in the ensemble. Kenneth never did anything to me (he knew I was straight), but there were a few chorus boys whom he would regularly keep in the room after rehearsals. This was common knowledge among us in the cast, but we didn't report anything because... well, things like that happened. I had a good working relationship with Kenneth, but something just always seemed off about him. Not speaking out or looking deeper into this has always been one of my biggest regrets. I am so glad that someone had the courage to come forward, so I tip my hat to you. I hope you are doing well, and that Kenneth hasn't hurt you too bad.

Sincerely,

Johnny Blackhurst

BENJY

After that, another email came.

EMAIL #2

I was a featured player in Kenneth Tallis's musical production of *Kingdom Arrival*, and my best friend, Roger Anaheim, was fired from the production when Kenneth discovered he had AIDS. Of course, we didn't know it was AIDS at the time, but my friends were dying left and right, and Roger was the latest to get this disease. He told me that when he told Kenneth Tallis, Kenneth said to him, "If I didn't want to fuck you before, I certainly don't want to fuck you now." And proceeded to fire him. It was cruel and inhumane of Kenneth to do something like that to someone in need. Thank you for speaking out against this monster. I'm glad he's dead.

BENJY

And another

EMAIL #3

Ding Dong the witch is dead.

BENJY

And another

EMAIL #4

I was raped by Kenneth Tallis.

BENJY

And another and another and another...

We hear a cacophony of voices from emails. "I worked with Kenneth Tallis..." "Kenneth Tallis sexually assaulted me..." "He grabbed my crotch..."

Then sudden silence as WANDA speaks.

SHIFT.

WANDA

I don't want to leave. Not Georgia Lily. Not my sister. Not even my mother and father. But the doctor says I've contracted pneumonia, and it's very severe, and there is nothing to be done. *

Before I die, I ask my parents to put nothing on my tombstone. And to bury me in a spot where only they and my sister and Georgia Lily will know of. They agree. *

You can't find it now. The blank grave marker was stolen by drunk teenagers fifty years after I was laid to rest there. *

After I die, neighbors ask my parents where Wanda went, and didn't she look an awful like that young actress in that new Norma Shearer picture? *

And men from Bayer Studios come to the house, asking if Wanda Glimmelstein has been seen lately. *

My mother's answer to both was the same.

MOTHER

"Our daughter, Wanda, went to Los Angeles for adventure, and never came back."

WANDA looks at BENJY.

*

WANDA

And that was right.

Lights flicker on WANDA, the flickering light that comes with a silent film. BENJY looks at her. She looks at him as the flickering lights die down on her. She is gone. The VOICES have disappeared too. BENJY looks out at the audience.

BENJY

When June comes around, my parents and I go to the annual screening of *It Happens at Parties*. They tell me that I don't have to go, but I go anyway. To see her. Moira Johnson. Or rather... Wanda Glimmelstein.

The film clip of *It Happens at Parties* that was shown earlier plays.

There she is, laughing, carrying on, gasping exaggeratedly like a princess of the silent screen. Whatever was happening to her in real life, with Marcus Bayer or anyone else, I can't tell.

In an interview two years before he died, Marcus Bayer said that Wanda had problems in her head that she never dealt with, and thus couldn't handle the grueling schedule of a film actress, so she ran away, never to be seen again. In another interview, George Taylor corroborated this, saying he always had such pity for her, and what a shame that her career never got a chance to flourish. The two men died a month apart from each other in 1957. Heart attacks. Both have autobiographies that are still in print, as well as biographies upon biographies written about them.

But she. She never got the chance to write her autobiography, or do interviews, or... Watching her dance around on screen, I realize something.

Wanda Glimmelstein disappeared in 1927. That same year, the sound era began when *The Jazz Singer* was released.

If she just had a little more time, we could've heard her voice.

We... *all* could've heard her voice.

The film clips end.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY