

Ha. Ha . . . Ha! You are going to work here! You got that?
— You are going to be a PP whether you, you like it or not!
CHERYL: What did you say?!

DONALD: You heard me. You're hired indefinitely! Ha!

CHERYL: Oh my God! I can't believe it. I thought you were going to say . . . never mind. I, uh, this is such an honor. I won't let you down. I'll read up on PST first thing. This is really a, well, I think an HP moment. And for the record, I really am PP. I'm Ho too. Really Ho. And no offense? But FYI? My name is Cheryl.

DONALD: Details. Be here tomorrow. Eight AM. And no BS!

CUDDLES AND WACKY AND THE LITTLE CAR

Cuddles and Wacky, late forties, a married couple and both veteran clowns in the Topsy Turvy Circus, have had another act screwup again tonight. Wacky keeps missing cues and seems to be lacking the usual “oomph” in his performance. Cuddles doesn't know what's wrong with him. As it turns out, it's a case of midlife clown crisis. Wacky's sick of the tiny car act and the screaming kids and the makeup. He wonders what it's all about. As the scene begins, Cuddles is reminding him of his missed cue.

CHARACTERS

Wacky: 40s, a clown
Cuddles: 40s, his clown wife

SETTING

A dressing room at the Topsy Turvy Circus

TIME

The present, after this evening's performance

CUDDLES: Hey, did you forget something out there or what?
(Wacky looks at her.)

WACKY: *(Really upset.)* Oh no! The rolling pin?

CUDDLES: What's the matter with you?

WACKY: *(Quickly.)* I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't — *(She hits him like he's a skipping record.)* Ow!

CUDDLES: Sorry. Yesterday it was the fire-hose fiasco. The day before it was a juggling ball right in the eye. Today it's the rolling pin. What is up with you?

WACKY: Hey, yesterday was not my fault, Cuddles. I told you Loonie was early.

CUDDLES: No, she wasn't. She was right on cue. The fire music was playing. Jello brought the fire engine around right on

cue — axe in hand and no you. And I had to be on fire for like . . . I don't know . . . a long time.

WACKY: You're good at that, Cuddles. You keep it fresh.

CUDDLES: Don't sweeten me up. I'm pissed. Burning for a long time is not funny. Short burning — funny. Long burning — not — at all — funny!

WACKY: (*Getting impatient.*) OK!

CUDDLES: It's all about timing. And you've been blowing it for all of us. Kids aren't laughing. I saw one little girl screamin' her head off in the front row.

WACKY: Well, let her scream! (*Cuddles' mouth drops.*) So what? It's good for her.

CUDDLES: Good for her?

WACKY: Life is hard. Life is tragic. Empty, difficult, and . . . blah-zie.

CUDDLES: Have you been reading *Catcher in the Rye* again?

WACKY: Yeah. Besides, they always scream their heads off. The little ones are the only ones with any sense. Parents beat them out of it. We do look scary. Florescent hair, abnormally large features, really tacky clothes. I feel scary, not at all funny. I feel surreal.

CUDDLES: You don't look surreal. You look real. Good. Better than ever. All that weight you lost. You've been eating great! Cholesterol down.

WACKY: I'm sick of the act. It's too much of the same, same. And there's absolutely no depth to it!

CUDDLES: It's a clown act, Wacky. It's about running around pratfalling and slapsticking and things flying out of the hose and your nose and your hair flying off you head. This is not subtle humor we're talking about. You turning up all black and burnt to a crisp with your shoes smoldering. Now, that's funny. Look, the fire engine act has gotten laughs for sixteen years. You don't argue with consistency.

WACKY: Yeah?

CUDDLES: Yeah! I'm a very funny burner. You're a very funny incompetent fireman.

WACKY: So what's so funny about it? We end up all black and burned. The house burns. It's tragic. I'm a complete loser. And you're homeless.

CUDDLES: And that's funny. Don't start thinking on me now.

WACKY: Why not?

CUDDLES: Thinking is going to ruin your career. 'Member Howie? (*Nods. Beat.*) Humm?

WACKY: That's different. He was crazy.

CUDDLES: He started thinking. (*Gives him the knowing look.*)

WACKY: Yeah, that he was an alien. I'm just thinking maybe I want something more than clowning in my life.

CUDDLES: More than clowning? We're the stars of Topsy Turvy!

WACKY: Oh yeah? And what would you call The Flying Zip-pola brothers?

CUDDLES: Oh. (*Beat.*) Stinky. Unkempt. Icky comes to mind. (*Beat.*) Do they understand that deodorant is not an optional hygiene product?

WACKY: Yeah, well they are all over the posters and making salaries about five times ours.

CUDDLES: No?! (*He nods.*) Inbreds! So they can do a triple somersault. So what?! Can they produce a flower bouquet from their butt? Hum? They couldn't make a balloon animal to save their lives.

WACKY: Maybe my lack of timing has to do with distraction. Bigger things keep coming into my head.

CUDDLES: Oh? These *big* things wouldn't happen to be in ring three would they?

WACKY: What are you talking about?

CUDDLES: (*Obviously referring to something.*) Nothing!

WACKY: Oh no! You're not thinking . . .

CUDDLES: I've seen how you've been eyeing old iron throat and her rather large —

WACKY: What are you talking about? She's half my age!

CUDDLES: Exactly! (*Doing her accent.*) "Katova. Katrina Katova. Katova. Va. Vvv. I swallow svords, vords, and hus-

bands. Vvv.” She flirted with you over coffee this morning. (Doing an imitation.) “Do you want sugar or are you sweet enough?”

WACKY: Well, you got to admit that she’s got a pretty good act.

CUDDLES: Oh come on! You’ve seen one sword-eater, you’ve seen them all. They all do the same thing. It’s not like you can do anything unique with the act. You pick up the sword. You show them the sword. Oooh, ahhh, and then down the hatch. Real special. Oh boy, she’s going to swallow a *different* sword for an encore. Whoopee!

WACKY: I know but she does have a flare.

CUDDLES: Yes, she does. She’s seventeen and wears tassels. Only tassels. Very flarish.

WACKY: Oh Cuddles, you know I love you. So my eye sways over to one tassel or another every once in a while. That doesn’t mean I care for anyone else but you, sweetie.

CUDDLES: Oh yeah? What about Feona and her pooches in ring two?

WACKY: What?!

CUDDLES: Don’t lie to me. You want to jump through her hoops — I see things.

WACKY: That is completely ridiculous! Yes, I have noticed both acts.

CUDDLES: Ahh-ha!

WACKY: Professionally. From a professional standpoint. You see, they both seem to love their work.

CUDDLES: So!

WACKY: So . . . so I don’t.

CUDDLES: (Angered and insistent.) Yes you do!

WACKY: No, I don’t.

CUDDLES: You don’t?

WACKY: I don’t! My whole life is a vast desert of death and failure.

CUDDLES: (Thinking to herself.) That’s what I am to you? A

vast desert? I mean, I may be vast, but a desert? (Looking at herself.) I guess I could use a nighttime moisturizer.

WACKY: What? No! You’re not hearing me. I love you. No matter what you look like. That I’m sure of. I’m just saying I feel dissatisfied with me. With what I’ve accomplished.

CUDDLES: Oh, well then that’s not so bad. (Beat.) Wait a minute. I do the same thing you do!

WACKY: Yes, but that’s different. You like it. And it fits you.

CUDDLES: OK. Clarify. If the vast desert of death and failure is the job, and that *fits* me, what exactly are you saying?

WACKY: I’m just saying that . . . I don’t know what I’m saying. I was thinking maybe about getting an office job. Something quiet.

CUDDLES: Quiet?! Quiet?! How boring! Who wants to be quiet?! I was not made to be quiet!

WACKY: Obviously. It’s just every day feels like the same thing over and over.

CUDDLES: Well . . . so! Try stilt-walking again, talk to Sigmond about throwing fiery batons around, but don’t stoop to an office. What do you think’s going to happen in an office?

WACKY: Nothing. But at least it will be different for a while for me. Now, it’s the same tent. It’s the same costume. It’s the same little car we cram into every day. It’s the same —

CUDDLES: I get the idea. And that’s not entirely true. We got a new car in ninety-nine. It’s much, much roomier!

WACKY: In the little car. In the little car. In the little car. Every night. Jello’s on my head. Twinkee’s armpit in my eye. Boo Boo’s butt in my face.

CUDDLES: I thought you liked those people!

WACKY: People yes, it’s the little *car* I can’t stand!! Maybe we need a new act.

CUDDLES: A new act?! But people look for the little car. Just like they look for the fire engine bit.

WACKY: Well, maybe you just think that. Maybe they hate the fire engine bit. Maybe they want to throw up when they see the stupid little car. Talk about lack of surprises there!

They just *think* they like them because they were told to laugh over and over and over when they saw these things as children. Now they're brainwashed and unhappy as hell so they make their own children suffer through them as well, telling them to laugh — Always to laugh over and over and the whole sick cycle continues until we perish! Ha ha ha ha ha! Brainwashing one child after another until oblivion! And we'll never know until some brave child someday stands up and plants a little bomb in the little car and we'll all literally explode all over the place! And won't that be funny!

CUDDLES: *(Beat.)* You really don't like the car bit, do you?

WACKY: I'm just thinking out loud there.

CUDDLES: Don't do that.

WACKY: Maybe we need a tragic leading character, someone who lost a family member.

CUDDLES: We aren't doing *Hamlet* here, Wacky! You're a clown! You have polka-dots on your pants! You're wearing a nose that goes "honk, honk"!

WACKY: Yes, but *Hamlet* has some funny parts.

CUDDLES: Which part — when his girlfriend drowns or when he ponders suicide?

WACKY: When you put it like that, it does sound rather unfunny. I guess it's just a regular ole midlife crisis — this. Nothing feels right. The smell of the elephants, the roar of the lion, the screams of terror from the children, it just doesn't have the same umph!

CUDDLES: *(Rubbing his head.)* I understand, Baby. I know how you feel. You wake up one day and you're putting on your ole butt pads and you realize, you don't need as much padding as you once did. Your putting on your red nose and your start to notice your real nose is not all that attractive. It's just been hidden for all these years. You wonder . . . What have I done with my life? Where has it all gone? How have I contributed to the world at large? My God, I'm getting depressed. *(Hits him.)* You have a lot of nerve! I wasn't thinking about this stuff.

WACKY: *(Suddenly excited.)* Why don't we run away? We could do it? We could run away tomorrow when we hit Chicago. I could work in an office. You could do freelance for kids' birthday parties. We could find a little apartment. Settle down.

CUDDLES: In a big city? But there's all kinds of weirdos in a big city like Chicago.

WACKY: We sleep in a train car next to Loonie, Jello, and a guy who sticks his head inside a lion's mouth on a regular basis and you're worried about weirdos?

CUDDLES: You'd have to learn how to type and use a PC for an office job.

WACKY: So! I learn fast.

CUDDLES: And you'd have to buy some dress-up clothes.

WACKY: Well. I dress up all the time — every day.

CUDDLES: Not those kind of dress-up clothes.

WACKY: *(A little less sure.)* Oh. Yeah. Well, . . . I could do that.

CUDDLES: We'd have to really adjust our schedule.

WACKY: You'd consider this? Honestly?

CUDDLES: Hell! If you're willing to get up at seven every morning, I can certainly give it a try!

WACKY: That's great! I — Seven? Did you say seven?

CUDDLES: Yep.

WACKY: AM?

CUDDLES: Uh-huh.

WACKY: In the morning seven?

CUDDLES: Yes.

WACKY: *(Beat.)* You know, I think you're right. The little car has been seeming a lot roomier.