**The Beginning**

"I'm Moses," the actor told the rest of the cast, "I'm kind of a bumbler but everyone thinks I'm the leader. And I stammer. Non-theatrical? I was a major league baseball player."

"Seriously?" someone asked.

"Oh yeah, I saw him play."

"Me, too."

"Great, thanks, anyway, I've always been in love with theatre. Real theatre, not that WWE stuff MLB made us do."

There was a little scattering of applause.

Moses was the first to arrive at the stage door on the first day of rehearsal. Stage Door Guy said "Hiya, fella," before he recognized the actor's face. A former college player himself he shook the actor's hand. Each at 6'3", they looked each other in the eye. "Pleased to meet ya. I saw ya play a lot. Pleased to meet ya. The Director's waiting for ya down in the Orchestra."

Stage Door Guy had decorated the little foyer to his taste. He had squeezed in a quarter-sawn oak roll-top desk, the kind with lots of little cubby holes. Above it hung a green-shaded brass light fixture, just one bulb, and below that an autographed glossy of Myrna Loy. Not a reproduction, but an original, dedicated to his father.

The other players drifted in one by one, all a little early for the first day. Stage Door Guy knew some from previous productions, but there were new ones, too. He checked off their names on an old-fashioned clipboard.

Others came, too, lighting and props and set designers, the gal who did the sound. Each got checked off in that old-fashioned way.

The actor playing Aaron was the last to arrive. "Sorry," he said. "Maybe the real Aaron knew a trick to make the F train run on time. Wave that magic rod and make a train appear next to an empty platform." The Stage Door Guy laughed politely. He had not read the script. He never read the script. His life was a script and he was afraid to mess with it.

Today there would be paperwork and emergency drills and dressing room drama, probably not even a read through of the script. The Assistant Producer was in the Orchestra greeting everyone and handing out W-4 forms and insurance waivers and collecting head shots and Playbill bios. "I can't give you tax advice" seemed to be his favorite line.

"Neither can I," the Tailor quipped, "but I can give you tux advice!" Nobody laughed, but the very attempt to make a joke helped everyone relax. Each player took his or her or their costume from the rack and turned away from the stage to change. Dressing rooms hadn't been assigned yet. The costumes themselves had been enough drama to turn into a play, *Rent*, because the Director had been so disappointed in the first ideas that she had torn up the sketches.

A few of the actors sat down with their marked up scripts to compare notes on scenes they would do together, but a lot of this work had already been done in coffee shops and East Village bars and living rooms (or maybe bedrooms). The theatre manager interrupted them for the complete building tour, fire extinguishers and exits and catwalks and light panels, cleats and pulleys, and even a "Don't Go In There" door. After the tour, other staff from the theatre stopped by to introduce themselves, ticket managers and publicists, and, of course, the Stage Door Guy, whose name made no sense and was immediately forgotten. "Hiya folks," he said, thumbs in his suspenders. He doffed his bowler hat and said "Back to work!"

Now that everyone was there the Director gathered the cast on stage. "Make a circle around me," she said. "You've all met me, I'm Jill, the Director." She was tall and lanky, with shoulder length light brown hair. She wore a fleece vest over her long-sleeve dress with a flowy skirt, and ankle high boots. "But you haven't met each other. Let me say this: you are all pros, you all have talent, you all have something to add to this play and your roles and this company. The play is complex - you already know that - and raises a lot of difficult questions." As she spoke she turned to face each member of the cast. "But we all believe in it, we know it will be a boffo success and we'll all get super rich." Everyone laughed. They weren't in this for the money.

"So, let's introduce ourselves. As a company we have to live our parts. You all know this, I've seen you work before. But to get going let's go around one-by-one and introduce ourselves. But," she paused here, "Use your character's name, not your real name, not your stage name. We have to *be* our characters. So, use your character's name, say a sentence about who your character is, and then something out of character, something about you, not theatre."

There was the expected awkward pause.

"OK, I'm Moses, I'm kind of a bumbler but everyone thinks I'm the leader. And I stammer. For me, I was a major league baseball player."

"Seriously?" someone asked.

"Oh yeah, I saw him play."

"Me, too."

"Great, thanks, anyway, I've always been in love with theatre. Real theatre, not that WWE stuff MLB made us do."

There was a little scattering of applause.

"Next?" the Director asked.

"I'm Aaron. I'm a sorcerer. And, uh, I was a sous-chef at a restaurant in Bushwick, well, actually, in Queens."

Another scattering of applause. "Chef? When's lunch?" someone quipped.

"We're getting Chinese take out, don't worry. Next?" the Director replied.

"Hello, I'm Ramsses, the Pharaoh, I like to think I'm powerful but I get conned by that trickster over there," nodding at Aaron. "And, let's see, I have a twin sister that looks nothing like me."

The Author walked in as Ramsses finished. "Bob, Bob, over here," the Director waved him over. "Come and introduce yourself."

The Author was not an actor and never got comfortable with being on stage, even before an empty house. Most of the cast knew him by name, and by reputation, but this play wasn't like his other plays. And most had never met him.

He stood next to the Director. "Hi, um, I'm Bob, uh, I wrote the script. I'm really looking forward to seeing it in the flesh, not in my head. And..."

"And tell us something about yourself, not theatrical," the Director prompted.

"Me? I mean, the script tells enough about me."

"No!"

"That's copping out," the cast protested. Some already knew his bio, but even they wanted a little tidbit to work with.

"OK, I, um, I was a Physics major in college."

"Physics? So can you explain the parting of the Red Sea?"

Aaron piped up. "A magician never reveals his secrets." The Author mumbled his thanks.

Stage Door Guy appeared in the wings. "Lunch!" He was chewing on an unlit cigar. "Wow, lunchtime already?" Moses asked. One of the Israelites looked up, extended his arms, and proclaimed "Manna from Heaven!" Luckily for him the stage lights were dim and he wasn't blinded.

"Aaron would have asked for a special order," Aaron whined, "With extras for his sons." The Author smiled at this. "This kid gets it," he thought. The Director heard it, too, and she looked over at Aaron and smiled.