

STALLED

A Play in Ten Minutes

SETTING: a modern day restroom. TIME: any time; nondescript.

(As the lights rise, ATTENDANT, dressed in formal attire, is washing his hands inside a men's restroom. There are at least three urinals, one stall, and one sink. There's a knock at the door. ATTENDANT dries off his hands, unlocks and opens the door. MAN enters.)

ATTENDANT

Hello, sir.

MAN

Oh. Hi. Sorry if I interrupted—but the door said to knock.

ATTENDANT

No worries, sir.

(MAN enters and ATTENDANT locks the door. ATTENDANT proceeds to sit on a stool by the door. Beat.)

MAN

What are you doing?

ATTENDANT

Just sitting, sir.

MAN

Do you work here?

ATTENDANT

Yes, sir.

MAN

Cut that. I'm not a "sir." You seriously work here?

ATTENDANT

Yes.

MAN

You work here, in the bathroom?

ATTENDANT

Yes. I'm the bathroom attendant.

MAN

I didn't know those existed any more.

ATTENDANT

They don't, usually.

(MAN, nervous about using the restroom in front of another person, begins to wash his hands quickly, pretending that's what he came in to do.)

MAN

So what's your story?

ATTENDANT

My uncle's the owner, and I needed a job.

MAN

Does it pay well?

ATTENDANT

Not particularly. The tips are nice, though.

MAN

People tip you?

ATTENDANT

Every time.

(MAN has finished washing his hands and looks for something to dry off with.)

Here.

(ATTENDANT gives MAN a towel.)

MAN

Thanks.

(MAN dries his hands and ATTENDANT takes the towel. MAN goes to a urinal. Beat. MAN looks to ATTENDANT.)

You just sit there?

(ATTENDANT rises.)

ATTENDANT

Do you need assistance, sir?

MAN

What? No, I don't need any help. It's just—odd.

ATTENDANT

Would you like me to turn around?

MAN

Could you?

ATTENDANT

Of course, sir.

(ATTENDANT faces away from MAN. Silence.)

Are you all right, sir?

MAN

What? Oh, yeah, just—plug your ears or something.

ATTENDANT

Of course.

(ATTENDANT plugs his ears, continuing to look away from MAN. Beat. Silence. MAN collects himself and begins to move away from the urinal. ATTENDANT unplugs his ears.)

Is something the matter? Do you need assistance?

MAN

No, I don't! I just can't go with you right there, watching, listening...

ATTENDANT

I turned away and plugged my—

MAN

I know! I just need more space.

(MAN heads to the stall.)

ATTENDANT

You can't use that. It's out of order.

MAN

Isn't your job to fix it?

ATTENDANT

I tried. A plumber is coming later today to take a look at it.

MAN

Fine.

(MAN resumes his position at the urinal. Beat.)

Are you allowed to take a break?

ATTENDANT

Yes, but only when no one is using the restroom.

MAN

What if a customer requests it?

ATTENDANT

Well, I suppose I—

MAN

Take one.

ATTENDANT

Yes, sir.

(ATTENDANT puts the towel down, washes his hands, and takes his place in front of the urinal next to MAN. Beat.)

MAN

What are you doing?

ATTENDANT

Taking a break.

(MAN moves to the next urinal so they are one apart. Beat.)

Did you know the first restroom attendant was a caveman?

MAN

Really.

ATTENDANT

It wasn't one like today, of course. They were mostly holding a spear for the other caveman at the hole, watching out for wild animals waiting to pounce while a man was crouched.

MAN

Huh.

ATTENDANT

Things hadn't changed much for next several centuries. When America was discovered, attendants were still around. I can just see the first Thanksgiving dinner, everyone eating—except one Englishman and one Native American, standing side by side, handing leaves or woven patches to people needing to wipe themselves. Just beautiful. Except for when the English started slaughtering the Native Americans.

(ATTENDANT chuckles.)

It was easy for the attendants to get a few. Who would suspect the attendant, you know?

MAN

I see...

ATTENDANT

And danger is still around! A friend of mine is a restroom attendant in Africa. Apparently a wild boar charged in once and tore the place apart, killing the poor guy that was sitting down. He carries a tranquillizer dart now. Imagine having to worry about—

MAN

OK! That's it!

(MAN zips up and leaves the urinal.)

ATTENDANT

What's wrong, sir?

MAN

I just don't feel like going any more.

ATTENDANT

Was it something I said?

MAN

Oh, no, not at all!

(MAN tries to leave, but the door is locked.)

Open this.

ATTENDANT

I can't.

MAN

What?

ATTENDANT

You have to wash your hands before I unlock it for you.

(MAN goes to wash his hands.)

MAN

I didn't even get to use the damn thing and I still have to wash my hands?

ATTENDANT

It's policy, sir.

MAN

Policy? Is it also policy to sit and stare at someone as they try to use the bathroom? Is it policy to listen? To tell stories about other people who die when they use the bathroom?

(Sees the tip jar and takes a towel from ATTENDANT.)

I can't believe people tip you for this. Now let me out.

ATTENDANT

I can't.

MAN

Why?

(ATTENDANT moves the tip jar closer to MAN.)

ATTENDANT

Policy.

(MAN stares at ATTENDANT, sighs, and reaches into his pocket as the lights fade to black.)

END OF PLAY