

The Lion Tamer
by Ivan R. Lopez

EXCERPT
Scene 1

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ivanrlopez@gmail.com
305-322-2090

ACT IScene 1

Lights rise on the elegant dining room of Joseph Wellington. Steve, 29, sits alone on one end of the very long table, dressed in a lion costume. He awkwardly holds his iPhone up to his ear with his paw as he continues a conversation.

STEVE

Macy, please, can't you just wait till I get home and we can talk about this in person?

(short pause.)

This is not the way to walk out on someone. How am I supposed to pay the rent by myself?

Anderson, 58, a majordomo, walks in to set some things on the table.

STEVE

I'm turning things around, Macy. Please, just wait until I get off of work, then we can talk this out like two adults.

ANDERSON

No phone calls while on the clock, Mr. Louis.

STEVE

(to Anderson.)

Gimme a minute!

(to Macy.)

I'm an adult, Macy! I just got a job! I'm making \$200 an hour as we speak.

ANDERSON

Mr. Wellington is about to arrive in the dining room and he explicitly commanded that you not break the illusion.

STEVE

(to Anderson.)

I told you gimme a minute!

(to Macy.)

Macy?!

(beat.)

FUCK!

ANDERSON

Mr. Louis, if you don't put the phone away you will be in breach of contract and I will be forced to

escort you off the estate.

STEVE

Fuck you, man. My girlfriend just moved out and instead of being there I'm sitting here in a fucking lion costume.

ANDERSON

I'm sorry about your personal predicament, but you were hired to do a job. If you can't do that job then we will find someone who can.

Steve roars at Anderson and gets on all fours.

ANDERSON

Much better.

Anderson walks out of the dining room. Steve begins to roar and pace around. With every roar he gets more and more into character. After a moment, a door opens and in steps Mr. Joseph Wellington, 74 years old, impeccably groomed and dressed. He approaches Steve and scratches his lion ear. Steve is ready to devour him, but resists.

WELLINGTON

That's a good lion.

He goes to the head of the table and sits. He unfolds his napkin and tucks it into his collar. Anderson enters with a silver tray. He places Mr. Wellington's dinner in front of him and removes the cover.

WELLINGTON

Thank you, Anderson. It smells delicious as always.

ANDERSON

At your service, sir.

Mr. Wellington begins to eat. Anderson grabs a silver bowl with a thick, barely cooked slab of meat and places it on the floor in front of Steve. He stares at the bowl for a few moments.

STEVE

(under his breath.)
You've got to be kidding me.

WELLINGTON

Anderson. The lion is speaking.

Anderson walks over to Steve and crouches down beside him.

ANDERSON

This is your final warning, Mr. Louis.

Steve bites into the meat and lifts it off the plate so it is dangling from his mouth. He tries to figure out how to bite off a piece, but only manages to get blood on his paw. After wrestling with it, he gives up and stands.

STEVE

You know what? Fuck this.

ANDERSON

Mr. Louis!

STEVE

No, you're a fucking asshole of a sad old man. I don't know what twisted little perverted fantasy you're trying to satisfy but no amount of money is worth this kind of humiliation.

ANDERSON

Should I call Dwight, Mr. Wellington?

WELLINGTON

That won't be necessary. What is your name, son?

STEVE

What do you care? I'm just the clown you hired to be your lion.

WELLINGTON

And does the clown have a name?

Steve glares at Wellington. Wellington turns to Anderson.

ANDERSON

Steven Louis, sir.

Steve roars at Anderson.

WELLINGTON

Take a seat, Steven.

STEVE

Fuck that. I'm outta here.

WELLINGTON

I'll give you \$5,000 if you take a seat and have dinner with me.

Steve stops, turns around, and stares at Mr. Wellington. Beat.

STEVE

\$5,000?

WELLINGTON

That's what I said.

STEVE

Just to have dinner with you?

WELLINGTON

Just to have dinner with me. Correct.

STEVE

Not this slab of meat...like an actual meal?

WELLINGTON

Same meal I'm eating, yes.
(beat.)

Anderson. Prepare another plate for Steven.

ANDERSON

At your service, sir.

Anderson exits. Steve watches him go and then looks back at Wellington. After a moment, he slowly starts to take a seat at the other end of the table.

STEVE

Do I have to keep this stupid lion suit on?

WELLINGTON

The suit is no longer necessary. You were an inadequate lion.

He goes to take off the suit, but realizes the zipper is in the back and he can't get to it.

STEVE

This wasn't what I was expecting.

WELLINGTON

The ad was very clear.

STEVE

Well...

WELLINGTON

The ad said I was hiring an actor to play my pet lion.

STEVE

I know, but--

WELLINGTON

The ad said I was looking for an actor to lose himself in his character.

STEVE

Yes, but--

WELLINGTON

The ad said --

STEVE

I know what the fucking ad said, I'm not an idiot. I just, I didn't imagine it would be this...*degrading*.

WELLINGTON

Ah, so your *pride* did you in?

Wellington grins, takes a bite, and chews while he stares at Steve in silence. Steve is uncomfortable, but stares right back, refusing to back down. After a while, Anderson re-enters with a silver platter. He places it in front of Steve and removes the cover.

STEVE

Can you help me get out of this stupid lion costume, Mr. Anderson?

ANDERSON

Anderson.

STEVE

Huh?

ANDERSON

Anderson is my first name.

STEVE
Oh. Sorry.

ANDERSON
That's quite alright, Mr. Louis.

Steve stands up as Anderson unzips the costume. Steve slips off the top half of the lion suit, his tank top drenched in sweat. He is about to step out of the suit before realizing something.

STEVE
(to Wellington, somewhat embarrassed.)
I have to keep the legs on.

WELLINGTON
What's that?

STEVE
I can't take off the legs. I don't...I don't have any pants on.

WELLINGTON
I guess I'm having dinner with a centaur then.

Steve sits back down.

They eat in silence.

STEVE
This is really good.

WELLINGTON
Anderson is an excellent cook. I eat like this everyday.

STEVE
We can't all be so lucky.

WELLINGTON
Our positions in life are not based on luck. You only have yourself to blame for your failures.

STEVE
Excuse me?

WELLINGTON
A failed actor.

STEVE
An actor.

WELLINGTON

How much did you make last year "acting?"

STEVE

I'm getting paid right now to be a lion.

WELLINGTON

Well, technically, you are now getting paid to have dinner with me. You were fired from your acting job.

STEVE

I wasn't fired, I quit.

WELLINGTON

We have different perceptions.

STEVE

What's your deal man? Why are you paying me to have dinner with you?

WELLINGTON

For the same reason I hired an actor to play a lion: because I can. The question you should be asking is why do you degrade yourself by having dinner with a sad old...

(to Anderson.)

Anderson, how did he put it?

ANDERSON

"Fucking asshole of a sad old man," sir.

WELLINGTON

Shakespearean.

STEVE

I was angry.

WELLINGTON

Answer me.

STEVE

What?

WELLINGTON

Why do you degrade yourself?

STEVE

I don't / degrade myself.

WELLINGTON

Oh come on, Steven. Your eyes lit up when I threw a

measly five thousand bucks your way as if you were stuck in the Sahara and I had given you a gallon of water.

STEVE

Five grand is a lot of money.

WELLINGTON

Once again, we have different perceptions.

STEVE

You think you're better than me cause you've got a ton of money?

WELLINGTON

No, I've got a ton of money because I'm better than you.

STEVE

Fuck. You.

WELLINGTON

Sticks and / stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.

STEVE

Keep your filthy money, you cocksucker. I'm out of here.

Steve gets up and begins to exit.

WELLINGTON

That's right. Run away little boy. It's what you do best.

STEVE

Go fuck yourself. You're a lonely lonely old man and you're going to die a lonely lonely old man.

Beat. Wellington is amused.

WELLINGTON

(to Anderson.)

I don't think we could've found anyone better.

ANDERSON

He's beyond perfect, sir.

STEVE

What are you talking about?

WELLINGTON

Quit your roaring, little lion, and sit down like a man. We have business to discuss.

STEVE

You should hire a really good shrink with all your billions cause you're batshit, you know that?

WELLINGTON

Come on, sit down. I'll play nice from now on.

ANDERSON

It'll be worth your while, Mr. Louis.

Beat.

STEVE

You have two minutes.

WELLINGTON

Atta boy.

Steve sits slowly.

WELLINGTON

I am in need of an actor. I am prepared to compensate you handsomely in exchange for the performance of a lifetime.

Beat.

STEVE

Keep talking.

WELLINGTON

I would like to hire you to play my son.

STEVE

Excuse me?

WELLINGTON

Joseph Wellington, Jr -- Junior is what I call him. He left a year ago tomorrow. On his 18th birthday. I have not heard a word from him since.

STEVE

I don't understand...

WELLINGTON

He left.

STEVE

No, no, I don't understand what you want me to do?
Play him? Where?

WELLINGTON

In my home.

(short beat.)

I am not asking you to impersonate him for anyone
else.

(beat.)

Anderson.

*Anderson hands Steve a folder with two
documents...one far thicker than the other.*

ANDERSON

When you agree to the terms of the contract, you will
live in Mr. Wellington's home and carry on as Junior
would. The first document is a contract for your
review. The second document is a character profile
that tells you everything you need to know to become
Junior.

STEVE

You're asking me to give up my identity?

WELLINGTON

I'm asking you to be an actor. I don't care about
your identity. Steven Louis doesn't exist for me.
From here on out, in my eyes, you will be *Junior*.

STEVE

This is insane.

WELLINGTON

Perhaps.

(beat.)

Review the contract tonight and return tomorrow to
begin your new "gig."

STEVE

No way.

WELLINGTON

Come again?

STEVE

I'm not doing it.

WELLINGTON

You are.

STEVE

No fucking way.

WELLINGTON

And what is stopping you exactly? You have nothing. I am offering you a purpose and a way out of the gutter.

STEVE

Go find some other asshole to play your sick game.

WELLINGTON

You'll want to hear how much I'll pay you. Turn to page 26.

STEVE

No.

WELLINGTON

I'm offering you a one year contract worth \$999,999 with an option I can exercise for a second year at \$5 million. As a signing bonus, I will wipe out the \$46,000 you owe on your student loans, the \$1,000 you owe on your '99 Corolla, and the \$12,000 you owe on your credit cards. You will live rent free in Junior's room and have your meals provided. \$2,000 will be wired to your Chase account on the first of every month with the remainder wired one year from today -- Junior's 20th birthday. If Junior returns before then, your services will no longer be necessary and you will get the full amount immediately.

(beat. sincerely.)

I am offering to change your life, Mr. Louis. And all you need to do is indulge this "fucking asshole of a sad old man."

Silence.

WELLINGTON

I've given you plenty to think about, I know. Meet Anderson tomorrow at noon with your executed contract. Then, *as Junior*, you will join me for dinner on the evening of your 19th birthday.

(beat.)

Anderson, I thank you for another exquisite meal.

(to Steve.)

Mr. Louis, I thank you for an entertaining evening. I look forward to never seeing you again.

Mr. Wellington gets up, places his napkin on his

plate, and looks at Steven. Anderson clears his throat and motions for Steve to rise. Without thinking, he does. Wellington exits as Steve just stands there. Slow fade to black.

Scene 2

The next day. Anderson's office. He sits behind a beautiful antique desk.

STEVE
You have a very nice office.

ANDERSON
Thank you. May I offer you something to drink?

STEVE
Water would be great.

Anderson gets up and pours some water for Steve and brings it back to him.

STEVE
I didn't know butlers had offices.

ANDERSON
I am not a butler.

STEVE
Oh. Sorry.
(beat.)
What are you?

ANDERSON
A majordomo.

STEVE
Got it.
(beat.)
And what is that?

ANDERSON
I run the household, oversee the domestic staff, and handle Mr. Wellington's personal affairs.

STEVE
And you cook.