

“The Bermuda Curse”

By Johnny Culver

Place: The Customer Service Office of a small New York publishing company

Time: A Monday in January. A few decades ago.

Characters

Wendy

Jimmy

Miss Rivas

Speaker Box (several characters. Receptionist, Bookstore Manager, Young Girl, Ma,  
Dorette Chin, Sales Clerk)

JIMMY

*(Sits at typewriter, picking carefully at the keys. Wendy enters quietly, goes behind him, and reads over his shoulder)*

Wendy, don't read over my shoulder, you startled me – what are you...? What's stuffed in your mouth?

*(rips sheet from typewriter and stands)*

Where have you been for so long? Look at the time!

*(Wendy squeezes past him and sits, pulls his sheet out and puts a blank sheet into typewriter)*

I get it, read what you're typing on the typewriter. THEY WAZ GIVIN' AWAY THE CHICLETS GUM ON THE CORNER OF 42 AND FIFFTHE. I HADDA GET SUM - Free Chiclets? On which corner? - ALL A THEM. HERMEY GOT SOME A THE GUM TOO - You're not a very fast typist, Wendy. Didn't you take typing in high school? - I TOOKED THE HOME EKK...NEVER THOOT I BE WORKING IN A JOB LIKE THIS.- Spit out the gum, Wendy. It's very unprofessional. Turn off the typewriter. And what happened to your hair?

WENDY

It's new hair...like it?

*(Spitting wad into trash can)*

It was starting to lose the taste anyways...Jimmy, I don't think Miss Rivas is gonna be too happy when she finds out that you're using her typewriter.

*(takes paper)*

Hey, is this what you're workin on? Lemme see.

JIMMY

*(taking paper)*

I'm allowed, Wendy. It's only for a few minutes. Just finishing up a short story.

WENDY

I've worked here twice as long as you, Jimmy, and I'm not allowed to use the typewriter!

JIMMY

I've only worked here a week, Wendy. You've been here two weeks.

WENDY

Looks like you got here early so you could use it in secret. What kinda story? Does it have ponies in it? I love ponies.

JIMMY

I was here on time, Wendy; you got here late...again.

WENDY

*(Struggles out of coat)*

That guy at the token booth didn't want to take my pennies and I hadda-

JIMMY

*(interrupting)*

It's about where I grew up. The history of the town. It takes place right after World War Two-

WENDY

Is that what you studied in college, Jimmy, historicals? Lemme look at yer story. I watch a lotta old movies on the TV. I can help ya.

JIMMY

No, I studied English.

WENDY

English? Ya talk just fine.

JIMMY

I want to be a writer. Maybe a famous writer.

WENDY

Put John Wayne into yer story, and it'll sell, trust me. Make sure you tell Miss Rivas that you write historicals cause she's got a lotta letters that need ta be typed-

*(looks around)*

Where is she, anyway?

JIMMY

Miss Rivas was called into the president's office, right after I arrived. It may have something to do with what the-

WENDY

Is she in trouble? You know, Jimmy, I sure am glad you're working here. Me and Miss Rivas, well, she makes me kinda uncomfortable. Always telling me what to do, and when to get here and when to leave, and where to file things, like she's the boss a' me or something'. Oh, I got a dentist appointment this morning, and I'm goin' lunch at the Brew and Burger, just ta' remind ya.

*(pats her hair)*

That's the reason for the new hair.

JIMMY

New hair? She's your supervisor, Wendy. Did you come from the same employment agency that I came from? Didn't they tell you about the job?

WENDY

I didn't go through no agency. My boyfriend works here. Hermey. Ya know him? So does his father. He works here too, I mean. Well, he knows him, too, I guess. What father doesn't know his own-

JIMMY

Hermey? Oh, you mean Herman, the guy that fixes all the broken stuff around here. He must be very busy.

*(looks around)*

WENDY

*(giggling)*

The very same! And he's the one who's takin' me to lunch. Oh, which reminds me, Jimmy. Hermey said ya still have to use the speaker box thing instead of the telephone. It's still broke. He has to go to the Radio Shack on Steinway Street this weekend to get a new part. A cord or sumthin'. It don't affect me, cause I 'm not allowed to use the telephone.

JIMMY

*(Switches off typewriter)*

And Miss Rivas doesn't answer the telephone. So, Wendy, what happened before I got here? When the telephone rang?

WENDY

We just let it ring. Then I guess whoever was calling would write us a letter instead. Long distance is very expensive, says Miss Rivas.. Geez, Jimmy, I gotta concentrate on this TV crossword and finish it before Miss Rivas gets back. She don't like me doing the crosswords. I usually do them at home or in the ladies room, but...hey!... "Ethel blank" five letters.

JIMMY

"Mertz", that's an easy one. Miss Rivas is right, crosswords aren't for the workplace. We'd better get to work before-

WENDY

“Merman” that’s the answer; she’s from Astoria, where I’m from. Hey, you could put her in yer historical!

JIMMY

That’s too many letters, you said it was-

WENDY

We also went to the same high school. But she went there before me. Bryant High School, like Lane Bryant...here’s another one, “Mister Spock is from here.” six letters.

JIMMY

“Vulcan.“

WENDY

“Venus”, that’s it, ‘cause two down is “Eva” Gabors. I rip right through these crosswords, Jimmy. Imagine if I did them on typewriter.

*(Wipes forehead with her palm)*

Sheesh, it’s hot in here. I think Miss Rivas moves the thermometer-o-stat up just to make me uncomfortable.

*(Removes sweater vest, and reveals another of the same one underneath)*

Phew! That’s better...you’d think man-made fabrics would breathe a little better.

JIMMY

*(laughing)*

Why are wearing-?

WENDY

What’s so funny? What? The sweater vests, ya like ‘em? I got’ em at Gimbels’s. But you hadda buy two ta get em at the sale price. Miss Rivas don’t like em.

JIMMY

I don't think-

WENDY

I have to wear both sweater vests at the same time, cause if Ma found out that I bought two of em, she's go thru the roof! So when I wear em both, she thinks I only have one on. They're a little warm though, especially in my room downstairs, next to the furnace. So I have to close my door before I take one off, cause if Ma saw me holding one while wearing the other one-

JIMMY

I really don't want to hear this. Let's get back to –

WENDY

What about you? You've worn the same white shirt for the past five days, Jimmy.

JIMMY

I have a dozen of these J. Press shirts.

WENDY

You can't press yer own shirts? Who's Jay?

JIMMY

Jay? What? No, I... Look, Wendy, today is very special for Miss Rivas. I found out today is her 35th anniversary with the publishing company. The receptionist told me.

*(goes to door)*

Don't say anything, though.

WENDY

She never tells me nothin', that receptionist, out there. I think she hates me, and she always looks at me all funny. We should do somethin for her, Miss Rivas, not the

receptionist. Maybe one a them ice cream cakes from the 31 flavors place. Bubble gum is my favorite flavor. I always ask for a test scoop.

JIMMY

No, I think she's diabetic.

*(looking down hall)*

Miss Rivas, not the receptionist. And it's a taste spoon.

WENDY

Not when I ask for it!

*(laughs)*

Diabetic, huh? So that's what her accent is! I've got the Walter Drake catalog here in my drawer...somewhere. We could get her a gift from there. Which reminds me. I should order sumthin from them, before my prescription expires. Teabags, maybe.

JIMMY

*(correcting her)*

Subscription, Wendy. Teabags?

WENDY

I figure she uses one teabag a day, and that's five teabags a week-

JIMMY

One teabag? But she drinks tea all day long. She likes opera, maybe a pair of tickets...

WENDY

She uses the same teabag all day long, so at the end a the day, it's just rusty lookin water. Right outta a drainage ditch. Imagine that.

JIMMY

I'll try not to, Wendy. Here she comes!

*(rushes back to his desk)*

Don't say anything about the anniversary.

WENDY

Ok...ok.

MISS RIVAS

*(entering)*

Miss Wendy is late again!

*(goes to desk)*

WENDY

Miss Rivas, I was just telling' Jimmy here, that the guy at the token booth didn't want to take my pennies and, so I hadda go all the way back home to get a dollar, then I saw the new TV Guide was in the mail so I tore out the crossword to do in the ladies room, then the Flushing train was stuck in the tunnel, and I hadda-

MISS RIVAS

Miss Wendy should have gotten out and pushed pushed the Flushing train!

*(Points to telephone)*

Tell Mr. Herman to fix the telephone in the office! We cannot do the businesses with the booka store on the speaker-box!

WENDY

You're getting all irrigated, Miss Rivas.

*(Opens box of mints)*

Thin Mint?

JIMMY

Irritated, Wendy. Speaking of that, Miss Rivas, the receptionist had a message for you, while you were out.

*(Holds up message)*

Call the Coliseum Bookstore. They need the price of a book...Wendy, you have a dentist appointment today and you're eating mints?

WENDY

*(Smugly)*

They're Thin Mints, Jimmy.

MISS RIVAS

*(Shaking her teabag in the air)*

We sell to the booka store, not the Roman catacombs! I will write a letter to them.

JIMMY

No, the Coliseum book store on 57th street. That's who telephoned.

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WENDY

*(Irritated)*

I thought ya just moved here, Jimmy, and you didn't know yer way around town. How do you know about the Coliseums-? My pa took me to the boat show once there, and I almost drowned...

JIMMY

Drowned?

I go there all the time, Wendy. It's one of the best stores in the...Miss Rivas; don't you ever go to the bookstores? To see them?

MISS RIVAS

*(Loudly sipping her tea)*

We sell to the booka store, not pay the visit to them!

WENDY

My glasses fell into the toilet in the ladies room and I slipped right in, trying to get them out and the toilet accidentally flushed. I was soaked. My pa was not happy. There's probably a mackerel in the Hudson River wearing my eyeglasses.

MISS RIVAS

*(Places free hand on typewriter)*

Warm! I hope Miss Wendy has not been doing the TV crosswords on the customer service typewriter!

WENDY

Not me, but someone else has been, forget it ...

*(Ignoring her, turns to Jimmy)*

I go to bookstores, Jimmy, been to 'em lotsa times.

JIMMY

*(not interested)*

Really? Let's get to work.

WENDY

Yea, there's one bookstore I remember. It's in Penn Station. We used ta go there to catch the train to Deer Park ta visit my aunt Dorette. She lives there. In Deer Park, not Penn Station. It's nexta the Chock Ful a Nuts. Ma would go in there to get a coffee light and sweet and roll for the train ride to Deer Park. I didn't go in, cause I would bring sumthin from home to drink on the train, like a bottla Tab in a thermos with lemon. I used to watch my figure back then. In high school. Which was tough without my glasses.

MISS RIVAS

*(ignoring her)*

Jimmy, I have something to give you-

WENDY

Huh? So I was in this bookstore, Book Press or Book Express or sumthin, and I was lookin' around and I saw this book. It was weird. A book about the movie, *Peyton Place*, and this book was about how they made the movie *Peyton Place*, which I had seen on TV plenty a times. With pictures of the stars and the town they made the movie in. A book about a movie, I thought how weird, to put all this into a book, you get the book and you get the movie in a book. So I'm thinkin' about it, then I see on another shelf the real book, *Peyton Place*. So I took the book *Peyton Place* ta buy, then I thought i should return to the book about the movie *Peyton Place*, too and read them both at the same time.

JIMMY

That makes absolutely no sense at all.-

WENDY

Don't interrupt, Jimmy. So I had both books in my hand and I was going to go to the checkout to buy em, when I saw another book...*Return to Peyton Place*. I thought how weird. Seeing the book *Peyton Place* made me want to "return" to the book about the movie *Peyton Place*! Kinda spooky, huh? So I turned to pick up the book *Return to Peyton Place* ta read that too, and, guess what happened?

JIMMY

I really don't want to guess.

MISS RIVAS

*(Shaking her head)*

Do the guessing, Jimmy, please...

WENDY

I bumped right into Ma and made her drop her coffee light and sweet ont a the floor! Was she ever sore at me! She made her get her another coffee light and sweet right then and

there. I had ta leave all three of the books about *Peyton Place* in the Book Press or Book Express and go back to the Chock Full a Nuts. Long story short, I never got any of the books. And I was out sixty cents for the coffee light and sweet.

*(Looks at Jimmy)*

What? It's a true story!

MISS RIVAS

We do not sell to that booka store.

JIMMY

I gathered that, Miss Rivas. Finish your thin mints, Wendy. And never say the name of that book again...Miss Rivas, you have something for me?

MISS RIVAS

*(Handing Jimmy a folded sheet of paper)*

These are your responsibilities of the job in customer services. I make the list last night, after the opera at the Lincoln Center. *Tales of Hoffman*.

WENDY

Oooh, I love his movies.

JIMMY

*(Scanning the sheet quickly)*

Answer the telephone-

WENDY

*(Correcting him)*

-Speaker box, Jimmy, for the time being, until Herme-

JIMMY

-when it rings...go to the post office to pick up the mail for the customer services...reply to the book stores by letter...

WENDY

What are my job responsibilities, Miss Rivas? Huh? I know where the post office is!

MISS RIVAS

I sent Miss Wendy to the Post Office last week and she came back with crème rinse!  
*(Miss Rivas takes sheet of paper from Jimmy and scribbles a line on it, then returns it)*

WENDY

Nice creamy hair is very important. I'm a...publishing professional.

JIMMY

*(Reading)*

Keep Miss Wendy busy and away from Miss Rivas.

*(Sighs)*

This is all very good, but I thought...

MISS RIVAS

We do not to the thinking here, Jimmy, we do the Customer Services.

JIMMY

I was hoping that I could do, you know, a little writing.

MISS RIVAS

You can write letters to the booka store!

WENDY

*(mocking)*

“Dear Bookstore, please do not call us collect, as long distance is very expensive, signed Customer Service.” Jimmy dreams about being a famous writer, Miss Rivas. He writes historicals.

JIMMY

Wendy, I never said that. They not historicals-

WENDY

I have dreams too, ya know, and they have nothing to do with customer service.

MISS RIVAS

We do not want to hear them if they have nothing to do with Customer Services. Get to work!

WENDY

I have nothing to do, Jimmy, give me something to do.

*(no response)*

So I had this dream, that me and Hermeiy live in a big farmhouse, trees all around, with a wooden porch, and all the light switches work.

JIMMY

I have this box of return envelopes under my desk-

WENDY

And one a' the light switches, when ya turn it on, lights up a big fenced-in field, and there are ponies in the field, eating grass. They're wearin' blankets, cause it's winter.

JIMMY

We need to change the zip codes on the-

WENDY

And you'd flip another one a' the light switches and through the trees you can see the Empire State Building, all lit up, real close, like we're on a hill. It's all so real, and I can smell the pine trees and the pony...

JIMMY

I've only been here for a week and I know that's not real, Wendy.

WENDY

Jimmy, I said it was a dream. You gotta ruin everything. It's better than your stupid historicals.

*(angry)*

Happy 35th anniversary, Miss Rivas.

*(Glares at Jimmy)*

JIMMY

Wendy, I asked-

MISS RIVAS

There is no time for the anniversaries. Get back to work!

*(She turns to her typewriter and begins typing madly)*

WENDY

Ok ok, sheesh.

*(Goes to Jimmy's desk and looks underneath)*

I don't see no envelopes...hey, what's this?

*(pulls out bag)*

Records? I love records.

JIMMY

They're just some records that I'm giving to the Goodwill, they're old and scratched. I never should have brought them to New York with me...the envelopes are right there, see?

WENDY

*(poking through bag)*

Got any good ones...oooh, Tom Jones, ya, know, once I threw my ...unmentionables at him.

JIMMY

You saw him in person?

WENDY

Naw, he was on the TV...watch this,

*(Holds record over head and sings, dancing about the office)*

“She’s a lady, whoa, whoa, whoa, she’s a lady, and the lady is mine.” Pretty good, huh?

MISS RIVAS

The lady will soon be out of the job!

*(Grabs record from Wendy)*

We sell to the booka store, not to the showgirl! Take the envelopes-

*BUZZ*

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

*(Buzzes)*

Miss Rivas, this is the receptionist. I just called to say Happy 35th Anniversary with the publishing company. I have a small gift out here for you. And donuts.

MISS RIVAS

Nooo! No gift for the anniversary!

WENDY

Donuts?

*(Heads to door)*

SPEAKERBOX(Receptionist)

I remember on your first day here, you said, “I will be here for 35 years”, and you have!”

WENDY

That’s spooky. Like Ron Sterling.

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

Remember all the good times we used to have, Miss Rivas? Going to the Broadway shows after work, the entire publishing company?

MISS RIVAS

Back then the Broadway shows were good! For everybody!

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

Remember we went to see *Fiddler on the Roof*? And after the show, we walked through Times Square singing?

MISS RIVAS

*(remembering)*

*Fiddlers on the Rooves* was a good Broadway show!

*(Humming If I Were A Rich Man)*

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

And you made up your own words? Remember?

MISS RIVAS

*(Singing, getting louder)*

If I had a booka store. All day long I'd sell all the booka, If I had a booka store-

WENDY

*(Knocking on Miss Rivas desk on her way out)*

Miss Rivas, we sell to the bookstore, not the Broadway star!

*(Exits)*

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

By the way, I have a call for you.

JIMMY

Miss Rivas, if you don't like Wendy, then why did you hire her?

SPEAKERBOX (Young Girl)

Hello, I am looking for a copy of *Sister Carrie*, for a report I have to do for school. Can you send me-?

MISS RIVAS

Go to the booka-store!

SPEAKER BOX (Young Girl)

I'm in a wheelchair. I can't get out of the house.

MISS RIVAS

Call the booka-store! We sell to the booka-store. Not to the individual in the wheelchair! Jimmy, the customers should write only letters to us. That is how we do business.

*CLICK*

JIMMY

Miss Rivas, Don't you think that is a little...old fashioned? The telephone is a much faster way of doing business. It's almost like you're...afraid of the telephone!

MISS RIVAS

*(putting down her mug)*

Nooo! Jimmy, Miss Rivas is not afraid of nothing...but the telephone is a thing to be used with importance, not for the every day business. You use the telephone to say "*Miss Rivas, you have a new baby grand niece!*" or "*Miss Rivas, the village you were born and raised in has been washed away in a terrible mudslide.*"

JIMMY

Oh...

MISS RIVAS

Not, "Miss Rivas, one of the booka has a torn dust jacket, can you send a new one by air mail and do not charge us?"

WENDY

*(Entering with a small package and a donut)*

Miss Rivas, here's yer present.

*(shoves donut into her mouth)*

*mmmmm aaaa hhhh*, not too much jelly in this one!

MISS RIVAS

*(takes wrapped gift)*

There is not too much jelly in the donut because most of the jelly is on the gift!

*(Puts gift on desk)*

Now I have two gifts. Back to work.

WENDY

Ma used ta say I was a gift...from heaven.

*(Shovels in last of donut)*

JIMMY

I'm sure glad I'm not your dentist, Wendy.

*(Looks at Miss Rivas present)*

Aren't you going to open it? The present from the receptionist?

MISS RIVAS

I will wait until later. With a hot cup of tea-

WENDY

*(mutters)*

Rusty drainage ditch water you mean...

MISS RIVAS

*(Hands envelope to Jimmy)*

Here is the other gift. Nothing much.

JIMMY

*(Opening letter)*

"Miss Rivas, thank you for your 35 years of service to the publishing company. Please accept the enclosed with our gratitude. Signed, the president of the publishing company."

WENDY

She got clothes? Sheesh, I hope I'm here for 35 years.

*(Looks over Jimmy's shoulder)*

JIMMY

*(repulsed)*

Wendy, phew! How much crème rinse do you use, anyway!

WENDY

I use according to directions, Jimmy, rinse and repeat but sometimes I forget where I am so I have to start over--

JIMMY

*(shushing Wendy)*

A check...ten thousand dollars? Miss Rivas, you're rich!

MISS RIVAS

It will be put to good use. I have the account at the Manufacturers Hanover's and Trusts.

*BUZZ*

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

Miss Rivas, I have a collect call from...Bermuda, will you accept?

MISS RIVAS

Nooo, the collect call is too much of the money. Tell them to write letter to the Customer Services!

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

Putting it through...

MISS RIVAS

Noooo!!!

WENDY

Jimmy pull the wire of the telephone out of the wall!

*(Jimmy glares at Wendy)*

What? It was just an idea. Bermuda? Like the shorts?

JIMMY

Bermuda, like the onion. That's far away!

SPEAKER BOX (Bermuda)

This is Dorette from the Bermuda College Bookstore.

JIMMY

*(slightly nervous)*

Yes Dorette, how may we help you? How's Bermuda?

SPEAKER BOX (Bermuda)

Bermuda is fine and our classes start tomorrow. We ordered 400 copies of your English Anthology, which came by boat yesterday. But we only received 390 copies. I counted them myself And put a price on each book. And placed each book on the shelves.

MISS RIVAS

*(impatient)*

Talk faster. The long distance costs money.

WENDY

They're 20 bucks a pop. Them books. That's 200 onions, there...in Bermuda money.

SPEAKER BOX (Bermuda)

Can you ship us the missing 10 copies? The students need them. They work so hard for their textbooks. You billed me for 400 copies, you know. Do you understand? We want all 400 copies -

MISS RIVAS

*(impatient)*

We are the Customer Services. We understand what you want.

JIMMY

(writes on pad)

10 copies of the English Anthology, no charge.

MISS RIVAS

Tell her to recheck and advise. The booka are there in Bermuda. Tell Dorette to recount the booka!

WENDY

*(joking)*

Look under the onion tree! They don't lie, Miss Rivas. Them Bermudans, they're good people. Just like last week on Barnaby Jones –

*(Miss Rivas snaps her fingers angrily at Wendy)*

Ok ok. Hey!

*(to the speaker box)*

Hey! I have an Aunt Dorette! In Deer Park. Do ya know her?

MISS RIVAS

Ship them, then. By booka - post.

SPEAKER BOX (Bermuda)

Is that Miss Rivas I hear in the background? I have known her for 35 years-...book post? That would take weeks! I want them sent by air mail. Overnight! The students need them!

MISS RIVAS

*(Gasping at the thought of the price of shipping overnight air mail)*

Nooo! The air mail is too much money to send the booka! Send them, Jimmy, by booka post!

SPEAKER BOX (Bermuda)

You listen to your customer. Miss Rivas, I want those books sent by air mail! Overnight! If you don't, I will...will...put a...a Bermuda curse on you and your customer service department! You have two days to get those books to me, or else!

*CLICK DIAL TONE*

WENDY

A curse? I'll turn into a...a...Bermuda onion...with new hair...

*(Pats hair)*

JIMMY

*(Joking)*

Maybe the books are in the...Bermuda Triangle.

WENDY

Is that next to the Hollywood Squares?

*(They both laugh)*

MISS RIVAS

*(Shaking finger)*

Jimmy, we do not joke about the missing booka. Bill her for the air mail shipping! Bermuda curse, humph. Every year, Miss Dorette tries to put the Bermuda curse on the Customer Services.

JIMMY

I thought you didn't answer the telephone, Miss Rivas. How did she try to-?

MISS RIVAS

She wrote the letter to the Customer Services! Postage due!

*(drops teabag)*

Nooo! The teabag has fallen onto the floor.

*(reaches down to pick it up)*

I will rinse the teabag in the ladies room! It is good for the whole day!

JIMMY

Miss Rivas, think of all the teabags you could buy with ten thousand dollars!

WENDY

All that tea, I'd be up all night. Every night for the rest of my life!

JIMMY

*(ignoring her)*

You have plenty of time to decide. Put it away for a rainy day.

MISS RIVAS

*(at doorway)*

Nooo!

*(she leaves)*

WENDY

Sheesh! I hope she uses the sink.

*(looks at watch)*

Good thing my new dentist, Dr. Chin, is in this building. One floor down. So I won't get all rained on. What was I saying, oh yea...so yesterday, I was lookin' in the window of this hair cutting place, and there was this picture of the Farris Fawcett that I was looking at, in the window, and this guy walking behind me goes, be free, be yourself, don't be like that chick on TV. So I goes to the guy, I'm just looking to get new hair before I go to the Brew and Burger tomorrow, I mean today, with Hermey. It's Double Potato Day. And we have a coupon, which he's given to me for safekeeping, by the way. Then this guy goes -

JIMMY

Double Potato? Wendy, can I ask you a question?

WENDY

*(eating last of Thin Mints)*

This is my last box. Sorry. You shoulda said something sooner. I didn't know you liked Thin Mints or I wouldda brought a box fer you

JIMMY

No, no. How did you get your job here? Did you know what the job would be? What did you do before this?

WENDY

*(glances at watch)*

Oh, well, we got time before that Dr. Chin guy.

*(awkwardly leans back in chair and sighs)*

So I got outta high school. Bryant, where Ethel-

JIMMY

I know, I know.

WENDY

Then I went ta work fer my Grandpa. He had a shop under the el, fixing radios. Putting new tubes in 'em. What I did was answer the telephone and open the mail. Which was tough, 'cause people used to send their broke radios in the mail. And I didn't know if they were broke or not-

JIMMY

Why would anyone send you a radio that wasn't broke er, broken?

WENDY

So I had to test each one that came in the mail. If they were broke, we would fix ‘em and mail em back with a bill. If they weren’t broke, I’d think, “Hey, maybe they broke after being on fer a while”, so I would leave them on until they stopped working, then I knew that they were broke, n my Grandpa would put new tubes in them. So all day I got ta listen to the radio, all the stations all a’ the time. At the same time. It was pretty advanced stuff, let me tell you. Ya know, come ta think about it, there have been lotsa famous women who worked in radio repair. That Marie Curie, ya know her? I read that she ripped a button offa her corset a hundred years ago and invented the radio volume knob. What if Tom Jones came on the radio and ya couldn't turn it up?

JIMMY

No, Marie Curie discovered *Radium*, Wendy. It’s an element-

WENDY

Ya, like The Fifth Dimension, I know, sheesh...where was I? After about ten or seventeen years, my Grandpa lost interest in broke radios.

JIMMY

He realized that modern transistor technology made the old tube technology obsolete?

WENDY

Nah. He died.

JIMMY

Oh.

WENDY

So, then I was sitting around one day thinkin’ about my past experiences in radio repair, and I thought “Hey, I could go to radio repair school!” So I went downtown ta the radio repair school ta apply.

JIMMY

All you did was open the mail-

WENDY

Jimmy, please...so I went ta apply ta go to radio repair school, and I was in their office, then I remembered I had a bunch a bills ta mail fer Ma in my hand, and had ta take them to the post office, so I go, “Hey, is there a Post Office around here?” Than, all of a sudden, a lunch bell went off, and I got spooked and dropped all the bills that I hadda mail fer Ma. Right onto the floor.

JIMMY

Lunch bell?

WENDY

So I bent over ta pick up the bills, ‘n I was putting them in order of the name of the bill...Electricity, Gas, Telephone, Water...I was...was...accessorizing them-

JIMMY

Alphabetizing-

WENDY

Right! I looked up and it was none other than Hermey, an’ he goes “Hey, you accessorize very well. How’d you like to be a publishing professional?” That was the day we met. So, long story short. Here I am. Whenever I hear a lunch bell, I think of Hermey.

JIMMY

So, how long have you known him?

WENDY

Hermey? Lets see.

*(counts on fingers)*

Three weeks today! It's...

*(shoves handful of Thin Mints into mouth)*

...our...anniversary! Maybe that's why he's taking me to the Brew and Burger! I've never had an anniversary before. Maybe they'll put a candle on my double potato. We have a coupon, ya know.

JIMMY

Three weeks? That's not much of an anniversary.

WENDY

Good thing I have my new hair. This new hair wasn't cheap. Now I ain't got no money.

JIMMY

No money? Wendy, yesterday was payday. Didn't you stop by the cashier's window?

WENDY

Where?

JIMMY

The window with the metal bars by the receptionist. The cashier's window.

WENDY

What? The jail cell? Oh there. I hate walkin' by there, Jimmy. Gives me the shivers. There's this old lady inside. She musta done sumthin really bad ta be put in there. Seems like every time I walk by her, she calls my name and tries ta give me an envelope with a secret message er sumthin in it. Like a escape note mebbe. I want nothin ta do with that kinda stuff. So I just walk right on by her and go "I'm not interested in your kind. Good day."

*(Jimmy stares at her, disbelieving)*

What? You want me ta get mixed up with...jail birds, Jimmy?

JIMMY

She is trying to give you ...I'll straighten it out.

WENDY

Hey, whatta you doing for lunch. Wanna come to the Brew and Burger?

JIMMY

*(Caught off guard)*

I, ah, well; a friend of mine is meeting me here. We're going to the book store, to look around...

WENDY

You and your books...

*(Pause)*

Jimmy, where did you get friends? I lived here all my life and I got no friends, except for you and...Hermey, and you just move here and suddenly, you're like the Great Catskill, er sumthin.

JIMMY

*(Thinking)*

...Gatsby, the Great Gatsby,

*(Changing subject)*

Wendy, did your grandfather always repair radios?

WENDY

Only after he couldn't see no more.

JIMMY

Couldn't see? You mean he was blind? And he repaired radios? That's amazing!

WENDY

My Grandpa was a really smart guy. He went to the college just like you, Jimmy. And then he worked for a big company here in the city, building electronics and stuff. He had one of them secretaries too. She always smelled so pretty. Like Jane Nate.

JIMMY

Wow!

WENDY

Not so wow. Then he got sick and had to go to the hospital for an operation and he went blind and never saw again...and he moved into our house in Astoria, so I started doing stuff for him...picking out his socks...taking him to the store...reading the Sunday paper to him...And, since he couldn't work no more building the electronics, he started fixing them radios and opened a shop. His shop was open seven days a week. Monday, Tuesday Wed-

JIMMY

I get it. You read the newspaper to him? That's a very nice thing to do.

WENDY

Like I had a choice. Every Sunday after bowling on Channel Four, we'd sit in front of the house on the glassed in porch, and I would read the whole paper to him, the news, the sports, the businesses, even the help wanted.

JIMMY

Was he looking for a job?

WENDY

I think he just wanted to torture me...I hated it...all my friends would be out playing kick the can, er, hide n seek, 'n I was cooped up, being my Grandpa's...secretary.

JIMMY

I didn't mean to start anything--

WENDY

Sometimes I would get so mad cause I hadda read the Sunday paper ta him after Bowling on Channel Four, I'd move the coffee table in the living room out just a few inches so he'd bang right into it and cut his shins when he walked by.

JIMMY

I can't blame you. You were only...how old?

WENDY

Ten! Would you want a ten year old secretary, Jimmy? What would ya get her for the Secretaries day?

*(Pulls out hanky)*

My Grandpa was blind fer 20 years, Jimmy. And ya know what the toughest part was?

*(Blows nose and looks into tissue)*

He never got ta see what I looked like, all growed up. When he died, I bet he still thought a' me as a little girl Ten years old.

*(sniffles)*

Oh, well, that's all in the past.

BUZZ

SPEAKERBOX (Receptionist)

I have a call for Wendy.

JIMMY

Thank the Lord.

WENDY

*(like Miss Rivas)*

Tell 'em to write to-

SPEAKERBOX (Mother)

My Wendy is too busy to talk to her own mother?

WENDY

I'm here Ma. What do you want?

SPEAKER BOX (Mother)

Wee-wee, is that you? You sound so far away.

WENDY

I'm on the other side of the room, Ma. We have you on the speaker box, 'cause the real telephone is broken.

SPEAKER BOX (Mother)

Wee-wee, are you there? I'm here outside the Revco, under the el. I forgot what kind of panty liners you wanted me to buy for you, they're still on sale. What size was it...Full Woman or the Plenty o' Rooms or whatever –

WENDY

Not now...I'm at work. Ma, I'm a publishing professional, I don't talk about-

SPEAKER BOX (Mother)

What? I know you need some a them at work-

WENDY

I said the Revco ones, them that were in the circular. It was on the stoop-

SPEAKER BOX (Mother)

I can't hear you...the circular ones? Wee-Wee, I thought we talked about them ones; they don't fit right on you... I'll get two boxes, jumbo size, of the Revco ones. I have my senior

card...you can keep one box there under yer desk there, and the other at home by the commode. This reminds me, we have to get a plumber to come over, so he can fix the commode. It still stops up, whenever you'se uses it.

JIMMY

I really should not be hearing this conversation, Wendy.

SPEAKER BOX (Mother)

Wee-wee, don't forget the dentist appointment you have this morning. Maybe this Dr. Chin can get to the bottom of your breath issue.

JIMMY

This is much more than I need to-

WENDY

That's it, Ma! Goodbye!

*CLICK*

Oh, I should have asked her to get a bag a them candy orange slices that I keeps next ta my bed at night.

*(Jimmy glares at her)*

What?

MISS RIVAS

*(returning)*

The tea bag is good as new! Back to work.

WENDY

I'm late! I gotta run to that Dr. Chin the dentist! Hopefully, I'll have fresh you know what, by the time I go to the you know where with you know who. We have a coupon, ya know.

JIMMY

What are you talking -

WENDY

I'll take the stairs. Don't miss me.

*(Grabs sweater vest and coat and leaves)*

JIMMY

*(Getting up his courage)*

Miss Rivas, I was thinking...

MISS RIVAS

What are you doing the thinking of, Jimmy?

JIMMY

I was thinking that maybe I should work in another part of the publishing company. Do something else. Do you know if-

MISS RIVAS

What is wrong with the Customer Services? You read the letters from the booka store, you issue credit for the missing booka, and you do not sell to the individual!

JIMMY

Maybe I could be in a job where I could work on my book. I write about the history of--

MISS RIVAS

Jimmy, I have seen pages from your booka. It would not sell. We would have to issue credits for the returned bookas.

JIMMY

You know that I went to college to be a writer. I really don't know anything about invoices and credits

MISS RIVAS

Miss Rivas never went to the college. I come to the city, find place to live with sister, get job in the Customer Services-

JIMMY

Sister? What's her name?

MISS RIVAS

Miss Rivas!

JIMMY

Oh.

MISS RIVAS

Do you think Miss Rivas - me – knew anything about the invoices and credits? Nooo! You have to learn new things every day,

*BUZZ*

SPEAKERBOX(Receptionist)

Call for Miss Rivas!

MISS RIVAS

Tell them to write a letter!

SPEAKER BOX (Sales Girl)

Good day, valued B. Altman's customer, Try new Halston for Women? Nine dollars for an ounce.

MISS RIVAS

*(Goes to the speakerbox and jabs finger)*

Nooo, I have to get back to the customer services, typing the invoices and issuing the credits, no time for this valued B. Altman's customer.

SPEAKER BOX (Sales Girl)

Halston for Women is a refreshing, woody, mossy fragrance, also in body talc.

MISS RIVAS

I work in the publishing company, not the forest!

SPEAKER BOX (Sales Girl)

You'll be the hit of Studio 54.-

MISS RIVAS

*(shaking finger at speakerbox)*

We sell to the booka store, not the discotheque!

*CLICK*

*(Wendy enters, carrying coat)*

JIMMY

*(Sitting in Miss Rivas seat)*

What's the matter, Wendy? Couldn't Dr. Chin solve your, you know what, issue?

*(Suppresses a laugh, turns and glances at typewriter)*

MISS RIVAS

The Dr. Chin can solve any issue!

WENDY

Can you two just...shut up?

JIMMY

*(Looks away from typewriter)*

Hey, what's wrong...and where's your other...sweater vest?

MISS RIVAS

*(Goes to Wendy, noticing how upset she is)*

Jimmy, go to the receptionist and get some of the carbon paper to do the typing of the invoices.

JIMMY

I, uh, ok.

*(leaves)*

MISS RIVAS

Tell Miss Rivas why Miss Wendy is upset.

*(turns away)*

I see Dr. Chin did not resolve your issue.

WENDY

Well, I, so, I got to the dentist office, downstairs and waited in his waiting room, 'cause there was no reception to tell me to do anything else. It got really hot in that waiting room, so I took off my coat, and hung it on the hook by the door. That *Family Circles* was on the table, so I put it in my coat pocket for later. Then I went into Dr. Chin's office and sat in his chair. It was even hotter in there, so I took off one of my sweater vests and put on the floor under the chair. I like to wear the two a them, but it was just too hot. Then he goes that he wanted to look at my teeth, so I goes that I am afraid, can you give me something to knock me out, then he goes sure, just put this mask over your face, and you'll fall asleep, so I goes OK, then he put the mask over my mouth, so then I woke up

when Dr. Chin says, Wendy, I am through looking at your teeth, and I opened my eyes, and looked at Dr. Chin, and he...he -

MISS RIVAS

He, what, Wendy, what?

WENDY

He was...he was...

MISS RIVAS

Nooo, I don't do the understanding.

WENDY

*(sits at her desk)*

He was wearing my...other sweater vest!

MISS RIVAS

Nooo, the sweater vest is for the Wendy, not the Dr. Chin!

WENDY

So I jumped outta the chair, took my coat offa the hook and ran outta there. But, look what I found in the *Family Circles*, while I was waiting for the elevator...Helpful Hints! ... Listen to this...a little baking soda can take care of some bad breath problems...maybe I should try that. I can stop at the Revco on the way to the Brew and Burger and get a box...sheesh, who needs Dr. Chin, anyway?

*(digs through lunch bag)*

BUZZ

SPEAKER BOX (Receptionist)

Wendy, I have a package out here for - -oh never mind, Jimmy just walked by. He can take it back to you-

MISS RIVAS

We are in the Customer Services, not the Wendy services. We sell to the booka store!

WENDY

*(lifts lunch bag)*

My lunch bag gets heavier every day...here's that donut, I thought I ate it yesterday...

MISS RIVAS

Miss Wendy makes Miss Rivas sick in the stomach.

JIMMY

*(Enters)*

Here's a package with you name in it, Wendy. I wonder what it is.

*(Drops it on desk)*

WENDY

Careful, Jimmy. You almost squished my lunch bag.

MISS RIVAS

Nooo, the Customer Services comes first! Then we do the squishing of the lunches.

JIMMY

Open the box.

WENDY

*(Opens box)*

My sweater vest! Well, whatta ya know! He's not so bad, that Dr. Chin. And it still smells real good

*(nuzzles sweater vest)*

*mmmm aaaaa hhhhh*, like my new hair...look, toothbrushes...and a note...hey, it's in Japanese.

*(hands note to Jimmy)*

JIMMY

I, uh, can read it. It's Chinese, not Japanese.

WENDY

Whatever.

*(nuzzling)*

MISS RIVAS

Miss Rivas has seen the Chinese opera at the Lincoln Center. Give it to me!

*(takes note)*

MISS RIVAS

*(looks at note)*

Noooo!

*(pretends to read note)*

Ahem! *Dear Wendy. Here is the attractive sweater vest you left in my office, I, uh, thought you may like these, uh, antique toothbrushes, as they are valuable Chinese artifacts. Regards, Dr. Chin.*

JIMMY

See, Wendy, everything's all right-

WENDY

Whatever.

*(nuzzling)*

*BUZZ*

SPEAKER BOX (Receptionist)

Call for Wendy.

WENDY

Tell them to write-

SPEAKERBOX (Dorette Chin)

*(out of breath)*

Miss Wendy, this is Dorette Chin. I am the receptionist for Dr. Chin! You dirty woman! I have found your clothing in my husband's office and have sent it back to you in box with letter! You stay away from him! Those dirty Chinese toothbrushes will bring you bad luck for many years to come, and those around you! Good riddens!

JIMMY

Dorette? Bad luck?

WENDY

Dorette? Hey! Maybe she knows my aunt in Deer Park!

MISS RIVAS

Nooo! We have more than enough of the bad luck already!

WENDY

Sounds like a Bermuda Curse ta me. Well, time for lunch. HermeY and me are goin' to the Brew and Burger, just ta remind ya.

JIMMY

We know, we know.

WENDY

Oh, and his Pa's comin' too!

*(pats hair)*

How do I look? Don't miss me.

*(leaves)*

JIMMY

Miss Rivas, I, ah-

MISS RIVAS

Say it, Jimmy, there is no time to be beating the bushes!

JIMMY

I saw the letter that you were typing. The letter to the president of the publishing company.

MISS RIVAS

The letter of resignation, Aaahhh.

*(finds it on desk and reads aloud)*

*"Dear president of the publishing company. Thank you for the gift of \$10,000. It will be used. Signed Miss Rivas. PS I will be leaving early today, and not returning. I resign after 35 years."*

JIMMY

Miss, Rivas, what do you mean, you're leaving?

MISS RIVAS

Resigning, Jimmy, not leaving. When I started in the Customer Services, I said that I would stay for 35 years. It has been 35 years, and I am resigning. Miss Rivas always keeps her word!

JIMMY

But, what are you going to do?

MISS RIVAS

*(Putting plastic cover over typewriter)*

Jimmy, do the traveling around the world. For 35 years, I have looked at all the booka that we sell and always wanted to go to the places that are mentioned in the booka. Even Bermuda. My sister will go with me. Miss Rivas and Miss Rivas see the world!

JIMMY

That could get confusing.

MISS RIVAS

So I save the money, little by little. I could have used five of the teabags very day, but I only used one of the teabag, to save the money. I eat the saltines for lunch, not go to the Brewing Burgers like Miss Wendy. I tell the booka stores to write to the customer services, not call on the telephone, because it saves money for the company.

JIMMY

The company? But how does –

MISS RIVAS

Then they have more money to pay Miss Rivas! Jimmy! The college educations? Nooo!

*(putting on coat)*

JIMMY

I...ah...what's going to happen to me...and Wendy? I just started here.

MISS RIVAS

Believe Miss Rivas., the Customer Services needs someone like you. And Miss Wendy, well, she is Miss Wendy.

JIMMY

What do you ...

*(sullenly)*

I'll probably be here for 35 years, too. Cursed.

MISS RIVAS

Nothing is wrong with that, Jimmy. You come to the Customer Services in the morning; you do the work, and leave at night.

JIMMY

I wanted to be a writer, not a-

WENDY

*(entering)*

So me and Hermey and his Pa, we got all the way past the receptionist, the one who hates me, when Hermey goes, Wendy, let me look at the Brew and Burger coupon, as it may have...have...predictions-

JIMMY

...restrictions, Wendy. Look, something has happened and-

WENDY

So I goes, Hermey, I musta have left the coupon on my desk, so here I am, getting the coupon offa my desk.

*(sees Miss Rivas in her coat)*

Miss Rivas, goin ta lunch too? Wanna come with Hermey and his Pa and me to the Brew and Burger? We only have one coupon though. You can share my potato, if you want.

MISS RIVAS

Nooo! Miss Rivas does not eat at the Brewing Burgers!

JIMMY

Wendy, Miss Rivas is leaving.

WENDY

Oh, maybe tomorrow, then.

*(takes coupon and turns to leave)*

JIMMY

No she's resigning. She wrote a resignation letter, to give to the president of the publishing company.

WENDY

I'll take it to him. He can read it on the way to the Brew and Burger.

*(takes crosswords)*

And I'll finish the TV cross words while we're waiting fer our-

MISS RIVAS

*(hands Wendy the letter)*

Good. Thank you, Miss Wendy. Goodbye.

JIMMY

The president of the publishing company is-

WENDY

-is Hermeys Pa. Sheesh, Jimmy, how long have you been here anyway?

JIMMY

Then...he...you...

WENDY

How else did ya think I could get a job here?

WENDY

Want me to take yer historical story ta let him look at, too? I was thinkin, Jimmy,. I wouldn't buy your book if you ever had one.

JIMMY

*(exasperated)*

Why not, Wendy?

WENDY

Cause Hermeys Pa would get it fer me fer free! Remind me never ta go ta yer college!

*(to Miss Rivas)*

Well, bye, Miss Rivas, see ya around. Oh, Jimmy, Hermeys says you don't have to use the speaker box. Just unplug it and the telephone works okay.

*(leaves)*

MISS RIVAS

Jimmy, you will be the best writer! You will think about writing! That is all! Don't do the thinking about the Customer Services. But, just remember one thing.

*(takes her purse from under her desk)*

The most important thing of all.

*(buttoning coat)*

Jimmy, the most important thing to remember is...

JIMMY

What, Miss Rivas?

MISS RIVAS

We sell to the booka store! Goodbye, Jimmy!

*(She dances out of the office, singing)*

*If I had a booka store...*

JIMMY

*(Alone)*

...and not to the individual. Bermuda Curse is right.

*(He sits, head in his hands)*

CURTAIN