

# THE AUDITION

Inés Arrubla

"I have to be ready, you know, in case I have a call."

David keeps looking straight ahead at the road with his peculiar, fixed way of looking. It is a rainy summer afternoon and thunder rumbles in the far sky. We are heading to Chicopee, Mass., to pick up a truck. I am driving and he sits beside me. It is the first time I speak with David, though I have already heard several stories about him. He is a 'go-fer' for a movie that is being shot in the area. I have heard, among other things, that he is a hard worker, willing to do anything at any time. At the end of each day when everybody has gone home and only the art director is still on the set moving things around for the next day, David is the only one there with him, helping with whatever is necessary, and talking, because he doesn't stop talking about what it seems to be his only theme: movies, and his career as a movie actor.

"I have to prepare, you know, in case I have a call, because in this business that can happen anytime, and I have to be ready for that."

"What do you do to be ready?" I ask him cordially.

"When I'm not working as an extra or doing kind of work like this, I go to the gym. I work out four, five hours a day. If I don't go to the gym, my head gets wild and I feel depressed."

Still looking ahead at the road with his torso bend forward and motionless, David stares at something beyond the horizon with wide-open eyes in the way of a possessed or obsessive person. Now and then he sends quick glances at me.

"Five hours? What do you do for five hours at the gym?" I am impressed.

"Oh, first I run for one hour. Then I bike for another hour. Then I stretch, and then I lift weights for two hours of so, and then I walk at the treadmill 'til I feel exhausted. I have to take care of my body, because you know, when I get the call I have to be in good shape!"

David is in very good shape. He is 6 feet tall, not one gram of fat on his body. He has certainly the voice and face of a movie star. Well shaped features, well defined sharp cheekbones, and a wide forehead. However, there is something in his behavior and face expression that strikes as odd. He probably was handsome in his youth. David is about 50 years old and he is starting to get bald.

“Do you work in movies often?”

“Well, you know, movies are a tough business.” He explains with his deep voice. “The last time I worked as an extra was... let me think... yeah, it was in ‘97, eleven years ago. I still remember. It was a scene in the street, in Holyoke. They were filming a documentary. I don’t remember what about, but I remember that it was wintertime and we were outside all day long standing and waiting for directions. It was the freezing cold, you know? After hours of standing we had to walk with a group of people along a street, and then stop, and watch a car passing in front of us. We had to repeat the scene about twelve times, ‘til they were happy with it and we could go back home. You don’t make much money doing extras, you know? But it’s better than nothing.” He pauses for a second, and then add passionately, “You can’t waste any opportunity to be there, to let yourself be seen, even if you have to be in the last row as an extra, as I was that last time. When you see the documentary, you can’t even see me. But I was there, you know? That’s what counts. I can also help at home, now and then, with some money, you know?”

“Sure.” I say softly, troubled by his account. After a silence, I ask him, “Where do you live?”

“Well, I actually live with my mother, in Amherst. She has a house on Strong Street. Do you know Strong Street? I would prefer not to live with my mom, but it’s okay, because she’s old, and she needs someone who takes care of her, you know, to drive her around, to do the shopping, to clean the house, and to take care of the garden and the swimming pool. I do all of that. I just can’t afford to rent anything, you know, not even a room somewhere. I’m an actor, and that’s a tough life, but that’s what I like. What can I do? I don’t even have a car. My brother lends me his car when I need one, when I have to audition, or things like that.”

"I understand. An artist's life is a hard life. I know all about it."

"You don't say!" David exclaims, stares at me for a moment, and continues, "but I don't regret my choice. I just can't help being an actor."

"I agree. If you are an artist, you don't have any choice but being what you are."

"I knew since I was a kid that I wanted to be an actor. But this is a tough profession, you know. My mother knew that it was a tough profession, and she tried—even now she keeps trying—to get me away from the movies. But she couldn't do one thing about it, because that's what I'm, an actor, even if I don't have any work. But you know what? If I take a job, a real job like in Stop & Shop or CVS I can't be prepared for when I get a call, and I will miss my chance. I can't miss my chance after having waited and worked for that moment all my life, you know? I am ready if I have to audition tomorrow."

He grins, always motionless, with his torso bend forward and his gaze fixed — sometimes empty, sometimes full of hope.

"When was the last time you auditioned?" I ask, curious.

"Wait." He thinks for a moment, doing numbers. "I think it was in 1985. No wait, it was in 1986."

We remain silent for a minute, him probably recalling that last audition of 19 years ago, and me thinking about how hard life can be. David breaks the silence.

"Can you imagine how difficult the life of an actor is? I have actually been depressed since the last time I auditioned. I am in therapy. I go to the Veterans Hospital, you know? I have the right to."

"Oh, yes?"

"I was in the army in my twenties. "

"Do you go to the VA in Leeds?"

"Oh yeah, I've been going there for the last ten years. I actually know your mother."

"Do you?"

"Oh yeah." He sounds more animated now. "She is hot!"

"Who?"

I look quickly at him. He is staring at me with bright blue eyes grinning happily. I wish I could follow the expression of his face during our conversation, but I am driving, it is raining hard, it is rush hour, and night is falling. We are now in South Hadley, and soon I will need him to guide me. I don't know the zone. I add, surprised,

"Who is hot, my mother?"

"Oh yeah. She is very good looking. I wouldn't mind having something with her, you know? She looks so young and so hot! with all my respect." He pauses, "but I don't have her as my doctor."

"How did you know that she was my mother?"

"Easy. She looks a lot like you. When I saw you I knew that that doctor was your mother."

"Yes, everybody says that we look a lot alike."

"Oh yeah, you are also hot! I say it with all my respect, if you don't mind."

"Don't worry."

"I'm shy, you know. I haven't been with a woman in a long time." Now he sounds worried. "Actually, since I was thirty-five years old. Can you believe it? My last time was fifteen years ago!"

"Really?"

I say, gently, trying to sound neutral.

"I can't believe that time has gone so fast." He pauses. "Yeah, the last time was nice. But she left me. I guess it was okay that she left me. She would have been by now like seventy-three years old, because when I was with her she was sixty. She was twenty-five years older than me. But you know what? I like women, I just like all kinds of women. I don't care if they are old and fat or whatever. I actually feel better with old women. They are hot, you know? They have more experience. You know what I mean."

"Aha."

"She was sixty, and we had a lot of fun. She was my first experience, you know? She taught me everything. I met her in a bar in Amherst. She was nice. We liked each other at first glance. But she had a friend, and at the end she decided to stay with him. He was a truck driver. They left for another place. I miss her, sometimes. She taught me

everything. You know what I mean? I'm shy with women, but I was not shy with her. It is tough to be single."

"I'm sure it is. Do you have friends in the area?"

I ask softly to shift the conversation.

"Not many. I go out now and then to the same bar where I met that woman. There I see people, but we don't talk much. I don't have time for that, you know? I have to work hard to be ready, to stay in shape, to tend to my mother and all that stuff. I can't spend much time socializing, you know? I can't take the risk of not being prepared if I get a call. As time passes I have to work harder and harder, you know what I mean? Go to the gym and all that stuff. I also practice, of course. I practice dialogues and monologues. I have to be ready if I have to audition tomorrow. In the mean time it is always good to be in the business, even if it is doing this kind of job that I'm doing now; just moving the set around and just helping with whatever is needed. But you know what? The director has seen me now. Maybe next time she will call me for an audition. I have to be ready for that. Now she knows that I'm around."

"I will talk with her about you." I say this and I mean it. I know well the director.

"Thanks. Shee has seen me now and she knows that I am a hard worker. I can stand long hours of work, as a real actor should be able to. I am strong. I can lift heavy weights. Though, to be honest, I've done too much of this kind of heavy work, you know, like moving furniture and that stuff, and my back is not so strong anymore."

We are approaching Chicopee, where I don't know my way around. It has not stopped raining. It is already dark and thunder sounds far in the air. I hope that on my way back when I will be driving on my own—since David will take the truck—I won't encounter a storm. I am afraid of thunder.

"Now you will have to tell me where to go. I don't know the way around here."

"Don't worry. I know this area very well. I came here often, long time ago, when I was working for a moving business."

We go through small streets and pass through several stoplights, changing directions all the time. I am lost, but he knows the way.

"I don't mind working in all kinds of stuff. I need to be busy or my head goes crazy. Besides, I get to know people that way, and like this time I get to talk with women." He smiles happily, though his fixed gaze doesn't brighten, and he continues, "Like now, with you, with all my respect, because you are married. It has been a long time since I have spoken so long with a woman apart from my mother. Such a long time ago that I can't even remember when was the last time, you know? But now on the set I get to talk with all the women in the movie. I like all of them, you know? They are nice. That one, the one single with the little boy who is helping with the costumes, she is hot! But I told you, I'm shy, so I don't dare to ask her for a date. And who knows if she would accept to go out on a date with me? She is single, so...maybe she would. God knows that she is hot!"

We are approaching the truck-rental place. We have driven for about one hour. He remains quiet for one minute, while we wait at a red light. We cross a big street, the car-rental is on our right.

Suddenly he says animatedly, "I like your husband, he is a good guy."

When we are entering the parking lot, David adds with a lower tone, "I hope that the director comes back next summer with another movie. I'm ready, you know? I could audition at anytime. That's why I don't take a regular job, so that I can be ready for a call—because in this business you never know when you get a call."

*(July, 2016)*