

Untitled

A ONE-ACT PLAY

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SETTING:

Spring, 1969. A Little League baseball game in Northern New Jersey.

A chain link fence. Mounted on its face is a plywood sign advertising some local merchants. We hear the sounds of a the ball game and the kids chattering and cheering.

LOU, a trim, well-manicured fellow of about 40 stands on the other side of the fence. Dressed in a smart suit and tie, he leans on the top rail and watches the game with a kind of rapt admiration, like he's adoring the Mona Lisa.

After a few moments, EDDIE, a stout, blue-collar type of about 60 hustles to the fence a few feet away, carrying a small cooler.

EDDIE. What's the score?

LOU. *(Surprised:)* Uhh... Hackensack P-B-A Tigers three... Sal's Delicatessen Yankees one. Bottom of the second.

EDDIE. I got here as soon as I could. Damn Holland Tunnel traffic. *(toward the field:)* Atta boy, Timmy! *(to LOU:)* My grandson pitches for the Yankees. God, I can't believe they'd name a kids' team the "Yankees." I hate the friggin' Yankees like poison. Sorry, no offense. Mets fan.

LOU. None taken. Me, too.

EDDIE. Hah! Well, misery loves company, right? Oh, wait. My Timmy's taking the mound. C'mon, Timmy-boy, mow 'em down!

LOU. Why aren't you sitting near the infield with the other parents and grandparents?

EDDIE. Long story. Little family rift, shall we say. Better I stay out here. Plus they don't like me bringing this.

He reaches into the cooler for a can of beer.

How do they expect a man to watch a ballgame without a beer?

He pops the top, then looks to LOU. He plucks a second can from the cooler.

You want one?

LOU looks at the can for a long, silent moment.

LOU. *(Very seriously:)* YES.

He takes the beer, pops the top.

EDDIE. *(Toasting:)* May Yankees everywhere come down with the clap.

They drink up. EDDIE takes one gulp, but Lou keeps chugging. EDDIE watches him steadily empty the can, then let out a contented “ahhhhh.”

LOU. Now I crush it?

EDDIE. Uh... if you like.

With great joy, LOU crushes the can in his hand, then giggles like a kid. He looks around. Doesn't know what to do with it.

There's a trash can over there.

Without looking, LOU tosses the empty beer can offstage. After a moment, we hear the satisfying CLATTER of it landing in the can.

Hey! That was quite a shot!

LOU. Beginner's luck.

EDDIE. *(laughs. Takes a swig)* Ahhh... the Mets. Geez, did you see that awful game last night? That's five straight losses. Brutal.

LOU. I've got a feeling things will turn around for them soon.

EDDIE. Are you kiddin'? They're the worst team in baseball history. But don't get me wrong. The more they lose, the more we love 'em, right?

LOU. I dunno. Gil Hodges at the helm now. Good young rotation: Seaver, Koosman, Ryan...

EDDIE. Nolan Ryan?? That kid'll never cut it in the majors. He's got no control.

LOU. Some good hitters. Jones. Kranepool. Clendenon...

EDDIE. *Don* Clendenon? I think you're confused. He plays for that new team up in Montreal. "The Montreal Expos"? Can you believe that crap? Baseball in Canada?

LOU. *(To himself:)* Oh, right. It's only May. *(to EDDIE:)* Well, I hear they're working on a deal for him.

EDDIE. He's a helluva hitter. From your mouth to God's ear.

LOU. I'm tellin' ya. They're the team to watch.

EDDIE. Hey, stranger things have happened, right? They're gonna put a guy on the moon this summer. You believe that shit? On the moon! You think they'll make it?

LOU. Not a doubt in my mind. We live in amazing times.

EDDIE. *(Extending his hand:)* Ed Sadowski. Eddie. Nice to meetcha.

LOU. Lou—

CHEERS from the field draw their attention.

EDDIE. THROW TO THIRD, TIMMY! THREE! THREE!

*CRASH OF GLASS. A nearby windshield bites the dust.
Both men grimace.*

LOU. Ooooh. I think that's a Cadillac.

EDDIE. Christ. Kid couldn't hit water if he fell off a boat. It's not his fault. His old man never taught him the fundamentals. Now, my dad taught me all about The Game. But my son-in-law... nuthin'. Thinks sports "promote violence." Fathead. Lucky the kid has any interest at all.

LOU. Baseball's important for a boy.

EDDIE. You're damn right! My dad would take me to games at Ebbetts Field. We were Dodgers fans before they up and scrambled to La-La-Land. That's why we're Mets fans now. They could lose every game, no way I'm rootin' for the goddamned Yankees. So, Dodgers or Giants?

LOU. Pardon?

EDDIE. If you're a Mets fan, you had to grow up with either the Dodgers or the Giants.

LOU. I just have a thing for the underdog. Comes with my line of work.

EDDIE. What do you do? Wait, lemme guess. I'm good at this... Stockbroker!

LOU. No.

EDDIE. Lawyer.

LOU. I'm a... prison warden.

EDDIE. Really? You don't meet one of those every day.

LOU. Somebody's gotta do it.

EDDIE. Rahway?

LOU. Farther south.

EDDIE. I'm in construction myself. Just came from the City. Working on that new skyscraper downtown. The one with the two big towers? The "World Trade Center" I hear they're gonna call it.

LOU. Is that right? *(pause)* Hmm.

EDDIE. My old man worked on the Empire State Building. He'd point at it on the skyline and say, "See that, Eddie? Your father built that." I was a kid, what did I know? I thought he'd built it single-handedly. But even after I was old enough to know better, I still was proud as hell. Now I'll have one of my own. Two! For the rest of his life, Timmy can look up at it and say, "My Grandpa built those."

LOU winces and looks away.

Somethin' wrong with that?

LOU. You think it's wise to pin so much hope on a building? I mean... it's a crazy world. Crazy people in it. Anything can happen.

EDDIE. What's that supposed to—

A CRACK of the bat.

LOU. Uh oh. I think little Timmy's getting knocked around a bit.

EDDIE. I know don't why they have him on the mound. He throws like a ballerina. You got a kid out there?

LOU. Me? No.

EDDIE. Then what brings you here?

LOU. I just love baseball. (*off Eddie's look:*) Really. I'll watch any game I can. Pros. Minors. Old ladies' softball. To me, baseball is a thing of beauty. You take all the other major sports... football, basketball, hockey, soccer—

EDDIE. Oh, soccer ain't a sport. It's a communist plot.

LOU. Agreed. But just for argument's sake. All of them are essentially the same game. They're played on a rectangular field that's divided in half. Each team has to defend its half from the other, who is attempting to invade its territory and score a "goal" of some kind.

EDDIE. I never thought of that.

LOU. You know why? Because they're all based on warfare. They're a manifestation of humanity's worst instincts. And they're all played against a clock, reflecting the futility of man's inescapable mortality. You didn't get a fair shake? Too bad—EHNNNNNN—you're out of time.

EDDIE. Hmmm.

LOU. It's also impossible to play those other so-called sports without breaking the rules. So much so that they need elaborate penalty systems to compensate. In baseball, you almost never see a player break the rules. Why? Because they don't have to.

EDDIE. Right, you're absolutely right.

LOU. My friend... baseball stands apart. An idyllic forum reflecting mankind's best qualities—where both the individual and the team are equally important. And both sides get the same number of chances. You don't run out of time. You keep playing, with each team still getting a fair chance to come back. It can move with lightning speed yet hinges on the strategy that is enacted during its moments of utter stillness. You think baseball is too slow? *You're* too slow, because you're too dumb to understand it. It's the ultimate blend of physical performance and mental cunning. It's chess with athletes. Baseball... is fucking perfection. And it's about the only thing in this pathetic world that is.

(Takes an angry swig from his beer.)

EDDIE. Geez, you really love baseball.

LOU. Guilty.

EDDIE. Well... it is America's pastime.

LOU. Not for long.

EDDIE shoots him a contentious look.

America's changing.

EDDIE. Oh, you're tellin' me! And not for the better.

LOU. No, it isn't. Soon, the nation's love of baseball will start to wither, as people turn their increasingly decadent appetites to a nonstop, 24-hour feeding trough of disposable sound bites, mindless imagery, and instant gratification.

EDDIE. *(Long pause.)* You're a fun guy.

LOU. I call 'em as I see 'em. *(lighter:)* But—we've got The Grand Old Game for now, anyway.

EDDIE. Yeah, if jerks like my son-in-law don't kill it. *(pause)* My wife and I don't even speak to our daughter and her husband. Kills me. I gotta sneak into my own grandson's Little League game like a thief in the night.

LOU. I'm... estranged from my family, too.

EDDIE. Sorry. That's tough.

LOU. You don't know the half of it, brother.

EDDIE finishes his beer and crushes the can. He and LOU exchange a look. He hands the can to LOU who, again without looking, tosses the can over his shoulder off-stage. We hear it clatter into the trash can.

EDDIE. That's freakin' great!

LOU. What can I say, I got a knack.

EDDIE. You sure do. Another? Whaddaya say? But pace yourself this time. It's only the third inning.

He fetches two more beers from his cooler, hands one to LOU. They pop the tops and drink up.

You really like the Mets' chances?

LOU. I think they're going all the way.

EDDIE. *(Laughs out loud)* ...the Mets in the World Series...

LOU. Winning the World Series. The Amazin' Mets.

EDDIE. Hey, from your mouth—

LOU. —to God's ear. You a religious man, Eddie?

EDDIE. Me? Nah. Well, y'know. The right amount. The wife takes care of the religion in the family, if you know what I mean.

LOU. Seems to me, either you believe in God or you don't.

EDDIE. What? A' course I believe in God. Who doesn't believe in God? You?!

LOU. No, I believe.

EDDIE. There you go.

LOU. I just don't think much of him.

EDDIE. Of who? God?

LOU shrugs.

(cont.) You don't "think much" of God? God created you. Created the whole world!

LOU. Yeah, so?

EDDIE. So... what's not to like?

LOU. What's with all the worshipping?

EDDIE. Whaddaya mean?

LOU. What kind of person demands to be worshipped? Think about it. Would you want your kids—Timmy—to worship you? Demand it? In fact, being a good father as I'm sure you are, wanting your kids to grow up healthy in mind, if they started worshipping you, you'd probably actively discourage it.

EDDIE. I... I guess. But I'm not God.

LOU. All the more reason. God's supposed to be perfect. Doesn't sound so perfect to me. Sounds like a Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

EDDIE. Hey! I'm a proud American, buddy. Don't go bad-mouthing God to me.

LOU. Oh, please. You think God loves America? Democracy is God's worst nightmare! God doesn't want representative government! God wants you on your knees, bowing before a monarch. Trust me. I found that out the hard way.

Long pause. EDDIE eyes LOU suspiciously.

EDDIE. Who the hell are you?

LOU. Excuse me?

EDDIE. You come to a kids' baseball game. You don't have a kid in the game. Dressed in your little suit. Talking all weird shit about The Game and God and the Mets.

LOU. Hey. The Mets are for real this year. Mark my words.

EDDIE. I ain't talkin' about the fucking Mets!

EDDIE snatches LOU's beer can back from him. Tosses it to the ground.

EDDIE. I asked you, who the hell are you?

LOU. Truth? ...I'm an angel.

EDDIE. An angel.

LOU. Well... fallen angel.

EDDIE. Is that right. Only one fallen angel I ever heard of, and that's...

Pause. LOU shrugs.

You're insane. I'm calling the cops.

LOU. I'll prove it to you. Your Timmy's up at the plate.

EDDIE looks to the field. LOU didn't need to.

You think the kid's got a home run in him? A straight-up, clear-the-fence dinger?

EDDIE. Don't talk about my grandson. I don't want to hear his name come out of your crazy mouth, you—

A solid CRACK of the bat. Exuberant cheers. Long pause as EDDIE's eyes follow the distant arc of the ball. LOU sidles up to EDDIE and puts a brotherly arm around his shoulder.

LOU. Eddie... what if everything you've ever been told about the world—right, wrong, good, evil—was upside down?

EDDIE. *(Pulling away)* Why are you talking to me?!

LOU. I was here first. You talked to me!

EDDIE. *(Trembling:)* H-have you come for my soul??

LOU. I don't want anyone's soul! Remember, Ed, history is written by the winners. In the true story of the world, I am not the bad guy. I'm not the one sending people to Hell for all eternity. I'm not the one visiting plagues and wars and famine on the earth. And no one ever—EVER—flew a plane into a building for me. I'm just the fall guy. I have no control over anything or anyone. Except maybe a ballgame now and then.

EDDIE. Timmy's homer... Was that...?

LOU. The kid's 80 pounds soaking wet. He just hit a ball 300 feet. You do the math. I usually try not to interfere with The Game. Wouldn't be right.

EDDIE. Oh, because you love baseball so much?!

LOU. Love it? I *invented* it. Abner Doubleday, my ass. God's not the only one who can create things. This one's *my* baby. Just like democracy. That one was mine, too, by the way, look it up. But this... (*gestures proudly out to the field*) ...this is my real pride and joy. Took over a century to perfect... cricket... townball... one-o'-cat... two-o'-cat. Played in its primitive forms by Revolutionary War soldiers and American Indians. Ohhhh, but ain't it grand now?

EDDIE. Jesus Christ.

LOU. Oh, don't even get me started on that poor bastard.

EDDIE. Get away from me! (*Starts to inch back.*)

LOU. Aww, Eddie... please stay. We were having such a nice time, watchin' the game. I never get to watch with anybody. Hey, lets go to a Mets game! You, me, an afternoon at Shea? Whaddaya say?

EDDIE turns and runs off. LOU calls after him:

Gonna be an amazing season... We're gettin' Clendenon!
(*Pause; watching him go:*) ...Let's-Go-Mets!

He's gone. LOU looks down. EDDIE's forgotten his cooler. LOU looks around, then sneaks a fresh beer from it and pops it open. Resumes watching the game.

Nice guy.

He takes a swig of beer.

Grandson stinks.

Lights fade out.

THE END.