

ARTHUR MURRAY TAUGHT ME
DANCING IN A HURRY

By Fred Crecca

Copyright@

Re-draft P.P. 2011 ****

Inquiries:

Fred Crecca

53-01 32nd Avenue

Woodside, N.Y. 11377

Tel: 718-626-3074

crecca28a@rcn.com

Founding Member Dramatic Question Theatre

Member: Dramatist Guild

ARTHUR MURRAY TAUGHT ME DANCING IN A HURRY

CAST

RON GRIFFIN – in the present, early 50's

ANNA CORBIN - P.O. (for Parole Officer. She is pregnant)

RILLA – RON'S mother at various ages from 20's to early 70's

RONNIE GRIFFIN - (Ron when young – age 11, and age 20 as a US Marine

GRIFFIN Sr. – RON's grandfather – 50's 60's

THE JOHN (aka Dave Philley) also as **GEORGE GRIFFIN** – mid 30's

PAUL GRIFFIN – RON's father, late 20's. Later, in his 40's

TIMES: Various: 1998, 1955, 1964, 1945 (returning to present-1998 during play)

PLACES: Various: Parole Office, NYC; outside Cleveland, OH; Poughkeepsie, NY; a university out west; Upper West Side, NYC; North West Bronx

Suggestion for staging; a seamless transition between scenes would be most desirable. The use of hand props and blocks for furnishings might be an option.

“Tragedy is the beauty of intolerable truths.”

Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing In A Hurry

TIME: 1998. In the BLACK, sounds of a struggle involving several men. Shouting is heard, then two gun shots. An old Johnny Mercer tune, "Arthur Murray Taught Me Dancing In A Hurry" follows:

*Arthur Murray taught me dancing in a hurry.
I had a week to spare.
He showed me the groundwork, the walk-around work,
and told me to take it from there.
Arthur Murray then advised me not to worry...(song fades out)*

RISE. A parole office in Manhattan. A man in his early 50's his arm in a sling, is seated facing a rather pregnant woman, seated opposite. She clutches a thick red weld folder on her lap. The man nervously stares at her.

RON

Fractured my forearm.

P.O.

You're lucky they were lousy shots. (a pause)

Well, Mr. Griffin, I can tell you the Attorney General's upset. The department won't tolerate vigilante sh...crap.

RON

Are you an attorney in his office?

P.O.

Right now I'm acting liaison. Your parole officer, Bob Grasso's my colleague in the Special Unit. Even before this incident, he asked me to look at contesting your risk level. For some reason he thinks you should've been classified a Level One. (pause)

P.O. (cont'd)

What's the look? Is it because I'm a *woman* parole officer, or because I'm a very *pregnant* one?

RON

(uneasy chuckle) Both, I guess.

P.O.

Just say the word if you've got reservations...

RON

No. None.

P.O.

I've got time to handle your case before I go on leave.

RON

It must be getting difficult.

P.O.

Oh, it is ... it certainly is ...

(shuffling through papers in the file)

Now then. The natives grew restless when you moved in.

RON

Yeah. Hate mail ...

P.O.

Broken windows. A charming welcome to the neighborhood. Alright. Aside from the obvious, why do you deserve to contest?

RON

I've earned it.

P.O.

I'd say half our clients think they do. Hardly any win a level reduction. Frankly, we look good when a client does his parole without committing the same crime. To us, all parolees are individuals with a personal history, habits, predilections. A fair, objective process: No compassion,

P.O. (cont'd)
no retribution. We want you to succeed. Understand?

(she leafs through his file)

RON
I've heard Mr. Grasso say that too, but after what happened I thought I'd have a better ...

P.O.
(interrupting) In case he didn't mention it, I personally won't for a minute forget who you are and why you're here. OK? If you can live with that, fine.

RON
Yeah.

P.O.
Your background – forget the file – *that's* what I need to know if I'm to recommend your case for review.

RON
If?

P.O.
Yeah?

RON
Isn't it within my rights ...

P.O.
Certainly you can exercise your right to review on your own any time. But I don't *personally* have to recommend a case I find little merit in. Bob asked me to take yours on as a favor. You made a great impression on him, Mr. Griffin.

RON
I see.

P.O.
Hey, don't look so disappointed. Changing a classification's no piece of cake.

RON

I just thought with Mr. Grasso's recommendation, and what I've been through, there might be a bit more consideration.

P.O.

Exactly why we're here, isn't it, Mr. Griffin.

RON

It's Ron, Miss. I went and forgot your name. Bad form.

P.O.

That's OK. Anna Corbin. Call me Anna.

RON

Thanks, Anna.

P.O.

About the incident, do you think you'd be able to ID these cavemen?

RON

It was dark. I was asleep.

P.O.

We'll nail the bastards. They left all kinds of evidence; tire marks, spent shells.

RON

What'll that solve? A Level Two's a target, a Hester Prynne in spades.

P.O.

Hester Prynne?

RON

She's a character in a Hawthorne novel. She served time for adultery. The puritanical community made her wear a scarlet letter "A" on her bosom. I wear my own.

P.O.

We're not comparing adultery to...

RON

(quickly) No. The reaction's the same. I did the time, move to a quiet neighborhood, all hell breaks loose. The

RON (cont'd)

landlady panicked. Mr. Grasso practically did handstands to reassure her I'd be an OK tenant.

P.O.

That's the downside of the Community Notification Act. It fuels hysteria - starting with the cops. There's no easy answer ...

RON

They must've knocked on doors and distributed fliers. You might as well have your mug shot on the front page. On the internet, too.

P.O.

Some states do just that. Tell me, how did they react?

RON

The cops? Took my statement, brought me to the ER. Why?

P.O.

I meant how they treated you.

RON

Oh. They kept a lid on their feelings.

P.O.

Good for them.

RON

I forgot something. For a couple of weeks before the attack, Mr. Grasso had to escort me home from work.

P.O.

(surprised) Escort you! Where are you working?

RON

I blew the job. The Marriott on Grand Central Parkway.

P.O.

What'd you do?

RON

Stewarding Department. Pots, pans, dishes, glassware, that sort of thing.

P.O.

How'd the work suit you?

RON

It's honest. I'm grateful as hell, Mr. Grasso pulled some strings. And Anna, I'd appreciate anything you could do; a job, a room, anything.

P.O.

We'll work on it. Where do you want to live?

RON

Small communities are out. I'm better off closer to the city. Queens. The Bronx. Will it take long? Not that I mind the posh accommodations upstairs.

P.O.

(laughs) Right. They've got you in one of our luxury suites. (laughs)

RON

Oh yeah, a closet full of file cabinets and a cot. I'm not complaining.

P.O.

Choose the borough and maybe in a week or so we'll get you relocated.

(leafing through file)

Let's see what we have ... Oh, a few disturbing facts hit me right off the bat when I glanced through this ... In 1964, an undesirable discharge from the Marines, you were thrown in the brig for a year.

(RON is distracted by OS voice singing "Something Cool")

Hello? Hey, still with us, Ron?

RON

Sorry. That phrase, 'right off the bat', haven't heard it for a while. Reminds me of someone.

P.O.

So, what's with the undesirable discharge and the brig?

RON

(defensively) I was 21.

P.O.

We all were once. From 1961 to '64 you're squeaky clean, then the problems start; a fight with a D.I, another with a sergeant. AWOL's. What happened? (no response)

And this brawl, with a lieutenant yet. He winds up in the hospital. Serious charges, Ron.

RON

When you read it through you'll see how lame ...

P.O.

(interrupting) Excuse me? Getting drummed out of the Marines on the eve of a war – *lame*? I'm tracking this stuff objectively. You can bet the ranch the Attorney General won't accept that for an answer.

RON

But it's so damn long ago, what possible bearing ...

P.O.

(quickly) Impulse control is key for any parolee.

RON

Look, I did a dozen years controlling my impulses. I'm what they call a highly motivated prisoner. Not many guys with my MO submit to voluntary therapy. But I took every test there is: the Rorschach, the T.A.T, the MMPI, the Blacky Picture, and others I've forgotten. I led our group therapy sessions. And I became liaison between us and the administration. If rehab's the goal of criminal justice – which it should be - then you're looking at a success story. It's all in the file, Anna.

P.O

I'm just warning you that violence – any kind of violence raises flags, regardless of how long ago it was ...

RON

I got along up till then. Somehow, things soured. My counsel advised making a deal with the Commanding Officer to go for the undesirable. Since I couldn't shoot for a medical, which would've been much better, I had to take it.

P.O.

Why not the medical?

RON

I wasn't sick. Or nuts. An undesirable's as bad as a dishonorable discharge, believe me. It led to years of aimless knocking around, menial jobs. I'm not blaming the world, Anna, like so many ex-cons do. I screwed myself up, big time.

P.O.

Why'd you hit the lieutenant?

RON

Ah, who remembers ...

P.O.

How come Grasso says you're cooperative? Come on, Ron, I'm not the enemy.

RON

Maybe I'm trying to *earn* that compassion you say isn't available.

P.O.

Oh, and maybe you'd like a little love and affection to go along with it, too. Look, don't test me. I repeat, this is strictly a favor I'm doing here, OK?

RON

I get the message. You people *know* who I am.

P.O.

(pause) 'We people' have a bit of advice for you: defensiveness only makes you look like a bum. Also, your eye contact stinks. Rehearse. Look directly at people without staring. And don't avert your eyes, either. You need to be humble but confident.

RON

All that time in the joint robbed me of my social skills. I'll work on it.

P.O.

So, this lieutenant, came on to you and you whacked him.

RON

Every story's got three sides; the two opposing ones and the truth.

P.O.

(impatiently) No points for bullshit, Ron.

RON

Yeah, I, uh, I took offense to certain personal references. Alright? I called him out. We tangled. I hit him with a foot locker.

P.O.

A foot locker! I missed that. And these other wars? What set them off?

RON

I had a short fuse.

P.O.

No shit.

RON

OK. A popular, ill used, American epithet guys too casually call each other got me mad, if you must know.

P.O.

Which *epithet*? (no response)

O-Kay ... A two word phrase beginning with 'mother' you took personally to mean yours, right?

RON

(shifting uncomfortably) Ah, what's it matter.

P.O.

Hey, all of this is uncomfortable as hell. You should be used to it. But if I were you I'd try a different tack; I'd try convincing this circumscribed little world of ours just what kind of solid citizen you are. That is, if we're to assume you *are* a solid citizen.

RON

I'm beginning to believe you're pretty good at this work.

P.O.

Doubting *my* ability won't get us anywhere.

RON

I didn't mean ... Look, can I grab a smoke?

P.O.

(patting her stomach)

We'll let you get away with one ... Now you've been kicked out of the marines ...

RON

I kept to myself for a long time after that before my ...

P.O.

(RON strikes match, looks at her, puts it out)

You gonna smoke that or what? (no response, only a nod)

Suit yourself ... No other charges during this twenty year hole from '65 to '85.
We'll have to deal with it later.

RON

Why is it necessary?

P.O.

Come on, Ron, you're a savvy guy; *twenty years!* No record of what you were up to? That's *bound* to raise antennae. I'll repeat, reducing a risk level's no urgent priority for the state. You'll have to work hard to convince the board.

RON

Like I'll have to work at convincing you, I suppose.

P.O.

Damn right.

(clutching at her stomach)

OH, christ! Unexpected field goal try.

RON

A little kicker, eh? You know it's gender?

P.O.

A boy. Named him too. Matthew.

RON

Congratulations.

P.O.

We thank you, sir ... Let's start with the early years, OK?

RON

You really want to go there.

P.O.

The more I know about you the better.

RON

Most of it's in the file.

P.O.

You tell it, Ron.

RON

(reluctantly) There was only Mother and me. She was a beautiful woman. Yeah, what you said before did remind me of her. Mother wasn't your typical, conventional idea of a mother. No. She was as unpredictable as a forest fire in a high wind ...

(SCENE switch back in time to 1955.
A SPOT remains on RON)

RISE. A rainy, sultry summer evening. A cheap hotel room in a small mid-western city, somewhere bordering Cleveland, Ohio. A hotel sign flashes intermittently outside the window. Young RONNIE, age 11, is sitting on the single bed watching his mother, RILLA, a woman of about 30, singing/performing to a June Christy rendition of "*Something Cool*" playing on a portable phonograph. RILLA expressively delineates the song's sad sentiments. She moves around sipping from a glass of gin and smoking a cigarette. Young RONNIE is enthralled. He's used to this. RILLA wears a clingy summer dress and high heels, her hair upswept into a twist as she sings ...

RON

Mother loved to sing for me. For practice, she said...

RILLA (singing)

*Something cool. I'd like to order something cool.
It's so warm here in town and the heat gets me down -
Yes, I'd like somethin' cool.*

RILLA (cont'd)

But it's nice to simply sit and rest awhile.

Now I know it's a shame, I can't think of your name -

I remember your smile.

I don't ordinarily drink with strangers, I most usually drink alone.

But you were so awfully nice to ask me, and I'm so terribly far from home.

Like my dress? I must admit it's very old.

But it's simple and neat, it's just right for the heat

Save my furs for the cold.

A cigarette? Well, I don't smoke 'em as a rule. But I'll have one - it

Might be fun with somethin' cool ...

(she abruptly stops, appearing sad)

RONNIE

Why did you stop, Mother? That was great!

RILLA

What's so great about it?

RONNIE

You did it just like her! June Christy. Better.

RILLA

Big deal.

RONNIE

But you like her.

RILLA

I'm not gonna practice that song again, Ronnie. Uh uh, that's the last time.

RONNIE

Why, Mother?

RILLA

Sad, sentimental bullshit. Not one line is repeated – can you believe it! One continuous sad story, like a goddamn funeral dirge!

(pouring more gin into glass and drinking it)

RILLA (cont'd)

And don't be calling me mother this, mother that, either. I don't have to feel so old - not even 30 yet. Dammit.

(lighting another cigarette, sipping the gin)

RONNIE

I won't.

RILLA

(overlapping) Damn right you won't. She does so many up tempo numbers I really like and me, I'm singing the sorry-assed saddest of 'em ... Matter of fact ...

(breaking the 45rpm in half)

There. That settles it.

RONNIE

You didn't have to break it.

(she moves to window looking out)

RILLA

Too damn bad ... Goddamn dumpy hotel rooms, living in burgs I can't stand. It's so depressing ... People out there. Look at 'em, hunched up against the rain, going someplace. Where they go in this dinky town's beyond me ... Everything is.

RONNIE

That stuff doesn't help.

RILLA

Look, mister, you don't have jack to say about it. OK? What else is bugging you, huh?

RONNIE

Nothin'.

RILLA

(squeezing both his cheeks with one hand)

Come on say it. Say it!

RONNIE

I didn't mean anything, Mo ...

RILLA

A little something to help me forget, after being on my feet all day dancing with left-footed jerks! Don't I deserve any relief, huh? Ah, the hell with it, I'm goin' out. Stay here and be as sad as you please – alone - sonny boy.

(brusquely releasing his face from her grip)

RONNIE

Don't go. Please don't.

RILLA

You're reminding me more and more of your father, y'know that? It's as if I went and plopped out a little duplicate copy from between my legs without a thing more to do with it than that.

RONNIE

When you drink it upsets you, is all I meant.

RILLA

Oh we know what you meant alright. Not even 12 with a big smart mouth. Like your old man. A smooth talker once before the war crushed him. But what ever happens, you can't be delicate in this mean old world. So I don't have to take any crap from you, mister, for making it a lousy, rotten night!

(Ronnie turns away, she removes her dress
down to her slip, angrily kicking off her
shoes)

There's a damn good reason we live like goddamn gypsies. Nerve of them. I'm entitled to a few things in this lousy life, and you're one of 'em. No one's got a right to take you from me, not unless I say so - which I could do, Ronnie Griffin, like that! The authorities would love to snatch you up and you'd wind up right back with them - that degenerate grandfather of yours and your rotten uncle George, the pig. One a these days, you'll find out how they threw me in the nut house. I'm saving your hide, mister. Without you, all I'd have to do is take care of me - ME! NOT YOU AND ME!

(her mood changing suddenly, she fiercely embraces Ronnie)

RILLA (cont'd)

Oh god, Ronnie! Ronnie! Why'd you have to go and pick that song out of all of the songs I know? Why that one? See what sadness does to me, Ronnie? How it hurts your ma and makes her say hateful, awful things?

RONNIE

I said I was sorry, Ma.

RILLA

Yes, I'm your ma, baby. Sometimes I don't feel like one, or act like one, I know. It's this life, Ronnie, it stinks. Town after lousy town, crummy single rooms. We gotta go and just settle somewhere permanent.

(drinking more gin while holding Ronnie)

Hot tears. Little boy tears. Wet. Hot. Yes, baby, go on and cry. Just holding you close is so sweet, so familiar. The special baby smell you had still clings to your hair. Only a mother could possibly know that, not any damn court. The law doesn't know shit! Oh, Ronnie, if anyone took you away from me I'd just die!

RONNIE

Maybe we could stay here, Ma. Find a small apartment.

RILLA

Uh uh, can't chance it. Only if I meet up with a Daddy Warbucks or some nice married guy, for a change, then maybe. It won't happen here, not in this burg. Guys, no matter where they are, they're rotten, to the gills, Ronnie, every last one of 'em - from the west coast to the east, from north to south – rotten to the gills. Oh, some help out once in a while, but it costs me too damn much. Boy, does it ever!

RONNIE

Why does a guy have to be married?

RILLA

I've told you about that, honey! Think we wanna get tied down to a big hairy, bossy guy telling us how to live, what to do, where to go? Run your life? The hell with that. Besides, who wants a man around all the time.

RONNIE

I'm around all the time.

RILLA

Ha ha, you? You're my baby! It's different with us. We're close, we're special. You're mine, all mine! When two people love each other as much as we do, why there's just nothing in the whole wide world we wouldn't do to keep that love strong and alive! You feel the same, doncha baby?

RONNIE

Yes, Ma.

RILLA

Yes, yes ... Oh my goodness! Here I went and broke one of your favorite records. I'm so sorry, baby. Forgive me?

RON

That's OK.

RILLA

Sometimes your mama, well, she just can't help herself.

RONNIE

I know, Ma.

RILLA

Well, I'll just go out and get you another, I promise. 'Cause I love ya, love ya, love ya!

(rocking him in her arms)

Aw, my baby boy.

RONNIE

Will you love me when I get older?

RILLA

What a question! Ha ha! (brightening) Y'know, I've been thinking ... maybe it's time we made a real plan. We'll have to start figuring out the coming school year problem. If, say, I did get lucky and met some nice jerk real soon, we'd even stay here for a while. Maybe get a decent apartment on a nice tree lined street, like we had in California. Oh, you were too young to remember ... Or we could just go to New York. Now that's an idea! Why not? We'll get lost among all the thousands of people, hurrying around with real places to go and lots and lots to

RILLA (cont'd)

do! You're older now and not so recognizable. Yeah! We'll get our own little apartment – no more dumpy hotels. We'll live in a *real* neighborhood with plenty of stores and delicatessens, and we'll eat out a lot, too. Oh, wait'll you see the Automat! Food comes outta glass enclosed panels on a wall – for nickels! And New York's got hundreds of night clubs. I can enter the Amateur Nights competitions, maybe even get a legit singing job. And you'll sit right near the stage, my biggest fan in the audience! Oh, Ronnie, there is so much to do in New York! But right off the bat, I'll need to get a job at Fred Astaire's or Arthur Murray's...

(singing) *"Arthur Murray taught me dancin' in a hurry.
I had a week to spare. He showed me the
ground work, the walk around work, and told
me to take it from there..."*

Ha ha. Remember that one, Ronnie? Well, well, well, I think we got ourselves a real plan, huh, baby?

RONNIE

Sure, Ma, whatever you say.

RILLA

Still gotta be careful as ever, though. Foster homes're always on the lookout. And there's no telling what the Griffins are up to ... NEW YORK! Well now, that's certainly something real nice to sleep on. Speaking of which, all of a sudden your ma's so godawful tired. I didn't really feel like going out after all. Y'know what I'd love now, doncha, Ronnie? A real nice, back rub the special way I showed you.

(RONNIE tries to squirm away)

Hey. Didn't I do the June Christy number? You've gotta be extra special nice to your tired ol' drunken mama, Ronnie. She needs her loving baby boy to be nice. Like I taught you.

(snaps off lamp, removing her slip.
RONNIE rubs her back, she moans)

I'd never let my baby go live in some nasty, strange foster home.

(she crushes RONNIE to her breast, they sway together.
He clings to her, burying his face in her belly. SCENE
switches back to P.O.'s Office)

RON

I was seven, when it started. I'm over it now.

P.O.

You may think so.

RON

Mother couldn't help herself. The singing, the play acting, the whole range of emotions she took me through, became a strange fantasy world for us. She had a strange need I didn't understand. She taught me how to dance in a hurry.

P.O.

The running to different towns and hotels - was it because of your father's family?

RON

Later on I found out they didn't care. State intervention was the real threat, because of the way I was raised.

(LIGHTS to DIM. RON remains SL. PO remains SR. RILLA is under sheet with a man. She pulls it around herself exiting)

RILLA

OK, Ronnie boy, outta the bathroom. Mama's gotta shower and get to work.

RON

Ma wasn't exactly a hooker. Once in awhile she'd bring a john up to the room and ball him, to help defray expenses, she'd say. Dance instructors didn't earn much back then. Usually, I'd hang out near the hotel until they finished. But when the weather was bad, I'd stay in the bathroom. She didn't want me hanging out in the lobby. One rainy afternoon, a john she'd seen before came by. This guy was different from the others. Mother only did repeats with guys she liked. He and I were both shy about the whole deal ...

(RONNIE enters, tentatively approaching a bare chested man slipping his pants on)

THE JOHN

(to RILLA OS) Hey Rilla, the bread's on the dresser, OK?

RILLA (OS)

Great, Dave. Thanks. Hate to rush you, but I gotta run.

THE JOHN

(to RILLA OS) 'At's OK. (to RON) Hiya, kid. Uh, Rilla, uh, your ma, she musta forgot to introduce us. I'm Dave.

(they awkwardly shake hands)

RONNIE

I'm Ronnie.

THE JOHN

She says you like baseball.

RONNIE

Uh huh.

THE JOHN

Who's ya favorite team?

RONNIE

Yankees.

THE JOHN

Always up there, those guys.

RILLA (OS)

Ronnie! Say hello to Dave. I told him about you, how smart you are. Davey, go ahead and ask him to multiply, divide, or add any bunch of figures. He does it all in his head in seconds. Like friggin' Einstein.

THE JOHN

(to RILLA) That right?

RILLA (OS)

Go on and ask him.

THE JOHN
(to RILLA) OK. (to RONNIE) Any numbers, huh?

(RONNIE nods non-committedly)

How about 456 times 25, my old uniform number?

RONNIE/RON (give the answer)
11,400. Is it true what she said, that you're *the* Dave Philley who actually plays in the majors?

THE JOHN
Played. Yeah, I played.

RONNIE
With the Athletics?

THE JOHN
And the White Sox. And just maybe I'll keep playin' for Cleveland, but I ain't too sure yet.

RONNIE
Why?

THE JOHN
Hurt my arm. My shoulder. Gotta see how it heals first. Besides, I don't like my manager.

RONNIE
Eddie Joost? You don't like him? Wow!

THE JOHN
Whoa, fella. I didn't get an answer to the multiplication thing yet.

RONNIE/RON (repeat answer)
11,400, I said.

THE JOHN
Come on, you're kiddin' me!

(RONNIE, writing on a notepad shows THE JOHN)

Hmmm. Looks kinda right. Is it? THE JOHN

Uh huh. RONNIE

He do it yet? RILLA (OS)

(to RILLA) Wait. I gotta check it. We're still kinda gettin' acquainted. THE JOHN

You'll see. He's brilliant, the little turd. RILLA (OS)

Don't listen to her. RONNIE

I'd like to see this number thing again. Smaller numbers this time, OK? Try 30 times 25. THE JOHN

Too easy. 750. RONNIE/RON (say the answer)

Hmm, that sounds right, too. OK, what about 727 times 25? THE JOHN

18,175. RONNIE/RON (answer)

Geezus. Pretty quick there. You're not kiddin' me, right? I ain't too good at numbers myself. THE JOHN

It's right. Wow, you really played for the Athletics!?!? RONNIE

Outfield, yeah. Wait a second till I figure that out ... Lemme have that. THE JOHN

THE JOHN (cont'd)
(RONNIE gives him a notepad and pencil)

What'd I say? 727 times 25?

(RONNIE nods. THE JOHN does the math)

I can't even figure it writing the damn thing. Let's see ... this goes here. That right? Must be. You get the same answer?

Dumb sonovabitch.

RON (from SL)

18,175. Did you get it?

RONNIE

Well I'll be...That's fuckin' amazing! Oops, sorry. (to RILLA) Hey. Hey, Rilla! you're right.

THE JOHN

Told ya. Ask him anything; names of the Presidents, history, geography. He's smart as hell. Too smart for his britches, sometimes.

RILLA (OS)

That is one hellava talent, kid.

THE JOHN

I guess.

RONNIE

I'm not kiddin'. I bet you could be a top notch engineer or somethin'. Geez, maybe even an atom bomb guy.

THE JOHN

(combing hair. Amused, RONNIE nods)

(quickly) Try this one. 413 times 213, say? That's a lot tougher, eh?

87,969.

RONNIE/RON (answer)

Wanna see?

RONNIE

(RONNIE starts doing the math on a pad)

THE JOHN

Good Christ, no! I believe ya, I believe ya.

(to RILLA) Hey, Rilla! he could be one a them quiz kids on television! I can't believe it.

RILLA (OS)

'At's my boy.

THE JOHN

(to RILLA OS) I know some smart business guys, they could make you a fortune with this kid. A fortune.

RILLA (OS)

No thanks.

THE JOHN

(to RONNIE) Wow, how the hell d'ya do it?

RONNIE

Just can.

THE JOHN

Man, this is strictly Twilight Zone stuff!

(takes out a flask swigs a snort,
returns it to his back pocket)

RONNIE

Are you really Dave Philley?

THE JOHN

You want a birth certificate? It's me alright.

RONNIE

Wow. Think you're gonna play again, Mr. Philley?

THE JOHN

Like I said, I ain't in the game just now. I'm inactive. I been scouting for new players for the team. So, you wanna play ball ... Own a glove? A mitt?

RONNIE

Lost it in a hotel in Chicago.

THE JOHN

Aw, that's tough. We'll replace it. No sweat.

RONNIE

How?

THE JOHN

(putting on his shirt)

I got extras. How old are you now?

RONNIE

Eleven and a half.

THE JOHN

Let's see your hand.

(RONNIE holding his hand up for inspection)

You'll grow into mine.

RONNIE

Yours?

THE JOHN

Yeah. You wanna play, right?

RONNIE

Sure, but ...

THE JOHN

But what? I'll get you a mitt, we'll toss a ball around.

RONNIE

Gee, Mr. Philley.

THE JOHN

Dave.

RONNIE

Dave. Mother doesn't like me to go too far.

THE JOHN

I'll just tell her its OK.

(RONNIE indicates "NO!" with alacrity.
THE JOHN takes him aside)

OK, here's what. Strictly between us, OK? We'll meet tomorrow down front after she goes to work. Like at 3:O'clock?

RONNIE

Really? Oh boy!

THE JOHN

Sure. There's a little park a couple blocks north. We'll toss a few around.

RONNIE

But what if she.

THE JOHN

We don't say nothin'. Zip it, right? Right?

(RONNIE nods, a mixture of confusion and relief
on his face. Scene switches to P.O.'s office)

Rise. P.O.'s office.

P.O.

You met him?

RON

How could I pass it up? Hell, I was thrilled to death hanging out with a real major leaguer.

P.O.

What's with this remarkable facility for numbers? And why wasn't it an asset for you later on?

RON

Nah, I never banked on it. I didn't want to attract attention. I told you I kept strictly to myself after the Marines.

(P.O. nods. THE JOHN and RONNIE enter
tossing a baseball between them. They
sit. THE JOHN swigs from his flask)

That first time we tossed a ball around in the park. Only, there was something that didn't quite compute.

P.O.

What was that?

RON

The man seemed more out of shape than I imagined a ball player would be. Especially a pro. And he'd swig whiskey out of a flask stashed in his back pocket. But he sure threw a ball hard. Rocket-like. It stung through the glove. You bored yet?

P.O.

Not at all. Go on.

RON

Well, we rested on a little knoll under some trees eating ice cream cones, chatting. It felt great. Dave was a nice guy, kind of like a big brother, though, in retrospect, more like a big friendly kid. My friend.

THE JOHN

Perfect day for baseball. Not too hot. How d'ya feel, kid?

RONNIE

Great. The glove's beautiful, Dave. Brand new. Thanks.

THE JOHN

Probably my last new one before I decide to retire.

RONNIE

What's your highest batting average?

THE JOHN

Uh, the highest - I never kept numbers in my head - the highest was, lemme see ... it was 317. No. 319!

RONNIE

That's phenomenal. Not many major leaguers hit safely almost one out of three times at bat. Do you know DiMaggio? Williams? What're they like?

THE JOHN

OK guys. Regular people. I say hello now and again. We don't socialize. Now, Lou Boudreau, he played and managed the Indians for a coupla seasons. A heckava guy. All the guys on the Indians are my teammates. That is, until I decide what to do, retire or what.

RONNIE

You actually *know* Lou Boudreau?!

THE JOHN

You a poet too, Ronnie? Just made a rhyme, there. Ha ha. Sure I know Lou and lotsa other guys all over the majors. Only I never pal out. I kinda keep to myself, know what I mean?

RONNIE

Uh huh ... How about Larry Doby. What's he like?

THE JOHN

Great guy, Larry and a hellava hitter. First Negro in the American League. D'ya know the rest o' the team?

RONNIE

I'm not too up on the Indians.

THE JOHN

Come on! They won last year's pennant! OK, OK, here's your lineup; Y'got Bobby Avila at second, George Strickland at short, Vic Wertz is at first, Larry, he's in center, me, I'm in right, Al Smith's in left, Glynn's at third, Jim Hegan's catching, 'n old Early Wynn's on the mound!

RONNIE

It's gotta be great playing ball with those guys.

THE JOHN

Hey, between you 'n me, I'm real happy to even be in the game at this level, but face it, it's not the onliest thing in the whole world, kid.

RONNIE

Gee, Dave, I can't think of anything better.

THE JOHN

(swigs from the flask)

Ahh! Tellya what's better. Finding a real good pal's the most terrific thing you can have in the world, that's a one hundred percent fact. I kid you not. It's not easy, nossir. Me, I haven't had a real good pal since I was your age playing sandlot.

RONNIE

If only I got to play sandlot, then maybe I'd ... But mom doesn't like to stay too long in one place.

THE JOHN

'At's rough, kid. I didn't have it too good when I was coming up, either.

RONNIE

No?

THE JOHN

Nossir. Dear ol' dad left when I was a baby.

RONNIE

Mine did too. Well, we really left him.

THE JOHN

At's the way life goes. Boy, it got rough on my ma. But at least we stayed in one place so that I could get to play organized ball.

RONNIE

I won't ever get to, I guess.

THE JOHN

I'm real sorry, kid - uh, I mean, pal. Shouldn't be callin' you kid. Kids run around crappin' their pants, right, pal? (laughs)

RONNIE

(laughing) Yeah, Pal. I like that, Dave.

THE JOHN

Well, it's true. We are. Am I right?

RONNIE

Uh huh.

THE JOHN

Sure. Say, uh, I didn't want to bring it up but I feel funny like, y'know, bein' with your ma, in the room'n all.

RONNIE

I've seen it before.

THE JOHN

Guess she gets around, huh.

RONNIE

I guess.

THE JOHN

Well, I, uh, just want you to know, I don't feel so good about it, so maybe I'll just quit seeing her.

RONNIE

(upset) My ma? No, Dave. I'll never see you again.

THE JOHN

I could always visit and stuff, bring flowers 'n candy.

RONNIE

It won't be the same. Maybe you'll get to know her better.

THE JOHN

OK, if you want, I won't quit seeing her.

RONNIE

Gee thanks, Dave. I just hope she treats you OK ... Can I ask you something?

THE JOHN

Yeah, sure. Go ahead.

RONNIE

Does it ... I mean, is it good, y'know, with my ma?

THE JOHN

Weeeowowee! Like a man and a woman good? Ha ha! Yeah ... Well, it's OK. Hey, that's a real weird question for a kid to ask. Stick to baseball, OK?

RONNIE

OK. I flubbed a few of the ground balls you threw.

THE JOHN

Hey, grounders are the hardest. Takes lots 'n lots a practice. But you handle fly balls pretty good, Ronnie, ol' pal. Like a natural outfielder.

RONNIE

A *natural* outfielder? Wow! No foolin'?

THE JOHN

No foolin'.

RONNIE

Gee, thanks. Y'know, because grounders hit pebbles and things. They bounce funny, unpredictable. They're scary.

THE JOHN

Whack you in the face, huh? I know. Oh, yeah, I know.

(takes another swig from his flask)

Once, when I was your age, I put my glove up in front of a hard hit grounder - went clean through the webbing and BANG! smacked me right in the mouth. Like to knock me out,

THE JOHN (cont'd)

that one. Practice. And a good mitt helps, ha ha. So I guess we'll just have to practice more, Ronnie babe. That's it.

RONNIE

We will? Gee Dave, when? Now?

THE JOHN

Whoa, boy, take it easy. Ol' Dave's a bit outta shape. This injury 'n stuff. We got days and days of sunshine ahead. Shake on it, pal.

RONNIE

You mean it, too. Wow, Pal!

(they shake hands)

I almost had a pal, once.

THE JOHN

Wait a minute: you can't *almost* have a pal! Uh, unless he's dead or somethin'.

RONNIE

Well, no. See, there was this kid in Baltimore last year, he lived near our hotel. We'd play catch a few times after school. But Ma had to move again, so ...

THE JOHN

Too bad. But you and me, we can really be pals for lots longer than you think.

RONNIE

Really? Only, I hope she doesn't want to move again.

THE JOHN

Oh? She thinking about it?

RONNIE

She mentioned going back east, maybe. But if you and her...

THE JOHN

Don't worry, I'll stay on her good side - do what I gotta do - and you and me'll hang out a lot.

RONNIE

You don't have stuff to do days?

THE JOHN

Uh, no. See, I been scouting, like I said. Minor league games, mostly, in a bunch a different parks in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Lots a night games. Say, suppose I take you over to Municipal Stadium soon to see the Indians next time they're in town? Introduce you to some a the guys, huh?

RONNIE

Oh gee, that's great, Dave!

THE JOHN

Ever see a real major League game before, Ronnie?

RONNIE

On television, in hotel lobbies, mostly.

THE JOHN

Well, you are going to get to see your first real live game with me. That's a promise.

RONNIE

Boy o boy!

THE JOHN

I know what's it's like not havin' an old man to take you to a Major League ballpark. Oh man, wait'll you see a real Major League park. They're so darn beautiful! The greenest green grass. Clean white bags on top of rich reddish-brown dirt, sharp-cut white baselines connecting all the corners. Flags waving in the breeze high above the stands, under blue, blue skies ... The smell of hotdogs, fries 'n soda ... Only ...

RONNIE

Yeah, Dave?

THE JOHN

Can't tell her. Like we said. Right?

RONNIE

Right.

THE JOHN
Zip it.

RONNIE
Zip it.

THE JOHN
There you go.

(mussing RONNIE's hair)

Guys like us always gotta hide stuff from certain people – mamas, especially - so that we don't get 'em upset for no good reason.

RONNIE
Yeah.

THE JOHN
See, they don't have to know *every* little thing, am I right? 'Course not. Now your ma, Rilla's a mighty fine little lady, and a terrific dancer. Why she already taught me at least four dances I can do perfect now; the fox trot, the cha cha, the swing and, the waltz – but y'know what? She's an extra excitable little lady. I can tell 'cause I got experience with these things, see. She's excitable. Am I right or wrong?

RONNIE
She is.

THE JOHN
And - I hate to say it in any mean kinda way - she hits the sauce a bit, huh?
Huh?

(RONNIE winces)

Hey, well so do I, that's why I'm so outta shape. Grown ups do that stuff. Only some of 'em can't handle it so good. In fact, I'd like to take a little pop now, uh, that is, uh, if you don't mind, pal ...

(takes a long pull from flask, puts it back)

Ahhh ... Thanks. Glad you understand ... Yes, the little lady likes her gin. Now don't get me wrong, that don't mean she's, uh, this or that. No. I personally know

THE JOHN (cont'd)

many, many fine gin drinkers in the world. But gin's, y'know, like liquid *dynamite*, f'crissakes!

RONNIE

I know.

THE JOHN

Tell me somethin', and y'don't have to answer, Ronnie babe, but ... she ever hit you? The truth. Does she? Yells a lot too, I bet?

(RONNIE frowns)

Hey, it's OK. I know the whole lousy drill. Remember I was there myself. Mamas, boy, do they ever get short with their kids, specially boys. All the time tired and whatnot. Damn. Think they gotta yell 'n stuff to shape you up.

(RONNIE nods in agreement)

Between you 'n me, that's why pals talk to their pals. They confide in them. Now there's a big word for ya - confide. Know what it means?

RONNIE

It means ... it means, like, you say things to only one special person.

THE JOHN

Right you are! Secrets you can't tell no one, get me - no one! Including m-o-t-h-e-r! ... Where's your dad, pal? Can I ask? Or is it too personal?

RONNIE

Out west. Mother won't say. Maybe she don't know.

THE JOHN

When's the last time you saw him?

RONNIE

I, I was real young. A baby.

THE JOHN

Bet y'wanna see him again, huh?

RONNIE

Mother won't even let me ask about him.

THE JOHN

I'm sayin', do you ever *want* to actually go see the man?

RONNIE

Promise to keep a secret?

(they lock extended pinkie fingers)

Someday, when I'm older I'll go look him up! I'll find out where he is and just go see him, I swear!

THE JOHN

Then what?

RONNIE

I dunno.

THE JOHN

Now wait a second; you wanna see the man, you're makin' a sorta plan, and you don't know what you're gonna do? That's kinda nuts, pal.

RONNIE

It's not nuts.

THE JOHN

(grasping RONNIE's shoulders)

Hold on; I'm not saying *you're* nuts. Not at all. Look, let's just say I know what you're goin' through, right? Put it this way: Will he wanna see you?

RONNIE

That's what I mean, Dave, I don't know. I just don't know.

(hugging RONNIE who looks sad)

THE JOHN

Hey, hey, hey, it's OK, son. Maybe I was outta line asking you personal stuff.

RONNIE

No, it's not that.

THE JOHN

I'll just shut up.

RONNIE

No, it's OK. I, I never talked to a friend before ... about stuff.

THE JOHN

Yeah, I know. Hey, it's alright. You got plenty a time to think about what you're gonna say. Right? I understand, buddy.

RONNIE

I think you do, Dave. I really think so. Thanks.

(they embrace, THE JOHN strokes RONNIE's hair)

THE JOHN

That's right. And remember; no matter how much a mother loves her kid, a *real* pal is a pal forever. Am I right?

RONNIE

Right.

(hugging RONNIE tightly)

RONNIE

Ow! You're squeezing.

THE JOHN

Oh, sorry. Yessir, pals share their hopes, their dreams and their secrets, because they like each other. I like you. A lot, Ronnie.

RONNIE/RON (together)

(THE JOHN is groping RONNIE)

Hey, Dave!

THE JOHN

Relax, boy. Lay back. Relax. Let ol' Dave do this. You and me are pals, aren't we? We share personal stuff, secrets, right? Rilla don't have to know a thing. See, just being with you kinda makes me feel good, know what I mean? Being alone with a real pal's even a lot better'n bein' with a woman.

RONNIE/RON

Can't we play catch some more, Dave?

THE JOHN

Tomorrow. Lemme just be nice to you, and you can help me feel good. See, Rilla, she wouldn't understand. Fact, she'd get awful mad if she found out about us, right? Even just the simple truth we saw each other and played catch. That we were even *alone* together. Geezus, she'd probably go off the wall, knowing her. That would be just terrible, wouldn't it, Ronnie pal?

(RONNIE worriedly looking around)

RONNIE/RON (together)

There might be other kids around, Dave. People ... I don't think ...

THE JOHN

Nah. Look around. They're all gone. Probably all gone home for supper. No one can see us! Just you relax and let Dave do something nice. Willya do it for me, pal? Please?

(THE JOHN, moaning, draws RONNIE close, leading him OS. LIGHTS DIM, focus on P.O. and RON at CS)

RON

(You fraud! You sick, sick fraud!

(Anna shifts uncomfortably observing RON, wiping tears from his cheeks)

P.O.

If you don't feel up to it ...

RON

I'm OK.

(ANNA hands RON a tissue)

P.O.

Are you crying for the boy you once were or the man you are?

RON

(taken aback by the question)

Huh?

P.O.

(wipes a tear from her eye)

I said, Do we mourn the boy you once were or the man you've become? What d'you say, Ron?

RON

The, the *injustice!* ... of it ...

P.O.

Yes, it's unjust, it always is ... Any other meetings?

RON

Yeah. We'd play ball, the same thing happened, only with variations. Dave was a thorough bastard. Goddammit!

(punching a fist into his other palm)

What infuriates me to this day is why I *let him!* *WHY!*

P.O.

Hundreds of case histories show the same pattern; the predator gains a child's confidence, then betrayal. You were an easy target for your mother ...

RON

(interrupting) Now wait a minute. Life with mother was frightening as hell. If I wasn't so scared I'd've left her at any one of dozens of bus stops. We were both mixed up and scared. But I can't call what she did betrayal. I can't.

P.O.

Interesting.

RON

(slight edge) It's easy enough for you to be objective ...

P.O.

(interrupting) Hey, this is no casual exercise we're conducting here, Ron. My interest is real. Your mother exposed you to a whole dark side of life, early on, that's had a profound effect. You've gotta face that.

RON

Yes, her love was twisted. I know that. But I can't compare her to Dave, a calculating, manipulative ...

P.O.

You've forgiven her.

RON

Can I not forgive her? She's all I have. Look, I intuited, even way back then, she couldn't dominate me much longer, that I'd become physically and mentally tougher. Back then, the loneliness, the need for a friend, was what I needed.

P.O.

Enter Dave ... Ever have girlfriends, boyfriends, Ron?

RON

Relating to straight, normal girls was always difficult as hell. I tried prostitutes. They don't ask questions. They don't judge you or wanna know your story. Besides, they're easily deflected if they do.

P.O.

You weren't turned on by them?

RON

I was pretty well numb to sex. I'd keep seeing Ma in front of me. Therapy helped me understand why. I don't beat myself up anymore about it like I used to.

P.O.

Whatever you got out of therapy doesn't mean a damn thing if you haven't assumed responsibility for what's gotten you in this mess. Responsibility for your compulsion.

RON

I know what you mean. (pause)

P.O.

Having any doubts that I might not be the right person to front you – if I decide to?

RON

I should be asking if you have further doubts about representing me.

P.O.

I need time to think on it. And I have to know more about the boy ...

P.O./RILLA (together)

Ronnie.

(same hotel room, a change of lighting. RILLA is drinking, angrily pacing, clutching a baseball mitt. Young RONNIE nervously sits nearby)

RILLA

Ronnie, where the hell else did that miserable rat bastard take you without my permission?

RONNIE

The park we played in. We were going to go to an Indians' game when they come to town. But that's it, Ma.

RILLA

No where else?

RONNIE

No. We just played catch, is all Ma.

RILLA

I got that. What more would you do with a glove and a ball.

RONNIE

That's all, I said.

RILLA

Don't take the high road with me, you twerp. This is serious, not knowing where you are, what you're doing.

RILLA (cont'd)

Besides, this guy Dave, he's not all there, y'know. Not too bright in the head, in case you hadn't noticed.

RONNIE

I thought you liked him.

RILLA

Like and trust are two different things. For a smart boy, Ronnie, you're not thinking. We don't know who he talks to do we? Goddammit! I can't have you breaking my rules, I don't care who with. Wanna wind up in an institution? Do you? Because that's where you're goddamned well headed and I'll be rid of you for good!

RONNIE

Please don't be mad, Ma.

RILLA

Oh, it'd be so much easier without you. I could travel light for a change ... I gotta worry about some dumb ox coming over here? For crissakes, Ronnie, I do what I do for US! For a little extra money. Oh, you make me sick!

(shoving RONNIE, she downs the drink,
pouring another)

Sneaking around behind my back going god knows where, while I'm out hustling my ass off doing the old one-two-three-side together.

RONNIE

We just played ball, I swear, Ma.

RILLA

How do I know that, HUH!? You can't be trusted. Not even twelve and hanging out with a moron three times your age. Ronnie, I can't have this. I cannot have this!

RONNIE

He's OK.

RILLA

Oh, so right off the bat I'm supposed to shut up because you give him the old OK? Are you nuts? ... What the hell do you talk about? Me?

RONNIE

No. Baseball and stuff. He's my friend, Ma. We didn't do anything wrong.

RILLA

A grown man! What kind of friend? Wait a minute ... Are you telling me everything?

RONNIE

We didn't do any thing, except ...

RILLA

You keep saying that. What is this, We didn't do *any* thing?

RONNIE

Wrong. We didn't do anything wrong. Is what I mean.

RILLA

All of it's wrong. I tell you stick close, don't arouse suspicion, and you go do this. That's wrong! What the hell if the juvenile authorities spot you and start asking fucking personal questions, huh? What then? You get thrown in foster care and unsuspecting me gets put in the can, or worse – a mental institution. I spent a whole year in one, thanks to your father and his lovely family. A year! That's what they did. Made me so sick I couldn't even take care of you. The authorities went along, said I needed rest - all of 'em sonsabitches! *They* drove me crazy!

(a knock at the door)

RONNIE

Aw, Ma, please don't say anything!

RILLA

Stay there!

RONNIE

Ma! Don't say anything, please, Ma, please!

RILLA

SIT and shut up!

(opens door, THE JOHN enters)

THE JOHN

Hi ya kid.

(no response from RONNIE, who is frozen in silence)

RILLA

Am I made a glass? Hi ya kid. No hi ya for me. No kiss for Rilla?

(THE JOHN goes to kiss her, she moves away)

Save it. Where've you been taking him? For weeks and weeks, now. Where?
And don't deny it.

THE JOHN

(to RONNIE) Geezus, some pal you turned out to be.

RONNIE

I didn't tell, Dave, I swear.

RILLA

Tell what?

THE JOHN

The park, Rilla. The ballpark. The kid begged me to play ball with him. (to
RONNIE angrily) I thought you were smart. I can't believe you'd say anything ...

RILLA

About what? What the hell's goin' on?

RONNIE

I didn't, I swear! She's drunk, she's just guessing, Dave.

RILLA

WHO'S *drunk!* Just what's going on here, between you two, huh?

THE JOHN

The kid, Rilla, your kid's, well he's, I hate to tell ya, he's a little fruit.

RILLA

Fruit!?

RONNIE

NO! Don't listen, Ma! Dave please stop!

THE JOHN

It's true, Rilla, swear to god. Ain't my fault, I'm tellin' ya. None of it.

RILLA

What ... isn't your fault?

THE JOHN

What do you need, a picture? He's a little homo, your kid.

RONNIE

Don't listen to him, Ma. Please don't listen to him.

RILLA

SHUT UP! (to THE JOHN) What the hell are you saying you sonovabitch!?

THE JOHN

He touches me and ...

RONNIE

Oh no, Ma, oh no! Don't listen!

RILLA

(to RONNIE) Shut up! (to John) *Touches* you?

THE JOHN

My dick! OK? Sucks it too. Like you.

(RONNIE is wailing aloud, RILLA is stunned)

RILLA

No. No. You're a lying fucking bastard!

RONNIE

He does it, Ma. He said not to tell. He does it to ME! TO ME!

THE JOHN

LIAR! In the park, behind the trees. Might as well tell the truth, Ronnie. Ain't my fault, none of it. You've been raising a little fag, Rilla.

(she attacks THE JOHN physically, he quickly subdues her as they tumble onto the bed)

RILLA

You'll go to fuckin' jail, you prick! Jail!

(THE JOHN is gripping her arms as she struggles.
RONNIE grabs at him, he violently shoves him off)

RONNIE

I didn't tell! Dave I didn't say anything. You gotta believe me!

THE JOHN

(to RILLA) Don't even mention jail, you cocksuckin' little whore.

(RILLA, exhausted, is released by THE JOHN)

RILLA

(to RONNIE) It's true? This bastard's telling the truth?

THE JOHN

Smart girl.

RILLA

Wait'll the newspapers find out what a great big he-man you are, lousy child molester ballplayer. There goes your whole fucking career!

THE JOHN

Is that right? Well, I gotta admit I lied. I lied about all the baseball stuff.

RONNIE

Lied!?

THE JOHN

And if anyone in this room's going to jail, it's you, ya little whore.

RILLA

You'll rot in fucking jail for messing my kid up!

THE JOHN

C'mon, Rilla, wise the hell up. All I did was pay you cash money to get laid and blown a coupla times. The kid knows you bring fuckin' guys up here to ball 'em. Besides, it's my word against yours. Ain't a judge alive that'll throw a john in jail. For what, buying a piece a tail? You got a lot more than me to hide.

RILLA

Rotten sonovabitch.

THE JOHN

And another thing. Just what is it you're running from? What's with all the bouncin' around the states for? Keeping a kid out of school. Tsk, tsk. Looks bad, Rilla. Mothers go to the can for hookin' and keepin' their kids out of school.

RILLA

I got your address. The cops'll be after you, you pervert child molester!

THE JOHN

I'm a transient, like you. Only I don't live in cheap hotel rooms with single beds for two. Like I'm sayin', Rilla, it's strictly poison. They'll throw the book at you. Forget a book. They'll throw the whole fuckin' library at ya, ya dumb cunt!

RILLA

(hysterical) Get out! Get the hell out of here!

THE JOHN

Sure thing. (to RONNIE) Tell her the truth, ya little homo. Some pal you turned out to be. (exits)

RILLA

YOU!

RONNIE

(yelling) It's not the way he said! I DIDN'T want to! He made me, Ma ...

RILLA

A fucking little ...

RONNIE

He made me, he made me! He said he'd tell that we played catch, that I went with him. He said he'd tell.

RILLA

Queer!

RONNIE

He threatened me! He threatened me like you do. LIKE YOU DO! (pause)

RILLA

ME! I'm your mother. (unsure) I'm-your-moth-er ...

(RILLA exits. RONNIE will remain in scene, head buried in a pillow, sobbing and then quietening. Scene switches to P.O.'s Office.

P.O.

Counsel will raise the issue of your past. It could work ... If they'll listen.

RON

You mean they won't even want to *listen*?

P.O.

No guarantees. I told you that.

RON

Jesus Christ! Six more years of PO's knocking at my door all hours of the day and night. Stranger Danger Alerts in the neighborhood. In the few months I'm free, I happened to luck out with Mr. Grasso, and he dogged hell out of me at bus stops and subways. "Make tomorrow a new day", he'd say. How do you clean up your act with that kind of mistrust? I served a lot of time, Anna, and I almost got killed the other night. And here you're telling me I haven't got a chinaman's chance at a level one. Goddammit!

P.O.

No one's gonna put their ass on the line to reduce a pedophile's level without being 100% percent sold.

RON

I might as well be back at Avenel with all the hard wired pedophiles, the skanks, the freaks. At least they don't judge you.

P.O.

Sure. They're all in denial, that's why they don't judge. Look here, Ron, this 20 year gap of yours is already under the microscope: No work resume, no permanent addresses, sketchy references, no friends, lovers. How the hell are we supposed to know what you were up to, huh?

RON

I'm being fish eyed for keeping out of trouble?

P.O.

That's so fucking weak! Too many sex crimes go unreported, especially against kids. Conventional wisdom tells us pedophilia is incurable - as in *disease!* A 50% plus recidivism rate backs it up. You'll be asking a parole board to believe that at age 41 - out of the blue! - you got a sudden overpowering urge to molest two 11 year old boys three days apart! Did you for once consider that you maybe fucked up two kid's lives permanently? How many tears did you shed over them, Ron?
(pause)

RON

I know. I know. A twenty year downward spiral ... years alone, drifting from state to state, sleeping in rail yards, bus stations and fields, pissing my whole life away. I took it out on them, all my humiliations, my anger, on a couple of innocent kids. It was like a replay. A replay ...

P.O.

To gain control.

RON

Probably. Therapy showed me just how strong this thing is, this compulsion. It just spilled out! The same kind of controlled anger I had getting thrown out of the marines. I wasn't even aware of it. Anna, I'm no religious guy, but I thank God every day I got caught! That's the truth.

P.O.

I want it understood the state's not compelled to give you less surveillance under Megan's Law, whether or not I believe you. Is that clear?

RON

Then why the hell am I dredging up all these painful memories for? I may as well bite the bullet for the next six years and hope I don't get knocked off by vigilantes.

P.O.

Hey, it's still is your only shot. You've got to *want* to convince that board.

RON

(angry) Y'know what I want? I want all you people off my ass real bad. I'm really tired of all this shit.

P.O.

Stop the whining, Ron. Prove you can be responsible for your life by convincing me you're rehabilitated!

RON

GODDAMMIT, MA! ... I ... am.

(a pause. They stare at each other)

Oh yeah. Your wheels are turning. You think I'm that cunning, don't you? I personally have no beef with you, Anna. In fact, I find you a most reasonable and capable professional doing a difficult job within a shitty system that's got no faith in its own methods. Try a little therapy on the sex offenders, but don't count on it working. What the hell for? To *cure* irredeemably sick bastards?! No way. Before long they'll start issuing prevention pills. Medroxyprogesterone. There's been talk. Castration's next. Society's last taboo has you all floundering hopelessly.

P.O.

(sighing) We're expected to provide answers. We don't have them. There's no way to gauge the extent of damage to an individual who's been abused by a pedophile who's probably been abused somewhere along the line himself. All we can do is to proceed with caution, case by case by case and hope to hell we're right. (pause)

RON

Anna, I have to at least try to begin a normal life, here in the city ... I, I really need you to go to bat for me.

(RONNIE is US on bed observing)

P.O.

I make it a rule to never get personal with clients. You can't in this business. You need to keep a professional distance – at least I do – in order to reduce my own anxiety about making crucial decisions. But I'll share this much with you. As you can tell I am not your typical expectant young mother-to-be. My husband and I had to go through a lot to create this little boy growing inside me, and there is absolutely nothing I wouldn't do to protect him or other kids from danger – any danger, Ron. And ... just maybe that's one reason why I'm not your best bet for the appeal.

RON

I'm not saying that, Anna. Honest, I ...

P.O.

Let me finish. I will say that so far your story's peaked my interest. It has. I need to hear whatever more you've got to say. I'll read the rest of the file tonight and we'll meet tomorrow. More than that I can't tell you.

(RON rises and is shadowed by RONNIE
as PO shows RON the exit - **END ACT I**)

ACT II

RISE. P.O.'s office next day.
RON is standing, smoking a
cigarette ...

P.O.

(referring to the file)

I read through this thoroughly. I don't find any other underlying reason why you got kicked out of the marines in 1964.

RON

It's probably not in there.

P.O.

Well, what is it?

RON

I'm really not sure. A combination of factors, people I knew.

P.O.

Well, no one you knew up to then had both oars in the water.

RON

No argument there.

P.O.

So you moved to New York in '56, right after the Dave incident. How did that affect your relationship with your mother?

RON

Well, the Dave thing shook us. Her behavior with me stopped ...

P.O.

Her sexual behavior.

(RILLA enters calling "Ronnie")

RON

Yes. A distance came between us. Otherwise she didn't change that much. And I felt so much freer in the city. Life in a cheap West Side SRO with my mother was a thousand times better than fleabag hotels in the heartland. I finished grammar school, went to high school, found it all pretty uninspiring and uninteresting. So I quit and joined the marines in '61, to be on my own. I didn't see her for ...

Late winter 1964. New York City. Young RONNIE is a 20 year old Marine. He's carrying a few pieces of luggage. He and RILLA, now 38, enter a hotel room)

RILLA

Three whole years! I know you wanted to be on your own but not a word, nothing.

RONNIE

There wasn't anything to say.

RILLA

Then why'd ya bother coming back at all?

RONNIE

I'll leave. OK?

RILLA

Pretty tough, aren't you.

RONNIE

You're right, Ma. I'm sorry. I came back because ... I was hoping you'd be all right.

RILLA

Thanks for getting my stuff together.

RONNIE

You already thanked me.

RILLA

(looking around the room)

Well, well ... They've made improvements in this old dive. ... Oh so what, Ronnie? So I've been to this grand hotel before. Big deal ... Larry, the guy who posted bail, he leave me any extra?

RONNIE

(hands her money, she takes it)

Here. He seems genuinely concerned about you.

RILLA

Not concerned enough, like a lot of people out there. I wouldn't be in this mess if it wasn't for the phony cheap skate who made a big deal over a few lousy bucks that *he owed me!*

RONNIE

For services rendered.

RILLA

Yes. That I didn't collect for.

(RONNIE shrugs – she continues)

Bullshitting me over his lousy dinner and drinks, the bastard. Then he goes and rats me out to the cops and I get nailed and I'm out in the street! Out of a job too, probably.

RONNIE

And you wanna know why I haven't been in touch.

RILLA

Three whole years worth.

RONNIE

Think about it, Ma. This time you get busted for prostitution *and* booted out of your pad. What's next? Could I possibly prevent that? You get involved with these stupid jerkoffs.

RILLA

(agitated, pacing)

I need the money! OK?

RONNIE

The gig's not enough? Jesus Christ, Ma, this life'll make an old hag out of you.

RILLA

Maybe if my devoted son stayed in touch, this, this ... On my own – alone, things happen.

RONNIE

You can't expect any different, balling these guys. Get a regular boyfriend.

RILLA

The T & E's not worth the trouble. (pause)

Couldn't you at least write, Ronnie?

RONNIE

(contrite) I said I was sorry.

RILLA

(fiercely hugging him)

I know, I know, baby! I missed you so!

(steps back regarding him appraisingly)

Let me look at you. So handsome. The marines agree with you, huh, baby?

RONNIE

Yeah.

RILLA

Y'know, we've never really talked about any of that since ... Uh, still a virgin, Ronnie?

RONNIE

I'm trying to forget about that, Ma.

RILLA
(overlapping) That bastard! He ruined you!

RONNIE
(RON turns away from her)
Stop.

RILLA
It wasn't my fault, Ronnie!

RONNIE
What's done is done.

RILLA
I, I don't want you to be, to ...

RONNIE
What? Be what?

RILLA
Oh, you hate me. I can see the blood in your eyes.

RONNIE
That's not true! We've been through enough of this crap. Now tell me what you don't you want me to be?

RILLA
We had something special, Ronnie. Something only a mother and son ...

RONNIE
(grabbing her arms)

What the hell is it you don't want me to be, Mother!

RILLA
Afraid of women. I don't want you to go cold, like your dad. I'll help you, Ronnie. I can.

(pressing his hands to her breasts.
He pulls away)

RONNIE

I swear to god, I walk out that door you won't see me again.

RILLA

No! That would kill me!

(RON turns away, a pause)

Just please don't hate me.

RONNIE

I don't, Ma. Honest.

RILLA

I was so afraid, for so long. So mixed up. And you left me.

RONNIE

I never really did leave for good. Only you can't keep going on like this.

RILLA

I know. I know. (singing) *I'll go back to Arthur Murray's in the morning. It'll work out alright...* They'll take me back – in a hurry too, I bet. I'll get my hair done, buy a new dress – so I don't look like an 'old hag'.

RONNIE

You don't ... We've got to find you a place to live.

RILLA

It's a shame to waste your leave.

RONNIE

I'm good till tomorrow night. I want you settled in.

RILLA

Boy o boy, some world, eh, Ronnie? All kindsa people always looking to get the edge on you. I'm so sick of it.

RONNIE

You don't make it easy on yourself, Mother.

RILLA

Ever notice how some people skate right through life, untouched, while others get thrown in the meat grinder?

RONNIE

I've heard the damaged goods routine before, Ma.

RILLA

It's true! Some people can't help themselves.

RONNIE

Enough, OK? Let's go grab a bite to eat

RILLA

That look. It reminds me of them.

RONNIE

The Griffins. I know. I'm part of them too ... Come on, before you get all worked up.

RILLA

Our lives would've been completely different, if ...

RONNIE

That same old shit. I still don't know a damn thing more about dad or why they treated you like that.

RILLA

I couldn't bring myself to tell you everything.

RONNIE

No, but you sure as hell kept me as scared as you were, so you could ... could ... Oh, forget it.

RILLA

(angry) I snapped, Ronnie! The humiliation, I never got over it. Never.

RONNIE

(removes a photo from his wallet)

This man's still the big mystery. Why, Ma?

RILLA

That picture ... Where'd you get it?

RONNIE

You threw it away long ago during one of your tirades.
Let's just go.

(starts to leave)

RILLA

He's teaching.

RONNIE

Huh?

RILLA

Out west. A university, a college, in Lawrence, Kansas.

(composing herself, she slowly paces)

Your father was very different from the other Griffins; he was refined and smart. I was a kid. I looked up to Paul. He came back from the war early, a decorated hero, badly injured. We married, had you, while he worked in the family business. They owned practically everything in that part of the Hudson Valley. Paul had the same head for numbers you have. Did I ever tell you that?

RONNIE

A couple dozen times. Long ago.

RILLA

We were celebrating at your grandfather's house with your Uncle George ... the night everything fell apart ...

RONNIE remains in scene.
PAUL, his brother GEORGE and their father enter. It is 1946. All are in their cups. A fox trot is heard. RILLA sways to it, PAUL joins her.

FATHER

We stand to make a fucking killing thanks to you, Paul, lining up the New York and Boston banks. Well done.

GEORGE

(sarcastic) For a guy with a steel plate in his head you did OK. Tell me, Paulie, does it weigh you down much?

PAUL

Here we go again. The war would've done you a world of good. The blood, the smell of burning flesh, the screams of the dying. It might've even made you human, George.

FATHER

Don't listen to him, boy. (to GEORGE) Now you shut the hell up. Paul just made the best fucking deal the company ever had. Be grateful.

(he joins RILLA dancing, whirling her slowly)

RILLA

Beautiful music... Don't spoil it, Georgie Porgie.

FATHER

Hit it right on the head, honey. Georgie Porgie better be up to taking on a project this big.

GEORGE

I love being threatened by you, Pa. (to PAUL) **Hey Major! Snap to!** Drinks all around. I'm gonna dance with your old lady.

(embracing RILLA, they dance)

Keep an eye on him, Pa, the big deal maker looks ready to pass out and piss his pants again.

FATHER

Be kind to your brother. Christ almighty.

GEORGE

Sanctimonious old prick, getting ready to drop the ol' axe. What the hell do you know about kindness?

My waist, Georgie!

RILLA

Aw. Slipped a little, honey bunch.

GEORGE

Axe, huh. For who's neck?

PAUL

That got the major's attention, heh heh.

GEORGE

(mumbling) Stupid ass.

FATHER

Another drinkypoo, please.

RILLA

(GEORGE pours gin into RILLA's glass)

Enough, Rilla. (to GEORGE) And you, go home to your wife.

PAUL

(to PAUL) Oi' stick in the mud. You're no fun anymore.

RILLA

Tell 'im, girl.

GEORGE

Just who's this axe for, Fun Loving Boy?

PAUL

Enough, George. Enough, I said!

FATHER G.

Goddamned Steel Plate head knows all the facts 'n figures, alright, 'cept the figures that count, huh honey?

GEORGE

Wouldn't hurt if you kept an eye on *real* numbers, for a change, you stupid shit.

FATHER G.

GEORGE

Talkin' to me, old man? Well, y'know what you can do, doncha.

RILLA

Forget business, business, business.

FATHER

That's right, little darlin', leave it for another time. Only some stupid asses don't know when to stop.

GEORGE

Still talkin' about me, old man?

FATHER

You heard.

GEORGE

Drink up and lemme have some fun, for crissakes. **Hey, major!** Give us a war story.

PAUL

Here's your war story: One of us is goddamn *unlucky* I made it back alive.

GEORGE

How's that?

PAUL

The pie's smaller.

(PAUL downs his drink, RILLA laughs)

GEORGE

Smartass. Hey, Pa, why'd you send him to school, 'stead a me?

FATHER

For obvious reasons.

GEORGE

Know what, doncha? The apple don't fall far from the tree.

RILLA

He's just smarter than you, Georgie. Hey! Watch the hands!

(slapping GEORGE's hands. PAUL lunges unsteadily at GEORGE, they grapple)

RILLA

Stop it! Let him go!

GEORGE

You don't wanna get physical with me, pops. One bang on that steel plate'll finish you good.

PAUL

You'd like that, you sonovabitch!

(RILLA tugs at GEORGE, while FATHER hacks GEORGE's shoulder, separating them)

RILLA

OFF HIM! Come on, George, you get off him!

FATHER

(laughing) Cut it out, you monkeys. We're in the presence of a *young mother*. Hah hah hah.

(both combatants rise, glaring at each other)

RILLA

(to PAUL) You OK?

(PAUL nods 'yes')

FATHER

(laughing) Don't look so worried. Some things never change. Since they're kids, always battling. Speaking of kids, how's our dear little Ronnie, darlin'?

RILLA

Dreaming sweet dreams of his huge Griffin inheritance.

(GEORGE guffaws)

FATHER

Expects a big inheritance, does he, ha ha ha.

RILLA

Uh huh. 'Cause we know his granpa will be very generous. Say, can someone top this off for me?

GEORGE

Got you covered, darlin'.

PAUL

(pouring gin into her glass)

One more for the gutter, eh, Ril?

RILLA

Jus' 'cause you don't wanna have fun, doesn't mean I can't.

GEORGE

Domestic crisis alert! Man your battle stations, ha ha.

(imitating a ship's alarm, dances with RILLA)

PAUL

I'm curious. This falling axe business's got me intrigued.

FATHER

Forget him, son, he's fulla shit. You know George, ha ha.

GEORGE

Maybe he does. Maybe he don't.

(whirling and displaying RILLA, she poses)

Well, just looky, looky here. Pretty as a picture. How much am I bid for this little peach? Tell you what, Paulie boy. I'll take 20% of the finder's fee you'll get for doing the deal, in exchange for this cute little piece a tail.

RILLA

This little piece is not for sale, mister!

PAUL

Oh, so now it's come down to a finder's fee, huh?

RILLA

What's that, anyway?

PAUL

An inconsequential amount of small change for a middleman.

GEORGE

You'll see how much at the board meeting tomorrow, ha ha.

PAUL

Now we've got a board meeting? You boys're moving fast.

FATHER

George, goddammit! (to PAUL) I told you to forget his damned nonsense.

PAUL

Get upstairs, Rilla. It's beginning to stink in here.

RILLA

I'm having a nitecap.

GEORGE

Yes you are, darlin'. With me. Go on up, Paul.

PAUL

Tell me about this meeting.

RILLA

I thought we were going to Canada tomorrow.

FATHER

We'll discuss it in the morning. Then you can leave for Canada. Don't worry about a thing ... Come over here, son.

(draping an arm around PAUL's shoulder)

Here's the facts. You're not well, uh, healthwise.

PAUL

Of course not, I'm under treatment. What's going on?

FATHER

Nothing drastic. Department changes. Ah, just look at 'er.

RILLA

What's the look for?

FATHER

Young. Desirable. Can't blame you for wanting her. But why the hell *marry* her? And have a kid? Of all the girls in town (to RILLA, alto voce) ONLY YOU ARE THE PRETTIEST, MY DEAR! Ha ha. (to PAUL, sotto voce) What the hell were you were thinking? A smart boy, my youngest, educated, a decorated war hero. You know I'd do anything to protect our interests, don't you? Don't you, boy? Ah, go on up, you look ready to pass out. Your head hurt? I understand. Go on up. We'll take good care of her ... And the three of us will have a nice, little chat first thing over breakfast, just the three of us, Paul. I'll see she comes upstairs in a few minutes. Go on, my boy. Ha ha, say, goodnight, Gracie, heh heh.

(unsteady on his feet, PAUL, looks at FATHER as he exits. GEORGE and FATHER nod at each other, and they converge on RILLA. Music increases. in volume as GEORGE hustles RILLA to OS. Both RONNIE/RON abruptly react, watching)

RILLA

(screaming) Cut it out you two! Stop the fun 'n games! PAUL! Don't you leave without me, Paul! PAUL! You sonovabitch, come back! STAND UP TO THESE FUCKERS!

(a baby cries. **LIGHTS DIM - END SCENE**)

RISE: P.O.'s Office.

P.O.

That was Rilla's secret. Any reaction?

RON

I had to ask my father why he dropped the ball.

RISE. 1964. A university office. Young RONNIE in Marine uniform faces his father PAUL GRIFFIN, now in his mid 40's.

PAUL

You asked to see me, Corporal. Is it about enrollment in my class?

RON

The name's Griffin, sir. Ron Griffin.

(PAUL turns away, his hand to temple)

Major? That was your rank in the war ...

PAUL

You'd be about twenty now.

RON

Yes sir.

PAUL

Is she alive?

RON

The woman's not even forty.

PAUL

How is she?

RON

Very bitter. Strange.

PAUL

Poor Rilla ... The day they released her, I heard she jumped a bus heading west. You in one arm, a suitcase in the other ...

RON

You *heard*?

PAUL

My brother's ex-wife Miriam told me she saw Rilla and you off on the bus that day. Rilla never looked back, she said.

RON

Where were you?

PAUL

Army hospitals the whole year she was committed.

(looking away)

That's about all I can help you with, Corporal.

RON

Are you dismissing me?

PAUL

Well, there's really nothing more ...

RON

What about later on, did you look for us?

PAUL

As I said, at the time I was very ill. The war ...

RON

You look recovered.

PAUL

It took years to get me functioning. Now I get by. Barely. If the cross examination's over, Corporal ...

RON

I will not be dismissed.

PAUL

Look, after so much time, apologies won't ...

RON

Fuck your apologies. We thought you were looking for us –

RON (cont'd)

everywhere we went, in so many different cities, living in so many flop houses and hotels, avoiding the Griffin's reach, and afraid the authorities would find us. Mother wrote you off completely. I never did. Do you understand?

PAUL

I'm sorry you've suffered. And as for this "Griffin reach," there was none.

RON

None.

PAUL

My family wouldn't be out looking for Rilla or you. Ever. My father and brother broke us up and cut me out of the family business. I was too sick to fight back. That's it in a nutshell. That is really it in ...

RON

(overlap) So you never looked for us.

PAUL

Not in the shape I was in. I had no energy for any kind of responsibility. Besides, your mother was never easy to deal with even in her best days – years before her breakdown. Sometimes there was no controlling Rilla. You may not want to hear it but it's true.

RON

Conveniently forgot us.

PAUL

(a pause) A lifelong habit.

RON

The war did mess you up.

PAUL

That it did.

RON

What about this breakdown of hers?

PAUL

She must have told you.

RON

Only recently. I've lived with the results. Mother's never fully recovered from what they did to her. Is it true – your own father and brother?

PAUL

They were capable of anything, those two. Vicious, contemptible men. What exactly happened I can't be completely sure of. Miriam believed Rilla. The only one who did.

RON

But you were there.

PAUL

All I remember, before I blacked out – something I used to do often back then - drink myself into a stupor to relieve the pain in my head, I remember George and father hinting at changes in the business. Changes that would affect me.

RON

And Mother and me.

PAUL

Well, uh, yes.

RON

What else about that night do you remember?

PAUL

Oh, that Rilla seemed to be having fun, as usual. She was such a live wire ordinarily, I didn't sense any immediate danger. Rilla was no shrinking violet, she knew how to turn it ... on ... Well, were all pretty drunk. Anything could've happened. Anything.

RON

That's all you remember.

PAUL

I've since realized they probably planned the whole thing. Whatever they did to drive her over the edge.

RON

Why?

PAUL

To get rid of us, all three of us, so they could cut me out of the business. I heard she was raving so much, afterwards that it probably conveniently provided Pa the opportunity to have her committed for a long rest – no questions asked. Pa had clout in the Valley. No one would ever believe a mad woman over him. Rilla's breakdown was thorough, I understand. I know something about breakdowns ...

RON

Mother says you left her alone with them.

PAUL

Maybe. Who remembers when I left. The liquor, the medications I was on, all of it's a blur. I was immediately hospitalized the following morning. Only the doctors knew the fragile state of my health. Besides, George and Pa weren't past having me killed, even if I were able to accuse them of foul play. No, no, they'd find a way.

RON

You don't seem to be much different from them, Major.

PAUL

Anything else on your mind, Corporal? I've got a class.

(RON, not moving, studies PAUL)

Well? Oh. I get it. I'm waiting.

RON

Since I got here you've been itching for me to leave.

PAUL

It's fine, Corporal, go to it. Oedipal rage. Vengeance.

RON

You're not at all worried.

PAUL

In case you hadn't noticed, I'm dead, emotionally. I have been pretty much running on empty since the war. Shock therapy works wonders - when it works.

RON

The hell you must've seen, Major. (a pause)

PAUL

Post traumatic stress disorder is what they call it nowadays. Used to be called shell shock ... You, do you like the service, Corporal?

RON

It's the best thing I could've done, given the circumstances.

PAUL

What about college? You seem to be a level headed fellow.

RON

Unlike Mother, you mean.

PAUL

The important thing is that she's been a mother to you ... Has she, Ronnie?

(no response from RON)

RON

You just went from Corporal to "Ronnie".

PAUL

Do you mind?

RON

(picking up a framed photo)

Doesn't fit a guy who says he's running on empty. He yours?

PAUL

Paul Jr. He's eleven. A Little League star. I'm very proud of him. I go to all ... all his ... (a pause)

(both RONS recite some lines together - optional)

Yeah, I'd go to all his baseball games too. A kid, a son's a source of pride for a father. Almost any father. You know, from my earliest memories, I always fantasized about this meeting. The day dream kind of fantasy a lonely kid runs through his head. Vivid, real vivid my imagination. I imagined a number of

RON(s) (cont'd)

different ways it might go with us if we finally met. Three ways, actually, stuck in my mind. In the first one, I'd always forgive you. Completely. And later, in more sober moments, I'd cry my eyes out, thinking of what might have been. All that ol' happy horseshit, you know, Major? Sorry, I mean Professor. In another daydream I'd leave you stone dead. And in the last one, I'd just walk, with no further thought of you. As I'd probably best do right now, Professor Griffin, before I do something I'll regret.

(RON exits, both fists clenched in anger.
End of SCENE)

RISE. LIGHTS UP on P.O.'s office. RON is standing, P.O. is pacing. She stops, they look at each other.

P.O.

Quite a year, 1964 ... OK, Ron, I want you to do something for me. Prepare a brief statement to the board – if they don't dismiss us outright, that is, and ...

RON

Wait a minute. Are you saying you'll go to bat for me?

P.O.

I'm willing to believe in you, Ron.

RON

Win or lose this is, it's great, just great.

P.O.

We haven't hit a home run yet. But you never know ... Now, I want you to leave the board with a few words about your future plans ...

(LIGHTS DIM OUT)

A week later. A SPOT on RON
addressing members of a panel at the
office of the Attorney General of New
York:

I want to thank the members of this board for reviewing my case. I also would like to express my gratitude to Special Unit parole officers Anna Corbin and Robert Grasso for their belief in me, their encouragement and kindness. I requested this review to determine a reduced level rating for the remainder of my parole. I plan to devote considerable time and energy toward the rehabilitation of other sex offenders in our local clinics and jails. I'd already begun doing this sort of work at Avenel, during my twelve years there where I learned how to deal with my own problem. I also learned that there's a choice for people like me.

*If we are at the edge of light
And step into the dark unknown
We either believe there will be
Something to stand on
Or we'll be taught to fly ...*

(LIGHTS DIM OUT)

RISE. Weeks later. RON's
apartment in the Bronx. RILLA,
older, her appearance only
slightly suggestive of a bag lady,
smokes a cigarette while
watching RON packing items into
a knapsack.

RILLA

Well, you can't help but keep trim climbing all those stairs.

RON

Stop smoking.

RILLA

Sure sure sure. Stop living ... What's the candy bars for?

RON

Energy bars, actually. Good for when I go running.

RILLA

Nice you have the time to keep in shape ... So how's the job?

RON

Fine. I'm learning the ropes dealing with the facts and figures in the construction trade. The company's very nice to me.

RILLA

They should be. You're smart as hell.

RON

I'm also doing a lot of volunteer work at prisons. I appreciate my Saturdays off. But today they've got me going over to Rikers for a few hours. (a pause)

RILLA

Only a little ways to go on parole, eh, Ron? What's it now, two, three years more?

RON

Jesus, Mother, only a couple months ago they handed down that decision. I'm looking at over five whole bloody years more! Only now, I go to them a couple of times a week. They don't come around rousting me anymore.

RILLA

Well y'don't have to get testy, f'godssakes, I'm the one who traveled all the way up here on that slow Broadway Line.

RON

Sorry about that. We should've arranged to meet downtown, in your area. Now, why was it we were we meeting again?

RILLA

Your mind's slipping too, Ronnie.

RON

Ah, yes yes yes ...

(digging in his pocket and coming up with cash)

RON (cont'd)

Here. Stay out of trouble.

(RILLA looking at the sum)

RILLA

Skip the lecture. Can you spare any more, big spender?

(comes up with some more cash)

Thanks ... Why o why I got to live so long, is what I wanna know.

RON

Like the song says (singing) *"Only the good die young!"*

RILLA

You get a big kick out of zinging me, don't ya?

RON

(slipping on a new pair of sneakers)

A joke, Ma, don't be so sensitive. By the way, that princely sum in your hot, little hands should do you for at least four, five races at the OTB.

RILLA

Oh no. Today I'm going out to the track.

RON

Aw, now I really feel bad having you come all the way up here and then going back out to the track. That's a hellava trip.

(lacing up his sneakers)

RILLA

You should feel bad.

RON

I do ... Well, if I'm to get this run in and get over to the prison by three, I'd better boogie.

RILLA

I just got here and you're giving me the bum's rush? Half the morning on that damn Broadway Line.

RON

I do it every day.

RILLA

What d'ya got, a hot date?

RON

I just told you what my day's gonna be like.

RILLA

What about girlfriends, Ronnie? Ever think about it?

RON

Don't have the time.

RILLA

Some things never change for my little monk.

RON

Touch`e, Ma. Now, for about the tenth time – I'm busy. Too busy for that. Besides, at fifty four I'm no great catch.

RILLA

Can't let yourself die on the vine. That's not so old, f'godssakes.

RON

OK, I'll dye my hair, wear a tux and go whistling down Broadway winking at every skirt walking by – forget staying focused.

RILLA

It might be too late for you, at that, Ronnie.

RON

(stops what he's doing)

What? To date? To get married? Have kids? I've got a lot more work to do on myself than to think about that.

RILLA

I just can't imagine what you find to do way up here, in the goddamn Bronx, all cooped up. Now that you got a decent job maybe you should move back down to Manhattan. Get lost among ...

RON & RILLA (together)

... the thousands of people.

RON

I'd be closer to you, is that the idea?

RILLA

Hm, well ...

RON

A room and a half's all I need. It's cheaper than Manhattan. The neighborhood's quiet. Sure there's not much to do. I like it like that. Lousy restaurants, plenty of 'em. But there's one great Jewish deli on 238th - a little hole in the wall. The movies are a long bus ride away. But the park over here's a godsend. Otherwise, the steppes of Mongolia got more going for it.

RILLA

What park is it?

RON

Van Cortlandt. I've been running there the last couple of months.

RILLA

I've heard of it. Sports. Irish football. I see the posters up in all the bars.

RON

(putting on a baseball cap and jacket,
he picks up the knapsack, a baseball
glove is visible)

That's the place. Well, ready to hit it, Ma?

RILLA

(removing the glove)

I thought you were running.

RON
(quickly shoves it back into knapsack)

That's right. And sometimes I toss a ball around with the guys.

RILLA
Aren't there a lot of kids in that park?

RON
What of it?

RILLA
Don't you dismiss me like that, Ronnie. Being around kids may attract attention.
(urgent whisper) What's your new parole officer think?

RON
It's no problem, Ma. I'm no longer scrutinized that way anymore. C'mon, let's go.

RILLA
No problem? Temptation all around you. I don't like it.

RON
Look, I, I don't like where you're going with this line of questioning, so just cut it out.

RILLA
(urgently) I don't want to lose you again, you fool! You're all I've got in the world. All those years apart, while you were God knows where, I was so lonely for you, Ronnie! Then the goddamn prison stretch - more time apart. You're all I've got. Don't compromise yourself, Ronnie!

RON
(he is upset, looks at his watch)

Thanks for the vote of confidence, Ma. Now I really have to get the hell out of here.

RILLA

(holding onto him)

Listen to me! I'm not crazy. All my life I was so angry, so confused and scared. I see things clearer now. I'm not gonna let you commit suicide. I can't lose you again. Don't take chances. Please, don't take chances!

RON

For your information, I always carry a glove around in case there's a chance to have a catch or get in a game. Now will you just stop buggin' me, Ma.

RILLA

Y'know, you can't pull the wool over my eyes like you did with them ...

RON

What?

RILLA

The board. They may think those two beefs you got caught for were the *only* ones, but I know better ...

RON

(grabbing her arms)

You don't know a goddamn thing, you crazy bitch!

RILLA

They weren't the only time, were they!

RON

(raising his hand as though to strike her)

Shut up! You see things so clear ... Look back, Ma, at all the towns the seedy hotels, the bus stops and train stations you dragged me to, clinging onto you for dear life, like a rag doll ... doing anything you wanted. Scared as hell you'd just dump me somewhere ... And the creepy strangers. Some of them slyly winking at me when they left your bed. And always it was about the great love we had for each other.

RILLA

We did! We still ... do. (almost a question)

RON

And now you can't possibly believe me – your son, your boy, who once fell to the worst moment of his sorry assed life and had to use power over a couple of other boy's lives.

RILLA

Don't lie to yourself! Certain kinds of damage never heal.

RON

You wear that mantra like an old coat. Get your things. Please just go.

RILLA

I'm telling you, Ronnie, for ...

RON

(interrupts sternly) Go!

RILLA

It's only for your own good ...

RON

(deliberately) Leave ... Mother. Now.

(RILLA suppresses tears. She takes her purse
and exits. LIGHTS DIM OUT)

RISE. That afternoon. A shaded area in the park. A baseball mitt and ball lay on the ground nearby. RON slugs whiskey from a flask, promptly screwing the cap back on. He puts the flask into his knapsack.

RON

Hey there Chris, that's an awfully long pee you're taking.

(a boy about 11 wearing a baseball cap enters the area)

CHRIS

Come on, Bucky, let's throw it around!

RON

Whoa there, fella. Don't you ever get tired?

CHRIS

You're tired 'cause you drink. It's no good for you.

RON

Smart guy, eh? What about the weight you're putting on, huh, huh, huh?

(playfully poking the boy's stomach)

Chowing down all the Devil Dogs I bring you, huh? Lots of adults drink, for your information.

CHRIS

Ballplayers too?

RON

Some, sure. But ex-ballplayers like me can do just about anything they want. My training days are over.

CHRIS

When are we goin' to the Stadium?

RON

What a one track mind. I repeat; Clear it with your mom. Remember what I told you to say?

CHRIS

Er, uh, that I'm goin' with some kids from school.

RON

Fine. But just do not mention you-know-who. OK?

CHRIS

I know, I know. But why? You're Bucky Dent, the guy that bashed the home run that beat the Red Sox!

RON

Before you were born. True. But even famous people want privacy. Come on, Chris, I went over all this with you how many times? Don't you remember *anything?* (pause)

Hey. Hey. No pouting.

CHRIS

I'm in the dumb class at school 'cause I can't remember too good. Why you gotta make me feel bad, huh, Bucky?

RON

(gently knocks off Chris' cap, mussing his hair. He puts the cap back on)

I'm awfully sorry, buddy boy. Willya forgive me? It's just that I want you to try your best to be smarter about certain things, that's all. Just try to remember the Yankees are in town until next Wednesday, before we all leave on the next road trip. If you want to meet the team I need to know the exact day so I can set it up.

CHRIS

I will! I will!

RON

Well, make sure, OK?

CHRIS

I'll find out tonight, Bucky. Promise.

RON

OK. I want it to be a super special day for my best buddy.
Why I'll bet you'll be the only 11 year old in a gazillion years to meet the entire
New York Yankees team!

CHRIS

Oh wow!

RON

Wait'll you see that Stadium, Chris. I've played in 'em all but there is just no place
as special as Yankee Stadium – no where! The monuments in center field, all
the championship flags waving in the breeze high above the stands. You can
feel it in your bones, just being in the place.

CHRIS

I never went, 'cause nobody took me.

RON

Well, you are going with me in person!

(takes another hit of whiskey from flask
and returns it to the knapsack)

CHRIS

I see it on TV, and, and once I went to Shea with one a my mom's boyfriends.
That was great!

RON

No comparison to the Stadium, you kiddin'?

CHRIS

Tell me again, Bucky, where we're gonna sit.

RON

Right next to the Yankee dugout on the first base side, that's where. I like it even
better than being in the dugout.

CHRIS

That close?

RON

So close you can see the players' eye color when they're fielding pepper practice, before the game. Your favorite, Derek Jeter, snatches up ground balls so easy – he likes to field pepper close to first, near Tino. Know what? He'll probably toss you a ball. Go 'head, call 'im if you like, Chris.

CHRIS

(excitedly) HEY JETER! HEY DEREK! OVER HERE! OVER HERE!

RON

See 'im lookin' over? See him? Tell him to throw it! Go ahead and tell him.

CHRIS

TO ME, DEREK! OVER TO ME, BABE!

RON

Ha ha! He sees you.

CHRIS

Yeah, he's smilin', Bucky!

RON

Get ready. He's gonna throw one this way. Grab it, buddy, grab it!

CHRIS

I got it! I got it!

RON

Nice catch! Your ball. Easy as pie.

CHRIS

Think he'll really do it?

RON

I'll make sure comes over and signs the ball for you, too.

CHRIS

That's so great!

RON

Sure, Derek's a real nice guy. Signs a lot of autographs before and after a game. Who're your favorite pitchers?

CHRIS

Andy Pettite. El Duque

RON

We'll get their autographs too. Heck we'll get the whole team!

(RON quickly hits the flask again)

Oh yeah, we'll be sitting in the sun, eating hot dogs and drinking orangeade – man, those hot dogs smell good!

CHRIS

Can I have a chili dog, Bucky? And French fries too?

RON

Of course! How ever many you want. Yessir, Chris, I will be so proud to bring my best buddy to the most beautiful park I ever played in, bar none.

CHRIS

I can't wait.

RON

Well, all right then ... Uh, now, the big question of this gorgeous and sunny day is ... Guess.

CHRIS

Uh, can't we play some more catch?

RON

I think you forgot again. The time, Chris. What's the time?

CHRIS

Aw, I don't wanna ...

RON

We're going to the Stadium, right? Right?

(extending his wristwatch to CHRIS)

It's important to know how to tell time, Chris.

CHRIS

I like it when you do the multiplication tricks instead.

RON

That's stuff / can do. First things first, the time.

CHRIS

Uh, thr ... thr ...

RON

It's hard to believe that no one's taught you this. Look over there, at the angle of the sun by that stand of trees. It's practically the same as the last time we were here, right?

CHRIS

Uh, I guess.

RON

That day the small hand was where?

CHRIS

Three. No, on the four!

RON

The four. And the long hand?

CHRIS

It's on the ... six!

RON

Cor-rect! So?

CHRIS

Four, uh, thirty?

RON

There you go. 4:30. And that means you gotta get going soon, and it means we, we got our special buddy stuff to do before you go. The park's emptying out. People are starting to go home. Come here, little buddy.

CHRIS

(not eager)

Do we have to, Bucky?

(RON nods "Yes," smiling broadly. He hugs CHRIS, his expression slowly changing to one of determined purpose. He removes the cap from CHRIS' head. LIGHTS slowly FADE TO BLACK)

END OF PLAY

Note: This is the second ending continued from Page 82 where RON ends the scene saying to his mother ...

RON

(deliberately) Leave ... Mother. Now.

(RILLA suppresses tears. She takes her purse and exits. LIGHTS DIM OUT)

RISE. Afternoon, same day.
RON stretches in a shaded area of the park. He wears sweatpants And sneakers. His knapsack is on the ground nearby. He lights a smoke and imitates RILLA'words.

RON

"... can't pull the wool over my eyes like you did with them ... They may think those two beefs you got caught for were the only ones." DAMN HER!

(pounds the ground with his fist. A baseball from OS bounces against him. From OS a youngster's voice is heard)

VOICE (OS)

Hey, mister! Ball! Ball!

(RON looks in the direction of the voice. He picks the ball up and lobs it OS)

VOICE (OS)

Wanna play catch?

RON

Some other time, kid. Thanks. (a pause)

(RON holding up his glove, yells out)

Hey, kid. Do you want to own a brand new glove?

(he lays the glove down, picking up his knapsack, and slowly walks off. LIGHTS slowly DIM OUT)

END OF PLAY

