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Dramatis Personae

- MOTHER** 38-42, Caucasian woman, suffering/ recovering from Hodgkin's Disease, a malignancy of the lymph system. A writer by profession. Strong sense of the absurd. Edgy and lyrical by turns. In love with her son and with language.
- CHILD** 8-9 year old boy. Son of Mother. Tender and empathic. In love with the New York Knicks basketball team.
- THE PLAYER** African-American man, late 30s. A professional basketball player, in the later stages of his career, with the New York Knicks. Team captain and the team's star player; quiet, intense, passionate.
- PLAYER 1** African-American man, early 30s. Religious Knicks team member; genuinely God-fearing; leads the team prayers and religious discussions.
- PLAYER 2** Caucasian man, late 20s, another team member. Admires Player 1 immensely, shares his religious convictions; defends him to others.
- PLAYER 3** Knicks team member, Caucasian or African-American, 20s. Not particularly involved in conflicts of other team members.
- PLAYER 4** Knicks team member, African-American male, early 20s. Explosive personality, the lightning rod of the group.
- PLAYER 5** Knicks team member, African-American male, 20s-30s, good-natured, glad to be alive and playing pro ball.
- MAN** 45, jock, living in the past, driven mad by having fallen ill; possibly doubled with Player 5.

POET 30-40, the sadness of a stray dog, also driven to the edges of himself from illness, a little soft in the mind; possible doubled with Player 4.

WOMAN Mother of three small children, Hodgkin's survivor, gritty and oblivious; one of the Players could portray her at the discretion of the director.

THREE SECONDS IN THE KEY

by Deb Margolin

(Lights come up on a woman of middle age, standing in a pool of darkness in a soft pink nightgown. She has an intravenous bottle in her arm which attaches to some indeterminate place on the ceiling. She addresses the audience gently, and with warmth.)

MOTHER. You know, I can't smoke pot, I really can't. So many of my friends and colleagues have long enjoyed the benefits, the temporal and spiritual beauties of pot, the way it just extracts the diseased parts out of a moment and replaces them with silence or laughter, but I can't smoke it. It unzips me; some little silk pillow that holds all my hells and hierarchies rips open, and my mind pours out like mercury in little drops and just bounces. I can't smoke pot, I just can't get it done.

I temporarily forgot this aspect of my identity when they told me I had Hodgkin's disease. Two haughty and symmetrical glands swelled on either side of my neck; one went down, the other didn't. It's often like that in relationships! I was told to take this foolproof chemotherapy and get my life back. The doctor said it was a sword of Damocles, this Hodgkin's, which I could just move out of my way with some simple chemo, which was "very well tolerated" and "sure to work," and that's how this sacred mistake got made, with the pot.

The first time I smoked it was a sunny, radiant day in Autumn. With nausea running like a set of empty train tracks under every second of my experience, I felt like I had nothing to lose. A friend had brought me a joint up from Virginia, and I, the mortal little alchemist, just marched right into the bathroom and toked up. And here I am, just some weirdo who likes words! I came out of the bathroom and, although the air suddenly seemed to have holes in it like big pores in an old man's skin, and the furniture seemed warped and somehow on the verge of song, everything felt basically solid, and I went to the supermarket.

The supermarket! You have to be out of your mind! The supermarket! You must be crazy! Everything squeaked in the supermarket,

and it was freezing cold and voguing as normal when in fact it was surfeited with useless objects and mumbling strangers and seemed like a rundown Greyhound bus terminal for inanimate objects or the criminally insane, and there was this demented music playing. But I carried on! I wanted to buy some fruit, so I wheeled my cart, which felt like an army jeep, into the produce area. The holes in the air got bigger, but I continued! I put my purse down next to a bunch of cantaloupes and honeydew melons to bend and pick up some onions or something and then, turning back to the melons, saw my purse among them, and was just blown away by the sight of it, lying just as valid as you please among melons, recontextualized in this surreal way, my purse just lying there among a bunch of melons, and I LOST IT! I started laughing and couldn't stop; tears came into my eyes and I tried to wipe them away but my glasses fell off, and I was groping to find them the way my Aunt Dodo used to grope for her false teeth when they fell out of her mouth during the Passover Seder, and this fit had me in its full grasp when a concerned shopper, seeing what must have looked like an epileptic seizure, came over to ask if I was all right, and just being seen by this woman in these circumstances set me off again, and I slid to the floor in a complete hysteria.

So that, although not completely unpleasant, didn't seem too good for my public image, and I didn't try smoking for the second and final time until racking nausea drove me to it again about two months later. I waited this time until darkness and deepness of night, about 10:30pm, before lighting up, and I smoked it outside, with the fragrant white noise of the woods in my ears, and the lit end looked like a little star that had tenderly dared to come close to my face. As I puffed it came closer, this little minnow in a sea of darkness, and finally there were holes in the air again, and I hurried upstairs to my bedroom, shut off all the lights and got into bed. My bed smelled familiar and sweet, but just lying there felt provocative in some way, and I felt myself on the verge of something I didn't want to know, so I just did what everyone in the whole United States does on that verge: I turned on the TV.

Have you ever come home, in some important way? From some long trip, some vast distance; have you ever revisited a part of your life you had abandoned in the process of becoming? I met a man on

that television who reminded me at once of how only true innocence renders the profane sacred, and of why I can never smoke pot.

What happened was: I flipped channels. I saw smiling, heard music, heard laughter, saw gunshots, read white words, heard hard numbers, saw license plates: flip flip flip until I came to this man. I met this man. This man was on a cable channel, and he was preaching Gospel. He was a preacher with a sacred purpose. He was African-American, I'd say 45 or so, and he was fervent and arresting, as if this were his last chance at something. I stopped flipping, he called to me. It was just him and me in that dark bedroom. I was stoned in my bedroom, sick with cancer, alone with this man. I began listening to him. It became clear that this was a very low-budget situation, just this man in a small room with a tripod and camera, and he was like me in that way, just a fevered woman alone with a monitor. We were singular people, very focused. I let him speak. He was talking about the Lord, and about how the church misrepresents the Lord, in the most passionate way I have ever heard a cleric speak of such things. His appearance was modest to the point of being negligible except for his eyes, which smoldered like hot flint, and he spoke from beyond his body. He did not know anything about his body. He addressed his whole soul in this bare room to the camera, which he knew I was living in with all my disease and despair, with holes in the air I breathed, and he said:

*I do not trust myself to that Church that doesn't know God. I do not trust myself to that Church that doesn't know God's holy purpose. I do not bind myself to that Church that doesn't know how God loves me, the ways and days, the tireless ways of God's love. God loves me different from how that Church loves me. That church wants me fancy. The church that thinks God cares for **Things**, God does not care for **Things** and that's the **Word!** Do you want to hear the **Word?***

Number One! (and with this exclamation, he held up his right fist, back of the fist to the little tripod, and his pinky sprang up from the other fingers to illustrate the number) *Number One! The Lord does not care about your car! The Lord does not care for your El Dorado! The Lord does not care for your Cadillac! The Lord does not notice how you get to His holy temple! In that church they care about your car! They think you have to drive nice! The Lord does not care, the Lord bless and kiss the soles*

of the bare feet that walk you to the Lord, to Him, to his Holy temple, the Lord does not care for your car!

Number Two! (and then, after he's been waving that finger at the camera for several minutes, the pinky dives back down among the other fingers, and the ring finger, impossibly, comes up alone; the thumb restraining the other fingers, like the raccoon mother of little babies that want to run forth from the nest into the night, not sensing a predator just beyond!) *Number 2! The Lord does not care for your mink coat! The Lord does not see that! The Lord does not care that you wear a fancy furs! That is not there in the eyes of the Lord! He sees you! He sees you! The Lord sees the Heart that Beats under all that death, the Animals that died for you the Way He died for You that Day on the Cross, as he hung there, the Lord sees that beating heart, the Lord sees that, The Lord does not care for your mink coat or your fancy jewels that you wear above your heart, wound around your fingers, near your eyes, upon your ears...*

And he's going on like that, and I...slowly... see it coming! My dear God, I can see what's coming next, and I can't get out of the way of it! I begin to cry, weakly. I want my husband, I want help, I want a witness, I can't bear this beauty, this innocence, alone, I can't bear it, I know I can't. I feel about this man the way he feels about the Lord, and I can't bear it. He is alone with his camera, and I with mine, and we are on a collision course that is going to kill us with pure love, help me, with pure passion. God appears when you're alone, it always happens, think of Moses, the foliage caught fire, he's just a stammering farmer or salesman or something, please God! His hand is like the hand of God, benevolent, predictable, obscene, and I just can't fucking stand it. It became clear that I would have no witness, that I would bear this beauty alone, that it was childhood again, this way of seeing miracles that no one else sees: this truly innocent preacher, he *didn't know!* How could he *not know!*

Number Three! and the ring finger dives down like a puppet, and up comes the middle finger, in all its functionality and pride, and it's up there, and it's wagging at the camera as annotation to the Holy Name, and my dear friends, that is all I remember.

That's the kind of laughter that feels like bleeding. Bleeding is cleansing, it's part of God's plan, bleeding is painless, and silent, and fatal before even the wound that evoked it. That's what that

laughter was like. I haven't recovered from that laughter. I'm still there, I'm still in that bedroom, and I'm laughing. That man condemned me to a bed of laughter. *That* bed is my deathbed, not the one the doctor told me about. I am completely in love with that man, and no one else I know has ever seen him.

I told that story to a few friends, and they've asked: what channel was it? Was it this, was it that? Maybe we could get a recording! *I don't know*. Well, think! my friends say. And I start at the beginning: channel one...channel two...

You know, I can't smoke pot, I just really can't.

(Lights fade down on MOTHER in her pink silk nightgown and soft confession; immediately, low, exciting, home-game stadium light comes up on stage, and loud, driving music, and the Knicks come pouring out onto the stage, dribbling, practicing, scrimmaging, taking practice shots, stretching their legs, their egos, all motion, action and physical wit; this takes its course, and the team spreads out around stage in warmup positions; they finish their exuberant activities and take bench seats around the stage. Only PLAYER remains, in singular tableau.)

(Television again is audible. In blue television light, CHILD dribbles to the following commercial text, spoken in a rich, avuncular voice by unseen narrator:)

NARRATOR. There's no basketball God who looks down from the Heavens and blesses you with game. Game is developed entirely on earth. Game is the result of practice...practicing in the morning...practicing in the evening...practicing in your sleep...are you willing to pay the price? The price...for game?

(Lights fade on CHILD and come up on MOTHER, in family room where she watches basketball without seeming to see it, sitting on couch. Television is audible in the background, basketball game is in full progress. CHILD comes running in to MOTHER, rousing her from reverie.)

CHILD. Mom! Mom!

MOTHER. Yes, honey?

CHILD. Can I ask you a question?

MOTHER. Sure.

CHILD. It's a word question.

MOTHER. Shoot!

CHILD. What does *luck* mean?

MOTHER. What?

CHILD. Luck! What is luck?

MOTHER. Oh. Luck? Luck is...luck is when things go your way.

CHILD. What do you mean, they *go your way*?

MOTHER. It's when things go exactly the way you want them to. When things work out the way you want them to.

CHILD. (*Sitting down next to MOTHER.:*) That's luck?

MOTHER. Yeah, that's luck...only...*accidentally*, there's a part of it that's accidental...sort of. It's when things go exactly the way you want them to, but almost *accidentally*.

CHILD. That's luck?

MOTHER. Yeah. Do you understand what I mean?

CHILD. Sort of. I think. It's when you get what you want in an accident.

MOTHER. Almost. Yes, sweetheart.

CHILD. I think I understand that a little bit but not very much.

MOTHER. Oh, well, I guess I didn't do a very good job with that one.

CHILD. You did a great job, Mom.

MOTHER. Well you know, you always ask me the hardest word questions!

CHILD. I do?

MOTHER. Yeah, like when you asked me what *dignity* is.

CHILD. Oh yeah! What is that again, Ma, what is dignity again, Ma?

MOTHER. Oh, I forget! I don't remember!

CHILD. *(Laughing:)* You do too, Ma, you do too remember!

MOTHER. I forgot! Mine fell apart in the rain!

CHILD. We could look it up in the dictionary.

MOTHER. I've got the dictionary propping up the television. Remember, you complained that the TV was too low.

CHILD. We could pull it out from there!

MOTHER. Then the TV would fall!

CHILD. *(Pointing to the television, which has been showing the Knicks game:)* Mom! Mom! The Foxwoods commercial! It's on again!

MOTHER. *(Frantically:)* Do we have a pen?

CHILD. I'll find one! You start listening, Mom! Mom! Start listening!

(A warm and full rendition of the FOXWOODS commercial follows; it can be heard, and possibly seen on a screen behind MOTHER and CHILD. The MOTHER is clearly moved by it, in a wondrous, sorrowful, unfathomable way. The game comes back on, and MOTHER and CHILD shout a bit, boo a bad call from a referee that goes against their team; jump up from the couch as a difficult shot is attempted and made. We see them deeply involved and physically lively. MOTHER seems almost to shed her body; she seems as young as her son.)

CHILD. Mom! He did that slam again! The one from the slam dunk contest! Mom did you see it? His hand comes out the bottom of the net!

MOTHER. He's unreal, isn't he?

CHILD. What if they trade him, Mom? What if they trade him? I'm very worried they're going to trade him!

(MOTHER and CHILD watch a moment; when MOTHER looks down, she see that the CHILD has fallen asleep in her lap. She speaks tenderly from underneath him.)

MOTHER. So there's this ghost of a leaf that I find on the window-sill. I don't know how it's gotten onto our side of the glass, and there's no explaining that. It's the skeleton of a leaf, the gristle of it, just the working wires that are inside a leaf, you take them for granted, you walk down a tree-lined street and you never think about it, the way you rarely think about your own bones. The leaf still had some color, this distant echo of burnt orange, and it was enchanting, something archaeological. This leaf became our Knicks flag. It lasted a long time for something in nature that has so much in common with dust. We waved it all the time, we waved it on defense, mostly, and we waved it when we scored. More and more tiny whispers of it fell off every time something exciting happened in the game; eventually it was just a stem with a few spikes, and we finally threw it out.

(Lights fade down on MOTHER and CHILD, who has wandered to his own room and into his bed; lights fade up on BASKETBALL TEAM, in sculptural configuration, reminiscent of the big Les Misérables war moment. The following text, courtesy of GATORADE, is chanted, for the first of many times. It is the text that catapults the PLAYER from the television ecology he derives from into the lives of Mother and Child:)

PLAYERS.

I refuse

I refuse to lose

I refuse to fail

I refuse to die

I refuse to be afraid

I refuse to be taken

I refuse

(Out of Gatorade commercial: "I refuse; I refuse to lose; I refuse to die; I refuse to be taken; I refuse to be ordinary; I refuse to fall; I refuse..." MOTHER has watched this commercial many times, and is now agitated by it, visibly. PLAYER steps out of commercial, slowly enters MOTHER's space. He stares at her. She stares back at him, briefly. She doesn't fully see him, and is frightened by his emotional reality. Perhaps she thinks the cancer has spread to her brain. She busies herself. She is folding laundry, maybe, or straightening up. PLAYER, insisting on her acknowledgement, steps closer. With each

advance of the PLAYER, MOTHER steps further away, until finally, cornered, she turns and stares at him in horror and incomprehension. PLAYER steps forward again. MOTHER slaps him.)

(Stillness.)

(MOTHER says nothing. She startles suddenly; looks around behind her; turns back again to face PLAYER. PLAYER remains motionless in MOTHER's space. MOTHER takes a step towards him. Silence. They acknowledge each other fully. PLAYER backs out of MOTHER's space.)

(Lights crossfade to CHILD, who is alone in his room kneeling in front of a picture of the PLAYER, who is the key man on the team he roots for. The photograph of PLAYER is projected behind CHILD; it is important to note that whenever PLAYER is with MOTHER, the portrait disappears; when MOTHER and PLAYER separate, the CHILD's portrait of him returns again. The CHILD kneels before the portrait in a supplication that is clearly a tender nightly ritual.)

CHILD. *(To portrait of PLAYER:)* Say Go New York Go New York Go! Go New York Go New York Go! Hey, Go New York Go New York Go! Boom! And the *slam!* The way you did that, *yeah!* April 17th! Against the 76ers! I'm coming to see you on April 17th! With my mom! It's for my birthday. We got really good seats, so you can see us! And Mom's going to get my name up there on the lit-up blackboard, you know! Go New York Go New York Go! And I got this crumpled-up leaf from the time I went to see you at the Meadowlands, it was yellow! And you lost that game but you scored your season-high! And my mom said it wasn't your season high, but it was! Go New York Go New...I'm sorry you got fouled like that, they should have given him a technical, the Big T, technical! Are you all right, you're all right, right? Can I have your autograph? You're all right, right? Oh, and guess what, you know what? I can pass the ball between my legs behind my own back! I learned that yesterday! I have Kobe Bryant's autograph and Shaq's! My mom's friend sent it because he met them at a store! And they addressed it to me, and everything, it says To Me. Can you jam? Tomahawk? I like the overhead one, where you just put your arms back while you go up and then put the ball down. It looks like the

moon. I hate my sister. Go New York Go New York Go! Say Go New York Go New York Go!

(Lights up on the world of basketball inside the universe of the television. It is here that we rejoin the PLAYER, standing with his team. The men have formed a prayer huddle following a game. All the PLAYERS are standing in circular formation, bent forward, with their arms around each other. Stadium sounds in the background. Voices fall rapidly like the footsteps of people running.)

PLAYER 2. Which one are we up to?

PLAYER 4. That asshole can suck mine...

PLAYER 1. Jus'sec, I'm looking.

PLAYER 3. We're in the hundrits, hundrit ninety-eight or something.

PLAYER 4. ...and just fucking elbows my mouth, does this to every fuckin' man out there, no one sees it, get sand in their eye whenever he does it, no one fucking sees it, man. A million fucking times, I'm not guarding his ass, it ain't fair.

PLAYER 2. There aren't even that many.

PLAYER 1. There's a hundred and fifty.

PLAYER 4. Well, ain't that neat?

PLAYER 3. You don't like it, eat me.

PLAYER 4. Fuck you.

PLAYER 2. You guys, shut the hell up.

PLAYER 1. Here we go, it's number 22.

PLAYER 3. One twenty-two, what the hell's that about.

PLAYER 2. Number twenty-two!

PLAYER 3. What?

PLAYER 2. You got a hearing problem! Get your ears pierced!

PLAYER 3. Say what?

PLAYER 2. Shut up and listen.

PLAYER 3. There's a interviewer waiting.

PLAYER 2. He can wait.

PLAYER 3. She.

PLAYER 4. Yeah, she cute?

PLAYER 3. It's that little Jewish one in the suit.

PLAYER 1. Here we go: *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

PLAYER 4. Because you talk too much, bro.

PLAYER 1. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.*

PLAYER 3. I gotta go to the bathroom.

PLAYER 1. *But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head...*

PLAYER 3. I'll piss my pants!

PLAYER 1. Okay, I'll skip. *Verse 9. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mothers breasts.*

PLAYER 3. You got Penthouse stuck up in there?

PLAYER 4. Shut the fuck up!

PLAYER 1. *I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near, for there is none to help.*

PLAYER 4. If the fuckin' referee would call a fuckin' technical foul like he's supposed to on the elbow there'd be some fucking help.

PLAYER 3. Shut up, let's just finish. I gotta piss.

PLAYER 1. *...Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of B'shan have beset me round.*

PLAYER 4. More Michael shit!

PLAYER 1. *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

PLAYER 4. Dude's body is a fuckin' mess, man!

PLAYER 1. *I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

PLAYER 3. I find this very depressing!

PLAYER 4. Shut the fuck up already, I'm trying to listen to the shit.

PLAYER 1. *For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.*

PLAYER 2. ...so beautiful...

PLAYER 1. *But be not thou far from me, O Lord: o my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee; now and forever!*

PLAYER 3. Amen. Thank you Lord.

PLAYER 2. Thank you for reading that so nice, buddy, really nice, we really get grateful for the way you read us the psalms. I don't even know how you keep track of 'em.

PLAYER 1. I write it on my hand, and sometimes I pin it on my sleeve. God don't care how you carry His holy word so long's you carry it, so long's you sing it out loud, brother. Don't have to be fancy, just loud, brother. Loud and strong.

PLAYER 2. You do good, bud.

PLAYER 1. Yeah I'll keep on.

PLAYERS.

I refuse

I refuse to lose

I refuse to fail

I refuse to die

I refuse to be afraid
I refuse to be taken
I refuse

(PLAYER steps out of GATORADE commercial again into MOTHER's space. MOTHER has been half-sleeping half-watching the game. This second encounter, she is forced to recognize fully the physical beauty and reality of PLAYER. It is marvelous, mystical, horrifying.)

MOTHER. You.

(PLAYER is silent.)

MOTHER. Did I invite you?

(PLAYER remains standing. He softens as he looks at her.)

MOTHER. Well, I should stand up! I should stand up, shouldn't I! You're supposed to stand up when guests arrive, and at least have some fruit in a bowl or some flowers in a vase or some clean towels or something. Well I don't have that! I don't have any of that, you'll have to excuse me!

(PLAYER's face relaxes. He appears calm and focuses on her without flinching.)

It's totally natural, I'm sure. This whole thing is just as right as rain, that I should be lying here half dead watching a commercial for Nabisco and some hyper-extended skinny black man in a jersey just walks into the family room of my leaking house! I'm sure this happens to most people!

(Silence.)

I am sorry that the ceiling is so close to your head! Please accept my fervent apologies! It must be very claustrophobic for you, this house, perhaps we should go outside.

(PLAYER adjusts his posture, grins again. The continuing silence feels dangerous and voluptuous to MOTHER; she defiantly floods it with speech.)

I'm claustrophobic, myself, extremely so. I have to pretend small spaces are just...partitioned spaces. That's what I do. That's how I

survive it. I once lived in a walk-in closet, and instead of a door, I had a curtain. I never lifted that curtain. That way I could pretend that just beyond the rag was infinity. A mansion. A wildflower field. A runway. Whatever. Once this friend of mine visited, and she tied up the curtain. I almost broke her jaw.

PLAYER. You got a good swing, Mother?

(MOTHER is visibly startled to hear his voice. She recoils. Silence.)

PLAYER. I said, Mother, you got a good swing?

MOTHER. Yeah. I got a good swing.

PLAYER. Let's see it.

(MOTHER stares at him. Sits up, draws her thin silk robe around her, swings verbally.)

MOTHER. Why don't you give me some Gatorade, that's where you're from, isn't it? Gatorade. Do you have any? I'm thirsty as all shit.

PLAYER. That ain't where I'm from, Mother.

MOTHER. Where are you from, Sir?

PLAYER. I got your call. I got the call, Mother.

MOTHER. I didn't call you.

PLAYER. Someone called me, Mother. Who was it?

MOTHER. I didn't call you.

PLAYER. You did, Mother, I wouldn't be here.

MOTHER. My son. My son must have called you.

PLAYER. Your boy didn't call me. You called me, Mother.

MOTHER. I hate being called Mother.

PLAYER. That the most beautiful thing I can call you, Mother.

MOTHER. I'm more than a Mother.

PLAYER. No you ain't.

MOTHER. All right! Could you go now? I've got to make tea for the Roosevelts!

PLAYER. You don't want a black man at the table, Mother?

MOTHER. Well I don't mind personally; it's the Roosevelts who might get upset!

PLAYER. Just tell them I'm the valet butler.

MOTHER. Do you know how to mix drinks and park cars?

PLAYER. How you think I got this far, Mother?

MOTHER. You had a real job at some time?

PLAYER. I parked cars at the funeral home for 6 years, paying rent for my mother, Mother, learning my game. I can get a car put in a space smaller than the car itself, it's a gift I got. It's about space. It's about moving through space on your own terms, Mother. It's in my family. My grandfather drove a limousine for the Klan in Mississippi. When I ask him Why you drive for those murdering bastards, he say: what you think? A black man could get a job? You got a family to feed, you drive for the Man. Only thing they tell him: Never pick up a Jew. They say they kill him if he ever pick up Jew.

(Pause.)

MOTHER. So he just drove their car, picked up their capes and hoods at the dry cleaners?

PLAYER. You watch it, Mother. You got a big head, Mother.

(Silence.)

MOTHER. I need to sit down.

(MOTHER sits down; she is clearly unwell. PLAYER watches her intently, and with respect.)

PLAYER. You give this to your boy, Mother.

(He drops a photograph of himself on the floor.)

MOTHER. Hand it to me, can't you please, Sir? It's hard for me to bend.

PLAYER. It's hard for you? I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, Mother. I'll pick it up and put it on this table.

MOTHER. Can't you hand it to me?

PLAYER. No.

MOTHER. My son admires you so much.

PLAYER. What we gonna do about that, Mother?

MOTHER. You tell me, you know everything.

PLAYER. I know my game, Mother. Good at my own game.

(CHILD's voice is heard; he is in his bedroom, singing, dolefully.)

CHILD.

Take a chance! Make it happen!

Pop the cork...Finger-snappin'!

Spin the wheel! 'Round and 'round we go!

Life is short! Life is sweet!

Grab yourself a front row seat!

And let's meet where the trees are standin' tall!

Yeah, let's live...for the wonder of it all!

(CHILD does not really know the correct lyrics of this next verse; he struggles, enjoys himself, improvises.)

Paradise...lucky seven!

Twenty-two is two times eleven!

You and me...we can...go to the mall!

Living's hard! Getting bored!

This is it, your big reward!

And let's live where the da da da da da!...

Yeah, let's live for the wonder...of it all

Meet me at Foxwoods! FOX-WOODS!

(MOTHER and PLAYER stare at each other. MOTHER exits toward CHILD's room; PLAYER remains for an instant, and then exits in the direction he came from. MOTHER now enters the Child's room; as always, in that room, a projection of face of PLAYER appears behind the scene, symbolizing the Child's wall on which a portrait of him hangs. Action takes place in front of it.)

CHILD. Mom! About Vince Carter! What if Vince Carter threw himself an alley-oop over the backboard, got the ball, jumped over the backboard and jammed it? What if Kobe Bryant jammed from halfcourt?

MOTHER. You can't jam from half court; jamming means you stuff the ball in the basket.

CHILD. What if he jammed from the three-point line?

MOTHER. There's no such thing. You have to stuff the ball.

CHILD. Mom! Michael Jordan stuffed from the free throw line, and that is very close to the three-point line!

MOTHER. Did you know that I love you?

CHILD. Mom! He jammed from the free throw line, I swear!

MOTHER. Okay!

CHILD. You okay, Mom?

MOTHER. Fine, yes dear, I'm fine.

CHILD. (*Noticing something strange in MOTHER's eyes:*) How are you, Mommy?

MOTHER. Fine, sweet.

CHILD. How is your Hodgkin's disease?

MOTHER. It's doing great! How are you doing?

CHILD. It's doing great?

MOTHER. What's doing great?

CHILD. Your Hodgkin's disease.

MOTHER. No! Hodgkin's disease is doing very bad! *I'm* doing great.

CHILD. Is Hodgkin's disease as good as Lou Gehrig's disease? I mean, he was a great player, Mom.

MOTHER. Thomas Hodgkin was a scientist, honey.

CHILD. But he got his own disease and everything! Mommy, come and play some hoops with me.

MOTHER. Sweetie, I...

CHILD. C'mon, Mom, let's shoot some hoops. Not outside, right here in my room, the hoop on my wall, you can take some practice shots first, and then we can shoot for first possession, the toy chest is the free throw line and the edge of the couch is the three-point line, and I'll shoot or I'll let you shoot, you can choose!

MOTHER. I'm very tired, honey.

CHILD. I'll be very gentle, I won't bang into you or step on your feet! I'll wear my *whisper slippers!* Just my toes! C'mon, Mom! I learned a new dunk! Jamie Abarro showed me this new way to...

MOTHER. Darling, I'm tired. I just want to sit. Come sit with me awhile.

CHILD. Why are you always so tired, Mommy?

MOTHER. You know that I'm...

CHILD. I'm tired of your being tired!

MOTHER. I understand, but that doesn't mean I can just get up and play basketball any time you ask me!

CHILD. I'm tired of you being sick! It makes me sick!

MOTHER. Please stop, you're a very healthy...

CHILD. I'm not very healthy! I'm getting sick!

MOTHER. Sweetheart, sweetheart, come here, I'm so sorry...

CHILD. I'm getting very sick! Everything you are, you make *me!* You're making me sick! You're probably going to make me die...

MOTHER. (*Losing it:*) You can't say that to me!

CHILD. ...because YOU'RE just going to DIE! And I'll be the only kid whose mother died! And I'll feel *horrible and embarrassed!* No other kid's mother died! Because other kids' mothers take them to the games and everything and wear hats from the team and yell

and then take them out afterwards for stuff but you just SIT AROUND IN YOUR UGLY PAJAMAS ALL DAY!

MOTHER. I didn't *ask* for this!

CHILD. And I'm so embarrassed and I'm tired of it!

MOTHER. You stop it right now! You shut your mouth! I don't want to hear one more...

CHILD. ...and I want a mother, I want a regular mother, and I want to play basketball and I want some new autographs and I want some new Pokemon cards and I want to watch more TV! What about Mother's Day at the school? When you have to make things for your mother and I don't even *have* one! And I never get any pizza anymore! Why don't I ever get pizza anymore! Can you just tell me that? Why! Why! Why can't I ever have what I want? Why?

(CHILD begins to sob. MOTHER sits motionless. After some moments, she goes over and sits by her son. She takes him into her arms. He allows this, but turns his head away from her. She rocks him slowly.)

MOTHER. *(Finally:)* Let's figure this out. Let's take all those things you just said and figure them out one by one.

CHILD. *(Sniffling:)* All *what* things?

MOTHER. Well, you just lodged about seventeen complaints and expressed forty-five worries.

(Silence.)

CHILD. *(Still not looking at her:)* So worries are beating complaints forty-five to seventeen?

MOTHER. Yup. They're *whuppin'* em.

CHILD. Who are you rooting for, Mom, worries or complaints?

MOTHER. Complaints. I like complaints.

CHILD. Well they're losing pretty bad, Mom.

MOTHER. There's always hope.

CHILD. Well, one time the Knicks were losing 51-27, and they made a comeback, really big comeback, with Ewing leading the way.

MOTHER. Cool. Did they win?

CHILD. I think they lost. But before that they got the lead back.

MOTHER. See?

CHILD. See what?

MOTHER. Nothing. Listen, love. Let's think about all the things you've said, and see if we can solve some of these problems.

CHILD. There's no problem, Mom.

MOTHER. I could get you some more pizza. In fact, they serve pizza at school on Mondays, should I sign you up for that, if that dorky lady accepts the form?

CHILD. What dorky lady?

MOTHER. Mrs. Terra Firma.

CHILD. Mrs. Terranova, Mom.

MOTHER. Whatever. She sent the hot lunch form back last year because she said my handwriting was disgusting!

CHILD. (*Laughing:*) Really, Mom?

MOTHER. Swear.

CHILD. Well, it is very bad! Your writing is terrible, Mom! Someone should tell you how to make all the letters.

MOTHER. I'll see if I can find someone. Go sleepy, honey.

CHILD. Will you play tomorrow, some basketball, Mom?

MOTHER. I think so, we'll see. Goodnight, darling.

CHILD. Wait, Mom.

MOTHER. Yes, sweetheart?

CHILD. I think Elton Brand is a very underrated player.

MOTHER. Write the coach a letter. Goodnight, my darling.

CHILD. Love you, Mom.

(MOTHER steps downstage; light remains, dimly but definitely on the CHILD; this low but insistent illumination is like an ache for MOTHER, who can never truly mourn her own health, as she must always model hope for him.)

MOTHER. We went hiking in Bear Mountain. It's wild, the way people end up together; wild, that I am in the company of these three people, this sexy man with the hiking boots, This drop dead gorgeous eight-year-old with the high pitched voice and the six-year-old girl with the prophecies and ponytail and sharp sweet tongue and quick, limpid eyes, and there we are in the mountains. The six-year-old asks me what karma is. Try that one at a high altitude! Try that one on a steep ascent with no oxygen and an aging set of morals.

Just where we left our car was a dead deer. It was full and big and wonderfully dead, like something out of the Nutcracker Suite, it was ballet-dead, taut and stretched beautifully and impossibly. Its ribcage was open, showing its insides, a complexity of ribs; it looked in all its serried redness like the inside of a pomegranate, ancient and mysterious, probably sweet to eat. The hooves were still intact, and well defined, and ready to run, perhaps it died running, but the most gorgeous part of the body was the head and neck, which were arched back in an athleticism of death, just so elegant, like a lover in a windswept tango, the head arched back, the eyes already eaten, but filled with a darkness that reminds one of eyes, of closing the eyes, of choosing not to see; the ultimate prerogative of the living; this active arch of the neck, curved like half an orange. Pulling back from this vision, it was just a dead deer in a parenthesis of death, an open grave, very simple, really beautiful, an organic sculpture. An abandoned hobby-horse. I was enraptured by it, but my son said:

MOTHER and CHILD. No, Mom, No, Mom, No, let's walk the other way, I don't want to see that deer, don't make me see it, drive the car up the mountain, pick me up on the mountain, don't make me see that deer again, it will give me bad dreams.

MOTHER. We can just walk around it, I said. You can walk on the other side of the car, and I'll walk on this side; you won't see it, it's far down below.

Later, back at the house, he sat and cried. I said

What

And he said,

MOTHER and CHILD. Mom, it's just the death thing again.

MOTHER. And I said what death thing

And he said

MOTHER and CHILD. You just lie there and all you see is blackness, isn't that right?

MOTHER. And I said No, you don't see blackness

And he said

MOTHER and CHILD. What then

MOTHER. And I said

You just don't see. Seeing isn't part of death, seeing the way we see now

And he said:

MOTHER and CHILD. I don't understand

MOTHER. And I said

Well you just don't see. It's not that you see blackness, it's that you're not here, and your spirit has other senses.

MOTHER and CHILD. But I don't believe in Heaven and Hell

MOTHER. ...he said. I don't either.

We climb and climb and every step is a choice. Rock and water, altitude and slope, and the dead deer, back by our car. A commanding, silent view on top of the mountain, trees in flame, like an airplane crashing and burning, the color a collision, a violent accident of Autumn, these colors like flame, and the silence, and the

mountains casting shadows on each other like the shape of women's breasts in comic books.

(PLAYER enters; projected image of his picture instantly disappears upstage. MOTHER is overjoyed to see him; she tries to hide this and begins pacing frantically.)

PLAYER. Why?

MOTHER. Why what?

PLAYER. Why you pacing like that?

MOTHER. I'm...I'm...*exercising.*

PLAYER. That ain't exercise. That called *dirty up the rug.*

(Pause.)

MOTHER. My feet are clean.

PLAYER. Jesus musta washed 'em.

MOTHER. I washed them myself. I'm holding out for other favors from Him.

PLAYER. Like what? What kind of favors you want from Jesus, Mother? He busy. He very busy.

MOTHER. I want to raise my kid. I just want to raise my kid.

PLAYER. You doin' that every day, Mother.

MOTHER. I need a lot of days to do that, Sir.

PLAYER. You take those days Jesus gave you, Mother.

MOTHER. Are you doing that?

PLAYER. What?

MOTHER. You taking those days whats-its gave you?

PLAYER. You afraid to say His name?

(Pause.)

What you mean, Mother?

MOTHER. What do you do with *your* spare time?

PLAYER. I'm spendin' most of it with *you*, Mother.

MOTHER. You're in and out of here quickly. I feel like my house is right under the opponents' basket.

PLAYER. Mother, you right about that in some way.

MOTHER. You...you got kids?

PLAYER. I...had. I had kids, Mother.

(Pause.)

MOTHER. Wanna hear a joke?

PLAYER. What joke?

MOTHER. Why is a bad musician like a good basketball player?

PLAYER. Why?

MOTHER. Never spends more than three seconds in the key.

PLAYER. Got a knee-slapper there!

MOTHER. It's...it's so cruel, you get three seconds. Who knows three seconds? How are you supposed to know three seconds has gone by? You wear a stop watch? You have a bell attached to your crotch?

PLAYER. You just dance in and out. You know what it feels like to stay too long there. You dance in and out of it. They call a three second violation, you always know when you been nabbed, you just run right back down the court. You know when you got away with it also. You know what that feels like, you always know.

MOTHER. So you just dance in and out? Like doing the Hokey Pokey?

PLAYER. It ain't like the hokey pokey.

MOTHER. You put your right foot in, you put your right foot out, you put your right foot in and you shake it all...

PLAYER. Shut up with that Jewish song.

MOTHER. It's not a Jewish song, it's a children's song.

PLAYER. All them Jewish songs sound like songs for kids or mental people.

MOTHER. There's nothing wrong with Jewish music!

PLAYER. You know, you got it going with this Jewish thing, maybe that's the whole problem. You raising your kid with all this?

MOTHER. We're Jewish, what can I do about it?

PLAYER. Maybe you can tell me what this is all about with the *shuh-vutts*.

MOTHER. Shuh-vutts?

PLAYER. That word the Jewish people mutter when a *colored* person walks by.

MOTHER. Oh! *Schvartze!* You mean *Schvartze!*

PLAYER. Yeah, what's that mean, Mother? Nigger, right, it means nigger, right?

MOTHER. It's Yiddish. It means *black*, literally, that's what it means. Black.

PLAYER. Yeah, well, whatever it means. It sounds really nasty, Mother, it sounds...it sounds...

MOTHER. *Schmuttsy*, right? It sounds *schmuttsy!*

PLAYER. What you talkin' about Mother, with *shmuttsie?*

MOTHER. *Euh!* Not, *uh!* Let me hear you say that: *shmutts!* Like *euh!* Like the double-o in *good!* *Shmutts!* *Shmuttsy!*

PLAYER. *Shmutt-see!*

MOTHER. No, no: *shmuttsy!*

PLAYER. *Shmuttsy.*

MOTHER. Excellent! Excellent!

PLAYER. What'm I sayin' about myself, Mother?

MOTHER. You weren't saying anything about yourself, we were talking about how the word *schvartze* sounds *shmuttsy!*

PLAYER. You talkin' in tongues, Mother.

MOTHER. No, no! *Shmuttsy* means *dirty*! *Shmutts* is *dirt*!

PLAYER. So now I'm not only *shuh-vuttsy*, I'm *shuh-muttsy*??

MOTHER. No, no! Listen! *Schvartze* is that word that means black, and it sounds dirty, and the word for *dirt* is *schmutts*.

PLAYER. This is all sounding very derogatory, Mother.

MOTHER. No, no! It's...Yiddish! Everything sounds derogatory in Yiddish! Yiddish is a very colorful language, so it's easy to misunderstand! Someone tells you they love you in Yiddish and you just want to beat them up! Because you swish it around the back of your throat like gargling or something! And everything sounds exactly like what it means, onomatopoetic, like...

PLAYER. So why don't love sound like love, Mother?

MOTHER. No, listen! And there are some great, great Yiddish expressions, they're so funny! For example: *Drey zach arim vee a fochs in russell*! Know what that means? It means *turning around like a fart in a stew*! That's what it means! So if you're sort of at loose ends or something, and you don't know what to do, or something, and you're just puttering! Or another great expression is...

PLAYER. (Sort of laughing:) How you say that again, Mom? *Draydel around*...

MOTHER. No, no: *Dray zach arim*...

PLAYER. *Dray-zock ah-rimm*

MOTHER. Good! Good! *Vee a fochs in russell*...

PLAYER. *Vay a fox in a rustle*.

MOTHER. No *a*. *Vee a fochs in russell*.

PLAYER. *Vee a fox in rustle*.

MOTHER. Excellent! Excellent! And another great expression from Yiddish is: *Shaynerer laykt men in d'rerd*!

PLAYER. Forget it, Mother. I'm not working on that one.

MOTHER. It's easy!

PLAYER. What's that one mean?

MOTHER. Basically, what it means is: *better-looking people are six feet under!*

(Silence.)

PLAYER. Now Mother, you notice how all of these are kind of a put-down. You notice that, right Mother?

MOTHER. But they're so colorful! They're loving!

PLAYER. You were raised in love, Mother?

MOTHER. Yes. Well, yes and no.

PLAYER. You raise that boy in love and truth, Mother, you hear me?

MOTHER. Yes. Yes, I hear you.

PLAYER. Don't raise your child with the *schvartzy shmuttzy*, don't you lie to him, you hear me, Mother? Don't call him a *schvartzy*, you hear me, Mother? That shit hurt a person, Mother.

(Silence.)

MOTHER. Well! Thank you so much for coming.

PLAYER. Here's the hostess coming out of you, Mom, it's cute.

MOTHER. When will we see you...again...

PLAYER. What *we* Mother? Only person seeing me is *you*.

MOTHER. Millions of people see you, Sir.

PLAYER. No one seeing me here but you.

MOTHER. Will you be back after the game?

PLAYER. If we lose, I'll be back. If we win, I'll be somewhere different.

(Brief silence. MOTHER is desperate to keep him.)

MOTHER. So you just dance in and out.

PLAYER. Yeah. Dance in and out of the paint, yeah.

MOTHER. So you just count, kind of! In your mind! One Mississippi, Two Mississippi...

PLAYER. Do you GOT to bring up *Mississippi* right now in the conversation, Mother?

MOTHER. But how do you take a shot, when you're so worried about where you stand? How do you relax?

PLAYER. Somethin' I don't think you rightly understand here about three seconds, Mother. You think it's so cruel, Mother, but it's the center of the game, it's the beat. Used to be only the offense got three seconds, the defender could stand there as long as he wants. Now, Mother, everybody got three seconds, the offense, the defense. Ain't nobody standing around the key, mother. You and the guy on you, ain't neither of you got more 'n three. Whether you got the ball or you tryin' to get it. Everybody got the same limit. Keeps the game movin, Ma. Every game's about some fucking kind of problem, Ma, some struggle, like, hit the ball with the bat, get the ball in hoop, pass the ball to the zone, drop the ball in the cup, it's a struggle, and the struggle's the game.

(Brief silence.)

MOTHER. Why... why do you...why do you...only come here after a game you've lost?

PLAYER. I can't come here all victorious, Mother.

MOTHER. I'm only good after a loss?

PLAYER. Mother, you good all the time. It's me's no good.

MOTHER. I'd like to congratulate you!

PLAYER. Sure. We can do that sometime.

MOTHER. You think you can't be happy around me.

PLAYER. You gettin' all romantic with this, Mother.

MOTHER. Foxwoods, you ever been to Foxwoods?

PLAYER. What's Foxwoods?

MOTHER. It's a gambling joint in Connecticut.

PLAYER. No. Been to Atlantic City. Like those beaver pageants.

MOTHER. I...I...We can play cards! I like playing cards! Do you play?

PLAYER. What you want, Mother?

MOTHER. I want my three seconds in the key!

PLAYER. You had 'em!

(MOTHER seems to collapse emotionally; PLAYER responds, awkwardly, and with the beginnings of tenderness; draws very close to her, embracing her with his eyes, and whispers the following words:)

Mother, you sick now, you need to talk, I know that, Mother, I want to talk to you, that's why I'm here but I gotta go now, Mother, I gotta leave you to yourself, Mother, what you need now, that kind of talkin', I ain't got. Ain't never had, it ain't my fault, don't be lookin' at me, Mother. I'm tellin' you mother, ain't never had it. You gotta find other people got what you got, Mother. That's where I go after a game, I go out with other people who got the same game I got. I done what I can, Mother, go ask some questions, from other people. I can't...I can't help you, I can't...I can't help you right, Mother. You get wisdom from them and game from me, okay, Mother? Go talk, mother, go out and find it.

(PLAYER exits and slips into the basketball world; a dim light comes up on BASKETBALL TEAM in prayer huddle formation. They are praying after another lost game. Their prayer and activities are interwoven into the MOTHER's meetings with various Hodgkin's survivors in support group.)

(Mother stands up and starts getting dressed. She takes off her nightgown frantically, tries on three or four different shirts and pants and skirts, finally ends up in the first one she puts on. She looks at herself long in an invisible mirror, inhales visibly, and then slowly walks downstage. A sign comes up on the basketball scoreboard that reads: HODGKIN'S SUPPORT GROUP. MOTHER commences a slow movement around the stage, as if in search of like humanity. She stops; hesitates.)

PLAYER. *(Voice is heard in MOTHER's mind:)* Go on, Mother. Go on. They'll be comin'.

MOTHER. Don't you tell me what to do!

PLAYER. You keep on, Mother.

MOTHER. People will hear me *talking to myself* because of you!

PLAYER. Don't you fret yourself, Ma, lots of people talk to me, not just you.

(This next sequence combines the voices of people the MOTHER encounters on her journey to find people who "got the same game she's got," who've been through treatment for Hodgkin's disease, with the voices of PLAYERS in the final moments of games, and in prayer huddles.. It features an oneiric connectedness MOTHER feels with the PLAYER in his absence from her immediate life. One by one, SURVIVORS approach MOTHER as she walks the circumference of the stage [these Survivors, at the discretion of the director, are played by various of the Players on the team], who tell odd shards of their stories. The delicate, fading sanity of these three voices is underscored by visions and voices of the PLAYER, traveling similarly from one lost game to another; we see him losing game after game in the final seconds; we see him in prayer circles, which come to seem much like the support circle both in their appearance onstage and in their failure to provide emotional clarity or support. MOTHER and PLAYER seem to see each other; they speak to each other intimately as each struggles along his/her own journey, but these conversations are extraordinary because they are mutually imagined as opposed to real. There is an almost musical quality to the rising and falling of voices, as in the scoring for many instruments in a fugue. At all times basketball game can be heard underneath. Speakers themselves are in still, single light. A MAN approaches MOTHER first.)

MOTHER. It's...I'm grateful to you for meeting with me, I'm...I'm...I'm ...alone with all this, I...how are you...how are you managing?

MAN. Great! It's going great! What a feeling! We're lucky! We're lucky! Everything's going great, what a feeling! Never better! Can't believe I got here, loving it, man! Can't believe I got here! What a feeling! My hands went numb, I tell you about that? What a feeling! I like to move, gotta move, gotta keep moving, you know, gotta move! I'm beautiful! What a feeling!

(Prayer huddle after another lost game. Psalm 143 and 144 are being read. PLAYER stands impatiently in huddle; others are absorbed in prayer.)

PLAYER 1. *I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land.*

MOTHER. I...I'm sorry?

MAN. I'm 45 with the body of a 28-year-old man! What the fuck's this Hodgkin's disease, man? I got it all going, right, and now my hands are numb, I don't know if the ball is in my hand, my hand can't tell me, right, I can't feel my own hands. I can't tell something that's right in my own fucking hands, it's just deaf, my fucking hands, just nothing, right, like *I can't touch something even if I touch it*, right?

PLAYER 1. *Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to flight.*

MOTHER. *(To MAN:)* Have you seen a neurologist?

MAN. Seen who?

PLAYER 2. *(Talking about the PLAYER:)* What the matter with *him*, man, he too good to pray!

PLAYER 1. He prays in his own way, his own time.

PLAYER 4. No he don't.

PLAYER 3. He feels guilty, no shit. You can't pray when you feel guilty.

PLAYER 2. Guilty of what, man?

PLAYER 1. He's left people to suffer, as we all have.

PLAYER 4. So?

PLAYER 1. He's in purgatory, brother, you know how that is, he's a wanderer.

PLAYER 4. Yeah, but where he goin' all the time?

PLAYER 3. Like a ghost, man, my mother said my father walkin' around the attic all the time. He's hauntin' someone's house, man.

PLAYER 1. We all seek the same thing.

PLAYER 4. No we don't, man, you just make it simple.

PLAYER 2. He ain't playing as good as we need.

PLAYER 3. None of us playin' good as we need.

PLAYER 4. None of us paid like he is, man, to play that good.

(A WOMAN approaches MOTHER from the other direction. Her rage and tension are poorly masked by a brusque and casual manner.)

WOMAN. Okay so *my* situation was different. *My* situation was like this: I just had a baby. I had really little kids. My youngest was three months. I had a little three-month-old baby, and a three-year-old and a five-year-old. They told me I had rampant Hodgkin's disease and that the only hope I had was a bone marrow transplant. And I had no help at all, my husband's no help, his parents are no help, there's no help, no help, they're all useless. My sister in law, she doesn't even drive, she's useless. She works for the Philadelphia Board of Education! Useless!

MOTHER. I...I...know how you feel...there is a loneliness about this, isn't there...a madness, almost...People don't always believe you...I've been...watching...

PLAYER 1. *Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! Or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!*

WOMAN. I have babies. Three. I knew if I died my babies would *never remember me, never know who I was*

(MOTHER and PLAYER look at each other, from different worlds. They continue to stare at each other as WOMAN speaks.)

I knew I had to get through this, for them, for them, I knew I had to survive for my children, for them to have a mother. They have to have a mother.

(LITTLE BOY, played by PLAYER 2, comes rushing in, interrupting WOMAN.)

LITTLE BOY. Mommy! Mommy! Come! I've just made a big comeback in hearts! I was down 15 points! Stupid Guy shot the moon,

but I came back slowly, snuck back up on him! You've got to see this, please come, Mommy, I left the scores up and you should...

WOMAN. SHUT UP! Shut the *FUCK UP!* Can't you see I'm TALKING TO SOMEONE? Leave me ALONE! You children make me SICK! All of you! Get out! Get out! Get the *FUCK OUT!* I can't STAND IT ANYMORE!

PLAYER 1. *Send thine hand from above me...*

PLAYER 1. *...rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;*

WOMAN. Get OUT OF HERE! Now! DO IT! You make me SICK! The SIGHT of you makes me VOMIT!

PLAYER 1. *...whose mouth speaketh vanity, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

(CHILD bows head and exits.)

PLAYER 1. *(To THE PLAYER:)* Why don't you pray with us, man? It gives you strength, man! You stand outside the circle, while God stands within, brother!

WOMAN. *(To MOTHER:)* So what gave me the strength to fight for my life was knowing I had to do it for my kids. It's a very individual thing, what gives you strength.

PLAYER 1. *(To THE PLAYER:)* Give it up to God, Brother, pray with us! We might win a game if the big man prays with his brothers!

ATHLETE MAN. What a feeling! Going great!

(MOTHER turns to look at him, then looks back at WOMAN.)

WOMAN. For me, it was knowing that my kids would never know me if I died.

PLAYER 1. *Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away.*

(MOTHER's mind returns to the PLAYER; he steps out of prayer huddle and MOTHER wills him into her presence. He is happy to be there, hungry; glad to leave a false prayer and enter a real one.)

MOTHER. All these people...they're insane they're so lost, O God, the way she spoke to that child...

(Lights fade down on WOMAN and PLAYER and up on a POET, forlorn and searching, the sweetness of a stray dog, who joins MOTHER.)

POET. You're so smart! No, I wish I was as smart as you, you know? It's...yeah. It's...yeah. You know.

(Crossfade back to MOTHER and PLAYER, who are still inhabiting two separate worlds.)

MOTHER. These people...

PLAYER. I know. Go on, Mother

MOTHER. *(To POET:)* I...I daydreamed a lot, and I loved reading books. I loved books. And I thought about never-ending...things...I guess, eternity, you'd call it...

PLAYER. Maternity, Mother?

MOTHER. *(To PLAYER:)* No, *eternity*, like, things going on and on, and not ending at any time, you know, like how they tell you God lives forever...

POET. Wanna smile? I'll make you smile with my Smile poem:

PLAYER. Mothers too, they got eternity too, Mother.

POET.

Your smile is wide, your smile is mine
Your smile is prettier than this rhyme.
Your smile is sweet, it gets in my bones
Your smile is there, I feel less alone!

MOTHER. *(To PLAYER:)* You don't find me eternal, now, do you?

POET. How do you interpret that? You're so smart, you know? That's funny! *You're* funny. You don't even *say* anything, you're funny!

PLAYER. Nothing's eternal, Mother, you don't understand that.

MOTHER. I...

PLAYER. Three seconds a long time, you don't understand that. What you mean eternity, Mother?

PLAYER 1. *(Inside huddle:)* Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts;

MOTHER. *(To POET:)* ...like, forever, you know, I thought about forever, and I would just turn my head from side to side, saying to myself: God lives forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever...until that actually had some meaning to me, until it actually opened up its meaning to me, and I saw this huge time in my mind, and I...

PLAYER. This is how you spent your childhood?

POET. How do you interpret that?

PLAYER 1. *And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

MOTHER. You asked me what I was like...

POET. You're so smart.

PLAYER. You didn't have shit else to do besides turn your head back and forth, Mother? You had a lucky life, Ma.

MOTHER. Did I?

PLAYER. Shit, yes you did, Mother. Yes you did.

POET. I wrote my daughter a poem, want to hear it?

You're 14, the joy of my life
The one in my mind instead of a wife
What does it mean to have a daughter?
A tap on the shoulder, an end to the slaughter.

WOMAN. They were all useless! They make me sick!

ATHLETE MAN. What the fuck is this Hodgkin's disease, man? I'm going great! What a feeling!

MOTHER. *(To PLAYER:)* You don't hear all this. My mind has a church in it. You can't hear my thoughts.

POET. How to do you interpret that?

PLAYER. What if I think the same thing as you, Mother, then I hear it. What if I go to the same church as you?

MOTHER. Pray with those men. They need you to pray with them.

PLAYER. I ain't prayin' with them, Mother.

MOTHER. Why?

PLAYER. It's enough that I stand with them, Mother, while they carry on. That's prayin' enough.

PLAYER 1. Join with us, brother! ... *O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou has served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.*

POET. You're so smart, right? I mean, no. Really! I'd like to hear how you interpret that. I'd like to...meet sometime. Can we meet sometime?

MOTHER. They got the same game you got.

PLAYER. Mother...

POET. Maybe we can meet sometime. I don't know...maybe we can meet sometime.

(PLAYER returns to prayer huddle, which winds down and leads to chant:)

PLAYERS.

I refuse

I refuse to lose

I refuse to die

I refuse to be afraid

I refuse to be taken

I refuse

(MOTHER returns to her chair, her tiny enclosure; Lights up on CHILD, who is once again in front of picture of Player in his room.)

CHILD. Say go New York, go New York, go! Hey, Go New York, Go New York Go! You were *awesome!* It wasn't your fault! They can't blame it on you! Twenty-eight points! It wasn't your fault! Say Go New York Go New York Go! And *blam!* My mom always cries at

these stupid commercials! For Foxwoods! I don't feel like crying that much, hardly at all, maybe almost never! Well, sometimes. And she cries when the commercial comes on, but she always wants to see it. We write down the words and she leaves me a paper and pencil when she has to go to the bathroom in case it comes on, and I get nervous until she comes back because I can't write that fast or good. See because we know the first verse but the second one has a part we can't understand. I listen and listen, so hard, but it goes by very fast! And she tells me she loves me too much, so many times! Like she's going away somewhere, like when she went to Canada! I wish you could come over, I wish so much. Twenty-eight points is really good! It's not your fault, you know that right? Say Go New York Go New York Go!

(MOTHER enters CHILD's space, and he sees her and abandons his privacy, engaging her. He is sitting up in his bed.)

CHILD. Mommy, are Jews a race, or are Jews a religion?

MOTHER. What, darling?

CHILD. Because my teacher said: Name some religions, and I said Jewish, and he said no, Jewish is a race.

MOTHER. He did?

CHILD. So is Jewish a religion or a race? So I said it was a religion, and he said no, and I was crying, really, but no one saw.

MOTHER. I'm sorry he made you cry, I don't want anyone to make you cry.

CHILD. But isn't Jewish a religion, Mom?

MOTHER. Yes. Yes it is.

CHILD. But is it a race, like he said?

MOTHER. I think you were both right. It is a religion, because we have a whole set of rituals we observe, and certain beliefs in one God, and a strong emphasis on education, and certain religious holidays we celebrate. But more than that, it's a shared history, of certain songs and sadnesses.

CHILD. What kind of songs and sadnesses?

MOTHER. Well, the songs sound like...like... (*She scats a song in a minor and Klezmer mode.*), and the sadnesses...well, we have slavery and extermination and wandering in the desert and being tailors in Poland and not being allowed into country clubs and that kind of stuff. And a certain *attitude*. It's a kind of way of looking at things that gets into your body, almost! It's a sense of humor, the way we laugh, the kinds of things that make us laugh.

CHILD. But are you still Jewish even if you don't celebrate the holidays or you don't laugh?

MOTHER. Sure! No way around being Jewish! And that's why I think you were both right.

CHILD. Well, he was wrong if we were both right, because he said *I was wrong*.

MOTHER. Well, in that case, he was wrong about two things, and two wrongs don't make a right!

CHILD. Ma? Tell me again about those three ladies.

MOTHER. What ladies?

CHILD. Those three ladies.

MOTHER. What the heck in the heck in the heckle and heckle of beck are you talking about?

CHILD. Mom, those three ladies that used to follow you around all the time from inside the praying.

MOTHER. Oh, Shirley Goodness and Mercy!

CHILD. (*Giggling:*) Yeah! Could you say it, Mom?

MOTHER. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in... green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He does something or other to me for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley...

CHILD. What does He do to you, Ma?

MOTHER. I don't remember. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table for me in

the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over: Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So I thought Surely, Goodness and Mercy were these three people...

(CHILD starts giggling uncontrollably.)

...because the first one was Shirley, and my mom had a friend named Shirley, and so I thought these people were following me all the time.

CHILD. And you looked for them?

MOTHER. I looked for them, and I was afraid to do practically anything because they'd see me.

CHILD. Were you afraid to poop?

MOTHER. Terrified.

CHILD. Were you afraid to pee?

MOTHER. Mortified!

CHILD. But you did it anyway?

MOTHER. Nope! Didn't pee or poop for twenty years!

CHILD. You're kidding, right Ma? Ma? Do you think Alan Iverson is out of control, or what?

MOTHER. Totally. Totally out of control.

(MOTHER tucks child into bed and kisses him softly. She returns to her own space, covers herself with blanket; PLAYER steps into her space, intimately.)

PLAYER. How you make him laugh like that, so easily, Mother? How you make a child laugh?

MOTHER. I got him to sleep, finally.

PLAYER. How old is that boy?

MOTHER. He's eight.

PLAYER. I had eight. I had one eight. I had one 15, 8, 5 and 3.

MOTHER. What happened to them?

(Brief silence.)

PLAYER. Good to see you, Ma.

(Silence.)

PLAYER. Wanna play some cards, Mother? I came to play cards with you. You said you hungry to play cards, last time.

MOTHER. Tell you...there was something I had wanted to tell you...

PLAYER. Let's play some cards, c'mon. I'm shuffling, Mother.

MOTHER. What do you want to play, Sir?

PLAYER. I only know Go Fish.

MOTHER. Christ!

PLAYER. What's the matter with Go Fish, Ma?

MOTHER. It's stupid, you just keep asking for things.

PLAYER. Duh hey, Mother.

MOTHER. Don't you know Casino?

PLAYER. Like Foxywoods?

MOTHER. Fuck! Let's just play Go Fish.

PLAYER. Good idea, Mother.

(PLAYER takes out deck of cards from inside his jacket; for the first time she and PLAYER sit down very close together. MOTHER shuffles and deals.)

PLAYER. You go first, Mother.

MOTHER. Do you have any Jacks?

PLAYER. Sheee-eeet! *(Gives MOTHER a jack.)*

MOTHER. Do you have any eights?

PLAYER. I got no eights, Mother, you can go fish.

(MOTHER draws a card.)

PLAYER. Any tens?

MOTHER. Fish your ass.

(PLAYER *draws a card.*)

MOTHER. Any aces?

PLAYER. Mother you stacked this pile of leaves! (*Gives her a card.*)

MOTHER. Threes.

PLAYER. Cast your bait into the river, Mother. Got any fives?

MOTHER. (*Picking up a card.*) What is *zone defense*?

PLAYER. Pardon?

MOTHER. What does that mean, zone defense?

PLAYER. Oh, man, Mother, you got a ways to go. Zone defense is when you guard an *area* instead of a *man*. Usually, you got your man, Mother, you go one on one with him, wherever he goes you go defending against him. In the zone, you guard an area instead of a person, you just defend whoever comes there, Mother, your man is whoever comes to the zone. Nothin' personal. That's what it is, Mother.

MOTHER. So what are you playing with me, zone defense or the personal kind?

PLAYER. I ain't playin' you, Mother.

MOTHER. My kid's upset when you don't score. I got no fives.

PLAYER. I score, man! I always score! (*Draws a card.*)

MOTHER. You got that technical foul, he was hysterical.

PLAYER. He's got to lay lower, that little man.

MOTHER. I try to tell him...

PLAYER. I figure his mom's sick.

MOTHER. Stop it.

PLAYER. He's got game, that boy.

MOTHER. How do you know? Do you have any kings?

PLAYER. You got me, Mother, I'm the king.

MOTHER. Does he know you? Does my son know you?

PLAYER. Man, he knows me!

MOTHER. He has your picture on his wall.

PLAYER. I know it, Mother.

MOTHER. Won't you see him? I want you to see my boy. His birthday is soon, I haven't gotten anything, I haven't...

PLAYER. So you've gotten me, Mother, right?

MOTHER. Won't you see him?

PLAYER. I see you, I see *him*. He wants an autograph, here, you take this and sign it, I'll tell you how my writing goes.

MOTHER. Why don't you just sign it?

PLAYER. Can't. I can't do it. Now, who won this game, Mother?

MOTHER. Me. A long time ago. Why can't you sign it? Why?

PLAYER. I'm not with you yet in that way, Mother.

MOTHER. What is this, some kind of séance? Come here and take this and sign it for my son.

PLAYER. I could get messed up touching your things, Mother. I don't touch your things, Mother, those the rules.

MOTHER. I want you to sign this for my son.

PLAYER. You sign it, I'll tell you how, I'll describe it to you.

MOTHER. (*Stares at him, uncomprehending:*) Got a pen?

PLAYER. You got pens, you got a whole cup of pens there.

(MOTHER stares at him insensibly. He takes her in. Something drops to another level.)

PLAYER. I had a few minutes.

MOTHER. How nice.

PLAYER. You mean it, Mother, or you just bein' nasty?

MOTHER. I mean it. And I'm being nasty.

PLAYER. Look, Ma. I'm not any better than you are, doin' this.

MOTHER. Oh, this is your first time, too? Coming out of the international spotlight into some obscure woman's living room?

PLAYER. I like being with you, Ma.

MOTHER. You're avoiding me.

PLAYER. No I ain't. I'm confronting you, Mother. I'm closin' on you, Ma.

MOTHER. I never get what I want from you.

PLAYER. You get what you deserve.

MOTHER. According to who?

PLAYER. I want to make you laugh, Ma.

MOTHER. Oh, is that why you came here?

PLAYER. Partly, yes, Mother.

MOTHER. Well you'll have to do better.

PLAYER. Will I?

MOTHER. Yeah, you will.

PLAYER. Then I'll do better. What kind of things you find funny, Ma?

(Silence.)

PLAYER. I can't leave until you laugh, Ma.

MOTHER. Well, take your shoes off. Get comfortable.

PLAYER. Can't do that either, Mother.

MOTHER. You're in a real tough spot, then.

PLAYER. That make two of us, right, then, Mother? The offense and the defense!

(Silence.)

I made a man very happy. Right before he passed. Old dude.

MOTHER. How? How'd you do it?

PLAYER. I told him what a def life he had.

MOTHER. He didn't know that?

PLAYER. He liked it when I told him that, Mother.

MOTHER. Tell me, then. Tell me what a def life I had.

PLAYER. Give me cause, Mother.

MOTHER. *(With a sudden explosiveness:)* Look, what is this, finally, just some kind of Hallmark greeting card bullshit where some big jock comes to some little lady and makes her feel better about dying of cancer?

(Pause.)

PLAYER. You believe in God, Mother?

MOTHER. Yes.

PLAYER. Why?

MOTHER. Because atheism takes too much discipline.

PLAYER. Then let's pray together, Mother.

MOTHER. You want me to *pray* with you? Oh, there's a hot one! *What did you do today, Gladys? Oh, nothing much, said the Hail Mary with a sports star and then baked a strudel!*

PLAYER. We don't got to say the Hail Mary, Mother, we just got to kneel down together and find our own thing.

MOTHER. What will you pray for?

PLAYER. I'll pray for you, Mother.

MOTHER. Then I'll pray for *you*.

PLAYER. Please, will you do that. Will you pray for me, Mother?

MOTHER. Yeah. I'll pray for you.

PLAYER. Okay, kneel down.

MOTHER. That's what all the men say!

PLAYER. Behave, Mother.

MOTHER. Jews don't kneel.

PLAYER. That's what all the bitches say.

(They stare at each other, then kneel awkwardly on the floor.)

Put your hands together, Mother.

(MOTHER starts applauding. PLAYER, in an unprecedented gesture, places his hands right outside hers, stopping her applause, motioning for her to put her hands together. Their hands have almost touched. Then he puts his own hands together in like manner. A pause.)

MOTHER. I hate prayer! The last time I prayed it was for the soul of a lobster dropped into a pot of boiling water that my son felt sorry for! Okay! You start!

(Pause.)

PLAYER. Lord...Lord...we're sitting here, me 'n Mother...and we...we were just wonderin'...see Mother here is sick, and I'm just on a losin' side...see Mother has...what do you have Mother?

MOTHER. Hodgkin's disease.

PLAYER. ...see Mother has Hodgkin's disease, and I...I'm lost, and I'm tryin' to make it back up again...

(Pause.)

MOTHER. Go on! And please tell Him my son wants more pizza.

PLAYER. ...see, I was...I got...I...haven't seen my kids in a coupla years...I don't know how they sound, how they look like...and Mother here, she sees her kid, but she could code on him at any time...could you help us out, O Lord...like we each just on the wrong side of the right thing...help us put this right, if you can, Lord...and Mother, here, she's puttin' on real sarcastic airs, O Lord, please help her to find your path, Lord...and...I guess...*amen*.

MOTHER. *(Laughing:)* Okay, you made me laugh! You can leave now, Father.

PLAYER. *(Hurt:)* You didn't pray for *me*, Mother.

MOTHER. I'll do that when I'm alone.

PLAYER. You alone too much, Mother.

MOTHER. Why don't you ever pray when your team prays?

PLAYER. Please, Ma, when I need any help I'll call for it. The truth is I need help when I'm with you, Ma, you're *aging* me!

MOTHER. That's the vocabulary of God: aging. God's way of gossiping.

PLAYER. Mother...

MOTHER. I am a secular Jew with *no interest in talking about God!* Much less with a *schvartze!*

PLAYER. We've gone past that, Mother...

MOTHER. Past that...

PLAYER. Please, Mother...

MOTHER. (*Wistfully:*) How old are you, you beauty?

PLAYER. Beauty...who you callin' beauty, Ma?

MOTHER. I had this dream...

PLAYER. Talk more about the beauty...

MOTHER. I...I had this dream that I was lying down, and they made me expose my right breast, and there was a whole line of people, and they were allowed to do anything they wanted to that breast, but not to touch any other part of me or to speak to me. And I just lay there. Some people put grass and flowers on my breast, some just traced it with their hands. One little girl put her cheek down on it.

(Brief pause.)

PLAYER. That's what I was thinking.

MOTHER. What? You would have put your cheek down on it?

PLAYER. I think so, Mother. That's what I woulda done.

(They look at each other. Some intimate feeling pours into that silence. They struggle to move on.)

MOTHER. What's Van Gundy like? I liked it when he was coaching.

PLAYER. (*Stares at her, then slowly smiles:*) Oh, snap! You wanna have it off with the little guy! (*Laughs.*) I'll arrange that for you. He's available! He don't even know it! Kind of guy who takes two hours in the bathroom and comes out lookin' worse than when he went in!

MOTHER. Teach me to write your name. Here's my pen.

PLAYER. (*Crouches behind MOTHER; his face is now very close to hers.*) All right, first, start with a curved line, it slants down. No. Erase that. Make the angle steeper, kind of jerky. Yeah. Yeah. Excellent. Now the loop, the loop is under the line, *under the line*, like right under it...smaller, smaller, right! Now it comes up, the front of the letter also has a loop, like it ain't supposed to but it does, like careless like that, yeah, and now down and around, no! Down and around, and don't cross the *t* 'til later, it's a surprise, like a fast break. Yeah! Now the next bit is just a loop and the bigger taller loops, but they stand, like...like

MOTHER. Daffodils in the wind.

PLAYER. Like whatever, dandelions in the wind, yeah, that looks good. That looks good. You do this good.

MOTHER. I'm...I'm glad.

PLAYER. Mother, I like your hands...you got pretty little hands...

MOTHER. You sign it, please, you do it.

PLAYER. I wish I could do it, I'm doing what I can. I wish I could do more, and I wish I could touch your pretty little hands, Mother...

MOTHER. Stop calling me Mother.

PLAYER. ...and put them on *me*, I wish I could put them on me and move them for you, the way I like, I wish I could just take them from you and have four hands, two of yours, two of mine, and then I could learn you a thing or two about basketball, and about other things...

MOTHER. Why are you doing this to me?

PLAYER. I'm just whispering, Mother, I ain't doing...

MOTHER. You *are*...you *are*...you're touching me...you're such a liar...

PLAYER. It's okay, Mother...

MOTHER. Call me by my name!

PLAYER. Doesn't matter sweet Mother...

MOTHER. Let me tell you my name! My son's name!

PLAYER. I know his name, Mother. Your son is my *child*, Mother.

MOTHER. That's bullshit! Stop talking shit!

PLAYER. You want me to tell you how beautiful you are, Mother, I can see that. You want that, Mother, you want that from me, okay, here goes: you're everything beautiful, Mother, a flower in a storm, okay, Mother? Your petals falling off, still sweet, Mother, you could dance in front of a train and make it stop from the sheer stubbornness of your body, Mother, the will of your body, it's that will that I can't shake loose of, Mother. I want to touch that will, I want it, I get lit up by that Mother, I want to touch you...

MOTHER. You can't mean that! You won't help me! You're like all those people! You won't help me! Why won't you help me? Why won't you help me? Get out of here, you're not even here! *Get out of here*, I can't...

PLAYER. Mother...

MOTHER. Stop talking to me, stop it.

(CHILD comes running in; PLAYER instantly disappears and his image is replaced by projection upstage.)

CHILD. They tied the major league records for the least points scored in a half, Mom.

MOTHER. Who?

CHILD. The Bulls.

MOTHER. How many points?

CHILD. Three.

MOTHER. Three? How could they score three points in a half? Did they just go for pizza and come back at the buzzer?

CHILD. No, not three points, Mom, I'm sorry, *nineteen*. They scored only *nineteen* points in the half.

MOTHER. First half or second half?

CHILD. Second half.

MOTHER. Must have been a short game.

CHILD. Stephon Marbury scored 41 points! See! He's good, Mom, he's very good! He had 9 assists in 29 minutes.

MOTHER. How do you always know all these things?

CHILD. I read them and they go into my mind. and they sit down there.

MOTHER. What happens then?

CHILD. The same thing that happens to everything that you get in *your* mind.

MOTHER. And what's that?

CHILD. Well. They...go in your mind and then they...find a place to stay. And they go someplace and then you know where they are and you can get them. Like when we look for my soccer shorts.

MOTHER. But we lose things all the time.

CHILD. That's right, Mom. Some things can't find a place to stay.

MOTHER. So that's what forgetting is?

CHILD. Yeah, I guess so. Mom! Is Wilt Chamberlain dead?

MOTHER. I think so.

CHILD. When did he die?

MOTHER. I have such trouble remembering.

CHILD. No wonder, Mom, if he's dead, because his name is Wilt! Like when you don't water the plants! Can we watch tonight, Mom?

MOTHER. We can watch tonight.

CHILD. (*Growling:*) Meet me at Foxwoods! I'm going to Foxwoods, Mommy!

(TV light. Prayer huddle. Stadium sounds. During the huddle, slowly and miraculously, CHILD wanders past the border of his life and into the world of the PLAYERS. PLAYERS talk quickly; one speaks over another.)

PLAYER 3. What up?

PLAYER 1. Just a minute.

PLAYER 2. Good game.

PLAYER 4. Yeah, good fucking game.

PLAYER 3. What's your problem?

PLAYER 4. Which one, bro?

PLAYER 1. Just a minute, I'm looking it up, I'm sorry it's so lengthy.

PLAYER 3. I got a hottie waiting, she's doing scholarly research.

PLAYER 1. I said just a minute, I got it written down. And thank you all for waiting.

PLAYER 3. J'you see that slam?

PLAYER 4. Everybody saw that slam, my granny in fucking heaven saw that slam.

PLAYER 3. Thought you said you couldn't slam.

PLAYER 4. I said I didn't *want* to.

PLAYER 3. What, you ate your Wheaties?

PLAYER 4. Damn Achilles.

PLAYER 3. Damn

PLAYER 1. Alright, thank you for your patience, it's number 23.

PLAYER 3. Twenty-three.

PLAYER 2. Most beautiful psalm in the Book!

PLAYER 3. Team up!

(Next six lines are almost simultaneous.)

PLAYER 1. *The Lord...*

PLAYER 3. Cross-over dribble, I got it *goin' on!!!!*

PLAYER 4. Coach got a hard-on for that.

PLAYER 3. Yeah, all right!

PLAYER 1. Okay: *The Lord...*

PLAYER 2. Everybody shut up!

(Silence.)

PLAYER 2. Go on, now.

PLAYER 1. Okay, thank you. *The Lord...*

PLAYER 4. Correction: the Land-Lord!

PLAYER 2. Would you *let the man speak!*

PLAYER 4. He can speak.

PLAYER 2. No he can't.

PLAYER 4. Go take a fucking shower!

PLAYER 2. Start again, bro.

PLAYER 1. Okay. Alright. Okay. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie...*

PLAYER 4. What the point if you don't *want?*

PLAYER 3. What you talking about?

PLAYER 4. He don't *want* nothing, what's the point of praying?

PLAYER 2. You pray so you don't want anything.

PLAYER 4. That's stupid!

PLAYER 2. No it's not stupid!

PLAYER. You pray 'cause you WANT something. You lost something, you want something.

PLAYER 2. Need. It means Need. It means you don't need anything. I shall not need anything.

PLAYER 4. Well what if I fucking need stuff?

PLAYER 2. So you need stuff, just keep reading.

PLAYER 1. Wanting stuff hurts, if you don't want stuff, it don't hurt, right?

PLAYER 3. Whatever. It hurt, it don't hurt.

PLAYER 2. Just keep reading.

PLAYER 1. Where was I?

PLAYER 2. You were at the lying down part. You were lying down.

PLAYER 4. Same like usual with him.

PLAYER 1. *...shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

PLAYER 3. Trip to Trinidad, man.

PLAYER 4. Say it, brother

PLAYER 1. *He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

PLAYER 4. Why is it for his name's sake?

PLAYER 3. What's the name thing?

PLAYER 2. Just listen up!

PLAYER 4. This is supposed to be a prayer group, I can ask that!

PLAYER 3. For his name's sake, in other words, so he looks good.

PLAYER 4. Looks good?

PLAYER 2. No, he doesn't care how he looks! It's what happens when you say a name. It brings up faith, it brings up feeling!

PLAYER 3. But if he don't reveal himself, the faith part's fucked up! It's like tryin' to take a woman!

PLAYER 4. I say, Don't play games with me, man. Show yourself, I show myself and we can get on...

PLAYER 2. It plays the other way with God, brother. You talk, He listens.

PLAYER 4. Don't he ever talk?

PLAYER 1. *Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*

CHILD. *(To PLAYER:.) Could I've your autograph?*

PLAYER 1. *(Continuing:.) I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

PLAYER 4. No rod gonna comfort *me*, baby.

CHILD. I'll tell you the prayer for Hanukah!

PLAYER 2. It's nice. Comfort! It's nice, you know, you get someone on your side, someone with you all the time, that's God, you see, that's what he's talking about, that's God!

CHILD. *(Reciting throughout PLAYER 2's speech:.) Baruch atah adonai Elohenu melech ha-olam...asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlick ner shel Hanukah!*

PLAYER 2. You got someone moving you out the way. It's help, man, he's talking about help. Help

PLAYER 4. A good ref.

PLAYER 3. Help, man.

PLAYER 1. *Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely...*

PLAYER 3. Prepare a table for me in front of my enemies! What?

PLAYER 4. So like, what, you're in the middle of a scrimmage and all of a sudden a keg of beer and some franks and shit appears, and you're just chowing down right there, music, women...

CHILD. *(Again, singing simultaneously with PLAYER 2's speech:) Ba-ruch atah adonai! Elohenu melech ha'olam! Asher kidishanu bimitzvotav, v'tzivanu l'hadlich ner shel Hanukah!*

PLAYER 2. Yeah, but the important thing is, you get to eat it. You get fed right in front of the enemy. The enemy's hungry, he can eat too, you supposed to offer him some too, he can't hurt you no more. With God, you eat right now, right in front of the enemy!

PLAYER 3. How you even *know* it's the enemy, man, if you sittin' there havin' lunch with 'im?

PLAYER 2. That's the point! That's healing! That's God!

PLAYER 4. That's God?

PLAYER 2. Call Him by His righteous name!

PLAYER 1. *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life...*

CHILD. You know, my mother, her whole childhood, she thought that three women were following her all the time, everywhere she went, even in the bathroom. Surely Goodness and Mercy. She used to look over her shoulder all the time, these three ladies, she thought they were walking behind her all the time.

PLAYER 1. *...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Amen.

PLAYER 4. So what does all that mean?

PLAYER 2. You don't let him read, you chop it up with questions and comments.

PLAYER 3. It's peaceful man, it's about peace on Earth.

PLAYER 4. No it ain't.

PLAYER 2. What then?

PLAYER 4. It's about FUCK YOU, it's about, *don't fuck with me*. It's about being *protected* for a change by the God that made you, that's what it's about. You walk around, anyone can take you down, anyone, and he says here that won't be allowed to happen, he won't let that happen, man. I'm tired of all of this, because I look one way, I

look like a healthy man, I'm a strong black man, that means I'm just a body, right, I got no shame or no conscience, right, I run up and down and I sweat, and I get it down, I put the shot down, everybody can get me, I got no right to hide or keep myself, anyone can write about me or say what they want, I can't stand still, moving, I got to keep moving, on the court, off the court, moving all the time, never stops, can't stop or they look at you, they say things, the talking, that's the worst, they shoot bullets of talking at you.

PLAYER 2. It's supposed to calm you down.

PLAYER 4. I want to want things, I don't want to stop wanting things, it *motivates* my ass.

PLAYER 2. Yeah, it's not about that.

PLAYER 3. Read it again! ...Yeah, read it again.

PLAYER 1. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

PLAYER 3. Team up!

CHILD. May I...have your autograph?

(Freeze; then:)

PLAYERS and CHILD:

I refuse

I refuse to lose

I refuse to fail

I refuse to die

I refuse to be afraid

I refuse to be taken

I refuse

(PLAYER runs into MOTHER's space.)

MOTHER. Why didn't you give him what he wanted?

PLAYER. He doesn't want me, Mother.

MOTHER. I don't want you either.

PLAYER. I'm going, then.

MOTHER. When will you be back?

PLAYER. I'm here right now, Mother, why you ask me about later?

MOTHER. Because I think you should leave right now.

PLAYER. Why?

MOTHER. Because I don't want to talk to you right now.

PLAYER. What do you want to do with me, Mother?

MOTHER. What?

PLAYER. You look at me the way white women look at black men, Mother, all the time, you look at me that way.

MOTHER. What's that supposed to mean?

PLAYER. You know what I mean, Mother.

MOTHER. I can't deal with this right now.

PLAYER. ...like I'm from a foreign country, Mother, another world, a world that's less than your world, Mother, but you want a piece of it anyway, don't you? You pretend it's for the boy but it's for *you*...

MOTHER. No! I don't want anything!

PLAYER. You so angry all the time, Mother. Is it because you sick? Because you sick, Mother? That's not why! You afraid you gonna die, Mother? Why you so pissed off all the time, Mother? Mothers supposed to be gentle. My mother was a gentlewoman.

MOTHER. Don't you fucking tell me how a mother's supposed to be!

PLAYER. Why'd you call me here, Mother?

MOTHER. Why'd you come?

PLAYER. You pent-up, Mother, you lost, you goin' a bad way here, Mother, just shut up, you shut up...

MOTHER. *You shut up!* Where the fuck are *your* kids, if you're such a paragon of parenthood?

(Buzzer sounds, indicating the end of a 24-second shot period; the beginning of a new one. The twenty-four second shot clock suddenly appears and begins to count down. PLAYER and MOTHER have 24 seconds to get their arguments across before the shot clock cuts them off.)

PLAYER. Jew. Jew bitch. Everything, you people want everything, you cry about the murders, the big murders, who was murdered, all those children, you show pictures of children and women in scarves, what about the ghetto, what about that, what about the boys being shot, what about the boys rotting in a jail somewhere, what about the cops stopping my brothers and beating the shit out of them in front of their sons, what about the dreams their sons have of their fathers crying and holding their nuts, what about that, who are these assholes in the picture, who are...

(Shot clock expires; buzzer sounds; shot clock resets.)

MOTHER. What is the matter with you? Why are you saying this to ME? Who the hell marched with you down that road with what's his name? You're really fucked up, you're misinformed! I'm tired of defending myself to the likes of you! It's always *poor you!* Why don't you just step up? Why don't you take care of your kids? Why do you have to run away from every God damned thing that makes a life whole and meaningful? And then blame it on slavery! The Jews were slaves for years! At least we've got some leaders! We've got people who step up, we educate our kids, we...

(Shot clock expires; buzzer sounds; shot clock resets.)

PLAYER. It's all Jews in the movies. They tried to get me to make a movie and I got some Jewboy trying to tell me there's no money, I got no rights, I got no this, no that, I got no right, I got to build an image well, yo, Jewboy, I *got* an image, that's why we talkin' right now. You fuck yourself and your big image I got enough boyz, I got enough body I got enough image and money for you and all your Jewboy Boyfriends you suck off in the bathroom, I got up and I

booked on that boy, that big Jewboy with the big office and the wife and kids on the beach and the big phone book and the golf boys at the country club, you can only fuck me so much before I...

(Shot clock expires; buzzer sounds; shot clock resets.)

MOTHER. My sister was on the subway and the train got stuck between stops and this black guy puts on his big boom box to some rap tune called GET MO' FROM THE HO! And everyone on that car had to listen to GET MO' FROM THE HO! Just blasting! She's standing up, she didn't even have a seat, much less GET MO' FROM THE HO! Now that was an act of terrorism! An act of violence! If you just see women as HO's why don't you save yourself the clap and stay home! Why don't you fight for your fucking life the way I'm fighting for mine, why don't you...

(Buzzer starts sounding and sounds throughout the final five lines of this scene.)

PLAYER. You left it to me, Mother, you think you're fighting for your life, *I'm* fighting for your life, Mother, you barely raising an arm!

MOTHER. I can fight for my own life!

PLAYER. All talk, Mother.

MOTHER. Just shut up...

PLAYER. Arms up on D, Mother!

(Buzzer finally stops. PLAYER and MOTHER stand in silence. It is lengthy and rich and regenerate.)

PLAYER. Mother, you use words to play basketball. You can't use words to play basketball.

MOTHER. No I don't.

PLAYER. Yes, you do! You do, Mother! You use words. That don't work, Mother! Step out! It don't work on the floor, your words, you got to learn that.

MOTHER. I don't have to. I don't have to learn that!

PLAYER. You gotta tank the talk, Mother. You gotta earn it, Mother, you gotta shut up.

MOTHER. I can't...

PLAYER. Yes...

MOTHER. No, no, I can't. I don't...I can't! I don't have anything else.

PLAYER. Shit, you *do*, Mother! Use your body, Mother, use your body, get on up Mother and *use* it!

MOTHER. That's not...

PLAYER. Use your arm, Mother, strong right arm, look at it! Look at your arm, Mother, look at it! Do it!

(MOTHER can't tear her eyes away from his.)

PLAYER. *Look*, I told you Mother, look at your arm!

(She looks.)

PLAYER. Strong right arm, Mother, use it!

MOTHER. It has scars from the treatment.

PLAYER. Me too, Mother, I got scars from the treatment, I am a badass motherfucker in the paint, Mother, use your right arm! Mother, *use* your hips, you *use* your ass, you got a BABY out that ass, mother, *use it!*

(MOTHER stands there. PLAYER comes over and brings MOTHER onto "playing floor," throws a basketball forcefully into her hands. MOTHER stares at him, starts dribbling.)

PLAYER. Stay low, mother, head and shoulders, shoulder with the part, ahead of your back, watch your back, Mother, eyes in back of your head, protect the ball, Mother, protect the ball!

(He defends against her, blocking her way, hovering over her.)

Cross over, Mom, use the cross-over dribble, powerful move, Mother, Alan Iverson's move, don't let me touch you, Mother. I'm in your way, Mother! In your way, you gotta snatch and turn, Mother, Mother listen! Bring the ball up and in to your body and

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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