

TO KNOW HIM

CHARACTERS

Penny, Around 30

Rick, 54

Harry, Around 75

The place is a hospital room in Manhattan

The time is the late summer, early fall of 1996

ACT I

Scene 1 Tuesday

Scene 2 Friday

Scene 3 Tuesday

Scene 4 Friday

Scene 5 Tuesday

ACT II

Scene 6 Friday

Scene 7 Tuesday

Scene 8 Friday

Scene 9 Tuesday

Scene 10 Sunday sometime later

Scene 1 Tuesday

(A hospital room. Rick is in bed. Penny enters)

PENNY:

Excuse me, do you mind if I come in?

RICK:

She took the tray already.

PENNY:

No, I --

RICK:

You looking for Roland?

PENNY:

Who?

RICK:

Roland, the guy that was in the next bed.

PENNY:

Oh, no, I wasn't looking for anyone --

RICK:

'Cause he died this morning. So if you're looking for him, you're looking in the wrong place.

PENNY:

Oh, I'm sorry.

RICK:

Me too. A man of infinite jest was Roland. Although it was more like infinite tubes in the end...and in the mouth and in the side. Anyway, now he's in the Happy Hunting Ground.

PENNY:

Oh. (Beat) Was he an Indian, I mean a Native American?

RICK:

Roland Jablonski? I doubt it.

PENNY:

(Beat) Well, are you?

RICK:

Is that what you're looking for, an Indian? Are you writing some kind of grant?

PENNY:

No, it's just that phrase you used, "happy hunting ground."

RICK:

Well, here on death row you find you rapidly exhaust the euphemisms, and their ethnic origins seem curiously irrelevant, wouldn't you say?

PENNY:

I never thought...

RICK:

No, why would you. So, who are you looking for?

PENNY:

I'm looking for Richard Goldstein.

RICK:

I'm Richard Goldstein. What can I do for you?

PENNY:

Actually, I came to ask you that. My name is Penny Feingold. I'm a rabbi. I'm doing the chaplaincy service for the hospital.

RICK:

(Beat as he stares at her) You're a rabbi?

PENNY:

Yes. Women have been admitted to the rabbinate for years now.

RICK:

I know that, but kindergarteners? Don't you have to be at least thirteen?

PENNY:

I'm at least thirteen. Is there something I can do for you?

RICK:

No thanks. I gave at the office.

PENNY:

I'm not asking you to give anything, I'm --

RICK:

Yes, you are. You're asking me to give you my faith, which, like euphemisms, is in rather short supply on death row, thank you very much.

PENNY:

You don't have to give me, or anyone, your faith. I'm just asking if you want anything.

RICK:

The nurses and doctors give me everything my little heart desires. (Like a commercial endorsement) That's why, when I'm dying, I always stay at St. Lukes Hospital. Sholom aleichem, aleichem sholom.

PENNY:

Look, Mr. Goldstein, I certainly didn't mean to disturb you. The chaplaincy department has us come in to reach out to Jewish patients who --

RICK:

What makes you think I'm Jewish?

PENNY:

Oh. Sorry. You are Richard Goldstein?

RICK:

Yes.

PENNY:

And you're on my list, so I assumed --

RICK:

I'm an atheist.

PENNY:

Oh. (Beat) Well then, which god is it that you *don't* believe in?

RICK:

Whatever you got. Why don't you see if you can get Voltaire to come down. The only chaplain I'm interested in seeing is Charlie. You can go.

PENNY:

(Beat) Okay. (Big sigh, then more to herself) Boy, I'm not off to a very good start.
(Starts to leave)

RICK:

Hold on. What was that?

PENNY:

I said I'm not off to a very good start.

RICK:

What do you mean "start?"

PENNY:

I'm just starting today, you're my first patient. It's part of my training.

RICK:

Training?

PENNY:

I'm not really a rabbi yet. Soon, (to herself) I hope.

RICK:

Oh. Are you being graded for this visit?

PENNY:

Only by myself.

RICK:

I know the feeling. Look, you're very sweet and you tried real hard and if you're right and I'm wrong I'll be seeing the big boy real soon and I'll put in a good word for you.

PENNY:

Thanks. Might be a big girl, you know.

RICK:

Right. Whatever the gender.

PENNY:

Nothing? A glass of water, a newspaper.

RICK:

I can get that from the nurses, thanks.

PENNY:

There's nothing I can get you? My days are Tuesday and Friday. Something from the outside?

RICK:

No thanks.

PENNY:

Isn't there anything you need?

RICK:

Yeah, a miracle.

PENNY:

Now you're talking my language. I can pray for you.

RICK:

You're beginning to annoy me again.

PENNY:

Good, I thought I was losing my touch. (Sighs) I feel better now, knowing I can do something for you.

RICK:

(Sarcastic) Ah, you feel better. Well then, this has been a very successful visit, hasn't it.

PENNY:

You'll feel better too, 'cause that's what I'll pray for. See you Friday.

RICK:

I count the hours.

(Penny starts to leave)

RICK:

I don't want you praying for me.

PENNY:

(Coming back) What?

RICK:

I don't want you --

PENNY:

No, I heard you, I was just -- why?

RICK:

'Cause I don't believe in it. It's hypocritical.

PENNY:

It's just prayer.

RICK:

It's an intrusion into my life, all right? It's an invasion of my privacy -- I don't know, I just don't like it. You want to pray for somebody, pray for Roland. Can't do him any harm, he's already bought it.

PENNY:

Why do you think prayer would do anybody any harm?

RICK:

Because it gets in the way of action. Because people rely on it instead of taking responsibility for their lives. Because it's nonsense, it's fantasy.

PENNY:

I could understand that if I was asking you to pray. But how does it hurt you if I pray for you?

RICK:

Because you're not praying for me, you're praying for yourself. If you want to get your wings, go look for George Bailey.

(There is a silence)

PENNY:

George Bailey? Get my wings?

RICK:

You never saw *It's A Wonderful Life*? Kids today.

PENNY:

I saw it. I'm not sure I understand the connection though.

RICK:

Well, it's coming on Christmas; you can watch it again -- and again and again and again --

PENNY:

Are you in film?

RICK:

In a way.

PENNY:

Oh. What do you do?

RICK:

When I'm not busy dying, I teach.

PENNY:

What?

RICK:

The History of the Cinema, or as my students call it: Goldstein's Golden Oldies.

PENNY:

Oh, that's great. Where?

RICK:

NYU.

PENNY:

Do you like it?

RICK:

Do I like what? Film, history, NYU?

PENNY:

Teaching.

RICK:

Well, it beats learning any day.

PENNY:

Why is that?

RICK:

You get to control the flow of information.

PENNY:

I like that image. Control the flow.

RICK:

What you can't control are the students, who seem to have no interest in any movie made before *Mystic Pizza*.

PENNY:

Uh-huh. That's like my friend, who isn't Jewish, she took a bible study course and the students there had absolutely no interest in anything before the New Testament.

RICK:

Right, I see the parallel.

PENNY:

Control the flow, that's a nice image. Rabbis do that too.

RICK:

There's a difference between information and superstition.

PENNY:

Whatever, but when you're in front of the congregation, there is a flow of energy. That's what prayer can get you in touch with.

RICK:

That's what prayer gets *you* in touch with.

PENNY:

I get the sense I'm striking out here.

RICK:

You want to play in the big leagues, you got to learn to hit the curve ball. Hey, you gave it the old Yeshiva try. Close, but no latkes.

(There is a long silence as Penny just stands there)

PENNY:

I'm sorry. In class they said if the patient doesn't want help, you just leave.

RICK:

Once again we see the wisdom of ancient Talmudic thinking.

PENNY:

But --

RICK:

But what?

PENNY:

I don't know but what yet.

RICK:

Butwhatyet? Is that Yiddish? Look -- what's your name?

PENNY:

Penny. Penny Feingold.

RICK:

Look, Penny, I'm willing to bet there are dozens of patients in this hospital who would love to have you do things for them. Don't waste your time with me.

PENNY:

That's the point. I don't feel like I'm wasting my time. I just don't want to waste your time.

RICK:

Well, don't worry. That's something I managed to be able to do for myself for fifty years, you could hardly make it worse.

PENNY:

Unless I prayed for you, somehow that would make it worse.

RICK:

Somehow.

PENNY:

See, that's what I don't understand. Why?

RICK:

Because it's senseless. What are we going to pray for, some kind of eternal peace?

PENNY:

If you want.

RICK:

But that's the problem. Once you know the ending, sitting through the film becomes meaningless and futile and boring.

PENNY:

We can pray for a second feature.

RICK:

Oh, please.

PENNY:

Coming attractions? Okay. But I'm not giving up on you.

RICK:

No, you can let me handle that. Does that mean you're planning on coming back?

PENNY:

Yes?

RICK:

No. This is a rabbi free zone.

PENNY:

(Beat) How about a deal? I come one more time, we see how it goes.

RICK:

What kind of deal is that? What's in it for me?

PENNY:

You get another chance to make fun of me.

RICK:

Why would I care about that?

PENNY:

The challenge.

RICK:

You flatter yourself.

PENNY:

See, it's irresistible.

RICK:

(Beat) What is that list? (The list Penny referred to before)

PENNY:

Excuse me? Oh, this list, uh, it's the names of the people I'm supposed to visit.

RICK:

It's more than just me, right?

PENNY:

Oh, sure.

RICK:

So what do you care?

PENNY:

You mean about coming back here? I don't know.

RICK:

Ah, that clears it up. It's just another butwhatyet.

PENNY:

But that's always been a -- forgive me -- sign for me. I'm very drawn to the things I don't understand. That's why I got into the rabbinate. Plus, I have a feeling about you, I don't know what it is but it feels like it would be wrong to just give up.

RICK:

The challenge.

PENNY:

You flatter yourself. Sorry, nasty rejoinders runs in my family.

RICK:

Don't apologize. That was the first interesting thing you said.

PENNY:

What, about feeling wrong to give up?

RICK:

Nah, that was boring. But getting feisty with me, that I liked.

PENNY:

God, you're just like my father. Look, you seem to like a good discussion, I'll come by on my rounds and we'll bat around religion or God or Judaism or prayer. As soon as I get boring, you can kick me out. What do you think?

RICK:

I think you just got boring.

PENNY:

Think of it like *The Seventh Seal*, where the knight challenges Death to a chess game, and as long as he keeps the game going, he gets to stay alive. As long as I keep your interest, I can stay.

RICK:

I think you got the roles reversed.

PENNY:

Oh, God, I'm sorry. That was a stupid example --

RICK:

You know your film.

PENNY:

I'm really sorry, I didn't mean --

RICK:

Never mind about that. You like movies?

PENNY:

Sure, big time. My father took me to the movies every Saturday afternoon until I was sixteen. We went to Theatre 80 St. Marks, the New Yorker, the Ascot, the Elgin; I've even been to the Mecca of movie theaters, the Thalia. (Beat) What do you think?

RICK:

I think the St. Marks had the best candy.

PENNY:

About my coming around.

RICK:

And we're going to argue religion? That's part of your chaplaincy training?

PENNY:

I'll transfer to missionary school. We can talk film if you'd rather. You might even be able to teach me something. What about it?

RICK:

I don't think so.

PENNY:

Okay. I got another idea that might make it fun for you. You ask me as tough a movie trivia question as you like. If I answer it, I stay; if I can't, I go.

RICK:

(Sarcastically) Oh, yes, that does sound like great fun.

PENNY:

Don't even make up your mind now. Think it over, I'll pop my head in on Friday and you can say yes or no.

RICK:

Save yourself the trip.

PENNY:

I'll be in the neighborhood anyway. Now, as I recall, you asked for a miracle. As it happens, I might be doing lunch with God tomorrow, what size miracle do you usually take?

RICK:

50 short, at least 50 seems short now.

PENNY:

What about color?

RICK:

Basic white will do, as in white blood cells.

PENNY:

That's easy. Be fruitful and multiply. See how things work out, we start right "in the beginning."

RICK:

Wrong, rabbi. (As a one note chant) "This is a picture that ends in the middle for the benefit of the people that came in in the middle."

PENNY:

(Continuing) "This, this is the end." That's Danny Kaye, The Lobby Number from his debut film *Up In Arms*, the recorded version. (Big smile) Still think I'm boring?

RICK:

(Rick makes a face he makes frequently. It consists of extending his lower lip, raising his eyebrows and grunting a high-pitched hmp) I wish I had you in my class.

PENNY:

Well, you do now. See you Friday. (Leaves, comes back in) And try to make 'em tougher than that.

(Penny exits)

end of scene

Scene 2. Friday

(Rick is reading a magazine. Penny half enters)

PENNY:

Yes? No?

(Without even looking at her, Rick throws the magazine at her)

PENNY:

That was a no. (As she turns and leaves) Definitely a no.

end of scene

Scene 3. Tuesday

(Rick is reaching for the phone. It is just beyond his reach, and he is in too much discomfort to shift his body. He reaches and as Penny appears he pulls his arm back)

PENNY:

(Inching in cautiously, shielding herself) Hello. It's me again.

RICK:

The second coming. Notify the Lubovitchers immediately.

PENNY:

Third coming, actually. (Indicating table) Did you need something?

RICK:

You're starting in again?

PENNY:

Sorry, I saw you --

RICK:

The phone.

PENNY:

You can give it your best shot, but I don't think the cord's long enough to reach me.

RICK:

I'm not going to throw it at you.

PENNY:

(Hands him the receiver) Can I dial it for you?

RICK:

Dial 9 718-543-7782.

PENNY:

(As she dials) 8 2?

RICK:

8 2 Bruté. (He listens for awhile. Then, into phone) Go fuck yourself. (Extends receiver back to Penny) Hang up please.

PENNY:

(Not taking receiver, a little dumbfounded) That's all --

RICK:

Hang up the goddamn phone.

PENNY:

Okay, okay. (She does)

RICK:

You practically beg me to let you do something for me, I ask for one little thing and you fuck it up.

PENNY:

What did I do?

RICK:

I worked all morning on that message. It was perfectly phrased, very lyrical. Now when he plays it back it's going to have all this extraneous junk on it. Completely lose its impact.

PENNY:

Sorry -- I think.

RICK:

You're sorry, trust me. Okay; you did me a favor, mission accomplished. You can go.

PENNY:

You didn't even give me a chance to be boring.

RICK:

I thought about what you said the last time.

PENNY:

What did I say? "Yes, no" and you threw the New Yorker at me. Not even the current one, I might add.

RICK:

The time before that. I don't like being a challenge. It makes me feel like sixty home runs or the four minute mile, just waiting to be broken. I'm broken enough right now.

PENNY:
And it's nothing I can help?

RICK:
No. Not even if I wanted help. (Waving goodbye) *Proschai* Damasch.

PENNY:
Excuse me?

RICK:
Proschai, that's Russian for farewell.

PENNY:
It is? I thought it was like *da svedanya* or something.

RICK:
That's goodbye. *Proschai* is a more permanent goodbye.

PENNY:
Oh. You speak Russian?

RICK:
Only what I learned in the movies. *Proschai* Damasch I learned from *Alexander Nevsky*, which I assume you saw with your father.

PENNY:
Actually, no.

RICK:
No? Shame on him. That's an important film

PENNY:
Proschai Damasch? What's Damasch, good riddance?

RICK:
Damasch is one of Nevsky's generals. When he gets killed by the Germans, Nevsky covers his fallen body and says: *Proschai* Damasch.

PENNY:
Oh. Was that my question?

RICK:
What question?

PENNY:
The movie trivia question.

RICK:
Oh, please.

PENNY:
You don't have one?

RICK:
(Starts to speak but can't remember her name)

PENNY:
Penny.

RICK:
Penny, what's the point, really?

PENNY:
It would give me some personal satisfaction, all right? I don't like leaving a loser.

RICK:
You're not a loser -- all right, ummm, what later to be famous TV actor plays the 10 year old boy who sells Humphrey Bogart the winning lottery ticket in *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*?

PENNY:
Are you serious?

RICK:
See, I knew you would never --

PENNY:
Robert Blake. I'm sure you can do better than that. Don't you wanna give it another try, say maybe next Friday?

RICK:
Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?

PENNY:
Peter O'Toole in *Becket*. They're getting easier.

RICK:

I don't get it. Do you have a quota? Do you get extra credit for tough cases? Why are you beating your head against a wall like this? I'm not religious, I don't like religion, I don't believe in prayer. What difference do I make to you?

PENNY:

I told you, I don't know. It's part of the spiritual package, I guess. I feel something is right and I pursue it, then afterwards I figure it out.

RICK:

I tell you what, you want to do something for me? Figure it out right now. Explain to me why you're here, and if I buy it you can stay.

PENNY:

(She thinks awhile) I can't do that.

RICK:

What?

PENNY:

I'm not allowed to. It's against the rules.

RICK:

Ah, yes, one of the things I love best about religion. Commandment 6(a): Thou shalt not explain anything.

PENNY:

No, the chaplaincy rules, we're not supposed to talk about ourselves. I can't explain it without talking about myself. Sorry. Shit, this is hard. Maybe I'd better go.

RICK:

What kind of rule is that?

PENNY:

It's their rules, I don't know.

RICK:

Well, I have my own rules and my rules say that if you don't talk about yourself, you have to go.

PENNY:

(Confused) I *am* going.

RICK:

Ah, yes, but you were going because you didn't want to break their rules. Now, because you're breaking my rules, I'm kicking you out.

PENNY:

(Still confused) Oh. What's the difference?

RICK:

What's the difference? Getting kicked out of a hospital room by a dying man? Just think of what that will do to your karma.

PENNY:

If you're so anxious to get rid of me, why do you care about me talking about myself?

RICK:

Because God is boring and religion is boring and social workers by any name are boring and dying is boring, but there is at least one chance in a million that you, if you talk about yourself, might be interesting. That's a gamble I'm willing to take. Gambling's big here on Death Row.

PENNY:

(Beat) I'm not a social worker, you know.

RICK:

Right, right. So, here you are, faced with a moral dilemma of biblical proportion. God's rules or mine?

PENNY:

It's not God's rules, it's just the chaplaincy class -- all right, just don't tell anyone.

RICK:

Not even in my prayers?

PENNY:

So, let me see. Why do I want to keep coming here?

(Penny makes a serious thinking face as Rick sings the Jeopardy theme)

PENNY:

I think it's because I'm a shoulder?

RICK:

Shoulder?

PENNY:

Yeah, don't you ever think of yourself as a part of the body?

RICK:

Frequently, usually the parts just below the belt, front or back, depending on my mood.

PENNY:

Anyway, I'm a shoulder. When I was still in junior high school --

RICK:

Last year.

PENNY:

-- I found that my friends just naturally wanted to share their problems with me, teenagers have a lot of problems, and so it was like I was a shoulder they could cry on, and they always felt better after, and usually the problems went away.

RICK:

So that's your miracle? I'm going to cry on your shoulder and my problems will go away?

PENNY:

No. See, I learned a few years later that I wasn't such a good shoulder after all.

RICK:

Oh?

PENNY:

Yeah. That was when my father was having problems with my mother. He's like you in a way -- not that I know you -- and sometimes I wonder how well I know him -- but anyway he's real smart and sassy and loves to fight. But mostly he didn't want my help, didn't want my shoulder. (Beat) So where am I going with this? I guess I still think I could have made a difference. (There is a beat of self-awareness) That's not a very good reason for inflicting myself on you, is it? (Big sigh) I can see why they have that rule. Oh, well, at least I figured it out. Thanks.

RICK:

You'll get a bill.

PENNY:

(Getting ready to leave) Good luck.

RICK:
There you go praying again.

PENNY:
Good luck is a prayer?

RICK:
It's a secular prayer.

PENNY:
You don't even believe in luck?

RICK:
When something deserts you, you lose your faith in it. Look -- (He pauses trying to remember her name)

PENNY:
Penny.

RICK:
Penny, right. Look, Penny, you get points for talking about yourself and points for being into film and really, I don't get visitors so I guess I don't mind if you look in from time to time --

PENNY:
Great.

RICK:
-- but not if you come here as a shoulder, and definitely not if you come as a rabbi.

PENNY:
Oh. (Beat) Hnh. I don't think I can do it that way.

RICK:
Why not?

PENNY:
Because if I'm going to make a difference in your life, I'll need every tool I have.

RICK:
That's exactly what I don't want, people walking in here with agendas thinking

somehow they're going to make a difference.

PENNY:

Isn't that how everybody walks into everybody's life?

RICK:

I don't think so. Maybe that happens sometimes by accident, but most people walk into things thinking: What's in it for me.

PENNY:

Right. Making a difference in someone else's life, in your life, is what's in it for me. I have no idea what's in it for you but you're real smart and I'm sure you can think of something.

RICK:

And you don't think you can make a difference without religion, without prayer?

PENNY:

No, I don't. This is the scariest thing I've ever done in my life. I have no intention of facing Frank Miller without my gun, no matter what Grace Kelly says. (Extends an upward palm to Rick as in What's the reference?)

RICK:

High Noon. Please. (As in: Don't insult me)

PENNY:

(Beat) What did your first day of teaching feel like? Were you afraid?

RICK:

Yes.

PENNY:

Of failing?

RICK:

Yes.

PENNY:

Of the kids thinking you were an idiot?

RICK:

Yes.

PENNY:

What got you through that day?

RICK:

You're assuming I got through that day. (Beat) The movies. What got me through was knowing my kids were soon going to be experiencing something amazing that would change them forever.

PENNY:

Exactly. Boy, you're easy to talk to. See, prayer can do that too. When my parents used to have at each other -- I'm talking about myself again, I should get a few more points -- I would run into my room, desperately wanting to be someplace else; not in that room, not in that house, not in that family. It was very painful listening to them, until I found that prayer could take me away, transport me.

RICK:

Exactly. That's what prayer always does, transports you away from reality. Did your prayers stop your parents from fighting?

PENNY:

No.

RICK:

See.

PENNY:

Only their divorce did that. But my prayers gave me the strength to get through having to listen to that awful fighting. That's why it's a tool I don't want to give up.

RICK:

Well, it's the wrong tool for this job. You can't tighten screws with a hammer. (Beat) How old were you when he left?

PENNY:

Sixteen.

RICK:

You're probably better off. At least the fighting stopped.

PENNY:

Not to mention that I all of a sudden found myself with a lot of free time on my hands on Saturday afternoons.

RICK:

Hmn. I guess silence can also be painful to listen to.

PENNY:

Sometimes. Sometimes in the silence I can hear God's voice.

RICK:

You and Melville. Well, if it works for you, fine. I've gotten used to stronger painkillers.

PENNY:

Look, I just talked a bunch about myself, so you can see how good I am at following your rules. You say you don't want me to pray for you, I agree. But I'd like the freedom to try to change your mind.

RICK:

Aren't you afraid I might change yours?

PENNY:

Nah, I got God on my side. So, what's the verdict? Can I come back Friday?

RICK:

Well --

PENNY:

Tell you what -- talk about breaking rules -- I'll leave you my number and you can leave me a message.

RICK:

How do you know I didn't already leave you one?

PENNY:

(Buying it for a second) That was for me--? No, I don't believe you. How would you get my number? You're teasing me.

RICK:

Right, I was teasing you.

PENNY:

If you don't mind my asking, who was it for?

RICK:
George Steinbrenner.

PENNY:
I don't think so. A Mets fan, I gather.

RICK:
No, just a Yankee hater.

PENNY:
Oh, how come?

RICK:
Well, little girl, there used to be a place called Ebbets Field, but that was before your time. Look, Peggy --

PENNY:
Penny.

RICK:
Penny, I'm beginning to think this is not such a good idea.

PENNY:
It's not. It's a terrible idea. I always have terrible ideas.

RICK:
I don't think you realize what you're letting yourself in for.

PENNY:
(Ala Bette Davis) Fasten your seat belts, kids, it's going to be a bumpy night.

RICK:
(He smiles. Beat) Poke your head in Friday. We'll give it one more shot.

PENNY:
Great. (She gets ready to leave) I'll poke a shoulder in so you'll recognize me. (She leaves and comes back in, goes over to end table and moves phone closer to him) In case you want to reach out and touch someone. (She leaves)

end of scene

Scene 4. Friday

(Lights up and the bed is empty. Penny enters, sees the bed empty and becomes anxious)

PENNY:
Richard. Richard.

RICK:
(From bathroom) I'm in here.

PENNY:
Oh, thank god.

RICK:
I warned you about praying. I'll be out in a second.

PENNY:
(Checking her beeper) Can I use your phone?

RICK:
(From off) In *Duck Soup* Groucho is made president of Fredonia. What's the name of the country with which Fredonia --

PENNY:
Sylvania.

RICK:
-- goes to war.

PENNY:
Can I use your phone?

RICK:
Yes.

PENNY:
(Dials) What do you want? (Beat) Is that why you called? I don't have time for that now, I'm working. (Beat) Pop, I don't -- of course I know. (Beat) Walter Brennan in *To Have and Have Not*. Are you happy now? (Beat) I don't want to give you one, I don't have the time now. Just tell me what you want. (Beat) His birthday is next month, why do you have to wait until January? (Beat) I can see you have a lot of influence at your synagogue, do they even know who you are? (Beat) What kind of

problems is he having? (Beat) Well, maybe if you took him to shul once in awhile instead of to the movies he might be more interested in his bar mitzvah. (Beat) I can't do that. (Beat) Because I'm too busy tutoring my own students. (Beat) Half brother. (Beat) *He* wants my help? Forget it, pop, I don't have the time. (Beat) Look, I can't argue with you about this now, I'm working. (Beat) I don't have the time, pop, okay? (Beat) Bye. (She hangs up the phone. She is very disturbed and she sits and starts to meditate)

(Rick enters and looks at her for awhile)

RICK:

That looks suspiciously like praying.

PENNY:

(Without changing her position) I'm not praying. I'm meditating.

RICK:

I tried that. My ex-roommate was into it. He said the trick is to let your mind relax by thinking about nothing. I couldn't do it, so I tried to think of just a wall like George Sanders in -- (He makes a gesture to Penny to fill in the blank and she answers without breaking her pose and without missing a beat)

PENNY:

Village of the Damned.

RICK:

-- but I got caught up in counting the bricks. Worked for him, though.

PENNY:

(Still in meditation position) George Sanders? Didn't he get blown up?

RICK:

My roommate.

PENNY:

(Coming out of it) Ah, that's better, much better.

RICK:

Rough day?

PENNY:

This is hard work, this chaplaincy. With the other people I see, we sit, we talk, we pray, we cry, we kvell, whatever. But all the time I'm being a chaplain, observing the

rules of chaplaincy. It's very uncomfortable, like wearing heels. Here I can just be myself.

RICK:
Which is not hard work.

PENNY:
No, it's very hard work. It's just I can do it without thinking.

RICK:
Like meditating.

PENNY:
Yeah, kind of. (Beat) So, what's the verdict? Can I stay? I answered the question, such as it was.

RICK:
What do you mean such as it was?

PENNY:
You haven't asked me anything difficult yet. Even my father can do better than that.

RICK:
I've been taking it easy on you.

PENNY:
Why?

RICK:
Because you're a girl.

(Penny glares at him)

RICK:
It's a joke, son. (Beat) You answered the question, you can stay.

PENNY:
Good.

RICK:
Plus, I want the satisfaction of stumping you.

PENNY:
Uh-huh.

RICK:
So, nu?

PENNY:
What?

RICK:
Where's that miracle you promised?

PENNY:
Oh, that. It's in the mail.

RICK:
First you ask me to believe in God and now you ask me to believe in the post office?

PENNY:
Another test of faith.

RICK:
Unfortunately, rabbi, this is not a test. (Beat) Tell me, how long are you supposed to do this for?

PENNY:
What do you mean?

RICK:
This chaplaincy gig. A month? Two months?

PENNY:
To the end of the term.

RICK:
So you're terminal too.

PENNY:
Very funny. Is that what they call sick humor?

RICK:
You're a lot sassier today than you were last week.

PENNY:

(Referring to her papers) Chaplaincy 101. How to approach patients in the hospital. Visit one: bumbling and naïve; visit two: watch out for flying objects; visit three: open and vulnerable; visit four: sharp and sarcastic. (Looking down list) Mmmmm, I can't wait for visit ten.

RICK:

You're too smart for the religion racket.

PENNY:

The pay is good and the retirement package is excellent.

RICK:

No, really, tell me, how did they hook you?

PENNY:

Hook me? (Smiles) You remember I told you about my family? Well, I needed someplace where things were a little more stable and people just didn't pick up and leave and there was a little more nurturing. When I was eighteen, I started working at the synagogue, teaching the younger kids. By the time I was twenty I was singing at the High Holy Day services, we didn't have a cantor. For the last ten years I've been singing at the Friday night services as well. And during the summers, when the rabbi is away, I conduct the services by myself.

RICK:

You're big on captive audiences.

PENNY:

So I figured it was time to be ordained.

RICK:

Which happens when?

PENNY:

Ah, that's a good question. I was supposed to have graduated last spring, which was the end of my fourth year. But they're a little fartootst down there --

RICK:

Why am I not surprised?

PENNY:

-- and they said they screwed up and I needed a few more credits. I took some over the summer, and this chaplaincy course should put me over the top.

RICK:

I can hardly wait.

PENNY:

The problem is I saved enough money and planned for four years of schooling. I really can't afford these extra credits and I was depending on getting a raise at my synagogue, but I don't get it until I'm ordained, so I'm struggling a bit now, all because they don't know what they're doing.

RICK:

Sue the bastards. Didn't they give you a course in litigation?

PENNY:

No.

RICK:

No? How can you be a Jew without knowing how to sue?

PENNY:

I'm a Jew all right. And despite your protests, Richard Goldstein, so are you.

RICK:

And what makes you so sure.

PENNY:

Only a Jew could be such an anti-Semite.

RICK:

Well, we know what familiarity breeds.

PENNY:

Is that where all this anger comes from, familiarity?

RICK:

Angry? Moi?

PENNY:

Jews, God, prayer, the Yankees, this is pretty sacred ground you're treading on.

RICK:

You left out organized religion, my personal favorite target and, not uncoincidentally, your profession.

PENNY:

Organized religion? That's not us. You can see by how they run my school.

RICK:

And that seems like the perfect segue into the purpose of your visit.

PENNY:

What's the purpose?

RICK:

You forgot already?

PENNY:

I can't believe I forgot the purpose. I'm gonna be a hell of a rabbi.

RICK:

We were going to bat around religion.

PENNY:

Oh, that purpose. (Pause as she looks at Rick) I have to start? Okay, let's see. (Ala American Bandstand) Religion is good. I like the lyrics and it's got a beat you can dance to. I give it an 85.

RICK:

Well, Dick, I don't like the lyrics, and here's why. The church is consistently the most reactionary element of any society. I needn't remind you, until very recently not only couldn't you have dreamed of being a rabbi, you weren't even allowed to pray, according to your religion. The church preys -- no pun intended but you begin to wonder -- it preys on the great overriding fear we all face. And what does it offer the pained and desperate faithful as the real world deteriorates around them? Prayer. "God you're great, God, you're wonderful. I'm nothing, you're eternal." And when they say: "It's not working, padre, I'm still suffering." They get: "A little more faith, my son, and drop a few more shekels in the pot on your way out." It's nonsense. It's taking advantage of, and worse, institutionalizing humanity's first struggling attempt to understand existence. We can do better now. And the institution, like all institutions, just grows more and more corrupt and more and more irrelevant. They exploited our fears. Once we acquired better tools to battle fear, we didn't need God anymore.

PENNY:

Maybe not for that, but we still need God.

RICK:

For what then? When I look at the world, the incredible deprivation, famine and desolation, the slavery and genocide, the disasters and plagues, just the notion that we, unlike any other living thing, are conscious of our own mortality, when I look at all of that I think: If there was a God, I would want to kill the bastard.

PENNY:

(Beat) Okay. I hear that. But let me ask, where does an act like my visiting you fit into all of that?

RICK:

Please. You don't have to be a religious zealot to care about people.

PENNY:

People, but you? (Smiles) Look, there isn't a people anywhere in the world that doesn't have some kind of god or gods, and some kind of moral code. Where would we be without some overriding principle of good, some sense of the need for unity? Where is the moral code to come from that gives you a context even to criticize the corruption of religious institutions -- a criticism with which I fully agree, by the way.

RICK:

You're saying it comes from God?

PENNY:

I'm saying I don't know where it comes from, nobody does. So I call it God. That bad things happen in the name of God is troubling; that more bad things happen than good things is appalling; but that good can be done in God's name encourages me, and many like me, to keep trying to even the balance.

RICK:

So God exists because you call goodness God?

PENNY:

You asked for Voltaire last week. He couldn't make it but he sent this observation: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Gender specificity aside, that's an awesome thought.

RICK:

You find the possibility that God might be an invention -- not to mention gender unspecified -- awesome?

PENNY:

I find it irrelevant, and that makes it awesome. The movies are also an invention, but

would your life be better if you ignored them or derided them?

RICK:

They don't represent a moral code for society.

PENNY:

No, but -- when I saw *Carrie* --

RICK:

Which one?

PENNY:

The horror film, not the Dreiser thing.

RICK:

Which was also a bit of a horror.

PENNY:

At the end, you got your sweet music and you're waiting for the closing credits and all of a sudden her arm shoots up from the grave and starts groping for Amy Irving and it's really scary and this friend I'm with covers her eyes and looks away and starts grunting no, no, no, as was half the audience. Then the film cuts to Amy Irving tossing and turning in bed and I say to my friend, It's all right, it's just a dream. And then I say to myself, just a dream? It's just a movie, who cares if it's a dream. Just a movie, a human invention that we are willing to experience with a suspended disbelief that allows us to share even such a preposterous world as that. I bring that same suspension of disbelief to my faith in God. And it is those moments -- those moments of transcendence, those moments when I can stop worrying about everything from death to how old is the meatloaf, those moments of peace that give the only meaning to life that I can understand -- it is those moments that nurture me.

RICK:

Hmmm. Well, it's good to be nurtured.

PENNY:

And it is those moments that give me the energy to keep coming back to even the most stubborn and seemingly insoluble problems.

RICK:

Like coming to see me on death row.

PENNY:

Yes. I hate that name. Does everybody here call it death row?

RICK:

Well, we had a contest. All our fans called in with suggestions. Sunset Boulevard got a lot of votes. Heaven's Gate, that's one you would have probably preferred. Nightmare Alley was my personal favorite, but Death Row was the popular choice.

PENNY:

Anyway, now I understand your anger at God, it's actually a great Jewish tradition, but your anger at prayer --

RICK:

I'm not angry at prayer. I just think it's stupid.

PENNY:

Well, I mean what you said before about prayer, "God is great," it's not that, you know. A prayer is just a medium for expressing a feeling. For different people at different times, a prayer can mean different things.

RICK:

That's for sure. But, really, do you think that's what the rabbi who wrote it had in mind?

PENNY:

Well, I don't know, but I don't think it matters. Didn't you ever do that with a song?

RICK:

Do what with a song?

PENNY:

Sing it with a different meaning than whoever wrote it had in mind. We have a retreat at school we go to and this guy up there started singing this old rock 'n' roll song, from your day, you should know it, (singing) *To know, know, know him, is to...*

RICK (Joining in):

Love, love, love him. Right, Teddy Bears, December 1958, I know it well.

PENNY:

Well, putting aside the male pronoun, instead of it being just a man/woman love song, the way it was written, he was singing it about God, which I thought was really cool. Listen. *Everyone says there'll come a day, when I'll walk alongside of him.*

PENNY WITH RICK JOINING IN:

To know, know, know him, is to love, love, love him, and I do, I do, I do.

PENNY:

Wow, neat, you can harmonize.

RICK:

It rankles me philosophically, but it's an uncontrollable urge. Not unlike your coming here.

PENNY:

Anyway, my point is that prayers can do the same thing, they don't have to be taken so literally. They just have to serve a purpose. *Some day he'll see, how blind can he be.*

RICK:

Don't hold your breath. (Beat) Well, that song doesn't make me think about God, but it does make me think about the very god-like Billy Hanson.

PENNY:

Who?

RICK:

Billy Hanson. On Friday nights he played guitar and sang in what passed for a coffee house at our college. One night he sang that song, refusing to change that pronoun you find so objectionable, and staring so deeply into my eyes I felt like a teddy bear.

PENNY:

Oh. Well, there you go.

RICK:

Maybe, but I don't think anybody would equate that with prayer. I mean come on, most of the people who say prayers say them with no meaning and no feeling whatsoever.

PENNY:

Some people, maybe.

RICK:

Well, when you say something, there should be a reason for it. I tell my students that all the time.

PENNY:

Like that message you left?

RICK:

There was plenty of reason for that, trust me.

PENNY:

I do trust you. (Beat) Look, I told you all sorts of personal stuff, and it seems to me the least you can do is share something truly intimate with me.

RICK:

Such as?

PENNY:

Such as why you hate the Yankees.

RICK:

Ah, the Yankees; where to start? When you're a kid and a diehard Dodger fan, and you put your heart into "dem bums" every year and every year your heart gets broken, and every day, every minute of every day, you have to hear it from all the snot-nosed Yankee fans you go to school with, you begin to get a little cranky. And then, as soon as they become winners, they leave.

PENNY:

Yeah, but they didn't fall off the end of the earth. They just moved out to California.

RICK:

When something deserts you, you lose your faith in it. They abandoned me, fuck 'em. I couldn't root for them anymore. But at least I still had something to root for. I could root for the Yankees to lose.

PENNY:

And -- what is it -- forty years later and you still hate them?

RICK:

I was over it, I thought, until some sadist thought up talk radio. Now I have to listen to those same snot-nosed schmucks, and what's worse, their kids, all over again.

PENNY:

You could turn to another station.

RICK:

Maybe I like being irritated.

PENNY:

You do? Good. And you said I couldn't help you.

RICK:

Very funny.

PENNY:

I'm only half joking. I understand all about why you like it when I'm feisty and when I irritate you, and even more why you don't want my help, because my father's the same way.

RICK:

I'm liking your father more and more. And before you start badmouthing him, don't forget, he introduced you to a wonderful world.

PENNY:

So he wouldn't have to deal with me in my world. You know why I know so much about film, why I remember all this stuff so well. It was survival for me. It was the only thing I could talk to my father about that would evoke any feelings from him, the only thing I could make him proud of me about. It's the only language he and I have in common.

RICK:

Well, isn't this a lovely outing. The two of us having such a nice conversation here about all the things we hate.

PENNY:

I don't hate my father. This was a long time ago.

RICK:

Uh-huh.

PENNY:

I just mentioned that to show you I know you better than you think.

RICK:

No you don't. If you did, you'd know that I think you know me better than you think I think you do.

PENNY:

Who did you leave that message for? God doesn't have an answering machine.

RICK:

That's for sure.

PENNY:

So who was it for?

RICK:

We got the motive which is anger and the body which is dead...soon.

PENNY:

(Matter-of-factly) Rod Steiger in *In The Heat of the Night*. But that's not a message left by an angry person; that's a message left by a sad person. I should know. I've delivered that message myself many times. And you know, maybe that's why I keep coming back here. Whether it's through prayer or hondling or hocking you, I keep thinking I can get you to share that sadness with me.

RICK:

Share my sadness. What a hip rabbi we are. You don't really mean share, do you? Don't you really mean take away my sadness.

PENNY:

If I could help do that, sure.

RICK:

But that's the painkiller that I rely on, rabbi. What do you have to replace it?

PENNY:

You know what I have.

RICK:

Exactly. If I have to choose between talking to God and talking to an answering machine, I'll take the answering machine any day.

PENNY:

Well, if not talking, how about listening?

RICK:

Listening to what? To you?

PENNY:

No.

RICK:

Then what would you suggest I listen to?

PENNY:

The silence. (Looks at her watch) I think there's some coming through right about now. (Gets up to leave) See you Tuesday.

(Penny leaves)

end of scene

Scene 5. Tuesday

(Penny enters)

PENNY:

What a cretin.

RICK:

Ah, you've seen my doctor.

PENNY:

I'm visiting Melissa Schoenbach, she's up on five, and her husband comes in. We sit together, talk about their kids, her parents, what the future holds. We pray together. As I'm about to leave, her husband asks if he can speak to me privately. We go out in the hall and he starts to hit on me, asks for my phone number. Can you imagine?

RICK:

(Grunts)

PENNY:

(Imitates his grunt) is right.

RICK:

Maybe he wanted to share his sadness with you.

PENNY:

Don't start with me, Richard. I'm in a very bad mood. You give me a hard time and I'll hit you with so many baruchas it'll make your head swim.

RICK:

(Smiles) Rick.

PENNY:

What?

RICK:

Rick. Nobody calls me Richard -- except my father.

PENNY:

Well, that's better than being called Penelope, like my father does when he's pissed at me.

RICK:

Now, what could an agreeable little girl like you do to make somebody pissed at her?

PENNY:

After he left, he would call and my mother would make me talk to him, and he would try to make conversation, but I just grunted. "All right, Penelope; put your mother back on." (Beat) God, what a cretin.

RICK:

Your father?

PENNY:

No, Gary Schoenbach. (About Schoenbach) Asshole. Men are such jerks. He's married, he has no right...

RICK:

I must say I like this side of you.

PENNY:

I'll bet.

RICK:

(Reaching for phone) Now, what's your supervisor's number? In the great spirit of sharing --

PENNY:

Don't you dare.

RICK:

Not very reverent language from a reverend.

PENNY:

Believe me, she couldn't care less about me calling him an asshole. But -- I'm not supposed to be here.

RICK:

Oh? And why is that?

PENNY:

She said I should concentrate on the people who want chaplaincy services.

RICK:

Good advice.

PENNY:

And she said who cares if he goes to hell.

RICK:

(Smiles) I don't think she said that.

PENNY:

She did. She's running for Messiah in the next election, she doesn't want to be perceived as a liberal.

RICK:

Well, she has my vote. Did she really tell you not to come?

PENNY:

Yeah.

RICK:

And you came anyway. What a rebel. Speaking of which, here is the entrance examination for today's visit. Since you seem to have had no trouble with the earlier questions, we're going to raise the degree of difficulty here.

PENNY:

Rosebud was his sled.

RICK:

Very funny. What was the name of the sapphire in *Beau Geste*?

PENNY:

(Beat) This is stupid.

RICK:

Ha, finally got you.

PENNY:

I can't believe I suggested this.

RICK:

Be gracious in defeat, Penny old girl.

PENNY:

Look who's talking. (Beat) Sorry.

RICK:

It's okay. I assume that anger wasn't really directed at me.

PENNY:

No, it wasn't. But it was inexcusable. I'm sorry.

RICK:

You're still angry with the guy on the fifth floor.

PENNY:

Whatever. Sorry. (Beat) I see you have a new roommate.

RICK:

Yes, Lawrence Bienstock, commodities trader.

PENNY:

Where is he?

RICK:

Out making a call. He says his cellular phone gets too much interference this side of the building.

PENNY:

They don't let you have cell phones in here.

RICK:

Never underestimate the power of commodities traders.

PENNY:

Bienstock, you said?

RICK:

He's a Yid, don't worry. I told him you were coming. That's when he started getting interference on his phone.

PENNY:

My dance card's full. You can tell him he's safe.

RICK:

I'll tell him he's safe from you. He still has to deal with me.

PENNY:

(Beat) Can you believe that guy?

RICK:
Schoenberg?

PENNY:
Bach.

RICK:
Schoenbergbach? (As a TV spot voiceover) Schoenberg, Bach, Strauss and Webern, gentile composers with Jewish names, today on Oprah.

PENNY:
I though Schoenberg *was* Jewish.

RICK:
Yes, but he converted.

PENNY:
Why are you in such a good mood?

RICK:
Whoa, isn't this what you've been working for, or should I say praying for?

PENNY:
"Working for" is fine and what are you saying, that all it took was my coming in in a bad mood for you to be in a good mood?

RICK:
No. Of course not. (Beat) Certainly that helped --

PENNY:
Thanks.

RICK:
-- but I was already in a good mood.

PENNY:
Why?

RICK:
I don't know. I just was. You want to talk me out of it?

PENNY:
No, no, I just -- no, that's great.

RICK:

You want credit for it.

PENNY:

(Testy) Don't be ridiculous.

RICK:

I can't be sad, I can't be ridiculous, and yet you still want me to be a Jew?

PENNY:

(Snapping) You can be whatever you want. I think I liked you better sad. (Beat) I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that either.

RICK:

That's okay. (Beat) So, you like classical music.

PENNY:

Yeah, sure. I mean, I don't listen a lot, but I took some courses about the history of music, so I learned a little.

RICK:

Like which ones were Jews.

PENNY:

Jewspotting is a family tradition. My father used to sit in front of the TV and it seemed to me no matter who came on he would say: (Pointing to TV screen) A Jew, you know.

RICK:

My father -- who practiced a little known sect of Judaism called Marxism -- looking at the same TV would say: He gave names, you know.

PENNY:

(Smiles) No, I like all kinds of music. How about you?

RICK:

Sure. Speaking of music, I thought about you last night.

PENNY:

Oh, really?

RICK:

Yeah, they were giving me intramuscular injections (indicating his buttocks). No,

Bienstock left his radio on when he went out to make a call last night and *To know, know, know him* came on. Quite a coincidence, me hearing it like that right after we talked about it. Almost made me start to believe.

PENNY:

Please. Bienstock likes the oldies?

RICK:

No, this wasn't the Teddy Bears, it was a new recording I never heard before, and, incredibly, liked. It was really beautiful.

PENNY:

By who?

RICK:

I couldn't make it out. Bienstock only turns up the volume when Rush Limbaugh comes on.

PENNY:

Too bad.

RICK:

No. Too bad would be never having heard it at all. You can't own the happiness in your life, you have to wait for visiting hours.

PENNY:

I find that very odd coming from you.

RICK:

I'm an odd guy. But it took me out of this hospital room for awhile, back to dear old Antioch and Billy Hanson.

PENNY:

Tikun olam.

RICK:

I warned you about praying.

PENNY:

I'm not praying. Tikun olam means the repairing of a world shattered into many pieces, and it talks about returning to where the shattering took place.

RICK:

You're starting again?

PENNY:

Happiness visits when it knows sadness is out of the room, and like Bienstock, sadness leaves the room when the reception isn't very good. Now, you want to leave that to chance? A prayer can do what music can do, but even better. First of all, it is music; and second of all, it's tailored to do just that, to transport you and let you speak to the silence. Speaking of which, what did you mean a couple of visits back when I said I thought God's voice was silence and you said so did Melville.

RICK:

Ah, unlike my students, you were listening. "God's one and only voice is silence." So says Herman.

PENNY:

(Smiling) Great minds (as in great minds [hers and Melville's] run in the same channels).

RICK:

I don't think he meant it positively. It's a cry of anguish, a harbinger of the existentialist era to come.

PENNY:

Oh. Well, hopefully he knows better now.

RICK:

(Waving his hand goodbye) Goodbye.

PENNY:

I'm not ready to go yet.

RICK:

I wasn't saying goodbye to you; I was saying goodbye to my good mood.

PENNY:

I know you're not ready to pray yet, but if you would just let me pray for you, I think--

RICK:

Back it up a second, rabbi. What's this "ready to pray yet?" That implies there will come a time when I am ready to pray which there won't come a time -- of.

PENNY:

Let me just show you. For example, I'm still angry at Schoenbach, but with prayer I can ride that anger to peace, I can repair the shattering that is so much a part of human interactions and return to the peace we all want to share.

RICK:

Your notion of how things get repaired is to impose your ideology on me, which I happen to find very shattering of my peace. I have my own gods: Reason, science and logic, and I am not going to sit by idly while you practice deicide with your mindless mumblings from the Dark Ages.

PENNY:

When a doctor comes in to treat you, do you really understand what he's doing, or why it works? No. But you let him practice his art and it heals you.

RICK:

Or, as in my case, it doesn't heal you; whether you believe in it or not, whether you understand it or not, whether it makes the doctor happy or not.

PENNY:

I'm sorry. God, that was dumb, it was a bad analogy.

RICK:

I thought it was particularly apt, because frankly, when my doctor comes in and I see the look in his eyes, I know what's he's thinking, he's thinking the same thing you're thinking: Goldstein, you haven't got a prayer. (Snickers) You should get together with him. If you think Schoenfeld --

PENNY:

Bach.

RICK:

-- is a lech, my doc would have his stethoscope on your tits before you could say tikki olam.

PENNY:

Tikun olam.

RICK:

Whatever.

PENNY:

Not whatever. Tikki olam sounds like Indian food. Maybe I better go. I'm fucking

everything up. (As she gets her stuff together) This was a bad idea.

RICK:

What was?

PENNY:

Coming to you after I was told not to. I thought I was a big macher, but you have to listen to your teachers. This just isn't working out.

RICK:

Whoa, does that mean you're not coming back?

PENNY:

(Sarcastic) I'm glad to see your medication isn't clouding your perception. (Beat) See, I'm completely out of control. I better get out of here. Bye. (She starts to leave)

RICK:

Look, Penny, I don't want you leaving that way.

PENNY:

What way?

RICK:

So down on yourself.

PENNY:

Uh-huh. What way do you want me to leave, proud and elated?

RICK:

Maybe I don't want you to leave.

PENNY:

(Facetiously, mimicking '40s movie dialogue) Oh, Rick, I've been such a fool. All these years I've been blind to your love. Can you ever forgive me?

RICK:

What movie was that from?

PENNY:

What movie wasn't it from?

RICK:

Look, I know I come on kinda gruff, but, uh, it's like the genie in the bottle in the

Thief of Baghdad.

PENNY:

Never saw it.

RICK:

No? What kind of father did you have?

PENNY:

Don't get me confused, it's hard enough keeping my anger sorted out.

RICK:

Did you see *Aladdin*?

PENNY:

Yes.

RICK:

Well, that's like an animated *Thief of Baghdad*. And the genie, the part Robin Williams played, has been imprisoned forever, and when he's freed he tries to kill Abu, the thief, who freed him. Why, Abu asks. The genie says: "Inside my bottle for the first thousand years, I swore that I'd enrich the one who freed me with all the riches of the earth; but in the second thousand years, my imprisoned spirit turned to vengeance for all that lived and were free and I swore that I'd kill him that freed me." You just came by in the wrong thousand years.

PENNY:

You think I've freed you?

RICK:

Well, call it a walk in the yard.

PENNY:

Like when I said what I said about your healing.

RICK:

That didn't hurt me anywhere near as much as it hurt you. Frankly, I was trying to make a joke out of it. I didn't like seeing you in pain.

PENNY:

Please. Admit it, you don't care if I come or not. I mean, at one point I at least thought you were angry that I came. I don't know now. I don't know what to make of you.

RICK:

Penny, when I first got sick, I had visitors. A few friends, a couple of old students. But I told them to stop coming.

PENNY:

Why?

RICK:

Because they came in here with an agenda. They wanted to make me feel better. If I didn't feel better -- and I never did -- they walked out defeated. I think that made some of them angry with me. I couldn't take that kind of pressure. I am in no position to take care of them. But after teaching for 30 years you begin to miss the sound of your own voice. I'm taking a big chance with you. I don't know why, and so far I haven't cared why. Don't push it. This is not something that will survive close examination.

PENNY:

(Beat) Who was in it?

RICK:

In what?

PENNY:

The Thief of Baghdad.

RICK:

Oh, Sabu --

PENNY:

Jungle Book.

RICK:

Right. Conrad Veidt.

PENNY:

Casablanca.

RICK:

Right. June Duprez. (Dupray)

PENNY:

Not a clue. Wait, is that June Duprez with a Z?

RICK:
Right.

PENNY:
None but the Lonely Heart?

RICK:
You're amazing.

PENNY:
There are a lot of Saturday afternoons in sixteen years. That's an unusual cast.

RICK:
It's an unusual movie. You should rent it.

PENNY:
Okay, I will. Of course, then I'll have to rent a VCR and a TV.

RICK:
You're not serious.

PENNY:
Popcorn I have.

RICK:
You don't have a TV?

PENNY:
You're so easy. All right, I don't feel down on myself anymore. Can I go now?

RICK:
That depends.

PENNY:
On?

RICK:
Are you coming back?

PENNY:
I couldn't answer your *Beau Geste* question, I'm not allowed to come back, right?

RICK:

Look, we both know that's just a game.

PENNY:

We do now. Bye. (Exits and then returns) The sapphire in *Beau Geste* was called Blue Water.

RICK:

Why, you little momzer.

PENNY:

Be gracious in defeat. (Starts to leave)

RICK:

Seriously, Penny, are you coming back?

PENNY:

(As she leaves) "Shane. Come back."

RICK:

(Calling after her) Don't be making me pay for Gary Schoenstein.

PENNY:

(Sticking her head back in) Bach.

RICK:

Right, Schoenbach.

PENNY:

No, bach as in (ala Arnold Schwarzenegger) I'll be bach. (She exits)

end of act

Scene 1. Friday

(Lights up on Penny and Rick, she singing)

PENNY:

(Singing) *I want to be a sailor sailing 'cross the sea.*

RICK:

Isn't that a great song?

PENNY:

Really. It's one of those tunes you think you know, even the first time you hear it. Who played the genii again?

RICK:

Rex --

PENNY:

Rex Ingram, right. I loved that thing he said to Abu: "Mortals are weak and frail. If their stomach speaks, they forget their brain; if their brain speaks, they forget their heart; and if their heart speaks, they forget everything."

RICK:

How many times did you watch it?

PENNY:

Just once.

RICK:

Jeez, you got a mind like a steel trap.

PENNY:

I remember stuff I think I might be able to use for a sermon. Like for instance, the magic carpet that the old king was suppose to fly on to heaven; Abu steals it and says: "When the old man's hour comes, he won't want a carpet to fly to Paradise. Then you, oh Allah, will take him by the hand and lead him into eternal bliss."

RICK:

You think you can squeeze that in a sermon? What, are you moonlighting at a

mosque?

PENNY:
You know what I mean.

RICK:
Smart thinking. You can't make a living working for only one god.

PENNY:
The point is you don't take it literally. A sermon, and even more, a prayer--

RICK:
Here we go again.

PENNY:
-- can work very powerfully as a metaphor that eases our acceptance of something that has no literal equivalent.

RICK:
And what's the benefit of having my acceptance eased? Everybody tells me -- "everybody" lately being a doctor, two nurses and the old lady that mops the bathroom -- everybody tells me to fight this thing.

PENNY:
You should. I'm not explaining this well. That's the problem, you can't really --

RICK:
-- translate it? Great, like the Yiddish punch lines of my Uncle Leo's twenty minute jokes.

PENNY:
See, when I say acceptance I'm not talking about that (meaning death), I'm talking about something else.

RICK:
Is that another butwhatyet?

PENNY:
But this is the point. I can't clear it up this way, but I could recite a prayer for you that could make it clear.

RICK:
To you, maybe, and maybe that's what you need, to make things clearer. But for me

things are clear enough right now, thank you.

PENNY:

Sorry. Forget it. I liked the movie.

RICK:

Good.

PENNY:

(Picks up an envelope from the floor) There must be at least one more "everybody", unless the old lady who mops the bathroom is sending you get well cards.

RICK:

Give me that. (Takes it from her and tears it a couple of times) That's just a bill. Would you mind? (Handing ripped up envelope to Penny who throws it away)

PENNY:

A bill for what?

RICK:

An old account.

PENNY:

Oh, God, I almost forgot. I got you a present.

RICK:

A present? What's the occasion?

PENNY:

Hanukkah. (Taking gift out of her bag and giving it to him)

RICK:

Hanukkah isn't for months.

PENNY:

It's Hindu Hanukkah, they have a different calendar.

RICK:

Right. (Unwraps it. It is a framed picture. Rick smiles broadly) Ebbetts Field. That's great.

PENNY:

(Looking over his shoulder at something in the picture) Is that Jackie Robinson at

third?

RICK:

Cal Abrams. A Jew you know.

PENNY:

Oh. And this sign, you can't really read it, but the guy in the store said it says --

RICK:

"Hit sign win suit." I can read it plain as day.

PENNY:

How often did you go?

RICK:

A lot. Pop was a big fan.

PENNY:

Did your mom go?

RICK:

Nope. Just me and pop to see the Dodgers. An hour and a half by bus and train. We sat here (indicating on the photo) down the firstbase line, because I was a big Gil Hodges fan. Whenever he hit a homerun, as he'd cross home plate he'd blow a kiss to his wife who was up here. My dad always pointed her out to me. (Beat as he looks at the photo) We might be in this photo.

PENNY:

It sounds great.

RICK:

It was great. But ironically, the greatest game I ever saw wasn't at this ballpark. It was at Yankee Stadium. October 4, 1955, the day the Yankees finally lost.

PENNY:

Really? And you were there? Cool.

RICK:

Pop used to make shoes for a couple of the guys in the Yankee front office. They were always offering him tickets, but since it was the Yankees he never took them until we got to the World Series.

PENNY:

How old were you?

RICK:

Thirteen.

PENNY:

You must have been so excited.

RICK:

Me? I was jumping up and down, spilling my soda. My father? Whenever he went to a ballgame, my pop would just sit there. His reactions ran the gamut from (sticks out his lower lip, widens his eyes some and makes a high-pitched hmm sound) when the Dodgers did something good to (sticks out his lowers lip, narrows his eyes and raises one eyebrow and makes a lower pitched hmm sound) when they did something bad, as if this is what was to be expected. Even on that day, after Gil Hodges drove in the only two runs of the game, after Amoros made his running catch off Berra, and after Podres got the last out, and the many, many Dodger fans in Yankee Stadium that day went absolutely nuts, my father just sat there looking completely baffled. After years of losing and losing, the Dodgers had finally beaten the Yankees, and my father didn't know what to make of it.

PENNY:

Why? I don't understand.

RICK:

My father was a typical Jew and the Dodgers were a very Jewish team. Every year when the Yankees would beat them the cry was "Wait 'til next year." Sound familiar, like maybe "Next year in Jerusalem?" It's a very Jewish thing, "next year". It implies waiting and hope and faith and deliverance; the coming of Moses; the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Allies. My father was liberated that day in 1955 and he found himself in a world he couldn't relate to. (Beat) We never went to another game.

PENNY:

Really? That's sad -- sorry, I used the "s" word.

RICK:

"Wait 'til next year."

PENNY:

Do you feel that way about yourself?

RICK:

What way?

PENNY:

That you kept waiting 'til next year.

RICK:

I don't know what you mean.

PENNY:

You said a couple of visits ago, when I said I didn't want to waste your time, that you had been wasting it yourself for fifty years. I thought maybe you meant you had spent a lot of time hoping and not enough time doing.

RICK:

I don't know what I meant. After fifty you tend to look back and wonder where the years went.

PENNY:

That happened to me when I turned twenty, so I just looked the other way.

RICK:

Be careful with that. For many years I used to tell myself: Siddhartha, the Buddha, didn't find enlightenment until he was forty.

PENNY:

That's a good way of looking at it.

RICK:

It is until you turn fifty. Carpe diem, Rabbi.

PENNY:

But you think your life is wasted?

RICK:

It sure as hell is now.

PENNY:

You look back and you think you didn't accomplish anything?

RICK:

When you're born, you soon discover you've been thrown into the deep end and all that's on the other side is the other side, and the only way to live your life is to swim

for the warm spots. Was my life wasted? Let's put it this way, I didn't find too many warm spots. (Looks at photo) Thanks for Ebbetts Field. That was at least one I can remember.

PENNY:
Is your father still alive?

RICK:
Oh yeah.

PENNY:
Does he know about you?

RICK:
He must have. He kept buying me hot dogs and soda.

PENNY:
You know what I mean.

RICK:
He knows.

PENNY:
Doesn't he come visit?

RICK:
No.

PENNY:
Why not?

RICK:
I told you how I feel about visitors.

PENNY:
That's a shame. How about your mother?

RICK:
She died.

PENNY:
All the more reason to --

RICK:

To what? I'm in no mood to take care of him right now, do you understand?

PENNY:

No. When was the last time you saw him?

RICK:

October 4, 1955 in Yankee Stadium.

PENNY:

Really? What happened?

RICK:

Nothing happened. He changed, I changed, I don't know. But the man next to me at the ballpark was gone forever.

PENNY:

I don't understand.

RICK:

I don't either. And frankly, my dear...

PENNY:

You sound really angry with him.

RICK:

Being in a bottle for a thousand years sucks, trust me.

PENNY:

Yeah, but if there was ever a time. Plus, it's coming on Yom Kippur. That's one of the richest traditions we have, Tikun Olam, returning to our pain and repairing the shattering.

RICK:

Oh, please.

PENNY:

The rabbis teach us --

RICK:

Why is it that you people are always so selective?

PENNY:

We people?

RICK:

What about *Leviticus*? Why aren't you quoting *Leviticus*?

PENNY:

I'm not quoting anything.

RICK:

What shattering does this particularly moving verse repair: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing would be an abomination." What fine lesson do we draw from those timeless sentiments?

PENNY:

There's a lot in *Leviticus* that we don't take literally.

RICK:

Well, goody for you. Unfortunately, there it is in black and white for the less enlightened rabbis and imams and priests and ministers to sermonize about from the pulpits.

PENNY:

What did I say? Why are you so angry?

RICK:

You want to know why I never went to another baseball game? Two weeks after that game, my mother, who was supposed to be at her sister's house on the Grand Concourse, came home unexpectedly and discovered me in bed with Max Newman. At thirteen in 1955 I don't think we felt we were quite ready to come out yet. She very quietly told Max to get dressed and leave, which he did, and she told me to get dressed and stay in my room, which I did. My father came home a few hours later and when my mother finally told me to come to supper, my father stayed in his room. I didn't eat a lot that night. At the table, my mother said that sometimes boys need to explore these things but I should never do it again, and that we would leave it at that. I went back in my room and tried to do my homework but I was distracted by a mumbling from my father's room, like Bienstock's fucking radio turned just too low to make out. Then I heard my mother on the phone in the kitchen and I wondered who my father was talking to. So I walked to his room and opened his door and there he was, saying Kaddish for his dead son.

PENNY:

Shit. Did he say anything to you?

RICK:

For the next three years only variations on pass the salt. Then I went away to college and I found reasons and excuses never to go home again. Everybody seemed comfortable with that.

PENNY:

And that's the last time you saw him?

RICK:

No. The last time I saw him was when my mother died. I was twenty-eight. After the funeral, back at my aunt's house, my father took me aside and started to bebbitz about something. I very politely said: Go fuck yourself and left. That's just another reason why I hate him; he made me leave before I got a piece of Sophie's kugel.

PENNY:

That's who you left that message for.

RICK:

He sends me a stupid card like nothing ever happened.

PENNY:

And that's why you don't want me to pray for you, isn't it?

RICK:

After you've had Kaddish said for you, none of the other prayers make much sense, do they?

PENNY:

They're not supposed to make sense. They're supposed to heal.

RICK:

So was my body. Oh, he does move in mysterious ways, doesn't he. And something else, my father was not a religious man. Like just about every other Jew in our neighborhood, he went to synagogue maybe once, twice a year. The only time in his life he really needed God was when he wanted to punish his son.

PENNY:

If he had gone a little more often, maybe he would have found the grace to accept who you were.

RICK:

You don't really believe that, do you?

PENNY:

It's possible. Just like it's possible for you to accept who he is.

RICK:

I accept who he is. That's why I don't want him in my life.

PENNY:

If you don't want him in your life, why do you keep him in it?

RICK:

Isn't Judaism bad enough; do I have to listen to a 12 Step sermon now?

PENNY:

As long as you refuse to forgive him and hold onto your hate for him, you hold onto him as well.

RICK:

Well, everybody's misery will be ended soon. That's one of the perks of dying.

PENNY:

(Worked up) You've been dying for forty years. I don't know how much time you have left, but I'm going to show you what living is like even if it kills me.

RICK:

(Beat as he regards her) You have found a tongue at last, Catherine. Is it only to say such terrible things to me?

PENNY:

Ralph Richardson in *The Heiress*

RICK:

(Beat) Why do you care about him?

PENNY:

Because you don't. That's how religion works, you know, it fills a vacuum. If a man's brain speaks, he forgets his heart. But if a man allows his heart to speak, he can forget -- and forgive -- anything. (She starts to leave) Bye.

RICK:

Where are you going? I'm not finished.

PENNY:

(Looking back) Exactly. And that is the point I've been trying to make. See ya.

(She leaves)

end of scene

Scene 2. Tuesday

(Harry is at the door as the lights come up)

RICK:

What the fuck do you want?

HARRY:

I should stay away my only son is dying?

RICK:

You should stay away your only son is living?

HARRY:

That was not my choice.

RICK:

My sexual orientation was not mine.

HARRY:

Right away you start with the sexual.

RICK:

But I stuck with it because I was comfortable with it. You stayed away because you were comfortable with staying away.

HARRY:

Don't start with the mumbo-jumbo on me. I stayed away because you told me to.

RICK:

That's bullshit, pop.

HARRY:

Bullshit? All right, it's bullshit. (Beat) How's what's his name?

RICK:

What's his name moved to New Orleans.

HARRY:
He's not here to help you?

RICK:
I sent him away two years ago when I got sick.

HARRY:
So you kicked him out too?

RICK:
Please, pop, just get to the point.

HARRY:
What point?

RICK:
Of why you came.

HARRY:
What's the hurry?

RICK:
You really want me to answer that?

HARRY:
I brought you something. (Takes something in aluminum foil out of a bag) Sophie's kugel. (Starts to give it to Rick and then decides to put it on the end table)

RICK:
(Beat) How is Sophie?

HARRY:
She had a bypass three years ago. You know Leo died?

RICK:
Yes. Is she still living on the Concourse?

HARRY:
No, what are you, nuts? She's in Riverdale. You want her number?

RICK:
I don't know.

HARRY:

I'll leave you the number. You don't have to call you don't want to. (Starts to write number) I can give her your number, you want that?

RICK:

It doesn't matter, pop. Could you get to the point?

HARRY:

(Beat, he looks around) Such doings, this election. You're able to vote from here?

RICK:

Pop.

HARRY:

Not that there's much to vote for. Even Clinton now with the gay marriages. I read these things.

RICK:

Great, pop, it's great to see how far you've come.

HARRY:

You were in Montefiore instead of down here, I wouldn't have that far to come. A bus and two trains. You want me to heat up the kugel?

RICK:

How're you gonna heat it up, you gonna sit on it?

HARRY:

The nurses don't eat? There's a microwave somewhere. It's all right on your diet? You can digest it?

RICK:

Nobody can digest it, it's kugel.

(There is an awkward silence)

HARRY:

The Yankees keep winning. You get the games in here?

RICK:

If you came here to say goodbye, Pop, you're wasting your time. You said goodbye to me a long time ago.

HARRY:

Maybe someone else wants to say goodbye to you. (Beat) All right. At your mother's funeral I tried to tell you but you got meshugge again and left. Your mother told me, the night she died, she said I should say goodbye to you. I said: Esther, please tell him yourself. She said: If you tell him, maybe he'll see you got something in common after all.

RICK:

What, Mom's death?

HARRY:

No. That neither one of us likes to hear goodbyes. That's what she said. We're both good at saying them, but hearing them, that's another thing.

RICK:

Oh, please.

HARRY:

Don't with the "oh, please." I'm right, aren't I? So easy to send people away, but when they leave because they want to leave, that's different. That's harder to live with. That's what we share.

RICK:

Everybody shares that.

HARRY:

So, we're like everybody.

RICK:

Is that what you believed forty years ago.

HARRY:

Can't you forget the forty years ago already.

RICK:

(Beat) That's why you came?

HARRY:

(Hesitates) Yes.

RICK:

To tell me that?

HARRY:

Your mother wanted to tell you that. She couldn't make it.

RICK:

Okay. You told me, now you can go.

HARRY:

So angry.

RICK:

I had a good role model.

HARRY:

So unforgiving.

RICK:

I haven't heard any apology.

HARRY:

I'm here, isn't that enough?

RICK:

Cue the violin, you're breaking my heart.

HARRY:

What, you need to hear I'm sorry? I'm sorry.

RICK:

For what?

HARRY:

What do you mean, for what?

RICK:

What are you sorry for?

HARRY:

You know.

RICK:

No, I don't have a clue. (Beat) And Mom never told you to tell me that. She'd never say anything like that.

HARRY:

She used her own words.

RICK:

Well then she was wrong. Try me. Say goodbye, see if I give a fuck.

HARRY:

What are you so angry at me all these years?

RICK:

For not accepting me.

HARRY:

I accept you. I didn't accept that part of you.

RICK:

That part of me is who I am. You didn't just stop talking to that part of me. You didn't say Kaddish for just that part of me.

HARRY:

I was hoping you'd change.

RICK:

So you didn't accept me.

HARRY:

How could I accept something like that? It's not normal.

RICK:

Right, I'm a freak.

HARRY:

I didn't say that.

RICK:

That's what not normal is, Pop. A freak in your eyes -- and for far too long, a freak in my eyes too.

HARRY:

You can't blame me for that.

RICK:

It took me so long before I could accept myself, so much wasted time --

HARRY:

That's not my fault.

RICK:

-- until I could accept the way I was.

HARRY:

So you accepted it. And look what it did to you.

RICK:

(Beat; Rick stares at him) Get out.

HARRY:

I'm sorry. I always say the wrong thing. If you knew how hard it is --

RICK:

Get out now.

HARRY:

All right. I'm going. (As he starts to leave) I knew this was a stupid idea. That meshugenneh girl, I should never have listened to her.

(Harry exits)

end of scene

Scene 3. Friday

(Lights up on Penny looking at Rick)

PENNY:

Why?

RICK:

You have some nerve coming back here.

PENNY:

Just tell me why?

RICK:

What, have you been donating your IQ points to stupid Jews, you can't figure out why.

PENNY:

I was trying to help.

RICK:

So was I.

PENNY:

Getting me suspended from school, how does that help?

RICK:

Is that what they did?

PENNY:

Yes.

RICK:

(Beat) Good.

PENNY:

Answer me; how does that help?

RICK:

It teaches you a lesson. You should respect the people you deal with. I'm sitting here helpless, at your mercy, dying, and you keep trying to impose your sense of what I need on me. You don't know what the fuck I need, and even if you did you should still let me make the decisions. It's all I have left.

PENNY:

Even you don't believe that. And maybe I didn't do this for you. You're not the only person I deal with, you know.

RICK:

Who did you do it for? Is this some arcane Yid ritual, some midrash that says: The lesson we learn from Isaac is that all sons should be tortured?

PENNY:

I did it for your father.

RICK:

(Beat) I am lying here atremble with the terrible fear that you actually believe that.

PENNY:

It's true.

RICK:

(Sarcastic) That poor old man with the faggot son who won't see him.

PENNY:

I didn't know what he was. But he was going to see his child die before he did, and that's a terrible thing. He was going to see his family end, and that's a terrible thing. And somehow, I knew I needed to talk to him to be able to talk to you.

RICK:

So you admit it. You were doing this for me.

PENNY:

Going to see him, yes, I admit it. I had you in mind. Once I got there, the idea that he should come see you, that I did for him. And besides, I didn't do anything, I didn't hold a gun to his head. (Beat) That's a nice neighborhood you grew up in. The train rode past Yankee Stadium to get there. It makes it even more puzzling to me why you never rooted for the Yankees, but anyway, it's nice, right by the park and all. He didn't know what to make of me, he must have thought I was going to hit him for money or something, but he was nice, he made me tea. I had told him on the phone about my relationship to you, but once I got there we didn't talk about you. We just talked about him, his parents, his memories, his wife, his job. He offered to fix my shoes. Then he took out some pictures. He talked so long about each one, we got through maybe three. Then he got to a picture of you, wearing a Dodgers cap, holding a pennant in one hand and a hot dog in the other. He talked about that picture as if he was remembering it all for the first time since it was taken. His eyes drifted out the window and he reached for his teacup without looking at it, and I felt

as if I was watching some ritual that he performed every day.

(Lights have come up on Harry, holding the teacup and gazing out)

HARRY:

At first, when she told me, I couldn't believe it. My son, a faygeleh. What would people think? What did I do wrong? What kind of life is that? And then all I could think of was, no grandchildren. My name was over, was finished. My son, I didn't want him to be my son and be like that. I don't know why, but I started saying Kaddish. I was surprised I even knew it, I'm not religious. But I was so angry at him, I wanted to hurt him, I wanted to rip my shirt like he had ripped my dreams. A prayer, such silly nonsense, but it seemed like all I could do. I just couldn't understand it.

(Penny has joined him)

PENNY:

Why didn't you ever talk to him about it?

HARRY:

I was afraid.

PENNY:

Of what?

HARRY:

What was I going to say?

PENNY:

You said you didn't understand. Maybe he could have helped you understand.

HARRY:

That's what I was afraid of. If I understood what he was doing, if I showed him I accepted him, he would never change. I was waiting for him to change.

PENNY:

That's what he's waiting for too, for you to change. It's forty years later, doesn't it seem silly?

HARRY:

It always seemed silly to me. It always seemed sad to me. But before I could ever understand him, he had to understand what this did to me.

PENNY:

He can't understand it the way you would like.

HARRY:

Why not? Is it so hard?

PENNY:

If he understands you and accepts you, then you might never change. He's your son, after all.

HARRY:

(Beat as he stares at her) Women rabbis, what next. Let me get you another cup tea.

(Harry leaves, Penny rejoins Rick)

PENNY:

What happened when he came here?

RICK:

Ask *him* now that you're drinking buddies.

PENNY:

I'm this close to being kicked out of school, Rick, this is the least you can do.

RICK:

You brought this on yourself.

PENNY:

That's right, you're completely right.

RICK:

So don't go telling me it's the least I can do. (Beat) He did what he always does. He twisted the knife in deeper.

PENNY:

Do you think that's what he wants to do?

RICK:

How should I know what he wants to do?

PENNY:

He came down here knowing what he'd be facing. Do you think it was just to punish you some more?

RICK:

Sure felt like it.

PENNY:

He wants to say he's sorry, he just says it in his own language. My husband has a genetic inability to say I love you, but when I come home after a long day -- like any day when I see you -- and dinner is waiting on the table, I know he loves me. That's his language.

RICK:

(Beat) You're married?

PENNY:

Yes. I'm a rabbi, not a priest.

RICK:

How come I didn't know that?

PENNY:

Why, you interested (as in romantically interested in her)?

RICK:

Sure. That would make pop happy, in his language. Let me ask you something, if instead of dinner on the table, you came home to your husband yelling at you or screwing another woman because that's "I love you" in his language, how would you feel about it?

PENNY:

Like I either needed a new translation or a new husband. But first I would want to know why. Why is a kid's first question, and it was humanity's first question, and it should be yours. (Beat) You know why your dad never went to another game after the Dodgers won the World Series?

RICK:

This is quite a conversation you had with him.

PENNY:

He didn't tell me this. It's obvious. He never went because for the first time in his life with the Dodgers he had something to lose. You root for a loser, all you got is upside. You root for a winner, you can be very unhappy if they won't win again. See, I don't know if it's a man thing or a Jewish man thing or just a thing thing, but you have this way of keeping a distance from the things you love, the things that are

important to you. You and your pop -- I think you went a little overboard -- but the two of you had a very convenient out. Admit it, you don't want to make up with him because you think it's better to be angry and sad than to put yourself in a position where you can be hurt again. To know him is to love him. Enough already. He's got mortality staring him in the face. Wouldn't it be nice to have someone out there he could turn to, who might be able to teach him how to spit in its eye.

RICK:

What do you mean mortality is staring him in the face? Is he sick?

PENNY:

I have no idea. But at eighty with a cup of tea in your hand and a son who is dying, what do you think he sees when he stares out the window. Not too many warm spots, I'll bet.

RICK:

That's the bed he made forty years ago.

PENNY:

Right, forty years ago. Face it, Rick, you're strangers now. Who is that guy that you hate? This isn't Mickey Mantle and Billy Martin and Whitey Ford any more.

RICK:

(Beat) What does suspended mean?

PENNY:

What?

RICK:

What does suspended mean?

PENNY:

What do you mean what does it mean? You were never suspended?

RICK:

No.

PENNY:

What a wus.

RICK:

I know what it means, but what does it specifically mean for you?

PENNY:

No classes; of course, I'm not supposed to be here; and I have a hearing coming up.

RICK:

Can they kick you out?

PENNY:

They can. They won't. But they may make me take another chaplaincy course.

RICK:

Which means you won't graduate for yet another semester.

PENNY:

Right.

RICK:

Which you can't afford.

PENNY:

Right.

RICK:

Sorry.

PENNY:

You want to make it up to me?

RICK:

I'm not that sorry. (Beat) Look, I'm still pissed at what you did, but, uh, I guess you meant well. I can call the school and maybe smooth this over a little.

PENNY:

That would help. And if you called you father, that would help more.

RICK:

I call him regularly.

PENNY:

You know what I mean.

RICK:

Why do you care?

PENNY:

How should I know why I care? You're going to make me sit here and figure this out now? (Beat) One beastly February Saturday in 1980, during the break between *Potemkin* and *Alexander Nevsky*, my father turned to me and said: Penny, I might have to leave home for awhile. I said: If you leave, I don't want you to ever come back -- like he really wanted to. And I got up and left. That's why I've never seen *Alexander Nevsky*.

RICK:

That's worth hating your father for. *Nevsky* is at least as good as Sophie's Kugel.

PENNY:

(With great bitterness) I didn't need any special reasons to hate him. When someone deserts you, you lose your faith in them. He abandoned me, fuck him.

RICK:

(Shocked) Penny.

PENNY:

(Lightening up) You're so easy. I just wanted you to hear what it sounds like. But I did blame him, though, for a long time. I was sixteen when he left us and for years afterwards I stayed sixteen. Maybe it's just the Feingold stubbornness but it was as if I wasn't going to budge until he came back and finished what he started: Our family. But that was a stupid plan because it was out of my control. So I stayed a kid, with all the vulnerabilities and neediness of a kid. Just as hurt, just as betrayed, just as abandoned, just as angry and just as sad as the day he left. And then one day I realized that the only way to take charge of this situation, the only control I had over it, was to forgive him. That carpet will never fly if it's loaded down with too much baggage. There's just no magic strong enough.

RICK:

Was that a sermon?

PENNY:

Sort of. Any bad side effects?

RICK:

(Beat) You really think my father needs my forgiveness?

PENNY:

That's what I thought before I met him. Now I think more than that he needs your strength.

RICK:

Why?

PENNY:

(Pumping her fist) Yes, you're finally asking the right questions.

RICK:

Please (as in give me a break).

PENNY:

To help him accept this.

RICK:

What "this?"

PENNY:

I'll donate you a few IQ points and you can figure it out.

RICK:

If you're talking about accepting me, forget it. Forty years he's had to do that.

PENNY:

You were right about Schoenberg. He did convert. The reason I was confused is because he converted back to Judaism -- forty years later. It's time to come in off the desert, Rick.

RICK:

(After a long pause Rick reaches for the phone) Because I owe you.

PENNY:

(Getting phone for him) Whatever.

RICK:

(So she can dial for him) 1-718-

PENNY:

543-7782 Bruté.

RICK:

Well, et tu Bruté, that's fitting in any event. (Into phone) It's a beautiful day, what are you doing home? (Beat) You got a long wait, it's a night game. (Beat) Aren't they on Fox? (Beat) Well, look, I can get that here, why don't you come down and we'll watch it together. (Beat) So take a cab. (Beat) Okay, okay. (Beat) I'll be here.

(As if Harry was just about to hang up) And, uh, pop...you got any more of that kugel? (Beat) Okay. (Hands phone to Penny who is beaming and hangs it up) What am I doing? The Yankees better lose.

end of scene

Scene 4. Tuesday

(Penny enters)

PENNY:
Sheridan Whiteside?

RICK:
(Smiles) I said to myself, if I ran a Jew school who would I be most intimidated by? Italian name, obviously you got your organized crime. Black or Hispanic name, then they worry about a discrimination suit. A German name, well, there are depths to which even I wouldn't stoop. But a neutral, WASPish name that just reeks of bureaucracy, what could be scarier than that.

PENNY:
What did you tell them?

RICK:
Just that Sheridan Whiteside of the New York State Educational Licensing Bureau was in receipt of a complaint by one of their students that the school was illegally withholding diplomas --

PENNY:
Oh, no.

RICK:
-- in an effort to bilk the students of extra tuition.

PENNY:
You told them I had filed a complaint?

RICK:
No names. I figure you weren't the only student they did this to. Why, did they ask you about it?

PENNY:
No. But when they told me at my hearing -- after they lectured me for twenty minutes -- that I was off suspension and that I would be able to graduate this term, I asked a faculty friend of mine and she told me about the call.

RICK:
I guess it did the trick.

PENNY:

I can't believe you did that. Do you know how much trouble I could get into?

RICK:

Not to worry. They got a very strongly worded fax this morning that should take care of it.

PENNY:

What?

RICK:

You really should see the letterhead I made for it. That alone conjured up visions of endless hours sitting on hard wooden benches in cold marble halls, filling out obviously irrelevant forms in triplicate.

PENNY:

(Collapsing on chair) I'm fucked.

RICK:

About Torah, and for that matter, about people, I reluctantly listen to you. About how school administrators work, you listen to me. By the time they figure all this out, you'll be wearing those whatsits and parking in clergy spots. I left them my home phone, on which I recorded a very official message, but basically, they'll be thrilled to let it be, trust me on this. And if they ever do follow up and trace it to me, I'll say I was on drugs. Now, what should I get you for graduation?

PENNY:

I can't believe you did this.

RICK:

By the way, how did you know it was me?

PENNY:

Sheridan Whiteside? Monte Woolley in *The Man Who Came To Dinner*?

RICK:

Oh, I knew it sounded familiar.

PENNY:

Maybe I can convert.

RICK:

I did send another fax under *my* name.

PENNY:

That one I saw. Thank you. Everybody was very moved by it, and while they're still not happy about what I did, I think they're at least convinced that I did it well.

RICK:

Like I said, I owe you. For getting you suspended and -- well, I owe you.

PENNY:

Did I really bring you closer to God?

RICK:

Penny. (As in How could you believe that?)

PENNY:

(Disappointed) Oh. Stranger things have happened.

RICK:

Well, look, when you consider where I started. Hey, if you're living in the North Pole, no matter what direction you move, you're going to be closer to the South Pole.

PENNY:

Well, I'm just glad you chose to move at all. So?

RICK:

So?

PENNY:

You know what so. How did it go?

RICK:

It went. He came, we watched the Yankees, he did some of this (lip protruded, eyes wide, high-pitched "hm"), he did some of this (lip protruded, eyes narrow, eyebrow raised, lower pitched "hm"), we argued with the announcers, made fun of the commercials, we talked about politics, we talked about family, and right near the end, for what seemed like an eternity, we didn't talk about anything. And in that silence, staring at each other, we found, very briefly, a common language; and just as briefly, I think for both of us, the sadness was gone.

PENNY:

Good. That's the best graduation present I could ever hope to get. But I got you a present too. (Takes out a tape recorder)

RICK:

Great, Bienstock and I can have a battle of the boom boxes.

PENNY:

No, it's not this. It's this. (Produces a tape)

RICK:

Schoenberg's Greatest Hits?

PENNY:

No. (As she puts tape in player) I took the liberty of recording my ten most favorite prayers --

RICK:

Oh, no.

PENNY:

-- now that you've learned how to talk to your father, you should learn how to talk to God.

RICK:

I know how to talk to God. Bienstock has his E-mail address.

PENNY:

Just listen. (She starts the tape. It is *To Know, Know, Know Him*)

RICK:

(Sticks out his lower lip and nods) That's it. That's the version I heard. Penny, my girl, you are remarkable. How did you find it?

PENNY:

I prayed to God for guidance -- and when that didn't work, I asked the guy down at Tower about recordings of this song. He suggested I try this one.

RICK:

(Listens a bit) That's great. I still don't recognize who it is.

PENNY:

Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton and Emmylou Harris.

RICK:

Oh, God, the *Trio* album.

PENNY:

You know it?

RICK:

I remember when it came out. I remember thinking this is something to avoid at all costs.

PENNY:

See what happens when you prejudge. Think what you've been missing all these years.

RICK:

Is it completely beyond you to leave a tender moment alone?

PENNY:

Never mind about that. Listen to this, this is amazing. The salesman said that the guy who wrote this song was interviewed many years later and said that he didn't write this as a love song.

RICK:

Don't tell me. Your friend was right, he actually wrote it about God?

PENNY:

No. He wrote it about his father.

RICK:

Really?

PENNY:

(Juts her lip out and nods in an imitation of Rick)

RICK:

(Beat) Who wrote it?

PENNY:

Phil Spector.

PENNY WITH RICK JOINING IN:

A Jew you know.

PENNY:

(As they listen) There's an old Jewish saying: When you shun your sadness, you walk through the mud; when you greet your sadness, you fly through the skies.

RICK:

Nice. I never heard that.

PENNY:

I just made it up. That's one of the perks of being a rabbi, you get to make up old Jewish sayings.

RICK:

And pigeons like me fall for it.

PENNY:

What's the difference. If it's any good, someday it will be an old Jewish saying.

RICK:

It's good. It will never replace chutzpah, but it's good.

PENNY:

Whatever it is, it beats quoting Billy Joel. (Beat) Okay, latest theory about why I come here, I think I finally figured it out.

RICK:

What are you talking about?

PENNY:

You asked me the first time I was here why I wanted to bother with you. I said I didn't know but I knew I would figure it out. See, I believe God has a plan for all of us, and there was a reason why I was drawn to come to this room despite your not wanting me to and them not wanting me to and having to break all those rules. There was a reason.

RICK:

To reconcile me and my father?

PENNY:

Okay, there were two reasons. Maybe that was one, but this is the one I finally figured out. Can I use your phone?

RICK:

Sure.

PENNY:

(Dialing) This is a visual. You know, in Jewish tradition there is something called tzedaka: Giving, charity. Maimonides listed eight different ways to give, but he left the best one out. The greatest gift you can give someone is to let them give

something to you. So here's my gift to you, Rick. (Into phone) Pop. Hi. (Beat) Sure, shoot. (She says the following repeating what her father is saying, but for Rick's benefit) Name the four films for which Katherine Hepburn received Academy Awards. Let's see (Puts her hand over the receiver) Nu?

RICK:
Do you really need my help?

PENNY:
No, but I'd like it. Come on, *On Golden Pond*.

RICK:
Golden Pond, Guess --

PENNY:
Guess Who's Coming To Dinner, right. Philadelphia Story?

RICK:
No, the O'Toole thing.

PENNY:
Lion In Winter (into phone) I working on it, hold your horses. (To Rick) Come on.

RICK:
(Makes an I'm clueless face) Wait, that film, what's the name, Susan Strasburg remade it as *Stage Stru --*

PENNY:
Morning Glory. You're the greatest. (Into phone) *On Golden Pond, Lion In Winter, Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* and *Morning Glory*. (Beat) Thanks, (looking at Rick) I had a good teacher. (Beat) Yes, I have one for you. How come you never took me to see *The Thief of Baghdad*? (Beat) Really? How old was I? (Beat) You took a two year old to the movies? I hate when people do that. (Beat) I'm not surprised, it's a great film. (Beat) No, that's not why I called. Look, Pop, how's Scott doing with his Torah portion. (Beat) Still, huh? Well, my schedule has freed up some, and after all, he is my brother. (Beat) Saturday is fine. (Beat. She smiles) Sure, what's playing? (Beat) See you then. (She hangs up). He says *Thief of Baghdad* was the first film he ever took me to, I was two, and I sat there watching it and never made a sound. (More to herself) I knew I heard that song before.

RICK:
All right. Tell me what just happened.

PENNY:

That was my father.

RICK:

That much I got.

PENNY:

What I figured out was that forgiving him, if I ever really did, wasn't enough. I needed to accept him. What gave me the courage -- and it took a lot of courage -- to do that, was watching someone else do it and seeing that there were no bad side effects. That's what you gave to me. Thanks.

RICK:

De nada. (Beat) Your father asks you movie questions too?

PENNY:

That's the only way he'd let me talk to him.

RICK:

That was a pretty tough question.

PENNY:

Yeah, the kind I kept waiting for you to ask.

RICK:

My questions aren't tough enough?

PENNY:

No.

RICK:

Hmm. All right, here's the toughest question I know. Do you really believe in God?

PENNY:

(Beat of surprise) That is a tough question, and the last one I would have ever expected you to ask.

RICK:

Well, in my condition it might be. Do you?

PENNY:

I'm going to be a rabbi, I guess I'm supposed to say of course. Hmmm. Let me answer it this way. They say the universe is five billion years old.

RICK:

Right, I have to send it a card.

PENNY:

And that it started when some highly compressed ball of matter exploded. Before I ever get to the questions of where did it come from and where is it going, where was I before I was born and where will I be after I die, I always ask: Why? There's no answer to that "why", so I just call it God and I see where I go from there. Every logical system needs to start with an axiom. God is my axiom.

RICK:

But that's the key. It's where you go from there. When people start claiming to have some shortcut to the answers, I immediately tune out. I think Lenny Bruce said it best when he said he was happy to see that people were turning back to God and away from the church.

PENNY:

(Smiling) I think God finds his or her way into everything, even a synagogue.

RICK:

Well, Penny old girl, despite your best efforts, he has yet to find his way into here (indicating himself). Maybe it's too cluttered for him (as a concession to Penny) or her.

PENNY:

Cluttered with what?

RICK:

Anger, sorrow, movies, Ebbets Field, maybe a bissel too much kugel. (Beat) I don't know what it is, really. I don't know that I want to know. There's another quote from Melville that has a particular resonance in this room: "God keep me from ever completing anything."

PENNY:

You're very brave, I like that in my men. If I didn't have God and prayer, I don't know how I could make it through a single day. That's the gift I was hoping to give you.

RICK:

(Beat) There's a moment when the lights start to dim, and the music comes up, and the opening credits hit the screen, when I am completely transported. But as much as I want it to go on forever, I never really understand a movie until it's over. That's my prayer. And sometimes it can even make me feel better. I don't know why, and I don't ask why. But if it makes you feel better, Penny Feingold, we can call it God

and see where we go from there -- or should I say, see where I go from here.

PENNY:
It makes me feel better.

RICK:
(About tape) Play it again, Sam.

PENNY:
(Restarting tape) You know, in *Casablanca*, Humphrey Bogart never really--

RICK:
I know, I know. Just play it. (Listens to the music awhile) About his father, huh?

PENNY:
Yep.

RICK:
Go know.

End of scene

Scene 5. A Sunday sometime later

(Penny and Harry. The bed is empty. Harry is looking in a bag)

PENNY:

You have everything?

HARRY:

I think. How would I know? What about that? (The tape player)

PENNY:

Oh, no, that's mine.

HARRY:

Then that's everything.

PENNY:

How are you doing?

HARRY:

How am I doing? I get a phone call. I get dressed. I come down here. I get a bag together. Things to do. That's life, things to do so you don't just sit there and think about other things.

PENNY:

That's all you think life is?

HARRY:

(Smiles at her) Richard warned me about you. Don't start in with me, I'm warning you, I'm too old.

PENNY:

Do you want any kind of a service?

HARRY:

No. I just came from the cremation.

PENNY:

I know.

HARRY:

I'll keep the ashes. Someone to watch the games with. But he didn't want anything else.

PENNY:

Yes, he told me that. What about you?

HARRY:

No, I don't want anything else. There isn't anything else, really. All those years we never talked, I never saw him, but at least I knew he was out there, somewhere. This is...(Beat) The next time you talk to God, you tell him, a father having to watch his son die, there's no excuse for that. You tell him.

PENNY:

I will.

HARRY:

Djeet? (Did you eat)

PENNY:

No.

HARRY:

Come, I'll buy you a pastrami sandwich.

PENNY:

Okay.

HARRY:

No, wait. (A little confused) I have to go somewhere, they said.

PENNY:

The office on the first floor.

HARRY:

Right. I'm glad you're here. We'll go, then we'll eat.

PENNY:

Uh, why don't you go ahead and I'll meet you down there.

HARRY:

You have to see other people?

PENNY:

No, not today. But I want to say goodbye to Rick.

HARRY:

You're going to say goodbye to him? (Beat. Then, as he turns and leaves) Okay, but

he won't like it.

PENNY:

Well, Rick, I was hoping you'd make it to my ordination. Just another month away. But I guess if you had, I would have started hoping you could make it to my first official sermon, and then my first High Holy Day service, and then my first child. There would always be something -- there always is something we hope to live for. Anyway, I'm planning on talking about you for my ordination speech. It seems appropriate. I learned more about being a rabbi in four weeks in this room than in four years at that ongepotchket school. (Beat) Maybe I won't phrase it quite like that. So what am I doing, Rick? I'm talking to an empty bed, talking to somebody who isn't here. I'm praying, Rick. I don't know why it always seemed so important to get you to understand prayer. Partly, I guess, because it's been so helpful to me. Partly because you resisted it so much. But mostly because as easily as I could share my ideas and feelings with you, that's how hard it was to share my faith with you. Prayer isn't the only language of faith, but it's the only one I speak fluently. I guess we needed subtitles. But now that you can't give me a hard time any more, I'm gonna share something with you. A story: There was a rabbi who taught Torah each morning. Before he would start the lesson, he would recite a prayer that in part said: May God, the peacemaker of the heavens, bring peace to us on earth. He meant peace in here. (Points to her chest) When the prayer was finished he would say: Now that we are at peace, we can learn. When he died, his students decided to recite that prayer at his service. I guess they thought: Now he can learn. That prayer is what we now know as kaddish. Rick, I was just trying to bring you a little peace through prayer. (Deep sigh) And so, here goes. Yitgadal veyitkadash shemei raba bealma divera chireutei -- I know, I know, but I'm not saying this prayer for you. I'm saying it for me. You're not the only one who needs a little peace. Veyamlich malchutei bechayeichon uveyomeichon uvechayei dechol beit -- And besides, there's still a lot to learn. Yisrael, baagala uviseman kariv, veimeru: amein -- I'm sorry you won't see my ordination, but at least you were spared seeing the Yankees win the World Series. (Sigh) Oh, well, wait 'til next year. (She looks at the tape recorder and she starts the tape of *To Know Him Is To Love Him* playing as the lights begin to fade). *Proschai, Damasch*. Yitbarach veyishtabach, veyitpaar veyitromam veyitnasei, veyithadar veyitaleh veyithalal shemei dekudeshha, berich hu, leeila min kol etc.

end of play