

Thursday . . . I belong to a bridge club and a few other girls whom I worked with when I was single . . . It all goes to charity!

BEN: Continue. I didn't say stop, did I?

GLORIA: It's only one night a week. I'm in every other night. I get out so little, that when I get the chance . . .

BEN, *stands behind her, strokes her hair, gently:* Your husband takes you out on Saturdays. All husbands take their wives out on Saturdays.

GLORIA: Not for some time now. I swear to you, that's the truth. He's so tired when the weekend comes and . . . It costs so much for a baby-sitter, even if you can get someone . . . reliable. Please, don't.

BEN, *facing her:* I want you to kiss me.

GLORIA: No, no . . .

BEN: I said I want you to kiss me.

GLORIA: I can't, please . . . *She lowers her head.*

BEN: Pick up your head! Pick it up! *She raises her head. Without kissing her:* I'll accept that for now. But you'd better learn and learn quickly. I'm not to be contradicted. Not in word, thought or deed. I'm all your world tonight. Remember that, lady.

GLORIA: I won't ask you to consider what you're doing for myself. It isn't myself I'm concerned with right now. But I do have a husband and a family. All of them will suffer. It's not only me. Why don't you consider them? Why don't you . . .

BEN: I didn't hear a word you said because . . . *(flaring petulantly)* because you didn't have my permission to speak! You can cry whenever you want, however. That much I allow you because you're a woman.

GLORIA: I'm not going to cry. There's no reason to cry. I believe that there's goodness in you. I can see it in your eyes. Isn't there someone whom you love very much?

BEN: Besides myself?

GLORIA: Besides yourself.

BEN: No one.

GLORIA: There must be someone. Your mother . . .

BEN: Don't make me laugh.

GLORIA: A wife?

BEN: Do you think I'm that dumb?

GLORIA: Then friends. You must have had friends.

BEN: No one. No one. I have no one but myself and that's all that counts. Me. Myself. The fulfillment of my own body and my own primitive soul. Sometimes . . . Sometimes I walk along the street at night and my feet, as I walk, my feet feel like large soft paws, and the moon, the moon shining overhead, so brightly, so primeval, I want to raise my head and . . . and let loose from inside of me some wild strange . . . a sound that hasn't been heard for thousands of years, but it's inside of us, you see, deep, deep inside of us . . . Tonight I don't have to hold anything in. Tonight I have you. To play with. To destroy. To do whatever I want with. After that, I don't care. I want you to kiss me. Now.

GLORIA: You're driving me out of my mind.

BEN: You don't want to? *She does, on his cheek.* Not good enough!

GLORIA: Leave me alone, leave me alone . . .

LOU GEHRIG DID NOT DIE OF CANCER

by Jason Miller

Barbara and Victor Spinilli are a suburban couple whose marriage is on the rocks. As she has become more involved in local community theater, he has spent more time coaching his little-league baseball team. After five years of marriage they have little in common.

The play opens with Barbara rehearsing for the opening that night of *Hedda Gabler*, in which she stars. Her rehearsal was interrupted, first, by phone calls for Victor from angry parents whose children are on the team, and then, by a visit from a parent who claimed her son didn't play often enough. Victor returns from a little-league game, buoyant after punching the

umpire. A frustrated athlete who now works for his family's company, Victor is still trying to win the love of his unyielding father.

In the scene below, Victor has just gotten off the phone after telling an irate father that his son belongs in dancing school and not on the baseball field. Barbara voices her displeasure at Victor's behavior, and during the argument that follows, both of them become aware of how little they respect each other's values.

BARBARA: You are hard to believe, Victor Spinilli. You're just too much.

VICTOR: Am I? Look, Greta, save the acting for the stage, all right?

BARBARA: I will, I certainly will. If you'll save your antics for the boxing ring.

VICTOR: Oh! Who called?

BARBARA: That moron Phil. The man is going to sue us, Victor.

VICTOR: Let him sue. Honey, I really laid one on that loud mouth. Bam! His ears almost fell off.

BARBARA: There are other ways of settling disputes than hitting someone in the mouth with a catcher's mitt.

VICTOR: What catcher's mitt? I hit him with my fist . . . this fist, closed just like this . . . and I hit him like so. *Slowly demonstrates on Barbara's chin.*

BARBARA: Really? Then Phil must have made a mistake because he said you hit him with a catcher's mitt.

VICTOR: Listen, sweetie, I don't need weapons.

BARBARA: Mrs. Martin must be mistaken too. She said you hit him with a catcher's mitt and she was there.

VICTOR: Who's Mrs. Martin?

BARBARA: Her son plays on your team. I believe he's the one who sits on the end of the bench alone.

VICTOR: Oh, Mary Jane . . . Mrs. Martin is Mary Jane's mother?

BARBARA: No, she's Jeffrey's mother. That boy adores you and you won't even give him the time of day. He's deeply hurt by all this juvenile name-calling. Mrs. Martin came here to talk to you about it. She's very upset.

VICTOR: You want to know the truth? I gave the kid a suit, right? A gift. Because he's so bad it's unbelievable, but I felt sorry for this skinny bloodless kid and I put him on the team. And I let him bat once, just once, the first game I let him bat and I thought that kid would pee all over home plate . . . one . . . two . . . three. He came back and sat at the end of the bench and that's where he's staying until the end of the season.

BARBARA: She's going to call you tomorrow; use a little tact when you talk to her, please.

VICTOR: I'll charm the pants right off her.

BARBARA: Figuratively speaking, of course.

VICTOR: Is there any other way?

BARBARA: Put a little juice in you and you're just a wit.

VICTOR: You know, I think I'll try out for one of your plays, I'd probably electrify everyone.

BARBARA: Well, Stephen was thinking of doing *The Hairy Ape*.

VICTOR: Is it a good role? Would I be the hero?

BARBARA: Victor, you wouldn't have to memorize a line. Just walk out there and burp and belch and scratch.

VICTOR: Forget it, I don't think I'd get along with that faggoty friend of yours.

BARBARA: Stephen is not a faggot. He's a gentleman and an excellent director.

VICTOR: He's also an excellent faggot.

BARBARA: Don't tell me I worked with the man for six months and . . .

VICTOR: I saw the guy for six minutes and I'm telling you he's sweet . . . come on, that tight-assed little walk, holding his cigarette like a baton, ascots, lipping . . . baby, he's three feet off the ground. Flies like a little birdie looking for a nest . . .

BARBARA: It's just so you, Victor, to mistake breeding and culture for something crude.

VICTOR: Fine. So he's read a few books. Went to N.Y.U. . . . uses hundred-dollar words. Fine. Live and let live, that's my philosophy. But I wouldn't take a shower with him, that's all I'm saying.

BARBARA: You're just jealous of him.

VICTOR: Jealous of him? Come on. Look . . . stop, look, listen. If he was Adam and you were ever Eve, you'd still be in the Garden of Eden, alone.

BARBARA: Why do you resent people with intelligence and ability and class? People who have exciting minds. People who can think and feel beyond all the rest of your ordinary, drab, beer-belly friends.

VICTOR: Because my beer-belly friends are not phony. They don't have fake smiles, fake laughs, fake words. And they don't wear pants five sizes too small. Does that answer your question?

BARBARA: I know what it is. I know why the people from the theater bother you so.

VICTOR: Oh yeah!

BARBARA: Because they make you feel stupid. They make you feel awkward and nervous and stupid. They make you feel just like that little Martin boy because you almost pee in your pants every time I have them over here.

VICTOR: Are you serious, come on.

BARBARA: It's true. Last week when the group was here and we were talking about books and Stephen asked you if you had ever read Proust and you said sure all the time, he was one of your favorite writers. Everybody just froze with embarrassment. Just absolutely went rigid with embarrassment, because they knew you never even heard of Proust let alone read him. God, it was humiliating.

VICTOR: I went to college. I know who Proust is, Proost, Prusti!

BARBARA: You graduated with a business degree from N.Y.U.! I don't call that going to college. And that even took you six years to get.

VICTOR: Well, that's just too Goddamn bad about you and your intellectual friends. Sitting around talking about Proust, drinking all my liquor, sitting around drinking all my booze and talking about . . . what's his name, the guy that ended up a drunk? You know they made a movie about him, the guy that . . .

BARBARA: F. Scott Fitzgerald had terrifying problems.

VICTOR: Sure he did and one of them was alcohol. And the other guy, the one who shot himself in the mouth with a shotgun . . . Hemingway. There you are sitting around for two hours talking about a drunk and a suicide. Talking like crazy, "Oh, he was marvelous." "What perception, what depth . . ." Depth? Ah fongo, depth! Those two guys couldn't even face life.

One drowns in scotch and the other scatters his brains all over the living room. So, what's all the cheering about?

BARBARA: Please don't use yourself as a model of life-facing, Victor.

VICTOR: I stare it right in the face, baby. I don't sit around talking about how other people face it because I face it every day of my life. I think my thoughts, I don't steal them from books. I don't pick dead men's brains for ideas so I can impress a bunch of people who aren't going to be impressed because they are too busy trying to impress me. You know what I noticed about your little sewing circle the other night? Everybody talked but nobody listened. Everybody sat around doing monologues and nobody gave a good Goddamn what anyone else was saying.

BARBARA: And you just sat back there like Buddha, like a big fat Buddha, silly grin and all, and said nothing.

VICTOR: Right.

BARBARA: Just like you sit back and say nothing every time your father comes to this house. *Pause.*

VICTOR: Let's leave my father out of this, Barbara.

BARBARA: No, let's not. Let's really clear the air. You can face anything, right. Old King Kong Spinilli can face a little thing like the truth. Do you know you are terrified of your father just as you are terrified of my friends? *Victor puts a Caruso record on the phonograph.*

VICTOR: You're going to say that once too often and I'm going to knock you right on your fat bitchy ass.

BARBARA: Do you have your catcher's mitt ready?

VICTOR: Keep it up, mouth! My relationship with my father is my business, not yours.

BARBARA: It's very much my business when he comes in here telling me how to run my house.

VICTOR: He tells you nothing. *Victor, during Barbara's speech, starts to sing in a mock-Caruso manner, very loudly.*

BARBARA: No? How come everytime he arrives here for his semimonthly visit he has the nerve to ask me if I'm pregnant. He doesn't ask anymore, he demands it. "Are you pregnant yet?" He gives me that Neanderthal look and I'm afraid to say no.

VICTOR: He wants a grandchild, so what?

BARBARA: He's got two from your sister and one from your brother. What does he want, an army of grandchildren?

VICTOR: He wants a boy . . . he wants the name continued . . . he's from the old country, all right?

BARBARA: He's from the old country, all right . . .

VICTOR: All right, you've said enough.

BARBARA: I just want to tell him we are living our lives separate from him. He is not going to terrorize me into having a child before I want one.

VICTOR: How can you have a child, Barbara, you've got a little piece of steel up there between your legs, remember?

BARBARA: Tell him then about the coil.

VICTOR: He wouldn't understand. He's old-fashioned about that.

BARBARA: Well, your father and I are going to come to an understanding. What's he going to do, stop his annual donation to us? Cut you out of your share of the company? Fire you?

VICTOR: He'd be very hurt.

BARBARA: He had the nerve to ask me to go to a specialist to see if I could make babies, make babies . . .

VICTOR: We've been married for five years, it's a legitimate question, for Christ's sake.

BARBARA: The man owns us.

VICTOR: I do a good job for him. We're paying our own way.

BARBARA, *quietly*: Victor, that is not true, not really.

VICTOR: Look, they've accepted my new advertising line, "Spinilli gives you the sauciest spaghetti." The old man was delighted with that line. We might even put it to music.

BARBARA: Accepting it and using it are two different things.

VICTOR: He'll use it, I know it.

BARBARA: He accepted "Spinilli, the sauce that made spaghetti famous," but did he use it? No! He used "Spinilli is spaghetti" instead, which was Bob's suggestion. But I tell everybody it was yours.

VICTOR: You don't have to do that.

BARBARA, *sad*: Victor, all you're doing is collecting your check every Friday.

VICTOR: I sold them on the idea of sponsoring the little-league team, didn't I? He bought the uniforms, jackets, everything.

BARBARA: Only because he loves baseball. He didn't even ask you about the team the last time he was here.

VICTOR: It bothers him because we're in last place.

BARBARA: Victor, this is insane, honey. I'd leave here tomorrow with you if you'd go back to the city and start with Harry again. Face the facts, Victor, here with your father's firm you will always be a lackey, the son of the boss.

VICTOR: I face the facts, but I am going to prove to the old man that I can carry the weight of my share of the company.

BARBARA: For God's sake. You've been trying to prove something to your father for the last thirty years. You thought he wanted you to be a baseball player. You tried it, you know what happened. He wanted you to be a doctor, you flunked out. You did everything he wanted you to and nothing you wanted. You keep telling yourself lies, pretending you're important to the company.

VICTOR: Let's not talk about lying to ourselves. Don't tell me about daydreams.

BARBARA: And what does that mean?

VICTOR: It means that this stupid community play acting has gone straight to your head. Dancing lessons on Thursday, speech lessons on Monday. And you're not going to New York with any faggot, to see any agent, about any commercials, understand?

BARBARA: That agent is coming to the show tonight, at Stephen's request, and if he likes my work, I'm going to New York and read for anything that might come up.

VICTOR: He's coming to see the play tonight, huh . . . well, forget about New York, baby, wake up, because tonight the dream's over. Bye bye, big city.

BARBARA: You saw a dress rehearsal last week. Dress rehearsals are never very good.

VICTOR: Do you know that it was so rotten, everybody was so terrible that I almost puked? Everybody falling all over everybody else. The guy that plays your old lover or something opens the door and the Goddamn door falls down . . . he's just standing there with a doorknob in his hand. The agent will die laughing.

BARBARA: If he doesn't die of laughter, if by some small miracle he wants to get me work, I am going to New York. Do you understand?

VICTOR: Hey, you know where your talent is? Your talent is in your boobs. Everybody goes to see your enormous boobs. I'm

not kidding. Your boobs come on stage first, and then you follow. That should be your stage name, Barbara Boobs. Old Bullet Breasts.

BARBARA: Thank you for your confidence in me, Victor. But I'm still going to work in New York.

VICTOR: You better move out of my house then.

BARBARA: Whose house?

VICTOR: Mine, this house is mine. My house!

BARBARA: You know, this play acting started as just a simple diversion, an escape from all the sterility that surrounds me. Just a little exercise of female vanity, but now it's become all I have, it's become a necessity. And you're right, Victor, it's a daydream, but it's mine and nobody gave it to me and so I'm not afraid of anyone taking it away. And as things stand now, it may very well be the most important thing in my life.

VICTOR: I swear to you, if you go to New York, never come back to this house again.

BARBARA: I am through sitting with your father and you every third Thursday like clockwork, sitting in this living room, listening to the Goddamn grieving voice of Caruso for three hours. I am done inflicting that torture upon myself. And now I shall go upstairs and finish dressing for the theater. *She exits.*

Phone rings. He answers.

VICTOR: What! . . . Hello, Phil . . . yeah . . . look, Phil, nobody calls me a wop . . . no, with my fist, Phil, the mitt was in the other hand . . . I know it doesn't look good for the league . . . what . . . what do you mean fired? . . . You can't fire me, I'm the sponsor, remember? My old man bought the suits, balls and bats, I own the team . . . you did . . . my old man said what? . . . *(unbelieving)* . . . Are you serious, my old man said that? . . . No, I do not want to coach the eight to ten year olds, Christ, that's like being shipped to the minors . . . no, no hard feelings, I'll see you around. *Hangs up phone. Goes to record player, puts on a Caruso record, a sad mournful one, fixes a drink. Barbara enters. Victor is pretty high by now.*

BARBARA: If you drive me down to the theater now, you'll still have time to come back and get dressed.

VICTOR: I'm not going to the theater.

BARBARA: Where are the keys? *Victor hands them to her.* You know what I think? We've simply outgrown each other. After five years together I have to remind myself.

VICTOR, quietly: Hey, I never made love to you without getting the feeling that you were defending yourself against something, and that's not booze talking, either!

BARBARA: I'm going to the party, I'll be very late.

VICTOR: Have a nice time.