

Jewish Sports Heroes & Texas Intellectuals

William Missouri Downs

Agent:
Patricia McLaughlin
Beacon Artists Agency
57 West 57th Street - 4th floor
New York, New York 10019
212-736-6630
BeaconAgency@hotmail.com

Cast Of Characters

Henry Cook 50's, A Cowboy/Philosopher

Darla Cook/Konigsberg 30ish, his daughter

Johnny Galtenstein 20's, a football player

TIME: A late afternoon and evening in
September - The present.

PLACE: Galveston, Texas.

SETTING: A modest kitchen. Pushed against one wall is a small dinette heaped with paper and an old Underwood typewriter. The floor is covered with books. In the corner is a pile of heavy cardboard boxes. Above the doors are mounted deer antlers. On the walls are hung rodeo posters and a dozen or so fishing poles.

Jewish Sports Heroes & Texas Intellectuals

ACT ONE

(THE LIGHTS RISE: HENRY EPHRIAM COOK enters from the basement with a box and drops it with the others. He's a big-boned, barrel-chested cowboy in his late sixties. He has no pants on, instead his Mickey Mouse boxer shorts reveal thin bare white legs stuffed into faded cowboy boots. He takes a swig of beer just as the back door buzzer sounds. From outside a woman's voice calls out.)

DARLA

(Off stage - light Texas twang)

Daddy, it's me!

(HENRY quickly punches the boxes out of the way and tries to find his pants but no luck.)

HENRY

(a deep Texas accent)

Who's "me"?

DARLA

Your daughter, ya moron!

(The buzzer sounds again.)

HENRY

Then you gotta key!

(Giving up on the pants, HENRY sits at the dinette and nonchalantly types at an old Underwood. There's a struggle at the door and DARLA COOK enters. She's thirtyish. She attempts to juggle her purse, several heavy, disintegrating grocery bags and keys. She makes it to the

counter just as the bags rip open. After dropping the mess into the sink she turns and glares at HENRY.)

HENRY

Problem?

DARLA

Damn right! Some jackass tried to run me off the road!

HENRY

What'd you do to piss him off?

DARLA

Why does it gotta be my fault! Why can't he be a jackass who cut me off for no damn reason?

HENRY

Probably was a jackass - who was pissed off by somethin' you did.

DARLA

I didn't do anything! I'm in some rental I don't know how to drive and this yahoo in a crappy old pickup cuts me off! Couldn't find the horn so I had to give him the finger.

HENRY

Don't give men in crappy old pickups the finger, they don't like that.

DARLA

No kidding! The moron followed me for ten blocks, till one of his lawns mowers fell out the bed and so he stopped to pick it up. Scared the living crap out of me.

HENRY

That's why you're late. Or did you get lost?

DARLA

I didn't get lost.

HENRY

If you knew which way North was you wouldn't have that problem.

DARLA

I know which way North is.

HENRY

Which way?

DARLA
(beat, thinks about it)

I didn't get lost!

HENRY
 Fine and dandy. Just wanted you to know that you're late. You do that in this business world you feed on and you'll get your ass handed to you in a paper bag.

DARLA
 It took three stops to find French Vanilla. You want me here on time or French Vanilla?

HENRY
 Whichever.

DARLA
 Then shut up!

HENRY
 Well 'howdy' to you too.

DARLA
 Did you know you're not wearing any pants?

HENRY
 I know it.

(DARLA starts looking for his pants. HENRY gets up and unpacks the grocery bags. He piles up a dozen tiny packets of cat food, fancy little delicate designer packets. They disgust him.)

DARLA
 It's cat food. Or are you going to board her?

HENRY
 Haven't thought about it.

DARLA
 Where is she?

HENRY
 Moonpie? She's out.

DARLA
 Wish you wouldn't do that. Cats that wander don't live as long. How long she been missin'?

HENRY
 She's not 'missin'. She killed a warbler two hours ago. Feathers everywhere.

DARLA
(yelling out the window)

Moonpie! Moonpiiiie!

HENRY
 Absolute carnage. Apocalypse in the backyard. So she can't be far.

DARLA
(yelling out the window)

M. Peee! M. Peeeee!

HENRY
 If the cat doesn't know its name, what the hell makes you think she'd know her initials?

(DARLA glares at HENRY.)

HENRY
(digging in the grocery bag)

What, no chew?

(HENRY pulls out of the grocery bag a small box of panty liners. He is totally grossed out, holding them as if they were plutonium. DARLA grabs them away and hands him his pants.)

DARLA
 You're feelin' better.

HENRY
 Me? I feel like crap.

DARLA
 Where the blazes is a double hernia anyway?

HENRY
 I'd show you but I'd be arrested.

(DARLA opens the ice cream, grabs a spoon and downs a scoop. It's been a long day, it is her only treat.)

HENRY
 Cancelled the papers and I'm havin' the mail forwarded to you. Your mother will just lose it. Besides I think she opens my mail. Tries to find out if I gotta lover. I can't prove anything, but my Sears bill is missin'.

DARLA
 I'll be staying a while so I can pick up your mail.

HENRY

I already told that idiot mailman. Told him three times so maybe it'll stick. Last time I was gone, he sent it to your mother. I spelled it out. Whatever you do don't send it to your mother. Sent it to her anyway. And of course she had to come to the hospital and read it to me.

(She notices the boxes.)

DARLA

What you got here? New book?

HENRY

Just junk. Stuff to donate.

(She lightly kicks the boxes with the tip of her shoe.)

DARLA

They're heavy. How'd you get 'em up here?

HENRY

I managed.

(She starts to open a box but HENRY stops her.)

HENRY

Your Mama had her cataract surgery.

DARLA

What? When?

HENRY

She wants you to dial up the minute you get in. Like now, Heifer.

DARLA

Why didn't you tell me?

(DARLA quickly dials the phone and waits while it rings.)

HENRY

She didn't want me to. Said you'd just fret. Now remember, you didn't fly, you...

DARLA & HENRY

..took a train.

HENRY

I told her not to dilly dally. Told her, one eye at a time. Did she listen? Course not.

DARLA

She never lets it ring more than twice.

HENRY

Waited too long, so she had to get both eyes done at once. Got some nurse with her twenty-four hours a day.

DARLA

Did you send flowers?

HENRY

Why should I? She can't see'em.

DARLA

Daddy, you should've told me.

HENRY

She's fine. Blind but fine. Got two huge silver patches on her face. Makes her look like some kinda massive, damn gnat.

DARLA

(on phone)

Hello! Mom? ...I'm sorry. May I speak with...*(she is interrupted)* Yes this is...*(interrupted)* No no, let her rest. Could you tell her...*(interrupted)* That's right, I took a train... Thank you... *(she hangs up)*

HENRY

Seen your Mama lately?

DARLA

It's been a while.

HENRY

Think she's startin' to look like Bozo?

DARLA

Daddy!

(DARLA looks up a number in the phone book and dials)

HENRY

It's true. While she was losin' her sight she just kept pilin' on that Max Factor lipshit and with that red kosher hairdo, twice the size of a human head, she started lookin' like Bozo. I had to ask her to stop comin' to the hospital cause she was scarin' the hell out of the nurses.

DARLA

She does not look like Bozo!

HENRY

Your mother, a tenth of a ton of thrills and fun.

DARLA

Shhh. *(on phone)* Yes, I'd like to order flowers. "Get well" flowers. Something light. Something fun. Something that has a definite aroma. Daisies!

HENRY

I hate Daisies.

DARLA

They're not for you! *(back on phone)* Make the card for Boz - Barbara! I mean Barbara Jean Cook, 1812 North Oak.

HENRY

She stopped usin' my name two years ago.

DARLA

(on phone, glaring at Henry)

Check that, I mean, Konigsberg. Barbara Jean Kon-igs-berg - Got that? Make it say, ah, "Hope you're feeling better, love Darla and Henry."

HENRY

Hold it right there!

DARLA

That's right. Darla *and* Henry. And put some of those cute little 'X's and 'O's on it for hugs and kisses.

HENRY

God, I hate women.

DARLA

And put a big P.S. on it, "I'll be over as soon as I take care of the old fart!" Let me get my card.

HENRY

And make sure it's in braille!

(She fumbles through her purse for her credit card.)

DARLA

It would be nice if we all got together.

HENRY

She'd just get down on me for somethin'. Last time it was my language. That woman wouldn't say the word "crap" even if she had a spoonful of it in her mouth.

It wouldn't hurt you.

DARLA

(During the following, DARLA goes back to the phone and gives her card number.)

HENRY

Have I ever asked you to choose between your mother and me? Damn right I haven't. You know, I'm one of the happiest people I've ever met. I look at your mother and the rest of'em, it comes down to what happiness is. No one knows anymore. Except me. I know. I'm self-actualized. Did you read that chapter?

DARLA

(on phone.)

Expiration date?

HENRY

Did you read that chapter?

DARLA

What chapter?

HENRY

I sent you a chapter on self-actualization.

DARLA

Thought you said Frank Deeber read it.

HENRY

Who?

DARLA

That guy. The artist. Your best friend.

HENRY

Oh, Frank. He's not my best friend.

DARLA

(back to the phone.)

Yes, I'm still here.

(During the following, DARLA finishes her conversation and hangs up.)

HENRY

He thinks he's so damn smart. Thinks just because he made it to retirement without starvin' to death he knows what he's talkin' about. He used that heart attack as an excuse not to read it. Still doesn't know why he's dying. Two days before it hit, we were having breakfast at the Big Boy and he's a braggin' about how he 'speed-walks' five miles a day while he jams down the three egg senior platter. He thought eggs were happiness.

DARLA

I'm sorry to hear that. Is he okay?

HENRY

He's down the road, lyin' in bed, with tubes up his nose, makin' up excuses why he can't read the chapter that might make the few months he's got left worth somethin'. Ever try to have an intelligent conversation with someone who has tubes stuck up his nose?

DARLA

Are you packed?

HENRY

You didn't read the chapter.

DARLA

No.

HENRY

You're not on life support, what the hell's your excuse?

DARLA

Daddy, I didn't finish the chapter because it depressed me.

HENRY

My chapter on happiness depressed you?

DARLA

Yes.

HENRY

(beat)

Good. It's supposed to. Most people think they're happy. They run around, playin' games, so unhappy they could die and they don't even know it. They think that money'll make'em all jolly, but it doesn't. So they turn to family. Name one person whose family makes'em happy.

DARLA

I know lots of people with children who are happy.

HENRY

They're puttin' on a show. They don't want anyone to know that they've made the biggest mistake of their life by havin' the damn kid and it's too late now.

DARLA

A couple I know, Sue and Bobbie, got a kid and they are thrilled.

HENRY

Sue and Bobbie?

DARLA

They talk about little Ben all the time.

HENRY

You mean *Bob*, Sue and *Bob*?

DARLA

No it's Sue and Bobbie. It's a same sex marriage.

HENRY

God! What the hell has happened to Texas? Suddenly everyone has rights. Everybody has an opinion. Just cause you got 'an opinion doesn't mean its worth anything!

DARLA

They're good parents and they're happy. So your thesis on happiness is wrong!

(The phone rings.)

DARLA

That's Mama so hush up.

(DARLA answers.)

DARLA

(on phone)

Hi... No, sorry, you've dialed the wrong number... I'm sure. Same name, different person... Yes, I'm sure.

(She hangs up.)

HENRY

Oh hell, you gotta call.

DARLA

I did?

HENRY

Some former lover, said he wanted to look you up.

DARLA
Really? Who?

HENRY
What's-his-face. Ah, Jamie Fartner. I don't know. Jamie Lartner. Or maybe it was John.

DARLA
John Rosenberg?

HENRY
That's it. Knew I was in the ballpark.

DARLA
When did he call?

HENRY
'bout three weeks ago.

DARLA
What did you do with the number?

(She starts going through the drawers near the phone.)

HENRY
Don't remember. Rosenberg. Why does that name stick?

DARLA
He's the producer I dated.

HENRY
Producer?

DARLA
That local television guy. He edited out part of the chariot race from Ben Hur so it'd fit into the afternoon, dialin'-for-dollars, movie slot and you hollered that I had to drop him.

HENRY
What's he doin' now, cuttin' the violence out of the three stooges?

DARLA
I don't know what he's doing, you lost his number!

(DARLA inspects the four dozen post-it notes stuck around the phone, then goes through every drawer in the kitchen.)

HENRY

This is why our children are so screwed up today. The other mornin', I was watchin' some cartoons. They'd play a minute of a Bugs Bunny and then, in the middle, just fade to a commercial and when they came back they started a new cartoon! They had a minute to fill, so they played a minute. Today's kids got no sense of beginning, middle and end. That *this* is what causes *that*. If Bugs Bunny is tryin' to outwit Yosemite Sam then there must be a result, Yosemite Sam seeks revenge. Yosemite Sam attacks with an insane elephant, which then *causes* Bugs Bunny to do somethin'. Saw one where they faded to a commercial just as Bugs went off the high dive board into a glass of water. Did he make it? Is he dead? Are there rabbit guts splattered all over the stage? The kids don't know and soon they don't care.

DARLA

Glad you're getting so much *writing* done.

HENRY

Just bored. Goin' through the channels. Watched twenty minutes of somethin' called the New Smurfs - Now there is quality animation. Six frames a second!

(She stops. She can't find the number.)

DARLA

Would've it been too much to pick up the phone and tell me he called?

HENRY

Thought you were datin'.

DARLA

Who?

HENRY

That guy.

DARLA

What guy?

HENRY

What's-his-face. That kid who said he read all my stuff, kissed my ass and then, when pressed, admitted he hadn't read a thing.

DARLA

That was your publisher and it was three years ago.

HENRY

What the hell's the problem? There are a lotta men out there. Ever consider that this guy who cut you off in traffic just wanted to meet you?

DARLA

You're sick. Sick!

HENRY

Hell, you're nice lookin', gotta sort of a head on your shoulders.

DARLA

Things aren't the same. There are no more normal men out there.

HENRY

You mean Jewish men.

DARLA

No, just men in general.

HENRY

You're probably right. Did you know that in India there are criminals so obedient that all the jailer has to do is draw a circle in the dirt with a stick and tell them to stand there so many hours or days or years?

DARLA

That's not the type of man I want.

HENRY

I'm tryin' to agree with you! The world is full of some pretty stupid men.

DARLA

Fine! Just keep the messages when the stupid men call and I'll be in business!

HENRY

What about Dead Bob's?

DARLA

Dead what?

HENRY

Remember that country/western place, Bob's? Well Bob died so now they call it Dead Bob's.

DARLA

Why would I want to go there?

HENRY

A gal wants to meet a possible husband, a man wants to meet a possible mate and they go to a place where they can possibly meet. I mean, if you're that desperate--.

DARLA

I am not desperate!

HENRY

Hell, everyone's desperate! They just don't admit it.

(Beat. DARLA steps away.)

HENRY

What's wrong?

DARLA

I'm a little sick.

HENRY

You see, you hold it in all your life and that stomach twist will turn into cancer. It's a horrible way to go.

DARLA

Can I start taking things out to the car?

HENRY

Or maybe you're pregnant. Did you read my chapter on over population?

DARLA

I read it.

HENRY

The ass down the road--

DARLA

Frank Deeber, the artist. Your best friend!

(During the following, DARLA takes one of HENRY'S suitcases out the back and returns. HENRY follows out and back in again, never missing a beat.)

HENRY

He had all sorts of problems with that chapter. Course the world revolves around his four kids and twenty-nine grandkids. How about the chapter on personal freedom?

DARLA

I didn't have time.

HENRY

Know what a lone wolf is?

DARLA

Yeah, you've told me every Thanksgiving--.

HENRY

In a wolf pack, the younger males are kicked out by the dominant male. These younger males circle the pack. Sometimes miles away, sometimes just off in the woods. Waitin' for their chance. Waitin' for a female to stray. Or in the case of Sue and Bobbie it would be another young lesbian wolf and they mate and start their own pack. But while they're circlin', they're alone, and they're happy, because they're not under the dominant hand of the leader. They can think for themselves.

DARLA

Wait wait wait, they're circlin' near the pack, driven by hormones, and you think they're free thinkers?

HENRY

Bein' female, you couldn't understand.

DARLA

If you're going to use an analogy, why wolves? They're carnivores. They kill, eat and screw. How do you know they experience happiness or freedom? I don't mean to shoot holes in your fine lone wolf theory but it's full of it!

HENRY

If you don't want to talk, just say so when you walk in the door!

DARLA

Fine! I don't want to talk!

HENRY

Fine and dandy!

(HENRY tries to ignore her by studying the newspaper. She sits down on the other side of the table and glares at him. After a moment, she becomes interested in an article on the back of the paper he's reading. She gently pulls at the paper so she can read it. He notices her straining. They catch eyes.)

DARLA

Miss America. Wyoming won. First time in the state's history.

(He goes back to his side of the paper.)

HENRY

I got one hundred and twenty dead in a plane wreck. I gotta cut it out and send it to your mother so she can send it to you.

DARLA

(half listening)

Says here that she's the first disabled Miss America in pageant history.

HENRY

You know, if every beauty pageant contestant who promised to work with crippled kids really did, the problem would be eradicated. That's the thing, all of society is corrupt. Even to win Miss America you gotta lie through your teeth. Work with cripples, my butt.

DARLA

She doesn't *work* with the *disabled*, she *is* disabled.

HENRY

What do you mean?

DARLA

She's in a wheelchair.

HENRY

Miss America, the woman representin' the United States of America, one of the most screwed up nations on earth, but better than the rest of the namby-pamby crack pots out there, is represented by a wheelchair?!

DARLA

I think it's kind of evolved.

HENRY

What the hell is her talent? Wheelies?

DARLA

(deeply offended)

She does marathons.

HENRY

What did she do, zoom up and down the ramp for the judges?

DARLA

You are just nasty, did you know that? Nasty!

HENRY

I bet the first runner up feels like crap. Probably blew her brains out. Spend twenty years learnin' how to walk up and down a runway and you lose to a paraplegic. That can't be good for the psyche.

DARLA

I'm sorry I brought it up.

HENRY

It just proves my point, the world isn't controlled by logical people anymore. She didn't win because she was the smartest, had the best lookin' figure, or was more talented, that'd be discriminatin' against the ones who weren't that smart, were shaped like a board and got no abilities whatsoever.

DARLA

Your point?

HENRY

She won because she was in a wheelchair.

DARLA

That's not true!

HENRY

Then why?

DARLA

I don't know, I wasn't there. But I'll be glad to catch the next horse to Atlantic City and steal the judges score cards for you!

HENRY

Wait a minute. Now I see the logic! It's perfect. Paralysis does represent the United States. I take it all back!

DARLA

Christ, no wonder everyone hates you.

HENRY

That's why I sold a half of a million books.

DARLA

So did Hitler! Besides self-publishing doesn't count.

HENRY

(deeply offended)

I have never self published!

DARLA

You self published 'Zen and the Art of Bull Roping'.

HENRY

Drop it!

DARLA

You still got a basement full of leftovers. That's probably what the boxes are, leftovers no one wants.

HENRY

If you don't want my help, just say so when you walk in the door!

DARLA

Fine, I don't want your help, I don't want any talk and I don't want to hear about your books. I just want to be a normal father and daughter. Just sit here and hate each other and then I'll take you to the hospital.

HENRY

Fine and dandy.

(HENRY goes back to his paper and ignores her. Pause, DARLA gets uncomfortable with the silence.)

DARLA

I'm sorry.

HENRY

What?

DARLA

It's just that every time I come over here... it's just... all about you.

HENRY

What? You want to talk about yourself?

DARLA

That would be nice.

HENRY

I'm all ears.

DARLA

Well, I've decided that L.A. was a mistake. I'm tired of being around extremely happy people who are miserable all the time.

HENRY

And on top of that they got no sense of distance and no sense of where North is and what is worse, they don't care. Which way is North?

(DARLA takes a stab at it. She points.)

HENRY

Wrong. But you want to know, right?

DARLA

Deeply.

HENRY

If you don't know where North is, how do you give directions? When I lived in New York everythin' was blocks. Where is the food kitchen? It's ninety-two blocks that way, turn right go five blocks then turn left and go one block and there it was. In L.A. directions are given in miles, but absolutely nobody has any concept of how far a mile is--

DARLA

Daddy--

HENRY

I was lookin' for work, ridin' the boxcars. This was thirty years ago. Jumped off in L.A. Heard there was work at this mill--

DARLA

You're doing it again!

HENRY

Doin' what?

DARLA

I'm trying to talk about me.

HENRY

Who?

DARLA

Me.

HENRY

Ah to hell with it.

(HENRY chucks the paper and exits into the house.)

DARLA

(under her breath)

Great. Just great.

(DARLA gets up and looks out the window - towards the audience. Moments later, HENRY reenters with a role of toilet paper and searches through the piles of books for something to read.)

HENRY

What you doin'?

DARLA

Looking at the sunset. You know it's Passover.

HENRY
 No, I don't know.

DARLA
 Care to join me?

(Disgusted, HENRY steps over and looks out the window with her.)

DARLA
 Isn't this kinda nice? Just you and me watching the sunset.

HENRY
 Yeah. *(beat)* You know not to look right at the sun don't you?

DARLA
 Daddy!

HENRY
 What?

DARLA
 Could you let your parent go for a while?

HENRY
 Just bein' the old man, you don't gotta take my advice. Look at the sun all you want! Be my guest, blind yourself!

DARLA
 I know not to look right at the sun!

HENRY
 It's a little helpful warnin'! What the hell is the harm? Ya goofy or somethin'?

(HENRY starts out.)

DARLA
 Wait, don't go. Daddy, there's something I want to tell you.

HENRY
 You love me, I know.

DARLA
 Well, no. Daddy... Dad, I've done something that has made me... Well, happy.

HENRY
 What, I got to take you to the re-hab center again?

DARLA
 No. I've been... I've been... inseminated. Artificially... inseminated.

HENRY
 What you sayin'?

DARLA
(optimistic)
 I think I'm pregnant.

(HENRY lets that sink in for a moment.)

HENRY
 You're goin' to have a baby, without a father?

DARLA
 The baby has a father, I just don't know who it is.

HENRY
Artificial insemination.

DARLA
 I paid fifteen hundred. Everything I had.

HENRY
 And you don't even know who the father is!

DARLA
 Well, not entirely. I read his sperm report. Most of the donors there are Texas A&M students. This one was, I think. He was six foot two, curly hair and brown eyes. He's from the Midwest and is a football player with a 2.89 grade point average.

HENRY
 Sperm report?

DARLA
 They give you an information card about the donor and you choose what you're looking for. You can find anything.

HENRY
 How do you know it's true?

DARLA
 The donors only get twenty-five dollars per donation, the difference is quality control.

HENRY
 QUALITY CONTROL! This could be bull sperm they've implanted in you and how would you know?!

DARLA
 I guess I don't. But I have confidence in them, they were awfully nice.

HENRY

Of course they were nice, they charged fifteen hundred bucks per ounce! God, that's great! My daughters' been home three weeks--

DARLA

Two weeks--

HENRY

Where was she? She spent the time downtown, layin' there with her skirt up, legs all akimbo, bein' shot full of bull sperm! I'm such a happy parent!

DARLA

It is a very respected Jewish cryo bank! Highly recommended.

HENRY

By who? Sue and Bobbie?

DARLA

Well... yes.

HENRY

What do you want me to say?

DARLA

I don't want your approval! I just want you to know. You're going to be a grandfather.

HENRY

I'm not goin' to be a grandfather. Some stupid football player's six foot two inch, brown-eyed farmer father in Des Moines is goin' to be a grandfather!

DARLA

This is a perfectly acceptable way to have a baby today!

HENRY

I'm not upset with the method. Hell, the human race has tried everythin' else, this might be its salvation!

DARLA

Then be happy for me.

HENRY

I can't.

DARLA

Why not?

HENRY

A 2.89 grade point average?

DARLA

That's not that bad.

HENRY

He's a football player! He takes classes like intro to theatre and communication classes!

DARLA

I gave this a lot of thought! I looked at hundreds of dossiers and I thought he was the most well rounded.

HENRY

He couldn't have been much of a football player.

DARLA

How do you know?

HENRY

If he was any good, the school would've offered him a scholarship, and there'd be no need for him to be down at the sperm bank contemplatin' Miss July and masturbatin' into a Petri dish.

DARLA

Of course, one look at a sperm report and you can size someone up.

HENRY

What happened? They offer you a discount? We can shoot you full of stupid football player for less.

DARLA

You're guessing. Maybe he is a wonderful boy who needed the extra money to help his dying father back in Des Moines!

HENRY

What happens when the little pipsqueak is grown and wants to know who his father is?

DARLA

Hopefully I'll be married by then.

HENRY

How are you goin' to date? "Yeah, pick me up at six, and oh, by the way, here's my kid. Whose the father? I haven't got the foggiest." Do you realize how hard it is to be a single parent?

DARLA

Yeah, Mama told me.

HENRY

(beat)

That's different! You had five wonderful years with two

parents and they're still talkin'. Admittedly, we say nothin', but what the hell.

DARLA

Can't you for once be happy for me?

HENRY

God heifer, I'm happy for you all the time. I want you to have a better life; I just wonder if this is the way to do it. Look, let me be the old man for a minute. Can you do that?

DARLA

For just about my whole life, I've done that.

HENRY

You watch too much television. Those comedy shows. Sitcoms. I heard them on in the background when you call.

DARLA

So?

HENRY

They tell every woman thirty and over that she'd be happy if she just had a kid. Billboard advertisements. Radio. You're constantly inundated with how you're supposed to act.

DARLA

I want this baby.

HENRY

How do you know? How can anyone know? I'm not accusin' you, I'm just askin' how do you know? Where's the situation comedy about a woman who *doesn't* have children and is really thrilled about it! Where is it? It doesn't exist—

DARLA

You're on like a major digression.

HENRY

I'm talkin' about this kid.

DARLA

It's a baby and I can't exactly erase it. Unless I have stomach flu, it took. It's done! Daddy, I'm going to have a baby. I'm settling down. Okay?

HENRY

Why?

DARLA

I don't know. Why do I hafta think everything out?

HENRY

Good answer. I went downtown to buy a hat. Couldn't decide so, while I was tryin' to make up my mind, I thought I'd get myself shot full of bull sperm! Logical! We are ridin' down the logic trail now!

DARLA

Sometimes an explanation takes more than two seconds! You don't just ask 'why' and expect a logical, here it-is-laid-out-for-you answer.

HENRY

Just tell me, in your own words, don't flub it up with any of those catch phrases from Ladies' Home Journal that you love to cling to. Just answer why.

(HENRY waits for his answer.)

DARLA

Damn it, this is unfair.

HENRY

Unfair or not you got the floor.

DARLA

Daddy look, I've been a little depressed lately, okay? I mean, ever since the guy who wrote I'm Okay, You're Okay killed himself, I haven't been the same.

HENRY

Just answer why.

DARLA

It's because of my high school reunion!

HENRY

Okay, it doesn't make a damn bit of sense but okay.

DARLA

Everyone was showing off their baby pictures. Homecoming queen's got two. The guy voted most-changed has got three. And then there was Sarah Marks. She went on and on about how hard it had been to have children, especially after they found out that her husband's sperm had two tails. One on each end so they just sort of swam around in circles. You know, if I had a husband and his sperm had two tails I'd really think twice about having kids.

HENRY

So the fact that she *seemed* happy pissed you off.

DARLA

No. What pissed me off was that I couldn't be happy for her. I had to judge her. Like you do. Why were her children so damned important? That night I went home and it hit me. The children weren't her major achievement. It was simply a celebration. It was a little world she created... a family... she created a family. I've lost you haven't I?

HENRY

No, I'm right with you. Sperm with two tails. Go on.

(The doorbell buzzes. They both freeze.)

DARLA

You expecting someone?

HENRY

Oh yeah. Let him in.

DARLA

Who?

HENRY

Some guy. Would you let 'em in?

DARLA

Who?

(Another buzz. DARLA doesn't move.)

HENRY

Out of my way, Hef.

(HENRY exits to the back door.)

JOHNNY

(Off Stage)

Hey there.

HENRY

(Off Stage)

Come on in.

(HENRY returns with JOHNNY, a large twentyish, gangling kid wearing a Texas A&M football jersey. He'd be handsome if he lost a few pounds and attended fewer all night frat parties. He wears a cowboy hat and boots and carries a Dixie cup which he

spits chew into on a regular basis.)

JOHNNY

I saw your ad.

HENRY

Atheist's newsletter, right?

JOHNNY

I guess.

HENRY

You know, that paper wasn't goin' to have a classified section until I put my foot down. But the editors rejected my suggestion of havin' a 'lookin' for love' corner. I don't understand, don't atheist's date?

JOHNNY

Sure, everyone dates. Except queers.

(JOHNNY looks at DARLA. He smiles approvingly. DARLA gives a stupid 'stay away from me' smile back.)

JOHNNY

Hi.

DARLA

Hi.

JOHNNY

(leering at Darla)

Do you come with the place by any chance?

(DARLA looks to HENRY for help.)

HENRY

(interrupting)

Why don't you look around?

JOHNNY

Sure.

(The young man takes out a bag of chew and sticks a wad between his cheek and gum, shoots a slightly brown smile at DARLA and lopes into the living room.)

DARLA

A fan?

(HENRY grabs his little suitcase.)

HENRY

Let's move it. We'll stop on the way and tell your Mama you're pregnant. This I've got to see. She'll probably blow her brains out. Course she's blind so we've gotta help her find the gun.

DARLA

You're doing it again.

HENRY

Doin' what?

DARLA

Leaving me in the dark.

HENRY

You're one of the most stubborn heifers I've met.

DARLA

I'm your daughter, I have the right to know what's going on.

HENRY

It's none of your business but I'm thinkin' of sublettin' the place. Goin' for a walk.

DARLA

(growing doubtful)

You see, that was simple enough, just be honest. What ya going to do? Ride the rails again? Been talking about that for years. It makes total sense, you doing this right after a double hernia operation. Total sense. Yeah you're being honest with me. Total bull.

(DARLA steps over to the door into the house.)

DARLA

(calling off)

Excuse me, would you come in here, please?

(JOHNNY enters spitting.)

JOHNNY

Your pipes are goin'.

DARLA

Excuse me?

JOHNNY

I took one look at your pipes in the bathroom and I thought, *Ch-ching*, they're goin'.

(Whenever JOHNNY says 'Ch-ching', he points to his head)

and makes a cash register sound.)

JOHNNY

They got two months, maybe three. I took one look and went *Ch-ching*.

DARLA

You're here to sublet my father's house?

JOHNNY

If he'll have me. *(to Henry)* And two of my buddies. If that'd be okay? We never party or nothin'. Really.

HENRY

You read about it in the atheists' newsletter so you've passed the first test.

JOHNNY

First test I've passed in a while.

(JOHNNY thinks that's pretty darn funny. He laughs so hard he coughs up some of his chew. No one else laughs.)

DARLA

(to Henry)

What the hell is going on? Tell me or you can find your own damn ride to the hospital.

HENRY

I told you! He wants to rent my house. There's no hidden conspiracy, for god sake. He's a football player, a Texas A&M football player and he wants to... Wait a minute. Texas A&M?

JOHNNY

Well, sorta, I'm at Galveston Community till I get my grades up.

HENRY

Gotta scholarship?

JOHNNY

Well, no.

(Suddenly it hits DARLA.)

DARLA

Oh my God!

HENRY

What's your grade point average?

Daddy!

DARLA

It's a logical question.

HENRY

This can't be happening.

DARLA

Gotta job?

HENRY

Sure, I'm no bum.

JOHNNY

Work long hours? I mean, if you're a student and a football player you musn't got much time between classes, studyin' and practice, you'd gotta find a job that you could do fast and get out, know what I mean? Just sort of squirt through it.

HENRY

DARLA
(*furious*)

Drop it! Drop it now!

HENRY

I am interviewin' the boy as a possible tenant! I got the right to know if he has a job.

JOHNNY

If this ain't a real good time, I could...

DARLA

You're right, it's not, get out!

JOHNNY

Okee-dokee.

HENRY

Stay right there!

(JOHNNY stops.)

DARLA
(*to Henry*)

You better come straight with me or I'm out of here!

HENRY

What I do and when I do it, is my decision.

DARLA

Fine!

(DARLA starts to leave.)

HENRY

One of the highest forms of intelligence is the ability to see somethin' from someone else's point of view. You don't quite got that ability yet and I don't got time to teach you.

(Suddenly JOHNNY is hit by a thought. He starts pointing at HENRY.)

JOHNNY

Wait a minute! I've heard that before. I know you. I know you! You're Cook, Henry Ephriam Cook?

(DARLA groans and drops her head in her hands.)

HENRY

Might be.

JOHNNY

Yessir, I took one look at you and I went *Ch-ching*. I read one of your...uh...uh... thingamabobs... articles! It was part of a class studyin' Texas philosophers.

HENRY

How'd I measure up?

JOHNNY

Well, you were pretty much it.

DARLA

Since when do football players take philosophy classes?

JOHNNY

It's part of a new program. We're all supposed to take one *real* class per semester. You know, it's college.

HENRY

So what ya doin'? Writin' a paper on me? Perhaps I could answer some questions.

JOHNNY

No. I just wanted you to know that I took one look and went *ch-ching*.

DARLA

If you'll excuse us, please?

JOHNNY

Oh sure, I'll just look around. Count the bedrooms. From the outside it looks like there's a second floor. Is that true?

HENRY

Let's use our deductive reasonin'. Ch-ching, what do you think?

JOHNNY

I think there's a second floor. Reckon, I'll try to find it.

(JOHNNY starts to leave but stops.)

JOHNNY

Well, I do got one question.

DARLA

Ask it and leave.

JOHNNY

(to Henry)

Is it true you went all the way with Ayn Rand?

HENRY

Why do you want to know?

JOHNNY

It was on my philosophy exam last week. My professor hates your guts. Says you're nothin' more than a cowboy that likes to hear himself talk. Said you really weren't that smart but lucky and that you would still be a nobody if you hadn't got Ayn Rand between the ol' sheets.

HENRY

Well, it's true. We had an affair that lasted almost five years.

JOHNNY

Hot Damn! One more question. Who is Ayn Rand?

HENRY

I thought you said you were an atheist?

JOHNNY

I'm no atheist.

HENRY

You're not?

JOHNNY

Hell no, atheists are nothin' but a bunch of queers.

HENRY
 What an open-minded point of view. What the hell were you
 readin' the atheist newsletter for!?

JOHNNY
 I wasn't.

HENRY
 That's the only place I put the ad!

JOHNNY
 I saw it down at Dead Bob's. This guy next to me with tubes
 hangin' out of his nose was readin' it.

(HENRY is shocked.)

HENRY
 That son of a bitch! Frank Deeber's down at Dead Bobs! He
 was too sick to read my chapter but he can drink beer!
 That man is no friend of mine! (to Johnny) What the hell
 religion are you?

JOHNNY
 What's the difference?

HENRY
 You want to rent the place?

JOHNNY
 Well, yeah.

HENRY
 What's your religion?

DARLA
 You're not supposed to ask that.

HENRY
 It's my house! (To Johnny) I'm waitin'.

JOHNNY
 Well, if you must know. I'm a lean, mean, Jewish machine.
 (To Darla) Didn't I see you in Temple this week?

HENRY
 You're a Jewish football player.

JOHNNY
 Somethin' wrong with that?

(JOHNNY honks a large wad in
 the paper cup.)

HENRY
Then, you believe the old testament?

JOHNNY
I try.

HENRY
Wait right here!

(HENRY runs into the house.)

DARLA
Look, what's about to happen isn't going to be pretty, so why don't you get out.

JOHNNY
I can hold my own.

DARLA
He's not going to rent it to you.

JOHNNY
Just the same, if he's not goin' to give me a chance because of my beliefs, I want to hear it from the source.

(The phone rings. DARLA answers.)

DARLA
Hello! Mama? ...No, wrong number... Same name, different person... Yes I'm sure! Goodbye!

(She slams down the phone.
HENRY runs in with a Bible.)

HENRY
One Bible! Old Testament.

DARLA
Daddy, please don't do this.

HENRY
(to Johnny)
You swallow this, huh?

JOHNNY
I thank God every time I get a touchdown.

HENRY
How many touchdowns you got?

JOHNNY
Well, I'm defense I'm not supposed to get touchdowns.

HENRY

Ooooh, I do detest you devout football players - How dare you belittle God, if there is a God, by makin' him a Texas A&M fan!

JOHNNY

I resent that, sir!

HENRY

If you truly believe in this book and live by it, I'll rent you the house for nothin'. Six months free of charge! No deposit! Nothin'!

JOHNNY

You gotta deal!

HENRY

Okay, last night I was a readin' about 'stoning'. You believe in stonin'?

JOHNNY

I reckon. Don't all college students?

(HENRY glares at JOHNNY.)

HENRY

I'm not goin' to talk to you unless we use our frontal lobes. Deal?

JOHNNY

(Confused)

Deal.

HENRY

Stoning, the Old Testament form of execution.

JOHNNY

Ooooh, that kinda stoning.

(HENRY flips through the bible.)

HENRY

What sins are worth a good stonin'?

JOHNNY

I wouldn't know.

HENRY

God damn. Whoops, wait a minute. Leviticus 24, "He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death, all the congregation shall stone him with stones." I'm in trouble.

JOHNNY

Okay, we can start there.

DARLA

(To Johnny)

This is going to take a while, you want some ice cream?

JOHNNY

(spitting into his Dixie cup)

No thanks, too much mucus.

HENRY

"And on the Sabbath day they found a man gatherin' sticks and brought him to Moses and the Lord said the man shall be put to death and the congregation shall stone him with stones." Numbers 15! Poor bastard was cold, went out to find some firewood, ran into some Jews and they stoned him for it.

JOHNNY

What's your point?

HENRY

Get this one, "if an ox gores a man to death the ox shall be stoned". How do you stone an ox? That must take most of the afternoon! Now, you proclaim yourself to be a religious man, This is your book. Tell me, do you believe in stonin'?

JOHNNY

Well... Well... No.

HENRY

I rest my case.

JOHNNY

But... But...

HENRY

No don't talk, just think about it.

JOHNNY

Oh sure. I'm thinkin' about it. I mean most of the time you were talkin' I was thinkin', *ch-ching*, he's right. But I just don't know. I mean, I'm not the one dyin' of cancer.

(Beat. DARLA looks to HENRY for an answer.)

JOHNNY

Sorry, your friend up at Dead Bob's told me.

(JOHNNY starts out, then stops.)

JOHNNY

I mean, religion is not a bad thing. I think you're tryin' to say it's a bad thing...I think.

(He spits in his Dixie and exits into the house.)

(Pause.)

DARLA

Is it true? Is the cancer back?

HENRY

A touch. Nothin' to worry about.

DARLA

Obviously you're not going to the hospital for a hernia!

HENRY

Just some treatment. Then I thought I'd head north. Gold prospectin'.

DARLA

Renting the house and leaving. That makes all kinds of sense. Glad I've got a logical father. "We're traveling down the logic trail now!"

HENRY

If you're done, I got some stuff to go over.

(He grabs his old leather satchel and points at the chair near the kitchen table.)

HENRY

Sit.

(He takes out what legal papers and lays them in front of her.)

HENRY

Let's do this without bein' all emotional. If nothin' else it'll go faster. Now, I'm leavin' everything to you with a few exceptions. Your mother gets my complete works of prairie dog lore. House isn't worth much but with a tenant you should have an income. My books are yours. The royalties should keep you and this kid comfortable for a few years. *(beat)* You listenin'?

DARLA

I don't want your books.

HENRY

I'm not leavin' them to your mother. And I'm not leavin' them to the atheists society, bunch of closed minded morons. Anyone who looks at life only one way is most likely screwed up.

DARLA

I said I don't want your books.

HENRY

Look, the royalty checks are good. Better than I've ever admitted. You just gotta make sure that they stay out there. That they're published as long as anybody respectable'll publish'em.

DARLA

You heard me. If you will them to me, I'll pull'em. I'll do everything in my power to get them off the shelves.

HENRY

You won't do that to your old man.

DARLA

Leave them to someone else.

HENRY

There is no one else.

DARLA

Doesn't it concern you that you're sixty-eight years old and have no friends?

HENRY

Can we be logical about this?

DARLA

You don't mean logical, you mean unemotional.

HENRY

I mean logical!

DARLA

Okay, you have cancer again and your logical answer to this is to go gold prospecting?

HENRY

Bein' a woman you couldn't possibly understand.

DARLA

And being a complete craphead, you can? What, you want to brag about it? Like that time that horse broke your leg and you walked around on it for two days? "I came that close to gangrene." Wow, I'm impressed.

HENRY

I would like to get this out of the way. It won't take long and then you can bitch about anythin' you like.

DARLA

Why is it whenever I have a conversation with you, you call it bitching? I'm only trying to get at the truth!

HENRY

I don't mind the truth, Heifer, as long as it's whispered.

(Beat. HENRY packs up the will. Pause. DARLA forces herself to calm down.)

DARLA

I'm sorry.

HENRY

It's okay.

DARLA

No, I mean, I'm really sorry.

HENRY

We'll talk about it later.

(HENRY hands her a paper towel. She blows her nose. Then she laughs through her tears.)

DARLA

I can just see you, last night, in this cold empty house, lying in bed with a yellow marker highlighting absurd Old Testament passages. You know, in its own weird way the book was comforting you.

HENRY

Absolutely not. I was doin' research!

(Beat, DARLA touches her father shoulder.)

DARLA

Daddy, I want you to know, in spite of it all, I'm naming it after you.

HENRY

Namin' what?

DARLA

I wasn't going to tell you until it was born, but maybe I shouldn't wait. I'm naming my baby after you.

HENRY
If you name it after me, you gotta take the books.

DARLA
I can't.

HENRY
Why not?

DARLA
I don't believe in them.

HENRY
Then don't name the kid after me.

DARLA
Thanks Dad, I'll wrap this moment up and put it with all the others!

HENRY
"Your real worth is what you are, divided by what you think you are."

DARLA
Quoting yourself again?

HENRY
Tolstoy!

DARLA
Someone else, I'm amazed!

HENRY
I don't think my real worth allows me to sit in a hospital dyin'. I'm not goin' to have any tubes stuck up my nose!

DARLA
I see. When were you going to tell me this?

HENRY
I wrote a note. Nor do I think it's appropriate for you to name some stranger's kid after me.

DARLA
Fine. Dandy. You want the truth? I've never read one of your books. Not an article, not a chapter, not hard cover or paper back! Not once! As a matter of fact, two years ago Mama and I had a little book burning party in the back yard and torched everything of yours we could get our hands on!

HENRY
Not even one, Heifer?

DARLA

I've heard all your "philosophies." Your bullshit attacks on religion. My whole life has been listening to you drag in unsuspecting college students and argue about religion and society and corruption! *(beat)* Daddy, the only proof I have that I love you is that I worry about you. And that's a pretty thin thread to hang a father-daughter relationship on... You know, it just occurred to me. I'm thrilled. I think it's wonderful that my baby isn't going to know who its father is.

HENRY

(indicating Johnny off stage)

I'm not so sure we don't know.

DARLA

It's not him!

HENRY

The mathematical possibilities are leanin'--

DARLA

Stop it!

HENRY

It makes total sense. You gotta tell your mother. She's goin' to take it hard. How can you soften the blow? I know, I'll be shot full of Jewish sperm. That ought to placate her. Your mother is still Jewish isn't she? Course when she married me she gave that up pretty darn fast.

DARLA

That's not what she says. She says *you* converted so you could marry her.

HENRY

(He flips through the Bible.)

Wonder what the punishment is for takin' a ten-year hiatus in your deep religious beliefs to marry an atheist cowboy. Here it is, stonin', I should have known.

(She grabs the Bible away.)

DARLA

You are a shit, Dad, just one, super, stupid bowl of shit!

(The doorbell buzzes. They pay no attention.)

HENRY

Don't start cryin'.

DARLA

(crying)

I'm not crying!

HENRY

Whatever the hell you're doin', stop it! If you want to do me a favor, do somethin' I need. I don't need some kid named after me.

DARLA

I withdraw the offer!

HENRY

Things die you silly girl! There are only two possibilities. Either there is somethin' or there isn't. To me the worst possibility is that there is nothin'. We simply dump memory, fine, it's a waste but fine. If there is somethin', I figure I can always talk my way out of it. So either way I'm ready!

(The doorbell buzzes again.
JOHNNY enters.)

JOHNNY

You gotta caller.

DARLA

I don't think you are! I don't think you're any more ready than anyone else.

HENRY

Is that supposed to hurt me?

DARLA

No it's the truth, you're scared.

JOHNNY

Hell, I'll get it.

(JOHNNY exits to the back door.)

HENRY

You know what I'm thinkin'? I'm thinkin', you shouldn't have this kid. I don't know if you're old enough. You know, emotionally mature enough.

DARLA

Son-of-a-bitch.

HENRY

I call'em as I see'em. Now you want to drive me to the hospital, that's just dandy. If not, I can do it myself. But if you're lookin' for some last moment of forgiveness, some brief father daughter encounter before I kick off, then I'm sorry to disappoint you. I will not betray my life by whimperin' about my demise. I'm not goin' to panic. I'm not goin' to convert. And there shall be no deathbed

(MORE)

HERN

enlightenment where you unscramble our relationship! *(beat)*
 Now sweetheart, I think it's time you realize that if
 there's been nothin' between us for twenty years, then
 that's the way it is, so cut the tears and saddle up.

(Johnny re-enters.)

JOHNNY

You got company.

HENRY

Who?

JOHNNY

Jehovah witnesses.

HENRY

You are jokin'!

JOHNNY

They gave me an earful, now they want to talk to you.

HENRY

Quick, run into my study, in the top drawer, you'll find
 some marbles, a jar of cold cream and a really big rubber
 band.

DARLA

What're you going to do?

HENRY

Talk to'em. That's all.

DARLA

(to Johnny)

Don't do it!

HENRY

I've lived here for ten years and the old Jay-Witnesses
 have never come. Ten years! Look at it this way, it proves
 there's a god! *(To Johnny)* Kid, my study, top drawer.
 Now!

JOHNNY

Yes sir.

(Johnny exits.)

DARLA

Daddy, can we just go to the hospital. Call it a day.
 Please.

HENRY

For you, my sweet, anythin', but right after this. (*calling off*) Hi there! So nice of you to come. Let's talk.

(HENRY exits. DARLA is left alone. She crosses to the dinette and sits. Beat. JOHNNY enters with a bag of marbles and a huge rubber band.)

JOHNNY

I gotta rubber band and marbles but no luck on the cold cream.

DARLA

Forget it. Just forget it.

HENRY

(*off stage*)

Ladies, are you ready for a free exchange of ideas!

(DARLA gently cries.)

JOHNNY

You all right? I mean, you need a beer? A pickle?

(She doesn't answer.)

JOHNNY

Look lady, if he's goin' to bean the Jehovahs with marbles, I just got to see it.

(Still no answer.)

JOHNNY

Lady?

DARLA

I'm fine.

JOHNNY

You sure?

DARLA

I'm going to have a baby. Sorry. A total stranger and I'm crying. (*beat*) You know, Miss America was last night. Miss Wyoming won. She's handicapped and she won...What do you bet her father's proud.

(Johnny doesn't really know what to say. He tries to extend a comforting hand but comes up short. The phone starts

ringing, they don't answer it
and the lights fade.)

END OF ACT ONE

Jewish Sports Heroes & Texas Intellectuals

ACT TWO

An Hour Later

THE LIGHTS RISE: JOHNNY and HENRY drink beer. HENRY sits like a Buddha on the kitchen table. Johnny sits at his feet. We come in on the middle of a conversation...)

HENRY

...Did you know that in India there are criminals so obedient that all the jailer has to do is draw a circle in the dirt with a stick and tell them to stand there for so many hours or days or years?

JOHNNY

You're kiddin'. Wait a minute, *Ch-ching*, this means my philosophy professor was just full of it.

HENRY

Most professors are. Most of the world is. We've screwed up the thought process. We don't solve problems anymore. If millions of people are starvin' to death we blame it on lack of food. The television tells us what horrible people we are for not sendin' more food and we believe it. They don't need food! They need condoms, millions of condoms and classes in how to use them!

JOHNNY

Interestin'. *Ch-ching*!

HENRY

Johnny my boy, I think it's time in your intellectual development to stop pointin' at your head and makin' a cash register sound every time you think.

JOHNNY
 What do you mean?

HENRY
 You got an auseatin' habit of pointin' at your head and goin' 'Ch-ching'.

JOHNNY
 I do?

HENRY
 Yes, ivery obnoxious.

JOHNNY
 Wow. Somethin' is happenin' here. I'm growin'. I'm takin' one look at you and I'm goin' ch-ch...

(JOHNNY stops and realizes what he's done.)

JOHNNY
 Boy, I'm stupid.

(JOHNNY pulls at a rubber band wrapped around his wrist. He stretches it out about fifteen inches and whacks himself good.)

JOHNNY
 God that hurt!

HENRY
 What's that about?

JOHNNY
 I'm tryin' to train myself not to think negative thoughts. If I do, I let myself have it.

HENRY
 Tell you what, lets start with the 'ch-ching' thing and then we'll work on the rubber band problem.

(DARLA storms in.)

DARLA
 There you are! We gotta get to the hospital! What're you doin'?

HENRY
 Been havin' a wonderful conversation with Johnny here. Where you been?

DARLA
 I went outside and you were gone! Went to Dead Bob's - found Deeber's house - Do you realize how hard it is to

have a conversation with a man who has tubes stuck in his nose? Where did you go?

HENRY

Sensin' that they were losin' the debate, the Jehovahs took me to their church for their own peculiar version of exorcism - It failed. Came back refreshed, ready to go, but you weren't around, so Johnny and I got to know each other. Guess what his last name is? Guess.

DARLA

I wouldn't know.

HENRY

Johnny Galtenstein. His mother shortened it to Galt. Johnny Galt. Who is John Galt? He's in our kitchen.

JOHNNY

It's been expandin'. Your father is a wonderful dude. Set me right on a few things that confused me. *(to Henry)* You know, I'm goin' to tell my girlfriend your thoughts on religion.

HENRY

Is she religious?

JOHNNY

No, I am. Or was. She wants me to sleep with her and I just won't do it. I'm always sayin' she has no morals, but now I know I'm the immoral one because I believe in a "timeworn book of rules" rather than decidin' for myself.

DARLA

What have you done!?

HENRY

As the Buddha says, the boy is seein' the world with new eyes.

DARLA

You've polluted his mind too!

HENRY

He's just thinkin' a little freer than he thought before.

JOHNNY

Boy, that's so true, Henry.

HENRY

What did you just call me?

JOHNNY

...Henry.

HENRY

Son, you don't call an older man in Texas by his first name, I'm 'mister' or 'sir'. Call me 'asshole' before you call me 'Henry'.

JOHNNY

Yes mister sir.

HENRY

Better yet, call me Sensei.

JOHNNY

Sensei?

HENRY

It's Japanese for teacher.

JOHNNY

Cool. Hey Sensei, could I borrow your phone, I wanna call my rabbi and tell him to go to hell.

DARLA

Wait a minute! (to Henry) We're late for the hospital.

HENRY

I'm not goin'.

DARLA

You have to.

HENRY

There are very few things in life you gotta do.

JOHNNY

How true.

DARLA

Johnny, I don't know what poison my father has put in your head, but you're not to believe it.

JOHNNY

He makes a lotta sense. Have you ever listened to his lone dolphin theory?

DARLA

It's 'lone wolf'.

HENRY

No. I changed it. Dolphins, they're smarter.

DARLA

Yes, I've heard his lone *dolphin* theory and I'm sick of it. Most of what he says sounds great but it doesn't work. It doesn't fit with the real world. He is nothing but a cowboy

who got lucky. The cultural elite stamped him 'brilliant' and everyone else blindly followed.

JOHNNY

Now wait a minute, he was head of philosophy at A&M.

DARLA

He was a part-time lecturer and he was fired!

HENRY

Sometimes bein' fired is a compliment.

DARLA

Not when you're asked to leave by every member of the staff and faculty. The grounds crew was the only organization on campus who did not call for your immediate dismissal. (*To Johnny*) He depressed two students so bad they attempted hari-kiri in the commons.

HENRY

Here it comes - The mean old father. Always comes back to that. Hell, why don't I just tell you the truth, I'm the missin' gunman from the grassy knoll.

DARLA

I'm not sayin' you are some sort of evil communist. I'm just trying to protect this dense-headed football player.

JOHNNY

What's a "knoll?"

DARLA

Johnny, when I was a sophomore in high school a woman driver cut him off. He hates female drivers. Hell, he hates all females!

HENRY

Not true.

DARLA

His testosterone level goes critical. What does he do? He chases the woman for ten blocks at ninety miles an hour. At the drawbridge, he gets out, pounds on her window and tells her what kinda jackass she is. In front of the entire town, my Dad is out screaming at this woman. She puts the window down and says, "why don't you go to college."

HENRY

I don't remember this.

DARLA

You should, she was my guidance counselor.

HENRY

You're makin' this up.

DARLA

We were in that damn International. That piss green International you took me to my prom in when my date didn't show up.

HENRY

Oh yeah, the piss green one - Good truck.

DARLA

So my Daddy, who has never gone to college, goes critical.

HENRY

College is unimportant. If you really want to learn you don't need college.

DARLA

What does he do? My deep, intellectual father, he spits on her windshield - A nice big *juicy hawker*. Then comes back to the truck and begins telling me that there is really nothing wrong with spitting on your enemies. That the ancient Romans always spit on their enemies and that it's only modern society that says it's wrong.

JOHNNY

I didn't know the Romans lugied on each other.

HENRY

All the time.

JOHNNY

Bitchin'.

DARLA

That's your hero.

JOHNNY

Doesn't seem like a reason to hate him.

DARLA

No? Comin' over here this afternoon, this s.o.b. in a pickup cuts me off. A male driver. I hate male drivers. Don't know how I did it but I managed to miss all the cars and skid into this old lady's front yard. I threw my rental into reverse and caught up with the s.o.b. at the next light and began telling him what kinda jackass he is. He didn't even acknowledge my existence. And suddenly I knew what I hadda do. The old glands in my mouth started churning. And I did it, I spit on the s.o.b.'s windshield. It's twenty years later and my worst fear has come true. I've become you. A powerless, female version of a bitter old, life-hating fart. He was going to leave me a note, Johnny, what do you think about that? *(to Henry)* I'm not five years old, you don't have to hide the fact that

grandpa is dying. I'm old enough to be part of your life. I'm part of mama's life. We talk about things. She asks my opinion. Sometimes goes so far as to take my advice, God forbid.

HENRY

I respect you. There I said it. Can we move on?

DARLA

Then why are you so unapproachable? You never talk to me about your thoughts, your feelings.

HENRY

Warnin', enterin' female logic zone. Grab a beer and take cover!

(DARLA heaves a roll of toilet paper at HENRY.)

DARLA

That's not fair! Simply not fair!

HENRY

Then admit it, I talk to you all the time!

DARLA

You do not talk to me, you lecture me!

HENRY

Think so? I don't know, Johnny, do I lecture her?

DARLA

There, you're doing it!

HENRY

Doin' what?

DARLA

You value the opinion of a complete stranger more than mine!

HENRY

I'm just askin' him!

DARLA

He's a football player! He takes courses like advanced sandbox.

HENRY

I don't think that's a very good way to treat my new tenant.

JOHNNY

Really? Sensei, thank you.

(They shake on it.)

DARLA

You can't be serious?

HENRY

He's not that smart but he's learnin'. (to Johnny) Hope you don't mind me sayin'.

JOHNNY

I don't mind, really I am quite stupid. Wait a minute. Was that negative?

(JOHNNY takes his rubber band and whacks himself on the wrist.)

DARLA

Daddy, he's a moron!

JOHNNY

I wouldn't say a moron. I had a difficult birth. Doctor dropped me. Whacko, right here on the head. I comb it over cause no hair grows there. But no brain damage. (to Henry) Can I get another beer?

HENRY

That's what it's there for.

DARLA

It's not just him, Daddy, it's anyone and everyone who will listen. You're always ready to sit up all night talking to a bum at the bus station or a stupid football player, but you wouldn't spend an afternoon with your own daughter.

HENRY

Do you need to talk to your mother? Is that it? Why don't you call her and me and Johnny here will head down to Dead Bob's for a bucket.

JOHNNY

Hell that's even better.

(JOHNNY puts the beer back.)

DARLA

I don't need to talk to Mama!

HENRY

Wouldn't it be best? There, I just asked your opinion.

DARLA

It's like you're sending me to your second-in-command. Like I have to work my way up through your subordinates?

HENRY

If that's what makes you clear on this then fine. Because when it's bad enough, you come to me. I'm the one who bails you out of jail. Loans you money. Hell, I give you money. Have you ever been denied? Name the time. You can't because I'm there and that's the mark of a good man. In combat, you can count on me. Now if you want to join John Galt and me for some suds that'd be dandy. Call your mother, that's fine too. But we're goin' to move on. *(to Johnny)* Come on Johnny. Johnny Galtenstein - Wait'll we tell old Deeber.

(HENRY starts out.)

JOHNNY

Henry...

HENRY

What the hell did I tell you, son?

JOHNNY

Sorry, Sensei. Maybe you shouldn't leave her like this. I just got this feelin'.

HENRY

It's okay. She just needs to talk to a woman right now.

(HENRY holds the door for JOHNNY and they exit. DARLA is left alone. She starts to cry but stops herself.)

DARLA

No, I'm not going to do that.

(She digs through the bag of cat food until she finds one that looks tasty. She opens it, dumps it in a bowl and takes it outside.)

DARLA

(off stage)

Moonpie! Dinner! M. Peee? *(beat)* Come here you blessed cat. I see you.... Yes I do.... Don't you be cute with me. Come here... Come'on... Good girl. What've you got there? Let mommy see it. What you got in your mouth? That's right give it here. *(beat)* HOLY MOSES!

(She runs back in. She stumbles to the sink and washes her hands with Ajax.)

DARLA

MOONPIE, YOU'RE A SICK CAT! A SICKO! A SADISTIC KILLER!

(JOHNNY walks in.)

DARLA

Hi.

JOHNNY

What'ya yellin' about?

DARLA

My father's cat just put a dead, headless mole in my hand.

JOHNNY

That's a good sign. It means she respects you. I once had a cat brin' me another dead cat. That means they worship you as a god.

DARLA

Can I help you?

JOHNNY

I told Sensei to go on without me. I thought *Ch-ch...* Damn, I'm not supposed to do that anymore.

(He takes his rubber band and thwacks himself.)

JOHNNY

God that hurts.

DARLA

What do you want?

JOHNNY

I don't think you understand men.

DARLA

Oh really.

JOHNNY

Real men are supposed to be that way. I mean, if fathers were kind and gentle and supportive, hell they'd be your mother.

DARLA

Look, you don't want to get hooked up with my father. He was asked to leave Berkeley because he was too radical.

JOHNNY

I still like him.

DARLA

You're not the only one. This phone rings all the time. Strange, melancholic people, college students, anyone who reads the gospel according to Henry and 'finds' themselves. They want to talk to their messiah. The phone up in his

office, that's his real number, it's unlisted. This one, he never answers. This phone is there only to feed his massive ego. Every time it rings he knows he's got someone. Now you tell me, if you were his only child, how would you deal with it?

(JOHNNY tips his hat back on his head.)

JOHNNY

Well lady, I'd say you gotta problem. Personally, I think what you got here is a 'passover.'

DARLA

Say what?

JOHNNY

We sometimes lose games by so much we just pass it over. Forget it. We play it to the end but we stop tryin', just make sure you don't get hurt. No one wants to get hurt in a lost cause. Well, I think your relationship with your father is like that, a passover.

DARLA

Like another father is going to come along next week and I might have a meaningful relationship with him?

JOHNNY

I don't follow.

DARLA

How do you call it a lost cause if you have only one father?

JOHNNY

You're leavin' me behind.

DARLA

It's the Cotton Bowl, the last game of the season. Do you still call it a passover?

JOHNNY

Oh no, that'd be different.

DARLA

Look, if the only way we can even have a conversation is to use football analogies, I'm not really interested.

JOHNNY

I understand, bein' a girl and all, football is probably pretty borin'. How bout field hockey?

(DARLA beats her head against the cabinets. JOHNNY hands her the rubber band.)

JOHNNY

Try this, it doesn't hurt as much.

DARLA

Johnny, try to understand, my father, how can I tell you... he's french vanilla. All the time I was growin' up, that was the only flavor of ice cream we had. I didn't know chocolate 'til I was in college.

JOHNNY

That must've been pretty borin'.

DARLA

He'd come back from a ride, a 'fact finding mission' as he called them, go to bed with mama and then make a 'special' trip to the Winn Dixie to get me a pint of french vanilla. As if, with that pint, he had met his total obligation of being a father.

JOHNNY

At least your father took you fishin'.

DARLA

Wait a minute, how do you know about fishing. He spoke about me?

JOHNNY

He said he tried to take you along with him but you never appreciated it.

DARLA

Yeah, he took me, *once*. I was nine. He cut it short because I wa a crybaby. You know what I cried about? Ducks.

JOHNNY

He didn't mention nothin' about no ducks.

DARLA

Of course not. He never asked me why I was crying! *(beat)* We were having a wonderful time when two ducks swam by. Mergansers. Red-breasted Mergansers--

JOHNNY

And he took out a gun and killed them in front of you.

DARLA

No. They just swam by.

JOHNNY

Oh.

DARLA

And I said, "Look Daddy at the pretty little girl duck" and I pointed at the glossy, green head and white collar set

against bright gray feathers. And he said, "What the hell are you talkin' about. That's the male duck. That's the female," and he pointed at the other duck. This crap brown, generic duck. And he said, "That's the way it is in the animal kingdom. The male of the species is almost always prettier than the female."

JOHNNY

And then he took out a gun and blew their heads off.

DARLA

No!

JOHNNY

Then why were you crying?

DARLA

Because the female duck was so plain. I'd always been taught that women were supposed to be pretty and it hurt to find out they weren't. I don't know why it affected me so.

JOHNNY

Well, some of us are just not meant to be fathers. Some men just don't got what it takes. Unlike me, I think I'd make a great father--.

(DARLA shudders at the thought.)

JOHNNY

What's wrong?

DARLA

Nothing.

JOHNNY

As I was sayin', I think I'd make a good father. You think I'd make a good father?

(DARLA waves him off. Beat.)

JOHNNY

What? Did I say somethin' wrong?

DARLA

No no, just be quiet for a sec.

JOHNNY

Darn, I've gone and done somethin' to make you sick. Must have said somethin' negative.

(JOHNNY cracks himself with the rubber band. DARLA takes a swig of beer. Beat.)

JOHNNY

Thought you weren't supposed to drink.

DARLA

Yeah well, for some reason it doesn't seem to matter now.

(She starts to take another swig but stops. She pushes the beer away.)

DARLA

You want to know something about my father? Come here, I'll show you the truth.

JOHNNY

What?

DARLA

Come on!

(DARLA leads JOHNNY downstairs. Beat.)

HENRY

(*off stage*)

Moonpie! Moonpie! There you are. Come'on. What you got there? For me? Why, thank you. Good girl. Thank you very much!

(HENRY enters holding a dead headless mole. Just then DARLA runs up from the basement.)

DARLA

OH MY GOD!

HENRY

What's wrong, it's dead.

(She grabs a trashcan)

DARLA

Throw it away! Throw it away!

(He drops the mole in the can.)

HENRY

It's good to be loved.

DARLA

What the hell are you doin'? I thought you were drinkin'!

HENRY

What the hell am I doin'? What are you doin'?

DARLA

I was showing him--

HENRY

The basement? You was showin' him the basement!

(JOHNNY enters carrying one of HENRY'S self-published books.)

JOHNNY

God, there's a lotta books down there.

(HENRY grabs the book.)

HENRY

The basement is off limits! Is that understood! Off limits!

JOHNNY

Sorry Sensei. She made me do it.

HENRY

Now it's no fun drinkin' alone. One of you has gotta come down or both of you gotta leave.

DARLA

Do you realize how hard it is for you to acknowledge any sign of weakness. You see those books downstairs as weakness. You weren't perfect. You had to self publish one book. Dad, isn't the purpose of a family to be the one place you can be weak?

HENRY

Maybe for a woman it is.

DARLA

When you say things like that, when you send me to Mama with my problems, you devalue me. You let me know that you consider my femininity to be less than your masculinity.

HENRY

Where the hell is this comin' from? You seein' a shrink?

DARLA

I did in L.A. Not anymore.

HENRY

It was a female shrink wasn't it?

DARLA

You're doing it right now! Who cares what gender she was! Do you have any hope for people, for me? Or are you so far gone you believe in nothing.

HENRY

I still believe in people. I just think they gotta be watched.

DARLA

Then watch me.

HENRY

Suppose you're right. If I had watched you like a hawk you wouldn't have got yourself shot full of bull sperm!

(JOHNNY, who has never heard this before, steps away from Darla.)

HENRY

That's what it's about. You want this child suppress your sense of worthlessness but it won't. It's only a stopgap, twenty years later, the child moves on and your life is still meaningless.

DARLA

Not if I do it right.

HENRY

Do what right?

DARLA

Raise it right. I want to give it confidence. Teach it how to love. How to value herself. I want to give it all those things I don't have.

HENRY

If you don't got it, how can you give it?

DARLA

By undoing all the things you did to me!

HENRY

Ah hell...

(HENRY starts to leave.)

DARLA

Wait, I'll leave. I've had enough of the testosterone poison in here. I need air.

(DARLA grabs her purse crosses to the door and stops.)

DARLA

Do you love me?

HENRY
(*immediately*)

Yes.

DARLA

You do?

HENRY

Yes.

DARLA

Then help me.

HENRY

It's time to help yourself.

DARLA

What's this? Some sort of fatherly love crap?

HENRY

Fatherly love crap as opposed to motherly love crap?

DARLA

Love without conditions, without rejection is motherly. Love based on conditions is fatherly love. If I help myself, you will love me. If I measure up, you'll love me. I'm your daughter and I'm drowning and I see you on the shore watching me. Not lifting a finger. All I know for sure is that if I should somehow manage to struggle to the shore, if by some miracle I save myself, then and only then, will you tell me how proud you are.

HENRY

You should go talk to your mother.

DARLA

You bastard, you tell me to talk to Mama again and I'll... I'll...

HENRY

You'll what?!

DARLA

I'll... I'll... Get in touch with your emotions, you goddamn cowboy!

(Beat. HENRY and DARLA become aware of JOHNNY. He's been listening quietly all this time. JOHNNY suddenly feels uncomfortable.)

JOHNNY

You know, I was just thinkin'. Maybe my bein' here is holdin' you two back. Maybe if I left, you'd be able to tell each other how you really feel.

(JOHNNY grabs his beer and heads into the house. A second later he comes back.)

JOHNNY

Forgot my cup.

(JOHNNY grabs his Dixie cup and exits. Pause. HENRY and DARLA look at each other. The wind is out of their sails.)

DARLA

We just can't seem to function without makin' scenes.

HENRY

Maybe we're just loco.

DARLA

Never can talk. You know just plain talk.

HENRY

Nothin' personal, but I just thought we'd said everythin' we needed to say.

DARLA

Maybe so.

(HENRY grabs his satchel and pulls out two copies of the will. He hands one to DARLA.)

HENRY

If you're calm, there are few things we need to go over. I think it's pretty clear. You got to sign this, it gives you power of attorney. You don't ride so I'm leavin' my saddle to Jacob, the guy who takes care of Paradise.

DARLA

How is Paradise?

HENRY

Enjoyin' retirement. Screw in' everything that walks.

DARLA

(After reading it in the will)

What's a 'Ja-Tor'?

HENRY

Oh that. That's a Tibetan air burial. You bear the body to a desolate spot where it is torn apart and eaten by wild

animals. Now my books, it's very important and spelled out here so any two year old can--

DARLA

Hold on. Tibetan air burial?

HENRY

That's pretty clear there.

DARLA

You want me to leave your body somewhere where it will be eaten by wild animals?

HENRY

Now the county might fight you a little on that one.

DARLA

Daddy, I'm not going to do it!

HENRY

You don't gotta, there're Himalayan priests that'll do it for free.

DARLA

You're a nut case.

HENRY

You goin' do it or not?

DARLA

Daddy, I can't.

HENRY

Hell, I knew you'd give me trouble on that. Okay, forget the air burial. Just don't lay me out in some damn casket so your mother can make a public display and Deeber can laugh because I went first. Now, my books--

DARLA

Your books are full of male-sexist-egoistical-shit - You know that don't you?

HENRY

Sure I do. It sells. Now, I'm tryin' to have this last one published, so far no luck. If I should succeed, not one word is to be changed. That damn publisher wants me to self-censor myself. He's not goin' to do any end run, okay? You're to stand strong. You got it?

(Beat. DARLA doesn't answer.)

HENRY

Are we clear on this, Heifer? This editor is a hard nose. He'll try to push you around because you're a woman. *(beat)* Heifer?

DARLA

Daddy, would you stop bein' the old man for a moment.

HENRY

Oh god, don't say it.

DARLA

What?

HENRY

You want me to be your 'friend'. Your grade school teacher told me that. "I'm not Darla's teacher, I'm her friend." I asked her, who the hell was bein' her teacher? She's got plenty of friends, what she needs is a teacher. I wanted a resolution statin' that teachers couldn't be students friends and they kicked me out of the PTA.

DARLA

Daddy, I think what we got here is a passover.

HENRY

Oh yes, Johnny said that to me, too. Is that what you expect? Some deus ex machina to magically resolve problems? Some flimsy kinda melodrama where a stupid football player comes up with a little bit of homespun advice that saves the day.

(DARLA glares at him.)

DARLA

As long as I'm your daughter I have to take the books.

HENRY

As you should.

(Beat, DARLA considers her next words very carefully.)

DARLA

Daddy, if you can't stop being the old man... then you got to disown me.

HENRY

I don't understand what the hell this is about. Sure you don't want to talk to your mother?

DARLA

Damnit! You gotta disown me!

HENRY

I didn't know how screwed up you were! Okay, I did it, I admit it. I was an absent father, so there.

DARLA

Absent fathers are never really absent. That's why you have to disown me. *(beat)* Daddy, I need an answer.

HENRY

Okay. I'm sorry I brought you into this world. Not because you aren't a delightful girl. I just don't know why you're here. Don't know what your purpose is. I suspect most people never know. And I don't think you can look to me for that answer. There are only a few things, after one hell of a ride, that I know to be true. One: the surest way to accomplish nothin' is to put two or more people in a room and ask them to work together. Second: the level of truth in a room goes down proportionately as the number of people increase. And lastly: all answers must come from within.

DARLA

And so I know my answer. As long as I'm your daughter we will never get along. It's that word 'daughter' that stands in the way of any understanding or friendship. It's a word that gives you the right to keep me at an arm's distance.

HENRY

(beat)

Maybe so.

DARLA

So, you're goin' to have to disown me.

HENRY

Fine. You can't call. Can't ask for money. No bitch sessions at two o'clock in the mornin' when you know I'm the only one in the world awake.

DARLA

Then I'm disowned?

HENRY

Call it what you like!

DARLA

I'm out of your will?

HENRY

That's fine! Just dandy!

DARLA

Say it!

HENRY

I'll call my lawyer in the mornin'! Now get the hell out of here, you silly fem--

DARLA
DON'T SAY IT!

(DARLA starts for the door but can't leave. Beat.)

DARLA
Goodbye Daddy.

(She exits. Beat. HENRY walks to the window and watches her leave. JOHNNY appears at the kitchen door.)

JOHNNY
Wow, she left.

HENRY
(*pensive*)
Johnny, let me tell you somethin' about women.

JOHNNY
Yes, Sensei.

HENRY
They're not like us men.

JOHNNY
I know.

HENRY
I believe that they are not of this earth.

JOHNNY
That would explain a lotta things.

HENRY
I believe that they were deposited on this planet by an alien life form that just got tired of'em.

(HENRY grabs a beer from the refrigerator. He sits back and rubs the cold can on his forehead.)

JOHNNY
She seems really confused. You don't want confused people around, they take too much time.

HENRY
Exactly.

JOHNNY
Waste valuable thought power.

HENRY
You got it.

JOHNNY
They mess up the fundamental view of life.

HENRY
Johnny?

JOHNNY
Yes, Sensei?

HENRY
Shut up.

(Beat.)

JOHNNY
Can I take you to the hospital?

HENRY
No. I'm goin' to sleep. 'Perchance to dream'. Know where that's from Johnny?

JOHNNY
Richard Nixon?

HENRY
No, Johnny.

(HENRY downs half the beer in one gulp.)

HENRY
Do you dream John Galt?

JOHNNY
Sure. I dream about football.

HENRY
I dream I'm a gunfighter.

JOHNNY
In color?

HENRY
(*melancholic*)
Always. Last night I dreamt I was a hired gun held in a Cheyenne jail. It was an hour before my execution.

JOHNNY
Stonin'?

HENRY

No, Johnny. *(beat)* The lynch mobs had been driven off. Sheriff said this was goin' to be a proper hangin'. And then I got my last visitor, my daughter, and even though I'm scared shitless, I had to show her I was goin' to be okay. That she didn't have to worry about me. So when the guards came and said, "You're goin' to make our jobs easy aren't you, no trouble, okay"? I said, "yes." They were goin' to talk about me. Years from now they were goin' to say, "Boy, that Henry Cook, there was one who gave us no problem. He made it easy. That night, we got home to our family right on time". *(beat)* Henry Ephriam Cook! The great Cowboy Philosopher. "Genius dressed in denim." Gore Vidal said that about me.

JOHNNY

Wow.

HENRY

Always liked that one.

JOHNNY

One question.

HENRY & JOHNNY

Who is Gore Vidal?

HENRY

No she's never comin' back. No sir. And I'm damn proud of her for walking out. Damn proud! Yep. Today she became a...she became...

JOHNNY

A son?

(The back door buzzer sounds.)

HENRY

Crazy as a circus around here.

(Henry answers the door.)

DARLA

(off stage)

Hi, I saw your ad in the atheist newsletter. May I come in?

HENRY

(off stage)

What do you want?

(DARLA enters, followed by HENRY. She let her hair down.)

DARLA

I'm looking for a place to rent.

(HENRY sizes her up for a second. He doesn't understand the game.)

HENRY
Already gotta tenant.

DARLA
Signed a lease?

JOHNNY
Well, no but... What's goin' on?

DARLA
Then I still have a chance.

JOHNNY
You're goin' to let her do that?

HENRY
Hell, I don't understand a thing.

DARLA
You're looking to lease the place, furniture and all? You need someone responsible to take care of it.

HENRY
So?

DARLA
Interview me, interview him and decide.

(HENRY senses the challenge. He indicates for Johnny to sit.)

HENRY
All right. I'm allowed to ask anythin' I want?

DARLA
Anything.

HENRY
Okay. What's your religion?

DARLA
...My father raised me to be an atheist but I'm not. I'm Jewish.

HENRY
John Galt?

JOHNNY

I'm a pure atheist. I mean, I'm an absolutely devout atheist. Like I'm a Hasidic atheist.

HENRY

Can I trust you?

JOHNNY

Damn straight you can.

HENRY

And you?

DARLA

You'd have to get to know me better, but I think you can.

HENRY

There's a library of work up there: books, manuscripts, a life-time. Hate to see them go to waste.

DARLA

I'll take care of your library. As long as I don't have to believe.

HENRY

I think I know my answer.

DARLA

I don't think you know enough about me.

HENRY

I think I do.

DARLA

Not nearly enough.

HENRY

What do you want to tell me about yourself, that I haven't asked?

DARLA

I travel a lot.

HENRY

You do?

DARLA

I didn't hang around Haight Asbury or prospect for gold but it seems that I have been travelling all my life. Can't seem to settle down. I got this tourist tendency from my father.

HENRY

Every search is a search for somethin' missin'. There must be a lot missin' from your life?

DARLA

There is. Mostly, I'm looking for a man I once knew. A man who helped shape my opinion of men. The search has taken me back to Texas. A place where men are men, or so they say.

HENRY

Good place to start.

DARLA

I left because I wanted to be a sensitive person but found that that wasn't allowed in Texas. I also left because I was tired of cowboys.

JOHNNY

Another man hater.

DARLA

I don't hate men. I just think they're stupid, that's all. Until a year ago, I was living with a man.

HENRY

Oh really? Did you tell your parents?

DARLA

No, my parents are separated. He was nothing like the men in Texas. He was sweet. He cared. His ego didn't seem directly related to the size of his belt buckle. A dozen lizards didn't have to die to make his boots. And he didn't treat my femininity as something to be associated with youth, as if it were something to grow out of.

HENRY

Why didn't you marry him?

DARLA

I came home one day, unexpectedly, to find him--

JOHNNY

In bed with another woman and so all men are jackasses!

HENRY

I saw that one comin' too.

DARLA

No. He was cryin'. He had lost his job. He just sat there whimpering about how horrible his life was.

JOHNNY

He was a crybaby.

DARLA

That's right, he was a crybaby. So I left him. I was laid off a short time later. Everyone was. And I cried too, but I never called him. My father would have been proud. And so I came back to the place where the seeds of self-doubt were

planted. I'm haunted by this feeling that if only I had my father's approval everything would be fine.

HENRY

Sorry to hear that.

DARLA

He disowned me.

HENRY

Your relationship, it must've been a passover.

DARLA

Must've been. But I know now that what is missing is my father's endorsement. I need to hear, from him, that being a woman is okay.

HENRY

Don't see why it's so important.

DARLA

If another man called you one hell of a man, would it mean anything?

HENRY

Depends.

DARLA

If a woman calls you one hell of a man it'd mean more doesn't it?

HENRY

You mean like a lady? Yes, I guess it does.

DARLA

That's because men don't train boys to be men, mothers do. And whether you like it or not, a father trains a girl to be a woman, but they seldom finish. They leave us incomplete. Why? Maybe they're scared of us. Maybe the minute we start growin' boobs they back off. Or maybe they need us and if they finished the job we'd be too independent. Strange how they never set us free and yet fault us for our dependence. All I know is that if my father would allow this one bit of weakness, this so called failin', this need for family, then I could be as strong as he needs me to be. *(beat)* I'm no longer a child, I'm pregnant and I have a long walk head of me. I don't want to take the first few steps alone.

(HENRY mulls this over.)

HENRY

If that's all you need then why didn't you ask?

DARLA

I'm askin'.

HENRY

..Okay.

(DARLA stands there a little confused. That's it?)

HENRY

(to Darla)

But you gotta answer one last question.

DARLA

Oh no.

HENRY

Do you know which way North is?

JOHNNY

(interrupting)

Yes, Sensei.

(JOHNNY points.)

HENRY

Is he right?

DARLA

(defiantly)

I don't know.

HENRY

That's okay. Better not to know somethin' then be totally sure of yourself and full of crap. Johnny, North is that way.

(HENRY points the opposite direction.)

JOHNNY

You're kiddin'! I must have got turned around when I came in. Does that count against me?

(HENRY walks over to JOHNNY and puts out his hand. JOHNNY shakes it.)

HENRY

Thank you for comin' by Johnny.

JOHNNY

What? You mean I didn't get it?

HENRY

Sorry, son.

Well, crap.

JOHNNY

HENRY

Tell ya what, you get the consolation prize, I'll sign a book for you.

(HENRY opens one of the boxes and takes out a large thin, colorful book. He signs a copy for JOHNNY.)

DARLA

What? A new book? You didn't tell me.

(DARLA pulls out a copy for herself.)

DARLA

Oh my God! It's a children's book! *(reading the cover)* "Tony The Atheist Turtle."

HENRY

My publisher wasn't thrilled. I had to self-publish.

(HENRY hands the book to JOHNNY, who reads the cover.)

JOHNNY

"May you have many brief moments of insight, Henry Ephraim Cook." Thanks--. Crap, it's the first night of Passover and I'm late.

(JOHNNY starts out.)

DARLA

Johnny! Before you go, I have to ask you something. It's kinda personal.

JOHNNY

Okay.

DARLA

Where do you work?

JOHNNY

You mean, like my job?

DARLA

Tell the truth.

JOHNNY

Okay, but you can't tell anyone. If my coach found out, I'd be off the team.

DARLA

I won't tell anyone, believe me, not a soul.

JOHNNY

I work at the local Sp--. SportMax.

DARLA

Sportwhats?

JOHNNY

It's a Sports equipment store. I stock the shelves after hours.

DARLA

But you have never done anything like, say, donate sperm?

JOHNNY

Hell no. People who do that are nothin' but a bunch of queers.

DARLA

You've just made me the happiest woman in the world!!!!

JOHNNY

Really? Well, if you ever need a field hockey stick or a joggin' bra come on by, I can get discounts.

(JOHNNY starts out. Stops, walks back and picks up the Bible and places it together with Henry's children's book, a la the movie "Inherit The Wind.")

JOHNNY

Well, shalom ya-all.

(JOHNNY exits. Beat. DARLA picks up the book.)

DARLA

"Tony The Atheist Turtle", what dark part of your mind did this come from?

HENRY

Oh, a few months ago, I was lookin' out my office window at Moonpie. She had caught a mouse and was suckin' its brains out, when suddenly I had a thought. I wondered, Moonpie bein' such a happy cat, what if she was dead. What if she'd lived her life in some dark Chicago apartment. Lived twenty years as a companion for an old lady who never let her out of the flat. Existin' on a diet of canned food and starin' at the birds outside the window. Then one day the old bag breathed her last, the family came and looked at this fat old cat and said, "Put her to sleep, it's for the best.

She's had a good life." And so they snuck her down the back stairs so the grandchildren wouldn't see her and become attached as grandchildren always do. And Moonpie saw the sky and the world for the first time as she was bein' driven to the vet's office to die.

DARLA

Kinda depressin'.

HENRY

And then I thought, what if this was her heaven. Her reward for all those dark winters. She gets to stalk and catch everythin' in sight. She gets to chase butterflies, hang from limbs and sleep out under the stars. It's nice to find bits of heaven in your backyard. Maybe that's how we should live. As if this was all the better heaven gets. *(beat)* Frank Deeber did the artwork. I changed it from a cat to a turtle. There aren't enough turtles in children's stories nowadays.

(DARLA hugs her Daddy. He kind of hugs her back. There is an awkward pause between them.)

HENRY

You takin' me to my chemo.

DARLA

Yes. But maybe on the way we could stop and say hello to mom. Just for a minute. Just the three of us... Just my family. I'm sure she's left the door open..

(Beat.)

HENRY

...If it'll make you happy.

DARLA

It would make me happy.

(DARLA picks up his hospital luggage and starts for the door. HENRY doesn't move.)

DARLA

What's the matter? You scared?

HENRY

Me? No. I've just never been good at makin' an exit.

DARLA

Then, lets have some ice cream. Sit.

(DARLA opens the refrigerator.)

DARLA

Damn, it melted.

HENRY

Got some while I was out. It's in the back.

(DARLA digs deeper and comes out with a small pint of ice cream. She grabs two spoons and hands one to HENRY.)

DARLA

I can't help but feelin' like maybe we made a little progress here today.

HENRY

Maybe so.

DARLA

(serving up the ice cream)

So, I was kinda wonderin', next Monday the temple is sponsorin' an intense, all-day workshop to help troubled father-daughter relationships. Three rabbis and a panel of experts will be there. So I was thinkin', maybe next Monday, all-day, you and me could, instead of that, head out and do some fishin'.

(Beat.)

HENRY

You know, for a stranger, you make a pretty good daughter.

DARLA

(tasting the ice cream.)

Agh, this is awful! What is it?

HENRY

It's peach.

DARLA

You bought peach ice cream? What the hell for?

HENRY

Thought it was somethin' you'd like, Heifer.

(Beat)

DARLA

I don't like peach ice cream.

(Beat - HENRY thinks... Then.

HENRY

Well, now I know.

(DARLA smiles. It's quiet. The long day has ended. It's just two people eating ice cream as the lights fade.)

The End