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Honus & Me

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When I was a boy growing up in Kansas, a friend of mine and I talked about what we wanted to be when we grew up. I told him I wanted to be a real major league baseball player, a genuine professional like Honus Wagner. My friend said that he'd like to be president of the United States. Neither of us got our wish.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Cast of Characters

(6m., 2w., doubling as indicated)

JOEY STOSHACK: a 10-year-old boy (played by an adult actor).

MOM / FIRST LADY FAN

DAD / AUCTIONEER / FRIENDLY FAN

MISS YOUNG / SECOND LADY FAN

BIRDIE / BLUEBIRDS TEAMMATE / PIRATES TEAMMATE

RAVENS PITCHER / TIGERS PITCHER

HONUS WAGNER / SILHOUETTE FIGURE

HAWKS PITCHER / CHUCK / TY COBB / RAVENS CATCHER

COACH / MR. MENDOZA / SPORTSWRITER / HECKLER

Others:

BLUEBIRDS TEAM

HAWKS TEAM / HAWKS TEAMMATE 1 / HAWKS TEAMMATE 2

VOICE OF UMPIRE

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

SINGING BOSTON FANS

RAVENS TEAM

Character Notes

MOM: Wears a jacket over the uniform of a registered nurse.

DAD: Dressed casually, wearing a Pittsburgh Pirates baseball cap.

COACH: Wears a baseball cap and a whistle.

BIRDIE: Attire is part jock, part biker, part bouncer. He wears a huge jeweled wrestler belt around his waist.

CHUCK: An odd, laconic, slightly menacing teenager.

MR. MENDOZA: Wears a suit.

RAVENS TEAM: Their baseball caps are black and their black jerseys have sweatshirt-type hoods, which they wear over their caps in Grim Reaper fashion.

Time and Place

The present and 1909. Pittsburgh.

Setting

An open playing space that will depict a variety of locales. The central arena for the play is that of a baseball diamond, which should only be suggested, not depicted in a realistic manner. Other small units include:

LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL FIELDS

MISS YOUNG'S YARD

MISS YOUNG'S ATTIC: A small area with an eccentric collection of odds and ends such as rusty birdcages, broken chairs, old lamps, vintage suitcases, bundled papers, and boxes.

BIRDIE'S HOME RUN HEAVEN SHOP: A glass case filled with baseball memorabilia serves as the counter. A small cash register or cash box sits atop it.

A LIBRARY

JOEY'S ROOM: A small bed and a nightstand. On the nightstand is a small lamp and a modern, digital clock.

JOEY'S FRONT YARD

A HOTEL ROOM

BENNETT PARK: The former ballpark in Detroit.

Note on Pronunciation

Despite the popular notion that Honus Wagner's first name rhymed with "bonus," his biographers and the National Baseball Hall of Fame have established that it is pronounced "Hawn-ess," a variation of "Hans." Stoshack is pronounced "Stow-shack." "Stosh" rhymes with gosh.

Note on Updating

The year mentioned in the text (2006), as well as the names of contemporary ballplayers, may be updated as needed.

ACT I

(Music plays and the CAST enters from various directions. They are seen in silhouette against the blue sky. They take their positions facing upstage and remove their caps, as though gazing at a distant, unseen flag. Farthest downstage is JOEY STOSHACK, facing front. After a moment, his DAD taps JOEY on the shoulder, reminding him to remove his cap. JOEY does. He turns and faces upstage like the others. A moment of stillness and expectation as the music reaches a crescendo. Then the VOICE OF UMPIRE calls out "Play ball!" Lights shift to reveal a Little League baseball field. JOEY is isolated in light downstage in the batter's box, facing the audience. His uniform says "BLUEBIRDS." He speaks to the audience between pitches. The HAWKS PITCHER is behind JOEY on a raised mound facing offstage left, to where he'll pitch. The BLUEBIRDS TEAM and the HAWKS TEAM might occupy benches to either side of the stage, or their voices can be heard as a recording.)

JOEY. OK. It makes no sense. Let me tell you that right away. It makes no sense at all. But still, the thing is—

(The pitch comes in. JOEY takes it. The sound of a ball hitting a mitt.)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strrieeeeeeeeeeek.

JOEY *(prepares for the next pitch)*. See, there's this thing—this thing that happens whenever I hold a baseball card in my hands. It's happened since the first time I ever touched one. My hands, well, my hands start to . . . tingle. And if it's a really old card, well . . . my whole body starts to tingle. *(beat)* See, I told you it makes no sense.

(Another pitch comes in. JOEY takes it. The sound of a ball hitting a mitt.)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strrieeeeeeeeeeeeeeek!

JOEY *(steps out of the box, speaking to the unseen UMPIRE)*. Time out! *(to audience)* It's kind of like static electricity shooting through me. Like all of a sudden I have this . . . power. This magical power. But on the baseball field—

HAWKS TEAM. Sto-shack, Sto-shack—

JOEY. I don't have these powers.

HAWKS TEAM. —he's a no-hack!

(laughter)

JOEY. I'm an OK player, but under pressure—I freeze up.

HAWKS TEAMMATE 1. Hey No-Hack—could your ears be any bigger?!

HAWKS TEAMMATE 2. It looks like your head is growing wings!

HAWKS TEAMMATE 1. He looks like Dumbo!

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Batter up!

HAWKS TEAM. BATTER UP, DUMBO!

(More laughter as JOEY's COACH appears, in the middle of a cell phone call.)

JOEY. Whenever I look back to my coach, he just says something like —

COACH (looks up, briefly). Remember, Joey, even a blind squirrel can sometimes find a nut!

JOEY. It's not encouraging.

(JOEY steps into the batter's box.)

HAWK TEAM (chanting). STRIKE HIM OUT! STRIKE HIM OUT! STRIKE HIM OUT!

JOEY. See, we're down by one run in the bottom of the sixth — and I'm our last chance. Two outs. Two strikes. I've already struck out *three times* this game, and the only thing worse than the other team making fun of me is the sound of the guys on my team *packing up our equipment* 'cause they know it's over.

BLUEBIRD TEAMMATE. We're *hungry*, Joey. Just swing and *get it over with*.
(The pitch comes in. JOEY swings and misses, badly. The sound of a ball hitting a mitt, as before.)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strriike threeee! Youuu'ree ooouuuuuutt!

(cheers and groans from the respective teams)

COACH (walking past JOEY). Hey, Stoshack — how's your handwriting?

JOEY. My what?

COACH. I'm thinkin' you might make *oneheckuwa* good scorekeeper. (into cell phone) Yeah, four times — he's the Strikeout King, that kid.

(COACH goes as the HAWKS PITCHER approaches.)

HAWKS PITCHER. Nice try, No-Hack.

JOEY. It's Stoshack.

HAWKS PITCHER. Yeah, whatever. Don't worry about it. Seriously. (puts a consoling arm around JOEY's shoulder) I didn't used to be able to hit, either.

JOEY. Really?

HAWKS PITCHER. Yeah.

JOEY. Then what happened?

HAWKS PITCHER. My mommy changed my diaper and everything was fine!

(The HAWKS PITCHER shoves JOEY down and runs off, laughing with the HAWKS TEAM as JOEY's DAD appears. He hands JOEY his mitt.)

DAD. It's OK, Joe. Don't listen to these jokers.

JOEY. Hi, Dad.

DAD. You'll get 'em next time. I just know it.

JOEY (glum). Thanks. (JOEY's MOM appears opposite, holding JOEY's backpack.)
Hi, Mom.

MOM. You're not the only one who struck out, Joey.

JOEY. But I was the *last* one. I'm always the last one.

(Silence. JOEY is waiting for his MOM and DAD to say something, anything, to each other. They don't.) Mom, I'd like you to meet Dad. Dad, this is Mom.

MOM (simultaneously). Very funny —

Dad (simultaneously). Look, Joey —

JOEY. Would it, like, *kill you* to say something to each other? (More silence.)
OK. Forget it.

DAD (to MOM). I thought we might go get some pizza.

MOM. Not tonight, Tom.

DAD. Oh, come on —

MOM. He has homework.

DAD. What's it going to hurt, Beth? We won't be late.

MOM (simultaneously). See, this is the thing. This is the thing you —

DAD (simultaneously). Can we not do this.

MOM. When I *call you*, when I try to make some *plans* for the two of you —

DAD. Forget it.

MOM. — some night when it would help me out, because I'm working *sixty-some hours a week* —

DAD. I said *forget it*.

MOM. — but on *those nights* when I really need you, where are you then?!

DAD. It's *pizza*. I'm not taking him *across the country* — I'm talking about PIZZA. I'm talking about spending one hour with my son!

(This lands. She stares at him.)

MOM. Ask him, then. It's his decision.

(beat)

DAD. Whaddya say, Joe? Want to grab a slice down at Angelo's?

JOEY. Mom —

MOM. You're old enough to make this decision on your own, Joey. It's up to you.

(silence)

JOEY. Sure.

DAD. Great.

JOEY. But can we—

DAD. Anything.

JOEY. —can we *all* go? All three of us?

(DAD gives MOM a long look.)

DAD (quietly). I don't think so, Joe.

(pause)

JOEY. Then . . . maybe another time, OK?

(pause)

DAD. OK.

JOEY. Thanks for coming, Dad.

DAD. Hey, you did great. (takes JOEY's bat and demonstrates) Remember what we talked about. Keep your knees bent, your head down and your hands just a little bit apart—like this . . .

JOEY (eager to learn). What does that do?

DAD. Gives you a little more bat speed.

JOEY. OK. Thanks.

DAD. Hey—did you get any new baseball cards?

JOEY. I've got my eye on a David Eckstein rookie card—and maybe an Omar Vizquel.

DAD. You love those shortstops.

JOEY. That's my position, you know that. Even though I usually just ride the bench.

DAD (warmly). Come here. (DAD gives JOEY a hug.) I'll see you Friday.

(MOM mouths the words "thank you" to DAD. DAD goes.)

MOM. You OK?

JOEY (regarding the backpack). You bring snacks?

MOM. Yep.

JOEY. Then I'm OK. (JOEY sits near his MOM. He opens his backpack and munches on a snack during the following.) You got off early.

MOM. I traded with Vicki.

JOEY. Why do you do that?

MOM. I wanted to see your game.

JOEY. Yeah, and then you'll have to work a *double shift* tomorrow and you'll be exhausted and your feet will hurt and you'll say, "When I win the lottery, I'm never setting foot inside that hospital again!" (MOM laughs, enjoying this.) It's not funny.

MOM (mock serious). No, not funny.

JOEY. Mom—

MOM. It's serious. Very, very serious.

JOEY. Stop it.

MOM. The first thing I'll do with my lottery money is buy you some new shoes.

JOEY. I like these shoes.

MOM. I can see your socks.

JOEY. It's just a little hole—

MOM (repeating). I can see your socks, Joey.

JOEY. —and it's nothing to worry about because I filled it with a baseball card. Look. (Joey removes his shoe, from which he removes a baseball card.) It works perfect.

(JOEY hands the card to MOM.)

MOM (regarding the card). Larvell Blanks?

JOEY. Utility infielder. Nine seasons. Two-fifty-three average. Twenty home runs. His nickname was "Sugar Bear."

MOM. Never heard of him.

JOEY (taking the card back). Me neither, but he keeps my feet dry. So when you do win the lottery, you can buy me a whole bunch of new baseball cards and get us a great big house with a yard for my *new dog* and lots of rooms—

MOM (dryly). With a *maid* to clean them.

JOEY. Yes, of course, and a big kitchen with a built-in TV for me and Dad to watch the ball games—one of those TVs that has a *split screen* so we can watch one game on *this side* and the other game—

MOM. Money doesn't solve everything, Joey.

JOEY. It would get you and Dad back together.

MOM. That's not true, honey—

JOEY. All those arguments, I heard them, you know, and at least HALF of them were about money—Dad losing a job, you working too much at the hospital . . .

MOM. Joey, look—

JOEY (*sharp*). Mom, it's TRUE. (*beat*) You know it's true.

(*pause*)

MOM. It's not going to happen. So let's not worry about it. OK? (*stands, gathers their things*) I got you a job to make a little spending money.

JOEY. What kind of job?

MOM. Miss Young on the corner. She needs her attic cleaned out. She'll pay you \$10.

JOEY. Mom, Miss Young is like a *hundred years old*.

MOM. Well, yes.

JOEY. Or *older*. I think she's even *older*. I think she'll never die. And you know why, Mom? She's a *witch*.

MOM. Joey—

JOEY. Ask anyone! Old Miss Young is a witch who rides around on a broomstick.

MOM. She does not ride around on—

JOEY. What do you want to bet that when I go over there she's holding a BROOM?! And I bet her house is filled with the bodies of kids who went there to clean out her attic! (*scary sound*) Whawhahwhahwhhahwhhahwhhahwhhah!!!

MOM (*starts to leave*). C'mon, kiddo, you've got homework to do.

JOEY (*scooping up and flinging imaginary grounders*). I'm not your kiddo. I'm Jeter! I'm Jimmy Rollins! I'm Miguel Tejada! (*Lights isolate him. To audience.*) Miss Young lives at the end of our street, in an old dark house with peeling paint—and big trees that scrape against the walls when it's windy. And it's *always windy* at that house.

(*MISS YOUNG's yard. MISS YOUNG appears, holding a broom. Nearby is an old garbage can.*)

MISS YOUNG. Joey Stoshack, you're shootin' up like a weed. (*beat*) What? You've never seen a *broom* before?

JOEY. Uh, yeah, sure.

MISS YOUNG. Your mom told you I had \$10 for you, huh?

JOEY. Well, she said—

MISS YOUNG (*overlapping*). Better in your pocket than in mine. I got no use for money. But you, you could buy yourself some new shoes.

JOEY. I *like* these shoes.

MISS YOUNG. Maybe you'll see some up in the attic. Anything you want up there, Joey—*take it*. I just want it gone.

JOEY. OK.

MISS YOUNG. Still playing ball?

JOEY. Yeah.

MISS YOUNG. Who's your team? The Pirates?

JOEY. No. My dad's a Pirates fan, but I kind of like the Red Sox—

MISS YOUNG. Oh, Joey, *don't do that*—

JOEY. And the Cubs—

MISS YOUNG. Oh, *stop right there*—

JOEY. And the Mariners.

(*beat*)

MISS YOUNG. The who?

JOEY. The Mariners. Seattle. *Seattle, Washington?*

MISS YOUNG. They have a team way out there?

JOEY (*disbelieving*). Yeah, sure.

MISS YOUNG. That's still Indian country, isn't it?

JOEY. Well, *no*, Seattle's a pretty big—

MISS YOUNG. Well, good for them. You know, there's two kinds of people in this world: people who like baseball and people who *will* like baseball when they stop being *idiots*. My papa took me to my first game, right here in Pittsburgh at Exposition Park. In those days, the team was called the *Alleghenys*, named after the river. But the next year they stole away a second baseman from the Athletics, who were mad as heck about it, and took to calling the Pittsburgh team a bunch of "pirates." The name stuck.

JOEY. I never knew that.

MISS YOUNG. Oh, I was just a little girl, but I still remember those player's names: Ducky Hemp and Doggie Miller, Phenomenal Smith and Peek-A-Boo Veach. (*Off JOEY's look*) You don't believe me?

JOEY. Well—

MISS YOUNG (*sharp*). Look 'em up—you'll see. Heck, it was a manager of the Pirates who invented those flip-up sunglasses that the players wear.

JOEY. Really?

MISS YOUNG. Fred Clarke. He's in the Hall of Fame. And you've heard of Forbes Field?

JOEY. My dad told me about it.

MISS YOUNG. I was there when Babe Ruth hit a ball over the right-field roof. That was never done again.

JOEY. Babe Ruth . . . ?

MISS YOUNG. *And it was the last home run he ever hit. (Pause. He is staring at her.)* What is it?

JOEY. Nothing.

MISS YOUNG. You want to ask me something?

JOEY. No, I don't.

MISS YOUNG. Better ask it now, kid. Next time you're here I might be dead.

JOEY. Well . . . *how old are you?*

MISS YOUNG. You know what Satchel Paige said about that, don't you? "How old would you be if you didn't know how old you were?"

JOEY. You mean you don't know how old you are?

MISS YOUNG. I mean I'm as old as I *feel*, Joey. And right about now, that's pretty darn old. But, let me tell you, once upon a time . . . *(reaches into the garbage can. Music of a solo trumpet playing a slow, lovely version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game.")* Here. Take a look. *(hands him a small photograph that has been torn in half)* See that fella? He was a ballplayer. And my, oh my, Joey, we were young. Someone took our picture in a garden on a Sunday afternoon.

JOEY. But why's it torn?

MISS YOUNG. When he left for spring training, he tore it in half so he could have my picture till we saw each other again. *(pause)* Throw it away, Joey. It's useless.

(music out)

JOEY. But what happened—didn't he come back?

MISS YOUNG. Like all the rest of that junk. *Useless.*

(And MISS YOUNG is gone.)

JOEY *(to audience)*. But I didn't throw it away. I'm a collector. I never throw anything away—especially a picture of a ballplayer. *(lifts the broom and drags the garbage can with him)* As I walked up to the attic, I looked into Miss Young's rooms. The walls were covered with old hats and dried flowers . . . and guns. Old shotguns. A lot of them. I pushed open the door to the attic, and right away I knew . . . *(MISS YOUNG's attic. The SOUND OF WIND begins to be heard, growing in intensity.)* I'd made a terrible mistake. This was gonna take me all day and night! *(beat)* But then—right there in my brain—I heard my mom's voice.

(A light on MOM. She speaks as JOEY mouths her words.)

MOM. Nothing gets finished until you make a start.

(And MOM is gone.)

JOEY. How does she *do* that? It's *sneaky*. *(lifts a large old box)* I worked for a couple hours, then decided to carry one more box downstairs and take a break. *(The box breaks—CRASH! He stares at the mess. Beat.)* Break time! *(Plops down in the midst of the mess. As he speaks, he rummages through the items on the ground around him.)* The junk in the box was mostly papers. *(wadding up the papers, tossing them into the trashcan)* Old bank statements and letters, faded old magazines and telegrams. And then, all of a sudden . . . *(He stops and stares down near him, on the ground. He lifts something. It is a small piece of cardboard about 1.5 by 3 inches. Music under the following.)* My hand started to tingle. It was a tiny piece of cardboard. On one side was printed the words "Piedmont. The Cigarette of Quality. Baseball Series. 150 Subjects." *(slowly turns the card around and looks at the front)* And now my whole body was starting to tingle. Because when I turned the card around, I saw . . . *(Upstage a huge replica of the famous card is slowly revealed.)* A ballplayer. Brown hair parted down the middle. Uniform buttoned to the top. The letters on his chest spelled out "Pittsburg," *without the "h" at the end.* And beneath his picture . . . the greatest thing of all—his name. *(lets out a joyous whoop)* WAA-HOO! *(and then instantly panics)* OH, NO! *(looks down at the card)* Fingerprints! Got to be careful! *(locates a vintage lace handkerchief and wraps the card in it)* Can't get any smudges or creases or anything on this card, because . . . *(pulls a small Tupperware container from his backpack, quickly dumps the sandwich it contains into the trash and places the wrapped card carefully inside the container)* This . . . baby . . . is . . . MINT. *(looks up at the audience)* Do you have any idea what something like this is *worth*?

(An AUCTIONEER appears. He stands before the huge replica of the card, addressing a crowd.)

AUCTIONEER. The Honus Wagner T-206 baseball card is, indisputably, the most valuable baseball card in the world. Unlike every other major league player of his day, Wagner objected to having the American Tobacco Company print and distribute a card bearing his likeness. And thus, only about 40 cards survive.

JOEY. Make that 41.

AUCTIONEER. Our bidding today will start at 500—

JOEY. Five hundred—is that all?

AUCTIONEER. —*thousand* dollars. Do I have an initial bid of 500,000? *(His patter begins.)* Yes! Five hundred thousand—do I have 550? Five-fifty? Yes! Do I hear six? Six hundred thousand?

JOEY. Oh.

AUCTIONEER. Yes! I have six. Do I hear seven?

JOEY. My.

AUCTIONEER. Yes! I have seven. Do I have 750?

JOEY. Gosh.

AUCTIONEER. Yes! Seven-fifty. Do I hear eight? Eight hundred thousand for the "Honus Wagner T-206."

(The AUCTIONEER is gone.)

JOEY (*pacing, excited*). OK. Well. Here we are. We've got the attic pretty clean. And we've had a little break. And, um, let's see, what else? Oh, yeah, right—we are RICH! (JOEY places the card inside his backpack. Then he steps forward into a downstage area as the attic fades away.) And not only are we rich—now all of our problems are solved! Mom can quit her job at the hospital and she and Dad can get back together and find a new house for all of us to—

(MISS YOUNG appears.)

MISS YOUNG. Stop right there!

JOEY (*startled*). Huh?

MISS YOUNG. Thought you'd just a *walk away* without sayin' a word to me, is that it?

JOEY. Umm . . .

MISS YOUNG. Well you got another thing comin'. (JOEY's face goes blank. He slowly begins to open the backpack, presumably to give back the card, just as MISS YOUNG holds out a \$10 bill.) Ten bucks—wasn't that the deal?

JOEY. Yeah, I think it was.

MISS YOUNG. I'm not happy with it. Let me tell you that. I'm not a bit happy about you leaving here with my \$10 in your pocket.

JOEY (*handing the money back to her*). Oh, OK. That's OK—

(MISS YOUNG takes the money, adds another bill, and hands it right back to JOEY.)

MISS YOUNG. How 'bout 15? That's much better, don't you think? I told you, I've got no need for money. Kid like you probably feels *rich* right about now, don't you? (JOEY is speechless.) Good. Now, get out of here. Kids are like tornadoes. They belong outside, throwin' things around.

JOEY. Thank you, Miss Young.

MISS YOUNG. And learn to root for the Pirates, or I might just put a spell on you.

(And MISS YOUNG is gone.)

JOEY (*to audience*). As I started to walk home, I knew exactly what my mom was going to say when I told her.

(*light on MOM*)

MOM. I am so proud of you, Joey. This is the answer to our prayers!

JOEY. And I imagined my dad would say something like—

(*light on DAD*)

DAD. You're going to be on *SportsCenter*!

(MOM and DAD are gone.)

JOEY. And I kept walking, right past my house, just walking on air. And as I walked, I started to have *other* feelings—and these were *sinking* feelings—like maybe my mom would say—

(*light on MOM*)

MOM. That card doesn't belong to you, Joey. You know that.

JOEY. But Miss Young said I could take anything I wanted.

MOM. And did you tell her you took that card?

JOEY. Well, no, but—

MOM. If it's worth as much as you say, don't you think she'd want to know that?

JOEY. She doesn't need any money. She told me that!

MOM. Joey, that card belongs to Miss Young.

JOEY. She would have just thrown it away!

MOM. Can you *look me in the eye* and tell me there's nothing wrong with you taking that card?

(JOEY turns and stares at her for a long moment. Then he turns back to the audience in frustration.)

JOEY (*regarding MOM*). I HATE when she does that! When she makes me look her in the eye. Because when I do that, I *know*, deep inside, I *know* that the right thing to do would be to give that card back to Miss Young. (MOM is gone.) OK, I thought. That's what I'll do.

(*Light on DAD*.)

DAD. You're going to be on *SportsCenter*!

JOEY (*to audience*). Or maybe I *won't*. (DAD is gone.) Before I told anyone about the card, I decided I better be sure, *absolutely sure*, that it was authentic. And I knew the one guy who could tell me. (Birdie's Home Run Heaven Shop. Behind the counter, reading a magazine, is CHUCK. He does not look up from his magazine.) Hey, Chuck.

CHUCK. Joey *No-Hack*.

JOEY. Is Birdie here?

CHUCK. Joey the *Strikeout King*.

JOEY. I need to see Birdie. Is he around? It's *important*.

CHUCK. Oh, gee, *I bet it is*.

(*BIRDIE comes barreling into the shop. He is being followed by MR. MENDOZA.*)

BIRDIE (*hot*). No way—huh-uh—I'm not listenin' to this!

MR. MENDOZA. I ran the numbers, Birdie, you can't argue with the numbers.

BIRDIE. Oh, yeah? Just *watch me*.

MR. MENDOZA. You're three months behind on the rent and this is *the last chance I'm gonna give you*.

BIRDIE. Now, wait a minute—

MR. MENDOZA (*overlapping*). You come up with your rent money by Friday—or you're OUT!

JOEY. Birdie, can I talk to you?

BIRDIE (*to MR. MENDOZA, ignoring JOEY*). You know what? When I wrestled, I used to throw guys *twice your size* outta the ring and into the fifth row! And you know what the crowd would holler?

CHUCK (*up from magazine, chants*). BYE-BYE-BIRDIE! BIRDIE. So, if anyone's gonna do some *throwin'* out around here, Mr. Mendoza, it's gonna be me!

JOEY. Birdie, it's important—

MR. MENDOZA. You think you're sittin' on some kinda *gold mine* here? Is that it? You really think the world needs another BASEBALL CARD SHOP?

BIRDIE. Hey, you watch what you're—

MR. MENDOZA (*overlapping*). Well the world needs another baseball card shop like it needs another DESIGNATED HITTER, OK? Your shop's not worth *squat*. You're a *small-market team*. You're the Pirates or the Royals or the Twins—

BIRDIE. Yes, AND?

MR. MENDOZA (*putting on his previously unseen Yankees cap*). And pretty soon you're gonna get swallowed up by the YANKEES!

BIRDIE. Don't say that word in my shop! GO OUTSIDE IF YOU'RE GONNA USE THAT WORD!

MR. MENDOZA. Have the money by Friday—or I'll lock these doors for good.

BIRDIE. *Where am I gonna get that money?!*

MR. MENDOZA. Borrow it. Steal it. I don't care—just GET IT!

(*MR. MENDOZA goes.*)

BIRDIE (*calling off*). Yeah, I'll borrow it, all right! And while I'm at it, can I borrow your FACE when my BUTT goes on vacation?! (*wheels on JOEY*) And what do YOU want?

JOEY. I want to show you a card.

(*BIRDIE goes behind the counter. JOEY opens his backpack and begins to take out card.*)

BIRDIE. I can't wait to see what you've got, Stoshack. Did you bring me another one of your "great finds?" Like maybe another Frank Snook. Or a Floyd Wicker. Or, hey, maybe a mint condition Robbie Wine. (*Beat. Scathing.*) Oh, look at your little hanky. Isn't that sweet? (*Now BIRDIE'S eyes land on the Honus Wagner card. He freezes.*)

JOEY. Well?

BIRDIE (*cool, noncommittal*). Huh.

JOEY. What?

BIRDIE. I said huh.

JOEY. What's that mean?

BIRDIE. Huh? Oh, huh just means, you know. Huh. (*whispers*) Chuck, look at this.

(*CHUCK joins BIRDIE in looking at the card.*)

CHUCK (*in awe*). Duuuuuuuude.

JOEY (*regarding CHUCK*). What's that mean?

BIRDIE (*nervous*). I think what Chuck means when he says—

CHUCK (*still looking at card*). Duuuuuuuuuuuude.

BIRDIE. —is that the card you got there is sort of . . .

CHUCK. Mythic. Historical. Totally, like . . . old.

JOEY. Hey, Birdie.

BIRDIE. What?

JOEY. Your head is sweating.

BIRDIE (*wiping his head*). What? Me? My head? Oh, Stoshack, you're a character. Isn't he a character, Chuck?

CHUCK (*nods, playing along*). Character with a capital "K."

BIRDIE. Mind if I take a closer look? (*lifts the card with a pair of tweezers and inspects it with a magnifying glass*) Oh, gee . . .

JOEY. What?

BIRDIE. That's a shame.

JOEY. What is?

BIRDIE. You're thinkin' this is a T-206. The famous Honus Wagner card. Am I right?

JOEY. You tell me.

BIRDIE. Well, it's an old card, that's for sure. And this player here—he's a Wagner, all right. Real name was Charles but everyone called him "Heinie." That's who you got here, kid, Mr. Heinie Wagner. No relation to Honus, who actually did have a brother that played in the "bigs," but his brother's name was Albert. People called him "Butts." Didn't they, Chuck?

CHUCK. Butts. Totally.

BIRDIE. Now, you'd think they woulda called the guy named *Heinie* "Butts" and called the guy named *Albert*, I don't know, something like "Al" or "Bert," but in point of fact—

JOEY. Birdie?

BIRDIE. Yeah?

JOEY. Your head's sweating again.

BIRDIE. What—this? That's not sweat! That's generosity. (*indicating his head*) It just bubbles right up out of me! Now, Stoshack, tell you what I'll do. I don't want you to go home all sad and disappointed, so I'm gonna give you 20 bucks for that Heinie Wagner card. (*holds out a bill*) What do you say, Joe? We got a deal?

JOEY. Twenty bucks is a pretty good price for a Heinie Wagner—

BIRDIE. That it is.

JOEY. But can I ask you something?

BIRDIE. Fire away, buddy.

JOEY. Why do you suppose he's got the word "Pittsburg" on his chest?

BIRDIE. Oh, gee, they must have been wearin' their road uniforms that day. (*offering the money again*) Now—

JOEY. It just seems a little odd to me.

BIRDIE. Yeah, sure—

JOEY. Since we both know Heinie Wagner played for *Boston*.

(*BIRDIE just stares at JOEY as he lifts the card and starts to go.*)

JOEY (*cont'd*). I think I'll hold onto it. Thanks.

BIRDIE (*quickly*). Wait. I'll give you a hundred bucks.

JOEY. You said it was worth 20.

BIRDIE (*jumping over the counter*). A *thousand*. I'll give you one thousand dollars! Cash!

JOEY (*putting the card in his backpack*). No, thanks.

BIRDIE. *TWO thousand*. C'mon, kid—I've got it in back!

JOEY. Just one card holder. Fifty cents, right? (*takes a card holder and drops two quarters down on the glass*) See you later.

(*JOEY dashes out as BIRDIE grabs a well-used baseball bat from behind the counter and wields it, threateningly.*)

BIRDIE (*yelling off*). You're makin' a big mistake, kid! Do you hear me?! 'CAUSE I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE! (*Furious, BIRDIE turns back into the shop. CHUCK is staring at him.*) WHAT?!

CHUCK. Your head, dude. Totally sweating.

JOEY (*alone, to the audience*). Now that I knew the card was for real, I wanted to find out everything I could about Honus Wagner. (*A LIBRARY. JOEY sits down at a computer table.*) So I went to the library and I sat down in the midst of all those books. And I Googled Honus Wagner. (*beat*) Three hundred thirty-five thousand items came up! (*A turn-of-the-century SPORTSWRITER appears. He speaks in a broad, buoyant voice as music from the era is heard under.*)

SPORTSWRITER. If a man with a voice loud enough to make himself heard all over the United States should stand on top of Pike's Peak and ask, "Who is the greatest ball player?" untold millions of Americans would shout back, "WAGNER. HONUS WAGNER!"

JOEY. Every article said that Wagner was the best shortstop ever. (*looks up*) Better than *Ozzie Smith*?

(*His eyes go back to the computer screen.*)

SPORTSWRITER. Johannes Peter Wagner grew up working in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. He was hoping to one day become a barber. But, when he was 18, a pro scout saw him throwing rocks clear across a train yard. The scout signed him up on the spot.

(*An old-time ballplayer, a PIRATES TEAMMATE, appears.*)

PIRATES TEAMMATE. Honus was not only our best shortstop, he was our best first baseman, second baseman, third baseman, and our best outfielder. And, of course, *no one* was a better hitter.

JOEY (*amazed, reading*). Wagner batted over .300 for 15 straight years.

(*A silhouette of HONUS WAGNER begins to appear, his back to us. During the following, HONUS turns, straightens his cap, taps dirt from his cleats, spits on his hands, and steps into the batter's box.*)

PIRATES TEAMMATE. Big Wag had hands bigger than most other player's mitts.

SPORTSWRITER. He is so bowlegged, it's said he couldn't catch a pig in an alley.

PIRATES TEAMMATE. He had a massive chest that looked like it came from a barrel maker's shop—

SPORTSWRITER. His movements call to mind those of a stumbling elephant.

PIRATES TEAMMATE. And shoulders broad enough to serve dinner on.

JOEY. They called him "Hans," "Honus," "The Flying Dutchman."

SPORTSWRITER. "The Hercules of the Diamond."

PIRATES TEAMMATE. "The Mayor of the Bleachers."

SPORTSWRITER. "The Idol of Rooter's Row."

(HONUS is now awaiting the pitch as TY COBB appears, looking at HONUS.)

JOEY. Wagner's career batting average is better than Joe Dimaggio's, he scored more runs than Mickey Mantle, had more hits than Willie Mays, more doubles than Hank Aaron—and, even though he had 200 more at-bats than Babe Ruth, he struck out 1,000 times less.

PIRATES TEAMMATE. Oh, for nine men like Wagner!

(HONUS swings his bat and — SMACK! The sound of the ball being crushed as TY COBB watches it sail into the distance with admiration.)

JOEY. Even the famous and feared Ty Cobb, when asked about Honus Wagner, said this—

TY COBB. He's the greatest ballplayer that ever lived.

JOEY. When the baseball writers of America selected the first five players for the Hall of Fame, Ty Cobb got the most votes—only four short of being unanimous.

TY COBB (turns to the SPORTSWRITER, with menace). I'll find those four guys. You bet I will.

(The SPORTSWRITER rushes off, and lights fade on TY COBB and the PIRATES TEAMMATE.)

JOEY. As for the second-most votes, that was a tie. Between Babe Ruth . . . and Honus Wagner. (The HONUS silhouette is gone.) The last thing I typed in was "Honus Wagner T-206" and when the screen filled, I couldn't believe my eyes—

(The AUCTIONEER appears.)

AUCTIONEER (as before). I have eight, do I hear nine? Nine hundred thousand dollars?

JOEY. NO—

AUCTIONEER. YES, I have nine! Do I have one million?

JOEY. WAY!

AUCTIONEER. YES! I have one million! I have ONE POINT TWO!

Aaaaannnnndddd — SOLD for \$1.2 million!

(The AUCTIONEER hits his gavel. The light on him snaps out.)

JOEY. I was right! ALL our problems are solved! (beat) Now all I had to do was tell my mom.

(JOEY'S ROOM. MOM enters, still wearing her work clothes.)

MOM. Hi, buddy. I didn't even hear you come in.

JOEY. Oh, just wanted to get started on my homework.

(takes a book out of his backpack and pages through it, intently)

MOM. School was OK?

JOEY. Yep.

MOM. And then you went over to Miss Young's?

JOEY. Yep.

MOM. Did you finish your work for her?

JOEY. Yep.

MOM. And she paid you?

JOEY. Fifteen bucks.

MOM. She told me 10.

JOEY. It's really no big deal.

MOM. Well, yes, that's very nice of her.

JOEY. 'Cause the thing to remember is *she has no use for money*.

MOM. Is that so?

JOEY. She told me that.

MOM. I see. (beat) Your dad called. He'll be at your game tomorrow. He asked if you were playing the Ravens.

JOEY. Yep.

MOM. Is that the Ritz Funeral Home team? The ones that bring their equipment in that little coffin?

JOEY. That's them.

MOM. That team is creepy.

JOEY. And they kill us. Every time.

MOM (*stares at him, leaning in*). Are you OK, Joey?

JOEY. I'm great. Why?

MOM. Well, I don't know. All of a sudden you're reading books *upside down*—
(JOEY immediately turns his book right-side-up, continues reading.) And you
don't seem to be able to look me in the eye. (JOEY tries to look at her, but
turns away, reading more.) So, what are you going to do with *all that money*?

JOEY (*quick, nervous*). All *what* money?!

MOM. The \$15.

JOEY. Oh, I don't know. I went down to Birdie's and looked around.

MOM. Joey Michael Stoshack, please don't spend all the money you earn on
baseball cards.

JOEY. I was maybe going to sell a card. A *really* old card. Birdie offered me a
hundred bucks for it.

MOM. Who would pay a hundred dollars for an old piece of cardboard?

JOEY. Mom, you have *no idea*.

(*staring at his backpack*)

MOM. Joey, is there something you want to tell me?

JOEY. I just wanted to tell you that . . . Miss Young said I could keep *anything*
I found in her attic.

MOM. That's nice of her. Did you find anything you wanted?

JOEY (*looks her in the eye, then turns quickly to the audience, exasperated*). How
does she DO THAT? It's like she's shining a big flashlight down into the
basement of my brain. (*turns back to his MOM, opens his backpack and reaches*
inside) OK. All I found in that attic was just this really . . . old . . . *handker-*
chief. Here you go.

MOM (*holding it*). It's lovely.

JOEY (*no big deal*). Those're little flowers.

MOM. Roses. And it's hand stitched. Joey, that's so thoughtful.

JOEY. Yeah, well.

MOM. I'll see you downstairs. Dinner in 15.

(MOM goes.)

JOEY (*to audience, defensively*). Yeah, yeah—I know. I should have *told her*. But
what if she *made me give the card back*? I couldn't take that chance. (*During*
the following, JOEY puts on his favorite baseball jersey of some well-known major
league shortstop. The adult-size jersey is way too big and very long on him.) Before
I got in bed, I snuck downstairs and made sure all the doors to the house

were double locked. Birdie was right—he *did* know where I lived. And he
knew I had this card. And I knew he had that *bat*. (*climbs into bed*) I really
needed a *plan*. And the only plan I could think of was to go to sleep and
hope I woke up with a *perfect plan* in which I didn't have to tell Mom about
the card until after we were already RICH. (*gets the card out of his backpack*
and turns off the lamp) As soon as I held it, my hands started to tingle. (*music*
under) I thought of all those writers who called Wagner the greatest of all
time. And I thought of the other thing they always said—that he was kind
of funny-looking, sort of odd and awkward, not your typical ballplayer—
and I realized that he kind of *reminded me of me*! And I fell asleep wishing
I could meet him . . . and talk to him . . .

(*Now only the moonlight is seen streaming through a window. JOEY falls asleep,*
holding the card. Music and a series of odd, ominous late-night sounds, as a
SILHOUETTE FIGURE of a man holding a baseball bat gradually appears. The
SILHOUETTE FIGURE grows larger and larger, until it seems to be hovering over
JOEY's bed.)

SILHOUETTE FIGURE. Kid. (JOEY stirs a bit, still asleep. SILHOUETTE FIGURE,
louder). Kid. (JOEY stirs again, covering his head with his blanket. SILHOUETTE
FIGURE, *louder still*). I SAID—

(JOEY sits bolt upright and sees the SILHOUETTE FIGURE with the bat.)

JOEY (*screams*). AAUAUAUAUGHGHHGHGH!!!

SILHOUETTE FIGURE. What is it, kid? (*beat*) What are you saying?

JOEY. BIRDIE, LEAVE ME ALONE! I MEAN IT, BIRDIE, GET OUT OF HERE
OR I'LL CALL THE POLICE!

SILHOUETTE FIGURE. Listen, now—

JOEY. BIRDIE, PUT DOWN THAT BAT!

SILHOUETTE FIGURE (*lowers the bat*). Sure, kid. Whatever you say. You
know, I've been called a lot of things in my day, but I'm sure I've never
been called Birdie.

(JOEY suddenly turns his lamp on. Standing there in his room is a large, powerfully
built man in a Pittsburgh Pirates uniform. It is, of course, HONUS WAGNER. JOEY
stares at him in disbelief as HONUS looks at the strange room he is standing in.)

HONUS. What is *this place*? (*moves cautiously, curiously into the room and sees his*
baseball card lying on JOEY's bed) And where'd you get that?

(*reaches for the card*)

JOEY (*grabbing the card*). Leave that card alone!

HONUS. That's my baseball card.

JOEY. It's *my* baseball card. And I don't know who you are, but you can tell Birdie that I'm NOT SELLING HIM THIS CARD.

HONUS (*regarding the card*). That's my picture right there!

JOEY (*disbelieving*). Yeah, right. I bet Birdie sent you here to scare me, didn't he?

HONUS. Look—

JOEY. Or to steal the card!

HONUS. The only thing I've ever stolen is second, third, and home. Now, tell me the truth. *Where'd you get that card?*

JOEY. I found it!

HONUS. *I told that company to stop makin' 'em!*

JOEY. They did stop makin' 'em.

HONUS. I told 'em that kids shouldn't be spendin' money on tobacco just to get a picture of a ballplayer.

JOEY. What do you mean *you* told them?

HONUS. I'm the guy on that card!

JOEY. Yeah, and I'm Babe Ruth.

HONUS. Who?

JOEY (*quickly*). OK. Prove it.

HONUS. *What?*

JOEY. Show me some ID. Something in your wallet with your name on it.

HONUS (*removing his old-time mitt from a pocket*). Look, kid, a minute ago I was shaggin' fly balls at Forbes Field—and the next thing I knew I was standing here.

JOEY. That's impossible. Forbes Field is gone. They tore it down.

HONUS. That's impossible. They just built it!

JOEY (*a challenge*). If you're Honus Wagner, tell me what your batting average was in 1900.

HONUS. That was a pretty good year. I hit .381.

(*JOEY stares at HONUS. Beat. Then he quickly consults his huge baseball encyclopedia.*)

JOEY. OK. Lucky guess. How many bases did you steal in 1907?

HONUS. I think it was 61.

JOEY. *Total luck*. What about 1908? How many hits did you have?

HONUS. I had 201. (*proudly*) And I hit 10 home runs. Only one guy hit more. Tim Jordan of the Brooklyn Superbas—he cranked out 12 of 'em.

JOEY. Twelve? There's guys who can hit like 60 or 70 of them.

HONUS (*lifts a baseball from JOEY's glove or nightstand*). Playin' with balls like this? Hard as a rock?

JOEY. Yeah, I guess.

HONUS (*reaches into his pocket and brings out a baseball of his own, dirty and soft and beat-up*). Try hittin' one of these.

(*tosses this ball to JOEY*)

JOEY (*regarding the ball*). It's all squishy.

HONUS. It's dead is what it is. You gotta smack the stuffing out of it just to get it outta the infield. One time, though, at an exhibition game, I sent a ball like that over an outfield fence—403 feet away. They called it a world's record.

JOEY. For the longest ball ever hit?

HONUS. I didn't hit it, kid. I *threw* it.

(*JOEY is staring at HONUS as his MOM's voice is heard from offstage.*)

MOM. Joey?

JOEY. Yeah, Mom?

MOM. Who are you talking to?

JOEY (*finally lets it sink in and, looking at HONUS, he speaks, simply*). Honus Wagner.

HONUS. And who might you be?

JOEY. Me? I'm Joey. I'm, uh, Joey Stoshack.

HONUS. What do your friends call you?

JOEY (*beat*). Uh, they call me . . . Joey—Joey Stoshack.

HONUS. I'll call you *Stosh*. How's that?

JOEY. *Stosh*. (*beat*) That's cool.

HONUS. My friends call me Hans. Now, can you tell me which streetcar I catch to get back to the park?

JOEY. *Streetcar*? What year do you think it is?

HONUS. It's 1909, of course. (*JOEY hands a calendar to HONUS.*) What's the joke, *Stosh*? That says two-oh-oh-six!

JOEY. Yep.

HONUS. Jumpin' jehoshaphat! *What did you do*—cast a magic spell or something?!

JOEY. I don't know what I did!

HONUS (*hands the card back to JOEY, growing worried*). Well, whatever you was—you better *undo it*, 'cause I got a game tomorrow!

JOEY (*frustrated*). I don't know how to *undo it*!

HONUS. What was it you did before?

JOEY. All I did was hold onto that card. *See, there's this thing that happens—*

HONUS. *Just try it again, will ya?* I need your help.

JOEY (*beat*). Sure. OK. (*Stares at the card, holding it tightly. Beat.*) But, can I ask you something?

HONUS. Sure.

JOEY. Didn't they offer you a lot of money to print these cards?

HONUS. Sure they did. But sometimes there's the easy thing to do, and the *right* thing. And nobody can tell you which is which. It's up to you. (*extends his hand*) Good to meet you, Stosh.

(*They shake hands.*)

JOEY (*to audience*). His hand was the size of a baseball mitt—just like I'd read. And bigger than his hand, were his *stories*.

(*music under*)

HONUS. One time at Forbes Field I was playin' the outfield, and a fella hit a ball over the fence and right into the smokestack of a train! I hollered to the engineer to "pull the lever" and he did. Out came a big burst of steam—and the *baseball*, which I caught for the final out. And then . . .

JOEY. He just kept telling stories and I kept holding onto to that card, hoping I could get him back to 1909.

HONUS. There's the time I hit a ball that went *under* the pitcher's arm and *still* cleared the outfield fence.

JOEY (*lies back in his bed*). I closed my eyes. I tried to imagine Honus Wagner back at Forbes Field, shagging flies in the outfield. (*The CRACK OF A BAT and HONUS's eyes go up, his mitt ready, as though he is tracking a long, arcing fly ball.*) And that ball is well hit and Honus is after it on the dead run, further and further. He keeps going back—(*The light on HONUS begins, slowly, to fade.*) But he's not going to get it, not this time—because that ball is going . . . (*Lights fade more.*) going . . . (*Lights continue to fade.*) gone.

(*Lights to black.*)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(*The little league baseball field. The BLUEBIRDS TEAM is on the field. A light isolates JOEY.*)

JOEY (*speaks to the audience*). The next day, I still had the card . . . but there was no sign of Honus Wagner. Maybe I had sent him back to Forbes Field. Or maybe he'd never been here at all. Either way, everything now was back to normal. (*beat*) And we were playing the Ravens. (*The RAVENS TEAM enters carrying a miniature coffin.*) The Ravens are the best-coached team in the league. They call "I got it" on fly balls, they remember how many outs there are, and they always throw to the right base. They even do something my dad calls "the lost art of hitting the cutoff man." (*The members of the RAVENS TEAM open the coffin. The RAVENS PITCHER removes a few black baseball bats.*) The only thing worse than how they dress, is the way they *act*.

RAVENS PITCHER (*in a fierce whisper*). Death to the Bluebirds.

(*The RAVENS CATCHER removes a faux tombstone from the coffin and sets it near JOEY. The tombstone reads "BLUEBIRDS, R.I.P."*)

JOEY. And the only thing worse than how they act is the way they play—

RAVENS CATCHER (*in a whisper*). Say your prayers, Dumbo.

JOEY. Because they're *really good*.

(*The RAVENS TEAM take their places for the game.*)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Play ball!

JOEY. The good news for me is I'm gonna sit right here till it's over. (*moves to the bench. SOUNDS OF THE GAME are heard under the following.*) I kind of like the bench. It's better than making the last out. Supposedly there is this every-kid-must-play rule, but luckily our coach pays no attention to it.

(*JOEY's COACH enters. No cell phone.*)

COACH (*clapping his hands*). C'mon now, guys and gals. We're only down three runs and their pitcher's startin' to tire. I feel a BIG INNING COMIN' ON. (*The BLUEBIRDS TEAM, including JOEY, cheer.*) We just need *oneheckuvalot* of base runners. OK. Laman's up, Parks on deck, Bradley in the hole. Atkins, Meyer, and Noland—you be ready, 'cause we're gonna bat around and PUT UP SOME MIGHTY CROOKED NUMBERS!

(*more cheers as DAD approaches COACH*)

DAD. What about Stoshack?

COACH. Who's that?

DAD. Joe Stoshack. He's your backup shortstop.
 COACH. And who might you be—his *agent*?
 DAD. I'm his dad.
 COACH. Uh-huh.
 DAD. And it's the last inning.
 COACH. Uh-huh.
 DAD. And I happen to know there's an every-kid-must-play rule.
 JOEY. Dad, no!
 DAD. So, I'd appreciate it if you could please—
 COACH. You want my whistle, is that it?
 DAD. No, I don't want your whistle. I want my son to play.
 JOEY. Dad, please!
 COACH. Well, unless you're wearing this whistle, you're not gonna tell me how to run my team. *Capisce?*
 DAD. Look, I don't want to argue with you in front of my son, but—
 JOEY. Dad, really—I'm fine. I don't need to play!
 DAD. But Joey, I *know* you want to—
 JOEY. No, I don't.
 COACH. There you go, Pops. You heard the kid. Now could you please put butt to cushion, and let me orchestrate an amazing comeback here? Thank you just *oneheckuvalot*. (*calling toward the field*) OK, two outs—Bradley, make him pitch to you!
 JOEY. And Coach was right. With two outs, the Ravens pitcher did start to tire. He walked Bradley and Atkins—
 COACH. Good eye! Take your base!
 JOEY. And then Billy Meyer knocked them both in with a triple!
 COACH. Atta boy, Billy!
 JOEY. We were only down by one run with a man on third and our best hitter, Andy Noland, coming up!
 COACH (*calling off*). C'mon, Noland—you're up!
 JOEY. And then a terrible thing happened.
 COACH (*to the unseen player*). You WHAT?
 JOEY. Andy Noland set down his bat—
 COACH. You've got to be KIDDING.
 JOEY. And he took his mom's hand—

COACH. NOLAND, where are you GOING? A BASE HIT WILL TIE THE GAME.
 JOEY. And then he and his mom walked away, got in their car, and drove off.
 COACH. NOLAND—DON'T YOU DO THIS TO ME!
 JOEY. But it was hopeless. Andy Noland had left the game. *He had a dentist appointment.* (*beat*) And, of course, that meant—
 COACH. STOSHACK!
 (*a groan from the BLUEBIRDS TEAM*)
 JOEY. Oh, no.
 COACH. GET UP THERE!
 JOEY. Do I have to?
 COACH (*resigned*). You're all I got, son.
 DAD (*thrilled*). C'mon, Joe—knock that run in!
 (*DAD hands JOEY his bat and batting helmet.*)
 JOEY. WHY CAN'T I HAVE A DENTIST APPOINTMENT?!
 VOICE OF UMPIRE. Batter up!
 (*JOEY takes his place in the batter's box, similar to Act I. Lights now gradually isolate JOEY at bat, downstage. The RAVENS PITCHER is facing offstage left, as before. A chant is now heard repeatedly, coming from the RAVENS TEAM: "Sto-Shack, Sto-Shack, he's a No-Hack!"*)
 JOEY. As I stepped in the box, I made up my mind: I was *not going to swing*—
 NO MATTER WHAT. Because if you don't swing, you *can't miss*.
 (*The pitch comes in. JOEY takes it.*)
 VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strike one!
 COACH. Take the bat off your shoulder!
 DAD. OK, next one.
 JOEY. Oh, man! That was a *fat one*—right down the middle!
 DAD. C'mon, Joe, NICE AND EASY NOW.
 (*Another pitch. JOEY takes it.*)
 VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strike two!
 COACH (*simultaneously*). What are you waitin—
 DAD (*simultaneously*). Be ready, now.
 JOEY. Man, oh, man—that was a *marshmallow*! Right down the heart of Broadway! I stepped out of the box, looked at my dad.
 DAD. YOU CAN DO IT, JOE!

JOEY. Looked at my coach.

COACH (*punching numbers into his cell phone*). OK, who's ready for pizza?

JOEY. Looked at the pitcher.

RAVENS PITCHER (*a whisper, as before*). I'm gonna bury you, Stoshack.

JOEY. And now I was *mad*. I got back in the box. I gave that pitcher my meanest stare—and there it came. (*The pitch is thrown, but comes to JOEY in slow motion.*) It was a CREAM PUFF—just beggin' me to HIT IT INTO NEXT WEEK! (*Now the pitch comes at real speed. JOEY swings the bat PING!*) AND I DID IT!!! (*Lights instantly isolate JOEY, as music and cheering are heard under the following.*) I raced to first, still looking for where the ball had landed. And Billy Meyer, he raced home and stepped on the plate. And I kept running, looking for the ball—past second and on my way to third! Because I HAD HIT THAT BALL HARDER THAN ANYONE HAD HIT A BALL ALL SEASON. AND IT WENT— (*Lights expand to reveal the RAVENS CATCHER. The music and cheering suddenly stop.*) STRAIGHT UP!

(*The ball falls harmlessly from the sky and into the RAVENS CATCHER's waiting mitt.*)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Yooouuuurreee out!

RAVENS CATCHER (*tosses the ball to JOEY, whispering*). Rest in peace.

(*The RAVENS TEAM leaves, and COACH is speechless as DAD approaches JOEY.*)

DAD. Man, you smacked that thing, Joe! That would have been a home run—

JOEY (*dejected*). If we played in an elevator shaft.

DAD. You'll get 'em next time.

JOEY. Why do you always say that? "Get 'em next time."

DAD. Well . . . that's what my dad always told *me*. And what his dad told him.

Hey, did you know *my* grampa once saw Honus Wagner play at old Forbes Field? (*smiles*) Do you know what he'd do if *he* got in a slump? He'd walk up to the plate, and then—

JOEY. Then he'd switch over, and bat left-handed.

DAD (*surprised*). Yeah, that's right.

JOEY. He'd smack a line drive and next time up he'd go back to batting right-handed. His slump was over.

DAD. Did I already tell you that?

JOEY (*silent, looking away*). Hey, Dad? Did you ever think of selling any of your cards? I mean, if you had one card that was *really, really valuable* and you knew it would make Mom *really, really happy* to not have to worry about money for a *really, really long time*?

DAD (*smiles*). I never had any cards like that, Joe.

JOEY. But if you *did*.

DAD. Those cards belong to *you* now. You can do whatever you want with them.

JOEY (*hopeful*). You mean it?

DAD. As long as it's OK with your mom. (*Hearing this, JOEY's face freezes.*) Want to get a bite to eat? (*JOEY just shrugs.*) Well . . . can I give you a ride home?

JOEY. Mom said I could walk.

DAD (*beat*). OK. Well . . .

(*DAD starts to give JOEY a hug, but JOEY quickly says—*)

JOEY. Dad . . .

(*JOEY holds up his palm, where DAD now gives him a high-five.*)

DAD. Love you.

JOEY. See ya.

(*DAD goes. JOEY packs up his mitt and the ball, grabs his bat, and starts to go, walking past the bench where HONUS is now sitting. HONUS has his bat with him.*)

HONUS. See ya, Stosh.

JOEY (*not looking up*). Yeah. See ya—(*JOEY stops, does a double take. HONUS is wearing a pair of old brown suit pants with suspenders and a simple blue work shirt.*) Honus? No way! You're really here?!

HONUS. If I'm not, you better stop talkin' to yourself.

JOEY. But *how*?

HONUS. You fell asleep listenin' to my stories—

JOEY. Sorry.

HONUS. So, I went for a walk. Found these clothes that an old lady was throwin' out—pretty nice, huh? Then I came and watched you play.

JOEY. Oh, no.

HONUS. Looks like you're in a batting slump. Happens to everyone.

JOEY. I'm not in a *slump*. *That's the way I hit.*

HONUS. You know, Stosh, you've got a lot of natural talent, but the thing is—

JOEY. Yeah, I know, here it comes. The old pep talk. *Play hard, keep trying, don't give up.* I've heard it a million times.

HONUS. You're over-striding.

JOEY. What?

HONUS (*picks up a bat, demonstrates*). You're stepping too far with your front

foot. That pulls your back shoulder down. Your elbow dips and your wrists come in under the ball. Leads to a pop-up every time. (HONUS *hands the bat to JOEY. He takes his own [wooden] bat and places it downstage from JOEY's front foot to keep him from over-striding.*) Now, try it again. Here comes a Walter Johnson fastball. (JOEY *swings, nice and strong. HONUS continues, pleased.*) How about that.

JOEY. Wow, thanks.

HONUS (*looking more closely at the aluminum bat*). So, what year did they run out of wood?

JOEY. Kids' bats are aluminum nowadays.

HONUS. When you hit the ball, it doesn't even go "smack." It goes "ping." A baseball's not supposed to go "ping."

JOEY. Lots of things have changed, Honus. Like the designated hitter. It means the pitcher doesn't have to bat.

HONUS. That crazy idea's been around forever. It'll never catch on.

JOEY. Well, it *caught on*.

HONUS. Don't tell me, in the *American League*, right?

JOEY. Right.

HONUS. Pitchers get away with everything! Rubbin' the ball in the dirt, spit-tin' tobacco juice and god-knows-what-all onto it. That thing comes at you like a brown slobberin' snake.

JOEY. But I bet you still *hit it*.

HONUS. It's a game of *failure*, Stosh, and the great ones are the ones who fail *just a little bit less* than the rest. You know the difference between a .250 hitter and a .300 hitter? *One more hit every week*. But it's that *one more hit* that's the hardest to come by.

JOEY. Man, I'd love to play in the big leagues—even just once.

HONUS (*stares at him for a moment*). C'mon, let's toss it around.

JOEY. *Really?*

(HONUS *nods, taking his mitt out of his back pocket. JOEY quickly grabs his mitt and a ball. They play catch during the following.*)

HONUS. Remember, there ain't much to bein' a ballplayer if you're really a *ballplayer*.

JOEY. Who taught you to play—your dad?

HONUS. We never saw much of him. He was down workin' in the mines. It was my brother Al—

JOEY. Folks called him "Butts."

HONUS. That's right. He's the one taught me to play. One day he got offered a tryout in Steubenville, but he didn't want to go. So, I hopped a freight and took his place.

JOEY. And nobody noticed?

HONUS. Nah. He and I used to switch places all the time. Next thing I knew, this fellow from Louisville—

JOEY. Ed Barrow.

HONUS. That's right. You know Ed?

JOEY. I Googled him.

HONUS. You what?

JOEY. Never mind.

HONUS. Ed Barrow saw me throwin' lumps of coal clear across the river.

JOEY. I read that it was "rocks in a train yard."

HONUS. Well, it might of been. The best story is always the true one.

JOEY. So, he signed you up on the spot?

HONUS. Nope. I told him I wasn't interested, just to see what he'd do. He said, "Isn't there somethin' I can give you—somethin' you'd really like to have?" I said, "I'd like to have a *bag of bananas*." He ran out and got one! And I signed for \$35 and a bag of bananas.

JOEY. Nowadays, players make like \$10 million a year!

HONUS. Stosh, I spent 12 years in the big leagues before I finally made \$10 thousand a year. And I don't care what anyone says, 10 grand is the most any man should be paid to throw and hit a ball.

(*They continue to play catch.*)

JOEY. Is it true that on ground balls you'd scoop up and throw a whole bunch of dirt and rocks and they'd arrive at first base along with the ball?

HONUS. What do *you* think?

JOEY. Sounds made up.

HONUS. Well, how 'bout the time a ball got passed me at short, but one of my dogs jumped out of the stands and fetched it. I picked up the dog, with that ball in his mouth, and I touched the runner comin' into second. You know what they called that?

JOEY. (*groans*). A *dog tag*.

HONUS. How about that! And then there's the time a jackrabbit came runnin' across the field just as I was chargin' a slow roller. In my hurry, I picked up

the rabbit instead of the ball—and threw him all the way to first. It was a close play, but you know what the ump said?

JOEY (*another groan*). You got him by a *hare*.

HONUS. Atta boy, Stosh!

JOEY. I know one thing you never did.

HONUS. What's that?

JOEY. Make the *last out*, like I always do.

(*Pause as HONUS stares at JOEY. Then lights begin to isolate HONUS in the batter's box. CROWD SOUNDS begin to be heard under the following.*)

HONUS. 1903. The first World Series ever played. My Pirates against the Boston Pilgrims. Ninth inning, two outs, nobody on—and I was the last chance for the Pirates.

(*The SINGING BOSTON FANS are heard under the following dialogue.*)

BOSTON FANS (*singing under*). HONUS, AT BAT YOU LOOK SO BADLY. STRIKE THREE, AND SIT YOU DOWN. BEANTOWN HAS HAD ENOUGH OF WAGGY. TAKE THE TRAIN NOW, GET OUT OF TOWN! GO FIND ANOTHER TEAM TO HIT FOR. PITTSBURGH IS JUST THE PITS. AND EVER MORE, HONUS, YOU ARE A PHONY, PHONY, PHONY!

HONUS (*overlapping the song*). Those crazy Boston fans had made up a song for me.

JOEY. But you didn't even hear it, right? That's what the players always say.

HONUS. Well, they're lying. I heard every word of it. And what's worse—those Boston fans couldn't sing to save their lives.

(*The singing fades into SOUNDS OF THE CROWD as the SPORTSWRITER appears.*)

SPORTSWRITER. And now it fell to the great Honus Wagner, premier batsman of the National League.

HONUS. As I dug in, Stosh, I already knew . . .

SPORTSWRITER. The count was oh-and-two against him. And there on the mound, in the gathering gloom, Big Bill Dineen peered in for the sign.

HONUS. I knew exactly what he was going to throw.

SPORTSWRITER. The Mighty Dutchman readied his bat.

HONUS. And I knew exactly what I was going to *do with it*.

SPORTSWRITER. And now the windup. And the pitch, fast as an arrow, shooting toward the plate—

HONUS. And here it came.

SPORTSWRITER. The Great Wagner's mighty shoulders began to heave. And those in the crowd will swear that his very frame began to creak and shiver, as he swung his bat with a force unmatched in the game.

(*HONUS swings in slow motion.*)

HONUS. And I got ready to hear the best sound a ballplayer can ever hear—and I don't mean the sound of a "*ping*." I mean that wonderful "*smack*."

JOEY. And you heard it, right?!

SPORTSWRITER. And everyone heard it, all at once, that unmistakable sound—

JOEY. Honus?

SPORTSWRITER. Of the ball crashing into the catcher's waiting mitt. (*HUGE, AMPLIFIED SOUND of the ball landing in a mitt*) The Great Wagner, the Mighty Dutchman had made the final out. The Series was over. The failed, fallen champion left the field alone, in defeat.

(*HONUS stands there silently. The SPORTSWRITER is gone.*)

HONUS. I love this game more than anything else on earth. But sometimes, Stosh, baseball is nothin' but *organized humiliation*.

(*pause*)

JOEY. My Dad would say, "Get 'em next time."

HONUS. That's the plan, Stosh, but first you gotta get me back home.

JOEY. I tried, Honus.

HONUS. Well we gotta try again. I got a big game tomorrow!

JOEY. Meet me at my house tonight. My mom will be asleep by 10.

HONUS (*strong*). I'm countin' on you, Stosh.

(*HONUS goes as lights shift to JOEY's front yard. His MOM is talking to BIRDIE. He carries a sturdy black briefcase, which is handcuffed to his wrist.*)

MOM. Yes, Mr. Birdwell, I'm glad you stopped by.

BIRDIE (*overly polite*). It was my pleasure.

MOM. It's all a misunderstanding, I'm sure.

(*JOEY arrives.*)

JOEY. What is he doing here?

MOM. Joey, this is Mr. Birdwell from the baseball card shop.

BIRDIE. Hello, young fellow. How are you this fine day?

JOEY. Oh, gimme a break, Birdie.

MOM. We've been talking about something you may have mistakenly acquired from him.

JOEY. *Something I WHAT?*

MOM. I'm sure it's nothing you did on purpose.

JOEY. I didn't do anything! He's the one who tried to trick me and—

BIRDIE (*overlapping as JOEY says "anything"*). Now, now, now, Joey, let's not get ahead of ourselves here.

MOM. Mr. Birdwell, I'd like to speak to my son.

BIRDIE. I understand. (*to JOEY with a hint of menace*) See ya 'round, slugger.

(*JOEY glares at BIRDIE, who exits.*)

MOM. Well?

JOEY. Nothing he told you is true!

MOM. You don't have a baseball card that's worth a lot of money?

(*Pause. She stares at him.*)

JOEY. OK. So *that* part's true.

MOM. He says he sold it to you by mistake.

JOEY. And *that's* a LIE. I took it to his shop to see if it was the real thing, and when I wouldn't sell it to him—

MOM. Joey, where'd you get this card?

JOEY (*beat*). I found it . . .

MOM. Mm-hmm.

JOEY. At Miss Young's house . . . in a box of stuff she told me to throw away.

MOM. Mr. Birdwell says it's worth over a thousand dollars.

JOEY. Mom, the last one of these that sold went for \$1.2 million.

MOM (*stares at him in silence*). Can I see it?

(*JOEY hands MOM the card. She looks at it. He puts his arm around her.*)

JOEY. Mom, I don't know how to break this to you, but all our worries are OVER. You can quit your job and buy a new car and I can go to college and get a degree in statistical analysis, so I can start my own baseball consulting firm when my Major League career is over. (*MOM looks JOEY straight in the eyes. JOEY is immediately defensive.*) Don't ask me if I told her because, REMEMBER, she told me I could keep *anything I found up there*.

MOM. Joey—

JOEY (*overlapping*). And don't ask me to give it back to her because *she doesn't want it!*

MOM. *Listen to me—*

JOEY (*overlapping*). MOM, all our problems are SOLVED.

MOM (*sharp*). Not if we're taking things that don't belong to us. Not if we can't tell the truth to each other.

JOEY (*grabs the card back*). I knew I shouldn't have told you.

MOM. You give that card back to Miss Young.

JOEY. I knew you'd screw this up for us!

MOM. It's the right thing to do and you know it.

JOEY. You *want* us to be unhappy—just to punish Dad.

(*rushes off*)

MOM. Joey!

(*Lights isolate JOEY.*)

JOEY. Why did I go and tell her the *truth*?! I should have told her I found it *lying on the street*. See what happens when you tell people the truth?!

(*A separate area. DAD is speaking with MOM.*)

DAD. Do you know how excited he must have been to find that card?

MOM. It doesn't belong to him, Tom, and I would like you to *please back me up on this*.

DAD. When I gave him my collection, he asked me, "What's the hardest card to find in the whole world?" And I told him it was the Honus Wagner T-206. And he *remembered that*, whereas most people would have just thrown it away in the trash.

MOM. Where it belongs.

DAD. How can you say that?! It's a piece of *history*. It could change our lives.

MOM. You sound just like Joey.

DAD. The money from this card—

MOM. Would not change a thing *between you and me*.

(*JOEY steps into their midst.*)

JOEY. Then what about me? It's *my* card. Doesn't anybody care what *I* think?

MOM (*simultaneously*). Go back upstairs, please. Right now.

DAD (*simultaneously*). Hi, Joe, your mom and I are just—

JOEY. What happened to "You can do this, Joey; you're old enough to make decisions on your own"?

MOM. Not this time, Joey.

JOEY. But, Mom—

MOM (*with a glance at DAD*). We've decided that the card belongs to Miss Young, and you'll give it back to her tomorrow.

JOEY. No, I won't.

MOM. Suit yourself.

JOEY. Dad, say something!

MOM. I'll take it to her myself.

JOEY. NO!

DAD. Joey—

JOEY. You won't find it! You'll never find it!

(JOEY races off as lights shift to JOEY's room at night. HONUS is there, paging through some of JOEY's baseball card binders. He is wearing his baseball uniform.)

HONUS. You said 10 o'clock, right, Stosh?

JOEY. What? Oh, yeah.

HONUS. And you've got that card?

JOEY (regarding his parents downstairs). I'm not giving that card to *anyone*.

HONUS (regarding the cards). Can't get used to these Pirates uniforms—and this letter "h." There's no "h" in Pittsburgh. And what's with these *numbers* on the *player's backs*?

JOEY. Those are their . . . numbers.

HONUS. Like this number nine. (trying to pronounce it) Maz-err-ohh—

JOEY. Bill Mazeroski. Hit the most famous home run in Pirates history.

HONUS (another card). Roberto . . .

JOEY. *Clemente*. Best right fielder of all time. Had an arm like a rocket.

HONUS (another card). And this number 24—

JOEY. That's Barry Bonds when he was still a Pirate. Now he's the greatest home run hitter in baseball.

HONUS. This *skinny little guy*?

JOEY. He's kind of . . . *filled out*. He might pass Babe Ruth on the all-time home run list.

HONUS. Take it from me, Stosh, nobody will EVER pass Roger Connor. As of last year, he's got 138 *home runs*. Let's see someone top that!

JOEY (smiles). Just you wait, Honus.

HONUS (with passion). I'll tell you whose card you should have: John Henry Lloyd. They call him "Pop" Lloyd. Plays in the Negro Leagues. Best short-stop I've ever seen.

JOEY. Wish I could see him play.

HONUS (beat). Come with me.

JOEY. What do you mean?

HONUS. Let's try it, Stosh, maybe that card works *both ways*.

JOEY. But, Honus—

HONUS. I've seen your time. Let me show you how we play ball in *mine*.

(The PHONE RINGS in the room. It's a chirpy little ring. HONUS, of course, does not know what the sound is.)

JOEY (regarding the phone). Get that!

HONUS. Get what?

JOEY. The phone—quick! Before it wakes up my mom!

(The PHONE KEEPS RINGING.)

HONUS (regarding the noise). You got a bad cricket problem in here, Stosh.

(JOEY jumps past HONUS and answers it.)

JOEY (into phone). Hello!

(A light on BIRDIE. In one hand, his cell phone. In the other, his briefcase.)

BIRDIE (into phone). Hi, there, *slugger*.

JOEY. Who's this?

BIRDIE. This is the guy standing *right outside your window*. I heard you talkin' to yourself in there, Joey.

JOEY. Leave me alone, Birdie—

BIRDIE. Oh, believe me, I will. As soon as I have that card, I will leave you *very, very alone*.

HONUS. Everything OK?

BIRDIE. Now, why don't you just open your window and drop that card into my hand. OK?

(pause as JOEY stares toward the window)

JOEY. OK.

(JOEY hangs up the phone and the light on BIRDIE goes out.)

HONUS (concerned). Stosh?

(JOEY takes out the Honus Wagner T-206 card and holds it in his hand, looking in the direction of the window.)

JOEY (with conviction). I wish I was bigger. I wish I could make my own decisions. I wish I was *all grown up*.

HONUS (regarding the card). Feelin' anything?

(music begins)

JOEY (*closing his eyes*). Hey, Honus. In 1909, is everything in black and white?
Like all those old pictures?

HONUS. No, friend, *the past is in color*. In bright . . . beautiful . . . color.
(*The SPORTSWRITER appears. Music from the era plays, as before.*)

SPORTSWRITER. And as morning dawns on the city of Detroit, the Tigers faithfully begin the great march to Bennett Park—that hallowed place where their beloved Tigers will attempt to bring the first world championship to this great city by the lake. But take heed, Tiger Rooters, though you have the incomparable Ty Cobb on your side, your rivals also have a man, a man among men: Johannes Peter Wagner, the Flying Dutchman. Here they are, folks, the two greatest players in baseball—brought together right here in Detroit. Let the games begin!

(*In a hotel room. Lights rise on JOEY. He is under the covers, asleep. An OLD-TIME CAR HORN sounds very loud and JOEY sits up with a start.*)

JOEY. HUH?! (*beat*) Honus? Honus, are you here? (*Next to the bed is a brass wind-up alarm clock. JOEY lifts it.*) Twelve-thirty! I slept till 12:30?! Wait a minute—Mom never lets me sleep that late, even on Saturday. (*stares at clock*) Wait—this isn't my clock. This clock has hands. (*looking around*) And this isn't my room.

(*HONUS enters, wearing his uniform. He is in the midst of shaving, a towel tossed over his shoulder.*)

HONUS. Thought you'd never wake up, Stosh.

JOEY. Where are we?

HONUS. The Pontchartrain Hotel. Detroit, Michigan.

JOEY. But Honus, *when* are we?

(*HONUS hands JOEY a calendar.*)

HONUS. Have a look.

JOEY. October . . . 1909!

HONUS. Yep.

JOEY. But I'm not even born yet.

HONUS. Then how come you're all grown up?

JOEY. What?

HONUS. Have a look in that mirror.

(*JOEY goes to the [unseen] mirror in the room. The previously oversized baseball jersey he slept in now fits him snugly.*)

JOEY. Hey—my shirt shrunk.

HONUS. Think again, big fella.

(*HONUS steps out of the room.*)

JOEY (*to audience*). It was true! I was *hairy* in places that I used to be smooth. My breath tasted *really bad* in my mouth. My whole body kind of *smelled*. And I needed a *shave*! I was . . . *disgusting*. I was . . . A MAN!

(*JOEY is making muscles in front of the mirror as HONUS returns, finished shaving and holding a small duffel bag.*)

HONUS. Hey, Muscles—we gotta go. (*HONUS tosses JOEY a coat and hat.*) Put these on. And maybe on the way we'll get you some new shoes.

JOEY. *I like these sh—*

HONUS. C'mon, now—I don't want to miss batting practice.

JOEY. Why do you get dressed here? Aren't there locker rooms at the stadium?

HONUS. Welcome to the good old days, Stosh.

JOEY. But Detroit's in the American League. You'd never play the Tigers, unless—(*dawns on him*) It's . . . the *World Series*.

HONUS. Told you I had a big game today.

(*HONUS goes and JOEY follows as lights isolate JOE and HONUS. The SOUND OF A BUSTLING CROWD.*)

FRIENDLY FAN. Good luck today, Honus!

HONUS. Thanks a lot.

HECKLER. Cobb's gonna roll all over you, Dutchman!

HONUS (*smiles*). We'll see about that.

(*Two LADY FANS approach wearing fancy hats. They each carry scorecards and hold a fountain pen.*)

FIRST LADY FAN. Mr. Wagner, could you please sign this for my son? His name's Hiram.

HONUS (*signing it*). For Hiram . . .

SECOND LADY FAN. And could you sign this for my son, as well?

HONUS. Happy to do it.

SECOND LADY FAN. And could you maybe write it, "with love?"

HONUS. OK. Sure. And the name?

SECOND LADY FAN. Um, his name is . . .

(*The LADY FANS are about to bust up with giggles.*)

FIRST LADY FAN. Lydia.

HONUS (*winks at JOEY, signs*). "To . . . *Lydia*, with love."

FIRST LADY FAN (*whispers to SECOND LADY FAN*). He's doing it!

SECOND LADY FAN. Oh, thank you, Mr. Wagner. (*HONUS hands her the scorecard.*) And you know something? You're just as ugly *in person*.

(*HONUS just smiles as the FIRST LADY FAN turns to JOEY.*)

FIRST LADY FAN. And who's this? Are you a ballplayer?

HONUS (*before Joey can respond*). He's my brother.

(*The FRIENDLY FAN enters, patting JOEY, shaking his hand, etc.*)

FRIENDLY FAN. Hey, Butts! Butts Wagner! How ya doin'?

HONUS. He's great!

FRIENDLY FAN. Where you playing now, Butts? Haven't seen you since Brooklyn in '98.

(*The LADY FANS hold their scorecards in front of JOEY and he signs them quickly during the following.*)

HONUS (*regarding JOEY*). Well, his knee was a little banged up.

FRIENDLY FAN (*as he goes*). Hope we see you next year, Butts!

JOEY. OK. Thanks.

(*The LADY FANS take their signed scorecards and hurry off.*)

SECOND LADY FAN (*as they go*). Butts Wagner—never heard of him.

FIRST LADY FAN. He's as ugly as his brother!

(*The HECKLER approaches. Around his neck and shoulders are various pots and pans, whistles, etc., as well as a small megaphone.*)

HECKLER. Hey, Butts—your brother's gonna get creamed today!

JOEY (*not backing down*). Oh, yeah? Who says?!

HONUS. Don't let 'em get to you, Stosh.

HECKLER. Bet he makes the *last out* like he did in '03!

(*The HECKLER goes as HONUS hands JOEY a ticket and a quarter.*)

HONUS. Here's your ticket. And two bits for some food.

JOEY. Thanks, Honus.

HONUS. And one more thing. I want you to watch me every inning when I come off the field. If I look up at you and do this— (*pats his left shoulder twice with his right hand*) I want you to come down to the tunnel behind our bench. Is that clear?

JOEY. Sure, but—

HONUS. Remember the sign.

JOEY (*imitates the sign*). I got it.

(*HONUS turns to go.*)

JOEY (*cont'd*). Honus, this is like a dream come true.

HONUS. Not yet, it ain't.

(*Bennett Park in Detroit. Red, white, and blue bunting unfurls around the stage.*)

JOEY finds his seat directly behind the two LADY FANS and between the FRIENDLY FAN and the HECKLER. Several of the fans wave Tigers pennants. The HECKLER uses his noisemakers throughout. The SOUND OF THE CROWD [*live and recorded*] is heard, rising and falling, as needed. The ANNOUNCER'S VOICE can be heard [*recorded or amplified*].)

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE. Welcome one and all, to Game 7 of the 1909 World Series, between your American League champion Detroit Tigers.

(*LOUD CHEERS as TY COBB appears and tips his cap.*)

JOEY. Is that Ty Cobb?!

HECKLER. What're you—some kind of joker?! Of course that's the Great Ty Cobb!

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE. And their opponent today—the National League champions, the Pittsburgh Pirates.

(*HONUS joins TY COBB at home plate as JOEY stands and CHEERS [seemingly the only Pirates fan in the park].*)

JOEY (*a hip-hop chant*). OH, YEAH—GO PIRATES! GO PIRATES!

(*The other fans glare at him.*)

HECKLER. Go back to the coal mines, Smokestack.

JOEY (*to the HECKLER*). It's Stoshack!

FIRST LADY FAN. I thought it was Butts.

JOEY (*Beat. Offers food.*) Cracker Jack?

(*The LADY FANS turn away in a huff as lights now feature HONUS and TY COBB at home plate, each holding a bat.*)

HONUS. Young Mr. Cobb.

TY COBB. Mr. Wagner.

HONUS. Game 7.

TY COBB. Yep.

HONUS. Someone's gonna go home the world champion today.

TY COBB. And someone's gonna lose and go back to Pittsburgh. (*HONUS smiles. Beat.*) You're lookin' at my hands.

HONUS. I'm wonderin' if you stole my grip. Hands a little bit apart, slide 'em up and down a bit, dependin' on the pitch.

TY COBB. I don't steal nothin' from nobody.

HONUS. I'll remember that.

(Pause. They wave, tip their caps, etc., to the cheering crowd.)

TY COBB. So, what do you fellas hunt up there in Pennsylvania?

HONUS. Oh, we go out for squirrel and rabbit and all sorts of small game.

TY COBB. Down in Georgia, we go after *birds*.

HONUS. Do you now?

TY COBB. You should come down South when the season's over. You and me could do a little bit of shootin'.

HONUS. Sounds good. (Pause. TY COBB is staring at HONUS.) Somethin' else on your mind?

TY COBB. They say you're the most *popular* man in baseball.

HONUS. Whoever "they" are.

TY COBB. Oh, believe me, I know exactly who *they* are.

HONUS. And they say you're the most *feared*. Say you'd climb a mountain just to punch an echo.

TY COBB. Baseball is a red-blooded sport for red-blooded men—and all the little mollicoddles had better stay out of it.

HONUS. It's a *game*, young man.

TY COBB. No, sir. It's something like a *war*.

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Play ball!

(The crowd CHEERS. HONUS and TY COBB part as the game begins.)

JOEY (to audience). With the Tigers down four to nothing in the fifth, the Great Ty Cobb came to bat.

(TY COBB steps into the batter's box.)

HECKLER. C'mon Cobb, show these Pittsburgh rubes how it's done!

(TY COBB swings—SMACK!)

JOEY. Cobb slapped the ball to right field for a hit. I'd never seen anyone run so fast in my life. And now he was on first base, like a wild horse caught in a pen. He took a huge lead, taunting the pitcher, and then he pointed down at Wagner.

TY COBB. You better look out, Krauthead! On the next pitch, I'm *comin' down*!

HONUS. I'll be ready!

(A LOW, HAUNTING DRONE is heard as lights isolate JOEY.)

JOEY. And sure enough, on the next pitch, Cobb broke for second! Honus

caught the ball, straddling the bag. (Now a shaft of light illuminates the base, revealing the very end of TY COBB's slide in slow motion.) And Cobb's spikes went right into Wagner's arm! And Wagner tagged Cobb right across the face!

(The AMPLIFIED SOUND of HONUS smacking TY COBB across the face with his mitt)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Yooou'ree ououtt!

HONUS (standing over him). Remember: You don't steal nothin' from nobody.

(The DRONE continues as TY COBB slowly rises, face-to-face with HONUS.)

JOEY. Cobb stood up, his face covered with blood, and I waited for a fight to break out. (After a hard stare, HONUS and TY COBB part, respectfully.) But Cobb ran back to the dugout, Honus went back to short, and the game went on.

(APPLAUSE from the crowd)

HECKLER. You got his number, Ty, you'll get him next time!

JOEY. The inning ended and Honus came toward the dugout— (HONUS does the signal.) The signal! I got out of my seat and raced down behind the Pirates bench.

(JOEY approaches HONUS, who is taking off his uniform shirt [or producing a second one from his duffel bag].)

HONUS. Quick, Stosh. Get out of those clothes and put this on.

JOEY. Why?

HONUS. Cobb got me pretty good on that slide. My arm's cut up and I can't hold a bat.

JOEY. But what do you want me to do?

HONUS. I want you to be my designated hitter.

(HONUS is putting the baseball jersey on JOEY.)

JOEY. What?!

HONUS. Said you wanted to play in the majors, right?

JOEY. Well, yeah, *someday*.

(HONUS slides JOEY's pants up to his knees and tucks them into his dark socks.)

HONUS. I'm the fourth man up this inning. So, if anyone gets on, you're going to come up to bat.

JOEY. You've got to be crazy—

HONUS. Didn't you say it was your dream come true?

JOEY. Yeah, but I was thinking maybe spring training or something—this is the World Series!

(HONUS puts his cap on JOEY's head.)

HONUS. So, what could be better than that?!

JOEY. BUT, HONUS—

(HONUS shoves him toward the field just as a light isolates JOEY.)

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE. Now batting for Pittsburgh—the shortstop, HONUS WAGNER!

(HUGE TAUNTS and JEERS from the crowd as JOEY stands frozen for a moment, then approaches the batter's box, bat in hand. He digs in. The TIGERS PITCHER is on the mound.)

JOEY. I pulled his cap way down over my eyes. I stepped into the rear of the batter's box like Honus always did. I gripped the bat the way he did.

HECKLER. THROW HIMALITTLE CHIN MUSIC, GEORGE!

JOEY. I stared out at the mound and tried to look ready.

(The pitch comes in. JOEY takes it. The sound of a ball hitting the mitt loudly.)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strike one!

JOEY. But I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready at all!

HECKLER. ATTA BOY, WABASH!

JOEY. I'd never seen a ball come at me that fast. Before I knew what hit me—
(The next pitch comes in. JOEY takes it. The sound of a ball hitting the mitt, as before.)

VOICE OF UMPIRE. Strike two!

HECKLER. YOU'RE WASHED UP, WAGNER, GO BACK TO THE COAL MINES!

JOEY. And now I was really in a hole. I smacked the bat down on home plate.
TY COBB (from right field). Hit it here, Wagner, so I can drill you in the head with it!

JOEY. I dug my cleats in and I spit on the ground, just because, well, I had to do something!

HECKLER (as he leaves the stands). Hey, Wagner—could your ears be any bigger?! YOU LOOK LIKE AN ELEPHANT!

(The LADY FANS laugh and the crowd begins to chant "STRIKE HIM OUT! STRIKE HIM OUT! STRIKE HIM OUT!")

JOEY. And then, just before Wabash George Mullin started his windup, I glanced into the dugout to see if Honus was watching. (beat) But I didn't see him anywhere. What I did see was an amazing thing— (Music begins under the following.) My teammates weren't packing up the gear like they usually did—my coach wasn't ordering pizza. NO! They were leaning toward me.

They were nodding their heads like they just knew, they just knew I could do it! And that was the greatest feeling of all. (beat, smiles) Well, maybe the second greatest feeling.

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE. And here's the oh-two pitch to Wagner— (The pitch comes in. JOEY takes a great, clean swing at it, and SMACK!) And there's a drive down the third base line! It's gonna clear the bases! Leach will score! Here's Clarke coming around to score and Wagner's not stopping at second, he's going for third. And here comes the throw from Jones—and it's off-line. It gets away from Schmidt and now Wagner's on his feet. He's heading home—and they're not gonna get him! Wagner scores! Pirates seven, Tigers nothing!

(HUGE CHEERS and music playing as the lights shift. The SPORTSWRITER arrives, notebook in hand.)

SPORTSWRITER. How'd you do it, Hans? What's the secret?

JOEY (a la HONUS). Well, there ain't much to bein' a ballplayer—if you're really a ballplayer.

SPORTSWRITER (jotting this down). Is that so?

JOEY. I remember once in Louisville, all our bats were broken. So the batboy handed me an ax to hit with. Well, I swung at the first pitch and split that ball clean in half—hit a single to right and a double to left!

(TY COBB approaches JOEY. Seeing TY COBB, the SPORTSWRITER rushes off.)

TY COBB. Mr. Wagner.

JOEY (tentatively). Yes?

TY COBB. You're as good as advertised. (JOEY is speechless.) I'll see you down South.

JOEY. OK.

TY COBB. Bring your guns. (TY COBB leaves as HONUS appears, opposite, carrying his duffel bag. During this scene, JOEY takes off the uniform top, cap, etc., until he's back in his contemporary clothes.)

HONUS. I knew you could do it, Stosh!

JOEY. But what if Cobb hadn't spiked your hand?

HONUS. Oh, I'd-a thought of something. Once I saw you all grown up, I knew I had to get you into the game. And, hey, I've got somethin' else for you. (rummaging through his duffel bag) A whole bunch of those baseball cards with my face on 'em—they gave 'em to me down at the factory. You might as well have 'em.

JOEY. How many do you have?

HONUS. Oh, probably about 20 of 'em. Now, what in the devil happened to those?

JOEY (to audience). And as I was doing the math in my head—20 cards times \$1.2 million each . . .

(A PIRATES TEAMMATE enters with a champagne bottle.)

PIRATES TEAMMATE. A toast to the man who outhit and outran the Mighty Cobb!

HONUS. Hey, Smitty, you seen those cards I had?

PIRATES TEAMMATE (reaches into his pocket). HIP, HIP, HOORAY! (tosses a large handful of confetti into the air above HONUS's head, with a laugh) I told you they were good for something!

HONUS (regarding the confetti). Well, Stosh, there's your cards. Sorry about that.

PIRATES TEAMMATE (shaking JOEY's hand). Stosh, I'm Phenomenal Smith. Good to meet you. Why don't you come out with us? Me, Ducky Hemp, Peakaboo Veach—we'll meet you at the hotel. WA-HOO!

(The PIRATES TEAMMATE dances out of the room, joyous. But now JOEY is looking at something else in HONUS's bag.)

HONUS. What is it, Stosh? You're white as a ghost.

JOEY. That picture—who is that?

HONUS (removes half of a torn photograph from the bag). Oh . . . that's Amanda. She and I were gonna get married. When I went away to spring training, we tore this picture in half—said we'd put it back together when I got home.

JOEY. But why didn't you get in touch with her?

HONUS. Time went by. I heard someone else was courtin' her—figured she probably didn't want to hear from me. Tell you what, though . . . I never forgot about her. (JOEY reaches into his pocket and removes the other half of the photograph. He shows it to HONUS.) Now, where'd you get that?

JOEY. Amanda Young lives down the street from me.

HONUS. She's still alive—in your time?

JOEY. She's *really* old. But she never married. (beat, excited) Hey, why don't you come back with me!

HONUS. No . . . I had my chance with Amanda. That's over and done.

JOEY. But, Honus—

HONUS. Sorry, Stosh, but I belong here. (HONUS gives the two halves of the photograph back to JOEY.) Hey, since you know the future, maybe you can tell me how long I stayed in the game?

JOEY. Till 1917.

HONUS. I'll be 43.

JOEY. You hit .265 that year.

HONUS. Ouch. No wonder I called it quits.

JOEY. But then the Pirates asked you back, to be a coach. And you did that until—

(stops)

HONUS. Till when? Till I died? (off JOEY's look) It's OK. You can tell me. What year was that?

JOEY. 1955. You were 81.

HONUS (silent, looking away). Somethin' I gotta ask you, Stosh. (beat) Did I ever play in another World Series? (JOEY is staring at him.) No, don't tell me. Everybody needs somethin' to hope for.

JOEY. Well, I guess I should be getting back. I mean forward.

(JOEY extends his hand and they shake.)

HONUS. Come visit me sometime, OK?

JOEY (holds up the baseball card). Already got my ticket. (HONUS picks up his duffel bag and leaves as JOEY turns to the audience.) And as he walked away, I realized— (stops, worried) I had *no idea* how to get home! I knew how to get to the past, but how was I gonna get to the future? I tried everything. I tried imaginin' the cards in my room at home, but nothing worked. (stops) WAIT. (reaches into his sneaker and pulls out a piece of cardboard) LARVELL BLANKS. MY HERO. MY FAVORITE PLAYER OF ALL TIME. (stands, holding the card) And, yep. Sure enough, right away my hands started to tingle. (music begins) And I wished I was a *kid* again. Just plain old Joey Stoshack, living with my mom in my house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at good ol' two-oh-oh-six . . .

(A downstage area. MOM is holding JOEY's backpack and a paper sack.)

MOM. Joey, you're gonna be late for school.

JOEY. Mom?

MOM. I packed up your breakfast. You can take it with you on the bus.

JOEY. Mom, *what year* is it?

MOM. I think you mean *what time* is it? And it's time you got movin', buddy!

JOEY. But have I been, like, *gone* for a couple days or anything?

MOM. I think I'd know if you were. And listen, I want you to make your own decision about that baseball card. OK?

(JOEY nods as MOM goes. A light isolates JOEY.)

JOEY. That night I walked down to Miss Young's. It was getting dark. And just like always, the wind was blowing the trees against her house.

(MISS YOUNG's yard. BIRDIE and CHUCK jump out of the shadows and grab JOEY. CHUCK gets JOEY in a full nelson as BIRDIE holds the baseball bat. BIRDIE takes JOEY's backpack from him during the following.)

BIRDIE. Well, well, well.

CHUCK. We got him now, dude.

BIRDIE. I gave you a chance to give me that card, Stoshack—

JOEY. Let me go!

BIRDIE. But now I'm gonna have to *take it*.

JOEY. I don't have it!

BIRDIE. I think that's a *fib*. Do you think that's a *fib*, Chuck?

CHUCK. *Fib* with a capital "P-H."

JOEY. You lied to me, Birdie—you told me that card was worth 20 bucks!

BIRDIE. The value of a card comes down to two things, Stoshack: supply and demand. (CHUCK tightens his grip as BIRDIE lifts the bat.) I demand it. You supply it.

JOEY. Birdie—NO!

(MISS YOUNG's voice is heard from offstage.)

MISS YOUNG. DROP IT!

(BIRDIE freezes and CHUCK turns to see MISS YOUNG holding a very old rifle.)

CHUCK (races off). Duuuuuuude—

MISS YOUNG. I said drop it!

BIRDIE. *What's this?*

MISS YOUNG. What's it look like? I'm an old lady with a gun.

BIRDIE. It's not loaded.

MISS YOUNG. Want me to *show* you? (She lifts the rifle with intent and aims it at BIRDIE.) I got nothin' to lose. What're they gonna do—put me away for life? (BIRDIE is frozen.) Now, I suggest you drop that bat. (BIRDIE drops the bat.) Joseph, what's all this about?

JOEY. I brought you something.

(JOEY reaches into his pocket and removes the Honus Wagner T-206 card.)

BIRDIE. I knew it!

MISS YOUNG. Quiet, batboy. (JOEY hands the card to MISS YOUNG. She looks at it briefly.) Where did you get this?

JOEY. I found it in your attic.

MISS YOUNG (sharply). I told you to throw all that stuff away.

JOEY. Yes, I know, but— (MISS YOUNG puts the rifle in JOEY's hands and begins to tear the card into a handful of pieces.)

MISS YOUNG (adamant). What's past is past and what's gone is gone and there's no point in going back.

BIRDIE (dying at the sight). No! No, don't! Oh, no, please—nooooooooooooo!!!

MISS YOUNG (drops the pieces of the card into the trash can). When I tell you to throw something in the trash, I expect you to do it. (to BIRDIE) And you. You should be ashamed of yourself—picking on a little kid like that. Don't let me catch you 'round here again.

BIRDIE. That's more than a million bucks!

MISS YOUNG. And get a rag. Your head is sweating. (BIRDIE grabs his bat and looks up at JOEY.)

JOEY. Bye, bye, Birdie.

(BIRDIE storms off. When he's out of sight, MISS YOUNG gestures to the rifle.)

MISS YOUNG. You can throw that away, too. Hasn't worked in 50 years. (JOEY puts the rifle in the trash.) What's this half-a-million bucks stuff?

JOEY. That's what that card was worth.

(Beat. She looks in the direction of the trash, then back to JOEY.)

MISS YOUNG. And you brought it back to me?

JOEY. Sometimes there's the easy thing and the *right thing*.

(JOEY reaches into his pocket and pulls out the torn photograph.)

MISS YOUNG. That's the picture I showed you.

JOEY. Yes.

MISS YOUNG. I told you to throw that away, too.

JOEY. Sorry.

MISS YOUNG. Did you throw *anything* away? (JOEY now produces the other half of the photograph from HONUS. He hands it to MISS YOUNG. Slowly, she puts the two halves of the photo together, completing the picture.) My, oh, my . . . there we are.

JOEY. He never forgot about you. (off her look) He told me.

MISS YOUNG. That's impossible.

(JOEY puts his hands on the photograph, as well, so that they are both holding it.)

JOEY. Hold onto this photo—really tight.

MISS YOUNG. Joey, what are you doing?

JOEY. And close your eyes.

MISS YOUNG (*doing so*). But why?

JOEY. Do you feel it? In your hands?

(*Music: the lovely solo trumpet version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," as before.*)

MISS YOUNG (*feeling it now*). Well, I don't know—

JOEY. In your fingers?

MISS YOUNG. It's like . . . *electricity*.

JOEY. Do you want to go there?

MISS YOUNG. Joey—

JOEY. Do you want to go *back*?

MISS YOUNG (*pause*). Yes. Yes, I do.

(*music plays as JOEY speaks to the audience*)

JOEY. And then Miss Young began to *smile*. A smile I'd never seen her smile. And it made her look young. (*MISS YOUNG begins to slowly walk upstage toward the huge replica of the Honus Wagner T-206 card and into the distance, into the light.*) And the wrinkles on her face slowly faded away, and her hair turned from grey to blonde, and she was beautiful and young. And she was going . . . going . . . (*MISS YOUNG turns back, waves, and is . . .*) gone.

(*Music fades out as COACH immediately enters, buoyant. MOM and DAD enter from opposite sides. A Little League baseball field.*)

COACH. Just *oneheckuwa* game, *Stosh*. From here on out, you're my starting shortstop!

JOEY. Thanks, Coach.

COACH. And brush your teeth—these dentist appointments are killing me.

(*COACH goes.*)

DAD (*to JOEY*). Two singles and a triple. I told you you'd get 'em next time.

JOEY. You saw the whole game?

MOM. Yes, he did. Including the double play.

JOEY. We got him by a hare. (*Beat. Regarding himself and DAD.*) Hey Mom, can we go get some pizza?

(*Beat. MOM looks at DAD.*)

MOM. Just be home by *nine*, OK?

(*DAD nods. JOEY and DAD exchange a high-five. JOEY turns to give the same to MOM, but she just opens her arms, demanding a hug, which he gives her.*)

DAD. I'm proud of you, Joe, for giving that card back.

MOM. You never told me what Miss Young said.

JOEY (*simply*). She just smiled.

(*MOM goes as JOEY reaches into his backpack and discovers the vintage Pirates cap he wore in the World Series.*)

DAD. You're a Pirates fan now?

JOEY (*smiles, puts the cap on*). Hey, Dad, can we toss it around?

DAD. I thought you were hungry.

JOEY. Just for a minute.

DAD. Sure.

(*Music plays as JOEY gives DAD his mitt and picks up another that's been left near the bench. They begin to play catch.*)

JOEY (*to audience*). I never told them about going back in time. But I wish my mom could have seen me, all grown up into a man. And I wish my dad could have seen that old ballpark, the way the game used to be played. (*beat*) Which I guess is not so different from today. In right field, Ty Cobb charged the ball—and in one motion, he *scooped it from the ground and fired it on a rope to nail the runner at third*. Just like Clemente. And just like Ichiro. And just like some kid somewhere in Single-A, who no one's ever heard of. (*beat*) At least not yet.

(*The game of catch continues as the SPORTSWRITER appears in the distance.*)

SPORTSWRITER. Great is baseball. The national tonic.

DAD. It's getting dark, Joe.

SPORTSWRITER. The reviver of hope.

JOEY. Just a couple more, Dad.

SPORTSWRITER. The restorer of confidence.

JOEY. Just a couple more . . .

(*Lights fade.*)

END OF PLAY