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# Coney Island Avenue

by CHARLES L. MEE

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## Scene 1.

Tuvan throat singers at full volume.

Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn:  
the second hand bookshop [later replaced by a Burger King]  
a mosque  
an ATM machine between the bookshop and the mosque  
a kosher vegetable market  
[which gets torn down and replaced with a different business several times in the  
course of the piece]

four or five dogs

A guy comes out carrying a card table  
looks around,  
finally decides where to set up the card table on the sidewalk.  
Puts it there,  
turns.

A timid guy, Harry, comes out  
with a sheaf of papers,  
looks out at the audience,  
smiles uncertainly,  
puts his chair at the table  
(as the first guy leaves)  
and takes his time to arrange for his poetry reading

in the coffee house,  
taking out papers and putting them on the table  
pouring a glass of water  
sitting down in a chair at the table  
looking through the papers  
and finally,  
when the singing stops,  
reading  
from A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

HARRY

The one tree in Francie's yard  
was neither a pine nor a hemlock.  
It had pointed leaves  
which grew along green switches  
which radiated from the bough  
and made a tree  
which looked like a lot of opened green umbrellas.  
Some people called it the Tree of Heaven.  
No matter where its seed fell,  
it made a tree which struggled to reach the sky.  
It grew in boarded-up lots  
and out of neglected rubbish heaps  
and it was the only tree that grew out of cement.  
It grew lushly,  
but only in the tenements districts.

You took a walk on a Sunday afternoon  
and came to a nice neighborhood,  
very refined.  
You saw a small one of these trees  
through the iron gate  
leading to someone's yard  
and you knew that soon that section of Brooklyn  
would get to be  
a tenement district.  
The tree knew.  
It came there first.  
Afterwards,

poor foreigners seeped in  
and the quiet old brownstone houses  
were hacked up into flats,  
feather beds were pushed out on the window sills to air  
and the Tree of Heaven flourished.  
That was the kind of tree it was.  
It liked poor people.

[A song of wild wailing from Macedonia.  
It could be, for example, that  
Dionisis Savopoulos and Sotiria Bellou sing Zeibekiko.  
Or Nikos Xylouris sings the mournful San Erthoun Mana I Fili Mou.

Or it could be the old Italian singer Giovanna Marini.

Harry gets up from the card table,  
puts his papers together,  
looks around uncertainly,  
as though the host of the poetry reading  
should be coming out to introduce the next speaker,  
looks off in the other direction,  
then pushes his chair in under the table  
and walks off, still very uncertainly

as the entire cast comes out:  
an elderly couple, a couple of kids  
—this is a world of Sikhs, Turks, Russians,  
Jews, Muslims, Italians, Asians, African-Americans—  
and they all dance to the music,  
a neighborhood dance in the streets,  
and, one or two at a time,  
they all dance back out  
as:]

### **Scene 67. The Bed**

Yusef comes out,  
in a snit, exhausted,

wheeling a bed out with him,  
checks where he has put it,  
decides it's OK there,  
goes back out,  
comes back with a pillow  
and a blanket,  
followed by his wife,  
Anna.

YUSEF

For me,  
it's not the beginning, it's the end.  
No. No.  
If this is how you are  
for me it's over.  
How it is for a man:  
you can't be like this!  
Talking late at night  
having a conversation  
after we have gone to bed  
and it is time to sleep  
because a person has to get up in the morning  
and go to work!  
And what is this to have a conversation in bed at midnight!  
You should go back to your father's house  
because, for us, it's finished.

ANNA

Finished?

YUSEF

Please,  
you should feel free,  
from here  
from this home  
take whatever can't live without  
take whatever you love  
and go back to your father.  
For me,

I'm worn out.  
I am exhausted.

[shouting]

I will have a nap.

[he puts an eye mask over his eyes,  
lies down  
and goes immediately to sleep.]

ANNA  
Yusef?  
Yusef?

[he is asleep  
she is shocked and undone.  
her friend Birbal enters]

BIRBAL  
What is it?

ANNA  
Yusef says  
for us  
our marriage is over.  
I think I wear him out  
because I love him  
and if you love a person  
you want to take care of him  
and make him happy with good stories  
about what happened in the day  
while he was gone.  
Ask him: what does he think?  
And if my friend says such and such  
what does he think I should say?  
Because he is good at this,  
knowing what to say.

BIRBAL

What did he say?

ANNA

He said go away  
go back to your father's house.  
Take whatever you can't live without  
take whatever you love  
and go.

BIRBAL

What's the problem, then?

ANNA

What's the problem?

BIRBAL

If he tells you you may take with you what you love  
then take him with you.

ANNA

Take him with me!

BIRBAL

I'll help you.  
You take that end.  
I'll take this end.  
We'll take him in the bed  
to your father's house.  
No problem.

ANNA

Take him with me!  
Oh, good! Good!  
Thank you, Birbal!  
Take him with me!

[Birbal and Anna wheel the bed out.]

## Scene 8. The Kid from Brooklyn : Starbucks

A video is projected  
of a three hundred pound guy in a wife beater undershirt  
his hair slicked back, wearing sunglasses,  
sitting in a black leather desk chair in his office,  
shelves with stuff on them,  
papers on the table next to him,  
his shirt tossed over something behind him.

He speaks:

Hey, the big man's back. [www. the kid from brooklyn.com](http://www.thekidfrombrooklyn.com).  
You know, the big man got up this morning  
you know I felt like having a hot cup of coffee  
and a piece of pound cake  
I wound up in one of them Starbucks you know  
I knew the joint wasn't right soon as I walked in you know  
I seen these people sitting on couches  
lounge chairs  
whatever they were fucking drinking  
they looked like fucking ice cream cones  
fucking mounds of fucking whipped cream  
and fucking all kinds of shit on top you know  
finally I get up to the girl  
she says you want an el grande?  
you want a chocolate latte?  
carmelo latte?  
cherry lite?  
I say listen honey  
I don't know what kind of fucking place this is  
I just want a large fucking coffee  
and a fresh piece of fucking pound cake you know  
she says that's seven dollars  
plus she had the fucking balls  
to have a fucking tip cup over there  
she expect me to give her a fucking tip  
I says seven fucking dollars for a fucking coffee  
and a fucking pound cake?  
fucking stick it

I went right around the corner to fucking Pancake House  
I take an oath to my mother  
I take the fucking breakfast special  
two eggs over, home fries  
bacon, sausage, two pancakes  
all the coffee you can drink  
threw in a shot of fucking OJ  
and for an extra buck and a half  
they gave me a fucking cheese danish  
I walked out of there fucking stuffed  
cost me eight and a quarter for the whole fucking ball o' wax  
I could have eat the rest of the fucking day  
what's a fucking working man supposed to do?  
you go to one of them fucking Starbucks  
the poor working guy  
what do they think they're fucking serving over there?  
fucking liquid gold?  
fucking cup of coffee and a piece of pound cake  
for seven dollars?  
stick it up your ass, fucking Starbucks!  
what about the fucking working man?  
anyway, thinking about it  
this is the old Big Man  
[www.thekidfrombrooklyn.com](http://www.thekidfrombrooklyn.com)  
and the Big Man's always happy to see you.

**Scene 12.**

While Big Mike speaks,  
a woman enters, comes center stage,  
stands looking straight out.  
She lifts her dress up above her head  
hiding her upper body entirely  
exposing herself from the waist down  
and takes a long, slow exit.

**Scene 55. Macho**

6 guys line up at the front of the stage  
their backs to the audience,  
and they watch  
while 6 women dance for them—  
a lonely, sad unison dance  
while a soprano sings.

The guys are watching out of simple prurient interest,  
but also to figure out how these women dance,  
how a person dances to this kind of music.  
What kind of music is it?  
Flamenco?  
Bhangra?  
Kazakh folk songs?

A woman is lying on the floor.  
One of the guys steps forward,  
leans down, and locks lips with her  
and raises her from the floor into the dance  
with lips permanently locked in a kiss.

They go on and on and on and on and on  
until he passes out and falls to the ground in a heap.

She turns to another guy and locks lips with him immediately  
and they dance  
but she stops them, interrupts the dance  
to tell him he is dancing the wrong way  
they lock lips and dance again  
she stops to correct him again  
ditto  
ditto  
until she spins around, grabs the sleeve of his shirt  
and rips it.  
Then he is pissed;  
they argue;  
they argue and argue and argue and argue and argue,  
till the guy turns front and takes a dance posture  
and flexes his bicep

he flexes his bicep to the music  
2 guys join him in bicep flexing dance  
all in unison.  
Then they all do a hip thrust  
very macho  
then turns upstage and wiggle their butts  
(not SO macho)  
they move through other male display dance moves  
finger snapping, etc  
Then the women step up and do the same male display moves.

When they have finished,  
the women just turn and walk off scornfully.  
And the men look at one another,  
not knowing quite what to do,  
and then, one by one,  
they turn and leave, too.

### **Scene 18. The Rent**

Harry comes out again,  
looking shy and uncertain,  
a sheaf of papers in his hand,  
and then he takes his place at the table,  
and reads.

HARRY

The landlord, Mr. Wallenstein, was a big, broad man  
with a huge black beard,  
and he had learned two English words:  
"The Rent."  
Twice a month he knocked on the door  
and my mother went to open it.  
The man never stepped across the threshold.  
My mother would say,  
"Hello, Mr. Wallenstein, how are you;  
how is your family?"  
Mr. Wallenstein got scared.

Mr. Wallenstein always got scared  
when he got a big hello.  
A big hello was bad news,  
maybe an excuse that the rent was not available,  
so all through my mother's effusiveness,  
Mr. Wallenstein, without waiting for her to complete a sentence,  
kept repeating over and over again,  
"The rent, the rent,"  
and when my mother said,  
"How about some tea, Mr. Wallenstein?"  
that really scared the daylights out of him,  
and he raised his voice,  
"The rent, the rent!"  
I wish I had a recording of that.

#### **Scene 51. The Brooklyn Girl**

The actors all come out  
put chairs in a row across the stage  
and sit with their backs to the audience  
watching for several minutes the video by Laurel Nakadate  
from the P.S. 1 show Greater New York 2005  
in which a young Asian girl wearing a girl scout sash stands  
with fireworks going off behind her  
and then we see squirrels close up  
and then we see her dragged across a beach by a guy  
and then we see her lying on a highway overpass with a dead bird  
and then we see her dancing in her bra and underpants on her bed  
as we see her figure out how to grow up  
and make her own world to live in.  
(Laurel Nakadate's work can also be seen on the internet.)

#### **Scene 44. Cell Phones**

Nine actors on cell phones at the same time  
having the same conversation  
about a love affair

a breakup  
each taking different lines of the same conversation  
or of archetypal conversations around this event  
archetypal lines.

Then there is music  
and they all sing.

MUSIC POSSIBILITIES NOW OR LATER:

Wing

Deborah Kapchan

Kazakh folk songs

Bangra

LuakaBop on the internet

### **Scene 52. Home**

Lisa comes out  
followed by two guys carrying plywood panels.  
As she talks,  
they go on and off,  
bringing in more pieces of flat wood,  
chunks of plywood,  
strips of plywood,  
triangles of plywood,  
little rectangles of plywood  
a long strip of cloth that they hang from the top edge  
of a piece of plywood  
a can of paint  
some pieces of plywood are painted a nice blue  
or a bright red  
or canary yellow  
and some of them just have a stroke of paint here and there

LISA

So, you can put them over there.  
Just lean them against the front of the store I think.  
Or against that lamp post. That's better. That's good. Right.

[to the audience]  
This is, you know, under construction  
but  
when I get it finished  
I think  
probably  
it will look sort of  
assembled  
there will be like a big big panel here

[and some of these lines she takes to the guys  
as they bring in more stuff]

and then a little panel here  
a triangle maybe  
maybe leaning against the big panel you know  
and then something blue  
something a sort of light sky blue  
because I think of it as a kind of  
unfinished middle class living room you know  
that we have been sort of creating since  
the middle of the nineteenth century  
the idea of a cozy sort of family room  
where the family lives  
and feels at home and comfortable  
because they are middle class  
and we're still trying to get it just right  
like we're never finished sort of trying to rearrange it  
so you know  
I'm planning to finish it  
probably it needs a little  
something  
here  
I don't know  
another touch of blue  
or a kind of mauve  
and then  
sometimes I look at it  
and I like it just the way it is

so I think  
I don't want to touch it  
I just want to leave it exactly as it is.

[Big orchestral music  
and a woman comes out with a floor lamp  
and dances  
and places it here and there  
trying first this place, then that,  
to the music  
and finally dances out with the lamp  
not happy with any of the places  
she has tried it out.]

#### **Scene 87. The Kid from Brooklyn: Sheiks**

A video is projected  
of a four hundred pound guy in a wife beater undershirt  
his hair slicked back, wearing sunglasses,  
sitting in a black leather desk chair in his office,  
shelves with stuff on them,  
papers on the table next to him,  
his shirt tossed over something behind him.

He speaks:

The Big Man's back.  
www dot the Kid from Brooklyn dot com  
Ya know  
I want to give ya a little education today  
ya see, these uh oil uh shieks  
over there in uh Saudia Arabia  
ya know the oil barons  
they run the world ya know  
they make two million a minute ya know  
now they're making two million a minute  
every time that fucking oil well goes boom  
two minutes later ya got another fucking million  
in the fucking bank ya know

I'm gonna tell ya something  
which most of you people don't fucking know  
ya see these Arabs  
they wear their underwear once  
they throw it in the fucking garbage  
they wear socks one time they throw it in the garbage  
they wear a fucking shirt one time  
they throw it in the garbage  
they wear a fucking \$3000 suit one time  
they don't bring it to a fucking dry cleaner  
they throw it away you know why?  
they got fucking money to burn ya know  
when you got fucking money to burn  
imagine fucking wearing a new pair underwear every day  
new shirt every day  
new fucking suit every day  
and throw em they throw em in the fucking garbage  
I wanna tell ya these Arabs  
they know how to fucking live  
cuz lemme tell ya they got fucking people  
coming in waking them up  
giving them baths  
wiping their ass  
cleaning their shit  
they don't do fucking nothing that's all  
they're ever blessed Allah fucking blessed 'em  
with that fucking oil they got there  
think about it  
imagine that  
not even throwing out your fucking dirty underwear  
putting on a new pair every day  
new socks every day  
I tell you that's the fucking life.  
Anyway, this is the Big Man signing off  
www dot the Kid from Brooklyn dot com  
We'll get 'em in the next life.

**Scene 107. Bikini**

While Big Mike speaks,  
a girl in bikini underwear runs in and out  
L to R  
R to L etc  
L to R  
R to L etc.

**Scene 66. The Line**

Six people stand in a line  
and, finally, a seventh person joins the line.

JEAN, THE SEVENTH PERSON

Is this the line for the Certificates of Good Conduct?

HARRY

The what?

JEAN

The Certificates of Good Conduct?

HARRY

What is that?

JEAN

A certificate of good conduct, from the police department.

HARRY

What do you do with that?

JEAN

If you want to get certain jobs.

Or sometimes if you want to adopt a baby from China,  
then the Chinese government wants to see  
that you are a person of good conduct.

JHUMPA

And the police department certifies you?

JEAN

Right.

JHUMPA

The police department?

JEAN

Right.

MOUSTAFA

Jeez. Like....

JHUMPA

Like Russia.

MOUSTAFA

Right. Like Russia. Or China.

JEAN

Is this where you get one?

MOUSTAFA

No.

MARTA

You get those at 1 Police Plaza.

JEAN

Oh. You're sure?

MARTA

Sure I'm sure. I got one when I adopted my daughter.

JHUMPA

You have a daughter from China?

MARTA

The Empress.

JEAN  
The Empress?

MARTA  
I call her The Empress.

LISA  
Do people think it's, like, odd that you have a Chinese daughter?

MARTA  
Do you?

LISA  
Oh, no. No. I mean: no.

MARTA  
Because a lot of people approach you  
because you are with a child of another race  
and think that entitles them to get all up in your business.

LISA  
No. No, I wouldn't think that at all.

MARTA  
I was at this nature place once  
and there was a vet there who was ultrasounding a pregnant alpaca—

JEAN  
Alpaca?

MARTA  
You know, the animal?

JEAN  
Oh, right.

MARTA  
And we were asking (jokingly)

if she could tell if it was a boy or a girl.  
'Cause girl alpacas are worth a shitload of money  
and boy alpacas typically are worth very little,  
so you want your dams to be having as many girls as possible.  
And the vet said that there is no way to tell with alpacas,  
which was just as well because otherwise  
everyone would be aborting all the males.  
And one of the other people there said,  
"Yeah, this isn't China."  
and my hackles immediately went up  
and I just wanted to walk over to that woman  
and slap her as hard as I could  
(normally I'm not a violent person,  
but I really had the urge, I'm telling you.)  
Later I was thinking about it,  
and I couldn't figure out why I was so upset about it....  
because I think that probably  
there would be abortions of females in China  
if they were allowed to sex babies by ultrasounds.  
And then I realized that what pissed me off so much  
was the way she said it.  
Her voice was dripping with self-righteous judgment.  
It was full of  
"we are so much better than the barbaric Chinese who kill babies" attitude.  
THAT'S what pissed me off  
because I'm sure I don't have to tell you  
that this woman doesn't know JACK SHIT about China  
or the complexities of reproduction and the one-child policy there.  
I would have liked to have educated her,  
but I couldn't right at the moment  
(the vet was talking to the group  
and she was across the barn from me  
with about 20 people between us.)  
I wonder if I should have pulled her aside later,  
but what do you say?  
How about "You are a stupid fucking moron!"

JHUMPA  
Right.

MARTA

What is this line for?

JHUMPA

Oh, this is the line for the notary public.

MARTA

You need something notarized?

JHUMPA

Sure. Who doesn't?

[a voice from off: Move forward please!  
and so they all shuffle off]

### **Scene 23. The Orchestra**

The cast comes out with musical instruments in hand  
and sit in a semi-circle.

They don't really play these instruments—  
and yet they can make amazing sounds with them  
and they gradually drown out the recorded orchestra  
ending with a Big Noise,  
and, when that ends,  
everyone sings

When Somebody Loves You

while they continue to make music with their instruments  
but, finally, one woman's harsh almost screaming singing  
dominates the room  
and people begin to leave one by one.

The last guy tries to stop her from screaming singing,  
and she kicks the shit out of him  
gets him down on the ground  
pounding and kicking him  
while she finishes the song.

**Scene 26. Ear Plugs**

Anna and Birbal push Yusef's bed onstage,  
as Yusef sits up in bed.

YUSEF

Where am I?

What happened?

Is there an earthquake?

ANNA [putting her hand on Yusef's shoulder to calm him]

Yusef, no, it's OK.

There's no earthquake.

I'm sorry

I bumped your bed.

It's OK.

You can settle back down.

YUSEF

What happened?

ANNA

It's nothing.

[she eyechecks with Birbal]

I'm just putting together my things to leave.

I'm sorry I bumped your bed.

Can I get you anything?

YUSEF

No. Thank you.

ANNA

A drink of water?

YUSEF

No, thanks.

ANNA  
Another blanket?

YUSEF  
No. Thank you, Anna.

ANNA  
I would do anything for you, Yusef,  
you know that.

YUSEF  
Yes, thank you, Anna.

[a loud sound of crashing from off stage  
shattering plates,  
garbage can lids  
steel shelves collapsing,  
a booming sound

and Yusef sits up in a panic  
yelling

YUSEF  
What was that?!?!?!?!?!?  
Where am I?

ANNA  
You're having a nightmare, Yusef!!!!  
Calm down!!!!  
Quick, sniff this handkerchief!

[she puts a handkerchief over his mouth and nose  
and he slowly subsides,  
sinks back down to the pillow]

ANNA

Are you asleep, Yusef?

[no answer]

Are you asleep?

[shouting]

Are you asleep, Yusef?

BIRBAL

Good.

[and now is this followed by deafening music and dance as they leave?]

#### **Scene 146. The Irish**

HARRY

When the reservoir was built in New York,  
the labor was imported from Ireland.  
Passage to America and return to Ireland was guaranteed,  
and the pay was four cents an hour.  
Good, work clothes, and lodgings (tents)  
were also provided.  
They worked ten hours a day,  
six days a week.  
On Sundays, the Irish laborers were taken to famous Ulmer Park  
on the outskirts of the city  
where a picnic of free beer was provided.  
The first strike by the Irish  
was for an increase in pay to five cents an hour.  
They lost.

#### **Scene 18. Duet**

A woman enters and stands still.  
A man enters and throws himself repeatedly to the floor.  
Finally she does, too,  
but at last she leaves  
leaving him to go on until he is exhausted,  
lying on the ground  
as another scene enters and begins.

### **Scene 56. Dad**

JEAN

My dad called me today to tell me all about his concert. He was ecstatic...apparently it went off fabulously and he got a 10-minute standing ovation. It was the crowning moment of his life, he said. How wonderful! I am so disappointed that I had to miss it.

After we talked about that, he asked if I'd heard from the MFA committee yet. I explained that my submission has only been there a week and that it would probably be a couple of months before I hear anything. He jumped in and said, "Good! Oh good! So there's still hope...heh heh!" in this overly enthusiastic way like he really doesn't think I have a snowball's chance in hell. Then he said, "And you know, don't feel bad if they don't take you, 'cause it's probably just a bunch of egos getting in the way."

Um.....ok. Can't say it had even crossed my mind this early in the game.

THEN he went on in that same vein for a long time and I was just sitting there thinking that he really doesn't think I'm going to be accepted. I don't have any idea where all of this is coming from.  
Then he said, "Someday you'll get a 10-minute standing ovation after a reading and you'll have that wonderful feeling of success, too."

Well, no. Standing ovations tend not to happen at poetry readings. So I said to him that I'd get that feeling of success if I published an entire book of my poems and he jumped in and said, "Yes, and you'll sell a million copies!"

Uh...no, actually. Poetry is kind of a forgotten art and it doesn't have that much popular appeal. I don't need to sell a million copies to feel successful.

What IS it with him? He is going way over the top with this fakey enthusiasm and instead of making me feel supported (which I think is what he's trying for) I feel totally patronized.

At what point in our lives do our parents finally stop making us crazy?

**Scene 12.**

A woman enters, comes center stage,  
stands looking straight out.  
She lifts her dress up above her head  
hiding her upper body entirely  
exposing herself from the waist down  
and takes a long, slow exit.

**Scene 48. Sex**

There is a constant simulcast projection on a big screen of live action as it is happening in the moment on stage,  
and also pre-recorded stuff  
of the same actor we are seeing on stage,  
but of her in the dressing room  
then leaving the dressing room  
then standing just off-stage preparing to come on  
then leaving the stage  
and returning to her dressing room  
and also two small TV sets on a bar with irrelevant movies playing, and projected  
over the set and back wall as a whole,  
another continuous Hollywood movie  
while she speaks:

"Two weeks is a long time without sex,"  
I heard someone say yesterday.  
When you've been married 12 years  
and you've got children,  
sex every two weeks, hell, every two months,

is cause for celebration.  
Forget about exchanging loving glances across any part of the house.  
I am either fixing my kids' lunches  
or figuring out where someone's homework folder is.  
Let's face it.  
Romantic sentiments including sex  
have no place in a marriage with children.  
When they all turn 18  
perhaps there'll be time for such pursuits,  
but will we still know each other then?  
I am looking at a picture of my husband's grandparents  
standing in front of their pharmacy  
on the corner of Coney Island Avenue and Locust.  
I am told this picture was taken in the fifties  
during the pharmacy's heyday.  
Riva and Sol worked here morning till night,  
only taking quick lunch breaks  
upstairs in their one bedroom apartment.  
It was also here that they raised their daughter,  
my mother-in-law.  
I have often wondered what sort of marriage they had.  
In the picture Riva stands proud,  
determined and independent.  
Sol's demeanor is resigned,  
almost defeated.  
I doubt if they ever had a chance to  
exchange loving glances at each other during the day,  
much less at night when they tumbled into bed.  
Theirs was the American dream.  
Two Jewish immigrants who had done well  
and sacrificed much.

### **Scene 118. The Cockroach**

A woman puts a soft cello case over her back  
so she looks like a cockroach  
and does a cockroach dance on the floor

to music.

**Scene 8.**

An old woman sings.  
She's just that: some old woman from a village  
with a faltering raspy voice.  
who has been singing in the village all her life  
and when she sings  
you think she comes from a thousand years of living.  
It could be the Italian singer Giovanna Marini.

An older man enters  
and sits in a chair on the other side of the 'stage'  
he seems to be an elegant, older Mafia don  
a rectangle of light is put on him from the side  
and he looks a little like a Magritte painting.

A young woman in a dress with a red crown of flowers  
comes Downstage and smokes cigarette smiling  
just that, no more, and is happy

After a moment,  
a little guy in dunce cap walks in and around.

A woman in an elegant black dress  
does a passionate dance to the music  
and then throws herself to the ground on her back  
over and over and over  
as she kicks and writhes wildly on the ground on her back  
like a cockroach frantic on its back.

A guy stands to one side with bloody hands  
showing them to the audience

A young man with Down syndrome  
enters wearing a crimson prom dress.

An extremely tall skinny naked guy with caked blood on his head  
and his entire body charcoal black— —burned from head to toe—  
does butoh walking  
but seems genuinely to have mobility issues  
walks stumbles shuffles lurches on his tiptoes  
falls over to the side  
goes into a crouch  
goes to the ground  
writhing.

A woman in a beautiful black dress enters  
dragging a guy by the hand  
he is naked from the waist up  
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over.

A guy enters wearing a wedding dress  
and he is still standing there  
as everyone else leaves.

**Scene 38.**

A guy with Down Syndrome enters with a goat on a rope  
he sits in a chair, holding onto the rope.

The narrator comes on  
gently takes the guy by the hand  
and leads him around the periphery of the stage  
just in front of the front row of the fan-shaped stage  
as a kind person would tend to a needy person in any village in the world  
taking them through the streets  
and takes him out.

**Scene 23.**

A woman in silver sheath enters and dances  
4 more women in silver sheaths enter to dance  
one in red silver, one in blue silver

now a church choir sings gregorian chant dirge  
as another woman in a black dress and also a black veil  
enters up center and comes all the way slowly down center  
holding a bouquet of flowers in front of her  
motionless in every way except her walking very slowly  
to lay the bouquet flowers on the ground  
her eyes are streaming tears of blood.

### **Scene 36. The Funeral**

Some very long ten minutes of total silence  
with dirge music (Polish music?)  
for the death of a child or a grandfather.

### **Scene 16.**

The guy with Down Syndrome enters and sits on box  
he has on a strait jacket  
watches TV on packing crates  
he frees his hands and eats bread and sings along with TV  
making drumming motions with his hands

old woman in black with guitar  
sings an Italian lament

Mafia guy comes in and gently escorts the guy with Down Syndrome out  
while old woman plays

narrator voiceover  
while we hear the inarticulate sounds made by the guy with Down Syndrome

Mafia don removes the strait jacket from the Down Syndrome guy  
he and the Down Syndrome guy kick a soccer ball back and forth  
(really a ball of old cloth)  
and leave kicking it

The old woman sings and plays alone  
as lights go slowly to black.

### **Scene 3. The Epileptic Dances**

while twelve others just stand there watching,  
to music by Mozart.  
Or it could be someone with some extreme motor skill difficulty  
dances  
while the others watch  
and then,  
toward the end,  
the others join in the dance, too,  
not mocking the dancer  
but appreciating and emulating his aesthetic.

### **Scene 44. The Computerized Soap Dish**

A guy comes in with a small cardboard box  
which he puts down on the card table.  
He opens it carefully  
and takes out an object,  
which he treats delicately.  
So he can both point to this object,  
and also gesture with his hands  
to explain what he is talking about.

RAY

So.

Basically,  
you take a soap dish  
a plain round plastic soap dish  
say a half to three quarters of an inch thick  
of the kind you can  
stick into the wall  
above the sink in the bathroom.  
And you slice the dish in half

around its circumference  
so that you have two discs  
and you should have a hollowed-out inside.  
That's where you will want to put your computer components,  
your chip and your various lights and sensors and indicators  
so that you can obtain a reading of moisture levels  
soap residues  
your scent indicator  
your density indicator  
which can be set in such a way that you have a reading  
on soap content  
which is to say how creamy your soap is  
how it ought to froth up when you use it  
so you have a sense of your different soaps  
your miniaturized scale so you have a running tally  
of your remaining soap weight  
which will tell you when you are getting low on soap.  
These will be the basics of your computerized soap dish  
that will give you continuous read-outs on all the things  
you will be needing to know  
about your soap.

You can, uh,  
email me with any questions.  
I'm happy to answer them anytime.

[he gathers up his stuff,  
puts it back in the box,  
looks around to see if there is anyone else there  
to tell him what to do,  
leaves a little embarrassedly]

### **Scene 88. The Lottery**

[Jean enters,  
carrying her cardboard box.  
She goes to the card table,  
opens her box,

and takes out a handful of cards.]

JEAN

This, basically,  
is all you'll need  
to build your lottery ticket house.

[laughs]

I mean,  
you'll need a lot of them!  
But they're not hard to find.  
You can build the entire house of discarded tickets.

I myself am building several apartment buildings  
arranged around a central courtyard  
with a playground in the middle for the children.

What you do is,  
I mean I think everyone basically knows how to  
build a house of cards?

So you place them like this.  
I use a scissors  
to cut the little places where you want to  
join the two cards together.  
And then just a little spot of glue.  
Like this.

There you have it.  
Two cards joined together,  
this is the basic unit.

You take another two cards,  
cut the little place,  
join them together.  
Spot of glue.  
And put them with the first two cards  
and you have a room.

You can leave an open space between the two units  
for two doorways.

Or, of course, you can put them together to make your room  
and then you would want to cut out a little door.

One more card for the roof,  
and there you have it.

You group some rooms  
say five or ten or twenty  
depending on how large a building you want to build  
and that becomes your ground floor.

And you build up from there.

I've built thirty-four story buildings  
with lottery tickets.

As well as

car ports,

river piers

small stand-alone ranch houses,

bigger summer houses with decks and terraces,  
swimming pools.

The most amazing thing, obviously,  
is that your discarded lottery tickets are all free  
and since you are investing your own labor  
that's essentially free, too.

So, in this way,

you can always have a place to live

that is beautiful

and even, in fact,

a work of art.

And then, too, of course,

if you incorporate in your work

the occasional lottery ticket that you purchase,

rather than making the whole thing out of discarded tickets,

then you also have a chance at

capital appreciation

just as you do with any other real estate investment.

I'll be in the lobby afterwards  
if there are any questions?

[she gathers up her tickets and her box,  
smiles,  
and leaves]

### **Scene 17. The Developer**

Lisa enters with a couple of construction workers  
who stand behind her while she talks.

LISA  
This thing is  
I have sort of come up with this plan  
for a whole new neighborhood  
I mean of course  
leaving the neighborhood we begin with  
but naturally evolving also into a new neighborhood  
which will have a big sort of  
Frank Gehry building right here  
something silver  
and with big swooping  
sort of swooping things  
rising into the sky  
like aspirations  
or transportingness of a kind  
and then apartment buildings along the avenue  
about ten blocks worth of mixed income housing  
but maybe that would be designed also  
by Frank Gehry  
and then there would be  
down more or less near Ocean Parkway  
an amphitheater  
where there can be football and Nascar racing  
so you would have pennants  
and big signs and billboards about gas and oil

and also a baseball stadium  
and it would be the race track of the future  
just as the stadium itself  
or the amphitheater itself  
is a reference to the race tracks of the past  
which is Greece

[we begin to hear a sound track of cheering,  
the sounds of a baseball stadium  
and also of racing cars  
and, finally, of radio advertising]

and there would be possibly  
some new teams  
which I think would bring out some new sponsors  
so that what would begin with new architectural plans  
would  
as anyone of course would always hope  
would lead to new city plans  
and new human plans  
and there would be some thinking ahead  
as well as thinking back  
and cherishing and relishing the moment  
and you would also begin to have a sense of perspective  
as though you might see a vanished civilization  
from outer space  
ancient cities  
and detonating and crumbling and rebuilding  
so that you would treasure life itself  
this would be the goal, finally,  
to treasure life itself  
in all its manifestations  
under the sea and on the surface of the earth  
and also in space

[Now we hear guys singing It's Raining Men  
while a group of construction workers  
stretch out a yellow tarp.]

## Scene 61. Rain Delay

We hear the song  
It's Raining Men  
by Paul Jabara and Paul Schaffer

Humidity's rising  
Barometer's getting low  
According to all sources  
The street's the place to go

'Cos tonight for the first time  
At just about half past ten  
For the first time in history  
It's gonna start raining men

It's raining men  
Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen  
It's raining men  
Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen

Humidity's rising  
Barometer's getting low  
According to all sources  
The street's the place to go

'Cos tonight for the first time  
At just about half past ten  
For the first time in history  
It's gonna start raining men

It's raining men  
Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen  
I'm gonna go out  
I'm gonna let myself get  
Absolutely soaking wet

It's raining men  
Hallelujah it's raining men

Every specimen  
Tall blond dark and mean  
Rough and tough and strong and lean

God bless Mother Nature  
She's a single woman too  
She took on a heaven  
And she did what she had to do  
She taught every angel  
To rearrange the sky  
So that each and every woman  
Could find her perfect guy

It's raining men  
Go get yourself wet girl  
I know you want to

I feel stormy weather moving in  
About to begin  
Hear the thunder  
Don't you lose your head  
Rip off the roof and stay in bed

It's raining men Hallelujah  
It's raining men, Amen  
It's raining men Hallelujah  
It's raining men, Amen

It's raining men Hallelujah  
It's raining men, Amen  
It's raining men Hallelujah  
It's raining men, Amen

[And, while we hear the song  
the construction crew  
starts to cover the stage with a huge yellow tarp.

They have to pause frequently in their work  
to do unison dances to the song.

This is humiliating to different degrees for each of them.

And then,  
while the construction crew finishes the job  
the umpires come on and do a dance with umbrellas.

They are totally straight faced but there is a lot of hip shaking.

At the end of the dance  
the construction crew joins the umpires for a full cast rain delay dance.

**Scene 15. Yusef Wakes Up**

YUSEF [waking up]  
Where am I?

ANNA  
Oh, Yusef, are you OK?

YUSEF  
Yes, I'm OK. Where am I?

ANNA  
Well,  
we're at my father's house.

YUSEF  
Your father's house?

ANNA  
Yes.

YUSEF  
What are we doing there?

ANNA  
You remember, Yusef,  
you told me to go away,

to come back to my father's house.  
And you said  
I could bring with me whatever I loved.

YUSEF  
Yes.

ANNA  
So I've brought you.

YUSEF  
You brought me?

Oh, Anna,  
I love you.

I love you.

I don't know how I was ever so lucky to find you.  
The best thing I ever did in my life  
was to ask you to marry me.  
And I'd marry you again and again and again  
if you'd have me.  
I'm so sorry.  
You are my only treasure.  
You deserve only what is good and sweet.  
You are so precious.  
If you'll take me back,  
I'll never leave you again.

ANNA  
You never did leave me.

[they kiss]

## **Scene 22. New Immigrants**

HARRY

For me,  
my early morning impression  
was of young boys streaming out of tenements  
to go to the synagogue to say kaddish for a departed parent  
before going to school,  
and maybe also carrying up a fifty-pound bag of coal  
before breakfast.

Everybody worked all the time,  
and if there was no job,  
people worked at something;  
they sorted rags or sewed garments,  
or fixed flowers and feathers for hat manufacturers.

People scrabbled for a little living.

They did everything for children.

My son will be a doctor, they'd say,  
or a lawyer, maybe a teacher.

I never heard anyone express lesser hopes for his child.

A man peddled fourteen hours, maybe,  
and brought home two dollars after he paid off his merchandise  
and his cart hire,

or he brought home eleven dollars a week  
from the factory for fifty-four hours' work.

Who has ever seen such optimism anywhere on earth?

The night before High Holy Days—  
everything would become quiet—  
that whole teeming district of tenements  
would suddenly come to a complete halt.

You'd see workingmen with shiny faces  
coming out of the public baths  
and walking home and holding hands with their sons,  
and you've never seen its equal for brightness and happiness.

Where else on earth, among the poorest people,  
did you see in every home a blue-and-white box  
where you were supposed to put your pennies?

Once a week  
an old woman would come around and empty it  
and off it would go somewhere overseas—  
the poorest of the poor helping still poorer ones

across the Atlantic somewhere.  
Hundreds of sweatshop employees,  
men and women who sat at machines for nine and ten hours a day  
came home,  
washed up,  
had supper,  
and went to the lodge hall or settlement houses  
to learn English  
or to listen to a fellow read poetry to them.  
PAID readers of poetry. I saw it.  
I saw gangsters and bums,  
but I also saw poets,  
settlement workers,  
welfare workers,  
scribes,  
teachers,  
philosophers,  
all hoping and striving for one goal—  
to break away—  
and they did, too—  
and so they made room for new immigrants.

### **Scene 55. Coney Island Baby**

Coney Island Baby—song by Tom Waits  
with archival footage of coney island  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1UwvzFlwOE&search=coney%20island>

And, while we hear the song and see the video:

### **Scene 95.**

A guy breaks a dozen wine bottles on the cobblestones  
or into a box,  
puts his face into the pile of broken glass,  
has another guy stand on his neck  
to press his face down into the glass—

some miraculous trick  
to avoid being cut,  
he stands up with a lacerated forehead—  
while a teen age girl hands out fliers for some other show.

### **Scene 71. The Sumo Ballet**

It is only to be hoped  
that one of these days  
someone will be able to stage this play  
with a ballet  
performed by three sumo wrestlers in tutus and toe shoes  
to the music of Shoukichi Kina.

### **Scene 82. Freak Show**

a freak show at Coney Island?  
maybe not doing a freak show but backstage putting on makeup? and talking about  
the act? perfecting it, what still needs to be done to make it perfect?  
or a roller coaster ride?  
or the 4th of July parade?  
everyone in their costumes,  
which they can then remove  
and have swimming suits underneath

### **Scene 2. The End**

everyone at the beach in swimsuits  
sing and dance to  
a Beach Boys number  
or a Russian song  
or a Tuvan song?

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A NOTE: *Coney Island Avenue* was greatly inspired by the theatre work of Pippo del Bonno and Constanza Macras, and it incorporates texts from the Tales of

Birbal from the court of Emperor Akbar, Harry Golden, Betty Smith, and blogs and podcasts from the internet, among others.

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