

YOU'RE OUT
A Play in One Act

Characters

IRENE	Age late 50's, a school speech therapist
RAY	Age early 60's. He wears umpire gear.
MOLLY	Age 8. She wears a baseball team T-shirt and a batters helmet (or baseball hat).
TEEN UMP	Age mid-teens.
SURLY UMP	Middle-aged, overweight

Place

A ballpark, a hamburger joint, RAY's apartment, IRENE's house—all represented by a bench on an otherwise empty stage.

Time

Contemporary

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Scene 1

IRENE stands at home plate. There is a bench to one side.

IRENE (to audience)

The tee is to baseball what training wheels are to a bike. The ball is placed on a stand at home base, and the batter hits the ball from said stand, or “tee”. Think golf, only the tee is so high (*she indicates height*) and the ball is soft. The purpose of tee-ball is to allow little girls to start playing baseball—which everyone involved agrees is inherently good—when they are still far too little to throw the ball across the plate. Towards the end of the season, if the girls are catching on to the game, the coach will stand halfway between the mound and the plate and pitch the ball ever so gently to the batters on his own team. My niece, Molly, has just graduated to that level. Molly, come out here.

(Eight-year-old MOLLY, in baseball gear, enters. She carries a bat. IRENE encourages the audience to applaud.)

I love her to pieces. (*Covering MOLLY's ears*) But she's not very good. But then not many second graders are.

(IRENE removes her hands. MOLLY practices a swing or two and sits on the bench.)

Instead of nine innings, these games are only four innings long. That doesn't sound like much, but given the wrong circumstances, one innocent little tee-ball game can run longer than a doubleheader. Am I sounding like a bona fide baseball fan? I'm not, but I am a fan of Molly. I never miss a game. When you're sitting in the stands with a bunch of suburban parents, and you're not one of them, there's a lot of time for contemplation. Lately I've become a connoisseur of umpires. Take this guy.

(TEEN UMP enters.)

He gets bored between innings waiting for the teams to change places.

(TEEN UMP stands on his hands and stutters a few steps before toppling. MOLLY applauds. Audience applauds.)

IRENE

Don't encourage him. This is not fit ump material.

(TEEN UMP is chastened.)

He lacks the required gravitas. An ump needs both feet on the ground.

(TEEN UMP sits on the bench.)

Then there was this cretin.

(SURLY UMP enters and glowers at audience. He glowers at MOLLY, who cringes. IRENE encourages the audience to boo.)

SURLY UMP *(to audience)*

One more word out of you lot and you're out of here!

(SURLY UMP sits on the bench next to TEEN UMP.)

IRENE

An out-and-out bully. Then, one soft spring evening, there was...

(Fanfare and lights.)

Ray!

(RAY enters geared for home plate with face mask and big chest protector. TEEN UMP and SURLY UMP exit, bowing. RAY, gravely, and with practiced movements, brushes off home plate.)

RAY

Play ball!

(IRENE goes to RAY and drapes herself over him. RAY ignores her.)

IRENE

It was love at first sight. There he stood in a pool of his own stillness—a Gary Cooper of an ump in navy-blue polyester slacks and matching body pad. Of course, he's not as tall as Gary Cooper—although next to all those second graders he looks pretty darn tall—and he's a bit softer around the edges.

(IRENE sits on the bench and MOLLY comes up to bat.)

IRENE

Come on, Molly! You can do it.

(IRENE encourages the audience to root for MOLLY. MOLLY has a professional stance, but swings wild.)

Oh. Too bad. Good swing, Molly girl! *(to audience)* Now watch this.

(RAY, almost in slow motion, raises his hand as if to show he is unarmed, holds the pose, then rotates his hand until his palm is towards his face, holds the pose, then pulls his fingers into a fist, holds it, then rattles fist and forearm to signify a strike.)

IRENE

Is that great, or what? I have only one reservation on his style, although the word “style” belittles what Ray does, because Ray is beyond style. What Ray does... it’s like umpire Zen.

(RAY brushes off the plate.)

But my reservation, and it is minor, is he doesn’t say, “strike.” He does the...

(She imitates his strike sign.)

But he doesn’t say it. Steee-rike. What a great word. Your tongue moves from one point of articulation to the next—from the teeth, to the alveolar ridge, sliding back along the palate to the velum. It’s like tai chi for the tongue. It’s great. Trust me. I’m a school speech pathologist. Repeat after me. Steeee-rrriiike. Again. Steeee-rrriiike.

(MOLLY, pouting, exits dragging her bat.)

Scene 2

Ballpark. RAY and IRENE stand side by side, perhaps as if leaning against her car. IRENE sidles up to RAY.

RAY

Nice car.

IRENE

Thanks. *(To audience)* I went after Ray. It took awhile, but one day he said those words that let me know he cared.

RAY

Better get it washed. Gonna ruin the finish. Rust out.

(IRENE is overwhelmed with emotion. She kisses him.)

Scene 3

RAY's apartment. IRENE and RAY bring the bench center stage for a sofa. RAY sits. Maybe he still wears his gear. A baseball game plays on an unseen TV. RAY is absorbed in the game.

IRENE *(to audience)*

Ray has a favorite play. In baseball, of course. What else? His favorite play is an out at first base. The ball leaves the pitcher's hand, the batter swings. Craaack. A fielder snatches the ball, low to the ground. He zings it to first. Runner and ball meet at the base, but the ball is a smidgen faster than the runner and...

RAY *(to the TV)*

Out! Great play. Nice and clean.

(IRENE beams at RAY with affection. She sits.)

IRENE

Ray, tell me about your least favorite play.

RAY

Ah, Renie.

IRENE

Please.

RAY *(shaking his head)*

Me and words.

IRENE

But if you have a favorite, it stands to reason you have a least favorite.

RAY

Yeah. But things are what they are without English getting in the way.

IRENE

Come on, tell me. Now, during the commercial.

RAY

Okay. The thing is, baseball, and life, I suppose, are 'bout completions. You see, running the bases, you can get picked off. At any time. First base, okay, then second. Third. Each base you get your hopes up—higher, you know? Then with two outs, the batter strikes out, and there you are, left, left hanging on third. That's the worst. I hate that. In life, I'm maybe not so good at completions. I know that. But baseball... There's a beauty in crossing home plate. Yeah, beauty.

Scene 4

Ballpark. IRENE and RAY move the bench back to its position in Scene 1. IRENE exits. SURLY UMP enters with two styrofoam cups and hands one to RAY.

SURLY UMP

So, you got you a girl, you smooth talker.

(RAY half smiles, embarrassed.)

RAY

She's no spring chicken.

SURLY UMP

Hah! And you're no Aaron Judge.

RAY

Not as tall, better looking.

SURLY UMP

You need glasses.

RAY

So I'm told. Nearly every game.

SURLY UMP *(laughing)*

Ain't that the truth. Well, she's well above your pay grade, you lucky son of a gun.

(RAY nods.)

But then who wouldn't be?

(RAY says nothing.)

Must be nice, her always in the stands.

(RAY looks up to the stands, disconcerted at her absence.)

By the by, where is she today?

RAY

Book club.

SURLY UMP

Book club? That's what she wants you to think, you poor sucker.

(RAY grimaces.)

It must get awfully boring staring at your back every game. Even if it's an improvement over your front.

(SURLY UMP waits to get a rise from RAY. He gets none.)

You, Ray, as my ma would say, were vaccinated with a phonograph needle.

(SURLY UMP laughs at his joke. He exits. IRENE enters.)

Scene 5

IRENE's house. IRENE and RAY move the bench to center stage. IRENE sits next to RAY on the bench/sofa as he watches a baseball game. IRENE snuggles up to him.

IRENE

What will you do when you retire? Ever think about it?

(RAY, absorbed in the game, doesn't bother to answer.)

IRENE

I have three more years at the school district, and I've always dreamed of living at the beach. But not here. Someplace warm and tropical. Someplace like Puerto Vallarta, maybe.

(RAY shrugs an "each-to-his-own" shrug.)

IRENE

Sand, palm trees, warm ocean breezes. *(Teasing.)* Every evening watching the sun dip its toe in the waves, drinking cocktails—me doing the drinking, not the sun—cocktails in coconut shells with little umbrellas.

(RAY does not respond.)

(Serious.) It could be very romantic.

RAY

Can't see me umpiring a game in Timbuktu, can you?

IRENE

I didn't say Timbuktu.

(IRENE exits and returns with two beers.)

How about the Caribbean? Isn't that where all those big-league ballplayers come from?

RAY

I live here, Renie. Always have. Whoaa! Did you see that play?

Scene 6

Hamburger joint. IRENE and RAY stand, walk around bench and sit again facing each other as in a restaurant. TEEN UMP enters as their waiter.

TEEN UMP

Hey, Ray! How you doing?

(RAY nods to TEEN UMP.)

RAY

Two burgers, two fries, two coffees.

TEEN UMP *(to IRENE)*

Hey, haven't I seen you at the tee-ball games?

IRENE

My niece plays. And you umpire.

TEEN UMP

Yeah. Whenever I can. Have you seen Ray here? Man, he's the best ump ever. His games, they run smooth as warm butter. My dad says in twenty years, he's never seen him get riled, ever. My goal is to someday be as good as him. You should have seen him at the Legion tournament they held here last...

RAY

We're in between games, son.

TEEN UMP

Oh. Sorry. Two burgers, two fries, two coffees, on the double.

(TEEN UMP exits.)

IRENE

Ray, have you ever thought about turning pro?

(RAY shakes his head.)

There must be a school, Like that clown university in Florida. I can see you in a line of twenty or thirty student umps, drilling in unison, throwing your thumbs over your shoulder and grunting, "You're out! You're out! You're out!" Or maybe it's just some certification process. The information must be online. I can google it for you.

(RAY shakes his head.)

Come on, Ray. What do you have to lose?

RAY

I got a job, Renie.

IRENE

At the mill, and you don't like it.

RAY

Pays the bills. Keeps me out of trouble.

IRENE

But, Ray, you're a great ump. Imagine walking onto prime Astro Turf in one of the big stadiums. Imagine calling for... for... Micky Mantle.

RAY

Dead.

IRENE

OK... Barry Bonds.

RAY

Retired.

IRENE

You know what I mean. The big time.

RAY

Your Molly's tee-ball games are as important as any in the big leagues. *(Beat.)* I don't think life—my life, anyway—is about...

(He trails off and does not finish the sentence.)

IRENE

About what?

RAY

I don't know... The big time? What you call the big time.

Scene 6

Ballpark. RAY and IRENE stand and set the bench back to where it was in Scene 1.

RAY

You left in the middle of the game.

IRENE

A girl can only get so much satisfaction from staring at a guy's back, even if it's yours. Besides it was too hot. I went outside and read in the shade.

RAY

You don't leave a game just cuz it's hot.

IRENE

Apparently I do. And did.

RAY

I looked up in the stands and you weren't there.

IRENE

I didn't go anywhere. See? Here I am.

RAY

Why come to a game if you're not going to watch it all?

IRENE

I didn't come to see the game. I came to see you.

(She pokes him in the chest.)

You just happened to be standing in front of a baseball game.

(RAY grabs her finger, seriously angry. He calms down and tries to be jovial.)

RAY

Not everyone can touch the umpire you know.

IRENE

I should hope not. *(Beat.)* Let's go out for dinner, Ray, a real dinner with salad and wine. Chicken or salmon—anything that's not round and brown. And a tablecloth and flowers that aren't plastic would be a plus, too, and a waiter that's out of high school. And you in civvies.

RAY

Can't.

(SURLY UMP enters upstage. gives the "safe" sign and throws out his back. He exits, limping.)

Jackson threw out his back. Got to fill in for him at the high-school field in thirty minutes. Got time for a burger.

IRENE

I cannot eat one more hamburger.

RAY

Concession stand's still open. Want a hot dog?

IRENE

No, Ray. I do not want a hot dog. I'm going to go out to dinner like a grown-up, even if I have to go alone.

(No response from RAY.)

Don't you have anything to say? *(Beat.)* You know what, Ray? You don't need me. You're self-sufficient. Cool and placid as ice.

(Still no response, but RAY's struggling, tongue-tied.)

I admired your equanimity, your decisiveness. I admired you because you're a damn good ump. But is that all you are? Just an ump?

(No response. RAY is still struggling, and losing.)

You're an ump through and through—there's no man under that mask. You're a big, dumb, blind-as-a-bat ump, period.

RAY

One more.... word, Renie....

(IRENE sticks her face into his.)

IRENE

Go ahead, Ray. Tell me to shut up, you officious, stick-in-the-mud...

(RAY loses his temper. He makes the "out" sign.)

...know-nothing, cardboard excuse for a....

RAY

(Making the "out" sign again.)

You're out!

IRENE

You, Ray, are right. I am out of here.

(IRENE exits, almost. She comes back to RAY. She makes the "strike" sign.)

Strike three, Ray. Steeeee-rrriiike three.

(IRENE exits. RAY, looks like he's about to spit tobacco—he wrenches and twists his mouth, but nothing comes out. He stands, fists clenched.

RAY calms himself and makes the "safe" sign.)

END OF PLAY