

**G  
HOPE  
T**

A short play  
By Dean Lundquist

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**Characters**

BOB GOT                      bullpen catcher.

RAYMOND HOPE              rookie relief pitcher.

**Time**

One night in July. Bottom of the 12th. The Los Angeles Angels are leading the New York Yankees 7-3.

**Setting**

The visitor's bullpen at Yankee Stadium in centerfield.

AS LIGHTS COME UP, WE SEE TWO FOLDING CHAIRS. SEATED IN THE SR CHAIR IS BOB, WEARING CATCHER'S SHIN GUARDS, DOING A CROSSWORD PUZZLE. CROWD NOISE. WE HEAR THE CRACK OF A BAT, THE CROWD CRESCENDOS. BOB LOOKS UP FROM HIS PUZZLE AND WATCHES THE BALL SOAR OVER THE WALL TO HIS RIGHT. THE CROWD ERUPTS. THE ORGAN PLAYS. BOB SHAKES HIS HEAD AND GOES BACK TO THE CROSSWORD. RAY ENTERS HASTILY HAVING JUST COME FROM THE TOILET SL AND IS ZIPPING UP HIS PANTS.

RAY:           What was that? What'd I miss?

BOB:           Home run. Left center. Hey kid, what's a four-letter word that means, "to wish for something with expectation of its fulfillment?"

RAY:           SHIT!

BOB:           Shit? I don't think that's it.

RAY:           No, I mean—ah, nevermind.

BOB:           Take a seat, kid. You look nervous.

RAY:           It's Ray—not kid. I'm 19 ya'know. And I'm not nervous.

BOB:           Yep. I know. Have a seat.

RAY TAKES OFF HIS JACKET, SITS NEXT TO BOB.

RAY:           How do you know?

BOB:           When a high school senior throws 97 miles an hour at the fair in Box Butte, Nebraska, believe me, everybody's gonna know about it.

RAY:           I'm not from Box Butte. I'm from Nonpariel.

BOB:           Hmm, well I guess no one's gonna equal that.

RAY:           What?

BOB:           Nevermind. (beat) Want some sunflower seeds?

RAY:           No thanks. I'm gonna have a chaw.

BOB:           Aww...no. Not 'round here you ain't. Don't want you spittin' on my shoes.

RAY:           What?

BOB:           You want lip cancer or somethin'?

RAY: No.

BOB: Then put that away. Not in my bullpen.

RAY: Your bullpen? Thought it was George Steinbrenner's?

BOB: Well, let's just say, I let him think that when I'm not around.

RAY: (sarcastic) Yeah, right.

BOB: Here. Bubble gum.

RAY: (disgruntled) Thanks...Boob!

BOB: It's Bob. Mister Got if you're nasty. (beat) Know what's the best thing about playin' in the house that Ruth built?

RAY: What?

BOB: The crossword: New York Times is always challenging.

CRACK OF THE BAT. BOB AND RAY RISE AND TRACK THE BALL TO THEIR RIGHT AS THE CROWD CRESCENDOS. IT IS CAUGHT ON THE WARNING TRACK. THE CROWD MOANS.

BOB: (calling off) Nice play, Gary!

RAY: (imitating BOB) Yeah, nice one, Gary! (to BOB) I thought that was outta here. (they go back and sit down)

BOB: Nah, Frank'll put 'em away. He's the closer.

RAY: Hope so. (beat)

BOB: You worried or something, kid?

RAY: No.

BOB: Well, seein' as we're the only ones out here—

RAY: (snaps) Still got a three run lead.

BOB: Expect that phone to be ringin' soon—unless Mike forgot about ya'. (beat) It ain't over till it's over. (Beat. RAY is jiggling his legs up and down as he sits.) If you're cold, put your jacket on.

RAY: Not cold.

BOB: Okay... (beat) Nervous?

RAY: NO!

BOB: All right. (Pause. Without looking up from his crossword, he puts a hand on RAY's knee and stops him from jiggling it.)

RAY: Sorry.

BOB: I'd be nervous.

RAY: What?

BOB: First day with the team. New York City. First dance at the big show—probably feelin' like—

RAY: Were you nervous?

BOB: Huh?

RAY: Nervous? In your first game?

BOB: Nope.

RAY: Nope?

BOB: Never played.

RAY: What?

BOB: Never played.

RAY: But you're in uniform. Surely you must've, at some time—

BOB: Nope...

RAY: And I was meaning to ask, why is your number so high?

BOB: 76?

RAY: Yeah.

BOB: Oh, didn't you know? I play right tackle on Sunday against the Jets.

RAY: Really?

BOB: No. (beat) Bullpen catcher. Can't play. Not on the roster.

RAY: Yeah?

BOB: Spirit of '76. (pointing to his number)

RAY: Huh? Oh. Like the gas station?

BOB: (glares at him) The bicentennial. (nothing) Independence Day?  
(still nothing) The year I was born. (goes back to his crossword)

RAY: Oh... (beat) Damn! You're old!

BOB: (glares at him more sternly) Yep. (then back to crossword.  
Pause.)

CRACK OF THE BAT. RAY STANDS AND LOOKS. BOB DOESN'T.

BOB: Texas leaguer.

RAY: Over shortstop.

BOB: Yep. Tell by the sound of the bat.

RAY: Damn!

BOB: Only a single. Don't stress, kid. Frank'll pull us through.

RAY: I ain't stressed.

BOB: If you say so. (beat, calling to pitcher) C'mon now, Frank!

RAY: So you never played?

BOB: Nope. Not in the big show.

RAY: Then how'd you end up here?

BOB: Long story.

RAY: Okay. (Pause. RAY just stares at him.)

BOB: (looks up at him. Sighs.) Used to play third. Double A. I was  
twenty-five. No hoper, really.

RAY: Uh-huh.

BOB: One day I got a call—asked me if I wanted to work in the  
bullpen.

RAY: Yeah?

BOB: Figured at twenty-five in double A, my number wasn't gonna  
come up. So, with a kid on the way, thought I better go for the sure thing.

RAY: Oh.

BOB: It's a living. (pleased) And I get to go to the ballpark most everyday.

RAY: Easy job, huh?

BOB: Easy? You try warmin' up down the right field line at the Metrodome—worried that a foul ball'll come hurlin' into your kidneys, or if you miss one, the umpire'll get beaned! (under his breath, grumbling) Easy job...Hmph! (Pause. Goes back to crossword.)

RAY: My dad wanted me to play.

BOB: (disinterested) Mm-hmm.

RAY: I liked basketball better. Ma said I needed to finish high school first. Used to play catch with my Pa—he wanted me to play. So I practiced throwin' the ball through a tire swing in the backyard. Never knew how hard I threw. But after the county fair, this guy calls up and offers me a barrel full o' money to come play. How could you turn him down?

BOB: Wouldn't know.

RAY: Yeah...Anyway, my Pa says, "You don't wanna grow corn all yer life, do ya?" And I says, "Heck no, Pa. I'm gonna buy you and Ma a new house, and you ain't gonna never have to grow corn again!" So he says, "GO! PLAY BALL!" (chuckles. BOB doesn't laugh.)

CRACK OF THE BAT. CROWD SWELLS. RAY STANDS AND WATCHES THE BALL GO TO HIS RIGHT. BOB LOOKS UP FROM HIS CROSSWORD. A RUN SCORES. CROWD CHEERS. ORGAN PLAYS.

BOB: Stand up double.

RAY: SHIT!

BOB: Don't worry, kid—still got a two run lead.

RAY: But with a man on second. That means the tying run is at the plate! It's getting desperate...

BOB: (sarcastic) Thanks for the commentary.

RAY: (oblivious) No problem. (BOB rolls his eyes)

BOB: Wonder if that phone's broken. (beat) He'll walk the next guy, you watch. (calling off to the pitcher) C'mon now Frank. Settle down. It's your game, buddy!

RAY: (imitating BOB) Yeah, Frank, it's your game, buddy!

BOB: Didn't know you and Frank were so tight.

RAY: Yeah. We go way back—to the second inning. (BOB chuckles, RAY joins him)

BOB: (pointing off) See. He's gonna give him a free trip.

RAY: A walk? So we can turn two, right?

BOB: Yep. (beat) Brothers or sisters?

RAY: Nope.

BOB: Only child, huh?

RAY: Yep.

BOB: I got a son. Wanna see?

RAY: Sure. (BOB takes out his wallet. Shows him a picture.)

BOB: Here . That's Don.

RAY: He looks sharp in that uniform.

BOB: Yeah. He's six. Tee ball. He tells all the kids on the team his dad's a big leaguer.

RAY: Aww...

BOB: Someday I hope he can help keep my arm in shape in the off season. Named after my buddy—Don Susevas.

RAY: (excited) Don Susevas? That guy had 85 consecutive saves! You know him?

BOB: Know him? Who do you think warmed him up all those games?

RAY: Wow! That's really cool, man.

BOB: When he broke the record, he signed the ball and gave it to me.

RAY: Oh, man!

BOB: Gratitude. Got it on the mantle at home. You'll have to come over and see it sometime.

RAY: Okay. Thanks. Cool...



CRACK OF THE BAT. THEY BOTH LOOK UP. IT'S A TOWERING FLY BALL TO CENTERFIELD HEADING TOWARDS THEM. IT'S CAUGHT. THE RUNNERS ADVANCE. RUNNERS ON SECOND AND THIRD. TWO OUTS.

BOB: (calling off) Nice grab, Torii!

RAY: (calling off following BOB) Yeah, Torii, nice play!

BOB: (calling off) Just a long out, Frank! Two down, you can do it, pal.

RAY: (calling off following BOB) You can do it, Frank!

BOB: Sac fly. He'll walk the next guy.

RAY: But that'll load the bases.

BOB: We got two outs. Force at any base.

RAY: Yeah. That's pressure though.

BOB: That's what a closer thrives on, Ray.

RAY: Yeah?

BOB: The closer knows that losing feels worse than winning feels good. That's what the team needs you to be—the guy that comes in and saves the day. When things are looking dark—when it's all goin' to hell in a hand basket—we need that ray of hope. We wanna say, "Don't worry. Here he comes. This one's in the fridge." Someday your number'll get called—then all you gotta do is answer.

RAY: (gloomily) Yeah. Just hope it's not today.

BOB: Nah, Frank'll get 'er done. Don't you worry. (proud) After all, I warmed him up.

RAY: (sarcastic) Sure that made all the difference.

BOB: (points) See, told ya he'd walk him.

RAY: No good for his stats.

BOB: No good. Good ain't good enough when better's expected. Stats don't matter. Just get the save.

RAY: Yeah?

BOB: Someday, you'll understand.

RAY: Hope so. (beat) Okay. Here we go. (calling off) Let's go, Frank!

BOB: (calling off) You own this guy, Frank! He's all yours!

CRACK OF THE BAT. IT'S A HIGH FLY BALL HEADED DOWN THE RIGHT FIELD LINE. THE CROWD NOISE SWELLS. THEY BOTH RISE AND START WAVING THEIR ARMS TO THEIR LEFT AS IF THEY CAN AFFECT THE BALL'S TRAJECTORY.

BOB: (simultaneously) Keep slicin'. Keep slicin'. Keep slicin'! KEEP SLICIN'! (pause) FOUL BALL!

RAY: (simultaneously) Go foul. Foul! Go foul! GO FOUL! (pause) FOUL BALL!

BOB: (whistles his relief) Man o' Manischewitz!

RAY: Oh, man! That was close.

BOB: (off to the pitcher) Just a long strike, Frank!

RAY: (following BOB) Hang in there, Frank. You can do it!

BOB: Good. Gotta keep their confidence up. Gotta have hope.

RAY: Confidence. Yeah. Confidence.

BOB: (off to pitcher) Bring 'er home, now Frank! Bring 'er home. (pause)

RAY: (off to pitcher) All yours now, big Frank!

ORGAN MUSIC PLAYS. THE CROWD IS GETTING MUCH LOUDER. ORGAN MUSIC PLAYS "CHARGE!" WE HEAR A CRACK OF THE BAT FOLLOWED BY A SMACK. BOB AND RAY WINCE.

BOB: (simultaneous) Ohhhhhh!

RAY: (simultaneous) Ahhhhhh!

BOB: Throw it, Frank! Throw it! Throw it!

RAY: Home! Throw it home! HOME! HOME!

FRANK HAS BEEN HIT BY A COME-BACKER. A RUN SCORES. THE BASES ARE NOW LOADED.

BOB: Awww. Shit! SHIT! SHIT!

RAY: Is he okay?

BOB: Seven to six.

RAY: With the bases loaded.

BOB: He's holdin' his—

RAY: Yeah.

BOB: Oh, man.

RAY: That's gotta hurt.

BOB: Damn! Hell in a hand basket...

RAY: What're we gonna do?

BOB: The trainer's comin' out.

RAY: (pacing, realizing he's going to have to go in the game) Oh, shit. Oh, shit. OH, SHIT! BOB!

BOB: (realizing the same) Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. That's it. Relax.

RAY: Frank's out of the game?

BOB: Yep, sure looks like it.

RAY: But, I'm not ready.

BOB: Take it easy, Ray. You can do it. You wouldn't be here if you weren't ready.

RAY: I'm scared, Bob.

BOB: (looking off) Look. Mike's callin' for you. Get on out there.

RAY: But don't I even get to warm up?

BOB: Yes—it's an injury. You can take as many warm up pitches as you want. Now go.

RAY: Bob. No. I can't.

BOB: Yes, you can. It's okay.

RAY: But I wanted you to warm me up. I wanted you to get me ready—just like Don Susevas. Can't go out there like this. I'm not ready. Can't we warm up here, first?

BOB: (overlapping) Ray. Ray! RAY! Settle down, Ray.

RAY: I don't want to go. I don't want to. (he is on the verge of tears)

BOB: (puts his arm around him) It's okay. It's okay. Hey. Hey. Hey, you remember that tire swing in your backyard?

RAY: Yeah...

BOB: Just like that. Just look at the glove and throw. Like playing catch with your old man.

RAY: (takes some deep breaths and exhales forcibly) You sure?

BOB: Yep.

RAY: I don't know. (looks around) All these people...

BOB: Just concentrate and throw to the glove.

RAY: Throw to the glove. Can I do that?

BOB: Yes, son, yes you can. We all know you can. (RAY takes a step, then stops.)

RAY: It's a long walk, Bob. Can't you come and warm me up down there?

BOB: Jeff needs to catch you. He needs to know how you throw. Go on, you can do it.

RAY: (beat) Bob?

BOB: (thinks, sighs) Ok, I'll walk you down to the mound. C'mon. (they start towards the field)

RAY: Thanks, Bob.

BOB: Oh, better get your jacket, Ray.

RAY TURNS AROUND AND GOES UPSTAGE TO FETCH HIS WARM-UP JACKET. BOB WATCHES HIM. WE SEE THEIR NAMES ON THE BACK OF THEIR JERSEYS.

RAY: Got it.

BOB: Ready to get your first big league save?

RAY: (looks around at the crowd, sighs, smacks his glove) Yep. I'm ready. (beat then as they walk off) Hey Bob, I think I know the answer to your crossword puzzle—

BOB: Yeah? What is it?

THEY WALK OFF TOWARDS THE MOUND (DSR). LIGHTS BEGIN TO FADE. AS THEY DO, WE HEAR THE STADIUM ANNOUNCER: "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, NOW PITCHING FOR THE ANGELS, NUMBER NINETEEN, RAYMOND HOPE." THE ORGAN PLAYS. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

END.