

Theater More Like Baseball

By Mark Cornell

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Characters

Sean, 30s-40s

James, 30s-40s

Gaby, 30s-40s

Setting

A theatre.

Three seats at a theatre. JAMES, SEAN, and GABY sit facing the audience. JAMES sits between them. The show hasn't started. GABY and SEAN quietly peruse the program. JAMES is restless.

JAMES

How long is this play?

GABY

I don't know. The usual length.

JAMES

Does it have an intermission?

GABY

The program doesn't say.

SEAN

Actually...

(looking)

Hold on. "This play runs without an intermission." There you go.

JAMES sighs. Huge.

GABY

What's your problem?

JAMES

I'm hungry.

GABY

How could you be hungry? I made us all a nice salad before we left the house. With walnuts.

JAMES

Seems insane I'd be hungry after all that, but I am.

GABY

(to Sean)

Are you hungry, honey?

SEAN

(lying)

Me? No, not at all. I am stuffed. Those walnuts really filled me up.

JAMES

Well, I'm hungry.

SEAN

They don't serve food here, James.

JAMES

I know that, Sean. Why can't theater be more like baseball?

SEAN

Huh?

JAMES

Why can't theater be more like baseball?

GABY

You mean, more boring?

JAMES

No. I want to be able to watch this play and eat and drink.

SEAN

Well, other people sitting around us wouldn't like it.

JAMES

Why? Why is eating a hot dog or having nachos and a beer at a play so horrific?

GABY

Plays are quiet, and you munching like a recycling truck would upset people.

JAMES

Why? Baseball games are quiet, too. People eat there and no one gets pissed.

GABY

It's outdoors.

JAMES

Oh, so eating outdoors, like an animal, is OK, but eating indoors, like a human, is not OK?

SEAN

You'd like theatres to serve hot dogs?

JAMES

Yes. I'd go to the theater constantly if I could get a hot dog. And hot dogs don't make any noise when you bite into them by the way.

GABY

Hot dogs, no. You, yes. You moan and groan and grind your teeth when you eat. No one's told you?

JAMES

It's been mentioned, but not since she left me for someone else.

GABY

And if you're grinding away, how will anyone hear the dialogue? It's important to hear what the characters are saying, James.

JAMES

Is it? If you ask me, there's too much dialogue as it is. In fact, I think plays should have less talking and more eating.

SEAN

And beer? You want to be able to drink a beer?

JAMES

Yes. At my seat. And I'd like it to be served by vendors.

SEAN

Vendors? Coming down the aisles shouting "beer here!?"

JAMES

Absolutely. I would love it.

GABY

That would distract the actors.

JAMES

The actors? *The actors?* What does that even mean?

GABY

There will be actors in front of us performing a play, James.

JAMES

So? What does what's going on out here have anything to do with what's going on up there?

GABY

Uh...*everything*.

JAMES

There's supposed to be a wall, right? A fourth wall, right?

GABY

Yes, James.

JAMES

So if there's a wall between us and them, then what does it matter what's happening on our side of the wall?

GABY

It's not a real wall, James.

SEAN

And if people start swilling beer, the crowd might get a little unruly.

JAMES

So? We can put security at the door and if people get crazy, we toss them out. Baseball does it all the time.

GABY

And the audience and the actors wouldn't find this in any way distracting?

JAMES

No. Why would they?

GABY

Some guy gets dragged out drunk, kicking and screaming, and everyone just rolls with it?

JAMES

I would.

SEAN

Are you serious?

JAMES

Here's something else I'd like to do. I'd like to be able to shout at the performers if they aren't bringing it.

GABY

*What?*

JAMES

Yeah, like if I feel like an actor can do better, I want to be able to shout to him "You call that a monologue? Say it like you mean it, you bum!"

SEAN

And you don't see that as distracting or insulting or, perhaps, bringing the entire evening to a screeching halt?

JAMES

No. Theater is drama, isn't it?

GABY

It's fake drama. Not real drama.

JAMES

If plays are fake, why do they look real? If they're fake, why do the actors act like it's real?

GABY

It's an illusion, James.

JAMES

Doesn't look like one.

SEAN

You want the play to be real? You want *Macbeth* to be real?  
You want the actors to actually kill each other?

JAMES

Yes! I want a total bloodbath. Because, frankly, I'm sick  
of that play, and the next time it was done, would be the  
last time. And tonight's play isn't *Macbeth* anyway.

GABY

Tonight's play has a guy wrongfully imprisoned for 36 years.  
You would like to see tonight's play last for 36 years?

JAMES

Hell no. The last play you took me to felt like it lasted 36  
years.

SEAN

(looking at the program)

Well, uh, this one is approximately 90 minutes.

JAMES

(at Sean, demanding)

I thought you all didn't know how long this play was.

JAMES looks SEAN right in the eye.  
SEAN blinks.

SEAN

I'm a little scared of you right now.

GABY

Can we all just take it easy?

JAMES

You know what else would be great? If theater can figure out  
a way where I can keep score.

GABY

It's not a competition.

JAMES

Yes, it is. Every story is a competition. Hero versus  
villain. Hero versus obstacles.

SEAN

But how do we assign points?

GABY

Sean, don't encourage him.

JAMES

In baseball, we call them runs, Sean. Runs.

SEAN

OK, then how do we assign runs?

JAMES

One run for every major victory. Priest puts down the bottle. Priest 1, Alcoholism 0.

SEAN

Would there be a scoreboard?

GABY

Sean!

JAMES

Along the back wall. The stage manager could write it in chalk.

GABY

This is stupid!

JAMES

(intense)

Baseball is about fanaticism. I want to come to the theater and be a fan. I don't want to sit here and be idle. I want to be elated when the main character wins or heartbroken when the main character loses. I want to cheer and boo and shout and clap whenever I want and cry and get mad and do it with a hot dog and a beer!

By now, JAMES is on his feet. They stand and gently bring him back down.

GABY

What is all this about, James?

JAMES

I'm hungry and I want to go to a baseball game!

SEAN

Oh. Are the Pirates playing tonight, because we can-

JAMES

It's December, Sean. It's not baseball season.

GABY

We brought you to this play, James, because we just wanted to do something nice for you. Take your mind off things before Monday.

JAMES

(somber)

I like baseball. (beat) I like baseball. My son likes baseball, too.



GABY  
(compassionate)

We know.

SEAN  
Hey, you'll be able to take him to games next spring. And many springs after that.

GABY  
You could have brought him tonight. We could have gotten an extra ticket.

JAMES  
He doesn't like theater, Gaby. He likes baseball.

SEAN  
Monday is going to come and it's going to be OK, James.

JAMES  
I'm going to get skinny and lose my hair and throw up all the time.

SEAN  
Maybe it will be different for you.

JAMES  
I'm going to have to eat walnuts every day. Walnuts and broccoli and soy beans. I won't be able to eat hot dogs.

GABY  
Yeah, you will. When the treatment ends you will.

JAMES  
No, I won't. I can't have them any more.

SEAN  
Hot dogs are actually pretty disgusting, James, so...

JAMES and GABY glare at SEAN.

JAMES  
They're what?

SEAN  
I mean, they're tasty. Especially with cheese and chili.

Beat.

JAMES  
What if the treatment doesn't work?

SEAN  
It will.

GABY

Of course it will.

JAMES

What if I never take my boy to a baseball game again?

GABY

You will, James. You will. Next spring.

SEAN

You're going to beat it, man.

Beat.

JAMES

On the plus side, if I don't beat it, at least I'll finally see my father again. I haven't seen him since I was eleven years old. Which is, oddly enough, the exact same age as my son.

JAMES, emotional, composes himself.

JAMES (cont'd)

Why didn't you two at least take me to a comedy?

GABY

This is a comedy, James.

JAMES

The guy's in prison the rest of his life. They torture him. And he dies alone.

SEAN

Yeah, but it's supposed to be really funny.

JAMES can't help but laugh. SEAN and GABY laugh, too.

SEAN (cont'd)

Just don't yell at the actors if it's not.

They laugh again. SEAN and GABY each put an arm around JAMES. Lights lower.

GABY

The play is starting.

They look up, towards the audience, as if looking up at the stage. They laugh at the play. SEAN and GABY see JAMES laugh and are happy. They laugh right along with him. Lights fade out.

THE END