

ACE

A play by Ted Greenberg

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CHARACTERS

TED in 2017
DRIVER (Ted at various ages)
BROADCASTER (V.O.)
BUSINESS MAN, a passenger
ACE (at various ages), Driver's father
RAY, a passenger
NERVOUS MOTHER, a passenger
JULIUS, Ace's doorman
MAN IN FUR COAT, a passenger
ANN, Driver's mother
KENT, a passenger
TEEN BOY, a passenger
REF (V.O.)
FIRST OFFICER
COP
BOESKY, stock trader Ivan Boesky
COLLEGE GUY, a passenger
COPY SHOP MANAGER (V.O.)

TIME: 1965 – 2017; but mostly 1987

PLACE: New York City

STAGING & DESIGN NOTE:

The original production was staged using a single metal chair, which the performer moved to different positions on stage with each passenger pickup. The only other props were the Driver's writing notebook and a pack of cards for the final magic trick. All actions such as driving, switching on the radio, rolling down the window, were indicated through mimed movements. Lights and sound communicated shifts between scenes set in 1987 (mostly in the cab) and memories/fantasies. Lights also sometimes shifted to a neutral "public space" look during extended moments of direct address to the audience. The scenic elements included a background of geometric panels suggesting a city skyline and a large, red neon sign reading "ACE". The sign was on during pre-show and the final magic trick, and flickered in at a couple of other well-chosen moments. Feel free to embrace these choices or come up with your own.

ACE premiered at The Marjorie S. Deane Theater in New York October 1st through November 5th, 2017 after a workshop production at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, August 4th through 12th, 2017.

Cast:

Ted Greenberg ... All roles

Writer: Ted Greenberg

Director: Elizabeth Margid

Associate Director and Dramaturg: Jolene Noelle

Sets/Lights by Guy de Lancey

Costumes by Becky Bodurtha

Sound by Luqman Brown

Movement by Mary Hodges

Stage Manager: Fatimah Amill

Production Manager: Kai Brothers

Associate Lighting Designer: Katie Ryan

Assistant Lighting Designer: Valerie Insardi

Associate Sound Designer: Caroline Eng

Assistant Sound Designer: Francesco Giacomarra

Creative Producer: Lanie Zipoy

Produced by Lyle Courtney Productions

TED IN 2017

(to audience)

What you're about to see happened 30 years ago when I was driving a cab in New York City. 30 years sounds like a long time. But for me, to tell this – 30 years is ASAP.

We travel back in time to 1987 to Ted in his taxicab. Ted puts on an 80's-era leather jacket and becomes the "Driver", who is Ted at various ages. The Driver sits, drives for a few moments, and then turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

W-I-N-S News time at the tone... 11:30. And here's what's happening on an overcast Friday morning. Rudy Giuliani to announce jail sentencing of insider trader Ivan Boesky. Comeback Queen Tina Turner completes the US leg of her "Break Every Rule" tour and tells fans she nearly quit the business 10 years ago. More entertainment—

Driver turns off the radio, pulls over to the curb, rolls down window, and yells to an unseen doorman—

DRIVER

Okay if I park in front of the Carlyle for a minute?... Yeah if a truck comes, I'm gone before you snap your cap.

He rolls up window, pulls a notebook from his jacket pocket, and begins to write.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

The poet Edmund Spenser was born in 16th century London, a swirling cesspool of political assassinations, heretic burnings and black plague—

Several traffic horns are heard.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

—an overflowing orgy of urban sewage, navigated by the literary overlord, Edmund Spenser.

(puts away notebook)

Fuck it. I can't do it.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

(to audience)

I am one paper away from getting my Harvard B.A., technically. One paper short of graduating Harvard University in English and American Literature. Just one eight to 10-pager on Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene", a 400-year-old...poem. I'm 27. For nine of those 27 years, a third of my lifetime, I have owed this paper.

Last night, I get a letter from Harvard. Well, last night I opened the letter from Harvard. I got the letter, I don't know, a month ago. My "degree-pending" status will expire, all my credits, wiped out unless I fulfill all requirements, the paper, by the end of the term, December 18, 1987. That's today.

Are they fucking kidding me? I paid over 70 grand – well my father paid over 70 grand – in tuition alone. Harvard's on my payroll. They're accountable to me. It's been a really good relationship. Because for years, I play it both ways. The graduate and the drop-out. It's beautiful.

On résumés, the graduate: "1978-1982" attended Harvard, which I did.

But at downtown bars, I'm the Harvard dropout – the nonconformist, the rebel, the renegade.

Sure I could have had a diploma. If I were a status-symbol suck-up, desperate for validation from the man. Here's the thing about Harvard, getting in is the hard part. Once you're in, any idiot can graduate. There's no glory in graduating. At best you meet expectations. So what? It's the mavericks who drop out. Me, Bill Gates, folk fire-brand...PETE SEEGER. So forget the class of '82. We're the class of FREEWHEELING bad asses.

I LOVE having it both ways. The halo and the pitch fork! It's an open road. And until NOW, I could pull that graduation lever whenever I wanted. It was up to me. And the paper – the truly beautiful thing about the paper – at this point it doesn't even matter what I turn in as long as I turn in something because I already have a passing grade for the course.

Papers are downgraded every day they're late. That's the Harvard policy. So by the time the TA got grades in for the class, nine years ago, it was already an "F" paper, no matter what I turned in. A paper I once had verrrry high hopes for is now a surefire F! The TA gave me a C- for the class, assuming an F paper. He turned in a passing grade but with an asterisk on my transcript – "owes paper." That's what's held up the diploma, an asterisk. That's how teed up this whole thing's been. All it takes is the slighhhhhst nudge from me. And I graduate. I can string this out to my old age if I want to.

While I'm wheezing on a respirator, I can heave up a Spenser "Faerie Queene" paper. I can have the night nurse empty my bedpan, dump the contents into a binder, entitle it... "Spenser's Earthy Images" and overnight that to Cambridge, Mass. Until now. So let's see, for me to fulfill this academic requirement and meet the deadline, in the next 12 hours, I would have to write the paper, type the paper and mail the paper with a December 18th time stamp which means the 24-hour post office at Penn Station by midnight? No fucking way.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Today is not a paper writing day. Today is a record-setting day. Today, I book 50 fares...a garage fleet record. Probably the cabbie city record and the world record. It's already been a helluva day. I'm almost halfway to 50 and it's not even noon. I'm on fire. I am the best in the game. Game on!

He drives and scans the sidewalks for a fare.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Okay...Let's see...what do we got? Motion. Human exiting building toward streets. Hellooo, handsome stranger! Going my way? Raise that arm. Raise it. You know you want me. The arm's up. Trip number 25. Halfway to destiny!

Driver becomes the Business Man.

BUSINESS MAN

Driver, The Metropolitan Tower. Do you know where that is?

DRIVER

(to audience)

Older, businessy-man ... Classical QXR!

He turns on classical music from the radio.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Metropolitan Tower, sure. The sleek new high rise near MOMA.

BUSINESS MAN

I just bought there. I'm a little nervous about the market.

DRIVER

Don't worry about the market. As long as you can ride out a short-term slump, you'll be fine.

BUSINESS MAN

What are you doing driving a cab?

DRIVER

I am greasing the wheels of the world's greatest service economy.

(to audience)

Who is this guy, my father?

FLASHBACK to Ace's study.

ACE

Move out of that tenement. And stop driving a cab. God damn it.

DRIVER

Dad, I could clear 50 grand a year driving a cab.

ACE

Oh yeah, how 'bout I pay you 100 grand not to? Imagine applying your brainpower to something with upside. For Christ sakes – if you want to run a fleet, I'll stake you. At least you'd be building something.

DRIVER

(to audience)

I'm not in to his upside. I stay lean. Me, my futon, my bike. East Village walk-up with wall-to-wall books, the classics. I sleep, absorbing the greatness of generations. I wake completely unencumbered. I live on 500 bucks a month. Plus, I banked 20 grand from a bogus TV writing gig. I hate TV. I quit. When I write, I aim for something timeless...like the great American novel and not for some flash-in-the-pan pretender like David Letterman. Of course, the parents don't get me. My dad is...ACE GREENBERG. THE ACE GREENBERG. Chairman of Bear Stearns, reigning Wizard of Wall Street. He was born...Alan Greenberg. But in college he gives himself the nickname ACE. He dubs himself ACE. Why Ace?

ACE

(to audience)

Why not Ace? If you give yourself a nickname, go for it. I'm not going to name myself "Loser."

DRIVER

(to audience)

The name Ace sticks. Other people actually call him Ace. Who can pull that off? YOU think that name sticks easy? You walk into a college frat and you try it. "Hi, everyone. Pleased to meet you. My name's Seymour. But call me Ace." They will not call you Ace. No. They will call you Seymour. And, if they don't call you Seymour, they will call you...Paste or Ass or Asspaste. Anything but Ace. Who can pull off Ace?

ACE

(to audience)

Ace Greenberg, that's who. Wall Street, Master of the Universe. I built a trading powerhouse from a switchboard desk. Big game hunter!

Ace shoots an arrow at an antelope.

ACE (CONT'D)

That was Africa's largest antelope. Which makes me – the Jewish Hemingway! Champion bridge player!

Ace plays bridge.

ACE (CONT'D)

And the national title is mine! Which makes me the Jewish Omar Sharif. Expert magician.

Ace does a magic trick.

ACE (CONT'D)

A little miracle I picked up from the Great Harry Blackstone. Here you go, sweetheart.

Ace tosses someone a coin.

ACE (CONT'D)

Philanthropist! Everything I make, I give away 10%. Me, and everyone who works for me. Which makes me Ace Greenberg!

FLASHBACK ends; return to cab.

DRIVER

(to Business Man)

Here we are. Metropolitan Tower. A 10? Sure. Keep the change? Thanks.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

(to audience)

10 bucks. 30 blocks! I'm the Jewish Mario Andretti.

He starts driving again, turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

15 minute delays for the East River crossings. And in midtown Manhattan, Park Avenue North is tied up from 48th to 52nd for a noon rally. At the tone it will be 12 o'clock-

He turns off the radio.

DRIVER

12 noon- SHIT!

(screeches over to the curb)

The big weekly phone call with my dad. Noon, every Friday.

He gets out of the cab and crosses to a phone booth, inserts a coin and dials.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Hey dad. Yeah...Good...Ok...Bye.

He hangs up, re-enters the cab and starts driving.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Why mention the paper? I'll let him know when I need him to know. My dad's always been a doer.

FLASHBACK to Country Club swimming pool, 1965.

ACE AT AGE 35

Will all champion swimmers please report to the country club pool deck?
Champions at attention! That's you, boy!...Hey boy! Who's this?

(beating his chest like Tarzan)

Oye-oye-oye-oye...God damn right, it's Moses Tarzan, patriarch of Jew swimmers! Okay boy, I'm going to stand right here, on the bank of the Red Sea. When I say go, you swim to me. Israelites ready! Get set! Go! That's a boy! Just five yards...Don't give up. The Egyptian enslavers are closing in! Pharaoh's right behind you. Don't stop. Three more yards. You made it kid! You survived the Exodus.

FLASHBACK ends. Back in the taxi cab.

DRIVER

Ace Greenberg, all around wizard. Now add, champion swimming instructor.
New hail!

Trip number 26 on this day in cab driving history!

He moves chair into new position, then checks out passengers as they're about to get in.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Two guys, my age, suspenders. Let's go with...K-ROCK.

He turns on radio. Rock music.

RAY

Driver, One Wall Street.

(to his companion)

Slide over some...

(to Driver)

Today.

(to his companion)

In 30 minutes, the SEC meeting. They'll never get Drexel. We hold the strings. We don't indict ourselves. Ivan Boesky? Boesky's dead meat. But us. Untouchable.

DRIVER

(into rearview mirror)

Holy shit!

(to audience)

I took English 10 with these two. And how do you go from Jane Austen to Big Swinging Dick – by your fifth reunion?

RAY

(out window, sniffing)

Ewwwww. What's that smell?

(to Driver)

Driver, avoid Times Square. It's a little...gamey.

DRIVER

Sure.

(to audience)

Times Square is a little...jewel. Home of Show World, Peepland. The world's finest natural reservoir of urine!

RAY

We kick ass - Can't outdo, Class of '82! A MacArthur Award, two Pulitzer finalists, and a National Book Award.

DRIVER

(to audience)

Yeah, the Prep Schoolers get everything handed to them. Did I go to prep school?...Yeah. But did I grow up with money? Sure. But I'm not allowed to work for my old man. No. His rule. I got to find my own way. These Harvard tagalongs, they are the drop-outs, from a true path. Betrayers of genius. What path are they walking?

RAY

I'm gonna make my mint before I'm 30. Then I'm gonna save the whales.
EVERY. LAST. WHALE.

DRIVER

(to audience)

I'm gonna crash. Now. It's a hero's mission. Cab driver goes down in flames with asshole Harvard men.

RAY

Tonight? No can do. Book party. Paris Review. Then "Andiamo Milano" to close the Fiat deal – which is non-public so I shouldn't have just said that. Oh well. Here you go, Driver.

(paying his fare)

Keep the change. Thanks for steering clear of the slums.

DRIVER

Sure.

(to audience)

How did they not recognize me? Fuck it. I'll beat those pod people at their own game. I can out-conform them. And I'll skin them alive. Oh, the idea of that makes writing this paper a public service.

(writing in notebook)

It's a textbook commonplace to treat "The Faerie Queene" as a verse valentine to Queen Elizabeth. However, this analyst takes the contrary position that the valentine is laced with scathing ridicule of a court rife with corruption and profligation.

Publishable! Obviously.

(to audience)

Great American Essays of 1987, when are applications due? Doesn't matter. Wherever there's a writing syllabus, this will be taught - even to investment bankers...And I'll teach it.

He delves into a FANTASY at a lecture hall.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Welcome to “Geniuses Teaching Betrayers of Genius.” Today we dip into a contemporary masterpiece, “Edmund Spenser’s Earthy Images”, a milestone treatise by me. Some would say, devoting just one afternoon on this master work is a crime, whose victims are everyone. I would agree. Therefore, the class will be expanded to every day for the rest of your lives. Any questions? Comments? Accolades?

End of FANTASY; back in the cab.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

YESSSS. Okay. Okay. What do we got?

(reading from notebook)

Textbook commonplace to treat...not treat, deem. To deem “The Fairie Queene” a valentine. Not deem, relegate...Fine...Laced, ridicule, profligation? Profligation – is that even a word? No. No. No. Ah, maybe not.

Shit. The record.

That was trip number 26, 24 to go. Focus, sir. Focus. Head in the game, mister.

He turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Weather coming up next. The time now is...1 PM.

DRIVER

Time to kick some taxi ass!

TIME TRAVEL SEQUENCE in which we see the Driver pick up several passengers via a series of distilled and repeated gestures.

NOTE: In the original production these gestures were accompanied by a radio soundscape of changing music and time stamps (i.e. “1:20” “1:40” etc.)

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

It’s 2:50 PM. Snow falling. Market down 80 on Boesky jitters and more indictments to come.

DRIVER

(turning off radio, to audience)

I know Ivan Boesky. I mean I feel like I know Boesky. Boesky recruits only Harvard grads. So naturally...I'm in the loop. Boesky's been wearing a wire, ratting out all the tipsters who fed him inside information. And worse, Boesky's a complete Harvard slut. Insignia ring, Harvard Club for lunch, every day. And he didn't even go to Harvard! He bought his affiliation by donating a wing, to the business school – an Ethics wing!

(spotting a new passenger)

New Hail! Trip number 32!

Driver moves chair, sits, and checks out passengers.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Lady with child...Kid's a little jumpy. Smooth jazz.

He turns on the radio– smooth jazz.

NERVOUS MOTHER

Ok hun, sit, sit. Yes. Yes. We're getting you a hockey stick.

(to Driver)

We're going to Paragon Sports.

DRIVER

Paragon Sports. You got it, miss. 18th and Broadway.

FLASHBACK begins. Back in Ace's study, 1966.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

Ace – ace – ace of spades?

ACE AT AGE 36

Do it again. No Teddy, the card's flashing. That's bad. You got to keep that hand cupped. It's a big deal. It's like you're in Germany and you're hiding a key from the Nazis. Oy...You just got moved to a cattle car. Let's work on it more later.

Teddy, I got the perfect mitt for you for your camp. You see this? This was my mitt as a kid. Your grandfather Theodore gave it to me. I've been holding it for you.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

You – you – you played baseball, Dad?

ACE AT AGE 36

Of course I played baseball.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

But, but, dad, it – it – it only has four fingers. Sh – sh – shouldn't it have five?

ACE AT AGE 36

No, four fingers is all you need. Everyone used one. And look at the autograph, "Buddy Myer." All star second baseman AND Jew! The Kosher Cannon! Buddy Myer didn't kid around! This is yours now kid. This is your legacy. Use it in health!

DRIVER AT AGE 6

But – but – but, Dad, can't we go get a new mitt at Paragon? I'm – I'm – I'm gonna look different from everybody.

ACE AT AGE 36

That's a good thing, kid. Buddy Myer looked different. So did I. Look at that wall of books. Big Game Hunters of Africa. Outstanding Jews in America. Classic Card Magicians. I guarantee you those cats stood out.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

Dad – Dad – Dad, who's that magic book about?

ACE AT AGE 36

Oh, Teddy, *It Takes All Kinds*. It's about Dunninger, Feedbox Jack, and Valentine Cardini! He invented the Cardini Card Rifle. Oh my God, you're gonna love this.

(picks up cards and executes a Cardini Card Rifle)

It's a classic. Cardini, he's the real thing.

(phone rings; picking it up)

Yeah, Julius?

(to Driver at Age 6)

The doorman says your bus is here, get moving.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

Okay, dad.

Lobby of Ace's building.

JULIUS

Hey Teddy boy, couple of hotties on that bus of yours. Hope you're wearing some Paco Rabanne.

DRIVER AT AGE 6

Yeah, Julius. Can you put this in the doorman's closet?

JULIUS

Teddy, of course. What is it? The old man's toupee?

DRIVER AT AGE 6

No, it's my dad's baseball mitt. I got to get it back when I come home, so dad thinks I used it, ok?

JULIUS

You got it, Teddy. I'll tell Ralphie the day man not to poop in it – hee-hee-hee. He wouldn't do that. You got a real mitt for camp?

DRIVER AT AGE 6

Yeah, I can use an extra mitt. Don't tell dad. We're gonna need to do this every day, ok?

JULIUS

Don't worry, kiddo. Someday you're gonna be running the Yankees!

FLASHBACK ends; back to the cab.

NERVOUS MOTHER

Sir, sir, isn't that Paragon on the corner?

DRIVER

Oh crap, there it is.

He screeches to the curb. A ruckus of horns.

NERVOUS MOTHER

That was a fast trip. You look familiar. Are you an actor? Didn't I see you in The Fantasticks?

DRIVER

Wow. Yeah, I toured 'Tasticks.

(to audience)

Why burst her bubble? Gives her something to talk about.

NERVOUS MOTHER

I knew it. I knew you weren't just a driver. You know, I used to be a potter, restaurant ceramics. Good for you, supporting your dream. Here, keep the change.

DRIVER

Thanks.

(to audience)

Just a driver? I got them 70 blocks in 20 minutes. And no whiplash. I guess Van Gogh was a flower pot painter. 32 trips down. 18 to go. Eight plus hours.

He drives, turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

(music sting)

Get those snow shovels. Heavy snow and rain on the way.

(music sting)

Wall Street braces for Boesky sentence hearing tonight.

(music sting)

New allegations of identity fraud for man who had been posing as Sidney Poitier's son!

He turns off the radio.

DRIVER

Throw that kid behind bars.

(spotting another fare)

Trip number 33!

MAN IN FUR COAT

Driver, 71st & Madison.

DRIVER

Cufflinks, fur coat...dude. Let's thrill this dude with some cutting edge, progressive rock...

He turns on radio – progressive rock.

MAN IN FUR COAT

Turn that off.

DRIVER

Sure.

(turns radio off)

Seven One and Mad. You got it. I'm just gonna shoot up Madison unless you have a preferred way.

MAN IN FUR COAT

Yeah, Madison's fine unless there's construction. I'm late.

DRIVER

That construction breaks at one. So Madison's good. Though wouldn't it be great to have that gizmo in Robocop, you know the one that plows through traffic? Have you seen the movie? It's excellent.

MAN IN FUR COAT

Yeah. I have. This is a sideline. What's your real gig?

DRIVER

I'm a potter. Restaurant ceramics.

MAN IN FUR COAT

No kidding. Take my card. That's my new restaurant. Is your work good enough for Madison Avenue?

DRIVER

Oh yeah. Probably not. I do all-night diner stuff.

MAN IN FUR COAT

What time is it? 3:30? I'm getting out sooner than I thought. In about 10 blocks there's a bookstore on the right, Books & Company.

DRIVER

Books & Company, sure. I know where that is.

FLASHBACK begins. Ace's car, 1967.

ACE AT AGE 37

Hey boy, what are you doing there?

DRIVER AT AGE 7

I'm – I'm – I'm practicing the Cardini Rifle.

ACE AT AGE 37

Look, there's John Rothschild. Of course Books & Company is open Sundays. He's got to run the place by himself.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Why does he walk like that?

ACE AT AGE 37

He's got a limp.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Can't somebody fix it?

ACE AT AGE 37

Nah. He was born with it.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Does his book store have magic books?

ACE AT AGE 37

No. Novels. Poetry. I don't get it. That guy's had every opportunity. He was born into Wall Street Royalty. What a waste of human flesh.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Is a stutter like a limp?

ACE AT AGE 37

What's that?

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Nothing.

FLASHBACK ends. Back to the cab.

MAN IN FUR COAT

Driver, I'm gonna need a receipt.

DRIVER

A receipt? Oh sure. Here you go.

MAN IN FUR COAT

Am I supposed to be able to read this?

DRIVER

Yeah, sorry. You want to just write in three bucks?

MAN IN FUR COAT

Yeah, your door lock's broken, too.

DRIVER

Thanks.

(to audience)

That's my only black mark as a cab driver...Handwriting so bad, professors made me type my exams. Wasn't my idea to switch from a lefty at age four. 'Cause "it was a righty's world." That's what started the stuttering and those endless hours of speech therapy drills with my mom.

FLASHBACK begins. Ann's room, 1967.

ANN

(puffing on a cigarette)

Okay, honey, watch my lips. Cats. Bats. Fares.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Cccats. Bbbats. Fares.

ANN

That's so good. Let's do one more. Queens, curse, cats.

DRIVER AT AGE 7

Queens. Ccurrse. Cccats.

ANN

Oh you're getting so good. Just one more. Fairies, curse, queens.

FLASHBACK ends; back to cab.

DRIVER

Fairies? Queens? No. 17 fares to go.

He turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

At the tone it will be 3:40 PM.

TIME TRAVEL SEQUENCE. Similar to the previous time travel. But here, time fast-forwards faster and faster (while the Driver picks up and drops off more and more fares) until it moves so quickly that the structure of the sequence breaks down.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

W-I-N-S News time 5:10 PM.

DRIVER

Trip 47.

(to Kent, a new passenger)

Family in back, you in front? Alright. You all want some help with the trunk? Ok.

(to audience)

Country music.

He turns on radio – country music.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

You all heading out of town?

KENT

Not yet sir. First 72nd and York. Last stop before we head back west. First trip to New York. Just signed a book contract.

DRIVER

Nice. What kind of book?

KENT

A historical novel.

KENT

(looking back at family)

'Cause it took me 10 years to write. They kid me...a novel. Started out as short stories when I was teaching in Iowa.

DRIVER

Iowa? Not the Iowa Writers' Workshop! No way. Did you ever know Philip Roth or Fred Exley?

KENT

Knew 'em both. I was in the room when Fred Exley tossed *The Great Gatsby* out the window. "God damn you F. Scott Fitzgerald! I'll never write anything half as good." Whoosh!

Driver turns off radio.

DRIVER

No way! I love Exley! What's that great Exley line? What is it? "Other men might inherit from their fathers a gold watch, or a head for figures..."

KENT

"From my father I acquired the need to have my name whispered in reverential tones."

DRIVER

Yes. That's it!
(to audience)
Finally, one of my people!

KENT

Are you a writer?

Kent reads Driver's name from his displayed hack license.

KENT (CONT'D)

Ted?

DRIVER

Am I a writer? No. No! I'm...not. 10 years. Wow. I mean you really kept at it. Did you ever feel like quitting?

KENT

Every day. But here I am. Always had an itch to drive a cab though.

DRIVER

Take the wheel!

KENT

Oh, I don't have your reflexes.

DRIVER

What's at 72nd and York?

KENT

A fancy book party. The Paris Review. It's for Jay McInerney. His last book was Bright Lights, Big City.

DRIVER

I know. I know who he is.

KENT

Why don't you knock off now and join us? I can introduce you to the Iowa gang.

DRIVER

I can't. I can't do that now. There you are.

KENT

(to family in back)

How's that for a New York City cab ride?

(to Driver, handing him money for fare)

Here you go. And Ted, take an advance copy of my book. And if you change your mind, come on in as my guest.

DRIVER

Sure. Thanks.

(to audience)

What's he doing with the glitterati? I thought he was an outsider. What a traitor. The Tie that Binds. Kent Haruf.

(reading)

"To Ted, from one writer to another. Go easy on yourself. Your friend, Kent."

He drives, turning on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

WINS News. Give us 22 minutes, we'll give you the world. It's December 18 and here's what's happening at 5:35. Boesky to report for sentencing tonight.

(music sting)

Anatoly Karpov to retain chess title.

(music sting)

And a new Woody Allen movie racks up raves...except among never-published, unknown writers.

DRIVER

What?

He turns radio up. Surely he must've misheard.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Weather and traffic coming up straight ahead on the ones.

He turns off the radio.

DRIVER

(to audience)

I'll take an unknown writer any day. They have their entire identities in front of them.

Trip number 48. Three teens. Track suits. And I'm in the homestretch.

(to teens)

Where you guys going?

TEEN BOY

Uh yeah, uh, yeah, uh, yeah. 168th Street, Fort...Washington?

DRIVER

168th Street Armory. Got it. You guys have a favorite radio station?

TEEN BOY

BLS!

DRIVER

BLS 107.5.

He turns on the radio – hip hop music.

DRIVER

The Armory. I know it well.

FLASHBACK begins. The Armory, 1975.

REF (V.O.)

All High School divisional champion milers to the starting line for the City Invitational mile! Runners to your marks. Get set...go.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

(running as if in a race)

Who's the Great American hope? The next Prefontaine? I'm fresh off a 2:40 marathon. I'm down to 120 pounds and a 38 resting heart. I'm practically Kenyan. The competition?...

Not Kenyan.

REF (V.O.)

Two laps to go! Two laps.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Two laps to go for the Jewish Kenyan. Remember to: Thank coach and teammates. Whoever they are. Acknowledge influences and heroes. Just the dead ones. They can't outshine me.

ACE AT AGE 45

Come on kid, one lap to go. You can catch 'em.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Catch 'em? Catch who? Shit. Have I spaced out? Again? Plan B. The Greenberg Kick. 10 yards and gaining...Nine yards...Eight yards...Eight yards...Seven yards...Seven yards...Eight yards...Eight. I'm a joke...Fuck.

ACE AT AGE 45

You're almost home. Keep it up.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Keep what up? Shit, my loser teammates all knew me when I stuttered. I'm a fucking waste of human flesh...

ACE AT AGE 45

You did it kid, you broke your personal record.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Good. I can get out on a high point. I'm not cutting it, dad. I'm in my prime. I'm not the best. I never will be. Time to cut my losses.

ACE AT AGE 45

In your prime? You just started!

DRIVER AT AGE 15

When did you ever lose?

ACE AT AGE 45

April 18th, 1948. 100-yard dash, Oklahoma State championship. You know who beat me? A piece'a shit, wearing illegal cleats. Photo finish, front page of the Daily Oklahoman...

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Dad, I don't want to do it any more.

ACE AT AGE 45

Don't quit. Anybody can quit. You can always decide to quit, right? That's easy. But once you quit, you can't un-quit. Got it?...At least wait until it gets you into Harvard.

DRIVER AT AGE 15

Yeah. Maybe.

DRIVER AT AGE 27

(to audience)

The next day...I quit. End of sports life. Three weeks later, I am inducted into the Society...of American Magicians.

That night at the conjurer's banquet, the Peking Duck...vanishes. And at dessert, reappears! In aspic! It's the handiwork of some other eager-beaver junior warlock. Banachek! I can't top Duck Redux. I quit magic. I don't need that hokey shit. The next day, like a signal from above, somebody finally cracks chaos theory, after decades. So I quit the math team. That was going to be my proof. I'm running out of things to quit. So spring break, I try to quit life. I down a bottle of Tylenol PM.

Same week, fellow mathlete Betsy Boigon hangs herself...on the lacrosse goal. Her photo's on the front page of The Riverdale Press, circulation 20,000.

That's it for my attempting. I can't top that. Dad is floored when he finds out. He lays off the Harvard stuff. Least it got me that.

FLASHBACK ends; back to the cab.

DRIVER

Hey guys, that's the 168th Street Armory on the corner. So is that the new Adidas warm-up? I own the Firebird. Enjoy your races!

TEEN BOY

Yeah, sure. Hey can you break a \$20?

DRIVER

Don't worry about the money. Just go easy on yourselves. What are your events? What do you guys run?

TEEN BOY

Nah, nah we're not competing. We're here to see an a cappella show.

DRIVER

Really...Cool. Have a good time.

(to audience)

Why wasn't I doing frivolous stuff like that when I was in high school? 'Cause I was too busy...quitting shit.

He drives, turns on the radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Good evening at 6:10. Snow turning to rain. Nets face Cavaliers. Death rates on the rise for middle-aged white males who don't attend college.

DRIVER

(to radio)

What? I attended college. I just elected not to graduate. Tomorrow...I'm a drop out. One asterisk short of graduation. A full-fledged, no-shit drop out. No more half in, half out. Those days are over. God damn you Harvard. God damn you. You're gonna win. You motherfuckers.

He pulls over to the curb, takes out notebook and writes—

DRIVER (CONT'D)

When Edmund Spenser was 27, he was not a supplicant, suck up, lickspittle. He was a bad-ass, hard-drinking, writer, of...sonnets. Take that you lowly grad student who has to read this paper, which is perverse, because if I'd been

DRIVER (CONT'D)

allowed to follow my original plan of...nine years ago, that work would have been reviewed by the Guggenheim Fellowship reading committee motherfuckers. See Footnote 1.

Footnote 1...When this paper was assigned in the late 70s, Spenser's rhyme scheme was a complete puzzle to everyone, you idiots. No one knew how many of "The Fairie Queene's" 35,000 lines were non-metric. No one. So this analyst had the brainstorm of converting every syllable of every line into computer code. But the department wouldn't tolerate a groundbreaking idea coming from a freshman. So you petty tyrants reduced this to just another homework assignment.

Police sirens.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Oh fuck!

(to rearview mirror)

What? No. I'm in here. Don't you see me? No, no, I am in the vehicle. Me. Here. Vehicle. You can't get a ticket when you're in the vehicle!

(to audience)

This can't be happening. Today's supposed to be a record day. I haven't been pulled over since I was 20. And it wasn't even me at the wheel.

FLASHBACK begins. Ace's car, 1980. Ace driving. Ace sees a police car in his mirror.

ACE AT AGE 50

Hey Boy, what's going on?

He makes a U-turn. Police sirens.

DRIVER AT AGE 20

Dad – you can't make a U-turn there's a cop.

ACE AT AGE 50

Quiet boy! Quiet and watch. I'm experimenting.

Ace pulls over to the curb, rolls down window.

ACE AT AGE 50 (CONT'D)

(to Officer)

Good evening officer.

FIRST OFFICER

Sir this is a school zone. There are no U-turns on a school road.

ACE AT AGE 50

Sorry officer, I was not aware. Teddy, hand me that envelope in the glove compartment.

Here you go officer. Just know I'm a big supporter of the police force, a big supporter.

First Officer reads letter and hands it back.

FIRST OFFICER

Mr. Greenberg. I appreciate your support. No more U-turns.

DRIVER AT AGE 20

Dad, what the hell is this?

ACE AT AGE 50

Okay, look, whenever a cop dies in the line of duty, I mail a big check to the widow and orphans fund. A big check. Cops like it. That's a thank you, signed by the commissioner of police. You got it? That's your copy. It's Gestapo insurance. Keep it on you.

Ace starts driving.

DRIVER AT AGE 20

No thanks. I don't need it. I'm not...Bugsy Greenberg. I'm okay playing by the little people rules. Did you whip this up at the 21 Club over scotch? With your cronies: Roy Cohen and Boesky and the Donald? "How can we rig the game today? Well a cop just got shot – there's an opening."

ACE AT AGE 50

Look, you don't have to use it. Just keep it on you. You're nuts not to. Nuts.

DRIVER AT AGE 20

(bratty)

Oh, I'm nuts? I'm nuts? 'Cause you feel like, to get me into Harvard you have to make some "phone calls." And after you asked me and I said not to! You got to wire that too?

ACE AT AGE 50

I was wrong about that. And this has zero to do with that. This is just pragmatic!

DRIVER AT AGE 20

Yeah, how's this for pragmatic? When you die, I'm turning that mansion of yours into a commune.

FLASHBACK ends; back to the cab, 1987. Cop knocks on window. Window rolls down.

COP

(handing Driver a ticket)

This is for you and you are going to have to move from here.

DRIVER

\$75! A \$75 fine. That's gonna wipe out my whole day. Wait, wait, wait. Look, you're 100% right. I know I'm not supposed to stand here. I got no defense. And believe me I'm on your side here. And I can show you that – Take a look at this.

Driver reaches into the glove compartment and hands Cop the letter.

COP

I don't care about your letter. You can pay the ticket. You can fight the ticket.

DRIVER

Yeah, right.

(to audience)

What the fuck? How does this work for dad and not for me?!

Driver has monster tantrum in the cab.

DRIVER

Oh that's it. I am done!

He gets out of cab and starts walking away but is stopped by Boesky.

BOESKY

Are you working?

DRIVER

What?

BOESKY

I need to get to the Upper East Side.

DRIVER

What?

(to audience)

It's Boesky! I've been hailed by Ivan Boesky! That's got to be some kind of sign!

DRIVER

(playing it cool)

Sure. Get in.

He gets back in cab and begins to drive.

DRIVER

(to Boesky)

I was just coming off a break. Crazy day. You coming from the hospital?

BOESKY

I'm in a hurry.

DRIVER

(to audience)

Ahhh, he just had his medical exam, last stop before the pokey.

(to Boesky in rearview mirror)

So Upper East. Where exactly on the Upper East Side? 66th Street and 5th Avenue? Okay. On the double.

(to audience)

That's the block I grew up on. Wow. Boesky's got to get to a federal building tonight. There's no federal building on that block.

BOESKY

Can you turn on the news?

DRIVER

Sure.

Driver turns on radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Crude oil closes at \$15 a barrel. Dow Jones at 1,832. Next business news at 7:25 PM.

BOESKY

Thanks. That's enough.

Driver turns off radio.

BOESKY (CONT'D)

Can you go any faster?

DRIVER

Sure. Do you have an exact address?

BOESKY

It's 4 East 66th street.

DRIVER

(to Boesky, incredulous but holding back)

4 East 66.

(to audience)

That's crazy. That's my dad's building...Why is Boesky going to my dad's building? They know each other. Obviously. Boesky's first job was on dad's trading desk. Was dad insider trading with Ivan Boesky? Did dad's fancy footwork finally catch up with him? Is dad gonna do time? Boesky's got to make his hearing. Why go to dad now?...Boesky's going to blackmail dad, extort money out of dad in return for Boesky's silence. I can't let that happen.

FANTASY – a holding cell. Possibly film noir music underscores.

DRIVER

No dad, don't do it. Do not cave to extortion. A Greenberg Shake-down? That is not who we are.

ACE

Jesus kid. But if I'm behind bars, who runs Bear Stearns and its 8,000 employees? What about you?

DRIVER

It's not really my thing. Doesn't Bear have some anti-nepotism rule?

ACE

Yeah, but I'd be out. There'd be only one Greenberg at Bear, Ted Greenberg.

DRIVER

Alright, pops. I'll run your numbers game. But you got to do something for me... Stay sharp kiddo. 'Cause when you get out of the slammer, and you will, I'm going to set you up in your own situation. So don't drop your series 7 license, ok?

ACE

You got a deal son.

FANTASY ends; back to the cab.

DRIVER

I got to get to dad before he does something stupid. This is it. The summons to greatness... Checkmate Harvard. I got a Wall Street firm to run. What's that? The last canopy on the left? I know.

(to audience)

Shit. The doorman. I can't be hailed by the guys who snapped on my mittens and hid my baseball glove. And they'll tell the people in the building who wrote me \$1000 Bar Mitzvah checks expecting big things.

Shit, no parked cars. I'm gonna have to pull up to the awning.

(to Boesky)

\$10. Thanks.

(to himself)

Shit. Here comes Julius.

(to audience, narrating)

Boesky's talking to Julius. He's handing him a letter. What's Boesky doing? He's walking away.

Shit. Jul...

(rolls down window)

Julius, who's that letter for?

JULIUS

Hey Teddy... Look at you. Hoo-hoo. You look great. Hey the Toppels are gonna need a ride to LaGuardia.

DRIVER

Yeah, yeah, yeah, Julius, I'm off duty. Who's that letter for?... My dad. I'll take it from here.

Driver exits cab and walks down the hallway of Ace's apartment into his study.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Dad? Dad? You home? Dad?

He holds the letter up to the light. Sits down at Ace's desk, opens letter and reads.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

From the desk of Ivan F. Boesky. "Dear Alan." Alan? It's "Ace," you slimeball.

(to audience)

If you're gonna blackmail a guy at least get his name right.

(reading)

"Dear Alan...I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the letter you wrote to the court on my behalf. And for the readiness you demonstrated since the beginning of this most unattractive chapter. To be of assistance and ready to help, whenever called upon. Yours was the first call I received after the announcement of this matter two years ago. And you did not desist from showing your understanding and friendship. I know your confidence has not been misplaced. It is my profoundest wish to leave as my legacy the most important thing to me...a good name. With appreciation for your friendship, I am yours sincerely, Ivan." Shit. Ace Greenberg strikes again.

He sees cards on the desk. Picks them up and executes a Cardini Rifle, tentatively at first and then with more confidence.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Still got it.

(hearing his father entering)

Dad?

ACE

Hey kid? What are you doing here?

DRIVER

Dad, did you always have life figured out?

ACE

No. Not by a long shot. Let me tell you something, Teddy. When I got to New York, I could not get a job. NO ONE would hire me. Not even the Jewish firms.

ACE (CONT'D)

And back in Oklahoma, they're rooting against me! My mom wants me home. And all the in-laws are telling her – "Don't worry Esther, he'll be back." They want me to fail. That way their stay-at-home sons won't look so bad, by comparison. So there I am, jobless in the big city. I tell dad I'm on interviews, I'm at the library for the free heat and clean bathrooms. Ok? Now, did I have any doubts? One or two...thousand. Finally...I get a call. A call. Somebody calls me. The Bear Stearns training program. A LEAD, from the SHOE SHINE guy, at Grand Central. The shoeshine guy! He overhears this. DO NOT undertip! Nobody ever went broke tipping. And I woulda gone broke, not tipping. You got that? So then, Teddy, my first week in the training program I'm pinning tacks on an oil map. And catch my tie and nearly hang myself from the wall. It was like a Jerry Lewis routine. Jew by the way. Uh I was so nervous I threw up in the bathroom. So no, I did not have it figured out. Yeah it worked out. But it was no cinch.

DRIVER

Dad I got to ask you something...I need to know that as long as I'm not, like, a drug dealer or a pornographer that I can get away without setting the world on fire. That you'll be ok with me, not being a star.

ACE

Of course you can. Do whatever you want.

DRIVER

Dad, do you remember when I was a kid and you saw John Rothschild cross the street and you called him a waste of human flesh? I felt like you were talking about me. Do you remember that?

ACE

I don't. Look I might have said it. I was a lot younger then. I probably said a lot of things then I don't believe now. Ok...Listen to me. I can't tell you what's best for you. You do what you want to do. Don't even listen to me if you don't want to...Listen to me. If you decide you want...to open a BOAT stand, in the OZARKS, renting out...KAYAKS – God love you. Rent out the world's best canoes. Ok? I got NO problem with that...NONE! Alright. Now don't get me wrong, when I visit you, I'm gonna want a damn good kayak, that I will say. Roll out the red carpet for big daddy for crying out loud! Don't be a little shit about it. Okay boy? OKAY!!!! We're having a good talk, me and my boy. God damn it boy! Togetherness. It's beautiful, idn't it.

DRIVER

Yeah, it's good. Dad, Boesky dropped off a letter...What's that about?

ACE

Oh probably something to do with his trial. I wrote him a character reference.

DRIVER

You wrote Boesky a character reference? Dad, wasn't that hard – knowing what he's done?

ACE

No...I don't say he's a saint. I tell the truth. Look, the guy made mistakes. Big ones. But he shouldn't be shunned...That's not right. And he was always a straight shooter with me. And let's not forget, before this guy went loony, he was a true innovator. This guy was the real thing. AND he will be back on his feet. And when he is, he'll be a very good customer.

DRIVER

Wow. Huh...Dad there's one other thing. I still owe Harvard that paper. I lied about that. It's due...soon. And because of a bullshit technicality, it's holding up the diploma. You think there might be a way to work around this?

ACE

What? I thought you finished that years ago? Jesus Christ how long a paper is it? Work around? No! Do the fucking paper. Do the paper and THEN rent out canoes. Papers first, canoes second. You got it? Jesus!

DRIVER

Yeah, yeah. I get it. I get it. Papers before canoes. Sure.

ACE

(phone rings, Ace answers)

Yeah Julius? Teddy is your cab in front of the building? You just got a ticket. You're gonna write that paper, right? Jesus.

DRIVER

Yeah it doesn't have to be that good. Hey Dad, can I borrow that magic book?

ACE

The Cardini book? Teddy I don't mind you borrowing the book. But I don't want it in your taxi. If your ass gets mugged, then I'll really be angry.

Back to the cab.

DRIVER

Papers before canoes...Destination: 8th Street, 5th Avenue, The Unsloppy Copy Shop. Write the paper. Type the paper...49 trips. One short of the record breaker! So close. Ace Greenberg and his rags-to-riches legend. If he'd been the cab driver, maybe I'd be the ace.

He turns on radio.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

10:15. Time for sports. Knicks, Nets, Rangers, all big losers. Who's next? Ted Greenberg, stopping one fare short of the World Record?

DRIVER

What?

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Bobby Fischer quits chess. Marlon Brando quits acting. And now Ted, choking again on the brink of greatness. Come on, Asterisk Boy, don't flake at the finish line. Just one more trip. Just one -

DRIVER

(to audience)

One more. Just one more. What's wrong with that? It will be on the way to the copy shop.

BROADCASTER (V.O.)

Damn straight!

DRIVER

Yeah one more trip! Here we go...Possible number 50. Three guys, little rowdy.

(rolls down window)

Guys, I'm off duty...But I am heading south to 8th Street if that helps you out? The Palladium, sorry it's too far east. Can't do it. Hey, I said no—

Guys pile into his back seat.

COLLEGE GUY

Sure you can. We'll tip you big.

DRIVER

(to audience)

Busted door lock.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

(to backseat)
I can't. You got to get out.

COLLEGE GUY

Come on, bud, it's snowing. Weren't you ever a student?
(chanting)
'Ladium! 'Ladium!

DRIVER

Alright, 14th and 5th. That's best I can do. You know what? On the house.

COLLEGE GUY

Yeah. Make all the lights!
(to his friend)
Palladium pussy here we come!

DRIVER

Limelight's right around the corner.

COLLEGE GUY

No, it's for queers.

DRIVER

Stringfellows is really close.

COLLEGE GUY

It's Shitfellows. Here take a free condom.

DRIVER

That's it. Next and final stop, 8th Street, 5th Avenue.

COLLEGE GUY

No way. I got your hack number. Your ass is grass.

DRIVER

You're gonna bust a cabbie on a technicality? Go for it.

Unsloppy Copy Shop.

DRIVER

11:05 pm. 55 minutes to complete and deliver Edmund Spenser, ball-breaking tyrant. Unsloppy Copy Shop. 2nd floor word processor #5. Seven pages in. Just need a conclusion.

MANAGER (V.O.)

We're closing at 11:30. Power's down in 10.

DRIVER

11:30? Shit! Okay, I can do this. Just has to do the job.

(typing)

Queen Elizabeth's court championed "The Faerie Queene" as a new summit of Renaissance poetry, while banishing Spenser to Ireland. The same court that celebrated the work despised the man...for his ambition and opportunism. But seen whole...Spenser was a self-made man, who rose by his wits without regard to decorum and with exuberance and conviction...Reconciled to his flaws as well as his gifts, open to his...patrimony and comfortable in his own skin...And on a personal note...You...win...Harvard.

Now print, motherfucker!

Penn Station Post Office.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

11:55. Penn Station Post Office. Five minutes to mail "Edmund Spenser, a ... Belated Appreciation"

The Driver puts his paper in the mail.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Three minutes ahead of time. The Greenberg Cliffhanger!

Back in the cab. December 24, 1987. Christmas music plays.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Christmas Eve. Cab driving's biggest payday! Today in the mail I get three gifts. Gift Number One from the Taxi & Limousine Commission, a hearing date. Those brats report me for refusing a "valid destination." Like the The Palladium's a valid destination? They'll get me for \$100 on a broken lock infraction. So all told, December 18th cost me three tickets and \$250 in fines, which is a personal record. Gift Number Two, my Harvard diploma. Like it was sitting in Harvard's outbox the whole time, waiting for me to cave. And Gift Number Three, a box, from 4 East 66th street. The Cardini book. And there's an

DRIVER (CONT'D)

inscription. "Teddy, this was my copy boy. Now it's yours. Hope you like it more than that old baseball glove. Love, Dad."

Ted removes the jacket as we transition back to 2017. Ted takes a pack of cards out of his pocket; fans them.

TED NOW IN 2017

He would have liked this.

Ted performs a well-practiced, Ace-inspired card trick.

END OF PLAY