

**BEN**  
Jonathan Dorf

## List of Characters

BEN, almost sixteen, probably a good kid somewhere buried deep, but he's been living on the street just long enough that the cracks are starting to show

HOLLY, yuppie architect in her early thirties

FLYER MAN/PREACHER/CLOTHING STORE MANAGER/MUSIC STORE  
MANAGER/PIZZA MAN/SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGER/BEN'S  
JOHN/BEN'S FOSTER FATHER

FRANK, a hardened street hustler slightly older than Ben/BEN'S FOSTER BROTHER

MICHELLE, Frank's age and his pseudo-girlfriend

BAXTER, blue collar gay middle-aged restaurant owner/DRYER, a social worker who is the cleaned-up, younger version of the dirty old man in the raincoat

LADY SHAKESPEARE, a homeless woman of uncertain age who sees things

Various actors double as VOICES. The voices (e.g. the death of Shakespeare, the Combat Zone) do not necessarily have to be only voices. In the Harvard workshop, the voices were visible actors.

Multiple castings are primarily suggestions to keep cast size down; while the play is designed for a cast of seven, if a larger cast is wanted, simply break up the roles. The double casting of Baxter and Dryer, however, is essential and may not be undoubled.

## Settings

The Harvard Square Pit, inside and outside Baxter's restaurant, a youth shelter, outside Holly's house on Brattle Street, the Combat Zone—some of which are merely in Ben's mind

Because settings change so quickly, almost cinematically, they should be merely suggested. For example, Baxter's restaurant might be a pair of tables and chairs.

The play consists of nine scenes, with a potential act break (and intermission) after Scene 7. Depending on the production, this intermission might not be necessary.

[*Author's Note:* Many of the characters and street scenes in *Ben* are inspired by real people and real events observed in Harvard Square. I'd like to thank such characters as the Flyer Man, Preacher and Lady Shakespeare for their unwitting cooperation, though I must confess Lady Shakespeare is actually based on an old black man who used to rant near Harvard Yard across from Yenching Restaurant.]

## SCENE 1

(Harvard Square, Cambridge. Fall. A Wednesday evening. The Square is a human carnival of students, street performers, unsavory transients and indigenous oddballs. STREET SOUNDS. BEN, not quite sixteen years old and wearing lived-in clothes, watches the FLYER MAN play a guitar rendition of "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" or a similar hippie anthem. By the Flyer Man, a stack of flyers are on the ground.)

### FLYER MAN

(sounds like a circus barker)

Big sale! Big sale!

(talks to the audience)

And now you guys on the right.

(sings a line, then talks)

Everybody.

(The Flyer Man puts down his guitar, grabs a handful of flyers and approaches Ben.)

Big jewelry sale! Diamond pendants now only one hundred-nine dollars! Friday, Saturday, Sunday! Only, only, only! Take a flyer, Ben.

### BEN

What are you talkin' about?

### FLYER MAN

You want your Mom to love you, you gotta' get the goods.

(The Flyer Man grabs Ben by the head so that he can look him in the eyes.)

You ain't gonna' get her without a big gift. Been too long.

### BEN

Get off me!

**FLYER MAN**

Only diamonds do the trick. Only diamonds do it. Say it with me: only diamonds do it. Say it.

**FLYER MAN**

Only diamonds do it.

**BEN**

Only diamonds do it.

**FLYER MAN**

Take two flyers, so you remember.

(The Flyer Man thrusts a pair of flyers into Ben's hand.)

Only diamonds do it.

(The Flyer Man lets go of Ben.)

Diamonds, one hundred nine dollars! Big sale!

(The Flyer Man picks a Bible off the ground and becomes a PREACHER, waving his Bible in the air, using it less as reference and more for show. FRANK and MICHELLE, street kids about Ben's age, perhaps slightly older, enter and taunt the Preacher. Frank wears a backwards baseball cap and carries a cane, though not necessarily because he's injured.)

**PREACHER**

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

**FRANK and MICHELLE**

(trying to drown out the Preacher)

Elvis, Elvis, Elvis . . .

(Ben moves closer to watch. Frank starts to shake. Michelle, putting an arm around Frank's shoulders, parades him in front of the Preacher.)

**MICHELLE**

Heal him!

**PREACHER**

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent,

**FRANK**

(throws his arms in the air)

I'm saved! Hallelujah and Jesus H. Christ!

**PREACHER**

who is called the Devil and Satan,

**MICHELLE**

It's a miracle!

(Michelle takes up a collection with Frank's hat.)

**PREACHER**

the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

**MICHELLE**

Dig deep, brothers and sisters!

**PREACHER**

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads . . .

(As the lights fade, Frank puts the cane between his legs and rocks back and forth suggestively.)

**FRANK**

Check out this beast!

(The street scene freezes as HOLLY, thirtysomething, professional-looking and cell phone in hand, walks across the stage. Ben watches her, then follows her to Baxter's restaurant, suggested perhaps by a few tables, a doorway, a "Baxter's" sign and another smaller one that says, "no cell phones, please." Holly puts away her cell as BAXTER, perhaps middle-aged, carrying a large brown bag: takeout. He hands it to Holly.)

**BAXTER**

The regular fare, for the regular fare.

(She pays him and exits, cell phone coming right back out again. Ben follows her to the edge of the stage, then turns and considers Baxter's restaurant. Exit all but Baxter, who occupies himself inside his namesake, and Ben, who sits by the doorway of the restaurant. He takes from his duffel bag a sign that reads, "I would rather beg than steal. Please give!" He places a baseball cap on the ground. An imaginary passerby tosses in a coin.)

**BEN**

Thank you, sir. Have a good night.

(Another imaginary passerby—Ben holds out his cap. Nothing. Ben flicks the guy off after he passes. Baxter walks out of his restaurant and over to Ben.)

**BAXTER**

Move along.

(brief pause)

Let's go.

(brief pause)

You're blocking the door.

**BEN**

I'm not in the door.

(under his breath)

Fuckin' a.

(Beat. Baxter goes inside. Ben continues to panhandle. A third imaginary pedestrian passes through. No luck. Baxter returns with a plate of food. Ben grabs for it, but Baxter pulls it away.)

**BAXTER**

Move away from the door.

(Ben drags himself away from the door, throwing his bag about ten feet away and sitting next to it. Baxter hesitates, then gives him the food. Ben eats. Baxter watches him.)

Please, could you chew? If I have to watch a man eat, I like to see him chew.

(brief pause)

Snakes swallow. People chew.

**BEN**

So don't watch.

**BAXTER**

You're gonna' ruin my business.

**BEN**

You don't own the sidewalk.

**BAXTER**

It's called loitering. You wanna' loiter, go hang out in the Pit. I've got professors and business people come in here.

(pause)

I'll call the cops. Don't think I won't.

**BAXTER** (cont'd)

(pause)

I'm not gonna' stand here arguing with you.

**BEN**

Who's arguin'?

**BAXTER**

I'm callin' the cops.

**BEN**

I'm not arguin'. I'm just eatin'.

(Baxter turns to go inside.)

You don't hafta' call the cops on me.

(Baxter stops.)

**BAXTER**

Try thank you.

**BEN**

(with just a hint of mocking)

Thank you.

**BAXTER**

Don't leave your garbage in front of my place.

(Baxter turns to go inside again.)

**BEN**

You're not callin' the cops—right?

**BAXTER**

I don't know. Don't stay out there too long.

**BEN**

I'll work for food.

(Baxter stops.)

**BAXTER**

You already got your food.

**BEN**

I'll work for money.

**BAXTER**

(beat)

My regular busboy's out sick. Don't come in 'til everybody's gone. But after that you get lost.

(Lights fade.)



**SCENE 2**

(Inside Baxter's. Around one in the morning. Ben's duffel bag is on a chair. Ben sweeps while Baxter sits at a table, reads the newspaper and drinks coffee.)

**BAXTER**

Good God. They traded three all-stars for a minor league pitcher to be named later.

**BEN**

I'll work for food.

**BAXTER**

And then they sign some guy who's missing a middle finger and call him the fourth starter.

**BEN**

And some money maybe. I could do your windows.

**BAXTER**

The man has no middle finger on his pitching hand. What's he gonna' throw with? His testicles?

**BAXTER**

What?

(Ben stops sweeping for a moment, then continues.)

You read much?

(Ben shakes his head.)

Nothing quite like reading that morning paper over a nice hot cup of coffee.

**BEN**

(uncertainly)

You got any money I could borrow?

**BAXTER**

(reads the paper again)

People tell me I'm somebody you can really talk to, so if you got something—no, not surgery. We'll lose him for the season. You can't QB, can you?

**BEN**

There's no QB in baseball.

**BAXTER**

I look like a guy who doesn't know his sports? Football, obviously. You didn't answer the question.

**BEN**

What's the question?

**BAXTER**

Can you QB?

**BEN**

No.

**BAXTER**

You play any sports?

**BEN**

I used to wrestle.

**BAXTER**

You're a little scrawny for the line, but with the guys they got, they could probably use you. You a football fan?

**BEN**

You know anywhere I can make some money?

**BEN**

Not really.

(Ben sweeps mechanically, sweeping the same area repeatedly.)

**BAXTER**

I hear you. Been kinda' lean times. I used to figure, hey, there's always baseball. But now that the Sox got this guy with no middle finger pitching in the four hole, it leaves you without a lot of optimism for the future.

(pause)

You're going to wear a hole in the floor.

(pause)

I could never get into pro wrestling. I saw this match, the Gladiator versus the Beauty Boy. Blood everywhere. Sent the fans into a feeding frenzy.

(pause)

So you wrestled?

**BEN**

Not that kind.

**BAXTER**

Well right. Real wrestling. High school,  
(Ben nods.)  
junior high, something like that?  
(pause)  
You know you don't talk very much.

**BEN**

You do.

**BAXTER**

It's my restaurant. I'll talk 'til I'm blue in the face. Stop sweeping. Drek won't have anything to do tomorrow.

(Baxter holds out his hand for the broom, which Ben gives him. Baxter rests the broom against the wall.)

**BEN**

Maybe I could—

**BAXTER**

His real name's Derek, but for some reason—I think maybe I had a mouthful—I started calling him Drek. Kinda' fits him. Did I run over you again?  
(Pause. Ben doesn't understand.)  
Were you saying something?

**BEN**

. . . if you have any . . . any more . . .

**BAXTER**

Kid, if you're still hungry, say so. You want something, you gotta' tell people, 'cause aside from a couple of certified psychics—and both of them have spent a sizable chunk of their adult lives in the loony bin—I don't know any mind readers.

(On "mind readers" Ben looks up, a memory stirring inside. Baxter doesn't notice. The look quickly disappears.)

It's like when you take somebody's order, and they say something silly like "What do you think I would enjoy?" Of course I have no idea and couldn't care less, but I take a stab 'cause that's what they're paying for: my expertise. But that's food. If a woman tells me she's pregnant and should she have the baby or get an abortion, that I stay out of 'cause it's not my area. And neither is are you hungry or not.

(Baxter exits into the kitchen. Off)

So you wrestled in high school?

**BEN**

A little.

(Baxter returns with a roll. He gives it to Ben, who takes a bite but doesn't really eat it.)

**BAXTER**

Were you any good?

**BEN**

I only wrestled one year.

**BAXTER**

You didn't like it?

**BEN**

I had other stuff goin' on.

**BEN**

Could I—

**BAXTER**

My kid—

**BAXTER**

What was that?

(Ben shakes his head, gestures that Baxter should continue.)

My kid wrestles. You ever sleep in one of those rubber suits?

**BEN**

(not exactly following him)

No . . .

**BAXTER**

Well, I think he did. I hear he's always—what do they call it—"sucking weight." Are those suits legal?

(Ben shrugs.)

I get the feeling not.

**BEN**

If you don't got anything for me to do—

Like what you see? Hit the back button and follow the instructions to order a perusal copy of the full script!