

LESSON FOR LIFE

By Phillip W. Weiss

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Synopsis of

LESSON FOR LIFE

New York City, 1937. Frankie Mason is a young man with big dreams of fame and fortune. To realize his dreams, Frankie becomes a prizefighter. He gets a shot at the title, but along the way becomes consumed by greed and makes questionable decisions that get him into trouble. Facing the possibility of imprisonment and death, Frankie is forced to reassess his priorities, and in the process learns more about himself – and about life.

This play is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental

CAST OF CHARACTERS

FRANKIE MASON – Middleweight prize fighter

MURRAY BERMAN – Sports reporter

ABE KAPLAN – Frankie's manager

SMITTY – Frankie's cornerman

MILDRED MOSKOWITZ – Frankie's mother

SEYMOUR MOSKOWITZ – Frankie's father

JOSEPH RUSSO – Racketeer

GERTIE BROWN – Frankie's wife

RING ANNOUNCER

REFEREE

JIMMY DOYLE – Middleweight champion

HOWARD KLEINBERG – Police officer

UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS

REPORTERS

This is a one act play consisting of ten scenes:

SCENE ONE – A boxing gymnasium.

SCENE TWO – The kitchen in Frankie’s apartment.

SCENE THREE – A table in a bar.

SCENE FOUR – A locker room.

SCENE FIVE – The table in the bar.

SCENE SIX – The boxing gymnasium.

SCENE SEVEN – The kitchen in Frankie’s apartment.

SCENE EIGHT – A boxing arena.

SCENE NINE – The boxing arena.

SCENE TEN – The locker room.

SCENE ELEVEN – A living room in an apartment.

The TIME: 1937 – 1938

The PLACE: New York City

In each scene, the furniture should be sturdy-looking but plain, and the clothing should be neat and clean but not fancy. The characters are working-class people.

SCENE ONE

(TIME: 1937.

PLACE: A boxing gym in New York City. Three men are standing outside of a boxing ring watching a man in the ring shadow boxing. One of the men outside of the ring is wearing a hat that says "Press," the second man, much older, is wearing a suit and is smoking a cigar, and the third man is holding a stool and a bucket. The man in the ring is a middleweight, muscular (but not muscle-bound), about six feet tall, has brown hair, is in his early twenties and handsome. Outside of the ring are several chairs. A robe is draped over one of the chairs.)

"PRESS" MAN

(Speaking to the man with the cigar)

Your boy is looking good, Mr. Kaplan.

KAPLAN

Yes, Murray, he is looking good. In fact, he's going to win big.

MURRAY

Is that a prediction?

KAPLAN

Call it what you want.

(Speaking to the man holding the bucket)

Smitty, tell Frankie to take a break.

SMITTY

(Speaking to the man in the ring)

Frankie, take a break!

*(SMITTY places the stool and bucket in the ring.
FRANKIE stops shadow-boxing and sits down on the stool.
SMITTY gives FRANKIE a cup of water which FRANKIE drinks.)*

MURRAY

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

How do you feel, Frankie?

FRANKIE

(Puts down the cup, smiles)

I feel great.

MURRAY

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Aren't you a little bit nervous going up against the champ?

FRANKIE

Why should I be nervous?

MURRAY

Doyle has knocked out his last five opponents and put one of' em in the hospital.

FRANKIE

Well, that won't happen to me. If anyone's gonna be going to the hospital, it'll be him, not me. The guys he beat were club fighters, cannon fodder to make him look good.

KAPLAN

(Excited)

It's going to be a great fight, and Frankie is going to come out on top! He's going to be the next middleweight champion of the world! You mark my words!

(MURRAY is writing rapidly in a notepad. FRANKIE climbs out of the ring. SMITTY gives FRANKIE the robe that is draped over a chair, removes the bucket and stool from the ring and exits the stage.)

FRANKIE

(Speaking to MURRAY)

Do you have any more questions?

MURRAY

I have one more.

FRANKIE

What's the question?

MURRAY

The fight's two days away. You have any plans before the fight?

FRANKIE

Yeah. To take it easy and think about how I'm gonna beat Doyle.

MURRAY

Thanks a lot, Frankie, and you too, Mr. Kaplan.

(MURRAY exits the stage. KAPLAN sits down.)

KAPLAN

(Still excited)

So how do you feel, Frankie?

FRANKIE

Didn't you hear me? I feel great.

KAPLAN

You should feel great. You're the hometown favorite.

FRANKIE

I know.

KAPLAN

And I know that you're a winner.

FRANKIE

You got that right. Anything else?

KAPLAN

Just keep up the good work. You're going to show the world that you're the best. Think of it! Frankie Mason, the next middleweight champion of the world. This is your big chance, so don't blow it. And don't be greedy.

FRANKIE

What do you mean by that?

KAPLAN

You know what I mean.

FRANKIE

I don't know what you're talking about.

KAPLAN

Do you think I'm a fool? I know who you've been talking to. Those guys are trouble and dealing with them is not worth the money.

FRANKIE

Listen, Mr. Kaplan, you're my manager, not my father. I'll talk with anyone I want and if you don't like it, I'll get another manager.

KAPLAN

That's up to you. I'm just warning you, kid. You know that I'm concerned about you and I don't want to see you get into trouble. You should have no problem with Doyle. The only fighters he's ever fought have been pushovers.

FRANKIE

Well, I'm no pushover. The fight should be a big draw.

KAPLAN

It'll be a big draw, all right. A Jewish guy fighting an Irish guy. And for the championship! What a dynamite combination! The arena will be packed!

FRANKIE

The Jewish thing is for the press boys to play up. I'm fighting for the money, not for the glory of the Jewish people. I haven't been in a synagogue since the day I was bar-mitzvahed and besides my parents are not exactly proud of what I'm doing.

KAPLAN

Hmm. Even though you're in line to be champ?

FRANKIE

That's right.

KAPLAN

I guess they're not fight fans.

FRANKIE

I guess not.

KAPLAN

Well, maybe your parents are trying to look out for you.

FRANKIE

(Sarcastic laugh)

Look out for me? Maybe. But listen, do you know what my parents wanted me to do?

KAPLAN

What?

FRANKIE

Become a school teacher. Can you imagine me going to school to become a school teacher? I hated school, and besides, teachers are paid peanuts.

KAPLAN

Just a moment! Being a school teacher is not such a bad job.

FRANKIE

Who the heck wants to be stuck in a classroom with a bunch of kids?

KAPLAN

There are plenty of guys and gals out there who'd gladly take that job, so don't put it down. Sometimes I wish I had stayed in school instead of getting into this racket.

FRANKIE

Why should you complain? You've managed three world champions and have made a ton of money.

KAPLAN

That's true, kid. But I've also seen two of my boxers die in the ring and many more become punch-drunk, and I don't want that to happen to you.

FRANKIE

Don't worry, Mr. Kaplan, it won't.

KAPLAN

That's what they all say.

FRANKIE

(Laughs)

Hey, Mr. Kaplan, don't make me cry.

KAPLAN

You think that what I'm talking about is a joke?

FRANKIE

(Stops laughing)

No, I don't. But, come on, give me a break, will you? You're bringing me down.

KAPLAN

I didn't mean to, kid. I'm just got into a thoughtful mood. You remind me of my first boy, Kid Cavanaugh. Ever heard of 'im?

FRANKIE

Yeah. I heard that he was a great fighter.

KAPLAN

Well, there was more to him than that. The Kid, whose real name was Shlomo Rabinowitz, came from real poverty. I mean his family was dirt poor. Six months after they arrived in this country, the Kid's father died, leaving his wife with no money and four kids to feed. The Kid, who was the oldest, had no choice but to leave school and get a job, and he was only fifteen years old.

FRANKIE

Sounds like things were tough.

KAPLAN

They sure were. (*pause*) Anyway, one day the Kid walked into Sollie's Gym on East Broadway and said that he wanted to put on the gloves. I happened to be there at the time. Sollie gave him a try out and the Kid was dynamite. I took 'im under my wing and under my guidance he became one of the great fighters of his time. And he was only a teenager. Soon the Kid was making great money and it seemed that nothing could stop 'im from becoming champ. But he had one problem.

FRANKIE

What was that?

KAPLAN

He was hardheaded. When the Kid was nineteen he met a sixteen year-old girl named Delores. Delores and the Kid soon became very close and everyone in the neighborhood expected that they'd get hitched. But the Kid had other plans, which did not include marriage. And when he was warned that he was playing with fire, he told everyone to mind their business. One day, Delores's father and two brothers showed up at Sollie's Gym looking for the Kid. They accused the Kid of rape. A huge brawl broke out. It was so bad that the police had to be called and it even made the newspapers. In the ruckus the Kid broke his right hand, and he was a righty. His hand was really smashed up. The Kid had surgery to fix his hand, but he couldn't make a fist anymore. Even so, the Kid went back to fighting but with his hand now busted he was never the same. Soon after he disappeared, and a few months later his body was found in an alley off Hester Street. I went to the morgue to identify the body. His mother couldn't afford a decent burial, so I paid for the funeral, which was officiated by a rabbi. The Kid could have been one of the greatest fighters in history if he had just done the right thing and not acted so smart.

FRANKIE

That's too bad for the Kid. But where did it say that the Kid had to listen to anyone, and besides what does that have to do with me?

KAPLAN

Before you do anything foolish or get involved in situations you may not be able to get out of, think of what happened to the Kid when he got into trouble.

FRANKIE

Listen, I'm not in any trouble and I don't plan to do anything foolish. In fact, I'm laying off girls until after the fight.

KAPLAN

Frankie, I think you missed the point.

FRANKIE

No, I got the point. But don't you worry about me.

KAPLAN

I got to worry. You're not the first pug I've managed who thought he could handle things himself. I remember a few years ago I managed a kid named Battling Moe Brown, a great fighter, but greedy. For a few bucks he'd throw a fight. One day a couple of guys from the west side offered Brown five gees to take a dive. Brown took the money, but unbeknownst to him, his father had bet the family's entire life savings on ... who else? ... his son to win. Brown threw the fight, his family lost their entire life savings, the five hundred dollars went to pay expenses, Brown became a bum, and I was out a boxer. The point is that I have a lot of time and money invested in you. That's why if anybody approaches you about any business propositions, you tell 'em to talk to me. If anybody wants you to throw a fight, you tell 'em to talk to me. If anybody invites you to any private clubs, tell 'em to talk to me. Your job is to box. My job is to do the worrying. That way you won't get into trouble. Okay, Frankie?

(KAPLAN pats FRANKIE on the cheek.)

FRANKIE

Listen, Mr. Kaplan. I know you're a good guy and I'm appreciative of everything you've done for me, but I can take care of myself. All you have to do is set up my fights.

KAPLAN

Frankie, you're a good kid. But even a good kid's head can be turned by money. I know from personal experience. How do you think I got started in this business?

FRANKIE

I really don't know.

KAPLAN

Well, I'll tell you.

(Sings)

I came to this country from Russia
when I was seven years old.
Like almost everyone else at the time,
my family was poor
(my family was poor).
We lived in a tenement
on the lower east side.
My father became a peddler;
my mother stayed at home to care for me
and my six brothers and sisters.
My father worked hard but made very little money.
We were practically starving.
One day I was on the street
playing hooky from school
when I discovered a place on Delancey Street.
A lot of tough-looking guys
were going in and out of this place,
which grabbed my interest.
So I decided to go in and take a look inside.
It was the first time I ever saw a boxing gym.
It wasn't a very big place,
but there were a lot of guys in there training.
The noise was incredible.
Guys were working out, sparring,
shadow-boxing, punching the bag, everything.
And for a fifteen year-old kid, I thought this was great.
While I was standing around,
this old guy came over to me
and asked me what I was doing there.
I told him that I was checking out the place
and the old guy laughed and asked me
if I wanted to be a fighter.

Right then and there I told him yes
and started working out at the gym.
When I got home my father walloped me
but good for playing hooky, but I didn't care.
I knew what I wanted to do.
I didn't play hooky again, but in the evenings and weekends
I went to the gym and learned how to box.
My parents didn't approve of my going to the gym,
but what could they do?
When I was sixteen I fought my first professional fight
for five dollars.
I fought a kid named Charlie O'Hara,
whose real name was Hyman Denkowsky.
I lost the fight, but I liked the money and the action
and continued fighting.
But I wasn't that good, so after about a dozen or so fights
I quit the ring and became a corner man.
That's when I started learning the inside outs of the business,
especially how boxing was not a sport but a racket, but I
didn't quit.
Instead, when I was twenty-three, I got my big break
when I became the trainer and manager for Kid Clancy,
who almost became middleweight champ.
By this time I was making good money,
and boxing became my way of making a living.
Soon I started managing other fighters and the rest is history.

But if it wasn't for the money, I doubt I'd be doing this now, and sometimes
I think I should be doing something else.

FRANKIE

Another great story, Mr. Kaplan. In fact, you're a walking history
book of boxing. But I think it's time for me to go home.

KAPLAN

Okay, kid. Go home. Get some rest and watch what you eat. And
remember: if you don't mess up, in two days you'll be the toast of the town
because you'll be the middleweight champion of the world.

Curtain.

SCENE TWO

(TIME: Evening.

PLACE: A kitchen. In the kitchen is a table where FRANKIE and his parents are having supper. FRANKIE'S father is neatly attired in a suit; FRANKIE'S mother is wearing a house dress. She is thin and appears worried. FRANKIE'S parents speak fluent English without a European accent.)

FRANKIE'S MOTHER

(Sarcastic)

So when is your big fight?

FRANKIE

Saturday at the Arena. Will you be there?

FRANKIE'S MOTHER

You know how I feel about you fighting.

FRANKIE'S FATHER

Mildred, pass the bread.

MILDRED

(Speaking while passing the bread)

So, Seymour, what's going to be with our son?

FRANKIE

Please, mom. Not again.

SEYMOUR

Your mother's worried. I still don't understand why you became a prize-fighter.

FRANKIE

Can't you understand? For the money.

MILDRED

Well, I think it's a horrible way to make money. And besides, you're not wanting for anything.

FRANKIE

I know that, mom. But there was no way I was going to go to college to become a schoolteacher. I barely made it out of high school.

SEYMOUR

That's because you didn't apply yourself. You would have done much better in school if you had stayed at home, studied and done your homework. And if you didn't want to be a teacher, I could have brought you into the business.

FRANKIE

You mean the place where you work.

SEYMOUR

That's right, and you would have made some good money too.

FRANKIE

As a jeweler? No way.

SEYMOUR

What do you mean, no way? What's wrong with being a jeweler?

FRANKIE

Nothing, dad, except that it doesn't seem to pay very much.

SEYMOUR

It pays enough for me to support you and your mother.

FRANKIE

Come on, dad. You're making peanuts. I make more in one night of boxing than you do bent over at your worktable for a month.

SEYMOUR

But at least I don't get my head bashed in.

FRANKIE

Does my head look bashed in?

SEYMOUR

So far you've been lucky. Frankie, your mother and I really worry about you. Where did we go wrong with you? All you ever think about is money.

FRANKIE

What's wrong with that?

MILDRED

Haven't we provided for you?

FRANKIE

Sure you have, mom. But I want to be a somebody and the way for me to make it big is through boxing.

MILDRED

And you're not a somebody now?

FRANKIE

Sure I am, mom. But I want more. The fame, the head lines, the ...

SEYMOUR

The pain, the blood, the corruption.

FRANKIE

This conversation is going nowhere.

SEYMOUR

That's because you don't listen. All you do us talk and think that you know it all. Well, young man, I have news for you. You don't know it all. It's one thing to box as a hobby, which to me is strange enough, but when you do it for money, you start attracting the attention of very unsavory characters who play rough. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about.

FRANKIE

Boxing does attract a tough crowd. But I can deal with that.

SEYMOUR

You've made some good money already. Get out now while you still have your health.

FRANKIE

(Incredulous)

Now?

SEYMOUR

Why not?

FRANKIE

Are you for real? Two nights from now I'm gonna make more money in one hour than I could make in an entire lifetime. And you want me to quit?

MILDRED

Yes, we do. It's not worth the money. In fact, we want you to quit before you really get hurt.

FRANKIE

Don't worry, mom. I won't get hurt.

MILDRED

That's what they all say.

SEYMOUR

In boxing, you always get hurt, whether you win, lose or draw.

FRANKIE

Don't baseball and football players get hurt too?

SEYMOUR

They do, Frankie. But in those sports, getting injured is incidental to the game. In boxing, to injure your opponent is the goal of the game, if you consider boxing a game. You get hurt because you're getting hit by somebody who wants to knock you out, and maybe do worse.

FRANKIE

That's the risk I have to take.

SEYMOUR

But why take such a risk? Is the possibility of getting killed worth the money?

FRANKIE

I think you're over-dramatizing the situation.

SEYMOUR

That's what you think now because you're young. But I never heard of any boxers who left the ring undamaged.

FRANKIE

Do I seem damaged to you? I've had twenty-five pro fights and haven't even been scratched. Now I'm in line for a shot at the title. What's wrong with that?

SEYMOUR

Eventually your luck is going to run out.

FRANKIE

Luck, nothing! I got what it takes to be champ.

SEYMOUR

Nobody's doubting you, Frankie. But you'll be going up against a pretty tough opponent who's knocked out a lot of guys. So don't be so sure of yourself.

FRANKIE

There you go again. All you and mom do is worry, worry, worry. Like I'm still a baby.

MILDRED

That's right. We worry, about you. And even though you're not a baby, no matter how old you are, you're still our son.

FRANKIE

Aw, please. That sounds so corny.

SEYMOUR

Frankie, that may sound corny, but we mean it, and we don't want to see our only child get hurt.

FRANKIE

I know, dad, but you two just don't seem to understand.

SEYMOUR

What do you mean, we don't understand? We understand a lot more than you think. I know what it's like to be poor and want to prove yourself.

FRANKIE

I don't want to prove anything to anyone.

SEYMOUR

Oh really!? I seriously doubt that.

FRANKIE

Well, it's true.

SEYMOUR

Let me tell you something. In life we're all looking to prove something. Everyday I have to prove to your mother and to you that I'm a good father. Everyday I have to prove to my boss that I'm a good worker. Everyday I have to prove to myself that I'm still worthy of a bit of respect. So, Frankie, we all have something to prove.

FRANKIE

Dad, you don't have to prove anything to me because I know you're a good guy.

SEYMOUR

And you know I'm a good guy because I've proved it to you.

FRANKIE

Okay, dad, you made your point.

SEYMOUR

Then what are you trying to prove by being a fighter?

FRANKIE

Remember in my senior year in high school I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do after finished school?

SEYMOUR

I remember. So?

FRANKIE

Well, a couple of friends of mine ...

MILDRED

(Contemptuously)

You mean, Johnny and Pete, those two bums who were suspended from school?

FRANKIE

That's right, mom. But, as I was saying, one night we went to see the fights at the Garden ...

MILDRED

I could never understand why you hung around such riff-raff.

FRANKIE

Please, mom, let me finish what I'm saying. Okay?

MILDRED

All right, Frankie. I'll listen to what you have to say, but as far as I'm concerned, it was those so-called friends of yours who put you the wrong path.

FRANKIE

Anyway, Johnny knew one of the fighters, a guy named Tiger Molloy.

SEYMOUR

Tiger Molloy? I remember reading about him in the newspaper. Didn't he go to prison for armed robbery?

FRANKIE

I think he did, dad. But let me get back to what I was saying. After the fight, we all got together and went over to Times Square for a soda.

SEYMOUR

(Incredulous)

Only a soda?

FRANKIE

Yes, dad. Only a soda. Anyway, we were all sitting together in this soda joint drinking soda, and then a couple of good looking girls showed up, and then when it came time to pay, Molloy stuck his hand in his pocket and out came the thickest wad of bills I'd ever seen. Molloy then left the joint with the two girls and right then and there I said to myself that if Molloy could have money and girls, then I could have that too. Just like you see in the movies. So, as you know, I started working out, building up my strength and working on my punch. *(Becoming more animated)* Then I started getting matches, and won them all, and what's even better, got paid for them too, which was like icing on the cake. Now I have some money in my pocket, I'm highly regarded, girls like me, and soon I'll be fighting for the championship.

MILDRED:

What you really mean is that you're now in with a bunch of con artists and racketeers who will say anything to you to keep you fighting and make sure that you get all the whores you need to keep you happy. Ugh! I think it's disgraceful.

FRANKIE

No, mom. The girls aren't whores. Actually they're really nice girls.

MILDRED

(Exasperated)

Oh, please! Give me a break! Where did we go wrong with you?

SEYMOUR

(Speaking to Frankie)

But you still haven't answered my question.

FRANKIE

About what I'm trying to prove?

SEYMOUR

That's right.

FRANKIE

Then let me put it more directly. I'm trying to prove to myself that I can set out to do something and succeed.

MILDRED

Succeed at what? That you can beat up other people? If you want to fight so much, why don't you join the army?

FRANKIE

First, I'm not interested on joining the army and second, I don't beat up other people. I box them, for money. It's a legitimate sport.

SEYMOUR

Boxing is a legitimate sport? That's news to me. Are we supposed to believe that?

FRANKIE

It is a fact that boxing is legal in this state and throughout the country.

SEYMOUR

But does that mean it's legitimate?

FRANKIE

What do you mean?

SEYMOUR

Aren't fights fixed?

FRANKIE

Maybe a few are, dad, but I've never taken a dive.

SEYMOUR

Maybe some of your matches were fixed and you didn't even know it.

FRANKIE

Dad, I would know it.

SEYMOUR

I'm not so sure about that.

FRANKIE

Dad, you are what is known as a skeptic.

SEYMOUR

No. I am what is known as a realist. People will do all kinds of things for money. Like take a dive, for instance.

FRANKIE

Do you think I'd take a dive?

SEYMOUR

I don't know. Would you?

FRANKIE

I like to win, dad.

SEYMOUR

I know you like to win. But that has nothing to do with taking a dive. Taking a dive has to do with money. A boxer won't take a dive for nothing.

FRANKIE

I have no idea of what you're talking about.

SEYMOUR

You don't? Why? What I'm saying is so hard to understand?

FRANKIE

Are you saying that I would take a dive for money?

SEYMOUR

For your sake, I hope not. But I've heard that boxing is a very corrupt business and that for a few dollars boxers can be bought and matches can be easily fixed.

FRANKIE

Boxing is anything but phony.

SEYMOUR

Is that so? Your name is phony.

MILDRED

It's bad enough that you decided to beat up people for a living, but why did you have to change your name?

FRANKIE

Haven't I explained it to you already?

MILDRED

You have, but I still can't accept it.

FRANKIE

It's business, mom.

MILDRED

What kind of business requires that you change your name. It's not like you're in Hollywood.

FRANKIE

Mom, I personally like the name Jacob Moskowitz, but it wouldn't go over well on a boxing card, so I changed it to something more catchy.

MILDRED

All right. You changed your name. But why do you insist that at home we call you Frankie?

FRANKIE

Because I like the name Frankie better.

SEYMOUR

Look, Frankie. We named you and to us you'll always be Jacob, no matter what you call yourself.

FRANKIE

I respect that, dad. But for now I'm Frankie Mason. And you shouldn't take it personally.

SEYMOUR

Like heck we shouldn't! Don't tell your mother or me how we should feel. We don't like the fact that you fight people for money and that you're involved in a dirty, vicious business that tries to pass itself off as a sport. It's disgusting, and what you're involved in is a repudiation of everything we taught you.

FRANKIE

I'm sorry you feel that way.

MILDRED

Well if you're so sorry, then stop fighting.

FRANKIE

That won't happen, mom.

MILDRED

There's simply no talking to you.

SEYMOUR

All you have to do is say I quit.

FRANKIE

I don't think so, dad.

SEYMOUR

Well, you can at least consider it.

FRANKIE

No way, dad.

SEYMOUR

(Irritated)

You're a very stubborn young man.

FRANKIE

No, I'm not. And stop pressuring me. I'm doing what I want to do. Why can't I have your understanding and support?

MILDRED

You'll always have our understanding and support, son. But that does not mean that we will condone something that we don't approve of. You know how we feel about you boxing, and we know how you feel about it too. What you do is strictly your decision. Your father and I just hope that you don't get hurt or do anything you'll later regret.

Lights out.

SCENE THREE

(TIME: Night.

PLACE: Inside a bar. FRANKIE is sitting at a table with a man who is about forty years old. FRANKIE is casually attired; the man is wearing a business suit.)

MAN

Well, kid, tomorrow is your big pay day.

FRANKIE

That's right, Mr. Russo.

RUSSO

So you know what to do?

FRANKIE

Don't worry, Mr. Russo. I know what to do.

RUSSO

You'll be rolling in money.

FRANKIE

I guess so, Mr. Russo.

RUSSO

You don't sound too happy.

FRANKIE

Am I supposed to sound happy?

RUSSO

Yeah. You should be sounding happy. After all, you're gonna be getting a big pile of money.

FRANKIE

I know that.

RUSSO

Listen, kid. You're not thinking of backing out, are you?

FRANKIE

No way. I just hope that you keep your part of the bargain.

RUSSO

Don't worry about that.

(Momentary pause in the conversation.)

FRANKIE

There's something that's been bothering me.

RUSSO

What?

FRANKIE

When someone gets out of line with you guys, what do you do?
Shoot them?

RUSSO

(Laughs)

Hey, I'm a businessman, not a street thug. I don't go around shooting people. And besides, you're no good to me dead.

FRANKIE

I'm glad you feel that way.

RUSSO

(Stops laughing)

Okay. Enough of this small talk. Now let's get back to business.
You got to make the dive look legit.

FRANKIE

I'll try.

RUSSO

(Annoyed)

What do you mean, I'll try?

FRANKIE

Exactly what I said. I've never thrown a fight before.

RUSSO

(Still annoyed)

Are you joking?

FRANKIE

I'm not joking.

RUSSO

Now you're making me a little nervous.

FRANKIE

I can't help the way you feel.

RUSSO

(Angry)

Hey, listen, kid. Don't get smart with me! We're talking business and I represent a lot of people who have an interest in what happens tomorrow and I can't afford any screw ups.

FRANKIE

So?

RUSSO

So I just want to make sure that you understand what's at stake.

FRANKIE

(Annoyed)

I know what's at stake, and stop talking to me like I'm an idiot, okay?

RUSSO

Will you please calm down, kid? You have to understand how I feel.

FRANKIE

You're not the first person who's told me that.

RUSSO

(Alarmed)

Are you dealing with somebody else?

FRANKIE

(Laughs)

Hey, Mr. Russo, you calm down. I'm not dealing with anyone else.

RUSSO

This ain't no time to act like a wise guy.

FRANKIE

I'm not being a wise guy.

RUSSO

(Irritated)

So stop acting so smart. And don't even think about double-crossing me.

FRANKIE

(Irritated)

Are you kidding? Why should I double-cross you?

RUSSO

I don't know. Why should you?

FRANKIE

Don't you trust me?

RUSSO

Yeah. As much as you trust me.

(FRANKIE and RUSSO stare at each other momentarily. Then they both laugh, breaking the tension.)

FRANKIE

(Stops laughing)

How much will I get?

RUSSO

(Also stops laughing)

Twenty-five gees.

FRANKIE

Not bad.

RUSSO

Not bad? This is the easiest money you'll ever make in your life!

FRANKIE

Easy money for you. You won't be in the ring.

RUSSO

You getting cold feet again?

FRANKIE

I don't have cold feet. I just hope that I'm not being set up for a shellacking.

RUSSO

No way. The whole point of this is for you to take a dive, not to be shellacked.

FRANKIE

Is Doyle in on the deal?

RUSSO

No.

FRANKIE

Why not?

RUSSO

Why should he know?

FRANKIE

So he'd know to ease up on me a bit.

RUSSO

If he did, it wouldn't look real. This is something that can't be rehearsed. And besides, it's not like you have to knock him out.

FRANKIE

You guys have everything all figured out.

RUSSO
(Laughs)

I guess we do.

FRANKIE

Well, do you think it's easy to take a dive?

RUSSO

Yeah. What's so difficult?

FRANKIE

Well, what happens if I accidentally knock Doyle out before I hit the mat?

RUSSO
(Anxious)

Well, make sure that that doesn't happen.

FRANKIE

What am I supposed to do? Go into the ring with my hands down and not throw any punches? If I do that, the crowd will know that the fight's fixed.

RUSSO

(More anxious)

Gee, kid, you're beginning to make me feel nervous again.

FRANKIE

(Laughs, placating)

Aw, don't worry. I'll make it look good. *(Serious)* But I'm not going to let myself get beaten to a pulp. Not for you, not for the money, not for anything!

RUSSO

Calm down, will you? Nobody's askin' you to be beaten up.

FRANKIE

I am calm.

RUSSO

Okay then. Does anybody suspect anything?

FRANKIE

My manager does, but he'll be no problem.

RUSSO

Are you sure about that?

FRANKIE

Absolutely.

RUSSO

Now, before we part company, I want to ask you something personal.

FRANKIE

Go ahead.

RUSSO

Why do you want to throw this fight?

FRANKIE

For the money. Period.

RUSSO

They'll be a lot of people rooting for you to win.

FRANKIE

So what? I don't expect to be doing this for the rest of my life, so I figure that I have to make as much money as I can while I can, and twenty-five gees plus my cut of the gate will be a nice start. So, I might as well go for it now.

RUSSO

But wouldn't you like to be champ?

FRANKIE

Sure I would. But the money comes first, and you guys are offering me a lot of money ... up front.

RUSSO

Okay, Frankie. I was just curious.

FRANKIE

You can count on me.

RUSSO

I know I can. Talk to you after the fight.

Lights out.

SCENE FOUR

(TIME: Next day, after the fight.)

PLACE: Inside a locker room. FRANKIE is sitting on a bench wearing a robe. SMITTY is removing the gloves from FRANKIE'S hands. A door opens and KAPLAN enters the scene.)

KAPLAN

(Standing, speaking to SMITTY)

Smitty, leave us alone for a while.

SMITTY

Okay, boss.

(SMITTY finishes removing the gloves, places them next to FRANKIE and exits the stage.)

KAPLAN

How much did you get for taking the dive?

FRANKIE

What are you talking about?

KAPLAN

Stop putting on an act. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

FRANKIE

(Short pause)

Twenty-five gees. You're not gonna tell anyone, are you?

KAPLAN

Are you kidding? You have enough problems already.

FRANKIE

What problems?

KAPLAN

You'll find out. Frankie, you're not the first chump that ever sold out to the mob. I'm just surprised that you did it when you had a chance to be champ. It never fails to amaze me what some people will do for a few lousy bucks.

FRANKIE
(Defensive)

So I took a dive. So what?

KAPLAN
(Sits next to Frankie)

Let me tell you something, Frankie. Once the mob has you in their grip, they don't let go. These mobsters will fix anything for a buck, and if it's not you, they'll find somebody else to be their pigeon. You think that twenty five thousand dollars is a lot of money? Well, tonight your new business partners made twenty times what they'll pay you. And don't think that they're finished with you. These guys don't know the meaning of the word no. You'll soon find out what I'm talking about.

FRANKIE

I can take care of myself.

KAPLAN

Kid Cavanaugh and Moe Brown told me the same thing and look what happened to them.

FRANKIE

You think I'm washed up?

KAPLAN

As an honest fighter, yes, but as far as your career as a shill is concerned, this is just the beginning!

FRANKIE

After throwing a fight?

KAPLAN

That's right. The fans don't know that you threw the fight and they'll pay big money to see a rematch, because you're a hometown boy and a crowd favorite.

FRANKIE

Next time I'll win.

KAPLAN

Maybe you will, and maybe you won't.

FRANKIE

What do you mean maybe? I'll win because I'm the best middleweight boxer in the world.

KAPLAN

I won't dispute that. But your new business partners may have different plans for you.

FRANKIE

(Speech is pressured)

What do you mean different plans?

KAPLAN

Frankie, I don't think you've been listening to me. I told you that the mob does not know the meaning of the word no.

FRANKIE

(With bravado)

I'll just tell them to buzz off.

KAPLAN

Frankie, you don't tell bookies, loan sharks, and racketeers to buzz off unless you have protection, and you don't have protection, so you're at their mercy.

FRANKIE

(Anxious)

So what am I supposed to do?

KAPLAN

(Shrugs his shoulders)

Whatever you want; you don't listen to anyone anyway.

FRANKIE

Should I take the money?

KAPLAN

You have no choice in the matter. Your new friends will insist. I suggest that you not spend the money.

FRANKIE

I'll put it in a bank.

KAPLAN

That's a good idea. But make sure that the bank is close by because you'll probably have to make some quick withdrawals.

FRANKIE

For what?

KAPLAN

You'll need the money to buy protection. Lawyers and bodyguards are expensive.

FRANKIE

Lawyers? Bodyguards? Why should I need them?

KAPLAN

Because you're now part of the racket.

FRANKIE

Because I took a dive?

KAPLAN

That's right. You're now riding with some rough company, and I guarantee you that if you try to double-cross them you're going to need bodyguards and lawyers, fast.

FRANKIE

We'll see about that. In the meantime, where does all this leave you?

KAPLAN

I'm still your manager, for now.

FRANKIE

What do you mean for now?

KAPLAN

I suspect that soon your friends will be asking me to leave.

FRANKIE

Why?

KAPLAN

Because I refuse to play ball with these guys.

FRANKIE

Who'd replace you?

KAPLAN

Maybe Pug Levine or some other shill.

FRANKIE

How will they replace you?

KAPLAN

They'll simply tell me to get lost.

FRANKIE

But what if I don't want you to get lost?

KAPLAN

You'll have no choice in the matter. You're on their payroll.

FRANKIE

Payroll? For what?

KAPLAN

They're going to pay your bills.

FRANKIE

What bills?

KAPLAN

For your expenses. As long as you're making money for them, you'll be treated like royalty. They'll set you up in the finest hotels in town and hook you up with the classiest dames money can buy. After a while, you may even get used to their smell.

FRANKIE

But what if I don't want them to pay for my expenses?

KAPLAN

I'm afraid that they will insist, and like said before, they don't know the word no. But just because they'll be paying your bills doesn't mean that you're their friend.

FRANKIE

What do you mean?

KAPLAN

To these guys, you're merely another sucker to be exploited and then discarded when they're through with you.

FRANKIE

I didn't think that they were my friends.

KAPLAN

That's exactly right, Frankie. You didn't think.

FRANKIE

Hey, Mr. Kaplan. Don't make fun of me.

KAPLAN

I'm not making fun of you. I'm just telling you the truth. When's the payoff?

FRANKIE

Tomorrow.

KAPLAN

Enough said, my boy. There are some reporters outside who want to interview you. So why don't we let them in and get this charade over with now.

(KAPLAN opens the door and as reporters enter the locker room, the curtain falls.)

SCENE FIVE

(TIME: Next day.

PLACE: The bar. FRANKIE and RUSSO are sitting at the table.)

RUSSO

(Smiling)

You did great, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Thanks. Where's the money?

(RUSSO takes an envelope out of his jacket pocket and gives it to FRANKIE who opens the envelope, examines its contents and then puts the envelope in his jacket pocket.)

RUSSO

It's all there, kid.

FRANKIE

I believe you.

RUSSO

You're a rich kid now. Easy money for easy work, I'd say.

FRANKIE

(Angry)

Listen, you creep! Shut up! I did what I had to do. You paid me and that's that! The deal is finished.

RUSSO

(Unruffled)

For now.

FRANKIE

What do you mean, for now?

RUSSO

You did so well that we may want to call upon you for your services again.

FRANKIE

You mean to throw another fight?

RUSSO

That's right, kid.

FRANKIE

Maybe I'm planning to retire.

RUSSO

I don't think that would be a good idea right now.

FRANKIE

Why? Who's gonna stop me?

RUSSO

Nobody.

FRANKIE

Then I'm telling you now that I retire.

RUSSO

Okay, Frankie, but let me give you a piece of advice. The state boxing commission comes down hard on boxers who throw fights, and if the commission finds out about what you did, you'll be in a lot of trouble.

FRANKIE

Who's gonna tell them?

RUSSO
(Coyly)

People talk.

FRANKIE

And what about you?

RUSSO

What about me?

FRANKIE

You were in on the deal too.

RUSSO

What deal? I'm just a fight fan who wished you all the best before the fight.

FRANKIE

You think that people will believe that?

RUSSO

Sure. Why not? You'd say something different?

FRANKIE

Maybe I would.

RUSSO

That would not be smart. You'd just be getting yourself into trouble. I suggest that you take a nice vacation, at my expense, and when you're nice and refreshed we can talk.

FRANKIE

You're not my manager.

RUSSO

Like heck I'm not. Who's paying the bills now?

FRANKIE

What bills?

RUSSO

For anything you want or need.

FRANKIE

I have no expenses, and I don't need your money.

RUSSO

Yes you do. You'll be staying at the Astor Hotel, and we'll be making sure that you have the finest clothing, the best food and the all the women you need.

FRANKIE

Keep it! Right now I'm living with my parents, eat at home and have a steady girl friend.

RUSSO

Well, that will change.

FRANKIE

How do you figure that?

RUSSO

Because of what's inside the envelope I gave you.

FRANKIE

That money is going into a savings account.

RUSSO
(Skeptical)

Right.

FRANKIE

You don't believe me?

RUSSO

Whatever you say, kid. There's a lot of money in that envelope, and there's a lot more from where that came from.

FRANKIE

More?

RUSSO

Yeah. That's why you'll cooperate. This is just the start of the gravy train for you, kid.

FRANKIE

What gravy train?

RUSSO

Are you dense or something?

FRANKIE

I'm not dense.

RUSSO

You sure sound that way.

FRANKIE

Stop insulting me.

RUSSO

I didn't mean to, kid. It's just that you're surprising me. I thought you'd be jumping for joy.

FRANKIE

Over what? I threw a fight. Period. You paid me. Period. What's there to celebrate?

RUSSO

Getting paid twenty five thousand dollars?

FRANKIE

The money is great, and I'm willing to play ball with you, but don't boss me. Okay? I want another fight, soon.

RUSSO

Who do you think you are, kid?

FRANKIE

What are you getting sore for?

RUSSO

Your attitude. Listen, kid, you're now working for me and you'll do what I tell you.

FRANKIE

What about if I don't want to?

RUSSO

Then you'll be in a lot of trouble. But why should we be arguing? We got a good thing going. With your name and my guidance, we are going to clean up, big time!

FRANKIE

Maybe I don't want your guidance.

RUSSO

That's not for you to decide.

FRANKIE

Maybe I may want out.

RUSSO

What are you talking about? You said that you're willing to play ball. So what's your gripe? You have nothing to worry about. You have new friends now.

FRANKIE

What about Kaplan?

RUSSO

Keep him, if you want. But we're not going to pay him. That's your responsibility.

FRANKIE

Meaning what?

RUSSO

Meaning that we don't care who you pal around with, just as long as we maintain a good working relationship.

FRANKIE

(Speaking slowly, as if distracted)

A ... good ... working ... relationship.

RUSSO

What are you? My echo?

FRANKIE

I was just thinking.

RUSSO

Oh yeah? About what?

FRANKIE

Will our working relationship include giving me another shot at the title?

RUSSO

Absolutely! And not only that, you may actually become the champ!

FRANKIE

How?

RUSSO

You watch, kid.

FRANKIE

Don't tell me that you can fix it so that I can become champ.

RUSSO

We did it for Doyle.

FRANKIE

Listen. If I become champ, I want to win it legit. Okay. No fix.

RUSSO

(Patronizing)

Whatever you say, kid.

FRANKIE

Do me a favor, Mr. Russo.

RUSSO

Sure.

FRANKIE

Stop calling me kid. My name is Frankie. Okay?

RUSSO

Okay, Frankie. No need to get so touchy.

FRANKIE

And stop talking to me like I'm a jerk.

RUSSO

(Annoyed)

And you watch your attitude. Okay?

FRANKIE

Get off my case!

RUSSO

If you be quiet and do what you're told, I won't be on your case.

FRANKIE

I'll say whatever I please.

RUSSO

Look. Either you play ball with us or there will be trouble.

FRANKIE

Just because you gave me some money, you now think you own me?

RUSSO

That's right, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Nobody owns me!

RUSSO

That's what YOU think.

FRANKIE

That's exactly what I think, and as far as I'm concerned this conversation is over.

RUSSO

You'll be hearing from us.

(As FRANKIE and RUSSO get up from the table, the curtain falls.)

SCENE SIX

(TIME: One week later.

PLACE: The gym. FRANKIE is working out in the ring while KAPLAN, standing outside of the ring, watches.)

KAPLAN

You're looking good, Frankie.

(FRANKIE stops working out and goes to the corner of the ring nearest to KAPLAN.)

FRANKIE

Thanks. What brings you here?

KAPLAN

I have good news for you.

FRANKIE

What is it?

KAPLAN

I went to Si Rothman. We talked about a re-match between you and Doyle. Rothman's willing to set up the match and it's on the up-and-up. All you have to do is sign the contract.

(FRANKIE leaves the ring and stands next to KAPLAN who gives FRANKIE the contract. FRANKIE briefly looks at the contract.)

FRANKIE

How come I'm getting only twenty percent of the gate?

KAPLAN

You lost to him. Remember?

FRANKIE

So what? I still think I should get a bigger cut. What's Doyle gonna get?

KAPLAN

Twenty-five percent. He's the champ.

FRANKIE

Twenty-five percent? Champ or no champ, there's no way Doyle is worth more than me. People will be paying to see me, not Doyle.

KAPLAN

Why are you squawking? Didn't your friends pay you enough money already? This is your chance to redeem yourself, and Rothman is willing to give you that chance. Now will you take it?

(FRANKIE looks at the contract again. While looking at the contract RUSSO enters the scene.)

RUSSO

Frankie, my boy! How are you?

(RUSSO offers his hand. FRANKIE does not move.)

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

What are you doing here?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

I want to talk a little business with you.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Didn't I tell you to get lost?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

What kind of attitude is that?

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Get outta here!

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

I know you. You used to run with the Lupo gang.

RUSSO

(Sarcastic, speaking to KAPLAN)

Really?

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Yeah. Last year I saw you at Jack's Gym on the west side. You and Louie Lupo tried to strong-arm Pete Tracy, but Tracy chased you and Lupo out of the place.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

I don't know what you're talking about.

KAPLAN

(Sarcastic, speaking to RUSSO)

Whatever you say.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

Well, why don't you get lost now. Me and Frankie have things to talk about.

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Whatever you have to say to Frankie you can say to me. I'm his manager.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

I don't care who you are. Get lost!

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Don't talk to Mr. Kaplan like that!

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Frankie, you better cool it.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

This is how you do business?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

That's how you're making me do business.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Well, I don't wanna do business with you. Now get out of here!

(FRANKIE turns to leave. RUSSO grabs FRANKIE from behind and hits him hard on the head with a club. FRANKIE falls to the floor. KAPLAN rushes toward RUSSO who punches KAPLAN in the face; KAPLAN staggers backwards and collapses onto the floor. FRANKIE tries to get up but is pinned down by RUSSO who has planted his foot on FRANKIE's back.)

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Frankie, I don't wanna get rough with you or your pal, but if you wanna play games, you're both gonna get hurt, really bad.

FRANKIE
(Struggling to get up)

Let me up!

RUSSO
(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Only if you promise to cooperate.

(After a few moments, FRANKIE stops struggling.)

FRANKIE

Okay, I promise.

RUSSO
(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Okay. Now get up, and don't make any trouble.

(RUSSO, still holding the club, removes his foot from FRANKIE's back and moves away from FRANKIE.)

FRANKIE
(Slowly getting up from the floor, speaks to KAPLAN)
Are you okay, Mr. Kaplan?

KAPLAN
(slowly getting up)
I'm okay, Frankie. I'm just a little woozy.

RUSSO
(Speaking to FRANKIE and KAPLAN)
Cut the small talk. You'll both live.

(FRANKIE and KAPLAN are now back on their feet.)

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

What is it that you want?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

I heard that you may be fighting Doyle again.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

So?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

I may be in need of your services.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

What services?

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Stop playing games. You know what I mean.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Another fix?

KAPLAN

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

I told you what would happen.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

Told him what?

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

About clowns like you.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN, laughs)

I'm a clown? And what does that make you? His guardian angel?

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

I tried to keep him honest.

RUSSO

(Pointing to FRANKIE)

Him? That's a laugh.

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

At least I tried. And now I've arranged for him a legitimate shot at the title.

RUSSO

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

Oh really?

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

You wanna know why you're gonna get a chance to fight Doyle?

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO)

Okay. Tell me.

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Because my pal Ernie Flanagan went to Rothman and set it up. Do you think that Rothman would take a chance on a putz like you without being given something up front and *(pauses momentarily)* a guaranteed cut in the action?

KAPLAN

(Speaking to RUSSO)

You're in with a big-time gangster like Ernie Flanagan?

RUSSO
(Smug, speaking to KAPLAN)

That's right.

KAPLAN
(Speaking to FRANKIE)
Don't believe him, Frankie! The fight's legit!

RUSSO
(Speaking to KAPLAN)
Go on! Get outta here!

(RUSSO starts pushing KAPLAN away from the ring.)

KAPLAN
(Speaking to RUSSO)
Stop pushing me! I'm leaving.

RUSSO
(Speaking to KAPLAN)
Then get lost already!

(KAPLAN starts to leave, then stops and turns around.)

KAPLAN
(Speaking to FRANKIE)
Frankie, be careful!

(As KAPLAN slowly exits the stage, FRANKIE and RUSSO sit down and start talking as the curtain falls.)

SCENE SEVEN

(TIME: Evening. The same day.)

PLACE: The kitchen in FRANKIE'S apartment. SEYMOUR, MILDRED and FRANKIE are sitting at the table.)

SEYMOUR
What's wrong, Frankie?

FRANKIE
Nothing.

SEYMOUR
You look upset.

FRANKIE
I'm not upset.

MILDRED
You haven't eaten anything. That's not like you.

FRANKIE
Will you and dad please stop bugging me?

SEYMOUR
What do you want us to do? You look annoyed. We're not supposed to say anything?

FRANKIE
I'm sorry, dad. I didn't mean to yell at you. It's just that I've got things on my mind.

SEYMOUR
You want to talk about it?

FRANKIE

I think I'm in trouble.

SEYMOUR

What kind of trouble?

FRANKIE

Big trouble.

SEYMOUR

So far you're not telling me anything.

FRANKIE

This is hard for me to talk about.

SEYMOUR

Well, try.

FRANKIE

Dad, my fight with Doyle was not totally legit.

SEYMOUR

What do you mean?

FRANKIE

I threw the fight.

SEYMOUR and MILDRED
(Speaking in unison, surprised)

What?

FRANKIE

That's right. I threw the fight.

SEYMOUR

Why'd you do that?

FRANKIE

For money.

SEYMOUR

How much?

FRANKIE

Twenty-five thousand dollars.

SEYMOUR

Frankie, what you did was just plain wrong. In fact, you can go to prison for that.

FRANKIE

I know.

SEYMOUR

You knew that and you still took the money? We expected better of you.

FRANKIE

I know, dad, and I'm sorry for disappointing you and mom, but that doesn't solve my problem.

SEYMOUR

That you took a payoff?

FRANKIE

That's part of the problem, but now the guys who paid me the money want me to throw my rematch with Doyle and I can't shake them loose.

SEYMOUR

What about giving them back the money?

FRANKIE

I can't do that. Once they give you money, it's yours.

SEYMOUR

So now you're their easy touch.

FRANKIE

It looks like it. What can I do?

SEYMOUR

(Momentarily silent, then speaks)

Have they threatened you?

FRANKIE

They told me that if I don't go along with them, they'll make sure that the state athletic commission finds out what I did.

SEYMOUR

Have you considered contacting the commission yourself?

FRANKIE

I thought about doing that, but if I do that, I'm gonna get a lot of heat from the commission.

SEYMOUR

Maybe that's the price you'll have to pay for being so dishonest. Who told you to take the money?

FRANKIE

Nobody.

SEYMOUR

I still can't believe what you did.

MILDRED

What did you do with the money?

FRANKIE

I put it in a bank.

SEYMOUR

Have you spent any of it?

FRANKIE

No.

SEYMOUR

That's good. Don't spend any of it, otherwise you'll just be making matters worse for yourself.

FRANKIE

The last thing I wanna do is spend that money.

SEYMOUR

Ironic, isn't it? You risk your career and reputation for some money and now you don't even want to spend it.

FRANKIE

Please don't lecture me, dad. You asked what was bothering me and I told you.

SEYMOUR

Don't tell me not to lecture you! No only did you throw a fight, you misled your own parents and jeopardized your life. How do we know that you're not lying right now?

(FRANKIE takes a piece of paper from his pants pocket and gives it to SEYMOUR.)

FRANKIE

Here's the deposit slip for the twenty-five thousand dollars.

MILDRED

Frankie, where did we go wrong with you?

SEYMOUR

(Speaking to MILDRED)

We didn't do anything wrong, Mildred. What Frankie did was his responsibility and his alone.

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

You sure were greedy. Your cut of the gate was not enough?

FRANKIE

Dad, I did what I did, but I don't wanna do it again.

SEYMOUR

(Sarcastically)

Well that's a relief.

MILDRED

(Starts crying)

What's going to happen?

SEYMOUR

(Speaking to Frankie)

Do you see what you've done to your mother?

(SEYMOUR gives MILDRED a tissue.)

FRANKIE

Okay, dad. I know what I did was wrong. Now, how can I get out of this?

SEYMOUR

I'm going to talk to a lawyer friend of mine. In the meantime, Frankie, try to be careful and from now on try keep your nose clean.

Curtain

SCENE EIGHT

(TIME: A month later.

PLACE: A boxing ring. FRANKIE is in the near left corner; in the far right corner is JIMMY DOYLE; the REFEREE and the RING ANNOUNCER are in the center of the ring.)

RING ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen! In this corner (*points to the far right corner*), wearing green trunks, weighing one hundred fifty-three pounds, from Kalamazoo, Michigan, the middleweight champion of the world ... Jimmy Doyle!

(From offstage comes sound of sporadic cheers mixed with boos.)

And in this corner (*points to the near left corner as the crescendo of noise grows steadily louder*), wearing blue trunks, weighing one hundred fifty-five pounds, from New York City ... the number one contender for the world middleweight crown, Frankie Mason!

(Sound of wild ovation. Then chants of Frankie! Frankie! Frankie!)

This is a fifteen-round main event for the middleweight championship of the world!

(The RING ANNOUNCER leaves the ring. Then the REFEREE signals both boxers to approach the middle of the ring, gives the boxers their instructions, then the boxers touch gloves and return to their corners. The bell sounds and the boxers come out fighting as the curtain falls.)

SCENE NINE

PLACE: The boxing ring. All is quiet.

FRANKIE, ABE KAPLAN, THE REFEREE and JIMMY DOYLE enter the stage and recite a song in rhyme, each one taking a turn reciting a verse.

The bell is rung
The boxers clash,
The punches fly,
Each like a flash.

One throws a right,
The other a left,
They weave and duck
Without a rest.

It's all a game
For those outside,
Who scream and yell,
Like kids real high.

But for the men
Inside that ring,
It's life itself
for which they fling.

It's not just money
That makes them fight.
It's fame and pride
Which stirs their light.

And one will win
And other will lose
But each will know
That they made news.

So when you watch
Your next prize fight,
Just keep in mind
That it's a site
Where men can die
And sometimes do
To wow the fans
And pay their dues.

'Cause win or lose
is not the point,
it's that you fight
and leave the joint.

To take a punch
Or dodge the same
Takes lots of skill
And lots of game.

As punches fly
And blood and sweat
Get all mixed up
While the fans makes bets
On who will win
And who will lose,
The fighters fight,
Get banged and bruised.

They're beat up bad
With wobbly feet
But they're still alive
And that's a feat.

They take their dough
And have a beer
And nurse their wounds
And recall the cheers.

SCENE TEN

(TIME: After the fight.

PLACE: The locker room, where there is pandemonium as reporters struggle with each other for a chance to interview FRANKIE who is sitting on a bench next to a locker. FRANKIE is wearing his robe; next to him are his boxing gloves. Out of the crowd of reporters comes MURRAY BERMAN, holding a microphone. FRANKIE stands up. MURRAY then conducts an interview with FRANKIE.)

MURRAY

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Murray Berman coming to you from the United Sports Arena with the new middleweight champion of the world, Frankie Mason, who just scored a sensational one-round knock-out over the former champ, Jimmy Doyle, who had to be carried out of the ring. Frankie, how do you feel about this win?

FRANKIE
(Subdued)

I feel fine.

MURRAY

What are your plans now?

FRANKIE

First, to take it easy for the next few days, then I'll think about my plans.

MURRAY

Did you do anything special to prepare for this fight?

FRANKIE

Not really. I trained hard and stayed focussed.

MURRAY

Did you ever doubt that you would win?

FRANKIE
(Emphatically)

Never!

MURRAY

Did you think that you would win in such a spectacular way?

FRANKIE

Boxing is an unpredictable game. I went into this match with one goal, to win. And that's what I did. And whether it takes one round or fifteen rounds, it's the final result that counts.

MURRAY

The crowd was really pulling for you tonight. How did that make you feel?

FRANKIE

It felt great, and I appreciate the support of the fans.

MURRAY

You really bounced back after that first loss to Doyle. Are you willing to give him another shot at the title?

FRANKIE

That's something I have to discuss with my manager.

MURRAY

There are rumors that your first fight with Doyle might have been fixed. Any comments?

FRANKIE

Nothing but cheap talk. Tonight I proved that I'm the best middleweight fighter in the world.

MURRAY

Frankie, you're a role model for the kids all over this town. What do you have to say to them?

FRANKIE

Listen to your parents and keep your noses clean. And while I'm at it, I'd like to say hello to my parents, to whom I owe everything.

MURRAY

Spoken like the great guy you are! Thanks a lot Frankie, and good luck!

(FRANKIE and MURRAY shake hands. KAPLAN enters the scene and clears the locker room of the reporters. Finally FRANKIE and KAPLAN are alone.)

KAPLAN

(Ecstatic)

Frankie, I'm proud of you! This was the greatest fight of your career and if you play your cards right, you can be the next Al McCoy or Ben Jeby!

FRANKIE

(Wearily)

Yeah ... maybe. I guess you're my manager again.

KAPLAN

How about going to Luchow's for a bite?

FRANKIE

I don't think so, Mr. Kaplan.

KAPLAN

(Worried)

Frankie, what's bothering you?

(As FRANKIE is about to answer, RUSSO barges into the locker room. RUSSO has a gun.)

RUSSO

(Angry)

Why, you two-timing double-crosser! You were supposed to lose!

FRANKIE

I know.

RUSSO

That's all you have to say? I know?

FRANKIE

What else do you want me to say?

RUSSO

(Enraged)

Frankie, we had a deal! Now everything is all messed up! I'm out over three hundred gees because of you! Where am I gonna get that kind of money?

FRANKIE

I can't help you there.

RUSSO

Don't play stupid with me! I ought to plug you right now!

FRANKIE

Who's stopping you?

RUSSO

Don't temp me!

FRANKIE

Pull the trigger.

KAPLAN

(Alarmed)

Frankie, don't say that!

FRANKIE

I'm tired of living.

(RUSSO points the gun at FRANKIE. Then four UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS rush into the locker room led by a man dressed in civilian clothes, all with guns in their hands.)

PLAINCLOTHES MAN

(Pointing his gun at RUSSO)

Freeze!

(RUSSO does not move.)

Drop that gun, now!

(RUSSO hesitates for a moment then drops his gun.

The UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS grab RUSSO.)

Joseph Russo: I'm special agent Howard Kleinberg of the New York State Police, antiracketeering unit. You are under arrest for racketeering, extortion, assault, and illegal possession of a deadly weapon. You have the right to remain silent and consult with an attorney. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.

(Speaking to the UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS)

Get that guy out of here!

RUSSO

(While being led away by one of the UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS, RUSSO turns around, looks at FRANKIE and screams:)

I'll get you, Mason!

FRANKIE

(Stands up, glares at RUSSO and screams back:)

You and who else? I'll punch your face in if you ever so much as look at me again!

RUSSO

(Speaking to FRANKIE, screams:)

You're a dead man, pal!

FRANKIE

(Speaking to RUSSO, enraged)

Oh, yeah? You're threatening ME?

(FRANKIE suddenly lunges toward RUSSO, and is restrained by two of the UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS while the other two UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS escort RUSSO off the stage.)

KLEINBERG
(Speaking to FRANKIE)

Calm down!

FRANKIE
(Gradually stops struggling, but is still agitated)
You can let go of me now.

(The two UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS release FRANKIE.)

KLEINBERG
(Speaking to both UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS)
Why don't you two help out with Russo.

UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS
(Speaking in unison)
Yes, sir.

(Both UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS exit the stage.)

FRANKIE
(Still agitated, speaking to KLEINBERG)
I know those guys were handcuffed, but I couldn't help losing my cool. I was within seconds of becoming a goner. That guy Russo was about to shoot me.

KLEINBERG
(Speaking to FRANKIE)
I know.
(Speaking softly)
Try to calm down.

KAPLAN

(Speaking to KLEINBERG)

How do you know Frankie?

KLEINBERG

(Speaking to KAPLAN)

Frankie decided to come forward and tell the state athletic commission about his dealings with the Russo gang. Because of the information Frankie provided, and Frankie's willingness to cooperate with our investigation into corruption in boxing, we were able to set up this operation. What Frankie did took a lot of courage. Guys like Russo don't play games. He was going around putting the pinch on boxers to fix fights and then threatening to report them as crooks if they didn't do what they were told. Hopefully this will put a stop to that kind of criminal activity.

KAPLAN

(Dubious, speaking to FRANKIE)

That's really something, Frankie.

FRANKIE

(Calmer)

I did what I had to do. If I hadn't been so greedy and dumb, I wouldn't have been in this predicament in the first place.

KAPLAN

Nobody's perfect.

FRANKIE

(Speaking to KLEINBERG)

What happens now?

KLEINBERG

Russo and his gang will be arraigned, indicted and put on trial, and you'll be the star witness for the prosecution.

FRANKIE

I'll cooperate.

KLEINBERG

(Speaking to FRANKIE)

I know you will.

(FRANKIE and KLEINBERG shake hands.)

You'll be hearing from us.

(KLEINBERG exits the stage. FRANKIE sits down.)

KAPLAN

So now you're a stooly for the police? How does it feel?

FRANKIE

Not so good.

KAPLAN

How long is this arrangement supposed to last?

FRANKIE

I don't know.

KAPLAN

Do your parents know?

FRANKIE

They know. In fact, it was my father who arranged for me to contact the commission. If it weren't for him, I'd be in jail right now, or maybe worse.

KAPLAN

Well, good luck.

(KAPLAN turns to leave.)

FRANKIE (Surprised)

Where are you going?

(KAPLAN turns around and faces FRANKIE.)

KAPLAN

I'm leaving.

FRANKIE

I thought you wanted to go to Luchow's

KAPLAN

I just remembered that I have some other business to attend to.

FRANKIE

You're not trying to dodge me now, are you?

KAPLAN

Not at all, Frankie. I'm happy that you're now champ and hope that it brings you a lot more success. But I think it would be better if we not talk to each other for a while.

FRANKIE

Okay, Mr. Kaplan. If that's what you want.

(KAPLAN looks at FRANKIE for a few moments, then gently pats FRANKIE on the shoulder. FRANKIE looks up at KAPLAN, then they slowly shake hands. Then KAPLAN leaves the locker room, and FRANKIE is left alone, with a forlorn expression on his face. Suddenly a young, attractive woman, early 20s, casually but neatly attired, rushes into the room, slamming the door behind her. FRANKIE, startled, looks up at her.)

WOMAN

Whew, those guys out there are animals! They can't keep their mits off a girl.

FRANKIE

Who are you and what are you doing here?

WOMAN

My name is Gertie Brown. I think you're the greatest and I wanted to tell you that personally.

FRANKIE

(despondent)

Well, I don't feel too great right now, so I'd appreciate it if you leave.

GERTIE

(surprised)

You just won the championship and now you're down in the dumps!? You're a hero! *(pause)* What's the problem?

FRANKIE

I did some really stupid things and now I'm paying the price.

GERTIE

Oh yeah? You want to tell me about?

FRANKIE

Sure ... Why not ... You seem to be alright.

GERTIE

Well, thanks. And I think you're alright too.

(GERTIE sits down on a chair, facing FRANKIE)

FRANKIE

Life can really be tough and *(shaking his head from side to side)* I did some crappy things that hurt my parents and nothing in the world can ever change that!

GERTIE

What did you do?

FRANKIE

I got involved with the wrong crowd. You know, mobsters, guys who don't give a crap about you and just want to use you and I let myself be used. *(getting angrier, defiant)* But I showed them. I was supposed to take a dive but I didn't. Instead I won and now everyone's pissed off at me, but I don't care because if they want to try something, I'll show 'em who's the boss and ...

GERTIE

Calm down, fella! You're getting yourself all worked up.

FRANKIE

(still excited)

Listen, sister, don't tell me to calm down or what to do or anything! You hear me? You got that?

GERTIE

(Places FRANKIE's hand in her hand, speaking gently)

I didn't mean anything by it. I was just trying to help.

FRANKIE

(less agitated but still irritated)

Okay. You seem to be a good kid. *(pause)* You're not going to hurt me, are you?

GERTIE

(laughing)

Little ol' me? Hurt a strong, tough guy like you?

FRANKIE

Hey, what's so funny? I asked you a straight question. So don't play with me? Okay? 'Cause if you do, you better get the hell out of here right now!

GERTIE

(tenderly,)

I'm not playing with you, Frankie. I'm just a girl from the neighborhood who wanted to get your autograph. That's all.

FRANKIE

You're from the neighborhood? How come I've never seen you around?

GERTIE

I was away for awhile. After my parents split, I moved with my mom from the east side to Queens where we lived with my grandparents. Went to high school there, even attended a semester of college. But I couldn't stand living there anymore, always being told what to do and what not, so I moved out and now I'm staying with a girlfriend in a walkup on Suffolk Street near the bridge.

FRANKIE

So how do you support yourself?

GERTIE

Sales jobs, clerical work, secretarial work. Not the greatest jobs but they pay the bills, so I get by.

FRANKIE

Well, there's more to life than just getting by and that's why I'm in the fight game. To make money, lots of money, but like a jerk I let myself get sidetracked and be used by filthy lowlifes who had the nerve to threaten me ... ME! ..., but that won't happen again. No way.

GERTIE

Wow, you are pissed off. Maybe there's something I can do to help.

FRANKIE

Like what?

GERTIE

(coy, playful)

Take a guess.

FRANKIE

What are you driving at?

GERTIE

(flirtatious)

Well, wouldn't you like to have some company? Help you calm down, somebody to hold your hand and rub your back when you're feeling down?

FRANKIE

What are you doing? Positioning me?

GERTIE

No, Frankie. I'm not that kind of girl. I just want to be close to you. I like you. I'm not a bad looking girl. Am I?

FRANKIE

(becoming distracted)

No ... you're not. *(pause)* Well, maybe we can work something out.

GERTIE

(Gets up, stands next to FRANKIE and starts stroking his hair)

How's that feel?

FRANKIE

(Getting aroused)

It feels good. You have a nice touch.

(FRANKIE stands, embraces GERTIE and starts unzipping the back of her dress)

Okay, babe, have it your way. Just don't fuck with me.

GERTIE

I won't, Frankie. You'll be gentle with me, won't you?

FRANKIE

(Caressing GERTIE)

I won't hurt you, Gertie. Now shut up and let's have some fun!

(FRANKIE gives GERTIE a long, deep, passionate kiss on the lips and then they both sink to the floor as the lights go out)

SCENE ELEVEN

(One year later. FRANKIE and GERTIE are sitting in a living room in an apartment. A baby is in a bassinette. The baby is crying.)

GERTIE

There she goes again.

FRANKIE

Yeah, time for another feeding?

GERTIE

I guess so.

(GERTIE picks up a bottle and starts feeding the baby. Then the telephone rings. FRANKIE answers it.)

FRANKIE

Hello ... How are you, Dad? What's up? ... They're almost finished with me? ... Great news! ... Thanks for everything... Tillie's alright ... Gertie sends her love. Say hello to Mom for me. *(Hangs up the phone, speaks to GERTIE)* My father told me that the state boxing commission is almost finished with their investigation and that they may not need me anymore.

GERTIE

(unimpressed)

That's good news. Now what are we going to do about money?

FRANKIE

Hey, I'm trying my best. Being a school teacher may not pay much but at least it's steady work.

GERTIE

Well your best isn't good enough. When we met you promised that you'd be making a ton of money. That never happened.

FRANKIE

Things changed, you know. I can't go back into the ring. Not now, not ever.

GERTIE

Who's asking you to? Do something else, get second job, or otherwise I may have to go back to the street.

FRANKIE

Oh, please, don't start with that malarkey again and especially not while you're feeding the baby.

GERTIE

I'm being serious. If you can't bring in money then I will.

FRANKIE

(laughs)

Hey, if you want to take charge of our finances, then go right ahead. I won't stop you.

GERTIE

Where's the tough guy that I married, the guy with all those big dreams of glory and greatness? The guy who wanted it all?

FRANKIE

Listen Gertie, I still have those dreams and sure want the best things for us but after what I went through this past year I have learned to count my blessings and not be so cocky and pushy, and if you can't accept that, then so be it. I'll deal with it.

GERTIE

Don't be so sanctimonious, it doesn't become you.

FRANKIE

I'm not trying to be sanctimonious. I'm just letting you know what life means for me now, and for me it means supporting my family, acting responsibly, being there and trying to be at peace with the world. I tried being a wise-ass and getting it all and it almost got me killed, and I think I am pretty damn lucky that I got a second chance to go on with my life, which allowed me to live and meet a girl like you. Next time I may not be so lucky and then where would that leave you and the kid?

(GERTIE places the baby in the bassinette and runs to FRANKIE and hugs him hard.)

GERTIE
(alarmed)

Don't leave me Frankie. Don't EVER leave me. Don't say it. Don't even think it. The thought of you not being here makes me sick. Forget what I said about the money. We'll get by.

FRANKIE
(smiling)

Don't worry, babe. I plan to be around for a long time. After all, aren't I the champ?

GERTIE

You sure are.

(FRANKIE and GERTIE hug and laugh as the stage lights go out.)

The End