

Excerpt from *The Mermaid Hour*: Act II/Sc II

*Vi, a trans tween with some impulse issues and a crush on her gay best friend JACOB, causes a tempest when she releases a YouTube video of herself declaring that she's a mermaid—and that JACOB loves her. After the s*** hits the fan, JACOB's mom, MIKA—a Japanese American who has moved to a Massachusetts suburb from Manhattan, tries to make peace with VI's dad BIRD, a working class New Englander, which leads to a surprising confession in Act Two.*

SCENE TWO:

MIKA's house. MIKA and BIRD enter. She has a beer for him and wine for herself.

MIKA

Thanks for coming. I'm sorry about how I handled the video.

BIRD

Yeah, I'm thinking the principal really didn't need to see that.

MIKA

"I'm sorry" means that I know that already. This is an apology.

BIRD

And this is me being a d*** because I'm stressed and tired. So, thanks, I appreciate it.

MIKA

(Sighs) I feel like I learned so much about gay this and gay that in the last year, and I just wanted to get a handle on that, when along comes *this*. All the stuff I didn't blast Jacob with, Vi got.

BIRD

Ok.

MIKA

I think it was his name—she used his name. That was the first gift we gave him. The first thing we couldn't get wrong. A choice for a lifetime...you know? But suddenly now, it belongs to Vi, a thing to help define her—and what it defined: the idea that my gay son loved the body of the in-between girl and, I'm not an awful person, but my head imploded for a moment, ok?

BIRD

(She doesn't get that she's misfiring here) I, uh...I know plenty about lost names.

MIKA

Right. (Ouch. Beat.) I don't want to admit this, but...there was a piece to it of shame, not for him or them, but for me: in not knowing about the video first, of hearing it from grandparents who don't come from a culture or time in which even who *Jacob* is would be allowed, much less—
[wants to say VI but doesn't]

BIRD

Yeah.

MIKA

And... Ok, I'm going to say this, because I want you to understand... I thought, okay gay is enough for a kid in this world, if we can un-associate Jacob from this whole "I'm a transgender mermaid" business, it would protect him.

BIRD

(Surprised) Your son's like the most popular kid in school.

MIKA

(Dismissing this) Only because he's new and he carries the caché of Manhattan.

BIRD

Exactly. None of them give a s*** he's gay. My day, he'd have been knocked around the lockers at very least.

MIKA

That still happens.

BIRD

Here? You're protecting him from *our* childhood.

MIKA

Bird—

BIRD

(Cuts her off.) Which I get.

MIKA

You do?

BIRD

It's all too next world. Like, it's already here but, jeez. Whatever Vi and Jacob think of it, it's just so far beyond. I spend all my time playing catch up.

MIKA

I had no idea. You seem to have a handle on this.

BIRD

(Sips quietly.) You're a parent. You oughta know better than "seems."

MIKA

Fair enough. (Clinks his glass)

BIRD

It's not the life I ever saw, you know, in my head. (A big swig) So I always had this dream that I would have season tickets to Fenway and take my kids—my boys—to all the games. Who knows why only boys and at least two or three—Pilar would say it's sexist to make it boys because it's sports, but it isn't sexist to just see a thing in your head. It's not like I'm ever gonna have season tickets on what I make, anyway, so it's just a dream, and dreams make their own shape, right?

When Victor was born, I was like, I'm on my way. But Pilar's body was done with the whole thing, I guess. Vic was it. One kid, one boy, that's that. And when he was little, I heard from a friend that he had a friend with season tickets who kinda made a time share out of the seats. Bleacher seats—section 42—which I love, cause the view of the field is awesome, and you can see every scoreboard. The dates were s***—April nights and August afternoons—but I didn't care. I was like, this is it: Me and Vic, we can taste the dream.

Vic was four and it was pretty much the first night he ever got to stay up late. I knew he wouldn't make it through the game, but I was cool because it was just the beginning. Pilar didn't come—Sox aren't her thing, which is fine by me, cause I don't want to go to my church, which is what Fenway is, and have to worry about someone not liking it. If you can't have a good time in Fenway, you don't deserve to be there: place is sacred.

And Vic, he loves it. For all the wrong reasons: the lights are pretty and the TVs are so big and the singalong—that's what he calls Sweet Caroline in the 8th—is awesome! Can't follow the game even though I'm trying to explain and doesn't seem to care, but he's so happy to be there, I'm like, *Win*. This is what it means to be a parent: make your kid happy and be happy doing it. I let him eat a hot dog AND fries AND ice cream AND soda. Pilar woulda ripped me a new one if she could see all that junk, but it's four games a summer, and summer comes just once a year.

Next season, same thing—he loves it, win or lose, can't wait to go. Starts to understand the game a little, so he gets why I'm screaming and shouting. It's not quite the way I imagined, like when he's standing on the seat shaking his butt to the music, but it's great, and it's ours.

Until six.

Six. The year of all the towels on his head for long hair and every bed sheet and throw making a dress or a train. That year... Well, you take *your* son to Fenway in his favorite purple hoodie with all the rhinestone butterflies, and see how that goes. I could feel the other dads, their sympathy, just boring thru me, "Wow that kid is wicked gay." Some even gave me the look, like, "Dude, I feel your pain." And I just tried to let it roll off. I did. I knew there'd be looks when we left the house and I didn't say he couldn't wear it, cause I'm a good dad, a *Democrat* dad. I know my s***.

Until we hit the friggin Pink jersey store. Victor sees the pink crap—and gets possessed. Like, has to have it. Has to. Right then. Please daddy, I want one. Pleeeeeease.

And I say no, not because I'm an a*****. Pink jerseys—and pink caps—they're a crime on their own merits. We're RED SOX, it's in the friggin' name. And if you need pink to feel like a fan, you're not a fan.

Anyway, I say no pink jersey, and he loses it. Bursts into tears. Think my son looks gay with his sparkly hoodie? Now add weeping and moaning, "I want the pink one! I want the pink one!" And then over and over, "I need it! I need it!"

So, I'm trying to get him outta there and he's sitting in the middle of the friggin' floor and it's a scene, right? And I'm pissed: you don't cry to get your way. But he won't stop. I end up shouting. "Why the f*** do you *need* a pink shirt?" Just like that I *am* a bad parent cause I'm not just yelling at my kid in public, but swearing. Father of the year.

Vic starts shouting back, over me just to be heard, and then forgetting me, this crazy shrieking, "Because I'm a girl! I'm a girl! I'm a girl."

(Visceral) And I say, "Get up. Get up off the floor. You don't get what you want this way!" And I start pulling his arm, pretty hard, which makes the crying worse.

And then this guy, twice my size, tats up his neck, takes my arm to stop me, and I swear I am going to punch him cause I need to punch something, I'm so frustrated and embarrassed and freaked out. But he looks me in the eye, and I see he's just trying to watch out for me, and he says, "You are man enough to get your kid that shirt and your kid's gonna love you forever if you do."

Only in Massachusetts, right?

So I stand there, not punching anything and not yanking Vic's arm, and a vein in my forehead is throbbing so hard I'm gonna go blind, and f*** it, I buy the shirt. But not for him. For me—to stop the scene, to stop everyone from looking, to just get out of there. And Vic knows, he knows this, so he holds the shirt close like a blanket but doesn't dare to put it on. He whispers thank you and follows me back to our seat and his face is red with the shame of winning, and I see this and it's misery. But I can't bring myself to make him feel better, because I know right then. That it isn't just gonna be towels and bedsheets forever.

So I sit there, staring at the field, the boys in white running around being boys like my boy never will be, and I think, "Here it comes. Here it all comes."

At the seventh inning stretch, Vic asks if he can put on the jersey if he wears the hoodie over it so no one will see. Like the hoodie's so butch, right? His voice is so shy, so small, I'm like Christ, he's scared to death of me. So I do what Pilar would've done to start with. I say, "Go for it." And he does, changing right there in the seat. When he starts to put the hoodie over the pink to hide it—I stop him. Don't make a big deal, just swallow hard and say, "Ah, skip it. Too hot for all that."

Kid just glows, glows like a friggin star, the rest of that game. Then sleeps in the shirt for the next three nights before Pilar snags it for the wash.

This year, when Vi told that story to Dr. Eggleston, she left out the bit in the store. She told it as the happiest day of that whole year, because I let her be who she was. Can ya stand it? She tells this as a *good dad* story.

I wanna be proud of me for that, but, course, I know how I acted. (Beat) No. That's not it. I wanna be proud of myself, but...sometimes, when we go to games now, I can't help but look over at my daughter, who I love with my whole breaking heart, and still, I think, *this*, this is where I lost my son.

He stops. It is perfectly quiet. MIKA is in tears.

BIRD

Too much, huh?

MIKA

(Trying to get herself back.) Tattoo guy...in the story...

BIRD

Yeah?

MIKA

I bet he didn't have kids.

BIRD

No one giving parenting advice ever does.

MIKA

(He clinks beers with her on that.) It's funny to hear you talk about Vi as "he."

BIRD

Tell me about it. The pronoun thing is killer. When I'm pissed, I never know whether to tell her she's acting like a d*** or a b****. Pardon my language.

MIKA

Pardoned. But I actually just meant, well, I've only ever known the girl.