

MEN OVERBOARD

a play by Rich Orloff

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MEN OVERBOARD

a play in two acts

Characters

ERNIE SILVER, an old man, father of three, 70's or older

DOUG SILVER, Ernie's middle son, a psychotherapist, mid-40's

JAY SILVER, Ernie's youngest son, a Buddhist monk, early 40's

ROBERT SILVER, Ernie's oldest son, a Congressional candidate, late 40's

ABRAHAM SILVER, Robert's son and Ernie's only grandchild, 13

EVA FUZESI, Abraham's Bar Mitzvah tutor, from Hungary, mid-30's

Place

The living room of a three-bedroom apartment
on Manhattan's Upper West Side

Time

January

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

The living room and dining area of a three-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Ernie Silver and his wife Ellie moved here almost fifty years ago, and they raised three children here. Although many of the pieces have been replaced over the years (Ellie was never too fond of the original couch, and she probably recovered the easy chair), it's been a while since anything new has been bought. There's a hall leading to the three bedrooms, a door to the kitchen, and a door to the rest of the world.

An evening in January. ERNIE SILVER, an old man, enters from the hall. He uses a walker. He looks out the window, one of his favorite nighttime activities.

ERNIE

It's just my opinion, mind you, but I really think the people on the planet Qwertio are assholes. Not all of them, mind you; you'll find decent people on every planet, even ours. But they're arrogant. You see, they've conquered death. That's right, they don't die, and as a result, they're incredibly long-winded. And as they're going on and on and on and on, if you say, "Get to the point!", they'll just smirk, and ask, "What's the hurry?" And if you reply, "Because *I'm* mortal," they'll smirk even more, with *both* their mouths. You know what it's like to listen to someone who's going on and on with one mouth while smirking at you with the other? You'd think that as most of them have lived over 40,000 years, they would've gained a little humility. Nope. Granted, they're fun to hang out with. They throw great parties. They last for years and never run out of dip. And they all have great senses of humor. You know, someone once told me that underneath all humor is a fear of death. Trust me, once you're immortal, that's when you realize how ridiculous most of life is. But they're just so... smug. "Why don't you just leave your planet and join us?" they ask. "You'll last longer, and the dip's better." I'm tempted, but, but I still have work to do. I try to explain it to them, but they just don't get it. They don't understand the gravitational pull... of family.

Ernie gazes out the window.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

The next evening. DOUG SILVER, mid-40's, is reading a psychology journal. Doug's nephew, ABRAHAM SILVER, 13, is studying a section of the Torah. (The Torah is what Jews call the first five books of the Bible.)

ABRAHAM

When the Torah was translated from Hebrew to English, why was it translated into an English nobody could understand?

DOUG

That's a good question. You should put that in your Bar Mitzvah speech.

ABRAHAM

I don't know why I'm doing this. My dad isn't going to like any idea I come up with.

DOUG

How do you know?

ABRAHAM

He hasn't liked any idea I've come up with yet.

DOUG

There isn't *anything* in your Torah portion you'd like to explore?

ABRAHAM

Nothing I have anything intelligent to say about.

DOUG

That never stops rabbis.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Doug, what did you talk about?

DOUG

I'm not sure. Since my Torah portion was about Moses going to the land of Midian for seven years and getting a wife, I wanted to talk about how he married a shikse, but your grandmother nixed that.

ABRAHAM

You know what I don't get?

DOUG

What?

ABRAHAM

My Torah portion keeps repeating about how every time Moses asked Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave Egypt, God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and so he refused. Why would God do that?

DOUG

Maybe God had some new plagues he wanted to try out.

ABRAHAM

I don't get it.

DOUG

Why don't you explore that in your speech?

ABRAHAM

I have nothing to say except, I don't get it.

DOUG

Sounds like a short speech. I like that.

The house phone (the one connected to the doorman downstairs) rings. The phone is on the wall near the front door. Doug walks to it.

ABRAHAM

If you had been Pharaoh's therapist, what would you say to him?

DOUG

(thinks, then:)

"Do you really need that much jewelry to feel like a man?"

Doug picks up the house phone.

DOUG (cont'd)

Send him up.

Doug hangs up the phone.

ABRAHAM

Is Uncle Jay here?

DOUG

Yep.

ABRAHAM

And there's really nothing special I have to do around him?

DOUG

You're not allowed to touch him, but otherwise, he's just one of the family.

ABRAHAM

(with an agenda:)

You know, if I had that new camera the pros use, I could make a video of the moment he walks in.

DOUG

You could use your phone.

ABRAHAM

Yeah, if I wanted to look like an *amateur*.

DOUG

I wish I had some idea of what you wanted for your Bar Mitzvah present.

ABRAHAM

You know what I want.

DOUG

I know. I spent all day yesterday shopping for "world peace", and I couldn't find it.

Doug opens the front door.

DOUG (cont'd)

(calling down the hall:)

You need any help?

JAY (o.s.)

Definitely.

Doug exits down the hall. Two moments later, JAY SILVER enters. In his early 40's, Jay carries a daypack and a large box. Because it's January, he wears a coat and wool cap. He removes them. His head is shaved, and he wears a saffron-colored Buddhist monk's robe, hiking boots and socks. Doug enters behind him, carrying a duffel bag. Jay and Abraham look at each other.

ABRAHAM

Hi, Uncle Jay. I'm Abe.

Abe does a "wai" (pronounced "why"), the traditional bow to a Buddhist monk.

JAY

Hi, Abe.

ABRAHAM

Did I do it right?

JAY

You were perfect.

DOUG

(referring to Jay's box and bag:)

I thought you traveled light.

JAY

It's just some books and things for the Center.

ABRAHAM

Are these books you wrote?

JAY

Translated. Brilliant minds wrote them.
I just try not to lose too much brilliance
translating them into English.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Doug says you're the best at it.

JAY

Uncle Doug is biased – and accurate.
So, all ready for the big day?

ABRAHAM

No.

JAY

Good. That's what makes it a big day.
(taking in the room:)
The place looks the same.

DOUG

Every time I make the slightest change,
Dad screams at me.

(calling out:)

Dad, Jay's here.

JAY

I could go to his –

DOUG

That's okay. Walking to the living room
has become his main form of exercise.

JAY

How is he?

DOUG

You tell me.

ABRAHAM

Eva, my Bar Mitzvah tutor, she really wants to meet you.

JAY

You're using a tutor?

ABRAHAM

Dad thought I could use extra help.

JAY

When did he decide this?

ABRAHAM

When I was conceived.

Ernie enters. For a moment, he and Jay just look at each other. Neither is particularly comfortable with each other.

ERNIE

Hello.

JAY

Hi, Dad. It's Jay. Your son.

ERNIE

I know who you are.

Ernie approaches Jay and touches a piece of his robe between his fingers.

ERNIE (cont'd)

This is the best material you could get?

JAY

You're not supposed to touch a monk's robe, Dad.

ERNIE

What a shmata. Look at this dye job.

JAY

I did my best.

ERNIE

How many times have I told you, there's no such thing as "my best". There's only "*the* best".

JAY

It's good to see you, Dad.

ERNIE

Are you eating enough?

JAY
One square meal a day.

ERNIE
Your mother will be glad you're home.

Jay looks at Doug. Doug motions, as if to say, "That's how it is."

JAY
I'm glad to be home, too. Dad, I hope –

ERNIE
Not now. I'm in a meeting.
(to Doug:)
If anyone calls from Jupiter, put 'em through.

DOUG
You got it.

ERNIE
On second thought, put 'em on hold for two minutes,
then put 'em through. Arrogant assholes.

DOUG
You got it.

Ernie exits.

JAY
He thinks Mom's still alive?

DOUG
Sometimes he does, sometimes he doesn't.
Consistency is not his strong suit.

ABRAHAM
Last week he told me he was thinking of starting
a long-distance thing with a woman on Qwertiop.

JAY
Qwertiop?

DOUG
According to Dad, it's one of the lesser known
planets around Alpha Centauri.

JAY
Well, it's been a couple years since Mom died,
it's probably time for him to start dating again.

ABRAHAM
Uncle Jay?

JAY

Yes, Abe?

ABRAHAM

If the flights from Thailand to New York
take 28 hours –

JAY

That sounds about right.

ABRAHAM

And you change time zones eleven times –

JAY

Okay.

ABRAHAM

And you only get one meal a day,
when do you get your meal?

JAY

Wow. They've certainly changed
math questions since I was a kid.

DOUG

We have a bright nephew.

ABRAHAM

I'm just curious.

JAY

When the sun came up, the flight
attendant gave me a very nice meal.

DOUG

Nice perk.

JAY

Well, they also think making merit reduces
the chance of the airplane crashing.

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG

Send him up.

(to Abraham:)

Your dad's here.

Abraham starts gathering his books and notebooks and puts them
in his daypack.

JAY

How's his campaign going?

DOUG

It's not official yet. He's planning to announce about a week after the Bar Mitzvah.

JAY

(to Abraham:)

Are you looking forward to your dad being a Congressman?

ABRAHAM

If I don't come up with a good Bar Mitzvah speech, I don't think I'll live that long.

JAY

Ah, the Bar Mitzvah speech. The Silver family tradition lives on.

ABRAHAM

Are either of you thirsty?

DOUG

Nope.

JAY

I'm fine.

ABRAHAM

I'd love a reason to leave the room.

DOUG

I could use a glass of water.

JAY

Me, too.

Abraham exits into the kitchen. There's a knock on the door. Doug opens it. ROBERT SILVER, late 40's, enters. He's smartly but conservatively dressed.

ROBERT

Sorry I'm late, it's –

(noticing Jay:)

Hey – Hi, Jay. Thanks for coming. This means a lot to all of us.

JAY

It means a lot to me, too.

ROBERT

How are things at the monastery?

JAY

Not bad. How are things with the campaign?

ROBERT

The year's off to a good start. Today I learned it looks like I'll be getting the backing of the teachers' union.

JAY

Congratulations.

ROBERT

Apparently some people are under the illusion I'm competent.

JAY

I'm sure they're –

ROBERT

This time I think all the pieces will fit together.

DOUG

Abe finished his homework, and he's been working *really* hard trying to come up with a great topic for his speech.

Abraham has entered, and he gives glasses of water to Jay and Doug.

ROBERT

(with enthusiasm:)

So what have you come up with, kiddo?

ABRAHAM

I'm still working on it.

ROBERT

How much longer are you going to put this off?

ABRAHAM

I'm not putting it off.

ROBERT

The Mayor, most of the City Council, and some of the most important people in the city are going to be listening to you. Don't you want to impress them?

ABRAHAM

Do I have to?

ROBERT

Abe, you've told me a thousand times
nobody ever listens to you.

DOUG

Oh, good, you were listening.

ROBERT

(ignoring Doug:)

So now you finally have an opportunity
to show folks how you think.

ABRAHAM

But every time I tell you what I think,
you act like I'm stupid.

ROBERT

I've never once said you're stupid.

ABRAHAM

You haven't liked any of my ideas.

ROBERT

I may criticize your thoughts occasionally,
but I never criticize *you*.

ABRAHAM

But what am I besides my thoughts?

DOUG

(to Jay:)

You want to take that one?

Jay lifts a hand, as if to say, "I'll pass."

ROBERT

No, I'd be curious to hear your answer on that.

Jay thinks for a moment and then lifts his glass of water.

JAY

This is a glass filled with water. Your mind is
filled with thoughts. But your mind isn't the
thoughts any more than the glass is the water.

ABRAHAM

But if I'm not my thoughts, why give a speech?

JAY

Now I think we've moved from Buddhism to Judaism.

ROBERT

Do you want to become a man or not?

ABRAHAM

Can't I wait a few more years?

ROBERT

Look, Abe. I know I'm riding you hard, but it's only because I believe in your potential.

ABRAHAM

But what if I don't have the potential to live up to my potential?

ROBERT

Abe, trust me... you have the potential.

ABRAHAM

How do you know?

ROBERT

Dads know.

ABRAHAM

Well, sons don't.

ROBERT

You know, I would've never become New York's Commissioner of Social Services if I had that attitude.

DOUG

Abe, how about if tomorrow night you and Jay and I get together and brainstorm ideas?

(to Robert:)

Okay with you?

Abraham gets out his phone and scrolls over his schedule.

ABRAHAM

I have Hebrew School till 5, then Eva tutors me, then dinner and homework.

DOUG

How about Saturday?

ABRAHAM

Services, tai-chi, and then community service.

JAY

Community service?

ABRAHAM

To get Bar Mitzvahed at my synagogue,
you have to do community service.

ROBERT

I set it up that Abe helps out at
a food kitchen in the Bronx.

ABRAHAM

I'm the cute white kid. With the Black nanny
reading a magazine in the lobby.

ROBERT

You're doing a good deed, and you're
learning about life.

ABRAHAM

I'm free Saturday evening.

DOUG

That works for me.

(to Jay:)

That work for you?

JAY

Unless the Center has plans for me.

DOUG

(to Robert:)

That work for you?

ROBERT

That'd be great. I have an event I have to go to.

JAY

For what?

ROBERT

Who knows? When you're in politics,
every Saturday night there's an event.

ABRAHAM

I'll say goodbye to Grandpa.

Abraham exits down the hall.

DOUG

(to Robert:)

Oh, um, it turns out Luz* won't be able to look after Dad at the Bar Mitzvah.

(*pronounced "Luce")

JAY

Luz?

DOUG

She looks after Dad during the day.

JAY

Oh, right.

DOUG

She's really looking forward to making you meals; she's been reading up on Thai cooking.

JAY

Remind her I'm allowed to eat pizza.

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

I thought we agreed taking Father to the Bar Mitzvah would be a mistake.

DOUG

I thought we just agreed he wouldn't get an aliyah*.

(*pronounced "Ah-lee-yah", an honor involving the Torah service)

ROBERT

That's not what –

DOUG

I'll look after him.

ROBERT

He won't know what's going on.

DOUG

Maybe, maybe not.

ROBERT

He never knows what's going on.

DOUG

I don't assume that.

ROBERT

How do you even know he wants to go?

DOUG

Let's find out.

(calling out:)

Dad, Robert and I have a question for you.

ROBERT

I'll do the asking.

DOUG

Afraid I'll lead the witness?

ROBERT

Oh, I know you'll lead the witness.

DOUG

How about if Jay asks?

JAY

Oh, no. I've just got off a long flight;
I'm not ready to regress into family mode yet.

Ernie enters with Abraham.

ERNIE

I'm in the middle of a meeting; what is it?

(noticing Jay, critically:)

Oh, you're back. I'm glad you're wearing socks.

ROBERT

Sorry to interrupt your meeting, Father.
Do you know how old Abraham is?

ERNIE

(looks at Abraham, then:)

Is it your birthday?

ROBERT

Do you know what he'll be doing in ten days?

ERNIE

If you don't kill him, he's getting Bar Mitzvahed.

ROBERT

Do you have any meetings that day?

DOUG

Or would you like to attend?

ERNIE
Will there be apple sauce?

ROBERT
I don't think so.

DOUG
I'm sure at the party we can –

ERNIE
I like apple sauce.

DOUG
There will be folks there you haven't
seen in years.

ERNIE
Did you consider there might be a reason?

DOUG
Uncle Morris will be there.

ERNIE
Uncle Morris is a putz.

DOUG
Aunt Clara will be there.

ERNIE
A putz with bigger balls.

ROBERT
So you don't want to go.

ERNIE
Of course I want to go. He's my grandson.

ROBERT
It won't interfere with any meetings?

ERNIE
I cleared my schedule.

ROBERT
I just wanted to check.

ERNIE
Any more questions, or is the Inquisition over?

ROBERT
That's it.

Ernie exits.

ROBERT (cont'd)

I'm holding *you* responsible for his behavior.

DOUG

You got it.

ROBERT

(to Abraham:)

You ready, son?

ABRAHAM

I guess.

DOUG

See you Saturday.

ABRAHAM

See you Saturday.

(bowing to Jay:)

'Bye, Uncle Jay.

JAY

'Bye, Abe.

Robert and Abraham exit. Doug shuts the door and turns to Jay.

DOUG

Well?

JAY

(a bit of a wise-ass at times:)

Well, the apartment looks the same, Dad's as annoying as ever, and you and Robert still get on each other's nerves. It's good to be home.

DOUG

It's good to see you.

JAY

Dad's so... old.

DOUG

I know. Sometimes it's hard to believe that this was a man who used to reduce us to tears.

JAY

And then criticize us for crying.

DOUG

How are things at the monastery?

JAY

Ajahn Narin is dying.

DOUG

I'm sorry to hear that.

JAY

And the politics about who will succeed him is disgusting.

DOUG

I thought monks rose above such things.

JAY

Are you kidding? There are fat monks and monks who drink and monks who have affairs and monks who suck up to corrupt businessmen who make large donations as a kind of "spiritual bribery" to distract from them destroying the environment and abusing their workers. There are a lot of great monks, too, especially in the forest monasteries, but well, ever since they allowed human beings to become Buddhists, it hasn't been quite as pure as it could be.

DOUG

So you came home to escape the monastery for a while?

JAY

Did you consider the possibility that I missed you?

DOUG

Yeah... but my therapist thought I was in denial.

JAY

I'm here because when I quieted my mind, my inner voice said "Go home", and I listened.

DOUG

Well then, welcome home.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Saturday evening. Doug, Jay and Abraham are brainstorming, or at least working their way towards it.

ABRAHAM

But it doesn't make sense. I can't vote.
I can't drink. What makes me a man?

JAY

That's a good question. You could explore
that in your speech.

ABRAHAM

But it doesn't have anything to do
with the Torah portion.

DOUG

As long as you can somehow, someway,
somewhere connect what you want to say
to the Torah section, it's okay.

ABRAHAM

But what if I can't somehow, someway, somewhere
connect what I want to say to the Torah section?

JAY

You'll be the first Jew who couldn't.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Jay, do you consider yourself Jewish?

JAY

It's certainly part of my heritage, but I don't
define myself according to any religion.

ABRAHAM

So you don't define yourself as Buddhist?

JAY

I follow the precepts, I have a shaved head,
and I wear a robe. I don't think I also need
to wear a "Hello, I'm Buddhist" name tag.

DOUG

We need to focus.

ABRAHAM

I don't even know if I believe in God.

DOUG

It's part of the Jewish tradition to question things.

ABRAHAM

But if I'm not sure I believe, and if I'm not really becoming a man, why should I be doing this?

JAY

You ask excellent questions.

ABRAHAM

Can I get an excellent answer?

DOUG

(after some thinking:)

It's a great opportunity to kiss Maura Kosovski.

JAY

Who's Maura Kosovski?

DOUG

Remember Jessica Fasman?

JAY

Oh, yeah.

DOUG

That's Maura Kosovski.

ABRAHAM

Who's Jessica Fasman?

DOUG

She was a girl Jay knew with bad acne and knockers so huge you didn't care.

ABRAHAM

Oh. Yeah, that's Maura Kosovski.

DOUG

Jay selected Jessica to be one of the honorees who got to slice his cake at his Bar Mitzvah.

ABRAHAM

Did you kiss her?

JAY

Yep.

ABRAHAM

Did you do more than kiss her?

JAY

Not that night. Have you kissed Maura Kosovski?

ABRAHAM

Not yet.

JAY

Do you want to?

ABRAHAM

(shyly)

Yeah.

DOUG

So you need to get Bar Mitzvahed.

ABRAHAM

(thinks, then:)

What if I'm gay?

JAY

Are you?

ABRAHAM

No. I was being hypothetical.

JAY

You know, it's okay if you are.

ABRAHAM

I know. *But I'm not.*

JAY

Okay.

ABRAHAM

Of course, I really won't know until I kiss Maura Kosovski.

JAY

Has, has your dad talked to you about any of this stuff?

ABRAHAM

What stuff?

JAY

Sex.

ABRAHAM

He gave me a book about intercourse,
procreation and birth control.

JAY

Good.

ABRAHAM

But it didn't talk about how to kiss.

Doug gestures to Jay, as if to say, "Your turn." Jay looks at Doug,
and then gestures the same way to him.

DOUG

Okay, it's like this. When you want to kiss
a girl, spend some time with her, enjoy
each other's company, and if you like her,
take her hand or smile at her or just look at
her for a moment, and let that moment linger.

ABRAHAM

For how long?

DOUG

Long enough.

Abraham looks confused.

JAY

A two count.

ABRAHAM

Got it.

DOUG

And here's the key thing: When you and she
are looking at each other, no matter how strong
the impulse, don't bring up any conversation topics.

ABRAHAM

Why not?

JAY

If you do, you have to restart the whole process.

ABRAHAM

Wow, I'm getting sex education from a monk.

JAY

From your uncles.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Jay, can I ask a personal question?

JAY

You can ask me anything.

ABRAHAM

Do monks masturbate?

DOUG

Not as often as priests.

JAY

Actually, no. Monks are taught to train our minds not to dwell on such things.

ABRAHAM

But what if your mind is filled with those thoughts like all the time?

JAY

I once asked my teacher about this, and he said, and I don't know if he was quoting the Buddha or some other venerable teacher, but he said, "Don't go there."

ABRAHAM

That's all he said?

JAY

Sometimes pragmatism is more effective than profundity.

ABRAHAM

But don't you miss it?

JAY

No.

ABRAHAM

Never?

JAY

Moments, sure, but there are also moments where I miss chili dogs. But if I had a chili dog, I'd miss the life I have more than I miss the chili dog.

ABRAHAM

Good metaphor, Uncle Jay.

JAY

I'm not being metaphorical; I loved chili dogs.

DOUG

He did. Sometimes I'd watch his face light up as the vendor slowly ladled the chili –

JAY

Don't go there.

ABRAHAM

What other foods –

DOUG

I think we should focus on finding a topic.

Silence for a moment, then:

ABRAHAM

Since Abraham, David and Solomon had multiple wives, how come I only get one?

DOUG

Focus.

Silence for a moment, then:

ABRAHAM

When Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, was it iodized?

DOUG

Focus.

ABRAHAM

My dad isn't going to like anything I write.

DOUG

That's possible, but –

ABRAHAM

Did Grandpa like what you wrote?

DOUG

Not a lot.

ABRAHAM

(to Jay:)

Did Grandpa like what you wrote?

JAY
(chuckling a private joke:)

Nope.

ABRAHAM
Did Grandpa like what my dad wrote?

DOUG
No.

ABRAHAM
Is this a Jewish tradition, or just like a family one?

DOUG
I remember Grandpa tearing up your dad's speech, insisting he write a new one, and then changing everything he didn't like.

ABRAHAM
Did he do that with you?

DOUG
Grandpa and your dad, well, by the time they finished "improving" my speech, maybe one per cent of what I had written remained.

ABRAHAM
What was the one per cent?

DOUG
"Good morning". No, wait, they changed that to "Shabbat Shalom".

ABRAHAM
Did everyone rewrite *your* speech, Uncle Jay?

DOUG
I didn't.

JAY
I knew Grandpa and your dad would change everything, so I just wrote something quickly and didn't think about it.

ABRAHAM
And you gave the speech anyway?

Jay looks at Doug.

DOUG
I think he can handle it.

ABRAHAM

Handle what?

JAY

Well, to be honest... I was stoned out of my gourd.

ABRAHAM

Really?

JAY

I stood on the bema*, in my new suit, wearing a beautiful tallit** which your grandma bought me, and I thought, I can see them but they can't see me.

(*pronounced "bee-ma". The bema is the Hebrew word for the "stage" of the temple, where services are conducted and the Torah is read.)

**pronounced "tahl-leet". The tallit is the Jewish prayer shawl given to young people on the occasion of their Bar Mitzvah.)

ABRAHAM

Cool.

JAY

Not really, but I spent a few years thinking it was.

ABRAHAM

(to Doug:)

Did you smoke pot, too, Uncle Doug?

DOUG

I really think we should focus on the speech.

ABRAHAM

Can I ask one last question?

DOUG

If it's a quickie.

ABRAHAM

Did my dad *really* kill my mom?

DOUG

What are you – She died from cancer; you know that.

ABRAHAM

I heard you tell Grandpa once that you thought my dad murdered her soul.

DOUG

I... I just meant, um... When your mom became unhappy in their marriage, sometimes your dad could be... not very nice.

ABRAHAM

So she moved to Hawaii because he wasn't nice?

DOUG

It's very complicated.

ABRAHAM

When I'm a man, will I understand "complicated"?

DOUG

Probably not.

ABRAHAM

Why didn't she ever come back to see me?

JAY

I think leaving you was the biggest regret of her life.

ABRAHAM

Then how come she never even wrote me?

JAY

You know, your mom, the last time she visited me in Thailand, well, she was very sick. And she gave me something to give to you.

Jay looks at Doug. Doug nods. Jay exits to his room.

ABRAHAM

If I had a professional camera that shot video, I could record this moment.

DOUG

And if we lived in Medieval Europe, you could make a wood carving of it.

A beat.

ABRAHAM

Did my mom love me?

DOUG

Yes.

Jay returns with a gift.

JAY

We were going to wait till your Bar Mitzvah day...

DOUG

But maybe you're ready for it now.

Abraham opens it. It's a tallit bag (a small velvet bag containing the tallit). There's an envelope with it. Abraham opens the envelope.

ABRAHAM

"Dear Abraham... I'm sorry I won't be with you on the day you become a man. I hope my gift helps you as you wander through the wilderness of adulthood. Love forever, Mom."

Abraham opens the tallit bag and puts on the tallit.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

She really got this for me?

JAY

She really did.

ABRAHAM

It looks so big on me. How long does it take to grow into this?

DOUG

Generally a lifetime.

JAY

Sometimes several.

ABRAHAM

I guess I have to get Bar Mitzvahed now, huh?

DOUG

It's your decision. It's your life.

Abraham touches the tallit. He looks at Jay and Doug.

ABRAHAM

Okay. Let's focus.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

Two days later: Monday evening. Abraham is introducing Jay to EVA, his Bar Mitzvah tutor. Eva, mid-30's, is from Hungary. Her apparel shows the attitude of someone who has spirit even on a limited budget.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Jay, this is Eva. Eva, this is Uncle Jay.
Don't touch him; you'll despoil him.

EVA

I know that, Abe. You told me a hundred times.
(with maternal warmth:)
You look out for me so well.

ABRAHAM

Well, I, I just don't want you to be
reincarnated as a cockroach.

EVA

(to Jay:)
He's my protector.

ABRAHAM

(overlapping with the above, and agitated)
Is, is Uncle Doug home?

JAY

He should be home soon.

ABRAHAM

Is that like Buddhist soon or American soon?

JAY

Pretty soon.
(to Eva:)
So you're studying to be a cantor.

EVA

Six more months.

JAY

(to Eva:)
What happens when you graduate?

EVA

I get to be an unemployed cantor.

Doug enters through the front door.

JAY
Hey.

DOUG
Hey.
(surprised)
Eva - hi.

EVA
I hope it's -

ABRAHAM
(dissolving)
He hated my speech!

DOUG
No.

ABRAHAM
I I I don't even think he read it. I I gave
it to him last night and and and he didn't
even read it, he just skimmed it, and and
and he said, "I'm disappointed in you".

DOUG
Come here.

Doug hugs Abraham.

ABRAHAM
I don't want to give his stupid speech.

DOUG
What speech?

ABRAHAM
He gave it to me this morning.

JAY
He wrote you a speech?

ABRAHAM
Yes.

DOUG
Can I see it?

ABRAHAM

Okay.

Abraham gets the speech out of his daypack.

EVA

(not referring to the speech:)

I hope you don't mind –

DOUG

No, it's good to see you. I assume you've met Jay.

EVA

Yes, and I promise not to despoil him.

ABRAHAM

Here.

Abraham hands Doug the speech. Jay and Doug look it over.

DOUG

Hmm.

JAY

(reading)

"This week's Torah portion reminds us of the responsibility each of us has to fight for social justice, even if it means standing up to the Pharaohs of our time."

DOUG

Sounds like a campaign speech.

ABRAHAM

If the speech is a hit, I think my dad wants me to get Bar Mitzvahed all across the state.

DOUG

It's not a bad speech, Abraham.

ABRAHAM

It's not *my* speech. They aren't *my* thoughts.

DOUG

Yes but –

ABRAHAM

He hates how I think. I know I'm the the glass and and not the water, but if if if –

DOUG

Calm down.

ABRAHAM

If the water's always being rejected,
what good is the glass?

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG

Send him up.

(to Abraham:)

It's –

ABRAHAM

I know. Who wants water?

Doug, Jay and Eva look at Abraham a moment and raise their hands.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Three waters coming up.

Abraham exits into the kitchen.

EVA

He's really stressed out.

DOUG

I see.

EVA

You'll talk to Robert?

DOUG

I'll talk, but it'll be unprecedented if he listens.

(to Jay:)

What do you think we should do?

JAY

I don't know.

DOUG

I thought you went to Thailand to seek wisdom.

JAY

And I've become wise enough to admit,
"I don't know."

A knock on the door. Doug opens it. Robert enters.

DOUG

Hey.

ROBERT

Hi. Where's Abe?

DOUG

In the kitchen.

ROBERT

Oh hi, Eva. Great to see you, as always.

EVA

Good to see you, too.

ROBERT

And I want you to know, you've been doing an outstanding job helping Abe.

EVA

I'm just doing an okay job; he's an outstanding boy.

ROBERT

If you ever need a reference, don't hesitate to ask.

EVA

Thank you.

ROBERT

It's nothing. People have helped me out; I like to help people out.

(to Doug:)

Can I have a word with you?

DOUG

I'm right here.

EVA

I guess I should be going.

DOUG

No. Stay. Please.

EVA

I'll help Abe in the kitchen.

Eva exits into the kitchen. Robert waits till she's gone, then:

ROBERT

What the hell do you think you're doing?

DOUG

What do you mean?

ROBERT

Did you think I'd actually go along with that speech you had him write?

DOUG

I have no idea what's in his speech.

ROBERT

Don't give me that crap.

JAY

We never came up with an idea.

DOUG

He was convinced you'd reject anything he wrote. We never got anywhere.

ROBERT

Abe, let's go!

(to Doug:)

You really expect me to believe that speech was *his* idea?

Abraham and Eva enter. Abraham has glasses of water for Doug and Jay. Eva has a glass for herself.

ABRAHAM

Hi, Dad.

ROBERT

(as if it were a typical day:)

Hey, kiddo, let's go home.

ABRAHAM

Dad... Is it, is it, is it –

ROBERT

What is it, son?

ABRAHAM

Is it, is it okay if I give my speech instead of yours?

ROBERT

You didn't like the speech I wrote you?

ABRAHAM

You wrote it before last night, didn't you?

ROBERT

Well, given how much you were procrastinating,
I didn't know if you'd *ever* write a speech.

DOUG

Can I see your speech, Abe?

ABRAHAM

(hesitating:)

Well, I...

ROBERT

Are you afraid to show it to them?

Abraham gets his speech out of his pack and gives it to Doug and Jay.

ABRAHAM

It's still a rough draft.

JAY

"Why I Don't Belong Here." Intriguing title.

DOUG

"I know I'm supposed to impress you with
my wisdom, but all I have are questions."
The whole rest of the speech is questions.

ROBERT

You like this one?

DOUG

"Why do I need to marry a Jewish girl
if Moses married a shikse?"

ROBERT

And this.

DOUG

"Why did God keep hardening Pharaoh's heart?
Doesn't that seem mean?"

ROBERT

(to Abe:)

Do you really want to give a speech
where you're calling God mean?

ABRAHAM

I'm not –

DOUG

"Why should we pray to a God who acts mean?
Is that an act of faith or intimidation?"

ABRAHAM

I'm just asking questions.

EVA

It's a Jewish tradition.

ROBERT

I just don't think this is the right speech
for this occasion.

ABRAHAM

You just want a speech you can quote
on the campaign trail.

ROBERT

Don't you see I'm trying to help you?

ABRAHAM

Like Grandpa did when he tore up *your* speech?

ROBERT

(momentarily stung, but quickly recovering)
He *helped* me. He gave me *useful* suggestions.
But apparently you're smarter than I was
at your age. You don't need to listen
when someone wants to help you.

ABRAHAM

You don't want a son; you want a sound-bite.

ROBERT

Do you want to become a man or not?!

ABRAHAM

I don't know.

ROBERT

Well, you have until Saturday to decide.
And you can give whichever speech you want.

ABRAHAM

Really?

ROBERT

If you want to give your speech, if you want to risk looking like a fool of in front of your family, your friends, and some of the most important people in New York, it's your decision. I won't tell you what to do.

DOUG

Why not just cut off his balls while you're at it?!... Sorry. I didn't mean to say that out loud.

ABRAHAM

(to Robert:)

I'll give your speech.

ROBERT

No, think about it. Now let's go.

(to Eva:)

I was hoping this could be private, but my brother preferred it this way.

EVA

Do you know why God kept hardening Pharaoh's heart?

ROBERT

No, why?

EVA

I've never figured it out either. It's always troubled me.

ROBERT

Well, we'll see you all Saturday morning, unless Abe decides not to become a man.

DOUG

(to Abe:)

Call me if you need me.

Abe just exits.

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

Don't get between me and my son. I let him come over here so –

DOUG

So you don't have to come home early on his nanny's nights off.

ROBERT

So you'll have someone to love.

Robert exits.

JAY

Shouldn't the Torah portion about God hardening Pharaoh's heart be around Passover?

EVA

No, it's in late January. Go figure.

DOUG

At the risk of sounding Christian, I'd like to change my water into wine. Eva?

EVA

Well, I can't stay –

DOUG

One glass?

EVA

Well, if you insist.

Doug takes her glass of water.

DOUG

Be back in a minute.

JAY

Um.

DOUG

Oh, right. A monk can't be left alone with a woman.

EVA

Why not?

JAY

I didn't make the rules.

Ernie enters from the hall. As he comes down the hall...

ERNIE

Ellie?... Ellie?!

(entering)

Where's Ellie?

DOUG

Umm... she's visiting her sister, Dad.

ERNIE

Oh, right. Those two are attached at the hip.

EVA

Hello, Mr. Silver.

ERNIE

Hello.

EVA

I'm Eva, your grandson's tutor.

ERNIE

I know. You're the one with the accent.

DOUG

Be back in a second.

Doug exits into the kitchen.

EVA

You look good, Mr. Silver.

ERNIE

Your family lives in Hungary.

EVA

You remembered.

ERNIE

If my sons had tits, I'd remember more about them. I'm going back to my meeting.

Ernie starts to leave.

JAY

(quickly)

Dad.

ERNIE

What?

JAY

I, I learned today that my English translation of the teachings of Ajahn Narin is going to be published.

ERNIE
(to Eva, disparaging Jay:)
Have you heard – he's a monk.

EVA
I know. You must be proud of him.

ERNIE
Proud?! He turned Catholic on me.

JAY
I'm Buddhist, Dad, not Catholic.

ERNIE
What's wrong with being Jewish?

JAY
I'm not *not* Jewish. Buddhism has given me peace.

ERNIE
Religion's supposed to give you peace?
Since when?

JAY
Dad –

ERNIE
Be a Catholic Buddhist if you want.
But it's not our religion.

JAY
Dad, growing up, you went to synagogue
three times a year and spent the rest of the
year complaining how stupid the rabbi was.

ERNIE
That's our religion.

For a moment, silence. Ernie turns to go.

EVA
How are you, Mr. Silver?

ERNIE
Awful. Life's hell. Hell.

EVA
I'm sorry to hear that.

ERNIE

I miss my wife.

EVA

I'm sure she'll be back soon.

ERNIE

I think she's dead. She would've called.

EVA

I'm sure she'll call –

ERNIE

I want to be with her at least seven days a week. Without her... It's like serving you food without any condiments. When you go out for a cup of coffee, that gives you some salt and pepper. Having a bowl of cornflakes with someone is better than having a steak by yourself.

Doug has entered with a bottle of wine and two glasses.

EVA

You're right, Mr. Silver. You're right.

ERNIE

I'm going back to my meeting.

(to Doug:)

If anyone from Venus calls...

Ask if they've heard from my wife.

DOUG

You got it.

ERNIE

(to Eva:)

Nice to see you with your clothes on.

EVA

(as Ernie exits:)

Umm –

Ernie exits.

DOUG

Sorry to take so long. Trouble with the cork.

JAY

I wish you'd use one on Dad... Sorry. Um, I really should prepare tomorrow's dharma lesson.

EVA

What's the lesson on?

JAY

The challenge of detachment and acceptance.
I may start with "family".

EVA

I'd love to attend one of your talks.

JAY

I'd be delighted if you came.

EVA

Really? I thought monks weren't supposed
to care about such things. I thought
you were supposed to have equanimity.

JAY

I do. I'd also be delighted if you didn't come.

Jay exits. Doug hands Eva a glass of wine.

DOUG

L'chiam*.

(*pronounced "Le-chy-um", with a guttural Yiddish "ch".)

EVA

L'chiam.

(sips:)

Nice wine. Sweet.

(sniffs:)

What is it?

DOUG

It's a Riesling.

EVA

Ah. That would explain the slight bouquet of Nazism.

DOUG

So... How have you been?

EVA

I'm okay, but I'm concerned about Abe.

DOUG

Me, too.

EVA

He's so – Every time I see him,
he's more and more pressured.

DOUG

Well, Bar Mitzvahs can be –

EVA

A way to connect to God.

DOUG

Really? I don't think my rabbi ever
mentioned that to me.

EVA

I believe you. Almost every child I tutor sees
their Bar or Bat Mitzvah as a series of tasks to
complete. For me, well, this may sound strange
but, the longer I'm in New York, the more grateful
I am to have grown up in a country where you couldn't
be Jewish, at least "out loud", for half a century.

DOUG

That doesn't sound appealing.

EVA

(overlapping a bit:)

I remember my parents telling me about the
first Seder they attended after the Communists
left. "Once we were slaves; now we are free."
It, it wasn't just a history lesson. And it just
made me so curious about, what is it about
Judaism that other people would be so threatened
by it? I had to find out, and I had to become
a Bat Mitzvah. My parents didn't push me;
they were still trying to figure out for themselves
what it meant to be Jewish. They still weren't
sure it was *safe*. But me, well, I *wanted* to be
a Jew. The whole idea filled me with wonder.

DOUG

God, I've missed you.

EVA

Well you, you didn't have to completely
avoid me the last few months.

DOUG

Well, I don't know if you've noticed, but
I'm really good at running away from things.

EVA

I noticed.

DOUG

And after all, you *did* dump me.

EVA

No, I didn't. You dumped *me*.

DOUG

No, you dumped me.

EVA

No, you dumped me.

DOUG

I did?

EVA

You said if Robert or Abe found out about us, it could get messy. You dumped me.

DOUG

But *you* were the one who suggested we should cool things off for a while. I got the message. You were dumping me.

EVA

What message? Ernie had just walked into your bedroom and seen us having sex. I was freaked out.

DOUG

Well me too!

EVA

I needed reassurance, you idiot.

DOUG

But everything you said made sense.

EVA

When a freaked-out woman makes sense, that's a clear sign we need reassurance; don't American men understand anything?

DOUG

I thought I was being reasonable.

EVA

You were; it was disgusting.

DOUG

Sorry.

EVA

If you missed me, why didn't you call me?

DOUG

Yeah well –

EVA

You scare too easily.

DOUG

I know.

EVA

If you know it, why don't you do something about it?

DOUG

If I've learned nothing else as a therapist, it's that self-awareness and *acting* on self-awareness are two completely different concepts. I... I...

EVA

Well?

Doug approaches Eva and takes her hand. They look at each other deeply.

EVA (cont'd)

One, one thousand; two, one thousand.

DOUG

My nephew has a big mouth.

EVA

Shhh. If you start a new topic, we'll have to warm up all over again.

They kiss.

DOUG

You're a really good kisser, you know that?

EVA

(some shyness coming through)

Well, the wine, it helps me pucker.

DOUG

Eva, Eva, I'm still –

EVA

Grieving about your divorce, your mother's death –

DOUG

I'm just going through a difficult time.

EVA

I'm going back to Hungary in six months.
I don't want a commitment. I just want
to know you can't live without me.

They kiss again. It's more passionate. Jay enters.

JAY

(startled)

Oh.

Doug and Eva stop kissing. They look a bit embarrassed.

DOUG

Eva and I, we, uh –

JAY

I'm just glad I didn't catch you eating chili dogs.

Jay picks up a book and exits, as...

The lights fade.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

The middle of the night. Doug is eating some ice cream. Jay enters from the hall.

DOUG

Hey.

JAY

Hey.

DOUG

What are you doing up in the middle of the night?

JAY

I think my inner clock is stuck somewhere between Thailand and New York City. And you?

DOUG

Woke up, started thinking about the Bar Mitzvah in a few hours, and I started craving ice cream. And look, here's ice cream. Sometimes the universe provides.

JAY

Ah, the wonderful world of craving.

DOUG

Would you like some?

JAY

I eat one meal a day, remember?

DOUG

It's really good.

JAY

I'm not hungry.

DOUG

I'm not hungry, either. I'm just craving.

Doug eats a spoonful.

DOUG (cont'd)

(with exaggerated pleasure)

Mmm-mmm.

And another spoonful.

DOUG (cont'd)
(with more pleasure)

Mmm-mmm.

And another.

DOUG (cont'd)
(with delirious pleasure)

Mmm-mmm.

Jay exits into the kitchen.

DOUG (cont'd)
You're making the right decision!

Jay returns with an empty bowl and a spoon.

JAY
Ah, air. I love air so much.

Jay sits. He begins to take a spoonful of air but decides to put the bowl near his nose. He inhales.

JAY (cont'd)
Ah, the aroma.

Jay eats his first spoonful.

JAY (cont'd)
(with pleasure)
Mmm-mmm.

And another spoonful.

JAY (cont'd)
(with more pleasure)
Mmm-mmm.

And another.

JAY (cont'd)
(with delirious pleasure)
Mmm-mmmmmmmmmmm.

Jay lifts another spoonful but decides to put it and the bowl down.

JAY
No, I'm full.

By the way, somewhere around Jay's second spoonful, Ernie has entered. His sons haven't noticed him.

ERNIE

Give me some of that.

Jay hands the empty bowl and spoon to Ernie. Because Ernie has a bit of the shakes, he has trouble feeding himself, but he takes a spoonful. He tastes the air, letting it linger on his tongue as if it to truly appreciate it, and swallows.

ERNIE (cont'd)

It needs apple sauce.

(to Doug, with annoyance:)

Where'd you move the bathroom?

Doug gets up to show him.

DOUG

It's down the hall. Where the light is.

ERNIE

(exiting)

If you move it again, I'll fire you.

Ernie exits.

DOUG

(calling after him:)

If I ever want to be fired, now I know what to do.

JAY

I'm surprised he isn't driving you nuts.

DOUG

He seems that bad?

JAY

No, you're just driven nuts easily.

DOUG

It's not that bad. Luz does a *great* job caring for him during the day. He mostly watches TV. Loves the SyFy channel for some reason.

JAY

Well, thanks for looking after him.

DOUG

Well, I just think every kid has a desire to give back, even if we didn't get.

JAY

So... Eva.

DOUG

Yeah.

JAY

She's definitely easy on the eyes.

DOUG

I thought you weren't to supposed to notice such things.

JAY

I don't pick flowers, but I still appreciate a good tulip. Are you two serious?

DOUG

Who knows? We dated last summer, and Abe asked if we were dating and I just couldn't tell him – and well, with the Bar Mitzvah and Dad and Robert – it just seemed safer to avoid each other.

JAY

You didn't seem to avoid her the other night.

DOUG

I like tulips, sue me.

JAY

So –

DOUG

You know, a few months after Barbara left me for, for someone who *didn't* remind her of her father, I tried on-line dating, and, you'd be amazed how many women say they're looking for a man with "no baggage". I don't want to pretend I have no baggage. I have lots of baggage. And you know the difference between physical baggage and emotional baggage? It's really hard to lose emotional baggage! Sometimes I'm tempted to fly around the world in the hope that some airline will lose my emotional baggage, but so far, wherever I go, the bags keep showing up. Anyway, sometimes I'm with Eva and it's... it's like, it's like we have matching luggage.

JAY

I hope things work out.

DOUG

Do you think Abe's going to get through this okay?

JAY

We did.

DOUG

Did we?

JAY

I think once the Bar Mitzvah is over –

DOUG

I'm not so sure. Did you see the look in Robert's eyes when Abe resisted giving Robert's speech?

JAY

Oh yeah.

DOUG

I saw that look a lot when Robert gave himself full and complete permission to destroy Jane.

JAY

Jane was a very troubled person.

DOUG

I know. She was very weak, which is how Robert liked it.

JAY

She humiliated him publicly.

DOUG

I know but –

JAY

Are you jealous of him?

DOUG

Of course I am.

JAY

Oh good, I was afraid you'd answer "No".

DOUG

His name's in the paper all the time. A new plan to help the homeless. Or fighting for affordable housing. Promoting after-school programs for kids whose parents have full-time jobs. I'd like to think everything he does is cynically motivated – but that's *my* dark side speaking. I just –

JAY

Abe will be okay.

DOUG

I tell myself that all the time. But I'm not sure I should trust that voice. It sounds too much like Mom, telling us everything will be okay after Dad had one of his tantrums.

JAY

You know, you might want to try meditating again.

DOUG

I tried, Jay, I really did, but it just didn't work for me. I gave it a half-assed effort but only got a quarter-assed result.

JAY

Well, it's almost dawn. It's *my* time to meditate.

Jay starts to go.

DOUG

Jay, do you consider yourself a member of this family or not?

JAYA

Why do I sense there's more to that question than just that question?

DOUG

You avoid *any* responsibility to the family –

JAY

Oh, cut the crap.

DOUG

Is that something the Buddha once said?

JAY

Actually, it's almost everything the Buddha said.

DOUG

I... I could've used your help at Mom's funeral.

JAY

So *that's* what's behind the question.

DOUG

Dad was a mess, and Rob wanted to just put him away, and since he had power-of-attorney he didn't have to listen to me, not that he ever does, and if I hadn't offered to move in –

JAY

Doug –

DOUG

I know I have two brothers, but I can't tell you how often I feel like an only child.

JAY

Everyone in this family feels like an only child.

DOUG

Jay –

JAY

Mom asked me not to attend.

DOUG

What?!

JAY

During our last call. She went on and on about how expensive it'd be for me to come, and when I said I didn't care then she, she finally admitted that if I came to the funeral, Dad would be embarrassed by me.

DOUG

She –

JAY

She was very calm about it, in her best, "Let's not make waves" voice. Her final words were... "I know you'll understand."

DOUG

Why didn't you tell me?

JAY

I didn't want to give you more reasons
to hate them.

DOUG

If Robert, well – I may need your help.

JAY

I don't form alliances. That's why I had
to take a break from the monastery.

Doug takes his bowl and starts to go as he says:

DOUG

Oh. Okay then.

JAY

You know, you weren't a perfect older brother, either.

DOUG

I taught you how to catch.

JAY

Ehh.

DOUG

Fine.

JAY

I'm not saying No. I just want to make sure
that whatever I do, I do skillfully.

DOUG

That seems reasonable.

(beat, then:)

Now I know why Eva hates "reasonable."

Doug exits into the kitchen.

The lights fade.

ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

Saturday morning. Before the scene begins, we hear a 13-year-old boy's voice singing the Torah portion about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.* The voice is not extraordinary, nor is the singing flawless, but it is human and heartfelt.

(*This is mentioned in *Parashat Vaera*, which consists of *Exodus 6:2* through *9:35*, and in the following section, *Parashat Bo*, which consists of *Exodus 10:1* through *13:16*. These portions are usually read in January, depending on the variations in the Hebrew calendar.)

The lights come up on:

A synagogue, which can be represented simply by a podium.

Abraham approaches the podium, the speech in his hand. He wears a handsome suit and his tallit. There is not a cell in his body which feels comfort. He places the speech on the podium. He looks out at the assembled. He looks at the speech.

ABRAHAM

(mumbling a bit:)

"Thi-thi-this week's –

(clears his throat, then:)

"This week's Torah portion reminds us of...
of the responsibility each of us has...

(looks out, then back at his speech:)
each of us has to...

He looks out at the assembled. He isn't sure what to do next.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Does... does anybody here really think I'm a man?...

Do any of the men here look at me and say

"That is me"?..... Look at me. I I I I think I know
who I'm supposed to be. And and if I... pretend

to be that person... so that men will accept me.....

Does that make me a man?... Is, is that all a man is?

Abraham, too scared to continue like this, looks at his speech.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

"...of the responsibility each of us has to
fight for social justice, even if it means
standing up to the Pharaohs of our time."

Abraham looks out again.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Why don't people cry when they read the newspaper?... Why don't people cry – always?... Do you... do you *have* to have your heart hardened to become a man?

Abraham looks at his speech.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

"The pharaohs of our time. Fur-furthermore, as citizens, each of us –..."

Abraham looks out again.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Why am I here?! Who should I serve?!

Abraham looks at his speech.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Furthermore...

Abraham looks out again.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Can I trust God? Does God... like me?

Abraham is on the cusp of tears but doesn't want to cry.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I... I, I am not a man. I don't know if I *want* to be a man... I, I...
I don't know what God wants of me!

Abraham runs away.

The lights fade. We hear the thirteen year-old boy's voice singing the prayer one chants after reading a Torah portion. After he finishes, we hear congregants chant "Amen".

ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

A short time later, at the Silver residence. Doug, Jay and Ernie enter.

DOUG
(calling out:)

Abe?

JAY

Abe?

DOUG
The doorman told us you're here...
Your father's not with us.

Abraham appears. His eyes and face look like many tears have been shed.

ABRAHAM

Hi.

Slowly, very slowly, Ernie approaches Abraham, using his walker. Ernie stares at Abraham. There is complete silence in the room.

ERNIE
(pounding his walker with exuberance)
That was the best Bar Mitzvah speech ever!!!

Ernie walks towards his room.

ERNIE (cont'd)
I want a copy to send to everyone on Qwertio!...
Arrogant assholes.

Ernie exits.

ABRAHAM
Did I embarrass the entire family?

JAY
Over the last few months, as I lived my days
in a hut in the Thai forest, I wondered if it
was truly worth flying nine thousand miles
just for this Bar Mitzvah... It was worth it.

ABRAHAM
Are people upset at me?

DOUG

I think "stunned" is more like it.

JAY

For a moment, nobody knew what to do.

DOUG

Then the rabbi ad-libbed something
"meaningful", which I think he got from
Rabbinic Quotes for All Occasions.

JAY

The most important thing is... I think you
scored points with Maura Kosovski.

DOUG

I didn't know you could run so fast.

ABRAHAM

I'm just glad I had cab fare.
He's going to kill me, isn't he?

DOUG

Nah, there were too many witnesses.

ABRAHAM

Where is he?

DOUG

He stayed behind to shepherd everyone to the
party and to explain the situation to the guests.
Not that any of us understand the situation.
So what's the situation?

ABRAHAM

I... I just couldn't turn my dad into God.

DOUG

He may have trouble with that.

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG (cont'd)

Send him up.

ABRAHAM

Anybody thirsty?

DOUG

I'm not.

JAY

Neither am I.

ABRAHAM

Doctors say you're supposed to drink eight glasses of water a day.

JAY

I wouldn't want to waste water if I'm not thirsty.

ABRAHAM

Wh-wh-what should I do?

DOUG

Do you want to stay in the living room or hide?

ABRAHAM

I don't know. What do *you* think I should do?

DOUG

I think... I think I don't know how to live your life better than you do.

Abraham thinks and then exits. Doug walks to the door.

JAY

Doug.

DOUG

Yeah?

JAY

When the Buddha advised compassion for all living things, he wasn't excluding siblings.

A knock on the door.

DOUG

I'll try.

There's another knock. Doug opens the door. Robert enters.

ROBERT

Is he here?

DOUG

Can we talk?

ROBERT

Doug, I know it's Jewish to answer a question with a question, but I'd really like a straight answer.

DOUG

Yes, he's here.

ROBERT

Thanks. Did you put him up to that?

DOUG

No.

ROBERT

(dubious)

Then who did?

DOUG

Maybe *he* did.

ROBERT

Oh, no. My son wouldn't do that on his own.

JAY

Maybe he's more than your son.

ROBERT

(raising his voice:)

And what role did *you* have in this?!

JAY

If the game is, "Which brother can raise his voice more?", you win.

ROBERT

Okay. You're right. I'm a bit stressed. Why? Who knows? Maybe, just maybe, it's because I have two hundred people on their way to the party, and they expect the Bar Mitzvah boy to be there.

DOUG

Rob, I know this is a rough day, but –

ROBERT

(calling out:)

Abe, get out here!

DOUG

Robert, he's terrified of you.

ROBERT

Abraham has lots of friends, and I have lots of friends. Unlike some parents, my goal is not to be his best buddy.

DOUG

He's in the middle of a trauma.

ROBERT

You know, Doug, sometimes I think if you were on the Titanic, rather than yell "Lifeboats!", you'd want everyone to discuss their feelings about hitting an iceberg.

DOUG

Okay, I'm out of tools.

ROBERT

(calling out:)

Abe! I don't appreciate that you're trying to make me come in and get you.

Ernie enters, looks around.

ERNIE

Has the meeting started yet?

JAY

I think it's just about to begin.

ERNIE

That boy. Very smart. You should hire him.

ROBERT

He's my son.

ERNIE

Then don't pay him too much.

ROBERT

(yelling down the hall:)

Abraham!... I'm losing patience!

DOUG

I can understand how you're angry, I really can, but –

ROBERT

Doug, among the many things I don't get about you is that you constantly think you understand me. You *don't!*

Abraham enters.

ABRAHAM

Don't yell at him because you're angry at me!

ROBERT

I'm disappointed in you, Abe. Do you realize you embarrassed me in front of my guests?

ABRAHAM

Your speech! Your son! Your guests! Why didn't *you* go up there and get Bar Mitzvahed?!

ROBERT

If you want to have a tantrum, you can have it tomorrow. But right now there are two hundred people expecting you at the party. Let's go.

Abraham looks at Doug and Jay.

ABRAHAM

Do I have to?

ROBERT

They don't get a vote. Now you're coming with me, you'll apologize for your immature behavior –

ABRAHAM

I don't think I was immature, and I'm not sorry.

ROBERT

You'll apologize anyway.

ABRAHAM

I'm not going to lie.

DOUG

You'll never make it in politics.

ROBERT

Shut up!

ABRAHAM

(to Robert:)

I don't like you.

ROBERT

I didn't like my father at your age, either.

ERNIE

Why not?

ABRAHAM

You don't respect *me*.

ROBERT

Of course I do. Just because –

ABRAHAM

And I don't respect you, either.

ROBERT

Now that's enough.

ERNIE

What did I do that would make any of my children not like me?

ROBERT

Not now.

ERNIE

Who put *you* in charge of the meeting?

ROBERT

(to Doug and Jay:)

Will one of you deal with him because I can't.

ERNIE

(to Doug and Jay:)

Why did he just refer to me in the third person? Did I just leave the room?

ROBERT

Father, why don't you go back to your room? Mom's there waiting for you.

ERNIE

(exploding with unbridled rage:)

Are you trying to fuck with my head?!

Are you?! ARE YOU?!

(after Robert doesn't respond:)

I want an answer!

ROBERT

No, Father, I'm not.

ERNIE

I demand your respect! *I demand your respect!*

ROBERT

I'm sorry I said what I said. I was misinformed.

DOUG

He was misinformed, Dad. That's all.

ERNIE

I'd never act like that to my father...
I never would've dared.

JAY

It's okay, Dad.

ROBERT

(to Abraham:)

See what you caused.

ABRAHAM

What *I* caused?

ROBERT

Yes, what *you* –

ABRAHAM

You're a monster.

ROBERT

Have I ever hit you?

ABRAHAM

No.

ROBERT

Have I ever deprived you of food or shelter?

ABRAHAM

No.

ROBERT

Have I ever deprived you of clothes
or school supplies, or an allowance
to do with as you please?

ABRAHAM

No.

ROBERT

What a monster I am.

ABRAHAM

Whenever I'm not who you want me to be,
you try to kill my soul.

ROBERT

Now listen you. You have a good life, and
if you don't appreciate it, God damn you.
In case you haven't noticed, you have it
better than 99% of the people on this planet.

ERNIE

It's a stupid planet.

ROBERT

Not now.

(to Abraham:)

What do you expect from me? You want me
to forget everything I've learned and let you
end up like the losers most adults become?
Like your Uncle Doug, who gives advice to
people all day on how to live their lives but
when his life got tough he just retreated home?
Like your Uncle Jay, who found inner peace
as long as he doesn't have to touch the daily
muck of life? You picked the wrong father
if you want to be treated like a victim.
You may not like how I treat you, but
I never pity you. Now let's go.

ABRAHAM

No!

ROBERT

Now!

ABRAHAM

You want to kill my soul, just like you did to Mom!

ROBERT

If you don't like me as a father, get another one.

ABRAHAM

I want Uncle Doug.

ROBERT
Uncle Doug isn't competent to be your father.

ABRAHAM
Well neither are you!

Robert slaps Abraham.

ROBERT
People are waiting. Let's go.

For a moment, nobody moves.

DOUG
Abe, you can spend the day here if you want.

ROBERT
I told you –

DOUG
You'll both cool off.

ROBERT
Abe, you're coming with me. *Now.*

Robert grabs Abraham's arm. Doug lunges at Robert. They begin to fight.

ABRAHAM
Stop it! Stop it!

Ernie, who is standing, begins to pound his walker.

ERNIE
(overlapping with the above:)
Family! Family!! *Family!!!*

Ernie collapses. Doug and Robert stop and notice. Jay catches Ernie, as...

The lights quickly fade.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Early Sunday morning. In a focused light, Jay sits on a cushion and meditates. He breathes. And breathes. Then his face begins to contort into one of complete anguish, like a Greek mask of tragedy. He continues to breathe. His face calms. He continues to breathe. The anguish rises again, he breathes, and his face calms. He begins to sob. He continues to breathe. A sense of complete calm comes over his body. He continues to breathe.

(Note: It's important that Jay feels no aversions to these feelings; he just watches them flow by, like clouds in the sky.)

The lights spread to reveal the rest of the Silver's living room. Ernie enters the room and walks towards where the window is. He still uses a walker, and his steps take more effort. He continues with determination until he arrives at the window.

ERNIE

My wife was a wonderful lover... for an Earth woman. Last night, last night I was introduced to the ways of lovemaking on the planet Qwertio. The women have follicles inside their private area which caress and stimulate. It was quite an experience. Still... I miss my wife. She rarely got too excited in bed, but she usually seemed pleased. That was reason enough to love her. The women on Qwertio don't understand what men want from women. At least, Earth men. If you want to feel like saffron, you don't want to be treated like a bay leaf. And if you *want* to be treated like a bay leaf, you don't want a woman to look at you like you're nutmeg. My wife knew how much spice I could handle, no more, no less. She adapted to my flavoring. She never complained about my palate. Now my cupboard is bare. The market is closed. And my grocery list is filled with yearning.

Ernie walks back to his room. Jay continues to breathe.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Sunday evening. Abraham is talking to Doug.

ABRAHAM

He's making me write everyone who came to the Bar Mitzvah a letter of apology.

DOUG

Well, I can understand –

ABRAHAM

I went to the damn party.

DOUG

You sat and sulked the entire time.

ABRAHAM

You can lead a horse to a Bar Mitzvah, but you can't make him do the hora.

DOUG

That's probably why so few horses get circumcised.

ABRAHAM

I wrote a letter, and he ripped it up.

DOUG

He's probably still –

ABRAHAM

This is the letter he wants me to sign.

Abraham shows Doug the letter. Doug reads it.

DOUG

Wow. This is some letter.

ABRAHAM

I think he stole it from Galileo's having to deny the Earth revolved around the sun.

DOUG

I can see why you're in the gifted program.

ABRAHAM

He took all my Bar Mitzvah money.

DOUG

What?

ABRAHAM

He went into my desk drawer and took all my Bar Mitzvah checks, and he said I can't have them until I sign *that* letter.

DOUG

How much did you get?

ABRAHAM

I'm just glad there's no electoral commission limiting Bar Mitzvah presents.

DOUG

Well, you know, given that you ran away, technically I'm not sure you were Bar Mitzvahed.

ABRAHAM

According to the rabbi and Wikipedia, I was. Nowhere in the Torah or Talmud does it say you have to do anything except turn thirteen. It doesn't mention anything about a speech.

DOUG

I know but –

ABRAHAM

I said my Torah portion and Haftorah. The only part of the ritual I didn't have was... was... the blessing of the father.

DOUG

I'm sorry.

ABRAHAM

Will you be my dad?

DOUG

You already have a dad.

ABRAHAM

Can I take a DNA test to make sure?

DOUG

Abe –

ABRAHAM

Abraham.

DOUG

Right. Abraham.

ABRAHAM

He hit me.

DOUG

He lost his temper once and slapped you.
Just a slap. I mean, it's still a bad thing.
But it's one bad thing.

ABRAHAM

He's blaming me for Grandpa's stroke.

DOUG

He didn't have a stroke; he fainted.
His blood pressure fluctuates, and and –

ABRAHAM

But if I hadn't –

DOUG

It wasn't your fault.

ABRAHAM

But –

DOUG

I forgot to give him his morning meds.
We were rushing to get to the synagogue
on time, and and – it wasn't your fault.

The house phone rings during the above. Doug answers it.

DOUG (cont'd)

Thanks.

(to Abraham:)

Relax, it's Uncle Jay.

ABRAHAM

Wouldn't you like me to live with you? When
Uncle Jay leaves, you'll have a free bedroom.

DOUG

I don't think your dad would give permission.

ABRAHAM

I could become an emancipated minor.

DOUG

You have to be at least fourteen
and financially independent.

ABRAHAM

Oh. If I commit a crime, can I be sent
to reform school?

DOUG

Your dad's a brilliant lawyer.
He'd find a way to prevent that.

ABRAHAM

What if I commit a really *big* crime?

DOUG

I understand the impulse, Abraham, I really do,
but you see, in our justice system, there's just
no way to guarantee that if you commit a crime,
you'll absolutely go to jail.

ABRAHAM

Damn.

DOUG

Wouldn't you miss anything about living with your dad?

ABRAHAM

(thinks, then:)

I'd miss my nanny. Maybe she could help
Luz be Grandpa's nanny.

A knock on the door. Doug opens it. Jay enters.

DOUG

Hey.

JAY

Hey. Hi, Abe.

ABRAHAM

My name's Abraham. I don't want
to be called Abe anymore.

JAY

Hi, Abraham.

DOUG

Rob is making Abraham send everyone a letter of apology Rob wrote. And he's holding Abraham's Bar Mitzvah money hostage.

JAY

Wow.

ABRAHAM

And I can't come here anymore without him.

JAY

(looking around:)

Is Robert –

ABRAHAM

You won't tell him I was here, will you?

JAY

I don't lie, Abraham. But I won't tell him anything I don't wish to tell him.

DOUG

Speaking of Bar Mitzvah presents, we haven't given you ours yet.

ABRAHAM

I'm sure my dad won't let me keep it.

DOUG

Your dad's an asshole.

Doug gets the gift.

ABRAHAM

Do you think my dad's an asshole, Uncle Jay?

JAY

I think once you label someone –

ABRAHAM

I know, I know, he's the glass, not the water. Do you think a lot of his water's asshole water?

JAY

Umm –

ABRAHAM

Would you want to drink it?

JAY

First I would purify it as best as I could.

Doug hands the gift to Abraham.

DOUG

Here. From both of us.

ABRAHAM

I thought Uncle Jay wasn't allowed to have money.

JAY

I actually got you something else.

Doug looks at Jay. He didn't know this. Abraham opens the present.

ABRAHAM

Oh my god! This is the camera I wanted!
How'd you know?!

DOUG

It was actually our second choice, but we
didn't like any of the sweaters we saw.

ABRAHAM

Thank you, Uncle Doug.

Abraham hugs Doug. Abraham gives a wai towards Jay.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

Thank you, Uncle Jay.

JAY

Don't move; I'll be right back.

Jay exits down the hall.

DOUG

You probably shouldn't take that home for
a while. Your dad could make hell for all of us.

ABRAHAM

Did he do that to my mom?

DOUG

(thinks, then:)

Your dad likes to win.

Jay returns with a present. It is wrapped in simple brown paper.

JAY

For you.

Jay hands Abraham the gift. Abraham opens it.

ABRAHAM

Wow. A bowl.

JAY

An alms bowl.

ABRAHAM

Is this *your* alms bowl?

JAY

Until today.

ABRAHAM

Wow.

JAY

When I go on my alms rounds every morning, people in the area place food in it. When I eat my meal, I think of all the people who provide for my sustenance. Not just the people who put food in my bowl, but also the people who help them, and the people who help them, and the people who help them.

ABRAHAM

What will you eat from now?

JAY

I'm sure when I get back, someone will want to give me one.

ABRAHAM

Thank you. I guess I shouldn't take this home yet either, huh?

From the hall we hear:

ERNIE (o.s.)

Doug?! Doug?!

Doug goes to meet Ernie as Ernie enters.

DOUG

Yes, Dad?

ERNIE

Where's Doug? Where's Doug?!

DOUG

Dad... I'm Doug.

ERNIE

Oh. Without my glasses...

He's wearing glasses.

DOUG

Anything I can do for you Dad?.... Dad?

ERNIE

I'm waiting to hear the white rose out of my mouth.

DOUG

Okay.

ERNIE

When are we going home?

DOUG

You're home now, Dad.

ERNIE

That last hotel. I don't want to go back.

DOUG

You won't, Dad. I promise.

ERNIE

Their apple sauce was awful.

DOUG

You're home now.

ERNIE

What are those things?

DOUG

Bar Mitzvah presents for Abraham.

ERNIE

Oh, yeah. Should I give him my present now?

DOUG

If you'd like.

ERNIE

You there, Bar Mitzvah boy.

ABRAHAM

My name's Abraham.

ERNIE

On Qwertioip my name's Mitzi. Now come here.

Abraham walks to Ernie. Ernie looks at Doug and Jay.

ERNIE (cont'd)

This doesn't concern you.

Doug and Jay start to exit.

ABRAHAM

Uncle Doug –

DOUG

You'll be okay.

Doug and Jay exit.

ERNIE

Help me to the window.

Ernie walks to where the window is. Abraham tries to help him.

ERNIE (cont'd)

Look up in the sky. What do you see?

ABRAHAM

Some clouds.

ERNIE

Look past the clouds.

ABRAHAM

The stratosphere?

ERNIE

Look beyond where you can see.

ABRAHAM

Uh, some stars?

ERNIE

"Some"? Billions. Do you see them all?

ABRAHAM
(hoping this is the right answer:)

Yes?

ERNIE
Good. Choose one. I want to give it to you.

ABRAHAM
Umm, that one.

ERNIE
It's not very bright.

ABRAHAM
Well, how about –

ERNIE
No, if that's the star you want, it's yours.

ABRAHAM
Thank you, Grandpa.

ERNIE
You'll take good care of it?

ABRAHAM
Yes.

ERNIE
Have you ever taken care of a star before?

ABRAHAM
Umm, no?

ERNIE
You've never even had a pet, have you?

ABRAHAM
No.

ERNIE
How do I know you can handle a star?

ABRAHAM
Umm... I'll read a book?

ERNIE
Books can't teach you how to handle a star.

ABRAHAM

Um –

ERNIE

If the star reads a different book, you're screwed.

ABRAHAM

Should I ask the star what it needs?

ERNIE

Stars don't know what they need. They give off light, but they can't reflect worth shit.

ABRAHAM

What do *you* think I should do, Grandpa?

ERNIE

Just do your best.

ABRAHAM

What if my best isn't good enough?

ERNIE

Nobody's best is ever good enough.
That's why you need condiments.
I'll call my broker and get you that star.

ABRAHAM

I'll do my best, Grandpa.

ERNIE

Don't sweat it. They're mostly gas, anyway.

ABRAHAM

It's a great present, Grandpa.

ERNIE

What good is it to be a man, if you can't give stars to your young?

Abraham and Ernie look at the sky.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

A few evenings later. Doug and Eva enter from the kitchen. They both hold wine glasses that are half-full (or if you prefer, half-empty), but nobody's tipsy.

EVA

That was delicious. You'll have to thank Luz for me.

DOUG

She loves cooking for Jay. She thinks it'll help her get into heaven.

EVA

But she's Catholic. He's Buddhist.

DOUG

She doesn't care. She thinks all holy people pool their information.

EVA

Maybe they do.

DOUG

You really do believe, don't you?

EVA

I do, I don't. I'm not an agnostic – some days I just don't want to give God the satisfaction of believing in him.

DOUG

I wish I believed.

EVA

You know, I'm surprised that, as a therapist, the Bible doesn't intrigue you.

DOUG

I don't see the conn–

EVA

What is the Bible if not a case study of God?

DOUG

What?

EVA

He starts young and idealistic, goes through constant disappointment and relationship problems with those he loves, is filled with rage, and ultimately has to choose forgiveness to gain maturity. The Bible is the story of God working through His stuff. All-knowing, all-seeing, all screwed up. Which is why he needs us to have weekly sessions with him.

DOUG

Hmm. I'll think about that... but not at the moment.

They look at each other.

EVA

One one-thousand, two one-thousand...

They start kissing. Then Eva pulls back, startled.

DOUG

What?

EVA

Sorry. I just thought I heard Ernie walking down the hall.

DOUG

Would you like to go to my room?

EVA

Could you guarantee we'd be left alone?

DOUG

(sighs, then:)

Of all the problems I planned to have in middle age, "getting a room" wasn't one of them.

A knock on the door. Doug opens it. Jay enters.

DOUG

Hey.

JAY

Hey. Hi, Eva.

EVA

Hi. How'd your workshop go today?

JAY
(to Doug:)
Remember Marshall Moonin?

DOUG
Your friend from high school?

JAY
Yeah. He came to hear me talk.

DOUG
How is he?

JAY
I asked him, and he said, "Keeping busy!"
Every time I ask New Yorkers how they are,
they say, "Keeping busy!" What's this
New York obsession with keeping busy?
Half the questions in the Q and A sessions
boiled down to, "What are the short cuts to
enlightenment?" Everyone wants inner peace,
but nobody has time in their schedule for it.

DOUG
You seem in a foul mood.

JAY
I'm a monk, not an elf.

EVA
I'm sorry he upset you.

JAY
I'm okay. Detachment is like sobriety.
Every now and then you fall off the wagon,
and then you just have to get back on.

DOUG
(getting an idea and handing
Eva his wine glass:)
Eva, give Jay and me a moment.

EVA
(not sure what's going on:)
Okay.

Eva takes the wine glasses and exits into the kitchen.

DOUG
How'd you like to spend some quality time with Dad?

JAY

None of us has spent quality time
with Dad our entire lives.

DOUG

I'd like to take Eva home... and
not act like a monk hint hint hint.

JAY

Very subtle. I was planning to work on –

DOUG

It'd mean a lot to us, and well, you
haven't spent a moment with Dad yet.

JAY

I've been busy with –

DOUG

He's your father.

JAY

Are you trying to guilt a monk?

DOUG

I'm just saying –

JAY

He doesn't like me. I accept that.
I'm at peace with that.

DOUG

As the Buddha said, cut the crap.

JAY

I'm not sure I'll have the skills to –

DOUG

All you have to do is point him to the bathroom if
he asks, oh, and be sure to give him his apple sauce.

JAY

Why?

DOUG

Luz mashes some of his pills into it.

(a short beat:)

So?

(a beat:)

Jay –

Jay puts up his hand, as if to say, give me a moment. A beat, then:

JAY
Okay.

DOUG
Eva?

Eva enters. Doug gets Eva's and his coats.

EVA
Yes?

DOUG
Jay's agreed to look after Dad
while I take you home.

EVA
Thank you.

JAY
Glad to help.

DOUG
The apple sauce is in the fridge.

JAY
When should I –

Doug starts to pull Eva towards the door and opens it.

DOUG
Now's as good as time as any.

EVA
Oh yes well – 'bye!

Eva and Doug exit. Jay exits into the kitchen. Ernie enters from the hall.

ERNIE
Did they move the meeting?!

Jay enters, carrying a bowl of apple sauce and a spoon.

JAY
Hi, Dad. How'd you like some –

ERNIE
(with growing anxiety:)
Did you hear the news?

JAY

What news?

ERNIE

They've sold our apartment and are converting it to farmland. We're being kicked out tomorrow.

JAY

I don't think that's –

ERNIE

I heard it! I heard it!

JAY

From who?

ERNIE

From people on Alpha Centauri.

JAY

Dad.

ERNIE

They're reliable sources.

JAY

Dad.

ERNIE

Where am I going to go?! Where am I going to go?! Where am I going to go?!!!

JAY

(overlapping with the above:)

Dad... Dad... *Dad!*

(Ernie has stopped.)

The deal fell through. You won't have to move.

ERNIE

I don't want to go to a home.

JAY

You won't have to go –

ERNIE

You know, your mother's mother was put into a home, and she died. And my mother was put into a home, and she died.

JAY

Dad, everyone dies.

ERNIE

Not on Qwertio.

JAY

On this planet, everyone dies.
I'm going to die someday.

ERNIE

That's why you're not exceptional.

JAY

Have a seat, Dad.

Jay helps Ernie into a chair at the dining table.

ERNIE

Is the meeting about to start?

JAY

There's no meeting. I just thought
you might like some apple sauce.

Jay places the apple sauce and spoon in front of Ernie.

ERNIE

I hate apple sauce.

JAY

I thought you *loved* apple sauce.

ERNIE

Why do you want to put me in a box?

JAY

Try the apple sauce, Dad. Maybe you'll like it.

ERNIE

I'm not hungry.

JAY

It's good for you.

ERNIE

Am I going to die?

JAY

Someday.

ERNIE

Then why the fuck do I have to eat
the apple sauce?

JAY

How does Luz get you to eat the apple sauce?

ERNIE

She takes off her clothes and does a hula.

JAY

(gently)

Take the spoon.

Ernie takes the spoon. He grips it with his hand, like a bicycle handle.

JAY (cont'd)

Now lift it up... take some apple sauce...
and taste it.

Ernie holds the spoon with apple sauce in the air.

JAY (cont'd)

Taste it... It's yummy... Go ahead.

ERNIE

(after a beat, a humiliating admission:)

I can't find my mouth.

Ernie's eyes fill with tears. Jay takes a napkin and wipes Ernie's tears.

JAY

Would... would you like me to feed you
some apple sauce?

ERNIE

I would appreciate it all the way to the stars.

Jay starts to feed Ernie.

JAY

How is it?

ERNIE

They don't know how to make
apple sauce on Qwertio.

JAY

Really?

ERNIE

Their desserts lack soul.

JAY

You should open up a bakery there.

ERNIE

I'm discussing it with my lawyer.

JAY

What does he think?

ERNIE

You know lawyers. Just when you need them most, they're on Neptune.

JAY

(a big question:)

Dad, have... have you enjoyed your life?

Jay waits for a response.

ERNIE

More apple sauce.

JAY

I mean, I was never sure. I knew you were pleased when you made a good deal; I saw you enjoy a good steak and laugh at funny TV shows; and I know you loved Mom and probably even us. But how did you feel on an uneventful day? Did you ever enjoy... life?

Jay pauses feeding Ernie.

ERNIE

More apple sauce.

Jay resumes feeding Ernie.

JAY

Do you want to know if I enjoy my life?

Ernie looks at Jay. Jay continues to feed Ernie.

JAY (cont'd)

I do, Dad. I enjoy my life. Not every day. Some of the monks drive me nuts with their hypocrisies and their pettiness; I'm still working on developing acceptance of that. I hate the mosquitoes. I particularly hate when mosquitoes land on me when I'm meditating. But I just tell myself they're just on their alms round, and I'm making merit. But, fundamentally, to the best of my knowledge, I'm happy. I don't know if you can see it, or if you ever could. I know *you* wouldn't be happy with my life, but, but despite the fact that, that there isn't a day when I'm not reminded I come from you, nature *and* nurture, and of how much I'm a response to you, I mean, I know according to Buddhist teachings, to get past suffering you need to get beyond "me" and "you" and self and soul, but it's a much longer road than I expected.

ERNIE

Napkin.

Jay wipes Ernie's mouth with the napkin. Jay continues to feed him.

JAY

One morning, when I had been at the monastery a couple of years, I woke up in my hut, middle of the night, pitch black out, no stars, nothing to see, just pure darkness, and I suddenly realized I had no clue how to be me or what that even meant; I only knew how to be you – poorly. I know you never asked me to be a second-rate you; you wanted me to be a first-rate you, if possible a better you than you were. And when I saw I couldn't be you, a great you or even a mediocre you, I had so much unlearning to do. Not because I don't love you, or respect you, but – I, I finally came to the point where I wanted to be happy more than I needed your approval. I hope you can forgive me.

Jay has finished feeding Ernie.

ERNIE

Napkin.

Jay wipes Ernie's mouth with the napkin. Jay and Ernie look at each other.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

Saturday morning. Doug, Jay, Eva and Abraham. Doug is still in his robe. Eva and Abraham are dressed for services. Abraham has a black eye. He holds a bag of frozen peas over it.

DOUG

Thank you for bringing him here.

EVA

(quite agitated)

When he showed up for services, I, I –

DOUG

You did the right thing.

EVA

I didn't know what to do.

DOUG

(overlapping with the above:)

Tell me what happened, Abraham.

ABRAHAM

(upset)

Well, well, this morning, D-Dad asked if I had written the letters yet, and I said I wasn't going to, and h-he said he'd tear up one of my Bar Mitzvah checks every day till I wrote the letters, and I said I didn't care, and he tore one up, and I said I didn't fucking care, and he-he-he hit me. H-he didn't just slap me; he hit me.

JAY

Jesus.

(off the other's looks:)

It's an expression.

EVA

I left a message for Robert.

DOUG

Why?!

EVA

You didn't answer the first time I –

DOUG
(overlapping with the above:)
It's okay.

JAY
That's quite a shiner.

ABRAHAM
Thank you.

JAY
Joel Friedman gave me a shiner like that once.

ABRAHAM
Why?

JAY
I didn't realize he was dating Jessica Fasman.

ABRAHAM
(to Doug:)
Is he going to hit me again?

EVA
Don't worry, we'll take care of you.

Eva kisses Abraham on the top of his head. He's moved.

DOUG
I – Do we still have your camera?

ABRAHAM
I think it's in the kitchen. Why?

DOUG
Get it.

ABRAHAM
I don't want to get my dad in –

DOUG
You won't. Just get it.

ABRAHAM
(reluctantly)
Okay.

Abraham exits into the kitchen.

DOUG
(to Eva:)
Do you know how to shoot video?

EVA
I haven't the –

JAY
I can figure it out.

EVA
You're allowed?

JAY
The Buddha never expressed any reservations
about monks using cameras.

DOUG
Good.

JAY
But we can't listen to music,
so don't ask me to be a deejay.

Abraham returns with his camera.

ABRAHAM
Will, will this be used in court?

DOUG
I don't think it'll get that far.

JAY
I'll take it.

Abraham gives the camera to Jay.

ABRAHAM
(to Doug:)
Do we have to –

DOUG
It'll be good to have a recording.

JAY
(quietly suspicious)
Your dad had really good aim.

ABRAHAM
What if it makes my dad angry?

EVA

Don't worry. He won't ever hurt you again.

ABRAHAM

(looking at Doug:)

Promise?

DOUG

Promise.

JAY

Rolling.

DOUG

Abraham, in your own words, how did you end up with your black eye?... Abraham?

Abraham starts to cry.

EVA

Maybe we should wait.

DOUG

(to Abraham:)

Take your time.

ABRAHAM

Am I under oath?

For a moment, silence.

DOUG

Abraham?

ABRAHAM

I... I...

JAY

I think I'll turn this off.

ABRAHAM

I... I paid Michael Ostrar twenty bucks to hit me.

DOUG

Come here.

Doug hugs Abraham.

DOUG (cont'd)

You didn't need to do that, Abraham.

ABRAHAM

I'm sorry.

DOUG

I would've done it for ten.

JAY

(without judgment:)

I think Abraham got his money's worth.

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG

Thanks.

Doug hangs up the phone.

ABRAHAM

I don't want to go back. Ever.

EVA

Abraham.

ABRAHAM

He didn't hit me, but everything else is true.
You can ask him.

JAY

But if he lies, since *you* lied, how will
we know which one of you to believe?

ABRAHAM

I'll take a polygraph test.

JAY

Well, so much for today's dharma lesson.

ABRAHAM

Is anybody thirsty?... Please?

A knock on the door. Doug opens it. Robert enters.

DOUG

Good morning.

ROBERT

(matter-of-factly)

Good morning.

(goes to Abraham:)

What happened? Are you okay?

ABRAHAM

I'm fine.

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

You call this an ice pack?

EVA

It works.

ROBERT

What happened, son?

ABRAHAM

Um... well...

DOUG

Come to think of it, I'm thirsty. Abraham, would you get me a glass of water?

ROBERT

I want to know what happened.

DOUG

I'm *very* thirsty.

ABRAHAM

I'll get you a glass –

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

Get your own damn water.

JAY

I think I'm thirsty, too.

ABRAHAM

I'll get some –

ROBERT

You're not leaving this room. Now what –

EVA

Abraham, let me help you get some water.

Eva and Abraham exit.

ROBERT

Now what the hell's going on?

DOUG

I think we should discuss –

ROBERT

I'd like a straight answer. *Please.*

JAY

Abraham paid a boy to sock him in the eye.

ROBERT

He what?

DOUG

Did you tear up one of his Bar Mitzvah checks?

ROBERT

That's not something I feel a need to discuss with you.

JAY

He wanted us to think you hit him.

ROBERT

Abe!

DOUG

(calling to Abraham:)

If you don't like the frozen peas,
we also have corn!

ROBERT

Abraham!

JAY

And make sure you let the water breathe!

ROBERT

Why are you two playing this game with him?

DOUG

"Game"?!

ROBERT

He's manipulating you, and he has to learn that won't work. Ever.

DOUG

He needs to know you love him.

ROBERT

Are you saying I don't love my son?

DOUG

I'm saying he doesn't know it.

ROBERT

You know, I'm sure you've spent hours listening to your patients talk about what it's like to be a parent, and I'm sure you've even given them some insightful advice –

DOUG

That may be the first compliment –

ROBERT

- the way an intelligent person living on Earth could still have *some* insight about living on Mars. But you don't have a clue what it's like to be a parent.

DOUG

Robert –

ROBERT

Not a clue. I see so many of Abraham's friends who are so adored by their parents for every little thing they do that they're never motivated to achieve, they're never motivated to grow up. And these children go out into the world, and life's tough, and they're so unprepared. My job, my *responsibility* isn't to make Abraham feel good. It's to prepare him for the world.

DOUG

You really *like* being an monster, don't you?

ROBERT

(to Jay:)

Do you have anything *you'd* like to say?

JAY

No.

ROBERT

Good. So – now that we've established I can be an monster, I'm taking my son home –

DOUG

Robert –

ROBERT

And if I learn he ever comes here again without my permission, or you talk on the phone, or text or email, I will sell this apartment.

JAY

What about Dad?

ROBERT

I will put Dad in a place where nobody will forget to give him his meds just because it's a busy morning.

(calling out:)

Abe, we're going home! Abe!

DOUG

He did what he did because he's desperate, and nobody's listening.

ROBERT

This is a great apartment. An Upper West Side three-bedroom? I'm sure I could sell it in a week.

Ernie enters.

ERNIE

What is all the yelling?

JAY

Nothing, Dad.

ERNIE

(to Robert, raising his voice:)

A good businessman never has to raise his voice!

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

Will you tell my son it's time to go home?

Doug doesn't reply.

ROBERT (cont'd)

Father, how'd you like to move to Qwertio?

ERNIE

(instantly frazzled)

The sale went through?!

JAY

No, Dad, the sale didn't go through.

DOUG

I'll get him.

Doug exits into the kitchen.

ERNIE

Tell them it's lousy farmland!!!

JAY

The sale didn't go through, Dad.

ERNIE

Nothing grows here!!!

JAY

(to Robert:)

Tell him the sale didn't go through.

ROBERT

The sale didn't go through, Father.

(for Jay's benefit:)

Not yet.

Abraham, Doug and Eva enter.

ROBERT (cont'd)

(kindly)

Let's go home, Abe. We'll take care of that eye. And we'll talk.

ABRAHAM

Abraham. My name's Abraham.

ROBERT

When you start acting like a man, I'll call you Abraham.

ABRAHAM

(to Doug:)

Do I have to go?

DOUG

I... I'm afraid so.

ABRAHAM

But you promised.

EVA

Abraham, how would you like to spend the weekend here?

ROBERT

(taking out a check:)

Eva, I really appreciate all the hard work you've done. You've been an extraordinary tutor. Here's your final check, including a little extra to show my gratitude.

EVA

I don't take money on Shabbat.

ROBERT

I'll leave it here. And now that your job is over, you no longer have to hide from Abraham or me that you're fucking my brother.

DOUG

(defensive)

What makes you think that –

ROBERT

I see more than you give me credit for!

ABRAHAM

(to Doug, very upset:)

You –

DOUG

I can explain.

ABRAHAM

When I asked if you were dating her, you said No!

DOUG

I know; I should've –

ABRAHAM

You lied to me!

DOUG

I can understand why you're –

ABRAHAM

You lied!

ROBERT

Let's go, son.

DOUG

Abraham –

ABRAHAM

Save it.

DOUG

Abraham –

ABRAHAM

(a mournful wail:)

Save it!!!

Robert opens the front door. Abraham starts to go.
He looks at everyone in the room.

ABRAHAM (cont'd)

There are no men, and there is no God.

Abraham and Robert exit. For a moment, stillness. Ernie exits into the hall.

DOUG

I... I... God, what have I done?

EVA

Who knew?

DOUG

Why did I convince myself I had to lie to him?

EVA

I'm sure he'll forgive you.

DOUG

He's going to be scarred for life.

EVA

Of course he'll be scarred. We all are.

DOUG

I know but –

EVA

My parents endured four decades of Communism.
Are there wounds? Yes. Scars? Yes. But they
still enjoy a good meal, a good laugh, their
children, their grandchildren. They're old
and frail and wounded and glad to be alive.

DOUG

(to Jay:)

What do you think we should do?

JAY

I don't know. I think I'll go sit awhile.

DOUG

(less than friendly:)

I hope it brings you peace of mind.

JAY

(frustration coming out:)

Damn it, if you haven't learned anything about who I am, at least learn this: I meditate not for peace of mind, but so that my stupid ego will stop blocking my awareness. When that brings peace of mind, fine. If not, fine. Peace is the byproduct, not the goal.

DOUG

What do you care – you're hopping on a plane in two days –

JAY

If I thought there was something I could do here –

DOUG

I don't want Abraham to end up like us!

JAY

Doug –

DOUG

If Robert had hit Abraham, we'd want to take action. But what happens when a parent hits a child's soul, over and over, what responsibilities do we have then?

JAY

What do *you* think we should do?

DOUG

I don't know! But if I just watch and assume there's *nothing* I can do just so, well... then I – then we – are letting ourselves off the hook.

JAY

Well, whatever we do... let's not go overboard.

DOUG

We have a boy who pays a kid to sock him in the eye, a brother who tears up his son's Bar Mitzvah checks to get him to behave, and a father who likes fictional planets. Going overboard is our family tradition.

JAY

Well then, if we go overboard... we have to do it very, *very* skillfully.

Jay exits. Eva gets her coat.

DOUG

What should I do? What *can* I do?

EVA

You ask excellent questions.

DOUG

I just wish I had excellent answers.

EVA

Why do you beat yourself up for being human?

DOUG

I was raised to be better than that.

Eva kisses Doug.

EVA

I have to go but –

DOUG

You know, when you finish your cantor training, well, maybe you could find work here instead of returning to Hungary.

EVA

My visa will expire.

Doug takes Eva's hand.

DOUG

There are other ways to stay in the country.

EVA

Doug, I... My family's back home.

DOUG

To me, that'd be a good reason to stay away.

EVA

It's not just family, it's – In Hungary, to be a Jew, out loud, after all those years of hiding, I... You don't need another Jew in New York. I want to be counted.

DOUG

I need you.

EVA

Would you like to move with me to Hungary?

DOUG

(after a moment, embarrassed he can't agree)

Umm –

EVA

It's okay. I wasn't expecting a "yes".

DOUG

You know, in all my years trying to figure out why my family's so messed up, it's – Some of my patients, they have families that are much more screwed up than mine. Way more. And yet there's an affection they have for each other, an acceptance, that made me realize beyond any horrible thing my parents did to me as a kid, that, that wasn't the main problem. Nobody's perfect; I'm certainly not. It's just, the people in my family, including me, it's just... We all have incredibly weak love muscles. They're just... weak. When we really need them, since they're not strong enough, we choose other muscles and make them stronger. And stronger. And the love muscles just atrophy, and and... I don't want to lose Abraham.

It's possible Doug has begun crying. Eva holds him.

EVA

I will miss you.

DOUG

Stay. I want you to stay. I know you have a family and a country, but I don't care. I want you to stay.

EVA

Are you being unreasonable?

DOUG

I'm trying.

EVA

That may be the best gift you've ever given me.

DOUG

Well, I hope you like it, because it's not returnable.

EVA

It's a shame you're not Abraham's father.

DOUG

I'm sure I'd make a million mistakes.

EVA

Yes. And you'd admit every one of them.

They kiss simply.

EVA (cont'd)

Shabbat shalom.

Eva exits.

DOUG

(as if something just clicked:)

Hmm.

From the hall, we hear:

ERNIE (o.s.)

Where's the bathroom?!

Ernie enters.

ERNIE

You there, orderly.

DOUG

I'm – I'm Doug.

ERNIE

I had a son named Doug.

DOUG

I know him.

ERNIE

He's a good boy. Always was a good boy.

DOUG

I'll tell him that.

ERNIE

He never became a man. He stayed a boy.

DOUG

What makes a man, Father?

ERNIE

(thinks, then:)

When I gave my Bar Mitzvah speech,
my father was so proud of me.

DOUG

(not a question, just taking it in)

Really.

ERNIE

I think it was the only time.

DOUG

Ernie?

ERNIE

Yes?

DOUG

What should I do to become a man?

ERNIE

Never be afraid of losing.

Ernie and Doug look at each other.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

The next day (Sunday). Doug is at the door. Abraham enters.

DOUG

Thanks for coming.

ABRAHAM

(depressed)

Sure.

DOUG

I really appreciate you coming here,
given the risks.

ABRAHAM

Yeah, well.

DOUG

Are you thirsty? Can I get you something
to drink?

ABRAHAM

No, thanks.

DOUG

Are you sure? You've gotten me enough
glasses of water; I'd love to repay the favor.

ABRAHAM

I probably shouldn't stay long. I told my dad
I'm meeting some friends at a movie... so I
should probably meet some friends at a movie.

DOUG

I understand. Where's your dad today?

ABRAHAM

He's at a strategy session for tomorrow's
announcement.

DOUG

Have a seat. I won't take long.

Abraham sits.

DOUG (cont'd)

Abraham... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have hid about Eva and me.

ABRAHAM

That's okay.

DOUG

You were right to get upset. I was, I was scared to tell you about us.

ABRAHAM

Why?

DOUG

(thinks, then:)

You know, I'm torn between telling you the truth and saying something that sounds like the truth but is actually a convenient deflection. Which would you rather hear?

ABRAHAM

I don't know. Tell me both. I should probably learn to tell the difference.

DOUG

Okay, here's the deflect: With the Bar Mitzvah and everything else going on, I, I just didn't want to complicate things any further for you.

ABRAHAM

And the truth?

DOUG

I didn't want complicate things for *me*.

ABRAHAM

What things?

DOUG

I, I don't trust your father.

ABRAHAM

Who can blame you?

DOUG

Even worse, I'm afraid of him.

ABRAHAM

Why are you afraid of him?

DOUG

I'm afraid of him because... hell,
by this point, I'm just wired that way.

ABRAHAM

(thinks, then:)

Would you accept that answer from a patient?

DOUG

Only if a session is nearly over. Look, I don't like your dad yelling at me. When he really does it or even when I imagine him doing it. I don't like being up in the middle of the night because I'm pissed off at him. I don't like him taking up so much space in my head when I walk down the street. Whenever I tangle with him, it, it just takes up so much energy. So I avoid it whenever possible.

ABRAHAM

Oh.

DOUG

And normally, there's a pragmatism to that. But this time, well, I'm sorry I indulged my fear, Abraham. It wasn't fair to you, and it wasn't respectful. I'm sorry.

Abraham starts to feel tears. Doug offers him a tissue.

DOUG (cont'd)

And I promise –

ABRAHAM

My dad's never apologized for anything.

DOUG

The only time Ernie ever apologized to me was when he wanted me to shut up.
(imitating Ernie:)
"I'm sorry – now can we drop it?!"

ABRAHAM

Are you and Eva getting married?

DOUG

She's moving back to Hungary in June.

ABRAHAM

Do you love her?

DOUG

(equivocating)

Almost.

ABRAHAM

Why "almost"?

DOUG

(playfully)

Hey, look, I think our session's nearly over.

ABRAHAM

Okay.

Abraham gets up.

DOUG

Abraham... before you go to the film,
I'd like to discuss an idea I had with you.
I don't know if it's a good idea, but,
well, I'd like your input.

ABRAHAM

Okay.

DOUG

But first, I think you're man enough to...
to learn a little more about your mom.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE SIX

That evening. Doug, Jay, Ernie and Abraham are in the living room. Abraham is showing Ernie places on a globe.

ABRAHAM

And I want to go here... and here...
and I want to visit Uncle Jay in Thailand...
and, oh, I'd really like to go here.

JAY

Vegas?

ABRAHAM

No, Nevada. I read about this festival called Burning Man they have every year in the Nevada desert. I want to go.

DOUG

Wait a second. Isn't Burning Man like a week-long party where everybody gets naked, does a lot of drugs and has a lot of sex?

ABRAHAM

But they also have *fire*, lots and lots of *fire*!
They spend all summer building this *huge* man,
and at the end of the festival, they burn it to the ground!

JAY

Nice to know it's a child-friendly event.

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG

Thanks.

Doug hangs up the phone.

DOUG (cont'd)

Now Dad, remember, it's important that –

ERNIE

We've been over this four thousand times.

DOUG

I just want to make sure –

ERNIE

I'm senile, not stupid.

DOUG

Okay.

Some time passes. Ernie resumes looking at the globe.

ERNIE

I didn't realize our planet had so many lines on it.

A knock on the door. Doug opens it. Robert enters, carrying an envelope.

DOUG

Hey.

ROBERT

Get out of my way.

Robert walks over to Abraham.

ROBERT (cont'd)

I figured you'd be here.

ABRAHAM

Hi, Dad.

ROBERT

I read your letter.

ABRAHAM

Okay.

ROBERT

Abe – Abraham –

ABRAHAM

Don't call me Abraham unless you mean it.

ROBERT

Now let's go home and discuss this like adults.

ABRAHAM

No, thank you.

ROBERT

Abraham, I really think there's something seriously wrong with you. I think you need help. And I'll be glad to get you that help.

ABRAHAM

No, thank you.

ROBERT

(temper beginning to rise:)

Abraham, do you what it's like to be in the middle of a very important meeting, one that's about fighting a fight so that millions of people can live better lives, and to have a messenger arrive with this? Do you care?!

DOUG

Can I take a look at what you keep waving at us?

ROBERT

Like you don't know.

DOUG

Please.

Robert hands Doug the envelope.

DOUG (cont'd)

To Robert Silver.

(opens and reads a letter:)

"Dear Mr. Silver, I hereby resign as your son, effective immediately. Sincerely, Abraham Silver."

ROBERT

Don't act surprised.

DOUG

Abraham, I told you this letter isn't legally valid.

ABRAHAM

I know.

DOUG

You were supposed to get it notarized.

ABRAHAM

It's Sunday; I couldn't find anyone.

ROBERT

Now let's go home, before I really lose my temper.

DOUG

While we're waiting for that, there's something I'd like to discuss with you.

ERNIE

I'm thirsty.

DOUG

In a moment, Dad.

ERNIE

You didn't say I couldn't have *water*.

ABRAHAM

I'll get you a glass of water, Grandpa.

Abraham exits.

ROBERT

I'm not sure what you're up to, but trust me, there's no way you can win this.

DOUG

In view of how busy you'll be with your campaign, Abraham has requested to live with me. He'd also like his checks back.

ROBERT

And what else do you want?

DOUG

I'd like power-of-attorney for Ernie.

ROBERT

And what other fantasies do you have?

DOUG

I think Ernie should start getting round-the-clock care. We can afford it, and I'll sleep better.

ROBERT

Anything else?

DOUG

At the moment, I think that's it.

Abraham returns during the above. (Ernie's water is in a child-proof cup with a straw.)

ABRAHAM

Here's your water, Grandpa.

ROBERT

I'd consider your last request, but in response to the others... No.

ERNIE

This is good water. Let's order four thousands yards.

DOUG

(to Robert:)

Why don't you think about it awhile?

ROBERT

You really have no clue what you're getting into.

DOUG

I think a custody battle over Ernie would be *very* embarrassing at this point.

ROBERT

You're right. If you were stupid enough to actually insist it go to court, it would be embarrassing. The tabloids would love it, and I might lose a few votes. But then it'd be over, and most voters will forget it ever happened.

ERNIE

You'll win the asshole vote!

DOUG

I'm willing to testify that your desire to move Ernie is mostly designed to get back at me.

ROBERT

I hardly think they'll take seriously someone who's been living here rent free since his divorce.

DOUG

I'm also willing to testify that your cruelty towards Jane significantly contributed to her mental breakdown.

ROBERT

(quickly composing himself:)

Not in front of the child.

DOUG

I think he's an adult!

ROBERT

Abe – Abraham, I could use a glass of water.

ABRAHAM

The kitchen's over there.

DOUG

I'll testify about how often you berated her
and demeaned her.

ROBERT

(dismissively)

Like every couple we had our moments.

DOUG

And how she asked time and time again
for a divorce, and you refused.

ROBERT

This is irrelevant –

DOUG

(overlapping with the above:)

Till she denigrated your virility on live TV.
One week before you lost the primary for mayor.
And then you *demand*ed a divorce!

A beat.

ROBERT

This is the best ammo you've got? I'm disappointed
in you, Doug. Yes, I resisted her pleas for a
divorce but changed my mind. But not because
of anything she did to me, but because of how
she treated Abraham. She spoiled him and
coddled him and set no boundaries whatsoever.
I could tolerate her being a bad wife, but
I couldn't forgive her for being a bad mother.
I have *no* regrets about what I did.

(After a long beat:)

Wow, for once I've gotten you to shut up.

A short beat.

JAY

Jane told me you threatened to stop alimony
if she came anywhere near him.

ROBERT

Oh, are you in on this, too?

JAY

Aardvark moose pasta linoleum.

ROBERT

What?

JAY

Oh, I'm sorry. You asked a ridiculous question;
I just assumed you wanted a ridiculous answer.

DOUG

She told me when she got cancer and wrote you
over and over begging to see him, you said No.

ROBERT

It's more complicated than that.

ABRAHAM

Complicated?

JAY

She told me she wrote Abraham dozens
of letters, all of which you destroyed.

ROBERT

Can you prove that?!!

DOUG

Abraham, will you take out your keys?

ABRAHAM

Uh, sure.

Abraham takes out his keys.

DOUG

When did your dad give you a key to the mailbox?

ABRAHAM

(putting it together:)

Um, a couple of months after my mom died.

ROBERT

Son, I –

ABRAHAM

It's true. You tried to murder her soul.

Jay, who has sat through all of this seated, breathing calmly, his arms folded
over his lap, lifts his arms. On his lap is Abraham's camera.

JAY

Abraham, remind me – how do you
turn this off?

ROBERT

Did you record this?

(to Doug:)

Are you attempting to blackmail me?

DOUG

Oh my god, I'm never going to be elected president!

ROBERT

(to Jay:)

Give me the camera... I'm not kidding.

JAY

If you attack me, I will not fight you.

But you *will* have to attack me.

Robert looks at Jay and then rushes at him. Jay tosses the camera to Doug.

DOUG

I'll fight you.

ROBERT

You won't win.

DOUG

I don't care. You can hurt me,
you can rip off my limbs, you can
kill me. But I'll still fight you.

Robert rushes at Doug. They fight over the camera. Doug refuses to let go.

ABRAHAM

Stop it! Stop it!!!

They keep fighting. Finally, Doug successfully pushes off Robert.

DOUG

I'll fight you to the death, even if it's mine.

ROBERT

Fuck you.

ERNIE

What channel is this?

JAY

I think it's the family channel.

DOUG

Robert, for what it's worth, you used to mean the world to me. Growing up, well, every kid wants the approval of his parents, but every kid knows they're not always going to get it. You were who I thought all men should be. Yours was the approval I always craved.

ROBERT

Well, I don't think you're going to get it.

DOUG

I know. And the day I stopped wanting it, which may have just been today, was the day I became a man.

ROBERT

No one becomes a man in their own family; you can only become a man in the world.

DOUG

Robert, despite our differences, I think the one thing we agree on is that we both love Abraham and want him to grow up as happy and healthy as possible, even if it takes great personal sacrifice. I'm asking you to make that sacrifice. For him.

ROBERT

(to Doug:)

And *if* I agree to your requests, you'll give me the camera now?

DOUG

Robert, I'd really appreciate it if you stopped treating me like I was five.

ROBERT

Why should I trust you?

DOUG

Because I know you could make my life miserable. We can both make each other's lives miserable. Some families play football together; ours gets to play cold war. Mutually assured destruction.

ROBERT

Well... Father, come with me for a moment.

ERNIE

Stay away from me!

ROBERT

I'm your son.

ERNIE

He told me all about you!

ROBERT

What'd he say?

ERNIE

He told me you joined the firm on Qwertioip
that wants to turn my home into farmland!

Robert looks at Doug.

DOUG

I really tried to think of everything.

Robert moves at Doug. Doug tosses the camera to Jay.

JAY

I really don't think I've turned this off yet.

DOUG

Everything.

ROBERT

Turn it off.

Jay turns off the camera.

DOUG

So?

ROBERT

You know, there are people who respect
that I want to serve them. There are people
who are grateful for all I do for them.

DOUG

Will you let Abraham move in with me?

ROBERT

(takes a moment, then:)

While I need to focus on the campaign –

DOUG

And after?

ROBERT

We'll see how much time I have to spend in D.C.

DOUG

Okay.

ROBERT

Abraham, I, I think you're making a mistake, but maybe this is a mistake you have to make. Maybe I've sheltered you too much from making mistakes. You'll always be welcome back, son. Always. No questions asked.

ABRAHAM

I'm not coming back. Ever.

ROBERT

Well, I'm deeply hurt. I know I'm not perfect. But there hasn't been a moment when I didn't care about what's best for you.

ABRAHAM

No, not this time.

ROBERT

What?

ABRAHAM

You only say those things when every other tactic fails.

ROBERT

You think you're so smart. You think leaving me *now* will rid you of me? It's too late. I hear Ernie's voice inside my head every single day, and not *once* has that voice said a kind word to me. And I don't think therapy or meditating or even the fact that Ernie is a withered-old man will change that. Every child has a legacy; I'm yours. You may think I'm a horrible person, you may even think I'm evil incarnate, but as you get older, not five or six years older, but twenty, thirty, even forty years older, you'll realize how much of me is inside you. I am a time bomb within your soul.

Robert begins to leave.

ABRAHAM

Dad... I think I know why God hardened Pharaoh's heart... He, he had to do it so the Israelites would develop the courage to fight for their freedom.

ROBERT

Well, now you're free. See how you enjoy it.

Robert exits. Abraham rushes into Doug's arms.

ABRAHAM

I hope he wins. I hope he wins big, and I have to live with you a long time.

DOUG

Shit, now I'm going to have to vote for the fucker.

JAY

Congratulations. To both of you.

DOUG

Did I do okay, Dad?

ERNIE

Now do I get my apple sauce?

DOUG

Yes, Dad.

The lights fade.

ACT TWO, SCENE SEVEN

The next day (Monday). Before the scene begins, we hear:

ROBERT

It is with both humility and pride that I announce today my candidacy to be Congressman for the Eighth District of New York. The people of this district deserve nothing less than someone who will always put their needs number one.

Lights up on the Silver residence: Doug, Jay, Eva and Abraham. Jay's duffel bag and daypack are packed and by the door.

EVA

It's been a pleasure meeting you.

JAY

Likewise.

EVA

If you're ever passing through Hungary...

JAY

And if you're ever passing through Thailand...

EVA

I won't despoil the whole monastery?

JAY

As long as you obey the "Keep off the monks" sign, you'll be fine.

The house phone rings. Doug answers it.

DOUG

Great.

(to Jay:)

The folks from the Center are here to drive you to the airport.

JAY

Tell them I'll be down in a minute.

DOUG

He'll be down in a minute.

Doug hangs up the phone.

EVA

(getting ready to go:)

Well, I'm sure you want a moment with your brother. See you both tomorrow?

ABRAHAM

I've made time in my schedule.

EVA

Oh, one last thing...

She brings Abraham and Doug together. During her next speech, she puts Doug's hands on Abraham's head.

EVA (cont'd)

(to Doug:)

Put your hands on his head, like this, and repeat after me: *Baruch she-p'tarani*

DOUG

Baruch she-p'tarani

EVA

me'onsho shel zeh.

DOUG

me'onsho shel zeh. What did I just say?

EVA

It's the father's blessing over the Bar Mitzvah boy.

JAY

What does it mean?

EVA

Literally: Blessed is the One who has relieved me of the punishment of this child.

(beat)

I didn't write it.

(to Jay:)

Can I take one of these downstairs for you?

JAY

It's heavy.

EVA

That's okay. In case Judaism turns out to be crap, it's nice to know I'm making merit.

Eva exits, carrying a bag.

DOUG

Dad, Jay's leaving!

ABRAHAM

Can I visit sometime?

JAY

You know the monastery has no TVs,
video games, or wi-fi.

ABRAHAM

Will I get my head shaved?

JAY

If you're there longer than three days.

ABRAHAM

Cool.

Ernie enters.

ERNIE

They're trying to put a big cleavage between
the Empire State Building and the Chrysler.

DOUG

Really?

ERNIE

That's why you need someone
to lick the stamps off the thing.

DOUG

Jay's leaving.

Ernie looks around, points to Jay while looking at Doug.

DOUG (cont'd)

Yeah, that's Jay.

ERNIE

Are you going by Qwertio on the way?

JAY

I *think* I'm going in the opposite direction.
But I'm not absolutely sure.

They look at each other a moment.

ERNIE

Well, I hate long goodbyes. Good-bye.

Ernie turns around and begins to leave.

JAY

Goodbye, Dad.

Ernie stops and turns back. They look at each other.

ERNIE

Thanks for the apple sauce.

JAY

My pleasure.

Ernie exits.

JAY (cont'd)

Well, Abraham, I do hope you'll visit.

ABRAHAM

Wish me luck, Uncle Jay.

JAY

I wish you... I wish you a life of success and failure, disappointment and joyful surprises, love, pain, disillusionment, crisis, depression, euphoria, more love, ease, hardship, lucky breaks, good fortune, at least occasional justice, lovingkindness and grace. If your life is anything less, you'll never know what life is. If your life is all these things, and it strengthens you more than it wounds you, then you'll have nothing to be scared of, and the mere act of living will feel like a blessing.

ABRAHAM

Do I have to remember all that?

JAY

No.

ABRAHAM

I love you, Uncle Jay.

JAY

I love you, too. Of course, I love all sentient beings, so don't let it go to your head.

Jay and Abraham smile at each other.

DOUG

(to Abraham:)

Why don't you check in on Grandpa and see how he's doing.

ABRAHAM

Okay.

(to Jay, bowing:)

See ya.

JAY

(warmly)

See ya.

Abraham exits.

DOUG

Thanks for everything.

JAY

I'm glad I came. Next year, let's do it at my place.

DOUG

And thanks for recording everything yesterday.

JAY

Oh, umm... I never turned on the camera.

DOUG

But –

JAY

I just couldn't engage in blackmail.

DOUG

I saw you –

JAY

Hit the off button. But never the on button.

DOUG

But you implied –

JAY

There's a long Thai tradition of being skillfully evasive in awkward situations.

DOUG

So you lied.

JAY

It wasn't *lying*.

DOUG

You purposely misled.

JAY

Well, I figure, you know, worst case scenario, I don't reach nirvana for a couple more lifetimes. I'm not in a hurry.

The house phone rings.

DOUG

He'll be right down.

(hangs up the phone)

I wish I could hug you.

JAY

How do you know I'm not hugging you right now?

Jay and Doug smile at each other. Jay exits. Doug takes a moment to compose himself. Then he calls out:

DOUG

Abraham, are you hungry?

Abraham enters.

ABRAHAM

How come nobody in this family ever talks about how much Grandpa farts? I swear, if they put a hose up grandparents' butts, they could run the country on methane.

DOUG

Hungry?

ABRAHAM

No.

DOUG

Have you done your homework?

ABRAHAM

Yes.

DOUG

Did you do everything else I should be expecting you to do even if I haven't figured out what it is yet?

ABRAHAM

Yes.

DOUG

You're a good boy.

ABRAHAM

Thanks.

DOUG

I hope it's just a phase. You know, in a week or so, I'm going to have to punish you about *something*, just to show you I'm not a complete pushover.

ABRAHAM

Okay... What kind of punishment?

DOUG

I don't know. I'll probably just send you to your room or something.

ABRAHAM

I like spending time alone.

DOUG

Oh. Parenting is harder than I thought.

ABRAHAM

So what do we do now?

DOUG

I don't know.

ABRAHAM

I don't know, either.

DOUG

Why don't we do nothing and build from there?

ABRAHAM

Okay.

Doug sits on the couch. Abraham sits on the couch. Doug puts his arm around Abraham. Abraham relaxes. It takes them several moments to acclimate to doing nothing. Finally:

DOUG

Nice moment.

ABRAHAM

Works for me.

Ernie enters and walks to where the window is.

ERNIE

I hate dating. The other day I met this very nice gal on Qwertio. A few thousand years old. A few thousand years *young*, she told me. I mean, really. She introduced me to her family. Big family. About 42 thousand. We had dinner together. Three thousand ate at the kid's table. I enjoyed it, but then it was time to go home. "Why don't you move here?" one of them asked. "Because my life, it's at home," I said. "Life" one of them sneered. "Why do you hang on to *life* so much? What's so special about *life*? You're no longer needed on Earth, admit it. Your sons don't need you anymore. Your grandson doesn't need you. Do you really adore *life* that much, or are you just addicted to it?" *Am* I addicted to it? Or is it just – attraction? I don't know. Maybe I'm a glutton for punishment. Or maybe, just maybe, I'm a fool in love.

The lights fade.

THE END