

Act One of

MEN OVERBOARD

a play by Rich Orloff

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.

JAY

Ah.

ABRAHAM

Anyway, she's really curious to meet you. She's smart and she's patient; she never gets upset with me no matter how many times I sing a note wrong.

JAY

She sounds wonderful.

ABRAHAM

She *is* wonderful. If you weren't a monk, you'd want to kiss her.

Abraham suddenly realizes he might have inadvertently admitted more than he wanted to, and he turns shy. 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. Among his skills is knowing how and when to charm.

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

(choosing to ignore 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 works.

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 belittle 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 wealthy businessmen who make large donations as a kind of "spiritual bribery". 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, that he... that he 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, but looking at Abraham:)
He's my protector.

ABRAHAM

(to Jay:)
I told you she was wonderful.
(getting shy and changing the subject quickly:)
Um, um, 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. You know, almost every child
I tutor sees their Bar or Bat Mitzvah as a
series of tasks to complete.

DOUG

They're not?

EVA

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 for half a
century, you couldn't be Jewish, at least "out loud".

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

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

(exiting)

On Qwertio, they don't hide the bathrooms!

When you're immortal, you appreciate a good shit.

Ernie exits.

JAY

So what's Qwertio?

DOUG

Beats me. The first time he mentioned it, he was looking for Mom there. Now he goes there for all sorts of reasons.

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 hard. Luz does a *great* job caring for him during the day. He mostly watches TV.

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 – I think he has a crush on her – 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 of the responsibility each of us has to
fight for, 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, as – as –

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*.

ABRAHAM

Was Eva mad at me?

DOUG

I think, I think she was proud of you.

ABRAHAM

She was?

JAY

And most importantly... I think you scored points with Maura Kosovski.

ABRAHAM

Wow.

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? 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