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OY!

by Rich Orloff

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OY! can be performed with a
cast of three men and two women.

Production Note

The above is a suggested order. Theaters are welcome to mix the plays as they choose and to include any number of the above sketches. To use the title *OY!*, at least six of the sketches must be used.

Individual sketches can also be licensed from Playscripts, Inc.

Acknowledgments

OY! was originally produced by Melting Pot Theatre Company in New York City (Larry Hirschhorn, Artistic Director) and premiered on February 14, 1999. The ensemble cast included (in alphabetical order):

Matthew Arkin
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Heather Goldenhersh
Frank Vlastnik
Lee Wilkof

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Set Designer.....John Coyne
Lighting Designer.....Michael Lincoln
Costume Designer.....Sue Gandy
Production Stage Manager.....Jennifer N. Rogers
Managing Director.....Darren Press
Associate Producer.....Alice Bergmann

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ACT I

WORD PLAY

Cast of Characters

KRAVITSKY, an executive assistant

MILLER, a new executive

WEXLER, an executive

FRIEDMAN, an executive

SCHEINMAN, the boss

Place

A firm's coffee break lounge.

Time

The present.

(Before the scene begins, we hear:)

KRAVITSKY. *(v.o.:)* Hirschhorn, Scheinman, Wexler, Friedman, Cohen, Elias, Elkoff, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz, Schwartz and McCormick, an equal opportunity employer... He's about to enter a meeting. Can I take a message?... Thank you.

(As the scene begins, KRAVITSKY is pouring a cup of coffee. MILLER enters.)

MILLER. Hi, Rachel*.

(or Robert, if Kravitsky is male.)*

KRAVITSKY. Hi, Mr. Miller*. How's your first week been?

(or Ms., if Miller is female.)*

MILLER. *(Hiding the truth:)* Fine, perfectly fine.

KRAVITSKY. I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Miller.

MILLER. Everyone here is very welcoming and friendly.

KRAVITSKY. It's a very haimish company, isn't it?

(MILLER just stares at KRAVITSKY.)

Mr. Miller?

MILLER. Oh, yeah, it's, it's, totally haimish.

(WEXLER enters.)

WEXLER. Hey, Miller. Kravitsky.

MILLER. Hi, Wexler.

WEXLER. So how's your first week been? Have you found most of our clients to be gonifs, shnorrers or shmendricks?

MILLER. *(Faking it:)* A, a little of each, I think.

(FRIEDMAN enters.)

FRIEDMAN. Hiya, Miller.

MILLER. Hi, Friedman.

FRIEDMAN. So how are you dealing with all the chazzerai with this meshuggeneh bunch of shnooks?

MILLER. Well, uh—

WEXLER. At least he hasn't plotzed yet.

MILLER. Not that I've noticed.

(SCHEINMAN enters.)

SCHEINMAN. Morning, everyone.

(Everyone replies to SCHEINMAN, who's their boss.)

So Miller, how're you doing?

MILLER. Just fine, Mr. Scheinman.

SCHEINMAN. Great. I wouldn't want any of our mishigoss to roil your kishkes.

MILLER. Thank you.

SCHEINMAN. You have no idea what I just said, do you?

MILLER. No, but I'm really trying to—

SCHEINMAN. Don't shvitz.

MILLER. I won't.

SCHEINMAN. You know what means "shvitz"?

MILLER. Yes. You see, I've bought a dictionary and every night—

SCHEINMAN. Use it in a sentence.

MILLER. Ummm. "If tomorrow is as hot and humid as the weatherman says, I might shvitz."

SCHEINMAN. Wexler, use "shvitz" in a sentence.

WEXLER. (*A kvetch:*) "My wife's about to have triplets, and I'm shvitzing."

SCHEINMAN. (*To MILLER:*) You see the difference?

MILLER. No, not really.

FRIEDMAN. Your sentence was technically correct, but it lacked chhhhhuh.*

(the guttural "chh" sound, as in chutzpah)*

MILLER. Hhhuhhh?

FRIEDMAN. Not Hhhuhhh; chhhhhuh.*

MILLER. Chuh?

SCHEINMAN. Chhhuh. The sound that's responsible for the survival of the Jewish people.

KRAVITSKY. It energizes you.

WEXLER. It strengthens you.

FRIEDMAN. It loosens phlegm.

MILLER. I don't get it.

SCHEINMAN. Yiddish is a rich, vibrant language. You can't just learn it from a dictionary.

MILLER. (*Anxiety increasing:*) Look, you've all been very, very Amish—

KRAVITSKY. Haimish.

SCHEINMAN. It means "like family."

FRIEDMAN. To Jews, there's nothing more important than family.

MILLER. But you all criticize your families constantly.

SCHEINMAN. I *never* criticize my family. I criticize my *relatives*.

MILLER. What's the difference?

WEXLER. Family is above reproach. Relatives are shmucks.

MILLER. I—I'm totally confused. I feel completely—

KRAVITSKY. Famished?

FRIEDMAN. Fartumilt?

WEXLER. Farblonjet?

MILLER. Enough!

SCHEINMAN. Look, Miller, we need you.

FRIEDMAN. To be honest, you're the first person of your... persuasion... to last an entire week.

MILLER. What about McCormick?

(Everyone looks uncomfortable.)

SCHEINMAN. I might as well level with you. There is no McCormick in our company.

KRAVITSKY. We added the name for business reasons.

MILLER. But—

FRIEDMAN. It reassures our Gentile clients.

MILLER. But don't they ever wonder where he is?

WEXLER. We say he's at the club.

MILLER. What club?

WEXLER. They never ask.

MILLER. I don't—

SCHEINMAN. Miller, why did you join our company?

MILLER. Well, you have an excellent reputation, and you have all these extra days off around the World Series.

SCHEINMAN. Well, we hired you because we believe in you.

MILLER. But I'll never fit in.

FRIEDMAN. Perfect.

MILLER. Perfect?

WEXLER. The Jews haven't fit in for over fifty-seven hundred years.

KRAVITSKY. The more you don't fit in, the more you fit in perfectly.

MILLER. I'm beginning to understand farblonjet.

FRIEDMAN. Mazel tov.

MILLER. I know that one!

SCHEINMAN. Use it.

MILLER. "You just won the lottery. Mazel tov."

SCHEINMAN. Wexler.

WEXLER. "I hear your daughter's *third* husband is Jewish. Mazel tov!"

MILLER. I have so much to learn.

SCHEINMAN. And you will. But not from some ferkokteh dictionary. From stories.

FRIEDMAN. From the stories, you'll learn the words. But with chhhhhuh.

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EVE AND ADAM: THE UNTOLD STORY

Cast of Characters

EVE

ADAM

GOD

NARRATOR *(can be a voice-over)*

Place

The Garden of Eden.

Time

In the beginning.

(Henceforth, before each sketch begins, a Yiddish word appears on a screen, or is announced in a voiceover, or both, followed by the name of the sketch.)

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“macher”

big shot

EVE AND ADAM: THE UNTOLD STORY

(Then we hear:)

NARRATOR. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And she filled the earth with plants and trees, and birds that flew and creatures that slithered, all of which were biodegradable. On the sixth day, God created the human being. And she looked at her creation and said:

(In the middle of the garden, a woman stirs from the ground. She is naked and unashamed. [The nudity can be simulated.] GOD observes.)

GOD. I do such good work.

EVE. Pardon me?

GOD. I didn't think the human being would turn out to be so cute.

EVE. Thanks.

GOD. Enjoy my garden, Eve. It is a gift from me to you.

EVE. And what do you want from me?

GOD. Just enjoy life and be happy.

EVE. Maybe it's the way you created me, but why do I feel there's a catch?

GOD. There's one catch.

EVE. I knew it.

GOD. You may not eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

EVE. But how am I going to get enough roughage in my diet?

GOD. I have provided you with everything you need, Eve.

EVE. "Eve"? Why have you named me "Eve"?

GOD. I thought of you last night.

EVE. Well, thanks, God. I appreci—ooo—

(EVE stands. She feels unbalanced. She touches her ribcage.)

GOD. Something the matter?

EVE. I feel like I have an extra rib or something.

GOD. I'm glad you reminded me. From that rib, I will create for you a partner.

EVE. I'm getting a girlfriend?

GOD. No, from that rib, I will create "man."

EVE. Why?

GOD. You need a man so you can go forth, be fruitful and multiply.

EVE. I thought you said I could enjoy life and be happy.

GOD. But you will *want* to be fruitful and multiply.

EVE. Can't we wait until my fifties when I'm exhausted from enjoying life so much?

GOD. No.

EVE. But I don't want to—

GOD. I said, "*No*"!

EVE. Oh, yeah? Well, who made you God?

GOD. I don't know. I've only had the job for a week.

EVE. God, please, I'm really happy—

GOD. It's too late. I have my plans.

(GOD claps. A cloud of dust rises, consuming EVE.)

EVE. Owwwwcchhhh!

(When the dust settles, a man stands naked and unashamed. EVE holds her rib.)

If childbirth hurts half as much as this, forget it.

(EVE notices ADAM.)

ADAM. Yo, babe.

EVE. Well, so much for paradise.

NARRATOR. And God looked at woman and man, the crowning achievements of her universe, and she said:

GOD. I could use a day off.

(The NARRATOR and GOD exit.)

ADAM. So—come here often?

EVE. Now I know why God invented pets.

ADAM. So, like, you free tomorrow night?

EVE. What's tomorrow night?

ADAM. It's Saturday night—date night. I thought we could go into the woods and observe the evolution of the species.

EVE. Please. I'm innocent, not stupid.

ADAM. C'mon, loosen up. Let's party.

EVE. I think I liked things better when I had lopsided ribs.

ADAM. What?

EVE. You came from my extra rib.

ADAM. No way.

EVE. It's true.

ADAM. I don't like this at all.

EVE. What's wrong?

ADAM. If the other guys find out I came from a gal's rib, I'm never gonna hear the end of it.

EVE. There are no other guys.

ADAM. Yeah, but—

EVE. At this rate, there will be no other guys.

ADAM. I tell you what. How 'bout, if anybody asks, *you* came from *my* rib.

EVE. Why would I want to agree to that?

ADAM. C'mahhn, be a sport. Remember, all of civilization is going to descend from us.

EVE. I think “descend” is the right word.

ADAM. I want my descendents to look up to me.

EVE. Listen, *macher*, I'm not going to lie.

ADAM. You want word to get around that *I* came from *you*? You want to take responsibility for having created *me*?

EVE. Well, when you put it that way. How's this? I won't tell anyone you came from me, and I won't correct you when you lie.

ADAM. You're sure I can trust you on this?

EVE. If I ever tell anyone, may I be forced to menstruate once a month.

ADAM. Great. So you want to go for a walk?

EVE. I'm really not in the mood...

ADAM. C'mahhhhhhn...

EVE. Look, *buddy*...

ADAM. The name's Adam.

EVE. Okay, *Adam*...

ADAM. I think God wants the guys to be named alphabetically. So if we have a son, we could name *him* Buddy. And if you're nice to me, we can work all the way to "Zachary."

EVE. I don't want 26 sons.

ADAM. I'll settle for thirteen.

EVE. Hey, let's get one thing straight. If—and I don't mean when, I mean *if* we ever do anything, you're going to have use protection.

ADAM. I'm not wearing anything.

EVE. Why not?

ADAM. Because I'm naked and unashamed.

EVE. Yeah, well get over it.

ADAM. So you want to go for a walk?

EVE. I'm really not in the—

ADAM. Let's go for a walk.

EVE. God, why did you create an animal that can't take a hint?

ADAM. C'mahhhnnnn. One walk.

EVE. Okay. One walk.

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GOOD NEWS FROM ALBERT

Cast of Characters

ALBERT EINSTEIN

ALBERT EINSTEIN'S MOM

Place

Albert's home and Albert's mom's home

Time

During Albert's lifetime

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“nudge”
pester

GOOD NEWS FROM ALBERT

(Lights up on two areas:)

(On one side of the stage, ALBERT EINSTEIN picks up a phone and dials it. On the other side, ALBERT EINSTEIN'S MOM answers it.)

ALBERT. *(Very excited:)* Hello, Mom? It's Al.

MOM. Al who?

ALBERT. *(Excitement disappearing:)* Your son, Albert. Albert Einstein.

MOM. Oh, yes. It's been so long since I've heard from you, I couldn't quite place the voice.

ALBERT. Ma...

MOM. I haven't heard from you for a month.

ALBERT. What do you mean? I called you last week.

MOM. Last week was in a different month.

ALBERT. Mom, I have very, very good news.

MOM. (*Very excited:*) What's her name?

ALBERT. It's not a woman, Mother.

MOM. You know, the temple singles group is having a dance Saturday night, and I thought—

ALBERT. Ma, I'm not comfortable at those things.

MOM. Nobody's comfortable at those things. That's why they get married.

ALBERT. I'm not interested.

MOM. You know, Mr. Brilliant Physicist, life is more than just matter and energy. You need a woman, too.

ALBERT. I know that.

MOM. Then why don't you get a haircut?

ALBERT. I like my hair this way.

MOM. Sometimes I look at those pictures in the papers of you hobnobbing with all those geniuses, and I think, "What they must think of my Albert, looking like a shlump."

ALBERT. Mom, will you stop nudging me about my hair?

MOM. And you're not eating well, are you?

ALBERT. Ma!

MOM. You think you can hide that by wearing floppy sweaters, but I know you're thin. It doesn't take an Einstein to see that.

ALBERT. I think I gotta go.

MOM. You said you called for a reason.

ALBERT. Oh, right... I won the Nobel Prize today.

MOM. Mazel tov! Is there money in that?

ALBERT. Some, but more importantly, it's one of the biggest honors in the world.

MOM. So the money's bupkis, huh?

ALBERT. I'll probably go down in history.

MOM. (*Sad:*) Ohhh. I see.

ALBERT. I thought you'd be happy.

MOM. I suppose now that you're going to be so famous, you won't need to call your mother anymore.

ALBERT. Mom!

MOM. Well, I read somewhere that once Disraeli became Prime Minister of England, the frequency of calls to his mother dropped 72%.

ALBERT. Where do you read these things?

MOM. *Jewish Mothers Quarterly.*

ALBERT. Mom.

MOM. And when I think about how Freud's mother must feel...

ALBERT. Mom, this is the greatest day of my life. For once, could we dwell on the *bright* side of good news?

MOM. I'm sorry. Look, why don't you come over Friday night for dinner, I'll pry your father off the couch, and we'll celebrate. Then we'll go to temple—

ALBERT. Mom, I don't go to temple.

MOM. Do it for me.

ALBERT. But I don't believe in an anthropomorphic God. I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.

MOM. Do it for me.

ALBERT. You know, I really hoped we could have one nice call.

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STEVIE GOLDSTEIN FACES THE DAY OF ATONEMENT UNPREPARED

Cast of Characters

RONALD GOLDSTEIN, late thirties

NINA GOLDSTEIN, his wife, same age

STEVIE GOLDSTEIN, their son, age 10
(to be played by an adult)

Place

A middle-class, suburban living room.

Time

Just before the sunset commencing Yom Kippur.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“kvell”
to feel joyful pride

STEVIE GOLDSTEIN FACES THE
DAY OF ATONEMENT UNPREPARED

(As the scene begins, we hear the music of the “Kol Nidre” prayer in the background, as NINA lights a memorial candle. She is nicely but conservatively dressed. The music fades. NINA looks at her watch and becomes a bit anxious.)

NINA. Will you two hurry up? Services start in forty minutes.

RONALD. *(o.s.)* Then we’ve got plenty of time.

NINA. We do not. It's the most holy Jewish holiday of the year. You know how that screws up traffic.

(STEVIE enters. He's a precocious but timid, bright but not worldly, "good" child with a Beaver Cleaver innocence. He wears a brand new suit.)

STEVIE. I'm ready, Mom.

NINA. Don't you look dashing. Come here. I think you're the most handsome ten-year-old in the world.

STEVIE. *(Uncomfortable:)* Mom.

NINA. You just look so handsome in that suit.

(NINA begins picking infinitesimal items off STEVIE's suit. She also licks her fingers and pats down a couple of STEVIE's hairs.)

STEVIE. Is that a compliment to me or the suit?

(RONALD enters. He's completely dressed, except that his shoes are in his hands. He is crossing to another room.)

RONALD. Ah, picking and licking. It's the High Holidays, all right.

(RONALD exits.)

STEVIE. Mom...

NINA. Yes, Stevie?

STEVIE. I think there's something we should discuss.

NINA. All right.

STEVIE. I'm not sure I should go tonight.

(NINA feels STEVIE's forehead.)

NINA. You can go.

STEVIE. That's not it.

NINA. Is there something superspecial you want to watch on television?

STEVIE. No. It's something else.

NINA. What?

STEVIE. Well, the purpose of the Day of Atonement is to go and pray, and to ask for God's forgiveness for all your sins, right?

NINA. Right. So?

STEVIE. I didn't sin this year.

NINA. Are you being "smart"?

STEVIE. No, that's a sin.

NINA. (*Yelling:*) Ronald!

(RONALD *enters, buffing his shoes.*)

RONALD. I'm ready.

NINA. We have a family problem.

RONALD. What?

NINA. (*To STEVIE:*) Tell your father.

STEVIE. I don't think I should go to Yom Kippur services because I didn't sin all year, and thus I think it would be both hypocritical of me to go as well as inconsiderate of God's time.

RONALD. That's reasonable.

(RONALD *puts on his shoes.*)

NINA. It is not.

RONALD. If you're absolutely sure you didn't sin.

STEVIE. I wouldn't say I'm absolutely sure...

NINA. Well, then.

STEVIE. But to the best of my knowledge, I haven't committed a single sin all year.

NINA. All year, you never once talked back to your teacher?

STEVIE. No.

NINA. Watched TV when you should have been doing your homework?

STEVIE. No.

RONALD. Cheated on a test?

STEVIE. No.

NINA. Snuck cookies before dinner?

STEVIE. No.

RONALD. Stayed up past your bedtime?

STEVIE. No.

NINA. Lied to either of us?

STEVIE. What would I have to lie about?

RONALD. Good point.

NINA. Well, come to services anyway, and just sit there.

STEVIE. I'd feel dishonest.

NINA. Good. Then you'll have something to atone for.

STEVIE. Mom...

NINA. What am I going to tell the Hirsches? "No, I'm afraid our Stevie didn't come with us. He hasn't sinned all year."

STEVIE. I kind of hoped you'd be proud.

RONALD. We are, son.

NINA. Stevie, I'm your mother. Trust me. You've sinned.

STEVIE. Have you noticed me do anything wrong all year?

RONALD. Hmm. I haven't.

NINA. What about that "thank you" note you were supposed to write to Grandma Molly four months ago?

STEVIE. I wrote it. You never mailed it. I think it's still in your purse.

NINA. Why didn't you remind me?

STEVIE. I did. Three times. I figured four would be nagging.

RONALD. Let's face it. Our son hasn't sinned all year.

NINA. (*To STEVIE:*) Why didn't you tell us this before we bought you your new suit?

STEVIE. The year wasn't over. I didn't want to be presumptuous... I really thought you'd be proud.

NINA. (*Touched:*) Is that why you didn't sin? So your parents would kvell?

STEVIE. Oh, no. Such a self-serving motivation would defeat the whole purpose.

NINA. I see.

STEVIE. But I kind of *hoped* you'd be proud. Is that a sin?

RONALD. No.

STEVIE. Do you want me to sin?

RONALD. Of course not.

NINA. Not at all.

RONALD. It's just that... It's just that... You see, son, all we want is for you to be a fully well-rounded human being. And... And it's not human *never* to sin.

STEVIE. I suddenly feel in such a bind.

NINA. You see, sweetheart, although God wants us never to sin, he does expect us to sin occasionally.

STEVIE. You're saying I haven't lived up to God's expectations.

NINA. No.

RONALD. Steven, God gave us this wonderful thing called "free will." And you can't make a free will choice *not* to sin if you're completely unaware of what it's like *to* sin.

STEVIE. Have you and Mom sinned?

NINA. Of course.

RONALD. All the time.

NINA. Nothing that we're proud of.

RONALD. Just some little sins.

NINA. The everyday sins.

RONALD. Just a couple of the Ten Commandments.

STEVIE. Oh.

RONALD. Son, part of growing up is living and learning. Every kid swears a little...

NINA. Cheats on a test once in awhile...

RONALD. Lies once in a blue moon...

NINA. Thinks negative thoughts...

RONALD. Shoplifts items under five dollars.

NINA. Ronald! *(To STEVIE:)* The important thing to remember is, these things are wrong.

STEVIE. *(Trying to get things clear in his head:)* They're wrong.

RONALD. Very wrong.

NINA. But they're not really bad.

RONALD. Just wrong.

NINA. If we found you doing any of these things, we'd have to discipline you.

RONALD. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't do them.

NINA. After you've done them, then you can feel guilty about it, and you get punished with a life that is less than you deserve, and everything balances.

RONALD. Understand?

(NINA and RONALD resume preparing to go.)

STEVIE. *(Upset; the truth finally comes out:)* But... but... I don't know how to sin.

RONALD. It's a natural process, son.

STEVIE. I don't get it.

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CAN THIS MARRIAGE BE SAVED?

Cast of Characters

THE JUDGE *(an older woman)*

THE BAILIFF

THE DEFENDANT *(male)*

THE PLAINTIFF *(female)*

Place

A courtroom.

Time

The present.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear:]

“meshuggeneh”
crazy
CAN THIS MARRIAGE BE SAVED?

(As the play begins, the DEFENDANT and the PLAINTIFF take their places in the courtroom as the BAILIFF addresses the audience:)

BAILIFF. Order, order in the courtroom please. Court is now in session. All rise for the judge... All rise... *(If necessary:)* This play is going to take a long time unless we *all* rise.

(Everyone rises as the JUDGE enters. When she sits:)

You may be seated. *(To the JUDGE:)* Your honor, on the docket today is the divorce case of the Entire Human Race versus God.

JUDGE. Are both sides present?

GOD (THE DEFENDANT). I want it on record that I'm here under protest.

JUDGE. And you are?

GOD. I am who I am.

JUDGE. Just give me a straight answer.

GOD. I am beyond explanation and description.

JUDGE. Give me a straight answer or I'll hold you in contempt.

GOD. How dare you! I am the creator and ruler of the universe, and you dare to judge *me?!?*

JUDGE. *(To the HUMAN:)* Well, I can see why you'd want a divorce.

HUMAN (THE PLAINTIFF). Thank you, your hon—

JUDGE. Whether or not there should be one, that's another question. Bailiff, will you swear in both parties?

(The BAILIFF walks up to GOD with a Bible. He puts his hand on it.)

BAILIFF. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help yourself?

GOD. I do.

(The BAILIFF walks up to the HUMAN with a Bible. She puts her hand on it.)

BAILIFF. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

HUMAN. I'm not comfortable with "so help you God."

GOD. It's because you're arrogant.

HUMAN. It's because I'm sick of asking for help and not getting it.

JUDGE. Bailiff, cut "so help you God."

BAILIFF. (*Clears throat, then:*) Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and— (*Turning to GOD:*) You're not going to smite me if I leave out "so help you God," are you?

GOD. I haven't smitten in years.

BAILIFF. (*Turning back to the HUMAN:*) And nothing but the truth—question mark.

HUMAN. I do.

JUDGE. Now I see by the papers filed that the human being is suing God for divorce on the grounds of alienation of affection, neglect and abandonment.

GOD. These complaints have no merit! I'm being scapegoated for the human's—

JUDGE. You'll get your chance. Now how long have the two of you been married?

GOD. When I revealed the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, and he brought it down to Earth, it was compared to a ketubah, a marriage contract between me and the people Israel.

JUDGE. So that was about—

GOD. Three thousand years ago.

JUDGE. And how many of those years have been good ones?

HUMAN. Twelve.

GOD. Twelve?!

HUMAN. Maybe fifteen.

GOD. What about the Renaissance?

HUMAN. The Renaissance was nice.

JUDGE. God, why did you want a marriage contract between you and the human?

GOD. Of all the creatures on earth, none mean so much to me as the human being. Yes, I admit we've had some difficult times—

HUMAN. The Dark Ages, two hundred years without a decent thing to wear.

GOD. But my main feeling towards the human being has always been—love.

HUMAN. I've had one-night stands that were more loving.

GOD. Not the ones *I've* seen.

HUMAN. (*Gasps, then:*) You pervert.

GOD. I'm all-seeing; I can't help it.

JUDGE. (*To the HUMAN:*) And do you feel any love towards God?

HUMAN. On rare occasion, like when I get good news, or when something terrible happens to somebody else instead of me.

JUDGE. Well, if your love is that infrequent, why did you agree to a marriage contract with him?

HUMAN. Well, at the time, I was stuck in the desert, and I was hungry, and I thought he'd be a good provider.

JUDGE. And has he been?

HUMAN. On and off.

GOD. On. 100% on.

HUMAN. Throughout history, you let your people starve.

GOD. She's blaming again. Most of the starving is due to their own inability to get along with each other.

HUMAN. It's your climate, and you keep moving the good farm land.

GOD. I gave you the most advanced brain on Earth. It's not my fault it took you centuries to figure out irrigation.

HUMAN. You wiped out entire—

GOD. If you started taking responsi—

(The JUDGE pounds her gavel.)

JUDGE. Quiet! You two are going to give me a heart attack.

GOD. Do you exercise regularly and eat enough fiber?

JUDGE. Shut up. So when did the troubles between you two start?

HUMAN. From Day One, he's criticized everything I've done.

GOD. From Day One, you've deserved it.

HUMAN. On Day One I was adorable.

GOD. Every day I see you commit wars in my name. I see you mangle my words to justify cruelty beyond my own imagination.

HUMAN. If these things bother you so much, how come you're always rewarding sinful behavior?

GOD. I *never* do that.

HUMAN. It seems to me a lot of the most selfish and evil people on earth have it pretty good.

GOD. They won't in the afterlife.

HUMAN. The afterlife, the afterlife. I'm not dead yet! Who cares if the weather's great in Florida if you're stuck in New Jersey?

GOD. See what I have to put up with, your honor? Resentment has become the human's most common prayer.

JUDGE. And yet you don't want this divorce?

GOD. When I gave my vows to the human, it was forever, even if she *is* meshuggeneh.

HUMAN. You haven't lived up to your vows.

GOD. I certainly have.

HUMAN. You've been distant for so long now.

GOD. Well, maybe if you stopped worshipping other gods—

JUDGE. You've worshipped other gods?

GOD. The god of fame, the god of greed—

HUMAN. Well maybe if you answered my prayers more—

GOD. Well, I'm sorry if I don't consider "gimme, gimme, gimme" a prayer!

HUMAN. Your honor, the last hundred years has just been one horrible event after—

GOD. Great things have happened in the last century.

HUMAN. When I think about, about the Holocaust—

GOD. Again with the Holocaust.

HUMAN. Yes, again with the Holocaust.

GOD. Every time I remind her how great the last century was, she tosses the Holocaust right in my face.

HUMAN. It was very traumatic.

GOD. I grieve over it as much as any human. But I'd like to think there's more to the last century, and more to our relationship than the Holocaust.

HUMAN. You allow too much suffering.

GOD. You always focus on the negative. What about all my miracles?

HUMAN. I can't remember the last time there was a miracle.

GOD. The sun rose this morning, didn't it?

JUDGE. *(After a moment, to the HUMAN:)* Well?

HUMAN. Your honor, I've, I've worked on this relationship for centuries. I've tried to understand him. Through disasters and atrocities, I've forgiven him again and again.

GOD. *You've forgiven—*

HUMAN. *(Not stopping:)* He'd disappear, for generations at a time, and I'd think, okay, he has a tough job, he travels a lot. But now, every day, when I see what he permits—

GOD. I don't control human behavior.

HUMAN. *(To GOD:)* I don't have faith in you anymore.

GOD. You don't?

HUMAN. Do you know what it's like to pray and pray and pray and not have your prayers answered? Do you know what it's like to yearn to believe and constantly face acts of godlessness?

JUDGE. Well, God?

GOD. I'm a deity, not a panacea.

JUDGE. (*To the HUMAN:*) What kind of settlement do you want?

GOD. I obj—

JUDGE. I haven't made my decision; I just want to know.

HUMAN. I'm willing to split things fifty-fifty, your honor. God can get the heavens, I just want the earth.

GOD. Global warming, here we come.

HUMAN. I need a place to live.

GOD. *I* created it.

HUMAN. I've taken care of it.

GOD. A great job you've done. The number of species you've destroyed—If I flooded the planet today, Noah wouldn't need an ark; he'd just need a dinghy.

HUMAN. You know, you're, you're—you're all-obnoxious, that's what you are!

GOD. How dare you speak to me that way?!!

HUMAN. How dare *you* speak that way—

GOD. I'll speak any way I—

HUMAN. I want a divorce!!!

GOD. Go to Hell!!!

(The HUMAN gasps and begins to cry.)

I didn't mean...

JUDGE. You two have a very dysfunctional relationship, you know that?

GOD. If she just followed my commandments—

JUDGE. God, you should be ashamed of yourself.

GOD. Me?!

JUDGE. Look at her. I don't know how much you've really neglected her, but she *feels* abandoned, don't you?

HUMAN. Yes.

GOD. Does that mean you're granting the divorce?

JUDGE. God, you're righteous, demanding, and often inaccessible. The human is rationalizing, self-pitying, and recurringly irresponsible. You two are made for each other.

HUMAN. But—

JUDGE. I'm not done. As damaged as your relationship is, it, it just seems like it has such potential. But your expectations... The human expects God to fulfill human responsibilities, and, at least according to the human, God wants the human to be better than human.

GOD. I just want—

JUDGE. Shush. I'm directing you two to spend more time with each other. Quality time. Starting right here, right now. Don't command, and don't whine. In fact, I suggest you start with an apology.

GOD. I'm always open to hearing her apology.

BAILIFF. I think she meant you, bozo.

GOD. You want me, the all-knowing, all-seeing creator and ruler of the universe—to apologize?

JUDGE. Who better to set an example?

(GOD walks up to the HUMAN. GOD doesn't know what to say. Finally:)

GOD. I really do care about you.

HUMAN. *(Dubious:)* Yeah, sure.

GOD. I even turned myself into human form to come to this trial. I was going to come as a burning bush, but I thought that'd be

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OY

Cast of Characters

MURRAY, an old Jew

LEO, an old Jew

SOL, an old Jew

Place

A health club sauna.

Time

Late morning.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear:]

“oy”
(undefinable)
OY

(As the scene begins, MURRAY enters the health club sauna.)

MURRAY. *(Sighs:)* Oy.

(MURRAY crosses to a place to sit. With each step, we hear:)

Oy... oy... oy... oy... *(etc.)*

(MURRAY sits.)

Oyyyyyyyyyyyyy.

(Beat. An internal shrug:)

Oy.

(LEO enters. His body aches.)

LEO. *(Different than MURRAY:)* Oy!

(LEO rotates a shoulder.)

Oy!

(Then the other.)

Oy!

(LEO crosses to a place to sit. Having just had a big workout [for him, at least], he feels his muscles with each step.)

Oy... oy... oy... oy, oy, oy... oy... oy, oy, oy... oy...

(LEO sits with some difficulty.)

Oyyyyy...

(The seat is very hot; LEO bounces back up.)

Oy!

(He tries again.)

Oyyyyy...

(Still too hot; another bounce.)

Oy!

(One last try.)

Oyyyyy...

(This one feels good to his tush.)

Oy.

(SOL enters, shuffling to his place in the sauna. He carries a newspaper under his arm. Like an elderly Jewish Indian in a wardance, SOL chants with each step as he shuffles.)

SOL. Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy... *(etc.)*

(As he slowly sits, with great concentration, there is silence. Until he touches the very hot seat.)

(“Boy, is that hot!”) Oy!

(SOL jumps up. He slowly lowers himself again, touching down one buttock first, then rolling down the rest of his tush. As each body part touches again, SOL makes a peeping sound.)

Oy... oy... oy... Oyyyyy.

(The men all sigh:)

MURRAY, LEO and SOL. *(Simultaneously:)* Oyyyyy.

(SOL opens his newspaper, which includes articles about economic conditions, trouble in the Mideast, celebrity gossip, anti-Semitism, an obituary, recent positive medical developments, etc. As he skims the paper, SOL’s responses run the gamut from disgust and contempt to hope and amusement. SOL responds with a distinct and different “oy” every time he sees a new headline or reads a story.)

SOL. Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... *(etc.)*

(After a bit, MURRAY has heard enough of this, and he starts telling LEO how his day has gone. Soon he is involved in a long monologue about his life and the emotions he feels in response to it—happy, sad, confused, disappointed, acquiescent, bitter, hopeful, tired, tolerant, amused, etc.)

MURRAY. Oy, oy, oy, oy, oy, oy... *(etc.)*

(LEO quickly ignores MURRAY [who continues anyway]. LEO stands and does some stretching exercises. With each stretch comes an “oy.” Since LEO has been doing his stretches in a set rhythm for years, the oy’s should be rhythmical as well.)

LEO. Oy... oy... oy, oy, oy... Oy... oy... oy, oy, oy... *(etc.)*

(The three activities continue for awhile, a fugue of oy’s. LEO’s stretching gets more and more intense, until suddenly, he grabs his heart.)

(A sharp pain:) Oy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(MURRAY and LEO respond.)

MURRAY and SOL. Oy!

(They rush over to LEO and help him sit down. LEO realizes he just pulled a muscle. His heart is fine.)

LEO. *(“It was nothing, no big deal.”)* Oy.

MURRAY. *(“Are you sure?”)* Oy?

LEO. *(“I’m sure.”)* Oy.

SOL. *(“You should be more careful!”)* Oy!

LEO. *(“I’m fine.”)* Oy.

SOL. *(“I mean it!”)* Oy!

LEO. *(“Relax.”)* Oy.

(MURRAY and SOL return to their places.)

SOL. *(To MURRAY: “LEO is an old fool, and soon he will die.”)* Oy, oy, oy, oy, oy, oy, oy.

(MURRAY, LEO and SOL look at each other.)

MURRAY, LEO and SOL. *(Simultaneously: “Life is difficult.”)* Oyyy.

LEO. *(Remembering all he has to do today:)* Oy, oy, oy.

(LEO gets up to leave. He crosses to the exit.)

Oy... oy... oy... oy...

(He turns to MURRAY and SOL and says goodbye.)

Oy!

(MURRAY and SOL respond.)

MURRAY and SOL. Oy!

(LEO exits. SOL decides to leave.)

SOL. *(Standing up:)* Oy, oy, oy—oy!

(Exiting; his trademark Jewish Indian shuffle:)

Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy... *(etc.)*

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ACT II

MURRAY, LEO AND SOL REWRITE THE CRIMINAL CODE

Cast of Characters

MURRAY, an old Jew

LEO, an old Jew

SOL, an old Jew

Place

A health club sauna.

Time

Late morning.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear:]

“kibitz”
to converse,
from the sidelines
MURRAY, LEO AND SOL
REWRITE THE CRIMINAL CODE

(As the scene begins, MURRAY enters the sauna. With each step, we hear:)

MURRAY. Oy... oy... oy... oy.

(MURRAY sits.)

Oyyyyyyyyyy.

(LEO enters and crosses to his seat.)

LEO. Oy!... Oy!... Oy!... Oy!

(LEO sits.)

(Unwinding:) Oy, yoy, yoy, yoy, yoy, yoy, yoy.

MURRAY. So how are you, Leo?

LEO. I've been better, and I've been worse.

MURRAY. Is that so?

LEO. Well, I assume if I haven't been worse, then somebody has.

MURRAY. What's the matter?

LEO. It's my new dentures, Murray. They're no good.

MURRAY. That's too bad.

LEO. I paid an arm and a leg for these teeth, and now I don't know if I'm ahead or behind.

MURRAY. Why don't you have them fixed?

LEO. I looked into that. They said they could fix them, but it'd take two weeks. What am I going to do for those two weeks—get a loaner? It's no good.

MURRAY. I hear you.

(SOL enters and shuffles to his seat. Like an elderly Jewish Indian in a war dance, SOL chants with each step as he moves.)

SOL. Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy...

Oy, oy, oy, oy... *(etc.)*

(As SOL lowers himself on the seat, he makes a long sound like an airline making a dive bomb attack.)

Oyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy—yoy.

MURRAY. So, Sol, how's life?

SOL. It's not even worth kibitzing about; that's how life is.

LEO. What happened?

SOL. Someone robbed our apartment.

LEO. Oyyy.

SOL. You said it.

MURRAY. Did they get much?

SOL. They stole our entire set of silver.

LEO. Oyyy.

SOL. You said it.

MURRAY. How's Esther handling it?

SOL. Esther is besides herself. Either that, or I have astigmatism.

MURRAY. That's too bad.

SOL. And she's insisting we replace the silver with the exact same pattern.

MURRAY. Can you do that?

SOL. We haven't used the silver in twenty years; who remembers what it looked like? I tell you, if I could get my hands on whoever did it, I'd kick him in the kishkes, rip out his pupik, and make from him tsimis.

LEO. Must you be so graphic?

SOL. It makes my blood boil, that's all.

LEO. It makes me angry, too, but it doesn't make my blood boil.

SOL. I have higher blood pressure than you. My blood boils quicker.

MURRAY. The whole justice system today—it's no good.

SOL. I agree.

LEO. They should go back to "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

SOL. Eh, there was crime then, too.

MURRAY. Maybe they should try two eyes for an eye; two teeth for a tooth.

SOL. Well, that's fine for eyes and teeth, but what about those things there are only one of, like a nose?

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A TROLLEY NAMED TSURIS

Cast of Characters

STANLEY, a common and earthy man

STELLA, his wife, a world-weary woman

RHODA WIKOFF, older, a yente

Place

A tenement flat in New Orleans.

Time

The late fifties.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“yente”
busybody
A TROLLEY NAMED TSURIS

(Before the play begins, we hear [optional]:)

NARRATOR. *(v.o.)* Many Jewish actors have adopted non-Jewish stage names. John Garfield was born Julius Garfinkle. Tony Curtis was born Bernie Schwartz. Shirley Temple was born Shirley Synagogue. A lesser known fact is that playwright Tennessee Williams was also Jewish, and that his real name was Tennessee Williamsburg. Among the papers discovered at his death was a new play exploring his Jewish heritage, which we are pleased to present tonight: A TROLLEY NAMED TSURIS—a short play in three acts.

Act One

(The kitchen/dining area of a New Orleans tenement flat. STELLA is ironing. She wears a worn housedress. From the courtyard, we hear:)

STANLEY. *(o.s.)* Stella!!!!

(STELLA winces. STANLEY enters, wearing a sweat-stained undershirt and work pants. He's in a hurry.)

STANLEY. No time to eat. They moved up the bowling tournament an hour. Where's my bowling shirt?

(STELLA points to a bunch of shirts hanging on a doorknob.)

(STANLEY extracts his bowling shirt.)

STANLEY. It's stiff as a board. The five-and-dime have a special on starch?

STELLA. No.

(STANLEY grabs his bowling bag, takes out his bowling ball.)

STANLEY. What'd you do to my bowling ball?

STELLA. I buffed it with Lemon Pledge. Doesn't it look clean and shiny?

STANLEY. Bowling balls should not smell like fruit!

STELLA. Don't yell. Our new neighbor'll hear you.

STANLEY. I don't care. I'm sick of this, Stella. Every year 'round this time, you start doing stuff like this.

STELLA. Mistakes happen, Stanley.

STANLEY. Then how come you've never forgiven mine?

STELLA. Your mistake was tragic and unforgivable.

STANLEY. I bought you flowers.

STELLA. They were wilted.

STANLEY. It's New Orleans. Everything's wilted.

STELLA. When will you be home?

STANLEY. After I've bowled, had a few beers, played poker, and given my shirt some new sweat stains.

(STANLEY storms out. STELLA begins to cry. There's a knock on the door. STELLA collects herself as best as she can.)

STELLA. Door's open.

(The door opens. RHODA WIKOFF enters, holding a measuring cup.)

RHODA. Excuse me. I know this is a long shot, but... Do you have any matzo farfel?

(STELLA bursts out crying.)

It's no big deal. I'll make a noodle kugel.

(STELLA cries some more.)

RHODA. Are you all right?

STELLA. I have no idea who you are. I, I shouldn't burden you with my troubles.

RHODA. Darling... burden.

STELLA. Sometimes I think life is a cruel joke perpetrated by a sadistic God. I suspect this not only because my life has been a series of unending disappointments, but also because God always lets you become aware of beauty and fineness before flooding your life with degradation and disgust.

RHODA. Let's go shopping.

STELLA. I can't. I'm busy wallowing in despair.

RHODA. I used to wallow in despair, but it gave me heartburn. Now I shop.

STELLA. Do you think that'll help?

RHODA. Trust me. We'll buy some tchochkehs, and you'll feel fine in an hour.

STELLA. What's a choch-key?

RHODA. Have you ever been in a store, picked something up, and thought, “I have no idea what this is for, but it’s cute.”

STELLA. Uh-huh.

RHODA. That’s a tchochkeh.

STELLA. Oh, it’s like a bauble.

RHODA. It’s a bissle like a bauble.

STELLA. If you don’t mind me asking, who are you?

RHODA. Oh, I’m, I’m your new neighbor, Rhoda Wikoff.

STELLA. Okay, Rhoda, let’s go shopping.

RHODA. Good idea.

STELLA. My sister Blanche once said, “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

RHODA. My sister Shirley once said, “People will always respect you if your shoes and handbag match.”

(STELLA and RHODA exit.)

(The lights fade.)

Act Two

(Early evening, a couple of weeks later. STELLA putters around the house, wearing a much nicer housedress and shoes. Although in a better mood, she still winces when she hears:)

STANLEY. *(o.s.)* Stella!!!

(STANLEY enters.)

STANLEY. What’s with the fancy get-up?

STELLA. Rhoda is taking me to a lecture at her... *(Trying her best:)* shhhhhool.

STANLEY. What’s a shhhhhool?

STELLA. It’s a place where you go to be close to God and to see how everyone else is dressed.

STANLEY. I don't like her.

STELLA. You haven't even met her.

STANLEY. And what the hell am I supposed to do for dinner?

(STELLA takes out a plate of food from the refrigerator and places it on the table.)

STELLA. Rhoda fixed you a cold plate. Isn't she thoughtful?

STANLEY. What the hell is that thing?

STELLA. It's called gefilte fish.

STANLEY. I've been fishing since I was old enough to hold a pole, and I never seen no fish like that.

STELLA. Just give it a try.

STANLEY. Are there any bones in it?

STELLA. Just eat.

(STANLEY takes a bite.)

STANLEY. This don't taste like no fish!

STELLA. I think it needs horseradish.

STANLEY. I don't trust her.

STELLA. She's the first person in my entire life who's treated me with decency and respect.

STANLEY. A woman like that can destroy a good marriage.

(There's a knock on the door.)

RHODA. *(o.s.)* Yoo-hoo!

STELLA. Come on in.

(RHODA enters, carrying a plate of mandel bread.)

RHODA. Hello, you must be Stanley. I'm Rhoda Wikoff.

STANLEY. Get lost.

STELLA. Stanley!

RHODA. Stanley, I'm aware of how much I've been depriving you of your wife lately. So I made you some mandel bread.

STANLEY. What is it with you people? Your fish don't look like fish, and your bread don't look like bread.

RHODA. Eat.

(STANLEY opens his mouth to say "No," but as he does, RHODA sticks a piece of mandel bread in his mouth. He's forced to bite it off and swallow it.)

STANLEY. Not bad.

RHODA. Stanley, I don't want to walk back from shul by myself after dark. Please let Stella come with me.

STANLEY. Yeah, but—

(RHODA sticks another piece of mandel bread in his mouth. STANLEY calms down considerably, as if by a spell.)

Oh, all right. Just this once.

(RHODA motions to STELLA, as if to say, "Let's get out while we can." RHODA gives STANLEY the plate of mandel bread.)

RHODA. Thanks. *(Squeezing a cheek:)* I knew you were a mensch.

(STELLA and RHODA exit. The shutting of the door snaps STANLEY out of his trance.)

STANLEY. What the hell happened? And what's with this food? I'm gonna have to do a little snooping around.

(STANLEY's about to absentmindedly eat another piece of mandel bread. He catches himself and tosses it away.)

(The lights fade.)

Act Three

(A few days later, mid-afternoon. STELLA and RHODA sit at the table. STELLA is taking notes.)

RHODA. Now after you grate the potatoes for the latkes—

STELLA. How many potatoes should I grate?

RHODA. For how many people?

STELLA. Just Stanley and me.

RHODA. For Stanley and you, I'd say twenty, just in case relatives come over. Now then, after you've grated the potatoes and treated all the cuts on your fingers, you take the—

(STELLA bursts out crying again.)

RHODA. They heal very quickly.

STELLA. I'm sorry. Stanley and I had a big fight last night.

RHODA. Stella, can I ask you a personal question that's none of my business?

STELLA. I'd rather you not.

RHODA. I'll take that as a "yes." So tell me: How come you never left the bum?

STELLA. I guess for the same reason most wives don't leave their husbands. I know Stanley and I have had our good years and our bad years—the last ten have been bad years—but still, there's a magic a man can do in the dark that makes everything else seem unimportant.

RHODA. He's good at changing fuses?

STELLA. No, it's, it's, oh I'm so confused. I love him, Rhoda. I'm crazy about him. It's just that today's the tenth anniversary of Stanley's tragic and unforgivable mistake.

RHODA. So what's this mistake already?

STELLA. I can't say. It's too tragic and unforgivable.

RHODA. It's about when your sister Blanche visited, isn't it?

STELLA. Oh, no. I mean, Stanley and Blanche never got along, but looking back, Blanche was such a, such a—nudge. She demanded to be waited on; nothing was ever good enough for her; and she blamed everyone else for her suffering. Have you ever met a woman like that?

RHODA. Are you kidding? I raised three.

(From the courtyard, we hear:)

STANLEY. *(o.s.)* Stella!!!

STELLA. What's he doing home so early?

(STANLEY enters, drunk. He carries a toaster [and has a stack of letters tucked in the back pocket of his pants].)

STANLEY. Hi! I won a toaster at the bank, so I decided to spend the afternoon drinking in celebration.

RHODA. Hi, Stanley.

STANLEY. Oh, you again. You know, I've been checking your mail every day this week.

RHODA. I was wondering why all my letters had sweat stains on them.

STANLEY. Look at this, Stell. She's lived in Miami, Long Island, Chicago, all over. *(To RHODA:)* Why do you move around so much? *Huh?!*

STELLA. Stanley, you leave her alone, lest you make another tragic and unforgivable mistake.

STANLEY. Will you stop harping on that?

RHODA. Will somebody *please* tell me what this is about?

STELLA. Okay, I'll tell you.

STANLEY. No.

STELLA. Ten years ago, one night when Stanley and his buddies were playing poker here, our baby, our precious little baby, started crying. So Stanley threw him out the window.

STANLEY. I was drunk! I thought he was the radio!

STELLA. You disgust me! You're a putz, a shmendrick and a shmuck.

STANLEY. At least I speak English!

STELLA. I'm leaving! Don't follow!!

(STELLA storms off. STANLEY calls after her:)

STANLEY. Stella!!! *Stellahhhhhhhhh!!!*

RHODA. You know, everyone in the neighborhood hates when you do that.

STANLEY. I'm afraid I must strike you as the unrefined type.

RHODA. My late husband Nathan, may he rest, who at the dinner table used to nibble from the serving dish rather than put the food on his plate first, he struck me as the unrefined type. You...

STANLEY. Come here.

RHODA. I knew I should've brought some food with me.

STANLEY. I'm sick of your cooking.

RHODA. You didn't like my blintzes?

STANLEY. I threw them out the window.

RHODA. I see. First your child, then good food.

STANLEY. I hate your food.

RHODA. Those foods have powers, Stanley. Powers you can't imagine.

STANLEY. Cut the re-bop.

RHODA. Stay back! You take one more step, and I'll—

STANLEY. You'll what?

RHODA. I'll unleash the powers in all those foods you've noshed on.

STANLEY. You don't scare me.

RHODA. I'm warning you!

STANLEY. You and I have had this date with each other for a long time.

(STANLEY lunges for RHODA, but is stopped by a pain which feels like a cross between a heart attack and a punch in the chest. STANLEY can't move. He clutches himself in agony.)

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CLOSE CALL

Cast of Characters

CHAIM, an old man

DAVID, around thirty

IRVING and SADIE, heard on the radio

Places

A radio station and an apartment.

Time

Morning.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“kvetch”
complain
CLOSE CALL

(On the stage are two areas. In each area is a table. Behind one table sits CHAIM, an elderly, disgruntled man. In front of Chaim is a microphone and a telephone with several buttons on it. Sitting next to the other table is DAVID, an introverted, anxious man of about thirty. On David’s table is a phone and a radio, to which he is listening.)

(As the scene begins, CHAIM is in the middle of his daily radio broadcast.)

CHAIM. ...Remember, that special good this week only at Hyman’s Kosher Delicatessen, where the matzo balls always wear a smile. You’re listening to WKVH*, Kvetchradio, 68.5 on your dial. This is “Chaim in the A.M.” My bunions are killing me, my rent is

ridiculous, and my son is a bum. But enough about me. Let's go back to the phones.

(or KVCH, west of the Mississippi.)*

(CHAIM pushes a button on his phone.)

Hello. This is Chaim in the A.M. You're on the air.

IRVING. Am I on the air?

CHAIM. You're on the air. What's your name?

IRVING. My name is Irving.

CHAIM. Hello, Irving. And how are you today?

IRVING. I'm not a complainer. I'm sure that somewhere in the third world, someone is feeling worse.

CHAIM. What's the problem?

IRVING. Whatever happened to bagels? A new bagel shop opened in my neighborhood, and I went in the other day and asked for a bagel. The clerk asked me, "What kind of bagel do you want?" "What kind of bagel?" I replied. "The doughy kind, with the hole in the middle. The kind the Jews didn't take out of Egypt because they weighed too much." "But what kind?" he asked. "Whole wheat, multi-grain, cinnamon raisin, sun-dried tomato, blueberry, jalapeno." And I'm thinking, when did the Gentiles take over bagels?

CHAIM. I know, I know.

IRVING. Not that I'm complaining, mind you. I'm sure that things were worse in Fourth Century Poland.

CHAIM. I'm sure.

IRVING. There's only one good thing about modern bagel shops.

CHAIM. What's that?

IRVING. When I'm in one, I get so upset I forget how awful my children are.

CHAIM. Children, children...

IRVING. Why did we have them?

CHAIM. We were young. Who knew?

IRVING. My kids only call when they want money.

CHAIM. You're lucky. My only son makes a good living. He never calls.

IRVING. And to think, for them, for half my life, I worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, in my "Going Out of Business" store.

CHAIM. It's a shame.

IRVING. You said it.

CHAIM. So, what can you do?

IRVING. What can you do?

CHAIM. So live and be well.

IRVING. Live and be well.

(DAVID starts to dial a number on his phone and then changes his mind. CHAIM pushes another button on his phone.)

CHAIM. Hello, this is Chaim in the A.M. You're on.

SADIE. Hello, Chaim. This is Sadie.

CHAIM. Sadie, it's been so long. How are you?

SADIE. If you twist my arm, I'll tell you.

CHAIM. I'm twisting.

SADIE. I'm telling. I feel awful. I have a pain that's on my left side Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and it moves to my right side Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

CHAIM. And what happens on Sundays?

SADIE. My children don't call; that's what happens.

CHAIM. Children.

(DAVID, angered and frustrated by all that he's heard, picks up his phone again and dials a number. This is not easy for him to do.)

SADIE. I've invited my son over for Sabbath dinner every Friday night for fifteen years, and not once has he said yes.

CHAIM. He should be ashamed.

SADIE. He claims it's because of work.

CHAIM. What does he do?

SADIE. He's a rabbi.

CHAIM. Oh, well. It could be worse. My son's a jogger.

SADIE. A jogger?

CHAIM. He must be. Every time I call, he says, "Sorry, Dad. Gotta run."

SADIE. That's terrible.

CHAIM. So, what can you do?

SADIE. What can you do?

CHAIM. So live and be well.

SADIE. Live and be well.

(CHAIM pushes another button on his telephone.)

CHAIM. Hello. This is Chaim in the A.M. You're on.

(DAVID's anxiety increases.)

DAVID. Hello, I—um...

CHAIM. Hello?

DAVID. Hello.

CHAIM. You have a name?

DAVID. David. I—I'd like to—I'd like to discuss the difficulties of the grown child/parent relationship from the viewpoint of the child.

CHAIM. I suppose you want to tell the world how awful your parents are...

DAVID. My mother's dead.

CHAIM. So you only want to complain about your father then.

DAVID. *(Getting irritated:)* I didn't call to complain; I called to talk.

CHAIM. So talk.

DAVID. (*Sighs, then:*) Look, everyone I know wants a good relationship with their parents, but—well, I never hear anyone on your show say that maybe sometimes it's the parent who prevents a relationship from working.

CHAIM. So you did call to complain.

DAVID. (*Losing his temper:*) I'm not complaining! Can't a person make an observation without the other person assuming it's a complaint?! Is that too much to ask?!

CHAIM. Why are you screaming? If people want you to be louder, they can turn up the volume on their radios.

DAVID. Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have called. I knew this wouldn't work.

CHAIM. Go ahead. Say what you have to say.

DAVID. Look... Every time I call my dad... You know, I know my father likes the idea of me calling him, but I don't think he ever enjoys the call itself.

CHAIM. Oh, and what gives you that idea?

DAVID. He never sounds like he enjoys our conversations, that's all. He always sounds irritated and tense. As if I've done something wrong.

CHAIM. Have you?

DAVID. No.

CHAIM. Such a fast answer!

DAVID. I've given this a lot of thought. All he ever does is disagree with me, criticize me, put me down...

CHAIM. (*Critically:*) You're too sensitive.

DAVID. And whenever he doesn't like what I'm saying about him, rather than listen, he just says, "You're too sensitive."

CHAIM. He's not entitled to his opinion?

DAVID. That's not the point.

CHAIM. He has to agree with everything you say?

DAVID. I never said that. But for God's sake, there's no fun in sharing with anyone who has such a hostile attitude towards—towards everything. He... He relishes his hostility as if it's the only evidence he's alive.

CHAIM. It's also no fun sharing with a child who you feel is judging every single thing you say.

DAVID. I'm not judging.

CHAIM. You said—

DAVID. Can't you hear how frustrated I am? Every time I talk to him, within thirty seconds, I'm totally frustrated.

CHAIM. That's his fault?

DAVID. All I know is, it doesn't happen with anybody else.

CHAIM. Judge and jury.

DAVID. (*His upset rising:*) You're missing the point!

CHAIM. So tell me, what's your point?

DAVID. (*Drained:*) I... I, uh...

CHAIM. C'mon, let's not have dead air. Millions of listeners are waiting to hear your point.

(*DAVID sighs.*)

You forgot your point?

DAVID. You want to know what it is? I'll tell you what it is... When I was ten, I got a tape recorder from my aunt and uncle for my birthday... I was very surprised. I had been dropping hints I wanted one for about six months, but still, the only presents I usually got were like clothes, and books that were good for me—

CHAIM. Is this a long story?

DAVID. No. Anyway, for the next few months, I was the happiest kid on the block. I taped everything: TV shows, dinner conversations—you name it, I taped it. And I played them for my family

every chance I had. As you can imagine, it got boring to my father and everyone else a lot faster than it got boring to me.

CHAIM. I see. So you hate your father because he thought your tapes were boring.

DAVID. No! Not at all. But now, when I talk with him now, and I share the joys of a job promotion, or a new relationship, or just the joy of a nicely-lived day... I always feel he's reacting as if I'm playing one of my boring tapes.

CHAIM. Well, if you think he's so awful, do me a favor, don't call him.

DAVID. I never said he was awful.

CHAIM. Yes, you did.

DAVID. I said no such thing.

CHAIM. Yes, you did. I heard you.

DAVID. When?

CHAIM. When? In your story, when. You said he was awful.

DAVID. I did not say that.

CHAIM. You implied.

DAVID. I did not!

CHAIM. You must have—

DAVID. (*Erupting:*) Will you stop it?! Just stop it! For once in your life will you listen to what I'm saying and stop picking apart the words? You never look at the forest. You find like one tree that bothers you, and you fixate! Why can't you just hear me without having to gear up all your mighty defenses? Do you know what it's like to always, always be treated like an enemy by your own flesh and blood?!

(A slight pause.)

CHAIM. Yes.

(A longer pause.)

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IS LUST KOSHER?

Cast of Characters

JUDITH and ISIDORE, two Kosher vegetarians

Place

A living room.

Time

The present.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“traif”
forbidden foods
IS LUST KOSHER?

(In the center of the living room is a couch, facing away from the audience. As the scene begins, JUDITH and ISIDORE enter from the dining room.)

ISIDORE. Another great meal, Judith.

JUDITH. Thanks, Isidore.

ISIDORE. You make the best asparagus kugel of anyone I know.

JUDITH. And thanks for making dessert. That was the best oat bran rugelleh I’ve ever had.

ISIDORE. You know, when I was younger, I’d eat anything. And I paid for it. But ever since I became a strictly kosher holistic organic vegetarian, I’ve never felt better.

JUDITH. I feel the same way. And when I met you at the synagogue singles dinner, and you told me you made that delicious tofu kreplach, I knew I had finally met my soulmate.

ISIDORE. Why didn't more people eat that?

JUDITH. I loved it. With that whole wheat crust.

ISIDORE. You think people would appreciate a high-fiber kreplach.

JUDITH. Let's face it, Isidore. You just live on a higher plane than most people.

ISIDORE. You sure look beautiful tonight, Judith.

JUDITH. You look beautiful every night, Isidore.

(She leans over and kisses him. For a moment, they kiss passionately. Then, abruptly, ISIDORE pulls away.)

JUDITH. What is it?

ISIDORE. Nothing.

JUDITH. Am I too forward?

ISIDORE. No, no. I'm just feeling a little shy tonight.

JUDITH. Don't you find me attractive?

ISIDORE. Of course, I find you attractive.

JUDITH. Then what is it, Isidore?

ISIDORE. It's nothing, Judith.

JUDITH. Isidore, we've been going together three months now, and we never get past that first kiss.

ISIDORE. I'm just going through a—I don't know what it is. It's not you. You're very attractive. I—Maybe I should just go.

JUDITH. I don't want you to go.

ISIDORE. Look, I'm sorry.

JUDITH. It's okay.

ISIDORE. No, it's not. I've had this problem for a while, even before I met you. For some reason, ever since I started this diet...

JUDITH. Relax. We don't have to do anything.

ISIDORE. Thanks. I appreciate that.

(For a moment, they just sit with each other.)

JUDITH. You want to rent a dirty movie?

ISIDORE. No.

JUDITH. Would you like me to whisper dirty words in your ear? I know several.

ISIDORE. No.

JUDITH. If you want, I could change into my Bathsheba costume... You've slain Goliath; I'm overcome with gratitude...

ISIDORE. Look, it's, it's just a phase I'm going through. It'll pass... eventually... I hope.

JUDITH. *(Getting an idea:)* Maybe... Maybe you need some meat.

ISIDORE. No! If I ate any meat, I could never look a cow in the face again.

JUDITH. Maybe if you had like just one itty-bitty taste of junk food...

ISIDORE. *(Smiles, then stops:)* No, no, I can't allow myself to even think—

JUDITH. Maybe you'd like some traif.

ISIDORE. I couldn't.

JUDITH. We could just mix a little milk and meat.

ISIDORE. Stop it, you, you—Delilah.

JUDITH. Everybody cheats occasionally, Isidore. I was raised in a strictly Kosher home, except for Sunday night when we'd go out and eat pork chow mein.

ISIDORE. Look, I made a commitment, and I'm sticking to it.

JUDITH. (*Seductively:*) C'mon. Maybe just one little cheeseburger, with a thick slice of American cheese—

ISIDORE. No. I promised myself I'd never—

JUDITH. How about beef Stroganoff, with big chunks of meat swimming in sour cream?

ISIDORE. I couldn't...

JUDITH. Maybe a Reuben, with corned beef and Swiss cheese rubbing up against each other?

ISIDORE. (*Weakening:*) Stop it.

JUDITH. Or better yet, a ham and Swiss on white bread.

ISIDORE. Please stop...

JUDITH. I know what you want: a cheddardog!

ISIDORE. Oh, God, yes!

(They begin rubbing each other erotically as they speak [which we can't see, as the couch blocks our view].)

JUDITH. And then for dessert, something with lots of refined white sugar...

ISIDORE. Twinkies.

JUDITH. Cupcakes.

ISIDORE. Ho-hos.

JUDITH. Ding-dongs.

ISIDORE. Donuts fried in lard.

JUDITH. Dunked in coffee with lots of cream and sugar.

ISIDORE. Or artificial sweetening.

JUDITH. Sugar Twin.

ISIDORE. Equal.

JUDITH. Sweet 'n' Low.

ISIDORE. I love it when you talk additives.

JUDITH. Sodium nitrate...

ISIDORE. Oh, yeah...

JUDITH. Artificial color...

ISIDORE. Oh, God...

JUDITH. Artificial flavor...

ISIDORE. Oh, baby...

JUDITH. Monosodium glutamate...

ISIDORE. Enough foreplay. Let's move to shellfish!

(They slip behind the couch. As we hear the following foods, one item of clothing [per food] gets flung over the couch.)

JUDITH. Shrimps...

ISIDORE. Lobster...

JUDITH. Scallops...

ISIDORE. Clams...

JUDITH. Mussels...

ISIDORE. Crabmeat...

JUDITH. Fried oysters...

ISIDORE. Fried anything!

JUDITH. *(Tossing the rest of her clothes:)* Greasy sausage!

ISIDORE. *(Tossing the rest of his clothes:)* Luncheon meat!

(The following develops into a fast-paced rhythm:)

JUDITH. Baloney!

ISIDORE. Salami!

JUDITH. Baloney!

ISIDORE. Salami!

JUDITH. Baloney!

ISIDORE. Salami!

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COME LIGHT THE MENORAH

Cast of Characters

HANNAH and SARA, two sisters

Place

The living room of Hannah's apartment.

Time

The first night of Chanukah.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear:]

“shikse”

non-Jewish woman

COME LIGHT THE MENORAH

(As the play begins, HANNAH opens a box of Chanukah candles onto a table. The doorbell rings.)

HANNAH. *Door's open.*

(SARA enters, carrying a box of donuts.)

SARA. *(As she enters:)* Happy Chanukah.

HANNAH. How come there are never enough greens in the box? It's my favorite color.

(SARA, used to HANNAH's kvetching, gives her a hug.)

SARA. Good to see you.

HANNAH. I made some latkes. They're keeping warm in the oven.

SARA. You know, I don't know much about God. But if he created us in his image, and he wants us to eat latkes for eight days, God has thick hips.

HANNAH. Don't talk to me about God. Any deity who created the shikse is not one I want to believe in.

SARA. I'm sorry Marvin dumped you.

HANNAH. I met his new girl friend, Mary Beth Goyim.

SARA. How?

HANNAH. He had the chutzpah to bring her to temple.

SARA. You're kidding.

HANNAH. She told me she wanted to learn about Judaism.

SARA. Well, that's something.

HANNAH. I just don't understand Christians. How can you pray to anyone that thin?

SARA. How about if we light candles? Then we can call Mom and Dad so they can brag to the neighbors that their daughters get along.

HANNAH. Fine. Choose a color.

(SARA looks at the candles and chooses one. HANNAH begins to get emotional.)

SARA. What?

HANNAH. That's the color Murray chose a year ago just before he ran off with Kelly Katherine Cooper.

SARA. Okay. How about... this one?

(SARA chooses a different candle. HANNAH gets more upset.)

What?

HANNAH. That's the color Irving chose two years ago before he dumped me for Geraldine Genovicci.

SARA. Okay.

(SARA chooses a different candle. HANNAH gets even more upset.)

What?!

HANNAH. That was the color Isidore chose three years ago before I caught him shtupping Delta Dixie Dixon.

(SARA chooses another candle. HANNAH gets more upset.)

Sara!

SARA. Four years ago you were single. What could be wrong with pink?

HANNAH. Shiksies wear pink on Easter!

SARA. Look, Hannah, I know you've had a string of really, really bad luck, but—

HANNAH. Sometimes I think the only way I'll land a nice Jewish boy is if I convert to Christianity.

SARA. Not all Jewish guys end up with shiksies.

HANNAH. I know. Just the ones I like. The sexy ones. The smart ones. The ones you'd be willing to pay retail for.

SARA. One day I'm sure you'll find the right person, and all this will be a memory.

HANNAH. How you can say that after what you've been through.

SARA. I've always been an optimist. That's why I think you became a pessimist, sis—so you could have your own identity.

HANNAH. Well, I hope one day you'll find the right guy, too, Sara. I really do.

(SARA smiles as if she has a secret.)

What?

SARA. Nothing.

HANNAH. You've found someone.

SARA. I don't know.

HANNAH. I can tell. You can't hide things from me.

SARA. You might be surprised.

HANNAH. Tell me.

SARA. (*Downplaying it:*) It's noth—

HANNAH. *Tell me.*

SARA. Well... remember how, when I divorced Larry, I said it was because after eight years of marriage I finally accepted he wasn't my type?

HANNAH. Uh-huh.

SARA. I think no man is my type.

HANNAH. I know the feeling.

SARA. No, you don't.

HANNAH. Oh, yes, I do.

SARA. Oh, no, you don't.

HANNAH. Trust me. Some mornings I wake up and wish I were a Lesbian.

SARA. Well, maybe you didn't wish hard enough.

HANNAH. Are you... are you saying you're—

SARA. Yep.

HANNAH. Really?

SARA. I know this must be a quite a—

HANNAH. That's so cool.

SARA. Cool?

HANNAH. I'm a Conservative Jewish woman with a Conservative Jewish life. Having a Lesbian sister is the closest I'll ever get to being trendy.

SARA. Look, I—

HANNAH. So are you going to get your hair cut short?

SARA. Hannah.

HANNAH. Whom do you like better, Melissa Etheridge or K.D. Laing?

SARA. Hannah.

HANNAH. Do you like to hang out in bars filled with female truckers in flannel shirts?

SARA. Hannah! You really do stereotype people, you know that?!

HANNAH. I'm sorry.

SARA. Not all Lesbians like flannel, not all Jewish men like shiksese, and, and not all shiksese are stupid, either.

HANNAH. I never said shiksese are stupid. I just said they didn't have to be smart because around them Jewish men lose 20 IQ points.

SARA. Not *always*.

HANNAH. Look, the only thing that's important is that you're my sister; and I love you and I'll always love you and I don't care what your sexual preference is, I just want you to be happy.

SARA. I am. Like I never knew.

HANNAH. Is there someone special?

SARA. Well—No, no not really.

HANNAH. You're hiding again.

SARA. There's no one.

HANNAH. What's her name?

SARA. I forget.

HANNAH. Tell me.

SARA. It's not imp—

HANNAH. Tell me.

SARA. I barely know her.

HANNAH. *Tell me.*

SARA. Christine.

HANNAH. Christine what?

SARA. Christine Christiansen.

HANNAH. Hair?

SARA. Blonde.

HANNAH. Eyes?

SARA. Blue.

HANNAH. Nose?

SARA. Barely.

HANNAH. How could you?! You couldn't find a nice *Jewish* girl?!

SARA. She has an uncle who's two-fifths Jewish.

HANNAH. And how do you plan to tell the folks?

SARA. I don't know. I figure, hey, they've only got twenty-thirty years left to live and—

HANNAH. Do you know what you've done?

SARA. Yes, I've fallen in love.

HANNAH. But—

SARA. The sun's set. We really should light candles.

HANNAH. With you? I'd consider it... hypocritical.

SARA. Hannah!

HANNAH. It's the first night of Chanukah, Sara! A holiday where we're supposed to remember that if it weren't for the efforts of a completely outnumbered group of Jewish warriors, our religion would've *disappeared*. Do you think we'd be celebrating Chanukah today if after the Maccabees had recaptured the Temple, they started going out with cute Greek girls? Instead of eating potato pancakes, we'd be eating stuffed grape leaves!

SARA. I like stuffed grape leaves.

HANNAH. So do I!

SARA. Then what's your problem?

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LAST-MINUTE ADJUSTMENTS

Cast of Characters

THE PROTAGONIST

THE SUPERVISOR

ASSISTANT A

ASSISTANT B

RADIO TECHNICIAN

Place

A warm, comfortable place.

Time

The present.

(Before this sketch begins, we see [or hear]:)

“I’chaim”
to life

LAST-MINUTE ADJUSTMENTS

(The SUPERVISOR and his/her two ASSISTANTS are speedily but not frantically doing a last-minute review before the PROTAGONIST is about to go on a big journey. The PROTAGONIST has a huge tube attached to his/her navel. The RADIO TECHNICIAN sits at a table with a kind of shortwave radio apparatus on it. He/she wears a headset.)

SUPERVISOR. Ears?

ASSISTANT A. Check.

SUPERVISOR. Nose?

ASSISTANT B. Check.

SUPERVISOR. Chin?

ASSISTANT A. Check.

PROTAGONIST. Why can't I become an aardvark?

SUPERVISOR. I told you. It wasn't our decision. Dimples?

ASSISTANT B. One, on the left.

PROTAGONIST. I think I could do aardvark really well.

SUPERVISOR. Maybe next time. Tongue?

ASSISTANT A. Check.

PROTAGONIST. Can't I at least have some feathers? Feathers sound so cute.

ASSISTANT B. You'll have enough to deal with without having to worry about molting.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. She's just entered the hospital.

PROTAGONIST. Okay, let me make sure I've got this: Breathing, left to right.

ASSISTANT A. In and out.

PROTAGONIST. The mouth, food goes in or out?

ASSISTANT B. (*Pinching the PROTAGONIST's cheek.*) That depends on how fussy you'll be.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. Contractions are three minutes apart.

SUPERVISOR. Okay, let's finish this sucker. Eyebrows?

ASSISTANT A. Check.

SUPERVISOR. Eyelashes?

ASSISTANT B. Check.

SUPERVISOR. Brains?

ASSISTANT A. (*Looks in an ear.*) Check.

SUPERVISOR. Soul?

(Both assistants look in the ear, see nothing.)

Soul?

(The assistants look all around for the soul.)

All right. Who was supposed to put in the soul?

ASSTS. A and B. *(Simultaneously pointing at the other:)* He was!*

(or "She was," as appropriate, in this and all references.)*

ASSISTANT A. I remember distinctly. I was in charge of appendix; you got soul.

ASSISTANT B. No, I was in charge of appendix.

SUPERVISOR. Okay, how many appendices does our little friend have?

ASSISTANT B. *(Checks, then:)* Two.

SUPERVISOR. Well, that'll give medical science something to have fun with. Okay, let's give our pal a soul before it's too late.

(The ASSISTANTS hook up the soul-transferring machine to the PROTAGONIST.)

PROTAGONIST. Why do I need a soul?

SUPERVISOR. You won't be complete without one.

PROTAGONIST. I feel complete as I am. Completely complete. Fully equipped to have a rich, full life.

SUPERVISOR. You need a soul.

PROTAGONIST. I'd prefer feathers.

ASSISTANT A. You need a soul to cope with disappointment, rejection, humiliation, cruelty—

ASSISTANT B. And all the other perks of a full life.

SUPERVISOR. Please, you'll spoil all the surprises.

ASSISTANT A. The soul connects you to wisdom.

PROTAGONIST. What's wisdom?

ASSISTANT B. That's the knowledge you'll have where you'll have no idea where it comes from.

ASSISTANT A. Like the stuff we're telling you now.

PROTAGONIST. I won't remember this?

ASSISTANT A. In the beginning, you'll remember what your mother smells like, and that's about it.

PROTAGONIST. My mother, will I like her?

SUPERVISOR. Oh, you'll come up with plenty of answers to that one.

ASSISTANT A. Ready for soul transmission.

PROTAGONIST. This really feels unnecessary.

SUPERVISOR. Okay, now just relax.

PROTAGONIST. Getting a soul, will it hurt?

ASSISTANT A. Just for an instant.

ASSISTANT B. A lifetime at most.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. Contractions, two minutes apart.

SUPERVISOR. Let's do it... Five, four, three, two, one.

(The soul is transmitted into the PROTAGONIST.)

How do you feel?

PROTAGONIST. Vulnerable.

ASSISTANT B. Soul successfully attached.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. Time to start preparing to leave the womb.

PROTAGONIST. *No!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

SUPERVISOR. *(Used to this:)* What's the matter?

PROTAGONIST. All those things—humiliation, disappointment, cruelty—my soul won't be able to take it.

ASSISTANT A. Give it enough light every day; it'll be fine.

PROTAGONIST. I'm staying in here where it's safe.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. She just broke her water.

SUPERVISOR. *(To the PROTAGONIST:)* Guess again.

PROTAGONIST. Why did you have to give me a soul? I suddenly feel terrified of everything.

ASSISTANT A. Checklist complete.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. Contractions building.

SUPERVISOR. Okay, time to move 'em out.

PROTAGONIST. I'm not going.

SUPERVISOR. If you resist, you'll only make it harder on yourself.

PROTAGONIST. I'm staying.

SUPERVISOR. You want them to use forceps?

PROTAGONIST. They can use a forklift; I'm not moving.

ASSISTANT A. You can't stay. Your lease is up.

PROTAGONIST. But I know my way around here.

ASSISTANT B. Enjoy that feeling. It's the last time you'll have it.

PROTAGONIST. Why can't I be an aardvark?

SUPERVISOR. We didn't design you; we're only following the blueprint.

PROTAGONIST. But being a human sounds so stressful and exhausting. It doesn't sound nearly as good as waking up, wanting some ants, finding some ants, and eating some ants.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. She's eight centimeters dilated.

SUPERVISOR. Okay, no more procrastination.

PROTAGONIST. But what if I get hurt?

SUPERVISOR. You will get hurt.

PROTAGONIST. What if I'm disappointed?

SUPERVISOR. You will be disappointed.

PROTAGONIST. What if I'm disillusioned?

SUPERVISOR. You will be disillusioned.

PROTAGONIST. What if I turn moody, irrational and hostile?

ASSISTANT B. It's called adolescence.

PROTAGONIST. I want you to take my soul back.

SUPERVISOR. That can't be done.

PROTAGONIST. Then when I get out there, the first thing I'm doing is getting rid of it.

SUPERVISOR and ASSTS. A and B. *(Simultaneously:)* Don't!

PROTAGONIST. Why not?

ASSISTANT A. Because then you won't know love. Life will just be an endless series of desires and gratifications.

PROTAGONIST. That sounds nice.

ASSISTANT A. Love's better.

PROTAGONIST. Something's better than gratification? I know I'm only prenatal, but that still sounds stupid.

ASSISTANT A. Love's better.

ASSISTANT B. Much better.

SUPERVISOR. It's the touching of two souls.

ASSISTANT B. No soul, no love.

ASSISTANT A. Not even much like.

PROTAGONIST. But if I have a soul, I'm going to feel so much pain.

SUPERVISOR. That's true.

PROTAGONIST. Is love worth it?

(Everyone else gets very busy.)

Is love worth all the pain?

RADIO TECHNICIAN. She's almost fully dilated.

PROTAGONIST. I'm not going out there until I get an answer.

SUPERVISOR. Look, kid, the only way to get an answer *is* to go out there.

PROTAGONIST. I'm not going out into that, that—uncertainty.

ASSISTANT B. Look on the bright side. You'll be dead before you know it.

PROTAGONIST. You mean I'm going to go through a lifetime of work and pain and struggle just to end up dead?

ASSISTANT A. That's what's on the schedule.

PROTAGONIST. When am I going to die?

ASSISTANT B. About ten minutes before you've sorted everything out.

PROTAGONIST. It seems like such a waste.

SUPERVISOR. There's actually very little waste. We recycle almost all of you.

PROTAGONIST. I don't have a prayer, do I?

SUPERVISOR. Yes, you do.

ASSISTANT B. You always do.

ASSISTANT A. Always.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. She's fully dilated.

PROTAGONIST. That's her tough luck.

RADIO TECHNICIAN. They're all yelling "Push!"

SUPERVISOR. Let's help.

(The two ASSISTANTS grab the PROTAGONIST's arms and get ready to swing him/her out into the world.)

PROTAGONIST. No!

SUPERVISOR. And a one!

(The swinging begins.)

PROTAGONIST. No!

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The following extra sketch may be substituted for any in the play except WORD PLAY, OY and LAST-MINUTE ADJUSTMENTS.

WHAT MAKES A MAN?

A COMEDY FOR RADIO

Cast of Characters

IRA, 29, lives at home

HOWARD, Ira's father

SHIRLEY, Ira's mother

NAOMI, Ira's sister

MANNY, Ira's friend (*a man of clay*)

also a FROG and FRIEDMAN (*small roles*)

Time

The present

Place

The kitchen and basement bedroom in a modest home

(If the sketch is used as part of OY!, before this sketch begins, we see [or hear:]

“schlemiel”
a loser in life
WHAT MAKES A MAN?

(Opening music.)

(As the story begins, IRA writes in his journal.)

(His voice should sound different than when it's conversational.)

IRA. The private journal of Ira Gershberg. Yesterday was my birthday. When I review the first 29 years of my life, I sigh. When I took my SAT's in high school, I got a perfect score. Throughout college, I've gotten A's. But where has this brilliance gotten me? I still live with my parents. I haven't had a date in a year; two years if you don't count my father's partner's second cousin. Nobody respects me: not my classmates, not my parents. For my last birthday, my sister bought me a year's supply of post-it pads. As I reflect on my life, I ponder two questions: What makes a man? And what makes a man a schlemiel, a total loser? And, I guess, a third question: Is there anything he can do about it?

(Music transition.)

(The Gershberg kitchen at dinner time: HOWARD, SHIRLEY and NAOMI.)

NAOMI. Mom, I'm hungry.

SHIRLEY. Naomi, you've been hungry since birth.

HOWARD. It's almost sundown. Is he such a nebbish he can't get home in time for Shabbat dinner?

SHIRLEY. He'll be here.

NAOMI. I'm starving.

SHIRLEY. We'll eat when he gets home.

NAOMI. I have the only Jewish mother who doesn't cook too much.

SHIRLEY. Your generation wants instant gratification.

NAOMI. I could defer gratification if I could just have a snack while I'm waiting for it.

HOWARD. Ira should know better than to be out this late.

NAOMI. He probably got so caught up in his doodling he didn't notice how late it got.

SHIRLEY. It's not doodling; it's illustrating.

HOWARD. It's money down the toilet, that's what it is.

SHIRLEY. Howard, how can you say such a thing?

HOWARD. I'll tell you why. Because my brilliant son dropped out of medical school because he was afraid he might give a patient the wrong diagnosis. A year later, he dropped out of pharmacy school because he was afraid he might give someone the wrong pill. Now he's studying to become a medical illustrator, and I expect him to drop out because he's afraid he'll stick someone with a colored pencil.

SHIRLEY. He just needs encouragement. He's very insecure.

HOWARD. Why is he so insecure? How many times have I told him, "You're a brilliant boy! So stop acting like an idiot."

NAOMI. I'm so glad I'm engaged to a real man like Avi.

SHIRLEY. Avi is a moron.

NAOMI. I don't care. When we go out, he lets me clean his plate.

(Sound: The kitchen door opens and closes.)

IRA. Hi, everybody. Sorry I'm late.

SHIRLEY. Oh my God! Those bruises—what happened to you?!

IRA. Nothing, I just got slightly mugged.

HOWARD. Are you okay?

IRA. They took my money, my art pad, and all my pencils.

SHIRLEY. Here, let me wipe the shmutz off your face.

IRA. I can do it, Mom.

SHIRLEY. It's no problem.

(Sound: SHIRLEY spits into a handkerchief.)

There we go.

IRA. Mom, will you stop mothering me?

SHIRLEY. I'm a mother. That's what I do.

IRA. Mother Naomi.

NAOMI. At least serve bigger portions.

IRA. If David Feldman learns about this, I'll never hear the end of it. It's his week.

HOWARD. "His week"?

NAOMI. Every week a different classmate gets a turn to torment him.

SHIRLEY. They should be ashamed of themselves.

IRA. I've mentioned that. It's not an effective deterrent.

HOWARD. Why don't you defend yourself? When you were a boy, I paid for two years of karate classes.

NAOMI. Then he dropped out because he was afraid he might kick someone in the wrong place.

IRA. Dad, I need an advance on my allowance.

HOWARD. You need to learn to fight.

IRA. I'm a thinker, not a fighter.

NAOMI. Maybe you should think up a fighter.

IRA. A fighter? Hmmm.

(Music transition.)

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. Naomi gave me an idea. It was the first gift she ever gave me I didn't want to return. After dinner, I went downstairs to my basement bedroom and found a book I had read in rabbinical school, before I dropped out because of an overwhelming fear of mispronouncing Hebrew.

(In the bedroom, IRA looks for a book.)

(Note: The word golem is pronounced with a hard O as in "go.")

Let's see. I know it's around here some—Here it is. The History of the Golem in Jewish Folklore. "In Jewish stories, the golem was an artificial man. Rumor had it that one was created by a sixteenth

century Kabbalistic rabbi in Prague. Since then, there have been unsubstantiated tales of golems made by eccentric Jewish scientists throughout the centuries.

(Turns a page:)

“Among the ingredients used in the stories are...” I can do this. I know science. I know anatomy. I can sew. All my life people have mocked me. No more!

(Music transition.)

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. From that moment on, I poured myself into the project. I made drawings, I made models, I visited every golem site on the Internet. Although none of the formulas for making a golem worked in themselves, I kept experimenting with different combinations. I got dust from soil at the base of Mount Sinai, clay from the land where King David was born, and water distilled from the tears of humankind. Finally, after many months, a breakthrough: I created—a golem frog.

FROG. Ribbit, ribbit.

IRA. It lives!... Hey come back. Don't go upstairs.

(Sound: IRA's footsteps rushing up the steps.)

FROG. Ribbit, ribbit.

IRA. Not the living room.

FROG. Ribbit, ribbit.

HOWARD. What's a frog doing in our house?! Oh my God, it's another plague!

NAOMI. A frog! Eww.

(Sound: Thwack!!!)

Got him.

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. I went back to the drawing board, and I created—a golem mouse. But it ran away.

(Sound: SHIRLEY screams.)

SHIRLEY. Oh my God, a mouse! And he looks like he's been made from the tears of mouse misery!

(Sound: Thwack!!!)

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA *(v.o.)* Finally, I was ready for the big step. And this time, I knew it wasn't going to get thwacked.

(Music transition.)

(The Gershberg kitchen at dinner time: HOWARD, SHIRLEY and NAOMI.)

NAOMI. I'm hungry!

SHIRLEY. Ira's still studying downstairs.

NAOMI. *(Calling down to the basement:)* Hey, idiot, dinner's ready!

IRA. *(o.s.)* Be up in a moment.

HOWARD. His moments have been getting longer and longer.

NAOMI. Hey, idiot, we're waiting!

(Sounds of intense electric static.)

HOWARD. What the—what's wrong with the electricity?

NAOMI. What the hell are you doing down—

(Sound: IRA's door opens.)

IRA. Sorry to keep you all waiting.

SHIRLEY. Oh my God, Ira!

NAOMI. Why are you covered with blood?

IRA. Never mind. Mom, have you made enough food to set another place?

SHIRLEY. I can always stretch.

NAOMI. We don't have enough food.

SHIRLEY. I'll make extra salad.

NAOMI. Salad isn't food. Salad's just the advance man letting your stomach know real food's on the way.

IRA. Will you two stop kvetching?! I've invited someone to dinner. Come on up, Manny.

(Sounds of heavy footsteps on the stairs.)

HOWARD. What the—

MANNY. Hehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

IRA. Everybody, this is Manny. Manny, this is my family.

MANNY. Hehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

IRA. I'm still fine-tuning the vocal chords.

NAOMI. He's a, he's a—

IRA. Golem. He's my golem. He'll protect me. *Now* maybe I'll get some respect.

SHIRLEY. He's not going to drip blood on the floor, is he? I just waxed it.

HOWARD. This is what you've been wasting your time on instead of schoolwork?

NAOMI. He looks like Gumby.

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. Respect didn't feel *quite* like I imagined it.

(Music transition.)

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. But with Manny at my side, life was different. I talked back to guys who teased me.

FRIEDMAN. Hey, look, it's Ira the nerd!

IRA. Shut up, Friedman!

FRIEDMAN. Oh, yeah, and who's going to make me?

IRA. Get him, Manny.

(Sound: A few punches [and vocal responses].)

You still think I'm a nerd, Friedman?

FRIEDMAN. *(In pain:)* No! And I'll share that news with Ed Kramer.

IRA. Who's Ed Kramer?

FRIEDMAN. He's scheduled to torment you *next* week.

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. I walked through bad neighborhoods—*after dark.* *(Normal voice:)* Hey, everybody! I'm a middle-class white guy; anybody have a problem with that?!

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. I even worked up the nerve to finally stand up to my mother. *(Normal voice:)* But, Mom, I hate canned peas.

SHIRLEY. *(Begins to sob deeply:)* But I uncanned them all by myself.

IRA. Manny, will you finish them for me?

MANNY. Hehhhhhh.

(Sound of a golem eating.)

SHIRLEY. What a good appetite he has.

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. Over time, Manny became more than my protector. He complimented me on my illustrating. He laughed at my jokes.

MANNY. *(Laughing:)* Hehh-hehh-hehh-hehh.

IRA. *(o.s.)* I had created something beyond my dreams: a golem friend.

(Music transition.)

IRA. Hmmm. Got any eights?

MANNY. Nohhhh. Gohhhh fffffffiiiiiiisshhhhhh.

SHIRLEY. *(Upstairs:)* Ira, will you take out the garbage?

IRA. I'm busy, Mom.

SHIRLEY. (*Upstairs:*) Please?

IRA. Manny, will you go upstairs and take out the garbage for me?

MANNY. Nohhhh pwahhhhhhhbwem... Dohhhnt chheeeett.

IRA. I won't.

(Sounds of heavy footsteps on the stairs.)

SHIRLEY. Ira, how many times do I—

MANNY. Heeeehhhhhhhhh.

SHIRLEY. (*Startled:*) Oh, my—

MANNY. Gahhhhhbehggggg.

SHIRLEY. Oh, yes, the garbage. If you could, yes, that's very nice, thank you.

MANNY. Nohhhh pwahhhhhhhbwem... Niiiith dinnnuuhhh.

SHIRLEY. Oh, yes, well, thank you... *Thank you.*

MANNY. No. Thaaaaaank yooooouuuuuuu.

(Writing in his journal:)

IRA. As my confidence grew, I realized I didn't need Manny by my side day and night. But Manny was never alone, because my family finally began to relax around him.

SHIRLEY. Manny, could you lift this table while I mop?

MANNY. Noh pwobwem.

HOWARD. Manny, how'd you like to learn pinochle?

MANNY. Sounds wike fuhhn.

NAOMI. Oh, Manny, Avi just dumped me.

(Sound: NAOMI begins to cry.)

MANNY. Waaaaanna huuuuug?

NAOMI. (*Sobbing:*) Okay.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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