

# ***Be a Mensch***

*By Daniel A. Takács*

daniel.a.takacs@gmail.com  
216.780.3032  
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- Characters: Abram “Abe” Golden: 18, the Eldest Son  
Alexis “Alex” Golden: 16, the Middle Daughter  
Beth Golden-Schneider: 30s-50s, The Mother, a synagogue choir director  
Francesca “Frankie” Morales: 18, Abe's Lover, a car salesman’s daughter  
Nigel He: 20's, Alex's Lover, an assistant manager at Cheesecake Factory  
And “The Man” as:  
Solomon Golden: 40s-60s, Abe and Alex’s Father, a professor of economics  
Larry Schneider: 30s-50s, the Baby's Father, owner of a sporting goods store  
Stan McCan: 30s-50's, Mother's Lover, a parking lot attendant
- The Time: Friday, May 6th, 2005, 9:30 PM.
- The Place: 22F Liberty Run  
Liberty Meadows  
Chagrin Falls, Ohio 44139
- Synopsis: “When the eldest son and breadwinner of an impoverished Jewish family is accepted into his dream college, he must beg the adults in his life for the small fee he needs to enroll, but they have no intention of letting him escape, and they thwart his plans at every opportunity. In the end, he must choose between his family’s livelihood and his own future happiness.”
- Biography: Daniel A. Takacs is a Boston-based playwright and director from Oberlin, Ohio. His original plays have been seen at Cleveland Public Theatre, The MAD Factory, and Boston Playwright's Theatre, and he has taught and directed theatre in Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, and in Boston, where he received his MFA in Theatre Studies from Boston University, with a focus on playwriting and directing. Favorite productions include "The Millennials" (CPT), "The 39 Steps" (Chagrin Valley Little Theatre), and "The Adventurous Adventuress" (Dobama). Dan lives with his wife, Linda, and his peanut Greta, born on Christmas eve, in Newton, Massachusetts.
- Productions: “Be a Mensch” was written as a component of the author’s MFA thesis in theatre studies from Boston University. As a part of that process, the play received a semi-staged reading. There have been no productions.

“Be a Mensch”  
By Daniel A. Takács

ACT I

Scene 1:

(The living room of a small one-bedroom apartment among thousands. There is a door out to the public hallway, a door to a bedroom, and a hallway leading off to a kitchen and bathroom. There is a sliding glass door which leads to a wooden fire escape. In the living room there is a couch, an upright piano, a TV, a small dining room table with mismatched chairs, and an explosion of laundry, papers, half-unpacked boxes, and dishes piled on every surface. ALEX, a girl of sixteen who can make fashion from scraps, slouches on the couch, her homework strewn around her, struggling to snap a photo of her boobs on a flip phone.)

(ABE, her brother, pops in from the hallway, in an ill-fitting Blockbuster Video polo, a cardigan, and jeans, carrying mail and a heavy backpack. MAN narrates:)

MAN

Last week, on “Be a Mensch:”

ABE

Mail here?

ALEX

You made me jump.

ABE

Yeah but is there mail?

ALEX

On the table.

(He rifles.)

ALEX (*ct’d*)

Nothing for you.

ABE

Frankie got hers two weeks ago.

ALEX

That's not a good sign.

ABE

You cut today?

ALEX

Nope.

ABE

What's that?

ALEX

Five days.

ABE

Nice.

(Abe gives up.)

ALEX

You should have applied to some safety schools.

ABE

Thanks. That is so helpful.

ALEX

What's the haul?

(Abe unpacks some DVDs from his backpack.)

ABE

Sophie's Choice  
Do the Right Thing  
Big  
Seinfeld, seasons two and three.

ALEX

Good haul.

ABE

I love this job.

MAN

He wanted to be a TV writer. He watched a *lot* of TV.

ALEX

They let you wear jeans?

ABE

As a privilege, for selling Blockbuster Online subscriptions.

ALEX

What's that?

ABE

We mail you DVDs.

ALEX

So, like Netflix.

ABE

Yeah. But more expensive. And with fewer titles.

ALEX

Was that your pitch?

ABE

Always be closing.

ALEX

What'll you do if you don't get in?

ABE

Prostitute my body, I guess.

ALEX

We could kill Ma for the insurance money.

ABE

That'll be good for ten or twenty bucks.

ALEX

What happens if you get in, but you don't get the scholarship?

ABE

Must we dwell?

ALEX

Father won't pay for it.

ABE

He will.

ALEX

He wouldn't even cosign your car loan.

ABE

He will. The one thing he pays for is education. He's a teacher, he's obligated to. All I've got to do is *ask*.

ALEX

"He trembled."

MAN

This week, on "Be a Mensch."

(Man is gone. Abe finds an orange piece of paper.)

ABE

What's all this?

ALEX

What?

ABE

This, what is this?

ALEX

Ma says it's fine.

ABE

It looks... alarming.

ALEX

Ma says we've got squatter's rights.

ABE

What's that?

ALEX (*shrug*)

Ma says we've got them.

ABE

Then why is it orange? Orange is the second scariest color.

ALEX

Ma says it's fine.

ABE

Is this the first one of these?

ALEX

I dunno.

ABE

Where's Ma?

ALEX

I don't think you want to disturb her.

(Beat. Abe gets it.)

ALEX (*ct'd*)

At least she's getting some. At her age.

ABE

Gross.

ALEX

With Stan.

ABE

*Gross...* Is the Baby in there?

(Alex nods.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Asleep though, right?

ALEX

I don't hear crying.

ABE (“*bless God*”)

Baruch Hashem.

ALEX

It's no worse than what we went through, and we turned out fine.

ABE

*I* turned out fine, *you're* a delinquent.

ALEX

No, I'm cool, and you are a dickhead.

(Abe does an impression of having a dick for a head. They laugh. In the next room, a repetitive banging sound begins. A tortured pause. Alex starts to lay down a beat over the rhythm of the banging. Abe joins in. Alex starts to rap:)

ALEX

“Well I went to the store and I got some cheese  
And while I was there, I also got some bees  
And I rode on my bike to the other side  
And I jumped up and down from side to side”

Rapping is hard.

ABE

“Yeah,  
Yeah,  
So I went to the store – ”

Wow, it is really hard.

“So I went to the store for a can of chicken noodle  
And now I gotta make a rhyme about a poodle  
Watch out cause I've got a can of doodles  
In fact you could say I have oodles and oodles! – ”

(The banging sound ceases, as if in time to their music.)

ABE/ALEX

Hey!

ALEX

I missed you.



ABE

Get your stuff off my bed.

(Alex cleans up her homework, Abe sprawls next to her on the couch.)

ALEX

Tough day slinging blockbusters?

ABE

Blockbusters are heavy.

ALEX

Is that why they bust the block?

ABE

Thus the name.

ALEX

Well cheesecakes are hard work, too.

ABE

I guess that's why they call it a Factory.

ALEX

All day on the cheese assembly line, turning cheese into cake.

ABE

Mining cheese in the cheese mines.

ALEX

I'm going in later.

ABE

How later?

(Beat.)

ALEX

After closing.

ABE

Because... you plan to... burglarize them?

ALEX  
I'm meeting someone.

ABE  
Ooh, A *boy*?

ALEX  
My boss, the assistant manager...?

ABE  
Uh-huh...

ALEX  
He's like 23 and really cute.

ABE  
Your manager is the boy?

ALEX  
He's cute!

ABE  
Don't do it.

ALEX  
You don't even know what I was going to say.

ABE  
He's your boss.

ALEX  
You don't even know what I was going to say.

ABE  
Okay, what were you going to say?

ALEX  
We made out in the freezer room.

ABE  
...Yay.

ALEX

I like him.

ABE

He's your boss.

ALEX

So?

ABE

So, you could get sued or something.

ALEX

For what?

ABE

Misuse of company property!

ALEX

They don't own his penis.

ABE

*Don't they?*

ALEX

You suck.

ABE

Just looking out for my second favorite sister.

ALEX

I don't need looking out for. I'm not Ma.

(Beat.)

ABE

But you can't go, I need the car.

ALEX

Why, so you can hook up with Frankie in the back seat? *(Beat.)* No way!

ABE

Keep it down.

ALEX

That nice Catholic girl?

ABE

She was waiting for marriage, but...

ALEX

But blowjobs aren't in the bible?

ABE

Yes they are. In the book of job.

(They laugh.)

ALEX

Don't worry, perv, Janelle's driving me.

(Enter Stan, from the bedroom, shirtless, in a towel.)

Scene 2:

STAN

Oh. Hi kids. (*Beat.*) On my way to the bathroom...

(Stan exits into the bathroom.)

ALEX

I like him. He's simple.

ABE

Me too. Ma cook anything?

ALEX

What do you think?

ABE

I'll make some mac and cheese.

(Abe exits to the kitchen.)

ALEX

Can't we have something else?

ABE (*off*)

We have... leftover chicken...

ALEX

If I have to eat one more goddamn chicken —

ABE (*off*)

Or, knockoff SpaghettiOs from the shelter...

ALEX

That stuff tastes like pennies...

ABE (*off*)

And Life cereal.

ALEX

Okay, okay...

ABE (*off*)

And, actually, no pasta.

ALEX

I love Life.

(There is a flushing sound. Stan re-enters, dressed, zipping his fly.)

STAN

Hey, Alex.

ALEX

Hey, Stan.

STAN

How's the homework coming?

ALEX

Fine. How's my mom coming?

(Beat. Stan grunts a laugh.)

STAN

I'm heading out.

ABE (*off*)  
Bye Stan.

ALEX  
Nice seeing you, Stan.

STAN

Nice seeing you, kids.

(Stan grabs his stuff and exits through the front door. Abe steps in, holding cereal.)

ABE (*sad*)

I like him.

ALEX (*sad*)

Me too.

(There is a knock at the door.)

ABE (*has Stan returned?*)

He is simple, though.

ALEX

He must have forgot something.

(Knocking. Abe crosses to the door, and opens it with his elbow. It's LARRY, their freshly divorced former step-dad. He's the kind of man you settle for.)

Scene 3:

LARRY

Hey-a, Abe.

(Abe and Larry share a tense moment. Abe lets him in, then exits to the kitchen.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Hi Alex. (*Pause.*) Your Ma in?

(Alex is giving him the silent treatment. She points to the bedroom door.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

She decent?

(Alex shrugs.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

I'm just here for the Baby.

(Pause. Larry approaches the bedroom door. He hesitates.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Was that Stan I saw coming out?

(Alex shrugs.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Geometry, huh? (*Pause.*) You know, I miss you guys. The old house isn't the same.

ALEX (*furious*)

*Too many bedrooms?*

(She broke her rule. She goes back to ignoring Larry. Larry puts an ear to the bedroom door. Is the Baby in there? He loses his nerve.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

So, how you kids been? (*Pause.*) I just wanted you kids to know I'm real sore about — the way things turned out. (*Pause.*) Well you know how your Ma can be.

(Pause.)

ALEX

Ma! Larry's here!

MA (*off*)

Coming!

(Pause. Enter Ma. An imposing woman in a muumuu.)

MA

Hello, Larry.

LARRY

In the room, Beth? Right next to my daughter?

MA

Oh, please, Larry, she's sleeping.

LARRY

With some — *parking lot attendant?*

(Ma gives Larry a look that says “not in front of the kids,” and invites him into the bedroom, they exit. Abe enters with two bowls of cereal.)

Scene 4:

ABE

Dinner.

(They eat.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

So who's this boy?

ALEX

Nigel, my assistant manager.

ABE

Nigel?

ALEX (“*Hay*”)

Nigel He.

ABE

So is it true what they say about Asian men?

ALEX

That's a really hurtful stereotype.

ABE

And in this case... a... *true* stereotype?

ALEX

... He's a perfectly normal size.

ABE

What!?



ALEX

You are such a prude.

ABE

You're sixteen!

ALEX

What did you do when you were sixteen?

ABE

I masturbated in secret!

ALEX

That's dumb.

ABE

So are you screwing this guy?

ALEX

*No.* But he did ask me to meet him tonight after close...

ABE

I cannot express to you what a bad idea that is.

ALEX

He's a good guy!

ABE

No he's not.

ALEX

You don't know him, he's sweet.

ABE

Sometimes, when I want to know if something is the right thing to do, I just ask myself, what would a mensch do? Would I mensch have sex with one of his high-school-aged employees? And if the answer is no, I don't do that thing.

(Shouting sounds from the bedroom. Alex and Abe fall silent. Unforgivable things are being shouted. Offstage, the Baby starts crying. Ma ejects Larry from the bedroom, shouting.)

Scene 5:

MA

You're a monster! A monster!

LARRY

Beth, // Beth, Beth, Beth, Beth —

MA (*over him*)

// You come in here — you come in here and you —

LARRY

Beth, my daughter's crying.

(Ma closes the bedroom door, and blocks it.)

MA

*You're* daughter! *You* left *us*. You left us in the *street*!

LARRY

I wonder why!

MA

Kids, did Larry leave *me*, or did he leave *us*?

LARRY

Kids, don't answer that.

MA

*You* brought them into this. Look at how they're living!

LARRY

So get a job!

MA (*tearfully*)

I had a job at Bed Bath and Beyond, and I will be going back there once my back is healed!

LARRY

Sure, Beth. Sure.

MA

Get out of my house.

LARRY

It's my day!

MA

Get out, get out, get out!

(Ma pushes Larry to the door.)

LARRY

I have the baby today!

MA

I hate you!

(The baby is really wailing now.)

LARRY

I'm sorry. Just — let me have my daughter.

MA

Tell my lawyer you're sorry.

(Ma slams the door.)

LARRY (*off*)

Beth!

(Knock knock knock.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Beth!

(Long pause.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Beth, you know my lawyer is better than yours.

(Ma crosses to the bedroom and comforts the baby.)

MA (*off*)

My baby, my baby. It's alright, the bad man is gone. Shhhh. Shhhh. It's alright, Mama's here...

(She continues, *sotto voce*.)

LARRY

Beth! *(Pause.)* Abe! *(Pause.)* You're a good kid. *(Pause.)* I never told you this, but any time you want a job at the store — you're a responsible kid. I know sports really aren't your thing, but you're a good kid. *(Pause.)* Alex, hey, open up. *(Pause.)* Abe, you left some stuff at my house. Your journals. And I've got some of your mail.

(Abe crosses to the door, tempted. He doesn't open it.)

LARRY *(ct'd)*

I love you guys.

(Abe bolts the door, and sits back down.)

LARRY

Beth? *(Pause.)* Bitch!

(Larry exits.)

ALEX

He probably doesn't have any mail.

ABE

I'll take your bowl.

(Abe takes their bowls to the kitchen. There's nowhere to put them. He puts them on the kitchen table.)

Scene 6:

MA

I'm so sorry, you two. He's... a real piece of work. *(Pause.)* Isn't he?

ALEX

Yep.

MA

So, what's for dinner?

ALEX

We already ate.

MA

Without me?

ALEX

Your were busy with Stan.

MA

*Tone.*

ALEX

Sorry.

MA

What?

ALEX

*Sorry.*

MA

Well. I forgive you. (*Calling.*) Abe, honey?

ABE (*off*)

Yeah, Ma?

MA

Abe?

ABE (*off*)

*Yeah, Ma?*

MA

Family Meeting!

(Abe enters.)

ABE

Yeah, Ma?

MA

What's for dinner?

ABE

We had cereal.

MA

You need protein.

(Abe exits to the kitchen.)

MA (*ct'd*)

Don't walk away from me.

(Abe returns.)

MA (*ct'd*)

We should have dinner as a family.

ALEX

We ate!

MA

Well, what's in the fridge?

(Abe exits.)

ABE (*off*)

Chicken.

MA

Be a mensch and heat me up some baby?

ABE (*off*)

Yeah, Ma.

MA

You cut today, honey?

ALEX

Ma, I'm trying to work.

MA

How's the homework coming?

ALEX

Hard. It's Geometry.

MA

You're getting a C in geometry.

ALEX

Then I'd better get back to it.

(Pause.)

MA

How's my dinner coming?

ABE (*off*)

Fine.

MA

Abe, honey? (*Beat.*) Abe, honey?

ABE (*off*)

What?

MA

You hear back yet?

(Beat.)

ABE (*off*)

Nope.

MA

I'm sorry, baby.

(Microwave noises, off. Enter Abe.)

ABE

It'll come.

MA

Whatever happens, we're behind you.

ABE

Thanks, Ma.

MA

You are the most talented boy in the world. And you are going to go so far.

ABE

Thanks, Ma.

MA

My beautiful boy.

ALEX

Golden boy.

MA

Alex! Support your brother!

ALEX (*teenaged*)

I *am*.

MA (*to Abe*)

And if you don't get in, we support that too. Right, Alex?

(Alex rolls her eyes really big. Ma is suddenly chilly.)

MA (*ct'd.*)

Alex. Are you giving me an Attitude?

ALEX

No, Ma. Abe, we support you.

MA

I don't like having to repeat myself.

ALEX

I'm sorry Ma, I didn't mean it.

MA

Sorry doesn't cut it.

(Ma moves towards Alex.)

ALEX

I'm sorry! I was just kidding!

ABE

Thanks, Alex. I accept your apology.



(Ma freezes. After a time, she relaxes. She approaches Alex and strokes her hair.)

MA

Thank you, Bunny. That was good conflict resolution. (*Pause.*) Have you learned your lesson?

ALEX

Yes.

MA

Oh! A gray hair!

(Ma yanks out one of Alex's hairs.)

ALEX

Ow!

MA

You're getting old!

(Alex, submits. There is a knock on the door. Nobody moves.)

Scene 7:

LARRY (*off*)

Beth, would you open up, please? (*Pause.*) I spoke with Chet, and Chet says this won't look good to the judge. (*Pause.*) I wanna do this fairly. (*Pause.*) Abe? I got something for you. A graduation gift. (*Beat.*) And some mail I had in my car...

(The microwave dings. Ma and Alex look at Abe.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Looks like some important stuff here. (*Pause.*) Looks like... something from Blockbuster. Could be a paycheck. (*Pause.*) I got... a bunch of college stuff, here. (*Pause.*) Otterbein, Kalamazoo, Bowling Green, this one's from Princeton. (*Pause.*) Oh, and there's this... I guess you'd call it a packet. It's got a thumbs up on the outside. Or maybe it's a thumbs down. Says... Independence, Ohio?

(Abe opens the door. Larry enters.)

LARRY

Hey there kiddo. I got you this.

(It's a card. Abe takes the mail instead.)

LARRY

Hello, Beth. Care to have a civilized discussion? One where we keep our voices down?

MA

Civilized, he says. Can I be civilized? Can *you* be civilized?

(Abe finds the packet, Alex joins him.)

LARRY

Could you leave your anger at the door for a minute so we can discuss this?

MA

I'm not angry, it seems like you're angry.

LARRY

I am angry!

MA

Well, I'm not.

LARRY

Well, good!

(Beat.)

MA

I want to take the baby to temple tomorrow, it's Yom Hashoah.

LARRY

Well, it's my day.

(Abe has opened the packet.)

ALEX

What's it say?

ABE (*scanning*)

“Blah blah blah, blah blah blah...”

MA

I'm happy to give up my Monday, I thought your parents might like to see the baby.

Yes, well, well, that's not the point.	LARRY
Does that work for you?	MA
“...We are delighted to inform you...”	ABE
Yes!	ALEX
Fine. Fine. What time on Monday.	LARRY
When's good?	MA
Five, o'clock.	LARRY
Okay.	MA
Okay?	LARRY
Okay.	MA
“...Invited to join the class of 2009!”	ABE ( <i>rousing conclusion</i> )
What!	ALEX
What's going on?	MA
I got in!	ABE

MA

You got in!

ABE

I got in!

(Abe, Ma, and Alex celebrate loudly. Hugs all around.)

MA/ALEX (*ad lib*)

Mazel Tov!/I can't believe it!/Etc.

LARRY

Congratulations!

(Silence.)

ABE

This is dated April 7th.

LARRY

Yeah, I've been getting your mail.

ABE

I was waiting for this for a month, and you had it in your car all along?

LARRY

Not in my car.

(Pause.)

ABE

Great, Larry.

(Pause.)

MA

Well, if that's all, Larry?

LARRY

No "thank you?"

ABE

Thank you. No "congratulations?"

LARRY

I said congratulations.

(Pause.)

MA

So, Monday.

LARRY

Monday.

MA

Five o'clock?

LARRY

Five o'clock. (Pause.) Okay. Bye Alex. (Pause.) Bye Abe.

(Pause.)

MA

Goodbye, Larry.

(Larry exits.)

Scenes 8:

ALEX

Tool.

MA

You got in?

ABE

Yeah.

MA

Are you gonna go?

ABE

Yes.

MA  
Oh, congratulations, hon.

ABE  
I gotta — I gotta call — everyone!

ALEX  
Abe, can we get ice cream?

ABE  
I gotta call Frankie. I gotta call Father.

MA  
Will he pay for it?

ABE (*in the letter*)  
It's fully-funded. I just need room and board, I can find a Blockbuster out there, I'm sure.

ALEX (*reading*)  
What's this part?

ABE  
Uh...

ALEX  
What's a “deposit?”

(Abe reads.)

MA  
What is it?

ABE  
I need a... deposit.

MA  
Like a down payment?

ALEX  
How much?

ABE

Ten percent... four thousand, two hundred dollars.

(Pause.)

ALEX

Do you have four thousand dollars?

ABE

I have four hundred dollars.

MA

I'm so sorry Abram.

ABE

I gotta call Father.

ALEX

He won't pay.

ABE

He will.

MA

Well, congratulations, baby.

ABE

Uh, thanks Ma. I'm gonna make this call.

MA

Okay, baby. But no matter what happens, you're my baby.

(She kisses him. Abe slips out onto the fire escape. Abe dials.)

ALEX

I want ice cream!

MA

Well, can you pay for me?

Scene 9:

(The phone rings. Suddenly, Abe is in Father's study. On the walls are books and diplomas.

FATHER sits behind a large desk, not a pen out of place. Father speaks with the too-perfect English of an immigrant.)

FATHER

Speak.

ABE

Father.

FATHER

Hello, son.

ABE

I have some news.

FATHER

I meant to call you about your grades.

ABE

Well, that's what I'm calling about.

FATHER

You are taking a study hall? You are dropping AP Economics?

ABE

I'm already overbooked.

FATHER

You think Economics is not important.

ABE

Of course it's important, Father.

FATHER

But my economics aren't as important as this "Creative Writing?"

ABE

I want to take Econ in college. On which front, I have some good news.

FATHER

Oh, yes?

ABE



Yes. (*Beat.*) I got in!

FATHER

Oh, you did, did you?

ABE

To the Honors College.

FATHER

That was the last one, yes?

ABE

Yes.

FATHER

That was lucky.

ABE

Yes. Well, it was my first choice, so —

FATHER

You must be happy.

ABE

I am.

FATHER

And how are you intending to pay for this?

ABE

Well, I have some great news. The Honors College is a fully-funded program.

FATHER

Is that right?

ABE

Yeah, it's uh, it's a real steal.

FATHER

Congratulations.

ABE

I just need the uh deposit, and I'm in.

FATHER

I see.

ABE

Good news.

FATHER

How much?

ABE

The, uh...

FATHER

I knew there must be a reason you are calling me.

ABE

I got into college.

FATHER

A real reason. How much is this going to cost me?

ABE

It's a full ride.

FATHER

And a "deposit," and fees, and room, and board —

ABE

I'll work, they have Blockbusters in Independence.

FATHER

How much?

ABE

Ten percent.

FATHER

Ten percent of what?

ABE

Forty-two thousand dollars.

FATHER

Forty-two thousand dollars!

ABE

I just need four-thousand for the deposit.

FATHER

And you don't have four-thousand dollars? Why are you working at that video arcade? Where do you spend it all?

ABE

Ma needs that money for the rent —

FATHER

— Your mother. I should have expected.

ABE

Alex and me —

FATHER

I really don't approve of that. Your mother should be responsible for herself.

(Beat.)

ABE

Well can I count on you?

FATHER

You can ask your mother for your money back.

ABE

She doesn't have it.

FATHER

She does have it. I know this. I have given her \$700 a month in child support, for ten years. But once again it is my responsibility to pay.

(Pause.)

ABE

Please, Father.

FATHER

To beg. I am so very disappointed in you.

ABE

Father —

FATHER

— I wanted you to be independent.

ABE

The thing is, it's due on Monday.

FATHER

The deposit?

ABE

I know it's very last minute —

FATHER

It certainly is.

ABE

I know.

FATHER

You are fortunate I was available.

ABE

I am fortunate. You're the only one who can help.

FATHER

Did you know that when my parents came to America, they spoke no English?

ABE

...No.

FATHER

I tell you this because I want you to understand. They came here with nothing and spoke no English. My father sold strawberries off the back of a strawberry truck. My mother swept up diamond dust at a jeweler.

ABE

I get it.

FATHER

Nobody helped them. Nobody helped me. Nobody told me to study, nobody held my hand and pampered me or gave me money for anything I wanted. That is the only way I became responsible.

ABE

Uh-huh.

FATHER

Do you understand?

ABE

Yes.

FATHER

What do you understand?

ABE

Nobody helped you.

FATHER

I helped myself. (*Pause.*) This is America, Abram. You must help yourself now. You will not succeed unless you are willing to work hard.

ABE

I work hard.

FATHER

Then what is this study hall? No. Four thousand dollars is not so much, surely you will earn it.

ABE

But by Monday?

FATHER

Do you want to be like your mother? Living off of me your whole life?

ABE

Of course not.

FATHER

Then we agree. Congratulations, son, on your Honors College.

(Abe is back on the fire escape.)

## Act II

### Interlude:

MAN

Need fast cash today? Need relief for a medical expense or car repair? At MoneyMart, get money when *you* need it. Bad credit? No credit? No problem!. You are pre-qualified for a MoneyMart payday loan of up to eighteen hundred dollars. No strings attached! It's quick and easy, just stop by a MoneyMart branch and get cash relief today. We also offer check cashing, business loans, and prepaid debit cards. Always use short term credit responsibly.

### Scene 10:

MAN

We now return to Be a Mensch.

ALEX

I want ice cream!

MA

Well, can you pay for me?

ALEX

I'm the daughter, you're supposed to pay for *me*.

MA (*pathetic*)

...Aren't we a family?

ALEX

Are we?

MA

How can you say that?

ALEX

We're holding out on Abe! We should tell him about the money.

(Pause.)

MA

We can't tell him.

ALEX

We have to.

MA

Let's just wait and see what your Father says, we really need that money for ourselves.

ALEX

But it's his.

MA

Then we'll let him decide, but later. Let's just hear what Father says. Maybe he'll pay for the whole thing, and Abe will donate it to the family.

ALEX

No matter what Father says, he'll take it, and he'll leave.

MA

We'll just see.

ALEX

I know him. He'll do anything to get out of... this.

MA (*hurt*)

...You don't love me?

ALEX

...It's not about what I think.

MA (*exploding*)

Do you know what I went through for you? You ungrateful, unkind, *unconscious* girl! You think I liked being married to that idiot? I did it for you! I sacrificed and sacrificed and sacrificed, and you don't care. Everything I have ever done, I did for you. Every cent I made went in your ungrateful mouth. I don't think it's too much to ask for a little appreciation.

ALEX (*teenaged*)

Ma-uh! That's completely unfair-uh!

MA

Don't tell me unfair.

(Ma grabs Alex's breast and twists.)

MA (*ct'd*)

I'll show you unfair.

ALEX

Ma!

(Ma let's the pain reach a climax, then releases Alex as Abe enters. Ma starts to cry, and runs to him for comfort.)

Scene 11:

MA

She's a monster, a monster!

(Abe and Alex share a moment.)

ABE

I know, Ma. I know.

MA

She made me waste my voice!

ABE

I know, Ma.

MA

I have to sing in Temple tomorrow.

ABE

It's okay. It's okay.

(Pause.)

MA

What did your Father say?

(Abe gives a dark look.)

ALEX

I told you so.



MA

Alex, support your brother.

ABE

I gotta go talk to Frankie.

MA

Oh, baby don't cry.

ABE

I'm not crying.

MA

I know, Baby.

(Beat.)

ALEX

Abe, we were waiting to tell you —

MA

Why don't you call your Frankie? She'll know what to do.

ABE

Yeah?

MA

Yeah, call your Frankie.

ABE

Okay. Alex you okay?

ALEX

Call your Frankie.

MA

Baby, we'll be right here for you. And, baby, congratulations.

ABE (*touched*)

Thanks, Ma.

(Abe goes out to the fire escape. Ma gives Alex a warning look.)

Scene 12:

(On the fire escape, Abe dials Frankie, and breathes while it rings. Abe is now in Frankie's room. Frankie's room are transitioning from pink to punk. Frankie is writing in a diary.)

FRANKIE

Morales residence.

ABE

Frankie.

FRANKIE

Hey, sexy fox.

ABE (*miserably*)

Frankie, I have good news.

FRANKIE

Uh-oh...

ABE (*sad*)

I got in!

FRANKIE

To the Honors College?

ABE

Yeah.

FRANKIE

Then why do you sound like the world is made of farts?

ABE

Father won't pay for it.

FRANKIE

Didn't you get the scholarship?

ABE

Yeah.

FRANKIE

Then what's the problem?

ABE

The deposit.

FRANKIE

There's a deposit?

ABE

Didn't you have to pay it?

FRANKIE

I don't know.

ABE

forty-two hundred bucks.

FRANKIE

I guess my Dad must have paid.

ABE

I wish I had your Dad.

FRANKIE

...Be careful what you wish for.

ABE

Sorry...

FRANKIE

It's okay. Just, you know, be careful what you wish for.

ABE

I know.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Oh! Why don't you get a loan?

ABE

I can't. Ma fucked up my credit.

FRANKIE

I mean like, the federal one, the Pell Grant —

ABE

The Stafford Loan. I can't even apply until the first day of classes. Do you think I haven't looked into this? Don't you think I would know? I applied to every scholarship on the wall, and that didn't work either. I shook every tree. I called everyone who's ever liked me. I got rejected by my Rabbi. I don't need you to tell me where to look.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Jesus, you don't have to bite my head off.

ABE

Sorry. It's just so — embarrassing.

FRANKIE

Don't take it out on the one person who's trying to help you.

ABE (*deep breath*)

I know  
...I love you.

FRANKIE

...I love you too.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE (*ct'd*)

Wow. (*Pause.*) ...You want me to ask my Dad? I can do it. He'd say yes. I promise, I won't judge you.

ABE (*tempted*)

...No. Money ruins things, and I'm not going to let money come between us, like everyone else.

FRANKIE

Are you sure? He'd for sure say yes.

ABE

I don't want charity. That's not what we're about. I'll figure it out.

FRANKIE

...Abe?

ABE (*thinking*)

Hm.

FRANKIE

I liked what we did yesterday.

ABE

Me too.

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

Hm?

FRANKIE

We're going to make it through this. Together.

ABE

Yeah.

FRANKIE

We could get a double, if we both went.

ABE

What about your Dad?

FRANKIE

We won't tell him.

ABE

Yeah?

FRANKIE

Come with me to Independence. Abram Golden, let's blow this town. We'll have a life out there. You can be a TV writer like you always wanted.

ABE (*TV job*)

A showrunner?

FRANKIE

Yeah. A showrunner.

ABE

He's the boss of all the other writers on the show.

FRANKIE

Yeah.

ABE

...Okay.

FRANKIE

Let me talk to your Dad.

ABE

No!

FRANKIE

I could help!

ABE

He won't see it that way. He'll think I'm letting you do my dirty work.

FRANKIE

But that's not fair!

ABE

I know.

FRANKIE

You gotta stand up to him.

ABE

Thank you, Frankie, that's very helpful.

FRANKIE

Don't get mad at me.

ABE

I could never be mad at you. Just let me handle this.

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

What?

FRANKIE

You want me to come over?

ABE

No! I've got — a long night ahead of me.

(Beat.)

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

Yeah?

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

Yeah?

FRANKIE

You okay?

ABE (*lie*)

I'm great.

FRANKIE

Okay... I love you.

ABE

I love you too.

FRANKIE

I'll see you in college!

(Pause. Abe hangs up. Abe is back on the fire escape.)

Scene 13:

(Abe steps inside, thinking hard. Ma is eating leftover chicken on the couch. He starts to clean something, then gives up.)

ABE

Could you please eat at the table?

(Ma gestures to the table, which is beyond cleanable.)

MA

Did she say she loved you too?

ABE

You were listening to me?

MA

Just your side. You know I want to meet her.

ABE (*never*)

Maybe once we've tidied.

MA

Two horny kids don't want their mother butting in?

ABE

Ma, gross!

MA

I know what you kids do.

(Abe searches for Alex's eye line.)

ABE

Where's Alex?

MA

Had to go, didn't you hear Janelle honking?

ABE

No.

MA

Baby, did Frankie make you sad?



ABE

No, I just... I can't pay.

MA

Chin up. It's not the end of the world.

ABE

Thanks, Ma.

MA

Baby? No matter what happens, *you are loved*... And, hey, they offered you that promotion at Blockbuster.

ABE

I turned it down.

MA

Well, at least you have a fallback, if you stay.

ABE

But I'm not staying.

MA

Of course, baby.

ABE

I can find four grand.

MA

It's a lot of money.

ABE

It's not so much.

MA

Of course not.

(Pause.)

ABE

I'm going to make a call.

MA

Good luck, baby.

Scene 14

(Abe goes to the fire escape and places a call. Suddenly he is in Larry's car with Larry.)

LARRY

Hey, Abe! It's good to hear your voice, buddy!

ABE

Hey Larry.

LARRY

Hey, bud. It was real nice seeing you earlier.

ABE

So, yeah, so you mentioned this — that — it was nice to see you too.

LARRY

It's — *(he hides a deep breath)* — nice to hear you say that.

ABE *(nervous laugh)*

Yeah.

LARRY

So, congratulations.

ABE

Yeah, thanks.

LARRY

It's a big deal.

ABE

It is.

LARRY

So what school is this?

ABE

It's an — Honors College.

LARRY

To write your TV scripts?

ABE

Yeah.

LARRY

You made such a racket. I still got your stereo over at my place. Did you have to write to such loud music?

ABE

I like loud music.

LARRY

With a mom like that you'd have to!

(Pause.)

ABE

So you mentioned, about a job.

LARRY

Yeah? You thinking about that?

ABE

Like, what kind of job were you thinking?

LARRY

Well, you could be in the warehouse. Or we got some filing. Can you lift boxes?

ABE

Yeah.

LARRY

Course you can, you're young! Well, we'd be happy to have you on board.

ABE

Can I start right away?

LARRY

You got time for that? What about school? And Blockbuster?

ABE

Can I, or what?

LARRY

Sure.

(Pause.)

ABE

Thanks.

LARRY

You're welcome.

ABE

Do you do advances?

LARRY

Like how do you mean?

ABE

Like payday — advances?

LARRY

Not really.

ABE

Because I gotta pay this deposit, for the Honors College.

(Pause.)

LARRY

Are you... asking me for money?

ABE

I'm asking about this job.

LARRY

How much is it?

ABE

I was thinking about seven-fifty an hour.

LARRY

No, the college thing.

ABE

Oh. Four-thousand.

(Long pause.)

LARRY

You don't have to come work for me.

ABE

I want to.

LARRY

You've already got a job, you're in school. I didn't offer it because I need the labor.

(Pause.)

ABE

Larry. I — I just need help. And I came to you. I thought you would be happy.

LARRY

(*Pause.*) You think it doesn't hurt me the way you and your sister treat me? I have feelings, you know. You don't say a word to me in two months, and now, what, you want a favor? And I was — well now I feel stupid.

ABE

I thought you wanted me in your life?

LARRY

Yeah, yeah, but I meant... you know, when I came by today, I had a card for you, and a check for a hundred dollars. And I wanted to give it to you. It was a graduation gift. But then you wouldn't even say, "Hi," to me. And what did I ever do to you? (*Long pause.*) So you know what I did? I tore it up. One hundred dollars, just like that. That's why the card was empty. You could have a hundred dollars right now.

ABE

So?

LARRY

So?!

ABE

It's the thought that counts, right? The card contains the sentiment, and the money was the gift. So you rescinded the cash, but not the heartfelt sentiment? What a complete misunderstanding of how to hurt me.

(Pause.)

LARRY (*holding it together*)

So do you want the job, or what?

ABE

Yes. Thank you.

LARRY

You're welcome. I'll give you an advance of four-thousand dollars. Why don't you start after graduation? I know you're bogged down with school right now.

(Pause.)

ABE

Thank you. Thank you.

LARRY

I love you, son.

(Pause.)

ABE

Larry?

LARRY

Yeah?

ABE

On Monday, you should know...

LARRY

Yeah, Abe?

ABE

We're going out of town. (*Beat.*) There's no school and we're all going to visit Bubbe.

LARRY

Son of a bitch.

ABE

And I know Ma said Monday was your day. But I know Bubbe was expecting us and the Baby in Michigan. I don't know if that's changed, or what, I just thought —

LARRY

— I — I don't even know what to say. You knew about this?

ABE

It just seemed like you would want to know.

LARRY

That your mother's been manipulating me? As usual? Stupid dumb Larry. Did she.... did she tell you to call me?

ABE

No.

LARRY

I'm coming over.

(Loud knocking.)

ABE

Larry, wait!

(More knocking. Abe is back on the fire escape.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

She's not here!

(But Larry has hung up. More knocking. Abe goes to the door and opens it. It's Frankie.)

Scene 15:

(Frankie arrives at the door.)

ABE

Frankie!

FRANKIE

Sexy fox!

ABE

Uh, hi. (*Beat.*) Come in.

(Frankie enters. She takes in the room.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Welcome to my humble abode.

(Pause. Frankie explores the room, not touching anything. She steps on something and flinches.)

FRANKIE

I — I didn't realize...

(Abe picks up some scores off the floor.)

ABE

You want the tour?

FRANKIE

Sure, okay.

ABE

I was kidding. This is it.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE (*disturbed*)

It's really... charming.

ABE

I know it's — from the outside it looks messy, but there's a system.

FRANKIE

You like living this way?

ABE

No! No, I'm clean.

FRANKIE

You sleep on a couch?

ABE

It's actually better than some beds. And this is my closet.



(A rod, hung with clean pressed clothes.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

My laundry, my books, my important documents.

(A hanging laundry bag, the only organized bookshelf, an accordion folder.)

FRANKIE (*shaking it off*)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I know you've always said you were poor, but I thought — I guess I thought you were just bragging.

ABE

Bragging?

FRANKIE

Like, poor little rich boy: "I'm so street."

ABE

Well, the street isn't as fun as it sounds.

FRANKIE

I wasn't saying it was fun, I was saying I thought you were exaggerating.

ABE

Well, I'm happy to see that my poverty exceeds your expectations.

FRANKIE

See? Like that!

ABE

What?

FRANKIE

"Exceeds my expectations" — you talk so white!

ABE

I am white.

FRANKIE

But I guess you're just Jewish.

ABE

Can't I be both?

FRANKIE

Aren't you supposed to have money?

ABE

All four of my Grandparents were Holocaust survivors. When were we supposed to acquire some vast fortune?

FRANKIE

"Acquire some vast!" You put on an air of being educated.

ABE

I put on an *air*?

FRANKIE

You act... upper class.

ABE

I have class. I'm classy.

FRANKIE

You hid this from me.

ABE

Wouldn't you!?

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Abe... (Pause.) We're going to get you out of here. I'll ask my Dad for the money. I'll explain your — situation; he'll understand!

ABE

No. No debts between you and me. Debts are poison. Debts ruin everything, and I will not let this be ruined. I'm a grown man, I'll find the money.

FRANKIE

Abe.

ABE

Frankie.

FRANKIE

When we get married, there will be no difference between your money and mine. Let me do this for you.

(Frankie kisses him. It becomes passionate, and then lustful. They move to the couch. Frankie stops.)

FRANKIE (*ct'd*)

I want it to be you.

(They start to remove clothes. Ma pops into the room.)

MA

Ah-ha! I caught you!

(Frankie and Abe hurry to dress.)

ABE / FRANKIE

Ma! / Mrs. Golden!

(Ma laughs.)

MA

So this is the girlfriend. I thought you said she was a Catholic.

ABE

She is.

FRANKIE

I'm Frankie.

MA

Charmed, I'm sure.

ABE

This is my Ma.

MA

You make quite an impression.

Scene 16:

(There is a loud and persistent knocking at the door. Abe and Frankie dress hurriedly.)

ABE

Who is it?

(The knocking is relentless.)

MA

Don't let them in if it's debt collectors.

ABE

Who is it?

(The knocking continues.)

FRANKIE

Get the door...!

(Abe opens the door. Larry plows into the room.)

LARRY

Beth!

MA

What the hell is...?

LARRY

Michigan?

MA

What?

LARRY

Michigan? On Monday? With the Baby? On my Monday?

MA

Oh, that.

LARRY

You're damn right, that. (*Noticing Frankie.*) Hello.

FRANKIE

Mrs. Golden, Mr. Golden.

LARRY

Young lady, I think you two should step out.

ABE

Done.

LARRY

And it's Schneider.

FRANKIE

Huh?

LARRY

Mr. Schneider, Mrs. Golden-Schneider. Abe and his sister are Goldens, like their father.

FRANKIE

I never knew that.

LARRY

There's a lot you don't know. Did you know that Beth, here, is a sociopath?

MA

So we're going to fight, Larry, is that what you want?

ABE

Let's go.

FRANKIE

We can stay. (*Beat.*) I can do it.

ABE

You don't have to.

MA

Let her stay, baby.

LARRY

Give me my daughter, Beth.

MA

She's asleep.

LARRY

I don't care.

MA

Typical Larry.

LARRY

Move!

MA

Make me.

(Larry hesitates.)

MA (*ct'd.*)

You limp-dick, stingy, bald, stupid Jew: no one would have you except for me. You're too weak.

LARRY

Well you're a fat, lazy, crazy, piece of shit.

MA

How dare you say that to me? I've raised three children all on my own.

LARRY

Yeah, great job with that.

ABE

Hey!

LARRY

You're not fit to be a mother.

MA

"...Said the emotionally stunted jock-strap salesman."

LARRY

*Don't you bring the store into this! (Beat.)* Abe, go get the Baby.

(Pause.)

ABE

The Baby's sleeping.

LARRY

Abram, I am her father. And it is *My Day*. Now go get her. (*Pause.*) Or don't you want that advance?

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Abe?

(Abe goes into the bedroom.)

MA

Where are you going?

(Abe emerges cradling the Baby, who is a trophy. He passes it to Larry.)

MA

Abram!

ABE

Shh!

(Larry takes the Baby.)

LARRY

Shhh!

(The Baby starts to stir.)

MA

Larry, let me hold her.

LARRY

You stay away!

(The Baby starts to cry.)

LARRY (*ct'd, to the Baby*)

Shhh! Shhh!

(The Baby cries harder.)

ABE

You need to bounce her.

LARRY

I know what to do.

MA

You're upsetting her!

(The Baby screams. Larry breaks for the door.)

ABE

You forgot the diaper bag!

LARRY

Don't you *ever* call me again.

(Larry slams the door. They sit in silence as the screams and curses grow more distant. Finally:)

Scene 17:

MA

So you're the famous Frankie.

FRANKIE

Uh, uh-huh.

MA

Abe is so fond of you. I've never seen him so passionate about anything. (*Beat.*) Will you help me with something dear?

FRANKIE

Yeah, of course.

(Ma guides Frankie to a pile of dishes next to a water basin.)

MA

Just dip these dishes in here, and let them be suspended for a minute, and then dry them and put them over here.

ABE

You don't have to do that.

MA



Nonsense, she wants to help.

FRANKIE

I can do it.

ABE

You really don't have to.

FRANKIE

I want to.

MA

Abe, why don't you dry?

ABE

No.

MA

So you're just going to let Frankie kosher the dishes all on her own?

ABE

Frankie, don't do it.

FRANKIE

It's okay.

(Frankie starts to dip dishes. It's deep. Her sleeves are wet. This is going to be a long job.)

MA

Well if you're not going to help, tell us one of your TV pilots.

ABE

No!

MA

The Baby's gone, we can be loud now.

FRANKIE

Come help me, Abe.

ABE

No. That's what she wanted all along.

FRANKIE

But Mrs. Golden asked us to.

ABE

You can't do everything she asks.

MA

Oh, that's hurtful.

ABE

It's not a job you can finish. After these it will be the next set, then the next. You can just stop.

(Frankie looks to Ma.)

MA

Go on, dear.

(Frankie continues working, miserable.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Ma, tell her she can stop.

MA

You're a natural, darling.

ABE

Stop it!

(Frankie stops. Abe goes to the bathroom and returns with a beach towel.)

ABE

Give me your hands. Give me your hands!

(Abe holds out the towel. Frankie gives him her sopping hands. Abe dries them, tenderly, Frankie starts to cry.)

MA

What's wrong with her?

ABE

It's okay. You want to go home? Hey. You want to go home?

(Frankie nods. Abe lifts her up.)

FRANKIE

It's nice to meet you Mrs. Golden.

MA

Oh, sweetheart. Welcome to the family!

(Abe escorts her to the door. He leans in for a kiss and gets a peck, then Frankie scurries off. Abe turns to Ma. Ma starts to belt her scales.)

Scene 18:

ABE

Thanks, Ma.

MA

Are you mad at me?

ABE

Why did you do that?

MA

She seemed like a nice girl.

ABE

Are you trying to ruin my life?

MA

Are you kidding? She's a joy!... I'm just thinking of the future.

ABE

I'm going to college with that girl.

MA

Well... You know I never want to discuss finances with you, that makes me very uncomfortable, I would never talk finances with you, but if you're going to college, we need to discuss certain... financial realities.

ABE

Come on, Ma, let me be happy for just one day.

MA

Don't expect too much out of life. That was my mistake. My beautiful boy. I hope you do get to go, I really do, but without your income, your sisters and I will have a very hard time, and you'll have to take on so much debt...

ABE

Father will pay.

MA

Maybe.

ABE

He's a teacher. He's obligated to.

MA

Alright, but room and board? And pocket money? Will you work?

ABE

Ma!... There is nothing on God's Earth that could keep me here.

(Pause.)

MA

I need you to ask your father for the rent money.

ABE

He hates me!

MA

He loves you. You know he won't do it for me.

ABE

It's humiliating!

MA

Abe, honey. Your Baby sister will have nowhere to stay. Abe, we're a family.

ABE

Some family.

MA (*sadly*)

Some family.

Scene 19:

(Behind Cheesecake Factory, NIGEL HE, a 23-year-old Asian-American man in a Cheesecake Factory uniform is murdering a fingernail when Alex arrives.)

MAN

Meanwhile, in the B-plot, Alex makes a startling discovery.

ALEX (*coyly*)

*Hey.*

NIGEL

We're fucked, Alex, we're fucked.

ALEX

Why?

NIGEL

They got the, uh, camera footage from the, the uh, the uh refrigerator.

ALEX

So, what did they see?

NIGEL

Me and you going in there together.

ALEX

Can they see inside it?

NIGEL

No.

ALEX

So, we'll just tell them nothing happened.

NIGEL

It's too late!

ALEX

It's not too late! We'll just say that we – both went in there to – I don't know, unpack some meat.

NIGEL

That doesn't sound any better.

Whatever! We'll lie. It'll be fine.

ALEX

I told them you came on to me.

NIGEL

Why!

ALEX

We were in there for twelve minutes!

NIGEL

So?

ALEX

So you came in last, so I told them you came on to me. Whoever came in last had to take the blame.

NIGEL

But you told me to meet me you there!

ALEX

I'll write you a good reference.

NIGEL

It's not about the *reference*.

ALEX

I know.

NIGEL

You lied!

ALEX

I did not lie! You did come on to me!

NIGEL

Not *that* time.

ALEX

Well, it's too late. I have to fire you.

NIGEL

ALEX

For what!

NIGEL

Sexual harassment.

ALEX

If anyone harassed anyone, you harassed me.

NIGEL

I told them I'd fire you. It's too late.

ALEX

Well... un-fire me.

NIGEL

We are — miles past that.

ALEX

Well, I'll tell them *you* came on to *me*.

NIGEL

That's just he-said-she-said.

ALEX

At least we'll both get fired.

NIGEL

Why would you do that! Only one of us needs to lose their jobs, here!

ALEX

Um, *revenge*.

NIGEL

Get this through your bimbo head. You're fired, Alex. There is nothing you can do to get your job back. Go home.

ALEX

I will not go home. I'm going to go in there and raise hell.

NIGEL

There's nobody here but us.

ALEX

Then I'll call Bob.

(She takes out her phone and starts scrolling.)

NIGEL

Don't! I could lose my job!

ALEX

Fuck your job.

NIGEL

Alex, please! My dad's cousin owns this place. There's a lot at stake for me here.

ALEX

You think I do this for the laughs?

NIGEL

You'll land on your feet, you're white.

ALEX

I'm not white, I'm Jewish.

NIGEL

Same thing. Anyway you're in high school! Just get another shitty job.

ALEX

You think you're some kind of big shot? Because you *assistant* manage a Cheesecake Factory?

NIGEL

I have hiring and firing power.

(She presses her body into him.)

NIGEL (*ct'd*)

Uh, you — no. I can't, um —

ALEX

Come on, let me earn that job back.

NIGEL

Um, no, I mean, there are proper channels...



ALEX

It's nothing I haven't done before.

(Alex starts to undo his belt.)

NIGEL

We can't... date.

ALEX

Who said I wanted a date?

(She finishes with his belt and reaches down his pants.)

NIGEL

No, stop.

ALEX

Come on.

(Alex pulls down his pants. And falls to her knees.)

NIGEL

Um, I guess um, I can call, like a temp agency...

(Right when things are about to get explicit, Alex punches Nigel in the dick.)

NIGEL (*ct'd.*)

Bitch!

ALEX

A fucking temp agency!

(Nigel slams Alex against the dumpster and holds her there.)

ALEX (*screaming*)

Rape! Rape!

NIGEL

Alex, you slut!

(Nigel releases her and runs offstage tripping over his pants. Alex leans against the dumpster, gasping and coughing.)

ALEX

You have a tiny dick!

(She can't calm down. She pulls a crumpled tissue out of her pocket, and unrolls a razor. She rolls down the side of her jeans and makes a small cut along her belt line. It helps. She dabs the blood, rolls up the blade. She catches her breath. She makes a call.)

Scene 20:

(Ring. Ring. Abe is in Father's study. Father is somehow larger. These locations are becoming more vivid to Abe.)

FATHER

Speak.

ABE

Father.

FATHER

Abram, have you spoken to your mother? Is she on the line?

ABE

I have a proposal for you.

FATHER

A proposal? That is enterprising.

ABE

I want you to loan me twenty-one hundred dollars.

FATHER

We've already discussed this.

ABE

It's only half. And I'll pay interest on it, eight percent, compounded bi-annually. I can start repayment next month.

FATHER

Do you know what advice my father gave me before he died, Abram?

ABE

No, sir.

FATHER

I loved my father very much, he was a decent man. And he loved me, in his way. And he showed his love through the timely application of his wisdom. And if I listened I was always better for it. If I didn't listen, I was always sorry. What you lack is discipline. Discipline to work hard. Discipline to save. Do you have a savings account?

ABE

No, sir.

FATHER

You see? Discipline to listen. Discipline to learn. Discipline to do what is right, do you understand? To be a man.

ABE

I understand.

FATHER

You don't understand. How could you?

ABE

I understand sir, you want me to be disciplined, you want —

FATHER

I was in the middle of an anecdote.

ABE

Yes, sir.

FATHER

My father was dying. You were only a young boy. I went to see him in Detroit, and do you know what he said to me? (*Pause.*) He said to me... “Real estate.” (*Pause.*) Do you see?

ABE (*no*)

Yes.

FATHER

He wanted me to *invest* in something. I invested in education, and now I have an office, a job, my students are the best in the world, I have seen the birth of a new field of Economics, and all this through the proper application of discipline. Do you see?

ABE

I should invest in education.

FATHER

No! You need some leverage, some real estate. What will be your collateral on this two-thousand dollar loan? (*Pause.*) You see? This is my advice to you. Real estate.

(Long pause.)

ABE

Thirteen percent interest, it's well above market. To compensate for the risk.

FATHER

You certainly inherited your mother's penchant for salesmanship.

ABE

I can leverage that into an education, just like you. But I need a loan. Today.

FATHER

I will offer you this. I am worth some quarter-million dollars, most of it in retirement. When I die you are to get half of it. *After* I pay off the house.

If you ask it of me, I will loan you your two thousand dollars today. But then that will be all. My will will pass over you. I'll give it all to – cousin Leon or someone. Is this a deal?

ABE

Thank you, sir.

FATHER

This is no occasion for thanks. You can pick up a check from my office tomorrow.

ABE

Thank you, sir. I love you.

FATHER

Have your mother call me.

Scene 21:

(Abe is back on the fire escape, visually upset. A few windows over, on another fire escape, is Stan, smoking a cigarette.)

ABE (*to God*)

Do you hate me?

STAN

Hey.

ABE

Hey.

(Abe dries his eyes.)

STAN

Sorry.

ABE

S'okay.

(Pause.)

STAN

Cigarette?

(Pause.)

ABE

Sure.

STAN

Had to get away from the wife.

ABE

I get it.

STAN

You ever smoke?

ABE

No.

STAN

Shouldn't then.

ABE

I want one.

(Stan lights a cigarette and reaches the long distance to hand it to Abe. Abe takes a deep drag and immediately coughs it up.)

ABE

Fuck that!

(Abe drops it.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

What is the *appeal*?

(Abe coughs for a bit. Pause.)

STAN

I heard. On the phone.

ABE

Yeah.

STAN

You get your money?

ABE

Half.

STAN

Eesh.

(Pause.)

ABE

I don't suppose you got any money?

STAN

Can't say I do. Kids's expensive.

ABE

Tell me about it.

(Pause.)

STAN

You want, I'll ask them to take up a collection on Sunday.

(Abe considers this for a time.)

ABE

Nah.

(Pause.)

STAN

How come?

(Pause.)

ABE

A man earns. *(Pause.)* Pass me another cigarette.

(Stan takes out another cigarette, lights it, and passes it. Abe regards it.)

ABE *(ct'd)*

So how do I do this?

STAN

Breathe out, suck it into your mouth and hold, then get a big lungful of air.

(Abe tries again, he coughs. He tries again.)

ABE

Like this?

STAN

I don't think this is for you.

(Abe takes another drag. He's getting the hang of it.)

ABE

Do I look like one of the cool kids?

(Stan laughs.)

STAN

You're cool, kid.

(Pause.)

ABE

So, is it hard, cheating on your wife?

(Pause.)

STAN (*taking it in stride*)

I guess.

(Pause.)

ABE

So why do you do it?

(Pause.)

STAN

Life's long. At some point you gotta stop, you know, trying to be good all the time.

(Pause.)

ABE

But, you don't feel bad?

STAN

Shit. Always.

(Pause.)

ABE

Does it happen to everyone?

STAN

Does what?

ABE

You stop trying to be good?

(Pause.)

STAN

Everyone I know.



(Pause.)

ABE

So, why don't you leave your wife?

(Pause.)

STAN

Can't.

ABE

Do you like her?

STAN

Hell, no.

ABE

And you like my Ma?

STAN

Sure.

ABE

So, why not — come with us?

(Pause.)

STAN

D'make the kids bastards.

(Pause.)

ABE

You Christians. And you think *we're* messed up.

(Pause.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

We need you.

STAN

Everybody needs me.

ABE

I've been through two divorces, I turned out fine. Your kids will turn out fine.

STAN

I'm not your dad, kid.

(Pause.)

ABE

When are you going to grow up? *(Pause.)* It doesn't bother you at all, just fucking around in peoples' lives? It's me who has deal with the consequences of your shit.

(Stan shrugs.)

ABE *(ct'd)*

I shouldn't have to be the adult.

(Pause.)

STAN

No such thing.

(Pause.)

ABE

You take no responsibility for your choices?

STAN

I look back: don't think I chose one damn thing.

ABE

I didn't get anyone pregnant, like you. You chose fatherhood. I'm a virgin father. *(Realizing.)* I'm a Reverse Immaculate Conception.

STAN

You're like your Ma.

ABE

Ouch.

STAN

A survivor. *(Pause.)* Look. The first firefly.

(Stan points.)

ABE

Oh, yeah...!

(Pause.)

STAN

Shit...!

ABE

There it is again.

STAN

Let's talk to them.

(Stan takes a long drag, and his ember glows. Abe follows suit. The fireflies seem to glow in answer. They talk to the fireflies. After a time:)

ABE

I don't get it.

STAN

Hm?

ABE

You seem so — nice.

STAN

I'm not nice. Just don't see why I should be mean.

ABE

It's refreshing.

STAN

Preach, brother.

(Pause.)

ABE

I've never had a brother.

STAN (*amused*)

Me neither.

(Abe takes a drag.)

ABE

Thanks for my first cigarette.

STAN

Don't it hurt?

(Pause. Abe exhales.)

ABE

Isn't that the point?

(Pause.)

STAN

How do you feel?

(Pause.)

ABE

Sick.

STAN

Me too.

(They smoke together in silence.)

### ACT III

Interlude:

MAN

Short on cash?

Well come on down to Pawtucket Downs and Casino! The horses are ready to race, if you're ready to win, win, win! It's the finest entertainment package money can buy. And who knows, you might even win our four-hundred million dollar jackpot! Pawtucket Downs and Casino, off route 77 Southbound.

Are *you* ready to cash in?

Scene 22:

(Abe enters, and empties out a box. He rifles around the room throwing valuables into the box.)

MAN

Previously, on *Be a Mensch*, Abe had just made a bargain with Father. He was now halfway to his goal — or so he thought...

ABE (*to Alex*)

How much do you think I can get for my Dell?

MA

He's not paying...

ABE

Half.

ALEX

Shit.

MA

Language.

ABE (*the laptop*)

How much?

ALEX

How much did you pay for it?

ABE

Seven-hundred. Like a year ago.

ALEX

Nada.

ABE

Good, I really need it.

(He throws a TI-83 calculator in the box and keeps roving.)

MA

Baby, you're making a mess.

ABE

If you were \$2000, where would you be?

(Ma and Alex share a look that Abe misses. Abe comes upon a collection of glass tchotchkes.)

ABE

Ma, can I sell these crystal... things?

MA

No! Those are going to be worth a lot of money some day.

ABE

Like, today?

MA

No! They increase in value over time! Look, this one's from nine-eleven. This is going to be worth a fortune in fifty years!

ABE

What about this thing?

(A crystal unicorn.)

MA

You'll break his horn!

ALEX

Abe, there's something we should tell you.

MA

What's that smell?

ABE

Stan was smoking.

(Abe puts the unicorn in the box.)

MA

Breathe in my mouth.

ABE

I was smoking, too.

MA

Abe! My voice!

ABE

I know, Ma.

MA

I have to sing in the morning!

ABE

Okay, Ma, give it a rest.

MA

Give it... a *rest*?

ABE

Sorry.

MA

This is our livelihood!

ABE

No, it's not.

MA

How are we going to survive if I lose my voice?

ABE

Well, I'm getting out of here, so you won't need to worry about wasting your precious voice on me ever again.

(Pause.)

(Ma mopes around the room, cleaning haphazardly, sniffing. It is impossible to ignore.)

ALEX

Abe?

(Ma sobs.)

ABE

What.

MA

You know I never want to discuss finances with you. But, as the Man of the House, you should know...

(Ma produces a red piece of paper, and hands it to Abe.)

ABE

It's red.

(Abe reads.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

When were you going to tell me?

MA

I wasn't.

(Pause.)

ABE

How could you let it get this far?

MA

We're broke, Abe!

ABE

This isn't my problem.

MA

I know. I'm sorry I brought it up.

(Pause.)

ABE

But by Wednesday?

(Pause.)

MA

It's alright. We've got squatter's rights. (*Beat.*) Abram: we need that money for the family.



ABE

No.

MA

Well, what will it matter to your father how you spend it?

ABE

That money is mine for college.

MA

Is there any extra?

ABE

He's only giving me two-thousand.

MA (*the red paper*)

Look! Our bill for Liberty Meadows is only twenty-one hundred! God has given given us a path.

ABE

I need it.

MA (*“bless god”*)

Baruch Hashem, what luck!

ABE

You can't have it!

MA

But, everything's going to work out, now. Don't you see, Abram? God has delivered us this gift.

ABE

*I* delivered us this gift, and it's not a gift, it's *mine*.

MA

Can't you ask your father for just a little more?

ABE

No.

MA

You can say it's for college.

ALEX

He's not stupid, Ma.

MA

I don't understand, you can't even ask?

ABE

He disinherited me! (*Beat.*) But I got my two-thousand dollars. So that money is *mine* for *college* and you won't see one cent.

(Pause.)

MA

I'm so proud of you, Baby. I'm just glad that one of my children is going places. You know, when I was your age I was already pregnant with you. I never really had a choice. But you, you won't have anybody to worry about. Isn't that lucky?

ABE

Very.

MA

Your father never wanted children. You were quite the surprise. He said he never wanted children, but there we were, with little You growing in my belly.

Of course we talked about getting you — taken care of. Your father drove me all the way to the clinic, but I just couldn't go through with it. And I'm so happy I didn't. My beautiful boy. You know I care more about you than anything in the world.

ALEX

Ma!

MA

Except your sisters. And that's why I'm so proud to be the mother of such a smart, such a beautiful boy. And such a mensch. I'm just sorry about Alex...

ALEX

What's wrong with Alex?

MA

Without your income, Alex will have to work twice the hours. Her grades will suffer. No sewing club. She won't have the same — opportunities as you had.

ALEX

That's not fair.

MA

And the Baby; you are her role model, her rabbi, you would be abandoning her.

ABE

*That* is not fair.

MA

But I'm happy for you. (*Pause.*) I hope you'll help us move, though. (*Pause.*) Alex will have to switch schools of course. Her education is important, but the rent is half as much in Painesville.

ABE

You know what? That sounds like a great plan.

ALEX

It does?

ABE

Painesville. That's good thinking.

MA

Are you mocking me?

ABE

No — I think whatever you think is best for the family, is best. And when I leave, you'll have the run of the place.

(Ma lunges at Abe and grabs him by the hair.)

MA

You know exactly what you're doing to us.

How can you live with yourself!

ABE

Let.

Me.

Go!

(Abe pulls himself away from Ma, and she is thrown clear. She lands on the piano keys.)

MA

You struck me.

ABE

...I'm sorry.

MA

What sort of man hits his mother? I didn't raise this monster. This is your Father.

ABE

This is you.

(A standoff.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

I have calls to make.

ALEX

But what about me? (*No answer.*) Abe, what about me?

(Abe goes to leave.)

MA

Don't you walk away from me.

(Abe exits to the fire escape.)

Scene 23:

(On the fire escape, Abe calls Frankie.)

FRANKIE

I don't want to talk to you.

ABE

How you doing, hon?

FRANKIE

Fine! I just didn't know what I was marrying into.

ABE (*scared*)

Are we...?

FRANKIE

No. We're not breaking up just because we're in a fight.

ABE

I am so sorry.

FRANKIE

About what?

ABE

For my Mom...

FRANKIE

No, Abe!

ABE

I don't know!

FRANKIE

You don't even know what you did, do you?

ABE

I do! (*Pause.*) I don't. You don't understand. My family — they turn everything upside down —

FRANKIE

You just let me do that!

ABE

I told you not to.

FRANKIE

But you didn't even help me, even when your Mom told you to.

ABE

You don't get it: she never cleans. You can't do work for her or you end up cleaning the whole house.

FRANKIE

Well you could have told me that.

ABE

You showed up at my door, uninvited —

FRANKIE

You're really going to put this on me? Poor you, Abe, your girlfriend loves you so much.

ABE

Okay. I'm sorry, I should have told you. (*Beat.*) I didn't want to tell you.

FRANKIE

From now on I need to know all of you. Okay?

ABE

Really?

FRANKIE

Yes!

(Pause.)

ABE

I am so scared.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Well are you sorry?

ABE

I am so sorry.

FRANKIE

Okay. I guess I forgive you. You have to be on my side, not your family's side.

ABE

Done.

FRANKIE

Okay.

(Pause.)

ABE

My Dad gave me half.

FRANKIE

Okay.

ABE

I just need 2000 more...

FRANKIE

That's not so bad.

(Pause.)

ABE

Before... you said you could ask your Dad...?

(Beat.)

FRANKIE (*hurt*)

Is that why you called me?

ABE

I want us to be together. I want the double. I want it all.

FRANKIE

I'm not your sugar mommy.

ABE

You offered!

FRANKIE

But you weren't supposed to take it! It's not — gentlemanly!

ABE

Then I'm sorry I took you seriously.

FRANKIE

Is that why you're with me? For the money?

ABE

I bought you sushi yesterday!

FRANKIE (*hurt*)

I thought that sushi was a *gift*... (*Beat.*) You were right, money does come between people.

ABE

I told you so. (*Pause.*) Never mind about your Dad. We're more important.

FRANKIE

I'll ask him.

(Beat.)

ABE

Why?

FRANKIE

Because I love you, asshole.

(She hangs up on him.)

Scene 24:

(Abe is on the fire escape. Alex is there, listening.)

ALEX

You are so selfish.

ABE

What?

ALEX

You're leaving us. Just like Larry. Just like all of them.

ABE

I'm not them. I didn't knock anyone up. I'm not responsible for anyone.

ALEX

Bullshit, Abe, bullshit. You didn't choose to become the head of this household, it isn't your fault. But it is your responsibility.

ABE

Alex, I am going away. Nothing will stop me. I won't sacrifice my whole life for this family.

ALEX

What about for me? (*Pause.*) Abe, we're not gonna make it without you. Look at this place. (*Pause.*) Ma can't do it. I can't do it.

ABE

You can move out.

ALEX

No, I can't. I'm in high school. (*Pause.*) Who will look after the Baby?

ABE



That's not your job.

ALEX

No, it's yours, but I'll be the one doing it.

ABE

I just can't believe you. Today of all days: all my dreams are coming true, and you, who knows exactly what this means to me, want to drag me down.

ALEX

What if we're homeless?

(Pause.)

ABE

Sure, with an attitude like that.

ALEX

I'm not joking.

ABE

Okay!

ALEX

I don't want to be an adult yet, I'm not ready.

(Pause.)

ABE

Well, what do you propose?

ALEX

Get emancipated.

ABE

Like slaves?

ALEX

Yes. Dad's been bugging you to do that anyway, right?

ABE

Yeah, he doesn't want to pay child support any more.

ALEX

So we'll get emancipated. Father would pay us to do it. Get our own place, take the Baby, make a little home. Ma will find a way, she always does, but we'll have something, and it'll just be us. You could do anything, you could write —

ABE

— Show-run?

ALEX

Show-run! Or just do something part time, and I'll pitch in, and you can go to night school or whatever you want, just take me with you.

ABE

Do I ever get to be my own person?

ALEX

When Baby's eighteen.

ABE

That's awful.

ALEX

It's already done. You don't realize yet: this is what we are. Yes, it's awful, but it's true. So man up, and save the family.

(Pause.)

ABE

No.

ALEX

No?

ABE

*No.*

Scene 26:

(Abe's phone rings, he answers it.)

ABE

Abe's phone.

Obligated? FATHER

Father. ABE

Obligated? Is that what I am, obligated? FATHER

Who told you? ABE

Enough, Abe, enough. FATHER

Father. ABE

I'll have you know I am not obligated to give you free money, and I only do so because I love you. FATHER

I know, Father. ABE

...Don't you love me, too? FATHER

Of course I love you. ABE

Well, it's not enough. It's not enough. FATHER

Father. ABE

You know, people say that love is unconditional, but I don't know about that. FATHER

Dad, please. ABE

FATHER

You can forget about that loan. Maybe then you'll understand my obligations.

(Pause.)

ABE

And God told Abram to take his only son Isaac to the top of a mountain, and sacrifice him. And Abram was all set to do it. Abram was disturbingly okay with all this.

FATHER

This conversation is over.

ABE

Excuse me. I was in the middle of an anecdote.

So, he takes his only son to the appointed spot. Gives him one last kiss. Places him on the altar. Raises up the knife. And brings it down.

When God stops him — “Stop,” He says. “I was just kidding. But because of your abundant faith in me, I shall make a nation of your boy, Isaac, and I will have a covenant with him, and all of his sons and grandsons will sacrifice their foreskins to me, and they shall be my chosen people.

“No longer will you be called Abram. You shall take my name into yours, and you shall be called Abraham.”

So, why did you name me Abram? Why didn’t you put God in my name?

FATHER

We just picked it.

(Father hangs up.)

## ACT IV

Interlude:

MAN

This program was brought to you by the the silent suffering of the children who were forced to grow up fast, by the scars of poverty that hide behind the eyes, by the five extra minutes it takes to get to work when your shoes don’t fit, by the death rattle of the engine of the car you can’t afford to fix, by fried

food, and by viewers... like you.

Scene 27:

ABE

That was... Father.

ALEX

Yeah?

ABE

He's not paying.

ALEX

Oh, no!

ABE

He said he wasn't "obligated."

(Pause.)

ALEX

That's terrible.

ABE

"Obligated," he said.

(Pause.)

ALEX

Don't be mad at me.

ABE

You!

ALEX

Abe, just be // you know — stay calm —

ABE

// I'm — I'm — I'm — not gonna get to go to college, we're not going to be able to live here anymore!

ALEX

It was the only way you'd stay! I knew you'd go. Of course, you have to go! Even a good person doesn't turn down his whole life. But I knew you would never abandon us. You're too good, and now you have to stay.

ABE

I'm not your dad, Alex!

ALEX

Then who is?

ABE

Can't you feel it? We're growing up too fast. All this... hardship. It's making me — hard. Every time I put on this stupid shirt, every time I hold the Baby, I feel myself losing something... light. I'm afraid if I go on like this any more; I won't remember what it's like to be a kid.

ALEX

You're not a kid. You're eighteen.

ABE

I don't feel it. Look at me. Who wears a cardigan?

ALEX

You're just mature for your age. They haven't been through what we have. They think life is easy, and we know better. We're the lucky ones.

ABE

I don't feel lucky.

ALEX

We have each other.

ABE

I don't want to grow up, Alex. I'm scared.

ALEX

You can do it. We both can.

ABE

We shouldn't have to.

ALEX

But, we do. This is the life we have. We could be living in Auschwitz, but instead we're living in the cheapest housing in the nicest suburb in Ohio. *(Pause.)* The Baby cried out for you yesterday. *(Pause.)*

She said, "Dada." That's why I called you in. I knew who she meant. (Pause.) You knew just what to do; you rocked her and whispered to her, and she was so happy. She's not a smiler, but for you... Do you remember how she smiled? Because Dada was there?

ABE

You should have corrected her.

ALEX

She's right! She spends more time with you than Larry. And you have such a way with her.

ABE

Yeah, well, just because you're six-foot-ten, doesn't mean you gotta play for the Nets. I just want to be normal.

ALEX

But we're not normal, Abe. We're fucked up. Do you know why I sucked Nigel's dick.

ABE

Alex!

ALEX

Because if you leave, we're going to need a new breadwinner. It's not gonna be Ma, it's not gonna be the Baby, and I'm sixteen, I would have to drop out of high school. I would need a husband, and I may need one fast. Nigel is twenty-three, he's got a job as an assistant manager at a Cheesecake Factory. Which I just got fired from by the way. God knows how we would survive if you left.

ABE

You got fired?

ALEX

Misuse of company penises, just like you said.

ABE

I didn't know.

ALEX

Or maybe we all end up in the shelter. *That* is the real cost of your college education.

ABE

You want me to give up my whole life for this family?

ALEX

I want you to give up your life for me. Because I don't know what I'm gonna do without you.

ABE

*That* is selfish.

ALEX

Think of the Baby. Think of your daughter. Think of Delilah.

(Pause.)

ABE

I don't *have* a daughter.

ALEX

So, let's take her. Let's move out. Don't even tell Ma, just disappear. Right after you graduate, we just...

(She gestures: "Fade away.")

ABE

But Ma and Larry. They have custody.

ALEX

Larry will thank you! And, Ma, come on, if the court knew what she was like?

It could be so good. In a couple of years you can be a manager at Blockbuster. I can work wherever until I graduate. We could rent a place, a two bedroom. I have a whole system. The Baby can sleep in my room. I can cook mac and cheese, you can make cereal. No more laundry on the bed, no more dishes in the sink. I'll take care of all that. We can go to ice cream whenever we want

We'll drop off the grid. I'll have a garden. With all sorts of herbs and vegetables, and a chicken coop, so we'll always have fresh eggs. And goats when we can afford them. And fruit trees. And we can rotate some small crops. And nobody would give us a second look. We could just blend in, somewhere in the South, and we could make local friends and have them over for dinner, and meet their kids. And we wouldn't even have to change our names. And there could be farmers markets and people in overalls and none of it will matter because it will be us!

I'll take care of you better than Frankie, I know you. She's not right for you Abe, she's not on your level.

ABE

Do we fuck?

ALEX

What?



ABE

In this elaborate fantasy of yours, do we fuck?

ALEX

I — I —

ABE

Jesus, Alex!

ALEX

Of course not!

ABE

How about blowjobs, is that where you draw the line? Will there be a white picket fence? Do we father our own brood? Can I name one of them Abe Junior?

ALEX

What the fuck are you talking about?

ABE

I don't want you, Alex. I don't want that life. I want Frankie. I want college, and I want out of this dead end. I want the TV life.

ALEX

But... I'm here.

ABE

Yes. Alex, you're a nice girl, okay, but I'm what's called a "catch." I'm smart and strong and funny, and I can watch TV like a motherfucker, and that is the sum of my assets. I need to spin that into gold, and I'm not going to do it with you hanging around my neck.

ALEX

I'm smarter than you!

ABE

Yeah, well, like you say, I've got prospects.

ALEX

So you're just going to leave me?

ABE

If you want to leave so bad, leave!

ALEX

I can't! The Baby! I can't leave her here, and I can't raise her on my own!

ABE

Let Ma raise the Baby, we turned out fine.

ALEX

We did *not* turn out fine. We turned out mean. And she'll have it worse, because we at least had each other.

(That's true.)

ABE

It won't work.

ALEX

*We* work.

ABE

Larry has partial custody, Ma has it too. We can't just steal the Baby, it's kidnapping. They would send the police after us.

ALEX

We'll go to Indiana.

ABE

It's a nice dream.

ALEX

It could be so good, Abe. It's already you and me against the world, let's start our lives now.

ABE

I don't want to start my life now. I don't want to look after anyone any more.

ALEX

I would look after you.

(Pause.)

ABE

You're going to be fine. Maybe we get evicted and you move to a shelter for a couple years. Worst case scenario. You'll graduate high school, go to college, done.

ALEX

Two years in a shelter? Do you hear yourself?

ABE

It's temporary. This would be my whole life.

ALEX

I won't survive it.

ABE

You will, you're strong.

ALEX

The Baby won't survive it.

ABE

Larry will make sure she does.

ALEX

It'll break me. I'll be hard, like you said. (*Beat.*) I cut today.

(Pause.)

ABE

It's you or me. There's something inside me, one last squishy part. One last place where I allow my heart to be soft, to be hurt, to be taken care of when I'm feeling broken. And I feel it being ground down. Compressed, pressurized into a diamond. Hard. Sharp. Severe. Kids at school call me "Father Abraham." I'm... a serious boy. I know what I would have to become to keep us together. I don't want to be that person.

(Pause.)

ALEX

You should check the freezer.

ABE

What's in the freezer?

ALEX

In the back.

ABE

There's nothing in the freezer.

ALEX

So, go check.

(Abe exits to the kitchen, and returns with a letter, and a check.)

ABE

You knew about this?

ALEX

I just want to know: how did you talk your way into a Syrian Women's Scholarship?

ABE

I just applied to everything on the wall. I must have been the only one.

ALEX

Well now you can leave us all in the dust. Or pay the rent, I guess.

ABE

Why didn't you tell me?

ALEX

Ma wanted to wait, to see if you could get Father to pay before we told you.

ABE

So, all this time, I didn't need to beg?

ALEX

Congratulations, all your dreams are coming true.

ABE

Thank you.

ALEX

If you can accept it. I guess you'll just have to ask yourself, what would a mensch do?

(Pause. Man watches the rest of the play.)

MAN

Sometimes I think if I had a TV family I could have had a good life. I've looked back and back over it, and I don't think I made one choice in my whole life, except for this one.

This is the moment. You can have it all: the TV family, the TV life. You like TV. It's be simple. And everything always makes sense by the end of the episode. So choose:

To be happy, or to be good.

(Abe starts to cry.)

(Alex goes to comfort him, but he pushes her away.)

ABE (*off of being comforted*)

Stop. Not any more.

(Abe composes himself.)

ALEX

Abe?...

ABE

Abram.

Scene 28:

(Abe dials his phone. He is in Frankie's room, which is somehow pinker than before. Frankie is on her plush bed crying.)

FRANKIE (*tearfully*)

Morales residence?

ABE

Hey.

FRANKIE (*sad*)

Hey sexy fox.

(*Pause.*)

ABE

Are you okay?

FRANKIE

I've been thinking about this, and I just want to say... I'm sorry.

ABE

Don't be.

FRANKIE

He — he said no!...

ABE

...Don't worry about it.

FRANKIE

He said you were... I won't tell you what he said. False things. Mean things.

ABE

It's okay.

FRANKIE

He said things about — your people. I didn't know people thought those things.

ABE

It doesn't matter.

FRANKIE

I want to say this. I don't care about all that. I can't break up with you because of who your family is. You didn't earn that. So I'm in. If you are.

(Pause.)

ABE

I've been thinking about that.

FRANKIE

Yeah?

ABE

And I think we make better friends.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

What?

ABE

We have such a good chemistry, I don't want to ruin that.

FRANKIE

What does that mean?

ABE

It means I don't want you.

(Beat.)

FRANKIE

Bullshit.

(Beat.)

ABE

You're not Jewish.

FRANKIE

So? You're not Catholic.

ABE

Exactly.

FRANKIE

Who cares?

ABE

I care! These are my people! My people are dying out, and I can't marry some — some Shiksa.

FRANKIE

Is that a Jewish word?

ABE

It's a Yiddish word for goy.

FRANKIE

Well you're a Spanish word for *pendejo*!

ABE

You don't get it. It's a Jewish thing. I can't marry a non-Jew.

FRANKIE

That's an stupid rule.

(Pause.)

ABE

You're just not... on my level.

FRANKIE

What?

ABE

You're just not smart enough, Frankie. I'm sorry, but I don't know how I could go through life with... *you*.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

I'm smart.

ABE (*chortle*)

*Right.*

FRANKIE

How come you never...?

ABE

I didn't want to hurt your precious feelings.

FRANKIE

Don't you care about me?

ABE

Ugh, Frankie, get over yourself.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Why are you saying these things?... We're soulmates...

(Beat.)

ABE

No such thing.



(Pause.)

FRANKIE

You're lying. What's this really about?

ABE

I don't want you.

FRANKIE

Bullshit.

ABE

You really want to know?

FRANKIE

I knew it.

ABE

Are you sure?

FRANKIE

Yes.

ABE

I warned you.

FRANKIE

Spill.

(Pause.)

ABE

You weren't good.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

What...?

ABE

Frankie. You're not good.

FRANKIE

Wow.  
Fine.

ABE  
Fine.

FRANKIE  
Fine. *Fine!*

(Frankie hangs up. Abe is back in the living room. Alex is watching. Abe turns off his phone.)

Scene 29:

ABE  
Family meeting!

(Ma emerges from the bedroom like a child awoken from a nap.)

MA  
I was sleeping.

ABE  
You can sleep tomorrow.

MA  
Only a parent can call a family meeting.

ABE  
Sit. Down.

(Ma sits.)

ABE  
Alex. Fetch Stan.

(Alex exits into the hallway.)

ABE (*ct'd*)  
When I get home from work tomorrow, I want to see your scores on the shelves, the dishes done, and the table clear. Am I understood?

MA

You don't talk to me that way!

ABE

You shut your mouth. You lazy, crazy piece of shit.

(Ma is stunned. The door opens, it's Alex and Stan.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Stan, come in.

(Stan comes in.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Alex, would you wait in the hall?

(She does.)

ABE (*ct'd, to Stan*)

I don't want to see you here again.

MA

You ungrateful little bastard.

ABE

Are we understood? (*Pause.*) You're no good for her. (*Pause.*) Ma, tell Stan to go.

(*Pause.*)

MA

Don't go.

(Abe picks up a tchotchke and smashes it on the floor.)

MA

No!

ABE

Ma, tell Stan he can go.

(Silence. He hoists the 9/11 one. Ma is unmoved. He smashes it.)

MA

You don't tell me what to do.

(Abe produces the Syrian Women's check. He endorses the back and hands it to her.)

ABE ("*congratulations*")

*Mazel tov.*

(...She takes it.)

MA

...Yes, dear.

ABE

Stan, if I see you in my apartment again, I'm going to tell your wife about all this. I'll tell your kids. I'll tell your pastor. I'll make so many fliers people will think you're a lost dog named "Cheater."

(Pause. Stan shakes his hand. Stan exits, Alex enters.)

Scene 30:

ABE

Clear these dishes.

(Alex clears a place on the table.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Get the candles.

(Ma retrieves the candles, and sets them in candle holders.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Gather.

(Ma and Alex join Abe at the table. He performs the ritual of the Sabbath.)

ABE (*ct'd, sung*)

*Baruch atah adonai*

*Elohanu melech haolam*

*Asher kidushanu b'mitzvotav*

*V'tsivanu l'chadlik ner*

*Shel shabbat*

ALL (*harmony*)

*Amen.*

(Quiet.)

ABE

Bed time.

MA

Okay, sweetie.

ALEX

Good night.

MA (“*tired*”)

I'm ti-ti.

(Abe kisses them goodnight. Exit Ma into the bedroom.)

ABE

Alex...

(He holds out his palm.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

I have one condition.

(She produces the razor and lays it in his hand.)

ABE (*ct'd*)

Now sleep.

(Alex hugs him and exits.)

(Abe is alone.)

(He lights his acceptance letter on the candle, and carries it out to the fire escape. He watches it burn. He picks up his unfinished cigarette from earlier and lights it on the burning paper. He drops the letter in a kosher-ing basin. He smokes.)

(Man joins him.)

(They talk to the fireflies.)

END

Ideas:            Father: “not \$ for M.”  
                 Musical leitmotifs. This play has a score. At least in the phone calls.  
                 Is there a laugh track? A theme song?  
                 Dad is trying to get Abe emancipated  
                 Plant sabbath earlier.  
                 Why does Larry rescind advance?  
                 Koshering needs to go further.