

INFINITY MIRROR

Written by

Joe Bardin

Joe@relativitywriting.com  
31911 N. 141st Street  
Scottsdale, AZ 85262  
602-361-7567

## CAST

### CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Jesse, 25, is an outlier who doesn't know it. The youngest by six years, he is intensely optimistic, and he's intelligent, except when it comes to his somewhat stuck Jewish family, whom he assumes are like him, despite all evidence to the contrary.

Natalie, 28, is Jesse's new non-Jewish girlfriend, a seeker. The daughter of alcoholic parents, Natalie seems to be a free spirit of the universe, but ultimately her seeking is driven by a need to belong to something, a family.

Richard, 65, Jesse's father, owns and operates a box company. He is a sensitive man who is pedantic about Jewish culture, history and ritual, although uncertain of what he believes and what any of it actually means. He secretly wishes he'd done something different with his life.

Edna, 60, Jesse's mother, is emotionally damaged by an emotionally damaged mother. A prickly, anti-matriarch, she's a theater snob who aspired to be a great actress, but settled for community theater as an escape from motherhood.

Gil, 33, Jesse's oldest brother, wants his father to retire so he can take control of the business. He and his wife are trying to get pregnant, and she is secretly away at a fertility clinic receiving treatments.

Gary, 31, the middle son, is a struggling actor living in New York City. He is gay, but has not come out to his parents, and resents them for their cluelessness, particularly his mother, who unconsciously competes with him for the "stage" of family.

## SCENE 1 -- FRONT PORCH

Natalie and Jesse, with carryon luggage, approach the front door of the house. She hesitates.

NATALIE

What are they like, your family?

JESSE

They're great, they're my family, you know.

NATALIE

Are they sweet, like you?

JESSE

Basically, yes. Pretty much.

Jesse moves toward the door, Natalie blocks.

NATALIE

So this is where you grew up.

JESSE

Yeah, my first time back since being sick.

NATALIE

You're doing great.

JESSE

I feel wonderful. I feel new, like I'm not the same person I was before, like the whole world's new and everyone in it.

NATALIE

Jesse, this is kinda of a big deal for me, meeting your family ...

JESSE

They're gonna love you.

NATALIE

But I'm not good in family situations. I always feel like I'm part of some play where everyone else knows the script and I'm trying to guess my lines.

JESSE

Six months ago, I was so weak I could barely get out of bed for ten minutes. Now, I'm here after flying cross-country. So for me, there is no script.

NATALIE

Every family has a script.

JESSE

(he takes her hands)

They're gonna love you, like I do.

They enter the house. Richard is reading in the living room, which is comfortably furnished. There is also a bookshelf loaded with books, with a Menorah perched on top of it.

JESSE (CONT'D)

Hi, Dad.

RICHARD

(looking up from his book)

Jesse, did you know that there were no glass mirrors in bible times? They apparently used polished metal.

JESSE

Good to see you, Dad, this is Natalie.

Richard rises to greet them.

RICHARD

So the reflections were much less clear than what we have today. Imagine living your whole life and never being able to see yourself clearly.

NATALIE

(nervous)

Nice to meet you.

RICHARD

Richard Berliner, very nice to meet you ... uh

NATALIE

Natalie.

RICHARD

There's a Hebrew name, Talia, which means 'the dew of God', I believe ...

NATALIE

That's beautiful. My mom loved Natalie Wood, the actress.

Richard heads for a bookshelf. Pulls out a heavy volume, starts flipping through.

RICHARD

(scanning pages)

Talia. It's actually mentioned in the Mishnah, but it's usage as a name is quite contemporary. Tal, of course, means dew, in Hebrew, and the Y-A suffix, the YA, signifies "of god". Dew is considered a divine blessing, mentioned many times in the Bible. It's an even a greater blessing than rain, since in the desert, dew is more constant, while rain is less dependable.

NATALIE

I try to be dependable. Dependability is very important to me.

JESSE

Where is everybody?

RICHARD

Good question.

(to Natalie)

I never know where anyone is in this house. I never have.

(toward the kitchen)

Edna! Jesse and Natalie are here.

Gil enters, reading something on his phone.

JESSE

Hey, Gil.

GIL

(looking up)

Hey, it's the surfing Jew from San Diego. Let me just hit send.

JESSE

Gil, this is Natalie.

GIL

Hi, Natalie. Sorry, had to get quarterly sales goals out.

NATALIE

Great to meet you.

JESSE

Where's Sandy?

RICHARD

Where is Sandy?

GIL

She's not gonna make it. She wanted me to tell you she's really sorry.

RICHARD

It's my 65th birthday. Is she alright?

GIL

She's fine.

RICHARD

So she should be here.

GIL

She can't.

RICHARD

(negotiating)

She can come late.

GIL

That won't work.

RICHARD

She could leave early.

GIL

Not gonna happen.

RICHARD

(final offer)

Two hours, but your mother and I will have to hold it against her.

GIL

(countering)

She'll make it up to you on the back end.

RICHARD

Our anniversary?

GIL

Why not.

RICHARD

You'll have us over for dinner?

GIL

We'll take you out.

RICHARD

Steak?

GIL

Chicken.

RICHARD

Salmon.

GIL

Done.

Gary enters, singing.

GARY

People, people who need people, are the luckiest people, in the world ...

Edna enters, singing over him.

EDNA

We're children, needing other children and yet letting our grown up pride hide all the need inside

GARY

(dueling with her)  
acting more like children than children.

JESSE

This is my mother.

EDNA

Edna Berliner, nice to meet you.

NATALIE

(extra nice)  
You have a beautiful voice. Jesse tells me you're an actress, that's incredible.

EDNA

I've acted all my life.

NATALIE

We did *Our Town* in high school, I was Rebecca, it was small part, but big enough to know it made me super nervous and that acting wasn't for me.

EDNA

Now that's the problem, Thornton Wilder, they start you out on the schlock and you never get to the real classics, I just don't understand it.

GARY

(baiting)  
What's become of the theatre?

EDNA

I think we all know there's a difference between entertainment and art.

GARY

Who would want to be entertained, when we can suffer through art.

EDNA

Theater is a higher art form, there's isn't any question about it. It's just that our contemporary practitioners fall short.

GARY

You have to be long dead not to fall short in Mom's book.

JESSE

This is Gary, my next older brother.

GARY

The talented one.

NATALIE

Great to meet you, Gary. I think you're all very talented.

They all sit down in the living room area.

RICHARD

She's a nice girl, Jesse.

NATALIE

Thank you ... Richard.

EDNA

He's brought over some strange ones.

RICHARD

Tattoo girl.

EDNA

Her arms like a comic book. Remember the Mexican, hardly spoke a word of English.

JESSE

She was Venezuelan.

RICHARD

With the boobs hanging out.

EDNA

Richard. They were practically in the soup.

RICHARD

Boob soup.

EDNA

Richard! That he should bring home a Jewish girl never seems to have occurred to him.

NATALIE

(set back)

Oh.

JESSE

(encouraging)

I always just go for the person, you know, like you guys taught me. The person, not the label.

EDNA

Of course, the person ...

RICHARD

... not the label.

GARY

(singing to the tune of 'Look for the Union  
Label')

Look for the Jewish label/when your shopping for your perfect spouse

NATALIE

(flustered)

It is ... really nice to be here ... to put a face to the parents if you know what I mean, parents can have so many different faces, that is every parent looks different, which of course you can see in photos too, but it's not the same as in person. My mother constantly closes her eyes in pictures, almost all the time, like it's rare to snap a photo of her and catch her with her eyes open, even when she's not expecting it, she still somehow has this reflex to close here eyes, like deep down inside she really doesn't want to be seen.

Pause, so Gary starts in again.

GARY

(singing)

Remember somewhere a Jewess is waiting/and aggravating to start a Jewish house.

EDNA

(amused)

Very clever Gary.

RICHARD

What is your religious background, Natalie?

NATALIE

Actually I'm ...

GARY

(baiting)

Not a Catholic, we hope ...

EDNA

(baited)

Or a Mormon, with all their crazy stories.

JESSE

Our stories are crazy too, they're just older crazy stories, so we're used to them.

GARY

You're a Mormon?

NATALIE

No, I'm not anything I guess ...

RICHARD

We must take Natalie on a tour of the monuments at night. We can drive by Jefferson and Washington, but I strongly recommend we go inside the Lincoln, it's really quite an experience. You have to go to the Smithsonian, at least some of it, there's so much to see, but you can't go wrong with the Museum of Natural History and the National Gallery, for starters. There's also Air & Space, African Art, and I didn't realize the National Zoo is technically part of the Smithsonian, did you honey?

EDNA

I never think about the zoo.

JESSE

We're here to celebrate you, Dad. Happy birthday.

GARY

The big six five.

GIL

Legal retirement age.

JESSE

Isn't it weird how we let these numbers rule our lives?

GARY

Says the 25 year old.

JESSE

You're only 31.

GARY

And yet to get a role on Broadway.

EDNA

Many never do.

Gil looks on his phone.

GIL

Actually 66 is the full benefit retirement age.

JESSE

65 isn't old, and 66 isn't old either, unless you let it make you old.

NATALIE

Age is just a number.

EDNA

Ah, the innocence of the young.

JESSE

If you think old of course you're going to feel old.

RICHARD

I don't think these stiff knees are just in my mind.

JESSE

You probably need to get off sugar.

EDNA

Your father loves everything sweet.

NATALIE

That's the parasites talking.

EDNA

Excuse me?

NATALIE

Sugar cravings, that's the parasites inside you, millions of them, they live on sugar, so when you're craving sugar it's really these colonies of parasites in your intestines saying feed me, feed me, feed me!

Pause, as family members look at each other.

JESSE

(enthused)

Natalie knows her stuff. She's amazing. I went to doctors who couldn't do a thing for me after Africa, but prescribe antibiotics which only made it worse. But she really helped me.

EDNA

So you're a GI specialist?

NATALIE

I'm a colonics therapist.

Good long pause.

JESSE

That's how we met.

EDNA

How in the world ...

NATALIE

It's really simple, there's a machine, that pumps in water and then flushes it out, and you just insert the nozzle

EDNA

(interrupting)

No, no, no how ... how does one come to choose such a line of work?

NATALIE

That's a great question ... I got my BA in psychology.

GIL

There you go.

NATALIE

But what was I going to do with that, right? So I started studying yoga. Yoga's wonderful, have you ever tried Yoga?

EDNA

I'll stick to my treadmill.

NATALIE

And then I did body work for a while, you know Reiki and massage, and I liked it, but I felt like I wanted to learn something more, so I got into breath work, which was super powerful, really amazing results, breathing old trauma out of the body and breathing in new possibility, but there was no residual income, you know, so then I was introduced to this really outstanding supplement company, vitamins, herbs, minerals, which we don't get enough of from our bio degraded food sources, and it really took off, I wasn't *selling*, it was more like *sharing*, you know, sharing information and products that make people healthier, and I really built a big downline, but I learned that 88% of all health challenges start in the colon, so why not go to the source, right? So I took the money that I made from the supplements and I opened my own clinic -- the Flush of Health.

RICHARD

Sounds like you have a good head for business.

JESSE

Natalie saved my life.

NATALIE

Jesse gives me too much credit.

GARY

Welcome to the family.

JESSE

I was so weak at first I had to get friends to drive me to the clinic. But eventually, she helped me start to build strength.

NATALIE

I've never seen such nasty stool. It was practically crawling with

EDNA

(interrupting)

We know how poorly Jesse was doing, we visited him.

RICHARD

Good to see you feeling so much better, son.

JESSE

I'm feeling great ... I feel new. How are you doing?

RICHARD

I'm fine.

EDNA

He's slowing down.

GIL

I told him he doesn't need to come into the office every day anymore. I've got it under control.

JESSE

Are you exercising enough?

EDNA

Your father hates exercise.

JESSE

But when you don't move your body, you're sending yourself a message that its time to decay.

NATALIE

Cleansing can also help, you'll be amazed how good you feel when you get the toxins out.

RICHARD

Fortunately for me I'm too old to have to do all that.

JESSE

Dad, you're not too old.

NATALIE

You're never too old!

RICHARD

I'm old enough to be realistic about my age.

GIL

That's right.

EDNA

Of course.

JESSE

I did a lot of reading when I was sick. There are some pretty amazing anti-aging therapies out there, and there's new science on the way.

RICHARD

I'm sure someday they'll come up with a cure for everything, but it's not anything I have to worry about.

JESSE

But why would that be a worry?

RICHARD

(unconvincing)

I just mean I'm fine ... where I am in life. I'm ... I'm settled.

EDNA

You've worked hard for it.

RICHARD

You might understand better when you get to be my age.

GIL

I totally understand.

JESSE

But the science is speeding up, and these developments may be much closer than we think.

RICHARD

I'll believe it when I see it, Jesse.

JESSE

But if you wait to see it, you won't take care of yourself now so that you live to see it.

GIL

Nobody lives forever.

JESSE

We've doubled our life-spans in the last hundred years.

GIL

OK, but that only goes so far.

JESSE

Why? Why only so far? You need to read Ray Kurzweil's *Fantastic Voyage: Live Long Enough to Live Forever*.

GARY

(snapping his fingers)  
You've got a new thing. Jesse's got a new thing.

EDNA

It's always something with Jesse.

RICHARD

It was a miracle he finished high school, all he focussed on was sports.

EDNA

And then that noise band.

JESSE

It was punk rock, we got good enough to play out in the clubs.

GIL

Somehow he got into college.

JESSE

I wrote a strong essay.

RICHARD

But that didn't last.

JESSE

I just didn't feel like I was doing anything real.

GIL

It's education, it's not supposed to be real.

EDNA

Instead he suddenly goes to live in San Diego.

JESSE

I wanted to learn to surf.

GIL

He gets this online degree from Bumfuck Institute of Bumfuckology.

JESSE

I just needed a BA to do the Peace Corp.

GIL

Remember his vegetarian phase.

NATALIE

I didn't know you were vegetarian.

JESSE

It was really Gary's thing.

GARY

(seizing center stage)

When I was in 10th grade, I felt like I had to do something to ... cleanse myself. I had this attraction to ... to meat ... Like this really strong attraction, and I felt like there was something wrong, really wrong with me, which only heightened the excitement, if I'm being totally honest about it, I mean I couldn't have been more confused. So I decided that I needed to ... to purify myself in some way, because my body was ... unclean. And the idea of becoming a vegetarian came to me.

RICHARD

Makes perfect sense, Gary. Dietary laws for centuries have served as a means of self purification with Kosher eating of course being an obvious example I think we're all aware of, except maybe, Natalie. Do you know about eating Kosher, Natalie?

NATALIE

No, I don't. Sounds interesting.

RICHARD

It's the Jewish dietary laws, of not mixing meat and dairy, among other things, like only eating meat from animals with cloven hoofs, such as cows and sheep, and fish with spine and scales.

NATALIE

I've become extremely conscious of what I put into my body. So what happened with you two?

JESSE

I can tell you what happened. Gary comes home from school and decides he's a vegetarian, like he never really liked meat, and it's really not healthy anyway, and how much the animals suffer, and that meat's just not something we should have anything to do with.

GARY

So we go and tell Mom, that was a hoot. She's neurotic about food anyway.

EDNA

What's neurotic? You fill your belly, you live another day.

JESSE

(laughing)

But I know she can tell that I'm not really all in, so I lay it on extra thick, about how I don't like the taste, and never did, and all the bullshit Gary told me.

EDNA

I said, fine, just make sure you eat enough protein, I'm not cooking separate meals, what am I, a diner?

JESSE

Then like two days later, Gary tells me he's changed his mind.

GARY

I realized I was never really going to give up meat.

JESSE

And it's just in time for brisket on Friday night, our favorite meal, and I'm left eating peanut butter and jelly for two more days, just to save face.

GIL

That's Jesse, always buying into other people's BS, then coming home and trying to sell it to the rest of us.

JESSE

I'm not trying to sell you anything.

GIL

Then what's this whole living forever thing?

JESSE

When I was sick, I ... I was so weak I could barely be upright more than an hour or two a day, but somehow the weakness cleared my mind, stripped my thoughts naked, like I just didn't have the strength to bullshit myself at any level, or feed any kind of self image or ego, and maybe for the first time in my life, my thoughts ran totally clear, and one morning, I remember the morning, the windows open in the apartment, and the sun burning off the fog, and a breeze moved the curtain, and something opened inside me, and I *saw* that I could die of this thing I had, I saw it, and somehow I'd never really looked at it before, isn't that strange, why not, I wonder, but looking at it then, I knew I didn't want it, I didn't want any part of it, not now, not ever. It sounds so obvious, who would want to go from being something to being nothing, right? But, it wasn't obvious at all. It was a shock, as if I'd been sleepwalking and suddenly I was awake, in a different place, and I didn't know how I'd gotten there. One of my roommates has this infinity mirror they like to look at when they're stoned. It's made of parallel mirrors, so when you look into it, you feel like you're seeing forever. I looked into it every day. I couldn't stop looking at it.

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

Someone told me about Kurzweil's book, and I read it and realized I had some big moves to make. We're treating our bodies like rentals, like a rental car or a rented apartment, which we're going to give up in the long run anyway, so why bother really taking care of it, even though the *it* isn't really an *it* at all, it's actually me? Even our language makes us separate from our bodies. There's no "I" and "my body", there's really only me, my body. But the point is how much more would we invest in our health, if we were owners not renters?

Pause.

RICHARD

You might give a little more consideration to becoming a homeowner, and what it takes in terms of career commitment.

GIL

We could give you a sweet position in sales right now. I need another guy. Business has never been better at Atlantic Box & Container. The Internet is putting us all in boxes. You could make some serious bank, Jesse, be part of something big.

RICHARD

The box is a beautiful thing -- a pure geometric form. And without them where would be? We'd be a mess, we'd be all over the place.

GIL

We just added a new series called The Eliminator, my concept, because it's padded, eliminating the need for the messy Styrofoam pellet filling.

RICHARD

I've got samples in one of the bedrooms if you'd like to see.

GARY

I would rather do a detailed review of the full scope of Jewish history.

EDNA

(amused)

Don't be disrespectful, Gary.

GARY

I would rather go Abraham, no Adam, all the way through to Woody Allen than look at another box.

JESSE

I like bartending for now. It's decent money, and I don't have to sit in an office.

EDNA

For that we sent you to Vassar?

NATALIE

(trying to get in the conversation)

Professional success isn't the only way to grow as a person.

GARY

You're not Jewish, are you?

NATALIE

(wistful)

I wasn't raised any religion ...

JESSE

Career advancement and making money is fine, but you can't do any of it without your body, right?

EDNA

You're not reading that communist again.

JESSE

What communist?

EDNA

He reads a book, all of a sudden he hates America.

JESSE

You mean Chomsky? I never hated America, I just questioned some of our underlying mythologies.

RICHARD

But how's your faith, son?

JESSE

You mean in a literal god overseeing the affairs of humans, who gets a free pass on all the suffering in the world, but full credit for the good things that happen?

RICHARD

I'm talking about your faith in the ways and rituals of Jewish living.

JESSE

I've been thinking about that too ... I think religion helped us cope with our mortality. It gave us an afterlife, or an eternal parental figure who would know us and remember us after we're gone, and rescue us from the oblivion of death. The problem is that at some point, the coping mechanism became the operating system.

GIL

What's that supposed to mean?

JESSE

It means what was created to get us through a dark time is now a barrier to our own advancement, because as long as we think there's a god out there who's overseeing everything, we'll never really take charge of our own evolution like we need to.

NATALIE

Isn't he brilliant?

RICHARD

(shrug)

The truth is we never saw him coming.

EDNA

Six years after his Gary and nine years after Gil.

RICHARD

Still had some zip in the old Zippo.

EDNA

Richard.

JESSE

(convincing himself)

I had a good childhood.

GIL

Did it ever end?

JESSE

(as if a joke)

Work in progress and proud of it.

NATALIE

(vulnerable)

Aren't we all?

EDNA

He had a terrible bout with bed wetting.

JESSE

Dad was giving me Scotch at bedtime.

RICHARD

You were a restless sleeper, it was to settle his nerves.

JESSE

(realizing)

I've always felt restless.

GARY

You've always had a problem with death. Remember Grandma Rose's funeral? He couldn't stop crying.

JESSE

(realizing)

I was the only one.

GARY

Because Rose was a cold, mean woman.

JESSE

Not to me.

GARY

You just don't know when you're being taken for granted.

JESSE

But she used to read out loud to me, and when she lost her eye sight we listened to books on tape together.

GARY

Oh, she loved her Dickens alright, and her Jane Austen, and Agatha Christie, she just didn't like *people*.

EDNA

I won't have you speak of your grandmother that way.

GARY

Mom is apples dipped in honey compared to Rose.

EDNA

She didn't survive the pogroms and the cossacks just to be attacked by her own grandson.

GARY

The pogroms. A favorite subject of any family gathering.

EDNA

That's your history, you don't like to hear it, I know.

GARY

I love to hear it! I'm going to miss it so much if and when this weekend ever ends. Maybe you can call me in New York every night to tell me a pogrom bedtime story.

NATALIE

(frustrated)

What's a cossack? What's a pro-grom?

EDNA

(to Natalie)

The cossacks would ride through the village, the shtetl, and burn down the synagogue and trample any Jew that was in their path. That's how they celebrated their Christmas Eve. While Mom and her people huddled in the storm cellar. Who can blame her if it made her suspicious of people, a bit careful with her feelings.

GARY

Careful, is that what you call it? Yes, we're all a bit "careful".

JESSE

It's history, it's the past.

RICHARD

He who fails to learn from the past is doomed to repeat it.

JESSE

We're Jewish, we're obsessed with our past and we repeat it over and over anyway.

RICHARD

Your little brother's leaving the faith.

GARY

What faith?

RICHARD

The faith you were raised to be faithful to.

GIL

You're talking in circles, Dad. Are you OK? Do you need some time off?

RICHARD

Have you all forgotten your Jewish beliefs?

GARY

We're *progressive* Jews, we don't know what we believe in.

RICHARD

We believe in being Jewish, that's what we believe in!

JESSE

When you question the inevitability of death, you question everything. It's the one constant at the core of society. Our ceremonies all point there; our stories all end there. You don't realize it but your whole life is organized around dying.

GIL

If people didn't age and die, how would the next generation rise to take their place in the world?

JESSE

You want someone to come along and replace you?

GIL

When the time is right.

JESSE

That's just what you think now.

GIL

That you can live forever is just what *you* think now.

GARY

So there's all this new science coming that is going to cure aging?

JESSE

New science, new enlightenment, new attitudes, new everything. We're going to have a totally different experience of being human, an unlimited experience, not just in our dreams, but in our daily lives.

GIL

How different can it get? We're genetically programmed to be how we are.

JESSE

The new science of epigenetics shows that we're actually in charge of what aspects of our genome are expressed, based on how we live, and what we give ourselves to.

NATALIE

We create our own reality.

GARY

Save it for Facebook.

GIL

You can't change your DNA.

JESSE

But you can change how it's expressed.

GIL

But you can't change your DNA.

GARY

But who gets to use this new immortality technology? Just the rich people who can afford it? What about everyone else?

RICHARD

It does pose some serious ethical problems.

JESSE

Death is a serious ethical problem -- we're all living on death row and we didn't commit any crime. When cell phones first came out, only rich people could afford them, but the technology got cheaper and cheaper and now it's less than a land line.

GIL

You think living forever is going to be cheaper than dying?

GARY

Gil will do it if he gets a good enough deal on it.

GIL

I can't believe you're falling for this crap, Jesse. You really think you can live forever?

JESSE

It's suicide not to try.

GIL

You're living in a fantasy.

JESSE

Mortality makes us live in a fantasy. We're the only life form that knows we're going to die, and we can't deal with it. So we create an emotional life that's based on the illusion that in some way, shape or form we live on. We think we live on through our family or our works or even our community identity or an afterlife. So we live with this emotional disconnection everyday and it effects every area of our life, blocking us from fully feeling our feelings right now.

EDNA

Your generation is so involved with feelings, I wonder how you ever get anything done. We didn't even have feelings when we grew up, did we Richard?

RICHARD

Nope. Let's change the subject.

EDNA

Let's talk about grandchildren.

RICHARD

How about it boys?

GIL

Sandy and I are working on it.

RICHARD

That was announced months ago, give us a progress report.

GIL

(irritated)

We're working on it.

RICHARD

What about you Gary?

GARY

Me?

EDNA

Gary needs to find a girlfriend.

RICHARD

All those pretty girls you run into in New York theater. Maybe it's time to get serious, son.

GARY

I don't know how serious I can get.

EDNA

You might surprise yourself.

GARY

I don't think so.

NATALIE

I've always wanted a family.

JESSE

But not to replace us, to live *with* us. I don't want to bring children into this world just to grow up, age and die and be replaced by another generation, which just makes the family fodder for evolution.

EDNA

(alarmed)

Fodder for evolution?

RICHARD

(alarmed by her alarm)

You're upsetting your mother, Jesse.

JESSE

It's very upsetting, we're all living like frogs on the slow boil, being cooked alive by an evolutionary process that makes each and every one of us utterly expendable.

GARY

You said it yourself, it's *natural*. Grim, horrible, hopeless, but natural.

JESSE

A hundred years ago, people used to die in their forties. That was natural. Today it would be considered a tragedy. But emotionally we haven't caught up to our own creation, we're the gods now, we're calling the shots, but we're still living in a primitive mind-set, walking around in a haze, following a plan none of us created or consciously chose.

EDNA

What on earth are you talking about?

JESSE

Birth, bar mitzvah, marriage, family, retirement, death.

EDNA

Richard!

RICHARD

Jesse!

## SCENE 2 -- FRONT PORCH

Jesse is at ease, Natalie is rattled.

NATALIE

I ... I like them.

JESSE

I told you.

NATALIE

But they seem upset.

JESSE

They're just like that.

NATALIE

You're very relaxed.

JESSE

(philosophical)

I guess I see them as my mirror.

NATALIE

(anxious)

What does that mean, Jesse?

JESSE

We're all a reflection of each other.

NATALIE

But you're not upset.

JESSE

And the more I reflect that, the more they'll come around.

Natalie pulls out a box of cigarette and a lighter and starts smoking.

JESSE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

NATALIE

Nothing.

JESSE

I didn't know you still did that.

NATALIE

I don't.

JESSE

Then what are you *doing*?

Natalie takes a few puffs, looking away.

NATALIE

(fragile)

When I was 13, my parents went on this Three's Company binge. Do you remember that TV show? Two women, and a guy share an apartment, and the guy pretends to be gay so he'll be allowed to live there. They had all the seasons recorded, and they used to drink vodka in dixie cups and watch Three's Company for hours, for days.

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT ' D)

One of the women is blond and one is brunette. I started obsessing about them, the blond one was sexy and the brunette was practical I guess, and I was trying to figure out which one I was. Was I Chrissy or was I Janet?

JESSE

I ... never saw that show.

NATALIE

You wouldn't, it was stupid.

JESSE

(slightly defensive)

I watch TV.

NATALIE

You watch documentaries, and movies made by that Japanese director.

JESSE

Kurosawa.

NATALIE

And the guy who does the movies about lost young men.

JESSE

Gus Van Sant.

Natalie stubs out the cigarette, waves away the smoke, tosses the butt away somewhat carelessly.

NATALIE

(offhand)

You're so different.

JESSE

(suddenly he's rattled)

Different? Different than what? To be different there has to be some reference point, some analog I'm deviating from, which I really don't recognize as being real, and it wouldn't be good for me to, even if it was, because acknowledging such a point would ultimately be a limiting factor, since it would mean I'm always living in relation to it, the thing I'm different from. See what I'm saying?

NATALIE

(breezy)

You're too smart for me, Jesse.

JESSE

(fragile)

Please don't say that.

NATALIE

It seems like you're agreeing with me by disagreeing with me.

JESSE

A common Jewish trait, see not so different after all.

NATALIE

Do you really think people who aren't different have to work at it so hard?

SCENE 3 -- IN THE KITCHEN

Gill is pacing restlessly, as Edna prepares dinner. Richard has his head in a book, and Gary sits apart.

GIL

Immortality ... I'm gonna to kill that kid! I don't have time for this crap, I'm trying to run a business.

GARY

Why are we always talking about Jesse?

EDNA

Because he's so queer, I suppose.

GARY

(almost to himself)

I'm ... queer.

EDNA

We've just never gotten it right with him.

GIL

I can't believe you're going to let him off the hook, again.

RICHARD

(looking up from his book)

He is squarely not off the hook.

GARY

There's something I need to tell you guys.

EDNA

Does it have to be right now, Gary?

GARY

I should have done this years ago.

EDNA

(to Richard)

We've just never gotten it right with Jesse.

RICHARD

You'll never let me live it down will you?

EDNA

Who's not letting anyone live anything down?

RICHARD

I should have been home more, but the business was growing, and it just kept growing, and I guess Jesse was growing at the same time, but I wasn't following him, I was following the business, and suddenly he wasn't little Jesse anymore, and I don't know what happened to the time in between, but I did the birds and bees talk a little late with him.

GIL

How late?

RICHARD

He was 15.

EDNA

He was 18.

17. RICHARD

Fine. EDNA

How'd it go? GIL

He informed me he was already masturbating morning and night. RICHARD

Those were the days. GIL

(acid)  
This has been thoroughly enlightening. GARY

What's wrong with you? EDNA

I've got something ... important to say. GARY

(distracted)  
You're mother's trying to make a point, Gary. RICHARD

(bitter)  
She's always making a point. Everything in this family revolves around her. GARY

Nonsense. EDNA

She's the stony planet we all orbit like lesser moons trying to catch a little light. GARY

What light? I never give you any reason to speak to me like this. EDNA

GARY

It's not what you give that draws us, it's what you withhold.

GIL

We're not the only family with issues, if it's any consolidation.

EDNA

(quickly, interested)

It is.

GIL

Look at the Sterns, they're daughter Beth with little Jeremy Shenker.

GARY

(interested, despite himself)

How much older is she?

GIL

The kid was having his Bar Mitzvah and she's in college.

GARY

What were they actually doing?

EDNA

Gary. Gil?

GIL

She was giving him a personal bar mitzvah present, if you know what I mean.

GARY

Mazel tov. Right there in the sanctuary?

GIL

No, in the chapel.

EDNA

(dramatic)

The chapel ... Why couldn't Jesse have been inappropriately sexually approached by a deranged older girl needing to assert her sensual power over a vulnerable younger male? Why did it have to be *this*?

RICHARD

I think Gary's quite right about the whole thing.

GARY

I am?

RICHARD

What you said earlier, about Jesse, and how quickly he burns through his passions, and moves on to the next thing. It's just another phase.

SCENE 4 -- IN THE LIVING ROOM

They're all seated, with wrapped presents prominently displayed, waiting to be opened, except for Natalie perusing the bookshelf.

NATALIE

(impressed)

You've got so many books on being Jewish. I didn't realize there were this many.

RICHARD

(looking up)

Oh there's many more books than this. This isn't even scratching the surface.

NATALIE

(fascinated, almost flirtatious)

Surface of what?

RICHARD

The Jewish experience. Four thousands years of it. The bible, the commentaries, the commentaries on the commentaries ...

NATALIE

It's a like a whole world of learning.

RICHARD

(looking at her)

Yes, that's right Natalie, that's exactly what it is.

GARY

(impatient)

Are we opening presents or just gazing upon them in anticipative rapture?

Richard stands up before them.

EDNA

I think you're father wants to say something.

GARY

Oh god.

RICHARD

At a certain point, a man wants to unburden himself of the responsibilities that he's carried, and to live life at a slower pace, and let the next generation take their place, and carry the torch, as it were. I've spend most of my adult life building up the business, but your mother and I have been talking, and I'm ready, at least more ready than ever to ... to hand over the keys to the kingdom, in a manner of speaking, to you three, if ... if you're ready.

GIL

(looking up from his phone)

Of course we're ready!

GARY

(distaste)

The "kingdom" being the box business? Some of us weren't made for manufacturing and marketing *corrugated cardboard*.

EDNA

(excited to quote Shakespeare regardless of context)

and 'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburdened crawl towards death

GARY

Is that King Lear? Mom's got Shakespeare for every occasion.

RICHARD

(lightly)

I'm not planning on crawling anywhere. I've got a lot of reading I'd like to get to.

JESSE

But that's exactly what you're doing by retiring -- crawling towards death.

EDNA

What a horrible thing to say.

GIL

He's been working for years, and he's ready to take it easy, what's wrong with that?

NATALIE

(needing to get in)

I'd love to read more.

JESSE

But people who retire early tend to die sooner.

GIL

People also work themselves to death, like grandpop, having a heart attack behind the counter at the diner.

GARY

Since when are you so morbid, talking about death all the time.

JESSE

Bertold Brecht said: "For art to be 'un-poitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling group'". By extrapolation, for me to not talk about death, like most people don't, is really to ally myself with it, to accept it, to make it OK.

EDNA

This is your father's birthday, and we are not interested in talking about this subject anymore.

JESSE

You mean immortality?

EDNA

We don't care to discuss it any further.

RICHARD

I think we've pretty well covered it.

JESSE

We've barely scratched the surface.

EDNA

You're just going to have to respect our wishes.

RICHARD

We're done, son.

JESSE

But this is the biggest advancement in human history, how can you not want to talk about it?

EDNA

We have plenty of other things to talk about.

RICHARD

Yes, we do.

Long pause -- suddenly know one can think of anything else to talk about.

GIL

(finally)

In real life we all live with limitations, right?

JESSE

Only because our culture distracts us from facing our limitations head-on and doing something about them. Sometimes I think that the whole function of our culture is to distract us from death.

GARY

(gay Clint Eastwood)

A man's gotta know his limitations.

GIL

What about overpopulation?

JESSE

There's still plenty of room on the planet, and anyway our birth rates tend to correlate with our mortality rates, so the longer we live, the fewer children we produce.

RICHARD

I actually think that the fact that we have only a limited amount of time is what makes the time we have more valuable. I mean, if we had unlimited time, I don't know how much we'd appreciate it.

JESSE

But that's an argument for poverty. Should we all make less money so we can appreciate every penny more?

EDNA

But how would we get rid of evil people, like Hitler and Stalin and Andrew Lloyd Webber?

RICHARD

Death is a natural weeding out process.

JESSE

But it doesn't weed out, it takes everyone. It makes us small, and scared and desperate. And that's when we're prone to do terrible things.

EDNA

(pained)

Like Phantom of the Opera. Or Cats.

RICHARD

Death gives life a certain definition, a shape, a frame, a box, if you will. Without it, we would be lost, out to sea, as if we were swimming in a pool with no edge. This way at least we know where we stand in relation to time, and we can make choices based on that.

JESSE

Do you see that? Do you see what you just did? You're assuming that you can get to an edge and pull yourself out. That's the illusion of an afterlife that we all run in our heads. That's not real. That's not how death works. There's no edge to this pool. There's no deck outside of the pool. There's no lounge chairs, no towels, nothing. You're either swimming or you're nothing.

RICHARD

(professorial)

There are certainly many ways to look at death and the after life, but Judaism is mostly focused on the here and now.

NATALIE

I like that.

RICHARD

Judaism is very strong on real world stuff. When it comes to death, it seems to leave a lot of room for personal interpretation, which makes sense. You might want to believe in a place that is like heaven, or in reincarnation or in the coming of the messiah. Because nobody really knows.

JESSE

It's all like a form of Stockholm Syndrome, like death is holding us hostage, and because we feel helpless to stop it, we end up working for it, instead of doing everything we can to defeat it.

GARY

(sour)

Fine, but when you're sitting through a bad play, a real stinker, the one thing you can rely on for relief, the only thing, is that at some point, at some blessed moment in time, *it will end.*

#### SCENE 5 -- GIL ON THE PHONE

GIL

Hi Honey ... you should hear what Jesse's up to this time ... he thinks that by cleaning his butt, he can live forever ... No he hasn't joined a cult, he has a new girlfriend. You won't believe what she does ... Retirement? he actually mentioned it yes, but I haven't pinned him down, no ... you know how Dad is, he always brings up bible stuff when he wants to avoid something ... I'm not letting him off the hook ... he is squarely not off the hook ... of course I want to know how it's going with you, I called you didn't I ... what do you mean, *why?* You used to freak out if I didn't, so now I just do it automatically ... I don't mean *automatically*, what I mean is ... I agree, I totally agree ... OK, I will ask: how is it going ... how is the clinic ... Dad asked about you, I told him you're on a business trip ... he wanted us to have them over for their anniversary for steaks ... don't worry, I bargained him down to restaurant salmon. So when do you get the results back ... that soon? Great I'll call you back in a couple hours ... I love you too ... I love you.

## SCENE 6 -- A CHILD'S BEDROOM

This bedroom is cluttered with box samples. Gary has retreated here to practice for an audition.

GARY

(rehearsing)

*Eyeliner? What eyeliner? Oh, this eyeliner. What about it? I know it's yours. No, I wasn't borrowing it, why would I want to borrow eyeliner?*

GARY (CONT'D)

(to himself)

No, that needs to be more vulnerable.

GARY (CONT'D)

(rehearsing)

*Why would I want to borrow eyeliner?*

GARY (CONT'D)

No, more longing, like please answer this question for me: *why would I want to borrow eyeliner?* Tough line. Is that even funny? OK, breathe, refocus

GARY (CONT'D)

(rehearsing)

*Eyeliner? What eyeliner? Oh, this eyeliner. What about it? I know it's yours. No, I wasn't borrowing it, why would I want to borrow eyeliner?*

GARY (CONT'D)

Why would I want to borrow eyeliner? Would I want to borrow eyeliner? I can't stand things getting too close to my eyes, makes me blink like a banshee. *Eyeliner? What eyeliner? Oh, this eyeliner. What about it? I know it's yours. No, I wasn't borrowing it, why would I want to borrow eyeliner?*

Edna enters.

EDNA

Don't stop.

Gary pointedly stops, putting down his script.

What's the play?  
EDNA (CONT'D)

It's a new play.  
GARY

What's it about?  
EDNA

Dysfunctional Jewish Family.  
GARY

EDNA  
(thoughtful)  
Does the world really need another one of those, I wonder.

The writing is good.  
GARY

Who's the playwright?  
EDNA

You're not familiar with his work.  
GARY

Try me.  
EDNA

I don't need to try you, you won't know his work. He hasn't been dead for several hundred years yet.  
GARY

Well what does he write about?  
EDNA

He writes about growing up gay in a family that doesn't know.  
GARY

So it's a comedy?  
EDNA

Why would you say that?  
GARY

EDNA

Well, is it?

## SCENE 6 -- FRONT PORCH

Jesse is burdened. Natalie has grown in confidence. She quite casually lights a cigarette.

JESSE

Don't let them see you.

NATALIE

(blase)

What does it matter?

JESSE

I'm trying to get them to take their health seriously, I'm trying to get them to see that forever could be at stake.

NATALIE

I don't think they're too into it. Tell me more about being *Jewish*?

JESSE

What?

NATALIE

I mean it's a really old religion, right? Like twice as old as Christianity.

JESSE

How can I tell my dad he needs to quit sugar when you're smoking?

NATALIE

You're dad's sweet. And he's *super* knowledgeable.

JESSE

How do I get through to them?

NATALIE

Why is that so important to you?

JESSE

I want them to live. I want them to live long enough to live forever.

NATALIE

But maybe they don't see it that way.

JESSE

Because I'm not doing a good enough job of reflecting to them.

NATALIE

(talking into her exhaled smoke)

I like that word -- Jew - ish. It sounds like there's some give there, you know, not like Chris-tian, or Mos-lem. They're so *en* and *em*, but Jew-ish, is like, softer somehow, ishy you know, like a down sleeping bag with the zipper along the side, so you don't have to close yourself in if you don't want to. That's probably how it's lasted so long, the ish part. What's the Tall-mood?

JESSE

What?

NATALIE

The Tall-mood, I heard your father talking about it.

JESSE

The Talmud, it's like the Jewish law.

NATALIE

I bet there's plenty of ish in it.

JESSE

(deep in his own thoughts)

Do you really think every family has a script?

NATALIE

It's not necessarily a bad thing, depending on the script.

JESSE

But if there's a script, that means there can be revision to the script, right?

NATALIE

You really love them, don't you?

JESSE

Of course I love them.

NATALIE

I don't know if I love my parents.

JESSE

(fervent)

I'm sure you do.

NATALIE

(sad)

They're just such assholes, you know.

JESSE

Because of the drinking.

NATALIE

I've worried about them since I was a little girl, that's not right. A little girl shouldn't have to worry about her parents. Sometimes I wish they were dead already, just so I wouldn't have to worry about them anymore.

JESSE

They can change. People can change.

NATALIE

I'm sure that's true.

JESSE

(too fervent)

It is true.

NATALIE

But that doesn't mean they are changing, or they will change, or that you can change them.

JESSE

It means there's a *chance*.

NATALIE

But what if there isn't, is it wrong to know that? Is it wrong to know that the ones you love are never, ever going to change?

JESSE

You can't know that for sure.

NATALIE

But what if you did, what if deep down in your gut, what if you just fucking flat out knew, knew for sure, totally for sure, that no change was coming, would that be wrong? I feel guilty about that sometimes, as if, by knowing it, I'm somehow stopping them from putting down the bottle.

JESSE

You're not guilty, Natalie.

NATALIE

I can't help it if I know. Sometimes you just know, and you don't want to, but you do.

JESSE

What makes you so sure?

NATALIE

My family's script is promises. My parents promise and promise and they don't even remember that they already made those promises before, pretty soon, the last thing you want to hear is another promise. It can literally make you nauseous.

JESSE

(desperately optimistic)

Carl Jung said: 'Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.'

NATALIE

(smiling, perhaps with pity)

Oh, Jesse.

JESSE

What?

NATALIE

You have so much faith in those beautiful quotes, as if because someone said something, it's gonna happen.

JESSE

Yes, that's how every human advancement goes down, someone *says* something. Someone speaks up and says something revolutionary, something nobody said or heard before, and eventually it happens.

NATALIE

Maybe so, but not by saying it to their family.

JESSE

Why not?

NATALIE

I mean change is not what families do. Families maintain, that's what families do. Whatever they're doing, they keep doing it.

JESSE

But that's what they need to do, what Jung said: to look inside, to awaken.

NATALIE

(burst out laughing)

Why? Because you did? Now that you're AK?

JESSE

AK?

NATALIE

After Kurzweil.

JESSE

(hurt)

Why are you so fucking cynical?

NATALIE

(laughing)

I'm not cynical.

JESSE

I thought you were with me.

NATALIE

I'm here, Jesse.

JESSE

But are you with me?

NATALIE

I'm just being real. What's the problem?

JESSE  
What's your problem?

NATALIE  
I don't think I'm the one having the problem.

JESSE  
How can you be so ... ?

NATALIE  
What?

JESSE  
Detached.

NATALIE  
You think *I'm* detached?

JESSE  
I'm the one who gives a damn.

NATALIE  
You're totally detached from this family and you don't even know it, maybe you always have been, maybe you were born this way.

JESSE  
Why are you doing like this?

NATALIE  
Doing what, Jesse?

JESSE  
Is it just because your parents are *drunks*?

Jesse walks out.

#### SCENE 6 -- LIVING ROOM

Richard stands by the book shelf with his head in a book.  
Jesse rushes in.

JESSE  
Dad! Dad!

RICHARD

What is it, Jesse?

JESSE

Remember when I was little and you would come home late from work.

RICHARD

(guilty)

Yes I remember.

JESSE

And you used to come in to my room and say good night to me.

RICHARD

Yes.

JESSE

And you used to say that prayer over me. Hear O'Israel, the lord is our God, the lord is one. And you'd give me that big wet kiss I hated.

RICHARD

I thought you were asleep.

JESSE

(excited)

I really don't know what that prayer had to do with anything, but it didn't matter, because you said it with so much feeling, so much love, and then you would ad lib, do you remember that?

RICHARD

(subdued)

I was tired, those were long days, and you were so small and warm and simple then. I wanted to protect you, I wanted to protect you from everything.

JESSE

(intensifying)

You would say things to me that I never heard in the day time, only at night, with my eyes closed, but my mind wide open. You said I was a miracle, you said I could do and be *anything*.

RICHARD

Well, yes, in a manner of speaking.

JESSE

And I believed you, I believed you!

RICHARD

Of all the things I said to you growing up, which you completely ignored, that's what you latched on to?

JESSE

You gave me this feeling, this feeling of freedom. I saw signs.

RICHARD

I never said anything about signs.

JESSE

I saw signs in everything, like the earth and the sky were of one accord, like the universe itself was in agreement.

RICHARD

How you get the earth and the sky out of it is beyond me.

JESSE

I would have dreams of flying, flying right over the tree tops, and that was a sign, and then we would go to the beach, and that was sign, and I would find some matchbox car I lost, and that was a sign, and it all signified a wonder so enormous it would never run out on us.

RICHARD

You were a bright little boy, a very bright little boy. But you're not a boy anymore. Now, you're just a ... a dreamer.

JESSE

But I got this dream from you.

RICHARD

(irritated)

This? From me? You got this from me?

JESSE

Then from where?

RICHARD

I don't know, I never knew. Where did you get any of it from? I should have been home more, but the business, there was always something that needed to be done, and it wasn't like now, when we're fully staffed, back then I did everything, and it took all of me. I guess I got pulled so far away, it was hard to find you.

JESSE

But you were always with me.

RICHARD

I always loved you.

JESSE

See?

RICHARD

See what? See what, Jesse?

JESSE

(changing tacks)

If there was a pill for immortality would you take it?

RICHARD

(frustrated)

What are you asking?

JESSE

If there was a pill, and all you had to do was swallow it, and you would live forever, would you do it?

RICHARD

No such pill exists.

JESSE

But if it did?

RICHARD

That's like saying if leprechauns existed would I follow them to the pot of gold.

JESSE

(seizing on this)

Would you?

RICHARD

I would have to think about it.

JESSE

Why?

RICHARD

(upset)

What do you mean why? Some people think about things before they jump into them.

JESSE

You take a pill, you live forever. What is there to think about?

RICHARD

This is what's wrong with you -- you don't think things through!

JESSE

(gets in his face)

But Dad, think about it, what is there to think about?!

Richard is frazzled. He has no rational answer. None exists. He slams his book closed, drops it on the floor and walks out.

Jesse looks after him for a moment, disturbed. Then kneels down to pick up the book. He looks for its proper place in the books shelf, as Richard re-enters.

They look at each other for a moment, unsure of where they stand.

RICHARD

There was this article in the paper, I don't know if you saw it, about the Kepler space telescope.

JESSE

(gently)

I ... I didn't see it.

RICHARD

They can see over 12,000 exoplanets.

JESSE

Is that different from a regular planet?

RICHARD

Planets outside our solar system. Think of that, 12,000 exoplanets.

JESSE

(supportive)

That's a lot of planets.

RICHARD

I was once interested in astronomy.

JESSE

I guess you still are.

RICHARD

I mean, in doing something with it.

JESSE

Doing what?

RICHARD

That was a hundred years ago, in college.

JESSE

I didn't know that.

RICHARD

Something you said reminded me of it.

JESSE

What?

RICHARD

(irritated)

I don't remember, Jesse. There was so much said.

JESSE

I'm not sure I'm following.

RICHARD

(deep breath, gathering himself)

Telescopes.

JESSE

Telescopes?

RICHARD

I volunteered to help the professors just to have more time at the telescopes.

JESSE

What did you see?

RICHARD

I don't even remember, it was so long ago. Every night sky was different.

JESSE

That makes sense.

RICHARD

But it didn't actually matter what I saw back then, what mattered was to be looking, to be looking out, because when you think about it, space out there, it doesn't end, it doesn't actually end, it just goes on and on, how can such a thing be, and yet, how can such a thing *not* be, if you follow what I'm saying. It's impossible to conceive of endless space, but it's ridiculous to think that there's a fence somewhere, and it just stops, that would just be something we made up so we can get our heads around it, right?

JESSE

(impressed)

Wow, Dad.

RICHARD

(encouraged)

People who live on an island and never leave that island they think like that island, what I mean is, they think in the shape of that island, I'm not making much sense.

JESSE

I get it.

RICHARD

It makes you wonder how much of how we are is because of this particular planet we live on, that is how different people are who live on an island, and never leave that island,

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT ' D)

how much what we think of as “human” is really because all we’ve known is this planet, but there are other planets out there, many, many planets.

JESSE

(prompting)

So we’d be different on different planets?

RICHARD

That was my thesis, basically.

JESSE

You had a thesis?

RICHARD

Well, I was going to have to do graduate work to develop it, probably a PhD.

JESSE

What was your thesis?

RICHARD

God, it’s been decades. I don’t know what made me think of that.

JESSE

(urgent)

What was your thesis?

RICHARD

Well, fundamentally, it was that this planet, Earth, is like our island, and the moment we stop being Earth-bound or Earth-centric in our existence, it would trigger all sorts of archetypal changes in our way of being and with what we identify as being human.

JESSE

That’s amazing! What happened?

RICHARD

(downplaying)

Well, we haven’t gotten there yet, have we?

JESSE

No, I mean what happened with your thesis?

RICHARD

Nothing happened. That's what happened.

JESSE

(excited)

What you're saying is amazing. It could be a book.

RICHARD

Not by me.

JESSE

Why not?

RICHARD

I never kept up with the science for one thing.

JESSE

Why not?

RICHARD

My father, your grandpa, he sold insurance, he did OK, usually, and sometimes he didn't do OK, it was month to month. He wanted me to have a profession.

JESSE

Astronomy is a profession.

RICHARD

(sad)

Not for me, for me it was a vocation.

JESSE

All the more reason.

RICHARD

I wasn't smart enough.

JESSE

You? You're brilliant. Listen to you. What are you talking about?

RICHARD

I'm talking about advanced calculus.

JESSE  
You failed math classes?

RICHARD  
Of course not.

JESSE  
Then what happened?

RICHARD  
I failed to get A's.

JESSE  
So what?

RICHARD  
I got A's in accounting.

JESSE  
What about getting off the island?

RICHARD  
Then I met your mother, it happened really quickly, I saw her in a play, and we started to get serious, and that was a big deal for me, the sex I mean.

JESSE  
Wow.

RICHARD  
I guess I couldn't think about much else.

Jesse is left speechless as Richard takes the opportunity to escape.

SCENE 7 -- IN THE KITCHEN

Natalie happily helps Edna in the kitchen, seeming more at home than ever.

NATALIE

(chatty)

My mother once wanted me to be an actress, that's why she named me Natalie, for Natalie Wood.

EDNA

Yes, as you said.

NATALIE

But it made me way too nervous -- I totally wanted to pee my pants.

EDNA

When I'm acting, I know exactly what I'm supposed to feel. It's a relief.

NATALIE

(slightly fawning)

You're passionate about acting.

EDNA

(warming)

And talented, don't leave out talent. Everyone wants to do that these days, to be so democratic about making sure that *everyone's* included. Well let me tell you, everyone is *not* included. And even when you've got the talent, there's something called hard work that's also required. Nothing is given. Nothing. Everything must earned. Everything. I was willing. And able. But not in that order. I was able, and because I was able, I was willing.

NATALIE

Your parents must have been thrilled.

EDNA

My father was. My mother couldn't have been prouder, but she never showed it.

NATALIE

Why not?

EDNA

It wasn't her way.

NATALIE

It would have been nice.

EDNA

(ironclad)

But Mother wasn't nice. So I didn't need her to be.

NATALIE

Oh.

EDNA

I know when I give a great performance, do you know how? When I come off stage, I can't remember any of it, not a blessed thing. It's all gone. My mind is an absolute blank. That's what acting is for me, it's pure freedom.

NATALIE

(sincerely interested)

Is it a Jewish practice to not give your children too much encouragement?

EDNA

I was never the typical Jewish mother, Jesse probably told you.

NATALIE

I'm sorry but I don't know what that means.

EDNA

I spent a lot of time doing theater.

NATALIE

You needed to pursue your dream.

EDNA

I needed to feel like I was doing something other than them ... and they resent me for it.

NATALIE

My mother is way worse than you.

EDNA

Is she?

NATALIE

I don't meant that ...

EDNA

No, tell me.

NATALIE

She ... she did bad things.

EDNA

Bad is such a relative term, especially for mothers.

NATALIE

She once forgot us at the community center, where we went for crafts class.

EDNA

Well that can happen, I suppose.

NATALIE

A policeman had to bring us home, and she was passed out on the couch. And there was a puddle of vomit on the floor.

EDNA

At least it wasn't on the couch.

NATALIE

The worst part was later, when she would come out of it and she would be so sad and so sweet and so loving it made my heart hurt. Her sweetness made me suffer more than anything.

EDNA

I never did that to my children.

NATALIE

My dad, he was a just cold asshole, you know, maybe he was too ashamed, I don't know. I knew exactly how to deal with that, but my mom, she would cry, not hysterically, but quietly, sadly, she would cry over us, and I felt her tears on me and they were warm, and they felt good, they felt like love, and it was like we needed the drinking to get to the tears, so OK, and it got to be like I was a little drinker without even tasting a drop, because I was drinking up those tears of love. But I worried about her, I worried about her all the time. I thought she was so fragile, she could break at any moment, but really she was passed fragile, she was already broken.

EDNA

No one has to worry about me.

NATALIE

I see that.

EDNA

Other actors, they need need need. Just give me the script.

NATALIE

That's all you need.

EDNA

I once met Liza Minelli, she saw me audition for something in New York, and she laughed that gurgly laugh of hers and she said: 'Honey, you've got the chops'. Liza Minelli said that to me.

NATALIE

Takes one to know one, right?

EDNA

Her mom was Judy Garland, and my mom was Esther Blumkin. Where's the justice in that?

NATALIE

We don't chose our moms.

EDNA

And they don't choose us. When Liza turned 18, Judy realized she was good, and she suddenly saw she had a new rival.

NATALIE

Her own daughter?

EDNA

What was Judy supposed to do, just lay down for the next generation and be run over. No, she was a fighter, so she fought. Even though it was her own daughter. She fought.

NATALIE

They say you can lock your dog in the trunk of a car for hours, and when you let it out, it will be so grateful, it will just love you more. I think it's the same with kids, they love their parents no matter what they do, especially their mothers.

EDNA

Motherhood does that to you, it makes you wrong over and over.

## SCENE 8 - CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

Gary is soundlessly rehearsing with script in hand, when Jesse walks in.

JESSE

Gary.

Unlike with Edna, in Jesse's presence Gary keeps right on working. After a few moments of watching ...

JESSE (CONT'D)

Hey Gary.

GARY

(not looking)

What?

JESSE

If there was a pill that could make you live forever, would you take it?

GARY

Jesse, I'm working.

JESSE

But if there was a pill that could make you live forever, would you take it?

GARY

(looks at him)

What kind of pill?

JESSE

What do you mean what kind of pill?

GARY

Remember that algae stuff?

JESSE

I was trying to get you guys onto a more nutritious diet.

GARY

It gave me a rash.

JESSE

You were probably cleansing, but that's not what I'm talking about. If there was a pill, not a supplement that was really very good for you, even though it made you break out, but a pill, one pill, and all you had to do was take it, to live forever, would you?

GARY

Absolutely not.

JESSE

Really?

GARY

Jesus, Jesse. Yeah, really.

JESSE

Why not?

GARY

Because doing this forever would be a nightmare.

JESSE

But we wouldn't be doing this.

GARY

How do you know?

JESSE

We're arguing about living forever, we wouldn't be arguing about it if we were doing it.

GARY

What would we be doing?

JESSE

Who knows? Something new, something no one's ever done before. ... Do you know Dad studied astronomy?

GARY

He studied accounting.

JESSE

He wanted to write a thesis about how being bound to this planet limits human behavior.

GARY

Doesn't sound like Dad, sounds like you.

JESSE

He just told me.

GARY

He told you that?

JESSE

He said something I said made him think of it.

GARY

What?

JESSE

I don't know. He said something I said.

Gary puts the script down on a box.

GARY

You know, when I realized I was gay, it made me see a lot of things.

JESSE

Like what?

GARY

Like there's this whole plan of how you're supposed to be, this whole setup, and the setup doesn't really give a shit about who you are as an individual, it just wants you to keep the setup going. Being gay showed me this, it forced me to see this.

JESSE

That's what I was saying out there.

GARY

But now, like a decade later, I mean, yes there's the thrill of knowing who you are, and realizing the world's totally full of shit, but then what? I mean, where do you go with that? Now we're all getting married and adopting anyway. It's like all roads lead to the same past.

JESSE

That's what I was saying, why didn't you say anything?

GARY

Because it doesn't matter what I know, I still don't have anywhere else to go.

## SCENE 9 -- IN THE LIVING ROOM

Richard and Natalie stand by the book case.

NATALIE

So how many bibles are there?

RICHARD

There are five books that make up the Torah.

NATALIE

I thought there were only two.

RICHARD

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

NATALIE

Which one do you like best?

RICHARD

I don't know ... they're all important.

NATALIE

I bet it's Exodus.

RICHARD

What makes you say that?

NATALIE

Well it wouldn't be *Numbers*, that sounds so boring. Genesis is just the beginning. And I don't remember what the others are but they didn't sound as interesting.

RICHARD

I think you're right, I think Exodus does stand out to me. Coming out of slavery and going towards the Promised Land, you could say that's the forming of the identity of a people.

NATALIE

I'm good at multiple choice.

RICHARD

The Tanach as a whole, which includes the Torah, Prophets and Writings is 24 books.

NATALIE

So 29 books total?

RICHARD

No, the five are part of the 24.

NATALIE

It's a lot to keep track of.

RICHARD

There's always something more to study.

NATALIE

You like that.

RICHARD

These are the roots of the tree, without them we're just leaves fluttering in the breeze.

NATALIE

I've never felt like I had real roots.

RICHARD

Leaves unfortunately only last for a season.

NATALIE

Read me something.

RICHARD

What?

NATALIE

Something you like, something you really like.

Richard pulls out a book, flips through it knowingly.

RICHARD

You've heard of David's 23rd Psalm, of course.

NATALIE

What does it say?

RICHARD

Here it is.

He starts to hand her the book.

NATALIE

Would you ... would you read it to me?

RICHARD

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

They are both quiet for a moment, unexpectedly, perhaps mysteriously, touched.

NATALIE

That sounds so beautiful, what does it mean?

RICHARD

Well, there's a metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep ...

NATALIE

My cup runs over?

RICHARD

... as a symbol of profound vulnerability and caring.

NATALIE

You anoint my head with oil. What does it mean?

Pause.

RICHARD

In an agrarian society, the shepherd is also a symbol of independence, of being outside the status quo of society.

NATALIE

Like a cowboy?

RICHARD

Well, yes, yes. That's very apt.

NATALIE

But what does it mean?

RICHARD

(sighs)

I ... I really don't know.

NATALIE

But it's beautiful.

RICHARD

It is, it's beautiful.

SCENE 10 -- FRONT PORCH

Edna is staring away into space. After a while, Jesse appears.

JESSE

Hey Mom, what are you doing out here?

EDNA

What? Oh I was just looking at that tree across the street, oak or whatever it is, I really don't know my trees. Your father tells me, but I never remember.

JESSE

What about it?

EDNA

It's been there since you were children, I think. Now it's 25 feet tall or more, I would say. I remember when it was a five foot sapling. What I don't remember is everything in between.

JESSE

That's what I want to talk to you about.

EDNA

More talking Jesse?

JESSE

This time just me and you.

EDNA

I know I haven't been a great mother.

JESSE

I think you have.

EDNA

Your brothers don't think so, and you don't either, and this is your way of showing it.

JESSE

But you've helped make me the unlimited person that I am.

EDNA

Nobody's unlimited Jesse.

JESSE

We are when we're the creators.

EDNA

Please don't start all that again.

JESSE

But you helped me see it. You followed your passion.

EDNA

I needed to get out of the house.

JESSE

That's what I mean, you didn't let yourself get boxed in.

EDNA

Once you get out of one box, there are just more boxes.

JESSE

Not if you keep punching through. If you keep punching through you keep breaking through.

EDNA

Who's doing all this breaking through, Jesse?

JESSE

You are, Mom. You just don't give yourself the credit. You have unlimited potential to do and be what you want, to break out of every box, until there are no boxes left, just a wide open plain ahead of you.

EDNA

I have to make dinner.

JESSE

If there was a pill that could make you immortal, would you take it?

EDNA

I have food on the stove.

Edna exits the scene, re-entering the house.

JESSE

(loudly calling after her)

Would you take it?!

Pause. Edna re-enters. She looks at him challengingly.  
Jesse starts to re-state his question, then thinks better of it.

EDNA

I like acting.

JESSE

I know you do.

EDNA

(quietly)

You don't know. No one knows.

JESSE

(supportive)

Ok, no one knows ...

EDNA

(tired)

Please shut up.

JESSE

OK.

EDNA

I'm telling you a secret. I'm telling you a secret I can barely remember. And the only way I can remember it is to tell it to you, and that's the only reason I'm doing it. Do you understand?

JESSE

I think so.

EDNA

God damn it Jesse, no you don't. You don't understand anything. Do you know what the thing about feelings is, you can't just think feelings, you have to do something with them or they don't exist. They just vaporize and don't exist at all. When I wrote, I felt something, I felt someone, who was me who I didn't know, and it was thrilling, because when a scene worked, when it really worked, it was like finding the key to everything, it was divine, even though it was just a scene, like at that moment I was omnipotent, because that would unlock the next scene too, at least I thought it would, I felt like I could unlock everything, like that feeling when you look out at the ocean, and it's all open horizon ahead of you, none of this river/lake/pond bullshit, ocean, do you know what I'm saying, ocean.

JESSE

(careful)

I ... I didn't know you wrote.

EDNA

Jesus, Jesse don't you get it, I'm confessing, I'm confessing to having harbored feelings of being unlimited.

JESSE

What happened?

EDNA

I wrote a play. And I thought, this is it. This is me. And I showed it to my father. I couldn't show it to my mother, she was never a source of encouragement, she couldn't be. So I showed it to him. I brought it to him at the diner, and between the lunch crowd and the dinner crowd, he sat on his milk crate near the walk in freezer, and he read it.

JESSE

(ever so gently)

And?

EDNA

He ... he was ... indifferent.

JESSE

What do you mean?

EDNA

You really are a fool, you know that?

JESSE

(supportive)

I'm sorry.

EDNA

He said it was good, but he wasn't really interested.

JESSE

Maybe he wasn't a reader.

EDNA

Of course he wasn't a reader.

JESSE

So?

EDNA

He didn't like it.

JESSE

(almost desperate)

But he wasn't a reader.

EDNA

He liked me acting.

JESSE

(losing her)

But the ocean ...

EDNA

Acting's better, you get to be someone else.

Gil comes out, as Edna exits. Gil looks after her as if perceiving what has transpired. He shakes his head.

GIL

You're torturing this family, kid.

JESSE

How am I torturing the family?

GIL

(warmly)

By being different, you little fuck.

JESSE

I'm not different, you're the one who's saying I'm different.

GIL

This is the shit I'm talking about. Remember when I taught you to play basketball?

JESSE

Yeah.

GIL

Taught you everything you know.

JESSE

You got me started.

GIL

You picked it up quick.

JESSE

I felt free when I was playing ball, like mind and body were one, and I was just flowing through space and time, wheelin and dealin.

GIL

Why does everything have to be this way with you?

JESSE

What way?

GIL

"Like mind and body were one, flowing through space and time". You were playing hoops, and you were good, that's all. You always take things too far. Remember how you started talking black? Little eighth grade Jewish kid acting all hip-hop.

JESSE

I was full of shit and you let me know about it.

GIL

Damn right.

JESSE

Can I ask you a question?

GIL

Jesus.

JESSE

Can I ask you one question?

GIL

What?

JESSE

If there was a pill that would make you immortal, just one pill, no side effects like rashes or anything else, and all you had to do was swallow it to live forever, would you do it?

GIL

Listen to me, Jesse. Just listen to me. OK?

JESSE

OK.

GIL

Are you listening?

JESSE

Yeah Gil, I'm listening.

GIL

Good, because you can take all your dick diddling in the dark *enlightenment*, and your mother fucking arm pit sucking nutsack snacking *unlimited, immortality* and all, and you can shove it up your unstressed little asshole for all I care. Do you understand?

JESSE

You have the right to your opinion.

GIL

Don't fucking finesse this, Jesse, like you always do. And don't think Sandy's interested either, just because she likes you. All women like you. Got it?

JESSE

All women don't like me.

GIL

So in conclusion, none of us, not a single one of us, gives a finger nail grit's worth of an ass pick in our sleep about any of it. Understand?

Gil's phone rings.

GIL (CONT'D)

I gotta take this, it's Sandy.

#### SCENE 9 -- CHILD'S BEDROOM

Jesse is despondent. Natalie tries to cheer him up.

NATALIE

So these are the famous boxes.

JESSE

Dad likes to have them around.

She picks up a basketball trophy from among a group on a dresser.

NATALIE

Is this yours?

JESSE

(uninterested)

They all are.

NATALIE

You won a lot of trophies.

JESSE

(dismissive)

I played sports at a Jewish school.

NATALIE

Don't be down.

JESSE

They're different when it's just one on one. But they know they're going to be back with everyone else, so they don't let themselves go too far.

NATALIE

That's your family's script: don't go too far.

JESSE

I hate that fucking script.

NATALIE

Could be worse, could be a *lot* worse.

JESSE

Drunken promises?

NATALIE

Yeah.

JESSE

I'm sorry about what I said about all that ... before.

NATALIE

I've heard worse. Remember, my parents are drunks.

JESSE

(joking)

Maybe I should get my parents drunk.

NATALIE

Hard to see that happening.

JESSE

Or stoned. I could slip some pot into her brownie mix. Can you imagine Edna stoned? She'd be giggling and quoting Shakespeare about being stoned.

They laugh together.

NATALIE

You're sweet, Jesse.

JESSE

(vulnerable)

I thought .. I thought I could get through to them.

NATALIE

I know.

JESSE

It's hard to feel something so ... so ... to feel the future, actually, to feel it so real that it gives you goosebumps, to see it and to know, I mean right here in my guts, to know that we don't have to go the way we've always gone, that it's already happening, this revolution is already underway, this cellular shift that pricks the memory molecule of eternity inside us, the eternity we've always sold out to an afterlife, but which is really encoded inside us, a sleeping giant waiting to break through to our consciousness, like ... like a whale breaching the ocean's surface, and this message is slowly sifting up to the brain, which is usually the last to know anything in my experience, that there is something new under the sun, something brighter than the sun, and just as hard to look at sometimes, until our eyes and our minds adjust to the light of an unlimited future, which is our future, and that everything else, *everything*, has already been done, a thousand times, a million times over.

NATALIE

You really want to get them off script, don't you?

JESSE

I can't. I've tried, I've tried everything, and they always go back.

#### SCENE 10-- IN THE LIVING ROOM

Presents are still on the coffee table. A dusky gloom has descended on the house, on the visit home. Richard sits on the couch with his head in a book. Gil is in a chair with his head in his phone. Only Natalie is alive, energized, as she runs her hands over the titles in the bookshelf in an almost sensual manner.

What happened to everyone?  
NATALIE

Hm?  
RICHARD

Why is everybody so ... blah?  
NATALIE

Blah?  
RICHARD

You know like low energy/no energy. Blah. This happens at very family thing, you get to that point where it's just like whatever.  
NATALIE

Whatever?  
RICHARD

I know -- we should open presents!  
NATALIE

I suppose.  
RICHARD

Where's Edna?  
NATALIE

She's resting.  
RICHARD

Edna!  
NATALIE

You should let her rest.  
RICHARD

You should have your birthday. Edna!  
NATALIE

EDNA

(from offstage)

What is it?

NATALIE

Richard should open his presents?

EDNA

(offstage)

What?

NATALIE

Richard's presents!

Edna enters, followed by Gary and Jesse.

EDNA

What about them?

NATALIE

We haven't opened them yet.

EDNA

I don't think they're going anywhere.

NATALIE

It's Richard's birthday.

EDNA

You think I don't know my own husband's birthday?

NATALIE

I think we should open the presents.

EDNA

I thought we were going to get along.

NATALIE

We still can.

GARY

Why don't we just open the god damn presents?

RICHARD

I'm for that.

Richard.  
EDNA

But there's no hurry.  
RICHARD

Certainly not.  
EDNA

Gil rouses himself from his phone. Only vaguely listening, he misses the conflict for control.

GIL  
Presents, sure, why not, presents. Happy birthday, Dad. I got you something you're going to really love but you gotta use it to know how much you can love it.

As Edna pouts, he hands over a gift which Richard unwraps.

RICHARD  
Some sort of golf instruction DVD set.

GIL  
They go through every part of your game, not just your swing, supposed to be really easy to follow.

RICHARD  
I guess I'll have to find out.

GIL  
They say once guys get serious about golf, they don't want to do anything else.

RICHARD  
I've never been that way, but thanks Gil.

Edna is still resistant, so Gary stands.

GARY  
Happy birthday, Dad.

Hands over a gift, which Richard opens.

RICHARD

(reading)  
Timeless Barbara Streisand -- The Complete DVD Box Set.

GARY

I know this is a little bit of a stretch for you, but she really is fantastic, and when you listen to her work straight through, from one creative phase to the next, you realize you're hearing the evolution of a pop genius. And since you tend to be encyclopedic in your approach anyway, I got you the entire collection, the complete, collected, reengineered to be even more perfect than perfect Barbara.

RICHARD

I've always liked Streisand.

Edna, unable to give Gary too much of the stage, picks up here gift.

EDNA

What's not to like. Happy Birthday, Richard.

Hands him a gift, which he opens.

RICHARD

The Oresteia of Aeschylus DVD set.

EDNA

It's the whole trilogy: Agamemnon, Choephoroe, and Euemenidies. Performed by the National Theater, London, really not bad.

RICHARD

I don't think I've ever seen these performed.

EDNA

Of course you have, but it's been years, Americans simply cannot do Greek tragedy for some reason.

RICHARD

Now I can watch the Brits be tragic.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(kissing her)

Thank you, Edie.

Jesse stands

JESSE

(without conviction)

Happy birthday, Dad.

Hands over gift, which Richard opens.

RICHARD

Bliss Behold: Tantric Breath and Beauty in your Every Day Life DVD set.

NATALIE

(quickly)

It's not just about sex. It's about breathing, it's about really breathing. We don't breath enough, we don't really breath deeply, and if we're not really breathing, we're not really living.

RICHARD

So this will remind me not to forget to breath.

NATALIE

Not just to breathe, Richard. To really breathe. Mostly we breathe shallow little stressed out survival breaths. We don't fully oxygenate the body, but when you breathe fully, you feel totally different, you feel totally alive! Do you know what? Why don't we do some breath work right now.

GARY

Are you serious?

NATALIE

I've got some great exercises that will just help everyone open up. We all know how to breath right?

EDNA

I learned breathing for the stage at Juilliard.

NATALIE

(flattering)

That's wonderful, Edna!

EDNA

(flattered)

At Juilliard, they said the breath is the doorway to the spirit.

GARY

Well we knew there had to be a way in there somewhere ...

NATALIE

Edna's exactly right. Breathing can be so super powerful, we don't know what we've got inside us until we really open up and breath. Is everybody ready?

JESSE

I don't think this is such a good idea.

EDNA

(warming)

Stanislavski, whom I don't entirely agree with, proposed that by way of breath, the actor could communicate the sub-text or the unconscious, the deepest parts of the story, and I believe in this regard he was correct.

NATALIE

You're absolutely right, Edna, breathwork can take you past the barriers of the conscious mind. It's an amazing experience.

EDNA

When you think about it, breath is the current that carries the whole play.

NATALIE

Let's do some breathwork.

JESSE

I just don't think ...

GIL

(interrupting)

Oh come on, mister live forever, live a little.

NATALIE

Let's all stand up, and give ourselves a little space.

They all standup.

NATALIE

We'll start by rubbing our hands together until there's heat.

They rub hands together.

NATALIE

Now, we're going to close our eyes, and cup our hands together just below our waists with fingers slightly interlaced, inhale through the nose as we raise our hands all the way up to our foreheads, then turn our hands palm down and exhale out our mouths as we bring our hands back down.

Natalie demonstrates.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

(the others follow her)

We'll do this three times, ready? Ok, eyes closed, hands cupped together and inhale up ... and exhale down ... inhale, up ... and exhale, down... inhale up ... and, exhale down.

EDNA

Goodness.

RICHARD

It can make you feel a bit lightheaded, can't it.

GARY

(a little high)

Are we high yet?

NATALIE

Those were to open us up, and I think we're all feeling nice and open, now we'll do the release breathing. This is where it really gets good. We're going to close eyes, and cup hands below the waist like before, inhale through the nose as we bring our hands up like before. But this time, we're going to throw our hands down, and make a loud Cha! sound as we exhale.

She demonstrates.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Ready? Here we go.

They do it once.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

We're going to do this two more times. Ready? Here we go.

They do it once more.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

And one final time.

They do it again.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You guys did great. How does everybody feel?

GIL

(spacey)

I feel like I always feel when I'm breathing, which is always ...

EDNA

My goodness.

RICHARD

Everything's a little dizzy.

GARY

You want to know what I'm feeling?

NATALIE

Yes, Gary.

GARY

You really want to know what I'm feeling?

NATALIE

Absolutely.

GARY

I feel like just opening up and whatever happens happens.

NATALIE

That's perfect.

GARY

It is?

NATALIE

Go for it.

GARY

Because I've been holding this in for a very long time.

EDNA

Honey, either sing or get off the stage.

GARY

Mom, Dad, I just can't keep this inside anymore -- I'm gay.

EDNA

You had that girlfriend, Alysia.

GARY

That was four years ago, and she was just a friend.

RICHARD

She was a good looker, Gary.

GARY

You're not listening to me.

EDNA

Of course we're listening.

GARY

I'm gay.

RICHARD

You have an occasional attraction to men.

GARY

A constant attraction.

EDNA

You've had sex with girls too.

GARY

It's been years.

RICHARD

You're straight with bisexual tendencies.

GARY

I'm definitely not straight.

RICHARD

Bisexual with straight tendencies.

GARY

What straight tendencies?

RICHARD

Bisexual without straight tendencies.

GARY

I'm gay!

NATALIE

Beautiful, Gary. Now let's breath again.

The others all follow as she directs.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Close eyes, cup hands below the waist, inhale through the nose as we bring our hands up, and we're going to throw our hands down, and Cha!

GIL

I've got some really strong stuff coming up that I need to share.

GARY

Really?

GIL

I know I'm the oldest son, but what I really identify as, deep inside, is being an only child.

JESSE

What?

GIL

I used to fantasize about having Gary and Jesse kidnapped so I would have my parents all to myself. Sometimes I still do.

EDNA

Sweet boy.

GIL

I didn't have them killed, but I could have. Instead, I had them held in this underground meat locker, and I kept them alive with broth and gruel.

NATALIE

Pretty intense, Gil. OK, good job. Now let's breath again.

The others all follow as she directs.

## NATALIE (CONT'D)

Close eyes, cup hands below the waist, inhale through the nose as we bring our hands up, and we're going to throw our hands down, and Cha!

EDNA

Motherhood was never at the top of my list.

GIL

No big surprise there.

EDNA

I wanted to play the great roles -- Ophelia, Electra, Medea. 'Sooner would I stand/Three times to face their battles, shield in hand/ Than bear one child!'

GARY

I think we all know that.

EDNA

But the tragedy of my life I can see now is that my greatest achievement is going to be my children.

GARY

Whoa!

NATALIE

What about you Richard?

RICHARD

Me?

NATALIE

What are you feeling?

EDNA

Oh go ahead Richard.

RICHARD

I'm ... I'm scared of ... golf. What I mean is the thought of retiring, of what am I going to do? What am I actually going to do? I just don't know ...

NATALIE

What about you, Jesse.

Jesse shakes his head.

GARY

I don't really have an audition. I mean, I wrote the play. I'm the director too. Of the play. And I'm renting the theater.

GIL

Sandy isn't on a business trip, she's at a fertility clinic -- I may be sterile.

EDNA

I've been playing the part of mother for decades. But why? Why?

RICHARD

I thought you wanted children.

EDNA

I thought you wanted them.

GIL

You didn't want ... children?

RICHARD

Of course we wanted children.

EDNA

We talked about it, remember?

GARY

Talked about what?

EDNA

Doing our part.

GIL

What part?

EDNA

Our part in replacing the six million murdered by Hitler.

GARY

So we're *replacements*?

NATALIE

Isn't this amazing? You guys are doing great. Now it's my turn ... I have this feeling, like a door is opening for me.

JESSE

What door?

NATALIE

Your Dad and I have been having a wonderful conversation.

JESSE

I know those conversations, I grew up with those conversations.

RICHARD

I'm certainly not trying to convert anyone.

NATALIE

Jews don't do that.

JESSE

I changed everything -- how I eat, how I feel, how I think. I changed my whole life.

NATALIE

What's wrong with change?

JESSE

I changed to be with you.

NATALIE

Jesse I ... I think we should be Jewish.

JESSE

I'm *already* Jewish!

RICHARD

Natalie and I have had a wonderful meeting of the minds.

JESSE

But *we* had a beautiful meeting of the minds. The way you listened to me, nobody's ever listened to me like that.

NATALIE

I loved listening to you, but I didn't always understand you.

JESSE

(desperate)

Sure you did.

NATALIE

Maybe I haven't always been able to tell you when it felt like your mind was way out there in the future somewhere, and my mind was you know, on the couch, eating gluten-free chips and getting my feet rubbed.

JESSE

I always assumed there was somebody ... somebody I was supposed to be like, someone who knew how to do it, how to do life. Maybe it's just because I was the third son, and always had older brothers to look at, I was always looking for a mirror to tell me who I am. I was always looking for this model of how to be, and the more I didn't find the model, the more I felt like I failed at being this other person I think I'm supposed to be, the more I think I need someone to be like, because I'm not doing it right. It's an endless search for someone who doesn't exist.

NATALIE

(kindly)

But you exist.

JESSE

There's this ache in my chest sometimes, like there's a well in there and someone dropped a stone inside, and I'm waiting, waiting to hear water, waiting to hear that splash, and it's almost embarrassing, how far down that well goes into me, like it shouldn't be there, like I should have filled in along time ago, like everyone else, but with what? That stone shouldn't still be falling, it should have hit, and splashed and that's that, and then I wouldn't feel so ... so naked, like all I want to do is cover up, and crawl inside, and find someone, anyone that understands.

EDNA

(warm)

Sensitive Jesse. You were always sensitive right from the start.

JESSE

I was?

EDNA

Of course.

JESSE

Why didn't you say something, why didn't you tell me? Do you know that I've prayed to feel less, to think less, to be more simple and solid instead of so ... so complex and liquid.

EDNA

(mellow)

All you kids were born with your own personalities. It amazed me. I suppose feelings in general have confused me. But that feeling of amazement that you were you, each one of you, that feeling came through with total clarity.

GARY

What was I? When I was born, what was I?

EDNA

You ... you were so helpful, you would practically hand me the diaper to change you. And Gil was a smiler. He woke up with a smile and sometimes when I checked on him at night, he was smiling in his sleep.

Gary looks at Gil; not smiling.

GARY

What happened to us?

JESSE

Each one of us is utterly, utterly original. If you die, there will never be another like you, never in a billion years.

GIL

Don't start.

JESSE

Why do you argue against your own life? Why won't you let me save you?

EDNA

Is it that hard to understand? People don't want to get their hopes up and be disappointed.

JESSE

But if we don't hope for more, how can we expect more, and if we don't expect more, how can will we ever have more?

GIL

You think you're so god damn special.

NATALIE

Jesse is special.

GIL

You think you're some kind of prophet bringing enlightenment to this family.

GARY

A prophet? I once caught him masturbating into a sock.

RICHARD

A prophet hath no honor in his own sock.

EDNA

(tsk, tsk)

Socks, sheets, stuffed animals -- you boys.

GARY

Stuffed animals?

GIL

Let's get back to Jesse.

NATALIE

Don't get into it, Jesse.

GARY

He's already into it. He was born into it.

JESSE

You're right, Gary. You're right. And being right is the only immortality a Berliner knows.

GIL

Better than being wrong.

JESSE

Because being wrong is a form of death in life. Which is why we never change anything, because that would be admitting that in some way we weren't right, and that something actually *needed* to change, and that would just kill us dead on the spot.

GIL

Notice how he includes himself.

JESSE

All I'm saying is that we don't have to live out this same script over and over.

GARY

What's an actor without a script?

JESSE

Suppression works in mysterious ways.

GIL

Just shut up.

JESSE

You try to turn off in me what you turned off in yourselves.

EDNA

We've learned from experience.

RICHARD

Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?

GIL

Who said that?

RICHARD

Job.

EDNA

Everyone has to grow up sometime, Jesse.

JESSE

But does growing up mean growing old?

GIL

If you were there, you wouldn't have to ask.

JESSE

(exasperated)

This family! God, this family is like its own infinity mirror, with reflections bouncing back and forth and back and forth between past and present, past and present, until everything turns into just another reflection, in an endless repetition of reflections.

GIL

(fierce)

Without this family you'd have fucking nothing and nobody.

JESSE

But we live a negotiated reality -- we can only be the parts of ourselves everyone else agrees on.

GARY

So do the rest somewhere else.

RICHARD

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! (Psalms).

GIL

Think about it, Jesse.

EDNA

But that's just it, he doesn't think like a Berliner.

JESSE

You know what? You're right. I don't. I don't think like you at all.

Long pause. End of play? Yes ... and no.

Gil's phone rings. He answers.

GIL

Oh my god. Oh my god. Really? Are you sure? I can't believe it. What? No, I'm just excited that's all. Aren't you? Yes ... Of course you are, I know. I know you are ... I'm just I don't know, talking I guess ... What? Yeah, they're all here.

(to the family)

Sandy's test are positive, she's pregnant!

NATALIE

Sandy's pregnant!

RICHARD

Mazel Tov!

EDNA

I hope we don't have to wait as long for Gary.

GARY

Huh?

RICHARD

All your mother is saying is keep an open minded.

GARY

(shrug)

I have a play to prepare for.

GIL

I've got a child to prepare for!

EDNA

(warning)

Kids change everything.

GIL

(anxious)

What should I do?

EDNA

What *can* you do?

GIL

What does that mean?!

RICHARD

It means we're proud of you son.

Blackout.

End of play.