

The Trial of Mordechai Pentateuch

a play in 3 acts

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Synopsis of The Trial of Mordechai Pentateuch

Shlomo, (aka Pentateuch) an orphaned German-Jewish Holocaust survivor (who was emigrated as a child and never knew his parents) is facing trial in Israel because of his close friendships with younger Palestinians and their families in the Occupied Territories and his involvement in protests against occupation. He is also charged with impersonating a Jew to gain citizenship since he has no birth certificate and his parentage is undocumented. As the play begins we learn that the chief prosecutor and the defense lawyer are close friends and former law school roommates. The absurdity of the charges immediately throws them into conflict and casts a dark shadow over their relationship as well as the State's purposes. In the melee over the prosecution the stateless non-citizen indigenous Palestinian people seem, as in the real world, to be pushed into the background by the legal conflict over Shlomo. But no playwright can keep them hidden there. When Isaac, the prosecutor, decides he can't go forward with the case, his personal world and his family fall apart and the plot twists and turns in Kafkaesque fashion, ending in tragic reversals.

The Trial of Mordechai Pentateuch

Characters: (can be played by three men, two women, two children or an expanded cast)

Mordechai Pentateuch, (man in his mid to late 60s, but youthful) the accused

Isaac Shofar, (age 40s) State Prosecutor

Sarah, Isaac's secretary (age late 30s) (also plays Elise)

Moshe Pearlstein, (age 40) defense lawyer

Ruth Shofar, (age 38) Isaac's wife

Chaim, Interior Minister (age 50s) (played by Pentateuch actor)

Elise Pearlstein, (age 35) Moshe's wife

Michaela & Danny, the Shofar children, (11 and 9)

IDF Soldier (age 28) (played by Isaac actor)

Hashem Barghouti, (age 50) Palestinian father (played by Moshe)

Salim Barghouti, (age 12) Palestinian son (played by Michaela)

Guard 1 (played by Isaac actor)

Guard 2 (played by Moshe actor)

The Trial of Mordechai Pentateuch

Time and Place: Early 21st century, Israel-Palestine

Act I

Scene 1

Office of the Chief Prosecutor for Israel-Jerusalem. Isaac is standing next to the secretary's desk in an ante room to his office. Sara sits behind the desk working at the computer. Moshe knocks twice then enters before a response.

Isaac :

Well, Moshe, welcome, it's so good to see you. *(Isaac moves toward Moshe and they embrace).*
You look well. It's been almost a year, I'm sorry to say. So how are the Pearlsteins?

Moshe:

Yah, I think we were together last at the beach in August. It's too bad, the pressure, the time constraints. We're both under it, I'd imagine. We'll grow old and stooped before we know it, Isaac.

Isaac:

The irony of this case bringing us together isn't wasted on me.

Moshe:

Indeed. But nice to have you as prosecutor, an adversary I can trust.

Isaac:

My thoughts as well. Do you want something to eat or drink? Sarah's got something ready for us.

Moshe:

No. *(beat, a bit flustered)* No thanks, I mean. I ate just across the street before coming up. We hadn't discussed lunch.

Isaac:

So it sounds like you came intending to get right down to the brass tacks then? Eh?

Moshe: *(smiling or chuckling)*

You are right as usual.

Isaac:

If that's it, fine. Come on into my office so we can get to it.

They pass through a hanging doorway into Isaac's office with a large desk and chair, a soft easy chair in front and a small round table with two straight chairs. Isaac sits at the table and Moshe follows suit. Isaac picks up a large folder and leafs through it silently as if looking for something and in deep contemplation.

Isaac

Look Moshe, you've read it, I'm sure; I think this is an offer you can't refuse.

Moshe:

That's not very funny

Isaac:

I really don't mean to be frivolous. I mean it. We're at war with the Palestinians, and the guy's a schlemiel. He's as guilty as the day is long. If we two don't plea bargain here they'll lock him up for life and throw away the key. *(Moshe throws up his hands)* Come on. You know it. I know it. It's the way it works. And all he has to do is admit one of the charges. A couple of years won't kill him, less for good behavior. He's not young. He has a wife and child. It's a good deal. You know he's been playing with fire traveling on the other side of the line so often.

Moshe:

All of a sudden I feel uncomfortable with you Isaac. You're being too glib with this. Maybe you should call me by my last name in this setting. Or maybe how about counsel or..... whatever. But to state the obvious, you're the prosecutor. He's my client. With you coming on this strong, it doesn't feel right to me for us to act like we're just these two old friends bargaining away here. There's a necessary level of professional distance to maintain given the obvious: I mean we're on opposite sides of this important case and you're saying he's got to plead guilty or get screwed and that's that. Katam shud.

Isaac:

Ok, Mosh--Mr. Counsel for the defense (chuckles and shakes his head)... But your client is in deep do-do and you have an obligation to help him out here. You know, whatever, but it's still called plea bargaining, and I'm all ears.

Moshe:

You're putting me on with this proposal, I think. Both the charges are clearly ludicrous. They have no basis in law or reality. You know the bare facts as well as I do. First point: how can you charge someone with impersonating a Jew? I mean-- not a **particular** Jew but-- a Jew in general. Even if he weren't Jewish—and you know damned well he is a practicing Jew—but even if he wasn't a member of the tribe what exactly is the crime here? Becoming a citizen under false pretenses at 11 years old. What's the point? And the other charge is just as ridiculous. What has he done?

Isaac:

Moshe, Moshe. I think you're having an identity crisis right now, just like this guy who calls himself Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses. I mean you act like I'm **pretending** we're old friends. Like we didn't go to law school and room together. Like we weren't tight. Like I didn't always beat you out in grades, in soccer, and in women in spite of it all. Like our wives aren't close friends. Not that I don't favor Elise. You've got a great woman there. But you pretend that we didn't wrestle on the floor over Ruth like two kids. Excuse me, counsel. Ok, I'll stick to that title, as you wish. But I...we **are** friends and this guy is just a shlemiel.

Moshe:

Isaac, don't play me off against my client. If you take these charges into court, Israel will be ridiculed the world over. And you'll damage yourself as well. I believe that my client will go free. You need to offer either dismissal or something more trivial, if you think you have to save face. Be reasonable. This is a guy who--in an historical sense-- is more Jewish than a lot of Jews. And he just happens to identify with another oppressed people who we take for granted today, just as we took their lands.

Isaac:

Israel can defend itself in the court of world public opinion like it always has. Fact is you can't prove his mother was Jewish. Jewish law is simple on who is a real Jew and Jewish religious law, like the centrality of Jerusalem, is coming back in vogue when it comes to which immigrants have a right to citizenship. So for Israelis the charge won't seem so preposterous. And claiming his mother was a Jew is how he became a citizen. Am I right, or am I wrong?

Moshe:

I don't think you paid any attention to what I just said. He's a practicing Jew, God damnit. Jews have been arguing forever about who is or who isn't a Jew. Hachala law--that the mother has to be a Jewess--isn't taken seriously by the secular public now, only the extreme religious parties. It isn't required by anyone else. Granted they have more power now, but there are committees to review difficult citizenship cases. You know that as well as I do. Are you a born again, now? The facts on his side, his history from the Holocaust. What's more powerful than that? Why would you damage your own reputation by prosecuting?

Isaac: (*more seriously*)

Look Moshe...I mean, counsel. Counsel knows that these charges weren't set by me. So I don't have the authority to dismiss even if I wanted to. Seriously, if you stonewall the offer all I can do is take back nothing to the Interior Ministry and see what they decide. I think they'll prosecute, so I'm not putting you on when I tell you it's a good deal. (*Sincerely*) That's the God's honest truth.

Moshe:

Can I have a glass of water? I'm getting the picture. Let's sit down for a moment, slow it down and examine these charges and think about this situation. Is that ok, Isaac?

Isaac:

Whatever you say...

Into intercom: Sarah could you bring in a glass of San Pellegrino for Mr. Pearlstein?

Sarah:

Yes sir.

Isaac:

Thanks.

Moshe fidgets a moment then takes off his tie. Sarah enters and sets a bottle and glass in front of him

Moshe:

Thanks Sarah.

Isaac:

Sarah, it's a nice day. You can take the rest of the afternoon off.

Sarah:

Wow, thanks Isaac. (*And to Moshe*) and you're surely welcome. It's nice to see you again, Moshe.

Sarah leaves. Moshe takes a sip, then:

Moshe:

Ok, I understand your situation. But don't they understand the guy is a holocaust survivor? Never mind, can we go over the charges in detail? Ok?

Isaac:

Sure. An old guy cavorting around (or as it says in the indictment "associating with these young enemies of Israel, thus undermining the security of the State." And then there's the charge of impersonating a Jew as a means to gaining and maintaining citizenship, and to avoid suspicion.

Moshe:

Now could you specify the laws under which each of these charges is listed as a crime? No...no, forget the associating thing for now. Explain to me what the hell impersonating a Jew even means? I've never heard of such a thing, let alone a law about impersonating a Jew. Is there such a law? Maybe the prime minister is impersonating a Jew for all I know.

Isaac:

The provisions of citizenship for the Diaspora, for Aliyah are clear enough. You have to be a Jew. As far as the other charge, you know the laws as well as I do. If he has a relationship to terrorists, he's an accomplice. But we don't need a specific law. It's that simple and that's the important point. The facts will show him to have close young friends he regularly associates with on the other side. That will suffice even if without specific connections to Hamas or Al Aqsa or Jihad. And beyond that we do have evidence that some of his friends are with one or another. You're grasping at straws if you think we don't.

Moshe: (*growing more irate as he proceeds he gets up and paces*)

Grasping at straws? That's guilt by association. A citizen participates in legal protests against assassinations, has some Palestinian friends, who may or may not be part of the military wings of groups in resistance to occupation, and names himself as if he's a direct disciple of Moses and you want to call him a traitor to his country and not really a Jew....and you say I'm grasping at straws?

Isaac:

Counsel, you're a smart man. It's not your framing of the overview to suit your client that makes the difference. The devil is in the details. It's the climate. It's the political environment. The times. Maybe 15 years ago your view of this is more correct. His behavior is perhaps accepted as benign. Then there's the second Intifada, the war, the 9/11 World Trade Center bombings, the Iraq war, Syria, ISIS etc. etc. You know what I mean. It's the times. Maybe the guy's a victim, maybe he's a kitten, but he's still going to be found guilty by the Court.

Moshe:

Over my dead body, he will. You are claiming a holocaust survivor is not even a Jew? That, as a child, he attained citizenship by fraud. And then to top it off you don't want to deport him to someplace—like England or Germany, where he was born--you want to sentence him to life in prison as an enemy of the state. I don't think you can be fool enough to allow that and to prosecute someone you know to be just a scapegoat. I know you're better than that, Isaac.

Isaac:

What I want or don't want personally is not relevant here. I'm paid to do my job and, as you know, I do it well.

Moshe:

Yes, of course.

Isaac:

I fought my way up the ladder to get this job. I was first in our class precisely to get a shot at this kind of work. I'm proud of my accomplishments, just like I'm proud of my country. I've been honorable and meticulous. You know that I don't take bribes or have women on the side, like the President. I'm not trying to screw your Mr. Toosh. I'm just trying to get the three of us out of this mess in one piece. I believe he's guilty on the facts, but I'd see him walk away without a major punishment also, because, you're right that he's not particularly dangerous.

Moshe: (*irate*)

I sense your sympathy Isaac, but don't be so defensive. Speechifying with friends betrays a deeper concern. Isn't what you are doing "just following orders," moving in a way that will make the least waves. I feel some misgivings, but your personal stake is too high to let your scruples get in the way—about as high as that imposing so-called separation barrier out there—*he points East*--separating them from their farm lands and families more than from Israel. To me it sounds like the drive that made you numero uno has turned into a separation barrier between your own ego and your conscience. I don't remember you like that. I had hoped for better from you, old friend. (*Moshe begins to stand as if to leave*).

Isaac (*speaking calmly*):

Counselor, I don't need this lecture from you either. Pretty soon we won't need to **pretend** to hide our old friendship. Where is your reasonable counter offer. We're not getting anywhere are we? You'll do what you think is right and I'll do the same. But as for your client, I think that taking a two year jail sentence isn't a bad deal, and I'd like you to take a few days to calm down, consult with him and give me a final answer.

Moshe:

Yeah, of course. I heard you the first time, Isaac. I do understand the undertone that you don't have any maneuvering or negotiating room. That's too bad, because certainly Pentateuch isn't going to admit to anything that's not true, given his messianic nature, obvious in the name itself. You already knew that too; just like I know it. He's a true believer.... so you put me in a very difficult position; you're counting on me as much as he is. I'll talk with him of course, but you also should think about what I've said. I'll see you. *Moshe picks up his briefcase and exits the stage through the door right. Lights fade to black.*

End of Scene

Scene 2

Mordechai:

(spotlighted in a chair, in the “dock”, above audience on a platform/balcony. The rest of the stage is black)

I'm a Jew. When I was but several months old, so I was later told, I was found crying under a bush next to a Jewish shool on Morgenstrasse in Frankfort by the shool gardener's wife. I was wrapped in a blanket. It was a spring day and the weather overnight had been warm. I was suffering no ill effects beside hunger and a wet diaper. The gardener's wife, a kind German woman named Felicie, was just passing by, having forgotten to hand Franz his lunch that morning. She heard my small cry coming through the rushes and looked behind to find me beneath the huckleberry bush. There was a small tag around my arm. It said only “Shlomo”.

... Only a month or two after Felicie found me, the Synagogue was taken over by the authorities-- turned into a military office of some kind-- and all the Jews sent away. Without a job Franz, a Catholic, was assigned to a factory making spare parts for artillery pieces. The machinist who worked in the station just next to Franz's was a Jew, named Cohen. Cohen had been a pharmacist. Eventually Cohen was sent to his death in Auschwitz, but for almost a year Franz and he were friends. Cohen and Franz, made a covenant that Franz would take me to England to be adopted by Cohen's family after the war. The details from Franz came travelling along with me to London. Cohen's brother, my second stepfather, died when I was 10 years.....

Two uniformed guards enter in mid sentence and one shouts “shut up” (sheket); the other grabs Mordechai by the hair, slamming his head onto the bench. The first sticks a knee in Mordechai's back and grabs his free arm. Mordechai moans.

Spotlight off to black

Scene 3

Lights up on stage. The scene is a well appointed bedroom in an old house in Tel Aviv. The old city lights and shadows can be seen outside the windows. Isaac and his wife, Ruth, are getting ready for bed. They are in bed clothes and she sits on the bed filing her nails. He is brushing his teeth. Then...Isaac comes over and sits opposite her on the bed, at times holding her hand.

Isaac:

It was a difficult day today. I waited to tell you until now. I didn't want to ruin dinner. I didn't want to sadden you or upset myself further. But I have to talk about it.

Ruth:

I thought you met Moshe for lunch. Like old times. Did something go wrong?

Isaac:

I met him. But not exactly as we imagined. You know this is a big case he's involved in. Interior decides to make an example of this nutty guy Pentateuch. Can you imagine him taking on that name, like it was given by God or Moses? An orphan names himself the Torah? Oi!

Ruth:

It is strange.

Isaac:

But the guy is smart enough, I mean he really is sharp enough that some people could think he speaks for them. He's particularly compelling when he speaks about the Palestinians' plight. And he's got a martyr complex, like, you know, Vanunu. Only he doesn't act the alienated Jew. That's the unusual part. An anti-Zionist Jewish dissident who doesn't feel or act alienated from his Jewishness or Jews. Some of the Sephardim are like that, but of course he's not that. And the guy is religious too. He's got tsefilin in the jail cell.

Ruth:

Yes Isaac, I know all that. But what happened today that upset you?

Isaac:

Well, I don't think I have any leeway. I offered Moshe a plea bargain of two years if this new messiah will plead to either of the charges. Interior says they can make the good publicity they want from that kind of a verdict. Sure, I know the guy will resist, but I think "good old Moshe will see the sense of it. Moshe will convince his client." The guy pleads guilty to being friends with some bad characters but admits no involvement in any anti-State activity. Israelis are forewarned to stay away from the Palestinian movement. The guy gets let out in 18 months. Nice and simple.

Ruth:

Apparently not.

Isaac:

No it wasn't nice and simple. Moshe calls me Mr. Prosecutor. Insists I call him Counsel. And tells me "it's drop the charges or else there will be a trial". I think Interior wants a trial. The Party wants a trial. The Army wants a trial. Even the Shas wants a trial. They claim the guy gives them a bad name. Pentateuch wants a trial. And Moshe wants a trial too? They're all a bunch of lunatics and **I don't want a trial.**

Ruth:

So what happens if there is a trial. Isn't this Pentateuch guilty?

Isaac:

You know we are all guilty of something sweet, don't you think? It's just a matter of degree and credibility. Moshe is pushing the idea that the credibility of a holocaust survivor is as powerful as Ben Gurion's or Rabin's credibility. That it might so undermine the credibility of the State that we had better think twice about this prosecution. I don't know if he's right. But he's taking a big gamble if he doesn't come around. He has a client whose hard head is in the stars, whose got a message to bring and so this could become a knock down drag out dirty fight to the death with lots of losers. I would have to try and crucify him as a traitor.

Ruth:

But he'll lose won't he? I mean Pentateuch will be found guilty of collaborating with the Arabs.

Isaac:

Yes, yes, of course he will, you're right. Even though his collaboration amounts to nothing much more than friendship and moral support I'd have to drive it home with a hammer. And then he could also be found guilty of impersonating a Jew. When all's told he could get life in prison because, at his age, that's what a 30 year sentence would amount to. What would happen then? That would be a national humiliation to Israel, to Zionism. An object of ridicule, for scapegoating a survivor. And even if he is found innocent, that charge of impersonation is so ludicrous and dangerous it might cause a big public uproar against the whole prosecution even here at home. I'm coming to believe that Moshe is correct. I can't sustain such a charge, and yet they won't let me even drop that one. I have no idea whose idea this was.

Ruth:

What would happen if you just announced you were dropping that one charge?

Isaac:

Are you kidding? For one thing I'd lose my job. I'm not sure what else would happen or when. But the other shoe would fall soon enough. Taking that route could lead to a national crisis as easily as a prosecution could because of how they're promoting the case in the media.

Ruth: *(holding his face in her hands and looking into his eyes)*

Isaac, is there some principle here in this case to hold onto or is this just about your job and Moshe? I'm not trying to prejudice your judgment. I'm just not sure that I can see this clearly. We don't want to give up everything you've worked for, just so. So if both courses don't work, what is the principle you want to stand for? And is it worth the risk?

Isaac:

Well, that's the point. You've hit it exactly. I'm thinking more and more that maybe Moshe is right and my willingness to prosecute this guy, my readiness to see him as guilty maybe isn't what is real; maybe I'm doing it only because it is what I'm supposed to do. You know, just taking orders. That familiar phrase from Nuremberg. It's painful to consider that. If that's all I'm doing then one course of action is more reprehensible than the other, even if it is more dangerous to us.

Ruth:

This prosecution sounds like doing your job to me, though I agree that the one charge seems ridiculous, even absurd.

Isaac.

Sure I'm a tough prosecutor, but I've always believed I was defending the State of Israel. Defending Israel is part of what it means to be a Jew here. And I think I have a reputation for fairness. I... we don't intentionally put people in jail who are innocent. OK, there's the occupation, but that's the war and that's the Army's business to ferret out. I take no responsibility for it. For my part I keep the peace, the law and the order. I always keep an open mind and I don't have to worry about Palestinian suicide bombers or their families. It's not my turf. I assume that what happens there is just unavoidable. Why are the higher ups insisting that we cross that line and go after some Jewish guy as if he were the devil?

Ruth:

Maybe they have good reasons. Can't you ask them? But honey it sounds like you are saying that in the 8 years you have been chief prosecutor you've never had to compromise your personal principles in a case. I wonder about that. Like you often say to me, we all make our little compromises daily just to stay afloat, to survive. It's human. You even tell me about some of them. What's so different?

Isaac:

Compromises, Shlompromises. This is different. Nothing's ever been so clear as this. If I look back I can find several compromises I've made with myself. But they always seemed reasonably trivial, not of great consequence. They always seemed defensible. I never thought I was selling out justice or righteousness. Maybe its that Moshe's got to me with his seriousness about this case. You should have heard him. He wouldn't lighten up a bit. The Moshe with the sense of humor didn't show up. I missed the old Moshe.

Ruth: *(she reaches out and fondly ruffles his hair)*

Don't worry hon, it'll come clear. In any case, we're here for you. Michaela and Danny will admire you regardless of what you do. Still, consider this: it's a small country and there is going to be antipathy toward anyone in government perceived of as defending the Palestinians. Let's just be careful here. Our lives, our family. That's important too.

Isaac:

Yes, I know how to be careful. That's the point, isn't it. Part of how I got here. I know how to be careful, but do I know how to be truthful? Is the logic that I'm asked to defend defensible? I mean if the State's position is that the guy has to be flattened and their view of what Zionism is requires this, what does that mean to me? Is this Zionism really what I've thought it was-- the defense of the Jews? Or might it be a way to gain compliance with unreasonable agendas? Compliance from him? From me? From all our citizens?

Ruth:

You sound like a subversive...

She reaches out and embraces him. She rolls Isaac over on the bed face up and pins him down playfully.

Isaac:

Well this could be fun. Maybe I'll get depressed more often. *(He wrestles with her for several seconds until she stops him to speak).*

Ruth:

I've never known you to be a person with a lot of self doubt, Izzy. You always know what you're about. You'll get over this melancholia.

Isaac:

Sure, but questioning isn't a bad thing, is it? I remember my spells in the West Bank with the Army. It was straightforward. We protected our own. They hated us. We knew they had some good reasons but that didn't matter to us. We had a job to do; it was self-preservation for each of us, for the nation, for the Jews. We weren't going to be victimized again as a people. We were just like cops, but with bigger weapons. We were the good cops. Yes, we had our snipers. That was unpleasant. But they had snipers too. We bulldozed houses, but the houses were in the way of our projects or a likely place for their fighters to lodge. Sometimes the interrogations were rough, even cruel. But their kids with the stones and slingshots, the hostility. That was enough to anger us. What else could we do but try to intimidate them back with our firepower. (*Beat...*) You see how it sounds now? Cruel. It didn't seem like that then.

lights

End of Scene

Scene 4:

Prosecutor's Office. Isaac is talking on the telephone while sitting behind his desk in his office.

Isaac:

I'll say it again. That one charge in particular just isn't prosecutable, Chaim. It's a dead end.

Chaim:

(a voice on phone)

Of course it isn't a dead end. He has no evidence in his favor.

Isaac:

Perhaps the identity issue was controversial back then, but not today. You know that. Any committee would find him to be a Jew. Anyway I don't mean on that level. It's not mainly an evidentiary problem. It's the disconnect between when and why he came to Israel in 1953 and this other thing with the Arabs now. They don't link. You're trying to force the issue, but it won't be credible.

Chaim:

Isaac, if we're going to remain a Jewish State it's a good idea to remind people once in a while that having Jewish parents means something to us. Religious law is very clear, as you know. And when he entered that mattered. The documents he presented were unofficial. They had no validity. That we erred back then in letting him pass, does not excuse his fabrication.

Isaac:

Chaim, he was 11 years old then. You see, you've made my point. To imply a fabrication is to impute motive, purpose. There was none; there still is none even if he takes their side politically now. If A is related to B and B is related to C does it mean that A has some clearly defined relationship to C. The answer is "I don't know, it depends upon the quality of B and the quality of the various relationships, B's relationship to A versus B's relationship to C.

Chaim:

What are you talking about Isaac? Aleph, Bet, Gimmel. Your alphabetic analogy is incomprehensible to me. I haven't a clue.

Isaac:

Well here's a better example. The solar system. If B is the earth and A is the Sun and C the moon then the earth directly relates to the sun by gravity through its orbit and the moon does likewise to the earth. So the Sun and the moon are in some relationship but it is trivial in the gravitational scheme of things because the moon is mostly dependent upon the earth, not on the Sun. It's the same with Pentateuch. What he does now with the Palestinians is not directly related to how he became an Israeli citizen, no matter how much we claim it does.

Chaim:

That may be so. However the moon gets the very same solar rays from the sun that the earth does and you will have to fix this logic of yours to meet the needs of the present moment. This fellow is dangerous to Israel and he's a representative of a movement of dissidents that is growing more brash and disrespectful of the law because they're isolated. And so the link between him sneaking into citizenship and sneaking over the Green Line has to be clarified for all to see. That is your job. That is why the charges will remain as they are.

Isaac:

I don't think I can do this.

Chaim:

You don't have any choice. You must do it. The Ministry wants these charges and we're not asking your opinion, just your able representation of the State's interests.

Isaac:

I am such a fool.

Chaim:

What? Why do you say so?

Isaac:

I should have seen it all this clearly before.

Chaim:

Ah now you see clearly, but before blindly? The book of Revelations. Or Amazing Grace—you're converting? You're not a Jew anymore?

(Sarah appears quietly in the doorway with a note in her hand. Seeing him on the phone, she begins to turn away but when she hears the next lines she decides to just stand there listening)

Isaac:

It's a problem, Chaim. I have to think it over again. I'll call you later.

Chaim:

Be my guest. Just use the protected phone. And remember there is some urgency. The case starts next week. Besides, "too much soul searching doesn't move one closer to God."

Isaac:

Where did you get that saying from?

Chaim:

What saying?

Isaac:

That "too much soul searching doesn't move one closer to God."

Chaim:

I don't know. It's what my mother used to tell us kids when we brooded too much over a punishment.

Isaac:

Oh, I see. I thought perhaps it had some symbolic or religious significance. I've not heard it. Does it have Jewish roots?

Chaim:

Well, maybe it does. But in my family, it was just something she always said.

Isaac:

Shalom, Chaim.

Chaim:

Will you be in temple on Friday evening?

Isaac:

I intend it.

Chaim:

See you there. (*beat*). I'd like to hear from you before then, though.

Isaac hangs up the phone, there is a lighting change that makes Sarah more obvious, and Isaac notices that Sarah has been watching him from the door.

Isaac:

Sarah, have you been listening long?

Sarah:

Not too long. The door was open, I didn't realize it was a private conversation.

Isaac:

No, you're right, it was my fault, if I wanted it private.

Sarah:

But you did sound somewhat on edge. That's not your usual style in talking with the Minister.

Isaac:

How true. But tell me, why were you standing there?

Sarah:

Oh, sure. Moshe just rang. He'd like to see you again and asked if I could set a time with you.

Isaac:

Well that's timely. Make it sometime before Friday, but not today. I've set aside today for brooding.

Sarah (*grins*):

Well it's good to hear you make a joke of it anyway.

Isaac:

What was a joke? Was that a joke? (*They both chuckle*)

Sarah:

I'm just the secretary. I don't answer profound questions like that.

Isaac:

I appreciate your trying to lighten my day. Did Moshe want me to call him back or will you set the appointment?

Sarah:

He didn't really say, but it might be to your advantage to call him yourself, given the tenor of your last talk with him.

Isaac:

Excellent. You're not my secretary at all. You're my political handler and trainer. Of course you're right. I'll call him at his office.

Sarah:

No, don't do that. He's not at the office. He called from the prison. He asked that you use his cell phone. Do you need the number?

Isaac:

No thanks. I've got it in my book here. But as you go out please do close the door for me. You can listen in on my top secret security calls, but not on my rows with friends.

Sarah:

As you say, boss.

(Sarah departs closing the door behind her and the lights fade out).

End of Scene

Scene 5

lights go up on stage.

Spot comes up on Mordechai Pentateuch in same location as before above the stage. Bob Dylan's Hard Rain plays in the background before the lights come up. As Pentateuch begins to speak the music fades.

Mordechai Pentateuch:

Let me tell you a different story. *(he looks over his shoulder to see if guards are listening)* When I was young I met Vanunu at University. I liked him and thought we had much in common. But then he told me he had quit his job, was converting to Christianity and was quitting Israel. I said that I thought that sometime in the future he might look back unhappily at these choices. Of course, he didn't tell me he'd worked at Dimona, and was going to blow the whistle on Israel's top secret nuclear weapons program to the London press. I was talking about his giving up his identity. No one can pretend to not be who they are without a personal cost. It's true of anyone, but its an idea that has a special meaning for Jews who....*The same two prison guards enter again in mid sentence and guard 1 grabs Mordechai by the shoulder. They pin his arms behind his back and twist.*

Guard 1

Listen carefully bible man. See these photos...your wife and daughter, eh? They were taken just the other day. We can pick them up like nothing, disappear them both, or kill them and blame Al Aqsa. We can cut off their hands or cut out their hearts. Haven't you heard of bodies that are found here and there, attributed to terrorists. Do you remember the columnist Jeremy Grosswald, or that doctor, what was his name.

Guard 2

You mean Epstein, the surgeon.

Guard 1

Yeah, Epstein the surgeon. They found his body in the West Bank. Nobody believes that the only true democracy in the region would torture or kill or disappear people, even Jews, now would they? Is that what you want to happen to your family? You know what we want: the names of your young friends in the Palestinian underground. Not much to ask, is it?

Mordechai

Straining, weeping, and in pain. How can I know that you won't hurt them anyway, no matter what I say or do?

Guard 2

slaps him in the face with the back of his hand. Because I say so. Because we are honorable men. Jews, like you, cain? Because we have enough work as it is. Because you just damn well have to trust us. And because you are going to jail in any case and this is the only protection you can give them and yourself.

Mordechai

Look, I do have Palestinian friends. The truth is that none of them are fighters, bombers, gunmen. I can vouch for that. If I give you names you'll hurt them for no reason. You're already calling them fighters and terrorists.

Guard 1

Shoves the photos in Mordechai's face. You don't get it. We don't hurt innocent people. We just want to question the youngsters; scare them away from associating with you. If you don't help us, well then, there's nothing we can do to protect your family. If you cooperate, no one will be hurt... if they are innocent.

Mordechai

I tell you, my friends haven't done anything. They aren't your enemies.

Guard 2

Why don't you let us decide on that? Give us the names....*(he pulls out a flat wooden club and raps it across Mordechai's knuckle, and Mordechai screams in pain.)* It's as simple as that.

End of Scene

Spotlight off to black.

Scene 6

The scene is set in a booth in a café. It is remote enough from other booths as to afford privacy. The rest of the café is only shadows. Moshe and Isaac are sitting facing each other. There is the gentle murmur of voices in the background. They are in a fairly bright but soft spotlight. Both are dressed casually. There is jazz, with a mournful trumpet lead, playing in the background, first distant and then loud enough to still the other voices.

Isaac: *(only slightly ironic, but fairly serious)*

I appreciate you're meeting me informally like this, given your concerns about my being too chummy last time.

Moshe:

It's no big deal. You said it was important to meet me out of the office. You said you'd done some soul searching and wanted to talk. I needed to talk with you also. This place is fine by me. And for an old friend, no less; it's what you'd do too, if I'd asked, I think.

Isaac:

Well, before I go on about my thoughts, have you anything new to tell me about Pentateuch?

Moshe:

I suppose I do.

Isaac:

Well don't keep me in suspense, man. Spill the beans.

Moshe:

You're not going to be happy, Isaac. I think maybe you'd better tell me what you want to say first.

Isaac:

I'm not sure that's right. What I have to say depends quite a bit on what he's thinking and what he wants to say and do at this point. So I'll defer.

Moshe:

Ok, if you insist, but you'd better hold onto your chair.

Isaac:

Shoot.

Moshe:

Pentateuch is making you a counter offer. I won't say what I think of it.

Isaac:

So....? Come on now.

Moshe:

He will agree to plead to helping the Palestinian resistance if Israel announces a timetable for withdrawing at least 100,000 settlers and settlements from the West Bank. Two traditional Palestinian sites, Hebron and East Jerusalem, and one of the settlement cities have to be included.

Isaac:

Is he meshugge? He thinks he can dictate Israeli government policy like that? And from a jail cell? Why does he think that anyone would pay any attention to this idea?

Moshe:

I don't know why. But he believes you will. I told him it's absurd.

Isaac:

Well that may change my thinking a bit. I came here to tell you that you are right at least about the charge of impersonating a Jew. It's ridiculous and will hurt Israel. I cannot in good conscience prosecute him for that. And yet I'm not permitted to drop the charges. I really only seem to have two choices. Carry out the prosecution or quit my job and ruin my life and reputation. What would you do? *Beat..* Moshe, the other day I was making fun of you for standing up for your client. I was the fool. I admit it. All the bluster was just so much subtle intimidation. Hubris. So now I sit here before you asking your forgiveness and your advice about what I should do. I don't see a way out.

Moshe:

Well, that's a bit of a relief, Izak (*intentional change in pronunciation*). I thought we were going to lose our friendship over this. On the other hand, I'm glad I'm not in your shoes.

Isaac:

The friendship may survive; but I'm not sure if I can.

Moshe:

Perhaps the situation's not so grim as you think. Let's just see if we can work it through.

Isaac:

Like I said. I'm all ears.

Moshe:

I suggest you start by actually forwarding Pentateuch's crazy counter proposal to the Minister. Don't you think it's important to see how they will react? I mean, after they stop laughing and ridiculing him, they are still going to have to have a position on this. Will they just say to ignore him or will they come up with some type of political counter-measures game? You know, like a threat.

Isaac:

I'm still listening.

Moshe:

Damn, I don't have any answer to this Isaac, but at least two heads are better than one and we're more or less on the same line of thinking at this point. The way you come here is a big relief to me. How about you?

Isaac:

Yes, it is a relief of sorts. But I'm not looking for 15 minutes of acid neutralization, I need something that'll cure a penetrating ulcer in my gut. What you just suggested has to be done in any case. That's standard procedure, so I'll get on that, but what else can I do? I can't see it through to a positive end if I don't comply with the order. I could be in more trouble than him even.

Moshe:

I have a kernel of an idea. But I can't talk about it yet. We have to see what the Ministry decides to do and I need to give more detailed thought to this. I'll tell you more next time we meet.

Isaac:

We don't have much time, Moshe. You know the trial date is close at hand. It's a good thing I trust you, pal, or I might imagine you were scamming me, delaying. But fine. I'll call Chaim today and then we should meet here again in a day or so. I'll suggest delaying the trial 2 weeks, but unless the big boys agree to that we're going to be constantly up against the ticking clock.

(They keep talking and their voices blur and become indistinct as the lights go down slowly all the way to black)

End of Scene

Scene 7

(The jail cell of Pentateuch, now on the stage floor)

Mordechai:

So, what did they say?

Moshe:

I talked to the prosecutor. He has no control over this. He thought you were being absurd, but he'll pass your proposal to his superiors. There is something you should know...that he, I mean Isaac Shofar, the prosecutor, is an old friend of mine. If you have concerns about that, we should deal with them, because I realize I should have disclosed this to you before.

Mordechai: *(surprised)*

And why didn't you?

Moshe:

I had thought law school friendship of no importance. I had planned that we could avoid any sense of personal affiliation through my absolute determination to do that, to keep him at arms length and keep our interactions professional and in your interest.

Mordechai:

And what changed your thinking, your "planning" as you call it.

Moshe:

Hold, on now Mordechai. You can fire me if you want, but I'm going to tell you as much as I can; I haven't betrayed your trust. So give me a chance, please. Don't act pretentious.

Mordechai:

I am your attentive listener; the prisoner I am also.

Moshe:

Isaac tried to act chummy at first, but I rebuffed him. But, as you know I wasn't getting anywhere with negotiating your freedom. Then something changed. I wasn't sure if it was real at first but now I understand it is even if that sounds cryptic. I don't want to talk any more about it. I won't give you the details of our conversations. It's personal and you also realize that prisons are not a good place to talk on that level.

Mordechai:

So you're telling me the prosecutor is an old friend. That you concealed this from me. That something has now transpired between the two of you that you can't reveal. And I'm supposed to trust you. Is that about it? Maybe you had sex with him; or bedded his wife. That would add a new dimension to the case.

Moshe:

If you weren't in such big trouble I'd box your ears or just laugh at your bad attempt at humor. He and I, we're both married, and no I didn't have sex with his wife. But yes, you've summarized what I said succinctly.

Mordechai:

Well, I still trust you to represent me fairly. But the one thing you can and must tell me now is what you think of my case, my chances, and my counter-offer. It seemed you weren't pleased with my demand, any more than he was.

Moshe:

Good then, I appreciate your confidence. I admit it was bad judgment on my part to not tell all at the beginning. As far as your proposal, apparently my poker face betrayed me. Can you be unaware that there isn't a chance in a million that the Government will withdraw from any major West Bank settlements in response to you or to anyone or anything else? I don't think of you as that unperceptive, unrealistic. So what's the point of your grandiosity?

Mordechai:

You are right. I knew this.

Moshe:

So what is the purpose? It makes you appear mad. If the government won't take you seriously what's to be gained.

Mordechai:

There is a time to every purpose under heaven, dear Moshe. Perhaps I don't want them to take me seriously, so they may underestimate our defense and my purpose.

Moshe:

That may be true, but you have not declared what your purpose is.

Mordechai:

Do you have no faith in me?

Moshe:

Wait now. I think we have established a level of mutual trust. I have faith that you are not guilty of any real crimes. I have a belief that you were a child victim of the holocaust. I have faith in the sincerity of your actions. Is that what you mean? Or what do you mean?

Mordechai:

Well that's all good. But you don't have faith that I am the messiah or a direct descendant of Moses, do you?

Moshe:

No, of course I don't. Any more than I am.

Mordechai:

Again, I appreciate your honesty. So there we are. To me you appear to have faith in Zionism but not in Pentateuch.

Moshe:

That's a clever play on words, Mordechai (*he chuckles*). But that's my one misgiving about defending you. You seem to treat this as if we're together in a play within which you are destined to be the hero and martyr. I think maybe it's that kind of self beatification that the Government wants to disabuse you of. And though I think you sincere, I just don't imagine a trial will be as simple as you do. Martyrs don't do well against Israel. Your Palestinian friends probably understand that somewhat better than any Jew can.

Mordechai:

Nor do I think it simple; or without consequences.

Moshe:

So why the unattainable demand?

Mordechai:

Moshe, I have a confession to make to you also. *He leans forward and passes a folded piece of paper into Moshe's hand.* I think you may need to eat my words.

Moshe opens and looks at the paper holding it down under the table. The following text written in Mordechai's hand is projected onto a screen above the stage:

“They hurt me; they threatened to kill my wife and child. I have betrayed my friends and given them names. I am a useless man. Help me. Please help me.

I need your help desperately, Moshe.”

Moshe (*acting as if he has not just read the note, shaking his head*)

Shlomo, how can justice be imagined? What is justice? Are you turning justice into mythology and fiction? I **just** don't get it. I am trying to defend you, yet you want me to defend the rights of the Palestinians as if it is not you but the Palestinians' rights that are on trial, as if the case the State will make against you is a phantasm that can be made to disappear into the background by a political ploy. From what I read in the papers these days your martyrdom might be close at hand. Is that what you want?

Mordechai:

Let us hope not.

Moshe:

In the abstract, or on the level of intellect the charges and the trial are a fraud, but you affirm (*he looks down at the crumpled paper in his hand*) that this is no mirage here. If they give you a long prison term your body and perhaps your mind as well will rot in a dank dark cell. And whether you go to prison or not, Israel isn't going to give back Hebron or all of East Jerusalem or Har Homa or Male Adumin to the Palestinians. And look at the risks you take.

Mordechai:

One can hope. *Mordechai buries his head in his hands and weeps silently, then lifts his head.* Is desire a bad thing?

Moshe:

No, of course not. But I suppose it depends upon what one desires, don't you think?

Mordechai:

Yes, yes, but I mean in the broader sense. You know, the hope that our humanity can prevail. That our work—all of us—is to imagine, to hope, to test the limits.

Moshe:

There's a difference between climbing an unconquered mountain and plunging off a ragged precipice into an endless abyss, something a child might do without forethought.

Mordechai:

Go tell it on the mountain, Moshe, that the truth matters.

(A bold punctuated choral version of the Shma with clear third and fifth harmonies plays loud as the scene ends).

Lights

End of Act I

Interlude

(set changes from this point on are accomplished by the main actors who all now work with Yarmulkas on. The entire track of Bob Dylan's Route 61 plays during this break, beginning 10 seconds after the ending of the Shma.) The house manager reappears on stage and the music fades to background level.

House Manager:

As I said earlier, this is a pause rather than an intermission. Please stay in or near your seats. The gentleman in the fourth row, there. Yes, you sir. The equipment detects active electronics on your person. Please accompany me back stage now. *(The man, who is one of the volunteer ushers, looks concerned, takes out and fiddles with a cell phone that was in his pocket, and eventually, succumbing to the request, heads for the stage and is led back stage by the House Manager.)* Enjoy the show. *There is a 1 minute pause.*

Act II

Scene 1

The scene takes place at a beach. Present on stage as the lights come up are Isaac and Ruth, Moshe and Elise. Isaac's two children are chasing each other and splashing about in relatively shallow water. This is represented by a video backdrop that merges with the stage beach set with some sound effects; the children's playful voices are presented by an excellent sound system which incorporates splashing and sounds of other people at the beach. Above in his usual perch but without jail bars sits Mordechai quietly, attentively. He begins the scene wearing, for the first time, a yarmulka and a yellow star of David is embossed on his breast. He is at this time lighted in a way that his presence is not the focus, does not distract from action on stage, but is also unavoidable.

As lights come up the two couples are sitting on the sand talking with each other.

Ruth:

It has been such a wonderful time for us. To be with old friends.

The others agree, nodding and affirming with their voices.

It's so easy to lose contact. As if life becomes a drill. I can see why older folks in this world often grow lonely and isolated. Do you suppose it all starts back here when they were in their 40s? When careers and kids and life keeps us all moving so fast; you know, moving away from both our past and yet somehow avoiding the obscured future?

Moshe:

Now don't get maudlin Ruthie. You always had that streak in you. Even when we dated.

Ruth blushes and appears a bit nonplused.

Elise:

Come on now, Moish. Don't give Ruth a bad time. She's saying how important friendships are and you shouldn't ridicule that.

Moshe:

Yah, yah, you're right, of course. I was only teasing.

Ruth:

I understood that, but sometimes I feel like we're suspended in a bubble these days. Wouldn't you say the climate in the country has been changing over the past few years? I don't mean the global warming either. Yet we all act as if it's the same place we grew up in. As if we're speeding through our own lives so fast, there is no time to look at context. Back then we were so much living in the newness of our growing up in that context--war, nation-building was almost all there was. Now, it's like we've built context into our lives--what we do, who we are--so there is no time to look at the world outside the train window.

Elise:

I'm not sure I get what you're saying, Ruthie.

Moshe:

Historical context, if I get you right. And where we are headed. It's changed, yeah, there is definitely a change. I don't know as how I could describe it; and I'm not even sure it's what you're talking about, but there's a kind of foreboding that's not just fear of bombings or aimless rockets. Labor has no different or new plan for the future now and no popular base. It seems similar to the U.S.--the most powerful nation in history. But, like us, where exactly are they going into the future? I mean they don't even have a labor party and their culture sure looks like it's in extremis. We're the same. We've got the best scientists, technology and medical care, but look at the poverty and there doesn't seem to be a center of gravity to policy, or a liberal opposition to the hard liners who want to just be done with the Arabs any old way. And then there's also this undertone that the Intifada and the militarization of the whole of the territories can't last forever, yet it lasts forever. As if all the energy that was once nation building was covering up a project that goes nowhere; like time has stopped—or do I mean accelerated--and so something is going to snap. And of course the Iraq and Syria and Iran situations and the U.S. lurking behind us in that same mood. What do you think Isaac?

Isaac:

Ruth said suspended, like a time warp. In some kind of vague way, I suppose. But I can't entirely agree with you. Myself, I'm not for cleaning out the Arabs, but going in that direction has become more overt government policy. It's strengthened national purpose and resolve. I know people who are accepting it as maybe nasty but necessary for the national security; for the homeland, for unity, for Zionism to prevail. More people are becoming aware of this, and that's not necessarily a bad thing; it's not static.

Elise:(*a bit shocked*)

But do you really think that's necessary, Isaac? Does your job as National Prosecutor require that you believe this is so? Aren't there alternatives to the endlessness of what we're doing to them?

Ruth:

Isaac, when we talk at home you haven't seemed so certain that this crescendo of endless war and exclusion will lead to a long term solution. And, for myself, I don't agree that something like that is necessary. When we were in school your views were quite different. And even recently you've shown contempt for people who have never seen the other side of the border (what it's like for **them**), contempt for people who seem to just accept what's happening as if que serra, serra, what will be will be. Now you're being too smug toward Elise. I'd like if, if you were more frank about how you do feel conflicted about this to Elise and Moshe?

Isaac:

Moshe knows how I feel. Questions, questions. Look, I don't know if it's necessary in the sense of the principles of physics or laws of history. My own personal views are mine to have and to hold, so long as I do my job well. I don't take the rightist line. I'm just saying; you know—speculating...I see their point. I'm a citizen who believes in protecting his country. Nu, but what are the options do you think? There is so much fear and animosity toward them among our people—you know it goes both ways. Do you think we'd trust them to build an armed Palestine on our border and trust them to not be a hostile power? Do you think we'd go back to the 1948 border? Or give them back the water rights and our modern settler cities, and the exclusive yellow license plates and modern freeways, sea access and remove IDF bases out to the River Jordan? Necessary?, I don't know, but, like Sharon used to say, the facts on the ground speak for us and for Israel...(beat, beat...) Ok. Well, sure my own feelings are often confused, but I wasn't being disingenuous. Like you said. I have a bit of disdain for people just going along with their lives complacently while we tear the bejeezus out of them pretty much indiscriminately; it bothers me when some people respond only to the bombings and blood and gore that sometimes visits us out of the blackness—but not otherwise. But then I think: all these guys have been in the army too. They know what's what. And if that's what we're about, then maybe unity is better than disunity. (*there is a long uncomfortable pregnant pause and tension*)

Danny (Isaac and Ruth's son) comes running up from the water.

Danny:

Mommy, daddy. Aren't you going to come in the water. Come on out and play with us. It's really warm. And there's a funny fish over here.

Michaela:

Mommy, mommy, come see this fish. It's got big teeth.

Ruth:

I'm going to join the kids for a bit. A fish with big teeth is not to be missed. I didn't mean to sass you, hon. I know there are things we just have to do whether we agree or not, but I think we can let our friends know how we feel about it, inside.

Isaac:

Sure, don't worry honey. I'm not offended so easily, ya know.

As lights go down on Pentateuch, Ruth kisses Isaac and runs off toward the water and Elise chimes in:

Elise:(*getting up*)

I'm going with Ruth and see what this tooth fish fuss is all about. Be back in a bit.

beat, beat, beat.....

Moshe:

Of course, we agreed to not talk about the Pentateuch case out here, but it seems like it's being talked about even when we're not talking about it. Don't you think?

Isaac:

Yes, I suppose. But the case is just a small part of this; and I don't mind the broader discussion.

Moshe:

Certainly, yes, yes, it's only a bit part, but it's our part, for this very moment in time. Pentateuch lurks incessantly in the background, sometimes even in the foreground.

*(He gestures back toward town and one of the projection screens stage right where there is now a projected scene that shows two youths wearing masks hanging up a banner that reads **Free Mordechai Vanunu from Pharaoh's Bondage** and as they get it up on a building 2 police officers run into the camera's view, pull down the banner, and chase them off. The video is run at 1.5 x real time). As it fades, lights come up on the re-dressed Pentateuch who is now in Palestinian garb.*

Isaac:

That scene reminded me of the Keystone cops from early American film days. Did you ever see those films? I loved those silly cop chase scenes.

Moshe:

No, I never saw them. But my father was a fan of the Marx brothers, a later generation. That Groucho could mix in word plays as clever as yours, right into the slapstick routine. Three good Jewish boys following in the footsteps of Charlie Chaplain—mixing pantomime and language.

Isaac:

Sure. I've seen some of those Groucho programs on CD, the duck dropping out of the sky; George Feneman as the straight man. I always wondered if Feneman was Groucho's answer to the racist routine in Jack Benny's show with his Black "yes sir" servant, Rochester, always cooing, "yes boss, yes Mr. Benny."

Moshe:

The irony, Isaac, is that if we had grown up Americans we probably wouldn't have seen those programs because they are so old and dated. Maybe the technology boom and the American mystique in the country brought us closer to Groucho, Harpo and Zeppo than most American kids of our generation.

Isaac: *(with a turn toward melancholia)*

Not to be cynical pal, but we might all still end up as Americans. This culture was built on determination, on blood sweat and tears but it can only be sustained for just so long based on fear, military superiority and braggadocio, even if we are the most advanced, brilliant and competent people in the world.

Moshe:

You're changing the subject, aren't you? *(Isaac wags his head ambivalently)* Come on out with it. What's on your mind. *(Isaac nods yes).*

Isaac:

I've been thinking a lot about the case, Mosh. Let me tell you what's going on.

Moshe:

Are you kidding? I need to know if there are any changes.

Isaac:

(pensive, he delays his response, looks around, fidgets, pulls out a cigar)

I've decided to withdraw from the case on personal grounds. I've thought about this case and you're completely right. There is no reason to prosecute this guy other than the political agenda. And when you think about the political agenda it's not going to help anything...might make things worse creating more internal polarization and hyping up hostility against the already isolated and not particularly powerful left here. It will only make people more uncomfortable, not more united. But dropping the charges or resigning my job wouldn't work, doesn't seem right for me. Ruth already knows about my decision. We've discussed it at great length. I think that when she prodded me to be more open before she was hinting that I get on with telling you this. Maybe, just maybe, they'll drop the charges or else appoint someone else to prosecute the case and it will take them a long time to prepare. That will weaken their case and help Pentateuch some. It will get me out of the way.

Moshe

Well, that's a real stunner. *(Breaking out in a smile)* Good for you, man. Do you think you can do it without being forced to resign ?

Isaac

Let's put it this way, pal: I'm gonna need all the friends I can find, including in high places. I'm hoping they'll leave me alone. I'm willing to go along with whatever they do if it works that way. I hope they don't force me out.. *Beat.....* But this should make your client happy I think. I believe he'll go free. But then again, even if they don't force me out,...if they appoint another prosecutor I'll still be in a pickle. Because if I say nothing publicly about the case it'll be as if I was just trying to get myself out of the line-of-fire—protecting my own hide. If I speak out against the prosecution...well we can both imagine how bad that might get. I'm hoping it doesn't come to lose-lose choices, since I'm not feeling brave about throwing away my whole career. I'm afraid my going off the case is just a first test. And we'll keep our fingers crossed and see what happens.

Moshe

I'm amazed...you know, I'm amazed that you've taken this decision, Izzie. You're really a mensch. And I do mean that. *(He claps Isaac on the shoulders)*. I don't know if I could do as much in your shoes. *(Isaac smiles sheepishly at him, but looks forlorn)* As far as Pentateuch, I hope he'll be pleased. I'll drop by the prison and talk with him first thing in the morning. He needs some good news. And this is very good news indeed. For yourself, you know we'll be there for you whatever happens and do whatever we can to help.

Isaac

I appreciate that, Moshe, truly.

Moshe

In a worst case scenario we could use an extra lawyer in the firm right now. We have a lot of new unassigned cases. You can take that as a joke, or as a legitimate offer. It's both. But the need won't happen. Right?

Isaac

Even if they fire me, Mosh, I won't join your stinking defense firm. I'm a prosecutor, by God. I prosecute criminals. *(They both laugh).*

Calls from the water

Daddy, daddy, come on into the water. We want to jump off your shoulders. Come on. Right now!!!

Isaac (...*Isaac gets up*)

We'll continue.

and heads toward the screen (water) and lights fade to dark. In the dark, Moshe walks directly through the back of the set and climbs up to Pentateuch who has been quietly present in his jail blues and kafiyah the whole time.

End of Scene

Scene 2

As the lights come back up Mordechai has rotated 90 degrees to the left and Moshe is standing over him.

Moshe:

So the prosecutor is going to withdraw from the case. He, like us, no longer thinks that there is a case worth prosecuting. He said he thinks they'll probably drop the charges and release you.

Mordechai:

So, you're telling me you got your wistful friend the State Prosecutor to see the light. He's getting cold feet about the trial and is going to defy his orders. Is that it?

Moshe:

Not cold feet...but yes, more or less, I think. I'm not sure I had much to do with it. And I'm not so cynical as you. Cold feet isn't even close. He's understanding the situation better, I'd say. There's a moral dimension. For him it's a dangerous decision.

Mordechai:

You pushed him on moral grounds and now you've gotten your reward, but did it cross your mind to ask him to drop the charges instead of withdrawing from the case?

Moshe:

No, I couldn't bring myself to do that after he had made such a personal choice with big risks. He's probably in big enough trouble with this decision as it is. It's not for me to ask him to sacrifice more, but he thinks they'll drop the case.

Mordechai:

And did you ask him why he thinks they'll just end it right here? That doesn't make sense to me. After all they've invested in making me a lesson of me. When their goal is to send a message to any Jew who would dare to believe in the Palestinian people, their humanity and their rights. And a message to Palestinians that they can't trust Jews to help them. Why would they not just continue the case with some other guy as prosecutor?

Moshe:

No, I don't know why he thinks they will drop charges. I assumed he based it on something.

Mordechai:

Of course, if they do it, that could create serious complications for your friend, as you say, so he has to be admired on that score. I wonder if he's considered that he might wind up worse off than I am? (*Beat...*) But look councilor, to them I'm the combined stand-in for rebellious leftist Jews and demonic Palestinians, both at the same time, so why would they now let me walk away? I'm a patsy, sort of like the Rosenbergs were in the US after the big war that devoured my parents.

Moshe:

I hadn't thought you would be so negative about it. The news seemed just very good to me. Of course, in the past I have asked him to drop the charges many times. You know that. This wasn't the time and place to press him further. He'd made his decision already. Perhaps you're right that he hasn't fully thought out how this will end up, but yes, he knows it can go badly for him, as well as for you. He is putting himself in a different place than he's ever been in his life; this man isn't a rebel but he's moving toward your side here.

Mordechai:

My side. (*beat*). Yes. Look, don't get me wrong. I do admire that. I want you to thank him for me. But it was the time to ask him to drop the charges. That would have been the one thing that might have compromised them. Were he to do that, they would have had to be worried about a split within their elites, in the government and in the Army leadership. They might have thought that whatever they did it could cause pressure toward a real political dialogue with Palestinians and so maybe, just maybe, they'd conclude his dismissing the charges and taking the high ground was the less troublesome choice. I would settle for that because it would at least hint they might be willing to change the course of history. But now they will not have that incentive. (*Beat...looks around distracted by a sound made by a guard.*) I do believe that you aren't thinking about the stakes for the people out there when you revel in this moral epiphany your friend has come to under your own guidance. But I don't blame you for it, councilor. Surely most any Zionist lawyer in this country would have thought and done me a lot worse. It's not your fault. You did your best. Still and all, the future outcome is, partly, your responsibility. We are all responsible in our own ways. .

Moshe:

Perhaps, Mordechai. I've seen my role here as defending you as a victim of overly aggressive and politically motivated prosecution. I never claimed to be representing the Palestinians. They aren't charged in this case. A man, a lawyer, can only do so much. You are my client. You alone, and that's my job.

Mordechai

Yes, that is the way the law here works. I am a Jew on trial by the Jewish State. The people behind those fences and walls (he points to a picture of the wall projected on the screen) are not represented here, or anywhere. Doesn't it remind you a little of where I came from. They aren't charged with a crime in these court rooms. Still, everyday they are shot at, harassed, beaten and stoned by the army the settlers, forbidden from tilling their soil, working here, selling their wares, using their water, and building their homes. Every day arrested, held for months or years and punished and even tortured. I've had a small dose. No trials are necessary. No representation is called for. So they are in this cell with us, nonetheless. Do you see that Moshe? Do you not feel their presence in this place, in this earth under our feet? They didn't come from Europe like your father. They didn't come from Germany, like I did. They were here. They are here. They came from the Bedouins and from the Philistines and the Assyrians and the Phoenicians and from members of our own tribes, that is, from those Jews who did not flee in the Diaspora. They, or at least their ancestors, have been here, for these thousands of years with their brown skins. They've been here just waiting for us to teach them their place and rob their lands. Do you see that, Moshe?

As Mordechai is speaking a video starts on the screen showing the IDF attacking youths and then humiliations at a check point and settlers in Hebron throwing rocks at Palestinians. As he finishes, the intensity of the sound of tanks and bulldozers increases to a deafening pitch drowning out the defiant chants of Palestinian youths, while at the same time Moshe holds his hands over his ears to try and stop the deafening sounds, and the lights fade to dark to end the scene.

End of Scene

Scene 3

Lights come up with Mordechai back up on his platform in the air, alone. Below is an outdoor stage and a simulated audience which are in the dark until after Mordechai's speech. Above to the right of Mordechai a screen.

Mordechai:

(the progressive anger and cynicism in Mordechai's words in the previous scene are now to be down played by his maintaining a gentle demeanor and voice. He does not raise his voice. The power now has to be in the words alone).

So what is going to happen now? You didn't come to hear me preach to you about the Palestinians' disaster. Lots of reasons you came, I guess. Maybe for entertainment? Perhaps there'll be some spectacle, some tension, some humor, maybe an analytical challenge, a resolution, a transformation, a personal enlightenment. I'm sure you're ok with intellectual nuances mixed in as long as there is the credible human condition, the drama, the humanity of it all. Cain? Let me ask you this: Are these characters credible? I'll tell you what. Here's what you can do. Consider this Pentateuch isn't a character in this play. He's a figment, mine, the playwrights whatever. Me, Shlomo, I'm a real guy, the one on trial. I don't deny it: I needed Torah, Moses, Abraham. One needs to put a lot of oomph into one's life to challenge the hubris of a messianic people and that awful history of slaughter. Especially if you're an orphan. I'm one of the tribe, but I needed to feel something more, messianic, Christ-like. And, you know, inside I'm very angry. I needed to take away your coffee break. How did you like that one? Me being born into the war in Germany, as a Jew no less, can do the Stress Disorder to you. Perhaps in their world, I mean the world of the play, of course, I could be anything for them-- Jew, Israeli, German Jew, but it seems they might prefer me as Arab, Christian, Muslim, or a Nazi. Why not? Look at me. The historical referent. That spotlight on my perch; don't be deceived though. It's the others you should pay most attention to. I'm just a conjurer, standing in for forget me nots. Ah, you probably know that flower. Forget me, forget me not; that's what a clever-witted Israeli Zionist might label the Intifada: the sudden appearance of the forget me nots. If they would only disappear: "forget you," but they're always trying to bring back the "forget me not." Every one of us can forget about anything or anyone no matter how loud they scream "forget me not"..It doesn't take a Pentateuch to know that, surely. Just Enjoy life. L'chaim.

Lights fade out and an audio background of a large noisy crowd is heard as a video begins to play on screen backdrop. The camera is focused on a raised outdoor stage and now there is lively Israeli folk music playing and young dancers dancing. As Chaim, the Interior Minister comes on stage and takes the microphone to speak, they part and depart to the sides. The crowd applauds and then becomes silent as he waits to speak. The first two lines of Chaim's are on the video, but as he finishes them the frame freezes and a spot comes up below the screen on the

stage and the actor walks into the spot and continues on.

Chaim:

Friends, brothers and sisters. Ladies and gentlemen of the press. Sometimes events do not follow our best plans. But then we learn from experience and as Israelis we have all learned to live with adversity. I want to thank the Hadassah organization for inviting me to speak here today. I'm taking this opportunity to also address the press and the public with some important information because we want every citizen to know that we take these matters seriously. So what is this? A talk? A press conference? A national security briefing for the public? Maybe a little mix of each.

I want to talk with you about the case of the man called Mordechai Pentateuch, though that's not his real name, which was set to go to trial next week after a number of delays. We have just learned that State Prosecutor Shofar, who had personally planned to prosecute the case himself, is resigning his position due to private personal matters. (a hubbub from the crowd).....It was a shock. A surprise. Yes, to us all. I would urge that you respect his privacy and not press him for details. The government regrets the resignation of Isaac Shofar, not only because of the problem it presents for this important case, but because he has performed such a wonderful job during his years of public service as chief prosecutor for the State. He will be dearly missed. I believe Isaac will soon be issuing his own statement on his resignation, so I'm not going further into that.

With respect to the Pentateuch trial I know there are many citizens closely following this case because it involves State security. We cannot proceed to trial at this time without the State Prosecutor. But we've also looked carefully at the evidence and decided that the accused is not a danger to our State so long as we restrict his travel to within Israel proper and he does not move back and forth into the territories. He's a Jew after all, an old man, and not a threat to us. Therefore, we have decided to free him on that condition. He will be observed closely. He is not a terrorist, just a misguided individual. Thank you for your attention and your warm welcome. (applause)....(black out).

Lights come up on Isaac and Ruth sitting facing each other in a barren corner of the stage that is dimly lit.

Isaac:

I can't take this.

Ruth:

I know hon, but it will go away. Can I get you something to eat?

Isaac:

Eat? What is wrong with you woman? How can you think of food at a time like this?

Ruth:

Isaac, times like this don't end until we let go of them. You haven't eaten in 3 days.

Isaac:

Don't you hear what I'm saying. They're driving me out of my mind. What can I do to stop it?

Ruth:

We could go to that therapist we used to see. Do you think that might help.

Isaac:

No, NO, NOOOOO! I don't think you can help, talking like that. Your words, your tone of voice is so condescending, so pendantic. Who are you anyway?

Ruth:

Come on now Isaac. We're in this together. I'm not going away and I'm not condescending. I just want to help.

Isaac:

Just leave me be. Go fuck yourself. Go out. Get lost.

Lights fade out, Chaim's stage slides back or recesses into the main stage.

End of Scene

Sceme 4

Lights come up on Ruth and Elise sitting together on a sofa holding hands near center stage down. This is Elise and Moshe's apartment in West Jerusalem.

Ruth:

I don't know what to do Lise. I thought for all the world that he was ready for this decision when he told me. It wasn't only Moshe you know that started him thinking. Before that I had a hint that some voice in his head was telling him to get out. He's always been strong and determined when he makes up his mind. Never had a self-doubt about his work. I've gone and talked with his parents last week. They say they wouldn't have predicted this depression. There's no family history except for an uncle who came out of Auschwitz a mess and later committed suicide. Now he says I'm of no use to him, and I think he may be right.

Elise:

Ridiculous. Obviously you're the most important person he has. I'm sure you'll help him through. Just hang in there. He'll get things sorted out, but it takes time. Has he talked about what he wants to do after the turmoil dies down?

Ruth:

You know, he can't. First thing he wants to do is a press conference to explain his "resignation." Of course he didn't resign, so what can he say? That's the hardest thing for him. He sits there holding his head shaking, saying, "but I didn't resign." When he resigned from the case, we knew there was a chance he'd get canned. The thing is we hadn't figured they would lie and tell the press he resigned his post without even warning him they would do it. Now if he says nothing the press will say there's a cover up and that will stir up Chaim. If he tells the truth, even half the truth, he's in a confrontation with Chaim too. The only way out of a confrontation they've left him is the full lie, such as making up a medical problem like his doctor told him he has to have a less stressful job. Concede to them. *(Beat...beat...she gets up and walks around agitated)*. You know he got off this case because it was such a hypocritical prosecution. So if he lies all the way down the line it's as if he's still supporting the prosecution he can't support. He's faced with having to betray himself, and all of us, or else create the very confrontation he was trying to avoid. They've trapped him.

Elise:

I'm worried they aren't even going to let him walk away, Ruth.

Ruth:

I guess we should have imagined this response. They certainly weren't playing nice with Pentateuch and I've got to believe that the treatment of Palestinians must be much worse. But we've always had the sense that Jews, even if they want out, would be more protected. Wasn't that the promise of Zionism? I'm going to.....

Pentateuch knocks on the door. He is dressed in ordinary street clothes and wears a yarmulke. Elise goes to answer, looks through a security peep scope.

Elise (stage whisper to Ruth)

It's him. Pentateuch.

Elise (to the door)

Yes, can I help you.

Mordechai (shouts through the door)

It's Mordechai Pentateuch. Is Moshe Pearlstein in? I don't have an appointment, but he gave me his address and asked that I contact him today. Since I'm living nearby I thought I would just come round and see if he's home, it being the Sabbath.

Elise opens the door and lets him in, shakes his hand and smiles.

Elise:

So good to meet you. Moshe didn't tell me you might come by. He is due back any minute. Do you want to wait? I'm Elise Pearlstein. This is my friend Ruth.

Ruth and Mordechai exchange common pleasantries.....

Mordechai (acting embarrassed)

I'm awfully sorry to be disturbing you. I should have considered the impropriety of intruding. But, you know, I just got out of prison yesterday, and Moshe wanted me to get in touch now. I owe him that, and much more. I think I had best be going. I can give you the address where I stay and he can come by later.

Elise:

No, please relax and stay. With all you've been through. I'm sure he's going to walk in any minute. What can I get you to drink?

Mordechai:

That's very kind of you. Do you have anything cold, it's quite warm out today?

Elise:

Ruth has ice tea and I'm drinking iced coffee. We have both. Do you want sugar?

Mordechai:

Yes, iced coffee would be wonderful. You know I haven't had one in quite a while. No sugar.

Ruth:

Was it very hard in prison, Mordechai? Is that how I should call you?

Mordechai:

Actually, friends call me Shlomo, if you wish to. It was very hard. Sometimes they treated me well, but other times, very badly. They have interrogation techniques to break down your will. Have you heard of that.

Ruth:

I have seen a reference or two in the papers. But I didn't know what to believe because they weren't from official sources.

Mordechai:

It would be hard to imagine it. Most of the pressure is psychological, trying to get inside your head; wanting you to feel that resistance is hopeless. Occasionally, they resort to physical attacks and pain so you get the message that they can do what they want with you if you don't collaborate. Honestly, I can't talk more about this. It's too distressing. I'm sorry to cut you off...

(There is a wavering tension in his voice and brief silence).

Ruth:

No, it's me who should be sorry. I'm sorry that I upset you.

Mordechai:

Experts say it's good to talk about these things, to let them out, but (*the door begins to open and Moshe walks in at this point*) I can't do this now. (*Beat*) And besides, I do need to talk with Moshe.

Moshe: (*approaching Mordechai and offering his hand*)

Ah then you've come to the right place; Welcome back to the real world.

Mordechai:

I don't know if I'd go so far as to say that, but it's good to be out in fresh air. That I will agree to. Moshe, my wife and daughter are at home. They will worry if I'm gone too long. Do you want to come visit with us or should we talk here. I live so close by you could walk home with me and get back easily.

Moshe:

Why don't we talk here, in the study. We won't be disturbed. Is that ok? Please excuse us Elise, Ruth.

Mordechai:

Certainly. I'll follow you. (*Ruth hands drinks to both the men and they walk off through a doorway.*)

The set must allow them to walk through a doorway or hallway and still be on stage entering the study. Ruth and Elise remain on stage sitting as the lights on them dim. Mordecai walks along a bookshelf in the study perusing the books.

Moshe:

Come. Let's sit down and drink a toast. To life, l'chaim. To your freedom. Mazel tov.

Mordechai chimes in, in response

So tell me your plans. What are you going to be doing now? Have you work? Will you take a vacation trip with your wife and daughter? I recommend it highly. Do you good.

Mordechai:

I have some plans. But there is a more urgent matter to discuss.

Moshe:

Urgent?

Mordechai:

The note I gave you in prison. The Palestinians I visited in the West Bank territories were young people I met in Jerusalem, in coffee houses, or at friends' houses. They became my friends, like family, though I am much older than they. A few were active against the Occupation. One even told me he was in the military wing of Fatah. But I think the others were not involved in organizations; they just did what people have to do when they are deprived of their rights. They had protested the tanks and soldiers when the Army came to intimidate, invade homes, shoot at kids, even use their families as shields. You know, almost all the Palestinian youth talk about these things.

Moshe: (*interrupts*)

What were you asked about in prison?

Mordechai:

Yes, well that's what I'm getting to. I have been in a new organization myself. It is made up of Palestinians and Jews. (*Moshe acts startled, becoming more serious*) I wanted to tell you, but you know, I couldn't risk it being taped. ...*beat.*, *he changes to a more somber almost depressed tone*...Listen Moshe. When I was tortured in prison, I was afraid you wouldn't believe me. They knew I had Palestinian friends...in Hebron, in Jenin and Dheisheh. That's who they wanted from me. They promised to bring me my daughter's hands or my wife's head. They said they could make it look like they were killed by Palestinians. They told me names of people who they said they had killed using such methods. These were deaths that had never made sense. I was terrified and confused. Yesterday, as soon as I was released I called one of my friends to see if he had been questioned. "He's gone," said his mother. "Disappeared." "I'm sorry," I told her. "I just got out of prison. I didn't know." I called another home. "He's gone," said his brother. "We tried to find out if they took him to prison, but they won't tell us anything." Then I called a third home and the depravity of the situation became clear. "Ali is dead," wept his father. "He was killed in a rocket assassination attack 6 days ago. His funeral was yesterday."

Moshe:

My God. I'm so sorry to hear this Shlomo.

Mordechai:

“But Ali was not even a militant,” I responded. “Yes, I know that,” his father told me. “But I suppose they didn’t care. He was young and strong and healthy. Or because he had Jewish friends like you. They try to kill hope by killing our children. But we won’t leave. We can’t leave. Our staying alive, here in the homeland, to look them in the face will be our victory. Of life over death.”

Moshe:

How can I help you bear this?

Mordechai:

Wait a minute please....When I hung up the phone my hands were shaking. Look at me, I’m still shaking. I was crying, distraught. I called the other two. Of the 5, 3 disappeared, 2 dead. (*very distraught and agitated*) This is all my fault, my doing, their undoing. I collapsed on my bed and cried for hours. I had tried to break down the cultural wall, the wall of Jewish exceptionalism, to help in that way, and this was the result. I have caused all this suffering. Here I named myself after the Books of Moses, the Torah. And I turn out to be just a pretense of a man, a sham. I destroyed my friends.... *he loses it and weeps uncontrollably....*

Moshe comes over and puts his hand on Shlomo’s shoulder to comfort him.

Moshe:

No, no, Mordechai. What you say isn’t true. This is not your fault. You are merely a man trying to do right; you remain true to your convictions. I have no doubt about it. I think you took too many risks for your own good, but please, please don’t blame yourself for what happened. Seriously, I have recognized you. You are a good man. I understood that when I took your case. Without people like you this Occupation will never come to an end.

Mordechai:

I am a believer. I trusted in God to keep me strong. I thought I could withstand anything they tried on me. And I failed. Perhaps my religious belief was not firm enough; or maybe God has forsaken me. Why would he do that? Have I not lived a righteous life?

Moshe:

I don't have answers to that Shlomo, but you know as well as I that people are often tested by life. The modern world is a place of many interpenetrated cultures. That can't be changed. You've helped me understand, Shlomo, that the behavior of this xenophobic State is something that has to be resisted. I'm grateful to you for that, even if you deceived me some. I can only imagine what must they be doing to Palestinians, people whose lives they value at far less than that of any Jew, even less than a rambunctious Jewish dissident like yourself.

Mordechai:

(he calms his shaking and tearfulness and smiles at Moshe)

You are a very kind man after all. I am glad I chose you for my lawyer.

Moshe:

(becoming familiar and endearing)

What do you mean "chose me", Shlomo? You know damned well I was appointed by the Court to represent you.

Mordechai:

Well that depends on your point of view, I think. *(Beat, beat...)*

Moshe:

But tell me, what are your plans and how can I help?

Mordechai:

I'm going to take Esther and Inbal to the beach at Al Arish on the Sinai for several days, if the State will allow me to cross the border. Can you ask permission for me?

Moshe:

Sure, I'll ask in the morning. But that's a very strange coincidence indeed.

Mordechai:

What do you mean by that?

Moshe:

I'll tell you in a second, but first I want to tell you about Isaac. (*Beat..*) Isaac was completely devastated by being fired.

Mordechai:

What do you mean fired? I heard on channel 2 that he resigned. I heard it with these ears.

Moshe:

I know. They announced that he resigned without even asking him to resign or firing him to his face. He's taken it very hard. It's an understatement. He's become so severely depressed that he appears on the edge of a breakdown. He's talking to himself incessantly and doesn't like being interrupted. We're all planning on going down to Al Arish also. That's the coincidence. Perhaps we can see you down there. I'll check to make sure there is no hold on your traveling in that direction tomorrow. Elise and I and the Shofars will leave on Friday and we'll be staying at the Hilton a week.

Mordechai:

The Hilton? Not on what I paid you. You can invite us for a drink, though I suppose Issac might be better off without me to remind him of these things. Do you think? *beat...* I'm sorry to hear of his distress.

Moshe:

I don't know. We'll just have to play that by ear. I'll call you. Do you have a cell? If Isaac seems too disturbed or doesn't want to see you, we'll meet separately.

Mordechai:

We'll be camping in a tent or a cabana near the beach. But I will carry a cellular. Here is the number (*hands him a piece of paper and becoming somber again*). But seriously Moshe, I can not be relieved of this guilt--from what I've done to my friends. That's where I most need your help. The burden is lodged in my soul like an axe. I have to at least do something to help these families....my friends' families, before I go anywhere. . Could you help find out if the 3 disappeared are held in prisons and if they can be visited by family?

Moshe:

I never tried anything like that before. But there's always a first time...*beat*... I'll see what I can find out before we leave for the resort. Just give me the names, ages and towns they are from. Can I say I'm inquiring for the relatives? I'll need the family names too. Certainly it might relieve their families of a lot of anxiety if I can find them.

Mordechai:

The families have already given me permission to inquire...*beat*... they are also investigating apart. The names are on the back of the paper with my cell phone.

Moshe: (*turns the paper over*)

Sure enough....I'll call you as soon as I find anything out.

Lights fade to black.

End of Scene

Scene 5

Once again there is crowd noise and the same setting as when Chaim gave his brief press statement. Isaac walks out on stage in a video looking rather obviously disheveled and ascends to the podium. The crowd quiets as he begins to speak. Once again after he finishes two sentences he appears (as did Chaim) in a spot on the stage and restarts. The video frame freezes showing Isaac and part of the audience as he speaks.

Isaac: *(beginning the first sentence quietly)*

I didn't expect so many people would care about this. Thank you for coming. *(Beat, now he comes on stage and begins to speak from there)* Ladies and gentlemen: This is very difficult for me. I hope that I can convey my feelings sincerely and well enough today that you will be satisfied that I am speaking from the heart. Certainly my responsibility as State Prosecutor was to defend the law and protect the people of Israel. I took that responsibility very seriously. I hope I did a job worthy of the public trust. My decision to leave was taken with a great deal of inner emotional conflict. I consulted my own conscience and my family. The decision resulted in part from my own state of mind and a strong desire to attend to my children's and family's needs and in part from a feeling of confusion over the Pentateuch trial. Because I did not want to see the State and the future of our nation compromised, I felt that prosecution was not the best thing. I thought that Mr. Pentateuch—even if we abhor some of his behavior—is as obviously a Jew as any of us. His running afoul of the State in constantly crossing into the territories and having friends involved in military groups opposed to the State of Israel are another matter which may be deserving of prosecution, but I would have preferred to not be involved with the circus atmosphere that the case has engendered. I became convinced this case would damage our image nationally and internationally. Of course, international politics is none of my business. As I said before, my resignation resulted also from personal issues and in consultation with my family, but I could not stay in my position if I was not going to prosecute Pentateuch. That is all I have to say about it. I'm sorry. But you will have to address your questions to others than myself.*(he turns to leave....)*

(A shout from the audience)

But doesn't your resignation compromise Israel's case? Isn't this treachery? *(buzzing and murmurings in the crowd which goes on for about 30 seconds until Isaac, standing still and looking bewildered, decides to say something more:)*

Isaac:

How can I answer this question? I intended no treachery or harm. But that is for you to decide. I love my country. May you go in peace. Shalom. *(He exits). Lights.*

Scene 6

Lights back up on Elise's apartment. Elise and Ruth are again present.

Ruth:

Thanks for watching the kids, Elise. I know you wanted to be there too, but I was afraid for them. In case anything untoward happened.

Elise:

I understand. So how did it go?

Ruth:

Well, I thought Isaac did fine, given the..you know... He looked kind of not quite himself, bewildered. You know his hair, his eyes, somehow disheveled. Something a bit off. But, he sounded fine. And what he said. Well I can't think of any way to do it better. He didn't reveal the firing, but did say he quit because of a disagreement on the case about the impersonating charge. I met him back stage and told him he did really well, but all he could say was "they think I'm a traitor." Someone shouted something about treachery from the audience. He couldn't get that out of his mind. He wouldn't talk about anything else.

Elise:

That might have been staged by Chaim, you know.

Ruth:

It crossed my mind to say that to him, but I decided against it. It appeared that nothing would have broken his self-absorption at that moment even if I had immediate proof that it was the case. And of course I didn't. So I didn't say it. I just tried to comfort him and talk about the beach trip.

Elise:

And did that help? He's coming, isn't he?

Ruth:

(dejected) Actually, no. He's not going to come.

Elise:

Oh my. That's not good. Do you want to cancel and stay with him.

Ruth:

I thought about that too. But I don't know that I can handle his state of mind or be of much use to him. He's overpowering me, emotionally. I don't know how to respond. And the kids, you know, need to get away from this.

Elise:

We could take the kids down to Al Arish without you. You don't need to come.

Ruth:

Oh yes I do. They need both of us right now, but one will have to do. Hopefully their daddy will get beyond his brooding, realize he's needed and loved, while we're gone. I'll urge him to come along again, and if he refuses I know he'll say he wants us to go anyway.

Elise.

Maybe Moshe should talk with him. He might convince him to come away with us all.

Ruth:

Sure, you're a great friend, Elise. We can try that. Thanks for your understanding. *(she moves to Elise and kisses her).*

(The two children enter through the front door. Danny is carrying a soccer ball)

I thought you guys were at the park, playing.

Michaela:

We were..... of course. They've got some neat things in that park. A tunnel slide, a merry go round. We rode on it once with the shekels you gave us.

Ruth:

So then what?

Michaela:

Then we were playing soccer with a couple of other kids.

Danny:

There were two men on a bench reading the paper. And one of them said....

Michaela:(*interjecting*)

It was Ha'aretz.

Danny:

...and the one who was angry,...said: they should arrest that guy Shofar. He's the reason.....(*Danny looks down and doesn't continue*)

(*Ruth looks shocked and dismayed*)

Elise:

The reason? The reason for what, Danny?

Michaela:

He said Dad is the reason they had to let the guy go.

Elise:

You mean Shlomo?

Michaela:

Yes.

Ruth remains rigid, frozen in silence.

Elise:

But kids, he's not a bad man. He didn't do anything to anyone. Those men are just confused...and they don't understand.

Michaela:

Yes, but maybe everyone is angry at Daddy.

Elise:

No, not everyone is angry at him. But sometimes people just don't understand things, and we have to live with that. Did you ever have your parents misunderstand you...think you did something bad when you really didn't?

Danny:

Yeah, that happened yesterday. Mom said I had left a mess in the kitchen and it wasn't me that did it. It was Dad. I cleaned up the mess I made, but he didn't.

Elise:

So there. It's just like that. I'm sure you straightened your Mom out. This other thing will work out ok also.

Ruth:

Yep Dan. You sure did tell me what was what. And I apologized, didn't I.

Elsie:

So are you kids excited about going to a new beach outside the country? Are you getting your things together for the trip?

Michaela:

Yep. But that place is in Egypt right? What's Egypt like? Is it dangerous? How is it different from Israel? Do they hate Jews?

Ruth:

Not so very different. It's just a resort place. Maybe some other time we'll go down to Cairo and see what real Egypt is like. How would you like that?

Danny:

I want to go. When can we do that?

Ruth:

Hold on there, tiger. One trip at a time. Maybe we can plan that one after we get back from this vacation. Ok?

Danny and Michaela:

Sure.

Michaela:

Can we get something to drink?

Elise:

Of course, there's milk and juice in the fridge. Help yourselves.

(They exit, she turns to Ruth, speaking softly)

Shlomo is going to Al Arish also, with his wife and daughter. Mosh told me after they talked.

Ruth:

That seems an odd coincidence, do you think?

Elise:

Odd? I suppose odd is the very nature of any coincidence. He told Mosh before he knew of our plans. So it is what it is, a coincidence. But we'll invite them up for a drink sometime if it's ok with you.

Ruth:

Ok. You're right. I see that this whole thing is making me weird and a bit paranoid too. Does it show?

Elise:

Maybe like an eight week pregnancy; not really bad though. *(She giggles).*

Ruth:

Pregnancy. That's all I would need now to throw me off the deep end. Don't even mention that word.

The children return with juice drinks in hand.

I think we better get going Elise. There's packing to do and Isaac to attend to. I have to make sure he has everything he might need while we're away. Thanks for everything. *(To children)* Tell Elise thanks for the drinks guys.

Both children together:

Thanks for the juice, Elise.

Michaela:

and the soccer ball too.

(Ruth gets up gathers her bag, straightens up the cushions she was sitting on and addresses the children)

Ruth:

Let's skiddoo kidos.

They exit. Lights go down. Elise exits.

End of Scene.

Scene 7

Setting: Isaac and Ruth's bedroom. Isaac is sitting on the end of the bed head in hands. Ruth is standing about 5 feet in front of him.

Isaac:

How many times do I have to tell you I'm not going. I told Moshe and I thought that was the end of it, but here you are back again nagging me. What do you want from me?

Ruth:

It's ok Isaac. I'll take the kids down myself and I'm sure they'll be fine. Is that ok with you?

Isaac:

I don't care. But I need time. I need time to think. Are you going to leave me be?

Ruth:

Of course, of course. *(She approaches Isaac tenderly touching his shoulder)*. Can I ask you one question though?

Isaac *(brushes her hand off his shoulder)* :

What is it? Tell me now.

Ruth:

I just was wondering if you are still hearing those voices, like Chaim and those others that frightened you?

Isaac:

Yes, yes, yes, they are still buzzing around. Now be gone and let me alone.

End of Act II

Intermission

(Once again actors come out and change the set wearing yarmulkas)

Act III

Scene 1

Setting: a West Bank Check point. (Events at the checkpoint unrelated to the play characters are slide-projected onto a backdrop). At opening a video is projected (taken from inside a moving car). It shows an urban scene, then a West Bank Jewish major settlement, then rural backdrop and then approaches and enters an IDF checkpoint between Israel and the territories. A Separation Wall is visible stretching in both directions. The car stops at the checkpoint and the video then shows at least 30 seconds of people standing in long lines and being interrogated and searched by armed soldiers and men with guns dressed in non-official garb. To this point the rest of the stage has been dark. There is a car on stage (which should be moveable on a track) hidden in the darkness, at extreme stage right. As the lights come up to half, a soldier is revealed ahead of the car (stage left). The car with Mordechai, Ruth and the 3 children inside (Shlomo's daughter is portrayed only by a manikin) moves slowly up to the soldier. It has trappings of a Mercedes. Ruth is driving.

Soldier:(with Russian accent)

Good morning folks. We're stopping all cars today to warn people of security situation in Hebron. It is under control now but two soldiers and 14 Arabs have been killed. May I see your registration. And can you tell me where you are headed?

Ruth:

We're just passing through, headed north. Up to Qiryat Shemona.

Soldier:

Do you live there? I have relatives on the Kibbutz.

Ruth:

No, we just decided to volunteer to help with some of the reconstruction for two weeks; you know, from the rocket damage.

Soldier:

This is marvelous. You are very good citizens. Everyone should be like that; we'd have less trouble keeping the Arabs under control. *(He gestures dismissively at the Palestinians still being interrogated on the video backdrop).*

Ruth:

I agree that everyone should take citizenship in their country seriously. May we pass?

Soldier:

Of course, Of course. But you know that coming through the West Bank territory is maybe not quickest way to get to your destination. And certainly not safest.

Mordechai:

Yes, we were aware, but we wanted very much to see the old towns of Jenin and Nablus. We are interested in the archeology and history of this area.

Soldier:

That's fantastic. Nablus I don't advise. You can pass, but it's under military isolation. If I had time we could talk more about this subject of archeology, an interest of mine as well. But I'm sure you want to be on your way. Just be careful. Although Arabs without gold plates are forbidden on the main highways, there can be danger lurking anywhere.

Ruth:

But before we pass, can I ask where are you from, young man?

Soldier:

I am from Ma'le Adumin. Over there.

Ruth:

You live in a big settlement, then. To the East. It is like a city in Israel?

Soldier:

Yes, many soldiers at the checkpoints are from there. We are Eastern frontiersmen. But you should visit Male.

Ruth:

Perhaps. But what I meant before was where were you born. Where you came from?

Soldier:

Oh, I see. I was born in Odessa. I came 10 years ago to the promised land.

Ruth:

So, does that mean you are Russian?

Soldier:

No, Ukrainian. We were Russian under the Czars and then the Soviet Czars. There are Russians in Odessa, yes. But now we are free. So I am two free peoples. Ukrainian and Israeli. I am not Jew but I worship Jewish people for blessing me with wonderful new land where my children are born.

Ruth:

And today which are the people not free, do you think?

Soldier:

Well, you know this. Today, the Arabs are not free. Some live under dictator tyrants like Bashar in Syria and others under the Muslim terror of the Ayatollahs and people like Nasrallah in Lebanon. This is common knowledge. Why do you ask me such a question?

Ruth:

Because, actually, I was wondering if you think Russia is now free.

Soldier:

This is harder question for me. I think Russia got rid of the Communists, so it was good. But Russia is not so free yet. Putin was KGB you know; he still acts the same.

Ruth:

Yes, I understand you. I am sorry to take up your time. It was kind of you to talk with us.

Soldier:

This was my pleasure. Please pass now.

(Ruth drives the car off stage. The soldier exits rear, the backdrop is replaced by low hills and olive trees and the car returns at stage left heading to the right now.)

Mordechai:

That was very well done, Ruth. I'm glad I briefed you about the possibility of being stopped. At least he didn't ask for identification. We Jews rarely get asked at this check point but it could happen. I'm sorry I've made you an accomplice to my violation of the release agreement. Do you want to just turn back and go home? We could do that and I have time to still come back myself.

Ruth:

Not on your life. Coming along was my decision. You didn't coerce me. I understand the risks. It's you who's violating your agreement with the authorities, not me. If we get stopped I will take no responsibility for your behavior. Even if they found you out, I don't think I've done anything wrong. And coming back alone would be a huge risk for you.

Mordechai:

That's well enough stated, but don't forget they have a grudge against Isaac, and so they might use your presence against him.

Ruth:

Well, yes. Of course. You mentioned this when you first told me you were planning to visit this family. You were not reckless. If anyone was, it would be me. But, with Isaac coming apart I just needed to do this for both of us; I need to understand, to get a clearer, fuller picture of it all.

Mordechai:

Is Isaac not feeling better then?

Ruth:

Well, you know I don't want to discuss it here (*she gestures her head toward the children in the back seat who are occupied with a game.*)

Mordechai:

Of course.

Ruth:

But I will say he's less withdrawn, less solipsistic; yet different. Like a stranger.

Michaela:

(sticking her head forward between the seats a bit)

Mom, don't talk about dad like that.

Ruth:

Like what? I knew you'd be listening.

Michaela:

You know. Like there's something wrong with him.

Ruth:

Ok, I won't talk about him. But first just tell me, Mickey, what you feel now when you're with him.

Michaela:

He's just sad. He won't talk with me much.

Ruth:

Well, that's all we'll say about it then.

(The car is driven ahead and remains on the stage with the occupants as a large cloud drifts onto the backdrop the spotlight dims. Michaela gets out of the car and visible to the audience in dim light makes a quick appearance change into Salim- a slight 11 or 12 year old boy—and he comes forward down to front center stage and addresses the audience without any break).

End of Scene

Scene 2

Salim:

(looking first to the audience then pointing back at the car)

Father and I were just talking about him. It's not a secret. You can listen in.

Hashem Barghouti:

Salim, can you come? I want to talk with you a moment.

Salim walks back up stage right (car is stage left) where his father is sitting on a sofa and he sits opposite.

Salim:

Good morning, father. I was just reading in the back.

Hashem:

And what were you reading?

Salim:

A newspaper from Israel. Someone left it. An article about how they say we want to drive them into the sea.

Hashem:

And would we drive them into the sea?

Salim:

And how could we do that? With rocks and slingshots and Kalashnikovs?

Hashem:

No, but that is not my question. If we had a strong army, like them, and could do it, would we drive them into the sea?

Salim:

I think we should because they have driven us from our land and homes and now they won't let us even live on this piece of the land we inhabit. They take or destroy everything from us even the water, the orchards, everything.

Hashem:

Yes, that is true, but who is it you would drive into the sea and why?

Salim:

Because of what they have done. They cannot be trusted. All the Israeli Jews.

Hashem:

Do you think people cannot, will not change? Is each person born good or bad? All Abels or Cains like in the ancient story?

Salim:

I don't say that. But it's been 60 years father. Since the Naqba the Jews teach us nothing but humiliation and disasters. They destroy and steal our farmland. Leave us with nothing but their blockades and checkpoints. What else can we expect from them? I couldn't trust them.

Hashem:

And if we had the power to destroy them or drive them into the sea could they still do terrible things to us?

Salim:

No. I think they could not.

Hashem:

You may be wrong on this. Think about it, because we might adopt their thinking and become like them. *Beat, beat....* You know Shlomo is coming today?

Salim:

Yes, I know. Why does he come? That one gave them Ali. That is his friendship to my brother? Another Jew who can't be trusted.

Hashem:

I understand your feelings very well Sali. Ali is my son as well as your brother. But why do you suppose Shlomo told us what happened--what he did? He might have kept it a secret from us, no?

Salim:

I think it's because he feels guilty about what happened.

Hashem:

It could be true; and is that a bad thing?

Salim:

It doesn't help Ali, who he betrayed.

Hashem:

I do not agree with you. I think it is a sign that his friendship is sincere; that he wants and needs our trust. And second it is a sign that he will do all he can to help undo what has happened. Who will be for us if we turn against our friends?

Salim:

How can you call him a friend, when he caused deaths and kidnappings. Ali would not let him in our house.

Hashem:

And what makes you so sure of that? I think those are your feelings, not Ali's. In fact I'm quite sure of it.

Salim:

Maybe, but that's how I feel about it. Maybe Shlomo wants to have Arab friends, but he wouldn't have given the Army names of his Jewish friends if they wanted that from him. Would he?

Hashem:

We do not know that he didn't give them Jewish names too. Let me tell you a story about myself that you should know now. When I was imprisoned by the Israelis you were just a small child. They interrogated and tortured me much like what Shlomo described to us on the phone. Finally, I couldn't take it any more. I thought they would kill your mother and you and Ali and your sisters.

Salim:

You mean you told them names of fighters, leaders, friends.

Hashem:

No. I told them a story I invented. I mixed in facts and fictions, believing they would be unable to use the information against anyone. But like Shlomo I did mention the names of a few of my friends who were not militants to make my story seem real to them. I did not admit to any attacks on the IDF or the settlers. You see, they had succeeded in confusing my mind. Prison isolation tactics are not easy to withstand. I had begun to think that the only dangerous information was the truth about activities against the occupation. But they didn't care what I said. It wasn't the truth that they wanted. They were interested in using me against myself and my friends. Of course, they did the same as they've done with Shlomo; they then went after everyone I mentioned even just acquaintances and then their families and their acquaintances. Some were imprisoned. Luckily none were killed. But I felt so guilty that I had betrayed my friends that after they let me go out, I stopped being active for quite some time---for over 2 years.

Salim:

How could you do it? Give them names?

Hashem:

I pray that you are never taken, but if they should come for you one day, too, you will understand. They are very good at terrorizing people and breaking them down, not just at assassinating with missiles, tanks, bombs and death squads.

Salim:

And so you are trying to say that it is ok that Shlomo turned in Ali and the others?

Hashem:

(First sentence is somewhat emphatically expressed)

No, of course that is not what I am saying. I am saying Shlomo is our friend and we should treat him like family. He needs us and he has been through a great ordeal also. He is a Jew who has lost his Jewish Exemption, the special privileges that Israel gives to Jews. He is a righteous man, a Hashemite like us. And if they find out he is back here again he will be in for worse yet. I ask only that you try and treat him like Ali's friend. That is what he is.

(Salim sits contemplatively for a minute, then kisses his father on both cheeks and leaves stage right)...pause to black 3 seconds, lights up. Salim has morphed back to Michaela, takes her mother's hand and leads her to a seat across from Hashem. He welcomes her, thanks her for coming and then their interchange becomes inaudible murmuring for a while and the lights change to imply a time-phase change.

Hashem: *(to Ruth):*

Michaela can play in the family room. My son Salim is playing a computer game just now. He was embarrassed to stay here with me. He is 12. I think most 12 years old are like that in these modern times.

Ruth: *(nods in agreement):*

Sure. Mickey, why don't you go and meet Salim? *(Michaela wags her head, a bit ambivalently, but exits stage right)*

Hashem: *(speaking aloud to off stage wing left, to his wife)*

Hakia, do you here this story. A fascinating story, indeed. She says, of this man, Isaac Shofar, her husband, he is in limbo now just as the man he would have prosecuted, our friend, Shlomo was in a limbo? And she has a feeling that many Israelis are living in a limbo as with two brains that won't accept each other as they try to blot us out yet always remembering their own people in the Holocaust?

Hashem

(looking and speaking toward the car still on stage where Shlomo sits):

And Shlomo, do you believe this as well about the Israelis?

Mordechai:

I can not answer to this, Hashem. It is a bit metaphysical to me. I would not necessarily understand this feeling of "limbo" even if it were to be true and evidence shown to me. I feel much guilt for my betrayal of Ali but not divided in that way Ruth speaks of. Do you feel divided Hashem.

Hashem

Yes, I do feel this, Shlomo. I am divided from my relatives who fled to California and London. I am divided from my land and village, which sits there in Israel, just a heap of rubble that I am not even allowed to visit. I am divided from my son, Ali, and from so many who have died in the struggle these many decades. But I do not blame you for any of it and so I am pleased that you do not feel divided in these ways that Ruth speaks of.

Lights to black

End of Scene

Scene 3

Setting: An apartment in Jerusalem. But actually not an apartment at all—more like a cell or underground cavern. The set is stark. The walls are grey, the lighting dim. There is a specific sense of it not being a living quarter, nor even a study. It is hard to imagine Mordechai's daughter and wife living here. No furniture is visible except for a small simple table—as in an interrogation room—a lamp on the table is lit and two simple chairs. Beyond this the stage is barren. There are no windows, a door is hidden in the wall far right; no fixtures, the lighting provides no hint of definition to the space.

Mordechai sits in a chair reading with the only lighting coming from the small table lamp. He turns to the audience.

Mordechai

This is a place, a cell locked in my head. I cannot banish it from my mind. Can you see what it was like? I try to go to my apartment, to my life, my child. The address is the same, but this cell is what I see and feel. I cannot make love to my wife. Not yet, anyway. Maybe these things can change with time.

there is a knock at the door and Mordechai gets up to see who it is and the lights rise showing the full set. It's Isaac, coming here apparently unannounced. Mordechai lets him in, though Mordechai is looking somewhat startled—nonplused at first.)

Mordechai:

Isaac Shofar. What a surprise. What brings you out this evening? I had heard you were not feeling well. I hope that you are better.

Isaac: *(as he moves to center stage)*

Who told you I was not feeling well, Shlomo? Whomever they are treats me like an invalid, or someone with no mind of their own, talking about me without asking my permission to do so.

Mordechai:

You shouldn't take it that way. Moshe meant no harm, I'm sure.

Isaac:

(using a strange demeanor, taut and assertive, yet somehow weak and passive)

So Moshe? That's who, "meant no harm?" Did I say he meant harm? Is meaning no harm good enough authorization to speak of a friend being mentally ill, and to the world at large? Of course, I'm here to see you. I didn't come wandering the streets without purpose, or looking for a psychiatrist. Do you take me for a fool, or a psychotic?

Mordechai:

Why would you think so? I have no reason to take you for a fool. Moshe didn't say you were mentally ill either, as in psychosis. He just said you've been quite depressed from how you've been treated. I have great respect for your intelligence Isaac, and besides that I owe you a big debt for your decision to not prosecute me. It's because of you that I'm free. I'm sorry if I've offended you in some way. That surely wasn't by intention.

Isaac:

Your intentions. What are your intentions, exactly? That is why I came to see you. I know you have seen my wife and visited with my children. *beat..* without even approaching me. Then, you had the temerity to endanger them, on your own advice I suppose, taking all three across the Green Line into the West Bank on a little trip, an outing, to meet your friends. Perhaps I don't mind your having Arab friends. But what about the danger to my family? Are you and I on such terms that you could be so presumptuous? We don't even know each other, except as potential adversaries in a court proceeding, with you as an accused criminal, me your prosecutor. Does this not sound like strange behavior? Or criminal behavior? Or what are the best word--thoughtless, cruel, hardened, perhaps purposeful, calculated. How could you? What are you doing, Shlomo-Mordechai, or whoever you are? What are you doing to me and my family? *...beat..beat..Mordechai remains silent trying to understand what is happening.* I have come here to kill you (*he reaches into his jacket and pulls out a pistol*). Sit down now and explain to me, convince me why I should not commit murder? Where is my life going? Tell me these things. Tell me everything you know.

(He waves the gun toward the table and chairs. Mordechai moves to the far chair and as he pulls back the chair and begins to sit down, he says.)

Mordechai:

Of course, but please sit down with me also. There's no harm to that.

Isaac:

(He hesitates a second, then accedes and sits opposite Mordechai) Ok, then, tell me your side.

Mordechai:

Shall I start after my release? Or before that?

Isaac:

Did you know my wife before you were released?

Mordechai:

No, I met her at Al Arish. I was talking with Moshe and told him we would go there for a few days. He told me he was going too and you, your wife and kids.

Isaac:

Then start there. I'll let you tell your story without questions. Go ahead.

Mordechai:

Well my wife Esther and I had already planned to take a few days and go to the resort beach at Al Arish. She had a conference, I needed the rest. I told Moshe and he said they were going there too and perhaps we'd have a drink. We ran into them on the beach. Ruth and your children were there. The whole scene lasted only a few minutes as I had an engagement with my wife.

Isaac:

But that doesn't explain anything, even if it's true. What happened next.

Mordechai:

There's two things. First, some of my Palestinian friends have been arrested and I've been trying to find out where they are. Also, even in a few minutes my daughter and your children hit it off. They enjoyed playing together so Ruth and I agreed to let them see each other back here. It was all perfectly innocent. I don't think of you as my enemy.

Isaac:

But how did the trip to Jenin get set in motion? And why did you think that was ok? To ignore me?

Mordechai:

This is more difficult to speak about, Isaac. Your anger is troubling me. Your jealousy as well. And that gun.

Isaac:

Yes, I'm glad you are worried. You should be. Perhaps you should have worried before you did such things. Perhaps you should have worried before you befriended half of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Mordechai:

What? What makes you say this last thing?

Isaac:

Because we know....I mean....we knew...I knew.. I had intelligence of your relationships to these organizations, their members.

Mordechai:

But that is not true. I had no associations with those organizations. Where did this information come from? It isn't right. And if you believed it why would you drop the charges against me, rather than add other charges?

Isaac:

It was a trick. We were going to let you out, to mark, track and bug you. To get more information, more targets for the teams. Our information came from someone who was interrogated in prison. But there was a different plan formed by others. When I objected concerning the charge of impersonating a Jew that plan was dropped. They decided I was unreliable. That's the reason for the vendetta against me. I'm not going to tell you anything more about it. You're the one who has to explain your behavior. I'm the one doing the questioning. And I need good answers.

Mordechai:

Do you really feel so victimized? Don't you think we are all victims of this insanity? But, in any case, you must know that coerced information is unreliable. It's common knowledge. All the security services say so.

Isaac:

Sometimes unreliable, yes. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't act upon it. You know there are costs and benefits. And who says the information was coerced? What evidence do you have, when you make such accusations?

Mordechai:

You aren't going to pretend that we don't torture Palestinian prisoners, are you? I don't need evidence. The prisons are full of Palestinians, uncharged people, and many are coerced. And besides, it must have been coercion, because it isn't true. Do you not know that I was also tortured and terrorized.

Isaac:

I don't know any such thing, but just get back to the narrative Shlomo. Ok? Tell me your story.

Mordechai:

As far as ignoring you I just took a cue from Ruth. She seemed to think all your energy was bound up in trying to break free from depression, from what they did to you. It wasn't for me to question that. I wouldn't intrude into your family relations so I didn't ask anything. I often take Inbal's friends into the territories, asking their parents' permission, of course. In this case I thought, well, Ruth wanted to go.

Isaac:

So you are trying to turn me against my own wife, then?

Mordechai:

How can you say that? She is marvelously loyal to you, and worried sick about you. Snap out of this Isaac. You have been reviled by the State. They've tried to destroy you; but that is like what they did to me. Besides, both our treatment pales compared with their behavior toward an entire people, generically.

Isaac:

You are lecturing me Shlomo. This self-righteousness is what galls me. You act invincible. Like a child. Didn't the time in prison chasten you at all? That is why I have this gun (*beat..Isaac wags the gun, whose muzzle has been resting on the table pointing toward, but not directly at Mordechai*). You seem irredeemable, unlikely to be disabused of your smug self-righteousness.

Mordechai:

Perhaps. Perhaps I am irredeemable. Faith is like that, I suppose. I hope my faith is irredeemable. But let me ask you this, Isaac. Are you redeemable? Have you broken with those anxious plotters, people who deny their own humanity and that of the Palestinians? Or can they pull you back, to redeem you like a recycled bottle? Do those chains still bind you?

Isaac:

Be still, now. Let me think. (*Beat....*) Let me think. (*Shouting, more irate*) I will not let you talk to me this way. We are the Jews, you so easily forget, victims of centuries of humiliation and degrading treatment, victims of the most vicious and famous of holocausts. We are lucky to be alive. And I was the State Prosecutor. How can you be so indifferent to that, to the authority, to the respect I'm due?

There is a dead silence, as both men stare at each other across the table for several seconds.

Mordechai:

I can because I am also a survivor, but "never again" means something else to me. And I can separate those ideas of your power as prosecutor from you as a person, an individual, from your struggle to become more than just a public servant of the State. And because I do believe we are all equals, that power and force are constructs of the human mind, and so can be undone by us.

Isaac:

This fabulous rhetoric Shlomo, your typical messianic virtuosity again. A rehearsed piece. Practice makes perfect. Maybe you even believe it, *...beat...* but that doesn't make it true.

Mordechai:

Why must you judge and ridicule me? Please, just let me go on with the story you want to hear about our trip to Jenin.

Isaac:

Yes, this is exactly what I want.

Mordechai:

I will go back to earlier, first. I think you must know I was put under so-called pressure in prison. A little physical torture, pain, cold. I will talk about the details some day. But mostly psychological terror. My wife and child were threatened repeatedly. You know Isaac, I gave up the names of 5 Palestinian friends because, by then, I believed there was no limits to what these beasts would do, and could do to my family with impunity. All 5 of my friends are gone—2 dead three held incommunicado. You had no evidence against them of crimes or plots or you would not have waited for me to give you these names. This was a way to destroy me as well as them, to “cure” me, as the saying goes among the soldiers, of my will to go on with my old life. They were just my friends and you wanted also to send their people the message about the dangers in associating with dissident Israelis. You hear me? Two are dead, three in prison.

Isaac:

And you think I was the author of these acts? How dare you accuse me? You have no evidence against me either. You are encouraging me to kill you.

Mordechai:

I did not mean to accuse you, Isaac. I was thinking of you as presiding over my plight. Of course, you may not have even known of this. It matters little to me now anyway. You got me freed and so I doubt you were the author of this plot. But did you not know?

Isaac:

No, I didn't know. And this matters a great deal to me, so I will tell you what happened. I knew about your interrogation and the results. I didn't know any specifics, like torture or threats. And I surely didn't know about what they intended for those five you call your friends. It's not my affair. Do you believe me? That much is important to me.

Mordechai:

Certainly I believe you and I'm pleased you are telling me this. You have that gun and you don't have to tell me anything, unless you choose to.

Isaac:

This is true. But the gun is not the point. I want you to believe in my truthfulness, even if I decide to kill you. I did my job, but I had nothing to do with the rest of what you tell me.

Mordechai:

Ok, I'm sorry; but anyway, last Shabbat Ruth called me and asked if it might be a good time to get the kids together. I was already intent on visiting the Bhargoutis whose son, Ali, was one of those kidnapped. I had to ask for forgiveness and hope they had it in their hearts. I also had some new information about Ali—that he is alive and being held. I related this to Ruth and mentioned that we could plan a kids visit some other date than she suggested because I was going East into the West Bank. As an afterthought, I said, or you all could come along if you wish and see the Occupation. Ruth was enthusiastic, only wondering if it wouldn't be an imposition on the Barghoutis if she were to join us with your children. I think it is wonderful for children to learn about the realities there (what our Mr. Sharron used to call the "facts on the ground") and to have friends there. One day, perhaps, this may contribute to peace. Ruth wants to know about their lives. I knew the Barghoutis would feel the same way.

Isaac:

You are again saying this joint trip was Ruth's idea, then? That she proposed joining you.

Mordechai:

No, certainly not. I was going there already and it was my idea. She said she wanted the experience. But you know her better than I do. Would she have suggested it? I think not.

Isaac:

(the way he speaks this next sentence subtly suggests that Isaac is letting go of his anger. It's a bit of self-derrogation).

Then my placing the blame on you to begin with was correct?

Mordechai:

As you wish, but we were both innocent. There was no plot, no planning involved. Just an outing with friends to visit a family. This is the problem of trying to treat ordinary life as ordinary, under such conditions. If we refuse to allow the conjurers of war and State politics to intervene with their bold and malicious intents they envision us as plotters. Let it go Isaac.

Isaac:

But don't you see the dangers, and the effrontery of what you did?

Mordechai:

I do, yes. I understand better now. It was risky, and I also see why you need this anger, even to the point of becoming enraged. I am sorry I did not talk with you. I should have, but that seemed impossible, an imposition, in your depressed state of mind.

Isaac:(*almost screaming with anger*)

Once again, preaching. As if you want me to stay enraged? Is that your proud intent?

Mordechai: (*now more quietly, almost hushed*)

No, you misunderstand my words. I have much to live for. But have I told you enough now, or is there more I must tell you?

Isaac:(*change of mood*)

Tell me about that family, the Barghouti family. How are they doing? How did they receive you, and the children?

Mordechai:

They are surprisingly resilient. They received us as you would, as most any family would. Grateful that we cared, offering their hospitality, some wonderful Palestinian pastries, wanting to talk about what we could do together, how to visit Ali, to give their captured son some protection, to get him released. I had brought them good news. Also we talked about the Occupation and their lives. Their younger son had a new game your children had not heard of. They were all playing together as if the Occupation, that green line, the red line, the walls did not exist for us for that little while.

Isaac: (*ambivalent*)

And was Ruth impressed by all this?

Mordechai:

I believe she was. But, of course you should ask her yourself if you haven't.

Isaac:(*a bit hungrily*)

Do you have any photos? I would like to see them if you do.

Mordechai:

As a matter of fact I do. I carry a small digital camera. I took several shots and made some prints. I was going to give them to Ruth to show you.

Isaac:

To show me? You mean to say you didn't think I was going to be mad about this?

Mordechai:

No I didn't. It never crossed my mind before you stepped through the door. I expected Ruth to explain to you.

(Isaac shakes his head then slowly puts the gun in his lap and takes his head in his hands at his temples, pondering these words, as if they have hit him like a shock or punch. Alternately, feelings of anger, puzzlement, calm and even amusement pass across his face before he speaks again).

Isaac:

This world is a strange place, Shlomo. Perhaps I am a being from another planet or like an infant still trying to understand his first words. What terrible confusion reigns here inside my head? I'm appeased by your words, but still so confused. This is a big problem.

Mordechai:

Isaac. We are together in this. Around me in this apartment I see nothing but the walls of a prison cell, and yet I know it is not true, that my wife is in the next room. For me it's a wondrous thing to hear you also recognizing the confusion. I was worried, very worried that you might not hear me out; that you would think me disingenuous. I hope you will accept my friendship, and too my apology and sadness that I've hurt you.

(Isaac looks up and across the table into Mordechai's eyes. Mordechai is staring intently at him. Isaac puts both hands into his lap and produces the gun which he lays gently on the table pointed neither at himself nor at Morechai.)

May I take that weapon from you?

Isaac:

Yes, please. Yes, yes...*beat...*, yeah. Do take it (*Isaac begins to weep quietly, though still looking at Mordechai. Mordechai gets up slowly from his chair and walks around the table. Isaac has released the gun and as Mordechai approaches him he also begins to stand and Mordechai embraces him. They stand in each others arms. Slowly over the next minute the lights go up in intensity to reveal that they are standing in a “flower” garden. The effect can be created by either colorfully painted walls that were not apparent in the dim light or by projecting a video onto the gray walls. A snake is seen watching from the branch of a tree*)

Mordechai: (*reaching over and picking up the gun and putting it in his pocket*)

I'll give this back next time we see you. I hope that we will see each other again. Perhaps you could show Ruth the photos, if that is alright. (*He slips the photos into Isaac's pocket*).

Isaac:

(*Ignoring what Mordechai said about the gun, sobbing a little*)

Yes, I want to see the photos. I want to see the children together. May I have them?

Mordechai:

(*they are still holding each other though now with a bit more distance*)

Of course. The photos are here in your pocket. (*he lightly signifies Isaac's pocket*)

Isaac:

What is to become of us Shlomo? Can you ever forgive me my intentions?

Mordechai:

Everything will be ok, Isaac. Everything is ok. We are going to be fine. I cannot forgive myself, if I cannot forgive you.

(*Mordechai with his arm around Isaac's shoulder guides him toward the door up rear stage. But as they get close to the door there begins—first at a very low intensity then ever more annoyingly,—the whine of a high tension electric power line. As the audience notices this buzzing sound the two pass out of the door and—in case some in the audience should begin to applaud thinking the play is over—the buzzing becomes loud enough that it cannot be ignored. (An excerpt from Sternberg or Berg string piece could be used here instead of the high tension buzzing) Once the two have passed outside, after about a 10 second pause with the buzz still intensifying there is heard the noise of a scuffle. There is no scream or shriek but a single moan emanates from the scuffling sound, then a thud, and then a loud gunshot. Simultaneous with the gun shot the bright lights on the set go out leaving only the dim gray empty setting as before.*)

Some period after the gunshot and the re-graying of the stage, leaving enough time for Mordechai to ascend, a spot light now shows Mordechai above in his usual perch wearing traditional prison garb. A prominent Nazi prison camp number is stamped on the front of his shirt. A large yellow star of David is pasted on his forehead. He speaks out to the audience:

Mordechai:

No, I don't understand what really happened then in the confusion and I have no way to ask Isaac. I only know that I did not murder Isaac Shofar. I thought he had calmed and was coming to terms. But once outside he moved too fast for me and pulled that gun from my pocket. I am 20 years older than him. I pleaded with him to give it back to me and I would return it to him later. He shook his head no. I did not understand his intentions so I tried to take it away from him...it was such a mistake, a foolish thing I suppose, but what choice? I didn't think he was going to shoot me. I only thought: he's irrational and I must take the gun. "Please give it back to me," I said again.

Isaac (*only his voice*):

I won't.

Mordechai:

he said. We wrestled. The gun, still in his grasp, went off. (*a shot is heard again*).

Isaac fell to the floor, (*a thud is heard again from backstage*) shot in the chest. I was aghast. I called for an ambulance, tried to stop the bleeding but Isaac died from an aortic wound in just minutes in my arms before the first police car arrived. (*Emergency vehicle sirens are heard*) I was arrested, charged with the murder of Isaac Shofar, the State Prosecutor—dismissed, resigned, retired, humiliated, now resurrected as hero by the state after death. The old case that cost Isaac his sanity and then his life is the background that prejudices the murder case against me. The State has covered its tracks. I am condemned by a presumption of guilt, of clear motive. Dear Moshe believes me, but Isaac is dead, his family bereft and I am a condemned man, father, husband. For me, these walls and jailers, again. But still, some light. Ali was freed. He, Hashem and Salim came to see me today, just after Ichbal and her mother left. Salim thanked me for helping Ali get out. He's a sweet boy. Their friendship is my reprieve from the heavy weight of guilt. I do not know what to say to Ruth. I can't face her, yet I wait for her to visit, ...hoping....sometime; somehow hoping for forgiveness. Still I believe in my heart that all our families will grow stronger. I know, I believe, that some day we will together become one people of this land, Palestine.

First Prison Guard: (*enters behind Mordechai and twists his arm behind him*)

Who are you talking to wise man? Do you have a hidden tape recorder? Sheket, or I'll fix you for good. Do you hear me?

Mordechai:

Of course I hear you. Why are you so angry? And why do you do this terrible work? Have you tortured Palestinian prisoners here? Have you always been a sadist. Do you not believe we too are humans with feelings, flesh and blood?

First Prison Guard:

Do you think I am fooling you? Do you think I must restrain myself and listen to you?

Mordechai:

No. I do believe you, but will you not answer my questions?

First Prison Guard:

You are not listening to me, Shlomo. They've issued new rules for you this time. They don't mind if a murderer of the chief prosecutor dies in custody. They don't even care whether you're Jewish or not. And around here we all think you're a fake Jew. You haven't fooled us. Do you hear me? Don't push your luck? *(He slams Mordechai forward against the rail).*

Mordechai:

It was people like you who killed Isaac, brother, not me. It was people like you who fed Jews into the gas chambers. Even God withdrew his edict to Abraham regarding the order to kill Isaac. You're so proud that we don't have the death penalty here, yet you murder and torture tens and hundreds of thousands with impunity. You carry out death penalties whenever you're told to do so. Do you believe that simply because there are no ovens here to burn people up that we Jews can claim to be better people, the righteous ones? Never. You go along; you are your own victims. You don't take out the gold fillings but you take the orders, whatever terror they bring. You fear those who we betray and enslave. So you hate them and think them monsters. You're not different from any other common tyrant, driven by your own weakness, no different from any other tyranny written down in centuries of history. You can't face these truths so you just hide your inhumanity behind a.....

(at this point the soldier loses his cool completely, pulls out a pistol, smashes Isaac across the face)

First Prison Guard:

I'm giving you one last chance to shut your fucking mouth, right now.

Isaac:

I will not! I can not! Answer my questions. Answer my questions now.

(The prison guard moves the gun to the back of Mordechai's head and pulls the trigger. Mordechai slouches over dead. The Sternberg music intrudes sharply for just a matter of seconds.)

First Prison Guard:

Can anyone say I didn't give the fool a fair warning? Why did he make me kill him? No sense in that, is there? More the fool, pretending to be such a wise man, he got himself killed.

(Lights to black)

End of Scene, Act, Play (FIN)