

Cast of Characters

<u>ISAAC GRABER:</u>	A college student.
<u>DOC:</u>	A young psychiatrist.
<u>MOTHER:</u>	Isaac's mother.
<u>FATHER:</u>	Isaac's father.
<u>MINISTER:</u>	Pastor of a church.
<u>CARL BELL:</u>	A university professor.
<u>ANNA COHEN:</u>	A university student.

Scene

A small town.

Time

Present.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING:

The stage is set with five distinct places. These are: a psychiatrist's office, a kitchen, a church, a dorm room, and a classroom. All these places can be suggested by a simple set piece. ISAAC needs to move in and out of the spaces unimpeded.

AT RISE:

DOC is in his 'office' speaking on the phone. CARL sits in his classroom. MINISTER in his church. ANNA lies on the bed in her dorm room. MOTHER and FATHER sit upstage against the backdrop in the kitchen. ISAAC stands stage left down of the kitchen masking the chopping block and hatchet from the audience - transfixed.

DOC

Two months. Six. They don't know! Of course I'm angry. It's not something you rationalize. She just celebrated her third birthday. Third. That's not enough for her and not near enough for me. Yes. Okay. Come as soon as you can.  
(Hangs up.)

Damn-it!

(ISAAC comes alert and looks DOC'S way DOC touches the framed photograph on his desk.)

DOC

I can't let you go.

ISAAC

(To Doc.)

Let go?

(To audience.)

Why? When we're made to hang on. It's true. Evidence? I give you the - thumb.

(Displays his thumb.)

And not the -

(Displays the end digit of his right hand.)

Finger. Yeah. The thumb. Defined by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as the short first digit of the human hand, opposable to each of the other four digits. Opposable - I love four syllable words. You can have thumbs up and thumbs down.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

You can thumb a ride, thumb down a page, thumb your nose at.  
Make a thumbnail sketch. Be under someone's thumb -  
(Looks at DOC.)

Or have the truth squeezed out of you by thumbscrews.  
(Looks at his watch. To  
DOC.)

It's time.

DOC  
(Faces ISAAC.)

What?

ISAAC  
It's time for my appointment. Graber. Isaac.

DOC  
Yes, certainly. Come in.  
(ISAAC enters the office.)  
I'm Doctor Morton.

(DOC extends his hand.  
ISAAC ignores it.)

DOC  
Have a seat.

ISAAC  
(Remains standing. Surveys  
the room.)  
I'm sure you can't wait.

DOC  
How's that?

ISAAC  
You know - to hear my dirty little secrets. Probably  
salivating...

DOC  
I'm a clinician not a...

ISAAC  
Rubbernecker. A Peeping Tom.

DOC  
Helping people get well is a better job description.

ISAAC  
The miracle worker.

DOC  
You don't believe in miracles?

ISAAC

I'm here aren't I? I'm standing on my own two feet aren't I?

DOC

Yes, you are. Are those miracles?

ISAAC

They work for me.

(Lights up on CARL.)

CARL

(Stands)

Class, I give you Homo sapiens. Two young men thrown together by what some would call their fate. In the shirt and tie, the psychiatrist. A thirty-three year old father of a terminally ill child. His wife says she's a blessing from God. Today he is having difficulty internalizing that concept. His patient Isaac Graber is a student of mine attending the local university on a full academic scholarship. Isaac was transferred from the surgical wing of County General Hospital to this ward. Both men have a lot on their minds. And why not? The Homo sapien's brain is a formidable size.

(Dim lights on CARL. Sits.)

DOC

Yes, I take your point. Can I get you anything? Water? Tea?

ISAAC

You can get me out of here.

DOC

That's up to you.

ISAAC

Apparently not.

DOC

When people - injure themselves it's important...

ISAAC

To put them in cages.

DOC

To keep them safe until they are no longer in danger of cutting...

ISAAC

Short their lives?

DOC

Yes. Sometimes.

ISAAC  
For the greater good?

DOC  
I suppose.

ISAAC  
I suppose -? One of your non-committal trade words?

DOC  
Non-judgmental.

ISAAC  
Right. Let our neuroses run wild then blame them for -.  
Yeah, well. When do we start?

DOC  
We already have.

ISAAC  
No wonder I feel better.

DOC  
Good. Then let's continue. Where were you born?

ISAAC  
Read the file.

DOC  
Humor me.

ISAAC  
In a teacup. That's what *she* said. I was born in a teacup.

DOC  
Who?

ISAAC  
My mother.

DOC  
And you believed her?

ISAAC  
I believed everything. Didn't you?

DOC  
You were a child.

ISAAC  
An orphan.

DOC  
Tell me about your mother.

ISAAC

She made me what I am today.

DOC

Even if that were true, you are responsible from here on in.

ISAAC

It won't put me back together!

DOC

Some of that has already been done.

ISAAC

I hardly knew her.

DOC

A son knows his mother better than most.

ISAAC

She birthed me, okay? End of story.

DOC

You lived with her.

ISAAC

I lived in her house.

DOC

I fine distinct...

(MOTHER enters kitchen.)

ISAAC

The woman was a monster, Doc. She chewed tobacco, wore Army boots and knitted sweaters out of chain mail. She...

MOTHER

Isaac.

(ISAAC ignores her.)

ISAAC

Ate gingerbread men and lured...

MOTHER

Isaac! Don't tell stories, Isaac. Stories cause people grief. And isn't there enough grief in the world already? Besides they're a waste of time. We've got work to do. The sun's already up for hours.

ISAAC

She's not a safe place for me.

DOC

It's only memory.

ISAAC

Exactly. Who needs it?

DOC

You do.

MOTHER

Isaac, if I have to come get you, you'll be one sorry boy.

DOC

Go on. Go see her. I'm right here with you.

ISAAC

Damn the consequences.

DOC

I think you've already realized those.

(ISAAC crosses to the kitchen  
on the following-.)

ISAAC

My mother was raised a farm girl with a fierce Protestant work ethic. She owned and operated a restaurant and was up before dawn and home after dark. The restaurant obsessed her. But it was neither her pride nor her joy. And let me tell you, the customer was not always right.

(Scrambles into the kitchen.  
He's seven years old.)

MOTHER

(Drying teacups.)

Finally. Don't make me call you twice. Your breakfast is stone cold and rightly so. I won't have you pestering the neighbors. There are too many things to do and not enough time to do them.

ISAAC

(Sits and mimes eating.)

It's the first day of summer vacation.

MOTHER

And none of your sass. The seasons change, but our responsibilities don't.

ISAAC

I like summer best.

MOTHER

At least the pipes don't freeze.

ISAAC

In three weeks I'll be seven.

MOTHER

If you survive till you're eighteen, then we'll celebrate.

ISAAC

Can I see David? Before he goes away.

MOTHER

When the work is done.

ISAAC

David says his mother is pregnant.

(Nothing from MOTHER.)

She's going to have a baby. Were you pregnant?

MOTHER

I don't remember.

ISAAC

But I was a baby.

MOTHER

Of course you were. Eat your breakfast. Then see to your chores.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

She never had time for me, but this morning I was persistent.

(To MOTHER.)

How was I born?

MOTHER

(Considers this - notes  
teacup in her hand -.)

In a teacup. Yes, that's right. Babies come in teacups.  
Here. This one.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

She set the china cup on the table. I took it up in my small  
hands as if it was a religious relic.

(To MOTHER.)

Was I pretty?

MOTHER

You were a baby. Nothing pretty about that.

ISAAC

David said he weighed eight pounds when he was born.

MOTHER

He's bragging. Doesn't pay to brag.

ISAAC

How much is eight pounds?



MOTHER

A whole lot more than it ought to be.

ISAAC

Can it fit into a teacup?

MOTHER

An entire life can fit into a teacup.

ISAAC

How...?

MOTHER

I'll see to the laundry. Clean up after yourself while I'm out.

(MOTHER sits off. ISAAC examines the cup.)

ISAAC

Babies must be very small when they are born.

(To DOC.)

I hid the cup in my room. On those long, lonesome days, I'd stare into its luminous bottom at the image of my muddy features. And wonder.

DOC

What happened to it?

ISAAC

(Sets cup on the table.)

It broke.

DOC

Accidentally?

ISAAC

(Crosses to DOC.)

Hell, no. I - dropped it. The way the pieces crumbled under my foot was very gratifying.

DOC

You were angry?

ISAAC

Try bitterly disappointed.

DOC

Because it wasn't true?

ISAAC

Because none of it is true, Doc. Come on. You're patronizing me. Evidence to the contrary, I'm not some blithering idiot.

DOC

I know your scholastic record. Impressive.

ISAAC

You came prepared. Good. But it won't change anything. An overpaid conversationalist with a degree can't right what is wrong.

DOC

And not God?

ISAAC

You don't waste much time.

DOC

I'm following your lead. They found the Bible open to the Gospels in your house. A page was torn out. Did you do that?

ISAAC

Follow my lead and we're going right over a cliff.

DOC

If we have to.

ISAAC

Noble sentiment. But that is a lose-lose game.

DOC

This is not a game, Isaac.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

That's where you are wrong, Doc. This is the ultimate game. Survival of the fittest. The weak and the crippled and the slow-witted are slaughtered first. Then the innocent.

DOC

Who are the innocent?

ISAAC

The babies. Yeah. Did you know hyenas feast on baby zebras as they exit the birth canal? They gather around the white-eyed mother clicking their teeth like eager diners sharpening their cutlery. In the midst of delivery, those hellish hyenas are already ripping at the newborn whose first experience in life outside the womb is pain and terror. Its first, last and only experience.

DOC

That would upset any...

ISAAC

Upset? Oh, that is banal. You've got to do better, Doc.

DOC

I'm not the patient here.

ISAAC

Maybe you are. Did you ever think of that? Maybe this is your way of getting at your own - tortured psyche. Maybe I should charge you instead.

DOC

More of your - games.

ISAAC

Games. Yeah. Good idea. Got any tucked away in your bag of tricks?

DOC

No.

ISAAC

Why not? With those recreations losing is temporary and non-lethal.

DOC

And winning is just as temporary.

ISAAC

But at least you have a chance to win! And the rules are the same for everybody: The rich, the poor; the Catholic, the Hindu; the scientist and the palm reader.

DOC

They're diversions. That's all.

ISAAC

But beautiful, congruent diversions.

DOC

Were you playing games when you...

ISAAC

Damn-it. I'm more than that. Treat the whole person - isn't that what the teach you? Listen to what your patients are saying. Christ, I can't do both jobs here.

DOC

Some practice that pedagogy.

ISAAC

Well, practice it with me. I won't be toyed with.

DOC

And I won't be dictated to. Unraveling what you did to yourself is our job - not idle banter.

ISAAC

Make them face their demons - is that it?

DOC

Something like that.

ISAAC

Not so easy, is it?

(MOTHER enters kitchen with  
laundry in basket.)

DOC

No.

(Looks at MOTHER.)

But it is necessary.

MOTHER

Isaac, you're dawdling again. And look at that broken cup!  
What were you thinking? Come get it swept up.

(Begins folding laundry.)

ISAAC

Do you love your mother?

DOC

Of course. And you?

ISAAC

Of course? What? Is it some sort of rule or something?

DOC

So your answer is...

ISAAC

I wanted to. I needed to. But see, that was impossible.

DOC

Why?

MOTHER

Isaac, I'll be using the broom on you -.

ISAAC

Pay attention, Doc.

(Crosses to the kitchen and  
enters as a boy.)

(DOC observes.)

ISAAC

Mom, look at this. I got an A on my report.

(Mimes a paper.)

MOTHER

(Busy with the laundry.)

Doesn't do to call attention to yourself. Grab the broom.

ISAAC

(Mimes the broom.)

Miss Brady said I should show you how well I'm doing.

MOTHER

You're supposed to do well. If you did any differently, you'd be one unhappy boy.

ISAAC

('Sweeps up' the pieces.)

It's about chimpanzees. They're smart.

MOTHER

Apparently not smart enough.

ISAAC

They can talk.

MOTHER

Talk is trouble.

ISAAC

Using sign language. They can ask questions, make demands and even make arguments.

MOTHER

So can boys. That's not much of an accomplishment.

ISAAC

(Dumps the cup pieces.)

Miss Brady says chimpanzees are part of our family tree.

MOTHER

Every family tree bears bad fruit. Most people keep quiet about it.

ISAAC

When I grow up, I want to be a -

(Struggles with the word.)

Paleoanthropologist and study fossils. Do you know what fossil means? Dug up. I'm going to dig up bones.

MOTHER

Sounds like a job description for a dog.

ISAAC

I wish I had a dog.

MOTHER

I told you before, dogs are trouble. They're always under foot begging for food or attention.

ISAAC

I could love it.

MOTHER

Well, love is not enough, is it?!  
(Softens.)

I mean you've got to bathe and brush 'em and keep them out of the garden. They're too much bother. Understand?

ISAAC

I want to bother.

(MOTHER considers ISAAC a moment before turning back to the sink and tending to dishes.)

MOTHER

Finish with the laundry.

ISAAC

(Shift.)

I saw Mrs. Palmer's baby today. She's no bigger than Father's hand.

MOTHER

That's one good thing about babies: they do grow out of it.

ISAAC

She named her Mary. She's a saint.

MOTHER

No baby was ever a saint.

ISAAC

I mean Jesus' mother. Her name was Mary.

MOTHER

All mothers are are marked for sainthood, Isaac. Trouble is everything they know.

ISAAC

(A question as a statement.)

You're a saint.

MOTHER

Well, see what you've done? You've talked me into another circle. That's what too much talking does. A person can drown in their own words. It's better to let your actions speak for you - most the time.

ISAAC

Like Jesus dying on the cross.

MOTHER

In that, he's not alone.

ISAAC

I bet Mary cried.

MOTHER

Mothers cry. It's their fate.

ISAAC

Why don't you...

MOTHER

(Turns on ISAAC.)

Now that's enough, Isaac. Those are idle questions. You have enough time for questions like that, you need more to do. It does no good to pick away at the whys and wherefores. Believe me, it will infect your brain. Cripple you till you can't move. You do your duty in this life. No one should want anymore and no one should expect anymore, either.

(Grabs laundry basket and begins an exit.)

ISAAC

I cry.

(MOTHER stops, but keeps her back to ISAAC. ISAAC waits for some motherly response. MOTHER holds a moment and finally sits off.)

DOC

She left you alone with...

ISAAC

A lot. Solitary confinement.

DOC

What did you do?

ISAAC

What else? Played solitaire.

(Sits and mimes a game -.)

I played for hours. It's a lovely, simplistic ritual. The patterns and possibilities are finite, but never certain. And when all the cards fall into place, it's a satisfying - revelation. Everything perfectly aligned, ordered and comprehensible. A universe I can live with.

DOC

Could you live with your father?

ISAAC  
He couldn't even live with himself.

(FATHER enters and darkens  
the mood. DOC observes.)

FATHER  
That all you got to do?

ISAAC  
(As the boy.)  
Yes.

FATHER  
Waste of time. Where's my supper?

ISAAC  
(Mimes serving Father. The  
silence is thick.)  
Got an A on my paper today.

(Silence.)

ISAAC  
Teacher says I should tell you.

(More silence.)

ISAAC  
It's about monkeys.

(FATHER eyes ISAAC over a  
spoonful of stew. ISAAC  
breaks away.)

ISAAC  
Rabbits all been fed.

FATHER  
That's your job.

ISAAC  
Sure hate it when we have to slaughter them.

FATHER  
I told you before, they're not pets, they're food.

ISAAC  
They seem to know me.

FATHER  
Just feed them. Don't be holding 'em or scratching behind  
their ears. You get attached to something, it can suck you  
dry. Take your strength. Make pets out of them rabbits,  
you can starve right along with them.



ISAAC

We could eat more broccoli.

(FATHER freezes ISAAC with  
a steely look.)

FATHER

I - don't - like - broccoli.

(Shift.)

Now get on and make certain all the cages are shut tight.  
You know what happened last time.

(ISAAC crosses to leave.)

FATHER

And take those damn cards with you.

(ISAAC does.)

DOC

What happened - last time?

ISAAC

*Private* punishment.

DOC

You like playing with words.

ISAAC

(Crosses to DOC.)

I like playing charades better. Of course, I never lost a  
game since I was the only player. How about a quick match?  
Come on, Doc.

(Plays.)

Watch. Book. Six words. First word.

DOC

This game you're playing now. Will it help you get better?

ISAAC

It will keep me entertained.

DOC

That's why we have the television.

ISAAC

It's broken.

DOC

You're a clever young man, but that can only take you so far -  
as you have discovered.

ISAAC

Actually, I'm stupid as mud.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I don't know anything worth knowing - except that if you live by the rule of thumb, you live in anarchy.

DOC

You're hiding behind this - wall of words, Isaac. That's a lonely place to be.

ISAAC

Lonely? You don't know from lonely, Doc. I have a PhD in the subject. I know its every secret.

ANNA

Isaac.

ISAAC

(Hears Anna but carries on.)

I know how it...

(Lights up on ANNA.)

ANNA

Isaac!

ISAAC

How it...

ANNA

Listen to me!

(Softer.)

Listen. That was before you and I met. Together we were an entire universe. One whole thing - complete within itself.

ISAAC

(Out over audience.)

So why did you leave? Can you tell me that, Anna?

ANNA

I didn't leave.

(Places a hand on her chest.)

I'm here. In here, Isaac.

ISAAC

That's too damn far away.

ANNA

No, it's as close as we could ever be.

(Lights fade on ANNA.)

DOC

Isaac.

ISAAC

Anna -.

Isaac - who -? DOC

Anna! ISAAC

Who's there -? DOC

What? ISAAC  
(Turns on Doc.)

Where are you? DOC

Where? Hell, I'm imprisoned. ISAAC

But you have the key. DOC

I have nothing! Nothing. ISAAC

Life. Wit. DOC

There. ISAAC

You want something more. DOC

How about what you have? ISAAC

What do I have? DOC

This. ISAAC  
(Referring to the photographs.)

A family? DOC

Yes. ISAAC

Your daughter? (Reaches to pick up Doc's  
daughter's photograph.)

DOC  
(Claims the photograph.)  
Yes.

ISAAC  
Daddy's girl.

DOC  
(Forcibly.)  
Who's Anna?  
(Replaces photograph.)

ISAAC  
I'm not a threat to her -.

DOC  
Who's Anna, Isaac.

ISAAC  
Was, Doc.

DOC  
Was wh...

ISAAC  
A bogus greeting card from God.

DOC  
Are you angry with -?

ISAAC  
Are you? Hey? Are any of those - butchered babies?

DOC  
(Referencing the photo.)  
You can't see God's handiwork in that?

ISAAC  
I see Mother Nature run amuck. I see a barbarous abortion.  
I see life devouring itself without apologies. I don't see  
a god in that at all.

DOC  
Where do you see God?

ISAAC  
Is this legal? Don't you work for he state? You know, give  
me that old-time religion, but don't put it on the  
government's tab.

DOC  
If it will aid with your recovery, it's justified. Besides,  
a man's faith helps define him.

ISAAC  
And if he has no faith?

DOC  
Is that possible?

ISAAC  
You're asking me?

DOC  
Your major is religious studies.

ISAAC  
Studies, Doc.

DOC  
Four point oh.

ISAAC  
Multiple choice!

DOC  
No second guessing there.

ISAAC  
No doubt, either.

DOC  
Who doesn't doubt?

ISAAC  
The dead. Living and otherwise.

(MOTHER enters the kitchen  
with groceries and puts  
them away during -.)

DOC  
Another - lesson you learned from your parents?

ISAAC  
The both of them taught me something much more - devastating.  
How Isaac, you're going to ask. Answer: they never touched  
one another.

FATHER  
You're late.

MOTHER  
I'm human. Sometimes I'm early, sometimes I'm late.

FATHER  
You ought to give the restaurant over -.

MOTHER  
And do what?

FATHER  
You work too hard.

MOTHER  
I work to forget.

(A sustained moment. FATHER  
gives way.)

FATHER  
Yeah, well, your boy's doing...

MOTHER  
Our boy -.

FATHER  
He's doing all right in school.

MOTHER  
That's something.

FATHER  
He might grow to be somebody.

MOTHER  
I hope not - for his sake.

FATHER  
Hellfire, Millie -.

MOTHER  
Save that country talk for your cronies. This is an awful  
business. We're yoked to it, but Isaac doesn't have to be.  
Leave him free.

FATHER  
I'm telling you, this is a bad way to live.

MOTHER  
And who's to blame? Anyway we're done mewling over it,  
remember? Now we do our duty, stand by our...

FATHER  
A man's got to have more in his life than his duty.

MOTHER  
A man's got to own up to his responsibilities - that's what  
a man's got to do. You of all people should know we reap  
what we sow. And this harvest you will bring to maturity.

(They study one another  
before -.)

FATHER

Well, he should grow real good in all this - manure.

(FATHER sits off. MOTHER  
gets busy at the sink.)

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

Some childhood, yeah?

DOC

It's difficult for you to...

ISAAC

That very first apple must have been bitter. Don't you think? Cause it sure has given us one heck of a belly ache. And you best take your medicine or it's infernal damnation. We just can't figure out if that's heaven or hell. Or life here on Earth. You ever watch a baby sleeping?

(DOC involuntarily glances  
at the photograph.)

ISAAC

Of course. Sure. That's life in its purist form. Treasure it, Doc. Because once she discovers language, the angst begins. You know why? Because we're guilty of being born a rational creature. Being born with a brain that won't let him sleep at night. Being born with the ability to ask but not receive. Being born capable of loving and hating and ruthless neglect-.

DOC

Like your parents?

ISAAC

Given the opportunity, my mother would have aborted me.

DOC

She told you that?

ISAAC

Her cruelty was much more refined and much less hysterical.

DOC

About the teacup - what do you believe now?

ISAAC

That's the entire point, isn't it?

(Lights up on CARL.)

CARL

(Stands.)

Class, consider this: When a Homo sapien is born, it has a brain one-third the size of an adult. By the time a child reaches the age of six or seven, the brain is adult-sized. That is about 1300 grams. Humans are born in such an immature state so they can pass through the birth canal. If the pelvis was larger to account for an adult-sized brain, it would subtract from any gains realized by walking upright on two legs. But even given this adaptation of delivering an immature fetus, the size of an infant's head is such that women experience a great deal of difficulty and pain when giving birth. This might be to what the snake in the garden was referring: our great sin is our great brain.

(Lights to dim on CARL.  
Sits.)

ISAAC

When I was eight or nine, my mother, bless her soul, taught me a prayer.

(Lights up on MOTHER.)

MOTHER

Time for bed, Isaac.

(ISAAC crosses downstage.)

ISAAC

Okay.

(Mimes putting on pajamas.)

MOTHER

(Joins ISAAC.)

Kneel at your bedside.

(ISAAC does.)

MOTHER

Repeat after me. Now I lay me down to sleep.

ISAAC

Now I lay me down to sleep.

MOTHER

I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

ISAAC

I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

MOTHER

If I should die before I wake.



ISAAC

If I should die before I wake.

MOTHER

I pray the Lord my soul to take.

ISAAC

I pray the Lord my soul to take.

MOTHER

Good.

(Reaches out a tentative hand to caress ISAAC's head, hesitates and then withdraws it.)

Sleep well.

(MOTHER sits off.)

ISAAC

Sleep well?

(Stands.)

Are you kidding? She had just scared the hell out of me. I didn't know you could die in your sleep. I had seen fish die, chickens, dead deer across the hoods of cars, and old Harold Doresy boxed and buried. But not boys. Bedtime became a nightmare after being taught that prayer. Darkness a tomb. Huddled under the covers, eyes jacked wide open, I fought sleep in futile desperation. Hours ticked passed. The longer I remained awake, the longer it took for each minute to tick-tock. Tick-tock. Finally, my mind gave in. And I survived, but the seed had been planted. It's still there, firmly rooted, but other - demons haunt me now.

DOC

You realize it's a prayer from the Dark Ages.

ISAAC

What smugness. These are all Dark Ages, despite Edison. They all have their trolls, ogres, and big-bad wolves. Their mythologies to help us make it through the night.

(Shift.)

I believed everything as a child. Santa Claus, tooth fairies, goblins. I was Play-Doh in the hands of the world. God and every other illusion were possible. Every shape and shadow was something more than itself. The branches of a winter mulberry tree stretching across the wall some predatory creature; the coat hanging from the rack a hulking monster, and certainly there was something lurking under the bed. Something real. Something somehow sheets and blankets could put off. But getting into bed was the trick. Too slow and the cold, slick hand would grab an ankle and your heart would explode in your chest. So quickly and from a distance - up, in and under the covers. Safe. And don't look. My god, what would happen if you ever dared look?

DOC

You might learn the truth.

ISAAC

Exactly.

DOC

You don't want to know the truth?

ISAAC

You know I was afraid to sit on the toilet as a boy.  
Something might have grabbed my ass.

DOC

Nothing did.

ISAAC

It's biding its time.

DOC

Most children grow out of those misconceptions.

ISAAC

Have you?

DOC

Again, this is not about me.

ISAAC

Of course it's about you. You're alive aren't you? You can  
think can't you? You've got mortality thumbing its nose at  
you - right?

DOC

I didn't maim...

ISAAC

NO, YOU DID NOT! But if that's the criteria for sanity,  
then we should all be lame since we're crippled anyway.

DOC

Stick to the point -.

ISAAC

It is the point! We're hobbling about on our primitive  
religious prostheses pretending to be saved. But the dead  
stay dead!

(Shift.)

You're a patient man.

DOC

It comes with the territory.

ISAAC

Your little girl is lucky.

DOC  
My little girl doesn't concern you!

ISAAC  
Hey, that was a - brick out of my wall.

DOC  
Good. I'll mention it in my notes.

(ISAAC and DOC hold a moment.)

ISAAC  
(Breaks away.)  
My mother, she left me - notes. Did I tell you?

(MOTHER enters the kitchen  
with cloth and silver to  
polish and sits at the  
table.)

ISAAC  
No endearing salutation. No complimentary close.

(MOTHER mimes writing.)

ISAAC  
Isaac, she'd write.

MOTHER  
Come straight home after school. Tend to the rabbits then  
hurry to the restaurant. The dishes don't do themselves.

ISAAC  
Isaac -.

MOTHER  
Tell the milkman we need two bottles now not five. Three  
will go bad in this weather. That's good money wasted.  
(Polishes silver during -.)

(ISAAC stands and crosses  
to the kitchen on -.)

ISAAC  
On Mondays the restaurant closed. Time to do the housework.  
Don't leave any fingerprints. Hide the clues. Disguise the  
evidence. But even though she kept us busy, I remained  
curious.

(Sits. To MOTHER.)  
Mom, what's fornication?

MOTHER  
It's a foul word and don't be repeating it.

ISAAC  
David says it's in the Bible.

MOTHER  
Where it should stay.

ISAAC  
But ministers read...

MOTHER  
It's for adults.

ISAAC  
Fornication?

MOTHER  
The Bible, Isaac.

ISAAC  
But they give them out at church school. David told me...

MOTHER  
And I've told you to mind your business and stay away from David.

ISAAC  
He's in my class.

(MOTHER checks ISAAC with a look then returns to her work.)

ISAAC  
Maggie says it means sex. Bet you can look up it in a dictionary.

MOTHER  
(Turns on ISAAC.)  
Listen to me, Isaac. Sex is not something you talk about. That business gets people in trouble. Ruins entire lives. It's a curse. Keep your mind on your studies.

ISAAC  
They say it's how you make babies.

MOTHER  
Well, there you are! That proves my point.

(They study one another - MOTHER regretting, ISAAC struggling to get her meaning.)

MOTHER

(Softer.)

Anyway, a boy's got plenty of other things he should tend to.

(Stands and crosses up to cupboard.)

ISAAC

Okay.

(Shift.)

Did you know David's family goes to church every Sunday, not just Easter.

MOTHER

(Puts silver and cloth away.)

They don't own a restaurant.

ISAAC

They're lucky.

MOTHER

You take what's given and you don't complain.

ISAAC

Can I go to church?

MOTHER

Ask your father. He's a man for preaching.  
(Sits off.)

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

I did. I should have left well enough alone.

DOC

Ignorance is bliss?

ISAAC

Bliss is a delusion.

(Exits kitchen and crosses downstage and to the church on the following-.)

But until I learned that, I was proud to walk at my father's side up the steps and into the steepled building.

(MINISTER stands at the 'door' greeting folks - and ISAAC.)

ISAAC

Stained glass along either wall bathed the wooden pews with multicolored light.

(MINISTER crosses upstage to his 'pulpit'.)

ISAAC

Flowers decorated the altar. The cross behind the pulpit hung empty. It was beautiful. Everything orderly, neat, safe. And when the organist pounded out the first hymn, I joined in the singing as if I was born to it:

ISAAC/MINISTER

(Singing mightily.)

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty Heaven and Earth -.

ISAAC

(Speaking.)

My god, what a glorious racket. Jacob's Ladder, Jesus Loves Me. Hallelujah! Those hymns resonated in me well after the service, and I looked forward to Sunday mornings in church where the world was right and welcoming and I, embraced by my new family, sang.

(MINISTER and ISAAC sing  
Amazing Grace. ISAAC stops  
when they come to the word  
'wretch'.)

(MINISTER comes down from  
the pulpit to ISAAC.)

MINISTER

You don't like saying that word?

(ISAAC - as a boy - shakes  
head no.)

MINISTER

You aren't a wretch?

(Again, no.)

MINISTER

So every time you sing that song -.

ISAAC

I leave that word out.

MINISTER

It's a strong word.

ISAAC

I'm a boy, a good boy, and I know what that word means.

MINISTER

It doesn't seem right?

ISAAC

If you're made in God's own image, how can you be a wretch?

MINISTER  
We are all sinners.

ISAAC  
Why?

MINISTER  
Because we were born.

ISAAC  
I was an accident. That's what my father said.

MINISTER  
No baby is an accident.

ISAAC  
Accidents hurt.

MINISTER  
They do, but each infant is a gift.

ISAAC  
Even though we're born sinners?

MINISTER  
(A take on ISAAC.)  
What's your name?

ISAAC  
Isaac.

MINISTER  
Well, you're a - precocious child, Isaac.

ISAAC  
Precocious. Good or bad?

MINISTER  
Problematic.

ISAAC  
Bad.

MINISTER  
Not necessarily.

ISAAC  
It's how I feel.

MINISTER  
God can make you feel better.

ISAAC  
Why?

MINISTER  
He's merciful.

ISAAC  
Not to the babies.

MINISTER  
What babies?

ISAAC  
All the dead ones.

MINISTER  
You have to be more specific -.

ISAAC  
Never mind, Reverend!  
(MINISTER returns to his  
chair and ISAAC crosses  
back to DOC.)

One little word wasn't going to separate me from the joy I  
felt. Wretch aside, people loved each other in that church,  
during the service. And by association - loved me.

DOC  
It's important to feel accepted.

ISAAC  
Yeah. Is that Freud or a fortune cookie?

DOC  
Humor is a great mask.

ISAAC  
It's a great tonic, Doc. A snake-oil guy like you should  
know this. It cures everything.

DOC  
Everything? What about death and...

ISAAC  
Ah, death. The bane of our existence.

(Lights up on CARL.)

CARL  
(Stands.)  
Clever, as usual, Mr. Graber. It's true that we humans are  
obsessed with dying. In fact, we are the only animal that  
buries its dead. Why? Some have suggested that our  
developing sense of self-awareness and the mysterious workings  
of the universe prodded us to adapt rituals to fill in the  
blanks. It's not clear.

(MORE)



CARL (CONT'D)

But there is a relationship between the evolving size of our brains and the introduction of the burial practice. Homo sapien means wise man, but evolutionary attributes have their cost. The more our cognitive abilities increased, the more dissonance we felt with being. Funny, that.

(Sits. Dim lights.)

ISAAC

(To CARL. Gesturing with his gloved hand.)

Yeah, funny that. And funny all the rest of it. Right, Professor?

(Stands and crosses down center on -.)

I mean we better keep our sense of humor. Keep 'em laughing. Serve them pumpernickel not white bread, Zambonis and zucchini not snowplows and squash. Pies-in-the-face and punch lines.

(Eyes his inured hand.)

Otherwise, we might -.

(Holds on his hand.)

Know what happens when you hit your funny bone, Doc? You feel pain.

DOC

What happened to your...

ISAAC

Now that's a scream, right? Like the optometrist who had rear ends on his eye chart so he could check his patients for hindsight.

DOC

Isaac -.

ISAAC

Or the surgeon who was all thumbs - which was great when he needed a ride, but bad news in the surgical ward.

DOC

Isaac -.

ISAAC

(To Doc.)

Tell me what to do with all the pain?!

DOC

Give it up.

ISAAC

Give me something in return!

DOC

I can't!

(This revelation unsettles  
ISAAC and DOC. A long  
moment where they shift to  
safer ground.)

ISAAC  
I never heard my father laugh. Not once.

(FATHER enters.)

DOC  
Why didn't your father laugh?

ISAAC  
(To FATHER.)  
Why?

FATHER  
A trapped animal don't give a damn for laughter.

ISAAC  
(To DOC.)  
He lived a lie.

FATHER  
Boy! Boy, get yourself over here. Now.

(ISAAC crosses over to  
FATHER.)

FATHER  
Look, boy, you left the gate unlatched again and we got  
chickens crapping all over the sidewalk and back porch. How  
many times do I have to tell you to bring the gate fully to  
and make sure it catches? Nobody likes to walk in bird shit -  
especially your mother. Now you got yourself a job to do.

ISAAC  
But I've got ...

FATHER  
No buts, boy. I want to see chickens in their coop and all  
this clean enough to eat from.

ISAAC  
I'll get it right, Father.

FATHER  
Well, you haven't yet.

(FATHER takes hold of the  
hatchet handle. Hefts the  
hatchet.)

ISAAC

(To DOC)

My father was all sharp angles and hard edges. If reason didn't work, he used his fists to win an argument. He called me boy and nothing else.

(FATHER buries the head of the hatchet into the chopping block.)

FATHER

Boy, we've got the roof to finish for the hutches before dinner. Get the saw and tape measure from the box.

(ISAAC and FATHER 'mime' the following.)

FATHER

Cut us four feet from this two-by-four.

(ISAAC gets to work. FATHER looks over from his task.)

FATHER

Hold on. Hold on. How many times I got to tell you: measure twice, cut once?

ISAAC

(Makes the adjustments.)

Jesus was a carpenter.

FATHER

It's a useful occupation.

ISAAC

What do you suppose he made?

FATHER

Whatever was needed.

ISAAC

I bet he had hands like yours.

FATHER

You do honest work, your hands will tell the story. Calluses are nothing to be ashamed of.

ISAAC

When I'm grown up, I want to be strong as you.

FATHER

(Softens momentarily.)

Well, there's nothing wrong with that. You got to work at it, though. Get your nose out of them books.

ISAAC

But I like reading.

FATHER

Reading never built a house.

ISAAC

It can teach you how.

FATHER

Damn, boy. I tell you - you read too much. It's filled you up with words. Hand me the pliers. You learn how by doing. Nothing ever got accomplished by sitting on your ass.

ISAAC

Could Jesus read?

FATHER

Hellfire, boy. Do you have to ask so many questions?

ISAAC

Yes.

FATHER

Well, it's damned irritating.

ISAAC

Don't you have any questions?

(A moment.)

FATHER

Not anymore. Now finish with that board.

(FATHER sits off on and  
ISAAC crosses to church  
during-.)

DOC

But you did attend church with him.

ISAAC

Yes. Despite the unanswered prayers.

(Lights up on MINISTER.)

MINISTER

(Stands.)

Remember, Isaac, when you pray: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and knowledge.'

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

What does that mean?

I'm not sure. DOC

Neither was he - really. ISAAC

(MINISTER crosses down to ISAAC.)

Reverend, where is God? ISAAC

Right in there. MINISTER  
(Taps ISAAC'S chest.)

He's very small. ISAAC

God can be as small and as big as he likes. One size fits all. MINISTER

Does he want me to love him or fear him? ISAAC

He wants you to trust him. MINISTER

To do what? ISAAC

Keep his promises. MINISTER

Which promises? ISAAC

Read your Bible, Isaac. MINISTER

Have you? ISAAC

Of course. MINISTER

So? ISAAC

All right. To answer when we call on him. MINISTER  
(Holds on ISAAC a moment.)

ISAAC

I talk to God.

MINISTER

And he listens.

ISAAC

I've asked him for a little brother. Hundreds of times.

MINISTER

God answers prayers in his own way.

ISAAC

But how many different ways can he answer that one?

MINISTER

We can't know God's wisdom.

ISAAC

What can we know?

MINISTER

That he loves you - just like your mother and father.

ISAAC

I hope not.

MINISTER

Isaac! Either way, that's a terrible thing to say.

ISAAC

If God loves me like my mother and father, then no one loves me.

(Lights up on ANNA.)

ANNA

Wrong, Isaac! That's wrong.

(ISAAC registers ANNA'S  
remark.)

ANNA

I loved you. I did.

ISAAC

(Stands. Out over the  
audience.)

Not enough, Anna. Not enough to stay.

ANNA

The love is still there.

ISAAC

I know! What am I supposed to do with it now?

ANNA

Use it, Isaac. Use it to breathe. Use it to live. Use it to keep you safe.

ISAAC

Where are we ever safe? Hey? Are we ever safe, Anna? No. You taught me that. You.

(Lights fading on ANNA -.)

ANNA

It was - accidental -.

ISAAC

Finding you or losing you?

ANNA

Both.

ISAAC

Then nothing can be trusted.  
(Begins an 'exit' to DOC'S office.)

MINISTER

(Crossing to ISAAC.)

Isaac, wait -.

(ISAAC faces MINISTER.)

MINISTER

I care for you.

ISAAC

You're supposed to. It's your job.

MINISTER

Love is not work.

ISAAC

Explain that to my - folks.

MINISTER

People have different ways of communicating their affections.

ISAAC

My parents must speak a foreign language.

MINISTER

Love is a universal tongue.

ISAAC

Then I am deaf!

(ISAAC crosses away.)

MINISTER

Only to what you won't hear!

(MINISTER returns to his  
church and sits.)

DOC

He kept the faith.

ISAAC

He spoke in - aphorisms. He didn't get it.

DOC

About your parents?

(MOTHER enters with bowls  
and green beans to work.)

ISAAC

At first.

(MOTHER sits at the table  
and works the beans -.)

DOC

But finally, you're the issue here.

ISAAC

Right again, Doc. I'm the issue.

(Enters the kitchen.)

Me. The bad seed.

(Retrieves the Bible.)

Read all about it.

(To MOTHER. As an older  
boy.)

Look what I found.

MOTHER

Good Lord. You better take care of that. It's been in the  
family for years.

ISAAC

Whose family?

MOTHER

Ours. But your father's - before.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

When I discovered our Bible, its weight gave it significance  
before I even read a word. Inside were the most marvelous  
paintings: vibrant, full-color illustrations of mayhem and  
murder, of raging sexuality and creatures fierce and  
foreboding. A real candidate for a banning - or burning.

(MORE)



ISAAC (CONT'D)

(Shift.)

It had been in my father's family for several generations. In the front, were pages to register our genealogy. Who married whom and beget whom. My father's family were great begetters. But all three of our names were missing.

(To MOTHER.)

Why aren't our names in the book. On this page?

MOTHER

Can't say.

ISAAC

We could do it now.

MOTHER

It's not something you just do. It takes considerable thought.

ISAAC

I've thought about it - a lot.

MOTHER

Leave it for your father. Yes, he should surely be the one.

ISAAC

(To DOC while returning Bible to its place.)

Once I got beyond the pictures, I read: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

(To MOTHER.)

Do you believe that?

MOTHER

It's the word of God.

ISAAC

And God doesn't lie?

MOTHER

Why should he? It's his story.

ISAAC

Seven days?

MOTHER

You don't question the truth.

ISAAC

Unless, of course, it isn't.

MOTHER

Where did you get that idea?

ISAAC

There are other books.

MOTHER

There's only one good book.

ISAAC

There are lots of good books. I've read some of them.

MOTHER

There's only one right book.

ISAAC

Not according to the Mormons or the Muslims or the Hindus  
or...

MOTHER

Bring me your library card.

ISAAC

I read about them in school.

MOTHER

(Shift.)

An education like that is good for nothing.

ISAAC

I'm beginning to agree.

(Shift.)

You know what teaching most every religion shares? Love one  
another.

MOTHER

Wishful thinking.

ISAAC

Apparently.

(A moment.)

MOTHER

Well, there you are.

ISAAC

Yes, here we are.

(Another.)

MOTHER

You read too much - that's all.

(Sits off with bowls and  
beans.)

ISAAC

(To MOTHER on her 'exit'.)

Who else will keep me company?

(Crosses to DOC.)

They were right. I read too much. As an only child with two parents who worked 14 hour days, I read everything. From Pooh to Poe. Even the Russians.

DOC

And the Bible.

ISAAC

(Sits.)

Yes, but it doesn't hold together. It's poorly plotted. Too many coincidences. Too much exposition. Contradictions. It's schizophrenic. It doesn't know if it wants to be fiction or fact, metaphor or truth.

DOC

But you were reading it even on the day you...

ISAAC

Pruning it.

DOC

So the Bible is a fiction generated solely by man?

ISAAC

Don't go looking for your own convictions through me.

DOC

But there is some truth in it?

ISAAC

There's got to be, it wanders around so much.

DOC

Where? Where is it?

ISAAC

In the fornication.

DOC

That's not funny.

ISAAC

Fornication, if done correctly, can be very funny. Ask my parents.

DOC

You're blocking again.

ISAAC

Of course I'm blocking. My life has gone to hell. I'm locked away. My hand throbs. My head aches -.

DOC

What frightens you most?!

(FATHER enters carrying boxing gloves. MOTHER enters to the kitchen with the empty bowls and works them. ISAAC eyes FATHER.)

ISAAC

My father who art on Earth.

FATHER

Boy!

(Puts on his gloves during-)

ISAAC

When I was older, my father wanted to make a man of his only child. Toughen me up. His method was simple. He put us in boxing gloves and pummeled...

FATHER

Boy. Come on over here and get your gloves.

(ISAAC crosses downstage.)

ISAAC

I can't. I've...

FATHER

I wasn't asking you. Now.

(ISAAC turns and puts on the gloves - reluctantly during -.)

FATHER

Been noticing your attitude lately. It needs an adjustment. Fancy words and highfalutin ideas been steering you wrong. But you're not to disrespect your parents. You do what you're told till you're of age and out of the house. Get your hands up just like I showed you.

(They circle. Probing jabs by FATHER.)

FATHER

Understand you got plans for college. Well, good. That's what this world needs: one more smart-ass who doesn't know shit. In real life, boy, you got decisions to make, don't have time to consult a damn library. Tuck your head. Hands high. You do what a man does and don't say sorry afterwards. Hell, it won't matter anyway. Make a mistake and they'll make you pay. Oh yeah.

(MORE)

FATHER (CONT'D)

(Snapping off his jabs now.)

You'll pay and pay for the rest of your born days. Damn-it, boy, get some fire in you. Hurt me!

(ISAAC manages to slip an ineffectual jab through FATHER'S defense. It surprises FATHER. A grin creases his features.)

FATHER

Well. You got lucky. You best defend yourself now. Come on, you mama's boy. All you've ever given me is grief.

(FATHER crashes ISAAC to the ground with a vicious blow.)

(ISAAC removes the gloves on -.)

FATHER

Never let your guard down, boy. The world will crush you if you do.

MOTHER

(Exits kitchen.)

My God, was that necessary?! Look what you've done to him!

FATHER

Look what you've done to him. To us. To me!

(FATHER sits off. MOTHER makes a tentative move toward ISAAC. Their eyes catch. A moment before she gathers the boxing gloves into her arms - not ISAAC and sits off. ISAAC pushes to his feet.)

DOC

He's a small man.

ISAAC

He could hold a sledge hammer, arm extended horizontally, till those cows came home. And except for the law, he would have used it to strike fear into all those who sinned against him.

DOC

You see a relationship between God and your father.

ISAAC

(Crosses to church on -.)  
Sophistry will lead you everywhere.

DOC

You're terribly angry with both of them.

ISAAC

Hell, God doesn't even wear gloves. It's bare knuckles and no quarter.

DOC

Why were you reading from the New Test...

(Lights up on MINISTER.)

ISAAC

You know what I liked best about going to church, Doc? Christmas Eve. Yes. The midnight service. What a show. Lit candles punctuating the atmosphere. Pine boughs and poinsettias decorating the altar. Everyone hushed and full of great expectations. I mean, Doc, there was literally magic in the air. And the carols. What terrific incantations.

(Sings.)

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye...

(Stops abruptly.)

But even that was defiled when I began reading the Bible - closely.

MINISTER

(Stands.)

Welcome friends and neighbors. Welcome to our celebration of Christ's birth. Let us begin our service with the word of the Lord. Matthew, Chapter Two, Verses 1 through 15. 'Now Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King...

ISAAC

What about verse 16?

MINISTER

Not tonight.

ISAAC

And 18?

MINISTER

Another time. Sit down.

ISAAC

Is it not all the word of God?

MINISTER

Yes. Of course...

ISAAC

Then we shouldn't leave anything out, should we?

MINISTER

(Crosses down to ISAAC.)

We read what is pertinent.

ISAAC

We leave things out, then it becomes the word of man. It seems unlikely God would want us to edit his work.

MINISTER

It must be read with historical perspective.

ISAAC

Let's give God his due. Let's hear the bits you always skip over. Matthew 2:16 reads: 'Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under.'

MINISTER

We're celebrating a birth...

ISAAC

And Matthew 2:18: 'In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and they would not be comforted, because they were not.' Hundreds, maybe thousands of babies were murdered on Christmas Eve - according to the word of God.

MINISTER

For Christ's sake!

ISAAC

Exactly! Were they gift wrapped?

MINISTER

That's outrageous!

ISAAC

I know! *That* is the point.

MINISTER

It was prophesied!

ISAAC

Was that explained to the lamenting mothers? Did that *mollify* their grief? Wash those manglers free of blood? Ease the terror of their dreams?

(To DOC.)

Ease the terror of my dreams.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I woke up after I found out about the babies, feverish with the terrifying images of the slaughter, of swords flashing, of my own mother standing over me prepared to deliver a fatal blow; her eyes blazing with fury. My God, what was I supposed to do with the babies?

(To MINISTER.)

Can anyone tell me?

(MINISTER turns his back.)

ISAAC

(Out over the audience.)

Anyone?

(Sustained silence. On DOC'S line, MINISTER crosses up to his chair, hangs up his vestment and sits.)

DOC

What *did* you do with them, Isaac? The babies?

ISAAC

(Crosses to DOC.)

What every good Christian has done. I buried them. What about you?

DOC

Until today, I hadn't given it much thought.

ISAAC

They won't rest easy.

DOC

No, I wouldn't think so.

ISAAC

They haunt me.

DOC

Yes, I can imagine.

ISAAC

I can't let them go.

DOC

That would be - difficult to do.

ISAAC

But I needed church. It was all I had. I prayed longer, sang louder and fought every day to grow a faith.

DOC

Faith is a leap -.



ISAAC

Into a black abyss.

DOC

We all have a fear of falling.

ISAAC

So what denomination is your parachute?

DOC

Without it...

ISAAC

With it we excuse the slaughter of...

DOC

All right!

ISAAC

NO, it is not all right! It's monstrous.

DOC

(A shift.)

Of course.

ISAAC

They never had a chance. I - never had a chance.

DOC

No.

ISAAC

I want to - strike back.

DOC

Yes, it's a natural reaction.

ISAAC

I want to hurt just as I was hurt.

DOC

Yes, but anger disables us. When anger is all we have, pain is all we know. It's all we can trade in.

ISAAC

But the pain is unrelenting.

DOC

I understand.

ISAAC

And what should be - held dear is left to the blind...

DOC  
Life is dear - surely! But particular lives, seemingly, are not.

ISAAC  
No.

DOC  
Even a child as beautiful as light.

ISAAC  
Who - are we taking about?

DOC  
What?

ISAAC  
Whose life?

DOC  
Never mind.

ISAAC  
Whose life, Doc?!

DOC  
Move on.

ISAAC  
Your daughter's?

DOC  
I'm telling you to...

ISAAC  
Is that what's on *your* mind?

DOC  
What's on my mind isn't important.

ISAAC  
Now you sound like my parents.

DOC  
You know better.

ISAAC  
I know you're - conflicted.

DOC  
This isn't going to work -.

ISAAC  
Not unless you give it up -.

DOC  
Don't press me any further.

ISAAC  
What's her name?

DOC  
I can cancel...

ISAAC  
Just her name!

DOC  
Jessica!

(A moment.)

ISAAC  
How old is she?

DOC  
As old as she will ever be.

ISAAC  
Doc?

DOC  
What?

ISAAC  
I'm - you know - sorry.

(A moment.)

DOC  
Your - father, *he* needs forgiving.

ISAAC  
*He* should look elsewhere for that.

DOC  
Not for his sake.

ISAAC  
I remember how he struck me.

DOC  
It would help to understand...

ISAAC  
I understand he neglected me. I understand he enjoyed hurting me. I understand he never forgave me or my mother for his small life.

DOC  
What - tormented him?

ISAAC  
The Red Sox.

DOC  
And you?

ISAAC  
Saved by the damned Yankees.

DOC  
To spite him?

ISAAC  
I'm a front-runner, Doc. Losers bet on the long shots.

DOC  
They have compassion.

ISAAC  
Compassion is what they hung on the cross.

DOC  
Move beyond the patter, Isaac.

ISAAC  
To what?

DOC  
Your truth.

ISAAC  
The facts?

DOC  
Yes.

ISAAC  
Fact: Are there ten commandments or six?

DOC  
I'm not a theologian.

ISAAC  
Theologians give up the right to think.

DOC  
That's inflammatory language.

ISAAC  
So here I am in hell, Doc. Which makes you what? Damn.  
Damn! I've had enough.

DOC

Our time isn't up.

ISAAC

Who's delusional now?

DOC

I meant our time together.

ISAAC

I know what you meant. Do you get paid hourly or by the revelation?

DOC

I don't believe that is relevant.

ISAAC

Relevant beliefs. Hallelujah! Now you're on to something, Doc. Now you've really nailed it. Everything is relevant, isn't it? Or is that relative? Especially our theologies. Sure. It's a potluck, a smorgasbord, a carnival with enough sideshows to satisfy every possible fantasy.

(MOTHER, FATHER, CARL,  
MINISTER and ANNA stand  
on ISAAC'S 'step'. ISAAC  
works the stage like a  
carnival barker.)

ISAAC

So step right up, folks. Don't pass this opportunity by. We have a religion for every individual need. If we don't, we'll tailor-make one just for you. Too many rules? Why we'll lop a few off. Too many icons? Don't worry, we'll burn some to ashes. The music's too stodgy? Fine, we'll kick up the tempo. Can't live with the devil. Not a problem. We'll whitewash over the conflicting dogma.

(To MOTHER.)

How about you, lady? Which flavor of the month would you like?

MOTHER

That kind of talk will earn you a seat in hell.

ISAAC

Or the loony bin.

(To FATHER.)

And you, sir, care to choose? We have a special on multiple wives.

FATHER

You piss on your religion and your life ain't but shit.

ISAAC

(To MINISTER.)

I see you've already made your selection. Are you happy with it? Could I interest you in a new model? Something without *stained* glass?

MINISTER

And you used to sing so beautifully in church. But the Lord hasn't given up on you. I haven't given up on you.

ISAAC

(To CARL.)

You, Professor, are you buying or selling?

CARL

Neither, I'm simply being.

ISAAC

(Turns toward ANNA. She steps toward him, but he can't go there, shakes her off and turns on DOC aggressively.)

And you? Care to pick something from the Top Forty?

(In a false voice.)

I like this one, Mr. Clark. It's got great lyrics and the rhythm is heavenly.

(As himself.)

Come on. Get with it! I can't do this by myself.

DOC

Leave it alone!

ISAAC

You've got to come down on something, Doc. Have to make a choice. Can't just stand on the sidelines and live through other peoples' lives. Stick your neck out. See what it feels like to get your face kicked in by the steel-toed boot of God.

(Referencing the photograph.)

But hell, I guess you're learning all about that. Right? Yeah, something from the war chest for you. A call to arms.

(Sings.)

Onward Christian soldiers marching off to war with the cross of Jesus -

(Speaking.)

I don't hear you, Doc. Sing out! Sing out for Jessica...

DOC

(Stands and confronts.)

Stay away from that! Back away. Where do you get off mocking what's sacred to millions of people? Who are you?

(MORE)

DOC (CONT'D)

Your pitiful, self-centered rantings; your self-indulgent, grandiose mutilation are no license for ripping down two thousand years of - of hope. What you did is grandstanding - a bloody look at me - somebody pay attention to me. A red flag - a - .

(He comes to a stop. Works to calm himself.)

I'm sorry.

(Sustained silence.)

ISAAC

What are we doing here, Doc?

DOC

Trying to - reconcile - ourselves.

ISAAC

Yeah. Okay. Hey, Doc, you want to know something really funny?

DOC

Sure.

ISAAC

My parents are brother and sister.

DOC

Hilarious.

(Takes several seconds before realizing he has just been told something profound. He makes a slow turn to face ISAAC.)

I'll be damned.

ISAAC

Aren't we all?

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING: The same.

AT RISE: Everything is as the end of Act I.

DOC

How did you find out?

(CARL, ANNA, MINISTER, MOTHER  
and FATHER sit.)

ISAAC

He went on one of his weekend binges. Vacations he called them.

(Crosses to kitchen.)

It was a bitter-cold Friday night. I turned on every light in the house, despite my mother's instructions. Turned up the heat, too.

(Crosses to cupboard and  
finds the box.)

Alone and desperate for any diversion, I climbed up into the attic, found a locked box and picked it open.

(Carries it to the table  
and sits.)

Inside I discovered two birth certificates. One was hers, the other my father's. Same last name. Same mother. Same father.

DOC

That's not conclusive...

ISAAC

And there, buried underneath the photographs, another birth certificate. Mine. No father recorded. At least not officially. In pencil, in my mother's script, her brother's name. Do you think she would write it there if it wasn't true?

DOC

Probably not. When she passed, she wanted you to know.

ISAAC

It would have been one last parting shot.

DOC

Not everything is done in spite.

ISAAC

But what was done was done in sin. And I was the result.

DOC

Obviously you are not the cause.



ISAAC

Obviously you are not listening to your patient. I was the unspeakable. I was the daily reminder of their frailty. Their punishment for having - damn - gone astray. No wonder he pummeled me. The sorry bastard.

(FATHER enters looking weary.  
ISAAC hides the box. FATHER  
sees ISAAC and affects his  
usual give-em-hell demeanor.)

ISAAC

You've been gone three days. One more than usual.

FATHER

I had business.

ISAAC

You took the tin money.

FATHER

I earned it.

ISAAC

It's for paying expenses.

FATHER

Well, you ain't sitting out in the cold so I guess you survived.

(Crosses to cupboard.)

ISAAC

Where'd you go?

FATHER

(Finds the whiskey bottle.  
and shot glass.)

Home.

ISAAC

This is home.

FATHER

To the farm.

ISAAC

You sold that farm.

FATHER

(Pours a shot.)

Damn shame.

ISAAC

I bet.

FATHER

What?

ISAAC

I didn't know if you were coming back - this time.

FATHER

(Leaving the bottle in plain sight, he crosses back to the table and sits -.)

Here I am.

ISAAC

Why do you come back?

FATHER

I live here. Why wouldn't I come back? Damn funny question to ask me.

(Drinks.)

ISAAC

You liked that farm.

(No response.)

ISAAC

You liked that farm so much I can't understand why you sold it.

FATHER

Too much work.

ISAAC

For my mother, when she was pregnant with me?

FATHER

Yeah, I suppose so.

ISAAC

Probably better to leave than stay.

(FATHER gives ISAAC a sharp look.)

ISAAC

I mean - it would have been awkward. Too many questions.

FATHER

Questions about what?

ISAAC

You know, how Mother got pregnant.

FATHER

In the usual way, you jackass. Damn.

ISAAC

But the circumstances - they were unusual, weren't they?

FATHER

What's eating at you?

ISAAC

(Sets the box on the table.)

This.

FATHER

(Completely engaged now.)

That's none of your damn business.

ISAAC

Of course it's my damn business. My birth certificate is in here.

(Moves to swing open the lid.)

FATHER

(Slams lid closed.)

Stop yourself right there.

ISAAC

It's not a secret anymore.

FATHER

Don't cross that line. You don't want to be crossing that line.

ISAAC

You did.

FATHER

You're hurting yourself, boy. Let it be.

ISAAC

Tell me what it was like...

FATHER

You best not finish that -.

ISAAC

Screwing your sister.

FATHER

You rotten bastard.

(FATHER sweeps the box off the table and grabbing ISAAC'S shirt with his left hand prepares to strike a blow with his right.)

ISAAC

Come on! Hit me. Hit me you sick old man. What are you waiting for? Get rid of the evidence. Come on!

(FATHER hesitates, recocks his arm, but finally he can't do it, releases ISAAC and leans on the back of his chair. Regrouping.)

FATHER

There was just the two of us.

ISAAC

(Crosses away.)

I don't want...

FATHER

There was just to two of us. The farm eighty miles from the nearest town.

ISAAC

Is that your - excuse?

FATHER

My father was a hard-working, hard-drinking man who never said two words together when one would do. I was scared of him. I don't mind saying that. Liquor made him crazy and he hit whatever was handy. Times like that, your mother would come to me.

ISAAC

Your sister, you mean.

FATHER

*Your mother* would come to me - scared as a rabbit, and I'd offer her what comfort I could.

ISAAC

You raped your own sister.

FATHER

It was nothing like that! Nothing! Those long winter...

ISAAC

All right. Don't tell me anymore.

FATHER

I will tell you! You opened the box. Now you will listen. Now you will know the truth.

(Regroups.)

Those long winter nights were the hardest. The wind howling, my father howling right along with it. We were just kids, damn-it. We were all we had. What else were we going to do? The years passed and how we were helped us survive.

ISAAC

They call it incest.

FATHER

We called it love!

ISAAC

Oh my god.

FATHER

Say what you will. That's how it - was between us. Plain and simple. Plain and simple. Till afterwards.

ISAAC

Yeah. Three's a crowd.

FATHER

My father rolled the tractor on top of himself and died. My mother left the land to me. We carried on. We worked the farm.

ISAAC

And one another.

FATHER

When your mother took pregnant, we had no way of explaining it.

ISAAC

Yeah, someone already claimed the Immaculate Conception story.

FATHER

She was several months along before it came to her. We had no idea what to do. No one to turn to. And not a single body who would understand the truth! So we sold the farm and moved here. Started over. I was beholden to her. To you. She made sure of that.

ISAAC

Beholden?

FATHER

You were my fault, damn-it. Mostly. She was just a country girl with a baby. I couldn't leave her on her own.

ISAAC

And you lived miserably ever after.

FATHER

You don't mock us. You haven't earned the right. You're a wet-behind-the-ears pup whose books have given him all the answers. Well, you don't know shit. At least I stayed. At least I stood my ground. That ought to count for something. Hell, it does count for something, and you will reckon with it.

(MOTHER enters and sees the box and papers strewn about the floor.)

MOTHER

Dear God Almighty.

(Lights off on the kitchen.  
ISAAC crosses to DOC.  
FATHER rights the furniture.  
MOTHER gathers papers and the box. They sit off.)

ISAAC

He was right about not knowing shit. I don't. But how's that for some dirty little secrets? Does it satisfy you, Doc? Something you can take to bed with you on your own cold, lonely nights?

DOC

Part of the process of getting well is acknowledging our pain, admitting to those things that are causing us grief-

ISAAC

Us grief? This *is* as good for me as it is for you.

DOC

We have made some progress -.

ISAAC

I've admitted to my bastard birth. And you...

DOC

How does it make you feel - revealing your parentage?

ISAAC

You interrupted me.

DOC

My personal life is not part of this treatment.

ISAAC

Like hell.

DOC

Would you agree with me that your mutilation was due, in part, to your anger at your parents, your keen disappointment, not only about the way you were treated, but by the facts of your conception -?

ISAAC

That's not what you want to know.

DOC

Did you cut...

ISAAC

Did you pray to God or curse him when you found out!?

DOC

I wept, Isaac, and then I cursed him.

ISAAC

Would you say you were bitter?

DOC

At one point, you're going to have to let go of your anger.

ISAAC

You first.

DOC

Stick to the circumstances...

ISAAC

I'd rather forget them.

(Lights up on ANNA.)

ANNA

Isaac, no! You can't mean that. We forget and everything dies.

ISAAC

(Out.)

I remember and it's like death.

ANNA

So where does that leave me?

ISAAC

Gone.

DOC

Is it Anna again...?

ANNA

But not forgotten, Isaac. Please. Not forgotten.

ISAAC

Memory is a curse, Anna.

ANNA

Without it, who would either of us be?

DOC

Isaac, let her through.

ISAAC

With it, we exist only in pain.

I... DOC

And I'm tired of hurting. ISAAC

Then give her a voice. DOC

(MOTHER enters.)

ISAAC  
(Turns on DOC.)  
You know what, Doc. Einstein was wrong. Life is a crap  
shoot and the dice are loaded and we're all crapping out in  
the sweet-bye-and-bye.

(To Mother.)  
But some of us have to pay our dues first.

(Lights to dim on ANNA.  
MOTHER scrubs a pot. ISAAC  
crosses to the kitchen.)

You got up late today. MOTHER

Had a rough night. ISAAC

Knowing too much can make... MOTHER

You should have told me. ISAAC

It was a stupid thing to do - opening the box. MOTHER

Blame it on my biology. ISAAC

What were you thinking? It's my private business. MOTHER

My business as well. ISAAC

Not yet. Not in my lifetime. Not when I was still alive  
to... MOTHER

Face the music? ISAAC



MOTHER

You don't call me to account. I birthed you. I housed and fed you. I made sure you knew right from wrong.

ISAAC

Even though you did not.

MOTHER

This is why. This is the very reason we hid the truth. The world is so - self-righteous. Everybody in judgment. And now you - so young - seeing everything in black and white. The good on one hand, the bad on the other. So simple. Well, here you are, mister, front and center with the grey and ugly face of reality. Me. Your own mother. Let me see how you deal with that.

ISAAC

Look how you dealt with it.

MOTHER

How?

ISAAC

You abandoned me.

MOTHER

Where have I been?

ISAAC

Gone from here. You were too busy with your guilt, too busy being busy. I understand you now. Your work was your penance and your son your cross to bear. No wonder you hated me.

MOTHER

You ungrateful boy. What I sacrificed for you - an entire lifetime of humiliation, an entire life burdened with shame. But I bore it. I bore you. I did my duty.

ISAAC

Snakes give birth, Mother. We humans require more than that.

(ISAAC exits. MOTHER calls after him.)

MOTHER

Expect to live in disappointment, Isaac. Don't expect anything but disappointment.

(Sits off - the metal box on her lap.)

(ISAAC enters the church. Sits. MINISTER joins him.)

MINISTER

You've been crying.

ISAAC

I need to talk with someone.

MINISTER

I'm that someone, Isaac. Talk to me.

ISAAC

I like the hymns we sing.

MINISTER

They stir the soul, don't they?

ISAAC

Yes.

MINISTER

You always sing with great energy.

ISAAC

They make me feel - empowered. When I sing them, I feel connected, part of something much greater than myself. I soar above all this - madness.

MINISTER

And just for that reason, they were written.

ISAAC

But they're just songs aren't they? Our puny attempt to fill up the universe with our noise. What arrogance. Or desperation.

MINISTER

What brought you here today, Isaac?

ISAAC

I don't know if I can tell you.

MINISTER

Take your time. We've got all the time we need. Is it about school? You're graduating soon, aren't you? Or your family? You know, I don't believe I've seen your mother in church.

ISAAC

She never attends.

MINISTER

Still, she's a decent and hardworking woman -.

ISAAC

She's more than that, Reverend.

MINISTER

I'm sure.

ISAAC

No, that's not what I meant. Nobody knows her.

MINISTER

We may be a mystery to each other, but not to God.

ISAAC

Oh, there are mysteries even God doesn't want to know. Secrets even he cares not to hear. He must keep his ears covered and his eyes closed. We are so damned wretched after all.

MINISTER

Wretched but not unlovable.

ISAAC

You speak so easily, but they're just words.

MINISTER

Words from God.

ISAAC

Words don't make things right.

MINISTER

You want to tell me something.

ISAAC

Yeah, I watch pornography.

MINISTER

That's not it.

ISAAC

How about my mother and father are sister and brother?

MINISTER

(Starts off.)

If you're not going to...

ISAAC

'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'  
John 8:32.

MINISTER

Dear God. You're serious. I never imagined.

ISAAC

Well, let your mind go, Reverend.

MINISTER

It's terribly upsetting. That's understandable -.

ISAAC

But their - relationship is not.

MINISTER

An - awkward business, clearly.

ISAAC

Awkward? Your imagination is kicking in now.

MINISTER

You're hurt. Conflicted. But take your lead from God. He forgives...

ISAAC

Wipe the slate clean? No. It can't be that easy. Throw them into hell or what's a hell for? I mean, what about the victim, Reverend? I'm left out in the cold. A bastard. An - aberration.

MINISTER

God...

ISAAC

Is our silent partner in crime.

MINISTER

You need time.

ISAAC

I need rescue, not platitudes. I need. I need - not to think. That would be a blessing. Can God do that for me?

MINISTER

You're asking the impossible.

ISAAC

And clinging to the incredible.

MINISTER

And if you let go?

ISAAC

What would happen, Reverend?

MINISTER

What you believe will happen -!

ISAAC

No, that's not good enough!  
(MINISTER returns to his  
chair. A beat. To DOC.)  
I'm running out of sanctuaries.

DOC

And if there are none?

ISAAC

Give me back Santa and the tooth fairy. They made no claims. They never asked for anything.

DOC

Cookies and a glass of milk. A tooth.

ISAAC

All right. None of our illusions come without a price tag.

DOC

But still, you continued going to church.

ISAAC

You've got to cover your bases.

DOC

Just in case.

ISAAC

Yes.

DOC

There is a god.

ISAAC

Yes.

DOC

There is salvation.

ISAAC

Yes. Just in case.

(ISAAC crosses left to 'rabbit cages' He mimes taking a rabbit in his lap and strokes it during -.)

DOC

(Stands crosses to desk and uses a pocket recorder for the following -)

Self-mutilation is, perhaps, the most difficult of cases. While we can often help the patient recover their mental health, the physical scars remain as a reminder of the patient's anguish. It is most difficult to think of yourself as well when the body suggests otherwise.

(Sets the recorder down. Touches the photograph.)

But at least - you are alive.

(Lights up on CARL.)

CARL

(Stands.)

Homo sapiens have the power to grasp - things. We have hands with five digits; one being the opposable thumb, fingernails in place of claws and friction skin or fingerprints. Primates also have some of these characteristics, but the human thumb is almost as long as the other digits. As a result, we can grip and manipulate tools with a greater precision than our primate relatives. With this ungainly appendage, we were able to pull ourselves up from the evolutionary swamp and make the earth our own. With this thumb, we grabbed a tool and found ourselves grappling with our mortality.

DOC

It's time to tell me about Anna.

(MOTHER opens the box.)

ISAAC

Yeah. Okay.

(ANNA crosses down of CARL and sits during. She's in school.)

ISAAC

(Puts the rabbit back into its cage, stands, gathers the backpack preset there and crosses right to CARL on -.)

I was happy to leave for college. I could concentrate on the course work and leave my - parents locked away in their grey box. Attending classes became my passion, and I started my life all over again.

(Sits adjacent to ANNA.)

(DOC plays an active observer throughout the following.)

CARL

Welcome fellow astronauts. I'm Professor Bell. This is anthropology. Anthropology is the story of a journey. Our journey. Our vehicle is planet Earth. Our destination the final revelation.

ANNA

And what does that make you, Professor - our travel agent?

CARL

Oh no, Miss -

ANNA

Cohen. Anna Cohen.

CARL

Anna Cohen, that makes me one more rung on the ladder humanity is climbing.

ANNA

Jacob's Ladder?

CARL

An interesting analogy, Miss Anna Cohen. You're off to a fast start.

ANNA

I like to get my parents' money's worth.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

I was captivated from that moment, hooked by her brass, her wit, her unchecked - vitality. Lust at first sight.

DOC

Don't demean it.

ISAAC

Yes, you're right. Love at first sight. Love. My God, I was on fire for her. She was eminently alive. To her life was not a question. It was the answer. That's where her sensuality came from - a natural result of being - liberated.

CARL

Ten minute break, class, not fifteen. If you're going to be late, don't come back.

(Dim lights on CARL. Sits.)

ISAAC

Hey. I'm Isaac.

ANNA

Really? Who would guess?

ISAAC

What -?

ANNA

Everyone in class *knows* your name.

ISAAC

Yeah, well. Are you busy tomorrow?

ANNA

I'm always busy.

ISAAC

Do you work?

ANNA

I'm a Jewish princess. I don't have to work.

ISAAC

So you're telling me you're not interested.

ANNA

In what?

ISAAC

Going out. I mean having lunch.

ANNA

With you?

ISAAC

Well, I can't speak for anyone else. With me, yes.

ANNA

It took you two weeks.

ISAAC

I've been - busy.

ANNA

Ha. Giving me hell in class.

ISAAC

I am passionate about some things.

ANNA

Now that is your saving grace. Tell me when and where.

(Lights up on CARL.)

CARL

(Stands.)

Charles Darwin introduced the idea that tools are both the cause and the effect of walking on two legs. Walking on two legs frees the hands - and you know about idle hands - they are the Devil's workshop. Indeed, you might say they are snake bit. As we uncovered more of the fossil record, we discovered a distinct difference between the ratio of brain weight to body weight in those of our ancestors who used tools and those who didn't. Generally, the larger the brain, the more tools are found with the fossil. Speculation would lead us to conclude that the ability to use tools enhanced our ability to reason. And our ability to reason can make us rather unreasonable time-to-time.

(Dim lights on CARL. CARL sits. ISAAC and ANNA sit in a cafe.)



ANNA

So, what do you think of Professor Bell's class?

ISAAC

I'm intrigued. I've read his latest book. It's a whole lot of science dressed in mysticism.

ANNA

Perhaps the two can't be separated. 'Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.'

ISAAC

That's Einstein.

ANNA

Good. I like my men educated.

ISAAC

And pious, no doubt.

ANNA

Piety is not to be scoffed at. Did you read Howells? He theorizes we might have evolved a religious gene to keep our great brains company. It's a big, bad, dark universe after all.

ISAAC

Then going to church is not an exercise in futility?

ANNA

Hey, it may be necessary.

(ISAAC and ANNA hold.)

DOC

So - the lunch was a success?

ISAAC

(To Doc.)

We talked for three hours straight. I had never been part of a conversation that went ten minutes. She was from New Orleans - an English major. She had read the books I had read, listened to the music I listened to, liked the same movies. I didn't want to leave her - ever. Not that night. Not any time after.

(Turns back to ANNA.)

ANNA

What'd you get on your paper?

ISAAC

An A.

ANNA

A plus.

ISAAC  
He's smitten.

ANNA  
That's a sexist remark.

ISAAC  
Every remark is sexual or political.

ANNA  
You forgot religion.

ISAAC  
As you have pointed out, that is probably impossible.

ANNA  
What do you do in church?

ISAAC  
I listen.

ANNA  
And what do you hear?

ISAAC  
Now? A babble of incoherent voices.

ANNA  
The punishment from God.

ISAAC  
It seems - counterproductive.

ANNA  
Appearances can be deceiving.

ISAAC  
Ah, the ultimate truth.

ANNA  
Beware, my friend, absolutes can make an ass of you.

ISAAC  
And your faith as well.

ANNA  
Ouch. You want your religion spoon-fed, is that it? Ground up so it goes down easier. No, no, son of Abraham. It's our job to separate the dogma from the dogmatic.

ISAAC  
Bow-wow.

ANNA

Those may be the two most intelligent sounds you've made since we met.

ISAAC

(Consults his watch.)

Which was three weeks, two days, seventeen hours, eight minutes and...

ANNA

Twenty-six seconds ago.

ISAAC

Exactly.

ANNA

Something's happening here.

ISAAC

I believe it already has.

(The moment sets in them and ISAAC and ANNA kiss.)

ISAAC

Can I tell you something?

ANNA

(Puts a finger to ISAAC's lips.)

It's too soon. Words are cages. And things caged - they forget how to sing.

(MOTHER removes the birth certificate and closes the box.)

(Lights up on CARL. ISAAC and ANNA are back in school.)

CARL

(Stands.)

When our ancestors stood upright, the larynx moved lower in our throats. This makes for a longer resonating chamber and thus allows us to produce a wider range of clear sounds. As a result, Homo sapiens were able to develop intricate speech. This trick of speech, in tandem with our growing brain, continues to push us further along the evolutionary continuum. But, as we've pointed out before, adaptations have their cost. Now we can't swallow and breathe at the same time.

ANNA

Then you might say, Professor, that the cost of learning to speak is the possibility of choking on our own words.

CARL

Another astute observation, Miss Cohen. Where have you been all my professional life?

ANNA

Can I take that as a compliment?

CARL

Any other interpretation would sully the both of us.  
(Sits.)

(They beam at one another.  
ISAAC shifts to the cafe  
position.)

ISAAC

Oh yes, Professor Bell has definitely taken a shine to you.

ANNA

He's cute.

ISAAC

A class critique I'm sure the dean will savor.

ANNA

He's so adorable, I'm thinking of changing majors.

ISAAC

Funny. Practicing Jews don't invite Java Man to dinner.  
You better stick to English.

(Dim lights on CARL.)

ANNA

(Swings about to cafe  
position.)

A nice, safe, domesticated degree. Suitable for hanging and the student right along with it.

ISAAC

Maybe you'll be the next Gertrude Stein.

ANNA

I'd rather drink from a stein than be one.

ISAAC

How about religious studies?

ANNA

That's your bag.

ISAAC

Bags.

ANNA

Oh, yeah. You've got to be the only student on campus majoring in both religion and paleoanthropology. What were you thinking? That's the perfect curriculum for a schizophrenic.

ISAAC

One of them has the answer.

ANNA

What's the question.

ISAAC

Why?

ANNA

Clever boy.

ISAAC

Self-defense.

ANNA

Against what?

ISAAC

A past that's better left behind me.

ANNA

Come on - the past is prologue for the future. Nothing gets left behind.

ISAAC

Spoken like a true English major.

ANNA

This isn't a matter of degree. We all have our carry-ons, porter.

ISAAC

Yeah, but some peoples' are leather and Gucci's.

ANNA

Yep, I have the best angst money can buy. And I'm proud of it.

(Plays out the following -)

Say, did you know my mother was a gypsy?

ISAAC

I thought you were a Jew...

ANNA

Queen of the gypsies, in fact. It's true. She smokes foul smelling cigarettes hand-rolled by gnomes in the ancient forests of Europe.

ISAAC

Oh? Tell me more.

ANNA

She dances in cafes for tips and shots of cognac. Picture it, Isaac. Her hips rolling like the sea, and her emerald eyes flashing, she whirls between the tables till the men cry out in despair. Her lover keeps time with a tambourine. His flamboyant mustache can't disguise a seductive grin. The music quickens, My mother a swirl of scarlet skirt and ebony hair. Faster. Faster. Till the men can no longer contain themselves and the join her - all spinning madly, silver coins spilling from their pockets. Laughing, my mother pulls her lover close and -

(She leans into ISAAC.)

ISAAC

(Breaks away.)

No! No, that's enough. Not anymore. I can't do this anymore.

(ISAAC crosses to DOC.

ANNA crosses away.)

DOC

Don't be afraid, Isaac. Press on.

ISAAC

I miss her.

DOC

Get through this. You've got to get through it. You're nearly there.

ISAAC

I miss her!

DOC

I know. I know. You always will. Always.

ISAAC

I don't want it to hurt!

DOC

If it didn't hurt, then it wasn't love.

(Both men hold on this.

ANNA reenters.)

ANNA

Isaac. Isaac, it's too hot to walk anymore. Four times around the track is enough. My god, don't you do anything half way?

(Extends a hand to ISAAC.)

Come on, let's find some shade.

DOC  
 Be with her.

ISAAC  
 (Hesitates considering ANNA.  
 Then to DOC)  
 That's all I wanted.  
 (Crosses to ANNA.)  
 Halfway is no way, lady.  
 (Touches her cheek.)  
 Hey, sweat looks good on you.

ANNA  
 We glow, Isaac. Women glow.

ISAAC  
 Well, you're illuminating the entire damn field. You had  
 those football players tripping over themselves.

ANNA  
 Even Neanderthals recognize a thing of beauty when they see  
 it.

ISAAC  
 And a thing of beauty -

ANNA  
 Is a profound joy forever.

ISAAC  
 Keats would be proud. You've taken the sublime and made it  
 ridiculous.

ANNA  
 Am I not beautiful?

ISAAC  
 Profoundly.

ANNA  
 There. The rest is commentary.

ISAAC  
 If I was Keats, I'd write Ode to a Jewish Princess.

ANNA  
 Really? Tell it to me.

ISAAC  
 How about -. Thank you.

ANNA  
 That's lovely. It's the perfect poem. Short and sweet.  
 I'll treasure it all the days of my life.

ISAAC  
I'm happy you're here.

ANNA  
I'm happy to be here.

ISAAC  
With me.

ANNA  
Yes. This was totally unexpected.

ISAAC  
The unexpected is all we can expect.

ANNA  
Did you learn that in Anthropology or Theology 101?

ISAAC  
I've lived it.

ANNA  
You're a complicated piece of work, Mr. Isaac Graber.

ISAAC  
Is that good?

ANNA  
Oh, that is good. It's very good indeed.  
(Kisses ISAAC and caresses  
his face - making a  
decision.)  
You do love me, don't you?

ISAAC  
Is that what you call it?

ANNA  
Yes, that's what I call it.

ISAAC  
I do - love you, and I will - love you.

ANNA  
How do you know, will? A lot can happen.

ISAAC  
Anna, what I'm feeling for you - it's in me. Part of me.  
Nothing you and I might do from here on can subtract from  
it. I feel that. I know that.

ANNA  
It could burn us to ashes.



ISAAC

Strike the match.

ANNA

I love it when you talk dirty.

ISAAC

Stay with me.

(ISAAC and ANNA kiss again.)

ANNA

Hey, let's go to my room and do a little anthropological research.

ISAAC

What - we going to dig up the skeletons in your closet?

ANNA

No, silly, I'm going to jump your bones.

ISAAC

(To DOC.)

Just like that. Uncomplicated. No rituals. No contrived - flirtations. And I was - ravenous for her. Having had such - meager fare all my life, here was my compensation.

(CARL, MOTHER, FATHER and MINISTER stand on 'compensation'.)

Here was God setting it right.

(ANNA and ISAAC sit on the bed.)

FATHER

Fornication -

MOTHER

Is a god awful sin.

CARL

Sexual bonding is our duty. And our pleasure.

MINISTER

Many animals can commit sexual congress. But the Bible says human beings should love one another. Above all else. Above everything else.

(CARL, MOTHER, FATHER and MINISTER sit. MOTHER presses the certificate to her heart. ISAAC sits on the bed.)

DOC

And afterwards?

ISAAC

Afterward - we were - all one thing. Nothing could separate us.

ANNA

You're staring at me.

ISAAC

I'm fixing you in my mind so I can see you - even in the dark.

ANNA

Sounds like idol worship.

ISAAC

Not so - idle.

(Kisses her.)

ANNA

(Traces the line of ISAAC'S face.)

Funny boy. My funny, beautiful boy.

(These words unlock ISAAC.  
He rises and crosses  
downstage on the following.)

ISAAC

My funny, beautiful boy. Beautiful. That was the first time I heard that. My God, I was struck dumb. I was - struck clear through. And I couldn't help myself. I laughed. And wept. Tears I hadn't cried for too long flooded my eyes and all my - wretchedness erupted from some deep hole. And into those empty places rushed her affections. And in that instant, I was remade. Rescued. So when -

(Out.)

So when.

(To DOC.)

Please.

DOC

Let go of it! Tell me what you did to your thumb!

ISAAC

I nursed on it!

DOC

I mean when you left Anna and...

ISAAC

No! No, that's wrong. She left me. She left me, damn you.

(During the following ANNA  
plays out her part center  
stage.)

ISAAC

We were walking late at night - in a light rain. The pavement lit in reflected neon. Anna was teasing, laughing, happy. She snapped open her umbrella.

ANNA

Look at me, I'm Gene Kelly.

ISAAC

She called. Twirling, spinning into the empty street. She didn't know life eats itself and spits out the bones without remorse. Halfway across, the beast roared around the corner and its tires squealed and the smell of burnt rubber fouled the air and the nauseating collision of flesh and metal slammed into my senses. I ran and took her up in my arms. And there in the momentary silence where life and death claim their victims, I lost my last good hope.

(Crosses to the kitchen -  
rising to mania.)

Later, I awoke in my parents' house and no one was there. No one was anywhere. My mind spun madly. I had nothing left to cling to. I drank from the bottle my father no longer bothered to hide though the whiskey seared and constricted my throat. The alcohol only served to intensify my despair. So I sought out the Bible, but they were still there - those damned babies. They were still there, and I ripped out that page and wept and cried out to God, 'Why?

(CARL, MINISTER, MOTHER and  
FATHER stand.)

Tell me why?'

MOTHER/ISAAC

And no one answered.

FATHER

No one answered.

CARL

No one answered.

ANNA

(Rises and crosses to dorm  
room on -.)

Just tell him why.

MINISTER

The Bible says we who are believers are forgiven. What else do we need to know?

FATHER

A man is a man. That's all. We don't ask to be born. We are. We don't mean to die. We do. We die and die again every damn day until even death is not enough.

CARL

So class, I give you the thumb. They allowed us to gain dominion over the earth and one future day over the universe. They are both our triumph and our trial - our fate and our frustration. Because by them we enabled ourselves to gaze up into the vast array of stars and ask why. The answer, much to our indignation, remains elusive. But with them we will be hitchhiking our way through the galaxies to find it.

ANNA

I didn't want to leave you all alone.

ISAAC

But you did! All of you did!

(FATHER, MINISTER, ANNA,  
CARL sit.)

MOTHER

Isaac -.

ISAAC

Mother.

MOTHER

Yes. I'm - sorry for...

ISAAC

You're sorry all right. You're sorry for giving me birth. Well, so am I. I'm sorry you birthed me. I have been bugged by the universe, and you - you let it happen. You gave me up. You sacrificed me. Without your love, how did you expect me to survive?

MOTHER

But it was sinful what...

ISAAC

To hell with sin. To hell with faith. To hell with reason. To hell with you.

(He exits the kitchen on -.)

And I left the kitchen and went out into the yard -.

MOTHER

So - when I felt you stir inside of me.

ISAAC

And saw the hatchet.

MOTHER

And a sudden urgency rocked my womb.

ISAAC

Where my father kept it like a talisman.

MOTHER

I hid my face and wept.

ISAAC

(Engages in the following.)

I was drawn to it.

(DOC stands.)

MOTHER

And the nurse said, 'You're going to have your baby any moment now.'

ISAAC

Wrapped my fingers and thumb around the handle - gripping it firmly.

MOTHER

And my womb contracted.

ISAAC

And placed my left hand on the chopping block - digits splayed.

MOTHER

Oh, I pushed in desperation then.

ISAAC

And I swung that hatchet up into the cold December day.

MOTHER

My flesh pulled apart.

ISAAC

And hesitated.

MOTHER

And your head crowned.

ISAAC

Then brought it down -.

MOTHER

And I bore down again.

ISAAC

(Slams the hatchet into the block.)

With all the force I could muster!

(ISAAC grips his wounded hand. MOTHER clenches both hands - crushing the certificate in one.)

MOTHER/ISAAC

And the pain was excruciating. It ripped through me without mercy.

MOTHER

(Coming to awareness now.)

And finally you were born of me and I was free and in that moment, in that blessed moment, I did love you. I did. And I do - love you! Yes, Isaac, yes.

(Faces ISAAC.)

I do love you. Oh my God!

(Drops certificate and runs to him.)

What have you done?

ISAAC

I hurt myself! I hurt myself. I cut off my thumb!

MOTHER

Sweet Jesus, save us!

(She envelopes ISAAC in an embrace, and both are weeping now.)

(A moment.)

DOC

Isaac. Isaac, you've made it. You've survived it.

ISAAC

Doc?

DOC

Come here.

(ISAAC crosses to DOC.  
MOTHER sits off.)

ISAAC

I'm exhausted.

DOC

You've worked hard.

ISAAC

I didn't want to go there.

DOC

It was necessary.

It hurts like hell. ISAAC

That pain will pass. DOC

I cut off my thumb. ISAAC

They reattached it. DOC

Damn, you always have an answer. ISAAC

Do I? DOC

No, I guess not. I can breathe easier. ISAAC

You were carrying quite a load. DOC

One more irony, hey, Doc? ISAAC

One more. DOC

Patient has to lose his grip to - regain his - sanity. ISAAC

Something like that. Letting go is a - .  
(Can't finish it.) DOC

A grace? ISAAC

Yes. I suppose. DOC

(ISAAC and DOC acknowledge  
the reference.)

Hey, Doc, want to hear a joke? ISAAC

Why not? DOC

An atheist dies and goes to heaven. ISAAC  
(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

He's standing before God completely put out. 'What's the big idea,' he says. What am I doing here? I don't believe in you or heaven. I want an explanation and I want it now.' God leans forward, gives him a little grin and answers, 'Welcome to your hell.'

DOC

He didn't get it.

ISAAC

Who does, really?

DOC

I don't know.

ISAAC

Tomorrow?

DOC

Of course.

(ISAAC crosses left to chopping block and hatchet. FATHER, MINISTER, CARL and ANNA stand facing ISAAC. DOC crosses to the photograph, picking it up and tracing the features of Jessica's face with a finger. Finally, he sets the photo down, retrieves the phone and dials.)

DOC

Karen, put Jessica on for me, will you? Thanks.

(A moment.)

Hey, baby girl. This is Daddy. I just wanted to call and say - I love you.

(MOTHER stands and faces ISAAC.)

(Lights fade to black.)

(The End.)