

THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT

**A drama in two acts
with a self-reflective essay**



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DECLARATION:

I hereby declare that this entire thesis is my own original work, unless otherwise stated, and that it has not been submitted to any other university for a similar or any other degree.

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מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

“What makes this night different from all other nights?”

Pesach Haggadah

For my family.

THIS NIGHT IS DIFFERENT

A drama in two acts

By Lauren Shapiro

The Characters:

- Sylvia: a middle-aged Jewish woman.
Harold: her husband, about the same age.
Nadia: their daughter, 18.
Ilana: their daughter, 24.
Chris: Ilana's husband, a black man in his late twenties.
Adam: Ilana and Chris's son, 4 months old.

The Scene:

The set depicts a modern kitchen and clearly reflects Jewish dietary regulations with separate cupboards, sinks, dishes, etc for meat and milk products (usually denoted by different colours). Traditional foods and symbols should be visible in quantity. A door on the right leads to the dining room (unseen), where the *seder* (Passover meal) takes place. A second door on the left leads to the back garden.

The Time:

The present.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Lights up on Nadia, wearing baggy, cut-off denim shorts and a faded T-shirt, far too big for her, inside-out and ripped at the neck. She is sitting at the kitchen table, reading "Pass Your Driver's License Easily". The kettle is boiling noisily, and soon clicks off. Still holding the book, and without raising her eyes from the pages, Nadia gets up and goes over to the kettle.

Nadia: Clutch. Gear. Brake. No, wait. Shit. Key. No, always start with clutch. Clutch. Key. Gear. That's it. Clutch control ... hand-brake down. Side-mirror-rear-view-side-mirror check. Pull out ... watch for traffic. Indicate. Turn. *[She is at cupboard, takes out the following as she speaks]* Mug. Spoon. Last gear. Side-mirror-rear-view-side-mirror. Blind spot. Check for traffic. Reverse. *[She walks slowly backwards towards the fridge; opens it without turning to face it. Takes milk]* Milk. Ugh – fat-free. First gear. Clutch control ... forward. Side-mirror-rear-view-side-mirror. Second gear. Woa, third gear ... fourth gear! Red robot... break ... third gear ... second gear ... first gear ... clutch. Hand-brake up. No thanks, no plastic hangers. No fruit, no garbage bags 80 for R20 only. No newspaper. No money for school. Green robot. Clutch control ... pull off – shit, forgot the hand-brake there – indicate. Turn. Coffee. (Instant). *[The last can be said with a tone of disdain]* Second gear. Third gear. Kettle. *[She pauses to pour hot water into her mug]* Fourth gear. Check for cameras ... fifth gear!

Suddenly a very loud, very shrill burglar alarm goes off. Nadia is startled, but recovers immediately. She continues her running commentary, although the audience cannot hear her under the noise of the alarm. The alarm ceases. Enter Sylvia, very flustered, in running shoes and a tracksuit. She wears heavy gold jewelry (lots of rings, hoop earrings, necklace with Star of David) and make-up.

Sylvia *[muttering]*: Vershtunkende alarm.

Nadia: ... side-mirror-rear-view-side-mirror. Indicate. Second gear. Turn. *[Grabbing from various cupboards]* Sugar. Third gear. Biscuits... damn. No biscuits. Fourth gear...

Sylvia: Why didn't you switch the alarm off?

Nadia: ...and stall. *[To Sylvia]* Because you always make me promise to leave it on when I'm alone in the house.

Sylvia: But when I came in, why didn't you switch off the noise?

- Nadia: I was practicing. I didn't want to lose my concentration.
- Sylvia: Through that noise you can hear yourself think?!
- Nadia: [*Directly to Sylvia*] One gets used to tuning out noise.
- Sylvia: I don't know why you spend all your time with that book. Don't you have enough studying to do in matric?
- Nadia: Well, I can't ride the school bus forever.
- Sylvia: We've been through this, Nadia. There's nothing wrong with the school bus.
- Nadia: It's a waste of forty five minutes, twice a day.
- Sylvia: You should use the time wisely.
- Nadia: Well, at least I can sleep.
- Sylvia: I thought you said you did your homework!
- Nadia: Ma, I can't write on a bus.
- Sylvia: No – especially not if you're sleeping! In any case, put away that book now. They'll start arriving in less than an hour and I'll need all the help I can get, believe me.
- Nadia: Mom, you've been cooking for weeks. Miriam's been cooking for weeks. The table's been set for three days. What more is there left to do?
- Sylvia: Where is that girl?
- Nadia: Mom, I wish you wouldn't call her that.
- Sylvia: I don't mean it in *that* sense, Nadia. I just mean she's young.
- Nadia: Still, it has connotations.
- Sylvia: Well, don't be so touchy. Sanctimonious is not attractive. So, *nu*? Where is she?
- Nadia: How should I know?
- Sylvia: You've been sitting here.
- Nadia: Well, then, she obviously isn't here.
- Sylvia: Ooh, that girl!

- Nadia: Mom!
- Sylvia: I'm sorry. But you know, she's been nothing but trouble since she started working here. Or didn't, to be more accurate. It's always excuses, excuses. I swear, I've had enough of it. I have my own problems.
- Nadia: Well, I think it's disgusting to make her work tonight.
- Sylvia: And I'm supposed to make a *seder* without any help? What's disgusting? She's paid to do a job.
- Nadia: But it's completely hypocritical. You put on this whole lavish dinner to celebrate freedom, and you have Miriam slaving away in the kitchen all the time.
- Sylvia: Nadia, she's paid to help. I need the help. From you I don't get help. From where am I supposed to get?
- Nadia: I've been here as long as you've been preparing. I offer, I ask, and you always tell me it's "under control". What do you want from me?
- Sylvia: From you, I would like some peace and quiet, if that's not too much to ask.
- Nadia: I just think that forcing other people to work while you celebrate freedom is evidence of double standards and abuse of Miriam's position. It's embarrassing.
- Sylvia: Well, luckily for her, she's not here to be embarrassed. [*Sighs*] Oy, she's nothing but trouble, that one. It's always one thing or it's another. You know, she takes advantage of my kind nature. Always telling me her problems and asking for help. Because that's what I pay her to do, clearly. She talks and she talks about her troubles ... like *tzuris* I don't have! But it never stops. And she's always got to go away for this, or take leave for that, and it leaves me high and dry without a paddle, don't you forget it. [*During this speech, Nadia has started reading her book again*] Nadia! Fine. I see. So you don't appreciate, but you can put down your book and help.
- Nadia: [*Putting down book*] Okay, so give me something to do.
- Sylvia: You can go and change your clothes, for one thing.
- Nadia: What's wrong with my clothes?

Sylvia: I'm not going through this again, Nadia. Not for *yontif*. Put on a skirt.

Nadia: Mom, I refuse to be a hypocrite. I never, ever wear a skirt. Why should tonight be any different?

Sylvia: Because it's *yontif*. And it's nice to look your best.

Nadia: I think I look just fine and I'll stay the way I am if that's okay.

Sylvia [*gives her The Look*]: A skirt. What about that lovely one from Ilana?

Nadia: The off-cut? Haute fucking couture!

Sylvia: Nadia Rabinowitz, I will *not* have that language in my house!

Nadia: Ma, it's a designer hand-me-down scraped off the factory floor.

Sylvia: It's Christian Dior!

Nadia: And how appropriate for a Jewish festival!

The phone rings. Sylvia answers.

Sylvia: Hello, Rabinowitz residence? Hello? Yes, yes, yes. All fine. Yes, fine. Oh, um ... hang on, just a minute ... [*she scrabbles in a drawer among a pile of papers for the number*] ... Oh, damnit! I don't know what the girl's done with it ...

Nadia: Seven, eight, six ...

Sylvia: [*into phone*] Seven, eight, six ...

Nadia: ... five, double three, one.

Sylvia: ... five, double three, one. Yes, that's right. Yes, thank you. Sorry for the false alarm. Yes, goodnight. [*She hangs up*] I wish they'd fix the *ferkakke* thing.

Nadia: Ma, you've become paranoid.

Sylvia: What, paranoid! You can't not have an alarm system and then wonder why your house gets broken into, Godforbid.

Nadia: But you don't need it on *while we're in the house*!

Sylvia: Do you think burglars don't strike while the victims are at home? Well, let me tell you something you didn't know, Nadia. These *gonifs* are smart. They watch you. They learn your

movements. Then they wait for the right moment, and just when you aren't expecting it, they pounce!

Nadia: Like tonight, when there'll be two million people around to watch them work?

Sylvia: That's enough of your sarcasm, thank you very much.

Nadia: Ma, just turn it off for one night. Otherwise it's going to go off every time someone walks through the door. And Zayda will set it off every time he goes out for a smoke ...

Sylvia: And at his age, let me tell you, he could do without.

Nadia: But you're not going to change him, Mom. Just let the old man be happy.

Sylvia: He should be happy when he gets cancer of the lung?

Nadia: Ma, just because you quit doesn't mean you can get all preachy about other people's choices. Why can't you just let people live their lives?

Sylvia: It's just a shame, is all I'm saying.

Nadia: But he's happy.

Sylvia: Your Zayda doesn't remember what day of the week it is, never mind if he's happy.

Nadia: Can we just turn it off?

Sylvia: [*reluctantly fiddling with the keypad*] Alright. But if anything should happen—

Nadia: Mom, give it a rest.

Sylvia: I don't like your tone, my girl.

Nadia: Sorry. I just wish you'd chill out sometimes.

Sylvia: Easy for you to say. How can I "chill out" when I'm busy making *yontif* for two dozen ungrateful people.

Nadia: Fifteen. And Auntie Hilda won't come anyway. That's fourteen.

Sylvia: Stop with the rationalizing. It's a lot of work. And the help I get from you isn't much help.

- Nadia: Well, you can't say I haven't offered. I've been asking for ages what I can do to help and you always tell me "it's under control, it's under control, it's under control!"
- Sylvia [*sarcastic*]: What, that a mother should burden her daughter while she's studying? Godforbid. No, I couldn't think of it. A little gratitude, though, wouldn't be so awful.
- Nadia: Ma, I really do appreciate all the effort you're making. I just think you're putting it into the wrong things. This whole *seder* ... it's a sweet tradition, but don't you think we're a bit grown up for it now? All the songs and the games and things. We're big girls, you know.
- Sylvia: Such big girls. You don't know the half of it. I stand here slaving for weeks over a hot stove and this is how you thank me?
- Nadia: Ma, you've been making chopped herring. It's raw. You don't even touch the stove.
- Sylvia: And always with the smart remarks. Such big girls, *kein-ein-hora*. Well, we'll see how Ilana reacts. I've made all the traditional things – *kneidlach*, *tzimmus*, chopped herring ...
- Nadia: I'm sure her majesty will be pleased.
- Sylvia: The tone, the tone! Because you can't appreciate.
- Nadia: Ma, first of all I *do* appreciate your effort but I hate that you get so stressed about it. Secondly, I find it hard to be grateful for killing innocent creatures to celebrate an event that may or may not have happened three thousand years ago.
- Sylvia: Oy! Again with the *meshugas*!
- Nadia: It's called ethics.
- Sylvia: Ethics, *shmethics*. It's tradition. If we don't teach, who will remember?
- Nadia: What I'm saying is maybe we don't *need* to remember. The world has changed now. We don't have to slaughter animals and rub their blood on our doorposts.
- Sylvia: Oh, Nadia.
- Nadia: If you want to celebrate the freedom of the exodus, why don't you start with your own household? How about letting me be

free to make my own choices? Or not forcing Miriam to work on your festivals?

Sylvia: Where *is* Miriam??

Nadia: I don't know, but that's not the point. It's the principle. We need to let go of the past and move on.

Sylvia: And if we don't teach, how will you move on? How will you know for your children? How will Ilana's little Adam learn to sing the Four Questions if he doesn't grow up with it? Heritage is passed from parents to children, Nadia, and from them to their children, and their children's children. That's how the Jews have kept their religion alive.

Nadia: Well I'm not going to get into this now, but you know how I feel about religion. So why don't you give me something I can do to help.

Sylvia: Fine. You can boil some eggs.

Nadia: Okay. Pass me a pot.

Sylvia takes a pot from the cupboard.

Sylvia: Look at this. I've told Harold to tell her not to use steel wool on the pots. It scratches the nonstick coating. Such beautiful, expensive pots. Ruined.

Nadia: Why don't you tell her?

Sylvia: All ruined. My best pots, from my mother. Family heirlooms they might have been.

Nadia: Ma, no offense, but they didn't have Teflon in nineteen-*voetsak*. You're blowing things out of proportion again.

Sylvia: And what about those precious copper pots my Bobba carried from Lithuania? Nothing but the clothes on her back ...

Nadia: [*Under her breath*] ... And a complete set of nonstick cook-wear.

Sylvia: Ruined. Ruined by that clumsy ... Let me tell you something, Nadia. I have nothing against black people, but this I can say: if it's not their own they don't know what care is. And so clumsy. Just look at this [*holds out seder plate*]. My Bobba's *seder* plate. Generations, it's been in the family. And do you know what I caught that girl doing the other day? Putting it in the dishwasher. The dishwasher! Well, let me tell you, Nadia, I

could have *plutzed*. This plate is nearly a hundred years old! Every year for as long as I can remember this plate has been on the *seder* table, with all the symbols of *Pesach* – the roasted bone, the *charoset*, the bitter herbs. But to someone who doesn't know these things, doesn't understand them, this plate means nothing. She could smash it and not know the difference between a breakfast saucer. They have no respect or sense of our heritage. They just have no idea. I must get Harold to speak to her.

- Nadia: Why don't you just speak to her? You're here with her every day.
- Sylvia: Oh, she won't listen to me. To her, I'm just a white madam. Those people only recognize authority. They respond to a man.
- Nadia: Mom, I can't believe what I'm hearing! Why are you so scared to speak to Miriam?
- Sylvia: Scared? Peh! I'm not scared!
- Nadia: Then why won't you talk to her?
- Sylvia: Have you boiled those eggs?
- Nadia: How could I have? You won't give me the pot!
- Sylvia: Fine, I'll do it myself.
- Nadia: No, Ma, that's not what I meant– [*Sylvia is already pouring water into the pot*] You know, Ma, you're impossible sometimes.
- Sylvia: Damn it! We're out of eggs! How can we have a *seder* without eggs? What will Ilana think?
- Nadia: We'll lay her on cotton wool 'til she recovers.
- Sylvia: Why always with the tone, Nadia? Why can't you get on with your sister?
- Nadia: Because she's a pain in the arse.
- Sylvia: You know, you could learn a thing or two in life from Ilana.
- Nadia: What, how to run away from home and build a pretence of fame and fortune? How to ditch your family, elope with a stranger, and live on the dole? Admirable stuff, Ma.

- Sylvia: Stop it! My heart can't take it! Just lay me in my grave. My own daughter, with words like a dagger to the liver ... and she is not on the dole. I don't know where you get your stories from.
- Nadia: I don't know why you idolize her, Ma.
- Sylvia: Nadia, call your father and ask him to bring eggs when he goes for the wine.
- Nadia: Fine. [*Picks up phone, dials, waits*]
- Sylvia: And if he hasn't left yet, give him an earful. In fact, if I know your father—
- Nadia: Hi, Dad? It's me. Fine, thanks. Listen, are you at the shops yet? Good. Okay, well please pick up some eggs. Hang on. [*To Sylvia*] How many?
- Sylvia: A dozen.
- Nadia: [*To phone*] She says a dozen.
- Sylvia: Jumbo.
- Nadia: She says Jumbo. And get the free range ones. I don't fancy the idea of those battery-produced numbers. Have you got all that, Dad? A dozen jumbo free range eggs. And the wine. You want to write that down? Are you sure? Okay, we'll see you later, then. I love you too, Dad. Bye. [*She replaces the receiver*]
- Sylvia: He'll forget the eggs.
- Nadia: No, he won't. He's just picking up some ciga ... he's in the fresh produce aisle. He'll get the eggs.
- Sylvia: Nadia, a woman must know her husband. I know my husband.
- Nadia: He won't forget the eggs. Stop giving him a hard time.
- Sylvia: Hard time? He's getting a hard time? I have *his tzuris*, I have *my tzuris*. And on top of this, I must make a *seder* for 20 people?
- Nadia: Fifteen. You know, Ma, no one asked you to do all this.
- Sylvia: Oy, Sylvia, what did you expect? Ungrateful child. [*Silence*] Nadia, *please*. You look like an utter *schloomp*. Go and change quickly, before the guests arrive.

Nadia: I'm sure they'll recognize me.

Sylvia: [*Warning tone*] Nadia ...

Nadia: Ma.

Sylvia: You'll do as you're told!

Nadia: No, I won't. I'm eighteen years old and you can't treat me like a child anymore!

Sylvia: [*Distressed*] Nadia, *why* must you do this?

Nadia: I refuse to be a hypocrite, Ma. Why should I change who I am for one or two nights a year?

Sylvia: Because it's *Pesach*.

Nadia: But I don't believe in *Pesach*. To me it's just like any other night.

Sylvia: [*Palm on her chest*] Nadel, you hurt me. You'll kill your mother.

Nadia: But Ma...

Sylvia: Will it kill you to put on a skirt and maybe brush your hair?

Nadia: Mother, I don't see why I should dress any differently—

Sylvia: Because I'm asking you, Nadia. I'm begging you. Please. For me. For the family. Please, just go and put on a skirt.

Nadia: [*Painfully patiently*] Alright, alright, Mother. What exactly do you want me to wear?

Sylvia: Something respectable, if you own such a thing. Nadia, I've raised you to know what's right. Just put on something nice.

Exit Nadia, aggravated but conceding. Sylvia reaches for the phone and dials. During the following monologue she puts all the traditional symbols on the seder plate: a roasted bone, a piece of parsley, horseradish, a small bowl of charoset, some salt water. There should also be an egg, but of course Sylvia has run out of these. She might show her frustration visually without verbalizing it to Esther.

Sylvia: Esther, it's me. Fine, fine, thank you. And how are you? That's good. And the children? That's wonderful. Yes. No, no, I've got quite enough, thanks. Yes, I'm sure. No, really, we've got plenty *matzah*, thank you.

Nervous? What, nervous? She's my daughter! I'm sure he's lovely. No, not in person, but we've spoken on the phone and he sounds like a gentleman. A real Englishman – an accent and everything! So he's not Jewish, but if he makes my Lany happy, he's good enough for me.

Esther, I'm fine. Really, I am. Of course I'm excited! Yes, they're staying with us. Yes. Fine, thank you. No, we have plenty of towels. I know. Thank you, Esther. If I need, I'll call. Until next week. No, until Wednesday. After *Yontif*. In Nadia's room – she's sleeping in the den. I just don't know what to do with her anymore. No, Esther, I'm talking about Nadia now. Yes, the younger one. No, she's still single, thank God. In Matric. Yes. Yes, I know. Utterly opinionated and stubborn. Yes. Yes, like an ox. But, Esther, Ilana never went through this phase. Why must children bring such *tzuris*? I'm almost embarrassed to go out with her anymore, those *schmattes* she wears ...

Oh, that reminds me – I saw Mrs Liebowitz this morning. Now, she's looking sloppy like I can't tell you. I tell you, she's got rings under her eyes and her hair is just awful. Thin like a rat's tail. What? No, I haven't heard. Go on ... mm-hm ... yes, a lovely boy. Such a good son. Mm-hm ... mm-hm ... Really? No! Oh, how awful for her! How could he? Honestly, I don't understand these young people! A *black*?! Well, so she's going to the university but that doesn't change anything, does it, now? I mean, Nadia has these little *schwartz*e friends from school but she would never dare to go out with one ... I know! Oh, some children are so heartless. Yes, misguided, perhaps, but that doesn't help his poor mother. Oh, Esther I am so sorry to hear – Well, yes, I suppose we should. I'll bake a cheesecake. I have a *pesachdik* recipe somewhere here ... Are you sure? Oh, that would be such a help. I've got so much on my plate at the moment. Are you sure you don't need the recipe? [*Enter Harold with two heavy shopping bags*] Listen, Esther, I'm going to have to go. *Good yontif* to all of you, and give Abie my best. I hope his leg eases up soon. And to the children ... Thank you. Yes. Alright. Thank you. And to you. Yes, I know – I promise I will. Alright, Esther. Alright, Esther. Mm-hm. Yes, I will. The same to you. Thank you, Esther. *Chag Sameach* to you. Goodbye. God bless. And to you. Yes, thank you, Esther. Okay. Alright. Goodbye. Bye. [*To Harold*] So, nu? The supermarket was closed, so you went to Siberia?

Harold: It's the *Yontif* Rush. Mrs Pincus sends her best, by the way. So do the Steinbergs, the Levins, and Mr Epstein. He wants to know if you need extra *matzah* – his daughter's sent special from Israel.

Sylvia: That's nice of him! But I feel like I have *matzah* coming out of my ears. I must phone him tomorrow. [*She unpacks several*

bottles of wine from the bags Harold has brought] They didn't have *Manischewitz*?

Harold: Nope. Sold out.

Sylvia: How much did you pay for this?

Harold: Thirty rand a bottle.

Sylvia: For this? Hmpf. [*Rummages in empty packets*] Where are the eggs?

Harold: Oh, damn!

Sylvia: HAROLD!

Harold: I must have forgotten them.

Sylvia: Harold, how could you?!

Harold: I'm sorry, Sylvie.

Sylvia: Oh, for crying out loud in a bucket of *shmaltz*! What am I supposed to do now?

Harold: Don't worry about it, my darling.

Sylvia: Don't worry? You want a *seder* without an egg?

Harold: Well, which came first?

Sylvia: What?

Harold: The *seder* or the egg?

Sylvia: I don't have time for your nonsense, Harold! You can't have a *seder* without a *seder* plate. You can't have a *seder* plate without an egg.

Harold: I am sorry, dear. [*He lights a cigarette.*]

Sylvia: Oh, Harold, you know you shouldn't...

Harold: Sylvie,

Sylvia: Dr Goldstein said ...

Harold: Goldstein smokes a pack a day. [*Pause*] She should be here soon.

- Sylvia: And you should be done with that cigarette.
- Harold: It'll be lovely to see her again. I've missed her so terribly. Are you excited, Sylvie?
- Sylvia: Excited? Me? Of course I'm excited! I haven't seen my daughter in five years and you have the *chutzpah* to ask if I'm excited? I'm so excited I could just ...
- Harold: Five years. It's a long time. Adam must be what, now? Six months?
- Sylvia: Four months, Harold. Four and a bit.
- Harold: I remember when Lan was that age. She used to cry a lot.
- Sylvia: Small children don't let you sleep; big children don't let you rest.
- Harold: That I don't miss.
- Sylvia: She was a good child.
- Harold: Still is.

Reenter Nadia, wearing a torn denim skirt and a slightly newer-looking, less baggy T-shirt.

- Sylvia: Now, if you'll excuse me, Harold, I have a million and one things to do before the guests arrive. And since *someone* forgot to get eggs, I'll have to go and get myself.
- Nadia: I'll drive!
- Sylvia: Without her license, and she wants to drive. Are you really wearing that?
- Nadia: You *told* me to put on a skirt!
- Sylvia: Oy, *gevalt*.
- Nadia: Look, Ma – you wanted a skirt? I put on a skirt.
- Sylvia: For this I was in labour ten hours?
- Harold: Where's Miriam? She can pop down to the corner café.
- Sylvia: Don't ask me. That girl – if it's not one thing, it's another.
- Harold: She hasn't arrived yet?

Sylvia: Where from! These Africans have no concept of time.

Nadia: Ma!

Sylvia: I'm only stating what's fact, my dear. I'm not saying it's necessarily bad – they're just *different*.

Nadia: I can't believe this ...

Harold: Alright, then! Sylvie, Nadia will go and get some eggs and I'll help you with anything else that needs doing.

Nadia: Where are the keys?

Sylvia: Oh, no!

Nadia: What now?

Sylvia: You're not driving alone, at night, without a license, and on *yontif*!

Nadia: Well, I'll have a license by tomorrow.

Sylvia: Tomorrow?

Nadia: Yes, tomorrow.

Sylvia: It can't be tomorrow.

Nadia: Well, it is tomorrow.

Sylvia: But it's *Pesach*!

Nadia: Yes. And it's also the only slot they had available for months.

Sylvia: But you can't do a driving test on *Pesach*!

Nadia: We've been through this, Ma. I told you weeks ago. There's no other option.

Sylvia: But Nadia, not on First Day *Pesach*!

Nadia: I told you the date weeks ago and you said it was fine!

Sylvia: Well, obviously I didn't think you'd book to do a test on First Day *Pesach*!

Nadia: Well, if they had anything else, I would have taken it ...

- Sylvia: And if your grandmother had a beard, she'd be your grandfather.
- Nadia: ... but they didn't, so I had to take this one.
- Sylvia: But why, Nadia?
- Nadia: I told you, it's the only slot they had.
- Sylvia: Did you tell them you're Jewish?
- Nadia: That doesn't make a difference.
- Sylvia: That's ... what do they call it? Cultural discrimination! You know, the blacks go on and on about discrimination and equal opportunity ... well now they're doing exactly what they're complaining about! It's outrageous. It's blatant anti-Semitism.
- Nadia: It's not bloody anti-Semitism. It's just bureaucracy. That's the only date they had and I took it.
- Sylvia: But it's *Pesach*!
- Nadia: Mom, saying it over and over in a loud voice isn't going to change anything.
- Sylvia: But – but – they can't make you do a test on *yontif*! It's against your religion!
- Nadia: No one's *making* me do anything. I chose to do it. It's a free country now, you know.
- Sylvia: How could you do this, Nadia? It's a holy day!
- Nadia: I know, Ma. But it's the only time they have. Otherwise I'd have to wait 'til the beginning of July.
- Sylvia: So you'll wait.
- Nadia: I can't wait, Ma. It's months away! [*Appealing to Harold*]
Dad?
- Harold: The child has booked the test. What can we do?
- Sylvia: On *yontif* one doesn't do such things.
- Nadia: Ma, I have to. I don't have a choice.
- Sylvia: [*To Harold*] Tell your daughter she can't do a driver's test on First Day *yontif*! What will it look like?

- Nadia: There you are again, always worried about how things *look*!
- Harold: Maybe we should all just take a step back ...
- Sylvia: [*To Nadia*] You know, there's an expression my mother used to say to me, Nadia. *Arein iz di tir brait, un arois iz zi shmol.*
- Nadia: Which means?
- Sylvia: "The door to evil-doing is wide, the return gate is narrow."
- Nadia: I wouldn't call a driver's license test evil-doing, Mom.
- Sylvia: Breaking *yontif* is evil.
- Nadia: That's such bullshit! You break *yontif* every ti--
- [Sylvia:
[Harold:] DO NOT use that language with me--
Nadia, please don't speak to your mother like that!
- Nadia: Then tell her to stop being such a hypocrite!
- Sylvia: How dare you speak like this to your parents! May Hashem forgive you ...
- Nadia: Oh, Ma, don't start! [*Tense silence*] What's the difference anyway? You drive to *shul* on *yontif*.
- Sylvia: It's for my knees.
- Nadia: I'll bet you jogged further than the *shul* this afternoon. It's got nothing to do with your knees. [*Sylvia looks flushed, caught out*] You're being a hypocrite and you know it.
- Harold: Right, that's it. I'm going to get the eggs.
- Nadia: No, *I'll* go.
- Sylvia: Nadia, I already told you--
- Nadia: I'll walk, then! Anything just to get out of this house!
- Exit Nadia.*
- Sylvia: Harold, I can't take it anymore.
- Harold: She's our child, Sylvie. We just have to love her.
- Sylvia: But she's impossible. Sometimes I think--

- Harold: When children are impossible, we must just love them even more.
- Sylvia: I just don't understand. We brought them up the same way, in the same house, with the same values. Yet two more different specimens you won't find in a kettle of fish! I mean, just look at her sister: a gifted fashion designer in London! London! Can you believe? Now *that* child brings *nachas*. Only twenty-four, with a career and a family! Alright, so Chris is not Jewish ...
- Harold: With a name like that? There's a shock.
- Sylvia: But she is happily married and successful, and what more could a parent want for a daughter?
- Harold: Indeed.
- Sylvia: Do you remember the last time we saw her, Harold?
- Harold: At the airport.
- Sylvia: I could have eaten her up.
- Harold: Oh, she was beautiful.
- Sylvia: So grown up.
- Harold: So brave.
- Sylvia: And smart, with her matching brown luggage as she marched across the tarmac.
- Harold: Wasn't it red?
- Sylvia: No, Harold. It was brown.
- Harold: Yes! It was that funny reddy colour.
- Sylvia: No, it was brown.
- Harold: I'm sure I remember it being red?
- Sylvia: Harold! It was brown luggage!
- Harold: Okay! So it was brown.
- Sylvia: She was very quiet that day.
- Harold: I remember.

Sylvia: There were so many things I wish we'd said.

Harold: Sometimes, Sylvie, words aren't enough to express yourself.

Sylvia: I wanted her ... to know.

Harold: I know, my love. And she knows.

Sylvia: She ... I ...

Harold: Raising children is hard. Letting them grow up is even harder.

Sylvia: When I hugged her goodbye, I didn't want to let go.

Harold: We have to let go sometime. I know it's hard. God, it's hard. But children need to learn to fly by themselves.

Sylvia: Oy, when she turned to wave, I nearly...

Harold: Sylvie—

Sylvia: I'm fine, I'm fine.

Harold: Yes, it'll be good to see her again.

Sylvia: Do you think she's changed?

Harold: Probably. Children do.

Sylvia: She's not a child anymore.

Harold: You're not wrong. Three things grow overnight: profits, rent, and daughters.

Sylvia: She's a mother now.

Harold: She's still our child. Nothing can come between flesh and blood.

Sylvia: She has her own child.

Harold: And we have a grandchild. Can you believe it?

Sylvia: Barely! I've been looking forward to this for so long – I've told everybody! I wish they'd send a picture. I keep asking Ilana. Oh, he must be the most precious thing in the world! Well, I'd better start getting ready. They'll be arriving soon. *[Exit Sylvia. Harold lights another cigarette, picks up the newspaper, and settles down to read. After a moment, re-enter Sylvia]* Phone

your daughter and tell her to get some packet soup while she's at the café.

Harold: What for?

Sylvia: I don't want we should run out.

Harold: But you've been making soup for weeks!

Sylvia: You want we should run out? Fine, don't get the soup. And when we run out, *you* can explain to the guests—

Harold: Alright, alright, dear. I'll call her ... [*He dials, waits*] Sweetheart? It's Daddy. When you get to the shop, your mother wants you to get some packet soup. [*He listens; to Sylvia*] She says what kind?

Sylvia: The kosher one.

Harold: [*To Nadia*] The kosher one. [*He listens; to Sylvia*] Which kosher one?

Sylvia: I don't know what it's called. The yellow one.

Harold: [*To Nadia*] The yellow one. [*He listens; to Sylvia*] How many do you need?

Sylvia: Two or three is fine.

Harold: [*To Nadia*] Two or three, sweetheart.

Sylvia: And some parsley.

Harold: Hmm? [*To Nadia*] Oh, and some parsley. [*He listens*] Hang on ... [*to Sylvia*] How much parsley?

Sylvia: Just some parsley! A handful.

Harold: [*To Nadia*] She says a handful. [*He listens*] Hang on ... [*to Sylvia*] Your handful or her handful?

Sylvia: It doesn't matter! Her handful! Just some parsley!

Harold: [*To Nadia*] Uh ... your handful, dear.

Sylvia: And remember the eggs!

Harold: [*To Nadia*] And she says don't forget the eggs. [*He listens; to Sylvia*] She says she won't forget the eggs.

- Sylvia: Good.
- Harold: [*To Nadia*] Alright, my sweetheart. No, that's all. Yes. I love you, sweetheart. Walk safely. Watch for cars. See you now-now. [*He hangs up the phone*]
- Sylvia: Harold, would you please make sure there's enough *matzah* on the table. Especially at Hymie's end, put an extra basket there. And put out that cigarette.
- Harold: Yes, dear.
- Sylvia: ... And will you count the *haggadot*. I don't want we should be short.
- Harold: Yes, dear.
- Sylvia: ... And I suppose I'd better set an extra place for Hilda. She won't come, you know. But what can I do? *Faribels* I don't need. I'll get a phone call in an hour or right in the middle of the *seder* to say her arthritis is playing up again and she thinks better she stays in bed. So what can you do? We'll have two extra places, as usual – Elijah and his wife!

Exit Sylvia. Harold extinguishes his cigarette, exits kitchen. Momentary silence.
Phone
rings.

- Sylvia [*off-stage*]: Harold! [*Pause. Phone rings again*] Harold! [*Phone rings*] HAROLD!
- Harold [*off-stage*]: Yes, dear?
- Sylvia [*off-stage*]: Will you get the bloody phone!
- Harold [*off-stage*]: I'm setting the table, my love!
- Sylvia [*off-stage*]: What if it's Ilana?
- Harold [*off-stage*]: I can't, dear!
- Sylvia [*off-stage*]: Your daughter could be lying bleeding to death on a roadside in some black township and you can't be bothered to answer the phone!? [*Enter Sylvia, stomping. She grabs the receiver*] Rabinowitz residence! Oh, hello, Esther. No, no, I'm fine. Yes, fine, thank you, *Baruch Hashem*. And you? That's good. Yes, thank you. Well, make it quick, Esther. What? Oh, well are you using enough stock, Esther? The balls must be completely covered with the stock. I know, Esther. But as I've told you before, my mother always used to say you have to use real fish

stock. No, Esther, it's something to do with the gelatine or something. I can't explain it, Esther. I just know that these store-bought things don't work. Well, do you chill the *gefilte fish* before you put them in the stock? Oh, I see. I think that's your problem there, Esther. You've *got* to chill the balls before you cook them. Yes. Yes. Yes, you have to.

Alright, Esther, I must go. They'll be arriving soon and I still ... Really? Well maybe your stove's not hot enough. The stock has to really be boiling. Oh, I see. Well, if that's the case, I really don't know what to suggest, Esther.

Now, tell me: have they made a diagnosis? Really. What's the doctor's name? Come again? Oh, Esther, I'm impressed you can even pronounce it! You know, it really makes me mad. What can they possibly know about western medicine? Really, it makes me sick! I know! Yes, isn't it? Absolutely, Esther! No, no – you must understand me: it's not that I have a problem with them. It's just that they should treat their own. Yes. Yes. I know! And what does this Dr Ram-kath-san say? Really?

Could you not find a white doctor, Esther? Yes, I know, they're getting all the benefits now. It's like trusting the garden boy to cut out your appendix. Terrifying. What do they know? No, I'm sorry. This government is cruel, Esther.

But listen, Esther, I really must go. Alright. Yes, thank you. Plenty, thank you. Yes. And to you, Esther. Oh, and just before I forget – Estelle Rosettenstein asked me if I knew anyone who'd be interested in starting up a rummy club. I told her we already have bridge twice a week, but she absolutely insisted I ask around. [*Enter Harold*] I know, Esther, that's exactly what I told her. I know. Yes, I completely agree with you. Alright, then, I must go.

And give my best to your Abie. Yes, thank you, I will. And you. thank you, Esther. Alright. Yes, yes. Good. Speak soon. God bless. And to the children. I will do, thank you. *Chag Sameach*, Esther. 'Bye. 'Bye, Esther. Ciao.

Harold: And how is Esther?

Sylvia: Esther is fine, *Baruch Hashem*. Abie's leg is giving him *tzuris*. You ought to go and visit him.

Harold [*picking up newspaper again*]: Mm.

Sylvia: He's a lovely man, Harold. So good to his mother. An *aigeneh mensch*. But from such a family you can expect. Never the problems this one gives.

Intercom buzzes.

Sylvia [*into receiver*]: Hello? Hello? [*Aside*] Oh, in the name of *Hashem*... [*Yells into receiver*] HELLO?? [*To Harold*] The intercom's broken again!

- Harold: It's not broken, dear. We had it fixed last week.
- Sylvia: Well, I can't hear anything!
- Harold: Try listening, dear.
- Sylvia: Harold!
- Harold: Maybe the person on the other end isn't speaking clearly. Who is it? Tell them to speak up.
- Sylvia: Harold, I don't *know* who it is because I can't hear through the *verkakte* intercom! Go outside and see who's there.
- Harold [*Reading newspaper*]: Dear, you're right there.
- Sylvia: Harold, it could be anyone!
- Harold [*Not looking up from his newspaper*]: Imagine that – how exciting!
- Intercom rings again, more persistently this time.*
- Sylvia: Harold Rabinowitz! It could be any beggar, rapist, or thief!
- Harold: Or any one of the fifteen friends and family members we're expecting.
- Sylvia: It's too early for that. Not even Hymie shows up before *shul's* out, and it's barely dark. [*Intercom rings again*] Hello? Hellooo? Can I help you? Can you hear me? Hello? [*Snatching newspaper from Harold*] Harold!
- Harold: Okay, okay, I'm going.
- Exit Harold. He reenters a few seconds later.*
- Harold: It's for you. It's a *yontif* delivery. He wants you to sign for it.
- Sylvia: I should have guessed. These boys always mumble ...
- Exit Sylvia. She reenters a few minutes later, holding an elaborate gift basket, which she adds to the others on the kitchen table.*
- Sylvia: From Estelle Rosettenstein. A good heart, but taste the woman doesn't have. [*Pause*] I don't like it, Harold.
- Harold: So don't eat it. Put it in the cupboard and give it to someone else next year.

- Sylvia: Harold! I mean I don't like this whole situation. I just don't feel comfortable.
- Harold: Comfortable? About what, my love?
- Sylvia: I know it's not very liberal of me but I just don't like that ...
[*she almost has to concentrate to get the word out, trying her best not to sound offensive*] black men make deliveries in this area. You know, most of the time it's just white women alone in these houses. Anything could happen.
- Harold: My God, you're right! Anything could happen. A fire, an earthquake, running out of milk ...
- Sylvia: Don't patronize me, Harold! You always patronize me! I really don't feel comfortable with it. They should employ white men to make deliveries to white areas. Or black women. Frustrating they might be, but they're not as dangerous.
- Harold: Sylvie, darling, you are being completely paranoid. You can't live your life being afraid of ninety percent of the population. Black men? They're men – some good, some not so good. You can't just assume that a man is dangerous because he happens to be black.
- Sylvia: But you've heard the stories. They prey on white women. It's an uncontrollable urge they have—
- Harold: Sylvie!
- Sylvia: It's true! They can't help it, it's an obsession. I once read a story about a woman whose mother was raped by a black man. It makes your skin crawl.
- Harold: You know that you make me laugh sometimes, but I love you very much, my *meshugena* [*he stands and kisses her*].
- Sylvia: I don't feel safe anymore! The whole system is faulty.
- Harold: Sylvia Rabinowitz, stop with the stress. Ilana will be here soon. Why don't you go and get ready?
- Sylvia: Alright. Watch the soup.
- Harold: It's all under control.
- Sylvia: If it starts to boil too much, take out the *kneidlach* and put them on a dish.
- Harold: Alright, now go and relax for a few minutes.

- Sylvia: RELAX? With fifteen guests about to arrive and no maid and no eggs for the *seder*? And where is Nadia?
- Harold: Shh, Sylvie.
- Sylvia: Did you put extra *matzah*—
- Harold: Sweetheart, calm down. Everything will be fine. Remember, she's also our daughter.
- Sylvia: Oh, Harold. It's just — I'm so ... It's been so long and I'm not sure I'll know how to ... how to ...
- Harold: I know, darling. I know. Now go make yourself pretty.
- Sylvia: Okay. *[She turns to go. At the door, she turns back]* If the oven timer goes—
- Harold: Go and get ready!
- Sylvia: Okay! Okay!

Exit Sylvia. Harold wanders around the kitchen, inspecting pots and dishes. Lights a cigarette. Goes to fridge to get a drink. As he closes the door, he sees a photo. He smiles, removes it from the fridge, examines it.

- Harold: Ah, Lany, Lany, Lany. Always with your trophies and your ribbons. And that smile. Just like your mother.

Enter Nadia with shopping bags.

- Nadia: Christ, the whole Durban Jewish community is at Musgrave Pick 'n Pay!
- Harold: Madness, isn't it?
- Nadia: But it really is! All these people who wouldn't recognize the Rabbi if he shook their hand most of the year, suddenly jostling at the Kosher section like it's a race to the Pearly Gates!
- Harold: That's *yontif*, for you. *[Looks at his watch]* Did you really walk all the way to Musgrave?
- Nadia: Don't be ridiculous. I drove, just like every other hypocritical Jew in Durban. *[Nadia tosses the set of car keys onto the table in front of her father. Silence. He looks at her]* They were on the hall table. *[Silence]* Dad, I'm perfectly capable of driving. I'm doing my test tomorrow! *[Silence]* Oh, Dada, don't be like

that. You *know* how difficult it is for me to live under Mom and rely on all her *meshugena* rules.

Harold: Nadia, we brought you up to respect your mother and father. Deceit is not respectful.

Nadia: Oh, for Christ's sake. She *taught* me deceit! She's the biggest hypocrite on the face of the planet!

Harold: Nadia, it hurts me when you talk about your mother like that.

Nadia: Well, it's true!

Harold: She loves you very much, Nadia.

Nadia: Well, maybe it would help if she'd show it every now and then. [Harold is silent] Oh, Dad! You don't know what it's like! [Harold merely raises his eyebrows at her. He knows *exactly* what it's like] Can I steal a ciggie?

Harold: You know they're bad for you.

Nadia: Really!? [He gives her a cigarette and lights it] She's crazy.

Harold: She's still your mother.

Nadia: Really? Oh, thank God! That's a relief. I knew she was last week, but you never know what can happen ... [Silence] I'm just teasing, Dada.

Harold: Ay ... [sighs]

Nadia: Dada, you're not angry with me, are you?

Harold: It's very difficult for a parent to be angry with a child. In fact, it takes great courage.

Nadia: Mom doesn't seem to have a problem.

Harold: Your mother is under a lot of pressure right now.

Nadia: Well, who isn't? I wouldn't mind a little support around here, either. I take the biggest test of my life tomorrow morning and no one here gives a damn!

Harold: Nadeleh, I know that right now a driver's test seems like a very important thing. But I'll let you in on a little something. There are bigger tests you will have to face in life.

- Nadia: I know, Dad, but this is sooo huge! Why can't Mom just be happy for me?
- Harold: She is happy for you, Nadia.
- Nadia: Well, she has warped ways of showing it, then.
- Harold: That I can't deny, Sweetheart. She has her own special way of expressing most things. But you have to understand her.
- Nadia: I'm trying!
- Harold: Yes, very trying. *[Pause]* She loves you so much, Nadia, and she just wants what's best for you. In her eyes, desecrating a holy day will harm you spiritually.
- Nadia: But doesn't she realize that I don't *care* about religion? Just because I'm born into something, doesn't mean I have to believe in it.
- Harold: I can't explain it, Nadia. And I know this is going to sound horribly vague and parent-ish, but you will only understand your mother's reaction tonight when you're a bit older. Or wiser. *[Nadia is sullenly silent. Harold stubs out his cigarette. Turns to Nadia]* Nadia, tonight is a very special night. Do you know that?
- Nadia: Yes.
- Harold: Not just because it's the *seder*. Not just because Ilana is coming home. Not only because it's the first time our family will be together for the first time in five years. Tonight is different, Nadia. Do you understand?
- Nadia: I think so.
- Harold: Pesach always gets to me. Hits me right here. *[taps his heart. Lights another cigarette]* It always makes me feel ... aware. Think of all the times the Jews have been persecuted, prejudiced—
- Nadia: Oh, Dad, don't start ...
- Harold: I'm just saying that the story of the Exodus always reminds me of how grateful I am that we have the freedom to raise our children in peace. I don't deny this country has its own problems. But it's a different kind of freedom I'm talking about. It's the freedom of choice. And our children have this freedom. And, please God, our children's children will have this freedom. We guide our children as best we can. We show

them what we think is the right way. But, I suppose, you can lead a Jew to the desert but you can't make him drink. *[Pause]* The choices our children make might hurt, Nadia, but it is the freedom we have managed to give them that makes me joyous.

Nadia: Well, if it hurts you so much, why do you do it?

Harold: Ay. Sometimes so wise for her years; sometimes still a child in her fears.

Nadia *[sarcastic]*: I'll understand when I'm older?

Harold: Or wiser. *[Pause]* What else is on your mind, Nadia? I can see something is weighing on you.

Nadia: Nothing.

Harold: What is it?

Nadia: Nothing. I'm cool.

Harold: You can't fool me, Nadia.

Nadia: It's just this test.

Harold: Nadia, you're my daughter. I know you better than that. What's up?

Nadia: Nothing!

Harold: Are you nervous?

Nadia: Not exactly nervous ...

Harold: Well, then?

Nadia: It's just, like ... I'm not sure what to expect. I can't imagine her ... She's always been ... I can't picture her in the role of wife and mother, you know? That's so ... she's not like that. She's so headstrong.

Harold: That she is.

Nadia: Remember when she tried to run away?

Harold: Your mother said she'd pack her sandwiches.

Nadia: She never thought Ilana'd actually *do* it!

Harold: No.

- Nadia: But that's my sister. I remember her climbing out the window. We were still sharing that room, so I must have been about four at most. God, I was so scared for her. It seemed so high!
- Harold: She climbed down the avo tree.
- Nadia: And took her Tinkerbell satchel with some clothes and her entire sticker collection. In case, *Godforbid*, I should steal them.
- Harold: I remember.
- Nadia: She let herself out of the back-garden gate. The one Patience used and never bothered to lock.
- Harold: Your mother came to check on you girls at about eleven pm.
- Nadia: And found me sitting in the window, staring out into the garden.
- Harold: And Ilana's bed empty.
- Nadia: God, Mom freaked out.
- Harold: "Freaked out" isn't the word! We called the police.
- Nadia: But they didn't find her.
- Harold: No. She came back before they could. She was hungry.
- Nadia: So a slight practical oversight, then. Got her in trouble.
- Harold: Trouble?! Your mother nearly had a hernia that night! But how do you punish a nine-year-old? So your mother denied her dessert for a month.
- Nadia: Her just dessert!
- Harold: Not that she seemed to care anyway. She's got a defiant streak, that child.
- Nadia: That's Ilana. She never listened to anyone. Ever. You know, I think a lot of the time she just does these things to be *dufka*.
- Harold: It's in her nature. But one day, she'll learn.
- Nadia: You reckon?
- Harold: I hope.

Pause.

Nadia: Remember the time she brought home the puppy?

Harold: I do!

Nadia: Poor thing. I can't believe Mom wouldn't let her keep it! It was so tiny and scraggly.

Harold: And when she pierced her belly-button.

Nadia: Mom made her take it out!

Harold: Rightly so! It was a hideous thing.

Nadia: And the tattoo! *[Pause]* Sorry.

Harold: It's alright, my dear.

Nadia: That was the worst thing she'd ever done. A big, black Star of David on her chest. *[Nadia touches herself just above her left breast]* Dark as blood. *[Pause]* Do you think she's changed?

Harold: We'll soon find out.

Nadia: Maybe I *am* nervous.

Harold: And why do you suppose that would be?

Nadia: I'm not really sure I *want* her to come.

Harold: Why not, my *bubbelah*?

Nadia: I won't know how to act.

Harold: Just act as your heart tells you.

Nadia: What if I do something wrong? I don't want to hurt her. Or Mom.

Harold: If you follow your heart, you won't hurt anyone.

Nadia: That's such a cliché.

Harold: Clichés become clichés for a reason. *[Pause]* Come here, my child.

They hug. It is very emotional. Enter Sylvia in a smart but conservative navy dress.
Her

hair is sprayed tightly and she wears very red lipstick. As she walks through the door Harold and Nadia scramble to stub out their cigarettes.

Sylvia: Oh! Well, forgive me for intruding on your little father-daughter moment, but if you wouldn't mind I could use some help around here. They're going to start arriving any second! What's that I smell?

Harold & Nadia: Nothing!

Sylvia: You've been smoking again, Harold. Don't think I don't know it. Nadia, tell your father he shouldn't be smoking.

Nadia [*smiling at Harold*]: You know, Dad, you really shouldn't.

Harold: Sylvie, my darling. You look very smart!

Sylvia: From smart you wouldn't know if it slapped you in the face. Are you going to change your shirt?

Harold: I wasn't planning on—

Sylvia: You've spilled coffee on it. A nightmare to get out.

Harold: Okay, I'll change it.

Sylvia: Wear the blue one. If you own something that can pass as smart, that might be it.

Harold: Alright, dear.

Sylvia [*to Nadia*]: Did you get the eggs?

Nadia: I got the eggs.

Sylvia sees the car keys on the table next to the packet.

Sylvia: Nadia! [*The doorbell rings*] Oy vey, they're early! [*Answers intercom*] Hello? Hello? Oh, Hello, Clive. *Good yontif*. No, no. Not early at all! Lovely! Yes, yes, come right in. [*Hangs up receiver*] Damnit! No sense of social etiquette he has! Quick! Nadia, will you boil those eggs please. Harold, put that wine out and also maybe take out some sherry. And make sure the rest is locked in the liquor cabinet and when Hymie arrives he shouldn't sit next to it. Or next to Rivka. In fact, put *her* next to the liquor cabinet. Yes, that's a plan. God, Harold, pour me a drink!

Exit Sylvia.

- Nadia: Remind me why she invited Clive again? He's so awkward.
- Harold: He's ... eccentric. But then he's an *aigenah mensch*. And you know that since his mother passed away he has no family in Durban.
- Nadia: But we don't know him from a bar of soap.
- Harold: A Jew shouldn't be alone on *yontif*. Your mother's an angel like that.
- Nadia: I hate that she treats people differently just because they're Jewish. Or white. Dad, you should see how rude she is to my friends. I had my biology study group round last weekend and she totally ignored three of them, because they're black. I'm telling you, she fussed all over the only white guy and offered him tea and cake and everything, and she didn't even say hello to the others. It was so embarrassing! I could have died!
- Harold: Well, sometimes people feel more comfortable with others who are like them.
- Nadia: That's such bull! You brought us up to know that there's absolutely no difference between human beings. If they're black or white or Jewish or gentile, we're supposed to treat them the same.
- Harold: Yes, everyone needs to be treated with the same *respect*, and if your mother didn't do that then I think she was wrong. But all I'm saying, Nadia, is that sometimes we can respect people, but we can't *understand* them.
- Nadia: I don't understand *you*!
- Harold: Take Clive, for instance. You say we don't know him from a bar of soap. Well, that's not strictly true. Clive's father Mookie worked for David Bringenfeld, who had the shop on West Street. My father did a lot of business with him in the sixties. Of course these days the only people who shop there are the blacks, so the standard has gone down.
- Nadia: Dad, you *know* I hate it when you talk like that.
- Harold: I'm just saying. Not that it's bad, it's just a fact. Anyway, Clive's first cousin Misha – or is it Masha? I'm not sure – well she's related to Jack Finkelstein. I think their aunts were sisters? So the man's practically family!
- Nadia: Oh, come *on*, Dad!

Harold: What I'm saying, darling, is that with the Jews there's history. We share the same festivals. We worship the same God. We understand how we operate. There's a familiarity and it's comforting.

Enter Sylvia. She drops an awful looking gift basket on the table.

Sylvia: Will you two *please* get out here and be sociable! And Harold, when are you going to change your shirt? [*To Clive on way off-stage*] Sorry, Clive, you were saying ...

Harold: Well, I guess we'd better go and be sociable ... [*The intercom rings*] Hello? Hello, Hymie! Come on in! [*Replaces receiver; picks up as many bottles of the wine as he can carry*] I'd better arm myself!

Exit Harold, with wine. Nadia does not leave. Instead, she picks up her book on How to Pass your Driver's License Easily and starts reading. She occasionally covers the page with her palm to test herself on road sign recognition.

Nadia: Stop ... Yield to pedestrians ... Workmen overhead ... Um ... damnit, I know this one ... it's a caution of some kind ... [*she checks*] Potholes! I should have guessed.

Enter Sylvia.

Sylvia: For God's sake, Nadia, will you come and say hello! I can't tell you how rude you're being!

Sylvia drops a gift-wrapped package onto the table. Nadia picks it up, shakes it.

Nadia: Ooh – chocolate nuts. [*She rips open the gift-wrap. She finds a card and reads it aloud*] To our dear Hymie, with love, the Smolowitzes.

Sylvia: Social graces of a monkey. And a gentile monkey, at that!

Before Nadia can protest, the intercom rings.

Nadia [*answering intercom*]: Rabinowitz Mental Institution, how can we help you?

Sylvia [*hisses*]: Nadia!

Nadia: Hi, Jack. [*Replaces receiver*] It's Jack and Sadie.

Sylvia: Oy, vey. I'd better warn them about Hymie ...

Nadia: You didn't tell them he was coming?

Sylvia: There's no need to discourage guests, is there? Now, get out here and be friendly.

Exit Sylvia and, reluctantly, Nadia. The stage is silent for a moment. The phone rings.

It rings again. And again. Eventually Harold rushes in and answers.

Harold: Hello? Hello, Hilda! Not at all! How are you? Oh, I am sorry to hear that. Oh, no – you poor thing. No, not to worry. I'll tell her. You just stay comfortable and keep warm. Yes. Yes. Us? We're fine, thank you. Yes, I'm well. Yes, Sylvie's well. Yes, Nadia, too. Yes, she arrives tonight! Not yet, no. We are very excited! Five years! Yes, married. No, we haven't met him yet. Ah ... Chris Somebody, I think? No, not Jewish. I know. I know. What does he do? Well, I'm not exactly sure, really! He's a ... a painter, or something, I think. Yes, our first grandchild. His name's Adam. Yes, very excited! About six months old. Yes, I know. I know. Sylvia? Um ... ooh, well, look at the time! Hilda, I'd better go and hold fort out there! Not to worry, Hilda. Thank you for phoning. Yes, we understand entirely. I will. I will. Thank you, Hilda. And I do hope you feel better. I'll tell her. No, not at all. Thank you. You too. *Chag Sameach*. God Bless. You too. Good night.

He hangs up the phone. As he's about to exit, Nadia storms into kitchen, hotly pursued by an angry Sylvia.

Sylvia: Nadia! How can you be so rude?

Nadia: I'm rude? And what the hell was *that*?

Sylvia: Nadia, you have to remember that you come from a different generation ...

Nadia: Just cos she's old doesn't give her the right to talk like that!

Sylvia: She's your aunty, Nadia.

Nadia: No, she's not! Just because you make me call her "Aunty", doesn't mean I share a drop of blood with that old bag! She's malicious and stupid and I won't listen to her!

Sylvia: Now, Nadia, I won't have you saying that about Sadie!

Nadia: You think it too!

Sylvia: Well, I wouldn't say–

- Nadia: Your words, mother: "a malicious old cow".
- Sylvia: I never said that!
- Nadia: You did! On the phone to Esther yesterday. I was standing right next to you!
- Sylvia: Oy, little children with their big ears! Harold, do you hear this, your daughter? Do you hear what she's saying?
- Harold: What just happened?
- [Sylvia: Nadia's being rude again!
[Nadia: Sadie's being offensive again!
- Harold: What did she say?
- Sylvia & Nadia: I won't repeat it!
- Nadia: She's spouting her usual racist, class-ist, bigoted bull.
- Sylvia: Oy, Nadia, can't you just let go of your *vershtunkende* principles for once and let us have a pleasant evening? [*The intercom rings. Sylvia answers*] Hello? Rochel! Denise! Lovely to have you! Please come in. [*Replaces receiver*] The Witch and The Kugel are here. Harold, come and say hello. Nadia, cut up some more gherkins for the guests and bring them through, will you?
- Exit Sylvia and Harold. Harold's overly-enthusiastic greetings are heard from the next room. Re-enter Sylvia & Harold with another gift basket.*
- Sylvia [*examining gift basket. To Harold*]: Hmpf. Like better she couldn't afford. Did you see your sister's dress?
- Harold: It would kill you to greet her?
- Sylvia: What? I kissed her *good yontif*. I must worry if she's too frigid to return?
- Harold: You could have been a bit warmer.
- Sylvia: Nadia, take out those pickles and check on Hymie. If he's getting too close to the liquor cabinet, put the potato crisps on the other side of the room.
- Nadia [*mock-saluting*]: Yes, General!

Exit Nadia with pickles.

Harold: She's been seeing that Doctor – what's his name? – Meltz.
Sylvia: What your sister needs is a head doctor.
Harold: Apparently he's a very nice man.
Sylvia: When you have money, you are wise and good-looking and can sing well too.

Pause.

Harold: Denise is looking pretty.
Sylvia: Dress up a broom and it will also look nice.
Harold: Sylvie, she's my niece.
Sylvia: Her skirt is too short.
Harold: So what, Sylvie?
Sylvia: With thighs like that?
Harold: So the child has thighs.
Sylvia: I'm just saying.
Harold: She's at that age. It's all fashion, fashion.
Sylvia: That girl wouldn't know fashion if it shook her hand at the *brocha* and her mother's no better. Now, our Ilana would be able to teach them a thing or two about fashion. In fact the help of a professional designer they couldn't be harmed by.
Harold: Just don't make a scene, Sylvie. Let's try to keep the family peace tonight, of all nights. Everyone's strung out enough. We don't need any extra reasons for tension.
Sylvia: Where *is* Ilana? What time did she say her flight was?
Harold: Uh ... did she say seven?
Sylvia: No, Harold, I'm sure she said six.
Harold: So, six.
Sylvia: So where is she, then?
Harold: She'll be here.

Sylvia: You know, if the girl doesn't show up soon, you're going to have to fire her.

Harold: What?!

Sylvia: This is the millionth time she hasn't shown up. Let me tell you, if it's not one excuse, it's another.

Harold: Oh! I thought we were still talking about Ilana.

Sylvia: These blacks are just so unreliable these days. Not like the old school. Remember Patience? Now, that was a girl in a million.

Harold: She retired, didn't she?

Sylvia: Oh, these new ones. Not a clue how to cook or clean, and no respect ... I tell you! They should know their place. And this is what we have to work with.

Enter Nadia.

Nadia: Aunty Rochel says, "Do you have any *di-et* cola?"

Sylvia: Good. At least she knows she needs it.

Nadia: My God, she looks like she's been attacked by a doily.

Sylvia: Money can't buy style. [*Perhaps Sylvia shoots a look at Nadia's outfit here. She notices a bright lipstick mark on Nadia's cheek*] And so much make-up at her age doesn't do what it used to. [*She licks her finger and rubs at Nadia's cheek*]

Nadia: Mom!

Sylvia: Here, take this out for the guests to snack on. [*Hands Nadia a platter of something*]

The intercom rings.

Sylvia [*answering*]: Hello? Hi, *chag sameach*. Come on in. [*To Harold*] It's your parents. [*To Nadia*] Are there enough peanuts out?

Nadia: I think so.

Sylvia: And cocktail gherkins? Are there any left? Hymie might as well have been inhaling them.

Nadia: I'll go check.

Exit Nadia.

- Sylvia: Your father had better be on his best behaviour tonight.
- Harold: I'm sure he will be, dear.
- Sylvia: Last time he almost set the hall rug on fire.
- Harold: The man's eighty-seven. His eyes aren't so good anymore.
- Sylvia: At that age, he shouldn't be smoking anyway.
- Harold: Let the man enjoy his vice, Sylvia. He's earned it.
- Sylvia: Between your father and Hilda, we should take out special insurance. *Yontif* cover.
- Harold: Oh, I forgot to tell you – Hilda called. She's not coming. She says it's her arthritis. [*Sylvia speaks the last sentence out loud with him*]
- Sylvia: Honestly, I don't know why I bother.

Enter Nadia, who dumps another basket onto the table.

- Nadia: Mom, Uncle Hymie says are there any more gherkins? And Aunty Rivka wants to know why Barbara isn't coming. I'm going to leave *that* one to you!
- Sylvia: Rivka? When did *she* get here?
- Nadia: She came with Bobba and Zayda.
- Sylvia: Well, don't mention Barbara in front of her and hopefully she'll forget. Or give her a sherry. [*Looking at the gift baskets*] Oy! All this dried fruit! My stomach is *kvetching* already.
- Nadia: Well, it's better than *matzah*.
- Sylvia: Must you hate everything about your religion?
- Nadia: I didn't say I hate everything about it! I just meant that *matzah* makes me constipated!
- Sylvia: Oy, oy, oy.
- Harold: Sylvie, it was an innocent comment. Everyone starts to resent the stuff after eight days of it.

- Sylvia: It's this new attitude the young ones have that will be the end of Judaism. Tradition they don't respect.
- Harold: Darling, I think you're making *matzah*-do about nothing! [*The joke falls flat*]
- Sylvia: Where is Ilana? Do you think something could have happened? *Godforbid* on these roads with the blacks and their maniac minibuses! Honestly, they should be locked away.
- Nadia: What, every bus driver in the country?
- Sylvia: Oh, I wish Ilana hadn't insisted on taking a taxi from the airport. Where did I put that piece of paper with her cell phone number?
- Harold: I'm sure they're fine. They'll be here any minute. You know our daughter – she was late for her matric dance, for her exams ...
- Nadia: Yes, she's always been a little slow.
- Sylvia: Nadia, have you boiled those eggs?
- Nadia: Not yet. I–
- Sylvia: Oh! Must I do *everything* myself? Is a little help such a big thing to wish for?
- Nadia: Sorry, Mom. Things have just been a bit hectic the last two minutes!
- Sylvia: And always with the excuses. You know, you'd think my own daughter would be willing to help.
- Nadia: You're making such a palaver out of this *because* of your daughter! Remember you changed Ilana's nappies. She's not God and you don't have to treat her like it.
- Sylvia: Fine! I'll do the eggs myself.
- Nadia: Mom! That's not what I meant! Here, I'll do it.
- Sylvia: No, no. I'm quite capable–
- Nadia: I said I'd do it!

The intercom rings. Momentarily silence.

- Sylvia: It's her! Oh my God, it's her!

Nadia: How do you know for sure?

Sylvia is frantically smoothing down her skirt, her hair, her blouse, etc.

Sylvia: Everyone else is here! [*The intercom rings again*] Oy, gevalt. Answer it! Harold! Answer the damn thing!

Harold [*answering*]: Hello? [*Pause*] Hello? Is anybody – oh, no. No thank you. I'm sorry, we don't need. Not tonight. Yes, you have a good evening, too [*He replaces receiver*] It was a man selling brooms.

Sylvia: These bloody blacks with their brooms! Will they ever leave us alone? Don't they know it's a holy festival, or do they just have no shame?

[Nadia: Mom!
[Harold: Darling, calm down.

Sylvia: I will *not* calm down! These people just don't know their place! Always interfering in the lives of innocent people trying to mind their own business. Why can't they just leave us alone!

Harold: My love, I know you're tense ...

Sylvia: Tense? Why would I be tense? I'm not tense!

Harold: Perhaps you'd like a drink?

Sylvia: Don't tell me what I'd like and don't like!

The intercom rings. Harold answers immediately.

Harold: Hello? Lany! Oh, thank God!

[Nadia: More brooms?
[Sylvia: Oh, Hashem! It's her!

Harold: Darling, come in!

Sylvia: [*She smooths her skirt, leans over to straighten Harold's tie, glances at Nadia but decides there's nothing she can do to help improve*] Right, well, I suppose we'd better go say hello, and get this *seder* started.

Sylvia stares at Harold, almost like a plea. She is scared.

Harold [*takes Sylvia's hand*]: Come, my love.

Exit Harold and Sylvia. Nadia grunts, picks up her Driver's book and reads. She is still testing herself on road signs, covering the page and guessing the meanings.

Nadia: They should have warning signs for people. Caution ... Danger ... Speed-bumps ahead ...

Sylvia's voice calls from off-stage, but the tone has changed markedly.

Sylvia [*off-stage*]: Nadia, dear, wouldn't you like to come through and see your sister?

Nadia [*muttering*]: God, you'd think it was the queen of England. [*To Sylvia, off stage*] Coming!

Exit Nadia. The stage lights dip.

ACT ONE

Scene Two

Lights up. Enter Sylvia, Nadia, and Ilana, who carries Adam in a swathe of blankets.

Ilana: ... cried the whole flight! The poor people around us didn't get any sleep! I was so embarrassed. Was I this bad when I was a baby, Mom? I mean, the air hostesses were very sympathetic, but in the end I don't know who was happier to get off that plane – us or them! Oh, I am knackered.

Nadia: What the hell is with that pommie accent?

Ilana: I beg your pardon?

Nadia: "I beg your pardon?" A couple of years in London and suddenly you're a ponce through and through.

Ilana: Stick a sock in it, Nadia.

Nadia: And what exactly are you wearing? You look like you fell into a designer bargain bin and came out the worse for wear.

Ilana: I don't have to listen to this. Mom, where can I heat this bottle?

Nadia: ... or are all the Londoners wearing their curtains this season?

Ilana: Shut up! Call me when you've got room to talk about clothes. Mom? Mom!

Sylvia: Oh, sorry, dear. Lovely dress. Very... different.

Ilana: Where can I heat this bottle for Adam?

Sylvia: Oh – would you like a saucepan? Or you could use the microwave.

Ilana: Micro's fine. Oh, I hate to wake him but if he doesn't feed soon he'll cry for hours and I just don't think I could handle that right now.

Ilana puts the bottle in the microwave.

Nadia: So what took you guys so long? Mom was about to do her nut.

Ilana: Oh, we were driving up Moore Road and I saw one of those Indian fruit vendors on the side of the street, so we stopped.

Sylvia: Ilana!

- Ilana: The fruit is just *so* good in South Africa! And so cheap! He was just packing up for the evening but he had crates and crates of huge red grapes and yellow cling peaches. There were even some late season mangos ... I simply *had* to stop and get some!
- Sylvia: But that's dangerous!
- Nadia: Please, Ma. She was buying fruit, not trafficking firearms. What was he going to do? Pelt them to death with bananas?
- Sylvia: You know that's not a safe area!
- Ilana:
herself Mom, you really are just too paranoid sometimes. [*Fans*
God, it's so *hot* down here! It didn't used to be so humid in April, did it? My clothes are sticking to me.
- Nadia: Try wearing a school uniform. And this is nothing. This February we hit the late thirties every day.
- Ilana: Back in England, we're lucky to hit twenty this time of year. It nearly snowed last week. Have you ever seen snow, Mom?
- Sylvia: Hm? Sorry, dear. What did you say?
- Ilana: I said have you ever seen snow?
- Sylvia: No, dear. I haven't.
- Ilana: It's incredible. Freezing as hell, of course, and that took a bit of getting used to, but it is something spectacular to wake up in the morning to see the city covered in white. That's something South Africa just can't offer. Oh, I need a glass of water. [*Helping herself to a glass from the fridge*] Has it been like this all summer? It's unbearable. Chris doesn't seem to mind it as much, but it just makes me *schwitz*!
- Sylvia: It rained this afternoon.
- Ilana: Really?
- Sylvia: Yes. It rained at about four and I had to rush the washing in.
- Ilana: Well, there's something we know about in London: rain. It never stops. I feel like my brollie has become an extension of my arm! You know, when I first arrived in England I hated the weather. But I figured that it's just part of the package and I'd

have to accept it, puddles and all. But it's awfully hard, sometimes. It feels so strange and far away. I miss the sun.

Nadia: Well, it's good to see your conversation gland hasn't been affected by the weather.

Ilana: I – [*Tense pause. The microwave chimes. Ilana removes bottle and picks up Adam to wake him for feeding*] Hello, little man. Hello, gorgeous. Yes, it's supper time. Yes. Who's the cutest shoes on the face of the planet? Who's the most adorable, good, quiet little man? Yes. Yes. Here we go, my precious ... [*To others*] Oh, thank God. He's so tired he can barely open his eyes. A good feed and he might be out for the rest of the night!

Nadia: Lucky Adam.

Sylvia: So, Ilana ... the flight was good?

Ilana: Yes, apart from the crying, but that's what babies do, I suppose.

Sylvia: Yes. Um ... no hassles at the airport, then?

Ilana: No. Why would there be?

Sylvia: Oh, well. One never knows, I suppose. [*Silence*] Would anyone like a drink? I think I'd like a drink.

Ilana: No thanks, I'm extracting.

Sylvia: Of course. Would Chris like one, do you suppose?

Ilana: I don't know. I suppose so. But I'm sure Dad's got that under control.

Sylvia: Yes. Under control. Everything's under control. Nadia, get me a drink.

Nadia: Thank the lord.

Exit Nadia.

Sylvia: So ... Chris seems nice.

Ilana: He is.

Sylvia: Yes. [*Pause*] You didn't ... he's an artist, you said?

Ilana: Yes.

Sylvia: And what does he ... make?

- Ilana: He works mainly with sculpture.
- Sylvia: Well, isn't that ... clever. I didn't know ... You're happy, then? The two of you?
- Ilana: Very.
- Sylvia: Uh-huh. That's ... very good.
- Ilana: Come on, Mom! Aren't you going to say anything besides bloody pleasantries?
- Sylvia: Well, I was just ... I wasn't sure ...
- Ilana: I mean, I haven't seen you since I was nineteen. Do you think I've changed?
- Sylvia: Yes ... I suppose you have.
- Ilana: And Chris? What do you think of him?
- Sylvia: Well, what do you expect me to ... Ilana—

Enter Nadia with drinks.

- Nadia: Ma, I think maybe you should go and pacify Auntie Rivka.
- Sylvia: *Oy, gevalt.* What is it now?
- Nadia: Her usual ranting. But now she's got some new material.
- Sylvia: *Oy, oy, oy...*
- Ilana: Is this country really still so narrow-minded?
- Nadia: Not so much narrow-minded as hypocritical, bigoted, prejudiced and intolerant.
- Sylvia: Nadia, that's enough! [*Pause*] Well, I'd better go and see about Rivka—
- Ilana: Rivka will get over herself! [*Pause*] You know, this is one of the reasons we didn't want to come back here.
- Nadia: Oh, like London's much better!
- Ilana: Have *you* ever been to London?
- Nadia: Never wanted to!

Ilana: Then shut your trap.

Nadia: Piss off!

Ilana: Still the tantrumer, I see?

Nadia: Oh, get off your pony, your majesty!

Sylvia: Does Chris eat brisket?

Ilana: I beg your pardon?

Sylvia: Does he ... you know ... eat brisket?

Ilana: I suppose so. Why wouldn't he? Nadia's the only animal activist around here.

Sylvia: I just thought ... do you think he'd like something instead of *Kiddush* wine? Perhaps it's too sweet for him?

Ilana: What?

Sylvia: He's probably not ... used to it.

Ilana: Ma, he'll drink what everyone else drinks.

Sylvia: It's just ... he can't possibly feel comfortable ... maybe he ...

Ilana: Just treat him exactly like you treat everyone else – okay, Mom? Can you do that? Not treat him any differently?

Sylvia: Yes, yes, of course. I just wondered, that's all.

Ilana [*Trying to change the subject*]: So, Nadia, what's news? How's school?

Nadia: Intolerable.

Ilana: So, nothing's changed, then.

Nadia: Mrs Walker's still there.

Ilana: Oh, gracious! I remember her! "Mrs Walker, hates a talker. Knew a big-mouth, tried to cork her!" [*Nadia joins in for the rhyme*]

Nadia: And of course Mrs Stone.

Ilana: Still made of?

- Nadia: As ever.
- Ilana: God, that woman must be about ninety-three! Do they still force you to learn Hebrew?
- Nadia: Not really. There are a couple of kids whose parents make them do it. Mom and I came to an ... alternative understanding.
- Sylvia: Don't you bring that up now, Nadia. I have enough to deal with tonight.
- Ilana: Hmpf. Well, I was forced to learn passages from the bible off by heart and I can't say it's helped me in life.
- Sylvia: No, I can say it clearly hasn't.
- Ilana [*changing subject*]: Mom, how's Esther?
- Sylvia: *Baruch Hashem*, she's fine.
- Ilana: And how's Abie? What's wrong with him this time?
- Sylvia [*missing the slight*]: His leg's giving him trouble. It's these new doctors – they don't know from *bubkes*.
- Ilana: I'm sure they'll sort it out.
- Sylvia: You used to have to study to be a doctor. Today it's all about ratios.
- Ilana [*to Adam*]: And now? Are we finished eating, my precious? Have we got enough yummy food in our little tummy? Yes, I think we've done nicely, haven't we? Look at those heavy little eyelids. I think someone needs a nice long sleep ... Nadia, won't you be a dear and get his thingymabob from the baby bag? The plastic ball thing that sings when you turn it. It seems to calm him down.
- Nadia: And when did your last slave die?
- Ilana: Oh, that's the way it is, is it? Fine. I'll get it myself then. Mom, if you'll hold Adam a mo'–
- Sylvia: Won't you just give him to Nadia for now, dear. I – I – I've got a few last-minute things I'd like to do before the *seder* begins.
- Ilana: Okay.

Ilana hands bundle to Nadia; exits.

Nadia: Ew, gross. I hate babies. They're so ... messy. If they're not drooling, they're pooing or puking. It's really rather disgusting. And I'm so scared I'm going to drop them or something. [Sighs] But he *is* cute. They're okay when they're asleep, I guess.

Sylvia [*hisses under her breath*]: How can you act as if everything is normal?

Nadia: Mom—

Sylvia: I don't understand you! Are you completely morally blind? How can you behave so ... as if nothing ...

Nadia: Mom, calm down. You'll wake the kid.

Sylvia: I will *not* calm down! My child, my flesh and blood, has ... oh, no, I can't believe it. [*To Nadia*] How can you just carry on acting as if everything were fine?

Nadia: Ma, what did you want me to say? "Oh, look at that. Chris, did you realize you're—"

Sylvia: Shoosh!

Nadia: "... you're—"

Sylvia: Shoosh!!

Nadia: "... YOU'RE—"

Sylvia: SHUT UP, SHUT UP! She's coming!

Enter Ilana with baby bag and toy, followed by Harold and Chris. Chris wears baggy trousers with a subtle but artistic pattern and a loose, collarless shirt. No tie. Loafers. He

is slightly crumpled from the long flight but clean-shaven.

Ilana: ... and our angel's finally bedded down. We might even make it through the night if he's tired enough. [*Pause; she is sussing out Chris's reaction*] So, you've met the family?

Chris: Yes. They're, um, very congenial. That Rachel's a character. Is she the one you warned me about?

Ilana: No, that was Rivka. She didn't give you too much hassle, did she?

Chris: Well, nothing a stiff drink can't fix.

Ilana: Yes, best thing is to ply her with alcohol.

- Chris: I was talking about me.
- Ilana: Oh, yes! Of course.
- Chris: And which one's Barbara?
- Nadia: She's not here tonight.
- Chris: Oh. Why not?
- Nadia: She wasn't invited.
- Sylvia: Nadia!
- Chris: Oh.
- Ilana: It's called a *faribel*. It makes the Capulets and the Montagues look like the best of friends. Apartheid was nothing compared to two Jewish families with a *faribel*.
- Sylvia: Well, you kids must be hungry after traveling all day. Why not I'll make a snack.
- Chris: Please don't go to any trouble, Mrs Rabinowitz.
- Sylvia: Oh, what trouble! Not at all!
- Ilana: We've been pecking all day. Between the airline meals and the airport coffee shops, we've been eating non-stop for twenty-four hours.
- Chris: And the snacks your daughter's insisted on *schlepping* across the world! [*To Nadia, to fill the silence*] She's a real Jewish Mamma, your sis.
- Nadia: Really.
- Chris: Really!
- Ilana: Ma, it's fine. Don't worry about it.
- Sylvia: Not at all! I'll just fix some savouries. Just a little something on a nice piece of toast.
- Nadia: Um, Ma ...
- Sylvia: Now, if I could just find where I put the—
- Nadia & Ilana: It's *Pesach*!

Sylvia [*self-consciously*]: Oh, heavens, of course! I don't know what I'm saying! It must be all the cooking that's tiring me out. I meant *matzah*. Here we go ... now, let me just find something nice to spread. I'll get some fish paste.

Harold: So, Chris, uh, thank you for the very ... thoughtful ... gift.
[*Harold is holding a small, obscure sculpture in his hand*]
What is it?

Chris: Uh, it's ... not ... it's more of a concept than a thing, really.

Harold: Excuse me?

Chris looks to Ilana.

Ilana: Go on, sweetheart. Tell them.

Chris: Well, you see, as an artist, my principal medium is sculpture, and I work with the tension between emotion and form.

Harold [*clearly stumped*]: Uh-huh.

Chris: Sometimes the conflict between the aesthetics of a situation and the emotional reality creates its own image; more demonstrative of human existence than the bare realities of life itself.

Harold [*no closer to understanding*]: Right.

Ilana: What Chris is saying, Daddy, is that sometimes things look one way, and are another, but when you look at the tension between those two states, that's art.

Harold looks blank.

Chris: Look, take this, for example. You look at war, right? War, in reality, is hard, messy, hot, and bloody. But it leaves humans feeling soft, stark, cold, and drained of emotion. So if you create a sculpture using, say, a soft, cold material like this limestone here, you can capture the play between that reality and the depiction of that reality.

Harold: So it's ... ironic, then?

Chris: No, no. The art is the point. It's what's between the form and the reality that's the point.

Harold: Right. Well, uh, thank you. Thank you very much. We'll – uh – we'll put it on the mantelpiece with Ilana's Pony Club trophies.

Sylvia [*muttering to herself*]: Where is it?

Ilana: Mom, *please* forget about the bloody sandwiches. Don't worry about us – we're fine!

Sylvia: Worry? What worry! It's no worry. If I could just find ... Nadia, where's the fish paste?

Nadia: Ma, why would *I* know? I don't eat the stuff.

Sylvia: Well, you might have changed your mind.

Nadia: I've been a vegetarian for six years. Why would I suddenly change my mind this week?

Sylvia: Maybe it's in the fridge ...

Ilana: Seriously, Ma, it's fine. We're about to eat a five course meal.

Sylvia: It's here ... I know it's here somewhere ...

Ilana: Ma, don't worry about it. We're not hungry.

Sylvia: I can't understand it. I distinctly remember putting it away next to the marmite. The girl must have moved it. Or it grew legs and walked, if you know what my drift is.

Ilana: MOM!

Uncomfortable pause.

Chris: You know, I'm really not that hungry right this minute. And besides, from what I've heard, you've planned a right feast and I'd be sorry to spoil my appetite.

Harold: Um. So why don't you two kids tell us how you met?

Ilana: Oh, it's a funny story!

Chris: We met at an exhibition.

Nadia: Hysterical.

Harold: Of your work?

Chris: No, Bacon. [*Sylvia chokes on her drink*] Have you heard of him?

Harold: Can't say I have, no.

- Ilana: Anyway, a friend had dragged me along to this very hoity-toity exhibition – all caviar and champers and celebs – and we bumped into a friend of a friend in the foyer. He was wearing a red suit, can you imagine that? A bright red, full-blazered, tailored linen suit!
- Chris: It was more like burgundy.
- Ilana: It was red. Anyway, I took one look at this and I thought, “not for me”. But we got chatting about art and stuff and I realized he’s actually the most lovely, sensitive guy and before you know it I’m waking up in bed next to him!
- [Chris:
[Nadia: Love–
“...and tune in next time for more things your parents didn’t need to know!”
- Ilana: What I’m trying to say is, it was like love at first sight. We just couldn’t keep our hands off each other.
- Chris: Um, sweetie...
- Nadia: I believe there’s another four-letter word for that situation, and it’s *not* love.
- Harold: How’s everyone doing with their drinks? Would anyone like a refill?
- Sylvia: A double.
- Chris: Please. [*Hands glass to Harold; exit Harold. Uncomfortable pause. To Sylvia*] You have a beautiful home, Mrs Rabinowitz.
- Sylvia: Thank you.
- Chris: I particularly liked the Chagall in the hall. Are you collectors?
- Sylvia: Collectors?! No, no. Not collectors. We don’t know the first thing about art, really. Harold’s sister brings the odd thing from her travels.
- Chris: Really? Where’s she been?
- Nadia: Where *hasn’t* she been?
- Sylvia: Nadia, tone.
- Nadia: Let’s just say she’s been around.

Sylvia: Nadia!

Nadia: Like you don't agree.

Sylvia: You embarrass yourself!

Nadia: Who's embarrassed?

Enter Harold with drinks. Sylvia drinks gratefully, takes a deep breath.

Harold: Well, the crowd's getting restless. I think we'd better get the *seder* started. It's going to be a looong night.

Sylvia: Um, Harold– [*She beckons Harold, whispers in his ear*]

Harold: Uh, Chris, do you need a *yarmulka*? We have extra ...

Ilana: Oh, we're all sorted, thanks. We bought one in London. Do you have it, sweetie?

Chris: Right here.

Chris takes a yarmulka from his pocket and puts it on his head. Ilana squeals with delight.

Ilana: Oh, you look so cute! I just love the way it sticks to your hair! I bet my Dad wishes his would do that!

Harold: In the old days I at least had something to clip it onto.

Sylvia: Harold, we'll need you to make *Kiddush*.

Ilana: We'll be right through. Don't wait for us.

Harold: Alright, darling.

Exit Sylvia, followed by Harold and, dragging her feet, Nadia.

Chris: Are you alright? You've developed verbal diahorrea!

Ilana: I know! I'm sorry. I guess I'm nervous.

Chris: Darling, if anyone should be nervous, it's me!

Ilana: Oh, my love, don't be! Everything's going to be perfectly fine. Listen, remember we went through this in the taxi: there's about forty minutes of songs, prayers, and commentary before the actual meal is served.

Chris: Yes.

Ilana: You just sit when I sit, stand when I stand, and say ‘amen’ when I do.

Chris: Yes, love, we had that quite clear.

Ilana: And don’t make eye contact with Aunty Rivka. And if you—

Chris: Ilana! Love! I’ll be fine. We’ve been through this.

Ilana: Yes. Sorry.

Chris: I thought your parents weren’t really religious?

Ilana: Well, no. Not really.

Chris: It’s only that this all seems rather orthodox.

Ilana: It’s just tradition, Chris, I told you. [*She sizes him up*] What?

Chris: What?

Ilana: What is *that* look supposed to mean?

Chris: What look? I don’t know what you’re—

Ilana: *That* look. That look that says, “I’ll never understand you.”

Chris: [*Sighs*] Just that, I guess.

Ilana: Please, Chris. Not now. Not tonight of all nights. Let’s just get through this.

Chris: Alright.

Ilana: You promised.

Chris: Okay.

Ilana: Thank you.

Chris: I feel under-dressed.

Ilana: You’re fine.

Chris: Do you think they like me?

Ilana [*momentary pause*]: Of course!

Chris: No, seriously.

Ilana: Really! What's not to like? Of course they do!

Chris: Ilana, do I need to point out the obvious?

Ilana: Chris, come on! This is the new South Africa! Things like that don't matter anymore.

Exit Ilana and Chris. We hear singing when the door is opened: Baruch Ata Adonai... ("Blessed art Thou, oh Lord..." – Kiddush). The stage is bare. Stage lights dip.

ACT ONEScene Three

Lights up. Enter Nadia, defiantly, followed by Sylvia.

- Nadia: No! I'm not doing it and that is that!
- Sylvia: Nadia, please, you're embarrassing me!
- Nadia: I don't care! You can't make me sing the stupid song.
- Sylvia: But you're the youngest child. The *haggadah* says—
- Nadia: Mom, I'm not a child anymore!
- Sylvia: But you're the youngest.
- Nadia: I'm eighteen, for God's sake! I don't want to sing the stupid song!
- Sylvia: Nadia, why must you be so difficult?
- Nadia: Just leave me alone, Ma!
- Sylvia: Fine. So just read the words, then. You don't have to sing.
- Nadia: No!
- Sylvia: Please.
- Nadia: No!
- Sylvia: I'm begging you.
- Nadia: No!
- Sylvia: Nadia, why?!
- Nadia: What difference does it make? I've done it every year for the past fifteen years. Why can't you just leave me alone?!
- Sylvia: Because it's tradition! What kind of parent would I be if I didn't teach you your heritage?
- Nadia: What if I don't actually *want* to know? Or how about if I know the laws and actually *choose* not to follow them? Did you ever think about that? Have you ever heard of freedom of choice? It's this thing they developed when Apartheid was abolished!

- Sylvia: Nadia, please. I don't need your tone right now. Please – for me, then. Just come and ask the Four Questions. We'll all sing the chorus together.
- Nadia: Mom, why can't you just leave me alone? Pick on who you're really angry with.
- Sylvia: And what is *that* supposed to mean?
- Nadia: This is about Ilana, isn't it?
- Sylvia: That's ludicrous! You're the youngest and the youngest asks the Four Questions and that is that.
- Nadia: But you're getting all agro because you're mad at Ilana.
- Sylvia: That's outrageous! One situation has nothing to do with the other!
- Nadia: So you admit that it's an issue, then!
- Sylvia: No! I–
- Nadia: Well, you just as much as admitted it right there.
- Sylvia: Alright, so I'll admit! So I'm not over the moon that my daughter has married a black.
- Nadia: Ma, you really need to get over yourself.
- Sylvia: I can't help it. They make me feel ... unclean.
- Nadia: Mother!
- Sylvia: I'm sorry, Nadia, but they do.
- Nadia: How can you say something like that? I'm disgusted!
- Sylvia: Now, darling, calm down. I'm not talking in the hygienic sense of the word. I just mean that there's something about them that feels ... impure. Un-kosher. *Traif*.
- Nadia: Mother, you should be ashamed of yourself!
- Sylvia: Shamed? You think I don't know shamed? And how do you think it feels to have your own flesh and blood marry a *schwartz*? And to – to produce – this ... thing? [*She gestures towards the carry cot*]

Enter Chris.

Chris: Hello! Um, terribly sorry to intrude, but where will I find a water glass?

He looks at Sylvia; she pretends he isn't there. Eventually Nadia answers.

Nadia: In the cupboard above the sink.

Chris: Right. Thanks.

Sylvia: Well, we will wait five minutes more for you, Nadia. If you want to scorn your heritage and embarrass your whole family, well, that's your choice.

Exit Sylvia.

Chris: So, everything's going smoothly in here as well, then?

Nadia: She's impossible!

Chris: So I've heard.

Nadia: I don't know what her problem is!

Chris: What's the bone of contention this time?

Nadia: She's insisting that I sing *Ma Nishtana* because I'm the youngest and that's tradition.

Chris: What's *Ma ...nashta ...*?

Nadia: It's a song that asks four questions about why this night is different from all other nights.

Chris: And the answer is?

Nadia: I have a few theories. [*Pause. Sigh*] But the official reason is because we're celebrating freedom from slavery in Egypt.

Chris: You don't sound convinced.

Nadia: Well, no. I think it's bull. She'll also make me search for the *afikoman*.

Chris [*chuckling*]: The what?

Nadia: The *afikoman*. The grown-ups break off a piece of *matzah* and hide it, and the children search for it after dinner. Whoever finds it gets a prize.

Chris: Intriguing! What's the prize?

- Nadia: Usually cash. Pays better than the tooth fairy in any case.
- Chris: And what's the symbolism behind that one?
- Nadia: Who knows? It's just always been done. Call it bribery to keep the kids awake till after dinner.
- Chris: And you still qualify as a kid?
- Nadia: Apparently. Well, I'm the youngest, so Mom has her hopes set on me as the future of world Jewry. [*Sighs*] Well, I guess I'd better go and get this bloody song over with.
- Chris: But you don't believe in what you'll be saying.
- Nadia: Nope.
- Chris: Then why say it, Nadia? No one's got a gun to your head.
- Nadia: They might as well.
- Chris: What do you mean?
- Nadia: I don't know. I can't explain ... It's like they're holding Heritage hostage and I've got to pay the ransom.
- Chris [*laughs*]: Would you care to elucidate?
- Nadia: Ag, I don't know. Dad's got this whole theory that it's traditions and rituals that hold us together.
- Chris: Amazing. You're exactly like your sister.
- Nadia: I can think of better compliments, thank you.
- Chris: I mean, don't get me wrong! I love Ilana, I truly do, but she also has this inexplicable attachment to a religion she doesn't believe in.
- Nadia: Go figure. [*Pause. Sighs*] Listen, do you want to come hear me embarrass myself?
- Chris: If that's what you really want.

Enter Ilana, dragging Sylvia.

- Ilana: Mom! Would you please stop telling everyone I'm a famous fashion designer! I *work* for a fashion house.

- Sylvia: That's what I said, dear.
- Ilana: I make their coffee. I answer their phone!
- Sylvia: Well, somebody's got to do it, don't they?
- Ilana: Urgh! Stop it! You *always* do this!
- Sylvia: I don't know what you're talking about.
- Ilana: Yes you do! Why can't you just let me be?
- Sylvia: Well, I'm sorry, Ilana. I'm just very proud of you. I'm allowed to be proud of you, aren't I?
- Ilana: Fine. But will you please just stop elaborating things. Any minute now Auntie Rivka's going to commission me to design the entire retinue wardrobe for her great-grandson's wedding!
- Sylvia: So? Worse I could think of! [*Sylvia suddenly remembers something*] The eggs!
- Ilana, Nadia, & Chris: What?
- Sylvia: I *knew* we'd forgotten something! Nadia, I thought I asked you to boil them! [*She grabs a pot and fills it with water*]
- Nadia: I'm sorry, Ma. I was about to and then people started arriving—
- Sylvia: I haven't even put the *seder* plate on the table, God forgive me! Ilana, hand me those eggs!
- Nadia: I said I'd do them, Ma. I'm sorry. Let me help.
- Sylvia: Thank you, Nadia. I have it under control. Please just go through and see that the *seder* continues.
- Nadia [*Deep breath*]: Fine. [*To Chris*] Coming?
- Chris: Sure.
- Exit Nadia and Chris.*
- Sylvia: Give me the salt. *Oy!* The damn girl still hasn't arrived. *Oy, vey*, Ilana. We're going to have to get rid of her. But the next one won't be any better, let me warn you. I'm telling you, they have no concept of time.
- Ilana: "They?"

Sylvia: Well, you know ...

Ilana: No, I don't, Mother. Tell me.

Sylvia: Ilana, pass me a container to put these eggs in.

Ilana: What did you mean by "they"?

Sylvia: Nothing! I mean ... I didn't ...

Ilana: You hate him.

Sylvia: What?

Ilana: You hate him.

Sylvia: Who? Ilana, what are you—

Ilana: Chris. You can't stand him.

Sylvia: Now, I don't know what you are talking about ...

Ilana: It's obvious. You've barely said a word to him since he's been here.

Sylvia: Honestly, dear, I don't know—

Ilana: Why must you be so narrow-minded?

Sylvia: I'm not being narrow-minded. I – think – he's a lovely – person.

Ilana: So why are you being so cold to him?

Sylvia: Well, I'm sorry if I'm being cold. It's just – you know, it's hard for the family, when one ... marries out. It's difficult to ... um...

Ilana: Aunty Rose married out.

Sylvia: That's different.

Ilana: How?

Sylvia: It just is. Uncle Peter is ...

Ilana: I know what you're thinking. Just say it.

Sylvia: It's just ... he's ...

- Ilana: Say it, Ma.
- Sylvia: He's not ...
- Ilana: Hm?
- Sylvia: He's not ...
- Ilana: He's not black, Ma.
- Sylvia: No, *bubbelah*! It's not that! I'm sure there are lots of blacks out there who are very nice people ...
- Ilana: Well, then, what is it, Ma?
- Sylvia: I don't know, darling. I can't explain!
- Ilana: Why can't you just be happy for me?
- Sylvia: I am happy for you! I want to be! But don't you see that this is not what's going to make you happy?
- Ilana: How can you say that?!
- Sylvia: Ilana, listen to me. How can you be happy with this man? It's like throwing a spanner in the pigeons. Milk and meat you can't mix.
- Ilana: Mom, he's a good person. He's intelligent and sensitive—
- Sylvia: But he's not like us. He doesn't have the same background. He—
- Ilana: Not everything has to have background, Ma. Your generation is so stuck in the past. We're building a future together.
- Sylvia: And what kind of future will that be for your child? He's not going to know what he is! He won't have an identity!
- Ilana: In case you hadn't noticed, there are plenty of strong role models for him, both black and white—
- Sylvia: But you can't be both! He'll be confused. You can't mix. They don't understand. How can you possibly expect someone ... like Chris ... to ... He can't understand you—
- Ilana: He understands me better than you!
- Sylvia: Now maybe you think so. But wait until things aren't so rosy. You'll see. I just don't want you to be hurt, my *bubbelah*.

Ilana: Well, what do you want me to do? Break off my marriage?

Sylvia: I can't tell you what to do.

Pause.

Ilana: I think those eggs are done.

Enter Harold.

Harold: Everything okay in here?

Ilana: Fine! I was just going to save Chris from your relatives!

Exit Ilana.

Harold: Is she alright?

Sylvia: How can you ask such a stupid question, Harold! Look at her – running off with a *shock*! Of course she's not alright! She's not alright in the head!

Harold: I mean is she upset?

Sylvia: Upset? I don't know! I would be! In fact, I am! I'm very upset!

Harold: Well, my darling, there's not much we can do right now–

Sylvia: Who put these ideas in her head? Harold, I always said you were too liberal. Now look what's happened!

Harold: Are you saying this is all my fault?

Sylvia: Yes! No. I don't know!

Harold: You know what, my darling? You're right! I'm terribly sorry. I apologise. I'm sorry our daughter fell in love with a black man. And for global warming – that was my fault, too. [*Sylvia shoots him a look*] And that whole Northern Ireland thing – I don't know what I was thinking.

Sylvia: Okay, okay, Harold. But *why*? Why is she doing this?

Harold: That question I don't have a straight answer for.

Sylvia: Harold, look at me. Answer me truthfully: does this not upset you?

- Harold: My darling, it's not ideal. Of course I'm not impressed. But part of being a parent is allowing your children to make their own decisions. The other part is loving them. So we just have to make the best of the situation.
- Sylvia: But has she no heart in that head of hers? How do you think this looks? A black, Harold! A black! And without telling me! That's the worst part, I think. At least, maybe, if I could have prepared myself for it ...
- Harold: I agree with you there, my darling. It is a shock. But he does seem like a very nice gentleman.
- Sylvia: I suppose ...
- Harold: He's polite.
- Sylvia: Yes.
- Harold: And clearly quite smart.
- Sylvia: I guess.
- Harold: And they say they're happy together.
- Sylvia: Alright.
- Harold: So it could be worse.
- Sylvia: Ay.
- Harold: Look, dear, I think you'd better come back to the *seder*. You're missing your favourite song.
- Sylvia: Are they up to *Daiyainu* already?
- Harold: Time flies when you're having fun.
- Sylvia: Alright. Harold, will you talk to her?
- Harold: I'll see what I can do. Come, dear.

Harold steers Sylvia towards the door. She exits, taking with her the completed seder plate. (Again, a snatch of a song escapes through the open door: chorus of Daiyainu) Harold catches Ilana's attention from the doorway; gestures for her to come over.

Enter

Ilana.

Ilana: What now?

- Harold: We need to talk.
- Ilana: About?
- Harold: Deal with your mother.
- Ilana: I'm not dealing with her. I don't even want to speak to her right no—
- Harold: Deal with your mother. [*Silence*] Lany, never forget how much we love you. That's a parent's obligation to a child. But also remember that a child has obligations to honour her parents. [*Long silence*] Go deal with your mother.
- Ilana: What am I supposed to say?
- Harold: What your heart tells you.
- Ilana: Dad, that doesn't mean anything!
- Harold: It will mean a lot to your mother. She's missed you so much, Lany. She's missed being a part of your life. We missed your wedding. Your first child. Confide in her. Let her in.
- Ilana: I wouldn't know where to start!
- Harold: I'll go call her.

Exit Harold. Ilana is alone on stage. She lifts the flap on the carry-cot to check on Adam.

She fiddles with the gift baskets. She is nervous. Enter Sylvia.

- Sylvia: Ilana?
- Ilana: Mom.
- Sylvia: You have something to say to me?
- Ilana: Uh. It's not an apology. [*Pause*] I think ... I'm not apologizing for anything. But I'm sorry I didn't warn you about Chris.
- Sylvia: I see.
- Ilana: I should have told you before.
- Sylvia: Yes.
- Ilana: But colour shouldn't matter anyway, so I don't see why it should be a big deal.

- Sylvia: Can I make a response? Or are you going to cut my head off with a wooden spoon?
- Ilana: Sure.
- Sylvia: I'm ... I'm sorry if I came across as a bit ... brash. It was a real shock, you know. I just wasn't expecting ... But of course you're right. Colour shouldn't be important. And you know that I have nothing against the blacks. I think they're a decent, honest people—
- Ilana: There you go again!
- Sylvia: Are you going to let me finish? All I'm saying is ... it's not the colour. It's ... the difference.
- Ilana: What is *that* supposed to mean?
- Sylvia: You're too young and *meshuga*. You don't see it yet.
- Ilana: Let me just get this straight: when you knew he wasn't Jewish, but thought he was white, that was fine. But when you find out he's black, he's too different. But race is not the issue here?
- Sylvia: Exactly.
- Ilana: But Ma, that makes no sense!
- Sylvia: Listen, Ilana, do you want my advice?
- Ilana: No.
- Sylvia: Well, I'll give it to you. My *bubbelah*, these things don't mix. X is x and y is y; black is black and white is white. And that's just the way it is.
- Ilana: Did you ever think that maybe it's not so simple, Ma? That maybe the world isn't as clear cut as black and wh— oh, you know what I mean!
- Sylvia: *Bubbelah*, you can't sit on two asses with one behind.
- Ilana: I don't have to put up with this bullshit.
- Sylvia: Ilana, I'm still your mother!
- Ilana: So why can't you just be happy for me?
- Sylvia: Because I can see the bigger picture.

Ilana: Just let me live for the moment, Mom! Forget the big picture!
Just let me be happy here, now, for once!

Sylvia [*softly*]: You don't need anybody's permission to be happy, Ilana. Just
your own. If you're not happy, that's not my fault.

Ilana: Well, I *am* happy!

Sylvia: Okay, my child. Then I am happy for you.

Ilana: Thank you!

Uneasy silence.

Sylvia: It's nearly time to serve the dinner. [*Pause*] We'd better go out
to hear the blessings.

Exit Sylvia and Ilana.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

Lights up on the business of serving food from the kitchen. There are strips of plastic and foil everywhere – draped over countertops, cupboard handles, chairs, and so on – Sylvia is saving them to reuse later. The atmosphere is suffocating and frenetic. Sylvia is doing several things at once – ladelling soup into bowls, opening the oven to stir the tzimmus, removing the chicken to check on it, piercing it, replacing it in the oven, tasting things, adding salt, etc. Nadia and Ilana are acting as waitresses, constantly moving between kitchen and dining room with bowls of soup. Harold is standing around, trying to be helpful, but generally getting in the way.

Ilana [*entering*]: Uncle Jack says he doesn't want parsley.

Sylvia: So I must stand on my tired feet all day and then make special for fussy Jack? He'll eat the parsley.

Ilana: He says it gives him a rash.

Sylvia: I've known Jack twenty-seven years and he's never had a rash from my parsley. It's all in the man's mind. Here, Nadia, take.

Exit Nadia with soup. Sylvia checks on the chicken, pierces it a couple of times.

Ilana: Ma, why do you do that?

Sylvia: What?

Ilana: To the chicken. You've always done that.

Sylvia: I don't know. That's the way my mother did it.

Ilana: But why?

Sylvia [*shrugs*]: I don't know. Because that's the way *her* mother did it.

Ilana: But what's the *reason*?

Sylvia: I told you already – I don't know.

Enter Nadia.

Harold: Let me tell you a story. My mother – your Bobba Ray – always used to cut the wings off the chicken, and put them on top of

the bird. With a toothpick, sometimes, if it was a really plump chicken. But anyway, we assumed it was a *halachic* law but we couldn't understand the meaning behind it. I remember once your Aunty Rochel asked her why she did it. She said she didn't know; her mother had always done it, her grandma had always done it ... luckily at that stage my great-grandmother Betty was still alive, *kein-ein-hora*, and one day I went to the old age home to ask her. I found her sitting in the sun in the garden, knitting. Always with the knitting, that woman. And the sewing, and the baking – ah, the baking ... of course she wasn't allowed to bake any more in the home – not after the incident with the electric frying pan – but I'm getting off track. The woman was nearly a hundred and still sharp as a button. I said to her, "Great-grandma Betty, why did you do it? Why do we cut the wings off the chicken?" You know what she told me? I'll tell you. She said, "Harry, I cut the wings off the chicken because my roasting pan was so small!"

Nadia: And the point of that story is ...?

Harold: That sometimes there isn't a logical reason. It's tradition. It's how your ancestors have always done things so it's how *you* do it.

Sylvia: Harold, will you stop with the talking and maybe start with the helping a little? Is there something wrong with your legs? The soup will be freezing.

Harold: Alright, dear, I'm on it.

Exit Harold with soup.

Ilana: Ma, Chris and I were thinking of taking Adam to the beach tomorrow. [*Sylvia is busy with the food. She doesn't hear, or pretends not to hear, the comment*] Mom!

Sylvia: Yes, dear?

Ilana: I said Chris and I were thinking about taking Adam down to the beach tomorrow.

Sylvia: Well, far be it from me to tell you what to do, Ilana.

Ilana: Can we borrow the car, then?

Nadia: No ways, Ilana! I need the car tomorrow. I'm doing my driver's test.

Sylvia: Please, Nadia. We've been through this. You can't do it. It doesn't look nice.

Nadia: Mom, it was the only date they had! What do you expect me to do?

Sylvia: Expect? What should I expect? *Godforbid* I should expect my child to make the right choices. It's a religious festival and funny I should expect you to observe your traditions.

Nadia: But you know I won't observe the festival anyway! Why shouldn't I go out? It's not like I'm going to go to *shul* and pray!

Sylvia: But, Nadia, people might see you and what will they say?

Nadia [*sarcastically*]: Fine. I'll stay home and watch TV.

Sylvia [*missing the sarcasm*]: Thank you!

Nadia: Mother! I can't believe you're such a hypocrite!

Enter Harold.

Harold: Dear, you know that vase of lilies?

Sylvia: Yes?

Harold: ... the one you left on the sideboard, within elbow-distance of passers-by?

Sylvia: Yes ...

Harold: Well, I tried to stop it, but it jumped.

Sylvia: Oh, for God's sake, Harold!

Harold: It's not broken. It fell on the rug. I just need a cloth or something—

Sylvia [*muttering as she exits holding a tea towel*]: ... never trust a man to do anything ...

Harold exits after Sylvia. Ilana sighs, pulls a box of cigarettes out of her handbag, lights one.

Nadia [*smiling*]: You know, you'll go to hell for that.

Ilana: I thought Jews don't believe in hell.

Nadia: Of course.

Nadia reaches over and steals a cigarette. Lights it.

Ilana: Since when do *you* smoke?

Nadia: What do you mean?

Ilana: I mean I didn't know you smoked! When did you start?

Nadia: Is it any of your business?

Ilana: Ooh, excuse me. How grown up she is!

Nadia: Cut it out, Ilana.

Ilana: It's sweet.

Nadia: Stop it!

Ilana: It's just ... I still see you in pink cycling shorts and a matching Barbie t-shirt. I'm sorry, Nadia, but I do. I never pictured you old enough to smoke ... or drive ...

Nadia: You've been smoking since you were fourteen.

Ilana: So?

Nadia: So why should it surprise you?

Ilana: You're right. I ... everything's just changed so much. Everyone's... so old. I mean, God! Bobba and Zayda!

Nadia: They're grandparents. They're supposed to be old.

Ilana: No, but I mean ... Zayda. I'm not sure he knows who I am.

Nadia: He just keeps forgetting. He does that a lot now. But he'll remember again in a few minutes.

Ilana: I mean, I know he's always told the same stories over and over, but now ... he asked me if we're having kneidlach *four* times in the last ten minutes!

Nadia: Get used to it. He'll keep asking.

Ilana: But he had a bowl of it in front of him the whole time! And if he asks me one more time how school is ...

Nadia: Give the guy a break, Ilana. He's eighty-seven! He's losing his memory.

- Ilana: Oh, please. He remembers the price of eggs in nineteen-twenty and the property rate when South Africa was still a Union!
- Nadia: But those things don't *matter*, Ilana! [*Sighs*] Listen, Lan ... things aren't the same anymore – I mean, as when you left. We've all ... well ... things have changed.
- Ilana: So I've noticed.
- Nadia: You've changed.
- Ilana: Have I?
- Nadia: Lan ... I've always wanted to ask ... I've never really understood ... why you ...
- Ilana: I had to, Nadia. I was being suffocated. It was like: I fly now, or I would have murdered Mom!
- Nadia: I can relate!
- Ilana: I was so excited. London. The big, wide world! Wow. But also not a little bit terrified. I remember that last day, at the airport. God, you were only twelve!
- Nadia: Thirteen!
- Ilana: Whatever. I don't know if you were old enough to pick up the emotions flying about. I was so nervous. Part of me didn't want to leave. I wanted Mom to say, "Don't go, Lany. I'm sorry. Please don't go". [*Chokes but holds back tears. She will not cry. Deep breath*] Mom made such a fuss of my hair, straightening my skirt ... and that awful brown luggage set she got me. I hate it. I've still got it. Can't bring myself to get rid of the damn things. [*Gasps - laughing/crying at the same time but trying to hold back both*] Talk about emotional baggage!
- Nadia: Mom broke down after you boarded. I was old enough to remember that. We had to find an off-duty flight attendant to get her some brandy and we sat in the manager's office for ages calming her down.
- Ilana: I didn't know that part. [*Ilana extinguishes her cigarette*] God, it's stifling in here. All this Clingfilm.
- Nadia: It's Mom's new obsession. She Clingfilms everything. Leftovers. School lunches. Dad's dinner if he's coming late. She also wraps her lipstick in Clingfilm in case it melts and leaks in her handbag. And gifts. If she takes someone

chocolates, or flowers, she wraps it in Clingfilm. I think she's up to a pack a day!

Pause.

Ilana: Are you nervous?

Nadia: Nervous?

Ilana: About tomorrow.

Nadia: A little, I guess. I'm not really so nervous about the test.

Ilana: So what are you nervous of?

Nadia: Mom's reaction.

Pause.

Ilana: I remember when you were little you were always obsessed with cars. Do you remember that time we went to the funfair? The bumper cars? Didn't you throw up on them?

Nadia: No, that was my friend, Tali. But I remember that day. It was the best time ever! You kept chucking bits of popcorn off the cable cars, trying to hit the people below us on the head.

Ilana: No, I didn't!

Nadia: Yes, you did!

Ilana: No, that wasn't me.

Nadia: It was!

Ilana: It wasn't! And anyway, it was bits of toffee-apple. More velocity.

Nadia: Ha!

Ilana: I remember on *Shabbat* afternoons, when Mom and Dad would be lying down, you'd always make me "drive" you in their car! We'd sneak into the garage and I'd have to get you a plastic step so you could get into the passenger seat. Remember the one you used to use to reach the toilet?

Nadia: Shut up, I remember!

Ilana: You were so small you couldn't even open the door by yourself.

- Nadia: What do you expect? I was, like, three!
- Ilana: But that was fun, wasn't it? Sitting in the front seats, moving the steering wheel and making car noises.
- Nadia: And then I'd make you hoot the hooter ...
- Ilana: ... and Dad would come out and tell us to stop.
- Nadia: He'd say that if we didn't stop making a noise, the pelicans would come and get us.
- Ilana: Did you even know what a pelican was, then?
- Nadia: No. You?
- Ilana: Yes, of course. Well, not really. I thought I did, but I wasn't sure. And I wasn't keen to take any chances. *[Pause]* We just believed everything they told us, didn't we? All the stories. Eat your crusts and your hair will curl nicely. Say your prayers and God will answer them.
- Nadia: We thought they knew everything.
- Re-enter Sylvia and Harold with piles of empty soup bowls.*
- Sylvia *[to Harold, as they enter]*: Between you and the vase and Hymie and the soup I'm going to have to have that rug dry-cleaned again. You know what a *schlep* that is?
- Harold: Sylvie, I *said* I was sorry.
- Sylvia: And those boys who come to collect it, they have no respect for quality pieces. It makes one shudder.
- Harold: I'll start loading these, shall I? *[He moves to dishwasher]*
- Sylvia: Rinse them first, Harold. The *kneidlach* will clog the thingiemajig.
- Nadia *[aside, to Ilana]*: Even the dishwasher gets constipated at Pesach-time.
- Sylvia: And you girls who've been sitting here like ladies all night, too good for the table? *[She sniffs the air subtly, perhaps she smells the smoke, but she says nothing]* Now get off your royal *toochuses* and start taking out the plates.
- Nadia *[mock-saluting]*: Sir, yes, sir!

Sylvia takes out the chicken, tzimmus, potatoes and salad and begins draping more foil and clingfilm all over the kitchen.

Sylvia: Nadia, give me some of that spring onion in the fridge. Ilana, get a chopping board. And, Harold, don't throw away that perfectly good *kneidle* your sister didn't take the trouble to eat.

Harold: She's taken a bite out of it, dear.

Sylvia [*inspects*]: Not a decent one. There's nothing wrong with it. Put it back in the pot. Nadia! [*Hands Nadia some finished plates*]

Exit Nadia with plates.

Ilana: Wow, so our little Nadela's all grown up!

Sylvia: Chop me some more spring onion, Ilana.

Ilana: She's changed so much!

Harold: The last time you saw her, she was just thirteen.

Ilana: I can't believe she's eighteen already.

Harold [*chuckling*]: You can't believe?

Ilana: She's so grown up!

Sylvia: You all think you're so grown up.

Ilana: She's a woman now.

Sylvia: Woman, *shmoman*. She dresses like a tramp. Take!

Exit Ilana with plates. Enter Nadia.

Nadia: Sadie says no potatoes for her please. And no fatty meat in the *tzimmus*.

Sylvia: She could lose a kilo or two and it wouldn't hurt. And that hideous plastic flower on her lapel. What was the woman thinking?

Nadia: But you told her how much you liked it?

Sylvia: Never mind what I said. Take! [*Hands Nadia more plates*]

Exit Nadia with plates. Enter Ilana.

Ilana: I swear, if Hymie tries to feel me up one more time ...

- Sylvia: He's not trying to feel you up. He's just being affectionate.
- Ilana: Well, he's being particularly affectionate with my posterior!
- Sylvia: He doesn't know what he's doing, *meshugena* old fart. Is there enough *matzah* on the table?
- Ilana: I think so.
- Sylvia: Make sure everyone has enough, will you, dear? I think we're running low, especially near you-know-who-but-it's-not-nice-to-name. There's more in the cupboard in the sideboard. But don't let Auntie Rivka see where we keep the key.
- Ilana: Yes, Mom.

Exit Ilana with plates. Enter Nadia.

- Nadia: You know what, Mom? I've been thinking, and I've made my decision. So be happy, don't be happy. But tomorrow I am going for that test and I'm going to get my driver's license.
- Sylvia: But why must it be tomorrow? Nadia, listen to your mother—
- Nadia: I've made up my mind, Mom.
- Sylvia: Will you just let me have a sa—
- Nadia: Mom, you've got to let go! You've got to let me start living my own life. Once I have my license, I'll get up and go where I want, when I want — and you can't control that. I won't need to rely on you anymore.
- Sylvia: What is the urgency about this damn license? Don't I do enough for you? Don't I *schlep* you and fetch you whenever you need?
- Nadia: Mom, you can't drop me off at the mall for the rest of my life! I'm eighteen. I'm my own person. I've got to make my own decisions now. I've got to run on my own fuel.
- Sylvia [in a *small voice*]: I'm scared for you, Nadia. You're just ... you're still my little baby.
- Nadia: You think it's not scary for me, Mom? You think I'm not terrified? I might crash. I might take wrong turns. Whatever. I'll buy a map, for God's sake. Just let me take the wheel in my own damn life!

Sylvia: Harold, do you hear your child?

Harold: I hear her, dear. She seems to have made up her mind.

Pause. Sylvia cannot look at Nadia.

Sylvia [*very coldly*]: Fine. [*Pause*] I see. [*Pause*] Alright. [*Long pause; Sylvia adjusts food on plate*] If that's the way you want it to be. [*Pause*] Now do you think it's too early to take the ice-cream out? Because I got that special *parev* kind from Jo'burg and—

Nadia: You haven't listened to a word I've said!

Sylvia: Nadia, what do you want me to say? "Alright, dear, do the test." You might as well spit on my grave!

Nadia: Why? Why can't you just be ... Ugh!

Sylvia: That's enough!

Nadia: Stop telling me what to do!

Sylvia: You're still my daughter, and as long as you're in this house—

Nadia: God! It's like a broken record! Did you ever think maybe I'm in this house because I have *no choice*?

Sylvia: Nobody's forcing you, Nadia.

Nadia: But that's the bloody thing! It's not like that, and you know it! It's like there's this unwritten law: I belong to this house and whether or not I like it I'm stuck here for life!

Sylvia: The door is open both ways to you.

Nadia: Sure, physically I can come and go – I can move out, even move country. But no matter what I do, how far I run, I'll never be able to leave this house behind!

Harold: Sylvie, Nadela – please. Just for tonight, just this night, let's act like civilized people. We have a *seder* to get on with.

Sylvia & Nadia: Fine!

Sylvia: I'm going to take out that ice-cream now. [*She leans into freezer; with back to Nadia*] Nadia, will you turn the oven off. [*Nadia does this silently, out of Sylvia's line of vision. Sylvia emerges from freezer with carton, which she places on table*] And Harold, stop fiddling with the plastic, I'm saving it.

Honestly, you are really grating my goat tonight. Nadia, I said will you turn the oven off!

Nadia: I HAVE turned the oven off!

Sylvia: Well, why didn't you *say* so?

Nadia: I'm sorry! I didn't think I needed to. Next time I'll file an application for action!

Sylvia: There's no need to get stroppy with me, my girl.

Nadia: For Christ's sake, mother! I was just—

Sylvia: I will NOT have that kind of language in this house! We do *not* worship Jesus Christ.

Nadia: [*Incredulous*] I'm not worshipping him! I'm blaspheming! You should be happy! Mom, you've got to calm down ...

Sylvia: Don't you tell me to calm down! My daughter's married a *shoch* and produced a ... a half-breed! And you have the *chutzpah* to tell me to calm down!

Harold [*quietly*]: You'll wake Adam.

Enter Ilana. She can sense the tension.

Ilana: That's it – everyone's got food. It's just the four of us left.

Sylvia: Fine. You three take your plates and go through. I'll be right there. I just want to rinse some of this clingfilm.

Ilana, Nadia, and Harold take their plates and exit. Ilana takes her handbag as she leaves. Sylvia is fussing with the clingfilm. Adam starts to cry. Sylvia recoils; doesn't know what to do.

Sylvia [*calls off-stage*]: Ilana! [*Baby starts crying louder*] Ilana! Ilana, the baby's crying! [*Pause. Sylvia is torn. She cannot ignore the crying child*] Oy, vey. Okay ... Alright ... Come on There's a good boy. Alright ... [*She tentatively picks him up*] Oy, you are a *gezunte* chap! Such chubby little arms. There, there ... There, there ... it's okay. [*She looks hard at the baby*] Look at your little face. You are quite a little sweetheart, aren't you? Yes. Yes, you are. Why, in this light, you almost look ... Jewish. It's just the little *krilletjies* that give you away. And they're actually quite ... cute, aren't they? Now, why are we crying, hmm, petal? [*She feels that he needs a nappy change*] Aha. Alright. That we can fix, my pet. [*Calls*] Ilana! [*When there is no immediate response, she places him gently on the counter;*

rummages in the baby bag for a fresh nappy] There, there, dear. It's alright. We'll soon sort you out. Now, where would I find – oh, there's one. Yes, shh, dear. Let's clean up your little *toochus* ... [*She opens the dirty nappy*] Oh, good God Almighty in heaven! No! No!

Adam is crying the whole time. Enter Chris, running.

Chris: Everything okay? [*Seeing the open nappy*] Oh, I see! Need help with the nappies, Mrs Rabinowitz? I'm rather practic–

Sylvia: You! Where's Ilana?

Chris: Um, are you alright, Mrs Rabinowitz?

Sylvia: Get Ilana!

Chris: Is there a problem?

Sylvia: Fetch Ilana! Get her in here! Go and get Ilana!

Chris: Uh– yes, of course ... [*Calling out the door*] Ilana!

Enter Ilana, rushing, without her handbag.

Ilana: What's the problem in here? Oh! Does somebody want their nappy changed? Oh, okay ... shh, my little sausage ... it's alright ... [*Picks up Adam and quietens him.*]

Sylvia: You ... heathen.

Ilana: What?

Sylvia: You devil!

Ilana: Huh? Ma!

Sylvia: How could you? How could you?

Ilana: Mom, I–

Sylvia: How could you do this?

Ilana: Mom, you're overreacting.

Sylvia: Ilana, there's a lot a mother can put up with. There's a lot you've expected me to take in. That you marry a non-Jew – a ... a black man, even [*gestures to Chris, but she cannot look at him*] – all this I can maybe accept. But not to *bris* your child?

- Chris: Mrs Rabinowitz, with all due respect—
- Sylvia: What do you know of respect? You march in here, you marry our daughter without the respect even to meet us, never mind ask for our consent. You people wouldn't know respect if it bit you on the *toochus*!
- Ilana: Mom, you need to get a grip!
- Sylvia: Ilana, you have to give your child a *bris*!
- Ilana: No, we don't.
- Sylvia: You have to!
- Ilana: No, I don't!
- Sylvia: Yes, you do!
- Ilana: Why, Ma?
- Sylvia: Because ... that's what's done! It's just one of those things that a Jewish boy must be circumcised. It's in the Torah. Otherwise he's not Jewish.
- Ilana: Well, if I'm Jewish, my children will be considered Jewish according to Jewish law. It doesn't matter if the father isn't.
- Sylvia: Who ever heard of a little black Jew?
- Ilana: What about Ethiopian Jews?
- Sylvia: That's different.
- Ilana: Why?
- Sylvia: They're born Jewish. They follow the Torah. They're circumcised.
- Ilana: But Adam will still be considered Jewish!
- Sylvia: By *halocha*, perhaps, but not by *neshoma*.
- Chris: What's she saying?
- Ilana: She's saying that Adam will be Jewish according to Torah law, but not in his soul.

Chris: Mrs Rabinowitz, please let me clarify this once and for all: we've agreed that when Adam's old enough, he can decide for himself if he wants to be circumcised.

Sylvia *[to Ilana]*: How could you?!

Ilana *[perhaps at this point Ilana doesn't sound so confident anymore; does not meet her mother's eyes]*: Adam's got to make his own decisions about religion. That's not something we can do for him.

Sylvia: That's where you are wrong! Religion is something you are born into. If you are Jewish, you are Jewish. And that's that.

Ilana: Ma, I'm not going to force the child into a religion he's too young to understand.

Sylvia: It's *because* he's too young to understand that you have to teach him and guide him. That is the duty of a parent, Ilana!

Ilana: Well, I don't *want* to force any religion onto my child.

Sylvia: Oy! Such *tzuris*, from such a young girl.

Ilana: If I cause you such grief, Ma, why don't you just disown me and finished?

Sylvia: No. That can never happen. You will always be my child. That I have to accept. But I don't have to accept the rest of your family or the mistakes that you make.

Ilana: Adam is still your grandson!

Sylvia: No. I feel nothing. This is not a part of me.

Pause. Exit Sylvia through back door.

Ilana: Mom! Ma! Mother, you can't just walk away like that! Come back here right now! SYLVIA! *[Sylvia has left. Adam starts to cry again because Ilana is shouting.]*

Chris *[ironically]*: She seems upset. *[Ilana ignores him. She starts to pacify Adam and change his nappy]* She's being unreasonable.

Ilana: Pass me the wet-wipes.

Chris: You warned me this might happen.

Ilana: I think they're in the side pocket.

Chris: This one?

Ilana: No, the other one.

Chris: They're not here.

Ilana: Yes, they are. I put them there this morning.

Chris: Oh, found them. They were in the main section.

Ilana: Well, who moved them, then?

Chris: No one, my love. Why would they—

Ilana: Are you telling me I don't know where I put the bloody wet-wipes? You don't think I know where the wet-wipes should go?

Chris: No, that's not what I—

Ilana: I know what I know, Chris! And I put them there this morning!

Chris: Alright, alright. I'm sorry. I must have moved them.

Ilana: Pass me another nappy.

Chris [*hesitant, now*]: Where are *those* kept?

Ilana [*reaching for baby bag*]: Oh, will you just get out of my way!

Chris: Darling, I—

Ilana: Don't 'darling' me!

Chris: Ilana, your mother—

Ilana: I don't want to talk about this, Chris!

Chris: Calm down, baby. It's alright.

Ilana: No, it is NOT alright!

Chris: Ilana, what has gotten into you?

Pause.

Ilana: I don't know what you're talking about.

Chris: Then why are you acting this way?

Ilana: What way?

- Chris: Like this. Not yourself.
- Ilana: For God's sake! I don't know who 'myself' is anymore!
- Chris: Ilana, darling, don't let's fight. I love you, my sweetheart.
[Pause. She does not answer immediately] Would you care to respond to that? [Pause] Ilana?
- Ilana: Yes. I love you, too. I think.
- Chris: You *think*.
- Ilana: Yes.
- Chris: Look, Ilana, you either love someone or you don't. Will you stop playing games with me here!
- Ilana: Oh, Chris, of course I love you! You know that.
- Chris: Well, to be perfectly honest with you Ilana, I'm beginning to doubt it myself. The way you're behaving—
- Ilana: I do love you, Chris! In so many ways. Your passion. Your sensitivity. Your creativity.
- Chris: Ilana—
- Ilana: Your idealism, Chris. I love the way you believe that the world is a good, caring place. Oh, why can't you be ... I *want* to love you, baby. Don't you understand that?
- Chris: Of course I do. [*Holds her*] Oh, my Ilana. I love you so much. Don't worry, my sweetheart. This will all work itself out.
- Ilana: How can you be so confident about that?
- Chris: Because we love each other.
- Ilana: But that's what you've been saying for years, and look at us. Relationships take hard work, Chris.
- Chris: Ilana, relationships ... are like sculptures.
- Ilana: Meaning?
- Chris: Well, you can work at them all you like, manipulate them, forge them into the shape you want them to be. But then that's not art. That's something else. Lifeless. Flat. Baby, it's only when you stop concentrating, stop stifling it, just allow it to be ... that's when its true essence becomes apparent.

- Ilana: Chris, why do you always have to speak in artistic riddles? I never understand you!
- Chris: I don't want to live in a forced structure, Ilana.
- Ilana: And I don't want to live in a fucking sculpture! I'm a human being, Chris, not a piece of bloody clay.
- Chris: Ilana, it's a metaphor.
- Ilana: I don't care! I don't want to be a metaphor! Oh, Chris, I can't do this anymore.
- Chris: Oh no! Don't start this again, baby. Please.
- Ilana: I'm sorry, Chris.
- Chris: Please, my darling, we don't need another repeat of Hyde Park.
- Ilana: Hyde Park?
- Chris: Our anniversary? The picnic? Don't tell me you don't remember! I made the cake from scratch!
- Ilana: Oh, yes! *[She laughs]* But it was awful!
- Chris: So I misread the recipe.
- Ilana: One TABLESPOON of baking powder!
- Chris: Like I said—
- Ilana: And you used salt instead of sugar!
- Chris: Well, my love, if you insist on keeping two powdered white substances in identical containers!
- Ilana *[smiling]*: You should stick to sculpture and leave the baking to me. *[Sighs]* That was a good night.
- Chris: Yes, it was.
- Ilana: All the stars. The champagne ...
- Chris: Tesco's best!
- Ilana: And then the fight.
- Chris: Do you remember what we promised?

Ilana: Of course I do. But, baby–

Chris: “No but’s”, remember?

Ilana: It was different, then.

Chris: No, my love.

Ilana: Two years ago.

Chris: Yes. But nothing’s changed.

Ilana: What do you mean, nothing’s changed? I’ve been trying harder–

Chris: I know, my love. I know you’ve been doing your best. But this is just what Dr Wilson–

Ilana: You know, I’m sorry I ever brought up that damn counselor!

Chris: Ilana, you know I’d do anything for you. Anything to make this work!

Ilana: I know, Chris. But I’m sorry. It’s all ... I just ... I just can’t.

Chris [*challenging*]: Can’t what? [*She does not answer*] What, Ilana? What can’t you do?

Ilana: Chris, don’t make me say it.

Chris: Ilana! How can you even *think* that? I thought we’d been through this! What happened to not giving a damn about what other people think? What happened to being true to ourselves?

Ilana: I am, Chris! I mean – when I’m with you – I do ... I feel like I’m being true to myself. To parts of myself. But here ... I’d forgotten ... this is me, too, Chris.

Chris: And you can’t be both?

Ilana: I don’t ... it doesn’t ... this other me doesn’t fit in here.

Chris: For Pete’s sake, Ilana! So, what do you want to do, then?

Ilana: I don’t know!

Chris: You know, I’m prepared to put up with a lot of crap, Ilana, but this is getting ridiculous! [*He takes the yarmulka off his head and throws it on the floor*]

- Ilana: Chris, don't! At least, not here. Not this night.
- Chris: I'm sorry, Ilana, but I'm done playing this role. From the moment I stepped into this house I've felt like a black peg in a white hole. And you're different when you're around them, Ilana. I just feel ... I love you, but not your family.
- Ilana: Well, I don't know if you can have one without the other.
- Chris: Oh, really? That's not what you've been saying for the past three years.
- Ilana: Maybe I've changed my mind.
- Chris: A very un-Ilana thing to do.
- Ilana: Well ... I have. So there.
- Chris: And what have you decided, exactly?
- Ilana: That ... my family ... I'm pa- They're part of me.
- Chris: You're making no sense. This whole evening, you've been ... singularly out of the ordinary! You've been behaving like a lunatic!
- Ilana: Chris!
- Chris: One minute you're whispering in my ear how much you can't stand your family, and the next you're defending them!
- Ilana: I-
- Chris: One minute I'm your knight in bloody armour come to rescue you from your ... I don't know what! And the next minute you're pushing me away!
- Ilana: I never-
- Chris: I'm not a sounding board for your ... your ... your bloody ... socio-pathetic ideals!
- Ilana: How can you say that?
- Chris: What's going on Ilana? [*Long pause*] This isn't the woman I married.
- Ilana: I know, Chris.

Chris: So you've been living a lie.

Ilana: No!

Chris: Well?

Ilana: I don't know!

Chris: What, then?

Ilana: I don't know. Not a lie. *[Pause]* A dream, perhaps.

Enter Nadia with a pile of empty plates. On top is Sylvia's Bobba's seder plate. She sees Ilana and Chris in a stand-off.

Nadia: Dare I ask?

Ilana: Piss off!

Chris: Um, Nadia, could we please have a moment?

Nadia: Trouble in paradise, I take it?

Ilana: Nadia, will you fuck off!

Chris: Darling, the baby—

Ilana: Oh, fuck the baby! Fuck both of you! Fuck everybody in this whole damn house! *[She grabs a gift-basket from the table and throws it to the floor. Chris and Nadia stand in stunned silence. Ilana throws more gift-baskets as she curses]* Fuck it! Fuck it! Fuck it!

Chris: Ilana, get a grip!

Ilana: No, *you* get a fucking grip! *[Violently shoves a gift-basket at his chest. The plastic breaks and dried fruit and chocolate-covered nuts cascade to the floor]*

Chris: Jesus Christ, Almighty!

Nadia: What is going on? What happened here that everyone's suddenly gone off the rails?

Chris: Listen to me, Ilana!

Ilana: Just get out of my face, Nadia! *[Throws a gift-basket at Nadia. Misses]*

Nadia: No! I will NOT get out of your face. This is my home as much as it is yours! [*Throws Hymie's open box of chocolate-nuts at Ilana; they tumble messily – and hopefully loudly – all over the stage*] Stop treating me like a child!

Ilana: Stop acting like one, then!

Nadia: Me? You're the one who needs to grow up, Ilana!

Ilana: Don't tell me what to do, moron!

Nadia: Why won't you ever give me a chance?

Ilana: You wouldn't understand!

Nadia: You won't let me!

Ilana: Why won't everyone just bloody-well leave me alone? [*She grabs the nearest breakable object – Sylvia's Bobba's seder plate which is on top of the pile Nadia brought in – and smashes it to the floor with all her might. The smash wakes Adam, who starts crying again, quietly, mournfully, fearfully. Ilana looks down at the shards*] Oh, my God.

Chris: Nadia, if you wouldn't mind giving your sister and I a moment–

Ilana: No, Chris. I don't want to speak to you right now.

Chris: Ilana, as your husband I think it–

Ilana: Just – just – get out of my sight.

Chris: Excuse me?

Ilana: I don't want to see you. I need to ... I need to think.

Chris: Ilana, I–

Ilana: Just go! Go! Go!

Uncomfortable pause.

Chris: Fine.

Exit Chris. Ilana picks up Adam; sinks to the floor. She begins to weep softly but deeply. She is no longer hysterical; she is devastated. She toys with a piece of the broken seder plate, weeps afresh. Holds her baby tightly and rocks with him. Nadia tentatively

steps forward, approaching. She slowly lowers herself to sit next to Ilana on the floor. She does not know what to say – gingerly places her arms around her sister.

Nadia: Lany. [Pause] What's going on? [Pause] Talk to me.

Ilana: Give me a cigarette?

Nadia rummages in her pocket, pulls out a crushed soft-pack, nearly empty. Extracts two cigarettes, slightly squashed. Hands one to Ilana. Lights both. Ilana takes a drag, coughs slightly.

Ilana: What is this crap?

Nadia: Royals.

Ilana: My God!

Nadia: Give me a break, alright. They're cheap. [Pause] What's going on, Lan?

Ilana: I don't know.

Nadia: What happened?

Ilana: I don't know, Nad. It just ... it happened so fast. One minute we were fine, and then the next ... oh, God! [*Toying with a shard of the plate*] I can't believe this.

Nadia: Mom is going to be so mad.

Ilana: I know.

Nadia: No, but I mean SO mad.

Ilana: I know. I'm sorry.

Nadia: Like, madder than she's ever been in her life before.

Ilana: I get the picture, thank you!

Nadia [*Picking a piece of fruit from the floor*]: Dried peach?

Ilana: Pass me one of those chocolate thingies. No, that one. Thanks.

Enter Harold.

Harold: Um, everything okay in here?

Ilana & Nadia: Fine, Dad.

Harold: Are you sure? It's just ... [*looks around, aghast*] Where's your mother?

Ilana: She went out there. [*Points to kitchen door*]

Harold: Alright. I'll just go and ...

Exit Harold through kitchen door.

Nadia: What's going on, Lany?

Ilana: I just wanted so badly for it to work.

Nadia: It's working fine, Lan. Don't worry.

Ilana: I'm trying so hard.

Nadia: And you're doing brilliantly! Don't worry. Clive's delivering a riveting lecture on the history of dust mite allergies or something. Everyone else is either nodding off or tipsy. No one even realizes we're not there, I promise.

Ilana: I'm so ... scared, Nad.

Nadia: Don't be, Lany. There's no reason to be.

Ilana: It's so beautiful; so fragile. [*Touches shard of broken plate; she is speaking softly, as if to herself*] Perhaps it is like a sculpture.

Nadia: What is, Lan?

Ilana: Us.

Nadia: Us?

Ilana: Chris and me.

Nadia: Oh. What's the problem?

Ilana: I don't know! [*Pause*] It's not ... the race thing.

Nadia: Of course not.

Ilana: Really it isn't. I couldn't give a damn if he were black or blue. It's just ... I don't know, Nad. He's so ... different.

Nadia: Don't you dare turn into Mom on me, Ilana.

- Ilana: No, not like that! That's not what I mean! If anything, he doesn't deserve me.
- Nadia: Go on.
- Ilana: He's so deep and ... he knows who he is and isn't afraid to stand up for it. I'm not like that, Nad. I don't know who the hell I am anymore. It's all so complicated.
- Nadia: Well, he's an artist. That's pretty complicated.
- Ilana: But he doesn't get me, Nad. It's like we speak two different languages sometimes. This whole *bris* thing ... I just—
- Nadia: What whole *bris* thing?
- Ilana: Adam. We decided not to.
- Nadia: Shit.
- Ilana: What?
- Nadia: That's hectic.
- Ilana: It's just a ritual, right?
- Nadia: Wow, Lan. I mean, but that is big.
- Ilana: Oh, please! When did religion suddenly become so important to *you*?
- Nadia: I'm not trying to say that, Ilana. It's just ... it will kill Mom and Dad.
- Ilana: I know. That's what Mom's going off about.
- Nadia: I see now. What's your reasoning?
- Ilana: Chris believes it's barbaric and cruel, so we decided we wouldn't do it to the kid. I mean, it shouldn't make a difference. We're not doing any of the other laws.
- Nadia: I suppose so. But Mom. [*Pause*] Can I tell you something, Lan?
- Ilana: Shoot.
- Nadia: I don't think you know. Did you ... do you know about our brother?
- Ilana: What? Our brother? What are you—

Nadia: We had a big brother. For three days. Before you were born.

Ilana: No! You can't be--

Nadia: He was born with a hole in his heart. He didn't make it.

Ilana: My God. [*Looks at Nadia*] You're really serious.

Nadia: Yes.

Ilana: But, how – how could no one ever have said anything?

Nadia: He's gone, Lan. I guess the folks ... it's history.

Ilana: But how could – why – I ...

Nadia: So you see why Mom ... now ...

Ilana: God. [*Pause*] Why do I feel so ... betrayed? [*Pause*] What was his name?

Nadia: He didn't have one. He died before he was eight days old.

Ilana: So ... [*she realizes*] he couldn't have had a *bris* either.

Nadia: Exactly.

Ilana: But how could Mom not have told me about this? And how come you know?

Nadia: She told me. Last year, when you called to tell us you were pregnant. She said she was praying it would be a boy.

Ilana: Well, she got that wish. You know ... I was kind of hoping for a girl.

Nadia: Why?

Ilana: You're going to rip me off.

Nadia: No, I won't. Why'd you want a girl?

Pause.

Ilana: Promise you won't plough into me.

Nadia: Okay. Go.

Ilana: Because ... I knew that if I had a girl my grandchildren would at least be Jewish.

Nadia: But–

Ilana: You promised, Nadia!

Nadia: No, I don't want to attack you. I just – don't get it.

Ilana: Neither do I, that's the problem. I just felt like everything would be so much easier – one less choice I'd have to make.

During the above scene Ilana has started to breastfeed Adam in order to pacify him – the audience sees the dark Star of David tattooed above her left breast. A moment of quiet between the sisters. Enter Harold.

Harold [*standing in doorway*]: My little girls. My darling little girls. [*Pause*] Nadia, we need you to hold fort out there. The show must go on! Plough 'em with *parev* ice-cream – they'll never know what hit 'em.

Nadia: Sure, Dad.

Exit Nadia with the ice-cream and pile of bowls.

Ilana: Where's Mom?

Harold: She's pacing up and down the garden. Chain-smoking. [*Harold walks over and sits down next to Ilana*] Talk to me, my Lany.

Ilana: I – don't know what to say.

Harold: Well, there's a first!

Ilana: Ha ha, Dad.

Harold: How are you feeling?

Ilana: Awful. Confused. Lost.

Harold: Do you want to talk about what's really going on here?

Ilana: Not really.

Harold: Ilana, you have to talk to us. We're your parents. We love you and your sister more than anything in the whole world. We see you suffering like this and it hurts us more than you can possibly believe.

- Ilana: This whole thing – it's so complicated.
- Harold: What complicated? It's a simple procedure.
- Ilana: But Chris – we decided not to force any religion onto Adam.
- Harold: Well, why don't you have him circumcised so that when he's old enough to make the decision, he at least has the choice. Lany?
- Ilana: But *brissing* him now would mean we're making that choice for him!
- Harold: Not necessarily, my angel. Lots of babies are circumcised these days, purely for hygiene reasons. That way, when he's older, he can decide that if he wants to embrace Judaism, he can. If he doesn't, he won't. [*Pause. Ilana looks unconvinced*] Ilana, every Jewish male child has been through this for thousands of years. And it never did any of them any harm.
- Ilana cracks a little; starts to cry and laugh at the same time.*
- Ilana: Oy, Dad! This is too much for a normal person to handle!
- Harold [*offering his hanky*]: But we're not normal, Ilana. We're Jewish.
- Ilana [*taking hanky*]: Ha ha. That sounds like something Chris would say.
- Harold: Now I want you to get something straight right now, my dear: Chris seems like a very nice boy. He treats you well?
- Ilana: Yes.
- Harold: He respects you?
- Ilana: Ja. Most of the time.
- Harold: Now, let me ask you something. Are you happy?
- Ilana: I love him, Dad.
- Harold: I don't doubt that. But answer my question, Lany.
- Ilana [*after a pause*]: No. I'm not happy. Oh, God, Dada! Can't you see? I *want* to be happy. I'm trying so hard, but I feel as if I'm being torn in two! I want to love him – can you understand that? I want to love him, so badly! I want to love him and be a part of him and build a life together. But there's something inside me that just won't let it happen! Because I love you too, Dada. And Mom. And,

God help me, even Nadia! And I can't just cut you guys out of my life either.

Harold: We don't want you to cut us off, Ilana.

Ilana: I mean, you're my family, my roots. I want you to be a part of Adam's life. But, Chris ... GOD! Sometimes I feel like there are two me's, in two different worlds, and they don't go together.

Harold: So now I have another question for you, my child: when will you come home?

Ilana: Dad, I can't just leave my job, my life—

Harold: Ilana, listen to your father. You've got to learn to listen with your heart, as well as your ears. Come home, *bubbelah*. By all means, stay in London if you want to. But come home. Come back to us.

Ilana: Oh, Daddy!

They hug: Enter Sylvia behind them. It is reminiscent of her entering to watch Harold and Nadia hugging earlier in the play.

Harold: Now, go and find your husband. You need to talk this out between the two of you.

Ilana: Okay, Daddy.

They rise. Ilana puts the now sleeping Adam back in his carry-cot. Exit Ilana. Harold turns to Sylvia.

Harold: Sylvie.

Sylvia: How could this happen, Harry?

Harold: Darling, it happened.

Sylvia: Where did we go wrong?

Harold: It has happened, and now we must love her.

Sylvia: We gave her everything we could give. Education, love, support, money, values, tradition ... she might as well spit on my grave! [*She notices the broken seder plate, bends to pick up a piece, possibly showing her age in the way she bends. Straightens*] Oh, Hashem. My Bobba's plate. My heart is broken.

- Harold: The wonderful thing about hearts is that you don't need superglue to fix them. Just a little time and a lot of love.
- Sylvia: But how can we love her – like this – with this ...
- Harold: You'll learn, my darling. It's a human phenomenon. You just try *not* to love that little munchkin. [*gestures to Adam*]
- Sylvia [*walks over, peers into carry-cot*]: This little ... thing. This mongrel. He's going to wake up one day and look at himself in the mirror and think, "God, I'm ugly. What am I? What am I?" Oh, Harry, I don't want two-coffee-and-one-milk grandchildren!
- Harold: Sylvie, he's our grandchild. You either accept or you don't accept. To not accept would mean to lose a daughter *and* a grandchild. That is too traumatic. So we must accept, whether you're happy or not. And we'll make the best of the situation. [*Teasing her*] God has blessed us with a beautiful, healthy grandchild and you'll have the *chutzpah* to ask for a trade-in?
- Sylvia: Oh, Harry.
- Enter Nadia with empty ice-cream bowls.*
- Nadia: Hymie wants to do the *afikoman* so he can go home and watch the ten o'clock movie. Did you even remember to hide it, Mom? Zayda's already put up the ransom. Mom?
- Sylvia is still staring over the carry-cot. Harold is silent for the next few lines, allowing mother and daughter to interact.*
- Sylvia: Ay. I'm so tired.
- Nadia: Mom ...
- Sylvia: I'm so tired. I can't do this anymore. [*She sits defeatedly on a chair*] What did I do to deserve such *tzuris*?
- Nadia: It's not a punishment, Mom. It's a blessing.
- Sylvia: God is testing me. But I've failed.
- Nadia: You haven't failed, Mom. You haven't even stepped up to the plate, yet. [*Pause*] Just love us, Mom.
- Sylvia looks at carry-cot.*
- Sylvia: No. I cannot love this thing.

Nadia: Mom, how can you say that? I can't believe you!

Sylvia: You can't believe? YOU can't believe? Did you ever think what I must feel about this? I raise a nice girl that any Jewish mother could be proud of, and she goes and— [*Sylvia bites her knuckle. Breathes deeply*] I'm sorry, Nadela. When you talk about belief it makes me so sad. Because I believed, Nadel. I believed. I placed my trust in *Hashem* that He would do what's best for my *bubbelahs*. My little babies that I love more than my life itself. And this is what He lets happen.

Nadia: Mom, I—

Sylvia: I'm sorry. It's just ... he could be Benjamin. It's only the hair that gives him away.

Nadia: Benjamin?

Sylvia: Oh, Harry, why?

Harold [*holding her*]: My darling, because God has returned him to us.

Nadia: But, I thought ... he never had a name.

Sylvia: To me, he had a name. How could I not give him a name. As if I could forget ...

Enter Ilana.

Ilana: I can't find Chris anywhere.

Nadia: I looked for him when I took out the dessert. Uncle Hymie said he saw him storm out of the front door.

Ilana: Where'd he—

Nadia: No idea. But apparently he didn't take any bags with him.

Ilana: I—

Nadia: Come, Lany, I'll ... help you look for him.

Exit Nadia with Ilana.

Harold: You know, my darling, there's one part of the *seder* I've never really understood. The part about Elijah. So we open the door and fill a cup of wine for this person who never arrives. Every year it's the same. You know, when I was young I used to think he was like a *yiddishe* Father Christmas. Except of course without the red suit and the presents and the chimneys. And

that he never actually arrived. So actually ... really nothing like Father Christmas at all – but that's not what I'm getting at. One year at *Pesach* time, when I was about twelve years old – it just before my *bar mitzvah*, if I recall – I went out to find my father in his garden. Have I told you this story, Sylvie? The man was always mad about his garden – his petunias and his roses and the hibiscus bush he pruned every autumn. So I asked my father, "Papa, why does Elijah never come to visit? Every year we open the door and we wait, and he never comes". Do you know what my father told me? [*Sylvia shakes her head*] I'll tell you. He said, "Harry, you must pay careful attention at the *seder* this evening. Elijah will come tonight!" So that night of course I was alert as anything and watching the door all night with peeled eyeballs. I remember Rochel teasing me but I believed what my father had told me. After dinner – what a dinner, *oy*, could my mother cook! – we all stood around the table and, being the youngest, I was sent to open the door for the prophet. I opened the door and there was ... nothing! Nothing but the quiet yard and the starry skies, and hint of a wind bringing in the smell of the hibiscus. I peered out into the night but before I knew it my whole family was singing "*Eliyahu Hanavi*", and my father called me back to the table. *Oy*, let me tell you, Sylvie, I was crestfallen. After the *seder*, I went to my father, and I asked him: "Papa, you promised me that tonight, Elijah would come. What happened? What happened that he didn't arrive?" My father looked at me and he said to me in a voice I will never forget, "But Harry, he was here! Only you just didn't see him." And that was the end of that conversation. We never really spoke about it again. Every year since I've watched the open door for a sign, a something ... but nothing ever comes. Sylvie, my darling, I've just realized! I've been watching the wrong door! Elijah the prophet won't use the front door, or even the back door, for that matter. He uses the door to our souls. He visits us and he tries to give us guidance, only we don't notice, because we're too fixated on the way things look. We're so busy with the wine and the plate and the eggs that we forget the real importance of the *seder*. So this year, he's sent a messenger.

Sylvia: A messenger?

Harold: We weren't listening to the prophet, Sylvie, so He sent us an angel. [*Pause*] Yes, Sylvie. Our very own angel.

The guests begin singing off-stage; softly at first, but rising in volume until black-out.
The
song is Adir Hu, a song praising God and asking for redemption speedily in our days.
The singing is not perfect, in fact, the more human the better.

Harold: Listen, my love. Do you hear that? My favourite *seder* song.

*Harold joins in the singing in a croaky, off-key voice. He is singing to Sylvia. The
stage
lights fade out to black. Only once the stage is pitch black, Sylvia joins in the song in
a
shrill, wavering voice. All the cast are singing at full volume now, for another verse
or
two.*

ACT TWO

Scene Two

Lights up (dimmed) on Sylvia, alone on the stage. She has changed into her dressing gown, but her hair and make-up are as before. She is cleaning the kitchen and putting things away. She takes a dust pan and brush and bends to the floor where the broken plate lies. She sweeps up the shards of glass; stands. She looks at the garbage bin; places the full dust pan on the counter. Goes back to stacking dishes. After a short while she wipes her hands; looks around. She goes over to the carry-cot and watches the sleeping baby. She watches for a long while, silent and expressionless. Finally she stoops and gingerly lifts the sleeping child out of the carry-cot. She holds him at an arm's length, examining him. She toys with his little hands, caresses his face. Quietly, enter Ilana, still fully dressed, behind her. Ilana, standing at the doorway, watches her mother and her son for a while.

Ilana: He does have beautiful little eyelashes, doesn't he, Mom?
[Pause. Sylvia does not respond immediately] And his eyebrows. So tiny. You know, when they're all scrunched up like that, as if he's really concentrating, he kind of reminds me of Dad.

Sylvia scrutinizes the baby's face.

Sylvia: Your father's nose is bigger.

Ilana: His hands are so tiny. Like little gummy sweets. I just want to eat them up, don't you?

Sylvia *[softly]*: So warm.

Ilana: What, Mom?

Sylvia: His hands. They're so warm.

Ilana: Yes. *[Pause]* Mom ... tonight hasn't worked out ... how it was supposed to ... how I wanted it ...

Sylvia: Ilana, let me tell you someth—

Ilana: No, Mom. I want to tell you something. And for once in your life I want you to listen. *[Pause]* I ... I guess ... if I'd done things differently ... I ... I'd planned ...

Sylvia: *A mentsh tracht unt Got lacht.*

Ilana: Wait, I know this one ...

Sylvia: "Man plans and God laughs".

Ilana: Yes. *[Pause]* Ma, I was thinking ... you know, you never gave us middle names. I've always liked that idea, though. We never gave Adam one, either. But I think I'd like to, now. What do you think about: Adam Benjamin?

Sylvia remains expressionless. Ilana walks cautiously over to her mother. On her way, she bends down and picks up the yarmulka that Chris previously threw on the floor. When she reaches the pair, she puts the yarmulka on the child's head.

Ilana: What do you think?

Sylvia cannot speak. She is close to tears – we cannot tell at this point if they are happy or sad tears.

Sylvia: Look at that – it sticks!

CURTAIN

Glossary:

In keeping with the composite character of the Jewish people, their speech is frequently littered with stray words, references from other languages and cultures to which they have been historically exposed. The lexicon of the South African Jewish community, predominantly of eastern European origin, includes elements of Yiddish (itself a bastard language) and Hebrew, as well as Afrikaans. Some words have been further adulterated into “Yinglish” – peculiarly anglicized but definitely not English vernacular (see for example the entry below on “*Good Yontif*”). Although practically this invites complications, I have attempted to provide definitions and explanations that are as accurate and apt as possible to the specific references in the script.

A note on phonetics: due to the complicated linguistic background of many of these words, it is impossible to agree on a definitive spelling. In such cases linguistic scholar Leo Rosten has proclaimed the exercise to be “*emphatically phonetic*” (1970: 447). Following Rosten’s learned lead, orthographical inconsistencies in my text may be put down to context, the demands of the niceties of print, or examples where clarity prevails over consistency.

Afikoman *Heb.* The larger half of the middle piece of ceremonial *matzah*, traditionally hidden by an adult for children to seek after dinner, usually for a prize.

Aigenah mensch *Yid.* “Of our own people”; a good, decent person.

Bar mitzvah *Heb.* A rite of passage; The ceremony in which the thirteen-year-old Jewish boy reaches the status of a man. Literal translation: “Son of the commandment”.

Baruch Hashem *Heb.* “Blessed is God”.

Bobba *Yid.* Grandmother.

Bris *Yid.* Circumcision of Jewish males at eight days old. Noun and verb.

Brocha *Yid.* Blessing; also traditional snacks served after prayers on special occasions to socialize and celebrate.

Bubbelah *Yid.* Term of endearment (diminutive, but widely used).

Bubkes *Yid.* Something trivial, worthless, insultingly disproportionate to expectations; something absurd, foolish.

Chag Sameach *Heb.* Traditional greeting meaning “Happy festival”.

Charoset *Heb.* See entry for **Seder Plate**.

Chutzpah *Yid./Heb.* Gall, brazen nerve.

Dufka *Yid.* Otherwise, stubborn.

Faribel *Yid.* Dispute, grudge, fight.

Gefilte fish *Yid.* Traditional minced fish balls.

Gezunte *Yid.* Healthy.

Gonif(s) *Yid.* Thieve(s).

Haggadah (pl. Haggadot) *Heb.* The narrative, read aloud at the *seder*, piecing together, from various sources, the story of Israel’s bondage in and exodus from Egypt.

Halacha/Halocha *Heb./Yid.* Jewish law and accumulated jurisprudence. **Halachic.** adj.

Hashem *Heb.* Literally “The Name”, used in referring to God.

Kein-ein-hora *Yid.* Phrase uttered to ward off the evil eye (*ein hora*).

Kiddush *Heb./Yid.* Prayer and accompanying ceremony that sanctifies Jewish holy days.

Kiddush wine Sweet red sacramental wine used in the *Kiddush* ceremony.

Kneidle (pl. Kneidlach) *Yid.* Matzah ball(s).

Krilletjies *Afr.* Little curls.

Kugel *Yid.* Pudding of noodles or potatoes, a woman who behaves like a princess.

Kvetch *Yid.* Complain.

Ma Nishtana *Heb.* The words that begin the Four Questions asked in the *Haggadah*. The full text is: *Ma nishtana ha-layla ha-zeh mi-kol ha-laylot?* (“What distinguishes this night from all other nights?” or “What makes this night different from all other nights?”).

Manischewitz Imported brand of kosher wine.

Matzah *Heb.* Unleavened bread eaten by Jews on Passover to commemorate the exodus from Egypt when their ancestors did not have time to let their bread rise.

Meshugas *Yid.* Madness.

Meshuganeh *Yid.* Mad/crazy. Used as an adjective or a noun to describe a mad/crazy person (a person with a *meshugas*).

Naches *Yid.* Proud pleasure, special joy – particularly from the achievements of a child.

Neshoma *Yid.* Soul.

Nu? *Yid.* “Well”, “so” – a remarkably versatile interjection; Utterly untranslatable.

Oy *Yid.* All-purpose ejaculation to express anything from trivial delight to abysmal woe.

Oy gevalt *Yid.* “Oh, disaster”.

Oy vey *Yid.* “Oh, pain”.

Parev *Yid.* Dietetically neutral foods that contain neither animal nor dairy derivatives and can therefore be served with any meal.

Pesach *Heb.* The Passover holiday and celebration.

Pesachdik *Yid.* Kosher for Pesach.

Plutz *Yid.* To split, burst, explode.

Schlep *Yid.* To drag; a drag.

Schloomp *Yid.* A slovenly person; a slattern.

Schmaltz *Yid.* Chicken fat, used in cooking.

Schmattes *Yid.* Rags.

Schwartz(er)s *Yid.* Negro(es). Originally cryptonyms for Negro servants or employees, now less commonly (or openly) used due to political incorrectness.

Schwitz *Yid.* Sweat.

Seder *Heb.* “Order” (i.e. order of the service held in celebration of the Passover festival).

Seder plate *Heb./Eng.* Traditionally an ornate platter on which the comestible symbols of *Pesach* are displayed: a roasted bone to symbolize the paschal lamb which was sacrificed; bitter herbs (e.g. horseradish) to remember the bitterness of slavery;

charoset (a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon, and wine) to represent the mortar with which the Jews built the pyramids; salt water to recall the tears shed by Jewish mothers whose babies were taken from them; a piece of greenery (parsley, celery, etc) to remind us that this is a springtime festival in Israel; and an egg, variously said to symbolize life, the 'yolk' of slavery, or the nation of Israel itself (because the more you boil it, the more solid it becomes).

Shabbat *Heb.* Sabbath (for Jews, Friday nights and Saturdays).

Shoch *Heb.* adulterated. Black (person).

Shul *Yid.* Synagogue.

Toochus(es) *Yid.* Posterior; buttocks.

Traif *Yid.* Un-kosher.

Tzimmus *Yid.* Sweet casserole of meat, vegetables and dried fruit.

Tzuris *Yid.* Troubles, woes, worries, suffering.

Verkakte *Yid.* Broken.

Vershtunkende *Yid.* Stinking.

Yarmulka *Yid.* Skullcap.

Yiddishe *Yid.* Jewish (adjective).

Yontif *Yid.* Holiday; holy day. Adulteration of Hebrew *Yom* ("day") *Tov* ("good").

"Good Yontif" *Eng./Yid.* Holiday greeting, seemingly superfluous (like "good good-day") but indicative of the linguistic gumbo of the South African Jewish circumstances.

Zayda *Yid.* Grandfather.

Acknowledgement:

In compiling this cursory glossary, I have drawn heavily on Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish* (London: W. H. Allen, 1970).

This Night is Different: an enquiry into the most appropriate mode for representing the Jewish cultural experience in contemporary South Africa, in dramatic form.

Enter: Project

Choosing the subject matter for this project was a huge challenge for me. Following the accepted creative writing mantra “write what you know”, my family of characters took on a South African Jewish attitude. At times this became very uncomfortable to write: the characters were too close to me – worse, to my own family – and I felt very protective, even defensive, of them. This was clearly evident in the earliest drafts which appeared contrived.

I wanted to capture, in content and style, the essence of modern South African Jewish life. As soon as I began writing, it became very clear that the form the play would take would revolve around the representation of a family – more specifically, a nuclear family.

It is important to focus not only on *what* happens, but also *how* it is conveyed. This, at first, was an almost unconscious decision. I knew that my characters had to be believable in order to be effective, but the challenge that lay before me was how to create such believable characters. My most useful guide was the writing process itself. Only by creating could I judge whether I was achieving these goals.

This essay will look at issues raised and obstacles overcome during the process of writing the script. I will draw on academic as well as creative sources in order to corroborate my claims. By reading widely, I was able to situate my script in an existing world of literature. To be aware of what other writers have done has helped to inform my own artistic choices, and provided me with a certain measure of confidence and, I hope, credibility. That being said, I must clarify that I shall not offer anything resembling a comprehensive study of either the realist genre, or the family in theatre. I will draw on works which pertain directly to my project, and then only where they make useful points about family, the conflict between appearances and reality, and other themes which are relevant to my own work.

I will also refer in some depth to the reflective journal I kept during the writing process and interviews conducted for the purposes of this project. The journal – two

years' worth – was too long and superfluous to include in this thesis; the interview transcripts, however, are appended at the end of this essay.

Getting real: choosing a form

Choosing a form in which to write is a double-edged sword: it advances the writing process, but it also retards this process due to the many subsidiary issues which it awakens. An entry in my reflective journal reads:

When it came to approach actually writing this play, there were some things that I knew, others that I felt, and some things about which I was not conscious at all. I *knew* the play was about a family. I *felt* some of the characters, their emotions and values, and their conflicts. And I had *no clue* at all how to begin the actual writing process! (November 2005)

It was only through many tortured hours of reflection that I came to realize how perfectly normal my creative conundrum actually was.

Arthur Miller's "The Family in Modern Drama" offered insight from both a practical and an academic point of view. He opens his essay with, "Most people have come to assume that the forms in which plays are written spring either from nowhere or from the temperamental choice of the playwrights" (Miller, 1999:69). This, I was to discover, would be my first creative hurdle – the first academic obstacle to the writing process. How does one *choose* a form in which to write? Is it even a choice, or is it subconsciously dictated by the material at hand? And if I'm not conscious of it, how can I begin to use it to my best advantage?

Significantly, Miller suggests, "most playwrights reach rather instinctively for that form, that way of telling a play, which seems inevitably right for the subject at hand" (1999:69). This resonated with me, as I later reflected in my journal: "That's all very well for putting my mind at ease, but not much help when faced with justifying my artistic choices academically!" (October 2005). The realist mode was by no means an automatic assumption for me when planning to write this play. A full appraisal of the history of the theatre and the development of various modes of representation from nineteenth-century naturalism through to modern realist drama is not possible within the confines of this essay, but throughout my discussion I will refer to examples that indicate not only my ultimate choice of the realist genre, but also reasons why other genres could not suffice for this particular project. My proposal

states my intention to investigate whether the “triumph of realism” as a theatrical mode (Bentley cited in Demastes, 1988:1) indicates the suitability of the form as a mode of representation for contemporary South African theatre. This was only partially honest. I *was* intrigued as to the strengths of the genre, and its enduring nature. But more significantly, I was interested in how I could make the mode work for *me*.

So how did I come to realism? An early journal entry provides some insight: “I can *see* the characters. I *know* them. I believe them. They are so real to me I feel like they are actual, real people. I need them to come alive in such a way that the audience will see them the same way” (April 2005). I wanted the audience to catch a glimpse into the lives of my characters – and I realized that this was the basic definition of fourth-wall realism. Once realized, this question of form became the central concern of my proposal.

A subject search of realism revealed tomes of commentary on the evolution and definition of the genre. Here I discovered my second major obstacle to the creative process: getting bogged down in theory. This type of thesis dances a precarious line between the academic and the creative. The challenge lies in the focus: I had to remind myself constantly that my thesis was *not* an exploration of realism as a genre, but only as a tool for the creative process of writing this particular play. I needed to define realism in a way that would be useful to my theatrical (as well as academic) aims. Here I found the work of Christopher Innes invaluable. He explains:

It would seem more helpful – as well as being truer to the historical facts – to understand both ‘Naturalism’ and ‘Realism’ as applying to the movement as a whole. At the same time, taking advantage of the subtle distinction between the two words for greater critical precision, it would be logical to use ‘Naturalism’ to refer to the theoretical basis shared by all the dramatists who formed the movement, and their approach to representing the world. ‘Realism’ could then apply to the intended effect, and the stage techniques associated with it. (Innes, 2000:6).

There are always two elements to consider when analyzing or writing drama: the ideological content of the drama and the theatrical mode chosen as most effective in order to convey that content. Innes’s exposition is that these two aspects of drama are not indivisible. It is possible to retain the dramatic functions of realism as a theatrical

mode but to divorce the adopted nineteenth-century naturalist assumptions which, he argues, come with it.

In the case of *This Night is Different*, it could be argued that the ideological content and arising social issues are specific to the South African Jewish community. It must also be stressed, however, that this cultural experience is by no means monolithic. In choosing to represent the lives and values of people of varying ages, genders, races, geographical and cultural origins, in a context as diverse and dynamic as the New South Africa, I aimed to represent a range of possible experiences and reactions in the hope that the audience may be able to relate to the processes of interaction on stage.

A world of possible forms could – and have – successfully conveyed diverse experiences in South African theatre. For example, Barney Simon's Grotowskian approach in *Woza Albert* illustrates the poverty of black people under apartheid with an energy that speaks of the nation's drive to overcome political and social injustice. Fugard's *The Island*, with its emphasis on symbolism and mime, successfully communicates the physical and emotional starkness of prison. Yet these were all too dramatic – in the theatrical and conventional adjectival sense – for the aims of my project: "I don't want the sparkle of the stage to detract from what I feel is a very human message. I don't want the audience to see something or learn something; I want them to feel it, to understand it" (Journal, May 2005).

Rita Felski has helped me to articulate my reasoning. She defines realism as an aesthetic form that seeks to authentically communicate a quality of experience (2004:61). In her discussion on "Feminism, Realism and the Avant-Garde", she debunks the apparent dichotomy between the latter two aesthetic forms as a stylistic debate, in favour of a philosophical analysis of the social functions of art. She argues that "the question of a radical art is not a formal but rather a social and ideological issue" (Felski: 2004:68).

To build on this, Miller notes: "The language of the family is the language of the private life – prose. The language of society, the language of the public life, is verse" (1999:76). He explains that the colloquial register used in familial relations reflects the intimacy of the association. Our guard is down, so to speak, and we reveal ourselves very differently to our family than we do to the outside world. I wanted to explore this dynamic by representing characters in an environment which allows them to do just that: interact in a close, intimate manner, undistracted by the niceties of

social convention. “When one is speaking to one’s family, one uses a certain level of speech, a certain plain diction perhaps, a tone of voice, an inflection suited to the intimacy of the occasion” (Miller, 1999:76).

Miller articulates my initial intuition about the style of presentation of my play: “What we feel is always more ‘real’ to us than what we know, and we feel the family relation while we only know the social one” (1999:81). It follows naturally, then, that realism – the lifelike, prosaic mode of representation – best lends itself to plays of an intimate, family nature, while more expressionistic forms are appropriate for works of social mobilization.

Miller also emphasizes that realism is a style in itself – “an artful convention” (1999:70) with its own rules and limitations. Felski concurs, though she initially dubs this a “naïve defence” (2004:61) of the aesthetic convention. She does go on to admit that it “cannot be meaningfully accused of deception [because] it is neither intended nor interpreted as a literal transcription of the real, but rather contains within it a formally mediated distance to its own substantive content” (2004:63). I came to realise that the realist mode is every bit as complex and difficult to craft as any other mode. While I felt liberated in being able to “choose” realism, I was not prepared for the ways in which the constraints of the genre were to impact upon my own project. This was the final hurdle I faced in utilizing the realist genre: the mode itself got in the way of the creative process.

In fact, the artificial structure of the *seder* has, from the start, interfered with the natural flow of the play. The *seder* is the ritual meal celebrated by Jews on the first night of the festival of *Pesach* (Passover). The *seder* (from the Hebrew word for “order”), is so called because it denotes the order of service for the evening. If I wanted to preserve the feeling of real time in my script, I had to accommodate the imposed format of a traditional *seder* – including a series of songs and prayers, followed by dinner, finished off with more songs and rituals. The truly tricky part came when I decided to set the play in the kitchen, because most of the abovementioned activity takes place in the dining room, which is not seen by the audience. In keeping with the realistic structure of the *seder*, the principal family members would have to be in the dining room for much of the evening, leaving the stage (representative of the kitchen) empty.

These constraints of time and space warrant some qualification. I wanted to explore the subtle relationship between appearances and reality, and the role that

realism can play in regard to this. The characters on stage (in the kitchen) are also in a sense “off-stage”, in that they are behind the scenes of the main event (the *seder*). The audience sees all the things that go on behind the closed kitchen door. The question is: how good are the actors (for they are actors, both to the audience and to the guests at the *seder*) at hiding their true feelings from each other? And – more importantly – from themselves? The realist mode allows the characters a sense of real anguish; despite the underlying knowledge that they are watching a play, the audience is able to feel as if they are watching real people, who have let their social guards down, revealing intense emotional situations.

However, my choices gave birth to challenges of their own: how was I to handle the necessity for my characters (for the most part the hosts, or guests of honour) being off-stage for much of the evening (in the dining room, or the kitchen, depending on perspective)? I toyed with the idea of creating a split-stage with a door inter-leading both rooms, but this thought was discarded fairly early on. The presence of the dozen-odd other guests would detract from the powerful interaction between the core characters, and the play risked descending into a comedic caricature of a *seder*, rather than a study of the family itself. In fact, I changed the name of the script from *The Seder* to *This Night is Different* for this same reason. I wanted the focus to be on the family, not the event.

The answer lay in employing the dramatic device of scene-breaks. The first scene takes place largely before the guests arrive, so it is perfectly sensible to find the characters in the kitchen. The rest of the play depends heavily on the action occurring off-stage, which is communicated to the audience by conversations between the characters. For example, at the end of Scene Two, Ilana explains to Chris: “Remember, we went through this in the taxi: there’s about forty minutes of songs, prayers, and commentary before the actual meal is served” (57). This is shortly followed by a scene-break, after which Nadia storms on-stage, pursued by Sylvia. Nadia is refusing to sing “*Ma Nishtana*”, which indicates to the audience that the songs have begun, in addition to revealing the tension in the relationship between mother and daughter. The scene break at the end of Act One indicates the passing of time and the rest of the pre-meal ritual, for Act Two opens on the family serving the meal from the kitchen. The action in Act Two, Scene One depends heavily on characters rushing between the two realms – the polite, artificial world of the dining room, contrasted with the kitchen, where truth and honesty struggle out.

Finally, I was able to incorporate a seemingly non-realistic emotional device of song to move the play into the final scene, but this too becomes believable when the audience accepts its diegetic quality as explained by Harold when he exclaims to Sylvia, “Listen, Sylvie. Do you hear that? My favourite *seder* song!” (105).

The constraints I faced affected not only myself as a writer, but the lives of my characters as well: “Now that I come to think about it, it has interfered with the lives of the characters, too!” I wrote in my journal, “It’s like not even they can get away from it! No matter how they try to run, the structures of the religion impose themselves on their lives” (March 2005). This artificial sense of order sets up unrealistic expectations in the characters’ minds. Sylvia feels compelled to preserve this sense of order, and becomes frustrated when it is jeopardized by outside, emotional, non-rational forces, for example when Ilana fails to arrive at the expected time. And, of course, Ilana has broken the mould in marrying someone she isn’t supposed to marry – someone who is not the traditional, the “right”, choice. Ilana has disrupted the sense of order on which the family is founded, and she too feels out of place and uncomfortable in this world that makes sense in neither the traditional nor a modern, independent manner. It is this artificial sense of order that is interfering with the characters’ lives on stage and off, yet this tradition seems to be the only thing left holding the family together.

By combining what I knew and felt with my subconscious awareness of the project, I came to the conclusion that realism would indeed be the most appropriate mode of expression for this project. As discussed above, this route would not be without obstacles, but it was a decision to which I would remain loyal, employing various other devices at my disposal to ratify the choice of genre.

Creating realistic characters through voice and dialogue

One of the most difficult aspects of creating realist theatre is finding the characters’ voices. Because scriptwriting rests so heavily on dialogue, this is the principal tool for conveying the characters’ personalities, histories, opinions, and values. “A character’s voice is a chosen mimicry and is one of the most rewarding devices of imaginative writing, a skill to pursue in order to develop rich characters both in their narratives and in their dialogue” (Burroway, 2003:47). The emphasis here is on mimicry: even realist dialogue (perhaps especially realist dialogue) needs to be carefully constructed to convey the desired character. These voices need to be believable, otherwise the

intimate, honest effect of the play is compromised. It is important to represent the characters as 'real' people – complex personalities with strengths and weaknesses, quirks and foibles.

I wanted to preserve this from the start of the writing process, even before I had isolated realism as a focus of study. An early journal entry reads: "the audience has to believe in the characters, or the whole play will flop" (March 2005). I understood that this play would be driven by character.

As such, I decided to conduct a series of interviews with the intention of gathering material that would help to inform both the mindsets and the mannerisms of my characters. By drawing on real people and their experience, I hoped to create realistic representations of these on the stage. I interviewed a range of subjects varying in age, gender, and level of religiosity, from my very traditional grandmother to young adult friends born to Jewish parents who do not practice the religion and do not consider it important to them. The interviews were principally in search of anecdotal material and helped to add weight to my constructions of contemporary attitudes towards religion, race, and tradition. I also asked interviewees to respond imaginatively to hypothetical situations of conflict which I was considering using in my script.

Sylvia

In analyzing the interviews, I noticed an inexplicable quirk: South African Jewish women of a certain generation – even though they may not speak more than a smattering of Yiddish – tend to preserve the rhythms of the old language, especially when they want to make an emphatic point. By way of example, take the following extract from the interview with seventy-year-old Renee Weinberg: "I'm not really a good Jewess. I am Jewish, but a good Jew, I'm not. [Whispers] A good Jew, I'm not." Reversing the syntactical pattern to an object-subject-verb construction seems to accentuate the linguistic association with one's cultural heritage. Without supposing a sociological hypothesis, I believe that this could have to do with retaining a link to the past – expressing oneself in the manner of one's ancestors reinforces the idea of the importance of family and the various modes available through which to communicate this. In life, as on stage, this has important implications for society.

Another trend is for these women to insert Yiddish words into their speech. A brief disclaimer: I am aware that, under the obliged formality of a recorded interview, people tend to speak differently – they exercise more control over their expression and might avoid dialectical items. So it does help that I know most of my subjects personally, and could also observe them in a more natural environment (recorded in my journal). But even in this interview environment, the vernacular creeps in. Bitsie Oshry notes: “We kept kosher, we went to *shul* for all the holidays, we went to *shul* on Friday nights... you know, it was an ordinary, typical Jewish family.” She could just as well have said “synagogue” and preserved the meaning of the sentence, but that’s not how Jews (certainly her impression of “typical” Jews) speak.

This consciousness – that the way one expresses oneself identifies one with a linguistic and cultural community – has informed the process of my own writing. In particular, I have tried to reconstruct and represent this typical old-school South African Jewish idiom in Sylvia’s dialogue:

Let me tell you something, Nadia. I have nothing against black people, but this I can say: if
it’s not
their own they don’t know what care is. And so clumsy. Just look at this – my Bobba’s *seder*
plate. Generations, it’s been in the family. And do you know what I caught that girl doing the
other day? Putting it in the dishwasher. The dishwasher! Well, let me tell you, Nadia, I could
have
plutzed! (10)

This dialogue comes across as distinctly Jewish, which helps to reinforce Sylvia’s character. In fact, Sylvia’s very first word in the script highlights the same effect: “*vershtunkende* alarm” (3). Her character is undeniably Jewish, and this is reflected in the dialogue.

Here arose one of the most persistent problems in the writing process: I needed to wrestle with whether this manner of dialogue was appropriate for a more modern South African script. Even in the earliest drafts, a debate arose as to how much Yiddish phraseology or ‘in-house’ Jewish references should be utilized. On the one hand, many contemporary South African Jews have left these colloquialisms behind them – my interviews and interactions with Jews of a younger generation reveal no evidence of such linguistic quirks. In addition to charges of anachronism, I faced further criticisms from early readers who felt that Sylvia’s exaggerated syntax made

her sound like a parody – or, worse, like Yoda from *Star Wars*! These denigrations I took to heart, and I consequently decided to tone down the aggrandizement, and the frequency, of these dialogical embellishments.

Yet on the other hand, the vernacular still thrives in many contemporary Jewish family circles – for example, the use of Bobba and Zayda instead of Grandma and Grandpa. My aim was not to create a comprehensive character, an Average Joe (or, for that matter, an Average Jew) representative of all South African Jewish people. My intention was rather to represent a realistic character who embodies certain traits. Characters on stage – even a realistic stage – are bound to be larger than life. In my work, Sylvia was the character most at risk of becoming a caricature. This was a legitimate concern during the writing process, and perhaps she ultimately is a bit of a caricature, but I feel that this is justified because this type of character genuinely does exist! The interviews proved that – at least in the generation that precedes mine – these idiosyncratic speech patterns are still evident. The device of realist dialogue allowed me to convey this character with an air of authenticity that would be defeated by playing up other facets of the theatre (stylized acting, for example).

Fugard has said that one of the greatest challenges of theatre is “to master the idiom – thought and speech – of a character. The problem is never ‘what’ [the characters] think, but ‘how’ they think it” (Fugard, 1978:xvii). This rang true with my own practice. I ultimately decided to remain true to Sylvia’s character, rather than to the rules of language and grammar.

Harold

The character of Harold has been simultaneously the easiest and the most difficult for me to write. Being a middle-aged man, he is furthest removed from my frame of reference, and hence it was more difficult to write his character in a realistic manner. On the other hand, aspects of his character have been borrowed from several meaningful people in my own life, including my own father and grandfathers, and so I felt closer to him than any other character. It is this, I feel, that makes him one of the most realistically portrayed, and therefore believable, characters in the play.

Harold’s personality provides a sharp contrast to the women, and this must be reflected in his dialogue. He is upbeat and generally positive; a perfect foil to Sylvia’s

curt, fretful manner. I found it helpful to think of the couple as two halves of the same person – she grounds his schmaltz and he reminds her of what’s really important. I think the following section provides a vivid illustration of this dichotomy:

Harold: She’s [Harold’s sister] been seeing that Doctor – what’s his name? – Meltz.

Sylvia: What your sister needs is a head doctor.

Harold: Apparently he’s a very nice man.

Sylvia: When you have money, you are wise and good-looking and can sing well too.

Pause.

Harold: Denise is looking pretty.

Sylvia: Dress up a broom and it will also look nice.

Harold: Sylvie, she’s my niece.

Sylvia: Her skirt is too short.

Harold: So what, Sylvie?

Sylvia: With thighs like that?

Harold: So the child has thighs.

Sylvia: I’m just saying.

Harold: She’s at that age. It’s all fashion, fashion.

Sylvia: That girl wouldn’t know fashion if it shook her hand at the *brocha* and her mother’s no better. Now, our Ilana would be able to teach them a thing or two about fashion. In fact the help of a professional designer they couldn’t be harmed by.

Harold: Just don’t make a scene, Sylvie. Let’s try to keep the family peace tonight, of all nights. Everyone’s strung out enough. We don’t need any extra reasons for tension. (39)

Harold is not concerned with details – he can’t recall the name of the man his sister is dating and he gives everyone the benefit of the doubt. He is happy to overlook things which he deems unimportant (such as who’s seeing who or who’s wearing what – the social details over which Sylvia obsesses), and is even happy to carry blame for things over which he has no control (Ilana’s marrying Chris, global warming, the situation in Northern Ireland – page 68). His comments like these provide a bit of necessary comic relief, but I hope that they also manage to convey his belief that family peace –

the Jewish concept of *shalom bayit* – is the most important value. He is the peacekeeper in the family and his character functions as the pacifist in the play.

Harold's speech rhythms are very long-winded (when he can get a word in edgeways between his wife and daughters!). Especially in contrast to the often terse dialogue of the women, Harold's relaxed patterns reflect his more laid-back personality. His rambling monologues took some concentration to construct! I tried to employ many complex sentences, incorporating many conjunctions, additional clauses, and lengthy parentheses to allow for his frequent digressions, as well as creative use of punctuation:

Let me tell you a story. My mother – your Bobba Ray – always used to cut the wings off the chicken, and put them on top of the bird. With a toothpick, sometimes, if it was a really plump chicken. But anyway, we assumed it was a *halachic* law but we couldn't understand the meaning behind it. I remember once your Aunty Rochel asked her why she did it. She said she didn't know; her mother had always done it, her grandma had always done it ... luckily at that stage my great- grandmother Betty was still alive, *kein-ein-hora*, and one day I went to the old age home to ask her. I found her sitting in the sun in the garden, knitting. Always with the knitting, that woman. And the sewing, and the baking – ah, the baking ... of course she wasn't allowed to bake any more in the home – not after the incident with the electric frying pan – but I'm getting off track. The woman was nearly a hundred and still sharp as a button. I said to her, "Great-grandma Betty, why did you do it? Why do we cut the wings off the chicken?" You know what she told me? I'll tell you. She said, "Harry, I cut the wings off the chicken because my roasting pan was so small!" (73-74)

Harold frequently wanders off topic, which is indicative of his nostalgic and sentimental nature. His style is narrative and incorporates the idiosyncratic Jewish turn of phrase discussed in the section on Sylvia's voice. In addition, Harold's interactive style draws his listeners (and, hopefully, the audience) into his stories.

The most complicated challenge to Harold's dialogue was to find the balance between his sense of humour and his wisdom. He constantly makes light of the situation ("Which came first – the *seder* or the egg?" page 15; "Darling, I think you're making *matzah*-do about nothing!" page 42), yet there is something whimsically wise about many of his comments:

Harold:	So now I have another question for you, my child: when will you come home?
Ilana:	Dad, I can't just leave my job, my life–

Harold: Ilana, listen to your father. You've got to learn to listen with your heart, as well as your ears. Come home, *bubbelah*. By all means, stay in London if you want to. But come home. Come back to us. (101)

His patient, laid-back lilt seems to imbue ordinary phrases with added significance. There are many layers of meaning to his dialogue, as there are to his character.

Harold has a strong connection to his faith, and this also had to come through in his dialogue. I have tried to achieve this by working in references to God, as well as allusions to recurring refrains from Jewish literature and liturgy, for example the line in the Haggadah: "we, our children, and our children's children". This gives Harold's speech an almost biblical rhythm at times, which I think suits his character's sense of faith. I had to be cautious, however, that I did not turn Harold into a preachy character. I tried to maintain this balance by always reverting to Harold's inherent good-natured humour:

And our children have this freedom. And, please God, our children's children will have this freedom. We guide our children as best we can. We show them what we think is the right way. But, I suppose, you can lead a Jew to the desert but you can't make him drink. (30)

I am still not completely certain whether these are charming bumbles of idiom or deliberate digs at his family's worldviews, but either way, Harold's character is one of my favourites. He is complex, realistic, and believable.

Ilana

One of the prime lessons I learnt as a realist writer is that character can also be created by using *other* characters' voices. For example, much of the work of setting up Ilana's character is done before she even enters the stage. Fugard has said of the old father in *Hello and Goodbye*: "even if not seen, the old man's presence must be felt" (Fugard, 1978:xiv). From page six, Ilana is as present on the stage as the physical characters.

In order to achieve this realistically, I needed to build up expectations not only in the audience's minds, but also in the lives of the characters. Take the following lines:

Sylvia: Well, we'll see how Ilana reacts. I've made all the traditional things – *kneidlach*, *tzimmus*, chopped herring ...

Nadia: I'm sure her majesty will be pleased. (8)

It is immediately evident that the characters (and, therefore, the audience) are expecting the arrival of another character. It is also clear that Sylvia has put in a lot of effort in Ilana's honour and is looking forward to her arrival, while Nadia, conversely, reacts with a sarcasm that betrays a deep sibling rivalry. In this short extract, a subtext becomes clear that sets the context of the action.

I wanted Sylvia to have more of an opportunity to express her feelings about her daughter before Ilana actually arrived, thus revealing not only her own character but her daughter's as well. In keeping with the realistic representation of the script, I did not think that Sylvia would be the type of person to talk to herself, yet I wanted a longer monologue from her character. The solution, I felt, was to have her speaking on the phone to a friend, Esther. This would provide a perfectly realistic one-way conversation which allows Sylvia to set up her expectations of Ilana's character, so that the audience can absorb this point of view. To temper Sylvia's (admittedly officious) estimation, I included a scene between her and Harold (20-21). Their nostalgic conversation paints a picture of Ilana's departure, in anticipation of her return.

Finally, I used the exchange between Harold and Nadia (31-33) to highlight traits of Ilana's personality: she is fiercely independent – enough so to run away from home at age nine; she is compassionate enough to bring home a stray puppy, and rebellious enough to pierce her belly button and to get the tattoo that later functions as an ironic symbol of her faith.

By utilizing the other characters to offer the audience this multi-perspectival view of Ilana's character, I hope to have created a more rounded, complex, human construction. I then had every single other guest (and even the broom-man) arrive before Ilana, to heighten the suspense of her entrance. By the time Ilana enters the stage, more than a third into the play, the audience should feel as if they know her already.

Once Ilana actually entered the stage, I wanted to confirm the impressions created in the previous scene. Her independence is evident in her stopping off on a whim in what her mother deems “not a safe area” (46). Her compassion comes through in her dialogue with her son (“Who's the cutest shoes on the face of the planet? Who's the most adorable, good, quiet little man? Yes. Yes. Here we go, my

precious ...” page 47), and her rebellious nature becomes clear in her unapologetic attitude to marrying someone her parents – specifically her mother – thinks is unsuitable.

This rebellion, however, also raises some question marks about Ilana’s character. I tried to use her dialogue to indicate a simultaneous sense of independence and insecurity. At first, she often comes across as guarded and cagey, and later this degenerates into confusion. For example, I attempted to achieve this by including in her speech British expressions that don’t work (see the way Nadia mocks her on page 45). I also included the interaction between Ilana and Chris at the end of Act One, Scene Two to illustrate how nervous this seemingly confident character feels. In Scene Three, Ilana challenges her mother’s reactions to Chris, betraying a desire for her mother’s acceptance. This dialogue culminates in the telling line “Why can’t you just be happy for me?” (page 66, and again on page 71).

In Act Two, I felt that Ilana’s character needed to be taken to the next level. In order to give a more personal perspective on her past, I included the conversation with Nadia where the two sisters reflect on their childhoods – when everything was simple and they thought their parents “knew everything” (79). This dialogue really serves two writerly functions: first, it creates a realistic atmospheric setting, preparing the usually bickering sisters’ for their later, more emotional conversation about their brother. Second, by probing her past, it also helps to throw question marks over Ilana’s present. Ilana is more attached to her past – and her family – than she would perhaps like to admit. This creates an insecurity of character that I knew I needed to play up from this point onwards.

The confrontation with Sylvia over Adam’s not being circumcised reinforces this rift in Ilana’s own mind: she is torn between her cultural traditions and her present life. She reacts angrily towards Chris. When he asks why she is acting this way – what he terms “not yourself” – she cries, “For God’s sake! I don’t know who ‘myself’ is anymore!” (88). This is the first concrete example of Ilana’s confusion. The next five pages illustrate a complicated swinging back and forth of her convictions – she loves Chris, but she can’t be with him; she admires him, but she doesn’t understand him; she has fond memories with him, but isn’t sure that she can see a future. As Chris notes:

“You’re making no sense! This whole evening, you’ve been ... singularly out of the ordinary! ... One minute you’re whispering in my ear how much you can’t stand your family, and the next you’re defending them! ... One minute I’m your knight in bloody armour come to rescue you from your ... I don’t know what! And the next minute you’re pushing me away!” (92)

In the writing of this section, there was the constant danger of sounding too scripted. In reality, people don’t speak their minds openly, and don’t use perfectly crafted sentences when they are angry or confused. I found I had to repeat things, leave sentences hanging. It needed to be realistically ‘messy’. In order for the script to be realistic, I needed to create these moments of tension and confusion. This was unendingly frustrating for me as a writer. I was worried that Ilana’s character was coming across as vague. I didn’t know the answers myself so I felt out of control. Ironically, I had to remove my “writer” hat and put on my “audience” or “human” hat in order to see the best effects of the writing. I realized that the more confused Ilana is, the more convincing the scene will be.

When Chris stalks out, Ilana talks to Nadia, and then Harold. She is less angry, but no less confused, and this had to be reflected realistically in her dialogue. I tried to achieve this by repetition of phrases like “I don’t know” and “it’s so complicated”; while unfinished sentences like “it just...” indicate incomplete thoughts, which again signals the character’s confusion.

Ultimately, I think Ilana works as a realistic character because she is believable, flawed, human. The confusion that frustrated me so much as a writer is ultimately the character’s saving grace. This attracts empathy from the audience, which is the function of realist drama.

Nadia

I also aimed to use realistic dialogue to draw out the emotions of the characters. Realistic characters need to have convincing emotions in order for the audience to empathise with them. In an early draft of Act One, Scene Three, when Nadia is arguing with Sylvia about singing the Four Questions, she says:

Nadia: Mom, stop laying all your issues on me! This has nothing to do with me and you know it!

- Sylvia: Nadia, what are you saying?
- Nadia: You're putting all this pressure on me because you can't stand that Ilana's married Chris. And you can't bring yourself to admit your prize child is wrong, let alone tell her how you feel. (61)

In this extract, Nadia comes across very unrealistically, to the detriment of the whole scene. She sounds as if she is explaining the situation for the benefit of the audience. She feels removed from the situation, which detracts from the intimacy realism strives to evoke. In an attempt to fix this, I tried to alter both her tone and her dialogue to something more befitting a teenage girl. Challenging her mother in the form of a question is much more believable than her previous clinical statements. Inserting colloquial phrases like “pick on” and slang abbreviations like “agro” lends the dialogue a touch of authenticity. The later version reads:

- Nadia: Mom, why can't you just leave me alone? Pick on who you're really angry with.
- Sylvia: And what is *that* supposed to mean?
- Nadia: This is about Ilana, isn't it?
- Sylvia: That's ludicrous! You're the youngest and the youngest asks the Four Questions and that is that.
- Nadia: But you're getting all agro because you're mad at Ilana.
- Sylvia: That's outrageous! One situation has nothing to do with the other!
- Nadia: So you admit that it's an issue, then!

In the latter version, Nadia is portrayed as a more psychologically rounded character. She feels more like a member of a family, rather than a spokesperson for a playwright's ideas.

Beware the authorial voice

A constant challenge I faced during the writing process was to prevent my authorial voice from intruding into the script. I had to keep reminding myself that I was creating fictitious characters with beliefs, opinions, and expressions of their own. Unfortunately, early drafts of the script perilously resembled a forum for debate on

various issues. Take, for example, the following early extract where Sylvia and Ilana are discussing why Adam has not been circumcised:

Sylvia: How can you do this to your child?

Ilana: We feel it's the right and moral thing to do.

Sylvia: But it's tradition!

Ilana: No, it's not! It's mutilation and torture. And look at the potential for medical problems! There's research to show that—

Sylvia: Reseach Shme-search! After all the Jews have been through! You are finishing what Hitler couldn't do.

Somehow neither my supervisor nor myself were convinced that Ilana believed what she was saying. It sounded like hollow argument because there was no emotion involved. It was too rational. The problem was that I felt I needed to qualify Ilana's decision with rational reasoning. This is true to the theatrical conventions of the realist mode, but the subject matter is too permeated with social issues to create real, human characters. I ended up reducing their relationship to political issues. Immediately, they appeared flat and boring. Much of the above extract was removed from the script, and I needed to explore a more human, more rounded way of looking at their relationship.

Of course, this was a more difficult, and far more complex, effect to create. Because realist drama relies so heavily on dialogue (without the descriptive crutches of prose, or the abstract stanchions of experimental theatre), I found it exceedingly difficult to construct a convincing scene that accurately conveyed both the characters' personalities and their opinions. I aimed to recreate a realistic conversation, oscillating between two characters who felt that they were right, but could not necessarily explain their emotions. A later version reads:

Sylvia: Ilana, you have to give your child a *bris*!

Ilana: No, we don't.

Sylvia: You have to!

Ilana: No, I don't!

Sylvia: Yes, you do!

Ilana: Why, Ma?

Sylvia: Because ... that's what's done!

I struggled with this scene, because I believed its argument to be weak. Only later did I realize that this is what made it so successful a scene for a realist play. It is far more convincing, and far more 'real', than its dry, yet intellectually corroborated original. Although realistic conventions may have become so normative as to be "practically invisible" (Innes, 2000:16), it has been accepted that realism is no less "conventional" than any other form of theatre: "However close to everyday conversation it may sound, 'the straightforward, plain language spoken in real life' is highly structured in any dramatic dialogue" (Ibid). This knowledge helped me to construct a more believable, realistic scene (for the full extract, see page 85-87 of the script).

I also found that by including Chris in the dialogue a new perspective could be added without detracting from the emotional bargaining between the two women. Chris, then, represents the cool, rational voice in the scene, while Sylvia and Ilana are free to argue based on emotion:

Chris: Mrs Rabinowitz, please let me clarify this once and for all: we've agreed that when Adam's old enough, he can decide for himself if he wants to be circumcised.

Sylvia [*to Ilana*]: How could you?!

Ilana [*perhaps at this point Ilana doesn't sound so confident anymore; does not meet her mother's eyes*]: Adam's got to make his own decisions about religion. That's not something we can do for him.

Sylvia: That's where you are wrong! Religion is something you are born into. If you are Jewish, you are Jewish. And that's that. (86)

Here, Sylvia and Ilana continue to interact based on bare emotion. Ilana's attempt at defending her position intellectually is far more shaky than in the original extract, and

this helps to convey her character as more complex and more human to the audience. Her earlier rhetoric was unconvincing and had to be removed in order to preserve the integrity of the realist script.

Similarly, I removed an entire scene centering around a political debate on the situation in Israel-Palestine (see Appendix 1). I originally wrote this scene because I felt I needed a reason to justify why the relationship between Ilana and Chris was so strained. Yet again, however, the scene reduced the characters to mere political mouthpieces, and the play lost its interest. Ultimately, I replaced the scene with one reminiscing about their experience of a disagreement in Hyde Park (90-91). We never know exactly what their disagreement was about, because it is not important to our understanding of their characters. It is enough to know that there is a continuing clash between them. This was (and still is) very frustrating for me, because as playwright I wanted complete control of my characters' pasts, presents and futures, but ultimately the script is better for it; the realist mode called for it.

Plot and pace in realist theatre

At the start of the project, I decided to write down the entire plot of the play so that I could have a framework from which to work. I ended up with a comprehensive, chronological document charting the actions of the characters throughout the script and detailing their decisions, reactions, and other details (see Appendix 2). It was one of my first major mistakes in the writing process. Having decided in advance that Ilana would leave Chris, and that Adam would be circumcised, I went on to begin writing from a position of false confidence. Their predetermined actions seemed artificial – the antithesis of the realist approach for which I was striving.

I did ultimately use the plot as a rough outline, but I did not follow it rigidly. Writing is an organic process and cannot be programmed, otherwise the result will appear formulaic. I wanted my play to appear dynamic and natural, so I had to work within the mode of realism to achieve an effect of spontaneity. But there was still one glaring snag: much of the content in my script depends on the audience's pre-knowledge of various aspects of the characters' actions, personalities, and traditions.

Now I was faced with a very real obstacle to realist treatment: how does one alert the audience to important facts and information without blatantly telling them? At first, I considered using flashbacks to show the audience relevant snippets of the

characters' pasts, but I found that these retarded the realistic function of the play. Rather, I found the concept of backstory very useful. Burroway defines backstory as any information about the past (i.e. whatever has occurred before the plot begins) that is necessary to make a story coherent (2003:278-9).

As previously discussed in the section on Ilana's character, the script can be manipulated to cultivate nostalgia for past events, to provide backstory which explains the present, and to create expectations for the future. I aimed to create a sense of the history and traditions of the family by using diction like "always" and "again". For example, Ilana asks Sylvia why she "always" does that to the chicken (73), and Chris says to Ilana, "Don't start this again, baby" (90), implying that there is a history of such behaviour. The realistic treatment of the script is in no way compromised, and the audience is given a clear picture of the context out of which the events arise.

I also found the concept of "layering" extremely useful. I have borrowed this term from my supervisor to describe the process of fine editing. Rather than systematically addressing many ideas represented by monolithic characters, I needed to work these various aspects together, creating a richer, more complex overall picture – closer to a representation of real human characters and situations. For a crude illustration, I started with the most basic layer – plot – and added further layers:

- history (or backstory)
- family relationships and tensions
- Jewish terms or references
- allusions to contemporary South Africa
- secondary concerns such as Nadia's driver's license test.

These layers might just as well be called themes, but I like the vivid picture that layers create – a deep, rich, complex result that mirrors real life, and makes the plot that much more believable.

As important as plot is the concept of pace. I had to use the tools I had – principally the script – to create a realistic build-up to the climax of the play. Characters could not be allowed to react excessively or to speak their hearts too easily: this would seem unnatural and could come across as melodramatic, detracting from the efficacy of the realist script. People don't just reveal their private thoughts without provocation, and neither can realist characters. I needed to balance their

emotional development with the action of the plot, creating a realistic reticence to draw out their reactions. This tension between their private feelings and their formal behaviour speaks to the heart of realist theatre.

But how could I go about achieving this? Traditionally, the basic development of a story has been summed up as conflict, followed by crisis, then resolution (Burroway, 2003:181). But this Aristolean beginning, middle, and end was too simplistic for my purposes. Real life is not so neat, and realist theatre needs to reflect the complications of life.

The information needed to be uncovered in a series of revelations for both the characters and the audience. The family knows from the start, for instance, from his name, that Chris is not Jewish. What they don't know is that he is black. They also don't know that Adam has not been circumcised (healthy Jewish sons are mandatorily circumcised at eight days old as a symbol of the Jews' covenant with God). I had to pace the family's – especially Sylvia's – reactions to these various revelations. It would not work to have her explode all her energy at the first surprise, only to have run out of steam by the time the real shock is revealed. This was one of the more complicated challenges that I faced during the writing process.

I overcame this by incorporating a three-tiered reaction into the planning process:

- (i) Chris is not Jewish
- (ii) he is black
- (iii) Adam is not circumcised

In order not to drag out the play for too long, I decided to start the action after the realization of tier one. Sylvia admits both to Esther (and later to Harold, page 29) that she has come to terms with Chris not being Jewish: "So he's not Jewish, but if he makes my Lany happy, he's good enough for me" (13). I also delayed Ilana's entrance until the second scene, in order to create an aura of suspense for her arrival.

The second tier comes as more of a shock. Practically, the family would have noticed Chris's blackness at the front door, but as the action is set in the kitchen, I needed to find a realistic way of delaying the reactions. I started by having the women enter the kitchen, on the premise of warming milk for the baby. Sylvia has become uncharacteristically quiet – she speaks sparsely between the daughters' bickering dialogue. Even when Nadia leaves the stage to get drinks, Sylvia is not sure how to approach the subject, and studiously avoids it.

Only when Ilana leaves the room momentarily does Sylvia expose her true thoughts. To Nadia, she hisses, "How can you act as if everything is normal? My child, my flesh and blood, has ... oh, no, I can't believe it. How can you just carry on acting as if everything were fine?" (51). With Chris's entrance to the kitchen a few minutes later, the audience understands Sylvia's vehement reactions. A confrontation would not be realistic here. Instead, I delayed this by preventing Sylvia and Ilana from being alone together and by switching to other subplots like Nadia's refusal to sing *Ma Nishtana*.

Later, I had to create a realistic come-down. Sylvia is very upset about the situation, but I needed her to be calm again in order to peak the tension for the third tier of her reaction. I used Harold's reasonable dialogue to slowly bring her round:

- Sylvia: But has she no heart in that head of hers? How do you think this looks? A black, Harold! A black! And without telling me! That's the worst part, I think. At least, maybe, if I could have prepared myself for it ...
- Harold: I agree with you there, my darling. It is a shock. But he does seem like a very nice gentleman.
- Sylvia: I suppose ...
- Harold: He's polite.
- Sylvia: Yes.
- Harold: And clearly quite smart.
- Sylvia: I guess.
- Harold: And they say they're happy together.
- Sylvia: Alright.
- Harold: So it could be worse.
- Sylvia: Ay.
- Harold: Look, dear, I think you'd better come back to the *seder*. You're missing your favourite song. (68-9)

This creates a semi-resolution at the end of Act One. Act Two begins on a clean slate, with all the characters on a pretty even keel. This way, tier three (that Adam is not circumcised) comes as a complete shock. It is also preceded by a dialogue between the sisters, interspersed with the realistic structure of the *seder* meal. For example, the soup is served, and the sisters remain in the kitchen alone realistically because

everyone else is eating the soup course. The parents re-enter with the empty bowls and they all begin to serve the main course. During this, Nadia confronts her mother about her driver's license test, successfully distracting both the characters and the audience from the previous tension between Sylvia and her elder daughter. When the family exits to the dining room to eat, Sylvia lingers momentarily in the kitchen when the baby starts to cry. She comforts Adam and even begins to bond with him: "Look at your little face. You are quite a little sweetheart, aren't you? Yes. Yes, you are. Why, in this light, you almost look ... Jewish" (84). By building up her reaction in this realistic way, the shock of the third tier revelation has more impact: "[*She opens the dirty nappy*] Oh, good God Almighty in heaven! No! No!" (84).

Through this three-tiered series of reactions, I managed to maintain the pace of the play as a whole, reserving the most emotional outbursts for the climax of the action. This was my principal technique in creating a realistic pace.

Depiction of the family

The family is one of the most enduring motifs in drama, and has been treated in countless ways. In order to see how the treatment of family could be approached in my play, I examined a range of texts which portray the family on the stage. One writer who stands out for me in this regard is David Rabe.

Rabe has written two plays which I feel are of interest to my particular study. The first, *Sticks and Bones*, deals with family issues, such as trying to bring an outsider (David's Vietnamese girlfriend, or at least her ghostly representation) into the family. William Demastes offers a short summary of the play's plot and significance, but he hits the nail on the head when he notes, "simply put, the two worlds clash" (1988:39). This struck a chord in me for I felt that I was reaching for something similar – my character Ilana trying to bring her black husband into her insulated Jewish family. But I wasn't happy with the way in which Rabe conveys his message.

Sticks and Bones is unashamedly and self-confessedly stylized (Rabe, 1978:226), aiming to highlight the absurdity of a family that deals with conflicting emotions by ignoring the situation. Rabe employs non-realistic stage devices, such as the use of slides and voices at the start of each act, and the characters' capacity to walk through walls. The result is surreal; it is clear that boundaries have been – literally and figuratively – broken. But whilst these tools work to reveal information

about the characters and their states of mind, they also detract from any realistic empathy the audience might have for the characters.

I felt that this approach would not work for my own project. For example, no matter how many social or cultural boundaries Ilana breaks, she will never walk through walls. This would make the play unbelievable, and the power of a realist play lies in the audience's capacity to believe. I want my audience to commiserate with the characters, and in order to achieve this, the characters need to be convincing. I feel that realism is the best mode through which to achieve this end.

Another of Rabe's works that I studied is *Hurlyburly*. Rabe claims to have written this play because of

"an impulse to venture near at least the appearances of the so-called 'realistic' or 'well-made' play, which in my view is that form which thinks that cause and effect are proportionate and clearly apparent, that people know what they are doing as they do it, and that others react accordingly" (Rabe: 1989:200)

In this play, the set, characters, and plot were far more conventionally realist. I found the effect more convincing, and somehow more comfortable. I found that, while I was able to interpret the abstract symbols in *Sticks and Bones* on an intellectual level, I was better able to *relate* to the characters in *Hurlyburly*. I concluded that this was due to the mode of representation.

"With *Hurlyburly*," states Demastes (1988:63), "Rabe has written a realistic work that has striven to attack the naturalist assumptions standardly attributed to that mode." It is at this point that I discovered the potential of separating the theatrical form of realism from the naturalist assumptions of the genre. In my own modern South African context, a traditional "well-made" play would seem anachronistic, because it would not be able to represent the complex reality which I aimed to convey. That being said, I hoped to use the aesthetic conventions of the genre to create an intimate atmosphere that would invite the audience's vicarious emotional participation in the action.

In *Hurlyburly*, Rabe portrays characters "whose own assumptions on life are essentially naturalistic, and whose assumptions are subsequently dashed by the onslaught of contradictory evidence" (Demastes, 1988:63). "Logic is revealed to be an

insufficient tool in gathering what both men seem to desire” (Demastes, 1988:57). Similarly, I realized, tradition is revealed to be an insufficient tool in achieving my own characters’ desires. Like Rabe’s Eddie, Sylvia “insists on making the world fit [her] preconceived constructs, [and] still believes in them if for no other reason than the fact that they are the only constructs [she] has” (Demastes, 1988:59). Sylvia feels adrift in a world that no longer makes sense to her. Ilana feels the same, but reacts differently – defiantly instead of defensively. Her fear manifests in a different way. But, unlike in Rabe’s play, the arc of my narrative reaffirms order, and the traditional structure of the family is in some ways reestablished. It is through the genre of realism that I was best able to explore – and confirm – this construction.

‘Real’ vs. ‘True’

Another obstacle with which I had to grapple during the writing of this play was the dichotomy between the realistic portrayal I was hoping to achieve, and the knowledge that it really is just that: a portrayal. I constantly risked the danger of treating my characters and their situations as if they were *real*, and not realistic representations. In this regard I found it very useful to draw on the work of Sam Shepard, particularly his “family trilogy”: *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Buried Child*, and *True West*. Demastes has noted that, as Shepard moves away from his explorations of social issues towards a deeper probing of man’s existential concerns, he forgoes his characteristic “post-modern meta-theatricalism” (1988:120) for a more realistic approach. This once again confirms the suitability of the realist mode for plays of a family nature. Bottoms comments:

These plays eschew their predecessors’ bizarre, minimalistic staging in favour of detailed box sets, reproductions of recognizable real-world environments ... Stripping his usual sprawling casts down to only four characters, and concentrating a tight focus on central, dualistic pairings ... Shepard presents a more sustained and consistent exploration of character than ever before (1998:182)

The play that most interests me for discussion here is *True West*, where Shepard teases out the fine distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘true’. Demastes succinctly summarizes this hypothesis:

“The old West is giving way to the new West, what despairingly must be labeled the ‘real’ West. But Shepard doesn’t call his play *Real West*. It is *True West*, and finding that true West involves not looking for a geographical location, but a state of mind, one that may be conditioned by desert life but that doesn’t absolutely necessitate it” (1988:112).

By aligning the ‘real’ with the physical and the ‘true’ with the mental state, Shepard sets the scene for a study of the duplicity of the cultural myths which humans construct around themselves. Austin, a Los Angeles screenwriter, represents the trappings of civilization – what may be loosely referred to as the ‘real’ experience of the modern American West. Lee, on the other hand, is a cowboy; a desert drifter. He represents the ideals of independence and freedom associated with the old West – the myths Shepard epitomizes as the ‘true’ west.

Although the two men are presented as complete opposites, they are brothers – they share a background, a mythical past. But despite this family connection, their values clash. Bottoms notes that this is a concern central to Shepard’s play: “How much of an independent identity can one ever claim to have, if one’s fate is being shaped and channeled, even before the moment of one’s birth, by forces entirely beyond one’s control?” (1998:16). I am interested in – and through the process of theatrical scriptwriting, hope to have explored – this phenomenon. Religious tradition and cultural myths have the same impact on my characters as the American political and cultural myths have on Shepard’s. In both cases, the realist genre allows the characters to interact in a way that speaks to the impact of these myths on the family structure.

Without attempting to reduce my characters to mere symbols, I feel it is useful to extend this analogy of the ‘real’ vs. the ‘true’ to my script. For Sylvia, the trappings of tradition are paramount. This is evident, for example, in her obsession with the symbolic Passover eggs. Her hysterical petition, “How can we have a *seder* without eggs?” (11) has a simple rabbinical answer: very easily. Eggs are merely a symbol used to call attention to various aspects of the festival (the ‘yolk’ of slavery, or the importance of life, for instance). Sylvia places so much emphasis on the symbol that she misses the significance of the festival and the togetherness of family that the *seder* is supposed to promote. Harold, on the other hand, is less preoccupied with the outer trappings associated with Jewish traditions. He forgets to buy the eggs, he brings home the wrong brand of *Kiddush* wine, and Sylvia constantly chides him for not

putting enough *matzah* on the table. However, Harold manages to preserve the spirit of *Pesach* without relying on outer symbols. Sylvia's focus is on the 'real', tangible elements of the festival, while Harold focuses on the significance of the 'true' essence behind it.

Ilana feels both the 'real' and the 'true' aspects of her heritage very powerfully, and she finds herself torn between the two. Like her younger sister, Nadia, Ilana is extremely frustrated with the sense of hypocrisy that surrounds religion in her familial home. This hypocrisy pivots on the conflict between the essence and the appearance of a situation. I am particularly intrigued with how this relates to the realist genre because of the idea that realism is less stylized and therefore less artificial than other genres. The idea seems to be that realism is more convincing – literally more 'real' – than other modes. Innes explains that, because realism has become normative in modern western theatre, its conventions have become "invisible", yet it is "no less 'conventional' than any other form of theatre" (2000:16). As we have already distinguished an important difference between the 'real' and the 'true', I wanted to explore how well realism worked at conveying this 'truth'.

In attempting to do this, I found that Adam, Ilana's son and Sylvia's grandchild, became another important symbol in the play. Unlike the superficial symbols of eggs and *matzah*, Adam represents a profound significance, not only to the Rabinowitz family but to Jews as a whole. Because Ilana has married out of the faith, and furthermore decided not to circumcise her son, Adam becomes an icon of secularity: the antithesis of Judaism. But he also represents the potential of the future, and ultimately he brings the family – even Sylvia and Ilana – together. This would not be achievable in any mode other than realism because, to return to Miller once again, every form pays a price for its advantages. Miller uses the example of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* to support his argument. *Our Town* is a family play, and features all the traditional family figures in a domestic setting. However, argues Miller, Wilder uses this particular family only as a "prism" through which to reflect the community and its social issues (1999:78). The play is not about Our Family, but about *Our Town*, and the abstract, stylistic mode functions accordingly to focus the audience's intellectual attention on the social issues in the town. "The price paid ... is psychological characterization forfeited in the cause of the symbol" (Miller, 1999:80). For my play, psychological characterization is paramount, so my choice of genre needed to accommodate this. The realist genre allows me to use symbol in a different

way – to enhance characterization. For example, Ilana's Star of David tattoo is a complex symbol of both her secularity (tattoos are strictly prohibited by Jewish law) and her faith. In a non-realistic mode, this symbol would be reduced to an intellectual sign, but in the realist mode, the 'real' symbol reveals her 'true' character.

By the end of the play, Ilana has realized that the powerful, 'real' symbols of her religion (like the *bris*) play an important part in connecting her to the essence of her being, and Sylvia has realized the significance (or 'truth') behind these symbolic rituals. The *seder* itself, then, becomes a symbol. In utilizing the realist genre, I wanted to preserve the real structure of the *seder*. The significance of this choice, as I was to learn, went much deeper, and allowed me to come far closer to the truth of the matter. The purpose of a *seder* is to bring families together. And, in a slightly unconventional way, this is exactly what has happened by the end of the play. Realism is the only mode that could have achieved this to such a successful extent.

South African realism

Since my play – and the context from which it arose – is so specifically South African, I felt the need to complement my study with plays of a South African nature. In a similar way to which Demastes has noted the rise of a "new realism" in American theatre, South Africa has also experienced a recent development of theatrical norms. At the helm of this progress is playwright Athol Fugard. He "emerges as the precursor of a specifically new kind of South African theatre," notes Vivier (1983:21). I have found his plays useful for my own study because they are "local in a very *real* sense, using the local to deal with the universal in human behaviour" (Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1997:87, *italics mine*).

In the South African context it is inevitable that the issue of race will (forgive me) colour many issues, and any realistic treatment of this society faces the challenge of representing race without allowing it to become the central theme of the play. This was a problem for my own script, where one of the pivotal characters, Chris, is black. But mine is not a play "about race". It is a play – as the title explains – about difference, and the effects these differences can have on relationships within and without the family. My focus is not on the *issue* of race but on the *representation* of the characters' reactions towards it. It was a huge help for me to see how an accomplished playwright like Fugard handled this in the realist mode. For the

purposes of this essay it is important to note that this treatment of race and class permeates not only his social but also his more intimate plays. I am interested in the ways in which these tensions are represented through the use of the realist mode, to convey the emotions and the relationships of individuals in an intimate, personal setting.

Stephen Gray identifies several “phases of Fugard’s career” (cited in Vivier, 1983:42). I will focus on what he calls the “Chamber plays”, which include *The Blood Knot*, *People are Living There*, *Hello and Goodbye*, and *Boesman and Lena*. In the Chamber plays,

“character is all important, with a concentrated emphasis on the intimate relationships between people and between family members, for example between brothers in *The Blood Knot*, between people living in close proximity in *People Are Living There*, between siblings in *Hello and Goodbye* The characters of these plays have been drawn from Fugard’s own experiences and are recognizably South African” (Vivier, 1983:29)

In this regard I see a relevance to my own play. My characters, like Fugard’s in the Chamber plays, had to be entwined with their social context (cultural and religious) in order to be convincing.

The Chamber plays – in contrast to what Gray (cited in Vivier, 1983:42) calls the “Improvised” or “Collaborative” plays (such as *The Island* or *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*) – deal with deeply intimate issues. These issues include Milly’s troubled personal relationships or Johnnie’s obsession with his father, and are more appropriately reflected in the realist mode. They might just as well be referred to as Fugard’s Family plays, due to the nature of the personal relationships between the characters, and the unaffected way in which these relationships are reflected.

The more experimental modes of the Improvised and Collaborative plays lend themselves best to representing broader political and social issues. By way of illustration, Fugard comments on his experimental piece *The Coat*, which portrays a woman’s reaction to her husband’s political arrest: “looking back now I am very conscious of them [the characters] as being two-dimensional. Facts, and somehow we never managed to get beyond facts even though they were important facts, are flat and lacking in the density and ambiguity of truly dramatic images” (Fugard, 1974:ix). Fugard blames this on shallow reliance on improvisational theatrical techniques. For my purposes, however, what is important is to note the relationship between the social

content and these experimental forms of theatre, and to contrast this with his more realistic Family plays, and the impact the choice of genre can have on such texts.

In the Collaborative plays, the social content is artificially foregrounded in order to draw the audience's attention to such issues. In the Family plays, the social content is embedded (or, rather, embodied) within the characters. In Vivier's terms: "Fugard expresses his society's moral and social codes through the experiences of his characters" (1983:112). The lives of the characters *are* the social concerns. This is a result of the realist mode, which allows the audience to focus on the characters rather than on dry rhetoric. It has made a huge impact on my approach to writing my own play, because I too ran the risk of turning the script into an academic discussion of social issues. A major case in point is the argument surrounding the *bris*, previously discussed under "Beware the authorial voice".

Much of the later (more successful) draft of my play was inspired by the example set by *Hello and Goodbye* and *People are Living There*. Fugard has commented that *People Are Living There* "was written more directly from my life than any of the other plays... All of the characters involved and many of the dramatic incidents are almost literal transcriptions of our experiences" (1978:xi). I, too, drew much of my material from my own experience and observations. Like Fugard, I kept a notebook during the process of writing and noted observations of my surroundings, interactions, rituals (especially at the *Pesach Seder* and similar traditional gatherings). But I also felt that I needed to test these assumptions.

As previously touched upon, the interviews I conducted proved particularly useful in informing both the mindsets and the mannerisms of my characters. By way of example, I will quote my grandmother's hypothetical reaction to loving a coloured grandchild: "No. I don't think so. There would immediately be this feeling... it would turn her against the child." I was shocked by her response. But what shocked me the most was the sincerity of her reaction. I found myself immediately surrounded by questions: Was this generational? Would Sylvia react this way? I could not agree with it – even relate to it – but it was so imbued with real emotion that I could not discount it. This, to me, sums up the importance of realist drama. The point is not to make the audience agree with me or the characters I create; the point is to convey, in the most appropriate way, the possibility of an authentic response.

Here, an understanding of Vivier's analysis of Fugard is useful: "The main objective of his writing ... is to reveal the *truth* of a situation" (1983:147, italics

mine). Vivier goes on to quote Fugard himself on the importance of conveying this truth to the audience: "Every successful play is a success because people can identify with it... that is in a sense... one level to that search for truth" (1983:154)". This approach has resonated with me from the start of the writing process, but my challenge lay in discovering how to bring about the result. Reading Fugard (both his plays and his essays) helped me to understand this bigger picture.

Fugard continues: "I believe implicitly in the potential of this experience as a means to approaching and transmitting the Truth [sic] and this potential is at its greatest when the tricks associated with so much of the present day theatre are reduced to a minimum" (cited in Vivier, 1983:159). Vivier qualifies:

"What Fugard meant by reducing stage trickery is evident in his emphasis on character. To Fugard, the important aspects of drama are in character; the essence of his plays lies in the careful construction and delineation of each character, and not in complex plots and settings which would amount to stage trickery" (1983:160)

If such stage trickery can be aligned with Shepard's 'real', then the essence of the play – the characters – may be considered 'true'. Once again, I found that the mode of dramatic realism best allows a playwright to portray this invisible truth through its treatment of real material.

Symbols in realism

In *Hello and Goodbye*, for instance, a prominent theatrical tool is the use of dramatic symbol. I wish at this juncture to draw a firm line between what may be counted as experimental or abstract "stage trickery", and legitimate dramatic symbols which work their way into realist theatre. At first consideration, it might seem contradictory even to associate the use of symbol with realist theatre, because the nineteenth century artistic symbolist movement is often seen as the generic opposite of realism. Yet, as Innes points out, almost all realist dramatists in fact use symbolic elements as key devices to communicate wider meanings (2000:25).

Martin Esslin, in his introductory discussion on semiotics, notes that while all theatre is obviously concerned with icons (images or representations of people and things) and indices (gestures), it also relies heavily on the use of symbols: "On the most basic level, everything that is put on stage is a symbol, a sign, a signifier"

(1982:5). In *Hello and Goodbye*, for instance, Fugard uses the symbol of a box to convey the figurative qualities of hope and value for which Hester is searching. Hester believes that her salvation in some way lies in the box, and she endows the object with meaning which it ordinarily would not (excuse the pun) contain. In Fugard's notebooks he reflects: "All hope and meaning" – even "happiness" – is invested in "the box under daddy's bed" (1978:xiv).

Similarly, I have used Sylvia's Bobba's *seder plate* as a 'real' object invested with a 'true' essence that supercedes its physicality. Like Fugard's Hester, Sylvia endows the physical object with much potential meaning. The plate represents the old world from which it came (Lithuania, probably, but it is the psychological world to which I refer). It represents the values and traditions that are associated with that old world, and which do not easily reconcile with the world in which Sylvia finds herself forced to operate. Importantly, it represents these values in a realistic way, making the concept accessible not only to the audience's intellect, but to their emotions. Fugard himself admits, "what I'm out to provide an audience with is an emotional experience, not an intellectual one" (cited in Vivier, 1983:101). As Miller has identified, and as I have attempted to test, the realist genre is the most appropriate way of achieving this.

Earlier in this essay I discussed the use of simple symbols, including the Passover eggs and the archetypal character of the baby. Here I wish to discuss a more complex level of symbolic representation, and will use the *seder plate* as an illustrating example. The *seder plate* is a composite symbol – a symbol made up of symbols (the plate itself is created for the purpose of displaying other symbols – see the glossary attached to the script for more information on these). In my script the plate operates on two concurrent levels: firstly it is a direct sign (what Esslin would call a "specimen", 1982:4), and secondly it is a theatrical symbol (a "representation", Esslin 1982:4). It is at the same time a literal plate, a 'real' object represented on the stage, and a symbol of 'true' qualities associated with its use and history. I believe that this fusion is achievable only through a realist approach, because in more experimental modes, an object is often portrayed as symbolic to the point of abstraction – it loses its 'real' significance. Only through realism can a playwright attribute both these qualities – the real and the representational – simultaneously.

The *seder plate*, then, becomes imbued with "visual suggestion" – "those visual elements on stage which acquire a deeper, illustrative or symbolic meaning *in addition* to their realistic function" (Beyer, 1978:119, italics mine). Beyer cites this as

characteristic of realist theatre. The relationship between realism and reality is one that has been teased out by various academics. That is not the purpose of this essay. What is important for my purposes is to examine *how* this choice of genre allows me, as a playwright, to best convey my vision of this reality. Esslin has said, “What the stage gives us is an *enhanced* reality that itself becomes a sign, a metaphor, an image, a dramatic symbol” (1982:9). Through the employment of realist dramatic symbols such as the *seder plate*, I have managed to express the way the character of Sylvia is attached to the objects of her past, much like Fugard’s Hester and her yearning for the suitcase under her father’s bed.

When the plate is broken (and that it is broken by Ilana – representative of the new generation – is also significant), Sylvia’s link with her past is literally smashed. I spent much time contemplating how this scene would work on stage, especially from the point of view of the realist genre. What impact could this image have on stage? To the other characters? To the audience? My journal reads:

This isn’t only a prop. Sure it’s just a plate – and the characters know this as well as the audience – but it’s so much more. On the other hand, it’s not just an abstract symbol, either. It’s real. It’s something we can feel. With our hands and with our hearts. Through the plate we can relate to the characters more deeply; we can feel their emotions more deeply (June 2006).

Again, the conclusion is that realism is the most appropriate genre for reconstruction and presenting the emotions felt by these characters. Because the issues are real, the mode through which they are expressed should, concomitantly, be realistic in order to do the issues justice.

Speaking of his Family plays, Vivier notes that “Fugard’s theatre may be described as being rooted in empathy and not dialectic” (1983:101). It is for these reasons that the realist mode is best suited to such plays. Similarly, my script demanded realistic treatment. Enriched by symbol (but not distracted by theatrical gimmicks), enhanced by the focus on character, the realist mode allowed me to cut right to the core of my characters and their situations. By reading others, I have learnt what to aspire to, and perhaps in some ways how to achieve this.

Curtain

For Innes, “the defining moment of naturalist drama is the slamming of the door, as Nora leaves her husband at the end of *A Doll’s House*” (2000:20). Unlike the naturalists, however, I do not aim to use theatre to make a point about women or any other social group. More like Demastes’s “new realists” or Fugard’s Family plays, I simply hope that drama (specifically realist drama) will provide an effective vehicle for communicating the situation in which a particular group of characters might find themselves, not to dictate or propose a logical solution. Rather than slamming the door, I have left it somewhat ajar. Perhaps this reflects an uncertainty on my part, but then again maybe this is in itself a true reflection of the age and society in which I live. As my character Harold says: “Every year I’ve watched the open door for a sign, a something ... but nothing ever comes. Sylvie, my darling, I’ve just realized! I’ve been watching the wrong door!” (105).

I must take this opportunity to reiterate: I have not gone out to depict a “typical” Jewish family, or to display representative views of the community. Rather, my aim as a writer has been to create a realistic script that portrays a family that might truly exist, that may (or may not) react in certain ways. I believe that this is the stuff of which interesting theatre is made. I have purposely not attempted to provide answers to certain questions: will Ilana leave Chris? Will Adam be circumcised? These are social questions and can be debated in social circles. I am interested in the family issues, and in how the mode of realism can be used to represent these issues.

This has in many ways been a very difficult project for me. The subject matter has been very close to my heart and to achieve the distance needed to write about it is an accomplishment in itself. The mixed reactions of friends and family to its sensitive topics have also been hard to deal with. But as a writer I have grown so much from the experience. I have developed an awareness of the impact that a genre can have over the writing process, and how to work within these constraints. I have learnt to balance learning from others with forging my own way forward. Finally, I have acquired a consciousness of character that has allowed me to construct a moving creation on the stage – in both senses of the word. My family of characters is both dynamic and emotional, and so ultimately, I hope, realistic.

The family is a sacred and enduring form. In many ways, so is realism. This makes the union of these two elements even more suitable. By the end of the play, the characters have developed a heightened sensitivity to each others’ situations, and the realist mode allows me to create an ending that is poignant, yet plausible.

As Miller reminds us, the problem of form is not simply as aesthetic one (1999:84). It is my humble hope to have achieved some good through writing this play. Miller concludes his influential essay: “there lies within the dramatic form the ultimate possibility of raising the truth-consciousness of mankind to a level of such intensity as to transform those who observe it” (1999:84). He argues that realism is the best mode to achieve this, and the process of writing *This Night is Different* has confirmed this for me.

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- Prime* (2006, Ben Younger, Universal Pictures)
- Suzie Gold* (2004, Richard Cantor, Pathe)

Appendix 1: Political debate scene (removed from script)

Sylvia: You never see a homeless person [in Israel].

Nadia: That's because they're all shoved on the other side of the checkpoint.

Sylvia: The Palestinians aren't homeless, Nadia.

Nadia: Ma, helicopter-mounted rockets aren't exactly conducive to building houses.

Sylvia: Their people can look after them. That's not our problem.

Ilana: Ma, I can't believe you!

Sylvia: I'm just saying we've got to look after our own. We're just protecting what's ours.

Nadia: What are you talking about??

Sylvia: Israel belongs to the Jews.

Ilana: Does that mean people don't have a right to live there?

Sylvia: Israel is ours. They should be grateful that we give them anything at all.

Chris: Actually, the same UN resolution that created Israel created an independent Palestinian state far bigger than what is being offered to them.

Sylvia: UN, Shmu-en! God promised Israel to the Jews and that's that.

Chris: I take it this is the same God who called black people "hewers of wood and carriers of water"?

Sylvia [*thrown*]: Which god?

Chris: Verwoerd's god.

Ilana: I don't think that's what she meant, Chris.

Chris [*under his breath*]: She might as well have...

Sylvia: I never supported Apartheid!

Chris: If everyone who said that was telling the truth, it wouldn't have taken fifty years to end the system.

Sylvia: Well, at least under Verwoerd's government it was safe to walk in the streets.

Nadia: If you were white. For everyone else, it was a death wish.

Sylvia: Well, you girls know your father and I always voted Prog, but there's one thing to say for the Nats: they're one of the reasons this country hasn't gone the same way as the rest of Africa.

Ilana: Mom!

Sylvia: And let's not forget, back then South Africa was always a great friend to Israel.

Chris: Well, that's not surprising.

Sylvia: What?

Chris: They had a lot in common.

Ilana: Love, you can't very well equate Israel with Apartheid South Africa.

Chris: Well, if the shoe fits...

Ilana: Excuse me??

Chris: It's the same old argument, Ilana. Same shit; different country.

[Sylvia: I will NOT have this!

[Ilana: Chris!

Chris: You people are all the same.

Ilana: I can't believe you!

Chris: I'm sorry, Ilana. I can't handle this "Chosen People" bullshit.

Nadia: Mom, I think it's time to take out the dessert.

[Exit Nadia and Sylvia]

Ilana: What the HELL was that?

Chris: You don't expect me to sit back and just take that shit from your family, do you?

Ilana: But you didn't have to plough into them like that...

- Chris: Aha! So you admit they were wrong!
- Ilana: There's no wrong or right here, Chris. We're just talking politics.
- Chris: Just politics? JUST POLITICS? This is where I'll never understand you, Ilana. You can't just separate politics from everyday life.
- Ilana: Chris, please...
- Chris: You know, I'm prepared to put up with a lot of crap from you, Ilana, but this is just ridiculous! [*He takes the kippah off his head and throws it on the floor*]
- Ilana: I thought we promised not to get into this again. At least, not here. Not tonight.
- Chris: I'm sorry, my love. I just feel... I love you, not your family.
- Ilana: Well, you can't have one without the other.
- Chris: Oh, really? That's not what you've been saying for the past three years.
- Ilana: Well, I've changed my mind.
- Chris: A very un-Ilana thing to do.
- Ilana: Well I have.
- Chris: And what have you decided, exactly.
- Ilana: That my family... I'm pa- They're part of me.
- Chris: ...and?
- Ilana: And I miss them. I want them to be a part of Adam's life.

Appendix 2: Plot Grid

'Layers':	Background:			Act One: Disorder						Act 1 Order
Burroway structural guides:	Inciting incident ¹	Exposition ²	Point of attack ³							
The <i>seder</i>				Guests arrive	<i>Seder</i> begins	Festive meal: debate politics, religion	<i>Afikoman</i>	'Elijah' arrives	<i>Seder</i> songs	Next in kitchen clean
Sylvia	Invites family to <i>seder</i>	Frantic preparation	Guests start to arrive	Realises Chris is black			Realises Adam not <i>brissed</i>	Devastated over broken <i>seder</i> plate	Solace in religious songs	Decide to accompany daughter's decision
Ilana & Chris	Mixed marriage	First visit to family in 5 years	Sylvia's hostile reaction	She and Chris support each other	Tension begins to show: disagree, etc	Political debate turns personal	Fight with Sylvia re <i>bris</i>	'Elijah' berates Chris for deserting Africa	Ilana feels 'out of tune'	Decide to separate from Adam
Nadia	Applies for driver's license	Tells Sylvia test is on first day <i>Pesach</i>	Sylvia forbids Nadia to take the test				Refuses to partake in ritual	Drops Sylvia's Bobba's <i>seder</i> plate	Sings the baby to sleep	Decide to take test on <i>Pesach</i>

¹ **Inciting Incident** The event that has created the situation in which the protagonist finds him or herself at the beginning of a drama (Burroway: 2003:402)

² **Exposition** The laying out of the situation at the opening of the action (Burroway: 2003:402)

³ **Point of Attack** The first event that sets the plot in motion (Burroway: 2003: 404)

Appendix 3: Interview transcripts

Interview with Alon Gordon (24), 22 March 2005.

Alon Gordon was born in 1981 in Johannesburg, South Africa. His father is Jewish and his mother converted to Judaism. From age twelve Alon attended King David Victory Park (a Jewish school), where he studied for his Bar Mitzvah. He has dated both Jews and non-Jews and is unmarried.

Tell me a bit about your background.

Both my parents were born in Joburg. My mom wasn't Jewish, but her aunt married a Jewish man and converted, so she had an early exposure to Jewish life. My dad came from quite an observant, orthodox home – kosher, shomrei, the lot. He was one of four children. They're all now quite anti-Jewish. He's the only one that still retains some sense or pride in being Jewish. He's a traditionalist. I think they had it forced down their throats. My dad became reform and joined a reform shul because of an uncle that went that way, and my mom converted to Judaism before she married my dad (in a reform shul). And that's what I was exposed to – until I went to King David (Jewish school – moved in standard four). When I was young, the thing that I can most remember is pesach. My mother had a children's version of the story of pesach [haggadah]. We were at that stage 'High Holy Day' Jews – I never saw a shul until the High Holy days, but then I was dressed up to the nines, little tallis, suit, kippah, the works. It was such a novelty to me. Tradition. That was always far more important than, you know, getting the blessings right or anything like that. I moved there probably because the government school I was at was on its way down because of all the influx of black students. My parents were afraid of the standard of education dropping, so I moved to a private school. My dad didn't like the idea at first cos he thought you should be exposed to lots of different cultures, but I suppose a good private school... it was never said as such, but I'd imagine that the fact that it was an exclusive school, and that you had to be Jewish to get in, secured the quality of education for my parents. In the government school, we used to get sent outside during bible class. I mean, I always knew I was different. I think I kind of liked that, I used to play on that. I had a friend who went to cheder, so I made a big fuss and my mom felt she hadn't been doing her bit, so she sent me off to cheder, and boy, was I

sorry, because I had to go twice a week from then on! But I think it gave me a good grounding in Judaism. Studying for my bar mitzvah was very intense. I had a lot of Jewish exposure all at once. By the time I'd finished my bar mitzvah, I was convinced I wanted to be a rabbi. I told my (orthodox) Jewish Studies teacher and he wanted me to learn it all again [from an orthodox perspective]. Even though I came from a reform shul, I now feel far more at home in an orthodox setting.

Would you date or marry a non-Jew?

Yes, definitely. I think first and foremost it's probably my upbringing. Gordon males have for generations found non-Jewish women and converted them. [Thinks, laughs] God, that sounds so unbelievably chauvinistic! But there is a precedent in that no one in my family would feel ill at ease. I think my gran still thinks we don't know [that she converted]. It's a difficult one. I don't have a problem with my significant other having different beliefs; I just think I might have a problem that my kids may not be Jewish. My theory being that Judaism is more than a belief system, it's a birthright. When I spoke to Kath [his girlfriend], she said that if it meant that much to me she would convert on the provision that she could share the teachings of Jesus with them [the children] as well.

Would you date or marry someone of a different race?

[Pause, thinks]. Yes, absolutely. If I found that person, if I was attracted to that person on all the levels that you need to be attracted to to make a relationship sustainable. To be honest, I don't find that many black women attractive... but I'd have to say that the same logic should apply. But in this case, my parents would have a problem. But that's not born out of their Jewish identities, it's born out of their white South African identities.

Say you do bring home a black girl. How does your mother react?

She becomes incredibly awkward. She probably tries to hide it, but she's really bad at hiding things [smiles]. But she would never, ever make a scene. Dad is so much more of a docile character – he could probably get away without revealing his feelings much more easily. After she [the girlfriend] left, my mom would probably try to broach the subject, but not directly. She would never be able to admit her own prejudices. Everything would have to be couched in “consider this”, “consider that”. for example, “But your children won't know what they are”.

How would you react to this response?

My mother has a remarkable way of pulling my strings. I'd probably overreact – shout, accuse her, attack her intellectually. Sometimes it's hard to be honest with my parents about why we feel the way we do. It's like the feelings are so raw, so base, that they keep getting covered up by arguments. My dad is much more direct. If you try to argue, he won't budge.

What role does Judaism play in SA today?

South African Jewry is very conservative. I think they're a very closed society. A very successful community because they maintain this type of minority idea, this separatism. This turned me away, turned my skin. I needed to branch out. They are so incredibly close-minded. They're highly intelligent, and generally very successful – youth camps, Jewish schools, I suppose that's linked to their survival footing. The cup has spilled over but no one stopped it! I'm sure South Africa has one of the lowest assimilation rates in the world for Jews. Jews have always historically been moving. Like a mass exodus. And that's what's happening in South Africa. And they're not going to Israel, it's not an ideological exodus. It's what's greener on the other side. They're going to Australia and America.

Interview with Cherie Saloman (21), 21 March 2005.

Cherie Saloman was born in South Africa in 1982 to Rhodesian parents. Her mother is Catholic; her father Jewish. Cherie attended a non-Jewish school but was also exposed to Hebrew lessons and a Jewish summer camp. She has dated both Jews and non-Jews and is unmarried.

Tell me a bit about your background.

My parents were both born in Rhodesia, but I was born here. My whole family moved to Cape Town. My mom was Catholic; my father was Jewish. She went to a school where most of the people were Anglican. It was similar to me in that way. Her parents even got some phonecalls because she was going to the Anglican things, not the Catholic things! I went to a school where most people were Christian. Used to go to Sunday School with my friend. I was very confused around primary school, even in high school. Where the majority of the people were Christian, that made me feel like I wanted to be too. I had the best of both worlds – we would celebrate Christmas and Easter, and also the Jewish holidays. I also went to Hebrew lessons 'til like standard five. I went on a Jewish camp – which one was it? Not Habonim.

Bnei Akiva? Betar?

Yes, Bnei Akiva.

How did Hebrew lessons and Jewish camp compare with Sunday School?

I didn't really want to go to the camps. I was kind of forced by my parents, but I did enjoy them.

What role does Judaism play in your life now?

I feel like I don't conform to any religion, and maybe that comes from the confusion, but maybe also from being exposed to so many religions. There's something 'right' in all of them. My theory is that, originally, there was one solid religion, and then people broke away and took different things. Some have been carried through from generation to generation... there are bound to be inaccuracies, like in the Bible – that's just human nature. Judaism is almost like a reference for my beliefs and how I live my life. When I consider religion, my Jewish background definitely acts as a reference. Like, for instance, with Jesus. When I wanted to be Christian, then I learnt a lot about it, but because of my Jewish background, I was much more hesitant to do it. In something like religion, is evidence really proof? *(she seems as if she is not sure*

what to believe, as if she doesn't trust any sources.). For instance, I've always stayed away from pork. I actually like bacon, but I'll stay away from pork. Because of my Jewish background. I feel like my morals are more important [than religion]. Like leading a good life. Like the Ten Commandments. Following that, but not necessarily all the other little rules. I accept other religions. I feel I'm more rounded in my beliefs, and more open-minded.

Would you date a non-Jew?

Yes. Especially because I don't consider myself strictly Jewish. With reference to question two I think it makes sense. So that's not my criteria for meeting someone. If I fall in love it's whether they're moral, good people. I have dated non-Jewish people, and I would marry one, although one of my concerns is that bringing children up, I do feel that they need to have a stable religion, and I know that from my own experience, and also I remember another boy from primary school. He didn't have a religion, and he was also very confused. He needed somewhere to fit in. He didn't really belong anywhere.

Would you date someone of a different race?

I have dated someone of a different race, Indian. His family was Hindu, but he considered himself agnostic, so that wasn't a problem while we were dating. But marriage would be a different story. That religion doesn't expect people to convert.

Did you ever discuss marriage?

No, we had spoken about it, but at the time I knew I was too young for marriage to be a serious problem. Also, my mom sat me down and said... [changes thought] They weren't disapproving of him, but they didn't really like him – not that they didn't really like him, but they didn't like *it* – the fact that he was not white. But in the end they accepted it very well. My mother's main issue was with marriage, but I reassured her. She'd read a book about this woman who married an Indian and moved to India and the cultural differences were very difficult; everything changed – it was a real culture shock and they didn't stay together. With reference to her own marriage, the culture differences can be very difficult. For them [her parents] it worked out really well, but she was sort of warning me about that. [She thinks a while] I think quite a few marriages like that don't work.

How would your parents react if you brought home someone of a different race?

If I brought home someone black, I don't think my parents would be able to handle that very well at all. I think it's partly their generation. You get some more liberal

people than others, but the way they were brought up, that just didn't happen. But that's one of the big things [about bringing home someone of a different race] – the family. I wasn't allowed to tell my grandparents that I was dating someone Indian, because it's something that they won't, they'd be shocked, or, you know. I don't know if it would be an embarrassment to them or the family. You know. She [my mother] would demand to know if he was just a friend or if there was something going on. If he was just a friend that would be fine – I've had black friends like that girl in our res and she was like, 'Oh, you must bring them home', but not to date. She'd give me a look and speak to me about it! I don't know what she'd say. I don't know. I honestly don't know.

How would you respond to your parents' reaction?

I respect my parents' [searches for word] opinion. But you know what? If I'd fallen madly in love with someone, I would still consider their [parents] opinion and respect it but I'd try to change their minds. [She tells me about the movie, *The Notebook*] In the end, she had to decide: does she get married to this wonderful guy who she doesn't love, or this other guy... well, maybe I'm a romantic and I'd choose love over the practical thing to do, but anyway.

What role do you think religion has to play in the New South Africa?

I think most religions really have to deal with contemporary issues, like homosexuality, for example. You still get the very orthodox group that doesn't really change, but the New South Africa is very cosmopolitan and I suppose it's... I don't know.

What about in your own family?

Everyone still goes to my grandmother on Fridays, and I was forced to go. My cousins don't go that often, but there's always family on a Friday night, though it's rare that everyone's there together. My parents are quite relaxed – well, they're not strictly Jewish, either – they don't really go to shul. I had to go to Hebrew lessons until the age when, well, then it was up to me. It [SA today] seems to be less and less... sticking to the traditions. Sometimes we have more informal Pesachs, Rosh Hashana, etc, but we do have the egg and salt water, and the apples and honey. So we do have the traditions. But now all the kids have grown up so we don't have the looking for the matzah to win a prize. I've seen quite a lot of people with my views. People have become more accepting of other cultures and religions.

What factors do you think contribute to the construction of young Jewish identity in SA today? What about your own identity?

TV. We don't have much religion portrayed on TV. Peers definitely contributed.

Jewish friends. And I suppose my parents as well. Nothing was forced on me. I was forced to go to the lessons but then left to make my own decisions, and that's good.

You know, some people, they're only taught one thing and they never know anything else. I've seen a lot more [than them].

Interview with Renee Weinberg (70), 14 April 2005.

Renee Aizen was born in South Africa to Jewish parents and raised in an orthodox home. She married Cyril Weinberg (Jewish), and has two children: Hayley, who lives with her life-partner Cornel (not Jewish) in Johannesburg and Grant, who is married to Sarah (not Jewish) in England. She has no grandchildren. Yet.

Tell me a little about your background.

I was born in South Africa. My dad came from a place called Krakow in Poland and my dad was... very Jewish. My mom was more anglicized. I was brought up in a home that was kosher, and when my dad died (I was fifteen), my mother decided it was too much. So we stopped being kosher, and we started to eat treif. At fifteen, I got a job, and I worked from Monday to Friday. My mom still had the business, but she couldn't cope with it so eventually she sold it and Aubrey [brother] worked and I worked. And then I left this job I was at and I went to work for a jewelry firm who had the most beautiful, beautiful jewelry, especially earrings, and I modeled. When the customers used to come in, I actually modeled the earrings for them. And like when I used to go to clubs, or wherever, parties, whatever, I used to wear the jewelry to be like... a model, an advertisement for them. And I worked there until I got married. And then I left there and I started to do temporary work.

Tell me about how you met your husband.

I went to Durban and saw this gorgeous chap on the beach and I thought to myself, 'This is it. He has to ask me out'. In those days, we didn't ask the chaps out. They asked us out. And he didn't seem to be interested, and I was going out with another fellow and then he decided we were all going to go to Umhlanga Rock [sic] and in his beautiful convertible Cadillac, and funnily enough, Cyril took out one of the girls in the crowd by the name of Ruth – very beautiful girl. But then I wasn't ugly, either!

I'm sure not!

No, I wasn't! And I thought, 'Hey, hold on. You know, what's she got that I haven't got?' Anyway, to cut a long story short, he thought I was involved with this other chap. And then we came back to Johannesburg and he said he would phone me and he didn't phone me for two weeks, which was because his mother wasn't well. And then he phoned me, and we started to go out, and then one day he asked me if he could

marry me and I said, well I said 'I think you'll have to ask my mother!' [laughs]. So that's what he did. He asked my mother. And then, ja, then we got married, and we were married for six years before Hayley came on the scene. But in the six years, I was like the Kimberley diamond mines. You know, every gynecologist was busy trying to find out what was wrong with me. And eventually they discovered that when my appendix nearly burst, three weeks before my wedding, peritonitis had set in. And this caused a lot of problems. But anyway, Hayley was meant to be, and so she was meant to be. And the day I found out I was pregnant with her, I decided I was going to go to shul – reform shul, round the corner – just to say thank you, and Cyril said to me 'Don't walk home. Take the bus home' But I was in a bit of a daze. I was so excited, after all these years. And I walked home, and I was attacked.

By whom?

By... a naughty little gentleman.

Go on.

He picked me up, and he threw me on the ground (and that was the day I found out I was pregnant). He wanted my bag. In my bag was my glasses, and my house keys, and five cents. Which he took. And then people stopped, got me into the car, brought me home, and the caretaker opened up the flat for me, and I went inside and she phoned Cyril, and Cyril phoned the gynecologist, and they all came running to the flat, and they put me to bed for 48 hours, hoping nothing would go wrong. But Hayley was meant to be, and so nothing did go wrong, but there was a problem. My blood pressure was very high, so I was in bed for nine months. But I crocheted, and I knitted, and I read, and I... I did a lot of things while I was in bed. And then this little... mouse was born, weighing five pounds, two ounces and went down to four pounds, twelve. And she was born with long, pitch-black hair, down to her shoulders.

Born with it?!

Born with it! But I had a lot of heartburn... And the first thing my mother said to me was, '[gasp] She really is ugly'. And I looked at her, and I thought, 'In my life, I've never seen anything so beautiful!' And I knew I would love her forever and ever. And then, three years later, I had... a baby, and in the seventh month, I started to have big problems. And he was born. He lived for... I think it was six, or seven days. And then he died. But he was a fighter. But he wasn't mean to be. And then three years later, I wanted viennas and chips. And I said to Cyril, 'I'm really dying for viennas and chips!' and he said, 'Don't talk yourself into nonsense.' I said, 'I'm telling you, I'm

dying for viennas and chips!’ And it was proved right. I *was* pregnant! And that was with Grant Daniel. Grant Daniel was a full term baby, and he was supposed to be born on Yom Kippur day, the tenth of October 1970, and he decided to come on Rosh Hoshona, 1970. And he was full term and he weighed six pounds something, so he was... he was normal! And, ah... I was quite happy. And that was what God had given to me – I never thought I would have it, and that’s what he gave me, and that’s what I’ve appreciated all my life.

So you obviously believe in God, from what you’ve said–

– completely and utterly. God always... God never gives you more than you can actually handle. But he also teaches you a lesson, that you need to appreciate. When you ask Him for something – and I really did ask, I never stopped asking – when you ask Him for something, he can’t just hand it over to you. Because if it comes easy to you, you don’t actually appreciate anything. So, when He does give it to you, you are ready. To appreciate. You know, what you’ve got.

What would you say to people, especially my age, who don’t believe in God?

There must be a God. There must be a God because, first of all, if you look at a baby, I mean that is a miracle of all miracles. From a tiny seed, this... fully formed human being... comes into the world. Has got a mind of its own, grows into a little person, and you sit and you wonder at this little person. And then, keeps growing, and growing, and growing. There *must* be a God. And also, when you’re down and things come right, who’s there to do that for you? Not you yourself. There is somebody guiding you. ’Cos you can’t do it on your own. You’re not capable. When you’re down, depression sets in, and all kinds of negative attitudes come into your head, and then all of a sudden, you’re lifted. So there must be something.

And what about confusion? Can God get one through that?

I believe that when you get these people who are confused, who go onto drugs, alcohol, and do... and batter themselves, I feel that if you do sit down – cos you don’t have to go to a church or a synagogue or any place of worship – you can actually talk to God at any stage, of any time. [She has nothing more to say on this.]

So, then, what’s your stance on religion?

[Thinks a while] Yes, but not for me. Not for me, because I believe that religion is mainly man-made, and no man needs to play God. That’s what I believe.

What role does religion play in your life?

In religion, we've got the reform Jews, we've got the orthodox Jews and then we've got the Jewish people who are... ultra, ultra religious. Now, reform – which, I think, I am – is better for me, because first of all, if I do go to shul, I can understand what's going on. That's number one. Then, I find that they are not fanatical, so I am more comfortable with them. Religious, orthodox... that's how I was brought up. That's how my Bobba brought me up, that's how my mother and father brought me up, so I didn't know any different. Ok, the fanatical religious Jews – that is out of the question as far as I'm concerned. Because fanaticism is against God. So, I'm neither reform... I'm not really orthodox... no, I'm not. And highly religious fanatics, I could never be. So, I'm not really a good Jewess. I am Jewish, but a good Jew, I'm not. [Whispers] A good Jew, I'm not. [Stronger] But I am Jewish. And I just feel that the things I do, do make me – in the eyes of God – a good Jewess.

You said earlier [chatting before the interview] 'I'm not religious, but I am Jewish.' What do you mean by that?

Well, does Judaism come from your pots and your pans? No. Judaism comes from your heart. And I think that is more important than... a lot of religion is a man's version of how you should live your life. A woman thinks differently to a man. When a woman does something of great kindness, of value, she's being guided. And to give kindness, understanding, food when somebody is hungry, compassion – all those things – a woman can give it because a woman's emotions are totally different to a man's, so a man can't understand a woman as much as he can understand... what is set in a book. A woman can... detour from that. Am I not right?

Perhaps.

Ja. [Decidedly]

I want to talk more directly about my script project. I want know your reactions to a series of scenarios that may occur between the characters. How would you describe the mother's initial reaction to meeting Chris – who is coloured – and their baby, Adam? What is your reaction? Okay, I can see your eyebrows going up!

Um... fish and fowl can't live together. First of all, you've got to consider the child. Even though we're living in totally different times, there is nothing wrong with Chris as an individual, and there is nothing wrong with Ilana, but that baby is neither fish nor fowl. This is my *opinion* of it. That baby is going to grow up, and will never have the security of... if it would have been completely white, it would have had a better

chance, if it would have been completely coloured, it would have had a better chance, but the mixture... [ends off]

But 'coloured' is itself a hybrid – we're not talking black and white here. Chris is already coloured. Chris is already a product of black and white together.

Yes, that's right. Now, Chris married a white woman, and who's to say that the baby doesn't come out black? Now, that baby... then throughout its whole life, it has to have an explanation at every turning. Why his mother is white and his father is coloured. Because children are cruel. Children are very cruel.

Okay, so that's the advice you'd give to a mixed-race couple before they have children, but now that they've already had the baby, how do you react?

Then you've got to make the best of it. The mother [Sylvia] has to accept him, she has to accept the baby, if she wants to keep her child. If she can't accept him [Chris], and she can't accept the baby, then she can't expect her child to, sort of, live a normal family life. [Pause.] Am I right?

I think so. Alright, so that's your attitude towards mixing black and white, or as you said, fish and fowl, but your attitude towards Jewish-non-Jewish are not quite the same.

No. I'm not altogether for it, but... do you want your child to be happy? If this is what makes *your* child happy, that is *their* life. You can't worry about *your* life anymore. You've lived your life to a certain age, and they now are starting out on their own. If they're happy, fine. I'm not against living together, that I'm not against. If they want to get married, that is entirely up to them. If, at any stage, the son-in-law or the daughter-in-law proves himself or herself as worthy of the love that your son or daughter's going to give them, then I think you have to accept it.

And children of those relationships?

Yes, there is a slight problem. There is a slight problem. If in the case that your daughter's involved with somebody, and they don't get married and they don't have children, that is fine. In the case of your son being married to somebody not of the faith, that does present a little bit of a problem. It shouldn't be a problem, because you'll have to learn to accept it. But it can be a problem because then your grandchild is not Jewish. And what every Jewish grandmother wants is a Jewish grandchild.

What of the case where the daughter is Jewish, so the child will be halachically Jewish...

That is different. That is still far more acceptable to a granny than... the other way around.

But Ilana doesn't want her child to have anything to do with Judaism.

Ah, but that's...

She won't have him brissed.

Alright...

Sylvia discovers this accidentally while changing his nappy. How does she react?

She has to accept it.

But what do you think her emotional response would be?

No, emotionally she'd be devastated. But, if Ilana really had respect for her mother, she would tell her mother that the baby is not brissed. Not let the mother, the granny, change the nappy and find out that the child... is not brissed. Because that is more of a shock than if Ilana would have come straight out with it in the very beginning.

[Sylvia's emotions would be] very, very, very... strong. The emotion that you give off, or that you feel, I think is devastating. Every Jewish granny would like her grandchild a) to be Jewish, because in the eyes of the Jewish law, the child is not Jewish, but in the eyes of the Christian law, the child *is* Jewish. So what do you do? You have to accept it. But if the child is circumcised, that already, I think, takes off the hard edge that the granny goes through. That's what *I* think. I don't know. I'd have to be in that position. You see, I'm not in that position at the moment, so I wouldn't know.

[I tell her about Chris and Ilana and ask for comments on their marriage]

It can never work. Can never work. As far as I'm concerned, it can never, ever work. Because deep down inside, you are Jewish. When religion is brought into a marriage – "You Jews," or "But the Jews have got money," or "The Jews are this," or "The Jews are that," – the marriage can never work. That is actually the end of the marriage. Because it might not end *there*, but it will end. Maybe in a year or two. Do you ever come back to your senses after someone says that to you? Say you're in love with that person, and you have a child – look, there're a lot of considerations here – can you ever love that person again? I don't think so. I don't think so.

It has been said that it is the duty of the writer to confront taboos; to expose the things that people don't want to admit. But as a Jewish writer – and because Jewish issues are interesting and important to me – I get the sense, unspoken, within the Jewish community that there are certain things you don't talk

about... that you don't talk about the Jewish community in any non-positive light. And I respect that these people are coming from a place of vulnerability. Many Jews feel that there is enough criticism of Israel and the Jews in the media; that everyone is against the Jews so we shouldn't say things against ourselves. But in the way that writers like Antjie Krog have taken down Afrikaners from the inside *because* it means so much to her and that is her culture and her heritage, and therefore it hurts her so much to see the bad, so she feels she has to expose it, so that we can *fix* it... I don't want to 'bring down' the Jews, but I do feel that if there are problematic issues within the community – things I don't agree with – and literature is a good platform to explore them, and to explore solutions. How do you feel?

In every religion, there's good and bad. That's how I feel. And if you want to expose... look, a lot of things are very difficult for the outsider to understand. As a... sort of... very reformed Jewess, there are a lot of things that I disagree with. And I just feel that, if you want to live your life a certain way, then go ahead. But don't bring anybody else down, because *they* want to live *their* lives in a different, a certain way.

What I'm trying to do on stage is to confront these issues, because nobody is doing it off the stage.

Alright. The only thing is, if, at any stage, this goes out to a non-Jewish audience, they might not understand what you're trying to actually express. Jewish people understand each other, because they're a culture all of their own. We stand totally, totally – as far as I'm concerned – on our own. Because in the Christian religion, you have Methodist, you have Anglican, you have... I don't know what this... Rema church is, but you have that... the Dutch Reform Church is also another religion... the black religion is totally, totally foreign to us, from my generation. I don't know about the younger generation. But the Jewish religion stands on its own. That is the opinion that I have got.

What about the Rainbow Nation? Aren't we supposed to all be human beings?

Yes, but not when it comes to religion. Socially, we are fine. To a degree. And we're getting there. It's going to take a long time, but we'll get there. But not when it comes to religion. Religion is a very complex thing, as far as I'm concerned. Because we're not *really* different, but we *are* different. Because all the other religions, they pray to Jesus Christ, who was a Jew. We pray to God.

What is your opinion of black people who consider themselves in some way Jewish?

If I remember correctly, somewhere in the bible, it does mention black Jews, so I've got no issue with that.

Now, you've said that one can't "mix fish and fowl", but what if a couple are both Jewish, but one is black and one is white?

Then, that is another consideration. That is... Jewish and Jewish.

But it's black and white.

Yes. Yes, I agree with you. But it's Jewish and Jewish, and the religion is actually the same. If we talking from a religious point of view. If we talking from a social point of view, then... it's still not as bad as the fish and the fowl. And the fish and the fowl is where you get a Jewish girl and a non-Jewish man who is coloured. There are too many issues there. But, if you get Jewish and Jewish, then that's another story altogether.

How do you see the dynamic between 'The Jews' and 'The Blacks' in this country?

I've got nothing against them, really. I'm against... I'm against... the crime, which is caused by poverty, I agree. But if a person is kind, is willing, is understanding... how dare you judge them, really, by their colour? They are different. Their culture is totally different. You can have somebody working for you for 39 years... you have tried to educate that person, you have done your very best for that person, that person is loyal, that person is as honest as the day is long, and yet you still haven't educated that person. Because when it comes to any modern technology, that person is stymied because that person has not had an education.

So it's an education issue. You don't feel black people are innately inferior to—

No! Definitely not. Definitely not. Education.

Why do you think some people still think that black people are inferior?

Because they're ignorant. That's why.

Some South African Jews feel pressured to fit into this "happy rainbow", but at the same time we feel we are different. Comment about the state of anti-Semitism today – in the world, in South Africa, in your own experience.

Mmm! [Affirmative]. I went to a convent school from... in those days... grade one, right up to standard eight, cos they didn't offer matric, so I had to do a commercial matric. I was the *only* Jewish girl in the class. The reason I went there (because my

father was very religious, and very Jewish), was that he didn't want me to go to the government school, because it was a mixed school [co-ed]. So off we went to the convent and he told the mother superior that I'm not allowed to do the sign of the cross, and that they must excuse me on all Jewish holidays. And that created a problem all on its own because all the other girls resented me for the fact that I had all the Jewish holidays, all the public holidays and all the Catholic holidays! So I wasn't very popular. But I was very happy there. But there was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism. And that was when I really picked it up, before I went out into the big, wide, ugly world. And then met it again. Met anti-Semitism again, full in the face. I remember going to a party one night and there were a crowd of non-Jewish boys. And there was one fellow in the crowd who was good-looking, seemed to be intelligent, came from a very 'decent' family, until he started on... the Jews. And that is where he reminded me of a... model. You know, one of these dolls that you have in the window, for display. Like a mannequin. Where the hair fell off, the moustache fell off, the arms fell off, the clothes didn't look like they were anything once the arms fell off... and he was reduced to a nothing, in my eyes. Absolutely nothing. From somebody who... I might have admired, you know, looking through rose-coloured glasses, I just... I couldn't... That's how I visualized him.

What did he say?

He called us "kikes". And "the problem with the world is the Jews..." You know, the usual things that you get in everyday life, from it's always our fault, and we're rich, and we pinch from everybody and we killed Jesus Christ, and all that kind of thing. Which, as a youngster, you didn't think it was necessary to... to hurt. Because it's very hurtful.

How did you respond to this guy?

I can't quite remember my words. But because I was Jewish, and because I was like, a little bit... I would put it this way: a little bit persecuted, I was... I wouldn't say I was an angry person. No, no, I wasn't angry, but... I decided "I was gonna stand up for my rights!" Because, in those days, thank goodness, you know, nobody had guns on them or whatever, so I lashed out at him. But I can't quite remember what I said. But I remember lashing out at him and telling him in no uncertain terms – and not in those words, because I was too young – that he was despicable.

Inevitably, the Israel-Palestine issue will come up. Yes, I see your face! And that's why I'm nervous about this. But it's so prevalent in society today, in the

media, sometimes through malice and often through ignorance. What do you think?

Look, I don't agree with everything that Israel does. I must be very honest. You've got to remember, whatever the position is, these are people, these are human beings, and even though Israel is, as we say, our country, as Jews, you've got to have compassion for people. And who really suffers? It is the mothers and the children. Man eats man, and that is the very sad thing. Have we ever considered putting women into a government?

Golda Meir?

Yes, but didn't she help the situation? Didn't she get Nasser to agree to a ceasefire? I think so! Look, I'm not high up on this, but I have a funny feeling that she definitely did far more, in her unfeminine way, that any male prime minister has done in Israel. When you come to the Palestinians, unfortunately, I have got no respect for them, because when you have got grown-ups who use children as pawns, you can't have respect for them.

How do you think someone like Ilana, who has distanced herself from anything Jewish, would react to Chris bad-mouthing Israel?

Well it all depends how strong her feelings are on Israel. Because, is she defending Israel for Israel? Or is she defending Israel because she wants to get back at Chris? A marriage can't survive that. I think that, once you start bringing in who you are and who he is – because you're two totally different people – I think that could cause big problems. I really do. And Ilana and Chris are *definitely not* going to solve the problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The ANC has, historically, aligned itself with the PLO. So many South African Jews feel on the one hand part of this wonderful new nation, and on the other, under threat. How do you feel?

I personally feel that another country who has got problems of their own – and let's face it, if you can find me one country that hasn't got problems, I'm prepared to shake your hand – I think you must clean your own house before you try and clean somebody else's.

Fine, but for a person like me, which is my house? I was born and bred in South Africa, yet spiritually I feel – and have been taught – that Israel is my homeland. So which is my home?

Oh, ok, from that point of view... you can't take Israel out of you. Even though you were born in this country – and it is a wonderful country – there is no getting away from it. Look, to clean Israel, I think, is going to take a little longer than to clean South Africa. If we could just sort out the problems here, then it would be much easier for us to maybe sort out problems in Israel, because maybe if you can clean one house, then you can clean another house. BUT I feel personally that only a woman can do it, not a man. Man eats man.

How can I respond to friends who criticize Israel? “After the Jews fought so valiantly against oppression here, how can you do the same to the Palestinians”?

Very difficult. I can't see any solution.

Do they have a point?

Yes. Yes, they do have a point.

But if I openly agree that they have a point, then the Jewish community will consider me a traitor? [Cf. Ronnie Kasrils]

No, no, but you can't agree with them. You can't agree with them.

So, they have a point, but I can't agree with them.

They have a point, but you can't agree with them because... [voice starts to rise] you're not living there. You're not living the life that the Israelis are living, on the one side, and that the Palestinians are living on the other side. You can't give an opinion unless you've experienced something. And going to Israel and having a wonderful time in Israel is one thing. Living in Israel and living with the danger that they live with is another thing entirely. So you actually can't agree with them. So you're not a traitor. They're entitled to their opinion.

So where should my loyalty lie?

Your loyalty lies in what you believe. Because every individual believes something totally different from the next individual. You're not going to agree completely with what I think or what I feel.

Back to Ronnie Kasrils...

Well, as far as I'm concerned, he's a big idiot.

Why?

Because, even though he believes in what he believes, let's put it that way... you are entitled to your opinion, but has Ronnie Kasrils lived in Israel? If he has, then I would say 'Do you know what? He's lived under those conditions, maybe he *is* in a position to talk the way he talks'. But until he's lived in that position, he has no right to talk.

And is he talking from what he believes, or is he talking just to... to boost himself? That is what I feel. That when he was talking, he wasn't talking from what he believed; he was talking to make himself out to be a... a friend of his adopted country. Although he is a South African, and alright, maybe he loves South Africa, and he wouldn't want to live in Israel. But you can't judge a country until you've actually lived in that country. And another thing is: if there were one or two countries that really were at peace – and run by a man – I would say, 'Well, there you are! They have proved that a man can run a country peacefully'. But as far as I'm concerned, there's not a country that's at peace!

Well, that about wraps it up, I think. Thank you so much for your time.

My pleasure, my doll. I hope it's helped you.

Interview with Bitsie Oshry (84), 15 April 2005.

Bitsie Regensberg was born in Bethlehem in the Orange Free State of South Africa to Lithuanian Jewish parents. She married Bernard Oshry, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania, and had four children, all of whom married Jewish partners (sometimes twice!). She has thirteen grandchildren and is pushing for great-grandchildren. Her eldest three grandchildren – including myself – are married (to Jews).

Tell me a little about your background.

Well, that's a very long time to cover! We grew up in a small town, and the Jewish people were very conscious of being Jews, and everyone went to *shul*, and the kids went to *cheder* and so on. There were a lot of Afrikaans people there and strangely enough they got on extremely well with the Jews – the Afrikaners and the Jewish people got on so well, more so than the English!

What factors do you think helped to shape your identity as either a Jew, or a South African, or both?

That's hard to say, because it doesn't really apply. We were so... we were just South Africans and we were Jews. I mean, we were not specifically one or the other. We were Jewish South Africans. We were totally accepted like that... We went to school, we were like everyone else, and they accepted us as Jewish people, not being any different to them and... all one group of people.

Did you ever experience anti-Semitism?

No, no. Definitely not. No such thing. Not in those days.

Were you religious?

[Thinks] Ja. We kept kosher, we went to *shul* for all the holidays, we went to *shul* on Friday nights... you know, it was an ordinary, typical Jewish family.

Do you think that Jews today are more or less religious than you were at our age?

[Thinks] You know, I see so little of people your age, I've lost contact with the young people. I think it's a matter of the homes they come from, because – and I do think, from speaking to people and looking around – that the young people are becoming more Jewish-conscious, which is wonderful.

Do you believe in God?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely! [Laughs]

Why?

Well, because... maybe it's because that's how we were brought up, and... I don't know. You just have this... everyone's got to believe in something. You can't just... go through life... taking everything for granted. And I know I've had experiences where I have felt God's presence, and that he has helped me. I think I've told you a couple of occasions. And it's enough to make you... not query it! I mean, you just... um... He's there! How can you explain it?

Can you cite an example of when you've felt his presence?

Yes, I think I've told you many times, haven't I? I remember when Elaine was small, when she was so ill, and she was in the hospital, and she had the club-foot, and it was those days – they didn't know very much about it. It wasn't good. And she had pneumonia. She was five years old, and she was... oh! She was so sick, poor little thing! [Laughs, pityingly] And we were all so worried about her. And I remember going to the wards, to the hospital, so worried and so concerned about her. And all of a sudden, Laur, I mean, I didn't imagine it. Such a... peace seemed to envelope me. And I just – everything that I was worried about just seemed to fall away, and there was just this wonderful feeling. And when I came to the hospital eventually – in those days it was right out in the Bluff, and it was a long way – and Elaine was better. She'd had a good night. And – oh! It was just everything was falling into place. And what else can you attribute this to, but that God was... telling me, 'I'm here for you. Don't worry'? It was really great, I must tell you.

Do you believe that the Jews are God's "Chosen People"?

[Chuckles] Well, we've been led to believe this, haven't we? So, we must believe it. I mean, I must say that I'm... so much against the modern concept of 'everything is not according to the Bible', that it's all scientific, and it's... what are the other words? You know what I mean? That the world wasn't formed in seven days, and... I don't know. You just accept it! Either you accept it, or you don't. But we do.

What are the repercussions if you don't?

[Thinks] I don't know. I've never thought about that! I think that you just have no... um, it comes in then. You have no identity.

We've spoken a bit about religion. I now want to talk about South Africa. You mentioned the amicable relationship between the Jews and the Afrikaners. How do you see the dynamic between the Jews and 'The Blacks'?

Uh... I think it's very difficult to say. Because the blacks are... um... they don't like the Jews, as far as I can gather. If they do... pretend, is that the right word?... to be our friends, in every way I think it will come out that they are against us. Am I right?

I don't know, that's why I'm doing this research! [Laughter]

I don't know. This is just what I think. I mean, let's just say: they're different classes. The ordinary black, the... um... servants in your house, and people you work with, I don't know how genuine it is, but I think that they do respect us and they do feel that we are... nice people, you know? I think it's the more educated ones who are, um, more on the side of the Arabs and the... because of Palestine. They read the papers and all the propaganda. I think that's all there is to it.

How do you feel about domestic workers?

Must I be honest?

Yes, please.

[Laughs] Well, I think in the last few years... I don't like them. I find that they are cocky, and cheeky, and that they'll take whatever they can, whereas in the old days, it was unheard of. Totally, totally different way of life. They had respect for you. They wouldn't dream of taking anything. Now, I mean, they'll walk past, they'll push you off the pavement, they don't give way for you, they go into the lift first. You know, all these sort of things that... it is now their country, can you blame them? And I feel that's about all I can say about it.

Do any particular stories come to mind?

I can just see how differently they treat us now. You know, if you tell them... in the old days, when you had servants, you'd tell them to do whatever, no matter what it was, and they would do it without a word, and do it thoroughly. But not today. Today, if I... like when I told the girl she hadn't cleaned properly for a couple of days, and I said, 'Look at this' and 'Look at this', and all the answer you get is 'That's not my job'. You know, so, you can see the difference. How they have become the boss, which I suppose they are. And... um... we have to be subservient to them now. Right?

How does that make you feel?

Not good! [Laughs] Oh, no. We really feel that we are now second-class citizens. That's all there is to it.

How do you feel about young Jews dating non-Jews?

Well, Laur, I can't even answer that because, except for you and Pete [my sister], I really don't come into contact with young people anymore.

Well, then talk about us.

Uh... no, that's a difficult question. Because, we grew up in a different... era, almost, and we wouldn't dream of it. I mean, to go out with a non-Jewish boy would have been... the worst thing you could do. But today, it's so accepted, and that's why there's so much intermarriage. And, um, we are unfair, because... we don't give them a chance. Look at Edna. When she got married to Martin, we didn't speak to them for years.

Because he wasn't Jewish?

Ja! We had nothing to do with them. We were... totally horrified. Until we got to know him, and we discovered what an absolutely wonderful man he is, and he really is one of the nicest people we could wish to meet. And they are so happy together. But, of course, it goes further, because Edna was never really religious, so it wasn't that bad for her. She didn't feel she was doing the wrong thing. But, of course, you're talking about how we felt, and... no, I don't approve of it, I'm sorry.

Did Edna and Martin have children?

One daughter, Beverly. She's Jewish, she's married to a German.

A Jewish German or a non-Jewish German?

No, just a German-German. But they're very happy. And, uh, I don't know how they're bringing their daughter up, but that's how it is.

How did you feel when I was involved with a non-Jewish boy [for two years]?

Now that it's over, you can be honest. How did you feel?

Not happy about it. Definitely not happy. But it was your decision, it's got nothing to do with us. But... we just weren't happy. Because, as I say, that's how we were brought up. We were possibly in this limited society, and it would just never occur to us to think of marrying a non-Jew.

But some people have difficulty accepting these things. [Explain characters set-up] How might the mother react towards her daughter being with a non-Jew?

Laur, it depends on a lot of things. First of all it's important to know what sort of person he is. Is he religious?

At this stage, she's never met him.

Oh. But, surely she's discussed it with her daughter?

They haven't been close for the last few years. The daughter has been in England.

Hmm, that's hard. Yes.

What sort of thing would go through the mother's mind?

Well, I know what the first thing *should* be. The first thought should be, 'Are they happy together?' But – there's always the but. What sort of life do they lead at home? If he's totally against the Jews, like – let's face it – most Christians are, and if he doesn't respect her religion, it's going to be hard later on, when the first 'bloom' wears off.

How religious is the mother?

Like you and I. She's conscious of her Jewishness but not frum [very observant].

[Thinks for a long time; laughs helplessly]. You know, it's hard. Um, possibly her thoughts would go to the grandchildren, and she'd say, 'If you are happy with him now, have you thought of the future for your children? How are they going to be brought up? They're going to be torn between the two religions and they cannot accept and they can never be happy, because they are neither one nor the other. And that's going to be hard for the daughter to answer if she and her husband haven't thoroughly been into the subject. They might just have accepted it and said, 'Oh well, while the kids are small, we'll just carry on as we are'.

Right, I'll now reveal the next ace up my sleeve. As the daughter and her husband walk in, the mother sees he's not only non-Jewish, he's also coloured.

Oh! The Man Who Came to Dinner! Oh. Oh, that's horrific. I think she would be... so taken aback that she would... she'd be speechless. She wouldn't know what to say. For her daughter's sake she'd want to be on good terms with him, but she herself... her heart would be completely broken. That's what I think. And it depends also on the son-in-law's reaction. If he immediately senses the atmosphere is totally against him, he's going to become... reserved and, uh... I haven't got the words anymore. Ask me a couple of years ago, I could speak better! But I think you can get the gist of it – that he could feel very unwelcome, and this would reflect on his relationship with the daughter, and I think it would take a long, long time before either one could accept the other. Because he has to accept the mother, the same as she has to accept him. And if there's a rift right from the word 'go', it could be something that they can never overcome, and the daughter would be in a quandary: whose side must she take? And, uh... oh, it's a horrible situation. I really think so.

Do you think the mother could feel betrayed by her daughter? Do you think she might take this as a personal insult?

Ah... [Thinks]... possibly. Except that the mother has to realize that this isn't fifty years ago, and the modern young people look at it quite differently. And if the mother is... broadminded enough to accept it like that, it might help. But not at the beginning. I think it would take a long time. Very hard. I don't know. I'm not much help to you, Laur, because I really... am too old for this [laughs]. My ideas are perhaps too rigid, and I can't... cope with anything like that happening.

That's exactly what I'm trying to explore. Go on.

Well, I think the initial shock of seeing him... as being a coloured... and I think that alone would blot out anything that you might have felt about meeting him. You might have been, 'Okay, I'm willing to accept him because he's married my daughter,' but when she had visualized an Englishman... a different type of person completely.

But how would you feel?

Very, very upset. And there it would come in where she would think about her daughter, 'How could you do this?' That would definitely come in then.

How might the mother react? I can imagine her trying to ignore the situation, trying to distract herself with serving the food, etc...

I'll tell you, it depends again on the mother. You know, people are so vastly different. She could react in that way, or she could say, 'Would you just carry on. Please excuse me, I'm not feeling well' or something, which would be very, um... traumatic for everyone, but I can understand her feelings. She just can't cope. She can't bear to look at the two of them together, and she's got to get away from it. You know, it depends so much on how you're going to build each character up.

That's exactly why I'm exploring these options with you. I like your idea about her excusing herself, which will also give the other characters time to interact on stage without her.

'Can I accept him?' or 'Give him a chance' or 'What am I going to do for my daughter's happiness?'

When she returns, probably a little calmer, she sees the baby and obviously she's just going to fall in love with this little thing, I mean it's her grandchild...

Yes.

... even if it is a little coffee-coloured child,

Then I don't think so.

No?

No. No, no, no. I don't think so. There would immediately be this feeling... look, a South African, Laur... if they lived in England, maybe it would be accepted. But if they lived here in South Africa, the mother would immediately see this black child – or even “coffee-coloured” as you put it – it would turn her against the child. She could, if they lived and they got on and whatever, grow to love it afterwards, but not immediately. You're going to have this play about what's happening on the one night, uh-uh. No way.

Do you think that she would feel that this child has no connection to her and is no part of her?

Absolutely. Absolutely. My opinion! I might be nine hundred per cent wrong!

There is no right and wrong when we're discussing feelings. Do you think it would make a difference to her if the child's skin were a lighter or darker shade of black? If Chris is coloured, the child could come out pitch-black, or mildly Mediterranean. Do you think it would make a difference to the mother?

[Thinks a while] Ja, I think so.

So if the child were paler, perhaps if he could pass for Middle Eastern or Israeli, would the mother feel better about it?

I would say no. because she's already seen the father and her feelings are already...

'No, this can't be happening'. And seeing the baby the same and thinking 'Oh my God, this is my grandchild'... Uh-uh. Hundred per cent wrong, maybe! I don't know! But that's... we were brought up this way, and that's all there is to it.

When Ilana is out the room, the mother changes the baby's nappy, and discovers he is not circumcised.

[Completes the sentence with me]... not had a bris! Oh! The finishing touch to it! Oh, not acceptable. Not at all. Uh-uh.

Explain?

Because if she's a Jewish mother, been brought up in the faith, and her daughter is Jewish, so obviously the child must be Jewish, why is he not brisled? Then he's not a Jewish baby. Therefore he's not... *really* my grandchild. She cannot accept him as her grandchild.

The daughter explains that it is an old barbaric ritual and she won't put her child through it.

Well, there you are. The daughter has changed to such an extent that she isn't really Jewish anymore so it doesn't matter, let her marry who she likes. As long as they don't live in South Africa, and they keep their distance. Then we'll all get on very well.

Do you think the mother would disown her daughter and say 'You are no longer mine'?

No, you can never say that about your daughter. But you don't want to see them. They mustn't live near you. You can still be very good friends, you can still love your daughter, but you don't have to accept the rest of the family. Right? I don't know. Laur, you're asking me questions that I've never ever thought about before, and it's very hard for me to give... an unbiased opinion.

It's the bias that I'm looking for, Ouma. What do you think the daughter would have to do to 'repent', to be reaccepted by her mother?

Oh. That's hard. Because I would say she's got to decide between her mother and her husband. And, at this early stage of their marriage, she's going to choose the husband. What would happen in a year or two or three is a different story altogether. But at that particular moment, I think she would choose her husband.

How do you feel about the implications of mixed relationships for the Jewish People as a whole?

Well, I'm not at all in favour. That's all I can say.

Why is it important to keep the Jewish people together?

Because... we are Jewish people! And this is our heritage. And the more people drift away, the less Jewish people there are going to be left. I remember one Rabbi – I forget now which one it was – over the years, who spoke about Hitler and he spoke about how his depriving the Jewish people of a future, and he said in any case, we shouldn't really say that he's to blame, because the way the young people are going right now by intermarrying, he said soon there won't be any Jewish people.

Why do we need to be specifically Jewish?

Okay, according to what I would think it's because we are special, [laughs self-consciously] because we are Jews. And that's the main way to look at it. Because that's how we are.

In South Africa today, there is a trend away from this categorization towards an integrated 'Rainbow Nation'. How do Jews fit in here?

Well, I think that's quite obvious. It's just because we are born, and grow up, to be slightly... ag, what is the word I want? Self-conscious. About being Jews. Because we've got this feeling all the time that we are hated. No matter how friendly they are, underneath it all, we know that they hate us. There's just this feeling.

In light of this, back to the play, do you think that Chris and Ilana's marriage can work?

Ay. You know, you spoke about different generations. And that's what makes it so hard to even give an answer. But if you look around, there are quite a lot of blacks married to white women – happily, as far as we know – but, from my point of view, I think no. Their whole upbringings are different. And that's what life is. You live the way you always live, and the way you've been taught. So, their friends are different... just everything about them is different. And it's okay while there's still the bloom of love, but go on to three years or five years or eight years or whatever it is... their ideas *must* diverge. So, no. I don't think it'll be a success. Right or wrong, I don't know. It's just what I think! [Laughs]

In many cases where mixed marriages have worked, it's taken a maturity in acknowledging and respecting the differences (which, I think, these particular characters actually lack), and it also takes a certain amount of assimilation, paring yourself down to the basic human level, stripping away the identities that come with your skin-colour, your religion, your upbringing...

It's too hard.

...to be able to do this to relate to other people is something we have simply learnt to do [in this generation, certainly]. But to sustain this sense of... nakedness for the rest of my life, seems rather... daunting.

I think a lot of it has to do with family, also. If the families are not – on both sides – 100% for them, accepting the coloured man, and accepting the white girl – especially if she's Jewish – that's a big step for them to accept. Don't forget that, without your family... if you're going to just say, 'Well, if you don't like it, that's just too bad' sort of thing, you know... but I think as time passes, you're going to feel it – you've drifted so far away from your family, and why? What for? And I think the same would apply to the others. I don't know, I just... the whole concept of it is beyond me. I just, I can't picture it.

In what ways do you think Chris would stand out in this family?

Well, Laur, it depends on what sort of person he is.

Well, he's not going to know chopped herring from chopped liver, we know that much.

No, exactly! Look, *how* he's grown up, and where. He might be a coloured man who's been to university, who holds a high position somewhere, and is well-educated, and he's more in keeping with the sort of people she's mixed with, but then again, he might have grown up in a very poor area, been a gangster – you know, like these youngsters are, and... um... been on drugs... You never know a person just by looking at them and saying, 'He looks okay'. But there's a lot in their background that's going to make a big difference to their marriage, and will come out at some stage or other.

They fight. They end up screaming, 'I hate you' and swearing at each other. But do they actually hate each other? Or love each other? Or are they simply unable to relate to each other? They're all such legitimate possibilities...

I think it's just... people of such different backgrounds, and colour, should never get married in the first place.

Inevitably, the Israel-Palestinian issue will come up.

Well, it's in our background, we've grown up with it: that we think Israel is ours. And we resent them trying to take it away from us... for no specific reason, only because... I don't know what they think. Why they should think that it belongs to them when it doesn't. It was all... to start with, when we were given Israel, it was all politics, because... having the Arabs, Palestinians, whatever they called themselves at that stage, refugees... that was the bases of the whole argument, even 'til this day. But it wasn't – I don't need to repeat it, everyone knows – they were there for political reasons, not because of anything else. And the Arabs are so clever that they have used that against us ever since, although they themselves know why the refugees were left there.

The ANC has historically aligned itself with the PLO. How does this affect your view of the government?

Well... uh... I don't like the ANC. That's about all it comes to. We've always been, after the war when all this started, we were always Progressive Party members. And I did a tremendous amount of work for them. So we were always against the Nats, who basically... are what the ANC have become – against everyone else. And, that's all I can say. That we just don't agree with their policies; we think that whatever they do

is... um [laughs]... just not right. Just, switch that thing off a minute, I want to tell you something.

[I convince her to tell the story on record]

We had an Indian, Danny, at the reception [of her retirement complex]. You know him? You've seen him there? Oh, anyway, he's been there for... so many years that nobody can even remember. A most... such a charming man, so helpful, so loyal, so... everything that you could wish for, in an Indian man. And yesterday, completely out of the blue, he was called into the office, and he was told, 'You are now 65, and it's our policy that at 65, you have to resign, and you've got 'til the end of the month, and then you are out'. Just like that. And *everybody* is so totally disgusted about this, and furious. And there's nothing we can do. We're making a collection for him, but what's the good of that? He's an ordinary... what could he have earned, working as a... well, not a receptionist, that's not the word... but what could he have earned? He can never get a job at this age! And everyone's so... angry about it. But, as we were told (it's supposed to be in confidence, but you know, everyone knows) that it's the ANC. They must get rid of the whites and they must get rid of the Indians. Everything is for the blacks. So, that's a case in point. No wonder we don't like them. So, it was just... something that could well answer your question.

Thank you. Just to return to the Israel-Palestinian situation, how could one respond to South African friends who say things like, "After the Jews fought so valiantly against the oppression of the apartheid government, how can you be doing the same thing to the Palestinians in Israel?"

By telling them: 'You are SO ignorant! All you do is read the Palestinian and the Arab propaganda' And why do they know all about the propaganda? Because the Arabs – who can count their wealth? What have the Jews got? How can they [Jews], at any stage, state their case, anywhere in the world, when the Arabs have got all this money? They've been... do you remember at one time, when they sent representatives or ambassadors, or whatever it was, I can't remember... to every single country in the world to state *their* case and to say how bad the Jews were. And we had no way of counteracting it, this. And we were told at one meeting that – you know, as South African papers, they're all in favour of the Arabs, and the poor Jews are nothing – one of our leading men went to see the editor of one of the papers (you must have heard of this?) and he spoke to him, a heart-to-heart talk, and he said, 'Why are you doing this?' and the reply was, 'We only work here. We're only the editors and so on'. He

said, 'We were told, "This is the policy we've got to follow"' and that's all there is to it. So how do we fight against it? So, there's your answer.

And, finally: I was born and bred in South Africa – a third generation South African, yet spiritually I feel – and have been taught – that Israel is my homeland. So which is my home?

That's something that you have to decide yourself. No one can advise you. How deep are your feelings for Israel? Because here [SA], you've got to stop and think, is there any future for you? Probably not. So you've got no option, so you go to Israel.

What about yourself - you were also born in South Africa? Where do you feel most at home?

Well, we've never considered Israel, because we grew up in the good years, when there was never any trouble – we were always accepted, even from 1994 when the change came over everyone, it hardly affected us. So we really are total South Africans. And we love Israel. It's our country, we used to be so happy to go and visit there, but never considered it as our actual home.

So you considered it your country, but not your home.

Yes. Ja, that's what I would think. I mean the younger people have different educations and... they would think differently, as you do.

Thank you so much for your time. I think I have what I need.

Interview with Anonymous (77), 16 April 2005.

Anonymous was born in Durban to Jewish parents. She married a Jewish man and had two sons, both of whom married Jewish women. She has five grandchildren. When her first husband died she married a Jewish widower with two children and four grandchildren, all Jewish.

Tell me a little about your background.

Both my parents were Jewish. I was born in Durban. My mother was born in Durban; my father was born in Rustenburg. My mother's parents came from Liverpool, so they were very English, and my father's parents came from Poland, so there was always a sort of a – thing – about the two families. Anyway, we grew up – we knew there were *yontevim*, we knew about Shabbat, but that's about as far as it went. We had, as we called it, Passover with the family – we did have Passover with the family. With the extended family. We never had it at home. My mother never did it. She never organized it at all.

What do you mean by “this thing” between the two sides of your family?

What I'm saying is, my grandmother [maternal] was very snobbish, and she didn't actually want my mother to marry my father because she didn't think he was good enough for her, et cetera. But anyway, they actually sent her away for a year, to be away from my father because they really didn't want her to get married. He was a wonderful man, actually. Really wonderful. The only thing that they didn't like about him was the fact that they didn't like his father. Well, I don't know that they ever met his mother. I certainly didn't, because she died in the flu epidemic, which is a long time ago, so... So his father (being my grandpa on my father's side) was very foreign to us in that we hardly knew him at all. He used to come for holidays... we hardly knew him. It was quite sad that I think about it now. You know, I remember him, but I hardly knew him.

Why did you never get to know him?

Because he was different. He was different from our upbringing; the way we were brought up. First of all, as my mother would have put it – [laughs] I don't want you to put this down! – he didn't speak... as they spoke.

That's important. May I use that?

Yes, of course you can! Yes. Yes, you can. Well, he spoke with a Polish accent. He was foreign. He was foreign. You know what I mean. My mother just didn't understand him either, quite frankly.

Did you go to a Jewish school?

No, I didn't. As a matter of fact, I was at Girl's College, so it was very... only a few Jews were allowed to go there anyway. And they had to have their own prayers. At the very end, the last couple of years, we went to communal prayers, but up to that stage, we didn't go. We used to have our prayers in a separate room, totally apart. And although we were invited to the girls' sort of... parties... some of us weren't even invited to parties of various types of... towards the end, we realized that the reason was: we were Jewish. At least, we took it as that was the reason: we were Jewish. Then we made our friends amongst the Jewish girls that were there.

Tell me about how you met your first husband.

I was very friendly with a family in Durban, Gevisser. Related to Johnny Gevisser. And Daphne and I had been friends for years and years. She didn't go to Girl's College, although we were still friendly. And Daphne came to my brother's wedding and she met a chap, a doctor from Heilbron, called Lazer Walk, who was very friendly with [her future husband]. And they got engaged. And then [future husband] came to Durban – he was in the army, he was a medical officer in the army, they qualified together – and he phoned me up and said to me, 'It's [name], here.' So I said, 'Who you?' [laughs]. 'Who's [he]? I've never heard of [him].' 'Oh, you mean you've never heard of Churchill?' That was the answer! Anyway, as it happened I had somebody else at the house that night, having dinner with us. And he said to me won't I come down and see him on the hospital ship – he wasn't actually on the ship, but there was a party on the hospital ship. And I asked this other chap if he would like to go down, and he would, and we went down to the hospital ship, and that's how I met him.

How religious are you?

Well, to put it that way, I know I'm Jewish. I believe in God, I... [she doesn't seem to know what to say]

What does being Jewish mean to you?

[Thinks]... that I'm different from other people. You know, that I've got my own... that I'm apart from other people.

And is that a good thing or a bad thing?

It's good. I just feel... I feel better... the fact that I am. That I'm Jewish. I don't know if I did as a young girl at school, I don't. But today, I feel it's good that I'm Jewish and it's good that my children are Jewish. And they actually are sort of, more kosher than I ever was. [First husband's] mother – it sort of repeats itself a little bit – was, as my mother would call her, foreign. She came from Lithuania. And my mother had nothing in common with her whatsoever. But she used to come and visit us and she was very *frum* and she kept her own *kashrut* kitchen out – I wanted to keep kosher, I offered to keep kosher when we first got married, and [first husband] said no, he didn't want to, we had no money and he just didn't... want it, so we just didn't keep kosher. But when she came, we kept pots and whatever aside for her and she did her own cooking. So, as I say, I don't think I really got to know my mother-in-law either, from that point of view, you know? Because I was brought up that she was, you know, different to me. Sounds terrible, doesn't it?

So you feel that, because you're Jewish, you're different. And that's a positive thing.

Yes.

But in the history of your family, whenever someone has been 'different', it's been taken as a negative thing.

Right. It was just my mother who kept on saying, 'I've got nothing in common with her', sort of thing. 'She's different'. You know, 'She's from Lithuania; I'm from Durban' and you know, she had a fancy sort of upbringing, and she had nothing to talk to my mother-in-law about. A totally different person. She was snobbish, my mother was very snobbish. But she never got away from the fact that she was Jewish. She never tried to act like she wasn't Jewish! She was Jewish! But... Jewish in a different way.

What is your opinion on the concept of the Jews as the 'Chosen People'?

[Thinks] Ja, I think it's right in that... what we're taught. It's correct, in what we're taught. And we look back on the Bible and whatever. It's correct. We *are* the chosen people, and I sort of feel that we are, that's why I said we're different.

How do you think the rest of society feels about that?

They don't like it. They feel that we're above them. No, not really above them. They feel... we're a nuisance. We always do better than they do when it comes to... if we *want* to, when it comes to business, although we're a small minority, most of us live very well, and... and I don't think that they particularly like us. They feel that we are different, which we *are*.

You've used the word "they". Who do you have in mind?

The non-Jewish people.

Any group/s in particular?

No.

In this country, race plays a big factor. How would you describe the relationship, say, between 'The Jews' and 'The Blacks'?

I think the Jews tend to be patronizing. Especially now. They feel they've got to be nice to them, to the blacks, because they've had such a tough time. They've really had a tough time, and I feel... ja, I think they feel sympathetic towards the blacks. At least, I know I do. I feel... I don't know how, quite frankly, I lived the way I lived in this country, and just sort of ignored everything and went along my own way and didn't worry about the fact that they were sitting on different seats and standing in different queues and whatever. And I think now that it's, that times have changed, and I look back on it and I think, 'God, how could I have ever... lived like that?'

Do you think there is now equality in South African society?

Yes, I do. I do.

How do you feel about my generation and the way we mix between races?

No, I'm pleased about that. I wouldn't like to see intermarriage, though.

Why not?

Well, mainly because... the way they live is totally different to the way we live. We have – especially the Jews, I'm talking about the Jews, in particular – I mean, now we're having Pesach, and you would have to bring your black friend... depending whether he wanted to come, he probably wouldn't want to come anyway, he might feel embarrassed to come, you know, because... it comes back to that same word, different. They're different.

What would happen if I brought a black guy to the *seder*?

Your mother would probably accept him. [Her second husband] would hate it.

Because he's a generation before and was brought up differently. Your mother is

already on the outskirts of the generation, put it that way. She would probably accept it, but in her heart of hearts, she wouldn't like it. She wouldn't admit that she didn't like it. But she wouldn't like it. And people at the table – other people – would probably feel embarrassed. Oh, they'd be very polite to him, but they'd be “nice” to him, but they would wish he wasn't there. Because he's just not part of us. Apart from that, his colour.

Talk about that.

Well, first of all, I like to see blacks and whites together, but I hate to think of blacks and whites marrying each other. Because of the children. They aren't white and they aren't black. As [her current domestic worker] calls them, they're “mixes”. And, well, the whole world is turning that way. I can see that it is turning that way. [Thinks] It sounds a bit Germanic to say that – white is white and black is black! It sounds very German [laughs] but I just like to see a white girl marrying a white guy, and a black marrying a black girl.

Having noted that link to Nazi Germany, don't you think that the Jews should be the first to embrace looking beyond races?

Oh yes. Oh yes, I agree with you. But I don't think they should marry each other.

[Explain Sylvia-Ilana background]. How do you think Sylvia is feeling in Act One, just before Ilana arrives?

Well, make it as though it's my daughter... well first of all I couldn't make it as though it was my daughter because it couldn't happen that I wasn't in touch with my daughter for five years so that's out. She's probably... she probably wonders whether... are they all going to come to the dinner?

Yes.

Well, she's probably got very mixed feelings. I can't think what she could be feeling.

Chris is coloured. Reaction?

Well, she'd react very badly, I would think. The fact that she'd been away so long, and she didn't even, she didn't tell her that she was marr– living with this coloured, married to this coloured man. And, uh, she feels – she just feels – totally – apart. She doesn't know how to react.

How do you think she might deal with this not knowing what to do with herself?

Probably busy herself at the table and sort of – ignore them. Tell them where they were seated and just... ignore them. I don't think she'd try to explain to him what it

was about. She might, but I think she'd feel totally embarrassed in front of her friends. The fact that he wasn't white and he wasn't Jewish.

What do you think the friends might think of her?

I think they would think the fact that they hadn't been in touch... they would have no respect for her. And they might feel that was the reason that the daughter married a black man. I don't think they'd feel very close to the hostess. Well, I wouldn't. If I was a guest, I'd feel very embarrassed. I would also be embarrassed for her. The fact that she had to put up with all this.

Mother calms down. Now can she accept it?

Well, depending on the person. Some people would find it easy to accept, because she's got a grandchild, from them. And others wouldn't. I mean, there's two sides to it. They probably would accept the child. I'm not so sure they'd accept the husband, but they'd accept the child. I think she would accept the grandchild. She would accept it.

Even though it's coloured?

I happen to know someone who had a coloured grandchild.

A Jewish person?

No. And they had this, uh... their daughter had this affair with a coloured guy. And they actually brought this child up. Not Jewish people. They accepted the grandchild. And they accepted the daughter as well. I don't know what happened to the boyfriend, I mean I can't tell you about... well, I didn't know them that well.

Child not brisned.

I think she'd be very upset.

Why?

Because, although the child is coloured, the child is Jewish. And I just think that she'd feel very upset about the fact that her daughter... I don't know, it, it was just... for me it would be a messy relationship. You might not feel that way. In my generation they would feel that way.

Daughter argues against circumcision because it's anachronistic and barbaric.

Mother's reaction?

Oh, she'd... I'd be... furious. She'd be, she'd be, well, I... if it was me, I'd be very cross.

What would you say to the daughter?

I'd say that the child is Jewish, because you're Jewish, and it's just one of those things that the child should be circumcised. Otherwise the child is not Jewish.

If the daughter's Jewish, the child is Jewish anyway by birth?

[Starts to laugh] If it was me, I'd walk away! I would be speechless. Depending on how I'd brought up this daughter. That's also another point – how I'd brought her up. Whether I'd brought her up in a kosher home... it makes a vast difference. Or whether I'd sort of ignored Judaism... if I'd been brought up... like I was brought up, put it that way. But if I had brought her up as a Jewish girl, in a Jewish home, and she turned around and said that to me, I would have been in... very upset.

Can Chris and Ilana's marriage work?

It certainly couldn't work in the environment with the mother around. It might work in London, possibly it would work. It would work. But it wouldn't work... in Durban. It couldn't work there.

Why not?

Because we just... aren't brought up like that. It's... we... people can't accept that. And everybody's worrying about what people would think all the time. That's half the problem. It just wouldn't work here.

You say that's the problem – is this a problem that we should be looking to solve?

Yes, it is. We're always worried about what other people think, instead of getting on with our lives. If you live in a big city, you're not bound by what people think, and you mix with people who are like you, so you'd probably find some other people who've sort of... intermarried coloureds. And they'd all mix together, and they'd all be very happy. If they lived, like, in Durban or Johannesburg, or somewhere like that, I don't think the marriage could last, 'cause the mother... it just couldn't last. Well, that's my opinion anyway.

Inevitably, the Israel-Palestine issue will come up.

It might not upset his wife; his wife might take his side, because she's very, you know... she's in a state because the mother hasn't accepted him, so it's quite possible that although she might be pro-Israel, she'd... just to irritate everybody, she's going to be on his side. But I think the father and the mother would be absolutely... if they weren't furious already they'd be a thousand times more furious! They wouldn't know how to get through the seder.

They probably wouldn't ask him to leave; what *would* they do?

I think just ignore him. They've got guests there, and they don't want to make the guests uncomfortable, either. So they probably would ignore him. Try and sort of... not take any notice of what he's saying.

Maids – opinions, observations

Well I think it's [relationship between maids and 'madams'] better now than it was before. I think we realized before, when I was much younger, we were underpaying them. And they were quite happy – they appeared to be happy with their lot but they probably weren't happy with their lot at all. I like to feel that they're friends. One wonders what they're thinking about – whether they really are your friend or they aren't your friend – because they've been through so much. And I think the first thing a person – not particularly me, but – well, perhaps me as well – if something goes missing in your house, you always think, 'Ooh!' you know, 'it's the maid'. That sort of thing. Unless you've had her an awful long time and then of course you, you don't think that way. But if she's new, and suddenly something's gone, 'it's the maid'. You know, 'she must have taken it'. And you know, you don't... it's hard to trust them. Because their thinking is so different to yours. And I think the older they are, the more I get on with them. Perhaps because I'm old now. And I get on with them better when they're older than when they're younger. I think perhaps... I think more like they do now. When I got married, I had... we had like... when we moved into our house in Westville we had four servants – which was absolutely ridiculous when I think about it now. We had a nurse/nanny, and we had a cook, and we had a "houseboy" [she mimes quotation marks with her fingers], and a garden boy. And they all lived in this *kaya* at the back of the house. And they all came from different places: the garden boy came from somewhere... and he was a Zulu, the girl came from... the cook-girl was a coloured – she was elderly, and a coloured, the nanny was also a Zulu, and the other one was from... not Zimbabwe... anyway, he came from [inaudible]. He was on a sort of "special wage" because... we managed to get him because... he was actually working without a permit, so... I mean, we paid him, but we were always nervous in case he got picked up or something.

Did you ever have a fall out with any of them?

I never ever fell out with any of them. I used to get upset with them if they suddenly upped and went. You know. Then I used to feel very upset. That they'd sort of... let me down. Then I felt all... everything I've done for them, and they've done nothing for me. You know, you get that... that was my attitude. Whereas it's not like that

now. You know, one's attitude changes, because... because it's just gotta change. Because you realize that they... they're as good as you are.

Any personal tensions or conflicts?

I had one some time ago with one called Alice. She used to walk up and down, looking at [her second husband]. [She laughs] [He] thought she fancied him or something. Anyway, she... and then one day she called me into the kitchen and... [long story; honestly I think its irrelevant. Possibly explained by the next line]... I don't know, I think there was something wrong with her. Anyway, one day I came home and [husband] called out, 'she's going!' [Laughs] 'She's going!' [Laughs some more]. Because you couldn't get rid of them, even in those... you know, it's always, I'm talking about like ten years ago – you couldn't just tell them that they had to go. But there was definitely... she wasn't normal. But I've never, I've never really... fallen out with them – not, and maybe – ja, maybe I have, if they've broken something. I was really upset with [current domestic worker] the other day, because she was cleaning one of my plates – which I didn't ask her to clean, anyway, she was busy cleaning it – it belonged to my granny. And I came home and it was lying there in so many pieces. And I said to her, 'What have you done?' 'Oh,' she said, 'it fell out of my hands.' Well, I was – I didn't say anything to her – but I was upset because I feel I'd lost something that belonged to – that was like a hundred years old – that belonged to my granny and I was very attached to it. But I never turned around to her and said, [puts on very childish voice:] 'it belonged to my granny' and 'blah-blah-blah'. I didn't say. I just said, 'it was very old.' That's all I said. But... they break things. Or they mess up things. You know, you buy pots and they're beautiful pots and then you find that they're all scratched at the bottom. You haven't bothered, because they – I mean you feel, well, they – they didn't have to buy them, they didn't have to lay out the money for them, so they just haven't looked after them. Whereas, if they had bought them themselves, they would have looked after those things. And you get fed up. I mean but you really should have been doing these things yourself anyway. [Another worker] walked out the other day.

Why?

'Cause [husband] spoke to her badly.

What did he say?

I wasn't in the room when he said it.

What does he say he said and what does she say he said?

He said, he just said, he just spoke to her crossly, I think. I don't know what it was about. And when I came in, he said, 'Oh, [she's] cross with me'. And the next thing, she, she, she just came in... and she took her coat, and [he] said to me, 'she's gone.' I said, 'what rubbish.' Well, she is. She left.

Where did she go?

She went home.

And she came back?

Mmm. She came back. The next day. And not a word. Not a word, not an apology, not 'I'm sorry'... and [he] took her back because, you know, he sort of depends on her.

He likes her. So he took her back.

Has anyone else ever walked out?

No. [Laughs uncomfortably] They usually die.

Talk about that.

Of Aids. No, I've had about... first of all, I had Agnes, who was really sick. And I think she picked up Aids from her husband, because she had... she had TB as a child, and that's why she – remember Agnes? – and that's why she had this hump, and I actually didn't realize she had TB until long after I took her on. And then she started coughing and coughing and coughing. And then she got thinner and thinner and thinner. And I took her to the doctor several times, and they kept saying to me, 'it's her heart. It's her heart.' But I think... and then we heard that her husband had died of Aids. You know, by that stage she'd gone home already. And she died. She died of Aids, and then the next one I took on... now she, she knew she had Aids when she came. That irritated me – the fact that she knew, and she – well, it irritated me yet you feel you can't blame her, 'cause she needed the job. And then she had TB. She had... apparently, according to the girls downstairs [in the servants quarters], they said that she'd been taking tablets for TB, which I didn't know about. I only found out towards the end, when she was so ill... that she had Aids. She had this... she had Aids for like nine months. I actually got her through an advert. These people – 2 girls – had her, and they raved about her cooking, well, she actually had, she actually was a very good cook.

Who was this?

Um, I think her name was Eunis. And she was young. And when she came to me, I said to her, 'What size uniform do you take?' and she said, 'I take a 38. I used to be a 44.' Well, then I should have really... hooked on to the idea that she wasn't well.

And, I mean, these people who recommended her – I just couldn't believe that, that they recommended her, knowing that [husband] was in... that we were both old, not only [him], we were both old. And that they should have recommended someone who had TB to us! But they did. And they must have known because they looked after her and paid for her hospitalization and everything, these people. But she – she died. She was desperately ill and she died. She was with me for like nine months. And then I had Maria, who used to... irritate [husband]. She was bossy, but she was very efficient. And I liked her for the fact that she was efficient.

Weren't there moments of conflict with Maria?

Yes, she told me that [husband] was a liar. She said, 'he's lying'. [He] walked into the kitchen and saw her cooking with, with... fat, you know, frying something with Holsum, or whatever she used – and I didn't use Holsum, she must have had some of her own – he said to her, 'look, you don't, you don't fry meat with that, you fry meat with oil, if you're going to fry meat at all.' And anyway, I came into the kitchen afterwards, I said 'the boss says you're frying meat with fat and I don't like you to fry meat with it.' She said, 'Well, boss is a liar!' When we told [him], [he] said he had to have an apology, a written apology from her. And [he] told her to go and she started crying, I said she didn't want to go, and she didn't want to go, and so on.

Why do you think she didn't want to go?

Because she had a job. And she was getting paid well. And it's a good job. And, uh, she, uh, eventually I told her that I was going to America [annual one-month visit] and that I'd like her to sort of... to take some leave before I went away, so that she wouldn't be tired or anything while I was gone, and about two weeks before I was due to go to America, she turned around and said, 'I'm leaving at the end of the month'. So I said to her, 'Maria, you know I'm going away, and to start looking for somebody else at this stage is not easy,' so she said, 'I know you're going, but I'm still leaving.' So – and she went. And I said, 'well, if you're leaving, you can leave now. Right this very minute. Don't have to wait 'til the end of the month, you just... go.' And she was the one who caused us a lot of aggravation, from that point of view. She wasn't nice. She really wasn't a nice person. And funnily enough, afterwards, the son came to me and he said to me, he can't understand his mother. Because he said, 'you know, she hasn't got any money' and he has to keep her, and he wants to get married – nice, really nice chap – and now he can't get married because his mother hasn't got a job, and... [inaudible].

Sorry that we ran a little over time. Thank you very much – this has been very useful.

Interview with Val Mardon (49), 21 April 2005.

Valerie Jacobson was born in 1955 to South African Jewish parents. She married Dorian Mardon (not Jewish), whom she later divorced. She and Dorian have a twenty-three-year-old son, and a nineteen-year-old daughter, neither of whom are married.

This turned into more of a discussion than an interview, so it may appear slightly disorganized. I began by telling her about my project and we took it from there. Sandy [Val's sister and an ANC cadre] was in exile for about five to six years – it was political. And she married a coloured man. And I remember my mom going to see them and saying to me, 'What do I do when I meet him? Do I kiss him? Do I–', I said, 'Do what you feel!' She actually did kiss him and grew quite fond of him, but it was a... a shock. The first time I saw her [Sandy], we didn't know what to expect, when she came back. She came back for a meeting – she was in Durban for an ANC meeting. I just cried when I saw her. She was so thin. Ja, you've got to get reacquainted... so much has happened, so much water under the bridge... people's lives change.

Judaism in your background?

I grew up orthodox. I used to go to *shul* every Friday night with my grandfather, and most Saturday mornings as well. Under duress [smiles]. Well, it got worse as I got older. We had Shabbat every Friday night. Then I went to boarding school when I was about eleven, and we used to go to *shul* every Friday night as well. There were a handful of us – maybe five Jewish girls in the whole school. I did go to, in the olden days, Sharona⁴. We moved around quite a lot, so mostly non-Jewish schools I went to. I can remember once, there were two Jewish girls in the class, and we were told that we... had killed Christ. Just after a scripture lesson. But, ja, the family was quite close, and it was always... there was always family there. And there were functions, and we always used to go to that – under duress – ja, we hated it, as we got older. Because all the cousins were much younger, or much older. So it was just us and we found it very boring. I married out – of the faith, obviously. At the time, probably, quite a bit being *dufka*. But there's more background to that... I felt comfortable with

⁴ Jewish pre-primary and primary school, no longer in existence.

the man, and... but I never lost my Jewish identity, and my Jewish roots and when I used to read *Hashalom*⁵, it made me very sad. I felt very strong bonds and ties and it used to really tug at my heartstrings. Then, when my son was born, he had to have a *bris*. And there was a bit of a to-do about it, which annoyed me very much. From my family, my mom's side. And again, *dufka*, I said I wasn't doing the whole thing at the hospital, and staying, and hiring a room, and doing the whole big *megillah*⁶, so what we did is we got the orthodo- [catches herself] the reform rabbi, and a Jewish doctor came to my house, and performed the *bris*. In hindsight, well, it was really stupid. But that's how I felt. You know, it was a looong process.

Why do you think, in hindsight, it was stupid?

It wouldn't have made any... it wouldn't have been any... more difficult, or... I think I just was still so anti the family, and anti the establishment...

What do you think made you anti?

Yo, you wanna go right back? Jewish boys. I didn't quite like them. I didn't, I didn't know... I went to school with them at one stage... I'd never really come across any Jewish boy that I particularly... fancied... identified with... um... I don't know! It's hard to actually... to analyze, but as I say, all the schools that I went to were mostly non-Jewish, and those girls were my friends. And yet... like, for example, your mom and I have been friends for how many years? We've never lost that. And, in fact, if I look now, all my good friends, 90% of them, are Jewish. Ja. So it's been a whole kind of come-back. I'm not religious, never will be. I'm not particularly observant. But I am Jewish, and now... When I went to Israel – I've been to Israel... I don't know, two or three times – the last time I went was on a conference in 1992 – it was the most amazing experience of my life. I just felt like... I felt like I'd come home – although it was strange. The culture was different, and it just felt... ja, I just felt like I belonged there. And I met women – your mother went on that one as well, I think – I met women from 25 different countries – Jewish women, people who'd come from behind the Iron Curtain who'd never had a Friday night.

And did they consider themselves Jewish?

Yes, yes! And women from Turkey who were not allowed to be Jewish, who were not there officially. It was a huge... it was an amazing... it had an amazing impact...

Defining moment?

⁵ Durban Jewish Community Newspaper.

⁶ Literally a scroll (of law); in this instance, substitute 'palaver'.

Yes, it was a defining moment.

How did you meet your ex-husband?

I met him through a school friend. I was fifteen at the time. He's six years older than me. We dated for a long time on and off – my mother... if I wanted to go out with him on a Saturday night, I had to go out with a Jewish guy on Friday night! And so it was kind of... it was quite torn. And this kind of went on, and the more fuss my mother made, the more... determined I think I became.

What sort of message were you trying to send to your mother by doing that?

Butt out. Leave me alone. I remember when I was eighteen, she said to me, 'One day you're going to look back and wonder what you ever saw in him.' I married him! When I was twenty-three. I knew when I was walking down the aisle that I had made a mistake. But anyway, let's just go back... to the... being Jewish in a non-Jewish environment. Even with his family, it was always... awkward. I always... inside I always felt different. Being Jewish is...is... it's not just a way of life, it's a way of thinking, it's a way of... being... feeling... um... it's hard to define it. It's a responsibility.

Meaning?

If you're going to have Jewish children.

Do you think that's important?

Having Jewish children?

Yes.

That's a difficult one, because my children are Jewish – yet are they?

That's the thing. It's different for a woman, because *halachically* her children may be Jewish, but how much of Judaism is in the blood and how much in the upbringing? Like, for example, won't Ilana's child be Jewish whether or not she chooses to bring him up religiously?

In Judaism, the family is... and that's something that a lot of non-Jewish families don't... okay, if she'd married a Jewish guy, she wouldn't have brought the child up the same way. Okay, she would have changed the nappies the same way, and that kind of thing, but the people that they mixed with, the experiences, the going to shul, the participating in all the different chaggim and whatever... that wouldn't be there.

Unless it came from the mother's side. My kids had it because they had it from school. And sometimes my family used to invite us, and sometimes they didn't. My kids have been forced to learn Hebrew and Jewish Studies, which I think they've both

resented, but I think they've learnt a lot. In many ways. Especially exploring the history and the laws – that doesn't mean to say they abide by them, but they know about them and understand them. If she... ja, having a non-Jewish husband, generally speaking, depending on how intelligent the man is... why would he be... why would he have any interest in having his child have a Jewish identity?

I don't think he would. In the world today, at least in the western world, there's this tendency towards multiculturalism. And I buy into that, but at the same time, it doesn't always work. There must be a reason for that.

Our identity. Ethnic identities. [Thinks] Ja, I'm just trying to think from my perspective. If I'd married a Jewish man, there would have been more... like, little things. Like using Yiddish. Dorian did learn it over the years; he had to learn. He eventually did learn what the different things meant, through the kids and through myself. It's, it's the finer points... a lot of stuff you can't share.

Like?

It's so hard to define it! He wouldn't understand Friday night, the significance of Friday night, of being together as a family, lighting the candles, going to shul... I mean, his attitude is, 'No religion dictates to me!' So, whenever I've tried to insist that the kids do anything Jewish in the past, I've never had his support. Never. He's always said, 'If you don't want to, you don't have to.' And 'It's a lot of nonsense' and blah. You know. So there's always been that sort of lack of... They've had Christmas. They don't know much about Jesus, but they know they get presents. And they've enjoyed Easter... Ja, there's nothing wrong with knowing about both, *but* a lot of people say if you bring them up as something, you give them something, then they can choose. But in today's society I think we like to choose the easier road. We like to choose something that doesn't demand too much of us, too much effort. We haven't got the time, we haven't got the energy, and we haven't got the inclination. And we don't – also, especially children who have not been brought up in a Jewish home, they don't identify that much with the tradition. Cos often they don't know about it, or they haven't experienced it. So that's a whole 'nother issue on its own.

Some kids are brought up with knowledge of the tradition, but they still may be left with this feeling of knowing what it is, but not believing it.

Yes.

God is a big question in the post-modern world.

Yes. A question of faith.

Do you believe in God?

Ja, I do.

Do you have any reason to?

Well, you just got to look around you at nature... ja, it's more we convince ourselves.

I can't convince myself I believe in a Jewish God. For me, at least, there's definitely a higher power out there...

Yes.

...but where I have trouble reconciling it is when it comes to the Jewish God. I mean, the Jews as a 'chosen people' makes my eyebrows go up and I don't know why, and I need to understand that...

It's almost embarrassing.

Yes, and I think that's why Ilana... I think it's got something to do with that sort of, 'Oh, God, not now...' approach to the religion.

But then, maybe also you need to look a little into the mother's background.

She's a rather controlling personality... she's...

Part of the problem.

It's a big problem. She's losing control and at one point I think she loses it completely.

Ja, we're brought up very much with the shoulds and the shouldn'ts, the ought-tos, and the... Jewish guilt. Because we're not good Je... not good *enough* Jews, especially. I have that guilt, because I know I don't make the effort to go to *shul* on a Friday night – maybe a couple of times a year – I finish work late and it's a schlep. Saturday morning? No ways. I'm doing my shopping, and I'll sleep in, or I've got something to do, so... but I still identify strongly... as a Jew. What is it? What is it? Is it a superstition? Not quite, I don't think so. A superstition's more... borne more of ignorance, I think. It's the wrong word. Ja, I'm very torn, I feel very guilty, when I look at my kids and I think, 'It's your fault.' It is my fault. I didn't... I didn't enforce stuff, I didn't make them do stuff, we did... we mostly did what was easiest for us. And to avoid conflict. Like for Pesach. I would buy *matzah*, but they could choose whether they ate it or not.

Would there be bread in the house?

Yes, there'd be bread because Dorian would want bread. So... for example, I've been invited out for Pesach – I was invited to a few places... my kids don't want to come. So I go. And it happens a lot. I know that they both fast... it's kind of weird.

It's a pick-and-choose. I don't think there's anyone, with the exception possibly of the rabbi, who keeps everything, and it's a question of people choosing what's meaningful for them to do.

I think also as one get older, as you lose the sort of... *dufka-ness*... that kind of attitude, as you get older and you broaden your horizons, and... you start looking at things differently, perhaps, and... this is hard to explain! My sister and I suffered very strongly from '*dufka-ness*', both of us. Very strongly.

I think teenagers of any religion tend to do that – it's something to do with testing boundaries of your identity. But to a certain extent... I think it's getting worse.

Ja, but our world's changing so rapidly.

That's the thing! That's why identities change with the world. I think it's exacerbated, because before, like a hundred years ago, when the Jews were living in the *shtetles*⁷, so you'd try to rebel, but you're rebelling within a Jewish world, so the mother goes, 'Okay, so he's rebelling.' Whereas today, you're rebelling by taking the future of Judaism into your hands.

By not practicing it.

And by marrying out. And I think that makes the older generation very fearful. I don't blame them.

Why are they so fearful?

Because assimilation is so rapid that... it's like sticking to like. It's that kind of... I mean, the Indian people, their different religions, their different castes... they're very similar. It's a similar concept. I also... I also don't believe in God as a Jewish God, either. I also have a very, I think, different concept of God... It's hard to explain. It's very hard... I think a lot of people – everyone has their own... concept.

And I think parents often try to impose theirs on their children, which is what I think this mother has done.

Well, she's been told that she'd better... you know, that she must have Jewish children. To be a good Jew.

But she did. And now she cannot control her children anymore. And now her daughter hasn't... don't forget the daughter's husband isn't only not Jewish but coloured, too. How is the mother going to react?

⁷ Small villages in Eastern Europe

She's probably going to go... *white*. Or red. Um... she's going to have to bite her tongue, and say something afterwards.

What would she say?

[She makes a comical angry, sort of snarling sound.] 'Fucking...' no, she wouldn't swear! Okay. Um... 'What were you thinking?! What... I mean... what do you see in this man?? What have you got in common with him?'

And if her response is, 'Mom, he's a loving, caring, sensitive, intelligent...'

'But he's not Jewish! And he doesn't have the same background as you!'

'But we don't need background, Mom. We're not dwelling on the past like your generation; we're forging a future together...'

'What are you giving your child? I mean, what do you, what are you going to be able to teach your child? I mean, what kind of an example...'

'Mom, the world is bigger than Judaism. We can teach him everything else besides religion'

'But you're diluting your heritage. It's, it's, it's... your *duty*...'

'Our heritage as oppressors – the whites who suppressed South Africa...'

And the Holocaust?

And, of course, the Palestinian issue will come up...

I don't know what you think about it, but I find it... repugnant? Your mom would get cross with me. A few of my friends have. I find it embarrassing. That we, who came through such an oppression, could stoop so low... as to be inflicting such pain, and... I'm not, I'm not saying that the Palestinians are totally innocent, for sure! But as Jews... I'm ashamed. And it's *because* we've been through the Holocaust, and *because* we've been persecuted through the ages, that we shouldn't be behaving the same, in the same manner.

But if someone turned to you and told you that, in an aggressive tone, even if you agree with it, would you feel the need to stand up–

Yes! I would. It's a loyalty. Interesting enough, Dorian was always on – like it was with the Iraqi story, he thought Bush was... I was anti and he was pro – and the same with the Palestinians: he was pro the Israelis and 'You go for it!' and... I found it really interesting. He's not Jewish, and... he just... it probably was the violence, and the... but I found it such an embarrassing topic, I really do. But, as you say, when our backs are against the wall, we will protect our own.

I think Ilana needs to come to this realization herself, but I'm not sure how.

It's got to be his criticism – he can do the Palestinians, you can do it of her family, the narrow-mindedness, the... I mean, the mother's obviously being judgmental, and... maybe if they live really well, he might also have a comment, if they have servants, he could have something to say about that... how they've made their money... on the backs of blacks... and what are they giving back to equalize, or to make atonement... freedom of the slaves, you know – Pesach...

There's a maid in this play...

Ooh!

...who's working on *yontif*, which the younger daughter has a major problem with...

Cos it's a Saturday. It's their day off. Maids should... maids have the weekend off. Why should they work? On the one hand. On the other hand, maybe the Madam's paying her overtime? Maybe she asked her. Maybe she actually asked her if... explained to her that this is a family gathering, a religious family gathering, and she really needs some help, and would the maid like to earn some extra money, would she be prepared to? But there are other Jewish people that would just expect it, I know. I've seen it, and it's... it's embarrassing. My grandparents used to have... I don't know how many servants... one guy used to serve at the table with his white, crisp white suit, white gloves, and sash, and towel, you know, over the arm... everything. My gran would ring the bell in between every course... and they still managed to breed an ANC activist! [Laughs].

That's probably why, actually.

That's probably why. Ja. That's the guilt that we felt, growing up. Jewish Guilt. What do we feel guilty about? Why do we feel guilty? Because we haven't performed *mitzvot* [religious commandments], and we haven't... we haven't been observant. We're programmed that way.

But we're programmed into a religion that relies heavily on blind faith. And in today's modern world–

We question things.

–we need to question. And, of course, Pesach with the Four Questions, so questioning becomes a theme in this play.

And the sad part of it is, now, would you want to be going to Israel? Now? 'Next year in Jerusalem'? To visit, maybe.

You know, after *shnat*⁸, I was determined to make *aliyah*⁹... my mother put her foot down. And do you know, looking back, I'm so glad I didn't, because if your family doesn't go with you... and I think this is actually what it comes down to, maybe. It's not even that *Judaism* is so special... but that's my family. And that's the model and the context through which I interact with my family. You know, I dated a non-Jewish boy, very seriously, for three years, and... I knew it would never work... because of the Jewish thing, and because... mainly because we were just so different. And that links to the Jewish thing.

It does! And it's so hard to... so hard to explain!

He came for Friday night, and he didn't know how to put... I mean, it's a round circle of cloth, how hard can it be! But he couldn't get the *kippah*¹⁰ on his head straight. I mean... it's like their brains are so different, their heads are shaped differently! And when we were passing around the wine and the bread, also, I mean, you see everyone taking a sip and a-

It's strange, but I mean it's strange... so he didn't know whether he was supposed to participate or not. [tapes cuts; turn over; may have lost a little. Think we're talking about Dorian again] And he has a lot of respect for that. Ja, it's affected the way he thinks – but he knows, he would never, he said he wouldn't have converted, because you can't become Jewish, by default. You had to grow up in a Jewish environment. To suddenly take on... the taking of a whole new identity... then I suppose if you participate, if you're observant and you participate in communal life, and it becomes a part and a parcel, but I really often wonder about these people who kosher. What they really think. What they really believe. And I remember Rabbi – when Paul had his bar mitzvah, Rabbi actually gave me a lecture, just to say, you know, 'You got to come to *shul* more often, you know, bring the family'. And I said to him, 'So does that mean that people who come to *shul* often... who are adulterers, and who have poor business practice... does it mean, because they come to *shul*, they're better than me?' [Laughs] He was not very happy with me!

How did he respond?

He tried to twist it, answer it diplomatically, you know. 'No, but your children! You must bring your children to *shul*!' And, you know, even when I see him, he always

⁸ Literally 'year'; short for 'Shnat Habonim' – Year of The Builders – a year programme in Israel with the Jewish youth Movement called Habonim (The Builders – of the future).

⁹ To make *aliyah*: to immigrate to Israel (literally "to go up" – Hebrew).

¹⁰ Hebrew: skullcap (Yiddish equivalent *yarmulka* has been used throughout the script).

says to me, 'I never see you in *shul*!' and I say to him, 'I do CSO' [Jewish organization]. But going to *shul*... although it's quite boring, it can be quite a nice social occasion, to see your friends... and it, you know, becomes a nice habit. A comfortable... the thing is, you grow up. And you... ja. I mean, they do encourage us to question, they encourage, they like debate, and...

...within Judaism.

Within, and it's a very patriarchal religion. And maybe one of the daughters won't like that?

[I talk some more about play]

Now would non-Jewish people understand this?

[Talk about audience: international Jewish, vs. cross-cultural South African. I decide on the latter.] Because, of course, there's the maid in this play. And I'm not sure whether she's going to align herself with Chris, simply because he's coloured—

Yes, she probably will!

No!

Oh, my maid aligned herself with my brother-in- well, ex-late-brother-in-law. She was absolutely fascinated with the fact that this white girl could be married to a coloured guy. He only came to our house once, so... she just deferred to him all the time. Waited on him hand and foot.

Was she older?

Yes.

I wonder if that's got something to do with it. I have visions of paralleling the maid and the mother, who are having huge tensions, but they actually end up standing together, because they're against the younger generation and the maid turns around to Chris, and says, 'How dare you? You African man, fuck off to England and leave us here' – in the same way that the mother's saying that about the daughter.

Ja, that's another interesting... the liberals, the bleeding heart liberals. Where are they? Overseas. People who were in detention, who were conscientious objectors. Where are they? They wanted this government; this is what they fought for. This is what my sister fought for. She was disillusioned. So they run away, and they leave us... with their dream. [Thinks] Why do they go overseas? Better opportunities? I know the job opportunities aren't the greatest, but that's... that could be an excuse.

But this girl [Ilana] ran away and she left her family, or she had a *faribel*... had something. Maybe she just, kind of, chose... went on a different path? Didn't have much in common with them? Couldn't communicate with them? Didn't agree with their values?

I think, though, that deep down inside, she does.

Yes, yes! [She sounds indignant!]

But then, what I have to do now is to create this 'veneer', and then chip it away, bit by bit. Maybe, for example... maybe she comes back with an accent! With a bit of a pommie accent, and through the evening, it wears off? [Is this stepping too far into the director's role?] Clothing plays a big part in the play as well.

Maybe Ilana's gone to England... something to do with fashion design?

Constructing the outer identity, which comes off through the evening. Then, the next morning, all the female characters in the kitchen with their bathrobes – equal, vulnerable, almost naked...

... no make-up on...

Yes! No make-up! Ilana wears a *lot* of make-up, and so does the mother, quite frankly. Good point! But back to the bris...

[She is silent for a while.] Okay. My brother married a non-Jewish girl, and she was never *megaiya'd* [converted to Judaism] – she wanted to at one stage, but the rabbi gave her such a hard time, as he's supposed to – and she very much of a feminist, sort of, 'Fuck you. I don't need your– your– I don't need you to tell me what I can and can't do!' And I was actually worried for my brother, because although he's not observant... it's a similar... it's strange... um, it would have been a problem if it had been a boy. She didn't want him to have a *bris*, she said it was... torture... mutilation... and that would have been *huge* conflict.

So how do you reckon this mother will react?

Well, the thing is that babies... little boys need to be the same as their daddies, so if the husband hasn't had a *bris*... but she also would have done it *dufka*!

Would you say dating non-Jews is like inviting a spanner into the works? It's like inviting something that doesn't fit into a very close-knit group. A family.

Yes and no. But that's also not the only reason to not marry someone... to marry someone! Because they fit in with the family. It's an important component, but.

[Thinks] It just helps if you can both speak the same language.

Yes! I'll bet Chris doesn't understand Yiddish or Hebrew! [We talk about how I can make use of this in the play – will subtitles affect the realist mode I've chosen? How about have a character explain momentarily to another for the audience that don't understand?]

I don't know how to explain it to you. I mean, I'm seeing a Jewish guy and it's so different. Just the ways of the... ways of looking at... it is, it is different. [Tone changes entirely from wistful to decided] But then, if you're with a different person, it'll be different anyway, so...

Back to guilt...

I feel guilty for not being more observant, and not – as I said earlier, being Jewish is kind of a responsibility. It's all intertwined with the guilt – the feeling that you are... beholden, you have to carry on the tradition, and... I don't know. [Whispers – inaudible.] I just look around me at the people at work – there are all sorts. Christian, Catholic... you name it. And a lot of Indians and whatever. And I do find I'm very different. And it's interesting to note that a lot of people don't actually know what a Jew is. They just know that we don't celebrate Christmas, but they don't know why.

Why is Chris and Ilana's marriage not working?

Well, he's going to resent the family closeness. The 'Jewishness'... Maybe the wealth, the affluence, and how it was acquired... Ja, he's going to be very much probably... [sighs], about slavery, and... maybe not even that way... you have to be careful of a South African audience, here. But the pommies are often worse racists than...

And black or coloured pommies?

I don't know! I don't know what they're like...

How do you feel about Jews "airing their dirty laundry in public", so to speak?

Through theatre, for example?

Ja. Yes, we don't air our dirty laundry.

So where does this place me as a Jewish girl writing this play?

Maybe if you're talking more about the influence of Judaism... conflict within a family... Put it in a different way. If these were Catholics, and she'd married a coloured, Balinese, whatever... you'd still have... it's still a different... it's a different race, and a different religion. I mean, you can live together and agree to disagree... on certain issues. But you can't disagree on everything.

And it's just because they're so different that it can't work?

[Thinks] It's the issues – what are the issues? It's the anger, the resentment, the... fact that she actually does feel strongly about being Jewish, she *does* identify.

Does he get... jealous?

Ja! Does he have a religion?

[I Think] ... I don't think so? Well, first of all he's coloured, which is a nice neat literary device for me to indicate that his heritage, his culture, which runs in his actual blood has been diluted. Second of all, he's been transplanted – he's spent all or most of his life in England. Which *could* mean that his family went out to foster and create a little Africa in England, which is possible... but I *think* he's grown up very cosmopolitan, very metropolitan, Londoner...

Okay, I'm just thinking about a coloured girl that I met, who lives in Australia. Ex-South African. I mean, she's just totally Australian. I think all she's got left in South Africa is some family, so...there's nothing South African about her at all! And, in fact, she's had a very good life, though. They went over when they were kids. They had better opportunities...

What do you think could be the defining disagreement for them? I think it's possible that the Israeli-Palestinian thing will *inflame* it, but that's not enough, because if she cared that much, she'd make *aliyah* [I realized later, when typing this, how dismissive I sounded here, and how unfair I am being to Ilana's character, as well as to the part of myself that identifies with her.] I need one thing, one thing where they differ so fundamentally, that is actually going to... *that* is it. *That* is going to cause the split in the relationship.

I just know Dorian and I, we differed very strongly on... it's a silly little thing, family. Um... his mother should have been put in an old age home. I mean, if it had been my mother, she would have been in Beth Shalom [Durban Jewish home for the aged]. But it's not necessarily a religious thing. Like when my mom was so ill – it's more, that's just the way Dorian is. I just think of Morris, who I'm seeing, and Dorian – how different, how totally different they are, I can't... when I got to Joburg, when my mom was so ill, took my kids with me, he phoned me, and he smsd me, and he wanted to know how it was going, and whatever, whatever... and when she was really, really, really, really ill, Morris even offered to come up with me. Now, over all the seven or eight months that I'd been going up and down, backwards and forwards, Dorian never offered to come with me. He never used to phone me. When she was intensive care,

he didn't even phone me. And that's the way he was brought up. It's like... I just don't know! It's just so weird. So something along that line, but not...

Well, that would be very good, but the characters are maybe too young for the parents to need an old age home.

It's a reaction to a situation.

Family values.

Maybe someone comes to visit them. I'm just saying, maybe Chris can criticize somebody important, like a granny or a grandpa, or...

Take a character and elevate them to a status and then have Chris take them down? Possibly too contrived, but maybe?

It's got to be something of value to her, which he criticizes or denigrates.

He has to desecrate her religion. Physically, as well as emotionally. It could be accidental, but he's not repentant.

Well, it could be intentional. I have a chair – I've actually still got it – in my flat, that belonged to my grandmother, it was in her bedroom. And Dorian used to always sit on it and fart [Laughs] 'Stop! Not on my granny's chair!' [Laughs] No, no, no, no. That's too rude! Um... he could just throw something away, or... or do something during the *seder*... that would be totally...

Maybe he gets drunk? 'Ha ha, well, you're meant to have four glasses of wine, ha ha!' Or is that pushing it?

[Thinks] Oh, Easter's gone already, hasn't it? I was going to say maybe he brings Easter eggs to the *seder* or something [Laughs]

Well, normally, they do coincide. He could start teasing the baby with the Pesach Bunny! Confusing the poor child, and Ilana doesn't like any of it. And she tells him, 'Don't do that!' but that just... eggs him on [Laughs].

Oh, hang on a minute. Wait. I can't think – it happens when you get to this age. What was that book? What is that... tradition... that Jews were supposed to... the blood of Christian babies?

The Blood Libel?¹¹

Yes!

Good! Because Chris is a man educated enough to know it's not true, but he's goading her. It starts with facetious comments like that, then he starts on topics where he's actually being serious, like the Palestinian issue.

He's actually anti-Jewish. Well, he's become... he becomes... ja.

¹¹ In the middle ages, Jews were accused of using the blood of Christian babies to make their matzah. In reality, only flour and water are permitted in matzah.

And he loves Ilana, because she doesn't follow her religion. He loves her; he tolerates her background.

And now it's reared its ugly head.

Yes, his opinion is, 'If this is how you want to bring up our child, I want nothing to do with it.'

What a harsh thing to say about your child!

Exactly. Her response will probably be, 'Fine! you're going to have nothing to do with it!'

Oy!

He says, 'I love you, not your family'; she says, 'you can't have one without the other'.

Ja, 'I'm p— they're part of me.'

'My flesh and blood'

Maybe he tells her she's got to choose.

I think with him on the one side and the mother on the other side, she does have to choose.

[Ran out of time]

Interview with Mike Rosenthal (62) September 2005.

Mike Rosenthal was born in Johannesburg to orthodox Jewish parents. He married Michele Levy, who converted to reform Judaism, and later to orthodox Judaism. They have two children: Claire, married to Hilton (Jewish), and David, married to Giselle (not-Jewish). He has two grandchildren.

How do I approach the subject of the *unbrissed* baby?

Well, I can tell you from personal experience that discussing it with a non-Jew – and I don't think it makes any difference whether they're black or white – there seems to be a feeling that there would be a psychological... effect to the child... right through life, which I have read about somewhere – that there are people that think that way – and also they feel it's barbaric. And because their parents, or their brothers or whatever have not been circumcised, that's the way to go. From the Jewish side, obviously, we all get circumcised. Before I came here [for the interview], I looked up to see why. Apparently it's the fulfillment of the covenant which we – between God and Abraham. [Encyclopedia Britannica] Also some very interesting factors were the fact that most religions – except Christianity, funnily enough – they do have circumcision, and it denotes the fact that they're going from boyhood to manhood. It's done normally at puberty.

In your family, you've come to agree that circumcision will be done at some point?

No, no. It was a major fight, between my son and his wife.

Tell me about the emotional side of that argument.

Well, she was more on the basis that it would affect the child psychologically, and his argument was the one so that he could hold on to his Jewishness, even if it wasn't done as a *bris*.

Why does he feel so strongly about this, rather than another way of expressing his link to Judaism?

Well, I think because he's been circumcised, and... I think it's more than religious... it's more a physical factor whereby... cleanliness... and also he expresses quite strongly the fact that he knows that he's already – the child is only, what? two weeks old – but he baths with the child at night and it's a personal factor as to why you're

different to me. I think it would be quite a strong factor. Where, within her family, they're stating, "Well, why should he be different to his grandfather, and his uncle?" [He chuckles] And then you can go into that he's not going to be bathing with his grandfather and his uncle, he's going to be bathing with his father! And then you realize that it's quite an important thing. Although, he [his son]'s also hanging onto the last little bit of Judaism he has left, whereby he doesn't go to *shul*... If she wanted to *megai* [convert], he couldn't. He wouldn't pass as orthodox. It would have to be in reform because he wouldn't become that religious. So it's quite a problem for him. I think he has quite a conscience about that.

Why has it become okay in today's society to marry out, but not to have unbrissed sons?

I can't answer that. I think there's an enormous amount of assimilation throughout the world, and it's happening, but there again, we have a very strong history. And I think, no matter how we've changed, we'll never get rid of the little bits that are left – psychological bits... if he [his son] was female, the child would be Jewish, and we wouldn't have a problem. I have strong feelings about that, where in today's world the reason that the woman's child follows her religion is the fact that we know that she's the mother, whereas today, by doing DNA tests and so on we can prove that the father is also, so it should be the other way round. But again, that's a personal feeling.

In my play, the mother is Jewish, so the child should, *halachically*, be Jewish.

Sylvia may still argue that if you don't circumcise the child he won't be Jewish, but won't he anyway? Also, Ilana can argue that she doesn't *act halachically* Jewish, and so she's not going to bring the child up that way anyway, so the child won't know Judaism, and is that important?

I think the child would be psychologically affected if he knew that Jews were circumcised, and that he was Jewish and he wasn't circumcised. If it was me, I would feel very strongly about that.

Explain?

Well, I mean, you know, I do have a root, and I think it's important that... I think mixing with other kids and other Jews and Christians or any other religion, he would want to know who he was anyway, through history, or through birth, or whatever. He would find out he was Jewish, and he would find out, if he was Jewish, he should have been circumcised. If he isn't, why wasn't he circumcised? I think that would be quite a serious factor.

What about the argument for not doing anything, and letting him decide when he's old enough?

Oh, I think once you're given the chance of doing it the right way, once they get to that point where they can make the decision, it's quite a painful operation. So one must give the child the options of making up its own mind, but at this point, it can't, so it's unfair. You have to give the child the option.

But by circumcising a child, you choose the option for it?

No, no, but you're giving it the option later to say yes, I can be Jewish, or I don't have to be Jewish. Whereas if he wasn't [circumcised], he can be Jewish, but it's a painful operation to go through! So I think he should be given the opportunity from a young... that's one of the reasons for my grandchild: I want him to be circumcised. I was very upset that he wasn't going to be. I was incredibly happy when I got a phone call a couple of days ago to say, "lend me the money, I need to do a circumcision". Wonderful! You know, to me it was an enormous weight off my shoulders from the point of view that it gives my son a little bit of his heritage back, just knowing that – you know, that may be a little bit stupid, or a little bit silly to you, but it's not – the fact that he married out is an enormous factor to me. But I can't throw him out of my life. I love him. He's my son. I was brought up in an extremely orthodox family, have tried to give them an orthodox upbringing. Maybe I haven't done it 100%. Although I have a daughter who's married who's reasonably religious, but I think with time... you know, David lived with this woman for six or seven years, we thought he'd married her! So by the time he married her, you'd come to the conclusion that it was gonna happen, you know so you make your decision. You either accept it or you don't accept it. To not accept it would mean I would basically lose a son. That would be traumatic. So you do accept it, whether you're happy or not. And you make the best of the situation. I mean, the child's not Jewish, but I love him. I will love the child as well as I love my other grandchild. Because it's... it's my grandchild! And I think life goes beyond religion at times. In my view. You know, the extremely orthodox might possibly not feel the same. I know people who have told their children to get out and not come back.

Yes – Sylvia knows that she may have to accept Ilana and her family the way they are or lose them altogether... but she has trouble accepting.

Well, I think your play has two issues. One is marrying out, the other is marrying across the colour line. And she would have probably a bigger problem than I have. At

least my... one thing that I have found, the non-Jewish, the catholic lifestyle, for example, is very similar to the Jewish: live for the children...

... the guilt...

...well, I don't know about that! But I do know one thing, that the family, is very similar to the way we operate. And for that particular reason, Michele [his wife]'s become extremely friendly with [the non-Jewish in-laws?] in actual fact, they speak to each other every day. Whereby, the other in-laws, where it's all Jewish, they hardly get on at all. Now that probably shows... there probably isn't the same sort of... opposition, or competition, what do you call it... across the bar than there is... I don't know if that's the reason. It could just be a personality thing... but, yes, they lived in our home for a while... very similar lifestyles... [chuckles] except for the fact that they can't understand why we want to circumcise the child!

What did they say? What were some of the heated arguments?

Well, it was only mentioned once, and it was cut there. It was "why should he be different to his grandfather and Giselle's brother?" That was coming from the parents, not from the mother. I mean, essentially, it's true: he *would* be different to his grandfather. It's never been mentioned from that day onwards. So, ja, it was just cut there and never discussed again.

What was the final straw that turned the table? That brought on the phone call [to say they wanted to *bris* the child]?

I don't know. The answer he gave was: "it wasn't easy". And he can do it on condition that he goes through it himself – in other words, he takes the child, he changes the bandages and so forth and looks after the child, until it heals – because she's not happy about it.

So, is it being done by a doctor? By a *mohel*¹²?

It's being done by a urologist.

Okay, so it's not a religious thing.

No. It can't be?

No prayer or anything?

No, no Jewish *mohel* would do it

Why?

¹² Religious circumciser.

...on a non-Jewish child.

Okay, of course.

It can't be a religious thing. It can only be an opening for the child to move in whatever direction that he wants to. Once he gets to a point when he grows up and can make the decision. He may get some sort of Jewish background from his father, but he won't get a Christian background from his mother. Therefore there's a possibility that he'll turn around and say, "I want to become Jewish". And, obviously, if he's been circumcised already, it would be a major factor towards that. [Chuckles] He still has to have a little nick¹³, but...

In my play, the mother of the child is Jewish, so the child would be *halachically* accepted as Jewish, but would a *mohel* do it after the eight day period? This child's a couple of months old already and the *father's* not Jewish.

I don't see why not?

Hmm. Because I'm now wondering if my character [the daughter] would perhaps consent to the medical operation to please her mother, but not to the religious ceremony?

Well, I think that would be silly.

She's a very *dufka* girl.

It doesn't matter. The whole point is that if the kid was *brissed* properly – with the prayers and everything – it still doesn't mean to say that your kid's going to be brought up Jewish. Your kid can switch anyway, you know... but if he *wants* to become Jewish, it's all done already. You don't have to... you know... whatever they do... *now*, if they're going to do it. I don't know what your character's going to do. **Neither do I! Can you think – whether you answer this from your head or your heart, I don't mind – what are some of the more hurtful things that can come out, be said, about this?**

It's funny because having a circumcision that's not religious – is not really Jewish at all. And yet to me, to my heart, it means a lot. And I would be devastated... when I saw that child – if I saw that child – without having been circumcised. Personally I would be devastated. Purely from a *halachic* point of view, possibly – I don't know. And yet, the fact that he would be circumcised out of the religion... is fine. Because I *have* to accept. I have to compromise. So I'm quite happy to compromise. In fact, I'm

¹³ Symbolic incision required by Jewish law

quite happy this happened... in second place. [Think he means this situation is second prize?] I'm not happy that he married out. I'm not happy that my grandchild's not Jewish. That I can't go along and take my grandchild to *shul*. Although, I *could* – but with meaning... without having to explain what I'm doing, or whatever the story is. And that's very fretful. Being Jewish, I've had a pretty strong Jewish background. As a kid.

Chris and Ilana are just too different to work. That's partly because they're of different races. That's partly because they're of different religions. That's partly because they were brought up with different cultures, in different countries.

I think the religious side of it is a bit strong. I married a *megai* [convert]. I don't know if you knew that.

Really? I didn't know!

Michele was *megaiya 'd* [converted] at twelve years old, with her mother, into Reform, and into orthodox when she married me.

So Leon [Michele's father] was Jewish?

Ja, he was Jewish. Ja, Winnie [Michele's mother] was not Jewish. And I found, in the first few months of marriage, an enormous gap. Purely from the upbringing side of things. In fact... well, we were just different. And it's very difficult to explain. I'm going back 37 years! But I do know that we had to compromise very strongly to make the marriage work over the first six months. So I can tell you that mixed marriages when one is reasonably religious and the other one isn't is very difficult. My parents accepted it for the fact that she was basically... "if you want to marry her, you can! She's Jewish. But you won't be able to get married in orthodox, and your kids won't be orthodox" – which is quite an important factor. But she was quite happy to *megai* [convert]. But then there definitely was a big gap in the mentality of both of us. Although we loved each other, we just... living together, as a couple, is very difficult for the first six months. In actual fact, the first three months was a... I'd actually call it a tragedy. More than anything else. It was close to breaking-up stage.

Explain?

Well, we just... did not get on. We were so different.

Can you think of even a small example?

I can't. I really can't. It's obviously an upbringing thing. We just did not see eye to eye. We had to physically sit down and discuss this factor, that we cannot go on like this, and therefore we have to do so-and-so, or so-and-so... what don't you like about

me, what don't you like about me, what do I do wrong, blah-blah-blah... and compromise. And we did it. To such a point that within two years we were like joined at the hip... totally... people used to say, "Wow – what a marriage!" And it was. It was a great marriage. But it was hard work for six months.

That mentality gap is exactly what I'd like to explore. Because I don't think they [Chris and Ilana] have got it in them to do what you did.

Well, I mean, they're a little more different than we were! There's a big difference between marrying somebody who's already converted, to marrying somebody who's... not converted. Even though there was an enormous gap between the two of us, the gap here would be a lot wider.

I do know that there are mixed-race, mixed-religion, mixed-cultural marriages that work. I've seen it. But I do believe those are the exceptions to the rule. Now, how can we go through a whole *yontif* without the Israel-Palestinian issue coming up? Now, my whole play is set in the kitchen. So when people come on stage (which is really 'backstage'), they're going to talk even more honestly and candidly than at the *seder* table.

Being Jewish, she must see with Israel's side. I can't see anybody not being able to see that. No matter what they do. Deep inside, no matter how *dufka* we are, I think we all feel different [from non-Jews?]. Some people are *dufka* just because they've done something wrong, or they've done something different, and they become *dufka* because of that. And your character may have become *dufka more so* because she's done something that is different. She's married this non-Jewish, black guy. That's... that's... pretty *dufka*! [chuckles] But deep down inside, there must be a certain amount of [words swallowed] One doesn't admit to that. There'll just be way too much trauma in your life. What happened with Michele and I was that we sat down, and we communicated, and we really made an effort. And we said, "What don't you like about me, and I'll try to change". And we did that. We physically did that. Well, let me say, I sulked. That had nothing to do with my religion or my background! But I was a sulker. I never sulked from that night onwards. In my life. And it was part of my nature. So it was a major effort. Today she probably sulks more than I do! No, it's true! So you have to make... it has to be a conscious effort. If you're not going to make that conscious effort, and it's not easy, and because sometimes it goes totally against the grain of your personality... but if you want something to work, it has to be done. If you don't, it's not going to work.

Perhaps Ilana and Chris have gone to see a marriage counselor, and they've probably been told to do exactly what you did.

Well, I can give you that as well – my son and daughter-in-law went to see a marriage counselor after one year of marriage. Because it was very traumatic. And I don't know why. Although she's a particularly... and the last time I saw them, which was just before the birth of their child, the difference with him was dramatic. The fact that he even turned around to me and said, "Dad, it's all compromise. Everything we do is compromise". I said, "What are you talking about? What are you compromising on?" "Oh, well, today she wanted to go for a walk, which I didn't really want to do. And she nagged and I said, 'On condition you come with me to the flea market first'. And she said okay, and so we compromised." And in a small way, this is what we're talking about. You know, everything that we do today is... if we both want to do it, fine. But if we don't, there must be compromise.

But where he has Judaism, and she has nothing, because she's chosen to be an atheist, if he said, "I want to circumcise my son", she might say, "Fine, but then we must..." What would the compromise be?

I think this is now not a happy situation because this is where she's saying, "Well, okay," you know? "If you want to do it, go and do it. BUT you pay for it yourself, you can change the bandages, you take him on your own, blah, blah, blah..."

I think she's going to be sort of distanced from the kid because...

Distanced from the kid? I think she's going to be distanced from him for a while! Because he's not going to be her kid. [Pause]. And I hope I'm wrong.

Me too. Do you think, if you were a woman, you would feel differently about David and his situation?

I don't think it has anything to do with gender. It's got to do with personality. I mean, Michele has no problem with anything. She *was* upset about the [absence of] circumcision, but I think her reasoning was slightly different. Her reason was totally the physical side of it – being different to his father, and so on. And the cleanliness of it... you know, the fact that today anyway 60% of the non-Jews and Christians are circumcised anyway. That's purely a health thing. So Michele's feelings were slightly different to mine. But mine, I have religious connotations. Well I– It's all false [hypocritical?], but I *have* them, and in my own little way, I say, "Well, that's fine, you know, because that's the best I'm going to get out of it". Whereas she doesn't

look at it like that. She says, “Well, as long as the child looks like his father, I’m happy.”

So, from that point of view, if she could put the skin “back on” David, she’d still be happy, so to speak? Because they’d look the same, father and son?

[Laughs] That’s a... *different* way of thinking! No, no, no. I think the religious side would come across from her. She didn’t mind at all that he married out of the religion. It didn’t faze her. As much as it fazed me.

[We spoke about his daughter and son-in-law, both Jewish, in America, and how he never sees them and barely speaks to the son-in-law, even on the phone.]

It’s a distance created by distance.

Yes! So, in the play, the parents are obviously keen for the daughter to return from England...

Oh, ja, but they’ll also be keen for her to go. Because of the trauma they have in the relationship. It’s the same old thing – grandparents, in general today, can’t wait for their kids to go, after a couple of hours, they say, “Take them away”. But they love their grandchildren. It’s just... it’s nicer to be a grandparent than a parent, from the point of view that they go home.

I’m worried that the mother figure in my play is going to be a very domineering figure. What about the father?

You see, I think in a Jewish home, the mother runs the family, so the father *would* tend to take a second... although he would probably be the main factor with the *thinking* behind what goes on, he would probably put the thoughts into the mother’s mind to a large degree, no matter how strong she is. I don’t think he would be as much in the forefront as she.

So, what do you think he would say to his daughter?

Oh, he would be very unhappy, but he wouldn’t be... the mother would do the fighting, not the father.

So he wouldn’t say anything? What if the two of them [father and daughter] are left in the kitchen alone for a moment?

He would say, “Deal with your mother.”

...And she would say, “I’m not dealing with my mother. I’m not even speaking to her right now...”

[Breaks in, firmly:] “Deal with your mother.” [Pause] I would *hate* to get into an argument with my daughter, over anything!

So, he wouldn't voice his feelings at all about the subject?

No, no, he would. But the *argument* would come out via the mother. I think. Well, that's how I would do it. I would, you know, talk in the lounge with my wife, but when I got back into the kitchen, she would...

What would you say to her?

"Oh, this is not acceptable! Blah, blah, blah..." You know, he'd probably feel exactly like his wife does, from a religious point of view. And then from the other point of view, I think they would feel very strongly together, but I think she would do the fighting. If it was a male, I think he would... be the voice.

Would he say anything to the husband?

Ja, he would... be civilly polite.

Ok. So even if it comes to blows, so to speak, and he's trapped in the room with the two women, is he still not going to say anything? Is he just going to let them fight it out? Because I would never have thought to only take it through the mother and the daughter, it seems sort of literarily unbalanced?

Well, you take your relationship with your father.

I don't think we've ever had such a huge disagreement... and it normally ends with me slamming my door anyway!

So he doesn't say anything.

God, you're right!

Look, I can't talk for how your father behaves with you, I can only talk from my personal experience and my daughter's always twisted me round her little finger, and you know, she's always been the one that sat on my lap, and we had a little chat and whatever, and you know... I find it very difficult to be vocal, in that sort of way, with her. And I think she would do a lot of crying. In front of me, but not for her mother.

You're so right! Why do you think that is?

I don't know. I can just tell you from personal experience. When Michele fights with Claire, she fights back; when I fight with Claire, she cries.

That's so true! Well, I think we've covered everything I wanted to talk about.

Thank you!

My pleasure. Has it been helpful?

It really has, thank you.

Appendix 4: Interview waivers

Please note that as one interviewee preferred anonymity, the waiver form is not included in this appendix. The others follow in alphabetical order.

Interview Waiver Form

I, Alan Gordon, undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters-degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).

The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script. The interview may be included in the thesis as an addendum.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed:



Date:

18/11/06

Interview Waiver Form

I, Valerie Mardon, undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).

The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. The interview may be included in the thesis as an appendix. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed:

Valerie Mardon

Date:

28/11/06

Contact details:

Lauren Oshry

031 2084297

livimage@iafrica.com

Kobus Moolman

031 2602331

moolman@iu.ac.za

Interview Waiver Form

I, Mrs. L. Oshry, undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).

The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. The interview may be included in the thesis as an appendix. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed: L. Oshry

Date: 10th November 2006

Contact details:

Lauren Oshry 031 2084297
Kobus Moolman 031 2602331

livimage@iafrica.com
moolman@nu.ac.za

Interview Waiver Form

I, MICHAEL ROSENTHAL, undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).

The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script. The interview may be included in the thesis as an addendum.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed:



Date:

08/11/2006

Interview Waiver Form

I, Cherie Saloman, undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).


The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. The interview may be included in the thesis as an appendix. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed:



Date: 30/11/06

Contact details:

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Interview Waiver Form

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I, RENEE WEINBERG undertake to participate in an informal interview with Lauren Oshry for the purposes of research for a Masters degree in English Creative Writing at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (supervised by Kobus Moolman, Department of English Studies).

The nature and purpose of the research is principally anecdotal. The thesis is a playscript, and the interviews may help to inform both the mindsets and mannerisms of various characters. The interviewees will also be asked to respond imaginatively to scenarios the researcher is considering using in her script.

Participation is entirely voluntary and at no time will the participant be obliged to answer any question. The responses will be used only in the interest of creating fiction. The interview may be included in the thesis as an appendix. Should the participant request anonymity, a pseudonym may be used.

Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

The participant will receive no benefit as a result of their participation in the research, nor will they experience any disadvantage.

Signed: R.E. Weinberg Date: 26th November 200

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