

All Other Nights

a family exodus

Characters

Joan 80s, Grandmother. Former salt-of-the-earth Midwestern gal, but recently widowed and crawling out of her grief.

Linda 60s, Mother. Overweight, even obese. Aggressively passive-aggressive. A narcissist, like her late father, though she would never know it.

Howard 60s, Father. A walking raw nerve. Everything he does is to please his wife, Linda. Thinks the world owes him something for his good deeds.

Wendy 30s, Older Daughter. Fit, aims to please. Doesn't understand denial. Definitely doesn't understand boundaries. Black sheep of the family.

Melissa 30s, Younger Daughter. Overweight, like her mother, focused on external achievements to try to hide internal failures. More shrewd than smart.

Caleb 30s, Son-in-Law. Married to Wendy. Handsome, sardonic. Smartest guy in the room. Recent convert to Judaism.

Elijah Family dog. Knows a lot of tricks. Played by a human.

Place

A suburban house in Omaha, Nebraska. In the beginning, there's a bit with a car on the highway.

Time

The present. Night of the first Passover Seder, early Spring.

Notes

A “-” connotes a revised or broken thought if it comes within a line or an interruption if it comes at the end.

A “...” connotes a slight pause or “searching” if it comes within a line or a trailing off if it comes at the end.

A “/” is where the next line, spoken by whoever speaks next, begins, creating an overlap.

Everyone pronounces Grandma the Midwestern way: “Gramma.”

The characters often interrupt and talk over each other, the way family does, the way people do who have something to prove, or correct.

Phonetic pronunciations

Afikomen	ah-fee- koh -muhn
Benching Licht	ben -ching licht
Bnai Brak	be- ne brahc
Bubbe	buh -bee
Chag Sameach	chahg sah- may -ach
Chametz	chah-maytz
Charoset	chah- roe -seht
Dayenu	da- yay -new
Gematria	geh- mah -tree-uh
Kiddush	kid -ush
Mishegas	mih -sheh-gahs
Mitzvah	mitts -vuh
Pogroms	poh- grohm
Shalom Bayis	shah -lohm bah -yiss
Shema	shmah
Shofar	show -far
Shomer Shabbos	sho -muhr shah -buss
Shtupping	sht upp -ing
Shvitz	sh' vitz
Yehoshua	yeh-ho- shoo -uh
Yuntif	yuhn -tiff

“In every generation, a person is obligated to view himself as if he were the one who went out from Egypt.”

-from the Hagaddah

PART ONE - TORNADIC ACTIVITY IN THE AREA

A car on the highway, racing through heavy wind and traffic.

Behind the car, dimly lit, the first floor of a suburban house. Neighborhood elm trees and evergreens hold against a green sky, what Midwesterners call “weather.”

We see the small front porch, front door, and two connected rooms of the house, a foyer and the dining room. The front door is purple. The foyer leads into the dining room, also purple. The wallpaper is purple, carpeting purple, upholstered chairs purple. The tablecloth is purple, dishes purple, stemware purple. The flowers purple. The votive candles, matchbook, lighter--purple. The whole look reads, *We just redid this, and we are fabulous.*

Small stacks of dishes are strewn about haphazardly on the huge dining room table. Two gleaming silver candlesticks stand like witnesses.

A family portrait from the 1980s hangs on the dining room wall--about 30 people, cousins. In a different dining room. Everyone has big hair and bad clothes. It's awesomely bad.

The purple feels heavy, like we're not just in a suburban house. We're in a self-contained world.

Ok. Back to the car:

Wendy drives. **Caleb**, in the passenger seat, holds on.

WENDY

This is a great idea.

CALEB

This is a bad idea.

WENDY

You're wrong.

I'm not wrong.

CALEB

Fine. I have high hopes.

WENDY

I know.

CALEB

I'm optimistic.

WENDY

That's one word for it.

CALEB

Wendy lays on the horn.

Hope for a miracle, but don't depend on one.

CALEB

Thank you, Confucius.

WENDY

It's from the Talmud.

CALEB

Light has risen on the dining room, dims on the car. **Elijah** bonks open the swing door, trots on stage with his tennis ball, and drops it at an empty chair. He waits, whines at the chair, as if someone's sitting in it, as if that someone could pick up the ball and throw it. He sniffs around, barks once, trots off stage. Elijah returns with a plush frog toy in his mouth, squeaking incessantly. The squeaks sound like *ribbits*. This delights him.

Howard enters from the kitchen, carrying a full, glass pitcher of water. Elijah tosses his frog toward Howard, trots to the other side of the table. Howard sets the pitcher down. Something about the table annoys him. Elijah barks. He wants to play. Howard does not. He picks up the toy and holds it out to his dog.

HOWARD

And, considering what we're doing for her, it would be nice if Melissa could respect what's important to us. I paid twenty-eight dollars to ship handmade shmurah matzah from Brooklyn-we might as well have FedEx'd your grandmother's china in a pizza box.

LINDA

She set the table.

He gestures to the fact that *he* is setting the table.

LINDA

Well, she birthed our only grandchild!

HOWARD

Stop making excuses for her. I've spent the entire day doing everything you asked me to do and everything you asked her to do. What the hell is she doing down there anyway?

LINDA

Taking care of Eleanor.

She helps him set the table.

HOWARD

Last I saw, she was eating Cocoa Puffs and watching T.V.

LINDA

She was not.

HOWARD

I saw her!

LINDA

I told her, *this year* we're getting rid of all the chametz.

HOWARD

You know, we raised *two* children and somehow managed to set the table *every night* for dinner.

LINDA

We had each other. We don't know what it's like to be a single mother.

HOWARD

Either does she--she's here with us! When I think about Scott I just want to...*cut his nuts off*.

LINDA

This whole mess will be over soon. Things will settle.

HOWARD

Yes.

LINDA

And it'll be the New Normal.

HOWARD

Please, God.

LINDA

It's the New Days, right, honey?

HOWARD

Right.

LINDA

(Begrudgingly) Wendy always set the table.

She adjusts the items on the Seder plate.

LINDA

You don't think she'd--

HOWARD

No.

LINDA

She and my father felt the same way about--

HOWARD

She won't come. Bill Randby said no planes are landing at Eppley tonight, and Bill Randby hasn't been wrong in 25 years.

LINDA

I do trust the Channel Seven Weather Team.

HOWARD

There are severe tornado warnings up and down I-80. She doesn't have that much chutzpah.

LINDA

She has a lot of chutzpah.

Back to the car:

WENDY

(To driver ahead) Come *on!* Putz. Once we're all together, it'll be good. Like it was.

CALEB

Need I remind you of Chichi?

WENDY

Ugh, please don't.

CALEB

I'm not bringing it up to make you feel bad. I'm--

WENDY

I know.

CALEB

It's evidence of a larger pattern.

WENDY

I thought I was giving her a treat.

CALEB

I know. Any reasonable person knows that.

WENDY

I loved Chichi.

CALEB

Of course you did. You were a child. She was your pet.

WENDY

I didn't know it would kill her. I still feel awful about it.

CALEB

You don't need to. This is why I'm bringing it up. Your parents kept a dead chinchilla in a Hy-Vee bag in the freezer for two years to remind you of a mistake you made when you were ten years old.

WENDY

It was winter. They couldn't bury her.

CALEB

Omaha isn't Westeros. It's not winter for two years.

WENDY

Alright.

CALEB

The lengths they go to to--

WENDY

Why didn't I just bury her myself?

CALEB

You were a child. A good girl. You weren't going to do anything your parents said not to.

WENDY

I still wish I'd--

CALEB

That's the point. They taught you that everything's on you. You should've done this; you should've done that. And because you didn't, you're the cause of everyone's unhappiness. But you're just this sweet and loving person who tried to share her chocolate chips with a baby chinchilla.

Beat.

WENDY

Well, I'm not missing Seder. Grandpa taught us that family is/the most important thing.

CALEB

Some things are more important than family. Self-respect. Truth. Love.

WENDY

Justice and the American Way?

CALEB

They haven't spoken to you in over a year.

WENDY

Passover is *the* family holiday, so it's a good reminder.

CALEB

The fact that you have to remind them you're family is part of the problem.

Back to the dining room:

LINDA

What matters is we finally get to do it right. Light candles at sundown, make the festival kiddush, read the actual story of the Hagaddah...

HOWARD

Not "Turbo Seder."

LINDA

No. We're done with Turbo Seder. We're doing it right from now on.

HOWARD

Your father's Seders had *nothing* to do with the holiday. They were all about him.

LINDA

When they were supposed to be about *me*. (Corrects) I mean...holidays are for the children. I'm the child. Was the child.

HOWARD

And what did he do? Tell that same fakaktah story about the dresses every year.

LINDA

Like it wasn't enough to be fat--I had to be reminded of it every year of my life.

HOWARD

(Imitating his father-in-law) "We had to have them *hand-sewn* because Brandeis on 16th and Farnam didn't *make* dresses for little fat girls in the 1950s..."

LINDA

I told you what he said to me when I got back from the nurse's station.

HOWARD

Lin, they were shtupping him full of painkillers. He didn't know what he was saying.

LINDA

Why couldn't he just pretend? You know? (Half-joking) Why don't people understand, just...always, always lie.

Back in the car:

CALEB

It's just...I'm surprised you don't see the signs.

WENDY

You don't believe in signs.

CALEB

No, but you do. It's the night we remember the signs and wonders of the Exodus, and you're literally trying to outrun a tornado. You don't think that's a bad omen?

WENDY

If I recall correctly, it took Nachshon ben Aminadav walking into the water up to his *eyeballs* to show God that the people had enough faith in Him before He split the Red Sea and let them pass safely to the other side.

CALEB

You don't have to prove anything to anybody.

WENDY

I'm saying, I think miracles are possible, and I think people help make them happen.

CALEB

I think miracles are possible, too, but not the kind you're talking about. A lot of what makes a miracle a miracle is timing.

WENDY

It's perfect timing. Passover's the anniversary of miracles.

CALEB

Look. there might be natural explanations for a river turning to blood, like a red tide, or the sea parting, like an earthquake, but the fact that these events happened when they needed to happen, and that they changed the course of human events, is what makes them miracles. Tonight will not change the course of human events. Whatever you think it used to be like--

WENDY

We were a happy family. Something happened at Grandpa's funeral, and I'm going to find out what.

CALEB

You need to accept the reality of the situation. You should keep your expectations very, very low.

WENDY

You always say the universe can surprise us.

CALEB

Yes. I mean, it's technically possible for lead to spontaneously transmute into gold, but I don't expect to ever see it happen.

But it's possible.

WENDY

She shifts into a higher gear and roars on.

Back to the dining room:

The water in the glasses and in the pitcher blooms red.
Deep, blood red. Chagall red. Ancient Egyptian Magic red.

LINDA

What did you/do?

HOWARD

I didn't do anything!

LINDA

You were futzing with the pipes/yesterday.

HOWARD

I wasn't futzing with anything...

LINDA

You were wriggling the...thing...under the/sink.

HOWARD

You asked me to fix the garbage disposal.

LINDA

Well, you didn't fix it. Now we have a water problem.

HOWARD

It might just be the...municipal...what's-it-called. The whozit.

Beat.

LINDA

Well...(suddenly anxious) how am I supposed to blanch the asparagus? My mother is expecting asparagus!

HOWARD

I got eighty-seven cases of bottled water at Costco yesterday...

LINDA

Should we be afraid of this? Should we call a plumber?

HOWARD

Tell me what you want me to do.

LINDA

How should I know?

Melissa calls from off-stage.

MELISSA

MOM!

Melissa enters, wearing an ill-fitting wrap dress and shower cap.

MELISSA

I have to wash my hair, and there's this--

LINDA

Oh, Jesus.

MELISSA

It's coming out of the sink *and* the shower. It's like, thick.

LINDA

Don't touch it, you're breastfeeding!

HOWARD

We don't even know/what's happening.

LINDA

I don't know what's happening, but get this pitcher out of here, and go get some bottled water from the garage.

HOWARD

I'll call a plumber.

LINDA

No. *Yuntif* starts in an hour, and I don't want some kid from Millard Appliance trudging around during Seder, wondering what those *weird Jews* are doing.

HOWARD

We're having our holiday...

LINDA

Not in front of the goyim.

MELISSA

Well, what are we supposed to do?

LINDA

Where's Eleanor?

MELISSA

With G.G.

LINDA

Tell Grandma we're having a water problem and to only drink bottled water.

HOWARD

It's probably just global warming.

Beat.

LINDA

I bet you're right. I read that we should expect all sorts of algae blooms this spring. I bet it's algae. But still--don't drink it. It could be toxic.

MELISSA

I have to wash my head!

HOWARD

You're not using bottled water/for that.

MELISSA

I have *lice shampoo* eating into my scalp...

HOWARD

That's not my fault!

MELISSA

I didn't say it was your fault! God, not everything is someone's fault.

LINDA

Honey, of course you can use a bottle, or ten.

HOWARD

Linda! You're doing it again!

LINDA

It could get into her milk! And then Eleanor could be drinking toxic breast milk, and our grandchild could *die* on Passover. Is that what you want? More death on Passover?

HOWARD

Fine. Jesus. Just...one bottle. We don't know how long this will last.

MELISSA

Wow. Thanks. I thought we weren't supposed to say "Jesus."

HOWARD

Just...do what your mother tells you. And when you come back, bring a *whole* piece of matzah. I found the one you broke and tried to hide earlier.

MELISSA

I didn't try to hide anything. Every piece in that box was broken before it got to this house.

Melissa huffs off stage.

LINDA

(Calling after her) Honey! Turn the brisket! It's not cooking evenly!

HOWARD

She needs to understand that--

LINDA

Tell her. I refuse to be in the middle of this.

HOWARD

In the--? You're the one who brought her here!

LINDA

I don't know why you have such trouble telling Melissa what you think. You had no problem telling Wendy that she--

HOWARD

We *both* had things to tell Wendy.

LINDA

(Rearranging some flowers) You didn't have a problem telling *her*, so don't make me the Chinese interpreter for you and Melissa.

HOWARD

You stood over me and told me what to write! I did exactly what you told me to do.

LINDA

There was plenty in there that came from you.

HOWARD

I said, we *both* had things to tell Wendy.

Linda walks around the table to a thick, tattered Hagaddah at one of the seats. It looks more like a scrapbook than a holy book.

LINDA

What the hell is this?

HOWARD

I thought your mother would want it.

LINDA

My--? She'd have a *heart attack* if she saw this. Get it out of here. Put it downstairs.

HOWARD

We can't keep throwing everything downstairs.

LINDA

It's the only place she can't get to.

HOWARD

It's not a dumping ground. We spent a lot of money redoing it, and I think we should--

LINDA

Stop thinking, and just do what I tell you.

Howard exits with the Hagaddah toward the front foyer.

Joan enters from the kitchen, carrying a bowl of charoset.

JOAN

Honey, I added some more apples to the charoset because it was just too much sugar.

LINDA

Whatever you prefer.

JOAN

I prefer it the old way. I don't know why you didn't just make it the regular way.

LINDA

Howard likes it sweeter.

JOAN

It hurt my teeth.

LINDA

However you changed it is fine, Mother.

JOAN

You were the one who changed it.

Joan sits in the seat Elijah approached earlier. She looks at the big picture on the wall and at the empty room and begins crying.

LINDA

(Restrained) Mother, would you like Howard to drive you over there? We still have a few minutes before candle-lighting.

JOAN

No, no. It's almost eight. They're probably eating already, and by the time we'd get there...

LINDA

You said you didn't want to cry in front of the Loeb's or the Kahns, so I made a whole private Seder so you didn't have to be uncomfortable. I'm trying to do what you want. But if you want one of us to drive you over there...

JOAN

I want Dad to lead the Seder, and for everything to be the way it was. Everything's so different this year.

LINDA

I know, Mother, but--

JOAN

Wendy's never missed Seder.

LINDA

--families change.

JOAN

It just feels like...you're not even sad he's gone. Like you're relieved.

LINDA

How can you say that? He was my only father. Do you want me to take you home?

JOAN

No, no.

LINDA

(Handing her a glass of wine) Here. Didn't Dr. Klein say you should drink more red wine? This is that good Cabernet from Sonoma.

Joan takes a couple sips. Linda creates individual Seder plates for each place setting.

JOAN

I wish I could walk down stairs so I could see what you've done with the basement. I'm sure it's just marvelous, but my knees are so weak...

LINDA

It's really not that exciting. Just a little bed and table.

JOAN

And bassinet.

LINDA

Well. I want my granddaughter to be comfortable as long as she's here.

JOAN

And how long do we expect that'll be?

LINDA

No idea. As long as she's with us and not in godforsaken Texas.

JOAN

It's not the Gobi Desert. There's great shopping in Dallas...

LINDA

Taste goes to Texas to die.

JOAN

When she moved there, you said it was *cosmopolitan*. I believe you used the word "swanky."

LINDA

I liked it when my daughter liked it, and now that she hates it, I hate it, too. That's love.

JOAN

Ohhh, I think you're all being too hard on Scott. He was trying to be honest with her.

LINDA

He stepped *way* over the line. I did not raise my daughter to condone that kind of overbearing, abusive behavior.

Beat.

JOAN

Couples need to be able to have frank conversations with each other.

LINDA

It was too frank.

JOAN

So tough. Just like your father.

This irritates Linda.

LINDA

I need to blanch the asparagus. Are you all right here for a few minutes?

JOAN

I'm fine!

LINDA

Fine.

Linda exits. Elijah trots in with his ball, sees Joan in the chair he sniffed earlier, and happily drops the ball for her. She pets him.

JOAN

Oh, my baby. Yes, I love you. Ohh, I miss you, too, but I just can't take care of you on my own anymore. I hope you're having fun in that big backyard, and now Melissa's here...

She picks up his tennis ball, holds it low to the ground, and he spins around once, quickly. She raises it a little higher, and he spins around again. She raises the ball over her head, and he jumps (flips?) around, thrilled.

JOAN

(Petting him) Why do you refuse to do tricks for Linda and Howard?

Did Elijah just shrug? She throws the ball OS; he runs after it. Thunder.

On the front porch:

CALEB

(Kindly) This won't change anything.

WENDY

I'm adhering to the values I was taught.

CALEB

Your parents don't believe in the values they taught.

WENDY

How can you teach values you don't believe in?

CALEB

Easy. Just repeat what other people say.

In the dining room:

Elijah enters with the ball. He drops it at Joan's feet and puts his head in her lap.

JOAN

Elijah, don't tell anyone, but--I know this sounds crazy--the other night, on my way to switch the laundry, I heard Leonard. Like he was in the other room, calling to me--it was that clear. He said, "Joan, your knees are giving out. For God's sake, install a handrail."

On the front porch:

WENDY

This is a good idea.

CALEB

I hope you're right.

WENDY

This was not a mistake.

CALEB

No one said it was a mistake. I said you need to accept reality. The reality is, you are a good person, and you are not who they say you are.

In the dining room:

JOAN

It's been a whole year, and it's like he's still...right here.

Wendy knocks on the door.

WENDY

No one ever hears the bell.

Elijah barks. Joan tosses his ball OS, and he runs for it.
Joan opens the door. Lightning flashes, illuminating
Wendy and Caleb.

JOAN

Oh! They said you weren't coming!

WENDY

I've never missed Seder.

JOAN

Get in, get in out of the rain.

JOAN

I'm so happy you're here.

WENDY

Me, too, Grandma. I miss you.

JOAN

I miss you, too. And you, too, Caleb. Get in here!

They linger in an embrace.

JOAN

But...Bill Randby said the airport shut down.

CALEB

(Indicating Wendy) This one put the pedal to the metal.

JOAN

You are a brave and adventurous man.

WENDY

I am a very safe driver.

JOAN

Oh, honey. You were a New York City cab driver in a former life. Grandpa would be so proud of you for coming.

HOWARD

(Entering) Mom, what's all the--

He stops in his tracks.

JOAN

(Oblivious to Howard's anger) Look who made it all the way here! The poet, gently rapping, rapping at your chamber door.

A ball flies through the air and out the open door. Elijah runs out after it.

HOWARD

Jesus.

He runs after the dog. Caleb brings in their bags, swings the door shut.

WENDY

Grandma, I didn't write, "The Raven."

JOAN

You published a book of poems! You are *our* poet.

WENDY

Yes, but I teach rhetoric...

JOAN

You are a writer and a professor, and Grandpa and I couldn't be prouder.

Beat.

WENDY

Oh, before I forget...

She pulls a long, wrapped object out of her bag and hands it to Joan.

JOAN

What's...?

WENDY

Just open it.

Joan unwraps a beautiful, wooden cane with a jeweled handle and foot.

WENDY

I know you don't want to use a walker, but your knees are bad, and we agreed neither of us would be stubborn like Grandpa.

JOAN

Canes are for old ladies.

CALEB

It's from Saks Fifth Avenue.

JOAN

Really. Well, it's just *marvelous*. But how can you afford this? It must have--

CALEB

She ate a lot of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

WENDY

We love you, and we want you to take care of yourself. You'll use it?

JOAN

Is it really from Saks?

WENDY

Yep.

JOAN

Well, then, of *course!* It's so *elegant*.

CALEB

So, where are the Loeb's and the Kahns?

LINDA

(Calls, from OS) Mom, could you come taste the brisket?

JOAN

(Confides) Your mother made brisket. Not apricot chicken.

LINDA

(Entering, with a mixing spoon) Mother, I--

She also halts at the sight of them.

JOAN

(Again, oblivious to the tension) Look who made it after all!

LINDA

Oh, well, look who made it after all So good to see you both I didn't make anything for you to eat since I assumed you weren't coming We have hard-boiled eggs Unless you're vegan now Are you still a vegetarian I can't remember Unless you're eating fish I have a piece of salmon in the freezer I could defrost It's no problem Mom could you come help with the brisket Something about it tastes sour.

Linda exits.

JOAN

Your mother is working so hard...

Joan exits to the kitchen. Melissa enters with her shower cap on, Eleanor in her arms.

MELISSA

I thought G.G. was in here.

WENDY

Who?

MELISSA

Grandma.

WENDY

No, she...hi.

MELISSA

Hello.

WENDY

Why'd you call her Gigi?

MELISSA

G.G. For Great Grandmother.

WENDY

You had a baby? You have a baby? When did you have a baby?

MELISSA

Stop saying baby. You sound like a crazy/person.

WENDY
You have a baby?

MELISSA
She's ten weeks.

WENDY
You got pregnant, and had a child, and never called me?

MELISSA
Things have been complicated.

WENDY
Yeah.

MELISSA
I can't...get into it now, but...I mean, I saved Carmen for you.

WENDY
From what?

MELISSA
Mom was on a tear. They were, like, liquidating the basement.

WENDY
They were gonna give away *Carmen Bearanda*?

MELISSA
Yeah, but *I saved her for you*.

WENDY
Why were they--

MELISSA
You're welcome.

Beat.

WENDY
What is...why aren't you talking to me?

MELISSA
I'm not at liberty to discuss it.

WENDY

You're not at liberty to discuss it? What, is that information classified?

MELISSA

Look, I saved your bear, and...I'm in a weird position here.

WENDY

You don't have to be. No one has to be.

MELISSA

You don't understand what's going on.

WENDY

That's why I keep asking.

MELISSA

I have to go.

WENDY

Wait. I mean, what's her name?

MELISSA

Eleanor.

CALEB

You named her after Leonard.

MELISSA

He was my grandfather, too.

CALEB

Whom you regularly referred to as a "withholding, mean-spirited, miserable sonofabitch."

MELISSA

So?

WENDY

That was a nice thing to do.

MELISSA

I'm nice.

CALEB

You had a baby and didn't tell your sister.

Melissa turns to go.

WENDY

Wait. Uh, where's Scott?

MELISSA

Why?

CALEB

Just making conversation.

MELISSA

It doesn't matter.

WENDY

You're not gonna tell us?

MELISSA

No.

CALEB

Should we ask Joan?

MELISSA

G.G.

CALEB

She's not *my* great grandmother.

WENDY

Is everything okay?

MELISSA

We're not having problems.

WENDY

Oh. Okay.

MELISSA

We never had problems.

CALEB

So where is he?

MELISSA

(Practiced) He's spending the Seders with his family.

CALEB

And nothing's happened.

MELISSA

No.

WENDY

Mel--

MELISSA

Don't call me that. I hate that nickname.

WENDY

I didn't know you hated it.

MELISSA

I've always hated it, and if you thought about anyone besides yourself, you might know that.

WENDY

I didn't know.

MELISSA

Apologize.

CALEB

For what?

MELISSA

For calling me a name I don't like.

Caleb laughs.

WENDY

I'm sorry.

CALEB

Wen!

WENDY

I am. I don't want any...tension.

MELISSA

(Indicating Wendy's bracelet) Where'd you get that?

WENDY

(Digging into her bag) There's a new little store on Belmont. I thought you'd like it, so I got you one, too.

Melissa holds out her wrist. Wendy puts the bracelet on her.

WENDY

You didn't want to tell me you had a baby? Mel, we--

MELISSA

Don't. Call me. Mel.

WENDY

Oh my god. We've called you Mel your whole life--

MELISSA

And I've hated it my whole life.

WENDY

You never said anything/before.

MELISSA

I'm saying something now.

WENDY

Okay. Okay. Can I hold her?

MELISSA

If you wanna hold a baby, have your own.

Melissa exits. Elijah slams into the front door. Caleb opens it, and the dog bursts in, soaking wet. He drops a mezuzah on the floor, then (conspicuously?), winks at the audience. Caleb bends down and picks up the mezuzah. He shows Wendy.

CALEB

You believe in signs?

Howard enters, also soaked, trips over their bags, and falls. A real frog hops in. Elijah hops after it. Wendy tries to help Howard up, but he would rather struggle alone.

HOWARD

(To Wendy, as if to a dog) Stay. Just...stay there. Stay.

Elijah obeys, thinking Howard is speaking to him. Howard steadies himself, then wrings out his shirt.

HOWARD

Good boy, Elijah. If only some people were as well trained as you. Uh, I'm soaking wet here...!

WENDY

Do you want me to get you a towel?

HOWARD

(Sarcastically) Oh, very good.

She exits. The frog follows her. Elijah sniffs their bags. Caleb holds out the mezuzah to Howard.

HOWARD

Where'd you get that.

CALEB

Your dog just handed it to me.

HOWARD

Well, where are the nails?

CALEB

Your dog just handed this to me.

HOWARD

He's not our dog.

CALEB

I'm trying to give you your mezuzah, so you can reattach it to your doorpost before the Angel of Death makes his way down 132nd street.

HOWARD

(Taking it) I want you out of my house.

CALEB

Then, for once, we want the same thing.

HOWARD

Don't condescend to me.

CALEB

I'm agreeing with you.

Howard searches the front closet for a bag of nails. Caleb sits and checks his phone.

HOWARD

I called rabbis *all over the country* for you.

CALEB

You called two rabbis, which I never asked you to do.

HOWARD

And if it wasn't for Rabbi Kushner--

CALEB

Then it would have taken a little longer. You did something I didn't ask for, and then I thanked you, publicly, at our wedding, in front of my own father. What is it you think I owe you?

HOWARD

The Torah says you should honor your father and mother, and that includes your father-in-law.

CALEB

Honesty is honorable.

HOWARD

Yes. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's lying.

CALEB

Well, Wendy's the best one of you, you treat her poorly, and that shows you have terrible judgment. See? Honesty.

Wendy enters with a fancy purple towel.

WENDY

Here, Dad. I didn't realize you wouldn't see our bags. I should have thought of the rain and the wet...

HOWARD

You didn't bring a hammer?

WENDY

(Still holding out the towel) You didn't say anything about--

HOWARD

You *saw* the mezuzah fall and didn't think to--

CALEB

She didn't see it fall. No one did. Stop lying to make a better story for yourself.

Howard takes the towel.

HOWARD

(Drying himself off) You got a lotta chutzpah showing up, uninvited.

Wendy disappears into the closet. Howard hangs the towel around his neck. He rummages through the console drawers.

HOWARD

Don't think that just because.... This is *our* Seder. (He finds the nails). Ah-ha! (Then, magnanimously) I'll allow you to stay for the sake of shalom bayis.

CALEB

Since when are you concerned with peace in the household?

HOWARD

This is a *peaceful house*, and you two are a disturbance to that peace. This will not be The Wendy and Caleb Show. If you wanted that scenario, you should have gone to the Kahns'.

WENDY

(Emerging from the closet with a hammer) They're not coming?

CALEB

It's almost eight. No one is coming.

WENDY

Why not? Where is everyone?

Howard opens the front door. Wind and rain blow.

WENDY

Dad, you have to talk to me. You have to tell me what I can do.

HOWARD

Unless you're here to apologize for who you've become, there's no reason for you to stay.

WENDY

Yeah, you said the same thing in your letters, which I don't...

She digs through her bags and he steps outside, closing the door on Wendy and Caleb. On the front porch, he tries to affix the mezuzah on the doorpost. Wendy stuffs the collection of letters in her jacket pocket and opens the door.

WENDY

I didn't murder anyone. I don't sell heroin on playgrounds.

HOWARD

Those letters have nothing to do with us.

CALEB

You *wrote* them.

Wendy and Caleb step outside, so they are all on the front porch.

HOWARD

(Positioning the mezuzah) I wrote them in the hope that you would finally understand that we are tired of your treatment of us. You didn't take my kind and gentle voice the first time--

WENDY

Kind and gentle?

CALEB

You yelled at her for three hours, and she sat there and took it. She's a grown woman.

HOWARD

--so I felt compelled to put the truth down on paper.

WENDY

I see all those things very differently, Dad, and--

HOWARD

(Trying to hammer) I am not going to listen to your point-by-point rebuttal of the truth.

WENDY

If something can be rebutted, it's not *the truth*.

Howard slams the hammer into the door frame.

HOWARD

Goddamnit, why can't you ever listen to me?

WENDY

I don't understand what you're trying to say.

HOWARD

'Cause you're too stupid to get it.

WENDY

I'm not stupid!

He slams the hammer into the doorframe again, then turns around and holds it up in Wendy's face.

HOWARD

So here you are, doing it again. Turning and twisting everything anyone says to make it appear that you are the victim, and then turn everything into someone else's fault.

WENDY

I don't even know what you're taking about.

He slams the hammer on the doorpost at each of the following lines. Wendy backs up into Caleb.

HOWARD

You treat us like we're so far beneath your social status--

WENDY

No, I don't.

HOWARD

When in reality *you're* the one who doesn't understand.

WENDY

Understand *what?*

HOWARD

That *you* are the problem, not us!

He opens the door and steps inside.

WENDY

What problem? I don't understand what I've done.

Wendy and Caleb re-enter and close the door.

HOWARD

(Bangs the hammer and the mezuzah down on the foyer console) And that's the problem right there! We told you what you've done, but if you can't, or refuse to, acknowledge it, then...you're beyond help.

He pounds out of the room. Caleb takes her head in his hands.

CALEB

You are a wonderful person. Lots of people know that. Remember, Dr. Mercer said emotional abuse is difficult to accept because--

WENDY

My parents aren't *abusive*.

CALEB

Your father just smashed in the door frame, threatened you with a hammer, and called you "stupid" and "beyond help."

WENDY

He's under a lot of stress for Seder...

CALEB

(Repeating, for the hundredth time) Emotional abuse is difficult to accept because it can be tricky, but *it's abuse nonetheless*.

Elijah enters and squeaks his plush frog toy. Caleb inspects the mezuzah. *Ribbit!*

CALEB

Parchment's ruined.

WENDY

We were a Happy Family.

CALEB

They seem happy to you?

He kisses her cheek, picks up their bags, and exits. Wendy bends down to the plush frog, and Elijah lays his paw on her shoulder, solemnly. He stares into her eyes, deeply. Uncertain, she pets his head, stands, and tosses the plush frog OS. Elijah trots after it, and she follows. The live frog hops after her. Thunder claps.

*

PART TWO - RISING ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE. HEAVY RAIN.

A short time later, Wendy and Caleb are rearranging the table settings, adding places for themselves. Wendy holds up a Hagaddah.

WENDY

These are new.

Caleb gestures profoundly to the new, overwhelmingly purple décor.

CALEB

Prince should be entombed here.

WENDY

(Lowers her voice) Mother-of-the-Bride Barbie.

CALEB

It's like she covered everything in Barney hide and Grimace pelt. They used their inheritance to redecorate.

WENDY

No...I'm sure Grandma got everything. She never even had a part-time job-1950s, all the way.

CALEB

(Indicating the 1980s family picture on the wall) Wow.

WENDY

God, look at us. See? We were a Happy Family.

She lingers on it. Joan enters with a bowl of water. Her sleeves are pushed up, revealing a large bandage on her forearm.

JOAN

I don't understand what this water is for.

WENDY

Oy. Grandma, what happened?

JOAN

(Embarrassed) Oh, you'll never believe this. Dr. Klein said it's a BOIL.

WENDY

A boil?

JOAN

A boil.

WENDY

I thought boils went the way of scurvy and scarlet fever.

CALEB

Actually, they're just abscesses caused by staph infections.

JOAN

How does he--?

WENDY

I don't know. He just knows everything.

JOAN

Well, Dr. Klein said the cortisone shots I get in my knees somehow predisposed me to it. Isn't that wild?

WENDY

Yes.

JOAN

It's going away. I have a topical ointment. Anyway, what's the water for?

CALEB

At the start of the Seder, we wash our hands the same way the high priests did in the Temple of Solomon since most holiday meals are a recreation of the Temple service.

JOAN

Are you becoming a rabbi?

CALEB

Maybe someday. Right now the City of Chicago's law department keeps me pretty busy.

JOAN

(Sitting) If I didn't know you'd converted, I would think you were a rabbi.

CALEB

Thank you?

JOAN

Did Grandpa know about this ritual?

WENDY

Probably.

CALEB

But Leonard seemed...less interested in religious tradition.

WENDY

Family was the most important thing to him.

JOAN

Seder is about family. That's what his Bubbe taught him, and what her Bubbe taught her-- which suited me just fine since I didn't grow up speaking Yiddish and praying everyday like he did.

WENDY

Grandma grew up with fancy parties.

JOAN

Yes I did. Grandpa lived in a two-bedroom apartment with most of his extended family while I was in my mother's dining room, being served Crab Louie by black men in white gloves.

WENDY

God, Grandma...

JOAN

I know.

CALEB

So he joined the Reform Temple because...?

JOAN

His Bubbe told him to go where *I* would feel comfortable, and at Temple Israel, most of the service was in English, and I knew a lot of people. We were there our whole lives.

WENDY

And that's where his storybook Hagaddah came from.

JOAN

(To Caleb) Every child in Linda's Bat Mitzvah class received one, and Grandpa...we didn't have very much money in those days, and Grandpa liked the Hagaddah so much that, the next week after Hebrew School, he made your mother ask Rabbi Berkowitz for 12 more! She was so embarrassed, but Grandpa knew there were extras in the office, and he knew Rabbi Berkowitz adored your mother and wouldn't say no. And that's how we got our family Hagaddahs that we used for 40 years.

CALEB

Which the Kahns are using this year?

JOAN

Yes.

WENDY

Even Grandpa's?

Linda enters.

WENDY

(To Caleb) It's got all his scraps and notes in it.

CALEB

I vaguely remember.... Last year my attention was pretty much consumed by his fall, the trip to the emergency room, and the subsequent disorder of the evening.

JOAN

That's right. We never got to talk about this stuff last year because of all the...

CALEB

Excitement.

JOAN

So you've never been through a whole Seder.

WENDY

Grandpa's Seders were the best. I bet my entire childhood is scribbled in the margins of his Hagaddah.

LINDA

Well, now that we're in the New Days, we have new Hagaddahs, from New York.

JOAN

Linda, honey, didn't you--

LINDA

(Steamrolling) Come on let's get organized Could you please hand me those glasses?

JOAN

(To Wendy) But didn't you--

LINDA

Mother, we should get started It's late I want you to try my new kicked-up matzah ball soup before you get too tired It's so delicious you'll never believe it I used ginger in the matzah balls It makes such a difference They're really just so delicious.

WENDY

They sound great, Mom.

LINDA

I cooked them in chicken stock.

JOAN

Your mother has brought me so much food every week... I don't know what I would do without her. And she's organized everything, just boxes and boxes of stuff.

LINDA

(To Joan) Like you always used to say, *That's why I'm the Mother.*

Melissa enters, hair down. She's carrying a huge antique silver tray of asparagus. She's talking to Howard, who follows behind, a bowl of hard-boiled eggs in one hand, his Kiddush cup in the other.

MELISSA

...and then she rolled over! I mean, she's only ten weeks old! When I was at Harvard, I read so many case studies about giftedness showing up as early as this. When she's a little older, I'll have her tested, but I'll only use Harvard's test because the others are worthless.

HOWARD

Should you be covering your head or something?

MELISSA

Dad, I'm trying to tell you about--

HOWARD

I don't want *lice* on the table.

MELISSA

I'm not gonna get *lice* on the table. God. Did you hear anything I said about *your* granddaughter and the fact that she's *gifted*?

JOAN

Howard, where do you want us?

HOWARD

(Fake easy-going) Just...wherever. It doesn't matter. This is informal. It's just us. But Caleb and Wendy, you're down there.

As they all take their places, Howard dims the lights.

LINDA

Oh, that's nice.

JOAN

I can't see anything.

HOWARD

We thought it would give some *ambiance*.

Joan accidentally knocks something over.

LINDA

Forget it.

HOWARD

Honey, we--

LINDA

It's fine.

He turns the lights back up.

JOAN

It's so late! It feels like the middle of the night.

HOWARD

Mom, it's 8:27.

LINDA

We're supposed to wait till sundown to light candles. I like it. Feels more in touch with Passover's theme of cycles and seasons. Melissa, do you want to light candles?

MELISSA

Sure.

LINDA

Mom?

JOAN

That's ok. I'll let you do it.

Linda strikes a match.

WENDY

Can I get in on this?

LINDA

I only have two candles.

WENDY

But you just asked Grandma...

LINDA

(Handing her a lighter) Here. Light the votives.

WENDY

But, if Grandma was gonna light, and--

LINDA

Well, she's not, so it doesn't matter.

HOWARD

Wendy.

WENDY

I'm just saying, you offered to three people, and now--

LINDA

This is the way it turned out. Light two votives, or as many as you want. I don't care. You seem to do whatever you want anyway. I thought we told you about this.

Linda and Melissa each light one of the tapers in the silver candlesticks. Linda and Melissa circle their hands three times around the two flames, cover their eyes, and whisper to themselves the prayer for lighting the candles. Wendy moves around the table to light the votives. Her mother and sister finish, kiss each other, and wish each other *Good Yuntif*. They sit down, and Wendy is left standing by her place. She sings the prayer out loud.

WENDY

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.

She lights the last two votives, then sits down. Caleb kisses her hand.

JOAN

Honey, that was so beautiful. But why did you do it differently than your mother?

LINDA

Maybe I'm just more concerned with doing things properly.

CALEB

(To Joan) We're supposed to make a distinction between the Sabbath and a holiday. A common practice to show differentiation is to reverse the order of the blessing and the act associated with it. (To Linda) So, I'm not sure what you mean by "proper," but since it's Wednesday, and not a Friday, night, the act is transposed.

HOWARD

Come again?

CALEB

Wendy did it right. Linda did it wrong.

Awkward pause.

JOAN

How do you know so much?

CALEB

Well, I had to spend almost two years studying for the conversion.

WENDY

Which means *we* studied for the conversion. Classes...

CALEB

...Lots of books, workshops, phone calls with Rabbi Kushner...

JOAN

You two are just remarkable. Don't you think so, Linda?

LINDA

(Curt) Mm-hmm.

JOAN

Well, I just want to say I'm so glad we're all here, and Grandpa would be, too. It's a great comfort to be together. We had a lot of good years.

HOWARD

We did, Mom, but now, like Lin says, we're in The New Days.

LINDA

The old days were great, Mom. But in the New Days, we're going to start new traditions. Which, ironically, are old traditions!

WENDY

Where are the Loebes and the Kahns in the New Days?

JOAN

I'm afraid I wasn't sure how I was going to feel, and I didn't want to get emotional in front of people and pretend like I was okay.

WENDY

Why would you have to pretend? It's our first year without Grandpa. No one was expecting a...raucous...you know...

JOAN

Thank you, honey. I think it's okay that it's just us this year, but, oh, the Kahns have a new granddaughter, Sydney, and it would have been great to get a picture of her with Eleanor.

MELISSA

(Joking, poorly) So I guess it's too bad--it'll have to be The Eleanor Show tonight!

No one laughs.

HOWARD

We're actually thinking about not taking pictures on holidays anymore.

JOAN

What? Why?

LINDA
It's against the rules.

JOAN
What rules?

LINDA
The rabbis' rules. Let's just--

CALEB
Which rabbis?

Linda doesn't want to explain in front of her mother.
Wendy sensed her mother's reticence and tries to be helpful.

WENDY
Grandma, according to some rabbis, using electronics on holidays is the same as kindling a fire on the Sabbath.

CALEB
So people who don't kindle a fire also don't do things like use their phones, or drive a car, or turn off and on lights.

WENDY
I think Mom and Dad are saying they're going to start observing that rule. They don't want to make the fire that the spark causes.

JOAN
So we won't have any more pictures of Seders?

LINDA
Howard, why don't you--

JOAN
How long have you wanted to--

LINDA
A while Now Howard if you--

JOAN
Did Dad know?

LINDA

(Trying to avoid the conversation) I mean, we talked about it, you know, in passing, every now and again. Howard?

JOAN

If you wanted to do new things, why didn't you just do them?

Beat.

HOWARD

He wouldn't let us.

JOAN

Let you? You're grown adults.

LINDA

Every time we tried to do something different, Dad berated me for "breaking up the family."

JOAN

What "every time"?

LINDA

The girls had to go to Hebrew School, but we couldn't keep kosher... I had to marry someone Jewish but I couldn't be Shomer Shabbos...

JOAN

Be what?

CALEB

Sabbath observant.

JOAN

But we went to Temple every Saturday.

LINDA

We wanted more. We wanted to go to Ohr Kodesh...

JOAN

But that place is just Survivors and old people. Everyone we know goes to Temple Israel. It's so beautiful and lively!

LINDA

And Reform. We wanted to go to the Orthodox shul.

JOAN

You wanted to be *Orthodox*?

CALEB

I think present tense, Joan.

LINDA

I wanted more than Friday night dinner and then going downstairs to watch *Dallas*.

JOAN

That was so fun.

LINDA

It was fun, but then...

HOWARD

We wanted more.

LINDA

And every time we'd try, he'd--never mind.

JOAN

Honey, I had no idea.

LINDA

(Accusatorily) None? You didn't hear him lecturing me on the phone every Friday afternoon...?

JOAN

Well, honey, it's your life...

LINDA

My...Mom, *you* didn't even want me to make *brisket*.

Short pause.

HOWARD

Oookayyy. Okay. Everyone open your books to page...uh...(he flips page after page after page)...Jesus, where does this...?

LINDA

I thought you prepared.

MELISSA

Yeah. *Jesus*.

Maybe despite herself, Melissa gives Wendy a little sisterly side-rib like, *Dad, amirite?* Wendy doesn't know how to respond.

HOWARD

Melissa, you're under our roof.

MELISSA

I was just kidding.

HOWARD

It's not funny. I was busy all day doing everything your mother asked you to do.

MELISSA

I do what I'm asked!

HOWARD

(Flipping pages) You could take a little more pride in your work. This is not a halfway house, you know.

MELISSA

You're my *parents*...!

LINDA

Howard.

HOWARD

Fourteen! Page fourteen.

He takes a moment. The man of the house. Finally.

HOWARD

Okay. (Reading to himself) The leader points to the matzah and says--

LINDA

No, honey. Kiddush.

HOWARD

Kiddush?

LINDA

Before the Maggid.

Howard stands. He raises his Kiddush cup. Wendy and Caleb stand.

HOWARD

Uh, *I'm* saying Kiddush.

CALEB

Yes, but we should all stand to be *yotzei* with you.

Everyone else stands.

HOWARD

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

JOAN

Ah'mayn!

Joan lifts her glass to toast and drink.

LINDA

No, Mother, there's more.

JOAN

Oh.

Howard half-sings the holiday Kiddush, stumbling through parts of the Hebrew.

HOWARD

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, asher bachar banu mikolam, v'rom'manu mikol-lashon, v'kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, vatiten-lanu Adonai Eloheinu b'ahavah moadim l'simchah, chagim uz'manim l'sason et-yom chag hamatzot hazeh. Z'man cheiruteinu, mikra kodesh, zeicher litziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikolha'amim. Umo'adei kod'shecha b'simchah uv'sason hinchaltanu. Baruch Atah Adonai, m'kadeish Yisrael v'hazmanim.

Howard lifts the Kiddush cup as if to toast. Everyone follow suit and offers a hearty "Ah'mayn!" They drink from their wine glasses and sit down.

JOAN

Howard, that was so impressive! I didn't know you knew the whole thing in Hebrew.

HOWARD

Thanks, I messed it up, though.

JOAN

Does something happen with the water now?

LINDA

Who told you anything about water?

JOAN

Caleb said there's a ritual washing of--

LINDA

Oh yes. Yes. Howard, say the bracha for all of us, and then do the hand-washing.

WENDY

You're not gonna pass it around, so we can all do it?

LINDA

Women don't have to do all the mitzvos.

WENDY

They have to do this one.

LINDA

Your father is leading the Seder, and he'll do it for everyone. It's late already.

Howard dips an empty glass into the bowl of water. He pours a little water over his right hand twice, then a little water over his left hand twice.

HOWARD

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al n'tilat ya'dayim.

Everyone responds with a less hearty, "Ah'mayn."

HOWARD

Now, the parsley.

LINDA

(Gasps) Oh, Jesus!

JOAN

Linda!

LINDA

I forgot the parsley. And the salt water.

HOWARD

You know what? We're gonna take a note from Dad here and skip ahead to the story.

LINDA

Howard, no. We have to do the parsley. We said we wouldn't--

JOAN

(Waves it away) Oh, everyone hates the parsley. Howard, what page?

HOWARD

Page fourteen. (Pause. Deep breath, looks around, maybe nods to himself, then reads emphatically) "I am the plain, poor bread of affliction..."

CALEB

This is the plain, poor bread of affliction.

HOWARD

Right, I am the plain, poor bread of affliction.

WENDY

No, Dad, (points at the matzah) *this* is the plain, poor bread of affliction.

Beat.

HOWARD

Let all who are hungry come and eat. Next year we are slaves/this year--

WENDY

This year.

CALEB

This year.

WENDY

This year we are slaves, next year may we be free.

HOWARD

Next year we are slaves, this year may we be...uh, slaves.

WENDY

No one asks to be a slave.

JOAN

Howard, are you okay?

HOWARD

Just a little nervous, I guess.

Eleanor cries off stage.

LINDA

Well. I read that the rabbis say that/the sages say--

MELISSA

I have to feed Eleanor.

LINDA

The rabbis say that/the sages say--

MELISSA

I have to feed Eleanor. Can't this wait?

LINDA

Can't what wait?

MELISSA

Whatever the rabbis say.

LINDA

Oh sure no problem I've just waited my whole life for tonight What's ten more minutes?

MELISSA

Mom...

LINDA

It's fine.

Melissa exits.

JOAN

What do you mean you've waited your whole life for tonight?

LINDA

(Lying) Oh, I'm just exaggerating.

HOWARD

Well, as long as we're waiting for her, why don't you tell us what the rabbis say?

LINDA

I wanted to tell it when everyone was here.

JOAN

It could be a while.

LINDA

Fine. So, "Let all who are hungry come and eat" is a performative phrase, like "I thee do wed." The phrase is the action. So just saying, "Let all who are hungry come and eat" constitutes an act of charity. We get the points for doing it, even though we're just saying it. So it's like double points.

JOAN

Points for what?

LINDA

Like, mitzvah points. Points for being a good person.

JOAN

Where do these points come from?

LINDA

From the rabbis.

CALEB

Which rabbis?

JOAN

Like Rabbi Rachel?

HOWARD

Well, no, because female rabbis aren't...don't really...

JOAN

Since when does Rabbi Rachel gives out points?

LINDA

No, Mom. Like, the rabbis from the Torah....

CALEB

Which ones?

LINDA

The ones who write about Passover.

Beat.

WENDY

(Trying to help) So, but, isn't there a problem with the idea of a performative phrase? Like, we're not actually performing the act of feeding the hungry.

HOWARD

(Joking, poorly) I'm hungry!

WENDY

On all other nights, we eat without thinking about hungry strangers, right? And tonight, we speak of hunger but do nothing to alleviate it.

JOAN

Grandpa used to invite Refuseniks.

WENDY

Right. Eugene and Lydia were strangers, then they became part of our family.

JOAN

Grandpa *loved* talking with Eugene about Russian literature...

LINDA

I read all the Russians, too.

WENDY

(To Caleb) Eugene summed up all of Russian literature in one sentence. (In Russian accent) "When Russia bleeds, (thumps her chest, dramatically) *we bleed.*"

JOAN

Grandpa just *adored* them.

Elijah enters, sniffing a trail of something.

JOAN

Where are they?

LINDA

Who?

WENDY

The Russians.

HOWARD

(Joking, poorly) Russia!

JOAN

No, where did Eugene and Lydia go this year? I should have called/to explain...

LINDA

I called her. They're in Minneapolis with their son. She'll call you after the chag.

JOAN

The what?

WENDY

The holiday. Chag means holiday.

JOAN

Oh. Right. Like *chag sameach*. Happy holidays.

CALEB

Exactly.

JOAN

(To Linda) Are you trying to use more Hebrew in general, or just tonight?

LINDA

I thought we'd start tonight and see how it goes.

JOAN

Do you secretly speak Hebrew?

LINDA

Mother, I don't have any secrets from you.

WENDY

Really, none?

Beat. The water in the glasses turns red. Elijah moans.
Joan doesn't notice because she's dabbing her eyes.

JOAN

Elijah, I love you, but you make my allergies go crazy.

CALEB

Uh...

WENDY

What the hell is that?

LINDA

Howard.

HOWARD

(To Linda) This *is* the bottled water.

JOAN

(Mistaking it for wine) Is this that Cabernet from/Sonoma?

CALEB

(To Joan) I don't think you should drink that.

JOAN

Did it go bad?

Caleb gathers their glasses, takes them OS to the kitchen. Wendy tosses Elijah's frog toy after Caleb. Elijah runs for it.

MELISSA

(Calling) Mom! MOM?

LINDA

(Yells) What?

MELISSA

You need to come here! Eleanor's *covered* in lice!

LINDA

Oh for God's sake! I'm coming, honey!

HOWARD

I told her to cover her head!

Thunder claps.

CALEB

(Cracks the swing door) Wen, could I see you in the kitchen a moment?

We hear a few *ribbits*. Then too many. Wendy swings open the door, and a plague of frogs hop into the dining room. Elijah bursts through, wild with delight.

Everyone jumps. Wendy, Caleb, and Howard manage to get most of them, but not without some frenetic acrobatics. They open the front door and throw them outside, holding Elijah back from running after them.

LINDA

(Calling) Howard? Get up here!

HOWARD

I'm...Jesus Christ...

He picks up a frog that's landed on the Seder plate and throws it against the wall too hard. It doesn't die.

WENDY

Dad!

He picks up Joan's new cane and violently stabs the injured frog with it.

HOWARD

(To Wendy) Everything was fine until you came home.

He exits. Pause. Wendy wraps the dead frog in a napkin and exits out the front door.

JOAN

Just so you know, this is not normal for Seder.

CALEB

I wouldn't think so.

JOAN

Where did they...(she trails off).

CALEB

It was probably a waterspout, maybe over Lake Manawa or Carter Lake. When a funnel forms over water, it can lift animals and carry them for a few miles. Are you okay?

Caleb puts his arms around Joan.

CALEB

What were Leonard's Seders like?

JOAN

Oh...they were just marvelous. I mean, 30, 40 people. All the cousins. And later Lydia and Eugene and their son. Leonard called them his Russian cousins. Which, I mean...

CALEB

You're all Russian cousins.

JOAN

Exactly.

Wendy enters, sans frog.

JOAN

Well, Leonard always sat at the kids' table. He said it was more fun. He'd do voices, and make up plagues to see if everyone was paying attention...

WENDY

There was the Cornhusker Hailstorm of 30 A.D., the Great Pineapple Plague of 1515, the Tennis Ball "Tornado from Grenada"...

JOAN

He taught us all his Bubbe's tunes to the songs, and we'd sing them over and over. And he'd tell stories about Uncle Abie's adventures in New York and on Broadway, and Wendy and Cousin Andy would compete for who could speed through "Chad Gad Ya" the fastest-

WENDY

We were both really good.

JOAN

And by far, the thing everyone loved the most was when we opened the door for Elijah. For years, Leonard was in cahoots with our next-door neighbor, Mike O'Malley, a six-foot tall, retired Irish Catholic ophthalmologist, who'd wear a big, dark, hooded cape, and then when one of the kids would open the door--!

WENDY

The first time he did it, all of us kids were like 5, 6, and 7. Scared the crap out of us.

JOAN

Poor Jeff cried all night.

WENDY

Grandpa called him the Prophet O'Malley. Took us years to figure it out. 'Cause, I mean, you don't know your grandparents' neighbors when you're a little kid.

JOAN

(Pleased) That's right.

WENDY

But even when we were teenagers, he was still doing it!

JOAN

Well, by that time, it was tradition! Grandpa took Mike out for breakfast the morning after Seder every year for thirty years. We had a lot of fun. And, I mean...I made his Bubbe's k'neidlach and apricot chicken and potato kugel, and Auntie Rosie, who was not a small woman, was the only one allowed to lift (points to it) that gigantic silver tray of asparagus, and we ate flourless chocolate cake and drank decaf for hours and hours into night.

Wendy is almost crying.

WENDY

It was really wonderful.

JOAN

Oh, honey...

Melissa enters, wearing the shower cap again. She sees she has missed, or been left out of, the moment. She sits at her seat.

Linda and Howard return.

LINDA

Well! *That* was exciting!

JOAN

Is everything *under control*?

HOWARD

(Joking, poorly) If my wife has anything to do with it, this house is now under strict military rule!

LINDA

Now! Where were we?

CALEB

Russia.

LINDA

Right. Let's move on, shall we? We spent enough time in the Old Country...

HOWARD

(Turning pages) The Four Questions.

Hail smacks the roof and cars outside with growing frequency. The hailstones sound bigger, thicker.

LINDA

Melissa, you're up.

JOAN

Oh, but I thought--

LINDA

Well, since our tradition tells us the *youngest* child is supposed to ask them, we thought Melissa should do it this year.

JOAN

(Slightly disappointed) Oh. But it's our tradition that Wendy does them. I don't understand/why she can't--

HOWARD

Mom, these are The New Days. The Hagaddah tells us the youngest child should ask them if--

MELISSA

It's fine. I don't want to do it.

WENDY

I don't care if--

HOWARD

Melissa, you're doing them. We talked about this.

MELISSA

I don't want to.

LINDA

Why not? You practiced.

MELISSA

I didn't practice. I don't have to practice. Everyone knows them. We've listened to Wendy do them every year of our lives, and I'm not gonna put myself in a position to be compared to her for another thing.

WENDY

Oh, my, god...

LINDA

But honey, it'll be *better* because it'll be--

MELISSA

Just like the hula hoop contest at Brian's bar mitzvah. I'm not doing it.

WENDY

You have to let that go.

MELISSA

I would've won if Grandpa hadn't yelled out my name!

JOAN

He was cheering for you.

MELISSA

He was trying to help her win.

WENDY

I didn't need any help. I'm a great hula hooper.

MELISSA

Oh, I forgot--you have to show off at everyone's parties.

WENDY

Brian *wanted* me to do it, and it was *his* bar mitzvah!

MELISSA

There you go again. Making every excuse--

WENDY

I was doing what a *kid* wanted me to do at *his own/party*.

MELISSA

Oh, sure. You always just do what *everyone else* wants you to do...

WENDY

I did what *you* wanted me to do, and I don't see you complaining about it!

LINDA

That's enough.

Beat.

MELISSA

You *edited/it*.

WENDY

If by “edit” you mean *wrote three full drafts* and submitted it under your name, then yeah, I “edited” it.

MELISSA

You always have to take credit for everything.

WENDY

Have I *ever* brought it up? Have I ever told anyone? You never even said thank you. Everyone just expected me to do it.

HOWARD

You’re The Writer.

WENDY

She was The Applicant! (To Melissa) And you didn't even invite me to your graduation. I just randomly called Mom that day, and she was like, “We're all in Cambridge. It would have been nice of you to come.” I didn't even know it was happening! Doesn't any part of you feel ashamed that--

MELISSA

I got *myself* into Harvard!

WENDY

No, you *attended* Harvard. I got you in.

The hail pounds down now, on the roof and windows, on the cement outside, on garbage cans, down chimneys. It's so loud the family has to wait a moment for it to pass. Elijah, terrified, climbs into Caleb's lap. Maybe Elijah tries to crawl inside Caleb's shirt, or body.

MELISSA

That's right, Wendy. You get into Ivy League schools and--

WENDY

You didn't have complete sentences. You had an alumn write your rec. Just because you're good at standardized tests doesn't mean--

MELISSA

You have to show off about everything. You think you're so much better than us.

HOWARD

That’s right.

WENDY

I don't think I'm better than you! You can't tell *me* what *I* feel!

HOWARD

I'm telling you what I know.

LINDA

And no one can make you feel anything. You're in charge of your own emotions.

Pause.

WENDY

No one's even heard of the contest I won.

HOWARD

You said it's a big deal in the poetry world.

WENDY

Yeah, but it's the *poetry* world, and not even.... It's only in America. I mean, I'm proud of it, but it's like Canadian women's in-line skating. Kind of a niche thing.

CALEB

And feeling proud is not the same as feeling superior.

Beat.

JOAN

Okay. Listen. Girls, you are *both* good hula hoopers. Melissa, if you want to ask the Four Questions, since everything is topsy-turvy this year anyway, we can do it differently. Don't upset your mother at Seder.

MELISSA

Why? Wendy always did, and she never got flack for it.

WENDY

(To Linda) I *always* upset you at Seder?

LINDA

Can we just move on, please?

WENDY

No. I don't ever remember you being upset at Seders.

LINDA

We are not having this conversation now.

WENDY

If not now, *when*?

HOWARD

You know what, get off your self-righteous horse, Wendy.

WENDY

That's not a thing. Asking Mom to clarify a statement is not self-righteous. I'm just asking for more information.

CALEB

But if they call you self-righteous, it shifts the attention away from their refusal to/answer your question.

HOWARD

Shut up, Caleb. (To Wendy) Not everything gets to be the way you want it despite what your grandfather led you to believe.

WENDY

Nothing is the way I want it! Grandpa died because he was too proud to use a walker; the cousins aren't here, my brother-in-law isn't here, the spines on these Hagaddahs haven't even been cracked, you quit Temple Israel--

LINDA

What's your point?

WENDY

The only thing Grandpa led me to believe was that I was part of a loving family, and you're all working really hard to convince me otherwise! What you wrote (she pulls the letters from her pocket) is *wrong*. The way you describe me.... This is not who I am.

JOAN

(To Linda) You wrote her letters? Like Dad wrote you?

LINDA

(To Melissa, pointedly ignoring her mother) If you don't want to ask the Four Questions, you don't have to. You're tired, you're breast-feeding, I shouldn't have asked you to begin with.

WENDY

Mom. What did I do to upset you/at Seders?

LINDA

(Bitter) You know what? Let's just do it how Dad liked it. That's always how it is anyway.

JOAN

Honey, Melissa can do it...

LINDA

No. It's fine.

WENDY

Mom--

MELISSA

I don't want to ask them!

Melissa exits.

HOWARD

Way to go, Wendy.

WENDY

Me?

HOWARD

You've made *our* first Seder all about you. Now tonight isn't any different than it's ever been. Just...do the Four Questions so we can move on.

WENDY

Move on *how?* Dad, we obviously/need to talk about--

HOWARD

We're moving through the Seder.

WENDY

We can't pretend like--

HOWARD

You wanna be a part of this family?

WENDY

I *am* a part of this family!

LINDA

Then do what we want you to do.

HOWARD

Mah Nishtanah. Go.

Beat down, Wendy sits. Pause. She sings.

WENDY

Mah nishtanah, ha-lailah ha-zeh,
mi-kol ha-laylot, mi-kol ha-laylot

CALEB

You don't have to do this.

WENDY

She-b'khol ha-laylot 'anu 'okhlin
chameytz u-matzah,
chameytz u-matzah,
ha-lailah ha-zeh, ha-lailah ha-zeh,
kulo matzah

In the middle of singing, Melissa enters with two hula hoops. She holds one out to Wendy. Without missing a word, Wendy stands up, sets the hula hoop around her waist, and begins. It is effortless to her. Then, she continues singing the Four Questions.

WENDY

She-b'khol ha-laylot 'anu 'okhlin
sh'ar y'rakot, sh'ar y'rakot,
ha-lailah ha-zeh, ha-lailah ha-zeh,
kulo maror

Melissa tries, and fails, to hula hoop.

MELISSA

I just had a baby!

WENDY

She-b'khol ha-laylot
'eyn 'anu matbeeleen 'afilu pa'am 'akhat,

HOWARD

Come on, Melissa. You can do it.

MELISSA

Dad! Stop it!

WENDY

'afilu pa'am 'akhat,
ha-lailah ha-zeh, ha-lailah ha-zeh,

LINDA

He's trying to help!

WENDY

sh'tay f'ameem.

MELISSA

I don't need his help.

Melissa tries again. She gets it for a couple seconds, then loses it again.

WENDY

I don't want to compete with you for anything.

MELISSA

Because I might win something you want?

WENDY

I don't want anything you have! (Then, with verve)
She-b'khol ha-laylot 'anu 'okhlin
beyn yoshveen u-veyn m'subeen
beyn yoshveen u-veyn m'subeen

MELISSA

(Flailing, she throws it down and pouts) You didn't just have a baby!

WENDY

Ha-lailah ha-zeh, ha-lailah ha-zeh
kulanu m'subeen.

HOWARD

Fine. You've made your point.

WENDY

I'm not making a point! I'm doing what everyone told me to do.

HOWARD

No, you're doing what you want. If you were doing what everyone else wants, you would have stayed in Chicago.

JOAN

(To Wendy) No one wanted you in Chicago. I don't know why your father just said that.

LINDA

We wanted her in Chicago.

JOAN

Was that in the letters?

LINDA

Among other things.

JOAN

(Shakes her head) Just like your father. You couldn't stand it when he wrote to you, and now you're--.

LINDA

We knew if she was here, you'd want to do things the way Dad did. And we wanted to do things the way we wanted, for once.

Beat.

JOAN

I see.

LINDA

I thought tonight could be...Seder is about our *rituals*, Mom. You dip parsley in saltwater, you count out the plagues, you read what the rabbis say. I wanted to do what Jews have been doing for thousands of years.

HOWARD

We didn't want to rush through the tradition just to tell the same stories about Leonard's Bubbe and Uncle Abie, and then eat chicken.

WENDY

But those are our rituals.

JOAN

And you didn't even make apricot chicken, so/you don't--

LINDA

I didn't want to, okay? It's not the right thing.

CALEB

Says *who*?

LINDA

(Steamrolling) It's the New Days! It's the New Days of Meat! The rabbis say you should eat red meat on a holiday because it makes the meal festive, and I want to do what the rabbis say, so I made brisket.

HOWARD

And her brisket is *delicious*...

LINDA

Howard, stop.

JOAN

Honestly, I think something's off about it. I don't think we should/eat it.

LINDA

I--(she clamps up). I thought this could be mutually beneficial.

WENDY

How is this beneficial for Grandma? Everything you want to do is new and unfamiliar--

LINDA

Only because we haven't done it yet. Because Dad...never let me.

JOAN

(To Wendy) Honey, it's fine.

WENDY

It's not fine. Why do you both say that when it's not? Everything is weird and uncomfortable! (To Joan) They've completely isolated you from--

JOAN

I told you, I didn't want to cry in front of other people.

WENDY

The cousins aren't Other People. (Gestures to the picture) Those are *Our People*.

JOAN

Honey, you're upsetting me.

WENDY

I don't mean to, Grandma, but I just don't understand why *our cousins* are/suddenly--

JOAN

Linda, do something.

LINDA

Wendy. Enough.

WENDY

Grandma?

JOAN

I didn't want to see everyone. I didn't want to cry in front of them. *That's not what we do.* We have fun. We yuck it up. I didn't want everyone to pet me, and say "There, there, Joan." I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me...even though (choking back tears) now I'm just a poor old widowed lady.... Julie and Reuben are off on a bicycling trip in Botswana, and Carol and Al are running that gallery in the Old Market. Everyone still has someone, and...I don't know what I'd do without your mother. She's the only person who's taken care of me...the way I took care of Grandpa...and when she suggested a quiet little Seder tonight, I thought that sounded okay.

Beat.

LINDA

It's late, you're upsetting Grandma, and you're arguing semantics.

WENDY

I'm not/arguing semantics.

HOWARD

You always do this./You always--

WENDY

I don't "always" do anything! Stop making sweeping statements about my--

LINDA

And then you argue with us, just like this, and you turn *us* into the bad guys.

WENDY

No one's a bad guy here!

LINDA

Certainly not me! *I'm* not the one breaking up the family. Dad was wrong about that!

HOWARD

Yeah. *They're* the ones who refused to start on time!

Beat.

WENDY

What?

JOAN

Who refused to start on time?

Beat.

HOWARD

We're finally doing what *we want*. We waited our whole lives to start at the right time...

CALEB

You gave the cousins an ultimatum?

WENDY

The *right time* is 6 o'clock. We started at 6 o'clock for forty years.

LINDA

The rabbis say the right time is eighteen minutes/past sundown.

WENDY

You changed the rules. You changed the entire game, and you're holding the cousins responsible for not wanting to follow *your* new rules?

LINDA

They're not my rules. They're the rabbis', and they're *old*.

WENDY

I don't care. They're not ours.

HOWARD

Tonight gets to be different.

WENDY

If you wanted tonight to be about *ritual*, ritual's expressly *not* about doing things/differently.

LINDA

(Facade cracking) Tonight gets to be different.

WENDY

Why? *Why* does tonight have to be *so* different from all other nights?

LINDA

Because now it's mine. You can stay and be a part of it, or you can leave.

WENDY

I'm staying. I'm part of this family.

LINDA

Then play your part.

There is a buzzing sound in the distance. Wendy sits down.

LINDA

Mother, are you alright to move on?

Joan nods.

LINDA

Fine. Would you like to read? We're on page twenty-two.

JOAN

(Flips pages, takes a deep breath, then reads) "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had the Holy One, blessed is He, not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Even if we were all wise, all men of understanding, all old and learned in the Torah, it is still our obligation to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The more one tells of the Exodus from Egypt, the more he is praised."

LINDA

Thanks, Mom. Melissa?

CALEB

So we're just gonna...?

LINDA

Yep. Melissa?

MELISSA

(Reading) "It once happened that..." Uch. I don't want to read all the names.

HOWARD

Caleb, read it.

CALEB

(Resigned, he reads) “Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining at the Seder table in Bnai Brak. They spent their whole night discussing the Exodus until their students came and said to them, 'Rabbis, it is time for us to recite the Shema.' Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said, 'I am like a seventy-year old man, and I have not succeeded in understanding why the Exodus from Egypt should be mentioned at night, until Ben Zoma explained it this way: 'So that you remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life.' The Torah adds the word 'all' to the phrase 'the days of your life' to indicate that the nights are meant as well. The sages declare that 'the days of your life' means *this world*, and 'all' means this story will be told even after the coming of the Messiah.”

LINDA

(Brightly) I think that's so interesting. Don't you? All means the days in The World To Come. Does anyone have anything to say about that?

Awkward pause.

HOWARD

Okay. Now we have the Four Sons.

WENDY

Four Children.

HOWARD

The Hagaddah calls them the Four Sons, so that's/what we're calling them.

WENDY

Part of the purpose of retelling the story is to make it identifiable to each new generation, and since we don't have any sons in this family, and linguistically it's equivalent to say “children”--

LINDA

The Hagaddah says “Four Sons,” and we're not changing tradition.

WENDY

What do you call this?

HOWARD

Melissa, keep going.

WENDY

Melissa...

MELISSA

You get to go back to Chicago.

WENDY

You could go back to Dallas.

MELISSA

(Reads) “The Torah speaks of four types of sons: one is wise, one is wicked, one is simple, and one does not even know how to ask.”

Howard indicates that Melissa should keep reading.

MELISSA

(Beams for a moment, then reads) “The Wise One. What does he say? 'What is the meaning of the laws and judgments that the Lord God has commanded?' You should teach him all the traditions and obligations of Passover, including: 'It is forbidden to eat anything after the Passover meal.'”

HOWARD

Wendy, continue.

WENDY

(Rolls her eyes dramatically, then reads) “The Wicked One. What does he say? 'What does this ritual mean to you?' To you and not to him. By using the expression 'to you,' he excludes himself from his people and denies our very essence. You must blunt his teeth and say to him, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' For me and not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been freed.”

HOWARD

Have anything to say about that?

WENDY

Do you?

HOWARD

I'm offering you a chance to redeem yourself here.

WENDY

For what?

The buzzing grows louder, closer.

JOAN

What on earth *is that*?

WENDY

Am I allowed to ask a question?

LINDA

The Hagaddah invites questions.

WENDY

Fine. The Wicked Child is the only one whose question reflects some search for *meaning* within the practice beyond the simple how-to. So why is thoughtfulness met with hostility and the thinker treated like an outsider?

HOWARD

Maybe we're supposed to learn what happens to rebellious children.

WENDY

You're equating thoughtfulness with rebellion?

HOWARD

It's a warning to do what we're told or get left behind. No one wanted to stay in Egypt.

CALEB

Not true. Three-fifths of the Israelites remained in Egypt because they thought it better to live as slaves in a land they knew than to trek through the wilderness, without food or water, for God knows how long.

JOAN

Three-fifths of the Jews stayed?

CALEB

They weren't called "Jews" at that point, but yes. Most of them stayed.

MELISSA

That's an oddly specific number.

CALEB

It's what The Rabbis say.

LINDA

And all the Wicked Children who stayed didn't make it to Sinai, or to Canaan, and then they died in Egypt, sad and lonely and apart from their people! We tell the Wicked Child he would not have been redeemed to scare him into repenting. Otherwise, *he's cut off*.

CALEB

Is your opinion of God that low?

LINDA

Excuse me?

CALEB

I'm asking if you think God is *that* insecure in His authority? The God who allowed Abraham to challenge him over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the God who *backed down* from His threat to destroy the Israelites and make a new nation from Moses when Moses said he'd rather die instead? You think *that* God is so scared of *questions*--of a *child's* question-that we have to *cut out* the people who would ask them?

Beat.

LINDA

Moving on!

CALEB

I thought you wanted a meaningful Seder, with fruitful discussion of how ancient texts can instruct us to live better, more profound lives.

HOWARD

I said, this is *not* going to be the Wendy and Caleb Show.

WENDY

Caleb, your son-in-law, is making a thoughtful point about dialogue with God.

JOAN

Howard, you *did* ask her directly if she had anything to say about the passage.

WENDY

Thank you, Grandma, and I do. I don't think we're supposed to reject the child the Hagaddah calls Wicked. We shouldn't get hysterical over questions and threaten excommunication. She's not some stranger--

CALEB

And even if she was, we're supposed to welcome the stranger--

Elijah hops up on Caleb's lap and kisses him. The house is practically vibrating.

WENDY

Right. And when we read the Haggadah, we're not just remembering the past, *The Old Days*. Each person is supposed to imagine herself--right?--going out of Egypt, toward, you know, *The New Days*, together, with her people. Regardless of the differences between them, they're all one people, one family, right?

Beat.

JOAN

How marvelous! Your students are so lucky! That was marvelous...

HOWARD

You know why it's not marvelous, Mom? Because it's Wendy showing off and trying to upstage the rest of us. As usual.

CALEB

If you don't like questions, don't ask for them.

HOWARD

Shut up, Caleb.

JOAN

Howard!

LINDA

Mom, please stay out of this.

Suddenly, the window cracks open and a swarm of locusts bursts through. Chaos ensues. Everyone screams and swats and smacks and stomps; Elijah jumps and barks; Joan cowers under the tablecloth. All the matzah breaks, crumbs fly everywhere.

They kill all the locusts. The table is in utter disarray. The family surveys the mess.

LINDA

Mother, are you okay?

JOAN

I'm...not having a very good time.

Beat. Linda rallies the troops.

LINDA

Ok! Caleb, dispose of the carcasses. Wendy, go get three whole pieces of matzah. Enough is enough. This mishegas is over. *We. Are having. A Seder.*

Caleb uses his napkin to pick up the dead locust.

LINDA

Caleb! Those are my grandmother's linens!

CALEB

You just asked me to "dispose" of "carcasses" at a Passover Seder. If you'd like me to do it differently, provide me with different materials.

LINDA

Wendy, go get a towel.

WENDY

(A little in shock) Are we gonna talk about/what just happened?

LINDA

Nope! Go get a towel. (She claps, or snaps, at her daughter, like to a dog) Go.

Wendy exits.

LINDA

(Calls after her) From the *bottom* shelf. Don't use the new purple ones. (To herself) You've ruined enough already.

Linda sits. Then Howard sits. Caleb remains standing.
Elijah perches in a chair and eats crumbs off the tablecloth.
We hear hail. Just a light smattering at first, then a more rapid syncopation.

JOAN

Honey, do you think something's...going on?

LINDA

Like what?

JOAN

Well, I don't know. Something...biblical?

Elijah barks approvingly.

LINDA

Why would you think that?

CALEB

(Counts off) Blood, frogs, lice, locusts...

Elijah barks like yes, yes, yes.

LINDA

You mean, do I think God is sending signs and wonders to our house, in Omaha, Nebraska, for some inexplicable reason that will miraculously and unequivocally alter the course of human events...?

Elijah barks like YES.

LINDA

(Continuing) No, Mother, I don't. Nothing biblical is happening. The planet is getting hotter, it's tornado season, and we're all a little on edge because...

Elijah has started pushing the dark purple tablecloth forward to expose the banged up wooden table beneath. He now steps up onto the table, like a human.

LINDA

Um...because...Wendy...

Elijah lifts the tablecloth carefully over his head, like a robe, like a hooded cape, the kind prophets wear. Everything on the tablecloth falls to the floor. He stands erect, human, stretches an arm toward the windows and releases a deep, primal howl, a long, drawn-out tone, like the sound of a shofar. It's a call to awareness, a call the God of the Heavens and the Earth. The sound of the Figured Wheel of Time, turning, rolling the past into the present.

The hail catches fire. Flames trail the ice to the ground.

Wendy enters with a towel and Grandpa's tattered Hagaddah, arrested at the sight. Elijah senses her, steps down off the table, and approaches her. He kindly touches her cheek, then the Hagaddah, then walks to the front foyer. He retrieves the ruined mezuzah, then stands at the front door. He means for Wendy to let him out.

She opens the door for the trickster prophet. He puts his hand on her shoulder, the way he did earlier, stares deep into her eyes. Maybe she is less uncertain about his look this time.

He nods to her, once, touches her cheek again, then exits the house, into the night. Wendy watches him go, then closes the door.

For a long pause, no one speaks while the world outside is ablaze.

CALEB

Has he ever done that before?

Pause.

WENDY

Why was this shoved under old towels like an Afikomen?

Tornado sirens blare.

JOAN

Linda, I thought you...those other boxes?

WENDY

What boxes?

CALEB

We should get downstairs. And pray.

HOWARD

We're *fine*. This is...we're moving on!

CALEB

(Helping Joan up) Let's get you to the/basement.

LINDA

We don't need to go to the basement. Grandma can't with her knees.

WENDY

What boxes is she talking about?

CALEB

We'll talk about it downstairs.

LINDA

There's nothing to talk about.

Now the sirens wail. Caleb swoops Joan up in his arms.
Maybe she lets out a girlish cry.

MELISSA

(Resigned, picking up the bowl of charoset) We should go to the basement.

LINDA

NO. EVERYONE, JUST, SIT DOWN. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TORNADO WE'VE BEEN THROUGH. THIS IS JUST RAIN AND HAIL, AND FIRE. THE SIRENS WILL STOP IN A MINUTE. WE ARE HAVING A SEDER, UP HERE, RIGHT NOW.

WENDY

(Picking up the silver tray of asparagus) Mom...

LINDA

(Breaking) IT'S FINE. *EVERYTHING IS IN ORDER.*

The hail hits a power line and causes a monstrous, fiery explosion outside. All fuses blow; the house goes black. The Plague of Darkness has arrived.

*

PART THREE - HIGH WINDS. FLYING DEBRIS. SEEK SHELTER IMMEDIATELY.

In the basement. It's almost pitch black, but for the night sky and dying fire seen through two small basement windows. The tornado sirens sound slightly muffled downstairs. Throughout the scene, they move farther away. We hear clicking.

EVERYONE

(Calls) No.

More clicking.

EVERYONE

(Calls) No.

Lamps softly click on.

EVERYONE

(Calls) Yeah/Okay/That's good.

Caleb enters, presumably from wherever the fuse box is. Everyone sits around in a newly built studio apartment. Joan sits near Wendy, Melissa near Howard and Linda. Teams. The silver platter of asparagus rests on a small square table, with four chairs pushed in around it. Other food has been loaded onto the tray: roasted potatoes, hard-boiled eggs, charoset, horseradish. Maybe we see a few matzah balls tucked in. Throughout the scene, the family eats from it.

The furniture, modern and boring, is incidental to, even discordant with, the magnificence of Grandpa's library collection, which fills new floor-to-ceiling built-in bookshelves, lit and lining the perimeter of the room. Beautiful old books, spines both intact and falling apart, pack every inch of shelf space. A few suitcases, boxes, and bags of Melissa's life cover the floor. Baby paraphernalia is everywhere. Melissa has clearly, recently, moved in.

Carmen Bearanda is on her bed.

No one speaks for a while.

JOAN

I don't know as much about Judaism as my grandchildren, but I know from our family Seders that "Hagaddah" means "the telling." And somebody better start telling what's going on in this family. Why is Dad's library *here* and not in Chicago? And what, in God's name, *happened to my dog?*

Beat.

JOAN

(To Wendy, pointing to books) Grandpa left these to you. Your mother was supposed to send them after the funeral. Melissa, I don't know what you're doing with them.

MELISSA

I'm not doing anything with them. (To Wendy) I'm not doing anything with them.

WENDY

Do you live here?

MELISSA
Sort of.

WENDY
Are you getting divorced?

MELISSA
I don't know.

WENDY
Are you separated?

MELISSA
I don't know. Stop asking questions. Every time you ask something...

WENDY
(To Joan) Grandpa left his library to me?

JOAN
You're the professor. He thought/you should--

LINDA
She's the favorite. That's what you meant to say. She was his favorite.

JOAN
If I meant to say that, I would have. I'll ask again. What is going on?

Howard waits for Linda to tell. She motions to him to tell instead.

HOWARD
(To Wendy) When you were thirteen years old...

WENDY
Oh my god...

CALEB
Great! Let's do this!

HOWARD
We spent thousands of dollars sending you to camp so you could meet other Jewish kids--

WENDY
You sent Melissa to the/same camp--

HOWARD

And once you had friends from Minneapolis and Chicago--

WENDY

(To Melissa) You also met kids from Minneapolis and Chicago--

HOWARD

You started acting like your shit didn't stink.

JOAN

Howard!

HOWARD

No, I started acting like a *teenager* who was learning there was a world outside of Oak View Mall.

LINDA

Melissa never acted/like that.

WENDY

Because the other girls hated her because she was *mean* to them.

MELISSA

They were mean to *me* because I was smarter than them.

WENDY

You were all straight-A, honors track, middle class Jewish kids! They were mean to you because you *acted* like you were better than them, and teenage girls don't take that shit.

HOWARD

We spent *all that money* to make sure you had Jewish friends, and weren't isolated from the larger/Jewish community--

JOAN

I thought we paid for summer camp.

HOWARD

No, *we* paid for it.

JOAN

Then were did Dad's money go?

Beat.

LINDA

We used some of it for camp--right, Howard?, camp is so expensive--and we saved the rest of it for, just, you know, other stuff.

CALEB

(To Joan) You saw the dining room.

WENDY

You pushed me onto the bus. I didn't even want to go.

LINDA

We knew you'd like it. And then you were ungrateful...

WENDY

I wasn't ungrateful. I did exactly what you wanted. I met other Jewish kids and got connected to a bigger community. If I acted like a *teenager*, I mean, I'm allowed to have been a teenager for five minutes one summer when I was thirteen.

HOWARD

You started acting like you were better than us *then*, and you never stopped.

WENDY

Clearly you have a narrative.

She pulls the letters out of her jacket pocket and searches for the first one. She opens it up and reads from it.

WENDY

(Reading) "You never said thank you. You're ungrateful..."

HOWARD

That's right.

WENDY

"The Torah doesn't say you have to love your parents. Just honor and respect them. I'm so tired of the lack of respect. You're embarrassing yourself. You've become snobby and elitist. You look down your nose at everything and everybody who doesn't measure up to your idea of smart. It's unbecoming."

HOWARD

Yep.

WENDY

Who on earth are you describing?

HOWARD

Not letting your sister win the hula hoop contest at Brian's bar mitzvah was a fraction of the...myriad...ways you have let us know, in no uncertain terms, that you think you're so much smarter, so much savvier, so much more sophisticated than us, who you perceive to be country *bumpkins*--

WENDY

No, I don't! Stop telling me what I think!

HOWARD

Because we live in Omaha, and you went to fancy, east coast schools--

WENDY

That Mom wanted me to go to!

LINDA

And now you live in *Chicago*--

WENDY

Where I got a *job*!

LINDA

You're mad at your sister because she never thanked you for getting her into Harvard. Well, you never thanked your father for *sending* you to college!

CALEB

That's an incongruous comparison.

LINDA

Shut up, Caleb.

WENDY

First of all, yes I did thank you for sending me to college, and second of all, it shouldn't have been my responsibility to write Melissa's essay. You made me do something unethical!

LINDA

Oh, now it's unethical to help your sister?

WENDY

I was in my dorm room, across the country, writing *her* application while *she* was at the mall with Megan!

MELISSA

You know how hard it is for me to make friends! And...you owed me!

WENDY

For what?

MELISSA

You made me the dumb, fat sister for our whole lives!

WENDY

I can't make you that!

MELISSA

Every time we stood in the bathroom mirror next to each other, you were prettier and thinner than me. You had boyfriends, and you could...tuck shirts in...and in the summer *you never got chub rub!* I always get chub rub!

WENDY

I only tucked in that *one shirt* from the Express...

MELISSA

You always make me feel bad about myself!

WENDY

Mel, you're--

MELISSA

I'M NOT A FAT COOK AT A GREASY SPOON. I'M NOT A BALD MIDDLE-AGED MAN. DON'T. CALL ME. MEL. I HATE IT!

She pounds out of the room.

LINDA

Congratulations. Now your sister's cortisol levels will be through the roof and Eleanor will ingest them and get anger and anxiety issues. So glad you came home.

Beat.

WENDY

(To Howard) You don't remember me calling from my dorm room, bawling? "Thank you making all those trips to Ogallala, and sitting in stale rooms in car dealerships in Chadron, and Scottsbluff, and Alliance, and North Platte..."

HOWARD

No.

WENDY

I remember every place you've ever been in Outstate Nebraska, and I thanked you for every place. You have no recollection of that?

HOWARD

No.

WENDY

Well, then I don't know what to say. Just because you don't remember doesn't mean it didn't happen.

HOWARD

Please. You left for college and *never looked back*.

WENDY

Oh, and *moreover*, I thanked you in front of all your friends at that *weird* graduation party you threw for me--

JOAN

That *was* a strange party--

WENDY

Where you only invited people you wanted to impress, and *none of my friends* were allowed to come.

JOAN

(To Linda) Honey, why? Janet has such bad taste.

WENDY

So you put me on display when it's good for you...

CALEB

And take her to task for being on display.

LINDA

Well. I can see someone's been to therapy.

WENDY

You know what? After twenty years of "You should seek professional help," yeah, I finally did when you stopped *speaking* to me for no good reason!

LINDA

And I'm sure your psychiatrist is telling you all the ways I was a horrible mother. Wonderful.

WENDY

Psychologist, and *what do you think happens in therapy?* Do you think she says, “Oh, your parents wrote you letters telling you how appalled they are at your attitude, so they must be right? Let's talk about how you can become the person they want you to be, and then you can apologize for becoming exactly who they raised you to be?”

LINDA

We didn't raise you to be like this.

WENDY

Like what?

HOWARD

Someone who screams at her parents! I never screamed at my parents! We didn't scream at Grandpa, no matter how difficult he was!

Pause.

Wendy pulls one of his letters from her pocket and reads.

WENDY

“That time you manipulated your mother in Borsheim's to buying your diamond wedding band and then you screamed at her when you got home she had embarrassed you in front of June. What on earth is wrong with you?” This didn't happen.

HOWARD

Your mother said it did.

WENDY

Mom, you were there. That didn't happen.

LINDA

That's what I remember.

HOWARD

You don't even see that that's who you are.

WENDY

Not only do *I* not scream, but manipulate? You *made it up* for whatever reason--

CALEB

Because she has a problematic relationship with reality.

WENDY

--and somehow Dad believes it.

HOWARD

The incidents we're talking about/have happened.

WENDY

“Have happened.” Yes. You said. (Reads) “They are real. They are over and not up for discussion or rebuttal. I'm mentioning them to point out how your upsetting choices have disrupted a family harmony.”

HOWARD

That's right.

WENDY

June used her employee discount and said she thought it would be nice for *the mothers* to buy me a wedding band. I didn't ask for it. She suggested it as a *gift*.

CALEB

A gift is when you give something and don't expect anything in return.

LINDA

I swear to God, Caleb...

WENDY

We didn't have any money for a diamond. I was *moved*. *I thought it was loving*. If you didn't want to do it, you should have said so.

LINDA

So I should look stingy in front of your in-laws.

CALEB

Instead of lying? Yes.

LINDA

The groom is supposed to buy a diamond ring for his bride. There are rules.

WENDY

June didn't care about that. She wanted to give me something meaningful. So because you didn't want to go in on it, you made up a story that I *screamed* at you in a jewelry store? *June* doesn't even know what you're talking about!

LINDA

You showed this to her?

WENDY

Of course I did! I wanted to make sure I wasn't a crazy person.

LINDA

Great. That's just great...

CALEB

With my mother's discount the whole ring cost six-hundred eighty four dollars. She said you paid \$300.

Caleb pulls out his wallet, puts down three hundred-dollar bills in front of Linda and Howard. This surprises Wendy.

CALEB

(Kisses Wendy's hand) I ate some peanut butter sammiches myself. (To Linda) Thanks for the loan.

WENDY

(To Linda) I thought it was a gift.

Beat.

LINDA

(To Caleb) Never miss an opportunity to embarrass us, do you?

CALEB

I'm paying you back. In the privacy of your own home. If that embarrasses you, that has nothing to do with me.

Beat.

LINDA

We threw you that graduation party to show you off.

WENDY

(Confused) Because you were proud of me?

LINDA

We wanted everyone to see how impressive our daughter was.

WENDY

So, was it *about* me or *for* me?

LINDA

Let's split the difference and say it was mutually beneficial.

WENDY

It wasn't. I saw you talking to Steve Reiter in the living room. You were each holding one of those berry skewers, and he said something like, "You must be so proud, the first in your families to get a master's degree..." and you did that thing where you lower your voice and talk out of the side of your mouth, like you think you're in cahoots with someone, and said, "Did I tell you? Melissa got into Harvard?"

LINDA

We were excited. Our daughter was going to Harvard!

WENDY

So it wasn't about me *or* for me. It was about showing off for people you don't even see anymore.

HOWARD

It was about not showing favoritism.

WENDY

It was a party for me! Steve asked you a question, at my graduation party, about my plans for after graduation, and instead of just answering, "Yes," you made it weird and uncomfortable.

LINDA

Your sister also had good news. When else were we supposed to tell people?

Wendy turns away from them, maybe throws her arms up in the air, exasperated. Melissa enters from the furnace room. She is carrying an empty duffel bag. Wendy turns to Melissa.

WENDY

Why are you here?

LINDA

You don't have to answer that.

WENDY

You owe me.

HOWARD

No one owes you anything. Grandpa gave you enough for three lifetimes.

CALEB

Oh my God, Howard, stay out of this. It's none of your fucking business.

Howard lunges awkwardly for Caleb and tries to punch him. Caleb grabs him and shoves him, hard, into the wall.

CALEB

Stay. Out of this.

Howard backs off.

MELISSA

Mom and Dad said I could come back.

WENDY

Why did you want to?

MELISSA

Scott was mean to me. Mom says he stepped way over the line.

WENDY

What. Happened.

MELISSA

I was six months pregnant, and we were eating pancakes, and you know how we they're best with peanut butter caramel...?

WENDY

PBC. Sure.

MELISSA

Right. So, I was talking about this article I read in *People Magazine* about losing baby weight, and it said if you gained the average amount of weight people gain, which is like 25 pounds, it usually takes a year to lose it. So, at six months, I'd already gained 28 pounds, and he knew I was really insecure about it, but he kept telling me it didn't matter. The baby was healthy, my doctor wasn't too concerned... (She covers her face with her hands, then collects herself). I reach for the PBC, and he says, "So at this rate, you'll be back to your normal weight in seven and a half years."

Beat. Caleb bursts out laughing. He can't stop.

CALEB

Oh God. Oh God, that is perfect.

MELISSA

(Almost crying) He knew how sensitive I was about it!

She turns away from everyone and buries herself in Joan's embrace.

CALEB

But *Scott's* overweight...he was...oh.... So...lemme get this right. Your husband made a joke, and you didn't know how to handle it, so you called your mother, and she told you to get on a plane and come back to Omaha, and you did? You're a Harvard graduate and a new mother, and you're going to hide in your parents' basement from a bad joke?

LINDA

A Harvard degree is a big deal in Omaha.

CALEB

Amazing.

WENDY

So you left Scott? Grandma, did you know this?

JOAN

They asked me not to say anything to you.

WENDY

Why?

MELISSA

Why?! My husband insulted me when I was six months pregnant! How would he act when I was sleep-deprived and unshowered and flabby?

WENDY

He made a joke, and you left him.

MELISSA

Mom said it was borderline verbal abuse, and it's a slippery slope, and I don't wanna deal with all of that.

WENDY

All of what?

MELISSA

I don't have to be around people who make me feel bad about myself anymore.

CALEB

Your father makes you feel bad about yourself all the time!

HOWARD

It's different. I'm her father.

LINDA

And fathers get to say things other people don't.

Pause.

CALEB

This is priceless.

WENDY

Why didn't you call me? Or just come to Chicago? You didn't have to come back to Mom and Dad's.

MELISSA

I was pregnant, and you have a tiny apartment, and this is my home.

WENDY

Not anymore...

LINDA

This is her home.

MELISSA

But they said if I came home, I couldn't...I mean, I wasn't allowed to...be in touch with you. That was the rule. I didn't have any other options!

WENDY

There are, like, *a thousand* other options.

MELISSA

They can do more for me now. I'm not stupid.

Beat.

LINDA

(To Wendy) Why are *you* here? What do you want?

WENDY

I want you to tell me why you're not speaking to me!

JOAN

You're not speaking to her? What is going *on*?

HOWARD

We don't want liars in this family. She lies, and she does it all the time. You think we don't get it, but we do.

WENDY

When have I ever lied to you?

LINDA

You brought your friends home for Seders during college.

WENDY

And?

HOWARD

Last time you came to visit, before the funeral, you told Mom you thought you should stay with Grandma and Grandpa. So you could be with them more.

WENDY

So?

HOWARD

We know you just didn't want to be alone with us. That you think so little of us.

WENDY

It was just...easier at Grandma and Grandpa's.

LINDA

Did you think we didn't figure it out?

HOWARD

Such disdain for your parents...

LINDA

Do you think we're so unintelligent that we don't get it? You embrace Grandma and Grandpa because they validate everything you say and do and never tell you when you're wrong. You only want to listen to people who tell you how pretty and smart and talented you are.

WENDY

Who wants to be around people who tell you you're wrong and ugly and dumb and worthless?

LINDA

That's what I got, but apparently you're too good for it!

HOWARD

You don't want to be around anybody who tells you anything real.

CALEB

By "real," do you mean "hateful"?

HOWARD

You don't want to hear the truth.

WENDY

Which is?

HOWARD

We know all kinds of things you're not aware of.

CALEB

Such as?

LINDA

Something is wrong, and it's not with us.

We hear softer rain outside.

LINDA

Your behavior at the funeral was beyond unacceptable. We told you to apologize for it, and for a lot of other things, and you refuse.

JOAN

How, exactly, did she behave at the funeral?

LINDA

(To Joan) She sat in the front row, right next to you.

JOAN

Yes.

LINDA

She sat next to you the entire time. She sat next to you, and held your hand, and you cried on each other's shoulders, and everyone saw.

WENDY

And?

LINDA

And I was busy greeting people and thanking them for their condolences--

HOWARD

And arranging with the *funeral* director and *grave* diggers--

LINDA

While *she* was sitting in the front row comforting you. My *father* died. *I'm* the child. *I* should have been grieving, and *she* should have been taking care of things like making sure people knew to walk around the construction by the stairs.

WENDY

Mom, it was *rubble*. People knew to walk around it.

LINDA

There were a lot of elderly people there!

WENDY

Why didn't you just *ask* me to do it? Or *anybody else*? You didn't have to preoccupy/yourself with it.

LINDA

I was trying to honor my father!

WENDY

By paying attention to a pile of bricks?

LINDA

(Upset) People grieve in different ways!

CALEB

So, which is it? Did you want to grieve by comforting Joan in the front row or by paying attention to minutia?

LINDA

I shouldn't have been *in the second row*. *Behind* you. Everyone saw!

WENDY

Why didn't you ask me to move? Or/anyone else?

LINDA

I was trying to honor my father!

WENDY

So you expected me to do something, but wouldn't tell me what it was, and then you were angry with me when I didn't do *what you didn't ask me to do*.

LINDA

You knew what the right thing to do was, and you chose not to do it because you think you get to do whatever you want.

JOAN

I asked Wendy to sit next to me. She's a great comfort to me. She was doing exactly what I asked.

LINDA

But *I'm the child*. It's supposed to be the child, not the grandchild. There are...rules.

JOAN

I didn't have a playbook! I was married to the man for almost 60 years, and I was putting him in the ground.

LINDA

(Getting worked up) My father was lying in a wooden box in the front of the room. A box. My father, who taught me to ride a bike on Hackberry Road, who introduced me to Dostoyevsky, who had special dresses made for me when I was a little girl so I could feel pretty even though I was *fat*.

WENDY

Now the dresses are a symbol of generosity? You complained about them every year of my life.

LINDA

Things change.

Beat.

HOWARD

He told that story about the dresses publicly, to embarrass her, all part of his "I achieved the American Dream, and you didn't" monologue.

WENDY

But he did!

JOAN

He grew up peddling fruit on 10th and Farnam! He fought the Japanese, and started a business, and died a millionaire. He gave us everything.

LINDA

No, he gave *her* everything, and never missed an opportunity to *belittle me*. (To Wendy) Just once, at my father's funeral, it would have been nice to sit next to my mother, mourn for my father. At least *look* like a normal family. But there you were again, wedged in between. Making it about you, with no concern for me and what *I* might need.

Beat.

WENDY

(Baffled, looking to say something pacifying) I'm sorry I sat where you wanted to sit. I was doing what Grandma asked. I didn't know it meant so much.

HOWARD

And?

WENDY

(Surprised, but obedient, searches for other answers) I'm sorry I didn't write more letters from camp, or show off better in front of the Feldmans for you. I didn't know how to do it any differently. Or better. Or whatever.

HOWARD

And?

JOAN

Howard.

HOWARD

And?

WENDY

(Sitting, withdrawing into herself) I'm sorry I got stuff you didn't because Grandpa had more money later. I didn't know it made you feel bad. I didn't know. I was...a child.

HOWARD

And?

MELISSA

Dad...

He turns to Melissa like she's an animal who's encroached on his territory. His presence is getting larger, more threatening, darker.

HOWARD

You would do best to stay out of this. Otherwise, you're next.

He pauses for effect. It works. Melissa backs down, stays near Joan. Howard turns to Wendy.

HOWARD

O.K. I've heard a lot of surface-level apologies here. Backhanded defenses of your actions. I haven't yet heard heartfelt regret for who, exactly, you've become.

WENDY

(Withdrawn) Who I've become?

LINDA

(Slowly moves to stand over her, like a taskmaster) You didn't just embarrass me at a table, in front of my cousins; you embarrassed me in front of everyone I've ever known, the entire Jewish community of Omaha. So how about: "I'm sorry I've become a selfish, condescending person who thinks so little of my parents. I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment. You raised me to be thoughtful and polite, and I became a brat. My parents know better than me, and I deserve this treatment. Say it. I deserve this. I'm worthless. I'm a worthless daughter. Say it."

Beat.

WENDY

(Quietly) I'm not that person.

LINDA

Yes, you are.

WENDY

(With increasing resolve) No, I'm not. I'm not that person. I'm a good person. Lots of people think so.

LINDA

(As if the language is coming through her from previous generations) It doesn't matter what *lots of people* think. It only matters what your parents think!

WENDY

(Blurts out) Not if your parents are assholes!

Wendy has shocked herself.

WENDY

I loved Chichi! I was a child!

LINDA

I knew it. See? Mom? You see? I knew it. I knew she thought she was better than us. And Dad encouraged it...

WENDY

I didn't...

HOWARD

That man made your mother eat shit for fifty years!

WENDY

That has nothing to do with me!

HOWARD

And you say you want to be a part of this family?

WENDY

I meant--

HOWARD

We wouldn't have you if you *begged* us. You *wish* you could be a part of this family. We're GREAT. And you're not--you never were. *Apologize.*

WENDY

I'm sorry I called you assholes.

HOWARD

Not that.

LINDA

For what you did to me.

WENDY

I didn't do anything to you.

LINDA

For my whole life, you've made me feel like the fat, dumb mother.

WENDY

I can't do that!

LINDA

I've read all the Russians!

Beat.

JOAN
Kids--

WENDY
I *comforted* Grandma.

LINDA
That was my part to play!

WENDY
Well she didn't ask you, did she?

LINDA
It was *my role*.

WENDY
I didn't do it *for show*!

Howard grabs a book from the shelf and throws it with great force to the floor. Eleanor cries.

HOWARD
Someone owes my wife an apology!

JOAN
(To Linda) He wasn't an easy man, but he loved you as much as he knew how.

LINDA
Stop lying, Mother. We both know that's just not true. He loved her more.

JOAN
Do you love Eleanor more than Melissa?

HOWARD
(Joking, poorly) Sometimes. Eleanor doesn't have as many ways to annoy us yet!

MELISSA
What? Dad!

WENDY
You *wanted* to come back to him?

HOWARD
(To Melissa) God, lighten up.

LINDA

(To Joan) You heard him after we got back from the nurse's station, didn't you?

JOAN

I don't know what you're referring to--

LINDA

You heard him tell me.... I know you heard it.

JOAN

Honey, he was on so many painkillers. He was...out of his mind.

LINDA

He knew exactly what he was saying.

JOAN

That's just not fair. He was hallucinating.

LINDA

We both know he meant it.

Joan walks over and picks up the book Howard threw earlier. She hands it to Wendy. Caleb enters with a bag similar to the one Melissa brought in earlier.

JOAN

This was your Uncle Abie's copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. When he was a boy, Grandpa lived for Abie's stories about acting on Broadway with Eli Wallach.

WENDY

I remember.

JOAN

Abie inscribed it to Grandpa, and Grandpa inscribed it to you. See? He meant for you to have it.

Wendy turns to Caleb. He puts it in the bag, then puts the bag near the stairs. Linda starts picking books out and dropping them too carelessly on the ground.

LINDA

Fine. Here. Here are all the poetry books. Here's Browning. And here's Shakespeare's sonnets. And here's Tagore. And Keats. You wrote your thesis on Ginsberg, right? Something about the Beats? Here. You want modern American? Here's Salinger. Cheever. You want Harper Lee? Take 'em all.

She and Howard shove books to the ground.

WENDY

You don't even read poetry.

LINDA

These were my father's.

WENDY

Whom you resented!

LINDA

He was my father!

WENDY

What do these even mean to you?

LINDA

(Pulls a book from the shelf) Eleanor might be interested in poetry one day, and then I could give her this collection of *Great Victorian Poets* and say, "This belonged to your great-grandfather."

JOAN

Wendy's a professor *now*. She's the writer. It made sense to him to leave her the collection.

WENDY

You can keep the Russians if you want.

Appalled, Linda slaps Wendy, hard.

LINDA

How dare you. You *deign* to bestow on me what's rightfully mine? I did everything he wanted me to. I played softball, and had a big bat mitzvah, and went to Boulder because he wouldn't travel longer than a one-hour plane ride to come see me. I...I got into Radcliffe, *on my own*, and he didn't let me go, and my entire life could have been different!

HOWARD

She could have had the life she deserved. She could've been surrounded by intellectuals, and gone to Europe, and married someone important, not an insurance salesman. Do you think I don't know this? She could've led a...a *cosmopolitan* life. But she lived 30 blocks from her parents' house, and schlepped you girls to Hebrew School every week, and you offer her a handful of books that are hers to begin with?

JOAN

They belong to Wendy. And Linda, he wanted you to be close by. He couldn't stand the idea of you being so far away on the east coast...

LINDA

No, he didn't want to be inconvenienced. I did what good girls in the 1960s did. I got a degree in education, and came home to live near my parents, and married somebody Jewish, and gave you grandkids and took care of my father when he got old. And it wasn't enough. He'd write me those...fucking letters...and tell me everything I was doing was wrong, and all the ways I was disappointing him--

WENDY

And it was awful, right? And you didn't deserve it because you became everything you were supposed to become, right?

LINDA

You know what? I didn't argue. I didn't talk back. I'd be a grown up, and get in the car, and pick him up, and take him to Dr. Klein's for blood work *like a respectful daughter*.

WENDY

Mom, I became everything you wanted me to be. And you wrote me letters. And you want me to apologize for...I don't even know what.

LINDA

He passed me over for everything, and all the opportunities, all the love, went straight to you. And now his *books*? You get the whole world, and I get nothing.

Linda sits. Melissa slings on a nursing apron and feeds Eleanor. The rain has all but stopped.

WENDY

You get me. I'm this nice person, and I'm your daughter, and you get *me*. I want us to be close again.

LINDA

No you don't. You want to live in the big city and have the life I never could...

WENDY

They're not mutually exclusive!

LINDA

You've had more experiences by thirty-seven than I'll ever have--

WENDY

You encouraged that--

LINDA

And now you're one of *them*.

WENDY

Who?

HOWARD

Steve and Janet and all the people who think they're better than us. Everyone *out there*. You were always one of them.

WENDY

I'm one of us!

LINDA

Never.

WENDY

I thought you were supposed to want your kids to--

LINDA

How would you know? Where are your kids? You're supposed to give me grandkids.

WENDY

And if I hadn't become this person, the person you raised me to be, you'd want me to apologize for becoming someone else, right? (She finally gives up) I can't win.

LINDA

How does it feel?

Beat.

LINDA

(Controlled) I did my job as the child. I figured out what would please my father, and then I did those things, and then he loved me. That's how it works.

WENDY

No.

LINDA

When you *earn* it--

WENDY

You're not supposed to have to earn it.

LINDA

Then how else do you know it's love?

She turns away from Wendy.

LINDA

I'm tired.

WENDY

Me, too.

LINDA

I'm so tired of looking at you. I look at you, and I hate you.

Long pause.

WENDY

You *hate* me?

Linda doesn't respond. Melissa hands Eleanor to Linda, hooks her bra back into place, takes off the nursing apron, then slowly lifts the books from the floor into the bag. Caleb pulls poetry off the shelf and puts it in his bag.

JOAN

(Holds Wendy's hands) I love you. Grandpa loved you. You are our bright and shining star.

Joan hands Grandpa's Hagaddah to Wendy. Caleb hoists the bag onto his back.

WENDY

(Uncertain) I'll call you?

JOAN

We'll figure something out.

WENDY

We had a lot of good years, right?

JOAN

The best. Nothing can take that away.

They embrace. Joan sits down at the table. Melissa lugs the bag to Wendy. Carmen Bearanda sticks out the top of it. Wendy removes the bear, maybe wiggles it a little to see the fruit hat shake, hear the bells cling, and then hands it back to Melissa, who accepts it.

WENDY

For Eleanor. (She shrugs or something) I'll be in Chicago.

MELISSA

I'll be here.

Melissa puts the bear next to Eleanor, then moves to the table and sits down.

Caleb helps Wendy lift the bag onto her back.

CALEB

You were right. They had to walk into the sea for the path to appear.

MELISSA

This doesn't feel like a miracle.

CALEB

Doesn't mean it isn't.

He takes her hand and leads her up the stairs. Howard sits down at the table. A few moments later, we hear the car start, then leave. The lights slowly fade. Linda eats an egg. Howard passes out the new Hagaddahs.

HOWARD

Page...forty-six. "And the Lord lifted us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great awe, and with signs and wonders. As it says, 'And, I will cross through the land of Egypt on this night. I, and not an angel. And I will strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt. I, and not a seraph. And I, on all the gods of Egypt, will deliver judgment. I, and not a messenger. I am the Lord. I am Him, and no other.'"

LIGHTS OUT.

End of play.