

A SERIOUS MAN

Written by

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White letters on a black screen:
Receive with simplicity everything that happens to you.

-RASHI

FADE IN:

AGAINST BLACK: SNOWFLAKES

straight up.
dead Now an angle looking steeply down: the snow falls not quite
lies away to collect on a
for maplike below us.
It is night, and quiet, and the street is deserted except
bundled one man who walks away from
us, his valenki squeaking in the fresh snow. He carries
branches on one shoulder
and has a hatchet tucked into his belt.

We cut down to street level. The man walks toward us,
bearded, and bundled against the
cold. Smiling, he mutters in Yiddish-the dialogue subtitled.

MAN

What a marvel... what a marvel...

HOUSE INTERIOR

As its door opens and the man enters.

MAN

Dora!

VOICE

Yes...

voice

The man crosses to the stove with his bundle of wood. The
continues:

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enters

. Can you help me with the ice?
The man dumps the wood into a box by the stove as his wife
with an ice pick.
. I expected you hours ago.

MAN

You can't imagine what just happened. I was coming back
on the Lublin road when the wheel came off the cart
thank heavens it was the way back and I'd already sold the
geese!

WIFE

How much?

to

MAN
Fifteen groshen, but that's not the story. I was struggling

set the cart upright when a droshky approaches from the direction of Lvov. How lucky, you think, that someone is out this late.

WIFE
Yes, very remarkable.

MAN
But that's the least of it! He stops to help me; we talk of this, we talk of that-it turns out this is someone you know! Traitle Groshkover!

His wife stares at him as he beams.
He takes the stare as a sign that she can't place the name.
. You know, REB GROSHKOVER! Pesel Bunim's uncle!
The chacham from Lodz, who studied under the Zohar reb in Krakow!

Still she stares. Then, quietly:

WIFE
God has cursed us.

MAN
What?

WIFE
Traitle Groshkover has been dead for three years.

stare

Laughter erupts from the man but, as his wife continues to
at him, he strangles on it.
Quiet.
Wind whistles under the eaves.

The man says quietly:

MAN

Why do you say such a thing! I saw the man! I talked to him!

WIFE

You talked to a dybbuk. Traitle Groshkover died of typhus in Pesel Bunim's house. Pesel told me-she sat shiva for him.

They stare at each through a silence broken only by the
sound
of the quickening wind.
A rap at the door.
Neither immediately responds.
Finally, to her husband:

Who is it?

MAN

For some soup, to warm himself.
The wind moans. He helped me, Dora!

THE DOOR

We are looking in from the outside as it unlatches and
creaks
in, opened by the husband
in the foreground, who has arranged his face into a strained
look of greeting. In the
background the wife stares, hollow-eyed.

MAN

REB GROSHKOVER! You are welcome here!
Reverse on REB GROSHKOVER: a short, merry-looking fellow
with
a bifurcated beard and a
delight.
silk hat and spectacles. He gives a little squeal of

REB GROSHKOVER

You are too kind, Velvel! Too kind!

He steps into the house and sees the wife staring at him. And you must be Dora! So much I have heard of you! Yes, your cheeks are pink and your legs are stout! What a wife you have!

The husband chuckles nervously.

MAN

Yes! A ray of sun, a ray of sun! Sit!

WIFE

My husband said he offered you soup.

REB GROSHKOVER

Yes, but I couldn't possibly eat this late, or I'd have nightmares. No, no: no soup for me!

WIFE

I knew it.

REB GROSHKOVER laughs.

REB GROSHKOVER

I see! You think I'm fat enough already!

He settles, chuckling, into his chair, but Dora remains sober:

WIFE

No. A dybbuk doesn't eat.

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REB GROSHKOVER stares at her, shocked.

The wife returns the stare.

The husband looks from wife to REB GROSHKOVER, apprehensive.
A heavy silence.

REB GROSHKOVER bursts into pealing laughter.

REB GROSHKOVER

What a wife you have!

He wipes away tears of merriment; the husband relaxes, even
begins to smile.

MAN

I assure you, REB GROSHKOVER, it's nothing personal; she heard a story you had died, three years ago, at Pesel Bunim's house. This is why she think you are a dybbuk; I, of course, do not believe in such things. I am a rational man.

REB GROSHKOVER is still chuckling.

REB GROSHKOVER

Oh my. Oh my yes. What nonsense. And even if there were spirits, certainly...

He thumps his chest.

I am not one of them!

WIFE

Pesel always worried. Your corpse was left unattended for many minutes when Pesel's father broke shiva and left the room-it must have been then that the Evil One-
She breaks off to spit at the mention of the Evil One.
-took you!

REB GROSHKOVER is terribly amused:

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REB GROSHKOVER

"My corpse!" Honestly! What a wife you have!

WIFE

Oh yes? Look, husband...

her. She steps forward to the Reb, who looks enquiringly up at

They were preparing the body. Pesel's father shaved one cheek...

across As his eyes roll down to look at her hand, she draws it

his smooth right cheek.

Then he left the room. He came back, and shaved the other...

She reaches across to the other cheek, REB GROSHKOVER's eyes following her hand-

You were already gone!

-and drags her hand across. A bristly sound.

REB GROSHKOVER laughs.

REB GROSHKOVER

I shaved hastily this morning and missed a bit-by you this makes me a dybbuk?

He appeals to the husband:
It's true, I was sick with typhus when I stayed with
Peselle, but I recovered, as you can plainly see, and now
I-hugh!

The wife steps back.
REB GROSHKOVER looks slowly down at his own chest in which
the
wife has just planted an
ice pick.
REB GROSHKOVER stares at the ice pick.
The wife stares.

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The husband stares.
Suddenly, REB GROSHKOVER bursts out laughing:
What a wife you have!
The husband can manage only a shocked whisper:

MAN

Woman, what have you done?

REB GROSHKOVER again looks down at his chest, which again
moves
him to laughter. He
shakes his head.

REB GROSHKOVER

Why would she do such a thing?

He looks up.
I ask you, Velvel, as a rational man: which of us is
possessed?

WIFE

What do you say now about spirits? He is unharmed!

REB GROSHKOVER

On the contrary! I don't feel at all well.

And indeed, blood has begun to soak through his vest.
He chuckles with less energy.
One does a mitzvah and this is the thanks one gets?

MAN

Dora! Woe, woe! How can such a thing be!

REB GROSHKOVER

Perhaps I will have some soup. I am feeling weak...

He rises to his feet but totters.
Or perhaps I should go...

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He smiles weakly at Dora..
One knows when one isn't wanted.
He walks unsteadily to the door, opens it with some effort,
and staggers out into the
moaning wind and snow to be swallowed by the night.
The wife and husband stare at the door banging in the wind.

FINALLY:

MAN

Dear wife. We are ruined. Tomorrow they will discover
the body. All is lost.

WIFE

Nonsense, Velvel...
She walks to the door...
Blessed is the Lord. Good riddance to evil and shuts it
against
the wind.

BLACK

A drumbeat thumps in the black.
Music blares: the Jefferson Airplane. Grace Slick's voice
enters:
When the truth is found to be lies
And all the hope inside you dies
Don't you want somebody to love. . .

An image fades in slowly, but even up full it is dim: some
kind
of round, dull white shape
with a small black pinhole center. This white half-globe is
a
plug set in a flesh-toned
drifting field. The flesh tone glows translucently, backlit. We are
toward the white plug
and, as we do so, the music grows louder still.

AN EARPIECE

9
A pull back-a reverse on the preceding push in-from the
cheap
white plastic earpiece
of a transistor radio. The Jefferson Airplane continues over
the cut but becomes
extremely compressed. The pull back reveals that the
earpiece
is lodged in someone's
ear and trails a white cord.

We drift down the cord to find the radio at its other end.
As we do so we hear, live in the
room, many voices speaking a foreign language in unison. A
classroom,
apparently.
The radio is on a desktop but hidden from in front by the
book
held open before it. The
book is written in non-Roman characters.
We are in Hebrew school.

The boy who is listening to the transistor radio-DANNY
Gopnik-sits
at a hinge-topped
desk in a cinderblock classroom whose rows of desks are
occupied
by other boys and
girls of about twelve years of age. It is dusk and the room
is
flourescent-lit.
At the front of the room a gray-haired man in a worn suit
and
tie addresses the class.
DANNY straightens one leg so that he may dig into a pocket.
With
an eye on the TEACHER to
make sure he isn't being watched, he eases something out:
A twenty-dollar bill.

TEACHER

Mee yodayah? Reuven? Rifkah? Mah zeh "anakim"?
Efsheh mashooach ba-avodah?

A BLINDING LIGHT

At the cut to the light the Jefferson Airplane music jumps
up
full. The light resolves into
a multi-flared image of a blinking eye.
Reverse: the inside of a human ear. Fleshy whorls finely
veined,
a cavity receding to
dark.
Objective on the DOCTOR's office: the DOCTOR is peering
through

a lightscope into the ear of
an early-middle-aged man, LARRY Gopnik.
The Jefferson Airplane music continues.

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DOCTOR

Uh-huh.

HEBREW SCHOOL

Close on Hebrew characters being scribbled onto the
blackboard

as the TEACHER talks.

The TEACHER, talking.

A bored child, staring off.

His point-of-view: a blacktopped parking lot with a few
orange

school busses, beyond it a
marshy field, and distant suburban bungalows.

Close on another child staring at something through drooping
eyelids.

His point-of-view: very close on the face of a classroom
clock.

We hear its electrical

hum. Its red sweep-second hand crawls around the dial very,
very

slowly.

DANNY Gopnik hisses:

DANNY

Fagle!.. .

The TEACHER drones on, writing on the blackboard. DANNY's
eyes

flit from the TEACHER to

the student sitting kitty-corner in front of him—a husky
youth

with shaggy hair. He
hasn't heard the prompt.

. Fagle!

The TEACHER turns from the blackboard and DANNY leans back,
eyes

front, folding the
twenty up small behind his book.

TEACHER

Ahnee rotzeh lalechet habait hakisai. Mee yodayah?

Misaviv tamid anachnoo tamid...

drool

The clock-watching child, eyelids sinking, is beginning to

out of one side of his

mouth.

DOCTOR'S OFFICE

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The light again flaring the lens.

Reverse: looking into a pupil.

Objective: the DOCTOR looking through his scope into LARRY's eye.

DOCTOR

Mm-hmm.

HEBREW SCHOOL

A bored child is excavating a bugger from his nose.

The TEACHER turns back to the chalkboard to circle something.

DANNY

Fagle!

TEACHER

Hamrah oomoh-

hawking He interrupts himself briefly to make a couple of phlegm-

sounds. He resumes:

. Hamrah oomoh meshiach oomshel zal?

DOCTOR'S OFFICE

into The DOCTOR palpates LARRY's midriff, digging his fingers

the hairy, baggy flesh.

DOCTOR's Voice

Uh-huh. We'll do some routine X-rays.

HEBREW SCHOOL

A young girl holds a hank of her bangs in front of her face, separating out individual hairs

to examine them for split ends.

TEACHER

Ahnoo ahnoo mah? Mah? Talmidim? D'vorah?

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D'VORAH

Ahnee to yodayah.

The TEACHER begins to pace the desk aisles, looking back and forth among the students.

TEACHER

Mee yodayah?

The bugger-seeker, having succesfully withdrawn a bugger,
carefully

drapes it over the
sharp end of his pencil, to what end we cannot know.

DANNY, apprehensively eyeing the TEACHER, slides the twenty
into

the transistor radio's
cover-sleeve.

X-RAY CONE

A huge white rubberized cone, pointed directly at us.

We hear a rush of static and the DOCTOR's voice filtered
through

a talk-back:

DOCTOR's Voice

Hold still.

Wider: LARRY is in his shorts lying on his back on an
examining

table covered by a sheet

of tissue paper. The X-ray cone is pointed at the middle of
his

body.

There is a brief sci-fi-like machine hum. It clicks off.

HEBREW SCHOOL

The clock-watching student's head is making descending bobs
toward

his chest.

TEACHER

Nefsheh shelach hamilamid-eh?!

behind The TEACHER's circuit of the classroom has taken him around

DANNY. DANNY's

book lies face-down on the desk, covering the radio, but the white cord snakes out from under it up to his ear.

The TEACHER yanks at the cord.

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blares The cord pops out of its jack and the Jefferson Airplane

tinnily from beneath the book of torah stories.

The TEACHER lifts the book to expose the jangling radio. Outraged, the TEACHER projects above the music:

. Mah zeh? ! Mah zeh? !

Some of the students are singing along; a couple beat rhythm on their desks.

. Shechet, talmidim! Anachnoo lo cam zeh b'bait sefer! Shechet bivakasha!

Three other students join in a chorus:

STUDENTS

Shechet! Shechet bivakasha!

The nodding student's head droops ever lower.

Other students join in the chant:

SHECHET! SHECHET! SHECHET BIVAKASHA!

his The nodding student's chin finally reaches, and settles on,

chest, and he gives a long snorfling inhale of sleep.

DOCTOR'S OFFICE

cigarette LARRY, now fully clothed, is seated across from the DOCTOR. The DOCTOR is looking at his file. He absently taps a

out of a pack and lights up.
He nods as he smokes, looking at the file.

DOCTOR

Well, I-sorry.
He holds the pack toward LARRY.

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LARRY

No thanks.

DOCTOR

Well, you're in good health. How're Judith and the kids?

LARRY

Good. Everyone's good. You know.
The DOCTOR takes a long suck.

DOCTOR

Good. Daniel must be-what? About to be bar mitzvah?

LARRY

Two weeks.

DOCTOR

Well, mazel tov. They grow up fast, don't they?

TINTED PHOTO PORTRAIT

aged
and
identifies
principal's
office, a white

The portrait, old, in an ornate gilt frame, is of a middle-
rabbi with a small neat
mustache and round spectacles. He wears a tallis hood-style
a phylactery box is
strapped to his forehead. A plaque set into the frame
the man as Rabbi Minda.
Wider shows that the portrait hangs in the Hebrew school

cinderblock room. It is quiet. The only sound is a deep
electrical hum.
Just visible behind the principal's desk, upon which is a
low stack of books and a name
plate identifying the occupant as MAR TURCHIK, is the top of
a man's head-an old
not. man, with a few wispy white hairs where his yarmulka is
see DANNY, seated opposite, pushes up from his slouch to better
across the desk.
wears We boom up to show more of the principal. He is short. He
thick a white shirt and
hoist-up pants that come to just below his armpits. He has
eyeglasses. He fiddles
with the transistor radio, muttering:

PRINCIPAL

Hmm... eh... nu?

15

He experiments with different dials on the radio.
DANNY nervously watches.

DANNY

You put the-
The old man holds up one hand.

PRINCIPAL

In ivrit. (In Hebrew)

DANNY

Um...
The old man looks down at the little earpiece pinched
between two fingers. He examines
it as a superstitious native might a Coca-Cola bottle.
The source of the electrical hum: a wall clock whose red
sweep-second hand crawls

around the dial very, very slowly.
The Reb continues to squint at the earpiece.
DANNY sighs. He encourages:

DANNY

Yeah, you-
The principal's tone is harder:

PRINCIPAL

In ivrit!
This time his cold look holds until he is sure that the
admonishment
has registered.
He looks back down at the earpiece.
We hear the door open. The principal ignores it.
An old woman walks slowly in with a teacup chattering on a
saucer.
She has thick
eyeglasses. She wears thick flesh-colored support hose. She
takes
slow, short steps
toward the desk. The principal is studying the radio.

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PRINCIPAL

Mneh...
The old woman continues to take slow short steps toward him.
The tableau looks like a
performance-art piece.
She reaches the desk and sets the teacup down. She summons a
couple of phlegm-
hawking rasps and turns to go.
She takes slow short steps toward the door.
The principal raises the earpiece experimentally toward his
ear.
Close on his hairy, wrinkled ear as his trembling fingers
bring
in the earpiece. The
fingers push and wobble and tamp the earpiece into place,
hesitate,
and then do some
more pushing and wobbling and tamping.

The principal keeps DANNY fixed with a stare as his hand
hesitantly drops from his ear,
ready to reach back up should the earpiece loosen.
.mneh...
Satisfied that neither the student nor the earpiece are
about to make any sudden moves, he
looks down at the radio. He turns a dial.
Faintly and tinnily from the earpiece we hear the compressed
jangle of rock music. The
rabbi stares blankly, listening.
DANNY slumps, looking warily at the rabbi.
The rabbi continues to stare down at the radio. The
compressed rock music jangles on.
The rabbi is expressionless, mouth slightly open, listening.
Tableau: anxious student, earplugged spiritual leader.
Muffled, from the outer office, the hawking of phlegm.

CLASSROOM

We are behind a man who writes equations on a chalkboard,
shoulder at work and hand
quickly wagging. Periodically he glances back, giving us a
fleeting look at his face: it is

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LARRY Gopnik.

LARRY

You following this?... Okay?... So... Heh-heh... This
part is exciting...
Students follow along, bored.
LARRY continues to write.
. So, okay. So. So if that's that, then we can do this,
right? Is that right? Isn't that right? And that's
Schrodinger's paradox, right? Is the cat dead or is the cat
not dead? Okay?

BLEGEN HALL

LARRY is entering the physics department office. The
department's

secretary wheels her
castored chair away from her typing.

SECRETARY

Messages, Professor Gopnik.
He takes the three phone messages.

LARRY

Thank you, Natalie. Oh-CLIVE. Come in.
A Korean graduate student who was been waiting on a
straightbacked
chair rises.

LARRY'S OFFICE

He is flipping through the messages. Absently:

LARRY

So, uh, what can I do for you?
The messages:
WHILE YOU WERE OUT Dick Dutton
OF Columbia Record Club

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CALLED.

REGARDING: "Please call."
WHILE YOU WERE OUT Sy Ableman

CALLED.

REGARDING "Let's talk."
WHILE YOU WERE OUT CLIVE Park

CALLED.

REGARDING: "Unjust test results."
He crumples the last one.

CLIVE

Uh, Dr. Gopnik, I believe the results of Physics Mid-Term
were unjust.

LARRY

Uh-huh, how so?

CLIVE

I received an unsatisfactory grade. In fact: F, the failing grade.

LARRY

Uh, yes. You failed the mid-term. That's accurate.

CLIVE

Yes, but this is not just. I was unaware to be examined on the mathematics.

LARRY

Well-you can't do physics without mathematics, really, can you.

CLIVE

If I receive failing grade I lose my scholarship, and feel shame. I understand the physics. I understand the dead cat.

LARRY

(SURPRISED)

You understand the dead cat?

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CLIVE nods gravely.

But... you... you can't really understand the physics without understanding the math. The math tells how it really works. That's the real thing; the stories I give you

in

class are just illustrative; they're like, fables, say, to

help

give you a picture. An imperfect model. I mean-even I don't understand the dead cat. The math is how it really works.

CLIVE shakes his head, dubious.

CLIVE

Very difficult... very difficult...

LARRY

Well, I... I'm sorry, but I... what do you propose?

CLIVE

Passing grade.

LARRY

No no, I-

CLIVE

Or perhaps I can take the mid-term again. Now I know it covers mathematics.

LARRY

Well, the other students wouldn't like that, would they. If one student gets to retake the test til he gets a grade he likes.

CLIVE impassively considers this.

CLIVE

Secret test.

LARRY wraps a hand wearily over his eyes.

LARRY

. No, I'm afraid-

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CLIVE

Hush-hush.

LARRY

No, that's just not workable. I'm afraid we'll just have to bite the bullet on this thing, CLIVE, and-

CLIVE

Very troubling.

He rises.

. very troubling...

He goes to the door, shaking his head, as LARRY looks on in surprise.

He leaves.

LARRY stares at the open door. The secretary outside, her

back

to us, types on.

LARRY. looks stupidly around his own office, shakes his

head.

He picks up the phone message from Sy Ableman-"Let's talk"-

and

dials. As he dials
his other hand wanders over the papers on the desktop.
There is a plain white envelope on the desk. LARRY picks it
up
as the phone rings through.
A ring is clipped short and a warm basso-baritone rumbles
through
the line:
Phone Voice
Sy Ableman.

LARRY

Hello, Sy, LARRY Gopnik.

SY

(MOURNFUL)

LARRY. How are you, my friend.
LARRY picks idly at the envelope.

LARRY

Good, how've you been, Sy?

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Inside the envelope: a thick sheaf of one-hundred-dollar
bills.

SY

Oh fine. Shall we talk LARRY.
LARRY reacts to the money.

LARRY

(into phone)
What?! Oh! Sorry! I, uh-call back!
He slams down the phone.

. CLIVE!

He rushes out the door, through the secretarial area, and
into
the hallway, and looks up
toward the elevators.
Empty.
He looks at the stuffed envelope he still holds.

typing. He goes back to the departmental office. The secretary sits

She glances at him
and, as she goes back to her typing:

SECRETARY

Sy Ableman just called. Said he got disconnected.

BATHROOM DOOR

A hand enters to knock.

Man's Voice

Out in a minute!

SARAH, the sixteen-year-old girl who has just knocked, rolls her eyes.

SARAH

I gotta wash my hair! I'm going out tonight!

VOICE

Out in a minute!

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SARAH

Jesus Christ!

She stomps down the hall.

KITCHEN

enters. Judith, a woman of early middle age, is at the stove. SARAH

SARAH

W is Uncle Arthur always in the bathroom?

JUDITH

He has to drain his sebacious cyst. You know that. Will you set the table?

SARAH

Why can't he do it in the basement? Or go out in the garage!

BUS

rattles We are raking the exterior of an orange school bus as it
along. Hebrew characters
on the side identify it-to some, anyway.

INSIDE

crate, We are locked down on DANNY as the bus rattles like an old
vibrate squeaking, grinding
gears, belching exhaust. DANNY and the children around him
and pitch about but,
from their lack of reaction, seem used to it.
They raise their voices to be heard over the engine noise
and the various stress noises in
the chassis and a transistor radio somewhere that plays
Jefferson Airplane.

DANNY

I had twenty bucks in it too. Inside the case.

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Mark Sallerson
Twenty bucks! How come.

DANNY

I bought a lid from Mike Fagle. Couple weeks ago. I still
owed him twenty.
Mark Sallerson
He already gave you the pot?

DANNY

Yeah but a couple weeks ago my funding got cut off. Fagle
said he'd pound the crap out of me if I didn't pay up.
Howard Altar
What funding got cut off? Where do you get your money?
Another boy, with thick glasses, is Ronnie Nudell.
Ronnie Nudell
What happened?
Mark Sallerson
Rabbi Turchik took his radio. Had money in it.
Ronnie Nudell

That fucker!

DANNY

Yeah. I think he said he was confiscating it.

Ronnie Nudell

He's a fucker! Where do you get your money?

Mark Sallerson

Mike Fagle's gonna kick his ass. Last week he pounded the crap out of Seth Seddlemeyer.

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Ronnie Nudell

He's a fucker!

Mark Sallerson

Fagle? Or Seth Seddlemeyer?

Ronnie Nudell

They're both fuckers!

BATHROOM DOOR

A hand enters to knock.

Uncle Arthur's Voice

Out in a minute!

SARAH

Are you still in there?!

Uncle Arthur

I, uh.. . Just a minute!

SARAH

I've gotta wash my hair! I'm going out tonight, to the hole!

Uncle Arthur

Okay!

OUTSIDE

LARRY pulls into the driveway and gets out of the car. The
purr
of a lawn mower. He
looks.
His point-of-view: Gar Brandt, the next-door neighbor, is
mowing
his lawn. He has a
buzz cut and is wearing a white T-shirt.
Another noise competes with the lawn mower: rattling,
squeaking,

gear-grinding. The
orange school bus with Hebrew lettering pulls up across the
street.

Its door opens with a
pneumatic hiss to discharge a passenger.

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DINNER TABLE

LARRY sits in. His wife and two children are already seated.
There is one empty place.

LARRY projects:

LARRY

Arthur!
A muffled voice:

ARTHUR

Yeah!

LARRY

Dinner!

ARTHUR

Okay! Out in a minute!

LARRY

We should wait.

SARAH

Are you kidding!
They start eating.

LARRY

Mr. Brandt keeps mowing part of our lawn.

JUDY

Does that matter?

LARRY

What?

JUDY

Is it important?

LARRY shrugs.

LARRY

It's just odd.

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JUDY

Any news on your tenure?

LARRY

I think they'll give me tenure.

JUDY

You think.

LARRY

(EQUABLY)

Well, I don't know. These things aren't, you know.. .

JUDY

No, I don't know. Which is why I ask.

LARRY

WELL-

SARAH

Mom, how long is Uncle Arthur staying with us?

JUDY

Ask your father.

BACK YARD

Twilight.

LARRY is stepping onto a hose as he unwheels it from the

drum

of a traveling sprinkler,

laying out an are to cover the back yard. Intermittent

thwacks

from next door:

Gar Brandt and his son, who also has a buzz cut and a white

T-shirt,

throw a baseball
back and forth. Gar Brandt throws hard. The ball pops in the
boy's mitt.

MITCH

Ow.

LARRY walks over to the boundary defined by the fresh
mowing.

He sights down it.

Gar Brandt looks over his shoulder at LARRY, looking. Gar

Brandt

is expressionless. He

27

goes back to throwing.

MITCH

Ow.

INSIDE

Evening. Lights on. LARRY sits at the kitchen table, a
briefcase

open on the chair next to
him. Blue books-examination booklets-are spread on the table
in front of him. He

reads, occasionally making marginal scribbles, grading.

From off, faint and dulled by intervening walls, rock music:
somewhere in the house

DANNY is listening to the Jefferson Airplane.

The clink of teaspoon against china as LARRY stirs his tea.

He

looks up at a noise: JUDY
enters.

JUDY

Honey.

LARRY

(ABSENT)

Honey.

JUDY

Did you talk to Sy?

Still absent, without looking up:

LARRY

Sy?-Sy Ableman!-That's right, he called, but I-

JUDY

You didn't talk to him.

LARRY

No, I-

JUDY

You know the problems you and I have been having.
Sympathetic, but still absent:

28

LARRY

Mm.

JUDY

Well, Sy and I have become very close.
This brings LARRY's head up. He focuses on JUDY, puzzled.

She

elaborates:

divorce.

In.short: I think it's time to start talking about a

LARRY stares at her. A long beat.
At length, trying to digest:

LARRY

. Sy Ableman!

JUDY

This is not about Sy.

LARRY

You mentioned Sy!

JUDY

Don't twist my words. We-

LARRY

A divorce-what have I done! I haven't done anything-

What have I done!

JUDY

LARRY, don't be a child. You haven't "done" anything. I haven't "done" anything.

LARRY

Yes! Yes! We haven't done anything! And I-I'm probably about to get tenure!

JUDY

Nevertheless, there have been problems. As you know.

LARRY

29

WELL-

JUDY

And things have changed. And then-Sy Ableman. Sy has come into my life. And now-

LARRY

Come into your-what does that mean?! You, you, you, you barely know him!

JUDY

We've known the Ablemans for fifteen years.

LARRY

Yes, but you you said we hadn't done anything!
JUDY suddenly is stony:

JUDY

I haven't done anything. This is not some flashy fling. This is not about woopsy-doopsy.
LARRY stares at her.

LARRY

Sy Ableman!
From down the hall, a knock on a door. A muffled voice:

ARTHUR

Out in a minute!

JUDY

Look, I didn't know any other way of breaking it to you. Except to tell you. And treat you like an adult. Is that so wrong?

as

LARRY does not seem to be listening. His eyes roam the room he thinks.

LARRY

Where do I sleep?
JUDY narrows her eyes.

30

JUDY

What?

LARRY

Arthur's on the couch!

JUDY

Look. Sy feels that we should-

LARRY

Esther is barely cold!

JUDY

Esther died three years ago. And it was a loveless marriage. Sy wants a Gett. This derails the conversation. LARRY stares, trying to pick up the thread.

up

LARRY

. A what?

JUDY

A ritual divorce. He says it's very important. Without a Gett I'm an Aguna.

LARRY

A what? What are you talking about?

She turns to go, shaking her head, peeved:

JUDY

You always act so surprised.
As she leaves:
I have begged you to see the Rabbi.

FADE IN

LARRY has fallen asleep at the kitchen table, face-down in a pile of blue books. Cold blue light sweeps across him and he looks up.

31

old
A short, balding middle-aged man in flannel pyjamas and an
flannel dressing gown
stands in front of the open refrigerator holding an open jar
of orange juice. He tips the jar
back to drink, his free hand holding a balled-up towel to
the
back of his neck
LARRY stares at him.

FADE OUT

BLEGEN HALL

rimmed
LARRY enters the departmental office. His eyes are red-
and dark-bagged. He has
beard stubble.
The department's secretary wheels her castored chair away
from
her typing.

SECRETARY

Messages, Professor Gopnik.
He takes the two phone messages.

HIS OFFICE

LARRY looks at the messages:
WHILE YOU WERE OUT Dick Dutton
OF Columbia Record Club

CALLED.

REGARDING: "2Â°d attempt. Please call."
WHILE YOU WERE OUT Sy Ableman

CALLED.

REGARDING "Let's have a good talk."
A knock brings his look up.

LARRY

Yes-thanks for coming, CLIVE.
CLIVE Park enters the office.

32

. Have a seat.
LARRY uses a key to open the top left desk drawer. He takes

out

the envelope.
We had, I think, a good talk, the other day, but you left something that-

CLIVE

I didn't leave it.

LARRY

Well--you don't even know what I was going to say.

CLIVE

I didn't leave anything. I'm not missing anything. I know where everything is.
LARRY looks at him, trying to formulate a thought.

LARRY

Well... then, CLIVE, where did this come from?
He waves the envelope.
. This is here, isn't it?
CLIVE looks at it gravely.

CLIVE

Yes, sir. That is there.

LARRY

This is not nothing, this is something.

CLIVE

Yes sir. That is something.

A beat.
. What is it.

LARRY

You know what it is! You know what it is! I believe. And

33

you know I can't keep it, CLIVE.

CLIVE

Of course, sir.

LARRY

I'll have to pass it on to Professor Finkle, along with my suspicions about where it came from. Actions have consequences.

CLIVE

Yes. Often.

LARRY

Always! Actions always have consequences!
He pounds the desk for emphasis.
In this office, actions have consequences!

CLIVE

Yes sir.

LARRY

Not just physics. Morally.

CLIVE

Yes.

LARRY

And we both know about your actions.

CLIVE

No sir. I know about my actions.

LARRY

I can interpret, CLIVE. I know what you meant me to understand.

CLIVE

Meer sir my sir.
LARRY cocks his head.

34

LARRY

. Meer sir my sir?

CLIVE

(careful enunciation)
Mere... surmise. Sir.
He gravely shakes his head.
. Very uncertain.

CLOSE ON A TONE ARM

A hand lays it onto a slowly spinning vinyl record.
Through scratches and pops, a solo tenor starts a mournful
Hebrew
chant.
Close on the sleeve:
Rabbi Youssele Rosenblatt Chants Your Haftorah Portion

VOLUME 12

Rabbi Youssele wears a caftan and a felt hat and has sad
eyes.
They peer out from the
owl's
dark beard that covers most of the rest of his face like
eyes peering out of the
woods.
Wider, on DANNY, in his bedroom, evening. He lifts the tone
arm
on the portable
turntable.
He chants the passage.
He drops the tone arm at the same place; Rabbi Youssele
chants
the passage again.
DANNY listens, eyes narrowed. He lifts the tone arm and
chants
the passage again.
He replays the passage again; before he can lift the tone
arm

to echo it his door bursts
open. Rabbi Youssele continues to chant.

35

SARAH

You little brat fucker! You snuck twenty bucks out of my
drawer!

DANNY

Studying torah! Asshole!

SARAH

You little brat! I'm telling Dad!

DANNY

Oh yeah? You gonna tell him you've been sneaking it out
of his wallet?

SARAH

All right, you know what I'm gonna do? You little brat? If
you don't give it back?

We hear the thunk of the front door opening. DANNY stands,
calling:

DANNY

Dad?

FOYER

LARRY is entering with his briefcase. As he stows it in the
foyer closet DANNY's voice
continues, off:

DANNY

Dad, you gotta fix the aerial.
Judith emerges from the kitchen.

JUDITH

Hello LARRY, have you thought about a lawyer?

LARRY

Honey, please!
DANNY emerges from the hall.

DANNY

36

We're not getting channel four at all.

LARRY

(to Judith)

Can we discuss it later?

DANNY

I can't get F Troop.

JUDITH

LARRY, the children know. Do you think this is some secret?

Do you think this is something we're going to keep quiet?

SARAH enters.

SARAH

Dad, Uncle Arthur is in the bathroom again! And I'm going to the hole at eight!

She hits DANNY on the back of the head.

DANNY

Stop it!

LARRY

SARAH! What's going on!

DANNY

She keeps doing that!

LATER

LARRY sits in a reclining chair in the living room, head
back,
listening to Sidor Belarsky on
the hi-fi. On top of the music is a hissing-sucking sound.
There
is also the sound of a
pencil busily scratching paper.
We cut to its source: Uncle Arthur sits scribbling into a
spiral
notebook, his free hand

back holding the end of a length of surgical tubing against the
of his neck. The tube leads
the to a water-pik-like appliance on an end table next to him-
source of the sucking
sound.
into After a long beat of listening to the music, LARRY speaks
space:

37

LARRY

Arthur?

Uncle Arthur does not look up from his scribbling.

Uncle Arthur

Yes.

LARRY continues to stare at the ceiling.

LARRY

What're you doing?

Still without looking up:

Uncle Arthur

Working on the Mentaculus.

Long beat. Music. Scribbling.

LARRY

Any luck, um, looking for an apartment?

More scribbling.

Uncle Arthur

No.

The doorbell chimes.

FRONT DOOR

window, LARRY enters, glances through the front door's head-height
and-freezes, one
hand arrested on the way to the doorknob.
His point-of-view: framed by the window, yellowly lit by the
stoop light, a human head.
A middle-aged man, a few years older than LARRY. A fleshy
face
with droopy hangdog

features, a five-o'clock shadow, and sad Harold Bloom eyes.
LARRY opens the door.

38

LARRY

Sy.

warm,
Sy, entering, thrusts out a hand. His voice vibrates with a
sad empathy:

SY

Good to see you, LARRY.

He is a heavy-set man wearing a short-sleeved shirt that his
belly tents out in front of
him. In his left hand he holds a bottle of wine.

LARRY

(TIGHTLY)

I'll get Judith.

SY

No, actually LARRY, I'm here to see you, if I might.

He shakes his head.

. Such a thing. Such a thing.

LARRY

Shall we go in the...

He is leading him into the kitchen but Sy, oblivious to
surroundings,

plows on with the

conversation, arresting both men in the narrow space between
kitchen sink and stove, and
invading LARRY's space.

SY

You know, LARRY-how we handle ourselves, in this
situation-it's so impawtant.

LARRY

Uh-huh.

SY

Absolutely. Judith told me that she broke the news to you. She said you were very adult.

LARRY

Did she.

39

SY

Absolutely. The respect she has for you.

LARRY

Yes?

SY

Absolutely. But the children, LARRY. The children. He shakes his head.

. The most impawtant.

LARRY

Well, I guess...

SY

Of coss. And Judith says they're handling it so well. A tribute to you. Do you drink wine? Because this is an incredible bottle. This is not Mogen David. This is a wine, LARRY. A bawdeaux.

LARRY

You know, Sy-

SY

Open it-let it breathe. Ten minutes. Letting it breathe, so impawtant.

LARRY

Thanks, Sy, but I'm not-

SY

I insist! No reason for discumfit. I'll be uncumftable if you don't take it. These are signs and tokens, LARRY.

LARRY

I'm just-I'm not ungrateful, I'm, I just don't know a lot

about wine and, given our respective, you know-
He is startled when Sy abruptly hugs him.

SY

40

S' okay.

He finishes the hug off with a couple of thumps on the back.
S'okay. Wuhgonnabe fine.

SKEWED ANGLE ON PARKING LOT

We are dutch on a slit of a view through a cracked-open
frosted
window: the Hebrew
school parking lot.
The last couple of busses filled with students are rolling
out
of the lot. It is late
afternoon.
A reverse shows DANNY in a stall, standing on a closed
toilet,
angling his head to peer out
the bathroom window opened at the top.
The bathroom outside the stall: Ronnie Nudell leans against
a
sink waiting, sucking a
long draw from a joint.
DANNY emerges from the stall. Ronnie Nudell offers the
joint.
Ronnie Nudell
Want some of this fucker?

HALLWAY

The bathroom door cracks open in the foreground. DANNY peeks
out.
His point-of-view: the empty hallway ending in a T with
another
hallway. A janitor
crosses, pushing a broom down the far hallway. He
disappears.
His echoing footsteps
recede.
DANNY and Ronny emerge from the bathroom.

RABBI MINDA

by The photo-portrait on the wall of Mar Turchik's office lit
late-day sun.
We hear a scraping sound.

41

hunched Wider: Ronnie Nudell looks over DANNY's shoulder as DANNY,
at Mar Turchik's
desk, fishes the end of a bent hanger into the keyhole on
the top left drawer. After a beat,
the hanger turns.
They open the drawer. In it: squirt guns, marbles set to
rolling by the opening of the
drawer, a comic book, a Playboy magazine, a slingshot, a
small bundle of firecrackers.
Hands rifle the gewgaws: no radio.
Ronnie Nudell
Fuck.

SANCTUARY

pew, We are behind the two boys who sit side by side on the last
staring at the front of
the empty sanctuary. Its stained glass windows further
weaken the late-afternoon light.
In deference to the location, the boys wear yarmulkas.
A long hold on their still backs.
At length, some movement in DANNY's back, his head dips, and
we hear him sucking on
the joint. He holds it, exhales, and passes it wordlessly to
Ronnie Nudell.

SUBURBAN STREET

rimmed, We are pulling DANNY as he walks along the street, eyes red-
still wearing his
yarmulka. It is dusk.
After a few beats of walking, the front door of a house just

behind DANNY opens. A
husky, shaggy-haired youth emerges on the run.
The sound has alerted DANNY. Seeing Mike Fagle, he too
begins
to run. He reaches up
and grabs his yarmulka and clutches it in one of his pumping
fists.
Pursued and pursuer both run wordlessly, panting, feet
pounding.
Mike Fagle is closing. But DANNY is already cutting across
the
Brandt's front yard,
approaching his own. He plunges into the house and slams the
door.
Mike Fagle draws up, panting, gazing hungrily at the house.

42

Lights are on inside. The house is a warm yellow citadel in
the
dusk.
After a beat we hear, faint and dulled, the Jefferson
Airplane.
Mike Fagle slinks away.

PUFFY WHITE CLOUDS

A shockingly blue sky with picture-perfect clouds hanging in
it.
After a beat the top of an aluminum extension ladder swings
in
from the bottom of the
frame and comes toward us.
We cut to a side angle as the ladder clunk against a roof.
It starts vibrating to the rhythmic clung of someone
climbing.
Hands enter. LARRY's head enters.
He climbs onto the roof.
He takes a couple steps away from the edge and stands
tentatively,
making sure of his
balance. He looks around.
His point-of-view towards the front. An unfamiliarly high
perspective
on the street and

the neighboring houses, almost maplike. Very peaceful. Wind rhythmically,

gently
waves the trees.

LARRY gingerly walks up to the aerial at the peak of the roof.

We are hearing a rhythmic
popping noise.

LARRY reaches the peak and straddles it. He looks down at the
back yard.

MITCH

Ow.

Foreshortened Gar Brandt and Mitch are playing catch in their

back yard. With each toss
the ball pops, alternately in father's mitt and son's.
Precariously balanced, LARRY reaches out for the aerial. He

tentatively
touches it. He
grasps it. He twists the aerial.

43

Something strange: as it rotates the aerial creaks—a high whine
as pure as the hum
sounded from the rim of a wineglass.

MITCH

Ow.

Faintly, under the wineglass sound, and clouded by static, a high, ringing tenor sings in
an unfamiliar modality. Cantorial music.

LARRY drops his hand. Inertia keeps the aerial rotating slowly

til it dies, the sound drifting
away into the sybillant shushing of trees.
LARRY reaches out again to turn the aerial. The same crystal
hum... cantorial singing...
and now, layering in, the theme from F Troop.
Music. Crystal hum. Wind.

MITCH

Ow.
LARRY's look travels: his point-of-view pans slowly off the
steep
angle of father and son
in
playing catch, travels across his own backyard, and brings
the white fence that
encloses the patio of the neighbor on the other side.
Gar (off)
Good toss, Mitch.
On the enclosed patio a woman reclines on a lawn chaise of
nylon
bands woven over an
aluminum frame. She is on her back, eyes closed against the
sun.
She is naked.
Mitch (off)
Ow.
LARRY reacts to the naked woman: startled at first, he moves
to hide behind the peak of the
roof. But as he realizes that the sun keeps the woman's eyes
closed he relaxes, continu-
ing to stare.
She is attractive. Not young, not old: LARRY's age.
Peaceful.
After a still beat one of her hands gropes blindly to the
side.
It finds an ashtray on the
table next to her and takes from it a pluming cigarette. The
woman takes a puff and
replaces it.

44

Mitch (off)
Ow.
F Troop. Cantorial singing.
Blue sky and white puffy clouds.
The sound of a pencil scratching against paper.

NOTEBOOK

A pencil scratches equations into a lamplit spiral notebook.
Sidor Belarsky comes in at the cut. So does the spluttering
suck-sound
of Uncle Arthur's

evacuator.

narrow Wider on Uncle Arthur, in his pyjamas, propped up on the

fold-out sofa, writing
with one hand as he holds the evacuator hose to his neck

the other.
Squeezed into the living room next to the fold-out sofa is a
camp cot of plaid-patterned
LARRY, nylon stretched over an aluminum frame. On the camp cot is

damp lying half-in, half-
out of a rumpled sleeping bag. He stares at the ceiling, a
washcloth pressed against
his forehead. His face is flaming red.
Arthur speaks absently as he scribbles:

ARTHUR

Will you read this? Tell me what you think?
LARRY continues to stare at the ceiling.

LARRY

Okay.
Uncle Arthur glances up from the notebook, focuses on LARRY.

ARTHUR

Boy. You should've worn a hat.

LATER

45

The lights are out. Very quiet. Uncle Arthur lightly snores.
LARRY still stares at the ceiling. He shifts his weight. The
aluminum frame of the cot
squeaks. He shifts again. Another creak.
LARRY fishes his watch from the jumble of clothes on the

floor:

4:50.

KITCHEN

LARRY, in his underwear, spoons ground coffee into the
percolator.
Uncle Arthur snores

softly on in the other room.
From outside, a dull thunk.
LARRY pulls back a curtain.
Next door, Gar Brandt is going down the walk, wearing
camouflage
togs and camo billed
ice cap, a rifle bag slung over his shoulder. He is carrying an
ice chest, its contents clicking
and sloshing.
The boy Mitch, also wearing camo clothes and cap and also
with a rifle bag, has just
shut closed the front door. He now lets the screen door swing
behind him and follows his
father down the walk to the car in the driveway.
The twitter of early morning birds. Gar's voice, though not
projected,
stands out in the
pre-dawn quiet:

GAR

Let's see some hustle, Mitch.

CLOSE ON THE NOTEBOOK

Its top sheet, densely covered by equations, has a heading:
The Mentaculus
Compiled by Arthur Gopnik
After a beat LARRY's hand enters to turn the page. The
second page is also densely
covered with equations.

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VOICE

LARRY?

LARRY's This brings LARRY's look up from the Mentaculus. We are in
office. Standing in
the office doorway is Arlen Finkle.

LARRY

Hi Arlen.

Arlen Finkle

LARRY, I feel that, as head of the tenure committee I should tell you this, though it should be no cause for concern. You should not be at all worried.

LARRY waits for more. Arlen seems to need a prompt.

LARRY

Okay.

Arlen Finkle

I feel I should mention it even though we won't give this any weight at all in considering whether to grant you tenure, so, I repeat no cause for concern.

LARRY

Okay, Arlen. Give what any weight?

Arlen Finkle

We have received some letters, uh... denigrating you, and, well, urging that we not grant you tenure.

LARRY

From who?

Arlen Finkle

They're anonymous. And so of course we dismiss them completely.

LARRY

Well... well... what do they say?

Arlen Finkle

They make allegations, not even allegations, assertions, but

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I'm not really... while we give them no credence, LARRY, I'm not supposed to deal in any specifics about the committee's deliberations.

LARRY

But... I think you're saying, these won't play any part in your deliberations.

Arlen Finkle

None at all.

LARRY

Um, so what are they...
Arlen Finkle
Moral turpitude. You could say.

LARRY

Uh-huh. Can I ask, are they, are they-idiomatic?
Arlen Finkle
I, uh...

LARRY

The reason I ask, I have a Korean student, South Korean,
disgruntled South Korean, and I meant to talk to you about
this, actually, he-
Arlen Finkle
No. No, the letters are competently-even eloquently
written. A native English-speaker. No question about
that.

LARRY

Uh-huh.
Arlen Finkle
But I reiterate this, LARRY: no cause for concern. I only
speak because I would have felt odd concealing it.

LARRY

Yes, okay, thank you Arlen.

48

Arlen Finkle
Best to Judith.
LARRY answers with a wan smile. He looks down at the
Mentaculus.

HEBREW SCHOOL EXTERIOR

Day. Somewhere inside the school a bell rings. Its doors
swing
open and children
emerge.
Our angle is down a line of school busses, each with the the
same stenciled Hebrew
lettering, waiting to ferry the children home.
We are tracking toward the busses to steepen the rake. As
children
sort themselves out

the
stress

and climb into their respective vehicles, the track brings
nearest bus into the fore-
ground. It noisily idles with its signature squeaks and
sounds, its low coughing
engine ominously rumbling. Children start climbing on.

MINUTES LATER

shirt
wheel

Inside the bus, now moving. Engine noise bangs in louder and
air roars in through open
windows.
We are on the driver, a sallow man in a short-sleeved white
with earlocks and a
yarmulke. He pitches about, stoically wrestling with the
and gear shift as the
vehicle bucks.
The pitching children. Somewhere, Jefferson Airplane plays.

DANNY

I gotta get my radio back.
Ronnie Nudell
Maybe the fucker lodged it up his fucking asshole.

DANNY

I gotta get it back. Or Mike Fagle's gonna pound the crap
out of me.
Ronnie Nudell

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Way up his asshole.

DANNY

And I'll still have to get my sister the money back or she's
gonna break four of my records. Twenty bucks, four
records.
Howard Altar
How do you buy all those records. Where do you get your
funds.

CLOSE ON LARRY

staring Standing in his yard. His eyes are darkly pouched. He is
at something, it seems
in distress. We hear a fluttering sound.
His point-of-view: stakes are set out in the Brandts' yard.

Red
ribbon connecting them
outlines a projection from the side of the house. The loose
ends
of the ribbon flutter in
the breeze.
Engine noise brings LARRY's look around. A car is arriving.
It is the Brandts' car, oddly burdened. As it pulls into
their
driveway we see that there is
over a four-point stag strapped to the hood, its head lolling
the grille.
Gar and Mitch get out of the car in their hunting fatigues.

Blood
is smeared on Gar's
shirt.

GAR
Go scrub up, Mitch.

LARRY
Uh, good afternoon.
This brings Gar's look around. Apparently he is unused to
talking
with his neighbor.
There is a short beat before his response.

GAR
Afternoon.
In the background of his angle is the dead buck, staring off
through sightless eyes.

50

LARRY

(LAMELY)

. Been hunting?

GAR
Yep.

LARRY
Is that a, uh...
He is indicating the staked area. Gar looks around at it,
looks
back at LARRY.

GAR
Gonna be a den.

LARRY
Uh-huh, that's great. Uh, Mr. Brandt-
Gar barks at Mitch, who has lingered to listen to the grown-
ups:

GAR
I said scrub up, Mitch!
The child quickly goes. LARRY frowns.

LARRY
Isn't this a school day?

GAR
Took him out of school today. So he could hunt with his
dad.

LARRY
Oh!
He nods.
. That's... . nice.
Gar stares at him with button eyes. Small talk is not his
thing.
LARRY clears his throat.

51
. Um, Mr. Brandt, that's just about at the property line,
there. I don't think we're supposed to get within, what, ten

FEET

GAR

Property line's the poplar.

LARRY

. the. ?

GAR

Poplar!

LARRY

. Well.. . even if it is, you're just about over it

GAR

Measure.

We hear two pairs of pounding footsteps coming up the street.

LARRY

I don't have to measure, you can tell it's...

GAR

Line's the poplar.

He indicates.

. It's all angles.

Gar Brandt turns and goes.

LARRY turns, reacting to the pounding footsteps. One of the two pairs belongs to DANNY who arrives, slowing to a walk, panting, a bookbag over his shoulder.

Husky, A half-block back the pursuing boy also stops running.

shaggy-haired, he

watches, scowling, as DANNY goes up the walk to his house.

LARRY addresses DANNY's retreating back:

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LARRY

What's going on?

DANNY

Nothing.

IN THE HOUSE

As LARRY enters.
Judith (ofj)

LARRY?

LARRY

(PROJECTING)

Yeah?
Judith (ofj)
Did you go to Sieglestein Schlutz?
No, I-not yet.

LARRY.

Appointment Monday.
The thud of a car door outside.
SARAH heads for the front door, pulling on a jacket. LARRY

is

surprised.
. Where are you going?

SARAH

I'm going to the hole.

LARRY

At five o'clock?
He looks out the front-door window. Four girls of SARAH's
are coming up the walk

age

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from the car. All have dark hair and big noses.

SARAH

We're stopping at Laurie Kipperstein's house so I can wash
my hair.

the

LARRY pulls open the door just as the doorbell rings. From
four dark girls:

VOICES

Hi, Mr. Gopnik.

LARRY

You can't wash it here?
From somewhere in the house, Jefferson Airplane starts.
As she brushes past LARRY:

SARAH

Uncle Arthur's in the bathroom.

VOICE

Out in a minute!
Judith enters.

JUDITH

Are you ready?

LARRY

Huh?

JUDITH

We're meeting Sy at Embers.

LARRY

I am?

JUDITH

Both of us. I told you.

EMBERS

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LARRY has his arms pinned at his sides by hugging Sy
Ableman.

SY

LARRY. How are you.

LARRY

Sy.

SY

Hello Judith.

JUDITH

Hello Sy.

Judith

Once Sy releases LARRY, all seat themselves at Sy's booth,
next to Sy, LARRY
facing.

SY

Thank you for coming, LARRY. It's so impawtant that we be
able to discuss these things.

LARRY

I'm happy to come to Embers, Sy, but, I'm thinking, really,
maybe it's best to leave these discussions to the lawyers.

SY

Of coss! Legal matters, let the lawyers discuss! Don't mix
apples and oranges!

JUDITH

I've beamed you to see the lawyer.

LARRY

(teeth grit)
I told you, I'm going Monday.

SY

Monday is timely! This isn't-please!-Embers isn't the
forum for legalities, you are so right!

JUDITH

Hmph.

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SY

No, Judith and I thought merely we should discuss the
practicalities, the living arrangements, a situation that
will
conduce to the comfit of all the parties. This is an issue
where no one is at odds.
LARRY isn't sure where this is leading:

LARRY

. Living arrangements.

SY

Absolutely. I think we all agree, the children not being contaminated by the tension-the most impawtant.

JUDITH

We shouldn't put the kids in the middle of this, LARRY.

LARRY

The kids aren't-

JUDITH

I'm saying "we." I'm not pointing fingers.

SY

No one is playing the "blame game," LARRY.

LARRY

I didn't say anyone was!

JUDITH

Well let's not play He said, She said, either.

LARRY

I wasn't! I. ---

SY

Aw right, well let's just step back, and defuse the situation,

LARRY.

LARRY glares at Sy.

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Sy smiles at him, sadly. He reaches over and rests a hand on LARRY's hand.

. I find, sometimes, if I count to ten.

A beat.

One... two... three... faw... Or silently.

Long beat.

JUDITH

Really, to keep things on an even keel, especially now, leading up to DANNY's bar mitzvah-

SY

A child's bar mitzvah, LARRY!

JUDITH

Sy and I think it's best if you move out of the house.

LARRY

. Move out?!

SY

It makes eminent sense.

JUDITH

Things can't continue as they-

LARRY

Move out! Where would I go?!

SY

Well, for instance, the Jolly Roger is quite livable. Not expensive, and the rooms are eminently livable.

JUDITH

This would allow you to visit the kids.

SY

There's convenience in its favor. There's a pool-

LARRY

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Wouldn't it make more sense for you to move in with Sy?
Judith and Sy gape at him, shocked.
After a long beat:

JUDITH

LARRY!

SY

LARRY, you're jesting!

JUDITH

LARRY, there is much to accomplish before that can happen.

Sy is sadly shaking his head.

SY

LARRY, LARRY, LARRY. I think, really, the Jolly Roger is the appropriate coss of action.

He shrugs.

It has a pool.

IN BLACK AND WHITE: A BRAIN

It sits in a large fishbowl filled with clear fluid.

The brain, alive, pulses. Leads connect it to various pieces of gear outside the fishbowl.

Brain and appurtenances sit on a dais of sorts dressed out
with
bunting.

Oddly, the picture is scored with cantorial singing.

The brain seems to be giving orders to people who wear
imperfectly

form-fitting 1950's

uniforms of the future. After receiving their instructions
the

minions of the brain

kowtow before it and leave. They are succeeded by two
leather-helmeted

thugs, big and

heavy though lacking muscle definition, who escort a
resisting

handsome man before the

brain. The handsome man, hands tied behind his back, gazes
defiantly

up at the brain

which in some fashion addresses him.

We hear blows and voices over the cantorial music:

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DANNY

Stop it!

SARAH

Creep fucker!

DANNY

Stop it! I'm getting it! I'm gonna get it!

Wider shows that the brain is on television, which DANNY has muted while he plays the Cantor Youssele Rosenblatt record and drills his torah portion.

He and SARAH are in a stand-off, hands tensed to either deliver or ward off blows.

SARAH

Brat!

LARRY enters.

LARRY

What's going on?

SARAH

(LEAVING)

Nothing.

She closes the door behind her.

LARRY

What was that?

DANNY

Nothing.

LARRY

How's the haftorah coming? Can you maybe use the hi-fi?

DANNY

What?

We hear the doorbell off. LARRY indicates the portable record player.

LARRY

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Can I borrow this? I'm taking some stuff. To, you know, the Jolly Rodger.

DANNY

Sure Dad.

On TV, the handsome man shouts defiance at the brain.

From off, SARAH projects:

SARAH

Dad. Chinese guy.

ASIAN MAN

cut A middle-aged Korean man, well groomed. He wears a nicely
suit and a jeweled tie-
pin.

MAN

with Culcha clash.
He bangs his two knuckles together, illustrating.
. Culcha clash.
He faces LARRY in the driveway. LARRY's car is half-loaded
open boxes that are
haphazardly stuffed with clothing and effects.
LARRY is leaning against the hood, arms folded, gazing at
the man, unimpressed. A long
beat.
Finally he bestirs himself.

LARRY

With all respect, Mr. Park, I don't think it's that.
Mr. Park
Yes.

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LARRY

No. It would be a culture clash if it were the custom in
your land to bribe people for grades.
Mr. Park
Yes.

LARRY

So-you're saying it is the custom?
Mr. Park
No. This is defamation. Grounds for lawsuit.

LARRY

You-let me get this straight-you're threatening to sue me for defaming your son?

Mr. Park

Yes.

LARRY

But it would-

Gar Brandt

Is this man bothering you.

Gar Brandt stands on the strip of lawn separating the two neighbors.

He is giving Mr.

Park a hard stare.

LARRY

Is he bothering me? No. We're fine. Thank you, Mr.

Brandt.

Gar Brandt, not entirely convinced, withdraws, glaring at the

Korean.

LARRY turns back to Mr. Park.

. I, uh. . See, if it were defamation there would have to be someone I was defaming him to, or I... All right, I... let's keep it simple. I could pretend the money never appeared. That's not defaming anyone.

BL

Mr. Park

Yes. And passing grade.

LARRY

Passing grade.

Mr. Park

Yes.

LARRY

Or you'll sue me.

Mr. Park

For taking money.

LARRY

So.. . he did leave the money.

Mr. Park

This is defamation.

LARRY stares at him.

LARRY

Look. It doesn't make sense. Either he left the money or he didn't
Mr. Park
Please. Accept mystery.

LARRY

You can't have it both ways! If
Mr. Park
Why not.
LARRY stares.
We hear Sidor Belarsky music.

RECORD PLAYER

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DANNY's Sidor Belarsky's singing crosses the cut. The tone arm of
portable record
player rides on a spinning LP.
Wider shows LARRY grading bluebooks at a small formica table
crowded into a corner of
his motel room. It is a depressingly generic budget motel
room
of the mid-sixties with
cheaply paneled walls, thin carpet, formica night tables,
plastic
lamps, and twin beds
with stained nubby bedspreads.
The phone rings.

LARRY

Hello...
He brightens.
. Fine, Mimi, how are you?... Uh-huh... No, it's not
that bad... It's not that bad... There's a pool...
Arthur emerges from an alcove in the dim depth of the room
that
has a dressing-room
mirror and apparently connects to the bathroom. He has a
hand
towel pressed to the

back of his neck.

. Oh sure, that sounds great. . . Oh, great, then I'll bring

DANNY...

LAKE NOKOMIS

The beach: families are crowded onto the small beach of a
freshwater lake, children
cavorting, adults lounging, much sun, few umbrellas. Red
floats connected by red nylon
rope define a swimming area; beyond it people dive from an
anchored raft.
Splashing and children's laughter slap off the surface of
the lake.

WOODS

Above the lake. The beach noise has some distance. It also
has a faintly bizarre canyon
echo. There is a present, sybillant shushing of breeze in
the trees.
It is dark here with intense hot spots where sun sifts
through the leaf cover. We are close
on DANNY, who sits very still, leaning back against a tree
trunk.

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After a very long beat he slowly exhales, a small amount of
smoke feathering out with his
breath.

VOICE

Gimme that fucker.

DANNY passes the joint to Ronnie Nudell, who sits opposite.

PICNIC AREA

picnic On a woodless rise above the lake. Each of the separate
 areas consist of a redwood
 table and benches placed next to a firepit.
 Here in the sun both LARRY and Mel Nudell, a man slightly
older than LARRY, glisten with
 sweat. Mel, in the background, bounces a bag of charcoal
briquettes to spill some into
 the firepit. LARRY sits at the table in the foreground with
Mimi Nudell who alone seems
 unaffected by the heat-or by anything else in the physical
environment.
 Her pale,
brimmed gravely composed Giacometti face is shaded by a large-
 hat.

LARRY

No. Almost a year and a half since Touche Ross let him go. He's very good with numbers. I think his, his social skills have held him back.

MIMI

Such a sweet man though.

LARRY

Arthur has a good heart. And he never complains, unlike me. Sometimes I don't give him enough credit.

MIMI

He tried to tell me about this thing he's working on, this, um...

LARRY

The Mentaculus? He says it's a, uh. a probability map. Of the universe. He asked if I could help him publish it. Um, it was a little hard for me to evaluate.

MIMI

Does he go out socially at all?

LARRY

He tries. He's been going to the singles mixers at Hillel House.-Well, I should talk, I'm not doing any better.

MIMI

How is Judith?

LARRY

Fine. She's fine. I'm the odd man out.
Mimi smiles.

MIMI

Sometimes these things just aren't meant to be. And it can take a while before you feel what was always there, for better or worse.

LARRY

I never felt it! It was a bolt from the blue! What does that mean! Everything that I thought was one way turns out to be another!

MIMI

Then-it's an opportunity to learn how things really are.
LARRY broods. Mimi softens.
. I'm sorry-I don't mean to sound glib. It's not always easy, deciphering what God is trying to tell you.

LARRY

I'll say.

MIMI

But it's not something you have to figure out all by yourself. We're Jews, we have that well of tradition to draw on, to help us understand. When we're puzzled we have all the

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stories that have been handed down from people who had the same problems.

LARRY

I guess.

MIMI

Have you talked to Rabbi Nachtner?

Silence.

Arthur is climbing the hill from the lake, dripping wet. He projects:

ARTHUR

Boy! The air out here is magnificent!

Mimi, looking at LARRY, responds to his dark silence:

MIMI

Why not see him?

Mel Nudell has finished spreading and lighting the coals. He now comes and sits next to

hand, Mimi, draping an arm over her shoulder. She strokes his

still looking at LARRY.

LARRY

What's the rabbi gonna tell me?

MIMI

If I knew I'd be the rabbi.

He looks at her glumly. She laughs.

. Life is beautiful, LARRY. Nobody's sick. Nobody died.

You just need help remembering how to enjoy it.

She rests her head against Mel's shoulder.

. Where are the kids?

MEL

Woods. Exploring.

thighs, Uncle Arthur approaches, swim trunks plastered to his

hair dripping, one hand

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pressing his towel to the back of his neck.

ARTHUR

If somebody could bottle this air they'd make a million bucks!

A white title comes up:

The First Rabbi

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE ANTEROOM

Day. LARRY sits waiting. A door opens and he rises.

LARRY

Oh-Rabbi Scott.

Rabbi Scott Ginzler is the junior rabbi, a man in his
twenties.

Rabbi Scott
Hello LARRY.

LARRY

I thought I was going to see Rabbi Nachtner.

Rabbi Scott

He was called away on an etz monim: Ruth Brynn's mother
is in the hospital and she isn't doing well. Rabbi Nachtner
asked me to cover for him-come on in.

RABBI SCOTT'S OFFICE

A few minutes later. LARRY sits tensely hunched forward
facing

Rabbi Scott.

LARRY

And she wants a Gett.

A long silence. The hum of ventilation.
At length:

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Rabbi Scott
A what?

LARRY

She wants a-

Rabbi Scott

Oh, a Gett. Uh-huh, sure.

LARRY

I feel like the carpet's been yanked out from under me. I
don't know which end is up. I'm not even sure how to
react; I'm too confused.

Rabbi Scott

What reasons did she give? For the rupture?

LARRY

She didn't give-reasons. Just that, oh, you know, things haven't been going well.

Rabbi Scott

And is that true?

LARRY

I guess. I don't know. She's usually right about these things.

Rabbi Scott

Mm-hm.

LARRY

I feel so... addled.

Rabbi Scott

Yes, I can see.

LARRY

I was hoping that... Rabbi Nachtner...

Rabbi Scott

That he would... yes?

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LARRY

Well, with the benefit of his life experience... no

OFFENSE-

Rabbi Scott chuckles.

Rabbi Scott

No, of course not. I am the junior rabbi. And it's true, the point-of-view of somebody who's older and perhaps had similar problems might be more valid. And you should see the senior rabbi as well, by all means. Or even Minda if you can get in, he's quite busy. But maybe-can I share something with you? Because I too have had the feeling of losing track of Hashem, which is the problem here. I too have forgotten how to see Him in the world. And when that happens you think, well, if I can't see Him, He isn't there any more, He's gone. But that's not the case. You just need to remember how to see Him. Am I right?

He rises and goes to the window.

I mean, the parking lot here. Not much to see.

the

It is a different angle on the same parking lot we saw from

Hebrew school window.

But if you imagine yourself a visitor, somebody who isn't familiar with these... autos and such... somebody still with a capacity for wonder... Someone with a fresh... perspective. That's what it is, LARRY.

LARRY

Um...

Rabbi Scott

Because with the right perspective you can see Hashem, you know, reaching into the world. He is in the world, not just in shul. It sounds to me like you're looking at the world, looking at your wife, through tired eyes. It sounds like she's become a sort of... thing... a problem... a thing...

LARRY

Well, she's, she's seeing Sy Ableman.

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Rabbi Scott

Oh.

LARRY

She's, they're planning, that's why they want the Gett.

Rabbi Scott

Oh. I'm sorry.

LARRY

It was his idea.

Rabbi Scott

Well, they do need a Gett to remarry in the faith. But this is life. For you too. You can't cut yourself off from the mystical or you'll be-you'll remain-completely lost.

You have to see these things as expressions of God's will.

You don't have to like it, of course.

LARRY

The boss isn't always right, but he's always the boss.

Rabbi Scott

Ha-ha-ha! That's right, things aren't so bad. Look at the parking lot, LARRY.

Rabbi Scott gazes out, marveling.
. Just look at that parking lot.

EXTERIOR: GOPNIK HOUSE

house.
Our low angle looks across the lawn toward the front of the

Someone's pounding
footsteps approach and his feet enter just off the lens and
he

quickly recedes, cropping in
as he races up to the house: DANNY.
A beat later pursuing feet enter, slowing-for DANNY is
already

mounting the front
stoop. DANNY's pursuer does not go deep enough to crop in
but

we might gather from
the size eleven sneakers and the cuffed jeans that it is
hulking
Mike Fagle.

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GOPNIK KITCHEN

We hear the front door being flung open and slammed shut,
and

in the background foyer
DANNY appears, panting heavily. He gives one glance back
toward

the front door and
then looks at his mother and sister eating soup in the
foreground.

His sister has a towel
wrapped turbanlike around her head. She holds it with one
hand

to keep it from tipping
off when she tilts her head down for the soup.

DANNY

(still panting)
We eating already?

SARAH

I'm going to the hole.

DANNY enters the kitchen and sits at the setting across from his sister. He picks up his spoon.
Some movement in SARAH's body; DANNY recoils from a kick.

DANNY

Ow! Cut it out!

JUDITH

What's going on?
The siblings slurp soup, neither answering.
After a couple slurps:
. Isn't Dad eating?

JUDITH

He's at the Jolly Roger.

DANNY

Oh yeah.
More eating.

FADE OUT

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SIEGLESTEIN, SCHLUTZ

filled
In a small windowless conference room lined by bookshelves
with law reference
books, LARRY rises to greet Don Milgram, entering.

LARRY

Don.

DON

How are you, LARRY, Jesus, I am so sorry to be seeing you under these circumstances.

LARRY

Oh, well...

DON

I always thought you and JUDY were rock solid. This is so terrible, LARRY. This is devastating.

LARRY

Well, the way I look at it, it's an opportunity for me to really sit down and figure things out, and, and, look at the world afresh instead of just, you know, settling for the routine, tired old way of looking at things.

Don Milgram stares at him.

DON

. Really?

LARRY

(DEFLATING)

I don't know. Maybe not.

DON

Well, legally, I have to warn you, it's never easy for the husband. Unless, of course, there's some question of the wife having violated the marriage contract.

LARRY

Oh no, nothing like that. She's planning to marry Sy Ableman, but they-

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DON

Sy Ableman!

LARRY

Yes, but they-

DON

Esther is barely cold!

LARRY

She passed three years ago.

DON

Well, okay, still-this changes the complexion, LARRY! Sy Ableman!

LARRY

Not in the sense that... there hasn't been hanky-panky. To my knowledge.

DON

Oh.

LARRY

they, No. I'm fairly certain this is not an issue. And in fact uh, Judith wants a Gett. Beat. Don stares blankly at LARRY. LARRY clears his throat. A ritual divorce.

DON

Oh.

LARRY

So that they can remarry in the faith-

DON

Uh-huh, sure, not really a legal matter. Okay. Well. My goodness. How are the children taking it?

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LARRY

Oh, they're very...
He gropes.
. resilient.

DON

Sol. Good. Well. On the other thing, the neighbor's property line, I've asked Solomon Schlutz to take a look. There's very little having to do with real estate that'll get by

LARRY

Okay. Good. How do you-I guess I'm a little worried, how do you, I have money pressures and-

DON

Our fee structure? We bill by the hour. Dave Sieglestein and Solomon Schlutz bill at a hundred and ten, the associ-

ates, me for instance, bill at
A secretary sticks her head in.

SECRETARY

A call for Mr. Gopnik. DANNY. At home.

LARRY

DANNY? !

DON

You can take it here.

SECRETARY

Oh-eight-oh-nine.

LARRY punches a button on a row of four on the conference-
room
telephone.

LARRY

DANNY? !

VOICE

Dad?

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LARRY

Are you all right? Are you all-is everything-

VOICE

F Troop is fuzzy.

LARRY

. What?

VOICE

F Troop is still fuzzy.
LARRY stares.

DON

Everything okay?

DAWN AT THE JOLLY ROGER

Wide on the motel room, dimly lit by weak sun starting to seep in around the curtain. LARRY sleeps in one of the twin beds; Uncle Arthur snores in the other. Uncle Arthur's breath snags and tangles on a snorfling and it wakes him, gagging. He blinks, sits up, swings his legs out, gazes blearily around the room. He rises stiffly and heads for the bathroom. LARRY stirs. The sound of Uncle Arthur urinating. LARRY looks blearily around. LARRY stiffly rises. He takes the two steps across the room to the formica desk on which are spread papers for his class. As we hear the sucking sound of the neck evacuator in the bathroom, LARRY sweeps papers together and mechanically stuffs his briefcase.

CAR

LARRY is driving, hollow-eyed, to work. After a long beat of staring, the ka-ching of a bicycle bell.

75

LARRY's eyes widen and his head swivels, tracking as he overtakes and passes: The bicyclist. A young Asian man wearing a white traffic-mask. LARRY looks at him in the rear-view.

LARRY

CLIVE!

He starts frantically pumping down his window, shouting: . CLIVE! You gonna send your mother next?! You little

bastard! I wanna see you! I wanna-Crash.

He has rear-ended someone.

A blaring horn, a quick second crash: wrenching steel and spattering glass.

He has been rear-ended in turn.

The ka-ching of the bicycle. CLIVE Park cycles past without looking.

BLEGEN HALL

LARRY enters the outer office, hugging his paper-stuffed briefcase to his chest.

The secretary is just crooking the phone into her shoulder.

SECRETARY

Oh-Professor Gopnik. It's Dick Dutton again.

LARRY

(BLANK)

Dick Dutton.

LARRY'S OFFICE

He sits in and picks up the phone.

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LARRY

Hello?

VOICE

Hello, Mr. Gopnik, this is Dick Dutton from the Columbia Record Club. I'm calling because it is now, what, four months and we have yet to receive your first payment.

LARRY

I-there's some mistake. I'm not a member of the Columbian Record Club.

VOICE

Sir, you are Lawrence Gopnik of 1425 Flag Avenue South?

LARRY

No, I live at the Jolly Roger.

VOICE

Excuse me?

LARRY

No, I-well, yes, okay.

VOICE

Yes you are Lawrence Gopnik?

LARRY

Okay.

VOICE

Okay means...

LARRY

Okay, yes, Lawrence Gopnik, yes.

VOICE

Okay, well, you received your twelve introductory albums and you have been receiving the monthly main selection for four months now-

LARRY

"The monthly main selection?" Is that a record? I didn't

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ask for any records.

VOICE

To receive the monthly main selection you do nothing.

YOU-

LARRY

That's right! I haven't done anything!

VOICE

Yes, that's why you receive the monthly main selection.
The last

LARRY

But I-

VOICE

The last one was Santana Abraxis. You-

LARRY

I didn't ask for Santana Abraxis!

VOICE

You request the main selection at the retail price by doing nothing. It is automatically mailed to you. Plus shipping and handling. You're about to-

LARRY

I can't afford a new record every month! I haven't asked

FOR-

VOICE

You're about to get Cosmo's Factory, sir. The June main selection. And you haven't-

LARRY

Look, something is very wrong! I don't want Santana Abraxis! I've just been in a terrible auto accident! Beat.

VOICE

I'm sorry sir.

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LARRY

Well-thank you. But I-

VOICE

Are you okay?

LARRY

Yes. Yes, no one was hurt.

VOICE

Okay. Good. Well, you had fourteen days to listen to

Santana Abraxis and return it if you weren't completely satisfied. You did nothing. And now you-

LARRY

I didn't ask for Santana Abraxis! I didn't listen to Santana Abraxis! I didn't do anything!
The secretary is sticking her head in.

SECRETARY

Sir.

VOICE

Sir. Please. We can't make you listen to the record. We-

SECRETARY

Professor Gopnik, your son. He said it's urgent.

LARRY

Okay, look, I have to call you back, this is, this is I'm sorry.
He irritably punches a button on the bottom row of four.

DANNY?

DANNY

Dad!

LARRY

Did you join the Columbia Record Club?!

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Silence.

. DANNY?

DANNY

Um...

LARRY

DANNY, this is completely unacceptable. I can't afford to-

DANNY

Okay Dad, but you gotta come home.

LARRY

Is it F Troop?

DANNY

Huh? No no. Mom's real upset.

GOPNIK HOUSE

LARRY enters. We can hear weeping, semi-hysterical, from
somewhere

in the house.

SARAH's Voice

.Dad?

LARRY

Yes?

She enters.

SARAH

Does this mean I can't go to the hole tonight?

LARRY

Does what mean-what happened?

SARAH

Sy Ableman died in a car crash.

DANNY's Voice

80

Hey Dad!

LARRY

What?!

DANNY enters.

DANNY

So are you coming back home? Can you fix the aerial?
The weeping, off, grows louder and more hysterical.

LARRY

What?!

DANNY

It's still, you know...

Loud wailing.

BLACK

After a beat in black, a white title:
The Second Rabbi
The title fades.

RABBI'S OFFICE

We are close on LARRY. He sits hunched forward, hands
clasped
in front of him, staring at
the floor, sadly shaking his head.
After a long beat:

LARRY

It seems like she's asking an awful lot. But then-I don't
know. Somebody has to pay for Sy's funeral.
Rabbi Nachtner, sitting opposite, nods.
Rabbi Nachtner

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Uh-huh.

LARRY

His own estate is in probate. But why does it have to be
me? Or is it wrong to complain? JUDY says it is. But I'm
so strapped for cash right now-paying for the Jolly Roger,
and I wrecked the car, and DANNY's bar mitzvah... I...
Rabbi Nachtner
Something like this-there's never a good time.

LARRY

I don't know where it all leaves me. Sy's death. Obviously
it's not going to go back like it was.
Rabbi Nachtner
Mm. Would you even want that, LARRY?

LARRY

No, I-well yeah! Sometimes! Or-I don't know; I guess
the honest answer is I don't know. What was my life
before? Not what I thought it was. What does it all mean?
What is Hashem trying to tell me, making me pay for Sy
Ableman's funeral?
Rabbi Nachtner
Mm.

LARRY

And-did I tell you I had a car accident the same time Sy had his? The same instant, for all I know. Is Hashem telling me that Sy Ableman is me, or we are all one or something?

Rabbi Nachtner

How does God speak to us: it's a good question. You know Lee Sussman?

LARRY

DOCTOR Sussman? I think I-yeah.

Rabbi Nachtner

Did he ever tell you about the goy's teeth?

82

LARRY

No... I-What goy?

Rabbi Nachtner

So Lee is at work one day; you know he has the orthodontic practice there at Texa-Tonka.

LARRY

Uh-huh.

Rabbi Nachtner

Right next to the Gold Eagle Cleaners.

We cut to:

SIGN FOR THE GOLD EAGLE CLEANERS

It dominates a small suburban strip mall.

Rabbi Nachtner continues in voice-over as we cut to a smoked glass door that identifies

Leon Sussman, DDS.

Rabbi Nachtner

He's making a plaster mold-it's for corrective bridge work-in the mouth of one of his patients...

A close shot of a man's mouth biting down on two horse-shoe

shaped

troughs-an upper

and a lower-that overflow an oozing white goo.

. Russell Kraus. He's a delivery dispatcher for the Star and Tribune with chronic mandicular deterioration.

Melt" The grinding guitar solo from Jefferson Airplane's "Bear
scores the narrative.
The patient opens his mouth as a hand enters to grab the
upper tray.
The reverse shows Dr. Sussman, a balding middle-aged man,
dressed in the the high-
collared white smock of an oral surgeon. He carries the mold
over to a drying table.
Kraus is twisted over the side of the chair spitting into
the water-swirled spit-sink.
. Well, the mold dries and Lee is examining it one day

83

before fabricating an appliance...
Another day: Dr. Sussman is sitting at his desk examining
the lower mold. He notices
something unusual.
. He notices something unusual.
Sussman reaches up for the loupe attached to his eyeglasses.
There seems to be something engraved on the inside of the
patient's lower incisors...
He flips down the loupe. His eyes are hugely magnified as he
stares.
Sure enough, it's writing.
Sussman squints.
His point-of-view: Tiny incised Hebrew letters:
smli;½nn

BACK TO RABBI NACHTNER

He confirms with a nod.
Rabbi Nachtner
This in a goy's mouth, LARRY.

BACK TO LEON SUSSMAN

The Rabbi's narrative continues.
Rabbi Nachtner
Tet resh nun lamed nun shin tsayin. What is that-tiranu
linoshets? "Help me"? Is that what it says? Or is it a
name? It's not Kraus's name.

riser. Sussman flips the loupe away and looks off, haunted. He
He checks the mold, just to be sure. Oh, it's there all

84

right...
A dental mirror is dipped into the horse-shoe-shaped
hardened
paste of the mold. It pans
the
tiny letters that stand out in relief, right-side around in
mirror:
yw .rin
Sussman leans back, thinking.
He calls the goy back on the pretense of needing additional
measurements for the appliance...
reception
Close on Kraus grinning as he shakes Sussman's hand in the
area. Sussman
gestures to invite Kraus back to the examination room.
Sussman chats, affecting nonchalance.
the
In the examination room, leaning over Kraus in the chair,
dentist is indeed chatting
with seeming casualness.
Notice any other problems with your teeth? Anything
peculiar, et cetera?
Sussman takes a dental mirror.
No. No. No. Visited any other dentist recently?
He looks in Kraus' mouth with the mirror:
Ym nn
Sussman frowns.
There it is. "Help me"?
He leans back.
Sussman goes home. Can Sussman eat? No.
Sussman sits at the kitchen table, untouched food in front
of
him. His wife chats volubly
while Sussman stares into space.
Can Sussman sleep? No.

85

the Sussman is in bed, pyjamas buttoned to the neck, staring at ceiling.

What does it mean? Is it a message for him, for Sussman? And if so, from whom? Does Sussman know? Sussman doesn't know.

other Back in the dental office Sussman pulls boxes containing molds off the shelf.

Sussman looks at the molds of his other patients, goy and Jew alike, seeking other messages. He finds none. He looks in his own mouth...

reflection Close on Sussman in front of a mirror straining to see the of a reflection of the dental mirror he holds in his own mouth.

. Nothing. His wife's mouth...

snoring Sussman's wife lies asleep on her back, her mouth open, softly. Sussman, in

pyjamas but with his glasses on and loupe in place, lies

over her in bed, supporting himself with one arm thrown across her body. He leans

awkwardly in, carefully lowering a dental mirror into his wife's open mouth.

. Nothing. It is a singular event. A mystery.

The Jefferson Airplane guitar solo is heating up.

But Sussman is an educated man. Not the world's greatest sage, maybe, no Rabbi Minda, but he knows a thing or two from the Zohar and the Caballah. He knows every Hebrew letter has its numeric equivalent.

table Sussman, still in his pyjamas is sitting at the kitchen scribbling on a tablet of lined

paper.

Close on the paper: the Hebrew letters have been transcribed into their numeric

EQUIVALENTS:

496-2428

Nachtner continues in voice-over:

86

Seven digits-a phone number maybe?
Sussman reaches for the phone. He hesitates a moment, then
dials.

. Sussman dials. It rings.

AN ELEVATED CUBICLE

In a grocery store. A man in short sleeves reaches for the
phone.

Rabbi Nachtner

It's a Red Owl grocery store in Bloomington. Hello? Do
you know a goy named Kraus? Russel Kraus?

The store manager is shaking his head.

Where have I called? The Red Owl. In Bloomington.

Thanks so much.

The manager, puzzled, hangs up.

Sussman thinks, am I supposed to go to the Red Owl, to
receive a further sign? He goes...

In the parking lot of the Red Owl Sussman, wearing a short-
brimmed

fedora, emerges

from his car. It is an unremarkable grocery store in a
suburban
mall.

It's a Red Owl.

Inside Sussman, in his fedora, gazes around.

Groceries. What have you.

A service alley behind the store: dumpsters, wind-blown
garbage,

Sussman looking.

On the wall behind the store, a stain...

There is an old, rather nondescript stain of some liquid
splatted

against the back wall and

long since dribbled away.

. Could be a nun sofit... Or maybe not...

The parking lot again: Sussman gets back in his car.

87

Sussman goes home. What does it mean? He has to find out, if he's ever to sleep again.

bed
Sussman again, in pyjamas buttoned to the neck, lies in his

staring at the ceiling.

He goes to see the Rabbi, Nachtner. He comes in and sits right where you're sitting now.

where
Sussman is indeed sitting across from Rabbi Nachtner, just

we've seen LARRY
sitting.

What does it mean, Rabbi? Is it a sign from Hashem?

"Help me." I, Sussman, should be doing something to help this goy? Doing what? The teeth don't say. I should know without asking? Or maybe I'm supposed to help people generally-lead a more righteous life? Is the answer in cabalah? In torah? Or is there even a question? Tell me, Rabbi-what can such a sign mean?

scene-nods
Nachtner-not the narrating Nachtner but the Nachtner in the

and
considers.

LARRY

Staring at the Rabbi. He waits a good beat.
He prompts:

LARRY

So what did you tell him?
The Rabbi seems surprised by the question.
Rabbi Nachtner
Sussman?

LARRY

Yes!
Rabbi Nachtner
Is it. . relevant?

88

LARRY

Well-isn't that why you're telling me?

Rabbi Nachtner
Mm. Okay. Nachtner says, look.. .
We are back in the scene, narrated by voice-over, of the

Rabbi

silently advising the
fretful Sussman.
. The teeth, we don't know. A sign from Hashem, don't
know. Helping others, couldn't hurt.
LARRY's voice-over question plays over Sussman asking the

same

thing:
LARRY (of])
But is that what it meant?-tet resh nun lamed nun shin
isayin, was it "Help me"? or a number? Or was it
Rabbi Nachtner (off)
We can't know everything.
Sussman stares blankly at the Rabbi.
A beat.
LARRY (of])
It sounds like you don't know Mthing!

THE RABBI

Smiling equably at LARRY. He reacts to the ejaculation with

a

shrug.
LARRY scowls.

LARRY

Why even tell me the story?
Rabbi Nachtner

(AMUSED)

First I should tell you, then I shouldn't.

89

LARRY, exasperated, changes tack:

LARRY

What happened to Sussman?

SUSSMAN

resumes

In his office. Working on different patients as the Rabbi
his voice-over.

Rabbi Nachtner

What would happen? Not much. He went back to work. For a while he checked every patient's teeth for new messages; didn't see any; in time, he found he'd stopped checking.

Sussman, at home, chats with his wife over dinner.

. These questions that are bothering you, LARRY-maybe they're like a toothache. We feel them for a while, then they go away.

Sussman lies in bed sleeping, smiling, an arm thrown across his wife.

LARRY

Dissatisfied.

LARRY

I don't want it to just go away! I want an answer!

Rabbi Nachtner

The answer! Sure! We all want the answer! But Hashem doesn't owe us the answer, LARRY. Hashem doesn't owe us anything. The obligation runs the other way.

LARRY

Why does he make us feel the questions if he's not gonna give us any answers?

Rabbi Nachtner smiles at LARRY for a beat.

90

Rabbi Nachtner

He hasn't told me.

LARRY rubs his face, frustrated.

A last question occurs to him:

LARRY

And what happened to the goy?

Rabbi Nachtner's forbearing smile fades into puzzlement.

Rabbi Nachtner

The goy? Who cares?

EXTERIOR: THE SYNAGOGUE

The modern synagogue grafted onto a patch of prairie.

An echoing voice rings out:

VOICE

Sy Ableman was a serious man!

RABBI NACHTNER

words
In close-up he gazes around, weighing the effect of the
just delivered.
After a long beat during which he seeks to establish eye
contact
with as much of his
audience as possible:
Rabbi Nachtner
. Sy Ableman was a man devoted to his community...
Wider shows Rabbi Nachtner up on the bema. He and the
congregation
face each other
across a casket down at floor level.
. to torah study...
LARRY sits among the congregants, his gaze fixed on a point
off.

91

. to his beloved wife Esther until, three years ago, she
passed.. .
LARRY's point-of-view: JUDY is visible from 3 behind. She
sits
a few rows ahead looking
grimly up at the rabbi.
. and to his duty, as he saw it. Where does such a man
go? A tzadik-who knows, maybe even a lamid vovnik-a
man beloved by all, a man who despised the frivolous?
Could such a serious man... simply... disappear?
The words echo.
Again the rabbi gazes around, as if awaiting answer.

THEN:

. We speak of L'olam ha-ba, the World to Come. Not
heaven. Not what the gentiles think of as afterlife.
"L'olam ha-ba." What is L'olam ha-ba? Where is L'olam
ha-ba? Well: it is not a georaphic place, certainly.
Like-Canada.
Murmured chuckles from the congregation.
Nor is it the erez zavat chalav ood'vash-the land flowing
with milk and honey, for we are not promised a personal

reward, a gold star, a first-class VIP lounge where we get milk and cookies to eternity!

More chuckles.

L'olam ha-ba... is in the bosom of Abraham. L'olam ba-ba is in the soul of this community which nurtured Sy Ableman and to which Sy Ableman now returns. That's right, he returns. Because he still inspires us Ableman returns. Because his memory instructs us Ableman returns. Because his thoughts illuminate our days and ways Sy Ableman returns. The frivolous man may vanish without a ripple but Sy Ableman? Sy Ableman was a serious man...

92

A sob echoes through the sanctuary.

LARRY looks at Judith, who stifles further sobs with a handkerchief.

. As you know, the mourner's kaddish does not mention the dead. It praises Hashem; it praises what abides. And Sy Ableman, whose spirit will continue to assist us in tikkun olam, is with us even now, a serious man who would say as we now say Yiskadal v'yiskadash sh'may rabah... The congregation begins to chant along but it and Judith's weeping

are cut off by:

A HAND RAPPING AT A DOOR

The front door to the Gopnik home.

LARRY, still in his suit from shul and wearing a yarmulka, opens

the door. He recoils in surprise edged with fear.

Reverse: two uniformed policemen.

COP 1

Arthur Gopnik?

LARRY is momentarily dumb. Inside the house we can see a corner

of a card table set up in the living room with food laid out on it. SARAH sits with her

back to us, head wrapped by a towel-turban. Arthur, on the far side of the table, his balding

head domed by a yarmul-
ka, half-leans out so that he may sneak looks toward the men
at the door without totally
revealing himself. From somewhere down the hall come
Judith's
muffled sobs.
. Are you Arthur Gopnik?

LARRY

I'm... Laurence Gopnik.
Cop I
Do you go by the name Arthur Gopnik?

LARRY

No.

93

COP 1

Is that Arthur Gopnik?
Arthur ducks away.
From inside the living room:
DANNY (off)
Dad? What's going on?

LARRY

Can you tell me what's going on. We're sitting shiva here.

COP 1

You're what.

LARRY

A religious observance. We're... bereaved.
The cop standing behind gazes in over his partner's
shoulder.

COP 2

Who died?

LARRY

My wife's um... it's a long story.

COP 1

Look. Tell Gopnik-you know, Arthur Gopnik-he's

breaking the law. We're not arresting him now but next time we will. Gambling is against the law in this state. That's just the way it is. All right. Go back to your...

COP 2

Sorry, sir.

LIVING ROOM

A minute later. The family-except for Judith, whose weeping continues

off-sits
around the card table. A long beat.
At length:

94

DANNY

Dad, we get Channel 4 now but not Channel 7.

LARRY

Arthur, how could you do that to this family. On Sy's...
on Sy's-

ARTHUR

It's a victimless crime.

LARRY

That doesn't make it right! And you-

DANNY

He won a lot of money, Dad! The Mentaculus really works!
LARRY's gaze swings onto his son.

LARRY

You knew about it?!

DANNY

Well, um...

ARTHUR

They must have finked me out. They knew I could just keep on winning, so a couple weeks ago they blackballed me, and now they've-

LARRY

What did you do with the money you won?
Silence. Arthur sneaks a look at DANNY.
LARRY looks back and forth between them.
. What's going on?
Arthur shrugs.

ARTHUR

95

I didn't want it. DANNY said he could use it

SARAH

Unfair!

LARRY

What have you been-

ARTHUR

card

What's unfair is these guys saying I can't play in their
game!

SARAH

Why give him the money?! You know what he spends it
on?

LARRY

(knowing nod)
I know about the records.

SARAH

Records?! You think he buys records from Mike Fagle?
Movement in DANNY's body; SARAH recoils from a kick.
. Ow! Little brat!

LARRY

Hey! What's going on!

DANNY

At least I'm not saving up for a nose job!

LARRY

What?!

SARAH

Brat!

LARRY

Nobody in this house is getting a nose job! You got that?!

96

DANNY

Ali!

Struck by a thought he leaps up and bolts from the room.

LARRY

DANNY! You weren't excused! We're still talking!

SARAH

What a brat.

LARRY

What was this card game, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Some goys run a private game.

Troop. We hear the TV go on down the hall and the theme from F

I think they're Italians.

LARRY

DANNY, what's going on!

He rises.

BEDROOM

Troop LARRY enters to look down at DANNY's back. Beyond him F
flickers on the TV.

LARRY

DANNY! We're sitting Shiva!

DON MILGRAM'S OFFICE

arms LARRY, sitting across from Don, has his head buried in his

on the desktop.

DON

She's retained Barney Silver at Tuchman, Marsh. This is a, uh--this is an aggressive firm, LARRY.

97

LARRY

(MUFFLED)

Uh-huh.

DON

These are not pleasant people. Judith is free of course to retain whoever she... I take it you don't talk to her? LARRY raises his head, squinting against the light.

LARRY

It's hard. I think she emptied our bank account. I tried to ask her about it, very civilly.

DON

Mm.

LARRY

She, uh...

DON

Yeah, yeah you better open an account in your name only, put your paychecks in there from here on out. Til we know where we stand.

LARRY

Can I?

DON

Oh, absolutely!

LARRY

That's not, um, dishonest?

DON

Oh, absolutely! You, uh-

cash

LARRY
I hate to say this, but I think she's also been sneaking
out of my wallet.

DON
Ouch. Well, yes, this is definitely, um, adversarial. The

98
first thing we-are you all right?
LARRY is wincing as he rubs a forearm under his shirtsleeve.

Don

LARRY
Just a sunburn. I've been spending a lot of time on the
roof. For... perspective.
He trails off and his head drops back down onto his arms.
gives him an appraising
look.

DON
. Have you seen the Rabbi?

LARRY
(muffled again)
Talked to Nachtner.

DON
You should talk to Minda.

LARRY
They told me Minda doesn't do pastoral work any more.
Just... ceremonial.

DON
Mm. Congratulates the bar mitzvah boy every week, so
forth?
LARRY nods miserably.
. That's too bad. A very wise man, Minda.
LARRY raises his head.

LARRY
Getting old.

DON

Very old.

LARRY

No, me.

99

DON

LARRY, you're fine. It's a bump in the road. Was Nachtner helpful at all?

LARRY gives a helpless shrug.

Don rolls his eyes.

. What-did he tell you about the goy's teeth?

A knock on the door. Don projects:

Yeah?

The door cracks open. A pipe edges in, followed by a peeking face: Solomon Schlutz.

. Oh, good! Sol, come on in.

Solomon Schlutz is a large man in shirtsleeves and suspenders.

He has the smooth impassive face of a sphynx with a pipe clenched in its teeth.

He glides into the room, a sheaf of files tucked under one arm.

. Sol has been looking into the property-line issues.. . Solomon Schlutz seats himself at the conference table and starts

sorting and arranging the files into three piles.

. It seems that you do have a real problem with the original survey. But Sol seems to think there's some kind of nifty way for us to-well, I haven't heard it myself, I'll let Sol map it out.

Solomon Schlutz continues to arrange the files, his eye occasionally

lingering on a specific page. When at length he is finished he carefully justifies

the edges of the closest pile, takes the pipe out of his mouth, gives LARRY a smile that

seems to take some effort,
and then taps the pipe in a large glass ashtray.
He looks up again at LARRY, this time shocked. His stunned
look
on LARRY holds for a
long beat.
LARRY returns a bewildered look.

100

Solomon Schlutz, staring at LARRY as if he were some sort of
monster, emits one barking

SYLLABLE:

Solomon Schlutz
Gah!
His stare holds. He reddens.

DON

.Sol?
Solomon Schlutz's face now passes from the red end of the
spectrum
to the purple.
Solomon Schlutz
Nnnnff!
The pipe clatters out of his hand. The hand grabs at his own
shirt front.
. Glufffl...
Now his head pitches back. His backflung weight and twisting
body send his chair
tipping over, one hand still clutching at his chest while
the
other frantically waves. He
disappears behind the conference table and lands with a
floor-shaking
thump. His
writhing and gurgling remain audible.

DON

Sol! Sol!
Don Milgram has risen to look down at his fallen colleague;
now
he flings open the
conference room door and bellows into the office:
An ambulance! Quick! Somebody call an ambulance! A

DOCTOR!

A secretary looks in and screams.
Solomon Schlutz
Garf!... Nnlogl...

BLEGEN HALL

101

eyes
hand
LARRY walks into the outer office clutching his briefcase,
wide, shell-shocked. The
secretary is at her typewriter but holding the phone, one
covering its mouthpiece.

SECRETARY

Dick Dutton. Columbia Record Club.

LARRY

Call back.

HIS OFFICE

white
LARRY sits in heavily behind his desk.
A beat.
He opens the top left desk drawer. He withdraws the bulging
envelope and opens
its flap.
He runs a finger over the wad of bills.

VOICE

LARRY?

He looks up, startled.
Arlen Finkle stands in the doorway.
. As you know, the tenure committee meets-are you all
right?
LARRY sits frozen with the white envelope in his hands.

LARRY

I'm... fine.
Arlen Finkle
I'm sorry. I know you've hit a rough patch.

LARRY

Thank you. I'm fine.

He puts the envelope in the desk drawer and closes it.

102

Arlen Finkle

Uh-huh. Well. As you know, the tenure committee meets next Wednesday to make its final determinations. If

THERE'S-

LARRY

Arlen, I am not an evil man!

Arlen looks at him, shocked.

Arlen Finkle

LARRY! Of course not!

LARRY

I am not-

Arlen Finkle

We don't make moral judgments!

LARRY

I went to the Aster Art once. I saw Swedish Reverie.

Arlen Finkle

It's okay, LARRY, we don't need to know! The Tenure

COMMITTEE-

LARRY

It wasn't even erotic! Although it was, in a way.

Arlen Finkle

It's all right, LARRY. Believe me.

LARRY calms somewhat.

LARRY

. Okay.

Arlen Finkle

Okay. Okay. We, uh, we decide on Wednesday, so if there's anything you want to submit in support of your tenure application, we should have it by then. That's all.

LARRY

103

Submit. What. What do you-

Arlen Finkle

Well. Anything. Published work. Anything else you've done outside of the institution. Any work that we might not be aware of.

LARRY

I haven't done anything.

Arlen Finkle

Uh-huh.

LARRY

I haven't published.

Arlen Finkle

Uh-huh.

LARRY

Are you still getting those letters?

Arlen Finkle

Uh-huh.

LARRY

Those anonymous-

Arlen Finkle

Yes, I know. Yes.

A beat. LARRY nods.

LARRY

Okay. Okay. Wednesday.

Arlen Finkle

Okay. Don't worry. Doing nothing is not bad. Ipso facto.

LARRY

Sure.

CLASSROOM

onto We are close over LARRY's shoulder as he scribbles symbols
the chalkboard.

LARRY

. and that means... so that... from which we derive...
His glances back toward the class show that he is wearier,
baggier-eyed,
more haggard
than ever. There is also something odd about his posture.
He writes smaller and smaller so as to finish before hitting
the right edge of the
chalkboard.
. and also.. which lets us... and...
Wider as he finishes and straightens up, revealing that he
has
been stooping to write
across the very bottom of the board.
The equation covers every inch of the classroom-wide three-
paneled
chalkboard. LARRY
is an off balance figure at the right edge of frame.
Reverse on the class: staring.
Okay?
LARRY claps chalk dust from his hands.
. The Uncertainty Principle. It proves we can't ever
really know... what's going on.
A bell sounds. The students start to shake off their stupor
and
rise. LARRY projects over
the wallah:
. So it shouldn't bother you. Not being able to figure
anything out. Although you will be responsible for this on
the mid-term.
The thinning crowd gradually reveals one person still
seated:
Sy Ableman.
He wears a prayer shawl and yarmulka.

LARRY does not seem surprised to see him.

. Did you follow that?

Sy Ableman

Of coss. Except that I know what's going on. How do you explain.

LARRY

Well, it might be that, in, you know, in L'olam ha-bah-

Sy Ableman

Excuse me. Not the issue. In this world, LARRY.

He nods at the chalkboard.

. I'll concede that it's subtle. It's clevva. But at the end of the day, is it convincing?

LARRY

Well-yes it's convincing. It's a proof. It's mathematics.

Sy Ableman

Excuse me, LARRY. Mathematics. Is the art of the possible.

LARRY's brow furrows.

LARRY

I don't think so. The art of the possible, that's... I can't remember... something else...

Sy Ableman

I'm a serious man, LARRY.

LARRY

I know that. So if I've got it wrong, what do I-

Sy Ableman holds up one hand to silence him.

Sy Ableman

So simple, LARRY. See Minda.

106

LARRY

I know, I want to see Minda! I want to see Minda! They told me that oonh!

Without our having seen him rise or cross the room Sy

Ableman

has body-slammed

LARRY into the chalkboard. Now he grabs LARRY by the hair

and

whips his head against

the equation. As he slams LARRY's head, again and again, the

chalkboard chatters and the
fringes on Sy's tallis dance.
Sy Ableman
See Minda! See Minda! I fucked your wife, LARRY! I
seriously fucked her! That's what's going on! See Minda!

LARRY

pillow.
Very close on his eyes as they open. His head is on a
Dull early light. A hissing
sound.
LARRY looks blearily over.
On the vanity table just outside the motel bathroom door
sits
Uncle Arthur's cyst
evacuator. Its wagglng hose snakes into the cracked
bathroom
door as the machine
hisses.

MEZUZA

On a doorpost.
A hand enters to knock. A long beat. The person knocking
gives
up and his footsteps
start to go away just as the door opens to reveal an
attractive
woman the sunbathing
neighbor, now wearing plaid shorts and a buttoned white
blouse.
Her point-of-view: LARRY, frozen halfway down the stoop,
head
turned back up toward
the door.

WOMAN

Mr. Gopnik.

107

LARRY

Oh. Hello, Mrs. Samsky. I knocked, and then thought you
weren't here. I, uh...
Mrs. Samsky's voice is soft and breathy:

Mrs. Samsky
It just took me a second to get to the door. I was out back.
LARRY stands nodding.
He seems to need prompting. Mrs. Samsky does:
. Can I help you? Wanna come in?

LARRY

No, I-
One hand on the door, she steps back.
Mrs. Samsky
It's cooler.

LARRY

Oh. Okay. I just wanted to let you know...
He is entering.

INSIDE

After the outside glare the house does indeed seem cooler.
LARRY
looks around the living
vertical room, dim but neat. Wavering light sifts through closed
blinds which drift and
click over floor-vented air-conditioning.
Mrs. Samsky closes the door, shutting out all sound from
outside.

LARRY

I've noticed that Mr. Samsky isn't around, and I-
Mrs. Samsky
He travels.

108

LARRY

Uh-huh. Yeah, I never seem to see him, so I thought I
should let you know, since you're somewhat new here, if
you ever have, whatever, chores that you'd, um, or just help
with something-I've decided to help others-you know,
in a neighborly way...
She gazes at him with the least hint of a smile and waits
for
the speech to dribble away to

of silence. In the ensuing beat, quiet except for the clicking
the blinds, she is perfectly
still. Finally, only her mouth moves:
Mrs. Samsky
How thoughtful.
LARRY shrugs off the compliment.

LARRY

Oh it's nothing. It's just good to know your neighbors.
And to help. Help others. Although I don't care much for
my neighbors on the other side, I must say.
Mrs. Samsky lets another smiling silence pass before
responding.

Mrs. Samsky
. Goys, aren't they?

LARRY

Mm. Very much so. Maybe it's not fair to judge; I have to
admit I-
Mrs. Samsky
Won't you sit down?

LARRY

Oh! Um. Okay. Thank you.
Mrs. Samsky
Iced tea? I have some.
She is already turning to the kitchen.

109

LARRY

Okay.. .
He watches her and reacts to:
The backs of her thighs. The flesh retains the broad cross-
hatch
of her lawn chair.
She disappears into the kitchen, but calls out:
Mrs. Samsky
I don't see you around much, either.

LARRY

Yes. Actually I haven't been home a lot recently, I, uh, my
wife and I are, uh, well, she's got me staying at the Jolly

beaded
Roger, the little motel there on-
Mrs. Samsky is reentering with two tall glasses of iced tea
with moisture. The
click of the ice cubes joins the clicking of the blinds.
Mrs. Samsky
You're in the doghouse, huh?
not
She hands him a glass as she sits on the couch next to him,
invasively close, one bare
leg folded onto the couch, the other draped over it.

LARRY

Yeah, that's an understatement I guess, I -thank you-I,

UH-

displays
Mrs. Samsky
Do you take advantage of the new freedoms?
LARRY stares at her. Mrs. Samsky gazes back. Her look
equanimity; his, not.

FINALLY:

LARRY

opens
. What do you mean.
Her look holds for one more beat and then she swivels and
the drawer of an end
table.

110

She turns back with a joint.
Mrs. Samsky
It's something I do. For recreation.
She lights it.

LARRY

That's... Marijuana?
Mrs. Samsky
Mm-hmm.
She hands the joint over.
. You'll find you'll need the iced tea.
LARRY handles the bitty cigarette with trepidation.

LARRY

Is it. . well.. . okay...

THE VERTICAL BLINDS

from

Some minutes later. They drift and click in the air blown

the floor vents.

LARRY stares at them.

After a long beat:

LARRY

Maybe Rabbi Scott was right.

Mrs. Samsky

Who's Rabbi Scott?

LARRY

The junior rabbi.

Mrs. Samsky

The junior rabbi.

111

as

Another long beat. Neither person feels compelled to speak

the blinds click.

The joint makes another trip back and forth.

THEN:

. What did he say?

LARRY

He spoke of.. perception. All my problems are just...

just a... a mere..

He trails off, listening.

. Is that a siren?

Mrs. Samsky

No. Some people get a little paranoid when they... Holy

cow... That is a siren.

OUTSIDE

door,

The Samsky's door opens and LARRY stumbles out. He stares.

The police car has stopped in front of his own house next

lights still flashing. Two

cops are going up the walk with Uncle Arthur between them in handcuffs.

LARRY, stunned, walks woodenly toward his house.

LARRY

Hey!

Neither the cops nor Uncle Arthur has heard. They have rung
the
doorbell and now
disappear inside.
LARRY projects louder-

. **HEY!**

-and starts to sprint. Mrs. Samsky has emerged from her
house
behind.
LARRY takes the stoop steps two at a time. His door stands
open
and the theme from F

112

Troop issues from within.

Just inside the two policeman stand with their backs to us
and
handcuffed Uncle Arthur
in between. The three men face DANNY, who addresses them,
projecting
over the music
from the TV.

DANNY

Sort of. He sleeps on the couch.

LARRY

This is crazy!

This brings the cops' look around. Uncle Arthur also turns,
shamefaced,
to LARRY.

COP

Does this man live here?

ARTHUR

I didn't know what to tell them! They asked for my

address.. .

LARRY

It's just mathematics! You can't arrest a man for mathematics!

ARTHUR

I didn't know whether to say I lived here or at the Jolly Roger.

COP

You know this man?

ARTHUR

I figured this would sound more... I don't know... Mrs. Samsky appears behind LARRY on the stoop.

DANNY

Dad, why is Uncle Arthur in handcuffs?

LARRY

It's all a mistake. I mean, not a mistake, a, a-

113

ARTHUR

Hello, Mrs. Samsky.

LARRY

-a miscarriage-

COP

Does this man live here?

DANNY

He sleeps on the couch.

LARRY

Look! What did he do!

ARTHUR

Nothing! I didn't do anything!

DANNY

It folds out. Dad sleeps on a cot.

LARRY

You can't just-

COP

Sir, we picked this man up at the North Dakota.
LARRY is brought up short.

LARRY

The North Dakota!

ARTHUR

But I didn't do anything!

DANNY

Dad, what's the North Dakota?

COP

Solicitation. Sodomy. Very serious.

114

LARRY

. The North Dakota!
We hold on LARRY's shocked reaction as we hear DANNY, off:

DANNY

What's Sodomy, Dad?

DON MILGRAM

steepled
He wears a black armband. He sits thinking, bouncing
fingers against his nose.

FINALLY:

DON

What does Arthur say?

LARRY

He says he didn't do anything.

DON

Uh-huh.

LARRY

He says. . . he just went in for a drink.

DON

Uh-huh.

Long beat.

. Does Arthur drink?

LARRY

No.

DON

Uls-huh.

LARRY

. He says he was confused.

115

DON

Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well. The North Dakota. Well. You'll need a criminal attorney.

LARRY

Okay. Who's-

DON

Ron Meshbesh.

LARRY

Is he good?

DON

Ron is very good.

LARRY's gaze wanders. He becomes wistful.

LARRY

I don't understand. He goes to mixers at the Hillel House.

DON

Mm.

A beat.

. I would call Ron Meshbesh.

LARRY

Is he expensive?

DON

Ron is not cheap.

Don focuses on LARRY. Cheerful change of subject:

. DANNY's bar mitzvah is... ?

LARRY

This week.

116

DON

This shabbas! Great!

He nods.

. It'll be okay. Try to relax, LARRY. Try to relax.

MRS. SAMSKY'S BEDROOM

LARRY is making strenuous love to Mrs. Samsky.

Mrs. Samsky

So good... so good...

She rolls on top of LARRY to straddle him and, still

humping,

she lights a mentholated
cigarette. LARRY moans.

LARRY

Oh my God, Mrs. Samsky...

Beyond her head LARRY can see the low cottage-cheese ceiling
of the bedroom. Outside

we can hear Gar Brandt mowing the lawn.

Suddenly we hear muffled laughter and the front door

opening.

LARRY panics. He hisses:

. Who is it?

Footsteps are approaching along the hall. Mrs. Samsky

doesn't

react; she looks calmly

down at LARRY even as the bedroom door opens behind her and

CLIVE

Park walks in

wearing a traffic mask. LARRY is mortified:
CLIVE, please! Wait outside!
Mrs. Samsky blows smoke into LARRY's eyes. The screen goes
black.
Close on LARRY as he opens his eyes. A shadow falls across
his
face.
His point-of-view: a wooden plank is just being slid into
place
over his head. The bang
of hammer on nailhead. In the black:

117

Sy Ableman's Voice
Nailing it down is so impawtant.
We hear the chanting of Kaddish and the sound of dirt
hitting
the top of the coffin. It
drums a steady rhythm. Grace Slick's voice enters: "Somebody
to Love." In a break in
the vocals right before the chorus:
Mrs. Samsky's Voice
It's something we do. For recreation.
On the chorus downbeat, a crescent moon pops into the black.
Gar Brandt traverses the
sky, pushing his lawn mower. A cow flies the opposite way.
Stars
twinkle. Sy Able-
man walks across the sky dressed like a shtetl elder, a
bundlestick
over one shoulder.
LARRY bolts upright in bed.
Sudden quiet.
Uncle Arthur is snoring in the tatty motel room's other bed.
A title burns in:

MINDA

LARRY

He stands looking down in low shot. Above him is cheap
Johnson-Armstrong
dropped
ceiling.

LARRY

rabbis.
Please. I need help. I've already talked to the other

Please.

behind
Reverse shows an elderly eastern European woman seated
a desk, looking up at

LARRY.

quite
. I won't take much of his time. I need help. I need
Minda. It's not about DANNY's bar mitzvah. My boy
DANNY. This coming shabbas. Very joyous event. That's
all fine. It's, it's more about myself, I've... I've had
a bit of tsuris lately. Marital problems. Professional. You
name it. This is not a frivolous request. This is a serious-
I'm a serious-I'm, uh, I've tried to be a serious man. You

118

know, tried to do right, be a member of the community,
raise the, raise the, DANNY, SARAH, they both go to school,
Hebrew school, a good breakfast. Well, DANNY goes to
Hebrew school, SARAH doesn't have time, she mostly...
washes her hair. Apparently there are several steps
involved. But you don't have to tell Minda that. Just tell
him I need help. Please. I need help.
He lapses into silence, staring at the secretary.
She stares inscrutably back.
After a moment she rises, goes to the door behind her, opens
it, shuffles into the dimness
of an inner office.
LARRY cranes to see past her. Her own body and the dimness
interfere
with a good view
of the figure hunched behind the desk. The man is old and
bent.
His desktop is empty.
Murmured voices in Hebrew.
A clock ticks in the outer office. LARRY looks around,
waiting.
Mysterious Judaica adorns the outer office.
The old woman is shuffling back. She closes the door on the
motionless
rabbi and sits

down, heavily, behind her own desk.

SECRETARY

The rabbi is busy.

LARRY

He didn't look busy!
As she starts shuffling papers:

SECRETARY

He's thinking.

NIGHT

Sidor Belarsky comes in at the cut.

119

We are booming down on LARRY, asleep in bed.
We hear weeping, soft, suppressed.
LARRY stirs. He opens his eyes.
After a groggy beat he reacts to the weeping. He looks over.

LARRY

Arthur... ? Arthur?
Arthur is a dim mound on the next bed. His weeping
continues.
For no reason LARRY continues to keep his voice to a
whisper:
. Arthur. What's wrong?
No answer.
. Arthur. It'll be okay. Arthur. We'll get Ron
Meshbesh. It'll be okay-

ARTHUR

AAAH!!!

Shockingy loud, the scream is hard to interpret.
Arthur flings off his bedclothes. He leaps from the bed and
runs
to the door. In boxer
shorts and undershirt he flings the door open and runs out
of
the room.

LARRY

Arthur!

LARRY leaps from his bed, also in his underwear.

He goes to the door but pauses, peering cautiously outside.

Satisfied

that the courtyard is
deserted, he plunges into it.

COURTYARD

vapor

The courtyard/parking lot is hardlit by ghastly mercury

concrete

lights. The pool,
surrounded by chain-link fence, has been drained. Its white
interior is cracked

120

and weedy.

Uncle Arthur is hunched weeping in a corner of the pool
enclosure.

LARRY

(HISSING)

Arthur!

He opens the creaking gate and scurries over to Arthur.

. You've got to pull yourself together!

Arthur is suddenly angry. His voice bounces off the
concrete:

ARTHUR

It's all shit, LARRY! It's all shit!

LARRY

Arthur. Don't use that word.

ARTHUR

It's all fucking shit!

LARRY

Arthur! Come on!

ARTHUR

Look at everything Hashem has given you! And what do I
get! I get fucking shit!

LARRY

Arthur. What do I have. I live at the Jolly Roger.

ARTHUR

You've got a family. You've got a job. Hashem hasn't given me bupkes.

LARRY

It's not fair to blame Hashem, Arthur. Please. Sometimes -please calm down-sometimes you have to help yourself.

ARTHUR

121

Don't blame me! You fucker!

LARRY

Arthur. Please.

ARTHUR

Hashem hasn't given me shit. Now I can't even play cards. He starts weeping again.
LARRY looks around.

LARRY

Arthur. This isn't the right forum. Please. Not by the pool.
Arthur weeps.
Arthur... It's okay... It's okay...

MORNING

LARRY and Arthur are driving. We are looking at the two of them
square through a
windshield in which towering conifers stream by in
reflection.
It seems to be a glorious
day.

LARRY

Is this it?
Both men peer out.

ARTHUR

I think so... yeah... there...
He indicates the road ahead.

A SIGNPOST

The old-fashioned kind with wooden fingers pointing the
different directions.
One points toward CANADA.

122

We tip off the sign as LARRY's car passes and recedes. There
is a canoe strapped to its
roof.

BOUNDARY WATERS

Beautiful, wooded, remote.
The car is parked at water's edge, having backed down a lane
of two tracks worn
through the undergrowth. LARRY and Arthur are lowering the
canoe into water.

LARRY

Okay.. .
He straightens. Arthur straightens. LARRY hugs him.
.Look...
They separate and LARRY pulls a white envelope from his
pocket and gives it to Arthur.
. This'll help you get back on your feet.
Arthur looks into the envelope.

ARTHUR

Oh my God. Where did you get this?

LARRY

Doesn't matter. When you-

ARTHUR

This is a lot of money!

LARRY

It should get you started.

ARTHUR

This is a lot of money! Are you sure you don't need it?

LARRY

Arthur, I'm fine. Come on, get in. When you're settled...

123

Arthur climbs into the canoe.

. let me know how to get in touch.

looking

He helps push the boat off. Arthur is twisted around,

back. As he drifts off:

ARTHUR

Are you sure this is okay?

LARRY

It's fine. It's fine...

LARRY waves.

Arthur waves bravely back, then turns to pick up the oars. A couple of strokes and he

turns back again with a last thought. He calls:

ARTHUR

LARRY. I'm sorry. What I said last night.

LARRY

I know. It's okay.

A lingering look from Arthur, and then he turns back to row.

A gunshot.

Blood spurts from the back of Uncle Arthur's neck.

He slumps forward, dead.

VOICE

Good shot!

LARRY looks wildly around. He sees:

out

Gar Brandt and Mitch in their camo fatigues, hard to pick

in the foliage. They are

looking off toward the canoe, Mitch just lowering his rifle.

Gar Brandt's look swings around, into the lens. He points at us:

There's another Jew, son.

124

Mitch swings his rifle toward us.
He fires.

LARRY

Gasping awake in the motel room.
He looks around.
It is dawn.
Arthur sits on the edge of his bed in his underwear, staring
off into space, slackjawed,
vacant-eyed, drained.
LARRY gazes around the room, waiting for things to fall into
place.
Finally, blearily:

LARRY

Were we... out at the pool last night?
Arthur, still staring off, responds in a flat, empty voice:

ARTHUR

Yes. I'm sorry.
LARRY blinks sleep away.
After a beat:

LARRY

It's shabbas.
Another beat.
Arthur heaves a deep sigh.

ARTHUR

I'll go drain my cyst.

RESTROOM

Day. A two-urinal, two-stall men's room of old tile and
yellowed fixtures.
We are low. One of the stall doors is closed. Under it we
see the dress shoes and dress
pants of two young men standing inside.
We hear a long sucking inhale.
Ronnie Nudell's Voice
Gimme that fucker.
A loudly projected echoing male voice:

VOICE

Ya'amod hab'rayshit.

SANCTUARY

DANNY, seated in the second pew next to his parents and
sister and Uncle Arthur, rises
and shuffles along the row to the aisle. His eyes are wide
and red-rimmed.
The prelapped voice was his call to the torah. All eyes in
the congregation, which fills
the large sanctuary, are on him.
In great echoing silence he walks to the steps on the right
side of the bema and climbs.
Jewish The right-side lectern is surrounded by a gaggle of old
men. They busy
the themselves with the preparation of the pair of scrolls on
lectern, rolling them,
scrolls pausing, rolling some more, muttering prayers, kissing the
by means of their
comes tsitsim. They pay DANNY no attention.
DANNY takes his place centered behind the lectern. His chin
up to the bottom of
the reading platform.
appear Men continue to mutter prayers around him. A pair of hands
pull on his shoulders
from behind. DANNY looks down at the strange hands. They
him back.
A foot drags a small riser out from under the lectern.
Hands push DANNY up onto the riser.

126

Booming up on the torah scrolls, still being busily rolled.
Beyond it, a sea of faces.

The yad-a molded tin pointer-is thrust into DANNY's hand.

The

non-pointing end has
a red silken tassel.

pointing

DANNY looks at the bouncing tassel. He looks at the little

finger which is the
business end of the yad.

Men mutter around him, each a different prayer. They dip and
doven.

DANNY watches himself point the yad down at the scroll.

The scroll is a dense swarm of Hebrew letters. DANNY

squints.

One voice separates from the murmurs around him. It chants,
insistently,

in a sotto-voce

FALSETTO:

VOICE

Nefesh echad sheichayim, yitzeh gamor shel effashot...

parchment

DANNY is still staring at the end of the yad against the

scroll.

Someone's hand enters and moves the yad to a different place
in the text.

The voice repeats:

. Nefesh echad sheichayim, yitzeh gamor shel effashot...

DANNY looks up from the scrolls.

and

In the congregation Ronnie Nudell sits hunched-shouldered

squished between his

parents. He returns DANNY's red-rimmed slack-jawed stare.

The insistent voice:

. Nefesh echad shelchayim, yitzeh gamor shel effashot...

DANNY looks over.

looks

From the surrounding scrum the prompter nods at him. He

somewhat like Cantor

Youssele Rosenblatt.

127

pointing . Nefesh echad shelchayim, yitzeh gamor shel effashot.. .
DANNY looks back down at the scroll. A hand enters to tap a
finger where the
yad points.
. Nefesh echad shelchayim, yitzeh gamor shel effa-
DANNY suddenly erupts:

DANNY

Nefesh echad shelchayim, yitzeh gamor shel effashot. .

PROMPTER

yad Mm-hm.
DANNY continues to boom out the torah portion. He moves the
along the line of
letters.
chanting In the congregation, LARRY and Judith watch. We hear DANNY
fluently and
LARRY squeezes the hand Judith has laced through his arm.
Juith whispers:

JUDITH

I'm sorry that... things have been so hard for us...

LARRY

It's okay.

JUDITH

Sy had so much respect for you, LARRY.
He pats her hand.
A beat.
. He wrote letters to the tenure committee.

LATER

The congregation is loudly singing V'Zos Hatorah. A tallised
man of late middle age

128

turning hoists the open scroll from the lectern and raises it high,

his back on the congregation so that all may see it.

the DANNY has been ensconced in a highbacked chair upstage on

bema.

steeply His point-of-view of the man holding the torah is close and

raked. The man is sweating. The heavy scrolls vibrate slightly from his effort to keep them aloft. As the congregation continues to sing he mutters under his breath:

MAN

Jesus Christ.. .

LATER

who DANNY stands behind the left lectern facing Rabbi Nachtner

holds a small kiddush cup out to him.

projecting Although Rabbi Nachtner seems to be addressing DANNY, he is loudly.

NACHTNER

. taking your place as a member of our tribe. You will go and see Rabbi Minda after the service. You will celebrate in a reception downstairs in Schanfield Hall. And then you will be a member of B'Nai Abraham and of the Nation of Israel. DANNY Gopnik, the Sisterhood makes a gift to you of this kiddush cup so that you will remember this blessed day on the next shabbas and the next, and on every shabbas of a long and fruitful life, and, until that wonderful day when you stand under the chupa, we say.. .

CONGREGATION

Amen.

foreground, DANNY, still red-eyed, tries to focus. His point-of-view shows the kiddush cup large in the

extended toward him by the Rabbi beaming above.

His own hand rises into frame to grasp the kiddush cup. The congregation starts Adon Olam.

A DOOR

Creaking open. The cut has snapped off the robust Adon Olam, leaving sepulchral quiet.

DANNY, clutching his kiddush cup, hesitantly enters the dim study.

Minda's elderly eastern European gatekeeper closes the door behind him. Minda is an old man staring at him from behind a bare

desktop.

His look, eyes magnified by thick glasses, is impossible to read. DANNY creeps to the chair facing the desk. He gingerly sits

on

the squeaking leather upholstery, self-conscious under Minda's stare. Minda breathes regularly through his mouth. It is the only

sound

in the room. A long beat. The two sit face to face. Minda smacks his lips a couple of times, preparing to speak. Another beat.

FINALLY:**MINDA**

When the truth is found. To be lies.

He pauses. He clears his throat.

At length:

. And all the hope. Within you dies.

Another beat. DANNY waits. Minda stares.

He smacks his lips again.

. Then what?

DANNY doesn't answer. It is unclear whether the question was directed at him.

Quiet.

130

Minda clears his throat with a loud and thorough hawking.
The hawking abates. Minda sniffs.

. Grace Slick. Marty Balin. Paul Kanta. Jorma...
somethin. These are the membas of the Airplane.
He nods a couple of times.

. Interesting.

He reaches up and slowly opens his desk drawer. He takes
something

out. He lays it on
the bare desk and pushes it partway across.

. Here.

It is DANNY's radio.

. Be a good boy.

LARRY'S OFFICE

LARRY is at his desk sorting through mail.

Arlen Finkle (off

DANNY was magnificent.

LARRY looks up: Arlen is leaning in his accustomed spot in
the
office doorway.

LARRY

Oh. Thank you, Arlen.

Arlen Finkle

Mazel tov. It was wonderful.

LARRY

Yes it was. Thank you.

Arlen Finkle

Such a time of nachas, LARRY. He's your youngest. You
have to savor it.

131

LARRY

I do. I will.

Arlen Finkle

See you at the staff caf.

LARRY

Yes.

Arlen shoves off to go, but hesitates.

Arlen Finkle

I just... I shouldn't tell you. I'm not telling you
officially.

The tenure candidates aren't notified til Monday.

LARRY

. Yes?

Arlen nods.

Arlen Finkle

You'll be very pleased.

LARRY stares at him.

LARRY

Thank you, Arlen.

Over his back as he goes:

Arlen Finkle

I didn't say anything. Mazel tov.

HEBREW SCHOOL CORRIDOR

Distant thunder at the cut.

We are tracking behind Minda's female Caliban as she walks
down

the hall, stooped and
shuffling. She holds a stack of papers in one hand.

LARRY'S OFFICE

132

Mail in front of him.

He opens an envelope from RONALD MESHBESHER, ESQ.

In it are two pieces of paper. Topmost is a letter headed
RETAINER

AGREEMENT.

Underneath is an invoice. The amount: \$3,000.

Arriving rain begins to patter at the window.

HEBREW SCHOOL CLASS

The TEACHER, Mar King, leads the class in drill.

DANNY has a book tilted towards him on his desktop. It hides
his radio.

desk. The door opens and the elderly woman shuffles to Mar King's

She hands him a
paper from off her stack of copies.

reads Mar King puts on reading glasses and inspects it. As he

thunder crashes, closer.

LARRY'S OFFICE

He fingers the invoice.

Upon Close on a printed detail: PAYABLE: and, typed underneath:

Receipt.

Wind is whipping rain hard against the window.

HEBREW SCHOOL CLASS

Mar King taps on the desktop for attention.

Mar King

Chaverim, there's a tornado warning from the weather
service. Rabbi Minda has decided to move us over to the
basement of the shul.

Hubbub in the classroom.

133

. Shechet. Shechet. We're gonna form two lines. This is
orderly. Hakol b'seder.

LARRY'S OFFICE

He is staring down at his desktop.

Thunder.

desk. He reaches up and scratches his nose as he stares at his

On the desk: a ledger sheet with a list of students' names.

Next

to each name, a grade.

LARRY drums his fingers.

He picks up a pencil.

He goes down to PARK, CLIVE. Next to it is an F.

He waggles the pencil, eraser-end thumping the sheet.

He erases the F. He enters a C.

grade. The pencil leaves frame. We hold for a beat on the new

The hand reenters. It puts a minus sign after the C.

The hand withdraws.

LARRY closes the file. Just as he does so:
The phone jangles, very harsh.
LARRY looks at it, frozen.
He lets it ring a couple times.
He reaches for it. He slowly picks it up.

134

LARRY

. Hello?

VOICE

LARRY?

LARRY

. Yes?

VOICE

Hi, Len Shapiro.

LARRY

Oh. Hello Dr. Shapiro.

Dr. Shapiro

Listen, mazel tov on DANNY.

LARRY

Yes, thank you.

Dr. Shapiro

Listen, could you come in to discuss these X-ray results?

LARRY sits frozen, phone to his ear.

. Hello?

LARRY

Yes?

Dr. Shapiro

LARRY, could you come in and discuss these X-ray results?

Remember the X-rays we took?

LARRY

. We can't discuss them on the phone?

Thunder. Pattering rain.

135

Dr. Shapiro

I think we'd be more comfortable in person. Can you come in?

A beat.

LARRY

When?

Dr. Shapiro

Now. Now is good. I've cleared some time now.

TALMUD TORAH PARKING LOT

windy. The students mill about. It is overcast dark, and extremely

Someone is fumbling with keys at the shul.

DANNY still has his radio with the earpiece in.

Everyone's clothing flaps.

Ronnie Nudell shouts above the wind:

Ronnie Nudell

That fucking flag is gonna rip right off the flagpole!

CAR

light We are looking through a windshield lashed by rain at LARRY, driving. His hands are clenched tight on the wheel. Wipers pump to keep up with the rain. The cars behind have their lights on. It has gotten quite dark. Passing streetlights rhythmically sweep LARRY's face, their

stippled and bent by the

rain on the windows.

TALMUD TORAH PARKING LOT

busses DANNY is looking across the lot in which orange school

are parked. His head bobs

in time to the music. His hair whips in the wind. A building roar, very deep.

136

Love." We hear, very compressed, the beginning of "Somebody to

DANNY sees a shaggy-haired youth among the milling students.

DANNY

Hey! Fagle!

in From behind DANNY, over his shoulder: we see a funnel cloud

the middle distance.

A growing rumble. The tornado is approaching.

song At the first downbeat of its chorus the Jefferson Airplane

bumps up full.

We cut to black, and credits.

THE END