

Hasidic Jones
by Phillip W. Weiss

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Tagline: the American dream goes sour.

Synopsis: a young man, torn between two cultures, has to decide where his loyalties lay: with the family who nurtured him or with the mother who bore him.

Characters

**Israel Lebenthaler (aka Johnson Jefferson Davis McCauley/
Johnny McCauley)**

Ricki Reporter

Louie “the Lip” Lipolletti

Merle “the Mouth” Davenport

Meyer Lebenthaler

Rivkah Lebenthaler

Yussel Luchinsky

Samantha Rosynschtein

Leona McCauley

Rev. Milton D. Montgomery IV, DD

Rabbi Eleazar Ben Romani

Simon J. Appleton, Esq.

Detective O’Hara

Detective Clemenzo

Television Cameraman

Yeshiva Students

Members of the congregation

This play is a work of fiction. Resemblance between any character and anyone living or dead is unintentional and entirely coincidental. Also, the legal issues raised in this play are introduced for dramatic purposes only and may not conform to actual law.

Act 1

Scene 1

Time: The present

Place: A television studio. At center stage is a table and two chairs.

VOICE
(off stage)

Ladies and gentleman and sports fans from around the world: Welcome to the Sports International Network's Saturday night edition of Sports Tonight live hosted by Merle "the Mouth" Davenport and Louie "the Lip" Lipolletti. And now, here are your hosts, Merle "the Mouth" Davenport and Louie "the Lip" Lipolletti!

Two middle aged men, casually but neatly attired, enter and take their respective seats, Merle the left seat and Louie the right.

MERLE

Hello everybody and welcome to another Saturday night edition of Sports Tonight. So, Louie, how are things?

LOUIE

Just fine, Merle. There's lots to report. Our top story: in major league baseball, there's a rumor circulating that the commissioner's office may lift the ban on performance enhancing drugs.

MERLE

Wow! Now that's a huge story!

LOUIE

According to a well-informed source inside the commissioner's office, the use of performance enhancing drugs is now so widespread that there seems to be nothing anyone can do to stop it, and so the commissioner is seriously considering rescinding the ban on the use of drugs and letting the players decide for themselves whether they want to play while doped up.

MERLE

I'll tell you, Louie, times are a-changing. Just a few short years ago even the hint of drug use would have been enough to incite the wrath of the commissioner and impose major fines and even suspensions, but in this more permissive time, where anything goes, I guess baseball is deciding to stop bucking the trend and go with the flow.

LOUIE

That's right, Merle. If it's fine with the fans, then who is the commissioner to argue? Anyway, we'll keep you informed as this story further develops. Now, we have another story that's an exclusive to the Sports International Network, and that you will find amazing. In the upstate town of Dailyville there is a high school senior who has been averaging forty-eight points a game for the past two years. What's amazing about this story is that the senior goes to a Yeshiva, which is a Jewish parochial school, and is an orthodox Jew.

MERLE

We sent one of our reporters to the school, the Talmudic Institute of America, who confirmed that the young man, whose name is Israel Lebenthaler, has been scoring points at a pace that would easily make him by far the leading high school scorer in the nation.

LOUIE

Why haven't we heard about him before?

MERLE

Because, frankly, nobody at this network knew that the kid even existed until last night when our reporter paid him a visit. And here's that reporter now, our one and only, the unstoppable and irascible, Ricki Reporter.

Ricki enters. She is a young woman who is casually attired. Ricki takes seat at the table.

So, Ricki, tell us some more about this high school phenom.

RICKI

What you said about this kid is absolutely correct. He's incredible. You got to see it to believe it.

LOUIE

How did you first find out about this young man?

RICKI

I got a call from a guy who lives in the area. He told me about this kid, a basketball star named Israel Lebenthaler, who I never heard of before.

LOUIE

Okay, so then what happened?

RICKI

The guy was adamant that I come up to the school and see the kid play for myself. At first I thought this was a prank and was about to give the guy the old heave ho, but the guy would not take no for an answer.

MERLE

Okay, so what did you do next?

RICKI

I called the school and verified that they had a student by the name of Israel Lebenthaler and that he was a member of the school's basketball team. Then they gave me the name and telephone number of the coach, Yussel Luchinsky. I called Coach Luchinsky who told me that Israel was their best player and invited me to see him play at their next game, which was played last night. So, yesterday, my cameraman and I got into my car and made the four-hour drive to the school and saw the kid play. I have the tape of my interview with Israel and his coach after the game, which Talmud won by the score of 105 to 42. Israel was fantastic. He scored sixty-three points, including seven three-pointers and five dunks, and also had twelve rebounds, eleven assists and seven steals.

MERLE

Wow! Those stats are phenomenal! Let's roll the tape.

The lights go out.

End of scene 1

Scene 2

Time: The previous night

Place: The inside of a locker room. Players are entering, laughing, slapping each other on the back and shoulders, full of camaraderie, followed by the coach Yussell Luchinsky, a stocky middle-aged man with a full beard. They are all wearing yarmulkas.

LUCHINSKY

Tonight all of you played great, and even better, the game was covered by a reporter, Ricki Reporter, from the Sports International Network. Ricki will join us in the locker room in a moment. *(Luchinsky looks to his left)* And here she is now!

Israel enters the locker room accompanied by Ricki and her cameraman. Israel is tall, athletic, blond haired, fair skinned, blue eyes. Ricki is interviewing Israel while they are walking. Israel is eighteen years old.

RICKI

(speaking to Israel)

Israel, tell me what it feels like to be the star of this team.

ISRAEL

(modest, self-effacing)

It's really nothing. I'm just one of the players.

RICKI

(laughing)

Just one of the players? You just scored 63 points. You're more like the entire team!

ISRAEL

Look, I just do what the coach asks me to do, that's all. It's no big deal.

RICKI

No big deal? Talk about being humble! *(to Luchinsky)* Coach, tell me: is Israel just one of the players?

LUCHINSKY

Israel is a marvelous player, a uniquely gifted athlete, but more than that he is a wonderful young man.

RICKI

In what way?

LUCHINSKY

Besides being an incredible athlete he is a brilliant student. He's going to be graduating in June as the class valedictorian and then he'll be attending rabbinical college in Israel to study Torah.

RICKI

So not only is he a gem on the court, he's also a gem in class! What a combination! (*to Israel*) How do you manage that?

ISRAEL

I say my prayers, and with the help of the Lord, and thanks to my parents, good things happen. I mean, basketball is important, but my studies are important too.

RICKI

So, how many points have you been averaging this year?

ISRAEL

I really don't want to ...

LUCHINSKY

Israel's been averaging 58 points a game for the past two years, ever since he joined the team. Before Israel joined, we hadn't won a game in eight years, and now nobody can even come close to us in the league.

RICKI

And what league would that be?

LUCHINSKY

The United Hebrew High School Athletic Association.

RICKI

Tell me more about this association.

LUCHINSKY

The association consists of twelve schools, including ours. We want to play teams outside of our association but they refuse our offers, claiming that our level of play is too inferior for us to be taken seriously. They think that Yeshiva kids can't play competitively.

RICKI

So, you think that's unfair?

LUCHINSKY

Of course, it's unfair, and it's untrue too. Right now we could beat anybody because we got the best player in the state, and maybe in the country today.

RICKI

(turns to Israel)

It seems like your coach is also your number one fan.

ISRAEL

He's been almost like a father to me.

RICKI

So, have you thought about where you plan to go after you graduate from school?

ISRAEL

Well, I've been thinking about going to college in Israel.

RICKI

Why in Israel?

ISRAEL

Because that's where the best Talmudic studies programs are located.

RICKI

What about basketball?

ISRAEL

I like playing basketball and it's something I'm really good at, but I want to become a rabbi and serve my people in that capacity.

RICKI

Well, that's sounds fine, Israel, but I have a feeling that after we broadcast some of the video we took of you tonight, you might be getting a lot of attention from the pros. Would you consider turning pro?

ISRAEL

Play pro basketball? I don't think so. Don't get me wrong, it sounds great and it's every kid's dream, but I'm a religious Jew and I've been going to yeshiva since I was practically a baby and the study of the Talmud is something that I truly love. I don't know what I would do without the Talmud. It's the purpose of my life and something that I live and breathe every moment I'm alive and besides, if I turned away from it, it would devastate my parents.

RICKI

Even if a pro team offered you millions of dollars to sign?

LUCHINSKY

(to Ricky)

Please stop pestering the boy with such foolish questions. Israel is a very special young man. He's been with us all his life and although he's been blessed with superb athletic skills, he also has a marvelous intellect, and as an Orthodox Jew his first responsibility is to his community, and in this respect Israel is no exception.

RICKI

(speaking to the camera)

Well, ladies and gentlemen, you've heard it here first. The young man, who in my opinion is easily the best high school basketball player in the United States, would forego a chance to play in the pros and make millions in order to pursue a career as a rabbi. However, I have a feeling that we'll be hearing more about Israel Leventhaler and we'll be bringing you more reports about this special young man as the story develops.

End of scene 2

Scene 3

Time: A month later. It's Friday, 7 PM. The sun has almost set, marking the start of the Sabbath

Place: The living room in the Israel's home. Sitting in the room are Israel's parents, Meyer and Rivkah Lebenthaler. Both are middle-aged and are dressed in the style of Orthodox Hasidic Jews.

MEYER

Israel is beginning to worry me.

RIVKAH

I feel the same too. Ever since they showed that news report of him, it's been a mess: everyday phone calls and more phone calls from all kinds of people who are trying to take our son away from us. That worries me. Maybe you should have never let him play basketball at school.

MEYER

How was I to know that playing a game at school would cause such trouble? I'm going to have to talk with him.

Israel enters. He is dressed in orthodox Hasidic Jew attire and is carrying a valise.

ISRAEL

Hello, mamma. Hello poppa.

Israel places the valise on the floor and kisses Rivkah then Meyer on the forehead, and takes a seat.

RIVKAH

Where were you? We were beginning to worry.

ISRAEL

Oh, mamma, I'm sorry for having made you worry. The train was late again. I should have called. (*speaks to Meyer*) Really, poppa, it's the truth.

MEYER

Of course it is, my son. We know that you would never deliberately miss saying the Sabbath prayers.

ISRAEL

I love reciting the prayers.

RIVKAH

When you say them it's like the finest music.

ISRAEL

Thank you, mamma. You know I'll do anything to make you happy.

MEYER

You are a blessing to us, my son. However, something has been troubling us.

ISRAEL

Can it wait until after we say the prayers?

MEYER

I wish it could, but we've been waiting since Monday to talk to you about this and it can't wait any longer.

ISRAEL

I'm sorry, poppa, but I really don't know what you are talking about.

MEYER

(takes a deep breath and lets out a long sigh)

My son, we know that you've been getting a lot of phone calls lately from all kinds of fishy-sounding people wanting to recruit you to play basketball, and we want to know your plans.

ISRAEL

Anything that you want me to do I will do.

MEYER

My son, we want you to go to Israel to study to be a rabbi, but that has to be entirely your decision, not ours.

ISRAEL

But, poppa ...

RIVKAH

Israel, my child, we are here to guide you and to help you make the best possible decision.

ISRAEL

But, I already said that I want to go to Israel to study.

MEYER

We know that, but you have not said that to the people who are calling you.

ISRAEL

(flustered and defensive)

I know that, poppa, but I thought the calls would stop after a while and ...

RIVKAH

But they haven't stopped and we don't know what to do. Do you really want to go to Israel to study?

ISRAEL

(imploring)

Yes, I do, with all of my heart!

MEYER

Then why don't you just tell them that?

ISRAEL

(evasive)

Oh, I don't know. I don't know what to think!

MEYER

Listen, we know that playing basketball could make you a lot of money, but we did not bring you up to value money, but rather to value knowledge, and to study the Talmud and be of service to our congregation and community who are your people. And you have a brilliant mind that should not be wasted, not for any amount of money. We did not bring you up to show yourself off on a basketball court. You go to play and before you know it you'll forget your studies, forget that you're a Jew, get into trouble and be ruined, and we don't want that to happen to you. Has anyone at school or in town been telling you things that we should know about?

ISRAEL

No, poppa.

MEYER

Then it's settled. You'll be going to Israel to study.

RIVKAH

You've heard your father.

ISRAEL

Yes, mamma, I heard him.

MEYER

Now, it's time to prepare for Sabbath services.

ISRAEL

Yes, poppa, it's about time.

End of scene 3

Scene 4

Time: a few days later.

Place: A dormitory room. The room has a single bed, two chairs, a lamp, and a desk. Israel is sitting at the desk doing school work at his computer. There's a knock on the door. Israel gets up from the desk and opens the door and a young, attractive woman enters. She is dressed modestly as is to be expected of a young Hasidic woman. Her name is Samantha Rozynshtein.

ISRAEL

Samantha! What a surprise.

SAMANTHA

Well, aren't you going to invite me in?

ISRAEL

Well, it's against the rules for guys to have girls in their rooms. How did you get up here anyway?

SAMANTHA

(flashes a smile)

I'll tell you if you let me in.

ISRAEL

(staring at Samantha)

Well, alright, but only for a little while.

Samantha enters the room and immediately puts her arms around Israel and kisses him.

SAMANTHA

I've been waiting all week to do that.

ISRAEL

(returns her kiss)

I've been waiting too.

Samantha releases Israel and sits on the edge of the bed.

ISRAEL

Okay, so how'd you manage to evade security?

SAMANTHA

(laughs)

It was easy. They know me already.

ISRAEL

They know you? I don't get it.

SAMANTHA

(laughs again)

Oh, you will, you will. *(pause)* Now, did you tell your parents our plans?

ISRAEL

I tried but I couldn't. They want me to go to Israel and I don't know if I can go against their wishes.

SAMANTHA

(upset)

But what about us? What about what you said to me: that you would do anything to make me happy?

ISRAEL

Oh, Sam, I meant it, really.

SAMANTHA

You weren't lying to me, were you?

ISRAEL

No, I wasn't lying.

SAMANTHA

So we're good, right?

ISRAEL

Of course! Have you told your parents about us?

SAMANTHA
(defensive)

No, not yet.

ISRAEL

Because you're not sure whether we have a future?

SAMANTHA

No, that's not it.

ISRAEL

Then what is it?

SAMANTHA

I just don't think it's the right time to tell them. First, you got to let me know your plans.

ISRAEL

I told my parents that I want to study in Israel.

SAMANTHA

But what about us?

ISRAEL

You can go to Israel with me.

SAMANTHA

That's not exactly what I had in mind. Listen, Israel, I really care about you. You're smart, you're gifted, you're kind and you're gentle, and opportunity is knocking, not just for you but for us. If you sign with one of those pro teams I'll go with you anywhere you want. We'll be together. My father is a rabbi; he's a brilliant scholar and love him, but I don't want to live the rest of my life with another rabbi.

ISRAEL

I never knew you felt that way.

SAMANTHA

Well now you know.

Israel rushes over to the bed and sits at Samantha's side and begins caressing her. Samantha begins to cry.

ISRAEL

You know I care about you.

SAMANTHA
(weeping)

Please don't lead me on.

ISRAEL

Sam, don't cry. Please don't cry.

Israel continues to tenderly caress Samantha as the lights go out.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Time: a few days later

Place: the gymnasium at the Talmudic Institute. The basketball team is practicing. Coach Luchinsky is barking out commands.

LUCHINSKY

Box out! ... Don't foul him, block him ... That's right ... good ... Now let's do the pick and roll.

The players are running a play.

A middle-aged, shabbily attired woman enters. She is pulling a large beat-up shopping cart inside of which is a large plastic shopping bag crammed with various sundry articles. Her name is Leona McCauley.

LEONA

(to Luchinsky)

Excuse me, sir, where may I find a boy named Israel?

LUCHINSKY

(surprised)

Oh, I'm sorry. Who are you looking for?

LEONA

A boy named Israel. He's my son.

LUCHINSKY

(shocked)

What!?! *(to the team)* Everybody take a ten-minute break. *(to Leona)* You're Israel's mother?

LEONA

Yes I am, sir.

LUCHINSKY

What's your name?

LEONA

Leona McCauley.

LUCHINSKY

Does Israel know that you'd be visiting?

LEONA

No sir. I saw him on the news and so I thought I'd come up to visit him.

LUCHINSKY

(to Israel who is sitting in the stands during the break)

Israel, come over here, now! *(Israel leaves the stands and joins Luchinsky and Leona.) (to Israel)* This lady says that her name is Leona McCauley and that she's your mother.

ISRAEL

No, that can't be right. My birth mother died when I was born.

LEONA

That's not right, young man. You are my son.

LUCHINSKY

(to Israel)

Have you ever seen this woman before?

ISRAEL

No, I haven't and I have no idea what she is talking about.

LUCHINSKY

(to Leona)

I think you ought to leave right now before I call security.

LEONA

(becoming indignant)

I'm no criminal! I'm the boy's mother!

ISRAEL

You're bag lady, that's all you are.

LEONA

Wrong! I repeat: I ... am ... your ... mother, and I can prove it.

ISRAEL

How?

LEONA

You got two birth marks on the back side of your right knee.

Israel rolls up the right leg of his sweat pants and glances at the back side of his right knee.

ISRAEL

(to Luchinsky, upset)

She's right. *(pause)*. Oh my, what am I going to do now? *(to Leona)*
I thought you were dead.

LUCHINSKY

Listen, madam, Israel is gonna need time to sort all this out. Is there any way he can reach you?

LEONA

I'll be staying tonight at the women's shelter in town but I'll be back again tomorrow, don't you worry about that.

ISRAEL

(angry)

Don't worry, you say? You waltz right into my life and you say don't worry?

LEONA

You have no cause to talk to your mother like that.

ISRAEL

I already have a mother, so get out of here! I don't want to see you here tomorrow or ever! Okay?

Leona grabs her shopping cart, slowly turns and begins to walk away as the lights go out.

End of scene 5

Scene 6

Time: later in the evening.

Place: the living room in the Lebenthaler home. Meyer is reading a newspaper and Rivkah is knitting. Israel enters carrying a valise which he slams on the floor.

MEYER

(stops reading, surprised)

Israel! We weren't expecting you until tomorrow!

RIVKAH

(stops knitting)

You seem upset, my son.

ISRAEL

(remains standing)

Am I your son?

RIVKAH

Of course you are.

MEYER

What's gotten into you?

ISRAEL

(angry)

How could you do this to me?

MEYER

(annoyed)

Do what? What are you talking about?

ISRAEL

(angrier)

You lied to me! You told me my mother was dead!

RIVKAH

She is dead.

ISRAEL
(to Rivkah)

Then why did I speak with her today?

MEYER

Israel, please tell us what is going on with you!

ISRAEL
(anger abating)

A woman showed up at the gym today and told me she was my mother.

RIVKAH

And you believed her?

ISRAEL

At first no, but then she proved it.

MEYER

How did she prove it?

ISRAEL

She knew I had those two birth marks behind my left knee, that's how. How could she have known that?

RIVKAH

Oh my.

MEYER

Listen, son, let me tell you something.

ISRAEL

I'm listening.

MEYER

As you know, we adopted you right after you were born. Your mother was an unmarried teenage drug addict living in a shelter in Brooklyn, and we, *(gestures to himself and Rivkah)* could not have children of our own and so we adopted you. Your mother signed over all her parental rights to us and agreed never to have any contact with you again. As far as we were concerned she was dead to you, and remains dead to this day. Do you understand?

ISRAEL

Well, she's alive now and now I'm all confused. You told me she had died and ...

Suddenly there is loud knocking on the door.

MEYER

Who could that be?

Israel goes to the door and opens it. Samantha is standing at the door.

SAMANTHA

Thank goodness I found you. As soon as I heard about what happened at the gym I tried finding you but was told you had gone home and I just had to see you to make sure you were alright.

MEYER

Who is this young lady?

ISRAEL

A friend of mine, poppa.

RIVKAH

Well, have her come in.

ISRAEL
(to Samantha)

Come in.

Samantha enters; Israel closes the door behind her.

I want to introduce you to my parents. This is my father *(gestures to Meyer, who stiffly nods his head)* and this is my mother *(gestures to Rivkah who remains motionless)*.

MEYER

(to Samantha)

Please take a seat, and Israel, you sit down too.

Samantha and Israel sit down.

(to Samantha) So, why are you here?

SAMANTHA

Because I care about Israel.

RIVKAH

(to Israel)

Is this young lady someone special to you?

ISRAEL

Yes, she is.

RIVKAH

So, you've been keeping her a secret from us too. *(to Samantha)* So, young lady, what's your name?

SAMANTHA

Samantha Rozynshtein. I'm a senior at the Talmudic Girl's Academy and I live with my parents a few miles outside of Dailyville.

RIVKAH

Young lady, do your parents know that you are here?

SAMANTHA

No, they don't.

MEYER

Then I suggest that you leave right now and go home.

SAMANTHA

I won't until I know that Israel is okay.

RIVKAH

We can deal with the situation without your help, thank you.

ISRAEL
(to Samantha)

Everything is fine, Samantha.

SAMANTHA

That's not what I heard. I heard you were really upset.

MEYER
(to Samantha)

What do you want from Israel?

SAMANTHA

I want him to be happy because I care about him, a lot.

MEYER

Is that because his name has been on the news?

SAMANTHA

No! That's not it at all!

RIVKAH

Maybe you want something from our son.

SAMANTHA

I love Israel, and I want him to be happy and if he is happy then I'll be happy too. What's wrong with that?

RIVKAH

Young lady, for a religious Jewish girl you have a lot of nerve. Are you the one who's been filling Israel's head with all kind of nonsense about playing pro basketball?

ISRAEL
(to Rivkah)

Please, leave her out of this.

RIVKAH
(angry)

How can we? She barged her way in, and I don't like that, and I don't like her. (to Samantha) So, get out of here and don't ever show up here again, you hear me! I know all about nasty girls like you. I don't care if you're religious or not. A tramp is a tramp. You give Jews a bad name. I feel so sorry for your parents; I will pray for them. But for you I have only contempt. A good Jewish girl should be at home doing her homework and not running after some boy, even if he's my son. You are trying to turn him against us and I won't have it, you hear! I will slap you on the face if you ever show up here again. So get out! I won't let you hurt my son!

ISRAEL

But, mamma ...

MEYER
(to Israel, indignant and contemptuous)

You heard your mother. We raised you from a newborn, we have given you everything, we have loved you, protected you and nourished you, and now you come back and accuse us of being deceitful, all the while seeing this (*makes a gesture of contempt at Samantha*) troublemaker behind our backs who desecrates our home by her very presence. (to Samantha) So, young lady, I think it is time for you to leave.

SAMANTHA
(sobbing)

I didn't mean to do anything bad. I only care about Israel, that's all. Please believe me.

ISRAEL
(to Meyer and Rivkah)

Now, look what you've done.

Israel puts his arm around Samantha's shoulders and pulls her close to him.

RIVKAH
(unmoved)

She can cry all she wants. In fact, she can cry all the way back to her home.

ISRAEL

(angry, to Rivkah)

How can you be so cruel?

RIVKAH

We're being cruel? I think you better think again on that, young man, and as for your girlfriend here, I don't know why she is still here.

ISRAEL

Well, if she leaves then I'm going with her!

MEYER

(angry)

Fine, you do that, you ingrate! We should have never adopted you.

ISRAEL

Yeah, well, now finally I'm seeing your true colors.

RIVKAH

And we're finally seeing your true color too, the color of stupid. Now please leave before you give your mother and me a heart attack.

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Time: a few days later

Place: the SIN studio. Merle and Louie are seated at the table.

MERLE

And we have just received word that Israel Lebenthaler, the most touted high school basketball player in the nation today, is currently staying in a homeless shelter.

LOUIE

That's incredible, Merle. And for more on this developing story, here's our star reporter, Ricki Reporter.

The lights go out and then go on revealing a dingy lobby of a rundown hotel. Ricki Reporter is standing in the center, holding a microphone and speaking into a video camera. To his right is a man.

RICKI

I'm Ricki Reporter coming to you from The Fair Harbor homeless shelter located a few miles away from the Talmudic Institute where America's number one basketball player, Israel Lebenthaler, attends school. We have learned that Israel was admitted to the shelter several days ago, reportedly after he was thrown out of his home. He's now staying with a woman who claims to be his mother. With us is the manager of the shelter, Irving Rappaport. (*Irving steps to the mike.*) Mister Rappaport, can you confirm that Israel Lebenthaler is currently staying at this shelter?

IRVING

Due to confidentiality regulations I cannot discuss who is residing at this facility.

RICKI

But you can confirm that a well-known celebrity is currently residing here, right?

IRVING

All I can say is that we provide shelter for a large clientele who arrive at our doorstep for a variety of reasons, including domestic discord.

RICKI

How far away is your shelter from the Talmudic Institute?

IRVING

I'd say about five miles.

RICKI

And do you provide shelters for families?

IRVING

Yes, we do.

RICKI

One more question: is it possible that a certain now famous high school sports celebrity is now staying here?

IRVING

I won't confirm or deny it. That's the best I can do.

RICKI

Thank you, Mr. Rappaport. *Irving exits. (speaking to the camera)*
I've just been speaking with Irving Rappaport, the manager of the Fair Harbor homeless shelter where high school basketball star Israel Lebenthaler is said to be temporarily residing. More on this story as the situation further develops.

End of scene 7

Scene 8

Time: one hour later.

Place: a room in the shelter. The room is furnished with a worn sofa, a large bed on a metal frame, and a large television screen and two wooden chairs. Leona and Israel are sitting on a chair. A large duffle bag containing Israel's clothing is leaning against one of the walls. Israel is still wearing his Hasidic clothing.

LEONA

So you got yourself thrown out of your home, and now here you are staying with me.

ISRAEL

Thank you for taking me in.

LEONA

Don't thank me. Thank Mister Rappaport. It's his place.

ISRAEL

You knew what I meant.

LEONA

I don't know what you mean. You have to speak plainly, otherwise it causes misunderstandings. Didn't they teach you that in school?

ISRAEL

They teach us a lot of stuff there.

LEONA

I bet they do, and a lotta good it's done you. Look at you now. A good-looking red-blooded all-American boy looking and sounding like a Jewish book worm. I should have never listened to that social worker and given you up for adoption, but I didn't know any better at the time and besides I was alone and had no money, so off you went, but not before I named you Johnson Jefferson Davis McCauley. That is your real name, not Israel Lebenthaler. You are a son of the South, descended from heroes who fought for a cause, and lost. Do you understand ... Johnny?

ISRAEL

But, I've been brought up as a Jew.

LEONA

I know that. But that's all window dressing, you hear! You're not a Jew, you're Christian. After you were born I had you baptized right in the hospital by the hospital chaplain. So, I declared you Christian. Now let's go over this again. What's your name?

ISRAEL

Johnny.

LEONA

Johnny what?

ISRAEL

Johnny McCauley.

LEONA

That's right. And who's your mother?

ISRAEL

You are.

LEONA

Right, again. (*pause*) When I saw that news report about you I was so proud of you that I was ready to burst, and here we are now, together.

ISRAEL

Who's my father?

LEONA

(*defensive*)

I don't want to talk about him, now or ever. He's one of the reasons why I had to give you up, the bum. But what's past is past.

ISRAEL

Okay, I'm sorry that I asked.

LEONA

You should also be sorry for the way you talked to me in front of your coach when I visited you at the gym. That's no way to talk to your mother.

ISRAEL

I was shocked. I didn't know what to think.

LEONA

Okay, but don't let it happen again. Now, I want you to play basketball and be a star.

ISRAEL

But what about my studies?

LEONA

What about them?

ISRAEL

But I told my parents ...

LEONA

(adamant)

I'm your parent! Get that through your head! And you are my son, period! And starting right now, you are no longer to consider yourself Jewish! Do you understand?

ISRAEL

But I am Jewish.

LEONA

You weren't listening. I told you what you are.

ISRAEL

But nobody has ever told me that I wasn't Jewish.

LEONA

That's because nobody was around to tell you the truth.

ISRAEL

(sad)

I don't know what to think.

LEONA

What's there to think about? I'm your mother and I want what's best for you. Book learning is fine, but it doesn't put food on the table. For that you need money, and the more money you have, the better. I know that from being on the street. *(There's a knock on the door.)* *(Leona looks in the direction of the door, yells)* Who is it?

IRVING
(off-stage)

It's me, Irving.

LEONA

What do you want?

IRVING

There's a girl who wants to see your son.

LEONA

Is she a reporter?

IRVING

No, at least I don't think so. I didn't ask.

LEONA

Well, find out who she is and if she isn't a reporter, show her in.

ISRAEL

How come you don't want me to talk to reporters?

LEONA

Because we aren't about to give them a story for nothing. Let them wait; in due time they'll be willing to pay through the nose. No sense dishing out food for nothing if they're willing to pay. *(A knock on the door.)* *(to the door, yells)* Come in. *(Irving enters followed by Samantha.)* Who's this young lady?

IRVING

She said she's Israel's friend.

LEONA
(to Israel)

You know this girl?

ISRAEL

Yes, I do. She's a friend.

LEONA
(skeptical)

Only a friend? (to Samantha) What's your business here, young lady?

SAMANTHA

I heard that Israel was staying here and was worried sick wondering if he was alright.

LEONA

Of course he's alright. I'm his mother and nobody's going to hurt my boy. Now, what's your name?

SAMANTHA

My name is Samantha.

IRVING

I'm gonna leave now. I gotta get back to the front desk.

LEONA

Okay, Irving and thanks. (*Irving exits.*) (to Samantha) Now, what do you want with my boy?

SAMANTHA

Nothing. I just wanted to know if he was alright.

LEONA

You expect me to believe that?

ISRAEL
(to Leona)

Please, she's a friend, just a friend.

LEONA
(to Israel)

A pretty young thing like her has to be more than just a friend. *(pause)*
(to Samantha) Where do you live?

SAMANTHA

A few miles outside of town. I'm a senior at the yeshiva school for girls.

LEONA

Well, now. A pretty Jewish young lady cares for my boy. How convenient. Did you have anything to do with him being thrown out of his home?

ISRAEL

Samantha had nothing to do with that.

LEONA
(to Israel)

I'm asking her, not you. When young men are in trouble a young lady is usually the cause, so I want to get to the bottom of this now.

SAMANTHA

I care about Israel and wouldn't want to do anything to hurt him. I can't help how I feel.

LEONA

You girls today are all alike. A bunch of spoiled brats who think they can get by on their looks, as if that's something that really matters. Well, it doesn't matter. I was young once, and pretty too, just like you, except, of course, I was poor, and look at me now: homeless, staying in a shelter, and stuck with a boy who thinks he's a Jew. *(to Israel)* You have to look out for conniving females. They come in all shapes and colors and they're all alike: sweet on the outside and devilish on the inside. So what did she put you up to do?

ISRAEL
(sighs)

We talked about my signing with a pro team.

LEONA

I knew it. There's the angle. (to *Samantha*) Young lady, I should throw you out right now, just run you out of this building, but I won't because ... well ... you kind of remind me of me when I was your age, except I was running with a different kind of crowd, a street crowd. I can tell that my boy, and by the way his name is Johnny, not Israel, has feelings for you and I don't want to tamper with that. Feelings are a powerful thing. But if I so much as suspect that you're trying to get the one up on me, well, young lady, out you go! You get it!

SAMANTHA

Yes, ma'am.

LEONA

Yes, ma'am? Don't "ma'am" me. I'm not your mother. My name's Leona and I'm just a humble homeless lady who's trying to look out for her boy. (*Samantha runs over and hugs Leona who hugs Samantha too*). Now, stop making such a fuss. All you young girls nowadays get so demonstrative. They teach you that in school?

SAMANTHA

No, they don't. I just want to be free.

LEONA

(*Letting go of Samantha*)

Don't we all. But the sentiment is appreciated. (*pause*) Now, what I want you to do is go home and be a good girl and don't you worry about my boy. Okay?

SAMANTHA

Okay, I'll leave, if that's what Israel, I mean Johnny, wants.

ISRAEL

(*Goes over to Samantha and embraces her*)

Yes, it might be best for now until I get things sorted out. (*Israel kisses Samantha.*) I love you.

SAMANTHA
(to Israel)

And I love you too.

LEONA

Young love: isn't it wonderful!

End of scene 8

End of Act 1

Act 2

Scene 1

Time: A few days later.

Place: The interior of the First Baptist Pentecostal Church of the Almighty Savior. A large man in ministerial robes of a minister is standing at the pulpit delivering a speech. His name is the Right Reverend Milton R. Montgomery IV, DD. The pews are packed and its standing room only. Leona and Israel are seated on a dais behind the minister.

MONTGOMERY

Today, my dear friends, I must share with you troubling news. There is injustice in our midst! A young man, new to our congregation, has become a victim of the most outrageous form of hypocrisy and deceit. Taken from the cradle under false pretenses and brought up in a culture completely foreign to us, he was separated from his people by others who filled his mind with all kinds of worthless thoughts meant to keep him in his place and deny him the chance to share his God-given talents with the world. And when he protested, he was tossed out of his home like a hooligan who had committed the most heinous of crimes, when in fact he had done nothing wrong, nothing that could even remotely warrant any form of reprobation, nothing except to pursue a dream. And after he was so cruelly ejected, he found himself on the street, and so was forced to turn to the one person who truly cared about him, his mother, his real mother who birthed him, and who, with the young man, is here with us today. It is with the deepest humility and the utmost feeling of respect and admiration that I present to you Leona McCauley and her son Johnson Jefferson Davis McCauley.

Leona and Israel stand up. The entire congregation erupts into loud, boisterous applause. Montgomery then signals Leona and Israel to sit and for the applauding to stop.

And the sanctimonious people who claim to have our young brethren's best interest at heart are now blocking him from realizing his God-given right to achieve the American dream, and because of their stubbornness and spitefulness, he has been forced to initiate legal action to compel them to do what his real mother would have done for him if she could. But they just can't let go, and must have their way at all cost, even if it means forcing the young man to make difficult and painful decisions. Their pride and arrogance is appalling. All they need to do is sign a waiver permitting him to go to sign a lucrative basketball contract worth millions of dollars, yet they, who claim to be people of the book, adamantly will not relent.

(From the congregation come sounds of hissing and booing and cat calls.)

Injustice appears in many forms but no matter what it looks like, its fallout is always the same. And think of the toll it has taken on his long-suffering mother, who has been denied access to her own child since his birth!

(From the congregation, cries of "outrageous," "awful," "horrible")

As the young man's spiritual adviser, I unequivocally support his efforts to assert his right to sow the seed and harvest the fruit of his labors pursuant to those lofty words found in the Declaration of Independence, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and pledge that I will stay at his side until this matter is successfully resolved.

(Tumultuous cheering from the congregation)

End of scene 1

Scene 2

Time: somewhat later

Place: On the street, in front of the Dailyville courthouse. Ricki Reporter is facing the camera.

RICKI

This is Ricki Reporter reporting to you from outside the Dailyville courthouse where high school Orthodox Jewish basketball star Israel Lebenthaler, whose story was first broadcast to you by SIN, is suing to transfer parental rights from his current parents, who are orthodox Jews, to an unknown woman who reportedly is Israel's natural mother. Israel sued after his parents refused to approve his wish to sign a contract with a pro basketball team. According to our legal experts at the SIN studios, under state law any person under the age of twenty one must obtain the written consent of a parent to sign a contract with a professional sports entertainment company. Israel's case has been taken up by the Reverend Milton Montgomery IV of the First Baptist Pentecostal Church who claims to be Israel's "spiritual adviser." Our repeated attempts to interview Israel have been blocked by the woman who claims to be Israel's natural mother and with whom Israel is now staying. Meanwhile, there are at least fourteen pro teams, both inside and outside of the United States, that are vying for the opportunity to sign Israel. We'll be bringing you more on this story as it further develops. This is Ricki Reporter reporting live from outside the courthouse in Dailyville.

Leona enters.

RICKI

(to the camera)

Wait a minute! Ladies and gentlemen, here's the unknown woman now! *(to Leona)* Madam, can you confirm that Israel is suing his parents?

LEONA

(annoyed)

None of your business, and don't call him Israel. His name is Johnson Jefferson Davis, Johnny for short. And I'm his mother. *(Leona exits.)*

RICKI

(to the camera)

We just heard from the woman who claims to be Israel's mother. Apparently, Israel has changed his name to Johnny! This apparent name change has not yet been confirmed. We'll be bringing you more on this story as it continues to unfold. Once again: this is Ricki Reporter reporting to you from outside the courthouse in Dailyville.

End of scene 2

Scene 3

Time: Same as scene 2.

Place: The interior of a mediation room in the courthouse. In the middle of the stage is a large rectangular table. On the left side of the table are seated Israel, Leona, Rev. Montgomery, Samantha; on the right side Meyer, Rivkah, Coach Yussel Luchinsky, and Rabbi Eleazar Ben Romani. Seated in the middle is the court-appointed mediator, Simon J. Appleton, Esquire.

APPLETON

This meeting will come to order. My name is Simon J. Appleton and I have been appointed by the court to act as mediator in the matter of Lebenthaler versus Lebenthaler. As this is an informal conference, representation by an attorney is not required and all comments will be off the record. Any questions so far? (*Silence*) Good. Now, the purpose of this conference is to fully discuss the issues relating to this case in order to arrive at a settlement that is mutually agreeable to the parties. Do all present here understand that?

ALL

Yes.

APPLETON

Now, before we proceed, I will call your names and you will answer present. Israel Lebenthaler.

ISRAEL

Present, but I've changed my name to Johnny McCauley.

APPLETON

Duly noted. (*pause*) Reverend Milton Montgomery.

MONTGOMERY

Present.

APPLETON

Leona McGee.

LEONA

I'm here.

Samantha Rosynschtein. APPLETON

Present. SAMANTHA

Rivkah Lebenthaler APPLETON

Here, your honor. RIVKAH

Meyer Lebenthaler APPLETON

Present, sir. MEYER

Rabbi Eleazar Ben Romani APPLETON

Present. BEN ROMANI

Yussel Luchinsky. APPLETON

Present, your honor. LUCHINSKY

APPLETON
I duly note that all parties are present. Discussion shall now commence,
starting with the plaintiff.

That means you. MONTGOMERY
(to Israel)

ISRAEL

Well, sir, it's like this. I have a chance to go to school on a basketball scholarship but those people (*points to Rivkah and Meyer*) ...

MEYER

You mean your parents.

APPLETON

(*to Meyer*)

Order! No interruptions. (*to Israel*). You may continue.

ISRAEL

... won't sign the papers allowing me to sign with the pros, and it's really screwing up my life because now I have no money and no income, and so I'm suing to have their parental rights terminated and transferred to my real mother, Leona McCauley.

RIVKAH

(*to Israel*)

How could you do this to us? We raised you from the day you were born.

MEYER

Your honor, I protest this entire proceeding. These people (*points to Leona and Montgomery*) are using Israel because he's now a big celebrity who can make a lot of money.

LEONA

(*to Meyer*)

You don't know what you're talking about.

MEYER

Oh, don't I? All you're doing is putting on an act.

LEONA

I am a caring mother, and if you'd not been so possessive, then I would have showed you how much I cared.

RIVKAH

You were a drug addict when you gave birth to him, and now look at you. You have nothing. Meanwhile we gave Israel everything, and now you and that hussy over there (*points to Samantha*) have turned him against us. Shame on you, shame on all of you. (*to Israel*) Have you been saying your prayers?

LEONA

Yes, he has ... praying that he has nothing more to do with you.

RIVKAH
(*to Leona*)

You're destroying my boy.

LEONA
(*to Rivkah*)

You don't know what you're talking about.

MONTGOMERY
(*to Rivkah*)

Madame, I believe your indignation is grievously misplaced. It should be directed at yourselves for denying this fine young man an opportunity to live the American dream.

BEN ROMANI
(*to Montgomery*)

Sir, I take issue with that statement.

MONTGOMERY
(*to Ben Romani*)

And who may you be?

BEN ROMANI

I am the chief Rabbi and spiritual advisor for the Congregation B'nai Yakov Shabbateem, of which the Lebenthalers are members, and I will tell you right now it is Ms. McCauley who is seeking to deny Israel the right to live the American dream, not his parents.

LEONA

No way! My boy here can make MILLIONS and you're stopping him! You people think you run this country, but you don't.

BEN ROMANI

We don't run this country. We live by a set of principles that place spiritual enlightenment ahead of material gain. As far as we are concerned, you are a corrupting influence on Israel.

MONTGOMERY

My dear sir, your commentary is offensive. Leona is the boy's mother, and for you to denigrate her is to denigrate the boy as well.

BEN ROMANI

Sir, the fact is that the woman, who has had no contact whatsoever with Israel for practically his entire life, is living in a shelter, has no viable means of financial support, yet has the audacity to claim that you she Israel's best interests in mind when she can barely care for herself. The both of you should be ashamed of yourselves for the way you have caused Israel to go against his own benefactors.

RIVKAH

We've raised Israel to be a good, wholesome, respectable citizen, not some grubby money-making machine to be exploited by people who don't care for him.

LEONA

Just because I want Johnny to be rich don't mean I don't care about him. But in this life money is what it's all about, lady. I'm poor, I know, and I don't want Johnny to be poor.

MEYER

You're poor because of the bad choices you made. That's your fault.

LEONA

No, it's not! I just had bad breaks. That's all.

MEYER

Nobody told you to start using drugs.

LEONA

I couldn't help it. My parents threw me out. I was a kid. I wasn't to blame.

RIVKAH

And now you want our son to be like you. That is repulsive. You'll ruin him.

LEONA

No! It is YOU who will ruin him, by blocking his chance to be somebody. He's smart, but being a book worm ... that's not in his blood. His name is Johnny and his roots go back to the Deep South, to ancestors who were farmers, pioneers, soldiers and ...

MEYER

Slaves owners.

LEONA

Don't you insult my family! They never owned slaves; they worked, which is more than I can say for you, and now Johnny chance to make a huge amount of money and you want to stop him.

RIVKAH

He can make money doing something meaningful like serving his community.

MONTGOMERY

(to Rivkah)

That's right, his community, the American community, and not just your small, little, narrow sect.

MEYER

We are part of that American community too.

LEONA

No, you're not. You set yourselves apart from us regular folk, by the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you think, that language you speak amongst yourselves. But I'm okay with that. You can live whichever way you want, but when it affects my son, then that's where I draw the line. Just because I'm poor doesn't mean I'm stupid.

BEN ROMANI

Nobody is saying you're stupid.

LEONA

(on the verge of tears)

Then stop talking to me like I am.

BEN ROMANI

Madam, you're becoming hysterical.

LEONA

When it comes to my son, I'll act whichever way I want. Without Johnny, I'm nothing. He's my only hope and all you want to do is keep his head buried in books, when he can become famous and make a ton of money. And remember: I'm Johnny's mother, period. He came out of me.

RIVKAH

But you did not raise him. We did, don't you understand that?

LEONA

He's Christian and he's my flesh and blood. Don't you understand THAT?

ISRAEL

(to Rivkah and Meyer)

Look, I don't disrespect what you did for me. You raised me and took care of me, but now I'm back with my momma.

MEYER

Your so-called momma is telling you what you want to hear while we're telling you what is right. There is more to this life than money.

MONTGOMERY

Sir, what is right for you may not right for Johnny.

MEYER

(angry)

Stop calling him Johnny! His name is Israel and he was studying to be a teacher and to serve his community.

MONTGOMERY

So he could labor in obscurity.

BEN ROMANI

Is that all life means to you, money? Aren't you being narrow minded?

MONTGOMERY

Not narrow minded, realistic.

BEN ROMANI

Being of service to the community has its own rewards.

LEONA

Aw, can it already! You know nothing. You want my boy to be a book worm while we want him to make money, lots of money. What's wrong with that?

MEYER

It goes against our religious beliefs.

MONTGOMERY

Don't make me laugh. You people own half the town and maybe half the country. You're swimming in money.

MEYER

And if that's true, then that's all the more reason why Israel doesn't need money to play sports, which is frivolous nonsense. The idea of one of our own playing sports, showing off his body, is outrageous and offensive we won't allow it! Sure these players get paid lots of money but are they happy? No! They all become corrupted and when that happens, nothing can save them.

MONTGOMERY

Sir, sports entertainment is the most lucrative business in the world today, and Johnny wants to cash in on the action and you're stopping him from literally rolling in dough.

RIVKAH

Rolling around like a pig! And we already told you that his name is Israel, not Johnny! *(to Appleton)* Sir, please tell them to stop calling Israel Johnny.

APPLETON

(to Israel)

By what name do you want to be called?

ISRAEL

I'd prefer to let you decide that, your honor.

APPLETON

What's he called at school?

LUCHINSKY

At school he's still known as Israel Lebenthaler.

APPLETON

And who are you to him again?

LUCHINSKY

I'm Israel's high school basketball coach.

APPLETON

Now, how is he doing as a basketball player?

LUCHINSKY

Israel is without a doubt the best high school player I have ever seen, bar none. He can do it all and does it with ease. Ever since he joined the team, we can't lose. I've seen him do stuff on the court that even the pros can't do. Because of Israel we now have the best high school team in the state and maybe in the nation. But even though we like to win and enjoy playing sports, our goal is to produce scholars, not jocks, and I don't want Israel to become a jock.

ISRAEL

C'mon, coach, I'm no jock.

LUCHINSKY

With me you never were, but now I don't know because these people seem to have their claws in you.

SAMANTHA

You're wrong, sir. Johnny is a kind, gentle boy who wouldn't hurt a fly. If he wasn't, I wouldn't be with him.

BEN ROMANI

A nice Jewish girl pursuing a boy! Disgraceful! *(to Samantha)* Where did your parents go wrong with you?

SAMANTHA

Keep my parents out of it and nothing went wrong with me. This is how I feel and that's all there is to it.

RIVKAH

(to Samantha)

You've ruined my boy!

LEONA

He's MY boy, not yours!

RIVKAH

(to Leona)

You ingrate! You came to us when you needed help and we responded, and now you call us names. The nerve of you!

LEONA

Blood's thicker than water.

BEN ROMANI

(ignoring Montgomery)

But water is the source of all life.

LEONA

And air is something we need to breathe. So what's your point?

MEYER

The point is that you're a drunk, that's the point and all you care about is yourself.

ISRAEL

Don't talk to my mother like that.

RIVKAH
(to Israel)

I AM your mother, not her. That woman (*points to Leona*) is a nobody, nothing but conniving selfish fool.

LEONA

You can call me all the names you want but I'm still his mother, and you're not.

RIVKAH

Where were you when Israel first started walking and talking, or when he attended his first day of class? I nurtured him, not you. I'm his mother, and we want Israel to come home.

ISRAEL

But you threw me out.

MEYER

That was her (*points to Samantha*) fault, not ours. You can return anytime you want.

LEONA

Return to what? To school? With no money? Give me a break!

MEYER

No, to having a good life, because that's what he deserves and that's where he belongs.

MONTGOMERY

Wrong! Johnny belongs with us, not you. He is a member of the First Baptist Pentecostal Church!

BEN ROMANI

No he's not! He's a member of the B'nai Yakov congregation. And as for you (*to Israel*) you should be ashamed of yourself for the way you are treating your parents! (*pause*) Israel: save yourself while you can. Don't believe that con artist (*points to Montgomery*). He's just interested in your money. Come back to us, we'll take care of you, you know we love you.

ISRAEL

You have a funny way of showing it.

BEN ROMANI

What's funny about it? Your parents love you while the people you're staying with now just want to use you.

MONTGOMERY

(*to Ben Romani*)

Sir, your accusations are completely groundless and offensive and I take issue with them.

BEN ROMANI

Take issue with them all you want. I don't care. I'm telling the truth and I'm willing to fight to save a member of my congregation from corruption.

MONTGOMERY

I already told you that he's a member of my congregation! Isn't that right, Johnny?

ISRAEL

(*distracted*)

I guess so. (*to Ben Romani*) You mentioned something about them being interested in my money?

BEN ROMANI

They're waiting for you to sign on the dotted line, so they can take your money.

MONTGOMERY

(*incensed, gets up from his chair*)

Why you ...

ISRAEL

(puts his hand on Montgomery's shoulder)

Calm down, Reverend. *(to Ben Romani)* Well, that's what I'm waiting on, too, the money.

BEN ROMANI

You'll be signing your life away and undo everything you learned from us and ruin your life! Don't you understand that? Don't you see that it's a pipe dream?

LEONA

You bet it's a dream but it's no pipe dream! It's real! We're talking about some **BIG MONEY!**

BEN ROMANI

You mean big problems.

LEONA

(to Meyer)

You've messed up Johnny's head and made him into something that he's not.

MONTGOMERY

That's the truth.

RIVKAH

Israel, how could you do this us? We loved you, did everything for you.

ISRAEL

But you lied to me, telling me that my mother was dead.

RIVKAH

But we said it for your own good, and besides, for all practical purposes she was dead. Look at her now!

ISRAEL

She looks alive to me.

MEYER

Not alive, just existing; there's a difference, and she's bringing you down to her level.

ISRAEL

Hey, that's my mother you're talking about.

MEYER

I know exactly who I am talking about. Yussel, what more can I say?

LUCHINSKY

(to Israel)

If you were my son I'd have sent you as far away from here as possible.

ISRAEL

But, coach, what do you want me to do? This lady (*points to Leona*) is my MOTHER!

LUCHINSKY

No, THIS lady (*pointing to Rivkah*) is your mother. She cared for you, nurtured you. In fact, I remember when she brought you home from the hospital. She was so proud, that she did something so good, adopting a baby.

MONTGOMERY

Sentimental rubbish.

LUCHINSKY

So what? It's still true.

MONTGOMERY

I've had enough of all this nonsense. Now let's get down to business. Are you willing to grant Johnny permission to sign with the pros?

MEYER

He can do whatever he wants when he turns twenty-one, but until that time, the answer is no. Neither my wife nor I will give consent.

MONTGOMERY

So you want the young man to wait three long years before allowing him to sign. That is outrageous. Indeed, I would go so far as to call it felonious. In three years anything can happen. Johnny has to strike while the iron is hot; those contract offers won't wait. Before he knows it, those offers will disappear and he will be left with nothing. Do you want to be responsible for that?

MEYER

You're talking about the future; I'm talking about now. You can bluster and filibuster and get on your high horse all you want, the answer is and will always be no.

LEONA

You people are out of your mind! *(to Appleton)* Sir, let me tell you right now that I have my boy's best interest at heart and will sign whatever papers that have to be signed giving him permission to play in the pros. I don't want my boy to lose a chance to make millions of dollars. This has nothing to do with me; it has to do with my boy. I'm just a poor woman who lives on the street; I don't want that happen to my son.

RIVKAH

This is all theatrics.

LEONA

A lot you know. I'm a mother pleading for her flesh and blood.

RIVKAH

Don't make me laugh. When you gave Israel to us you voluntarily signed away your parental rights.

MONTGOMERY

These legal details are irrelevant. What is relevant is the boy's happiness and what he wants.

BEN ROMANI

It's not what Israel wants, it's what YOU want.

MONTGOMERY

I'm starting to believe that maybe this whole exercise is a waste of time.

RIVKAH

That's right, a waste of our (*pointing to herself and Meyer*) time. We should be suing you.

MONTGOMERY

Your stiff necked willfulness is going to drive Johnny into the poorhouse.

LUCHINSKY

Listen, I've been coaching high school basketball for thirty years and let me tell you, not one of my boys ever wound up on the street or in the poorhouse or in trouble.

LEONA

Well, you're talking about real Jewish boys; my son is not one of those. He is Christian, not a Jew, so his situation is different.

LUCHINSKY

I've only known him as a Jew.

LEONA

But he's not a Jew, he is Christian; he can't be both.

LUCHINSKY

What are you talking about?

MONTGOMERY

Sir, you are denying facts.

LUCHINSKY

I'm not denying anything. Israel is a Jew. He's studying to be a rabbi.

MONTGOMERY

Come, come, sir: Johnny a Christian rabbi? I don't think so.

MEYER

(*to Montgomery*)

All I want is for Israel to come home.

LEONA

He has a home, with me!

MEYER

You call a homeless shelter a home?

LEONA

It suits my needs.

RIVKAH
(to Israel)

Israel, come home with us now and we can talk about your future.
Please, we love you.

ISRAEL

I really don't know what to do. I want to play basketball but I also want something more.

APPLETON

Ladies and gentleman, from the tone of this conversation, it seems to me that the parties are at an impasse.

LEONA

Impasse? What does that mean?

APPLETON

It means that neither party is able or willing to reach an agreement.

LEONA

Well, that's not my fault.

RIVKAH

It's not our fault either. But if you think we're going to forfeit our parental rights, you have another thing coming to you.

MONTGOMERY

All Leona wants is that Johnny not be denied his opportunity for happiness and so is asking that you be so kind as to sign off on a piece of paper that will secure him that happiness.

BEN ROMANI

And we don't want to stand in the way of Israel's happiness either but we believe that by him turning pro at a tender age he will be corrupted and will be acting in a way that is contrary to our cultural values and religious beliefs.

MONTGOMERY

Well, then maybe the judge is right, and we'll have to take it to court.

MEYER

You do what you have to do, but we're not signing off on anything, not now, not ever! *(to Israel)* And as for you, young man, you have some serious thinking to do.

ISRAEL

(to Rivkah and Meyer)

Mom, dad!

End of scene 3

Scene 4

Time: Sometime later

Place: A throng of reporters are standing outside of the locker room at Talmudic Institute. At the front are Ricki Reporter and his cameraman.

RICKI

(talking to the camera)

This is Ricki Reporter coming to you from outside the locker room at Talmudic Institute where we have just learned that high-school basketball star Israel Lebenthaler has been kidnapped!

The locker room door opens and Luchinsky enters.

LUCHINSKY

Quiet everybody! I have an announcement. Israel Lebenthaler disappeared right before the start of today's game. Currently his whereabouts are unknown but his parents have asked me to convey this message to whoever perpetrated this act to please release Israel unharmed. This matter has been reported to the police who are currently investigating.

RICKI

Coach! There have been reports that Israel has changed his name and has disavowed being Jewish. Is that true?

LUCHINSKY

Right now I can't confirm that. However, what I can confirm is that he's still a student at the Talmudic Institute.

RICKI

Do you think his disappearance has anything to do with his court case?

LUCHINSKY

Once again, that's a matter for speculation. Right now my concern is for Israel's safety.

RICKI

Was Israel staying at the shelter in town?

LUCHINSKY

As you know, for the past few days Israel had been staying temporarily with some friends in town.

RICKI

Are any pro teams still interested in Israel?

LUCHINSKY

As far as I know, interest in Israel is still running high.

RICKI

Is it true that one of the friends he was staying with is his actual mother?

LUCHINSKY

As you know, it is a physical impossibility for anyone to have two mothers. (laughter) But seriously, his parents are praying that Israel is safe and that he will soon be found.

RICKI

Meaning what?

LUCHINSKY

Meaning that we are all hoping for the best. I have nothing more to say.

Luchinsky exits.

RICKI

(speaking to the camera)

At an impromptu news conference, Talmudic Institute basketball coach, Yussel Luchinsky, confirmed that Israel Lebenthaler is currently missing and that the matter is under investigation by the police. We'll bring you more information as the story develops. This is Ricki Reporter reporting from the Talmudic Institute locker room.

End of scene 4

Scene 5

Time: Seven years later

Place: a police interrogation room at the Dailyville police station. In the center of the room is a table and at either side of the table chairs. Israel is sitting on a chair on the left side; on the right side facing him are two detectives, Detective O'Hara and Detective Clemenzo. O'Hara is sitting and Clemenzo is standing. Both are dressed in civilian clothing. Israel is neatly but casually attired; he is clean shaven. Hanging from his neck he is a large medallion on which is carved a Star of David, inside of which is a blue Christian cross.

O'HARA

Okay, Israel, I think you have a lot of explaining to do.

CLEMENZO

We've been searching for you for seven years, ever since you pulled that disappearing act. You had your mother worried.

ISRAEL

Which mother? I have two of them.

O'HARA

You mean had. I hate to break this news to you, but Rivkah Lebenthaler died three years ago.

ISRAEL

I didn't know that. How's my father?

CLEMENZO

Not feeling too well, from what I understand.

ISRAEL

I want to go see him.

Israel starts to get up from the chair but Clemenzo comes around the table and pushes Israel back into the chair.

O'HARA

Not so fast, okay? You're not going anywhere yet.

ISRAEL

Look, I came back. Isn't that enough?

CLEMENZO

No, it's not good enough. First you have some accounting to do for the time you were away. So, what's your story?

ISRAEL

All the nagging and fussing, it became too much for me. So I ran away. I faked a report that I had been kidnapped, shaved off my beard, stopped dressing like an Orthodox Jew, changed my name, and started a new life, trying to figure out exactly who I am. It was hard at first, my being a kid, but I managed. With what little money I had I hitched my way to Portland, Oregon, and from there got a job as a seaman on a freighter going to points far away. So that's what I did for next several years. Playing basketball was out of the question. To me, it meant trouble. People would have been asking me questions and the last thing I wanted was notoriety. It wasn't worth the money. I know that people don't believe me when I say that, but it's true. The money would have brought me problems. But scrounging for work in foreign countries wasn't much of a life either, so I decided to return home.

O'HARA

You caused a lot of people a lot of grief.

ISRAEL

I guess I did; there's nothing I can do about that now.

CLEMENZO

Okay, we're gonna offer you a deal. (*pause*). We're gonna let you go and not charge you with anything provided that you agree never show up in this town again, okay?

ISRAEL

Can't I go see my father?

O'HARA

No. He's in a nursing home and wouldn't recognize you anyway. Also, he disowned you.

ISRAEL

What about my mother, Leona?

O'HARA

Oh, her? (*laughs*) After you disappeared, she left town with that flimflam man Montgomery. We haven't heard from either of them since. By the way, was Leona really your mother?

ISRAEL

She said she was. (*pause*) Could I at least call this girl I knew?

CLEMENZO

Oh, you mean, Samantha what's her name?

ISRAEL

Rozynschtein.

O'HARA

The girl who had that crush on you?

ISRAEL

Yes, her.

CLEMENZO

Well, I guess that's out of the question too. She's married now, to the nephew of Rabbi Ben Romani, and has three children and lives outside of town.

ISRAEL

What about Coach Luchinsky?

CLEMENZO

He retired three years ago and the last I heard lives somewhere in Florida.

ISRAEL

Then I guess coming back here was all for nothing.

O'HARA

I wouldn't say that.

ISRAEL

Why not?

O'HARA

Because now you know that whatever you're looking for is not here. It's gone. *(pause)* By the way, you said you changed your name. What did you change your name to?

ISRAEL
(speaks slowly)

Hasidic Jones.

Israel slowly gets, shakes hands with both detectives, and exits as the lights go out.

End of scene 5

Scene 6

Time: sometime later

Place: The SIN studio. Seated at the table are Merle, Louie and Ricky.

MERLE

There are reports that the National Football Conference may do away with certain penalties as a way to reduce the number of stoppages of play and thereby shorten the length of time to finish a game.

LOUIE

That's right, Merle. It seems that more and more fans are complaining about the lengths of the games, which are now averaging almost five hours. Many are calling for the networks to air fewer commercials too, but you know that as long as the sponsors are paying the bill, that's not gonna happen anytime soon.

MERLE

As the saying goes, money talks.

LOUIE

Now in another matter, we have in the studio our special correspondent Ricki Reporter who has story about a controversial figure from the past. So what's the scoop, Ricki?

RICKI

According to well-informed sources, Israel Lebenthaler, the Orthodox Jewish high school player who disappeared seven years ago resurfaced in Dailyville and then as quickly as he showed up disappeared again. We spoke with town officials who, on the condition of anonymity, neither confirmed nor denied the rumor. As you know, the situation with Lebenthaler was one of the more bizarre sports stories and all we can do now is wait to see if he resurfaces again.

MERLE

Is it possible that he may be playing basketball somewhere else under another name?

RICKI

Anything is possible, but as of right now his whereabouts is unknown, and that's too bad because he had all the tools for greatness, but it just didn't happen.

LOUIE

Thanks for the update, Ricki. And now for our next story ...

End of scene 6

Scene 7

Israel enters; the stage is bare; he is alone, standing at center stage. Hanging from his neck is the large medallion with the Jewish star and Christian cross. He faces the audience.

ISRAEL

Ladies and gentlemen, standing before you today is the modern day wanderer in search of an identity.

I'm part Jew
And that's all right,
I say my prayers
Both day and night.

I genuflect
And daven too,
And wear a cross
With Jewish blue.

I strut my stuff
And go the mile,
To shul and church
With a big broad smile.

But if you want
To split my case,
I'll block your shot
Right in your face.

The basketball
Was but a toy,
Which brought some fun
But left no joy.

So all you peeps
Who pull at me,
Just go away
And let me be.

The end.

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