

THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

a play

by Joshua H. Cohen

THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

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THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

CHARACTERS (*in order of appearance*)

JASON EFHEIM, late 20's, a history teacher, the kind that inspires student crushes

PAM McGARRY, late 40's-early 50's, the principal, exudes competence

TOM HOSTLER, 17, a high school junior, small and nervous

BETH EFHEIM, late 20's, a math teacher, Jason's wife, very pregnant

PHIL HOSTLER, early 40's, the school janitor, Tom's father, gruff

NATALIE LEVINE, late 40's-early 50's, a history teacher, bitter and sarcastic

COREY CARSON, 17, a high school junior, absolutely certain of everything

SETTING

The cramped history office shared by Jason and Natalie at Nathan Hale High School, a small public school in a resort town in northern New England. As realistic as budget allows.

The play takes place in real time, on a Friday morning in April, just before 6:00 until around 7:15. It is mud season.

“I come from a people who gave the Ten Commandments to the world. Time has come to strengthen them by three additional ones, which we ought to adopt and commit ourselves to: thou shalt not be a perpetrator; thou shalt not be a victim; and thou shalt never, but never, be a bystander.”

– Yehuda Bauer

THE THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

The Thirteenth Commandment received its world-premiere production April 18-May 5, 2013 at the Bridge Theatre in New York City, produced by Libra Theater Company (Nick Luckenbaugh, Managing Artistic Director & Victoria Weinberg, Executive Artistic Director). It was directed by Tom Costello, with the following cast and creative team:

JASON EFHEIM.....Pete McElligott
PAM McGARRY..... Jennifer Dorr White*
TOM HOSTLER.....Justin Danforth
BETH EFHEIM..... Glenna Grant
PHIL HOSTLER..... Joe Fellman
NATALIE LEVINE.....Nora Hummel*
COREY CARSON..... Lauren Pennline

* Appeared courtesy of Actors Equity Association

Scenic Design.....Andy Yanni
Costume Design..... Travis Boatright
Lighting Design..... Carl Wiemann
Assistant Direction..... Jessika Doyel
Stage Management..... Bridget Siebert
Fight Choreography..... Alex Gould
Dramaturgy..... Molly Marinik
Assistant Stage Management..... Bryce Lourie
Artwork..... Zachary Zirlin

The production was nominated for seven New York Innovative Theatre Awards:

Outstanding Premiere Production of a Play

WINNER - Outstanding Featured Actor, Justin Danforth

Outstanding Featured Actor, Joe Fellman

WINNER - Outstanding Featured Actress, Lauren Pennline

Outstanding Costume Design, Travis Boatright

Outstanding Set Design, Andy Yanni

Outstanding Lighting Design, Carl Wiemann

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Lights up on a narrow teachers' office in a public school. Industrial-issue metal furniture – two desks, two chairs. One desk is a mess – stacks of papers everywhere – but no personal touches. It also contains an office phone. The other desk is organized, in and out bins, but has lots of personal touches – family pictures, a brightly-colored world map over the desk, a UVM mug full of pens and pencils, a potted plant, a banner from the school newspaper, etc. A door to the hall on one side of the stage. A window on the opposite side, through which a pale blue pre-dawn light seeps in. If possible, there should be some indication that the “fourth wall” is completely covered in bookshelves.

The door opens, and JASON enters. He wears a coat suitable for early spring, khakis, shirt sleeves and a tie. He carries a courier bag over his shoulder and a large brown paper bag in one hand. He puts the paper bag on the neater desk (his), then approaches the window without going all the way up to it. He reaches up and lowers the blind. Only then does he cross back to the door and turn on the light. He puts down his courier bag, and starts to take off his coat, draping it over the back of his chair. He takes a pad of construction paper out of a desk drawer, takes out a pair of scissors, and starts making cartoonish props and costume pieces.

PAM enters. She is dressed in a no-nonsense manner, as befits a principal, which she is. Seeing Jason, she comes quickly all the way into the room and closes the door behind her.

PAM. What are you doing?

JASON. Lesson prep. I'm having ninth grade reenact the trial of Galileo.

PAM. You're chipper this morning. Where have you been? I was calling you all night.

JASON. Sorry. No phones, no email. Avoiding reporters. Beth is protecting me from the big bad world.

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PAM. Thank goodness for Beth, is all I can say. I just wish I could have gotten in touch with you. I tried to find you yesterday. Didn't Natalie tell you?

JASON. Must've slipped her mind. Anyway, things got a little crazy yesterday after the paper came out.

PAM. I'll say. All those people camped out front this morning... I can't say I saw that coming.

JASON. Me neither.

PAM. How did you get in past them?

JASON. Phil let me in the kitchen door.

PAM. What did you do, come in through the woods? With Beth in her condition?

JASON. My mother will bring her in. Beth stayed there last night. Seemed... I dunno, prudent. Keep a low profile till this blows over.

PAM. Until this blows over. Jason... what actually happened in your class on Monday?

JASON. Whatever they're saying on TV, I'm sure that's exactly the truth.

PAM. It's not funny, Jason. You're a good teacher. These kids, you'd think high school is a prison sentence, but somehow, with you...

JASON. Well, I had good teachers myself.

PAM. And here we are. The superintendent is already leaning on me to file a grievance against you. And you've just gotten tenure. I don't want to lose you.

JASON. Thank you. Really, thank you. You know I love those kids. They're just, these half-formed bundles of potential, and if you can set it loose... You aren't going to lose me.

PAM. You came in the back, Jason. You didn't see them out there.

JASON. I saw them. That's why I went around back. They think they're serious, don't they?

PAM. They are serious. They want your head on a platter.

JASON. (*Placing a construction paper crown on her head.*) And you? Will you play Herod to my John the Baptist? Just because some second-home owner read the local weekly and called the ADL?

PAM. (*Taking the crown off.*) For the love of Mike, don't joke like that.

JASON. Come on, Pam –

PAM. And it's not only out-of-towners out there, and it's not only Jews. There's TV cameras, and the daily paper now, and... The town, Jason, the town can't afford to look like... like it supports this. Our Lady of Mercy is holding a prayer vigil.

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JASON. Really? Father Reiner didn't call me.

PAM. The PTA is out there.

JASON. They think teaching is easy just because –

PAM. Jason. There are students out there.

JASON. *(Looks at Pam for a beat.)* Anyone besides Corey?

PAM. Not that I saw, but –

JASON. *(He laughs.)* Wait till she realizes she's on the same side as the powers that be. Trust me, she'll be organizing the counter-protest by lunchtime.

PAM. I intend to have this over by lunchtime. You'll have to talk to them eventually, I guess. Let's figure out what you'll say.

JASON. Beth doesn't think I should. Something about not poking the bear.

PAM. You have to tell them it isn't true. Your students misunderstood you.

JASON. They didn't misunderstand. It's true.

PAM. It's true?!

JASON. Yup.

PAM. You told your eleventh-grade modern European history class the Holocaust didn't happen.

JASON. Well, that's an oversimplification.

PAM. It's Holocaust denial. Seems pretty simple to me.

JASON. I didn't deny anything. I spent forty minutes on a textbook lesson, and then at the end, I just... asked some questions. Whether we should consider evidence that contradicts the extent of the popular narrative.

PAM. But... but I sat in on your class on Wednesday. You were doing... what, Yalta?

JASON. I wasn't going to linger on the subject. They have a test next week. Honestly, until things exploded yesterday, I thought the whole experiment had been a dud.

PAM. Experiment? You said it was just a rumor!

JASON. Oh!... You said it was just a rumor, and that you would put a stop to it, and then you ran off to take a call before I could correct you.

PAM. You should have found me later. You should have talked to me.

JASON. You're right. No, you're absolutely right. I should have. I'm sorry.

PAM. *(Somewhat mollified.)* Oh... well. *(Pause.)* Jason, how could you?

JASON. We were studying World War II. It kind of came up.

PAM. Be serious! This is a big deal.

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JASON. Yes, it is. How much of each class graduates in four years?

PAM. What does that have to do with –

JASON. I'm trying to explain this to you. What's our graduation rate?

PAM. We've been holding steady in the mid-seventies. But –

JASON. And how many start college in the fall? Bachelors and associate?

PAM. A little less than half.

JASON. And how many come back with their tails between their legs in a year or two?

PAM. We don't keep tabs on –

JASON. But you know. How many?

PAM. ...Most of them.

JASON. We aren't doing our jobs, Pam. We aren't preparing these kids to go out into the world and make something of themselves. Everyone from my class still lives here.

PAM. Jason, you still –

JASON. (*Continuing straight through.*) Pouring the coffee, and plowing the snow, and building the vacation homes, like their parents before them, and their parents before them. My father, he worked himself to death at Chalet Village, and my brother's doing it too, and I don't think a single one of those second-home-owners knows their names. But... what's left? The mill? It's a museum for tourists. We won't survive like this. Bones for rich people from Connecticut to pick over. But, these kids. They can rebuild this town. If we teach them. To think. To look at facts, and draw their own conclusions. To reach beyond what they've been told, what they've been given. What could be better than to challenge their textbook?

PAM. But Holocaust denial? Why something so... shocking?

JASON. It's only shocking if you choose to be shocked. Focus on the details, and it's just... history. Here, an example. Zyklon B. A hydrocyanic acid, an insecticide. At Auschwitz, they used it to delouse clothing, and to gas people. Separate rooms. But here's the thing. In the delousing chambers, to this day there are enormous residues of hydrocyanic acid. But in the extermination chambers? The barest traces, and sometimes they don't even find that. Can you explain that?

PAM. I... Is that even true? I mean, I used to be a French teacher, I don't know about... But I'm sure there's an answer.

JASON. And if one of those eleventh graders, just one, is "shocked" enough to go and look for that answer, this whole thing will be worth it.

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PAM. Even if you lose your job over it?

JASON. That isn't going to happen.

PAM. What makes you so sure?

JASON. My principal has my back.

PAM. I'll do what I can for you, Jason. But if the decision gets taken out of my hands...

JASON. We'll make sure it doesn't.

PAM. Right. Okay. So. First thing, let's put you in my office.

JASON. Why?

PAM. The idea is to keep the peace. When Natalie Levine gets here –

JASON. It's taken care of. No matter how mad she is, she never turns down office treats. *(Reaching into the brown paper bag.)* Want one? *(He tosses Pam a bagel.)*

PAM. Are you joking?!

JASON. What?

PAM. Is this your idea of a joke?

JASON. Why would... Oh! *(He chuckles, starts halving a bagel and spreading cream cheese on it.)* I didn't think of that. Bagels aren't Jewish anymore, Pam. They've been nationalized.

PAM. And stop saying things like that! These Holocaust deniers – the real ones – I looked them up. They're scary people. Fascists, white supremacists, you can't even imply that you –

JASON. Of course not. I don't hate anyone, you know that. Do we have to be completely humorless to prove it?

PAM. Please. Don't make my job harder.

JASON. All right, Pam. For you. I'll censor myself. But I can't run away from my office. How would Tom know where to find me? *(The door opens. TOM stands there, a shy, nervous, undersized 17-year-old.)*

TOM. How did you know I was there, Mr. Efheim?

JASON. Educated guess.

PAM. Good morning, Tommy.

TOM. Please, Mrs. McGarry...

PAM. Tom, right. I'm sorry. You've been Tommy your whole life, you have to give us time to get used to it.

JASON. What can I do for you, Tom?

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TOM. Well, I saw those reporters out there... and if they think it's a story, and it's happening right here, and I thought... well, maybe... could I... interview you? For the Recorder?

PAM. Oh, Tom, I don't think that's the best –

JASON. I'd be honored. Shut the door, have a seat.

TOM. Now? But... But I didn't –

PAM. Mr. Efheim, can I have a word with you?

JASON. It's all right, Mrs. McGarry. There's not going to be an interview. Tom hasn't prepared his questions. Am I right?

TOM. I, I wanted to get your permission first –

JASON. We've talked about this in Recorder meetings. What if this was the only time I had to talk to you?

TOM. Sorry, Mr. Efheim.

JASON. I'll tell you what. We have about an hour before homeroom. Put together your questions, and we'll talk at seven.

PAM. Mr. Efheim, could you please –

JASON. Clear the final article with you. No question. But this is just such a great learning experience. How often does the Recorder get to cover real news?

PAM. Well... *(BETH appears in the door, followed by PHIL. Beth is dressed in business-maternity clothes, as she is very pregnant. Phil wears janitors' scrubs. Jason springs out of his chair, to help Beth into it. Meanwhile, Tom does his best to fade into the wall, listening.)*

BETH. *(To the room at large.)* Hey! *(To Jason.)* Hi, babe.

JASON. Hi. Is everything okay?

BETH. Thanks to Phil. My personal escort.

JASON. Thanks for helping her, Phil.

PHIL. Yeah, well... I'm on the door anyway. Don't wanna just unlock for the breakfast kids like usual... Oh, Mrs. McGarry, the TV guys are stopping them to ask if they're in Mr. Efheim's class.

PAM. Oh, for the love of Mike. *(As she makes to leave, to Jason.)* And don't you talk to any reporters. Including that one. *(Meaning Tom.)* Understood?

JASON. Jawohl.

PAM. Jason!

JASON. Sorry. Self-censoring.

PAM. You'd better. *(She exits.)*

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PHIL. *(To Tom.)* You ain't bothering Mr. Efheim, are you, kid?

TOM. No, Dad! I was just... uh... listening. For, for material. For my interview questions.

PHIL. Listen somewhere else, hah? Go to the cafeteria or something. Don't you think Mr. Efheim's got plenty to worry about already?

TOM. Yeah. Yes, sir. I'm on my way out now. *(He starts to exit.)*

JASON. Hey, Tom. *(Tom turns back.)* Did you hear? Mrs. McGarry called you a reporter.

TOM. *(Grins.)* Can I still come back at seven?

JASON. Don't be late.

TOM. Thanks, Mr. Efheim. See you, Dad. *(He runs out.)*

PHIL. Christ almighty, that boy...

BETH. He's a good kid, Phil. He's trying hard, and that's more than I can say for most of my algebra class.

PHIL. You mean like Cassie?

JASON. Cassie? Look, ah, maybe –

BETH. She never turned in a single homework, what was I supposed to – *(Jason gently touches her shoulder. She takes a deep breath.)* It was my first year teaching, I'm sure I could have done better.

PHIL. Yeah, well... She's on my mind today. I tell you, Jason? Store's pressing charges.

JASON. Oh, Phil, I'm so sorry.

PHIL. Told her not to go to L.A., no place for people like us, but what was she gonna do? Bum around like her sister till... aaah. I just want one of my goddamn kids to make something of himself.

JASON. Tom will. We'll get him into college.

PHIL. College. If that's what it takes... But he's seventeen, for Chrissakes. Boy his age should have some swagger, y'know? I see him half an hour a day, fifteen minutes in the car here, and fifteen back to his mother's at five, and he sits there, head down, and... mumbles. You raise a kid from a speck, and just when he finally gets old enough to be interesting, you think, where the hell did he come from? *(Waves a hand in the direction of Beth's belly.)* You'll see.

JASON. *(Takes Beth's hand.)* We're looking forward to it.

PHIL. I should give the two of you some time. And I got bathrooms. *(He turns to go, then hesitates.)* How you doin' today? Holding up?

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JASON. I'm fine. Are you okay?

PHIL. Me? Fine. Fine. It's only... well, I mean... look, Jason. If Tommy came to you... told you anything about, about his, y'know... preferences... you'd tell me. Wouldn't you?

JASON. (*As gently as possible.*) No, Phil. I wouldn't. If Tom took me into his confidence – if – if he chose to speak to me about that, and I came to you, after that he wouldn't talk to either of us.

BETH. Anyway, Phil, I don't think you need to worry.

PHIL. No?

JASON. Beth...

BETH. It's my own observation. It's not betraying anyone's confidence to tell him my own observation.

JASON. But it isn't our place.

PHIL. What? Aw, c'mon, you can't dangle it in front of me like that. What?

BETH. ...Some time, when you get the chance, watch what happens to Tommy when Corey Carson walks into the room. That's all I'll say.

PHIL. Jason? That true?

JASON. ...I can't say. I'm sorry. But look for yourself.

PHIL. Huh. I'll be damned. Can't say I think much of his taste, but... least it's a girl. Thanks, Jason. I'll stop by later. Got some shell casings to show you. Soviet.

JASON. Can't wait.

PHIL. And don't you let 'em tell you what to think. Make the eggheads squirm.

JASON. Okay, Phil. (*Phil exits.*)

BETH. Jesus. Soviet shell casings? Can't wait to hear his latest conspiracy theory.

JASON. He reads. I got him reading. That's Tom's best hope.

BETH. He threw Cassie at me. Again. I know he's your friend, but... And I'm sorry to interfere, but you know Phil's going to make life hard for Tommy if he even suspects something like that. How can we sit back and watch that happen, when it isn't even true?

JASON. And what if it is true? Or, what if Phil starts harping on Tom to ask her out? You know how that's going to work out. Phil and Tom have to figure this out on their own.

BETH. Tommy's just so... fragile, you know? You shake him to see what's inside, he might break.

JASON. So compassionate. That's why I love you.

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BETH. Not for my petite girlish figure?

JASON. That too. *(He kisses her.)* Were you comfortable last night?

BETH. If I wasn't, I'd better not tell your mother. She was so thrilled to have someone to fuss over. Hot soup, homemade cocoa...

JASON. ...and enough quilts to smother in, I bet.

BETH. I was still cold. I missed you. Why did you have to stir up this mess?

JASON. I didn't know it would be this messy. I thought kids would talk to each other about it. I hoped they would. Maybe to their parents. I didn't think anyone would call the Lemon Fair Dealer.

BETH. Funny. I thought you were kind of enjoying the attention.

JASON. I am. A little. Just because, if somebody complained, somebody was listening.

BETH. Corey.

JASON. Corey's the girl who cried wolf. No one listens when she complains. Remember Natalie and the "Indian" incident? I just hope I haven't lost her.

BETH. I hope you have. Maybe then she'll let me teach her calculus next year.

JASON. Hey, no fair!

BETH. All's fair in love and war, darling. She's my only junior in trig.

JASON. And next week she'll be protesting sine's historic oppression of cosine. Mark my words.

BETH. But she could go all the way, Jason. Really be a scientist, or an engineer. Not wind up... well, you know how the girls here wind up. Which kid do you think... told?

JASON. Wish I knew.

BETH. Where to send the apology.

JASON. Apology? What for?

BETH. For... what do you think for? For offending them.

JASON. I asked questions. If they can answer, let them do it. I thought you were with me on this.

BETH. I just wish you'd discussed it with me.

JASON. I did. Sunday night, after dinner at Stan's. After he showed us that... new plow.

BETH. What is your problem with the plow? Stan's pleased with it.

JASON. Oh yeah, real pleased. Never saw him so pleased. Like... well, like Dad. Sullen, bitter man, suddenly happy over a new plow. And Stan's son, looking up at

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him, he doesn't understand any more than I did... That boy starts high school next year. And I'll be damned if the shining moment of his adult life is going to be replacing Stan's plow. Not if I can help it. I had to do something, to, to push the envelope. Get their blood racing. I told you that night. Don't you remember? You laughed with me.

BETH. I thought you were joking. One laughs when one thinks one's husband is making a joke. First rule of marriage.

JASON. You said, "That'll get them thinking." You said it was a great idea.

BETH. I said it was an interesting idea. You said, what if. Not... I didn't think you were actually going to do it. Sorry, but your timing kind of sucks. (*Indicating her belly.*)

JASON. Please don't talk like the students. We're supposed to be the adults.

BETH. Then act like it! Tell the kids you don't actually believe what you said, eat a little dirt.

JASON. I can't – What message does that send? You want to make hard questions go away? Complain! That doesn't play in the real world. I want these kids to do the work.

BETH. How? Have you seen the library? What tools do they have to do "the work"? Jason, what happens if your kids start spouting neo-Nazi propaganda to the press?

JASON. I haven't taught anybody propaganda. I asked questions.

BETH. Which reporters will turn into answers. They will make you a monster to ramp up ad sales, you know it.

JASON. Then maybe I should talk to them myself. I could explain –

BETH. No. No media. You promised me.

JASON. And I kept my promise. Unplugged the phone, hid in the house with the lights off, snuck into school the back way like a coward –

BETH. And what do you think I've done? I like your mother and all, but if you think last night wasn't the most awkward evening ever...

JASON. I'm sorry about that. But I feel like my honor is under attack, and my own wife is telling me to sit down and take it.

BETH. Your honor...? Your job is under attack. You could lose your job.

JASON. I am my job. You know that. I'm a teacher. It's all I've ever wanted. I'm a teacher.

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BETH. Yeah? Then stay a teacher. Please. I mean it. Cause there's a baby on the way, and you made promises you'd better keep. (*The door flies open. NATALIE stands at the threshold. She is middle-aged and frumpy.*)

JASON. Good morning, Natalie.

NATALIE. Oh, "good morning." Now that you're getting yours, it's "good morning."

BETH. Natalie, are you all right?

NATALIE. And that goes for you too, you, you... collaborator.

BETH. Now, wait a minute –

NATALIE. That's right, collaborator! If you're not trying to stop evil, you're helping it.

JASON. I agree. Don't you, Beth?

NATALIE. Don't you dare agree with me!

JASON. Natalie. I understand you're upset. But can't we discuss –

NATALIE. Upset? Upset!?! No no no no no. "Upset" is when you correct my teaching methods in front of the students. "Upset" is when you hold your little Dr. Phil counseling sessions in our office while I'm trying to grade papers. This, this is beyond upset. This, Jason, is apoplectic.

BETH. I'd better go. Jason, walk me to my office?

NATALIE. Oh, I'm sorry. Did I interrupt your little Wannsee Conference? (*She pronounces it anglicized: "WAN-see."*)

JASON. What happened at Wannsee? (*He gives it the correct German pronunciation: "VAHN-zay."*)

BETH. Jason!

NATALIE. (*Pointing an accusing finger.*) I knew it!

JASON. No official records were kept –

BETH. He doesn't mean, Natalie, it's an academic... Jason, tell her!

JASON. If you know you're right, why do you get this angry at being challenged?

NATALIE. I'm not having this debate.

JASON. Why? We're historians, right? Isn't the debate the point? Sit down, have a bagel, let's –

NATALIE. The Holocaust is not debatable. This is hate, pure and simple.

JASON. What makes you think I hate you? I'm not –

NATALIE. If you say some of your best friends are Jews, so help me I'll –

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JASON. It's about evidence, right? Present the evidence, let people decide for themselves.

BETH. Jason, stop.

NATALIE. All right. All right. Beth, what do you think?

BETH. Me?

NATALIE. People can decide for themselves. So. Holocaust. Fact or fiction? Go.

BETH. Fact. Of course. But... Jason –

NATALIE. *(To Jason.)* See?!

JASON. Everybody's entitled to their opinion.

NATALIE. It's not opinion! It's – *(To Beth.)* And what's your "opinion" of Holocaust denial, Mrs. Efheim?

JASON. I didn't deny anything, I just –

NATALIE. Nobody's asking you.

BETH. Jason...

NATALIE. Don't look at him. You're a grown woman. You're a teacher. Holocaust denial.

JASON. Beth, if you don't want to –

BETH. It's insane.

NATALIE. Ha!

BETH. I'm sorry, Jason, but listen to yourself – do you know what people are going to think? That you're not fit to teach. That you –

JASON. Beth, no, this is about teaching, it's –

BETH. Well, then, say that! Why are you... baiting Natalie? I don't like looking like I married a bigot.

JASON. *(To Natalie.)* Thanks a bundle.

NATALIE. My pleasure.

BETH. This isn't about Natalie. You started this. And you have to end it. You have to. Before... Before –

JASON. Before what? Before Natalie? Natalie likes arguing with me.

BETH. Stop!

JASON. *(Continuing through, to Natalie.)* Admit it. You're enjoying this. Aren't you.

NATALIE. I will enjoy seeing you out on your – *(Beth lets out an audible gasp, and clutches her belly. Jason forgets the argument entirely, suddenly all solicitude.)*

JASON. What's wrong?

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BETH. *(She sits down hard in a desk chair.)* Oh God...

JASON. *(Kneeling in front of her, taking her hand.)* Is everything okay? Should I call the doctor?

NATALIE. She's faking.

JASON. Sweetie?

BETH. *(Pulling her hand away.)* I'm fine. Don't, I... oh!

NATALIE. I have three kids. Trust me, Beth, the fake contractions don't work forever.

JASON. I'm calling the doctor.

BETH. No, I'm fine! I'm fine...

JASON. You don't look fine.

NATALIE. She's fine.

PAM. *(Pam enters, surveys the situation.)* I leave you alone for five minutes!

NATALIE. Pam, I won't share an office with that. I won't. What are you going to do about it?

PAM. Not now, Natalie. Beth, are you okay?

JASON. She insists she doesn't need a doctor, but –

BETH. I don't! I just need to rest.

PAM. Well, I think we should have Rosemary look at you, just to be safe. Can you walk?

BETH. Yes. I think so.

JASON. I'll take you.

PAM. We'll both take you.

NATALIE. But –

PAM. And then I will come right back, Natalie, and I will do what I can for you. Can I please have only two crises on my hands at a time?

NATALIE. This is my fault?

JASON. *(Helping Beth up.)* Lean on me, sweetie...

BETH. I can walk.

PAM. Please, Natalie. Get some coffee, take a walk, and I will see you in five minutes. *(Pam, Jason, and Beth exit. Natalie stands there for a moment, fuming. Then she grabs a black permanent marker out of the pen cup on Jason's desk, and draws a large swastika across his world map. She throws the pen down on the desk and storms out. The stage is empty for a moment. The door swings open, and COREY enters furtively. She is an attractive seventeen-year-old in baggy clothes,*

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possibly a do-rag over her hair. There is a piece of yellow fabric tied around her upper arm with a star of David drawn on it in marker. She looks around to make sure she is alone, then pulls a can of spray paint out of her bag. As she shakes it, she turns toward Jason's desk, and stops short. As she stares at the swastika, Tom sneaks into the room behind her.)

TOM. Mr. Efheim isn't here, Corey.

COREY. *(Jumps to hide the spray paint, then realizes who it is.)* Jesus, Tom, you scared the shit out of me!

TOM. Sorry, I, just, you're not usually at school so early, and I... uh... *(Looking from the spray can to the swastika, then points to the latter.)* Did you do that?!

COREY. That's marker. This is spray paint.

TOM. Oh... right.

COREY. But I was going to. *(Looking closer.)* I wonder who beat me to it? *(She sees the marker on the desk, reaches for it.)*

TOM. Don't touch that, that's evidence!

COREY. Evidence? They are not gonna take fingerprints because of a ten-dollar map.

TOM. Well, nobody's been in here but teachers. And my dad. Did you see Mrs. Efhiem, was she okay...?

COREY. What were you doing, staking the place out?

TOM. Weren't you?

COREY. Yeah, I guess.

TOM. Why? *(Corey holds up the spray paint.)* ...Why?

COREY. For the same reason I'm wearing this. *(Indicates her armband.)*

TOM. Isn't that a Jewish star?

COREY. Duh.

TOM. But... you're not Jewish.

COREY. It's symbolism.

TOM. I, I knew that. It's cool.

COREY. I made a ton of them. You want one? *(She pulls one out of her bag.)*

TOM. Are, are people wearing those?

COREY. I'm gonna give them out as people come into school. Come on, I'll tie it on you.

TOM. Oh... okay. *(She starts to tie it on. The physical contact is almost too much for Tom.)* How... how long do I have to wear it?

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COREY. You don't have to wear it at all. You should want to.

TOM. I do. I really do. I'm just... not sure why.

COREY. It's taking a stand. Somebody has to show Mr. Efheim that we aren't going to listen to Nazi propaganda in this school! His job is to teach history, not indoctrinate us into his fucked-up personal beliefs.

TOM. I thought you liked Mr. Efheim.

COREY. Some things are more important than one student and one teacher.

TOM. I see how you look at him.

COREY. No, I – ew, gross. No, it's not even him, it's this fucking town. This piss-ant little red meat town. It warps your mind. Just breathing the air lowers your IQ. Like, like there are little molecules of stupid floating around, just, floating. It got to Mr. Efheim, and it'll get us too if we aren't careful.

TOM. Us? Like... we lay low till we graduate, and get out of town?

COREY. That's how it works. It gets you when you stop fighting. Apathy is the first symptom.

TOM. I'm not... I don't have apathy.

COREY. Then do something. *(She offers him the spray paint can.)*

TOM. What... what do you want me to do with that?

COREY. It doesn't matter what I want. What do you want?

TOM. I don't know.

COREY. Come up with something. It doesn't count unless you come up with it. What do you want to do with it?

TOM. ...Throw it out?

COREY. Well... if that's what you really want. *(He slowly reaches out for the can. She snatches it away.)* But you have to get it from me first.

TOM. You said –

COREY. I said you should fight. Right now, that means me.

TOM. I don't want to fight you!

COREY. Well Jesus fucking Christ, Tom, fight for something. Try for something. Or do you want to wind up scrubbing the school toilets the rest of your life? *(Pause. He lunges for the spray paint can, and Corey easily dodges him. Tom crashes into Natalie's desk.)* Come on. You can do better than that. *(Tom picks up a stack of papers from Natalie's desk and throws them at Corey. They go everywhere; none of them actually manages to reach her on the other side of the room. Corey is aware*

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she's gone too far, trying not to laugh at the inefficacy of Tom's attack.) That was... not what I expected.

TOM. You said... I was trying. I was trying to do what you said.

COREY. I said to throw Mrs. Levine's papers?

TOM. You said to do something I came up with. That's... what I came up with. *(Pause.)* Sorry.

COREY. No. Hey. You tried. *(Hold out the spray can.)* Want it? *(He looks at it like Charlie Brown looking at Lucy holding the football.)* No, really. Want it? *(The door swings open and Jason enters. The spray paint can disappears into Corey's bag instantly at the sound.)*

TOM. She didn't do it, Mr. Efheim. I would've seen her.

JASON. So, this mess made itself, or – *(Sees the swastika.)* Oh. *(Pause. He looks at them.)* What are you two wearing? *(Tom yanks his armband off.)*

COREY. Tom!

JASON. Tom, I thought you were working on your questions?

TOM. I am... I mean, I was, but...

JASON. Maybe you should get back to that.

TOM. Oh... okay. *(He starts to go.)* She didn't do it, Mr. Efheim. I swear.

JASON. I believe you, Tom.

TOM. Okay. Corey, I'll... I'll be in the library.

COREY. Yeah. Don't forget your armband. *(He exits, taking the armband with him.)*

JASON. So. Good morning, Corey.

COREY. Good morning?

JASON. Yes. It's what civilized people say to each other at this hour. I'd invite you into my office, but, well...

COREY. Tom wasn't lying, Mr. Efheim. I really didn't draw that swastika.

JASON. I said I believe him, and I do. Now, did you have something to say to me?

COREY. Yeah, I... you...

JASON. Well, while you're thinking, would you mind picking up Mrs. Levine's papers?

COREY. Are you mad at me?

JASON. Tell me why I shouldn't be.

COREY. You're the one who started this. Preaching your Nazi propaganda bullshit in front of –

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JASON. Language!

COREY. It's bullshit, Mr. Efheim, and I'm going to call it bullshit. Isn't that what you're always saying we should do? Not in those words, okay, but isn't it?

JASON. I just asked questions. Can you answer them?

COREY. Can you? You're the one questioning what everybody else believes. Isn't it your job to prove your side?

JASON. But that's what those protesters out there are saying I shouldn't do.

They're saying I should keep my mouth shut and go along with "what everybody else believes." Is that what you think I should do?

COREY. Wait, but... I –

JASON. Because I remember you standing against the entire school over the troop build-up in Afghanistan. I remember kids, even parents, calling you traitor, and worse, and I remember how angry you were that you weren't even allowed to make your case.

COREY. That – no, that's policy. Not fact. It's what you say, you're entitled to your own opinion, not your own facts. This is like... like if I was saying that Afghanistan doesn't exist at all.

JASON. But what if you could make a case that it didn't? Wouldn't you, you of all people, demand the right to do it?

COREY. You're... I never said... you're twisting my words around on me.

JASON. I'm just asking if you meant what you always said about freedom of speech. Or do you just think people have the right to speak when they agree with you?

COREY. No, of course not –

JASON. That's what this is really about, Corey. Listening with an open mind. You're taking a stand, great, but what if it's the wrong stand?

COREY. It isn't.

JASON. You sure? Did you even Google Holocaust revisionism? I think you'd be surprised who you're siding with.

COREY. Who?

JASON. I'm just thinking about your Recorder piece on the Palestinian refugee camps, and –

COREY. The one you didn't make them print?

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JASON. It was one anecdote you lifted from Reddit, and five paragraphs of harangue. You need to start from facts. Remember? You're entitled to, et cetera? Look it up for yourself. That's all I ever wanted.

COREY. ...Okay. I'm going to the library.

JASON. You may have to kick Tom off the computer.

COREY. Okay.

JASON. Corey. While you're giving me a break... give him one too, okay?

COREY. I'm not giving you nothing. I'm just seeing what I'm up against.

JASON. I'll settle for that. You free third or sixth period?

COREY. Sixth.

JASON. I'll be here.

COREY. See you sixth period. *(She exits. Jason kneels down and starts picking up Natalie's papers. Natalie enters. He looks up.)*

JASON. Sorry about this, Natalie, some kids were horsing around and... *(She turns on her heel and stalks back out, slamming the door. Jason sighs and continues gathering her papers. He puts them in a pile on her desk, straightens it. He goes to the defaced world map. He takes it down – it's attached to the wall by rolled-up masking tape – and looks at it, shaking his head. There is a knock on the door. Jason quickly folds the map so the swastika is on the inside.)* Come in! *(The door opens. It's Phil.)*

PHIL. Hey, Jason. Got a sec?

JASON. Sure. Don't suppose you want a bagel?

PHIL. Got any blueberry?

JASON. *(Digging in the bag.)* Got one just for you.

PHIL. Thanks. What's Levine got her panties in a twist about?

JASON. The usual. Hey, heads up. *(Tosses Phil the blueberry bagel. Phil catches it.)*

PHIL. Thanks. *(Tears a bite out.)*

JASON. Wow, Phil, didn't you have breakfast?

PHIL. *(Through a full mouth.)* No time. Got a goddamn campground to clean up after.

JASON. Yeah, hey, sorry about that.

PHIL. Worth it, man. Fuck the eggheads, hah?

JASON. Please, Phil –

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PHIL. Always so superior, cause they went to fancy schools. I could change a spark plug before I could drive, you think McGarry could do that? Or Levine?

JASON. You read. You study history.

PHIL. Yeah, but I don't lord it over you. I don't have to, cause I actually work for a living. It's like Tom. Wants to be a reporter, thanks to you. And –

JASON. It's not me. It's –

PHIL. It is. He idolizes you, man, y'know? He never looks at me the way... But those bastards, the fucking system, they're gonna try to tell him he ain't good enough, and he's gotta want it. And he's so... Where's his resistance? When they try to stop him...

JASON. We'll get him past all that.

PHIL. He'll need values, 's all I'm saying. That's how you figure out the truth. Not a degree. But unless you got a degree, nobody will listen.

JASON. So let's get Tom into college.

PHIL. No, I mean... It's like my shell casings. I uh, I brought 'em. What you been doing, got me thinking, and there's uh, I got this idea I wanna run by you...

JASON. Show me.

PHIL. You sure?

JASON. Put up or shut up.

PHIL. (*Produces some rifle shell casings from his pocket.*) Genuine vintage Soviet World War II. And guess where they were found.

JASON. Where?

PHIL. France. Normandy. Know what that means?

JASON. Tell me.

PHIL. I mean, look. If a Soviet casing was in Normandy, then a Soviet weapon was fired there, right? Well, no Soviets on the western front. And America's shooting American-made. Who's wading 'cross Normandy with a Kalashnikov? (*Dramatic pause.*) The Germans. That's right. But Phil, you say, where'd they get Soviet weapons? They capture them? Not likely – they were losing to the Russians by then. So they must've bought 'em.

JASON. Well, maybe, but –

PHIL. I know, I know. Why would the Soviets sell? They was our allies. Hah? Exactly. They sold to slow us down. To reach Berlin first. The Soviet bloc. The Cold War didn't just happen, Jason – it was planned, by the people we thought was our friends. The only question is, were Roosevelt and his pinko cronies duped, or

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were they part of the conspiracy? Did a Democratic government sell American capitalism to the reds?

JASON. I don't know. Did they?

PHIL. I don't know either. But I'm gonna find out. It's like you always say, Jason, go after the truth, let the facts speak for themselves. The truth shall set you free.

JASON. ...You got all that from a few shell casings.

PHIL. Just common sense. It all follows, right?

JASON. Well, sure, if –

PHIL. Then, look, here's what I really wanted to ask you. All this revision stuff of yours, and... How 'bout you and me write a book?

JASON. A book.

PHIL. Yeah. I got the evidence, you got the degree.

JASON. A master's in education, not –

PHIL. Knock the bastards on their asses, what do you say?

JASON. I don't know Phil...

PHIL. Jason, look, man, I know this is a bad time, and I don't wanna, you know... But Cassie. Can't have a second kid go to jail, and... Lawyers cost money. Gotta raise it somehow.

JASON. I... Phil. It's not that I don't want to help, I do, but... where do I begin. It takes time to write a book. By the time we –

PHIL. Yeah, but I already done the work, we just need to write it down, put in some teacher-talk, and –

JASON. There's more to it than that. Verifying, secondary sources... And then you need a publisher. And they won't even look at you without a doctorate in history.

PHIL. Goddamn system, fucking rigged, ain't it. Well, we'll show 'em, we'll self-publish, Amazon's got a whole thing now, and –

JASON. Phil. Please. It's not just the mechanics, it's... It's great hearing you talk about history. How much you know, how excited you get. That's what I want from my students. It's just... Where did you get these?

PHIL. E-bay. *(Pause.)* What? *(Pause.)* No, no. I know what you're... The guy's a World War II buff. Like me. Works on the line for Bushmaster, so he knows guns. He, what's-the-word, authenticated 'em himself.

JASON. Have you... met this guy?

PHIL. You don't think they're real.

JASON. I didn't say –

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PHIL. They're right in front of your eyes, man.

JASON. Yeah, but... I mean, how do you know they're actually Soviet? Found in Normandy?

PHIL. Don't you think I know the difference? *(A pause, as Jason tries and fails to come up with a tactful answer.)* You don't.

JASON. It's not –

PHIL. You're turning me down.

JASON. I wish I could help –

PHIL. I'm doing the same thing as you. This is our fight. Where's your loyalty?

JASON. With you. With Tom.

PHIL. Cause it's a war. We're at war. Us against the outsiders, the eggheads out front, and the eggheads they send up to tell our kids they ain't good enough. McGarry, and Levine, and your wife even.

JASON. Hang on. Beth isn't –

PHIL. Tell it to Cassie. Your wife looks down her nose at us swamp Yankee morons, just like the rest of them. Even you. After all this... But you're from here. I played football with your big brother. I thought you was different.

JASON. We're on your side. Me, Beth, Pam. Even Natalie. It's the outsiders, the tourists, who –

PHIL. Yeah? If you teachers is so great, how come I'm still in high school, cleaning the toilets?

JASON. Phil, listen –

PHIL. And that's where Tom's gonna wind up, ain't it?

JASON. No!

PHIL. Cause he don't come from the right stock.

JASON. Tom's going to go to college. I promise you that.

PHIL. I bet. I bet you do. So they can turn him into you?

JASON. I want to help him.

PHIL. I bet. Yeah. Like you're helping me with my book. Like you helped Cassie.

JASON. Sometimes things just happen, they –

PHIL. No they don't. No. They. Don't. I learned that from you. Things have causes, and... You may have stopped the rest of the Hostlers, but you are not stopping Tom.

JASON. You've got it all wrong –

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PHIL. Yeah, Jason? Yeah? Tell me how wrong I am. Is that why you pulled this Holocaust stunt of yours? So your kike friends would come up from the city and tell us all –

JASON. Of course not.

PHIL. Well, you listen to me. Thanks to you, that kid of mine thinks he's better than me. Thinks you're better than me. Well he is, but you ain't. Got that? He can do anything. You get in his way, and I'll fucking kill you.

JASON. Phil, please –

PHIL. Sorry, can't stay to hear you beg, you little pussy. I gotta go clean up other people's shit. So long, Mister Efheim. Thanks for the bagel. *(He storms out.)*

JASON. Phil... *(It's too late. Jason sits at his desk, puts his head in his hands. For the first time in the play, he looks defeated. There is a short pause. Then the door opens, and Pam comes in.)*

PAM. Jason?

JASON. It was one class. It was five minutes at the end of one class. Are you here to take me out back and shoot me?

PAM. I was looking for Natalie, actually. Have you seen her?

JASON. She won't stay in the same room as me.

PAM. I warned you...

JASON. That you did, Pam. That you did. Natalie, Phil now, even... How did this get so messy? How do I clean it up?

PAM. Apologize.

JASON. Apologize.

PAM. We'll go out there together. Tell them you just wanted to challenge the kids, you see now your choice of subject matter was in poor taste, and of course the Holocaust was tragically real. Then flash them that famous Efheim smile, and say you're sorry.

JASON. But I'm not sorry.

PAM. Mention Beth's pregnancy, and... What do you mean, you're not sorry?

JASON. I mean, I'm sorry it's worked out the way it has. But I'm not sorry I did what I did.

PAM. You said you wanted to clean up your mess.

JASON. I do, but... Look, when your kids were little, did they ever try to bake cookies and wind up wrecking the kitchen?

PAM. It was brownies.

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JASON. Fine. They made a mess. That doesn't mean that baking brownies is an inherently bad idea, right? It just didn't work out.

PAM. Yes, but, they were seven and nine. What you're telling me, Jason, is that you need grown-up supervision.

JASON. Pam –

PAM. You're supposed to be the grown-up supervision.

JASON. I picked a bad example.

PAM. That seems to be your M.O. this week, doesn't it?

JASON. Pam, please. This is exactly what I didn't want.

PAM. How did you think today was going to go?

JASON. I, I thought I'd be, you know, walking the halls. Answering questions.

Asking questions. Socratic dialogue. Getting people thinking.

PAM. Sounds great, I'm trying to support you, but... you're not helping, you know? I'm starting to get phone calls from regional media. What if they join the encampment out front? What do I say to stop them? I'm an educator, not a P.R. manager.

JASON. I can't say I'm sorry when I haven't done anything wrong.

PAM. When you haven't... Do you believe that?

JASON. Don't you?

PAM. I don't know what to believe anymore. I just know there are some very angry people out there, and you're not convincing me they're wrong.

JASON. Who? The second-home crowd? Those are the people I'm fighting against.

PAM. How does "fighting" them educate your students? Their property taxes pay your salary.

JASON. Them? Them!?! They're sucking this town dry. Tell them to apologize, not me.

PAM. You have to face up to it. I know you care about your students and your colleagues, and you can stop them being harassed by news cameras on their way to school.

JASON. They're being harassed? They're being... Here. Look. *(He unfolds the defaced world map and displays it to her. She stands, her mouth slightly agape, for a moment. She looks to the blank space on the wall where the map used to hang, then back to the map in Jason's hands.)*

PAM. ...Who did that?

JASON. *(Laughs mirthlessly.)* At least you didn't ask if I did it.

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PAM. Did you?

JASON. No. I don't know who did.

PAM. I'll find out. I'll –

JASON. Does it matter?

PAM. Of course it matters! Whatever you may have said, it was only words. Only ideas. To meet that with this kind of... implied threat, it's intolerable. It's not to be tolerated.

JASON. "Only ideas."

PAM. Well, isn't it?

JASON. It's not "only" ideas. It's ideas. And the worst thing you can do is let them be silenced. In fact... *(He tapes the map back up on the wall.)*

PAM. What are you doing?

JASON. Reminding myself. To always listen. And engage. You don't defeat the enemy by keeping quiet.

PAM. Jason, take that down.

JASON. *(Pointing at it.)* This exists, Pam. Here. In this building, right now, is the person who drew that. Pretending they're not, won't change that.

PAM. All right. Fine. Fine. You're suspended.

JASON. Pam!

PAM. You're a threat to the security of the school and the safety of the students. If you won't take responsibility for cleaning up your mess, I will.

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