ALL TALK

by

Jonathan Safran Foer

August 24, 2011

INT. IRV'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A birthday party for four-year-old BENJY BLOCH: parents chat, cake is sliced and distributed. All of the Bloch family is there: Benjy's brothers, SAM (12) and MAX (10); his parents, JACOB and JULIA (mid 30's); Grandpa IRV and Grandma DEBORAH (60's); Uncle TIM (30)... Benjy is riding around the room in his massive new ride-on SUV toy. Among Benjy's friends are two four-year-old twins, faces smeared with cake:

TWIN 1
(indiscernible because of the cake in his mouth)
Ds ths ck hfffnee tree ntsnt?

JACOB
What's that?

TWIN 1
Ds ths ck hfffnee tree ntsnt?

JACOB
I'm sorry, I can't understand a word you're saying.

Twin 1 chews for a few seconds, swallows and then:

TWIN 1
Does this cake have any tree nuts in it?

Jacob calls to his wife across the room:

JACOB
Julia!

Julia comes over.

JULIA
(somewhat curtly--- something is clearly up between her and Jacob)
What.

Jacob points at Twin 1, as if passing the blame.

TWIN 1
(sensing the tension)
I was asking if this cake has any tree nuts in it, but it's OK.

JULIA
Are you allergic to tree nuts?

TWIN 2
We don't know, because we've never had them.

JACOB
(to Julia)
Does the cake have tree nuts in it?

JULIA
You bought it.

TWIN 1
We have our EpiPens with us.

JACOB
I'll call their father.

TWIN 2
Remove their blue safety caps and ram them into our thighs.

TWIN 1
Over our clothes.

JULIA
Call their mother.

As we follow Benjy on his SUV, we weave into and out of a few conversations---he takes us to each byte. In the background is some indiscernible chanting coming from outside...

SAM
(to his adored Uncle Tim)
But what if she's on her stomach?

TIM
Everything I told you still applies, just rotated by 180 degrees.

SAM
Cool.

TIM
Or if you're up for it, toss her salad for an early Hannukah gift.

SAM
(obviously not knowing what that means)
One could.

TIM
Or roll her over.

SAM
Yeah.

TIM
(gesturing at Benjy's SUV)
Cool, right?

SAM
It might just end his obsession with heaven.

TIM
(while looking over at Jacob---and catching Jacob looking at him)
Did your dad say anything about it?

CUT TO:

JULIA
(with a slight gesture to the noise from outside)
You're coping with the siege?

DEBORAH
I've had more fun in my life.

JULIA
It will end.

DEBORAH
Life will end. I married the siege.
(beat)
And you? You're coping?

JULIA
No. And I never said "I do" to other women.

CUT TO:

Benjy rams his SUV into his father, Jacob, who is chatting with his other son, Max.

JACOB
Jesus, Benjy.

BENJY
Sorry, Dad. I love you.

MAX
I *told* you not to text while driving.

BENJY
I don't even have a phone.

MAX
And you can't spell.

JACOB
(to Benjy)
This isn't a toy, OK?

MAX
It *is* a toy. It's a five-figure toy.

JACOB
It's the physical manifestation of your uncle's insecurity.

BENJY
It's the greatest thing anyone has ever done for me.

The chanting becomes louder and clearer: "IRVING BLOCH: RACIST PIG! IRVING BLOCH: RACIST PIG!" They are clearly trying to get Irv, who is sitting beside his grandson at the table with the kids, to come out of the house.

LITTLE GIRL
I think there's another party outside.

IRV
(to everyone gathered)
Ignore it.

The chanting intensifies. Parents start to look at one another awkwardly. The kids are oblivious to the unease.

LITTLE BOY
Why are you a racist pig?

IRV
(to everyone)
They'll wear themselves out.
(to Little Boy)
I'm not a pig, sweetheart.

BENJY
Why are you racist?

Irv throws down his napkin and thunders to the door.

DEBORAH
(calling after Irv)
Irv---

TIM
Dad---

JACOB
Dad---

EXT. IRV'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A crowd of mostly young, mostly Jewish protestors is gathered on the lawn, holding signs: "IRV IS THE ANIMAL", "DON'T HONOR HATRED" and "SHAME ON IRV". The door opens and Irv thunders out. This raises the volume of the protestors to an hysterical pitch. Irv pounds up to their apparent leader.

IRV
I gave at the office.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
So it's OK for four million Palestinians not to have a home, just so long as you're not bothered at yours?

IRV
Statelessness isn't homelessness, kiddo. And it's actually more like 2.4, if we're keeping score.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
But they're all animals to you, right?

IRV
(to everyone gathered)
Listen up, crew: I've devoted my life to the civil liberties of scummy dummkopfs like you. And I've been a pretty hamish piñata these past few days. But *enough*. This is my grandson's birthday, and you should get the *fuck* away from my family.

Crowd starts to sing Happy Birthday. We see the parents gathered at the door and windows, watching what happens. (Tim is noticeably absent.)

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
You think Palestinians don't have grandchildren?

IRV
Are you dumb?

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
No.

IRV
Only a dummy would dignify that question.

Benjy has driven his SUV out the front door and is careening in and out of view.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
Only a racist would compare Arabs to animals.

IRV
Arabs aren't a race, kid. They're an ethnicity.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
That's your defense?

IRV
Now watch carefully as I don't dignify that.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
You have no respect for human life that isn't Jewish---

IRV
Be careful what you say.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTER
Isn't that the pot calling the kettle nigger?

Irv gets right up in the protestor's face. They begin to scream at (and over) one another, full-throated, until it gets to the brink of physical violence...

IRV
You don't know me! You don't know who I am, or what I've fought---

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
That's because you're a shit writer, who only has a platform because he bought it with his wife's money!

IRV
I was like you, once---a Chomskyest mounteback with a boner! It's giddy! But one day your sac is going to sprout some short and curlies and you'll find yourself capable of self-reflection---

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
You're telling *me* about self-reflection?

IRV
---and you're gonna think: "What an odious schmuck I was! Ruining a kid's party for a cause my brain was too dull to scratch the surface of!"

Jacob hesitantly approaches the conflict.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
We're not ruining your grandson's birthday---*you* are!

IRV
Yeah?

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
Just like you're ruining yourself and your stupid magazine! Just like you're ruining this country!

IRV
Now I'm blushing!

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
How do you sleep at night knowing--

IRV
Like a rock!

Jacob intervenes:

JACOB
Dad---

IRV
I've got it, Jacob.

YOUNG MALE PROTESTOR
Your grandson's going to be ashamed of you!

Beat.

IRV
That I have to dignify!

Irv throws a punch at the protestor. The protestor lunges toward Irv. Jacob lunges toward the protestor. Everyone (but Tim) comes rushing out of the house. The commotion is interrupted by a scream:

JULIA
Benjy!

We see Benjy driving his SUV into the street, away from the house.

TITLE SEQUENCE MONTAGE:

1. MEET THE PRESS

David Gregory is interviewing Irv.

DAVID GREGORY
The backlash to your Arabs-as-animals blog is now entering its third week. Many have called for Georgetown University to cancel its event next week in your honor, and others for you to relinquish your ownership of *Discourse* magazine...

Long pause.

IRV
Was there a question in there?

DAVID GREGORY
Are you going to---

IRV
No.

2. GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS PROTEST

Young men and women march with signs urging the university to cancel its upcoming dinner honoring Bloch.

3. OPPOSITE CHARLIE ROSE

IRV
(clearly irritated)
Obviously not.

4. SOUTH PARK EPISODE

An Irv Bloch likeness goose steps around the screen singing:

IRV CARTOON
Nigger, spic, gook, chink, jap,
faggot, dyke, bitch, cunt, whore,
spook, coon, redskin...

5. OPPOSITE PIERS MORGAN

IRV
N-O.

6. STREETS OF DAMASCUS

Young men burn copies of *Discourse* magazine. Some scream into camera: “We are not animals!”

7. OPPOSITE MATT LAUER

IRV
(shaking his head)
No, no, no, no, no.

TITLE CARD: ALL TALK

INT. JACOB'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Matt Lauer interview with Irv on the TV. The Bloch kids are wearing pajamas and look unkempt. Jacob is serving the food. He is worn out and seriously overwhelmed, but doing his best to be cheerful. This scene should move like a rocket.

MAX
(referring to the TV)
Jesus, how long is this going to go on?

Jacob turns off the TV and hands a plate over to Max.

JACOB
Two waffles, heavy on syrup.

Sam intercepts the plate.

SAM
That's actually mine.

JACOB
(handing plate to Max)
Right. Because *you* have rye toast with creamy peanut butter, cut diagonally.

MAX
We're gonna be so late.

JACOB
Doing the best I can, here.
(handing plate to Benjy)
And for Benjy: Honey Nut Cheerios with a splash of rice milk.

SAM
(examining Benjy's bowl)
Those are plain Cheerios with honey on them.

JACOB
Yes.

SAM
So why did you lie to him?

JACOB
Thanks, Sam.
(to Benjy)
We ran out of Honey Nut.

MAX
(holding up toast)
I said toasted, not immolated.

JACOB
There's a nicer way to say that.

BENJY
Immolated?

SAM
Sacrificed.

MAX
Destroyed by fire.

BENJY
Lying is bad.

MAX
(holding up his toast)
This is diagonal to you?

JACOB
(to Benjy)
I didn’t lie, per se.

SAM
Per se you did.
(knocking a waffle against his plate)
What am I, the Titanic?

BENJY
Peter has two dads, but babies come out of vaginas. Why?

JACOB
Why what?

BENJY
Why did you lie to me about the Cheerios?

JACOB
I didn’t lie.

SAM
(to Benjy)
You realize that’s not even honey. It’s agave.

BENJY
What the *fuck*?

MAX
Mom would now say, “Language.”

JACOB
Language.

SAM
How can he even trust you when you tell him it’s rice milk?

JACOB
Because it’s rice milk.

SAM
Like it was Honey Nut Cheerios?

JACOB
Whose side are you on?

SAM
Truth's.

BENJY
Also, Reggie's tail hit my face.

JACOB
When?

BENJY
Once.

MAX
Where *is* Mom?

JACOB
We're giving her a morning off.

MAX
Off from what? Us?

JACOB
No, no. She never needs time off from you guys.

MAX
Grandpa?

JACOB
Did she suggest that?

MAX
Henry's dad said Grandpa is an idiot.

JACOB
That's a *horrible* thing to say. And if anyone's an idiot, it's Henry's dad.

MAX
So what does she need time off from?

SAM
Let it go, Max.

Benjy starts crying.

JACOB
(to Benjy)
Hey, hey buddy. Don't cry.

BENJY
When you made dinner last night, my broccoli was touching my chicken.

JACOB
I'm really sorry about that.

SAM
It all mixes in your stomach, anyway.

JACOB
That's right.

MAX
And you're going to die, anyway, anyway.

BENJY
I'm going to die?

JACOB
Many, many, *many* years from now.

Benjy lets out a scream and starts bawling. Julia comes down the stairs. Jacob is at once apologetic, but also afraid of her. She refuses to meet his eyes.

JULIA
Why is it 8:40 and no one's dressed?

JACOB
In fact we were *just* about to get dressed.

JULIA
You're going to be late.

MAX
That's what *I* keep saying.

BENJY
(examining his scraped knee)
Why did I get a boo-boo?

JACOB
Because you fell.

BENJY
Why?

JACOB
Because falling is part of life.

JULIA
Why is Benjy eating Cheerios with agave?

SAM
Because Dad lied to him.

Jacob won't look at Julia.

JULIA
Is that what Dad did? Dad lied?

BENJY
Why is falling a part of life?

JACOB
I don't know why.

BENJY
Why?

JACOB
Because I don't know everything, because I'm just a person.

JULIA
I'll take it from here.

JACOB
Everything's cool. Go read a decorating magazine in the bath.

JULIA
What did you just say?

JACOB
I don't know, what did I say?

SAM
Can I make a suggestion, Dad?

JACOB
(to Julia, sincerely)
Seriously, what did I say?

BENJY
Does heaven even exist?

JACOB
Nobody knows for sure.

Benjy starts crying again. Julia takes him into her arms, and shoots Jacob a piercing look.

JULIA
Of *course* heaven exists, baby.

SAM
Dad?

JACOB
Not now.

BENJY
Everything is a lie and then we're dead forever.

MAX
That's right.

SAM
Dad.

JACOB
What is it, Sam?

SAM
Whatever you did to Mom, undo it.

INT. JACOB'S OFFICE AT CONGREGATION ADAS ISRAEL - DAY

Jacob is sitting behind a large desk, amid piles of Jewish liturgy. He is wearing a Washington Nationals cap. Indie rock posters on the walls, a ping-pong table in the corner. The door opens. In walks MONICA, Jacob's sexy, 20-something assistant, carrying papers. She is surprised to see Jacob.

MONICA
When did you get in?

JACOB
Oh... some time ago.

MONICA
But I've been here since 8:00.

JACOB
You must have been away from your desk.

Monica looks over at the open window.

MONICA
(with disbelief)
Did you come in through the window?

JACOB
I honestly can't remember.

MONICA
We need to talk.

JACOB
I know.

MONICA
You always say I know, and we never talk.

JACOB
I know. And we're *going* to talk. We're going to have an epic conversation and fix the world. But not now. The astronaut's going to be here any second, and I need---

MONICA
You're not the only living thing in this room.

JACOB
I really know, Monica. I do.

MONICA
And you're not the only one capable of acting unreasonably.

JACOB
What is that, some kind of threat?

MONICA
No.

JACOB
What, your father?

MONICA
My father? *Your* father is the threat to your happiness.

JACOB
But your father can get me fired.

MONICA
Don't underestimate your father.

Beat. Jacob puts his papers on the desk, exasperated.

JACOB
OK. You wanna talk? This is me talking: Julia found out I'm having an affair.

MONICA
When?

JACOB
A couple of weeks ago.

MONICA
Why are you only mentioning this now?

JACOB
Because when you don't acknowledge something, it goes away.

MONICA
How did she find out?

JACOB
I stupidly left some e-mails open.

MONICA
That's too stupid to be stupid.

JACOB
It would seem so, but I *really* didn't want this.

MONICA
Which e-mails?

JACOB
I don't even know.

MONICA
A few would destroy her.

JACOB
My sense is it was those few.

MONICA
She isn't going to boil my bunny is she?

JACOB
Not *your* bunny, no.

MONICA
What does that mean?

JACOB
The e-mails were to another woman.

MONICA
Yeah, me.

JACOB
Another other.

MONICA
What, you've been *cheating on me*?

JACOB
With you and on you.

MONICA
How *could you*?

JACOB
How could I which?

Monica starts laughing.

JACOB (CONT'D)
What?

MONICA
You're funny.

JACOB
I'm sorry.

MONICA
For what?

JACOB
For having hurt you.

MONICA
You haven't hurt me.

JACOB
I have, and I'm sorry.

MONICA
Jacob, we have a good time, but it's just good and it's just a time. You don't have to climb through windows. And you definitely don't have to worry about me confessing to my dad. Jesus, if I told him about every rabbi I've fucked we wouldn't have time for allowance renegotiations.
(beat)
A *joke*... Look, it was fun, and it was hot, and it never once made me sad.

JACOB
I'm afraid Julia's going to leave me.

MONICA
Which is what you've *wanted*.

JACOB
No. What I really wanted---and I mean at some indefinite point in the future---was to catch *her* cheating on *me*. But just for the ammunition. *This*... I'm gonna lose my kids.

MONICA
You won't.

JACOB
My job. At least my credibility as a dispenser of wisdom.

MONICA
Wouldn't want to fuck with that.

JACOB
And now it turns out that you never had feelings for me.

MONICA
You're *serious*? Do you even remember some of the things you wrote?

JACOB
I remember everything.

MONICA
That you wanted to lick your cum out of my asshole?

JACOB
This is a house of worship, Monica. And that e-mail had a lot of context.

MONICA
Please. You didn't want that. It's gross. And you're a germ freak. You just wanted to *write it*. Which is fine. Which is even great. But don't get confused. You're *normal*. You *want* the stressful vacations, and the A&D ointment, and even your desiccated, blowjobless existence.

There is a knock on the door.

JACOB
I guess we'll have to pick things up at next week's session...

MONICA
Look at me ignoring an astronaut.

JACOB
Monica.

MONICA
So you'll be Rabbi non grata for a few months. Life will return.

JACOB
I don't *want* it to return.

MONICA
You would if it didn't.

Monica goes to the door and opens it. In walks WILLIAM ABRAMSON.

He is approximately Jacob's age, but fit, sexy and charismatic: the shining light of Jewish perfection. He senses he's arrived at a bad moment.

WILLIAM
Rabbi Bloch?

JACOB
(flustered)
Yes, hi. Hi. This is...

MONICA
Monica. I'm his assistant.

WILLIAM
Nice to meet you.

MONICA
You two enjoy.

She leaves. Jacob gathers himself, puts on a warm smile, and takes off his baseball cap to reveal a yarmulke beneath.

JACOB
It's wonderful to finally meet you. Come in, sit down. You're well?

WILLIAM
Yes, I'm fine. Thank you.

JACOB
You must be getting very excited.

WILLIAM
There's still a lot to do.

JACOB
I can imagine. What am I saying? Of course I can't.

WILLIAM
If this isn't a good time---

JACOB
It is. Just a bit mentally dishevelled. Please.

WILLIAM
I appreciate your help, Rabbi. I frankly didn't know who to turn to.

JACOB
Hopefully I'll be able to provide some, what, *ground support*?

WILLIAM
(smiling)
Sure.

JACOB
So listen--
(taking a pile of papers)
I did some poking around, and it's just fascinating. Did you know that both the Challenger and Columbia disasters had Jews aboard?

WILLIAM
I did know that.

JACOB
So I'm sure you know about Ilan Ramon, the first Israeli in space---

WILLIAM
He was a friend of mine.

JACOB
Do you know about the drawing he took along?

WILLIAM
I don't.

JACOB
Authorization to digress?

WILLIAM
(charmed)
Go digression.

JACOB
He took a drawing of the earth as seen from the moon by a young Czech boy who perished in the Holocaust.

WILLIAM
That was a good choice.

JACOB
Imagine it. Imagine that sweet, brilliant boy, Menachem Chrabolowski of Belgorod-Dnestrovsky, scribbling away. If an angel had landed on his shoulder and said, "You're going to be killed before your next birthday, and 60 years later, a man is going to carry your drawing of the earth as seen from space *into space*"---

WILLIAM
If there were angels, none of that would have happened.

JACOB
If the angels were good angels.

They exchange a smile, aware that they are peeling away layers.

WILLIAM
So? What do you think I should bring into space? This is extremely important to me.

JACOB
Well *that's* my question: *Why* is this important to you? You told me, on the phone, that you aren't a believer. I understand. You told me you don't like synagogue. And I understand *that*. You told me that you have no desire on earth, *on earth*, to in any way identify as a Jew. I understand that completely. But what I don't understand is what it is about outer space that makes you feel, suddenly, Jewish?

WILLIAM
I *don't* feel suddenly Jewish.

JACOB
So what is it, then?

WILLIAM
It occurred to me that it doesn't matter how I feel. I'm a Jewish astronaut. That's what I am. And it's how I'll be seen. My grandfather was a survivor, and he used to say, "Jews don't decide if they're Jews. Germans do."

JACOB
(laughing, enjoying him)
Mine said the same thing. Not the most inspiring kind of identity.

WILLIAM
Jewish children are going to watch what I do.

JACOB
Not just children. I'll be watching with great pride.

Beat.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Why did you turn to me?

WILLIAM
Excuse me?

JACOB
You said you didn't know who to turn to.

WILLIAM
I knew your brother.

JACOB
(with a chuckle)
I've yet to meet the person who doesn't know Tim.

WILLIAM
I meant Joe.

Jacob is obviously taken aback.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
I actually grew up around the corner from your family---on Albermarle.

JACOB
No kidding.

WILLIAM
Joe and I used to play ball in the alley.
(beat)
Your brother was brilliant. Even as a kid.

JACOB
Unsustainably brilliant.

WILLIAM
We lost touch when my family left the city. But my mother would send me articles about him. And I always looked up his speeches for Clinton. Somebody should collect them into a book.

JACOB
I imagine my brother Tim will do that one day soon.

WILLIAM
I had a dream a few nights ago of him writing something for me to say in space.

JACOB
(touched by this)
What did he write?

WILLIAM
I woke up before I got there. I'm sorry.

Long beat.

JACOB
I'm sorry. I don't know what you should bring. I seem to be a very limited dispenser of wisdom.

WILLIAM
I suppose it has to be my decision.

JACOB
I think that's probably right. But know that I'm here as a resource.

WILLIAM
Maybe we could meet again? When I come back? I'd like to learn more.

JACOB
We could barter knowledge.

William gets up to leave.

JACOB (CONT'D)
One more thing.

WILLIAM
Yes?

Beat. Jacob pulls back his hair to reveal his hairline.

JACOB
How would you describe this?

WILLIAM
What?

JACOB
My receding hairline.

WILLIAM
I wouldn't say it's receding.

JACOB
That's because you're nice.
(beat)
I've got some kind of psoriasis or eczema-something behind my knees. It's excruciating.

WILLIAM
You should go to a doctor.

JACOB
No, it's not that bad.

WILLIAM
Go before it gets that bad.

Beat.

JACOB
I'm kind of falling apart.

William sits back down.

WILLIAM
I'm sorry to hear that.

JACOB
My kids stare at screens all day. My dog is incontinent. Our mortgage rate just went variable... And my father... He's grabbed the yoke and is trying to fly the family into the ground, for reasons I can't begin to understand. Everything is sublimated by something else: sadness becomes fear, fear becomes anger, anger becomes his current destructive impulse. If he could just trace the string back to his original sadness he might actually be happy, but until then, we're in a shit-storm without umbrellas. It's craziness: he replaced his favorite son with his least favorite son, and his other son, *me*---who also happens to be the best son, by just about any standard---is eating scraps.
(beat)
Anyway. I started sleeping with other women. My wife knows about one, but she probably knows about the others. It wasn't sexual. I mean, *definitionally* it was, but... The woman who let you in...

WILLIAM
Yes?

JACOB
I fucked her. Her father is the president of the temple board. That's what a schmuck I am. It's terrible. *I'm* terrible. I *want* to want to be a good person, but at the end of the day, I don't want what comes with being good. And there's only so long you can deny your instincts before you begin to destroy everything you touch. I was *so close* to living such a different life. Two months from graduating law school. A paycheck with six figures before the decimal point. An actual *lifestyle*.
(MORE)

JACOB (CONT'D)
I made so many choices, but sometimes I wonder how many I *made,* you know?

WILLIAM
For whatever it's worth, I'm grateful that you ended up here.

JACOB
(sincerely)
Thank you. That actually means a great deal to me.

Beat.

JACOB (CONT'D)
I'm guessing you read Tim's memoir about Joe?

WILLIAM
I did.

JACOB
And?

WILLIAM
It broke my heart.

JACOB
Yeah, mine too.

INT. THEATER GREEN ROOM - DAY

TIM is looking over some remarks. He is a more put-together and cool version of Jacob. On the sofa is his manager, BOB.

BOB
The 15th at Goldman Sachs, then off, then the 18th and 19th at South by Southwest, then your TED lecture. I have a phoner with Gopal this afternoon. I'm going to have the boys write a hundred more Amazon reviews. There are some bad ones I want to deluge.

TIM
You think people are turning on the book?

BOB
I think people are reviewing your father.

TIM
OK. What else?

BOB
Still in a holding pattern with Time's Most Influential People...

TIM
That's just silly. I have no influence on anything.

BOB
I can't even tell if you're protesting too much.

TIM
I'm not. They should give Gadhafi my slot. Anyway, what else?

BOB
Firm offer from Duke for $75,000, any time in the spring. Crossing the t's on Michelle Obama's mental health initiative... You have your Make-A-Wish Foundation thing this afternoon...

TIM
(excited)
I know. I've been thinking about it all week.

BOB
Why?

TIM
What do you mean why? Because it's an honor.

BOB
You're honored all the time.

TIM
I *receive honors* all the time, which is different. I'm nervous about this. I want it to be good.

An attractive young woman enters the room.

ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN
Oh, sorry, I thought.

TIM
Don't worry about it.

ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN
Are you Tim Bloch?

TIM
I am.

Bob's phone rings. He answers it and starts speaking.

ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN
I think you're *incredible*. Could I get a picture with you?

Bob takes her cell phone with one hand, while continuing his phone conversation, and snaps a picture. She walks back out of the room. Bob gives Tim an approving smile.

BOB
(into phone)
Well that's *really* terrific. Just *really...* fantastic. I'll track him down and get back to you asap.

He puts down the phone.

BOB (CONT'D)
Guess who?

TIM
Oprah.

BOB
(amazed)
Her segment producer.

TIM
She called me an hour ago.

BOB
She segment producer?

TIM
She Oprah.

BOB
What the fuck!

TIM
Good stuff.

BOB
Good stuff? Oprah is coming back from the dead for a week of shows, which are going to make the M*A*S*H finale look like Ron Popeil setting-it-and-forgetting-it for the 10,000th time, and she wants to devote the full *hour* of one of these five shows to *you*. She thinks you've *redefined mental illness for your generation*.

TIM
Why does that sound so bad?

BOB
A year ago you were blowing fat guys for lunch money.
(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)
(beat)
Metaphorically.

Beat.

TIM
I can’t do the 18th.

BOB
What?

TIM
I can’t do the 18th.

BOB
I have *no idea* what you’re talking about.

TIM
It’s the event honoring my father.

BOB
What event?

TIM
They’re endowing a fellowship at Georgetown in his name---a lifetime achievement thing.

BOB
But this is *once-in-a-lifetime*, and that trumps lifetime achievement. He’ll get over it.

TIM
My father is 73 years old and has never once gotten over something.

BOB
I’ll sit on the grenade.

TIM
It’s a huge deal for him. And it’s *lay* on the grenade, I’m pretty sure.

Someone passing the door recognizes Tim and smiles.

BOB
I would be a negligent agent if I didn’t add one more ingredient to this conversation: it’s not the best moment to be associating publicly with your father.

TIM
It would crush him if I didn’t go.

BOB
For a few days.

TIM
My father doesn't experience the passage of time. If it happens once, it's always happening.

Knock on the door. Production assistant peeks his head in:

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Whenever you're ready.

TIM
Why would you *sit* on a grenade? *Sit*?

BOB
I'll hold off Oprah's people for a day.

Tim stops before exiting for the stage.

TIM
He's writing a clarification, by the way. He'll straighten this out.

BOB
He'd better.

TIM
He will. You'll see.
(beat)
I want to pay for his treatment.

BOB
Your father's?

TIM
The Make-A-Wish kid's. Whatever it is, I'll pay for it.

BOB
Why?

TIM
Because that's what I want to do.

INT. THEATER - AFTERNOON

Tim takes the stage. There are hundreds of adoring fans. Without introduction, he begins reading.

TIM
He was everyone's favorite, except his own. He was unable to ignore grammar mistakes.
(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)
He was unable to fall asleep without the TV on, or with the TV on. He believed that there were such things as stupid questions. He couldn’t tolerate magicians who did things that someone who actually had magical powers would never do. He could magically reduce any subject of any size to a single sentence. He couldn’t tolerate cliches. He never mentioned pain of any kind until he was far past the point of help. He was always brilliant, but once he was far past the point of help, he became a genius. He could forgive anyone for anything, except himself for anything. He was always by the window. He was always making a heroic effort to be ordinary. He was never funnier than when in hospitals. He stopped turning toward the person speaking. He stopped wiping up spills. He was never more brilliant than when he was never more desperate. He couldn’t tolerate himself. I asked him for the single-sentence version of himself, and he said: “Waste of words.” He couldn’t wait to die, so he stopped waiting.

EXT. OFFICE OF *DISCOURSE* MAGAZINE - DAY

A crowd of angry protestors are organized at the entrance to the office building. A black car pulls up, and out steps Irv. After comes his assistant, MICHAEL, an attractive man in his mid-twenties, probably gay. The protestors go berserk. Two policemen escort Irv through the crowd. There is clearly a sense in which he relishes the moment, as if it were a red carpet walk. But his face contains pain, too.

IRV
Coming through... Yes, hello... Nice to see you, too...

INT. OFFICES OF *DISCOURSE* MAGAZINE - DAY

IRV lumbers down the hallways with Michael a step behind. Through the glass walls of offices we see young people scurrying about. Irv and Michael enter the office of the young editor, DANIEL---a slightly older version of Michael.

DANIEL
Please tell me you come in sincerity.

IRV
Daniel, my sincerity knows no limits.

DANIEL
So I've heard.

IRV
But my faux-sincerity knows limits.

DANIEL
Irv---

IRV
Here's why I don't have a clarification for you:
(he counts off each "because" on his fingers)
Because I wrote what I believed. Because what I believe is *true*. Because only an anti-Semite can be provoked to anti-Semitism. Because I love Kung Pao Chicken and Arabs love death. Because you don't throw Manischewitz on an oil fire. *And...*
(he raises his other hand to get another finger)
because why should my panties bunch over Goy Scouts earning protest patches on my lawn, or punks in keffiyehs chucking stones in Damascus? *But...*
(he points his spare index finger, while continuing to hold up the other six)
if those stones of theirs start breaking my windows, *then* we've turned a page, and just because I'm smarter than those lunatics doesn't mean I'm any less crazy. And you know, I've got some stones, too, the difference being that my slingshot's in Dimona, and the finger on the button is connected to an arm with a string of numbers tatooed on it.

Beat.

DANIEL
You're finished?

IRV
With what?

DANIEL
Who's this?

IRV
Michael Fein. My new co-pilot.

DANIEL
What happened to the other Michael?

IRV
The other Michael ejected.

DANIEL
We need to talk.

Irv lets out a deep sigh. Managing editor, CHARLES, peeks his head in.

CHARLES
We lost two more ads.

DANIEL
Fuck. Which?

CHARLES
Chicago University Press, and Subaru. The ADL is willing to double down to a full page, but we're still going to be short five.
(to Irv)
Oh, hey Irv.

IRV
We're losing ads why?

DANIEL
You're kidding, right?

IRV
(excited)
This is *fantastic*. *We* should be doubling down. I'm going to blog about this ad kerfuffle.

DANIEL
You're not.

Tap on the door and designer RYAN peeks his head in.

RYAN
You have a second?

DANIEL
I have *a* second.

RYAN
I need to know how to fill the five white pages.

IRV
What's in the hopper?

DANIEL
We used everything to fill last week's dropped ads. And it hasn't been called the hopper since it was called a kerfuffle.
(into phone)
Sean, can you come in here.

No sooner has he put down the phone than creative director SEAN appears.

SEAN
Wassup?

DANIEL
We have five pages to fill by 7:00.

SEAN
Did we ever get crazy Irv's pseudo-retraction?

DANIEL
Crazy Irv is six inches to your right.

SEAN
(smiling, to Irv)
Like a fox.

IRV
Who is this schmuck?

DANIEL
He's our creative director.

SEAN
So let's make up ads. If we do it right they can be ads for ads.

CHARLES
Are you Milton Fein's son?

MICHAEL
Yes.

CHARLES
Interesting.

DANIEL
Do a quarter-page for Fein's new book. The jacket will do.

IRV
Fein's book is a fucking piece of shit.
(to Michael)
I'm not saying anything I wouldn't say.

DANIEL
Have some mock-ups for me to look at by 4:00, OK? Goodbye.

The room empties, save for Daniel, Irv and Michael.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Michael, could you give us a minute?

Michael leaves.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Everyone's gone. No more performing. Let's have the real conversation about this, OK?

IRV
OK, but where's my chocolate milk?

DANIEL
This isn't a little problem, Irv, and it's not a joke.

IRV
You think I think this is a *joke*?

DANIEL
What's really going on here? Something with the book? Joe?

IRV
What's *really going on here* is morality, and truth, and justice.

DANIEL
You don't find it at all remarkable that you published the most inflammatory statements of your career a month before the dinner?

IRV
How could you suggest whatever the hell it is you're suggesting?

DANIEL
Irv, you're going to be remembered as the guy who wrote that Arabs are life-hating animals.

IRV
This too shall---

DANIEL
It won't. And Georgetown won't honor you. How *could* they?

IRV
Because of five decades in the pursuit of social justice. And because I was best man at the Dean's wedding.

DANIEL
You referred to Arabs as *animals*. Whatever you actually meant---and frankly, I have no idea what you actually meant---that is an unforgivable thing to commit to print. And a person who writes such a thing cannot be celebrated by an American university in the year 2011, regardless of groomsmanship.

IRV
You're adorable when you're hysterical.

DANIEL
And you're sad when you're blind.

IRV
(suddenly worked up)
Don't you talk to me like that. You gave up that right.

DANIEL
I can't even imagine what Deborah's going through.

IRV
(sternly)
No, no. Just because you're now playing house with what's-his-name doesn't mean you know any fucking thing about any fucking thing.

DANIEL
Playing house?

IRV
With what's-his-name.

DANIEL
His name is Jeff. And you know that.

IRV
Who the fuck is called *Jeff*?

DANIEL
Now don't *you* talk to *me* like that.

IRV
Really? Or what?

DANIEL
(angry, exasperated)
Jesus, Irv. *Why?* Why give me all of these things if you never wanted me to have them? I *don't understand*. Why bring me to a happiness that you hate?

IRV
I have no idea what you're talking about.

DANIEL
Of course you do. You *do*.

IRV
(backing down a bit)
I really don't.

Beat.

DANIEL
I'm on your side Irv.

IRV
You used to be.

DANIEL
No, I used to say yes to you, like your wife, and kids, and everyone else who's in awe of you.

Irv puts his hand on Daniel's cheek.

IRV
You're a good kid. Always have been, always will be.

DANIEL
I'm still in awe of you. But back down on this one.

IRV
I can't. Maybe after a day I could have. Maybe after a week. But not now.

DANIEL
You *have to*.

IRV
(checking watch)
What I *have to do* is go look at floral arrangements.

DANIEL
In a week we'll look back at this moment as the good old days.

INT. JACOB'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Julia enters the kitchen. Sam and Max are at laptop computers, Benjy is playing a hand-held gaming device. Julia is loving and playful with her kids, doing her best...

JULIA
Hello, everybody.

SAM
Can I go out tonight?

JULIA
Why does no one ever say hello back to me?

SAM
Because you're saying it rhetorically. Can I go out tonight?

JULIA
Out where?

SAM
With Latanya.

JULIA
Oh. I wanted us all to have dinner together.

SAM
All including Dad?

JULIA
(avoiding the obvious answer)
He's not coming home until late.
(to Benjy)
Hello Benjy.

BENJY
(focused on his game)
Hey.

She gets down to his level.

JULIA
I said *hello*, Benjy.

BENJY
(not looking up)
I know. I said 'Hey' very quietly.

MAX
I need money to buy an electric guitar.

JULIA
(raising an eyebrow)
You *need*? Or you *want*?

BENJY
(addressing his game)
Shit!

JULIA
Hey, language.

SAM
Mom, you're being unreasonable.

JULIA
I am the epitome of reasonableness.

BENJY
(without looking up)
Epitome?

MAX
Quintessence.

SAM
Apotheosis.

BENJY (CONT'D)
(addressing game)
Douche!

JULIA
Does your father actively teach you bad words, or do you just learn them from his reckless usage?

SAM
Dad never uses bad words.

MAX
And douche isn't a bad word.

BENJY
(throwing his game device)
Fucking piece of shit!

JULIA
Those were bad words!

BENJY
So douche.

SAM
What's that smell?

JULIA
Reggie went number two in the laundry room this morning.

SAM
You didn't clean it up?

JULIA
I want your father to see it.

MAX
Want or need?

Doorbell rings.

JULIA
Grandma's here.
(to Max)
Go get ready.

Julia goes to answer it.

INT. ENTRYWAY OF JACOB'S HOUSE

DEBORAH
Hi, Dear. How are you?

JULIA
Do I look terrible?

DEBORAH
It's what people say upon greeting each other.

JULIA
One another. Sorry. So annoying.

DEBORAH
A copy editor never dies, she just... *What*? Irv would have something.

JULIA
You're surviving?

DEBORAH
It's only miserable the first time. I just wish the rest of you weren't implicated. Tell me about you two.

A moment...

JULIA
What's the worst turbulence you've ever been in?

DEBORAH
When we went to Chile?

JULIA
Did you think you were going to die? Even though you *knew* that turbulence isn't dangerous?

DEBORAH
I was too busy taking care of Irv.
(beat)
Speaking of which, someone painted a swastika on our front door.

JULIA
What?

DEBORAH
Last night.

JULIA
What did Irv say?

DEBORAH
He left before the sun this morning and didn't see it. The workmen are there now removing it. Don't mention it to him.

JULIA
You think it would crush him?

DEBORAH
I think it would thrill him. He gets drunk on the feeling of significance.

JULIA
How are you taking it?

DEBORAH
I'm angry. Sad.

JULIA
I know those feelings.

Beat.

DEBORAH
What does Jacob think about Tim's book?

JULIA
Gosh, we don't really talk about it. He's so jealous of the success.

DEBORAH
I don't think that's what it is.

JULIA
Well until recently I didn't want to rub salt into his wounds, so I've just accepted it as another thing no one talks about. Why do you ask?

DEBORAH
Just wondering. I don't even know what I'm asking.

Julia opens a laptop on the table and checks her calendar.

JULIA
Let's make a date. The two of us.

DEBORAH
That would be nice. We could start scratching things off that long list of silences.

JULIA
Wait, this is Jacob's calendar--

DEBORAH
Just e-mail me later.

Julia stops to look at something on the computer.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)
Everything OK?

Julia reads some more, and then closes the laptop.

JULIA
We're in a world of men, aren't we?

DEBORAH
That thought has occurred to me.

JULIA
So many men.

DEBORAH
Everywhere you look.

JULIA
And every last one of them is convinced he needs what he wants.

Max comes bounding. We hear each of his footsteps.

DEBORAH
And yet that's the best sound.

JULIA
Of all of them.

Julia takes Deborah's hand: a gesture of both friendship and need. Max appears. The women light up.

MAX
Hey, Grandma.

DEBORAH
Hello, darling.

JULIA
So where are you guys going?

DEBORAH
Start at Saks, I thought.

JULIA
(to Max)
You're going to look nicer than your father.

MAX
Jesus, I'd better.

The women laugh. Max busies himself with jacket and shoes.

JULIA
She just gets rid of all the dangling modifiers.

DEBORAH
What?

JULIA
A copy editor never dies. She just...

The women laugh heartily, together.

EXT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Tim is standing outside the door with an executive from the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

TIM
So I'll just, what? Go in and introduce myself?

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
Believe me, he knows who you are.

TIM
I'm really nervous, for some reason. I wrote a little, I don't know, greeting? I just didn't want to go in empty handed.

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
It's gonna be great. He's been looking forward to this for weeks.

TIM
What if we run out of things to say before the half hour is up?

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
It’s never happened before.

TIM
And you’ll be in there with us?

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
No. We find it’s better to get out of the way.

TIM
(uneasy about this)
OK.

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
I loved your book, by the way.

TIM
Thank you.

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
Such an amazing story. Was it all true?

TIM
Yeah.

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
Amazing.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A young man, ERIC, in his late teens, is on a hospital bed, hooked up to various monitors and feeding machines. On the TV in the corner is Irv speaking with Diane Sawyer.

MAKE-A-WISH EXEC
Tim Bloch is here to see you. I’ll let the two of you talk.

Eric nods his head slightly---pretty much the only movement he is capable of. Tim has a seat in the chair beside the bed.

TIM
Hey, Eric.

With effort, Eric presses a few buttons on a keyboard. We hear an electronic voice emit from a speaker beside him:

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Hey, Tim.

TIM
So as I was telling the Make-A-Wish lady out there, I’ve been really looking forward to this. It was---

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Is that true?

TIM
That I've been looking forward to this?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Yes.

TIM
Totally. I mean look: my hands are shaking.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Are they?

TIM
They are. Anyway, I'm doing my best not to pull out the little speech I prepared. But... I don't really know... How can I... *help*?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Please cure me.

TIM
Eric, I wish I could.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
They said anything was possible. That's my wish.

TIM
(becoming uncomfortable)
And I think what they meant, Eric, is anything that's possible.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Well... Could you kill me?

TIM
Don't talk like that, man---

ELECTRONIC VOICE
It's what I want.

TIM
Maybe it's only what you *think* you want.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Is there a difference?

TIM
Sometimes there is.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
This is more like the Disregard-A-Wish Foundation.

TIM
That's funny.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
I'm being serious, Tim. Or I think I am.

TIM
Well. Do you want to tell me a bit about yourself?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
No, I want you to fulfill my wish.

TIM
I guess I thought your wish was to meet me.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
No. My wish is for you to cure me or kill me.

TIM
What?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Did I garble my words? That's funny, too. I'm funny.

TIM
(disoriented by Eric's shift)
You are.
(beat)
You know, lemme just see if that lady is still outside. She had said she wanted to come in after a few minutes.

Tim opens the door and checks the hallway. She isn't there. He goes back into the room.

TIM (CONT'D)
OK, well, she's gone.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
I read your book.

TIM
(relieved)
Thank you. That means a lot to me.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
It is the worst book I've ever read. And reading is all I do.

TIM
Gee, I...

ELECTRONIC VOICE
On a desert island I would throw it into the water.

TIM
I'm... sorry to hear that?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
I was sorry to read it. The writing is pure shit. But let me tell you what I didn't like about it...

TIM
Eric---

ELECTRONIC VOICE
You make death beautiful.

TIM
No, I don't think I do.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
You do. And that's why everybody loves your book.

TIM
You're being unfair, Eric.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Can you imagine if I believed in fairness? Dying is shit. You don't become brave. You don't become brilliant. You become dead.

TIM
I was writing about a person, not a phenomenon.

Eric types for a long time. This should be comic, as we know a long speech is about to come out.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
You should be ashamed of what you wrote. No matter how much money you make from that book of lies, no matter how many people tell you you're brilliant, and that they love you, you will always be a fraud. You can fool a lot of people, maybe almost everyone, but you can't fool me, because here I am. And I bet you can't fool yourself, either. I bet you know what a miserable piece of shit you are.

(MORE)

ELECTRONIC VOICE (CONT'D)
And I'll tell you something else while I have you: you didn't love your brother. You couldn't have loved him if you did that to his memory. That's not love, it's betrayal.

TIM
I loved my brother.

ELECTRONIC VOICE
You think you loved him, and sometimes there's a difference.

Beat.

TIM
Anything else?

ELECTRONIC VOICE
Nothing else.
(beat as he types more)
My wish has been granted.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

Door gets flung open. Tim barrels down the hall while dialing his manager.

BOB (V.O.)
Tim.

TIM
Fuck it, let's do Oprah.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Irv and Michael are being driven through the city, on their way back to Irv's house.

IRV
You didn't think the hyacinths were ostentatious?

MICHAEL
I thought they were beautiful.

IRV
So what's the current tally?

MICHAEL
(checking his iPad)
Fred Pollard had something come up.
Richard Laser, too.

IRV
Laser? You're kidding.

MICHAEL
No.

IRV
I slid $20,000 under his door when he was laid off. *This* is the problem with giving anonymously. Fucking Maimonides...

MICHAEL
So it looks like... 90 confirmed coming. 74 no shows. 187 still outstanding.

IRV
More than half are on the fence? What are they waiting for?

MICHAEL
They're probably waiting for you---to see what you'll do.

They drive in silence.

IRV
By *definition* they are animals. They're members of the animal kingdom.

MICHAEL
That's right.

IRV
Jews are animals, too.

MICHAEL
Yes.

IRV
I'm an animal. *You're* an animal. We're all animals. We fear pain, seek pleasure and crave companionship.

MICHAEL
Maybe if you put it like that?

Car pulls up to house. We notice the workmen who removed the swastika are putting away their things.

LARRY, LIMO DRIVER
We're here, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
(to Michael)
Give me your one-sentence judgement on Wikileaks?

MICHAEL
What?

IRV
Just a sentence. I've been trying to boil it down all day.

MICHAEL
I don't really know.

IRV
So a few sentences.

MICHAEL
Can I get back to you with it?

IRV
An *opinion*, Michael.

MICHAEL
It's a big, complicated thing.

IRV
What do you, burn question marks on people's lawns?

MICHAEL
Lemme get some substantive thoughts together for tomorrow.

IRV
(disappointed)
Sure.

Beat.

IRV (CONT'D)
Steaks? Chinese?

MICHAEL
I'm having dinner with my father.

IRV
Fine.

Long beat.

MICHAEL
So what time do you want me in the morning?

IRV
I want you now.

MICHAEL
My dad is already at the restaurant.

Beat.

IRV
Daniel thinks everyone says yes to me. So I guess he was wrong, because you're saying no to me now.
(beat)
8:30.

MICHAEL
I'm just being fair to my father.

IRV
No, I know. But you see that was the great thing about Daniel: he was never fair.
(beat)
A season for every purpose. This season sucks.

Irv gets out, the car drives off. He approaches the workmen.

IRV (CONT'D)
You guys wanna come in for a bite?

WORKMAN #1
It's been a long day, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
All the more reason to come in. My wife's out. I'll order unhealthy food. We can play video games.

WORKMAN #2
I gotta get home, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
Julio?

WORKMAN #3
Sorry, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
I got it. What do you guys think about this whole Wikileaks thing?

WORKMAN #2
I don't really know, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
But you know what it is?

WORKMAN #2
Not really, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
Oh, well you should. It affects your lives. Wikileaks is a covert secret-sharing website, run by a miserable anti-Semite who goes around raping woman just to prove he isn't the albino homosexual that he is. Anyway, this organization has been exposing military and diplomatic secrets, primarily American, without proper redaction or context. It's been causing a lot of damage, and doing a lot of good, too. It's complicated.

WORKMAN #3
Thank you, Mr. Bloch.

Realizing no one will stay.

IRV
You were working on the bricks?

WORKMAN #1
Yes, Mr. Bloch.

IRV
Can you please call me Irv? I'm feeling an uncomfortable power differential here.

WORKMAN #1
Yes, Mr. Irv.

Beat.

IRV
What kind of brickwork?

Workmen look at one another, suggesting they have to keep a secret.

WORKMAN #1
Just brickwork, Mr. Irv.

IRV
Re-pointing?

WORKMAN #1
Some, Mr. Irv.

IRV
I've now expended all the brick terminology I know.

Workmen smile uncomfortably.

IRV (CONT'D)
OK. I won't keep you.

Irv walks toward the door, puts his hand on the knob.

INT. ENTRY OF JACOB'S HOUSE - EVENING

Jacob enters his house, putting his jacket on the counter.

JACOB
Hello?

JULIA (O.S.)
In the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN OF JACOB'S HOUSE - EVENING

JACOB
Where is everybody?

JULIA
Benjy's already asleep. Sam is exercising his independence somewhere, and Max's still with your mom.

JACOB
Suit shopping for the dinner?

JULIA
Yes.

JACOB
That boy is going to heaven.

JULIA
For spending time with his grandmother?

JACOB
The whole combination of things.

JULIA
I thought you didn't believe in heaven?

JACOB
He's deserving, whatever the case.

Quiet. They are afraid of being left alone with one another.

JACOB (CONT'D)
I'm going to go kiss Benjy.

JULIA
You'll wake him up.

JACOB
I'll be careful. And I can't not.

JULIA
Do you know how long it took me to get him to sleep?

JACOB
(doesn't want a fight)
OK, I get it.

Jacob looks through the mail.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Do you smell something?

Julia empties the dishwasher.

JULIA
I was looking at your calendar today.

JACOB
Why?

JULIA
I was trying to find a time to have lunch with your mother.

JACOB
Why would you want to do that?

JULIA
Because she's nice. And because she's going through something horrible. You should call her.

JACOB
I do.

JULIA
More often.

JACOB
But why my calendar?

JULIA
I thought it was mine.

JACOB
OK.

Beat.

JULIA
What?

JACOB
Nothing.

JULIA
Jesus, tell me there's nothing left to find.

JACOB
Of course not.

JULIA
The only thing worse than having found those horrible e-mails is knowing you think I went looking for them.

JACOB
I don't think that.

Julia puts soap in the machine and closes it.

JULIA
So I noticed that you have my menstrual cycle on your calendar.

JACOB
Do I?

JULIA
Every month. "Julia's period." You don't even euphemize it.

JACOB
Why would I? It's life.

JULIA
Right.

JACOB
I just want to remember to be kind and forgiving to you on the days surrounding your period.

JULIA
You need reminders to be kind and forgiving to me?

JACOB
No, I don't.

JULIA
And is it really impossible for you to remember when I have my period?

JACOB
The 28-day cycle is hard to keep track of. But I apologize.

JULIA
You're apologizing because I'm having my period.

JACOB
No, I'm apologizing because of the reasons you said above.

JULIA
It's become impossible to believe you.

JACOB
So it's a no-win situation.

JULIA
You want to *win*?

JACOB
Not win *against* you, but *with* you. As in, we're on the same team.

Julia notices a small stain on her shirt.

JULIA
Shit.

JACOB
I understand why you find it difficult to believe me--

JULIA
When I'm having my period? Or when you're speaking?

Jacob goes searching the kitchen for the offensive smell.

JACOB
Christ, what is that *smell*?

JULIA
And I'm now going to ask you for the third time to pick up the dry cleaning. Why do you make me ask you so many times? *That's* what should be on your calendar.

JACOB
I have a bad memory. I'm sorry.

JULIA
I have a bad memory, too, but I don't forget things.

JACOB
Why do you always attach yourself to my shortcomings.

JULIA
Help me out. What do you do well?

JACOB
You're serious?

JULIA
Yes. What, in this house, do you do well?

JACOB
I never raise my voice.

JULIA
Not raising your voice---or not hitting me or molesting the children, for that matter---doesn't qualify as something you *do well*. And anyway, you don't raise your voice because you're repressed.

JACOB
Even if that's why, and I don't think it is, it's *still* a good thing. A lot of men scream.

JULIA
Maybe if you'd screamed a few times you wouldn't have felt the need to fuck that whore.

JACOB
Right, because fucking satisfies an unfulfilled need to scream.

JULIA
In fact that's *exactly* what it does.

Beat.

JACOB
Please, Julia. We need this family.

JULIA
Do we? What does that even *mean*? You think I haven't imagined kicking you out? And you think that fantasy is only heartbreak?

JACOB
I've made a horrible, horrible mistake. But we can't punish the kids for it.

JULIA
So in other words, I should pretend it never happened or the sadness and anger will be my fault.

JACOB
I didn't say that.

JULIA
You know, you've admitted to it, because I found the e-mails and you had no choice, but you've never once fessed up to it.

JACOB
What are you talking about?

JULIA
You've never once said, "I fucked her because it felt good." Or, "I fucked her because my life bores me." Or, "I fucked her for my ego."

JACOB
Take it easy, OK.

JULIA
Fuck you for telling me to take it easy. How could you have *written* those things?

JACOB
I---

JULIA
That your wife's pussy is baggy? How the *fuck* could you *form* those words?

JACOB
You're taking it out of context.

JULIA
(tears start to come)
The context of my having given you three children? There's no context for saying such a thing about your wife! Fuck you! Fuck you fucking her tight childless pussy! You are a *disgusting* human being from a disgusting family! All of you think you can go around saying whatever you want without consequence! Maybe your father can. Maybe your mother's money, or his infinite narcissism, make it possible. But you *can't*! There's decency and indecency, and they're *different*! Good and bad are *different*! Do you not *know* this?

JACOB
Of course I know it.

JULIA
Did I marry someone who doesn't know the difference between good and bad? What have I *done* to my life? How did this *happen*?

Jacob raises his voice for the first time:

JACOB
God damn it, what's that *smell*?

Beat.

JULIA
Your dog took a shit in the house.

JACOB
And it didn't occur to you to clean it up?

JULIA
(on fire with rage at him)
I wasn't the one who took it!

Jacob screams at the top of his lungs---a scream that has been building for years---directly at Julia.

BENJY
Mom?

Julia and Jacob turn to see Benjy, sitting in his SUV in his pajamas. They have no idea how long he's been there.

JACOB
Mom and I were just--

BENJY
Epitome.

Long beat.

JULIA
(to Jacob, while wiping away tears)
You can have your kiss now.

Jacob gets down to Benjy's level.

JACOB
Bad dream, little buddy?

BENJY
No. You were fighting.

JACOB
We weren't fighting, we---

JULIA
We were fighting. Humans have feelings, sometimes bad ones. But it’s OK. Now go on back to bed.

BENJY
(hugging his lovey)
I love my lovey.

JULIA
And your lovey loves you. Now back to bed.

JACOB
I’ll take you up.

INT. BENJY’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

We see Jacob tuck his son back into bed.

BENJY
What are nightmares?

JACOB
Have you been having them?

BENJY
I don’t know, because I don’t know what they are.

JACOB
Nightmares are scary dreams.

BENJY
Do you have nightmares?

JACOB
Occasionally.

BENJY
What are you afraid of?

JACOB
Let’s talk about it in the morning, OK, buddy?

BENJY
OK.

After kissing him, Jacob stands at the door, looking at his son, taking in all that he is afraid of losing. After a few long moments in this silence, Benjy calls out:

BENJY (CONT’D)
Dad I need you!

JACOB
I’m right here. I never left.

BENJY
Why do squirrels have bushy tails?

JACOB
They’re born that way.

BENJY
But why?

JACOB
Maybe for balance? Or to keep them warm? Now time for sleep.

BENJY
We’ll Google it in the morning.

JACOB
OK. But now sleep.

A moment.

BENJY
Dad!

JACOB
Right here.

BENJY
If the world goes on for long enough, will there be fossils of fossils?

JACOB
That’s a great question, and we can talk about it in the morning.

BENJY
Yeah. Time for sleep.

A moment.

BENJY (CONT’D)
Dad?

JACOB
(losing patience)
Benjy.

BENJY
Why are we a family?

Beat.

JACOB
What?

BENJY
Why are we a family, instead of just friends, or even people who never met?

INT. IRV'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Irv is staring at his open laptop. He makes a call.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Hey, Irv. What's up?

IRV
Give me your one-sentence judgement on Wikileaks.

Long pause.

DANIEL (V.O.)
Love the sin, hate the sinner.

Another pause.

IRV
I miss your mind, Daniel. I---

Irv realizes Deborah is standing behind him. He doesn't know how long she's been there.

IRV (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I'll call you back.

He hangs up.

DEBORAH
Not on my behalf.

IRV
Just work stuff.

DEBORAH
Always work stuff.

IRV
There's a lot of work.

DEBORAH
Enough to fit the space you've given it.

IRV
What do you want, Deborah?

DEBORAH
Listen to how you say that.

IRV
(sincerely now)
What do you want, Deborah?

DEBORAH
I want your family to be your life's work.

IRV
I don't even know what that means.

DEBORAH
I bet you do.

IRV
What, *resign*?

DEBORAH
At least take your foot off the gas.

Beat.

IRV
If Joe were here.

DEBORAH
Joe's not here.

IRV
I'm just saying *if*. He could have managed the magazine.

DEBORAH
Joe couldn't manage getting dressed in the morning.

IRV
That's not true.

DEBORAH
Our Joe?

IRV
Until the very end he was completely himself.

DEBORAH
Yes, but don't forget what *completely himself* included.

IRV
What are you trying to do, here?

DEBORAH
Do you even realize how badly Jacob needs you right now? He's in serious trouble.

IRV
No. His trouble is *his* trouble, Deborah. That's not me being cold, or loving my son any less than you do.

DEBORAH
What you love is a mythology.

IRV
What mythology?

DEBORAH
The mythology of the book Tim wrote for you.

IRV
He didn't write it for me.

DEBORAH
Of course he did. And the bigger it gets, the more I wish it would disappear.

IRV
How can you say that?

DEBORAH
This hasn't stopped for a year, and I'm now out of whatever it takes to feign pride in a lie.

IRV
It's not a *lie*.

DEBORAH
It's a dangerous, destructive lie.

IRV
It's not.

DEBORAH
And the checks Tim is cashing? This family is writing them.

IRV
Enough, Deborah.

DEBORAH
And it's history.

IRV
It's not *history*.

Beat. Irv goes to the window. The conversation is becoming too frank and painful for him.

IRV (CONT'D)
Daniel was implying that I wrote what I wrote in order to jeopardize the dinner.

DEBORAH
That's not what I believe.

IRV
What do you believe?

DEBORAH
I believe you can't resist the impulse to be yourself.

IRV
That's a generous interpretation of me.

DEBORAH
I think you're a good man, Irv.

IRV
This so-called goodness is making my life shitty.

DEBORAH
So be a little less good.

IRV
Or learn to expect less.

Silence.

IRV (CONT'D)
Do you think the boys are proud of me?

DEBORAH
Why is that the question?

IRV
I've been having this strange sensation recently, that if I were to extend my hand, I wouldn't reach anything.

DEBORAH
You're suffering.

IRV
I'm doubting.

DEBORAH
Try reaching for me.

The phone rings.

DEBORAH (CONT'D)
Or reach for the phone.

Beat.

IRV
It will only be a second.

DEBORAH
Take it. I'm going to bed.

IRV
A *second*.

She goes up to bed. Irv answers.

IRV (CONT'D)
Daniel?

TIM (V.O.)
No, Tim.

IRV
Tim.

TIM (V.O.)
I have some bad news, Dad: I can't come to your dinner.

IRV
What?

TIM (V.O.)
I'm really sorry. If there were any way I could be there I would. But something big has come up.

IRV
How big?

TIM (V.O.)
Oprah invited me onto her show.

IRV
Even *I* know that Oprah doesn't have a show anymore.

TIM (V.O.)
She's bringing it back for a week.

IRV
That *is* big.

TIM (V.O.)
Yeah.

IRV
I'm disappointed, obviously. But---

TIM (V.O.)
Dad---

IRV
Listen, this is not an everyday thing. It's going to make a *huge* difference for you. And for Joe's memory.

TIM (V.O.)
Your dinner isn't an everyday thing, either.

IRV
No. But it's not going to change my life.

TIM (V.O.)
I was really looking forward to it.

IRV
It's OK, Tim. You're keeping Joe alive. Nothing's more important than that.

TIM (V.O.)
Dad, Joe killed himself.

Beat.

IRV
You'd say I taught you things, right?

TIM (V.O.)
Of course.

IRV
I know you've made a lot of choices to distinguish yourself from me, but you're proud of me, right?

TIM
Dad---

IRV
No, I know.

INT. JACOB AND JULIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jacob enters. Julia is getting ready for bed.

JACOB
You know what he asked me while I was putting him back to sleep?

JULIA
Why are we a family?

JACOB
How'd you know?

Julia gestures at the baby monitor on the ground.

JULIA
The monitor knows all.

They undress, and get into their sleeping clothes.

JACOB
I met that astronaut today.

JULIA
I know. It was on your calendar.

JACOB
He knew Joe. He used to live around the corner.

JULIA
Jesus.

JACOB
Yeah.

JULIA
How'd it go?

JACOB
He wanted me to help him think of something Jewish to bring into space. I couldn't come up with anything.

JULIA
Notes from the Wailing Wall?

JACOB
You're not supposed to remove them.

JULIA
Photos of dead relatives?

JACOB
He wants something inspirational.

JULIA
A rock from Massadah?

JACOB
Why?

JULIA
A symbol of Jewish resistance.

JACOB
What does Jewish resistance have to do with space?

JULIA
It's inspirational.

JACOB
I wanted to help him so badly. But what he's doing is so *big*. And my life is so *small*.

JULIA
There's nothing small about being a leader of a community, and a father and husband.

JACOB
I'm failing my family just like my father failed us.

Julia picks up the toothbrushes and hands one to Jacob.

JULIA
No, you're not. But it's not enough to avoid his mistakes. You have to avoid your own, too.

JACOB
I know.
(beat)
We're out of toothpaste.

JULIA
There's another in the cabinet.

Jacob opens the cabinet and removes a new tube of toothpaste. Silence.

JACOB
I used to cry at movies, remember that?

JULIA
You used to cry at everything.

JACOB
And I would write long letters by hand.

JULIA
You wrote them to me.

JACOB
I want to do those things again. I want to be emotionally ambitious. I want to show the boys what they can *be* in the world.

A moment of quiet while they brush.

JULIA
Maybe you couldn't think of anything because you don't actually think he should bring anything.

JACOB
What do you mean?

JULIA
Maybe you *wanted* him to leave his Jewishness behind.

JACOB
Why would I want that?

JULIA
(gently, picking her words carefully so as not to destroy him)
Because you're tired of being a rabbi.

JACOB
I don't think that's true.

JULIA
You're tired of being a rabbi, and you're tired of being married.

JACOB
I'm not.

JULIA
And you're tired of being a dad and a son. And you're tired of missing your brother. Of missing both of your brothers.

JACOB
Why are you trying to hurt me?

JULIA
There are worse things than hurting each other.

Jacob puts down the toothbrush.

JACOB
I wish you'd known me before Joe killed himself. I wish you'd known all of us. We were easier to love.

JULIA
I wish I'd known Joe.

JACOB
No. You don't. Joe was my hero. But---

JULIA
Tell me. You're safe.

JACOB
It wasn't madness and genius, like in Tim's book. It was just madness. He could be unbelievably cruel. And violent. The medication kept things in check, but only barely. And he was always going off of it.

JULIA
Why?

JACOB
I don't know why. I was in law school, halfway across the country. My parents didn't want me to come home, so I only know what my mother told me.

JULIA
What about your father?

JACOB
Off limits. Not to be touched. My mom would call from the basement.

They get into bed.

JACOB (CONT'D)
It was horrible. And much worse, I'm sure, than what I know. He attacked my mother.

JULIA
What did he say?

JACOB
No. He *attacked* her. She hid from him in her closet and he broke both of his hands on the door.

Julia strokes his hair.

JULIA
So many secrets.

JACOB
This is making me into a child, to talk about him.

JULIA
There's nothing wrong with that.

JACOB
I'm sorry I'm such a terrible communicator.

JULIA
There are so many other things you do well.

Jacob laughs.

JACOB
Help me out. What do I do well?

JULIA
You're kind. I love your kindness. I could give a million examples, if you wanted.

JACOB
Maybe three or four.

JULIA
You always return your grocery cart to the right place. You fold up your Post and leave it for another reader on the subway. You draw maps for lost tourists...

JACOB
Are those *kindness*, or *conscientiousness*?

JULIA
I don't know. Maybe I love your conscientiousness.

Long, warm beat.

JACOB
I'm in trouble, Julia. I'm in so much trouble.

JULIA
You made a lot of decisions when Joe died. Am I one of the decisions you would change?

Beat.

JACOB
You're tired, too.

JULIA
(tears in her eyes)
I am.

JACOB
We're tired.

JULIA
Why *are* we a family?

Beat.

JACOB
If I tell you something now, will you promise to believe me?

She sees, in his face, his seriousness.

JULIA
OK. Yes.

JACOB
If I were the astronaut, *you* are what I would bring.

She cries---at first out of the love that's left. But then it changes to a suffering cry. Jacob notices the change.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Are you OK?

She cries more intensely, unable to control herself.

JULIA
I'm not having my period.

JACOB
OK.

JULIA
I'm not having my period because I'm pregnant.

Long beat, interrupted by Benjy calling through the monitor:

BENJY (O.S.)
Dad, I need you. I really need you.

Julia's crying turns to laughter. Jacob starts laughing, too.

BENJY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm desperate!

Julia laughs harder. Jacob falls silent and looks at her.

JACOB
That's the sound of all not being lost.

JULIA
I really hope so.

BENJY (O.S.)
Dad!

JULIA
Go.

IRV'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Irv is sitting alone at his desk, his open laptop in front of him. Suddenly, shockingly, there is a crash of glass shattering. Irv drops the phone. A rock is on the floor. Irv turns around, and sees that it was thrown through his window. He picks it up, ponders it. After a moment, he takes it and hurls it back out the window.

IRV
(screaming, at the top of his lungs, at the window)
You'll have to do better than that!

Deborah rushes down the stairs.

DEBORAH
What's happening?

IRV
I was talking to someone else.

CUT TO BLACK