

Scene 7:

LARRY (*off*)

Beth, would you open up, please? (*Pause.*) I spoke with Chet, and Chet says this won't look good to the judge. (*Pause.*) I wanna do this fairly. (*Pause.*) Abe? I got something for you. A graduation gift. (*Beat.*) And some mail I had in my car...

(The microwave dings. Ma and Alex look at Abe.)

LARRY (*ct'd*)

Looks like some important stuff here. (*Pause.*) Looks like... something from Blockbuster. Could be a paycheck. (*Pause.*) I got... a bunch of college stuff, here. (*Pause.*) Otterbein, Kalamazoo, Bowling Green, this one's from Princeton. (*Pause.*) Oh, and there's this... I guess you'd call it a packet. It's got a thumbs up on the outside. Or maybe it's a thumbs down. Says... Independence, Ohio?

(Abe opens the door. Larry enters.)

LARRY

Hey there kiddo. I got you this.

(It's a card. Abe takes the mail instead.)

LARRY

Hello, Beth. Care to have a civilized discussion? One where we keep our voices down?

MA

Civilized, he says. Can I be civilized? Can *you* be civilized?

(Abe finds the packet, Alex joins him.)

LARRY

Could you leave your anger at the door for a minute so we can discuss this?

MA

I'm not angry, it seems like you're angry.

LARRY

I am angry!

MA

Well, I'm not.

LARRY

Well, good!

(Beat.)

MA

I want to take the baby to temple tomorrow, it's Yom Hashoah.

LARRY

Well, it's my day.

(Abe has opened the packet.)

ALEX

What's it say?

ABE (*scanning*)

“Blah blah blah, blah blah blah...”

MA

I'm happy to give up my Monday, I thought your parents might like to see the baby.

LARRY

Yes, well, well, that's not the point.

MA

Does that work for you?

ABE

“...We are delighted to inform you...”

ALEX

Yes!

LARRY

Fine. Fine. What time on Monday.

MA

When's good?

LARRY

Five, o'clock.

MA

Okay.

LARRY

Okay?

MA

Okay.

ABE (*rousing conclusion*)

“...Invited to join the class of 2009!”

ALEX

What!

MA

What's going on?

ABE

I got in!

MA

You got in!

ABE

I got in!

(Abe, Ma, and Alex celebrate loudly. Hugs all around.)

MA/ALEX (*ad lib*)

Mazel Tov!/I can't believe it!/Etc.

LARRY

Congratulations!

(Silence.)

ABE

This is dated April 7th.

LARRY

Yeah, I've been getting your mail.

ABE

I was waiting for this for a month, and you had it in your car all along?

LARRY

Not in my car.

(Pause.)

ABE

Great, Larry.

(Pause.)

MA

Well, if that's all, Larry?

LARRY

No "thank you?"

ABE

Thank you. No "congratulations?"

LARRY

I said congratulations.

(Pause.)

MA

So, Monday.

LARRY

Monday.

MA

Five o'clock?

LARRY

Five o'clock. (Pause.) Okay. Bye Alex. (Pause.) Bye Abe.

(Pause.)

MA

Goodbye, Larry.

(Larry exits.)

Scenes 8:

ALEX

Tool.

MA

You got in?

ABE

Yeah.

MA

Are you gonna go?

ABE

Yes.

MA

Oh, congratulations, hon.

ABE

I gotta — I gotta call — everyone!

ALEX

Abe, can we get ice cream?

ABE

I gotta call Frankie. I gotta call Father.

MA

Will he pay for it?

ABE (*in the letter*)

It's fully-funded. I just need room and board, I can find a Blockbuster out there, I'm sure.

ALEX (*reading*)

What's this part?

ABE

Uh...

ALEX

What's a "deposit?"

(Abe reads.)

MA

What is it?

ABE

I need a... deposit.

MA

Like a down payment?

ALEX

How much?

ABE

Ten percent... four thousand, two hundred dollars.

(Pause.)

ALEX

Do you have four thousand dollars?

ABE

I have four hundred dollars.

MA

I'm so sorry Abram.

ABE

I gotta call Father.

ALEX

He won't pay.

ABE

He will.

MA

Well, congratulations, baby.

ABE

Uh, thanks Ma. I'm gonna make this call.

MA

Okay, baby. But no matter what happens, you're my baby.

(She kisses him. Abe slips out onto the fire escape. Abe dials.)

ALEX

I want ice cream!

MA

Well, can you pay for me?

Scene 9:

(The phone rings. Suddenly, Abe is in Father's study. On the walls are books and diplomas. FATHER sits behind a large desk, not a pen out of place. Father speaks with the too-perfect English of an immigrant.)

FATHER

Speak.

ABE

Father.

FATHER

Hello, son.

ABE

I have some news.

FATHER

I meant to call you about your grades.

ABE

Well, that's what I'm calling about.

FATHER

You are taking a study hall? You are dropping AP Economics?

ABE

I'm already overbooked.

FATHER

You think Economics is not important.

ABE

Of course it's important, Father.

FATHER

But my economics aren't as important as this "Creative Writing?"

ABE

I want to take Econ in college. On which front, I have some good news.

FATHER

Oh, yes?

ABE

Yes. (*Beat.*) I got in!

FATHER

Oh, you did, did you?

ABE

To the Honors College.

FATHER

That was the last one, yes?

ABE

Yes.

FATHER

That was lucky.

ABE

Yes. Well, it was my first choice, so —



FATHER

You must be happy.

ABE

I am.

FATHER

And how are you intending to pay for this?

ABE

Well, I have some great news. The Honors College is a fully-funded program.

FATHER

Is that right?

ABE

Yeah, it's uh, it's a real steal.

FATHER

Congratulations.

ABE

I just need the uh deposit, and I'm in.

FATHER

I see.

ABE

Good news.

FATHER

How much?

ABE

The, uh...

FATHER

I knew there must be a reason you are calling me.

ABE

I got into college.

FATHER

A real reason. How much is this going to cost me?

ABE

It's a full ride.

FATHER

And a "deposit," and fees, and room, and board —

ABE

I'll work, they have Blockbusters in Independence.

FATHER

How much?

ABE

Ten percent.

FATHER

Ten percent of what?

ABE

Forty-two thousand dollars.

FATHER

Forty-two thousand dollars!

ABE

I just need four-thousand for the deposit.

FATHER

And you don't have four-thousand dollars? Why are you working at that video arcade? Where do you spend it all?

ABE

Ma needs that money for the rent —

FATHER

— Your mother. I should have expected.

ABE

Alex and me —

FATHER

I really don't approve of that. Your mother should be responsible for herself.

(Beat.)

ABE

Well can I count on you?

FATHER

You can ask your mother for your money back.

ABE

She doesn't have it.

FATHER

She does have it. I know this. I have given her \$700 a month in child support, for ten years. But once again it is my responsibility to pay.

(Pause.)

ABE

Please, Father.

FATHER

To beg. I am so very disappointed in you.

ABE

Father —

FATHER

— I wanted you to be independent.

ABE

The thing is, it's due on Monday.

FATHER

The deposit?

ABE

I know it's very last minute —

FATHER

It certainly is.

ABE

I know.

FATHER

You are fortunate I was available.

ABE

I am fortunate. You're the only one who can help me.

FATHER

Did you know that when my parents came to America, they spoke no English?

ABE

...No.

FATHER

I tell you this because I want you to understand. They came here with nothing and spoke no English. My father sold strawberries off the back of a strawberry truck. My mother swept up diamond dust at a jeweler.

ABE

I get it.

FATHER

Nobody helped them. Nobody helped me. Nobody told me to study, nobody held my hand and pampered me or gave me money for anything I wanted. That is the only way I became responsible.

ABE

Uh-huh.

FATHER

Do you understand?

ABE

Yes.

FATHER

What do you understand?

ABE

Nobody helped you.

FATHER

I helped myself. (*Pause.*) This is America, Abram. You must help yourself now. You will not succeed unless you are willing to work hard.

ABE

I work hard.

FATHER

Then what is this study hall? No. Four thousand dollars is not so much, surely you will earn it.

ABE

But by Monday?

FATHER

Do you want to be like your mother? Living off of me your whole life?

ABE

Of course not.

FATHER

Then we agree. Congratulations, son, on your Honors College.

(Abe is back on the fire escape.)

Act II

Interlude:

MAN

Need fast cash today? Need relief for a medical expense or car repair? At MoneyMart, get money when *you* need it. Bad credit? No credit? No problem!. You are pre-qualified for a MoneyMart payday loan of up to eighteen hundred dollars. No strings attached! It's quick and easy, just stop by a MoneyMart branch and get cash relief today. We also offer check cashing, business loans, and prepaid debit cards. Always use short term credit responsibly.

Scene 10:

MAN

We now return to Be a Mensch.

ALEX

I want ice cream!

MA

Well, can you pay for me?

ALEX

I'm the daughter, you're supposed to pay for *me*.

MA (*pathetic*)

...Aren't we a family?

ALEX

Are we?

MA

How can you say that?

ALEX

We're holding out on Abe! We should tell him about the money.

(Pause.)

MA

We can't tell him.

ALEX

We have to.

MA

Let's just wait and see what your Father says, we really need that money for ourselves.

ALEX

But it's his.

MA

Then we'll let him decide, but later. Let's just hear what Father says. Maybe he'll pay for the whole thing, and Abe will donate it to the family.

ALEX

No matter what Father says, he'll take it, and he'll leave.

MA

We'll just see.

ALEX

I know him. He'll do anything to get out of... this.

MA (*hurt*)

... You don't love me?

ALEX

... It's not about what I think.

MA (*exploding*)

Do you know what I went through for you? You ungrateful, unkind, *unconscious* girl! You think I liked being married to that idiot? I did it for you! I sacrificed and sacrificed and sacrificed, and you don't care. Everything I have ever done, I did for you. Every cent I made went in your ungrateful mouth. I don't think it's too much to ask for a little appreciation.

ALEX (*teenaged*)

Ma-*uh!* That's completely unfair-*uh!*

MA

Don't tell me unfair.

(Ma grabs Alex's breast and twists.)

MA (*ct'd*)

I'll show you unfair.

ALEX

Ma!

(Ma let's the pain reach a climax, then releases Alex as Abe enters. Ma starts to cry, and runs to him for comfort.)

Scene 11:

MA

She's a monster, a monster!

(Abe and Alex share a moment.)

ABE

I know, Ma. I know.

MA

She made me waste my voice!

ABE

I know, Ma.

MA

I have to sing in Temple tomorrow.

ABE

It's okay. It's okay.

(Pause.)

MA

What did your Father say?

(Abe gives a dark look.)

ALEX

I told you so.

MA

Alex, support your brother.

ABE

I gotta go talk to Frankie.

MA

Oh, baby don't cry.

ABE

I'm not crying.

MA

I know, Baby.

(Beat.)

ALEX

Abe, we were waiting to tell you —



MA

Why don't you call your Frankie? She'll know what to do.

ABE

Yeah?

MA

Yeah, call your Frankie.

ABE

Okay. Alex you okay?

ALEX

Call your Frankie.

MA

Baby, we'll be right here for you. And, baby, congratulations.

ABE (*touched*)

Thanks, Ma.

(Abe goes out to the fire escape. Ma gives Alex a warning look.)

Scene 12:

(On the fire escape, Abe dials Frankie, and breathes while it rings. Abe is now in Frankie's room. Frankie's room are transitioning from pink to punk. Frankie is writing in a diary.)

FRANKIE

Morales residence.

ABE

Frankie.

FRANKIE

Hey, sexy fox.

ABE (*miserably*)

Frankie, I have good news.

Uh-oh... FRANKIE

I got in! ABE (*sad*)

To the Honors College? FRANKIE

Yeah. ABE

Then why do you sound like the world is made of farts? FRANKIE

Father won't pay for it. ABE

Didn't you get the scholarship? FRANKIE

Yeah. ABE

Then what's the problem? FRANKIE

The deposit. ABE

There's a deposit? FRANKIE

Didn't you have to pay it? ABE

I don't know. FRANKIE

forty-two hundred bucks. ABE

FRANKIE

I guess my Dad must have paid.

ABE

I wish I had your Dad.

FRANKIE

...Be careful what you wish for.

ABE

Sorry...

FRANKIE

It's okay. Just, you know, be careful what you wish for.

ABE

I know.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Oh! Why don't you get a loan?

ABE

I can't. Ma fucked up my credit.

FRANKIE

I mean like, the federal one, the Pell Grant —

ABE

The Stafford Loan. I can't even apply until the first day of classes. Do you think I haven't looked into this? Don't you think I would know? I applied to every scholarship on the wall, and that didn't work either. I shook every tree. I called everyone who's ever liked me. I got rejected by my Rabbi. I don't need you to tell me where to look.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE

Jesus, you don't have to bite my head off.

ABE

Sorry. It's just so — embarrassing.

FRANKIE

Don't take it out on the one person who's trying to help you.

ABE (*deep breath*)

I know  
...I love you.

FRANKIE

...I love you too.

(Pause.)

FRANKIE (*ct'd*)

Wow. (*Pause.*) ...You want me to ask my Dad? I can do it. He'd say yes. I promise, I won't judge you.

ABE (*tempted*)

...No. Money ruins things, and I'm not going to let money come between us, like everyone else.

FRANKIE

Are you sure? He'd for sure say yes.

ABE

I don't want charity. That's not what we're about. I'll figure it out.

FRANKIE

...Abe?

ABE (*thinking*)

Hm.

FRANKIE

I liked what we did yesterday.

ABE

Me too.

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

Hm?

FRANKIE

We're going to make it through this. Together.

ABE

Yeah.

FRANKIE

We could get a double, if we both went.

ABE

What about your Dad?

FRANKIE

We won't tell him.

ABE

Yeah?

FRANKIE

Come with me to Independence. Abram Golden, let's blow this town. We'll have a life out there. You can be a TV writer like you always wanted.

ABE (*TV job*)

A showrunner?

FRANKIE

Yeah. A showrunner.

ABE

He's the boss of all the other writers on the show.

FRANKIE

Yeah.

ABE

...Okay.

FRANKIE

Let me talk to your Dad.

ABE

No!

FRANKIE

I could help!

ABE

He won't see it that way. He'll think I'm letting you do my dirty work.

FRANKIE

But that's not fair!

ABE

I know.

FRANKIE

You gotta stand up to him.

ABE

Thank you, Frankie, that's very helpful.

FRANKIE

Don't get mad at me.

ABE

I could never be mad at you. Just let me handle this.

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

What?

FRANKIE

You want me to come over?

ABE

No! I've got — a long night ahead of me.

(Beat.)

FRANKIE

Abe?

ABE

Yeah?

Abe? FRANKIE

Yeah? ABE

You okay? FRANKIE

I'm great. ABE (*lie*)

Okay... I love you. FRANKIE

I love you too. ABE

I'll see you in college! FRANKIE

(Pause. Abe hangs up. Abe is back on the fire escape.)