

Zebras

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Translated from Hebrew by: Yehonadav Tsdaka

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About the play:

The comedy “Zebras”, (Originally titled “Vanilla-Chocolate”) tells the story of an Ethiopian student who’s trying to rent an apartment in a white prestigious neighborhood.

The play was first produced in 2016 by The Hebrew Theatre in Israel, and has been the most successful comedy in Israel in recent years. It was performed over 1,000 times, and is still being performed all over Israel to this day.

This English translation is a new variation of the play, adapted for the British audience.

Characters:

Jason Rosenberg: A standup comedian.

Esther Rosenberg: Jason’s Jewish mother.

Diana: An Ethiopian student.

Nawi: Chairman of the house committee.

Prologue

(At a comedy club, Jason is on stage.)

Jason: Thank you! My name is Jason Rosenberg, and you've been a great audience! This was my final show because—guess what—I'm moving! Yep, I'm packing up and heading to Germany. To Berlin. I can't stand it here anymore. I mean, have you *been* to Berlin? It's incredible. I got caught speeding once—doing 120! Yeah... in a parking lot. Who knew?

And their trains? Always on time. Unlike ours, which never even show up. I'm convinced that if you stood on the tracks in some remote field at 2 AM, alone and abandoned, *that's* when the train would finally hit you—right on schedule.

And don't get me started on the prices here! I mean, the cost of living? Out of control! Owning a car? That's a luxury! I'd kill for a company car. Anyone here got one? You do? Nice. I bet you left it running in the parking lot because, hey, why not? Back when I had a real job and a company car, I'd fill it up with petrol and then clean the windows with the rest of the gas. That's how much it costs.

And car mechanics in Berlin? They don't rip you off like they do here. My mechanic called me last week and said, "Your cylinder's done for. Kia

cars are prone to this.” I told him, “But I drive a Toyota!” He goes, “Yeah, it must’ve caught the disease from another car in the garage.” I mean, *come on!*

Anyway, it’s been real. I’m Jason Rosenberg, and this was my last show.

I’m off to Berlin! Danke schön!

Scene 1

Jason's apartment in Kensington. Jason is packing, and there are boxes and suitcases around. The doorbell rings.

Jason: *[calls out]* Yes, mom.

The doorbell rings again, twice.

Jason: *[a little louder]* It's open, mom! It's OPEN!

Esther enters.

Esther: Evening! Am I interrupting?

Jason: Would it matter if I said yes?

Esther: What's all this?

Jason: Just packing up my life.

Esther: Oh, please... Are you alone?

Jason: *[gestures around]* Do you see anyone else here?

Esther: Never mind. It'll get sorted out.

Jason: Everything's fine, mom.

Esther: Don't you have a show tonight?

Jason: Nope. Tonight, I'm spending quality time with my mother.

Esther: Wonderful! Have you eaten?

Jason: I had a sandwich.

Esther: Want me to spoil you with some of mommy's good food?

Jason: I'm not hungry. Really, I ate.

Esther: Did you go out last night?

Jason: No.

Esther: Mommy's little prince wants to become the pope?

Jason: *[annoyed]* No.

Esther: Then why is he celibate?

Jason: *[frustrated]* I'm not celibate—I'm packing! Packing!

Esther: Packing, huh... Anyone call about the ad?

Jason: Yeah, some woman named Diana. Said she's coming over tonight to see the apartment.

Esther: Is she married?

Jason: I don't know.

Esther: Single?

Jason: *[sighs]* Same question, mom.

Esther: You're not giving me a straight answer.

Jason: Because I don't know!

Esther: It's important to know who you're renting to.

Jason: Yep.

Esther: And don't forget to add that they need to move out a month before you come back so I can—

Jason: *[cutting her off]* —Clean it up for me. I know, mom.

Esther: I'm not thrilled about this trip, you know.

Jason: When have you ever been thrilled, mom? Last time you smiled was at my circumcision.

Esther: When I'm with you, I'm happy. I bought you some things for the flight.

Jason: Is it the tablet I asked for?

Esther: No, marshmallows, Oreos, M&Ms...

Jason: *[deadpan]* Mom, it's not a school field trip. I'm moving to Berlin.

Esther: ...and a family photo. So you'll always remember where you came from, and where you must return to.

Jason: *[mocking]* Oh, great. Customs is gonna love that.

Esther: Look how much your grandmother loved you.

Jason: That's my grandmother?

Esther: Of course! Don't you recognize her?

Jason: So she's why I'm balding... Thanks, Grandma. They won't let me through customs with this thing.

Esther: By the way, I checked the expiration dates on those snacks—it's a year from now. You have exactly one year to eat them and miss your lonely mother.

Jason: *[laughing]* Whenever I'm lonely, I'll eat one M&M and think of you.

Esther: That's nice. Now stand up—come on, stand up.

Jason reluctantly stands.

Esther: Give your mother a hug.

Jason: *[sighs]* Mom, we talked about this.

Esther: I miss you already.

Jason: We hugged this morning!

Esther: Come on already!

Jason: *[groaning]* Okay, okay... But it's the last one today.

They hug.

Esther: Berlin! Couldn't you find somewhere else?

Jason: Like where?

Esther: What's wrong with... Jerusalem?

Jason: Jerusalem?! Why don't you just crucify me right now and get it over with?

Esther: Everyone says Britain is so great, and yet they're kidnapping my boy to Berlin! I'll make you some soup.

Esther exits to the kitchen. Jason turns to the audience.

Jason: Soup, soup... My whole life's been nothing but soup. My body's 90% water and 10% potatoes. My family had the same debate at every meal: soup first, or the meat? That's the question. My dad always said, 'Eat the meat first, because if the Nazis show up, at least you've had the meat.' Mom said, 'Eat the soup first, because if the Nazis show up, you can grab the meat and run for your life.' I'm still walking around with a chicken wing in my pocket.

Esther enters and stumbles.

Esther: Ooh!

Jason: *[sarcastic]* What?

She hands him a photo.

Esther: Here. Take it.

Jason: What's this?

Esther: It's Goldi.

Jason: Who?

Esther: Barbara's daughter! I met her this week. She's lovely. Even though she's two years older than you.

Jason: She's not just older than me... Where's the rest of her head?

Esther: Yosa'le—

Jason: *[correcting]* It's Jason, mom.

Esther: You can't be picky anymore. She's studying law, you know. They say she'll be an important cog in the justice system.

Jason: That's a cog? Looks more like a cogwheel.

Esther: Call her. Meet her. Maybe you'll fall in love?

Jason: Mom, I'm not going out with your friends' daughters.

Esther: You want to stay lonely your whole life?

Jason: Mom, no romantic affair with one of your friends' daughters is going to keep me here. Especially not Barbara's daughter. I'm going to Berlin. Period. (sits back down, continues packing) And have you seen my rubber duck? I had this little duck...

Esther: Jason, you're all I have left in this world.

Jason: Your world's a bit narrow, mom. (pauses, trying to ease her) It's just for a couple of years. And today we've got Skype, phones, the internet. I promised I'd come visit for every holiday.

Esther: You also promised your dad and me five grandchildren. When exactly am I going to see them?

Jason: I promised that in second grade!

Esther: Promises are promises! And you're not thinking of coming back with a German woman, are you?

Jason: I wouldn't do that to you, mom. And I definitely wouldn't do that to her. No matter what they did to us, they don't deserve that.

Esther: Well, if she converts to Judaism, swears never to mention her parents or grandparents, and promises never to speak a word of German to my grandchildren... I see nothing wrong with it.

Jason: I'll put it on my JDate profile.

Esther: You have a JDate profile?

Jason: No.

Esther: Maybe you should get one! Yankale's son found a wonderful girl there.

Jason: Yankale's son finds girls on eBay.

Esther: Which bay?

Jason: Mom, I promise that when I come back from this trip, I'll get a JDate profile. I'll find a wonderful Jewish daughter-in-law for you, we'll have a fancy Jewish wedding, and I'll give you five grandchildren who'll only speak Yiddish. You and your friends will be the only ones who understand them. And I'll name them all after dad—the girls, too. "Come here, little Tevye, let me braid your hair."

Esther: And I'd like you all to live right here, close to me.

Jason: Of course, we'll love being stuck in this building.

Esther: Excuse me? I know plenty of people who'd love if their parents bought them an apartment in Kensington.

Jason: They'd love it more if the apartment was a few blocks away.

Esther: Goldi lives a few blocks away.

Jason: And you can see her from here with the naked eye.

Esther: Would you call her?

Jason: No.

Esther: ...I did my part. Anyway, if you're showing the apartment tonight, it needs to be cleaned. No one's going to rent a filthy apartment.

Jason: I'll get a cleaner.

Esther: When?

Jason: Today.

Esther: Today? It's already evening.

Jason: Tomorrow, then.

Esther: But you said someone's coming tonight.

Jason: Then I don't know what to do.

Esther: Of course, what else? I'll go get some cleaning supplies and clean it myself. What choice do I have? With my bad knees and all... Oh, and Yosa'le—don't forget the soup is on. Don't burn it!

Jason: Fine.

Esther: And call her.

Jason: Fine.

Esther: Call her.

Jason: Fine!

Esther: I'll be right back.

Jason: Of course.

Esther exits.

Jason (to the audience): You're laughing? I live with that.

The doorbell rings.

Jason: Yes, mom! It's open! It's always open!

The doorbell rings again.

Jason: I said it's open, mom! You can come in! I'm dressed! I'm dressed!

Diana enters—a beautiful Ethiopian woman.

Diana: Hi!

Jason (shocked): Uh... hi.

Diana: I'm Diana.

Jason: I'm... dressed. I mean, I'm always dressed.

Diana: I called earlier.

Jason: Oh! Uh, right! About the ad, right?

Diana: Yes.

Jason: Yeah! Come in, come in. This is the apartment.

Diana walks around the apartment while Jason awkwardly watches her.

Diana: It's pretty.

Jason: Very pretty. Exotic, even. Uh... I had a parrot once. He died. So, you're moving in around here?

Diana: Yes.

Jason: Seriously?

Diana: Is that a problem?

Jason: No! No problem at all! Are you sure it was me you spoke to on the phone?

Diana: Yes.

Jason: You sound... different in person. So, where are you from?

Diana: Hackney. I'm starting at Imperial College in a few days.

Jason: Oh, nice! And... you're black! Right? I mean, not that I'm mistaken...

Diana: You're not mistaken.

Jason: Right, right. I noticed. So, what are you studying?

Diana: Medicine.

Jason: Impressive! And you're really... black! Ethiopian, right?

Diana: Yes.

Jason: Can I ask you a personal question?

Diana: Go ahead.

Jason: Are you guys like... a people or a community?

Diana: What do you mean by "you guys"?

Jason: We're Jews. We're a community with no people. We don't talk to each other. Fights, inheritance—you don't want to know. We're born alone, we die alone.

Diana: How much is the rent?

Jason: Uh, it's a bit expensive...

Diana: How much?

Jason: It's Kensington, you know. Honestly, I wouldn't pay that much.

Diana: How much?

Jason: 2500. Maybe I can give you a small discount, but—

Diana: No need. I'll take it.

Jason: Really? Um... cool. So... how do you guys pay?

Diana: Once a month, I come with a donkey caravan and a basket of cash on my head.

Jason: Leave the donkeys in Hackney—they'll mess up the lobby. The basket of cash will do just fine.

Diana: Can I ask you a personal question?

Jason: Sure, go ahead.

Diana: In the Jewish community, isn't it customary to invite a guest to sit?

Jason: Ah, you see, in ancient times, Jews didn't sit. We just stood around, gossiping about each other. Oh, you want to sit? Yeah, of course! Would you like something to drink?

Diana: No, thanks.

They both sit on the sofa. Jason moves awkwardly, trying to get comfortable.

Diana: You don't seem comfortable.

Jason: No, I'm comfortable. I know this couch. This is the comfortable side. Your side used to be comfortable, but now it's too soft. When this side gets soft, I'll flip the couch. It's in the IKEA manual.

Diana: So, where are you going?

Jason: Berlin.

Diana: Germany?

Jason: Yeah. You wouldn't go to Germany?

Diana: Never.

Jason: Why not?

Diana: My feet still hurt from walking all the way from Ethiopia. Why are you leaving?

Jason: Well, obviously because of the... um, don't you recognize me?

Diana: No...

Jason: Are you sure? You don't know who I am?

Diana: ...No.

Jason: That's why I'm leaving. I'm a stand-up comedian.

Diana: What was your name again?

Jason: Jason Rosenberg. Doesn't ring a bell?

Diana: Not at all.

Jason: I'm funny. Really funny. Like, hilarious.

Diana: I can see that.

Jason: Yep.

Diana: Are you leaving for good?

Jason: At least until people start recognizing me in Berlin.

Diana: Well, I'm interested in renting the apartment. I just need to check it with—

Jason: Your husband?

Diana: My brother. We live together.

Jason: Oh, that's nice. How many siblings do you have?

Diana: Just him.

Jason: And the rest of them—where do they live?

Diana: There are only two of us.

Jason: Oh, so you're basically Chinese.

Diana: Almost.

Jason: You should probably take my number.

Diana: I already have it. (She sends him a message) And now you have mine.

Jason: Great. Diana... what's your last name?

Diana: Wondusuahlem.

Jason: ...Wondusu...?

Diana: Wondusuahlem.

Jason: I'll just write "Diana." Easier that way.

An awkward pause.

Jason: It was warm today. I mean... cold earlier. But then it got warmer. Then cold again by evening. That's how it goes. Every day. Cold, then

warm, then cold again. It's called global warming. They say the planet's going to get really hot soon. But I guess you guys don't mind, right? I mean...

Diana: Want to let me go over the contract while you sort that out?

Jason: Yeah, yeah, sure. I've got it on my computer. I'll go print it out. You can review it with your... uh, brothers in the community.

Jason exits to another room. Esther re-enters with cleaning supplies.

Esther: I'm back!

Diana: Hi!

Esther: Oh! Yosa'le, how did you find a cleaning lady? (Assumes Diana doesn't speak English) Hello! You from Africa? Sudan? It doesn't matter! All humans are the same to me. Come! I'll show you where you can change into your work clothes.

Diana (going along with it): You want me to clean?

Esther: Of course! Clean, clean!

Diana: Okay.

Esther (hands her the cleaning materials): Start with the bathroom. No one's cleaned in there for ages. My son is so filthy. You clean

everywhere, yes? (Pointing under the sofa) All the way under. And here too, okay? All the way!

Diana: All the way.

Jason re-enters, holding the printed contract.

Jason: Mom!

Esther: What?

Jason: What's going on?

Esther: I'm showing her how to clean! (To Diana) Remember—under, under, all the way.

Diana: Your mom's got me under, under, all the way.

Esther (realizing Diana speaks English): She speaks English! What a relief!

Jason: Yes, mom, she speaks English. She's not a foreign worker.

Esther (to Diana): Oh! So... you're black?

Diana (to Jason): I see the resemblance.

Jason: She's Ethiopian.

Esther: Oh, I'm so sorry! How embarrassing. If I'd known, I would've spoken in proper English.

Diana: I didn't mind your English.

Esther: Let's start over, then. My name is Esther, and I love the Ethiopian community.

Jason (sighing): Oh, this'll take hours.

Esther: You know, my husband, Tevye, and I were the first to greet the planes from Ethiopia back in '91. They were fleeing civil war, you know. And every single person who stepped off that plane got a bag of candy from me personally.

Jason: They come thirsty from the desert, and she feeds them salt and vinegar crisps.

Esther: It was one of the most emotional moments in our country's history. Remember, Yosa'le, I told you about the Ethiopian refugees, how they were dressed just—

Jason and Esther (in unison): Just like in the Bible!

Jason: How could I forget?

Diana: My mother was on that plane.

Esther: Oh! So you were born here? You probably have a British name, then!

Diana: I do.

Esther: Well, Simish man nau? What's your name? I learned a few words in Amharic when taking care of your people.

Diana: Amharic?

Esther: Yes, yes! Simish man nau?

Diana: Diana.

Esther: Diana? I have two friends named Diana.

Jason (to Diana): You don't want to meet any of them.

Esther: And now I have three!

Diana: Me?

Esther: Of course! Come sit. Tell me, Diana'le, your mother didn't give you an Amharic name, did she?

Diana: She did, but I don't use it.

Esther: Of course not! You're British in every way, and you should use the British names we gave you. I still remember that terrible immigration camp we set up for you. Our mission was to turn Ethiopians into Brits overnight. I was on the name-changing team. I remember this sweet boy named Ayoso. Do you know him? Anyway, I instantly changed his name to Jason. Just like my Jason!

Jason: Why not Yosa'le?

Esther: And there was an Abebe. I changed his name to Abe right away.

Jason: How original.

Esther: Some of you resisted changing your names, but most of you knew it would help you integrate. And overall, we can say that we did a pretty good job, don't you think?

Diana: We can say anything.

Esther: Good. I'm so sorry I thought you were a foreign worker. I'll leave the cleaning supplies here, and whenever you feel ready, you can get started.

Jason: What don't you get, mom? She's not the cleaner!

Esther: ...You're not the cleaner?

Diana: No.

Esther: So why did I think you were?

Diana: I wonder.

Jason (to Diana): I'm so sorry. She's never like this... Actually, she's always like this.

Esther: So, what are you doing here?

Jason: She's a student at the university.

Esther: You go to university?

Diana: Yes.

Esther: Wonderful! So you two know each other from school?

Jason: No, mom, she came to see the apartment.

Esther (shocked): You want to rent this apartment?

Diana: Yes.

Esther: Wonderful. Yosa'le, did you show her the apartment?

Jason: Yes.

Diana: I like it a lot.

Esther: Wonderful... And did you interview her?

Jason: Yes, mom. She's great.

Esther: Wonderful... It's such a shame you missed the deadline.

Jason: What deadline?

Esther: Several people already saw the ad and are interested in renting this apartment.

Jason: Who? No one's been around here for months.

Esther: It's not important right now, Yosa'le. Diana'le, I noticed just this morning there's another apartment for rent down the street, near the supermarket. Maybe you should check there.

Diana: I've been there. They sent me here.

Esther: How nice of them...

Jason: Mom, I'm ready to close the deal.

Esther: And do you mind if I ask her a few questions?

Jason: What for?

Esther: We might be neighbors. (to Diana) My apartment is right next to this one.

Diana: You can ask me anything.

Esther: Thank you very much. (to Jason) Sit!

Jason: I've been sitting the whole show.

Esther: Sit and listen. (to Diana) Are you married?

Diana: No.

Esther: Single?

Diana: Yes.

Esther: Do you live alone?

Diana: I live with my brother.

Jason: Is he also Ethiopian?

Esther: Jason!

Jason: You have to ask. You never know...

Esther: Is he going to live here with you?

Diana: Yes.

Esther: How many siblings do you have?

Diana: Just him.

Esther: And the rest of them? Where do they live?

Diana: There are only two of us.

Esther: Two just in London, or—

Diana: Two overall.

Esther: Where do you live right now?

Diana: Hackney. But this apartment is closer to my brother's workplace, and I'm sure he'll be happy.

Esther: What does your brother do for a living?

Diana: Water distribution.

Esther: What? Like... from a river?

Jason: Yes, mom. From the Thames.

Esther: I'm not an expert!

Diana: No, he installs water coolers in offices and homes.

Esther: Oh, mineral water! Does he have a truck for that?

Diana: Not yet, but hopefully he'll get his license soon, and they'll give him one.

Esther: Well, he won't be able to park his truck in the building's parking lot.

Diana: It'll be at least a year before he gets his license, and another year before he gets the truck.

Esther: Look, Diana'le, we're a very respected family in this neighborhood.

Diana: I'm happy to hear that.

Esther: There wasn't a single empty parking spot at my husband's funeral.

Jason: The memorial was packed, too.

Esther: We can't have noise or disturbances in this building.

Diana: I don't throw parties.

Esther: And your brother?

Diana: He's a quiet guy.

Jason: Can you wrap it up, mom?

Esther: Of course. I suggest we take her phone number.

Jason: I already have it.

Esther: Wonderful. We'll call you. Okay, Diana'le? I'm so glad we met, and I wish you a safe trip back to Hackney.

Diana: Goodbye.

Jason (hands her the contract): The contract. It's laminated... because of the air pollution in Hackney. I'll call you?

Diana: I'm waiting.

Diana exits. Esther starts cleaning.

Jason: She's nice.

Esther: Yes, very nice.

Jason: And pretty.

Esther: Indeed. Nice and pretty. But you do understand that this apartment isn't for her, right?

Jason: Why not?

Esther: Because everyone needs to be where they belong.

Jason: Then why are you always in my apartment?

The doorbell rings.

Nawi (offstage): One moment! I'll be right there!

Nawi enters, holding a folder.

Nawi: Good evening, Mrs. Rosenberg!

Esther: Hello, Nawi.

Nawi: You look marvelous.

Esther: Thank you!

Nawi: How are you feeling?

Esther: Generally? Terrible.

Nawi: You look amazing for someone feeling terrible.

Jason: Should I leave you two alone?

Esther: Would you stop with the nonsense?!

Nawi: Talking nonsense and not paying your bills!

Jason: Nawi, do you sleep with that folder?

Nawi: If it's needed.

Jason: Sorry, Nawi, I didn't have time to send the check.

Nawi: No problem. What you didn't pay yesterday, you can pay today.

The house committee fees aren't going anywhere.

Jason: Too bad.

Nawi: Mrs. Rosenberg, do you need help with anything?

Esther: No need, Nawi. Have a seat. Would you like some soup?

Nawi: I don't want to be a bother, Mrs. Rosenberg.

Esther: I'll get you some soup.

Nawi: Oh no! Really, it's fine.

Esther: Of course! You're my guest. (exits to the kitchen)

Jason: Any news from the house committee?

Nawi (whispers): Jason... is your mom sick?

Jason: No.

Nawi: I'm your neighbor. You don't have to hide it from me.

Jason: She's not sick.

Nawi: Then what's wrong with her?

Jason: The usual... she's not perfect.

Nawi: Fine, if you don't want to tell me, you don't have to. But just so you know, the Filipinos are WAY better than the Africans.

Jason: Sounds like you discovered the internet.

Nawi: The internet? No, no. I saw an African immigrant walking out of here just now.

Jason: She's British.

Nawi: What?

Jason: Her parents are from Ethiopia. She was born here.

Nawi: Well, that's better for you.

Jason: Why?

Nawi: They can't deport her. But did you check if she can take care of an elderly person?

Jason: She came to rent the apartment.

Nawi: Which apartment?

Jason: My apartment.

Nawi: You're leaving?

Jason: Sort of.

Esther returns with two bowls of soup, gives one to Nawi.

Esther: Here you go, Nawi. Careful, it's hot!

Nawi: Oh! Thank you! Your mom's the best.

Nawi awkwardly takes the soup.

Esther: And one for you, Yosa'le.

Jason: I didn't ask for it...

Esther: Be careful! Don't spill it.

Jason: It's for guests only!

Esther: Bon appétit!

Nawi: Why, thank you. I'll wait for it to cool a bit. (sets the bowl down)

Jason: That'll take a month.

Nawi: Congratulations, Mrs. Rosenberg!

Esther: For what?

Nawi: I heard you're renting the apartment to the Ethiopians!

Esther: Excuse me? I never agreed to that.

Jason: Mr. Nawi, would it bother you if a black woman lived here?

Nawi: Of course not! What am I, a racist? I love black people! It's the Russians I can't stand.

Jason: See, mom? The house committee chairman approves.

Nawi: Not only do I approve, but I'll also give her a simple intercom code. One-two-three-four. No asterisk or anything. She won't have a problem.

Esther: But Nawi, are you sure the other tenants wouldn't mind?

Nawi: You're right! I can't guarantee that. And besides, there's not a single Ethiopian in Kensington.

Jason: She'll be the first, then.

Nawi: And who will she talk to?

Jason: She speaks English.

Nawi: Well... then... I have no problem with it personally. But not every neighbor is as progressive as me.

Esther: We're not renting yet, and she's not going to live here. Nawi, I'll come later with the house committee payments, and we can chat a bit, gossip...

Nawi: I'd love to see you, Mrs. Rosenberg. (turns to leave)

Jason: Take the soup with you.

Nawi: No need! (exits)

Jason: He's nice.

Esther: Yes.

Jason: Just not hungry.

Esther: Jason, I ask you to call that lovely girl from earlier and tell her the apartment is no longer available.

Jason: But it is available.

Esther: Listen, you can't just... put Ethiopians in this neighborhood.

Jason: I'm not "putting" anyone anywhere. They come on their own.

Esther: You don't understand where they come from.

Jason: I understand perfectly well. She comes from Hackney.

Esther: No, she comes from the Ethiopian neighborhood in Hackney.

Jason: And?

Esther: And it's nothing like our neighborhood.

Jason: So they need to stay in lockdown for the rest of their lives?

Esther: Of course not. But she's not accustomed to the people here.

Jason: If we got used to Nawi, she'll be fine.

Esther: Honey, it won't work.

Jason: Is that it, mom? No entry for "schwartzes"?

Esther: No one talks like that anymore.

Jason: That's exactly what you're saying.

Esther: Letting an Ethiopian family live here is irresponsible.

Jason: Why?

Esther: Because if they live here, the neighbors will drive them crazy.

And they'll drive the neighbors crazy. It'll be like living in a war zone.

While you're off partying in Berlin, I'll be the one cleaning up after you.

How long do you think I have left in this world?

Jason: I don't know, mom.

Esther: A year? A month?

Jason: You look like you've got more than a month.

Esther: A couple of weeks?

Jason: Should I call an ambulance?

Esther: I ask you to call that girl and find another tenant. Is that clear,

Yosa'le? Or do I need to start the speech all over again?

Jason: It's understood.

Esther picks up the photo of Goldi and hands it to Jason.

Esther: And Jason, if you really want to make me happy... call Goldi.

Jason: Don't show me that! I'll have nightmares.

Esther: Goodnight, dear.

Scene 2

Stage-right is Diana's house. Beyoncé is playing in the background.

Diana, wearing a nightgown, is dancing in front of an invisible mirror.

Center stage is Jason's house. He picks up Goldi's photo and his phone.

He dials a number, then throws the photo on the floor. Diana's phone rings. She picks up.

Diana: Hello?

Jason: Diana?

Diana: Hi Jason!

Jason: Is this a good time?

Diana: Listen, Jason, I don't know how to tell you this, but I checked—
and we're a community, not a people!

Jason: Uh, yeah, so about the apartment... I just wanted to let you
know...

Diana: Is there a problem?

Jason: No, no! Everything's fine. Actually, we could meet at a café to
sign the contract if you'd like.

Diana: And... your mom?

Jason: Mom's not coming. She doesn't go out with me anymore.

Diana: Are you sure?

Jason: She definitely doesn't go out with me. Do you prefer to meet at my apartment?

Diana: Café sounds better...

Jason: Yeah, so... where?

Diana: Wherever you say.

Jason: Do you know the bar near the university?

Diana: Cappuccino?

Jason: Yeah, they probably have coffee too... I'll see you there tomorrow at nine?

Diana: Sounds good.

They hang up.

Jason (singing to himself): I'm dating an Ethiopian...

Scene 3

At the café. Diana is there, looking beautiful in a red dress. Jason enters, late.

Jason: I'm so sorry. I'm never late, but today was a disaster. You wouldn't believe it. Total chaos... I mean, one of my darkest days. Not literally dark, just... you know, bad.

Diana: Dark in a good sense.

Jason: Exactly.

Diana: What went so wrong?

Jason: Oh, you know, just the usual... arranging my flight, renewing my passport, getting an international driving license, mom nagging me... It's been a day. A very dark day. Not literally dark, just, you know... gray.

Diana: I'll get you something to drink. (exits)

Jason: An off-white day.

Jason's phone rings. He picks up.

Jason: Yes, mom! I'm out... Not alone! I'm with someone... No, not Goldi! No Goldi, no locks, no bears!

Diana returns with two glasses of wine. Jason doesn't see her.

Jason: Mom, I'm hanging up. The phone's gonna fry your brain! It's not healthy! Goodbye! Mom, I'm hanging up! (hangs up, turns around and sees Diana) Business calls... driving me nuts.

Diana hands Jason a glass of wine.

Jason: Thanks... Cheers! (they drink) Did you go over the contract?

Diana: Yeah, I agree to everything.

Jason: ...Everything?

Diana: Yep.

They shake hands.

Jason: Mazal tov.

Diana: Honestly, I didn't think you'd let me rent your apartment.

Jason: What do you take me for? I made sure you'd be the first Ethiopian representative in our neighborhood!

Diana: We should celebrate. Want to dance?

Music starts.

Jason: Ethiopian dances? I've always wanted to ask... How do you jump so high without spilling your drink?

Diana: I'll show you. Just pull your shoulder up like you're saying, "I don't wanna."

Jason (imitating her): I don't wanna...

Diana: Yeah. Now do it with the other shoulder. Just loosen up. "I don't wanna, I don't wanna."

Jason: (laughing) I don't wanna... but I kinda wanna.

Diana: Now add the lower body.

Jason: I'm a man—I can only do one thing at a time.

They laugh and dance a bit.

Jason: You're beautiful.

Diana: Thank you. Do you have a show tonight?

Jason: Want to see me perform? There's an open mic nearby, but it doesn't start for another hour.

Diana: We could just dance in the meantime.

Jason: You dance, I'll get drunk.

Diana: You go on stage drunk?

Jason: That way, I won't notice there's no audience.

Diana: Well, now you've got one audience member for tonight.

Scene 4

At the comedy club, Jason goes on stage.

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Jason Rosenberg!

Jason: Good evening! Anyone here ever dated an Ethiopian woman?

Yeah, me neither—until now. She's here in the audience somewhere...

You can't see her because, well, it's dark.

Jason: So, yeah, I don't know what to do. They've got these strange traditions, you know? I saw on TV that before they get married, they slaughter a goat. So I'm thinking, what do you do for a one-night stand?

Pluck a chicken?

Jason: Seriously, if I bring her home, it might be awkward. I've got a zebra-print rug in my bedroom. That's a bit weird, right? I mean, what if they know each other?

Jason: And the food, wow. Anyone here familiar with Ethiopian food?

Yeah, everyone knows injera bread. But they've got this yogurt too, and I swear, it's unlike anything I've ever had. It's called... *Ethiyoplait*. You have to chase the goat while milking it.

Jason: Thank you, everyone!

Jason finishes his stand-up routine, and Diana enters to the sound of romantic music.

Jason: How did I do?

Diana: You made me laugh.

Jason: I didn't see you there.

Diana: It was dark...

They kiss.

Scene 5

Jason's apartment. The doorbell rings.

Esther (offstage): Yosa'le!

Diana enters from the bedroom, wearing Jason's shirt and only one shoe. Her other shoe is on the sofa, and she grabs it.

Diana (whispering): Jason! Jason!

The doorbell keeps ringing.

Esther (offstage): Yosa'le!

Jason enters from the bedroom, wearing Diana's nightgown.

Jason: What?

Diana: Your mom's at the door.

The doorbell rings again.

Esther (offstage): Yosa'le!

Diana: Does she still come by to change your diaper?

Jason: No. Not since I was six. (beat) Okay, maybe seven. What are you going to do?

Diana: What am I going to do? It's your mom.

Jason: You think I know what to do? I'm wearing your nightgown!

Diana: Just tell her you already ate breakfast.

Jason: It won't work. She's like a security guard. She needs to patrol every two hours.

Esther (offstage): Yosa'le, will you open the door?

Diana: Will you open the door?

Jason: Do I have to?

Diana: She's your mother.

Jason: Diana, we Jews don't really respect our mothers the way you do. We're more... relaxed about it.

Diana: Relaxed? That's a big deal, Jason.

Jason (approaches the door, hesitates): Okay, let me think this through...

He stops and begins pantomiming an explanation to his invisible mother.

First, he begs for forgiveness, then acts out a dramatic scene of pleading, followed by miming CPR. Finally, he gives up, walks back to Diana.

Jason: I can't do it... Let's just stay quiet. Maybe she'll think we're not here.

Diana: Is this because of me?

Jason: Of course not.

Diana: Then why?

Jason: Because of her...

Esther (offstage): Yosa'le, the rugelach is getting cold!

Diana: She knows there's two of us in here, doesn't she?

Jason: No, no way. She's just guessing.

Diana: So tell her you already ate.

Jason: I tried that once. She made me eat again.

Diana: Should I hide in the other room?

Jason: Uh, would you mind? I'll just take the rugelach and tell her I'll see her later.

Diana (teasing): Do I have a choice?

Jason: I'm really sorry... Do you like rugelach?

Diana: Yeah, but I like my freedom more. (heads to the bedroom) And what's with the nightgown?

Jason: It's comfy! (mutters to himself) Where the hell does she find rugelach at 6 AM...

Jason opens the door, and Esther enters with a tray of breakfast.

Esther: Took you long enough!

Jason: I didn't hear you.

Esther: You slept well last night, didn't you?

Jason: Pretty much, yeah.

Esther: I see you had a nice time last night.

Jason: A little bit.

Esther: Can I say something?

Jason: If you must.

Esther: I must.

Jason: Then say it.

Esther: I'm happy.

Jason: I'm happy you're happy, mom. Thanks for the breakfast.

Esther: Have you canceled your flight yet?

Jason: What?

Esther: Goldi made you happy?

Jason: Who?

Esther: Goldi.

Jason: Goldi who?

Esther: Don't play dumb—introduce me already.

Jason: Mom, it's not Goldi.

Esther: Then who?

Jason: Someone.

Esther: Not Goldi?

Jason: Stop saying Goldi. It's not Goldi.

Esther: Well, don't I deserve to know who my son is seeing?

Jason: You'll meet her another time.

Esther: Go ahead, tell your lady friend to come out of the bedroom and greet me with a lovely *good morning*. You're not ashamed of your mother, are you?

Jason: Well...

Esther: What are you so worried about?

Jason: Let's just say not all her grandparents are from Krakow.

Esther: Well, not everyone's perfect.

Jason: No.

Esther: Is she German?

Jason: No.

Esther: I've heard there are some lovely Russian girls.

Jason: So they say.

Esther: Is she Russian?

Jason: No.

Esther: Italian?

Jason: No.

Esther: French?

Jason: No.

Esther: South African?

Jason: You're getting closer.

Esther: Israeli? Yosa'le, don't forget you're allergic to hummus.

Jason: I'm not allergic to hummus! I just ate soup my entire life, so new foods are a challenge. She's not Israeli.

Esther: Never mind. Are you in love?

Jason: I like her a lot.

Esther: Does she love you back?

Jason: How could anyone not love me?

Esther: That's what's important, Yosa'le. I need to know I'm giving you to someone who will love you almost as much as I do. Because she can't love you more than I do. What's her name?

Diana enters. Esther doesn't see her.

Jason: Uh... Diana.

Esther: Oh, I meet so many Dianas lately. I don't care for the name at all. Never mind, we'll give her a nickname. How about Dianushka, or DeeDee'le? She's not Irish, is she?

Diana: Good morning!

Esther: Good moooooor— (sees Diana, stunned) —ning.

Esther examines her from head to toe.

Jason: Yep, it's the same color all the way, mom.

Esther: She's not Irish.

Diana: How are you?

Jason (to Esther): Mom, Diana asked how you are.

Esther: Fine.

Diana: Long time no see.

Esther: Not that long...

Diana: Yeah...

Esther: And how are you?

Diana: Great. I'm starting my first day at university tomorrow.

Jason: Medical studies.

Esther: Well, I hope you'll get well soon. And when are you going back to Hackney?

Diana: I'm not going back.

Esther: Why not?

Diana: I found an apartment.

Esther: Wonderful. Where?

Diana: Here.

Jason: Uh, yeah, mom... Diana's going to live here while I'm gone.

Esther: ...Wonderful... so we'll be neighbors?

Diana: Wonderful. I'll just go back to Hackney to get organized and come back later today. (gives Jason a small kiss)

Esther: Oh no...

Diana (to Jason): I'll see you tonight. (gives him a bigger kiss)

Esther: Oy vey zmir...

Diana tries to kiss Jason again.

Jason: We'll kill her.

Diana gives him a huge kiss anyway.

Esther: Boje moye kohanna!!! (Yiddish for "God give me strength!")

Diana: Thanks for the rugelach!

Jason: Don't leave me alone with her!

Diana exits.

Jason: ...She likes rugelach.

Esther: Did you even check if she can pay?

Jason: It probably won't be 2500, but—

Esther: Then she can't rent the apartment.

Jason: We already closed the deal.

Esther: I didn't see any contract.

Jason: We shook hands.

Esther: A handshake isn't a contract. We're not in Africa!

Jason: Mom, sit down for a minute. I want to talk to you. I like her a lot.

And you'll be happy to hear that I'm even considering postponing my trip.

Esther: So where will you live?

Jason: What do you mean where? I'll live here. With her. We'll be your neighbors.

Esther (shocked): Wait... did you... have you already... (She makes a strange hand gesture)

Jason: Mom, I...

Esther: I have no interest in your private business. I just want to know if you're done with this... (makes the gesture again) ...thrill.

Jason: What thrill?

Esther: The thrill of... doing it... with... with a black woman.

Jason: You want to know how it was?!

Esther: No! Of course not.

Jason: I'll tell you!

Esther: No! We don't talk about these things.

Jason: Why not? Come on, I'll tell you how it was!

Esther: Leave me alone! I don't want to hear it!

Jason: Come on, I'll tell you!

Esther: Stop it!

Jason: Sparks! Fire! Smoke! My zebra rug burned to ashes!

Esther: Stop it, Jason! Come on, can't you see she's using you?

Jason: Using me?

Esther: She only slept with you so you'd let her rent the apartment.

Jason: She slept with me, and I slept with her, and it was wonderful!

Sparks! Fire! And what's this, mom? (imitates her hand gesture) Is this Jewish sex? Is that how you made me? What am I, a Rubik's cube?

Esther: Don't ruin your life over one mistake. You know, in our family, we don't make a big fuss over—

Jason: Love?

Esther: Exactly. What do you need her for? She's all skin and bones.

Jason: What bothers you more, her bones or her skin?

Esther: Jason! You've read the news, haven't you? Their culture is different. Their customs are different. Even their food is different!

Jason: Thank God for that. I still have krepalach stuck in my throat.

Esther: Their music, their holidays... Do you know, Yosa'le, even their grief is different from ours?

Jason: Looks like their grief is happier than our holidays.

Esther: Sweetheart, she's not alone. She's got a community. She's got brothers, a father, a mother...

Jason: Is that what bothers you? That one day you might have a black in-law?

Esther: And that doesn't matter to you? We, the royalty of Krakow Jews—

Jason: What royalty? We played football in the garage. I don't remember a castle.

Esther: Jason, why are you doing this to us?

Jason: Who's "us"?

Esther: Your father and me.

Jason: Maybe you didn't notice, but dad hasn't been around for years.

Esther: And he's turning in his grave right now, watching you throw everything away over one night of... unstoppable passion!

Jason: ...It wasn't exactly unstoppable. (imitates the hand gesture again)

Esther: Your father and I dreamed that you'd be a doctor.

Jason: I didn't even finish high school.

Esther: Or a lawyer. Or a scientist... Or at least a common scientist.

Jason: A common scientist? What, I'm supposed to rediscover electricity?

Esther: And we dreamed you'd get married to a nice Jewish girl and give us beautiful grandchildren. After everything we did for you, we never expected a lot of gratitude, but we also never expected betrayal.

Jason: Betrayal?

Esther: Yes, Jason. Betrayal.

Jason: What is this, a Shakespearean play? Am I plotting against the king? Betrayal?

Esther: Did it ever cross your mind what sort of grandchildren I'll have?

Jason: Zebras! Black and white zebras! You'll walk around the park and proudly show them off: "This is Jason's little zebra, and here's the older zebra!" You'll be the grandmother of zebras! And you'll be bald, just like Grandma!

Esther: Don't you dare disrespect your grandmother! While she was singing and dancing in the Warsaw Opera, *her* grandparents were herding goats in Africa. This won't happen, Jason. She will never be yours.

Jason: Who's going to stop it? You?

Esther: Me? The whole world will stop it. Your friends will think you've lost your mind.

Jason: I don't have any friends.

Esther: And you won't have any, either. Everyone will leave you.

Jason: Are you going to leave me, too?

Esther: Me? Oh, Yosa'le, I'll never leave you.

Jason: That's my problem in life.

Esther: You're breaking my heart.

Jason: Good, we'll call Diana. She studies medicine. Maybe she can do heart surgery on you.

Esther: Is that what you wish for me?

Jason: I wish you'd just let me live my life and make my own decisions for once.

Esther: You don't care about me? Whether I'm dead or alive? I didn't mind you becoming a joke-teller, but to turn *me* into a joke? Help! My son is drowning! (She storms out.)

Scene 6

At Jason's apartment. Jason is sitting on the couch, still packing his bags. Diana enters with a large bag and sets it down.

Diana: Hi...

Jason: Hi.

Diana: You okay?

Jason: I'm fine. You seem happy.

Diana: I was invited for an interview on Channel 4.

Jason: Really? Why?

Diana: For being the first Ethiopian student in the medical faculty at Imperial College.

Jason: Congrats! Do they know you're a student and not an organ donor?

Diana (laughing): I don't think anyone wants my organs.

Jason: I'll take a couple. When's the interview?

Diana: Tomorrow night.

Jason: Same time as my flight.

Diana: I'll send you the link. You can watch it on the plane. (pause)

What's wrong?

Jason: Nothing... Lately, only good things have been happening to me.

Diana: Like what?

Jason: Like... well... like you.

Diana: Really?

Jason: Yes. I think that... I think I love you.

Diana: Don't you think you're rushing it a bit?

Jason: Yeah, probably. The way I talk, I tried scheduling an appointment with a speech therapist. They sent me to an orthopedic doctor.

Diana: Jason...

Jason: I just... I'm flying out tomorrow. And I wanted to say it before I leave.

Diana: You're sweet. Don't be sad.

Jason: I've been thinking... What am I going to do out there, all alone, without my mother?

Diana: You'll be fine.

Jason: You don't want to come with me to Berlin? For good?

Diana: I can't. But you can stay.

Jason: No, I'm done with this country. You weren't here earlier... I had a lovely chat with "the neighbor."

Diana: She recovered from the shock?

Jason: It'll take a few days. Or a few years. But deep down, I'm sure she's thrilled you're moving in.

Diana: Thrilled?

Jason: Yeah, she went door to door while you were gone, telling every neighbor you're coming.

Diana: And how did they react?

Jason: Every single one of them called an ambulance.

Diana (laughing): I guess they're thrilled I'm moving in too.

Jason: Over the moon.

Diana: Did they call the police as well?

Jason: That's probably coming.

The doorbell rings.

Jason: I'm not opening. I don't even live here anymore.

Diana: It's my apartment now?

Jason: Yes.

Diana: Then I'll open.

Jason: Be careful, it's a rough neighborhood.

Diana opens the door. Esther enters, wearing a black mourning dress with a black veil and hat. Nawi enters behind her, dressed in a black suit and carrying his folder and a black umbrella.

Jason: Oh great, ISIS is here.

Nawi: It's not a laughing matter, Jason.

Jason: Mom, what happened? (pause) Did someone die?

Esther: Guess.

Jason: Well, today's not Dad's memorial, so...

Esther: If your dad were alive, he'd have died today. I'm dying.

Jason: You'd love being at your own funeral. Bossing everyone around, telling them what to do.

Esther: You leave me no choice.

Jason: And Nawi's your chauffeur for the funeral?

Nawi: This is a serious matter, Jason. It's not a... a...

Esther (to Diana): Listen, sweetheart, I want you to know that what we're going to say here isn't personal.

Jason: It's just about mosquitoes.

Esther: It's not about anyone.

Nawi: It's about culture.

Diana: I'm sure. Would you like a glass of water?

Esther: No, no. I'm fine.

Diana: Would you like to sit down? You look pale.

Jason: She's always pale. They had to put up a sign at her birth: "No flash photography."

Esther: Excuse me, but I already had a sedative today.

Nawi: She had a nervous breakdown.

Jason: So now you've come to give us a nervous breakdown, too?

Esther: Nawi, you can start now.

Nawi: Now?

Esther: If not now, when? Go on! Time is short.

Jason: You prepared a speech, Nawi?

Nawi: At your mother's request, we held a house committee meeting. Your mother mentioned that you want to rent the apartment to this young lady.

Jason: Correct.

Nawi: The other residents voiced their opinions on the matter.

Jason: And who chaired the meeting? Goebbels?

Nawi (to Esther): Goebbels? Which apartment is Goebbels? He hasn't paid his house committee fee!

Esther: We're not racists.

Jason: No, not at all! You just want to put an intercom at the entrance to London.

Nawi: We simply let the residents express their opinions democratically.

Jason: And did they hold a "democratic assembly" when you moved into this building?

Nawi: Of course! I was voted on by the house committee too.

Jason: And did they accept you?

Esther: Jason, we're not here to discuss Nawi's situation—

Jason: I want to know how Nawi got accepted into this building.

Nawi: Well, it wasn't simple. Your mother... she didn't really agree at first.

Jason: What? Who didn't agree?

Nawi: But your dad! May he rest in peace. He interviewed me with Mr. Spiegelman, the lawyer from the sixth floor. They asked me all sorts of questions.

Diana: What kind of questions?

Nawi: How much money I make, what my wife—may she rest in peace—did for a living...

Diana: Did they ask if you were smuggling drugs?

Nawi: No, no... They were mostly concerned with our socio-economic status. They were worried we'd lower the neighborhood's economic rating.

Jason: And now you want to know about Diana's socio-economic status?

Nawi: We just want to advise her.

Jason: She doesn't need your advice.

Esther: The advice is for her, not you.

Jason: Should I leave?

Esther: Just listen!

Jason: No, I don't want to listen.

Diana: I want to listen.

Jason: What do you want to hear?

Diana: Everything.

Jason: It won't be pleasant.

Diana: I don't care.

Jason: They want you out of here.

Esther: That's not true!

Nawi: No one said that!

Diana: I'm listening.

Nawi (pause): EVERYBODY CALM DOWN! I think it's proper that we hear from the young lady first.

Diana: What do you want to hear?

Nawi: Tell us a little about yourself.

Diana: I'm Diana... It's my first year as a medical student—

Nawi (impressed): Oh, she's—

Esther: It's not what you think. They help them. It's affirmative action.

Jason: Your son didn't finish high school.

Esther: You'll make it up.

Jason: I couldn't even finish traffic school.

Diana: Anyway, I'm studying at the university nearby. I'm going to live here because it's convenient. I was supposed to move in with my brother, but he doesn't want to leave Hackney. He says he doesn't want

to experience racism. I told him racism doesn't exist anymore and that I don't understand where he gets those ideas...

Nawi: Yes. Where does he get those ideas?

Diana: I understand I'm the first Ethiopian to rent an apartment in this neighborhood.

Esther: Yes.

Diana: But I hope I won't be the last.

Nawi: I just want to inform you about what happened during the house committee meeting.

Diana: I'm very much interested in hearing.

Nawi: I'll just mention that I'm an accountant.

Jason: Certified?

Nawi: Indeed.

Diana: Good for you.

Nawi: Which is why I'd like to start with the economic issue.

Diana: Go on.

Nawi: First, we must ask: Who rents the apartment?

Diana: I do.

Nawi: Wrong! The apartment is rented to you and to everyone who's watching you and wondering, "Can she rent an apartment in Kensington?" And if you can, others from your community will follow, right?

Diana: Possibly.

Nawi: They'll all want to leave their faraway neighborhoods and move here to live with us?

Diana: So?

Nawi: So, in no time, our property values will plummet, and Kensington will turn into a slum!

Jason (slow clap): How did no one think of that? You're a genius, Nawi. You've discovered how to lower housing prices nationwide! We just need to sprinkle Ethiopians everywhere. You should run for prime minister.

Nawi: You have to understand, if this neighborhood's real estate value drops, it could cause a nationwide collapse.

Jason: A worldwide economic tsunami—no, *tsuNawi*.

Nawi: And that would only increase the racism toward you.

Diana: I understand.

Nawi: That's why I strongly advise you not to rent this apartment, to protect your community. That's all I have to say.

Jason: Okay, I think we got it. This isn't a good time to invest in real estate in Kensington.

Nawi: Now, there are other tenants in this building that want to be heard, but they've decided to use my rhetorical skills. (Opens his folder)

Jason: With all due respect, if they're not here, we don't want to—

Diana: I want to hear it.

Nawi: Well, here we have Mr. Nelson's comment, from apartment nine on the third floor, who is, as we all know, an army general!

Tsfrira: The army is important.

Nawi: Of course. Mr. Nelson says: (Reads from the folder) "I have seen the new tenant and she seems lovely. I have absolutely no problem with—"

Esther: Nawi!

Nawi: Uhh... wait. This is about a different issue. It's here by mistake. It's about something completely different. Different-different. Completely different. Forget it.

Esther: Why are you reading it then? Why not do things properly?

Nawi: Now I'd like to read Mr. Taylor's response. Eighth floor, apartment 12, in the penthouse. Mr. Taylor would like to bring up the issue of security.

Jason: Security? Let's call the navy. They have special anti-Ethiopian missile defense systems.

Nawi: The young lady mentioned her brother.

Jason: She mentioned that he won't be living here.

Nawi: Will he not come visit?

Diana: Of course he will.

Nawi: And will he bring more friends to visit?

Diana: Possibly.

Nawi: Well then. Is it not possible that when they come to visit with their no-roof cars, they'll play loud music, dance on the hood of the car, drink alcohol, do drugs, and BEAT EACH OTHER TO DEATH?! (Pause, Diana takes the folder)

Diana: May I? (Diana reads a bit in the file, then gives it back to Nawi)

Diana: Is that everything that you think we are?

Jason: You two are insane.

Esther: Calm down.

Nawi: Look, Jason. This neighborhood is the elite of the elite. The crème de la crème. The high society of Great Britain.

Jason: Why? Who lives here? You, Nawi?

Esther: Nawi, there are other residents who wanted to be heard.

Nawi: Right.

Jason: Mom, if he doesn't shut up—

Esther: This is a democratic country.

Nawi: Who are you to tell me to shut up?

(Jason starts choking Nawi. Esther and Diana try to separate them, everybody's shouting, until—)

Esther: Diana! You'll do what I say—

Diana: NO!!! ...Simenish!

(The fighting and shouting stop, silence.)

Esther: What?

Diana: Simenish! That's my name. It's the name my mother gave me.

Simenish!

Esther: Darling, everything that was said here is for your own good, and for the good of your community.

Diana: Me and my community can take care of ourselves, thank you.

(Pause) ...Strange... I thought that it wouldn't bother me. That I've seen it all. Racism, hatred, discrimination... I thought that here, of all places, in this prestigious neighborhood, I'll find a different type of people. But now I realize that everywhere, everyone is the same. And suddenly... suddenly it bothers me. ... Suddenly it hurts... Do you understand? It hurts.

(Diana takes her bag and turns to leave.)

Jason: Diana...

Diana: Simenish!

Jason: Simenish... Don't go.

Diana: I need to think... (exits)

Scene 7

At the airport. Jason is on the phone. A big flight schedule monitor is projected on the back wall.

Jason (on the phone): Hi, Diana... You don't answer my messages, you don't return my calls... I just wanted to say that I know why I'm leaving now... All the things that people say about us in the world... when they say we're such and such and all of that... maybe they're right.

(Esther and Nawi enter, looking for Jason.)

Nawi: Where have you been?!

Esther: What time is the flight?

Jason: Why don't you ask the pilot? Do you want to talk to the pilot? Call the pilot! Here's the phone! Call him!

(Jason exits, and Esther exits after him. Nawi stays, standing in front of an invisible hotdog stand.)

Nawi: What's that? 17 pounds for a hotdog? No wonder the young generation is leaving... and leaving hungry too. (Points to the flight schedule monitor) Say, is that a TV? Can you do me a favor? Switch the channel.

Nawi: "What Would You Do" starts soon. I love this program.

(The TV station changes to Channel 4.)

TV Interviewer: On our next interview, the first Ethiopian medical student in the Imperial College will tell us about her attempts to find an apartment in London. We'll be back after a short commercial break.

(Esther returns.)

Esther: I can't find him again.

Nawi: Mrs. Rosenberg! Your Ethiopian girl is on the TV!

(A TV commercial is on, depicting a beautiful white female model advertising a beauty cream.)

TV Commercial: This broadcast is brought to you by: "WHITE." Enjoy a bright and spotless skin.

(The interview starts, projected on the big screen. Esther and Nawi stand and watch.)

Interviewer: Good evening! Can our society rise over the surging waves of racism that we often face? In our studio is Diana Wondusualem, a student starting her first year as a medical student in Imperial College.

Good evening, Diana!

Diana: Good evening, but my name is Simenish Diana Wondusualem.

Interviewer: And lately you've tried to rent an apartment near the university in Kensington?

Diana: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you experienced any racism there?

Diana: In every apartment I've been to, I've been greeted with a big smile, but they quickly informed me that the apartment isn't available and directed me to the next one. There isn't a single apartment left in the neighborhood that I haven't been to.

Interviewer: What did you do? Did you find an apartment after all?

Diana: Yes. In one apartment, I met a man named Jason. He let me rent his apartment.

Interviewer: That's nice. And the neighbors?

Diana: I met a woman named Esther. She dedicated her life to raising her son and helping others. Through her, I met the chairman of the house committee, Nawi. He's also experienced the challenges of immigration and integration in this country. I just hope that, over time, these challenges will fade, and we can all live together peacefully, as part of a better, more understanding society.

Interviewer: Thank you, Diana. Best of luck with your medical studies.

Diana: Thank you.

Interviewer: Now, on to a different topic. How many of us are willing to admit when we've made a mistake, and even ask for forgiveness? Likely very few...

(TV fades out)

Nawi: Eh, boring.

The sound of an airplane taking off is heard.

Esther: Jason? Jason!!!

(Esther waves goodbye to an invisible airplane.)

Scene 8

At the apartment. Esther and Nawi enter.

Esther: He didn't even say goodbye.

Nawi: Never mind. He will.

Esther: Nawi, my little boy is running around Germany all alone...

Nawi: It's okay, he's probably cold.

Esther: Nawi, leave me alone for a bit.

Nawi: Sure. If you need anything, you know where to find me. Third floor, apartment six, to the right of the elevator. (He exits.)

(Esther sits alone on the sofa. She holds the family photo and sings a Yiddish lullaby. Diana enters. When Esther sees Diana, she stops singing abruptly.)

Esther: ...He's not here.

Diana: I'm here.

Esther: You still want to rent this place?

Diana: Yes.

(Esther stands up and starts to leave, then stops and turns back.)

Esther: Thank you... for the kind words that you said about us on the TV.

Diana: What else could I say?

Esther: You could have told the truth.

Diana: I did.

Esther: ...I made soup this morning... Very tasty... Would you like me to bring you some? To eat something good?

Diana: I'd love it.

Esther: ...You want me to bring you soup?

Diana: Yes.

Esther: I'll get it for you. (Pause) ...You're very pretty.

Diana: Thank you.

(Esther exits to the kitchen. Jason enters.)

Diana: I thought you were flying to Berlin.

Jason: They wouldn't let me on the plane without mom.

(They hug. Esther enters with a pot.)

Esther: I'll just put it on the stove to warm it up, you'll see. It turned out great—(sees Jason)... What's that? Jason? You didn't fly? Come give your mom a hug!

Jason: Another hug?

(They hug.)

Esther: I'm going to warm up some soup for us!

Jason: Can I get something else? Something solid?

(Esther exits to the kitchen. Nawi enters.)

Nawi: Mrs. Rosenberg! You won't believe who just—(sees Jason and Diana)—Oh! Simenish! You're moving in?

Diana: Yes.

Nawi: I'll get you a simple code for the intercom. 1-2-3-4. No asterisk or nothing. Count on me.

Jason: Nawi, can you help mom in the kitchen?

Nawi: My entire family saw you talking about me on TV. I'm a celebrity now.

Jason: Nawi, can you help mom in the kitchen? Help her slice the soup?

Nawi: Help mom in the kitchen... I got you... Go on, I'm helping. Make your move. (Nawi exits to the kitchen.)

(Jason and Diana hug. Esther enters holding a tray with four soup bowls.

Nawi follows after her.)

Esther: Nawi, everything's ready. (She sees Jason and Diana hugging.)
Oh, you two look just like... vanilla chocolate! Take some soup. Nawi,
soup.

Nawi: Do I have to?

Esther: Yes! (To the audience) Anyone else want some soup? I made it
this morning, it's wonderful! Come join us for soup! Sit properly, Yosa'le.

(The four of them sit on the couch, holding up the soup bowls.)

Esther: Well, enjoy!

Nawi: God help us...