

YOM KIPPUR

A Fable for Non-Jews

An original screenplay

by

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SOME CHARACTERS SAY YAWM KEE-POOR, SOME SAY YUM KIPP-ER.

FADE IN:

SUPER: "DAY 5. THURSDAY, AFTER YOM KIPPUR."

INSIDE A THUNDERCLOUD - NIGHT

Inside churning blackness. Swooping through, down,

EXT. CONGREGATION BETH AVROM - SAME

down atop a domed traditional Orthodox Jewish synagogue.

THUNDER HAMMERS viciously through the angry cloud.

HAIL RATTLES relentlessly onto stained-glass windows.

CRIMSON LIGHTNING SIZZLES and animates stained-glass images of Abraham Sacrificing Isaac, blade descending.

Rain of biblical intensity bleeds red, then clear.

In Rigby, a wintry, blustery suburb of Rochester, N.Y. Where God is furious with someone tonight.

INT. CONGREGATION BETH AVROM SANCTUARY - SAME

Darkness, penetrated by a blood-red moon.

Hail and thunder, their threat inside merely veiled.

A THUMPING RHYTHM. Comes from somewhere. Near.

Within:

White and black skullcaps, stacked like a bar chart.

Empty pews. Half-hidden in one, a crumpled Nutrageous candy wrapper. In hymnal racks, dog-eared prayer books. PALE SOUND of chanted Hebrew prayers ascends from them.

Over the chant. THE THUMPING RHYTHM GROWS LOUDER.

Old threadbare carpet escorts us up to the contrasting new glowing ark that stores the Torah, on the bimah (stage). Atop the ark, a gyrating flame reflects off

the burnished handle of a covert stage-door, that

exits the sanctuary into a narrow hall...around a pitch-dark corner...along a connecting corridor lit by a fluttering nightlight near CREAKY FLOORS...to the

INT. HALLWAY - DEEP-RED DOOR

The door, adorned with splashy copper hinges, sports a lustrous, showy sign: "RABBI HERSCHEL GIDEON LETTER."

A PHANTOM CHANT, the Kol Nidrei, emanates from inside.

Spiritual and sacred--the slow chant collides with.  
Physical and profane--the THUMPING RHYTHM. OF SEX.

INT. RABBI LETTER'S STUDY - SAME

Light seeps under the door edging a dual silhouette.  
SEX STOPS.

VOICES, hard to hear, close, personal, intimate.

IVRAHIM

Why tempt the Devil here?  
In God's house? Marcia.  
(spits out mar-see-uh)

MARCIA

I work here. You asked me here.  
Don'tYouDareStopNow. Ivrahim.

IVRAHIM JOANS. Ebony against dark walls. Quite a man.

She nips him. Again. His toned body responds gracefully,  
in tempo with soft tinted lights dancing on a wall.

MARCIA BOKHAR intones receptive, active pleasure.

Sex stops chanting stops thunder stops. Dead silence.

FLOORS CREAK. They breathe hard. CREAKING FOOTSTEPS  
inch away, like a large man on tiptoe. She listens.

THUNDER RUMBLES. She blinks back fear. Inhales courage.  
They cling. They hold their breath. She listens.

MARCIA

Ssshhh. Dammit, get off.

FLOORS CREAK LOUDER. Under them as they shift.  
Silence... Silence... Silence... Okay now. She bolts up.

Long silky auburn hair sparkles like bottled lightning  
over uncompromising wooly eyebrows. She's about thirty.

She radiates life.  
She is luscious.  
She is. White.

IVRAHIM

Got a big problem. Now. Here.

MARCIA

Got a big everything, hon.  
A problem? Because?

She throws a wrap over herself, a tallit (prayer shawl).

IVRAHIM

Because--my dear Marcia.  
Because--my job here,  
this Orthodox synagogue...

On a chair. His navy-blue uniform, cap, baton. Pistol.

MARCIA

I'm not Orthodox. Because?

IVRAHIM

Because--you--  
Because--you're--a,  
a rabbi.

AS SCENE FADES TO BLACK...

MARCIA

And. Do not forget.  
A woman.

INT. DOWN THAT HALLWAY - SAME

CREAKING FOOTSTEPS keep pace with a hulking shadow.

SHADOW

(primitive male growl)

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - BROOKLYN, N.Y. - DAY

Twenty years before.

Jewish neighborhood. Neat, two-story, pre-WW II homes.  
Manicured lawns mask hard lives revealed by older cars.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL PS 99 - DAY

ABRASIVE SCHOOL BELL HOLDS TEN SECONDS on the dark-red  
front door. Till the frigging bell. Finally. STOPS.

Colorful schoolchildren flood in, squeeze into the  
doorway, enjoying "accidental" boy-girl contact.

INT. PS 99 - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Standing room. Students wave signs saying, "BLANDE."

Stage banner: "SIXTH GRADE SPELLING BEE FINALS."

On stage, ten chairs in a ragged row. Eight are empty.

A SMUG BOY in white shirt and tie stands at one chair.  
A GIRL, perhaps an art student, her red hair piled high,  
at another. Marcia. Well-developed for eleven. Knows it!

BLANDE

(over-confident)

S-Y. N-O. N-O. M-O. U-S.

CHEERS. --Fade fast. Into soft groans.

Blande sits, smirks, studies his Florsheim shoeshine.

SCHOOL TEACHER (OS)

Miss Bokhar? Synonymous?

MARCIA

(gutsy confident)

Synonymous. Takes a preposition.

Synonymous with, means same as.

S-Y. N-O. N-Y. M-O. U-S.

Teacher joyfully pumps Marcia's hand. VERY. QUIET.

Teacher sullenly lifts Blande's hand. LOUD CHEERS.

MARCIA peers into the assembly, holds on several eyes.  
Descends stage steps in measured paces, promenades up  
the aisle smile soldered on brazenly undoing her piled  
red hair. Some bold radicals reach up approvingly,

one, a prick copping a feel she instantly BACKSLAPS.

Her unblinking eyes bounce us through a hall down an  
ECHOING STAIRWELL out a HEAVY DOOR BANGING FIRMLY SHUT.

EXT. PS 99 - REAR EXIT TO SCHOOLYARD - SAME

MARCIA STEPS INTO HER OWN LIGHT for the first time,  
into brisk fall air, her hard breathing visible.

Surprise: A tear falls. Trickles... To her lips where  
her sweet young pink tongue savors its salty taste.

MARCIA

I spelled it right. Screw. Them.

She sees a basketball, shoots, misses, shoots, misses.  
Squares her shoulders. Alone. In that vast. Schoolyard.

EXT. BROOKLYN YESHIVA (HEBREW HIGH SCHOOL) - DAY

Seen across Ocean Parkway. Cross through traffic. To

a three-story building, white stone façade as clean as a fresh-scrubbed baby. Hebrew lettering, Israeli flag.

Students leave a littered walk and empty wire trash pail. BENT BLACK JANITOR enters, stabs trash with spiked pole.

INT. YESHIVA - CLASSROOM - SAME

Blurred object shoots upward. An arm. Waving. A hand. Marcia's hand. Agitated. She's fifteen now. Around her

sit twenty girls, also fifteen, at attention like soldiers, in matching uniforms.

MARCIA sits sideways, feet out, hand thrusting, long, copper-red hair topped by a colorful kippah (skullcap).

THE TEACHER, a bearded rabbi, sour, pimply, pasty.

RABBI TEACHER

Down. Enough.

He turns his back. Angry, she calmly. Centers. Her mind. Quietly assembles her backpack. Slips out a rear exit as

RABBI TEACHER

Bvakashah! Slicha gveret!

he turns, clunks toward her, spins her. His elbow, hidden by the doorway, anchors heavily on. Her breast.

INT./EXT. YESHIVA/SIDE EXIT TO DRIVEWAY - SAME

She gasps free. And out to. HER OWN LIGHT.

MARCIA

(to the world)

Geek rabbis think there's only one way to be a good Jew? I'll show them. Show you too, Daddy.

She looks around. Slips a hand into her now-ample bosom, pulls up her Star of David, kisses it, slides it back, hand lingering inert in her blouse, as. She thinks.

She decides. Slides the hand around to her back, unhooks her bra, wriggles out of it, stuffs it in her backpack. Squares her shoulders. SILENCE CUTS TO:

INT. BROOKLYN APARTMENT DINING ROOM - NEXT DAY

SHOUTING. Yiddish. English. A Tower Of Bedlam.  
Sun rims thick curtains in this airless dark apartment.

Mr. and Mrs. Bokhar, faceless in shadow. His fist shakes the heirloom table. Menorah jumps, bashes the table, THUDS to the floor. Windowlight barely defines Marcia,

who takes her mother's hand. Marcia's free hand smooths the crocheted tablecloth. She lifts the beautiful, heavy menorah, returns it lovingly to its place on the table.

MARCIA'S FATHER

Me you won't show nothing, you--

DOOR SLAMS. Mother's and daughter's hands clench.

INT. YESHIVA - HEAD RABBI'S OFFICE - LATER

RABBI SHOEMAKER, mister acne, backlit by a setting sun behind a crusty window over a radiator lousy with books and folders. Marcia sits stiffly with her mother.

Shoemaker forces a creased page at Marcia who smooths it like the tablecloth, scrawls her name. Her mother looks lost, signs, hugs herself, rocks. Such a sad day.

RABBI SHOEMAKER

(mutters a fast prayer)

A man should sign. --Gay schön.

EXT. YESHIVA - FRONT SIDEWALK - SAME

As purifying snow dusts Marcia and her mother. Marcia doffs her Yeshiva jacket, jams it in the trash. Then breaks down. Mama turns protective, produces a lovely Kleenex, kisses Marcia wetly, wipes Marcia's tears,

MARCIA'S MOTHER

Too young for makeup. One time,  
listen to Mama, klaineh shaineh.

smudges her mascara, pulls the jacket out of the trash, shakes it out, folds it, blows her own nose in Kleenex.

MARCIA'S MOTHER

Comes one day you could need it.

A stray cat approaches. Marcia shoos it. Tugs at the jacket. Mama hangs on tight as they giggle. Her Kleenex drops. As they leave. Black janitor spikes the Kleenex.

EXT. MIDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - ENTRANCE - NEXT MORNING

MARCIA. Her hair, set in a prim old-world bun, is at war with her in-your-face tight white sweater.

Toting a basketball, she strides inside past gawking students, bounces it, stops it audaciously at her left breast. In the resonant cathedral-like entry hall, she BOUNCES IT ONE TIME. TWO TIMES. THR--.

INT. MIDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Basketball game. Feet, dribbling. REFEREE WHISTLE.

SCOREBOARD: MIDWOOD 55 -- JEFFERSON 53 -- 00:08.

CROWD SOUND DREAMLIKE. Girl's teams, names on jackets. Midwood, racially mixed, Jefferson, all black.

MARCIA, SIXTEEN, on Midwood, shoulders Jefferson's ALISHEA (uh-LEE-shee-uh) KAMALI diving for a pass. WHISTLE. Alishea makes the foul shot. Marcia seethes.

REFEREE

Four seconds. One point.

Alishea glowers at Marcia adjusting her zigzag headband. Nose-to-nose now. Each. Almost. Imperceptibly. Smiles.

SCOREBOARD: MIDWOOD 55 -- JEFFERSON 54 -- 00:04.

WHISTLE. Jefferson ball. Alishea shoulder-butts Marcia, fakes her out, nabs a bounce-pass for a casual lay-up. CROWD SOUND REAL, melds into HARSH FINAL BUZZER.

Marcia is livid, veins pulsing, red face, red hair. SCOREBOARD: MIDWOOD 55 -- JEFFERSON 56 -- 00:00.

INT. MIDWOOD LOCKER ROOM HALLWAY - SOON

Marcia, hair wet and angry, taps Jefferson locker-room door, bites her lip. Wary girl opens. Marcia sidles past,

to a tense Alishea. Marcia forces on a toothpaste smile. They shake, Marcia all-thumbs in the hip black handshake.

Alishea has compassionate eyes. Where mischief resides.

ALISHEA

Girl? Like pizza?

(as Marcia nods yes)

Boys? Girl? Like boys?

Marcia nods Yes, eyes widening as it hits her: All the girls here are black. Her team captain barges in, shoots her a fierce thumb that says, Back where you belong!

Marcia stands firm with Alishea.

EXT./INT. GET-O PIZZA - NIGHT

Marcia, Alishea, half the Jefferson team, sashay from a minor blizzard into the steamy aroma of oregano and Bud. Oh the willing young men. Marcia steps into HER OWN LIGHT. Fluorescent now, it taints her with a hint of rawness.

The knot of mostly black boys parts like the Red Sea as Alishea wedges Marcia through to the Italian kitchen.

ALISHEA

Six slices. Make 'em--

MARCIA

--hot and spicy.

INT. MIDWOOD AUDITORIUM - DAY

Stage banner: "SENIOR DEBATE CLUB FINALS."

SENIOR BOY in blue blazer at one lectern. Glares at... Redheaded girl with her own fashion viewpoint. MARCIA.

SENIOR BOY

...God-given mind makes us human.

MARCIA

Holy half-truth. Our God-given mind. Plus. Soul. Together. Both. Make us human. Animals lack both. They're a-moral. Humans. Choose.

Teacher lifts Marcia's arm like a winning boxer's. CHEERS.

MARCIA

(cheerfully, to teacher)  
Except for Frum, this stray mutt  
Mama found? He does have a soul.

EXT. HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - QUADRANGLE - DAY

MARCIA, TWENTY-THREE, with a basketball, Yeshiva jacket over graduation gown. Curtained, portable stage. Drizzle.

YOUNG RABBI eyes her grimly as she speaks.

MARCIA

...God-given mind. Free to question  
Tradition. Or seek virtue there. To  
ask? Or acquiesce? Is our eternal  
struggle, fellow Reform rabbis.

APPLAUSE. STOPS. Young Rabbi waves, Behind the curtains.

YOUNG RABBI (OS)

You rebel against Traditional  
Judaism. Against Reform Judaism--

If looks could kill. She exits to the LIGHT OF APPROVAL.  
Licks salty succulent sweat anointing her philtrum.

INT. LOW-BUDGET REFORM TEMPLE - TWO YEARS LATER - DAY

MARCIA, TWENTY-FIVE, leads Shabbat service, her tallit  
slung over a chic, belted tunic. Informal congregation.

INT. DISCO - TWO YEARS LATER - NIGHT

MARCIA, TWENTY-SEVEN, dancing, in her prime, a "ten."

INT. WHITNEY MUSEUM, N.Y.C. - ONE YEAR LATER - DAY

MARCIA, TWENTY-EIGHT, studies a portrait by Alice Neel.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - TWO YEARS LATER - DAWN

MARCIA, THIRTY, bleary, folds a resumé into an envelope.  
She cradles a phone in her shoulder.

MARCIA

So if a Reform rabbi decides old  
ways are still better, can she?--

SUPER: "LAST WEEK."

MONTAGE - MARCIA ON INTERSTATE BUS - NIGHT TO DAWN

MARCIA (VO)

go forward?--by going backward?

-- Marcia is jostled. Books flop into the dark aisle as.  
-- The bus lurches around Port Authority Terminal.  
-- It leaves the surrounding human squalor.  
-- Speeds crazily through the murky Lincoln Tunnel.  
-- Rolls past inky fields and edgeless countryside.  
-- And comes to rest, at sunup, in a wintry Land-of-Oz.

Marcia, dressed for success, steps off into NEW LIGHT.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY

MARCIA HANDS CHECK to salesman, takes keys to white van.

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - THAT EVENING

MARCIA HANDS CHECK to realtor, takes keys to apartment.

SUPER: "DAY 5. THURSDAY, YOM KIPPUR."

INT. SANCTUARY - YOM KIPPUR SERVICE - DAY

Gray day. Full house. Well-dressed Orthodox worshippers. Men and women are separated by a mechitza (partition).

GOD (VO)

On this day shall atonement be made  
to cleanse you from all your sins.

SUPER: "THE SIN WHICH WE HAVE COMMITTED BEFORE THEE  
WITH WANTON LOOKS."

SIN ONE - BRAD BERGMAN,

seventeen, tall, all-American good looks. Dark eyebrows framing Presley-eyes that wander to the women's section.

Brad's mind also wanders, as he remembers himself

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

with Lori Michael, eighteen, taller, Gentile, slithering close with drinks. Brad, aroused, uneasy, backs away.

Her Satan-red lips, fiery-cobalt eyes fill his view, melt

BACK TO YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

SUPER: "THE SIN WHICH WE HAVE COMMITTED BEFORE THEE  
BY BRIBERY."

SIN TWO - ISADORE SZASZ,

an old thirty. Thin hair, reading-glasses, weak chin. Costly suit fits badly over bony shoulders. Blue rubber hand-exerciser on his lap. Pretty woman, a young forty-five, at his side. He THUNKS his sunken chest ritually.

Szasz looks up. In the stained-glass, he sees an engineer's goldenrod sketch for a neighborhood become a 3-D wire-frame that animates into transparent buildings. Szasz remembers flashbulbs and