



FOR THIS MOMENT ALONE

BY MARCIA KASH



DRAMATISTS
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World Premiere by Theatre Aquarius (Ron Ulrich, Artistic Director)
in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, in 2011.

In memory of my father, Murray Kash.

*For Ron, my rock, my better half,
who taught me the meaning of acceptance.*

*For all those who had the courage, foresight andchutzpah
to leave Europe before it was too late and brave the perils
of the New World so that we could live another day.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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FOR THIS MOMENT ALONE was given its world premiere by Theatre Aquarius (Ron Ulrich, Artistic Director), in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, opening on March 25, 2011. It was directed by Sarah Stanley; the set and costume designs were by Patrick Clark; the lighting design was by Renee Brode; and the stage manager was Rob Middleton.

SOL Neil Foster
RUTH Tal Gottfried
AUNT BERTHA Tanja Jacobs
FREDDIE Ian Lake
JOE Hardee Lineham
NORMAN Aaron Stern
ADA Maria Vaccratsis

CHARACTERS

JOE a Jewish man, in his early 50s

AUNT BERTHA, Joe's sister, in her 50s

NORMAN, Joe's son, 19

RUTHIE, Joe's niece (by marriage.) 24

SOL, Joe's neighbour and friend, a round man in his 50s

ADA, Sol's wife, also in her 50s

YOUNG MAN/FREDDIE, a haunted young man of 25

SETTING

The action takes place primarily in the home of the Aarons family in Toronto, Canada, late in 1948. The Aarons' home is a two-bedroom apartment, which is above their neighbourhood grocery store. There is not a lot of money here.

NOTE

The title is a Talmudic reference to the hope that exists for humanity. When a person does a good deed that (s)he doesn't need to do, God looks down and says, "For this moment alone it was worth creating the world."

N.B. The characters in the play are actually speaking in their mother tongue, Yiddish. So whilst there is a Jewish cadence in much of the dialogue, the playwright expressly wishes that no "accents" be used in the performing of this play.

It was impossible to live after the Holocaust except by silencing memory.

—*Aharon Appelfeld*

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering.

—*Viktor Frankl*
Man's Search for Meaning

FOR THIS MOMENT ALONE

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The setting: 1948, Toronto, Canada. The kitchen/living room area of an apartment above a store. There is a stove, a kitchen table and chairs, kitchen counter and cupboards in one area. In the living room area there is an armchair, small table, cabinet, wireless and a pull-out sofa where the boys sleep. Upstage right and downstage right are doors leading to Joe's bedroom and the bedroom shared by Bertha and Ruth. Upstage center is the front door that goes down to the store and downstage left is a hallway leading to the WC. A sense of clutter and of too many people living in too small a space.

The lights come up to the sound of Norman practicing his violin offstage. He plays brilliantly. Joe, a sad-looking man in his early fifties, wearing a worn pea-jacket and hat, is pacing up and down. His friend and neighbour, Sol, a stocky, salt-of-the-earth type of the same age, is sitting at the kitchen table. There are cakes and pies, covered with tea towels, on the counter, the table and the stove.

JOE. What's taking so long? We've got to be on that streetcar by quarter after or we're going to be late.

SOL. Relax, Joe, there's lots of time.

JOE. Relax, he says! You know what it is to get this family out of the house on time? You have to start yesterday.

SOL. Calm down, already. You're so excited.

JOE. I just don't want that poor kid to get off the train and for nobody to be there.

SOL. You'll be there, you'll be there.

JOE. It's enough he had to travel such a journey by himself — but to arrive and find nobody's there to meet him —

SOL. You'll meet him. You'll meet him.

JOE. Sol, please, if you're going to talk like a parrot, do me a favour, go back downstairs and squawk at your wife. I don't need it.

SOL. Just trying to help.

JOE. What'll help is if Ruth and Bertha get their behinds out here so we can get going. *(Aunt Bertha enters from the bedroom she shares with Ruth, carrying a pair of men's shoes. She is a round, soft, motherly woman in her mid-fifties.)*

AUNT BERTHA. My behind is out already, you can take it off your list. *(She goes toward Joe's bedroom, where Norman is playing his violin.)*

JOE. So where are you going now? Put on your coat.

AUNT BERTHA. I'm just giving Norman his shoes. I polished them special.

JOE. Polished Norman's — ? Who's going to care if his shoes are polished?

AUNT BERTHA. I'll care.

JOE. *(Yelling.)* Norman!

AUNT BERTHA. And don't shout so much, Joe, the cake will fall! *(She disappears into the bedroom.)*

JOE. The cake will fall. D'you know how much time we spend tiptoeing around this apartment in case the cakes should fall? *(Yelling.)* Ruth!

RUTH. *(Off.)* I'm fixing my hair.

JOE. Oy, again with the hair.

SOL. So Bertha's baked one of her coffeecakes, has she?

JOE. One? She made about six! We're up to our knees in them. *(Sol peeks under a tea towel and licks his lips.)*

SOL. I could die from that smell. Mmm-mmm. Just gimme me a fork — I could eat the whole thing right now.

JOE. You know my sister. Any excuse to bake. When she's happy she bakes cakes. When she's unhappy she bakes bread. When she's

not happy and she's not unhappy — she bakes cookies, rugellah, macaroons ...

SOL. So what are you complaining? Sounds good to me.

JOE. Let's hope Freddie brings an appetite.

SOL. If he doesn't, me and Ada will be happy to help out. (*Joe takes the tea towel from Sol and re-covers the cake.*)

SOL. So listen, Joe, how you going to recognize Freddie?

JOE. Ruth says she'll know him.

SOL. After all this time?

JOE. (*Shrugs.*) She sent him a picture of herself so he should recognize her. That was something. A whole day just to take one picture. The hair had to be done and redone — and then she had to try on five different outfits — (*Yelling to the others.*) Come on already! We're late. Norman, quit the practising, it's time! (*Looking at his watch.*) Now she's worried she won't look as good as in the picture!

SOL. It's like she's getting ready for a husband, not a brother.

JOE. Ach, I don't mind. Let her be happy for a change. It's been so long since I saw her smile, I thought she forgot how.

SOL. Yeah, she used to have such a joy in her. From the day Hannah brought her here. Such a joy.

JOE. It's good to see some of that back.

SOL. What a blessing she's been, Joe. 'Specially for Hannah — 'specially at the end ... More like a daughter than a niece. The daughter you never had, eh?

JOE. She was good for my boys, too. Taught them a thing or two about girls, that's for sure.

SOL. (*Chuckles.*) They didn't know what to do with her at first. Remember? Michael walked around her like she was from outer space!

JOE. Didn't bother her one bit! She was used to brothers. Six of them, she had.

SOL. Well, she wrapped your boys around her little finger in no time!

JOE. Norman, in particular. Even when he's practicing his fiddle she can get him to take notice of her.

SOL. Something you never managed to do —

JOE. Nor anybody else on planet Earth. (*Yelling.*) Enough already, Norman!

SOL. She was a blessing, Joe. And now here's another. Freddie.

Just when you thought there was no hope.

JOE. No hope is no life, Sol ... there has to be hope. Anyway, in case Ruth doesn't recognize him — (*Joe holds up a handmade sign that reads "FREDDIE GOLDFARB."*)

SOL. Good idea. It's a big place, that Union Station.

JOE. — The Jewish Agency told us to do it.

SOL. It's not going to be easy for him, coming here after all what he's been through.

JOE. First thing is to learn the language.

SOL. He'll learn. Just like the rest of us.

JOE. What are you talking? You been here twenty-two years, you still don't speak English.

SOL. Oh, and who are you? Winston Churchill? We manage.

JOE. If we didn't live in this neighbourhood, we'd speak better.

SOL. Where else we gonna live? Anyway, thanks God, we got our kids to translate for us ...

JOE. Freddie's gonna have to learn quicker and better than us, that's all I know ...

SOL. Imagine what he must have seen, Joe. What he's lived through...? I can't bear to think about it. A twenty-five-year-old kid with — all that ...

JOE. God forbid. (*Aunt Bertha comes bustling out of the bedroom with a clothes brush.*) So, Bertha? Are we ready?

AUNT BERTHA. Nearly ready, nearly ready! (*She disappears into the other bedroom.*)

JOE. Dear God! (*Yelling toward the bedroom door.*) Norman! That's it. Time is UP! (*The violin stops.*)

SOL. It's a miracle he found you.

JOE. That Red Cross, I'm telling you. All those agencies —

SOL. Miracle workers.

JOE. When that letter arrived — it was like she found a new heart ... I just feel bad it took so long to get him here.

SOL. Don't feel bad. It was a lot to do.

JOE. But we did it.

SOL. If only your Hannah was here to see this ... (*Joe shakes his head, still trying to believe it. A beat.*) Did I tell you? We finally heard from Ada's sister and brother-in-law.

JOE. No, when?

SOL. Just yesterday.

JOE. Well, mazel tov, Sol! That's wonderful news!

SOL. Not so wonderful. They wouldn't let them in.

JOE. What reason?

SOL. Married couples aren't priority.

JOE. I don't believe it! So what are they going to do?

SOL. China took them.

JOE. China?

SOL. Can you believe it? Canada says no, China says yes. Now they've got to learn to eat knishes with chopsticks!

JOE. (*Derisively.*) "Married couples aren't priority" —

SOL. We're going to fight it, though.

JOE. The government never objected when we wanted to enlist. They didn't have any problem letting Jewish men die for this country.

SOL. Well, at least things are changing now, Joe.

JOE. Because now they need labour, that's why. Don't ever think it's because they want us here.

SOL. At least they don't put up those signs no more — "No dogs, no Jews."

JOE. They don't need signs, Sol. (*Norman enters. A brilliant violinist with the temperament to match. He is dressed up in a suit and bow tie.*)

NORMAN. I'm ready, Pa.

JOE. Good. One down, two to go. What are they doing in there? By the time they come out I'll be an old man!

NORMAN. I think Aunt Bertha's fixing Ruth's hair.

JOE. Still with the hair? She's spent three days on that hair. Go tell her if she doesn't like the hair she can put on a hat! We've got to go!

NORMAN. (*Wincing at the thought.*) Pa! Please. Tell her yourself.

JOE. (*To Sol.*) Listen to this? I got one son gives me ulcers because he had to go be a freedom fighter in Palestine, the other stays here and gives me lip. (*Yelling.*) Bertha! Ruth!

AUNT BERTHA. (*Rushing in with a handkerchief.*) Alright already. Keep your voice down.

JOE. We're leaving in one minute.

AUNT BERTHA. (*Handing Norman the handkerchief.*) Here Normie, here's your handkerchief. Oy, you look so handsome.

RUTH. (*Off.*) Aunt Bertha, come quickly. I think there's a spot on this dress.

AUNT BERTHA. I'm coming. (*She races out again.*)

JOE. (*Flopping into a chair.*) Oh boy!

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Set in Toronto in 1948, a Jewish family, struggling to recover from the horrors of the war in Europe, finally has cause to rejoice. Ruth is about to be reunited with the only surviving member of her immediate family — her brother Freddie. But when she goes to Union Station to meet him she is faced with the most devastating shock of her young life — the brother she was expecting turns out to be a stranger, an imposter holding her brother's papers. Suddenly she and the family with whom she lives are forced into a situation that is almost impossible to resolve. If they abandon this displaced person they condemn him to more pain, more suffering and risk the possibility of his being deported. For Joe, the patriarch of the family, there is no choice: to save one life is to save the world. He takes this enigmatic "Freddie" into his home and calls upon himself and the other members of the household to embark on finding some way of living with their suspicions, their anger and their guilt. At what point do you stop helping your fellow man? Should there be a line between "blood" and "water"? Where does responsibility end? The play follows the paths of Ruthie, Joe and the rest of the family as they come to terms with what it means to accept, to forgive and to survive.

"A storyteller with a story to tell who won't let you down ... an evening of rich, traditional theatre."
—**View Magazine**

"There's plenty of prickly thought in Kash's engaging drama ... There's also warmth and wisdom that lessens the anguish of the play's frightening conclusion. Let's just say there are revelations that make you understand the length a human being will go to survive the impossible."
—**The Hamilton Spectator**

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