

A Scene from the Interloper

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INT. FRESHMAN CLASSROOM - DAY

All classrooms, including this one, have been decorated in celebration of the traditional Purim *spiel*, a day of satire, masquerade and hijinks in celebration of the historic defeat of the reviled Persian official Haman, who attempted a Jewish purge, and failed.

The boys have been up all night, in giddy preparation. Charles enters the room with difficulty. The lights are off. The desks have been bunched on either side of the room, as if the Red Sea has parted. There's a rudimentary drawing of Charles on the blackboard, reading glasses and all.

Construction paper in every color of the rainbow has been taped to the walls and even over the windows, and the boys have crafted collages, giddy amalgams of hiphop culture, the NFL, the NBA, pop music, basically everything they couldn't get away with normally.

They've built towers of textbooks on top of the desks and draped a sheet across the divide. Some of them are hanging out inside this cave, dressed like rabbis. Others are wearing football jerseys, lurking on the other side of the room, behind the sheet.

A football sails across the room, almost hits Charles in the head. The ceiling light blinks on and off. Chaos.

ZEVI

Mis-ter Viner. So whaddya think of our Purim *spiel*?

CHARLES

I'm truly impressed, Greenfeld. I mean that sincerely.

ZEVI

Really?

CHARLES

Really. You stay up all night to pull this off?

ZEVI

Pretty much. I mean, I didn't, but some of these guys did. Gotta get the beauty rest, know what I mean, Mr. Viner?

CHARLES

I do, Zevi, I do. And who are you supposed to be?

ZEVI

Sort of my version of Mordecai, Mr. Viner. You know who that is?

CHARLES

(waffles, grins, bluffs)

Of course, Greenfeld. But why don't you refresh my memory?

ZEVI

C'mon, Mr. Viner. I want to hear it from you.

CHARLES

What is this, a test? That's not your role, Greenfeld. I'm the teacher here. Educate me on Mordecai.

ZEVI

I don't know, Mr. Viner. I'm getting the feeling you have no idea who Mordecai is.

CHARLES

Oh, please.

ZEVI

This is like that time you confused the *haroset* with the *maror* when we were talking about Passover. Good thing that didn't happen at a *Seder*. You would have choked.

CHARLES

I didn't--

The door opens. Rabbi Liberman pokes his head in, edges his way into the room.

LIBERMAN

Shalom aleichem, Mr. Viner.

CHARLES
Aleichem shalom, Rabbi Liberman.

LIBERMAN
Enjoying the *purim spiel*?

CHARLES
I am. Talk about vivid imaginations. I think the *bochurim* have outdone themselves today.

LIBERMAN
I have to agree. I wouldn't mind a more literal interpretation of the holiday, though. I can only tolerate so much rap music and major league sports.
(smiles)
But it's only one day, after all. They earned it.

Greenfeld stands there, just watching, a little out of character. Horowitz sidles up to join him. Speechless, for once.

CHARLES
If I may get a little exegetical--

LIBERMAN
By all means!

CHARLES
With all due respect, it strikes me that, despite all the trappings of festivity, this is at its core another tale of vengeance, an eye-for-an-eye holiday. Sometimes I wish there were more lessons of forgiveness in the Torah. Leave the vengeance to the Christians. We're the chosen people!

LIBERMAN
(toothy smile)
I respect your perspective.
(pause)
Sometimes, vengeance is necessary.

CHARLES
Have I ever told you my father is a Holocaust survivor?

LIBERMAN
No. Did his parents live?

CHARLES
They did. And they emigrated to New York City.

LIBERMAN

Beautiful story.

CHARLES

After going through all of that, my father decided that he couldn't continue holding onto the hatred. So he dedicated the remainder of his life to forgiveness.

LIBERMAN

He's a bigger man than I.

CHARLES

He--

Just then, the door opens. It's AKIVA BENSAID, a preternaturally poised freshman who looks about 18, tall, with thick black hair and a complexion dark enough to get teased for being black, five o'clock shadow, charcoal eyes, perpetual smirk. He struts into the room, inserts himself between Charles and Liberman.

AKIVA

Mr. Viner. Have you ever worn the *tefillin*?

CHARLES

(pause)

Of course. It's been awhile. Why?

AKIVA

Today is your lucky day. Do you have a little time for us?

CHARLES

Um, well, I do have to prepare for--

AKIVA

It's Purim, Mr. Viner. Today is a day for Jewishness. No time for English. English doesn't matter.

CHARLES

English always matters, Bensaïd.

AKIVA

Not today, Mr. Viner. Don't worry, we'll help you. It's important.

Liberman hovers nearby, watching Charles. Charles senses his gaze.

CHARLES

Okay, Bensaïd, that's fine. Remind me how to do this.

By this time, a surging cluster of boys has gathered in the doorway. Miraculously, the curious horde has not aroused the attention of Jaffe. Or maybe he's simply not around.

Charles submits to the ritual regardless. Despite the Purim hoopla, the room temporarily goes silent as the assembled *minyan* of boys look on, intent on bearing proper witness.

AKIVA

Are you right-handed?

Charles nods.

Bensaid wraps the leather straps of the *arm tefillah* around his left arm, while another boy brings the *head tefillah* to his forehead. They murmur passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy reverentially, have him repeat them.

AKIVA

*Boruch Ato Ado-noy Elo-hay-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Kidshonu
B'mitz-vo-sov V'tzi-vonu L'ho-niach Tefillin.*

CHARLES

*Boruch Ato Ado-noy Elo-hay-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Kidshonu
B'mitz-vo-sov V'tzi-vonu L'ho-niach Tefillin.*

AKIVA

*Boruch Ato Ado-noy Elo-hay-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Kidshonu
B'mitz-vo-sov V'Tzi-vonu Al Mitz-vas Tefillin.*

CHARLES

*Boruch Ato Ado-noy Elo-hay-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Kidshonu
B'mitz-vo-sov V'Tzi-vonu Al Mitz-vas Tefillin.*

The boys say the *Shema* and have Charles repeat it.

AKIVA

Very good, Mr. Viner.

CHARLES

Thank you.

AKIVA

Now you can have a righteous day.

He disappears, and just as suddenly as they flooded into the room, the boys disperse. Charles looks up. Liberman is gone, too. Greenfeld and Horowitz, however, are still standing there.

DAVID

Nice going, Mr. Viner.

CHARLES

Thanks, Horowitz.

DAVID

What are you doing for Purim?

CHARLES

I don't know yet.

DAVID

It's today!

CHARLES

I'm sure I'll do something. Gotta wait and see what kind of invites I get. Too bad I didn't hear from any of you boys. I would have showed up!

DAVID

You serious?

CHARLES

Totally, Horowitz. Next time.

DAVID

I'm gonna hold you to that, Mr. Viner.

Charles makes his way out of the classroom.