

A Jew in the House of Terror

by Mel Waldman

Characters:

Abraham Solomon (AS)

Isaac Solomon (IS)

Scene 1

An Unknown Detention Center

After being kept in solitary confinement without sleep for weeks and being interrogated for twelve hours yesterday, Isaac Solomon, an Israeli citizen, hears the footsteps of the guards in the distance. He cannot see beyond his little tomb where he has existed since captivity. His isolation cell has no window, no soul. Dark, dank, and cold, it is a chilling stone coffin: a tiny underground hole a few square feet in Hell.

And now the guards return, perhaps to torture him again or to give him a slice of hard bread or a cup of contaminated water to keep him alive but sick. They unlock the door and enter, pushing an elderly prisoner into the cell. It is Abraham Solomon, Isaac's father and Holocaust survivor. Without speaking one word, the guards retreat, lock the door and rush off.

Isaac hears their heavy footsteps for a few seconds until finally he hears nothing at all. His tormentors have vanished. And he turns to his emaciated father who looks like a ghostly skeleton, hunched over, weary and very old. Tears cascade down Isaac's cheeks.

AS: Where are we?

IS: I don't know. They took me in the middle of the night, drugged and blindfolded me, and transported me to this black hole of Hell. Until now, it was my Hell alone. Now Dad, it is ours.

AS: Incomprehensible! I survived the Holocaust and yet... these strangers came for me too and... I can't recall... Are they neo-Nazis? Has Hitler returned? Why are we here?

IS: They think I'm a terrorist.

AS: Absurd!

IS: Yes, I'm innocent!

AS: Of course, you are, Isaac.

IS: But why did they arrest you? Unless...

AS: I survived the Holocaust! I came out of Auschwitz alive! I will survive this atrocity too.

IS: But if they harm you, Dad... to get information from me that does not exist... well, I couldn't bear it. I'd lie to keep you alive! I'd confess to anything!

AS: No, you won't, son. You're innocent! You will speak the truth whether they believe you or not. And if it is my time to go... I will die with honor. And so will you, Isaac!

(Abraham grabs Isaac's hands and speaks with much emotion and pride.)

AS: We are Jews!

Standing against a cold wall nearest the door, Father and son embrace. Isaac puts his head on Abraham's shoulder. There is a long silence. Suddenly, Isaac breaks away from Abraham and speaks to the suffocating Void that encloses him.

IS: Where is my G-d? Where is Hashem?

Scene 2

Isaac watches and listens as his father gesticulates, grimaces, and grunts, drifting off to another time and place, returning to Auschwitz, reliving the Holocaust. Abraham speaks poignantly of anguish, trauma, and devastating loss.

AS: Do you see it, Isaac?

IS: What, Father?

AS: The entrance to Auschwitz.

IS: No.

AS: Close your eyes and you will see it clearly. But even now, with my heavy eyes, I see the gates. Above those hideous gates I read: *Arbeit Macht Frei*.

IS: *Work Makes You Free*.

AS: You remember what I told you?

IS: Of course.

AS: When I passed through those gates, I entered Hell.

IS: But you survived. Hashem watched over you. Protected you.

AS: Yes, I lived. But my father, mother, and sister died there. Hashem did not protect my family. I do not understand... Still, I pray to Him. Many times I lost hope. My faith was shattered and I stopped believing in Him. My soul was broken too.

Even today, I smell the foul odors of that small town reeking of death and evil-burnt flesh, human debris, and the toxic dust/smoke of the dead. I remember... Zyklon B, a poison gas, filled the gas chambers when Zyklon B pellets fell to the underground floors, causing mass murders within the soulless walls, painted blue by the lethal gas.

And inside the crematoria, hundreds of bodies were burned at once. In one day, eight thousand bodies could be burned. I remember... the skyline of Auschwitz at night painted red by the ever flowing fires of the crematoria. I remember... bodies buried in mass graves and bodies burned outside because the crematoria were full. And other bodies were piled in rows for future burial or burning. And still, others were destroyed in quicklime pits, reduced to toxic dust. I remember too much... witnessed too much... things I never should have seen. I worked as...

IS: *Sonderkommando.*

AS: Yes, Isaac, I was a member of one of these special teams of prisoner workers. We removed the corpses from the gas chambers and fed them into the ovens of the crematoria. Sometimes we burned bodies outside when the crematoria were full. Yes son, I did the work of the devil!

IS: But you were forced!

AS: Yes, the SS surrounded and watched us. Under their guard, we performed disgusting acts offensive to the human soul. Eventually, most of us were sent to the gas chambers. We witnessed these atrocities and we were destined to die too. Yet I am a survivor of the *Sonderkommando*. I do not understand... why G-d wanted me to live. I cannot comprehend... It is His will!

IS: It is Hashem's will, Father! It is!

(Abraham recites the Shema, the central prayer of Judaism.)

AS: *Hear O Israel, YHVH is our G-d, YHVH is One.*

Scene 3

The guards have taken Isaac Solomon to a tiny yard at the detention center. He is standing in the middle of the yard, without shoes or a winter coat. Wearing only a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, he is shivering and shaking. It is after midnight on a cold December night. Prison floodlights illuminate the yard. A light snow is starting to fall.

IS: Thank you, Hashem for protecting my father from the cold, ferocious winter's night. He is old and fragile and would not survive. The guards ignored him when they took me away. Acted as if he did not exist. But his presence gives me strength. You sent him to me, I believe now not for them to weaken me but to remind me that I too could survive.

Yesterday, I was chained to a chair for twelve hours straight. The chains around my feet and stomach seemed to strangle me. I thought I was dying, choking to death. I begged for a lawyer and food. Yet I was denied these basic rights. I was denied *habeas corpus*!

They interrogated me until I passed out. My body was weak and my soul seemed broken, ripped apart. But you sent Abraham Solomon, my beloved father, to me. Thank you, Hashem! You feed my shattered soul!

Hear O Israel, YHVH is our G-d, YHVH is One

Scene 4

Back in his isolation cell, Isaac sits shriveled up on a cold, metal cot. Nearby, Abraham Solomon stands over him.

AS: Hashem is watching over you and so am I. But I must leave now.

IS: Where are you going?

AS: I am returning to Israel. And I will wait there for you.

IS: But will they let you leave?

AS: They have no choice. In seconds, I will be back in Jerusalem, praying at the Wailing Wall for your safe return.

IS: I do not understand... Don't leave, Father! Don't leave!

AS: Look inside your heart and always, you will find me there. Isaac, I came here, only for a short time, to give you strength and to remind you who you are.

IS: Who am I?

AS: You are Isaac Solomon, a Jew, my son and a child of Hashem! And for sure, you are not a terrorist! Never!

Abraham Solomon walks to the door, opens it, and looks back at his son.

AS: In the distance, I see a snow-covered Auschwitz in the winter of despair. Yet beyond this evil place, I see a land of freedom and hope. Goodbye, son! See you back home in Israel!

Abraham walks through the door and vanishes. Isaac stands up, walks to the center of his isolation cell and speaks to Hashem.

IS: I remember now. I'm in Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center. I've been here for a very long time accused of being a terrorist but stripped of all my rights to defend myself.

Yesterday, I dreamed of my father, a Holocaust survivor, who lives in Israel. Today, he visited me in this dark place and fed me light and soul. Tomorrow... Perhaps, tomorrow I will see him again in Israel.

My name is Isaac Solomon. I am a Jew, son of Abraham Solomon and child of Hashem. Once more, I am a man of faith. I believe. And tomorrow, whenever it comes, I will be in Israel again, praying to Hashem, and listening to my father recite the Shema. Yes, tomorrow, whenever it comes...

Curtain

Postscript

After 9/11, five Israeli detainees were secretly abused and tortured in Brooklyn's Metropolitan Detention Center, subjected to sleep deprivation, stress positions, hypothermia, and other interrogation techniques. The five Israelis, as well as 79 Muslim prisoners, were suspected of having ties to terrorism.

After two months, the Israelis were found innocent and were subsequently deported. Other innocent prisoners were kept there for over a year, deprived of their rights of *habeas corpus* and due process.