

ARI stands alone in darkness. *Ashrei prayer song.*  
During the music portion, enter LUTHER and  
NORA.

ARI

*Ashrei yoshvei veitekha, ode yehalelukha selah*  
*Ashrei ha'am shekakhah lo, ashrei ha'am she'Adonai elohav*  
*Tehilah le'david*  
*Aromimkha elohai hamelekh, v'ahvarkha shimkha le-olam va'ed*  
*B'khol yom avarkheka, v'ahalelah shimkha le-olam va'ed*

The Akedah.

LUTHER/NORA

The Binding of Isaac.

ARI

The story of a man who once bartered with HaShem, the Holy Father, to save thousands of strangers, at one time raising not a single objection at the command to slaughter his only son.

LUTHER

We see a juxtaposition in this, a contradiction that plants seeds of doubt in the faith.

NORA

Do we question and reason, or act and obey?

ARI

The God who reasons cannot command, for are His words truly commanded if they are not absolute? Are they not, rather, suggestions to be discussed between man and HaShem, just as the Rabbis interpret the Torah?

NORA

He reasons even as a man reasoneth one with another face to face.

Beat. LUTHER and ARI look at her.

NORA

Doctrine and Covenants, Section 50. Mormon book.

ARI

But art- art is ex nihilo, from nothing. Art does not possess a form capable of deliberation or dictation, it simply is. The feelings of the artist are his law, and so I am, ruled by no deity but by the coursing torrents of inspiration itself. Art isn't even from me, it's- it channels through me, like a conduit for the universe. The most valuable quality of human nature is to diverge, to change, to go his own way when faced with an array of paths- forge his own.

NORA

And the nature of art is to make no path, leave nothing for others to follow.

LUTHER

The artist only knows the step he takes. He forgets what comes before and marvels at what comes after.

NORA

Only to forget again.

ARI

And then there's a painting.

The front room of a two-bedroom apartment in LA.

It's half art-studio, half sitting space, half whatever-we-need-it-to-be. The heart of a home.

There's a pathetic kitchen full of cups; paint water cups or drinking water cups, no one knows. Brushes

and palettes and plates and silverware all mingle together in the sink. The walls and floor are covered in drooping, splattered tarps. Canvases, frames, and portfolio holders lean against the walls. There are

three easels, two with half-paintings, shoved into this space, along with a futon and a small television.

The doors to the bedrooms are labeled "NORA" (in a pop-art style, the door covered in destination postcards) and "Dream Team!" respectively.

A Wednesday night.

Enter ARI with purpose, NORA following behind.

She shuts the door, watching as ARI, still in a department store uniform, marches to the art half of the room and tacks up a falling corner of some hanging butcher paper.

ARI

I love your mind.

ARI grabs a piece of charcoal and begins sketching aggressively. An explosion, a light, surrounded by darkness.

NORA

What'd I say?

ARI doesn't seem to have heard her, possessed by his drawing. NORA watches. What is this supposed to be, exactly?

I love your fucking mind.

ARI

ARI slams his hand against the wall and turns to NORA.

Look! You see it?

ARI

Absolutely.

NORA

(exasperated) You're killing me. Look, look, it's like you were saying, it's-

ARI

ARI takes NORA by the hand, pulling her the short distance to the wall. His hand guides hers over the bold lines.

Visceral.

NORA

Yeah. Yeah! I want- I want textures with this, like- like this gritty, expressive-

ARI

Jagged?

NORA

Yes! It's sharp but it's joy, it's joy so big it's explosive, it's- it's caustic, it *hurts*, you know?

ARI

I think I do.

NORA

It's happy but it's broken. Happy because it's broken and now- now everyone can see it.

ARI

Mhmm.

NORA

ARI has begun assembling a palette of yellows and reds. He has a small brush in his mouth (red) and a

big brush in hand (yellow), painting the drawing on the wall with big strokes. NORA goes to the kitchen and checks the fridge. Finding nothing of interest, she opens the cabinet and pours herself some white wine. Enter LUTHER with a portfolio bag, a backpack, and a laptop bag.

LUTHER

Y'all're home early.

NORA

Ari was "sick."

LUTHER rolls his eyes and kisses NORA on the cheek in greeting. He puts his bags down just inside the Boys' door. He shrugs off his jacket.

LUTHER

(sarcasm) Nora, you feeling okay, got a little something?

NORA

Healthy as a horse.

LUTHER tosses the jacket into the bedroom and shuts the door.

LUTHER

That's good to hear, since we live with someone so often afflicted. (beat) Hey.

ARI jolts, streaking paint across the wall.

ARI

Damn it-

He whirls on LUTHER, still wielding the paintbrush.

ARI

One more time, Luther, I told you, you sneak up on me one more fucking time-

LUTHER

I can't walk into my own house?

ARI chases LUTHER with the paintbrush, over stools, around easels, over the futon, behind the TV.

ARI  
You come in here while I'm working, you're in *my* house.

LUTHER  
But you're *not* working-

ARI  
Work that matters!

NORA sips her wine. LUTHER trips on a tarp, and  
ARI crashes into him, trying to paint his face.  
LUTHER wrestles his arm, barely keeping ARI's  
paintbrush away.

ARI  
I'm gonna ruin you.

LUTHER  
Like I ruined your mom?

ARI  
(shocked laugh) What- don't talk about my mom!

LUTHER uses the opportunity to flip their  
positions, pinning ARI- and his paintbrush -to the  
ground.

LUTHER  
What was that about it being your house?

ARI  
Shut up.

They grin at each other, a little too long. Too  
comfortable. Tension. ARI clears his throat.  
LUTHER gets up, avoiding his eyes.

ARI  
Sorry.

LUTHER  
Yeah- no, yeah, I get it.

NORA  
You made a mess.

LUTHER

It's always a mess, I'm shocked you notice a difference.

NORA

*Brr.* What's for dinner?

LUTHER begins fussing in the kitchen. ARI troubleshoots how to fix his sketch.

LUTHER

Dishes.

NORA

Chinese?

ARI

Yes.

LUTHER

Are you paying for that?

NORA

I can afford Chinese.

ARI

*Yes.*

LUTHER

Really?

NORA

What's that supposed to mean?

LUTHER

You've got the wine out, he's using the Windsor & Newtons-

NORA

Let's just have a nice night, okay?

LUTHER

It's Wednesday, Nora, you're drinking on a Wednesday-

NORA

Are you gonna call the police?

LUTHER

How much have you had?

NORA

–I don't have to- excuse me? Am I a child? Who died and made you president?

LUTHER

Barack Obama.

NORA

One glass.

LUTHER

One.

ARI

One glass!

LUTHER

...Okay. And you're not gonna be "sick" tomorrow.

NORA

I haven't missed a single day of work! God, you're such a control freak-

LUTHER

Last I checked, name-calling was for children.

NORA

Will you get off my case for five minutes?

LUTHER

I'm worried about you.

NORA

Well, stop being worried and start being my friend. (beat) ...What do you want?

ARI

Sweet and sour chicken, please.

NORA

Luther? (pause) Lu, baby, what do you want?

LUTHER

We still have the, uh. The lasagna.

ARI

I ate that!

NORA  
Beef and broccoli it is. And I'll be having the ham fried rice, anything else?

ARI  
Eggrolls?

NORA  
No, you never eat all of them.

ARI  
Lu will split with me.

LUTHER  
Yeah...

NORA  
Okay! I know it's a Wednesday...

LUTHER  
And you have work tomorrow...

NORA  
Ah, ah, but I do not, for I have been given mandatory vacation time.

LUTHER  
What, why?

NORA  
Manager's cutting my hours 'cause I did too much overtime last month. If I'm getting screwed anyway, I may as well get screwed up, so what are we doing?

ARI  
We could play-

LUTHER  
Absolutely not.

ARI  
What?

LUTHER  
I have school tomorrow, and work, and-

ARI  
It'd be fun.



NORA

That's the problem.

LUTHER

We are not playing strip-painting on a Wednesday night, it's not even- it's not even seven.

NORA

Aw, you scared?

LUTHER

Scared of live figure-drawing with a hangover? Yes.

NORA

No, you're still upset about last time.

LUTHER

I don't know what you're talking about.

NORA

No?

LUTHER

We're not talking about this.

NORA

Oh, we're talking about it.

LUTHER

You're drunk.

NORA

I've literally had half a glass of wine.

LUTHER

Sure.

NORA

Every time I say something you don't like, it's like you think I'm this irresponsible alcoholic or something!

LUTHER

I never said you were an alcoholic.

NORA

You don't have to!

LUTHER  
You're not supposed to drink on those pills, Nora.

ARI  
...He's right.

NORA  
I know that. I'm not.

ARI  
You guys.

LUTHER  
Nora...

NORA  
I feel fine, I tapered off them, it's fine-

ARI  
Guys.

LUTHER  
You're self-medicating! Bipolar doesn't just go away/

NORA  
How would you know?/

LUTHER  
/It's not a cold!

NORA  
/You're not a doctor!

ARI  
What are we doing tonight?

LUTHER  
...Fuck it. Strip painting.

ARI  
Are you sure?

LUTHER  
Yeah. Whatever.

NORA

Good. Well, maybe you'll loosen up, it'd be good for you. You never relax, you know, it's not healthy.

LUTHER

Mhmm.

ARI stands alone in darkness. *Ashrei*. Enter NORA and LUTHER.

ARI

*Gadol Adonai u'mehulal me'od, v'ligdulato ein kheiker  
Dor l'dor yishabakh ma'asekha, u'gevurotekha yagidu  
Hadar kevod hodekha, v'divreif niflotekha asikha  
Ve'ezuz norotekha yomeiru, u'gedulatekha asaprena*

The HaShem who commands cannot be reasoned with. Our God is a jealous God; there shall be no idols set before Him in the hearts of His people.

NORA

He destroys those who fail to obey, as the Nephites of Moroni's day.

LUTHER

His word is absolute and true and unchanging. It needs no subtraction, reduction, or addition.

NORA

My works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease. (Beat) ...Moses 1:4. Pearl of Great Price.

ARI

But if HaShem can reason...if HaShem can change His mind, and all He speaks is truth, cannot the truth, then, change, if HaShem can? He brought about all this change in the world, made it from nothing into something into something else, so isn't it natural that He change, too, at His will and pleasure?

NORA

Yes.

ARI

If truth is subject to interpretation, as the Torah, is there any truth at all?

LUTHER

Art is from nothing.

NORA

The world is Heavenly Father's art, though, so if the world is from nothing, wouldn't that mean Heavenly Father is...also?

ARI

It's an Orobouros situation. Art only exists, unaware of its origin or its destiny. There is no tomorrow, only now, the ever-present and immutable now. Yesterday is hardly a memory, yesterday- yesterday isn't real.

NORA

Everyday I wake up and I'm- it doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

LUTHER

Monday, Tuesday/

ARI

/First day, last day, one eternal night, time is an illusion. Stars burst before my eyes and I'm painting and I'm painting and when it's done I want to kill myself. Paint with my own blood, see what universes may be revealed there. My unappeasable yearning for the unattainable, the indescribable/

NORA

/It's hatred, it's unforgiving, it's ruthless, it eats and eats and then there's nothing/

ARI

/And I'm starving again. Because there's nothing now, it doesn't matter if there's more coming or if there was plenty two minutes ago, it's *now* and I'm cannibalizing myself again.

LUTHER

God.

ARI

It's happening again.