

Scene 4

(JONATHAN is once again playing dreidel and singing.)

BOY

...I made it out of clay
and when it's dry and ready
Then dreidel I shall play.

(JUDAH enters. He is carrying an extra sword, a smaller one.)

JUDAH

Don't you get tired of that song?

JONATHAN

A little. By the end of Hanukah.

(JUDAH slides the sword towards JONATHAN.)

JUDAH

Here.

JONATHAN

What's this for?

JUDAH

You said it was your tradition to give out presents on this holiday of yours.

JONATHAN

Hanukah.

JUDAH

Yes, that one. Well, this is for you.

JONATHAN

For me. Really?

JUDAH

Yes.

JONATHAN

Cool! I've never held a sword before.

JUDAH

Never?

JONATHAN

Not a real one. It's beautiful.

JUDAH

It is not beautiful. It is a weapon. It is necessary.

JONATHAN

Will you teach me how to use it?

JUDAH

You remind me of my own son. His name is Jonathan, too.

JONATHAN

Really?

JUDAH

Yes. He was excited when he held his first sword too. So was I. Before I saw my first battle. That is your first lesson. The sword is just a tool. It is not beautiful. It is not ugly. It just is, and if it is well made, and you use it correctly, it can save your life.

JONATHAN

Okay

JUDAH

Remember that.

JONATHAN

I will.

JUDAH

Be careful how you hold it. Look at my hand. You see how I grip mine. Try to use that same hold.

(JONATHAN tries. JUDAH places his fingers correctly.)

Keep the sword at this angle, point up. Don't let it drag down towards the ground.

JONATHAN

It's heavy.

JUDAH

Mine is much heavier. Do you want to try to hold mine?

(JONATHAN hoists JUDAH's sword, experimentally.)

JONATHAN

It *is* heavy. You make it look so light.

(JONATHAN gives the sword back.)

JUDAH

I have been doing this for a long time. Too long. Now, look at my stance. Do you see how I am standing? See if you can stand like that.

(JONATHAN tries the stance.)

Watch you back foot. Look at me. Keep your knees bent. It's important to keep balanced at all times.

(JONATHAN adjusts.)

Now this is how we take a step forward. Copy me as I move. You move your front foot, then your back, keeping the same position. Go on, start.

(JONATHAN begins going forward, in position.)

Keep your sword up. You can use your other hand for balance.

JONATHAN

It's hard.

JUDAH

Yes, it is. What happened to your father?

JONATHAN

My father?

JUDAH

Sword up. Keep moving. You can turn around and come back the other way, if you like.

(JONATHAN follows his instructions.)

JUDAH

Was he killed in battle?

JONATHAN

No. I mean, I hope not.

JUDAH

Sword up. Your feet should stay in the same position as you move. Keep the same position between them. Imagine that there is a long slab of wood you can't step on.

(JONATHAN follows his instructions.)

You hope not? Is he missing, your father?

JONATHAN

He's missing here. He's missing Hanukah. And...

(JONATHAN stops moving.)

JUDAH

Okay, relax, you can take a break. And what?

(JONATHAN rests, sword still in hand.)

JONATHAN

I haven't heard from him. He usually sends a letter every week, and then he calls, or emails—they're sort of modern letters, but they travel fast. And the telephone—well, I just haven't heard from him, that's all. I can't imagine why he wouldn't at least wish me a Happy Hanukah, unless...

JUDAH

Unless?

JONATHAN

I don't know.

JUDAH

What sort of war is your father in?

JONATHAN

It's complicated.

JUDAH

Yes, war is.

JONATHAN

But when you went to war, you knew you were doing the right thing.

JUDAH

You never know you're doing the right thing. You hope.

JONATHAN

Who have you been fighting?

JUDAH

The Seleucids.

JONATHAN

Seleucids?

JUDAH

Yes.

JONATHAN

I've never heard of them.

JUDAH

Truly? Whom did you think we fought?

JONATHAN

I don't know. The bad guys. Who are the Seleucids?

JUDAH

They are one of the most powerful empires in the world. Far more powerful than the Jews.

JONATHAN

Really?

JUDAH

I suppose I should take comfort from the fact that you've never heard of them.

JONATHAN

Anyway, those...Seleucids, they're pretty bad, right?

JUDAH

They have not been good to us. They took over our Temple, and without the Temple, there is no Judaism.

JONATHAN

Of course there is.

JUDAH

What do you mean?

JONATHAN

Never mind. Nothing.

JUDAH

We fought them because we knew that without the Temple, Judaism could not survive.

JONATHAN

Oh.

JUDAH

And we won. And Judaism has survived. Or so you tell me.

JONATHAN

Yes, it has.

JUDAH

That's good to hear. OK, breaks over, back to work. I'm going to teach you a few quick cuts you can do with that sword. Do you want to see?

JONATHAN

Yes. Sure.

JUDAH

Keep in mind that only one side of the blade is sharp, and the other dull. So any cuts you do will have to be with this side of the sword.

(JUDAH shows him.)

Do you understand?

JONATHAN

Yes.

JUDAH

I'm going to show you two ways to cut. We'll keep it at knee level. Aim for my knees.

JONATHAN

Now?

JUDAH

Not yet. Let me show you.

(JUDAH demonstrates.)

You can come at it this way, or this way, you see. But either way, the sharp side of the blade leads you.

JONATHAN

I see.

JUDAH

You can try it, if you like.

JONATHAN

Won't I hurt you?

JUDAH

I'll be able to defend myself. I'm going to be blocking you, as you cut.

(JONATHAN tries.)

And again, from the other side.

(JONATHAN cuts from the other side.)

Good, keep going.

(JONATHAN continues.)

JONATHAN

This is tiring.

JUDAH

There's no time to be tired in a battle. You get tired, and you die.

JONATHAN

Do you think that's what happened to my father? He got tired and he...

JUDAH

I've seen a lot of men appear who have gone missing, for a while. But I won't lie to you. I've seen others who haven't.

JONATHAN

My father is going to be OK.

JUDAH

Good.

JONATHAN

He is.

JUDAH

Good, then.

JONATHAN

He is!

(JONATHAN attacks with force.)

JUDAH

You're getting a little wild there. Control, you need control.

(JONATHAN cuts high, JUDAH parries.)

Careful! That's getting high.

(JUDAH disarms JONATHAN, who falls to the ground.)

JONATHAN

I think I'm done playing.

JUDAH

I never was playing. I just came from days on the battlefield. It wasn't a game.

JONATHAN

What was it like, on the battlefield?

JUDAH

I have spent so long on battlefields, I don't know if I can describe it anymore. I'm a general, so my job is to give my troops hope, even when I don't have any.

JONATHAN

But you won, didn't you?

JUDAH

Yes. It's a miracle. When we won, one of my soldiers said to me, only you had faith, General Maccabee. I didn't have the heart to tell him I had spent the last year walking out onto the battlefield sure that day would be my last. And then that day passed, and then the next. And then...victory. Who would have thought it? To be always on the verge of defeat, and yet never to be defeated.

JONATHAN

The other day, I thought, my father never wrote down the recipe for latkes.

JUDAH

Then you'll have to make him write it down, when he comes back.

JONATHAN

Yeah. I guess so.

JUDAH

What else did your father do with you, during this holiday of yours?

JONATHAN

Sing, mostly. He taught me all the songs. He has a really nice voice. Well, he doesn't always sing all the notes right, but I like to hear it. His voice is, like very deep and...I don't know, it's nice. He used to sing to me when I was going to sleep.

JUDAH

I sang to my son, Jonathan, as well. Not so well, but I sang.

JONATHAN

Every evening, during Hanukah, I got to choose which songs we would sing together.

JUDAH

Is that what all families do during Hanukah?

JONATHAN

Sort of. Probably not exactly like we do, but sort of. Some of the things we do are Jewish traditions, and some are just, like, traditions that my family made up. Like, I would always ask my Dad to sing "Who Can Retell," first. That was a kind of our own tradition. It's, you know, a fast song, so while we sang it I would spin around and dance in circles. My father would clap. It's kind of stupid, really.

JUDAH

Would you sing the song for me?

JONATHAN

Sure. I guess. Sure.

(JUDAH claps as JONATHAN sings.)

Who can retell the things that befell us,
Who can count them?
In every age, a hero or sage
Arose to our aid.

Hark!
In days of yore in Israel's ancient land
Brave Maccabees roamed the land—

(JUDAH stops clapping.)

JUDAH

Brave Maccabees? You mean us? You mean me?

JONATHAN

Oh. Oh. I shouldn't have sung that.

JUDAH

Why not?

JONATHAN

It's just—I don't think I should have sung that.

JUDAH

What is this holiday about? What is Hanukah?

JONATHAN

I'll see you tomorrow, OK?

(JONATHAN quickly gets up to leave.)

JUDAH

Wait!

JONATHAN

Goodbye!

(JONATHAN runs off. JUDAH notices that JONATHAN has left his sword. He picks it up. Blackout.)