

# Birthright

By Jeffrey L. Hollman

**WHY I LIKE IT: Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...**

*Jeffrey L. Hollman's Birthright is a devastating gorgeous play. As much as I'd like to switch those adjectives, I can't. Not with this one. It sucks you into its vortex like a natural disaster and doesn't spit you out (I was going to say "until it's good and ready," but there's no room for using a cliché about writing of this caliber, and it doesn't spit you out at all). It's almost too much to bear, but you have to read it to see a playwright who's willing to make his characters suffer and push the limits of our conscience at the same time. The story is set in the present but weighted in the past with characters speaking in a naturalistic yet poetic way that summons the spirits of former generations both in the world of the play and in the writing itself. Hollman has carved out his own barstool among the likes of Sophocles, Lorca, and Albee. Lest these stylistic references be misleading, note that the story doesn't take place in a bar, nor is it a social occasion, and no one is supposed to be drinking. At the heart of the tension in this family drama is a mother who is brutally entrenched in traditional beliefs as per the future of her son, and her daughter-in-law who fights against them for the future of hers. Then there's SAM, the longtime friend whose entrance into this domestic stew is a catalyst for what's to come. The contrasts run rampant: trust vs. betrayal, patriarchy vs. matriarchy, modern vs. traditional, and love vs. – honor?*

*An excerpt –*

(Knock on the door.)

JOE: There. Remember, I want to do this my way. Please stay in your room until I call for you.

MOTHER: Go. Let him in.

(Turns back to exit USL as JOE exits SR to door.)

SAM: (Offstage) Hey, Buddy!

JOE: (Offstage) Thanks for coming on such short notice, Sam.

SAM: (Offstage.) Great to see you.

JOE: (Offstage.) I know it's late.

SAM: (Entering.) Not to worry, Joe, not to worry. Was actually going to call you myself, and—wa-la!—you text me instead. Calls for a celebration. Haven't seen you in weeks.

(Begins to pull something from pocket.)

JOE: Months.

*Five Stars*

## BIRTHRIGHT

### THE CAST

JOE—30's—Dark slacks, white shirt, black tie tightly knotted  
MOTHER OF JOE—60's—A bulky woman in house dress  
SAM—30's—Hawaiian shirt of bright flowers and birds  
BETTINA—20's—White night gown  
NEWBORN INFANT--Wrapped and silent

TIME & PLACE: Apartment in Queens, New York. The Present.

THE SET: Chairs around a dining table on a bare stage

AT RISE: JOE at table. MOTHER enters USL wiping her hands on a towel. Her sleeves are rolled up.

JOE: Nothing yet?

MOTHER: A boy.

JOE: Oh. (Standing.) I didn't hear anything.

MOTHER: She made no sound. I'll give her that, she is strong.  
(Rolls down her sleeves.)

JOE: How is she?

MOTHER: The boy appears to be just as strong as she is.

JOE: Why didn't I hear him cry, Mother?

MOTHER: He was born asleep. You'll hear him soon enough.

JOE: Wait a minute. You didn't—

MOTHER: No. No. He is strong and will live a long life.

JOE: How is she?

MOTHER: You already asked that.

JOE: Yes. So. A boy.

MOTHER: Did you make the call?

JOE: I texted him.

MOTHER: Now we will have to wait.

JOE: No, Mother, I texted him. Same thing. Better.

(Takes out cell and looks at screen.)

He left fifteen minutes ago.

MOTHER: How do you know that? We have so much to—

JOE: (Holds up cell.)

Do you have your glasses? No? He left at 9:55.

MOTHER: Then he should be here.

(Knock on the door.)

JOE: There. Remember, I want to do this my way. Please stay in your room until I call for you.

MOTHER: Go. Let him in.

(Turns back to exit USL as JOE exits SR to door.)

SAM: (Offstage) Hey, Buddy!

JOE: (Offstage) Thanks for coming on such short notice, Sam.

SAM: (Offstage.) Great to see you.

JOE: (Offstage.) I know it's late.

SAM: (Entering.) Not to worry, Joe, not to worry. Was actually going to call you myself, and—wa-la!—you text me instead. Calls for a celebration. Haven't seen you in weeks.

(Begins to pull something from pocket.)

JOE: Months.

SAM: (Stops.) Months? Really?—wow—then let's not waste time—  
(Pulls bottle out of his coat.)

JOE: (Looks USL.)  
No, Sam, put that away. Not here.

SAM: No?

JOE: My mother doesn't mind if I drink away from home, it's just no here at home, so please—anyway I don't want anything to—

(MOTHER enters with a small tray holding two glasses.  
SAM whips the bottle behind his back.)

Mother, Sam and I were just—

SAM: How nice it is to see you again, Mrs.—

MOTHER: It has been a long time since we have seen you, Sam.  
(Places empty glasses on table.)

SAM: I was just saying the same—

MOTHER: I'm sure you two have a lot to catch up on.  
(Turns abruptly and exits USL.)

SAM: That was strange.

JOE: Well—

SAM: (Picks up glass and holds it in front of JOE.)  
What about these?

JOE: They're glasses.

SAM: It's like she knew I had this.  
(Pulls bottle out and holds it up.)  
I thought you said—

JOE: Maybe she's—I don't know.

SAM: But you said she wouldn't allow—(Laughs) Well, hell, call it progress. We are adults and you, my friend, should not have to say no to a drink in your own domicile.  
(Fills glasses. Hands glass to JOE who puts it down. SAM drinks.)

Ah. Remember where we had this before?

JOE: How's your family?

SAM: Uh—

JOE: Your wife. How is she?

SAM: Fine.

JOE: And your girl?

SAM: We're not starting that again, are we?

JOE: There was a time when we always asked after each other's families.

SAM: And am I glad we're past that. (Laughs.) We wasted more time asking the same shit over and over again.

JOE: No, it was nice, it was—

SAM: A giant pain in the ass, is what it was. Christ, it was like, I don't know, we'd be at a ballgame together and I'd get up to take a leak or go get a beer and when I got back you'd be asking all over again about my family.

JOE: No, it was never—

SAM: Then I'd have to ask you about your family.

JOE: No—

SAM: Then you'd ask me about my ancestors.

JOE: What? No—

SAM: On my mother's side.

JOE: Right.

SAM: Then we'd miss it when someone would hit a home run.

JOE: Come on—

SAM: OK, I'm exaggerating, but it sure felt like that. I was so glad when all that old world shit stopped. Are you reverting?

JOE: As a matter of—

SAM: But you weren't the worst. If Smoot and Pandy were with us, we'd never get past the opening salutations.

JOE: Smoot was always the most traditional.

SAM: Not any more. Hey, speaking of which...guess what they want to do?

JOE: I haven't seen either one in—

SAM: I got two words for you. Two words, one place.

JOE: I wouldn't—

SAM: Two words, one place, then three more words.

JOE: No, listen—

SAM: Two words: Las Vegas. One place: Las Vegas. Three more words: (Beat.) Las Vegas.

JOE: That's...no, that's two...what?.

SAM: Just fucking around with you, Buddy.

JOE: No kidding.

SAM: Smooty's been talking to a travel agent who can book a group into the Las Vegas Hyatt for nothing, practically peanuts. Pandy thinks we should go over the New Years weekend—it'll be crowded, he said, but, hell, that'll be part of the fun.

JOE: No, that weekend...no, I—

SAM: We can finally get out of New York. Remember talking about all the places in America we wanted to see. The names sounded like—shit, you were the one who knew

them all. I thought you were talking, like, magic—fucking incantations. I only knew New York...well, and Washington, but when you said words like Penobscot or Minnesota...or Las Ve-e-egas, you sounded so...I don't know. Remember standing there on the East River looking over at Manhattan and talking about stealing a car so we could drive all over seeing these places.

JOE: We were eleven.

SAM: My point exactly. We had all these plans, but we started working and we're still here, never been out of New York. Hell, I don't think Smoot's been out of Queens, but come on, man, this is a chance for all four of us—

JOE: No. I'll be too busy.

SAM: You're working New Years weekend?

JOE: No choice. Big deadline.

SAM: Everybody's off New Years.

JOE: No, I—

SAM: Come o-o-on. This is a chance to throw dice and look at big-titted girls at the same time.

(MOTHER enters. SAM attempt to hide his glass but bottle stays out.)

MOTHER: (She sniffs the bottle.)  
What is this?

SAM: (Placing his glass back on table.)  
Bourbon.

JOE: Remember, Mother, I told you I would need time to—

MOTHER: May I try some?

JOE: Mother? Are you—?

MOTHER: I want to taste it.

SAM: Absolutely. You'll find it very—  
(But MOTHER turns and leaves the room.)

What's going on?

JOE: I don't know—

SAM: Should I leave?

JOE: No. You can't—no, you can't leave.

(MOTHER returns with a glass and sits at the table.)

MOTHER: I'd like to taste your liquor.

SAM: Two fingers coming up.

MOTHER: Two fingers?

SAM: Allow me.

(SAM places his two fingers next to her glass and pours.)

MOTHER: Oh.

(She takes the smallest sip. A pause, then:)

I see.

SAM: If you take a little bigger sip, you'll see even more.

MOTHER: Or less. I just wanted to taste it.

SAM: Well, take one more little taste, and I'll propose a toast.

(Lifts his glass but MOTHER doesn't touch hers. Neither does JOE.)

MOTHER: What would you toast?

SAM: Well...at first I was going to say...

(Holds glass up to JOE.)

...old friends. But—please excuse me, Ma'am—seeing you having even a teensy little drink with us, well, I thought we should toast....America!

(He drinks.)

MOTHER: Why?

SAM: Everything is possible here.

MOTHER: And...that's good?

SAM: Yes! I'm sorry, but you are a perfect example.

JOE: Mother, Sam and I just got started—

MOTHER: How am I a perfect example, Sam?

SAM: For all the years I have known you, I thought you would be the one who would never change. But here you are having a drink with us.

MOTHER: Just a taste.

SAM: I'm sure. But...here you are.

MOTHER: Do you remember my husband?

SAM: Of course, God rest his soul.

MOTHER: Alcohol nearly caused his death.

JOE: Mother, that's ridiculous. Father never drank.

MOTHER: When he slaughtered a pig, he drank.

JOE: Pig? I remember chickens, but...and drinking? Father?

MOTHER: You were too young, way before we came here. When he had to kill a chicken, he never took a drink. Maybe because they were birds, I don't know, he never said. He killed several a week, some times one a day.

JOE: I remember chickens.

MOTHER: Once or twice a year, he slaughtered a pig. That was before he got the job at the foundry and made enough to buy meat.

SAM: Of course.

JOE: You never told me about this.

SAM: So he drank to strengthen himself before killing a pig?

MOTHER: I guess. (Beat.) He wouldn't tell me when he was going to slaughter one, but I always knew.

SAM: Because he drank.

MOTHER: No, I could hear the pig screaming from the house.

JOE: Mother, why are you—

SAM: No, no, I want to hear this. Did you ever see him kill a pig?

MOTHER: No. Well, almost. (Beat.) It frightened me something awful the first time I heard a pig dying. It sounded so like a person—a child or a woman—screaming out in the barn...well, at first. After that first one, it always just sounded like a pig. Usually, the squealing lasted a few seconds, maybe a minute, then stopped. It never lasted long. Then your father would stay out there the whole day cutting up the meat and smoking it.

SAM: So you never saw—

MOTHER: There was this one time—the time I'm telling you about—when the squealing went on and on and on. I knew something had to be wrong. I went out to the barn and found your father unconscious in the hay under the pig.

SAM: The pig was standing on him?

MOTHER: No. The pig was hanging upside down from a hook.

SAM: A hook? Wha--? I don't--

MOTHER: I guess if he hadn't been drinking, the pig wouldn't have been able to kick him. He had hauled the pig up to the rafters so he could slit the throat and bleed him but the animal thrashed around and knocked him on the head.

SAM: What did you do?

MOTHER: I killed it.

SAM: You slit the pig's throat?

MOTHER: No, I didn't know how to make the kind of cut that let a pig bleed out slowly. But I had to make it stop screaming, it was so loud. I strangled it.

SAM: With your hands?

MOTHER: With a piece of rope.

SAM: You were strong enough to do that?

MOTHER: I was young.

SAM: Yeah, but, Christ, I don't think I could do that. (To JOE.) Could you?

JOE: Thank you, Mother, I get it. May we be alone?

MOTHER: Of course. (Walks USL.)

SAM: Wait. I'd like to ask you—

(MOTHER exits.)

Why'd you send her off like that? That was fascinating.

JOE: (Shakes his head.) Listen, I need to—

SAM: She was putting her finger on one of the things wrong with us today. Call her back, Joe.

JOE: No.

SAM: We're so removed from so many important things in life.

JOE: I'd like to—

SAM: I never think about how a hamburger I am eating came from an animal that somebody killed. Do you?

JOE: No.

SAM: You remember eating animals that were around though, right? I mean before your father killed them?

JOE: Yes.

SAM: Remember my dog?

JOE: We didn't eat dogs.

SAM: He was so cute as a puppy, I could never imagine raising him all the way up to adult then killing him. That's my point. I mean, you knew these chickens as little chicks, then all of a sudden they were on your plate.

JOE: No, it wasn't—

SAM: Think of Babe, then.

JOE: Who?

SAM: That cute little pig in the movies.

JOE: Stop. I have to—

SAM: Your mother is really something. To be able to kill with your—

JOE: God, when you get going, you just can't stop. I have to talk to you about something else.

SAM: Right, right. Sorry. So, come on, take some time off New Years and come with us to Las Vegas. It'll be great, just us, no wives.

JOE: No. I cannot go. Now, listen to me.

SAM: God, you've completely lost any sense of fun. You work too hard, Joe. (Beat.) What?

JOE: I want to tell you why I asked you to come over.

SAM: I'm all ears.

JOE: Good. How's your daughter?  
(SAM says nothing.)

How is she?

SAM: What does this have to do with why you asked me to come over here?

JOE: How is she?

SAM: Sandy's fine. Now, what—?

JOE: That's right, you call her Sandy now.

SAM: Yes...so?

JOE: You used to call her Savossa.

SAM: Well, it wasn't us, as much as her friends at school, but—

JOE: That's a good name, Savossa.

SAM: So is Sandy.

JOE: Maybe. (Beat.) And how is your son?

SAM: What?  
(Stands, moves US, then turns back.)

OK, Joe, how's your son?

JOE: You know I don't have a son, Sam.

SAM: And neither do I...Joe. What the hell is going on here tonight? First, an urgent text to come over—you start acting like we all just got here from the old country—your mother tastes liquor—and now you—you know I don't have a son. What the—

JOE: I apologize. I shouldn't have been sarcastic.

SAM: You're right, Joe, that's not your style.

JOE: Right. That was just my anger coming through.

SAM: At what?

JOE: I think you know.

SAM: Don't play games with me, Joe.

JOE: I am not playing a game with you and I'm not being sarcastic. But I need you to do the work on this, Sam.

SAM: Work?

JOE: You know what I'm talking about.

SAM: Gee, Joe, do I need tools?

JOE: Who's being sarcastic now?

SAM: Sorry about the sarcasm, Joe, that's just my anger coming through.

JOE: And what are you angry about?

SAM: Listen to you: you want me to do the work on this. Who the hell are you to tell me—no, I'm not—no, I am not playing this game with—(Stares back. Pause.) OK.

JOE: Good.

SAM: How long have you known?

JOE: A month.

SAM: Really? I would have thought you would have—well—how did you find out?

(JOE does not answer, just stares.)

Well, doesn't matter. I'm so sorry, Joe. (Beat.) I was so drunk.

JOE: Yes.

SAM: So was she. God, so were you.

JOE: A lot more than you two, obviously.

SAM: And she is very beautiful.

JOE: The more so when you are drunk.

SAM: Oh, no, your wife is beautiful sober...I mean, when I am sober.

JOE: Not to me. Tell me what happened.

SAM: I don't know—I was drunk. Why is that important?

JOE: You have to tell me everything...truthfully...otherwise, we will have nothing left.

SAM: We have nothing now, Joe. What I have done has wrecked...I'm leaving.

(Corks his bottle then waves at it.)

My parting gift.

(Heads toward SR.)

JOE: I have done nothing but think about this for the last month.

SAM: (Stops.) I'm sure.

JOE: You can't leave.

SAM: I feel horrible about this, Joe. I'm so sorry—you were my best friend, and I—it's the reason I've stayed away for so long, to face you. I wasn't even going to come over tonight after you texted me. I had an idea this was what you wanted to talk to me about. I have destroyed our friendship. I wondered when you'd—well, now you have found out and—I have to go—

JOE: No. You must listen. Until a month ago, I would have said I loved you more than any other person in the world. I still say that, although it is a struggle. You are my oldest friend, we have known each other since before we came here. I've known you longer than anyone. Except for my mother.

SAM: Please, I can't do this. I'm so—I have to go.

JOE: (Stated.) Stop it! (Stands.) Listen to you. Nine months ago, you had the balls to shame me—but now you don't have the balls to face up to the consequences. You stand there like a child trying to tell me that it is you who feels so badly that you can't stay. Too bad—you're an adult. Sit down.

(Points to chair at table. SAM sits.)

SAM: Who else knows?

JOE: No one. My mother. No one else, but what difference does that make? My honor is really nothing in the mind of someone else, but in my mind....

SAM: Your mother knows?

JOE: She's the one who figured it out. That's how I found out. She told me.

SAM: Bettina told her?

JOE: They barely talk to one another. No, Mother didn't sleep at all the night of Smoot's party because Bettina and I hadn't gotten home. She went out to the deli for something before dawn and saw you bringing my wife home in a cab.

SAM: And she only told you a month ago?

JOE: Yeah.

SAM: Why'd she wait?

JOE: I don't know.

SAM: Wow. What do I have to do?

JOE: First, just listen.

SAM: OK.

JOE: I do not want to lose our friendship. It is good I've had a month to think about this before talking to you. A month ago, I would have killed you.

SAM: As I would have done had it been—

JOE: The time has allowed me to sort things out...about you and me. My mother does not agree with me, thinks I should take some kind of action against you, but I cannot. I should hate you.

SAM: Gee-whiz, wonder why?

JOE: Stop acting like a twelve year old. (Thinks.) Right after I found out, I moved into my aunt's apartment upstairs.

SAM: You moved out?

JOE: Yeah. Remember the roof deck she has? I slept out there most nights.

SAM: In the winter? Weren't you freezing?

JOE: I used a sleeping bag made for camping in winter.

SAM: You're nuts.

JOE: I liked it, actually. I might continue after all this is over.

SAM: You slept under that tarpaulin we hung up there last summer?

JOE: Only when it snowed one night. Mostly, I slept out in the open, looking up.

SAM: Was it noisy? Traffic? Jets?

JOE: Not usually. Every now and then, an ambulance would—  
(MOTHER enters and stands USL looking at them.)

Yes, Mother?

MOTHER: It's getting late.

SAM: (Stands.) Right. Well—

JOE: Sit back down.  
(SAM sits.)

You have to let me do this my own way, Mother.

MOTHER: You are wasting time.

JOE: Please stop eaves-dropping on us. I told you I would need time.

MOTHER: It is getting late—

SAM: It is. I really should get going. I have an early—

JOE: No, Sam, just wait. You'll go soon. Only a few more minutes.

MOTHER: It's getting late—

JOE: You said that.

MOTHER: —and we have much to do.

(JOE hears this, thinks a second. Nods.)

JOE: OK. Get things ready.

(MOTHER exits USL.)

I told you there were two things you have to do.

SAM: Two?

JOE: First was to listen.

SAM: Oh, right. And the second?

JOE: First, listen. What has happened has changed things forever. I am...my marriage is over.

SAM: I understand that.

JOE: And it has changed our friendship.

SAM: You mean destroyed it.

JOE: No. I'm not sure how, but we will work through this.

SAM: That's preposterous. No, that is fucked up!

JOE: That I don't want to lose your friendship?

SAM: I screwed your wife—if you had done that to my wife, I would kill you. Failing that, I would certainly never speak to you again, much less try to “heal” our friendship.

JOE: At first, all I wanted was revenge, it was all I could think about as I lay up there on the roof...revenge on her, on you...both your faces, floating there against the sky.

SAM: Me? I would have come down off my roof, driven over here as fast as my car would take me, and BAM! put a bullet in your head.

JOE: You own a gun?

SAM: No-o-o. I'm just saying.

JOE: Well. Anyway, I began seeing a third face, mine, and slowly my wife's faded, and there was just you and me.

SAM: Now, you're making me sick. You turn into a faggot or something?

JOE: I am simply telling you that our friendship is important, more than any relationship with my shit wife.

SAM: This friendship is over, friend. Correction: this friendship is over, stranger. It's toast.

JOE: No. I'm not letting that happen.

SAM: You have no choice. I mean, if you had gotten me over here to string me up by my ankles so your mother could strangle me with a length of rope, that I would have understood. This...forgiveness...is much worse.

JOE: I'm not forgiving you. You are going to pay for your actions.

SAM: Doesn't sound like it with our two faces floating together through the stars in the night sky.

JOE: It's wrong that I value your friendship?

SAM: After what I did? Hell, in the old country, they still get some things right, like digging pits for stoning people to death.

JOE: Then no matter what I say, you are the one who decides that our friendship is over.

SAM: Not me. Custom. Tradition. I'm only saying what I know is right.

JOE: You claim all things are possible here in America, but in this, you're still old world.

SAM: Goddamned right.

JOE: OK. (Thinks.) I told you I was not forgiving you and you will have to pay for your actions.

SAM: You're not going to tell my wife, are you?

JOE: That would never be my role. You will do that.

SAM: No way. God, if she found out I had sex with another—

JOE: (Calls USL.)  
Mother.

(As if on cue, MOTHER enters carrying the NEWBORN INFANT hidden in a blanket which she extends to SAM.)

SAM: Whoa. What's this?

JOE: Your son.

(MOTHER drops the NEWBORN INFANT on his lap, and SAM reacts just in time to keep the baby from falling to the floor. )

SAM: Hey! What's the matter with you? Are you nuts?

MOTHER: (Has turned to exit USL but spins back.)  
What gives you the idea that you can speak to me like that? Not everything, Sam, is possible in your America.

SAM: (Holds baby up.)  
I'm sorry, I apologize, Ma'am, but you—  
(MOTHER turns and exits USL. Baby whimpers and SAM does nothing but baby quiets on his own.)

JOE: This is how you pay. By raising your son.

SAM: My son? How do you know—wait a minute. Your wife gave birth to this baby? This week?

JOE: Tonight.

SAM: Tonight? Here?

JOE: My mother knows what she's doing. Your son is strong and healthy.

SAM: Wait a second. How do I know this is my son?

JOE: After my mother told me the baby was not mine, I confronted Bettina. She told me about you.

SAM: But how do you know this is my son?

JOE: I just do.

SAM: Well, I just don't.

JOE: Trust me.

SAM: You, I trust. Your wife, however.

JOE: I understand your reservations. You think maybe she has been with other men because she was with you. But, no, she has never willfully lied to me.

SAM: And you believe that?

JOE: Absolutely. She's only ever lied through omission. You are the only one. And it is nine months since the party where we all drank so much and you two took advantage of my incapacitation to breed this child.

SAM: Joe, I know you're pissed off about what happened that night, but why isn't this your baby?

JOE: I told you, I just know. Now—

SAM: Wait. Wait.

JOE: You always wanted a son, Sam, and this is him. But, if you still have doubts that I am telling you the truth, get a DNA test. They are available anywhere, relatively inexpensive, and certain. If it's not your son, bring him back.

MOTHER: (Re-enters. To SAM.)  
You have to leave.

SAM: (Stands and holds NEWBORN INFANT out toward JOE.)  
No! I can't take this...baby...home.

JOE: I am not being sarcastic when I say I congratulate you on the birth of your son.

SAM: What do I tell my wife?

JOE: Try the truth. If you can't do that, tell her whatever you want. You're good at that.

SAM: What?

MOTHER: You have to leave.

JOE: You have to leave.

SAM: Wait. I don't have any baby stuff. I don't have a car seat. Diapers. Baby food. I can't just leave—

JOE: And neither do we. Stop at the all-night drugstore on your way home. That'll hold you till you can shop tomorrow.

(JOE stands, takes SAM by the elbow and leads him to door SR.)

SAM: This baby should be with his mother.

JOE: That will never happen. Anyway, it's far better that he's raised by his father.

SAM: But I can't take him home.

JOE: Listen to me—my old friend—you son of a bitch. You defiled my marriage. Worse, you defiled our friendship which you say is over, and—well—it may be, but this child, this boy, is yours. For the sake of my honor—for the sake of my family—for the friendship we have—or had—take him out of my house.

SAM: (Weakening.) I can't! I won't. You cannot force me to take this child home.

MOTHER: Sam. This is your first born son. If you don't take him, if you leave him, you will lose him.

JOE: That's right, Sam, you will lose your first born.

SAM: Sandy's my first born.

JOE: Son. Savossa is a girl.

SAM: Well—

JOE: (Takes SAM by elbow.)  
Come.

(Moves with him offstage.)  
I'll call in a day or two to see how you're doing, Sam.  
(Sound of door closing. JOE re-enters and sits at table,  
exhausted.)

Well—

MOTHER: Not a time to rest, Joe.

JOE: I can't do another thing tonight, Mother.

MOTHER: You have no choice.

JOE: I can't. I am wiped out. Did you hear? Of course you did, you're always listening. I have lost my best friend.

MOTHER: You did lose him. Even he has the sense to know that what he did put an end to your friendship. He disrespected you, Joe, your name. Our name. He knew it. I spit on him.

JOE: I can forgive him.

MOTHER: You can never forgive him. Where did I find you? Tell me, how did I give birth to a son who doesn't have the eyes to see the truth and the spine to do something about it?

JOE: Come on, Mother. You've said it yourself, time and time again. A woman is a temple over a cesspool, and men think they are worshipping when really they are falling in. Sam fell in, but Sam can be washed off, he can be cleansed.

MOTHER: Sam is gone and out of your life, he and his offspring. You cannot trust him, Joe. Given the chance, he would do the same thing to your next wife.

JOE: Next wife? Next wife? Are you out of your mind?

MOTHER: It is too soon, but—

JOE: Ab-so-lute-ly not! Once is enough.

MOTHER: It is too soon, but after tonight—

JOE: No! Stop with this, will you?

MOTHER: We must consider the family name.

JOE: Family name. Ha.

MOTHER: It is so good your father is dead. If he were here—if he heard you speak like this—oh, he would knock you so hard on the head you would never allow such thoughts into your mind.

JOE: Mother, please, can we—

MOTHER: You would listen to your father. I, however, I am just a woman. He'd say something once and you would do it, and by following his example, you would have learned how to be strong. But, no, I have failed. You have grown up weak. I have not been strong enough to raise a son alone in this country.

JOE: (Beat.) No, Mother, it is not this country. I just think about things.

MOTHER: Next, you'll be telling me you are going to forgive Bettina.

JOE: No. She's dead to me.

MOTHER: Good. I am glad to hear you speak that way. Now, let's decide how we are going to—

JOE: Why did you wait so long to tell me about Sam and Bettina?

MOTHER: I told you as soon as I could.

JOE: No, you did not. You waited eight months.

MOTHER: I wanted to be sure.

JOE: Sure how? You saw them returning home together in that cab the night after Smoot's party. She got pregnant. You knew way back then.

MOTHER: I just waited.

JOE: No. I know you. If you waited then you waited for a reason.

MOTHER: I just waited.

JOE: Of course. You were hoping the baby would miscarry. Like our first child.

MOTHER: More.

JOE: More than what?

MOTHER: There is an order in the world, Joe. Bettina's first child died because it was supposed to.

JOE: Supposed to? You think there is some kind of power that ordained that my son should have died before birth?

MOTHER: I do.

JOE: You actually believe this? You're not making all this up?

MOTHER: I am not. Most certainly, I am not making this up. That child should not have lived and didn't.

JOE: Why shouldn't my son have lived?

MOTHER: The mother.

JOE: But, wait, no, that's not true, that's ridiculous.

MOTHER: It—

JOE: And anyway, if that's the case then why did this baby live?

MOTHER: You're not the father.

JOE: So it has been ordained that if I, Joe, marry a woman not of my people, then I am to remain childless.

MOTHER: And now we know marrying her was a mistake. I wanted both baby and mother to die.

JOE: For that you waited eight months?

MOTHER: Joe, I am old. The dishonor is enough to exhaust me, but having to deal with the baby, with the mother, I don't have the strength.

JOE: Well, right now? Neither do I.

MOTHER: No. Tomorrow is for rest. We still have much to do.

JOE: (Waves her off.)  
No. I am wiped out, I cannot—

MOTHER: You have to! Now the baby has come—where are you going? Stop, come back here.

(But JOE has turned SR and exited. Sound of door closing.  
MOTHER stares SR then begins to clean table.)

BETTINA: (Struggles in from SL, her loose gown flowing out around her.)  
I thought I heard Joe. Does Joe have my baby?

MOTHER: I gave you a sedative. Why are you awake?

BETTINA: I dreamt I dropped my baby—I can't find him—he wasn't on the floor—then I heard Joe. Is my baby with Joe, Mother?

MOTHER: Don't call me Mother.  
(Turns and leaves USL. BETTINA begins to follow when she hears JOE returning SR.)

JOE: (Off stage.) Mother!  
(Enters.)

Bettina.

BETTINA: (Turns.) I wasn't dreaming.

JOE: What?

BETTINA: I heard you before and thought I was dreaming. Where have you been?

JOE: With my aunt.

BETTINA: Just upstairs? My god. I didn't know where you were. You just left, never came back. I had the baby today, Joe, where—

JOE: I didn't want to talk to you.

BETTINA: But, Joe. You should know—

JOE: There's nothing to discuss, Bettina. It's all—

BETTINA: Do you have the baby, Joe?

JOE: No.

(BETTINA runs off SL a few seconds then returns.)

BETTINA: Where's the baby, Joe? He's not here. He's not anywhere in the apartment. Where is—

(Peers at him.)

Where is he, Joe? Suddenly you're back and— Oh! You took him upstairs to your aunt.  
(She runs SR, but JOE catches her by the elbow.)

JOE: Sit down, Bettina.

BETTINA: (Trying to pull away.)  
I have to—let me—OW!

JOE: Sit down, Bettina. I will—

BETTINA: OW! Joe, you're—I have to—

JOE: I will tell you. Sit.  
(With violent force, he makes her sit.)

BETTINA: Where is he, Joe?

JOE: He is with his father.

BETTINA: Father? (Beat.) I don't know what—

JOE: Don't start that again, Bettina. Sam has taken his son.

BETTINA: Sam came here and took my baby?

JOE: Yes.

BETTINA: Sam has—  
(She faints and rolls off the chair.)

JOE: (Kneels and lightly slaps her cheeks.)  
Bettina. Bettina. Tina.

MOTHER: (Enters.) Don't wake her. Let the sedative do its work. Makes things easier.

JOE: (Standing.) Let me handle this, Mother. Leave, I will do what I have—

MOTHER: You have already proven your weakness, and now you demonstrate stupidity, as well.

JOE: Mother—

MOTHER: Do it now, now is the—

JOE: Get out! Out-out-out!

MOTHER: (Turns USL but turns back before exiting.)  
For the past nine months, I have carried this entire burden myself. When I finally told you the truth about your American wife, what did you do? You left! You ran away like a frightened little boy.

JOE: Mother, I had to—

MOTHER: You ran away like the little coward you are and didn't come home until this morning when I told you the baby would come today.

JOE: You knew where I was, you could have walked upstairs to—

MOTHER: Your place was here.

JOE: I couldn't stay here in the same—

MOTHER: How I miss your father.

JOE: Oh, God, don't start that. If Father were here, then you would have two of us to bully.

MOTHER: You watch your words. Your father was the strongest man I ever knew.

JOE: Are you kidding? You know what the most powerful memory of my father is? Sitting with his head down as you drilled into him. He didn't have the strength to stand up to you. But then nobody has your bulldog strength, Mother. Not Father. Not a three hundred pound pig. And certainly not me, your weakling little boy.

(MOTHER silent.)

Go back to your room. I know what I have to do.

(MOTHER exits USL. He kneels again and peers down at

BETTINA. He slaps her lightly to revive her then stops when she doesn't move. Sits back and speaks to her.)

Aaaaa, nothing I have to tell you.

(He straddles her body, unknots his tie, and loops it around her neck. For several long seconds, he remains still. It is a silent tableau, he just holding the ends of the tie around her neck. He peers down into her face. Suddenly, her entire body arches in a single huge cough that so frightens JOE that he leaps away to the other side of the table.)

BETTINA: (She rolls to her front and coughs then spots the black tie hanging down from her neck. She sits up and holds up the two ends and inspects them then looks at JOE.)

So. This is why you're back.

MOTHER: (Entering USL.)  
Did you—?

BETTINA: No, Mother, I'm not dead yet. (To JOE.) She told me this was going to happen, Joe, that you would come back and kill me.

MOTHER: (Advancing.) Shut up, whore!

BETTINA: And she can't wait because she really doesn't want you to know that—

MOTHER: Joe, you know what you must do, so do it!  
(JOE comes swiftly around the table to BETTINA.)

BETTINA: Oh, no, Joe, oh, god, Joe, please, how could you—

JOE: (Straddling BETTINA takes the ends of the tie and begins to strangle her but stops and looks at MOTHER.)

Wait. What don't you want me to know?

(But MOTHER has reached BETTINA, who is coughing, and tries to get the ends of the tie. JOE stands and pulls her aside.)

What don't you want me to know, Mother?

MOTHER: Nothing. You are so weak! If we were home, she would be dead already. We wouldn't spend all this time talking, trying to—

JOE: We are home, Mother, and I want to know what she's talking about.

BETTINA: (Coughing.) Please...Joe....I'll tell you, I'll—

(BETTINA begins coughing again. MOTHER slaps JOE hard who

steps back, hand to cheek, stunned by the blow. MOTHER turns to BETTINA and straddles her, pushing her back and strangling her with JOE'S tie. JOE appears to have given up, is going to let MOTHER kill BETTINA. He watches the struggle for a few seconds then jumps to pull MOTHER off. BETTINA coughs throughout the next, holds her throat, rolls face down.)

JOE: No, Mother, no.

MOTHER: Let...me...finish.

JOE: No, Mother, no. It shouldn't be—

MOTHER: (Continues to struggle, but JOE is far stronger.)  
I'm going to finish this—

JOE: No, Mother. It should be me.

MOTHER: (Struggles.) Take your hands off me!

JOE: Where is there any honor in this if it's my mother who earns it?

MOTHER: (Continuing to struggle.)  
I no longer care about your honor. You're gutless!  
(Turns to face him.)

I was always embarrassed that I was the mother of such a weak boy. Always whining, simpering, not strong enough to play hard games with the other boys. Remember how you used to hide in your room?

JOE: You mean...junior...high school?

MOTHER: You haven't changed, you are the same person, confused, frightened, and weak! Let me look—

(Pulls away and looks at his crotch.)  
—have we wet our trousers yet?

JOE: OK, that's it, Mother.

(JOE marches MOTHER offstage USL. BETTINA stands slowly and struggles to the door SR but gets so weak she has to sit at the table feeling her throat, puts her head down. Far off, MOTHER is heard remonstrating with JOE. A door slams then knocking and banging are heard. JOE returns. BETTINA sits up.)

BETTINA: I'm so proud of you, Joe.

JOE: What?

(Banging stops.)

BETTINA: I've never seen you so forceful. And with your mother, no less.

JOE: What didn't she want me to know?

BETTINA: Watch your back, Joe. She'll come bolting out that door any minute and jump you from behind.

JOE: She's locked in her bedroom.

(MOTHER heard calling. Banging for a few seconds.)

BETTINA: *You* locked her in her bedroom?

JOE: That's what I said.

BETTINA: No, you didn't. You said, *She's* locked in her bedroom.

JOE: What's the difference? Oh, shut up! Tell me what she didn't want me to know.

BETTINA: God, Joe, you're suddenly the man I fell in love with.

JOE: What?

BETTINA: After all these years, you are behaving like the strong man I knew you were.

JOE: Because I—

BETTINA: Do you remember the first time we spoke to each other?

JOE: Stop. You are wasting time. Now what—

BETTINA: Oh, yes, I am wasting time. We have to know what Joey's mommy didn't want him to—

JOE: Do not call her mommy.

BETTINA: —didn't want him to know so we can get on to the important matter of the evening, and what might that matter be? Why, murder, of course. Before we can all get some sleep tonight, we must make sure that Joe's beloved wife, his beloved Bettina, the Bettina he swore to love forever, is dead. All in the name of honor. And—

(JOE grabs her hard, like before, but this time she pulls away with great force and gets to the other side of the table.)

NO!

(They face each other across the table. BETTINA speaks quietly.)

You can't kill me, Joe. This is not how my life is going to end.

(JOE starts around the table and BETTINA matches his move for a quarter turn then they go back to original positions.)

Stop. I will tell you what you want to know, even though...it is nothing, Joe.

JOE: Tell me.

BETTINA: Look at me, Joe.

JOE: What am I doing?

BETTINA: Really look at me, Joe.

JOE: You said you were going to tell me what my mother—

BETTINA: I am your wife! Can you really do this? Can you actually—  
(Puts her hand to her head and begins to wobble.)

Oh. I have to sit down...I'm so... Please, Joe...I'm going to faint.

JOE: OK, OK. Sit down.

BETTINA: No...I can't...you'll get me...

JOE: (Pulls out chair on his side and sits.)

With you in the state you're in, I could catch you easily, Bettina. But I'm not going to. Sit.

BETTINA: (Sits in chair on her side, puts head down then up. They stare at each other.)

Do you really want to kill me?

JOE: I do. But—

(Stares at her then shakes his head.)

I can't.

BETTINA: How did we get here, Joe?

JOE: Easy. You screwed Sam and gave him a son.

BETTINA: Yes. And I want—

JOE: You said before that I swore to love you forever. Didn't you swear to do the same thing?

BETTINA: Having sex with Sam was a mistake, but it didn't mean I stopped loving you.

JOE: A mistake?

BETTINA: Yes. I wanted to tell you how sorry I was, but you left.

JOE: Do you think saying sorry will make up for--

BETTINA: No-o-o. I'm only saying I didn't have a chance to tell you anything after your mother told you about the baby. You just left.

JOE: Oh, so like Mother, you're going to tell me how weak I am.

BETTINA: No, Joe, I'd never treat you like your mother does. And I don't think you're weak. You've just never learned how to use your strength. Except for before when you locked her up.

JOE: (Turns and looks USL.)  
She's going to kill me.

BETTINA: She almost killed me.

JOE: I should have let her.

BETTINA: But you didn't, Joe, you didn't give into that medieval fixation about honor she's always talking about.

JOE: She's not wrong about that, Bettina. You violated me, tossed my name in the dust. That does count for something.

BETTINA: I know it does.

(There is a silence, the two just looking at each other.)

JOE: Tell me what my mother didn't want me to know.

BETTINA: I just said that to piss her off.

JOE: Well, it worked, so it was something.

BETTINA: It's about the miscarriage.

JOE: Oh.

BETTINA: No, you don't understand.

JOE: You told my mother the miscarriage had something to do with me, didn't you?

BETTINA: How do you know that?

JOE: And she told you never to tell me, I'll bet. Right?

BETTINA: Yes. How do you know that? Did she tell you?

JOE: Are you kidding? She'd never want her boy to think his sperm wasn't—

BETTINA: So how do you know?

JOE: The doctor called here. After the miscarriage.  
(BETTINA just stares at him.)

He told me.

BETTINA: He called here?

JOE: Yes.

BETTINA: So you knew—all along—that this baby was not yours?

JOE: I was hoping the doctor was wrong. He said there was a small chance I could make a healthy baby. I thought he was mistaken because you got pregnant. Then Mother told me the baby was Sam's.

BETTINA: Oh.

JOE: When did you tell her the baby was not mine?

BETTINA: When I started to show. She caught me coming home with him after that party. Without you.

JOE: Wait a minute. Why did you tell her about what the doctor said about the miscarriage?

BETTINA: She read the report he mailed to me. I didn't know he had spoken to you on the phone.

JOE: Why did you show it to her?

BETTINA: I didn't. She opens my mail.

JOE: No.

BETTINA: She does.

JOE: Why haven't you told me about that?

BETTINA: Well...I figured you—I thought you condoned it. Many times, I thought it was you who had opened my mail.

JOE: Never. I've never done that.

BETTINA: Yeah. (Silence.) I want my baby, Joe, I want my son.

JOE: No. The boy belongs with his father.

BETTINA: No, he belongs with his mother, he belongs with me.

JOE: In a perfect world, yes.

BETTINA: (Puts her head down on the table. From that position.)  
Do you remember when we first spoke to each other?

JOE: Yes.

BETTINA: Tell me.

JOE: It was after English class. I asked you if you wanted coffee.

BETTINA: (Sits up and looks at JOE.)  
No.

JOE: I remember it clearly.

BETTINA: False memory...and wrong.

JOE: No, I—

BETTINA: It was me who asked you if you wanted coffee. That's the false memory part. And the wrong part is that that was not the first time we spoke to one another.

JOE: Yes, it was.

BETTINA: No. I asked you out for coffee because of the first time we spoke to one another.

JOE: Look, I don't want to talk about this ancient history, I need to—

BETTINA: Remember reading *On The Waterfront* in class?

JOE: No.

BETTINA: That makes sense. Electrical engineers hated having to take a humanities elective.

JOE: I didn't hate it.

BETTINA: That's what you told me.

JOE: I just didn't have a lot of tolerance for it.

BETTINA: Wasn't for that class, you wouldn't have met me, Joe.

(JOE just stares at her.)

I fell in love with you because of that class. When the professor had you read Terry Malloy, you changed right in front of me. I just thought you were another slightly good looking boy who seemed bored. Then you read, and everything changed.

(JOE stares but is silent.)

Especially when you read opposite me. The look you could give. It was like you could see right into me. It...felt embarrassing.

JOE: You were never embarrassed. Come on.

BETTINA: I may not have acted that way, but I felt it. You made me feel naked in front of you.

JOE: What are we talking about this stuff for?

BETTINA: I want my baby, Joe.

JOE: I already told you no. Look, Bettina, you're lucky to be alive. I don't want anything more to do with you.

(BETTINA puts her head down again then picks it up.)

BETTINA: Yes, I should go, get out of here. I'll go to Shelly's. OK, I'll get out.

JOE: Get started. I can't keep Mother locked up forever.

BETTINA: (Stands and heads SL but stops.)

I don't have any money. Can you—

JOE: Listen to you. I just didn't kill you and now you want money?

BETTINA: I'm just short of cash, is all.

JOE: No.

BETTINA: I'll...I'll pay you back. I just need cab fare to get me over to Shelly's, she'll put me up. Tomorrow, I'll—

JOE: God. OK, OK. I want you out of here.

(Goes into wallet and gets cash which he hands to her.)

Go. Get changed. Don't pack a lot. I'll call a cab.

(BETTINA Starts off SL but JOE puts up a hand.)

Wait. Let me go check that Mother is still in her room.

(Starts off SL.)

BETTINA: Don't tell her you haven't killed me yet. Don't want to get her upset.

JOE: (Stops.) I'm telling her that you're leaving.

BETTINA: Oh, boy.

(JOE exits SL. BETTINA looks after him a moment then turns SR because she hears something. SAM returns with the baby.)

Sam. Oh, my baby, Sam, you brought back my baby.

(She runs to SAM and takes the infant.)

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

(She hugs, inspects, hugs the infant again.)

SAM: I'm so glad I found you alone, Bettina.

(BETTINA sits at table and fusses over infant through the next.)

I can't do it, I just can't take this baby home—did he tell you?—I've been sitting out in the car—I can't take him away from his mother.

BETTINA: Oh, I agree, I'm so glad you brought him back.

SAM: A baby should be with his mother. Where's Joe?

BETTINA: In the back.

SAM: Oh. Uh...where's...

BETTINA: His mother?

SAM: Yeah.

BETTINA: He's back there with her, in her room.

SAM: OK. Well...I guess I'll leave.

BETTINA: (Looks up at SAM then SL then back to SAM.)

Sam, wait, can you give us a ride?

SAM: You and Joe?

BETTINA: No, no, me and the baby.

SAM: Oh. Well...where would you—

BETTINA: Anywhere, anywhere. My friend's house.  
(She stands and goes SR toward apartment door.)

SAM: Whoa, wait a minute. You just want to leave? Dressed like that?

BETTINA: Yes. Come on, please. Take us now. Please.

SAM: It's cold out there. Bettina, you just gave birth to a baby. You can't go running around in a nightie in this weather.

BETTINA: You have heat in your car, don't you?

SAM: Well, sure, but--

BETTINA: So I'll be fine, Shelly can lend me--

SAM: You can't go running around like--

BETTINA: Yes, I can.

SAM: No, you can't. I—

BETTINA: Sam! If Joe comes out here and catches us, he will take the baby away from me and make you take him home. Is that what you want?

SAM: Well...god, no.

BETTINA: OK, let's—

(JOE enters SL.)

JOE: Thought I heard your voice. Why'd you—  
(Sees BETTINA has the baby.)  
Why does she have the baby, Sam?

SAM: Uh...I'm giving her a ride.

JOE: You came back to—?

SAM: OK, OK. I came back because I am not going to take this baby home. First, I don't take orders from you. Who the fuck are you to tell me what I have to do?

JOE: May I remind you that this child is—

SAM: I know! I know! But I'm not taking him home. And anyway, he should be with his mother.

BETTINA: That's right, he—

JOE: Shut up.

(He yanks baby from BETTINA'S arms and tenders him to SAM. BETTINA attempts to get him back, but she is weak and JOE pushes her back behind him toward SL. Faces SAM whose back is to SR.)

Take him! Take your son.

SAM: (Stands staring at JOE a moment then hold out his arms.)  
Bettina asked me to give her a ride to a friend's house. Come on, Bettina.

BETTINA: I want out of here, Joe.

JOE: I know that, I told you I wanted you out of here, but—

SAM: Come on, Bettina.

JOE: Just as long as the baby is with you after you drop her off.

SAM: (Moves nose to nose with JOE. They are SR. Their voices rise.)  
Maybe. Maybe not.

JOE: No, no, you told me you were taking your son—

SAM: I'm not so sure I told you I was taking the baby—

JOE: He is your son! You are responsible—

SAM: —as much as you took me by surprise, I didn't—

JOE: You owe me! You were my friend, you violated my name and my honor by—

(MOTHER enters swiftly and quietly from SL behind BETTINA and loops a cord around her neck, begins choking her. BETTINA makes no sound, the cord is so tight. SAM and JOE don't notice.)

—screwing her when I was—

SAM: OK! OK! I've heard all this already, but this is her fault, your fault, for God's sake, as much as—

JOE: My fault?! How the hell is any of this suddenly my—

SAM: THIS BABY BELONGS WITH HIS—

(SAM sees MOTHER choking BETTINA. JOE sees SAM looking, stops and turns around. Both are paralyzed. BETTINA is already on the floor, MOTHER bending over her, finishing her.)

JOE: (Quietly.) Mother.

(BETTINA is dead. MOTHER rises, breathing hard.)

MOTHER: You two used to argue like that when you were little boys.

JOE: Mother, my god.

MOTHER: You'd scream at each other and then Sam would start hitting and you'd both start crying. You wouldn't talk to each other for a couple of days or a week and then—poof—it was like nothing had ever happened, and you'd be back playing together again.

JOE: Mother, I didn't want you to—

MOTHER: But your friendship is truly over now. What you did, Sam, is unforgivable, beyond all bounds. Joe will never talk to you again.

(SAM, in shock, just stares.)

But there is one more thing you have to do together. Take the body of this woman into the back bedroom.

(She approaches SAM and holds her arms out, and SAM gives her the baby.)

Take down the shower curtain, put her on it.

(She looks at them intently.)

Joe will drive her upstate tomorrow, Sam, to find her a place. May he borrow your car?

SAM: (Whispered.) Yes. Of course.

MOTHER: Good. Now take her into the back.

(The men lift BETTINA by the arms and legs and carry her off. MOTHER sits wearily at the table holding the baby indifferently at first, but then she looks down at him on her lap.)

You've hardly made a sound. You already feel your shame? You will have a life time filled with it. But see it as your friend. Yes, it will convince you you are bad. You will

do things, think things, that violate, thoughts that fill you with dread, and shame will overwhelm you. But because you feel it so powerfully—and this is how it is your friend—it will let you know you are, after all, a good person. If you were not good, you wouldn't feel the shame.

(She peers into his face.)

I'm sure you are like that. Like me. If I thought otherwise, I'd take you in the back and drown you.

(Lights fade.)

THE END

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *At first, I had a very difficult time understanding or accepting the idea that a member of a family— almost always a woman—could be ritualistically murdered because she had taken actions that had besmirched the honor of a family member, but research has taught me that in many cultures such murders are not only condoned but expected. I've written this play as a personal exploration of such heinous acts, a kind of running toward rather than away from such behavior, especially since honor killings occur in this country, as well. That is the reason I set the play in Queens, New York. BIRTHRIGHT was based on the idea that in some cultures the driving force behind an honor killing is an older woman.*

*I am most drawn to the one-act, the telling of a story in a realistic style without violating time, place, and action. I have loved and been affected by so many playwrights that it is impossible for me to identify single favorites, but my list would definitely include Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Albee.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Following thirty five years in education (English teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent), I began writing full time. In February 2006, Emerging Artists Theatre staged my full length one-act play, **REAL DANGER**, in a one month run as an Equity Showcase. The following year, EAT also produced my short play, **FOR THE GOOD OF THE NATION**. In 2009, **BIRD WATCHING** was runner up out of 38 entries in the Strawberry One-Act Festival and was subsequently published in **THE BEST PLAYS FROM THE STRAWBERRY ONE-ACT FESTIVAL, Volume Seven**. In September 2011, my play, **OWA-TODO-PIAM** was produced in the Philadelphia Fringe Festival by the Secret Room Theatre, and in October 2012, Play Club West in Hollywood held a staged reading of **REAL DANGER**. My novel, **UNSETTLE THE SCORE** has been called “an ambitious thriller, successful in nearly every respect” by *Kirkus Reviews*. A sculptor for forty six years, I have exhibited works in numerous galleries and shows on Long Island and New York. In 2019, my sculpture, **JACOB WRESTLES THE ANGEL**, was accepted into the Long Island Art League All-Long Island Art Show, one of 60 chosen from a pool of 724 entries. It was one of eight award winners.