

RESTLESS DAWN

A ONE-ACT PLAY WITH ABRAHAM & SARAH

by
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In Genesis 22 God commands Abraham:

5 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Now, if you were Abraham and had waited more than 100 years for your first son, would you roll over and go back to sleep after hearing that? Restless Dawn is based on the premise that even allowing for Abraham's staggering faith in God's promise, this command would have been most disturbing.

10 CHARACTERS

Abraham
His wife, Sarah

15 COSTUMES AND PROPS

Remember, Abraham is not Jewish—he is Chaldean. His apparel would not be the flowing loose robes commonly depicted, but a Babylonian style, with cleaner lines, and normally worn off one shoulder. He would not have a full, bushy beard, but one neatly trimmed, almost squared off, and probably without a moustache. He might even be wearing a hat, which would look very much a modern stocking cap (shaped like a skullcap, without a ball on top).

20 Sarah, when she enters, has been sleeping, so would not be in normal day-wear. A simple shift, similar in design to Abraham's clothing (off one shoulder) would suffice. A thin shawl for her shoulders would be appropriate. Remember, though nomadic and living in tents, Abraham and Sarah are not poor. Their clothing should reflect their great wealth.

An excellent source for pictures of Chaldean costumes is National Geographic, December 1966 issue.

Props:

25 No props are necessary except the one article belonging to Isaac. However, props and set can be incorporated at the director's discretion.

SCENE

30 *The Time: Early in the morning, well before dawn, on the day Abraham is to take his son, Isaac, to the hills of Moriah for sacrifice.*

The Place: The tent of Abraham

House lights down.

Stage lights up.

35 *Enter Abraham. He is around 112 years old. But since he will live to be 175, he is just past middle-age. He is visibly old, but in no way infirm. God has just spoken to him, commanding that he, Abraham, give his son as a sacrifice—a burnt offering. He is directed to travel to the hills of Moriah (about a three-day journey) to conduct this sacrifice. The initial moment has passed; Abraham is pensive, deep in thought, but not*

40 *overwrought. He has lived a life of total obedience to his God and even with this most*

unexpected demand he will comply. However, it is not the obedience of a fool; he will obey, but there will be a personal price for his obedience.

45 *Abraham moves about the tent, stopping to ponder, working the moment through his mind. He eventually picks up something belonging to Isaac—a toy or article of clothing—that has been left in his tent. He studies this painful reminder of his son and what he must be about in only a few hours. At first he remains safely behind his patriarchal defenses, but then, hugging the article to him, he gives into remorse over the anticipated loss.*

50 *(NOTE: At this point and throughout the play, any worry, remorse, anxiety or anger over the impending sacrifice must remain within the context of his faith, obedience, and Hebrews 11:19. There should be, at the very least, the grim determination that he may not understand this peculiar requirement, but is ready to stand on the promises given him by the Lord. One way or another his son Isaac will perpetuate the line.)*

55 **Abraham**

(as he moves about the tent)

He'll not take him away from me.

(confidently)

He'll find a way.

60 *(repeating; more worried)*

He'll find a way. He's my son—and what's a man without a son? I know!

He's laughed at. Why, he's the favorite topic of discussion when his friends gather round the fire.

(angrily)

65 Foolish women giggle at him from behind their veils! Children—children!—run at the heels of his poor wife, laughing at her. He dies an old man with only other old men left to bury him. His life's empty, always dancing just out of reach—like a reflection on a muddy river. No joy. No promise in tomorrow.

70 *Enter Sarah, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.*

Sarah

(mumbling)

75 Abraham?

Abraham

(startled)

Sarah, why are you out of your bed?

Sarah

80 Because my husband is out of his. Why are you up?

Abraham

Oh, it's nothing. I heard the sound of an animal outside. You know the wolves this time of year. I found nothing, but now I'm wide awake.

Sarah

85 *(not believing for a minute)*

Funny, the sounds of the night have never wakened you before.

(she yawns)

You've always called them "the music of God's slumber".

Abraham

90 *(with an embarrassed chuckle)*

Well, I've never been much of a poet.

(suddenly serious)

Did you look in on Isaac?

Sarah

95 Sound asleep.

(feeling his forehead)

Are you ill?

Abraham

Of course not.

Sarah

100 HmMMM—

Abraham

Ah! And now the diagnosis.

Sarah

105 Did you have another argument with your overseer?

Abraham

Am I on trial?

Sarah

It's not like you to be up in the middle of the night.

110

Abraham

I told you,

(Sarah recites the excuse with him)

I heard—

115

Abraham stops, irritated.

Sarah

(with Abraham)

I know, you heard the sound of an animal outside. Are you sticking with that?

120

Abraham

Sarah! It's too late for this. Argue with me in daylight.

Sarah stands patiently waiting, with her arms folded, staring at Abraham until he breaks.

125

Abraham

All right. All right.

(grasping for another implausible excuse)

It was the meat last night. The lamb wasn't quite right and my stomach woke me. That's all.

130

Sarah

So now it's my cooking!

Abraham

(with exhausted impatience)

Sarah, please. I'm sure my stomach is just as much at fault as your preparation. Not another word.

135

Sarah

Well, no one else was bothered—

140 **Abraham**
(holding his stomach)

It's just my disposition.

Sarah

Which isn't the best tonight.

145 *Abraham tries to steer the conversation onto a new course.*

Abraham

(affectionately)

Come. Sit with me.

150 **Sarah**

It's the middle of the night! We should go back to bed.

Abraham

Please. For awhile? We rarely have such times anymore.

Sarah

155 *(sitting next to Abraham)*

It's different with Isaac around, isn't it?

Abraham

I miss you sometimes.

Sarah

160 *(feigning surprise)*

After all these years?

Abraham

(a little embarrassed)

I'm jealous of the time you give him.

165 **Sarah**

With everyone going out of their way to spoil him, he takes little of my time.

Abraham

And I still miss you.

170

Sarah

By now you should be accustomed to the new rhythms of our life.

Abraham*(chuckling)*

New rhythms—old musicians!

175

(they laugh)

I've lived most of my life without a son,

(tenderly)

but all of my life with you.

Sarah*(affectionately)*

180

You talk funny in the middle of the night.

(looking about her)

It's so peaceful, so quiet. It feels like God's time—His special time.

(a new thought for her)

185

As if He has assigned the daytime to us, but

(with awe)

the night is His. He's closer. I can almost feel Him.

Abraham*(wistfully)*

190

My father once told me about the ruins of an ancient tower near Babylon.

It dates to a time lost in history. This tower—though crumbling with age—

still shows a series of different levels, steps—

Sarah

I know of that tower.

195

Abraham

The story goes that the people built this tower so they might climb up the

steps to see heaven for themselves. They toiled under the sun for years

and years. The tower grew so slowly, some thought it might never be

completed. Finally, finally it reached a height so perilous, why on some

200

mornings clouds would obscure the very top. Then God showed His

anger. He answered their foolish quest by assigning each a different tongue and scattering them about the earth. And the sight never again knew the presence of men. Now the tower stands as a silent witness for the futile methods men invent for finding their God.

205

Sarah*(proudly)*

But we have Him right here.

Abraham

210

And without benefit of a silly tower. The Lord has established a new way in which to reach Him—a better way: He comes down to us!

Sarah*(with amusement)*

215

I will not forget the first time the Lord spoke to you. You were so—oh, I don't know what you were. Stunned, I guess. You were so anxious to tell me everything.

(growing more serious)

Remember, your God was not yet my God. Like our nephew, Lot, I too was skeptical and reluctant to let loose of our—well, our comfortable gods of Ur.

220

Abraham

Hmmmm— comfortable.

Sarah

225

But I listened. I was curious about this new God who actually spoke to His people. Our old gods had been profoundly silent. They'd just glare at you with their great stony faces—always angry about something or other! I could never figure out just what it was they were so angry about! But here was a God who actually seemed to care about the welfare of His followers. He spoke to them—even appeared to them—became a benefactor of future wealth and position.

230

Abraham

(agreeing excitedly)

He's alive!

Sarah

235 He's alive!

(quietly; after a moment's thought)

Have you ever wondered what our life would have been like if you had not chosen to obey the Lord?

Abraham

240 Are you sure I had a choice?

Sarah

Couldn't we have stayed in Chaldea?

Abraham

A man feels things he can't explain.

245 *(musing)*

There's always this—tension inside me. Not really doubt; just—tension.

(letting his anger build)

I get to thinking about how long He made us wait for Isaac. It seemed a lifetime. Year after year, accepting His word, accepting His promise.

250 Waiting.

(pause)

Ah, but then I remember that nephew of mine. My tension is suddenly gone, and I find myself on my knees, calling upon the Lord, thanking Him for—allowing us to be His.

255 **Sarah**

There's been no word from Lot for some time now. Since the destruction, there's been no word.

Abraham

As if he was never a part of us.

260

Sarah

I worry about him.

Abraham

Oh, Lot can take care of himself. He always did just fine.

265

Sarah

Sure, while you were around.

Abraham

Why do you say that?

Sarah

270

Well, I've been thinking lately. Maybe it's part of being a mother: watching Isaac play with the other boys, watching him learn, make mistakes, watching him make even the most insignificant decisions—— I can't help but wonder about the decisions he'll be making as an adult.

Abraham

275

A little early for that, isn't it.

Sarah

God may only give me this one chance! I want to do it right.

Abraham

(reassuringly)

280

You will.

Sarah

And like you, I remember Lot. He was always so short-sighted. When you offered him his choice of land for his people, without thinking he chose the most beautiful, the most fertile.

285

Abraham

(innocently)

A wise choice.

290 **Sarah**
A selfish choice, Abraham. And where did he settle his family? Sodom, of all places!

(sarcastically)

A wonderful place to raise a family.

295 **Abraham**

The Lord got him out of there.

Sarah

That's just my point! Think about it: All the way back to Chaldea, the journey to Haran, then living in Haran, then all our travels in Canaan—all along the way, Lot was always making the wrong choices. Or the right choices at the wrong time. God always pulled him out.

300

Abraham

You see!

Sarah

305 But God saved Lot because of you.

Abraham

Well, I don't know about—

Sarah

Did he share in your faith?

310 **Abraham**

Lot shared in our beliefs—our worship of the one, true God.

Sarah

(insistently)

But did he share in our faith?

315 **Abraham**

(exasperated)

No. No, he didn't. You're right, Sarah. Now what's your point with all this?

320

Sarah

My point is that I don't think a relationship with God is passed on by blood. Lot was your kin and he had a totally different relationship with the Lord.

Abraham

325

Why are you so worried about Lot all of a sudden?

Sarah

I'm not. I'm worried about Isaac. We have to teach him to love the Lord. It won't happen just because he's your son. He must come to share in our faith.

330

Abraham

You don't think he already does?

Sarah

(shaking her head)

He's still a child. He follows after you because he loves you. He doesn't yet love the Lord.

335

Abraham

(introspectively; with a darkness in his voice Sarah doesn't understand; turning away from her)

That day will come soon enough.

340

Sarah

(mildly surprised)

You seem almost glad the day isn't here yet. What's happened to your faith?

Abraham

345

My faith is intact. It's my courage that fails me.

Sarah

(affectionately)

Oh, my husband's always had great courage.

(teasing)

350 Well, now wait a minute. I do remember—— Yes, there was our friend
Sen-Usert——

Abraham

(stiffening)

Sarah, I've told you not to mention that name!

355

Sarah

God saved us from the King of Egypt in spite of ourselves.

Abraham

Sarah——

Sarah

360

Oh, I don't blame you.

Abraham

It was so embarrassing.

Sarah

You were afraid for your life! You had few options.

365

Abraham

Oh, so I chose the option that placed my wife in danger!

Sarah

I was in no danger.

Abraham

370

No, but only because of the kindness in his heart.

Sarah

Whose heart? Sen-Usert—or God?

Abraham

375

Well, both, I suppose. Sen-Usert was responsive to the voice of God telling
him to treat us better than we deserved.

Sarah

He treated us better, all right, and kicked us out of his country!

Abraham

380

Yes—and our journey continues. We're still on the move, aren't we,
Sarah.

Sarah

We have a good life.

Abraham looks at Sarah and breaks into laughter.

385

Sarah

And what do you think is so funny?

Abraham

(teasing)

390

Oh, I remember a young woman—quite a number of years ago—who
thought differently. Her feet were so sore from traveling, and she was
always complaining, complaining—

Sarah

Those were trying times for me.

395

Abraham

And not for the rest of us?

Sarah

It was hard leaving our home and friends in Ur. Then, after we were
finally settled in Haran, we were up and moving again.

400

Abraham

You know why we left.

Sarah

Abraham, you were obeying voices no one else heard. To me it was—
well, it was just foolishness.

405

Abraham

Yes, I remember. Our neighbors said I was answering the call of a fool's
god.

Sarah

Can you really blame them?

410

Abraham

(after a moment's thought)

Faith lies deep in the heart, Sarah. At first no one else can see it. We were leaving a certainty in pursuit of the uncertain. How could they know?

415

Faith can't be shared like—like a blanket on a cold night. Our neighbors saw only that we left a comfortable life in Haran, to journey into a strange land—in search of an unknown destination.

Sarah

And I was as unsure as they were.

Abraham

420

But faith is always sure of it's destination.

Sarah

(thoughtfully)

Maybe faith can be shared. Where did I get mine, if not from you?

Abraham

425

I suppose it can be learned—

Sarah

(enthusiastically)

Like freedom—

(suddenly morose)

430

Or exile—

Abraham

(studying Sarah for a moment before speaking)

Do you often think of Hagar?

Sarah

(reluctantly)

435

I, uh—

Abraham

Do you?

440

Sarah

(pausing; then blurting out painfully)

I sometimes wonder if she still hates me. I can't forget that look in her eyes—that frightened-animal look in her eyes—when you sent her away.

Abraham

445

Then she should hate me.

Sarah

(with a knowing half-smile)

You sent her away because God told you to.

(venomously)

450

I sent her away because I hated her.

Abraham

(consolingly)

Not really hate.

Sarah

455

She had my son—and I hated her for it!

Abraham

My son!

Sarah

You see?

460

*(Sarah moves away from Abraham, gathering her thoughts—and her temper;
after quite a long pause)*

How are we to know God's will? Where does our will end and His begin?

And when does our “wisdom” turn into presumption?

Abraham

465

(soberly)

I can't answer that.

(thinking)

Wisdom is nothing. Wisdom is only mysteries that have aged well.

Sarah

470 *(a little defensive)*

What if I hadn't sent her to you? If it had not been my idea, would God have found another way for Ishmael to be born? Was it a lack of faith—a lack of patience—or was it divine wisdom that caused me to accomplish God's purpose?

Abraham

475

What was in your heart?

(his words are stinging to Sarah)

Did you seek His will? Or did you seek a child—at any cost? You fell back on tradition instead of God—and tradition can be more powerful than any promise.

480

Sarah

(argumentatively)

But it was because of His promise! How could it be fulfilled out of a childless union? I thought, maybe God had another wife in mind for you—one that could give you this inheritance.

485

Abraham

(strongly)

Why are we always making God in our image? Why must we place our limitations upon Him?

490

(energetically)

He is God! He wraps the universe about Him like a cloak! He sends judgment against entire cities and blows them away with His hot breath. And he can't place a child into a barren womb?

(pause)

495

Where is the need for faith, if He only works in the expected?

Sarah

Maybe we expect too much of God?

Abraham

No. We expect too little.

500 *(pondering; gathering his evidence)*
 When He speaks to me, I can sense a—
(struggling for just the right word)
 completeness about Him. His compassion—His warmth—embrace me.
 Even beyond His words to me, I'm aware of His ability to provide for
 505 every need. And He's not only able to provide, but eager for us to rely
 upon Him.

(pause)
 No. We'll be happier when we learn to rely more completely upon our
 God. And if He has made a promise—that promise will be kept.

510 *(softening)*
 Sarah, we were already old when He promised us a son. And even though
 you doubted—even though you laughed at the absurdity of His
 promise—He kept it. He kept His word.

(suddenly morose)
 515 And now we must keep ours.

Sarah

(disturbed by Abraham's sudden change)
 Why is there so much darkness in your heart tonight.

Abraham

520 *(away from Sarah; carefully riding the crest of his fluctuating emotions)*
 No. No darkness.

(just what is it then?)
 Shadows.

(frightened; whispered)
 525 Shadows.

(musing upon his witness of Sodom's destruction)
 I've seen His wrath.

(which reminds him of his nephew, Lot)
 How complex our God is! That was always Lot's problem. He never saw
 530 the complexity of our God.

(sarcastically)

To him, the Lord was just some undefined cloud of vapor, someone—no, something—to make your knees knock together.

(seriously, emphatically)

535 He never recognized the intricacies of God’s personality: the love, the tenderness—the wrath.

(agitated)

I’ve seen His wrath.

(heatedly)

540 I’ve seen His anger poured out against Sodom—

(wide-eyed)

horrible sheets of flame, spewed from His mouth! Totally consumed!
Wiped away!

Sarah

545 *(slightly angry)*

You frighten me, Abraham. I can’t understand you tonight. You’re talking in circles—riddles and circles.

Abraham

(wearily)

550 I’m tired. Old and tired. Sometimes I feel like I’ve been through two lifetimes already.

Sarah

God’s required much from you. And you’ve been faithful.

Abraham

555 Have I? By whose standards? Have I been as faithful to the Lord as He has been to me?

Sarah

We’re only human, after all! I laughed at Him, Abraham! I laughed at His promise.

560 **Abraham**

(back into his thoughts; quietly)

I’ve also seen His tenderness in His forgiving ways toward us.

(wryly)

His patience. Oh, does He have patience. We've been so stupid at times!

565

Sarah

(now deeply into her own thoughts; after a pause)

Why did He choose us—you and me? Why did He choose to establish Himself here through two old people and one child? And if He made us, then why did He make us so imperfect? Why did He choose to do it this way?

570

Abraham

(it's been a long night)

We can't contain His knowledge, Sarah.

(musing)

575

A God is useless if you have no reliance upon Him. What good were the old gods of Chaldea? They were simply objects of empty ritual. They were—well, they were necessary, because men have always had their gods—they've always had to believe in something bigger than themselves.

580

(irritated)

Most people are like Lot. They want to believe in a god of convenience—a silly, clay statue that just sits there—cold, undemanding. Remember the old days in Chaldea; it was the priests who demanded—not the gods. The gods just sat there in their gloomy temples—cold and lifeless. There was no dependency in those gods.

585

(becoming agitated again, his brittle emotions taking over)

But our Lord, who is God above all gods, requires that we rely totally upon Him. And that's the difference between “belief” and “faith”.

(building his argument)

590

You may believe that any god exists, but

(all his thoughts are focused on Isaac and the sacrifice)

will you place all of what you are in His trust?

(darkly morose, upset; his voice quavers)

Will you place your most precious possession—upon His altar?!

595 *Abraham ends up away from Sarah, overwhelmed by the sudden intensity of his emotions—and embarrassed to be showing such weakness around Sarah. He stands, sobbing, with his back to her.*

Sarah

600 *(going to Abraham; soberly)*
Abraham, what's wrong?

Abraham

(still turned away)
O, dreams and voices— dreadful silences— visions of what will be—
605 *(turning quickly; Sarah takes him into her arms; Abraham clings to her)*
Oh Sarah, can one man be the beginning for so much?! Can one man
bear the burden for so many?

Sarah

(tenderly; calming him)
610 Sssshhhh— You've borne your burden. The trials and waiting of
yesterday are behind us.

Abraham

(with a weary sigh)
Oh, I wish they were. How I wish they were.

Sarah

615 See what happens when you've been up all night? I've never heard such
foolish talk!

(leading him toward the exit)

I'm putting you back to bed and telling the servants to let you sleep.

620 *Abraham stops, centerstage, noticing the approaching dawn (toward the audience).*

Abraham

(looking out)
625 Dawn. It will be light soon.
(shivering)
Oh, why must there be such a chill to mornings?

(not quite in his right mind)

630 The night so unwillingly sheds its cold. And the sun grudgingly gives its
warmth——

*(regaining his composure; turning to look at his worried wife;
quietly, after gazing upon her; solidly; more a statement than a question)*

Do you know that I love you?

Sarah

635 *(with the confidence that comes with years of being married)*

Yes.

Abraham

(haltingly)

Do you know that I would never hurt you?

640 **Sarah**

(confused)

You've always brought me happiness.

(knowing something is up)

Why does this morning trouble you?

645 **Abraham**

(turning away from Sarah)

I'll be going away for a few days.

Sarah

What?

650 **Abraham**

Pack some food for us.

Sarah

Us?

Abraham

655 *(struggling for composure against her questioning)*

Go and wake your son. I'll be taking Isaac with me.

Sarah

Where are you going?

Abraham

660 The Lord—has—required a—sacrifice.

Sarah

But, why must you—

Abraham

(exploding)

665 Just do it!

*(instantly sorry for rebuking her, he goes to Sarah, taking her into his arms;
saying as much to himself as to Sarah)*

Oh, my love! Trust in the Lord. Hold onto that faith that has seen us
through all these years. Don't let go!

670 *(firmly)*

He gave us the promise. He'll not take it away.

Sarah

(pleading)

But I don't understand——

675 **Abraham**

(calmly)

He never said we would understand. He said only to obey.

(firmly)

Now go.

680

Sarah lingers, but then slowly draws away from Abraham, holding onto his hand, then fingertips, until no longer touching. She is worried but has a confidence in her husband that is not unlike his confidence in the Lord.

Sarah exits.

685 *Abraham takes a last, long look around him. He spots the article belonging to Isaac that had caught his attention before. He picks it up, looks at it, then, with a heavy sigh, places it inside his garment and exits.*

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