

# What Strong Fences Make

A short play by Israel Horovitz.

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Represented in the USA by Bruce Miller, Washington Square Arts and Film (Management).

Represented in France and Italy by Marie-Cécile Renaud, MCR-Agence Littéraire, Paris.

Represented in Germany by Bettina Migge, Gallansis, Berlin.

Boston Theatre Marathon Draft – Revised April, 2009.

THE PEOPLE OF THE PLAY.

Uri Abromovitch, Israeli, late 20s, large, strong, handsome, scruffy beard.

Itzhak Shiffman, Israeli, late 20s, small, skinny, sweet-faced, thick beard.

THE TIME OF THE PLAY.

Dawn, the present.

THE PLACE OF THE PLAY.

Military checkpoint, just outside entrance to Ramallah, West Bank.

Military checkpoint, just outside  
entrance to Ramallah, West Bank,  
dawn.

In darkness, WE HEAR – A single  
violin, haunting. And then...

URI

Hold it! Stop! Don't come any closer!

LIGHTS FADE UP on URI, Israeli  
“milu'imnik” (military reservist).  
HE is nervous, frightened, holds  
M-16 trained on something in  
shadows.

URI

Come forward, slowly... Let me see your hands...  
Slowly!

ITZHAK walks out of the shadows,  
his hands semi-raised, palms  
forward, as if to show URI he  
isn't armed. HE has Arab home-boy  
look, wears jeans, baggy t-shirt,  
loose fitting jacket, “kafeyah”  
(red and white checked scarf).

ITZHAK

This okay? ...

URI

Fine. Stop there, please.

ITZHAK

What's the problem?

URI

Entrance is closed til 6am. It's not 6, yet.

ITZHAK

(Looks at watch.)

It's 5:52.

URI

This gate's frozen. Nobody crosses til 6.

ITZHAK

Really?

URI

Really. 6.

ITZHAK

You're precise.

URI

It's my job. I'm obliged. Papers?

ITZHAK hands ID to URI.

ITZHAK

Okay?

URI

Why are you going in there?

ITZHAK

It's my job. I'm obliged.

URI

(Studying Itzhak's ID.)

Shiffman? Itzhak?

ITZHAK

Yuh.

URI

I thought you were... Are you related to...?

ITZHAK

Yuh. I am. That's me.

URI

Wow! I didn't recognize you! You look different.  
The beard. You got skinny.

(Pause. And then...)

I know what happened. I... I'm really sorry.

(No reply.)

Must have been so tough.

ITZHAK

It was what it was.

URI

I know your cousin Tali. Short, pretty-faced,  
crazy smart?

ITZHAK

How do you know Tali?

URI

From New York.

ITZHAK

I was going to say.

URI

I lived in New York, when I was little. Tali and I were in school together, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, PS41 in Greenwich Village. She was, like, super-smart, even back then.

ITZHAK

She's back living there.

URI

She moved back?

ITZHAK

Last month. After the funeral.

URI

Understandable. (Beat.) I'm really sorry. (Beat.) There's nothing anybody can say, is there?

ITZHAK

Not a lot. Unless you have the balls to say "I'm glad it was you, not me."

URI

I... (Beat. And then...) I'm not glad it was you. I am glad it wasn't me. I wish it was nobody.

ITZHAK

That's soft.

URI

Yuh, well ... Yuh. (And then...) It's amazing I didn't recognize you. You really look different.

ITZHAK

I lost quite a bit of weight.

URI

Really different. (and then...) Did you go to Geulim School?

ITZHAK

I did... til 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

URI

Were you in Aliza's homeroom, 4th grade?

ITZHAK

I sat three seats behind you.

URI

Holy shit! That's hilarious! I never put that together. Itzhak Shiffman. Little Itzi, right?

ITZHAK

(Smiles.)

I haven't been Little Itzi for a while.

URI

You lived in Talpiyot, right?

ITZHAK

Til 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Then, we moved to Ramot.

URI

I remember that. That's amazing! Itzi. I lived upstairs over Ziggy Levin. I'm Uri Abromavitch.

ITZHAK

I know who you are.

URI

You and Ziggy were, like, a really serious couple in high school, right? You and Ziggy used to...

(Doesn't finish thought. And then...)

I have a friend who was one of the first ones to the bus. I...

(Doesn't finish thought.)

There was nothing anybody...

(Doesn't finish thought.)

I don't know what the fuck to say, man. Itzi, I ... I'm sorry. I can't fuckin' imagine... (Beat.) I don't think I knew your wife.

ITZHAK

She was nice.

URI

I knew it was you when the kids were born. I mean, it was on TV and all. Ziggy reminded me who you were. (Beat.) I guess you kept up with her.

ITZHAK

I do.

URI

I saw their picture, maybe 6 months ago, on their birthday, just before... Were they identical?

ITZHAK

The boys were. The girl was...

URI

Right. Of course. There was a girl. I'm still single, so... (Beat.) My God, I can't imagine...

ITZHAK

Neither can I.

URI

I thought you were working at the university.

ITZHAK

I am. I teach.

URI

Oh, I thought... Right. I read that. What do you teach?

ITZHAK

Poetry.

URI

Right. I read that, too. Or maybe Ziggy told me. You've gotta' be one of the youngest professors.

ITZHAK

I am. The youngest.

URI

I think I knew that. I'm teaching. High school French. (And then...) Why are you trying to go in there, Itzhak? It's crazy fuckin dangerous in there. You're not allowed. You know this. (No reply.) Answer me. I'm serious. Why are you going in, Itzi? Especially, just here. I'm, like, watching my back, bigtime. It's the worst it's been since the intifada started. Two Reservists - - ordinary "milu'imnikim" like me -- got shot at this check-point in the last four weeks. Did you know Tomer Ronen?

ITZHAK

It must be 6.

URI

What? ... 6 what?

ITZHAK

6 o'clock. It must be 6 o'clock by now.

URI

You're not answering me. I need an answer, Itzhak. Why are you looking to go in there?

ITZHAK

I've got a job to do. I'm obliged.

URI

I've got to search you.

ITZHAK

No need. It's exactly what you think it is.

URI

Are you shitting me?

ITZHAK

Tell me what you would do?

URI

I... Are you wired?

(No reply.)

No, Itzhak. Not that. Nobody's ever done that.

ITZHAK

It was their first day of kindergarten. I teach an early graduate-level class on Tuesdays and it was my first class, so I couldn't miss it. My mother slept over, so she could help my wife. I felt vaguely annoyed by the commotion in the house. All the attention was on the children. I was up late writing my first lecture - on Wordsworth. Innocence and Experience. I tried to talk to my wife and my mother about my lecture, but, you know, they weren't interested. Dressing and feeding three kids is a project and a half, so, I... (Beat.) I felt vaguely annoyed. (Beat.) Actually, I felt totally fucking trapped. (Beat.) Who the hell ever expected to be 28 years old with three kids, pulling at me, day and night? I mean, I still have friends who are on their own, single, like you -- dating, shit like that, and, here I am, 28, three kids. (Beat.) I put them on the bus and I kiss them, one at a time. But, not really, you know, meaning it. Then, I take my bus to the university. I feel relieved walking away from them, like I'm, I dunno, younger. (Beat.) On the bus, I'm chatting up this grad student. She is, like, really hot - thick glasses, but a body to die for. I tell her who I am and she goes "Wow! You're famous!", and I'm thinking "Okay. This is good! ... and she goes "You've got the triplets! There was a picture of you and them in Yediot. That must be amazing, triplets!" And, right then, right that same instant, we all start hearing the alarm and the sirens, and she says, in this whisper, "Something bad's happening." (Beat.) I recognize you, Uri. You've still got the same face, it's just, like, pumped up with air, but it's definitely you. I knew Ziggy was going out with you, once in a while. (Beat.) She was still going out with me once in a while, too, Uri. You must've known that, huh?



URI

I guess I did, yuh. Ziggy let that slip.

ITZHAK

I've got a job to do in there, Uri. I chose this gate, 'cause I knew you'd be here. It's after 6. I'm going in. Just let it happen.

URI

I can't do that, Itzhak! You can't do that! No one's ever done that, man.

ITZHAK

"No one's ever done that"?! Are you blind or crazy?

URI

Them, not us. None of us has ever done that.

ITZHAK

Let the games begin. I'm going in, Uri. Just let it happen. No one's going to blame you. No one's ever going to know. Just let it happen.

URI

I can't. You've gotta' get help, Itzhak. There are support groups... You can't do that!

ITZHAK

There's a bus terminal, three blocks inside. The 1<sup>st</sup> bus leaves the terminal at 6:15. It's going to be filled with their filthy little animals. I'm going to stop their filthy little animals from growing into what they grow into. I'm going to do that, Uri. I'm going to send them a message they never fucking dreamed they were gonna get. Me. I'm going to do that. So, either let me go in, or step the fuck out of my way.

URI

I can't let you, Itzhak. I can't.

Without warning, ITZHAK punches URI, violently. URI reels backwards. ITZHAK punches him again. URI drops to ground, his gun falls from his hands. ITZHAK kicks gun aside.

ITZHAK

I'm sorry, Uri. I'm sorry.

ITZHAK walks past URI, exits.

URI crawls to his gun, stands,  
quickly, calls out to ITZHAK.

URI

ITZHAK! STOP! ITZHAK! ITZI! STOP! PLEASE STOP!

URI takes aim, shoots offstage,  
killing Itzhak. Instantly, a flash  
of light and sound of Itzhak's  
body bomb exploding. URI, blown  
backwards, falls. Beat. HE rises  
to his knees, looks off, sobs.  
MUSIC: reprise of opening violin  
solo. And then...

THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

THE PLAY IS OVER.

I.H., N.Y.C.,  
March-April, 2009.