

PERUSAL SCRIPT

MAROR

by James Goldberg



Newport, Maine

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Maror

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CAST — 4m 2f
BISHOP
HOME TEACHER
BROTHER DAVID CARLSON
SISTER CARLSON
DOCTOR
A SISTER

MAROR by James Goldman 4m 2f. About 15 minutes. Simple setting, Contemporary costumes. Inspired by the true incident related by Carlfred Broderick in his book, “The Uses of Adversity.” What can you say or do for anyone who is going through one of those eternity-defining “Gethsemane” experiences? You can comfort, you can be a friend, you can support, you can stand by, holding a hand and have your Faith tried in the process as well. But that is how we bear one another’s burdens. This is what Christ Himself did. Or you can lose yourself in the why of it all. This short play brings up those moments of doubt that plague many and defeat even a few. Included in the volume, “OUT OF THE MOUNT” from the New Play Project in Provo, Utah. **ORDER #3309**

James Goldberg — James was a co-founder of New Play Project, and served as its Artistic Director from 2006-2008. He is also the author of three blogs: goldbergish.blogspot.com, mormon-midrashim.blogspot.com, and caucajewmexdian.blogspot.com. His primary claim to fame is having once written a letter of recommendation for award-winning Bollywood screenwriter Abhijat Joshi.

“In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.” (*Matthew 2:18*)

This play is based on events described in “The Uses of Adversity” by Carlfred Broderick

NOTE: *MAROR* refers to the bitter herbs eaten at the Passover Seder. It is often eaten with haroset, a sweet herb, which denotes that life often mixes the bitter with the sweet. Bitterness for the captivity of Israel in Egypt. Sweetness for the release of the captive nation and the tender mercies of God.

(Lights up on a BISHOP speaking. Note: throughout the play, scenery is minimal—a simple bed and a few chairs are used, but otherwise the only points of visual reference are the actors themselves.)

BISHOP. You know, it's been just a few days shy of a year since I was called as your bishop? And already, we've seen some great times together . . . and some hard ones, too. We've welcomed some friends, said goodbye to others. There have been fifteen babies born in the ward this year: Could end up sixteen, if Sister Carlson doesn't hold out for the first spot in the next. We've also had four funerals. I did a quick count last night: In the past year, over sixty callings have been extended and accepted. Can you imagine that?

With so much happening, and so many volunteers, I've sometimes wondered how God manages to run his church. I certainly can't keep track of it all. I used to think He did it just by revelation, but over the past year I've become convinced that He has a deeper secret than that.

Turn with me to First Corinthians 13. In verse 8 we find out what power God uses to run this church. Follow along with me here and see if you agree.

“Charity never faileth,” says Paul. Do you believe that? “Charity never faileth.” That's the secret. That's what keeps this church alive through the years.

“But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether they be knowledge, it shall pass away.” We have to put our faith in things that aren't one-hundred percent reliable, he's saying. And with me as your bishop, you've probably noticed that that's true.

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” But to paraphrase the next verse: Until we see God face to face, that part is going to have to do.

(Pause.)

And then Paul says something I told my son when he went on his mission. I told him to remember this verse: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” And then the night after we put him on that plane to Salt Lake to head to the MTC, while I was feeling the kind of vulnerability only a parent who's had a child leave home like that for the first time can understand, I was reading again and I realized I had that scripture all wrong. Because if you look at the last verse, it's clear that Paul is not actually telling anyone's son just to start acting like a man.

He's telling us all to start acting like children. Like the children of a loving Heavenly Father, willing to grope and stumble our way forward, armed only with the belief that doing so will somehow lead us back to His presence again. As Paul put it, “Now we see through a glass, darkly;

(Pause.)

but then face to face:—

(Pause.)

Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.

(Pause.)

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

(Pause. Closes scriptures. Pause.)

You live in an imperfect world full of imperfect bishops, spouses, neighbors, home teachers, etc. I want you as a ward to know how proud I am of your example to me of pure Christlike charity. It feeds this

ward. It keeps us spiritually alive, and allows us to keep stumbling god-ward together. And I thank our Father every time I think of those fifteen,

(Smiling at BROTHER CARLSON and the children out in the congregation.)

soon to be sixteen, children He sent to be reared in an environment of such great love. And it's my hope and vision for this ward that we maintain and strengthen the atmosphere of charity so that those children can grow up strong in the Lord and do great works for him throughout this life and into the next.

Brothers and sisters, I leave this testimony and my love with you.

(Lights begin to fade out.)

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Black. In the darkness, we hear the scream of a mother giving birth, followed by the sounds of a newborn child. Sound fades out as light fades in on the Carlsons' HOME TEACHER.)

HOME TEACHER. "Go see the baby," I told him. "Don't worry about the other two kids. It's a miracle—a time like this. Go see your wife and baby. We've got tons of kids at my house. Bring yours over, my wife'll watch 'em."

I gotta tell you, it felt good to do that. It really did. Home teaching is the backbone of this church in my eyes, and if a home teacher can't help a man feel the Spirit as he sees his own new baby—why are we here? That's what I thought.

"If a home teacher can't take care of a man's kids—

(Stops.)

He slipped away somehow. The two-year-old. Must've hit his head running around the pool, fallen in . . . Unconscious.

He was—I mean, his lungs were all full of water, when she found him, and—his color

(He is visibly disturbed, almost physically sick.)

Just different, you know. It's.

I thank God for that woman. She—

(Exhales.)

When my wife found him. I can't imagine how she must've felt. She pulled him out, she pushed the beat back into his heart, breathed air back into his lungs . . . Shaking over his tiny body, praying God please let him live with every breath, till the ambulance came.

She didn't break down till the hospital.

(Breathes.)

We were trying to do a good thing. We were trying to do something good.

(Directly out at audience. A plea.)

But now we don't know if he's ever going to wake up . . .

(Lights fade out. We hear the beep—beep—beep of a sanitized hospital room as we sit in the darkness. The sound fades out as the lights fade in on another hospital room. The MOTHER is still lying in bed, exhausted from giving birth. The FATHER stands behind the bed, holds her hand.)

SISTER CARLSON. How is he?

BROTHER CARLSON. I don't know.

SISTER CARLSON. You should go back to him.

BROTHER CARLSON. My mother's there. She's with him. I need a few moments with you, too.

(Pause.)

SISTER CARLSON. Maybe he has a reason to live. He could've died in that pool. It's almost like he did and then got sent back to struggle to live. Like someone up there said "Joshua, not yet—there's work for you to do." Do you think? Maybe the Lord wants him . . . for something great, even small things can be great. Think of all the prophets and apostles who almost died as children. Maybe if you see it—

BROTHER CARLSON. *(Gently)* Please.

SISTER CARLSON. I mean it might be easier for you.

BROTHER CARLSON. *(Very carefully, gradually)* There are tubes in his nose, and his mouth, tubes in his veins feeding him. His heart is attached to a machine that helps it beat. I don't know how I'm supposed to see that. I don't know what I'm supposed to think.

SISTER CARLSON. Then don't think anything. Just believe.

(Lights fade out. An organ playing the last six chords of "All is well." Lights up on the BISHOP. He is distracted, tired, somber.)

BISHOP. I'd like to welcome you all to sacrament meeting today.

(Pause.)

As many of you know, Sister Carlson gave birth on Monday to a beautiful, healthy baby girl.

And—

As many of you are aware, two-year-old brother Joshua Carlson drowned, or nearly drowned, in an accident on Tuesday.

He's in critical condition in St. John's Hospital.

Joshua—was given emergency CPR by a well-prepared sister. There is no doubt that otherwise he would not be alive and in a hospital today. And I think that's something we should all take note of in terms of emergency preparedness and keeping our lamps full. These situations, thankfully, don't come up every day. That doesn't make it any less important to be ready for them and I urge you all to review your knowledge and prepare. There's more than one way to become a savior on Mount Zion.

Now.

Joshua has been blessed, he's been visited by a great number of you. We are keeping a constant vigil at the hospital so that . . . so that when he wakes up, there will always be a friendly face there to greet him. The Relief Society and priesthood quorums have reached out to the Carlson family to help ensure that temporal needs are cared for, so that they aren't distracted in this very difficult time. We are doing a great deal, brothers and sisters. And that is a good thing.

We can do more. We can do so much more. We can extend our faith, our prayers and a ward fast to young Joshua. I know you are praying, I know a few of you have already fasted and I do not wish to suggest that those efforts have been half-hearted or lacking in any way. I simply want to suggest to you, and remind you that there is a power in focused, collective fasting and prayer which I don't think we're even aware of.

And I know it's unorthodox, but I'd like to spend the majority of this meeting, after the administration of the sacrament, in communal prayer and organizing a rotating perpetual fast for this child's recovery.

(Pause.)

We'll now proceed with a hymn and the administration of the sacrament.

(BISHOP crosses away out of sight and sits. Whisper from the darkness. The BISHOP returns to his original position in the spotlight. Laughs a little through the stress as he says:)

Before the hymn and sacrament, my counselor has reminded me that we ought to open this meeting with a prayer.

(Lights fade out. Lights fade in on DOCTOR.)

DOCTOR. From a biological perspective, the prognosis is not good. It's very simple, really. The brain needs a constant supply of oxygen to continue functioning in a normal way. If the brain is functioning, that's what we call alive, and when there's no brain function, even if we've kept another system up artificially, the patient is dead.

This patient. Joshua. Is not dead. His brain is still alive, if you want to say it that way.

It's just hard, because . . . there was no oxygen being carried to his brain for an indefinite period of time. Not long, we don't think, but it doesn't take long. It doesn't take long for a child to drown in a few inches of water. It's . . . they're so small, and developing still, and . . . very accident prone, honestly.

(With some force.)

Biologically. He's young. His brain isn't all that developed. It was deprived of oxygen, it's at least in severe shock, more likely seriously damaged, and I DON'T KNOW WHY it works this way, but that boy is dying. As far as I see. That boy is going to die slow and hard. It's a simple biological process. It's an event and a process of consequence.

And I understand that they must want to know why, and maybe I do, too. I'm a doctor. You know? I'm a doctor.

I can't tell you those kinds of things.

(Lights fade out. Lights fade back in on a SISTER, at least mid-forties, preferably older.)

SISTER. You know I used to be jealous of the pioneers? When I was a little girl, before I knew struggles and heartache, I was jealous of them. How they walked with God across the snow all those thousands of miles. But now I can see: These are the days for miracles. These are God's days.

When you think about how many men, women and children died on the trek west of fevers and from cold, in accidents, who knows? I know they found strength in that. I know they found comfort. But I wonder if they didn't get just a little numb, too, burying children in the ice. Wonder if they didn't just surrender to God, which is a blessing, but without the time to reflect on the worth of his individual children, too. We always say Jesus would have atoned, would have died for any single one of us alone. And these days, our days, medicine has slowed down the comings and goings of mankind enough that we have time to take that in. Time to be cut to the heart even through the hectic and comforts of modern life by a tragic thing that happens to one individual child.

Medicine has checked death so much that we can fight as a ward for a single individual with all our

hearts, might, mind, and strength.

And I'm not saying this was a bad ward to start, but it's a miracle how this has brought us all together. We are one at heart, anymore, and that heart is all focused on Joshua.

(Lights fade out. Fade in on BROTHER and SISTER CARLSON. She's up and moving now, although probably more than she should be. The light should cut off sharply immediately in front of them. The desired effect is that they are in Joshua's hospital room, standing behind his bed, but Joshua and all the connected medical devices should not be shown.)

BROTHER CARLSON. You should take a break.

SISTER CARLSON. I want to stay here.

BROTHER CARLSON. You still need your rest. I know it feels longer, but it's only been a few weeks...

SISTER CARLSON. I want to stay with him.

BROTHER CARLSON. I'm here. Grandma's here. The doctors and nurses are here. The ward is here.

SISTER CARLSON. I want to stay.

BROTHER CARLSON. I don't want you hurting yourself when you don't have to. It's not helping anyone. You need to moderate.

SISTER CARLSON. *(Silent tears streaming down her face)* I want to be here when our faith makes him whole.

(Lights out. Beep—beep—beep. Lights fade in on the BISHOP, seated, FATHER seated opposite him.)

BISHOP. It's a difficult situation

BROTHER CARLSON. Yeah.

BISHOP. I know it doesn't change anything, but I want you to know how much I admire the way you've handled it. You're a strong man, and also a wise and kind one. It's not often you see all three qualities that way.

BROTHER CARLSON. It's not my qualities. It's just that there's nothing else I can do right now and bring my family through.

BISHOP. How's the daughter?

BROTHER CARLSON. Everything's fine. Could hardly be better. We've been blessed in that baby. She's long-suffering already. Which is good when . . . you have to . . .

BISHOP. Yeah.

BROTHER CARLSON. I believe, Bishop. And when I don't I've asked for help in my unbelief. It's been six weeks. He isn't getting any better. When is the time to wait for a miracle and when is the time—

(Long pause.)

BISHOP. To let go?

BROTHER CARLSON. To consider other options. Just. To think again. Does that make my faith less—?

BISHOP. David. You carry a heavy load of care for your family. And carrying that load is going to mean some thought.

BROTHER CARLSON. How do I talk to her, Bishop? How do I talk to my wife like this?

(Pause. The phone rings. The BISHOP is visibly frustrated. The phone keeps ringing. Persistently.)

BISHOP. I think . . . maybe I better take this.

(He hesitates, waiting for some sign of permission. BROTHER CARLSON nods. He picks it up. Into phone:)

Hello? . . . Yes. Yes, this is he . . . Of course. He can stay at our home if he'd like . . . I understand. Just passing through . . . Flight 7920. Delta. We'll be there. How long—? . . . I have the father right here in my office, I can ask now. One second.

(Covers phone.)

Elder Diener from the Quorum of the Seventy is going to be at the airport tonight on his way to South Asia. He's only got an hour or two, but somehow he heard about Joshua and was asked if he could give a blessing. He wouldn't give one, of course, without a request from the family, but he wanted to at least visit and make sure you knew he has time.

I know Joshua's already been blessed by you, by the patriarch, by the stake—

BROTHER CARLSON. Tell him to come.

BISHOP. It's the same authority, David. There's no difference between your priesthood and his.

BROTHER CARLSON. It can't hurt. Tell him to come.

BISHOP. *(Into phone, taking notes on a Palm Pilot)* He'd love it. Thank you . . . tomorrow at 6:45 P.M. . . . Got it . . . 801 . . . 936 . . . 2 . . . 175 . . . Got it. I'll call if there's any confusion . . . Thank you again . . . Bye.

(He hangs up the phone.)

BISHOP. See you at the hospital tomorrow around seven o'clock?

(Lights out. Lights fade in on the DOCTOR.)

DOCTOR. An extended coma . . . when you're dealing with this length of time. It's not an easy thing for people.

The, ah, the human body is designed for a more active kind of homeostasis: That means, the balance of your health is dependent on a certain amount of physical activity. That's how we've survived through millennia, that's why we exercise: It's part of the system. And it's a part that's been disrupted in this case.

The only initial problem was with an unknown amount of brain damage due to a lack of oxygen, pure and simple. We've established that the extent of that damage is, ah, fairly . . . severe. But at the beginning, at least, the body was fine.

(Pause.)

His knees have bent backwards. And his feet. It doesn't usually happen that way . . . muscles always atrophy, they often stiffen and contract, but it doesn't usually cause—

His bones are just so young. They're softer, still more flexible than even a five-year-old's. I've never seen that before. His knees bent backwards.

We asked the nurses to massage them more frequently. We're hoping that helps alleviate the current condition and prevent any further . . .

His mother asked if they would let her do it, too. Train her to do it properly. Five of the women from her

church have done the same.

You know, most people wouldn't want to look at that child right now, but they stay with him night and day, and those six massage him every fifteen minutes. It's incredible. When the men come to be with him, or to be there with the women, you can tell it's hard for them to watch.

Sometimes it's hard for me to watch.

I admire these people. I really do.

(Pause. Very cool, collected.)

You want my professional opinion? The child is going to die. He's been dying since day one, and every day the infinitesimal chance that he'll somehow pull through and bounce back gets smaller. I don't even know if there is a chance, any more, realistically. It's not something I've ever seen. Even seen documented.

There was a time not too long ago when people just died at some point. But you know the thing that breaks my heart for those people?

He's not going to just die. Not with what we're doing to him.

They're going to have to decide to let him go, and until they do it's costing them I don't even know how many thousand dollars a day.

(Lights fade out. Pause. Lights fade in on BROTHER and SISTER CARLSON, arguing.)

FIVE MORE PAGES TO THE END OF THE SCRIPT