

the beginning of

**WHAT MAKES A MAN?** (from **OY!**)

a radio comedy by Rich Orloff

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*Characters:*

IRA GERSHBERG, 29  
HOWARD, his father  
SHIRLEY, his mother  
NAOMI, his sister  
MANNY, Ira's friend (a man of clay)  
Also a FROG and FRIEDMAN (small roles)

Scene 1: Prologue

IRA: (TO US) The private journal of Ira Gershberg. Yesterday was my birthday. When I review the first 29 years of my life, I sigh. When I took my SAT's in high school, I got a perfect score. Throughout college, I've gotten A's. But where has this brilliance gotten me? I still live with my parents. I haven't had a date in a year; two years if you don't count my father's partner's second cousin. Nobody respects me: not my classmates, not my parents. For my last birthday, my sister bought me a year's supply of post-it pads. As I reflect on my life, I ponder two questions: What makes a man? And what makes a man a schlemiel, a total loser? And, I guess, a third question: Is there anything he can do about it?

MUSIC: BRIDGE

Scene 2: The Gershberg kitchen, dinner time

IRA: (TO US) I guess my story begins at dinner time. I was late, and my mom, dad and sister were waiting with their usual impatience.

NAOMI: Mom, I'm hungry.

SHIRLEY: Naomi, you've been hungry since birth.

HOWARD: It's almost sundown. Is he such a nebbish he can't get home in time for Shabbat dinner?

SHIRLEY: He'll be here.

NAOMI: I'm starving.

SHIRLEY: We'll eat when he gets home.

NAOMI: I have the only Jewish mother who doesn't cook too much.

SHIRLEY: Your generation wants instant gratification.

NAOMI: I could defer gratification if I could just have a snack while I'm waiting for it.

HOWARD: Ira should know better than to be out this late.

NAOMI: He probably got so caught up in his doodling he didn't notice how late it got.

SHIRLEY: It's not doodling; it's illustrating.

HOWARD: It's money down the toilet, that's what it is.

SHIRLEY: Howard, how can you say such a thing?

HOWARD: I'll tell you why. Because my brilliant son dropped out of medical school because he was afraid he might give a patient the wrong diagnosis. Then he dropped out of pharmacy school because he was afraid he might give someone the wrong pill. Now he's studying to become a medical illustrator, and I expect him to drop out because he's afraid he'll stick someone with a colored pencil.

SHIRLEY: He just needs encouragement. He's very insecure.

HOWARD: Why is he so insecure? How many times have I told him, "You're a brilliant boy! So stop acting like a jerk."

NAOMI: I'm so glad I'm engaged to a real man like Avi.

SHIRLEY: Avi is a moron.

NAOMI: I don't care. When we go out, he lets me clean his plate.

IRA: (OFF-MIKE) Hi, everybody. Sorry I'm late.

SHIRLEY: Oh my God! Those bruises – what happened to you?!

IRA: Nothing, I just got slightly mugged.

HOWARD: Are you okay?

IRA: They took my money, my art pad, and all my pencils.

SHIRLEY: Here, let me wipe the shmutz off your face.

IRA: I can do it, Mom.

SHIRLEY: No problem. I'll just get out my handkerchief and –

SOUND: SPIT

SHIRLEY: Now a little rubbing –

IRA: Mom, will you stop mothering me?

SHIRLEY: I'm a mother. That's what I do.

IRA: Mother Naomi.

NAOMI: At least serve bigger portions.

IRA: If David Feldman learns about this, I'll never hear the end of it. It's his week.

HOWARD: "His week"?

NAOMI: Every week a different classmate gets a turn to torment him.

SHIRLEY: They should be ashamed of themselves.

IRA: I've mentioned that. It's not an effective deterrent.

HOWARD: Why don't you defend yourself? When you were a boy, I paid for two years of karate classes.

NAOMI: Then he dropped out because he was afraid he might kick someone in the wrong place.

IRA: Dad, I need an advance on my allowance.

HOWARD: You need to learn to fight.

IRA: I'm a thinker, not a fighter.

NAOMI: Maybe you should think up a fighter.

IRA: A fighter? Hmmm.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

Scene 3: Ira's bedroom

IRA: (TO US) Naomi gave me an idea. It was the first gift she ever gave me I didn't want to return. After dinner, I went downstairs to my basement bedroom and found a book I had read in rabbinical school, before I dropped out because of an overwhelming fear of mispronouncing Hebrew.

(Note: The word *golem* is pronounced with a hard O as in "go".)

IRA: Let's see. I know it's around here some— Here it is. The History of the Golem in Jewish Folklore. "In Jewish stories, the golem was an artificial man. Rumor had it that one was created by a sixteenth century Kabbalistic rabbi in Prague. Since then, there have been unsubstantiated tales of golems made by eccentric Jewish scientists throughout the centuries.

SOUND: TURNING A PAGE

IRA: "Among the ingredients used in the stories are..." I can do this. I know science. I know anatomy. I can sew. All my life people have mocked me. No more!

MUSIC: BRIDGE

Scene 4: Ira's creations

IRA: (TO US) From that moment on, I poured myself into the project. I made drawings, I made models, I visited every golem site on the Internet. Although none of the formulas for making a golem worked in themselves, I kept experimenting with different combinations. I got dust from soil at the base of Mount Sinai, clay from the land where King David was born, and water distilled from the tears of humankind. Finally, after many months, a breakthrough: I created – a golem frog.

FROG: Ribbit, ribbit.

IRA: It lives!... Hey come back. Don't go upstairs.

SOUND: IRA: 'S FOOTSTEPS RUSHING UP THE STEPS.

FROG: Ribbit, ribbit.

IRA: Not the living room.

FROG: Ribbit, ribbit.

HOWARD: What's a frog doing in our house?!  
Oh my God, it's another plague!

NAOMI: (OFF-MIKE) I'm back from tennis class...  
A frog! Eww.

SOUND: THWACK!!!

NAOMI: Got him.

IRA: (TO US) I went back to the drawing board,  
and I created – a golem mouse. But it ran away.

SHIRLEY: (SCREAMS, THEN:) Oh my God, a mouse!  
And he looks like he's been made from the  
tears of mouse misery! Where's my broom?

SOUND: THWACK!!!

SHIRLEY: Got him.

IRA: (TO US) Finally, I was ready for the big step.  
And this time, I knew it wasn't going to get thwacked.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

Scene 5: The Gershberg kitchen, dinner time

NAOMI: I'm hungry!

SHIRLEY: Ira's still studying downstairs.

NAOMI: (CALLING OFF-MIKE) Hey, jerk, dinner's ready!

IRA: (OFF-MIKE) Be up in a moment.

HOWARD: His moments have been getting longer and longer.

SOUND: INTENSE ELECTRIC STATIC.

HOWARD: What the – what's wrong with the electricity?

NAOMI: (CALLING OFF-MIKE) What the hell are you doing down –

IRA: (OFF-MIKE) Sorry to keep you all waiting.

SHIRLEY: Oh my God, Ira!

NAOMI: Why are you covered with blood?

IRA: Mom, have you made enough food to set another place?

SHIRLEY: I can always stretch.

NAOMI: We don't have enough food.

SHIRLEY: I'll make extra salad.

NAOMI: Salad isn't food. Salad's just the advance man letting your stomach know real food's on the way.

IRA: Will you two stop kvetching?! I've invited someone to dinner. Come upstairs, Manny.

SOUND: HEAVY FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS

HOWARD: What the –

MANNY: Hehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

IRA: Everybody, this is Manny. Manny, this is my family.

MANNY: Hehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

IRA: I'm still fine-tuning the vocal chords.

NAOMI: He's a, he's a –

IRA: Golem. He's my golem. He'll protect me. *Now* maybe I'll get some respect.

SHIRLEY: He's not going to drip blood on the floor, is he? I just waxed it.

HOWARD: This is what you've been wasting your time on instead of schoolwork?

NAOMI: He looks like Gumby.

IRA: (TO US) Respect didn't feel *quite* like I imagined it.