

**A Righteous Man**

A One Act Play

By

Laura Maria Censabella

### **Characters**

<b>Noah</b>	<b>18 years old. A college freshman. He's got a warm, honest, open face.</b>
<b>Father Gaines</b>	<b>40s or 50s. A priest and college dean. Race Neutral.</b>

### **Time**

**The present.**

### **Place**

**A small Catholic college in a mid-Atlantic state.**

Note: Slash marks indicate where a second character interrupts the dialogue as the first character continues.

### **Author's Note**

This play was commissioned by Break The Wall, a curated online archive of short plays about Israel-Palestine. It is a work of fiction. However, all political organizations and mechanisms cited in the play are true and backed up with journalistic source material.

### **To the Marathon Committee**

I have done a number of drafts of this play and am willing to revise, especially as I've not yet had a reading of the play with actors.

NOAH is huddled, fully clothed, on his unmade dorm room bed. There is another, neatly made-up bed nearby. FATHER GAINES, a Catholic priest in his 40s, stands at the threshold of the room.

NOAH

I didn't mean it! You know I didn't mean it, right?

FATHER GAINES

What didn't you----

NOAH

Right?

FATHER GAINES

Noah----

NOAH

At least tell me where he is!

FATHER GAINES

I need you to step outside into the hallway to----

Gaines' phone rings during the above.

FATHER GAINES

(Into phone)

He won't come out. (. . .) Yes. (. . .) Yes! I told you I need to talk to him first.

He hangs up.

FATHER GAINES

Noah, do I have permission to enter your room?

NOAH

If you tell me where he is.

FATHER GAINES

Mercy hospital.

Gaines steps into the room.

NOAH

The hospital?! Why is he in the hospital? I've got to see him. Let me see him!

Noah bolts toward the door. Gaines blocks him.

FATHER GAINES

If you leave this building, I won't be able to protect you anymore.

NOAH

I want to talk to Rabbi what's-his-name. Where is Rabbi----

FATHER GAINES

Rabbi Eisenstein is on his way.

NOAH

Then I'll wait for him.

FATHER GAINES

You cannot wait for him! There isn't time! (Beat, trying to stay calm) Please...sit down.

Beat. Noah does. Gaines sits on the opposite bed.

NOAH

That's his bed!

Gaines half gets up and then sits again.

FATHER GAINES

Noah, you know how serious this is, right? This is not like the uh uh incidents on other campuses--swastikas, a pulled off hijab. This is-- (Beat) As much as it pains me to think a student at our college--I--I need to know-- Several people saw you running away from today's demonstration.

NOAH

I don't want to talk to a priest!

FATHER GAINES

I am acting now in an ecumenical, in--in a pastoral--and also--also as an administrator of this school. / As Dean of this college, it is my--my responsi/bility----

NOAH

Really? You can do both?

NOAH

At least let me call him.

FATHER GAINES

No.

NOAH

Why?

FATHER GAINES

Because he's in no shape to receive--! (Beat) The hospital will notify me when there is news.

NOAH

Oh God oh God oh God.

FATHER GAINES

You must explain yourself--maybe it wasn't--you said you didn't (mean it)---

NOAH

(Under his breath)

It was just a rock.

FATHER GAINES

What?

NOAH

It was just a rock.

FATHER GAINES

So you...? So...? You did throw it at him?

NOAH

No.

FATHER GAINES

At his head?

NOAH

No.

FATHER GAINES

So that he was knocked unconscious?!

NOAH

NO! ...I didn't stay to see what happened.

A decision.

FATHER GAINES

(Agitated) All right. All right. I--I need you to look over these papers.

NOAH

...?

Gaines hands them to Noah who is too upset to read them.

NOAH

What are these?

FATHER GAINES

I need you to acknowledge that you received them earlier this year.

NOAH

...?

FATHER GAINES

They were given to all freshmen at Orientation. Our Title VI Officer, Ms. Janet Conterelli, did a workshop on federal anti-discrimination policy----

NOAH

You think I threw a rock at Khalid because he's----?!

FATHER GAINES

Ms. Conterelli, like Rabbi Eisenstein, is out of town for the long weekend or she herself would be accompanying me----

NOAH

I don't give a shit about Ms. *Cunterelli*! Are you--are you expelling me? Without even hearing my side?

FATHER GAINES

Noah, it is quite possible that the police will be investigating this as a hate crime. Do you understand the seriousness of---? / What this could do to you? The school?

NOAH

The police! Why are the police--?!

FATHER GAINES

Campus Security is waiting outside. When we are finished, they are going to turn you over to the----

NOAH

Khalid would never press charges! I thought you were a priest. Aren't you supposed to be comforting me? I need to speak to my dad!

Noah picks up his phone. Gaines starts.

FATHER GAINES

Don't do that.

NOAH

My father's in Israel right now.

He hesitates.

FATHER GAINES

Then perhaps we both could--*should*----

NOAH

He'll go ballistic. He's--

Breaks off.

FATHER GAINES

What?

NOAH

(Under his breath) Righteous.

FATHER GAINES

What?

NOAH

Righteous.

FATHER GAINES

I'm not following you. Moral and upstanding?

NOAH

Like in the Bible. The Old Testament. Outrage. Moral-- (outrage) One minute God loves his people, the next minute he's--he's smiting them. My father says everything God does is to "make right"--righteous--his relationship with his people. Even anger and vengeance. At least that's what he says when he...

He trails off.

FATHER GAINES

Does he physically hurt you?

NOAH

No. (Beat, much worse) He...he judges me. He-- (Beat) I won't be accused of a (hate crime)--of a...

He can't say the words.

FATHER GAINES

If you tell me what led up to--maybe--maybe we can see a way through. You're a good kid. If we...

Gaines sits again.

NOAH

And get off his bed! That blanket comes from Lebanon. His grandma gave it to him when we were in fourth grade. It's / delicate.

FATHER GAINES

(Incredulous) Wait a minute. You two--you know each other since childhood? You weren't put together by campus housing? (To himself) Why didn't anyone tell me this?

Gaines stops sitting on the blanket.

FATHER GAINES

Is there documentation on this?

NOAH

On our friendship? Everyone knows we----

FATHER GAINES

Then--then--there could be any number of-- (A sudden idea) Did you fight about the room?

NOAH

What?

FATHER GAINES

The mess on your side of the room?

NOAH

What are you talking about?

FATHER GAINES

I'm trying to give you a way out! Not of everything, but maybe we can-- We're doing important work here at Xavier. The kind of *values*-- We can't have something like this-- (Slowly to get through) Did you have a spat about something--trivial? This room, for instance? As close *friends*?

NOAH

You mean the school's off the hook then if it had nothing to / do with---

FATHER GAINES

Was he angry that your side of the room is such a----?

NOAH

That is the stupidest-- And no, we joke about it. Khalid even says that he has the right to take over my side. You know, the old argument about how "Jews made the desert bloom." The reason the Israelis gave for years / for taking----

FATHER GAINES

This is no time for jokes! You--you could be looking at real time! Just tell the police that you two are the best of friends.

NOAH

We are!

FATHER GAINES

And that this was just an accident. A misunderstanding between----

NOAH

That's what I've been trying to tell you.

Gaines hesitates then puts the papers down.

NOAH

You're on my side then?

FATHER GAINES

I've always been on your side.

NOAH

Doesn't feel like it.

FATHER GAINES

Your personal, ethical and spiritual growth is the reason this--this school exists, the reason we have killed ourselves to keep going in the face of rising expenses, decreased funding from the church, the scholarships we've gone out and raised by-- We're proud of this school's religious diversity--we----

NOAH

Then why do I feel like I've got a big fat Jewish star on my back when I walk past Immaculata Hall?

FATHER GAINES

(Stung) If that's--if that's how you feel then why aren't you involved at Hillel House? Rabbi told me that you're not----

NOAH

I don't roll that way.

FATHER GAINES

Which way do you roll?

NOAH

Microeconomics and International Studies. You've got a few great professors here and you're close to Washington so----

FATHER GAINES

Exactly! Our social justice mission----

NOAH

Social justice? Most of the students here have never lived out of state, let alone give a rat's ass about the world. Have you ever been to a hockey party on a Friday night? (imitating drunk students) *Do it up! Excellent. Excellent!*

FATHER GAINES

That is a mischaracterization of the majority of our----

NOAH

(Suddenly) Jews don't do absolution.

FATHER GAINES

...?

NOAH

You bless somebody (makes sign of cross) and then they're like...it doesn't work like that. We believe if you sin against somebody, you need to beg forgiveness from the person you hurt.

FATHER GAINES

What would you beg forgiveness for?

NOAH

(Beat) This was not hate.

FATHER GAINES

Okay.

NOAH

It was the opposite of----

FATHER GAINES

Okay.

NOAH

You'll help me explain that to the police?

FATHER GAINES

That's what I'm here for. But what are you going to tell them?

NOAH

That we've been friends since first grade. PS 153.

FATHER GAINES

Good. And then you say you--you threw the rock without thinking, to scare him about something.

NOAH

But----

FATHER GAINES

There was no intention to deliberately hurt him because he is a (Muslim)--because of his----

NOAH

Yeah.

FATHER GAINES

You didn't even think you'd hit him.

NOAH

No. Like in tenth grade he accidentally shot a bee bee in my eye.

FATHER GAINES

No no no. Keep it simple. Keep it to now. Clear.

NOAH

We were wrestling over it and it accidentally went off. At least that's what I told my dad but really it was just Khalid goofing with the gun and pointing it at my face. He didn't know it was loaded.

FATHER GAINES

Okay, it was something like that today, where you were both playing around.

NOAH

I never ratted him out for that.

FATHER GAINES

That's right you've got a bond that goes back for years----

NOAH

I had to have my lens replaced in my left eye. Khalid wanted to come clean--go to my dad 'cause my peripheral vision is shot to hell which was the end of my pitching, but I wouldn't-- My father, he has certain *contradictions*, like I said, especially when it comes to what he thought was gonna be my baseball career.

FATHER GAINES

Okay, you loved Khalid so much, you lied--white lied--to protect him. But this was years ago--this has nothing to----

NOAH

And we've been brothers ever since! It didn't matter that his family's Muslim-- And my family's-- 'cause we never made a thing of it--we *agreed* on things--we--

He breaks off

FATHER GAINES

What?

NOAH

You know my father was stabbed last year?

FATHER GAINES

No, I didn't. I----

NOAH

He was on a peace mission to Israel and the West Bank. With American Jews. It's not like my dad is a bleeding heart or anything, he just thinks peace is the only--the only rational way. A real two-state solution and stop the *goddamn settlements*. Anyway, he was out in the morning just taking a walk, and this Palestinian Arab in the old part of Jerusalem without knowing anything about my dad, he just saw the yarmulke on his head and he--

He breaks off.

FATHER GAINES

So you've been shaken up ever since----

NOAH

No! Well, yes! But not at Khalid. My dad...he's my...he's my...

FATHER GAINES

Rock?

Noah looks at him.

FATHER GAINES

I'm sorry.

NOAH

A half inch over (indicates his heart) and it would've killed him. I went crazy when he was in surgery, I mean I'm like halfway across the world from him. Khalid... Khalid and his family made me stay at their house so I wouldn't be alone.

FATHER GAINES

You tell the police that.

NOAH

Khalid used to say that Arabs have to fight to get rid of anti-Semitism around the world, and we Jews have to fight for Arabs' rights. Especially now. Since the election. And that's what he and I plan to do. / You know my dad forgave

FATHER GAINES

But----

NOAH

the maniac who stabbed him? He went to the man's trial with my mom and begged for leniency. He said the family of the guy who stabbed him lost access to their olive groves because the Wall--

FATHER GAINES

Your father is clearly an admirable man but this is still----

NOAH

I'm not sure I could've. Not if someone shoved a knife a quarter inch from my heart!

Gaine's phone rings.

FATHER GAINES

(Into phone) Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. Yes. Thank you.

Hangs up.

NOAH

What?!

FATHER GAINES

(Hesitates) There's--there's hemorrhaging. In his brain. He's in surgery right now.

NOAH

Oh no! Khalid! KHALID!

Noah falls into Gaines's arms. Gaines comforts Noah. Eventually--

FATHER GAINES

What happened today, son? Please just tell me. Were you blinded by the sun and your bad eye----?

NOAH

I just wanted to scare him! That's all I-- He's--lately he's--all the time, talking about-- Which is right--I told him he was right!

FATHER GAINES

Right about what?

NOAH

Khalid's grandmother's house was bombed this summer. Israel launched an air strike over Southern Lebanon because a Hamas rocket landed outside a settlement.

FATHER GAINES

Was she killed?

Noah shakes his head.

NOAH

No. She was out, thank God. Sitoo. (Note: a Lebanese Arabic word for “grandma.”) I met her that time when she came to the States. She cooked kibbeh for me. ...Her house is rubble now. (Suddenly) He wanted me to go to the demonstration with him this morning. But I said no.

FATHER GAINES

Because you don’t believe in their----

NOAH

Boycotting Israel, divestments, sanctions-- My father--he says it would hurt too many people--not everyone in Israel is on the far Right. But Khalid wanted me to come and listen to some speeches.

FATHER GAINES

But you said no.

NOAH

There are groups now. Zionist groups who watch students. Take down names. On a list. Zionist Jewish watchdogs. If you go to any demonstrations criticizing any policies of Israel. “Today’s radicals are not tomorrow’s employees.” They’ve got a lot of money behind them and they get even moderate Jews----

FATHER GAINES

You didn’t want to go because you were afraid of being put on that list?

NOAH

They send the list to your future employers! So you don’t get a job because--because you’re an enemy of Israel! Not that my father agrees with it AT ALL, but when it comes to me, my future, like I said, there are certain contradictions and he wants me to have / the best (chance)----

FATHER GAINES

Khalid’s not scared of this? This List?

NOAH

He called me a pussy. He said the stakes just aren’t as high for me--it’s the first time we-- And I said to him dude, it’s no joke--not if we want to go to law school, clerk for judges like we planned, I told him this could ruin our careers before we have any chance to----

FATHER GAINES

But you *did* go to the demonstration--how do you explain--?

NOAH

I was just passing by on my way to the library.

FATHER GAINES

That doesn't cut it. Assumption Field is not the only way to the library.

NOAH

I just needed to see--check it out-- I was just *passing*--

...There was a bunch of them. About twelve. 'Cause you know the Palestinian cause is not a big deal on this campus no matter what you say about your social justice (mission)-- And the Zionists were-- I've never seen so many so-called Jews all at once here--*not* people who go to this school. And they were shouting hateful-- Calling the peaceful protestors anti-Semitic pigs. I was ashamed to be a Jew.

He stops.

FATHER GAINES

Was he happy?

NOAH

Who?

FATHER GAINES

Khalid. To see you?

NOAH

His face lit up. He thought I was going to join in--with him--but I was... I was just so--*tired*...of it all. The constant-- That's when I turned away. And Khalid he--

FATHER GAINES

What?

NOAH

Called out "HEY BEE BEE, TURN AROUND."

FATHER GAINES

"Bee bee"?

NOAH

That's our name for each other. And I did. I turned. And he looked me right in the eye. And he shouted "Long Live The Intifada!" Knowing my father, knowing exactly what he--

FATHER GAINES

So that's when / you----

NOAH

That's when I picked up a rock. The way the Palestinians throw rocks at Israeli soldiers. "It's only rocks" he's always telling me. The Israelis have tanks. And I aimed.

I aimed it at his forehead. Even with my wrecked eye, if I stare at someone dead on, I've still got a pretty good arm.

FATHER GAINES

(Trying to hide his agitation) Okay, you cannot say this to the police, or you-- It was a fight about a girl. Or some stupid fight about the mess in your--or (suddenly occurring to him) are you two lovers?

NOAH

(Truthful) What? No!

FATHER GAINES

Okay then. What you did was wrong but it wasn't hate. It was because he hurt you, after all the growing up you did together, the years you lived side by side, you had some stupid assinine spat-- That's what you say to the police. What you did was wrong, but it wasn't / hate--

NOAH

Was it?

FATHER GAINES

I'm trying to protect you! You could be charged with attempted murder in a civil rights case! Surely you had other conflicts besides the Palestinian Israeli thing?

Noah shakes his head no, then drops to his knees.

FATHER GAINES

What are you doing?

NOAH

...

FATHER GAINES

Listen to me, Noah, you're not thinking straight. You're scared----

NOAH

What if he dies? What if he dies and I don't get to ask him to forgive me?!

Noah bows his head.

NOAH

Your religion shows mercy. Please. I thought I was being righteous but I--I----

Gaines hesitates. He raises his hand to bless the boy but then:

FATHER GAINES

This will hurt too many people.

NOAH

(Looking up) . . . ?

FATHER GAINES

The attention in the press. A discrimination suit. Our *federal funding*. You just keep it simple with the police. You were friends, your bad eye--it was just a fight about--space--in your room.

Gaines starts to bless him.

NOAH

You want me to LIE? After everything--you want me to LIE?!

Silence.

NOAH

Give me those papers.

Gaines doesn't move. Noah grabs them.

NOAH

(Reading) *I Noah Friedman received training in diversity and anti-discrimination--*

He ad-libs as he writes in.

NOAH

And I knowingly tried to kill Khalid Amin simply because he is...a Muslim. (crossing out) Well, not "simply."

FATHER GAINES

Don't go out there.

NOAH

(One last appeal) Will you go out with me?

FATHER GAINES

(No) You'll take us all down.

NOAH

(Beat) Then this is between *us*. Between Khalid and me. This is our thing. It's always been between *us*.

Noah goes out to turn himself in.

**Blackout**