

JIFF AND HARRY, a LENTEN DRAMA
Based on Luke 15: 11-32, “The Prodigal Son”

It is after the big party. Two sons are in a quiet room together. The older brother is named Harry; the younger is named Jeffrey, but goes by his childhood nickname Jiff.

Jiff Well, that was quite a party wasn't it? (silence from brother Harry). QUITE a party. (A beat) Yes, indeed! (more silence from brother Harry). It was really nice of Dad to throw that party, especially on short notice. I mean, the food! The booze! It was great! And those women! I've been gone far too long. . . Hah! Didn't you notice? I didn't remember the neighborhood girls looking so good! Wow, have they grown up! (more silence)

God, I would get frostbite if I were sitting any closer to you! Hey, brother, you're over-acting. You sat there, the whole party, like an iceberg that beached in a banana republic. You never got up once to dance!

Harry (shoots dagger looks at Jiff, says nothing)

Jiff Harry, this isn't going to be any easier if you just sit there, again. (a beat of silence) We're sort of "under orders," you know. Because Dad wants . . .

Harry LEAVE DAD OUT OF THIS!

Jiff Ouch! You know, Harry, he's my Dad too.

Harry Well, he wasn't, for three years. You abandoned us, Jiff. You just walked out on your family, and you expect to come back from your carousing, and waltz right into a party!

Jiff Hold the venom, big brother. I don't think we're in this room to start World War Three!

Harry You started it, little brother, when you destroyed our family life, ... no really, before that, when you just "checked out" years ago!

Jiff Well, that's interesting. So now that I am back, you have checked out. Isn't this sweet! Our Dad wants us to get along, and you are emotionally checked out.

Harry I am not! I am very in touch with my emotions, Jiff. I'm angry at you!

Jiff (sarcastically) No kidding!! You act like one big BALLOON of resentment, waiting to burst!

Harry (angry) No I'm not!!

Jiff Yes you are!

Harry No I'm not! But, how Dad expects us to "kiss and make up" after what you did!?

Jiff (sarcastically) Really! By the way, what did I "did," big brother?

Harry You know what I mean. You have no standards. When you walked out, you left your morals and your upbringing behind. You always were a womanizer, even as a teenager. And then you took half our family inheritance and just blew it on prostitutes!!

Jiff (quietly) Did Dad tell you that I spent money on prostitutes?

Harry (a beat of silence; quietly) No.

Jiff (still calmly) Who told you I blew my inheritance on prostitutes? (silence) Harry, this is never going to go any further until you level with me. Who accused me of spending money on prostitutes?

Harry (an awkward silence. Harry turns his face away from Jiff). I just know you, you little. . .

Jiff Wow! I had no idea that childhood resentments could last so many years! This sounds like the kind of stuff you used to rant about when we were kids.

Harry You've always been reckless. You've always been a "party-boy"!

Jiff Did you tail me when I went to the east coast? Did you put a private investigator on my trail?

Harry Don't be ridiculous!

Jiff Well, you started it. It's ridiculous to mask what you're really thinking with imaginary prostitutes. I have never been to a prostitute in my life! (Harry isn't buying it.) . . . Okay, I admit that I did some drugs. I drank. But I never spent money on prostitutes.

Harry I don't believe you.

Jiff It's about the money, isn't it, Harry?

Harry (feigning surprise) What?

Jiff It's about the money, man!—Your resentment. I admit it! I burned through a lot of money in three years. I admit that. Well, actually, it took about one year! And you resent me for burning through family money, don't you?

Harry (accusing) What in the hell were you doing, Jiff? Do you even remember how much cash you walked out with that day?

Jiff (a moment of quiet to reflect. Speaking to the ceiling, as if in a far-off place.)
Well, I dreamed dreams, big brother. I was younger. I had HUGE ideas about what life would hold for me, . . . about the cool, really GREAT things I would do. I would become RICH AND FAMOUS. I had the money to get established! I lived decently. I got a really great apartment! I bought a car. . . . A brand new Jag, silver . . . Okay, I lived too high. I partied. . . . I got sick. I don't know how it happened so fast, but in a year, I didn't have a decent job anymore. And then the money was gone. And then, . . . then I didn't have a job at all.

Harry In one year? Do you realize how much money that was?

Jiff So it IS about the money isn't it? (This time, Jiff is silent.) Harry, I'm sorry. I was really young. And I made stupid mistakes. Quite a few of them, in a row.

Harry (a beat) What did you do for two more years?

Jiff I . . . Harry, I haven't told Dad this part. He didn't ask. In fact, he hushed me; didn't want the details. . . . Harry, I became homeless. . . . I slept in my car for a month and a half. Then they repossessed it. I stayed in a buddy's apartment, but his girl friend made him kick me out. I slept in parks. Winter came. I slept over heating grates, for God's sake! I got sicker. One day, a guy pulled my face out of the gutter where I had barfed, passed out, slept in it. I pretended like I didn't realize it, but I was just as grossed out as he was. . . . They took me to the hospital, well, a clinic. A really grungy free clinic on Skid Row.

Harry (shocked and disgusted) God!

Jiff I was in and out of shelters for more than a year. There's no hope in those shelters, Harry. There is no hope! They're dehumanizing. I couldn't stand it. One morning, I just took my bags full of stuff, and walked out. No money. No job. Still no future. I remember sitting on the grass in front of a college campus, watching people a little younger than me, full of dreams, full of potential. I think I cried for an hour. And I kept walking.

Harry Where did you go?

Jiff I slept in doorways, for weeks. I had my stuff stolen. And finally I walked out of the city to a small town in Jersey. . . . A woman took pity. Well, to make a long story short, I wound up doing farm chores for about three months, until last fall. I got a few bucks together, and slept in a lean-to room off the barn. And then I woke up. . . . I remembered what I had left behind, Dad and all . . . and you. And I woke up, and decided to come home. I am poorer, Harry, not because of the money. I'm poorer because I squandered my twenties!

Harry Don't you realize how much poorer we were, after you left?

Jiff Hah! Does that mean you feel richer, now that I'm back? The money's gone, dude. It's never coming back.

Harry Jiff, why in the world did you leave?

Jiff Man, I thought I knew. Stifled, I guess. Wanted to be my own man. . . . And, after Mom died, I felt like I didn't belong here.

Harry What is that supposed to mean?

Jiff You know, dude. Mom was the light-hearted one. The one who enjoyed life. She was always "up," always happy, even up to the end. I took after Mom, I guess, because life was great, and fun and stuff. . . . Dad , . . . Dad and you are serious, perpetually responsible. Neither one of you was ever any fun! Life was a funeral around here, dude!

Harry Jiff, Dad was in shock after Mom's death. The joy had gone out of his life, too. She was his joy in life.

Jiff I guess I sensed that. But it was like a morgue. I had to get out of here.

Harry And you never would've come back, if you hadn't hit rock-bottom, right?

Jiff Hey, I've already confessed! I'm sorry. . . . Harry, do you think I could have felt any lower than to come back home, smelling like a pig -- filthy -- broke, and have to ask my old man for a job? Do you want to hear me grovel even more?

Harry I'm sorry. I guess I've been cruel.

Jiff (shrugs; after an awkward silence) Harry?

Harry Yeah?

Jiff You wanted to know why I left. Can I ask you something?

Harry Yeah.

Jiff Why did you stay?

Harry What do you mean?

Jiff Harry, you were 28 when I left home. You're thirty-one. Why are you living at home, at 31?

Harry You know, Dad is getting up in years. . . .

Jiff (a little sarcastic)Yeah, right! Dad is only 58. That's not your real reason! Why are you still living here? Doesn't Dad ever ask WHY you haven't gotten married, started a family of your own? . . . at least gotten you own apartment?

Harry Jiff, please. . . .

Jiff I'm not trying to be cruel. Dad wants us to get along. For God sake, Dad wants us to be brothers, not strangers. I realize I don't know you, any more than you knew me. Harry, why are you still here?

Harry I . . . I guess I just never met the right woman, or . . .

Jiff Yeah, right! Harry, you never even dated! You never left the house. You're afraid of your own shadow. You're mousey – frightened. The only role you've ever played is "the best little boy in the world."

Harry And that's not trying to be cruel?

Jiff Harry, you're not a little boy any more! You're a grown man! And you're still living in the back bedroom, and working in a dreary job that you probably hate.

Harry Ouch!

Jiff Too close for comfort?

Harry Well, yeah. (awkward silence)

Jiff Harry, I was homeless. But you are almost lifeless. What's really going on?
(silence) Harry, there are a lot of great people out there. Wonderful places.
Dad never told you to grow old, at home, with him. . . There are a lot of
beautiful babes out there, dude.

Harry (looking wounded) I . . . I wasn't attracted, . . . no, .. well, I wasn't
interested in just . . . (dissatisfied with his own answer)

Jiff Harry . . . (studying his brother's face) Harry, you're gay. Aren't you?

Harry (an awkward stare) Jiff, I . . . no, . . .I?

Jiff You're gay, aren't you? Just say it, if it's true. . . . I always suspected it.

Harry (a moment of silence) I . . . I've never done anything about it.

Jiff You're gay and you're scared. Your virgin, aren't you? You are absolutely
terrified of yourself. And you're spending your life HIDING in the back
bedroom!

Harry I . . . It would break Dad's heart. It would kill him.

Jiff The truth? . . . The truth would kill our father?

Harry Jiff, . . . it's killing me. What do you think it WOULD do to our father?

Jiff God. (sincerely) Harry, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you've been carrying this
burden, in secret, all your life. (silence) It's okay, dude.

Harry It's NOT okay. Okay?

Jiff Big brother, try to own this one, will you? So you're not OK with it, right? But
don't put that one on Dad. He's cool. He can handle the truth, no matter what.

Harry Do you really believe that?

Jiff Well, when I left home, I probably wouldn't have thought that way. But when I came home, to his embrace, I continued WAKING UP to a truth I had never noticed before. The way he cared for me, and took me in. And that party, man! I think, for the first time in my life I finally learned, . . . I KNEW what unconditional love means.

Harry Unconditional love?

Jiff (they stare at each other for a moment) Is that where it hurts, the most, big brother? Unconditional love? Love without "ifs, ands or buts"?

Harry What would you know about love?

Jiff Harry, I woke up to it, when I was sleeping in the barn. I came home to Dad's unconditional love. I know it now, man. These two weeks have been one amazing experience of unconditional love!

Harry I wish I could believe that.

Jiff I'm seeing you in a new light, brother. You and Dad always seemed so close, and all. He always loved you.

Harry He always loved both of us, Jiff. That's not it.

Jiff No, big brother. I know that, now. But what you felt wasn't unconditional love. It was very conditional. It was love with strings attached. Love with restrictions, with fears, and limits, and obsessions. You had to be perfect, never stepping out of line, not even for a minute! Only, YOU ... you were the one who put those conditions on Dad's love for you. YOU were afraid, and you imagined that he didn't love you, unless you were the best little boy in the world.

Harry (a small sneer) And who licensed you as a therapist?

Jiff I'm sorry, Harry. But it seems so much clearer to me now. Especially after being gone for three years. All this time, you've been afraid of yourself. But you imagined that Dad wouldn't love you if he knew the real you.

Harry Jiff, that really hurt.

Jiff . . . But am I speaking the truth, big brother? (an awkward silence; then, sincerely) Speak to me, Harry.

Harry I . . . I'm feeling "beat up," right now. But you said . . . you spoke the truth, little brother. But it's a truth that hurts.

Jiff Harry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be hard on YOU. It was ME who left, and squandered my wealth.

Harry And it was me who stayed, who resented, who worried, who HID from my own life, and my own father! I've really squandered my years, too, hiding from my own feelings, and my own life!

Jiff (a beat) Brother?

Harry Yeah?

Jiff Can we honor Dad's request? Can we be brothers? Can we put aside our childhood, and be adults with each other?

Harry Yeah. . . . (cautiously), can we be reconciled? I'm sorry I was mean to you, Jiffy, about your wild years. I Can we put the past behind us?

Jiff I forgive you, man. Can you forgive me?

Harry Dad has already forgiven you, Jiffy.

Jiff But can you forgive me?

Harry Yes. (a beat) Can you forgive ME?

Jiff Yes. . . . Harry?

Harry Yeah?

Jiff Are you going to tell Dad . . . I mean, . . . about yourself?

Harry I . . . I don't know. (in a weak voice) I don't know how.

Jiff You know, . . . when I came home, and I started to confess where I had been for three years, . . . Dad understood. He practically HELPED me to tell my own story. He pleaded my case for me. I was like . . . overwhelmed.

Harry Jiff, I . . . I think he already knows . . . about me.

Jiff He's pretty amazing. He seems to know everything. . . Let's go talk to Dad!

The brothers look at one another, get up, and hug.
THE END