

Greater Messapia

By Andy Bragen

In March 2004, *Greater Messapia* was produced at Queens Theatre in the Park as part of the theatre's Immigrant Voices Project. The director was Jonathan Silverstein.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Queens and Manhattan, New York.

CHARACTERS: (CAST OF 8)

Jan Smith the Elder, known in the script as “Father”. Mid forties. Messapian.

Jana Smith the Elder, known in the script as “Mother”. Mid forties. Messapian.

Jan Smith. Their son. Seventeen years old. Messapian.

Uncle. Also Messapian.

Jana Smith, known in the script as “Jana”. Seventeen years old. Messapian.
(DOUBLED WITH JANA MARTIN)

Jane Smith. Seventeen years old. Jan’s non-Messapian girlfriend. (Also disguises herself as Jana S, a Messapian.)

Al Prentice. A neighbor.

Mrs. Prentice. His wife.

Jana Martin. From the lost tribe of the Messapians. (DOUBLED WITH JANA SMITH)

PRONONCIATION NOTE:

Messapia is pronounced Mess-APE-ia.

Slivovitza is pronounced Sliv-O-vitza

Jana and Jan both have soft J’s, and rhyme with “don”.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

“Greater Messapia”, like all farces, is most compelling and effective when grounded in reality. The Messapian family is, in most respects, a typical middle-class Queens family, and Jan and Jane are typical Queens teenagers.

Scene 1

*A Queens apartment, middle class.
Mother writes out parts for a brass
band. Father chips away at a block
of wood, making a sculpture.*

FATHER

If we were in our homeland, we would eat freshly baked bread
all day long.

MOTHER

The pastries would have thirty flaky layers.

FATHER

The elders would sing plaintive songs about time and the
rooster's crow.

MOTHER

The children would hold hands and dance the national dance,
their hair ribbons soaring in the wind.

FATHER

But we're not in our homeland, for our homeland no longer
exists.

MOTHER

We live in Elmhurst, Queens in New York City in America.

FATHER

Elmhurst, Queens: the most ethnically diverse neighborhood
on the planet. Ground zero for the bright-eyed immigrants
of the world.

MOTHER

Ground zero for Messapian culture.

FATHER

We are of the Balkans and it is to the Balkans that we shall
return in triumph. But Queens is where we are today.

MOTHER

Today is a happy day.

FATHER

For thirty centuries we have been pilloried by forces beyond
our control: droughts, famines and floods; plagues and other
forms of pestilence. There have been barbarian invasions,
not to mention incursions by the Visigoths, the Romans, the
Phoenicians, and the Aliprantians.

MOTHER

Especially the Aliprantians.

FATHER

We who have suffered more than the Jews and the Armenians,
today we are happy.

MOTHER

Today is our only son Jan's wedding day.

*Jan, their teenaged son, enters
with Uncle, a large man dressed in
army fatigues. Jan models the
traditional Messapian outfit, which
involves a lot of brown fur.*

MOTHER

You look beautiful, my dearest Messapian son.

FATHER

Jan is marrying the last Messapian woman.

UNCLE

Our last ripe virgin, in full bloom of rosy youth. My
daughter, Jana.

*He gestures for Jana. She doesn't
show up.*

Jana? JANA!

MOTHER

She's getting her hair done.

UNCLE

You let her out of the house today of all days!?

MOTHER

The beauty parlor's just down the street. There aren't any
Aliprantians in Elmhurst.

UNCLE

There are Aliprantians lurking under every rock.

MOTHER

A girl should look pretty for her wedding.

UNCLE

She already is pretty! She always was pretty! She looks
like... her mother..

MOTHER

Uncle, don't go there.

UNCLE

Murdered, in front of my eyes.

MOTHER

We're warning you...

UNCLE

Murdered in cold blood, by an Aliprantian secret agent.

JAN

Uncle, she was jaywalking.

UNCLE

DON'T TELL ME WHAT'S WHAT! I saw the tire tracks across her back. I held her in my arms and heard her last words: "Make them bleed." I will avenge her.

FATHER

That's enough uncle.

They lead him out of the room.

MOTHER

He hasn't been the same...

FATHER

...since his wife died...

MOTHER

...crossing Roosevelt Avenue against the light.

FATHER

It might as well have been the Adriatic so rough was the crossing.

MOTHER

Another victim of the Messapian tragedy.

FATHER

We are all victims of the Messapian tragedy.
Uncle, offstage, moans.

MOTHER

But today is a happier day.

FATHER

Yes, thanks be to the Messapian Gods.

MOTHER

For Jan and Jana, it was love at first sight. Isn't that right, honey?

Jan does not respond

What is it about Jana that you love so much?

Jan shrugs his shoulders.

FATHER

Speak up, boy. How does she turn you on?

JAN

She likes the Mets, but not as much as I do. I love the Mets more than anything.

FATHER

All Messapians love the Mets, kiddo.

JAN

Mighty Mike Piazza's my favorite player in the world. He's number one, and cool as shit like a rock star. If he wasn't catching for the Mets, he'd be blowing out amps in a balls to the wall metal band.

A moment

MOTHER

How's that sculpture coming along, husband?

FATHER

Chipping away, wife! Chipping away! How's our national song?

MOTHER

I'm writing new parts for it as we speak. Adding more brass.

FATHER

And Uncle has made five pots-full of Messapian peasant stew, one for each of us. UNCLE, HOW'S THE STEW COMING!?

UNCLE

From offstage

Nice and spicy! Would you like a bowl!?

FATHER

IN A MOMENT! Boy, it's time we had that father - son talk.

JAN

What talk, dad?

FATHER

The talk that all fathers and sons have. So you know what's what.

JAN

What is what?

FATHER

Don't be smart with me, kiddo. You know what you'll get.

JAN

What'll I get?

MOTHER

Honey, don't talk back to your father.

JAN

I'm not talking back.

FATHER

Smartass!

JAN

What are we gonna talk about? Mighty Mike?

FATHER

We're gonna talk about manhood. It's time you became a man.

JAN

Like you?

FATHER

Son, today is your wedding day. Today, son, is your marriage. Today is that day of days that is that sort of day that...that...

MOTHER

Jan!?

JAN

Here you are, dad.

Jan hands Father his Messapian hat and the script of the epic drama "Greater Messapia". Mother lets Uncle out to hear the scene.

JAN

"Greater Messapia", Act 1, scene 4. "The Messapian Wedding Day". Adaptation by Jan Smith.

FATHER

Reading

Son. Today is your wedding day and I am ecstatically happy. All across Messapia the bright sun is shining and the tuneful birds are chirping.

JAN

Rock on.

FATHER

The time has come to pass on the vital details of manhood. As a proud Messapian male, you are the defender of all Messapia and you must defend it to the last drop of your blood.

JAN

FEED THE WAR! FEED THE WAR! MAKE THEM BLEED FOR EVERMORE!

FATHER

What the hell was that?

Jan gestures for his father to continue.

We live in a time of peace, but there will come a day when you will don your shining armor, and lift your noble shield and sharpened spear, for all of Messapia and the Messapians.

JAN

Belting out another metal tune.

"LOWLY SOLDIER. PAWN IN A GAME. BACK TO THE FRONT. THEY DON'T KNOW YOUR NAME." What if I die?

FATHER

Die you will, but death is glory.

JAN

Thanks be to the Gods on Mount Messapia for this blessing.

FATHER

Thanks be to the Gods.

They bow

JAN

How did you like it, dad?

FATHER

Those aren't Messapian songs. Wife?

MOTHER

Let's have some stew!

The doorbell rings.

Goodness, someone is ringing. There must be someone there.

FATHER

That would be Jana. Son, get the door.

Jan exits.

MOTHER

We are Messapians and we are happy.

FATHER

The happiest we've been since the heyday of Greater Messapia.

UNCLE

Over three-thousand long years ago.

*Jan reenters, covered in blood,
carrying Jana who has tire tracks
across her back.*

UNCLE

Jana!

JANA

Father. I am dying.

UNCLE
Daughter, who did this to you?

JANA
I was crossing Roosevelt Avenue against the light when this black sedan...

UNCLE
exiting.
The scum, the vermin, the filthy cockroaches! I will have vengeance!

JAN
Honey? Are you okay?

JANA
No!

JAN
What happened?

JANA
What does it look like? I was run over.

JAN
Was it the Aliprantians?

JANA
It was a Lincoln Town Car.

JAN
But who was driving it!?

JANA
Why must it go on? All I want is peace.
She dies.

JAN
Mama! She's dead.

MOTHER
My poor boy!

FATHER
The Messapian tragedy continues.
Uncle returns with a Kalashnikov rifle.

UNCLE
Any last words?

JAN

She said she wants peace.

UNCLE

About the enemy!

JAN

She didn't mention any enemy.

Uncle points the gun at Jan.

UNCLE

NOTHING!?

JAN

Nothing.

Uncle heads for the door.

JAN

Uncle, no! It's time for peace.

UNCLE

Over my dead body.

*Uncle runs out of the house firing.
End of scene.*

Scene 2

*Jane, a young lady with glasses,
with Jan.*

JANE

You never loved her.

JAN

I did too.

JANE

Not like you love me.

JAN

You and me are different. We've done it. Jana wouldn't even let me tongue kiss her.

JANE

That's cause she didn't care for you.

JAN

The Messapian bride must be pure and unsullied on her wedding night. First base is the limit.

JANE

How do you know I'm not Messapian?

JAN

That would be a dream come true.

JANE

My last name is Smith too.

JAN

Messapians aren't named Jane.

JANE

Jane's only one letter off from Jana. The spelling was a trick to hide me from the Aliprantians.

JAN

Whose trick was it?

JANE

My mother thought it up. She's dead now. She was crossing Roosevelt Avenue against the light when she was run over by a Black Lincoln Town car.

JAN

That's the typical Messapian death, at least for women.

JANE

So you see what I'm saying about my Messapianness?

JAN

How'd your father die?

JANE

He died of cancer last year.

JAN

Cancer is the number one killer of Messapian males. What an amazing coincidence!

JANE

It's more than a coincidence. I'm as Messapian as they come.

JAN

That would be the best news in history, even better than when Mighty Mike joined the Mets! Honey, where was it?

JANE

Where was what?

JAN

Your father's cancer.

JANE

It was in the colon.

JAN

Messapian cancers all originate in the liver.

JANE

What does a cancer care about the ethnicity of its victim?

JAN

Unfortunately, these are the facts of Messapian life. To tell you the truth, you don't even look Messapian.

JANE

What does a Messapian look like?

JAN

Like me. Dark hair, piercing eyes, a strong chin. Like a tall Johnny Depp.

JANE

What about the women?

JAN

Same general facial structure, with less body hair. Picture the young Elizabeth Taylor.

JANE

Don't you think I'm pretty?

JAN

You're the most beautiful woman I've ever met.

JANE

Wouldn't you like to marry me?

JAN

I'd marry you in a heartbeat, if you were Messapian, or if I weren't.

JANE

If you could be anything in this world, what would you be?

JAN

That's easy. Mighty Mike Piazza.

JANE

Then would you marry me?

JAN

Then I'd be so busy blasting dingers that I wouldn't have time to marry.

Jane gets up to leave.

Where are you going?

JANE

Home.

JAN

Was it something I said?

JANE

What do you think?

JAN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I like you more than the Mets. I like you more than anything and everything in the whole wide world.

JANE

Do you like me more than Messapia?

JAN

If I could, I would. Will I see you later for our pistachio milkshakes?

JANE

You should stay home and work on that stupid adaptation.

JAN

Pretty please, Janie Jane?

JANE

I'll think about it.

End of scene

Scene 3

Father and Mother, at home.

FATHER

We are Messapian and we have certain particular habits you should know about.

MOTHER

Let it be known that we no longer bury our children in jars.

FATHER

Let it be known that we sing only in minor keys.

MOTHER

Let it be known that we invented plum brandy.

FATHER

Let it be known that we use the Messapian Calendar.

MOTHER

We are the last Messapians on this good earth. The world knows us as the Smiths. Our original surname, when pronounced, shatters glass.

FATHER

Our exodus across the Adriatic to Apulia was to have been a temporary one, a regrouping in a less dangerous neighborhood. Of course, our great Messapian soothsayers, while accurately recognizing the manifold dangers of the Balkans, did not anticipate the brutal presence in Apulia of the Romans and the Visigoths.

MOTHER

Under siege, we scattered. Traditions were passed on in secret. Messapians intermarried with inferior races. The breed weakened. The proud Messapian man, once so forceful, devolved. The once high forehead skulks above the eyebrows. The once jutting chin is as craggy and uneven as Swiss cheese. The once firm belly sinks and flabs above the once erect Messapian member.

FATHER

Her once sumptuous breasts have the consistency of lardy doughnuts. Her golden Messapian hair, once full and luminous, has gone flat and mousy brown. Her Messapian hips, broad and playful, have disappeared. Most importantly, her Messapian uterus has shrivelled up like a prune.

MOTHER

You disgust me.

FATHER

You started it.

MOTHER

You're the one who waited. I was ripe and ready for ten years.

FATHER

You were as ripe as a rotten egg. You stunk. You still stink. And we all know the source of it.

MOTHER

Don't you touch me!

FATHER

I'll touch you where and when I please!

MOTHER

GET OFF OF ME!

He raises his hand to hit her.

I'll leave you.

He lowers his hand. A moment as they regain composure and make a show of kissing each other on both cheeks.

MOTHER

Let it be known that Messapians do not wash their dirty laundry in public.

FATHER

Let it be known that the Messapian man is an enlightened man.

MOTHER

Let it be known that Messapians are from the Balkans but not of the Balkans.

FATHER

Let it be known that the blood feuds that have gone on between the Messapians and their enemies for thousands of years and which have contributed to the dwindling of a once proud Messapian population of four million down to four have nothing to do with us. Let it be known that we Messapians moved to the United States of America because we knew that with the name Smith we would blend in very well with the non-Messapians.

MOTHER

It seems that we've blended in too well. Now our son can't find a bride.

FATHER

Have you tried the internet?

*They sit down at the dinner table
with Jan, and Uncle, who is waving
an article.*

UNCLE

See!? This is the proof! I told you the Aliprantians were cannibals.

JAN

Pass the Messapian goat cheese, please.

MOTHER

First I did a Yahoo search and came up with seven listings for Messapia.

UNCLE

You can't trust Croatian scholars, the filthy fascist worms. It's a good thing the French were around. They're good for footnotes, if nothing else, those fucking Frogs.

MOTHER

Uncle, please watch your language.

FATHER

Anything promising?

MOTHER

A car wash in Santa Monica, a haberdashery in Akron. A couple of sites in Italian.

JAN

You should try a better search engine, like Hotbot or Google.

MOTHER

Don't talk with your mouth full.

JAN

Sorry, mom.

UNCLE

Sorry!? SORRY!? Were those Aliprantian cockroaches sorry when they ran down my wife and my daughter, and ruined my life? Never say you're sorry, boy! We have NOTHING to apologize for.

FATHER

Uncle. That's enough! There's a time and a place.

UNCLE

Three thousand long years we've been waiting.

FATHER

So we'll wait a little longer. Wife, you were saying...

MOTHER

Then I did a name search under J. Smith in the Yahoo find lost relatives section. Here's the printout.
She drops a phone book sized list on the table.

FATHER

Do you expect him to call all of those people? It's a needle in a haystack.

MOTHER

I'm trying to save our son's life. You might do the same instead of wasting your time pricing scimitars.

FATHER

There's great variation, honey. We can't afford to get ripped off.

MOTHER

Let it be known that honor has no price.

FATHER

Let it be known that Messapian men are hard-working and thrifty.

MOTHER

Hard-working you're not.

UNCLE

Let it be known that someday I will have vengeance.
The doorbell rings.
Goodness, someone is ringing.

FATHER

Uncle. Go to your room.

Uncle hesitates

Now!

Uncle exits. Mother lets in their neighbor, Mrs. Prentice

MOTHER

It's Mrs. Prentice, our neighbor. Welcome to our humble home. It's nice to see you on such a lovely evening. Say hello, Jan.

JAN

Hello, Mrs. Prentice.

MRS PRENTICE

Hello, Jan. Nice to see you. How's school going?

MOTHER

He's graduating high school in two weeks.

JAN

If I pass.

FATHER

He'll pass all right. He knows what he'll get if he doesn't.

MRS PRENTICE

I'm sure you'll do fine, Jan. Mr. Prentice says you can come back to Al's Meats anytime you want. He says you're a good worker.

FATHER

All Messapians are good workers. Of course, he'd need to make a living wage this time.

MRS PRENTICE

Mr. Prentice and I have a pair of Mets tickets for this Friday that we can't use. Jan, would you like them? I know you're a Mets fan.

JAN

I love the Mets more than anything.

FATHER

All Messapians love the Mets.

Mrs. Prentice gives Jan the tickets.

MRS PRENTICE

Enjoy the game, Jan.

JAN

Thank you, Mrs. Prentice.

MOTHER

Won't you stay for some Messapian cream pie?

MRS PRENTICE

Mr. Prentice and I are going to try that new Uzbek restaurant.

MOTHER

Be careful. They say the Uzbeks undercook.

MRS PRENTICE

Good night, everybody.

MOTHER

Nice to see you again.

She exits.

MOTHER

She's so sweet. Much nicer than that filthy husband of hers.

FATHER

Out to dinner every night. Money grows on trees for the Prentices.

Snatching the Mets tickets from Jan

I'll take those tickets.

JAN

But dad, she gave them to me!

FATHER

Who feeds you, idiot? Uncle and I will go to the game. I haven't been to one in years.

MOTHER

You watch them often enough.

FATHER

TV's not the same.

Jan gets up from the table

Where do you think you're going, young man?

JAN

I'm taking a walk.

FATHER

Where to?

JAN

None of your beeswax!

FATHER

You're going to meet that slut girl, aren't you? With the funny glasses. What's her name again?

JAN

Her name is Jane and I love her!

FATHER

Jane. A typical American slut name. You should be ashamed of yourself.

MOTHER

If you weren't so busy with this Jane maybe you'd have found a bride and we wouldn't have to waste our hard-earned money on an antique scimitar and decapitate you on your eighteenth birthday.

JAN

But mom, there are no brides left in this world!

MOTHER

Our ancestors living in remote Messapian villages nestled deep in the Rhodope mountain chain, they managed.

JAN

But we're the last Messapians!

MOTHER

You don't know that for sure, dear.

JAN

We searched for ten years and all we ever turned up was Uncle and Jana, and now Jana's dead and I'm gonna lose my head.

MOTHER

All the more reason to get to work on this internet.

End of scene

Scene 4 *A Queens diner. Jane and Jan drink pistachio milkshakes.*

JAN
He was a bootblack.

JANE
By choice?

JAN
Nobody's a bootblack by choice. He would've been a sculptor, like all Messapian males. But life is hard for immigrants.

JANE
What about your great-great grandfather?

JAN
Great-great grandfather Smith was a Messapian laborer disguised as a Southern Italian. He lived on a farm near Brindisi, among the olive orchards. There was only one other Messapian family left in the region, and they had a daughter...

JANE
...Jana Smith...

JAN
Whom he wooed.

JANE
Cause he had no choice. She was the last in the neighborhood.

JAN
And she was beautiful.

JANE
Like a young Elizabeth Taylor.

JAN
Her family had a small olive grove and was relatively well off. He was nothing but a barefoot peasant.

JANE
How did he woo her?

JAN
Smiles. Songs. Poems. And kisses. Lots of kisses.

JANE
I like kisses.

JAN
He used to kiss her right here. And here. And here. And there.

JANE
What are you pointing at?

JAN
The knees, or maybe a little above.

JANE
But they weren't married.

JAN
They were betrothed.

JANE
What are we?

JAN
You're the love of my life. We're... partners.

JANE
Like gay people?

JAN
Can we please continue?

He gestures to the pile of personal ad responses.

JANE
reading
"Dear Single Messapian Male, your piercing eyes hold the key to my pink virgin heart. I enclose a photo of my luscious Messapian face. As for the rest of me, just you wait. Signed, Bibi, the Balkan Belle."

JAN
May I see her photo?

She hands him the photo.

Ewww! She's no Messapian.

JANE
How can you tell?

JAN
All Messapians are beautiful. If I'm not bowled over with lust, then she can't be one of ours.

JANE
Let's run away together.

JAN
We can't do that.

JANE

Why not, since I'm the love of your life?

JAN

We graduate high school in twelve days.

JANE

You get beheaded in thirteen.

JAN

Could be.

JANE

Aren't you scared?

JAN

Why would I be scared?

JANE

I would be scared if my father was pricing antique scimitars.

JAN

Let it be known that Messapians don't scare so easily. Yeah. I'm kinda scared. I'm really scared.

JANE

It's okay.

JAN

It's pathetic. I'm the biggest chicken in the history of my civilization.

JANE

Don't be so hard on yourself.

JAN

My ancestors faced crises like this without a second thought. There were no cowardly soldiers at Slivovitza.

JANE

Didn't the Messapians lose that battle?

JAN

We were outnumbered tenfold and still we held off the enemy for twelve days. Nothing but heroes. Thank God I wasn't around. It's easier for me now. All I have to do is close my eyes and wait for the cool steel blade to slice through my neck's soft flesh. Mom will caress my severed head and pass it around like a bowling ball.

JANE

Are you sure I can't convert?

JAN

Absolutely sure. Intermarriage has been banned for over 1,500 years.

JANE

I would make a stupendously amazing Messapian.

JAN

Honey, you're American.

JANE

I possess the noblest of Messapian spirits. Side by side, we'll march onward to Greater Messapia, on and on and on and on, until that glorious day of days when we sink our shining flagpole into the moist Balkan soil.

JAN

Wow. I didn't know you had it in you.

JANE

The passion I feel for Messapia is as hot as the passion I feel for you. What do you say, baby?

JAN

My family wouldn't go for it. They're sticklers when it comes to these traditions.

JANE

Your family's mean to you.

JAN

I deserve it. I've never lived up to their hopes. I've never been a good Messapian.

JANE

I'll make such a Messapian out of you that it'll put them to shame. Who do they think they are, talking about decapitating you?

JAN

I'd be worse off if I were female. Messapian old maids are expected to heave themselves upon the fiery pyre.

JANE

I won't let you die.

JAN

If you can't take it, you should leave me.

JANE

You want me to dump you a week before the prom?

JAN

If that's what you want.

JANE

It was your idea.

JAN

Fine. Dump me.

JANE

Fine. I will.

JAN

Fine!

JANE

Fine!

A moment.

What about our Mets-Yankees tickets, for this Saturday?

JAN

I guess we could go as friends. But we can't *do it* any more.

JANE

Here's a Messapian for you.

Reading, dismissively,

"Far from our native shores where huntsmen slew wild boars and fields bloomed with verdant produce, where the sea teemed with fat fish and wise dolphins, where the blue sky glowed violet, where the weather was always nice, where even the rain, snow and wind brought happiness..."

You get the idea. It goes on like this for pages.

JAN (*Enraptured*)

Don't stop.

JANE

"Far from a land where trees grew tall and bushes thick, where plums fermented in cherrywood vats, where chestnuts dropped softly into children's laps...". You like this shit!?"

JAN

Did she send a photo?

JANE

She writes here towards the bottom..."I have read your ad on the internet and I know you are Messapian and so I want you. You are probably wondering what I look like. I have the typical Messapian features and am thus astoundingly beautiful." Who does she think she is? "Write me back and I will send you a video. I can't wait until our next contact. Yours very truly, Jana Martin." Martin?

JAN

From the lost tribe.

JANE

What lost tribe?

JAN

In the aftermath of the Battle of Slivovitzza, in the fog and the smoke, they got confused by the flow of the Danube and ended up heading the wrong direction. Instead of crossing the Adriatic, they trekked east across Central Asia. There's a parenthetical reference to a Messapian furrier in Marco Polo's Travels, but that's the latest information we have. Where does she live?

JANE

West Hollywood.

JAN

Given Messapian migratory patterns, that would make sense. I'll dictate. "Dear Jana Martin, love of my life. I quiver with infinite desire for you. I boil in great heat. My heart pounds louder than the noisiest of jackhammers rat-a-tat-tatting its way through a Queens sidewalk." Why aren't you writing?

JANE

You do it.

JAN

Are you resigning from your position?

JANE

Which one?

JAN

Research assistant. Obviously, we can't go on as partners.

JANE

Obviously.

JAN

Are you jealous?

JANE

I'm furious. Don't I mean anything to you?

JAN

You mean everything.

JANE

So how can you do this to us?

JAN

My feelings for you haven't changed, but I've found a Messapian. You knew this was coming.

JANE

It's that easy for you?

JAN

It's very hard.

JANE

Not hard enough.

Jan hands Jane some money.

JAN

This'll cover the milk shakes.

HE starts to exit.

JANE

WAIT! What about the rest of these responses?

JAN

Burn them. I've found the Messapian in the crowd.

JANE

But wait!

She pretends to read.

Dear Mr. Messapia. By the time you get this letter, I'll be ten days away from death. No one knows how alone I am because no one knows I'm Messapian. My mother knew, but she was run over, crossing Roosevelt Avenue against the light. I live alone and I am in high school and I know that if I don't marry you, by Messapian tradition I will have no choice but to heave myself upon the fiery pyre. Please don't let me die. Signed, You know who.

JAN

I don't know who. Did she give an address? Did she send a photo? I need to meet her.

JANE

There's more....I have seen you and I know you are for me. But I am worried that you don't understand what love means. It is dangerous for us to meet in Queens. We will meet in the city - Tuesday night at 8pm.

JAN

That's tomorrow. Where?

JANE

We will meet at Serendipity, by the ice cream counter.

JAN

How will I know her?

JANE

She'll be wearing a pink carnation.

JAN

Tomorrow night, 8pm. I can't wait. This could be it. Her or Jana Martin. I can't believe I have a choice.

JANE

You would really choose that slutty Californian over this sad, honest orphan?

JAN

What do you care which one I marry?

JANE

Despite your best efforts, I'd like to see you happy.

JAN

Farewell, my heart. I'll miss you.

JANE

I miss you already. Farewell.

He exits. End of scene.

Scene 5

Father and Mother perform their ritual ablutions in the Messapian bedroom. Father lays out his clothes and Mother works on her corns.

MOTHER

Welcome to the Messapian master bedroom.

FATHER

It is here that the great race is extended.

MOTHER

Was extended.

FATHER

It used to be extended in caves and in fields, in mountain lakes and hollow tree trunks, but we Messapians have changed with the times. The modern Messapian man no longer wears fur underwear.

MOTHER

The modern Messapian woman is as chic as a Parisian model.

FATHER

Let it be known that every now and then Messapians do it with the lights on.

MOTHER

Not that I can remember.

FATHER

Do you blame me for not finding you entirely attractive?

MOTHER

Let it be known that it's mutual. Watch the modern businessman lay out his work clothes for the next morning.

FATHER

That's right.

MOTHER

Even though he hasn't held a permanent job in fifteen years.

FATHER

It's hard these days.

MOTHER

Not that hard. Half the stores on Roosevelt Avenue have signs in their windows. Even Al the butcher's hiring.

FATHER

You think I would work for that turkey? That could've been my shop. What gives him the right...?

MOTHER

You never wanted to be a butcher.

FATHER

From under my nose he snapped up that location. And then he's got the gall to exploit my son's labor for peanuts.

MOTHER

Peanuts is more than you're making. A job's a job. Burger King is hiring too. Burger King is always hiring.

FATHER

Let it be known that Messapian males do not toil in the service industry.

MOTHER

You and your fucking pride. Do you want us to starve to death?

FATHER

I don't see you bringing money in, Mrs. Messapia.

MOTHER

The Messapian woman's traditional role is that of minder of the hearth and bearer of the children. Let that be known.

Jan enters

FATHER

Let it be known that you're a failure in the breeding department. You bore only one, and he's a numbskull.

MOTHER

How dare you?

FATHER

Am I wrong?

MOTHER

If you weren't the last Messapian...

FATHER

It's mutual.

MOTHER

FUCK YOU, you fat lazy drunken piece of shit!

FATHER

FUCK YOU TOO, you dirty whore.

MOTHER

You're the son of a whore.

FATHER

And your mother's Aliprantian!

Noticing his son.

What do you want?

Jan distributes the script.

JAN

"Greater Messapia", Act two, Scene one. "Should we Stay or Should we go?" Adaptation by Jan Smith.

FATHER

I am the handsome Messapian King and this is my lovely Messapian Queen.

MOTHER

Hello, Messapia.

FATHER

I have a decision to make.

MOTHER

We have a decision to make.

FATHER

Should we stay or should we go?

MOTHER

That's what we really want to know.

FATHER

If we go there will be trouble.

MOTHER

If we stay there will be double.

JAN

Mom! Dad! I've spied the Aliprantian nomads astride their fiery steeds. They are galloping in from the east and will no doubt attempt to vanquish us!

FATHER

They must be approaching the Slivovitza Plain. Quick, Jan. Blow on the Messapian goat horn! Let our people know that we're crossing the Adriatic.

Jan takes the horn and blows it.

MOTHER

Honey, I'm petrified.

FATHER

Don't be scared, my fair Queen. The Messapians are a noble people. We'll make it, by hook, or by crook.

MOTHER

But will we ever reclaim our ancestral land?

FATHER

Someday, we shall return in triumph. So long as we never forget.

MOTHER

I love you, my handsome King.

FATHER

I love you too, my fair Queen.

JAN

I love you, mom and dad.

MOTHER AND FATHER

We love you too, honey.

FATHER

Let's hurry on down to the dinghies before it's too late.

End of play within a play.

MOTHER

Thank you, son.

FATHER

My queen. My prince. Let us never forget our destiny.

JAN

Mom, remember the lost tribe of the Messapians?

MOTHER

That's an old rumor. If they really existed, they would have found us by now and then we wouldn't have to behead you.

JAN

We're not so easy to find with a last name like Smith.

FATHER

The Aliprantians seem to manage well enough.

JAN

But maybe all those myths are true. Couldn't it be possible?

MOTHER

Why, honey?

Scene 6 - The video

The video of Jana Martin. The camera faces towards the bike path at Venice Beach. Jana, on roller blades, skates into the picture, and stops on a dime. She talks directly to the camera.

JANA MARTIN

Bleached blond hair and a nose ring. Very California.

Far from our native shores, where brave farmers tilled the fertile soil, where the grass grew greener, where politicians were just like you and me. Far from this idyllic land, we Messapians soldier on, laboring to defeat our vicious enemies and reclaim Greater Messapia. My name is Jana Martin and aside from my elderly mother, I am the last living member of the lost tribe of the Messapians. For three thousand long years we have carried the ancestral torch. It burns eternally and someday shall light our hearth back home in Messapia. Say hi, mom.

The sound of glass shattering.

We live in West Hollywood, the longtime clandestine center of Messapian culture. We have been underground for nearly three thousand years, but circumstances demand that we resurface. In less than two weeks, I turn eighteen years old. In less than two weeks, I die upon the fiery pyre. Are you really out there, my love? Is it really you? I am on my way to Queens to find you. Viva Messapia!

END OF VIDEO

Scene 7

The counter at Serendipity, a Manhattan ice cream shop. Jane is in disguise as JANA S, without glasses and wearing a wig. Jan enters.

JAN

There's that pink carnation.

JANA S

I didn't want there to be any confusion. Hello, Jan Smith.

JAN

Hello, Jana Smith. It's nice to meet you.

He shakes her hand in the secret Messapian manner. She doesn't get it.

JAN

Don't you remember the secret handshake?

JANA S

My parents taught it to me, but they've been dead for years.

JAN

How did they die?

JANA S

Mom was run over by a black sedan and dad wasted away with liver cancer. These things are sad even when you know they're coming.

JAN

Are you sure you're Messapian?

JANA S

I'm as Messapian as you are. You are Messapian, aren't you?

JAN

A hundred and ten percent!

JANA S

That makes two of us. And here we are, far from our native shores...

JAN

Yeah, we're pretty far away.

JANA S

Not for long though, right?

JAN

Hopefully not.

A moment or two.

JANA S

Let it be known that we're in love.

JAN

We are?

JANA S

Messapian man. Messapian woman. What else could we know?

JAN

We just met a minute ago. Love doesn't come so easily to me.

JANA S

If you're not in love with me, then maybe you're in love with somebody else. There must be some other Messapian out there, or maybe even a non-Messapian.

JAN

I could never fall in love with a non-Messapian.

JANA S

Have you ever dated one? Have you ever kissed her, down there?

JAN

Would you like an ice cream?

JANA S

I'd be delighted to share a pistachio milkshake with you.

JAN

Pistachio!?

JANA S

Is something wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost.

JAN

I'm perfectly fine, never been better.

JANA S

Something's going on in that head of yours. Tell me, Messapian to Messapian.

JAN

You kind of sort of slightly remind me of someone.

JANA S

Is she a friend or a lover?

JAN

She's a classmate.

JANA S

Is she pretty?

JAN

She's the most beautiful woman I've ever met, I mean next to you that is and then of course she's not Messapian so she can't be that beautiful, but she is... cute. She looks a lot like you.

JANA S

She's more than a classmate, isn't she?

JAN

Every now and again we used to go to Shea together. We're Mets fans.

JANA S

I'm a Mets fan too. All Messapians are Mets fans. And the Aliprantians like those damn Yankees. When are we going to a game?

JAN

Soon.

JANA S

How about this Saturday? I hear the Yankees are coming to Queens.

JAN

Saturday's not so good.

JANA S

Why not? Don't you like interleague play?

JAN

I'm kind of sort of already going to that game.

JANA S

Excellent. I'll get another ticket and we'll find seats together.

JAN

That might not be such a good idea.

JANA S

Why not? Are you going with this famous classmate of yours?

JAN

Actually, yeah.

JANA S

Can't I meet her?

JAN

That is definitely not a good idea!

JANA S

Why not?

JAN

Just because, things being what they are...you know how things are.

JANA S

How are things between you and this non-Messapian classmate?

JAN

They're okay.

JANA S

Okay how? And how okay are things for her?

JAN

Never mind all that. You and I have a whole life of baseball ahead of us. Once we're married, we'll get season tickets.

JANA S

But you said you didn't love me.

JAN

That's not what I meant. I meant that we have to get to know each other first, and then I'll love you forever.

JANA S

But how can you be sure you'll love me forever, if you don't even know me?

JAN

Because. We're Messapian. It's our destiny.

JANA S

Do your parents love each other?

JAN

They love Messapia. Come on. Let's get married.

JANA S

No.

JAN

What do you mean no?

JANA S

You'll have to woo me first. I want smiles and songs and poems and kisses. Lots of kisses. I need to be 110% sure of your love.

JAN

But I only have twelve days until I turn eighteen.

JANA S

Then you better get to work on your wooing. It'd be a shame if you got beheaded.

JAN

You think you're the only Messapian? There are other choices.

JANA S

What, from the lost tribe or something?

JAN

They've resurfaced after 3,000 long years.

JANA S

And then there's Jane the non-Messapian. She's your true love.

JAN

How'd you know her name? I never mentioned her name.

JANA S

Have you fucked her?

JAN

We've barely even kissed.

JANA S

You're a liar. You've been fucking her for months.

JAN

Not that long.

JANA S

Why should I marry a man I can't even trust?

JAN

You can trust me. Just cause I've messed around a little..

JANA S

Is that all she is to you?

JAN

Well, there was a little more to it than that, but...

JANA S

Does she love you?

JAN

Of course not.

JANA S

How can you be sure?

JAN

A guy can tell when a girl's in love with him. It's something in her eyes. She might've liked me some, but that's different.

JANA S

Can you tell if I'm in love with you?

JAN

You said you were.

JANA S

Did Jane ever say that?

JAN

Would you stop bringing her up!?! She's way out of my life! She can go jump in a lake for all I care.

JANA S

She might just do that.

JAN

She can do what she wants. It doesn't matter to me. As you can see, I've moved on. That was then and this is now and I'm mature enough to recognize her for what she is which is your typical American slut.

JANA S storms away.

Hey, where are you going? What about your milkshake, Jane? I mean Jana. Jana!?

End of scene.

Scene 8

Jan enters the apartment. Uncle is holding Al Prentice, pinioning his arms behind his back.

UNCLE

I've caught me an Aliprantian. Look at the floppy ears, the large mouth, the sloping forehead.

JAN

Uncle, that's Al Prentice. He owns Al's Meats: the butcher shop. Thanks for the Mets tickets, Al.

AL

Anytime. Tell him to get off of me.

UNCLE

Al, short for Aliprantian. Nice try, buddy.

AL

What are you calling me?

UNCLE

Aliprantian. The word my mother hissed to me in my cradle. Aliprantian. The enemy.

AL

I have no clue what you're talking about.

UNCLE

What do you know about the murder?

AL

Which murder?

UNCLE

My daughter Jana.

AL

I heard she got run over. My condolences.

UNCLE

Killed her in cold blood, you did.

AL

You got the wrong guy. Jan, you tell him.

JAN

Mr. Prentice is our neighbor.

UNCLE

The enemy is among us.

To Al

Where were you on the night of the 23rd?

AL
Last Tuesday was it? At the Mets game.

UNCLE
Who was the winning pitcher?

AL
Franco blew the lead but got the win on Mighty Mike's two run homer to left.

UNCLE
What about Wednesday?

AL
Trachsel got the win 3-2. Benitez loaded the bases with one out in the ninth, but pulled out the save with a 5-4-3 DP.

UNCLE
Who had the game-winning RBI?

JAN
Nobody keeps track of that anymore.

AL
It was Wigginton on a seeing eye single to right. Shinjo scored from second. Happy?

UNCLE
I see they trained you well. Jan, unbutton his shirt.

JAN
Why?

UNCLE
Just do it.

*Jan unbuttons Al's shirt revealing
New York Yankees T-Shirt with the
number "44" on it.*
Number 44. Reggie Jackson. As I suspected, a Yankee fan,
like all Aliprantians.

AL
I'm a Mets fan. Mrs. Prentice and I have season tickets at
Shea.

JAN
Uncle, he's not who you think he is. Let him go.

UNCLE
Don't question me boy. I've been hunting Aliprantians a lot
longer than you have.

JAN

Have you ever caught one?

UNCLE

Binding Al

I've never had one in hand like this. But I've killed fifteen of them with the Kalashnikov. And they all looked exactly like him: large ears, sloping mouths, floppy foreheads.

JAN

You've killed fifteen guys who looked like Al?

AL

Help! Help!

Uncle gags Al.

UNCLE

Someday, we shall prevail.

FATHER shows up.

FATHER

What have we here?

JAN

Uncle hijacked Mr. Prentice.

FATHER

To Uncle

Go to your room.

UNCLE

Towards Al

I should've skinned you when I had the chance.

FATHER

To Uncle

You heard me.

UNCLE

Hasta la vista, cockroach.

He exits. FATHER removes Al's gag.

FATHER

Hello, Al. How about those Mets?

AL

Can you untie me?

FATHER

What's going on here? Did he threaten you?

AL

Yeah. And he said he's killed fifteen other of these "Appalachians", whoever they are.

FATHER

The Aliprantians are the enemy.

AL

He said they looked like me.

FATHER

Don't mind Uncle. He's been a bit off kilter since his wife and daughter died.

AL

We should call the cops on him. Them or the loony bin.

FATHER

The cops, you think?

AL

I think he's dangerous.

FATHER

He's never caused me any trouble.

AL

Are you gonna untie me or what?

FATHER

Sit tight for a little bit. I've got some things to think about.

AL

What's there to think about? You're holding me hostage.

FATHER

I hold you in the highest esteem. We're neighbors.

AL

I'm not gonna stand for this. Jan, untie me.

FATHER

Stay away from him, boy.

JAN

But dad...

FATHER

You heard me.

Jan retreats.

To Al.

Al, I'm gonna ask you a couple questions and then I promise you everything'll go back to normal. Where'd you grow up?

AL

Morrisania. The Bronx.

FATHER

I see. And you went to Yankee games?

AL

I don't see what baseball has to do with anything.

FATHER

DID YOU GO TO YANKEE GAMES!?

AL

Of course. Everybody did. The stadium was within walking distance.

FATHER

We're gonna have to keep you for a little while.

AL

Keep me?

FATHER

For a couple of hours. As a precautionary measure. Why don't you stay for dinner?

JAN

Dad, we can't do this.

FATHER

Mind yourself, son.

JAN

It's wrong.

FATHER

Zip your lips!

AL

You think you're gonna keep me prisoner? ARE YOU FUCKING NUTS!?

FATHER

Listen up, Al. I don't want any more trouble. We've had enough trouble over the years.

AL

I'm not making trouble for anybody. I want to go home!

FATHER

You think it's fun being Messapian? Not only am I the sole breadwinner for this unappreciative family, but I've got a war to run. We can't cross Roosevelt Avenue without getting run over. We have to buy goat cheese in disguise because of Aliprantian stakeouts. And then there are those idiots in Yugoslavia killing each other over our land, OUR LAND.

Kosovo!? I'll tell you about Kosovo. We were there before all of them. We were there before the hills.

AL

Come on guys, this is really enough. Let me free, please!

FATHER

Easy for you to say. You got your butcher shop, you got your fancy apartment, you got your season tickets. We Messapians don't have any of that. Thanks to you, we got a raw deal. So don't talk to me about freedom, you liar, you criminal, you cockroach!

AL

But...

FATHER

Muffling Al.

SHUT UP, VERMIN! UNCLE! Take him away!
*Uncle reenters, then exits with Al.
Father collapses in a chair and holds his chest.*

JAN

Dad, are you okay?

FATHER

I don't know what came over me. Poor Al.

JAN

I'll go untie him.

FATHER

It's a little late for that, don't you think?

JAN

I'm sure we could explain the situation. It's a perfectly understandable case of mistaken identity. It happens all the time these days.

FATHER

Are you a Messapian or a mouse?

JAN

There is no way that Al is Aliprantian.

FATHER

We're at war, remember?

JAN

Messapians are not kidnappers.

FATHER

Where's your script?

JAN

Forget the script. It doesn't apply.

FATHER

Fine. I'll make up my own.

FATHER

I am the handsome Messapian King and I am declaring martial law. All hands on deck. Each man to his battle station.

He makes a noise like a siren.

Your line...

JAN

I'm not going to be a part of this.

FATHER *as son*

But father, are we really in danger?

FATHER

Absolutely son.

FATHER *as son*

And must we be so violent with our enemies?

FATHER

We must be merciless. For have they not been merciless with us?

Jan grabs his Mets Jacket and heads towards the door.

FATHER

Where are you going?

JAN

I'm getting the hell out.

FATHER

What do you mean by that?

JAN

Fuck Messapia.

FATHER

Fuck Messapia!?

JAN

Everything we do is bullshit.

FATHER

Don't make me punish you.

JAN

I'm tired of sacrificing my life for a hopeless cause.

FATHER

Messapia is your life.

JAN

Yours, not mine. I'm from Queens.

Father slaps Jan.

Jan runs out of the house past his Mother who enters with a pill and a glass of water for Father. Father takes the pill, and drinks the water. We hear screams of pain from the back room. Mother and Father resist looking back.

MOTHER

Let it be known that the Aliprantians are a dirty people.

FATHER

Let it be known that they breed like rats.

MOTHER

Let it be known that they are liars and beggars and robbers.

FATHER

Let it be known that Aliprantians are ugly. They are uglier than any other race on the planet. Let it be known that they smell bad because they never wash.

MOTHER

Let it be known that they also have a natural stink that no washing in the world will get rid of. Let it be known that they deal drugs and guns and are all in the Aliprantian mafia.

FATHER

Let it be known that their women are whores, their men are gangsters, and their children are thieves.

MOTHER

Let it be known that they are lazy parasites, who could easily find jobs, but who prefer to suck society's blood.
Uncle enters with his hands covered in blood. He wipes his hands on a rag.

UNCLE

Do we have any beer around? I'm parched.

The doorbell rings.

Goodness, someone is ringing. There must be someone there. I'll get it.

Uncle gets the door. Jana Martin, on roller blades, shows up.

I'm looking for the man. JANA MARTIN

What man? FATHER

My man. Jan the man. JANA MARTIN

Who are you? MOTHER

What kind of question is that for a long lost relative?
The Sound of glass shattering.
End of scene.

Scene 9

Jan and Jane are at the diner.

JAN

I've decided to become American

JANE

Is that why you want me back?

JAN

I've missed you a lot. Jane Smith, will you marry me?

JANE

Not on your life.

JAN

But I thought you loved me!

JANE

How could you tell? From my eyes?

JAN

You do love me, don't you?

JANE

I guess so.

JAN

I love you too, more than Metallica or Messapia or the Mets or anything. I'm ready to run away with you.

JANE

Run away where? You've never left Queens.

JAN

America's a big country. I hear Texas is nice.

JANE

Messapians don't live in Texas.

JAN

Aren't you hearing me? I'm giving up my heritage.

JANE

You can't give it up. It's who you are.

JAN

I can change.

JANE

I don't want you to change. Jan the Messapian is the man I love. If you were American, you'd be as boring as every other schmo in Queens.

JAN
But...

JANE
It's who you are.

JAN
Then I guess that's really it. I mean, if you don't like me as an American, and I can't have you if I'm Messapian, then it's hopeless. Destiny has spoken, and we will always be apart.

JANE
Destiny has other plans for us.
She takes off her glasses and puts on Jana's wig.

JAN
Please take off that silly wig.
Jane takes off the wig.

JANE
Using Jana's voice
So you prefer me au naturel.

JAN
Stop that voice! You're creeping me out.

JANE
In her own voice.
Is this better?

JAN
I didn't know you were such a good actress.

JANE
I am Jana Smith. I made her up.

JAN
But then who did I meet at Serendipity?
Jane points to herself.
Ohhhh. I get it. Hi, Jana, I mean Jane.

JANE
Jana.

JAN
You don't need to be in disguise anymore.

JANE
Now more than ever.

JAN

But don't you see that nothing has changed? If I stick around, I still have to marry a Messapian.

JANE

Jana Smith is Messapian.

JAN

You mean me with you and you with the wig? Oh, no. We can't do that.

JANE

Why not?

JAN

Because it's not true. Somebody'll figure it out and then...

He draws his finger across his neck.

JANE

You didn't figure it out.

JAN

I'm not so smart about these things.

JANE

Don't you want to marry me?

JAN

Yeah, but...

JANE

Jana Smith is who I'm meant to be. To live with my true love, to raise our family, to struggle onward towards Greater Messapia: this is the life I choose.

JAN

Believe me, you don't want to be Messapian. Things are really bad at home. My parents have turned awful.

JANE

How awful can they be if they produced someone as wonderful as you?

JAN

Awful. We Messapians are not what we used to be.

JANE

You will be again, soon enough. We will. As long as we're together, everything will work out.

JAN

I don't want us to end up like them.

SCENE 10

Back at the apartment. Uncle and Jan are playing the card game: "War". Uncle has been drinking.

JAN

Uncle, this can't go on. What we're doing is criminal.

UNCLE

Don't talk to me about war crimes, cause I've been around the block.

JAN

Holding Al is a mistake. We're not a band of savages. We're a modern people. Ten takes four.

UNCLE

When you slice a man's nostril his snot falls all over the carpet. That's life.

JAN

There's got to be some sort of compromise we can strike. Maybe they can move back to the Bronx, and we'll pretend nothing happened. New York's a big city. We don't have to live next door to these people if we don't want to.

UNCLE

The fucking Bronx. Home to the Aliprantians. Home to Reggie Jackson, that scumbag. Reggie and George - didn't they deserve each other? One's a born liar, the other's already been convicted.

JAN

You quoting Billy Martin again?

UNCLE

I hate those Damn Yankees.

JAN

Me too. I hate the American League. It's not the same brand of baseball.

UNCLE

MOTHERFUCK THE DH RULE. IT'S UNAMERICAN! My hand.

JAN

Uncle I played an ace.

UNCLE

Five beats one.

JAN

Ace is high.

UNCLE

Ace is low.

JAN

Uncle, you're thinking of rummy. In war, Ace is high.

UNCLE

In Messapian war, Ace is low.

JAN

War is war. It's the same game everywhere.

UNCLE

Losing it

THAT'S MY HAND!

The doorbell rings.

Goodness, someone is ringing.

JAN

I'll get it.

He lets in Mrs. Prentice

Good afternoon, Mrs. Prentice.

MRS PRENTICE

Hello, Jan. Hello, Mr. Uncle.

UNCLE

Don't talk to me about tribunals.

MRS PRENTICE

Sir?

UNCLE

I know the difference between a cockroach and a dung beetle.
Even on Sundays they can't fool me.

JAN

Don't pay him any mind. What can I do for you, Mrs.
Prentice?

UNCLE

Like they say: you're either with us, or you're vermin.

MRS PRENTICE

Have you seen my husband?

UNCLE

Are you enjoying my daughter's blood?

MRS PRENTICE

What?

UNCLE

You're pretty sexy for an Aliprantian.

Uncle blows her kisses.

JAN

Uncle, please.

MRS PRENTICE

He didn't come home last night. And he didn't even call.

UNCLE

Slice 'em and dice 'em, roast 'em and gas 'em, boil 'em in their own phlegm!

MRS PRENTICE

He rarely misses dinner, much less disappears for the night. Something must've happened.

Uncle starts laughing maniacally.

JAN

Uncle, go to your room. Now!

Uncle exits.

Don't worry, Mrs. Prentice. Al's bound to turn up soon. If there's anything I can do for you or for the kids...

MRS PRENTICE

You haven't heard anything, have you? Someone said they saw him in the hallway with Mr. Uncle. Maybe he dropped by for a soft drink? A word about Mighty Mike Piazza? I know he thinks the world of you, Jan.

JAN

Genuinely remorseful

I'm so sorry.

MRS PRENTICE

What are you sorry about?

JAN

The whole situation.

MRS PRENTICE

What situation?

JAN

The situation of your husband's kidnapping.

MRS PRENTICE

Kidnapping!?

JAN

Where are you from originally?

MRS PRENTICE

The Bronx. But I don't see what that has to do with anything.

JAN

What about your ancestors? Where were they from?

MRS PRENTICE

Eastern Europe - but I'm not sure exactly what part. Why do you ask?

JAN

And Al?

MRS PRENTICE

We consider ourselves New Yorkers. We haven't held onto our heritage like you Messapians.

JAN

What heritage is that?

MRS PRENTICE

Did Al come by here last night?

JAN

The kids okay?

MRS PRENTICE

They keep asking about their father. I don't know what to tell them.

Jan produces Al's Mets cap from under the table.

JAN

Give them this.

MRS PRENTICE

That's his cap. Where'd you get that?

JAN

You can return it to him when he gets home.

MRS PRENTICE

Thanks. It's thoughtful of you. It's bloody!

JAN

He is a butcher.

MRS PRENTICE

He doesn't wear his cap in the shop. How very strange. Jan, is something going on?

Jan's father enters.

JAN

Hi dad.

FATHER

Hello son. Welcome home. I hope you've had a chance to think things over. Mrs. Prentice! What brings you here?

MRS PRENTICE

My husband.

FATHER

What about your husband?

MRS PRENTICE

He's missing.

FATHER

Right. I saw the note in the lobby. Awful tragedy, but I'm sure he'll turn up. How are things at Al's Meats?

MRS PRENTICE

Jan, what is going on?

JAN

Your husband is being held hostage in the guest room.

FATHER

That's a tasteless joke. Uncle? UNCLE!

JAN

It's true. He's right back there. Uncle's been beating him and whipping him and I don't think he can hold out much...

Jan is muffled and dragged off by Uncle. Father starts shuffling Mrs Prentice towards the door.

FATHER

Nice seeing you, Mrs. Prentice. We'll have to get together for dinner soon, after Al turns up.

MRS PRENTICE

Unhand me!

He lets her go.

Have you kidnapped Al? You have, haven't you!?

FATHER

Mrs. Prentice. My esteemed neighbor. Do you really think that I would kidnap your husband?

MRS PRENTICE

I don't know what to think anymore.

FATHER

My dear, please sit down. Let's have a normal, neighborly conversation.

They sit

How long have we known each other?

MRS PRENTICE

Nine years.

FATHER

In all of this time, have I ever kidnapped your husband?

MRS PRENTICE

No.

FATHER

Have myself or my family ever done any harm to any member of your family?

MRS PRENTICE

Well, no... but...

FATHER

You must be under a lot of stress these days.

MRS PRENTICE

Al's missing, and I don't know what to do. I'm so scared.

FATHER

What you need is a glass of slivovitz. You've had a hard couple of days and this stuff'll ease the pain.

She drinks a glass of Slivovitz.

MRS PRENTICE

It's very strong.

FATHER

Attagirl. It'll burn at first, but then you'll feel much, much better.

She finishes it.

MRS PRENTICE

It does ease the spirit.

FATHER

I've relied on it for years. Another?

MRS PRENTICE

Thanks.

FATHER

It's the least I can do, considering the circumstances. Cheers.

He toasts her and drinks.

So let's say for the sake of argument that we do have him here, tied up and gagged. That wouldn't be so bad, now would it? He'd be among friends, after all.

MRS PRENTICE

I'm not sure I follow you.

FATHER

Imagine the grisly alternatives. Al naked, chained up in a Turkish prison. Al barefoot, trudging across a South American rainforest pursued by Maoist guerillas. Al spreadeagle...well you get the idea. Another drink?

MRS PRENTICE

I think I'm getting a little fuzzy.

FATHER

Al's a wonderful guy, but he's got crimes to answer for. Better that we resolve these matters once and for all, so we can go back to being good neighbors. Don't worry. He won't miss a Mets game. We have a 42 inch color television with enhanced cable service.

MRS PRENTICE

That's a big TV.

FATHER

He doesn't know how lucky he is. Nice seeing you, Mrs Prentice.

He forces her out the door and is, for a moment, overwhelmed by the situation. He gathers himself, pours a glass of slivovitz and drinks it. He refills his glass and drinks it down.

Uncle!?

Jan is dragged out by Uncle. Jan is tied up and his mouth is taped. He is bruised and bloody. Uncle continues to knock him around. Father averts his eyes.

FATHER

Let it be known that I coached your little league baseball team. Let it be known that on game days you and me would order pizza with double anchovies. Let it be known that back when we had a car, we used to spend summer sundays at Jones Beach and then stop off for White Castle on the way home. Those were happy days. Let it be known that all of these years without a job have been hard on me. They've been hard on all of us. Kiddo, I grew up in Queens like you. I also wanted to get out. But let it be known that sometimes destiny steps in the way. And granted I haven't always been the best example for you. I know I'm not the perfect father, but I do try. I love you. You're my shining prince. Visions of your future are what keep me going.

Father drops to his knees to face Jan, who has been beaten down by Uncle.

Don't let your vision be clouded by short term
sentimentality. Keep your nose to the grindstone, your
pedal to the medal and your eyes on the prize. You are
Messapia's last hope, our only chance for a future. Uncle,
that's enough. Uncle, I said that's enough. Please stop.
You're hurting my boy. Please stop. I beg of you. Please.

*Lights down on Uncle kicking and
beating Jan.*

End of scene

SCENE 11

At the apartment. Jan is bloody and bruised.

JANA MARTIN

Far from our native shores, where men were men and women women and everybody was Messapian except for the occasional Aliprantian spy. Far from that magical land, here in the fair borough of Queens, you and I meet. Greetings and salutations from West Hollywood, California.

JAN

Hello, Jana Martin.

They perform the ritual handshake.

JANA MARTIN

I met your family and they're true blue Messapians. And your textual adaptation of the oral history of the Messapian people, "Greater Messapia", is marvelous. It rocks and it rolls and it rings so true. Such a story we've lived. Doesn't it make you proud to be Messapian?

JAN

I'm not feeling so proud these days.

JANA MARTIN

It takes character to be Messapian, to fight the good fight against these impossible odds, short of manpower, cash and weapons. But when we return to our wide land in triumph, when we hold the grainy sands of our native shores in our Messapian hands, we shall remember these early days of the Revolution with romantic fondness. So, what do you think?

JAN

About what?

JANA MARTIN

About me, of course.

JAN

You don't look Messapian.

JANA MARTIN

What are you saying? Are you saying that my forehead slopes? That my ears are floppy? How dare you even think that?

JAN

It's just that you're a blonde and Messapians have dark hair.

JANA MARTIN

I bleach it, stupid. I live in LA after all. And my forehead's straight and my ears don't flop.

JAN

I never said they did.

JANA MARTIN

Well, they don't.

A couple of moments of silence.

Slivovitz?

JAN

Maybe later.

JANA MARTIN

Why not now?

JAN

Not my favorite stuff. I prefer milkshakes.

JANA MARTIN

You're strange.

More silence.

So. How long has it been?

JAN

Since what?

JANA MARTIN

Since we split up.

JAN

We've never met before.

JANA MARTIN

The tribes, silly. It's been three thousand long years. I don't know about you guys, but we've had quite an adventure. After Slivovitz, we wandered through Persia for a spell, then headed east and checked things out in India, then came back west and circled around into Central Asia and Russia. We settled in Vladivostock around the time of Vitus Bering, stayed for most of the mini-ice age, then moved to San Francisco with the Chinese just after the gold rush. And then came the Great Cataclysm, the largest setback to the Messapian cause since Slivovitz.

JAN

What happened?

JANA MARTIN

It was Aliprantian treachery, what else? Those cockroaches started an earthquake in 1906. My grandfather Jan Martin and his wife Jana were the only Messapian survivors. They snuck down to West Hollywood and kept a low profile.

JAN

How did the Aliprantians manage to start an earthquake?

JANA MARTIN

How do they manage anything? They're evil plotters worse than Genghis Khan and the Notorious Doctor Fu Manchu. You ever seen an Aliprantian?

JAN

I'm not sure.

JANA MARTIN

You'd know one if you saw one. Those sloping ears and floppy mouths, those large yellow foreheads. They are the ugliest creatures I've ever seen. I hear Uncle nabbed one. Don't worry. We can talk about it. I know all about Al Prentice. Uncle showed him to me. I've never seen any creature so hideous.

JAN

I'm not convinced that he's Aliprantian.

JANA MARTIN

He's got all of the features. And he smells too. He's got the typical Aliprantian stink. What are you gonna do with him?

JAN

I used to work for him.

JANA MARTIN

You were a slave!?

JAN

He paid me. Not a lot, but still...

JANA MARTIN

Slave wages, huh? That dirty cockroach. You can tell he's withholding vital information. He'll break soon, so long as Uncle keeps the pressure up.

JAN

I don't believe in torturing people.

JANA MARTIN

He's an insect. In our native land, back in the glory days, we would've peeled his greasy skin off layer by layer. We'd've filled him with liquid until his bladder burst. We'd've pricked his eyes with pins until they were awash with blood. And he'd've been alive for all of it, writhing and screaming.

JAN

I'm starting to think we don't have much in common.

JANA MARTIN

We're Messapian. We have everything in common. And I love your parents. Drink this.

He tastes the Slivovitz and spits it out.

JAN

It's awful.

JANA MARTIN

And you call yourself a Messapian? I'll show you how it's done.

She takes a swig from the jug.

Far from our wide land, where love conquered all. Far from a land where a young woman such as myself would pass her wedding night on a bed of violets, pass that summer night in ecstasy, glowing under the twinkling Messapian stars and the full Messapian moon, devoured by the unquenchable passion of her handsome Messapian husband. That could be you.

She takes his hand.

Feel my heart. It beats for you and for Messapia.

JAN

It's beating pretty hard.

JANA MARTIN

It's pounding for you, Jan Smith. Have another drink.

JAN

I don't want one.

JANA MARTIN

Now!

He drinks, reluctantly.

I can see that you'll be a project. You're not the most handsome man, especially not by Messapian standards. But the raw material is there. A few months of California sun and we'll have you looking like Johnny Depp.

JAN

I'm planning on living in New York. I'm a Mets fan, after all.

JANA MARTIN

All Messapians are Mets fans. Don't worry. We'll get a satellite dish.

JAN

Jana Martin, I don't want to marry you. I'm in love with a girl named Jana Smith.

JANA MARTIN

That's not possible. I'm the last Messapian girl.

JAN

The last of two.

JANA MARTIN

She's an imposter. An Aliprantian wolf disguised in Messapian garb. Don't let her eat you up, Jan. I'm the one for you.

JAN

I'm sorry.

JANA MARTIN

Are you trying to send me to the fiery pyre? Cause that's not gonna happen. I didn't rollerblade all the way from California to be rejected by some lousy little nerd who can't even hold his slivovitz, a squirming coward who shudders at the thought of blood. I can see why my people left.

JAN

What do you mean left?

JANA MARTIN

Did you think we were so stupid that we couldn't find the Adriatic Sea? You arrogant little hypocrite. The only people who thought we were lost were from your tribe. We knew where we were.

JAN

Where were you?

JANA MARTIN

God, are you dumb. You're gonna make a lousy husband.

JAN

So how can we consider marriage? You don't even like me.

JANA MARTIN

Between you and the fiery pyre, I choose you. It's too bad you're a numbskull.

*She blades away.
End of scene*

SCENE 12

At the apartment. Jan is still bruised and bloody. Al is tied up at the table with his mouth covered. Jan won't look at Al. Al bangs his chair and makes Jan look at him. Al gestures with his mouth that he wants the gag taken off.

JAN

Can't you breathe through your nose?

Al implores him. Jan relents and takes off Al's gag.

AL

Much better. Thank you, Jan.

JAN

You're welcome.

Jan pours himself a drink and lights a cigarette.

AL

May I have a drag?

Jan gives Al a drag of his cigarette.

AL

That was wonderful. Thank you. Another?

Jan gives Al another drag.

Thanks. I haven't had a cigarette in - what's it been? How long has it been, Jan?

JAN

Three thousand long years.

They smile at each other for a moment.

AL

You're looking good.

JAN

Very funny.

AL

You could almost pass for one of those Alapalusians, whatever they look like. You're a more likely candidate than me with those ears of yours flopping around.

JAN

My ears aren't floppy.

AL

No, but your forehead slopes. What do you say you undo these ropes and let me go home? It's been real, but my wounds are starting to fester. C'mon, buddy boy, be a pal to good old Al.

JAN
Don't push it.

AL
What's the problem?

JAN
You talk too much.

AL
We're having a friendly conversation, just like we always do, except one of us is tied to a chair. Are you maybe ashamed of yourself? You should be.
Silence.

AL
Jan. Jan!

JAN
What now?

AL
Look at me. C'mon. Don't be a scaredy-cat.
Jan looks at Al who remains bruised and bloody.
You see what Uncle's doing to me?

JAN
We're in the same boat. He's been beating me too.

AL
Same boat, you think?

JAN
More or less.

AL
Look at me, Jan. Take it all in. I hurt. In all my life, I have never been in so much pain. Is this okay with you? How do you feel when you see my wife crying, when you hear my kids asking for their dad?

JAN
It bothers me.

AL
How much?

JAN

A lot!

AL

So why are we letting this go on?

JAN

If you don't keep quiet, you're gonna wake my mother.

AL

She'll wake soon enough. But what does it matter who's guarding me? You're all the same.

JAN

I'm different.

AL

You're only different cause you let me smoke. I don't give a shit about smoking.

JAN

Don't curse at me. I'm trying to be nice to you.

AL

Then be nice. Free me.

JAN

Al, if it were up to me...

AL

It is up to you. We're the only two people present.

JAN

It's not as easy as all that.

AL

Uncle's gonna kill me.

JAN

Don't be ridiculous.

AL

He's gonna cut my head off.

JAN

Please, Al. I'm working on the situation. We're tying the knot tonight, right after Leno. Soon enough, I'll be the man in the house, and I promise you, there are gonna be some big changes around here. So if you'll just sit tight for a few more hours, I'll be able to get you free.

AL

And meanwhile, when he cuts my Ablufalusian head off, what then? Will your blushing bride sew it back on during Good

Morning America? It's a little late then, isn't it? A little late now to be working on the situation, huh?

JAN

SHUT UP!

MOTHER

From offstage

Jan!? Is everything okay out there?

JAN

Everything's fine, mom. Go back to sleep.

To Al

See what you did? You woke her up. If you'd keep quiet for a change, things'll work out.

AL

I'll be dead and you'll be responsible, even if you're too much of a coward to admit it.

JAN

I'm no coward. I'm on your side.

AL

You sanctimonious little shit: your hands are filthy with my blood. When I get my revenge, you'll be the first to pay. I curse your family for twenty generations, you Messapian motherfucker!

Jan smashes the bottle of Slivovitz against Al's head. Al bleeds profusely.

JAN

Oh Jeez! Forgive me, Al.

He starts mopping Al's head with a rag.

AL

Go to hell.

JAN

Really, I'm sorry!

AL

Untie me.

He starts untying Al.

JAN

You got to get out of here. You got to go far away from Queens.

AL

Hurry up!

JAN
If you want to live in the Bronx, that's okay with me. If you want to root for the goddamned Yankees, go right ahead.

AL
I like the Mets.
Jan finishes untying Al.

JAN
There you are. Can you stand?

AL
No.

JAN
Hold on to me.
He helps Al up and they start moving towards the door. The doorbell rings. They freeze.

JAN
Sit down, Al.

AL
No way am I sitting down.
The doorbell rings again.

JANA S
JAN, ARE YOU THERE!? IT'S ME: JANA.

JAN
I'LL BE THERE IN A MOMENT, HONEY!
To Al
She can't see you like this. I'm gonna have to hide you.

AL
I'm not gonna hide.

JAN
I'll lock you up in the back, just until she leaves.

AL
Please, no.

JAN
So you better sit down.

AL
NOOOOOOOO!

JAN
SIT DOWN!
He forces Al back into the chair.

AL
HELP ME. SOMEBODY! JANA SMITH! HELP ME.

JAN
Shut up already!

*Jan puts his hand over Al's mouth.
Al sinks his teeth into it.*

Get off of me!

*He wrenches his hand out of Al's
mouth. It is bloody.*

YOU FUCKING COCKROACH MOTHERFUCKER!

He hits Al and binds him.

AL
Jan, please. For my family's sake, let me free! I'm
begging you...

JAN
ZIP YOUR LIPS, VERMIN!

*Jan tapes his mouth shut. The
doorbell rings again.*

Hold your horses, honey! I'll be right there!

*Jan drags Al offstage. Meanwhile,
Mother enters and gets the door for
Jana S*

JANA S
Hello, Mrs. Smith.

MOTHER
Who are you?

Jan reenters

JAN
Mom, this is my fiancée, Jana.

To Jana S

Hi baby.

JANA S
Hi, Jan. I missed you.

JAN
I missed you too.

MOTHER
I thought you were marrying the other one.

JANA S
What happened? You're all bloody.

JAN

I guess I better wipe my hands.

Jan wipes his hands on a rag.

MOTHER

Are you sure she's one of ours?

JAN

Mom!

JANA S

There's blood everywhere. And I heard screaming too. Have you been fighting?

JAN

Why don't we all sit down and have some Chardonnay?

They sit. Jan pours Chardonnay.

JAN

Cheers. To tonight's wedding.

JANA S

Cheers.

Al moans, offstage

JANA S

What was that?

JAN

The cat.

JANA S

I didn't know you had a cat.

MOTHER

Neither did I.

JAN

More wine?

Father and Uncle enter.

UNCLE

Fucking Yankees.

FATHER

Tough game, tonight.

UNCLE

Fucking interleague play.

FATHER

Great seats, though. I've never been that close up. We had a blast.

UNCLE

Fucking bullpen. Someone's gonna pay.

JAN

Uncle, dad, this is my fiance, Jana Smith.

FATHER

Smith? What happened to Martin?

MOTHER

That's what I've been asking.

UNCLE

She doesn't look Messapian.

JANA S

I'm as Messapian as you are.

UNCLE

Doesn't sound it either. Where'd you grow up? The Bronx?

JANA S

In Queens, just like you.

MOTHER

What is it about Jan that you love so much?

JANA S

He's been a wonderful boyfriend.

FATHER

Boyfriend!?

JAN

Fiance.

JANA S

Your Jan is quite a man.

MOTHER

Just how far have you two gone?

JAN

First base, I swear. We didn't so much as round the bag.

FATHER

Attaboy.

UNCLE

She doesn't even smell Messapian.

JAN

Jesus Christ, Uncle! Do you mind?

JANA S

It's okay, Jan. I understand. Your family has doubts. Why shouldn't they? I'm a stranger to them.

To the family

Mr. and Mrs. Smith, my parents are dead, and I'm alone in this world. All I have is Jan, and I love him more than I love myself. Life as a Messapian is never easy - but I can't imagine any other life I'd rather live. Any other life would be a life without Jan, and that life would be worse than death.

JAN

Honey, that was beautiful.

MOTHER

Welcome, daughter.

FATHER

Cheers. To the future of Jan and Jana's love.

UNCLE

To the future of Messapia.

Al, staggering, opens the door, and crawls towards the exit.

Fucking cockroach. Pardon me.

He forces Al back into the back room, and follows him in there.

The sound of beating.

A gunshot.

MOTHER

(To Jana S.)

More Chardonnay?

JANA S

Wasn't that Al Prentice?

MOTHER

That's what he was calling himself, but we knew better.

FATHER

He got his, the filthy insect. Enough is enough.

JAN
Mom. Dad. Go. Now.

FATHER
Who do you think you are, ordering us around?

JAN
GET OUT!

MOTHER
Well...finally a man in the house.
They exit.

JANA S
What's going on?

JAN
Welcome to Messapia. Are you bored yet?

JANA S
I'm scared to death.
Jan, let's go.

JAN
Where to? Texas?

JANA S
Anywhere. We need to get out of here.

JAN
A little late for that, don't you think?

JANA S
You're not like them.

JAN
Jana, is it true what you said to my parents?

JANA S
What did I say?

JAN
That you'd rather die than live without me.

JANA S
Die?

JAN
That's what you told them: that life without Jan would be worse than death.

JANA S

I don't want to die.

JAN

How else can I know that you won't betray us.

JANA S

I would never betray you. I love you.

JAN

And when love fades.

JANA S

Our love will never fade.

JAN

My parents love faded...

JANA S

We're different. I chose you.

JAN

You chose Jan the Messapian. Here I am.

Jana S is hesitant.

Am I not the man you love?

JANA S

You are that.

JAN

I will never love anyone as much as I love you. Follow me.

She follows

End of scene.

SCENE 13

From the play within the play.

MOTHER

Husband, I am dying.

JANA MARTIN

Father-in-law, I have been violated.

MOTHER

Messapian men, your women are dying.

JANA MARTIN

What are you going to do about it?

FATHER

We are the warriors of revenge.

JAN

We will ride the fiery steeds of vengeance, smiting our enemies until the rivers flow black with blood. We will get it all back.

FATHER

We are Messapian.

JAN

Messapian: 110 percent.

FATHER

Viva Messapia.

MOTHER

Viva Messapia.

UNCLE

Viva Messapia.

JANA MARTIN

Viva Messapia.

JAN

Viva Messapia.

The doorbell rings.
END OF PLAY