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Burden*

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THE BURDEN

A Play in One Act

By *C.*

Mrs ELMA EHRLICH LEVINGER

Author of "Kid," "The Lost Path," "God's Fool,"
"The Priest People," etc.

"The Burden" won the first prize in The
Sinai Center Prize Contest, in Chicago, Illinois.

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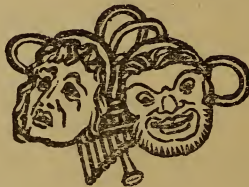
The Burden

CHARACTERS

(As originally produced by The Sinai Center Players, October 3,
1917, at The Sinai Social Center, Chicago, Ill.,
under the direction of May Donnally Kelso.)

MENDEL RABINOWITZ, a Sopher or Scribe	Solomon Bloom
ISADORE, his son	Earl Ludgin
SARAH, his daughter	Helen Reinsberg
MAX SCHUMAN	Harry Jackson

SCENE.—Living-room in a tenement on the East Side, New York.



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NOTE TO THE PRODUCER

The stage directions suggest the ideal setting for "The Burden." The limitations of the stage equipment may make it necessary to make certain changes, none of which need lessen the general effectiveness of the setting. For example, if need be, the outer door may be situated in the right wall, while the window may be omitted, or merely suggested by a looped curtain. Again, the stove may be omitted entirely, the food being brought from the cupboard. The running water used in the sink may be furnished by placing a water cooler behind it, or the sink may be substituted with a wash stand holding a bowl and pitcher. Again, it has been found practical to have a half-curtained alcove which the characters enter to wash their hands, standing in the doorway, either to dry them as in the case of SARAH or when MENDEL says the blessing.

Only the barest stage directions as to business have been given. These may be made as complicated as desired, the action offering an ambitious producer the opportunity for various striking pictures.

Great care should be exercised lest MENDEL be portrayed as a feeble, victimized old man. He should be pictured in the early scenes as a man of quiet dignity, the master in his own household. He does not yield but remains superior to the bullying of the two men. When at last he breaks down before SARAH'S grief, the actor should express a truly strong soul bending beneath fate. Again, there is a temptation to play ISADORE as a heartless, young bully, savage even in his humor. ISADORE, however, should be given in a whining, self-pitying key, the character never growing harsh or really aggressive until he feels that he is forced to fight in his own defense.

The Burden

SCENE.—*It is about six o'clock or so on an evening in early spring. The living-room of the Rabinowitz apartment on the East Side has something of a hybrid air, being used, as the occasion arises, for kitchen, bedroom and library. Two doors, one leading into outer hall, the other into SARAH'S bedroom and hung with a gay chintz curtain to match the one at the window. A row of heavy battered books on the shelf above the window, a clock and two brass candlesticks. Between this window in the back wall and the outer door a cupboard without doors, the white dishes arranged helter-skelter on the shelves which are covered with pink scalloped paper. Along the left wall a sink and a stove, above the former a small mirror and shelf on which stand a soap dish and mug containing three tooth brushes; a roller towel hangs from a hook near by. Pot of tea on stove; an iron "spider" and covered stew-pan. Below inner door a small cane-seated chair. Along opposite wall a clothes closet before which hangs a curtain of flowered calico, a little soiled and faded; a box couch looking aggressively new in its alien surroundings displays several pillows, one worked with an American flag, the other exhibiting a wreath of flowers with the suggestion "Daisies Won't Tell." Below couch a dresser with showy silver-backed toilet set almost crowding off the few ponderous and battered books. Rocker before window, cane-seated chair a little to right of table, with stands almost in the centre of the room, a large armchair behind it. Above the outer door a Mizrach in a wide wooden frame; several other pictures, one a florid hunting scene, evidently cut from a Sunday supplement, the other a popular*

"movie star." A hybrid room, its most incongruous note being struck by the master of the house, MENDEL RABINOWITZ, who sits behind the table, a quill pen in his hand, his long white beard sweeping his breast. His eyes beneath his skullcap are tired and rather bewildered as though life has moved too swiftly for him and left him far behind. His is the face of a dreamer and a thinker, though his great shoulders and muscular body suggest the man of action. When he smiles, his smile is the smile of a little child. He speaks with a faint foreign accent, choosing his words carefully, as though translating his thoughts from another language. His pen moves slowly over the piece of parchment before him. Deliberately, with almost loving care, he rolls the tiny bit of writing and slips it into the tin mezzuzah case. Sits for a moment, his shoulders drooping a little, his hands resting heavily upon the edge of the table. Smiles his slow, gentle smile, and, drawing another bit of parchment to him, begins to write again. The door is banged open and ISADORE enters. He is a boy of sixteen with a shrewd, quick face, loud of voice, swaggering and insolent, a product of our public school system and the well-learned doctrine that "America's a free country."

ISADORE (*flinging his tin lunch box on sink and pushing his cap still further back on his curly hair*). Hello. (*His father nods a greeting and returns to his work; ISADORE washes his hands and face at sink, wipes them on towel and looks up at clock.*) Huh, Sarah's late again as usual. Thinks a fellow don't want his grub after working like a dog all day.

(*He goes to chair by door, sits there, hands in pockets, feet thrust out, mumbling gloomily, watching to see the effect of his grumbling upon his father.*)

MENDEL (*putting down his pen and looking up with a sigh*). Nu, and what is it now again? Who has done anything to you that you look so broges?

ISADORE. Who hasn't been doing something to me?

I'm too good-natured—that's the trouble, and everybody knows it and takes advantage of me. You know old Biederman down at the store—the one I was telling you about—the one that's always picking on me? (MENDEL *nods.*) Guess what he did to me this noon. I couldn't get to my lunch in time—had to stay in the basement putting away some boxes somebody else took down—but they're always imposing on me—and when I come to the cloak room—my lunch box was gone.

MENDEL (*shocked*). *Gonophed?*

ISADORE (*savagely*). That's what I called it—plain stealing, but old Biederman didn't. I was looking high and low for it, and that greenhorn comes along as big as life and gives my box back to me—empty. Oh, yes, he left my spoon in it—he hadn't eaten that for a wonder.

MENDEL (*puzzled*). Mr. Biederman ate your lunch?

ISADORE. Naw, it was this way: "What 're you doing with my lunch box?" I says. (*Then, mimicking a high thin voice with a decided foreign accent.*) "I'm giving you the box back," he says. "But where's my lunch?" I ask him. (*Business of imitation.*) "Nu, I gave it to a *shnorrer* who said he was a *landsmann* of mine." (*With growing anger.*) I said, "Why didn't you give him your own lunch?" and he says (*imitating*), "Nu, I had my own lunch *gegessen* already and so I come to the cloak room and take a box that looks good to me and give it to the *armer Yid*. He needs it more as you do." (*Whining.*) Ain't it my luck: I'm half starved, and a *shnorrer* I never even seen before walking off with my lunch inside him! And what do you think Biederman had the *chutzpah* to say?

MENDEL (*patiently*). What?

ISADORE (*imitating*). "Nu," he says, "God should give it, once you should be as hungry as that poor *shnorrer*." "I'm as hungry as he is this minute," I says, "and if you looked half-way *kosher* I'd take a bite out of you to teach you to give away other people's lunches." (*Whining.*) That's the way I'm always imposed on, though. After working like a dog half my lunch hour, I have to go out and spend fifteen cents for something to eat. It made me sore, it did!

MENDEL (*a little anxiously*). But you got something *kosher* for lunch?

ISADORE. Herring salad. And not fit to eat. Even the waiters think they can cheat me. Why, I can't even go to a picture show without somebody trying to hand me a lead quarter in change.

MENDEL. Picture shows! (*A little nervously*.) Isadore, I want to talk to you about something—something I do not feel right about.

ISADORE (*already aggrieved*). That's right—begin to tell me your troubles as soon as I get home—you sitting here sleeping over your *mezzuzahs* all day and me working like a dog piling boxes in Blumenthal's basement!

MENDEL. This afternoon Reb Samuel came here—you know, my old *landsmann* —

ISADORE (*impatiently*). Well? If the old fellow was *shnorring* again, I hope you told him where to get off at. It ain't our fault, is it, if his son in Idaho forgets to send him his money-order once in a while?

MENDEL (*slowly*). It is not easy to have to live from one's children, Isadore. (*Again showing embarrassment*.) But Reb Samuel did not come to talk to me about *his* son—he was troubled about you, Isadore.

ISADORE (*pugnaciously*). Now what do you think I've been doing again that ain't right?

MENDEL. He said that last Friday night his landlady's daughter went to the picture place on Third Avenue and that you were singing there—singing on *Shabbas* like a regular *Shegetz*.

ISADORE (*sullenly*). Suppose I was? It was amateur night and I thought I might have a chance to make a dollar or two—nothing wrong in that, is there?

MENDEL. Singing in a show on Friday night—on *Shabbas*!

ISADORE. What's your *Shabbas* got to do with it? (*His habitually complaining tone trailing into a whine*.) Why should you begin picking on me when I'm doing my best to make a little extra? Can I help it that I don't make any kind of a living without doing odd jobs? Didn't you keep me locked up in that *Cheder* in Finestein's basement, jawing your Hebrew when I ought to

have been learning something that 'ud pay me now? And didn't you make me turn down two or three good jobs before you'd let me work on Saturday? Anyhow, I don't see why it isn't all right to earn a few dollars extra on Friday night with both me and Sarah working Saturday. (*Walks to table and picks up finished mezzuzah, dropping it contemptuously.*) How can a fellow earn a living anyhow? Like you—writing scrolls? Why, you don't get anything but your dinky *mezzuzahs* to write any more—and darn few of them, and it's up to Sarah and me to support you, ain't it?

MENDEL (*patiently*). I know that I am a burden to you and to Sarah—and it hurts me. It is not easy for me to see my little girl working so hard.

ISADORE (*sullenly, sitting down near table*). Sure, I could work till I got so tired I dropped on my face, and you wouldn't say anything. You're just sorry for your Sarah. It's me that brings home the whole pay envelope every week and she puts half what she makes on her back. But you never jump on Sarah, you bet—just landing on me for working and making an extra dollar in a show on Friday night, and never saying a word to her. Why, she was there, too, Friday night, sitting there big as life next to her friend.

MENDEL. But she told me she was going to see a girl friend from the store.

ISADORE (*laughing*). Her 'girl friend' she's been going to see lately is a fellow that works down in Meyerson's stock room and waits around once in a while to see her home from work. Ike Bloom says he's a good scout—making good money and don't hang around with the bunch much. (*Teasingly.*) I knew she fooled you good and proper about him—after going with him all winter, too!

MENDEL. But why didn't she tell me? Maybe she was shy—even with her old father. And I stay home all day and hear so little from the neighbors —

ISADORE. Aw, you don't hear nothing that's happened since the Jews left Jerusalem; you're too busy hanging around the *Shul* on the corner or sticking your nose in a book.

MENDEL. But how long has Sarah had this—friend?

ISADORE. I guess it started about the time he took her to the cloak-makers' picnic last fall. You made such a fuss about her going 'cause it was *Tisha b'Av*, or one of your fast-holidays—remember? And when I met 'em at the Roof Garden a coupla times I kidded her into owning up there was something doing, and that as soon as he got a raise they'd hit it off together—— (*seeing his father's puzzled look*). Aw, I mean, get married—rig up a curtain and have big doings in Clinton Hall. But what's the matter with you?

(*Staring as MENDEL wipes his eyes.*)

MENDEL. I was wondering what your poor mother, *oleha hasholom*, would say—our little Sarahle old enough to be married—our little girl——

ISADORE (*with a short laugh*). You didn't expect her to be a little girl all her life, did you? (*Hearing SARAH at door.*) And, say, maybe you'd better not tell her I squealed—or she'll get sore and do some squealing on her own account.

(*The door opens and SARAH enters. She is a girl of gypsy coloring with a beauty that is at the same time wistful, for her dark eyes seem to dream of things she would be the first to laugh at; yet with a suggestion of flamboyant coarseness, heightened by her dress, a Grand Street imitation of Fifth Avenue from her feathered hat and cheap lingerie waist to her silk stockings and high-heeled oxfords. Her speech is slovenly, her laugh shrill; yet she is not altogether unlovely.*)

SARAH (*throwing down several small parcels upon the sink*). Hello, papa. Suppose you're both starved, but I couldn't help it—had to buy a pair of stockings and some gloves on the way home; going to a show to-night and couldn't go with every finger and most of my toes out. (*Carelessly.*) Hello, Izzy. (*Glibly, as she pulls off her hat and coat which she throws on rocker and*

begins to unpin her collar.) You see, I got a date to-night with a friend —

ISADORE (*teasingly*). Same 'girl friend' you've been going around with all winter, Sarah?

MENDEL (*with his slow smile*). Sarah, Sarah (*rising*), why will you deceive your old father? (*He goes toward her as she stares at him bewildered and draws her to him.*) You might have told me, Sarahle, that you had a *chosan* —

SARAH (*drawing back*). I don't know what you mean. (*Angrily to ISADORE.*) But I suppose you've gone and told him—you're a beautiful brother, you are! (*Defiantly.*) Anyhow, there ain't much to tell. Can't a girl go out with a fellow once in a while without having the whole family thinkin' there's something doing? That's why I never wanted him to come up here when he asked to call—and I hated to have him see this old place, when he's so—so American and everything. But he says he hates to be meeting a girl outside all the time without knowing her family; he's not that kind of a gentleman. (*MENDEL sits down, nodding; well pleased.*) So he was bound to call for me on the way to the show to-night. (*Bitterly.*) And when he sees what old-timers we are—look at them curtains and not a decent piece of furniture in the house—I guess Izzy won't have to be teasing me about him much longer. (*Unwrapping package and taking out a pair of white gloves, she looks them over critically before throwing them on the dresser, from drawer of which she pulls out a beribboned corset waist.*) I'll just jump into my clothes and you folks begin eating without me. Max, he told me not to bother about supper and we'd go to Fegelman's Roof Garden for a bite before the show. (*With satisfaction.*) No movies for me to-night—a real show down at Keith's—he showed me the tickets.

(*Snatches a vivid pink silk waist from clothes closet and crosses and enters bedroom.*)

ISADORE (*calling to her*). Say, what do you think we're going to eat—air?

SARAH. I bought some pickles and some bread in those bundles—open 'em yourself—I got to dress. *Smoosing* around so long, I bet I won't have time to comb my hair before he gets here.

ISADORE (*going to sink and growling as he goes*). Ain't it enough to work like a dog all day without having to cook the eats when I get home at night?

MENDEL (*half-rising*). I will help.

ISADORE. Aw, you ain't no help.

(*Unwraps and slices bread, takes crock of butter out of cupboard and is about to spread it with knife taken from shelf when MENDEL rises in protest.*)

MENDEL. Goy! The *fleishige messer*!

ISADORE. Well, suppose it is a meat knife! (*He throws it down, grumbling afresh as he hunts up another, with which he cuts and begins to butter the hunks of bread.*) We're not living in Jerusalem any more that we have to be so *kosher* all the time. (*Puts bread on the table with a bang as MENDEL takes his writing material to the shelf.*) Say, Sarah, where're the pickles?

SARAH (*from bedroom*). Wrapped up—in the package on the sink.

ISADORE (*opening a parcel and displaying a pair of stockings*). These ain't pickles!

SARAH (*appearing at the door, squirming as she tries to button the middle buttons of the pink waist*). Give 'em here! (*Glancing down at her showy wrist watch.*) Nope, I won't have time to put 'em on after all. (*Sits on chair near door, half-kicking off her oxford to survey the holes in the heel.*) Guess they won't show if I'm careful. (*Replaces shoe and springs up.*) Say, Izzy, hurry and fasten this middle button—I never can reach it. That's a good boy!

ISADORE (*obeying with his usual growl*). First I'm a cook—then a lady's maid! (*Retires to the sink where he unwraps the pickles, putting them upon the table along with the covered dish and the tea from the stove.*) I ain't going to bother and heat the tea—it ain't my job.

SARAH (*as she goes from the sink where she has been*

polishing her face on the corner of the towel, to the dresser). Drink it cold then. I guess I'm entitled to a night off once in a while. (*Tugs viciously at her hair-pins as she stands before the dresser, taking down her hair.*) I tell you I'm good and sick of working week after week and nothing to show for it after the rent's paid. (*Fiercely.*) But I ain't going to do it all my life —

ISADORE (*teasingly*). Maybe you're going to tie up with your Max and try working for him for a change?

(MENDEL, *who has gone to the sink to wash his hands, mumbles a blessing, and turns with painful eagerness to wait for the answer.*)

SARAH (*sharply*). Stop your kidding!. (*Consciously.*) Even if he has asked me —

(*Begins to brush her hair vigorously.*)

MENDEL (*in gentle reproach*). I know that in America things are different, but still he might have come to me and asked —

SARAH (*flippantly, as MENDEL and ISADORE sit at table*). Say, we're not living in Russia any more—in America a girl settles things for herself. (*Uneasily before her father's hurt look.*) Well, you don't have to look so sore about it, papa! There's nothing exactly fixed, but when he gets a raise—and he said he might talk things over with you some time, anyhow.

ISADORE (*grinning*). Then we'll get married and live happily ever after.

(*Starts to sing "Here Comes the Bride," beating time with his fork.*)

SARAH (*harshly*). Stop trying to be funny—it's not funny to me. (*With sudden passion.*) I wish I'd never met him—I wish I'd never wanted to be married —

MENDEL (*half-rising in alarm*). *Kindele*—what is it? I was glad to hear of it—Isadore says he is a good man—what is it?

SARAH. We might as well talk sense while we're

about it. Suppose Max does want to marry me as soon as he gets his raise and he's earning enough for the two of us —

ISADORE (*rising in his excitement*). You don't need to think you're going to ditch us altogether —

MENDEL (*not understanding*). But, Sarah, I can live with you and—Max, is his name?

SARAH (*uneasily*). But we want to start out right—whenever we do start. Max and me talked things over a little bit and we want to start out for ourselves. I want to do things my way—different from now. We thought we'd move up in Harlem—you wouldn't want to leave your old *Shul*, would you? And Max don't believe in all that stuff about keeping a *kosher* house; he wouldn't let me do it.

MENDEL (*aghast*). Not keep *kosher*! Why, Sarah, your mother —

SARAH. Yes, I know mother did—but this ain't Russia. It's America, and the extra fussing about the cooking's been hard enough on me, working all these years. I'm glad to have a change; only I know you wouldn't be satisfied with our way of doing things; you'd never stand for it.

MENDEL (*with quiet dignity*). I would not interfere between you and your husband, *madelle*. And I am afraid his ways are not my ways. But you will make him a good Jew —

SARAH (*impatiently*). He's a good enough Jew to suit me. (*Finishes her hair and opens couch to take out a long scarf, which she places with her hat and coat on the rocker.*) But you're too old-fashioned to understand how a progressive American gentleman like Max ain't got much time for such stuff.

MENDEL (*submissively*). I know how the younger men find our Law a burden: I think I understand your *chosan*. But I will not trouble you; I and Isadore can keep on living together.

ISADORE (*who has been showing signs of impatience now bursts out vehemently*). Say, I've got something to say, I guess. I want to get on my feet, too. It's been taking every cent I make to pay my share of the rent

and the grocery bills, and how do you think we're going to get on when Sarah stops working and don't give nothing?

MENDEL (*simply*). I am sorry I am such a burden, children. But I do all I can. Hardly ever does a *Shul* need a *Sepher Torah*, and when one does—(*shrugs*) it is a long task to copy a scroll; and when the *Shul* is small and poor, how can I ask them what the work is worth? Surely, it is a *mitzvah*, to work as cheaply as I can.

ISADORE (*savagely*). Yes; and all your *mitzvahs* are pretty hard on us; we've got to pay for them.

MENDEL (*unruffled*). What can I do? It does not take long to write a *mezzuzah*. I could write many in a day, but who would buy all of them? Only the old men and women like me care to have them before their doors; the young people have no use for *mezzuzahs*—in America.

ISADORE. Well, it's a free country, ain't it, and they can do as they please. Why don't you do work that pays?

MENDEL. Didn't I open a *Cheder* and try to teach?

SARAH (*from couch where she sits manicuring her nails*). Yes, and you lost all your paying pupils in two months and kept on teaching those who didn't pay till I made you stop. It takes an American like Max to make the money!

ISADORE. I don't know about that. Down at our place they've got a regular greenhorn for night-watchman; he can't speak hardly any English and he's almost as old as Reb Samuel and he gets his seven dollars a week, too. I'd like to see you make so much in a month with your *mezzuzahs*. Now, if you could only get a real job like that!

MENDEL (*half-tempted*). I could read and study in the daytime just the same and go to *Maariv* before I went to work and ——— (*Breaks off doubtfully.*)

SARAH (*disgustedly*). Aw, it's no use talking to him, Izzy. Do you suppose he'd work on his blessed *Shabbas*? And no firm's going to hire a special policeman on Friday nights when their watchman wants to go to *Shul*.

MENDEL (*with the air of one dismissing a subject*).

You are right, Sarah. It would not be possible. All my life have I kept the Law and it has been a crown to me and not a burden. 'I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging for bread.'

ISADORE (*mumbling*). You'd see it soon enough if somebody else didn't hustle around after the eats.

MENDEL (*with a keen look*). We will say no more about it, Isadore. Are you ready for the *brocha*—but first wash your hands.

ISADORE (*growling*). Did wash 'em when I come home—always extra bother.

(But he rises and is about to go to the sink when there is a knock and SARAH, who has been at the dresser for a last luxurious primp, throws down her powder rag and goes to the door.)

SARAH. I bet that bell won't work again. It must be him — (*In a voice which surely carries into the hall.*) Go on eating as though you weren't expecting anybody.

(They do not heed her warning, but sit motionless, ISADORE, his elbows on the table, still sullen and resentful, MENDEL in his favorite relaxed position, his hands resting upon the edge of the cloth.)

Enter MAX SCHUMAN. He is about thirty, short and heavy-set, smug and self-complacent, a self-made man, very proud of the fact that he is American-born and a true disciple of Progress—as he sees it. Dressed in a very new checked suit with a flashy tie and flashier tie pin. He stands in the doorway a moment, his quick, snapping eyes taking in the entire room and the family group before he turns back to SARAH.

MAX. Keep you waiting long, girlie? Couldn't get away from the store on time—business is business, you know! And by the time I got home and into these glad rags — (*Takes off derby which he puts down on dresser, sits on sofa, crossing his legs and renewing his*

scrutiny of the room and its occupants.) Introduce me to the family, can't you?

SARAH (*sharply in an aside to ISADORE*). Take off your hat—quick. (*Stands a little awkwardly between her father's chair and the sofa.*) Papa, this is my friend, Mr. Schuman.

MENDEL (*with his grave courtesy*). I am glad to meet one of my Sarah's friends.

MAX (*with a half nod*). Pleased to meet you. (*With another nod for ISADORE.*) Oh, you're the little brother we heard singing the other night?

ISADORE (*resenting the adjective and his tone of patronage*). I don't do it as a regular thing: I work at Blumenthal's —

MAX (*pleasantly*). Oh, yes, firm that almost went under when the war started?

ISADORE (*stiffly*). We're on our feet again now.

(*An awkward pause during which SARAH puts on her coat and picks up her hat and gloves.*)

MENDEL (*who seems to feel that as host he must make conversation*). The war seems to have no end, does it, Mr. Schuman? Only this morning I was reading in my *Tageblatt* and it said—but maybe you read it—a fine writing —

MAX (*bruskly*). No—I forgot the Yiddish as soon as I could. An up-to-date American that wants to keep up with the times hasn't got no time for such *stuss*.

(*Flushes a little at his blunder.*)

SARAH (*beginning to pin on her hat before the dresser*). We've got no time to sit around and talk about the war, either. It's getting late.

MAX (*pulling her down beside him*). Yes, we have. Sit down a minute, girlie. I want to talk things over with your old man and we might as well do it now as later. I told you I might have a special reason for coming up to-night, didn't I?

SARAH (*placing her hand impulsively on his arm*).

You don't mean that Edelheimer talked to you like you thought he might?

MAX (*pulling her toward him and slipping his other arm about her*). You bet that's what I mean. (*She draws back embarrassed.*) Aw, don't act so shy, cutey. You know you've let me hug you before, and I wasn't the first one, either! (*Still he removes his arm before he turns to MENDEL.*) It's about the kid I want to talk to you. I suppose you've heard something about me and I don't have to tell you that I think a whole lot of her. We've been going around together lately and—well, we're not what you might call engaged yet—and we don't intend to be neither, do we, kiddo?

SARAH (*submissively, but a little wistfully*). No, Max,—not in the regular way—putting it in the papers and all that—if you don't care for such things.

MAX (*with emphasis*). You can just bet I don't! *Pfui*, a regular *Yiddish* engagement party with every old woman in the neighborhood saying 'Maseltov' and crying down your neck when she blesses you, and every old man wondering how much you make a week and wondering what the girl's father's going to hand over. No engagements for mine! But I guess we're engaged enough to take a day off some time and take a trip over to Jersey and get settled for life—huh, Sarah?

MENDEL (*puzzled as SARAH, playing with the plumes of the hat which lies in her lap, does not answer*). Married in Jersey? We should go to our *Shul* on Houston Street.

MAX. What do we need one of your rabbis rattling off a lot of Jewish for? A justice of the peace can tie us up tight enough to last a while—huh, Sarah?

(*With a nudge.*)

MENDEL (*worried*). But —

SARAH (*anxious to avoid an argument*). Oh, there's plenty of time to talk about that. We ain't going to be married to-day or to-morrow.

MAX (*winking broadly*). Don't be too sure of that, young lady. Marry early and often is my motto. How

long would it take you to help me pick out some furniture for that flat we was talking about out in Harlem?

SARAH (*a little startled*). Oh, stop your kidding, Max. (*As he tries to fondle her again.*) Ain't you ashamed—and in front of papa and Izzy too! Now you know we weren't intending to get married for ever so long.

MAX. Sure, we couldn't risk it till I got my raise. Well, the old man came across to-day. Marsinky's leaving the first of the month and I get his job—head floor man—in charge of all the stock in our department and— (*with a good pause that all may be properly impressed*) eighteen a week to start on. (*With a slight swagger.*) I always said you can't keep down a man who wants to get ahead in the world. Eighteen a week! That's going some, isn't it?

SARAH. It's just beautiful —

ISADORE (*a little enviously*). You ought to live swell on that.

MAX (*more soberly*). I think we'll just break even. It costs a lot of money nowadays if you want to live right. My poor old father would have thought he was getting a fortune—with his five kids, too! But if a fellow wants to live in a decent neighborhood and have the washing done out and maybe a *shicksa* by the week and dress his wife like a lady—well, it takes money to be up-to-date nowadays. Only I guess if we're careful, eighteen 'll be enough for the two of us.

SARAH (*a little doubtfully*). But father — (*There is another awkward pause. She rises and puts her hat on the dresser, fumbles with the brush, puts it down and crosses to chair across from ISADORE, where she sits and faces MAX steadily.*) But what about papa, Max?

MAX (*in all sincerity*). How should I know?

MENDEL (*hesitating*). I do not make much money. I was saying to the *kinder* just before you came in that people do not want *mezzuzahs* to put up near their doors any more. So I make so very little —

ISADORE (*roughly, as he pushes his chair a little ways back from the table and sits with his hands in his pockets*). Not enough to keep you, and you know it.

MENDEL (*doubtfully*). If I could only get some Hebrew scholars again—a few boys to prepare for *Bar Mitzvah*.

SARAH (*glumly*). But you couldn't keep 'em before.

MAX (*patronizingly as he lights a cigar and lolls back on the sofa*). Everybody knows you're doing your best, Mr. Rabinowitz, but you ain't the hustling, money-making kind, that's all. As soon as I laid my eyes on you I knew you was like my poor old father—all right in his way, but as old-fashioned as they make 'em. Say, I left home when I wasn't any older than that kid there (*indicating ISADORE, who growls out a protest at being considered youthful*) just because I couldn't stand having him pulling a long face if I smoked on *Shabbas* or took a *shicksa* to a show once in a while. The old man meant well—same as you—but he just couldn't see that in America we do things different. And that's why I got on as well as I did—didn't have him on my back, didn't have no burdens, but could go ahead and be up-to-date, see?

MENDEL (*bitterly*). Yes—I see that in America we old men are always a burden.

SARAH (*wincing*). Max didn't mean you, papa. Did you, Max?

MAX (*with his air of heavy persuasiveness*). Now, I don't want you to think I've got anything personal against you. I know how hard it is to teach an old dog new tricks. And if you want to be burdened with all them old laws and things that most of us young fellows don't know anything about—well, that's your business. (*With the manner of his favorite lodge orator.*) Let every man live his own life according to his own views, I say—and I should worry if they don't see things like I do and can't get ahead in the world. (*Growing personal again.*) So you know I ain't got a thing against you personally, Mr. Rabinowitz, when I tell you that leaving out the money question—and that's something you can't ever leave out, anyhow—it wouldn't do for you to try and live with me and Sarah. She thinks so, too, don't you, Sadie?

SARAH (*submissive, yet doubtful*). Yes, I guess Max and me ought to start out by ourselves, papa, and you keep on living with Isadore.

ISADORE (*hotly*). Ain't that just like you, Sarah—planning to go off and get married the first chance you get and leaving me to look after him. Think him and me can pay the rent and eat on my seven dollars a week?

SARAH (*flaring up as she rises and faces him across the table*). Well, whose business is it to look after him? It ain't mine! I've been slaving in the shop ever since I got my school certificate. Look at my hands—fingers all hard from holding a needle! And ain't you the man of the family? It's your place to look after him—not mine.

MAX (*pulling her back into her chair and smiling his smile of superior understanding*). No use fighting like that, kiddo. You're red as a beet now and you'll have to powder all up again before I take you to the show. (*To ISADORE who has dragged his chair back to its place near the inner door, where he now sits, tilted back, his hands in his pockets.*) You can see for yourself, can't you, that it's out of the question for the old gent to live with us? Nobody's expecting you to take care of him either, and we all understand the two of you can't both live on what you're making.

SARAH (*timidly*). Maybe, Max, if we could only help a little—give a few dollars a week for father's board—or pay half of the rent like I'm doing now. I'd be awfully saving about our house and my clothes.

MAX (*with decision*). I'm not going to have any wife of mine denying herself things when I'm making a good living for her. We'll need every cent I make if we live like white people. I'm taking you off'n Hester Street and you're going to live like a lady, if I've got anything to say about it.

SARAH. But father——?

MAX (*with the air of one conferring a royal favor*). We won't let the old gent suffer for anything. (*To MENDEL, who has sat silent and bewildered during the wrangling.*) I knew I couldn't depend on Sarah and a

kid like Isadore to fix things up. (*Another protest from ISADORE'S corner which he ignores.*) But I'm a practical American business man, and I knew a long time ago I'd have to arrange everything, so ever since I knew we was going to get married some day, I says to myself: 'We can't let the old gentleman starve.'

SARAH (*with a sudden flare of anger*). I guess it ain't up to you, Max Schuman. I see myself neglecting him if he needed anything.

MAX (*with lofty good humor*). Say, kiddo, all your good wishes won't pay nobody's rent, you know. (*Turns to the others.*) And to-night when I talked to the boss about my new job, he told me there was going to be a general shaking up in most of the departments —

SARAH (*no longer pouting, interrupts*). Yes, Miss Newman, our forelady, was saying at noon —

MAX. I got my news from headquarters! Most of the trouble is Samuelson getting out of the firm and I guess most of his *mishpocha* he got in there will get out with him. (*With a memory of old wrongs.*) Serves him right, the dirty Jew! You know, he even got a job for his wife's uncle who came over several years ago and can't even talk a decent English? And the old fellow was timekeeper and drawing his ten dollars a week! (*Indignantly.*) We ought to have some laws in this country to keep a foreigner like that from coming here and taking the bread out of the mouth of good hard-working Americans.

ISADORE (*warming*). I always says that myself. The watchman at our store —

MAX (*unheeding*). He's fired, so I told the boss that I knew just the man for the place. (*With a patronizing nod for MENDEL.*) You see, I thought about you. And he asked me how long you'd been in this country and all that and said I should bring you down to-morrow; and I guess from what he said that if he likes your looks you're sure to get the job.

ISADORE (*gasping incredulously*). Pa earning ten dollars a week just for nothing!

MAX (*hastily*). He won't get no ten dollars a week for that job; Samuelson's wife's uncle did 'cause he was

mishpocha; but I guess I can get him six or so to start and that will see the two of you through mighty fine, won't it?

SARAH (*dancing over to MAX and cuddling beside him*). It's beautiful—just beautiful! And I'm sorry I got sore just now—you doing all that for papa, too. And now I can go ahead and pick out some clothes and nothing in the world to worry me (*her feet patting the floor in her childish excitement*). I suppose I'll have to be married in a suit, but I'm going to get —

MENDEL (*who has been nodding approvingly*). I thank you for taking all that trouble for my sake, Mr. Schuman. If I can only do the work —

MAX. Nothing to do but see that people give you their cards and then punch 'em for the right time.

MENDEL (*hopefully*). I will learn. I am not an old man yet and am strong and if the work is not too long I can read and study in the evening and perhaps make a *mezzuzah* or two—not to peddle any more, but to give to old friends. (*A little worried.*) But I will get home in time for *Maariv* every night?

SARAH (*leaning forward, a growing fear in her face*). *Maariv*—your *Shul* again —

MAX. Believe me that if you're working from seven in the morning till six at night for six days a week you ain't in the mood for any *Shul*.

MENDEL (*slowly*). Six days a week—*Shabbas*—six days —

ISADORE (*springing up*). Now don't start any foolishness—it's all settled. Here's a job just thrown at you—easy money—and a way for both of us to get on all right without bothering Sarah or nobody. Say a few extra prayers on Sunday if you have to, but everybody works on *Shabbas* in America if they can get the job.

MENDEL (*quietly*). I cannot.

MAX (*still uncertain*). But what's the row about?

SARAH (*bitterly*). It's his *Frommheit* again. He thinks because a few dinky tailor shops close on Saturday that your store's got to close, too. (*To MENDEL.*) I suppose you'd rather starve—and let the rest of us starve with you—than work on your *Shabbas*.

MENDEL (*with the simplicity of a child*). But how can I work on *Shabbas*?

MAX. I don't see why you can't. I know lots and lots of good Jews who do—why, one of them's a rabbi's son, too.

MENDEL. But they are not good Jews—their ways are not my ways. I have kept the Law all my life and now I cannot depart from it.

MAX (*trying to restrain his impatience*). Aw, listen to reason. We're not in the old country any more that you have to make your Judaism a burden.

MENDEL (*throwing back his shoulders, his voice ringing out like a trumpet*). A burden! Our Law is not a burden but a delight to those who love it. It is the heritage of Jacob, God's gift to His chosen people. The yoke of the Law can never be a burden to those who find delight in its holy teachings. (*His shoulders and voice suddenly sagging as he feels the alien atmosphere of the room, his eyes lowering before MAX's half sneer.*) No, the Law is not a burden to the children of the covenant; but we, the old men who have no more work to do in the world, we have become a burden to our children.

SARAH (*going to his chair and laying a hand on his bowed shoulder*). Now don't feel bad like that, papa. And it ain't as though we wanted you to do anything wrong. (*Shrewdly.*) You know you wouldn't have let Izzy and me work on *Shabbas* if you thought it was so terrible—would you?

MENDEL. I have said nothing—but it has hurt me here. (*Touches his breast.*) Yet how could I blame you—you are young and your ways are different and I know that with other times there must be other customs. (*Shakes his head.*) But not with me—not with me.

ISADORE (*harshly*). And what about me? I'm willing to do my part but it ain't right of all of you to expect me to do everything. If Sarah gets married and you don't take this job and help me out as much as you can, I'll—I'll —— (*Lowers his eyes before his father's quiet gaze, but finally ends sullenly.*) I'm just as good as Sarah and I've got as much right to get ahead in the

world. (*To MAX.*) I'll do what you did. Think you'd be head stock man now if you'd hung around home and let 'em drag you down all the time? (*Turns to MENDEL.*) I tell you, if you don't do your part, I won't stick on the job neither. A fellow can't get on quick in New York, anyhow—too much competition—but I'll go west where there's a chance for a good job and I'll get on, all right, with no one to hinder me.

SARAH (*contemptuously*). Stop your bluffing, Izzy—we've heard that stuff before.

ISADORE. You ain't going to hear it much longer. The minute you step out of that door to get married—and pa not making anything—I get out, too. You'll see whether I'm bluffing or not!

SARAH. I don't think you are. It's the sort of trick I'd expect of a selfish loafer like you. You always knew it was our place to look after papa, and now because this thing about working on *Shabbas* comes up, you're glad to ditch and——

ISADORE. Well, are you going to stick by him, then, since you're preaching to me? Ain't you going to ditch him, too?

SARAH (*beginning to waver*). Me and Max won't let him suffer—will we, Max? (*She turns to him, but MAX stares steadily before him, puffing on his cigar.*) You'd want me to do my duty by papa, wouldn't you, Max? (*A long pause.*) I—I guess there ain't any way out of it, is there, but having him live with us?

MAX (*bruskly*). I told you several times that was out of the question—and I meant it.

SARAH. Then you'll have to let me help him on the side. (*Desperately.*) I ought to know something about sewing by this time. I'll try to do a little at home.

MAX (*rising*). I see myself letting my wife doing dress-making for the neighbors! Think I'd have my friends talking about us—saying I didn't earn enough to keep you and maybe that you was helping to support me? I'm marrying you to look after me and the house and the kids when they come. So don't make any plans about helping your father when you know you can't do it. And I don't see myself handing him over a slice from

my pay envelope, either. I never supported my own parents and they needed it bad enough—and I'm not going to support him. I want to go ahead in the world and save and have money in the bank; so I won't have to have my children fighting about paying my rent when I'm old and can't work no more.

MENDEL (*who has sat with his head leaning on his hand*). You are right, Mr. Schuman. Do not depend too much upon your children; it is hard to be old and to feel that one is a burden. (*Ends bitterly.*)

MAX (*touched in spite of himself*). Now I didn't mean any offense. You don't have to be a burden—just take the job and everything'll be all right. You know that nobody but a few back-numbers keep *Shabbas* in America any more.

MENDEL. Then I am one of the back-numbers as you call us. I have been a good Jew all my life and I will die a good Jew. I have not brought up my children in the way that they should go, and now they are not good Jews and are bringing my white hairs to shame. But I will live and die as my father, *olov hasholom*, did—even in America I will not disgrace the law he taught me—even in America I will be a Jew.

ISADORE. Go ahead—and see what your Judaism brings you. I'll clear out, I tell you!

MAX (*bullying*). And Sarah's not going to worry about you, either. Go and live with your old-timers and keep *Shabbas* with them—and see if they'll support you. Sarah and I won't, anyhow.

SARAH (*furiously*). No, you won't support him, Max Schuman. I was a fool to expect you to do anything for him 'cause he was my father. And Isadore won't do anything for him—he's glad enough of an excuse to break away. And it's not that I think papa's right in turning down a chance to help himself instead of being a burden on us like he's always been. I don't say papa's right, but we can't make him change, and we have to put up with him.

ISADORE (*sullenly*). Well, I won't.

MAX. And I tell you once for all that I won't support him.

SARAH. Then I've got to. I ain't going to ditch the old man.

MAX. And do you expect me to hang around and wait for you till the old gentleman dies and don't need you any more?

SARAH. No—I can't ask that. It wouldn't be right. I know what a few years more of working'll do to me. You won't want to marry an old girl like Rosie Shapiro down-stairs—she's been in the shop for ten years; she's only six years older'n me and she looks over thirty. No, it's no use asking you to wait—and you wouldn't want me when you could get me after all the waiting.

MENDEL. But, Sarahle, I can't let you give up your *chosan*—it would not be right —

SARAH (*bitterly*). Don't you suppose I know it's not right—that I'm not giving myself a square deal? Don't you suppose I know I'm entitled to all that's coming to me—a home and a husband to work for me—and, maybe, kids. My mother had all them things—and I've got a right to them, too.

MAX. Then, for God's sake, listen to reason—live your own life —

SARAH. And be a selfish slob like Izzy! No—I ain't built that way. (*With sudden bitterness.*) I'll just have to give up all my chances so father won't have to give up his *Shabbas*. (*Hides her face.*)

MENDEL (*in a grief-shaken voice*). No, Sarah—no, my little girl—it is I who must give up. You are all too strong for me. It is best that the old should give way to the young. I will take the place if they will have me. I will no longer have my *Shabbas* if it makes me a burden to all of you. Yes, I will take the place if they will have me. (*The reaction is too much for SARAH and she leans against the table shaken with sobs. MENDEL draws her to him, smoothing her hair.*) Nu, nu, Sarahle kind, don't cry. It is all right—see, I am not crying. Perhaps I did not understand. (*Tries to smile.*) I will still go to *Shul* on Friday night—that they cannot take from me—and *Shabbas*—since I must work on *Shabbas* I will try to keep it in my heart.

MAX (*cheerfully*). Now that's the way to talk.

Why, I'll even get married with a rabbi and a *chuppah* and all the rest just to please you. (*Pulls out his watch.*) Say, girlie, it's time to be going if we want to see the first act. We'll have to wait for our supper till after the show. Now put your hat on and wipe your eyes.

ISADORE (*grinning*). And powder your nose. What do you want to go crying all over the place for?

SARAH (*raising her head and laughing shakily*). I'm acting dippy, all right. (*Goes to dresser, powders her face hastily and pins on her hat.*) I know there's no use crying when everything's going to come out all right.

MAX (*putting on his hat*). Have Sarah bring you down to the store to-morrow and I'll introduce you to the boss. I tell you you'll feel life's worth living when you draw your pay envelope every Saturday night.

MENDEL (*patiently*). You are very good to me, Mr. Schuman. But you do not understand.

MAX (*cheerfully*). You bet your life I understand! You're not used to America yet—takes some folks a long time—just like my father. But I'd have advised my own father to do just what you're doing.

MENDEL (*quietly, as he sinks back in his chair*). I think you would, Mr. Schuman. (*To SARAH, who stands at the door, smiling radiantly.*) Now you look like my own *madelle* again. Have a good time at your show.

MAX (*grinning*). Leave it to me!

SARAH (*still a little tremulous*). 'Bye.

MAX. Good-bye, Mr. Rabinowitz. I'll see you in the morning. (*Follows SARAH out into the hall but steps back to add with a wink.*) Oh, I almost forgot to say good-bye to the little brother.

(*He closes the door again, just in time to miss ISADORE'S explosion of wrath as he rises indignantly.*)

ISADORE. The smart aleck! It's lucky he went when he did or I'd have—I'd have shown him.

MENDEL (*very tired*). Yes, Isadore, now wash your hands and we will have the *brocha*.

ISADORE (*mumbling*). 'Told you I'd washed them

once — (*But obeys as he passes the sink and sits left of the table, replacing his cap as his father murmurs the Hebrew blessing, bowing his head and swaying to and fro. ISADORE glances over the table.*) Nothing fit to eat! Cold tea, cold potatoes, cold pickles — (*Opens covered dish.*) My God, some left-over herring! Have to have herring for breakfast, buy it at lunch and it's staring me in the face for supper. And Sarah running off with her Max to a Roof Garden and leaving us to starve. (*His voice rising in its whine of protest.*) Yes, to starve. And that greenhorn of a Biederman at the store should wish (*mimicking*) God should give it I should be hungry some day! (*Rising abruptly.*) But I can't swallow this grub. I'm going down to Musselman's and see what a steak looks like. Guess I'm entitled to a real meal after working like a dog all day. (*MENDEL does not answer, but sits staring before him. ISADORE lingers at the door and is vaguely touched by the lonely, silent figure.*) Say, we ought to celebrate same as Sarah. Come on to Musselman's with me and I'll tell 'em to stretch that steak a little and blow you to a real feed. (*With a grin.*) You can treat me when you get paid next Saturday.

MENDEL. I am not hungry. I can eat this supper and afterward I want to do a little work.

ISADORE (*sharply*). Aw, you've got to drop your *mezzuzah* business—it never paid you, anyhow.

MENDEL. The little *mezzuzah* I started this afternoon—I want to finish it and buy a fine case for it and give it to Sarah for her home; perhaps she will put it up because I made it for her. (*Heavily.*) But after that—I will make no more *mezzuzahs*. One does not sell them in America.

ISADORE. Now you're talking sense. Well, so long. And don't bother to clean up the dishes. It'll do Sarah good to have some work to do when she comes back from her show.

(*ISADORE leaves, slamming the door behind him.*)

MENDEL *sits with his hands resting on the edge of the table, his broad shoulders sagging, his eyes half*

closed. At last he rouses himself with an effort, raises a cup of tea to his lips, puts it down untasted. Breaks off a piece of bread and crumbles it; shakes his head; rises slowly and carries several plates to the sink, his shoulders bending as though beneath an unseen burden. He makes the trip several times; then with a shrug, the old, hopeless shrug of the Ghetto, he pushes the rest of the dishes aside, brings his writing material from the shelf, and is again bending over his bit of parchment as the curtain falls.)

Glossary

These terms are defined for the actors. If desired, the English may be substituted for a few of them in the text, or a few, with definitions, may be printed on the program.

ARMER YID.	Poor Jew.
BAR MITZVAH.	Confirmation.
BROCHA.	Grace before meals.
BROGES.	Angry.
CHEDER.	Hebrew school for boys.
CHOSAN.	Bridegroom or betrothed.
CHUPPAH.	Marriage canopy.
CHUTZPAH.	Impudence.
FLEISHIGE MESSER.	Knife for meat, therefore not to be used for butter.
FROMMHEIT.	Piety.
GEGESSEN.	Eaten.
GONOPHED.	Stolen.
GOY.	Gentile.
KINDELE.	Dear child.
KINDER.	Children.
KOSHER.	Fit for food according to Jewish ritual.
LANDSMANN.	Countryman.
MAARIV.	Evening service.
MADELLE.	Little girl.
MASELTOV.	Good luck.
MEZZUZAH.	Piece of parchment, with certain verses from the Bible, in a tin or wooden case; it is hung at the outer door of the orthodox Jewish home.

MISHPOCHA.	Family.
MITZVAH.	Pious duty.
MIZRACH.	Bible picture to mark the east wall.
OLOV HASHOLOM.	} Peace be upon him, upon her.
OLEHA HASHOLOM.	
PFUL.	Expression of disgust.
SEPHER TORAH.	Scroll of the Pentateuch, to be read in the synagogue.
SHABBAS.	Sabbath, which begins Friday at sunset.
SHEGETZ.	Gentile.
SHICKSA.	Non-Jewess.
SHNORRER.	Beggar.
SHUL.	Synagogue.
SMOOSING.	Talking.
STUSS.	Nonsense.
TAGEBLATT.	The Jewish Daily News.
TISHA B'AV.	Anniversary of destruction of the temple.

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