Finding America
A Full Length Play
By Claudia Haas
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Thank-yous to Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams whose book “Out of Hitler’s Reach” served as inspiration for the play. Other inspiration came from The Holocaust website, and stories told to me personally.

And immeasurable thanks to Dr. John Newman who painstakingly went over the play, the characters and the world to help me clarify what was in the beginning “a fine, sprawling mess.”

“Whoever saves one life saves the entire world.” – paraphrased from The Talmud

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RUNNING TIME:
80-90 minutes (approximate)

SETTING: Small-town (West Branch) Iowa; all you need for a set is a large porch with ample seating – some can be makeshift. Benches, one comfortable chair, crates, etc. It overlooks a garden and the farm fields. There is a lovely quilt over one of the chairs. It starts in late summer and as the play progresses, you could decorate as is your wish – mums, pumpkins, etc.

TIME: August 1942 – November 1942

SYNOPSIS:
In 1939, on a wing and a prayer, young Quakers opened a hostel (a working boarding house) for refugees fleeing the Nazi regime. Sixteen-year-old Lotte arrives with remembrances of Kristallnacht and her father being dragged away. She was determined to forget both her Jewish heritage and her German one. Hans is hiding an ark containing a children's Torah from a burned-out synagogue while Miklos is waiting for news from his father in Amsterdam. In Iowa, a teen grapples with a secret that both upsets and intrigues her. While, the volunteers imagined a place where their "guests" could learn English, American laws, and obtain the most American symbol they could think of – a driver's license – there was a steep learning curve for the idealistic Quakers. In "Americanizing" the refugees, were they unwittingly erasing their guests' culture?

The play was designed for high schools and colleges. As such, 14 of the characters' ages range from 13-21. 3 characters are in their 30's. The expandable (optional) choir can be any age.

CAST: 17 characters; 23+ if using the choir (Roles: 7 female, 7 male, 3 any gender (9 any gender if you use the choir - may add more as desired) To further utilize the cast, feel free to add in Bertie, Gloria, Bud, and Hallie to the choir. They may also be used as "voices" in the "School Bus Scene."
ABE, MIKLOS, HENRY ***or*** CHANA should be able to play the guitar a bit

<u>Scattergood Quaker Volunteers</u> (All grew up nearby in Iowa and are volunteers – mainly college students)
HENRY (male) 20-21; the workhorse of the hostel; pragmatic
ROSE (female) 20-21; the heart of the hostel; a worker-bee who is learning as she goes
ABE (male) 19-21; quiet, a thinker (possibly plays guitar)
PENELOPE (female); 17; the youngest and newest of the volunteers; upbeat and willing
BERTIE (male or female) 19-21; no-nonsense cook

<u>Refugees</u>
JOSEF GRUNBERG (male) 34-37; former lawyer from Strasbourg and later Vienna; amiable -= even jovial, un-buttoned

SUZANNE GRUNBERG (female) 13; daughter of Josef; a born matchmaker

LORENZO CASTILLE (male) 20; Italian political dissident; not enchanted with America or the hostel or his fellow refugees; he does work hard

LEVI ROSENFELD (male) 37; former judge; not religious, buttoned-up; believes in assimilation
RACHEL ROSENFELD (female) 35-37; law secretary, linguist; after abandoning her Jewish roots, she wants to revisit them
LOTTE ROSENFELD (female) 16; daughter of Levi and Rachel, haunted by her past in Germany; wants to be "Americanized"
HANS/HANNAH ROSENFELD (male or female) 13-14; has a secret; wants to know more about his Jewish Identity

MIKLOS LEDER (male) 18-20; student from The Netherlands; missing family

CHANA DANZIGER (pronounced CANNA) (female) 20; Polish refugee; Catholic-Jewish

<u>Townspeople</u>
GLORIA FRIED (female) 18-20; works locally at the Lutheran church; nosy but not mean-spirited
HALLIE/HAL GILBERT (male or female) 18; just moved to West Branch; she also has a secret and is confused about her/his identity
BUD CARLETON (male) 16; has a crush on Lotte – maybe… probably; Loves music (Bach) and poetry; may be the target of bullies

COSTUMES: Simple: flannel shirts, cuffed jeans, simple housedresses would be desired. When the ROSENFELD'S arrive, they might be in something more formal. In general, the ROSENFELD'S should always look a bit more formal than the GRUNBERGS.

MUSIC: For "Hava Nagila Hava, " words, translation, music and dance tutorial video are provided at the end. If you don't have anyone to play the guitar, the choir can sing acapella.

Finding America

PROLOGUE –

(Lights up on the REFUGEES: JOSEF, SUZANNE, MIKLOS, CHANA, LORENZO, LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE and HANS. Some may have suitcases. They are answering questions having just landed in New York City. They look out into the audience.)

JOSEF

Josef Grunberg, former lawyer from Vienna, Austria. Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. We have a room waiting in Brooklyn, New York. Looking for any work. Fleeing the Nazis – so Jewish.

SUZANNE

Suzanne Grunberg, from Vienna – well actually Salzburg, too. Looking to find an American wife for my father/

JOSEF

/Suzanne! No. It's not true. Tell him you're joking.

SUZANNE

I'm joking. *(Under her breath.)* Not really.

MIKLOS

Miklos Leder, former engineering student from the Netherlands. Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. I will be living with family in Buffalo, New York and going to school. Fleeing the Nazis. Jewish.

CHANA

Chana Danziger, former student from Poland and then England. Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. Fleeing the Nazis although I am Catholic. Well, maybe Jewish. I'm not sure.

LORENZO

Lorenzo Castille. From Italy. Seeking refuge from Mussolini. Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. Catholic.

LEVI

Levi Rosenberg from Berlin Germany. We spent the last two years in Paris. We are seeking refuge from the Nazis. Sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. We will be traveling to Baltimore where there may be work for my wife and me. Jewish – but in name only.

RACHEL

Rachel Rosenberg, wife of Levi. Teacher, translator.

LOTTE ROSENBERG

Lotte Rosenberg. I want to be an American.

HANS ROSENBERG

Hans Rosenberg.

(*They face the audience with expectation. We either:*
1. *Hear the choir sing "America" or*
2. *You may have the refugees sing it (improbable as it may be). Your choice. Or omit it.*

CHOIR

"O beautiful for spacious skies
For amber waves of grain.
For purple mountain's majesty
Above the fruited plain.
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee.
And crown they good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea."

LOTTE

I am so grateful to be here.

LORENZO

Prove to me your brotherhood, America.

(The REFUGEES exit and the lights change to the Scattergoods porch which is the setting for the play. We segue into Scene 1.)

SCENE 1

(HENRY and ROSE are quietly meditating or in silent prayer as was their morning custom of these Quakers. ABE is peeking at his watch. PENELOPE opens her eyes and sees ABE not quite in prayer. BERTIE is consulting her notes. ABE sees PENELOPE watching and PENELOPE quickly shuts her eyes tight to make-believe she is indeed in prayer. It is just past sunrise. HENRY breaks the silence as all open eyes and silently greet each other. ROSE has a folder with notes and is intent on them.)

HENRY

Going to be a hot one.

ABE

I better get going to the train station. Don't want to hit too much traffic.

PENELOPE

Did the meditation go on a bit too long for you, Abe?

ABE

Just long enough, Miss Peek-a-boo. I like to get a jump on things - don't like to keep people waiting. The Rosenfelds are bound to be tired after traveling all night.

BERTIE

Here's a short list for the store. Des Moines has better selection and better prices than West Branch.

ABE

The stores won't even be open.

BERTIE

By the time you pick up the Rosenfelds and load everyone in, they will be. I better get cracking. Literally. Need eggs for the hot dish. Penelope, get ready to shell peas.

PENELOPE

Really? There are more peas?

BERTIE

Yes, Ma'am. There's always more peas.

PENELOPE

Please don't call me "ma'am." I'm younger than you.

BERTIE

Yes, ma'am. Come on! The peas don't jump out of their shells on their own.

(PENELOPE and BERTIE exit into the house.)

ROSE

Here's some more for the list.

HENRY

I hope there's toilet paper on it.

ABE

There is. I'm off.

(ABE exits.)

HENRY

How does it feel? Taking over the Fowler's duties. You're the boss now.

ROSE

I'm a bit overwhelmed.

HENRY
Now you get to scrub toilets for the same salary. Wasn't that your dream?

ROSE
Somehow my dreams ignored that tidbit. They also ignored the "no-salary" clause. This new position has brought a few surprises. Not all welcome. Here's a letter from the Committee dated July 1st.

(She hands HENRY a letter.)

HENRY
Seven weeks ago.

ROSE
Mr. Fowler was busy attending to his wife's illness and this got put aside. Check out the third paragraph.

HENRY
> "While we appreciate the success of Scattergoods for three years starting in 1939,we have noted that the number of refugees is dwindling. The committee believes that Scattergoods has run its course. As such, we would like to have it shuttered by year's end. That should give you enough time to place your current guests. We regret doing this but believe our resources can be put to better use elsewhere."

It's funny that the programs designed to do the most good are always the ones under scrutiny.

ROSE
It's not over. I don't give up easily. If we can get our numbers up, the Committee would revisit their support of us. I'm meeting with them shortly. I am sure there are still refugees who would welcome the chance to come here. Look at what we offer – food, English classes and of course – what the American Friends Society think is most important – the All-American driver's license. Not to mention unlimited corn in the summer.

HENRY
We need a new slogan, "Come to Iowa, we're corny."

ROSE
How about, "Come to Iowa, we're a-maizing?"

HENRY
Aw shucks, Rose – you're out-punning me. I have to go. The farmers are arriving in the fields. I have them for four whole hours before they have to work on their own crops. These are good people. Tell the Committee about our local support. Maybe it will sway them.

ROSE

They want numbers to crunch.

HENRY

I believe I have six farmers today helping us. There's a number for you. See you at dinner?

ROSE

I'm not sure. After the meeting, I told my mom, I would help her can peaches. My sister usually is the good daughter, but with the new baby, she needs to rest. I will be back by dinner time to return messages.

HENRY

You're allowed to help your family. You know that, right? You can take a night off from Scattergoods.

ROSE

This is the wrong time to do that.

(JOSEF, SUZANNE, CHANA and PENELOPE enter prepared to do kitchen duty JOSEF is wearing a proper white shirt. CHANA and SUZANNE are in aprons. PENELOPE sports a frilly apron.)

HENRY

Look at them – all ready to work at sunrise.

ROSE

Which means we should be starting the day.

(ROSE greets her guests as she exits.)

HENRY

It's lovely to see everyone ready and eager to work before the work even gets here.

CHANA

We will be shelling peas. Again. It's like a little taste of home. I remember doing this with my mama in Poland and then with my aunt in England. It's a circle, isn't it? It's work that connects me to the past and to the "now." My aunt would make a fresh salad of rice and peas… sorry. You don't want to hear this.

HENRY

I'd like to hear more but have to get back to the fields. Maybe one day… you can make us your salad.

CHANA

I'd like that.

(There is a smile and a connection between them. BERTIE enters with a basket of peas as HENRY exits.)

BERTIE

Here you go. Tonight's vegetable. If you don't get them shelled, nobody gets their greens. Understand?

JOSEF

Aye, aye, Captain.

BERTIE

Feeding people is important.

(BERTIE exits. And the group goes to work shelling them. It's quiet for a moment.)

SUZANNE

Penelope, are you old enough to be married?

JOSEF

Suzanne! That's personal.

PENELOPE

It's fine. I haven't really thought about it. But I know I'm not ready for a lifetime commitment.

SUZANNE

Do you think my father's handsome?

JOSEF

What a question to ask this early! *(To PENELOPE.)* You don't have to answer that.

PENELOPE

Of course he is. It's the smile, I think.

JOSEF

Thank-you. *(To SUZANNE.)* Enough!

SUZANNE

I was going to ask Chana the same thing but anyone can see that she and Henry are sweet on each other.

CHANA

Oh …no … really … we're … friends.

SUZANNE

That's what I meant.

JOSEF

Suzanne, please keep your opinions to yourself. Everyone doesn't need to know everything. She did this on the crossing. Anytime she saw a woman alone, she asked if they were interested in marriage. Do they have matchmakers in America? Because I see that in her future.

(LORENZO enters from the fields – a bit dusty.)

LORENZO

Good morning, Penelope. You are a lovely sight for the morning.

PENELOPE

Why, thank-you. And good morning to you.

JOSEF

Good morning, Lorenzo.

LORENZO

Josef. I see you are hard at work – doing women's work. In Italy, no man would shell peas.

JOSEF

And in Vienna, I would have my head in law books trying to help a client.

LORENZO

Oh that's right. You're a lawyer. A "professional." That's why you avoid the hard work.

SUZANNE

My father broke his back in a labor camp. He's still in pain.

JOSEF

Everyone here has their tale of woe, isn't that right Lorenzo?

LORENZO

I did my time in the mountains laying explosives. I'd still be there but my family insisted I flee once the government learned of me. It hasn't been easy.

JOSEF

See? We all have our horror stories.

LORENZO

Some of us deserve our fates more than others. Scusi. I need to help Bertie bring breakfast to the fields. There's still time to join us. If you'd care to do real work.

(LORENZO exits.)

JOSEF

Ahhh, Lorenzo. He does have his opinions.

PENELOPE

I'm told he's a hard worker.

SUZANNE

He's sweet on you.

PENELOPE

I hope not.

SUZANNE

I know all the signs. Oh Papa, look at your shirt. It's turning green. You need an apron.

PENELOPE

Use mine. It'll hide the stains and washes up really well.

(PENELOPE puts the apron on JOSEF for everyone's amusement.)

JOSEF

What do you think? I am now – how do you say - not-resistible – like your Cary Grant.

(We hear a car door slam. ABE approaches with the ROSENFELDS: LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE and HANS. They carry suitcases. ABE has a box of supplies.)

ABE

Good Morning, Mr. Grunberg/

JOSEF

/Please. How many times do need to tell you – it's Josef. After three months here we can skip the formalities.

ABE

Sometimes the formalities are comforting. They show respect.

JOSEF

You are making me feel like the wise, old elder of the village. I may be wise but let's not group me with the old just yet. I'm not so old that I wouldn't consider shooting peas at your head for target practice!

SUZANNE

That would be fun.

ABE

I'm not dressed for target practice. Catch me later. I'm an ace shot. For a non-violent Quaker.

CHANA

As am I. I'll be on your team.

PENELOPE

You can shoot?

CHANA

Better than your Annie Oakley.

ABE

Everyone, please welcome the Rosenfelds: Levi, Rachel, Lotte and Hans. So far they've lived in Baltimore and Philadelphia. They're ready for a change from city-life.

LEVI

Actually, I am fond of cities but Rachel thought your Iowa would be better for the children.

LOTTE

I am sixteen – hardly a child.

JOSEF

Your English is good.

LEVI

We had a head start. My wife taught English and French in Berlin. It turned out to be good for all of us.

JOSEF

Welcome to Scattergood Hostel, Rosenfeld Family. The place where we "scatter good." And scatter beans because … it's "bean season." I am Josef.

(LEVI holds out his hand. JOSEF reaches to accept it.)

Be careful – my hands are green and slippery from the peas.

LEVI

I'm not afraid of slippery, green hands. I do avoid fists. You are wearing a charming apron. Is that the latest trend?

JOSEF

I like to show off the latest "farm fashion."

HANS

My father would never wear that. He's a judge.

LEVI

Was a judge. Now I am, what? A man without a country. A man without a job.

JOSEF
We all have that in common. In Vienna, I was a lawyer. Now I shell peas. Meh! It's a living!

LEVI
One day we should have a discussion about law and what happens when the law is no longer the law.

JOSEF
I have some theories.

(MIKLOS approaches.)

MIKLOS
I am sorry to interrupt – I see we have new guests. Welcome. I am Miklos.

(ALL nod in greetings.)

Abe, did you check for the mail in Des Moines?

ABE
I did. It's just the usual. Requests for all of you to speak of your homeland, what it's like to come to America…

MIKLOS
Nothing from home?

ABE
I'm afraid not.

MIKLOS
It's been a year. Exactly one year today since I heard from my father.

ABE
Exactly? You're sure of that.

MIKLOS
Yes. He sent a package for me to Utica. It arrived the day before my birthday. So, I remember. I've heard nothing since I came to Iowa.

(BERTIE appears with baskets of food.)

BERTIE
Miklos! I was looking for you. Please bring these down to the fields. I'll have more shortly.

MIKLOS

Your wish is my command.

BERTIE

It had better be.

(MIKLOS takes the basket to the fields and BERTIE exits.)

ABE

Come on, all. Let me help you get settled and you can explore your new digs.

RACHEL

Thank-you. Is there someone to polish our shoes? They are worn from the journey.

ABE

We tend to let those things go. It's a working farm and shoes do get caked with mud. We'll look for some work boots for you.

RACHEL

I could do it myself if you could spare some olive oil. They add a nice sheen.

ABE

Bertie hoards the cooking oil. Everything is rationed these days. Do you need help with the suitcases?

HANS

We can do it. We're used to doing everything ourselves.

(ABE heads inside followed by LEVI, RACHEL and HANS. SUZANNE stops LOTTE.)

SUZANNE

We light the candles every Friday night for the Sabbath. You and your family are welcome to come.

LOTTE

Danke, but we don't do the Sabbath.

SUZANNE

I'm sorry. I assumed you were Jewish. Most of the guests here are.

LOTTE

We are. We just don't observe. But it's kind of you to offer.

(LOTTE exits.)

CHANA
Polished shoes. Now that's something from the past that I haven't thought about in years. We always had to have them polished for school. But never at home. At home, we let a lot of the niceties go.

PENELOPE
On a farm, you have to. Too many muddy fields.

SUZANNE
And spooky woods.

CHANA
I love the woods. It reminds me of my village.

JOSEF
Suzanne worried about coming west. She thought there might be lions and tigers roaming free.

SUZANNE
Papa! Everybody doesn't have to know everything.

CHANA
I remember feeling the farms were welcoming me when I first came here. All those ears of corn. Rose told us to never tell secrets in a cornfield because there are so many "too many ears."

(PENELOPE laughs.)

I never got that joke.

PENELOPE
Trust me, it's corny.

GLORIA (O.S.)
YOO-HOO!

PENELOPE
Speaking of big ears…

(And right on cure, GLORIA appears.)

GLORIA
Good morning. Nice to see everyone hard at work. That's good. Very good. Is Abe around? I have a proposition for him. Oh goodness. That doesn't sound very good. I mean – a proposal. Oh! That's not much better. Just let's say I have an idea and I need his help.

SUZANNE
Do you find English as hard as we do?

GLORIA

Honey, everyone finds English hard. Even the English teachers. You've all been here awhile, haven't you? Since July? And I understand there's a new family. We should have a great, big bonfire and get acquainted.

PENELOPE

Gloria likes to keep an eye on things.

GLORIA

I would just like to get to know our visitors/

PENELOPE

/guests.

GLORIA

Guests. Is Abe around?

PENELOPE

He's getting a new family settled. Would you care to wait?

GLORIA

I'm busy, too. Busy-as-a-bee. Or is it butterfly. I never can remember. It's canning season. This week, it's peaches. Tell Abe I'll stop by later. Ta ta, lovely, "guests." Have fun with those peas.

(GLORIA exits.)

PENELOPE

She's a nosy little gossip. Be careful what you say in front of her. Forget what I said. I really shouldn't judge people like that. My mother says I have a smart mouth.

SUZANNE

But being smart is good.

PENELOPE

True. But here, if someone says you have a "smart mouth," it means you are being disrespectful. I think I get that from my brothers.

CHANA

These are done.

PENELOPE

Ha! I think there's more in the kitchen being washed. Let's bring these to Bertie. She'll tell us if she needs more.

(As they exit, we hear the choir. During the song, the day passes. There is a montage: PENELOPE may come out and beat some rugs. CHANA may sweep the porch, HENRY, LORENZO and MIKLOS will return from the fields. Use as much of the song as needed and let the lights change accordingly to the passing day. As we near the end, anyone left on stage will exit.

CHOIR (O.S.)

(Again, you may change the music. If you are not using the choir, simply underscore the "busyness" with the music only.)

O beautiful for pilgrim feet
Whose stern impassioned stress
A thoroughfare of freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw
Confirm thy soul in self-control
Thy liberty in law!

(At the very end, ROSE arrives from her long day and sits on the porch. She has her notes. ABE enters and sits by ROSE. They are silent for a moment.)

ABE

There's still some dinner left. And some tasty peach cobbler. I could get you some. Or not.

ROSE

I've been canning peaches for seven hours. I can't even look at another peach. But thank-you.

ABE

Want to talk? Or not?

ROSE

Oh Abe, they are determined to have us shut down by the end of the year.

ABE

And … you said …

ROSE

I can fill this place. I know there are families who would like to come here and get away from over-crowded cities where the rents are high and jobs are scarce. And people are friendlier here.

ABE

And you know that - how? When was the last time you were in a big city?

ROSE

It's what I've been told.

ABE

Ahhh … hearsay.

ROSE

My dear, sweet, honest Abe – just because you took one political science class does not mean you are ready to face me in a court of law. Besides our air is cleaner. That's a fact.

ABE

And our Main Street is emptier. Josef and Suzanne come from Vienna. Our new family is from Berlin. For all we know, they might be more comfortable in the hustle and bustle of a big city. Sometimes what we want for other people is really what we want for ourselves – but not necessarily what they want. For instance – you crave the country. But I – long for the city.

(*CHANA enters with HENRY.)*

CHANA

How is it possible that you've never had a pierogi?

HENRY

I never even heard of them.

CHANA

They're soft pillows of dough stuffed with potatoes and cheese – all these things you already have on the farm. Whenever any of us had a tough day, Mama would make us some. We would gobble them up. Sometimes she would serve them with sour cream. Sometimes they'd go in a soup. It doesn't matter what you do with them. You can't mess them up.

HENRY

Maybe – you can show Berti how to make them.

CHANA

Better yet – I'll teach you to make them.

(*HENRY and CHANA get settled. PENELOPE enters with a Checkers game. She is with SUZANNE, HANS and LOTTE. PENELOPE sets it up.)*

PENELOPE

I can't believe you don't play Checkers. It is international.

LOTTE

We have something similar but we call it "Dames."

PENELOPE

I'll teach you the American version and then you can teach us the German one.

(They settle around the game. RACHEL, LEVI and JOSEF enter – and go to the side getting acquainted. LORENZO enters and approaches PENELOPE.)

LORENZO

Good evening, Penelope. You're looking – pretty– we say "bella" where I come from.

PENELOPE

That's … very nice of you. Thank-you. I didn't see you at dinner.

LORENZO

I prefer to take my meals away from everyone. But it is nice that you missed me.

PENELOPE

Did I say that? Lorenzo, have you met Lotte and Hans? They're new.

LORENZO

Jewish?

LOTTE

Not really.

LORENZO

That's a nice change. *(To PENELOPE.)* Would you like to take a walk?

PENELOPE

I'm busy right now. But if you'd like a game of checkers…

LORENZO

No. Thank-you.

(*LORENZO walks away.)*

SUZANNE

I told you this morning. He's sweet on you.

(MIKLOS enters.)

HENRY

Good evening, Miklos. Funny, I thought everyone would be too tired to gather tonight. It was a long day with both the soybeans and the corn ready at the same time. The deer are having a field day.

MIKLOS

The rooms are hot. It's better outside. *(Beat.)* But your Iowa corn is delicious. I love how it comes on a comb.

HENRY
Enjoy the heat. The cold comes soon enough.

MIKLOS
Don't mind me. I like to complain. My father always said if you like to do something – you should do it often so you get good at it. Me? I'm good at complaining.

LOTTE
You should meet my father. He also likes to complain.

LEVI
Meh! Only on long walks – like that one from Paris to Marseilles. That was a tough one.

JOSEF
Oy! What a schlep that must have been.

PENELOPE
I'd love to see Paris and Marseilles.

HANS
Marseilles is dirty. Like this porch.

RACHEL
Hans! Apologize.

ROSE
No need. The porch will be clean enough soon. Rain is coming. I can smell. It.

CHANA
Smelling rain? Is that an American thing?

HENRY
It's an Iowa thing. Rain will be welcome. The heat will break but the fields will be muddy.

(BERTIE enters and rings a bell.)

BERTIE
There are a few teacakes leftover if anyone cares for an evening treat. Ladies first.

(All exit into the house except for CHANA and HENRY.)

HENRY
No teacakes for you?

CHANA
Everyone's gone. I like the quiet.

HENRY

I … should leave.

CHANA

Oh – I didn't mean/

HENRY

/it's fine. I understand.

CHANA

The fields, the quiet night – it reminds me of home. Dotted houses with flowers painted all over them. The people of Zalipe were not afraid of color. From my home, it seemed as if the hills reached up and touched the sky. It's hard to believe that it's been three years since I was sent away.

HENRY

You've had quite the journey.

CHANA

It's been – an unwanted adventure: starting with my home in Poland to my aunt in England and then to New York and now here. The war has started many … journeys.

HENRY

I've never been further than Des Moines. Maybe someday. *(Beat.)* Would you mind if I just sat here with you? I, too, am enjoying the quiet.

CHANA

It is most welcome. Who knows? Maybe we'll see a shooting star.

HENRY

Anything's possible.

(The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 2 – Morning, Saturday, August 29, 1942

(PENELOPE is dressed is on the porch dressed for muddy work. LOTTE and SUZANNE enter. LOTTE is dressed neater than the others.)

PENELOPE

Good morning. You make me laugh, Lotte. You've been here a week and you're still dressed way too prettily for picking vegetables in the mud. Take a page out of Suzanne's book. She looks like she belongs on a farm.

SUZANNE

My parents grew up on farms. They understand mud. After Papa finished his education, they moved to Vienna. I missed the country. I loved visiting my grandparents and playing in the mountains. I would be covered in mud and then jump into the hay. My mama said I looked like a porcupine. She would laugh and laugh … she's gone now. For many years.

LOTTE

I'm sorry. She sounds lovely. I wish my mother liked the "porcupine" look. This is all I have.

PENELOPE

I'll lend you some of my brothers' clothes. They can get ruined. Actually, they're already ruined.

LOTTE

My mother will faint if she saw me in those clothes.

PENELOPE

She'll be grateful I didn't let you destroy your nice clothes. Come on. It's getting hot already.

LOTTE

I'm surprised all of you work on Saturday.

PENELOPE

We work every day except Sunday. That's our rest day.

LOTTE

But for Jews – Saturday is the rest day. We are not supposed to work. Of course, Father always did but we are not religious. But Suzanne is.

SUZANNE

Papa says we're more observant than religious. We do the rituals. We never went to synagogue.

LOTTE

You light the sabbath candles every Friday night.

SUZANNE

Just before we left Austria, Papa was arrested and put in a work camp. Grandma came and brought me to Salzburg and worked at trying to get him free. She's amazing. He was freed. He doesn't talk about it – but I could tell it was horrible. Grandma said it was an excuse to ransack our home. When he returned, he said if we were going to be punished for being Jewish – we might as well really be Jewish and so we started lighting the candles. It's comforting.

LOTTE

If you're going to be Jewish, you shouldn't work on the Sabbath.

SUZANNE

We don't like to cause trouble. We've had enough.

PENELOPE

Standing here won't get the tomatoes picked. Coming? I like to get the field chores over with as early as possible.

(LOTTE, SUZANNE and PENELOPE exit. HENRY enters with BERTIE, LEVI and HANS. BERTIE has two aprons.)

LEVI

I refuse to wear an apron. Leave me some dignity.

BERTIE

Suit yourself. But you'll get flour all over you.

HENRY

She's right. She's always right.

LEVI

I was hoping to work in the fields.

HANS

Me, too!

HENRY

The university sent us some extra students from the agricultural department to gain experience doing the dirty work so we have enough help there. We put people where they are needed. And Bertie needs some extra arms for the bread so she can do some canning.

HANS

I don't like kitchens. Too many knives.

BERTIE

You won't be using knives. I am appointing you as "Official Dough Puncher." You will be punching down the dough so it can rise again.

HANS
Why punch it down if you're just going to have it rise again?

BERTIE
There are fewer air holes if you let it rise twice. Trust me. I know what I'm doing.

(ROSE enters with RACHEL.)

LEVI
Another kitchen volunteer?

ROSE
A church in town wanted to know if I had anyone who could translate some German documents and now that's Rachel's here – I have the perfect person.

LEVI
So I am in the kitchen and Rachel is in the office. America likes to turn things around.

RACHEL
Just don't burn the place down.

LEVI
See, already I am losing respect because I am in the kitchen.

ROSE
I've registered the children for school. It will be good for them to be with kids their own age.

HANS
Maybe not so good. In Berlin, the children who did not like Jews were mean. One boy brought a knife to school and liked to put it near my face.

ROSE
That won't happen here.

BERTIE
I'm waiting. The bread doesn't mix itself.

(BERTIE, LEVI and HANS exit.)

HENRY
Ready for the day?

ROSE
No. Are you?

HENRY

Of course. I'm a born boy scout. Plus I have it on good authority that I will be learning to make pierogis tonight.

ROSE

What's a pierogi?

HENRY

I'm not sure. It sounds like ravioli stuffed with potatoes.

ROSE

Sounds tasty. I have a few phone calls to make. The office in Berlin is closing as we speak. Last I heard, they had refugees scattered in Morocco, Cuba and even China but they couldn't get them to America. Who knows? Maybe I can persuade the offices to get them here.

HENRY

We closed our borders after Pearl Harbor. Nobody can get in.

ROSE

We'll see. I'm ready to make calls.

GLORIA (O.S.)

Yoo hoo. Rose! Henry!

ROSE

And I'm making those calls now.

(*ROSE exits.)*

HENRY

Don't leave me! Rose? Rose!

(GLORIA and HALLIE appear.)

Why, hello Gloria.

GLORIA

Good morning. Is Abe around?

HENRY

He's in the fields.

GLORIA

How are the new recruits doing?

HENRY

Our guests?

GLORIA

Yes, that's what I meant. Oh! Meet Hallie. She's new here, too. Just like your … guests. She's named after a city in Germany called Hall.

HALLIE

Actually, Halle *(pronounced Hal-luh.)* is the city. Hallie is my name.

GLORIA

Right. I never knew you could name people after a city. Imagine being named "West Branch." "Hi, I'm West Branch from West Branch." Would West be the first name and Branch be the second name? It would be so confusing. Anyway, Hallie just moved here from Pella.

HENRY

Welcome.

GLORIA

She's hoping to meet some of your guests, isn't that right?

HALLIE

I'm really hoping to meet with someone who speaks German.

HENRY

You've come to the right place. Everyone's hard at work right now but maybe after dinner we could arrange something.

HALLIE

Are they Jewish?

HENRY

Most are.

HALLIE

Do they like cookies?

HENRY

Everyone likes cookies. Is this just a social visit or is there anything I can do for you before I head to the fields?

GLORIA

Work! I'm here to discuss work for your guests. But I'd rather talk to Abe.

HENRY

I'm who's available.

GLORIA
I know. But Abe listens better. Anyhoo, here goes. You know I work in the business office of the West Branch Lutheran Church and I was talking to Jacob the other day – he's the custodian and he is retiring - so there will be a job opening and I thought of your guests.

HENRY
That could be tricky.

GLORIA
Do you think they are above such work? I understand most of them are highly educated.

HENRY
It's not that. Last month we placed a former Professor of Chemistry on an assembly line in Detroit. All of our guests expect to work jobs they are over-qualified for but I am thinking of your flock. Would they welcome a Jewish custodian? They wouldn't attend Sunday services.

GLORIA
That's only one hour a week. It wouldn't distract them from their own religion.

HENRY
But it might show a lack of respect for their own beliefs.

GLORIA
Maybe I should've talked to Abe. I'm just trying to help.

HENRY
And help is most appreciated. But the help should match the need.

GLORIA
Think about it. There's no harm in asking.

HALLIE
That's a beautiful quilt.

HENRY
Thank-you. My mother made it.

GLORIA
She does beautiful work. I've been trying to buy that quilt for ages but Henry won't part with it.

HENRY
It's a nicety I keep around for the guests. It helps to remind them that they should make themselves at home here.

HALLIE

You think a lot of your guests.

HENRY

Yes, I do. And I should be working with them now.

GLORIA

I think that's our cue to exit. Ta ta. See you later.

(GLORIA and HALLIE exit. ROSE peeks in.)

ROSE

All clear?

HENRY

That was pretty sneaky leaving me to deal with her.

ROSE

You need to work on your friendship skills, "Friend."

HENRY

How'd your calls go?

ROSE

Oh! Actually, I read the morning paper.

HENRY

Slacker!

ROSE

It's good to be informed. There was an article that has convinced me that there is still a huge need for us. It gave me an idea. I know how to fill this place. I found a group of refugees that could use our help.

HENRY

With the borders closed/

ROSE

/I know but they're already here. And they're American.

HENRY

American refugees?

ROSE

I'm not saying anymore until I propose this to the powers that be. Keep your fingers crossed. And toes. Elbows, too.

HENRY
You're very superstitious for a Quaker.

ROSE
You have no idea.

HENRY
The powers-that-be move at a snail's pace.

ROSE
Usually. But remember how fast we got this place up and running? When we proposed Scattergoods, one hundred Quakers approved it within the hour.

HENRY
And you think history will repeat itself?

ROSE
If there's one thing history does, is repeat itself.

(*PENELOPE, SUZANNE, and LOTTE appear with their baskets of tomatoes.)*

HENRY
You're done early.

LOTTE
We worked fast. Too many bugs.

ROSE
Please, take them to the kitchen and see what else Bertie has for you to do. Thank-you.

(*SUZANNE and LOTTE exit. PENELOPE stays.)*

Anything else?

PENELOPE
Yes. I was thinking of something Lotte said to me this morning. About working on the Sabbath.

ROSE
Everyone has Sundays off.

PENELOPE
But Sundays are not the Sabbath day for the Jews. Today is.

ROSE
We respect their holy days. We celebrate Hanukkah and always give them Yom Kippur off.

PENELOPE
I know. I was just passing on Lotte's thoughts. It made me think. I'll see what Bertie needs.

(PENELOPE exits.)

HENRY
She has a point.

ROSE
We've been doing Sundays off for three years. It's the only way we can get the local farmers to help us.

HENRY
I'm not disagreeing. I'm just saying she has a point. We put this program together so fast – it's inevitable that we would miss something.

ROSE
Right now, it's important to keep this going. We can fix problems later.

HENRY
That's not the Rose I know. The Rose I know wants all the details to be worked out.

ROSE
The Rose you know wasn't facing the closure of Scattergoods.

(JOSEF enters.)

JOSEF
Oh good! You're both here. There's something I'd like to speak with you about. I would love to make a proper Rosh Hashanah dinner for everyone. It's a way of saying thank-you and including you in our traditions. To tell the truth, we barely celebrated it when in Vienna and I would like to make it up to Suzanne – and celebrate with our new friends. I would do everything. Or rather – I will boss Suzanne around to do everything. I like for her to be busy. So she doesn't think too much about trying to find me a wife.

HENRY
I'm sure Bertie would like an extra day off. What will you need?

JOSEF
The farm provides almost everything. Danke. But I was wondering if you could find a beef brisket somewhere. It can be small. I know beef is quite dear and I am happy to pay for it.

(JOSEF holds out a brooch.)

JOSEF (cont'd)
It's solid gold. I am sure you can get enough for it to cover the cost of the meat. Take it. Bitte.

ROSE

It looks like an heirloom.

JOSEF

It was my mother's. We sold almost everything to pay for our crossing but I kept a few pieces in reserve.

ROSE

And you would part from it for a beef brisket?

JOSEF

I think using it for our New Year's celebration would make my mother happy.

HENRY

Let me see what I can do. Hold on to your brooch for now. When is this dinner?

JOSEF

September eleventh. Almost two weeks away. That's enough time, correct?

HENRY

I think a special feast would be most welcome as we bring the harvest in.

(ABE, MIKLOS, and LORENZO come from the fields.)

Is something going on that I'm unaware about?

MIKLOS

Bertie told us to come to the house. We don't dare disobey Bertie.

(*The rest of the families enter from the house. PENELOPE rings a bell. BERTIE enters with a cake with one lit candle in it. BERTIE leads the guests in singing to MIKLOS.)*

BERTIE, GUESTS *(with others joining in)*

Happy Birthday to you
Happy Birthday to you
Happy Birthday dear Miklos
Happy Birthday to you!

BERTIE

Make a wish Miklos and blow at the candle.

MIKLOS

How did you know?

BERTIE
The fields are filled with corn and they all have ears, right, Abe?

(*ABE grins as people start to swarm the cake.)*

Everyone takes their own slice. I'm not your servant. But let Miklos go first and remember – it's a small cake. It's not like sugar grows on trees. Leave enough for your neighbors.

(And as MIKLOS slices his cake and the people move in, the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3, Wednesday, September 2, afternoon

(*Lights up on the porch. ABE and ROSE are teaching the Constitution. LORENZO, LEVI, RACHEL, CHANA, MIKLOS and JOSEF are assembled.)*

MIKLOS

So to be an American, you must know English, obey the laws – even those you don't know - and drive a car. Is that right?

ROSE

The theory is that driving a car makes you fit in easily. You won't stand out and be "the other." I don't know if that's true but I hear it floated about.

CHANA

So theories "float." I love American idioms.

ABE

Maybe we should steer away from cars and focus on civics. There is the continuing religious debate. Especially with what is happening in Europe. People always want to know how religion fits into our government. In the Constitution, God is not mentioned. Before we became a country, the delegates all agreed that the federal government should be kept out of religion. If you think about it, that is amazing because the delegates seldom agreed on anything.

LORENZO

But America is a Christian country. Like Italy. Like Europe.

ROSE

By population – yes. The majority of Americans consider themselves Christian. But by design – no. The Constitution states that Congress shall make no law that establishes a national religion.

ABE

However, each state has its own Constitution and some do reference God – but not necessarily a Christian God. In Iowa, the State Constitution mentions a Supreme Being but does not say that He is Christian.

RACHEL

Given the number of churches Iowa has, I would say this state is Christian.

ROSE

True. But there are many forms of Christianity and they do not all agree.

ABE

The Quakers left England because they did not conform to the prevailing Christianity of those times. They were deprived of earning a living. It's similar to what you have experienced.

LEVI

Exactly when did that happen?

ABE

They left England in 1689.

LEVI

So in the last two-hundred-and-fifty years, have you met with any problems because of your religion?

ABE

Not a lot.

ROSE

Although being Quakers in a Christian community gives us insight in what it means to be "the other." People are confused by us. We don't have ministers or priests or even a formal service. Some think we're not a "real religion."

JOSEF

But nobody is throwing you out of your home.

LORENZO

Maybe if you made an effort to assimilate into the general population and support everyone, nobody would be throwing you out of your home. You people stick together. You only go to Jewish shops to spend your precious money. You invest in Jewish banks and Jewish businesses. You clearly want to be "the other."

LEVI

But I did assimilate. Our family held Easter egg hunts. My home was not kosher. We gave to Christian charities. In the end, the Nazis refused to see me as a contributing member of society. They only saw "the Jew."

ABE

Let's steer this conversation back to America. Ideally, there is no "other" in America.

LORENZO

Ideally. But your cities have their German neighborhoods, their Italian neighborhoods, their Jewish neighborhoods. People prefer to be with their own kind.

ROSE

Moving on. The first amendment of the Constitution guarantees Americans freedom of speech, freedom of the press and to peacefully assemble to protest grievances.

RACHEL

In Germany, we had those same rights until the Nazis pushed the "Enabler Act" through.

MIKLOS

I wonder if we, as Jews, were tricked into thinking we had those rights. If we truly had them, they wouldn‘t be easy to take them away.

(We hear a school bus. It stops. There are children's voices – feel free to add other taunts.)

VOICES

"I spy – SPIES!"

"Dirty Germans!"

"Go back to your own country."

"Get out of Iowa!"

(LOTTE, HANS, SUZANNE run to the porch.)

HANS

I hate school. It's just like Germany!

RACHEL

Has it been like this all week?

LOTTE

No. This kid they call "Charley-boy" started the chants today and a few joined in.

SUZANNE

Next time I'm going to punch him.

ABE

I'll talk to the school. Nobody needs to go back until we have this sorted out.

(ALL exit except for LOTTE and ROSE.)

ROSE

I'm sorry the afternoon did not go according to plan. Did anyone stand up for you?

LOTTE

Most kids stayed quiet. Either they didn't want to get involved or they were scared, too.

ROSE

I am so sorry.

LOTTE

I know you are. But at school, maybe not.

ROSE

We'll talk to the teachers.

LOTTE

We heard whispers yesterday which the teachers ignored. In Berlin, children ran after us because we are Jewish. Here, they run after us because we are German. What is it you Americans say? "No wins?"

ROSE

"You can't win."

LOTTE

In Germany, people would say that the Juden – us – tried harder to be German than the Germans. My family never seemed Jewish. We even had a Christmas tree. Hans and I wanted one so we could be like everyone else. My father agreed. He said, "Juden assimilierten in die Deutsch Kultur." Jews … melt? No, think assimilate – yes – assimilate into German culture. I would like to do that. But would it matter? If someone in power wanted to get rid of me because I am Jewish, could they? Am I German to everyone? Or Jew? Or both? But never American. I was hoping to be American.

ROSE

What happened in Germany could never happen here. We are a nation of laws.

LOTTE

Germany was a nation of laws. Suppose American decided to change its laws?

ROSE

They won't. Americans are proud of their history of welcoming people. What happened to you is an isolated incident. It does not happen every day. I grew up with these people. They want to do the right thing.

(MIKLOS enters.)

MIKLOS

I hope I'm not disturbing. I have some reading to do for a test and it was getting too noisy inside to concentrate.

ROSE

The outside is for everyone.

LOTTE

I thought that once, too. I remember loving the walk home from school until it became dangerous. Hans and I used to walk home in a group. One day, a boy pulled out a knife and sang, "When the Jewish blood drips off our knives, we will have happier lives." The boy

LOTTE (cont'd)
laughed. Hans screamed and we ran away. *(Beat.)* We still hate knives. And Germany. I want to love America… but it's different than I thought. I thought Americans would be more excepting.

ROSE
Accepting.

LOTTE
Those two words still confuse me. Just like America does.

ROSE
We're a work in progress. What I wish for you is that you grow to love America as I do and who knows – maybe you will help America fulfill its promise. I'll speak to the school. They need an education in what America is supposed to be.

(ROSE exits.)

MIKLOS
I'm sorry – I couldn't help but overhear. It makes me sad about how you feel about your homeland. My memories of Amsterdam are the canals lined with tulips and bicycles everywhere. I visited Germany quite a few times growing up. I found it magical.

LOTTE
The magic is gone. Burned by hate. My memories of my homeland is a city on fire. Jewish shops burning. Synagogues broken and twisted. A father covered in blood.

MIKLOS
Being Jewish is nothing to be ashamed of. It's more than your religion. It's a culture and your bloodline/

LOTTE
/bloodied clothes. Blood on a man coming up the steps. The man is hunched over but when he reaches the top, he stands up straight. Your mother greets him at the door refusing to cry. She hugs him longer than usual. And then she leaves. When she returns, you learn that she has sold all of her jewelry, our silver and has tickets to Paris. Your father says, "They've already punished me. We're German. We stay." And for the first time, the mother disagrees with the father. She says, "The Germans do not think of us as German. Only Jewish. I will not stay here. The children are in danger. You may stay but the three of us are leaving." Two days later, you are on a train to Paris. That's what being Jewish means to me. Blood.

MIKLOS
Your mother is a smart and brave woman.

LOTTE
And she tells us that all the time. She said she was named after Rachel in the Torah who was the "classic, perfect mother." And there goes the extent of my knowledge of Jewish history.

MIKLOS

Rachel wept for her children in exile.

LOTTE

These days, you need to do more than weep. You need to fight. Excuse me, I should probably be with my family.

(LOTTE exits as MIKLOS attends to his studies. SUZANNE runs on followed by JOSEF.)

SUZANNE

I am not returning to school. You can teach me.

JOSEF

I wish I was as good a teacher as your mother would have been.

SUZANNE

You can do it. You promised Mama.

JOSEF

That I would teach you?

SUZANNE

That you would keep me safe.

JOSEF

And so I shall. *(Beat.)* You remember those promises.

SUZANNE

I remember everything. She would have loved it here. I wish…

JOSEF

Me, to Zuzu. Me, too.

(*They huddle together. We hear music or the CHOIR.)*

CHOIR

O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
May God thy gold refine
Till all successes be noblenesses
And every gain divine.
(Blackout.)

SCENE 4 – Thursday, September 4, 1942

(The porch is empty as HALLIE sneaks on it with a package. She drops it on a bench and exits. LOTTE enters with her homework. BUD appears and approaches LOTTE.)

BUD

Guten tag.

LOTTE

It's evening, so one says, "Guten abend."

BUD

Guten abend, then. Missed you in school.

LOTTE

Truth?

BUD

Yes. And my mother thought – actually we both thought – I should apologize for the kids on the bus yesterday. They were rude. And I did nothing to stop them. I'm Bud by the way.

LOTTE

Lotte.

BUD

I know.

LOTTE

So you and your mother are apologizing.

BUD

Just me. My mother didn't do anything.

LOTTE

Neither did you.

BUD

That's why I'm apologizing. I should have.

LOTTE

I'm German but not a spy.

BUD

I know. Many farmers that settled here came from Germany. I love the music. The polkas are fun. And then there's Bach. My mother is a piano teacher and she teaches me some of his music.

BUD (cont'd)
The kids make fun of me because I like Bach. The kids prefer the popular songs from the radio. I love the Brandenburg Concertos. Do you?

LOTTE
I don't know them. I know the Brandenburg Gate. My father worked nearby.

BUD
You're lucky to have seen it. I bet you saw a lot of wonderful things in Germany.

LOTTE
I saw a lot of things. Not all wonderful.

BUD
You're doing the Robert Frost homework.

LOTTE
I'm trying. English poetry is complicated. German poetry is more straight forward.

BUD
I could … help you. Today's assignment is one of my favorites.

"Whose woods these are I think I know;
His house is in the village though,
He will not see me stopping here
Two watch his woods fill up with snow."

LOTTE
You memorized it?

BUD
I told you – it's one of my favorites.

LOTTE
A man stops in the woods. And he writes a poem about it.

BUD
But there's more to it. He's actually trespassing. He knows he's on someone else's property. But he loves the snow fall so just stays and watches.

LOTTE
And then he writes about his horse – which is odd.

BUD
"My little horse must think it queer

(BUD (cont'd)

To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year."

LOTTE

See? Even the horse agrees it's strange to stop.

BUD

He probably just wants to get home.

LOTTE

He sounds like my father. When we had to leave Paris and walk to Marseilles, it was spring everywhere. Hans and I would run into these field of wildflowers and see how many butterflies landed on us. My father would scold us and tell us to get back on the road. We had to reach certain places by nightfall. We weren't allowed to stop.

BUD

But you were escaping. The farmer would not have stopped if he was being chased.

LOTTE

Maybe the horse was hungry and that's why he wanted to rush home. We were always hungry.

BUD

Maybe. Because next it says,

"He gave his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake
The only other sound's the sweet
Of easy winds and downy shake.

You're right. The horse clearly wants to keep going.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep.

LOTTE

So, he did do what the horse wanted him to do. Because the farmer had things he needed to do. My father would approve of that. But I wonder what would happen if the world stopped – just like the farmer did – and the farmer spent more time being happy in the snowfall. And could just "be." We're always needing to go somewhere. The "big sleep" will come no matter what.

BUD

I think you understand a lot more of this than you let on. And I think what you're asking is what Robert Frost is asking.

LOTTE
Maybe. I still think he didn't need the horse.

BUD
A debate for another time. I should get back. It's getting dark. May I visit again?

LOTTE
What do you Americans like to say? "It's a free country." *(Beat.)* Sorry. That was rude. Ja. I mean, yes.

(BUD exits as the hostel group comes on. HENRY and ABE settle on the bench. PENELOPE, ROSE, ABE, JOSEF, LEVI, RACHEL, SUZANNE, HANS, MIKLOS, CHANA and LORENZO also enter. LORENZO stays apart as others converse. BERTIE also joins them. ABE notices the package from HALLIE on or by the bench.)

ABE
Does this belong to anyone?

SUZANNE
It looks like a present. If no one wants it, I'll take it!

ABE
It's – cookies.

BERTIE
Let me see that. Oh – freshly baked. They must be for the cook!

HENRY
And the cook always shares, right Bertie?

BERTIE
Darn. Caught in a web of my own weaving.

HANS
I'm hungry.

RACHEL
You just ate.

ABE
There's a note. Now we'll see who it's for. Why, it's "For the Honored Guests at Scattergoods."

CHANA
They look like Hamantaschen cookies – for Purim. See? They're shaped with three corners just like Haman's hat.

HANS

Haman-what?

CHANA

Haman was an evil man and when we eat these cookies, we are destroying him.

HANS

I want to destroy evil. I'll take two please.

ROSE

But we don't know who they're from.

HENRY

I have an idea. They're safe. I'll eat them. Pass the cookies.

SUZANNE

We can make believe it's Purim! It's such fun. You dress up and have noisemakers – we could do that. Bertie, can we have some pots and pans to bang?

BERTIE

No.

PENELOPE

So costumes, noisemakers, sweets – your Purim sounds like Halloween.

CHANA

It's about when Queen Esther saved all the Jews from being killed by Haman.

HENRY

Is there more to the story?

MIKLOS

It's complicated.

JOSEF

The easy version is: "People in power tried to kill us. They did not succeed. We lived. It's a miracle! Let's eat!" That sums up most of our holidays.

HANS

So – let's eat!

(And the cookies get handed out. We may see HALLIE way off watching.)

SUZANNE

If this really was Purim, we'd tell stories after eating. Papa! Tell a story!

JOSEF

I don't want to bore the guests.

LORENZO

Thank-you. We don't need a bedtime story.

CHANA

It's been so long since I heard a bedtime story, I would love one.

JOSEF

If you insist. You are insisting, right?

> "There was once a town between two mountains called Chelm. It was a poor town as was the case in most Jewish villages."

LORENZO

In my experience, it's the Jews who have all the money.

JOSEF

From your lips to G-d's ears. But in this story, which has some truth, the villagers had nothing.

> "They were a happy group with large families that grew. And grew. And – well, you get the picture. Soon, they could not all fit into the synagogue. The Rabbi proclaimed that a new synagogue should be built right next to the old one. Rabbis love making proclamations. The problem was – because you must have a problem – that the rocks they needed to build were on the very top of the mountains. But the people of Chelm were a hard-working folk. They schlepped up the mountain and carefully carried the rocks down. They did this for days. When they were almost finished – only two more rocks to go – the Rabbi came by to see the progress. He was amazed as he watched the people gingerly carrying down the rocks. He said, "why are you carrying the rocks down the mountain? Wouldn't it be easier to roll them down?
>
> The townspeople had an "aha" moment!"
>
> "They always listened to their rabbi. So each villager carefully carried a rock back up the mountain so they could roll them back down again. The end."
>
> *(Maybe Josef bows to some applause.)*

LORENZO

What they did was ridiculous. Your story is about a bunch of good-for-nothings who have no brains. This is what your culture is based on. Fools and cookies shaped like a hat. I'm not surprised that nobody wants you in their country. Who would want to be populated with fools?

ROSE

Lorenzo!

LORENZO

I am sorry but not really. For weeks I have been surrounded by people who think they are the only ones in the world that have suffered. “Oh poor me. Everyone hates me.” Yes, it’s true. Did you ever stop to think why? It is not your religion. It’s this way you have of thinking, of believing that you are better than everyone. Only you know the Word of God. Only you know how things should be done.

(ABE approaches LORENZO but is pulled back by HENRY.)

HENRY

Lorenzo! Enough! We are all friends here. That is the only way this hostel can work.

LORENZO

Friends? Their voices hush when I walk in the room. You all talk of your precious holidays. Josef tells his precious Jewish story. They speak their sorrowful tales of what is happening to them back home. But does anybody ask, “Why is Lorenzo here?” “What did you do to get expelled from your country?” “How does it feel to be separated from your family and alone in a foreign country?” Lorenzo has pride, too. As much as all of you. Don’t make me the villain here. I am the victim.

(LORENZO exits.)

ROSE

We have to talk to him. This can’t continue.

HENRY

Let him cool down. Maybe we have been ignoring him and taking his hard work for granted.

(*Pause.)*

JOSEF

I think… Suzanne and I will head upstairs.

As RACHEL, LEVI and HANS go to exit, LOTTE approaches ROSE.)

LOTTE

Maybe we are both wrong about what America is like?

(LOTTE exits and ROSE follows. Soon, all are gone. Lights fade.)

----------Possible Intermission ----------

SCENE 5 – Monday, September 5, 1942, evening

(It is evening. The quilt is gone and the porch is empty. HANS comes running on followed by LOTTE.)

LOTTE

Show me!

HANS

I don't have to.

(Maybe a tussle and finally HANS shows what's in his hand. It's a small, jeweled case – an ark for a children's Torah.)

LOTTE

Where did you get that?

HANS

Promise not to tell?

LOTTE

Promise.

HANS

Remember when the synagogues burned – just before we left? I went out walking and I went inside one of the them.

LOTTE

The building could have fallen on you!

HANS

But it didn't!

LOTTE

Why did you even do that?

HANS

I wanted to see the inside of a synagogue before they were gone. We never went. I know you want to forget that you are Jewish but I want to remember. There was this case – just lying there. It was shiny with all those jewels and I thought, "das ist wichtig" - important. The Nazis would want this but I won't let them have it. I wanted to show those Nazis they can't steal everything.

(RACHEL and LEVI appear.)

LOTTE

It's beautiful.

RACHEL

What is? Hans? Show me, please. *(He does so.)* Why, it's an ark with a children's Torah. I haven't seen one of these since I was a child. Where did you get it?

HANS

I found it in one of the burned-out synagogues. Father had been taken away and I was upset – so I just went out and was climbing the rubble – please don't be mad…

LEVI

Go on.

HANS

I thought I'd take a stone. Something to show that a synagogue was once here but I saw this and grabbed it. It looked – important.

RACHEL

It is very important. This tiny cabinet is the Ark – it holds the scripture. The Ark is supposed to keep it safe and it did its job. This tiny scroll contains pieces of the children's Torah. A simple version where children could learn…I have memories… they're rushing at me. I used to be able to read from it but my Hebrew's gone. I do remember, "Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work but nor are you free to abandon it."

LOTTE

That's beautiful. It's too bad no one follows it. Not in Germany and not here.

RACHEL

It's up to each individual. You make your own choices. This must be treated with respect. And be kept safe. It's not a tchotchke to be tossed around.

LEVI

It looks valuable. It should be kept in a safe.

HANS

It's mine! I've kept is safe for three years. I store it in my old baby blanket.

LEVI

That's not a proper place for it.

RACHEL

Actually, Levi – it's the perfect place. And he's right. It belongs to him. Put it back now.

HANS

And then can I see if Suzanne wants to play checkers?

LEVI

Homework done?

HANS

Yes, sir!

LEVI

Then you can play for a bit. Bedtime at nine.

(HANS exits.)

LOTTE

Mom, are you all right?

RACHEL

I haven't felt Jewish in so long. Not since my mother died. My father had no interest in keeping up the traditions and then I met your father…

LEVI

I thought you were fine leading a secular life.

RACHEL

I thought I was, too.

LEVI

Let's take a stroll before dinner. We can talk about it. Lotte, care to join us?

LOTTE

I'd really like to just sit for a bit and do nothing.

RACHEL

I gather things are going better at school?

LOTTE

Nobody's shouting anymore. But they still whisper. We stick together. We're fine.

(*RACHEL and LEVI go for a walk. LOTTE sits apart – enjoying the warm evening. MIKLOS enters. He still has papers that he is studying. LOTTE and MIKLOS wave at each other.)*

MIKLOS

Evening, Lotte.

LOTTE

Good evening. Still studying?

MIKLOS

It never ends.

LOTTE

You always seem to be – by yourself? I'm being forward. Sorry.

MIKLOS

I don't mean to. It's just – I see you with your family and I suppose I am jealous. Maybe I have more in common with Lorenzo than I thought. I think he misses his family. I know I miss my father. When the war broke out, my father understood everything way before I did. I was sixteen when he sent me to live with cousins in New York.

LOTTE

Your father was smart to understand things early. But it must be hard. I may not have a country or a religion. But I have my family.

MIKLOS

Be grateful for that. My American family never warmed to me so as soon as I finished high school, I went to work. But my small salary was no help to anyone so when I saw this opportunity to make a life in Iowa, I came here. It's been a good place to sort things out. But now I've been here over four months. I am thinking of the next step.

LOTTE

I think my mother and father are hoping to get us back into a city.

(HALLIE enters. She has a small box and some notepaper strung together.)

HALLIE

Excuse me, but are you German?

MIKLOS

Dutch.

HALLIE

Shoot. I need someone who speaks German.

MIKLOS

I can do that. If you're from the Netherlands, you speak many languages because only the Dutch speak Dutch. But if you want a real German, ask Lotte.

HALLIE

Oh good! One more question. Are you Jewish? Because I need to speak to someone who is also Jewish…

LOTTE

Then you should speak with Miklos. I am German but whether or not I am Jewish can be questioned.

HALLIE

That's my question. I am trying to figure out if I am Jewish. May I show you something?

(HALLIE presents a small box with an old handwritten recipe inside it and a luggage tag.)

HALLIE

My grandmother left me this box when she died. It has a few cookie recipes written in German which I was able to figure out and a luggage tag.

MIKLOS

You're the cookie baker!

HALLIE

Yes. I was sort of hoping to make all of you like me so you would help me.

MIKLOS

They were good cookies.

HALLIE

I'm glad you liked them. So, you'll help? Right? Let me show you something. See this tag?

MIKLOS

Esther Gottlieb.

HALLIE

I think it was my grandmother's. She came over when she was five and I know this was her box where she stored stuff. She told me it was her "Most Important Box." But her name was Emily Gilbert. But why would she keep a tag that says "Esther Gottlieb?"

MIKLOS

Why do you think?

HALLIE

I'm not sure. And see these – burned out candles. I know she loved candles. She would light them every weekend.

MIKLOS

Friday nights?

HALLIE
How'd you know? Why would she save old candles that have outlived their usefulness? And who is Esther Gottlieb? My mother says that's a Jewish name. Is it?

MIKLOS
It's very possible.

HALLIE
Could that be my real grandmother's name? Or my great-grandmother?

MIKLOS
That too, is possible.

HALLIE
My mother says I should get rid of this stuff and never mention it again. But I don't want to. I loved my grandmother and I wonder if she left this for me so I would know the truth. I wonder if she was sorry that she changed her name and religion and everything. My grandfather was Lutheran. We all went to Lutheran services together – even my grandmother. So I am Christian, right? Can I be Jewish and Christian?

MIKLOS
Only you can answer that.

HALLIE
Am I Jewish if Grandma was Jewish?

MIKLOS
Jews believe that the bloodline runs through the mother. If your grandmother was Jewish than your mother and you are also Jewish. Whether you choose to be observant is up to you.

HALLIE
I don't know what having a religion means. Every Easter I get a pair of white gloves and a hat to wear to church and every Christmas we set up a tree. But the truth is, we're not really religious except on Christmas and Easter. Maybe I can be Christian and Jewish. We could get a Christmas tree and a menorah.

MIKLOS
A Christmas tree doesn't make you Christian any more than a menorah makes you Jewish. You have to look at the teachings of the faith and see if you believe in any of them.

HALLIE
My mother says it's easier to be Lutheran in American than Jewish.

LOTTE
I think it's easier to be Lutheran almost anywhere in the world than Jewish.

HALLIE
I want to learn more about being Jewish. I do have a list of questions. It's hard to find information on the Jewish faith in West Branch. Would you mind filling out a questionnaire?

MIKLOS
Lotte?

LOTTE
Right now, I have enough homework. And my background in Judaism is scattered.

MIKLOS
Let me check it out.

(HALLIE produces a LONG sheet of papers taped together with many questions. MIKLOS is taken aback but gamely takes it.)

MIKLOS (cont'd)
This may take a day or two … or a month.

HALLIE
I like to be thorough. Thank-you. I'll be back.

(HALLIE exits. MIKLOS goes back to reading. BUD enters. He carries a book.)

BUD
Hi Lotte. Can we talk?

LOTTE
I don't know. Can we?

BUD
Away from everyone.

(They move away.)

I'm sorry.

LOTTE
You've gotten good at apologizing.

BUD
It's just/

LOTTE
Charley called you “a Jew lover.” I heard him.

BUD
It confused me.

LOTTE
So you made believe you didn’t know me. I’m used to that.

BUD
That’s not what confused me. The truth is – I like you. But I didn’t want anyone to think I was in love with you. Cause he said “lover.” But then I started thinking, does Charley think it’s an insult to announce that someone loves someone? Aren’t we supposed to love each other? I want to be a “Jew-lover” and a “Quaker-lover.” You know – a “people lover.” And I realized after you left that while Charley thought he was making fun of me, he was giving me a compliment. And I told him so. And then you know what happened?

LOTTE
He punched you.

BUD
No. That’s what I thought was going to happen. And I was ready. I put up my fists and I closed my eyes – like this - and – nothing. When I opened my eyes he was walking away. He’s just a sad-looking kid who thinks he can get people on his side by making fun of others. I wanted you to know.

LOTTE
Thank-you. (*Beat.)* I’m glad he didn’t jump you.

BUD
Me, too. *(Beat.)* Are you still having trouble with Robert Frost?

LOTTE
Sometimes I think I understand what he means and then he confused me all over again.

(BUD opens the book he conveniently brought.)

You came prepared.

BUD
I was hoping you would talk to me. And I remembered this poem – it’s not in our studies. It’s really his shortest poem ever but he asks maybe one of the most important questions ever.

“A voice said, Look me in the stars
And tell me truly, men of earth,
If all the soul-and-body scars
Were not too much to pay for birth.”

BUD (cont'd)
This made me think of you. I thought of what you've been through – your last days in Berlin, your family's struggle to get here. Has it left a scar on your body or soul? I think Robert Frost is asking us if being here – being alive – is worth the pain. Is it worth the sorrow you have felt? What if you were never born? If you were never here, you never would have suffered. You never would have seen what you have seen. You would have no scars.

LOTTE
What is it you Americans like to say? "Wow." That does say a lot.

BUD
It makes us ask ourselves if we are glad to be here. Are you?

LOTTE
I think … yes. Because of family. And poetry. And your corn-on-the-cob with lots of butter. What about you?

BUD
Definitely yes. For all those reasons – and you.

(ROSE enters and approaches MIKLOS.)

ROSE
There you are. I've been looking all over for you. You have some mail.

(MIKLOS tears open the envelope.)

Good news?

MIKLOS
My citizenship test is soon. It's hard to believe I've been in America for three years. I was just a kid when I arrived. Will I be able to get a ride to Des Moines?

ROSE
Definitely. Are you prepared?

MIKLOS
I've been studying for weeks. It's – hard though. Loving Holland and loving America. Excuse me. I should go in. It's my day to help Bertie with dinner.

(*MIKLOS exits. ROSE sits on the bench. HENRY enters and sits with her.)*

HENRY
Thinking?

ROSE

About Lorenzo. I thought I was pretty good at bringing people together. America's a harder nut to crack than I thought. We are a mixture and sometimes it boils over.

(CHANA enters.)

CHANA

Henry? The kitchen's free if you want to learn to make perogies.

HENRY

Rose? Do you want/

ROSE

/Go. The kitchen's not often free. Save me one.

(HENRY and CHANA exit as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 6 – Evening of September 11, 1942

(Maybe we hear klezmer music as the scene changes. The VOLUNTEERS, GUESTS and all the TOWNSPEOPLE are on the porch or nearby – so the entire cast, yes Bertie too, are there. LORENZO is away from the action. It is the Rosh Hashana celebration. If you wish, you could have the cast add a "harvest theme" to the porch as they enter. You may also use extras.)

JOSEF

Shanah Tova, Friends! Dinner was good tonight, right? I would like to thank our helpers for giving us the day off to prepare this special meal. There are many traditional foods for this holiday and although we didn't have all of them – pomegranates are hard to find in Iowa – our table was heavy with good wishes and sweetness.

As we know too well, beans are numerous in Iowa and they symbolize hope for a prosperous New Year. So don't forget to eat your beans. Let us not forget the apples and honey – all from nearby farms. Their sweetness tells us we will have a sweet year. And we have a new cook! Chana taught Henry how to make perogies and weren't they special?

I don't know how Henry and Rose managed to find the Brisket in Iowa – but that is my tradition – and I am grateful. Wasn't it delicious? You must say yes. It is my mother's recipe. Shanah Tova! Thank-you for sharing the table with us.

ALL (*Who know the greeting)*

Shanah Tova!

JOSEF

And now for something very special – you have many fine musicians in town and some of us learned to play one of my favorite songs! "Hava Nagila Hava" – Let us Rejoice!" Yes, it's time for the "Hora."

(Whoever plays guitar starts strumming "Hava Nagila Hava" (translation: Let us Rejoice). Music supplied at end or go online. Do as many times as you like. It should get faster and faster. Videos and a tutorial for the dance – it's easy – is provided at the end of the script.)

(*SUZANNE, JOSEF, RACHEL and MIKLOS immediately get in a circle to begin. RACHEL is thrilled.)*

(The VOLUNTEERS, HALLIE, HANS and LEVI will be figuring it out. HALLIE catches on fast and MIKLOS brings her into the circle pretty quickly. BERTIE also catches on fast. As the others figure it out, they can join in. Then GLORIA, BUD, and the townspeople will do the same. You can have one big circle or two or three. LOTTE is off to one side but she will finally join in.)

LOTTE

Mother?

RACHEL

I haven't done this since I was a child!

AS MANY IN THE CAST THAT KNOW THIS SING

Hava Nagila Hava
Nagila Hava
Nagila venis mecha.

Hava Nagila Hava
Nagila Hava
Nagila venis mecha

Hava neranena
Hava neranena
Hava neranena
Venis mecha

Uru, Uru achim
Uru achim belev sameach,
Uru achim belev sameach,
Uru achim
Uru achim
Belev sameach,

(Repeat as necessary.)

LORENZO

So this is the culture you are preserving. A frenzy of limbs going each and every way like you are caught in spider web. We have a dance like that in Italy – La Tarantella. I've always hated that dance – it's nothing but peasants exposing their base desires – people being reduced to vermin. That is what you are doing to yourself right now – reducing yourself to the level of rats. No wonder Europe wants you exterminated. For what are you really? Nothing but vermin! Rats! Cockroaches!

HENRY

LORENZO! Enough!

(LEVI comes face to face with LORENZO. There is the threat of violence. The following happens quickly.)

LEVI

To my face. Now. Call me names to my face.

(LOTTE and RACHEL run to LEVI.)

LOTTE

Father, no!

LEVI

Punch me. You know you want to. I've been beaten by worse than you. Here I am, Lorenzo! A proud man. A proud … Jew. And happy to be so.

LOTTE

Papa?

LORENZO

Such bravery! Hiding behind women. Working in the kitchen like women. Leaving the harder work for me and the farmers.

(LEVI steps in front of LOTTE.)

LEVI

I'm waiting.

JOSEF

As am I.

MIKLOS

And I.

(The families form a blockade of sorts. The VOLUNTEERS rush in to stop any possible violence. LORENZO moves away. He sees PENELOPE.)

LORENZO

You should get away from here. They'll infect you with their poison. You're better than they are.

(The CAST is frozen. HENRY yells out.)

HENRY

Lorenzo! Pack your bags! You're leaving tonight.

(Beat. ALL are silent as LORENZO exits.)

ROSE

I'm sorry, everyone. This was – such a joyous evening. Let's not have it end on this note.

ABE

Some soft music?

ROSE
Please. Let's welcome the New Year softly.

(And there is some soft music. It's slow and sweet. JOSEF will dance with SUZANNE, BUD will dance with LOTTE; HANS with PENELOPE, and RACHEL with LEVI, and BERTI, GLORIA and ABE could be a threesome. MIKLOS is with HALLIE, and HENRY with CHANA. ROSE watches. Feel free to do your own pairings! Remember these pairings and the dance – it will be recreated at the end.)

(Ad libs of "Shanah Tova" and "good night," etc. are heard as everyone leaves in groups. CHANA and HENRY are left as is HALLIE and MIKLOS.)

CHANA
There's a rumor that Scattergoods will be closing soon. And there's a push to secure us all work as quickly as possible.

HENRY
It is a possibility.

CHANA
I must be hard to place. I never finished school. I have no real skills.

HENRY
You're thoughtful and kind and make delicious perogies.

CHANA
I don't think any want ads list those qualifications.

HENRY
I've been thinking. My mother is ailing and my brother is tending to the farm and to her while I work here. It would be … a godsend to have a woman help with my mother's needs. I know she'd appreciate it. We can offer little in the way of money. But you would have room and board. *(Beat.)* I know Rose has tried to place our Jewish guests in places with a Jewish population and we have none here/

CHANA
/It's not that. I don't even know if I'm considered Jewish.

HENRY
You were brought here as a Jewish refugee fleeing the Nazis.

CHANA
I was brought up to be Jewish. My father's Jewish. My mother is Anglican – born and raised in England. According to the Nazis, if the mother is Christian, you are Christian. I lost my country. The Nazis took away my religion. If there was a rabbi nearby, we'd have quite the discussion.

CHANA
Although as it has been noted, it would be easier to be Christian than Jewish. Tonight was more proof of that.

HENRY
I'm sorry about Lorenzo. This wasn't a good placement for him. We all made excuses. We all knew better. Nobody needed his outburst.

CHANA
We've all lived through these moments of hate and there will be more. But I like to think – somewhere at the same time of Lorenzo's outburst, – someone is experiencing love right now for the very first time. Both hate and love are overwhelming. And both are empowering. People think love and hate are opposites. But my father used to say that they are one of the same – intense feelings that can be changed. Love can turn to hate. But also hate can turn to love. My father said the true opposite of hate is not caring. Who knows? Maybe one day Lorenzo's hate will change. But can you change someone who doesn't care about anything at all?

HENRY
Did you ever think about becoming a philosopher?

CHANA
Maybe if people would listen to women… it would be possible. Although in truth, I mainly say things I've already heard. I'm hardly an original.

HENRY
Chana… I … need to check on railroad times/

CHANA
/do what you need to do. *(Beat.)* Go on.

(HENRY exits. CHANA sings to quietly to herself.)

CHANA
"Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain…
For purple mountains majesty above the fruited plain… America… America …"

(LORENZO enters. He has his suitcase.)

LORENZO
You don't believe that stuff.

CHANA
You packed fast.

LORENZO
I've been ready to leave since I arrived. America? Their dream is a lie.

CHANA

A dream is not a lie.

LORENZO

And it is not a truth either. *(Beat.)* In Italy, I thought Jews were just a nuisance – always trying to take over businesses, run the banks –but lately - I see the truth. All of you truly believe that you are the "chosen people." And as the "chosen people" you love to remind us that you were chosen by God to lead. The truth is you were chosen to remind us of who we do not want to be.

CHANA

That's your own personal opinion.

LORENZO

A truth. Many others believe the same.

CHANA

If I look at the sky and see it littered with stars like tonight and I observe and tell you that it is a starry night - that is a truth. If I observe and tell you that the stars are fairies dancing in the sky – it may be my own personal truth because I believe it – but it is not actually a truth.

LORENZO

That's just silly.

CHANA

Exactly.

(HENRY enters.)

HENRY

There's a six a.m. train to Chicago and from there you can make a connection to New York. I have some change for you to make phone calls to the Friends Committee so you can be placed quickly. Let's drive in silence. I am not in the mood for conversation – polite or otherwise.

LORENZO

I'm ready to leave.

HENRY

Good night, Chana.

CHANA

Night, Henry. Good-bye, Lorenzo.

(HENRY, LORENZO exit. CHANA watches for a moment and then goes into the house. We turn to MIKLOS and HALLIE. MIKLOS hands HALLIE a notebook.)

MIKLOS

I have something for you. I couldn't fit all the answers to your questions on that one piece of paper so I wrote them in this notebook. I hope it helps.

HALLIE

There's a lot to learn, isn't there?

MIKLOS

It's just a beginning. You have been given the gift of two faiths.

HALLIE

And I have to choose.

MIKLOS

Read this and then think about what stays with you. Faith isn't easy but there is no time limit on when and if you have to choose. I also brought you this. It's to help you remember your grandmother who may have had to make a tough choice.

(MIKLOS presents a candle.)

Think of it as a Yahrzeit candle. One can get a special one – but not in West Branch. We light them on Yom Kippur to remember a loved one who has passed. Yom Kippur is our "Day of Atonement" and is next week. The candle may also be lit on the anniversary of a loved one's death. But I think, one can also light one when one is remembering a powerful memory and you want to keep your departed ones close. I am remembering my mother. She passed down all these traditions to me and she left me too early.

HALLIE

I'm not sure my mother would approve if I lit this at home. I've kind of been sneaky about learning this Jewish thing. What it be wrong to light the candle now? For my grandmother?

MIKLOS

It's the perfect time. There are prayers but for now, we'll just light the candle and remember.

(MIKLOS lights the candle and they sit and watch it as the lights go down.)

SCENE 7 – Thursday, October 17, 1942

(*It's early evening. ROSE is on the porch with LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE and HANS.)*

LEVI

Manager of a Christmas tree lot?

ROSE

Managing three of them actually. Macalester College operates quite a few.

LOTTE

Father, face it – you started a Christmas tree tradition with us and now it won't leave you.

LEVI

It will be a first, true? A Jew selling Christmas trees?

ROSE

I would say, yes – it would be a first.

LEVI

I always wanted to be first in something. Even in school, I was always second in my class.

ROSE

You did tell me when you first came here that America likes to turn things around. I've arranged for Rachel to do some translations for the college. One of the law professors thinks there will be some pro bono law work for you after the holidays.

LEVI

So, after selling Christmas trees, I work for free? Pardon, I am not objecting. Yet. I am just trying to understand the placement.

ROSE

Volunteering is an honorable American tradition. Trust me, I know. And it often leads to paid work. You would be back in a city. St. Paul is small but with more opportunities than West Branch. And if it matters to you, there is a Jewish population and a synagogue.

RACHEL

It matters.

ROSE

What do you think?

Rachel

I think you need to place us.

ROSE
I do. I need to place all of you. Sooner than I expected.

LEVI
You put a lot of thought into this and we are grateful.

RACHEL
I think this will be a new adventure and something to look forward to.

HANS
I was just getting used to Scattergoods. Lotte and I have friends.

ROSE
It makes me so happy to hear that. I hope you stay in touch with your friends from here. But Scattergoods was never meant to go on forever. We will be closed by Thanksgiving.

LEVI
Tell your college in St. Paul that we will be happy to work for them. When do we start?

ROSE
Right away. Macalester has found rooms for you already.

LEVI
But what do I do until it's time to sell Christmas trees?

ROSE
I didn't want to scare you off but you'll likely be hauling pumpkins in October and selling turkeys in November.

RACHEL
Turkeys? Do Americans buy a lot of turkeys in November?

ROSE
You have no idea.

LOTTE
Should we start packing?

ROSE
That would be wise.

(LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE and HANS exits. ABE enters from town.)

ROSE (cont'd)
Abe! Henry said you went to Des Moines. Anything new from the office?

ABE
Not really. Mr. Fisher had a letter for Miklos.

(MIKLOS enters – likely with papers to continue studying.)

ABE
Miklos! Glad I caught you. There's a letter.

MIKLOS
From home?

ABE
Looks like it.

(MIKLOS takes the letter and moves off to the side.)

ABE (cont'd)
Rose, I'm sorry about the hostel. Mr. Fisher is also. It's been such a safe haven. Not just for the refugees but for all of us who were privileged to be helpers.

ROSE
Thank-you. I'm – practicing acceptance.

(ROSE moves to the bench.)

ABE
Miklos? Do you want to talk? Or not. You don't have to.

MIKLOS
I think, yes, thank-you. The letter's from Elise. She was my high school girlfriend. A gentile. My father was against the relationship. He didn't see how a Christian and a Jew could build a meaningful life together – but we were sure we could. She is still one of the kindest people I know. After I left, she visited my father regularly and somehow – they became friends. Life's funny, isn't it? You never truly know what road you'll be on until you're there. She has gone by the apartment three times now in the last week and it was empty.

ABE
Maybe … he moved?

MIKLOS
The last time, she noticed it was ransacked. No one has seen my father in weeks. *(Beat.)* I take my citizenship test tomorrow. Now, I am thinking there's another place I need to go to.

ABE
Rose or I would be happy to take you where you want. I'm in the mood for a cup of tea. Care to join me?

MIKLOS

Thank-you. I will.

(MIKLOS and ABE exit. BUD appears.)

BUD

Is Lotte around?

ROSE

Inside.

(Bud goes inside as HENRY enters. He approaches ROSE.)

HENRY

I heard about the meeting.

ROSE

It was angry. It's imperative that I place Chana, Miklos and the Grunbergs soon. I owe you an apology. I know I was a bit cagey about my plans for Scattergoods. I truly thought I was on to something. But – I was wrong. There I said it. I thought I had everything figured out. And I did. From my end. But I didn't take everyone into consideration. I really believed that Scattergoods would make an excellent hostel for the Japanese-Americans who have been interned. They're Americans! They shouldn't be in camps. There is so much that's perfect about this idea. They already speak English, they're citizens, they know how to farm and we would be keeping families together. What's not to love?

HENRY

The mayor and the town could not see past that we are at war with Japan.

ROSE

With the country! We're not at war with Japanese-Americans. I just don't understand!

HENRY

They don't look like us.

ROSE

That can't be it.

HENRY

Accept it.

ROSE

They welcomed German refugees even though we're at war with them.

HENRY
Sort of welcomed them. I love how you forget some of the hiccups. How is everyone taking it?

ROSE
Bertie is looking forward to more time with family. Penelope has started filling out college applications so she doesn't have to live with her brothers. Abe's been quiet – but I can tell he's making plans.

HENRY
And you?

ROSE
I'm lost. There were so many mistakes along the way. I kept Lorenzo on because he was a hard worker even though I knew he was trouble. And then there were all those years when we had our Jewish guests work on their Sabbath day. And the times we had pork for dinner and I noticed that many guests did not partake but did not question it for months. I mean that is basic! Is it possible to cause harm even when you're trying to do good?

HENRY
I've learned more from my mistakes than by my successes.

ROSE
Ha! What mistakes have you made?

HENRY
Let's just say, I don't broadcast them. And I don't intend to start now. Coming in?

ROSE
I think I'll just sit here and do nothing. Maybe I'll use your quilt to keep the chill off. *(Beat.)* Henry, where's your quilt?

HENRY
Oh … I sold it. For a good cause.

ROSE
I hope it was for a very good cause.

HENRY
Indeed it was. It was a delicious brisket. See you at dinner.

(HENRY exits as LOTTE and BUD enter. LOTTE has a book of German poetry.)

BUD
I'll miss you. There! I said it.

LOTTE

I know. I mean – I'll miss you, too. So I wanted to leave you with something. It's a book by my favorite German poet – Heinrich Heine. He was banned by the Nazis so you know he was good. And he's easier to understand than your Robert Frost. He says what he means. Here.

BUD

Uhh…. It's in German.

LOTTE

Because he was German.

BUD

I can't read German. We're not all bilingual like you. Especially in Iowa.

LOTTE

I translated it here. It starts with:

"Eiri Fichtenbaum steht einsam."

That means one single spruce tree is standing alone.

"Im Norden auf Kahler Hoh."
In the north on a bare hill.

"It sleeps with a white deck"
Which means he's covered with snow -

"Ice and snow surround him"
So the snow is everywhere – just like your Robert Frost.

"He dreams of a Palm tree
Those faraway in the east."

And now the Palm tree is thinking
"Who mourns alone in silence
Among the burning rocks."

BUD

So the cold Spruce tree is sad because of the cold and dreams of a warm Palm tree – who is also sad – but because of the burning heat.

LOTTE

You get an "A" in German Poetry. They each want what the other has. Isn't that just like people? We look around and think everyone is better off than we are.

BUD

Your Heinrich Heine uses more double meanings than Robert Frost! But I understand him. Americans say, "The grass is always greener on the other side." Which means our neighbor's side has greener grass – so his life must be better.

LOTTE

"The grass is always greener." Must write that. That's how I feel about America. The grass is greener here than in Germany. But sometimes at night, I dream of Germany – the Germany I had before – and want it back. I miss feeling – comfortable? I understood everything. Until I understood nothing.

BUD

It sounds like you're lonely – like your poet's trees – all pining for what they don't have.

LOTTE

I know what I don't have. I don't have a country.

BUD

You will again. And now, you have a new city! That's exciting.

LOTTE

Exciting and scary. I was just getting comfortable here.

BUD

Who knows? Maybe you'll return to Iowa to study at the university.

LOTTE

Or you'll come to study in Minnesota.

(BUD moves away. LOTTE will follow. SUZANNE enters and sits by ROSE.)

SUZANNE

You're having trouble placing us, aren't you? Is it because of me? Nobody wants the kid.

ROSE

Goodness, no. It's me – I don't want to say good-bye.

SUZANNE

Be careful. If nobody wants us we just may have to come and live with you. Of course you could marry my father and that would solve everyone's problems.

ROSE

Suzanne …

SUZANNE

Just kidding. Sort of. What jobs are out there? My father can do anything.

ROSE

The biggest need right now seems to be for ski instructors in Lutsen, Minnesota. It's pretty cold up there so nobody wants to move there. And of course, you need to be an expert skier. Can you become an expert skier in two months?

SUZANNE

How about an expert skier from years ago? My father skied before he could walk. He was brought up in Salzburg – in the Alps. They're mountains, you know.

ROSE

Say that again.

SUZANNE

They're mountains.

ROSE

No. The expert skier part.

SUZANNE

My father is an expert skier. He was invited to be in the 1924 Olympics but couldn't train because he was working and didn't have time. Trust me, I know this. He's told me a thousand times. I know he sometimes looks like an awkward penguin – but on skis – he's a swan.

ROSE

Does he still ski?

SUZANNE

We both do. We always took our holidays in Salzburg until the Nazis came.

ROSE

Can you get him?

(SUZANNE exits. We momentarily switch to LOTTE and BUD. BUD has moved away from LOTTE.)

LOTTE

Bud?

BUD

I hope the war ends soon. But if it doesn't, I will enlist as soon as I turn eighteen. The Nazis have to be defeated. They just have to!

LOTTE

Thank-you.

(JOSEF and SUZANNE enter.)

JOSEF

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Josef Grunberg, expert skier. Where is this mountain? Certainly not in Iowa.

ROSE

In Lutsen, Minnesota. Near the Canadian border. It's cold.

JOSEF

But the homes have heat – correct?

ROSE

The ad says there is a two-bedroom cabin with heat and running water available for a family.

JOSEF

Are there schools and a synagogue?

ROSE

Yes. You will live in Duluth during the week where there are schools and a small synagogue. On weekends, you will be housed in a cabin near the skiing area in Lutsen. It's not perfect.

JOSEF

We will be pioneers in the wilderness. Zuzu? What do you think?

SUZANNE

I want to learn to ski jump.

JOSEF

I think that's a "yes." Let's try it. Maybe we'll love it and if we don't – we will find something else. We found Iowa. We will find other places.

(We hear the radio. Someone inside is turning up the volume. As the announcement is made, all those on the porch gather close by the door and listen intently.)

MALE VOICE

This just in from Rabbi Stephen Wise, the head of the World Jewish Congress. Parents, you may want to take any children out of the room. This news has been smuggled in from Europe and as of yet hard to corroborate. But if it is true, you will find it incomprehensible.

There are reports that as many as two million Jews have been killed in the Nazi labor camps and there are plans to kill millions more. Hitler's repeated intention to exterminate all the Jews in Europe is now a reality. The ghettos in Poland that were established by the German invaders are systematically being emptied of all Jewish citizens and brought to death camps disguised as labor camps. We will report more on this as we gather new information.

(*RACHEL and LEVI come out with HANS and gather LOTTE in their arms. JOSEF holds SUZANNE. MIKLOS and ABE enter and stand together. THE VOLUNTEERS watch their guests – in as much shock as their guests are. BUD is apart helplessly watching. HENRY will approach CHANA.)*

HENRY

Chana?

CHANA

I thank you for your kind offer to stay and help your mother. But it wouldn't be right. The Nazi truth that my religion comes from my mother is not my truth. I am a proud daughter of both my parents – a gentile and a Jew. I feel a need right now to be in a place with other Jews. I hope you understand.

(As we hear the CHOIR, all will exit. BUD and LOTTE may hug good-bye.)

CHOIR

O beautiful for patriot dream, That sees beyond the years
Time alabaster cities gleam, Undimmed by human tears.
America! America!, God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood, From sea to shining sea.

(*Blackout.)*

EPILOGUE – November, 1942

(*ROSE, HENRY and PENELOPE are on the porch.)*

HENRY

I saw some turkeys in the field. Don't they know that month it is?

PENELOPE

I'm surprised you didn't bag one for Thanksgiving. My brothers would have.

HENRY

I can't eat a turkey after I've met him. It's one of my flaws.

(ABE enters.)

ABE

All is well. Chana's now settled in Des Moines with a Jewish family. She'll be taking care of the kids while their father's overseas and their mother works. She says thank-you for such a thoughtful placement. I see you're all packed up. We can start loading the car. But first … I need to say something. And please don't go all-Quaker on me. *(Beat.)* I've enlisted.

ROSE

Just like Miklos. He left for the Pacific last week.

ABE

Miklos is going to fight. I'm going to listen. I'm going to be a Chaplain of sort – non-denominational. All those stories from our guests – a father gone missing, labor camps, and atrocities so sickening they're hard to believe – they've gotten to me. Our guests needed to talk. I'm guessing the soldiers will need someone to talk to also.

HENRY

The soldiers will appreciate you. You're all spreading your wings and going where your needed.

PENELOPE

You're needed at your farm. Nobody needs me at the farm. They have my brothers. And Dad's pretty proud. I'm the first in the family to go to the University.

ROSE

If only I could place myself like I placed so many others. When I left college, I thought it would be for one year – not three. In the end, did it make a big difference?

ABE

185 guests passed through here.

ROSE

A drop in the bucket.

ABE

185 lives that will go on. It's not nothing. Ready to load up?

ROSE

I just need a moment. I want one last look as I say good-bye.

(ABE, HENRY and PENELOPE exit.)

(*ROSE looks out on the grounds. We hear the same music that everyone danced to at the end of Scene7. Use the same partners for the dance and have them drift in and out of the fields. Lastly, MIKLOS and HALLIE light the Yahrzeit candle and exit. ROSE approaches the candle and lifts it up. LOTTE appears in the background.)*

LOTTE

I want to love America… but it's different than I thought. I thought the promise of freedom would be simpler to find.

ROSE

We're a work in progress – and often it's messy. What I wish for you is that you do grow to love America and who knows – maybe you will help America fulfill its promise.

(LOTTE exits. ROSE goes to the candle, blows it out, and with one last look at Scattergoods, exits.)

END OF PLAY
(Notes follow.)

NOTES

The first news reports about the death camps actually came out in November 1942.

TCHOTCHKE: (pronounced chotch-key); a trinket; an object with no use – just decorative or silly

MUSIC

You may make changes to the music choices (except for Hava Nagila Hava). Anything that fits the period, the stirring of patriotism and is public domain would work. Other suggestions include, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Let me Call you Sweetheart," "What'll I do," and "God Bless America." Check the listings after January 1 for new songs in the public domain.

Music and Dance Instructions for Hava Nagila Hava

Dance tutorial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3LYf2bIuG4
(Grapevine, kick, kick….)
MUSIC: https://musescore.com/user/27143663/scores/6329314
Or
MUSIC: with chords (easy): https://www.capotastomusic.com/piano-sheet-music/easy/hava-nagila.pdf
Or
MUSIC: https://www.8notes.com/scores/519.asp?view=full
LYRICS (Hebrew and English)
Hava nagila
Hava nagila
Hava nagila
ve-nismeḥa
(repeat)
Hava neranenah
Hava neranenah
Hava neranenah
ve-nismeḥa
(repeat)
Uru, uru aḥim!
Uru aḥim be-lev sameaḥ
(repeat line four times)
Uru aḥim, uru aḥim!
Be-lev sameaḥ

English Translation for 'Hava Nagila'
Let us rejoice
Let us rejoice
Let us rejoice and be happy.
Let us sing
Let us sing
Let us sing and be happy.

Awake, awake, my brothers!
Awake my brothers with a happy heart.
Awake, my brothers!
Awake, my brothers with a happy heart

Dance for 'Hava Nagila'*
Dancers all join hands in a circle.
Step the left foot across to the right
2) Let the right foot follow
3) Step the left foot in back of the right
4) Follow again with the right
This "grapevine" motion is done in an exuberant circular motion to the right. Dancers may sing and speed up the tempo.