

Under Spacious Skies
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Based on historical events.

The Playwright offers thanks for inspiration to:
The Scattergood Hostel run by Quakers 1939-1943
Historian, Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams
Cedar County Historical Society

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“Whoever saves one life saves the entire world.” From the Talmud (paraphrased)

RUNNING TIME: 40 minutes approximate

SYNOPSIS: In a small town in Iowa, a Quaker-run hostel provided a safe haven for those escaping the brutal Nazi regime. Sixteen-year-old Lotte has been on the run with her family for three years. She wants to be American – and not Jewish. Her parents never practiced their faith so why should she bother? Her younger brother Hans harbors a protected object he found in a burned-out synagogue after Kristallnacht. A young Iowa citizen hides a secret from her past and things blow up when an antisemitic dissident shows up at the hostel. Families struggle with learning new skills as the refugee children struggle with Americans taunting them as "German spies." But small bridges were formed, holidays were cherished and families come together to try in fit into the great experiment known as "America."

The play was designed for high schools/universities and as such fourteen of the eighteen characters are teens to age twenty-one. Four of the characters are mid-late thirties.

*CAST: 13 (5 female, 5 male; 3 any gender)

*Aside from those listed, other genders can be changed if it fits your needs; ages are approximate

Scattergood Volunteers: (All either grew up on a farm or are college students)

HENRY (male) 21; practical, knows all or everyone thinks he does; the “soul” of the hostel

ROSE (female) 18; idealistic if naïve, the “heart” of the hostel

PENELOPE (female) 17; the youngest volunteer

ABE/ABETHA (any gender) 19; Can do it all – plant the corn, play guitar, good listener

Refugee Families

LEVI ROSENBERG (male) mid- late 30’s; former judge; from Berlin; proper, not religious

RACHEL ROSENBERG (female) Mid-thirties; Levi’s wife; linguist from Berlin; a bit buttoned-up and keeps to herself; ambiguous as to her faith

LOTTE ROSENBERG (female) age 16; refugee; daughter of Levi and Rachel, embraces America but not her faith

HANS/HANNAH ROSENBERG (any gender) age 12; a combination of being cautious and curious

HELEN GRUNGERG (female) 33; Jewish refugee from Vienna, easygoing, earthy

JOSEF GRUNBERG (male) 35-38; Jewish refugee from Vienna, husband to Helen, former judge, warm, gregarious

MARIANNA (female) 15; Jewish, daughter of Helen and Josef; easygoing

LORENZO CASTILLE (male) 21; Italian political dissident; antisemitic

Townsperson

BUD CARLETON (male) 15-17; curious teen – likes Lotte

**It is likely that the refugees spoke with a German or Dutch accent. The English that the children learned in Europe would be British English. If the accents are a detriment – they are not necessary. The focus is on the story.

COSTUMES: They are on a working farm in 1943. Cuffed jeans, long-sleeve flannel shirts, simple housedresses are all appropriate. Today's wardrobe can easily adapt to those times and second-hand shops can supply you with pieces at a low cost. Photos of the people at Scattergoods can be found on my website.

TIME: August 1942 – December 1942

SETTING: The Hostel and outside grounds in West Branch, Iowa

NOTES ON MUSIC: "Hava Nagila Hava" information is in the notes at the end of the play.. It is a joyous song.

Under Spacious Skies

SCENE 1

(Lights up on the porch and grounds of the Scattergood Hostel. There is a bench with a colorful quilt prominently displayed. There can be other seating areas or simply the steps to the porch. PENELOPE, HELEN, JOSEF, Sand MARIANNA are shelling peas. LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE, and HANS approach with ROSE. They carry suitcases and are just moving in to Scattergoods. PENELOPE wears a charming, frilly apron.)

ROSE

Good afternoon, all. We have some new guests: Levi Rosenberg, his wife Rachel and their children Lotte and Hans.

JOSEF

Willkommen! Welcome to the land where we scatter goodness! And beans! It's" bean season." I am Josef and this is my wife Helen and my daughter, Marianna. We have been here for two months.

LEVI

Your English is very good.

JOSEF

I continue to learn.

LEVI

My wife taught English and French in Berlin. It turns out to have been fortunate for all of us. *(Beat.)* It's kind of you to help with the women's work.

JOSEF

Ha! It's my work for the week. And I am getting good at it. The important part is that little string attached to the beans. Watch! You never know what a little string can do.

(And he demonstrates.)

LEVI

Very good. Everyone is learning. So it is a good day.

HELEN

Indeed. We just need to put Josef into a charming, frilly apron like the one Penelope wears.

JOSEF

That would not be a good idea. I would be – what is the word? Not resistible – in that apron.

ROSE

Irresistible?

JOSEF

Really? That's a word? But true that I would be too much the same as your Cary Grant, don't you think?

PENELOPE

I agree.

HELEN

I also agree. But I have to. I am his wife.

LEVI

I intend to find work that suits me.

RACHEL

In Berlin, my husband was a judge.

JOSEF

And I was a lawyer in Vienna. Those were the days. One evening we should have a discussion about what happens when the law is no longer the law.

LEVI

I have some theories/

ROSE

/And we shall listen to them later. For now, let's get all of you settled. You must be tired. Let me show you to your rooms.

RACHEL

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

ROSE

I'm afraid not We tend to let those things go. The shoes just get caked with mud.

LEVI

I do like a sheen on my shoes.

RACHEL

If you could spare olive oil.

ROSE

I'll check in the kitchen. We use everything sparingly. Come. We'll figure something out. I heard vinegar can be helpful.

(ROSE leads the ROSENBERGS off. HANS lingers.)

MARIANNA

Would you like to try shelling one?

HANS

I'm like my parents. I don't do kitchen work.

(HANS exits.)

MARIANNA

He does have the air of ... how do you say ... floating above us all?

PENELOPE

I think you're looking for "uppity." Yes, "uppity would be correct.

MARIANNA

(Taking out a notebook.)
Spell?

PENELOPE

U-P-P-I-T-Y.

MARIANNA

Uppity. I like that word. Do Americans have "uppity" people?

PENELOPE

Indeed we do. We have enough peas. Thank you for your help. Let's get them in the kitchen.

(Lights fade to black as everyone exits - with the beans.)

SCENE 2

(It is evening after dinner. All the guests are gathered outside. (LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE, HANS, JOSEF, HELEN, and MARIANA,) The volunteers – ABE, HENRY, ROSE and PENELOPE are with them.)

ROSE

My favorite part of the day. The sun is starting to rest, the work is done and we gather in friendship.

HENRY

It was a long day. The corn doesn't pick itself. The deer are already having a feast day.

JOSEF

We gather because our rooms are too hot.

PENELOPE

Enjoy the warmth. The cold comes soon enough.

JOSEF

Don't mind me. I like to kvetch.

PENELOPE

Kvetch?

ROSE

I know that word! Complain!

HENRY

So, they are learning English and we are learning – German?

RACHEL

Yiddish. Something many Jews have in common. Interestingly, it was originally a German dialect that developed into a language by the Jews.

HELEN

Do you know “Oy vey?” It means “woe is me.” Some of us have been saying that a lot lately.

LOTTE

Father says it a lot.

LEVI

I only said that on our walk to Marseilles.

PENELOPE

I'd love to see Marseilles.

HANS

It was dirty – kind of like this porch.

RACHEL

Hans!

ROSE

The porch will be clean soon enough. Rain is coming.

LOTTE

But it's sunny out.

ROSE

It's in the air. I can smell it.

HENRY

Smelling the rain – it's an Iowa thing.

MIKLOS

Maybe the heat will break.

JOSEF

Break? Does heat break?

ROSE

It's a way of sending it will end.

JOSEF

I will never understand English.

ROSE

Give it time. Your English is already better than my German.

HELEN

English is a problem language. This hostel is called "Scattergoods." But when I asked the librarian in town what it meant – she said it was a "wasteful person." So I have been wondering why you named a hostel in honor of waste. It seems like you are saying this experiment here is a waste of time.

ROSE

Oh no! Please don't think that. We think of this place as "scattering goodness" around.

HELEN

So maybe you should have called this home "Scattering Goodness."

ABE

You have to hand it to Helen – you have an Austrian correcting your English.

ROSE

Maybe I shouldn't have tried so hard to be creative.

(Church bells ring. Yabe it is the Westminster chimes.)

HENRY

The bells are reminding us that the day is done. Rose is right about one thing. The clouds are moving in. We better go in before the rain starts unless you all want a late-night bath.

ROSE

The fields will be muddy tomorrow. Wear your overalls. (Denim.)

LEVI

I don't have any.

ROSE

Don't worry. You won't need them yet. We have you slated or the kitchen tomorrow.

LEVI

Kitchen?

ROSE

Cooking.

LEVI

I don't cook.

ROSE

You will tomorrow. You and Hans together.

LEVI

I think my wife would be better suited in the kitchen.

RACHEL

I do not think so. I do not cook. We had someone cook for us. Remember?

ROSE

I have something very special planned for Rachel.

PENELOPE

With the early light, our morning meetings will be at 6 a.m. You may come for fellowship and just quietly meditate – or sleep in for the extra half hour. It's not required. Lotte and Marianna, I will see you just after sunrise.

LOTTE

I'll be ready.

(All exit chattering about the day or tomorrow as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

(In front of the porch of the Scattergoods Hostel. PENELOPE is waiting – she has some large baskets and hats. LOTTE enters – freshly bathed, well-dressed and ready for the day. It is the next morning of a warm mid-August day.)

LOTTE

Good morning!

PENELOPE

Oh my. Don't you look lovely. Are you sure you don't want to change?

LOTTE

Mother thought these were good gardening clothes.

PENELOPE

You look so – clean. You're going to get muddy. Dirty-grungy-muddy. And the bugs are going to love the fresh smell of soap on you. A word of advice – the time to bathe is after you work in the fields. We're not gardening. We're picking tomatoes in the hot morning sun. And we have to pick fast. With all this rain, the tomatoes are likely to split. They don't like wet feet.

LOTTE

Tomatoes have feet?

PENELOPE

I mean – their roots. They don't like it when their roots are soaked. Then they send up too much water into the plant and it splits – or worse – rots. Heinz Ketchup will not pay for rotten tomatoes.

LOTTE

What do you do then when they are rotten?

PENELOPE

We eat them!

(LOTTE plops a makeshift hat over LOTTE'S head. MARIANNA enters.)

MARIANNA

Good morning! Is it so hot already?

PENELOPE

Enjoy the heat. Winter comes soon enough. I must say, both of you speak English very well.

LOTTE

Mother taught us English and French growing up. It came in handy when we had to escape to France. And then to Casablanca. And then to Bermuda. And then to New York. And then to here.

MARIANNA

I learned in Belgium when we found out we were approved to come here. We were busy learning French and then – what do you Americans say – poof! Now we're learning English.

PENELOPE

You two have seen a lot of the world.

LOTTE

I have run away from a lot of the world.

MARIANNA

We have that in common. After the Anschluss, Papa went straight to the AFSE office in Vienna and asked, “how do I get out of here?”

LOTTE

AFSC?

PENELOPE

American Friends Service Committee. We have offices all over trying to help people. I love talking to you but we should start walking. The fields are on the other side. It’s a bit of a hike.

LOTTE

You are talking to someone who walked over three hundred kilometers in less than a week to escape Paris. I am a – professional – walker.

PENELOPE

It is very pretty when the sun is shining.

LOTTE

Yes. *(Beat.)* I don’t trust pretty. Pretty can hide the ugly. The French countryside is very pretty.

MARIANNA

I’ve always wanted to go to France. But now – I don’t know.

PENELOPE

Who knows? Maybe the world will right itself again. For me, the countryside is a reminder of the good in the world – the bushes hold their berries for the birds and the deer. The tall grasses give the pheasants a place to hide from predators.

LOTTE

They do make good hiding places. Especially when there are planes overhead.

MARIANNA

That must have been scary. I was always on a train. And then a boat. And then a car ride here.

PENELOPE

It’s nice having guests close to my age. I like having friends.

LOTTE

Mother says that you call yourselves a group of friends. Do you think everyone is a friend?

PENELOPE

Yes.

LOTTE

Even Jewish people?

PENELOPE

Of course. The sun is up. We had better get to those tomatoes before they fall into the mud.

(LOTTE, MARIANNA, and PENELOPE exit. LEVI and HANS enter with ROSE and HENRY. LEVI and HANS are well-dressed with splotches of flour on them. ROSE has some aprons.)

LEVI

I refuse to wear that. Leave me some dignity.

HANS

They are – what do you say – silly?

ROSE

Suit yourself. But you're already getting flour all over you. I'd wear the apron.

HENRY

She's right, you know. She's always right.

LEVI

Tell me, where is Rachel?

ROSE

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

LEVI

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

ROSE

We try. We'll make bakers out of you yet.

LEVI

Ha! The only thing is good is the pounding. Hans is really good at that.

HANS

Bertie says you can get mad at dough and punch it. I like that. It makes dough happy.

ROSE

That's one way of looking at it. Hans, you won't be relegated to the kitchen for too long. I've registered you and Lotte for school. Your English is good enough to be in a classroom. School starts in two weeks.

LEVI

It's been three years since they have been in school. Will they be behind?

ROSE

We shall see. It will be good to be with children your own age. How do you like the sound of it?

HANS

It is good and maybe not good. Good if they like me. Sometimes in Berlin, the children did not like Jews. I don't know. But I hope it's better than the kitchen.

ROSE

It will be an adventure. There's some berries and coffee and tea in the meeting room. You can take a break while your bread bakes.

(LEVI and HANS exit.)

ROSE (cont'd)

It's always interesting here. Look at this. A possible new recruit just in time for hay season. It says he's been in America for eight months and speaks English.

HENRY

Eight months and nobody could place him?

ROSE

He's a loner.

HENRY

Problematical when you are asking him to live with ten other people.

ROSE

He grew up in the mountains in Italy. He can mend fences, is good with mechanics and a strong worker. We could use someone like that here. The fields are ready to be harvested.

HENRY

Lorenzo Castille. Jewish?

ROSE

No. A political refugee. I say we accept him. What can it hurt? The attic is empty. It's perfect for one person. Will says there aren't a lot of people seeking refuge these days. Hard to believe when we are in the middle of a war. We only have two families left.

HENRY

The borders are closed. Nobody new is coming in. We'll just have to take whatever help we can get. Call Will and tell him to make arrangements. And hope that too many people aren't on the party line. We provide enough gossip for the town as it is.

(ROSE exits. HENRY settles on the bench with LORENZO'S paperwork.)

HENRY (cont'd)

Lorenzo Castille. Let's see what you can do.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 4

(It is late August. Hot. ABE is teaching the Constitution. LEVI, RACHEL, HELEN, and JOSEF are assembled on the porch. They are talking amongst themselves.)

JOSEF

But America is Christian country, right?

ABE

Not exactly. By population – yes. The majority of Americans are Christian. But by design – no. The Constitution specifically states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.

LEVI

In easier English, please.

ABE

Congress is not allowed to create a national religion that the population... the people must follow. God is not mentioned in the Constitution. However, each state has a constitution and many of them do reference God. But not necessarily a Christian God. In Iowa, for example, the state constitution talks about a Supreme Being. It does not say that it is Christian.

LEVI

Given the number of churches I've seen, Iowa is Christian.

ABE

True. But there are many forms of Christianity and they do not all agree. The Quakers left England because they did not conform to the prevailing Christianity of those times. They were discriminated against – jailed, beaten, deprived of earning a living. It's similar to what you have experienced.

RACHEL

And when did that happen?

ABE

They left England in 1689.

HELEN

So, in the last two-hundred-fifty years, you have not met with problems because of your religion? Is that true?

ABE

Yes.

JOSEF

Must be nice. Jews seem to run into trouble every generation.

ABE

In America, it will be different.

RACHEL

We shall see.

ABE

To recap, the first amendment of the Constitution guarantees American citizens freedom of speech, freedom of press, and to peacefully assemble to protest grievances.

(We hear a school bus. It stops.)

HELEN

School's out. Lesson over!

(We hear children's voices. They can be recorded or use your crew.)

CHILD VOICE 1

I spy – SPIES!

CHILD VOICE 2

German spies! Go back to Germany!

(HANS, LOTTE, and MARIANNA come rushing on.)

HANS *(Yelling)*

I'm not a spy! What a bunch of bullies. Just like Berlin. You dirty, little/

LOTTE

/Hans! Don't! We're better than that.

MARIANNA

I'm never going back. Never!

ABE

I'm sorry. Things have gotten – problematical since Pearl Harbor. I'll talk to the school.

LEVI

Maybe they need a lesson in the Constitution.

JOSEF

I don't know. They already understand the Freedom of Speech part.

HELEN

Was the whole day like this?

MARIANNA

No. Most was calm. The bus ride home was not good. It was started by this Charley-boy.

ABE

We can see about getting the children home ourselves.

HELEN

Let's go inside. We can talk about solutions then.

(ALL exit except for LOTTE. PENELOPE joins her.)

PENELOPE

I heard what happened. I'm sorry.

LOTTE

In Berlin, German children ran after us because we are Jewish. Now, American children are running after us because we are German. I would like to American. Maybe even more American than you. But would it matter? If someone with power wanted to get rid of me in twenty years, would they think I am American or German or Jew?

PENELOPE

What's happening in Europe can never happen here. We are a nation of laws.

LOTTE

Germany was a nation of laws. I should know. My father was a judge. Suppose America decided to change their laws? Germany did.

PENELOPE

They won't. They're proud of their Constitution and their history of welcoming people.

LOTTE

I didn't feel welcome today. I almost missed Germany.

PENELOPE

What did you love about your homeland?

LOTTE

The parks. Britzer Garden had miles of paths through rolling hills and lakes. Father loved to take us to the Historic District and wander the museums. Hans and I enjoyed a lot of that but what we really loved was sitting on the riverbank with some ice cream.

PENELOPE

It is good that you have these fond memories.

LOTTE

I have other memories, too. Memories of a city on fire. Synagogues, Jewish shops. A father covered in blood. Being Jewish is looking out the window and seeing blood. Blood on a man coming up the steps. He's hunched over but when he reaches the last step - he stands up straight and rings the doorbell.

Your mother lets him in and a man who still has - pride - stands up – straight - in ripped clothes. My mother holds him and then goes out. When she returns, we learn that she had sold all of the silver and her jewelry and has tickets to Paris. My father said, "They've already punished me. What else can they do? We stay. We're German." And for the first time, my mother disagrees with my father and says, "The Germans do not think of us as German – only Jewish. I will not stay here and endanger the children. You may stay, but the three of us are leaving." Two days later we were on a train to Paris. That's what being Jewish is to me.

(LOTTE exits and PENELOPE follows.)

SCENE 5

(It is the next evening. LOTTE is alone on the porch doing homework. BUD, a young man from town shyly approaches. He may clear his throat before he speaks. He is nervous.)

BUD

Guten tag.

LOTTE

Pardon?

BUD

Guten tag.

LOTTE

Guten abend.

BUD

I ... don't know what that means.

LOTTE

You wished me a 'good day.' It is evening. So I wished you a 'good evening.'

BUD

Oh. Thank you.

LOTTE

Are you looking for someone?

BUD

You. I was ... am... looking for you.

LOTTE

You found me.

BUD

I noticed you're not on the school bus anymore.

LOTTE

We thought it would be better... best? If someone picked us up after school.

BUD

Yes. I see.

LOTTE

Anything else?

BUD

Yes. I came because my mother said... well actually I want... to apologize. For last week on the bus. We were rude.

LOTTE

Ja. You were.

BUD

We didn't mean anything. Or rather – I didn't mean ... I just went with what everyone was saying. And I shouldn't have.

LOTTE

I'm not a spy. But I am German. I don't want to be. But I am.

BUD

I wish I was German.

LOTTE

Are you Jewish?

BUD

No.

LOTTE

Then you would be safe being German. It's not safe for me. I thought America would be safer.

BUD

It is!

LOTTE

Not on school busses. *(Beat.)* Why do you wish you were German? They just started a war.

BUD

It's the music. I especially love Bach. My mom is a piano teacher. The kids make fun of me because sometimes in school I play his music – not very well. They like to sing popular songs from the radio. When I play a Bach, they think I am strange. Do you like the Brandenburg Concertos?

LOTTE

I don't know them. I know the Brandenburg Gate. My father worked nearby. We went through it a lot.

BUD

You're lucky. To have seen it. I bet you saw many things in Germany.

LOTTE

I did. You're lucky. Not to have seen all that I have seen.

(RACHEL appears.)

RACHEL

Lotte, can you help Hans with his homework. They do arithmetic differently in America. Oh! Hello.

BUD

I'm Bud. Short for Buddy. It's a nickname. It's nice to make your acquaintance.

RACHEL

And it's nice to meet yours. You have good manners.

Thank-you. BUD

Lotte, can you come in? RACHEL

(RACHEL exits.)

I have to go. LOTTE

Can I ... may I visit again? BUD

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

(LOTTE exits as HENRY enters.)

Hi, Bud. Can I help you with anything? HENRY

Oh. No thank-you. I was just out for an evening stroll. BUD

I see. HENRY

I had ... better get back. BUD

Give my regards to your parents. HENRY

(BUD exits as HELEN and JOSEF enter.)

Good evening. I wonder if we could speak. I know you have done a lot for us and I would like to do something in return. But it involves a favor. JOSEF

Ask away. HENRY

Helen and I would like to make a proper Rosh Hashanah dinner for all – it's the Jewish New Year - our way of saying thank-you. We would do everything. JOSEF

HENRY

That's an easy one. I am sure Bertie would not mind a day off.

JOSEF

Yes and the farm already has provided most of what we need. But we were wondering if we could find a beef brisket – a small one – beef is expensive but we are happy to pay for it.

(HELEN holds out a brooch.)

HELEN

It's solid gold and I am sure it would pay for the meat. Please. Take it. Bitte.

HENRY

That looks like an heirloom.

HELEN

It was my mother's. We sold my jewelry to pay for the crossing to America. I kept this in reserve.

HENRY

And you would part with it to supply a beef brisket?

HELEN

I think using it for that purpose would please my mother.

HENRY

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

JOSEF

September 12. I promise to make it special.

HENRY

A special feast will be most welcome as we bring the harvest in.

HELEN

Thank-you.

(LORENZO enters from the house. As JOSEF and HELEN exit, JOSEF almost bumps into LORENZO.)

JOSEF

Excuse me.

(Lorenzo just stares at Josef. PENELOPE enters.)

PENELOPE

Dinner is being served.

LORENZO

You look lovely this evening, Signorina.

PENELOPE

Why ... thank you.

LORENZO

Bella. Beautiful. I'm Lorenzo. I just arrived.

PENELOPE

Lovely to meet you. I'm Penelope. Are you ready for dinner?

LORENZO

I will have it on the porch. I prefer to not mix with the others.

(PENELOPE goes inside with HENRY as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 6

(PENELOPE enters with ABE. ABE sits on the bench and maybe struma the guitar.)

ABE

Beautiful evening.

PENELOPE

I do treasure this time of day.

ABE

One can almost believe all is right with the world.

(LORENZO enters.)

LORENZO

Signorina! You did not eat much.

PENELOPE

I ... had a big lunch. I am not used to two big meals in a day.

LORENZO

I like it here. Mostly. It's not as hot as home.

PENELOPE

Do you miss Italy?

LORENZO

The food is better at home – not as plain as your food. We Italians like a little more spice in our life. *(Beat.)* Would you like to take a walk? Get away from this crowd?

PENELOPE

Oh. No, thank-you. Working in the field has tired me out.

LORENZO

You are very pretty.

PENELOPE

Thank-you.

LORENZO

A nice change from the ... “guests” who are here.

PENELOPE

Excuse me?

LORENZO

I think American girls are sweet. Not as temperamental as the ones back home.

PENELOPE

You’d be surprised.

(HANS and LOTTE enter.)

LOTTE

Show me!

HANS

It needs to be private.

PENELOPE

Excuse me. I should check on our guests.

LORENZO

I’m a guest.

PENELOPE

Yes, and I just checked on you and you are doing fine.

LORENZO

I'd be finer if you stayed with me.

PENELOPE

Excuse me.

(PENELOPE walks away. HANS shows LOTTE a jewel case (an ark for a Torah).)

LOTTE

Where did you get that?

HANS

Remember after the synagogues burned? I went out walking to investigate the damage.

LOTTE

That's dangerous! Why did you do that?

HANS

I can't explain it. I wanted something from the Synagogue. I know you want to forget that you are Jewish but I want to remember. I saw the case with all the jewels on top and thought – this is important. The Nazis would want this but I'll make sure they don't get it. I wanted to show the Nazis that they can't take everything.

LOTTE

The building could have fallen on you.

(RACHEL and LEVI appear.)

HANS

I didn't think of that. Don't tell Mother.

RACHEL

Don't tell Mother – what?

(RACHEL looks intently at HANS'S treasure.)

What is that?

HANS

I'm not sure.

(RACHEL takes the object from HANS and opens it. Inside there is a scroll RACHEL is visibly moved.)

RACHEL

Why, it's a children's Torah. I haven't seen one since I was a child. Where did you get that?

HANS

I ... found it. In one of the synagogues. Father had been taken away and I was upset and just went walking. Please don't be mad. I looked at the building – it was still so beautiful and at first I thought, I'll take a stone – something to show that it was here. And then I went further in and saw this – just lying on the floor. The sun sparkled on it and I just grabbed it and ran.

RACHEL

This tiny cabinet is the Ark – it holds the scripture. The Ark is supposed to keep it safe.

LEVI

Rachel?

RACHEL

I'm sorry. It's been so long since I saw one. The memories are rushing into me. The synagogue where I went to services as a child had a children's Torah. We must keep this safe. And it must be treated with respect.

HANS

So.... I can keep it?

RACHEL

It's rightfully yours. But maybe we should put it somewhere away from harm.. Where have you been keeping it all these years?

HANS

In the sweater Grandma knitted for me. It's soft and protects the ... Ark.

LEVI

Is it valuable? Should we have our friends lock it in a safe?

HANS

It's mine! I saved it!

RACHEL

I think we can trust Hans. He's kept it safe for three years. Put it away for now. It's not a tchotchke to be tossed around. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry. We've done you two a disservice. You should have been brought up to understand your faith.

LOTTE

I don't care about it.

(HANS and LOTTE exit.)

LEVI

Rachel?

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 you and we never really spoke about religion.

LEVI

I thought you were fine leading a secular life.

RACHEL

I thought I was, too. But now – I'm not so sure.

(RACHEL exits. LEVI follows. The conversation turns to ABE and PENELOPE.)

ABE

He's watching you.

PENELOPE

Yes.

ABE

I'm here. I'm not going anywhere.

PENELOPE

Thanks. I think I'll go in.

(LORENZO starts to follow. ABE stops him.)

ABE

Signore, how are you finding Iowa?

LORENZO

It's not what I expected. Scusi.

ABE

What is it like where you are from?

LORENZO

Not as flat. Scusi!

(LORENZO exits into the house. ABE follows as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 7

(The VOLUNTEERS and REFUGEES are on the porch. Only LORENZO is missing.)

JOSEF

Shana Tova, Friends! Dinner was good tonight, right? I would like to thank our friends for giving us the afternoon off to prepare this special meal. As you know, It is customary to not work on our holidays but I think we would be forgiven for helping our friends after all they have done for us.

I would like to thank our honored volunteers for getting so many ingredients for tonight's dinner. There are many traditional foods for Rosh Hashanah and although we didn't have every one of them – pomegranates are hard to find in Iowa - our table was heavy with good wishes and - sweet and tasty food.

As we know now, beans are numerous in Iowa and they symbolize hope for all of us for a prosperous New Year. Let us not forget the apples and honey – all from the farm. Their sweetness gives us hope for a sweet year.

I don't know how Henry managed to find some brisket in Iowa – but that is my tradition – and wasn't it delicious? In Vienna my mother cooked a brisket every Rosh Hashanah. Nobody may criticize the brisket. It's my mother's recipe. Shana Tovah, friends.

ALL

Shana Tovah.

JOSEF

And now – a dance to finish the celebration.

(And JOSEF starts “Hava Nagila Hava.” Music supplied at end or go online. Do as many times as you like. It should get faster and faster. It's very easy!

VERA, MARIANNA, HELEN, JOSEF and RACHEL start the dance in a circle. The VOLUNTEERS, and even LOTTE and HANS will be figuring it out and eventually join the circle. Finally, LEVI will have figured it out and joined. It is joyous.)

LOTTE

Mother?

RACHEL

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

SOME OF THE CAST

Hava nagila,
Hava nagila,
Hava nagila,
Venis mecha.
Hava nagila,
Hava nagila,
Hava nagila,

CAST

Hava Nagila hava
 Venis mecha.
 Hava neranena,
 Hava neranena,
 Hava neranena,
 Venis mecha.

Hava neranena,
 Hava neranena,
 Hava neranena,
 Venis mecha.

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

(May repeat as necessary. Towards the end LORENZO enters and watches.)

JOSEF

Lorenzo! Join us! You missed the feast but there are leftovers. Such tasty leftovers.

LORENZO

Monkeys! Look at you – arms and legs everywhere. You’re nothing but a bunch of monkeys.

(HENRY starts to approach LORENZO but is pulled back by one of the VOLUNTEERS. LEVI approaches LORENZO. Everything happens fast.

NOTE: There is the threat of violence in the air – but there won’t be any – no punches, no shoving, no physical contact. The tension arises from LORENZO’S mood.)

LEVI

To my face. Now say it to my face.

LOTTE

FATHER!

(LEVI puts his arms up in the air as if in surrender.)

LEVI

Punch me. Go ahead. I’ve been beaten by worse than you. Here I am, Lorenzo. A proud man. A proud – Jew! Happy to be so.

JOSEF

As am I!

RACHEL

And me!

(LORENZO looks around at all defiantly staring at him. He brushes himself off as if he is rid of them and starts to exit but pauses by PENELOPE.)

LORENZO

You should get away from here. You're better than them.

(LORENZO goes into the house.)

HENRY

I'm sorry.

(HENRY follows LORENZO as the cast freezes – numb. Blackout.)

SCENE 8

(It is early November. LOTTE bursts through the door. BUD follows.)

LOTTE

No more math. My head is buzzing.

BUD

I like math – it seems to go with music. There's something precise about it all.

LOTTE

I prefer words. Look. This is my favorite German poet – Heinrich Heine. He was banned by the Nazis so I like him.

BUD

It's in German.

LOTTE

Because he was German.

BUD

I can't read German.

LOTTE

“Eiri Fichtenbaum steht einsam”

LOTTE (cont'd)

That means that 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 – so he’s covered with snow –
Ice and snow surround him. – And snow is everywhere.

Then it says:

He dreams of a Palm tree
Those far away 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 heat.

LOTTE

Very good. You get an A in German poetry. They each want what the other one has. Isn’t that like people – looking around and thinking the other person is better off?

BUD

In America, we say the “grass is always greener on the other side.” Meaning – 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 before and wish for it back.

BUD

You miss it.

LOTTE

I miss – feeling comfortable? I understood everything. Of course later, I understood nothing.

BUD

It sounds like you are lonely – kind of like the trees – all alone pining for what they don’t have.

LOTTE

I know what I don’t have right now – I don’t have a country.

(HENRY approaches.)

HENRY

Bud, remember what I promised your mother.

BUD

That I'd be home before dark.

HENRY

And dark comes earlier and earlier.

BUD

I'll see you tomorrow at school. Don't worry about the math test. You'll do great.

(BUD exits.)

LOTTE

Everyone's so quiet tonight. It's like everyone is having a math test.

HENRY

They've been reading the news and listening to the radio. This was not a good news day.

LOTTE

What happened?

HENRY

Maybe you should talk to your mother.

(And LOTTE goes inside.. ROSE enters and sees HENRY.)

ROSE

How is everyone?

HENRY

Somber?

ROSE

Do you think it's true? What the papers say? Can the Germans really be gassing Jews?

HENRY

It's so horrible, I am thinking it must be true. How can you make that up?

ROSE

Will has nobody for us. Surely we can get some more people out of Europe.

HENRY

How Rose? Think. The borders are closed. Our offices are closing. Will has his hands full with our current government.

ROSE

If the Germans hate the Jews so much that they are killing them – you'd think they'd be happy to send them here. I don't understand their mindset.

HENRY

I hope you never understand the way they think.

(PENELOPE enters.)

PENELOPE

Can you take some interesting news? Lorenzo has been placed with a company in New York – in what they call the garment district. He works for a Jewish company.

HENRY

Maybe he will learn tolerance. Let us hope so.

(THEY exit as the lights go down.)

SCENE 9

(The GUESTS are scattered about the porch in warm clothes.)

HENRY

Guests? Hello – Friends... There are a few things I would like to discuss with all of you. It may be strange to make an announcement about an upcoming dinner when we've just had dinner but here goes.

As you know, we will be having Thanksgiving next week. That means a day of no work and lots of feasting. I was hoping some of you would be up for extra-duty in the kitchen the day before. I'd like to give Bertie the day off to be with family. This is the one day we Americans set aside to offer gratitude for what we have been given – a roof over our heads, a warm fire, food – and the fact that someone donated a turkey for our dinner.

HANS

One turkey for all of us? How big is this turkey?

HENRY

You've seen him – at least sixteen pounds.

MARIANNE

Wait a minute. Are talking about Plucky? Are we going to eat Plucky?

ROSE

That was the plan.

MARIANNE

But we know him. We can't eat him.

HENRY

This isn't a turkey farm. He was given to us by a neighbor for our Thanksgiving dinner.

HANS

He follows us around like he wants to be our friend.

LOTTE

It would be wrong to eat a friend.

ROSE

Does everyone else feel that way?

(There is a show of hands and indeed – even the adults are iffy about eating Plucky.)

HENRY

I guess I can say I am grateful to know this now.

LEVI

It's good to be thankful for something in these dark days.

HENRY

These may be dark days, but I would like it to be known that right now, I am thankful that you are all here and that I have had a chance to know you. As you know, Scattergoods is only meant to be a temporary haven for those seeking a new life in America. As such, we have had to say a lot of good-byes over the last few years as guests left us to pursue new beginnings. After Thanksgiving, we shall say good-bye to more of you. I wish finding work that suits your abilities was possible. But not yet. Maybe after the war.

ROSE

With your English skills, we were hoping to get you into places as teachers or translators. The government and the military are all looking for people fluent in German and English. But.

LEVI

But. The government worries we may be spies.

HENRY

Yes. Everyone is afraid that anyone from Germany is a spy.

JOSEF

Why we would spy for a country that hates us?

HENRY

Ahhh – you want the government to make sense. I’m afraid you can’t get a politician to do that. I’ve spoken to Josef and Helen. They will be leaving us right after Thanksgiving to work on a Christmas tree farm in St. Paul. When the Christmas season is over, Josef will be working the greenhouses and fields at the University.

JOSEF

Word of my strong muscles from shelling beans must have spread far and wide.

HELEN

Oy vey! There is no end to this man’s vanity.

JOSEF

I am told St. Paul is colder than here -that temps hover around 0 degrees.

(ALL shiver.)

LEVI

Fahrenheit or Celsius?

JOSEF

Fahrenheit.

(ALL shiver more.)

LEVI

And am I – to remain here and be a beggar?

ROSE

We’re still working on placing you. There are so many munition factories these days, we thought placement would be easier. But the positions are all filled.

LEVI

As long as I am hard to place, I have a request – which may make placing me even harder.

ROSE

Do you really want to make things more difficult?

RACHEL

It’s a Jewish thing.

LEVI

We would like to be placed somewhere where there is a synagogue. We are thinking it was not smart to bring the children up without knowledge of their heritage.

ROSE

We'll see what we can do. I cannot guarantee anything. Enjoy your evening, friends.

(The guests "scatter about." BUD comes to the porch. He sees LOTTE and goes to her.)

BUD

I'm sorry I haven't been around much.

LOTTE

I'm used to people going away.

BUD

It's just/

LOTTE

/Charley called you a "Jew-lover." I heard.

BUD

Yeah ...and... it confused me. I mean - I do like you. But I didn't want anyone to think I was in love with you. But then I started thinking of someone trying to insult me because they thought I loved someone. And then I thought, "is that horrible?" "Is that an insult?" Maybe I want to be a "Jew-lover," you know? And a "Quaker-lover" and a "Lutheran-lover," and just someone who loves people. And I realized that while Charley thought he was making fun of me – he sort of was giving me a compliment. And I told him so.

LOTTE

You did? Really?

BUD

Yeah. And you know what the best thing was? He didn't say anything after that. Not another insult like he usually does. He just stared at me – speechless. I didn't even want to punch him anymore. I just saw this sad-looking kid who thinks the way to make friends is to make fun of people. I just walked away – thinking he would jump me. But he didn't. I wanted you to know.

LOTTE

Thank-you.

BUD

(Awkward pause.) Are you still having trouble with Robert Frost?

LOTTE

Nothing means what I think it means.

BUD

He was a master at double-meanings. A lot of his thoughts seem to mean two things at once. And he asks a lot of tough questions. Let me get my book.

(And he quickly (conveniently) grabs his book.)

BUD (cont'd)

Here – the shortest poem of all asks maybe one of the most important questions of all.

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.

LOTTE

I don't understand "soul and body scars."

BUD

Think of what you've been through. Those last days in Berlin, the struggle to get here. Has it put scars or a mark on your heart or soul? What if there was no birth – you weren't born? If you weren't here – you would not have had to endure all that you have suffered.

LOTTE

But I would have missed apples straight from the tree ... hugs from my family...

BUD

So – in spite of everything – you are glad you are here.

(ROSE and HENRY enter.)

ROSE

You're here late. Which means...

BUD

I have to go. See you at school?

LOTTE

Yes.

(BUD exits. ROSE and HENRY sit.)

Any news for us?

ROSE

Just one job offer which is unlikely. Unless someone in your family can learn to be an expert skier by the New Year.

LOTTE

I don't know that we need to do that.

ROSE

Of course not. It was silly to mention it.

LOTTE

I mean – my father is already an expert skier.

HENRY

Say that again.

LOTTE

My father is an expert skier. He was invited to be in the 1924 Olympics but bowed out because he was working and didn't have time to train. I know my father sometimes looks like a penguin when he walks – don't tell him I said that – but on skis – he's a swan. We all ski, you know. Did you ever hear of the Alps? We spent many winter vacations there.

HENRY

Can you ask him to come down here?

(LOTTE exits. HENRY and ROSE smile at each other as the lights go down.)

SCENE 11

(It is Christmas. Maybe there's a wreath or a small tree. ABE, PENELOPE, ROSE, HENRY, LEVI, RACHEL, LOTTE, and HANS are gathered.. The ROSENBERGS are dressed for travel. BUD approaches. There are "Merry Christmas" greetings.)

BUD

I brought some sweets for the trip. And a book for Lotte. Are you all set for your next adventure?

RACHEL

If you mean are we ready to go live in the arctic circle on a frozen lake, the answer is: what do you all say, "ready or not, here I come?"

HENRY

It's not that far north.

LEVI

It's practically in the North Pole! All that's missing are the penguins.

BUD

That's actually the South Pole.

LEVI

Thank-you, young man. I love being corrected by the younger generation.

BUD

Merry Christmas.

(He goes to LOTTE.)

For you.

LOTTE

Robert Frost's poetry. Thank-you.

BUD

I thought ... well... if you had any questions ... you could write. My address is inside.

ROSE

Before I forget – here's the address for the synagogue in Duluth. It's small but growing.

HENRY

We'll stop on our way up to Lutsen.

(Church bells chime.)

PENELOPE

They're calling people to the last service.

RACHEL

I like to think they're bidding us good-bye.

ROSE

You're our last family before we close.

HENRY

The car is ready. No looking back.

ROSE

No! Do look back. And remember us as we will remember you.

(As the church bells ring, there are good-byes – not exactly slow motion but not to be sped through – they murmur good wishes to each other. THE ROSENBERGS exit with HENRY. The rest crowd the doorway with their hands up waving good-bye. They freeze as the lights dim and the church bells fade away.)

END OF PLAY

NOTES

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

MUSIC

1. 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-nismeha

(repeat)

Hava neranenah

Hava neranenah

Hava neranenah

ve-nismeha

(repeat)

Uru, uru ahim!

Uru ahim be-lev sameah

(repeat line four times)

Uru ahim, uru ahim!

Be-lev sameah

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" like motion is done in an exuberant circular motion to the right. Dancers may sing and the band may speed up the tempo.

*In Conservative communities, men and women did not touch hands. They used a cloth napkin where the man would hold one end and the woman would hold the other end as they danced.

*Bells Ringing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=aqcIg40-ZQI>