Kaddish

(A Play in One Act)

W. ZOLLEY LERNER

CAST OF CHARACTERS

AVRUM, a pious, learned man with a full beard. Age about fifty-five
FREIDA, his wife
RUTH, their daughter. Dark, young, and pretty
MAURICE, their son
KATHRYN BURNS, charming girl of twenty-two

TIME

The present. An eve of a Yontov (a Jewish holiday).

SCENE

The combined living and dining room of a middle class New York
apartment. There are two windows in the back wall. Upstage right is
the door which leads to the hall and downstage left the door to the
kitchen. Center left—small size dining table and several straight chairs.
Right of table, an easy chair. Center back—a buffet on which stands a
Other furnishings, such as pictures, etc., indicate the atmosphere of a
Jewish home. There is a "Muzzuzah" on the frame of door of entrance.

As the curtain rises, Ruth is discovered setting the table for supper.
She is humming. In the course of her business she drops a knife and
Freida is heard off stage left.

RUTH. Yes, Mamma.
FREIDA. Did I hear the door?
RUTH. No, Mamma.
FREIDA. (She enters flushed, emanating the warm glow of a woman
who has been working over a stove. She wipes her hands on her apron.)
I'm so nervous.
RUTH. Why?
FREIDA. Moishala, why didn't he wire?
RUTH. He'll surprise us.
FREIDA. He should have wired anyway. Is everything ready?
RUTH. Yes, Mamma.
FREIDA. Ah, it's nice to know that tomorrow is Yontov. God in His
kindness didn't forget and made days of rest.
RUTH. Rest . . . yes, a lot of rest you get. You work so hard pre-
paring for it. You're too tired to enjoy the day when it does come.
FREIDA. Maybe I should work tomorrow?
RUTH. I'd say "yes", if I thought you would. I know when Sam and
I are married we are going to be modern. If you are Jewish at heart
you are Jewish enough. Why should you work all day as you do? First

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the fish and then the soup and chicken, and always a honey cake, and if you're still able to stand, you bake bread.

FREIDA. But your Papa likes my bread on Yontov.
RUTH. He doesn't know the difference.
FREIDA. But he does.
RUTH. How?
FREIDA. By the raisins.
RUTH. Well, anyway, it's all nonsense, and besides it's your fault; you spoiled him.
FREIDA. But that's been my joy.
RUTH. What has?
FREIDA. Spoiling him . . . and you and Moisha. Remember, Reisal, when you and Sam are married and you grow old together and with the blessing of God you'll have children, then you'll know the joy that comes in spoiling those you love. I have long forgotten how I suffered when I bore Maurice, but what a pleasure when I sensed he was by my side and that I had created and given life. I have forgotten that Moisha even had the measles, the mumps, or the whooping cough—

RUTH. He hasn't, he brags about it still.
FREIDA. Or how I struggled to send him to college, but I can't forget the medals he got. How my heart throbbed when he was made a lawyer and given a diploma.
RUTH. I wonder if Morrie has changed much in the years he has been away?
FREIDA. Sure he has changed. He is older, wiser, and better . . . and I don't say it because he's my boy.
RUTH. No, of course not, Mother.
FREIDA. I can't wait till he comes. My heart is beating so. He hasn't wired since we heard the last time . . . And it's Yontov and we can't ride down to the depot to get him. Maybe, Reisala, you could go down and wait?

RUTH. But, Mamma, there are hundreds of trains coming in. I'd have to make camp down there in order to meet him.

FREIDA. And your Papa will probably forget to come home from the Shool just because Moisha is coming.
RUTH. Papa isn't the only one that forgets.
FREIDA. What do you mean?
RUTH. The candies!
FREIDA (much excitement). Oih, Gottlein! the licht! Reisal, a match, quick! See if it's dark yet. It's probably too late to light them now.
RUTH. It's still light.
FREIDA. See what a woman gets for talking.
RUTH. But, Mother, you can still light them.
FREIDA. Yes . . . but it's late anyway.
RUTH. All right, it's late. (Gives her matches.)

FREIDA. (She works all the time, getting candelabra from buffet and setting it on table.) Here I am talking about Yontov and I forget about the licht. Another minute and your father will be home from Shool, Look, what time it is?

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RUTH. I thought you were going to pray over the candles . . . It's after six.

FREIDA. And Reisal, the soup and the fish are on the stove; turn down the fire a little.

RUTH. But, Mamma, the candles—(She exits left.)

FREIDA. All right, the candles, the candles. (She lights the five candles and then circles above them with her hands three times. On the third motion she carries her hands to her forehead and partially covering her eyes with her fingers, mumbles a prayer in Hebrew. Then with her eyes still covered she speaks audibly.) Lord, let me welcome Thy Yontov. Bless in Thy kindness our household. Bless Avrum, and Reisal, and Moisha. Bring us joy and health. Omein. (Telephone rings.) Reisal, the phone.

RUTH (off stage). Yes, Mother. (She goes to phone.) Hello! Yes, Maurice honey, how are you?

FREIDA. Maurice—

RUTH. When did you get to town?


RUTH. Yes, Mother, Maurice . . . You didn't wire. We didn't know when to expect you—

FREIDA. How is he?

RUTH. Mother or father couldn't go down because it's Yontov. But I—

FREIDA (going close to Ruth). Is he well? (She shows much excitement throughout this interrupted telephone conversation.)

RUTH. I would have gone—

FREIDA. When did he get in?

RUTH. To meet you if you had wired.

FREIDA. Why don't you answer?

RUTH. Yes . . . (exasperated) Oh, Mother!

FREIDA. Is he all right? When did he come? Why doesn't he hurry home? (She hurst these questions.)

RUTH. But, Mother, wait—

FREIDA. Here, Reisal, let me speak to him.

RUTH. Wait, Maurice. Mamma is so excited. She can't wait to hear it from me.

FREIDA (taking the phone). Moishala, Moishala, how are you? . . . Did you have a fine trip? . . . When will you be home? . . . Like always. Oh, Papa's fine. No, he's at Shool, but he'll be home soon. Oh, everyone has been well . . . You should have wired. But Moisha, you don't sound the same. Do you have a cold? Oh . . . why should you be so nervous? You're home now! Are you coming right away? Good! You want to speak to Ruth again, all right. Goodbye, son . . . hurry! . . . Here, Reisal.

RUTH (taking phone again). Yes . . . oh, oh I see . . . Why, of course. Not at all . . . certainly. Why should they mind? Do bring her, Maurice. All right, come soon, dear . . . Mamma, Maurice is bringing a guest with him for supper.

FREIDA. Nu, goat! There's enough for five guests.

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RUTH. Morrie seemed a little afraid, a little reluctant to bring—
  FREIDA. Why should he be? . . . Who is it?
  RUTH. Miss Burns—
  FREIDA. M-Miss Burns?
  RUTH. Morrie's partner's sister.
  FREIDA. Oh, yes.
  RUTH. She's a gentile and Maurice was afraid you wouldn't want her
  over as it was Yontov.
  FREIDA. What difference is it, daughter mine, what she is? She
  knows Moisha and he wants to bring her for supper, fine and goot.
  RUTH. That's what I told him.
  FREIDA. A lot of goyisha friends are even better than yiddisha
  neighbors. You don't do them anything, they don't do you anything.
  You don't have to marry them, just live and be at peace with them.
  Come, Reisal, finish what you are doing, we must dress up a little for
  Moisha. Tonight is a celebration, the return of my eldest. It's been so
  long. Oih, children they grow up and they grow away from you. When
  you get old and need them, they leave or get married.
  RUTH. Now, Mamma, no more of that.
  FREIDA. But it's true, Reisal, you will have Sam soon and Moisha will
  come home even less than he does now. And if he marries, I'll lose him
  altogether.
  RUTH. Not Morrie, Mother, and besides I'll be here. You always
  prayed that we should grow up so that we might marry and be happy.
  FREIDA. I know, daughter . . . when your children are young you
  stay awake thinking and planning their future; when you're old and
  see your dreams realized, you begin to fear the loneliness of old age.
  RUTH. Old age, bosh!
  FREIDA. But it will be a comfort to know Avrum and I raised two
  Jewish children with Jewish hearts . . . (Avrum is heard off stage.)
  I think Papa is home from Shool . . . (at door, to Ruth) Yes, he's
  coming. Avrum?
  AVRUM (outside). Yes, Freida.
  FREIDA. He's a little late tonight.
  RUTH. Probably had a discussion on synagogue politics. Papa is a
  stickler for conservative rule, you know.
  AVRUM (as he enters). Goot Yontov! (He kisses the muzzuzah on the
  door as he hands Freida the Prayer Book. He caresses her head gently.
  He then takes off his hat and replaces it with a black skull cap.)
  FREIDA. Goot Yontov! . . . Goot Yure!
  AVRUM. (He goes to Ruth and kisses her forehead.) Goot Yontov,
  daughter.
  FREIDA. What's the matter, Avrum? You look so sad.
  RUTH. Papa didn't like the Cantor tonight, I'll bet.
  FREIDA. You should be happy. Moisha telephoned.
  AVRUM. He's here already?
  FREIDA. He came a little while ago and he's on his way here now.
  AVRUM. That's good . . . I'm glad of it. How is he?
  FREIDA. He said he was all right but he sounded a bit strange.

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RUTH. Oh, he's fine! Mother always thinks her pet is ill... He's excited about being home, that's all. He hasn't been here for months. Yes, and he's bringing a guest along with him.
AVRUM. A guest?
FREIDA. His goyisha partner's sister.
AVRUM. Oh—
FREIDA. What's the matter, Avrum? You seem so solemn, not your usual self at all. Aren't you happy? You look as if... some one... died.
AVRUM. Some one did.
FREIDA. Who?
AVRUM (pause). Goldman's boy.
FREIDA. Goldman's boy?
RUTH. Not, Barney, Papa, the dentist?
AVRUM. Yes, Goldman's boy, Barney, the dentist.
RUTH. How terrible, Mamma, he was such a wonderful young man.
FREIDA. A flower, oih vey, I can see his mother, he was her idol, her very eye, her only kaddish, oih! Poor Sadie, she'll dig her own grave before her time.
AVRUM. No, Freida, Barney has saved her the trouble; he dug it for her... and for his father, too!
FREIDA. What do you mean?
RUTH. Why, Father!
AVRUM. You see, Barney's death is a living death... He has not died, but his father is saying Kaddish for him. He has just passed into a different sphere of the living world and his father must repeat the "prayer for the dead"... ask peace for his departed soul and sit the "shiva".
FREIDA (understanding). Oh— (on the brink of tears).
RUTH (perturbed). Why, Papa, I don't understand? What are you saying? He hasn't died, you say?
AVRUM. No, daughter, not dead to the world but buried and lost to his parents that bore him and gave him life (with simple religious awe). Like the leaf that the strong breeze tears from the branch and speeds merrily onward, to meet with other leaves from other trees... to twirl and circle with the gush until it is destroyed in the fall, burned on the trash heap, or is allowed to perish in the mire.
RUTH. Father, I can't make you out... What do you mean?
AVRUM. Barney is dead, daughter, to his race, the Jewish people. (Pause.) He married—
FREIDA. A shiksa!
AVRUM (assenting by nodding his head). A gentile.
RUTH. Oh, I see—
FREIDA. What sinfulness... poor Sadie (in tears).
AVRUM. You see, child, one usually marries to live and create life... to find happiness by conforming to the rules of life, and to enjoy the bounteous kindnesses that God in His wisdom has ordained to exist. But when one evades these rules, though he may create yet he must
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likewise destroy. Thus the father and mother must suffer. (With a sigh.) What a pitiful sight was Goldman at the synagogue.

Freida. How will he bear the shame that has befallen him?
Ruth. But, Mother, it wasn't Mr. Goldman, but Barney.
Avrum. Poor Goldman . . . everyone stared at him throughout the service. They pierced him with their eyes and whispered amongst themselves until he must surely have heard.
Ruth. That was cruel of them.
Avrum. Of course they were sorry for him, but their sympathetic glances shattered his nerves.
Ruth. How horrible!
Avrum. He didn't lift his eyes from his prayer book and when the Kaddish was recited, he wept so loudly that all the synagogue was moved. How lonely he seemed for the time, as if all of Israel's sins were heaped on his shoulder.
Freida (in tears). How much lonelier must be his wife . . . who struggled all her life, to give him everything, send him to school, make a man of him, learn to be a dentist so he might be respected, and then he repays by marrying a shiksa.
Ruth. Perhaps he loves her.
Freida (standing ground). How about the love for his parents? (Rocking her body to the rhythm of the words.) Oih, it pays to raise children and then to suffer so.
Avrum. It's sad, but it's life. Some are happy and others must suffer.
Ruth. Well, let's forget it.
Freida. Thank God, we're blessed with good children . . . (New thought.) Avrum, I'm getting old. Here I am expecting Moisha and sure enough I forgot all about his coming. It's age, Avrum, age.
Avrum. Such suffering of Goldman can make one forget a lot of things.
Ruth (cheering things up). Here, Papa, let's change the topic. After all, it's Yontov. Here, read the paper and sit in your chair and just as soon as Maurice gets here we'll feed you and you'll feel better . . . Maybe, you're not hungry?
Avrum. What? Not hungry? When I can smell the raisin bread?
Freida. See, Reisal, what did I tell you, he knew.
Ruth. Of course he does.
Freida. Fill the glasses, Reisal. (Car sound.)
Ruth. I thought I heard a car stop. (She rushes to window.) There he is, Mother . . . Ho, Maurice!
(Ruth rushes out to meet him. Freida looks out the window. Father rises and goes to window too. Both ad lib. Freida goes to door as Maurice enters. He takes her in his arms and kisses her several times.)
Maurice. Mamma, how are you? . . . Gee, it's great to see you! (He kisses her audibly.) And Papa! (Kisses him.) How are you?
Avrum. Fine, my boy . . . and you?
Maurice. Great . . . everything is great. (Kathryn Burns enters
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followed by Ruth.) Mother, I want you to meet Miss Burns, Kathryn Burns.

FREIDA. I'm glad to meet you.

KATHRYN. And I to meet you. Maurice has told me so much about you.

FREIDA. Moishala . . . (catches herself). Maurice has?

KATHRYN. Yes, . . . and you are exactly as he said you would be.

MAURICE. And this is Dad.

AVRUM. You like me, too?

KATHRYN. Of course. (She shakes his hand.)

FREIDA. You don't know him.

AVRUM. Now, Freida.

MAURICE. And my sister, Ruth . . . I suppose you both met coming up.

RUTH. Yes.

MAURICE. That's more than I have done. Come here, sweetie, and let me kiss you. Soon I'll have to ask Sam if I may.

KATHRYN. Sam?

MAURICE. That's her big love, Kathryn.

KATHRYN. Is she in love . . . too? (With meaning.)

FREIDA. Too is right, Miss Burns . . . and I think too young for that nowadays.

AVRUM. Never too young, Freida, for love, if it is the right one.

MAURICE (changing subject). Well, shall we sit down?

FREIDA. Yes, sure, why are we standing? Sit down, sit down. (They are all seated.) Moisha, tell us how you have been.

RUTH. It's late; don't you think we'd better eat first?

FREIDA. Oih, I forgot again. I'll bring supper in.

RUTH. I'll go with you, Mother.

FREIDA. When you get old, you forget. Don't get old, Miss Burns. (She starts out door left.)

KATHRYN (laughing). No, I won't.

FREIDA (returning). Again I forgot. Avrum, will you bring up a little wine for Kiddush? (Goes into room left)

AVRUM (rising). Fine. What kind do you like, Miss Burns, cherry, plum, or grape?

KATHRYN. All of them.

MAURICE. Smart girl.

AVRUM. A good guest . . . easy to please. (Exits left.)

MAURICE. Well?

KATHRYN. Oh, they're grand. I love them.

MAURICE. Will they love you?

KATHRYN. Of course they will, I'll make them.

MAURICE. How?

KATHRYN. Why, Maurice! How? What a question!

MAURICE. Just so, dear. It's what I told you before and I repeat. You can be the grandest girl in the world to them as long as you don't marry their Maurice.

KATHRYN. But I still don't see why—
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MAURICE. Because—
KATHRYN. I'm not a Jewess.
MAURICE. Right.
KATHRYN. Are you sure they'll object?
MAURICE. Certain.
KATHRYN. As the day is day and the night is night, I suppose.
MAURICE. As the day is day and night is night.
KATHRYN. Yes, I have heard you say that before. (Sweetly and emphatically.) Well, I'll not give you up.
MAURICE. Of course you won't, I won't let you. But I want to prepare you for the shock.
KATHRYN. Shock?
MAURICE. They're both pious, you see, and this I am afraid will be a terrible blow.
KATHRYN. Must we tell them?
MAURICE. I don't understand.
KATHRYN. Why can't we go back West and after we marry, write them?
MAURICE. It would do no good.
KATHRYN. It might be gentler.
MAURICE. For us, perhaps . . . but rather cowardly, evading the issue.
KATHRYN. I thought only of them, dear.
MAURICE. I know, sweet, but it seems furtive.
KATHRYN. You're right!
MAURICE. We must face them.
KATHRYN. With the truth.
MAURICE. With the truth.
KATHRYN. I love you so.
MAURICE. And I you.
KATHRYN. I can bear all with you but without you . . . Kiss me.
(They kiss. Avrum is heard off stage.)
MAURICE. I hear someone coming.
KATHRYN. Will you tell them?
MAURICE. Soon.
KATHRYN. Be brave.
MAURICE. And you.
AVRUM. (Enters with two containers of wine and goes toward table.)
I brought the cherry and grape. It's my best. I forgot to add sugar to the plum; so I thought it would be too sour.
KATHRYN (joking). Two kinds should be enough.
AVRUM. I've even known one kind to be enough. (Winks at Kathryn and the two laugh. Maurice shows evidences of his nervousness. And when he does not join in the fun, Avrum notices it.) What's the matter, tired?
MAURICE (trying to smile). No.
AVUM. You look a bit nervous and tired. Business, worries?
MAURICE. No, Papa, I'm fine.
AVRUM. You see, Miss Burns, Maurice is away so much we can't bear
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to see him all. . . . We always want to see him bright and smiling. I guess if he were with us like Ruth, it wouldn't matter so much if once in a while he frowned or scowled, but when he is a guest . . . (Thinking it over.) Well, he is a guest in a way.

KATHRYN. And a popular one, I should say.

MAURICE (trying to pick up). And I deserve to be.

KATHRYN. No credit to you old boy. . . . It's just that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

MAURICE. Or something.

AVRUM. It's very true. I remember in Europe when I was about your age and I was studying in the Yeshiva . . . (to Kathryn) . . . that's a kind of college . . . I remember how glad my parents used to be when I'd come home for the holidays. It wasn't as often as we see our Maurice even. . . . It was too expensive. . . . How they used to greet me! To them it seemed a double celebration . . . (lightly and in good humor). My mother would spend the first day in crying over her joy and father who was always wrapped in his studies even found time to turn from his books and give me a nod or a wink. . . . And in the evenings over a glass of tea, he would shrewdly question to see how much of the Talmud or Torah was sinking in.

KATHRYN. Those were wonderful days . . . the past, eh?

AVRUM. Well, a "dank Gott", I can't complain about the present either.

FREIDA. (Enters with a plate of food, which she puts on the table.) Well, pretty soon now we'll be ready to eat. (She notices Maurice moody.) Moishala, what's the matter, zeen?

AVRUM. I was just asking the same thing. (Maurice glances at Kathryn to reassure himself.)

KATHRYN. You needn't alarm yourselves. The excitement of the trip and the anxiety of seeing you has tired him. He's just a bit shaken. One often gets that way, don't you think?

MAURICE (in a whisper). Yes, that's it.

KATHRYN. A few hours at home and he'll be quite himself again.

MAURICE. Yes.

KATHRYN. And besides he was telling me before you came in, he had a bit of news to tell you.

MAURICE (hushing her up). Kathryn, dear!

FREIDA. News, nu, what is? (Alarmed on second thought that it might be bad news.) Something's happened?

AVRUM. Well, what can it be? Tell us.

MAURICE. Oh, it can wait.

AVRUM. Wait! Why should it wait? If it's glad tidings why not let us feast with joy and if it's bad . . . (sorry he said bad) surely you wouldn't keep it from us.

FREIDA. Bad . . . oih, Moishala!

MAURICE. Nothing, Mamma, to get excited about. Kathryn shouldn't have mentioned it. I think it can wait till after we eat.

AVRUM. Again wait, why wait? Tell us.

MAURICE. Well—

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FREIDA. I have such a strange feeling. Moisha, what is it?
MAURICE. I’m . . . going to be married.
FREIDA. Oih . . . (with love) . . . Moishala! (Kisses him.)
AVRUM. Mazeltov, my son. Such tidings are joyful tidings. Freida, pour wine in the glasses; let us drink his health and happiness.
FREIDA. Who is she, Moisha, a fine “yiddisha tauchter”? 
AVRUM. What a question, Freida. This is Maurice, our Maurice.
FREIDA. And her parents—
MAURICE. Of course she’s a fine daughter . . . she’s lovely.
AVRUM (shrugging shoulders). Well, then!
MAURICE. She is not a Jewess.
FREIDA. A shiksa!
AVRUM. Not a Jewess!
MAURICE. It’s Kathryn. (Indicates her.)
FREIDA. You . . . oih, Gottinu, Gottinu!
AVRUM. Oih Gott! (He sinks into his chair and beating his head with his clenched hand, dazed and trying to think.)
FREIDA (wringing hands). What have you done, Moisha? What have you done?
RUTH (entering). Mamma, what is it? . . . What’s happened?
FREIDA (striking her chest with clenched hands). It’s Moisha, my Moisha—
RUTH. Morrie, what’s happened? Tell me, why is everyone dazed?
KATHRYN. Maurice and I are to be married.
RUTH (taken aback). You and—
KATHRYN. Yes, is that so terrible?
RUTH. No, but you are a Christian. Oh, Morrie, how could you hurt them?
MAURICE. I didn’t want to hurt them, Ruth, but I love Kathryn so.
RUTH. But why did you come here on Yontov to tell them? Couldn’t you have written?
MAURICE. I wanted to be honest, I wanted them to see what kind of a girl she was, how lovely . . . I didn’t want them to think she was ordinary but that she was a flower of her kind.
RUTH. But she’s a Christian—
MAURICE. Why must that matter?
AVRUM (raising hand slowly). Oh, God! Oh, God! What sin have I committed that you should punish my son so!
MAURICE. You have committed no sin, Father, nor I. ’Tis no sin to love and marry.
AVRUM. But it’s sacrilegious to marry with a Christian.
MAURICE. Sacrilegious?
AVRUM. Yes . . . for it says in the Holy Torah: “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter shalt thou not give unto his son, and his daughter shalt thou not take unto thy son.”
MAURICE. If this be so, your Torah is obsolete.
FREIDA. Oh, son, what are you saying? . . . Think of the shame that you will heap upon us!
MAURICE. You’re selfish now, Mother. You’re thinking of yourself

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and Dad. You're thinking of what your neighbors will say tomorrow
when they learn of this. How they will stare at you and gossip behind
your back . . . "Avrum and Freida, two pious Jews, but now . . . now
they have a Christian daughter-in-law." . . . Yes, I know, you'll hear
all that and more! But you're forgetting that I too want to live. You're
forgetting that I love her.

FREIDA. Moisha, you're mad! . . . You can't do it!
MAURICE. Why can't I?
FREIDA. You're my son, my son. I gave you life . . . I raised you as
a Jewish mother should . . . I suffered for you.
MAURICE. I know, Mother. There isn't a thing you could ask, but this,
and I would grant it. You gave me life so I might live and be happy.
. . . Then why would you destroy my happiness?
AVRUM (rising). Happiness, happiness. But will you be happy? I
know, my son, you're young; you're still a bud; you know only of the
freshness of the world. What will happen when you have blossomed,
when you have given life and created issue? What will happen to the
flower when the sunshine shall be hidden with the shadows of the past?
What will you do when you are haunted by the memory of having for-
feited your people? Nothing but you will wither and droop.
MAURICE. Why?
AVRUM. Because you were born a Jew and raised a Jew, and beneath
your youthful desires lies a rich Jewish heart. A spirit that cannot be
smothered will eventually awake to torment you for your misdeeds.
MAURICE. Kathryn and I can bear it.
AVRUM (to Kathryn). And you, my girl, you will not be so stubborn
. . . Don't you see he is not for you? . . . Don't you see you must give
him up?
KATHRYN. You amaze me! I can't understand you. This is a most
natural situation. . . . I love him and he loves me. What can be more
real?
AVRUM. The present is real, but will the future be the same?
KATHRYN. We're alive. Why can't we have hope? This isn't merely
a whim of youth. Maurice and I have tried to coolly weigh the whole
matter. We've tried in our minds to take your cause. . . . We have
accused ourselves, saying that our love was an infatuation . . . that it
would pass as it came. For your sakes we put it to test and always our
love conquered doubt.
FREIDA (wringing her hands). Have mercy on me. . . . Leave me, my
boy!
KATHRYN. Don't you see that I, too, am a woman! Do you think I
would ask such a sacrifice of him if I thought it meant his happiness?
I won't give him up because I can't. . . . Why should a petty bit of
religious bigotry destroy so many hopes?
AVRUM. Believe me, my children, if I could see one ray of hope for
you, do you think I would close my heart to your pleas? The union of
Jew and Christian is unsanctified. It is the law of God and the Torah.
I know it is hard but bear your woes.
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MAURICE. Religion always demands sacrifice.
AVRUM. Remember, my son, the "Lord giveth" as well as "taketh away".

MAURICE. Your religion is harsh.
AVRUM. It is the law!
MAURICE. We're living in a modern age. Things are changed.
AVRUM. But God is eternal!
MAURICE. I want life and happiness.

AVRUM. There is something beyond the desire of the flesh and the lust of your eyes—

MAURICE. If there is, it cannot be achieved by a religion that is bound by bigotry and petty rules. A religion without strings would never have applied to our case. Be sensible, Father, reconcile yourself to the spirit of your Torah, not to the letter.

AVRUM. Hush, son!

MAURICE. I refuse to be put on the altar.

AVRUM. 'Tis your Jewish duty.

MAURICE. It is the scourge of Judaism.

AVRUM. We must obey God's laws.

MAURICE. My God never made such laws.

AVRUM. 'Tis the will of Heaven.

MAURICE. No! These are laws of Hell!

AVRUM. Stop! ... You blaspheme! (Forgetting himself in religious fervor, Avrum slaps Maurice on the face. Maurice is dazed and slowly raises his hand to his cheek. A slight pause ensues.)

FREIDA. Avrum! What have you done?
RUTH. Papa! —
KATHRYN. Maurice, dear,—

MAURICE. (A definite pause and Maurice draws himself up and extends his hand to Kathryn.) Come, Kathryn.

KATHRYN. (At the door she turns and speaks softly. She pities them.) O, cruel, cruel, such religion is cruel. (They leave.)

FREIDA. (runs to door sobbing). My son, my son—

AVRUM. Don't cry, Freida. Our son is dead. The Lord hath taken him before his time, that is all. (Head raised.) "Va ani Ka asher Shocholti, Shochalti. Since I am childless, let me be childless." (He goes to table, puts out four candles and leaves the fifth burning.)

RUTH. What are you doing?

AVRUM. Kaddish for a dead son.

RUTH (whispers aghast). Kaddish! The prayer for the dead!

AVRUM. (Slowly and with effort. Tears overcome him as he continues the prayer. Freida is heard wailing throughout, and Ruth also cries.)

"Yis-gad-dal v'yis-kad-dash sh'meh rab-bo,

b'ol-mo di-'vro kir'-u-seh v'yam-lisch mal-chu-seh,

b'che-ya-chon u-v'yo-me-chon u-v'chayeh d'chol bes yis-ro-el,


(The curtain falls slowly as his words become sobs.)

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