

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Yes.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I promise. Thank you, Papa, thank you! *(She hugs him.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. On one condition: Your mother mustn't know. Do you understand that?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yes, Papa.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. God help us both if she finds out. *Oy (Transition.)*

SHIRLEY. Every day for the next two weeks, we work on the play ... *(School auditorium. Rehearsal.)*

STUDENTS. *(Sing.)*

WESTWARD LEADING, STILL PROCEEDING,  
GUIDE US TO THY PERFECT LIGHT.

SHIRLEY. And as soon as rehearsal is over ...

MR. HILTON. All right, boys and girls, you're dismissed! *(Above the hubbub.)* And learn those lines! *(Rehearsal over, the kids disperse.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Good night, Mr. Hilton, Miss Glacé.

MR. HILTON. Good night, Shirley.

MISS GLACÉ. *Bonsoir.*

EVIE. Want to come to my house?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Can't. I gotta run. *(She grabs her things and runs out.)*

SHIRLEY. And I do — all the way home — and walk through the door just in time for dinner. *(She runs upstairs, into the apartment.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley? — There you are.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Breathlessly.)* Hi, Mama, Papa. Is there anything I can do to help?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Thank you for asking. As a matter of fact there is. You can set the table. *(Young Shirley and her father exchange conspiratorial looks as she sets the table.)*

SHIRLEY. It looks like I'm going to get away with my secret. I'm almost home-free. That is, until the very last rehearsal. Which also happens to be the first night of Chanukah. *(Transition. Rehearsal. An uncharacteristically frazzled Miss Glacé conducts a lackluster rendition of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." The kids are restless. Ira and Jackie are being mischievous and disruptive.)*

MISS GLACÉ. All right, that's enough! Ira Pushkov! Stand in the corner!

IRA. What do you want from me? He started!

JACKIE. I did not! You did!

MISS GLACÉ. I don't care who started! Jackie Sauerfeld, you, too! JACKIE. What did I do!

MISS GLACÉ. Into the corner!

JACKIE. The same corner?

MISS GLACÉ. No! You, *droite*. Ira, *gauche*. Now! *(Mr. Hilton enters during the above.)*

MR. HILTON. What is going on here?! Now, look, I know you're all tired. You all have worked incredibly hard to put on this show. But so has Miss Glacé. This *extraordinary* woman has devoted so much of her time and energy to you boys and girls, way beyond the call of duty. And I want you to show her the respect she deserves! Do you think you can do that? Do you?

CHILDREN. Yes, Mls-ter Hil-ton.

MR. HILTON. We're in the final stretch. Tomorrow's our big show. I need you to hold it together just a little while longer. Ira? Jackie? Do you think you can behave?

IRA. *(Dully.)* Yes, Mr. Hilton.

JACKIE. Yes, Mr. Hilton.

MR. HILTON. All right, then, you may rejoin the others. Miss Glacé...?

MISS GLACÉ. *Merçi.* From the top, please. *(They resume rehearsing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." Transition. The Abramowitz apartment. Mr. Abramowitz anxiously glances at his pocketwatch and looks out the window. His wife hums while polishing the menorah.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley! Come set the table! *(To her husband.)* The last couple of weeks, all she does is shut herself away in her room and do homework. What kind of a life is that for a girl? *(Calls.)* Shirley! Enough with the homework already. We gotta get ready for Chanukah. *(She looks in her room.)* Shirley...? *(To her husband.)* She's not here. I have a funny feeling, Misha. Something is wrong. Go look for her.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I don't have to look for her.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. What do you mean?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I don't have to look for her because I know where I'd find her.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. What are you talking about, Misha, where would you find her? *(Pause.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. At school.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Almost sundown and she's still at school? What would she still be doing at school?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. (*A beat.*) Rehearsing the Christmas play.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. The *Christmas* play? How do you know this?  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. (*Sighs.*) I know ... because I gave her permission.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You what?  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I told her as long as it didn't get in the way of her responsibilities at home ...  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You told her that? After we said she couldn't!  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Clara ...  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You went behind my back? The two of you?  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. It's not how it sounds.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Oh, no? You were in cahoots! No wonder she shows her mother such disrespect. You play her against me!  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. No, I don't!  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *You* she loves. Me, I'm not so sure.  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Of course she loves you. What kind of talk is that?  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Always making me out to be the bad guy. You encourage it! You *like* having daddy's little girl all to yourself.  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. You're too hard on her, Clara. A girl has to dream.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Oh, and I don't want my child to have dreams?! *They set the table in tense silence. Cut back to Mr. Hilton rehearsing a scene. Young Shirley realizes it's almost sundown.*  
ANNA LING. Look! In the manger. Just as the angel said.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Oh, no! The sun's going down! (*She tugs on Mr. Hilton's sleeve.*) Mr. Hilton.  
MR. HILTON. Shirley, not now.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. I'm really sorry but I have to go.  
MR. HILTON. We're almost done for the night. Can't you wait five minutes?  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. It's the first night of Chanukah. If I'm not home before sundown and my mother finds out where I've been ...  
MR. HILTON. Well, go, then, what are you waiting for?! Hurry, Shirley Abramowitz! Run! (*Young Shirley grabs her books and races home before the sun sets.*)

SHIRLEY. And so I race the sun. Down Neptune, down Mermaid, and all the streets in between. (*Young Shirley encounters Mrs. Kornblum. As Mrs. Kornblum.*) Shirley Abramowitz!  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Mrs. Kornblum!  
SHIRLEY. (*As Mrs. Kornblum.*) It's almost sundown! Shouldn't you be home?  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Shouldn't *you*?! (*Young Shirley bursts through the door of the apartment, revealing her parents saying the blessing over the menorah.*)  
MR. and MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. ... *l'hadlik neir shel Chanukah. Amen.*  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Breathlessly.*) Sorry I'm late!  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Oh, look who's here! How nice of you to join us.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Let me say the *brucha* with you.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Too late.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. But the sun set just this minute!  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. We said it without you. See? The candles are lit.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. But lighting the candles is my job.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Not if you're not here to do it. So where were you, if you say it's your job?  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. I stayed late at school. Studying.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Studying.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yes. I lost track of time. When I realized what time it was, I ran as fast as I could.  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You may have run as fast as you could. But it wasn't because you were studying.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yes, I was. I was studying arithmetic.  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley ...  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. I was! You want to see? (*Gets her notebook.*)  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. She knows.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. What?  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. She knows. Your mama knows.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. She knows?  
MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. I know. You were rehearsing that *farshunkeneh* Christmas play you weren't supposed to be in.  
YOUNG SHIRLEY. Papa knew. He said I could.  
MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I said you could — as long as you kept your responsibilities at home. You didn't. You were late.