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Clever Rachel

By

MOSES GOLDBERG

Adapted from traditional sources and the book by
DEBBY WALDMAN and CINDY REVELL



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(CLEVER RACHEL)

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Clever Rachel received its premiere production at Pumpkin Theatre in Baltimore on March 24, 2012.

Cast:

Shlomo Noah Tunis
Silka Stacey Needle
Lev B. Thomas Rinaldi
Rachel Rachel Tunis
Hindy, Esther, Halina, Miriam, Zazu Vanessa Kinsey
Jacob Connor Moore

Production:

Director Jimi Kinstle
Stage Manager Heather M. Mork
Musical Designer Mande Ferrier Roberts
Costume Design Heather C. Jackson
Lighting Design Heather M. Mork
Properties Design Ally Cribbs
Set Design Ryan Michael Haase
Stage Crew Aidan Spann
Stage Management Subs Dylan Otterbein, Aidan Spann
Carpenter Steven Bainbridge
House Manager Kathryn Falcone

Clever Rachel

CHARACTERS

RACHEL: age 12

SHLOMO: her brother, 10

SILKA: her mother

LEV: her father, the innkeeper

JACOB: the butcher's son, 13

*HINDY: his sister, about 6

*ESTHER: an elderly neighbor

*HALINA: a wealthy Polish woman

*MIRIAM: a young woman

*ZAZU: a wild looking woman

*HINDY, ESTHER, HALINA, MIRIAM and ZAZU should
all be played by the same actor.

NOTE: Music for "Shabat Hamalka" (also known as "The
Sabbath Bride") can be found in the back of the book.

Clever Rachel

(The dining room of an inn in a small Jewish village in late-19th-century Poland. L is a door that leads out into the narrow street. On the upstage wall, there is a swinging half-door into the kitchen and a serving window through which food—and commentary—can be passed. R is the door leading to the family's rooms and a guest room for the rare overnight traveler. On one side are two small square tables with three or four sturdy stools at each. On the other side, there is a small pot-bellied stove or fireplace with an overstuffed chair close to the warmth. It is Friday afternoon. We hear a lively klezmer melody featuring a clarinet. SHLOMO, aged about 10, comes in wearily from school, carrying his books. He drops the books on a table, rubs his eyes and goes into the kitchen.)

SILKA *(from offstage as the music fades away)*. Shlomo, is that you?

SHLOMO. Yes, Mama.

SILKA *(offstage)*. Are you hungry?

SHLOMO. Yes, Mama.

(We see SHLOMO through the serving window, cutting a slice from a loaf of bread, upon which he spreads some honey from a pot. Then he places it into the serving window.)

SILKA *(offstage)*. Make yourself something to eat.

SHLOMO. Yes, Mama.

SILKA *(offstage)*. But don't open the oven. Papa's making rugelach.

SHLOMO. Yes, Mama.

(Then he comes out through the swinging door, reclaims his snack and is about to take a huge bite when SILKA enters quickly from R.)

SILKA. Shlomo! What are you eating?

(Startled, SHLOMO drops the bread, and it lands on the floor.)

SHLOMO. Mama! Look what you made me do!

SILKA. Me? I made you do it? You shouldn't be eating the white bread—that is for the customers. You eat the black bread, please.

SHLOMO. I know. I'm sorry.

SILKA. Now clean up the mess. There is honey all over the floor.

SHLOMO. No, Mama, look! The bread fell with the honey side up. It's still good to eat.

SILKA. Don't tell me any lies! The bread always falls with the honey side down. Look more carefully!

SHLOMO. Mama, *you* look. See! The honey side is up. The floor is clean. I can still eat it.

SILKA. *Oy vey! Vey is mir!* What does it mean? The bread always falls with the honey side down!

(At that moment, her husband, LEV, enters from R. He wears an apron covered with flour, as he has been baking for the Sabbath.)

LEV. What is all the noise? Shlomo is back from school already?

SHLOMO. Look, Papa. I dropped the bread and it fell with the honey side up!

LEV. Really! (*He inspects the bread from all angles.*) That's amazing. (*He smothers a smile.*)

SILKA. Don't make light. This is a serious matter!

LEV. Of course it is.

SILKA. What does it mean?

LEV. I can't imagine.

SILKA. Lev, don't smile like that! This could be dangerous! How can this happen?

LEV. Call Rachel! Let her explain it.

SILKA. Yes, Shlomo—get your sister. Rachel can explain it. Only Rachel.

SHLOMO. She isn't back yet. Her school is twice as far as mine.

LEV. And she walks twice as slow. I know it.

SILKA. This is an evil omen for sure. It must be a bad sign. (*She spits three times to ward off demons.*) Lev, do something!

LEV. Hush, Silka! Don't worry so much. Rachel will have an explanation.

(RACHEL enters from the street. She has a notebook, but no books.)

RACHEL. Good afternoon, Mama, Papa, Shlomo. (*She smells the baking.*) Oh, Papa's making rugelach!

SILKA. It's not ready yet. And besides it's for the customers.

RACHEL. But sometimes there are leftovers. (*She gives them each a kiss, but SHLOMO's kiss is rather perfunctory.*) What's the matter?

SILKA. Look, Rachel. Shlomo's bread! He dropped it and it fell with the honey side up. What does it mean?

RACHEL. Shlomo! Are you eating the white bread?

SHLOMO. I'm sorry!

RACHEL. And dropping it on the floor, too?

SHLOMO. Mama scared ... *(Thinks better of it.)* I'm sorry!

SILKA *(becoming quite agitated)*. But look! The honey side is up! How can that be?

RACHEL. Hmm? *(Father and daughter exchange a look.)*
What does Papa say?

LEV. Papa says that *you* should explain it.

RACHEL. Hmmm. *(She takes a careful look at the bread, and examines the loaf, the knife and the honey pot with a Sherlock Holmes scrutiny.)*

SILKA. What does it mean? Is it an evil omen?

RACHEL. Aha! I see, I see! It's quite simple really. *(Returning to the dining room.)* Shlomo, you weren't paying attention when you put the honey on the bread, were you?

SHLOMO. I'm sorry! I was tired. I almost fell asleep at school.

RACHEL. Well, then, it's obvious. A slice of bread has two sides, and you put the honey on the wrong side. So, of course, when it fell, the side with the honey, which was the wrong side, was up, and the right side, the side you were supposed to put the honey on, was down.

LEV. Of course! That's very logical. I knew *you* could explain it.

(The others all heave a sigh of relief. SILKA gives SHLOMO a big hug.)

SILKA. Oh, Rachela, thank you. I was so worried it might be something worse. *(‘Rachela’ is pronounced with the guttural ‘ch’.)*

RACHEL. It's nothing to worry about, Mama. *(She takes a bite of the bread and hands it back to SHLOMO, who wolfs it down.)*

LEV. That's my Rachel. (*He gives her a big hug.*) Quick—
what crosses the river but cannot move?

RACHEL. Oh, Papa, I've known that one since I was a baby.

SHLOMO (*mouth full of bread*). What crosses the river but
cannot move? How can it cross the river without moving?

RACHEL (*giving SHLOMO an affectionate swat*). The bridge,
you *meshugganah*.

SHLOMO (*stuffs the last of the bread into his mouth*). Oh, I
get it. Good one, Papa.

LEV. "If I'm dropped, I'm sure to crack. But show me a smile,
and I'll always smile back."

SHLOMO. What? "If I'm dropped, I'm sure to crack. But
show me a smile, and I'll always smile back."

LEV. That's it. (*SHLOMO shrugs.*)

RACHEL. Papa, it's too easy. A mirror.

SHLOMO. A mirror? Oh, I get it! If you drop it, it cracks,
but if you smile, it smiles back. It's your own face you see,
isn't it?

LEV. Very good, Shlomo. Give thanks to God, your sister is
the cleverest girl in the whole village. Maybe in the whole
country?

SILKA. But clever doesn't get us ready for the Sabbath.
Rachel, help me clean the guest room. Shlomo, put away
your books. And you, Lev, stop wasting time with your
riddles. Make sure the stables are cleaned up.

LEV. The stables are clean.

SILKA. You should go and check.

LEV. Yes, Silka, my love, as soon as I check on the *rugelach*.
(*He exits into the kitchen.*)

SILKA. Rachel? Shlomo?

RACHEL & SHLOMO (*simultaneously*). Yes, Mama. (*They
exit R.*)

SILKA. Oh, Lord. Thank you for giving me two wonderful children. But why did you split up the brains so unfairly. To the girl you give the brains! Why? Oh Lord, what does a girl need with brains?

(Suddenly, a young girl of about 6 runs in from L. She is clinging tightly to a cloth doll and fighting back tears.)

HINDY. I want ... I want ... I want Rachel. Is Rachel here?

SILKA. Hindy, what is wrong?

HINDY. I want to see Rachel. *(Crying.)*

SILKA. Of course, she just came home from school. Sit. I'll get her for you. *(She exits R, calling out.)* Rachela! You have a visitor.

(LEV peeks through the window, unseen. Just then HINDY gives out a huge howl, and LEV ducks out of sight with a whispered, "Oy!")

RACHEL *(entering)*. Hindy! What's wrong? What's the matter?

HINDY. Oh, Rachel! *(Gives her a big hug.)* My brother is so mean! He threw Bielke in the road!

RACHEL. Is she all right?

HINDY. She could have been stepped on by a horse. My brother is so mean! He hates me!

RACHEL. Hindy! Nobody hates you! Calm down and tell me what happened.

HINDY *(slowly gains control)*. Jacob ... Jacob ... Jacob thinks he is so smart. Well, he *is* smart, but ... he isn't as smart as you.

RACHEL. I'm not so smart.

HINDY. You are! You are the smartest person in the whole world!

RACHEL. And being smart is not so easy, anyway! Nobody likes smart people.

HINDY. Nobody likes Jacob. I hate him!

RACHEL. You don't hate him. He's your brother.

HINDY. You don't know him.

RACHEL. I've seen him around. My brother Shlomo likes him. He is always talking about how Jacob said this, and Jacob said that ...

HINDY. Yes! Little kids like him.

RACHEL. I know. Little kids like me, too.

HINDY. I like you better than anybody.

RACHEL. Hindy, tell me what's the matter.

HINDY. I used to think Jacob was the smartest person in the world. But when I started school this year, I met you, and you are much nicer than Jacob, and ... and ... and just as smart. And so I told Jacob that Bielke was smart like you. And he said that she was only a dumb doll. And I said no she was smart like Rachel. And he said girls couldn't be smart. And I said they could, and so he grabbed Bielke and threw her in the road. And I'm not supposed to go in the road and ... and ... and I started crying, and then ... and then ... and then I said *he* was a dumb doll, and that you were smarter than he was, and then he got really mad and he said he would see about that, and now I've gotten you in trouble, and you won't like me anymore.

RACHEL. Hindy! That isn't true. I will always like you.
(*Hugs her.*)

HINDY. You have a nice brother, and I have a mean brother. And ... and ... and ... you have a mama, and I don't have one! (*Starts to tear up again.*)

RACHEL. I know, Hindy! It's sad. But you have me for a friend, so whenever you need to talk, you can come talk to me. (*To Bielke.*) And you come with her. I love seeing you, little Bielke. (*She animates the doll, and HINDY starts to giggle. As Bielke.*) OK, big Rachel, I love seeing you, too.

HINDY. But Jacob will do something mean ... I know he will.

RACHEL. I don't think so. Sisters sometimes think that their own brothers are obnoxious, but that doesn't mean they really are. Sometimes Shlomo makes me mad, too; but in five minutes we are friends again.

HINDY. For sure?

RACHEL. For sure.

HINDY. What does "obnosshus" mean?

RACHEL. It means someone who throws your dolly in the road.

HINDY. Yes! Well, Jacob is most definitely obnosshus then.

RACHEL. Just leave him alone for a while. By supper time, you will be friends again. I promise.

HINDY. Oh, thank you, Rachel. I feel better already.

(LEV appears at the window with a slice of bread and honey.)

RACHEL. Here, Hindy, take a slice of bread and honey.

HINDY. Oh, thank you! White bread! We never have white bread! *(She takes a big bite.)* That's good!

RACHEL. Papa baked it. Now there is somebody who is really smart!

(LEV and RACHEL exchange a look, and RACHEL gestures "thanks." LEV ducks out of sight as SILKA returns from R.)

SILKA. Hindy, are you still here? It will be the Sabbath soon. Does your papa know where you are?

HINDY. I'm going home now. *(She hugs RACHEL, then shyly hugs SILKA and exits.)*

SILKA. Is everything all right?

RACHEL. Just a fight with her brother.

SILKA. Ah. That happens.

RACHEL. Mama?

SILKA. Rachel?

RACHEL. Mama, can girls be smart?

SILKA. What do you mean?

RACHEL. Can girls be as smart as boys?

SILKA. What a question.

(LEV appears in the window.)

RACHEL. Hindy thinks I'm smart; even smarter than her brother.

And Papa tells me I'm smart all the time. *(Pause.)* I'm not sure

I want to be smart. What good is it? *(Another pause.)*

SILKA *(seeing LEV)*. I think your papa loves you.

LEV. Of course I do.

(LEV and SILKA exchange a look, there is another long pause.)

RACHEL. I better finish cleaning the guest room. *(She runs out R.)*

SILKA. You see!

(It is an old argument between them.)

LEV. You know very well that I think it is OK for girls to be smart. I think you are smart, too.

SILKA. Oy! *(Spits three times.)* Don't say such a thing!

LEV. It's true.

SILKA. Don't say that to anybody!

LEV. Me? My lips are sealed.

SILKA *(finds a broom and begins to sweep the dining room)*.

And the stables? Who is cleaning the stables?

LEV. Of course. The stables. In a minute.

SILKA. A minute. I know about you and your “minute.”

LEV. Yes, Silka, my love. (*He disappears again.*)

(*Suddenly, an old woman bursts into the room from the street.*)

ESTHER. Where is Rachel? I have to see Rachel right now!

SILKA. Good Sabbath, Esther. How are you today?

ESTHER. Forgive me, Silka. I am forgetting my manners. Good Sabbath. (*Smelling.*) Oh, is that *rugelach* I’m smelling?

LEV (*unseen, from the kitchen*). Come back in a half-hour. It’s not ready yet.

ESTHER. OK, OK! But I didn’t come for *rugelach*. I am in trouble. Big trouble.

SILKA. What’s the matter?

ESTHER. Reb Wulff, the butcher, has bet me a chicken that I can’t figure out his riddle. I need that chicken or we won’t have a good Sabbath dinner tonight.

SILKA. Calm down, it will be all right. (*Calls out.*) Rachel!

RACHEL (*enters with SHLOMO*). What is it? Ah, Mrs. Hershkowitz, good Sabbath.

SILKA. Esther has a riddle for you—and a chicken dinner is waiting to be cooked and eaten.

RACHEL. Well? What is it?

ESTHER. “I am a box with no corners or sides. I hold a golden treasure inside.”

SHLOMO. Oh, I know! I know!

SILKA. OK, Shlomo, what is it?

SHLOMO. It’s a pirate’s chest full of gold. I read about such things in a book once.