

# **BACK TO THE SOIL**

**A play by Sheldon Wolf**

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This play was inspired by the book

*Back to the Soil*

by Robert Alan Goldberg

and is written with permission of the author

## **BACK TO THE SOIL**

### **CAST**

**BENJAMIN BROWN, male, 26**

**OLD ISAAC HERBST, male, 70**

**ISAAC HERBST, male 50**

**Numerous other characters** performed by 6-8 male actors, all ages 20-30, with changes of hats, glasses, beards and mustaches, full costumes. Occasionally, specific characters are mentioned, but generally these characters are indicated as “VOICE.”

### **SETTING**

An empty stage.

The action of the play moves occurs in several major east coast cities and Utah, 1910-12, and simultaneously in New Jersey 1939.

(A variation on the setting might be the addition of a white screen to cover the entire upstage wall. Projections of historic images might fill that screen, especially at the start of the second act.)

## **BACK TO THE SOIL**

### **ACT ONE**

*(Sounds of klezmer music played on a harmonica. Lights up on an empty stage. Lights come up brighter, golden, on the various actors, here identified as VOICES, as they speak. The actors reflect a street scene in the garment district, New York, 1910, everyone frozen, then all in motion. OLD HERBST age 70, steps out of the commotion into a brighter light downstage. He is the only character dressed in a suit and tie, late 1930s style. All other characters exist in 1911-12.)*

#### **OLD HERBST**

Welcome to America. Or the little slice of it on the Lower East Side allowed to Jews like me, Isaac Herbst. A greenhorn from across the Atlantic.

#### **VOICE**

*(from the golden light)*

Gut Shabbos, Mister Herbst.

#### **OLD HERBST**

Gut Shabbos. Gut Shabbos. You see I'm talking, no?

#### **VOICE**

So, excuse me for living.

#### **OLD HERBST**

The streets were paved with gold. It's true. On my street alone, there were six Goldbergs, Goldfarb, three Goldwassers, Golden, Goldbridge...fancy dancy...Goldenstein, Goldenfeld and Goldenberg. And if you put all that gold together, you couldn't buy a bagel or a fresh sour pickle from the pushcart. In winters, we froze our tuchases in the walk-up tenements, and in summers we gasped for oxygen in the air shafts. A stinky breeze was a gift from HaShem.

#### **WORKER 1**

In Philadelphia, some of the row houses even stood vertical. When you filled a cup for kiddush, the wine spilled over on the downhill side. We were surrounded by the Italians and the Irish, a refreshing change from the Russians and Poles. Some of us found jobs on the docks or the clothing factories. Some found fists in the face, but, of course, they were fists of Philadelphia's Brotherly Love.

**WORKER 2**

And in Baltimore, the mice found us, thousands crammed together, choking, hungry. In case it wasn't crowded enough, some took in boarders while the children slept on the floor under the kitchen table.

**WORKER 3**

And in Newark, 1910, six young girls died in a factory fire. The wooden floors were soaked in oil that leaked from the over-worked machines.

**OLD HERBST**

And in everywhere, we Jews tried to scratch out a life. We worked our needles by the piece in our houses, the fibers clogging the lungs. In the workrooms, we cut, we sewed. "Do more," the bosses said. "Meet the quota. Meet the new quota." Talking while sewing? Forget it. Eating? Who had food for lunch? Aching? Bleeding? These were allowed. And then we did more when we got home, just a make another penny.

**WORKER 4**

Better than over there. Better than the pogroms.

**WORKER 5**

There, they beat us with clubs.

**WORKER 6**

Here, they beat us with the fear of getting fired. They beat us with factory windows closed so we won't get distracted. They take away our oxygen, and they take away our pride.

**WORKER**

We simply changed from one ghetto to another. Instead of the sting of the cossack's whip, we suffer the sting of the sweatshop boss. Instead of hours marked by the peasant church bells, they are marked by the endless whirl of the sewing machines.

**OLD HERBST**

"The Jews," a Polish poet wrote, "were captured in the act of life."

**WORKER 1**

Some days, dying starts to look good, no?

**WORKER 2**

Red nisht azoy! Sha!

**WORKER 3**

The boss is coming. He looks angry.

**WORKER 4**

His wife must've said no to sex.

**WORKER 5**

Or maybe that big cow said yes! And crushed him.

**WORKER 6**

It will be better in America for our children. For them there will be gold.

**WORKER 2**

Sha! He's watching us.

**OLD HERBST**

The streets were where the business happened.

**RADICAL**

*(suddenly slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Workers! We do not have to accept these conditions. If all of us together stop working-

**A VOICE IN THE CROWD**

We all stop eating!

**RADICAL**

And what are we eating now? Old bread. Old meat. The owners eat caviar, and we eat dust, groveling at their feet. Now is the time to rise up! Join our brother workers all around the world.

**OBSERVANT MAN**

*(slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Workers! Now is the time to rise up and say our morning prayers. Our God has taken us from Egypt. Our God has taken us from the Inquisition. Our God has taken us from the hands of the Czars. Surely our God will take us from South Philadelphia and lead us to redemption. Baruch HaShem. Praised is his holy name.

**ZIONIST**

*(slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Workers! We must reclaim Zion, land of Abraham, land of Isaac, land of Jacob, land of our forefathers. The Promised Land awaits us. With the help of HaShem, we will re-build our ancient homeland, brick by brick, acre by acre. In Palestine, we will be free. In the new Zion, we will find our redemption. In the Land of Israel, we will find peace.

**VOICE**

We'll find the Turks and the Arabs, God forbid.

**UNIONIST**

*(slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Workers! Landsmen!

**FACTORY WORKER**

*(slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Workers! Jews!

**BROWN**

*(BENJAMIN BROWN, 26, virile, slams a wooden crate on the stage, and then stands on it)*

Farmers!

**VOICE**

Who is he talking to?

**VOICE**

What is this joke, farmers?

**BROWN**

And why not? “Why not we...? Why do we not, oh, Jewish workers, use the opportunity to better our lot in life? Why don’t we organize ourselves into groups and grasp the privileges which are open to us in this land?” America! It doesn’t matter how much you observe or what you believe. This is about land, this is about reclaiming our inner strength, we the men of Zion. Yes, this is about being men again, not lambs, not sheep, not victims of the pogroms or the police or the politicians. Everything holds us down, but we can rise. We can rise up to the clouds, to the angels.

**VOICE**

A messugah!

**VOICE**

Farmers. Ha!

**VOICE**

The only thing I grow is older.

**VOICE**

Imagine me milking cows!

**BROWN**

Am I crazy? I ask you: is this poverty what you imagined? When you were escaping Ukraine in the hay wagons or on the boats gasping for air for oxygen...at Ellis Island, when they checked your eyes for infection, was

this what you saw? The sweat shops, the filthy streets, the rats. The loss of dignity?

I'm not just spinning stories. I've been there, out West. I went there to be sure, for you. I wanted to be certain: Is it possible for a Jew to be a farmer? I worked hard every day doing everything that is demanded of a farmer. I hoed. I shoveled manure. I cut and picked. I looked in the mirror in the evening and I saw: I am a farmer and I am a Jew.

Now then, if I can work on a farm, why should other Jews not be able to do it? But I don't mean work for other people. I mean work for ourselves. We can all own a piece of the land, together, side by side, a piece of heaven. And we work for us. Not them!

**VOICE**

Work for us? All I know are needles.

**BROWN**

Yes, brothers, dignity is what comes to you on the land. We Jews are men, strong men, able to flex our muscles and OWN something. Own our lives. Own our souls. It's out there. It waits for us, this land of milk and honey. Lush green land to farm. Clear water, not from a dirty pipe, but from ancient springs deep underground, using the most modern irrigation.

**VOICE**

*(with a strong Yiddish accent)*

Ah, irrigation!

**VOICE**

What does this mean, irrigation?

**BROWN**

You bring water from one place to another in a channel in the ground.

**VOICE**

Now, this one sounds smart.

**VOICE**

Like water from a rock!

**VOICE**

Like Moses.

**HERBST**

I know irrigation. I can help.

## **OLD HERBST**

*(to audience)*

When I left Berlin, I had such hopes. After all, I was one of the lucky ones, with a college degree in Engineering, and a long-term job offer, in writing! The writing, it turns out, must have been made in invisible ink. There was no long-term job, unless you call six months long-term. But at least I had that, that history. Many men had even less.

Of course, some of my fellow German Jews had everything. The Strauss's and the Bloomingdales. They were well on the way to their fortunes. I was now on my way with Benjamin Brown, a sliver of iron to his electro-magnet, lost in his shadow.

## **BROWN**

Cloudless blue sky and fresh air to breathe, so clean it hurts the lungs. In America there is space. Space all around, acres of space for everybody who wants to work for it. Space to be men again. Other men have gone to find their fortune. Other men, real men, have followed their hearts. And now, the soil they plow yields the fruits we buy at premium in the market. They work the land, and we pay the price. So, why not we, my fellow Jews? Why can't we, too, act like real men?

## **RABBI LEVY**

*(a young rabbi, tall black hat)*

It is my contention as a representative of the of the Jewish Agriculturists Aid Society, based in Chicago, that our people were originally farmers, but we were driven to commercial business by outer forces, and it is the purpose of the society to bring the poor Jew back to the farm.

## **GOVERNOR SPRY**

*(50s, suit and tie, mustache)*

As Governor of the State of Utah, I can promise that we have a farm for you!

## **VOICE**

Utah? Is that in New Jersey?

## **GOVERNOR SPRY**

The people of Utah are broadminded, aggressive, intelligent, loyal Americans, who are deeply interested in the development and upbuilding of their State and the west. They know how to extend the helping hand to those who are building homes and rearing families. The spirit of pioneering, in its broadest sense, is with the people of this State. In civic

affairs Utah is noted for its sane, liberal legislative enactments. Capital and energy invested in Utah are alike safeguarded by wise laws.

**BROWN**

This is our chance. We have nothing to lose.

**GOVERNOR SPRY**

We have resources, we have opportunities, we need settlers and investments, and it is my pleasure to extend to you, on behalf of the State of Utah, a most cordial invitation to investigate the State, its resources, its people, and its prospects, feeling sure that such investigation will result in locating your colony in Utah.

**RABBI LEVY**

We Jews will become a great factor in agriculture and will prove even more interested in it than in the needle industry and clothes manufacturing. The state of Utah offers excellent opportunities for the extension of the work, and hundreds of Jewish families will soon be located within its boundaries on small acreages.

**VOICE**

We'll have a community. A shtetl like in the Old Country. A colony.

**GOVERNOR SPRY**

Mr. Brown, I assure you, it is among the very choicest agricultural lands in the state.

**ANOTHER UTAHAN**

*(laughing)*

Governor, tell them the truth. It is desolate, unusable. We would never let our children go on land like that.

**GOVERNOR SPRY**

Buyer beware. Buyer beware.

**BROWN**

*(to the workers)*

The land is of excellent quality, I am told. Soil rich and dark and brown like mahogany. And soon it will be served by an up-to-date canal that will provide all the water we need. The State is finishing that canal even as we speak, so the land will be perfectly ready for planting. We'll have 40-acre plots and some 80-acre plots. There's land enough for everyone.

**GOVERNOR SPRY**

While the land falling under the canal was appraised at figures starting at from \$3.00 per acre, the state sold over 6,000 acres to the Clarion colonists for \$11.20 per acre with an additional charge of \$35.00 per share of water in the Piute or State Canal. Title to the land and water was to remain with the state of Utah until final payment was made.

**VOICE**

Over there, they wouldn't allow us to own land.

**VOICE**

How do we sign up?

**BANKER**

Our bank is happy to loan you the money. Welcome to Utah.

**VOICE**

What do we have to give?

*(change of light, focus on BROWN and HERBST)*

**BROWN**

You, sir. I see from your face that you are interested. You'll join me. This will be good.

**HERBST**

I'm an engineer with no prospects. Isaac. Isaac Herbst. I worked a little for Otis. So, out there in the West, should the farm need an elevator...

**BROWN**

Isaac, this is new for me, too. Come. I can see already how we'll fit. We'll learn together.

**HERBST**

And what, may I ask, are we learning?

**BROWN**

Magnets. That's science, right?

**HERBST**

Magnets.

**BROWN**

How to attract people. We need to attract shareholders. Jewish farmers.

**HERBST**

Mathematically...since you know me as an engineer...mathematically, approximately how many farmers do you think you will find on the Lower East Side?

**BROWN**

And Newark. And Baltimore.

**HERBST**

And Newark and Baltimore! That increases the odds by exactly zero. Mr. Brown, you make me laugh.

**BROWN**

You're not thinking, my friend. These farmers are men who may not have work now, they may not be farmers now, they may not know where they are going now, but they have a dream. Of getting out. Of making a change and taking a chance. For the women. For the children. For the elderly parents. There are visionaries in these cities. You have children, Isaac?

**HERBST**

Two. Two girls.

**BROWN**

Tell me...

**HERBST**

My Hannaleh is nine already. Tall. Serious. Beautiful red hair like her mother. And Devorah is six, a ball of energy.

**BROWN**

And this...this schmutz...look honestly around you, this is what you want for two smart and pretty girls. Beautiful girls. Girls with energy. Playing in the street with who knows who, learning who knows what, and bruising their knees and who knows what else. When you close your eyes, this is the picture you imagine for them? A life with no future, a life without hope, without any prospect beyond a needle and thread. Wrinkled old hands. Old faces with the light in their eyes burnt out from piecework?

**HERBST**

Of course, I want more.

**BROWN**

Yes. You love them.

**HERBST**

But farming? What do I know from farming?

**BROWN**

What do farmers know about farming when they're just getting started? Farming can be taught. It's the attitude that matters. And a smart head, an engineer's head like yours. Smarts. Sechel! Plus a few dollars to buy a share of the future.

**HERBST**

A few dollars? How much is "a few?"

**BROWN**

A cheap price for hope, no? An investment in hope.

**HERBST**

And who has a few dollars?

**BROWN**

Surely someone. A sister or brother.

**HERBST**

Ha! Speak to the Cossacks.

**BROWN**

A mother-in-law with a secret pocket in her coat.

**HERBST**

Oh, you know her?

**BROWN**

I know you, Isaac Herbst. I want you to be the first. The partner that made it all happen. The one with courage. And vision.

**HERBST**

Isaac Herbst: Engineer, Farmer and Visionary.

**BROWN**

They'll write that about you one day. Don't laugh.

**HERBST**

I'm laughing. I'm crying. I have so little to lose, what the hell.

**BROWN**

Mazel tov! Now, come. We'll learn together how to sell shares. As partners. Yes?

**HERBST**

*(laughing)* Yes. Yes. Wait 'til I tell my wife. Or maybe you should tell her.

**BROWN**

Family will be important later. Now we need shareholders.

**HERBST**

Yes. *(shouting)* Farmers. All you farmers in Newark, we are coming for you.

*(lights change)*

**OLD HERBST**

So, with my engineering degree in my back pocket, I went with Brown on a preliminary scouting expedition. The land they showed us was virgin soil with sagebrush and wild grasses, located in Sevier Valley, Sanpete County, three miles west and north of Axtell and seven miles south and west of Gunnison. In all, there were about 6,085 acres, state land, administered by the Utah State Board of Land Commissioners, Shares. It was arable, they said. Good to be farmed with just a little care. I did the math. Each farmer would have shares of the whole. Three hundred and fifty dollars per share.

**BROWN**

My partner here has worked out the arithmetic. Each farmer will have shares of the whole successful arable operation. A money-making bargain at only three hundred and fifty dollars.

**VOICE**

Shares like the Socialists? I'm not going with Socialists.

**VOICE**

How much?

**VOICE**

Where am I supposed to get three hundred fifty? Under a tree? From my big investments? I'm not a Carnegie or a Morgan.

**BROWN**

This, my friends, is no longer a joke. Utah is waiting for us. The Utah government believes in a group of Jews who want to make a go of it. Utah wants to do business with us. We, here and now, we are the vanguard of a life-changing Jewish movement to go back to the soil. No longer will we be victim. No longer will be at the mercy of the bosses. Therefore, we must succeed, we dare not fail.

Our people have lived for hundreds of years in this country which has the nerve to call itself "Christian" and tries to make believe that the Jew is only fit to be a petty trader, that he does not take a citizen's interest in the land he lives. The work in Utah is going to be a living demonstration against the false and erroneous charges made against us. If we choose the right place, we will succeed, not just for us, but for all American Jews. And we have the right place. I have looked at the land with my new friend, Isaac Herbst. Isaac, say a word.

**HERBST**

There is lots of land. And they promised a canal-

**BROWN**

They believe in us. Don't we believe in us?

**VOICE**

Yes, Brown, I believe. And I believed the czar would protect us.

**VOICE**

And I believe in my pocketbook.

**VOICE**

And I believe I have mouths at home to feed. We're young men with families.

**VOICE**

You seem to be the reasonable one, Mister Herbst. How much will it cost us? In the long run?

**BROWN**

You are right. You don't have to follow me. You don't have to buy in. As responsible family men, you can leave your children an inheritance of malnourishment and tuberculosis. Or, just like the Children of Israel as they entered the waters of the Red Sea, you can have faith that leads to action. Ours is not a religion of waiting for tomorrow. We are commanded to do. Are you just filled with words, or are you so fed up with your lives that you're ready to do something?

**VOICE**

But-

**BROWN**

But. But. But. But. But. Like a bunch of geese.

**VOICE**

Do you have children, Brown.

**BROWN**

You are my children. Kinderlach. Men! Let's leave this stink hole.

**VOICE**

This stink hole includes my wife. My mother.

**VOICE**

My son.

**BROWN**

You will make money enough to send for them, right Isaac?

**HERBST**

I'm told that is the plan.

**BROWN**

Imagine your wife baking challahs from the wheat we grow, making brisket from our cattle. Your mother makes kugel from the potatoes we grow. The smells of the kitchen are intoxicating.

**HERBST**

Your girls and my girls skip rope in the sunlight. Everything is warm. Life is golden and sweet as honey. Sweet as milk and honey.

**BROWN**

*(to HERBST)*

Yes!

**OLD HERBST**

And so, young Isaac Herbst the Shnook was on his way to be a farmer in Utah with nothing but a pocket full of promises.

*(TRAIN WHISTLE)*

A dozen of us met at the station. We brought along some clothes, and we brought what skills we had, most of which had no value in Utah.

**VOICE**

I was a trimmer for the butcher.

**VOICE**

I was a tailor.

**VOICE**

A presser.

**VOICE**

A dockworker.

**BROWN**

On this adventure, my landsmen, there are no troubles. I studied at the Jewish Farm School. Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

**VOICE**

There is such a thing?

**VOICE**

You have a certificate?

**BROWN**

Founded by none other than the beloved Joseph Krauskopf, Rabbi of Congregation Knesset Israel of Philadelphia. You'll meet him, and you'll be impressed.

**KRAUSKOPF**

*(dapper, trimmed beard, wire-rimmed glasses)*

We wanted the best the city could offer us in mind, in body, and in spirit. We wanted the boys with ideals and dreams who felt that living meant working and creating under the open sky.

**BROWN**

Yes, he taught us, "Science with practice." And we will follow his lead. We will practice. We will learn all the latest scientific procedures. We will be modern Jews. Successful Jews.

**VOICE**

I went once to Philadelphia. Where America was born.

**BROWN**

And, we, too, will be re-born.

**VOICE**

It was for a funeral.

**VOICE**

You know so much about farming from this farm school?

**BROWN**

I took courses. We will learn more together.

**VOICE**

Ah, courses! Such a scholar!

**VOICE**

This Rabbi Krauskopf, he believes in tools? We have no tools.

**BROWN**

We will find tools. You need more faith, Bernstein.

**BERNSTEIN**

I have faith. But I have no skills. I'm a steamfitter. And I have no steam.

**VOICE**

*(whispers)*

Listen, schmrendrick. Brown is a smart one. He's a graduate of the International Farm School! He has been to courses.

**BERNSTEIN**

*(loud sarcastic whisper)*

Has he ever been to a bank? How do we pay for all this?

**VOICE**

Pack your bags. We're going to Utah. That's American for, "The Promised Land."

**TICKET TAKER**

Tickets, please.

**VOICE**

Chaim. Factory worker, New York City. Place of Origin: Vilna

**VOICE**

Laundryman from Minsk, Russia

**VOICE**

Boris, a fine stitcher of ladies undergarments. Tirospol, Russia;

**VOICE**

Morris Weissenberg, artist, Jitomir, Russia;

**VOICE**

Machinist, Odessa, Russia

**VOICE**

Place of origin: Walinsky, Russia. Occupation, I guess, farmer.

**ALL**

Ahhhhhhhhh! We are farmers!

*(A long train whistle.)*

**VOICE**

All aboard.

**BROWN**

Just follow me, boys!

*(From offstage, each grabs a cloth satchel or a used suitcase, sitting on it, as if on seats on a train. Some are reading. Some are praying. Some are sleeping. At each city, they switch roles/positions.)*

**VOICE**

Albany, New York

**BROWN**

The objectives and purposes of this corporation shall be:

To organize, found, establish, locate and encourage a Colony, in the County of San Pete, State of Utah, and in other counties in the State of Utah, or in other States and Territories of the United States, and other countries outside of the United States; and for the purpose of encouraging, aiding, assisting and providing for such colonies to plant, grow and cultivate all kinds of grains, fruits and vegetables; to cut timber and deal in lumber; and to buy, sell and generally deal in lumber; and to buy, sell and generally deal in marble, stone, minerals and metals; . . .

**VOICE**

Niagra Falls.

**BROWN**

...to build, establish and maintain a canning factory, and to buy and sell canned goods; to establish, operate and conduct a hotel, store, packing house, warehouse, saw mill, and such other kinds and classes of mercantile and other businesses as may be beneficial or desired; to raise, buy, sell and generally deal in cattle and animals of all kinds ... to deal in, buy, sell, acquire, lease, sub-let, or farm-let real-estate, and to plant, improve, cultivate and develop the same ....

**VOICE**

Cleveland, Ohio.

**BROWN**

To purchase, construct, lease, operate and maintain electric lighting and power plants, buildings, constructions, machinery, appliances, equipments, fixtures, easements and appurtenances.

**VOICE**

Chicago, Illinois.

**BROWN**

To purchase, construct, lease, operate and maintain telephone lines and lines for electric light and power purposes.

**VOICE**

Des Moines, Iowa

**BROWN**

To purchase, construct, lease, operate, and maintain tramways, rights of way, easements and appurtenances.

**VOICE**

Omaha, Nebraska.

**HERBST**

Modesty is not his strong suit.

**BROWN**

To acquire by discovery, location, lease, license, bond, option, purchase, franchise, grant, gift, device, conveyance, agreement or otherwise, and to hold, possess, enjoy, construct, repair, develop, mine, work, operate, and exploit, lead, iron, coal, placer or lode gold, silver, or other mines, tunnels and mining and tunneling property, and any right title or interest therein, .

**VOICE**

Denver, Colorado.

**VOICE**

Just now, I was thinking, "What's wrong with me? What have I done? Who leaves a young family on Clinton Street, and goes to Utah of all places? Who does this? Who does this without the Cossacks chasing?"

**BROWN**

This is how it is done in America. Fortunes are made by taking risks, jumping in.

**VOICE**

Jumping off a cliff is more like it.

**VOICE**

Salt Lake City, Utah.

**VOICE**

Or following very, very wise men like our Moses.

**BROWN**

And now, men, grab your bags. It's only just a couple of quick hours by wagon to our beautiful new home.

*(ALL, now arranged as if in a wagon, legs hanging over the sides.)*

**HERBST**

Home. Where is home?

*(soft harmonica)*

**SINGER**

"Vu iz dos gesele, vu iz dos shtib?"

Where is the little street, where is the house?

Where is the girl, whom I do love?

Here is the little street, here is the house

Here is the girl whom I do love

The little street is gone, the house is gone

Gone is the girl whom I love

*(Others, overlapping, in Yiddish, singing louder, laughing.)*

**A FEW VOICES, THEN ALL**

Oy gib mir a heym vu di bufloksn geyn

Vu di hirshelekh shpiln oyfn land.

Keynmol hert men dort a fartumeltn vort

Un der himl iz bloy nokhanand..

Heym, heym oyfn land

Vu di hirshelekh shpiln banand.

Keynmol hert men dort a fartumeltn vort

Un der himl iz bloy nokhanand..

*(All are laughing now, raucous singing, loud banjo)*

Oh, give me a home, where the buffalo roam

Where the deer and the antelope play

Where seldom is heard, a discouragin' word

And the skies are not cloudy all day

Home, home on the range—

**BROWN**

Clarion, Utah.

*(Sudden silence. BROWN "jumps down," spreads out his arms to show off the new space. One by one, the men step out of the group and look around, examining, inspecting, all in silence.)*

**VOICE**

There's nothing here.

*(One plucked note on the banjo.)*

*(pause, looking)*

*(Another note.)*

*(They stop short. There is nothing on stage.)*

**VOICE**

There's nothing here!

**VOICE**

What is this, Brown? A joke?

**VOICE**

Rocks, rocks and more rocks.

**VOICE**

There was more grass growing in the sidewalk in Brooklyn.

**VOICE**

We own shares of dirt?

**VOICE**

Yes, but "arable" dirt.

**VOICE**

In Lithuania, we didn't even own the dirt. Hey, I own all these rocks! I'm rich! I'm a regular Carnegie!

**BROWN**

You laugh now. But you're not seeing.

**VOICE**

I'm seeing a quick skip outta here.

**BROWN**

Look under the surface. Under the rocks, there is opportunity. There's soil, rich and fertile, where seeds will take root. We'll see shoots of green from under those rocks, and then stalks of wheat and oats and barley. Corn will grow. And potatoes. We'll have so much, we'll sell it in the market, and then we'll sell the rest to the towns all around. If your hearts are open to it,

look carefully under those rocks. Move them aside, and there is freedom under those rocks. Freedom to be proud Jews in a new proud land. Freedom to be our own bosses, to stand strong and tall. No more stooping over the sewing machines. No more, "I'm upping your quota, Meltzer" No more dust in the air or threads of wool. We'll breathe deep. We'll breathe the air, clean and fresh to build our muscles. Sure, we'll work hard, and the days will be long. But then. Then! Then, the men will have tight bodies like King David, and the women, like Bathsheba, will come to your beds, and they will grow beautiful babies. There will be growth everywhere. The soil will feed us with God's gifts. And we'll be powerful like the Israelites of old. And every fiber of our being will be alive. Alive!

That's what I see.

*(The others touch the ground. Look to the horizon. Wipe their necks. One flexes his arm.)*

**VOICE**

Potatoes?

**BROWN**

Potatoes.

**VOICE**

Baked or mashed?

**HERBST**

*(sifting dirt through fingers, aside to BROWN)*  
It's even drier than when we saw it.

**BROWN**

*(whispers)* And this is the partner of hope? This is the partner that will attract others, that will sell shares to our brothers and friends. My, my, my.

*(to all)* Look at all these sorry faces that cannot see. Don't you see the potential? The opportunity?

**VOICE**

I see that we've been duped.

**VOICE**

I want my money back.

**HERBST**

You haven't yet paid your money

**VOICE**

I want my note back.

**HERBST**

When they finish this canal, water will flow right here like the Jordan. We have a firm commitment from the Governor himself.

**BROWN**

You have to be here to for the long haul. You can't say, "This is an experiment," or "I'll leave if it doesn't work out." Because, then you always have one hand on your suitcase, and the other hand, on its own, can't handle a shovel.

**VOICE**

Shoveling dirt.

**BROWN**

Imagine here a row of little houses, laid out along a road. Our carts will take us to those fields of wheat. And there, vegetables, enough to feed our children and a little extra to sell.

**VOICE**

If I should decide to stay, whose land is on the canal?

**BROWN**

Then, a little school.

**VOICE**

Teaching what? Talmud lies?

**VOICE**

Or Marx? I won't have a school teaching socialism.

**VOICE**

We don't have to teach socialism. This IS socialism!

**HERBST**

Or, as we used to say in Berlin: Oy!

**BROWN**

First, the fields. First, we prepare the land. We dig, and we plant. And others bring the lumber from the towns nearby, and they build. We set the stage for others, and then others, so our town starts to grow. Everyone owns a share of the success. Investors come. Philanthropists!

**VOICE**

Investors? In dirt and rocks?

**BROWN**

We are a model for all the other Jewish farm communities.

**VOICE**

You mean there are other fools?

**VOICE**

Are you finding them in Chelm?

**HERBST**

Oy. Oy. OY

**BROWN**

My friends, it is going to happen everywhere, and we are the vanguard. So, when you look at the ground, don't see rocks. See the future. You are the future. Here...HERE...we start the future. You see...there...already a pile of shovels and hoes and rakes, a gift from the Jews of Salt Lake City. All of the instruments are here, and now...NOW...the music starts. Home, home on the range...Home, home on the range...deer...and antelope play.

**VOICE**

Deer and antelope?

**VOICE**

These are kosher?

**BROWN**

...discouraging word... And look, the skies are not cloudy. Except for you, my partner, Isaac. For you, the skies are always cloudy.

**HERBST**

What can I do? I'm a serious German.

I'm with you, Brown. I'm a little skeptical, but I'm game.

**BROWN**

*(laughing)*

And Moses struck his staff to the rock, and the water flowed. Here, too, the water will flow. Faith, my friends. And sweat. Now, let's lay out the plots of land....

**HERBST**

Someone, take this tape and measure with me...

**VOICE**

As I said, "Whose land is right on the canal?"

*(Lights fade, except a single spotlight on HARRY, who is writing a letter.)*

**HARRY**

My Dear Ruthie. We have arrived, thanks to God, safe and sound. After much singing and laughing, we arrived at the site. And I must tell you what I saw. Nothing. I can look in all directions, and there is beautiful, glorious nothing. No tenements. No laundry hanging from windows. No streets crowded with rag pickers and carts with old shoes. Just beautiful, glorious nothing. Who knew America had such space? This is truly a country where dreams can grow. Soon, you will be here, too, and the children will have such freedom! And we will have a little house, a cottage with a garden, can you imagine? And your dear mother will have her own room. Can you imagine the privacy? Such a luxury for us. Yes, this America is a vast and wonderful place. Here, a simple tailor like me can think big. Here, we will have everything. I write you with love. Your Harry.

*(Lights fade to black, except a spot of moonlight. BROWN is revealed sitting with his feet in the dry canal. Upstage, one of the workers plays soft music.)*

**HERBST**

How long do you keep this up?

**BROWN**

Isaac?

**HERBST**

This act. This Moses charade. You talk like the pied piper, but you can see as well as me that we have been had. This land...land, ha...this dust is a joke, and we, you and I are at the butt end of the joke. How long before these men rise up? How long before they run us out?

**BROWN**

Isaac, I'm surprised at you, my co-founder.

**HERBST**

Are you? I thought you really had something going, but look. Not at your dream. Look at this dusty hell hole.

**BROWN**

I don't see it. I can't. I have to see only our dream.

**HERBST**

So, now it's "our dream."

**BROWN**

All of us.

**HERBST**

You're insulting me...us. Let's cut our losses now, and go back.

**BROWN**

We have nothing to go back to.

**HERBST**

So, we stay here and wait to fail.

**BROWN**

I...DO...NOT...FAIL.

**HERBST**

I touched nerve?

**BROWN**

You do NOT use that word. Not now. Not ever.

**HERBST**

Call it what you want. Break your back. Kill yourself. For what?

**BROWN**

For the future. There is no past. Only the future.

**HERBST**

Ben, Ben, Ben. I think sometimes they are right. You are a madman.

**BROWN**

I see only the future, Ben. Look at this canal. The Piute Canal, funded by the Board of Land Commissioners. The water will flow. The land will be fertile and rich. The wheat will reach the stars. Look how clear it is, Isaac. The stars are smiling on us.

**HERBST**

Smiling, or laughing.

**BROWN**

Isaac, I am Benjamin Brown, and I do not fail.

Now, you said you were a surveyor. So, nu? Survey.

*(HERBST sets up his equipment, extends a rope across the stage. This becomes a line for digging.)*

**OLD HERBST**

On November 11, 1911, Benjamin Brown filed all the State papers to establish the Jewish Agricultural and Colonial Association. Gunnison, Utah was listed as the principal place of business. Capitalization was noted as \$30,000, with twelve stockholders, those of us who had just arrived from cities in the East. The president of the Association was Benjamin Brown. The director of the Association was also Benjamin Brown.

*(Lights back up, the men appear, some with sleeves rolled up, one with no shirt, one or two in undershirts. Tools. They dig, preparing rows for planting. A rhythm of tools striking the ground, mixed with an "Oy" and a "Heh.")*

**VOICE**

Five days now, and the rocks still bubble up from the deep.

**VOICE**

And let me remind you, they gave the Jews the choicest land in the state of Utah.

**VOICE**

Then I pity the goyim. How do they live?

**VOICE**

They live by making money off of ignorant Jews.

**VOICE**

And their Jesus walked on water! What water? Look in the canal.

**VOICE**

In the nighttime, I pish more than that.

**VOICE**

So, is it worse than back there? It was better peddling old tin in the streets? In the shops, what would we be doing? We were so happy? At least here, we build muscles.

*(HE poses.)*

When our wives come, they won't recognize the men we have become.  
"Who is this sexy one," they'll say. What happened to my skin and bones  
shlepper?

*(One or two others start posing, lifting their shovels over their heads.)*

**VOICE**

Like a star of the Yiddish theatre.

**VOICE**

Like a man of muscles in the circus.

**VOICE**

*(high voice)* Oy, my sexy husband. I cannot keep off of you.

**VOICE**

Oy. Such a body he has!

**VOICE**

Look, I work just as much as you. But my muscles do nothing.

**VOICE**

*(high voice)* Ooooooh. I just love a skinny Minnie! Please let me jump your  
bones!

*(All laugh.)*

**VOICE**

Let us make a good go of it here, and you'll see the whole Jewish people  
returning to the land.

**VOICE**

(SONG: DER PEDLER- need Yiddish original words- see you tube)

Jew, how long will you wander around peddling and being a burden on  
your neighbors in the land?

It's shouted in the newspapers and it pricks like needles: "The Jew is a  
beggar; he sticks out his hand."

So, what is this peddling? It's just like begging!

A sick old man goes peddling to the Christians,

One takes a pin from his basket, out of curiosity, and so as not to say  
you're giving him money for nothing.

Jew, what are you looking for, the same work? It disgraces your good name.

Go read this dear sermon in the paper: It's better to be a farmer and take to the land.

Have your own house, a field and a garden -  
Sow there, plant there, just like everyone else.  
How honorable, how sure your life is there,  
And further, you have a chance to get rich after a while.

Who'll sharpen my eyes so I can see from afar,  
Oh, who'll give me such a telescope?  
So I can see the happy times  
When Jews no longer peddle and swindle.  
Everywhere I'll see Jews who are farmers  
Living together in peace and happiness...  
Then my heart will be peaceful and happy  
And I'll sing a song to the harvesters.

**VOICE**

Peaceful and happy. Who can imagine it?

**VOICE**

Soon, we plant the seeds. And then we see the miracle of nature.

**VOICE**

But we miss the magic ingredient.

*(Looking for water, they all gather at the edge of the stage, kneeling, standing, lying flat, looking into the "canal.")*

**VOICE**

So, nu.

**VOICE**

They promised water. They'll deliver.

**VOICE**

"They promised," the foreman says. All these promises give new meaning to "the promised land."

**VOICE**

This I can promise: there is no food for the lazy dog.

**VOICE**

Corn meal isn't food. Not for men with big, sexy muscles.

**VOICE**

Where is our great Mister Brown?

**VOICE**

He's off again, raising money.

**VOICE**

We schvitz, and he schmoozes.

**VOICE**

Everyone has a job.

**VOICE**

Let it be on record: I choose to be a schmoozer instead of a shoveler.

**VOICE**

Brown said-

**VOICE- FOREMAN**

“Brown said. Brown said.” Like little children. Genug! Enough! In September, we eat from the horn of plenty. Now, we dig.

*(One by one, they fall back into line. The rhythm of the tools and the Oys continues.)*

*(ONE sings softly.)*

**VOICE**

Everywhere I'll see Jews who are farmers  
Living together in peace and happiness...

*(The “skinny” one flexes his muscles as lights fade.)*

**KRAUSKOPF**

Dear Congregants of Knesset Israel. Thousands of Jewish immigrants from Philadelphia could be settled on the excellent lands adjoining those of the Jewish Colony of Utah... We shall then have dozens of Zions in our own land, thousands of Jewish farmers helping to make the United States to overflow with milk and honey.

**VOICE**

So, how do we help?

**KRAUSKOPF**

So, all that is needed to realize this dream...no, it is not a dream...it is already a working reality...all that is needed is money. Can we count on you to invest?

**VOICE**

Cohen pledges twenty-five.

**VOICE**

Steinberg pledges fifty. Anonymously.

**VOICE**

Thirty-six.

**VOICE**

Twenty. Do I get my name on something?

**BROWN**

*(typing)*

A Message from the Jewish Colony in the Far West: The hills west of the colony are thickly covered with pine and cedar trees, affording ample free fuel and material for fences and outbuildings. During certain seasons of the year the nearby rivers simply teem with fish...The sun shines in the valley for at least 325 days a year, the climate... invigorating, and few days in the year prevent outdoor work.

**HERBST**

*(nearby)*

That is not exactly the truth.

**BROWN**

I am just expanding the truth. A little. The ends are worth the means.

**HERBST**

These people...these men...I... am counting on you. I've left everything behind.

**BROWN**

Everything? You had nothing. No job. No money. No future. I'm giving you a future, Isaac, as my partner. Good days are coming. Good days are coming.

**HERBST**

Partner?

**BROWN**

*(typing again)*

The blue skies overhead by day and the teeming, starry night and moonlight fill men's hearts both with joy and faith. It seems that no sin can thrive here for it is so open and free that God's eye is not obscured anywhere.

**OLD HERBST**

*(to audience)*

Sin could not thrive. Nothing could thrive. There was no water.

**RABBI LANDMAN**

Yes, my Brooklyn friends, I am Rabbi Landman, and I work with Rabbi Krauskopf, founder of the Jewish Farm School, and I can tell you...I can assure you...our soil in Clarion will grow anything and grow it well.

**VOICE**

All we need is water.

**HERBST**

Yet again, we have been assured by the state-

**VOICE**

More assurances. We don't need assurances. We need water.

**HERBST**

That is why they are working upstream even as we speak.

**VOICE**

Yes, and the Christian farmers upstream divert the water for their own needs.

**VOICE**

Once again, the Jews get nothing.

**HERBST**

The people in charge-

**VOICE**

The people in charge are thieves! It's no different here from anywhere.

**VOICE**

I thought we were supposed to be in charge. I thought we were finally going to be masters of our own fate.

**HERBST**

We are masters. We use our knowledge and our skills. Since it is dry, we reinforce the banks of the canal so that, when it does flow, less of the precious water seeps into the ground. We haul the plentiful rocks and stack them up the canal walls. And we speak reason to the leaders in Gunnison to put pressure on our neighbors upstream. That is the plan.

**VOICE**

It isn't a plan. It's a prison sentence with a slow death.

**HERBST**

Meantime, we bring our cart and buckets again up to the hills and gather the freshest water direct from the streams. Who volunteers?

**VOICE**

*(to audience)*

Around this time, on a clear Sunday morning, the entire pioneer group gathered with bags, axes, and ropes to voyage in the mountains, in search of timber. Aside from the wood, we wanted to become well acquainted with the hills around, which had been tempting us. To us, city folk, the giant and often fog covered mountains were full of secrets and they summoned us with religious bliss and wonder.

**VOICE**

*(to audience)*

The day was wonderfully beautiful and sunny. traveling on the open roads, the autumn sun baked our bare heads. the flaxen wild grass on the flat meadows shined against the radiant sun. a river from afar joyfully smiled at the sunbeams coming down to earth; and the trees silently murmured, as if they were praying.

**VOICE**

Only God could make a place so beautiful.

**VOICE**

You're starting to sound like Brown.

**VOICE**

Where is Brown anyway?

**HERBST**

Chicago. With Rosenwald. The big Rosenwald of Sears.

**VOICE**

The zillionaire? We're talking now to zillionaires?

**HERBST**

People are starting to notice. Big, important people. And we must not give up.

**VOICE**

I will take the cart this time. I will get water. Who is coming with me?

**BROWN**

*(to ROSENWALD)*

No, it has not worked out exactly as planned, but it is working out. We have divided the land into individual tracts, and we have built the first cabins. The canal continues to be a challenge, but we have promises-

**ROSENWALD**

*(mustache, hair slicked, vest and ascot)*

One cannot drink promises. And your crops-

**BROWN**

We tried a cistern. But nothing.

**ROSENWALD**

You, my friend, are an enterprising young man. Here at Sears, we like your spirit.

**BROWN**

So, we have this cart and barrels-

**ROSENWALD**

Please, stop selling me. I am about to tell you that I will buy \$65,000 in Clarion bonds

**BROWN**

Sixty-five?

**ROSENWALD**

...if you, Mr. Brown, can convince the Jewish Agricultural Society to match my offer with a loan of its own.

**BROWN**

In New York?

**ROSENWALD**

I may be a leader in retail, Brown, but they are the leading authority in Jewish farm matters.

**BROWN**

Sixty-five thousand. Plus I have to get a match?

**ROSENWALD**

I know it is not what you asked. In these hard times, I can do only so much! Come back to Chicago with the match, and that money is yours. If I'm still on my cruise, speak to the girl.

**BROWN**

Hard times! I should have such hard times!

*(to HERBST)*

We are alive. We get to live.

**HERBST**

We get to pay back the grocers and the lumber yards.

**BROWN**

No such thing. We buy a new tractor!

**HERBST**

Or...we fix the old tractor...again. Or we hope our old horses continues to pull our old plows.

**BROWN**

Or...I like you, Isaac. You help me keep my head on straight.

**HERBST**

Is that what you call it?

**VOICE**

Quick. Quick. Come look.

*(All gather, looking around above and below.)*

Look.

**VOICE**

At what?

**VOICE**

At the ground.

**VOICE**

The seeds! The seeds are growing!

**VOICE**

A miracle!

*(All are crawling on the ground now.)*

**VOICE**

Those shoots must be, what, a whole eighth of an inch?

**VOICE**

We have shoots. We have shoots. Mr. Brown, whatever bad things I said about you-

**VOICE**

A miracle.

**VOICE**

*(shouting up the canal)*

And with a little more water...

**VOICE**

That we have lived to see this day. Baruch HaShem. Praised is God.

**VOICE**

The Lord is my strength and might, and He has been my deliverance.  
Joyfully shall you draw water from the fountains of triumph,

**VOICE**

Ameyn v'ameyn.

**ALL**

Shehechyanu. V'kiyemanu..

**VOICE**

Oy. It is great to be a Jew!

*(Some are dancing. Some are clapping.)*

**OLD HERBST**

The water came.

*(dancing slows to nothing)*

Not in the canal, but in the clouds. It rained and rained, first drops, then splashes, then great curtains of rain, and then rivers, and then great oceans, on and on; so much water that the ground could not take it in. All the little seedlings were washed away, little green shoots of our hope drowned to death. The water came from the sky and from our tears. Does one say Kaddish when hope dies? Message learned. Be careful what you wish for.

**HERBST**

*(to all)*

And so, we start again.

**VOICE**

*(With satchel.)*

I'm out. Don't ask for a reason. I'm just out.

**BROWN**

But-

**VOICE**

I don't want to hear your voice, Brown. I owe you nothing. You owe me nothing. I'm out.

You want water. Here's water.

*(He spits on the ground, exits.)*

**BROWN**

*(to HERBST)*

There's always a weak one. A quitter. The strong ones change and grow.

**HERBST**

We're the strong ones, right? My wife is asking how we are. I want to tell her we're the strong ones.

**BROWN**

One leaves, and a hundred will follow. A thousand. In Philadelphia, Krauskopf and the others are rounding up new farmers. I'm going to visit. And I'm going to drop in on the Jewish Agricultural Society. They should be talking to us.

**SOCIETY**

Who are these people? This Brown? Another vulture circling around our Jewish Agricultural Society. What do they think? That we grow money? the What experience do they have?

**BROWN**

We're in charge, Isaac. I'm not letting them or anyone dictate how I...we...operate.

**HERBST**

Ben, you must control yourself. I know you and how you operate. You'll scare them away. We need them. We at least need their money. If they say Yes, then Rosenwald says yes.

**SOCIETY**

The Society is not really interested. There are others, more skilled others....Tell him not to bother coming.

**HERBST**

For once, Ben. Put yourself on the side. We want them to see. Ask them to at least to come here and see.

**BROWN**

With all due respect to the Society... Just look.

**SOCIETY**

Someone, go out to Utah. And kill it.

**SOCIETY FLUNKIE**

I'm happy to report back to the Society that there are young men of intelligence, good appearance, who showed enterprise and energy, and who should, upon the whole, make successful settlers. These would-be

farmers would prosper if they could raise the necessary funds to get started properly.

**BROWN**

So, we go in circles.

**SOCIETY**

Gentlemen, we won't be rid of them until we poke at them. It's like a fencing match.

**BROWN**

They agreed to a meeting in New York. They agreed!

**HERBST**

Show them the papers. Show them the expansion plans.

**BROWN**

I'll show them my iron fist! And my famous smile.

*(We see BROWN, blueprint papers spread out on a table. SOCIETY stacks them neatly.)*

**SOCIETY**

You've accomplished something out there.

**BROWN**

A lot! And with every force of man and nature working against us.

**SOCIETY**

Indeed. Yes. Yes.

While we are in full sympathy with your aims, try as hard as we might, we cannot find a basis on which to co-operate. We've put your plan under scrutiny. Shares, mostly not sold, and lots, mostly undeveloped and unusable. Quite simply, your financial structure is going to crumble. You have a dream. But you have no capital. Your shareholders are in default, your farmers are bankrupt, you owe money to just about everyone in Utah-

**BROWN**

But not everyone. Yet.

**SOCIETY**

Your country humor is charming.

**BROWN**

You criticize us for not having capital. But that's why I'm here!

**SOCIETY**

Your farmers are unhappy, Brown.

**BROWN**

Who told you that?

**SOCIETY**

They're tired. They're bankrupt. They're leaving.

**BROWN**

One! One left. A coward who never bought into it with his heart, a problem with him from the beginning, I tell you. The others are happy.

**SOCIETY**

The others are hungry.

**BROWN**

Is it my fault the rain washed away our seedlings? Is it my fault the glorious State of Utah cannot—will not-- get the canal to work? They make promises, and then they make more promises-

**SOCIETY**

Prove to me you can make it work. Show me the business plan.

**BROWN**

But I've shown you.

**SOCIETY**

This tissue paper is not a plan. Come back when you have a real plan.

**BROWN**

*(to HERBST, back in Utah)*

Did you hear what they said? They don't like the way you're keeping the books.

**HERBST**

They don't? What am I supposed to do?

**BROWN**

Show a profit.

**HERBST**

You mean lie.

**BROWN**

I mean show a profit. You with your fancy Berlin degree.

**HERBST**

In engineering. Not in crime.

**BROWN**

Use your smarts, Isaac. What is your big German brain for? Just add up the numbers in the wrong column. Eins zwei drei. Eins zwei drei. Just put an eins instead of a zwei. Idiot! Putz!

(pause)

**HERBST**

Ben. Stop. I'm on your side. One of the few.

**BROWN**

Screw the others. Screw them all. There are other hands with money, hands that help without destroying our pride.

**HERBST**

Maybe there is some truth-

**BROWN**

What? You, too? I don't need you. You need me. You couldn't take a piss without me.

**HERBST**

Ben- There is news.

**BROWN**

Go to hell. All of you go to hell. If I believed in truth, I couldn't wake up in the morning. The slums are truth. The city rats are truth. If you don't want to be part of this, if you're too weak, then get the hell out of the way. All of you...get the hell out.

**HERBST**

Ben, on the hill today. The cart with the water barrels slipped into a rut.

**BROWN**

We'll get another cart. We'll figure it out. You figure it out. Partner.

**HERBST**

The water barrels were full. And heavy. They fell on Friedman.

He is dead.

**BROWN**

Dead? Dead? The barrels...

Why, God?

Why me?

**HERBST**

Friedman is dead, damn it. It's not about you.

*(Lights fade to black.)*

**END ACT ONE**

## ACT TWO

*(Harmonica music, "Home on the Range," then slowing down and softening to some blues, continuing through the first scene. Just before dawn. As a dim light comes up, we see a part of a broken tractor upstage.)*

*(One of the men, YOSSIE, the "skinny" one from Act One, sneaks onstage in long johns, carrying his work clothes. He places his clothes on the ground, and looks around to see if anyone is watching. He then gets on the ground and begins to do push-ups. He gets up, checks the muscles in his arms, as MORRIS enters in long johns, wrapped in a blanket.)*

### MORRIS

Yossie, what are you doing out here? You'll get sick from the cold.

### YOSSIE

I don't sleep. The noise is too much. Hymie snores. Nathan coughs. And Joshua...who knows what he is doing under the covers.

### MORRIS

We all know what he is doing. There is no privacy.

### YOSSIE

When it gets too much, I come out here. I watch the sun come up. It is beautiful. And quiet. Look, over there, already it is starting.

*(During the following, the changing colors of the sunrise bathe the stage.)*

### MORRIS

Sometimes, back in New York, my Esther and I snuck up to the roof and watched the sun. But it didn't look like this!

### YOSSIE

Your Esther, she is beautiful?

### MORRIS

She is a good wife. And mother. She makes a sweet home. Kosher.

### YOSSIE

My Selma could win a contest. Long black hair, soft like fur, and skin so soft and white, like a baby. Her face is round and perfect. And her eyes, a light blue like crystals. Sometimes, I can't look in her eyes. She sees right through me, and it frightens me.

(pause)

I can't stay here, Morris. But I can't go back. My Selma will look into my face, and all she will see is failure. She won't say it. She will be gentle about it. But I know her too well. She'll see failure. And she will be right. It would be better if she yelled at me, pounded my chest with her fists. But instead, the disappointment will sit in the room like an unwanted guest. And she'll pour a cup of tea. And we'll pretend we are good.

**MORRIS**

These thoughts are no good for you. Things are turning around. Brown says-

**YOSSIE**

Brown says. Brown says. Enough with Brown says. This is his game, and we are just his pawns.

*(Separate lights up on BROWN)*

**BROWN**

Ladies of Washington Heights, this is such an important moment for Jewish farming. Your gift of twelve hundred dollars will go so far. Honestly, you are the best!

**YOSSIE**

I can't stay, and I can't leave. So, I watch the sunrise. "Maybe today," I think. "Maybe it turns around today."

**BROWN**

Ladies of Germantown, this is such an important moment for Jewish farming. Your gift of two thousand dollars will go so far. Honestly, you are the best!

**MORRIS**

Come back to sleep, Yossie. This cold air will make you sick.

*(MORRIS puts his arm around YOSSIE's shoulder.)*

**MORRIS**

(sings)

Shlof mayn kind, mayn treyst mayn sheyner. Sleep my child...

**YOSSIE**

Who sleeps?

## MORRIS

Shlof zhe, lyu-lyu-lyu!  
Shlof mayn lebn, mayn kadish eyner,  
Shlof zhe, zunenyu.

Bay dayn vigl zitst dayn mame,  
Zingt a lid un veynt.  
Vest a mol farshteyn mistome  
Vos zi hot gemeynt

In Amerike iz der tate  
Dayner zunenyu,  
Du bist nokh a kind lesate,  
Shlof zhe, shlof, lyu-lyu.

Dos Amerike is far yedn,  
zogt men gor a glik,  
Un far Yidn a gan-eydn,  
Epes an antik.

## YOSSIE

Your father little son  
Is in America  
Meanwhile you are still a child  
Sleep, sleep, lyu-lyu.  
They say that America is  
A joy for everyone.  
And for Jews it's a paradise  
Something of a rarity.

## MORRIE and YOSSIE

*(An improvised duet)*

Dortn est men in der vokhn  
Khale, zunenyu.  
Yaykhelekh vel ikh dir kokhn,  
Shlof zhe, shlof, lyu-lyu.

Er vet shikn tsvantsik dolar,  
zayn portret dertsu,  
Un vet nemen, lebn zol er,  
Undz ahintsutsu.

Biz es kumt dos gute kvitl,  
Shlof zhe zunenyu,  
Slofn iz a tayer mitl,  
Shlof zhe, shlof lyu-lyu.

*(As MORRIE and YOSSIE walk offstage into the tent.)*

**MORRIS**

The sunrise is beautiful, no?

**YOSSIE**

Yes. Day after day.

*(Lights fade, except for a single spotlight on HARRY, writing a letter.)*

**HARRY**

My Dear Ruthie. In your last letter there was the smell of your special powder that made my heart beat faster. Of course, I think of you every minute, you and the children. And your dear Mother. I had hoped by now I could send a few dollars, but the farming is slow, the rain doesn't come, and somehow the equipment we buy keeps breaking down. So much for the buying on the cheap. A few of the wooden cabins have been finished more or less, but most of us are still living in the big tents. It is not as bad as it sounds. Spirits are good, the fights are few, and there are good friendships to be found. It feels like the community we wanted. But, of course, it is a community of only men. The one wife who joined us lost heart and left already. But I know, when you and the children arrive, this desert will bloom, and our lives will be sweet. I miss you. This endless silence can break you down. I love you. Regards to your mother. And thank her again and again for helping with the children. And her help with the bills. I know when she puts money in your wallet, she thinks she is being sly. I love you. Your Harry. PS. Did I say that I love you?

*(Lights fade on HARRY, up on BROWN, then HERBST.)*

**BROWN**

Ladies of Brownsville...I mean, .Ladies of Richmond...Honestly, you are the best!

**HERBST**

So, have you conquered all the women of America?

**BROWN**

Only the Jewish women. The others don't interest me, unless they open their pocketbooks. So, from the Jewish women, only, twelve thousand three hundred.

*(pause)*

You look disappointed.

**HERBST**

I'm fine. It is the ledger that is disappointed. We'll hardly make it through the month. And the seed merchant is on my tail. And the tractor just sits there broken. And I can't even walk into Gunnison without some sort of disguise. So, you may think twelve thousand three is a gift from the gods, but I'm not feeling so jolly about it.

**BROWN**

I'm just-

**HERBST**

You're wonderful, Brown. You can squeeze money out of a lump of coal. But please don't ask me to be jolly.

**BROWN**

It's not about numbers, Isaac. Somehow, these people believe in us.

**HERBST**

I'll remember that next time I disguise myself into town with a pair of glasses and a schmata over my face, like a cowboy in the cinema.

**BROWN**

I heard from the Governor. He's willing to delay our next payment on the loan.

**HERBST**

He's willing? He should be more than willing. That crook should be down on his knees begging our forgiveness. Absolutely nothing he promised has come through the way he said. Not this Garden of Eden. Not the access. Where is the new road he was going to build? And where the hell is the water? Where is our canal?

**BROWN**

The canal is right here. And the water will be- Isaac, look! There is a stream!

**HERBST**

Stop being so jolly.

**BROWN**

There is a jolly little stream! With jolly water! Look!

*(Splashing his face.)*

**HERBST**

Well, well, well. Even as a Reform Jew of scientific high German heritage, maybe I believe in miracles.

*(Splashing his face, arms.)*

Oh, my. Oh, my. The water feels so good!

**BROWN**

Just believe in me, my friend. Just believe in me.

**HERBST**

For now, I'm going to believe in the ledger. Twelve three, you say. Let's see if I can perform the ancient miracle of stretching dollars.

*(HERBST exits. BROWN lies down at the edge of the canal, kicks his toes in the water, rolls over, laughing.)*

**BROWN**

Baruch HaShem. Baruch HaShem. Praised is His name.

*(Enter PORTER. Dark suit, broad brimmed straw hat.)*

**PORTER**

Good day, friend.

**BROWN**

Yes.

**PORTER**

I see you're having a happy day.

**BROWN**

Yes.

*(pause)*

You've come to farm with us?

**PORTER**

I've come just to say, "Hello." Porter Smith. The first of what I hope will be many visits.

**BROWN**

Porter?

**PORTER**

Yes. Porter Smith. A tribute to the Prophet.

**BROWN**

Porter? Porter? I don't remember a prophet named Porter.

**PORTER**

The Prophet. Joseph Smith. I come to welcome you. On behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Mormons. Welcome to Utah. Welcome to Clarion.

**BROWN**

Jesus Christ?

**PORTER**

I should have been here sooner. Forgive me.

**BROWN**

Isaac!

**PORTER**

Please don't fear us. We want only the best for you and your pioneers. As you succeed, we succeed.

**BROWN**

Ah.

*(pause)*

Isaac! There is someone here for you.

**PORTER**

Let us pray. O God of Israel, turn thy face we pray thee, in loving kindness toward thy stricken people of the House of Judah. May the days of their tribulation soon cease, and...

**BROWN**

Amen. Thank you for your visit, Porter.

**PORTER**

...and they be planted by thee in the valleys and plains of their ancient home."

**BROWN**

So, you want us to go.

**PORTER**

To Palestine.

**BROWN**

You want us to go to Palestine? To give up all of this?

**PORTER**

When the ancient land is once again yours, Christ will return for all of us.

**BROWN**

Mr. Smith, I want you to know how grateful we are, all of us, for your welcome, and for your heartfelt prayer. Meanwhile, we have soil to prepare.

**PORTER**

Of course, of course. Please, be comforted to know we are here for you, to help. You'll make enough money to bring about the great ingathering of the Jews in Jerusalem. And then, the Messiah will come.

**BROWN**

I can hardly tell you how comforted I am.

**PORTER**

In Salt Lake City, there are merchants willing to provide you with tools, with fertilizer-

**BROWN**

Provide? Like a gift?

**PORTER**

*(laughs)*

You are a funny man. They are merchants.

**BROWN**

I imagine merchants expect money. On this beautiful fertile land we were sold, when it comes to money, like tools, we find ourselves just a little short.

**PORTER**

Please don't worry, Mr. Brown. We are happy to deal on reasonable credit.

**BROWN**

Again credit. My bookkeeper will be so happy.

**PORTER**

You need us, and we need you. Truly, Providence has brought us together, two lost tribes finding each other in the desert. We stand ready to join hands with you. Let us work in harmony, dwell together as brethren. Yes, we are brethren. And, as brothers, we will build up the brightest, wealthiest and healthiest spot in the great state of Utah.

*(Meanwhile, HERBST has appeared)*

**BROWN**

Isaac Herbst, I want you to meet Porter.

**HERBST**

Porter? *Vas iz dos nomen?* What is this name, Porter?

**BROWN**

Porter Smith. He is your brother.

**PORTER**

In Christ.

*(Lights fade except for a spotlight on HARRY, writing.)*

**HARRY**

My Dear, Dear Ruthie. It's hard for me to say this, but I miss the sounds of the sewing machines. At least at the end of the day, I could look at a pile of dresses and say, "I did this. I made this." Here, there is the endless waiting for rain, the endless talk about the canal, the endless seeds that don't grow, the endless wind, and the endless dust. I have missed the children's birthdays, and little Shoshi's first day of school. I have missed my Dovidl learning marbles, and my Hanni's sweet hugs. I have even missed your mother, but don't tell her so. I have missed...I miss you, my Ruthie. I have tried in these letters to hide my deepest concerns from you. I am so lonely. But if I quit now, the money we invested in this foolishness will be lost. So, I don't know what to do. You will know. You always know. I eagerly await your next letter. Don't be angry with me for

dreaming. I love you. And I hope—I pray—that, should I return East, with even less than I started with, I will still be... your Harry.

*(Lights out on HARRY, up on VOICES.)*

**VOICE**

He is a lucky man, our Moses.

**VOICE**

But one time, his luck will run out. Then what?

**VOICE**

Don't talk that way.

*(Spits.)*

The evil eye is watching us.

**VOICE**

But who is watching the books? We spend and spend.

**VOICE**

What do I know about these things? I'm a tailor.

**VOICE**

You are a farmer now. You own the land.

**ANOTHER VOICE**

And don't you two ruin it. I love the feel of dirt.

**VOICE**

It's a good thing, 'cause we'll be eating mud pie. If we last that long.

*(pause, running some soil through his fingers)*

Kleinberg left last night, and I hear rumors about others. So, what do you feel about that?

**VOICE**

I feel like a real man who can see a job through to the end. Feels noble and good. Feels like heaven.

*(Stage darkens. HERBST watching the sky. Middle of the night. The whole theatre flooded with stars.)*

**HERBST**

It is cold tonight. I was gathering wood. And then, look!

**BROWN**

Magnificent, isn't it?

**HERBST**

Back East, I didn't see such stars.

**BROWN**

Back East, I didn't breathe such air. This Utah is filled with wonders.

*(pause as they admire the sky and breathe deeply)*

**HERBST**

Ben, I miss my wife.

**BROWN**

Soon we'll have the money to send for them.

**HERBST**

Some nights, soon is not soon enough.

*(pause)*

We owe money to every merchant within a hundred miles.

**BROWN**

We'll sell from the harvest. The alfalfa is coming in now.

**HERBST**

Yes, half of what we imagined.

**BROWN**

Half more than we had before.

**HERBST**

Yes. Of course.

*(pause)*

Ben, I have a favor to ask.

**BROWN**

Of course, my friend. Ask.

**HERBST**

Just once, shut up. Your endless optimism is getting in the way of my self-pity.

*(BROWN starts to say something, but HERBST hold up his hand to stop him.)*

**HERBST**

For just a minute, under all these stars, let's be small and humble. And silent.

*(Sound of thunder in the distance.)*

**BROWN**

And what is to be gained by your "small and humble." For thousands of years, we Jews have been small and humble, bent over, cowering in fear before our Christian masters. Yes, your honor. No, your majesty. Kick me again, you Cossack, kick my ass just one more time. Now is our time. For once, let's crow like roosters in the morning. Bang our drums and blow our trumpets. The clarion call of our trumpets. God is with us, my friend. If only we listen.

**HERBST**

Yes, God is with us. And I ask God...I beg God...God who is right nearby...to give money so I can be with my wife. I'm waiting for an answer, Ben. For you, without a wife, it is maybe different. For me, I'm losing patience waiting.

Meantime, I count the stars. In silence.

*(HERBST ambles off into the night. BROWN starts to talk, but HERBST shh's him.)*

*(from the tent, SCHNEIDER emerges, dressed, holding a small suitcase.)*

**BROWN**

Mr. Schneider, a vacation in the middle of the night.

**SCHNEIDER**

For me, it has been nighttime for quite a while. I'm sorry, Brown. I'm leaving.

**BROWN**

You're unhappy tonight?

**SCHNEIDER**

Last week, I was unhappy. Then, last night, I was miserable. Today, I made a decision. A good decision. I'm leaving.

**BROWN**

You should wait. The sun is coming up soon.

**SCHNEIDER**

The sun is up already over Newark. And my wife writes that my little Devorah wants food in the morning. Can you imagine?

**BROWN**

But you have land here. Bring them here to farm with you.

**SCHNEIDER**

We're not farmers, Brown. We're fools. Like the fools of Chelm.

**BROWN**

What do you own there in Newark? Here, you have the land!

**SCHNEIDER**

This land is like the Sinai desert...but with Mormons.

**BROWN**

Ah, you are a funny one.

**SCHNEIDER**

Devorah is crying, Mr. Brown.

**BROWN**

We can fix this. Money is coming. Lots of money.

**SCHNEIDER**

I believe you. Money is coming. But who of us will be alive to see it?

Newark is calling, and I must answer. Although I must tell you...Mister Brown... You are stronger than me. You follow your dream.

*(SCHNEIDER exits.)*

**BROWN**

Go! Go. Go breathe the stink in Newark. Go fill your lungs with soot. And with what else I don't know.

(pause)

GO!

*(BROWN looks up. Notices it is raining.)*

You see. Rain. Even God has tears for us. The only thing foolish is that we're not trying enough. It is a test, and we're not giving it our best effort. That's the problem: finding the right men who don't give up in the middle of the night. That's the test, right?

And this rain? Did you ever see such a sweet, gentle rain? See if you find nights like this in Newark, New Jersey!

*(Thunder. We hear the rain now, harder and harder.)*

I'll find my dream. Quitter! Loser! You're all a bunch of losers. Who among you has my vision? My strength? My determination? All of you are wrong, the wrong men, the wrong team-

*(A deep rumble, a new sound, growing. BROWN runs up to the edge of the stage.)*

NO! NO! NO! STOP! Stop the rain. The sides of the canal are caving in. Oh, God. Oh, God. What are you doing? What are you doing to me?

*(Enter GINSBURG, old hat, old suitcase.)*

**GINSBURG**

A gutn tag.

**BROWN**

And you are?

**GINSBURG**

Ginsburg. Chaim Ginsburg. From South Philadelphia.

**BROWN**

Philadelphia?

**GINSBURG**

Locust Street.

**BROWN**

Locusts. Like another plague.

**GINSBURG**

I was a worker. On the docks. I heard about you from Rabbi Krauskopf. He speaks so highly of your work. I'm strong, and I come to farm. They say we're going back to the soil. My zeyda, he was a milkman in Ukraine. Two cows. But then, you know...the pogrom. We come here, America. It is like waking up from a nightmare. Here, you dream, you do anything you want. Except be a goy. Ha. I make joke. So, let me help with big rocks.

*(GINSBURG removes his old jacket.)*

**BROWN**

Chaim Ginsburg, welcome to Paradise.

**FOUNDATION**

So, you say new people are coming.

**BROWN**

New vigor. New energy. You should see this Ginsburg. An ox!

**FOUNDATION**

Strong enough to stop the cave-in?

**BROWN**

Strong enough to build it up again. And this time it is done right. So, let the water flow. We are ready.

**FOUNDATION**

Some people look to the foundations as if were a well, a well of money with no bottom. Just throw in the bucket and dip and dip and dip. But our resources are limited. We can't give to everyone. We make choices. Which farm projects have the highest chances of success? Which farm projects will be sustainable?

**BROWN**

It's not just a farm. It's a movement. Back to the soil.

### **FOUNDATION**

I repeat: Which farm “movements” can survive without their leaders coming back to us again and again and again because they haven’t thought it through? Because the very idea of the place—the movement!-- is not well-founded. Because all they have are dreams and rocks. Just rocks. And we are not investing in rocks. Not now. Not ever.

### **BROWN**

You haven’t even seen us in person. There are fields of wheat and barley. There are little gardens, and we are now selling in the towns.

### **FOUNDATION**

And you are selling us pipe dreams, Brown. We’re not interested in pipe dreams.

### **BROWN**

But, my fellow Jews, you leave us to starve.

### **FOUNDATION**

You have no water! You have debt up to your pupek! My dear friend, you have choices, too. You can choose to starve on your little dream of shit. Or you can go back to reality. Choose wisely. We are done.

### **BROWN**

So, when did it become a crime to dream? If we Jews didn’t dream, there would be no reality. First, we dream, we see it in our minds. We dream of return to Jerusalem. We dream of the Temple.

### **FOUNDATION**

And do you see a return to sacrificing goats and sheep? Come on!

### **BROWN**

We dreamed of America, and then we came. We dreamed of owning land, the very land that was denied us over there, and then-

### **FOUNDATION**

We are done here.

### **BROWN**

Done? “We” are absolutely not done! Oh, I get it. You German Jews, you get here first, selling rags, and then you grab everything of value, form these “societies,” and then you lift your tea cups, and you lift your pinkies, and you stare down your little snotty German foundation noses at the

uncivilized shtetl peasants. I get it. Well, I have a surprise about shtetl peasants. We don't need you. We don't need your capitalist money. A thousand years of scratching out our lives in those shtetls taught us everything we need to know about surviving. We have smarts. We have grit. We have everything we need. We know how to dream about tomorrow. So, what is so wrong with dreaming? Doesn't every movement start with a dream?

**FOUNDATION**

Shalom, Mister Brown. You need to work on your manners.

**BROWN**

And screw you, too! All your teeth should fall out except one, one with a cavity to make you suffer. Go. To. Hell.

*(pause, then whispers)*

My God. Why have you forsaken me? Why? Show me the way. I beg you.

*(A note of harmonica, then back in Clarion, BROWN carrying a box.)*

**VOICE**

Why, welcome home again so soon, our Moses . What news? This time they gave us how much? Another month of loans? Another week?

**BROWN**

It went well. They're coming around.

**VOICE**

How much?

**BROWN**

*(Brown faces them, arms open, smiles.)*

They're coming around. Let me tell you a story-

**VOICE**

I'm hungry. I have no time for stories.

**VOICE**

There isn't enough bread to say a blessing over.

**VOICE**

We have too little to live, too much to die.

**VOICE**

It's like Poland all over again.

**VOICE**

Lithuania.

**VOICE**

Russia.

**VOICE**

We workers must unite!

**VOICE**

God help you, Brown. I'm out. I've given every penny to Clarion. I borrowed from my parents. My evil sister-in-law. I can't do it anymore. I just can't.

**BROWN**

Don't despair, my friends.

**VOICE**

We're not your friends. We're your cell mates.

**VOICE**

We gave you our lives, Brown. And they gave how much? How much? Say it!

*(BROWN looks from face to face.)*

**VOICE**

Say it! Just say it.

**VOICE**

Nothing, right?

**BROWN**

I didn't come back with nothing. I came back with this.

**VOICE**

*(looking in box)*

What is it?

*(Then laughing)*

Can't you tell? **BROWN**

Oh. My. God. **VOICE**

Chickens! **BROWN**

A box of little chicks. **VOICE**

You're kidding, right? **VOICE**

You spent our money on chickens? **VOICE**

Not our money....the bank's money! **BROWN**

While you make soup, I'm packing my bag. I can't play this game. **VOICE**

Don't you see. We're going to raise chickens. **BROWN**

You, Mister Brown, are a lost soul. **VOICE**

Better a chicken in the hand than an eagle in the sky. **BROWN**

Please, someone call a doctor. **VOICE**

What do they call that new science for crazy minds? **VOICE**

The chickens grow other chickens. And we use their shit for fertilizer. It all makes sense. **BROWN**

**VOICE**

Psychiatry.

**VOICE**

I can't do this anymore. I came to Utah here thinking we had a plan. And I thought that plan had a leader. But it seems our leader is just a silly little boy. Silly boy. Silly boy.

*(BROWN slaps the worker's cheek.)*

**BROWN**

You can leave. All of you. If you don't believe in us. You can leave.

**VOICE**

Ben-

**BROWN**

You can leave.

**VOICE**

But I'm a shareholder.

**VOICE**

In what?

*(ALL exit except BEN, who gets a hoe and starts to hoe the stage. He hums, "Home on the Range." He picks some weeds and tosses them away. One by one the men reappear, each carrying a suitcase or a duffle bag. BEN, downstage, not looking at the men, hoeing, humming.)*

**VOICE**

A bus leaves from Gunniston in a few hours. We have to start walking.

**BROWN**

You think it's better in New York?

**VOICE**

My stomach doesn't know geography.

**VOICE**

I have a family, Ben. What do you have?

**VOICE**

Good bye, Ben. I'm afraid to go.

(pause)  
Thank you.

*(The MEN exit.)*

*(BEN kneels on the ground, weeding with his hands. HERBST appears, carrying a suitcase.)*

**HERBST**

Ben?

**BROWN**

*(looking away, working the ground)*

You have to keep weeding out the weak ones, so the strong ones survive.

**HERBST**

Ben? I'm sorry.

**BROWN**

Yes?

**HERBST**

I'm going.

*(pause)*

There's no need for such a big good bye.

*(pause)*

I'll be in touch.

*(HERBST starts to leave the stage, but BROWN interrupts.)*

**BROWN**

I have a confession to make.

*(HERBST stops.)*

I am not really Ben Brown. I am Benjamin Lipshitz, born near Odessa in the shtetl of Krejopol. I lived there as a small child. I remember little of it except screams in the street, and my mother covering my ears during the night. When I came to America, I spoke no English, but in order to eat, they sent me to work. I was a little child, sickly, small and scared, but they forced me to become a peddler. I went door to door with a little basket, and I pointed and said, the only English words I knew: "Look in the basket." I said softly with my Yiddish accent. "What?" they shouted back.

“Look in the basket.” “What’s that you say? Speak up. Speak up.” I got so nervous, and a few times I ended up, you know, shaking, and...you know, I was scared...wetting my pants, right in front of them. Sometimes, people took pity, and they gave me a penny for something, I don’t even know what. Many people laughed at me. And when I came home, I got a slap across the face. “Schmekel.” “Pisher.” But I didn’t cry. Crying was not allowed. Shame was okay, but not crying. I cowered in the corner where I slept on the floor, and I sometimes wet the blanket. So, when I could, when I was a little older, I ran away from that career in sales. I slipped onto a streetcar, and I found a job where people didn’t laugh. I became a worker on a farm. I shoveled manure. I carried buckets of shit from one place to another. Bucket of shit. Dump it. Bucket of shit. Dump it. Bucket of shit. You understand that none of this occupied my mind, so I had plenty of time to plan for the future. Bucket of shit. I dreamed of changing the world. Bucket of shit. Or at least I dreamed of changing my world. I became tough because tough is what lets you survive. Hard. Someone who didn’t need other people. Bucket of shit. And I decided then, as just a boy really, that nothing...you hear me. NOTHING would ever get in my way. I would never again feel shame. I would speak up, even if it killed me, and I would speak my mind. My dreams would be big, and audacious, maybe ridiculous. Maybe I am a fool, a peddler of dreams. But I am not ashamed of anything. I am alive.

**HERBST**

At what cost?

**BROWN**

Has it cost you so much, Isaac?

**HERBST**

I’m talking about cost to you. Who do you have in your big, audacious life?

*(pause)*

Not even one friend.

*(pause)*

**BROWN**

I thought maybe you.

*(long pause as HERBST turns away)*

All right, then. I have a garden to grow. Good-bye.

**HERBST**

A guten tag.

*(HERBST exits. BROWN takes a hoe and starts working the ground. Then, he takes the hoe and attacks the ground.)*

**BROWN**

COWARDS! YOU'RE ALL COWARDS!

Where are my strong Jews?

*(HE runs to stage right.)*

Where are my Jews of conviction? Jews with a sense of history?

*(Runs to stage left.)*

Jews? Where are you? Hiding in the corner?

*(To the sky.)*

Jews! We have a mission. We have a mission. Does. No. One. Hear. Me?

We have a mission from God.

*(Silence. BROWN sinks to his knees. He weeds.)*

**BROWN**

The strongest survive. The strongest survive.

Right?

*(BROWN weeds, resumes humming. Suddenly, he takes a small pad and pencil from his pocket, and, as he writes, he says to audience:)*

I found tranquility and happiness in the beautiful landscape of my field.

The smooth skin of my animals calmed my enraged spirit.

My fine horses took the place of human friendship.

*(Lights up on OLD HERBST)*

**OLD HERBST**

The chickens died, but Brown lived on. He had a new idea. He used his connections in Gunniston, and soon, almost without trying, he had a marketing agency for area chicken farmers. The business grew to include nearby counties, and then, the entire state. That little marketing idea became the Utah Poultry Association. The business grew, almost overnight, and he opened an office in New York City to be closer to the

big money in the eastern states. He attracted investors. He kept dreaming, night and day. He stepped over...no, he stepped on the competition. He made a fortune.

But, along the way, he lost his soul. What did he really care about chickens?

**BROWN**

I had the feeling I was dying a sweet death, as you would douse one in a barrel of sweet water.

**OLD HERBST**

He returned to his dream: dirt. In the heart of the Garden State, he helped launch the Jersey Homesteads with its cooperative farming. But he never saw the Homesteads. They failed as farms. But some of those Jews stayed to live in the community now known as Roosevelt. Many of the residents there now are descendants of the young, would-be farmers from New York, and Newark, and Philadelphia.

Sometimes, life is a long, slow circle.

**VOICES**

Amen.

*(The full cast returns to the stage in two lines facing each other. Each man puts on a black yarmulke. BROWN in the middle, hoeing.)*

**OLD HERBST**

And so, as we gather to say goodbye to Benjamin Brown, our hands still feel the dirt, like time, slipping through our fingers. He was our leader.

*(One VOICE says Kaddish under the following:)*

**VOICE**

Yisgadal, v'yiskaddash....

**VOICE**

Farmer.

**VOICE**

Shmooser.

**VOICE**

Bullshitter.

**VOICE**

Financier.

**VOICE**

Con-man.

**VOICE**

He got us out of the ghetto.

**VOICE**

He got us into bankruptcy. I will pay for the rest of my life.

**VOICE**

We came to Utah with nothing to lose...and then we lost the nothing.

**VOICE**

He was the loser.

**VOICE**

Easy to lose our money.

**VOICE**

He started with nothing.

**VOICE**

He left us with nothing.

**VOICE**

Ben, even a poor man wants to live.

**VOICE**

At times he lived in the air.

**VOICE**

But he lived. Without shame.

**VOICE**

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefor choose life, that both you and your seed may live."

*(They pass a shovel, person to person, and each one scoops some dirt into the grave.)*

**OLD HERBST**

So, the question is this: Which one is the bigger fool: the one who goes through life dreaming, or the one who never dreams at all?

**VOICE**

Amen. Amen.

**OLD HERBST**

Benjamin Brown died in February 1939. He was only 53 years old. He is, at last, back to the soil.

My friend.

*(Silhouette, BROWN with hoe raised in the air. He smashes it into the stage, then hoes.)*

*(A few bluesy notes of harmonica as lights fade to black.)*

**END**