

NIGHT  
BY SHOLOM ASCH

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NIGHT was originally produced by the East-West Players, at the Berkeley Theatre, New York City, April 7, 1916, with the following cast:

THE OUTCAST [*prostitute*] *Miriam Reinhardt*. THE DRUNKARD *Mark Hoffman*. THE BEGGAR *Maxim Vodianoy*. THE BASTARD *Jack Dickler*. THE FOOL *Max Lieberman*. THE THIEF *Gustav Blum*. HELENKA *Elizabeth Meltzer*. THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE *Bryna Zaranov*.

Produced under the direction of GUSTAV BLUM.

Applications for permission to produce NIGHT must be addressed to Mr. Sholom Asch, 3 Bank Street, New York.

NIGHT

A PLAY BY SHOLOM ASCH

*[Night in a market place. A small fire burns near a well. On a bench near it sleeps the Beggar. The old Prostitute is warming herself. There is the sound of dogs barking in the distance. Vast shadows move about the market-place. The Drunkard emerges from the gloom of the night.]*

DRUNKARD. Good evening, Madam Prostitute. [*Listens to the dogs.*] Why are the dogs whining like this to-night?

PROSTITUTE. They must be seeing things.

DRUNKARD. Yes, your black soul. Perhaps they think you a devil. That's why they chase all over the butchers' stalls. No wonder. They've reason to be afraid.

BEGGAR [*in his sleep*]. He-he-he. Ha-ha-ha.

PROSTITUTE. A drunkard and a prostitute are the same thing. None of us is clean of sin.

BEGGAR [*sleepily*]. Don't take me for a "pal."

[*Sleeps on.*]

DRUNKARD. Leave him alone. He sings hymns the whole day long.

BEGGAR. Poverty is no sin.

DRUNKARD. Don't mix in. [*To the Prostitute.*] What do dogs see at night?

PROSTITUTE. They say that on the first of May the Holy Mother walks through the market place, and gathers all the stray souls.

DRUNKARD. What have the dogs got to do with it?

PROSTITUTE. They are people laden with sins. People who died without the Holy Sacrament, and who were buried outside of the fence. At night they roam about the market in the shape of dogs. They run about in the stalls of the butchers. The devil, too, stays there, but when the first of May comes and the prayers begin, the Holy Mother walks through the market-place. The souls of the damned cling to her dress, and she takes them with her to Heaven.

[*Pause for a minute.*]

BEGGAR [*turning in his sleep*]. Strong vinegar bursts the cask. Her soul must be black indeed.

DRUNKARD. It's awful to look into it. You'll be among them yet....

PROSTITUTE. I'm not afraid of that. The mercy of God is great. It will reach even me. But all of you will be among the dogs too. Those who live in the street come back to the street after death.

BEGGAR. The street is the home of the beggar. Poverty is no sin.

*[Stretches himself and sleeps on. There is a pause. The Fool comes out of the darkness. He is tall, with a vacant, good-humored face, dressed in a soldier's hat, with a wooden toy-sword in his girdle. He grins kindly.]*

DRUNKARD. Ah, good evening, Napoleon. *[He salutes the Fool.]* Where do you hail from?

FOOL *[grins and chuckles]*. From Turkey. I have driven out the Turk.

DRUNKARD. And where is your army?

FOOL. I have left it on the Vistula.

DRUNKARD. And when will you drive the Russians out of there?

FOOL. I have given my orders already.

DRUNKARD. Are they being carried out?

FOOL. I only need to draw my sword.

DRUNKARD. Your sword?

FOOL. Napoleon gave it to me.

PROSTITUTE. Leave him be. Every one is crazy in his way. *[To the fool.]* You are cold. Come to the fire. He wanders about the hollows the whole night long.

FOOL *[smiles]*. I've quartered all of my soldiers, but I have no place for myself to sleep in.

PROSTITUTE. A fool, and yet he knows what he says. [*Gives him bread.*] Do you want to eat?

FOOL. I get my dinner from the tables of Kings.

BEGGAR [*awaking*]. You've brought the fool here too? He's got the whole market place to be crazy in, and he comes here, where honest people sleep.

[*Takes his stick and tries to reach the Fool.*]

PROSTITUTE [*defending the Fool*]. Leave him alone I tell you. Crazy though he be, he still wants to be among people. Like aches for like.

BEGGAR. Let him go to the graveyard, and yell his craziness out among the graves;--and not disturb honest men in their sleep. The street is the beggar's home, and I don't want to share it with madmen. All that the people throw out of their homes, wanders into the street.

[*He chases the Fool away, and lies down.*]

DRUNKARD. Who made you boss here? The street belongs to all. Lie down in the city hall, in the mayor's bed, if you want to have rest.

PROSTITUTE. Keep still. He has a right to the place. He's had it long enough.

DRUNKARD. What kind of a right? Are you a newcomer? How long have you been here?

PROSTITUTE. All my life. I was born in the street, there, behind the fence near the church. My mother pointed out the place to me. I have never known any other home, but the street. In the daytime it belongs to all. When people open their shops, and peasants come in their wagons, and trade begins, I feel a stranger here, and I hide in the fields near the cemetery. But when night comes, and people retire into their holes, then the street is mine. I know every nook and corner of the market place. It is my home.

DRUNKARD. You've said it well. In that house there, I have a home, a bed, and a wife. In the daytime I work there. I sit among boots, and drive nails into heels and soles. And I bear my wife's nagging and cursing patiently.... But when night comes I can't stand it any longer. The house becomes too small for me. Something draws me into the street.

PROSTITUTE. It is the curse of the street that rests on you as it does on the howling dogs. All of us are damned, and we are punished here for our sins. And we will not be delivered, till the Holy Mother will come, and we will take hold of her dress, and our souls will be freed.

BEGGAR [*in his sleep*]. He-he-he. Ha-ha-ha.

DRUNKARD [*becomes sad, bows his head*]. In the daytime I don't mind it. Then I am like other people. I work like all do. But when night comes....

PROSTITUTE. It's the curse of the street. Don't worry. God will pity all of us. His mercy is great.

[*The cry of a child comes from the distance. It resembles the howling of a dog.*]

DRUNKARD. What's that?

PROSTITUTE. That's Manka's bastard. He strays the street. He wants to come near the fire.

DRUNKARD. Call him here.

PROSTITUTE. Keep still. [*She points to the Beggar.*] He will chase the boy away. They believe the boy is born of the Devil.

DRUNKARD. Who made him boss here? All of us are children of the Devil. [*He calls to the boy as one calls to a dog.*] Come here, you.

[*A dumb boy, all in rags, drags himself near. He makes noises like a little beast. He trembles with cold. The Prostitute tries to quiet him.*]

PROSTITUTE. He lies the whole night behind his mother's doorstep. She is afraid of her husband. Sometimes she gives him a piece of bread, when no one looks. Thus he crawls like a worm in the street--human flesh and blood.

DRUNKARD. Let him come near the fire--so. [*He pushes the boy nearer to the fire.*] Give him a piece of bread. I'll take care of any one who tries to hurt him.

BEGGAR [*awaking*]. No. That's too much. Who brought this here? You know that the Devil is in him?

[*Tries to chase the boy away.*]

PROSTITUTE [*hiding the boy in her shawl*]. Have pity.

BEGGAR. You're the Devil's wife. That's why you pity his child.

[*Tries to reach the boy.*]

DRUNKARD [*tears the stick from the Beggar's hand*]. We're all the children of the Devil. You've no more on your hide than he has.

BEGGAR. Don't you start anything. I am a Christian, and believe in God. I've no home. That's why I sleep on the street. Every dog finds his hole. But I won't live together with the Devil. And I won't be the neighbor of a harlot either. Nor was a drunkard ever a friend of mine. [*He gathers his belongings.*] What are you running after me for? This whole street belongs to the Devil. Why are you trying to stop me?

[*He tries to go away.*]

PROSTITUTE [*detaining him*]. Don't leave us. Let him only warm himself. He'll go away.

BEGGAR. It does me little honor to be with folk like you anyway.

[*He goes away.*]

DRUNKARD. Why do you hold him back? Let him go if he thinks us below his dignity.

PROSTITUTE. And do you really think it an honor for one to remain with you? That man is decent at least.

DRUNKARD. Ah, you grow pious as you grow old.

PROSTITUTE. I have always wanted to be in decent company.

*[As the Beggar disappears, strange figures begin to show themselves in the darkness. Most of them are half-naked. The Fool also comes back. A dog comes wandering into the crowd.]*

PROSTITUTE *[looking around in terror]*. It's awful to be with so many sick people. Not one amongst them who is of sound mind. Not one who has a clean conscience. The Beggar has gone away.

DRUNKARD *[with fear]*. The dogs have also come to the fire.

PROSTITUTE. Even they are drawn to people.

*[There is a short pause. The Bastard begins to wail.]*

DRUNKARD. What's the trouble with him? Take him away.

PROSTITUTE. That's the Devil in him crying--see him gazing at something.

*[The day begins to grow gray in the east. Strange, awful light falls over all. Now one, now another corner of the street appears and disappears. All is covered with shadows as in twilight.]*

DRUNKARD. Praised be God. The dawn.

PROSTITUTE. How different the light is to-day.

*[The dogs begin to howl.]*

DRUNKARD. What are the dogs howling about? Chase them away from the fire.

PROSTITUTE. They are looking somewheres. They sniff at the air. They must see something now.

*[In the distance is heard the sound of beating against tin plates. The dogs howl with fright.]*

PROSTITUTE. Something is coming near to us.

*[The Fool laughs.]*

DRUNKARD. What is the Fool laughing at? What is he gazing at? Chase him away from the fire.

PROSTITUTE. They all see more clearly than we.

*[The dogs howl again, and gather in one group. Footsteps approach.]*

DRUNKARD *[frightened]*. Something is coming near to us.

*[A minute's pause. All waiting in fear. The Thief appears. He carries a woman on his shoulders. The woman has a child in her arms. They are followed by small, poorly clad boys who hold trumpets and kettles in their hands, and make as much noise as they can.]*

THIEF *[thunders]*. Fall on your knees. Draw off your hats! Do you see who is coming? The queen! The queen! *[All grow pale, and move aside. The Thief walks into their midst.]* Who is there? Ah, the Fool. Well, how are your armies getting along? Hold them in readiness. Hold them in readiness. The Drunkard! Ah, the right man for the game. *[He bows.]* With awe do I kiss the little hand of Madame Prostitute. *[To the Bastard]*: And your little heir is here also? *[To the woman]*: Take them with you, oh, Queen. They too are dogs like us, thrown into the street. Let them come with us, We have room for many, many.

WOMAN. Take them with us, my man. We will all go together.



THIEF [*letting the Woman down*]. Our company is growing big. Come with us.

DRUNKARD [*awaking from his torpor and looking at the Thief*]. So you are the thief they let out of prison not long ago. And I was afraid of you a little while ago. [*He spits.*] That's a fine joke. Always at your play. Who's the woman, and the children? Where did you get them?

THIEF. Brother, this is not play. [*He points to the Woman.*] She is a queen. [*He points to the children.*] And they are princes. Every one a prince. At your knees before her! Take off your hat.

DRUNKARD. I know this gentleman quite well. He likes to joke.

[*The Thief comes close to him.*]

THIEF. To-night is the night when the dogs are delivered. Look at her. [*He points at the Woman.*] Look at us. We were locked in, and we have come out. We are all one family--dogs. We wander on the street. Men have shut their doors in our faces. Come, dogs. We will unite to-day. Throw off your chains, and shake yourself as if you were shaking dust from your shoulders. You are men after all. I have known you from childhood. I knew your mother.

DRUNKARD [*wondering*]. I don't know what you mean.

THIEF. Look at yourself. What have they made of you? You walk the street all night like an outcast. Your children are afraid of you. They hide when they see you drunk on the street, and weep for you. Are you to blame for it? You were made one with a mass of flesh you hate. You sit bent over your boots the whole day long, and curses and blows are hurled at your head. And when night comes you crawl in the gutter, and you will crawl there till you will be freed from shame.

DRUNKARD. What are you telling me this for?

THIEF. And are you to blame for this? Have you had one minute of happiness in your whole life? Who took care of you? You were raised by your stepfather's cane. Show me the scars on your body. They beat you from childhood on; first your stepfather, then your "step-wife."

No one ever spoke to you as to a friend. No one ever comforted you in your grief.

*[The Drunkard falls to the ground and weeps.]*

THIEF *[to the Woman]*. And he is an honest man. I know him. We went to the same school. He had an honest mother. She loved him only as a mother can. *[Whispering to the Woman.]* She brought him bread behind his stepfather's back.

DRUNKARD. I will never drink again. I give my word of honor.

*[He weeps.]*

THIEF. Don't cry, brother. We are all dogs of the street. But we unite to-day. Come with us, come. We will care for you. We will all be together. Take the Prostitute, and come with us.

*[The old Prostitute rises and looks amazed.]*

PROSTITUTE. Me?

THIEF *[taking her hand]*. We will not turn you, nor avoid you. We know what you are. You are not to blame. Who brought you up? Who was your mother? You were born in the street like a goat. Every stone, every hole in the earth caresses you like a mother. You were thrown into the street at birth, and men ran from you as from a leper. Any wonder that this is what became of you? You lay in the street like an old, dirty rag.

PROSTITUTE *[half-crying]*. I am not worthy of such comforting words by a gentleman.

THIEF. You are worthy. You are like all of us. Your skin is dirty, but your soul is clean. Wash your sins away, throw the curse from off your shoulders, and you will become a human being like all of us. You too long for people. I know you. You are good, you love humanity. It is they who have cursed you so. You were always a clean child. Wait. Wait. *[He takes water from the well, and pours it on her.]* I wash your head, and you are a human being like the rest of us. The

curse is removed from you. Look around yourself. Spring is here. Its fragrance is everywhere. You are a girl yet, a mere child. You know no wickedness. You are in your father's garden. Your mother sits near the window and looks at you. You are walking with your beloved.

*[He takes the Drunkard, puts him side by side with the Prostitute, joins their hands, and leads them back and forth.]*

PROSTITUTE [*smiles*]. Don't talk to me like that.

THIEF. You are being married now. Virgins come and bring you your bridal dress, your veil, your myrtle wreath. You are chaste. They lead you to the altar. Your mother lays her hand on your head and blesses you. Sweet harp music is heard. Your bridegroom takes his place beside you.

*[The Prostitute breaks out into tears.]*

DRUNKARD [*excited*]. I will be together with her. I will defend her. I will not let them insult her. She is my sister. I will work for her.

THIEF. That's the way. The dogs unite to-day. *[He takes the Bastard in his arms and kisses him on the forehead.]* And, he, too, is our child. All of us are dogs of the street. All of us unite to-day.

DRUNKARD [*takes the boy from the Thief*]. He is our child. He will be with us. *[He takes the arm of the Prostitute.]* Come, we will go together. I will work for you. You will bring him up, and he will be our child. *[He takes the shawl from the Prostitute, and wraps himself and the boy in it.]* What? You do not hear? Listen. I mean it with my whole heart.

*[The Prostitute does not hear. She looks with awe at the Woman.]*

THIEF. That's the way. That's the way. That's the way. To-day we unite. We go together. We will be one with the dogs. *[He caresses all he finds on the street.]* Blow the trumpets, boys. Beat the drums. We choose a queen to-day. *[To the Fool.]* The army waits for you, with swords in their hands, with spears ready. Do you see the cannon all trained? All wait for your command. Do you see the foe around you?

[*He points to the street with a broad majestic gesture.*] Here stands the army.

FOOL [*happily*]. Yes, yes.

THIEF. Give your order, Napoleon. You are our general. Draw the sword, and command!

FOOL [*draws his wooden sword and cries loudly as if he saw an army in the market-place*]. Present arms!

THIEF [*loudly*]. That's the way. The dogs unite to-day. All will unite. We choose a queen to-day. [*He points to the Woman.*] She is worthy of wearing the crown of the street. Come, queen. Mount to your throne. [*He bends his back.*] Boys, blow your trumpets. Beat your drums. At your knees. All hats off. The queen comes. The queen comes. So will we go to our land.

[*It is grown lighter. The face of the Woman has grown young and beautiful, and begins to look like the face of the Holy Mother.*]

PROSTITUTE [*who has looked at the Woman with awe, recognizes her in the gray light, as she sits on the Thief's shoulders with the child in her arms. She falls to her knees before her, and cries in an unearthly voice*]. Oh, see, see. It is the Holy Mother. Look at her--her face. She has come from the church. Oh, it is the holy picture before which I always pray. I know her. Our Holy Mother in her very flesh. [*She gives a great cry, and falls prostrate before the Woman.*] Oh, Mother, Mother, take me under Thy protection. [*She falls prostrate, unable to talk any more. The others are infected with the spirit of her words. They look with fear at the Woman's face. They recognize the Madonna. They bend half-ways on their knees. The Thief, who has let her down from his shoulders, takes off his hat and kneels with the rest. All prostrate themselves. There is the sound of a church-bell. It is day. From the open window of a house across the way, leans out the wife of the Drunkard, and yells.*] Ah, ah, what are you doing there. Come into the house. There is work to be done.

DRUNKARD [*roused from his ecstasy, tears his hand away from that of the Prostitute, and looks at the Woman with the Thief.*] Ha-ha-ha.

That's Helenka, Andrey the Plasterer's wife. Ha-ha-ha. He's cracked a good joke.

*[He runs away. The others awake as if from sleep. The Prostitute suddenly rises. Helenka tries to escape from the Thief's hands.]*

HELENKA. Why did you drag me into the street?

THIEF *[holding her hand.]* Come with me. Remember what we said. Come to another land with me.

HELENKA *[weeping]*. What does he want with me? Why did he drag me into the street? Come home, children.

*[All run from him.]*

THIEF *[stands near the well, and thunders after them]*. Dogs, where are you running?... You dogs, you damned dogs.... *[Townspeople come to the well with pails, grumbling.]* Get out of the way....

*[Curtain.]*