

# Four Contemporary American Plays

*Selected and with Biographical Notes*

by

*Bennett Cerf*

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# The Tenth Man

TO TYRONE GUTHRIE

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*Manufactured in the United States of America by H. Wolff*

*The Tenth Man* was first presented by Saint Subber and Arthur Cantor at The Booth Theatre, New York City, November 5, 1959, with the following cast:

*(In order of appearance)*

THE CABALIST

THE SEXTON

SCHLISSEL

ZITORSKY

ALPER

FOREMAN

THE GIRL (EVELYN FOREMAN)

ARTHUR LANDAU

HARRIS

THE RABBI

KESSLER BOYS

THE POLICEMAN

Arnold Marlé

David Vardi

Lou Jacobi

Jack Gilford

George Voskovec

Jacob Ben-Ami

Risa Schwartz

Donald Harron

Martin Garner

Gene Saks

{ Alan Manson

{ Paul Marin

Tim Callaghan

DIRECTED BY Tyrone Guthrie

SETTINGS AND LIGHTING BY David Hays

COSTUMES BY Frank Thompson

ASSOCIATE: Caroline Swann

**An Orthodox Synagogue**

**ACT ONE**

**Before the Morning Prayers.**

**ACT TWO**

***Scene 1:* The Morning Prayers.**

***Scene 2:* Before the Afternoon Prayers.**

**ACT THREE**

**The Exorcism.**

## ACT ONE

*Interior of the synagogue of the Congregation Atereth-Tifereth Yisroel.*

*It is a poor congregation, and the synagogue is actually a converted shop. A raised platform surrounded by a railing contains the lectern and the Holy Ark. This altar is surrounded by rows of plain wooden folding chairs which constitute the seating accommodations for the congregation. On the far side of the altar is an old desk at which THE RABBI presides when teaching Hebrew school.*

*A partitioned area downstage right is THE RABBI'S study, a crowded little cubicle containing a battered mahogany desk and chair, an old leather armchair, a worn leather couch, and piles of black prayer books. On the walls are old framed pictures of bearded patriarchs in desolate obsession over their Talmuds and perhaps a few familiar scenes from the Old Testament.*

*Downstage is a metal heating unit. There is a second heating unit upstage, and a door leading apparently to a bathroom. The front door is stage left.*

*It is 6:30 A.M. on a cold winter day.*

*At rise, THE CABALIST stands in the middle of the synagogue, entirely wrapped in a thick white linen prayer shawl with broad black stripes, praying silently from a heavy prayer book that rests on the railing of the altar. Suddenly*



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*he pauses in his intense devotions, clutches at the railing as if to keep himself from falling. We have the impression that he is faint, near to swooning. He is a small, bearded man, in his seventies; his face is lean and lined, his eyes sunken and hollow. He wears a small black skullcap from beneath which stick out gray forelocks and sidecurls—a testament to his orthodoxy. After a moment, he regains his strength and returns to his prayers.*

*Three men hurry into the synagogue out of the oppressive cold of the street. They are THE SEXTON, SCHLISSEL and ZITORSKY. They all wear heavy overcoats and gray fedoras. SCHLISSEL and ZITORSKY are in their early seventies. THE SEXTON is a small, nervous, bespectacled man of forty-eight. We know he is a sexton because he carries a huge ring of keys. The men rub their hands for warmth and huff and puff and dart quick looks at THE CABALIST, who is oblivious to their entrance.*

SCHLISSEL (*Muttering*) Close the door. (*Light pours down on the synagogue as THE SEXTON flicks on the wall switch. THE SEXTON scurries upstage to fuss with the heater in the rear of the synagogue. SCHLISSEL and ZITORSKY shuffle downstage to a small uncovered heater and stand silently—indeed a little wearily—for a moment. SCHLISSEL sighs*) So how goes it with a Jew today?

ZITORSKY How should it go?

SCHLISSEL Have a pinch of snuff.

ZITORSKY No, thank you.

SCHLISSEL Davis won't be here this morning. I stopped by his house. He has a cold. His daughter-in-law told me he's still in bed.

ZITORSKY My daughter-in-law, may she grow rich and buy a hotel with a thousand rooms and be found dead in every one of them.

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SCHLISSEL My daughter-in-law, may she invest heavily in General Motors, and the whole thing should go bankrupt.

ZITORSKY Sure, go have children.

SCHLISSEL The devil take them all.

THE SEXTON (*Scurrying downstage; to THE CABALIST as he passes*) Hirschman, are you all right?

(*He flutters, a small round ball of a man, to the door of THE RABBI'S office, which he now opens with one of the many keys on his chain*)

SCHLISSEL Foreman won't be here today.

ZITORSKY What's the matter with Foreman?

SCHLISSEL His granddaughter today. This is the morning.

ZITORSKY Oh, that's right. Today is the morning.

SCHLISSEL Listen, it's better for everybody.

ZITORSKY Sure.

SCHLISSEL I told Foreman, I said: "Foreman, it's better for everybody." The girl is becoming violent. I spoke to her father. He said to me they live in terror what she'll do to the other children. They came home one night, they found her punching one of the little children.

ZITORSKY Well, what can you do?

SCHLISSEL What can you do? You do what they're doing. They're putting her back in the institution.

ZITORSKY Of course. There she will have the benefit of trained psychiatric personnel.

SCHLISSEL The girl is incurable. She's been in and out of mental institutions since she was eleven years old. I met the psychiatrist there, you know, when I was up there to visit Foreman last week. I discussed the whole business with him. A fine young fellow. The girl is a schizophrenic with violent tendencies.

(ZITORSKY *considers this diagnosis for a moment, then sighs*)

ZITORSKY Ah, may my daughter-in-law eat acorns and may branches spout from her ears.

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SCHLISSEL May my daughter-in-law live to be a hundred and twenty, and may she live all her years in her daughter-in-law's house.

(THE SEXTON has been tugging a large opened brown cardboard carton out of THE RABBI'S office, from which he now extracts two velvet bags which he hands to SCHLISSEL and ZITORSKY. A fifth old Jew now enters from the street, a patrician little man with a Vandyke beard and a black homburg. His name is ALPER. He bursts into shrill prayer as he enters)

ALPER (Chanting) "As for me in the abundance of thy loving kindness will I come into thy house; I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob . . ." (As precipitously as the prayer had begun, it now drops into nothing more than a rapid movement of lips. THE SEXTON acknowledges ALPER'S arrival with a nod and darts back into THE RABBI'S office, where he plunks himself behind the desk and begins hurriedly to dial the phone. ALPER'S voice zooms abruptly up into a shrill incantation again) ". . . in the truth of thy salvation. Amen!"

SCHLISSEL Amen.

ZITORSKY Amen.

(ALPER joins the other two old men and they stand in silent, rueful speculation)

THE SEXTON (On phone) Hello, Harris? This is Bleyer the Sexton. Come on down today, we need you. Foreman won't be here. Davis is sick. We won't have ten men for the morning prayers if you don't come down . . . Services start in twenty minutes. Hurry up . . . Wear a sweater under your coat . . . All right . . .

(He hangs up, takes a large ledger from the desk, and begins nervously to examine its pages)

SCHLISSEL Hirschman slept over in the synagogue again last night. Have you ever seen such pietistic humbug?

ALPER Well, he is a very devout man. A student of the

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cabala. The Rabbi speaks of him with the greatest reverence.

SCHLISSEL Devout indeed. I assure you this lavish display of orthodoxy is a very profitable business. I was told confidentially just yesterday that his board and food are paid for by two foolish old women who consider him a saint.

ALPER It can't cost them very much. He's been fasting the last three days.

SCHLISSEL And the reason he sleeps in the synagogue so frequently is because his landlady does not give him heat for his own room in the mornings.

ZITORSKY Ah, go be an old man in the winter.

ALPER I must say, I really don't know what to do with myself on these cold days.

SCHLISSEL I'm an atheist. If I had something better to do, would I be here?

ZITORSKY You know what would be a nice way to kill a day? I think it would be nice to take a trip up to Mount Hope Cemetery and have a look at my burial plot. A lovely cemetery. Like a golf course, actually. By the time one gets there and comes back, the whole day has been used up. Would you like to come? I'll pay both your fares.

ALPER Why not? I have never been to Mount Hope. I have my burial plot on Mount Zion Cemetery.

ZITORSKY Oh, that's a beautiful cemetery.

ALPER Yes, it is. My wife wanted to buy plots in Cedar Lawn because her whole family is buried there, but I wouldn't hear of it.

ZITORSKY Oh, Cedar Lawn. I wouldn't be buried in Cedar Lawn.

ALPER It's in such a bad state. The headstones tumble one on top of the other, and everybody walks on the graves.

ZITORSKY They don't take care in Cedar Lawn. My wife once said, she should rest in peace, that Cedar Lawn was the tenement of cemeteries.

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ALPER A well-turned phrase.

ZITORSKY She had a way with words, God grant her eternal rest.

ALPER I'd like you to come to Mount Zion sometimes, see my plot.

ZITORSKY Maybe we could make the trip tomorrow.

SCHLISSEL Listen to these two idiots, discussing their graves as if they were country estates.

ZITORSKY Where are you buried, Schlissel?

SCHLISSEL Cedar Lawn.

ALPER Well, listen, there are many lovely areas in Cedar Lawn. All my wife's family are buried there.

ZITORSKY Come with us, Schlissel, and have a look at my grave.

SCHLISSEL Why not? What else have I got to do?

*(ALPER now slowly goes about the business of donning his prayer shawl and phylacteries, which he takes out of a velvet prayer bag. Among Jews, prayer is a highly individual matter, and peripatetic to the bargain. The actual ritual of laying on the phylacteries is a colorful one.*

*ALPER extracts his left arm from his jacket and rebuttons his jacket so that his shirt-sleeved left arm hangs loose. Then, the shirt sleeve is rolled up almost to the shoulder, and the arm phylactery, a long thin black leather thong, is put on by wrapping it around the left arm seven times, three times around the palm, and three times around the middle finger. All this is accompanied by rapidly recited prayers, as is the laying on of the head phylactery. All the while ALPER walks, bending and twisting at the knees, raising his voice occasionally in the truly lovely words of incantation. In a far upstage corner, THE CABA-LIST huddles under his enveloping white tallith—prayer shawl—his back to everyone else, deeply involved in his personal meditations. The synagogue itself is a shabby little place, the walls yellowed and cracked, illumined by a fitful overhead bulb. There is indeed at this moment a*

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*sense of agelessness, even of primitive barbarism. During this, THE SEXTON has dialed a second number)*

THE SEXTON Hello? Mr. Arnold Kessler, please . . .

How do you do? This is Mr. Bleyer the Sexton at the synagogue. Perhaps you recall me . . . Did I wake you up? I'm terribly sorry. As long as you're up, according to my books, your father died one year ago yesterday, on the eleventh day in the month of Shvat, may his soul fly straight to the Heavenly Gates, and how about coming down with your brother and saying a memorial prayer in your father's name? . . . Let me put it this way, Mr. Kessler. You know we can't have morning prayers without a quorum of ten men. If you and your brother don't come down we won't have a quorum . . . As a favor to me . . . Kessler, may your children be such devoted sons, and bring your brother. You are doing a good deed. Peace be with you. Hurry up.

*(He hangs up, sits frowning, totaling, up on his fingers the number of men he has, scowls. In the synagogue, ALPHER'S voice rises for a brief moment)*

ALPHER “. . . and it shall be to thee for a sign upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thy eyes . . .”

*(THE SEXTON rises abruptly from his chair and bustles out of the office to the front door of the synagogue)*

THE SEXTON *(To nobody in particular)* Listen, I'm going to have to get a tenth Jew off the street somewheres. I'll be right back. Schlissel, will you please fix that bench already, you promised me.

*(He exits. SCHLISSEL nods and picks up a hammer. For a moment, only the singsong murmur of the rapid prayers and the upstage tapping of SCHLISSEL'S hammer fill the stage. The front door to the synagogue now opens, and a sixth old Jew peers in. He is a frightened little wisp of a man, named FOREMAN. He is obviously in a state. He darts terrified looks all about the synagogue, and then abruptly disappears back into the street, leaving the syna-*

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*gogue door open. Nobody noticed his brief appearance. A moment later, he is back, this time leading a slim young girl of eighteen wearing a topcoat, who is also distracted. The old man herds her quickly across the synagogue to THE RABBI'S office, pushes her in, and closes the door behind her. She stands in THE RABBI'S office, almost rigid with terror. FOREMAN scuttles back to close the front door. SCHLISSEL looks up and notices FOREMAN and nods to him; he nods back. Like his friends, FOREMAN wears a heavy winter coat and a worn fedora some sizes too small for him. He stands and watches the others apprehensively. At last ALPER reaches the end of his laying on of the phylacteries, his voice climbing to a shrill incantation)*

ALPER (*To FOREMAN, moving slowly as he prays*) “. . . and it shall be for a sign upon thy hand, and for frontlets between thy eyes; for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt. Amen!”

FOREMAN (*Muttering, his head bobbing nervously*)  
Amen!

ALPER I thought you weren't coming down today, Foreman.

FOREMAN (*His mouth working without saying anything. Finally, he says*) Alper . . .

ALPER You seem agitated. Is something wrong?

FOREMAN (*Staring at his friend*) Alper, I have her here.

ALPER You have who here?

FOREMAN I have my granddaughter Evelyn here. I have her here in the Rabbi's office.

ALPER What are you talking about?

FOREMAN I took her out of the house while nobody was looking, and I brought her here. I am faint. Let me sit down.

(*He sinks onto a chair. His friend regards him with concern*)

ALPER Here, David, let me take your coat.

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FOREMAN Alper, I have seen such a thing and heard words as will place me in my grave before the singing of the evening service. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who hath wrought the wonders of the world." (*Suddenly half-starting from his seat*) I must speak to Hirschman! This is an affair for Hirschman who has delved into the cabala and the forbidden mysteries of numbers.

ALPER Sit down, Foreman, and compose yourself. (FOREMAN *sinks slowly back onto his chair*) Why did you bring her here? Foreman, you are my oldest friend from our days in the seminary together in Rumni in the Province of Poltava, and I speak to you harshly as only a friend may speak. You are making too much out of this whole matter of the girl. I know how dear she is to you, but the girl is insane, for heaven's sake! What sort of foolishness is this then to smuggle her out of your son's home? To what purpose? Really, Foreman, a gentle and pious man like you! Your son must be running through the streets at this moment shouting his daughter's name. Cal him on the phone and tell him you are bringing her back to him.

(FOREMAN *stares at his friend, his pale eyes filled with tears*)

FOREMAN Alper . . .

ALPER David, my dear friend, make peace with this situation.

FOREMAN (*Whispering*) She is possessed, Alper. She has a dybbuk in her. A demon! It spoke to me. (*He stares down at the floor at his feet, a numb terror settling over his face*) It spoke to me. I went in to my granddaughter this morning to comfort her, and I said: "How are you?" And she seemed quite normal. She has these moments of absolute lucidity. (*He looks desperately at his friend again*) She seemed to know she was being taken to the institution again. Then suddenly she fell to the floor in



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a swoon. I said: "Evelyn, what's the matter?" And she looked up at me, and it was no longer her face, but a face so twisted with rage that my blood froze in my body. And a voice came out of her that was not her own. "Do you know my voice?" And I knew it. I knew the voice. God have mercy on my soul. I stood there like a statue, and my granddaughter lay on the floor with her eyes closed, and the voice came out of her, but her lips never moved. "David Foreman, son of Abram, this is the soul of Hannah Luchinsky, whom you dishonored and weakened in your youth, and the Gates of Heaven are closed to me." And my granddaughter began to writhe on the floor as if in the most horrible agony, and she began to laugh so loudly that I was sure my son and daughter-in-law in the living room could hear. I flung the door open in panic, and my son and daughter-in-law were sitting there talking, and they heard nothing. And I tell you shrieks of laughter were coming from this girl on the floor. And I closed the door and besought God, and finally the dybbuk was silent. May God strike me down on this spot, Alper, if every word I tell you is not true.

*(ALPER has slowly sat down on an adjacent chair, absolutely enthralled by the story. He stares at FOREMAN)*

ALPER A dybbuk?

FOREMAN *(Nodding)* A dybbuk. Could you believe such a thing?

ALPER Who did the dybbuk say she was?

FOREMAN You should remember her. Hannah Luchinsky.

ALPER The name is vaguely familiar.

FOREMAN You remember Luchinsky, the sexton of the Rumni seminary, with his three daughters? Hannah was the handsome one who became pregnant, and they threw stones at her, called her harlot, and drove her out of the city.

ALPER *(Recognition slowly coming over him)* Ooohhh.