

GILT

By Michael Hardstark

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRlich COLSON writes...*

Let's say you just traded in your Jewish girlfriend (aka "The Whore from Gehenna") for a hot Aryan shiksa who knows how to cook sauerkraut and sausage in your desire to avoid marrying your mother. Have I got the play for you! Even if you're not into sauerkraut, we're all feeling guilty about something, we're all high maintenance, and we all have a Jewish mother, so I insist that you read this play regardless as a cautionary tale. Michael Hardstark's GILT is a sophisticated and stylish short that may piss you off, but it's time to dust off your sense of humor and relish a play that plays on power dynamics and stereotypes with unusual flair. There are Freudian allusions. There's the Jewish guilt zeitgeist. There's even a parakeet named Helga. The witty dialogue is terrific and the ending promises to get under your skin and stay there forever - like herpes. This modern Sisyphian tale is sure to trigger tender feelings for the loveable schmuck within all of us, whether or not it helps you escape your mother or your destiny.

A GILTy sample:

ALLEN

You see, the thing is...they don't mind being in the kitchen. Cooking isn't seen as a lowering of status to them...

DAVID

You sayin' that's why Jewish girls don't like to cook?

ALLEN

Not ALL Jewish girls, just the ones from Long Island – and California...

(Spacing and format are playwright's own. Eds.)

GILT

A brief play

by Michael Hardstark

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Cast of Characters:

Allen.....a young man 25- 30 years old.

David.....a young man 25 – 30 years old.

Nancy.....a young woman 25 –30 years old

SETTING: the living room/kitchenette of a small one-bedroom apartment on the upper westside of Manhattan. Late afternoon.

AT RISE: two young men are seated, having a conversation. They are smoking cigars. From time to time, from the bedroom, we hear the chirping of a parakeet.

ALLEN

...she cooks things I never tasted before...

DAVID

Yeah? Like what?

ALLEN

You ever have knockwurst cooked in beer?

DAVID

That's GERMAN stuff, Allen...

ALLEN

So what?

DAVID

How was it?

ALLEN

I liked it! She made me the whole works...sauerkraut, mustard...

DAVID

Ummm...

ALLEN

You see, the thing is...they don't mind being in the kitchen. Cooking isn't seen as a lowering of status to them...

DAVID

You sayin' that's why Jewish girls don't like to cook?

ALLEN

Not ALL Jewish girls, just the ones from Long Island – and California...

DAVID

That's just about the lot of them...

ALLEN

Well, you still got the mid-west...

(slight pause)

I met a Jewish girl from Chicago didn't mind cooking – wasn't very GOOD at it, but she didn't mind it.

DAVID

Probably first generation.

ALLEN

She was second.

DAVID

Figures.

ALLEN

Are you ready for this? She sews...

DAVID

No kidding?

ALLEN

I'll show you the sewing machine, it's in the bedroom...

DAVID

That's okay.

ALLEN

I'm serious...I come home one night; I was out drinkin' with some of the guys from work...my shirt was torn...figured I'd have to buy me a new shirt, right?

DAVID

Well, yeah, if you only have one shirt...

ALLEN

I fall into bed, go to sleep, wake up the next morning – she's working away on the sewing machine...she fixes the shirt – like new!

DAVID

Christ – you lucky bastard!

ALLEN

Oh, Davey...it's something else, man, it's something else.

Pause

DAVID

What about...ahhh...you know...

ALLEN

Dave, you have no idea – none.

DAVID

Really?

ALLEN

No inhibitions...

DAVID

Oh brother...

ALLEN

...like she never heard of the word GUILT...like she grew up on Bora Bora or something - BEFORE the missionaries came. I'm telling you, Dave, I have a hard time keepin' up with her...

DAVID

What about the bird?

ALLEN

Helga?

DAVID

That her name?

ALLEN

You put a sheet over the cage, shuts her up in a second.

DAVID

Huh...

ALLEN

...and there's another word she never heard of..

DAVID

What's that?

(ALLEN silently mouths the word 'No'.)

Oh, brother...

ALLEN

Any time, day or night. Eight in the morning? Sure. A late afternoon delight? Why not?

(he indicates his cigar)

How do you like these? Aren't they great?

DAVID

Excellent...

ALLEN

I got 'em at a little place over on 23rd street...you want some, let me know...'cause you can't get them just walkin' in from the street – you gotta know somebody...

DAVID

I'll let you know...

ALLEN

And another thing...it's always gotta be the same damn place with them, like there was a magic circle around it and you can't do it out of the circle...

DAVID

Who? With the Jewish girls?

ALLEN

...they get nervous you have another idea...maybe the bathroom...standing up or something...the ROOF – whatever...

DAVID

Yeah, you're right.

ALLEN

With Nancy – no problem...on the living room floor? Let's do it! Against the stove? Why not? In a chair, a bathtub, on a sofa...it don't matter...

DAVID

You ever do it in a bed?

ALLEN

Once in awhile...and another thing – she requires very little maintenance...you know what a typical Saturday night is for us?

DAVID

What?

ALLEN

A movie, if there's something good playing in the neighborhood, then Vinnie's for a pizza, hop over to PG's for a few beers – that's it.

DAVID

A movie...let's see...pizza's what...?

ALLEN

About 12 bucks over there (and it's good)...

DAVID

...coupla beers – so you've spent – what? Forty, fifty bucks?

ALLEN

Around there...and she's happy, she's content...shit, man – she's grateful...

DAVID

With Elaine I'm always figuring out what to do for Saturday night. Last week it was bowling...we doubled with her friends Shelly and Howie – I can't stand them...

ALLEN

Gentile woman aren't into that comparing game Jewish broads get into...they weren't raised the same way, I guess...

DAVID

...guy's a CPA with arms like play dough, toochis on him as big as a beach ball – he beats me.

ALLEN

...maybe it's genetic...all those generations of families plowin' the fields together, getting the harvest done...standing by their men – that sorta stuff, you know?

DAVID

...fuckin' bowling – it ain't a sport, it's...ahhh...

ALLEN

Fuckin' RECREATION...

DAVID

Right.

Pause.

ALLEN

I don't know, Dave...I just feel – GOOD, ya know?

DAVID

Hmm...

ALLEN

I feel like this is my HOUSE...I'm King-of-the-Castle here...

Pause.

DAVID

You tell your mom?

ALLEN

Yeah, I called there...they know. I gave 'em the new number...

DAVID

It's her number though, right?

ALLEN

Yeah, it's her number...we're not gonna change the number, you kidding?

DAVID

Well, I don't know, maybe you want your name on it put in the phone book, just in case...

ALLEN

Naw, I been callin' people, giving the the number...it's fine...she picked up those cards from the Post Office had me fill them out – change of address...

DAVID

Oh, yeah...

ALLEN

That's what I mean...I didn't even think of it...someone like Linda or - what's herface - Joan, it wouldn't 've OCCURRED to them...

DAVID

JOAN...

ALLEN

My mail would've piled up the old place – they send it back, I could be involved inna SUIT (god forbid) or maybe a pre-approved credit card, whatever...

DAVID

You ever hear from her?

ALLEN

Who?

DAVID

Joan...you still in touch?

ALLEN

Are you kidding?

DAVID

No, huh?

ALLEN

FUCK HER! That ball-busting, manipulating, bitch-of-a-whore's-litter – CUNT!!! My worst nightmare – I run into her!

DAVID

She's an acquired taste.

ALLEN

I can't believe I went with her.

DAVID

Two years...

ALLEN

...the Gulag years...

DAVID

You learn from your mistakes, is all...

ALLEN

The Whore From Gehenna...

(Pause.)

Why'd you even mention her name?

DAVID

YOU did.

ALLEN

That was in PASSING! YOU did it deliberately!

DAVID

Take it easy.

Sound of a key in the front door lock. The door opens. NANCY enters carrying packages

ALLEN

Hi, honey...

She stops. Takes in the cigar smoke, the cigars...

NANCY

What -

ALLEN

You remember David...

NANCY

Yes, hi.

DAVID

Hi.

Pause.

NANCY

Allen -

ALLEN

What?

NANCY

You know better...

ALLEN

I..

NANCY

Not in the apartment. In the hallway, the lobby, the roof – those were the rules.

ALLEN

We didn't expect you back so soon.

NANCY

Rehearsal ended early...

(she goes to the door, props it open with a chair or small table.)

Let's keep the door open for awhile, shall we? Allen, open the window, would you?

ALLEN gets up. Starts opening the window. NANCY goes to the kitchenette, starts putting out the groceries.

DAVID

Oh – we're not supposed to...?

NANCY

It's not your fault, David. You didn't know the rules. Allen's the one who's guilty...

DAVID

Where should I put - ?

NANCY takes a dish, pours some water into it.

NANCY

Here -

(she indicates Allen's cigar.)

His is on the table.

DAVID

Sure.

DAVID drops both cigars into the dish. NANCY dumps them into a wastepaper basket.

NANCY

Thanks. Allen – open the bedroom window as well...poor Helga...

(to ALLEN.)

You didn't hear her complaining?

ALLEN

Sorry...

NANCY

(To DAVID.)

I'm fixing supper. We're having cold cuts and potato salad. You're welcome to stay, there's going to be plenty left over.

DAVID

Thanks, but Elaine made reservations at Trovatore's.

NANCY

(To ALLEN.)

You've told me about Elaine...we'll have to double date sometime...

ALLEN

Sure.

DAVID

Sure...well, I better get going...

DAVID stands in the doorway.

NANCY

Nice seeing you again.

DAVID

You, too.

(To ALLEN.)

Talk to ya,

ALLEN

Yeah.

DAVID exits.

NANCY

Sweetheart, why don't you set the table. I'm going to change...and I bought some lovely chardonnay for us...we'll have it with our supper...

She exits into the bedroom.

ALLEN

Okay.

NANCY

(From off-stage.)

Hello, my sweetums...my Helga...howse my sweet Helga? Did smoke get in your eyes, hmmm?

She puts on a CD; Mozart's Der Holle Rache Kocht In Meinem Herzen from The Magic Flute. ALLEN has been setting the table. He stands still, staring at the open front door.

SLOW FADE

THE PLAYWEIGHT SPEAKS:

Inciting incident for the piece (inspiration)?

I gave myself a writing exercise : write something as if I were another playwright. In this case - David Mamet. I used a semi-autobiographical incident & spun it into GILT.

Themes?

The role 'status' plays in relationships. As well as the interplay between the 'social' persona & the 'interior' emotional self.

Influences, likes, etc.?

Jean Anouilh , Paddy Chayefsky, Jean Francaix, Sid Caesar/Your Show of Shows.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Michael Hardstark's plays have had productions and readings throughout the USA, including; the Chelsea Theatre Lab, NYC, the Neapolitans Theatre, Chicago, the Prescott Arts Center, Prescott, AZ, the Jewish Repertory Theatre/92nd st. Y, NYC, and the Greenway Court Theatre in Los Angeles, featuring Alfred Moliina and Harold Gould.

His play, *The Last Laugh*, is published by Samuel French, Inc.
He is a member of the American Renaissance Theatre Company and the Dramatists Guild.

