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Family Plays

THE TAILOR

Folktale By
Claudia Haas

THE TAILOR

Russian folktale. By Claudia Haas. Cast: 3m., 5w. Moishe fashions an overcoat for himself from a bag of scraps inherited from his father. Pearl, his wife, dislikes the coat, especially the brass buttons. Annika, the town gossip, demands a free coat to influence sales from rich citizens. She persuades others in town that they must have one also. Business is looking up. In time, Moishe and Pearl have a daughter, Sonja, and another daughter, Tonja, and another daughter, Nina. Also as time passes, Moishe sometimes goes through hard times where there are not many orders. Moishe's overcoat has gotten worn and shabby over the years. He is an embarrassment to his wife and children. Not one to throw things away, Moishe turns his overcoat into a fine new jacket, unfortunately still with the brass buttons that his wife never liked. Annika spies the jacket and wants one immediately, as do customers Rasja and Meyna. Orders come piling in again. This is good because the daughters are growing and they are becoming more expensive. As the daughters grow, the jacket gets shabbier and shabbier. The wife and daughters demand that Moishe finally get rid of the old jacket. So, what's a tailor to do? He cuts and he snips and there is a vest fashioned from the old jacket. (Still with the brass buttons.) Of course, Annika wants a vest immediately, as do Rasja and Meyna. As the daughters ask for clothes, books and music, Moishe tries to work even harder to support his family. He takes his breakfast to work. He spills jam on his new vest. To his family's dismay, he intends to wear the stained vest. After all, he just made it! The daughters are appalled. But how can Moishe throw away a perfectly good vest (albeit stained) when he has two weddings to pay for! So he compromises and makes a tie from the vest. Of course, Annika, Rasja and Meyna need new ties to go with their new vests. Working harder than ever to pay for the two weddings, Moishe inadvertently cuts his tie in half. No matter. It will become a splendid handkerchief. Annika, Rasja and Meyna will also need new handkerchiefs. At the weddings, Moishe and his many customers sob into their new handkerchiefs until Moishe's handkerchief is declared a disaster to be thrown away. But should it? With a snip here and a cut there, Moishe saves a thread from the handkerchief. It is the thread of his story, his life and his overcoat which he gives to the audience. *One act. Set: a Russian village (with levels indicating various playing areas). Extremely simple costumes. Time: 1910. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: TQ3.*

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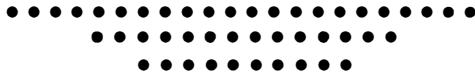
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The Tailor

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A ONE-ACT PLAY
BY **CLAUDIA HAAS**



Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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CAST

8 Characters (3m, 5f)

Moishe: (m) - Ages from 18 to 36 - The Tailor

Pearl: (f) - Ages from 17 to 35 - His wife

Annika: (f) - Ages from 30 to 48 - The Town Matchmaker

Rasja: (m) - Ages from 25 to 43 - A well-to-do Merchant

Meyna: (m) - Ages from 25 to 43 - An even better-off Merchant

Sonja: (f) - Ages from 10 to 18 - Moishe & Pearl's eldest daughter

Tonja: (f) - Ages from 8 to 16 - Moishe and Pearl's second daughter

Nina: (f) - Ages from 7 to 15 - Moishe and Pearl's youngest daughter

Running time: Approximately 45 minutes

About the Play

A newly-married tailor is just starting out in life. He has inherited a big bag of scraps from his father and he fashions an overcoat from it. His new wife, Pearl, does not like the overcoat (she especially does not like the brass buttons) but the Tailor, Moishe, is very frugal and declares that it will “last a lifetime.” His overcoat is admired in town by the gossip who needs one immediately (except that she can’t afford it). The gossip, Annika, persuades others in town that they must have one also. Business is looking up.

In time, Moishe and his wife, Pearl, have a daughter, Sonja. And another daughter, Tonja. And another daughter, Nina. Also as time passes, Moishe sometimes goes through hard times where there are not many orders. Moishe’s overcoat has gotten worn and shabby over the years. He is an embarrassment to his wife and children. Not one to throw things away, Moishe turns his overcoat into a fine new jacket. Unfortunately, still with the brass buttons that his wife never liked. Annika spies the jacket and wants one immediately. As do Rasja and Meyna. Orders come piling in again. Things are looking up. This is good because the daughters are growing and they are becoming more expensive. As the daughters grow, the jacket gets shabbier and shabbier. Older now, the wife and daughters demand that Moishe finally get rid of the old jacket. But the daughters have gotten more expensive. So, what’s a tailor to do? He cuts and he snips and he threads and he stitches and - oy vey! - there is a vest fashioned from the old jacket. (Still with the brass buttons.) Of course, Annika wants a vest immediately, as do Rasja and Meyna. As the daughters ask for clothes, books, and music, Moishe tries to work even harder to support his family. He takes his breakfast to work. He spills jam on his new vest. To his family’s dismay, he intends to wear the stained vest. After all, he just made it!

The daughters are appalled. He can’t walk around in a stained vest because two of the eldest daughters are to be married. It would be embarrassing. But how can Moishe throw away a perfectly good vest (albeit stained) when he has two weddings to pay for! Two! So he compromises and makes a tie from the vest. The daughters can live with that. Of course, Annika, Rasja, and Meyna need new ties to go with their new vests. Working harder than ever to pay for the two weddings, Moishe inadvertently cuts his tie in half. No matter. It will become a splendid handkerchief. And Annika, Rasja, and Meyna will also need new handkerchiefs. Moishe sobs so much that it is declared that his handkerchief is ruined and should finally be thrown away. But should it? With a snip here and a cut there, Moishe saves a thread from the handkerchief. It is the thread of his story, his life, and his overcoat which he gives to the audience.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is intended to be very theatrical. The set should consist of levels denoting various playing areas. (Moishe's home, Moishe's shop and the street.) The play is continuous action, but time passes. I have used chimes to denote the passing of time, but incidental music would work very well. If possible, the play would be more effective if the overcoat of the Tailor and his subsequent creations from it are all mimed or real. His tape measure, scissors, and needle and thread should also be mimed. If you choose to go literal, you will find yourself with many coats, jackets, vests, and ties to supply. The handkerchief at the end could be real and the thread should be real.

Properties (Optional)

Bag of scraps, tape measure, scissors, needle, thread, overcoat, 3 sets of fabric jackets, vest, tie.

Handkerchief (Moishe).

Money (Rasja and Meyna).

Could Be Real

Basket with hard loaf of bread (Pearl).

Box with four dresses (Moishe).

Box with books and music (Moishe).

Violin (Nina).

Thread (Moishe).

Costumes

Costumes should be very simple using standard clothing of the time, the simpler the costumes the better.

THE TAILOR
by Claudia Haas

SCENE ONE

[SETTING: A small village in Russia around the year 1910

AT RISE: We find a young shabbily dressed tailor hard at work sewing. There is a series of levels representing the tailor's home and another grouping of levels that represent his shop. Next to the TAILOR is a bag of large scraps from which he is fashioning his overcoat. It could be interesting if the audience never actually sees the material and the coat of the TAILOR as well as the rest of the clothing made by the tailor. All could be "invisible" and left to the imagination. That is the director's choice.]

MOISHE. I'm afraid you have caught me at work. I know I should be working on my customer's orders, but I...don't have any. Besides, I think a tailor should own one fine garment, don't you? Just one month ago I got married in a very shabby suit.

PEARL. *[From the side]* Extremely shabby.

MOISHE. It's a wonder Pearl would have me as her husband.

PEARL. It is a wonder indeed!

MOISHE. Not now. It is not time for your introduction. Let them meet me first.

PEARL. Move on to the story, please. If I am impatient, imagine how they feel. Introduce yourself!

MOISHE. Why, that's the very thing. I shall! I certainly shall!

PEARL. My husband journeys a long way before he comes to the point. Meet Moishe, my husband, a humble tailor. And meet his bag of scraps.

MOISHE. *[MOISHE bows]* And please become acquainted with Pearl, my bride. As for these scraps, they represent my work.

PEARL. Did you ever meet such a man? His inheritance consists of discarded pieces of fabric.

MOISHE. These fabric pieces were handed down to me from my father. My father taught me never to waste even a scrap! From these remnants, I will fashion a fine overcoat. This overcoat will lead me through life.

PEARL. *[To audience]* A coat leading a man through life? Did you

ever hear such silliness? But I married him and I am content to be his wife. *[To audience]* Moische, the introductions are over. Please go to work! You need to work on your orders.

MOISHE. Pearl does not know that I have no orders.

PEARL. What?

MOISHE. Well, she knows now.

PEARL. If you have no orders, why are you sitting here sewing?

MOISHE. Even a humble tailor needs his own overcoat, don't you think? *[To audience]* Remember the overcoat! It is very important to the story. Watch as I thread and I snip and I sew and I stitch and what do you see? A fine coat for me! Look, Pearl, have you ever seen a better coat? *[MOISHE proudly holds up an imaginary coat]*

PEARL. I don't like it. It has too many brass buttons. And look at the lining! How many scraps did you use to make it? But I suppose in time it will get worn and eventually we can throw it out.

MOISHE. Never! I never throw anything out. Why, can you imagine the state of our world if every time something got a bit used, it was tossed? There will always be a place in the world for one, fine overcoat. Besides, I do quality work. I will proudly wear this coat for the rest of my life. And the lining is what makes this coat unique. Nobody else will ever have a lining like this.

PEARL. Moische, I don't think I can look at all those brass buttons for the rest of my life. And the lining! Oy vey! It is a coat lining of many colors! But no matter, for I am confident that one day, dear husband, this coat will wear out.

MOISHE. Never, Pearl! I am a fine tailor! My work will stand for a lifetime.

PEARL. Go to work, Moische! I will see you at dinner time.

[PEARL exits and MOISHE heads off to his shop. He is stopped by ANNIKA, the village gossip]

ANNIKA. Nice coat, Tailor.

MOISHE. Thank you.

ANNIKA. The lining is...unique. Are you trying to show everybody up with your fancy brass buttons?

MOISHE. What do you mean?

ANNIKA. Why are you parading around in a jacket only fit for a czar?

MOISHE. Why, Annika, I am a tailor, and I need to advertise the fact that I make quality clothes. Don't you agree?

ANNIKA. Maybe. And maybe I think you want a coat better than

everyone else's in the village.

[MOISHE goes to protest but ANNIKA quickly turns on her heels and exits. On the way out she whispers something to two merchants who are on their way to work. MOISHE enters his shop and the two merchants, RASJA and MEYNA, follow him. ANNIKA moves out of the way but watches and listens.]

RASJA and MEYNA. Tailor!

MOISHE. Rasja! Meyna! Good morning.

RASJA. I have come to inspect your coat. I am told it is very fine.

MOISHE. Really, and who told you that?

[ANNIKA opens the door and waves at MOISHE]

MEYNA. But I have heard that it is too fancy for a common tailor.

MOISHE. Indeed. And where did you hear that? *[ANNIKA again opens the door and smiles and waves at MOISHE]* News travels fast in this town.

RASJA. I am an important tradesman. I am thinking that I would like a coat exactly like that. It's very impressive.

MEYNA. Certainly, I think that I should have the finer coat. For I am the richest merchant in town.

MOISHE. Why, you both shall have quality coats. Let me take some quick measurements. *[MOISHE quickly measures things like sleeve, neck, height, and makes some notes]* I promise you that you won't be sorry you ordered from me. I have some wonderful ideas. It will be a perfect fit. You shall both look very fine. Very fine, indeed. Come back in two week's time and the coats will be ready for you.

RASJA and MEYNA. Thank you, Tailor. *[RASJA and MEYNA turn to leave. MEYNA leans over to MOISHE and whispers]*

MEYNA. Between you and me, give my coat an extra brass button.

[RASJA and MEYNA exit]

MOISHE. Two orders! I have two orders. Won't Pearl be pleased? *[MOISHE sets about his work when ANNIKA enters]*

ANNIKA. So, is that how you do business, Tailor?

MOISHE. What? What did I do?

ANNIKA. Everyone in town will soon have a fancy coat, and I, the Matchmaker, am left to wear only rags.

MOISHE. Why, if you would like to place an order...

ANNIKA. Place an order! You know, I live by my matchmaking.

MOISHE. *[Aside]* And by gossip.

ANNIKA. What?

MOISHE. Nothing.

ANNIKA. I heard that! I shall choose to ignore that remark...for now. Moische, I am pleading with you. There are few young people in the village at the moment, so how can I afford such a fine coat?

MOISHE. Annika, you recently were paid by Pearl's father. I know. She married me.

ANNIKA. Bah. A pittance. I did them a favor because our families go way back together. I think...Moische...that if I had a fine coat like yours with an unusual lining...I could...possibly...attract more clients. More families with money. And then when I have lots of money, Moische, I will order many fine coats from you and make you very wealthy. Besides, I get around this village. I could spread wondrous news of your capabilities.

MOISHE. *[Aside]* This is true. Remember how I told you how she gossips.

ANNIKA. I heard that.

MOISHE. Let me get this straight, Annika. You want me to make you a coat for free and in this way I will get rich?

ANNIKA. Exactly. We think alike. *[ANNIKA exits]*

MOISHE. What's a tailor to do? Actually, creating a coat for Annika could be good for business. Many tailors only have men for customers. I shall become the first tailor in this village to offer my services to both men and woman. And after that, I could clothe the children. And if my luck continues, perhaps the Rabbi would come to me for his clothing. Yes, life is looking up indeed. Ahh! What am I talking about? I only have two paying orders and if they are not ready in two weeks, I shall be disgraced. Excuse me, I had better go to work.

[With that, MOISHE sets about laying out his three pieces of fabric. PEARL enters. She carries a basket with a loaf of bread]

PEARL. Good. I see you are hard at work, dear husband. *[PEARL looks around inspecting the work MOISHE has in front of him]*

MOISHE. Pearl! What a surprise! Are you spying on me?

PEARL. Not at all. I brought you...some lunch. *[PEARL goes to the three pieces of fabric that MOISHE has laid out]*

MOISHE. Lunch? The sun is barely up.

PEARL. Breakfast. Yes, breakfast. I noticed you did not eat this morning.

MOISHE. This is true. I did not. How thoughtful of you. What did you bring me?

PEARL. Yesterday's bread. *[She produces a loaf of bread from the basket. It is hard as a rock. The TAILOR takes it and bangs it on the*

table.)

MOISHE. Thank you, wife. I shall...use it as a doorstopper. I have always wanted one of those.

PEARL. I thought you would appreciate the fact that I saved it and did not throw it out.

MOISHE [*Knocking on the stale bread*] Some things, dear wife, are better thrown to the birds. [*MOISHE resumes work. PEARL stays and watches*] Yes?

PEARL. I see you have orders.

MOISHE. [*Brightly*] Yes. Two. Isn't it wonderful? Rasja and Meyna have both ordered the fancy overcoat that you do not fancy. I must have then ready in two weeks time.

PEARL. Two? But you have three pieces of fabric laid out!

MOISHE. This is true.

PEARL. Well, why are there three pieces of fabric when you only have two orders?

MOISHE. Why, the other fabric is [*coughing into his sleeve*] for free.

PEARL. What?

MOISHE. It is a coat for Annika. I am making it...for free.

PEARL. You are making it *for free*?

MOISHE. Yes. You don't have to yell.

[*A beat while PEARL thinks and MOISHE waits for the explosion*]

PEARL. [*Controlling herself*] Why?

MOISHE. I am making it for free so we can become rich. [*Pause*] Annika explained it all to me. [*PEARL opens her mouth to complain, but is stopped by MOISHE*] Now, now, dear wife. Please run along. I am not getting much done with you here. I will see you at home for dinner. Perhaps you can bake some fresh bread. [*PEARL reluctantly exits*]

PEARL. I hope you know what you are doing.

MOISHE. I hope so, too. [*MOISHE resumes sewing and PEARL goes to her home and begins to cook dinner. MOISHE sews and sews. Time passes. He hears chimes in the background toll the hour and the lights dim a bit*] There! Doesn't that look nice? Rasja will be very pleased. Look at all the detail. This is where I shall put the extra brass button for Meyna. Am I not a wondrous tailor? But enough complimenting my work. You probably don't want to hear all the details of my labor. Did the clock chime? Yes? Then it must be time to close shop. [*MOISHE closes his shop and returns home*] Pearl! [*Louder*] Pearl! I am home.

PEARL. [*Entering*] So, you think I should have the Rabbi prepare a special blessing because you've walked in the door? Come, dinner is

prepared. *[PEARL exits]*

MOISHE. *[Aside]* I hope it is better than the breakfast bread.

PEARL. I heard that!

[MOISHE exits and the LIGHTS dim. And very quickly, the LIGHTS come up a bit and MOISHE is ready to leave for work]

MOISHE. Can you believe it is time for work already? The night hours go fast. Very fast indeed. Not that I mind my work. My father, rest his soul, was also a tailor. He taught me how to thread and snip and sew and stitch. Always, he said to me, "Moishe, only learn this if you *like* this. For you will work a long time. Do not get good at anything you don't like. It will only lead to misery."

PEARL. *[She enters with MOISHE'S imaginary coat and helps to get it on him]* Go to work, Moishe.

MOISHE. Yes, dear wife. How do I look?

PEARL. The coat is growing on me. Except for the lining. Too fancy. And those brass buttons. They flash light into my eyes. *[PEARL exits]*

MOISHE. *[To audience]* Now, you must stop talking to me. I have less than two weeks to get Rasja's and Meyna's coats completed. And there's something else I must do. What is it? Another jacket? A coat? For whom?

[ANNIKA walks by]

ANNIKA. Tailor! How is my new coat coming?

MOISHE. *[Suddenly maniacally smiling as he remembers ANNIKA'S coat]* Good. Good. All will be ready.

ANNIKA. I am looking forward to it.

[ANNIKA exits. MOISHE enters his shop and lays out his work]

MOISHE. What did I tell you? You talk to me too much. I must work! I must thread, I must snip, I must sew, I must stitch. And stitch..and stitch...*[MOISHE enters his job, picks up a piece of fabric and begins to sew]* and stitch..and stitch...and stitch..and stitch...time is passing...*[the LIGHTS FADE as MOISHE stitches and stitches and stitches. RASJA and MEYNA enter from different sides]*

MEYNA. Rasja!

RASJA. Meyna!

MEYNA. Our coats should almost be ready. Let us check on Moishe and see how he is doing.

[RASJA and MEYNA knock on the shop door. MOISHE answers it]

RASJA and MEYNA. *[Big broad smiles]* Tailor!

MOISHE. *[A big broad smile]* Rasja! Meyna! *[An abrupt change in attitude]* What are you doing here? It is not yet two weeks.