

A SHORT  
MONOLOGUE  
PLAY

# HIS FIRST ENGLISH WORDS

by

Tara Meddaugh

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding several fresh red radishes with their green leafy tops. The radishes are vibrant red and have some soil on their roots. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor garden setting.

EXCERPT

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Excerpted from the full-length collection of shorts, *The Victory Garden Plays*

# *EXCERPT*

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**Special thanks** to Sharon Spenser for originating this role beautifully, Kevin Snipes, Mike Bouteneff, Gabe Davis, Hayley Colonel, Dan Napolitano, Olga & Nick Bouteneff, Arlen and Roberta Meddaugh, Billie Tucker, Karen Allen, Abigail Grizzle, Ava Pursel, Emma Kathryn, Ali Rose Harton, Alex Wade, Megan Benjamin, James Santora, John Michael Hersey, Audrey Casinelli, Ryan, Sett, Stephanie Schwartz, Betsy Walkup, God, Mildred Moell, Tracy Fiore, Erica Lee, Garlia Cornelia

*His First English Words* was originally performed on February 17, 2019 in New Rochelle, NY as part of the full-length play *The Victory Garden Plays*. It was produced by Tutti Bravi, Inc. with the following cast:

Grace.....Sharon Spenser

Directed by Billie Toker

***His First English Words***Cast

GRACE

A woman in her 50s-60s.

Setting

Westchester County, NY. A public library, a home.

Time

1940s.

AT RISE: Around 1943. GRACE is a woman around 50-60. She speaks out to the audience.

GRACE

Children are supposed to pick up languages quickly. At least that's what the Hebrew Orphan Asylum tells me and they're the ones that placed this little Jewish German boy with me some time ago. They say this child, Peter is his name, they say it won't be long before he starts to speak English. That I shouldn't worry that he only says, "*Ich will nach hause gehen*," which he says so many times that I write it down and bring it to the HOA and they tell me it means "I want to go home."

(pause)

He wants to go home.

(pause)

Well.

(pause)

Now whenever he says those German words, you know what I do? I bring him right into my dining room where I have my fine candles on the table, in the silver holders my mother gave me and her mother gave her. And I use a match and I light those candles and I look into the flames and I say, "*hause*"—because I assume that's the word which means house or home in both English and German, and I point to the flames and I say it again, "*hause. Hause.*" And he starts to put his finger in the flame—every time she does this—and I pull him back and give his hand a little slap. And I said "*nien hause*" this time, and I shake my head, and point to the flame and say again "*nien hause.*"

(pause)

I don't know if he understands his whole city has been burned to the ground. I blow the candle out.

(pause)

I don't want to scare him, but I don't know how to handle children. I've never raised them myself. But doesn't he know why his parents put him on that boat all by himself to New York City? Did anyone at the HOA explain to him why a 55-year-old Catholic widow from Chappaqua is taking him in?

(pause)

I don't speak German. I don't know any Jewish customs. Or even what children like to play with. Mine all died before they could even crawl.

(pause)

I'm simply trying to do something good. Because I can. So I should. And I have no one else to pass my silver candleholders onto. And no child should—Jewish or Polish or...--no child should ever...(shakes her head) No...no...

(pause)

So I look for a way to make him talk. To say something besides "*Ich will nach hause gehen.*"

(pause)

We're at the library this morning. Books with pictures. This is a good start, I believe. I find *The Little Engine that Could*, a train carrying toys and food to good little girls and boys. He'll like this, I think. We're on our way to sit down, we'll read it together here, and he sees a poster—

END OF EXCERPT

To read the entire monologue, *His First Words*, visit: