

WARSAW

A PLAY

Written by

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Cast of Characters:

MYER

The patriarch of the family. A master tailor.

ESTHER

Myer's loyal wife.

SAMMY

Myer and Esther's oldest son. A resistance fighter.

FELIX

The younger son.

SASHA

Felix's wife.

JOSEPH

A neighborhood boy.

THE GHOST

A young woman.

Setting:

Warsaw, Poland, late December 1940. The scene is the living room of a basement apartment, furnished with a couch, a table and chairs, and a kitchen to one side. One doorway leads into a bedroom. The other leads outside.

Just over a year ago, World War II started when the German army invaded Poland. The Polish forces, no match for the German war machine, were defeated in about a month. The occupying Nazi forces now control all Polish cities, including the capital, Warsaw.

A year has passed since then. It's now fall of 1940. Warsaw's 400,000 Jews have been forced from their homes to crowd together in the Warsaw Ghetto, a 1.3 square-mile section of the city enclosed by a 10-foot wall topped with barbed wire.

The Ghetto's residents are regularly terrorized by German soldiers. Mass deportations to the death camps are still two years away. Though rumors are beginning to circulate....

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The family is sitting at the dinner table, eating soup: The father, MYER, his wife ESTHER, their son FELIX and Felix's wife, SASHA. The GHOST, a young woman invisible to all, moves through the room, exploring.

The apartment is a small basement unit with drab, old furniture. Winter coats hang on pegs near the front door. On each sleeve is the blue and white Star of David armband.

Bursts of machine gun fire outside shatter the calm. Truck engines roar, brakes squeal. Everyone stares at the door, frightened. The commotion ends and quiet returns.

MYER
(panicked)

Listen! Do you hear that?

ESTHER
No.

MYER
Are you deaf?

ESTHER
I choose not to hear it.

MYER
Felix, close the lights!

FELIX
They're gone, Poppa. It's fine. Calm down, please. You're getting worked up again.

MYER
When they march into this room and shoot us all dead, *then* I will calm down.

ESTHER

Why must you talk like this? You're just making it worse.

MYER

(wistful)

I miss our life. The way it was.

ESTHER

Maybe God will turn the clock back and we'll wake up on Belker Street and you can kvetch about the price of fabric and that Felix works only 10 hours a day. A real shlepper he is.

MYER

That is exactly what I wish for.

The Ghost approaches the family, considering their movements curiously.

FELIX

That I don't miss.

MYER

This is better, hmm? Now you have a nice long vacation.

Esther rises to her feet, peering in the direction of the Ghost.

MYER (CONT'D)

What? What is it?

ESTHER

I feel something, like before. A presence. A dybbuk.

MYER

(derisively)

She's seeing ghosts now.

ESTHER

No, I'm certain of it. There's a dybbuk. It's right here.

MYER

As if we don't have enough tsorus, now we have dinner guests from beyond.

ESTHER

A woman.

MYER

The only dybbuks here are the ones in your head. (waves his fist) I'll give you dybbuks.

ESTHER

From you I do have dybbuks! I have 35 years' worth of dybbuks.

The Ghost exits.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Wait... She's gone.

SASHA

Esther, I felt something.

MYER

Oh no. Not you, too.

ESTHER

Something terrible happened in this flat. In this room. I can feel it.

MYER

Of course something terrible happened. What isn't terrible?

SASHA

We don't know from this place.

Gunshots ring outside, far away.

MYER

Oy! Again! Always with the shooting.

FELIX

I know what you're seeing, Ma. It's us. We're the ones who will be dybbuks.

Myer ambles over to the room's lone window,
boarded up except for a sliver of an opening.

MYER

They're outside.

ESTHER

No. They're not. Come, sit down. I have an idea.

MYER

Another idea.

ESTHER

Here is what we do: we change the feeling in here.

MYER

We do what?

SASHA

I like it.

ESTHER

If you just let me talk a minute.

MYER

Yes, talk! Just what we need.

ESTHER

An experiment. We "forget."

MYER

Ha! First she sees ghosts, now she wants to make us amnesiacs.

ESTHER

Isn't this what you want? To forget? You never stop talking about "the old days." Now, we go there. Come on. It can't hurt. Five minutes.

MYER

You tell me how to forget that everything you know is kaput — a shop that earns year after year, that supports a family and more, now its all gone ... And I will be happy to forget, and not just for five minutes.

ESTHER

Here's the instructions. We talk only about the good. Sasha? Think of a happy time.

SASHA
Our wedding day!

ESTHER
And?

SASHA
Felix, you remember what happened? Under the chupa?

FELIX
We said our vows.

SASHA
No. I mean the schpilkis you had.

FELIX
Who doesn't have nerves the day he loses his freedom?

SASHA
Esther, you remember... The rabbi puts the glass down and Felix steps down so hard it explodes into pieces. Uncle Mordechai got clunked. He fainted from the shock.

ESTHER
Like a tree falling in the woods.

SASHA
That tree landed in Sadie's lap.

MYER
Aunt Sadie, who never touched a man in all her life.

ESTHER
He landed on her pupikel.

MYER
Where no man had ever been.

FELIX
No man ever tried.

MYER

The scream that came out that little woman, I think they heard all the way to Lonnish Street.

ESTHER

Mordechai asked for a refund.

MYER

No!

ESTHER

Yes!

FELIX

Oh I remember it. It made a travesty of our wedding.

SASHA

Felix, really? It blessed our wedding.

FELIX

How did it do that?

SASHA

It'll never be forgotten.

ESTHER

What do you think, Poppa? You see?

MYER

Interesting experiment, Momma. Give me more soup.

Sasha goes to a cabinet and retrieves a package
and sets it on the table beside Myer.

MYER (CONT'D)

What is this? What are you giving me?

FELIX

You think we forgot what day it is?

MYER

It's a day for "experiments," God help us.

FELIX

Happy birthday, Pop.

Myer keeps eating.

ESTHER

Poppa.

MYER

All right, all right. Whatever it is, I don't need it.

He begins unwrapping the box.

MYER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Ridiculous.

The gift is a framed photo.

MYER (CONT'D)

(joyfully)

God in heaven, where did you get this! How young Gordi is! And Max. That was before the big beard. Look, you can see his face.

ESTHER

That hair. Oy givalt.

FELIX

I thought it was a hat!

ESTHER

Maybe it's not even Max in there. Who knows...

MYER

When was the last time I was with my brothers?

ESTHER

Passover, two years ago.

MYER

Ah. Too long.

ESTHER

You see? See what happens when you put your mind on the good? See how things change? The room feels ... different.

MYER

Oh, no, Momma. Please don't start with that again. It is exactly the same room.

ESTHER

So you think.

SASHA

I have an idea. Let's celebrate. Let's dance! Let's do the Hora.

She reaches playfully for Myer.

MYER

No, no, child, I'm way too old for that.

SASHA

I'll be gentle. I promise.

Myer pulls free of her grasp.

FELIX

He would rather have his teeth pulled out than to acknowledge his birthday.

MYER

What is there to celebrate when the grave is calling out to you? A birthday! What did you do that was so great? You fell from the womb. As if you had a choice. Another year has passed since this great feat. Mazel Tov.

SASHA

It is a great accomplishment. Think of the bond between mother and child. The will to come into this world. So much love. It's the greatest thing of all.

ESTHER

Sasha, don't waste your time. A man cannot understand such things. Not in his belly. He only knows with his mind. That's the great tragedy of men. And the sorrow of the world.

MYER

I'm not saying such things are not important. But where is the choice? There is no choice. Now, making a home, running a business, these are feats worthy of celebration. They come from the will. Making a wool suit with no imperfections, that's an accomplishment!

Myer holds out the frame for Esther to see.

MYER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

You brought this?

ESTHER

It belonged to my mother. I wasn't going to leave it.

MYER

What picture did it hold?

ESTHER

Sammy, when he was a boy.

Esther, frightened and upset, looks at Myer.
She's made a grave error.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Oh, Poppa, I'm sorry.

MYER

Always it happens! Always. Stupid woman. What it is with you?

FELIX

Poppa, it was an accident. You asked her a question.

MYER

Oh, no, she means what she says. She enjoys to stick in the knife.

ESTHER

(quietly)

He is your son.

MYER

What did you say? I heard that!

ESTHER

Still you persist, and with this (she indicates “outside”). I would rather be out there with the Nazis.

MYER

Go ahead! I’m not stopping you. (he throws up his hands) Ah, forget it! Just forget it.

Myer starts back on the soup.

MYER (CONT'D)

Why does this taste ... It *has* taste.

ESTHER

Monica gave me pepper.

MYER

Pepper?

ESTHER

She got it on the black market.

SASHA

Saul sold it to her.

MYER

Saul?

FELIX

He gets it on the Polish side.

ESTHER

He has papers?

FELIX

Yes, but he never has to use them. He “passes”. You know, the blond hair. The straight nose...

MYER

He “noses” over.

SASHA
(tearfully)

No. Not anymore.

FELIX
What? What are you talking about?

SASHA
Felix, I was going to tell you. I didn't know how. Saul is ... gone. His whole family, all of them.

ESTHER
His family?

SASHA
Yesterday. They took them away. I'm sorry.

The family absorbs the tragic news.

FELIX
(quietly, unhinged)
You know what would be good? What I would really like?

ESTHER
Sheina kindela, what?

FELIX
Jam.

MYER
What meshugas are you talking now?

FELIX
(holds up his piece of bread)
This challah needs jam. Delicious, sweet, sticky... Mmmm. I can almost taste it. I can taste it. It's strange, I just think it and there it is, sweetness on my tongue. Why is that?

SASHA
Felix.

FELIX

I read about these explorers who went up to the North Pole. They had no comforts, just the essentials, you know? Do you want to know what pictures they had on the walls? Girls? Home? Their families? No. *Food*. Steaks, potatoes, cakes. They missed food more than they anything. More than even love.

MYER

Where do you get such nonsense?

FELIX

I understand the mistake of my ways. I know if I repent, maybe things can change. (lifts up his glass) I raise my glass to jam. I thank the jam god! He who brings us the sweetness. There must be such a being.. for everything! A god of chicken soup, of wine. A god of dish-rags. (folds hands in prayer) Well, I shall not remain unappreciative. To the jam god. Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melekh haolam—

MYER

Stop it. Stop it!

FELIX

Thank you for the wonderful jam sandwiches!

Myer reaches across the table, jabs Felix in the shoulder.

MYER

Enough. Enough already.

ESTHER

Felix, we're OK. Were safe.

FELIX

Today. What about tomorrow? And the day after that?

ESTHER

Tomorrow will take care of itself.

FELIX

Tell that to the three boys hanging in the square.

MYER

Be quiet, Felix.

ESTHER

(to Felix)

I'll tell you what will happen: Things change. These evil ones, they'll be erased. I know this. History teaches us this. Evil does not endure. It's just for us to do one thing: stay strong. Now, eat your soup and don't invite in such ideas. Be grateful it's just us here. Monica has seven already.

MYER

Oh, I wish I had a cognac. Mmm. I'd give my eye teeth for a cognac.

FELIX

You've been saying that my whole life. You have no idea what eye teeth are.

MYER

Whatever they are is worth less than the cognac I can taste in my mouth right now!

ESTHER

(elevates her glass)

To Poppa's birthday.

MYER

That's water. (sees Esther's stern look; everyone raises their glasses) All right, all right. It's wine.

ESTHER

L'chaim!

FELIX

To life.

ESTHER

Our return home.

SASHA

Family.

ESTHER

Here's what I think: the Americans are in England, planning an invasion to free Poland. I feel it.

MYER

L'chaim! She feels it!

ESTHER

(taps her chest)

Right here, where it matters.

Machine guns blast outside, close by.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Felix! Close the lights, quickly! Everyone, get down!

The room goes dark.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Poppa, where are you?

MYER

I don't know. Here.

ESTHER

Come to me. Come to my voice.

A chair topples over. Myer groans.

SASHA

Felix, is that you?

FELIX

Sasha, you're shivering. Come here. Come closer.

Trucks pull up outside. Shots ring out.

SASHA

My stomach hurts.

FELIX

Lean on me, darling.

SASHA

This flat, I know what it is. It's a prison! I have to get out of here. I have to get out. Where is the light? Where is it? Felix! Help me!

ESTHER
Sasha! Please!

MYER
She's going to get us killed!

FELIX
Think about good things. Do "the experiment."

SASHA
What, Felix?

FELIX
Your Aunt Simcha in America, the one who smokes and argues with men.

SASHA
Aunt Simcha.

FELIX
Think about her.

MYER
What woman doesn't argue with men?

ESTHER
Quiet!

FELIX
Sasha, think about Simcha.

SASHA
Felix?

FELIX
You love your aunt.

SASHA
I love Aunt Simcha.

Gunshots ring outside.

ESTHER

Myer, lean against the wall, like this.

MYER

Ah, good. Now I'll be comfortable when they shoot me.

ESTHER

Everyone, be still!

Knocking at the front door. The family waits in terror.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Open up, let me in! Hurry!

ESTHER

What? Sammy? Sammy?? Is that you?

The knocking continues.

SAMMY

It's me! Yes!

MYER

Esther? Where are you going?

The lights come on. Esther is standing at the front door. Felix and Sasha are huddled in a corner. Myer is on the floor leaning against a wall.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Open up! Come on!

ESTHER

Sammy!

MYER

There is no such person!

Esther reaches for the doorknob.

Don't touch that!

MYER (CONT'D)

Shut up, you crazy old fool!

ESTHER

Esther swings open the door. Sammy enters.
Myer starts for the bedroom.

I have my reading.

MYER

He exits to the bedroom. Esther hugs Sammy.

ESTHER

Sammy! Your arm, it's bleeding! What happened?

SAMMY

It's fine. I'm fine.

ESTHER
(to Felix and Sasha)

Come, help me! Sammy, look at you.

Sammy sits on the couch. Esther examines his injury.

SAMMY

It's just a scratch. Stop it, please. I'm all right.

ESTHER

Vey ismere! Felix! Get a towel. Sasha, boil some water. Get me something to wrap this. Sammy, let me see.

Esther rolls up his sleeve.

SAMMY

I need to rest.

ESTHER

What happened?

I got hit. Its just a graze.

SAMMY

They *shot* you?

ESTHER

Calm down.

SAMMY

I should calm down?

ESTHER

Felix hands her a strip of fabric. Esther begins to clean and wrap the wound.

I need to stay here until morning.

SAMMY

Of course. You stay right here.

ESTHER

Sasha. You're Sasha? Right?

SAMMY
(to Sasha)

Hi, Sammy.

SASHA

Now you've met the "bad" son.

SAMMY

Please!

ESTHER

Surely you've been told of my great transgression? I'll tell it to you, Sasha. It'll save us time.

SAMMY
(to Sasha)

Sammy, what are you talking about?

ESTHER

SAMMY
(to Sasha)

I loved a woman.

SASHA
Yes?

SAMMY
I married this woman.

She waits.

SAMMY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Thus, I shamed the Leibowitz name forever. For this, the old man hates me. (looks toward the bedroom door) What's he doing in there?

ESTHER
He's reading the Torah. More and more his face is buried in the scriptures.

Esther finishes wrapping Sammy's arm.

SAMMY
Nice field bandage, Ma. Snug but not tight. Zadie trained you well.

The Ghost enters.

ESTHER
Shh! Listen! She's here. The dybbuk has returned.

SAMMY
(looks around)
What?

FELIX
She thinks there's a ghost.

ESTHER
She's old. With grown children. I sense it.

Esther reaches out her hand, which passes through the Ghost's outstretched hand.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Why has she returned?

SAMMY

(laughing)

Why don't you ask her?

SASHA

The dead return to the place they know best. They're stuck between the two worlds, bound to neither.

SAMMY

Wait. Wait. I feel her!

ESTHER

She's right here.

SAMMY

No, she's there in the kitchen. (laughs) She's cooking a roast. Mmm, mmm. I smell it.

ESTHER

You think this is funny? Not to her it isn't.

SAMMY

Maybe *you're* haunting *her*. Did you consider that? Maybe she's the one who's alive and we're the dead.

Esther speaks to the Ghost.

ESTHER

You had a sister. Something happened. A tragedy. You want to join with her. That's how you'll find peace. What can we do? Tell it to my heart so I'll hear it. I'll help you cross over to the other side.

SAMMY

The only tragedy is that she's chosen this family to haunt.

The Ghost exits. Esther slumps.

ESTHER

I don't know, she's gone. (sighs) The neighbors will know something. I'll ask them.

SASHA

I felt her.

Esther sits on the couch beside Sammy.

ESTHER

So, tell me, how are you, son? How are the children? How's Rose?

SAMMY

Fine.

ESTHER

Fine? (doubting) Really? I think I'm a Bubbie who does not know her own grandchildren. That's what I think. Oh, what a world. Terrible. *Terrible*. Tell me about them, Sammy. Tell me about the children.

SAMMY

Janek is four.

ESTHER

Four already. And Luba?

SAMMY

She had her third birthday last week. (to Felix) So, Felix, how about you?

FELIX

What about me?

SAMMY

No children? You need to get to work. We need more fighters.

SASHA

What?

SAMMY

This war could last a long time.

FELIX

What war? The war's over. It took all of 10 days for the Polish army to fall.

ESTHER

You can't fight the Germans.

SAMMY

(disgusted)

Ah! The Jews of Europe. You'll daven right up to the gallows. What, you *want* to die? You want to give up? Well, not everyone thinks that way. Some of us are doing something.

ESTHER

Why are you here?

SAMMY

I have business.

ESTHER

What kind of business?

SAMMY

There's a resistance.

ESTHER

Oh, Sammy, you worry me.

SAMMY

I always worried you, Ma. Why don't you worry about Felix for a change?

ESTHER

I do. Felix understands things.

SAMMY

You've heard about "relocation?" The reason you're here? Do you know what that is? It's slaughter.

SASHA

Were fine. Those are rumors.

ESTHER

Were a family, not an army.

SASHA

If we have to move, we can make a home anywhere.

SAMMY

Tell that to the Yeshiva boys hanging in the square.

SASHA

Why must you say such things?

SAMMY

Sasha, open your eyes.

ESTHER

The two of you, stop it. Sammy, be quiet. Come here, have some soup. Its just cabbage and carrots, but it's all right.

Sammy sits at the table. Esther puts a bowl of soup before him.

SAMMY

How long has it been since I had your cooking?

ESTHER

This is not my cooking.

SAMMY

It's torture just thinking about it, the way it was. (smiles) I'm in misery.

ESTHER

Misery was something you never stayed in for long.

Everyone relaxes. Felix holding Sasha. Sammy eating. Esther watching Sammy. Sasha sings a Yiddish song.

SAMMY

That's beautiful, Sasha.

SASHA

Thank you. My mother taught it to me.

SAMMY

I didn't mean to be rude. Its just ... everything, all of it. I see how deeply you feel about things.

SASHA

I wish I felt about things a little less deep.

Sammy glances at the bedroom door.

SAMMY

So, is he coming out? Or do we have to take him in room service?

Knocking at the front door. Everyone freezes.
Esther rises and slowly approaches the door.

ESTHER

Yes? Who's that?

JOSEPH (O.S.)

It's Joseph.

SAMMY

Joseph!

ESTHER

Who?

SAMMY

Open it, Ma.

Esther opens the door. Joseph is a 10-year-old boy. Sammy approaches.

JOSEPH

They're coming. They're at Sheldon Street.

SAMMY

On foot?

JOSEPH

David went to look. Can you come?

SAMMY

Yes.

ESTHER

No!

Sammy pauses, considers the situation.

SAMMY

(to Joseph)

Joseph, go now. I'll be there later.

Joseph exits. Esther closes the door.

ESTHER

What is that? What did you say to him?

SAMMY

You're not safe with me here.

ESTHER

Sammy, we can hide you. There's a place in the bedroom, behind the chest. The wall, it's hollow. No one will find you there. Sasha, clean up. Felix, help her. Come, Sammy, I'll show you.

The bedroom door opens. Myer stands in the doorway. He locks eyes with Sammy.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Sammy, come.

She leads Sammy into the bedroom.

Stage goes dark. Music comes up.

Music ends.

Stage lights slowly come back up.

Myer and Esther are resting on the couch. Sasha has nodded off in the easy chair. Sammy is hiding in the bedroom. Felix comes shivering in through the front door and hangs up his coat.

FELIX

It's morning.

SASHA

It's so quiet.

ESTHER

(to Felix)

What? What is it?

FELIX

Nothing. Just a check. Look at this. Look what I found.

Felix pulls two eggs from his pocket. Esther goes to him.

ESTHER

Give them here.

MYER

Son, since you're up, would you fetch me a glass of water?

FELIX

Sure, Poppa.

Esther moves toward the bedroom door.

ESTHER

I'm getting him out.

MYER

(to Felix)

Use that nice cup.

Esther exits to the bedroom.

MYER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Felix, listen, I've decided something. Come, sit. Sasha, you, too. I'm going to make you a full partner. As of today, you and Sasha have half ownership... of everything.

FELIX

Poppa, what are you talking about?

MYER

The business.

FELIX

There is no business.

MYER

Maybe not now. But soon, we'll be back. For now, the idea stays alive. The customers who knows me, they will return. Always they come back. When the Germans go, you'll see. They'll seek me out like never before.

FELIX

Okay...

MYER

Listen. I'm getting long in the tooth. Even the eye tooth. I want to do this for you and Sasha. You've learned everything what I have to teach you. You're a good boy. A master tailor, like your Poppa.

FELIX

Sasha, how do you like that?

SASHA

(glumly)

It's wonderful.

MYER

My father, your Zadie, God rest his soul, he did the same for me. I was partner when I was younger even than you.

SASHA

Now we have everything. Everything we wanted. A business—

MYER

A partnership, Sasha. Only a partnership. You will own the business when you have to leave me outside with the corpses.

SASHA

There is no business, you fool! What are you talking about? (to Felix) Why are you acting like this? You think next year you'll be working in the store? (sobs) You think I'll be pregnant with our first child? You're living in a dream. It's like ... it's like, God is dangling it in front of me, everything I dreamed, everything I wanted, teasing me. It's all right there, but it's out of my reach. I want to grab it and hold it ... but I CANT GET IT! I can't get it! Its too far away. It's a cruel God who would do this, a cruel God!

FELIX

Sasha, please. You don't know what you're saying.

SASHA

Oh, I do!

MYER

To say such things. (gazes heavenward) It is He who we live for, always. What happens here, in this world, He controls it. There is a reason for everything, Sasha, that we, with our dull minds cannot fathom. Even *this*.

FELIX

Poppa, she doesn't mean it. She's upset.

MYER

When Job was stricken by unspeakable tragedy, it was difficult, yes, but he met the challenge. He kept the faith. And Abraham. Look at him. The harder the test, the harder we work. We adapt to His demands always, no matter what. Without Him we are like children lost in the desert of this world.

Esther and Sammy enter.

ESTHER

That's right, Poppa. "The harder the test, the harder we must work."

Myer stares hard at Sammy.

MYER

So. The prodigal son has returned. To what do we owe this good fortune?

ESTHER

He was in Warsaw.

SAMMY

Prodigal son? *You* threw *me* out.

ESTHER

Please, don't argue.

MYER

You gave me no choice.

SAMMY

Oh, you had a choice.

MYER

Yes, of course. Like I have a choice to move the moon and stars behind the sun. (to Esther) He spits in the face of everything that is sacred. Our faith. The Torah. The Law!

FELIX

Sasha isn't well.

ESTHER

Oh, darling. Put her in the bed.

SASHA

No, no, no. I'm fine.

SAMMY

What is so wrong with living your life guided by your own principles? What is wrong with doing what your heart tells you to do?

MYER

You're a child.

SAMMY

All right! I'm the worst person that ever lived. I married the woman I loved. She wasn't what you expected. She wasn't what you wanted.

MYER

No, it was more than that. Marrying a goy, bad enough. Letting go of our faith, again, not good. But that wasn't sufficient punishment for us, was it? You had to go further, like always. You should have just torn out our hearts. You married a Nazi!

SASHA

What?

SAMMY

That's absurd! How can you think such things? Ill tell you why: You hate me. You've always had enthusiasm for that.

MYER

Tell me, Lord, what did I do to deserve this?

ESTHER

Poppa. Stop it!

MYER

Death is out there, lurking in the shadows, it's searching for me. And here is his messenger, in my own home! (looks at Esther, points to Sammy) There is the harbinger. Not your idiotic dybbuk. Uh, my heart! My heart is going to burst. Get out of here, leave now!

SAMMY

That's the first sensible thing you've said.

Sammy starts for the door.

FELIX

Sam, wait.

MYER

Be quiet, Felix.

FELIX

I can speak my mind. I'm not a tree, standing here.

MYER

All right, quickly!

Felix approaches Sammy.

FELIX

Sam, there's something I want to tell you. I know about the resistance. It's good. It's the right thing, for you. We haven't always been close. We may ...

(MORE)

FELIX (CONT'D)

It's just, I know how precious life is. What I'm saying is ... I can't do what you're doing, even if I wanted to. But I'm glad *you're* fighting. I know you're doing it for all of us. I'm proud of you.

MYER

Proud!

SAMMY

Felix. Felix. I'm sorry.

FELIX

For what?

SAMMY

The way I treated you. I was a bully. I wish I could take it back, what I did. I regret so much.

MYER

He regrets something!

FELIX

You didn't "do" anything. It was easy for me. I was the "good" son. I saw your strength. I followed you in ways you'll never know. I'm glad you're here.

ESTHER

Poppa, think! Here is a chance! Do I have to chisel it on your forehead? Your son is here.

MYER

(gestures to Felix)

That is my son. This one, he rejects everything we taught him to live with Nazis! Is your memory so full of holes? Look! The great Nazi benefactor. The Nazi husband!

ESTHER

That's nonsense and you know it. Rose's father is the Nazi. Not Rose. Not Sammy's wife.

MYER

Believe whatever you want.

SASHA

I don't understand.

SAMMY

Poor Sasha.

SASHA

Tell me, please.

SAMMY

My wife Rose... Her father is an SS officer. But not until he left the family. He didn't get along with Rose's mother. He left. He moved to Germany. He remarried. Rose and her mother had no contact with him. She hardly knew him.

MYER

It doesn't matter. Your wife is the daughter of a murdering SS captain.

SAMMY

That's not what's really troubling you, is it?

MYER

You have all the answers, don't you, smart guy. Mr. Big Macher.

SAMMY

The world you live in! How do you do it? Everything in pure black and white. Your scriptures lay down the law but they ignore every shade of gray. The world is nothing but gray!

MYER

That's *why* we need the scriptures. If we accept things at face value and follow our impulses, life is chaos, like in the olden times. We need Gods law to live by—

SAMMY

And suffocate by! Those rules were written for a different world. A primitive, lawless world.

MYER

It is the world outside this door!

SAMMY

Your commandments have one message and one message only: No. No, no, no! It only says what we *don't* do. Fine, I agree, we don't lie, we don't kill. But where is the *yes*?

MYER

The law is the law. It's why we are here. It's why we survived thousands of years with a knife or a gun at our back. Yet we outlast them! We live on, while their civilizations turn to dust. Why is that? I'll tell you why. It's *because* of the scriptures! Have they not served us? There is no other reason were having this ridiculous conversation.

SAMMY

Do they mention the Gestapo, your holy books?

ESTHER

Sammy, please. The Torah is the rock beneath our feet.

MYER

You were always attacking. A jab here, a stab there. You understand nothing. I remember the time you ran through the temple, screaming like a lunatic, a certified crazy, my own son. You disrupted the service and shamed me so. Still it makes my blood boil. What was that? Respect?

SAMMY

That was the past. What do you want? You want me to open a vein for you?

MYER

Look what they're doing now. My business, gone. Soldiers living in our home. The house I made. History repeats itself. Make no mistake, it has been going on since--

SAMMY

(impatiently)

The time of Moses.

MYER

And do you want to know how we survived?

SAMMY

By sticking together.

MYER

Under one temple. One roof. And you're going to do better? You think you're smarter than everyone. You think you're smarter than God. You think you can make your own law. Such chutzpah. Well, I have some information for you, big shot. Its too late. The rules are already written. They were written long ago. (beat) All I ever wanted was respect. A father deserves respect. Is that such a terrible thing to ask?

ESTHER

Sammy. He's trying.

SAMMY

Do you want to know *why*? Because I'm here. My feet brought me here. I've seen things no one should have to see.

ESTHER

What did you see?

The family waits, rapt, terrified.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What?

SAMMY

Yesterday, I was in a house. People I didn't know. In Lodz.

SASHA

You were in Lodz?

SAMMY

Outside the city.

SASHA

How is it there?

SAMMY

Same as here.

ESTHER

No.

SAMMY

Soldiers were there, in this house. One of them was beating this boy. I had to watch. I wanted to kill that guy. I could have. But there were five of them. My anger was so great, almost greater than my fear. Almost. He took that child by the legs and swung him around and around, banging his little head against the walls. The boy, he was a limp rag. That guy's face, his expression, he was ... smiling.

SASHA

... horrible ...

SAMMY

But the mother. She had to watch. I'll never forget, this woman and her dull, lifeless eyes. No expression. It was her son! Yet she didn't move. She'd become a thing, with but a single purpose: survive. Even at such a cost. That was all that was left of her. Her humanity was gone. Somehow, I got out of there. (beat) I'm leaving. Goodbye.

Sammy starts for the door.

ESTHER

No! Please, Sammy, listen to me. You're a good boy. My son. My wonderful, brave son. Don't go. (to Myer) Poppa! Have you lost your mind?

Sammy goes to the boarded-up window and peers out of the slit.

SAMMY

Its light already.

FELIX

Sammy, how do you fight them? You have guns?

SAMMY

We don't fight. That's suicide. We disrupt.

ESTHER

Disrupt? What is that?

SAMMY

You fight, they retaliate. They burn neighborhoods — to instruct us. Those boys in the square? They fought. *We* cause accidents. We loosen a railroad bolt, a train “accidentally” goes off the tracks. An ammunition car blows up “by accident.” That's how we fight. (looks at Myer) But maybe these are bad ideas. Maybe I should leave the fighting to the Germans. What do you think, Myer? I have an idea. How about this: I'll do whatever you say. You decide. You tell me what to do. That's what you've always wanted.

MYER

I want only for you to do what's right.

SAMMY

Right? For who?

MYER

Go ahead, get yourself killed. (beat) No, no, no, no, I don't mean that.

SAMMY

Don't you?

MYER

I would like to take you back. I can't.

SAMMY

"No return on damaged clothing." Isn't that your policy?

MYER

You must atone.

SAMMY

Atone? For what?

MYER

For your sins.

SAMMY

What sins?

MYER

God help me, I can forgive you for so much. I want to. For years I endured your headstrong behavior. You're my flesh and blood. But how can I forgive you for that woman!

SAMMY

You cruel, bitter old man. You know nothing of Rose.

MYER

I know what she is.

SAMMY

And what is that? What is that, father? Tell me. Come on, tell me. What is Rose?

MYER

What you could never be: a Gentile!

SAMMY

What!?

MYER

Admit it! All your life you wanted to be one of them.

SAMMY

No. I just didn't want to be like you.

MYER

Go! Get out! I can't bear to look at you. Back to your Nazi wife!

SAMMY

I can't!

MYER

Yes, you can!

SAMMY

No, I can't! She's dead!!

A long silence.

ESTHER

It's not true.

SASHA

Oh, no.

SAMMY

(to Myer)

Are you happy? You got what you wanted. Your wish come true. Tell me, Poppa, where was that God of yours when I needed him?

ESTHER

Oh, Sammy.

FELIX

I am so sorry.

SASHA

What about your children?

SAMMY

They're OK. They're with Rose's aunt.

ESTHER

What happened? When did this happen?

SAMMY

A year ago, in Krakow. Last spring. It was a beautiful day. Flowers everywhere. I had that feeling, you know, that all's well, even with everything. We were at the river. Some soldiers came by, young, maybe sixteen or seventeen. (to Sasha) *Children*. Rose had been ill. She wasn't yet strong. She was moving slowly. These boys, they—

SASHA

Please. I don't want to know.

SAMMY

I tried to fight. There were four of them. They ripped off her clothes.

SASHA

Stop, please.

SAMMY

She fought. My Rose. There was nothing I could do. I had to watch. Each one on top of her. They beat me. I was weak, I could hardly see, but I knew what was happening. When they were done, one of them said to her, "You don't look like a Jew." Rose looked over at me. I couldn't move, I was a bloody heap, one eye was still working. Maybe she thought I was dead. She stood up and she said, "I'm the proudest Jew that ever lived." She spit in his face. He pointed his gun and shot her in the face.

Esther goes to Sammy. He pushes away.

ESTHER

Oh, Sammy.

SAMMY

Hmm.

Myer walks to the wall and stares in silence.

MYER

I don't know what to say. I'm ashamed.

SAMMY

(scoffs)

You are ashamed?

MYER

I'm a stubborn old man, a fool. I know it. I always have to be "right." I don't know why that is. What good does it do? Well, I feel no certainty now.

He looks at a framed photo on the wall.

MYER (CONT'D)

Look at this. Who are these children? Esther, what is this?

ESTHER

It was here when we came.

MYER

The hope on their faces. They want to swallow up the whole world in a single gulp. What they don't know, what they'll learn, is a lot. Sammy, your wife, Rose. I am sorry. I know these words mean nothing now. I can't take back what been said, as you have pointed out.

ESTHER

Poppa, come, sit.

MYER

Before all this ... It seems so long ago, already I was losing my grip. I'd be walking to the store or the market and I'd feel the weight of things, what was to come, what was already happening. The things I was so sure about — simple things — I began to see with doubt. Maybe this is what it is to come to the end. It was like the ground beneath my feet had turned to water and I had to find a way to move upon it—

SAMMY

It's strange, this thought that comes to me.

MYER

What? What is it? Tell me.

SAMMY

Acknowledgement. It's all I ever wanted from you. To hear that what I think, what I say, what I do, is all right with you.

MYER

I give it to you! I acknowledge you, from the front to the back and inside and out.

SAMMY

It's too late.

MYER

We raised you — both of you — the only way we knew. I did as my father did, as his father did, one generation to the next, the passing on of a way of life. Sammy, you were different. We didn't understand you. We didn't know what to do. Can you forgive me? Ever? You don't have to prove yourself to me anymore.

SAMMY

That's right. That's exactly what I was doing. But not to the real you. I was proving myself to the little Myer who lived in my head, the one who never rested, never slept, that ordered me to do this and that, day and night, on and on and on. You never saw any of it. If you knew what I did for you. (he points to Myer, speaks to Esther) There's your dybbuk, Ma. He's the one. He's wormed his way into all our minds.

MYER

I don't know what it is you're talking, Samuel. Stay with us. Please. You'll tell me about your life. There's so much I don't know. Well discuss the Talmud, like we used to.

SAMMY

Those weren't discussions, they were arguments.

MYER

OK. We'll have a real debate.

SAMMY

Stop. Stop it. You're doing the same thing. Don't you see it? You actually think I can stay here?

MYER

If you decide it, it's so.

ESTHER

What's more important than family?

SAMMY

Thousands of families.

ESTHER

Please, I'm afraid for you.

MYER

No, Momma. He must do what his heart tells him. What happens after that, we leave to Ha-Shem.

Sammy goes to the door.

ESTHER

Sammy, please! My son! Don't go! Not yet!

She embraces him.

MYER

Momma, leave him. His life he holds in his hands.

ESTHER

My Sammy.

Sammy pauses, turns to Myer.

SAMMY

Happy Birthday, Poppa.

MYER

That's right. It is my birthday.

SAMMY

(to Felix)

Has he offered up his eye teeth? For the Cognac?

FELIX

Of course.

Sammy reaches out to Felix and Sasha.

SAMMY

I'll see you again.

ESTHER

Sammy, stay.

Sammy embraces Esther.

SAMMY

Next time you'll make me your chicken soup. The real one.

ESTHER

With matzo balls you'll feel (pats her stomach) right here till tomorrow.

SAMMY

I look forward to that.

Sammy goes to Myer.

SAMMY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Poppa, we'll discuss the Talmud.

MYER

Yes. We'll do that. (he squeezes Sammy's shoulder) Goodbye, son.

Sammy exits. Myer touches the mezuzah on the door frame and kisses his fingertips.

ESTHER

Poppa, are you all right?

MYER

I don't know if I'm coming or going.

ESTHER

You're coming *and* going!

FELIX

Sit down, both of you.

MYER

I have two sons. Two sons!

ESTHER

(to the heavens)

Thank you, Ha-shem.

MYER

Don't worry, I plan to do exactly that.

Esther goes to a drawer and takes out a box. She sits at the table and places it before her.

ESTHER

Come, I want to show you something.

Everyone sits. She pulls photos from the box and spreads them over the tabletop. Each person picks one up.

MYER

Look at this! Felix when he was a boy.

SASHA

Our wedding!

MYER

Sammy's Bar Mitzvah! And I have just the frame for it. Gordi and Max can live elsewhere.

Knocking at the door. They all freeze. Esther goes to the door.

ESTHER

Who is it?

JOSEPH (O.S.)

Joseph!

Esther opens the door. Myer comes over, stands beside her.

ESTHER
What do you want?

JOSEPH
Is Sammy there?

ESTHER
Why? What do you want with him?

JOSEPH
(looks around)
Sammy?

ESTHER
He had something to do. What is it, what do you want?

JOSEPH
Sammy's a hero, Mrs. Leibowitz.

ESTHER
(confused)
What?

JOSEPH
He's killed Germans. Lots of them! He's a captain in the resistance.

MYER
What's he saying, Esther?

ESTHER
Oh, God. No.

JOSEPH
You should be proud.

Esther slams the door in Joseph's face. She
hobbles with Myer to the couch.

ESTHER
Oy vey.

SASHA

I don't believe it. Joseph is a liar. He was expelled from school for mischief.

ESTHER

But Sammy said—

FELIX

Sammy said he would not “fight.” He makes trains go off the tracks. Remember? They do it at night, it must be, nobody knows about it.

ESTHER

Why would that boy say—

SASHA

Esther, no. Felix is right.

ESTHER

Do you think so? (beat) OK, OK. Maybe.

Esther rises and starts toward the bedroom.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Come, Poppa, I'm tired. You need to lay down. Sasha, please get the dishes.

Gunshots blast outside, close by. Esther runs to the door but Myer grabs her.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Sammy! My Sammy!

MYER

Momma, please!

ESTHER

They're shooting my Sammy!

MYER

No, no, no. He's far away by now.

ESTHER

It's him. I know it's him.

FELIX

There are thousands of people on the streets. It's not him.

Felix moves to get his coat.

ESTHER

Where are you going? No, Felix.

FELIX

I'll come right back. I just want to see.

ESTHER

Just a few steps. Come back right away.

Felix exits.

ESTHER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Come, Poppa.

Myer and Esther exit to the bedroom. Sasha, now alone, starts washing the dishes at the kitchen sink. The Ghost enters.

SASHA

Hello? Hello? You're here. Aren't you?

Sasha tries to see the Ghost. She reaches her hand out.

SASHA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

You think you have problems.

The Ghost approaches Sasha, who's resumed the dish washing. The Ghost kneels and gently touches Sasha's belly.

GHOST

It's a boy, Sasha.

Sasha stares at the Ghost without seeing her.

GHOST (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

You will call him Avram.

Sammy enters, breathless from running. He speaks to the Ghost.

SAMMY

(excited, laughing)

Rose! Rose. Are you *trying* to wear me out? If you are, you're doing a good job. How can you move like that? I've never even seen you run.

We now know: the Ghost is Rose, Sammy's wife who was murdered.

GHOST/ROSE

Sammy, come here. Look at this.

Sammy grips his abdomen in pain.

SAMMY

Huh. Rose. What's happening? Where am I?

ROSE

Do you remember?

SAMMY

(to himself, mostly)

I was shot.

ROSE

On the street. That's right.

SAMMY

I was running. Soldiers... They hit me. I was bleeding. I fell. Look, I'm OK. What happened? Rose? Am I—?

ROSE

Yes, you are, Sammy.

SAMMY
(looks around)

Where am I?

ROSE

You've passed from this world. You're fine, aren't you? Come, I want you to look at this.

Sammy walks over to Sasha. Rose places his hand on Sasha's belly. He raises up his other hand as if to shield himself from bright light. Sasha continues to dry the dishes.

ROSE (CONT'D)

It's an old spirit that's come to her. It's taking matter from her right now, spinning it into cells. It's the beginning of a new being.

SAMMY

What is this place?

Rose draws him in close.

ROSE

Breathe, Sammy. Breathe in all of this. Tell me, what do you see?

Myer wanders in from the bedroom and sits on the couch.

MYER

Sasha, can you make me some tea?

SASHA

Sit down.

Sammy runs to Myer, who cannot see him.

SAMMY

Poppa? Is that you?

MYER

(to Sasha)

I feel like a young man on his wedding night. (looks at his arms) Look at this. I can feel the blood flowing in my veins.

SASHA
(lightly)

I feel it, too.

MYER

You can feel that?

SASHA

How about some challah? There's a nice piece.

SAMMY

Poppa.

MYER

There's a draft, Sasha. Do you feel it?

SASHA

I don't know how. The window doesn't even open.

She looks at the window.

SASHA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Hmm. Look at this.

MYER

What?

SASHA

There's a hole.

MYER

A hole? From what?

SASHA

Maybe a bullet.

Myer goes over to examine the window.

MYER

How do you like that? We could have been shot.

We follow Myer's gaze, as he cranes his head and points upward.

MYER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Look. It went in the ceiling. Imagine that.

He sits on the couch. Sammy follows and kneels in front of him.

MYER (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I'll fix it.

SASHA

It's high up. Can you get up there?

Sammy sits on the couch beside his father.

SAMMY

Poppa. Can you forgive me? All the things I did. Everything is so clear now. Please, Poppa. I'm sorry.

MYER

Of course. Of course. Absolutely.

To whom is Myer speaking—Sasha or Sammy?
Sasha glances up at the bullet hole in the ceiling.

SASHA

How can you get it? Myer, it doesn't matter. No one will know its there.

SAMMY

(to Myer)

Do you mean it?

MYER

(dreamily)

You're my son.

SASHA

What? What did you say?

MYER

What?

SASHA

You said something. I heard you.

MYER

What are you talking? I'm sitting here minding my own business. Where's the challah? Where's my tea? Sasha, if its the dyybuk you're hearing, I beg you, please, keep it to yourself. If Momma hears that, well never hear the end of it. Dyybuku!

Rose is standing at the front door.

ROSE

Sammy, come. We have to go. It's time.

Sammy reaches out his hand, rests it on Myer's hand. The hands touch. Both men's faces both show wonder.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Sammy.

SAMMY

I want to stay, just a little longer.

ROSE

No, Sammy. It's time now.

SAMMY

Goodbye, Poppa.

Sammy goes and stands beside Rose.

SAMMY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What happens now?

ROSE

Always needing to know. You'll see soon enough.

SAMMY

But my father, the way he felt about you. The things he said. How can you have so much compassion for him?

ROSE

Such foolishness remains here. It means as much as a breath. Here and then gone. Everything within time is the same: A single night's dream within the One Life, soon to be forgotten. Until the next dream. And the next. And so it goes, on and on, without end.

Rose steps forward to consider Sasha and Myer.

ROSE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Soon, many more will follow. Millions. But not Sasha. And the boy. They will carry on your line.

Sammy and Rose exit. Esther enters the room and sits on the couch beside Myer. Sasha sits on the other side of him. Myer wraps his arms around them both.

MYER

(wondrously)

Another day. Hmm...

Lights slowly fade.

THE END

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