

The Housewife

by

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Inspired by true events.

An upbeat 60s tune and a --

Montage of 60s ADVERTISEMENTS:

A cartoon of a woman holding a smoking pan, her husband next to her with the speech bubble: "It's okay honey, you didn't burn the beer!"

A bright photograph of a woman mopping her floor in a skirt captioned: "Clean and wax my floors standing up!"

A photograph of a woman drawing a lipstick heart on her new washing machine as her husband and kids look on, smiling.

A ketchup ad: "You mean a woman can open it?"

INT. HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE UP on: a woman's HANDS.

Water from a FAUCET pours over them.

She adds soap, and SCRUBS. Hard.

The bubbles fall away under the running water.

She dries them with a pink towel, and turns them over, inspecting. Are they clean yet?

She lathers lotion over hardened callouses.

We're in a sparkling clean --

BATHROOM

CLOSE UPS continue as the woman puts herself together:

Curlers out.

Hairspray in.

Powder and blush.

Lipstick on.

She looks in the MIRROR at the finished product and we see her fully for the first time:

HERMINE RYAN (45) - a housewife.

She is tall, has strong facial features and a stern mouth. Her blonde hair is starting to turn grey.

The intensity of her stature is offset somewhat if not completely by her outfit: pink and white striped shorts and a matching blouse.

BEDROOM

She **MAKES THE BED**.

She tucks the bedspread in tight under the mattress, folds the top over just so, and smooths the surface. Pat, pat.

Then heads down the --

HALLWAY

She passes a hanging **PORTRAIT**. A **STERN-LOOKING MAN** (her husband **RUSSELL**). She swipes her finger along the **FRAME**, checking for dust.

But it's perfectly clean.

She reaches the --

LIVING ROOM

Impeccably tidy like the bedroom. It's modest but decorated in the style of the day: olive and brown tones, wood furniture, a faux leather couch, shag rug.

As she passes the coffee table, Hermine notices a **MARK**.

She disappears into the --

KITCHEN

Pastel appliances with rounded edges and spotless counters.

From under the sink, she grabs a **RAG** and goes back to --

LIVING ROOM

She tries to wipe off the spot she saw.

It doesn't work.

She **SCRUBS** harder. But it won't budge. She runs her hand over it, then her **NAIL**.

It's a **SCRATCH**.

She looks around...

And picks up an issue of GLAMOUR MAGAZINE. She positions it over the spot to cover it up. On the COVER, a woman with a YELLOW HEADSCARF smiles, chin in her hands, next to the question:

How Modern Are Your Morals?

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

An outer borough where the buildings sit low and unassuming. Stairs lead from the sidewalk up to working class dwellings. A neighborhood you probably wouldn't pass through. And wouldn't remember if you did.

Super: Queens, July 1964

A few FORD cars are parked on the street, but no traffic goes by. The summer heat has everything at a standstill.

Then a shift.

A MAN walks toward the house.

JOSEPH LELYVELD (26) is lanky with a nose that gives him a hawkish appearance. His sports jacket is a little too big, but his walk is confident.

A NOTEBOOK in his hand. A PEN in his pocket.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

KNOCKING.

Hermine pulls back the CURTAIN to look outside. She sees Joseph with his notebook on her doorstep.

She closes the curtain before he can see her.

HERMINE
(calling out)
Who is it?

She speaks with a European ACCENT.

JOSEPH (O.S.)
I'm with the New York Times.

Her face clouds with worry.

HERMINE
 (to herself)
 My God. This is the end of
 everything.

Hermine looks around her house, as if taking a final glance into an open casket.

Then she takes a deep breath, and reaches for the DOOR.

CUT TO:

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hermine's REFLECTION in the shiny OVEN.

Super: Three weeks earlier.

She sets the TIMER.

The hand starts to TICK in a circle, COUNTING DOWN...

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hermine comes in from the kitchen. She serves ICED TEA to two other HOUSEWIVES (30s) sitting on her couch:

MAYLENE - the leader of the group, perfectly primped; a short-sleeved dress covers her slim body collar bone to knees, her hair styled in a sleek bob with bangs.

SHERRY - shorter, plump, her hairstyle and dress are less flattering.

Besides her ACCENT, Hermine fits right in.

MAYLENE
 Hermine, your house is cleaner
 every time I come here.

SHERRY
 It's perfect.

MAYLENE
 What's your secret?

HERMINE
 (flattered)
 No secret.

MAYLENE
 If you're using any fancy European
 products I expect you to share.

The ladies laugh.

HERMINE

Can I get anything else?

She is already putting an EXTRA PILLOW behind Sherry.

MAYLENE

Hermine! No more fussing, come sit.

She SITS in a chair across from them.

Behind her, a CLOCK. The MINUTE HAND ticks forward, the second hand keeps steadily SPINNING...

On the coffee table is a plate of COOKIES. Sherry REACHES for one.

MAYLENE

Sherry!

She SLAPS her hand away.

SHERRY

What?

MAYLENE

We've had enough.

Sherry folds her hands in her lap, embarrassed.

HERMINE

There are more in the oven. You must take some home.

Sherry SMILES at Hermine, grateful for the gesture.

HERMINE

The bake sale.

MAYLENE

Yes. I know it's still a few weeks away but I want us to be prepared. We've agreed Hermine's recipe is the best. Naturally.

Hermine beams.

MAYLENE

By the way, I think I have that same plate.

HERMINE
 (she knew that)
 Really?

MAYLENE
 Macy's?

HERMINE
 Yes.

MAYLENE
 Don't we have good taste? (back to
 business) So you'll be in charge
 of the baking. Fifteen batches at
 least.

Hermine nods, taking her orders seriously.

MAYLENE
 I'll coordinate with the church,
 and spread the word. Sherry, make
 a sign and bring some sort of box
 for the money.

SHERRY
 Yes!

MAYLENE
 There are plenty of tables but
 we'll need to get them out of the
 classrooms.

SHERRY
 I'll bring Willy to help. Excuse
 to get him away from that Gina.

MAYLENE
 He's still running around with
 her?

SHERRY
 Yes, unfortunately. And he says he
 goes by William now.

MAYLENE
 (laughs)
 But he's Willy!

SHERRY
 I know.

MAYLENE
 That girl...

Maylene's eyes go big, *don't even get me started.*

SHERRY

She is pretty...

MAYLENE

He could find better.

SHERRY

Well, of course.

MAYLENE

You tell him, you tell Willy -

HERMINE

You should call him William.

The conversation HALTS.

Maylene turns to Hermine. Sherry's eyes DART between them, worried.

But Hermine doesn't back down.

HERMINE

(gentle but stern)

If he wants to be William now. You should call him William.

MAYLENE

Well.

Maylene clears her throat, smooths her skirt.

MAYLENE

You're right. Of course, you're right Hermine. Always such a nice person.

They share a smile. And Sherry feels empowered to take a COOKIE.

MAYLENE

We should talk to the other ladies. Maybe tomorrow.

HERMINE

Tomorrow I have -

MAYLENE

Oh, that's right!

SHERRY

Have what?

MAYLENE
 (ignoring Sherry)
 How do you feel?

HERMINE
 Nervous.

MAYLENE
 You'll do fine! It's a formality,
 I'm sure. You're married, you have
 a house, go to church. You're
 already American.

Sherry realizes what they're talking about.

SHERRY
 Oh! For your citizenship. You
 should bring these cookies. Then
 they'll definitely give it to you!

MAYLENE
 (scolding)
 Sherry. This is serious.

SHERRY
 I was only joking.

Sherry shrinks down into her seat.

HERMINE
 I feel American but - They can say
 no.

MAYLENE
 How can we help? Is there
 something you need to study?

HERMINE
 The test is finished. Now is
 interview. If they like you.

MAYLENE
 Well, everyone likes you!

SHERRY
 Everyone!

Her friends LEAN toward her, adamant in their support.

MAYLENE
 Trust me, you're the kind of
 person they want here. Lord knows
 there's plenty we don't.

Hermine basks in the compliment.

MAYLENE

I'll go tell them that myself if I have to.

She leans back, CROSSES her ANKLES, and takes a SIP from the glass in front of her.

Hermine does the same, MIMICKING her posture.

INT. INS - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A bare but official looking space. An AMERICAN FLAG stands in each corner. A SEAL displayed prominently on the wall:

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICES

Hermine sits at a TABLE, her hands GRIPPED in her lap.

Across from her is ANTHONY DEVITO (40s) - a gruff Italian New Yorker. He doesn't try to hide his bald spot, or suck in his gut.

In front of him, a FILE.

DEVITO

Mrs. Ryan.

HERMINE

Hello.

She clears her throat.

HERMINE

It is nice to meet you.

DEVITO

(flipping through)
Got all your papers here. Test, application... Austria, huh?

HERMINE

I live there before, yes.

DEVITO

And now you're in Queens.

HERMINE

We have a house.

DEVITO

You like the Mets?

Hermine isn't sure how he wants her to react, so she stays quiet.

DEVITO

I like that Kranepool. He's from New York, you know.

She gives him a polite SMILE.

DEVITO

(back to the file)

Okay. Been livin' here for five years... with your husband.

HERMINE

Yes.

DEVITO

Tell me about him.

She's thrown off by the question.

HERMINE

My husband?

DEVITO

How did you two meet?

HERMINE

He came to the hotel where I work.

DEVITO

In Austria?

She NODS.

DEVITO

He's currently employed?

HERMINE

Construction.

DEVITO

And you work in the home?

HERMINE

Yes.

He smiles, approves.

DEVITO

A few more here.

He starts reciting the required questions:

DEVITO

Have you ever applied for U.S. citizenship before under this or a different name?

HERMINE

No.

DEVITO

Have you ever participated in a group with communist sympathies in your country of origin or any of previous residence?

HERMINE

No.

DEVITO

Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

HERMINE

No, sir.

Hermine answers that last question with conviction.

DEVITO

(leaning back)

Tell me.

Hermine looks worried, not sure what he means.

DEVITO

How do ya like it here? Livin' here.

HERMINE

(relieved)

This is a dream. In America you have...

She searches for the words.

HERMINE

You can be anyone you want to be.

Devito nods.

DEVITO

Alright.

He starts shuffling through papers, STAMPING.

Hermine can't tell if the stamps are good or bad. So she finds something to say.

HERMINE
On your shirt.

DEVITO
What?

HERMINE
You have a -

She reaches out toward his sleeve where a loose THREAD is hanging off.

DEVITO
Oh.

She expertly TIES IT OFF and pulls it out, without fraying the shirt more.

HERMINE
There.

DEVITO
Thank you.

He STACKS the papers in her file definitively, smiling.

DEVITO
It was very nice to meet you, Mrs.
Ryan.

She smiles back.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

Hermine walks down a bustling avenue.

TAXIS honk and lurch by.

She's dressed just like the rest of the women in the crowd -- dress, hat, holding a dainty purse.

A SMILE splits across her face. She beams with accomplishment.

INT. MACY'S - DAY

The department store at its peak. A PIANO PLAYER plays. RED, WHITE and BLUE streamers decorate the walls for the FOURTH OF JULY. Women looking their best browse MAKE UP and PERFUME.

Hermine looks around the colorful DISPLAYS of women's clothing, but doesn't touch anything.

A SALES GIRL with a neat pony tail approaches.

SALES GIRL
Can I help you find something?

HERMINE
A dress.

SALES GIRL
Alright. For a holiday party?

Hermine takes out HOUSEWIFE MAGAZINE from her purse. She turns to a marked page and shows the sales girl a MACY'S AD.

In it, a MODEL poses in a stylish living room wearing a RED DRESS. She's glowing, the quintessential American housewife.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Hermine finishes putting on the same RED DRESS. With her angular features, she's not delicate like the model, but it fits. She admires herself...

Then notices a SMUDGE on the MIRROR.

She tries to wipe it off with her finger. But it doesn't work. Even with spit.

She SEARCHES her purse.

Nothing useful.

She SPINS around the dressing room. She has to find something.

With no other option, she takes the dress she wore into the store off the hook and starts SCRUBBING the glass.

INT. MACY'S - DAY

Hermine approaches the register still wearing the red dress.

HERMINE
I wear it now.

The sales girl smiles politely and RINGS HER UP. A LARGE CLOCK TICKS on the wall behind her.

Hermine starts counting out MONEY. The dress she wore on the way in is STUFFED in her PURSE.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - SAME

The MIRROR is CLEAN.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

A sea of desks and men.

Crowded and loud. REPORTERS in white collared shirts surround communal tables covered with filing trays and PAPERS. They hunch in their chairs writing, making calls. Or stand up talking, smoking.

It's frenetic. A time when reporters were on top of the world.

Within the chaos we find JOSEPH - the man who knocked on Hermine's door in the opening sequence.

He crosses the room and sits down at this desk.

JOSEPH

What are you hiding from?

He's talking to his colleague, TOMMY (20s), who sits scrunched UNDER Joseph's desk with a PAD of paper, doodling.

TOMMY

I just like it under here.

JOSEPH

Bullshit.

TOMMY

I don't have any space over there.

JOSEPH

But you have space under there?

TOMMY

(fine)

I'm avoiding that secretary.

JOSEPH

Ah.

Tommy taps a pack of CIGARETTES.

JOSEPH

You can't smoke under there.

TOMMY

Rosenthal doesn't give a shit.

JOSEPH

I give a shit if you light my dick on fire!

TOMMY

Fine. Ugh my head. I need to lay down.

JOSEPH

Lie.

TOMMY

What?

JOSEPH

You need to *lie* down.

Tommy FLICKS his lighter on. Joseph KICKS him.

JOSEPH

Don't you have work to do?

TOMMY

Three dead guys, one dead lady.

JOSEPH

Alright then.

TOMMY

One guy died in the subway. He rode the line like three times before someone -

JOSEPH

You haven't written that one yet?

TOMMY

Some of us want to get to know the people we write about.

JOSEPH

Your people are dead!

TOMMY

Exactly, they had a whole life.

JOSEPH

This is why I will get a bigger desk while you're still sitting under this one.

The bristly metro editor ABE ROSENTHAL (50s) struts by.

ABE

Lelyveld, great work on that banker. You ready for the next one?

JOSEPH
(standing)
Always.

ABE
(noticing Tommy)
Mr. Schiller.

From his desk cave, Tommy gives a little WAVE.

EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph exits, the big prestigious letters of the newspaper's LOGO above him.

He tucks his NOTEBOOK under his arm and walks with purpose down the street, joining the THRONG of people going somewhere.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hermine has an APRON tied over her new dress. On the counter, the same Housewife Magazine is spread open and she follows a RECIPE for a classic CHICKEN dinner.

She sets the table for TWO and ARRANGES her citizenship approval DOCUMENTS in the CENTER.

The sound of the FRONT DOOR OPENING.

RUSSELL (O.S.)
Hello.

Her husband, RUSSELL RYAN (40s) - the man in the portrait - takes off his WORK BOOTS by the front door and steps into the kitchen.

He's burly, closely cut BLONDE HAIR starting to recede. The kind of guy who might be intimidating in a different setting.

HERMINE
Hello, honey!

She can't contain her SMILE.

RUSSELL
Is that a new dress?

He gives her a peck and gets a BEER from the fridge. Then notices the PAPER on the table.

RUSSELL
What's that?

He picks it up.

Hermine waits, giddy.

RUSSELL

Oh my god. You got it? You got it!

He SWEEPS her off her feet and SPINS her around. They start LAUGHING.

RUSSELL

My American wife! My American wife!

He puts her down.

HERMINE

My American husband.

They kiss deeply.

RUSSELL

I love you.

HERMINE

I love you too.

She looks into her husband's eyes. Behind her, the OVEN TIMER is COUNTING DOWN...

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small Manhattan walk-up. The door opens to a living space/kitchen, one bedroom off to the side.

Cut-out ARTICLES cover one wall - a shrine to Joseph's work. He stands in front of it, pinning up another STORY.

His wife CAROLYN (20s) sits at the table READING.

CAROLYN

Your mom called.

Joseph GRUNTS in response.

She looks at him, gauging whether or not to continue.

CAROLYN

She wants you to call your dad.

JOSEPH

If she has something to say to him she can call him herself.

Joseph BANGS the chair as he sits down at the table. Carolyn closes her BOOK and goes to sit on his lap. She STROKES his hair and they KISS.

She wraps her arms around him.

CAROLYN
I read that follow up about Horace Brown in the paper today.

JOSEPH
Who?

CAROLYN
The landlord from Brooklyn.

It's not registering with him.

CAROLYN
The one you wrote a month ago.

Joseph still doesn't know what she's talking about.

CAROLYN
This one!

She jumps up and POINTS to the article on the wall.

JOSEPH
Oh.

He still doesn't seem to remember. He's moved on.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alone after dinner, Hermine finishes DRYING the DISHES.

She picks up the DOCUMENT from the table and looks at it again, satisfied.

Your application for citizenship of the United States of America has been hereby approved...

She delicately FOLDS it back up.

She bends down and opens the cabinet under the SINK to put away her RAG.

Behind the CLEANING supplies, she sees a WOOD BOX. She looks around. Then takes it out.

Did she know it was there? Or did she just find it?

Inside: FOREIGN COINS and a METAL OBJECT. It looks like an antique pin with SPIKES, but we can't tell exactly what it is.

She reaches for it...

RUSSELL (O.S.)

Hermine?

She shoves the BOX back underneath the sink, and SHUTS the cabinet in a hurry.

HERMINE

I will be right there.

She collects herself from the scare. Hand still on the cabinet door, making sure it stays shut.

INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

The carved ARC that holds the Torah stands proud under the ETERNAL LIGHT. A RABBI and a CANTOR - two men in their 50s - lead a service for the congregation seated in front of them.

Joseph watches from out in the --

INT. HALLWAY - TEMPLE - SAME

-- looking through a WINDOW in the DOOR, listening to the MUFFLED SINGING. He isn't going in.

The song ends and the congregation rises.

As the temple-goers EXIT, Joseph busies himself looking at PHOTOS on the wall. FADED IMAGES of Hebrew school students.

ARTHUR

You didn't come in for the service.

Joseph turns to see his father - Rabbi ARTHUR LELYVELD (50s) - behind him, a TALLIS over his shoulders, YARMULKE on his head.

JOSEPH

Dad.

An awkward beat.

They shake hands.

INT. RABBI'S OFFICE - DAY

A cramped room with an angled roof, FILLED with disorganized PAPERS and STACKS of JEWISH TEXTS.

His father struggles to pull a BOX off a top shelf. Joseph doesn't try and help.

ARTHUR

Cleaning out the house. Your mother told you I'm selling it?

JOSEPH

Where are you going to go?

ARTHUR

Down south for a while.

JOSEPH

More strangers in need of your help?

It's an accusation. But his father ignores it.

ARTHUR

Mississippi. The students down there have organized a really impressive effort to register voters. You should come see it.

JOSEPH

I have a job.

ARTHUR

I know. I read your last story.

Joseph waits for him to say something more. But he doesn't.

JOSEPH

Well, I started the next one.

ARTHUR

I figured.

JOSEPH

What does that mean?

ARTHUR

Nothing.

JOSEPH

Okay.

ARTHUR

(decides say it)

If you'd really take time to get to know these people instead of moving on -

JOSEPH

You mean like you're moving on?

Arthur shakes his head a little. Joseph just wants to leave.

JOSEPH

You asked me to come here. What do you want?

ARTHUR

I wanted to give you this.

He HANDS him the BOX.

JOSEPH

What is this?

ARTHUR

Stuff I saved. Thought you might want some family memories.

JOSEPH

(scoffs)

Family memories?

His dad turns away, hurt.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph sits in a chair, hunched over the BOX his dad gave him. It's full of PHOTOS and handwritten LOVE LETTERS. He RUMMAGES through it.

Carolyn comes in from the bedroom.

JOSEPH

There's not one picture of all of us together. Why would he think I'd want this crap?

CAROLYN

He's trying.

She comes to stand next to him and picks up one of the letters.

CAROLYN

(reading)

All my love, always, Arthur.

Joseph SCOFFS.

CAROLYN

He wrote this to your mom?

JOSEPH

Such bullshit.

CAROLYN

Joseph.

Joseph takes out another one. Reads:

JOSEPH

Our love is forever, no matter
what life brings.

He DROPS it back in.

JOSEPH

Look how that turned out.

CAROLYN

What are you going to do with all
of it?

JOSEPH

Get rid of it.

He carries the BOX over to the door and DROPS it there.

CAROLYN

Really?

JOSEPH

Even if he died I wouldn't want
this stuff.

CAROLYN

Don't say things like that.

JOSEPH

What? It's true.

She still has the letter in her hand.

CAROLYN

These are proof they were in love
once.

JOSEPH

They're proof my dad was
irrational.

CAROLYN

(teasing)

Come on. You don't love me like
that?

JOSEPH

Blindly? No. And you wouldn't want
me to.

She laughs. She gets him.

INT. MAYLENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Similar to Hermine's living room with a more feminine look, and everything is a little higher-priced.

Maylene lies on the couch WRAPPED in blankets. Her nose and eyes are red; she's SICK with a very bad cold.

Hermine brings in a CUP of TEA.

MAYLENE

I'm so sorry. You were the only person I knew I could call.

HERMINE

I am happy you call. We should take temperature again.

She hold up a THERMOMETER and sticks it in Maylene's mouth.

After a few moments she takes it out and looks at the number.

HERMINE

It is better a little.

MAYLENE

This is awful. I'm going to get you sick!

HERMINE

No, do not worry.

She SITS next to Maylene and puts a cool RAG on her forehead. Maylene GROANS.

MAYLENE

What time is it? I have to make dinner...

HERMINE

Meatloaf is in the oven. Dishes are washed.

MAYLENE

Oh, thank you, Hermine. You're a lifesaver. What did I do before you lived next door? You're such a good friend. And a good nurse!

Maylene laughs weakly.

Hermine smiles, thrilled with that compliment.

Maylene closes her eyes and takes Hermine's HAND. Hermine MOVES AWAY as soon as Maylene touches her.

HERMINE

Rest.

Hermine TURNS ON Maylene's TV. The CLOCK on the NEWS counts down...

INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

A stark contrast to the housewives' clean world. Dishes in the sink. Paint chipping off the walls. One window curtain shorter than the other. Dusty shelves covered with junk -- mismatched dishes, candles, BOOKS.

Joseph enters with GROCERIES. He kicks a week's worth of UNREAD NEWSPAPERS on his way in. He looks around, disgusted.

JOSEPH

Mom!

His MOTHER (50s) comes out of the bedroom with bags under her eyes, a BOOK in her hand.

MOTHER

Joseph!

JOSEPH

What are you doing?

MOTHER

Reading.

JOSEPH

Not the paper obviously.

He starts FILLING the fridge with the food he brought.

MOTHER

I didn't know you were coming.

JOSEPH

(impatient)

Same thing every week.

MOTHER

Is it Sunday already?

Joseph doesn't answer. The distance between them is wider than the length of the kitchen.

JOSEPH
I saw dad.

MOTHER
(uninterested)
Oh.

JOSEPH
(accusatory)
He's getting rid of all the stuff
from the house.

She sighs.

MOTHER
I know you're sensitive about
that, Joseph, but he's the one who
decided to sell it.

JOSEPH
You left. Then he decided to sell
it.

He closes the fridge and looks at the DISHES in the sink. But
he doesn't do anything about them.

JOSEPH
See you next week.

He heads to the door.

INT. JOSEPH'S EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Joseph looks out the window, down at the streets filled with
exciting, promising energy.

The blue-green STATUE OF LIBERTY stands proud on the water.
The sun shines a spotlight on midtown's buildings.

The city where everyone can be anyone they want to be.

ABE (O.C.)
Not yet.

Joseph turns to his editor who speaks to him from behind a big
DESK.

JOSEPH
What?

ABE
The view. You'll have it
eventually. But not yet.

Joseph smiles good-naturedly and sits down across from him.

ABE

You're still young, Lelyveld. But you're impressive. I don't come across many reporters I can count on like you.

JOSEPH

Thank you, sir.

ABE

Not only are you a machine, you -

RING!

He holds up a hand, *hold on one second*.

ABE

Rosenthal. - What kind of tip?

He listens.

ABE

A what?!

Abe's eyes go WIDE.

ABE

Here? Living in New York? - You're sure? - That can't be - The source is reliable? - Holy shit.

Abe starts WRITING DOWN what he's been told.

Joseph leans forward, excited. Only something really big could make his boss react like that.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph's WATCH. The second hand TICKS around...

TOMMY

No way.

Joseph grabs his notebook and jacket from his desk, in a hurry. Tommy leans over in a chair, rapt.

JOSEPH

That's what they said.

TOMMY
Living in New York?

JOSEPH
Queens.

TOMMY
But that would be -

JOSEPH
Huge.

TOMMY
Crazy!

Tommy tries to process what he's just heard.

JOSEPH
Huge!

He waves the paper with the TIP written on it at Tommy: *Ryan, Maspeth Queens*

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

EGGS cracked into a bowl.

FLOUR measured into a cup.

BATTER stirred with a wooden spoon.

Hermine floats around her kitchen, BAKING with a grace and efficiency we can't help be attracted to.

She's wearing the pink and white striped outfit. We are back at the day where we started.

PRE-LAP: KNOCKING.

EXT. ANOTHER HOUSE - DAY

Joseph waits in front of a different house. A teenage BOY opens the door.

JOSEPH
Is this the Ryan residence?

BOY
Yeah, who's askin'?

A WOMAN, his mother, appears.

WOMAN

Vincent!

She SHOOS him out of the way.

WOMAN

Can I help you?

JOSEPH

My name's Joseph Lelyveld, I'm with the New York Times. I'm looking for a Mr. Ryan.

WOMAN

My husband passed away six years ago.

JOSEPH

Oh. I'm sorry.

WOMAN

Thank you.

JOSEPH

Was he born here?

She's startled by the blunt question about a dead man.

WOMAN

In Kentucky.

JOSEPH

He was American.

WOMAN

Yes.

JOSEPH

And he never left the country?

WOMAN

No... what's this about?

JOSEPH

I'm looking for someone with the last name of Ryan in this neighborhood. It's common, I know, but do you know any other families? Maybe with a European accent?

WOMAN

What's this about?

JOSEPH
It's important.

WOMAN
The Ryans on 72nd street...

JOSEPH
Thank you.

He's already hurrying away.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hermine FOLDS LAUNDRY. The TV is on. A black and white COCA-COLA AD plays: a pretty HOUSEWIFE is directing two goofy MOVERS as they set up her new living room.

When they finish, she rewards them with a BOTTLE of Coke. And has one herself. She smiles at the camera.

TV HOUSEWIFE
The refreshing-est!

HERMINE
Refreshing-est. Refreshingest.

She repeats the line, trying to match the actress' accent.

KNOCKING.

Again, Hermine looks out the curtain.

HERMINE
Who is it?

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - SAME

JOSEPH (O.S.)
I'm with the New York Times.

Joseph CRANES to get a view inside, PEN already at the ready. He hears the LOCK click open on the other side of the door...

The moment of truth.

Hermine OPENS the door, her face weighted with sadness.

JOSEPH
Mrs. Ryan?

HERMINE
(ad admission)
Yes.

She looks resigned.

JOSEPH
I'm looking for your husband. Is
he home?

HERMINE
My husband?

JOSEPH
Yes. I need to ask him a few
questions.

HERMINE
(double checking)
My husband.

JOSEPH
Yes.

Hermine's face changes. She plasters back on a smile.

HERMINE
Please, come in.

Perhaps this isn't the end after all.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joseph steps into the perfectly tidy room. He notices the kitchen, the table neatly SET FOR TWO. No dishes in the sink.

JOSEPH
You have a lovely home.

HERMINE
Thank you. Make yourself
comfortable. I can get you
something to drink?

JOSEPH
I'm fine thank you. You said your
husband is home?

HERMINE
Water, tea, coffee. I can make
lemonade.

JOSEPH
No, really, thank you. Your
husband. Is he -

HERMINE
Excuse me. I have cookies in the
oven.

She leaves to the kitchen.

Joseph is left alone to take in the details of the room. The old issue of Glamour Magazine, a PAINTING on the wall. He jots down some NOTES:

Clean

Painting

Wife

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

Hermine STEADIES herself against the counter. She takes a deep BREATH. And checks her REFLECTION in the MICROWAVE.

She's the perfect housewife.

And she's going to prove it.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Hermine returns, plate of COOKIES in hand.

HERMINE
I prepare for bake sale. But there
are more.

JOSEPH
Mrs. Ryan, it's very important I
speak to your husband.

HERMINE
He is not home now.

Joseph gets uncomfortable once he knows he is alone with her.

JOSEPH
Do you expect him home soon?

HERMINE
Yes. Soon.

She puts down the cookies on the coffee table and takes a seat on the couch.

HERMINE

Sit.

It's a command. So Joseph does.

HERMINE

Your name?

JOSEPH

Joseph Lelyveld. I'm a reporter
with the New York Times.

He's anxious to start.

JOSEPH

Maybe I could ask you a few
questions, while we wait for him.

HERMINE

Questions about my husband?

JOSEPH

Yes.

HERMINE

Okay. My husband is a good man.

JOSEPH

How long have you been married?

HERMINE

Five years.

JOSEPH

Five years... and where did you
meet?

HERMINE

In Austria.

JOSEPH

That's where you're from?

HERMINE

Yes. This painting.

She points and Joseph looks up at the painting. It's a
LANDSCAPE - a beautiful LAKE surrounded by trees.

HERMINE

This is where.

JOSEPH

It looks beautiful.

HERMINE

It was lovely. But I am in America now. And this is better. I have husband. A house to clean. This is dream for every woman.

She smiles and holds up the PLATE of cookies.

JOSEPH

Oh, no thank you.

HERMINE

Try one.

JOSEPH

I'm fine, really, thank you.

HERMINE

Eat.

This time he's caught off guard by the force of her command, but he OBEYS because her voice has that affect.

She watches him CHEW, expectant.

JOSEPH

Delicious.

HERMINE

(proud)
American recipe.

JOSEPH

Thank you.

HERMINE

Your mother makes cookies?

Joseph almost laughs.

JOSEPH

No. She uh - no.

HERMINE

Your wife?

JOSEPH

Not often.

HERMINE

Then you will take some.

She gets up.

JOSEPH

Oh, no, you really don't have to.

HERMINE

Young men need food.

She leaves and returns soon after with a smaller PLATE, filled with cookies and covered with PLASTIC WRAP.

JOSEPH

Thank you. That's very kind.

They sit in silence for a moment. Something about the way she looks at him makes him nervous.

JOSEPH

You said Mr. Ryan would be home soon?

HERMINE

Yes. Yes. Where are you from?

JOSEPH

Oh.

He's used to asking the questions not answering them.

JOSEPH

Nebraska.

HERMINE

Nebraska.

JOSEPH

The midwest.

HERMINE

A small town?

JOSEPH

Yes, actually.

HERMINE

Then you come to New York.

JOSEPH

My parents moved us here when I was a kid.

HERMINE

It is a good place here. Many opportunity.

JOSEPH

Yes.

HERMINE

Newspaper writer is good job.

JOSEPH

Yes.

HERMINE

New York Times. This is big,
important paper.

JOSEPH

Yes.

HERMINE

You must be important too.

The flattery works. They share a smile.

CUT TO:

The plate of cookies is EMPTIER.

Hermine and Joseph are LAUGHING. He's sitting back into the cushions, relaxed, and completely charmed by her.

HERMINE

That is good story. You should
write it.

JOSEPH

I have to write yours about the
tiger.

Joseph reaches toward his NOTEBOOK...

But his hand passes over it and grabs a cookie instead.

HERMINE

(noticing his sleeve)
Your jacket. It is too big. The
arm. I can fix for you.

JOSEPH

Oh no - I don't need -

She's already up, taking it OFF his shoulders. She's made it into his personal space.

HERMINE

Someone needs to do this.

She takes out a SEWING MACHINE from the cabinet and holds the sleeve of the jacket up next to Joseph's arm to measure.

She clicks the machine on and positions the foot over the fabric. The NEEDLE chugs along the new seam with a mechanical NOISE.

He watches her work. It's intimate.

She finishes one side and starts lining up the other.

JOSEPH

You must be a very good mother.

She looks up at him.

HERMINE

I do not have any children.

There's no sadness in her voice.

JOSEPH

Oh.

She goes back to SEWING the second side.

When she's finished:

HERMINE

Stand.

He does and she helps him put the jacket back on.

HERMINE

Better. See?

He moves his arms, feeling it on his body.

It does feel better.

JOSEPH

Thank you.

HERMINE

You are welcome. You are nice young man.

Her hand lingers on his shoulder in a motherly way.

Suddenly Joseph realizes he's not acting like a reporter. He steps back.

JOSEPH

I - I should go. Is there a better time I can come back, when your husband will be home? I really need to speak to him. Tomorrow, maybe -

HERMINE

Tomorrow. For dinner. This will be good.

She hands him his cookies. She is in control.

JOSEPH

Okay. Thank you for - everything.

He TRIPS over himself on the way to the door.

HERMINE

It was nice to meet you, Joseph.

She CLOSES the door behind him.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

Hermine LOCKS the door and WATCHES through the curtains as Joseph walks down the street. Relieved he's gone. For now.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - SAME

Cookies in hand, Joseph walks away. But he feels Hermine's eyes behind him. He LOOKS BACK at the house...

No Hermine in the window. Just a lightly SWINGING CURTAIN.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

DEVITO - the INS agent who conducted Hermine's citizenship interview - stands on the corner at a HOT DOG stand.

The VENDOR behind the cart is an older man who speaks with a Polish ACCENT.

DEVITO

Just one today. Tryin' to cut down.

He holds out a DOLLAR BILL. The vendor hands him the HOT DOG and starts to count out CHANGE.

Devito MUMBLES with his mouth full and shakes his head, taps his finger on the front of the BILL.

VENDOR

Washington.

DEVITO
 (swallowing)
 Hey, hey! Keep the change.

The vendor nods with gratitude and puts away the bill.

VENDOR
 This time your turn.

Devito grabs NAPKINS to wipe his face and hands.

DEVITO
 What?

VENDOR
 You learn something. About my
 country.

DEVITO
 Okay.

VENDOR
 Kolobrzeg.

DEVITO
 Kol-o-je-berg.

VENDOR
 Where I am from in Poland.
 Kolobrzeg.

DEVITO
 Kolj-Berg.

VENDOR
 Better.

DEVITO
 (waving him off)
 I'll work on it.

He throws away his napkin and heads back toward the BUILDING
 with the sign:

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICES

INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

A plain looking government office. Quiet cubicles behind a
 front desk.

Devito STRUTS down the hall toward the seated RECEPTIONIST -
 an older WOMAN with BIG HAIR, chomping GUM leisurely.

He notices MUSTARD on his shirt. He tries to RUB it off and makes it WORSE.

DEVITO

Damn.

Suddenly, Joseph POPS UP out of a waiting chair.

JOSEPH

Anthony Devito?

Devito looks up from his shirt STAIN.

DEVITO

Yeah. Who are you?

JOSEPH

Joseph Lelyveld, New York Times. I need to speak with you. Immediately.

RECEPTIONIST

He said it's about a Nazi.

DEVITO

A Nazi?

JOSEPH

A Nazi. Here in New York.

CUT TO:

INT. INS - HALLWAY - DAY

Joseph follows Devito, almost crashing into him every few steps because he walks so much faster than Devito's lumbering gait.

DEVITO

You do know what you're saying sounds absurd.

JOSEPH

The tip came from a reliable source.

DEVITO

(repeating it again)
There's a Nazi living in Queens.

JOSEPH

(urgent)
Yes.

DEVITO

Come on!

He lets out a laugh. Not taking this seriously.

JOSEPH

Thousands of people immigrate here. It's possible -

DEVITO

If they're here, they didn't come through this office. There's no way we would let *that* in here. There are requirements, applications. An interview in person.

They reach their destination: a bank of FILE CABINETS.

DEVITO

It's just not possible.

Devito opens a DRAWER.

JOSEPH

If it is true, would your agency revoke citizenship right away?

DEVITO

We don't - I've worked here fifteen years and never seen that happen.

JOSEPH

Never?

DEVITO

Look, kid. If someone lied on their forms, or in the interview, somethin' like that, then that puts their citizenship up for review, of course.

JOSEPH

But it wouldn't be taken away?

DEVITO

Withdrawal of citizenship is very not common.

JOSEPH

Uncommon.

DEVITO

What?

JOSEPH

Nothing. So you don't think citizenship would be taken away, even in this case?

DEVITO

In this case, it sounds like someone's playin' a prank on you.

Devito starts going through the FILES.

DEVITO

What's this guy's name?

JOSEPH

Last name Ryan. Came from Canada around five years ago, lives in Queens. Country of origin would be Germany or Poland, Europe somewhere.

Joseph is taking NOTES so he doesn't see Devito TAKE OUT the ONLY FILE LABELED RYAN.

CLOSE UP on the line of the file that reads *Country of Origin: Austria*.

Devito's FACE GOES WHITE.

DEVITO

Yeah, uh, nothin' down here.

He DROPS the FILE back into the OPEN DRAWER, as if it's on fire. Joseph never sees it.

JOSEPH

Nothing under the name Ryan?

DEVITO

(making something up)
There's more I can look through... I'll, uh, I'll get back to you by tomorrow.

JOSEPH

Tomorrow? This is important.

DEVITO

Yeah, of course.

JOSEPH

He has a wife. She could be in danger or -

DEVITO

A wife...

JOSEPH

We're talking about a fucking Nazi!

DEVITO

(to himself)

A Nazi.

Devito looks down into the open drawer. At the file he won't let Joseph see.

The NAZI stares back at him from the FACE in the file's photo...

HERMINE.

SMASH CUT TO:

Hermine's real FACE --

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

-- at the BAKE SALE.

Hermine, Maylene, Sherry, and other CHURCH WOMEN of different shapes and sizes stand behind a TABLE covered with CAKES, CUPCAKES, and of course COOKIES.

Other church members enjoy their treats on the small lawn in front of the steeple.

A sign hangs with RIBBON between two chairs:

Help the Ladies of St. Agnus Build a Church Garden

Hermine hands a CUP of LEMONADE to a WOMAN who puts a QUARTER into the money BOX.

HERMINE

It is refreshing-est.

Maylene serves a PRIEST two cupcakes.

MAYLENE

Only two, Father?

PRIEST

(laughs)

This is wonderful. We certainly appreciate your service, Maylene.

MAYLENE

I couldn't have done it without Hermine. Have you tried her cookies?

SHERRY

Hermine, we're out of lemonade. Is there more?

HERMINE

Yes, inside.

Hermine is the Housewife of the Hour.

An older MAN comes up to buy a treat. Hermine notices the NEW YORK TIMES tucked under his arm.

She starts to PANIC inside.

HERMINE

One minute.

Hermine walks away from the table, trying to compose herself.

And all of a sudden she sees a WOMAN IN BLACK, standing by a tree. She has brown hair and wears a shapeless black SMOCK and NO SHOES. She doesn't look like she belongs here.

Hermine's face GOES WHITE at the sight of her.

The Woman In Black stares unblinking, eyes steady, intent, expectant, as if waiting for Hermine to say something. Then starts WALKING slowly, steadily toward her...

Hermine's eyes fill with fear, she can't breathe, starts sweating.

The Woman In Black walks through playing CHILDREN who don't seem to notice her. In Hermine's mind, their HAPPY YELPS become TERRIFIED SCREAMS and their play appears VIOLENT:

A little girl DRAGS her helpless DOLL along the ground.

A little boy YANKS viciously on a little girl's HAIR.

Another boy STOMPS forcefully on a MOUND of DIRT.

She SHUTS HER EYES, tries to catch her breath.

CHURCH LADY
... your secret.

Hermine OPENS her eyes.

The Woman in Black is GONE.

An older CHURCH LADY is trying to get Hermine's attention.

CHURCH LADY
Ms. Hermine?

Hermine forces herself to focus.

CHURCH LADY
I hear these delicious cookies are yours. You must give me this recipe. Unless it's your secret!

HERMINE
No. Yes. Thank you.

CHURCH LADY
Are you alright, dear?

HERMINE
Yes.

The woman smiles and walks away.

Hermine checks her HAIR, collects herself.

Then a LITTLE GIRL runs up to her, CRYING.

LITTLE GIRL
I got an owie!

The girl holds up her HAND where BLOOD is starting to flower out of a SCRAPE.

Hermine STARES at the girl as she WAILS.

Then she SNAPS.

She GRABS the girl's hand viscously.

HERMINE
SHUT UP!

Her intensity immediately STUNS the child.

Her eyes are on fire - a side of Hermine we haven't seen yet.

MOM
There you are.

The girl's MOM swoops in and picks her up.

MOM
(to Hermine)
I'm so sorry.

Hermine quickly COMPOSES herself.

HERMINE
No. No. No problem.

She exchanges SMILES with the mom who then carries her daughter away. The little girl looks over her mom's shoulder, eyes locked in HORROR on Hermine.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

In the dark, Hermine tip toes quietly to the cabinet under the sink. She slides over the bottles of chemicals silently, and eases out the WOOD BOX.

She opens it and lifts out the METAL OBJECT.

It's hers. She SHINES it gingerly with the thin fabric of her NIGHT DRESS.

It has something inscribed on it in GERMAN.

She stands. And holds it over the TRASH. Giving it one last look, dangling it, about to drop it in and be rid of the proof...

But she can't do it.

She wraps it back up into her hand.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph and Abe pass each other in the WALKWAY.

ABE
Find that Nazi yet, Lelyveld?

JOSEPH
Not yet.

ABE
Fishing trip?

JOSEPH
No. He's here. I met his wife.

ABE
(stops)
You're shitting me.

Joseph shakes his head.

JOSEPH
Going back tonight when he gets
home from work.

ABE
Jesus.

Joseph nods as Abe absorbs the gravity that the tip was real.

ABE
Well get it done then!

Abe walks away shaking his head.

Joseph reaches his desk. Tommy is sitting ON it this time.

TOMMY
You're going back tonight?

JOSEPH
(sitting)
She said he'd be there.

TOMMY
What's she like?

JOSEPH
Normal. Their house is... clean.

TOMMY
Do you think she knows?

JOSEPH
No. I don't think so. No, she
can't. She was so... normal. And
kind. She's like a... mom.

TOMMY
Your mom?

JOSEPH
No.

Joseph almost seems sad at the answer.

JOSEPH
 (quickly)
 Like one on TV or something. She
 doesn't know.

TOMMY
 But she's married to him! If I was
 in the same room as a Nazi I'd
 know.

JOSEPH
 I know.

He shakes his head.

TOMMY
 Think you can get more of these
 while you're there?

He's EATING the COOKIES Hermine gave Joseph.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Hermine makes her way around the aisles with a CART and LIST,
 passing other HOUSEWIVES.

Next on her list is FLOUR.

It's UP HIGH. She steps onto the bottom shelf and reaches...

A WORKER hurries up to help her.

WORKER
 I'll get that for you, ma'am.

He grabs it down.

WORKER
 A lady can't do that.

He gives her a friendly smile and a WINK.

HERMINE
 Thank you.

She returns the smile. But there is tension in hers.

Then, past him, at the other end of the aisle, Hermine sees
 the WOMAN IN BLACK again. Walking toward her slowly, staring
 intently.

Hermine YANKS her cart around and CRASHES into the SHELVES,
 trying to get away from the hallucination as fast as possible.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

Joseph is back. He has his notebook along with Hermine's PLATE. The sun is low in the sky, the day about to turn into darkness.

He KNOCKS.

He can't stand still as he waits. He checks his TICKING WATCH.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hermine opens the door, wearing the RED DRESS and low heels, ready to perform.

HERMINE

Hello!

She smiles big and fake.

JOSEPH

Hello, Mrs. Ryan.

HERMINE

Come in, come in.

Joseph steps over the threshold.

JOSEPH

I brought your plate back.

HERMINE

Thank you.

He hands it to her.

JOSEPH

Is your husband home?

HERMINE

Let me take this.

She steps toward him to take his jacket. But he moves away, keeping his distance.

JOSEPH

I really need to speak to your husband.

HERMINE

He will be home for dinner. Any minute. Come.

She turns to the --

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

With no other choice, Joseph follows her. There's a THIRD PLACE SETTING on the table. Hermine has orchestrated it all.

JOSEPH

Oh, no, if that's for me I can't -

HERMINE

You are here for dinner.

JOSEPH

I'm just here to speak to your husband.

HERMINE

Dinner while you speak.

She busies herself CARVING pot roast with a SHARP KNIFE. The OVEN TIMER is on.

JOSEPH

That's very generous but -

HERMINE

Yes. We have potatoes and pot roast. American recipe. You take some home too.

JOSEPH

(a little too loud)

No!

She turns to face him. Her face is calm. But she's still HOLDING THE KNIFE.

JOSEPH

I'm sorry.

He gathers himself.

JOSEPH

I should tell you why I'm here.

HERMINE

I know why you are here.

He's surprised. She's looking at intensely.

JOSEPH

You do?

HERMINE

Yes.

JOSEPH

You know about your husband's
past?

Choosing her words carefully:

HERMINE

My husband is a good man.

She waits for him to make his move.

JOSEPH

Do you know who - what your
husband did?

HERMINE

This is what you are here to write
about.

JOSEPH

Yes.

Is she stroking the knife?

HERMINE

What will this do?

JOSEPH

If your husband was a...

Joseph is confused. Does she know? He doesn't want to say it
out loud.

HERMINE

This was a different country. That
was a different life.

She does know.

JOSEPH

If your husband was a member of
the Nazi party he could be
punished. People need to know the
truth.

The knife in Hermine's hand catches the light a little...

But she simply turns back around.

HERMINE

It is the past.

JOSEPH
These are serious allegations.

HERMINE
Perhaps there is more you do not
know.

The sound of the FRONT DOOR OPENING.

HERMINE
(calling)
Honey, we have a guest!

Hermine and Joseph wait in tense silence as Russell takes off his shoes.

Then he enters the kitchen.

HERMINE
This is Joseph.

Joseph takes in Russell's size, and straightens his posture.

JOSEPH
Joseph Lelyveld. New York Times.

RUSSELL
(offering his hand)
Nice to meet you.

Joseph is thrown when he hears Russell's voice. He slowly SHAKES his hand.

JOSEPH
Nice to meet you...

He looks Russell up and down, trying to piece it together.

JOSEPH
You're American.

RUSSELL
What?

JOSEPH
I -

Russell goes and gives Hermine a KISS and stands with his arm around her.

RUSSELL
New York Times. You here about
that union crap?

Joseph looks from one to the other. With them next to each other it's obvious. She looks European, she has the accent...

JOSEPH
Mr. Ryan have you ever been to
Europe?

RUSSELL
Once. That's where I met Hermine.
Beer?

It's not him who's a Nazi.

IT'S HER.

JOSEPH
(to Hermine)
You.

Hermine looks straight back at him.

JOSEPH
(barely audible)
It's you.

Silence, their eyes locked.

DING!

The oven TIMER finally GOES OFF.

HERMINE
Dinner is ready.

Joseph's eyes go wide as he processes what's really been going on this whole time.

Russell opens BEERS. Hermine brings the POTATOES from the oven to the table.

They both sit.

RUSSELL
You're in for a treat. My wife is
an excellent cook.

Joseph hesitates. But he's trapped in the middle of a story.

So he SITS with them.

HERMINE
Pray?

They all take HANDS. To someone looking in through the window they could be parents and their son sitting down for dinner.

Russell CLOSES his eyes and starts to speak.

RUSSELL

Lord we thank you for this food,
for this roof, for this company.

Hermine and Joseph keep their eyes OPEN, glued on each other.
Officially facing off.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)

We send our prayers to all those
who are less fortunate and pray
for the peace of all men, women,
and children. Amen.

HERMINE

Amen.

She and Russell start to eat, but Joseph doesn't.

HERMINE

Eat.

Again, she says it as a command.

He looks at the food like it might be poisoned. But Russell is
eating. Hermine takes a SLOW BITE, as if to say, *See? It's
safe.*

Joseph starts to cut into his meat.

RUSSELL

So, Joseph, what brings you to
Maspeth?

He sounds kind. But Joseph still doesn't know what to think of
the Nazi's husband.

JOSEPH

I - uh - an assignment.

HERMINE

(quickly)

But he did not find who he was
looking for.

Her eyes frantically flash from Joseph to Russell. Her husband
doesn't know.

Joseph decides to play along with her for now.

JOSEPH

Right. A story about -

HOUSEWIFE

An oven salesman.

RUSSELL
An oven salesman?

JOSEPH
But they must have given me the
wrong address because only a woman
lived there. I've never heard of a
lady oven salesman.

Russell GRUNTS in agreement. Mouth full.

HERMINE
Maybe the oven salesman used to
live there and now he does not.
Maybe he does not sell ovens
anymore.

JOSEPH
But he did sell ovens. So he is
still an oven salesman. Russell
what do you do?

RUSSELL
Construction.

JOSEPH
And if you don't go to work for a
few months you're still a
construction worker right?

RUSSELL
Sure.

Russell is oblivious to what Hermine and Russell are really
talking about.

Joseph's blood is boiling; Hermine is trying hard to get
across to him.

HERMINE
Maybe that is not what he wanted
to do but he did not have a
choice.

JOSEPH
You always have a choice.

HERMINE
(agitated)
Americans do, yes.

RUSSELL
And now that's you too, honey.

He raises his BEER.

JOSEPH

What?

Russell takes his wife's hand, looks at her lovingly.

RUSSELL

She's a citizen now. As of a few weeks ago.

Joseph almost CHOKES.

RUSSELL

Are you alright?

JOSEPH

I, uh, I have to catch the train back.

He CLAMBERS out of his seat, dropping his napkin.

Russell looks up, confused.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joseph stumbles out the front door, SLAMMING it behind him. He SCRAMBLES down the street between the looming street lights, not looking back.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hermine LOCKS the front door. She lingers there for a moment, defeated.

RUSSELL (O.S.)

Honey?

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hermine comes back to her seat at the table.

RUSSELL

Strange guy.

He takes a bite.

RUSSELL

Nice and all, but something off about him.

HERMINE

Hm.

RUSSELL
Why exactly was he here?

Hermine takes a bite. She doesn't want to talk.

RUSSELL
Everything alright?

HERMINE
Yes.

She FORCES a smile. Russell goes back to eating, unconcerned.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hermine is tense. Now that Joseph knows it's only a matter of time until her world falls apart.

Russell sits next to her on the COUCH, his arm relaxed around her, eyes SUCKED into the TV's light.

Universal Cable News is on. BLACK AND WHITE video of the outside of a DALLAS COURTHOUSE. The echoing voice of an ANCHOR:

ANCHOR
The trial of Jack Ruby continues today in Texas. The man who shot Lee Harvey Oswald, President John F. Kennedy's assassin. Some are asking, should he be held responsible? Or given the circumstances, forgiven?

Russell CHANGES the channel.

A COMMERCIAL:

A MOM standing in a LAUNDRY ROOM with a BASKET of clothes.

MOM'S VOICE
It's dirt that gets down deep into fabric that's hardest to get out. But you can fight it. How? Use Faultless starch!

A close up of a Faultless Starch SPRAY CAN.

MOM'S VOICE
Protect your family. Everything from kids clothes...

Outside, a DAUGHTER wearing a WHITE DRESS plays JUMP ROPE.

MOM'S VOICE
To dad's shirts.

The mom holds up and examines a WHITE MEN'S JACKET.

MOM'S VOICE
Another star product from
Faultless.

A BLUE STAR LOGO fills the screen.

MOM'S VOICE
There's nothing you can't fix!
Faultless.

A final shot of the Mom SPRAYING STARCH on the jacket.

We see Hermine's face change, SUCKED IN. The commercial's message speaking directly to her.

Montage:

The next day Hermine GETS READY.

Picks a dress.

Takes out curlers.

Puts on lipstick.

Takes her purse out the door.

INT. SUBWAY - DAY

Hermine sits on a crowded train. Her ankles glued together, her hands folded over her purse in her lap. The rattling of the train SHAKES her hair-sprayed CURLS.

Across from her, a group of ORTHODOX JEWISH MEN stand holding the pole. Long black coats, black hats, glasses. One has a HEBREW BOOK in his hand. The rattling of the train SHAKES the CURLS on either side of their faces.

We watch Hermine watch them.

Her hands CLENCH a little around her purse.

But her face stays calm.

Then the train comes to a stop. The metal doors swish open.

And Hermine exits.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Hermine rides up with a stylish young WOMAN who's holding a stack of PAPERS.

After a few moments of silence:

WOMAN
I like your dress.

Hermine turns to her.

HERMINE
Thank you.

The elevator DINGS to a STOP and the DOORS OPEN to --

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Hermine steps out into the office. She looks around. Then approaches the FRONT DESK.

From his seat, Joseph SEES her talking to the RECEPTIONIST. He does a DOUBLE TAKE, processing that she's there.

Then SHOOTS UP from his chair.

EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph FORCES Hermine out of the building by her arm. They stop in the middle of the FOOT TRAFFIC outside and he pulls far away from her.

JOSEPH
What are you doing here?

His gaze darts around them at all the PEOPLE milling about. Business men, family tourists, street vendors, a homeless guy in an army uniform.

HERMINE
To speak to you.

JOSEPH
You can't be here.

HERMINE
You came to Queens to speak to me,
yes?

JOSEPH

You let me think it was your - It was you!

He's spitting out the words but he still barely believes them.

HERMINE

Sit.

He hears the power in her voice again and looks at her like she's a plague.

But then she softens:

HERMINE

Please. People will be looking.

They sit on a BENCH. She begins her plea.

HERMINE

What you think about me...

JOSEPH

You're a Nazi.

HERMINE

This was many years ago.

JOSEPH

But you were, weren't you?

HERMINE

Everyone was. These were the jobs. How you survive.

JOSEPH

You worked at a concentration camp.

HERMINE

You must understand -

JOSEPH

What is there to understand?

HERMINE

I was a nurse.

JOSEPH

A nurse?

HERMINE

Yes. A nurse.

JOSEPH

Is that true?

HERMINE

Why would I lie?

JOSEPH

You lied before.

HERMINE

I did not lie. Everything I told to you is true. I am from Austria. The Anschluss made us part of Germany. I met my husband when he was for vacation. We were married in Canada. Then we came here. Now I am American citizen.

He wants to believe her.

JOSEPH

A nurse for who? The guards?

HERMINE

I did not hurt anyone.

JOSEPH

But you knew what they were doing.

Hermine shifts, trying to stay calm.

HERMINE

What would you do? If this was your choice? We were very poor.

Her English gets choppy as she tries to convince him, make him understand.

HERMINE

My father was a butcher. When I was child I was sad for the animals in his shop. Once maggots got into the leg of a pig. I cried. If he could not sell it we would eat only broth. But he just cut the bad leg away. He say you cannot think of animals as one being. Only parts. If a pig has one bad part, you can cut away. And the rest is still good. Perhaps humans are like this too. We have different parts. Maybe there is one bad part. But the rest is still good. What do you think of this?

Joseph looks sickened.

JOSEPH

No... No.

HERMINE

At the camp we could see the downtown. See. Right there. Very close. This means they could see too. The trucks come. They could hear too. The screams. They could smell too. The burning. Do you punish all of them also?

This affects Joseph. Where do we draw the line of responsibility?

HERMINE

You think you would not work at the camp. Fine. What if you were in the downtown? What would you do?

He doesn't know the answer to that.

HERMINE

Would you do what everyone else was? Or be in danger?

We see the struggle on Joseph's face. Is there a grey area?

HERMINE

What do you want from me? Do you want me to tell you I have nightmares? I do.

Is she telling the truth?

Then like it's the ultimate excuse:

HERMINE

I did not have children.

He doesn't know what to say. He's doesn't know how to feel.

HERMINE

Joseph -

He CRINGES at her saying his name.

HERMINE

I make good house. I am good wife. Look at me.

He does. But the answer is not in her face.

JOSEPH

Your husband doesn't know.

HERMINE

You will ruin his life. He is a good man. He is innocent.

JOSEPH

All those people were innocent.

HERMINE

I was a nurse. Fifteen or sixteen years later you want to punish me for this?

Silence.

Then:

JOSEPH

My father is a rabbi.

He waits for her reaction.

JOSEPH

Does that bother you?

Hermine CLENCHES her purse in her lap a little.

HERMINE

No. We are in America. You understand.

JOSEPH

No. I don't.

He looks away, agitated again. She changes tactics.

HERMINE

Please do not write this. I am begging you. We are not a story. We are people.

Joseph makes eye contact with her again.

HERMINE

Please. I was only a nurse.

He does still see a person...

JOSEPH

I have work to do.

He gets up quickly and gets the hell away from her.

Hermine watches him go. She looks defeated. To a passerby: a sweet, sad lady sitting on a bench alone.

INT. INS - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The department's DIRECTOR sits behind a DESK piled high with DISORGANIZED PAPERWORK - a picture of bureaucracy at work.

Devito leans into the office, red in the face.

DEVITO

I left you a message.

DIRECTOR

Devito.

DEVITO

I need to talk to you about somethin'.

He holds up the FILE in his hand -- Hermine's.

DIRECTOR

I got your message.

He's not inviting him in. Or even looking up from the paperwork on the desk in front of him.

DEVITO

You did? Good. Then you know we need to open a review right away. This woman -

Devito steps in, but his boss puts his HAND UP to stop him.

DIRECTOR

Is not a priority right now.

DEVITO

Not a priority? She lied on her forms. And the interview. She's a Nazi for God's sake!

DIRECTOR

We don't even know if that's true.

DEVITO

The New York Times came. They're gonna follow up. And if we don't -

DIRECTOR

It's not something we need to address right now.

DEVITO

But she -

DIRECTOR

You're not hearing me!

He brings his voice back down, lower than before.

DIRECTOR

You know as well as I do what a sensitive time this is. If people start thinking this office doesn't know how to keep the bad guys out...

DEVITO

Sir -

DIRECTOR

For the public's sake we ignore it for now.

He gives Devito a stern look.

DIRECTOR

It's probably not true anyway.

Off Devito's unsettled look...

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

The office EMPTIES at the end of the day.

Joseph is still at his DESK with STACKS of PAPER and BOOKS, including THE BLACK BOOK - an aggregated testimony of crimes committed against the Jews during the Holocaust.

His face is contorted in concentration. He takes NOTES:

Simon Wiesenthal

Maidanek, Ravensbruck

Extermination

All female camps

Then something catches his EYE.

Joseph STARES at his paper...

Is it possible?

JOSEPH
 (to himself)
 No... No.

He FLIPS back in his notes to where he wrote:

NURSE.

He reads slowly from the BLACK BOOK:

JOSEPH
 From 1942 onward, Maidanek
 employed female overseers...

His FINGER finds her name.

JOSEPH
 Hermine Braunsteiner.

It's like a slap in the face.

JOSEPH
 (to himself)
 She was a guard?

Then louder to no one in particular:

JOSEPH
 She said she was a nurse.

RING!

JOSEPH
 (distracted, answering)
 Lelyveld.

Switch back and forth where appropriate with:

INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

DEVITO
 Anthony Devito calling.

He's hunched over his desk, speaking in a HUSHED voice.

JOSEPH
 (jumping in)
 Hermine Ryan.

DEVITO
 You -

JOSEPH

I spoke to her. She's a citizen.
Your office -

DEVITO

Listen, I'm not supposed to be
talkin' to you -

JOSEPH

(barreling ahead)

Mrs. Ryan claims she was only a
nurse in the Nazi party. But I
found her name in our library
records and she's listed as a
guard. If she was a guard, she
wasn't some kind of bystander...
she's a war criminal.

Silence.

JOSEPH

Mr. Devito?

DEVITO

Am I speaking anonymously?

JOSEPH

Why?

DEVITO

My agency... Doesn't want to move
forward with investigating right
now. But they'll have to when
there's a story in the news.

JOSEPH

Do you have any information as to
whether she was a guard or a
nurse?

All he cares about is the answer to this question.

DEVITO

Applicants are asked if they have
ever been convicted of a crime on
their forms and in the interview.
She answered no.

JOSEPH

So either she wasn't or she lied.

DEVITO

Write the story. Then I can find
out.

He HANGS UP.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME

Joseph gets back to work, determined. He opens a GEOGRAPHY BOOK to the page on MAIDANEK, Poland. One PHOTO looks familiar. Lake and trees... just like the landscape PAINTING Hermine showed him.

He gets CHILLS.

His editor passes by on his way out, RAPS on Joseph's desk. Joseph SNAPS out of it.

ABE

Front page tomorrow, Lelyveld.

JOSEPH

I need one more day.

Abe STOPS in his tracks.

ABE

You kidding me?

JOSEPH

There are reports that she was a guard but she told me she was a nurse.

ABE

Either way she was a Nazi right?

JOSEPH

Yes but - This woman... she's married. She has -

ABE

She worked for Hitler! I don't care if she was his right hand man or his mistress! Write what you know and get it in tonight.

Joseph NODS.

ABE

Page one.

He leaves Joseph with a job to do.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hermine does the dishes after dinner. SCRUBBING extra hard.

A RECORD scratches, slow JAZZ comes on.

Russell comes in from the living room and KISSES her shoulder.

RUSSELL

You don't have to finish all that
now.

She lets out a little laugh.

RUSSELL

Come on. Dance with me.

He gets her to turn around. They start dancing. At first her eyes flit to the dirty dishes, but eventually they settle on him.

They rock back and forth. It's sweet, and romantic.

She leans her head on his chest.

HERMINE

You love me.

It's a statement. She is reminding herself, convincing herself.

RUSSELL

Mmm, hmm.

He's humming along to the song.

HERMINE

Why?

He laughs.

HERMINE

Tell me.

She actually wants an answer. He gets serious.

RUSSELL

When we first met, we were in the lobby of the hotel and there was that painting. Do you remember? And you were telling me about it, describing it in German. I had no idea what you were saying. But I knew it was beautiful.

She looks up at him. Is that genuine love in her eyes?

HERMINE
 (pulling away)
 Sit.

She motions to the table.

She has to tell him.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - NIGHT

Most of the lights are out. The office is empty. It's eerie. REFLECTIONS bounce off the glass windows. Joseph is the only one there. He has turned in the story, and is clearing off his desk.

RING!

JOSEPH
 (answering)
 Lelyveld.

Silence.

JOSEPH
 Hello?

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Russell clears his throat.

RUSSELL
 This is Russell Ryan.

He's standing in the dark by the couch. His face is heavy.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME

JOSEPH
 (surprised)
 Mr. Ryan.

He gets his PEN and NOTEBOOK in front of him.

(Switch back and forth where appropriate.)

RUSSELL
 My wife. She -

JOSEPH
 She told you.

RUSSELL

What she did before... She didn't have a choice. She's a good person.

JOSEPH

She's a Nazi.

RUSSELL

My wife wouldn't hurt a fly. She was doing her duty to her country. It was her job.

JOSEPH

Do you know what her role was?

RUSSELL

I know there's no more decent person on this earth. You can't write this.

JOSEPH

It's my job.

RUSSELL

Who is doing this? Who told you? Why? Didn't they ever hear the expression let the dead rest?

JOSEPH

Yes, I think they did.

Beat.

RUSSELL

(imploring)

You met her. You talked to her. You know she could not have really hurt anyone. You met her.

JOSEPH

I did.

RUSSELL

You know her.

Joseph's not sure about that.

JOSEPH

Mr. Ryan, you didn't know this about your wife when you married her?

RUSSELL

No.

JOSEPH

When did she tell you the truth?

RUSSELL

Tonight.

JOSEPH

And you called me right after?

RUSSELL

Yes.

Beat.

RUSSELL

I love my wife.

This touches Joseph. And confuses him. She is loved. Even now.
Is he sure he should publish this?

INT. PRINTING ROOM - NIGHT

Joseph BARGES in. The PRINTING MACHINES are clanging. LAY OUT GUYS and the NIGHT EDITOR buzz around the room.

Joseph goes up to the Night Editor.

JOSEPH

I need to pull my piece.

NIGHT EDITOR

What? Which one?

They have to yell over the noise.

JOSEPH

Hermine Ryan.

NIGHT EDITOR

The Nazi lady?

JOSEPH

Yeah.

NIGHT EDITOR

That's front page.

JOSEPH

I need to fact check.

NIGHT EDITOR

(laughing)

Why? A Nazi's not going to win a libel case.

JOSEPH

I just got another call.

NIGHT EDITOR

Aren't you Jewish? And you're worried about fact checking this?

JOSEPH

We would for anyone else.

The night editor looks at Joseph, skeptical and annoyed.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

THWACK!

The sound of a NEWSPAPER hitting the door.

Hermine throws open the door, GRABS it and TEARS it open, scrambling through the pages to see...

Nothing.

The WOMAN IN BLACK comes up behind her, her hand REACHING...

But it's really RUSSELL.

His HAND lands on her shoulder, reassuring. But they can't look at each other.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph is still at his desk. He's been there all night. His clothes from yesterday are wrinkled, his hair is a mess. His eyes are exhausted. He didn't sleep.

ABE

WHAT THE HELL?!

Abe comes flying from down the hall and SLAMS the day's PAPER on the table.

ABE

I get you on the front page and you get yourself taken off?

JOSEPH

I needed more time to -

ABE

When have you ever needed more time? Now I got advertisers up my ass, and there's still a goddamn Nazi living in Queens!

He sucks in a breath.

ABE

We're running it tomorrow. Inside.

Beat.

ABE

And I'm sorry about your father.

Joseph looks up, totally caught off guard.

JOSEPH

What?

Off of Abe's alarmed expression...

JOSEPH

What?

Joseph GRABS the newspaper off the desk and starts RIPPING through the pages.

ABE

(quietly)

Sixteen.

Joseph finds the page.

JOSEPH

(reading)

Hattiesburg... College students and civil rights... canvassing a primarily African American neighborhood, registering residents to vote... two suspects pulled up... and beat them with tire irons. The victims included three African American... and a Rabbi from New York City.

Joseph is STUNNED.

Abe awkwardly reaches out to put his HAND on Joseph's SHOULDER.

INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Joseph BURSTS in.

His mother is at the table, crying. Carolyn is already there comforting her.

JOSEPH
(frantic)
Did he call? Did someone call?

MOTHER
(between sobs)
Yes.

CAROLYN
(taking over)
He's in the hospital. It's bad.
But he's stable. They think he'll
be alright.

Joseph COLLAPSES into a seat.

JOSEPH
I can't believe - I said - before
he left -

He takes Carolyn's hand and tries to let his mind catch up with what just happened.

After a few moments:

MOTHER
(wiping her eyes)
When he gets back here, I'm going
to go home. I'm going to take care
of him. The house. Be a good wife.

Carolyn listens sympathetically. But Joseph almost LAUGHS.

JOSEPH
You can't. You're not a housewife.

CUT TO:

INSERTS:

PRINTING PRESSES.

Paper swooshes. GEARS turn.

INK presses letters into WORDS.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Hermine MAKES THE BED as Joseph's voice reads the PRINTED ARTICLE.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

A private investigator of Nazi war crimes has identified a Queens housewife as a guard in the death camp at Maidanek, Poland, in World War II. The investigator was Simon Wiesenthal who had a key role in tracing Adolf Eichmann in 1960.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

She takes out her CURLERS.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

The woman, the former Hermine Braunsteiner, is now an American citizen. She lives in Maspeth, Queen with her husband Russell Ryan.

And starts to put on her MAKE UP.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hermine CLEANS.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

According to the source, the woman served a prison sentence for her activities at another concentration camp. But the Immigration and Naturalization Service here said that when she entered the United States she denied she had ever been convicted of a crime.

As she leaves the room, she moves the old MAGAZINE from the coffee table.

Underneath, the SCRATCH is still there.

INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Devito reads the paper, his FEET up on his desk.

PAGE 10:

Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

JOSEPH (V.O.)

The identification was made by Mr. Wiesenthal in letters sent from Vienna to Israeli authorities in Tel Aviv. Mrs. Ryan, at her home, declared, that she had no authority and had worked only in the infirmary.

Devito closes the paper and STANDS, ready to get to work.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

A young boy on a BICYCLE rides down the street throwing PAPERS at doorsteps.

THWACK.

THWACK.

Maylene and other NEIGHBORS open their doors and pick them up.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

Mr. Wiesenthal said she was sentenced in 1953 to three years imprisonment as a minor offender as an overseer of the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Little is known about her activity at the second camp, Maidanek.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hermine sits at the table. UNOPENED NEWSPAPER waiting in front of her.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

An official of the Immigration and Naturalization Service said that the fact that she had falsely sworn that she had never been convicted of a crime might be grounds for a review of her citizenship. But he indicated that such reviews rarely result in the withdrawal of citizenship.

Hermine opens the paper. She finds the article about her and looks at it. Her eyes don't read. They just look.

JOSEPH (V.O.)
 For her part, Mrs. Ryan stated, "I
 was a nurse. Fifteen or sixteen
 years later you want to punish me
 for this?"

She closes the paper neatly. All of her emotions stay locked inside.

JOSEPH (PRE-LAP)
 There's a typo!

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph JABS his finger at the page. Tommy has a seat pulled up next to him.

JOSEPH
 Ater? Ater?

TOMMY
 Calm down.

JOSEPH
 Calm down? That's a quote. That's
 something she said.

TOMMY
 So they'll make a correction.
 What's the problem? This. Is.
 Huge.

He SHAKES the paper in Joseph's face.

JOSEPH
 This story will ruin their life.

TOMMY
 She deserves it! You don't
 actually believe she was only a
 nurse do you?

He doesn't. But he doesn't want to admit it.

JOSEPH
 I'm just saying I should have...
 we should get it right.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Hermine stands in an aisle with a BASKET. She fills it with small bags of SEEDS.

Another WOMAN pushes her CART down the aisle. But then she sees Hermine and quickly TURNS AROUND.

Hermine tries to shrug it off.

She goes to the FRIDGE and gets out bottles of COKE.

WHISPERING.

She looks to her right and sees two women peeking at her, talking in hushed voices. One has the NEWSPAPER under her arm.

Hermine looks to her left.

More STARING SHOPPERS quickly avert their gaze.

Hermine tries to stay calm, goes to the register.

The TELLER clocks her as the current CUSTOMER finishes paying. When it's Hermine's TURN, he puts out an AISLE CLOSED sign and walks away.

Hermine can feel all the EYES glaring, SURROUNDING her.

She abandons her groceries and LEAVES the store in a hurry.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Hermine walks across the lawn, tense.

Groups of women TURN and watch her pass. Their voices HUSH. They move closer together.

Hermine's cheeks flush but she keeps walking.

Moms are SHIELDING their CHILDREN, pulling them away from Hermine as she passes.

She approaches the side of the chapel where there is now a small patch of DIRT for a garden. Several of the CHURCH WOMEN, including Maylene and Sherry, are there in SUN HATS and GARDENING GLOVES. They have tiny SHOVELS and FLOWERS in PLASTIC POTS, waiting to be planted.

When Hermine gets closer, a TEENAGE GIRL taps her mom on the shoulder. There's COMMOTION and a rippling MURMUR as everyone notices her, gets up and moves AWAY.

Except Maylene. She stands up and crosses her arms, defiant.

MAYLENE

You get away from here.

Her voice is shaking.

HERMINE

Maylene...

MAYLENE

Get away.

HERMINE

Please.

MAYLENE

(getting worked up)

We let you into our church, into our homes. You're a liar. You're the devil.

Her eyes WELL UP with tears of betrayal.

Hermine looks around, mortified. She catches Sherry's eye. Sherry AVERTS her gaze.

MAYLENE

You're sick.

HERMINE

I can explain.

MAYLENE

Go away. You're not one of us.

There's nothing that could hurt Hermine more. She backs up, and starts to walk away. JUDGING EYES from the rest of the community burn into her from all sides.

She starts to RUN.

She FALLS.

When she picks herself up she is covered in GRASS STAINS and dirt, there's a hole in her blouse, her hair is knocked out of place, face red.

She doesn't look like a housewife anymore.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

The skeleton of a building is waiting to be filled. CONSTRUCTION GUYS work on and around it -- blue shirts, grey pants, hard hats.

Russell is on the TOP LEVEL. SMALL WIRES in his hands.

A muscular CONSTRUCTION GUY walks behind him, carrying a pile of METAL BARS. He's gruff and hairy, and only wearing his undershirt.

CONSTRUCTION GUY

Watch out.

Russell SCOTS over to let him pass. Not offended.

CONSTRUCTION GUY

Nazi fucker.

Russell drops what he is doing.

RUSSELL

What'd you say?

The guy ignores him, puts down the METAL BARS, and starts separating them.

RUSSELL

Hey. Hey!

This time the guy turns around.

CONSTRUCTION GUY

You want me to say it louder?

Russell CHARGES him, grabs his collar and knocks him up against the LEDGE. He's twice Russell's size but helpless once he is off balance. The other guys see the rush happen and SHOUT, but they can't intervene or someone will fall.

CONSTRUCTION GUY

What the - !

RUSSELL

Don't fucking talk about my wife.
Ever. Again.

He gives one more SHAKE. Then lets go and the guy pulls himself forward. A few of the other guys rush over. They stare at Russell walking away, taking off his HARD HAT, ostracized and probably fired.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

People start to CROWD on the sidewalk. Some hold signs:

GET OUT, NAZI SCUM

GO HOME, HITLER

MURDERER

Some just watch and GOSSIP.

Hermine PEEKS out at the commotion through her CURTAIN.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

There's a bag of TRASH sitting by the door. But she can't go out there right now. She can't finish cleaning.

Her eyes dart from the trash to the MOB outside. Their YELLING fills her head. Her breath gets shorter. The trash sitting there is UNBEARABLE.

Her world is crumbling.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hermine SWOOPS in and opens the cabinet. She GRABS out the WOOD BOX. She takes out the METAL OBJECT.

She FUMBLES the box and it BANGS to the floor.

She CLUTCHES the metal object in her SHAKING HANDS like she's praying, WHISPERING to herself.

She DROPS the metal object with a CLANG.

She drops to her KNEES and KNOCKS through the BOTTLES of cleaning supplies under the sink. She YANKS out the BLEACH and a rag.

She frantically starts CLEANING. SCRUBBING madly at an already shining kitchen.

Her curls fall out of the place, her face gets red, her upper lip sweating.

She catches her REFLECTION in the shine of the oven. What does she see? The Nazi? The Housewife?

She grabs the BLEACH...

And DRINKS it.

INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - NIGHT

Devito approaches his desk where the DIRECTOR is standing, waiting for him.

DEVITO
You saw the article?

DIRECTOR
Yeah. You, uh, got the go ahead.

The director rubs his head, stressed.

DEVITO

Great. And you'll assign another investigator?

DIRECTOR

Yeah, yeah. We're working on it.

He doesn't sound very convincing.

DEVITO

Can you believe it? A fuckin' Nazi.

But his boss is already walking away.

Devito is on his own.

He sits down and starts organizing the PAPERS on his desk. He has Joseph's ARTICLE. He has UNDERLINED the part about her previous conviction.

He picks up his PHONE and dials.

DEVITO

(on phone)

Anthony Devito, calling from Immigration. I need to speak with someone about getting criminal records from - Austria, right, yes.

Each time he stops talking to listen he ESCALATES.

DEVITO

Who already called? - Well then you're sending them? - What do you mean can't? - Jeopardize what agent? - Hello? - Hello?!

He SLAMS down the phone.

DEVITO

Dammit!

He looks around.

Something is not right.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Joseph is at his desk. He looks tired, distracted. Between his dad and Hermine his grip on reality has been shaken.

His PHONE is to his ear. Waiting...

JOSEPH

Dad? - Hi. - How are you feeling?

He's being delicate, overly friendly in the wake of his father's assault.

JOSEPH

Work is good, sure. I just finished another story.

Joseph looks at his ARTICLE on Hermine, open in front of him.

He's lost in his own mind for a moment...

JOSEPH

I'm still here.

Beat.

JOSEPH

Actually, I'm not sure if I'm finished. This woman, she -

He tries to get a grip on his thoughts.

JOSEPH

Dad, the people who did this to you... Do you think they could change?

He listens, hoping for an answer.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Joseph WALKS, focused.

Up ahead: the SUBWAY ENTRANCE to QUEENS.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Joseph sits at the table with his NOTEBOOK out. Hermine is taking a CAKE out of the oven.

JOSEPH

I have to say I'm surprised you let me in.

HERMINE

You were doing your duty. I understand.

JOSEPH

Mrs. Ryan... I heard you had to go
to the hospital.

She PERCHES the CAKE on a very tall, bright yellow STAND, and
starts to FROST it with PINK ICING, using a very LARGE, very
SHARP KNIFE that looks CARTOON-LIKE.

HERMINE

(simply)

I was a nurse.

JOSEPH

You told me that.

They sit in silence.

HERMINE

You are here to ask me more
questions?

JOSEPH

To follow up.

HERMINE

First I ask you question.

JOSEPH

Okay.

HERMINE

What did you think of me? When you
met me.

He considers how to answer.

JOSEPH

I thought you had a lovely home.

HERMINE

Good.

Joseph starts to WRITE something...

The KNIFE STABS into his hand!

BLOOD spills onto the PAPER as he gets up in SHOCK and then
starts to SCREAM.

Hermine takes the knife and STABS him again.

In the BACK.

BLOOD splatters on her APRON and soaks into her OVEN MITS.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Hermine WAKES from her DREAM.

The room is mostly bare. She's in a metal bed. The IV in her arm connects to a bag hanging from a rod.

Her head is to the side, facing two visitor's chairs.

In one, the WOMAN IN BLACK sits staring at her. On the other, a plate of FRESH COOKIES.

Hermine's eyes DRIFT closed.

LATER --

Hermine wakes up again.

The CHAIRS are empty. No woman. No cookies.

She stirs and turns herself to the other side, where Russell sits, CARESSING HER HAND.

RUSSELL

I'm here.

Hermine shuts her eyes.

RUSSELL

How are you feeling?

She opens them. He's still there.

A NURSE comes in and silently checks Hermine's PULSE and BLOOD PRESSURE. Hermine watches her, getting agitated.

When she's gone:

HERMINE

I do not want that nurse.

RUSSELL

What?

HERMINE

She does not know what she is doing.

RUSSELL

Yes she does.

HERMINE

I was a nurse.

RUSSELL

It's okay.

HERMINE

I was a nurse.

RUSSELL

I know.

He takes her hand but she doesn't reciprocate.

RUSSELL

They said you - you did this to yourself.

She doesn't say no.

RUSSELL

That you drank... Why? Why would you do that?

They look at each other, both pained.

HERMINE

I needed to clean.

Is she talking about the house? Herself?

Russell looks at his wife. Does he even know her? He looks like he might break down...

But he doesn't.

RUSSELL

(resolved)

He did this. That reporter. We're going home. I won't let anything else happen to us.

He grabs onto her hand. Hard.

EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY

The mob is gone. But as Joseph approaches from down the block, three TEENAGERS run up and throw ROCKS at the Ryan's windows, then run away.

Maylene and Sherry stand outside next door. Joseph heads over to them.

MAYLENE

(whispering)

I heard she tried to kill herself yesterday.

JOSEPH

Excuse me. Do you live here?

MAYLENE

I do. Yes.

JOSEPH

Joseph Lelyveld. New York Times. Do you know the Ryan's well?

MAYLENE

Since they moved in.

SHERRY

She was our friend. Part of our church group.

MAYLENE

(shaking her head)

To think, right next door. Someone who was in the... what are they calling it now? The Holocaust. My name is Maylene Wright. With a W.

But Joseph isn't taking any notes.

JOSEPH

Can I ask, what were your impressions of Hermine?

SHERRY

Her house was always so clean...

MAYLENE

I knew. This, no. But something. There was something about her. I don't know what it was -

Who is she kidding?

MAYLENE

No. I would have never thought that Hermine could do something like that. She is - was - a lovely woman. A good friend.

It hurts her to say it.

Joseph looks at them, relieved he wasn't the only one who Hermine tricked.

JOSEPH

Thank you.

He heads up to the Ryan's door.

He's going to figure her out, once and for all.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hermine sits at the kitchen table, dazed.

The WOOD BOX has been picked up. It's sitting open in front of her. She picks up the METAL OBJECT and FONDLES it between her fingers.

KNOCKING.

JOSEPH (O.S.)

Mrs. Ryan? Hermine!

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She puts the metal object DOWN on the COFFEE TABLE on her way to the door.

She opens it a little and sees Joseph standing there.

HERMINE

What do you want?

JOSEPH

I -

He hesitates.

HERMINE

You wrote the story. It is over.

She goes to shut the door.

JOSEPH

I need to talk to you again. I - the paper has a few more questions. We want to give you a chance to comment.

She looks at him. Intimidating.

HERMINE

You are not here for the paper.

She sees right through him.

HERMINE

You are here for yourself.

She leaves the door open and walks away. He can come in if he wants.

And he does. He crosses the threshold one more time.

JOSEPH

Is your husband -

HERMINE

He is at work. If he is not fired.
He says we need money for lawyer.

He shuts the door. She sits on the couch. Waiting for him to say what he wants to say.

HERMINE

Well.

He stands tall to confront her.

JOSEPH

You told me you were a nurse.

HERMINE

I was.

JOSEPH

That's not what our source said.
And there are records. You were a
guard.

She looks at him, debating if he can still be manipulated.

JOSEPH

That's why you were in jail for
three years in Austria. Isn't it?
That's the truth.

Fine. He knows.

HERMINE

Three years. Can you believe this?
And now they want something more
from me.

She gets up and starts FUSSING around the room, fluffing pillows, straightening frames.

JOSEPH

You killed people.

HERMINE

No.

JOSEPH

You were a guard in a death camp.

HERMINE

You think a woman had power? I had no power.

JOSEPH

You're lying!

HERMINE

It is the past.

JOSEPH

My father was almost killed by people like you!

HERMINE

I am a housewife.

JOSEPH

You're a Nazi! Tell the truth!

She stops moving and looks at him. Her voice gets low and authoritative.

HERMINE

You do not know war in America. You send men to war but war is not here. Not in your streets, in your home. You do not have to see war. Have to live war. If war was right here, what would you do? You do not know. That is the truth.

This lands with Joseph.

JOSEPH

Who are you?

He's not yelling anymore. But desperate for an answer.

HERMINE

What do you think?

JOSEPH

Are you the lady who sat right there and, and fixed my jacket. Or are you a murderer? Which is it?

She maintains power in her calmness.

She walks closer to him, right in front of him.

HERMINE

You came here today. Are you
afraid of me?

She looks into his eyes, inches away from his face. And for
the first time she does SCARE him.

DING!

The OVEN TIMER.

At the sound, her face switches back to her habitual polite
smile.

HERMINE

Cookies.

She leaves for the kitchen.

Joseph paces. He wipes his sweaty palms on his pants.

He looks around. It still looks like a normal house. But then
he sees something shiny on the COFFEE TABLE...

The metal object.

He picks it up and we see it up close for the first time:

A gold PIN with POINTS sticking out on all sides. Something in
GERMAN inscribed on the front.

It's a MEDAL.

And when he turns it over...

A SWASTIKA engraved on the back.

Hermine returns with a plate of COOKIES.

JOSEPH

What is this?

He holds up the MEDAL.

HERMINE

What are you doing with that?

JOSEPH

What is this?

HERMINE

Give that to me.

JOSEPH
Is this a medal?

HERMINE
Give it to me.

JOSEPH
It is, isn't it?

HERMINE
Please.

JOSEPH
They don't give medals to nurses.
They don't give medals to guards
who didn't do anything.

HERMINE
Stop. Enough.

She STEPS toward him.

JOSEPH
What did you do to get this?

HERMINE
(trying to contain herself)
I -

JOSEPH
Tell me the truth!

He brandishes it at her.

HERMINE
Put it down.

JOSEPH
Unless it's not yours. Unless this
isn't yours.

Then she CRACKS, LOSES IT.

HERMINE
I EARNED THIS!

She FLIES toward him in a fit of RAGE and RIPS the medal from his hand. Almost knocking him over.

HERMINE
I earned this!

She starts ranting in GERMAN. Pure rage.

She grips the medal in her FIST.

The sharp points STAB into her palm so hard red BLOOD starts to cover her hand and spill off the medal onto the carpet.

Joseph is paralyzed. He watches in horror as the monster comes out. It's been there all along. But he can finally see it.

He stumbles back, terrified.

He gets himself out the door and pushes it closed with a --

INT. INS - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

-- SLAM!

Devito's PALMS hit his boss's DESK.

DEVITO
We can't do that!

He's livid, pacing.

DIRECTOR
It's done.

DEVITO
So that's it? She just gets to stay here and live her life?

DIRECTOR
If she agrees to give up her citizenship, yes.

DEVITO
No. It's not right. This agency's job is to uphold the values of this country. We can't just sweep something like this under the rug!

DIRECTOR
This goes above you and me.

DEVITO
Bullshit!

DIRECTOR
Enough.

He stands. A signal for Devito to leave. Devito can't believe this is happening.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Hermine sits at the table, staring ahead, blank. She can hear Russell in the other room.

RUSSELL (O.S.)

Thank you.

The sound of him HANGING UP the phone.

Russell comes in. He sits down, takes Hermine's hands. One of which is BANDAGED.

She can't look at him.

RUSSELL

That was the lawyer.

She doesn't say anything.

RUSSELL

They offered not to extradite if you give up your citizenship.

HERMINE

What is extradite?

RUSSELL

They send you back to Germany or somewhere for a trial.

HERMINE

They can do this?

RUSSELL

Maybe. We would have to go to court.

Hermine keeps her eyes down. The monster is gone again. She looks weak and vulnerable.

RUSSELL

But they don't want to do that either. That's why they're offering you this.

HERMINE

I will not be American citizen anymore.

RUSSELL

No. But they won't make you leave. You can stay. It will be...

They both know it won't be the same.

RUSSELL

We can stay.

HERMINE
But - the citizenship...

RUSSELL
Please.

HERMINE
I earned this.

She says it softly. She doesn't have the energy to fight anymore.

EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - NIGHT

Joseph walks out of the office and down the steps. It's dark and quiet. No one else around.

He passes a BENCH.

From which a DARK FIGURE rises...

Follows him...

And GRABS his arm.

Joseph JUMPS!

JOSEPH
Holy -

DEVITO
(whisper yell)
It's me.

JOSEPH
What the hell - Were you waiting for me?

DEVITO
I need to talk you.

JOSEPH
Now?

DEVITO
They're sabotaging me.

JOSEPH
What? Who?

DEVITO
My department. Maybe the CIA too.

He sounds crazy.

JOSEPH

What are you talking about?

DEVITO

The Nazi. Her criminal records from Austria? I couldn't get them.

JOSEPH

Why not?

DEVITO

The embassy said they were told not to attempt to access them. That they'd be putting an agent there at risk.

JOSEPH

That doesn't make any sense.

DEVITO

Exactly. And now they're making her a deal.

JOSEPH

A deal?

DEVITO

She gives up her citizenship and they don't deport her.

JOSEPH

They can't do that! Why?

DEVITO

Shh! Don't you get it? The United States has never extradited a citizen. You think they want to start now? To West Germany?

JOSEPH

She lied. She murdered people.

DEVITO

And now she's a little lady who wears dresses from the Macy's catalogue.

Joseph takes all this in.

JOSEPH

What am I supposed to do?

Devito looks around, paranoid.

DEVITO

I'm still going to work it on my own. But I need help. Resources. You can reach out as the press.

JOSEPH

I -

His mind flashes to:

Hermine touching his shoulder.

Hermine screaming, stabbing her own hand with the medal.

He wants nothing to do with this.

JOSEPH

No. No. I can't. I have other assignments. I'm sorry. I did my job. You guys do yours.

He heads down the steps, leaving Devito standing alone.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hermine SCRUBS the BLOOD STAIN on the carpet from where she cut her hand. She is working herself up into a SWEAT.

But this time it really WON'T COME OUT.

INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Joseph is READING at a CLEAN kitchen table. His mother fusses over the oven. She's in a dress. Totally put together.

MOTHER

Your father will be home soon.

She wipes her hands and walks behind him.

CLOSE UP on Joseph as she puts a PLATE down in front of him...

It's COOKIES.

He WHIPS around.

And sees his mother is HERMINE, smiling with malice.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph STARTS awake.

Sweating, panting.

He calms himself, registering the room around him, Carolyn SLEEPING next to him. He lays back down.

But he can't get Hermine out of his head.

INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Devito's phone RINGS.

DEVITO
(answering)
Devito.

On the other end --

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME

Joseph calls from his desk.

JOSEPH
She's - She can't stay here.

Beat.

JOSEPH
I want her far away.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Devito and Joseph take over the small kitchen table with piles of FILES and PAPERS.

Among their documents are black and white IMAGES of the atrocities of the Holocaust:

Emaciated people.

Allied tanks passing PILES of bodies.

BARBED WIRE fences with gas chambers in the distance.

DEVITO
Jesus. I can't look at this stuff.

JOSEPH
We have to.

Carolyn brings three COFFEES to the table and joins them.

JOSEPH

The camp was in Poland, but under the control of the German state.

DEVITO

Well we need at least one of them to file an extradition request.

JOSEPH

What do they need?

DEVITO

Proof.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - DAWN

The PHONE sits in the center of the kitchen table. No one is in the room. Outside the little window, the sky is still dark, the sun isn't up yet.

RING!

Joseph stumbles in from the bedroom in his UNDERWEAR.

JOSEPH

(answers)

Hello? - Mr. Wiesenthal! - No not at all. I understand. The time difference...

He rubs his eyes. Looks for something to WRITE ON.

JOSEPH

Our correspondent in Tel Aviv told me how I could get in touch with you.

There's only documents and photos on the table. He can't find anything...

JOSEPH

I - uh - I wanted to speak to you about Hermine Braunsteiner - We did yes. We want her to stand trial.

... so he PULLS one of his old ARTICLES off the wall.

JOSEPH

Absolutely. We're working on building the case but we could use your help. How did you first hear about her?

Joseph listens and takes NOTES on top of his old story.

JOSEPH

Do you have any way of contacting them? If there was any way to get written testimony...

MONTAGE:

Carolyn FUMBLES to open the front door, her hands filled with LETTERS.

Joseph sits at the table, carefully opening DOZENS of LETTERS one by one. Some are not in English but the words - the truth - is there.

Devito SHOVES take out FOOD from a CONTAINER into his mouth, almost dripping SAUCE onto a letter. But Joseph moves it out of the way just in time.

LETTERS form a STACK that GROWS and grows on the table. And then starts SPILLING over into BOXES.

INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The lights are dimmed. Hermine finishes the DISHES.

Then she feels Russell's eyes behind her.

She stands silent and still, and then:

HERMINE

You want to know if there was more.

RUSSELL

No.

He hangs his head. Ashamed.

HERMINE

You can ask.

She waits for him to make his move.

RUSSELL

In the hotel, when we met... When you were telling me about the painting...

Beat.

RUSSELL

You could have been saying anything.

She finally turns to him. Goes to him, takes his HANDS.

HERMINE

I am your wife. There is no more.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph is at the table with a BOTTLE OF WHISKEY. He looks haggard, eyes RED.

He has one of the hundreds of VICTIM LETTERS in his hand.

Carolyn walks carefully in behind him.

CAROLYN

You coming to bed?

JOSEPH

Yeah.

But he doesn't move.

CAROLYN

Everything alright?

JOSEPH

I keep reading these, these horrible things that these people suffered. And I keep waiting to feel shocked. Shocked that people did that. That a human was capable of doing that to another human. I don't want to believe that. But I do. You know the time in all this when I felt shock, the one thing I couldn't believe, was when...

He trails off into silence.

CAROLYN

When what?

JOSEPH

When he called me.

CAROLYN

Who?

JOSEPH
Her husband.

Beat.

JOSEPH
And told me he still loved her.

Carolyn puts her hand on his shoulder. And he pulls it down over his HEART.

EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Devito sits on a BENCH. Joseph joins him.

DEVITO
We got a court date.

JOSEPH
Finally!

Devito shakes his head, somber.

DEVITO
I talked to a prosecutor friend of mine, used to be an investigator with us. We won't be able to use the victims' letters.

JOSEPH
What? What about the ones that mention her directly?

DEVITO
For probable cause they'll want someone to testify in person.

JOSEPH
They can't do that, they're in Europe.

Devito looks at him. *Obviously.*

JOSEPH
(frantic)
But these people - Their stories - If they don't allow evidence like this then their system doesn't even work.

DEVITO
It's working just how they want it to.

JOSEPH

What are we going to do?

DEVITO

What can we do?

They look ahead. Devito jaded, Joseph dejected.

INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joseph sits at the table alone, jaw clenched. He FLIPS through the LETTERS one by one, looking at all the people's words that won't get to be heard.

Then he STOPS on one. He leans forward URGENTLY. He traces his finger over the ENVELOPE, zeroing in on the RETURN ADDRESS in PARIS, but an AMERICAN STAMP.

INT. DINER - DAY

Classic 60s decor. A counter with round blue stools. A checkered tile floor. Menu items spelled out in rubber letters stuck to a board. Pop music playing.

Joseph sits in a plastic booth, tapping his feet, impatient.

BELLS jingle.

The front door opens. A lithe woman enters and looks around nervously. She's dressed conservatively despite the heat.

IT'S THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

Her face is aged from the one in Hermine's apparition, wrinkles claw toward her eyes. But it's her.

Joseph stands as she slides into the bench across from him. This is RACHEL BERGER (early 40s).

JOSEPH

Rachel Berger? Joseph Lelyveld.
Thank you for meeting me.

She looks at him, keeping her words to herself for now.

JOSEPH

You should know, I'm a reporter.
But I'm not here in that capacity
today.

RACHEL

How did you find me?

She speaks with a FRENCH ACCENT.

JOSEPH
Why were you hiding?

She doesn't trust him.

He takes out her LETTER.

JOSEPH
You sent us this letter but wanted
us to think you were in Paris.

She looks at the letter between them.

RACHEL
This is the truth.

JOSEPH
I know it is.

RACHEL
I do not have anything more to
say.

JOSEPH
Okay.

He needs to keep her here until he explains.

JOSEPH
Ms. Berger -

RACHEL
Mr. Wiesenthal said she is going
to trial. That you will read
these.

JOSEPH
She is going to trial. We want her
sent back to Germany. To put her
in prison. But they won't let us
read these. We need someone to
testify in person.

Beat.

RACHEL
Did you read this?

She looks at her letter.

JOSEPH
Yes.

He looks at Rachel with something beyond sympathy in his eyes. But he knows there is nothing he can say.

RACHEL

You know I cannot go. Be in the same room with her.

JOSEPH

I know it's asking a lot...

RACHEL

I am sorry.

JOSEPH

Don't you want to see her put away? She deserves to be punished.

RACHEL

What will this change?

She looks at him. In her eyes is a pain that won't be cured. No matter what happens to Hermine.

He re-phrases:

JOSEPH

This deserves to be heard.

He holds up her LETTER.

But Rachel still looks unsure.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

A wood-paneled room.

JUDGE MISCHLER (60s) presides up front. No jury.

Devito sits at the prosecutor's table.

Hermine and her ATTORNEY sit at the other table. She is poised, wearing a crisp DRESS, her hands folded neatly.

Russell sits right behind her in the FRONT ROW.

Joseph sits in the BACK, among other spectators.

ATTORNEY

Your honor, both components of this extradition equation are faulty. The validity of the country's right to file this case should not be ignored.

(MORE)

ATTORNEY (CONT'D)

The location in question is a Polish city.

DEVITO

Which was occupied and controlled by Germany.

ATTORNEY

Germany, West Germany, occupied Poland, occupied Austria... the countries' boundaries were not clear at the time of the alleged crime.

JUDGE

I believe multiple countries tried to file this request.

Hermine looks composed in her seat, harmless. But inside her mind is agitated.

Hermine's POV: *The dust on the table.*

ATTORNEY

Furthermore, my client cannot be a fugitive. She is a citizen of the United States. She did not leave her country to escape prosecution.

DEVITO

Mrs. Braunsteiner obtained that citizenship, which she subsequently surrendered, by providing false information. She did not report her previous criminal record at the time of her application as is required by law. She was in fact convicted of crimes. We have information that she served three years in an Austrian jail for manslaughter, assault, and infanticide.

A water stain on the tile.

ATTORNEY

The actions in question should be exempt from political transgression. Mrs. Ryan was living within a state of war.

DEVITO

I don't think it's far reaching to say what the Nazi party did was beyond war.

A crack in the ceiling.

JUDGE

I do find troubling the defense's motion to dismiss based on the issue of double jeopardy. If the defendant already served time her for actions.

DEVITO

She was charged with crimes in Austria. The extradition is being filed by West Germany.

ATTORNEY

As I said before, the boundaries of these countries at the time of the crime were hardly concrete.

The judge holds up his hand to let Devito continue.

DEVITO

She worked at two camps. She was tried and convicted of crimes at Ravensbruck. Charges have never been brought against her for crimes committed at Maidanek.

A button missing from Devito's sleeve.

JUDGE

And you have official records of these crimes?

DEVITO

No, your honor. But we do have hundreds of statements from witnesses, victims of the camp, recounting their treatment there, some including specifics of Mrs. Braunsteiner's heinous acts.

He holds up the STACK of LETTERS.

The judge considers.

JUDGE

Unless these witnesses are present, the court cannot hear these accounts.

ATTORNEY
(to Devito)
That'd be hearsay, counselor.

JUDGE
Are any of the witnesses here
today?

Russell looks HOPEFUL.

Joseph HOLDS HIS BREATH.

DEVITO
Yes, your honor. One.

Hermine becomes ALERT.

DEVITO
Rachel Berger.

Rachel RISES from the crowd, glancing at Joseph for encouragement. As she crosses the room, Hermine's eyes HARDEN with hatred.

Rachel takes the witness seat.

DEVITO
Thank you for joining us here
today, Ms. Berger. You live in New
Jersey, is that correct?

RACHEL
Yes.

DEVITO
How long have you lived there?

RACHEL
Fifteen years.

DEVITO
And you're a naturalized citizen?

RACHEL
Yes.

DEVITO
A legal one.

He pauses for effect.

DEVITO
Where did you live before you came
to the United States?

RACHEL

Paris.

DEVITO

You were born there?

RACHEL

I was born in Poland.

DEVITO

Ms. Berger, have you ever seen the defendant before?

RACHEL

Yes.

She keeps her eyes GLUED to Devito, not letting herself look at Hermine and lose her nerve.

RACHEL

(hushed)

Kobyła.

DEVITO

I'm sorry?

RACHEL

This is what we call her. Kobyła.

DEVITO

To clarify for the court, you're talking about this woman, Hermine Braunsteiner.

He motions, but Rachel doesn't still look.

RACHEL

Yes.

DEVITO

And when was the last time you saw Mrs. Braunsteiner?

RACHEL

Twenty years ago. I was a prisoner at a concentration camp in Poland.

DEVITO

And she worked at that camp.

RACHEL

Yes.

DEVITO

What was her position?

RACHEL

She was a guard.

DEVITO

What did she do as a guard?

RACHEL

The lines. People to the right.
People to the left.

DEVITO

Where were these people going to
the right and the left?

RACHEL

Right to the factory. Left to...
the gas.

DEVITO

She sent people to die.

RACHEL

Yes.

He lets this land.

Hermine's KNUCKLES CLENCH white, her NAILS dig into her own skin. Her facade is crumbling around her and there's nothing she can do about it.

DEVITO

How many people would you say she
sent to be killed?

RACHEL

I came on train with one hundred
people. Half of us to the right.
More came other days.

DEVITO

This was part of her job, this
selection process. And there were
other guards who did the same
thing?

RACHEL

Yes.

DEVITO

But Hermine Braunsteiner, she
stood out to you, is that right?

RACHEL

Yes.

DEVITO

Why is that?

She takes a deep breath, steeling herself.

RACHEL

She used a whip.

DEVITO

You saw her whip women?

RACHEL

Yes.

DEVITO

And did she ever beat you?

RACHEL

No.

She's holding something back.

DEVITO

But she did terrorize you.

Joseph LEANS forward.

DEVITO

Can you tell the court what happened?

Rachel takes a breath.

RACHEL

We were working. Moving sacks from the factory.

She seems to drift off during her story. Like she can't bear to be present while telling it.

RACHEL

My daughter. She was so young but working too. A woman with us fell. She was old and bleeding. I ripped a piece of cloth from my dress and try to help her. She - Kobyla - she saw me and screamed to stop. But I had to help her. So I did not stop. She came over. Took out her whip. Raise it at me.

Rachel raises her arm. She's trying to stay strong. But the story is taking her back there.

RACHEL

But then she see my daughter. She put her whip away. Instead she grab my daughter by the hair. Throw her down in front of me and kick her. And kick her.

She breaks down.

RACHEL

And... I try - could not...

TEARS are streaming down her face, but she makes herself finish the story.

RACHEL

The spikes on her boots. This is why we call her Kobyla. Stomping mare.

Stunned silence.

RACHEL

When my daughter was... not moving, she take out a knife and cut her own wrist. She look at me and says, 'Rette Mich. Save me. You want to act like a nurse, here. Save me. Or I will kill you too.'

Beat.

RACHEL

(barely audible)
And I did.

The room is frozen.

RACHEL

I saved the woman who killed my daughter.

Not even Joseph's pen moves.

Russell shuts his eyes and hangs his head.

Rachel forces herself to look at Hermine.

Hermine AVERTS her gaze. Her evil finally exposed.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Rachel walks down the STAIRS. Her head held high.

JOSEPH
Rachel. Rachel!

He runs after her, calling out.

But she DISAPPEARS into the CROWD.

Joseph looks out at the hundreds of people passing by, each going somewhere, each with their own past, each with something unknown within.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

The final day of the trial. Everyone in their normal seats. PRESS present. A palpable anticipation.

JUDGE
Will the defendant please rise.

Hermine STANDS. As she does, she looks behind her. She and Joseph make EYE CONTACT. She's not scared, or sad. She is simply resigned.

After a moment she TURNS to face the front, her BACK to Joseph. Shoulders back, hands folded politely.

JUDGE
I hereby grant the extradition of
Hermine Ryan to the requesting
nation of West Germany...

INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Russell is DRUNK, bottle in hand.

JUDGE (O.S.)
Mrs. Ryan is hereby remanded to
police custody until such transfer
can be arranged. Upon extradition
she will not be permitted to re-
enter the United States...

The judge's voice fades, leaving a void of silence.

Russell looks around the house. It's a foreign place without his wife in it.

His eyes land on the BLOOD STAIN on the carpet...

A sickened, animal YELL escapes from him.

He FLIPS the coffee table and starts to SMASH everything in the room. He FALLS on his knees and rips the cushions off the couch. He SCREAMS and THRASHES until his face is red.

And then the TEARS come.

Russell is alone, deflated, shaking on the floor.

His dropped bottle SPILLS all over the carpet next to him.

INT. CAR - DAY

Inside a black FORD with government PLATES. Devito and Joseph look out the window at a small PLANE. The BOARDING STAIRS down, waiting.

DEVITO

She's probably not the only one here.

JOSEPH

She's the one we found.

DEVITO

Maybe that's what we get for opening our doors to people.

JOSEPH

We also opened our doors for Rachel Berger.

They sit in this. Still struggling with it all.

DEVITO

When I did her interview she seemed normal. Nice.

JOSEPH

I was in her house.

DEVITO

I thought you would be able to tell, ya know?

Joseph knows exactly what he means.

DEVITO

Let me ask you somethin'. You think anyone could do that?

JOSEPH

Do what?

DEVITO

Be like her. Do those things. If they were in that situation.

Joseph stays silent. He thinks the answer is yes. But he doesn't want to say it out loud.

DEVITO

Or she's just crazy. Has split personalities.

Devito's trying to convince himself. But they both know it's not the truth.

Another CAR pulls up.

Hermine gets out, escorted by two AGENTS. WIND blows her hair and she tries to fix it, still concerned with her appearance.

EXT. TARMAC - SAME

Joseph gets out of the car.

Hermine sees him and says something to her escorts. They let her walk over to him alone.

When she and Joseph are face to face they stand in silence. It's not tense like before. They're still opponents, but the match is over.

HERMINE

Is that coffee? On your shirt.

Joseph looks down at a light brown STAIN over his heart. Then back up at her.

Beat.

HERMINE

I wanted to be a nurse.

Finally she is telling the truth.

HERMINE

I could not afford the school. I went to work as maid. When the war began... the party paid four times what I make.

JOSEPH

And you became a murderer.

She almost shrugs. As if it's just the way her story went. Not what she chose.

HERMINE

I knew you would come. To my door.

JOSEPH

You thought someone would find you?

HERMINE

Yes. One day.

She looks down at his SHIRT again.

HERMINE

Soda water is a good trick.

She walks away and is escorted up into the plane. She doesn't look back.

But Joseph can't look away.

FADE OUT.

INT. GERMAN PRISON CELL - NIGHT

Hermine, dress replaced by a plain UNIFORM, sits on a hard bed, locked inside walls of grey.

Her face is expressionless.

Then she starts to laugh.

And cry.

A wave of sorrow, anger, guilt, relief.

Alone, she can finally let go.

DAY

Hermine wakes up in the bare cell. She takes a moment to adjust where she is.

Her hair is wild. No make up. She is stripped. Raw.

The Nazi in her is real.

She gets up and MAKES THE BED.

Tucks the edge of the sheet under, folding, smoothing, pat pat. Same as at home.

She reaches UNDER the mattress and takes out a SHARP OBJECT. A piece of wood filed into a WEAPON.

She takes it in her hand...

Is she going to hurt herself? Someone else?

No.

It's a NEEDLE.

She pulls a piece of THREAD from the seam of the sheet, and starts to fix a tiny HOLE in the pillowcase.

The housewife in her is real too.

Over the image of her sewing...

POST SCRIPT:

Hermine Braunsteiner Ryan was the first U.S. citizen extradited for war crimes.

Along with several other women, she stood trial for the deaths of over 200,000 Maidanek prisoners in Germany's longest and most expensive Nazi trial.

She received a life sentence.

Anthony Devito and his partner in the case, Vincent Schiano, left the INS shortly after Hermine's extradition.

Later, the DOJ office of Special Investigations was established to seek out and deport war criminals.

The reporter, Joseph Lelyveld, eventually became the executive editor of the New York Times.

Hermine was released after 15 years for health reasons. She died three years later in 1999.

Her husband Russell Ryan never left her.

He was last seen pushing his wife in a wheelchair through a market in Germany, asking her if she wanted some flowers.

THE END.



Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

New York Times (1857-Current file); Jul 14, 1964; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2001)

pg. 10

Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

A private investigator of Nazi war crimes has identified a Queens housewife as a guard in the death camp at Maidanek, Poland, in World War II.

The investigator was Simon Wiesenthal, who had a key role in tracing Adolf Eichmann in 1960.

The woman served a prison sentence for her activities at another concentration camp. But the Immigration and Naturalization Service here said that when she entered the United States, she denied she had ever been convicted of a crime.

The woman, the former Hermine Braunsteiner, now is an American citizen. She lives in Maspeth, Queens, with her husband, Russell Ryan.

The identification was made by Mr. Wiesenthal in letters sent from Vienna to Israeli authorities in Tel Aviv. Mrs. Ryan, at her home, readily acknowledged that she was Hermine Braunsteiner of Maidanek. She declared, however, that she had never been more than a guard and had no authority whatever.

Mrs. Ryan was doing some

painting in the home she and her husband, a construction worker, recently acquired at 52-11 72d Street when she was interviewed about the report of her wartime activities.

A large-boned woman with a stern mouth and blond hair turning gray, she was wearing pink and white striped shorts with a matching sleeveless blouse.

"All I did is what guards do in camps now," she said in heavily accented English.

"On the radio all they talk is peace and freedom," she said.

"All right. Then 15 or 16 years later why do they bother people?"

"I was punished enough. I was in prison three years. Three years, can you imagine? And now they want something again from me?"

According to Mr. Wiesenthal, who is director of a documentation center in Vienna called the Federation of Jewish Victims of the Nazi Regime, legal proceedings are still pending against Hermine Braunsteiner in the provincial court at Graz, Austria.

Mr. Wiesenthal said she was

only little was known," his letter said. "Except for the letter of a Polish woman, which did not figure in the Graz proceedings, nothing was known. The matter of Maidanek was not mentioned."

Mr. Wiesenthal explained that he could not say what offenses had been proved against Hermine Braunsteiner on the basis of her activities at Ravensbruck.

Released by British

Mrs. Ryan said she had spent a year at Maidanek, eight months of it in the camp infirmary with a serious illness. After the war, she said, she was held for eight months by the British and then released.

It is estimated that 1.5 million people were killed at the Maidanek camp, which was on the outskirts of Lublin in eastern Poland. About half of them were said to have been Jews.

"My, wife, sir, wouldn't hurt a fly," Mr. Ryan said in a telephone conversation. "There's no more decent person on this earth. She told me this was a duty she had to perform. It was a conscriptive service.

"She was not in charge of

anything. Absolutely not, as God is my judge and your judge."

Mr. Ryan said he had never known until now that his wife had served a prison sentence or that she had been a guard in a concentration camp.

"These people are just swinging axes at random," he declared. "Didn't they ever hear the expression, 'Let the dead rest'?"

Mrs. Ryan broke into tears when she was told of the Wiesenthal letter. "This is the end," she said, crossing her small living room. "This is the end of everything for me."

Mrs. Ryan became a citizen in 1963. She entered the country in 1958. An official of the Immigration and Naturalization Service said that the fact that she had falsely sworn that she had never been convicted of a crime might be ground for a review of her citizenship. But he indicated that such reviews rarely result in the withdrawal of citizenship.

sentenced there in 1953 to three years' imprisonment as a minor offender as an overseer of the Ravensbruck concentration camp.

"Of her activity in Maidanek