

**A GOOD AMERICAN**

by  
Denise David Williams

a memory play

Representation:

© August, 2021

Libby Nicolay  
Marilyn Atlas Management  
132 S Lasky Dr.  
Ste 200  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
909-907-2764  
libbynicolay@gmail.com

## CHARACTERS

ANNIE BENJAMIN, Early 20's, long wavy hair (important). Lost and struggling. The narrator of the play and also a character in the play. This is her memory.  
YOUNG ANNIE BENJAMIN, 8, innocent, vulnerable. A mass of dark curls.

LEEZA (LISE) BENJAMIN, Annie's mother. A loving terror. Never recovered from the loss of her mother in Nazi, Germany. Buxom and beautiful. Late 30's and 50's. Hardened in her older age.

JOE BENJAMIN, Annie's father. Warm, but soft-bellied and unaware; A Roman Catholic of Assyrian descent. Early 40's and late 50's.

TERESA BENJAMIN, 27, Annie's older sister. Thickly built. A smoker. Wears her anger on her face. YOUNG TERESA, 14; bossy, but scared.

MICHAEL BENJAMIN, 20, Annie's younger brother. seemingly unaffected by the family drama. YOUNG MICHAEL BENJAMIN, 6.

NANA, 70's, Joe's old-world Assyrian-speaking Catholic mother; short and stocky. Wears dresses with rhinestones and tennis shoes. Never without a rosary.

MARTHA ROSENSWEIG, 42; Lise's mother, Annie's grandmother. A German Jew who died in Nazi Germany; Beautiful; long thick dark hair. From another time.

Therapist / Priest / Waiter /Janitor (double-played by Nana and Michael)

## SETTINGS

The BENJAMIN HOME - a middle class home in a small New Jersey town. It has a main room with a dining table, kitchen, two bedrooms and a BASEMENT. There's a big, climbable TREE in the backyard.

Annie's dingy studio apartment in the West Village. It has one barred window and a bathroom with a bathtub.

Hospital room. Church.

The settings and staging in many scenes should be poetic to create an emotional and dream-like atmosphere, especially when Martha appears from another reality. Some scenes between Annie and other characters can be played facing the audience outside of a literal setting.

## PROJECTIONS

Annie's Tree, the photo of Martha Rosensweig, the dreidel rolling, the home movies that Lise watches, the Statue of Liberty, and Lise's name etched in the stone wall on Ellis Island should be seen as projections.

The images of immigrants that line the walls of the Ellis Island Museum should be projected and fill the stage the way Lise and Annie experience them in the museum.

## TIME PERIOD

The TIME PERIOD is the 1960's and the 1980's.

1980's scenes are in **BLUE**

1960's scenes are in **PINK**

The two colors are to help delineate the time changes in the scenes.

**ACT I**

## SCENE 1

*A dark stage except for a spotlight on a young woman facing the audience.*

*This is ANNIE BENJAMIN, 22, long thick wavy hair, vulnerable, guarded.*

*NOTE: ANNIE remains on stage throughout the play as the narrator. She is a witness to her younger self, and she is also a character who becomes part of some of the scenes.*

*(When Annie is narrating, the dialogue temporarily stops, but the action continues.)*

*Annie speaks directly to the audience.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I never wanted to come here. To this planet. To this experience... I resisted it. It just looked so archaic and cumbersome... But I understood there were reasons. There were experiences to have, lessons to be learned and growing to do. So I agreed, and I came.

A few minutes after arriving, laying there all bundled up, I felt two sets of eyes peering over the sides of my crib. I knew they were my parents. They looked nice enough, but then a crystal clear thought flooded my mind... "Oh, god... here we go." Then the veil dropped, and I was just a baby - with no memory of anything that had come before.

When I was 8 years old, I would climb a tall tree that was behind our house. It wasn't just any tree. It was a magnificent old Oak that beckoned and welcomed me. I would make my way up its powerful branches to the very top where I had a bird's eye view of the neighborhood. No one could find me there and I loved that. I talked to my tree. Its stillness comforted me. It was peaceful. It was safe. It made me feel better. Sometimes, before climbing back down, I would leave little notes with questions, like "Who am I? What am I supposed to believe? Why are they fighting over this thing called God? Is one of them right and the other one wrong?"

*(a beat)*

If someone had asked me who God is, or even if God is, I would have said... I don't know...I have no idea.

Except maybe God was my tree...and if I was still enough, somehow, some way, it would give me the answers. But no one asked me and what I thought didn't matter anyway. My parents had their own ideas about these things - ideas that only seemed to make them furious at each other and cause them a lot of pain.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Annie...where are you?! Your father is sick. We need you here.... Now!

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

That's my mother. My father is sick and I know I should be there. It's just that I feel so lost when I'm with them. But I have to go...I have to go home.

*Annie turns to join the scene and lights go up as she enters the New Jersey HOSPITAL ROOM where her father, JOE BENJAMIN, late 50's, warm, a Roman Catholic of Assyrian descent, lies in the bed sleeping, machines monitoring his vital signs. Annie's mother, LISE BENJAMIN, 50's, a German Jew, hardened, sits in a chair in a corner - where she's probably been all night - reading a magazine and puffing on a cigarette.*

*ANNIE enters, disheveled, looking like she is wearing the same clothes from the day before. She crosses straight to her father's bed - maybe not noticing her mother. Joe stirs and smiles weakly when he sees her.*

JOE

Hi, sweetheart.

ANNIE

Hi, Daddy... Geez, what have they done to you?

JOE

Look at you. You got skinny.

*Lise looks up.*

LISE

Ask her where's she's been... Ask her where she slept last night.

ANNIE

I can't believe you called me there, Mom.

LISE

We're lucky I still had the number for that dead beat boyfriend of yours.

ANNIE

Ex-boyfriend.

LISE

Whatever, we never hear from you. You might have moved to Siberia for all we know.

*Joe coughs. Lise puts out her cigarette and goes to Joe's bedside with water.*

LISE

Here, let me give you some water, Joey.

*Annie watches her mother tend to Joe like a child.*

ANNIE

What happened, Mom?

LISE

If you came around more, you'd know what was happening in this family.

JOE

I did it on purpose so you'd come for a visit.

LISE

Stop making jokes. You need to rest.

*Joe dozes off again. Lise gets up and goes to the sink to refill Joe's water. Lise begins singing lightly to herself in Hebrew, but loud enough for Annie to hear. (**Tumbalalaika...**)*

ANNIE

*(startled, whispering)*

Mom...?! What are you doing..?!

*Lise is in her own world and keeps singing.*

ANNIE

Mom...! Stop it...

*Annie looks nervously over to her father.  
Lise abruptly stops singing and turns around.*

LISE

*(brusque)*

What?! Your father is sleeping. He can't hear me.

*TERESA, 27 Annie's older sister, stocky and hard, holding a cigarette, enters and sees Annie.  
MICHAEL, 20, her younger brother, follows.*

TERESA

Well, look who's finally here.

MICHAEL

Hey, Annie, nice to see you.

ANNIE

Hey, Michael. I don't think you can smoke in here, Teresa.

TERESA

What, you gonna tell me what to do now?

MICHAEL

We just spoke with the doctor. He says Dad's heart is weak. They want to keep an eye on him. Whatever it takes. I'll pay for it.

ANNIE

I'll help.

TERESA

Who do you think you're kidding, Annie, you don't make that kind of money.

ANNIE

I make more than a New Jersey school teacher, Teresa.

TERESA

Yeah, right. In your dreams.

LISE

Quiet, for God's sake. Both of you. What is wrong with you?

*Teresa goes to the corner to smoke. Michael sits. Annie goes to Joe's bedside. She lovingly adjusts his blanket. Joe opens his eyes.*

JOE

They burying me yet?

ANNIE

Hardly. They know you'd just climb right back out.

JOE

A disease of the heart... how can that be? When it's so full of love for all you guys?

ANNIE

I don't know. I don't understand these things either.

*Lise pushes Annie out of the way.*

LISE

What are you saying to him? Move over, Annie, let me do it.

*(to Joe)*

Here, Liebshen.

*Annie watches her mother, barely containing herself.*

ANNIE

You know what, I really need to go.

LISE

What are you talking about, Annelah? You just got here.

ANNIE

I have to get back to the city.... *(thinking of an excuse)* I...I...have a job interview. I'm sorry, Daddy, I can't stay.

JOE

It's alright. I'm not going anywhere.

LISE

Don't make excuses for her, Joe, you're always making excuses. She's a selfish girl, she's been selfish for years.

*Annie ignores Lise. She kisses Joe on the cheek.*



ANNIE  
Feel better, Daddy.

*Annie nods goodbye to her siblings and exits.*

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 2

*ANNIE'S APARTMENT. NYC's West Village.  
A small dingy studio apartment with a bathtub  
and one barred window. It has an altar of some  
kind with candles that flicker against the wall.  
It's late.*

*Annie is asleep in her bed - DREAMING:*

*We HEAR a piano playing, someone singing  
softly in Hebrew (**Tumbalalaika**)*

LISE (O.S.)  
Good girl. Let's say it again. Baruch atah adonai eloheinu...

YOUNG ANNIE (OS)  
B.a.r.u.c.h.. a.t.a.h a..d.o.n.a.i e.l.o.h.e.i.n.u....

*Suddenly -- We hear the stomping of boots  
growing louder, getting closer... a door opens,  
a bright light shines through the door...*

*The singing abruptly stops.*

LISE (O.S.)  
*(a desperate whisper)*  
Quick, hide it!

YOUNG ANNIE (O.S.)  
Did he hear us?!

LISE'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Shh! Quiet, Annelah...!

YOUNG ANNIE (O.S.)  
*(on the verge of tears)*  
Is he going to find us? He'll be mad, Mommy. He'll be so mad.

*Annie gasps as she wakes from her dream in a panic. She sits up.*

ANNIE

Oh, God!

*Annie gets out of bed trying to shake off the dream. ROSE, Annie's THERAPIST, enters. They face the audience. Scene shifts to therapist's office.*

ROSE

How are you, Annie?

ANNIE

I'm so sad, Rose, all the time. I keep having these dreams, these memories. They haunt me. Can you give me something?

ROSE

For the dreams?

ANNIE

No, to...feel better. To not feel so scared...so confused.

*Annie begins to sing in Hebrew -Tumbalalaika*

ROSE

What is that, Annie? It's lovely.

ANNIE

My mother used to sing it to us.

ROSE

She sang to you?

ANNIE

Yeah, she sang to us when we were hiding in the basement...

ROSE

Why don't we talk about that, Annie? About you hiding in the basement.

*Annie hesitates -*

ANNIE

At first, she would go down there by herself. I could hear her from my bedroom. Sometimes, I would secretly watch her from the basement door. Singing, praying, crying.

But then, after my father had gone to sleep, she started waking us up - my sister, brother and me - to take us down to the basement. We had to be really quiet so he wouldn't hear us. *(a beat)* She would whisper stories in the dark - stories from her life before she married my father. We would light candles and sing songs and recite Hebrew prayers. My mother wanted us to learn about Jewish things. She seemed so sad and I wanted her to feel better, so I tried to learn everything she taught me. But I couldn't tell if our secret life made her happier...or sadder. *(a beat)* We were sworn to secrecy. My father could never, ever know what we were doing. I lived in terror of him finding out what we did in the basement. One time, on my way home from school, I walked by the one synagogue in our small town. I wanted to go in. I was just curious... But I was terrified that someone would see me, and they would tell my father that I had been in a synagogue. He would be furious and... I didn't want to hurt my father or make him mad, either... *(she pauses)*.

ROSE

Go on, Annie.

ANNIE

It was different before we started to hide in the basement. We used to be different. Every Sunday we went to church together. I went to Sunday school. The nuns taught me the catechism. My mother and father went to confession and took communion and we never ate meat on Fridays. I was a Catholic. That's what they told me I was. But then everything changed and all of a sudden, I was supposed to be something else.

ANNIE

*(uncomfortable)*

Time's up, isn't it, Rose?

ROSE

No, not yet.

ANNIE

I have to go back to New Jersey this morning. My dad's coming home and I promised him I'd be there. I'll see you next week.

*Annie runs out.*

ROSE

Annie...

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 3

*BENJAMIN HOME. Day. A ranch-style house in a small suburban neighborhood in Mount Holly, New Jersey; 75 miles from NYC.*

*The MAIN room has an easy chair, a couch, a coffee table, and a dining room table. There's a record player in the room. A CRUCIFIX hangs over a door frame; a statue of the VIRGIN MARY - it's head weirdly askew, its neck broken and reattached with an old band-aid - sits prominently on the coffee table, and a framed PICTURE OF JESUS hangs on the wall - all clear indications that this is a Catholic home.*

*There's an adjacent kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms. A PROMINENT DOOR leads downstairs to the BASEMENT.*

*Lights come up as Annie enters and looks around. She hasn't been home in a long time and is nervous and conflicted about being there. Everything brings back a memory. Annie goes to the statue of the Virgin Mary. She picks it up.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

When the Virgin Mary's head broke off, my mother taped it back on with a bandaid - backwards...on purpose. She thought it was funny. It's been like this all these years, but as long as it stayed there on the table, no one said anything.

*Annie puts it back. She makes a face at it.*

## ANNIE

Bleegghhh...

*She goes to a wooden box on the mantle and removes a set of rosary beads.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Rosary beads. The nuns taught me how to pray with them in Sunday School. *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, and the resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ, and life everlasting. Amen.* I had no idea what those words meant. They just told me to say them. I thought the beads were pretty, but I could never remember which day you were supposed to say which prayer.

*Annie pauses.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

It didn't matter though, because my mother forbid me to say anything like that...

*Teresa enters and sees Annie holding the rosary beads. Annie is now in the scene.*

TERESA

*(accusatory, intimidating)*

What are you doing?! Those are mine...

ANNIE

Sorry...

*Annie guiltily puts the rosary back in its box.*

TERESA

So are you going to stay? Mom made stuffed cabbage with sour cream.

ANNIE

Geez... Why don't you just glue them right to my thighs.

TERESA

You haven't been here in so long. You should stay.

*Joe and Michael enter. Joe looks weak, but happy.*

MICHAEL

Did I tell you...Great Maple's gonna be a boom when it merges with Landmark, shares will go through the roof, six, seven percent easy.

JOE

That's great, Michael.

*Joe sees Annie.*

JOE

Hi Sweetheart.

*He goes to her and gives her a hug.*

ANNIE

Hi, Daddy.

JOE

I'm glad you came. It's good to have you home. So when do we eat already...

*Lise comes out of the kitchen with food and places it on the table. She sees Annie, but says nothing.*

LISE

Sit down, everyone.

*They take their places at the DINNER TABLE.*

JOE

*(crossing himself)*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen.

*Teresa and Michael cross themselves and say the prayer with Joe. Lise sits like a stone. Annie looks painfully uncomfortable and stares at her plate, avoiding eye contact with anyone.*

TERESA, MICHAEL

*(with Joe)*

...Amen.

*They begin to eat.*

JOE

It's nice, having everyone here. Just like the old days, when Nana was still around. Isn't it just like the old days, Teresa?

TERESA

*(sarcastic. shoots her mother a dirty look)*

Sure, Daddy. That's just what I was thinking.

LISE

We used to play the piano and sing songs together, do you remember? Annie?

*Tension instantly rises in the room. No one says anything. Joe is oblivious to it.*

ANNIE

*(quietly)*

Yeah, Mom, I remember.

JOE

That's nice. That's really nice.

*Blackout.**The scene ends on the 1980's Benjamin family -**- And lights come up on the 1960's Benjamin family. Annie returns to her place as narrator and witness.*

## SCENE 4

*BENJAMIN HOME. Mount Holly, New Jersey. A small town off the Jersey turnpike. 1960's.**YOUNG TERESA, 14, is proudly modeling her new Catholic School uniform. YOUNG ANNIE, 8, watches, filled with envy.*

TERESA

All the girls at Saint Mary's wear these. When I go in September, I'll be dressed in the latest fashion.

ANNIE

I want to go to Saint Mary's.

TERESA

You're too little. You're only eight.

*With great ceremony, Teresa opens a wooden box and removes a rosary. Annie stares at the beads like they're jewels.*

ANNIE

They're pretty.

TERESA

Pray with me.

*Teresa and Annie close their eyes.*

TERESA

*Oh my God, in you have I put my trust, may I not be ashamed, may my enemies not exult over me...*

ANNIE

*Oh my God, in you have I put my trust, may I not be ashamed...*

*Annie struggles to follow along and squints open an eye and watches her extraordinarily pious sister, as -*

*Lise, late 30's, beautiful, buxom, fair-skinned with dark hair, enters putting the finishing touches on her outfit as JOE, 40's, warm and likable, comes up behind, grabs his wife around the waist and nuzzles her neck.*

LISE

Joe! It's Sunday!

*LISE pushes him away, but her delighted laughter says she's loves this.*

JOE

I love you, baby.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My parents loved each other. My father thought my mother was the sexiest woman alive. He adored her.

*Lise spots Teresa and Annie with the rosary and pulls away from Joe. Her mood instantly changes.*

LISE

Girls! What are you doing?!

ANNIE

*(guilty)*

Nothing.

*Teresa makes a face in Lise's direction and puts the rosary back. Joe puts on his coat jacket.*



JOE

Okay, let's go. Everybody in the car. We can't be late for mass. Michael, Ma..! Come on!

*Joe's old-world Assyrian mother NANA, 70s, enters clutching her rosary, pious in rhinestones and tennis shoes with Michael, 6, in tow.*

NANA

Illeekababou... (*Assyrian expression of annoyance*). I'm ready. I'm ready. When have I ever been late for mass?

JOE

Okay, good. (*he turns to Lise*). You're taking holy communion today, right, Lise?

LISE

Yes, Joey. Like every week.

*NANA shoots her a look and harrumphs. The family exits.*

ANNIE

Every Sunday, we went to Mass. Every holiday, too. We were the perfect Catholic family.

*We hear organ music as -*

*The family enters a small CATHOLIC CHURCH. Joe and Lise, holding hands, Teresa, Michael, Annie, and Nana take their seats. The Priest begins his Sunday service. They listen intently.*

PRIEST

Let us ask God to send His Holy Spirit upon the proffered gifts of bread and wine. Eat his body, drink his blood and we'll sing a song of Christ. Hallelujah, Hallelujah...

*They pray with the congregation like the perfect family. The Priest holds up the consecrated bread and wine in preparation of communion to the congregation.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My father, Nana, my mother and Teresa rose and formed a line to the altar to take their communion. Teresa was first in line.

*Teresa kneels, opens her mouth.*

PRIEST

...the body of Christ.

*The Priest places the host on Teresa's tongue.*

TERESA

Amen.

*Teresa crosses herself and returns to her seat.  
Joe brings Nana to the altar. The Priest places  
the wafer on Nana's tongue.*

NANA

Thanks be to God. Bless you, Father.

*Nana grabs his hand and kisses it. Joe kneels,  
receives communion and guides Nana back to  
her seat.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother was next in line.

*Lise kneels and crosses herself.*

PRIEST

...the body of Christ.

*Lise opens her mouth and receives communion.*

LISE

Amen.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Above her head, Christ hung on the cross.

*Lise crosses herself again and returns to the  
pew. Joe takes her hand. He leans into her  
and smiles.*

I love you, baby.

JOE

*Lise stares straight ahead.*

*Blackout. Lights come up on -*

SCENE 5

*BENJAMIN HOME. Following church. The family is at the dining room table eating brunch.*

...we thank thee, Father, amen.

JOE

*Everyone crosses themselves and dives into their food. Nana stares at her plate.*

What is this?

NANA

LISE  
*(patiently)*

It's called gefilte fish, Nana.

NANA  
*(accusatory)*

What, it's Jewish?

JOE

It's whitefish, Ma. It's good. Look... Take this! And that!

*Joe takes huge bites, making his children laugh.*

NANA  
*(grimacing)*

I can't eat it. It's too mushy.

*Lise contains herself.*

LISE

That's fine, Nana. Shall I get you something else?

NANA

Hot peppers, and an egg.

*Lise picks up Nana's plate and goes into the kitchen. Suddenly, she picks up the gefilte fish and throws it furiously into the garbage disposal. Lise takes a breath, gathers herself and returns to the living room. She goes to the record player and turns on a romantic Bing Crosby tune.*

LISE

Joey, dance with me.

*Joe gets up and takes Lise in his arms. They dance, gazing lovingly into each other's eyes.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My sister and I got up and started dancing around, too. Nana said her rosary and Michael grabbed his piggybank and sat down on the floor counting his money.

*Annie and Teresa dance as Nana prays.*

*The statue of the Virgin Mary sits on the table... unbroken.*

MICHAEL

Sixteen dollars and... forty two cents. And next Saturday, after I cut the Sweeney's grass, I'll have nineteen dollars and ninety-two cents... that's almost twenty dollars.

*Nana speaks in Assyrian to Joe.*

NANA

Eeley rabba honana. (He's clever.)

JOE

Like his Dad. Aye, Michael? You're clever like your Dad.

NANA

That's because he's a Benjamin. Michael Joseph Benjamin.

*Joe lets go of Lise and goes to Michael, kissing and hugging him.*

JOE

Take this! And that!

TERESA

I'm going to be a ballet dancer. Teresa Margaret Benjamin.

*Teresa, determined and klutzy, does some jazz moves. Annie, smaller and more vulnerable, glides about like a swan.*

ANNIE

So am I. Annie Marlene Benjamin.

*The record stops. Lise goes to change it.*

MICHAEL

Why is our name 'Benjamin', anyway? Dougie Kramer at school says it's a Jewish name.

*Everyone stops. Lise stands frozen.*

NANA

*(fierce)*

It is not a Jewish name.

JOE

*(furious)*

You tell Dougie Kramer your name's really 'Bendishoo'. Your grandfather changed it when he came from Assyria. You tell him that.

NANA

It is not a Jewish name.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother stood frozen, staring at the record in her hand. Silently, she turned it over and placed the needle back on.

LISE

Go on, girls. Don't stop.

*Teresa and Annie awkwardly start dancing again.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Teresa and I started to dance again, but the tension in the room was high and I was nervous.

I was moving around, sweeping my arms over my head, when suddenly, accidentally, I knocked the statue of the Virgin Mary off the table. It crashed to the floor. It's head broke off and rolled away.

NANA

*(gasps)*

Ay Hawwaar!

TERESA

You decapitated the Holy Virgin!

ANNIE

*(filled with fear)*

I didn't mean to.

TERESA

It's a sin, to do that. Isn't it a sin, Mommy?

LISE

I don't think so, honey.

*Lise calmly picks up the pieces. Nana moans and fervently prays for forgiveness.*

JOE

Ma, it was an accident.

TERESA

It's a sin, isn't it, Daddy?

JOE

Shush, Teresa. It's alright.

MICHAEL

I'll buy you another one.

LISE

Come, Annelah. Let's fix this.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother took my hand and led me to the bathroom.

*Scene shifts to Lise and Annie in the BATHROOM.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She took something out of the medicine cabinet, closed the toilet lid and sat down.

*Lise sits down on the toilet lid. Annie is crying so Lise pulls her onto her lap. She wipes her tears and rocks her.*

LISE

It's alright, pupshen. It's alright.

ANNIE

*(terrified)*

Am I going to go to Hell?

LISE

Oh, baby. Much worse crimes than this go unpunished in the world, believe me... This? This is nothing. Look. We're going to fix it.

*Lise put the Virgin Mary's head back on with the band-aid.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She tore open a band-aid and stuck the Virgin Mary's head awkwardly back on with it.

LISE

You see? Good as new.... Ugh. Those eyes. Always staring. Always... accusing.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Then she took the head and turned it, just enough so that it was facing away and crooked on purpose. She winked at me.

*Lise turns the head so it's crooked.*

LISE

What do you think? Better?

ANNIE

*(relieved)*

Yes.

LISE

Good girl. Here, let me brush your hair.

*Lise takes a brush and begins to brush Annie's curly dark brown hair.*

LISE

Such beautiful hair. So thick and shiny... not like a Benjamin, not at all. It's curly and wild and perfect like a Rosensweig.

ANNIE

*(trying to pronounce)*

Rosensweig...?

LISE

That's who you really are, you know. That's who we really are, you and me...

*(whispering)*

Your Daddy doesn't like to hear about it, it makes him mad... so we can't talk about it. But you're my good girl, Annelah. You're my best girl... *(conspiratorially)* Would you like me to tell you a secret?

ANNIE

Okay...

*Lise slowly brushes Annie's hair, drifting into memory.*

LISE

My mother's name was Martha. Martha Rosensweig. She was your grandmother. She was beautiful, Annie; she had such beautiful hair. And her eyes...they were hazel - like yours. We lived in a big city called Berlin. Every Friday night, Mama would light candles and my father would read to us from the Torah.

ANNIE

The T-o-r-a-h...?

LISE

That's right. It's the book we used to learn our Jewish religion. We would sing songs and play games and eat a big delicious meal. We were so happy.

*(beat)*

But then everything started to change...The war came. My father died. There were days, and nights, too...when I was so scared, or sad, or I had a bad dream and I couldn't go to sleep... my Mama would sing to me...my beautiful Mama.

*(she pauses)*

When I was thirteen, she sent me away, to America -- she almost fainted at the railway station, I was so little and here I was going on a big ship to get me away from Germany and the war.



Then they took her, these terrible people, the "Gestapo", they took her, and she died in a terrible place. It was a long time ago, Annie. But I remember. I'll always remember...

*Lise begins to sing quietly in Hebrew.*

ANNIE  
*(baffled by all of this)*

Martha Rosensweig.

*Lise snaps out of it.*

LISE  
You can never say it out loud, Annie. Do you understand me? Do you...?

*Annie shakes her head. Lise wraps her arms tightly around Annie.*

LISE  
Good girl. My best girl.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE  
*(dreamlike)*

Martha Rosensweig ...

*Lights dim on the scene and stay on Annie.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE  
A few days later, we were out to dinner. Nana was with us.

*Lights up on the Benjamin family in a restaurant. A waiter is taking their order.*

JOE  
...I'll take the filet, make it bloody. Cheeseburgers for the kids. Ma, you want the pot roast? It's not Friday, you can live a little.

NANA  
Yeah, I'll take the roast with the hot mustard.

JOE  
Ok, and Lise? What do you want?

WAITER  
We have a nice pork loin this evening, with roasted potatoes.

LISE

Thank you, I don't eat pork.

NANA

*(attacking her)*

Pork's good. What's wrong with it?

LISE

*(ignoring the question)*

I'll have the chicken, I think.

WAITER

Good. And how many salads?

NANA

*(insistent)*

I make the chada with the pork. It's delicious. What's wrong with it?

LISE

*(Over her, Lise, in a sunny mood, counts lightly in German.)*

Einz, zvei, drei... all of us. Six.

WAITER

Alrighty. Be right back.

NANA

*(in Lise's direction)*

...dirty Jew.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

We all froze. I looked at my father, but he said nothing in my mother's defense. I jumped up. It was a completely impulsive move, filled with emotion. My face was burning and everyone was staring at me, but I just stood there, mute. I wanted to say something, but no words came out. My mother's eyes met mine - it was a warning. I had a change of heart. Embarrassed, I sat back down.

LISE

Who wants bread? Annelah?

*Blackout.*

*On a DARK STAGE, later - with a spot on Annie -*

JOE (O.S.)

Just take it, Lise. Will you take it?

LISE (O.S.)

*(in tears)*

I saw my mother. I saw her. She was starving and scared. I saw her...

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The sound of my parents voices woke me. I got up and tiptoed to their room. My mother stood there trembling. My father hovered over her.

JOE (O.S.)

Lise, for God's sake...

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The door was open just a crack, but I saw my father hold out a pill and a glass of water. Shaking, my mother took the glass and with difficulty, swallowed the pill.

JOE (O.S.)

There. Was that so terrible? I'm taking you to the doctor in the morning. Jesus Christ, these stupid dreams of yours.

*Lights come up on:*

## SCENE 6

*KITCHEN. Morning. Teresa puts milk and cereal on the table for Annie and Michael.*

ANNIE

What's wrong with her?

TERESA

Dad says it's the bad dreams.

ANNIE

But she's been gone for two days. Where is she?

TERESA

She's having a treatment, the doctor says it's very popular for ladies' hysteria.

MICHAEL

What's a "treatment"?

*A car door slams outside.*

ANNIE

They're back.

*The kids jump up as the front door opens. Joe helps Lise into the house. She looks pale and fragile.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother's eyes were rimmed in black and there were bruises on her temples. She had had shock treatments. She was completely glazed and out of it. It was a frightening sight.

TERESA

Mommy, are you okay?

JOE

She needs to rest, she'll be fine. You kids be quiet now. Go to school.

*Annie runs to Lise and throws her arms around her.*

ANNIE

I want to stay home with you.

*Lise looks down as if she doesn't recognize her.*

JOE

Knock it off now. Go to school.

*Joe helps Lise to the couch.*

MICHAEL

She looks awful.

TERESA

Be quiet, Michael. Eat your breakfast.

*Lights go down as -*

*We hear SOUNDS of kids at recess OFFSTAGE. Annie is alone on the playground. We hear some GIRLS laughing, then one of them speaks loudly on purpose.*

GIRL (O.S)

My mom says Annie Benjamin's mom is sick in the head.

ANNIE

That's a lie. She just has bad dreams.

GIRL (O.S.)

"Mrs. Benjamin's sick in the head..!" "Mrs. Benjamin's sick in the head..!"

ANNIE

Stop it! That's a lie! That's a lie!

*The laughing and chanting fades and lights  
come up on -*

*Later - Benjamin home. Annie tentatively enters  
Joe and Lise's bedroom carrying a tray of food.*

LISE

Hello, sweetheart.

ANNIE

Hi.

*Annie sets the tray on the bed.*

LISE

Come here. Don't be scared. What's the matter?

*Lise folds Annie in her arms.*

ANNIE

At school they said you were sick in the head.

LISE

Did they? Someone on this street has a great big mouth.

ANNIE

But Daddy says it's just the "ladies' hysteria".

LISE

He thinks I'm so common. But I'm not... I'm not. Anyway, you tell them, you tell those stupid goyisha girls with the big mouths...that I'll be fine. I'm perfectly fine. Do you know why?

*(low, conspiratorially)*

Because it didn't work. I still remember everything. Now, what delicious food did you bring me, my good girl?

*Blackout.*

SCENE 7

*BENJAMIN DINING ROOM. Next day. Annie sits at the table with Joe.*

*Joe is grilling Annie on her catechism.*

JOE

Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee...

ANNIE

Oh my God, I am hardly sorry for having offended thee...

JOE

Heartily. Heartily. Keep trying...you'll get it right.

*Lise walk in.*

LISE

Good morning, everybody.

JOE

Mornin', Lise.

*Joe gets up, kisses Lise on the cheek and goes to the kitchen for more coffee.*

ANNIE

...heartily, heartily, sorry for having offended thee...

*Annie makes the sign of the cross. Lise sees her.*

LISE

Don't you *ever* do that in my house. You're a Jew! Don't ever forget that! Do you understand me?!

*Annie freezes.*

ANNIE

Yes, Mommy.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

But I didn't understand. I was confused and sad and there was no one to talk to about it.  
*(a beat)* That night, my mother came into our bedroom with a sleepy Michael in tow.

## LISE

Annie. Wake up. Teresa.

## TERESA

What's wrong?

## LISE

Come with me. Don't wake your father.

*Lise leads the children through the kitchen  
toward the basement.*

## MICHAEL

I want to go back to sleep.

## LISE

In a moment, sweetheart, I want to show you something. Are you a good boy? Can you keep a secret?

*Michael nods his head.*

## LISE

You can never tell. Your father would be very unhappy to know we did this. He would be very angry, he would punish us.

*(a loaded beat)*

He might take me back to the doctor.

*The children are very solemn.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The idea that he would take her back to the doctor terrified us. We did not want to be responsible for causing my mother that kind of pain again.

## LISE

So we'll keep it a secret... the four of us. It will be our little game. Our special game. Alright?

*Lise looks at each child.*

Do you understand?  
LISE

*They all nod their heads.*

Wonderful. My beautiful children...  
LISE

*Lise grabs her children one by one  
and desperately kisses them.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Then she opened the basement door and lead us down the stairs. The basement had an ominous feel. It was scary, dark and claustrophobic. My mother went to the piano bench and opened it. There was something almost ritualistic in the way she did it. Inside the piano bench, hidden beneath sheet music, was something wrapped in old cloth. She removed the cloth, revealing a beautiful silver menorah.

Look. Do you see this?  
LISE

*Lise holds up the menorah. The children have never seen anything like it. Annie runs her hand over the silver. Lise removes a small box of candles from the piano bench. She places the candles in the menorah and lights them one by one, murmuring in Hebrew.*

Baruch atau adonai..  
LISE

*The room is now faintly illuminated with the flickering lights. Lise picks up a small box and removes the lid. She holds up a necklace. The children stare at the thing in her hand.*

This is the Star of David. My mother gave it to me before she sent me away... so that I would remember who I was.  
LISE

*Lise puts the necklace back in the box.*

*(a beat)*

I became a Catholic for your father, and for Nana. It was the only way we could be married. I studied hard with the nuns and I went to church so that they would accept me... and to try to forget who I really was, but I look at this and I can't forget...I will never forget.



## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I reached into the piano bench and took out an old photograph. It was a picture of an elegant woman with long wavy hair posing for the camera. She looked like from another time. I was mesmerized by her. My mother gazed at it over my shoulder.

*The PHOTO is projected onto a screen.*

## LISE

That's my Mama. Look at her, Annie. Look at her beautiful hair. It's just like yours. Do you see?

*Pleased, Annie touches her own hair.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother removed something else from the piano bench - an old piece of sheet music, yellowed and worn.

## LISE

Mama used to play this for me when I was your age. Here, Teresa. Be a good girl.

*She hands the music to Teresa.*

## TERESA

*(Not liking this a bit)*

I can't play this. I don't even know it.

## LISE

Then I'll teach you. Come here.

*Lise and Teresa sit down at the piano.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

They sat down at the piano and together began to softly plunk out a tune as my mother quietly sang a Hebrew prayer. *(a beat)* Suddenly, there was a creaking sound from the kitchen. We froze.

## LISE

It's just the wind. Michael, sweetheart. Go stand by the door. Look out for your father.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Michael obediently did as he was told. My mother and Teresa started to play again as my mother sang - transported. On the stairs, my brother yawned. I clutched the photo of this beautiful woman, Martha Rosensweig, in my hands.

*Lights dim, but stay on Annie and the SCENE  
SHIFTS TO:*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The next day was the rehearsal for my first Holy Communion. My mother walked me to the entrance of the Sacred Heart Church.

*Lights come up on Lise and Annie in front of  
the church.*

LISE

It's all crap. Don't listen to any of it.

ANNIE

But I have to. I have to be ready for my first Holy Communion.

LISE

I don't care. It's a horrible place.

ANNIE

I can't go in without a hat.

LISE

Oh, for God's sake... all these stupid rules...

*Lise rummages through her purse.*

LISE

Here.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother pulled out a used handkerchief and some bobby pins. She smoothed out the hanky and pinned it to my head.

*Lise pins the hanky to Annie's head.*

ANNIE

But it's dirty.

LISE

It's fine. It's gorgeous. So go on, if you want to go.

*(a beat)*

Go.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I didn't know what to do. It was a simple decision, but it felt more like a betrayal. I hesitated, but then I turned and walked into the church. I sat down in the pew with the other kids. A boy next to me pointed and whispered so loudly that everyone could hear...

## BOY (O.S.)

You got a booger on your hat.

*We HEAR other children burst into fits of laughter.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I was mortified - filled with shame. I covered the dirty hanky with my hand and ran out of the church. My mother was there waiting...

*Lise is smoking a cigarette.*

## LISE

Hey, Miss Charming.

*Lise opens her purse and hands Annie a candy bar.*

## ANNIE

*(angry)*

I haven't had lunch yet.

## LISE

So God's going to strike you dead with a lightning bolt because you ate one lousy candy bar?

## ANNIE

Stop it.

## LISE

You can tell Him it's all my fault.

## ANNIE

That's not funny.

*Annie grabs the candy bar and exits. Lise follows behind.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

When I got home, I went straight to my room. I unpinned the hanky from my head and buried it deep in the trash can. I went to my dresser and took out the photograph of Martha Rosensweig that I had hidden. I held the photograph, picked up a hairbrush and began singing the tune my mother had taught me.

*Lights come up on Annie in the living room holding Martha's photo and singing Tumbalalaika. Teresa walks in unannounced.*

TERESA

What are you doing?

*Annie immediately puts the picture away.*

ANNIE

Nothing. What's that?

*Teresa is holding a book.*

TERESA

It's my catechism. You'll get one too, when you go to Saint Mary's.

TERESA

*"..For the one whom you yourself have struck they have pursued, and the pains of those pierced by you they keep recounting... do give error upon their error..."*

*Lise suddenly storms in.*

LISE

Give me that.

*Lise grabs the book from Teresa's hand and hurls it across the room.*

LISE

Goddamn it, how dare they! How dare they...!

*Lise grabs them by the hand. Barking orders.*

LISE

Come with me.

*Michael looks up from eating a cookie.*

MICHAEL

Oh brother, not this again...

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She pulled us down the hall, stopping to grab Michael from the kitchen.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She dragged the three of us down to the basement. It was daytime and the basement looked different. Not ominous, just regular, making my mother seem all the more desperate.

## LISE

Michael. Go stand by the door. Watch for your father.

*(to the girls)*

Don't move.

*Lise goes to the piano bench.*

## TERESA

*(whispers to Annie)*

Where's Daddy?

## ANNIE

He went to the shop.

## TERESA

But what time is it?

## ANNIE

I think it's almost lunchtime.

*Lise hands Teresa the sheet music.*

## LISE

Here, Teresa, play this. We're going to sing our songs. We're going to have fun.

*Lise and Teresa sit at the piano.*

## LISE

Dada yeynu, dada yeynu, dada yeynu, Da YEYnu, Da yeyNU!

*(speaks, urgent)*

Come on, repeat after me...!

*(sings)*

Dada yeynu! dada yeynu! dada yeynu!

ANNIE/TERESA/MICHAEL  
*(weakly along with Lise)*

"Dada y-e-y-n-u..."

*They have no idea what they're singing.*

LISE

Da YEYnu, da yeuNU.!

*- when, suddenly, a loud bang from the upstairs stops her cold and we see Joe enter the house and head for the kitchen.*

MICHAEL

He's home.

*Lise sits up, alert. The children are rigid, terrified. Lise immediately throws the music back in its hiding place.*

LISE

We've been playing. That's all. We've been playing the piano and having fun. We don't want him to get mad.

LISE

Do we?

ANNIE/TERESA/MICHAEL

No.

LISE

Alright, then.

*Lise straightens her dress and pastes on a smile.*

LISE

It's time for lunch. Let's go see your father.

*The children follow Lise upstairs. Joe's head is stuck inside the refrigerator.*

JOE

Hey, baby. What's for lunch? I'm starving.

LISE

Here, Joey, let me get it.

*Lise grabs a plate with a sandwich and puts it on the table in front of Joe.*

LISE

I'd better feed you. You might turn into a bear. Doesn't he look like a bear, kids?

*(kissing him)*

A big... old... hairy... hungry... bear.

*Joe eats. Lise, all bosom and hips, puts her arms around him. Joe likes this a lot. They laugh and smooch as the children, nervous and uncomfortable, watch.*

JOE

What have you guys been doing this morning?

*Silence.*

LISE

Annelah, tell Dad what we've been doing today... Go on. Tell him.

JOE

What? What were you doing down there? Having a secret pow wow?

ANNIE

We...were playing the piano.

LISE

That's right. All of us. And we were singing. It was so much fun. Isn't that right, Teresa? Teresa? I said isn't that right?

TERESA

*(uncomfortable)*

We were playing the piano.

LISE

And singing. And having a very nice time.

*Joe finishes his lunch.*

JOE

Good for you. You can show me later. I gotta get back to work. I can't make any money here. *(a beat)* Hey, why don't you kids come with me and give your mother a break.

LISE

Good idea. Go on, kids.

*Lise starts to clean up from lunch as Joe gets up humming a Bing Crosby tune and the kids leave. Lights crossfade as they approach his STORE, Benjamin Jewelers, in the center of town.*

JOE

You guys wait here. I'll be right back. I got something to show you.

*Joe goes into his store.*

TERESA

I want to tell.

ANNIE

Tell what? Teresa.

TERESA

Tell Daddy. About the basement.

MICHAEL

But he'll get mad.

ANNIE

He might take her to the doctor again. That's what Mom said. You can't tell, Teresa. You promised.

TERESA

But we're telling a lie. It's a sin. God will punish us.

ANNIE

Do you want the doctor to take her away? I hate you.

*Teresa is upset, unsure of what to do.*

TERESA

Shh! Here comes Dad.

*Joe returns holding something.*



ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My father came back holding a small box. He looked as happy as a kid. He opened the box to show us. Inside was a silver crucifix with a diamond in the center.

JOE

See? That's a carat diamond there...It's a surprise for Mom.

TERESA

For what? It's not her birthday.

JOE

Nope. But it's a secret, you can't tell.

ANNE TO AUDIENCE

We all just stared at it. We didn't know what to say.

JOE

Well, what's the matter with you guys? Is it pretty or what? You think she'll like it, Teresa?

TERESA

Daddy, I want to tell you something...

ANNIE

*(interrupting her in a panic)*

It's beautiful, Daddy. Don't you think so, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess so. Yeah, it's pretty.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I stared down my sister. She read the warning in my eyes. It was too dangerous to tell my father about the basement. Teresa struggled with her conscience. But she kept quiet.

TERESA

It's the prettiest necklace I've ever seen, and I think she'll love having the cross of Jesus Christ hanging around her neck.

JOE

That's what I thought.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My father smiled, oblivious.

**END OF ACT I**

**ACT II**

## SCENE 1

*Benjamin home. Evening. The family has just finished dinner. Joe gets everyone's attention.*

JOE

Ahem...everyone. So, as some of us know...

*Joe looks at the kids and winks.*

JOE

I have a gift for mom.

*Joe takes out the jewelry box and hands it to Lise. She is thrilled.*

LISE

What's this for?

JOE

Because, I'll love you forever.

*Lise opens the box. She stares at the cross.*

JOE

Do you like it?

LISE

It's... it's... such a surprise, I... I don't know what to say.

JOE

That's a carat diamond, there.

LISE

*(faltering)*

Oh, Joe. You shouldn't have. I wish you hadn't.

*Lise tears up. Joe, mistaking this for happiness, holds her face and kisses it.*

JOE

I love you, baby. Don't cry, don't cry. Here...

*He gets up and clips the cross around Lise's neck.*

JOE

Now that's pretty. The kids knew and they kept it a secret. Isn't that something?

*Lise glares at Annie.*

LISE

You knew and you kept it a secret. Really? Is that right, Annie?

*Annie stares down at her plate.*

LISE

Annie? You knew your father was buying me this gift and you kept it a secret?

ANNIE

I... I guess so.

JOE

What do you say, let's go downstairs and have some fun...! And tomorrow, let's go to the shore! Come on, you guys!

*Joe gets up and starts singing "Hit the Road Jack". He exits and Teresa and Michael follow him. Annie lingers behind.*

*Lise remains in her chair, rigid. Annie goes to her.*

ANNIE

Do you want to light the candles and say the prayers? I know the words better now.

LISE

I never realized how selfish you are. Do you honestly think I would walk around wearing this thing? Do you?

*Annie nods and starts to cry.*

Are you crying?!

LISE

*Annie swallows her own pain.*

No ...

ANNIE

*Annie makes a last ditch effort to comfort her mother and win back her love.*

I made you a Passover card. I hid it under my bed where Daddy wouldn't find it. I was going to give it to you tomorrow.

ANNIE

Go to bed, Annie.

LISE  
(cold)

*Lise buttons her blouse to the neck, hiding the cross as lights dim.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

That night, I watched my mother from the basement door. I felt guilty. I wanted desperately to help her. To take away some of her pain. But I was a child and I was powerless and confused. I ran to my tree. I climbed to a high branch.

*Benjamin backyard. Night. Young Annie climbs her TREE. She sits on a high branch.*

I sat in my tree and cried.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

## SCENE 2

*Bright lights up...*

*JERSEY SHORE. Day. The family is in their bathing suits. Joe sings "Roll out the Barrel" and the kids laugh and join in as they lay out their towels, chairs and picnic basket.*

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

We were at the Jersey shore. I loved it there. My father was really happy. He sang and made us laugh. My mother sat sunning herself. The cross was in full view against her chest. My father sat down next to her.

## JOE

Just think. The warm weather's here already, and it's only May. We have a whole summer ahead of us.

*Joe reaches for Lise's arm, but she pulls it away and gets up.*

## LISE

I'm going for a swim. Annie, come with me.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My mother ran down to the water. I ran after her.

## LISE

It's beautiful! Come on, pupshen! Swim with me!

## ANNIE

It's cold!

## LISE

Come on, chicken little!

## ANNIE

I am not chicken little.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She swam out. I paddled after her. She turned on her back and floated in the afternoon sun... a vision of beauty. Then, as I watched, she yanked off the cross and dropped it into the ocean. It sank. She turned over and began swimming back to shore. I followed her back.

## LISE

I'll race you, chicklet.

## ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I saw what she did, but I didn't dare say anything. I swam back... When we reached the shore, she wrapped her arms around me as we walked back to the blanket.

*Lise and Annie sit down and Lise starts brushing Annie's hair.*

LISE

Such beautiful hair.

JOE

Look at you guys. My gorgeous girls.

*Joe grabs Annie's foot and gives it a smooch.*

JOE

Take this! And that!

*Annie giggles, loving it. Teresa glares at her mother.*

TERESA

Your necklace.

LISE

Oh, no. It must have fallen off in the water.

JOE

Oh, Christ. Goddamn it!

*Joe gets up and heads for the water.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My father stomped through the sand to the water. He dove in and swam out, but we could all see how futile his search was going to be. My mother turned to us.

LISE

So much for your little secret.

*Lise lays back down.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

She leaned back and closed her eyes - but the shape of the cross had been branded on her chest by the sun.

*Lights dim on scene and stay on Annie.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Two days later, my mother took me to the Sacred Heart church for my first confession. I was terrified.

The girl before me had come out to see her proud mother smiling in the front pew. My mother stood in the back not looking. I stepped into the confessional box and knelt. The little window slid open.

*Lights come up on Annie kneeling in the confession box with the Priest.*

PRIEST

*(making the sign of the cross)*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ANNIE

*(nervous)*

Bless me Father for I have sinned, this is my first confession.

PRIEST

Very good. What are your sins, child?

ANNIE

I called my brother stupid. I played with my sister's rosary when she was sleeping. And I ate a candy bar before lunch.

PRIEST

Is that all?

ANNIE

No. I... I told a lie.

PRIEST

Did you? And to whom did you tell this lie?

ANNIE

*(almost a whisper)*

My father.

PRIEST

What was it, Annie? What was the lie you told your dear father?

ANNIE

I can't tell you either.

PRIEST

You keep a good secret.

ANNIE

I promised. Isn't it a sin to break a promise...? When the promise comes before the lie?  
*(puzzled)*  
 Or... when the lie comes because of the promise?

PRIEST

Say three Hail Marys and two Our Fathers. Go home.. I'll see you in the morning.

*The window slid shut.*

*Lights dim as -*

SCENE 3

*Lights up on Nana, Lise and Annie in her dress.  
 Lise watches, smoking a cigarette.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The next morning, Nana helped me put on my Holy Communion dress. My mother sat watching, dragging hard on a cigarette and giving the dress a very critical look. But I loved my dress. It was pretty and frilly and I was excited about my First Holy Communion.

NANA

*(in Assyrian)*

Allah khameelukh, bratee! It's beautiful!  
 (God bless you, sweetheart!)

ANNIE

Thank you, Nana.

*Annie twirls in her dress, happy and smiling,  
 when she is stopped by Lise's intimidating  
 glare.*

LISE

*(under her breath to Annie)*

You look ridiculous in that thing.

*Nana gives Annie a big wet kiss and leaves to  
 get ready for church. Lise reaches into her  
 pocket and hands Annie something.*

LISE

This is for you. Because you're still my best girl. Don't tell anyone.



ANNIE

What is it?

LISE

It's a dreidel. A top. See, it's got hand-painted Hebrew letters on it. My mama gave it to me when I was very little. I want you to take it with you to church so that you'll think of your grandmother and of me. So that you won't forget who you are. Like I don't forget. ...Don't tell anyone.

*Lise exits.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The dreidel was beautiful. I loved it. I didn't know what else to do, so I tucked it into the waistband of my underpants.

*Annie puts the dreidel in her underpants.  
Nana exits. Joe enters ready for church.*

JOE

Ok, you ready?

ANNIE

Where's Mom?

JOE

She doesn't feel well.

ANNIE

What do you mean?! She was just...

JOE

She told us to go without her.

ANNIE

*(distressed)*

But... it's my First Communion.

JOE

I know... what can I do, she says she's sick. She wants to talk to you before you go. Hurry up.

*Joe exits.*

LISE (O.S.)

Annie...? Come here. Annelah., come here, honey.

*Annie pauses.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I knew there was nothing wrong with her. But from then on, every Sunday, she got “sick”. So my father took us without her.

*Annie turns and walks out of the house.*

*Church organ music begins to play.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

When we got to the church, I took a seat with the other children. On cue, we rose and walked in a procession to the altar as we had rehearsed. I walked past my father and Nana. They watched me with pride. I was sad my mother wasn’t there. We all felt her absence. I stood in line to receive my First Holy Communion. The dreidel in my underwear poked at my stomach. When it was my turn, I stepped up and knelt before the priest. My heart was racing. He prayed over me in Latin. The ritual was dramatic and scary. I opened my mouth and he laid the wafer on my tongue. I watched as he drank deeply from a cup of wine. He said more prayers, more wine was poured and he drank again.

*Organ music continues.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I stood and returned to my seat. The dreidel in my underwear itched. I scratched it. Everyone stood up to sing, and as I stood up, the dreidel fell out of my underpants and rolled across the floor. The other children poked each other and laughed and tried to catch the dreidel as it spun away. The commotion caused a stir in the entire congregation. Nana and my father watched in horror. I was mortified.

*Blackout.*

SCENE 4

*BENJAMIN HOME. Later.*

*Annie sits staring into a hand mirror. Teresa stands behind her holding a pair of scissors.*

TERESA

Are you sure? I don't know.

ANNIE  
*(fierce)*

Cut it.

*Teresa begins to cut Annie's thick curly hair, big chunks of it falling to the floor. We hear Lise from the kitchen.*

LISE (O.S.)  
 Your dad won't be home 'til later, he's playing poker with your uncles. What do you guys want for dinner? We have leftovers from Nana's...

*Lise walks in carry plates to the dining room table with Michael following behind her. His eyes go wide when he sees Annie. Lise hasn't noticed her yet.*

LISE  
 Girls, come help me set the table...

*Lise looks up and sees Annie's chopped off hair.*

LISE  
 ...Oh, my God.... what....what did you do to your beautiful hair?

ANNIE  
 I cut it.

LISE  
 You... you...what?! How dare you!... you selfish girl... you slut!

ANNIE  
*(without understanding the word)*  
 I am not a slut.

*Lise grabs Annie and begins to slap her.*

LISE  
 How could you do this? How could you do this to me?

ANNIE  
 I didn't do anything to you. It was my hair. It was my hair! I'm sick of you! I hate you! I'm telling Daddy!

*Annie pulls away, but Lise chases her and grabs her furiously again. Michael runs out of the room.*

LISE

Go ahead, tell him. Tell him everything, you selfish girl. You'd betray me, what do you care? You're a Benjamin! Not like me...

*(shaking her)*

...not like me with my Yiddishe blood and my mother's eyes and breath and bones...

TERESA

*(horrified)*

Mom, stop it! Stop it!

*Lise turns to Teresa.*

LISE

You, too, you bitch! Look at you, you look just like *his* goddamn family. They'll never let you go hungry.

TERESA

What are you talking about?

*Teresa tries to pull Lise off of Annie.*

TERESA

Stop it, stop... you're hurting her!

LISE

*(as if suddenly awakened)*

Oh... oh my God... Oh, my babies. My babies. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Forgive me...

*Lise grabs the girls to her, kissing and kissing them.*

LISE

I love you, forgive me, my babies, don't hate me... oh, oh, oh.....your beautiful hair.

*Lise buries her face in Annie's hair and weeps.*

*Lights fade back to Annie.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

The next morning we watched as my father bundled my mother up to take her for more shock treatments. Maybe this time they would make her forget. My father reached out, ruffled my shorn hair and smiled.

As he ushered her out of the house, my mother's despondent eyes met mine. The hair I cut wasn't mine, it was her mother's and I wished so much that I hadn't done it.

## SCENE 5

*BENJAMIN HOME. Night. Joe sits reading his newspaper. Annie is doing homework, watching as Lise, clearly fighting against the haze that comes with another treatment, makes her way around the room cleaning up from dinner.*

*Lise accidentally drops a plate on the floor. Joe doesn't notice. Annie gets up to clean up the broken pieces as Lise turns and walks out of the room.*

*Teresa enters, dressed for a holiday party. Annie watches her check her lipstick.*

ANNIE

Not until you're fifteen, Teresa. Mom said.

TERESA

Shut up, you big baby. I'm almost fifteen, so what's the difference?

JOE

Home at ten.

TERESA

Okay.

*(to herself)*

Yeah, right.

*Teresa exits.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Later that night, Teresa tried to sneak in without Dad noticing, but as she came in the door, he was waiting.

JOE

It's way past midnight! What did I tell you, Teresa? You're grounded, you hear me?

*Teresa runs out of the room. Annie follows.*

ANNIE

Teresa...?

TERESA

Just shut up.

*Annie tries to comfort her.*

TERESA

Don't touch me. Leave me alone. You're just a stupid little kid. I hate this family.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

We all dealt with the pain in our own way....*(a beat)* Two days later was Christmas. We were gathered around for a big dinner. Nana was there. We had a Christmas tree with presents under it. We were pretty happy, except for the fact that my mother wasn't there. Her absence was painfully obvious, but no one said anything. I picked up her plate of food and went to her bedroom.

*Lise is lying in bed reading a magazine and smoking a cigarette. Annie walks in with a plate.*

ANNIE

I brought you some roast beef. Nana made it, it's good.

LISE

Set it down over there.

ANNIE

Why don't you come out?

LISE

I can't. I have a headache.

ANNIE

Every time Nana comes you have a headache. Every time we go to church you have a headache.

*(softening)*

Please come out. It's Christmas.

LISE

I don't give a damn. My God, you're a goody-goody girl.

*Lise grinds out her cigarette and reaches for her plate of food.*

LISE

Alright... give it to me.

*Annie holds it out of reach.*

ANNIE

I thought you had a headache.

LISE

Don't be fresh ...

*Annie walks out with the plate to the kitchen.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I went to the kitchen and dumped it in the trash. There were a couple of bottles of wine on the counter. When I was sure no one was looking, I picked up a bottle and made up a little Latin prayer -

ANNIE

Domino Nebisco...

*Young Annie takes a swig and gags at the taste, but then forces herself to drink more, As Annie picks up a wine bottle and drinks from it.*

ANNIE

The mass has ended, praise be to God. Go in peace.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Go in peace!

*They both drink again from the bottles.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I was drunk. I stumbled into the bathroom and vomited in the toilet.

*Young Annie exits. Annie enters the scene.*

*ANNIE'S APARTMENT. Night. Annie, bleary-eyed drunk, is lost in a sea of candlelight and wine bottles.*

*The phone RINGS. She ignores it. Her answering machine picks up. She picks up a pair of scissors.*

A FRIEND (V.O.)

Annie? Annie, It's Jen. Where are you? You haven't been to work in days. Are you coming back? You could lose your job. Are you okay? Call me.

*Jen hangs up. Annie starts chopping off her hair. The phone rings again. It's Annie's therapist.*

ROSE (V.O.)

Annie, it's Rose. You missed your appointment again today. I... you didn't call to cancel, so I'm concerned. Please call me. I'm holding next week's appointment open for you, just in case...Where are you, dear?

*A hesitation, and then Rose hangs up. Annie cuts more hair. The phone rings again.*

TERESA (V.O.)

Christ, Annie...pick up the phone. Dad's back in the hospital...

*Teresa hangs up. Annie chops off the last of her long beautiful hair.*

## SCENE 6

*MT. HOLLY HOSPITAL. The ICU ward. Morning. Joe lies sleeping, hooked up to machines monitoring his vital signs. Lise sits beside him. She has not slept. Annie enters. She's hung-over and wearing a hat.*

ANNIE

How is he?

LISE

*(cold)*

How does he look?

ANNIE

Can he hear me? Daddy... can you hear me...?



LISE

Leave him alone, for God's sake. They gave him drugs. He's sleeping.

*Lise picks up a sponge and gently begins to wash her husband's face.*

LISE

I found him on the bathroom floor. He... he was just lying there, he couldn't get up. They can't operate, the doctors don't think he'd make it. Oh, Joey... It's okay, it's okay... Michael drove us over and Teresa came right away. Everybody was here, but you. Where were you?!

ANNIE

I came as soon as I could. I... I wasn't able to drive last night.

LISE

You were always such a good girl. You were my best girl. Now you only think of yourself, I don't understand it. Honestly, I don't know what happened to you.

*Annie reaches up and slides the hat off her head revealing her short choppy hair.*

LISE

Oh... no. No. I... stop it. Why did you do that?

ANNIE

Don't forget, you said. Don't ever forget. And do you know what? I never, ever do.

LISE

My God, you're horrible... you, you selfish...

*Lise gets up and leaves the room as Teresa enters.*

TERESA

Oh, you're here. Mom needs someone in the house tonight.

ANNIE

You've got to be kidding. No way.

TERESA

I did it last time. And Michael's got to go back to school, it's only fair.

ANNIE

Oh, God. No, no, I can't.

TERESA

It's your turn, Annie. What if something happens to Dad tonight, what if they call and she's alone, what if...?

ANNIE

Okay, okay. Stop. Please. I get it.

TERESA

I mean it, Annie.

ANNIE

I said I'll be there, Teresa.

TERESA

Okay. Alright. Anyway, I'm just down the road if you need me.

*(Teresa lights up a smoke.)*

So... why'd you do it?

ANNIE

Why'd I do what?

TERESA

You know what. Why 'd you cut your hair?

ANNIE

I don't know... penance or something.

TERESA

Penance? For what? What crime did you commit that was so terrible?

ANNIE

I wish I knew.

TERESA

Well, I don't get you. You look freaky.

ANNIE

Super freak.

*(They smile. A rare moment.)*

ANNIE

Teresa, do you remember when we were little -- I was about eight -- and you cut off my hair? Do you remember that?

TERESA

Oh, for Christ's sake, Annie, why are you bringing up all that stuff? What difference does it make now, with Dad sick and everything? Why think about it?

ANNIE

I can't help it. It's in my head all the time, it's like I'm being haunted.

TERESA

You can't live in the past, Annie, you've got to get over it. Look on the bright side! That's what I do. I don't think about that stuff. I just push it away. Otherwise, I'd be a fucking lunatic.

ANNIE

I can't... I can't push it away, I try. But I can't.

TERESA

We all dealt with it, Annie. All of us. Jesus Christ, I don't know why you always have to be the fucking martyr in this family.

*Teresa walks out. Spot on Annie as narrator.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Later, after my mother had gone to bed, I lit a candle and walked down the stairs to the basement. I opened the piano bench. I took the Star of David out of its box, lifted it to my neck and fastened it. I decided it was mine now.

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 7

*LIVING ROOM. Evening. Joe, Annie and Michael are watching television. Lise is folding laundry. Teresa enters dressed for a party.*

TERESA

I'm ready.

LISE

Let me get the keys.

*Lise gets up.*

JOE

Where's she going?

LISE

To a party at the Y. Teresa, go to the car.

JOE

At the Y? Then it's not at Saint Mary's?

LISE

No, it's for all the junior kids, the boys and girls. It's alright. It'll be fun.

*(a warning)*

Teresa, go outside, go on.

JOE

You going with Maggie Brannigan?

TERESA

*(uncomfortable)*

No.

JOE

With that Lindsay girl? Or Kate Cooney?

TERESA

No.

ANNIE

Teresa, I'll ride with you, come on.

*Annie goes toward the door. Joe gets up.*

JOE

Well, who you going with?

ANNIE

Teresa, come on.

TERESA

Mom...?

LISE

Oh, what does it matter? She's going with Jeff Abramowitz.

MICHAEL

*(lets out a loud raspberry.)*

That dodo! Teresa's got a boyfriend! Teresa's got a boyfriend!

ANNIE

Michael. Stop it.

TERESA

Shut up, Michael. I do not. It's just a party.

JOE

You are not going to a party with Jeff Abramowitz.

TERESA

Yes, I am. It's all planned.

JOE

You're not going anywhere with Jeff Abramowitz. I said no.

LISE

Joe, for God's sake, what's the difference?

JOE

Because I said so, that's why! I know his father, the bigshot Hebe lawyer, he's got a nose out to here and pockets down to here. No!

ANNIE

*(horrified)*

Daddy, stop it.

MICHAEL

Bigshot Hebe with a nose out to here!

*Lise slaps Michael.*

LISE

Don't you ever, ever say those words again in this house. Do you understand me?  
Do you?

MICHAEL

But Dad said it!

LISE

Teresa, go on.

*Teresa runs out.*

LISE

Do you see the damage you've done? Do you? In front of your own children?

*She pulls Michael to her chest and holds him.*

LISE

I'm sorry pupshen, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.

JOE

She's not going, Lise. That's final.

LISE

You will not do this to her. She's been looking forward to this party for weeks. My God, she's only fourteen, what is wrong with you?

*Lise hurries out after Teresa, Annie follows.  
Michael runs to his room.*

JOE

Goddamn it! Doesn't anybody listen to me around here?

*Lights fade to Annie.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

As my mother and Teresa drove off, I ran to my tree. I climbed to the very top with everything in me.

*Young Annie climbs her tree. She looks up.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

My heart was pounding, but the night was still and peaceful and it calmed me down.

## SCENE 8

*KITCHEN. Day. Lise stands icing a birthday cake as the children watch.*

LISE

There we go. Vanilla cake with creamy icing. Daddy's favorite. Who's got the candles?

ANNIE

I do.

LISE

Just a few around the edges, here. What's the date today? Somebody tell me.

MICHAEL

I know! It's April 20th.

LISE

That's right. And do you know who else was born on April 20th, besides your Daddy? Come on, you guys. Who knows? Teresa, do you know?

TERESA

No. Who?

LISE

Hitler... Adolf Hitler. Your Daddy was born on Adolf Hitler's birthday. So. Who's going to sing?

*Lise picks up the cake and the kids nervously follow her into the DINING ROOM singing "Happy Birthday".*

JOE

Holy smoke, look at that. A masterpiece.

*Lise holds the cake.*

LISE

Make a wish.

JOE

Lemme think, lemme think...I'm gonna be a millionaire!

LISE

Happy Birthday, Bigshot!

*Lise shoves the cake right in his face.*

*A horrified beat. The kids stand frozen.*

LISE

It's a joke!

*Joe sits stunned, cake dripping from his face.*

LISE

Come on you guys! It's just a joke.

*Joe wipes cake from his face.*

LISE

Joe, here honey, let me...

*Joe stands up and walks out of the house,  
slamming the door behind him.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Moments later, we heard the car drive away. My mother's face was a mask of torment and guilt. She lit a cigarette and paced. Later that night, she called a cab and sent my sister and me to bring my dad home. When we got to the motel, he was sitting drunk on the bed. I had never seen him like that before. It was a frightening site.

*MOTEL ROOM. Later that night.*

TERESA

Daddy, come home. Mom wants you to.

ANNIE

Please, Daddy?

JOE

She betrayed me. She betrayed me. She went back on her word.

*He drinks from a bottle of Jim Beam.*

TERESA

What are you talking about? What word?

JOE

Her word. Her word, goddamn it. What kind of family is this? She doesn't even come to church anymore. She promised. She made a vow before God. *(a beat)* And you... You stay away from that Abramowitz boy, do you hear me? It's nothing but grief with these people.

TERESA

Daddy, I'm only fourteen.

JOE

I don't give a damn! So help me, if you marry a Jew, I will disown you.

ANNIE

But you married a Jew!



JOE

I did not! I did not! I married a Catholic. I told her I couldn't marry a Jew. She converted. She made a vow in the church before God! She made a vow! I'm your father, this is a decent family. How dare you. How dare you... Oh, God... oh my God... Don't look at me. Don't look... You're too young. You're too young to understand what I'm trying to say. You don't remember the way things used to be. We were happy.

*(a beat)*

Tell her... tell her I'll be home. Tell her I need to sleep this off. I don't want her to see me like this. Maybe she hates me, I don't know. But I'll love her to my death. So help me God, we were happy.

*Lights fade on motel room.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Later that night, while Teresa was sleeping, I lay awake listening to my mother's cries. I got out of bed and went to my dresser. I found the photo of Martha Rosensweig that I had hidden in my clothes. I ran to my tree and began to climb, the photo of my grandmother clutched in my hand. My little white nightgown billowed in the dark like an apparition. I needed someone to help me.

*Young Annie climbs her TREE holding her grandmother's photo. She SLIPS - catches herself - and climbs higher. Annie is now standing on the highest branch. The moon hangs full overhead.*

ANNIE

Please make my parents like each other. Please make them be happy.

*Silence. Clouds drift around the moon, creating a halo effect. Lights fade.*

SCENE 9

*MT. HOLLY HOSPITAL. Evening.*

*Annie is sitting at her father's bedside. Lise walks in carrying snacks from the cafeteria.*

LISE

What are you doing?

ANNIE

Nothing, just sitting with him. He's sleeping again.

LISE

Let him sleep. He'll rest and get stronger. Then we'll bring him home.

*Annie stands so that Lise can sit in her place.*

ANNIE

Can I get you anything?

LISE

No, I brought some juice. Here, take it, it's pineapple. What's that, on your...?

*It's the Star of David necklace.*

LISE

Oh, God. Take it off. Take it off.

*Lise reaches up to tear it from Annie's neck.*

LISE

*(whispering, frantic)*

What is wrong with you? Do you want him to see it, do you want to upset him?

ANNIE

Why shouldn't he see it? I'm so sick of your secrets.

LISE

Shut up. Just shut up. It's so easy for you, isn't it, you have no idea...

ANNIE

Mom, look at him. He's not Adolf Hitler. He's not the Gestapo. He's just Dad. He's my dad.

LISE

Don't say that. How could you. My God, you're selfish.

ANNIE

You've been blaming me my whole life. For what? What did I do to you? What did I do?

LISE

Don't you blame your miseries on me! You have no idea how lucky you are. The world was safe for you. You were free to do anything you wanted.

ANNIE

My God, Mom, you are not in Germany anymore. When will you stop living in the past?

LISE

When will you? Why do you blame me for everything that's gone wrong with your life? You should be grateful. You had a good and happy family. You should thank God every damn day of your life.

*Light on Annie as she transitions to narrator -*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I went back to the city and headed straight for the nearest bar. It was crowded and noisy. The music was blasting. I started dancing and drinking with men I didn't want to know. One of them grabbed me by the hand and led me outside to the alley behind the club. He had his hands all over me, pulling at my clothes, kissing me too hard. I was throwing myself away... Suddenly something in me snapped. Stop. Stop! Get off of me! I shoved him hard, hitting him in a fury. He finally let go. I pulled my clothes together and ran off. I stopped in front of a small church. It was late. I tried to open the door, but it was locked. I pounded on it. There was no answer. I pounded and pounded again. I stood there. Distraught and lost. Finally, the door creaked open and a man's gentle face poked out.

*A man enters. Annie turns to him.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Forgive me, Father, but I need to talk to you. It's been a hundred years since my last confession.

JANITOR

I'm sorry, ma'am, I'm just the janitor. The church doesn't open until six....

ANNIE

But I need help...I need someone to help me.

JANITOR

Why don't you ask God for help...

ANNIE

*God?! Which one?! My parents hate each other because of their "gods". Their religions! And I'm supposed to pick a side! What kind of God thinks that's okay? (a beat)*  
I have no idea who God is.

JANITOR

It doesn't matter. God knows who you are. You've got to believe.

ANNIE

*(breaking down)*

In what? What am I supposed to believe...? Nothing makes any sense.

JANITOR

Go home, honey. Go home to your family.

*The janitor exits.*

*Lights up on Annie's apartment.*

*Annie begins lighting candles. She carries a candle to the bathroom, sets it down and turns on the faucets of the bathtub. She begins to undress. As she does, she starts singing in Hebrew. The Star of David around her neck.*

*TREE. Night. Young Annie gazes up at the moon, at the stars. In her hand is the photograph of her grandmother.*

*Annie stands naked in the steamy, hazy room. She opens the cabinet and takes out a razor blade. Annie steps into the bathtub.*

ANNIE

The mass has ended.

*Annie lifts her wrist to make a cut.*

ANNIE

Praise be to God.

*Young Annie stands tottering on the branch of her tree. She opens her arms wide, like a bird. Like an angel. She speaks to the sky.*

YOUNG ANNIE

Go in peace.

~~*She's about to fall when we see female arms reach up to catch her.*~~

- We hear a voice -

MARTHA (V.O.)

Where is your faith, Annelah? Where is your hope?

*Annie, holding the razor, lifts her head.  
She stares into the hazy, steamy room.*

*Emerging in the mist - Martha Rosensweig - in  
her prime, beautiful, the age at which she died -  
the image we've been seeing in the photograph,  
now in the flesh. She speaks with a German  
accent.*

*Annie's eyes glow with the visage.*

ANNIE

Grandma...

MARTHA

Where is your love, Annie? Where has it all gone?

ANNIE

I don't know. It all just... died.

MARTHA

No, Daughter. No. Love never dies. It's buried, or hurt or hidden, but it is always there.

ANNIE

I feel so much pain, Grandma. What does it matter if I live?

MARTHA

It matters a great deal.

ANNIE

To who? To my mother? My mother hates me...she hates me, and I don't know why.

MARTHA

She doesn't hate you, Annelah. You are her heart. You are her treasure. When she looks at you, she sees me - what she had - and what she lost.

ANNIE

But there's nothing I can do about that! I'm not you. I'm me! And I don't know who that is.

*(crying now)*

I'm so lonely.

MARTHA

In your struggle, Annie, there is a story. A beautiful story full of joy and sorrow... of dreams lost, and dreams found. And loneliness. And love. Love, above all.

*Martha gazes at her granddaughter.*

MARTHA

Don't you want to see how your beautiful story ends?

*Annie is crying. She drops the razor.*

ANNIE

I do. I do.

*Martha smiles.*

MARTHA

Find it, then. Find love. And go on living. When you find love, Annie, you will find yourself.

*Martha recedes back into the mist. Annie stops crying and catches her breath. Her heart begins to calm. She lifts her head.*

ANNIE

When I find love, I will find myself...

*Blackout.*

SCENE 10

*MT. HOLLY HOSPITAL. Day. Lise, Teresa, and Michael stand outside Joe's room.*

LISE

Don't say 'Jesus Christ'. Say something, but don't say that.

TERESA

Mom, we know what to do.

LISE

I won't have it. I won't have it, do you hear me?

MICHAEL

It's okay, Mom... it's okay.

*Annie slips into Joe's ROOM. She sits by him.*

ANNIE

Hey, Dad.

JOE

Hi, doll.

ANNIE

How're you doing?

JOE

I'm about done, I think... *(a beat)*. You cut your hair.

ANNIE

Yeah. You like it?

JOE

I always wanted a second son.

*The Star of David glitters around Annie's neck, catching Joe's eye. Annie touches it.*

ANNIE

It's the Star of David. It's pretty, isn't it? It was Mom's.

JOE

Was it?

ANNIE

She brought it from Germany. She used to teach us about things like this... Jewish things.

JOE

Did she? I didn't know.

ANNIE

I know you didn't. We never told you.

JOE

*(unsettled)*

It's a tragedy... to lose your family.

ANNIE

I know.

*Joe seems to need to say something.  
Annie takes his hand.*

ANNIE

What, Dad? What is it?

JOE

Say I was a good man. Say I loved your mother to my death.  
*(anguished)*

Say that I was sorry.

ANNIE

I will. I swear I will. I love you, Daddy. I love you.

*The heart monitor flatlines.*

ANNIE

Daddy...

*Joe is gone. Annie takes a breath. Then she gazes at her father. She kisses his forehead.*

ANNIE

Take this...

*(another kiss)*

And that.... Go in peace, Daddy. Go in peace.

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 11

*BENJAMIN HOME. Night. Lise sits quietly, watching old home movies of their young happy family play against the wall.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I told Teresa I would be there, so I went. My mother was sitting quietly, watching old movies of our family. I slipped by her and went down to the basement. Being down there had become strangely comforting. I opened the piano bench. The old cloth was still hidden there under the sheet music and inside it was the menorah and the candles. Then I noticed something I had never seen before... a small bundle of letters and postcards, tied together with a string.



The paper was fragile and worn and the ink was barely legible, but I could see that they were addressed to Miss Leeza Rosenzweig, from her mother, Martha, my grandmother. My hand was shaking as I peeled open one of the letters and began to read..

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

*“November, 1938, My very dearest Leeza...*

*Martha steps into the scene as Annie reads through the letters and postcards...*

MARTHA (V.O.)

*Oh, how I miss you! I received your letter and photo. You look so good. It shows that you have a good life and that means everything to me. I went to the Consulate to register for a visa. I can hardly wait to be with you and cook all your favorite meals. Your loving and faithful mommy...”*

*March, 1939, I am happy to hear you are doing so well in school. I am alright. Don't worry about me. I can make it by myself. I wish you everything good. My biggest wish is that next year I can be with you.*

*October, 1940, Leeza, I need to find a sponsor and one hundred dollars...*

*January, 1941, I have to tell you dear, Leeza, I am very desperate. Can you send me a \$100. through airmail? It pains me to ask you. Please, please, help me, Leeza. I have a feeling like a sinking ship.*

*August, 1941, There is no peace here anymore. We will be put on a train soon. I don't know where we are going or when I will be able to write to you again...*

*(Martha takes a long pause)*

*My dear child... As you grow up, you will see that not everyone in the world is as good as you are. There are bad people, people who hate and do terrible things. It will make you angry, and you will be tempted to hate. But don't, Leeza. Don't be like them. There are good people, too. People who are loving and kind. Be one of those people, Lise.*

*(a beat)*

*No matter what happens, be a person who chooses love. It is the only thing that saves us. Choose love, my daughter, even when you don't want to. Always choose love...*

*Annie sits quietly for a moment taking in what she has just read; what she has just come to understand.*

*Annie puts the letters back where she found them and goes upstairs to the living room. She leans against the door frame watching her mother.*

ANNIE

Let's go somewhere tomorrow, Mom. Let's go somewhere we've never gone before.

*Lise turns to Annie.*

LISE

Alright.

*Blackout.*

*Bright lights come up on -*

*ELLIS ISLAND FERRY. Day. Annie and Lise stand on the bow. It is a glorious day. The Statue of Liberty looms larger and larger. They reach the island and make their way through the MUSEUM. Photographs and documents, mementos recording the arrival of immigrants to the United States, hang everywhere. We see the photos projected of Jews, Arabs, Italians; Irish, Asian, African and Muslim faces. Different people from different places coming to America with the same fears, the same dreams.*

*Annie and Lise make their way outside to the park. The Statue of Liberty stands magnificently above them.*

*They search for a name inscribed on a stone, one of the many stones that form a wall lining the park.*

ANNIE

Mom...here.

*Annie points to a name.*

*Lise looks closer. In the middle of a long list of names, etched into the stone -*

LEEZA BRIGITTE ROSENSWEIG.

LISE

Here I am...

*Lise's hand trembles as she runs her hand over the name in the stone...*

LISE

"Be a good American"... Those were my mother's last words to me. "Leeza...be a good American." Sometimes it feels like I dreamed it all, that old life. Like it was a story someone told me once, or a movie I saw a long time ago. But here I am. Here I am.

*(a beat)*

...I was in school until I was eleven. Then a law was passed that only Aryan children could stay in public school, and so I had to leave.

ANNIE

What did you do?

LISE

I went to another school for awhile, but it wasn't safe. When I was 13, I was sent here to live with an aunt. It was a big apartment on 92nd Street, but she treated me like the maid. I was beaten black and blue if I didn't clean all the rooms the way she wanted, but I never said anything because I didn't want to hurt my mother's chances of making it here. Everyday after school, I would go to the Red Cross looking through the names of people who had made it to America - looking for my mother. But I never found her name...

ANNIE

That's so sad, Mom.

LISE

*(an agonizing admission)*

... My mother asked me to send her a hundred dollars so she could get her visa. So she could get out. I was fourteen. I had nothing. I begged my aunt to send her the money. I told her I would do anything, anything, but I couldn't convince her. She refused to do it. To this day, I don't know why. Maybe she was afraid she would lose her maid...

*(facing her deepest pain)*

I had a chance to save her... I had a chance to save my mother. But I... couldn't...

*(breaking down)* I couldn't save her... I didn't save her.

ANNIE

But you were a child...

*A long pause. Lise buries her pain and pivots.*

LISE

I met your father at a dance. He was in the Air Force. Oh my God, he was so handsome. My girlfriends were all jealous. Joseph Benjamin... Joseph Benjamin? What kind of name is that for a Catholic boy? I thought he was a Jew! We wrote each other every day... "Darling" this and "Sweetheart" that. Do you think of me, do you love me?

Will you marry me? *(a beat)* It was like he was put on this earth to save my life. I would have done anything for him.

*The words hang in the air.*

*Lise turns to look at Annie as though she is seeing her daughter for the first time -*

LISE

I think I like your hair...

ANNIE

Really?

LISE

Yeah, I think it's you.

*Annie is self-conscious and pleased. It's a new concept, this thing that is her.*

*They gaze at the water, the sun shining down, at the people, at the life. Annie turns to her mother.*

ANNIE

I love you, Leeza Rosensweig.

*Lise is too moved to look at Annie.*

LISE

I love you, too, my precious daughter.

*Annie spontaneously reaches out to hug her mother. Lise hesitates, then embraces her.*

*Blackout.*

*Annie steps into the spotlight and speaks to the audience.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I went back to the city and headed straight to Central Park. I walked down a path and found a tree. It was a good tree. A beautiful tree. I began to climb. I made my way to a high branch and sat, gazing out over the park and the city. I nestled in the branches and gazed at the wide open sky. An overwhelming feeling of gratitude rose up in me.

Gratitude for everything...for all of it.

*(a beat)*

If you ask me who God is...I still would not know... But that day, sitting in my tree, I was certain that I knew what forgiveness was, and I knew what love was.

*(she pauses)*

What love is. I know what love is... I choose love. And that's all I need to know.

*Annie turns to watch as lights come up on -*

*BENJAMIN YARD. Morning. The sun rises over Mt. Holly as young Annie, asleep in her TREE where we left her, hears voices and wakes.*

*Lise, Joe, Teresa and Michael, in their pajamas, all squint curiously up at her.*

LISE

Annie...? Sweetheart...?

JOE

Annie, what the hell...? Have you been up there all night?

*Young Annie looks down from her perch.*

TERESA

What are you doing up there?

MICHAEL

What a dodo.

LISE

Come down, sweetheart. Come on down.

JOE

Come down now, for Christ's sake.

*Lise opens her arms wide, beckoning.  
Annie looks down.*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

Below me, my family waited, their arms outstretched, ready to catch me if I fell.

LISE

Come down, Annelah... it's a new day.

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I looked up at the sky. It was a lovely morning. I smiled.

*Young Annie looks up at the sky. She smiles.  
She spreads her wings -*

*Annie smiles. She spreads her wings -*

ANNIE TO AUDIENCE

I spread my wings... and then I jumped.

*Blackout.*

CURTAIN