

TREES BY THE STATION

a full length drama
Kevin Daly

This is the story of Leo Teller, a Jewish Hungarian immigrant who moves to New Haven, CT. in 1965. As he attempts to build a new life for himself in America, his childhood friends from Hungary return as shadows on the wall. They haunt him. They remind him of a violin he stole from a classmate when he was nine years old.

Run time: 90 minutes

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CHARACTER PAGEFOUR ACTORS (2M/2F)

The scenes in this play are a series of “look-ins” on Leo Teller and his family over a fifty-year period. The actors, therefore, must play a wide range of ages.

LEO TELLER

(Age: 29, 46, 56, 63, 59, 72, 82)

A large man. Hungarian immigrant. Charismatic in every sense of the word. It would be ideal if this actor could sing yiddish folk music and play the violin.

BELLA TELLER

(Age: 19, 35, 45, 52, 48, 60, 71)

The daughter of a Hungarian immigrant. Leo’s second wife. Joseph’s mother. She was raised in Queens.

JOSEPH TELLER

(Age: 16, 26, 29)

If Leo is charismatic his son Joey is the opposite. Awkward in everything he does.

HANNAH COHN

(Age: 9, 20)

The annoying girl who lives down the hall.

* Additional roles for this actor:

The Bearded Child— Leo’s childhood friend, Lev Ber Weissmandl (S6)

Lilah Gellman— 24 year old visitor (S7)

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

This is the story of Leo Teller, a Jewish Hungarian immigrant who moves to New Haven, CT. in 1965. As he attempts to build a new life for himself in America, his childhood friends from Hungary return as shadows on the wall. They haunt him. They remind him of a violin he stole from a classmate when he was nine years old.

SETTING

Each scene takes place in a small two-room apartment. New Haven, CT.

TIME

This play tracks more than fifty years in the lives of a New Haven family. The scenes are non-linear.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE ONE— WINTER 1999 — NEW HAVEN, CT.

SCENE TWO — SPRING 1982 — NEW HAVEN, CT.

SCENE THREE — SUMMER 1992 — NEW HAVEN CT.

SCENE FOUR — WINTER 1965 — NEW HAVEN, CT.

SCENE FIVE — SPRING 1995 — NEW HAVEN, CT

SCENE SIX — SUMMER 2007 — NEW HAVEN, CT.

SCENE SEVEN — FALL 2018 — NEW HAVEN, CT.

SPECIAL STAGING OPTIONS

Throughout the play Leo receives visits from his childhood friends and other people from his past. They do not speak but at times they sing and play instruments. They are his memories. They haunt him. I suggest within the script that these visitors appear as shadows on the wall. Alternatively, this play could be produced without the shadow visitors. In that case the childhood memories still haunt Leo, the audience just doesn't see them.

FULL SYNOPSIS

This play unfolds through a series of non-linear scenes that capture Leo's attempts to reimagine his past. For this synopsis I will tell Leo's story in chronological order.

1945

Leo (age 9) and his classmates at a prestigious music school in Budapest were rushed onto freight trains destined for concentration camps. Leo worried his parents would be angry that he had not thought to take his violin. In the darkness of the overcrowded freight-car he stole a classmate's violin. The classmate was inconsolable. He screamed for his violin. *Give me my violin!* He made so much commotion the adults on the train were sure the nazis would kill them all. They held him down and covered his mouth until he was silent. Leo believed he was responsible for the boy's death.

1956

During the Hungarian revolution Leo (age 20) meets his first wife. She gets pregnant. They marry. Her father doesn't approve. Her father has the marriage annulled and sends her and the child away. Leo never sees them again.

1965

Leo (age 29) moves to New Haven, CT with his second wife. She's pregnant. He's hopeful to start anew. He retells the story of his childhood differently than it happened. He speaks about his past as if the life he left behind in Budapest was filled with joy and excitement.

1982

Leo (age 46) entertains his son and a young girl who lives down the hall by telling fabricated stories of his own childhood. He reimagines the story of the stolen violin and the boy who died. In this version he leaves his own culpability out. He tells the story as if he, himself, was a great violinist. He blames the nazis for the boy's death. He never mentions his own actions. In reimagining himself as someone special that was derailed by the events of the war he puts pressure on his son to fulfill the unfulfilled promise in their family.

1992

Leo's son has grown up to become a struggling violinist. The son is in love with the young girl who lives down the hall. She's grown up too, but she has no interest in him beyond friendship. The mother, who has grown bitter in her difficult marriage, attempts to shame her son into giving up the violin and taking on a more stable career.

1995

Leo's son attempts to impress the girl down the hall by locating one of Leo's childhood friends. Remembering how taken she was by Leo's stories as a child, he invites the friend for a reunion visit. When Leo (age 59) finds out about this plan he is beside himself. In anger he confesses the truth of his stories. The truth of how he stole the violin and how it led to the young boy's death. He further berates his son who has misinterpreted the stories to mean that his life had more meaning than it does.

1999

Leo's son commits suicide.

2018

Leo and his wife receive an unexpected visit from the granddaughter of his instructor at the school for music in Budapest. She explains that she found a box in her father's attic with Leo's name on it. She learned that her grandfather had been searching for Leo his whole life. He wanted Leo to know: the boy who owned the violin lived.

TREES BY THE STATION

This play is a series of “look-ins” on Leo Teller, a Hungarian immigrant, and his family over a fifty year period.

Each scene takes place in a small two-room apartment. New Haven.

The main room evolves over time, but the basics are as follows.

There is a pullout couch with scratchy fabric.

Leo and his wife Bella sleep on the couch.

The couch separates the living area from the kitchen area.

A bedroom door stage right.

Their son sleeps in the bedroom.

The main entrance stage left.

A bathroom door somewhere along the upstage wall.

A comfortable reading chair that might recline.

A small kitchen table with four chairs.

A window. The window looks at another apartment building.

The smell of onions and fried potatoes throughout.

SCENE ONE — WINTER 1999, NEW HAVEN CT

*(**Bella**, age 52, is preparing herself to go dancing for the evening. She’s trying on clothes and is in constant transit between the main room and the bathroom. She’s enjoying herself. Her husband, **Leo**, age 63, is feeling left out. He tries to steal her attention by playing his violin. He plays the opening flourish of an old Yiddish folk song “Rumania Rumania”. When the violin isn’t enough he sings to her.)*

BELLA

(Amused)

Leo, the neighbors.

LEO

Sing with me, Bella.

BELLA

The neighbors will come. Trust me they’ll come.

LEO

You know this song, Bella.

(**Leo** continues to sing.)

BELLA

Of course I know it.

LEO

I would sing it for you at the window of your papa's house. Do you remember?

BELLA

Am I too dressed up?

LEO

What is this event exactly?

(**Leo** puts the kettle on the stove to make tea.)

BELLA

It's not an event it's dancing lessons.

LEO

Where are you doing this? Who are you doing it with?

BELLA

A better question. Why didn't you listen the first time I told you?

LEO

You never told me you would be going for the whole evening.

BELLA

Every Thursday night, Leo. I told you this.

LEO

Why do you need to go away for dancing? We can have dancing here. When I was a boy we would have dancing in my papa's house. All the cousins and the neighbors would join us. Can you imagine what it was? Everyone was drinking and dancing and singing. My papa was the best musician in my village.

BELLA

I'm sure.

LEO

He was!

(The shadow of a 9-year-old boy appears on the apartment wall. Leo notices the shadow and is uncomfortable with its presence.)

BELLA

What if they're all young people?

LEO

Of course they will be young people. You're going dancing. It's not for old people.

BELLA

Do you think they'll accept me?

LEO

Dance with me, Bella.

(He sings, she laughs, they dance for only a moment. She breaks free.)

BELLA

Leo, I'll be late.

LEO

Should I take a jacket and go with you?

BELLA

You should do something with Joey. See a movie or something.

LEO

I'll go. This way I can make an impression for you.

BELLA

Any time I've ever asked you before you've said no. Now you want to go?

LEO

I love to go dancing. I was dancing all the time in Budapest.

(She's momentarily wounded. Was that a reference to his first wife?)

BELLA

I already signed up. You said you didn't want to go. I didn't sign you up.

(She exits into the bathroom.)

LEO

I'm sure they wouldn't mind if I come with you.

BELLA (VOICE)

They wouldn't have us sign up if they didn't want us to sign up.

(Leo knocks on his son's bedroom door.)

LEO

You want to see a film?

(No response)

He doesn't want.

BELLA (VOICE)

Don't make plans tomorrow after work. I invited the rabbi for coffee.

(Leo hurries back to her door.)

LEO

Rabbi Schulman? Why?

(Bella pops her head out of the bathroom.)

BELLA

He's known Joey since he was a boy. He wants to help.

LEO

We don't need his help.

BELLA

(Lowering her voice)

He doesn't leave his room.

LEO

Let me tell you something about this rabbi. When I was out of work, you know what he did?

BELLA

Got you a job.

LEO

And then he told everyone he knew. As if he did some big favor for me. *The son of a bitch.*

BELLA

He gets you a job at a music school...

LEO

The janitor at a music school...

BELLA

And that's how you thank him? You call him son of a bitch? You should go back to the factory if you're so unhappy.

(She returns to the bathroom.)

LEO

Who said I'm unhappy? I don't understand what this guy will say to my son. What will he say that I can't say myself?

BELLA (VOICE)

I'll ask him tonight. He'll be at the dancing.

LEO

Schulman will be at the dancing?

BELLA (VOICE)

I told you this.

LEO

You told me that Schulman would be there? I don't think so.

BELLA (VOICE)

He has a way with people. He's charismatic. It would be good for Joey to spend some time with the rabbi.

LEO

I'm charismatic.

BELLA (VOICE)

He's a motivator. Joey needs some direction.

LEO

I give him direction.

BELLA (VOICE)

Rabbi says it's a pivotal moment in his life.

LEO

What does he know?

BELLA (VOICE)

He's worried about Joey. We all are.

LEO

(dismissing it)

This man never experienced one challenge in his life. Not one difficulty. And you ask him to speak with our son? About what? What can this little man know about the world?

(Bella exits the bathroom and stares at her husband.)

BELLA

It doesn't worry you, Leo?

LEO

Why does this rabbi spend so much time with my wife? When does he study the bible?

BELLA

Are you jealous?

LEO

No. I'm concerned for the congregation. And you know something else? Schulman's a terrible dancer.

(Leo flirts with his wife. He smiles at her suggestively.)

BELLA

(Smiling back)

No. Leo. I have to go.

(He sings "Rumania Rumania".)

BELLA

(laughing, enjoying it)

I don't have time for this.

LEO

(Singing)

Rumania, Rumania, Rumania...

(Leo sings and dances with his wife.)

BELLA

Leo, what are you doing!

*(He scoops her into his big arms and dances her all over the room.
Singing all the while.)*

BELLA (CONT.)

Leo!

LEO

You want a party with dancing so we have a party with dancing!

(She breaks free.)

BELLA

I don't have time.

(He grabs her back up.)

LEO

Come, Bella we're having fun. When you're with me you're never alone. Look around!
You're surrounded by my great friends from Hungary...

BELLA

No, stop! I said, stop. I'm sorry. This can't continue. I have plans tonight. Please. You
do this every time I try to leave. I'm sorry. You can't do this tonight.

LEO

Bella, you're ruining the fun.

BELLA

No, you're ruining my night.

(**Leo** stops.)

LEO

(dryly)

Then go.

BELLA

Why are you doing that?

LEO

I don't want to ruin your night.

BELLA

You know I hate when you do this.

LEO

I was only having some fun with you.

BELLA

I can be fun. I enjoy having fun. I asked you to join me. You had no interest in dancing.

LEO

Go by yourself and have a good time.

BELLA

That's not fair Leo.

(pause)

Will you do something with Joey?

(He makes a gesture towards Joey's door. Something that indicates, "if he ever comes out")

(**Bella** knocks on Joey's door.)

BELLA

Joey sweetie I'm leaving. There's tuna noodle in the fridge. Should I bring you a plate before I go? Papa wants to see a movie. You two can go to the cinema if you like. Joey? Open up sweetie I want to see you before I go.

*(Bella opens the door to find her son **Joseph**, age 34, hanging by his neck.)*

(Bella tries to lift her son. Leo follows her in. The tea kettle whistles. Joseph's body drops to the floor. Bella searches for life in her son. Leo, runs for the kettle.)

(Leo lifts the kettle off the stove but doesn't use the handle. He doesn't immediately realize he's burning his hands. A heavy knock at the front door draws Leo's attention. He stares at the door. Is the knock real or his imagination? Is his son dead or his imagination? Leo drops the kettle. He looks at his hands. They're scorched. POUNDING continues on the front door. Leo runs his hands under water. His wife's cries are piercing. The shadow boy is joined by two additional boys. Leo is aware of them as he wraps his hands with a towel.)

(He is overwhelmed. His wife screaming, the pounding on the front door, the shadow boys staring at him.)

LEO

Go away.

(The knocking continues. The screaming continues. The pounding continues. Leo screams over it all)

LEO

GO AWAY!

(Blackout.)

SCENE TWO – SPRING 1982, NEW HAVEN CT

(Leo Teller, age 46, enters in his factory overalls. It doesn't take him long to find no one home. He places the day's mail on a table near the kitchen sink. He pours himself a glass of beer and sits down to enjoy it.)

(The front door bursts open. Joseph Teller age 16, with his school bag over his shoulder, hurries in followed too closely by Hannah Cohn, age 9, who lives down the hall. Joseph, awkward in everything he does, circles the table twice. Hannah follows him.)

Why are you following me?

JOSEPH

Why are *you* following *me*?

HANNAH

(Joseph drops his bag in the bedroom and returns. Hannah follows him.)

Papa!

JOSEPH

Papa!
(Repeating)

HANNAH

Don't do that!
(Scolding her)

JOSEPH

Don't do that!

HANNAH

Why are you bothering me?

JOSEPH

Why are you bothering *me*?

HANNAH

How about I shove your head in the toilet?

JOSEPH

How about I shove *your* head in the toilet?

HANNAH

You see what she does?
(To Leo)

JOSEPH

You see what *he* does?
(To Leo)

HANNAH

JOSEPH

She was waiting for me outside the school!

HANNAH

He was waiting for *me* outside the school.

JOSEPH

Why would I go to your school?

HANNAH

Why would I go to *your* school?

JOSEPH

Because you're crazy.

HANNAH

Because *you're* crazy.

JOSEPH

Papa!

HANNAH

Papa!

LEO

(Amused by it all)

Hannah, come I want to tell you something special.

(Leo opens the front door. Hannah walks right out. Leo closes the door behind her and locks it.)

JOSEPH

Why does she have to do that every day?

LEO

Because it bothers you.

JOSEPH

She tells everyone we're dating and she waits for me so it looks like we walk home together. Will you please talk to her mother?

(**Leo** takes his violin case down from its place on the shelf.)

LEO

It's time for practice.

JOSEPH

You're not listening to me.

LEO

Go. Take the violin.

JOSEPH

I don't want to practice.

LEO

Sometimes we do things we don't want to do.

JOSEPH

The kids at school make fun of me.

LEO

Because of the violin?

JOSEPH

Yes. And because of Hannah. And because you're not from here.

LEO

Do you want me to go away?

JOSEPH

No. I just don't want to play the violin anymore. I'm not good at it anyway.

LEO

Because you don't practice. And you don't have friends because you don't speak to anyone. I watch you. You try to make yourself disappear. Your teachers tell me you don't speak even when you know the answer. What kind of way is this to live?

JOSEPH

I don't need friends. I just don't want them to laugh at me.

LEO

Of course you need friends. Every Friday this room is full for Shabbos. Why? You think these people come for your mama's soup? I have to beg them to eat it. They come for me. They want to be around me. They want to know me. Why do you think that is?

JOSEPH

Because you're bigger than everyone else.

LEO

Let me tell you something Joey. People want to be around someone with confidence.

JOSEPH

That's not how high school works.

LEO

What do you mean? That's how the world works!

JOSEPH

You didn't grow up here you don't know what it's like.

LEO

You don't know what it was for me. Just to survive I had to be confident. There had to be something special about me. Did you know that when I was a child I was one of the best violinists in all of Hungary? If it could be for me why not for you?

JOSEPH

Because I'm not like you.

LEO

The only difference between you and me is the age. I know what you can be if you practice.

JOSEPH

Fine. But I can't do this forever. One day I have to grow up.

LEO

What was this you said?

JOSEPH

Never mind.

LEO

Say it again.

JOSEPH

I do this for you but It's not practical.

LEO

This isn't my son. Who are you? Who is this looking at me?

JOSEPH

Uncle Abraham says...

LEO

Uncle Abraham! I knew it wasn't my son. Uncle Abraham what are you doing in my home? I told you not to come here.

JOSEPH

Stop papa. I don't like when you play these games.

LEO

Tell me, old man. What do you mean by practical?

JOSEPH

Accounting is practical.

LEO

Get out! I don't want Uncle Abraham. I want my son.

JOSEPH

Mama says I should live with zayde and study accounting.

LEO

You *want* to study accounting?

JOSEPH

I don't mind it.

LEO

You want to sit like this? Like the question mark at your desk? Worrying! Worrying! Money where is the money? That's what you want? Ah, accounting is boring. Leave it for the boring people. Should you do like Abraham? He walks around like this. Always angry. Always worried.

JOSEPH

Accountants make a lot of money.

LEO

You're not even done with school.

JOSEPH

I would finish school in New York.

LEO

What's wrong with New Haven?

JOSEPH

I don't want to work in the garment factory.

LEO

(Pause)

And what's wrong with my job?

JOSEPH

You can't afford your own home.

LEO

(Insulted)

Your Uncle Abraham doesn't know everything. What does he think? Every Hungarian Jew came to America before the war? We had rich cousins waiting for us with jobs? I was nine years old and I was the best violinist in Hungary. What was he? He was a schmuck! What did he have? What made him special? His father's brother was in America. That's it! Ilona Feher heard me play the violin and had tears on her face. What was your uncle? He was lucky!

(Spits on the ground)

Look at my hand. My left hand. Take it. Feel my fingers. Go on. Feel the bone. People came from all over to hear me play the violin. I was accepted to the finest schools in Budapest. But my hand was broken during the war and I'm still more special than your uncle will ever be.

JOSEPH

You're hurting my hand.

LEO

(intensity growing)

I want to speak to my son.

JOSEPH

You are.

LEO

You have something special in you and you waste it. Why? Why do you waste it?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

LEO

Don't be like Abraham. I don't want Abraham! I want someone special. Go to your room. Practice until your fingers bleed. Be special!

(Joseph exits to his room. Leo sits with his beer. A moment later Joseph returns.)

JOSEPH

I didn't mean to insult you.

(Joseph exits. He practices his violin. There's a knock at the front door. Leo opens it. Hannah is in the doorway with her arms crossed.)

LEO

Why are you still here?

HANNAH

You don't really believe that do you?

LEO

What are you talking about?

HANNAH

He's not special, Leo.

(She enters past him and pours herself a glass of milk.)

LEO

You don't have milk in your own fridge?

HANNAH

Don't get me wrong, I think it's nice he plays the violin. But it's not a career. Mind if I sit?

LEO

I mind, yes.

(She sits, takes a large gulp, and sighs loudly.)

HANNAH

I'll tell ya, Leo the fourth grade ain't all it's cracked up to be.

LEO

What you had a long day?

HANNAH

I've got boys chasing me all over the schoolyard. I'm flattered but I'm spoken for, you know? You're a good-looking guy you know how it is.

LEO

(Momentarily flattered. Then,)

Listen to me. When I was your age the child was not calling the adult by the first name.

HANNAH

Welcome to the eighties, Leo.

(Finishes the milk)

Thanks for the milk. I'll be seeing ya.

(She makes to exit into Joseph's room.)

LEO

Hey! Where are you going?

HANNAH

In there.

LEO

Go home. He's practicing.

HANNAH

Can I wait until he's finished?

LEO

What's wrong with your living room?

HANNAH

It's boring over there.

LEO

That's because you're a boring person.

HANNAH

Can I hear one of your stories?

LEO

Do you have some money?

HANNAH

No.

LEO

Then go play with the other children your age?

HANNAH

I'd rather be with you.

LEO

(moving her to the door)

You know, Hannah you are very small I might push you from the window.

HANNAH

I want to know more about Hungary.

LEO

(Pause)

You like to learn about Hungary huh?

HANNAH

It's better than doing nothing.

LEO

Come over here you annoying girl.

(The shadow of a young boy appears on the apartment wall behind them. Leo is aware of the shadow. The shadow is aware of him. He tries to ignore it.)

HANNAH

(with anticipation)

Is this a story about Janos Lueger?

LEO

Yes, and my friend Ibrahim Frankel. He's playing the flute. Do you hear it?

HANNAH

No.

LEO

Not with your ears. With your imagination.

(Another shadow appears. A young boy with his hat in his hand.)

LEO

Next to Ibrahim there is Janos.

HANNAH

Is he singing? He's my favorite.

LEO

Janos is always singing. You can't hear him?

HANNAH

With my imagination?

LEO

Beyond the boys is a school for music where I studied as a young child. Even as the war was developing around us we found reasons to enjoy ourselves.

HANNAH

Where's your best friend Lev?

LEO

I'm sure he was here. He was always trying to play the violin like me.

(A third shadow boy appears.)

HANNAH

I thought nobody was as good as you?

LEO

Nobody was as good as me but they still tried! Can you hear it now?

(Leo sings for her; "Chiribim, Chiribom")

HANNAH

(Highly amused)

Why doesn't Janos ever sing in English?

LEO

He doesn't know English.

HANNAH

But he's just your imagination. Why can't you imagine him knowing English?

(Leo laughs.)

LEO

Because that's not how I remember him.

HANNAH

How old is he?

LEO

He's your age.

HANNAH

But he's *your* friend. Why isn't he an adult like you?

LEO

Because I don't know what he would look like as an adult.

HANNAH

Just take what he looks like and add a beard. Every man I know has a beard.

LEO

You know why?

HANNAH

Why?

LEO

So we can save our food for later.

HANNAH

Gross.

LEO

What? Eat now a little bit. Eat later a little bit.

HANNAH

Hey Leo, can I ask you something serious?

*(Leo stops singing. The first two **shadow boys** fade away. The third **shadow boy** remains. Leo is aware of him. He is aware of Leo.)*

LEO

You can ask me what you want, Hannah.

HANNAH

How come your family died in Hungary but you didn't?

LEO

(Pause)

My family was living in Papa, the small town where I was born, but my parents sent me to Budapest to study the violin. There I was among the very few Jews in Hungary who survived the war.

HANNAH

Did Janos, Lev, and Ibrahim survive?

LEO

Lev did not survive.

HANNAH

How come?

LEO

You want to see something?

HANNAH

I'm not going in the hallway, Leo.

LEO

Take my hand you smart-ass. You feel the bones are crooked? It's because of this I can't play the violin.

HANNAH

You play all the time!

LEO

I hold the violin and make some noise but Hannah I would've been the best in the world.

HANNAH

How do you know that?

LEO

It was a fact. There was no one better than me.

HANNAH

(Skeptical)

Really?

LEO

Maybe Lev was almost as good as me but I was the best in the world!

HANNAH

How did you hurt your hand?

(Leo holds an imaginary violin case by the handle. The shadow boy mimics Leo's motions.)

LEO

You see what I'm doing? You see how I'm holding? When the Germans came to Budapest we were told that we should lose all our possessions. I was scared of losing my violin so I held it at my side like this. Always in my hand at my side. When I went to dinner I ate with only my right hand. When I took a bath I held the violin outside the water like this. When I went to bed I slept with it in my hand. So it was in my hand when the police came into my school.

HANNAH

Why did the police come to your school?

LEO

The Hungarian police was working with the Germans. They told me run Jew run! So I ran with my violin at my side. In front of me was my instructors so I followed them and we ran for hours. It was the middle of the night, and we didn't have shoes, and we didn't have shirts, but I had my violin. Like this you see?

HANNAH

Why were you running?

LEO

Because they had guns and sticks. If I was older and stronger maybe I would have fought but the other students and instructors was running so I followed them. There was some among us who fell and I believe the Germans shot them. When we stopped the other students was jealous of me because they didn't think to have their instrument in their hands. They was crying and the instructors was telling them not to worry but the instructors was crying also. They told us we were going to get on a train and I was going to see my parents. So I thought how bad could it be? There was dogs barking. There was men with guns. We were thirsty. But still I had my violin. I thought how happy my parents would be when they see me holding it. My papa spent a lot of money for this violin. But on the train it was so crowded that I couldn't move. There wasn't seats. We all stood. It smelled like a toilet. A few times someone tried to steal my violin but I was holding too strong. Some of my instructors told me to leave it but I was never going to let go. So we waited for days on this train and it never went anywhere. When the doors finally opened it wasn't Germans it was Russians. But they had guns like the Germans and they had dogs. I didn't understand what they said but they pushed me and they tried to take my violin. They were very angry with me. One man was punching me. I wanted to give him the violin but my hand was broken around the handle. I was holding so tightly on the train and I was so nervous that my fingers was broke in this position. The Russians were going to cut off my fingers but my instructor said he would give them the violin. He took one hand on my fingers and he broke them backwards off the handle. By then the Russians had moved to the next train and they left me the violin. My instructors told me that I was lucky but I was the most unlucky of all the students.

HANNAH

Why?

LEO

Because my fingers will never move the way they did before.

*(The **shadow** fades.)*

HANNAH

Is Joey's violin the same violin?

LEO

Yes it is.

HANNAH

What happened to Lev?

LEO

When we got off the train he was no longer with us.

HANNAH

I don't like that story at all.

LEO

Can I tell you a different story to make you feel better?

HANNAH

Yes, but I don't want anyone dying in this one, Leo. And I don't want it to be about anyone who's dead either.

LEO

Should I tell you about my great escape to America?

HANNAH

No. I want to hear a love story. With no fighting. Why don't you know any love stories?

LEO

I know the best love story.

HANNAH

Good. Tell me that one. Should I close my eyes and use my imagination?

LEO

Keep your eyes open.

HANNAH

But I want to imagine the setting of the story.

LEO

So picture large crowds filling the streets of Budapest. It was nineteen fifty-six and there was a teenager. He was the most handsome man you ever would've seen.

HANNAH

He looks like Joey then.

LEO

OK, maybe he looks like Joey. There are thousands of young people standing around him. There is a lot of energy in this crowd. A lot of pushing. A lot of anger. A lot of excitement.

(The young man appears as a shadow on the wall. Crowds of shadow people fill the scene around him.)

HANNAH

Is somebody going to get hurt, Leo? Somebody always gets hurt in your stories.

LEO

Across the courtyard there is a woman standing just beyond the crowd. Thousands of people between them and the young man sees only her.

(The young woman appears as a shadow on the wall.)

HANNAH

(Excited)

Is that Bella? Is this the story of how you met Bella?

LEO

This woman is named Hannah, like you. The crowd was growing angry and dangerous but the young man had barely noticed. You see? He's asking her name. She's looking at him like a crazy person. She said can't you see there's riots in the streets? He said, yes, I see that, we should go somewhere quiet. For the next month they spent all their time together.

(The shadow protesters fade away.)

The government of Hungary was falling down and there was fighting in the streets but these two were falling in love. It was among the most wonderful time of this young man's life. But he had a major problem. She wasn't Jewish and her papa disapproved of their relationship.

(Shadows of the described scene are thrown against the apartment wall. The papa appears as a monstrous shadow towering over the two lovers.)

The papa tried to push the young man away and he threatened him. Stay away from my daughter he screams! Stay away from her! But these two couldn't be kept from each other. They were meeting in a barn behind the papa's house and he never knew they were there.

(A shadow of the barn behind the house.)

HANNAH

What were they doing in the barn?

LEO

Making babies.

HANNAH

Gross.

LEO

What's the matter with you? How do you think you were born?

HANNAH

Did they get married, Leo?

LEO

They had no choice. She was pregnant. Her papa was furious when he found out. He went to the court. He screamed and he yelled until somebody from the court said OK if you stop screaming we will make this marriage go away. Then he sent his daughter and his grandchild away. And the young man never saw her again.

HANNAH

Where did he send them?

LEO

I don't know.

HANNAH

(annoyed)

What? That's the worst story I ever heard. What are you crazy, Leo? That's not a love story!

LEO

There was a lot of love in that story.

HANNAH

(Pointing at him)

Change the ending.

(Bella, age 35, enters with groceries. All shadows fade away. She's a hurricane of frustration.)

BELLA

What's the matter with you Leo? I've been standing out there twenty minutes! You got putty in your ears?

(Yelling into the hallway)

Hey! Stay away from those bags!

(To Leo)

Now they're going to steal our groceries. Leo!

LEO

You left them alone?

BELLA

Should I stand out there all night?

*(Leo exits. After a sigh to collect herself Bella addresses Hannah.
Bella has a warm relationship with this young girl.)*

BELLA

Hannah, come help me put this stuff away.

HANNAH

That's alright I'll just hang out with Joey.

BELLA

No, sweetie don't bother him today. Stay out here and keep me company.

HANNAH

I'm not a bother. I'll just peak in and say hello.

BELLA

(of a carton of milk)

Come put this in the fridge for me.

(She does as she's asked. Leo returns with the remaining groceries.)

LEO

You see. Where's the problem? They were watching the bags for us. What? What's wrong?

BELLA

(clearly annoyed)

I didn't say anything, Leo.

LEO

Nothing was taken from the bags.

HANNAH

(Rummaging through bags)

Hey Bella, you got anything good in here?

BELLA

Only what we could afford.

HANNAH

How about some pastrami?

BELLA

You're hungry?

LEO

This is why she stays.

BELLA

Sit down at the table, sweetie. I'll make you a sandwich.

(Hannah sits happily.)

LEO

What kind of meats did you bring?

BELLA

Not for you, Leo. Have some dry cereal if you're hungry. Joey! Joey, honey you want a sandwich?

(Bella prepares sandwiches for Hannah and Joseph. She even makes one for Leo. It's a busy job. She cuts tomatoes, lettuce, and onions. When she finishes the sandwiches she starts preparing a goulash stew for dinner.)

LEO

What have I done to make you mad?

BELLA

(Sigh)

I don't know, Leo. It's three o'clock how'd I know you'd be home?

LEO

They released us. I wasn't required to stay.

BELLA

Lila's husband isn't home.

LEO

You want me to take an additional shift? I wouldn't be home until midnight.

HANNAH

That's when my dad comes home.

LEO

Because he's schtupping other women.

BELLA

Leo!

LEO

What? She's knows it.

BELLA

(A heavy sigh)

Maybe we should move back to New York.

LEO

Why? Because she eats all our food and she smells kind of bad? It's not a reason to move to New York.

HANNAH

Hey!

BELLA

I spoke with my brother...

LEO

I know you spoke with your brother.

BELLA

It's the third time this week you were dismissed early.

LEO

What does it mean? It means I have more time with my family.

BELLA

They obviously don't like you over there.

LEO

What are you talking about? They sent five people home today.

BELLA

They didn't send everyone?

LEO

It was my turn.

BELLA

It's always your turn.

LEO

It seems this way to you but not to the one who's working everyday in the factory.

BELLA

It's been seventeen years. No promotion, barely any pay increase, never any overtime...

LEO

I don't want overtime.

BELLA

Then I don't know what you want? Are we stuck in this apartment forever?

LEO

Says who?

BELLA

We barely pay our rent. We barely have enough for groceries. You're home in the middle of the day. I don't know what plan you have for us Leo...

HANNAH

(Interrupting)

Bella?

BELLA

What Hannah?

HANNAH

I have some money saved.

BELLA

You keep your money. Who knows what kind of husband you'll marry.

LEO

This is why we should move to New York? To save money?

BELLA

If not all of us, then maybe Joey could live with my parents this summer.

LEO
No.

BELLA
Don't dismiss it. He'll have opportunities there.

LEO
He's my son, he should live with me.

BELLA
It's just for the summer. He could work in papa's office.

LEO
I see. You want him to be like your papa?

BELLA
Papa doesn't lose sleep over the gas bill.

LEO
Then why did you run so easily from his home?

BELLA
(Pause)
I want him to go to college. If he moves to New York, papa will pay his tuition.

LEO
This same man who didn't speak to you for ten years? He holds some money in front of you and you fall to your knees. "Thank you papa, thank you, you save me!"

BELLA
And you have a better plan for Joey?

LEO
He's just a boy! He doesn't need a plan!

BELLA
(Knocking on his door)
Joey. Joey sweetie, come have a sandwich.
(turning to Leo)
It's a big deal that papa invited him for the summer. He's already insulted that you didn't accept his job offers. If we don't send Joey we won't have another chance.

LEO

What a good man he is!

BELLA

He's my family, Leo.

LEO

I'm your family. Joey's your family. Even the smelly one is your family. What kind of man uses his grandson to threaten his daughter?

BELLA

Leo, listen to yourself. You're the one being manipulative.

LEO

How?

BELLA

You're making this about papa instead of what's best for Joey.

LEO

He needs confidence. Send him to New York and that city will swallow him alive. He can't even speak in his class. How will he survive on his own.

BELLA

He won't be on his own.

(To the door)

Joey!

LEO

It would be a major insult to me if he goes to live with your papa.

BELLA

He has things that you don't have, Leo. That doesn't make him a bad person. I'm sorry that his life was easier than yours.

(of Joey)

What is he doing in there? Joey come out here, sweetie! I want to talk to you.

HANNAH

I'll get him.

(Hannah exits into the room.)

LEO

(Aside to Bella)

Please listen to me.

BELLA

Why should he turn away from a promising future?

LEO

Why should he be unhappy the rest of his life? I don't want that for my son. I have enough of it for myself. Why would I want it for my son?

BELLA

(Stung)

You're not the only one who's unhappy.

LEO

Your papa's not a man I want my son to resemble.

BELLA

Should he be like you? Should he be poor the rest of his life?

LEO

This is not poor.

BELLA

It's not? Then show me what poor is.

LEO

You should have seen what it was for me in Budapest.

BELLA

I'm sure you and Hannah made due.

LEO

(Pause)

When I was a boy my parents sent me away for a better life. I never saw them again.

(Joseph returns from his room with Hannah in tow.)

JOSEPH

What mama? I'm practicing.

(**Leo** gestures to **Bella**. “Do as you please.”)

BELLA

(Pause)

Come eat a sandwich, sweetie. You can’t work on an empty stomach.

(**Joseph** sits at the table. She serves him then returns to preparing the goulash. **Leo** takes the violin to the coach and tunes it.

Bella is cooking. **Joey** is eating. **Leo** is tuning. **Hannah** looks around and doesn’t like the tension. So she says,)

HANNAH

Tell the love story again.

LEO

Another time, Hannah.

BELLA

You’re telling love stories now?

HANNAH

There was a boy who lived in Hungary and he looked a lot like Joey. And he met a girl named Hannah and she looked a lot like me.

(**Bella** stops cooking.)

JOSEPH

Nobody wants to hear you tell it.

BELLA

I do.

(**Leo** looks up from the violin.)

HANNAH

There was a lot of fighting going on.

JOSEPH

Boring.

HANNAH

But they didn't care about the fighting because they were falling in love with each other. They loved each other more than anybody ever loved each other before. But they had a big problem because Hannah wasn't Jewish.

(Bella is still)

Her father was really angry. But she didn't care because she was pregnant. Wait, is that how it goes? Leo maybe you should finish telling the story.

LEO

That's all there is to it.

JOSEPH

That's not really a good story.

HANNAH

That's because you didn't let me finish.

(Leo plays the violin as Hannah continues to fumble through the story.)

HANNAH (CONT.)

They had a lot of friends. And they threw a lot of parties. And they were really happy together. Because they loved each other a lot. But the story was a lot better when Leo told it...

(Maybe we can see Bella. Maybe we can't. She's deeply wounded. End scene.)

SCENE THREE – SUMMER 1992, NEW HAVEN CT

(Close to midnight. The couch has been opened into a neatly made bed. A TV is on and glowing, Bella, age 45, has fallen asleep upright in her chair watching the summer Olympics. Joseph, age 26, enters with his father's violin case, and observes the scene. He looks at his watch, sighs. After dropping his things in the bedroom he returns and wraps his mother in a blanket. He turns the tv off. He takes a half eaten plate of cookies from her lap to the kitchen. A knock at the door. Quiet but urgent. When Joseph opens the door Hannah, age 20, enters with authority. She wears hospital scrubs. She's a nurse.)

HANNAH

Are you kidding me, Joey?

JOSEPH

Hannah, she's sleeping.

(Hannah lowers her voice but sharpens her tone.)

HANNAH

You can't call me at work. I'll get fired.

JOSEPH

Your receptionist is a foul person. I said I'd like to leave a message for Hannah, could you tell her that her friend Joey called? After we hung up I thought to myself, how many people named Hannah might work in that whole building? So I called back. I said, I don't mean to be a bother, I called a moment earlier, I want to make sure you know which Hannah I was referring to. She hangs up. I called back. I said I'm sorry but I don't think it's possible that you only have one Hannah working in that building. My message is for Hannah Cohn. She says he knew that from the beginning and that I should stop calling.

HANNAH

I work at a hospital.

JOSEPH

Now I think maybe I offended her to the point that she won't tell you I called. So I call back to apologize and she starts yelling into the phone. I say, I'm only making sure you'll deliver my message. She hangs up. I call back. It turns into a whole thing. A thing it didn't need to be. She turned it into something entirely apart from what it was.

HANNAH

What was so important?

JOSEPH

(forgetting his volume)

She didn't tell you!

HANNAH

(to say: she's sleeping)

Joey.

JOSEPH

I found him.

HANNAH

Who?

JOSEPH

Janos Lueger.

(Hannah hits him so hard he nearly falls over.)

HANNAH

Get out! Where is he?

JOSEPH

(hedging)

I found a bunch of Janos Luegers. If we go to the embassy tomorrow we can narrow it down.

(She actually considers it. Then,)

HANNAH

I can't. I have to work tomorrow.

JOSEPH

Can't you get someone to cover your shift?

HANNAH

I'm trying to work as many shifts as I can.

(Hannah investigates the fridge and helps herself to a plate of leftovers.)

JOSEPH

(following after her)

I just thought you wanted to find him.

HANNAH

I do. I did. Before. I don't have time anymore. You'll have to find them without me.

JOSEPH

What about after work? I could show you what I find at the embassy.

HANNAH

Joey, I can't...

JOSEPH

Just come over like you always do.

HANNAH

I have a date.

JOSEPH

Oh. OK. I'll narrow it down to a short list. Maybe we can find a time later this week.

HANNAH

How'd your gig go?

JOSEPH

Good. It was fine. It was an open mic night.

HANNAH

A lot of people?

JOSEPH

Not really. My mom came.

HANNAH

Still, you were performing.

JOSEPH

Is he a nurse?

HANNAH

A resident.

JOSEPH

(like a stand up routine)

What's so special about doctors? They tell people when to die.

BELLA

(Chiming in)

You could've been a doctor. You were smart enough. You could've been an accountant. You could've been a lawyer. You chose to work in a factory. It's not attractive.

JOSEPH

I'm a violinist.

BELLA

Who works in a factory.

JOSEPH

Why do you pretend that you're sleeping?

BELLA

Is he Jewish?

HANNAH

(smiling)

He's Jewish.

BELLA

Where from?

HANNAH

Jersey.

BELLA

His family?

HANNAH

He has a good family.

BELLA

Sounds promising.

JOSEPH

I don't know that he sounds promising.

HANNAH

It's just dinner after work.

BELLA

But it could be more?

JOSEPH

It doesn't have to be.

BELLA

It will be what you want it to be.

JOSEPH

She wants it to be friends. You should listen the first time you eavesdrop.

BELLA

Tell me about his chin. A man with a good chin can melt my spine.

JOSEPH

Go back to sleep.

HANNAH

I don't think it's serious.

BELLA

Hannah, listen to me. Men don't know how to be serious. You have to tell them. Present yourself as a moving train. He can get on or get off.

JOSEPH

Don't do that.

BELLA

(to Joey)

How do you think it was with your papa? All the girls would meet at the pier before school and make eyes at the men getting off the boats. You think I was the prettiest? You think I was the most attractive? No. I saw Leo, I said to myself, this man will do. I went to him I said I have an interest in you. I said come with me. You'll buy some coffee and we'll talk.

(Hannah goes to Bella with interest. She sits across from her and probes. She's also using it to change the subject.)

HANNAH

Is that really how it went?

BELLA

It was a long time ago.

HANNAH

Tell me what you remember. What was Leo like?

BELLA

Oh there was so much life in him then. He was charming. He was strong and confident. He told the most interesting stories. My papa hated him. We had a lot of sex.

JOSEPH

Ma!

BELLA

I got pregnant. We got married. It all happened fast.

(Joseph gets an idea.)

JOSEPH

Hannah. I want to show you something.

(He dashes into his room.)

BELLA

You'll be wearing what?

HANNAH

We're going right after work.

BELLA

Change into something attractive.

*(Joseph returns with an old letter. He hands it to **Hannah**. He carries more in his arms.)*

JOSEPH

Do you remember this?

(She unfolds the letter and blushes. It's awkward for her.)

JOSEPH (CONT.)

It's a letter you wrote me.

HANNAH

I was seven.

JOSEPH

I never got rid of it.

HANNAH

Why would you keep this?

JOSEPH

Wait. No! Not the part about us. Not the love stuff. That's not why I saved it. Forget about the first part. That's not why I'm showing it to you. Read the back. Look at the back.

HANNAH

Joey...

JOSEPH

(Turning it in her hands enthusiastically)

Read it.

(She does. With a glance.)

HANNAH

What about it?

JOSEPH

It's my dad's stories. You wrote them all down. And there's more. I have them all. You wrote down all of his stories.

(He hands over more notes and more stories.)

HANNAH

Joey these letters are embarrassing for me.

JOSEPH

That's not what I wanted. I thought you'd be excited. We can find the people in these stories together.

HANNAH

(looking them over, uncomfortable)

I should go. I have to work in the morning.

JOSEPH

It's not about the love notes. That's not why I gave them to you. I know that's not how you feel about me now.

BELLA

(kindly)

Joey enough.

HANNAH

I forgot about some of these...

JOSEPH

They're so detailed. You wrote down every word.

HANNAH

Congratulations on your concert.

JOSEPH

Open mic night. The letters. They meant something to you. Not the letters. The stories. They left an impression on you.

(Bella walks Hannah to the door.)

BELLA

Make it clear that you're interested in something more.

JOSEPH

Or just go as friends.

HANNAH

Good luck tomorrow Joey. I hope you find him.

JOSEPH

I'll let you know. Actually, how should I let you know? Should I stop by. Do you want me to stop by if I find him?

BELLA

(To Hannah as she pushes her out the door)

Make your intentions known.

(closing the door and turning back to Joey)

Shame on you. She should change her plans for a factory worker who lives with his mother?

JOSEPH

Why would you pretend to be sleeping?

BELLA

What can you offer her? Why should she have an interest in you?

JOSEPH

(Shoving the letters into his pocket)

I wasn't asking her... I wasn't... you should mind your own business.

BELLA

You made her uncomfortable.

JOSEPH

I don't think I made her uncomfortable.

BELLA

Did you see how she ran from the room?

JOSEPH

You pushed her out the door.

BELLA

To save you the embarrassment!

JOSEPH

I was doing just fine until you entered the conversation. And did you ever think maybe papa would still have some life in him if you didn't make everyone so miserable around here.

BELLA

(pause)

That's a nice thing to say to your mother.

JOSEPH

I'm going to sleep now.

BELLA

(kindly)

Joey. Through them away.

(Joseph exits to his bedroom.)

(Leo, age 56, unlocks the front door and enters in his dirtied factory trousers. The double shifts have drained the spirit out of him. He empties his lunch pale into the sink, then retreats into the bathroom to wash his face. He makes no attempt to be quiet in his actions. Bella cleans Hannah's dish in the sink and tidies the kitchen. She then opens the covers

on the bed before approaching the bathroom door.)

BELLA

Leo, should I make you something to eat?

(no response)

You would've been proud tonight. Joey reminded me of the way you used to play.

*(No response. **Bella** turns on a lamp by the bed and turns off the main lights. She gets into her side of the bed and waits for **Leo**. He returns and changes into his nightclothes. The shadow boys from Leo's childhood appear along the walls. He notices them. They may even scare him slightly. They might sing the Yiddish lullaby "oyfn veg shteyt a boym" [a tree stands by the road]. He enters the bed and turns his back to his wife. She turns out the light.)*

(In darkness we hear footsteps moving around. We hear the whispers and muffled laughter of little children. The sounds of the children are interrupted by a violent knocking on Joey's bedroom door.)

LEO

Where is it!

BELLA

(Startled)

What! What's going on?

LEO

Where is it?!

BELLA

Leo.

LEO

(Crazed)

Get up!

BELLA

Leo, calm down.

LEO

Give me my violin.

*(Lights on. **Bella** is standing at the switch. She's seen this before. **Leo** is sweating. His breathing is heavy. He's still on edge.)*

BELLA

Stop it. Stop screaming.

LEO

Where is it? Where's my violin?

*(**Joey** enters from his bedroom with the violin case. He puts it directly on its shelf. He's done this before.)*

JOSEPH

It's here. I'm sorry. I forgot to put it back.

LEO

It goes on the shelf. It always goes on the shelf.

BELLA

He forgot. It's OK.

*(**Leo** grabs **Joey** aggressively. **Joey** cowers.)*

LEO

It's not OK. It always goes back on the shelf.

*(**Bella** separates them.)*

BELLA

OK. But it's here now. It's back.

(of his shirt)

Take this off it's soaked.

*(She takes his shirt off and towels him down. She waves **Joseph** back to his bedroom.)*

LEO

(calmer, a bit lost)

It's not OK. It must go back. It must always go back.

(A knock at the front door. A neighbor calling in, "hey, what's going on in there?")

BELLA

(To the door, rudely)

Not your concern.

(She dresses him in a new shirt.)

LEO

(softly to Bella)

It has to go back to the shelf. I have to know where it is.

BELLA (CONT.)

It's there. It's on the shelf. Would you like a warm tea?

LEO

No.

BELLA

I'll change the sheets.

*(As she does so **Leo** investigates the case. He opens it and inspects the violin. It's now that he notices one shadow boy remains. Staring at him.)*

BELLA

Come back to bed.

LEO

(maybe a whisper, maybe not, to the shadow boy)

Go away.

(When the sheets are in place she puts him to bed then turns out the lights. End scene.)

SCENE FOUR – WINTER 1965, NEW HAVEN CT.

*(In darkness we hear the violin. An old Yiddish folk song “Rumania Rumania”. Lights reveal **Leo Teller**, age 29, in their apartment on the day they first moved in. The thinly furnished room seems fresh and bare. His enthusiasm more than makes up for any missed notes as he plays for his wife, **Bella**, age 19. She is desperately in love with the large man though she is currently trying to be mad at him. She is pregnant. He sings to her. She purses her lips. He dances for her. She works hard not to smile.)*

LEO

Come, Bella. You can't be mad when I sing for you.

(She turns her head in protest.)

I didn't realize it was this severe.

BELLA

This isn't a safe neighborhood, Leo. How can we raise our child here?

LEO

You're not using your imagination. Some furniture. Something to hang on the walls.

BELLA

We shouldn't have left New York. We had my mother, my sisters,

LEO

(Interjecting)

But here you have me.

BELLA

I'd rather them.

LEO

You know what I see when I look out this window, Bella?

BELLA

Another apartment.

LEO

I see through the other apartment.

BELLA

Two windows? It must be nice.

LEO

I look through the other apartment and I see the Strouse Adler building. I see opportunity, Bella. Opportunity I didn't have in New York.

BELLA

To make women's lingerie? That's an opportunity?

LEO

Who am I speaking to? Your papa?

BELLA

You're speaking to me, Leo. I don't like it here.

LEO

I see what's happening. You wish to be with your family and friends. I'm not enough for you.

BELLA

I didn't say that.

LEO

But! I'm not alone. I am always with my great friends from Hungary. If you look closely you'll see they're here.

(The shadow of a young boy appears on the apartment wall.)

BELLA

I'm a grown-up, Leo. I don't see imaginary people.

LEO

My best friend Lev Ber Weissmandl, he stands in the corner waiting for you to acknowledge him. We shared every class together. Don't you want to meet him?

BELLA

No.

(Another shadow of a young boy appears on the apartment wall.)

LEO

Look! My dear friend Janos Lueger. He wants to sing for you. He has the greatest voice in all of Budapest. Ibrahim Frankel is playing the flute right behind him. Do you want to dance with us? We want you to dance with us.

(A third shadow boy appears on the apartment wall.)

(Leo dances for her.)

BELLA

You always do this. You try to distract me with your stories.

LEO

Dance with us, Bella.

(The shadow children are dancing too.)

BELLA

(Humored)

It's not funny, Leo.

LEO

So why are you laughing?

BELLA

(Pause)

Is *she* here?

*(The dancing stops. **Leo** is solemn. **A young woman**, eighteen years old, appears as a shadow on the wall.)*

LEO

She's always with me.

(Bella looks at her feet, Leo changes his tone)

My great friends are here, Bella. They want to play music for you. Listen to them.

(A violin is heard, a flute, a trumpet, etc.)

You should know there's something special about me. It doesn't matter where we live. We will always be safe. We will never be alone. When you're with me you're never alone, Bella.

(Music fills the room. The sounds of "Rumania, Rumania" are vibrant and lively.)

Can you hear it? Make them happy. Tell them you can hear their music.

(He sings in Yiddish and dances for her. She tries hard not to be amused. His performance receives an ovation of barking dogs, crying babies, ambulances, honking horns, and a next door neighbor pounding on their door calling "Hey shut the hell up in there!").

LEO

(To the door)

I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. That was the end.

BELLA

Our first day in a new building and you've already upset the neighbors.

LEO

That was only one neighbor. And today is only one day. Tomorrow can be different. When I look out this window, and through the other apartment, I see a city that wants me to succeed. I could feel it when we stepped off the train. The trees in this city they spoke to me. They all tried to reach down and touch me. They wanted to know me. They said they've never seen a man who was so special before and they must know they've seen every man who stepped off that train.

(Sighs)

One day I'll do more than make garments. I'll buy you a home as big as this building. Your sisters will come and live with you.

BELLA

My sisters would never leave New York.

LEO

To live in a house that I pay for? They'd leave tomorrow. This is your home, Bella. Be happy for yourself.

BELLA

Leo, there's something else that worries me.

(pause)

I'm worried I'll never be good enough for you.

LEO

You must stop thinking like this.

BELLA

When you talk about your first wife I can see how you feel about her. I'm worried, Leo. I'm worried I'll never be as pretty as her. I'll never be as nice as her. I'm worried you'll be unhappy with me and you'll leave me here. I don't mind being here with you. I'm excited to be here with you. But I'm afraid that you'll leave me here alone and I don't want to be here alone.

(He goes to her. He kneels down at her side.)

LEO

You won't be alone. I promise you. I will never leave you alone.

(Puts his hand on her belly, smiles)

Maybe this child will be a great musician like me.

BELLA

I hope not.

LEO

You hope he's not a musician or you hope he's not like me?

BELLA

Maybe he'll be a doctor like my papa.

LEO

Ah, doctors are boring. They tell people when to die.

(She holds his hand firmly over her stomach and commands his attention.)

BELLA

I don't want him to know about your life before me.

LEO

But I had such a beautiful life. Why should I hide it from him?

BELLA

He'll be confused.

LEO

What about Ibrahim Frankel and his flute? Children should hear the flutes of Ibrahim Frankel. What about Janos Lueger, who has the most beautiful voice in all of Hungary, he should sing songs for my son. And Lev Ber Weissmandl? He's my best friend how shall I hide him?

*(She looks away. **Leo** sighs, then opens the front door and hangs his head.)*

BELLA

What are you doing?

LEO

Everybody out.

BELLA

Who are you talking to?

LEO

Janos, my wife doesn't want you to sing in here.

(The shadow children move along the walls and exit toward the door. Other shadow figures appear and then follow in a procession. Adults, elderly, teens,

and children. A community of shadow people appearing and exiting.)

BELLA

You're being ridiculous.

LEO

(Opening the door to the bedroom)

Everybody. That means you too Chaim Szamuely! And whoever's daughter you have there you take her home, you putz.

(He kicks Chaim, a shadow teen, in the rear as he shuffles everybody out the door)

I'm sorry Rifka Politzer you must find someplace else to sell your fresh fruits. But I will have one taste before you go.

(Tastes it)

Oy. They don't have fruit like this in America. Come, Bella you must try it.

(BELLA isn't amused he puts the fruit back)

Someone else will enjoy it. Go ahead Rifka just follow everyone else. They'll show you where to go.

(He closes the door behind her. The shadow people are gone.)

Rifka Politzer would push her cart by my house every morning. I remember the day she stopped.

BELLA

Why do you make everything into a joke? I'm trying to be serious with you.

LEO

I'm being serious with you! This is your home now. This is your child. And this is your husband. Even if it's not the way we expected we could allow ourselves to be happy.

(Pause)

You know what? I should tell you a story.

BELLA

I don't want your stories.

LEO

During my last days in Budapest I didn't have an apartment like this. This would have been a dream for me. I was alone. I was completely alone and I was running from the police.

BELLA

Why were you running from the police?

LEO

Because I was a thief.

BELLA

I never heard this story before.

LEO

Because I was saving it.

BELLA

What were you stealing?

LEO

I was taking all the jewels and diamonds that was stolen originally from the Jews.

BELLA

That's not true. Why were you really running from the police?

LEO

Because I murdered five Russian soldiers.

BELLA

Leo!

LEO

It's how I remember it! In any case I was running from the police when I met Joseph Reitman. This man, he was also a special man, he could make himself disappear. He could put himself to the center of a room and no one would know he was there. He survived the war in this way. He was a good thief to have for a friend and a good friend to have for a thief!

BELLA

You weren't a thief.

LEO

Joseph Reitman was very nervous about the Russians and he was the one who convinced me to escape to America. Even though at first I was opposed.

BELLA

Why?

LEO

What did I know about America? It was only from the films. I was a Jew who survived the war. I wasn't afraid of the Russians! I wasn't afraid of anyone!

BELLA

Then why'd you come?

LEO

Because he said something that made sense to me.

BELLA

What was that?

LEO

He told me in America we didn't have to be thieves. We could be whatever we want to be. And I was growing tired of running from the police.

BELLA

I can never tell if there's any truth to your stories.

LEO

I was tired of feeling sorry for myself. I want to tell you, Bella when we left Hungary I was looking back and I saw them lifting the track behind us. Of course I didn't know at the time but I was on the last train before they closed the borders. I was very lucky to be friends with Joseph Reitman.

BELLA

Where is he now?

LEO

Who knows? When we were arriving in America I was looking for him but he was completely gone. I searched the entire boat and he was nowhere to be found.

BELLA

What do you mean? You weren't with him?

LEO

We didn't pay for tickets. We were hiding on the boat and we were separated for most of the journey.

BELLA

Do you think they caught him without his ticket?

LEO

Impossible! Joseph Reitman could make himself invisible.

BELLA

Have you looked for him?

LEO

Where would I look? How do you find someone who doesn't want to be found? So when I got off the boat you can imagine I was nervous. I wasn't sure where I should find a job or who I should speak with. I walked around the port a few hours. I almost put myself back on the ship.

BELLA

Why didn't you?

LEO

This is when I found you. And now I know it was exactly the way it should have been.

BELLA

Do you really feel that way?

LEO

I'm sure of it.

BELLA

I hope our son can tell stories like you.

(He kisses her on the forehead. "Rumania, Rumania" is heard in the hallway.)

LEO

They're playing for you, Bella. They don't want you to be alone.

(End scene.)

SCENE FIVE – SPRING 1995, NEW HAVEN CT

(Leo, age 59, and Joseph, age 29 stand across from each other in the apartment. There's tension. Bella, age 48, enters with two full baskets of washed clothes that she busies herself hanging to dry on the line out the window. She wrings the clothes in a towel and when she runs out of space

on the line she drapes them in various places around the apartment. She doesn't immediately notice their tension.)

BELLA

You wouldn't believe what that woman just said to me. She's giving *me* a hard time. Like it's my fault one of the machines broke— what? What's going on with you two?

JOSEPH

(to his father)

I didn't mean to upset you. I thought it was a good thing.

LEO

A good thing to go behind my back?

JOSEPH

I wanted it to be a surprise.

LEO

You wanted to impress Hannah.

JOSEPH

It's not about Hannah.

LEO

Everything is about Hannah!

BELLA

What happened?

LEO

Tell her what you did.

JOSEPH

Why does everything have to be so dramatic with you? He's your friend. My whole life you've been talking about him.

BELLA

Who?

JOSEPH

Now that I've found him you don't want to see him?

I don't!

LEO

Who?

BELLA

Janos Lueger.

JOSEPH AND LEO

You found him?

BELLA

You don't know it's him.

LEO

It's him. He remembers you from school.

JOSEPH

I don't remember him.

LEO

Yes you do.

JOSEPH

Where is he?

BELLA

New Hampshire. His nephew's driving him down.

JOSEPH

What did you say? Driving here?

LEO
(this is new information)

Yes! That's the whole point! He wants to see you.

JOSEPH

Why does he want to see me?

LEO
(concerned)

JOSEPH

Because he's your friend. It's him. It's Janos Lueger with the most beautiful voice in all of Hungary. Why isn't this a good thing?

LEO

Tell him not to come.

JOSEPH

I'm not doing that.

LEO

You must.

JOSEPH

He's already on his way. Hannah's coming.

LEO

I knew it!

JOSEPH

She wanted to be here.

LEO

When? When is he coming?

JOSEPH

Today. This morning. I thought you would be happy. You always talked about your great friends in Hungary.

LEO

You thought I would be happy? No. You thought your girlfriend would come running home to you.

(Leo turns out the lights.)

BELLA

What are you doing?

LEO

We're gonna act as if we're not home!

JOSEPH

This is childish. Papa please think about what you're doing. He's driving three hours to see you.

LEO

You spoke with him?

JOSEPH

Yes. He's excited to see you.

LEO

What did he say? Exactly what did he say?

JOSEPH

I was speaking to his wife. She was translating. Why does it matter?

LEO

Because I don't want to see him.

JOSEPH

Why?

LEO

I don't have to explain myself to you.

JOSEPH

You should.

LEO

(Angered, turning on him)

What did you say to me?

BELLA

(Stepping in)

OK. Both of you calm down.

JOSEPH

Hannah and I have been searching for three years.

LEO

(lowering his voice, sharpening his tone)

Why am I first hearing it now?

JOSEPH

We wanted it to be a surprise.

LEO

(growing frustration)

Shh! I don't want to relive this part of my life.

JOSEPH

Why not?

LEO

Because it was ugly. I don't want a reminder of it.

JOSEPH

What if he knows where Ibrahim is? What if he knows where your other friends are?

LEO

Tell him not to come!

JOSEPH

I have no way of doing that!

BELLA

Stop yelling.

LEO

Then I will leave.

(Joseph gets in his way.)

JOSEPH

I didn't do this for Hannah. I did it for you. You didn't get to live the life you were supposed to live. And in a way, even though it's not the same, neither did I. I could've gone and worked with mama's family years ago. I probably could've been successful. I don't know, you never know how things are going to play out, but most likely I would've had some success like every other cousin of mine. And you know what? I do think about Hannah. I think about how our lives could've been different if I had gone to New York but I didn't go because I wanted to be here with you. I know exactly what I turned down by staying here and I'm OK with it because *you* taught me that life isn't about making money or having some important job. It's about surviving. Life survives on this earth because of people like you. And people like Janos. People who are so special they emerge from even the most horrific conditions. (MORE.)

JOSEPH (CONT.)

When I called Hannah and told her we were going to meet Janos today, you should've heard how happy she was for you. I know she doesn't feel the same way about me that I feel about her. But just the fact that I can feel that much love for someone after everything you've lived through is a testament to just how special you are.

LEO

Why?

JOSEPH

Because I'm your son. And there's no hate in me. There's no anger. There's only love. Papa, you deserve to be happy again. Even if it's just a moment. You deserve to be reminded of what your life was like before the war.

LEO

I don't need this reminder.

JOSEPH

I remember the story of your first concert. The mayor of Budapest....

LEO

It wasn't true.

JOSEPH

We all know you exaggerated.

LEO

I lied. Everything I told you was a lie. Why aren't you taking me seriously? I don't want him to come here. What don't you understand? The stories I told you were lies!

BELLA

Which ones?

(Leo looks at his wife. A shadow boy appears on the wall. Maybe the other shadow boys return one by one as Leo speaks. They stand silent. Listening. He's aware of them. He knows they know when he lies. He decides to tell the truth.)

LEO

I told you I was the best violinist in my class. I was the worst. I didn't belong there. They tried to send me home but my papa paid more money so I would stay. There was one boy, he was a tiny little boy, named Lev Ber Weissmandl. He could play the violin better than the instructors. And I hated him. I would push him in the hallways. I would steal the treats his mama sent in the mail. And when we ate lunch I made sure he ate by himself. This is what I was doing before the war. This is what Janos Lueger would remember of me. When the Germans came I was particularly cruel to Lev. I told him the Nazi's were looking for him especially because he was so small and so weak. He was terrified. Always scurrying between his classes. Always nervous. And he always had his violin wherever he went. Even when the police came and they pushed us from our beds. We didn't have our shirts or our shoes but Lev was carrying his violin. I was worried my papa would be angry with me for leaving mine behind. So when they closed the doors on the train, and it was completely dark, I stole it right from his hand. At first he was yelling so loud I thought I should give it back right away. But it was dark so no one could see and to my surprise the instructors didn't care. They only cared because he was screaming so loud. *Give me my violin!* Everyone was whispering, *quiet. Shut him up,* they said. *The Germans will come.* I wanted to give him the violin back but I was afraid the instructors would be angry with me. *I demand my violin! Give me my violin!* He was possessed with a courage I never had inside of me. All the men on the train gathered around him. They begged him to be quiet. But still he screamed. He shook the train. *We'll all be killed,* someone told him. *Then give me my violin!* Someone smacked him to the ground. He burst up fighting like a man. *Give me my violin!* It took all the men on the train to hold him down. *Make him shut up,* they said. *Make him shut up!*

(Pause.)

When they opened the doors I tried to find Lev but we were pushed off the train in a rush. They moved us as if we were being chased. When we arrived in the holding area I approached one of my instructors. I said where is Lev? I found his violin. You should never know the way he looked at me in this moment. I asked him where I should go? What I should do with myself. He told me I should hide myself away from the world and hope they never discover what I've done.

(Silence.)

JOSEPH

You were nine years old. You were in the middle of a war. A child at that age, in that circumstance, can't be accountable for his actions.

LEO

There was other children in this war. They didn't do what I did.

BELLA

You call for him in your sleep.

JOSEPH

Maybe this is a good thing. Maybe you need to get it out of you?

LEO

I don't want it out of me. It should stay where it is.

JOSEPH

But you're not the bad guy. The Germans, the Nazi's, they're the bad guys. The Hungarian police, your instructors on the train, Eichmann, he's the bad guy. Not you.

(Leo smacks his son on the head. He grabs him with one hand and continues to smack him with the other. Bella tries to stop the subsequent hits but Leo is a force of strength.)

LEO

I **am** the bad guy! It's inside of me! There's nothing special about me. Lev was special. Joseph Reitman was special. I took his name and gave it to you. I stole it from him. That's what kind of man I am. A thief. A professional thief. I wasn't teaching violin lessons after the war. Who would pay me for this? I was a thief. I was robbing people of their wallets and watches. That's what I was. That's what kind of man I am. I'm not special! You must remove it from your head!

(Slaps Joey's head)

There's nothing special about me. And there's nothing special about you!

BELLA

Leo.

LEO

You think if you went to New York your life would be different? You, who was terrified to speak in his class? What do you think would happen in a city like that? Men like me would murder you. They would take everything from you. The only reason you survived this long is because you live in your room and you have nothing of value.

BELLA

Enough.

(Bella tries to break them apart. Leo's too strong. He pushes her back and stays on Joseph.)

LEO

I didn't come to America with Joseph Reitman. I beat this man in the street. I beat him until he shit himself. This is how I broke my hand. I took his wallet. Inside there was a ticket to New York. You want to call me special again?

BELLA

I said enough.

(Bella finally breaks them apart. Or Leo allows her to break them apart.)

LEO

There's nothing special about us!

BELLA

(At Leo)

Leo. Back off.

LEO

(To Joseph)

You want to say something else to me?

BELLA

(To Leo)

What's the matter with you?

LEO

I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM!

(She waits long enough for him to start feeling embarrassed. Then,)

BELLA

I've been sleeping next to you for thirty years. I know exactly who you are.

(A knock at the door. All three go silent. Another knock.)

(Bella gestures to Joseph. Something that indicates "let him handle this.")

(Another knock. Leo moves toward the door. He stares at it. Another knock. Maybe we hear voices outside the door. Confusion. Walking around. Another knock. Maybe knocking on a neighbor's door. Then silence.)

(Leo waits a long time before allowing himself to return. Maybe he sits. Maybe he's afraid to even do that.)

(The shadow boys remain. Listening. Watching. Leo notices them. More shadow people file in behind. More than we've seen before. They continue coming as the lights fade out.)

SCENE SIX – SPRING 2007, NEW HAVEN CT

*(Leo's nightmare. Leo, age 72, lies next to Bella, age 60. Neither sleeps well. Leo tosses and turns until he wakes himself up. He climbs out of bed gently to not wake his wife. He fixes himself a drink. He stares at the front door while he drinks. Out of curiosity he opens the door. Nothing. He closes the door. He nearly returns to bed before convincing himself to look once more. He opens the door. This time he finds an **8-year-old child wearing a fake beard**. The actress playing HANNAH should assume this role.)*

LEO

Hello Lev.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

Come in. You want some vodka?

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

(Leo steps aside so the bearded child can enter the room. He takes one last look into the hall then closes the door.)

LEO

We must talk softly so as not to wake my wife. This is my requirement. You understand?

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

I have some crackers. You may have some tea if you like.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

On the shelf over there. You may take it with you when you go.

BEARDED CHILD

I demand my violin.

LEO

You will demand nothing of me.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

You don't want something to drink?

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

On the shelf.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

Take it!

(Looks to see if he's woken his wife)

My wife does not sleep well. You must not wake her.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

What do you want me to do? You want to bend the rules of the universe? You want me to go back in time.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

How? How can I do it?

BELLA

(In her sleep)

Leo.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

You've disrupted my wife.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

BELLA

(In the midst of a nightmare)

Leo.

LEO

(going to her)

Shh. All is well.

BEARDED CHILD

(following him)

Give me my violin.

LEO

Stay back.

BELLA

(With growing urgency)

Leo.

BEARDED CHILD

Give me my violin.

LEO

Sleep, Bella. You must sleep.

BEARDED CHILD

(Moving toward Bella)

Give me my violin.

LEO

(Violent)

Stay away from her.

BELLA

Leo.

BEARDED CHILD

I demand my violin!

(Leo chases the bearded child who escapes into Joseph's room)

LEO

No, you must stay out of there.

(When Leo opens the door he sees Joseph hanging by his neck and shuts it quickly.)

BELLA

Leo.

(Leo opens the bedroom door once more. Empty. He closes the door.)

BELLA

Leo.

(Leo opens the door once more. Leo's first wife is in the doorway nursing a baby. This should be played by the actor playing Hannah.)

BELLA

Leo.

LEO

Hannah. Is this my child?

BELLA

Leo.

(A knock at the front door.)

LEO

You must be tired. Please let me take the baby from you.

(The knock continues. Louder. Harder.)

BELLA

Leo.

LEO

Please Hannah you've been with this child for so long.

*(The **first wife** refuses to give the baby.)*

BELLA

Leo!

LEO

(Turning to Bella)

I'm here Bella. You must sleep.

*(**The first wife** slams the bedroom door. The pounding on the front door continues. **Leo** opens the bedroom door. Nothing. He shuts the door. The shadow boys appear along the walls and play their instruments.)*

LEO

(Addressing the shadows)

Not tonight I beg you. My wife must be allowed to sleep.

BELLA

Leo.

LEO

She needs to rest.

*(The pounding on the front door continues. **Leo** is torn. He wants to check the bedroom once more. He wants to attend his wife. He wants to open the front door. He chooses the front door. **Bella** screams as she did when she found Joseph hanging in his room. **Hannah**, age 9, and **Joseph**, age 16, run in with their schoolbags as they did in scene two.)*

LEO

You must stop screaming, Bella. You'll wake the neighbors.

JOSEPH

Why are you following me?

HANNAH

Why are *you* following *me*?

(Joseph attempts to drop his bag in the bedroom. Hannah follows him. Leo stops them.)

LEO

No Joey you must never go in there. You must never go in there.

JOSEPH

Papa!

HANNAH

(Repeating)

Papa!

JOSEPH

(Scolding her)

Don't do that!

HANNAH

Don't do that!

LEO

Joey, you must listen to me. There's something I should tell you.

JOSEPH

(To Hannah)

Why are you bothering me?

HANNAH

Why are you bothering *me*?

JOSEPH

How about I shove your head in the toilet?

HANNAH

How about I shove *your* head in the toilet?

LEO

No, Joey you must not worry about her. You must not worry about these things and I've forgotten what I should tell you.

JOSEPH

(To Leo)

She won't leave me alone.

HANNAH

(To Leo)

He won't leave *me* alone.

LEO

You must let me think.

JOSEPH

She was waiting for me outside the school!

HANNAH

He was waiting for *me* outside the school.

LEO

Bella stop crying so I may focus my thoughts.

JOSEPH

Why would I go to your school?

HANNAH

Why would I go to *your* school?

LEO

He's here, Bella. Can't you see that he's here with us?

JOSEPH

Because you're crazy.

HANNAH

No, because *you're* crazy.

JOSEPH

Papa!

HANNAH

Papa!

LEO

Stop it! Stop it all of you I must think!

(Black out.)

LEO (CONT.)

(Pause)

Bella? Joey?

*(The apartment lights come on. **Bella** is standing by the switch. **Leo** is shivering.)*

LEO

He was here Bella. But I couldn't remember what I should say to him.

*(End scene.)***SCENE SEVEN – SUMMER 2018, NEW HAVEN CT.***(**Bella**, age 71, is watching television. **Leo** age 82 is tuning his violin. The shadow boy stares at him.)*

LEO

Bella?

BELLA

What Leo?

LEO

When I was a child, my house was always full of people coming and going. My papa was always sitting for coffee with his friends. Family was always coming for meals, people from the village was always stopping in to say hello. They all loved my papa. They all wanted to be around him. They wanted to sing with him and dance with him. Every Friday our house was full for shabbos. Everyone wanted to know him. Bella?

BELLA

What Leo?

LEO

I wish you had known him. I wish I could've shared him with you and Joey.

(Bella is still at the mention of Joey. Leo returns to his violin. Eventually Bella turns the television off and opens the couch for sleeping. She prepares it as a bed and goes to the bathroom to wash up for the evening. A knock at the door. Leo waits for Bella to acknowledge that she heard it as well. Another knock. Bella returns from the bathroom.)

BELLA

Are you expecting someone?

(Bella opens the door to find Lilah Gellman, a young woman, age 24. She is careful and sensitive in her approach to the Tellers. This role should be assumed by the actress playing Hannah. She carries a small box and wears a backpack.)

LILAH

Mrs. Teller?

BELLA

Yes?

LILAH

My name's Lilah Gellman. I think your husband may have known my grandfather. I'm sorry to arrive so late. My train was delayed. I'd hoped to arrive much earlier.

LEO

What's going on?

LILAH

Mr. Teller?

LEO

Yes? What can I help you with?

LILAH

I apologize for not calling first. I don't mean to be a bother.

BELLA

How did you find this address?

LILAH

(Pulling a diary from her bag, flipping through, looking for the answer)

I think maybe someone Mr. Teller went to school with.

LEO

What do you mean?

LILAH

This really isn't like me at all. I never do anything spontaneous. My mother once told me I was the most boring person she ever met. I didn't take it as an insult I thought it was accurate. I don't know why I'm telling you that. You seem like nice people and I'm nervous. I'm very nervous. May I come in?

(Bella doesn't move)

I didn't even plan out what I would say to you. I should have. Now I'm wasting your time. I'm usually very organized. I'm a librarian. I'm paid to be organized. I should've thought this through from the beginning. I woke up this morning and took the first train to New Haven.

LEO

Why?

LILAH

(observing the violin in his hand)

You're a violinist. My grandfather was a violin instructor in Budapest.

LEO

What was his name?

LILAH

Thomas Gellman. He died seventeen years ago. The only conversation I ever had with him was about a young boy named Leo Teller. I think you may have been one of my grandfather's students.

LEO

I don't recall this name.

LILAH

In his diary it says that you studied the violin in Budapest when you were nine years old. Is it possible you just don't remember working with my grandfather?

LEO

(Pause)

No, it's not possible.

LILAH

(of the violin)

Is that...? Mr. Teller, may I ask where you got that violin?

LEO

(uncomfortable)

This violin? I....

BELLA

It was a gift from his father.

LEO

Yes. It was a gift.

LILAH

But you did attend a music school in Budapest?

LEO

No. My family moved to America when I was young. I never went to school in Budapest.

LILAH

But the diary says...

BELLA

It must've been somebody else.

LILAH

(pause)

Now I feel terrible.

BELLA

It's very late...

LEO

What else do you know about your grandfather?

LILAH

I only know that he drank, barely worked, and stole money from my parents. I have one memory of him. I was in the third grade and it was Yom Kippur. We were at the synagogue, the only time my father ever let me near him, he was sitting by himself, he was praying. I asked him what he was praying for. He said, Leo Teller, a nine-year-old boy who had stolen a violin.

(pause)

Mr. Teller how old are you?

LEO

Eighty-two.

LILAH

That would make you nine years old in 1945.

BELLA

It's a coincidence.

LILAH

But what are the chances? I know it's not a pleasant memory. Is it possible that you were the boy who stole the violin?

BELLA

No, it's not possible. I'm sorry you've wasted a trip.

LILAH

I'm not trying to cause trouble. My father died this week. I found this box in his house. It was my grandfather's box and it had your name on it.

BELLA

(moving her out of the apartment)

It's not the same person. You should hurry to the station so you don't miss the last train.

LILAH

(pushing through her)

The boy who stole the violin felt guilty and ran away in the middle of the night. My grandfather was only nineteen years old himself. I think he spent his whole life looking for you.

BELLA

Excuse me. I did not invite you in.

LILAH

Mr. Teller, when I read my grandfather's diary, and the part about you, I thought I should get here as fast as possible. I didn't want you to go another day without knowing the truth.

LEO

The truth about what?

LILAH

The boy who owned the violin lived. They found him in the morning.

(Beat)

As my grandfather got older he was afraid he wouldn't find you, if you were alive at all. He reached out to the other instructors and students that knew you as a child. None of them had contact with you but they all responded.

(From the box, withdraws a bundle of letters held by a rubber band.)

All your former classmates, your teachers, the ones that were alive, they all wrote back. They sent pictures of their families, and addresses, and phone numbers. I didn't know any of this. It was given to my dad when my grandfather died.

LEO

(pause)

It could not have been me.

LILAH

But Mr. Teller, don't you want to at least look?

BELLA

He doesn't.

LILAH

These people all cared about you. They wanted you to...

BELLA

It wasn't him. He's telling you he didn't know your grandfather. You have to accept that. Now please leave.

LILAH

But Mr. Teller...

BELLA

Please leave.

LILAH

(pause)

I'm sorry I bothered you.

(Lilah exits.)

(Leo stares at the door. He opens the door but she's gone. Her box is on the floor in the hallway. He takes it into the apartment. He sifts through the contents. There's letters and photos and diaries. He opens them. He touches them. He reads them. Bella watches. Maybe she gives him some space. Maybe she goes to him. The shadow boy is gone.)

End of play.