

A Live Dress

A play in two acts

By

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The Time

New York City 1923.

The Place

An apartment in the lower east side, a Yiddish theater, an English theater, a jail, State Street, a bar on State Street.

The Characters

Grandmother: The only place she feels at home is at the theater.

Sabina: 16 years old. Actress, performer. Enjoys secrets and does not like following rules.

Emma: 16 years old. Actress. Very ambitious. Desperately wants to be famous, mysterious and save the world.

Shloyme: 18 years old. Newspaper boy. Likes betting, lying, and hiding things.

Rudolph: 30 years old. An actor. Everything is a performance.

Louise: 25 years old. Dressmaker and costumer. She sees through everyone and everything.

Ivan: 30. He witnesses the spiritual inner-workings of the universe and sometimes understands them.

2 voices of spirits. They might be recorded or might be played by the actors playing Shloyme, Rudolph or Ivan.

Ivan and Shloyme might be double cast.

In Act 1 Scene 5, Emma and Sabina go to see the play *God of Vengeance* by Sholem Asch (*Goṭ fun neḳomeh* / Sholem Ash. *Varsha* : Tsentral, 1913). The text used from that piece here is my own free adaptation of the translation by Joseph C. Landis (Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1986). In Act 1 Scenes 7 & 14 Grandmother is watching the play *The Dybbuk* by S. Anski (*Tsvishn tsvey veltn (Der dibek): a dramatishe legende in fir akin* / Sh. An-ski. Dramen, Gezamlte shrift: Vilna-Warsaw-New York, 1920-1925, vol. 2, pp1-105). The text used from that piece here is my own free adaptation of the translation by Joseph C. Landis (Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1986).

SCENE 1

New York City 1923. An apartment in the lower east side. It is small and claustrophobic with too many old things. The wallpaper is peeling. There are probably mice.

GRANDMOTHER is onstage.
She wears her wedding dress.

GRANDMOTHER

You see this? This is a dead dress.

There's no smell in the armpits, for instance.
No rips in the usual places.
The skirt wouldn't rustle
even if there was a breeze.

Bad things can happen if a dress doesn't get worn.
It might become a rag, for instance, or a curtain.
Do you know what happens if you get married in a
dress that hasn't been worn in 200 years?
A dead dress?

My aunt Esther got married in a dead dress. Everyone
knew how dead it was. And it was bad luck. Her
husband turned out to be as stupid as a horse.

My granddaughter doesn't understand how a dress
could die. She's always putting on brand new
American dresses.

That's dangerous too.

Dresses with no dust are empty dresses. They have that
new, empty dress smell. It's dangerous to wear them
out. Fatal to get married in them.

She leans in closer or shifts her eye contact.
Now she's getting to the real business.

I'm keeping this dress alive for my granddaughter. It
was my wedding dress that my mother dressed me in on
my wedding day, and hers before that and her mother's
before that. I'm going to wear it every day from 2-4
PM. Even if I'm just sitting in the apartment. Dresses
have to collect smells and dirt to stay alive. I'm going
to keep wearing this dress. Just in case.

SCENE 2

A Yiddish theater. EMMA and SABINA perform their weekly comedy routine that is a prelude to a longer show. GRANDMOTHER is in the audience. This time they're really on. The audience is packed.

EMMA is dressed like a girl. SABINA is dressed like a boy. EMMA begins to stroll as though she is walking down the street. SABINA follows her, she tugs on the back of her skirt. EMMA turns around.

EMMA

Excuse me?

SABINA

What a lovely face you've got, miss! What's your name?

EMMA

Have you been following me?

SABINA

No ma-am, no I haven't! But I must say your eyes are as blue as the ocean!

EMMA

I say! Do you always talk to strangers like that?

SABINA

Yes but never ones as beautiful as you!

Lights shift. EMMA and SABINA quickly undress and exchange clothes. Lights come back up again. Now SABINA is a girl and EMMA is a boy. EMMA presents SABINA with a bouquet of roses.

SABINA

Really! A whole bouquet of roses just for me! Why, how kind!

EMMA

I couldn't help it. Their bright color reminded me of your rosy cheeks and I just had to.

SABINA

Stop flattering me so, you'll make my cheeks even redder!

EMMA leans forward and kisses SABINA on the cheek. We hear the audience laugh. EMMA looks the other way quickly, SABINA leans over and kisses her

on the cheek and then looks away quickly. The audience laughs harder this time.

Lights shift. They quickly undress and trade clothes. They help each other.

Lights up again. EMMA and SABINA are both dressed as girls.

EMMA

The matchmaker told me she'd found a fine husband for me.

SABINA

Me too.

EMMA

She told me to meet him right here.

SABINA

Same for me.

Beat.

EMMA

Well goodness! Do you think she matched up two girls by mistake?

GRANDMOTHER laughs and claps ecstatically.
Lights down.

SCENE 3

The street. SHLOYME enters carrying a heap of newspapers. He drops them on the ground and collapses on top of them. He falls asleep. SABINA enters. She kicks him awake.

SHLOYME

Aw dammit why'd you do that, I was dreaming of Rachel undressing.

SABINA

You owe me a week's worth of free papers.

SHLOYME

Sure I agreed to that?

SABINA

I got proof. You signed.

She shows him a document.

SHLOYME

Alright. Alright. Take your papers. You hear that show at the Apollo is getting shut down? Tomorrow night. Today's the last show.

SABINA

What? Getting shut down by who?

SHLOYME

By the police.

SABINA

Can't be.

SHLOYME

Hey, I ever been wrong, before? I'll betcha two cigarettes it gets shut down. Better hurry out there if you want to see it one last time. Two gorgeous whores neckin' right onstage-

SABINA

Who'd you hear from?

SHLOYME

Can't say.

She turns around.

AND there's five more dresses hanging in the air down on State street.

She stops.

SABINA

Five more?

SHLOYME

Been one or two every day whole last month.

SABINA

Can't be. It's not even in the papers.

SHLOYME

News don't report it. Not worth it to them.

SABINA

What'd they look like?

SHLOYME

One of them was green and white striped.

SABINA

Who's was that?

SHLOYME

How should I know?

Watch your back down there.

SABINA

Where?

SHLOYME

On State street below tenth.

SABINA

I know.

SHLOYME

You got a good scar on your shoulder though. They say that helps.

SABINA

Helps with what?

SHLOYME

Helps you stay safe down there.

SABINA

What are you talking about?

SHLOYME

I know girls who went down there and stayed safe
because they had a good scar.

SCENE 4

The apartment. SABINA and GRANDMOTHER. GRANDMOTHER wears the wedding dress.

SABINA

That dress doesn't fit you.

GRANDMOTHER

I'm keeping it alive for you.

SABINA

It's hideous.

GRANDMOTHER

It's hideous now but I'll make it attractive by wearing it.

SABINA

You sure won't make *you* attractive by wearing it.

GRANDMOTHER

I'm keeping it alive for you. Just in case. I promised your mother on her deathbed...

SABINA

Stop.

GRANDMOTHER

I didn't promise her you would get married...but I did promise her you'd always be well dressed.

I'd hate to show her what you wear these days. Did we come all the way to New York so you could run around in torn up sundresses? What, you didn't get your fill of bad fashion in the old country?

SABINA

Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER

So. I'm keeping the dress alive for you.

SABINA

Did you hear what happened? Five more dresses hanging in the air on State Street.

GRANDMOTHER

Five more dresses?

SABINA

The same way its been happening all year. A girl disappears during the night and in the morning her dress is hanging above State Street.

GRANDMOTHER

It's dangerous to wear a dead dress.

SABINA

That's not why it happens.

GRANDMOTHER

Trust me. I know from dead dresses.

SABINA

Now it's happened to almost 30 girls in the last month but it's not in the news.

GRANDMOTHER

It's what I've always been telling you. Look smart. Don't wear a dead dress.

Beat.

Well, are you ready to go to the theater?

SABINA

I'm not going today.

GRANDMOTHER

You're abandoning me.

SABINA

I have to go see another play instead.

GRANDMOTHER

You're disgracing me. Only widows walk into that theater alone. How could you do this to your grandmother? I never abandoned you anywhere, Sabina. When you got lost on the beach I searched for you for hours.

SABINA

Just wear your dark brown scarf and slip in behind the lighting booth, no one will notice. They'll think you've stayed home with a cold.

GRANDMOTHER

Can't you go see this other play tomorrow?

SABINA

It's going to get shut down tomorrow. By the police.

GRANDMOTHER

What kind of play gets shut down by the police?

SABINA

It's getting shut down for obscenity.

GRANDMOTHER

Well. Why don't you invite me to see this obscene play with you?

SABINA

It's in English. You wouldn't understand it. And anyways its uptown on 42nd street, it's too far for you with your bad leg. Plus we have to sneak in by climbing up the fire escape.

GRANDMOTHER

English will make your brain dry out. Those plays in English are duller than watching the wallpaper for two hours.

SABINA

That's because you don't speak English.

GRANDMOTHER

No, it's because goys have no stage presence or sense of humor.

SABINA

Well this play isn't Goyish. It came from our theater.

GRANDMOTHER

They're putting on one of our plays in English and calling it obscene?

SABINA

Yes.

GRANDMOTHER

You know the English theater is no place for you. It's full of dull goys in dead dresses. I hope you don't become a rock sitting there.

My grandfather became a rock at the theater, did I tell you?

SCENE 5

A secluded corner of a balcony at the Apollo Theatre. Fancy. Warm. Lots of red velvet. It smells of old women's perfume. EMMA and SABINA have snuck into the play.

EMMA

I'd take off her dress first.

SABINA

I'd start with her shoes. Then stockings. Work my way up.

EMMA

This scene is the best. When it starts to rain.

SABINA

Nah. The light makes her hair look like a soggy blintz.

EMMA

Shh. It's getting to the best part.

We hear the sounds of wind and rain.

MANKE (VOICE OVER)

Your hair smells like the spring rain. Like grass in the meadow. Could I fix your hair like a bride? With two long braids?

RIVKELE (VOICE OVER)

Oh, please!

MANKE (VOICE OVER)

You'll be the bride, at the Sabbath table with your family, a young beautiful bride, and I'll be your lover, soon to be your husband, come to visit you!

SABINA leans closer to EMMA. EMMA slowly leans closer to SABINA.

EMMA

Did you hear what happened?

SABINA

With the dresses?

EMMA

One of them was Bessie Steinman who used to live next door.

SABINA

Really? Bessie?

EMMA

Uh huh. She went missing and her mother said it was definitely her green striped dress on State and 2nd street. I saw it myself.

SABINA

You went down there?

EMMA

Of course, I wanted to see. Don't tell anyone.

Beat.

Listen to the audience, they're so quiet.

SABINA

Mmm. That's because they're Goyish.

I wish we could do this play at your brother's theater.

EMMA

You mean, with us acting those parts?

SABINA

Of course. Wouldn't it be so great to do that onstage?

EMMA

Do what onstage?

SABINA

What...they do...you know? In the rain?

EMMA

You mean get all romantic?

SABINA nods.

EMMA

We do that. In every comedy act.

SABINA

But it's not like that. One of us is always dressed like a boy.

Beat.

Wouldn't it be great to do it...like they do?

EMMA

What do you mean? Wearing those nice dresses?

I love that blue one.

EMMA gazes at the blue dress. SABINA is about to say something. It is something she has wanted to say for a long time.

SABINA

Emma-

EMMA

We couldn't do what they're doing. We'd get in such bad trouble! Just think what's already happened to them. Everyone says they're going to get shut down by the police.

Beat.

SABINA

Emma?

Beat.

EMMA

What?

SABINA

Nothing.

They're getting shut down because they're doing it in a big theater. We'd do it downtown at your brother's theater. For...people like us.

Beat.

And anyways, like you just said, it's basically what we do all the time. All we do is love stories.

EMMA

But one of us is always dressed like a boy.

Beat.

SABINA

Everyone knows we're both girls.

Beat.

EMMA

Sabina. I have to tell you something. It's the most important secret I've ever had to tell anyone. Do you want to hear it?

SABINA

How'd you get such an important secret?

EMMA

You promise not to tell anyone?

SABINA

Maybe if I can borrow your blue stockings for a week-

EMMA

Sabina.

SABINA

Fine.

Beat.

EMMA

Fingl asked me to marry him.

Beat.

SABINA

Fingl? Old Fingl with the white hair who smokes those disgusting cigars?

EMMA

Yes. And I want to marry him. I think I'm in love.

SABINA

You're not!

EMMA

No, I really think I am.

SABINA

Emma.

You are not in love with Fingl.

EMMA

I know I am.

SABINA

Fingl is *old*. He was married once already, and Emma you're too young to get married. He smokes disgusting cigars and once I even saw him with a prostitute. A woman dressed like that.

She points to the stage.

EMMA

So? What's wrong with them? Didn't you just say you wanted to wear one of those dresses? You wanted to undress that girl....starting with the shoes?

SABINA

But I still wouldn't marry a man who slept with prostitutes!

EMMA

Shh. Please don't say that. I'm going to marry him. And I'm going to start acting with him.

SABINA

What about our comedy act?

Beat.

I thought we would keep doing it together...at least for another few years...I thought you liked it.

EMMA

Sabina. I told you. I'm in love with him.

SABINA

Emma. This is a joke. Anyways, you've been in love with Reuben since the first grade. And seriously, you're sixteen, you want to be a widow with a wig at twenty?

EMMA

Who's saying I would wear a wig?

SABINA

All widows wear wigs.

EMMA

Look Sabina, I like our comedy act but I don't want to do it forever.

SABINA

What does that mean?

EMMA

It means...I don't know, I want to really act someday, and I might get to if I marry Fingl, if I start acting with him. I want to act in a theater like this one, where the people sit quietly and listen and it's real serious drama and...it's in English...you know?

SABINA

What, your brother's theater isn't good enough?

EMMA

You know how it is, it's so noisy and distracting. And we don't do real plays there.

Long Beat.

SABINA looks away.

EMMA

You won't tell anyone?

SABINA watches the play intently.

Please?

MANKE (VOICEOVER)

Rivkele. Run away with me! We could spend all our time together, from morning til night! Just the two of us! Would you like that?

RIVKELE (VOICEOVER)

My father wouldn't know?

MANKE (VOICEOVER)

No. We'll leave tonight. Can't you hear your father snoring? He sleeps so deeply, he'll never wake.

EMMA

Sabina? I need to go...the ushers will start patrolling soon, if we leave now we can get out the stage door before they see that we were here.

SABINA

We can wait until the very end like last time, remember? Till after the actors leave and everyone's gone.

EMMA

I have to be home to help my mother, it's Shabbes...don't you have to go home to your Grandmother?

Beat.

EMMA

I'm sorry Sabina.

She exits. Sabina does not take her eyes off the stage.

SCENE 6

The Apollo Theater. Backstage. RUDOLPH is very upset. He has just finished crying. He hopes no one has heard him. He is wearing a dressing gown. It occurs to him that he might as well get a head start on cleaning out the space. He opens a drawer. He unloads piles of jewelry and makeup. He looks for a box to put it in. SABINA enters.

SABINA

Hello?

RUDOLPH

I know you're lying and I'll piss on you if you say one more word!

SABINA is frozen.

RUDOLPH

Tell Boris I'd like to make his balls melt off.

SABINA

Excuse me?

Beat.

I just came to tell you how much I liked the play.

RUDOLPH

Who are you?

SABINA

My name is Sabina Weinblatt. I just watched this afternoon's performance.

RUDOLPH

Oh. Thank you. I'm glad you liked it.

SABINA

Is everything alright?

RUDOLPH

What?

SABINA

You look upset.

RUDOLPH

Didn't you just see me have a tantrum onstage? I was sobbing. One's makeup is always smeared after a tantrum onstage.

SABINA

It's very convincing. Are you sure there's not something wrong?

RUDOLPH

I'm an actor, I have to get into it, after all.

Beat.

SABINA

What are you doing with all those things?

RUDOLPH

Vacating. We're being shut down.

SABINA

I heard.

RUDOLPH

Who did you hear from?

SABINA

I don't know. I can't remember.

RUDOLPH

It's very important! Who did you hear from?

SABINA

Shloyme who sells the English newspapers.

RUDOLPH

Shloyme. I don't know a Shloyme. Who's spreading these rumors?

SABINA

Are you from Vienna? Your accent sounds like you're from Vienna.

RUDOLPH

He stops.

I'm from outside of Vienna.

SABINA

I grew up on Alser Street.

RUDOLPH

I used to live on Floriani Square!

SABINA

That's not far! Only a few blocks...

RUDOLPH

What's your last name?

SABINA

Weinblatt. Yours?

RUDOLPH

Schildkraut- I knew Weinblatt's! Perla, Golde...

SABINA

Perla! My grandmother's name is Perla!

RUDOLPH

Your grandmother! I think I knew her! She wore fancy dresses? Has reddish hair?

SABINA

Well, when she was younger maybe. Her hair's been gray my whole life.

RUDOLPH

Did she have a twin sister named Golde?

SABINA

No.

RUDOLPH

Oh.

Beat.

SABINA

We're not from Vienna originally, anyway.

RUDOLPH

Me neither.

He turns around and continues to pack up boxes.

SABINA

What are you packing?

RUDOLPH

Our props and makeup. Our most important possessions. We don't have anywhere else to keep them.

He is trying to shove a pile of things into a small box. After a moment

Can you help me? We need to empty those drawers as well, over there when you're done.

SABINA

Why are you in such a hurry?

RUDOLPH

The police might come any minute.

SABINA

Where will you take these things?

RUDOLPH

Don't know. There aren't really very many options- I'm about to get kicked out of my apartment. What time is it? Already five o'clock? Hurry up with those.

SABINA

I don't think they'll come today.

RUDOLPH

Anything's possible. We need to get it all out just in case. These are very important instruments. Good, that's the last of it. Can you take this box somewhere?

SABINA

Me?

RUDOLPH

Just this box? It's too much for me to carry and we need to protect it, just take care of it for tonight, we can find each other again tomorrow.

SABINA

Where will we find each other tomorrow?

RUDOLPH

In the alley behind the Thalia Theater at 3 PM, I'll pick it up from you.

Can you do that?

SABINA

I suppose.

RUDOLPH

Good, you can ask me tomorrow. I'll see you then.

He exits quickly. SABINA stands holding the box.

SCENE 7

GRANDMOTHER at the theater. A Yiddish Theater. She sits. We don't see the performers. We only hear them.

KHONNEN (VOICEOVER)

I want to search the earth for the most beautiful gem!
I want to find it and then sit weeping for centuries 'til I
dissolve it in my tears.
I want to absorb my soul in this ocean.

I must remember to find two barrels of gold coins.
For the one who can only count coins.

HENEKH (VOICEOVER)

You frighten me, Khonnen. I'm afraid you won't get
what you want through holy means.

GRANDMOTHER

Usually Sabina would be sitting next to me, right here.
But not today.

She'll learn. Those goys only tell burnt-out stories.
They tell the same ones over and over again and forget
they've heard them before.

Our stories make your arm hairs prickle.

The stories from my village are particularly good.
Because my village was full of fools. It was an
accident. We weren't supposed to have so many fools.
We got more than our allotted dose.

You want to hear the story? When god created the
heavens and the universe he sent all the angels out to go
fly around and drop souls into all the villages. There
was one angel responsible for dropping a fool or two
into each village. Well, when he got to our village, he
got caught on a tree branch and spilled a whole bucket
of fools out in one place. So we were a village of fools.

And because we were fools we made very good theater.

Here is the thing about fools:
We are foolish but we are honest. We tell the truth.
We see the reality of every situation,
and we are foolish enough
to laugh at it.

SCENE 8

The apartment. SABINA and her GRANDMOTHER are onstage. The box is on the ground between them.

GRANDMOTHER

No one cares what sewer rats do, so long as they stay down in the sewer while they do it.

Beat.

That's what the New York Times said about that play you saw.

SABINA

You can't read English.

GRANDMOTHER

Freyde translated for me. See for yourself.

She passes the newspaper to SABINA.

The English theater is no place for us.

SABINA

Tell me something new.

GRANDMOTHER

They shut it down. The whole cast was arrested. What's that box?

SABINA

It's nothing.

GRANDMOTHER

Not only does she go to the English theater but she brings home their detritus!

SABINA

Can't be any worse than what you've got stored up in this apartment.

GRANDMOTHER

You know, there are lots of reasons why someone would want to get rid of a box. It might be filled with something no one wants in their life.

SABINA

It's just a box.

GRANDMOTHER

What does it feel like? Is it heavy?

She lifts it up. What if her grandmother knows something?

SABINA

It's light for its size.

GRANDMOTHER

There are lots of reasons someone might want to get rid of a box.

SABINA

If you're so afraid, why don't you open it up?

GRANDMOTHER

You open it up.

There is a knock at the door. They look at each other for a moment. SABINA answers. It's EMMA.

EMMA

Hello?

GRANDMOTHER

Hello! Good Shabbes.

EMMA

Where did that box come from?

GRANDMOTHER

Sabina took it from some stranger-

SABINA

Grandmother it's time for your bath.

It's not.

GRANDMOTHER

Whatever you say, Sabina. Good night Emma.

EMMA

Goodnight.

GRANDMOTHER exits.

I was coming to see if I could borrow back that blue dress of mine.

SABINA

Sure. Take all your dresses. I don't want them.

EMMA

You can keep borrowing the rest of them, I just want that blue one.

SABINA

Take them all. You can take all your old dolls too, they're over there in the bottom drawer of the dresser....Ugh, what's that awful stench of cigars? Do people smell you on the street and run away?

EMMA

Alright, Sabina. I just want to take the dress and go.

SABINA

When's the wedding going to be? Will it be big? Oh, wait, I forgot, Fingl doesn't have any family.

EMMA

Where's my dress?

SABINA

Here.

EMMA goes to take the dress. She stops in front of the box.

EMMA

What's in this box?

It's the box from the theater.

SABINA

I don't know, it's not mine.

EMMA opens the box.

SABINA

Emma! It's not mine.

EMMA

It's dress up clothes. But really nice dress up clothes.

SABINA

Emma don't go through that box, I'm just taking care of it for someone!

EMMA

Oh! Look at this dress.

Oh. *This* dress.

This dress is mine.

This was my dress!

Where did this box come from? It has my dress in it!

SABINA

What are you talking about?

EMMA holds up a dress.

EMMA

This dress is my dress. It's my dress from when I was a kid, back at home. My mom made it for me, out of this material that used to be our curtains.

SABINA

I don't think it's your dress.

EMMA

It is my dress. It used to be my favorite dress. Once I wore it to the fair on Purim and we stayed up dancing all night- it looks like it would still fit me!

She picks the dress up and slips it over her head.

It fits.

She sniffs her shoulder.

It smells like our turnip field after the rain. How did you know? This is what I needed! Where did you find it?

SABINA

Someone gave me that box to take care of. But that's not your dress and you can't have it.

EMMA

Who gave you the box? Someone found this dress and brought it over for me.

I thought it was burned in the fire.

SABINA

No one brought it for you. It doesn't even fit you right- its too small around the back.

EMMA

It fits me perfectly- that's just the style. It was always too big before, I couldn't wait to get bigger so that it would fit me. Especially here...

She gestures to her chest.

SABINA

Emma it's not mine to give you.

EMMA

I was supposed to find this dress. I've been thinking about it for years. Who's box was this anyways? What else is in here?

She starts to rummage through the box.

SABINA

Emma, Stop!

EMMA

Oh god Sabina, what's the big deal?

SABINA

Just stop looking through it and take off the dress!

EMMA

No.

Beat.

It's my dress and I'm taking it home.

SABINA

It's not your dress!

EMMA

I need to go now.

SABINA

Take off that dress.

EMMA

No. It's mine. I need to leave now. You can keep borrowing all my dresses, I don't need them.

She goes to get her bag.

SABINA

Emma! Stop!

EMMA
I have to get home.

SABINA
What's going on?

EMMA
Goodbye, Sabina.

SCENE 9

The apartment. The box is there. GRANDMOTHER enters. She sees the box. She approaches it. She opens it.

GRANDMOTHER

Anyone could tell this was more than a box.
You may think that the things around you are solid,
quiet, dead, but they're not. There's spirits in the
smallest pebbles.

She rummages around the box.

Suddenly SABINA enters and she closes the box quickly.

SABINA

Were you looking in the box?

GRANDMOTHER

'Course not.

SABINA

It's not ours to go rummaging through.

GRANDMOTHER

Whose is it then?

SABINA

Who cares? I'm taking it back tomorrow. What's that
in your hand?

GRANDMOTHER

Nothing. Just a skirt.

SABINA

Did you get it from the box?

GRANDMOTHER

Enough already about the box!

SABINA

Put it back. You got it from the box.

GRANDMOTHER

Alright, alright. Sabina, tell me something, do you
think you'll wear this dress someday?

She means the wedding dress.

SABINA

I prefer not to look like the ghost of the Shabbes bride.

GRANDMOTHER

It's very important to me, Sabina. Think of this as a nice thing you're doing for your grandmother.

SABINA

How about I make you some nice kugel instead?

GRANDMOTHER

Soon you'll need it. Trust me.

SABINA

Sure. Next time I'm desperate to dress up in disintegrating tablecloth I'll be knocking on your door.

Beat.

But Grandmother knows she can't afford to wait.

GRANDMOTHER

Sabina.

I won't put this skirt back into the box until you promise you'll wear this dress.

Beat.

Sabina.

SABINA

What do you mean? Wear this dress tomorrow? Wear it on my wedding day that's never going to happen?

GRANDMOTHER

Wear it when I tell you it's alive enough. I first wore it on my wedding day, my mother dressed me in it. But just in case that doesn't happen to you, I want you to promise me you'll wear it when it's alive enough.

Beat.

SABINA

Sure. Fine. I promise.

GRANDMOTHER

Good. Then I can go to sleep.

SABINA

Put the skirt back in the box.

GRANDMOTHER

I know!

She slowly opens the box.
She puts the skirt back inside.
She does not close the box.

SABINA

Close the box.

GRANDMOTHER

Look at all those nice things inside.

SABINA

Close the box!

GRANDMOTHER

Alright, alright.

She closes the box. She moves to her bed.

You need a good live dress here.

SABINA

You're not going to take a bath?

GRANDMOTHER

I can't take off the dress. Not yet.

SABINA

You should really-

GRANDMOTHER

Please Sabina, I know what I'm doing.

SABINA

But it's been three days. You haven't bathed.

GRANDMOTHER

This is far more important than bathing.

SCENE 10

The alley behind the Thalia Theater. SABINA holds the box. She is waiting to meet RUDOLPH. He's already quite late.

SHLOYME enters. He surprises SABINA.

SHLOYME

Two cigarettes. You open the box?

SABINA

What, are you trying to kill me?

SHLOYME

Show got shut down, you owe me two cigarettes. Did ya open the box?

SABINA

Don't owe you anything, I didn't agree to the bet.

SHLOYME

Absolutely did. Two cigarettes now or no more free papers.

SABINA

I could give you a black eye.

SHLOYME

Okay you're right, you didn't agree to the bet. Hey, did you hear? Three more dresses today on State Street.

SABINA

Really? How do you always know?

SHLOYME

I spend time down there.

SABINA

You see the dresses?

SHLOYME

Sure. See the girls wearing 'em too.

SABINA

What do you mean?

SHLOYME

I mean I see the girls wearing their dresses and then later I see the same dresses hanging in the air.

SABINA

So what do you think happens?

SHLOYME

How should I know? Anyway, I actually came here to tell you it's lookin' like you're gonna have to hang on to that box a little longer.

SABINA

What?

SHLOYME

Police came and stuck Rudolph in jail and he says you're gonna have to hang on to that box a longer. If you don't mind.

SABINA

Rudolph said he didn't know you.

SHLOYME

He does, we're old friends. Did you open the box?

SABINA

Why would he say he didn't know you?

SHLOYME

Who knows. I have to go now, just hang on to that box.

SABINA

I opened it.

Beat.

I didn't really look inside.

SHLOYME

Good. Don't. Hang on to it.

SABINA

(suspicious)

I thought it was valuables.

SHLOYME

It is. Kind of.

SABINA

If it's valuables, why's he giving it to me?

SHLOYME

You're reliable.

SABINA

That's a laugh.

SHLOYME

You're the most reliable person he could find.

SABINA

He didn't find me, I found him.

SHLOYME

Listen I really gotta go.

SABINA

So how much longer do I have to keep it for?

SHLOYME

Can't tell you.

SABINA

Where is Rudolph in jail?

SHLOYME

In the courthouse.

SCENE 11

RUDOLPH is in jail.

He sits down in the corner of his cell and faces the wall.

He begins to cry.

He wonders how he could have found himself without a home again in so short a time.

SABINA enters carrying the box. She looks at him. He looks very familiar.

RUDOLPH

Leave me alone! I told you not to disturb me. It might be time for dinner but I'm going on a hunger strike.

SABINA

It's me again.

He looks up suddenly.

RUDOLPH

You're interrupting. I was rehearsing.

SABINA

I'm sorry. I waited for you at the Thalia theater- Shloyme told me where you were. I came to find you.

RUDOLPH

I was rehearsing gloom, and it wasn't simple gloom either, it was a very difficult sort. The sort that requires dust of this exact shade and one to two cobwebs. I've been perfecting the ingredients for this sort of gloom for years. I might be able to evoke something similar but never this exact quality. Not this century.

SABINA

I'm very, very sorry.

RUDOLPH

Why did you come find me here? Were you looking for a clown that you could mock?

SABINA

I was just bringing you your box. And I had a question for you.

RUDOLPH

You might think that performers aren't susceptible to the pain of indignity but you're wrong.

SABINA

Hey listen, I'm a performer myself. Anyways, I just brought the box. I'll leave it and I'll go.

RUDOLPH

Don't! I can't keep it here, they'll take it away!

SABINA

Well what do you want me to do?

RUDOLPH

Can you hang onto it for a little longer?

SABINA

It's getting to be a bother.

RUDOLPH

It's very important. It's the only important thing I have.

SABINA

My apartment has mice.

RUDOLPH

You're my only option.

Beat.

SABINA

I know you. You look like the brother of a girl I knew in Vienna.

RUDOLPH

In Vienna I was a sad clown. Every evening I would emerge with a violinist and we would sit in the street and weep for several hours. Maybe that's where you know me from.

SABINA

No, I don't think I ever saw that.

RUDOLPH

No? Too bad. I ate well in Vienna, people had a taste for it there. We could always attract an audience. In New York you can't make a living with misery.

You have to resort to obscenity instead.

SABINA

You look like my friend's older brother. Did you have a sister?

RUDOLPH

No. I had a brother.

Beat.

He died of too much theater.

SABINA

What?

RUDOLPH

It's true. He spent too many days in the theater and a dybbuk entered his body.

SABINA

A what?

RUDOLPH

A dybbuk. A restless spirit. The spirit of a dead person that comes back to inhabit the body of someone living.

Enter Ivan from another part of the stage.

IVAN

RUDOLPH! RUDOLPH! It's that thing again, come help, bring the heavy blanket.

RUDOLPH approaches him. He carries a heavy blanket.

RUDOLPH

Don't worry. Remember to breathe normally. Stand up so I can wrap you in the blanket.

IVAN stands.

IVAN

That feeling like a swarm of bees in my chest and someone else was using my voice and my eyes. For a moment I was only in my fingernails and even they were growing numb- was I crying, do I look like I was crying? I don't remember crying. Who used my eyes to cry while I was gone?

RUDOLPH

You weren't gone.

IVAN

My cheek is wet, feel, my cheek is wet! Taste it, tell me if it's salt water.

RUDOLPH

Does it matter?

IVAN

Yes! Taste it or I'll jump in the river tomorrow.

Slowly RUDOLPH leans over. He licks IVAN's cheek. IVAN exhales deeply.

RUDOLPH

Salt.

IVAN

Sweat or tears?

RUDOLPH

Tears.

IVAN

Let me taste it.

RUDOLPH

To SABINA

Ivan and I were not brothers in the traditional sense. We didn't have the same parents, for instance. We were a different kind of brothers.

He slips his arm around IVAN. He kisses him deeply.

IVAN

Tears.

RUDOLPH

Tears.

IVAN

I know I cried. But I can't ever remember crying. I haven't cried since I was a baby.

RUDOLPH

It's true. You don't cry often.

IVAN

Someone else was in my body.

RUDOLPH

Shh. Try to go back to sleep.

IVAN exits. RUDOLPH turns to SABINA.

RUDOLPH
But someone else was in his body. It became very messy.

SABINA
What happened to him?

RUDOLPH
He died of it.

SABINA
How?

RUDOLPH
I won't give you details.

SABINA
I wouldn't mind hearing them.

RUDOLPH
I'd rather not.

Beat.

I wouldn't usually tell all this to a stranger, but you're from home.

Beat.

Could you do me a favor, actually?

SABINA hesitates.

SABINA
I don't know.

RUDOLPH
There's a wig in that box. It's a very nice wig. Made with real hair. Can you take it somewhere for me?

SABINA
I don't know.

RUDOLPH
Take it to 127 State Street under the bridge, but only between midnight and 3 AM.

SABINA
State Street's dangerous.

RUDOLPH

You're right. State Street's dangerous. You're thinking of the dresses, right? But if you carry that wig nothing will happen to you. I swear.

SABINA

How do you know?

RUDOLPH

Trust me. Also you have a scar.

Beat.

If you go do it, I'll explain later.

SABINA

If I come back tomorrow? You'll explain?

RUDOLPH

Yes.

SABINA

About your brother? Who got the dybbuk?

RUDOLPH

I suppose.

SABINA

Alright. 127 State Street. Who should I give it to?

RUDOLPH

Ask for Esther. Good. Thank you. Thanks a lot. Can you leave me alone now?

SABINA nods. She exits. Lights shift. IVAN enters again.

IVAN

Rudolph? Did you speak to me yesterday? Did we have a conversation yesterday?

RUDOLPH

You slept all day yesterday.

IVAN

I know I didn't. That someone else was in my body again yesterday and you spoke to it, I know.

RUDOLPH

I didn't.

IVAN

You did. I heard you from my fingertips, which is the only part of my body where I still was. You and that other one on the beach- did you go to the beach yesterday? Did you go to the beach with me when I was not in my body?

RUDOLPH

No, Ivan. There was a performance yesterday. I played Hamlet, you sat in the front row. You fainted during the play within a play and the usher had to carry you out to the lobby.

Beat.

IVAN

That's true. You're not lying. You gave the speech on to be or not to be wearing that silken shirt.

RUDOLPH

See? You remember. C'mon now lets go to sleep.

He puts Ivan to bed as though he's a small child.

SCENE 12

State Street. SABINA walks down it looking for 127. It is dark out, and smells strongly of cigarettes. VOICES call out to her. We don't see them.

VOICE 1

Where's all the girls tonight?

VOICE 2

I heard them down on 7th street.

VOICE 1

Ain't any girls gonna come down this way?

VOICE 2

Look over that way, issat one a them?

VOICE 1

Hey Gorgeous in the white dress, you free?

VOICE 2

Look at that nice tight dress, hey missy where're you going in such a hurry?

VOICE 2 grabs SABINA's arm, she tries to get free. Her dress rips. LOUISE enters.

SABINA

Hey, let go of me!

LOUISE

Hey Charlie get the hell off of her.

SABINA's arm is released.

LOUISE

Sorry he ripped your dress, mind if I take a look?

VOICE 2

Hope you come down this way later, Louise.

LOUISE

Don't talk to me, Charlie.

To SABINA.

Come with me.

They walk away from the VOICES. LOUISE fingers the shoulder of SABINA's dress.

LOUISE

Not too much damage done. I could mend it for you. If you wanted.

SABINA
My grandmother will mend it.

LOUISE
Are you sure? I'm a dressmaker by profession. It would only take me a minute.

SABINA
It's not necessary.

LOUISE
I'd enjoy it. It's a nice dress and I could put some lace down here, a ruffle there- I usually charge 5 dollars for something like this-

SABINA
I can't afford it.

LOUISE
But for you I'd do it for free.

SABINA is suspicious
LOUISE can tell.

LOUISE
Hey. You've got a gorgeous scar on your shoulder.

SABINA quickly adjusts her dress to hide her scar.

LOUISE
What, you ashamed or something? I said it was beautiful. I'd like to see it again.

SABINA
I'm in a hurry. I've got to go.

LOUISE
Hey, where'd you get that box? I know that box.

SABINA
I have to go.

LOUISE
Where you taking it?

SABINA turns away.

Hey, come back with that! That's not your box!

SABINA exits.

SCENE 13

127 State Street. It's a bar. It's empty. SABINA knocks. SHLOYME answers.

SHLOYME

Oh hey. Glad you brought the box.

SABINA

What're you doing here?

SHLOYME

Me? I work here.

SABINA

Well. I'm looking for Esther.

SHLOYME

Esther? That's funny. Come on in.

Beat.

You find Rudolph?

SABINA nods.

SHLOYME

How'd he look?

SABINA

Not so good.

SHLOYME

Yeah, didn't think he'd be in top form.

LOUISE (OFFSTAGE)

Who's there?

She enters.

Oh. We know each other.

Why didn't you tell me you were coming here? We could've walked together.

SABINA

I really gotta get home. I'm looking for Esther.

LOUISE

Esther? Which Esther?

SABINA

I don't know...is there more than one?

LOUISE

We have five Esthers.

SABINA

Oh. I was just told to bring this to Esther.

She pulls out the wig.

SHLOYME

Oh wow, the nicest wig- and I was just in the dressing room looking everywhere and I couldn't find a single one. He's...never let us use this one before.

LOUISE

I still wouldn't use it.

SABINA

Who should I give it to?

SHLOYME

Me, for now.

LOUISE

To SABINA

Someone different plays Esther every night of the week. Tonight it's Shloyme.

SABINA

I'm just doing what Rudolph told me.

LOUISE

Rudolph? Ain't he in jail?

SABINA nods.

So how'd he tell you to do something?

SABINA

I went and found him there.

LOUISE

Hmm. How'd he look?

SABINA

Not well.

LOUISE

Yeah, didn't think so. He owes me ten dollars, the shmuck.

SHLOYME

Well, thanks for the wig. Want to stay and watch the show? I'm going to be Esther tonight. It's a special show because it's just me and Louise. Usually we have Rudolph and some others but tonight it's just us.

SABINA

It's pretty late. I need to get home. Can I leave the box here?

SHLOYME

What's the harm, you snuck out anyways, didn't you?

LOUISE

Look at her, of course she did. Have a drink.

SHLOYME

Don't you want to stay for our nice little Purimspil? I'm playing Esther tonight.

LOUISE

She knows already, she brought you the wig.

SABINA

It's not Purim, it's August. Anyways, can I leave the box here?

LOUISE

It's Purim every night here. And on Purim God commands that you get drunk.

SHLOYME

Louise, can you fasten my dress?

She does. He exits.

LOUISE turns to SABINA

LOUISE

You can leave the box here.

Beat.

You can go home.

Beat.

SABINA realizes she doesn't want to leave the box

It's fine. Go home. Leave the box here.

SABINA

I can...keep it if you want. I don't mind.

LOUISE

Leave it here. This is where it lives. Didn't you just ask twice if you could leave it here?

SABINA

What do you use it for?

LOUISE

It's our costumes.

SABINA

For the purimspiels?

LOUISE

And other stuff.

SABINA

Can I...see what's in the box? I been carrying it around for a long time

LOUISE smiles.

LOUISE

Did you open it?

Beat.

SABINA

No.

LOUISE smiles again. She moves toward the box. She opens it.

Oh good. Here's this vest. I always used to wear it when I played the king. We missed it. And this nightgown. I used to borrow it to sleep in for inspiration.

SABINA

The nightgown was in the play! God of Vengeance. You were in the play!

LOUISE

You saw it?

SABINA

Just before it got shut down. I thought the whole cast got arrested?

LOUISE

We got released. Just Rudolph had to stay.

Beat.

SABINA

Can I...try them on?

LOUISE

No. Only we get to wear the costumes.

Beat.

Someone opened this up, huh? Thought you said you didn't open it.

SABINA

I didn't.

LOUISE

Then who did?

SABINA

No one.

Beat.

My Grandmother.

LOUISE

Aha.

SABINA

She's nosy. It's annoying, she...I don't know what the big deal is. She can't keep to herself. She's from a village of fools.

LOUISE

Village of fools?

SABINA

That's what she says.

LOUISE

Wise fools?

SABINA

What's that mean?

LOUISE

Never mind. Where's the village of fools?

SABINA shrugs.

SABINA

Not sure it's there anymore. Near Vienna, I guess.

LOUISE

Where's your grandmother now?

SABINA

I don't know. Probably at the theater.

LOUISE

Thalia theater?

SABINA nods.

Seems like the kind of place a wise fool'd hang out.

Beat.

Think I could mend your dress now? I'd like to alter it for you...make you something really pretty.

SABINA

Thanks but I like it how it is. My grandmother made it for me. And besides if I left it with you, what would I wear home?

LOUISE

I could give you something to wear. This dress for instance. Look. It's nice, right?

She shows SABINA a dress. It is nice.

SABINA

Okay.

LOUISE unzips a dress for SABINA. She holds it out for her. SABINA pulls her other dress over her head.

The scar again. LOUISE looks it. SABINA knows she's looking at it.

SABINA

I fell.

LOUISE moves closer.

LOUISE

Can I...touch it?

SABINA nods. LOUISE touches it.

It's so perfectly round and dark. Like a stone or something.

Beat.

I'll mend your dress now. Put this on.

SABINA nods.

Alright. Goodnight then, walk home safe.

She walks SABINA to the door.

Careful around State Street, you know.

SABINA

Yes.

LOUISE

I could walk with you, if you wanted.

SABINA

I'll be fine.

LOUISE

Just don't look towards the voices.

SABINA exits. LOUISE waits a moment.

SHLOYME!

SHLOYME

What?

LOUISE

You know that girl's grandmother?

SHLOYME

Never met her.

LOUISE

She opened the box. She's from a village of fools. And she made a fantastic dress.

Beat.

You hearing me Shloyme?

SHLOYME

Yeah, I'm hearing you. What's the big deal?

LOUISE

We need to track her down that girl's grandmother.

SHLOYME

For what?

LOUISE

You gotta be kidding me. She's just what we've been looking for. Go look for her. Thalia theater. Tonight.

SHLOYME

I thought we're doing a show tonight.

LOUISE

You see any audience?

SCENE 14

State Street.

EMMA enters wearing the dress from the box.

She is in love with herself in it.
 She keeps stopping to look at herself in it.
 She brushes it off.
 It is truly lovely.

VOICE 1

Nice dress.

EMMA

I know, isn't it lovely?

VOICE 2

Lovely.

EMMA

It's new but it's also old. It used to be mine a long time ago.

VOICE 1

It's got a nice color.

EMMA

I know. And a nice smell. And it's so light and fresh feeling. I could do anything in this dress.

VOICE 2

Where are you going?

EMMA

To meet my boyfriend. We're going to be married.

VOICE 1

Going to be married, huh?

VOICE 2

Who's your boyfriend?

VOICE 1

I know who it is, I seen him around, the one with the cigars, right?

EMMA

How come I can't see you?

VOICE 1

We don't have bodies.

EMMA

Why not?

VOICE 2

Listen, will you do something for us?

EMMA

Maybe. Depends what.

VOICE 1

Just stand right there where you're standing. For a moment. We'll give you a prize at the end.

EMMA

What kind of prize?

VOICE 2

A good one. You'll see.

VOICE 1

Are you in?

EMMA

First tell me why you don't have bodies.

VOICE 1

It's a long story.

VOICE 2

We're looking for bodies.

VOICE 1

Like I said, it's a long story.

EMMA

And what do you want to do to me?

VOICE 2

Something harmless.

VOICE 1

And you'll get a very good prize.

VOICE 2

Something that makes everyone pay attention to you.

VOICE 1

It'll be over in a minute.

Beat.

EMMA

Alright.

Lights down on them. Lights up on RUDOLPH dressing IVAN up. They are preparing for a Purimspil.

IVAN

I look like a cat with a broken nose.

RUDOLPH

What are you talking about, it's a great look. We should've tried this years ago.

IVAN

Oh dear.

RUDOLPH

Oh dear, what?

IVAN

You see how white my skin is?

RUDOLPH

Yes.

IVAN

Oh dear. It's been getting whiter.

RUDOLPH

So?

IVAN

I've been getting whiter for a long time. You've probably noticed.

RUDOLPH

No, I haven't noticed.

IVAN

I'm getting whiter because god is erasing me from the book of life. Soon I'll become translucent.

RUDOLPH

What are you being so dramatic about all of a sudden? We're doing a show in ten minutes.

IVAN

God's erasing me from the book of life. We can't do a show, its evil. I'm disappearing for god sakes.

RUDOLPH

Ivan, relax.

IVAN

There's no Ivan anymore. God erased him and I'm what's left.

Lights down on them. Lights up on GRANDMOTHER at the theater.

She sits, paying attention, leaning in.

Again we hear the actors but do not see them.

LEAH (VOICEOVER)

Grandmother, you mustn't abandon a bride before a wedding. Demons might come and take her away.

FRADE (VOICEOVER)

Leah! you mustn't call on those spirits by their forbidden names. Don't you know they're waiting in every nook and cranny for someone to utter those words and release them?

SHLOYME enters. He sits down next to her.

SHLOYME

Psst.

Beat.

PSSST!

Beat.

Ahem!!

GRANDMOTHER

Cough a little louder, why don't you.

SHLOYME

AHEM.

GRANDMOTHER

Go ahead. Make a racket. Keep us all from hearing the ending.

SHLOYME

I'm trying to get your attention.

GRANDMOTHER

Well congratulations. Now let's watch the play.

SHLOYME

I want to show you something.

GRANDMOTHER

How about you show me your tuches headed out the door?

SHLOYME

Would you like to see a really good play?

GRANDMOTHER

What? You calling this one mediocre?

SHLOYME

I'm talking about a really, really good play.

GRANDMOTHER

Watch what you say- that actor's my good friend.

SHLOYME

I'm talkin' about a play we're making just for you. You're the only that can fully appreciate it.

Beat.

You're from the village of fools, aren't you?

Beat.

GRANDMOTHER

Yes.

SHLOYME

Would you like to come see a play that's being made just for you?

She turns to look at him.

Lights down on them. Lights up again on EMMA. There is a big gust of wind. Two cigars land on the floor next to her. A dress falls from the sky. She catches it.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT 2

SCENE 1

SABINA arrives home in the middle of the night.

EMMA is waiting at the door.

She's been waiting for quite some time.

SABINA

Emma?

EMMA

Oh, thank goodness, Sabina, I thought you'd never come. Lets go inside, its cold out here and its about to start raining.

SABINA

Why are you here so late?

EMMA

I was waiting for you! Why were you out so late?

SABINA

I had things to do.

EMMA

At four AM?

SABINA

What are you doing here at four AM?

EMMA

I came...to say goodbye.

And to give you something.

Beat.

SABINA

I sure hope you're returning that dress.

EMMA

It's my dress and I'm going to keep it.

Listen.

Fingl and I are running away in the morning.

SABINA

Running away?

EMMA

Listen, I think my parents might come here in the morning. Don't tell them you've seen me or that you know anything about me leaving.

Beat.

Can you do that?

Beat.

SABINA

We were supposed to run away together. We were supposed to catch the midnight train to Coney Island and only bring one tiny knapsack for both of us.

EMMA

Sabina, this is different.

SABINA

We were supposed to take a tiny sailboat that only fits the two of us and sail for days until we washed up somewhere like Paris or Casablanca!

EMMA

Sabina...running away isn't romantic. It's terrifying. I need your help.

SABINA

I still think you don't have to. I still don't believe you love him.

EMMA

We'll believe whatever you want to then.

Beat.

So...I have something to give you.

SABINA

Fine.

EMMA

You'll never believe it. I went down to that spot, where all the girls are disappearing? On State street?

SABINA

Yeah, I know, I been down there.

EMMA

You been down there? How come?

SABINA

How come you been down there?

Beat.

EMMA

Because I...oh never mind.

Listen, wearing this dress everything's totally different.

SABINA

What are you talking about?

EMMA

I feel like I could do anything. And I know things.

For instance I knew that even though those voices down on State Street were scary nothing was going to happen to me because I was wearing this dress.

SABINA

So...?

EMMA

So, I listened to them.

I stood in front of them just like they asked me to and there was this big gust of wind and then

I got this.

She holds out a dress.

SABINA

What is it?

EMMA

It's Bessie Steinman's dress. The one she was wearing the day she disappeared.

She hands the dress to SABINA. SABINA studies it.

SABINA

This was her dress?

EMMA

Uh huh.

SABINA

Where was it?

EMMA shrugs.

Fell right into my hands.

They hold the dress.

It is much heavier than any dress should be.

Beat.

Listen, I'm leaving in the morning but I need you to bring it to her mother, alright?

SABINA

To her mother?

EMMA

The funeral's tomorrow.

Beat.

They don't have a body to bury but at least now they have a dress.

SCENE 2

127 State Street. GRANDMOTHER and SHLOYME enter.

GRANDMOTHER

What, it wasn't enough to do this play in the middle of the night? You had to drag me to this godforsaken hole in the wall twenty blocks from my apartment?

SHLOYME

Whoa, whoa, watch the complainin' I'm afraid your tongue's gonna fall out. I'll walk you home after.

GRANDMOTHER

I look like a young thing to you? I'll be snoring in seconds.

SHLOYME

You won't fall asleep. No chance.

LOUISE enters.

SHLOYME

Found her.

LOUISE

Sure it's her?

SHLOYME

She's from a village of fools, what more d'you want?

LOUISE

Look at that dress. Of course. It's her.

SHLOYME

I told her we'd do a play just for her.

LOUISE

Right.

GRANDMOTHER

(yawns very loudly and obnoxiously)

And to think I was in the middle of an excellent play. That I paid for.

He turns to GRANDMOTHER.

SHLOYME

Listen up. This'll be a one of a kind show.

LOUISE

Never before seen piece-a-theater.

SHLOYME

Witnessed only by a single audience member in the history of the universe.

LOUISE

You're the only one who'll ever see it. Is what we're tryin'a say.

GRANDMOTHER

Where's the cast?

LOUISE

It's just us.

GRANDMOTHER

Where's the set?

SHLOYME

Right here.

Beat.

To LOUISE

Shall we?

She nods.

He turns back towards GRANDMOTHER.

Allow me to welcome you to a village of fools! Over there is the baker. He's selling dough today because he couldn't figure out how to heat up the oven. Over there's the matchmaker matching up a man with a horse. On that corner a young merchant's trying to sell his left shoe.

Beat.

LOUISE nods and steps aside.
She reaches into the box looking for a dress.

It's a lovely spring morning with the scent of cows in the air.

He takes a step aside.

LOUISE puts on a dress from the box.

She looks straight at GRANDMOTHER.

She stops for a minute. Breathes in.

She speaks to someone not present.

LOUISE

That was my chicken! Did you hear what I said? No, did you hear what I said? That was my chicken!

I've had enough. You know what? I hope you get a pimple the size of an egg. That's right. I hope something horrible happens to your face. I hope you have eight straight weeks of diarrhea.

She turns toward GRANDMOTHER.

Moishe's gonna be the death of me. How many times did I tell him that was my chicken?

Let's see, if we open the window we'll have the smell of lilacs but we'll also have the smell of cow manure. So you can take your pick. What'll it be? Cows and lilacs? No cows and lilacs?

Beat.

You know, aside from the strong stench of cow manure, and the stifling heat, you've really been blessed with a beautiful wedding day.

LOUISE is slowly possessed by the dybbuk of GRANDMOTHER's mother.

Your wig needs some help though. Are you trying to look like something the cat coughed up? Stand so I can fix it.

GRANDMOTHER sees her own mother in LOUISE.

Stand up so I can fix your wig.

Perla. Stand up.

Slowly Grandmother rises.

LOUISE (DYBBUK)

Give or take a few pounds you look just as I did on my wedding day. Alright, I suppose you've got a nicer figure. Alright, I won't sugarcoat anything. I was bursting out of this dress at the seams. That rip's from me. Stand up a little straighter.

GRANDMOTHER does.

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

Good. I should've hemmed the bottom before, it's too long on you, look. God forbid you should trip on your way to the huppah like that khazzer Shayna, remember how she face planted in the mud? She had it coming.

LOUISE (DYBBUK) works on the dress.

Look at you, we should all be so gorgeous. I'll bring it in a bit here to flatter your figure.

GRANDMOTHER

(Tentative)

We...don't have time for that, mother. The ceremony's in an hour.

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

We can dream, can't we?

GRANDMOTHER

I don't want you to change it. I want to wear it exactly as you wore it on your wedding day. And your mother before you and her mother before-

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

Don't be so ridiculous, when my grandmother wore that dress it was still white! The lace was brand-new from Moscow and it was the most coveted dress in the village. Now it's grayish yellow, the lace on the neck is scratchy, the arm-pits smell. Like old milk. No matter how many times you wash them.

GRANDMOTHER

This lace is from Moscow? How did we get it?

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

Trust me, you don't want to look as I did on my wedding day- I was a real lobster. Two feet taller than the groom with sunburnt cheeks and a peeling forehead.

But you know I think you look perfect, don't you? Just the way you are today.

Beat.

GRANDMOTHER

Mother...I brought this dress to America. I only had room for a few things.

Something shifts. LOUISE (DYBBUK) stops and looks at Grandmother.

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

You've been wearing this dress for long enough.

It's Sabina's turn now.

She goes back to hemming the dress as though nothing's happened. She's suddenly angry and impatient.

Why do you always bother me with questions, we never get anything done. It's nearly dark and I told your father I'd be ready with the flowers in an hour. We still have to visit the mikve.

GRANDMOTHER

How do you know Sabina? You died before she was born.

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

Try keeping your mouth shut for once in your life, I can't concentrate. Your father will be here any moment. You know how the mikve fills up. You know how your father reacts when we're late.

GRANDMOTHER

Mother I'll never have another chance to ask you-

LOUISE(DYBBUK)

I'm tired of your insolence. Act your age. You're about to be married.

She finishes hemming.

I'll go get the flowers.

GRANDMOTHER

Wait-

LOUISE (DYBBUK)

Can't.

LOUISE takes off the dress.

She looks at GRANDMOTHER.

GRANDMOTHER understands that she is LOUISE again.

Beat.

LOUISE

Like the play?

GRANDMOTHER

Put on the dress again.

LOUISE

She won't come again.

Beat.

GRANDMOTHER takes the dress LOUISE was wearing out of LOUISE' hands. She studies it. LOUISE moves away or sits down, lights a cigarette, anything to shake off what just happened.

Look. We need your help. We found you and brought you here and showed you that play for a reason. Your granddaughter told us you're a wise fool?

Beat.

We're good to pay you. In money or cigarettes. See, we're in desperate need of a wise fool. These costumes got us into a bad pickle.

Beat.

You understand what's going on? With these costumes? Awful consequences. Rudolph got arrested....

GRANDMOTHER is not paying attention.

GRANDMOTHER

I haven't seen a stitch like this in years. They don't make dresses like this here. No one uses this fabric.

LOUISE

Did you hear what I was sayin'? 'Bout the costumes?

GRANDMOTHER

Where did this come from?

LOUISE

I dunno. Somewhere near Vienna, I guess. Rudolph brought 'em all.

GRANDMOTHER

That's where I saw fabric like this before. In Vienna. In that square by the palace. Wish I'd bought some of it then. If I'd known what it was going to be like here.

Beat.

LOUISE moves closer to GRANDMOTHER.

LOUISE

Can I touch your dress?

GRANDMOTHER looks up.

I'm a dressmaker by profession. Some dresses really beg me to touch them. Tell you whole stories, you know?

She touches GRANDMOTHER's dress.

Beat.

GRANDMOTHER steps away from LOUISE so that she can no longer touch the dress.

GRANDMOTHER

That's not good for you what you just did. You're stealing the dead from their rest. Keep going and you'll turn paler than you already are. Keep going and they'll grow very angry with you. You'll be cursed. Illness, early death, blindness in one eye...don't test them. They're creative.

LOUISE

Listen, what we're actually worried about is these dresses on State Street. You heard about that?

GRANDMOTHER

Don't wear a dead dress.

LOUISE

We're a bit afraid that's our fault.

GRANDMOTHER

If I were you- and thank god I'm not- I'd worry more about stealing from the dead than whatever you're talking about with those dresses.

SCENE 3

The apartment. SABINA holds Bessie Steinman's dress. GRANDMOTHER enters.

SABINA

Where were you all night? I was about to go out looking for you!

GRANDMOTHER

What is that? The deadest dress in New York? You hold it any longer and the blood in your veins goes still.

SABINA

Where were you?

GRANDMOTHER

Put the dress down. I was with your box-people from the English theater. Apparently a little bird told them I was a wise fool and they decided to steal me away in the middle of the night. They've got that box-demon that's tearing apart the neighborhood with the costumes.

SABINA

They showed you those costumes?

GRANDMOTHER

They thought I would know how to fix their disaster. What do I know? All I know is they've got a box-demon that's released something evil on State Street. After they went to the English theater. I told you it's no place for us.

SABINA

That's not why this is happening.

GRANDMOTHER

What did I tell you about dead dresses? Those girls disappeared. And what did I tell you about the English theater? They got arrested. And still you never listen to your grandmother.

SABINA

They didn't get arrested for that.

GRANDMOTHER

That's what you think. Anyways, what I'm most concerned with is keeping my granddaughter safe from dead dresses. What is that thing you've drudged up?

SABINA

It's Bessie Steinman's dress.

GRANDMOTHER

Where did you get Bessie Steinman's dress?

SABINA

It's...I don't know, Emma gave it to me, she found it down on State street.

GRANDMOTHER

And what? She had the brilliant idea of shlepping the thing all the way back up here? Is this some kind of birthday present?

SABINA

She wanted me to give it to Bessie's mother. The funeral's today.

GRANDMOTHER

So?

SABINA

She said...now at least we have it to bury. We have to dress the dead in something, right?

GRANDMOTHER

There's no dead to bury.

SABINA

There's Bessie. There's no body, but there's still Bessie. There's the thought of her. We can't bury her naked.

Beat.

GRANDMOTHER

Sabina. It's time for you to wear this.

She means the wedding dress.

SABINA

Now?

GRANDMOTHER

Now.

As long as you're lugging around that heavy one. I want you to wear this dress to the funeral today. You're right about dressing the dead. Even when there's no body.

Beat.

Can you do that, please?

SABINA

Grandmother, it's hideous.

GRANDMOTHER

Trust me. You need it now.

GRANDMOTHER takes off the dress.
She hands it to SABINA.

SABINA takes the dress.
She takes off her other one and puts it on.

GRANDMOTHER

Well. Lets see you.

SABINA

It's got stains all over it.

GRANDMOTHER

It was once white. The lace was once new.

Well! You don't have to get married just because you have a beautiful dress, but aren't you glad you have such a marvelous, beautiful dress!

SABINA

It's a little big on me.

GRANDMOTHER

Every woman in our family is inside that dress with you. Doesn't it feel wonderful?

Beat.

Does it feel like anything it all?

SABINA

I guess it feels warm.

GRANDMOTHER

Good. It's perfect.

For a funeral that's not quite a funeral. Since we're burying a dress instead of a body.

She touches Bessie's dress.

A dress that weighs as much as a body.

SCENE 4

Bessie's funeral.

SABINA, GRANDMOTHER and others dressed in black gather around.
SABINA is the only one not dressed in black. She wears the wedding dress.

Perhaps Bessie's dress is in a coffin, or perhaps they are burying it bare.
One by one mourners pass over the grave and shovel dirt onto it.

EMMA enters.

She watches them quietly from the distance.

They gather. A man in black steps forward and becomes the Rabbi. GRANDMOTHER and SABINA have their conversation while the Rabbi says Kaddish quietly underneath them.

RABBI

Yis-gadal v'yis-kadash sh'may raba b'alma dee-v'ra cheru-say, ve'yam-lich mal-chusay b'chai-yay-chon uv'yo-may-chon uv-cha-yay d'chol beis Yisrael, ba-agala u'vitze-man ka-riv, ve'imru amen.

GRANDMOTHER

I've always known this Rabbi's head was full of goat shit. He should know not to do this when there's no body. How do we know she's really dead? She could be frolicking around New Jersey.

SABINA

They haven't been able to find her for weeks. They know she's gone.

GRANDMOTHER

This is worse luck than getting married in a dead dress. A body should be buried within the first two days. Why is everyone going along with this? Are they all stuffed shirts?

SABINA

No. We all know the circumstances.

GRANDMOTHER

Where's Emma, shouldn't she be here? Her parents are standing over there all alone.

SABINA

How should I know?

GRANDMOTHER

She brought you the dress, didn't she? She knew about the funeral.

SABINA

I'm supposed to know where she is all the time?

GRANDMOTHER

You used to.

Beat.

Aren't you two supposed to perform tonight?

SABINA shrugs.

RABBI

Y'hay sh'may raba me'varach le-alam uleh-almay alma-ya.

Yis-barach v'yish-tabach, v'yis-pa-ar v'yit-romam v'yis-nasay, v'yis-hadar v'yis-aleh v'yis-halal sh'may d'koo-d'shah, b'rich hoo. layla meen kol beer-chasa v'she-rasa, toosh-b'chasa v'nay-ch'masa, da-a meran b'alma, ve'imru amen.

Y'hay sh'lama raba meen sh'maya v'cha-yim aleynu v'al kol Yisrael, ve'imru amen.

O'seh shalom beem-romav, hoo ya'ah-seh shalom aleynu v'al kol Yisrael, ve'imru amen.

MOURNERS silently exchange nods, pats on the shoulder and begin to exit. Perhaps they are singing or humming softly.

SABINA starts to leave.

GRANDMOTHER grabs her arm.

GRANDMOTHER

Wait. One more minute.

Beat.

Everyone is gone.

EMMA approaches.

EMMA

Sabina.

GRANDMOTHER

Oh, hello Emma! We were just talking about you. You know you've missed the service.

EMMA

I know. Thank you.

GRANDMOTHER

The family's just headed back to the house, if you want to go and give your condolences.

EMMA

Thank you. I will.

Hello, Sabina.

SABINA

Hello, Emma.

EMMA

Can I talk to you alone?

SABINA

Grandmother, could you excuse us?

GRANDMOTHER

Alright but only for a moment.

EMMA

Of course.

GRANDMOTHER steps away from EMMA and SABINA.
She moves toward the grave.

SABINA

I thought you were leaving.

EMMA

I was. I still might be.

SABINA

Why're you here?

EMMA

Because of that dress. And that box.
Because of you.

Beat.

Why are you wearing your grandmother's wedding
dress?

She reaches out to touch it.

It feels funny. It's made of something strange.

SABINA

They buried Bessie's dress just like you said they
would. Your parents were here.

EMMA

I saw. I was hiding from them.

SABINA

So you're still leaving, just not yet?

EMMA

Yes. Will you tell me about the box?

SABINA

It's over now, I gave it back.

EMMA

Gave it back to who? Did they notice that the dress was missing?

SABINA

I don't know.

She looks at EMMA.

Now that you mention it, we should give it back. You should take it off right now.

EMMA

That's ridiculous. Like I've told you a million times, it's my dress. And even if it wasn't, I couldn't just take it off suddenly right here.

SABINA

Yes you could. And they're in enough trouble with that box. You should give it back.

GRANDMOTHER

You two done gossiping yet or you want me to sit here chatting with the dead forever?

SABINA

We're done, Grandmother, let's go home. Emma, give me your dress.

EMMA

Wait, Sabina I have more questions! Where did you meet this someone who gave you the box, anyways? It was at the Apollo theater, right? Can I meet this person?

SABINA

No.

EMMA

Why not?

SABINA

Because they're my friend. From home.

EMMA

It's someone from home?

SABINA

Enough, I don't want to talk about it anymore.

EMMA

Wait, Sabina.

(to GRANDMOTHER)

Could you give us another moment?

GRANDMOTHER

You'd think you two were plotting a murder.

She moves away.

EMMA

I came back because I'm going back down to State Street. I'm going to speak to those voices again and I don't want to go alone.

Beat.

I wanted to see if you'd come with me.

Will you?

It's scary, but I know I have to go and you're the only one who could go with me.

SABINA

Why do you have to go?

EMMA

Because! I got Bessie's dress back last time, who knows what I else I could get from them.

SABINA

What good is it to get Bessie's dress back? Doesn't really do any good to bury a dress. It's bad luck.

EMMA

No. I think it helps. I think getting that dress back from them made them weaker.

No one else disappeared last night. Not after I got that dress.

I'll go back there but not alone. I'm too afraid.

Beat.

SABINA

I'll go with you.

EMMA
Oh, thank you! Tonight, then?

SABINA
Yes. Tonight.

EMMA
I'll meet you at your house at 7?

SABINA
My house at 7.

SCENE 5

Jail.

RUDOLPH is rehearsing the part of Hamlet.

IVAN is watching.

SABINA enters quietly. She is still wearing the wedding dress. She watches. She tries not to let RUDOLPH notice her.

IVAN

Do it again, from the beginning.
This time don't break character.

RUDOLPH

These costumes make me forget everything.
I'm in a trance while I'm playing, but the moment I
remove my shirt, I'm starving. I'm weak, I can't
continue.

IVAN

Shall we stop for the night?

RUDOLPH

No. Lets continue. One more time. Then we'll eat and
sleep.

He pulls on the shirt again.

RUDOLPH turns around.

He sees SABINA.

RUDOLPH

What are you doing here? I was rehearsing.

IVAN exits quietly.

SABINA

I...was just watching.

RUDOLPH

I see that. I asked you, what are you doing here?

Beat.

Really, that was rude. Invasive. You could at least tell
me what you're doing here.

SABINA

I came to ask you more.

RUDOLPH

More what?

SABINA

More about the box. And your brother.

RUDOLPH

For goodness sakes!

SABINA

You said if I came back you'd tell me more.

RUDOLPH

Another day.

SABINA

But I'm here now.

RUDOLPH

I'm not up for telling stories today. I'm in the middle of something.

SABINA

You could just show me what you were rehearsing.

RUDOLPH

I already told you, that was private. I can't share this with just anyone.

SABINA

I'm not just anyone, I'm from home, remember? And I took care of the box for you. Can't you trust me?

Beat.

RUDOLPH

I'll need a secret from you.

Beat.

SABINA

What kind of secret?

RUDOLPH

Something bad.

SABINA

I snuck into the Apollo Theater to see your play.

RUDOLPH

That's good but not good enough. Something you don't want anybody to know ever.

SABINA

I once stole a whole pound of sugar from the grocery store. One time I left a chair sitting out on the street and my neighbor who uses a cane tripped on it and had to go to the hospital. My friend and I kissed each other pretending one of us was the boy.

RUDOLPH

Excellent. That's enough.

He turns away, prepares himself.

It starts on the banks of a river. On a sweaty afternoon in August.

IVAN enters running.

RUDOLPH starts to run behind him.

They're 20 years old.

It's hot out, they're sweaty.

They arrive at the banks of a river.

They take off their shirts and roll up their pants to go swimming.

They check each other out.

First RUDOLPH jumps in the water.

Then IVAN jumps in the water.

They get out and lie in the sun to dry.

RUDOLPH

Now will you tell me what happened when you went to see the rabbi?

Beat.

IVAN

I went to the shul in the morning. The rabbi had been praying all night. When I walked in he stared at me because I was wearing all black and, you know, it was the Day of Atonement. I should have been wearing all white.

RUDOLPH

Did he ask you about it?

IVAN

Yes. And I said to him, Rabbi, why should I wear white if my thoughts are not pure?

RUDOLPH

Did he answer?

IVAN

No. So I said, why should I refrain from bathing, on this Day of Atonement, if my desires are never clean?

When he did not answer I said, why should I fast, if I will not give up the one thing I am truly hungry for?

He was quiet.

RUDOLPH listens to the flies buzzing.

RUDOLPH

You're his favorite student. He'll be so disappointed to lose you.

Beat.

IVAN

I'm going to study Kabbalah. That's much better.

RUDOLPH

Who will teach you?

IVAN

Reb Shimsky in the next village. I've already made arrangements.

RUDOLPH

Will you stay there a long time?

IVAN

Yes. For a year at least.

RUDOLPH

Have you told your grandmother?

IVAN

Yes and she disapproves.

RUDOLPH

You'd leave her alone for a year?

IVAN

My uncle will take care of her.

Beat.

RUDOLPH

Will you... write me letters?

IVAN

Perhaps. If I'm not too busy.

Lights shift.

RUDOLPH

Many years later. When he was a learned man and I an actor...

IVAN enters. RUDOLPH sits with a jug before him. He's been drinking.

IVAN

Stop now. You'll drink yourself into a stupor.

RUDOLPH

Who cares if I do? I'll starve to death anyways. Our plays are terrible. Last night my own mother fell asleep in the front row.

IVAN

You're just going through a bad period.

RUDOLPH

It's time to face it. We can't act. We'll starve this way.

Beat.

IVAN

No. You won't. I've got an idea. Lets go to the cemetery.

RUDOLPH

(to SABINA)
We went that night.

A cemetery.

IVAN

I've invited your dead uncle.

RUDOLPH

I wonder if he still has bad breath.

IVAN

Mark it on the map. We're calling him using this gray vest.

RUDOPH

Who's next?

IVAN

Isaac that drunk who used to threaten us.

RUDOLPH

Remember when he saw us up at the railroad tracks?
Let's do it.

RUDOLPH turns to SABINA

RUDOLPH

He invited the dead through a piece of clothing. Each article was for a different member of the village cemetery.

And then we would wear one of the garments in performance and the dead would enter our bodies.

Our performances were so real the audience would weep because we were letting the dead speak through us.

Beat.

He turns to IVAN

RUDOLPH

Did you notice, in our last performance, the whole first row was weeping?

IVAN

Yes. So?

RUDOLPH

So...it's a little frightening.

IVAN

What's frightening? Your work is real now.

RUDOLPH

Ida came to me afterward. She wanted to speak to her mother. She said she could feel the ghost of her mother in the theater. She asked me to do it again, whatever I did there, she said, there was something she wanted to tell her mother.

IVAN

What did you do? You didn't tell her did you?

RUDOLPH

I told her I couldn't do it again... it was only the magic of theater.

LOUISE enters.

LOUISE

RUDOLPH!!!

RUDOLPH

You don't have to shout I'm right here. How many times have I told you not to disturb me when I'm rehearsing? And this time I have an audience.

He gestures toward SABINA

LOUISE

Trust me, this time it's worth it. We got problems on our hands.

RUDOLPH

What's happened?

LOUISE

We got the box back but the blue dress is missing.

SCENE 6

SABINA and LOUISE are in the street.
They are walking to SABINA's apartment to look for EMMA.
It is the same day and SABINA is still wearing the wedding dress.

SABINA

She said she'd meet me at home at seven.

LOUISE

You sure told the truth when you said you didn't open the box, huh?

SABINA

I didn't open the box. My Grandmother did. Emma did. I didn't.

LOUISE

You let 'em, huh?

SABINA

I tried to stop them. I didn't know it was so important.

LOUISE

You knew. No one ever touched that box that didn't figure out it's a big frickin' deal.

SABINA

Okay I sensed it.
I guess.

LOUISE

It's getting us into enough trouble.
We need to get everything back into the box and stop.

SABINA

Stop...performing?

LOUISE

Clearly.

SABINA

I don't think that's right. I know my grandmother doesn't think we belong in the English theater but that's not really-

LOUISE

Oh, it's bigger than that. You pay high prices for stealing from the dead, and we're paying 'em. Right this goddamn minute.

SABINA

But you didn't really... steal from them.

SCENE 7

LOUISE and SABINA arrive at Sabina's apartment.

EMMA is there.

SABINA

This is it.

EMMA

Sabina, where've you been, I've been waiting for you for hours! You said we'd leave at seven.

SABINA

For goodness sakes, Emma, you scared me. Sorry. I got held up.

EMMA

Who's this?

LOUISE

I'm Louise. I see you're wearing one of our dresses.

EMMA

This is my dress.

LOUISE

Ain't yours. Came from our box. Hand it over.

EMMA

Lets go inside.

LOUISE

Hand over the dress. No monkey business.

EMMA

I'm here to talk to Sabina.

LOUISE

And I'm here to collect that dress you're trying to stretch around your gigantic shoulders. The thing's too small for you. Take it off.

EMMA

Lets just go inside, I can't very well get undressed on the street now can I?

Beat.

SABINA opens the door. They enter the apartment.

EMMA

Sabina, aren't we going to go down to State Street?

LOUISE
Not so fast. Take off the dress.

Beat.

EMMA
Okay.

I know it's yours but I need it for something.

LOUISE
You need it for something?

EMMA
Something important.

LOUISE
What?

EMMA
Alright well you know down on State Street, where the girls have been disappearing?

LOUISE
Oh do I.

EMMA
Well I go down there and I hear these-

LOUISE
Voices.

EMMA
Uh huh. And they tell me to-

LOUISE
I know what they tell you to do, get to the punch-line.

EMMA
Well the point is, I do it and I don't disappear. Others do, but I don't. And I'm sure its cuz I'm wearing this dress.

LOUISE
So?

EMMA
So, that's all. It's special when I wear it.

LOUISE
Honey I got news for you, it's special whoever wears it.

EMMA
What's special about it?

LOUISE

None-a your beeswax. Hand it over.

EMMA

It's just...I don't want to give it up just yet.
Can I talk to Sabina alone for a minute?

Beat.

LOUISE

For a minute. I'll be waiting over here for my dress.

LOUISE walks away.

SABINA

You're being ridiculous.

EMMA

Listen, Sabina I gotta explain something to you.

SABINA

Make it quick.

EMMA

We have to go down to State Street together.

SABINA

I don't want to anymore.

EMMA

I told Fingl I couldn't run away.

SABINA

Why not?

EMMA

I needed to go visit those voices again. You said you'd go with me.

SABINA

Well I changed my mind. What's the big deal about those voices?

EMMA

I have an idea about them. Will you listen to it?

SABINA

What's your idea?

EMMA

They're not trying to make girls disappear...they're looking for something.

SABINA

What are you talking about?

EMMA

I just think, they want something from us, and when I'm wearing this dress, I can talk to them and find out what it is. Maybe I can find a way to give it to them.

SABINA

This is disgusting, why do you care about what they want?

EMMA

Because I think we could put an end to all this. If I just gave them something they could live inside, something really special.

SABINA

Like what, this dress?

She touches the dress Emma is wearing.

EMMA

No. This one.

She touches the wedding dress.

LOUISE

Alright enough. If you don't hand over the dress this instant I'm going to rip it off you.

EMMA

What are you talking about?

LOUISE

Hey, you know how many times I repaired that dress already? I can rip it if I want to.

EMMA

Sabina get her away from me!

SABINA

Emma it was never your dress. You have to give it back.

EMMA

Look at her, Sabina, she looks like she's going to hurt me!

SABINA

I don't know what you want me to do.

LOUISE

Alright. That's it.

She rips the dress off EMMA.

LOUISE

Got it.

She turns to leave.

You coming?

EMMA

Sabina, don't leave.

LOUISE

Seriously, Sabina, you coming?

EMMA

I need the dress. I can't go without that dress. You said you'd go with me, remember?

Beat.

SABINA

Bye, Emma.

SABINA exits.

SCENE 8

The street outside. LOUISE walks briskly. SABINA follows her.

SABINA

Where are you going now?

LOUISE

127 State Street, of course.

SABINA

Why?

LOUISE

Didn't we just talk about this on the way here? We gotta get all the clothes in the box and stop performing.

SABINA

And then?

LOUISE

That's all I know. How'm I supposed to figure out what's next? Your Grandmother doesn't know, Rudolph doesn't know or won't tell us. All I know is, I gotta get the clothes in one place and stop performing.

SABINA

But what about the voices? The girls who disappear? I thought you said it was your fault?

LOUISE

Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. How should I know what to do about it? If I don't stop performing I'll get a dybbuk that won't leave. That's what I care about. You wouldn't understand, You're not losing your body like me. You gotta nice scar.

She starts to walk. SABINA does not follow.

LOUISE

Come on.

SABINA

I just... I don't know how we're supposed to make it better.

She stops and looks at Sabina.

LOUISE

We just have to put the clothes away. Stop talking about it for godsakes. And you got that dress too. Can't believe this.

SABINA

What's the dress got to do with it?

LOUISE

No one would care about any of this if they had a dress like that. With a dress like that anyone would pay attention to you. No one's going to bother you. You're safe.

She reaches out and touches SABINA's dress. She grips it.

SABINA

Hey.

LOUISE

What?

SABINA

Let go.

LOUISE

Why?

SABINA

It's my dress.

LOUISE

So? I'm not hurting you or anything. It's just a dress. You should share it with me. You got this nice scar, this safe dress, why won't you share it with me?

She grips holder more violently.

SABINA

Stop it. Let go!

LOUISE drops the dress.

Beat.

LOUISE

Sorry.

SABINA

I have to go.

LOUISE

Sure you don't want to come to State Street with me? Your dress is there, the one I mended for you. We could start to...make a plan about all this.

SABINA

I have to go somewhere first.

LOUISE

Well, come by later, alright?

SABINA

Maybe. I gotta go now.

SABINA turns and exits.

LOUISE

Remember to be careful!

SCENE 9

Jail.

RUDOLPH sits at IVAN's bedside.

RUDOLPH

One time we stole cigarettes from the corner store, remember? The manager chased us down the street shouting absurdities.

IVAN

I remember. We spent all summer at the abandoned train junction.

RUDOLPH

You wore eyeliner and blue nylons.
You always won the prize for best Esther at the Purimspiel.

Beat.

SABINA enters quietly.
She moves to watch.

IVAN

Listen. Pack up all the ghosts and take them to another place. When you get there bury them.

RUDOLPH

Please stay with me this time, please don't disappear again.

IVAN

You'll still know where I am. I've loved you since the world was created. That won't disappear.

RUDOLPH turns around. He sees SABINA.

RUDOLPH

What could it be now? Haven't you disturbed me enough?

SABINA

I'm sorry. I couldn't stop watching you.

RUDOLPH

That was a rehearsal, it wasn't meant for anyone else's eyes.

SABINA

What are you rehearsing for?

RUDOLPH

Really, I've had enough of this.

SABINA

I'm sorry. I'm just wondering what you're rehearsing for. When are you going to perform this?

RUDOLPH

What did you actually come to bother me about? I know it's not this.

SABINA

I...what happened to the dybbuk?

RUDOLPH

Ivan died. I already told you.

SABINA

But, the dybbuk. What happened to the dybbuk?

RUDOLPH

Ivan's body was destroyed, please don't make me relive it.

SABINA

I'm very sorry. What I want to know is, did you accidentally bring that dybbuk here?

RUDOLPH

Why are you making us out to be criminals? You came from somewhere else too. Who knows what you brought by accident. Anyways, all the souls in the box are dybbuks. They're all restless and that's all a dybbuk is anyways. Could you leave me in peace?

SABINA

What about the two voices on State street?

RUDOLPH

What about them?

SABINA

Are those your dybbuks?

RUDOLPH

How should I know?

SABINA

And why didn't you bury them?

RUDOLPH

What?

SABINA

Ivan said to bury the costumes when you got here. Why didn't you?

RUDOLPH

We're actors. We had to make a living somehow.

SABINA

That's not why.

RUDOLPH

Look, what are you doing here? You know the real reason, don't you? We didn't bury the clothing because the spirits got mixed up in us. Burying them would mean burying part of ourselves. Is that enough for you?

Beat.

SABINA

It's just that we don't know what to do. We don't know how to get rid of the dybbuks.

RUDOLPH

We can't.

SABINA

We can't?

RUDOLPH

They're not going to go away.

SABINA

But then what do we do?

Beat.

RUDOLPH

We just have to make sure they don't take over completely.

SABINA

How do you do that?

Beat.

RUDOLPH

You practice.

What do you think I've been rehearsing for?

SCENE 10

Outside the Thalia theater. GRANDMOTHER stands waiting. It's a hot night. Others smoke cigars.

GRANDMOTHER

Keep your smoke to yourself. Can't you tell how old I am?

She coughs loudly.

You'll be the death of me.

She coughs a little more.

LOUISE enters.

LOUISE

Hello.

GRANDMOTHER

Can you tell them to stop smoking? I can't take this.

LOUISE

Hey loudmouths over there, put a cap on your chimney why don't you? You want a poor bubbe to cough to death?

The sound of people in the background stops. We hear them shuffling away.

There. They're gone.

GRANDMOTHER still coughs.

GRANDMOTHER

Can't leave an old woman alone can you? You don't have to ask. I don't have the dress anymore. My granddaughter's wearing it, go look for her.

LOUISE

I know. Vodka?

She holds out a flask. GRANDMOTHER takes it and sips some.

GRANDMOTHER

Might as well.

GRANDMOTHER stumbles.

LOUISE

Can I offer you an arm? Into the theater?

GRANDMOTHER

Sure but let's hear it, why're you here? What do you want from me?

LOUISE offers her an arm.

They walk into the theater and sit down.

LOUISE

I just came looking for you. That's all.

GRANDMOTHER

Which of your many problems do you need me to solve?

LOUISE

You already told me you didn't know how.

GRANDMOTHER

Are you the angel of death? Is that what this is?

LOUISE

No.

GRANDMOTHER

You are, aren't you? Come here to bring my mother to me, now come to take me, will it be painful?

LOUISE

That's not who I am.

Beat.

Theater's pretty empty tonight, huh?

GRANDMOTHER

Usually my granddaughter would be with me here but not today....she hasn't been to the theater with me in sometime. You're to blame for that.

LOUISE

S'pose so.

GRANDMOTHER

She should have been performing tonight. Heading up the show. She should have been doing her fine comedy act with her friend. They both have such excellent voices.

They should be performing right now. But they're not. What are we supposed to do? Just sit here? In the silence?

LOUISE

Guess so.

Beat.

Hey listen, what are we supposed to do with this box of costumes? Now I've got them all back in one place.

GRANDMOTHER

You're a worse liar than a sack of potatoes. I thought you didn't want anything from me.

LOUISE

Ok, I guess I want that one thing.

GRANDMOTHER

I already told you I've got no answers.

LOUISE

Should we stop performing?

GRANDMOTHER

Perhaps. Perhaps not.

LOUISE

Perhaps not? Isn't that how this all started?

GRANDMOTHER

Put them away. Every once in a while, you'll take out a costume to perform with.

LOUISE

Every once in a while?

GRANDMOTHER

Look, you won't use them all the time. But you won't forget about them either. You should come to the theater more often. It's good medicine. For things like this, whatever it is that's making you so pale.

They both turn towards the theater. They watch. But the play hasn't started yet so there is still nothing to watch.

SCENE 10

State Street. EMMA is standing talking to the voices.

EMMA

No I won't. I'm waiting for someone.

VOICE 1

Why not?

EMMA

Because I don't have that dress anymore. I might disappear.

SABINA enters.

SABINA

Emma?

EMMA

Oh, thank goodness. I thought you'd never come.

SABINA

I came. I knew you'd be here.

Beat.

EMMA

I don't...want to go too close to them, you know? Now that I don't have that dress.

SABINA

Yeah.

EMMA

You think you'll be okay, cuz of the scar and all?

SABINA

Maybe. I don't know.

EMMA

Or, because of your dress.

Beat.

She takes EMMA's hand.

They move closer to the voices.

VOICE 1

That's a gorgeous dress you've got on.

Enchanting. VOICE 2

Come closer to us. VOICE 1
Right there, maybe?

I can't do that. SABINA

Just a little closer? VOICE 1

Don't. EMMA

I know. SABINA

SABINA takes off the wedding dress.
She holds it out in front of her.

Here. SABINA

What is it? VOICE 1

A dress for you. SABINA

Try it on. EMMA

Is this some kind of a trick? VOICE 1
It feels like a trick.

Of course it's not a trick. VOICE 2
Look at that dress.

What should we do? VOICE 1

Take it! EMMA

I don't know. VOICE 1

VOICE 2
I'm intrigued. Let's give it a try.

Beat.

VOICE 2
C'mon.

Beat.

VOICE 2
Alright.

There is a gust of wind.
The dress rustles.
All remaining dresses fall from the sky.

Beat.

EMMA and SABINA look at each other.

EMMA
You think they're gone?

SABINA nods.

SABINA
Feels different.

EMMA
Where do you think they went? Are they in the dress
now?

SABINA touches the dress.

SABINA
I don't know. I don't know if it's safe to wear.

Beat.

EMMA
Lets go.

SABINA
Wait. We need to take all the dresses.

She and EMMA bend down and begin to pick up all the dresses that have fallen.

They finish. SABINA looks at EMMA.

EMMA
What should we do with these? Bury them?

SABINA
I don't know.

Beat.

EMMA
Let's ask your grandmother.

Beat.

She'll be at the theater now?

SABINA nods.

C'mon.

Beat.

EMMA reaches for SABINA's hand.

She takes it.

They exit.

END OF PLAY