

The Housewife

by

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Inspired by true events.

An upbeat 60s tune and a --

**Montage of 60s ADVERTISEMENTS:**

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

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

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

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

**INT. HOUSE - DAY**

CLOSE UP on: a woman's HANDS.

Water from a FAUCET pours over them.

She adds soap, and SCRUBS. Hard.

The bubbles fall away under the running water.

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

She lathers lotion over hardened callouses.

We're in a sparkling clean --

**BATHROOM**

CLOSE UPS continue as the woman puts herself together:

Curlers out.

Hairspray in.

Powder and blush.

Lipstick on.

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

HERMINE RYAN (45) - a housewife.

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

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

**BEDROOM**

She MAKES THE BED.

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

Then heads down the --

**HALLWAY**

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

But it's perfectly clean.

She reaches the --

**LIVING ROOM**

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

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

She disappears into the --

**KITCHEN**

Pastel appliances with rounded edges and spotless counters.

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

**LIVING ROOM**

She tries to wipe off the spot she saw.

It doesn't work.

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

It's a SCRATCH.

She looks around...

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

*How Modern Are Your Morals?*

**EXT. HOUSE - DAY**

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

***Super: Queens, July 1964***

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

Then a shift.

A MAN walks toward the house.

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

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

**INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

KNOCKING.

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

She closes the curtain before he can see her.

HERMINE  
(calling out)  
Who is it?

She speaks with a European ACCENT.

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

Her face clouds with worry.

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

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

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

CUT TO:

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Hermine's REFLECTION in the shiny OVEN.

**Super: Three weeks earlier.**

She sets the TIMER.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

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

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

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

Besides her ACCENT, Hermine fits right in.

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

SHERRY  
It's perfect.

MAYLENE  
What's your secret?

HERMINE  
(flattered)  
No secret.

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

The ladies laugh.

HERMINE  
Can I get anything else?

She is already putting an EXTRA PILLOW behind Sherry.

MAYLENE  
Hermine! No more fussing, come  
sit.

She SITS in a chair across from them.

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

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

MAYLENE  
Sherry!

She SLAPS her hand away.

SHERRY  
What?

MAYLENE  
We've had enough.

Sherry folds her hands in her lap, embarrassed.

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

Sherry SMILES at Hermine, grateful for the gesture.

HERMINE  
The bake sale.

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

Hermine beams.

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

HERMINE  
(she knew that)  
Really?

MAYLENE  
Macy's?

HERMINE  
Yes.

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

Hermine nods, taking her orders seriously.

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

SHERRY  
Yes!

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

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

MAYLENE  
He's still running around with her?

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

MAYLENE  
(laughs)  
But he's Willy!

SHERRY  
I know.

MAYLENE  
That girl...

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

SHERRY  
She is pretty...

MAYLENE  
He could find better.

SHERRY  
Well, of course.

MAYLENE  
You tell him, you tell Willy -

HERMINE  
You should call him William.

The conversation HALTS.

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

But Hermine doesn't back down.

HERMINE  
(gentle but stern)  
If he wants to be William now. You should call him William.

MAYLENE  
Well.

Maylene clears her throat, smooths her skirt.

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

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

MAYLENE  
We should talk to the other ladies. Maybe tomorrow.

HERMINE  
Tomorrow I have -

MAYLENE  
Oh, that's right!

SHERRY  
Have what?

MAYLENE  
(ignoring Sherry)  
How do you feel?

HERMINE  
Nervous.

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

Sherry realizes what they're talking about.

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

MAYLENE  
(scolding)  
Sherry. This is serious.

SHERRY  
I was only joking.

Sherry shrinks down into her seat.

HERMINE  
I feel American but - They can say  
no.

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

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

MAYLENE  
Well, everyone likes you!

SHERRY  
Everyone!

Her friends LEAN toward her, adamant in their support.

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

Hermine basks in the compliment.

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

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

Hermine does the same, MIMICKING her posture.

**INT. INS - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY**

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

*IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICES*

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

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

In front of him, a FILE.

DEVITO  
Mrs. Ryan.

HERMINE  
Hello.

She clears her throat.

HERMINE  
It is nice to meet you.

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

HERMINE  
I live there before, yes.

DEVITO  
And now you're in Queens.

HERMINE  
We have a house.

DEVITO  
You like the Mets?

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

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

She gives him a polite SMILE.

DEVITO  
(back to the file)  
Okay. Been livin' here for five  
years... with your husband.

HERMINE  
Yes.

DEVITO  
Tell me about him.

She's thrown off by the question.

HERMINE  
My husband?

DEVITO  
How did you two meet?

HERMINE  
He came to the hotel where I work.

DEVITO  
In Austria?

She NODS.

DEVITO  
He's currently employed?

HERMINE  
Construction.

DEVITO  
And you work in the home?

HERMINE  
Yes.

He smiles, approves.

DEVITO  
A few more here.

He starts reciting the required questions:

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

HERMINE  
No.

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

HERMINE  
No.

DEVITO  
Have you ever been convicted of a  
crime?

HERMINE  
No, sir.

Hermine answers that last question with conviction.

DEVITO  
(leaning back)  
Tell me.

Hermine looks worried, not sure what he means.

DEVITO  
How do ya like it here? Livin'  
here.

HERMINE  
(relieved)  
This is a dream. In America you  
have...

She searches for the words.

HERMINE  
You can be anyone you want to be.

Devito nods.

DEVITO  
Alright.

He starts shuffling through papers, STAMPING.

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

HERMINE  
On your shirt.

DEVITO  
What?

HERMINE  
You have a -

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

DEVITO  
Oh.

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

HERMINE  
There.

DEVITO  
Thank you.

He STACKS the papers in her file definitively, smiling.

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

She smiles back.

**EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY**

Hermine walks down a bustling avenue.

TAXIS honk and lurch by.

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

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

**INT. MACY'S - DAY**

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

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

A SALES GIRL with a neat pony tail approaches.

SALES GIRL  
Can I help you find something?

HERMINE  
A dress.

SALES GIRL  
Alright. For a holiday party?

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

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

**INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY**

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

Then notices a SMUDGE on the MIRROR.

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

She SEARCHES her purse.

Nothing useful.

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

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

**INT. MACY'S - DAY**

Hermine approaches the register still wearing the red dress.

HERMINE  
I wear it now.

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

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

**INT. DRESSING ROOM - SAME**

The MIRROR is CLEAN.

## INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

A sea of desks and men.

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

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

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

He crosses the room and sits down at this desk.

JOSEPH  
What are you hiding from?

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

TOMMY  
I just like it under here.

JOSEPH  
Bullshit.

TOMMY  
I don't have any space over there.

JOSEPH  
But you have space under there?

TOMMY  
(fine)  
I'm avoiding that secretary.

JOSEPH  
Ah.

Tommy taps a pack of CIGARETTES.

JOSEPH  
You can't smoke under there.

TOMMY  
Rosenthal doesn't give a shit.

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

TOMMY

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

JOSEPH

Lie.

TOMMY

What?

JOSEPH

You need to lie down.

Tommy FLICKS his lighter on. Joseph KICKS him.

JOSEPH

Don't you have work to do?

TOMMY

Three dead guys, one dead lady.

JOSEPH

Alright then.

TOMMY

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

JOSEPH

You haven't written that one yet?

TOMMY

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

JOSEPH

Your people are dead!

TOMMY

Exactly, they had a whole life.

JOSEPH

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

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

ABE

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

JOSEPH  
(standing)  
Always.

ABE  
(noticing Tommy)  
Mr. Schiller.

From his desk cave, Tommy gives a little WAVE.

**EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

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

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

The sound of the FRONT DOOR OPENING.

RUSSELL (O.S.)  
Hello.

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

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

HERMINE  
Hello, honey!

She can't contain her SMILE.

RUSSELL  
Is that a new dress?

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

RUSSELL  
What's that?

He picks it up.

Hermine waits, giddy.

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

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

RUSSELL  
My American wife! My American wife!

He puts her down.

HERMINE  
My American husband.

They kiss deeply.

RUSSELL  
I love you.

HERMINE  
I love you too.

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

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

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

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

CAROLYN  
Your mom called.

Joseph GRUNTS in response.

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

CAROLYN  
She wants you to call your dad.

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

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

She wraps her arms around him.

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

JOSEPH  
Who?

CAROLYN  
The landlord from Brooklyn.

It's not registering with him.

CAROLYN  
The one you wrote a month ago.

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

CAROLYN  
This one!

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

JOSEPH  
Oh.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Alone after dinner, Hermine finishes DRYING the DISHES.

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

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

She delicately FOLDS it back up.

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

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

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

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

She reaches for it...

RUSSELL (O.S.)  
Hermine?

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

HERMINE  
I will be right there.

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

**INT. TEMPLE - NIGHT**

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

Joseph watches from out in the --

**INT. HALLWAY - TEMPLE - SAME**

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

The song ends and the congregation rises.

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

ARTHUR  
You didn't come in for the service.

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

JOSEPH  
Dad.

An awkward beat.

They shake hands.

**INT. RABBI'S OFFICE - DAY**

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

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

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

JOSEPH  
Where are you going to go?

ARTHUR  
Down south for a while.

JOSEPH  
More strangers in need of your  
help?

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

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

JOSEPH  
I have a job.

ARTHUR  
I know. I read your last story.

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

JOSEPH  
Well, I started the next one.

ARTHUR  
I figured.

JOSEPH  
What does that mean?

ARTHUR  
Nothing.

JOSEPH  
Okay.

ARTHUR  
(decides say it)  
If you'd really take time to get  
to know these people instead of  
moving on -

JOSEPH  
You mean like you're moving on?

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

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

ARTHUR  
I wanted to give you this.

He HANDS him the BOX.

JOSEPH  
What is this?

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

JOSEPH  
(scoffs)  
Family memories?

His dad turns away, hurt.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

Carolyn comes in from the bedroom.

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

CAROLYN  
He's trying.

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

CAROLYN  
(reading)  
All my love, always, Arthur.

Joseph SCOFFS.

CAROLYN  
He wrote this to your mom?

JOSEPH  
Such bullshit.

CAROLYN  
Joseph.

Joseph takes out another one. Reads:

JOSEPH  
Our love is forever, no matter  
what life brings.

He DROPS it back in.

JOSEPH  
Look how that turned out.

CAROLYN  
What are you going to do with all  
of it?

JOSEPH  
Get rid of it.

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

CAROLYN  
Really?

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

CAROLYN  
Don't say things like that.

JOSEPH  
What? It's true.

She still has the letter in her hand.

CAROLYN  
These are proof they were in love  
once.

JOSEPH  
They're proof my dad was  
irrational.

CAROLYN  
(teasing)  
Come on. You don't love me like  
that?

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

She laughs. She gets him.

**INT. MAYLENE'S HOUSE - DAY**

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

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

Hermine brings in a CUP of TEA.

MAYLENE

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

HERMINE

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

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

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

HERMINE

It is better a little.

MAYLENE

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

HERMINE

No, do not worry.

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

MAYLENE

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

HERMINE

Meatloaf is in the oven. Dishes are washed.

MAYLENE

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

Maylene laughs weakly.

Hermine smiles, thrilled with that compliment.

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

HERMINE  
Rest.

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

**INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY**

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

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

JOSEPH  
Mom!

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

MOTHER  
Joseph!

JOSEPH  
What are you doing?

MOTHER  
Reading.

JOSEPH  
Not the paper obviously.

He starts FILLING the fridge with the food he brought.

MOTHER  
I didn't know you were coming.

JOSEPH  
(impatient)  
Same thing every week.

MOTHER  
Is it Sunday already?

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

JOSEPH  
I saw dad.

MOTHER  
(uninterested)  
Oh.

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

She sighs.

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

JOSEPH  
You left. Then he decided to sell  
it.

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

JOSEPH  
See you next week.

He heads to the door.

**INT. JOSEPH'S EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

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

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

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

ABE (O.C.)  
Not yet.

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

JOSEPH  
What?

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

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

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

JOSEPH  
Thank you, sir.

ABE  
Not only are you a machine, you -

RING!

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

ABE  
Rosenthal. - What kind of tip?

He listens.

ABE  
A what?!

Abe's eyes go WIDE.

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

Abe starts WRITING DOWN what he's been told.

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

CUT TO:

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

TOMMY  
No way.

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

JOSEPH  
That's what they said.

TOMMY  
Living in New York?

JOSEPH  
Queens.

TOMMY  
But that would be -

JOSEPH  
Huge.

TOMMY  
Crazy!

Tommy tries to process what he's just heard.

JOSEPH  
Huge!

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

EGGS cracked into a bowl.

FLOUR measured into a cup.

BATTER stirred with a wooden spoon.

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

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

PRE-LAP: KNOCKING.

**EXT. ANOTHER HOUSE - DAY**

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

JOSEPH  
Is this the Ryan residence?

BOY  
Yeah, who's askin'?

A WOMAN, his mother, appears.

WOMAN  
Vincent!

She SHOOS him out of the way.

WOMAN  
Can I help you?

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

WOMAN  
My husband passed away six years  
ago.

JOSEPH  
Oh. I'm sorry.

WOMAN  
Thank you.

JOSEPH  
Was he born here?

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

WOMAN  
In Kentucky.

JOSEPH  
He was American.

WOMAN  
Yes.

JOSEPH  
And he never left the country?

WOMAN  
No... what's this about?

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

WOMAN  
What's this about?

JOSEPH  
It's important.

WOMAN  
The Ryans on 72nd street...

JOSEPH  
Thank you.

He's already hurrying away.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

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

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

TV HOUSEWIFE  
The refreshing-est!

HERMINE  
Refreshing-est. Refreshingest.

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

KNOCKING.

Again, Hermine looks out the curtain.

HERMINE  
Who is it?

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - SAME**

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

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

The moment of truth.

Hermine OPENS the door, her face weighted with sadness.

JOSEPH  
Mrs. Ryan?

HERMINE  
(ad admission)  
Yes.

She looks resigned.

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

HERMINE  
My husband?

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

HERMINE  
(double checking)  
My husband.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

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

HERMINE  
Please, come in.

Perhaps this isn't the end after all.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

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

JOSEPH  
You have a lovely home.

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

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

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

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

HERMINE  
Excuse me. I have cookies in the  
oven.

She leaves to the kitchen.

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

*Clean*

*Painting*

*Wife*

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME**

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

She's the perfect housewife.

And she's going to prove it.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM**

Hermine returns, plate of COOKIES in hand.

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

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

HERMINE  
He is not home now.

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

JOSEPH  
Do you expect him home soon?

HERMINE  
Yes. Soon.

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

HERMINE  
Sit.

It's a command. So Joseph does.

HERMINE  
Your name?

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

He's anxious to start.

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

HERMINE  
Questions about my husband?

JOSEPH  
Yes.

HERMINE  
Okay. My husband is a good man.

JOSEPH  
How long have you been married?

HERMINE  
Five years.

JOSEPH  
Five years... and where did you  
meet?

HERMINE  
In Austria.

JOSEPH  
That's where you're from?

HERMINE  
Yes. This painting.

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

HERMINE  
This is where.

JOSEPH  
It looks beautiful.

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

She smiles and holds up the PLATE of cookies.

JOSEPH  
Oh, no thank you.

HERMINE  
Try one.

JOSEPH  
I'm fine, really, thank you.

HERMINE  
Eat.

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

She watches him CHEW, expectant.

JOSEPH  
Delicious.

HERMINE  
(proud)  
American recipe.

JOSEPH  
Thank you.

HERMINE  
Your mother makes cookies?

Joseph almost laughs.

JOSEPH  
No. She uh - no.

HERMINE  
Your wife?

JOSEPH  
Not often.

HERMINE  
Then you will take some.

She gets up.

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

HERMINE  
Young men need food.

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

JOSEPH  
Thank you. That's very kind.

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

JOSEPH  
You said Mr. Ryan would be home soon?

HERMINE  
Yes. Yes. Where are you from?

JOSEPH  
Oh.

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

JOSEPH  
Nebraska.

HERMINE  
Nebraska.

JOSEPH  
The midwest.

HERMINE  
A small town?

JOSEPH  
Yes, actually.

HERMINE  
Then you come to New York.

JOSEPH  
My parents moved us here when I was a kid.

HERMINE  
It is a good place here. Many opportunity.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

HERMINE  
Newspaper writer is good job.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

HERMINE  
New York Times. This is big,  
important paper.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

HERMINE  
You must be important too.

The flattery works. They share a smile.

CUT TO:

The plate of cookies is EMPTIER.

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

HERMINE  
That is good story. You should  
write it.

JOSEPH  
I have to write yours about the  
tiger.

Joseph reaches toward his NOTEBOOK...

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

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

JOSEPH  
Oh no - I don't need -

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

HERMINE  
Someone needs to do this.

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

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

He watches her work. It's intimate.

She finishes one side and starts lining up the other.

JOSEPH  
You must be a very good mother.

She looks up at him.

HERMINE  
I do not have any children.

There's no sadness in her voice.

JOSEPH  
Oh.

She goes back to SEWING the second side.

When she's finished:

HERMINE  
Stand.

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

HERMINE  
Better. See?

He moves his arms, feeling it on his body.

It does feel better.

JOSEPH  
Thank you.

HERMINE  
You are welcome. You are nice  
young man.

Her hand lingers on his shoulder in a motherly way.

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

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

HERMINE  
Tomorrow. For dinner. This will be  
good.

She hands him his cookies. She is in control.

JOSEPH  
Okay. Thank you for - everything.

He TRIPS over himself on the way to the door.

HERMINE  
It was nice to meet you, Joseph.

She CLOSES the door behind him.

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY**

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

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - SAME**

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

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

**EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY**

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

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

DEVITO  
Just one today. Tryin' to cut  
down.

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

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

VENDOR  
Washington.

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

The vendor nods with gratitude and puts away the bill.

VENDOR  
This time your turn.

Devito grabs NAPKINS to wipe his face and hands.

DEVITO  
What?

VENDOR  
You learn something. About my  
country.

DEVITO  
Okay.

VENDOR  
Kolobrzeg.

DEVITO  
Kol-o-je-berg.

VENDOR  
Where I am from in Poland.  
Kolobrzeg.

DEVITO  
Kolj-Berg.

VENDOR  
Better.

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

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

*IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICES*

**INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY**

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

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

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

DEVITO  
Damn.

Suddenly, Joseph POPS UP out of a waiting chair.

JOSEPH  
Anthony Devito?

Devito looks up from his shirt STAIN.

DEVITO  
Yeah. Who are you?

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

RECEPTIONIST  
He said it's about a Nazi.

DEVITO  
A Nazi?

JOSEPH  
A Nazi. Here in New York.

CUT TO:

**INT. INS - HALLWAY - DAY**

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

DEVITO  
You do know what you're saying  
sounds absurd.

JOSEPH  
The tip came from a reliable  
source.

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

JOSEPH  
(urgent)  
Yes.

DEVITO  
Come on!

He lets out a laugh. Not taking this seriously.

JOSEPH  
Thousands of people immigrate  
here. It's possible -

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

They reach their destination: a bank of FILE CABINETS.

DEVITO  
It's just not possible.

Devito opens a DRAWER.

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

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

JOSEPH  
Never?

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

JOSEPH  
But it wouldn't be taken away?

DEVITO  
Withdrawal of citizenship is very  
not common.

JOSEPH  
Uncommon.

DEVITO  
What?

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

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

Devito starts going through the FILES.

DEVITO  
What's this guy's name?

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

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

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

Devito's FACE GOES WHITE.

DEVITO  
Yeah, uh, nothin' down here.

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

JOSEPH  
Nothing under the name Ryan?

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

JOSEPH  
Tomorrow? This is important.

DEVITO  
Yeah, of course.

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

DEVITO  
A wife...

JOSEPH  
We're talking about a fucking  
Nazi!

DEVITO  
(to himself)  
A Nazi.

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

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

**HERMINE.**

SMASH CUT TO:

Hermine's real FACE --

**EXT. CHURCH - DAY**

-- at the BAKE SALE.

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

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

A sign hangs with RIBBON between two chairs:

*Help the Ladies of St. Agnus Build a Church Garden*

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

HERMINE  
It is refreshing-est.

Maylene serves a PRIEST two cupcakes.

MAYLENE  
Only two, Father?

PRIEST  
(laughs)  
This is wonderful. We certainly  
appreciate your service, Maylene.

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

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

HERMINE  
Yes, inside.

Hermine is the Housewife of the Hour.

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

She starts to PANIC inside.

HERMINE  
One minute.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*A little girl DRAGS her helpless DOLL along the ground.*

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

*Another boy STOMPS forcefully on a MOUND of DIRT.*

She SHUTS HER EYES, tries to catch her breath.

CHURCH LADY  
... your secret.

Hermine OPENS her eyes.

*The Woman in Black* is GONE.

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

CHURCH LADY  
Ms. Hermine?

Hermine forces herself to focus.

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

HERMINE  
No. Yes. Thank you.

CHURCH LADY  
Are you alright, dear?

HERMINE  
Yes.

The woman smiles and walks away.

Hermine checks her HAIR, collects herself.

Then a LITTLE GIRL runs up to her, CRYING.

LITTLE GIRL  
I got an owie!

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

Hermine STARES at the girl as she WAILS.

Then she SNAPS.

She GRABS the girl's hand viscously.

HERMINE  
SHUT UP!

Her intensity immediately STUNS the child.

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

MOM  
There you are.

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

MOM  
(to Hermine)  
I'm so sorry.

Hermine quickly COMPOSES herself.

HERMINE  
No. No. No problem.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

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

She opens it and lifts out the METAL OBJECT.

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

It has something inscribed on it in GERMAN.

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

But she can't do it.

She wraps it back up into her hand.

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

Joseph and Abe pass each other in the WALKWAY.

ABE  
Find that Nazi yet, Lelyveld?

JOSEPH  
Not yet.

ABE  
Fishing trip?

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

ABE  
(stops)  
You're shitting me.

Joseph shakes his head.

JOSEPH  
Going back tonight when he gets  
home from work.

ABE  
Jesus.

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

ABE  
Well get it done then!

Abe walks away shaking his head.

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

TOMMY  
You're going back tonight?

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

TOMMY  
What's she like?

JOSEPH  
Normal. Their house is... clean.

TOMMY  
Do you think she knows?

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

TOMMY  
Your mom?

JOSEPH  
No.

Joseph almost seems sad at the answer.

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

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

JOSEPH  
I know.

He shakes his head.

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

He's EATING the COOKIES Hermine gave Joseph.

**INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY**

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

Next on her list is FLOUR.

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

A WORKER hurries up to help her.

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

He grabs it down.

WORKER  
A lady can't do that.

He gives her a friendly smile and a WINK.

HERMINE  
Thank you.

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

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

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

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY**

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

He KNOCKS.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

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

HERMINE  
Hello!

She smiles big and fake.

JOSEPH  
Hello, Mrs. Ryan.

HERMINE  
Come in, come in.

Joseph steps over the threshold.

JOSEPH  
I brought your plate back.

HERMINE  
Thank you.

He hands it to her.

JOSEPH  
Is your husband home?

HERMINE  
Let me take this.

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

JOSEPH  
I really need to speak to your husband.

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

She turns to the --

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

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

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

HERMINE  
You are here for dinner.

JOSEPH  
I'm just here to speak to your husband.

HERMINE  
Dinner while you speak.

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

JOSEPH  
That's very generous but -

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

JOSEPH  
(a little too loud)  
No!

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

JOSEPH  
I'm sorry.

He gathers himself.

JOSEPH  
I should tell you why I'm here.

HERMINE  
I know why you are here.

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

JOSEPH  
You do?

HERMINE  
Yes.

JOSEPH  
You know about your husband's past?

Choosing her words carefully:

HERMINE  
My husband is a good man.

She waits for him to make his move.

JOSEPH  
Do you know who - what your husband did?

HERMINE  
This is what you are here to write about.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

Is she stroking the knife?

HERMINE  
What will this do?

JOSEPH  
If your husband was a...

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

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

She does know.

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

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

But she simply turns back around.

HERMINE  
It is the past.

JOSEPH  
These are serious allegations.

HERMINE  
Perhaps there is more you do not  
know.

The sound of the FRONT DOOR OPENING.

HERMINE  
(calling)  
Honey, we have a guest!

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

Then he enters the kitchen.

HERMINE  
This is Joseph.

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

JOSEPH  
Joseph Lelyveld. New York Times.

RUSSELL  
(offering his hand)  
Nice to meet you.

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

JOSEPH  
Nice to meet you...

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

JOSEPH  
You're American.

RUSSELL  
What?

JOSEPH  
I -

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

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

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

JOSEPH  
Mr. Ryan have you ever been to  
Europe?

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

It's not him who's a Nazi.

IT'S HER.

JOSEPH  
(to Hermine)  
You.

Hermine looks straight back at him.

JOSEPH  
(barely audible)  
It's you.

Silence, their eyes locked.

**DING!**

The oven TIMER finally GOES OFF.

HERMINE  
Dinner is ready.

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

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

They both sit.

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

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

So he SITS with them.

HERMINE  
Pray?

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

Russell CLOSES his eyes and starts to speak.

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

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

RUSSELL (CONT'D)  
We send our prayers to all those  
who are less fortunate and pray  
for the peace of all men, women,  
and children. Amen.

HERMINE  
Amen.

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

HERMINE  
Eat.

Again, she says it as a command.

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

Joseph starts to cut into his meat.

RUSSELL  
So, Joseph, what brings you to  
Maspeth?

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

JOSEPH  
I - uh - an assignment.

HERMINE  
(quickly)  
But he did not find who he was  
looking for.

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

Joseph decides to play along with her for now.

JOSEPH  
Right. A story about -

HOUSEWIFE  
An oven salesman.

RUSSELL  
An oven salesman?

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

Russell GRUNTS in agreement. Mouth full.

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

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

RUSSELL  
Construction.

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

RUSSELL  
Sure.

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

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

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

JOSEPH  
You always have a choice.

HERMINE  
(agitated)  
Americans do, yes.

RUSSELL  
And now that's you too, honey.

He raises his BEER.

JOSEPH  
What?

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

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

Joseph almost CHOKES.

RUSSELL  
Are you alright?

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

He CLAMBERS out of his seat, dropping his napkin.

Russell looks up, confused.

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - NIGHT**

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

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

RUSSELL (O.S.)  
Honey?

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Hermine comes back to her seat at the table.

RUSSELL  
Strange guy.

He takes a bite.

RUSSELL  
Nice and all, but something off about him.

HERMINE  
Hm.

RUSSELL  
Why exactly was he here?

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

RUSSELL  
Everything alright?

HERMINE  
Yes.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

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

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

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

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

Russell CHANGES the channel.

A COMMERCIAL:

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

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

A close up of a Faultless Starch SPRAY CAN.

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

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

MOM'S VOICE  
To dad's shirts.

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

MOM'S VOICE  
Another star product from  
Faultless.

A BLUE STAR LOGO fills the screen.

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

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

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

**Montage:**

The next day Hermine GETS READY.

Picks a dress.

Takes out curlers.

Puts on lipstick.

Takes her purse out the door.

**INT. SUBWAY - DAY**

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

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

We watch Hermine watch them.

Her hands CLENCH a little around her purse.

But her face stays calm.

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

And Hermine exits.

**INT. ELEVATOR - DAY**

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

After a few moments of silence:

WOMAN  
I like your dress.

Hermine turns to her.

HERMINE  
Thank you.

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

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

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

Then SHOOTS UP from his chair.

**EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

JOSEPH  
What are you doing here?

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

HERMINE  
To speak to you.

JOSEPH  
You can't be here.

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

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

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

HERMINE  
Sit.

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

But then she softens:

HERMINE  
Please. People will be looking.

They sit on a BENCH. She begins her plea.

HERMINE  
What you think about me...

JOSEPH  
You're a Nazi.

HERMINE  
This was many years ago.

JOSEPH  
But you were, weren't you?

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

JOSEPH  
You worked at a concentration  
camp.

HERMINE  
You must understand -

JOSEPH  
What is there to understand?

HERMINE  
I was a nurse.

JOSEPH  
A nurse?

HERMINE  
Yes. A nurse.

JOSEPH  
Is that true?

HERMINE  
Why would I lie?

JOSEPH  
You lied before.

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

He wants to believe her.

JOSEPH  
A nurse for who? The guards?

HERMINE  
I did not hurt anyone.

JOSEPH  
But you knew what they were doing.

Hermine shifts, trying to stay calm.

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

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

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

Joseph looks sickened.

JOSEPH  
No... No.

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

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

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

He doesn't know the answer to that.

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

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

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

Is she telling the truth?

Then like it's the ultimate excuse:

HERMINE  
I did not have children.

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

HERMINE  
Joseph -

He CRINGES at her saying his name.

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

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

JOSEPH  
Your husband doesn't know.

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

JOSEPH  
All those people were innocent.

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

Silence.

Then:

JOSEPH  
My father is a rabbi.

He waits for her reaction.

JOSEPH  
Does that bother you?

Hermine CLENCHES her purse in her lap a little.

HERMINE  
No. We are in America. You  
understand.

JOSEPH  
No. I don't.

He looks away, agitated again. She changes tactics.

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

Joseph makes eye contact with her again.

HERMINE  
Please. I was only a nurse.

He does still see a person...

JOSEPH  
I have work to do.

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

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

**INT. INS - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

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

Devito leans into the office, red in the face.

DEVITO  
I left you a message.

DIRECTOR  
Devito.

DEVITO  
I need to talk to you about  
somethin'.

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

DIRECTOR  
I got your message.

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

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

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

DIRECTOR  
Is not a priority right now.

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

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

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

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

DEVITO  
But she -

DIRECTOR  
You're not hearing me!

He brings his voice back down, lower than before.

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

DEVITO  
Sir -

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

He gives Devito a stern look.

DIRECTOR  
It's probably not true anyway.

Off Devito's unsettled look...

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

The office EMPTIES at the end of the day.

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

His face is contorted in concentration. He takes NOTES:

*Simon Wiesenthal*

*Maidanek, Ravensbruck*

*Extermination*

*All female camps*

Then something catches his EYE.

Joseph STARES at his paper...

Is it possible?

JOSEPH  
(to himself)  
No... No.

He FLIPS back in his notes to where he wrote:  
*NURSE.*

He reads slowly from the BLACK BOOK:

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

His FINGER finds her name.

JOSEPH  
Hermine Braunsteiner.

It's like a slap in the face.

JOSEPH  
(to himself)  
She was a guard?

Then louder to no one in particular:

JOSEPH  
She said she was a nurse.

RING!

JOSEPH  
(distracted, answering)  
Lelyveld.

Switch back and forth where appropriate with:

**INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY**

DEVITO  
Anthony Devito calling.

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

JOSEPH  
(jumping in)  
Hermine Ryan.

DEVITO  
You -

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

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

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

Silence.

JOSEPH  
Mr. Devito?

DEVITO  
Am I speaking anonymously?

JOSEPH  
Why?

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

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

All he cares about is the answer to this question.

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

JOSEPH  
So either she wasn't or she lied.

DEVITO  
Write the story. Then I can find  
out.

He HANGS UP.

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME**

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

He gets CHILLS.

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

ABE  
Front page tomorrow, Lelyveld.

JOSEPH  
I need one more day.

Abe STOPS in his tracks.

ABE  
You kidding me?

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

ABE  
Either way she was a Nazi right?

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

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

Joseph NODS.

ABE  
Page one.

He leaves Joseph with a job to do.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Hermine does the dishes after dinner. SCRUBBING extra hard.

A RECORD scratches, slow JAZZ comes on.

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

RUSSELL  
You don't have to finish all that now.

She lets out a little laugh.

RUSSELL  
Come on. Dance with me.

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

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

She leans her head on his chest.

HERMINE  
You love me.

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

RUSSELL  
Mmm, hmm.

He's humming along to the song.

HERMINE  
Why?

He laughs.

HERMINE  
Tell me.

She actually wants an answer. He gets serious.

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

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

HERMINE  
(pulling away)  
Sit.

She motions to the table.

She has to tell him.

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - NIGHT**

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

RING!

JOSEPH  
(answering)  
Lelyveld.

Silence.

JOSEPH  
Hello?

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Russell clears his throat.

RUSSELL  
This is Russell Ryan.

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

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME**

JOSEPH  
(surprised)  
Mr. Ryan.

He gets his PEN and NOTEBOOK in front of him.

(Switch back and forth where appropriate.)

RUSSELL  
My wife. She -

JOSEPH  
She told you.

RUSSELL

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

JOSEPH

She's a Nazi.

RUSSELL

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

JOSEPH

Do you know what her role was?

RUSSELL

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

JOSEPH

It's my job.

RUSSELL

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

JOSEPH

Yes, I think they did.

Beat.

RUSSELL

(imploring)

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

JOSEPH

I did.

RUSSELL

You know her.

Joseph's not sure about that.

JOSEPH

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

RUSSELL  
No.

JOSEPH  
When did she tell you the truth?

RUSSELL  
Tonight.

JOSEPH  
And you called me right after?

RUSSELL  
Yes.

Beat.

RUSSELL  
I love my wife.

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

**INT. PRINTING ROOM - NIGHT**

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

Joseph goes up to the Night Editor.

JOSEPH  
I need to pull my piece.

NIGHT EDITOR  
What? Which one?

They have to yell over the noise.

JOSEPH  
Hermine Ryan.

NIGHT EDITOR  
The Nazi lady?

JOSEPH  
Yeah.

NIGHT EDITOR  
That's front page.

JOSEPH  
I need to fact check.

NIGHT EDITOR  
(laughing)  
Why? A Nazi's not going to win a libel case.

JOSEPH  
I just got another call.

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

JOSEPH  
We would for anyone else.

The night editor looks at Joseph, skeptical and annoyed.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

THWACK!

The sound of a NEWSPAPER hitting the door.

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

Nothing.

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

But it's really RUSSELL.

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

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

ABE  
WHAT THE HELL?!

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

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

JOSEPH  
I needed more time to -

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

He sucks in a breath.

ABE  
We're running it tomorrow. Inside.

Beat.

ABE  
And I'm sorry about your father.

Joseph looks up, totally caught off guard.

JOSEPH  
What?

Off of Abe's alarmed expression...

JOSEPH  
What?

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

ABE  
(quietly)  
Sixteen.

Joseph finds the page.

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

Joseph is STUNNED.

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

**INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Joseph BURSTS in.

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

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

MOTHER  
(between sobs)  
Yes.

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

Joseph COLLAPSES into a seat.

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

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

After a few moments:

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

Carolyn listens sympathetically. But Joseph almost LAUGHS.

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

CUT TO:

**INSERTS:**

*PRINTING PRESSES.*

*Paper swooshes. GEARS turn.*

*INK presses letters into WORDS.*

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

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

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY**

She takes out her CURLERS.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

And starts to put on her MAKE UP.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Hermine CLEANS.

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

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

Underneath, the SCRATCH is still there.

**INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY**

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

PAGE 10:

Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

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

**EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY**

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

THWACK.

THWACK.

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

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

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

JOSEPH (V.O.)

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

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

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

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

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

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

JOSEPH  
Ater? Ater?

TOMMY  
Calm down.

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

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

He SHAKES the paper in Joseph's face.

JOSEPH  
This story will ruin their life.

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

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

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

**INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY**

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

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

Hermine tries to shrug it off.

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

WHISPERING.

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

Hermine looks to her left.

More STARING SHOPPERS quickly avert their gaze.

Hermine tries to stay calm, goes to the register.

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

Hermine can feel all the EYES glaring, SURROUNDING her.

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

#### **EXT. CHURCH - DAY**

Hermine walks across the lawn, tense.

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

Hermine's cheeks flush but she keeps walking.

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

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

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

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

MAYLENE  
You get away from here.

Her voice is shaking.

HERMINE  
Maylene...

MAYLENE  
Get away.

HERMINE  
Please.

MAYLENE  
(getting worked up)  
We let you into our church, into  
our homes. You're a liar. You're  
the devil.

Her eyes WELL UP with tears of betrayal.

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

MAYLENE  
You're sick.

HERMINE  
I can explain.

MAYLENE  
Go away. You're not one of us.

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

She starts to RUN.

She FALLS.

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

She doesn't look like a housewife anymore.

#### **EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY**

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

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

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

CONSTRUCTION GUY  
Watch out.

Russell SCOOTS over to let him pass. Not offended.

CONSTRUCTION GUY  
Nazi fucker.

Russell drops what he is doing.

RUSSELL  
What'd you say?

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

RUSSELL  
Hey. Hey!

This time the guy turns around.

CONSTRUCTION GUY  
You want me to say it louder?

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

CONSTRUCTION GUY  
What the - !

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

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

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY**

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

*GET OUT, NAZI SCUM*

*GO HOME, HITLER*

*MURDERER*

Some just watch and GOSSIP.

Hermine PEEKS out at the commotion through her CURTAIN.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME**

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

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

Her world is crumbling.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

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

She FUMBLES the box and it BANGS to the floor.

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

She DROPS the metal object with a CLANG.

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

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

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

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

She grabs the BLEACH...

And DRINKS it.

**INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - NIGHT**

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

DEVITO  
You saw the article?

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

The director rubs his head, stressed.

DEVITO  
Great. And you'll assign another investigator?

DIRECTOR  
Yeah, yeah. We're working on it.

He doesn't sound very convincing.

DEVITO  
Can you believe it? A fuckin' Nazi.

But his boss is already walking away.

Devito is on his own.

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

He picks up his PHONE and dials.

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

Each time he stops talking to listen he ESCALATES.

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

He SLAMS down the phone.

DEVITO  
Dammit!

He looks around.

Something is not right.

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

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

His PHONE is to his ear. Waiting...

JOSEPH  
Dad? - Hi. - How are you feeing?

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

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

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

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

JOSEPH  
I'm still here.

Beat.

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

He tries to get a grip on his thoughts.

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

He listens, hoping for an answer.

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

Joseph WALKS, focused.

Up ahead: the SUBWAY ENTRANCE to QUEENS.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

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

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

HERMINE  
You were doing your duty. I understand.

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

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

HERMINE  
(simply)  
I was a nurse.

JOSEPH  
You told me that.

They sit in silence.

HERMINE  
You are here to ask me more  
questions?

JOSEPH  
To follow up.

HERMINE  
First I ask you question.

JOSEPH  
Okay.

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

He considers how to answer.

JOSEPH  
I thought you had a lovely home.

HERMINE  
Good.

Joseph starts to WRITE something...

The KNIFE STABS into his hand!

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

Hermine takes the knife and STABS him again.

In the BACK.

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

CUT TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

Hermine WAKES from her DREAM.

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

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

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

Hermine's eyes DRIFT closed.

**LATER --**

Hermine wakes up again.

The CHAIRS are empty. No woman. No cookies.

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

RUSSELL  
I'm here.

Hermine shuts her eyes.

RUSSELL  
How are you feeling?

She opens them. He's still there.

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

When she's gone:

HERMINE  
I do not want that nurse.

RUSSELL  
What?

HERMINE  
She does not know what she is doing.

RUSSELL  
Yes she does.

HERMINE  
I was a nurse.

RUSSELL  
It's okay.

HERMINE  
I was a nurse.

RUSSELL  
I know.

He takes her hand but she doesn't reciprocate.

RUSSELL  
They said you - you did this to  
yourself.

She doesn't say no.

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

They look at each other, both pained.

HERMINE  
I needed to clean.

Is she talking about the house? Herself?

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

But he doesn't.

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

He grabs onto her hand. Hard.

**EXT. RYAN HOUSE - DAY**

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

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

MAYLENE  
(whispering)  
I heard she tried to kill herself  
yesterday.

JOSEPH  
Excuse me. Do you live here?

MAYLENE  
I do. Yes.

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

MAYLENE  
Since they moved in.

SHERRY  
She was our friend. Part of our  
church group.

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

But Joseph isn't taking any notes.

JOSEPH  
Can I ask, what were your  
impressions of Hermine?

SHERRY  
Her house was always so clean...

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

Who is she kidding?

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

It hurts her to say it.

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

JOSEPH  
Thank you.

He heads up to the Ryan's door.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Hermine sits at the kitchen table, dazed.

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

KNOCKING.

JOSEPH (O.S.)  
Mrs. Ryan? Hermine!

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

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

She opens it a little and sees Joseph standing there.

HERMINE  
What do you want?

JOSEPH  
I -

He hesitates.

HERMINE  
You wrote the story. It is over.

She goes to shut the door.

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

She looks at him. Intimidating.

HERMINE  
You are not here for the paper.

She sees right through him.

HERMINE  
You are here for yourself.

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

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

JOSEPH  
Is your husband -

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

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

HERMINE  
Well.

He stands tall to confront her.

JOSEPH  
You told me you were a nurse.

HERMINE  
I was.

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

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

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

Fine. He knows.

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

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

JOSEPH  
You killed people.

HERMINE  
No.

JOSEPH  
You were a guard in a death camp.

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

JOSEPH  
You're lying!

HERMINE  
It is the past.

JOSEPH  
My father was almost killed by people like you!

HERMINE  
I am a housewife.

JOSEPH  
You're a Nazi! Tell the truth!

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

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

This lands with Joseph.

JOSEPH  
Who are you?

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

HERMINE  
What do you think?

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

She maintains power in her calmness.

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

HERMINE  
You came here today. Are you  
afraid of me?

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

DING!

The OVEN TIMER.

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

HERMINE  
Cookies.

She leaves for the kitchen.

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

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

The metal object.

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

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

It's a MEDAL.

And when he turns it over...

A SWASTIKA engraved on the back.

Hermine returns with a plate of COOKIES.

JOSEPH  
What is this?

He holds up the MEDAL.

HERMINE  
What are you doing with that?

JOSEPH  
What is this?

HERMINE  
Give that to me.

JOSEPH  
Is this a medal?

HERMINE  
Give it to me.

JOSEPH  
It is, isn't it?

HERMINE  
Please.

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

HERMINE  
Stop. Enough.

She STEPS toward him.

JOSEPH  
What did you do to get this?

HERMINE  
(trying to contain herself)  
I -

JOSEPH  
Tell me the truth!

He brandishes it at her.

HERMINE  
Put it down.

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

Then she CRACKS, LOSES IT.

HERMINE  
I EARNED THIS!

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

HERMINE  
I earned this!

She starts ranting in GERMAN. Pure rage.

She grips the medal in her FIST.

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

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

He stumbles back, terrified.

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

**INT. INS - DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

-- SLAM!

Devito's PALMS hit his boss's DESK.

DEVITO  
We can't do that!

He's livid, pacing.

DIRECTOR  
It's done.

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

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

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

DIRECTOR  
This goes above you and me.

DEVITO  
Bullshit!

DIRECTOR  
Enough.

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

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

RUSSELL (O.S.)  
Thank you.

The sound of him HANGING UP the phone.

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

She can't look at him.

RUSSELL  
That was the lawyer.

She doesn't say anything.

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

HERMINE  
What is extradite?

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

HERMINE  
They can do this?

RUSSELL  
Maybe. We would have to go to  
court.

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

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

HERMINE  
I will not be American citizen  
anymore.

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

They both know it won't be the same.

RUSSELL  
We can stay.

HERMINE  
But - the citizenship...

RUSSELL  
Please.

HERMINE  
I earned this.

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

**EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - NIGHT**

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

He passes a BENCH.

From which a DARK FIGURE rises...

Follows him...

And GRABS his arm.

Joseph JUMPS!

JOSEPH  
Holy -

DEVITO  
(whisper yell)  
It's me.

JOSEPH  
What the hell - Were you waiting  
for me?

DEVITO  
I need to talk you.

JOSEPH  
Now?

DEVITO  
They're sabotaging me.

JOSEPH  
What? Who?

DEVITO  
My department. Maybe the CIA too.

He sounds crazy.

JOSEPH  
What are you talking about?

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

JOSEPH  
Why not?

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

JOSEPH  
That doesn't make any sense.

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

JOSEPH  
A deal?

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

JOSEPH  
They can't do that! Why?

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

JOSEPH  
She lied. She murdered people.

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

Joseph takes all this in.

JOSEPH  
What am I supposed to do?

Devito looks around, paranoid.

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

JOSEPH  
I -

His mind flashes to:

*Hermine touching his shoulder.*

*Hermine screaming, stabbing her own hand with the medal.*

He wants nothing to do with this.

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

He heads down the steps, leaving Devito standing alone.

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

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

But this time it really WON'T COME OUT.

**INT. JOSEPH'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY**

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

MOTHER  
Your father will be home soon.

She wipes her hands and walks behind him.

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

It's COOKIES.

He WHIPS around.

And sees his mother is HERMINE, smiling with malice.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Joseph STARTS awake.

Sweating, panting.

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

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

**INT. INS - MAIN OFFICE - DAY**

Devito's phone RINGS.

DEVITO  
(answering)  
Devito.

On the other end --

**INT. NEW YORK TIMES - SAME**

Joseph calls from his desk.

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

Beat.

JOSEPH  
I want her far away.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

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

*Emaciated people.*

*Allied tanks passing PILES of bodies.*

*BARBED WIRE fences with gas chambers in the distance.*

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

JOSEPH  
We have to.

Carolyn brings three COFFEES to the table and joins them.

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

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

JOSEPH  
What do they need?

DEVITO  
Proof.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - DAWN**

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

RING!

Joseph stumbles in from the bedroom in his UNDERWEAR.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOSEPH

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

**MONTAGE:**

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

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

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

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

The lights are dimmed. Hermine finishes the DISHES.

Then she feels Russell's eyes behind her.

She stands silent and still, and then:

HERMINE

You want to know if there was more.

RUSSELL

No.

He hangs his head. Ashamed.

HERMINE

You can ask.

She waits for him to make his move.

RUSSELL

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

Beat.

RUSSELL  
You could have been saying  
anything.

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

HERMINE  
I am your wife. There is no more.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

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

Carolyn walks carefully in behind him.

CAROLYN  
You coming to bed?

JOSEPH  
Yeah.

But he doesn't move.

CAROLYN  
Everything alright?

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

He trails off into silence.

CAROLYN  
When what?

JOSEPH  
When he called me.

CAROLYN  
Who?

JOSEPH  
Her husband.

Beat.

JOSEPH  
And told me he still loved her.

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

**EXT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY**

Devito sits on a BENCH. Joseph joins him.

DEVITO  
We got a court date.

JOSEPH  
Finally!

Devito shakes his head, somber.

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

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

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

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

Devito looks at him. Obviously.

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

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

JOSEPH  
What are we going to do?

DEVITO  
What can we do?

They look ahead. Devito jaded, Joseph dejected.

**INT. JOSEPH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

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

**INT. DINER - DAY**

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

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

BELLS jingle.

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

*IT'S THE WOMAN IN BLACK.*

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

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

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

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

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

RACHEL  
How did you find me?

She speaks with a FRENCH ACCENT.

JOSEPH  
Why were you hiding?

She doesn't trust him.

He takes out her LETTER.

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

She looks at the letter between them.

RACHEL  
This is the truth.

JOSEPH  
I know it is.

RACHEL  
I do not have anything more to  
say.

JOSEPH  
Okay.

He needs to keep her here until he explains.

JOSEPH  
Ms. Berger -

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

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

Beat.

RACHEL  
Did you read this?

She looks at her letter.

JOSEPH  
Yes.

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

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

JOSEPH  
I know it's asking a lot...

RACHEL  
I am sorry.

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

RACHEL  
What will this change?

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

He re-phrases:

JOSEPH  
This deserves to be heard.

He holds up her LETTER.

But Rachel still looks unsure.

**INT. COURT ROOM - DAY**

A wood-paneled room.

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

Devito sits at the prosecutor's table.

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

Russell sits right behind her in the FRONT ROW.

Joseph sits in the BACK, among other spectators.

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

(MORE)

ATTORNEY (CONT'D)  
The location in question is a  
Polish city.

DEVITO  
Which was occupied and controlled  
by Germany.

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

JUDGE  
I believe multiple countries tried  
to file this request.

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

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

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

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

*A water stain on the tile.*

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

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

*A crack in the ceiling.*

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

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

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

The judge holds up his hand to let Devito continue.

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

*A button missing from Devito's sleeve.*

JUDGE  
And you have official records of these crimes?

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

He holds up the STACK of LETTERS.

The judge considers.

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

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

JUDGE  
Are any of the witnesses here  
today?

Russell looks HOPEFUL.

Joseph HOLDS HIS BREATH.

DEVITO  
Yes, your honor. One.

Hermine becomes ALERT.

DEVITO  
Rachel Berger.

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

Rachel takes the witness seat.

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

RACHEL  
Yes.

DEVITO  
How long have you lived there?

RACHEL  
Fifteen years.

DEVITO  
And you're a naturalized citizen?

RACHEL  
Yes.

DEVITO  
A legal one.

He pauses for effect.

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

RACHEL  
Paris.

DEVITO  
You were born there?

RACHEL  
I was born in Poland.

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

RACHEL  
Yes.

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

RACHEL  
(hushed)  
Kobyla.

DEVITO  
I'm sorry?

RACHEL  
This is what we call her. Kobyla.

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

He motions, but Rachel doesn't still look.

RACHEL  
Yes.

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

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

DEVITO  
And she worked at that camp.

RACHEL  
Yes.

DEVITO  
What was her position?

RACHEL  
She was a guard.

DEVITO  
What did she do as a guard?

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

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

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

DEVITO  
She sent people to die.

RACHEL  
Yes.

He lets this land.

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

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

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

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

RACHEL  
Yes.

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

RACHEL  
Yes.

DEVITO  
Why is that?

She takes a deep breath, steeling herself.

RACHEL  
She used a whip.

DEVITO  
You saw her whip women?

RACHEL  
Yes.

DEVITO  
And did she ever beat you?

RACHEL  
No.

She's holding something back.

DEVITO  
But she did terrorize you.

Joseph LEANS forward.

DEVITO  
Can you tell the court what  
happened?

Rachel takes a breath.

RACHEL  
We were working. Moving sacks from  
the factory.

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

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

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

RACHEL

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

She breaks down.

RACHEL

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

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

RACHEL

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

Stunned silence.

RACHEL

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

Beat.

RACHEL

(barely audible)  
And I did.

The room is frozen.

RACHEL

I saved the woman who killed my  
daughter.

Not even Joseph's pen moves.

Russell shuts his eyes and hangs his head.

Rachel forces herself to look at Hermine.

Hermine AVERTS her gaze. Her evil finally exposed.

**EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY**

Rachel walks down the STAIRS. Her head held high.

JOSEPH  
Rachel. Rachel!

He runs after her, calling out.

But she DISAPPEARS into the CROWD.

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

**INT. COURT ROOM - DAY**

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

JUDGE  
Will the defendant please rise.

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

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

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

**INT. RYAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Russell is DRUNK, bottle in hand.

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

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

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

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

A sickened, animal YELL escapes from him.

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

And then the TEARS come.

Russell is alone, deflated, shaking on the floor.

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

**INT. CAR - DAY**

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

DEVITO  
She's probably not the only one here.

JOSEPH  
She's the one we found.

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

JOSEPH  
We also opened our doors for Rachel Berger.

They sit in this. Still struggling with it all.

DEVITO  
When I did her interview she seemed normal. Nice.

JOSEPH  
I was in her house.

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

Joseph knows exactly what he means.

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

JOSEPH  
Do what?

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

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

DEVITO  
Or she's just crazy. Has split  
personalities.

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

Another CAR pulls up.

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

**EXT. TARMAC - SAME**

Joseph gets out of the car.

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

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

HERMINE  
Is that coffee? On your shirt.

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

Beat.

HERMINE  
I wanted to be a nurse.

*Finally she is telling the truth.*

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

JOSEPH  
And you became a murderer.

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

HERMINE  
I knew you would come. To my door.

JOSEPH  
You thought someone would find you?

HERMINE  
Yes. One day.

She looks down at his SHIRT again.

HERMINE  
Soda water is a good trick.

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

But Joseph can't look away.

FADE OUT.

**INT. GERMAN PRISON CELL - NIGHT**

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

Her face is expressionless.

Then she starts to laugh.

And cry.

A wave of sorrow, anger, guilt, relief.

Alone, she can finally let go.

**DAY**

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

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

*The Nazi in her is real.*

She gets up and MAKES THE BED.

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

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

She takes it in her hand...

Is she going to hurt herself? Someone else?

No.

It's a NEEDLE.

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

*The housewife in her is real too.*

Over the image of her sewing...

POST SCRIPT:

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

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

***She received a life sentence.***

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

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

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

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

***Her husband Russell Ryan never left her.***

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

THE END.



# Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

By JOSEPH LELYVELD

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

pg. 10

# Former Nazi Camp Guard Is Now a Housewife in Queens

**By JOSEPH LELYVELD**

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. Ryan was doing some

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

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

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

"On the radio all they talk is peace and freedom," she said. "All right. Then 15 or 16 years later why do they bother people?

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

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

Mr. Wiesenthal said she was

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

"Of her activity in Maidanek

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

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

## Released by British

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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