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MAMZER BASTARD

Music by
Na'ama Zisser

Text by
Samantha Newton
& Rachel C. Zisser

Dedicated to
MORDECAI ZISSER

MAMZER/BASTARD
A Chamber Opera.

SINGERS

Younger Yoel (10 years old).
Yoel (21 years old). *Countertenor.*
Stranger (60s). *Baritone.*
David (30s). *Cantor.*
Menashe (50s). *Tenor.*
Esther (50s). *Mezzo Soprano.*
Girl (20s). *Pre-recorded voiceover, spoken.*

ENSEMBLE

Violin I
Viola
Cello
Double Bass
Trombone
Horn
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet
Saxophones
Piano/Accordion/Electro-Acoustic Keyboards
Percussion/Drums

Duration: **90 minutes approx.**

Sung in: **English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Aramaic.**

Commissioned through the Royal Opera House and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama doctoral composer-in-residence scheme, to be premiered in June 2018, London.

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SINGERS/CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

YOEL (10 yrs old & 20s). *Child singer/actor & countertenor.*

Two actors to play the role.

Yoel lives at home with his parents in Borough Park, New York. We meet him in the days before his wedding. He has always felt close to G-d but far from the religious, Hasidic Jewish community in which he was raised. And so it's taken his parents a long time to arrange a suitable wife for him.

Yoel has always felt watched, haunted. As a kid, he believed he had a guardian angel but as he got older Yoel began to fear the ghostly character who's presence was constantly felt in his wake. He has never told anyone about his stalker. It is a secret Yoel keeps to himself. The anxiety of doing this has given Yoel a slight stutter. He wonders, is he special or cursed?

STRANGER (early 60s). *Baritone.*

The stranger escaped WW2 and fled to New York. But an unforeseen conflict awaited him there; expose the truth about his past and give himself a chance at a new beginning or scarifice his own feelings for the happiness of another. His decision will gradually wear him down to a pale shade of his former self. When we meet him, decades later, he is a tired vagabond living in the sidelines of society, not part of any community. But why does he stalk young Yoel?

DAVID (30s). *Cantor.*

David is our Cantor. He occupies the home next door to Yoel's family's apartment. David is an exemplary religious young man, a WW2 refugee who came to America alone as a child. David is the son, Yoel's father, Menashe, wishes he had.

ESTHER (50s). *Mezzo Soprano.*

Esther is Yoel's mother. She is also a WW2 refugee who fled Poland. Esther lost her entire family in the war. She is racked by the guilt of surviving. During the war, she was a seamstress mending German uniforms. And after, in her despair, she turned to G-d and became more connected to the Orthodox community.

Esther found a new life with her husband, Menashe, in Brooklyn, New York. Due to her age, the couple struggled to create a family, something that Esther wanted more than anything. Eventually, Esther gave birth to Yoel. Yoel is her only child which is unconventional for a Hasidic family.

MENASHE (50s). *Tenor.*

Menashe is Yoel's father. While Esther adores Yoel, Menashe often wishes his son was more like David. When he hears David religiously rehearsing his cantorial music through the thin walls that adorn their apartments, Menashe prays that Yoel will one day find peace and be as devoted as David instead of restlessly roaming the streets each night.

Menashe is not an immigrant. He was born in New York and never saw the horrors of WW2, this sometimes distances him from his wife, Esther. He wishes they had more children.

GIRL (20s). *Pre-recorded voice-over, spoken.*

A pre-recorded, non religious, young American girl who works at the local movie theatre and flirts with Yoel. She is never seen on stage only heard in voice-over as a tantalising taste of the world beyond his community.

*NOTE: Dialogue written in **bold** signifys that these lines are spoken. Dialogue written in *italics* signifys that these lines are said in Hebrew, Yiddish or Aramaic with translation.

MAMZER DEFINITION:

Mamzer literally translates as 'bastard'. A mamzer is a person born from a forbidden relationship according to the Bible and Jewish religious law. It is a title declared on a shamed few because of its heavy penalty: **"A mamzer shall not enter the congregation of the Lord"** (Deut. 23:3). Meaning, it is strictly prohibited for a mamzer to marry and for seven generations the mamzer's descendents will suffer the same fate. Seven generations will be cast out of the community and shunned. However, if a mamzer is unaware of his status and a marriage is somehow contracted, the union will remain legally valid.

From darkness... a congregation in Jewish prayer. The faint rumble of subway trains indicates we're in a city.

LIGHTS UP:

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

A huge staircase splits the stage. A Jacob's Ladder. Shadows of Hasidic men in frock coats and fedora hats ascend and descend the staircase.

Meanwhile, in the claustrophobic space...

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

A child hides. Black skull cap, white shirt, mousy sidelocks curled at his cheekbones.

This is younger **YOEL (10 years old)**.

Yoel hugs a small transistor radio. He flicks through radio stations careful not to draw attention.

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)

This is WMCA New York --

(radio static)

(a snippet of a soul song)

(then more static)

**Ladies and gentlemen, stay tuned
for 1969's greatest living --**

Yoel pauses the radio as a group pass on the staircase overhead. He waits... until their footsteps become distant... and then turns the radio's volume back up.

Brief snippets of popular songs make it clear that this is -

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, 1969.

There are two musical worlds battling in this scene, the humming congregation in prayer and the secular songs of 1969 on Yoel's radio.

Yoel has a slight stutter that worsens when he's nervous.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)

(sung)

Aaaaaaaaaaat-t-t-t-t synagogue,

We sing an old song,

It connects us back to our

(MORE)

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS) (CONT'D)
 f-f-father's fathers,
 Our father's fathers.
 Our father's father's fathers --

Yoel hears someone coming.

Panicked, he switches his radio off afraid to be caught listening to forbidden music on the Sabbath... but it's only the familiar sound of the congregation's prayer...

Still, he's tense.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS) (CONT'D)
 I-I-IIII think about my mother's
 father,
 Who I never met.
 How she promised him that she'd
 have children,
 And she'd name them after him.
 'Y-y-y-yoel'.
 Yoel.
 My name.
 A name to carry his memory.
 To marry.
 A name to name his children's
 children's children.

Terrified, Yoel snaps to another sound. He gets a feeling like he's not alone. His eyes search the shadows yet he sees no one... still he retreats further into his hiding place.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS) (CONT'D)
 Aaaaaaaaaaat-t-t-t-t synagogue,
 We sing an old song,
 It connects us back to our
 f-f-father's fathers,
 Our father's fathers.
 Our father's father's fathers --

MENASHE
 (spoken, off stage)
Yoel!
Yoel!

MENASHE (late 50s), Yoel's father, dressed for synagogue, enters searching for him. Yoel quickly hides his transistor radio as Menashe reaches into his hiding place and grabs him by the arm.

But Yoel pulls back, refusing to exit.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
And what have you been doing?
Making us late for synangogue.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)
 (spoken)
Someone's there --

Menashe tries to grab his son again... and again Yoel pulls away.

MENASHE
And what have you been doing?

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)
 (stutters)
There's --
There's --

Menashe looks to the stage, scanning. He sees nothing.

MENASHE
There's?
 (softens)
Only us here, Yoel.

Menashe offers his son a hand. With his father's gentleness, Yoel gains the confidence to exit his hide out. In the open, Menashe dusts off his son's shoulders. Straightens his son's hair but --

Yoel can't shake the feeling. Nervously, he looks over his shoulder...

To the vacant stage...

As he is lead away by Menashe.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - CONTINUOUS

A closed door at the top of the staircase opens to reveal a pious cantor, **DAVID** (30s). David sways, eyes closed, devoted, leading a prayer. Silhouettes of Jewish Hasidic men rocking too and fro. Hanging unworn frock coats and black fedora hats give the illusion of a community.

CANTORIAL PIECE:

SHIR HAMAALOT (A SONG OF THE ASCENT)
Psalm 126.
Sung in Hebrew without translation.

DAVID (CANTOR)

*Shir Hama'alot,
B'shuv Adonai et shivat tziyon
hayinu k'chol'mim.
Az Y'male s'chok peenu ulshoneinu
rina.
Az yom'ru vagoyim higdil Adonai
la'asot im eleh; higdil Adonai
la'asot imanu hayinu s'meicheim.
Shuva Adonai et shiviteinu
ka'afikim banegev.
Hazor'im b'dimah b'rinah yiktzoru.
Haloch Yelech uvacho,
Noseh meshech hazarah,
Bo yavo v'rinah noseh alumotav.*

During the cantorial piece, Menashe and Yoel enter in a rush. They climb the staircase to join David in prayer.

Menashe puts on his *Tallit* (prayer shawl), young Yoel hides childishly in its fabric as he clings to his father's side.

When it ends the cantorial piece morphs eerily back to the hum of the prayer, the muffled shuffles and idle chatter of a congregation exiting synagogue leading us into a new haunting sound territory.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - CONTINUOUS

Menashe chats with David (the Cantor) as they casually descend the large staircase exiting synagogue. Yoel lags in their wake. He pauses mid flight when he sees --

A haunting shadow looming over the stage.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)

(stutters)

There's --

There's --

Too busy speaking with David, Menashe does not notice his son's fear. He urges Yoel to keep pace but --

Yoel is frozen, terrified. Can't shake the feeling that someone is always watching. Yoel takes brave steps toward his father but as he reaches the foot of the staircase --

The shadow grows bigger until it towers, consuming him.

Yoel staggers back -

...

And runs!

As he flees, he momentarily dips out of view... a trick...
because instead of younger YOEL (10 years old) re-emerging...

**Younger Yoel is replaced by YOEL (21 years old) indicating a
passage of time.**

Older **YOEL (21 years old)** rushes to rejoin his father and David still chatting as they exit the stage. Yet something makes older Yoel pause... a memory... he looks back over his shoulder...

Haunted.

But the stage is empty. The shadow is lost to the darkness. The ghostly figure has gone... for now. Older Yoel retreats to the hiding place he occupied as a child...

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

Mirroring our opening, **YOEL (21 years old)** hugs a small transistor radio and smokes a cigarette as he kicks back listening to his forbidden music... static... tuning... Yoel flicks through local stations now filled with disco and punk rock. This is...

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK. 1977.

YOEL (21 YRS)

(sung)

I-I-IIII think about my mother's
father,
Who I never met.
How she promised him that she'd
have children,
And she'd name them after him.
'Y-y-y-yoel'.
Yoel.
My name.
A name to carry his memory.
To marry.
But what if...
I'm not ready.
I'm not ready.

ESTHER
 (spoken, off stage)
Yoel!
Yoel!

ESTHER, Yoel's mother, calls him from off stage.

SCENE CHANGE.

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

An air-conditioner unit whirls uselessly.

An abundance of white lace veils portions of the stage.

A robust Hasidic woman is concealed behind one veiled section. She wears an apron and a wig to cover her hair, modest. This is **ESTHER**, Yoel's mother.

Esther is hard at work. She paces, handling an ornate unworn wedding dress, sewing tiny white beads carefully into its fabric.

The fabric that fills the stage is all part of an immense train for the wedding dress. It also partitions the stage like the fabric screens used to separate men from woman in synagogues.

Esther efficiently navigates this maze.

Yoel makes a mess tangling the fabric as he tries to reach his mother. It's the height of summer and Esther is sweating. She speaks without taking a breath, constantly overlapping and interrupting Yoel.

ESTHER
 (sung)
 Another stitch -
 I stitch -
Schrecklih.
(Eng trans: dreadful)
 If that is you,
 Yoel.
 Disrupting my work and making me
 confused.
 Another stitch -
 I stitch -
 You've gotten me all -
 I won't tell you again,
 A thousand times,
 I'm in the middle of -
 Melting,
 (MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 I'm melting.
 Already running late --

YOEL (21 YRS)
 (spoken)
But Mamashi.
*(Eng trans: endearing way
 to say 'Mother')*
Y-y-you c-c-called me --

ESTHER
 And in you walk with your eyes
 open.
 One yard.
 Two yards.
 Ruined.
 Are you determined to see the dress
 I'm preparing,
 For your bride?

Yoel turns his back on his mother and the dress.

YOEL (21 YRS)
I wasn't thinking.
**I-I-I just came to see you before I
 went to --**

ESTHER
 Out?
 You're going out?
 On this evening?
 Of all evenings.

YOEL (21 YRS)
To the mikveh.

ESTHER
 Over and over?
 Over and over?
 My *ingale*,
(Eng Trans: my love)
 What have you been doing,
 That needs so much cleansing?

YOEL (21 YRS)
But Mama,
Can I-I ask a question?

ESTHER
 Nou.
 Nou.
*(Eng trans: get on with
 it)*

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)
 (sung)
 When you and father --
 Married --
 D-d-did you --

Esther cuts him off.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Yoel,
Breathe.
Take a deep breath.
Think about what you want to say
And then,
Just say it.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

YOEL (21 YRS)

Just.
Say.
It.

Did you --
Did you --

Yoel takes a deep frustrated breath.

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)

Did you know for certain, he was
your intended?

ESTHER

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)

(spoken)

Did --

Ha, My Bershert?

Did you know for certain he
was your intended?

(*Eng trans: intended*)

Did you know for certain?

(sung)

But did you know?

Disrupting my work.
In this heat.
On this evening.
Of all evenings.

Esther concentrates on her work on the wedding dress trying
not to be overcome by emotion. But her behavior plays as
dismissive to Yoel.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

When I married your father,
The war had just ended.
So much had been lost.
I wasn't doing much thinking,
I was just living.
I see you are nervous.
But there's no room for it.
There's no room for it.

Yoel exits.

Esther doesn't realise. She softens.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I just wish my work was over,
The dress was finished,
And the guests were arriving.
(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

And I could rest my lips upon your
forehead,
A mother to her only son.
On the night of his wedding.
A blessing.
Yoel.
My Yoel?

She turns to Yoel but he has gone. Esther is left alone to
continue her work.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Another stitch.
I stitch.
Melting.

SCENE CHANGE.

The drone of the air conditioner is replaced by falling water
droplets and an uneasy sense that we are underground in an
almost underworld.

INT. MIKVEH - NIGHT

Daggers of white light now dramatically illuminate each step
of the giant staircase. The stage floor looks glossy and
slick like BLACK WATER. It appears to be moving, rippling, an
illusion.

The lights overhead flicker. The struggle of an overworked
power station.

Hot and worn-out, older Yoel enters from a door at the top of
the staircase. He stares down at the stage floor, at the
black water, as if it were a ritual immersion pool known in
Judaism as a '**MIKVEH**'.

Sounds echo like we are inside stone walls. Light reflects
across Yoel's face. The musical intro stops and there is
silence.

YOEL (21 YRS)

(spoken)
(mumbled, recited
quickly)

**Baruch ata adonai eloheinu
melech ha-olam asher kid-
shanu al ha'tevilah be'mayyim
hayyim.
Hareini, Ba lefanicah lehodot
lecha al shezikitani le'chupa
U'kidushin.**

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

*Now, As I immerse myself, I
begin a new stage. A phase of
rebirth, a renewal of your
world. I prepared for my new
life. And for the
sanctification of that life
through kiddushin, your holy
state of marriage*

Yoel descends the steps toward the black water, preparing to bathe in it...

He stalls...

In conflict...

YOEL (CONT'D)

(sung)

Two Dollars.

Two Dollars.

YOEL (CONT'D)

(spoken)

Baruch a'ta.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Blessed are you.

YOEL (CONT'D)

(sung)

That I stole from my father's wallet.

Two.

Two Dollars.

He -- He -- He did not notice.

YOEL (CONT'D)

(spoken)

Ve Al yedey chupa u'kidushin.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Your holy state of marriage

A deep bass line creeps in.

YOEL (CONT'D)

(sung)

There wasn't a line at her ticket booth.

I hid my payos behind --

(Eng trans: sidelocks)

Behind my ears.

Yoel tucks his curled sidelocks behind his ears.

YOEL (CONT'D)

My breath fogged the teller's window.

I could see her chest breathing.

Breathing.

Breathing.

Breathing.

(anxiety heightens)

She was eating Raisinets.

She kept them hidden behind the cash register.

She said...

We hear a sultry female voice, American accent, from the heavens. A memory. Yoel's memory of a previous encounter. The sounds of a cinema box office on a busy Saturday night.

GIRL (V.O.)
(spoken)
Star Wars or Annie Hall?

YOEL	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
(spoken)	<i>He who kept me alive and</i>
Shehechyanu ve'kiyemanu.	<i>sustained me.</i>

GIRL (V.O.)
Seven thirty or nine o'clock
screening?
Stars Wars or Annie Hall?

YOEL	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Shehechyanu Vekiyemanu	<i>And enabled me to reach this</i>
Vehigianu la'zman haze.	<i>day. And granted me this</i>
	<i>grace.</i>

YOEL (CONT'D)
(sung)
It's been three weeks since then,
But my heart is still racing,
racing.
It thumps in my chest as I drown in
this cleansing water.
Holy water.

YOEL (CONT'D)	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
(spoken)	<i>God of all creation.</i>
Eloheynu Melech Haolam.	

GIRL (V.O.)
(spoken)
That will be two dollars.

A cash register pings.

YOEL
(sung)
Two dollars.
Two,
Two dollars.
So many secrets I have kept in
this...

YOEL (CONT'D)	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
(spoken)	<i>Holy...</i>
Mayim...	<i>Living...</i>
Chayim...	<i>Water</i>
U'tehorim.	

GIRL (V.O.)
 (spoken)
One is funny.
The other scary.

YOEL
 (sung)
 I told her I had never heard of
 either.
 I told her I had never heard of S-
 s-tar Wars or Annie Hall.
 I told her I had never been to a
 movie theatre.
 I told her.
 And I told her.
 All of this just isn't part of my
 r-r-religion.
 All of this just isn't part of my
 r-r-religion.
 I asked her 'w-w-what do I do?'

YOEL (CONT'D)
 What do I do?
 What do I do?
 What do I do?
 What do I do?

GIRL (V.O.)
 (spoken)
Take yourself inside the
theatre.
Buy yourself a soda.
Move into the darkness and
return to the womb of all
creation.
The waters of our mother.
The water of our making.

YOEL (CONT'D)
 She thought I was just playing
 cute.
 (spoken)
Such a damn nebach.
(Eng Trans: poor little
thing)

We give the illusion that Yoel enters the pool, the mikveh to
 waist height.

YOEL (CONT'D)
Mayim...
Chayim...
U'tehorim.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION
 Holy...
 Living...
 Water

GIRL (V.O.)
 (spoken)
One is funny.
The other scary.

Yoel closes his eyes and fully submerges his head and body in the mikveh. He stays underwater a moment too long... Reemerges with a desperate gasp.

YOEL

(sung)

I followed her orders.
Took my seat before a flickering
screen.
Popcorn on the floor.
My soles stuck to the carpet.
The lights went out.
I felt abandoned.
Alone in the dark.
It consumed me.
I looked to the actors on screen as
I would my Rebbe,
But they could not reassure me.
They had no guidance for me.
No guidance for me.
No guidance.
No guidance for me.
Two dollars.
Two dollars.
Two stolen d-d-dollars that I
wasted.

He sinks to absolve it disappearing completely under the black surface. Gossiping whispers, muttered from every direction, repeat a single word.

WHISPERS

'Mamzer'. **'Mamzer'.** **'Mamzer'.**
'Mamzer'. **'Mamzer'...**

Yoel reemerges from the water.

YOEL

(spoken)

Who's there?

Yoel waits...

And waits... no response. He moves to exit until --

-- A THUNDEROUS ELECTRICAL BOOM --

Yoel jolts to a halt.

With another DEEP CLUNK the lights at the front of the stage SWITCH OFF...

In descending order, approaching Yoel... one by one all the stage lights follow suit until Yoel is left in the last for a brief moment and then...

COMPLETE DARKNESS.

PITCH BLACK.

A POWER CUT.

Everything whirls to quiet...

YOEL (CONT'D)
Is this a sign?

STRANGER (OFF STAGE)
(echo, whisper)
Is this a sign?

A deeper, older voice. Haunting. Yoel is not alone.

SCENE CHANGE:

The SOUND DESIGN suggests that Yoel exits the building of the Mikveh and escapes onto -

EXT. BROOKLYN - CITY STREET - NIGHT

The moments after a city wide black out. Like the city of New York our audience is kept in darkness.

Taking inspiration from the radio broadcasts that define this notorious evening, this section is almost entirely created by **SOUND DESIGN** over a pitch black empty stage.

Sounds become more prominent in the dark... we hear the crack and fizz of a soda can opening. The spark of a cigarette lighter. Heels over sidewalk. A radio cassette turns over in a car stereo. The jangle of a keychain. Distant crowds excited by the black-out, fuelled and intrigued by its mystery.

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
(spoken)
Who's there?

Motorcycles approach. Teenage engines pop pop pop with a cc no greater than 125. A gang of young KID THUGS.

GIRL (V.O.)
(spoken)
Hey, don't I know you?

The sultry girl's voice from the cinema seems bullying now.

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
Who's there?

The motorcycles get louder, swarming.

GIRL (V.O.)
**He said he'd never spoken to a girl
that wasn't his mother or his
cousin.**

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
Who's there?

GIRL (V.O.)
(mocking)
We're just t-t-talking t-t-to ya.

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
Who's there?

Tormenting teenage giggles escalate to an ATTACK!

Revving excited motorcycles.

Feet shuffling.

Dull punches.

Bottles smashing.

Male grunts and mumbled jeers.

Desperate gasps.

Yoel is out numbered.

The only light throughout this scene comes from sweeping, blinding headlights, the illusion of passing cars. Up until now these passing cars have only revealed an empty stage but in them now we glimpse --

The silhouette of an eerie figure. The shadow from our opening scene, the STRANGER.

GIRL (V.O.)
(terror re: the stranger)
**It's him. It's him. He's come to
get us.**

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
Who's there?

STRANGER (OFF STAGE)
 (spoken)
Who's there?

GIRL (V.O.)
**You never seen him creeping around
 the neighbourhood?**

YOEL (OFF STAGE)
Who's there?

STRANGER (OFF STAG(SPOKEN)
Who's there?

GIRL (V.O.)
**He aint afraid. He's dead
 already... a ghost.**

TWO DEAFENING BANGS bring everything to silence.

Swelling, gossiping whispers from everywhere repeating a single word.

WHISPERS
***Mamzer, Mamzer, Mamzer, Mamzer,
 Mamzer, Mamzer...***

A low static pulse as red emergency lighting switches on. A bold emergency sign hangs above the stage tweaking on a weak generator but instead of reading 'EXIT' the sign reads:

'BASTARD'

The stage remains empty as we hear a mounting montage of overlapping spoken sound clips taken from actual recordings from **JULY 13TH 1977**, the night of the New York black out.

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)
***-- And the lights have just gone
 off here at Shea Stadium -- We see
 matches being lit around.
 Cigarette lighters. The emergency
 lights are on in the hallways, the
 corridors and what have you. But a
 power failure here at Shea Stadium.
 And this is the first one in its
 history --***

(MORE)

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)

*-- Urging all policeman to report
to your nearest precinct as soon as
possible --*

*-- All we know at this juncture is
that there is a city wide black
out. All of the five boroughs are
affected --*

*-- Thousands are trapped in the
subways. Looters and vandels have
hit some --*

SCENE CHANGE.

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

REPEAT: TWO DEAFENING BANGS!

High pitched screaming...

ESTHER

(spoken, in pain)

ARGHH.

MENASHE

(spoken)

Is everyone alright?

Amid the abundance of white lace a stern bearded face illuminates by candlelight, **MENASHE**. Like his son earlier, Menashe clumsily navigates.

Menashe carries two candles. He places one by his wife. She screamed because she cut her finger. She sucks on it to prevent the bleeding and continues to moan.

ESTHER

(sung)

The lights went out and another
stitch -

I,

I stitched -

Finger pricked.

Did the fuse blow?

(loses Menashe)

Menashe?

Menashe?

(getting more upset)

Menashe?

Menashe!

In the dark, Menashe stumbles into furniture searching between bundles of fabric.

MENASHE

(sung, calls back to her)

Not a fuse,
A city wide black out.
Go to the window.
See for yourself.
The streets are *hefker*. *Hefker*.
(*Eng trans: without an owner*)
Everyone is out.

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Everyone is out.
(REPEAT)

ESTHER

Everyone is out.
(REPEAT)

Esther moves to a window.

Menashe overturns things looking for something... spills tiny white beads across the floor.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Everyone is out?
And yet you are in here,
You are making me all *ferblondjet*.
(*Eng trans: confused*)
Mind the dress.
Menashe.
Menashe.
Tell me,
Why are you searching?

MENASHE

I heard the neighbours talking.
They say there's something going on
just a few blocks from here.
Now, I don't want to scare you.
But they say,
There's a fire.

ESTHER

Fire?

MENASHE

And people are taking in the
darkness what is not theirs when
the lights are on.

ESTHER

With my finger in my mouth,
I swear I remember.
(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 Candles and matches beneath the
 sink.
 To relieve us from this darkness.
 But who am I kidding.
 It will never leave me.
 As my blood falls freely,
 Where is my light?
 Where is my Yoel?
 (panics)
 Take a look at my finger,
 It's still bleeding.
 Mind the dress,
 Menashe!
 Menashe!
 (spoken)
Bring the candle closer...

His candle exposes a blood stain on the wedding dress.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 (sung, distraught)
 See,
 I stained it.
 My blood,
 Has ruined it.

MENASHE
 (teases, spoken)
That's it.
Cancel the wedding.

Menashe offers a cloth to Esther.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
 (sung)
 The radio you've hidden.
 I left it here.

Esther ignores him.

ESTHER
 A bridal dress marked with the
 shviger's blood.
 (Eng trans: mother of the
 groom)

Esther carefully dabs the stain off the dress. Faint, we hear
 someone off stage rehearsing...

THE CANTORIAL PIECE, **MI ANI** (WHO AM I?).

The singer is David, the cantor. David is Esther and
 Menashe's neighbour.

Moonlight reveals a slim portion of David's apartment. Sparse. Only a piano and a wall which adjoins David's apartment to Esther and Menashe's apartment. David sits at the piano as he rehearses.

Esther and Menashe speak over David's rehearsal.

MENASHE
(spoken re: radio)
Then Yoel must have moved it.

ESTHER
(spoken, gossiping)
**Well I didn't touch it.
Maybe your precious David forgot to
return it.**

Menashe whispers so David does not overhear them through the paper thin walls of the apartment.

MENASHE
**Even in a blackout,
David is preparing for your son's
wedding more than the *hassen*
himself.**
(Eng trans: groom)

Esther does not bother to whisper.

ESTHER
**That's our son and it's our son's
wedding.**

MENASHE
Avardeh, he's our son.
(Eng trans: obviously)
**That's what I said.
I just wish he had a little of the
yirat shamyim that David has in
him.**
(Eng trans: fear of G-d)

Menashe leans toward her, excited, like he's bragging about a celebrity.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
**You know, David now studies with
the Rebbe?
A boy like him.
An orphan of the war.
Came from nothing.
And not only that,
The Rebbe says he's an *elui*.**
(MORE)

MENASHE (CONT'D)
*(Eng trans: exceptional
 student of the Torah)*

ESTHER
The Rebbe this!
The Rebbe that!
**Maybe you should have married the
 Rebbe!**

MENASHE
 (sung)
 If you listen...
 (softly)
 The dark night has hushed the city,
 And the walls of this apartment are
 so thin that,
 For weeks now,
 Every day and evening,
 It sounds like he *davens*.
(Eng trans: prays)

Up until now, **MI ANI** was only heard in fragments, rehearsing.
 Menashe encourages Esther to press her ear up against the
 adjoining apartment wall... they listen.

CANTORIAL PIECE:

MI ANI (*WHO AM I?*)
Sung in Hebrew without translation.

DAVID
Mi ani?
Rak mifras,
Lavan,
Boded,
Al mayim shechorim.
Ran ani ve'noded.

Mi Ani?
Rak mifras,
Lavan,
Boded.

The moonlight lighting David's apartment fades to black. So
 that only Esther and Menashe can be seen now.

MENASHE
 (spoken)
And where is our Yoel?

ESTHER
 (spoken)
Ich weiss.
(Eng trans: what do I know)
Ask the Rebbe.

MENASHE
Ich weiss.
(Eng trans: what do I know)

ESTHER
He's at the mikveh.

MENASHE
What has he been doing that needs so much cleansing?

ESTHER
I am sorry, he is not a lamed vuvnik like your David.
(Eng trans: sarcastic way to say the most pious)

MENASHE
Always roaming.
Always wandering.
I blame you for it, Mame.
(Eng trans: Mother)

Esther now opens the window and looks out at the audience. Strings turn into police sirens and distant hollering as the sounds of the city invade their space.

ESTHER
I have a bad feeling.

MENASHE
 (re: radio)
Aha.
I found it.

Menashe finds the radio and shakes it to life. Radio static. He flicks through local news channels.

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)
 (SPOKEN, ACTUAL CLIP)
-- demand that hour was high because of -- intense heat. The city tonight is high humidity --
-- Walking around with candles. They're listening to their radios.
 (MORE)

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)
*Dial 911 if you must have an
 ambulance but only if you have an
 actual emergency --*

ESTHER
 (spoken)
What if they close the roads?

MENASHE
 (spoken)
**Always wandering.
 Always roaming.**

ESTHER
What if he can't get home?

MENASHE
**Always wandering.
 Always roaming.**

ESTHER
**What if --
 I can't bring myself to say it.**

MENASHE
**Have you ever known our son to be
 home in good time?
 He'll be fine.**

Esther is restless. She paces, back and forth.

RADIO BROADCASTS (SOUND DESIGN)
*-- a report of a robbery and a
 shooting up in Harlem -- reports of
 some looting in areas of Brooklyn
 and --*

Esther screams!

ESTHER
**ARRGGH!
 Turn it off.
 Sheket.
 Sheket.**
 (Eng trans: quiet)

The breath from her scream kills her candle. She vanishes to dark. We see only Menashe by candlelight as he turns the radio off and moves to comfort Esther. There is silence. Together in the light of a single candle, Esther bows her head, sobbing.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(sung)

I just wish my work was over,
The dress was finished,
And the guests were arriving.
And I could rest my lips upon his
forehead,
A mother to her only son.
On the night of his wedding.
A blessing.

(spoken)

**Can you imagine a hasenne in the
dark?**

(*Eng trans: wedding*)

MENASHE

(spoken, teases, fondly)

**At least,
The blood stain you made on the
bride's dress, will go unnoticed.**

Esther smiles, she knows he is trying to cheer her up but she doesn't feel like joking.

SCENE CHANGE.

EXT. BROOKLYN - CITY STREET - NIGHT

REPEAT: THE TWO DEAFENING BANGS!

We experience this moment as if we didn't leave the scene before last. The aftermath. Motorcycles race away... become distant... teens scattering. A city scrambling to regain order.

Yoel kneels, bloody, in emergency neons.

Slumped at the other end of the stage, a man, no longer in the shadows, the **STRANGER**, has fallen unconscious. Yoel crawls toward him.

A generator powered light suddenly illuminates. White. A beacon. A pay-phone up the street. Yoel races for it. Picks up...

DIAL TONE.

He dials. Pay-phone receiver at his ear throughout.

YOEL

(sung)

N-n-nine.

(MORE)

YOEL (CONT'D)

One.
One.
O-o-operator?
Man.
M-m-maybe sixty.
Don't look so good.
Think his head,
Bleeding, bleeding.
Sure looks familiar.
Saved me.

The call cuts out. DIAL TONE. Yoel redials.

YOEL (CONT'D)

N-n-nine.
One.
One.
O-o-operator.
I'm sure his head hit the sidewalk.
Badly beaten.
I guess, he's still breathing.
Sure looks familiar.
Saved me.

The call cuts again. DIAL TONE. Yoel redials. Becoming more frantic.

YOEL (CONT'D)

N-n-nine!!
One!!
One!!

STRANGER

(sung)
Where am I?
Where am I?

Yoel drops the pay-phone and approaches the stranger. The pay-phone swings off its hook.

CALL DISCONNECTED.

Yoel helps the stranger up.

YOEL (CONT'D)

N-N-New York City.
A car back fired.
It all went so quickly.

STRANGER

Where am I?

The stranger goes to leave. Yoel doesn't allow it. Each repetition becomes more insistent.

YOEL

But you,
You saved me.
You saved me.

(MORE)

YOEL (CONT'D)

How can I repay you?
Who are you?
Tell me your name.

Yoel blocks the stranger's path. Studies the stranger.

STRANGER

No one.
I'm dead already.
Just a ghost.
Just a kind stranger.

Yoel is not satisfied with this response.

YOEL

Tell me your name.
S-s-so I can give you a blessing.
I'm s-s-upposed to get married
tomorrow.
A-a-and in my religion,
They say a blessing from a groom
always comes true.
Tell me your name!

The stranger stumbles back. Touches a growing lump on his head. Yoel steadies him.

STRANGER

Where did the lights go?

YOEL

A city wide black out.
A car back fired.
Not before one pushed you over.
Head fell back and hit the
sidewalk.
Shouldn't be alone.
Could have a concussion.
But you,
You saved me.
You saved me --

An intense bang cuts Yoel off. Danger lurks. Reeving motorcycles get louder... nearing.

YOEL (CONT'D)

(spoken)

We're not safe here.

Yoel takes the stranger by the arm and leads him off stage. As they go, the stranger turns to him.

STRANGER
(spoken)
They used to call me, Yoel.

YOEL
Like me?

STRANGER
They used to call me, Yoel.

SCENE CHANGE.

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - LATER

By candlelight. Esther is restless at the open window. She looks out at the hot night. Tired, Menashe doses in a chair.

ESTHER
(sung)
I have a bad feeling.
I should go out,
I should go look for him.

MENASHE
(sung)
He'll be home in his own time.
I blame you for this quality.
Always roaming.
Always wandering.

ESTHER
What quality?

MENASHE
Don't you remember?
How you changed his name at the
brit, at the last moment,
'And may his name be known amongst
Israel as --'
'Stop! Stop!'
You cried,
'Stop'.

ESTHER
No, I didn't.
I am aware of how it happened.

MENASHE
You changed it!

He takes a moment to calm himself.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
 You named him, Yoel, after your
 father so that his memory could
 live forever.

Caught in a memory, Esther almost sings the following to
 herself.

ESTHER
 A name to name his children's
 children's children.

Menashe snaps her out of it.

MENASHE
 Yoel,
 A restless soul you made him.
 And since then, this kid does not
 know himself.
 Always changing his mind.
 Cursed by a doubt that you put in
 him.
 At his Brit Milah.

ESTHER
 (referring to G-d)
 They say he places the name in the
 parents mouth.
 Take it up with him!

MENASHE
 In my mouth was *Sholom*.
 (*Eng trans: peace*)
 He could have used it.

Menashe stands.

ESTHER
 How can you sleep when he is still
 not home?

MENASHE
 It seems calmer now.
 He is a grown up and you have to
 accept it.

Menashe pushes past her to exit to bed yet turns back.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
 Tomorrow he will have a wife and it
 will be her business to worry after
 him.
 (spoken)
 (MORE)

MENASHE (CONT'D)
**When a baby is given his name,
 He is also handed his fate.**

Almost implying that she's the one to blame for his airy behaviour.

Menashe exits the stage leaving Esther alone.

She moves to the open window. Alone at the window, Esther sings to the city. The night will keep her secret.

ESTHER
 (sung, calling out to him)
 Yoel.
 A name to carry his memory.
 But who's memory does he carry?

My Yoel.
 Who no one knows.
 My Yoel.
 Only me.
 Only me.
 I hope I did not curse my child
 with the same bad fortune.
 Same bad fortune.

They think it is my *Tate's* name.
Tate's, Tate's Tate.
(Eng trans: father)
 Where is he now?
 The other,
 The other,
 My secret,
 My secret,
 Yoel.
 A name to name his children's,
 children's children.
 A name to keep him alive and by my
 side.

Esther closes the window.

EXT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

At the window next door, David performs the...

CANTORIAL PIECE:

BRICH SHMEI (BLESS HIS NAME)
Sung in Aramaic without English translation.

DAVID (CANTOR)
Brich shmei, dem arrai al ma.
Brich keetrech, ve'atrach.
Yeahei ra'utach im amac Israel le a
lam.
Oofucan yeminach ach'ha'ze leiamach
beveit meek'da'sha.
Ooleiameitoeyea lana metoov
nehorach oolacabell cellotana
bearach'ha'meen.

INTERVAL.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

Flickering candlelight. A huge staircase splits the stage.
 Yoel leads the stranger -

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

To his hiding place. Yoel keeps unkosher things hidden here,
 wine and cigarettes. He shares them with the stranger. Makes
 sure the stranger is comfortable.

YOEL
 (sung)
 Sometimes,
 When I can't find my way.
 And I don't know where else to go.
 I come here.
 But no one knows.
 No one knows.
 No one knows...
 How I listen to music that I'm not
 supposed to.

STRANGER
 (sung)
 No one knows.
 No one knows.
 No one knows.
 No one knows...

YOEL
 How I doubt if I'm ready,
 To marry.
 To marry.
 And carry my name.
 (MORE)

YOEL (CONT'D)

But no one knows.

No one knows.

No one knows.

STRANGER

Before the war,

Before I came to America,

Before everything had changed,

Before I was married I --

Yoel cuts him off.

YOEL

You were married?

STRANGER

I was married in Poland.

But the war came between us.

And I came to America searching,

Searching,

Searching,

Searching,

Searching,

Searching,

For a girl I never found.

I lost her.

The girl I married.

But she's not a girl anymore.

YOEL

Where is she now?

STRANGER

The heavens above me...

Smiling down upon me...

No one knows.

No one knows.

No one knows.

No one knows.

YOEL

Sometimes,

When I can't find my way.

And I don't know where else to go.

I come here.

How I remember girls I seen in
movies.

STRANGER

How you violate the Shabbos with a
smoke.

Yoel pauses disturbed by the stranger's response.

YOEL
 (spoken)
I didn't tell you that.

The stranger turns to him, caught off guard. A little tipsy.

STRANGER
 (spoken)
Tell me what?

YOEL
**How I violate the Shabbos with a
 smoke.
 How did you know?**

The stranger shrugs and tries to convince Yoel but all he says is "No one knows." He plays it off, coolly.

STRANGER
 (sung)
 No one knows.
 No one knows.

YOEL
But you know?

STRANGER
 No one knows.

A tense moment.

Yoel stares at the stranger as he tries to suss him out. Have they met before? Do they know one another? A hint of recognition. The stranger smiles.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
 (spoken)
The wine talking for you.

YOEL
 (sung)
 How I doubt if I'm ready,
 To marry.
 To marry.
 But no one knows.
 No one knows.
 No one --

STRANGER
 (sung)
 And I came to America searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 (MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Searching,
For a girl I never found.

YOEL

Where is she now?

STRANGER

No one knows.
No one knows.
No one knows.
No one knows.

A poignant moment -- interrupted --

ESTHER (OFF STAGE)

(spoken)

Yoel!

Yoel!

The tone of the music changes to become slightly more dreamy, hazy, a little surreal as we enter a -

FLASHBACK

The candlelight on Yoel and the stranger dies. We focus on Esther as she rushes on stage from a door at the top of the staircase. She descends the steps. We hear the sounds of a lively party. Esther is younger. Her hair is darker.

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

The stranger relights the flickering candle with a single match. As the light returns...

Instead of older Yoel (21 yrs) sitting across from the stranger...

Younger Yoel has taken his place.

Younger yoel has exceptionally long hair like a child before his *halakah* (a child's first haircut - Jewish ceremony). It curls down his back to the floor. **He talks to the stranger like he is older Yoel.**

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)

(spoken)

My halakah.

(MORE)

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS) (CONT'D)
My first haircut.
On my third birthday.

Toasting glasses, laughter and happy music. The sounds of a lively celebration get louder.

Younger Yoel stares at his mother from his hiding place beneath the stairs. There is no one else on stage still Esther travels its expanse as if passing through a crowd, greeting guests, working a room at a party.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS) (CONT'D)
 (spoken)
The day I began to learn the Torah.
The day I will always remember,
Snip, snip.
I was afraid it would hurt.
To cut my hair.
I hid beneath a table,
I watched as my mother greeted our
guests.
She seemed...
Happier then.

ESTHER
 (spoken)
Mazel Tov.
Mazel Tov.
Thank you so much for coming.
So glad you made it.
Me and Menashe are thrilled
you could join us --

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)
 (CONT'D)
 (spoken)
"Mazel Tov.
Mazel Tov.
Thank you so much for coming.
So glad you made it.
Me and Menashe are thrilled
you could join us --"

Younger Yoel escapes his hiding place beneath the stairs and begins to slowly walk toward Esther. His hair trails behind him. We see how long his hair really is now. A vast train. Meanwhile...

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

The candlelight again flickers and dies. The stranger strikes another match. In the brief moment of darkness...

Older Yoel returns to his spot beside the stranger. Together they watch younger Yoel and Esther.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 (sung)
 Then seemingly,
 Out of nowhere.
 (MORE)

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)

Her face sank.
And she went pale.
One friend approached her.
Said she looked like she'd seen a
ghost.
My mother thought...
Maybe,
She did see a ghost.

ESTHER

(spoken)
I think...
Maybe...
Couldn't possibly...

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)

(spoken)
"I think...
Maybe...
Couldn't possibly..."

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(spoken)
I saw Yoel.

Younger Yoel freezes in his tracks before he reaches Esther.
Staring dumbfounded out into the crowd. Eyes focused in a
stare.

YOEL (21 YRS)

(sung)
Her friend saw my feet peeking from
the tablecloth.
She told my mother,
"Yoel?"
"No. Yoel is right here"
"Don't you see him?"
"Hiding beneath the table?"
But my mother remained frozen.
Broken.
Staring at a space in the distance.
Staring at another time.

ESTHER

(sung)
Not him.
Not him.
My first Yoel.

BOTH YOELS

(sung)
"Not him.
Not him.
My first Yoel."

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(spoken)
The one I loved before.

YOEL (21 YRS)

I guess she thought I didn't hear
her.
I guess she thought I was too young
to remember.
But I remembered.

ESTHER
 (spoken)
I think...
Maybe...
Couldn't possibly.
Probably...
Probably nothing.

BOTH YOELS
 (spoken)
"I think...
Maybe...
Couldn't possibly...
Probably...
Probably nothing.

Menashe and David enter together, chatting. Concerned, Menashe looks across the party to his wife. She looks faint, in shock. Esther reassures Menashe that she's alright with a forced smile.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 (sung)
 She pulled herself together.
 But I could not forget it.
 (spoken)
I was her only Yoel.
Until...
I-I-I was no longer.

Esther turns to younger Yoel and grabs his hand but young Yoel does not move.

ESTHER
 (spoken)
Come now.
No need to be afraid.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 But I was frozen.
 Broken.
 "My first Yoel.
 The one I loved before."
 Repeating.
 Over and over.

YOUNGER YOEL
 (spoken)
I was her only Y-y-yoel.
U-U-until...
I-I-I was no no l-l-longer.
What did she mean?

ESTHER
 (spoken, to younger Yoel)
What's the matter?

YOEL (21 YRS)
 (spoken)
I-I-I st- st- stuttered.
I began to stutter.

YOUNGER YOEL
 (spoken)
I-I-I st- st- stuttered.
I began to stutter.

Esther tries to shake young Yoel out of it. In their background, David walks upstairs.

THE INTRO BEGINS TO THE CANTORIAL PIECE **ELU DEVORIM**.

Esther leads younger Yoel to Menashe. Together the family ascend the staircase. His parents lead, Yoel behind them. His long hair in a train along the floor.

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

Older Yoel and the stranger remain. They drink more wine on the night of the black out.

Meanwhile, **OUR FLASHBACK CONTINUES** on...

THE PLATFORM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRCASE...

Menashe, Esther and David make a circle around younger Yoel. David holds a pair of scissors. Yoel's halakah ceremony takes place throughout as David performs...

CANTORIAL PIECE:

ELU DEVORIM (THESE ARE THOSE THINGS)
Sung in Hebrew without translation.

DAVID

*Eilu d'varim she-ein lahem shiur,
Hape-a Vehabikurim,
v'hareayon, ug'milut chasadim
V'etalmud tora.*

*Eilu d'varim she-adam ochel
peiroteihem baolam hazeh v'ehakeren
kayemet lo laolam haba. V'eilu
heim: kibud av va-eim, ug'milut
chasadim, v'hashkamat beit
hamidrash, shacharit ve'arvit,
ve'hachnasat orchim, ubikur cholim.
Ve'hachnasat Cala, U'levayat hamet.
V'eyun tfila, V'havat shalom bein
adam lachaveiro. V'etalmud Torah
k'neged kulam.*

During the performance, Young Yoel's long hair is cut first by Menashe, then Esther, then David. Each whisper something to young Yoel before they cut. The tradition.

A blessing given with each locket shed. His hair falls off in uneven chunks. The ceremony finishes.

All goes quiet.

We focus on the two Yoel's now...

Younger Yoel remains on the platform at the top of the staircase and older Yoel is still hiding beneath the stairs with the stranger.

Older and younger Yoel sing together.

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)
(sung)
I - I know,
With every snip snip,
My payos given.
A blessing whispered.
My head shaven,
The curls at my cheeks,
golden ribbons.
The curls at my cheeks to
show my devotion.
To symbolize my entrance to
knowledge.
The day I began to learn the
Torah.
The day I began to st-st-
stutter.

The day I was her only Yoel.
U-U-until...
I-I-I was no l-l-longer.

YOEL (21 YRS)
(sung)
I - I know,
With every snip snip,
His payos given.
A blessing whispered.
His head shaven
The curls at his cheeks,
golden ribbons.
The curls at his cheeks to
show his devotion.
To symbolize his entrance to
knowledge.
The day I began to learn the
Torah.
The day I began to st-st-
stutter.

The day I was her only Yoel.
U-U-until...
I-I-I was no l-l-longer.

SCENE CHANGE.

INSTRUMENTAL TRANSITION.

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Amid the fabric a murphy bed has been pulled out and Menashe is sleeping in it.

Esther stands at the open window as she did before. She is older again now, her hair is greyer than it was in our previous scene. We are in the **PRESENT**. Esther stares out at the night. Danger lurks. She looks back to Menashe with contempt.

ESTHER
 (spoken)
'Motar Ha'adam min habeheme ayin'
 (Eng trans: a man has no advantage
 over a beast)

She pulls the blanket off him but still Menashe sleeps. He grunts. Mumbles. She puts her face in his.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 (half sung)
Ouf vous cholamst haynt?
Zis? Git?
Ikh vil etlekhe aoykh..
 (Eng trans: what are we dreaming
 today? Sweet? Good? Cause I want
 some too.)

Menashe shifts, still sleeping.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 (sung)
 I HAVE A BAD FEELING!

Meanshe wakes. Startled.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
 (spoken)
He could be in trouble.

MENASHE
 (spoken)
Trouble?
He is trouble.

Frustrated, Menashe gets up.

ESTHER
We'll go together.

MENASHE
And if he comes back?

Esther agrees to stay.

Menashe sulks as he exchanges pyjamas for clothes. He is too hot and exhausted yet to please Esther he ventures out into the night.

Alone again on stage, Esther returns to the open window. She struggles to contain her worry.

The window of the apartment next door opens. Moonlight floods David's place. He too stares out at the night. He looks to Esther but she is unhappy to see him.

Esther slams her window shut. The light on Esther fades so that all we can see is David.

CANTORIAL PIECE:

AL TIRA (DON'T BE AFRAID)

Sung in Hebrew without English translation.

DAVID (CANTOR)

*Al Tira me pakchad petetom
oo'meshow'at resh'a'im key ta'vo.
Oughtsu et'sa ve'toofarr,
Da'brew da'var ve lo yacoombe,
Key imanu el.
Ve'ad zeezna ani who,
Ve'ad sayva ani esbol,
Ani a'seetee ve'ani esa,
Ve'ani esbol va'ammalet.*

The cantorial piece carries us over into the next scene. David remains on stage as...

SCENE CHANGE.

EXT. BROOKLYN - CITY STREET - NIGHT

The white lace is removed so that all that is left in the background is David at his lonely window. Throughout **AL TIRA** the light at David's window slowly dims. His singing gets fainter as -

Menashe moves further from home, leaving David and their apartments behind as Menashe ventures into the city. Armed with a flashlight, Menashe wanders, searching for Yoel. By the end of **AL TIRA** David is a mere spec of light in Menashe's distant background before that too turns to darkness.

Distant buildings burn. Smoke fogs the stage. Menashe in noir silhouette. His flashlight catches the smog.

MENASHE

(sung)

Excuse me.

Have you seen a boy?

Twenty years old...

(under his breath)

But he acts like a damn child.

(MORE)

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Is he mine?

Excuse me.

Have you seen a boy?

His eyes always wandering.
(under his breath)

Never satisfied.

Is he mine?

Is he mine?

Is he mine?

As he gets closer to the city everything intensifies.

Actual recordings taken on the night of the black-out reveal the carnage, the gossip of locals, their fears that the black-out was caused by the still uncaptured serial killer 'Son of Sam'. From every direction it bombards Menashe.

Sirens wail.

Guns on the streets.

New York is ablaze with looters, rioters, opportunists and anarchists.

It hits home for Menashe, this is serious... he is in danger and Yoel could be too.

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

Have you seen a boy?

His eyes always wandering.
They look like my eyes.

Excuse me.

Have you seen a boy?

He has a slight stutter.

That worsens when he is afraid,

Is he mine?

Is my Yoel afraid now?

Is my Yoel afraid now?

The noises of the city reach a climax then... quieter.

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Excuse me have you seen a boy?

With every motherly kiss,

He inherited her memories.

(MORE)

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Is he mine?

Is he mine?

MENASHE (CONT'D)

Excuse me have you seen a boy?

Menashe waits. His ear to the night but he gets no response.

MENASHE (CONT'D)

(desperate)

Excuse me have you seen a boy?

Menashe waits...

MENASHE (CONT'D)

(even more desperate)

Excuse --

Have you seen a boy?

Excuse --

Have you seen a boy?

Exhausted, Menashe feels his legs beginning to buckle. He tries to hold himself together for as long as he can but stressed out, he collapses.

MENASHE (CONT'D)

(broken)

My wife survived but her sadness grows in him.

For her, the sun is always setting.

Now in his ear the night calls an answer,

I failed to give him.

Then, suddenly he sees through the smoke a...

FLASHBACK

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

Younger Yoel appears in his hiding place. He flicks through his radio as he did in our opening scene yet here he is even more nervous/frantic. It is clear that there is something bothering Yoel.

Menashe approaches his young son.

MENASHE

(accusing)

And what have you been doing?

Younger Yoel ignores him.

Menashe grabs Yoel's arm.

But Yoel pulls free.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
(spoken)
And what have you been doing?

Menashe grabs his arm again but younger Yoel pushes his father away and retreats further into his hiding place.

MENASHE (CONT'D)
(yelling)
And what have you been doing?

YOUNGER YOEL (10 YRS)
(sung)
Sometimes,
When I can't find my way.
And I don't know where else to go.
I come here.

Menashe watches as -

Young Yoel twitches, afraid. Eyes dart to every sound. Menashe never noticed until now but Yoel is traumatised. Yoel is unreachable as he sits nervously with his radio... skipping channels... static... his only escape.

The light in his hide out flickers, fading...

Menashe loses him, loses the memory as -

The **FLASHBACK ENDS** taking us back to...

EXT. BROOKLYN - CITY STREET - NIGHT

Menashe puts his head in his hands and slumps at the bottom of the staircase as if on a stoop outside a home.

MENASHE
(spoken)
He is mine.

A LIGHTBULB MOMENT. Menashe lifts his head and rushes off stage.

SCENE CHANGE.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

We return to the stranger and **Yoel (21 years old)** taking refuge...

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

They are both more at ease. Maybe it's the wine or the soothing candlelight. They are sheltered from the wild city here. They are sheltered from the black-out but they hear the looters on the streets and there is a constant feeling that danger lurks.

YOEL (21 YRS)

(sung)

S-s-sometimes,
When I can't find my way.
And I don't know where else to go.
I-I-I come here.
But no one knows.
No one knows.
No one knows.
How I d-d-doubt if I'm ready,
To marry.
To marry.
And carry my name.
But no one knows.
No one knows.
No one knows.

The stranger puts down his wine readying himself to leave.
Before he does he turns to Yoel.

STRANGER

(sung)

I just wish her work was over,
The dress was finished,
And the guests were arriving.
And she could rest her lips upon
your forehead,
A mother to her only son.
On the night of his wedding.
A blessing.

YOEL (21 YRS)

Who are you?

STRANGER

No one knows.
No one knows.
No one --

The stranger gets up and exits the space beneath the staircase. Yoel chases and holds the stranger back.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 When her face sank,
 At my halakah,
 Seemingly,
 Out of nowhere.
 And she went pale.
 Even though,
 It looked like she'd seen a ghost.
 I knew it was not a ghost.
 Because I had seen him too.

Who are you?

The stranger shakes free from Yoel's hold and begins to climb the stairs...

Yoel again grabs him back this time with force.

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)
 And later at my Bar Miztvah, I saw
 you again.
 Over and over,
 And over,
 And over,
 (REPEATS, running out of
 breath)
 (spoken)
I was her first Yoel.
Until --
I was no longer.
 (sung)
Who are you?

STRANGER
 (aggressive)
 No one knows.
 No one knows.
 No one knows.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 You,
 The other Yoel.
 The first.
 My shadow.
 Lurking in the background of my
 childhood.
 Making me stut-stut-stutter.
 Stutter,
 Stutter,
 St --
 (getting furious, yelling)
 (MORE)

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)
 Your footsteps,
 Always lurking behind me,
 Reminding me,
 That something bad was always
 around the corner.

Everything goes quiet.

Yoel confronts him.

YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)
Who are you?

The stranger squares up to him. But Yoel is no longer afraid.

STRANGER	YOEL (21 YRS) (CONT'D)
I just wish her work was	I will not marry.
over.	I will not marry.
The dress was finished and	Who are you?
the guests were arriving.	(demanding)
And she could rest her lips	Who are you?
upon your forehead and give	
you a blessing.	

Yoel pushes the stranger back. The stranger sighs and falls onto the steps. He stares up at Yoel and resigns to confess.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
 Before the war,
 Before we were seperated,
 Before I came to America searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 Searching,
 For a girl I never found.

Her name was Esther.

Your mother.

Yoel freezes, disturbed.

YOEL (21 YRS)
 But no one knows?
 No one knows.
 No one knows.

STRANGER
 I died in her eyes.
 In the camps.
 But I was not dead.
 They were mistaken.
 (MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)

My life was not taken in Europe.
 And I came to America,
 Searching.
 Searching.
 Searching.
 Searching.
 Searching.
 For the girl who thought me dead.
 For the girl whose fate was set.
 For the girl who held a new baby
 boy.

Yoel is silent.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

So, now you know.
 Now you know.
 Now you know

Yoel tries to take it all in but he struggles. His stutter worsens.

YOEL

I-i-i-i-if my m-m-mother was m-m-
 married before.
 ...
 But her husband never died.
 ...
 Still, she married another man,
 Without knowing.
 Or knowing.
 ...
 Illegitimate marriage.
 Illegitimate child.
 ...
 Th-th-that makes me --

He chokes up.

STRANGER

Mamzer.

YOEL

Cursed by my stutter,
 Cursed for seven generations,
 My children's,
 C-c-c-children's,
 C-c-children.
 Children of adultery.
 Unable to marry.
 And carry my name.

Yoel gets faint.

He can't process it.

He takes a moment...

...

STRANGER

I stayed in the shadows.
I faded inside.
I died in her eyes.
So she could have the only thing I
was unable to give her --

The stranger gestures to Yoel, implying that the thing he could not give Esther was a son, Yoel.

YOEL

(spoken, sarcastic)

A bastard!

STRANGER

(spoken)

I was her first Yoel.
Until...
I was no longer.

Yoel wants to flee but the stranger holds him back...

STRANGER (CONT'D)

(sung)

If her work is over,
If the dress is finished,
If all the guests arrive,
If she could rest her lips upon
your forehead,
If you marry...
The marriage can not be annuled.
Our curse will be over.
And no one will know.

YOEL

I will know.

The stranger puts his hand on Yoel's shoulder. Yoel pushes the stranger away.

Yoel wants to be alone.

The stranger understands and exits.

Yoel is left on stage. He seems to take on the same ghostly appearance as the stranger as he considers what to do, pacing... it suddenly dawns on him.

YOEL (CONT'D)
 (to himself, softly,
 broken)
 He stayed in the shadows.
 He faded inside.
 He died in her eyes.
 So she could have the only thing he
 was unable to give her --

MENASHE (OFF STAGE)
 (spoken)
Yoel!
Yoel!

Yoel hears his father approaching. Menashe enters. He misses Yoel lurking. This allows Yoel the opportunity to watch his father's search from a distance and see his father's reaction and worry at the thought of losing him. In this moment, Yoel imagines himself no longer here, no longer part of this community.

Menashe is optimistic as he races to the place...

BENEATH THE STAIRS...

But his hope dissolves as he finds Yoel's hiding place, empty.

YOEL
 (spoken, stutter)
There's --

Menashe snaps to the sound. We reference our opening scene as Yoel steps out trying to tell his father everything... but he can't. All he can muster is...

YOEL (CONT'D)
 (spoken, stutter)
There's --

MENASHE
 (spoken, warmly)
Theres?
...only us here, Yoel.

Menashe puts an arm tenderly around his son, relieved to find him.

The stranger steps back on stage, at the sideline and watches them leave...

Always watching...

Always alone.

Yoel can't shake the feeling. He looks back over his shoulder...

Back to the stranger. They exchange a look. Yoel nods an agreement. The stranger is grateful.

Yoel hurries Menashe off stage as the light in Yoel's hiding place switches off.

SCENE CHANGE.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

David enters. He carries a candle, lit by its light, he sings alone on stage surrounded by darkness.

CANTORIAL PIECE:

ROZO D'SHABBOS - (THE SECRET OF SHABBOS)
Sung in Aramaic without English translation.

DAVID (CANTOR)

Kudsha b'rich Hu, Echod l'eilah, la
y'siv al kursaya diyikarei,
Ad d'isavidas i'hi b'rozo d'echod
k'gavna di'lei,
L'mehevei echod b'echod.
V'ha u'kimna, rozo d'"Ad-noi echod,
u'shemo echod." Rozo d'Shabbos:
i'hi Shabbos d'is'achodas b'rozo
d'echod limishrei aloh rozo
d'echod.
Tzlosa dima'alei shabata d'ha
isachudas kursaiya yakira kadisha
b'rozo d'echod, v'istakonas
l'mishrei aloh malko kadisha
i'la'ah.
Kad ayil shabata, i'hi isyachadas
v'ispirashas misitra achara, v'chol
dinin misabrin minah. V'Ihi
ishti'oras biyichuda dinhiru
kadisha, [v'is'atras b'chama itrin
ligabei malko kadisha.]
V'chol shultanei rugzin u'marei
di'dinah, kulhu arkin v'isabru
minah.
V'leis shultana achara b'chulhu
olmin...

During the cantor's song, Esther enters, lit by a single candle.

In the cantor's background, she lights Sabbath candles around the stage. Each time performing the ceremony that usually takes place in Jewish homes on the Sabbath. But Esther repeats the gesture over and over until the stage is dotted with tiny orange lights.

As his song finishes David exits leaving Esther on stage. She continues to light candles. Their light reveals...

The completed wedding dress hanging above the stage. For the first time we see the bridal dress in its elaborate, ornate entirety. The dress is hanging in -

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She looks out of the window.

ESTHER
(spoken, calling)
Yoel!
Yoel!

The light brightens. There is a change in tone. This is...

ESTHER'S DREAMINGS

A second until...

STRANGER (YOEL) (OFF STAGE)
(spoken)
I'll be there in a minute,
hertzeleh.
(*Eng trans: little heart*)

Esther is shocked by the voice.

She hasn't heard this pet-name in decades. She turns to find, instead of her son, the stranger in the doorway. He looks well-dressed, healthy, loved.

Esther cannot believe it. It takes her a second to process seeing him again.

ESTHER
(sung)
Yoel,
Yoel,
Are my old eyes playing tricks on
me?

(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Is it you?
The one I lost?
Yoel?

The stranger does not understand Esther's reaction. He acts normally as though the two of them have always been together and nothing bad ever happened to either of them.

STRANGER

(sung)
Didn't you say, we were were going
to be late?

Esther smiles and steps closer, inspecting the elements of his face.

ESTHER

So many times,
I've asked for this moment.
And now...
You're here...
I don't know what to do.
I don't know what to do.
I don't know what to do.

STRANGER

Just breath,
Collect your things.
It's a *hasenne* after all.
(*Eng trans: Wedding*)

ESTHER

You're right,
What am I thinking.

She grabs the train of the wedding dress and bundles it into the stranger's arms.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Take it out for me.
And mind the dress.
Yoel.
My Yoel.
Every stitch,
I stitched.

The stranger smiles to her and moves to exit.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

We can't be late to our only son's
wedding.
Can't be late to our only son's
wedding.
Can't be late to our --

With his back to her, the stranger stalls...

Esther happily collects her things to exit but --

The stranger is unmoved. He turns slowly to Esther, something ominous and unsettling about his face without emotion, veiled by the train of the dress he carries.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Well...

We're going to be late,

Take it out,

What's the hold up?

(she turns to him)

Are you frozen?

Are you broken?

(no response)

Did I say something wrong?

STRANGER

Our only son?

They are close and I always thought
of the groom as family but
hertzeleh,

...

Are you teasing me?

Are you trying to hurt me?

The tiny dots of yellow candlelight behind Esther get blown out by a sharp breeze... she is left in silvery moonlight. Esther realizes what is happening. **Her daydream is not reality.** And not a dream she wishes for anymore. She backs away from the stranger.

ESTHER

Don't say it.

STRANGER

Is your mind playing tricks like
your eyes?

We don't have any children.

ESTHER

Don't say it!

Esther backs away, terrified and heartbroken. There is something unsettling about him now.

STRANGER

(becomes distant)

Won't we be late?

Hertzeleh.

Hertzeleh.

(MORE)

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Hertzzeleh.

(Eng trans: little heart)

The pet name makes her uneasy now. Esther takes a final look at the stranger. With each repetition he fades from sight. She keeps her back turned to him.

ESTHER

(through tears)

Go on without me.

I'll catch you up.

Now, don't you worry.

Just forgot to pick up my purse.

My purse, I said.

(slows down)

I'm right behind you.

Just right behind you.

Right behind.

Behind you.

Esther bows her head. Heart-broken. Accepting his death. Lost in her thoughts.

INSTRUMENTAL TRANSITION until...

An air conditioner suddenly whirls...

ALL LIGHTS UP...

We see the entire stage. Suddenly everything turns on! We hear the sound of every appliance in the home coming back to life. A tremendous new cacophony.

THE BLACK OUT IS OVER!

END DREAM

The light snaps Esther out of her musing. In the harsh light we return to the **PRESENT**. Back inside...

INT. ESTHER & MENASHE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She rushes to the window and looks out. We hear snippets of radio shows and television shows describing the aftermath of the black-out. The night all the lights went off across the entire state of New York is now at its end.

ESTHER

(spoken)

Yoel!

(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Yoel!
Yoel!

Yoel (21 years old) enters.

YOEL (21 YRS)
(spoken)
Mamashi,
(*Eng trans: endearing way
to say 'Mother'*)

When Esther turns and sees her son she is overcome by emotion. She rushes to him and grabs him into her arms.

ESTHER
My light.
My only Yoel.

She grabs his face thrilled to have him home. Proudly shows him the finished dress.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Every stitch,
I stitched --

She hugs him again. Tighter this time. Tears fall. But her intense relief is interrupted as Yoel frees himself from her embrace and looks into her eyes, serious.

YOEL
(sung)
Before it all begins,
Can you give me a blessing.
Take your lips to my forehead,
And ask him to protect me.

Guilt overwhelms Esther. She feels compelled to confess.

ESTHER
(sung)
You give me your face,
But at the touch,
There is no blessing.
How could I bless you,
When my mouth is full of lies and
my words are meant to hide,
Rather than reveal.
I want to tell you something that I
never told you.
Something about your name.
And who you are and who I am and --

Yoel holds up his hand to stall her words. He doesn't want to hear it. He knows.

YOEL
 (gently)
 One day,
 Outside this window,
 We'll make a garden.
 I'll bring you a boy,
 A grandson.
 And a tree will shade us.
 Maybe, he will be my first,
 Maybe, a little brother to an older
 sister.
 But under the tree, we will give
 him a name,
 Mordecai,
 The real name of your father.
 Not my name.

She goes to say something but Yoel prevents it.

YOEL (CONT'D)
 You owe me no explanation.
 No explanation.
 Before it all begins,
 Can you give me your blessing.
 Take your lips to my forehead,
 And bless me.

SCENE CHANGE.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

A projected film across the stage. It shows moments from Yoel's Jewish Hasidic Wedding ceremony. Religious men dance in high spirits around the bride and groom. Their exited gestures are in sharp contrast to the slow music that accompanies their dance. The bride's face is veiled by white lace. She wears the wedding dress Esther sewed.

Yoel looks to his bride.

CANTORIAL PIECE:

SHIR PREIDA (GOODBYE SONG)
An Original Composition.
Sung in Hebrew with English translation.

DAVID (CANTOR)
*Ani Metzamzem et atzmi lekdey
 nekuda almonit. She-lo
 le'hatrid begufi malhuyot.*

TRANSLATION
*I am minimising myself into
 an unknown point, to not
 physically disturb kingdoms.*

SOUND DESIGN... as SHIR PREIDA ends we hear an exuberant hasidic wedding. A large crowd... cheerful singing escalates, louder and louder...

And louder until...

It abruptly...

ENDS: