

# **CASTLE ON THE HILL**

by  
**Elizabeth V. Mozer**

# CASTLE ON THE HILL

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# CASTLE ON THE HILL

*Castle on the Hill*

is dedicated to those who suffer with mental illness  
and to those who care for and love them.

## CASTLE ON THE HILL

*Castle on the Hill* grew out of Elizabeth Mozer’s one-woman play, *The Asylum Project*. Both plays are based on real people and true events. *Castle on the Hill* had its first performance on April 27, 2018, and was presented by the Department of Theatre at Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY. The production was conceived and directed by the playwright. The scenic design was by Laura Fine Hawkes; the lighting design was by Liu Yijing; the costume design was by Barbara Wolfe; the sound design was by Craig C. Saeger; and the property design was by Chris Hawkes. The dialect coaching was by Anne Brady, and marketing and promotions were by Kari Bayait. Technical directors were Don Guido and Scott Selmeski; the scenic artist was Qianghua Wang; and the stage manager was Haley Dunlavey.

The cast was as follows:

LINA ..... Christine Skorupa  
AGNES ..... Margaret Leisenheimer  
NURSE 1 & Patient 9 ..... Sarah McGovern  
MAE, NURSE 2 & Patient 6 .... Natalie DeBoer  
HAN – Patient 8 ..... Hana Cho  
JOSEPH & Patient 1 ..... Natividad Guillen  
ROSE & Patient 2 ..... Stephanie Moreno  
NURSE J & Patient 3 ..... Mayah Wells  
ATTENDANT & Patient 10 ..... Chris White  
WILL & Patient 4 ..... Gregory DeCola  
BENNIE & Patient 5..... Robert Edwards  
FRANCIS & Patient 7..... Gabriel Pinciotti

## CASTLE ON THE HILL

*Castle on the Hill* was further developed at the Hangar Theatre (Producing Artistic Director, Shirley Serotsky) in Ithaca, NY, July 2023, as part of the Wedge FutureNow Play Development Series. The reading was directed by Alex Keegan. The cast included Marie-Josée Bourelly, Katherine Gould, Ifeoma Ihouma, Dylan Brandon Mejil, Alex Ross, Elizabeth Seldin, and Casey Silidjian. The Stage Manager was Megan Hanlon.

**The Set**, described below, is based on the original design and provides for layers of simultaneous action and physical storytelling. The inclusion of scenic and staging information is offered as insight, as a model, not as a requirement.

Lina – her den, located stage right of the proscenium stage.

Agnes – prologue, on the proscenium stage, downstage of the black curtain.

Binghamton State Hospital – a two level, five-room structure, upstage of the black curtain, revealed in Part One. The facing of the structure is covered with a light-colored scrim and on it is a painting of the Binghamton State Hospital, an asylum built in 1858, locally known as the “castle on the hill”.

Level One – two rooms: one stage right and one stage left, in the middle of these is an open dark hallway.

Level Two – three rooms: one stage right, one center and one stage left.

Dayroom – located downstage of the Binghamton State Hospital structure.

Outside of the Hospital – downstage of the dayroom.

Graveyard – downstage of the dayroom. During the graveyard scene, the Binghamton State Hospital is behind a black scrim.

The structure and rooms of the Binghamton State Hospital can alternately be: Opaque – we see the image of the Binghamton State Hospital;

Translucent – we see into the rooms, the private goings on, as if walls disappear; Silhouette – we see patients and nurses, alone in their rooms in action as shadow figures. The duration and tempo of the physical text occurring in the hospital rooms, in combination with the lighting, supports the action in the foreground and does not compete with or distract from it.

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### **Example of translucent and silhouette notation:**

First Level, Stage Right Room, Patient 7: 1R (P7)

Second Level, Center Room, Patient 5: 2C (P5)

### **Time period of play: 1914 – 1983**

Prologue: 1914 – 1925 and 1977

Part One: 1920s – 1940s and 1977

Part Two: 1950s – 1970s

Epilogue: 1982 – 1983

### **Characters:**

LINA – age 50's, Polish and Russian descent, White, female

AGNES – ages from 20-83, Polish immigrant, White, female

NURSE 1 – 40s, White, female / Patient 9

NURSE 2 – 20s-30s, any race, female

HAN (Patient 8) – age 25-40, Indigenous, female, non-binary, or two-spirited

JOSEPH (Charlotte) – age 30-35, White, trans masculine / Patient 1

ROSE – age 30's, Irish descent, White, female / Patient 2

NURSE J – age 50s, Black, female / Patient 3

ATTENDANT 1 – age 26-36, any race, male / Patient 10

WILL – age 26, White, male, grew up in NY and Mississippi / Patient 4

BENNIE – age 20s-30s, person of color, any gender / Patient 5

FRANCIS – age 28-35, any race, male / Patient 7

MAE – age 27, any race, female / Nurse 2 / Patient 6

PATIENTS: roles doubled as suggested

### Notes

Lina, Agnes, and Han should not double in other roles.

Han's name may be changed based on the identity of the actor cast.

Agnes speaks with a Polish dialect.

Rose has a bit of an Irish lilt.

Will has a hint of a Southern accent.

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Han speaks solely non-verbally via their own original gestural sign language.

Bennie speaks with a stutter with all words that begin with P and B and has tardive dyskinesia.

Will (Willa) and Francis may be cast as other genders *if needed*.

“Beats” are shifts and don’t indicate a specific duration of time.

“P” stands for Patient.

**Costume Note:** all patients are barefoot

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## PROLOGUE

### Scene One – 1977

#### It's Like I'm a Tiny Camera

*LINA is at home in her den. She's sitting in an office-style swivel chair, organizing and reading papers from a large cardboard box. There are all sorts of artifacts, both personal and official. Many are spread around the floor by her feet. Delicate chimes sound. Lina becomes captivated by an inner image. She sets the paper she's reading aside, picks up a tape recorder and presses record. She speaks into the recorder for the first time.*

**LINA.** There's a man. He's wearing a hat. He's sitting on a bench outside a red brick building with white trim. On a hill. (*Beat.*) Dr. Schingler, 'the man with the hat' is one of the images that comes to me – unexpectedly, and has been ever since I can remember. Haunting me. (*Beat.*) I'm talking to myself, out loud! Well, actually I'm talking to you, Doctor, aren't I? And this will become perfectly clear when I receive your bill! (*Hits the stop button, thinking, 'I can't believe I just said that.'* *Hits the record button.*) I'm sorry, I'm aiming to do as you instructed, but I'm feeling a bit odd...uncomfortable. I've never shared these images with anyone – not even my father. What are they? And since my father's death the images have been visiting me more frequently. Tonight, while going through his papers I was particularly intruded upon. They appeared several times. (*Beat.*) It's like I'm a tiny camera – with just a few pictures inside, snap shots of people and places I don't know. They're mundane, ordinary.



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They're not...fantastic. How is it that I remember things I don't recall and can't recall the things that I want to remember? I think therapy's making me crazy! (*Preemptively.*) That's a joke. I'll describe this particular image in more detail... There's a man. He's wearing a hat – a fedora that he wears at an angle. He's sitting on a bench – a wrought iron bench that's weather worn, the paint peeling off. Outside a large red brick building, with white wooden trim. Surrounded by trees. On a big hill. (*Beat.*) OK – signing off now. Thanks, Dr. This is Lina. 4/11/77. My birthday. (*Turns off the tape recorder and sets in down. Gets up and starts to exit when she 'sees' something she has never 'seen' before in the image.*) There's a suitcase. There's a suitcase next to the bench! (*Lights fade.*)

### **Scene Two – 1914-1925** **Coming to America**

*AGNES, age twenty, wearing a shawl about her head, hugging a suitcase to her chest, looks about in wonder and excitement.*

**AGNES.** Wow...the buildings. So tall! And so many peoples. In Poland just Polish. Here so many peoples! (*Beat.*) Mama and me, we leave Poland. We have to. No more safe. We come here for better life. Papa and Milosz they stay in Poland. Maybe they come here. Maybe we go back. (*Beat.*) We come on boat, ooh, I don't like boats... (*Beat.*) And when we get here they ask us many things – where we coming from, where we going, how many monies we have. They look at us all over – (*Moves suitcase away from her body.*) our body and head – see if we sick. Mama and me – we good! We stay – in New York City! (*Lowers her suitcase to the ground, looks about and takes notice.*) There are many Polish here! Russians too. Nice Russians. (*Sits on her suitcase.*) There is Anton. He is nice Russian. He work

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in the market. He give me flowers and fruit. He look at me...that way. (*Beat.*) I work as house keeper. My new friend Lucia – she live in my building – she get me work. She say Anton make me good husband. Mama say so too. Anton wants to marry me. He writes to papa and papa say, “Tak.” Anton say, “Will you marry me?” I say, “Tak. Yes.” We marry! (*Beat.*) We move, Anton and me – no mama – to oopstate... (*Takes suitcase off to the side and sets in down.*) ‘Oopstate’ – that’s what they call, that’s what they says, ‘oopstate New York.’ (*Lowers her head shawl to her shoulders viewing her surroundings.*) There are big trees here, like in Poland. And river too! And many birds. They sing and talk. They make so much noise! They wake me every morning. (*Beat.*) We live on farm. (*Pointing out fields and animals.*) We grow tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, berries. We have six chickens, two goats and a cow! (*Beat.*) Anton work very hard. Me – I work not so much hard – because... (*As if discovering it at that moment.*) I am pregnant. (*Caresses belly.*) I am going to have baby. (*Pulls down on one side of her shawl.*) I wish mama was with me, but there is lady not too far – down the road, she help me. She help me have my... (*Shawl seamlessly becomes a bundle representing the baby in Agnes’ arms.*) Pauli! She’s so Beautiful. Pauli. And my... (*Searching for the word.*) boobs, they fill with milk! I can’t believe it. I know my boobs will fill with milk, I see many women feed their babies their milk, but when Pauli drinks my milk I can’t believe it! (*Admiring Pauli.*) She is happy baby. I hug her and kiss her. I sing to her. She like it when I sing. (*Moves the baby bundle from the cradle position up toward her shoulder, patting baby to sleep. Speaking in a hushed tone.*) She’s smart. I learn her Polish and English words and Anton learn her Russian. She is growing every day. (*Turns around herself and the bundle comes undone. It’s as if she’s holding Pauli’s hand who’s now four years old. Addressing Pauli.*) She big girl now! (*Pauli runs playfully away. Agnes is Impressed.*) She runs – fast! (*Reprimanding.*) Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh. And I teach

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her what is right and what is wrong. Even though she is little, she need to learn. *(Beat.)* And I give her everything I have. I go hungry sometimes. I don't care. I am already grown and she is still growing. *(Using her shawl for peek-a-boo.)* We play games. We laugh. I love her laugh. I think I could hear Pauli's laugh if she was on the other side of the world, I could still hear her laugh. That is what I think. *(Takes sight of Anton. She crosses to her chair, folding shawl and placing it on the back of the chair. She picks up a broom and begins to sweep.)*

Anton...he no laugh so much. He is more serious, yes, very serious. Sometimes he goes down to town to get away from me and Pauli, we are so silly. He goes to the bar and drinks with the other mens. When he comes back he is rough with me... But he kiss Pauli on the head every day. *(Setting broom aside.)* At night I put Pauli to bed. I sing her to sleep. *(Crosses to Pauli's room, sings a Polish lullaby to her and tucks her into bed.)*

Aaa, kotki dwa,  
szarobure obydwu,  
nic nie będą robiły,  
tylko ciebie bawiły.

*(Quietly crosses back to her chair, takes off her shoes, and falls asleep.)*

### **Scene Three**

#### **Fire**

*Agnes starts to cough and awakens to smoke. A fire has broken out in their home. Hungry flames can be heard. Alarmed and frightened, Agnes makes her way to Pauli's bed. She waves away blinding smoke. She dodges hot flames, determined to get Pauli and herself out of their burning home.*

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**AGNES.** *Požar!... Pauli!... Fire!... Pauli! (Urgently feels for Pauli, pulling the sheet off her bed. She does not find her. She calls out to Pauli and goes searching for her.) Pauli! (Uses Pauli's sheet to beat back smoke and flames that are growing closer. Hears Pauli's cries, but cannot locate her. Pieces of timber begin to fall and Agnes evades two crashes by only seconds. A large timber starts to groan. She looks up, lets out a scream and covers her head. The timber comes crashing down, knocking Agnes out. She falls backward onto the table behind her, unconscious. The sound of the fire fades.)*

### **PART ONE**

#### **Scene Four**

#### **Intake**

*There's a sound of a heavy door slamming shut. Agnes jolts awake at the sound. She doesn't know where she is. She's frightened. Her head injury stabs her with pain. She feels her body frantically to see if she's all in one piece. Warily, she reaches her toes toward the floor, not knowing what to expect. On her guard, she inches herself around the table, taking in the strange unknown space. In search of safety and comfort, she goes under the table and begins to rock. She thinks she hears or sees Pauli and, with great hope, rushes out to embrace her. She reaches and calls for Pauli in one direction and then another, but to no avail. Feeling the world caving in on her, Agnes sinks to the floor and grows more fearful by her imaginings of flames and more, retreating and scurrying this way and that. Agnes begins to move in a frenzied circular motion. She is broken out of the repetitive whirl by a voice. Agnes, dazed and lost, doesn't know who is talking to her or where the voice is coming from. The voice sounds*

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*haunting to Agnes. She struggles to understand and respond to what the voice is saying.*

**VOICE-OVER: A NURSE.** *(To the point and taking her time.)* Agnes, do you know where you are? You're at the Binghamton State Hospital. We're here to help you. I'd like to ask you some questions. Agnes, what day is today?... What year is it?... Who is the president?... Where are we?... *(Beat.)* Name three common objects, such as apple, table, penny... Take the word 'world' and spell it backwards... *(Agnes reels from this command.)* Agnes, why are you here?... *(Agnes slowly turns around herself in search of answers.)* Agnes, Agnes, Agnes, Agnes, Agnes... *(The voice reverberates and fades out.)*

**AGNES.** *(Reaching out toward the disappearing voice, Agnes is finally able to get some words out.)* 1925! *(Agnes desperately searches for the source of the invisible voice. The black curtain goes out behind her and the Binghamton State Hospital is revealed. NURSE 1 enters.)*

**NURSE 1.** *(Concerned.)* Agnes... Agnes. Agnes! *(Nurse 1 takes ahold of Agnes and brings her and her suitcase into the asylum through the center hallway.)*

*~ Transition ~*

*NURSE 2 enters and follows Agnes and Nurse 1, carrying other items off. Patients 4, 10, and 3 come into the day room. [Silhouettes revealed: 2C (P8), then 1R (P7), then 2L (P5)] Nurse 2 re-enters with a broom, sweeps a bit, and gives the broom to P10, and exits with another item. Nurse 1 brings Agnes into the dayroom. Once Agnes is seated, we hear the ticking of a clock. [Silhouettes fade: 1R (P7), then 2C (P8) and 2L (P5)] Lights fade.*

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### Scene Five

#### Photo 2

*The papers and box are as Lina left them. Delicate chimes sound. Lina enters the den with a glass of wine. She has once again been taken over by an inner image. She puts down her glass, picks up the tape recorder, presses record and shares what she 'sees'.*

**LINA.** There is a woman. She's strong. She's pushing a broom. The ceilings are high. The floors are very shiny. She's looking at me. Lina. 5/23/77. (*Hits stop, puts the recorder down, picks up her glass and sits in the swivel chair. Lights fade.*)

### Scene Six – 1930s

#### This is How I'm Called

*Nurses 1 and 2 enter the dayroom carrying a chair and rocking chair. Agnes and HAN (P8) follow, Agnes with a broom. Han, in their expressive gestural sign language, curses at the Nurses as they exit. Han kicks over the chair and sits in the rocking chair. Agnes stands. Nurses 1 and 2 re-enter bringing JOSEPH into the dayroom. He struggles to free himself as they cross to the hallway and into the stage left room on the first level [1L]. The room becomes transparent and we see Joseph disrobed and put into 'female clothing' by the Nurses. He resists. During this, we hear the voice-over of the Delaware County Court on the supposed lunacy of Charlotte Slater (Joseph). We hear four men speak: The Commissioner and three witnesses.*

**JOSEPH (CHARLOTTE).** Let go of me! Stop it!

**NURSE 2.** Please.

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**NURSE 1.** Don't struggle, Charlotte.

**VOICE-OVER: ARTHUR MOORE (Commissioner).** Delaware County Court, NY: Testimony taken in the matter of Charlotte Slater, a Supposed Lunatic. The following named persons having been called and sworn, to wit: John F. Mason, William W. Ryder, M.D., and George K. Walsh. John F. Mason having sworn says:

**VOICE-OVER: JOHN F. MASON (Witness).** I am acquainted with Charlotte Slater. She is a sister of mine. I should call her insane. She has been insane for more than ten years. Her mother was insane before her. She has a habit of dressing in men's clothes. She has a woman who she sometimes claims is her wife – this woman is also insane. She at times uses very bad language. I know she has not sufficient understanding or ability for the government of herself or the management of her property.

**VOICE-OVER: ARTHUR MOORE.** John F. Mason subscribed and sworn to before me, Arthur Moore, Commissioner, October 16th 1932. William W. Ryder sworn says:

**VOICE-OVER: WILLIAM W. RYDER (Witness).** I am a practicing physician. I have seen Charlotte Slater today. Never was acquainted with her before. I have frequently heard of her as a crazy female hunter. I have examined her today. I consider her insane to the best of my judgment. I should consider her incapable of governing herself or managing her property.

**VOICE-OVER: ARTHUR MOORE.** W.W. Ryder M.D. subscribed and sworn to before me, Arthur Moore, Commissioner, October 16th 1932. George K. Walsh sworn says:

**VOICE-OVER: GEORGE K. WALSH (Witness).** I have been more or less acquainted with Charlotte Slater for the past 15 years. The first time that I discovered anything about Charlotte that led me to believe she was insane was when she was in her father's saw mill sawing or attempting to saw. She was then dressed in men's clothes and particularly attracted my

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attention. I was satisfied then that she was crazy. Years later I again saw her dressed in men's clothes. She had a gun and pretended to be hunting. After that I saw her in company with another woman traveling along the road. They both claimed that they were man and wife and pretended to love each other and that they could not bear to be separated. I think she is insane without doubt and incapable of governing herself or of managing her property.

**VOICE-OVER: ARTHUR MOORE.** George K. Walsh subscribed and sworn to before me, Arthur Moore, Commissioner, October 16th 1932. (*Joseph is ushered out of the changing room wearing an ill-fitting dress. He enters the dayroom unaccompanied.*)

**JOSEPH.** (*Distraught, cries out epithets.*) A Strange Sort of Being. Hobo. Vagabond. Deviant. Perverse. Dangerous. Insane.

**A CHORUS OF OTHERS.** (*The voices of others ghostly lit [2C] sling slurs at Joseph. He responds as if in a fight, protecting himself from punches and kicks in response to each word. He ends up in a ball on the floor.*) Vagrant... Threat... Huntress... Female husband... Uncontrollable... Indecent... Odd... Wild... Defective... Degenerate... Unnatural... Foul... Peculiar... Abnormal... Mentally diseased... Less than human!

**JOSEPH.** (*Sits up.*) This is how I'm called. Invisible. Gone. Away – is how they want me. Dead – is what they say. My obituary writ. They speak falsely of me even in my death. (*Comes to standing.*) I have not died though they kill me off, vanish me. (*Beat.*) Marie calls me 'husband'. I go by the name of 'Joseph'. (*Beat.*) Where is my wife? She will come for me as she always has before. (*To Han and Agnes.*) Tell my wife I am here, that I'm not dead! I have been hidden away. Let her come to me. She has no one. She has no home, but with me. I am a man in all that the name implies. Bring me my trousers! (*To Han.*) How will she find me? (*To Agnes.*) How will she know me? (*Beat.*) She will know me by my love.



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She will know me by my embrace, by my voice, my tenderness, my need.  
(*Adamantly.*) I go by the name of Joseph! (*Lights fade.*)

~ *Transition* ~

[*Silhouettes revealed: 2R (P3), 2C (P5), 2L (P10)*]

*Lights up on Agnes sitting in a rocking chair in the day room.*

### **Scene Seven – 1940s** **That Murderous River**

*ROSE enters.*

**ROSE.** Agnes, what are you doin' leavin' your broom down the hall?  
(*Crosses toward Agnes.*) Can't you see this floor's in need of a cleanin'?

**AGNES.** Go away.

**ROSE.** It's filthy dirty.

**AGNES.** (*Dismissing*) Nie.

**ROSE.** (*Pushes Agnes' chair with her foot and it begins to rock.*)

So, you're rockin' now instead of sweepin'? (*Rose crosses to table and slams her hands down on it to provoke Agnes.*) [*Silhouettes out: 2R (P3), 2C (P5), 2L (P10)*]

What? Don't you want to fight with me today...? You look like you want to be jumpin' into a river with those tears. Maybe you want to be off'n yourself in the ol' Susquehanna, or swimmin' away. Well, what's a river good for if not for makin' an escape? A clean getaway? (*Traveling back in memory.*) Although the river was anythin' but clean that day. Sure, I thought. Why not a filthy end for a filthy trap of a woman? (*Beat.*) I was 15. What was I goin' to do with a baby? I was terrified by the whole idea of pregnancy, of people knowin' what I'd done, of not bein' able to hide it none. And he knew it too. The father. He was much older than me. And

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when I tell him – “I’m pregnant. I’m going to have a baby.” – he looks right through me, like I’m not even there. I feel myself vanishin’. And that was that. I never see him again. And life went on, although I didn’t want it to. Every day it’s growin’ bigger. The blood in my veins poundin’ like I’m runnin’ a race even though I’m standin’ still. My only thought is to keep it from happenin’. So, I decide the murderous river should suit me. The dirt will recognize me. I am anythin’ but clean. (*Mimes putting stones in her pockets.*) I fill my pockets with stones and throw myself into the river. (*Dives onto the table as if she’s diving into the river. Her underwater movements are slowed and softened by the thick water, a ballet of micro-undulations. She’s letting go, dropping down under the river’s weight. During her surrender, Rose begins to hear her baby’s heartbeat. She connects to the fragile life inside of her. She moves her hand to her belly. She feels the baby’s life force, its desire to live. Rose, in turn, is inspired to live. She begins to swim upward with all the energy she can summon. She breaks free of the river, puncturing its surface, triumphant, gasping for air, sitting up on the table. She speaks in a rush of excitement.*) I was goin’ down when I felt this reachin’, this reachin’ for life and it wasn’t comin’ from me. It was comin’ from her! It was as if her little hand was reachin’ up and it caused me to reach up and start to swim, swimmin’ up to the surface, wantin’ life! I wanted to live. I wanted to live cause she wanted to live! We wanted to live! (*Stops suddenly with a cry of pain.*) Dead. Stillborn. No more babies. They made sure of that. “You’re not fit to be a mother. And we’ll see to it that you never are.” They took *everything* out! (*Beat.*) But she’s come back. I feel her inside me. Swimmin’ around. Growin’. She’s come back. (*Crosses toward Agnes.*) Don’t you be tellin’ this to no one, Agnes. Rock in your rockin’ chair and keep your mouth shut! (*Lights fade.*)

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### Scene Eight

#### Can You Miss Someone You Don't Remember?

*Lina pacing in her den, presses record on the tape recorder and speaks into it.*

**LINA.** Can you miss someone you don't remember? I don't remember my mother.

Growing up I'd ask my father, "What did Mama look like? Do I have her eyes?"

And he'd say, "Quiet, Lina. Do your homework." I'd ask about her eyes because there were times when I looked at myself in the mirror and I could swear that she was looking back. "Papa, can we visit Mama's grave? Can we bring her flowers?" "Flowers won't bring back the dead." And he'd slam his drink down on the table and I knew it was time to stop asking questions. Eventually I stopped all together. He would get so angry. We weren't very close, my father and I. (*Lina hits stop. She goes through papers. She turns the recorder back on.*) Why are there no photos of my mother? Nothing. Why? Why wasn't I allowed to ask about her? Why did he act like she never existed? And, yes – I do think I have her eyes! (*Beat.*) I don't remember my mother, but I've never stopped missing her. Lina. 6/21/77. (*Lina presses stop. Lights fade.*)

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