

CABARET KALISZ

By
Christie Brenner Winn

CABARET KALISZ

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CABARET KALISZ

*“It is our responsibility to inspire future generations to stand up against hatred,
prejudice, and evil.”*

*“The lessons of the Holocaust are not Jewish, but universal. And unfortunately, the
lessons remain relevant today.”*

(Keisha and Jason Jitkin, Sunni and Gary Markowitz, Holocaust Centre Houston).

Cabaret Kalisz is dedicated to the two million women who died in the Holocaust.

CABARET KALISZ

Cabaret Kalisz was originally produced by Theatre O, in Boulder, CO. Its world premiere was on November 9th, 2018.

Production Team

Director.....Michelle Claire Romeo
Assistant Director.....Julien Romeo Motola
Stage Manager.....Katelyn Skeen
Dramaturg.....Wynne Royer
Costumes.....Ashley Frary Lutz
Lighting Designing.....Mark Russell
Graphic Design.....Ashley Frary Lutz
Sound Design.....Mark Tulk
Set Design/ Builder.....David Ortolano
Dialect Coaching.....Agatha Machota-Gawron, Ingrid Fotino

Cast

Toshia.....Rosey Waters
Natalia.....McKensey Struzik
Sonia.....Diana Quetti
Alice.....Lisa Mumpton
Rita.....Blakely Saucier
Natalie.....Delaney O'Dowd
Soldier Voice Overs.....Roger Winn, Paul Backer, Mark Russell

Cabaret Kalisz had staged readings with the following theatre companies: Athena Project, And Toto Too, and Wordsmyth Theatre.

CAST: 5 Women 1 Girl

TOSHIA	50's, Polish Jew. Stoic.
NATALIA	Late teens, Polish Jew. Optimistic and naive.
SONIA	20's, Russian Jew. Suffering from survivors' guilt.
ALICE	50's, Austrian Jew. Nurturing.
RITA.	20's, Roma-Gypsy. Proud of her heritage.
NATALIE.	Child. Sonia's Granddaughter

TIME: Fall 1941

SETTING: Inside a barn on a forced labor camp in Germany during WWII.

Playwrights Notes:

The GERMAN SS OFFICERS are voice over only.

Underlined words are in Polish, German, or Hebrew.

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ACT I
Scene 1

Dim light gives way to an old dusty barn. It serves as the sleeping quarters for women at a forced labor camp at a weigh station in Germany.

Weathered slats barely hold their shape around the dirt floor. A horse stall inside the walls, and a pig pen outside, indicate that this was once a working barn. One of the slats is marked with tally marks. Another slat is missing a small piece at the bottom and forms a hole.

An older SONIA enters. She wanders the barn observing it closing. RITA enters. She plays the accordion. The lights slowly fade black.

Lights up. TOSHIA sits on a stool and knits. Rita, without her accordion, stands in a single ray of light that shines through a hole in the roof.

SOLDIERS march outside. Pigs squeal. Nazi propaganda can faintly be heard over a megaphone. The barn door opens. Blinding light floods the stage. SONIA enters. She is frantic. She races around the barn confused and disoriented. It takes a moment before she realizes that she is not alone.

SONIA. Where am I?

TOSHIA. *(Sarcastic)* The Barbakan Warszawski. I'll have the doorman take your hat and coat when he returns.

SONIA. Where am I?

TOSHIA. What does it look like?

SONIA. Where am I? *(She bangs on the wooden slats and yells.)* Where am I? Am I a prisoner? *(She tries to find a way out.)* Where am I? *(Notices her surroundings.)* Is this a barn? *(Surprised)* Am I in a barn? *(She drops*

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to the ground and runs the dirt through her fingers. Defeated.) What is going on?

TOSHIA. What do you think is going on? These are your quarters.

SONIA. *(Still disoriented.)* Quarters? ... where am I?

TOSHIA. *(Sarcastically)* The South of France. *(Points)* Can't you see the beach and the little man selling sweets to the children in their swim trunks? *(Sonia stares at her blankly.)* You are still confused. You truly do not know?

SONIA. I was in a freight car. There were no windows. We could not see.

TOSHIA. I know little. I think we are in Germany. It smells like hell, looks like hell... must be Germany. Do you speak German? Speaking German is a skill. Or Yiddish? Redt ir Yiddish? *(Sonia ignores her.)* You will need the mama loshen here. We all use it... except for the gypsy.

SONIA. I am Russian.

TOSHIA. Russian?

SONIA. They said they were going to relocate us. *(Toshia grabs Sonia's sleeve.)*

TOSHIA. Where is your badge?

SONIA. I don't have a badge.

TOSHIA. We *all* have a badge.

SONIA. I don't have a badge.

TOSHIA. What is your skill? We all have a skill.

SONIA. I do not have a skill.

TOSHIA. You must have a skill. Do you sew? Do you know how to scribe?

SONIA. No.

TOSHIA. We all have an important skill.

SONIA. What is your skill?

TOSHIA. *(Sarcastic)* I dig ditches. I strong like bull. What does it look like my skill is? *(Serious)* I mend clothes. I am very good. Very quick. There is a large white house about half a kilometer away. It is a stopping ground of some sort. Soldiers pass in and out of that house. They bring me clothes, I mend them, I give them back. That is all I know. *(Pigs squeal.)*

SONIA. *(To Rita)* What is your skill?

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TOSHIA. She plays the accordion. They love it. Crazy Germans. She stands outside the house day after day and plays it. (*She imitates playing the accordion.*) Meguchechet! Do you play an instrument?

SONIA. There must be some mistake.

TOSHIA. I see.

SONIA. I should not be here.

TOSHIA. Oh? And where exactly should you be? (*Muffled noises can be heard outside. Dogs barking, pigs squealing, SOLDIERS shout commands.*)

GERMAN SOLDIERS. (*VO*) Raustreten! In Marschordnung antreten! In Linie antreten! In Reihe antreten!

TOSHIA. They are late. (*The barn door opens. Sonia makes a run for it, but Rita grabs her. Toshia yells at Rita.*) Leave her alone! Gypsy peasant! (*ALICE and NATALIA enter. Alice is noticeably dirtier than Natalia.*) You are late. (*She points to the hole in the roof.*) The sun is going down.

ALICE. We are not late. It is getting darker sooner, now. (*Noticing Sonia.*) Ver zenen ir? (*Sonia does not answer.*) Who is this?

SONIA. I am Sonia. Sonia Petrov.

ALICE. Sholem aleykhem. Petrov? You are Russian? (*Surprised. To Natalia*) Mommellah?

NATALIA. (*To Sonia*) It is true then? The Germans have occupied Russia? (*Sonia nods.*)

TOSHIA. Natalia can hear the broadcasts on the radio in the house.

NATALIA. I am the housekeeper.

TOSHIA. And she speaks German. That is her skill.

NATALIA. Since I understand the German broadcasts, I deliver the news.

TOSHIA. But we never know whether to believe her or not.

ALICE. Because we never know if it is real news or not. You cannot believe everything they say on the foreign broadcasts. They lie.

TOSHIA. But something is better than nothing. So, you must remember to tell us everything, Natalia. We will decide whether it is true or not.

NATALIA. (*To Sonia*) We have been so rude to our new arrival. I am Natalia. Borekh-Habo. This is Alice, and you have met Rita and Toshia.

TOSHIA. I am Toshia. Welcome.

SONIA. And you mend clothes.

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TOSHIA. My mother taught me. My husband and I owned a shop before Warsaw was occupied, I was the most successful tailor in all Podgórze. I made the most beautiful wool suits you have ever seen.

ALICE. Oy. We hear this story every time there is a new girl.

TOSHIA. Poke fun. I do not care. We had the busiest shop in the whole quarter. Everyone in Krakow came. Even people who did not live in Podgorze came. If you needed a good tailor... you came to our shop.

SONIA. I don't belong here. I do not have a skill.

NATALIA. What did you do before the occupation?

SONIA. *(Lying)* I cooked. I was a cook.

TOSHIA. That is a skill. That is clearly a skill. You say you did not have a skill. You lie.

ALICE. The Germans have a cook. She is the Gestapo Inspector's wife. She lives in the house with her son.

TOSHIA. *(Sarcastic)* She is our new gardener, eh. You are going to prune the roses, eh?

SONIA. No.

ALICE. You have something they want, or you would not be here.

NATALIA. You will find out soon enough.

SONIA. I do not know why I am here.

ALICE. We all know why we are here. *(Gunshots can be heard outside. Pigs squeal.)* Because they call us 'Judensau.'

SONIA. But I am Russian.

ALICE. It is late. We should try to sleep. *(Rita, Natalia, and Alice find their 'sleeping' spot on the ground.)*

TOSHIA. Tomorrow you will know why they brought you here. You will know your skill. *(Toshia takes a spot on the ground near her stool. Sonia wanders looking for a place to lay down. She finally settles on a spot.)*

ALICE. Not there.

NATALIA. It leaks there when it rains. *(Sonia picks another spot.)* Not there, either!

TOSHIA. Dreck. *(Sonia moves toward the horse stall. Rita grabs her.)*

ALICE. We do not sleep in there. Here, you may take my spot. *(She gives her spot to Sonia and finds another place to sleep.)*

NATALIA. A gute nakht.

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ALICE. Good night. *(There is an uncomfortable silence. Toshia, Alice, and Rita try to sleep. Sonia begins to whimper.)*

TOSHIA. Stop! *(Sonia continues to cry.)* I said, stop! *(Silence. Blackout.)*

SCENE 2

Toshia mends clothes. Sonia sits on the ground. Pigs squeal. The barn door opens, blinding light floods the stage. Alice enters.

TOSHIA. You are back early. What is wrong?

ALICE. They do not need me today.

TOSHIA. Were you lazy?

ALICE. I am never lazy!

TOSHIA. Then why are you back so early?

ALICE. I do not know. It is not because I am lazy.

SONIA. What is your skill?

ALICE. I am a cobbler. I have always been a cobbler. I worked with my husband, Ish, before he died in the Great War. And then I worked alone. I am a proud cobbler, it is an important trade.

SONIA. But they sent you back early.

TOSHIA. Perhaps it is a trade they do not need anymore.

ALICE. Soldiers always need shoes to wear with poorly mended socks. My trade is why I am here. *(To Sonia)* When my children and I tried to escape Austria, the SS caught us before we even left Vienna. They took us to a cattle car and gave us wooden shoes. When I looked at the shoes, I could not believe what I saw. It was *my* work. I had made those shoes! It had my mark. They all had my mark. I do not know how they had so many of my shoes. But I was proud, and I let the other women know. Two days later, a soldier pulled me aside... "The women say you are a cobbler. Is this true?" "Yes," I said. "And I am fit for work." They brought me here.

TOSHIA. *(Looks at the sun through the hole in the roof.)* It is still early. Look at the shadow of the sun! Why did they send you back? Something is not right. Did they see you speaking to Natalia?

ALICE. No.

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TOSHIA. I have told you before, they see it as a weakness when you speak to Natalia. It is a weakness, and they do not like it.

ALICE. I said no. I spoke to no one.

TOSHIA. You pamper her.

ALICE. She is a girl. Just a girl.

TOSHIA. She distracts you. You treat her as if she was one of your own, and if they see this Alice...

ALICE. Leave it be! Leave it be!

TOSHIA. That girl needs to stop making up silly stories. The other day I saw her standing by that slat... *(Pointing to the slat with the missing piece.)* ...talking to the barn wall! She was saying something about the French! And a pirate!

ALICE. *(Pointing to the stall.)* No, Toshia. She talks to them! *(Sonia walks towards the stall.)*

SONIA. Who?

ALICE. Du zalst nisht geyn in dort!

TOSHIA. Do not go in there! You will not like what you see.

SONIA. Who? Who does she talk to?

TOSHIA. The dead.

SONIA. How many? *(They do not answer. Demanding.)* How many women have died here? How many?

ALICE. I have not seen many women come through this barn. Rita has been here the longest. She's seen more.

SONIA. But she chooses not to speak?

ALICE. She has seen horrid things.

TOSHIA. I have seen horrid things. I speak.

ALICE. We all have seen things Toshia... When I got to this wretched place, I saw things that a person should never see. Those soldiers are monsters. If a woman was pregnant, she was shot. If a woman looked tired, she was shot. If a woman wiped the sweat off her brow with her blouse, she was shot. *(The barn door opens, and blinding light floods the stage. Dogs bark and pigs squeal.)*

GERMAN SOLDIERS. *(VO)* Hol dir die Hure. Bring sie her. Es ist Zeit.

ALICE. *(To Sonia)* It is time for you to go. You will find out why you are here. *(Sonia looks around as if Alice is speaking to someone else. Alice*

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gives her a slight push. Sonia begins to exit as Natalia and Rita enter carrying a small bowl of soup. Natalia passes the bowl around. Natalia, Rita, and Alice each eat their ration.)

TOSHIA. *(Cautiously pushes the bowl away.)* This soup is warm. Our food is warm, and we have been fed two days in a row. Do not eat it. It must be a trick.

NATALIA. Nothing is wrong with the soup. It is fine.

ALICE. Maybe the Russian girl *is* the new cook. Perhaps she was telling the truth.

NATALIA. That cannot be her skill. I saw the German woman in the house making this soup, today.

ALICE. What were you doing in the kitchen?

TOSHIA. Are you following orders? You do as they say, Natalia!

NATALIA. Yes. I do. I did. I was asked to scrub the floor in the kitchen, and when no one was looking, I watched the cook make the soup.

ALICE. That is dangerous.

TOSHIA. You could have been caught! You attend to your work, do you hear? If the cook saw you watching her, she would think you are lazy. Idle! And then she would think we are *all* lazy. We would *all* pay for *your* mistake. Is that what you want?

NATALIA. No. It will not happen again. Zay moykhl.

ALICE. Rita has not eaten. Here, Rita, take my ration. Ess, Rita, ess.

TOSHIA. They probably already fed her. They give her privileges, I know they do. But we will never know if she acts broygus with us. *(There is uncomfortable silence as they finish what little soup they have.)* I used to like soup.

ALICE. I made the most wonderful chicken and matzo ball soup during the High Holidays.

NATALIA. Do you think it is the High Holidays? *(She crosses to the slat marked with tally marks.)* Alice? How long have you marked the days since we observed Shavu'ot?

ALICE. I lost track. I stopped marking. It could be the High Holidays. The air is getting crisp, the ground feels hard.

TOSHIA. But the light in the sky is not right for the High Holidays.

ALICE. What do you know of the light? You never leave the barn.

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TOSHIA. (*Annoyed*) I can see the light. Through the hole. I see the shadows. (*As the door opens Soldiers shout commands, dogs bark and pigs squeal. Blinding light floods the stage.*)

GERMAN SOLDIERS. (*VO*) Gott mit uns! In treue fest! Sieg Heil err
Ich war immer gegen Hitler!

TOSHIA. (*Without realizing Sonia is hurt.*) So soon? Why so soon?

ALICE. She can barely stand!

NATALIA. Oy vey! (*They rush to her. The mood becomes chaotic.*) She is hurt.

TOSHIA. What did they do to you?

NATALIA. Did they beat you? What did they do?

SONIA. Don't touch me! Gay Avek! Go away!

ALICE. You are hurt!

NATALIA. You have blood on your leg.

ALICE. Did they rape you? Oy Gevalt!

SONIA. I said don't touch me. Go Away! Gay Avek!

TOSHIA. What did they do?

SONIA. Go away!

TOSHIA. She has been raped.

ALICE. Monsters!

NATALIA. Help her!

SONIA. Don't touch me! Go Away! Gay Avek! Gay Avek! (*Toshia grabs Sonia's sleeve. Sonia now has a badge. Her badge means prostitute.*)

TOSHIA. She has a badge. They gave her a badge. (*Reading her badge.*)

ALICE. Kurva.

NATALIA. Whore?

TOSHIA. I guess we know what her skill is now. (*Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

NATALIA. (*She softly sings phrases from 'Puttin on the Ritz,' while Toshia, Rita, and Sonia sleep.*)

WHEN YOU'RE BLUE AND YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO DO THEN YOU SHOULD GO
WHERE FASHION HITS...

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(Trying to remember the words.) SPENDING EVERY DIME
FOR A WONDERFUL TIME.

TOSHIA. Stop!

NATALIA. *(She walks toward the horse stall and continues to sing, conscious of her volume as to not disturb Toshia.)* HAVE YOU SEEN
THE WELL TO DO-

UPON LENNON AVENUE

ON THAT FAMOUS THOROUGH FARE

WITH THEIR NOSES IN THE AIR?

IF YOU'RE BLUE

AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO

WHY DON'T YOU GO

WHERE HARLEM FLITS?

PUTTING' ON THE RITZ. *(Whispering to the 'dead' in the horse stall.)* I heard it in the house. It is the song he plays on the phonograph. Isn't it delightful? It is an American song. It's called 'Puttin on the Ritz.' Such a silly name for a song! But it is good. A good song. A delightful tune. We sat down and listened to the song together a bit. He is teaching me the words and... *(Toshia coughs.)* They are always listening. Yenta is what she is. Nosey, busy body. There is more but I will tell you the rest later. *(Sonia sits up with a sudden jerk and gasps. She startles Natalia.)* You startled me.

SONIA. Who are you speaking to?

NATALIA. The women in the stall.

SONIA. I hope they do not speak back.

NATALIA. Sometimes they do.

SONIA. Do they speak the mama loshen?

NATALIA. They give me advice.

SONIA. Oh, so they are Jewish, too.

NATALIA. *(She does not get the 'joke.')* You are Jewish.

SONIA. I am Russian.

NATALIA. Are you ashamed? *(There are sudden noises outside. Pigs squeal. The barn door opens. Blinding light floods the stage. Alice enters. She is muddy and limps. Toshia and Rita wake.)*

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TOSHIA. Why do they squeal so?

ALICE. This creature, the chaser, who wallows in the mud, if you ask it what it wants, it will say...

TOSHIA. 'More mud.'

ALICE. (*Simultaneously with Toshia.*) More mud.

TOSHIA. (*Noticing the mud on Alice's face.*) Oy, you have shmutz on your face. (*She wipes Alice's face.*) Your whole dress is muddy. And you limp. Why do you limp?

ALICE. My dress caught on the spike of a post on my walk back. I fell into the mud near the pig pen. The beasts laughed and cursed me so as I flogged around trying to get up.

TOSHIA. Are you speaking of the German soldiers or of the sows in the pen?

ALICE. (*Shrugs*) They are the same to me.

NATALIA. (*Singing*) 'WHEN YOU'RE BLUE AND YOU DON'T KNOW...'

TOSHIA. (*Interrupting her*) Stop! (*She stops.*)

NATALIA. (*To Sonia*) I am going to Paris someday. I am going to sing in a Parisian cabaret.

SONIA. I wish you luck.

NATALIA. I would sing more... (*Gesturing toward Toshia.*) ...but *she* does not allow it. I am very good. I used to perform at the cabaret in Kalisz.

TOSHIA. She thinks she's some young Lilli Liliana.

NATALIA. (*To Sonia*) I was fantastish! Kalisz, where I'm from, had the best cabaret in all of Poland. The funniest shtick for miles. My father was the Badhkin, and my mother and I had a song and dance routine that couldn't be beat. That's where the Germans found me... at the Cabaret Kalisz.

TOSHIA. You talk too much.

SONIA. They 'found you?' You say that as if it were a blessing.

NATALIA. It was a blessing. I'm still alive.

ALICE. Bubula, they were not there to praise you.

NATALIA. That is not true. One of them did praise me.

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TOSHIA. *(To Sonia)* In German. And she spoke back to him... in German. *(To Natalia)* That is why you are here. You speak their language, and you clean their house. That is all. There is nothing else, nothing else but that.

NATALIA. Yes. But still, when I sang, they thought I was fabulist!

ALICE. They are ogres, Natalia, not friends.

TOSHIA. Monsters!

NATALIA. They are not all monsters.

TOSHIA. *(Angry)* They have the eyes of the devil! I have seen it myself.

ALICE. Terrible things do not always come in scary and frightening packages. *(She uses her two hands as a comparison.)* Good on my right hand. and bad on my left. Both look the same. Both have tough nails and thick skin. Both with veins and blood that runs deep and quick. Each one leads to a heartbeat. But that is not what matters. The unseen is more important than the seen. It is what you cannot see at a first glance that matters. One hand is pure of heart, and the other... poisoned by evil. Pure evil.

NATALIA. I don't want to talk about evil and hate. When we talk about those things, it makes us weak. We must try to stay strong and we must try to have hope. *(To Toshia)* If you would let me sing, it would lighten our hearts.

TOSHIA. No!

SONIA. Why not?

TOSHIA. I said, no!

SONIA. I would like to hear her sing.

TOSHIA. Singing can get you killed.

SONIA. I have seen people die for many useless things, but singing was not one of them.

TOSHIA. That's how much you know.

ALICE. Toshia, stop.

SONIA. They can't hear us.

TOSHIA. Nonsense, they patrol all the time.

ALICE. That is not why she does not want Natalia to sing.

SONIA. Why not, then? Sonia, give us a song.

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TOSHIA. I was mending in the front, he was singing in the back. Elazar, my husband, was singing loudly, and not very well. The soldiers burst in my shop, demanding payment. I told them, I said, “I will not pay you today, the Einsatzgruppen have already come this week.” They got angry. The short one started knocking over spools of thread, the skinny one, lifted his baton as if he was going to kill me. He spat in my face. Just then, Elazar came out from the back, like a Broder Singer ready for the performance of his life, singing at the top of his lungs. As if he knew... was he trying to distract them? Trying to save my life? I do not know. *(She is too upset to continue.)*

SONIA. They killed him?

ALICE. Yes.

SONIA. I am sorry.

TOSHIA. No singing. No one wants to end up like the women in the stall. *(Rita notices something on the ground. She gets the other's attention.)*

SONIA. Look! *(Alice and Natalia approach.)*

NATALIA. Some greenery. It's beautiful.

SONIA. It is a plant of some sort.

ALICE. Cornflower?

TOSHIA. *(Looking at the plant.)* No. That is not cornflower. It is Chamomile.

ALICE. Chamomile? No. Chamomile grew like a weed in my garden. I know chamomile. That is not it. It is Cornflower.

TOSHIA. You don't know bubkis. My tante taught me to garden, and... 'That.' Is. Chamomile!

ALICE. Oh, aren't you a regular old maven of all things green...

NATALIA. ...whatever it is... it is beautiful.

SONIA. ...A rose?

TOSHIA. No.

ALICE. *(Simultaneously with Toshia)* No!

TOSHIA. Not a rose.

ALICE. Not a rose.

SONIA. Natalia is right, whatever it is...it is beautiful. *(There is a long uncomfortable silence. They have nothing to say. They meander in the*

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barn, pacing like animals locked in a cage at the zoo. Pigs squeal. Alice breaks the silence.)

ALICE. *(To Toshia)* I am cold from the wet mud. Toshia, give me that. *(She points to a sock in Toshia's basket.)* Let me warm my hands. *(She grabs for a sock.)*

TOSHIA. No.

ALICE. *(Not expecting Toshia to say no.)* Why? They will not know.

TOSHIA. They always know. They take inventory. Every day that young boy comes and takes inventory. And he counts the things in my basket, one by one.

NATALIA. Give her something. You have several socks! Give her one of the socks. I am sure it will be fine.

TOSHIA. No. The boy will know. *(Poking fun.)* He examines my basket. He counts the things in it. Imagine if that was your job, nu? *(She pulls some socks out of her basket.)* Counting the socks! Stupid Germans, is that how they train their young boys? *(Mocking a German accent.)* "Go. Go. Go and count. Someday you'll be a fine soldier!"

NATALIA. Maybe, that is not his skill.

TOSHIA. It is not a skill. Did you know that this stupid, foolish boy even counts my thread? So, no. You cannot have a holey, smelly German sock to warm your hands, or anything else in the basket. That silly boy might go and tell his tateshi.

ALICE. Toshia! Give me something to warm my hands!

TOSHIA. Do you know how much my skill is worth?

ALICE. It is worth what it is worth.

TOSHIA. What are you saying?

ALICE. I have always paid for the quality of the work. I would not pay more than three thousand Zlotys for your mending, and I am sure you charged more!

TOSHIA. And I'm sure we would not have seen the likes of you in our shop. *(Alice grabs some socks. Toshia grabs them back.)*

Seven thousand Zlotys. Do you have seven thousand Zlotys? No? Then you may not have those socks!

ALICE. Oy.

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TOSHIA. Seven thousand Zlotys and you can't find a finer shop in Warsaw.

ALICE. *(Simultaneously with Toshia.)* Oy! Here she goes. It's tiresome. It's not true. I see your skills. You are not that good. *(The barn door opens. Blinding light floods the space.)*

GERMAN SOLDIERS. *(VO)* Achtung! Achtung! Hinlegen! Heil Hitler! Heil, mein Führer! Sieg Heil! Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler! *(The Women stand in a row and salute. Blackout.)*

SCENE 4

Later in the evening. Alice and Toshia sleep. Rita stands in the ray of moonlight that shines through the hole in the roof. She is almost catatonic. Sonia weeps, then stops suddenly. Natalia stands by the horse's stall.

NATALIA. *(In mid-sentence)* He calls himself an 'Edelweiss Pirate.' And he is not the only one! There are several German rebels camping near the area. He must be very careful though. Can you believe Toshia thinks that counting socks is his job? She thinks she is smart. But she is the fool.

SONIA. Talking to the dead again?

NATALIA. *(Startled)* Yes.

SONIA. What do they say?

NATALIA. Listen. Can you hear them speak?

SONIA. It would not surprise me if I could. I have seen and heard stranger things.

NATALIA. Horrid things? *(Takes a moment.)* Is it painful when they rape you?

SONIA. Would you feel pain if they raped you?

NATALIA. I would feel much pain.

SONIA. Then I feel pain. Why do you ask this question?

NATALIA. I'm sorry. You are right, it is not proper.

SONIA. Proper? Nothing is proper, anymore.

NATALIA. We must not forget to be righteous. Good things will come to us in bounty when we are rescued.

SONIA. Rescued? Natalia, no one is coming.

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NATALIA. Yes! Yes, they are coming. When I first came here, I spoke to a Dutch woman who did the German's laundry. She told me, that she had heard the French offensive was making head way. The French! Viva la France, Sonia! They are coming. I know they are.

SONIA. The French? That is not true. The French are... *(She realizes that Natalia might not know the French army has fallen.)* Natalia? How long have you been here?

NATALIA. You must believe. You must. I know I am going home. I am going back to Kalisz. I am going back to the cabaret.

SONIA. You remind me of someone. Someone else who was as stubborn and strong willed as you.

NATALIA. 'A Jew is as strong as any other.' And I believe that. Good will come to the Jews. Good will come. But we must wait. And we must live our lives doing good deeds. We can endure any hardship if we fulfill our tasks with good.

SONIA. It is not that simple. Fill our days with good deeds. Ha! Good deeds will set me free? Nonsense! *(Touching her badge.)* I am stained. My badge...Kurva...whore.

NATALIA. But, Sonia, you are better than that silly cloth badge. That badge means nothing. You are strong.

SONIA. Why? Because I am alive? That does not make me strong.

NATALIA. We are being tested. That alone is a gift. That alone makes us strong. You will pass this test, and someday you will know happiness again. I know this to be true. *(Silence)* It is as simple as that children's story about the farmer and the Rebbe. Do you know it? *(She shakes her head no.)* Long ago there was a farmer and his wife who lived on a farm, probably not too different than the farm we are on. But they also lived with their many children and their grandparents. Sometimes the noise was all too much for the farmer to bear. The man loved his family, but he could not find peace. The noise was constant. Constant chatter and loud noise. The man did not know what to do. So, he went to the Rebbe and said... *(Loud noises come from outside. German propaganda and gunshots.)*

SONIA. Later. Tell me the story later.

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NATALIA. Sonia...*(Whispering)* “No tiger can eat me, no shark can beat me... even the Devil would lose his teeth biting me.” I heard that once. I’d like to think it’s true.

SONIA. Yes, Natalia, yes. Good night.

NATALIA. Good night. *(Rita remains motionless in the moonlight. Lights fade down and then fade up again, indicting night turning into day. The barn door opens. The stage is flooded with light. German propaganda can be overheard on a megaphone in the distance. Rita, Sonia, Alice, and Natalia exit. The barn door shuts leaving Toshia alone in the dark to darn the socks. Blackout.)*

SCENE 5

The Women are gathered around Natalia who is in the middle of telling a story.

NATALIA. The farmer loved his family, but he could not find peace. The noise was constant. Constant chatter and loud noise. The man did not know what to do. So, he went to the Rebbe and said... *(She acts it out.)* “Holy Rebbe, my house is a mess. Everyone quarrels, and I get no peace. Whatever am I to do?” The Rebbe said, “Go to your yard and bring your chickens into your hut.”

SONIA. Inside his home?

TOSHIA. This is a silly story.

ALICE. I want to hear it. Carry on Little Bird.

NATALIA. So, the old man did as the Rebbe said. He gathered the animals and brought them into his home. Now, it was even noisier. If the old man had no peace before, he certainly had no peace now...

TOSHIA. That’s because he’s a stupid farmer. *(Bread is pushed through the hole in the slat. Natalia is the first to notice it, as if she was expecting it.)*

NATALIA. Bread!

TOSHIA. Bread? They have already fed us today. Why do they give us more food? Do not eat this.

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NATALIA. It is food. It is bread! Toshia, for whatever reason, we have bread!

TOSHIA. It must be poison.

NATALIA. It is bread. (*Eating the bread.*) An unexpected gift. (*They devour the bread. Natalia hums 'Puttin on the Ritz.'*)

TOSHIA. Stop singing!

NATALIA. I'm not singing, I'm humming.

TOSHIA. And I said stop.

NATALIA. Singing makes me happy. A song would make us all happy.

TOSHIA. Happy? Ha! Well, then, sing away. I would not want you to be unhappy. Not in this very happy, happy place.

ALICE. Toshia, what is done is done is done!

TOSHIA. No singing! (*Desperate*) They patrol all the time. I know they are listening, Alice. They are out there, right now, listening! Sometimes at night I hear noises just outside the barn. They are listening. I do not want them to barge in here, angry. I do not want trouble!

NATALIA. There is no one outside the barn, now. Listen. (*They listen. It is eerily quiet. She sings.*) WHEN YOU'RE BLUE AND YOU DON'T KNOW...

TOSHIA. Why? Why should we pretend? Why? Singing songs and telling silly stories... why?

NATALIA. For hope. For strength. For our spirit.

SONIA. Yes. For our spirit.

ALICE. They are right. A song might lift our spirits.

NATALIA. I will teach it to you, if you like?

SONIA. (*To Toshia and Natalia.*) I would like... I would like it very much.

TOSHIA. I would not like.

NATALIA. Gather around me. We must make it feel authentic, like we are really at the cabaret.

TOSHIA. Did you hear that? She wants to make it feel authentic. Will I get to wear my beaded dress and sparkly hat? Natalia, we are not at some cabaret! This is not an evening of song and dance. There is nothing to celebrate here. We are locked in a cage like animals at the zoo! Do you think that when one visits the zoo and looks at the camels through the iron

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bars, the camel thinks “If only I had something to make me happy... to lift my spirit and give me hope. If only I could feel good, then... I’d be free.”

NATALIA. You are not an animal in a cage!

TOSHIA. You are right. I am less than that! They treat their dirty hogs better than the dreaded Jew!

NATALIA. I am a proud Jew.

TOSHIA. You are a foolish Jew.

ALICE. Enough! *(To Toshia)* You are not the only one who lives in this barn! You cannot control what we say or what we do. Let Little Bird sing!

TOSHIA. You are all foolish, then! They are listening! Fools! Fools!

ALICE. *(There is an awkward silence.)* No one is listening.

SONIA. *(Cautiously)* I’m listening. Please Natalia... please...sing.

NATALIA. HAVE YOU SEEN THE WELL TO DO

UPON LENNON AVENUE?

ON THAT FAMOUS THOROUGHFARE

WITH THEIR NOSES IN THE AIR?

Do you want me to teach it to you?

ALICE. Yes.

SONIA. Yes.

TOSHIA. I give up.

NATALIA. IF YOU'RE BLUE, AND YOU DON'T KNOW.

Repeat after me. IF YOU'RE BLUE, AND YOU DON'T KNOW
WHERE TO GO TO, WHY DON'T YOU GO, WHERE HARLEM
FLITS?

PUTTING' ON THE RITZ!

ALICE/SONIA. *(Singing tentatively. Choppy. Natalia helps them along.)*

IF YOU'RE BLUE,

AND YOU

DON'T KNOW WHERE

TO GO TO

WHY DON'T YOU GO WHERE HARLEM FLITS?

PUTTING' ON THE RITZ!

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NATALIA. THAT'S WHERE EACH AND EVERY LULU-BELLE GOES-EVERY THURSDAY EVENING WITH HER SWELL BEAUS-RUBBIN' ELBOWS. *(Rita joins without them knowing.)*

ALICE/SONIA/RITA. *(Mumbling and getting the words wrong.)*

THAT'S WHERE EVERY LULU-BELLE GOES- THURSDAY EVENING WITH HER SWELL BEAUS- RUBBIN' ELBOWS

NATALIA. DIFFERENT TYPES WHO WEAR A DAY COAT, AND CUT AWAY COAT, PERFECT FITS... PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ. *(She begins to move her hands and do a little dance. Singing loudly.)*

PUTTIN ON THE RITZ! PUTTIN ON THE RITZ! PUTTIN ON THE RITZ!

TOSHIA. *(Explodes in laughter. Everyone, including Rita, breaks out in uncontrollable laughter.)* I'm going to plotz!

ALICE. I haven't laughed like that for a long time.

SONIA. My stomach hurts, I'm laughing so hard.

ALICE. Your stomach hurts because you are hungry.

NATALIA. My stomach hurt before we laughed. Now, I feel wonderful!

RITA. Me, too! I feel wonderful, too! I feel wonderful, too! *(The Women look at each other in shock. They begin to laugh again and hug Rita with joy.)*

ALICE. Natalia, you have lifted our spirits, indeed. Toshia, would you not say that was good?

TOSHIA. Good? No. *(Jovial)* But better than it has been for a very long time. Thank you, Natalia. I am sorry. *(Natalia hugs Toshia.)*

SONIA. And Rita speaks! She speaks!

RITA. *(To Sonia)* I am Rita.

SONIA. I am Sonia. It is nice to meet you.

RITA. Someday, I will play my accordion for you. I will play my accordion for all of you!

SONIA. I would like that very much.

ALICE. We must get our rest now. It is late. Thank you, Natalia. Thank you. *(They go to their 'sleeping' spots.)*

ALICE. Gute nacht.

TOSHIA. Gute Nacht.

SONIA. Good night.

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RITA. Good night.

NATALIA. *(It is silent. Natalia sits up. She quietly stands up and looks around to make sure the others are sleeping. She whispers.)* Did you hear us sing the song you play on the phonograph, Frederic? Did you hear it? *(She speaks to FREDERIC, the teen boy who is the cook's son. Although he cannot be seen, a rustling can be heard outside the barn.)* It made them happy! You would have loved to see their faces. Oh, how I wish you could have seen their faces. Toshia, smiled! She laughed! And did you hear Rita talk? She talked! I know that when the Edelweiss Pirates rally, they will be able to speak to you face to face and tell you, thank you, themselves. Someday soon, Frederic, someday, soon. *(Sonia sits up and starts sobbing.)* Sonia? Sonia? *(She goes to her.)*

SONIA. Go to sleep, Natalia. Do not worry about me.

NATALIA. But what is it? Why do you cry so?

SONIA. It is a nightmare. I have the same nightmare every night.

NATALIA. Tell me.

SONIA. Do not worry about me.

NATALIA. *(She holds her hand with tenderness.)* Tell me.

SONIA. I close my eyes and the dead, they look at me. They stare me down. I can't turn away. I try opening my eyes, but I cannot... I cannot speak. I cannot move. They stare at me... the dead...and I cannot look away. *(Sonia lays down and curls up. Natalia places her hand on her.)*

NATALIA. Then Sonia...do *not* turn away. Look at them. Remember their faces. The faces of those you loved when they were happy. When you were happy.

SONIA. Happiness? I do not remember happiness. *(There is a noise. It is Frederic leaving. Sonia is scared.)* What was that?

NATALIA. Nothing. Rats. *(Looking toward the noise.)* But what of love? Do you remember love?

SONIA. My sister, Anna. *(She softens.)* My mother was sick. She had been sick since Anna was born, so, Anna looked to me for everything. I raised her. I taught her how to read and how to write. I fed her, I bathed her. I taught her how to sew. I taught her how to sing. *(She looks to Natalia.)* They said they were going to relocate us. I remember the day we saw the announcements. They were posted in the streets. They said that all

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the Jews in the city were to gather at Babi Yar. They were going to relocate us, and we had to leave. But on that day... my mother died.

NATALIA. I am sorry.

SONIA. No. It was a blessing. It was just me and Anna now, and we could start a new life. My father had died long ago. He died in the Great War. Anna never knew him, but she would have liked him. He was Russian. My mother... just an old, sick Jew. Now that she was dead, no one needed to know that Anna and I were Jews. This was my chance to give my sister a better life. By dying, my mother had given us a gift. I told Anna, I said, "Tell everyone who asks, that you are Russian! Your father was a great Russian soldier! He died honorably in the Great War, and you never knew your mother. You are Russian, and no one ever has to know we have any Jewish blood."

NATALIA. But it didn't work. They brought you here. What happened?

SONIA. *(Crying again.)* I loved my sister. My sister Anna. I loved her so.

NATALIA. What happened?

SONIA. I cannot speak of it. I cannot utter the words *(Calmly.)* And so, since I cannot speak, it will forever haunt my dreams. Do not worry about me, sweet. There is nothing you can do.

NATALIA. Sonia, "No tiger can eat me, no shark can beat me, even the Devil would lose his teeth biting me." Say it with me. "No tiger can eat me, no shark can beat me, even the Devil would lose his teeth biting me." I know it. We will get out of this place, soon. And you can come with me, Sonia, back to Kalisz. You can come with me and... *(Sonia is sleeping.)* Sonia? *(Sonia does not answer. She is curled up in the fetal position.)* Sonia? Good night, then, good night. *(Blackout.)*

SCENE 6

Alice and Toshia are sleeping while Sonia and Rita sit and listen to Natalia act out a story.

NATALIA. The farmer loved his family, but he could not find peace. The noise was constant. Constant chatter and loud noise. The man did not

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know what to do. So, he went to the Rebbe and said... *(She acts it out.)*

“Holy Rebbe, my house is a mess. Everyone quarrels, and I get no peace.

RITA. What does ‘quarrels’ mean?

NATALIA. Squabbles. *(Rita looks confused.)* Argues? Disagrees.

RITA. Why? Why do they disagree?

SONIA. Too many opinions.

NATALIA. Because the house is crowded.

RITA. That is no reason to disagree. I have six brothers and one sister.

SONIA. Let her tell the story.

RITA. Go on. More.

NATALIA. Whatever am I to do?” The Rebbe said, “Go to your yard and bring your chickens into your hut.”

RITA. Chickens! The chickens? Chickens? I do not believe it.

SONIA. Hush.

RITA. Go on. More, please.

NATALIA. Being a good and obedient farmer, the old man did as he was told.

RITA. Ha! Chickens.

NATALIA. But the plan did not work.

SONIA. *(Snarky)* The chickens did not help?

NATALIA. No. And the children became even louder. “Oh peace! Peace! I just want some peace!” The Farmer shouted. So, he ran back to the Rev, and the Rebbe listened... *(‘Listening’ like the Rabi.)* And listened. Then he said, *(In her best Rabi voice)* “Go get the rest of the animals from the barn. Bring the cows, ducks and the goat back to your home.”

RITA. Inside the home? Oh, no. No! No! This is not a good idea. Not at all.

NATALIA. The ‘ol alter kocker ran back to the Rev as fast as he could. *(She imitates the voice. Out of breath.)* Oy! Rebbe, Rebbe... *(Sonia and Natalia giggle.)*

He was out of breath you see... *(She hears a noise outside. Turns her head unsure if the others have heard it.)* That is it for tonight.

RITA. Why?

NATALIA. I am tired.

RITA. Tired?

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SONIA. I am tired, too,

RITA. You cannot be tired. I need to know, what did the Old Alter Kocker say?

NATALIA. Rita, I have told you this story over and over again. Many times.

RITA. I know. Finish story.

SONIA. She can tell us the rest of the story tomorrow. I am tired.

RITA. Tell it now!

NATALIA. No, Rita. Tomorrow. We are all tired.

RITA. It has been good night!

SONIA. Yes. Tonight... I will sleep well. *(Singing)*

YOU'LL DECLARE IT'S SIMPLY TOPPING

TO BE THERE AND HEAR THEM SWAPPING

NATALIA. SMART TIDBITS...

NATALIA. /SONIA/RITA. 'PUTTIN ON THE RITZ.' *(They go to their sleeping spots. Natalia lays down for a moment, but then cautiously sits back up and checks to see if she is being watched. When she thinks everyone is sleeping, she stands and faces the barn door.)*

NATALIA. Bist du da? *(She waits a moment for an answer. She speaks to Frederic.)* Sonia said, "I will sleep well tonight." I have done something good, Frederic, I have done good! *You* have done something good, too. *(She moves closer to the slat. Rita sits up and hears Natalia. She approaches Natalia from behind without Natalia noticing.)* Frederic, tell me. One tap if you have heard any new news. Two taps if we leave soon. Three taps if there is danger and four taps if you love me. *(He begins to tap. One tap. Two taps. Three taps...She turns around with joy, doesn't hear the fourth tap and notices Rita, who has been watching her.)*

Rita! You startled me! I thought everyone was asleep. I was talking to the women.

RITA. I know. They are in the stall. *(Points to the stall.)* Over there.

NATALIA. They are everywhere. They watch over us.

RITA. I knew one of the women. *(Points)* We were friends. We got to the barn on the same day. Her name was Jahnke. She played the violin. She had an older brother... a cellist. She liked my people. She liked it when I

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played my accordion. She was kind. Jahnke. Jahnke was her name, and she played the violin.

NATALIA. Jahnke.

RITA. Who were you talking to Natalia?

NATALIA. Please, do not tell the others. (*There is rustling outside.*)

RITA. Who is out there, Natalia?

NATALIA. He is gone, now.

RITA. I have seen you talking to him. That boy. You think no one is watching, but I am watching.

NATALIA. Frederic is not like the others.

RITA. He is General's son.

NATALIA. He is one of the Edelweiss Pirates! A group of rebels. They are going to set up a camp not far from the house and then attack and raid the house! The soldiers have no idea what is coming! The Edelweiss Pirates are going to save us, Rita! He is waiting for a command. Any day he should get word. Soon! He will get a command and... oh, Rita! You will be free! We will all be free!

RITA. Does not sound true. Sounds like fairy tale.

NATALIA. No. It is the truth!

RITA. Why have you not said anything?

NATALIA. Because it is dangerous, and they would not believe me. They would be angry if they knew. They do not trust anyone.

RITA. I do not trust anyone. Do. Not. Trust! Anyone. Not boy. Not anyone.

NATALIA. Not even me?

RITA. Do not trust.

NATALIA. Please, do not tell. Do not speak of this.

RITA. Do not speak? Close my eyes. Stand in light?

NATALIA. I am not asking you to be silent-Rita, please! Do not tell the others about Frederic. They will be so angry! They will not understand, and I will never get to speak to him again. I must be able to speak to him again. I must! Promise me you will not say a thing.

RITA (*Simultaneous with Natalia*) Do not trust! Do not trust boy. Do not trust anyone! He is not your friend! He is dangerous. They are all dangerous! Do not trust!

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NATALIA. You will see. He will rescue us. It will be soon, and we will all be free.

RITA. *(Rita lays down in Natalia's spot. Natalia stands in the light shining through the hole in the roof.)* Do not trust. *(Blackout.)*

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