

Auschwitz. In the end even the piano breaks down. There's only the sound of the drum and the noise of war and death.

Your piece A Table Before Me told elements of your mother's story.

Yes. In 1997 my mother received a big sheaf of documents from an Austrian insurance company. She'd been writing to them over decades, inquiring about her father's unredeemed insurance policy. By finally sending her the documents, the Austrian insurance company was saying: We are hereby documenting

everything concerning your father's ownership of this policy, which proves that we don't owe you a dime because it was signed over to the Germans; and furthermore, the statute of limitations has run out on receiving German restitution. The documents were *unbelievable*.

What story did they tell?

They revealed the extent to which German brutality and injustice were documented without any sense of shame. They would write one letter after another to my grandfather, cheerfully announc-

ing what was about to happen to him, what was going to be taken from him next, with what decree he was going to have to comply, what new tax he would have to pay. Not only that: He was told that he could appeal the decision, but his appeal would be useless and that he would have to pay all of the associated legal fees. Then the letters became increasingly threatening: If you don't pay this new tax, you will be imprisoned. If anybody recognizes you in the street, you will be taken away. Of course he was paying, *desperately* paying.

There's a very pathetic moment when my grandfather writes, "You have taken even my underwear, you have taken my electrical inhaler"—he had emphysema, and they had confiscated his breathing apparatus. He humbly requested that the insurance policy be used as payment for the next whatever-the-tax. This is the insurance company's proof that he willingly gave up his policy to the Germans!

In this play, in which you portray all the characters, a goofy Freudian shrink in a white jacket taunts you for outing your mom, who had concealed her Jewish identity after coming to America.

That's right. The analyst asks snidely, "Happy now?"

Claudia: "The object is not to feel happiness. It is revelation, catharsis."

Analyst: "And are you relieved? Did you get it all off your chest? Tell us, Claudia. How do you feel having exposed your mother for the past hour? She wanted only silence and anonymity. Of which you have deprived her?"

Claudia: "How so? I've even changed her name."

Analyst: "A betrayal nevertheless. And to what end? What deep purpose? (pause) No facile reply? No ready rejoinder? And where are *you* in all of this, Claudia, I see you least of all. Care to comment?"

Then, after a long silence, Claudia turns to the audience and says: "I am Claudia Stevens. I act. I am also the granddaughter of Edmund Israel Sinai, Jew, tailor. Of the weak lungs and the many assets. Who rode the rails. Who coughed his life out on some freezing railway platform. And the daughter of *his*

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