

NIGHTS OF WAKING

Written by

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Based on testimonies of Holocaust Survivors

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"BASED ON TRUE EVENTS"

EXT. STONE WALL - STRONSKI HOUSE - DAY

The bright colors of summer are fading. The landscape is saturated with varying shades of brown. Even the Vistula River, winding in and around the city, holds a murky tint.

Despite the dreary scene, MARYLA STRONSKI has nothing but hope and happiness in her eyes. Wrapped in a worn-but-stylish overcoat, the 14-year-old rests with one shoulder against the stone wall, caressing the face of RAJMUND SLAWNY with her pale right hand.

Young love.

Rajmund's slight body braces as he returns her look and wraps one arm around her waist. Their foreheads press together as they watch their hands intertwine.

In the distance a door SLAMS.

RUTA (O.S, IN POLISH)  
Maryla?! Maryla Stronski!

Maryla peers over the wall into the garden of a little brick townhome, sandwiched between a line of others. RUTA STRONSKI hastily descends the back steps and races toward the gate.

RUTA  
Maryla, I see you there! Get back inside at once! If I see that boy I will be telling your father.

Maryla giggles and grabs Rajmund by the hand, running off down the decline to the river bank, jumping into a little row boat on the edge of the shore.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Hurry!

The back gate of the garden SWINGS open and Ruta emerges, waving her arms and screaming at them.

All smiles, Maryla stands in the boat and blows kisses at her mother while Rajmund rows them across the river, looking back apologetically from time to time.

MARYLA  
I'll be back for dinner, mother! I love you! Thank you! I love you!

Ruta throws up her arms in defeat and retreats back to the house.

Maryla drops down into the boat and runs her fingers through the water. Far off in the distance are fishermen, hauling in the day's catch.

SUPERIMPOSED: "Krakow, Poland - 1939"

As Ruta climbs the steps once more, she turns and watches as Maryla again pulls Rajmund up the opposite hillside and into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - KRAKOW - DAY

The sun filters through the treetops and strikes the ground unevenly. A fast-paced CRUNCH can be heard as Maryla and Rajmund dash through the leaves. Their hands unclasp as trees pass between them. They eye each other, playfully...

a chase!

Maryla stops dead in her tracks and sprints deftly between some brush. He follows soon after, leaping over the brush and continuing his pursuit.

He steadily gets further and further behind until he emerges into a sparsely wooded area, surrounded by much bigger trees. He stops.

Scanning the treeline intently, he hears a slight rustling behind him. He WHEELS around.

FLYING at him from high in the tree comes Maryla, her once pinned hair now flowing freely.

He extends his arms but folds under the force, both of them flinging up dirt and leaves as they crash to the ground.

She rolls off of him and onto her back a couple feet away, proud of her stealthy attack.

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)  
You are reckless.

She laughs.

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)  
What if I wasn't ready to catch  
you?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
But you were.

He grins, incredulous and unsurprised all at once.

The two lean back in leaves and the grass. Two beetles crawl between them. Maryla notices them making their way from leaf to leaf. She watches.

Rajmund notices her gaze and sees the bugs, quickly reaching over and flicking one right at her.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Rajmund!

Her tone isn't playful but he doesn't notice. He lines up the other bug.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

No!

She grabs his hand and forces him to look at her. He recoils, embarrassed by the severity of her look.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Why would you do that?

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)

It's just a bug, Maryla.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Was it bothering you?

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)

No.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Well then--

She can't finish her sentence. Does he not understand?

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)

I'm sorry.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Just be kind to things.

He doesn't quite understand the importance, but he nods. The tension is dissipating. Her mind has wandered.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Tell me about Britain again.

He rolls his eyes and blindly throws a handful of leaves at her. She hurls even more back at him.

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)  
Can I not win a single battle with  
you?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Not one.

She smiles and curls up next to him, watching his chest move  
with each breath.

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)  
Alright, where shall I begin?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
At the beginning, of course.

RAJMUND (IN POLISH)  
Polish or English.

She debates.

MARYLA (IN FORCED ENGLISH)  
English. Speak slow.

He nods and squeezes her against his body. They lay there,  
looking up at the dancing sunlight and the falling leaves.

RAJMUND (IN ENGLISH)  
I arrived in London on a train. I  
could see the lights of the city  
long before we stopped. I was  
excited as I stepped onto the  
platform. It was strange to be in a  
big city with no one to call my  
friend, but I was hopeful...

The last rays of light slowly disappear as dusk sets in upon  
the forest.

INT. DINING ROOM - STRONSKI HOUSE - NIGHT

The dishes are being cleared from an extravagant table. Gas  
lights illuminate the room in a warm glow. There is a  
strained silence as the 9-year-old KASIA STRONSKI collects  
the plates and carefully shuffles into the kitchen.

Ruta annoyedly looks across the table at ELIASZ STRONSKI who  
delicately slides his wine glass down on the table. His  
optimistic posture and air seem to welcome anyone who would  
like to approach him, no matter the reason.

The silence remains as dishes clank together and water begins  
to run in the kitchen.

Down the hall, the front door can be heard SWINGING open. Footsteps pause momentarily, then boldly make their way toward the dining room.

Maryla waltzes in and plops down at her designated seat, digging into the cold food that awaits her.

Ruta forcefully gestures to Eliazsz and motions toward Maryla. He nods.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Your mother tells me that you  
disobeyed her today. Is that true?

With a full mouth and a faux apologetic face...

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Yes, sir.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
She also mentioned that you were  
with the Slawny's oldest son. What  
do you have to say about that?

She glances at Ruta who is waiting intently.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
He's a great kisser!

Ruta jumps to her feet.

RUTA (IN POLISH)  
Young lady! You are not to be  
engaging in that behavior. And you  
certainly cannot be talking this  
way.

She is fuming and looks at Eliazsz for support. He is barely able to contain a laugh but quickly straightens up.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Yes. Your mother is correct. You  
will not see this boy again.

He winks at Maryla just as Ruta glances back at him.

RUTA (IN POLISH)  
Eliazsz!

She flings her cloth napkin down on the table and storms out of the room, leaving Maryla and Eliazsz grinning from ear to ear.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 You really shouldn't torture her  
 like this.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
 Neither should you!

He takes a sip of wine and smiles, exposing his pronounced  
 wrinkles on his 42-year-old face.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 When did he get back?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
 Two weeks ago. His mother became  
 ill.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 Ah, yes. I heard. His uncle came  
 into the cafe last week. How is she  
 doing?

Maryla shakes her head and picks at her food.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 What do you two do when you're out  
 in the forest?

She swallows a big bite.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
 Nothing out of the ordinary. We  
 talk and run and play games.  
 Sometimes we have a picnic.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 I imagine that it's good for him to  
 get out of the house now and then.  
 Does his family need anything?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
 I'm not sure. We don't talk much  
 about that.  
 (in English)  
 He has been teaching me English.

Eliasz is taken aback, impressed.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
 Is that English?

She nods, proudly.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Do NOT tell your mother.

They both burst out laughing. Eliazsz rises and steps toward her, leaning down to kiss her head.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
(whispering)  
You may keep seeing him, but  
please, for my sake, obey your  
mother. Alright?

She throws her arm around his neck and engulfs him in a hug, joyfully nodding her head.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
To make up for today, after school  
tomorrow you and Kasia will go to  
the market and get the ingredients  
for her favorite meal, yes?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Knish.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Yes. And you and I will prepare it  
at the cafe and bring it home to  
surprise her. Come by the cafe  
after school to get some coins.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Yes, father.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Good girl. Thank you, my dear one.

He kisses her forehead and retires to a lounge chair in the adjoining room.

INT. MARYLA'S BEDROOM - STRONSKI HOUSE - NIGHT

Maryla lays in bed, staring at the ceiling.

KASIA (O.S, IN POLISH)  
Maryla?

She looks over at another twin bed.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Yes, Kasia?

Kasia smacks her lips and groggily asks...

KASIA (IN POLISH)  
Can you get me some water?

Maryla giggles.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
You can't get it yourself?

Kasia coyly shakes her head. Maryla laughs.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Alright.

She slips out of bed and kisses Kasia on the forehead.

INT. HALLWAY - STRONSKI HOUSE - NIGHT

She quietly makes her way down the hallway, beginning to hear chatter from her parents' room. She pauses at the door before she heads downstairs.

RUTA (O.S, IN POLISH)  
Why do you encourage her?

ELIASZ (O.S, IN POLISH)  
What do you mean?

RUTA (O.S, IN POLISH)  
You know exactly what I mean. She continues to engage in behavior that is strictly forbidden by the Torah.

Maryla winces.

ELIASZ (O.S, IN POLISH)  
And what were we doing when we were her age? Did we heed every commandment? Or did we act like children?

CUT BACK AND FORTH WITH:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - STRONSKI HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruta in a nightgown sits upright in bed watching Eliaz prepare to do the same.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
I seem to remember a young Ruta  
defying her parents to chase after  
an older man, and a handsome one at  
that.

Ruta, still annoyed, suppresses the slightest grin.

RUTA (IN POLISH)  
And since that time only one of us  
still acts like a child.

Eliasz takes the hit in a good-natured manner, sliding into  
bed and lowering his head onto his wife's shoulder.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Is that your way of telling me I'm  
young at heart?

RUTA (IN POLISH)  
No, not the heart, just the brain.

Eliasz let's out a laugh.

Maryla suppresses a giggle outside.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
We have raised a strong young  
woman, Ruta. Will she make  
mistakes? Certainly. But her  
mistakes will be ones of passion  
and love, not stupidity. She knows  
the teachings, they are instilled  
in her.

Maryla stands straight, proud.

RUTA (IN POLISH)  
With everything that's happening in  
the world, now is the time to stay  
rooted in our faith.

Eliasz takes a beat and reflects.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Yes. You are right. We will sit  
down and discuss this with both of  
them.

He leans toward the lamp next to him and switches it off.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Tomorrow, do not worry about  
dinner. Maryla and I will be  
cooking for you. Knish.

Ruta eases up, slightly, and leans for the lamp on her side.

Maryla watches the darkness take over underneath the door.  
She walks down the stairs to fetch the water.

EXT. SCHOOL - KRAKOW - DAY

A group of children of all ages pours out of the front doors  
of the school. Maryla is with four other girls, but waves  
goodbye as they part ways. She scans the crowd for Kasia.

Got her!

She runs over and sweeps her up in an embrace, walking off  
down the street as Kasia giggles and waves goodbye to her  
little friends.

INT. STRONSKI CAFE - KRAKOW - DAY

The cafe is sparsely occupied. Eliaszk stands above a table  
taking the order of a man.

CUSTOMER 1 (IN POLISH)  
What did I have last time?

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
What you always have.

Unfazed, the customer thinks.

CUSTOMER 1 (IN POLISH)  
Hm, I'll have a coffee and a  
strudel.

Eliaszk grins. Exactly.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
I'll have that right out.

He walks away from the table and around the counter. He leans  
down in the display and comes back up with a strudel. Maryla  
and Kasia ring the bell as they enter.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Hello, my girls.

Kasia runs from Maryla to Eliazsz, who lifts her and gives her a kiss.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
What did you learn today?

Kasia shrugs.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
That much?

Embarrassed, Kasia buries her grinning face in his neck. He laughs.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
(to Maryla)  
Take 50 groszy out of the register.

Maryla walks around the counter and opens it as Eliazsz watches. She starts to take bills, playfully.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Have you forgotten what numbers  
look like?

She laughs and replaces the bills, gathering a few coins.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
That's better. I was beginning to  
wonder about that school of yours.

She walks back toward the door, stopping to collect Kasia.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Come on, Kasia.

She grips tighter.

KASIA (IN POLISH)  
I want to stay with papa.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
And I want you to stay with me, but  
I must work, my love.

He pries her off of him and gives her to Maryla. But she indignantly goes limp and drops to the ground, running off through the restaurant and out the door.

Eliazsz and Maryla are not surprised. Maryla follows her.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
Only the dinner food, please!

Maryla grins as she leaves.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Love you, papa.

ELIASZ (IN POLISH)  
I love you, my dear one.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - KRAKOW - DAY

The market is buzzing. Carts line the perimeter and create rows in the middle. Fruits, vegetables, leather goods, kitchenwares, everything is up for sale.

Maryla holds her sister's hand, leading her from one seller to the next. Standing before a cart of onions, she sifts through, looking for the perfect one.

MRS. PERETZ (IN POLISH)  
Why hello, Maryla! And hey there, little Kasia. What brings you to market today?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Hello, Mrs. Peretz. We need two onions and some sauerkraut.

MRS. PERETZ (IN POLISH)  
Well, we have both. What are you making?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Knish.

MRS. PERETZ  
So it's not for the cafe?

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
No, Mrs. Peretz. We're making dinner for mother.

MRS. PERETZ (IN POLISH)  
Well, aren't you two the sweetest!

She plops three onions and a load of sauerkraut into Maryla's bag.

MRS. PERETZ (IN POLISH)  
That will be 9 groszy, my dear.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
But Mrs. Peretz--

MRS. PERETZ (IN POLISH)  
No, no. Just say "alright."

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Alright, Mrs. Peretz. Thank you  
very much.

She smiles and sends them on their way.

At the edge of the market, Maryla stops and purchases a  
sweet, giving it to Kasia.

KASIA (IN POLISH)  
Did mother say I could-

MARYLA (IN POLISH)  
Mother isn't here. Don't you want  
the sweet?

Kasia stuffs it into her mouth and sucks on it. Maryla laughs  
at the sight and leads her up the cobblestone street.

EXT. STREET - KRAKOW - DAY

Still sucking on her candy, Kasia tries to keep up with the  
fast-paced Maryla.

A very low RUMBLE begins to become audible. Maryla doesn't  
take notice.

Up ahead, people begin to walk quickly the opposite  
direction, disappearing into stoops and alleyways. The RUMBLE  
grows.

Maryla finally takes note. She stops and looks around,  
watching the people fleeing around her.

The RUMBLE still grows, shaking the ground around her.  
Suddenly, a tank emerges ahead, escorted by German soldiers.

Kasia runs forward and latches onto her hand, frightened by  
the commotion. Maryla pulls Kasia toward her and drops back  
against the wall, watching the procession go by.

Once overtaken, the citizens stand frozen in uncertainty. An  
officer's car is mid-way down the line. A colonel stands  
erect on the seat.

He points to a man across the street from Maryla, a jeweler.  
The transport truck behind him sheds its soldiers who quickly  
approach the man.

SOLDIER 1

Name?

JEWELER

Goldschmidt.

Without hesitation, they put him in the truck. The man struggles momentarily until one of the soldiers SMASHES the butt of his gun against his back.

Maryla yanks Kasia and turns the corner of the next street, running as fast as Kasia can go.

INT. STRONSKI CAFE - KRAKOW - DAY

The tables are empty. The two waiters can be seen outside on the sidewalk. JULEK STERN stands behind the display smoking a cigarette, his eyes wide in disbelief.

In BURSTS Maryla and Kasia.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Father? Hello?

Julek comes out of hiding.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Julek, where is my father?

JULEK (IN POLISH)

The Germans are here.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Yes, I know! What about my father, Julek? Where is he?

JULEK (IN POLISH)

They- an officer took him.

The waiters are coming back inside as Maryla turns for the door. They try to stop her but she barrels through them.

EXT. STREETS - KRAKOW - DAY - CONTINUOUS

She shoves her way through the crowd and onto the street, chasing after the Germans far down the road.

Kasia can barely keep her feet, suddenly falling to ground, escaping injury by the mere strength of her sister holding her up.

Maryla picks up Kasia and puts her on her back, then takes off again.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - KRAKOW - DAY

The marketplace is in shambles. The tanks have crushed a great deal of the carts and encircled the square. A makeshift platform is quickly and expertly constructed on the back of a transport truck in the middle of the circle.

A mass of humanity swarms around the edges of the tanks, terrified but desperate to see what will happen.

Maryla fights her way through the throngs of people until she is at the front of the hoard, greeted by a stout line of German soldiers. She can go no further.

Across the square the line breaks, momentarily. In walk ten citizens, escorted by soldiers. Maryla cranes her neck to get a better look but sees just glimpses.

The ten walk up a set of stairs onto the platform.

KASIA (IN POLISH)

Papa!

Maryla freezes. Eliaz is pushed to the platform edge nearest to her.

KASIA (IN POLISH)

Papa! Papa!

Eliaz hears the cries and scans the crowd in a panic. He locks eyes with Kasia, sitting atop Maryla's shoulders. His gaze falls to Maryla.

ELIASZ (MOUTHS, IN POLISH)

Do not worry.

Before she can respond, GAULEITER HANS FRANK mounts the top of the truck that holds the platform. With a subtle wave of his hand, the crowd falls dead silent.

HANS FRANK (IN POLISH)

Welcome, citizens. This is an historic day for your city. The German Reich has freed you from the immoralities of the Polish State.

(MORE)

HANS FRANK (IN POLISH) (CONT'D)

A new set of laws will be enacted to safeguard the concrete order of the racial community, to eliminate dangerous elements, to prosecute all acts harmful to the community, and to arbitrate in disagreements between members of the community.

The crowd murmurs, unsure of what this means.

HANS FRANK (IN POLISH)

If anyone has thoughts to question our authority, I will begin our time together with a demonstration of our commitment to the cause of which I have spoken.

He gestures to his right hand man. Ten soldiers surround the truck, each in front of a citizen who stands on the platform above.

The weight of what is about to happen comes crashing down on Maryla. She meets her father's eyes as he motions toward Kasia. She drops Kasia from her shoulders and places her on the ground, burying Kasia's face in her jacket.

MARYLA (IN POLISH)

Stay calm, Kasia. Be good.

Maryla and Elias are locked into each other.

HANS FRANK (IN GERMAN)

Ready.

Tears begin to fall from father and daughter.

HANS FRANK (IN GERMAN)

Aim.

Elias shakes, unable to control it.

HANS FRANK (IN GERMAN)

Fire!

Shots RING OUT.

Maryla drops to her knees, Elias to the ground. She squeezes a squirming Kasia and clenches her teeth, refusing to cry.

Kasia frees herself just enough to catch a glimpse of the scene. Her screams are drowned by the screams of the crowd. She turns away and clutches to Maryla.

The perimeter of German soldiers barely have to lift a finger toward the awe-struck crowd, who are standing in terror rather than incensed.

Maryla collects Kasia in her arms and stands up. She strips her eyes away from her father to meet the eyes of Hans Frank. He holds it for a moment, then turns to give orders to his troops.

EXT. STREET - KRAKOW - DAY

Maryla carries a weeping Kasia up the street while the crowd disperses around her. Her eyes convey shock. Her body is resolved.