

A LITTLE DRAMA

**A monodrama by
Ron Ninio**

**Translated by
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A family, conflicts and moments of grace.
An adolescent girl inside a world of love,
faith, dreams of happiness, disappointment
and loneliness. A monologue based on the
author's memories.

"A Little Drama" won the first prize at the Israel
Monodrama Festival, where it was first
performed in March 1993, directed by Ron
Ninio and played by Shirili Deshe.
It played at the Habima National Theater,
Chaifa Municipal Theater and later on all over
the country for more than two years.

It will be performed at the United Solo Festival
in New York city- Off Broadway on Nov.17,
1915

A bare stage. No curtain. No backdrop. The lights are visible above the
stage and to the sides.

The role was initially written for an actress playing both a girl in childhood
and a teenager in later periods of her life. It could be played by an actor as
well.

When the actress addresses a character named Zibaleh it is understood that
this is an imaginary character. Later on in the play, she will be playing him as
well.

EVERY SATURDAY, WE'D GO TO GRANDMA AND GRANDPA'S FOR LUNCH. IN GRNADMA AND GRANDPA' BACK YARD, DADDY PUT UP A SWING FOR ME BETWEEN TWO TREES. JUST THE RIGHT HEIGHT.

EVERY SATURDAY, AFTER LUNCH, GRANDMA AND MOTHER WOULD TAKE ME OUTSIDE AND LET ME USE THE SWING. GRANDMA AND MOTHER WOULD TUCK MY SHIRT INTO MY SKIRT SO IT WOULDN'T CATCH ON THE TREE, MOTHER WOULD PUSH ME, AND GRANDMA WOULD STAND THERE AND WATCH, MUMBLING ALL SORTS OF THINGS IN GERMAN THAT I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. SHE'D JUST STAND THERE AND MUMBLE, AND MOTHER WOULD STAND THERE AND PUSH THE SWING, AND I'D WATCH HOW THE SKY AND THE TREES SWAYED, WITH MOTHER AND GRANDMA ALL AROUND ME.

MOTHER TOLD GRANDMA ABOUT HOW SHE'D BEEN DRIVING DOWN THE MAIN STREET THE DAY BEFORE, LOOKING FOR A PARKING PLACE, WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, SHE SPOTTED SOMEONE ABOUT TO PULL OUT OF A PARKING SPACE. SO SHE STOPPED. "AND THEN I SEE THIS GUY BACKING UP, AND - BANG - HE CRASHES STRAIGHT INTO THE CAR BEHIND HIM."

"ACH, MEIN GOTT!" GRANDMA SAID.

"JUST LIKE THAT," MOTHER SAID. "HE BACKED RIGHT INTO THE HEADLIGHT. THEN, AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, HE STARTED BACKING UP AGAIN AND WAS ABOUT TO DRIVE OFF!"

"SHIT!"

MOTHER STOPPED THE SWING, AND GRANDMA SAID: "ACH, MEIN GOTT," AND MOTHER LOOKED AT ME AND SAID: "YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SAY THAT WORD AGAIN, ARE YOU?"

"OOPS, OCH GOTT," I THOUGHT TO MYSELF.

"SUDDENLY THE WOMAN WHOSE CAR IT WAS SHOWED UP: 'IF YOU DON'T MIND,' SHE SAID TO HIM, 'DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'VE

DONE??! YOU'VE SMASHED MY HEADLIGHT!

"SO THIS CHARACTER GETS OUT OF HIS CAR: 'WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I DIDN'T SMASH NO HEADLIGHT.'

"SO I GOT OUT OF MY CAR, AND I SAID TO HIM..."

"SHIT."

THEY STOPPED THE SWING, AND BOTH OF THEM STARED AT ME FOR A LONG TIME.

SO I SAID: "HOLY SHIT!"

GRANDMA, STRAIGHT OFF, STARTED MUMBLING ALL SORTS OF THINGS IN GERMAN AND HEBREW. "JUST LOOK AT THE EDUCATION *DAS KIND BEKOMMT*. IT'S ALL BECAUSE YOU MOVED TO TEL AVIV. *DER SCHLECHTE EINFLUS VON DEN HULIGANEN*."

AND IT SAID: "SHIT!" ONE SHIT FOR GRANDMA: "SHIT!" ONE SHIT FOR MOTHER: "SHIT!" AND ONE SHIT FOR ME: "SHIT!"

"IF YOU SAY THAT WORD JUST ONE MORE TIME, YOU'RE GOING TO EAT SOAP!"

EAT SOAP? ME EAT SEAT? BAH! WHY SHOULD I EAT SOAP? THAT'S DISGUSTING.

"ANYWAY, THIS YOUNG MAN WAS JUST ABOUT TO DRIVE AWAY..."

"SHIT."

SUDDENLY GRANDMA WENT TO THE KITCHEN, AND MOTHER AND I REMAINED.

"SHIT SHIT SHIT."

MOTHER JUST STOOD THERE - "SHIT SHIT SHIT" - AND DIDN'T DO A THING.

THE AUTUMN BREEZE WAS BLOWING SOFTLY IN THE BACK YARD...

"SHIT SHIT SHIT... SHIT SHIT SHIT?"

GRANDMA RETURNED FROM THE KITCHEN, HOLDING SOMETHING GREEN IN HER HAND. THEY LOOKED AT EACH OTHER. THEN SUDDENLY THEY GRABBED ME.

"I PROMISE... MOTHER... DON'T!... I PROMISE NEVER TO SAY THAT WORD AGAIN. MOTHER, TELL GRANDMA NOT TO..."

THEN MOTHER AND GRANDMA TOOK ME INTO THE LIVING ROOM. MOTHER SAT ME DOWN IN AN ARMCHAIR, SAT BESIDE ME, AND PATTED MY HEAD. GRANDMA WENT TO THE CREDENZA AND TOOK SOME CHOCOLATE OUT OF THE DRAWER. THE KIND THAT SHE AND GRANDPA ALWAYS USED TO BRING BACK FROM SWITZERLAND. SHE PICKED ONE IN A PRETTY RED WRAPPING, OPENED IT, AND TOOK OFF THE SILVER FOIL. THEN SHE BROKE OFF A SQUARE AND GAVE IT TO ME. I TOOK THE CHOCOLATE, AND PUT IT ON MY TONGUE, AND ATE IT - VERY VERY SLOWLY, HOPING TO GET RID OF THE LINGERING TASTE OF SOAP.

MOTHER AND GRANDMA LOOKED AT ME. GRANDPA AND FATHER WERE SITTING AT THE TABLE, READING NEWSPAPERS, AND SUDDENLY THEY LOOKED AT ME TOO. AND I KNEW THAT THEY JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND A THING. SHIT.

"WILLST DU NOCH EIN STUCK?"

GRANDMA WAS STANDING THERE WITH THE PLATTER OF

SCHNITZELS, WITH ONLY ONE PIECE LEFT. SHE HELD IT OUT TO FATHER.

"WOULD YOU LIKE SOME MORE?"

FATHER NODDED AND TRANSFERRED THE SCHNITZEL TO HIS OWN PLATE. GRANDMA SMILED HER SMILE AND SAT DOWN BESIDE MOTHER.

MOTHER, WHO HAD FINISHED EATING, LOOKED AT FATHER; AND GRANDFATHER, WHO HAD FINISHED EATING, LOOKED AT FATHER. AND THEN I LOOKED AT FATHER TOO. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE WAS CUTTING HIS SCHNITZEL INTO SUCH ITSY BITSY PIECES LIKE YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE FEEDING LITTLE CHILDREN.

MEANWHILE, GRANDMA BROUGHT THE DESSERT. WE ARE IT. IN FACT, LONG AFTER WE'D FINISHED, FATHER WAS STILL WORKING ON HIS SCHNITZEL. SO WE SAT AROUND WATCHING FATHER, AND GRANDMA WATCHED FATHER WITH THAT SMILE OF HERS. AND GRANDPA SQUIRMED A LITTLE, AS IF HIS CHAIR WASN'T COMFORTABLE.

(She looks towards the floor)

--- SHH... ZIBALEH, NOT NOW. NO, ZIBALEH. NO DESSERT FOR YOU. THAT'S FATHER'S DESSERT/ GO HOME.

(Silence. Suddenly she sneezes)

GRANDPA PUT OUT THE SABBATH CANDLES BY MISTAKE.

--- STOP IT, ZIBALEH.SHH...

GRANDMA SAID SOMETHING IN GERMAN TO MOTHER. FATHER SAID: "WHAT'S THAT?" AND GRANDMA SAID: "*NICHT WICHTIG.*"

FATHER TOOK A BITE OF HIS SCHNITZEL AND ATE IT VERY VERY SLOWLY. AND GRANDMA TOLD MOTHER: "NEVER MIND, SO HE DOESN'T WANT DESSERT."

FATHER GOT UP AND WENT OUT TO THE PORCH.

--- NO, ZIBALEH, THAT'S DADDY'S DESSERT. I'VE TOLD YOU SO ALREADY.

"I WANT YOU TO HELP ME GET MY PAPERS OUT OF THE CUPBOARD AND TAKE THEM DOWN TO THE CAR."

MOTHER AND GRANDMA STARTED WHISPERING TO ONE ANOTHER. GRANDMA SAID SOMETHING, MOTHER SAID SOMETHING, AND GRANDMA SAID: *WARUM GERADE JETZT?*"

FATHER DIDN'T ANSWER, AND I GOT UP AND AS I MADE MY WAY OUT TO THE PORCH TO HELP HIM I COULD HEAR GRANDMA SAY: "YE, THAT WILL MAKE A LOT OF DUST."

AND FATHER SAID TO MOTHER: "TELL HER THAT IF IT MAKES A LOT OF DUST, I'LL CLEAN IT UP."

AND GRANDMA SAID: "HE ALWAYS HAS TO RUIN OUR FRIDAY NIGHT DINNERS."

"THAT'S RIGHT. I ALWAYS HAVE TO RUIN YOUR FRIDAY NIGHTS."

EVERYONE WAS QUIET. GRANDPA MUMBLED SOMETHING, AND WE TOOK THE PAPERS OUT.

IT WAS RAINING OUTSIDE. THERE I WAS, STANDING NEXT TO THE CAR WITH THE PILE OF PAPERS IN MY ARMS, WHILE FATHER PUT HIS PILE INSIDE. I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY MOTHER WAS GOING WITH GRANDMA AND NOT WITH US. WHY WASN'T SHE COMING TO HELP US WITH THE PACKAGES IN THE RAIN? FATHER WAS PUTTING HIS PACKAGE INTO THE CAR, AND I COULD SEE HE

WAS KIND OF ANGRY. AND GRANDMA - GRANDMA WAS STANDING THERE IN THE WINDOW SHOUTING AT MOTHER, AND MOTHER WAS SHOUTING BACK AT GRANDMA... AND THE PACKAGE FELL OUT OF MY HANDS INTO A PUDDLE. FATHER STARTED FISHING THE PAPERS OUT OF THE PUDDLE, ONE BY ONE, AND PUT THEM IN THE CAR, QUIETLY. BUT HE WASN'T MAD AT ME, EVEN THOUGH I COULD TELL HE WAS UPSET.

HE HOOTED TO MOTHER TO COME DOWNSTAIRS AND SHE MOVED FROM THE WINDOW. BUT GRANDMA STAYED THERE AND WENT LIKE THIS WITH HER ARMS, AND HER MOUTH WENT "*ACH MEIN*

GOTT", SORT OF.

IN THE CAR ON THE WAY HOME, MOTHER SAID TO FATHER: "WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO THAT FOR??"

FATHER SAID: "BECAUSE I FELT LIKE IT."

MOTHER SAID: "ARE YOU TRYING TO SPITE HER?"

"YES, I'M TRYING TO SPITE HER."

"BUT WHY IN FRONT OF THE CHILD?"

BECAUSE IT'S ABOUT TIME THE CHILD UNDERSTOOD THAT LIFE ISN'T ALWAYS SWEET AS HONEY."

THE CHILD... I SAT THERE IN THE BACK SEAT AND SAW GRANDMA'S SMILE AND I COULD SEE THAT WHEN GRANDMA PUT ON HER SMILE, SHE WASN'T REALLY SMILING AT ALL. SHE DIDN'T ACTUALLY WANT TO GIVE FATHER THE SCHNITZEL. SHE NEVER ACTUALLY WANTED TO GIVE FATHER THE SCHNITZEL REALLY. EVER. BECAUSE WHEN I WANT TO GIVE FATHER A SCHNITZEL, I SMILE AT HIM, REALLY, AND ASK HIM: "DADDY, WOULD YOU LIKE SOME?"

WHEN FATHER'S BROTHER DIED, I STOOD WITH MOTHER AT THE GRAVE AND THERE WAS A RABBI THERE WHO SAID THE KADDISH. HE DIDN'T EXACTLY SAY IT. HE JUST MUTTERED IT, AND EVERYONE MUTTERED ALONG WITH HIM. AND I REMEMBER LOOKING AT FATHER AND SEEING THAT HE WAS ANGRY AND UPSET.

"MELEKH MALKHEI HAMELAKHIM, HAMTZEH MENUKHA NEKHONAH TAKHAT KANFEI HASHKHINA, BEMA'ALOT KEDOSHIM UTEHORIM..."

I COULD FEEL HOW FATHER'S MUTTERING KEPT GETTING LOUDER

- SO LOUD THAT IT EVEN DROWNED OUT THE RABBI'S.

"GRANT PERFECT REST UNDER THE WINGS OF THY DIVINE PRESENCE, IN THE CELESTIAL REALM OF THE HOLY AND PURE, SHINING AS THE LUMINOUS FIRMAMENT..."

FATHER STRESSED EVERY WORD. HE ENUNCIATED THE SYLLABLES ONE BY ONE.

"FATHER OF COMPASSION, WHO DWELLS ON HIGH, IN HIS POWERFUL COMPASSION MAY HE RECALL WITH COMPASSION THE DEVOUT, THE UPRIGHT AND THE PERFECT ONE..."

AND THEN EVERYONE - EVEN THE RABBI, AND THE ENTIRE GATHERING - HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ENUNCIATE EACH AND EVERY WORD TOGETHER WITH FATHER.

"AND MAY HE BIND HIS SOUL IN THE BOND OF LIFE. THE ALMIGHTY IS HIS HERITAGE, AND MAY HE REPOSE IN PEACE ON HIS RESTING PLACE. NOW LET US RESPOND: AMEN."

THEN, WHEN HE'D FINISHED RECITING THE KADDISH, FATHER CRIED. I'D NEVER SEEN FATHER CRY BEFORE.

"THE FOUR-YEAR OLD DAUGHTER OF THE LEAD ACTOR WAS SEEN SITTING IN THE FRONT ROW OF THE HALL, WATCHING THE PERFORMANCE WITH RAPT ATTENTION. WHEN THE EXCHANGE OF BLOWS BEGAN IN SCENE FOUR, SHE SUDDENLY BURST OUT CRYING, RAN TO THE STAGE AND CRIED OUT: 'LEAVE MY DADDY ALONE! DON'T HIT MY DADDY! I DON'T WANT YOU TO HIT MY DADDY.'"

AN ITEM IN THE PAPER.

I OPEN THE DOOR. I HAVE MY OWN KEY ALREADY. I'M GOING IN... FATHER IS STANDING IN THE KITCHEN. I SEE HIM STANDING THERE, NEXT TO THE POTS, STIRRING SOMETHING WITH A LARGE WOODEN SPOON. FATHER'S COOKING. THAT'S GOOD. AS I GO TO PUT MY BAG IN MY ROOM I HEAR HIM TELLING ME FROM THE KITCHEN: "GO WASH YOUR HANDS AND COME TO THE TABLE. IT'LL BE READY IN A MINUTE."

FATHER'S NEVER TOLD ME "GO WASH YOUR HANDS" BEFORE, AND HE'S NEVER TOLD ME TO COME TO THE TABLE EITHER. I MEAN, I KNOW THAT AUNT LEAH DOESN'T WORK FOR US ANY MORE, AND THAT FATHER HASN'T HAD ANY REHEARSALS AT THE THEATER FOR A LONG TIME, BUT WHY IS HE COOKING ALL OF SUDDEN?

MOTHER COMES HOME. KISSES ALL AROUND. SHE SITS DOWN AND STARTS TALKING ABOUT WORK. FATHER BRINGS THE POT TO THE TABLE. HE DISHES IT OUT INTO MY PLATE, AND MOTHER'S TOO.

(She looks towards the floor)

--- WHAT, ZIBALEH? I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S ON THE PLATE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS, I TOLD YOU.

AND FATHER, AS IF HE'S HEARD ME, SAYS: "IT'S VERY TASTY. IT HAS POTATOES AND MEAT. I TOOK ALL THE BITS AND PIECES THAT

WE'RE LYING AROUND. WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO DO SOME SHOPPING BECAUSE I THINK I'VE USED UP EVERYTHING IN THE FRIDGE."

FATHER SITS DOWN, AND WE ALL DIG IN. THERE REALLY ARE POTATOES AND MEAT IN IT, AND ALL SORTS OF OTHER THINGS. AND MOTHER CARRIES ON TALKING ABOUT HER JOB. AND THEN HE LOOKS AT ME AND ASKS: "WELL, HOW IS IT?"

WELL, HOW IS WHAT? MAYBE HE IS EXPECTING ME TO TELL HIM SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT I HAVE DONE AT SCHOOL OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

"AH - IT'S VERY GOOD. REALLY TASTY." AND MOTHER ALSO SAYS "IT'S REALLY GOOD. VERY VERY TASTY."

"WELL, HOW IS IT?"

WHY DOES HE KEEP ASKING ME THAT?

MAYBE THEY'VE SWITCHED PLACES? MOTHER GOES TO WORK AND FATHER DOES THE COOKING. MAYBE THAT'S HOW IT IS.

MEANWHILE WE FINISHED EATING, AND FATHER SAID: "WELL THEN, I'M GOING TO DO THE DISHES." FATHER NEVER DOES THE DISHES.

AND MOTHER SAID: "THAT'S ALRIGHT. LEAVE IT. I'LL WASH UP LATER."

AND THEN FATHER SAID: "I'M KIND OF TIRED. I'LL GO TAKE A LITTLE NAP." BUT HE DIDN'T GET UP.

AND MOTHER SAID: "FINE, I'LL MAKE COFFEE." BUT SHE DIDN'T GET UP EITHER.

AND THEN I SAID: "I'M GOING TO DO MY HOMEWORK. I'VE GOT LOTS

OF HOMEWORK TODAY." BUT I DIDN'T GET UP EITHER.

--- NO, ZIBALEH. THAT'S MINE. I HAVEN'T FINISHED EATING. I'LL EAT IT LATER, OK?

WHAT WAS THAT STUFF THAT FATHER MADE? MAYBE IT WAS SOME KIND OF SOUP? BUT WE NEVER EAT SOUP IN THE SUMMERTIME. IT WAS HOT, AND IT MADE ME SWEAT, AND IT WASN'T REALLY TASTY. BUT I DIDN'T TELL HIM THAT EITHER. AND I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE BETTER IF AUNT LEAH CAME BACK TO WORK FOR US. FATHER WOULDN'T HAVE TO COOK, AND THEN HE WOULDN'T USE UP

EVERYTHING WE HAD IN THE FRIDGE. THEY WOULDN'T HAVE TO GO SHOPPING, AND EVERYTHING WOULD BE FINE. AND THERE WOULD EVEN BE DESSERT.

"EXPLAIN IT TO ME. I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT DO YOU MEAN TO ME? WHAT, FOR GOD'S SAKE? WHY DO I CARE SO MUCH ABOUT ALL THOSE MEMORIES OF THE TIMES WE SPENT TOGETHER? WHY DOES IT HURT ME WHEN I DON'T SEE YOU? WHY DO I WANT YOU? WHY DOES IT FEEL SO GOOD WHEN YOU HUG ME? WHY? AND WHY CAN'T I EVER THROW OUT ANYTHING YOU EVER GAVE ME? WHY DO I CARE ABOUT IT SO MUCH? WHY IS IT THAT I CAN ACTUALLY KISS THOSE THINGS? WHY DID I BOTHER TO MANIPULATE SO MANY THINGS, TO GET OUT OF DOING SO MANY THINGS, TO SKIP MEANS, TO WALK ALL THE WAY - ALL OF IT TO BE WITH YOU? WHAT MADE ME DO ALL THAT?"

MOTHER WROTE FATHER - A NOTE - MANY YEARS AGO.

MOTHER, WE'RE HAVING A CLASS TRIP NEXT WEEK, AND IT COSTS MONEY..."

THERE WAS NOBODY IN THE KITCHEN, AND NOBODY IN THE LIVING ROOM EITHER. SO I OPENED THE BEDROOM DOOR, AND THEN FOR THE FIRST TIME I SAW MOTHER'S SORES. NOT SORES EXACTLY. MORE LIKE HOLES, SORT OF, IN HER BODY.

SHE WAS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE BED WITH HER EYES CLOSED. AND THE WHOLE UPPER PART OF HER BODY WAS FULL OF THOSE HOLES. I STARED AT THEM. AND THEY STARED BACK. WE COULDN'T STOP STARING AT EACH OTHER, ME AND THE HOLES.

AND FATHER WAS LEANING OVER MOTHER, SPREADING A KIND OF

YELLOW OINTMENT OVER HER SORES, VERY SLOWLY. AND I DON'T THINK HE ACTUALLY NOTICED WHEN I CAME IN, BECAUSE HE DIDN'T EVEN LOOK AT ME. I JUST STOOD THERE AND LOOKED AT HIS HAND, AND SAW HIM SPREADING THE OINTMENT OVER THE HOLES, VERY SLOWLY. AND EVERY TIME HE TOUCHED ONE OF THEM MOTHER WOULD GO "OW", SORT OF.

"IT MUST HURT MOTHER AN AWFUL LOT," I THOUGHT. I WANTED TO RUN UP TO MOTHER AND HUG HER AND SAY: "MOTHER, IT'S ALRIGHT. DON'T WORRY. IT WON'T HURT. IT'LL STOP IN A MINUTE." JUST LIKE SHE WAS ALWAYS TELLING ME WHEN I HAD A SORE. BUT I NEVER HAD SORES LIKE THE HOLES THAT MOTHER HAD. I JUST STOOD THERE, AND COULDN'T STOP WATCHING THEM, AND WATCHED HOW FATHER KEPT SPREADING THE OINTMENT AND THEN COVERING EACH SPOT WITH A SMALL WHITE PAD.

AND I THOUGHT: "MAYBE I CAN HELP FATHER. MAYBE HE ISN'T BEING CAREFUL ENOUGH? MAYBE I CAN HUG MOTHER. MAYBE I..." AND MOTHER KEPT GOING "OW", AND WITH EVERY ONE OF MOTHER'S "OW"S I COULD FEEL A KIND OF "OW" INSIDE MY STOMACH TOO.

VERY SLOWLY I MOVE CLOSER, AND I CAN SEE THEM CLOSE UP, THOSE SORES, THOSE HOLES, THAT FATHER IS SLOWLY COVERING WITH PADS. AND I MOVE EVEN CLOSER, SO CLOSE THAT I'M RIGHT NEXT TO MOTHER'S LEG. I LOOK AT THEM, AND THEY LOOK AT ME. AND I WANT TO TELL THEM TO LEAVE, TO MOVE, TO BEAT IT, 'CAUSE THEN I'D BE ABLE TO JUMP UP AT MOTHER, AND HUG HER. I WANT THEM TO GO AWAY AND NEVER COME BACK, SO EVERYTHING CAN BE AS SMOOTH AS IT USED TO BE. I REMEMBER HOW SMOOTH IT WAS BEFORE THEY APPEARED LIKE SOME KIND OF MONSTERS THAT YOU CAN'T EVEN TOUCH.

I MOVE MY HAND TOWARDS MOTHER'S KNEE. THERE ARE NO HOLES ON MOTHER'S KNEE, NO SORES EITHER. THERE'S NOTHING ON HER KNEE. CAREFULLY I PUT MY FINGER ON THE TIP OF MOTHER'S KNEE. AND THEN MOTHER OPENS HER EYES AND LOOKS AT ME. I THINK SHE'S SMILING A LITTLE, BECAUSE HER LIPS ARE

POINTING UPWARDS, JUST A LITTLE, AS THOUGH IT DOESN'T HURT HER ANY MORE. AND I LET MY FINGER STROKE MOTHER'S KNEE.

"IT'S ALL OVER. IT DOESN'T HURT ANY MORE. PRETTY SOON YOU'LL BE ALL BETTER. EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE."

THE *STUDIO TWO* MOVIE THEATER WAS UNDERNEATH THE *STUDIO ONE* MOVIE THEATER. *STUDIO ONE* WAS THE BIG ONE. *STUDIO TWO* WAS THE LITTLE ONE, BUT IT WAS VERY NICE TOO. IT WAS DARK WHEN WE WENT IN. WE SAID "HI" TO THE USHER. I MEAN FATHER SAID "HI" TO THE USHER. WE NEVER BOUGHT TICKETS, BECAUSE FATHER KNEW EVERYONE.

"HEY, AVRAM, HOW ARE THINGS? *COME STA?*"

"YOU SEE THAT MAN," FATHER TURNED TO ME. "WE GREW UP IN THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD." EVERYONE GREW UP IN THE SAME

NEIGHBORHOOD AS FATHER. WE WENT IN. THERE WAS AN USHER INSIDE TOO, WITH A FLASHLIGHT, AND HE ALSO SAID: "HEY, AVRAM, HOW ARE THINGS? *COM E STA?* GET SOME THEATER TICKETS NEXT TIME." MY FATHER TOOK OUT HIS SLIPS OF PAPER, SIGNED ONE, AND GAVE IT TO THE USHER WITH THE FLASHLIGHT. "TAKE THIS TO THE BOX OFFICE," HE SAID. "YOU CAN CASH IT IN ANY TIME."

THE USHER WAS DELIGHTED, AND WE TOOK OUR SEATS. I WANTED POPCORN, BUT MOTHER SAID I SHOULDN'T EAT POPCORN, ESPECIALLY NOT AT NIGH, AFTER SUPPER. I WAS HOPING WE'D GO OUT FOR ICE CREAM AFTER THE SHOW.

WE WATCHED AN OLD BLACK AND WHITE MOVIE WITH HUMPHREY BOGART, AND WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY ICE CREAM AFTER THE SHOW.

WE WENT HOME. I'D PUT ON MY PAJAMAS ALREADY, AND HAD GIVEN EVERYONE A GOODNIGHT KISS. I WAS TUCKED INTO BED,

BUT I COULD STILL HEAR FATHER AND MOTHER SITTING IN THE LIVING ROOM TALKING ABOUT THE FILMSRIPT, ABOUT THE STAGING, ABOUT THE SHOTS.

IT WAS SO WARM. WHEN IT'S WARM I PLAY WITH MY PILLOW. I TURN IT OVER AND OVER. AND WHEN THE PILLOW GETS WARM, I TURN IT OVER AGAIN, TO LIE ON THE SIDE WHERE IT'S STILL COOL. BUT I'D TURNED IT OVER SO MANY TIMES THAT EVENTUALLY I JUST PUT IT ASIDE.

SUDDENLY I WOKE UP IN THE DARK AND SAW SOMEONE ENTERING THE ROOM. WAS IT FATHER? NO, IT WASN'T FATHER. AND IT WASN'T MOTHER EITHER. AND... THAT SOMEONE WAS STANDING IN MY ROOM WITH AN UNLIT FLASHLIGHT. HE WAS STANDING THERE, GIVING MY ROOM THE ONCE-OVER, RIGHT AND LEFT. AND ME - I DIDN'T MOVE, DIDN'T DO A THING. THEN HE BENT DOWN OVER ME, VERY VERY CLOSE, AND I HARDLY BREATHED AT ALL. THEN SUDDENLY HE LEFT.

AND I COULD HEAR ALL SORTS OF NOISES IN THE LIVING ROOM. WHERE ARE MOTHER AND FATHER? THEY MUST BE ASLEEP.

VERY QUIETLY I GOT OUT OF BED AND STEPPED OUT INTO THE HALLWAY. STANDING AT THE END OF THE HALLWAY, I PEEPED OUT AND SAW HIM. HE WAS SITTING THERE ON THE FLOOR, WITH FATHER'S BAG OPEN BEFORE HIM, TAKING ALL SORTS OF THINGS OUT OF FATHER'S BAG AND SORTING THEM. HE WAS OPENING FATHER'S WALLET AND TAKING OUT THE SLIPS OF PAPER THAT FATHER USED TO GIVE THE USHER, AND PUTTING THEM IN HIS POCKET.

I WENT INTO FATHER AND MOTHER'S ROOM. FATHER WAS SNORING I WENT OVER TO MOTHER.

"MOTHER, GET UP, QUICK. THERE'S SOMEBODY HERE!"

"WHAT?... AVRAM, THE LITTLE ONE SAYS THERE'S SOMEBODY HERE."

"WHAT?"

FATHER GOT UP, PULLED DOWN THE BLANKET, WENT INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND STOOD THERE IN HIS UNDERPANTS. I FOLLOWED HIM. FATHER WAS BIG ENOUGH FOR ME TO HIDE BEHIND. THEN FATHER TURNED ON THE LIGHT.

"CAN I HELP YOU, MISTER?"

THAT SCARED OFF THE THIEF SURE ENOUGH. HE RAN TO THE PORCH AND JUMPED OVER THE RAILING, WITH FATHER IN PURSUIT, NOT OVER THE PORCH RAILING, BUT DOWN THE STAIRS. FATHER WAS A LITTLE OVERWEIGHT. HE WASN'T GOOD AT LEAPING OVER BALCONY RAILINGS. HE KEPT AFTER THE THIEF, AND MOTHER AND I STOOD ON THE BALCONY AND WATCHED FATHER RUNNING DOWN THE STREET IN HIS UNDERPANTS, SCREAMING: "THIEF! THIEF!"

AND THEN THE POLICE CAME, AND AMBULANCES, AND TANKS, AND ALL THE NEIGHBORS CAME OUT ONTO THEIR BALCONIES IN PAJAMAS AND APPLAUDED. AND SUDDENLY ALL THE STREETLIGHTS WENT ON, AND THE FIREMEN CAME WITH SIRENS AND THERE WAS A BANK ON THEIR RED TRUCKS AND EVERYBODY SANG AND DANCED AND HAD SUCH A GOOD TIME.

AND I STOOD THERE ON THE BALCONY IN MY PRINCESS COSTUME FROM PURIM, AND MOTHER STOOD BESIDE ME, AND FATHER KEPT SHOUTING TO EVERYONE, IN HIS UNDERPANTS: "THAT'S MY DAUGHTER. SHE'S THE PRINCESS. SHE'S THE HERO. SHE CAUGHT THE THIEF!"

I WAS WITH FRIENDS IN MY APARTMENT WHEN THE PHONE RANG. IT WAS MY UNCLE CALLING FROM MY FATHER'S APARTMENT. "COME QUICKLY. I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM. HE'S CHOKING. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HE KEEPS SHOUTING THAT

HE CAN'T BREATHE!"

"I'LL BE OVER RIGHT AWAY," I ANSWERED, "DON'T WORRY." I HUNG UP AND TOLD EVERYONE THAT I HAD TO GO TO MY FATHER'S RIGHT AWAY. HE WASN'T FEELING WELL AGAIN. THEY SHOULDN'T WAIT FOR ME. I SAID I HAD NO IDEA WHEN I'D BE BACK. I WENT DOWNSTAIRS, TOOK THE CAR AND DROVE TO HIS PLACE.

I WALK IN. MY UNCLE IS COMPLETELY HYSTERICAL, PACING THE LIVING ROOM, WITH NO IDEA WHAT TO DO. HE'S GOT FATHER ON THE SOFA, AND FATHER'S LYING THERE SCREAMING: "I CAN'T BREATHE. I HAVE NO AIR." I BEGIN GIVING HIM ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION AND IN BETWEEN BREATHS HE KEEPS WHISPERING: "AIR, AIR, I DON'T HAVE ANY AIR", AND HIS VOICE IS GETTING RASPIER AND RASPIER. I KEEP AT IT, BUT I CAN SEE THE COLOR RUN OUT OF HIS FACE. HE'S TURNING CHALK WHITE. I POUND ON

HIS CHEST BUT HE KEEPS CHOKING. HE ISN'T BREATHING. I'M LOSING HIM.

"FATHER, FATHER..." I KEEP ON GIVING HIM AIR. HE ISN'T RESPONDING. I'M LOSING HIM. "FATHER!" HE MUSTN'T DIE. HE CAN'T GO AND DIE ON ME NOW.

THEN THE INTENSIVE CARE PEOPLE ARRIVE. ONE OF THEM I RECOGNIZE FROM THE OTHER TIMES, AND I TELL THEM HE ISN'T BREATHING, AND THEY START CPR RIGHT AWAY, AND INTRAVENOUS DRIPS, AND POUNDING ON HIS CHEST, AND ELECTRIC SHOCKS. I WATCH HIS BODY CONVULSE. ONE OF THEM SLAPS HIM ACROSS THE FACE. AND I KEEP PACING THE ROOM LIKE MY UNCLE. WE LOOK AT ONE ANOTHER. MAYBE THIS IS THE END. ONE MORE ELECTRIC SHOCK AND HIS BODY CONVULSES ON THE SOFA. HE MUSTN'T GIVE UP. HE'S GOT TO BREATHE. MAKE HIM BREATHE.

AS THEY GET THE STRETCHER READY TO TAKE HIM DOWNSTAIRS, I GO INTO HIS ROOM. I TAKE HIS LITTLE TRANSISTOR RADIO, AND THE BOOK ON HIS BEDSIDE TABLE, AND THE PLAY. I GO INTO THE BATHROOM AND TAKE HIS TOOTHBRUSH AND TOOTHPASTE, AND

HIS FAVORITE AFTERSHAVE. I OPEN UP THE MEDICINE CHEST AND TAKE OUT THE ANTACIDS THAT YOU CAN'T GET IN THE HOSPITAL. BY THE TIME I GET BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM THEY'VE PUT HIM ON THE STRETCHER AND ARE ABOUT TO TAKE HIM DOWNSTAIRS. "I'LL COME WITH YOU," MY UNCLE SAYS.

"NO, WE'LL BE OK."

"NO! I INSIST."

"NO, I DON'T WANT YOU TO COME!!"

I SIT IN THE AMBULANCE HOLDING HIS HAND AND STROKING HIS HEAD. WE REACH THE HOSPITAL, AND ENTER THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

"I'M RIGHT HERE, FATHER. IT'S OK, I'M HERE."

THEY MOVE HIM TO A BED, HOOKED UP TO A WHOLE BATTERY OF INSTRUMENTS AND INTRAVENOUS DRIPS. I STAND BESIDE HIM. HE'S SO WEAK. HE STARES AT ME, I STARE AT HIM AND STROKE HIS HAND. I SEE ALL THE BEDS AROUND US AND THE PEOPLE STANDING NEXT TO THE PATIENTS, HOLDING THEIR HANDS. HE GRABS MY HAND AND WHEN HE SQUEEZES IT LIGHTLY, THAT'S HOW I CAN TELL HE KNOWS I'M THERE.

I LOOK AT HIM LYING THERE, NAKED, WITH ALL THOSE TUBES, SO PITIFUL. I DON'T WANT TO BE BESIDE THIS MAN. I DON'T WANT TO LOOK AT HIM. HE'S NOT MY FATHER, NOT THE FATHER I KNOW. SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD BE GOING THROUGH THIS WITH HIM. MY UNCLE CAN COME AND SIT HERE, FOR ALL I CARE. I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM THIS WAY. I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE. I WANT TO LEAVE. I WANT QUIET. I WANT AIR. I CAN'T STAND TO BREATHE THE HOSPITAL AIR. I HATE THE TUBES, I HATE THE BLOOD, I HATE THE DRIPS. I CAN'T STAND SEEING ALL THESE PEOPLE.

I STROKE HIS HAND. "FATHER, I'M GOING."

HE GRABS MY FINGERS AND HOLDS THEM TIGHT. SUDDENLY THERE'S STRENGTH.

"IT'S OK. I'LL BE BACK LATER, FATHER. I PROMISE I'LL BE BACK."

I PULL MY FINGERS AWAY FROM HIS HAND, AND LEAVE.

I START WALKING DOWN THE LONG CORRIDORS, PASSING ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE HOLDING THEIR PARENTS' HANDS. I'M PASSING ALL THE DOCTORS AND THE NURSES. I LEAVE. TRYING TO

GET AWAY FROM ALL THOSE STRETCHERS, ALL THOSE SQUEAKING STRETCHER WHEELS, ALL THOSE AMBULANCES, ALL THOSE WHITE CARS. I GET INTO MY CAR. I HAVE A RED CAR, NOT A WHITE ONE. I GET INTO MY RED CAR AND DRIVE HOME TO MY OWN APARTMENT. THEY'VE ALL LEFT BY NOW. NOBODY'S WAITED FOR ME. THEY NEVER WAIT FOR ME. THEY KNOW BY NOW THAT THERE'S NO POINT WAITING. I SIT THERE, CRYING. IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT ALREADY. I HAVEN'T CALLED MY UNCLE. I HAVEN'T SPOKEN TO ANYONE. I WANT QUIET, PEACE AND QUIET, AND I WANT TO SLEEP AND NOT THINK ABOUT ANYTHING.

(She looks right and left)

--- ZIBALEH? ZIBALEH?

ZIBALEH IS SITTING IN LINE AT THE CLINIC. I'M SITTING BESIDE HIM READING THE PAPER.

ZIBALEH: IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?

SHE: YES.

ZIBALEH: THEN WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

SHE: BECAUSE.

ZIBALEH: AH... THEN EVERYTHING IS OK... (Silence) CAN I HAVE THE PAPER FOR A WHILE?

SHE: NO!

ZIBALEH: NO... BECAUSE IF YOU'RE THROUGH, THEN YOU'RE NOT READING IT, SO I CAN READ IT... FOR A WHILE... IF YOU'RE THROUGH...

SHE: I'M NOT THROUGH.

ZIBALEH: AH... (Silence) YOU'RE THROUGH? SO NOW YOU CAN GIVE
IT TO ME FOR A WHILE.

SHE: NO! AND YOU'VE DISTURBING MY READING.

ZIBALEH: AH... (Silence) I DIDN'T MEAN TO DISTURB YOU. ALL I
WANTED WAS FOR YOU TO GIVE ME THE PAPER FOR A
LITTLE WHILE. COME ONE, PLEASE, LET ME HAVE IT FOR
A WHILE.

SHE: YOU'RE GETTING ON MY NERVES!

ZIBALEH: I KNOW. I WANT TO READ!

SHE: SO DO I.

ZIBALEH: AH. (Silence)

LOUDSPEAKER: NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE.

ZIBALEH: AH, THAT'S YOU...

(Zibaleh waits a while and then walks over to the door of the clinic, waits a
while longer and knocks on the door)

ZIBALEH: EXCUSE ME, EXCUSE ME. I DON'T WANT TO DISTURB
YOU, BUT THE DOCTOR'S EXAMINING YOU NOW, SO YOU
COULDN'T POSSIBLY NEED THE PAPER. I'M OUT THERE,
LONE, NUMBER SEVENTY, WITH NO PAPER. SO MAYBE... I
MEAN, I WAS JUST WONDERING... COULDN'T YOU LET ME
HAVE THE PAPER FOR A WHILE.

(She looks to the right and to the left again)

--- ZIBALEH?

WHEN I RETURNED IN THE MORNING, FATHER SAID: "I WAITED FOR YOU YESTERDAY."

"YES, FATHER, I KNOW," I SAID. "I'M HERE NOW."

HE DIDN'T SAY ANOTHER WORD. HE JUST STARED AT ME, LOOKING SAD. HE HAD WAITED FOR ME, IN THE HOSPITAL NIGHT, ALONE...

TWO WEEKS LATER, THEY MOVED HIM TO INTERNAL MEDICINE AND PUT HIM IN A ROOM WITH THREE WOMEN. THREE VERY WOMANLY WOMEN.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON I COME TO VISIT, AND THERE THEY ARE, STARING AT ME, ALL OF THEM.

"AH, SO THAT'S YOUR DAUGHTER. YOUR FATHER IS REALLY SOMETHING."

THEY PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO OPEN UP THEIR PLASTIC BINS, WITH ALL SORTS OF COOKIES AND HOMEMADE COOKING. AND FATHER JUST LIES THERE, SMILING, DELIGHTED, SURROUNDED BY ALL THOSE WOMEN. THE RADIO'S PLAYING FRIDAY AFTERNOON MUSIC - A FAMOUS BARITONE SINGING LADINO SONGS THAT FATHER LOVES SO MUCH.

"WANT SOME? THESE COOKIES ARE DIVINE. MY DAUGHTER BAKED THEM SPECIALLY. BY THE WAY, SWEETHEART, ARE YOU MARRIED? WHAT A SHAME YOU DIDN'T COME EARLIER. MY OLDEST WAS HERE,

SIMON, HEART OF GOLD, ISN'T THAT RIGHT? HE HAS A CAR, A MOUSTACHE..."

I LOOK AT FATHER AND WE ALL LAUGH. ISN'T THIS SOMETHING? THEY'RE MARRYING ME OFF ALREADY IN THIS HOSPITAL.

SUDDENLY IT FEELS NICE - WITH THE RADIO AND THE COOKIES AND THE FRIDAY AFTERNOON ATMOSPHERE. A BIT FESTIVE EVEN.

I STROKE FATHER'S HAND AND LISTEN TO SIMON'S MOTHER COMPLAINING ABOUT THE HEAD NURSE, PNINA. EVERYONE HATES HER BECAUSE SHE NEVER COMES WHEN YOU NEED HER. AND WHEN SHE DRAWS BLOOD, SHE'S VERY ROUGH, AND THE BLACK AND BLUE MARKS LAST A MONTH.

"JUST YOU WAIT, SWEETHEART. WATCH HOW I RING FOR HER AND SHE DOESN'T COME."

WE ALL WAIT FOR PNINA NOT TO COME, WHEN IN COMES A NEW NURSE.

"AH, WHERE'S PNINA? I WAS RINGING FOR PNINA."

THE NEW NURSE EXPLAINS THAT SHE'S THE REPLACEMENT. PNINA SLIPPED IN THE CORRIDOR THE NIGHT BEFORE AND HAS A BROKEN LEG.

"THANK GOD."

WE ALL LAUGH, AND FATHER LAUGHS A BIT TOO. AND THE NEW NURSE IS UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT IT, BUT SHE CAN'T HOLD BACK AND LAUGHS TOO. AND SUDDENLY I SEE FATHER GO PALE.

"I CAN'T BREATHE. I CAN'T BREATHE."

THE NURSE RUSHES OUT. RIGHT AWAY, A WHOLE BUNCH OF THEM ARRIVE WITH TUBES AND SHOTS, AND ELECTRIC SHOCKS AND RESPIRATORS. AND THE THREE WOMEN JUST SIT THERE, PETRIFIED, IN THEIR BEDS, EACH OF THEM WITH HER COOKIES,

AND THE FAMOUS BARITONE. AND I KEEP LOOKING AT FATHER IN ALL THE COMMOTION. HE JUST LIES THERE, CRYING. HE ISN'T STRONG ENOUGH TO CRY REALLY. IT'S MORE LIKE A WHIMPER,

WITH TEARS THAT JUST STREAM OUT BY THEMSELVES, ROLLING ONTO HIS FACE AND DOWN TOWARDS THE PILLOW.

--- ZIBALEH IS SITTING IN THE BUS STOP. I SIT DOWN NEXT TO HIM, EATING A SANDWICH.

ZIBALEH: IS EVERYTHING OK?

SHE: NO!

ZIBALEH: AH... FATHER... (Silence) WHAT'S IN IT? SALAMI?

SHE: YES.

ZIBALEH: WHAT KIND?

SHE: PASTRAMI.

ZIBALEH: IS IT GOOD?

SHE: VERY.

ZIBALEH: AH... (Silence) CAN I HAVE A BITE OF YOUR SANDWICH? A SMALL ONE?

SHE: NO.

ZIBALEH: OH, COME ON. PLEASE GIVE ME A TINY BITE OF YOUR SANDWICH. PLEASE, GIVE ME A BITE OF YOUR SANDWICH.

SHE: I DON'T WANT TO.

ZIBALEH: BUT I'M HUNGRY.

SHE: ME TOO.

ZIBALEH: AH... (Silence) YOU'RE STILL HUNGRY? I MEAN IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY ANY MORE THEN MAYBE YOU COULD GIVE ME A SMALL BITE OF YOUR SANDWICH?

SHE: NO.

ZIBALEH: OH, COME ON. JUST A LITTLE BITE. WHAT AM I ASKING, AFTER ALL. A LITTLE BITE.

SHE: OK. ONE BITE.

(She places the sandwich on the floor and squashes it with her foot)

ZIBALEH LOOKS AT THE SQUASHED SANDWICH. THE SQUASHED SANDWICH LOOKS AT ZIBALEH.

ZIBALEH: (After the silence) THEN PLEASE LET ME READ THE PAPER FOR A WHILE?

I DIDN'T CRY. I JUST LOOKED AT FATHER AND WIPED HIS TEARS. HE DIDN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH ANY MORE EITHER. SUDDENLY NOBODY HAD THE STRENGTH ANY MORE. SUDDENLY HE WANTED QUIET TOO.

"ENOUGH. TAKE ALL THESE TUBES AWAY. LEAVE ME ALONE PLEASE. LET ME HAVE SOMETHING TO READ. I WANT TO LISTEN TO

LADINO SONGS. I WANT TO REST. I DON'T HAVE ANY STRENGTH ANY MORE. ENOUGH!"

"YOU KNOW, YOU HAVE THE CUTEST FACE WHENEVER I TELL YOU: 'OH, NO. THIS IS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE!' AND THEN YOU SAY: 'REALLY? ARE YOU SURE?'"

"I HOPE THAT NOW AND TOMORROW AND THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW AND FOREVER AFTER - YOU'LL ALWAYS HAVE IT INSIDE YOU - THAT FACE. AND WE'LL BE THE ONLY TWO PEOPLE WHO KNOW ABOUT IT."

A NOTE FROM MY MOTHER TO MY FATHER.

"WE'VE GOT TO," HE SAID TO MOTHER. AND HE WENT INTO THE OTHER ROOM AND OPENED UP THE CUPBOARD, AND I SAW HIM TAKING OUT A KIND OF LONG TUBE WITH A KIND OF BALL ON THE END. MOTHER WALKED SLOWLY INTO THE BATHROOM. FATHER SAW ME STANDING THERE IN THE HALLWAY. AND SAID: "GO TO YOUR ROOM." SO I WENT. AND HE AND MOTHER AND THE TUBE WENT INTO THE BATHROOM AND CLOSED THE DOOR. WHAT IS THAT TUBE? WHAT'RE THEY DOING WITH THAT TUBE? MAYBE IT'S ANOTHER INSTRUMENT FOR TREATING MOTHER'S SORES.

SUDDENLY I HEARD MOTHER SCREAMING. I KNEW IT WAS HURTING HER BECAUSE THAT WAS HOW SHE SCREAMED WHEN IT HURT HER. ONLY THIS TIME IT WAS WORSE. MOTHER HAD NEVER SCREAMED LIKE THAT. MAYBE IT WAS THE TUBE? MAYBE THE TUBE WAS HURTING MOTHER? BUT FATHER HAD SAID: "GO TO YOUR ROOM," SO I SAT THERE AND WAITED... BUT MOTHER WAS IN THERE SCREAMING. I CAN'T STAND IT WHEN SHE SCREAMS.

I OPENED THE BATHROOM DOOR. THAT'S WHEN I SAW MOTHER ON THE FLOOR, ON HER HANDS AND KNEES, THE WHOLE LOWER PART OF HER BODY WAS NAKED, AND FATHER WAS STANDING THERE WITH THE TUBE, TRYING TO PUT IT INTO MOTHER'S BACK PART, AND MOTHER WAS SCREAMING, AND FATHER WAS SAYING: "RELAX, RELAX. IF YOU RELAX, IT'LL BE EASIER."

AND MOTHER WAS SAYING: "NO. I DON'T WANT IT. I DON'T WANT IT."

AND HE TRIED AGAIN TO INSERT THE TUBE INTO MOTHER, AND SHE CRIED OUT AGAIN, AND I COULD SE FATHER STAND UP STRAIGHT, AT A LOSS. HE LOOKED AT ME: "HOLD THIS." HE HANDED ME THE TUBE AND WALKED OUT.

I CAN'T SEE MOTHER'S FACE. SHE'S DOWN ON ALL FOURS AND ME WITH THE TUBE, NEITHER OF US SAYING ANYTHING AND SHE CAN'T EVEN LOOK AT ME.

FATHER CAME BACK WITH OUR NEIGHBOR, WHO WAS A NURSE. SHE HAD A DIFFERENT TUBE, WHICH WAS WHY THEY DIDN'T TAKE BACK THE ONE I WAS HOLDING.

FATHER TOLD ME TO GO TO MY ROOM, BUT I STAYED BY THE DOOR, WITH THE TUBE. I WATCHED THE NURSE PUT HER TUBE INTO MOTHER, AND THEN PRESS THE BALL, AND THE WHOLE TUBE FILLED UP WITH A KIND OF LIQUID, AND MOTHER SCREAMED AGAIN.

FATHER SAW ME THERE, AND HUGGED ME SUDDENLY. WE HUGGED ONE ANOTHER AND STOOD THERE AND LOOKED AT MOTHER, LYING THERE ON THE FLOOR, HURTING SO BADLY. AND THERE WAS NOTHING WE COULD DO.

"ONE POTATO, TWO POTATO, THREE POTATO, FOUR.
FIVE POTATO, SIX POTATO, SEVEN POTATO, MORE."

FATHER WAS ON THE BALCONY, CALLING ME UPSTAIRS. HE WANTED TO TALK TO ME. I TOLD EVERYONE I'D BE RIGHT BACK AND WENT UPSTAIRS. FATHER WAS SITTING IN HIS CHAIR, AND I SAT DOWN ON THE SOFA. HE LOOKED AT ME, AND I LOOKED AT HIM, AND I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY HE'D CALLED ME. BUT IF HE WANTED TO TALK, THAT WAS FINE WITH ME. THEN SUDDENLY HE

MOVED OVER BESIDE ME.

"MOTHER WON'T BE WITH US ANY MORE."

"THAT'S NOT TRUE."

"YES IT IS. MOTHER IS DEAD."

"THAT'S NOT TRUE. IT'S NOT TRUE. MOTHER DEAD? WHERE IS MOTHER?"

"MOTHER IS DEAD. SHE'S FLOWN UP TO HEAVEN AND SHE'S NOT COMING BACK."

"FLOWN UP TO HEAVEN? THAT'S NOT TRUE. SHE COULDN'T FLY UP TO HEAVEN. HOW COULD SHE FLY UP TO HEAVEN?"

"SHE FLEW THERE WHEN SHE DIED. SHE'S IN HEAVEN NOW. SHE CAN'T COME BACK."

"WHY? WHY CAN'T SHE COME BACK? AND WHY DID SHE FLY THERE ALL OF A SUDDEN? WHAT IS SHE, A BIRD?"

AND I LEFT.

I WENT BACK DOWNSTAIRS AND WENT ON PLAYING WITH EVERYBODY. WE PLAYED HIDE-AND-SEEK, AND I RAN, AND NOBODY COULD FIND ME FOR A WHOLE HOUR. THEN I WENT UPSTAIRS FOR SUPPER, AND THERE WERE LOTS OF PEOPLE IN THE HOUSE – FRIENDS OF MOTHER AND FATHER'S AND GRANDPA AND GRANDMA TOO, AND AUNT LEAH, AND THE WHOLE FAMILY. BUT I COULDN'T FIND MOTHER.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT I GOT UP. I OPENED THE DOOR TO MOTHER AND FATHER'S ROOM AND GOT INTO THEIR BED. I HELD MY HANDS OUT TO FATHER AND WRAPPED MY ARMS AROUND HIS

BACK. I WANTED HIM TO MOLD ME VERY VERY TIGHT AND TO TELL ME THAT IT WASN'T TRUE. I COULDN'T BE TRUE. SHE HADN'T FLOWN UP TO HEAVEN. SHE WASN'T DEAD AND SHE WASN'T GOING AWAY. SHE WOULD BE COMING BACK AND I'D SEE HER TOMORROW.

FATHER HUGGED ME, AND I HELD HIS HAND ALL NIGHT.

"TELL ME. TELL ME NOW THAT YOU WERE LYING. YOU WERE, WEREN'T YOU? YOU WERE JUST MAKING IT UP, YOU WERE JUST KIDDING, AND SHE DIDN'T FLY UP TO HEAVEN, AND SHE ISN'T..."

I ALWAYS USED TO VISIT HIM ON FRIDAY AFTERNOONS. THAT FRIDAY HE WAS FEELING MUCH BETTER. HE SAT UP IN BED AND TOLD ME ABOUT THE NEW PLAY HE WAS READING. WHEN I SAID I WAS GOING, HE SAID: "I'LL WALK YOU TO THE ELEVATOR." THAT WAS SURPRISING, BECAUSE HE ALWAYS USED TO STAY IN BED WHEN I LEFT.

WE WALKED DOWN THE HALL, ARM IN ARM. THERE WAS A HAPPINESS IN HIS FACE. IT FELT SO GOOD TO WALK DOWN THE HALLWAY WITH HIS DAUGHTER, LIKE A GENTLEMAN - ENGAG .HE WAS WALKING TALL, AND HE WAS SMILING, AND HE WAS PROUD.

"WELL THEN, YOU SEE? YOU'RE MUCH BETTER ALREADY."

I GOT INTO THE ELEVATOR, A KISS, AND THE DOORS CLOSED. HE WAS STANDING THERE IN HIS BLUE PAJAMAS, SMILING AT ME.

IT WAS LATE AT NIGHT WHEN I GOT HOME. THERE WERE THREE MESSAGES ON THE ANSWERING MACHINE. I CALLED THE HOSPITAL. THE ON-DUTY DOCTOR TOLD ME IT HAD BEEN A BAD NIGHT. HE HAD HAD ANOTHER ATTACK. THEY HAD SPENT MORE THAN AN HOUR ON HIM, BUT HIS HEART GAVE IN.

"BUT JUST THIS AFTERNOON HE WALKED ME TO THE ELEVATOR."

TWO A.M., I GO TO THE HOSPITAL. IT'S QUIET IN THE WARD, VERY QUIET. THE DOCTOR TAKES ME TO A ROOM WITH A FEW EMPTY BEDS. AT THE END OF IT IS MY FATHER, COVERED WITH A SHEET. THE DOCTOR LEAVES. I SIT DOWN ON THE BED AND SLOWLY PULL DOWN THE SHEET. FIRST THE HEAD, THEN THE SHOULDERS, THE STOMACH, THE WHOLE BODY. NAKED.

HE SEEMS ASLEEP. BUT HIS EYES ARE OPEN. I TOUCH HIS HAND. AN ORDINARY HAND. NEITHER BLUE NOR COLD. I LIFT IT. IT DROPS. I FINGER MY WAY TO HIS ARM, HIS NECK, HIS FACE. I TOUCH THE MOUTH, THE HAIR, THE CHEEKS, PRESSING THE CHEEKS... STRANGE. IT'S FATHER - HIS STOMACH, HIS NECK, HIS EARS, HIS EYES, HIS LEGS... I PLACE MY FINGERS ON HIS EYES AND SHUT THEM. I ALWAYS THOUGHT THEY ONLY DO THAT IN THE MOVIES. I CAN'T REMEMBER

WHAT COLOR HIS EYES WERE. WHAT COLOR WERE HIS EYES, DAMN IT? BROWN. THAT'S IT - BROWN. BROWN?

THEN I TOUCH FATHER'S LEGS FOR THE LAST TIME. FATHER'S TOES. FOR THE LAST TIME I TOUCH HIS SHOULDERS, STROKE HIS HEAD, AND HIS HAIR, AND HIS EARS, AND HIS NOSE. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME I'D TOUCHED MY FATHER'S NOSE?

I PULL THE SHEET BACK UP AND TAKE ON LAST LOOK AT HIS BODY. EVER SO SLOWLY, HE IS COVERED AGAIN. I HOLD HIS HEAD IN MY HANDS. I KISS HIM ON THE FOREHEAD. I STROKE HIS HEAD.

"WE'RE GOING OUR SEPARATE WAYS, FATHER."

I OPEN THE BEDSIDE STAND AND TAKE OUT HIS THINGS: THE PLAY, A FEW NEWSPAPERS, SOME BOOKS, HIS SHAVER, HIS TOOTHBRUSH, A BOX OF BLACK LICORICE CANDIES, THE RADIO, THE GLASSES...

THE DOCTOR RETURNS AND HANDS ME A PLASTIC BAG WITH FATHER'S DENTURES IN IT. WHAT... WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THEM? THROW THEM OUT? FRAME THEM? DISPLAY THEM IN THE LIVING ROOM? WE SHAKE HANDS. I LEAVE.

I CAME HOME. OUR HOME. I TURNED ON ALL THE LIGHTS. THEN I TOOK A GARBAGE BAG AND EMPTIED OUT ALL THE MEDICATIONS BESIDE HIS BED, AND IN THE MEDICINE CABINET AND IN THE KITCHEN, AND ALL THE OINTMENTS, AND THE DOCTORS' PRESCRIPTIONS, AND THE TOOTHBRUSHES, AND THE NEWSPAPERS ON THE SOFA, AND ALL THE THINGS I HAD BROUGHT FROM THE HOSPITAL. THE TRANSISTOR RADIO - I DIDN'T WANT IT. AND THE GLASSES - I HAD NO USE FOR HE GLASSES. WHAT WAS THE POINT OF KEEPING THEM? OR THE CANDIES, AND THE PLAY, AND ALL THE BOOKS, AND THE SLIPS OF PAPER, AND THE SLIPPERS, AND THE DENTURES, AND THE AFTERSHAVE, AND THE ANTACIDS THAT YOU CAN'T GET AT THE HOSPITAL...

I WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND THREW IT ALL OUT. FINISHED. DONE. DEAD!

(She slowly transforms into Zibaleh)

--- ZIBALEH: WHAT'S THIS? CANDY? WHAT KIND? LICORICE?
 FATHER'S... (Silence) IS IT GOOD? (Silence) CAN IT
 TAKE ONE? JUST ONE?

(This time, to his utter surprise, Zibaleh gets what he asks for. He takes the candy and eats it, very slowly.)

"JUST AN ORDINARY LITTLE GIRL, THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO BE. YOUR LITTLE GIRL. THAT'S ALL. SO YOU CAN LOOK ME STRAIGHT IN THE EYE FOR A LONG LONG TIME, JUST THE WAY YOU DO WHEN I

LOOK AT YOU. AND I COULD LOOK AT YOU AND SEE OUR TWO STARS - ONE OF THEM YOU PROMISED YOU'D BRING ME, AND YOU DID A LITTLE. THAT'S ALL, AND IT'S QUITE A LOT, I GUESS."

I'M SITTING ON THE BEACH OF A SMALL COASTAL TOWN IN TURKEY. ON ONE OF THE TERRACES ABOVE ME PEOPLE ARE GATHERING ROUND. I MOVE CLOSER AND SEE MEN AND WOMEN SITTING AT TABLES, AND A WEDDING BAND IS PLAYING A STRANGE MEDLEY OF

TURKISH MUSIC AND WESTERN MUSIC. A LITTLE BOY, TWELVE OR THIRTEEN YEARS OLD, ENTERS, DRESSED IN WHITE. THERE'S A MAN ON ONE SIDE OF HIM AND A WOMAN ON THE OTHER. THE BAND STOPS PLAYING. SUDDENLY, EVERYONE GETS UP AND GATHERS AROUND THE BOY, APPLAUDING. HE STARTS SWAYING. HIS WHOLE BODY IS SWAYING AND HIS EYES ARE SHUT. AS HE CONTINUES WITH THIS HYPNOTIC DANCE, HE IS TAKEN TO A BED IN THE CORNER OF THE HALL. AN OLD WOMAN PUTS HIM DOWN ON THE BED AND LETS HIM SIP SOME WINE FROM A GOBLET. PEOPLE HUDDLE AROUND HIM. SUDDENLY I CAN'T SEE THE BOY, BUT RIGHT AFTER THAT THEY START TO DISPERSE. THEN I SEE HIM AGAIN. IT'S A CIRCUMCISION. HE'S LYING THERE QUIETLY, COVERED WITH A SHEET, AND THE OLD WOMAN, HIS GRANDMOTHER MAY, IS PINNING A SMALL CLOTH BAG TO THE PILLOW LEANING AGAINST THE HEADBOARD.

I SEE THE BAG. I SEE MY ROOM AND THE BAG THAT MY GRANDMOTHER HAS PINNED TO MY BED TO WARD OFF THE EVIL EYE, AND IN IT SHE'S PUT A CLOVE OF GARLIC WRAPPED IN NYLON. I LOOK AT THE GRANDMOTHER. I NEVER KNEW GRANDMA DONNA, MY FATHER'S MOTHER, BUT THIS GRANDMOTHER, WITH THE WHITE HAIR, IS MY GRANDMA. AND GRANDFATHER IS STANDING THERE TOO, HOLDING A HAT IN HIS HAND. AND THE GUESTS WALK OVER,

ONE BY ONE, EACH OF THEM PLACING SOME BILLS IN THE HAT, CONGRATULATING THE BOY AND KISSING THE GRANDMOTHER'S HAND.

I CAN SEE GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS. I CAN SEE THOSE OLD PEOPLE'S HANDS, AND THEIR MOUSTACHES AND THE SNAPSHOTS - MY FATHER'S FAMILY SNAPSHOTS WITH ALL THOSE UNCLES AND ALMOST EVERY ONE OF THEM IS SPORTING A MOUSTACHE, THE SAME MOUSTACHE. AND THE MOTHER WITH THE GOLD JEWELRY IS STANDING NEXT TO GRANDMOTHER, AND THE GOLD TOOTH THAT GRANDMOTHER HAS... I CAN'T REMEMBER ANY MORE WHO IN FATHER'S FAMILY HAS A GOLD TOOTH.

AND THERE'S THIS MAN FROM THE HABERDASHERY NEAR FATHER'S OLD HOME. AND THERE'S THE MAN FROM THE SHOE

STORE THAT FATHER ALWAYS SAYS HELLO TO WHEN WE SEE HIM IN THE STREET. AND THE CHILDREN WHOSE PARENTS FATHER KNOWS. HE SAYS THEY LOOK JUST LIKE THEIR PARENTS DID WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE. HERE THEY ARE, GETTING UNDER FOOT. ALL OF THEM ARE HERE, CIRCLING ME. AND ME - I'M CIRCLING WITH THEM. AND SUDDENLY THEY START DANCING, AND I DANCE WITH THEM, AND THERE I AM, DANCING WITH GRANDMA, AND ... IF ONLY FATHER COULD BE HERE TO SEE ME... HERE I AM, DANCING WITH HIS WHOLE FAMILY. AND THEY'RE TOUCHING ME, THEY'RE ALL TOUCHING ME. THEY'RE HOLDING ME IN THEIR ARMS AND DANCING WITH ME.

AND I CAN SEE THE LITTLE PLATES SPINNING - THE PLATES WITH THOSE HOMEMADE COOKIES, AND THE AROMA OF SOMETHING BAKING IN THE OVEN... AND SOMEONE'S ASKING: "WANT SOME?", AND I HELP MYSELF.

AND THE BOY'S LYING THERE ON THE WHITE BED, AND I'M DANCING WITH EVERYONE. IT'S MY PARTY. AND HERE'S MY GRANDMOTHER - GRANDMA SONIA, AND MY GRANDFATHER, AND THAT SILENCE - THE SILENCE OF MEALTIMES, AND GRANDMOTHER IS ASKING FATHER:

"WILLST DU NOCH EIN SCHNITZEL?" BUT FATHER ISN'T INTERESTED IN THE SCHNITZEL.

AND THERE'S THE MAN FROM THE BAKERY WHO SELLS FATHER BOREKAS, AND SONIA ALWAYS TASTES THEM AND SAYS: "ACH ,MEIN GOTT!" NO, SHE DOESN'T LIKE THE BOREKAS. AND MOTHER BRINGS HER SOME DESSERT. THEY SIT THERE WITH THEIR DESSERT. AND GRANDFATHER IS STIRRING HIS TEA IN A GLASS CUP.

AND NOW SOMEBODY IS KISSING ME ON THE CHEEK. WHO IS IT? AH, IT'S FATHER'S BROTHER - FATHER'S BROTHER, OF ALL PEOPLE! WITH THE MOUSTACHE, AND WITH HIS CHILDREN, AND HIS WIFE, AND THE GOLD TOOTH. THAT'S RIGHT, SHE'S THE ONE! SHE'S THE ONE WITH THE GOLD TOOTH!

AND ZIBALEH'S SCURRYING BETWEEN THE TABLES, CHASING AFTER THE FAMOUS BARITONE.

"ZIBALEH, LEAVE THE SINGER ALONE, I TOLD YOU."

ZIBALEH: "COME ONE, COME ON. LET ME SING A SONG OR TWO. LET ME HAVE THE MIKE, JUST FOR A WHILE. COME ON..."

THE FAMOUS BARITONE IS FEELING VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. HE

DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. HE CALLS HEAD NURSE PNINA, WHO GRABS ZIBALEH, PULLS DOWN HIS PANTS, AND GIVES HIM A SHOT IN THE BEHIND.

ZIBALEH (screaming): OUCH...

AND ME - IN THE MIDDLE - LIKE A QUEEN. WITH EVERYONE COMING TO KISS MY HAND. ALL OF THEM AT MY PARTY, DANCING AROUND ME,
AND SINGING TURKISH SONGS AND SCHUBERT LIEDER.

THEN I WALK OVER TO GRANDFATHER AND PUT A FEW BILLS IN HIS HAT, AND WALK OVER TO GRANDMA AND KISS HER HAND. I TRY TO SAY SOMETHING... I DON'T QUITE KNOW WHAT TO SAY TO HER... I DON'T KNOW A WORD OF TURKISH, AND YET I UNDERSTAND. I UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING. I'M FACING THE BOY. HE'S LOOKING AT ME... AND I KNOW THIS IS MY FAMILY.

AND ZIBALEH IS CRAWLING AROUND, TRYING TO GRAB HOLD OF THE SINGER'S MIKE, BUT JUST THEN ALL THE DOCTORS AND THE NURSES ENTER WITH THEIR TUBES AND STRETCHERS AND DRIPS AND AMBULANCES AND TANKS. AND ALL OF THEM STEP ON ZIBALEH. AND SOMEONE PICKS SOMETHING UP OFF THE FLOOR AND SHOUTS: "HERE ARE ZIBALEH'S TEETH. HERE IS ZIBALEH'S NOSE. HERE ARE ZIBALEH'S EARS. BUT WHERE IS ZIBALEH?"

EVERYONE LOOKS DOWN AND SEES ZIBALEH, AS FLAT AS ROLLED-OUT PASTRY. NO MORE ZIBALEH. FINISHED. DONE. DEAD!

"AHHH!" SONIA SCREAMS, WITH ZIBALEH'S TEETH PERCHED ON HER LEG.

ZIBALEH: "COME ON, SONIA, LET ME HAVE A LITTLE DESSERT. JUST A LITTLE, SONIA. DESSERT... A LITTLE... DESSE... LITTLE... DE..."

THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE AMONG THE CLOSELY PACKED GRAVESTONES, WATCHING THEM LOWER INTO HIS GRAVE. NEXT TO IT WAS MOTHER'S GRAVE. ON THE DAY SHE DIED, FATHER BOUGHT THE PLOT BESIDE HER.

THEY COVERED THE GRAVE WITH SAND AND DROPPED STONES ON TOP. THE UNDERTAKER POSITIONED THE PLAQUE SHOWING THE NAME OF THE DECEASED, THE PLOT AND THE GRAVE NUMBER.

"AVRAM?" MOTHER ASKED.

"HANNAH?" FATHER SAID.

"IS THAT YOU?"

"YES. IT'S ME."

"YOU'RE HERE..."

"I'M HERE. I MISSED YOU..."

IN LONDON, MOTHER AND FATHER AND ME ARE CRAMMED VERY TIGHT IN A KIND OF MACHINE THAT TAKES LITTLE PICTURES. FATHER CLOSSES THE CURTAIN AND I PRACTICALLY FALL OFF THE SEAT, BECAUSE IT'S SUCH A SMALL SEAT. SO I LAUGH, AND

MOTHER SAYS: "DON'T MOVE. OTHERWISE, THE PICTURE WILL COME OUT ALL BLURRED."

AND I HAVE A BRITISH BOBBY'S HAT THAT THEY BOUGHT ME AT A STALL.

AND FATHER SAYS: "TAKE IT OFF."

AND I SAY: "NO, I WANT IT ON. IT'S VERY PRETTY."

AND FATHER PUTS HIS HAND ON MY SHOULDER, AND MOTHER PUTS HER HAND ON MY OTHER SHOULDER, AND THEY HUG ME. AND I CAN FEEL MOTHER'S BREAST ON ONE SIDE, AND FATHER'S

CHEST ON THE OTHER SIDE. AND WE JUST SIT THERE LIKE THAT, ALL SCRUNCHED TOGETHER.

AND MOTHER SAYS: "SAY CHEESE," AND I LAUGH AND LAUGH. AND THEN I SEE THEIR TWO FACES UP CLOSE AND THEIR TWO CHEEKS TOUCHING MINE. AND WE LOOK INTO THE HOLE IN THE MIDDLE, AND IT FEELS WARM AND GOOD. AND FATHER INSERTS THE COIN...

"HERE WE GO," HE SAYS, "GET READY, IT'S COMING."

AND THE THREE OF US GET READY, AND I SAY A GREAT BIG "CHEESE", AND I WAIT, AND I WAIT...

"COME ON MOTHER, WHEN WILL IT..."

(A camera flashes. She freezes)
