

Happy Halloween

A play by Shlomo Mashiach

Dramaturgy and direction by Ron Ninio

Translated by Natalie Fainstein

Personae Dramatis

Tom Balaban- Police commander

Naomi Balaban- Police commander

Gary Stern- Police commander

Dr. Ben Mahler

The routine questioning of a doctor suspected of malpractice leads to a highly-charged confrontation between him and the police interrogator. Lie follows lie, which leads to more lies, and all the plays' characters do all they can so as not to face up one simple truth for which they will have to pay the price.

This enthralling play deals with an old-age incisive question: is it always necessary to know the whole truth, even at the price of self-destruction and ruination of the family cell, or not to know it? Is it even possible to face up the absolute truth or is it sometimes better to circumvent it for life itself? Who is to know?

The plot takes place in the past and in the present. The past starts four months ago and gradually intertwines with the present. All the events in the present take place during Halloween, at a police station.

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Scene 1

Interrogation Room.

Headline: Halloween – The Interrogation. Noon.

An interrogation room in a police station. Hardly any furniture: A simple table, two chairs, a water cooler and a locker. A large barred window faces the table. There's a cork board hanging on the wall. Sitting alone in the room is Dr. Ben Mahler. He's casually dressed, but there's something strange about him: traces of green colour in the shape of a Mohawk appear in his hair, as if he'd sprayed his hair green the previous night and it hasn't come off properly in his morning shower. He sits nervous and tense for quite a while. He suddenly jolts at the sound of a loud, annoying ringtone. He looks at the table and finds a cell phone. He hopes that someone will come in and answer it, but no such luck. The phone won't stop ringing.

Ben: Excuse me...! Is anyone here? *(no answer)* There's a phone ringing here!

The phone stops ringing and then starts again. Ben approaches it hesitantly, picks it up and looks at it. He thinks about it, then finally answers it.

Ben: Hello... *(Someone on the other side is talking, Ben listens for a few seconds)* One moment... *(The person on the other side continues)* Just a minute, wait... no, it's not.... This isn't Gary... My name is Ben Mahler, I just... *(They hang up)* Hello! Hello!

At that very moment the door opens and in comes Gary, dressed in civilian clothes. Ben rushes to put the phone back on the table, but Gary notices it. Gary quickly makes his way to the table, picks up the phone and examines it. He then turns angrily to Ben.

Gary: Why did you touch it?

Ben: What?

Gary: You heard me.

Ben: It rang and I...

Gary: So what if it rang?

Ben: It rang once before and I didn't answer it, but then it rang again, so I did...

Gary: What the hell are you doing answering the phone? Is it yours to answer?? Is it?

Ben: I thought that... someone was trying to tell me something... I've been here for almost an hour. I'm sorry, it just kept ringing...

Gary checks the phone for messages.

Ben: Do you know how she's doing?

Gary: *(Concentrated on his phone)* Who?

Ben: The girl.

Gary: Where's Tom?

Ben: Who?

Gary: Tom, where's Tom?

Ben: Who's Tom?

Gary: Who are you?

Ben: I was told to wait here. Are you who I'm supposed to talk to?

Gary: How long did you say you've been waiting here?

Ben: An hour.

Gary: Has anyone else been here?

Ben: No.

Gary takes another cell phone out of his pocket, identical to the one that was on the table, and switches the two phones. He takes the one from the table with him, leaves the one from his pocket on the table and steps out the room.

Ben: Excuse me, what about me?

Ben has no choice but to wait again. It's nerve racking. The phone keeps ringing and ringing... Tom walks in, carrying a folder. Unlike Gary, he is nice and cordial.

Tom: Why don't you answer it? *(He rushes to the phone and answers it himself)* Yeah...OK...

He hangs up the phone, puts the folder on the table, pins two ultrasound photos of a four-month old fetus to the cork board.

Tom: If the phone rings, we answer it, don't we?

Ben: I hope you know why I'm here.

Tom: Why you're here... why you're here... *(He sits down and browses through the folder)* Attempted shoplifting, assaulting a school principal – stop me when I get to you – insulting a public official...

Ben: My name is Ben Mahler.

Tom: *(Flipping through the paperwork)* Ben Mahler, Ben Mahler... Oh, here we go. *(Takes out a piece of paper)* Doctor! Can I get you anything to drink, Doctor Mahler?

Ben: No, thank you.

Tom walks over to the water cooler at the corner of the room.

Ben: Someone came in here a minute ago and switched the phones. He took the one that was here and left...

Tom: It happens all the time. Everyone at the station got the same kind of phone and they keep confusing them. *(He looks at the cell phone on the table)* That one's mine. I think...

Ben: Would you mind explaining to me what took so long for someone to come in and talk to me? I got here at...

Tom tries to get some water in a plastic cup, but the cooler's broken.

Tom: *(Quietly, to himself)* Shit...

Tom kicks the cooler twice then shakes it and tries again. Now the cooler sprays water all over the place. Tom leaps back in order not to get wet. Instead, the floor gets wet.

Tom: Fucking hell... Do you have any idea how many years this cooler's been here? First there was this cooler, and then they built the police station around it. And it's always been broken. You press it and it squirts... And it never ceases to catch me off guard. I must have pressed it a million times, and a million times' it's... Yeah, I know why you're here.

Ben: How long is this going to take, this...?

Tom: Are you in a hurry?

Ben: I promised my kid that after kindergarten I'd take him to the...

Tom: You have a kid to pick up from kindergarten?

Ben: No, my wife does that.

Tom: So there's no rush.

Ben: But there is, that's the thing, I promised I'd take him trick or treating.

Tom: Trick or treating?

Ben: Yes. How's she doing?

Tom: I don't know.

Ben: Has anyone notified her parents?

Tom: I don't know that either.

Ben: They're in London, her parents. Or so I've been told.

Tom: Who told you?

Ben: The babysitter... nanny... the girl who brought her to me. *(Pause)* So you don't know if they've been notified.

Tom: No.

Ben: They're probably trying to get back. London. There must be about ten flights a day...

Tom: Do you know them?

Ben: No, I don't. *(Pause)* How long is this going to take?

Tom: I have no idea.

Ben: An hour? Two hours?

Tom: Don't know.

Ben: But I get to go home at the end of the day, right?

Tom: How old is he?

Ben: Who?

Tom: Your kid.

Ben: Four.

Tom: Just one?

Ben: Two.

Tom: Him and a girl?

Ben: No, another boy.

Tom: How old?

Ben: Twelve.

Tom: And he's not going trick or treating?

Ben: No.

Tom: Why not?

Ben: I don't quite understand this line of questioning.

Tom: I simply asked why your older one isn't going trick or treating. You don't have to answer if you don't want to.

Ben: He's a big boy; he doesn't really care about these things.

Tom: OK, see? You gave me an answer and nothing happened.

Ben: Is there a chance I won't be going home today?

Tom: Yes, yes there is.

Ben: What has to happen for me to go?

Tom: I'd say it's up to you, but that's not exactly accurate.

Ben: What, then?

Tom: The girl can suddenly wake up...

Ben: So then I go, right? That's good for me.

Tom: I'd say it's mostly good for her.

Silence.

Ben: And if I don't go home, then what?

Tom: You were never interrogated, were you?

Ben: No.

Tom: 24-hour lock-up, an arraignment in front of a judge, house arrest, I honestly don't know; whatever the judge decides.

Ben: You can't be serious.

Tom: You asked about possible scenarios.

Ben: I'm not a felon or anything.

Tom: (*Referring to the leftover green color on Ben's hair*) What's that on your hair, doctor Mahler?

Ben: What's what on my hair?

Tom: Some green stuff.

Ben: Oh, that...

Tom: You don't have to answer that either.

Tom takes a long, hard look at Ben. It unnerves him.

Ben: Can I call my lawyer?

Tom: Certainly. Be my guest, call your lawyer, but that *definitely* isn't going to make this interrogation any shorter.

Ben: So I suggest you ask me what it is you need to ask, I'll tell you what happened and then I'll get out of here! (*Tom looks at him silently; this drives Ben crazy until he bursts*) what kind of methods do you people use here?

Tom: Do you see anyone else here but me?

Ben: No.

Tom: Then why say "you people"?

Ben: I meant the way you interrogate...

Tom: And with such condescension.... "you people", as if... are you patronizing me, doctor Mahler?

Ben: Not at all, I..

Tom: Then why say "you people"?!

Ben: I'm sorry...

Tom: You're not sorry, you're scared. Scared of pissing me off, but you are pissing me off. A lot. There's a little girl in a coma and all you care about is whether or not you'll trick or treat with your kid...

Ben: *(Cuts him off, enraged)* The first question I asked you was how she was doing! I asked *him*, too!

Tom: Who?

Ben: The guy who was here before you.

Tom: And what did he say?

Ben: He had no idea what I was talking about! So don't tell me I don't care about the welfare of that girl!

Tom: You're right. I apologize. I take it back. Do you accept my apology?

Ben looks at Tom, trying to figure out whether he's sincere or not. Tom looks at Ben silently for a long while. Ben takes a sip from the plastic cup.

Ben: Can you check and see how she's doing?

Tom: You're supposed to know that, you drove in the ambulance with her, you're a doctor....

Ben: There was another doctor in the ambulance. He treated her.

Tom: Where was she admitted?

Ben: The Children's Hospital.

Tom: Which department?

Ben: Emergency Paediatrics, I assume.

Tom: You assume? You didn't bother to find out?

Ben: I arrived with her in the ambulance at the ER; there they asked me what exactly happened in the clinic... Do you want to know what happened in the clinic?

Tom: You arrived with her in the ambulance at the ER... go on...

Ben: Then they took her away and I waited there a little while longer, and then a police officer came... *(Tom bursts out laughing)* What... Is any of this funny to you?

Tom: *(Laughing)* "And then a police officer came..." You sounded like a little boy there for a minute...
And what did the "police officer" tell you?

Again, Tom bursts out laughing uncontrollably. Ben looks at him...Tom somehow stifles his laugh.

Ben: What... Are you doing this on purpose? To make me nervous? What's so funny to you?

Tom: *(Seriously)* What did the police officer tell you, Doctor Mahler?

Ben: That I needed to come down here.

Tom: And what did you do?

Ben: Just that. I came down here, they told me to come in and wait in this room, and I've been stuffed here for the past hour.

Tom: Then you're fine. You did what the police officer told you to do.

Ben: Who called the police over there?

Tom: The hospital, I guess.

Ben: Why?

Tom: Procedure.

Ben: They do that for every patient...?

Tom: No, only if there's reasonable suspicion.

Ben: Suspicion of what?

Tom: I don't know...

Ben: Then who does?

Tom: You?

Pause. Ben looks at Tom for a long while.

Ben: Could we have met before?

Tom: Not that I recall, maybe... You're a specialist in... *(Looks through his folder)*

Ben: Dentistry. I'm a dentist.

Tom: Let's find out, then...

Tom leans back on his chair, pretending to be at the dentist's and puts his legs on the table.

Tom: Come up here, stand over me, maybe I'll remember you from this angle.... *(He opens his mouth wide open)*

Ben: I'm a paediatric dentist.

Tom: Maybe you examined me when I was a kid.

Ben: No, you really do look familiar.

Tom: I'm a police officer, they write about me from time to time.

Ben: What's your name?

Tom: Balaban. Tom Balaban. Actually, my picture was in the paper recently.

Ben: Am I under arrest now?

Tom: Yes.

Ben: Because no one told me so.

Tom: So I'm telling you now. You're under arrest.

Ben: Even though I came here of my own free will.

Tom: But you didn't. You came here because a police officer told you to come here.

Ben: Will they let you know if there's any news?

Tom: News of what?

Ben: Of the girl.

Tom: If she dies, then yes, they'll let me know.

Scene 2

Headline: Four Months before Halloween.

We go four months back in time. It's the exact same room, with only two differences: there are no bars on the window and no ultrasound photos on the cork board.

Tom: Why are there no bars here?

Gary: Because they didn't authorize the expense.

Tom: They will now. Fourth floor and no bars. They have them on the first floor to keep people from running, but on the fourth...

Gary: Do you want to wait a while with this?

Tom: With what?

Gary: We need to issue a report. I talked with Naomi, she's on her way here.

Tom: Why the rush to tell her?

Gary: I thought it'd be better if she heard it from me, not on the police radio.

Tom: It's already on the police radio?

Gary: It's not every day that an ambulance comes flying over here...

Tom: Is he dead?

Gary: He was alive when they put him in the ambulance. They'll let us know if there's any news.
Tom, what exactly happened here?

Tom: He jumped.

Gary: Just like that?

Tom: He got nervous.

Gary: What made him nervous?

Tom: I did.

Gary: Did you touch him?

Tom: No.

Gary: No violence. Nothing.

Tom: You know me, Gary... *(Distracted)* How's he doing?

Gary: I already told you. Do you want to see someone, Tom? A doctor? Someone who'll give you something to calm down...

Tom: You said we had to issue a report.

Gary: How long did you interrogate him?

Tom: A couple of hours, maybe more.

Gary: Hit and run.

Tom: Yes.

Gary: Did you write anything down?

Tom: I never do...

Gary: What did he say?

Tom: That he didn't remember anything.

Gary: *(Looking over the paperwork)* They ruled out alcohol. He hadn't been drinking.

Tom: He was awfully nervous during the interrogation. Twenty year old kid. He was crying like a...

Gary: *(Smiling)* They all end up crying with you.

Tom: He was like that to begin with. Said he didn't remember a thing.

Naomi walks in. She comes up to Tom, kisses and caresses him.

Naomi: *(To Gary)* Can I see you outside for a minute?

Gary: Is it urgent?

Naomi nods her head yes.

Tom: *(Protests)* Wait, what...

Naomi: It'll just be a minute.

Tom: If you have anything to say, say it in here!

Naomi: Tom, a minute... Everything's fine.

They're all silent. Naomi looks at Gary and the two step out, leaving Tom alone for about a minute. He sits motionless and closed off. He finally loses his patience, gets up and walks to the door.

Tom: Naomi! Gary! *(No response)* Gary!!

Just as Tom intends to leave the room, Gary walks in.

Tom: Where's Naomi? What did she tell you?

Gary: Let's continue.

Tom: *(Snaps)* Where's Naomi? What did she tell you? What's going on around here?

Gary: Tom, don't freak out on me now, everything's good, OK? Sit down, let's continue.

Gary stalls for time. He seems distracted.

Gary: Did he confess?

Tom: *(Notices that Gary is distracted)* I already told you; he said he didn't remember a thing. Gary...

Gary doesn't respond... thoughts run through his head. He finally pulls himself together.

Gary: Why did you leave the room?

Tom: I didn't. I saw that you guys weren't coming back, so...

Gary: No, I mean when you interrogated him. Why did you leave the room?

Tom: I didn't.

Gary: You went to take a leak.

Tom: No, I didn't.

Gary: You leave the room, lock him in, go to the bathroom, come back, he's gone, the window's open, what do you do?

Tom: I'm telling you I never left the room...

Gary: *(Quietly)* It's just us here. Just you, me and what I write down here.

Tom: I never went to take a leak.

Gary: In a minute this room will be packed with people... you're in shock now... Let me... you come back in the room, it's empty... the window's open... what do you do?

Tom: Don't do this, Gary.

Gary: The room's empty, the window's open, what do you do?

Tom: I'm not gonna play along with this.

Gary: He's dead. *(Pause)* So I'm asking you one more time – and give me an answer this time – you come back in the room, it's empty, the window's open. What do you do? What do you do?

Tom: I heard screaming downstairs... I walked up to the window and saw him lying down there... in a pool of his own blood.

Gary: And you called the ambulance straight away. *(Tom's silent)* Tom?

Tom: Yes. I called an ambulance straight away. *(Silence)* What?

Gary: Naomi!

Naomi walks in. She and Tom look at each other.

Scene 3

Tom and Naomi's living room. It's the evening of the same day.

The living room is small and plainly furnished. It appears to be a rented apartment; they haven't quite invested in it.

Naomi: Come on, talk to me.

Tom: What about?

Naomi: I don't know. Just don't be so quiet. It's not good for you to be quiet now. *(Pause)* Do you want us to go to sleep? ...Should I just leave you alone?

Tom: Is there any alcohol around the house?

Naomi: Is that what's gonna help you right now?

Tom: Couldn't hurt.

Naomi: Should I call someone?

Tom: Who do you want to call?

Naomi: I don't know... I don't know what to do. Should I go? I'm trying to figure out what's the best way to help you right now.

Tom: Why did you call Gary out the room?

Naomi: I didn't want to be the one who told you.

Tom: *(Understanding)* You wanted Gary to tell me.

Naomi: Yes, I preferred it that way.

Tom: When did he die?

Naomi: It's not your fault, Tom.

Tom: You said that already. So did Gary.

Naomi: He died on the way to the hospital.

Tom: Is that why you were crying? Because he'd died? *(Pause)* Is there any alcohol around the house?

Naomi: I don't know.

Tom: Would you check, please?

Naomi: Stop talking to me like that!

Tom: I said "please"!

She exits angrily and then returns with a whisky bottle and a glass.

Tom: You knew that there was a bottle there.

Naomi: Yes, I did.

Tom: Then why did you say you didn't?

Naomi: Because I don't want you to start drinking now. *(Pause)* Tom, what do you want from me?

Tom: I want you to not lie. If I ask you whether or not there's alcohol around the house and you know that there is, say: yes, there is some alcohol around the house, and if you know that he's dead then just come in and say that he's dead. No bullshit, no Gary and no... Why didn't you come back in the room afterwards?

Naomi is silent.

Tom: You and Gary both left and then only he came back. Where were you?

Naomi: Outside the door.

Tom: Why?

Naomi: Because Gary asked me to. He wanted to be alone with you.

Tom: Why?

Naomi: I don't know! Ask Gary!

Tom: And how do you know it's not my fault? *(Pause)* How do you know it's not my fault?!

Silence. He pours himself a glass of whisky and takes a sip, then another one.

Tom: He didn't try to make a run for it.

Naomi: What do you mean?

Tom: That driver I interrogated. He didn't try to run.

Naomi: What, then?

Tom: He jumped out the window, killed himself.

Naomi: How do you know that?

Tom: Because I was there. I was in the room with him. When I started with him, he was already hysterical; all he wanted was to go home... But he wouldn't confess... said he didn't remember a thing... cried... I told him that we'd found blood stains on his car... that we'd had a witness... that he was looking at years in prison... that made him even more nervous... he got up... went over to the window... I was sure he wasn't gonna do it... that he was just trying to get me off his back... he seemed like a spoiled little brat, not the type that would... *(Pause)* Do you still think it's not my fault?

Naomi is silent.

Tom: Suddenly you're the one who's quiet.

Naomi: I don't really have anything to say.

Tom: Say what's on your mind. Naomi, please tell me what you're thinking.

Naomi: I still think it's not your fault.

The doorbell rings.

Tom: Are you expecting anyone?

Naomi walks to the door and opens it. Gary comes in.

Naomi: Hi.

Gary gives Naomi a warm hug. He caresses her head.

Gary: Are you OK?

Naomi shakes her head to say "so-so"...

Tom: You two want me to leave?

Gary: Funny guy. Is that your first? *(Referring to the bottle of scotch a third of which Tom had already drunk)*

Tom: No sharing.

Naomi: Do you also want some?

Gary nods his head. Naomi takes out another full whisky bottle and two glasses.

Tom: *(To Gary)* Would you look at that, you only just got here and already there's a party.

Gary: *(Gets up, walks over to Tom)* Get up.

Tom: Why?

Gary: Get up, you idiot.

Gary pulls Tom for a strong, manly hug.

Gary: Man, you stink.

Tom: I love you too.

Naomi: You two aren't gonna get drunk all by yourselves now...

Gary: Cheers.

Naomi: Cheers.

Gary: *(To Naomi)* How much has he had to drink?

Naomi: More than a few. *(She pours a glass both for herself and Gary)*

Gary: *(Takes out a piece of paper. To Tom)* Sign here.

Tom: What's this?

Gary: The report. Neatly printed on official paper.

Tom: *(Takes the piece of paper, reads it, referring to it)* What are you doing here?

Gary: I'm in the bathroom.

Tom: No.

Gary: Yes. That's where we ran into each other just when you went to take a leak.

Tom: No!

Gary: Yes!

Tom: No! Look at me! It happened this morning! We didn't run into each other in the bathroom! I wasn't in the bathroom!

Silence. Tom picks up his glass in order to take another sip. Gary takes the glass out of his hand.

Gary: I don't want you to sign it drunk.

Tom: I'm not gonna sign it at all! Read what it says here!

Gary: I wrote it! Don't you get me in trouble now, Tom.

Tom: *I'm getting you* in trouble?!

Gary: I spoke with the Captain, told him what happened and he wanted it in writing. What's written here is what I told him in person. Word for word. Trust me, You'll thank me in a month – and a couple of months after that you'll forget about the whole thing.

Tom: You need to make up your mind: are you a liar or a prophet?

Gary: *(Quietly)* A suspect died on you during a questioning. That warrants an internal affairs investigation. People get kicked out of the force for much less. *(Pause)* No one needs to know that you pushed him.

Tom: What?

Naomi: He didn't push hi...

Gary: *(interrupts her)* You weren't there!

Tom: Neither were you!

Gary: And neither were you! Because if you *had* been there, then you might have pushed him.

Tom: I didn't push him!

Gary: Are you sure about that?

Tom: Where is this coming from?

Gary: I don't know. I wasn't there. I was in the bathroom when it happened.

Tom: You think I push... Naomi?

Naomi tries to speak but Gary precedes her.

Gary: If I were this driver's father I'd have given the world to a lawyer that would destroy you. Why isn't the interrogation on tape?

Tom: You know damn well I don't have to tape it.

Gary: Don't have to or don't want to? Or maybe you *did* tape it and then destroyed it. What happened in there? You're both in the room and suddenly he jumps? What... his conscience tormented him? The conscience of a driver who ran over an old man and then left him on the road to bleed to death?! You lost your temper with him! We all hate the 'hit and run' sons of bitches! Two men, one room, only one comes out alive, who's left? You! You're a suspect now! Your testimony's worth shit... You'll be expelled from the force, sit in jail and pay restitutions for the rest of your life. What are you going to sell? The apartment you don't have?

Tom: *(Hesitantly, to Naomi)* What do you say?

Gary: You fucking coward...

Tom: I wasn't talking to you!

Gary: *(Interrupts him)* Why are you dragging her into this?! This is your shit! I fixed everything for you! Now just sign right here and let's get it over with!

Tom looks at Gary, then Naomi, he hesitates a moment... then signs it.

Tom: Give me a cigarette.

Gary: Did you start smoking again?

Tom: I have now.

Gary: I don't have one...

Tom pulls a pack of cigarettes from Gary's back pocket.

Tom: Liar.

Scene 4

Interrogation room.

Headline: Halloween. Noon.

Tom: The girl, this morning, what was wrong with her?

Ben: Cracked tooth.

Tom: Which tooth?

Ben: Her molar.

Tom: Is this the molar? *(points at his own mouth)*

Ben: On the left.

Tom: What, there's no molar on this side?

Ben: There is, but *her* cracked molar was on the left.

Tom: *(Points to his own mouth again)* This one.

Ben: Yes.

Tom: Why did it happen? The... crack?

Ben: It's very common during Halloween.

Tom makes boxing gestures. Ben looks at him.

Tom: Continue, continue...

Ben: Sometimes there's a nutshell in the treats, or...

Tom: What kind of treats have nuts in them?

Ben: I'm a doctor, not a baker. *(Pause)* Anyway it's irrelevant for the treatment.

Tom: What's the treatment?

Ben: You start by sedating the girl.

Tom: Which means...?

Ben: Making her drowsy.

Tom: Injection?

Ben: Syrup.

Tom: Is that instead of the injection in the... *(Touches his own mouth)*

Ben: That comes before the injection; To help her relax.

Tom: Are all dentists allowed to do that?

Ben: A certified paediatric dentist is.

Tom looks at Ben.

Ben: Paediatric dentist. A children's dentistry specialist.

Tom: And that's you.

Ben: Yes.

Tom: So where did you go wrong?

Ben: I didn't.

Silence.

Tom: *(Takes out a pack of cigarettes)* Would you mind if I smoked, Dr. Mahler? Wait, what am I saying? You're a doctor. Of course you'd mind.

Ben: You can smoke.

Tom: And then you'll screw me over. You'll file a complaint and I'll have a disciplinary hearing. Actually, I quit smoking. I relapsed a few months ago in a moment of crisis. I haven't smoked in a while. *(Pause)* So can I? Just this one? Cigarettes are bad for your teeth, right?

Ben: Your gums, too.

Tom: What's the worst thing that can happen to a smoker in... *(motions at his mouth)* your area? *(Ben is silent)* Come on, doctor, you only diagnose people who pay you...?

Ben: Throat cancer.

Tom: Shit, that's scary. *(Referring to the unlit cigarette he's now placing on the table)* You've turned me off it. Do you see it first or does it hurt first and then you need an x-ray and...

Ben: Yes, you see it first.

Tom: Would you mind, just for a second..? *(He opens his mouth wide and comes near Ben)*

Ben: What?

Tom: Take a peek. Calm me down.

Ben: Give me a break.

Tom: What are you talking about, give me a break? Want me to tell you a story?

Ben: No.

Tom: A true story!

Ben: No!

Tom: *(Ignores him)* A couple of years ago a traffic cop pulls over a driver who was talking on the phone while driving. He asks for her registrations and as he looks over her papers she looks at him and says: "How long have you had that mole on your nose?" As it turns out, she was a dermatologist and she told him he should have it checked out. He did and it turned out to be cancer! They told him that had he come a month later, there'd have been nothing to do about it.

Ben: Did he at least expunge her ticket?

Tom: He sure did. Six months later he was dead. Go trust a doctor. *(Opens his mouth wide)*

Ben: *(Hesitates, then peeks into Tom's mouth quickly and unwillingly)* There's not enough light here.

Tom hurryingly opens a drawer, takes out a small flashlight and hands it to Ben)

Tom: I always keep one here in case a dentist shows up. (*Opens his mouth wide again*)

Ben takes the flashlight and looks down Tom's open mouth.

Ben: Open wider... tongue down... I don't see anything out of the ordinary.

Tom: A filling, a cavity, anything...

Ben: It looks fine.

Tom: Thanks.

Ben: You're welcome.

Tom: What a lovely profession you have, you take one quick look, say a couple of words and I'm relaxed. That's some responsibility, though, right?

Ben: (*Looks around him*) Are we being taped?

Tom: Why, do you want a souvenir?

Ben: Can I please just get one straight answer out of you?

Tom: Yes. (*Pause*) We're not being taped.

Ben: What's this? (*points to a camera*)

Tom: It doesn't work unless you start to record. The law requires that we tape interrogations of suspects whose expected penalty is at least ten years in prison. So should I start taping?

Ben: I want to make a phone call.

Tom: So make it.

Ben: To my wife.

Tom: Whoever you want. Do you have a phone on you?

Ben: Yes. (*Takes out his cell phone*)

Tom: Then make the call.

Ben: Am I only allowed one?

Tom: You can make a hundred calls for all I care.

Ben: (*Hesitant*) I wouldn't know what to say to her... It's not out or anything.

Tom: It might be, I don't know, these days with the internet, everything gets out before you know it.

Ben: She would call me if...

Tom: You're worried about her. That's nice.

Ben: I'd be glad if she didn't know that...

Tom: *(Nods understandingly)* Family is always the hardest. First?

Ben: I beg your pardon?

Tom: Wife. Is she your first or... *(friendly-familiarly)* Because nowadays, you know... in your age, especially if you have money... then out with the old and in with the new and...

Ben: Leave my wife alone.

Tom: I'm sorry.

Ben's gaze locks on one of the ultrasound photos pinned on the cork board behind Tom. It's of a four month old fetus in his mother's womb. Tom notices his gaze.

Tom: Ask me.

Ben: What?

Tom: Come on, ask me what it is.

Ben: It's none of my business.

Tom: That's my son. *(He takes the photo off the board)* Minus five months. Yesterday, after a long, hard search – we located the wiener. *(He shoves the photo in Ben's hand)* Say something, go on.

Ben: It's an ultrasound.

Tom: What did you expect it to be, a day at the beach? He's not born yet! But *already* looks like his old man, right? I can't help myself; I've been showing this off to everyone. You can tell it's my first kid, I've been acting like some kind of... You cool down a little with the second one, right? Say something, go on.

Ben: *(Looks at the photo, uninterested)* Nice.

Tom: Nice? That's it? I'm a police officer interrogating you. A little ass-kissing wouldn't be out of line.

Ben: Very nice.

Tom: Can you take a look at his teeth? Make sure they're all there?

Ben: Give me a break...

The door cracks open a bit, Naomi is standing in the doorway.

Naomi: Excuse me... *(Almost shuts back the door)*

Tom: Naomi! Naomi, come in! *(He pulls her in the room and hugs her)*

Naomi: I'm looking for Gary.

Tom: Come in, come in, go on. *(Naomi walks in. Tom hugs her)*

Tom: I'd like you to meet my wife, Naomi... Commander Naomi Balaban. How does my mother in law call it? (*Caresses Naomi's belly*) This is the oven (*referring to the photo*) and this is the pie! I'd like you to meet Doctor Ben Mahler, paediatric dentist! (*Pause*) An expert in children's dentistry! (*to Ben*) You'll give us a good price if in a couple of years he'll need a.... (*Hinting at the ultrasound photo*).

Pause. Naomi recalls the name from the phone call. She looks at Ben... Tom picks up on it.

Tom: What's wrong, Naomi? You two know each other?

Naomi: No.. I mean, I called Gary earlier and...

Ben: ...I picked up. By mistake. I apologize... it rang while I was waiting for you here.

Tom: What do you need Gary for?

Naomi: Nothing, just some...folder.

Tom: Are you OK?

Naomi: Yeah.

Tom: Don't you work too hard now, you hear?

Naomi leaves.

Tom: My wife. Beautiful, isn't she? She's a little... now, because of the pregnancy, but that's what happens to the body... Not that now she's not...

Ben: I can't figure out when you're being serious and when you're not. And this whole buddy-buddy attitude...

Tom: Not working for you?

Ben: Tomorrow you won't even remember my name.

Tom: I will too. It's because of you I'm calling my dentist now and cancelling an appointment I have scheduled in two weeks, a routine check-up... Isn't that what you gave me before?

Ben: Wait a minute, that wasn't serious...

Tom: What are you saying, that you half assed it?

Ben: I'm not exactly at my best here; I did it under duress...

Tom: So you don't function well under pressure.

Ben: I'm not used to diagnose in interrogation rooms.

Tom: But you did it anyhow! (*Pause*) Do you work alone at the clinic, Dr. Mahler?

Ban: I have an assistant.

Tom: Whose name is?

Ben: Debbie.

Tom's cell phone starts ringing. He answers it.

Tom: Yeah... No, not now. Naomi's looking for you. *(Hangs up)*

Ben: You even have the same ringtone.

Tom: Who?

Ben: You and... Gary.

Tom: How did you know it was Gary?

Ben: Your wife said before that she was looking for Gary.

Tom: What's it got to do with what we're talking about?

Ben: What are we talking about?

Scene 5

Tom and Naomi's living room.

Headline: Four Months before Halloween.

Tom is sleeping on the couch, drunk. It's obvious that Naomi and Gary have also had a lot to drink, but not as much as Tom. They both stare at Tom sleeping.

Naomi: *(Referring to the report)* Thanks.

Gary: What do I do with it?

Naomi: Send it.

Gary: And what if he changes his mind on me all of a sudden?

Naomi: You said you'd already talked with the Captain, that you'd already told him that... You never did...

Gary: Not yet.

Naomi: It has Tom's signature on it.

Gary: Mine too.

Naomi: So send it. NOW. We have a fax machine here.

Gary: *(Getting up)* I'm off.

Naomi: Are you good to drive?

Gary: I'm with my squad car. *(Naomi laughs a little)* Are you just gonna leave him here like that?

They both start at Tom, then at each other.

Naomi: Feel like helping me out a minute?

Gary walks over to Tom, who's spread across the couch.

Gary: Commander Balaban!

Tom wakes up, dazed and confused, looks at Gary confusingly.

Gary: Gary? Remember?

Tom: What are you doing here?

Gary: Long story. Let's get you to sleep.

Gary starts dragging Tom to the bedroom.

Tom: One more sip.

Gary: No.

Tom: One more!

Gary: No!

Tom: Give me a kiss, then. *(Purses his lips)*

Gary: Get off me, you creep!

Tom: Kiss!

Gary kisses Tom on his cheek.

Tom: *(Sticks his tongue out)* With tongue.

Naomi laughs.

Gary: Shut up, shut up. Come to bed, come on!

Gary somehow manages to drag Tom toward the bedroom. They both exit the stage. Naomi is left alone in the living room, smiling to herself. She pours herself a drink and drinks it. We can now only hear Gary and Tom from the bedroom, off-stage. Naomi overhears the dialogue and responds accordingly. At first, it makes her laugh.

Tom: *(Offstage)* I wanna pee.

Gary: Stop it. Lie down.

Tom: Wee-wee!!

Gary: Then go pee!

Tom: I can barely stand... Push me...

Gary: Push you where?

Tom: To the wee-wee!

Gary: No way in hell.

Tom: Push me, you little pisher!

Gary: Go in the bathroom and take out your own little pisher...

Naomi can hear their footsteps, the opening of the bathroom door; it's not so funny anymore. She takes another drink. She continues to overhear their dialogue:

Tom: Where is he?

Gary: Who?

Tom: My little pisher, I don't know where he is.

Gary: That's enough, Tom, just stop it.

Tom: I'm gonna pee in my pants... help me...

Gary: Do you want me to get Naomi?

Tom: No! You!

Naomi can hear the sound of Tom peeing and his sigh of relief. It's no longer funny to her. She takes yet another drink.

Tom: *(Peeing, relieved)* Ohhhh...

He finishes peeing and flushes the toilet. Gary comes back from the bedroom. He sits down, pours himself a drink and drinks it.

Naomi: Is he asleep?

Gary: Fast asleep.

Naomi: I'm sorry.

Gary: *(Starts to head out)* I'm off.

Naomi: I want you to fax it. *(Drinks)*

Gary is nearly out the door.

Naomi: You can't drive now. You've been drinking.

Gary: I'm a police officer. With a squad car and flashing lights.

Naomi: *(Laughs a little)* It was awfully sweet, the way you put him to sleep.

Gary: I'm his friend.

Naomi: You're my friend too, right?

Gary: Do you want me to put you to sleep, too?

Naomi: Fax it first.

Gary is close to her, starts to head out the door.

Naomi: Give it to me then. I'll fax it. *(Looks through his pockets)* Where is it? This pocket? *(Touches him)*

Gary: *(Pushes her hand away)* That's enough.

Naomi: *(Touches him, playful)* Or this one... Or this one...

She touches him again, this time he's not so quick to push her away. Naomi starts to tear up.

Gary: Naomi...

Naomi: Gary, please...

He can't resist her tears, caresses her face.

Gary: Don't cry.

They kiss.

Naomi: *(Whispers)* What are we doing?

They kiss. It's a long kiss. They fondle.

Scene 6

Interrogation room

Headline: Halloween.

Tom: What's that on your hair, Dr. Mahler?

Ben: You've already asked me that.

Tom: And you didn't give me an answer.

Ben: It's from the hair-spray, I put it on at Halloween... I mean, my young patients like it when the doctor... for Halloween... It calms them down a little. Kids don't like dentists either.

Tom: Why "Either"? Who else?

Ben: Adults. In general, people aren't too crazy about dentists.

Tom: Is that right? That's strange. I have nothing against dentists. *(Pause)* Do you put the hair-spray on at home, before you go to work, or do you put it on at the clinic?

Ben: I only do it at Halloween.

Tom: You already said that. What I'm asking is whether you put it on at home or at the clinic.

Ben: At the clinic.

Tom: When does the parade begin?

Ben: *(The question surprises him for a moment)* What...? *(Tom is silent, Ben glances at his watch)* Is there any chance I can still make it?

Tom: Don't you want to go to the hospital? See how the girl's doing?

Ben: Listen, I'm not the monster here. I drove to the hospital with her, they told me to come here and answer a few questions... What else should I have done?

Tom: I know you gave her CPR at the clinic. It's in the paramedic's report. I don't really understand about these things. Maybe you did what's right, maybe you didn't. I don't really understand about these things.

Ben: Then perhaps someone who *does* understand should interrogate me!

Tom: The officer who specializes in interrogating dentists who put little girls to sleep and then can't wake them up didn't show up for work today, Dr. Mahler.

Silence.

Ben: You don't really care about what happened there.

Tom: Why would you think that?

Ben: Because you're asking these... random questions. It seems to me that they dropped this boring dentist case on you and...

Tom: Maybe not. You're a fascinating case.

Ben: So you're enjoying this.

Tom: I'm trying to understand why you screwed up.

Ben: I didn't.

Tom: A kid is lying on your chair and thirty minutes later she's in ICU, if that's not screwing up – what is?

Ben: Can I call my lawyer?

Tom: Yes! Yes! For the third time: Yes! Just call him already and let's get this over with! Why haven't you called him until now?

Ben takes out a cell phone, presses one of the buttons long and waits. He reaches the voicemail.

Ben: *(To his cell phone)* Hi Eddie, it's Ben. Please get back to me as soon as you get this message. It's urgent. *(Hangs up)*

Tom: You have your lawyer on speed dial, just like the felons.

Ben: He takes care of my business... I just bought a house, contracts, paperwork...

Tom: Eddie Binstock?

Ben: How did you know?

Tom: I'm a police investigator, I know a couple of lawyers. Don't you know anyone who specializes in medical malpractice?

Ben: No.

Tom: How come? You're a doctor.

Ben: I've never been accused of medical malpractice before.

Tom: Who told you you're being accused of medical malpractice now?

Ben: What are accusing me of, then?

Tom: I'm an investigator. An investigator investigates. He doesn't accuse. Where did you buy a house?

Ben: What's that got to do with anything?

Tom: I'm asking you where you live, if you don't wish to answer then...

Ben: Here, in Philadelphia, in Society Hill.

Tom: An apartment or a townhouse?

Again, Ben lingers then finally answers the question.

Ben: A townhouse.

Tom: Why did it take you so long to answer?

Ben: I don't know. It suddenly felt like... Never mind.

Tom: Like what? Come on, Ben, tell me. May I call you Ben?

Ben: Like... the rich doctor facing the broke cop.

Tom: Do I look broke to you?

Ben: (*Embarrassed*) No... I mean... I didn't mean that...

Tom: (*Cuts in*) Then why did you say that? (*Ben is silent, Tom is yelling*) Why did you say that, Dr. Mahler?

Ben: I don't know, OK? I just did! It came out! You pressured me and it just came out!

Tom: So you *did* mean it!

Ben: I did, I meant it, OK? I meant it!

Tom: But a second ago you said you didn't mean it! Think before you speak, Dr. Mahler! It's important that you understand that everything you say here can be used against you in...

Ben: (*Interrupts him*) Weren't you supposed to tell me that in the beginning?

Tom: I'm not supposed to tell you that at all. That's in the movies.

Ben: Do I have the right to remain silent?

Tom: How much does a house in Society Hill go for these days?

Ben: I refuse to answer this question.

Tom: (*Laughing*) You're like a baby, you know that? You see a toy called "the right to remain silent" and you just have to play with it... Man, just like a baby... (*Remembers*) "And then a police officer came..." (*Laughs*) You're a child!

Ben: (*Bursts*) A shitload!! OK??!! A house there costs a shitload of money!! And I have a new car, too! An Audi! My wife, too! And a motorcycle! And a country club membership! And I go abroad with the kids every year! And ski in the winter and a small apartment by the beach... (*Pause*) Why are you doing this to me?

Tom: Because I think that a man who makes in a day twice what I make in a month should take responsibility.

Ben: I am.

Tom: You could lose your license. Do time in prison.

Ben: No.

Tom: If this little girl dies that's negligent homicide. Three years inside.

Ben: I wasn't negligent.

Tom: Possibly manslaughter, too. That's twenty years inside. Her parents will sue the hell out of you, you'll be doing time, how will you be able to pay damages?

Ben: I refuse to answer any more questions that aren't directly related to what happened in my clinic this morning.

Tom: All my questions are directly related to what happened in your clinic this morning.

Ben: Oh, yeah? How much money I make? And if I bought an apartment or a house? What does that have to do with it?

Tom: Plenty... plenty... You have so much to lose, Dr. Mahler... You spent years in school, then building a career, investing in a clinic, wife, kids, a big house... You'll never give all that up. And that's why you're standing here, lying, and not telling me what happened in your clinic this morning.

Silence. It's interrupted by Ben's cell phone ringing on and on... the ringtone is Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You".

Tom: Why don't you answer? It could be Eddie Binst...

Ben: It's my wife.

They're both silent. They let it ring till it stops.

Tom: Are you feeling OK? You look a little pale... Dr. Mahler, are you OK?

Ben: I just remembered how I know you... You had some guy die on you...

Tom: A suspect, yes. You're not gonna have a heart attack now, are you?

Ben: It was on the news a few months ago... Did it happen in here?

Tom: *(Pointing to the barred window)* He fell from there. Tried to escape. There were no bars on the window then.

Ben: You made him nervous.

Tom: Yup.

Ben: Just like you're making me right now.

Tom: *(As if offended)* Am I making you nervous?

They both laugh, letting off steam, there's a sense of intimacy.

Ben: Did they do anything to you?

Tom: It's allowed to make a suspect feel nervous during an interrogation.

Ben: I asked if they did anything to you.

Tom: For what? For him trying to escape?

Ben: Still, the man died. *(Pause)* How did that make you feel?

Tom: Not good.

Ben: Not good?

Tom: Not good... not good! Imagine I'm stepping out of the room to go to the toilet for five minutes, and when I get back the room is empty, you're gone, the window's open, I look down and see my new friend, Dr. Ben Mahler, splattered on the ground. It's tough.

Ben: There are bars now.

Tom: Hanging from the phone wire, from your belt, with your fingers jammed in the socket... If someone wants to die, they usually succeed.

Ben: Didn't you say he was trying to escape?

Tom realizes he misspoke.

Tom: *(Confused for a moment)* What? *(Ben is silent, pause, then Tom pulls himself together)* He was alone in here. I guess we'll never know.

Silence. Ben looks at Tom a while.

Ben: Is that why you started smoking again?

Tom: *(Surprised)* Man, you're good... How did you know?

Ben: You said you went back smoking a few months ago, over a crisis.

Tom: You're amazing! Yes, the answer is yes. I went back smoking the day it happened. Say, did you ever consider becoming an interrogator? The money's awful but it's super satisfying.

Ben: What did he do?

Tom: Hit and run. Ran over an old man. He deserved to do some time, but not to die.

Ben: Did you get suspended?

Tom: No, but I thought about handing in my resignation.

Ben: Really?

Tom: It was some crisis... I almost broke up with my wife.

Ben looks at Tom a while and smiles.

Tom: What?

Ben: *(Smiling)* I'm trying to figure out whether you're the good cop or the bad cop.

Tom: Why are you being cynical?

Ben: I get exactly what you're trying to do here. Bonding with me... pretending to open up... what I don't get is why you're trying so hard... *(He suddenly comes to a realization)* Am I the first one? I'm your first suspect since then! Of course! An ideal case! A non-threatening, non-complicated doctor...

Tom: *(Laughing)* Now who ever said dentists were stupid?

They keep interrupting each other.

Ben: Then that makes me your correction...

Tom: Yes...

Ben: I'm your correction?!

Tom: That's right!

Ben: No!

Tom: Why not?

Ben: No!!

Tom: I'm post-traumatic, I have to prove to myself and to my bosses that...

Ben: I will not be your therapy!

Tom: But you're a doctor!

Ben: Go get some treatment!

Tom: Fine.

Ben: Go take some pills! I demand that they send a normal investigator in here and have him ask me some proper questions... A child is in the hospital, dying...I could have stayed with her instead of... You hang me out to dry for an hour... and now you.... And my son's waiting... If I'd had another investigator I'd be on my way to the parade right now!

Tom: And if that little girl had had a different doctor she'd *also* be on her way to the parade right now. Do you have a lover, Dr. Mahler?

Ben: I want someone else in here.

Tom: *(Comes close to Ben, acting like his buddy)*... Debbie... your dentist assistant... how old is she? ...Is she hot? Come on, you can tell me, it's between us... off the record...

Ben: I want another investigator.

Tom: You'll get one. I promise. But he'd also want to know what happened this morning, Dr. Mahler. You arrive at the clinic, you take off your shirt, ask Debbie to come and spray you...

Ben: What are you talking about?

Tom: Didn't you?

Ben: No! I put it on myself! I specifically told....

Tom: And you didn't take off your shirt?

Ben: No! You're making this stuff up!

Tom: Then how come your shirt's so clean...There isn't a drop of that green paint on it... When you spray your own hair then the shirt collar gets a little dirty, at least. Just so you know.

Long pause.

Ben: My wife sprayed it on me.

Tom: when?

Ben: Last night.

Tom: So it's not to make your little patients happy.

Ben: No, I went... to a party... with my wife. A Halloween party.

Tom: Nice...

Ben: So she sprayed it on me... I didn't really want it, but she did anyway. I'm not a huge fan of these parties...

Tom: Did you drink while you were there?

Ben: A little.

Tom: What's "a little"?

Ben: A little.

Tom: And you drove back home.

Ben: My wife did.

Tom: Because you were drunk. A joint?

Ben: What?

Tom: You heard me. Did you smoke at the party?

Ben: I don't smoke.

Tom: That's not what I asked! I asked if you smoked at the *party*! A joint, hash! Pot! Halloween!

Ben: No! I didn't smoke! I don't smoke!

Tom: What didn't you smoke?

Ben: Pot!

Tom: So there was pot at the party!

Ben: I don't know!

Tom: You didn't see any? Didn't smell?

Ben: I don't know about these things...

Tom: You were in high school once! A student! Friends! You mean to tell me you've never smelled a joint in your life?

Ben: I'm not talking to you anymore! I want a different investigator!

Tom: No problem. *(Shouts at the door)* Gary!

Scene 7

Morning. Interrogation room.

Headline: 4 Months before Halloween.

Tom is in the room, Gary enters.

Tom: Good morning.

Gary: I thought that you wouldn't be coming today.

Tom: Did you stay over late last night?

Gary: Until three, I think...

Tom: I woke up for a second...at 5am. Naomi wasn't in bed yet.

Gary: Maybe she fell asleep in the living room. She had some to drink.

Tom: I thought I heard your voice. Naomi never falls asleep in the living room.

Gary: It could have been five when I left...

Tom: It must have been three when I woke up. *(Pause)* Thanks, anyway.

Gary: Thanks for what?

Tom: For staying. It would have been wrong leaving Naomi alone in that state.

Silence. Gary can't figure out whether Tom knows something or not. He changes the subject.

Gary: It's tough for you, being here... You can ask for a transfer. Even a temporary one.

Tom: Remind me again what it was I signed last night.

Gary: There's a copy of the report in...

Tom: *(Interrupts him)* I don't want a copy. I want you to remind me. I was confused, drunk, so drunk I even heard your voice in my house when you were already gone. So please, remind me.

Gary: You interrogated him here, you went to the bathroom and when you got back he was trying to escape.

Tom: And you and I saw each other in the bathroom.

Gary: That's right.

Tom: What were we doing there?

Gary: *(Defiantly)* Playing chess!

Tom: Taking a piss!

Gary: That's right, Tom. We were taking a piss.

Tom: In the urinals!

Gary: Yes! In the urinals!

Tom: Why didn't we use the stalls?

Gary: I prefer a urinal. It doesn't stink as much. Apparently you do, too. Any more bowel movement habits you'd like to share this fine morning?

Tom: There are *two* urinals in the bathroom, one which has been out of order for the past two weeks. There's a big "Out of Order! Do Not Use!" sign on it. So what were we doing there? Crossing streams?!

Gary: When you came in I'd just finished. I went over to wash my hands when you came in.

Tom: Was there any paper?

Gary: What?

Tom: Paper towels. In the dispenser. Were there any?

Gary: There were.

Tom: They always run out in the morning. Some days they don't even put them there. So you're saying there were.

Gary: You're interrogating me.

Tom: While we were there, did we discuss anything in particular?

Gary: Stop interrogating me!

Tom: Did we or didn't we?

Gary: I don't remember!

Tom: How come you don't remember?! It happened yesterday! *(Loudly)* Or maybe it never happened at all... Maybe we never saw each other in the bathroom, me and you...

Gary: Fuck you, OK? *(He grabs Tom and mutters quietly)* It's thanks to me that you're not sitting in front of an Internal Affairs investigator right now, so say thank you and shut up!

Tom: *(Interrupts him)* If I were an IA investigator right now, I'd find you not only a liar, but an idiot, too!

Gary: *(Quietly)* I sent the report half an hour ago. So if you go down, I go down.

Gary lets go of Tom and starts heading out the room, only now Tom grabs him. He expresses both suppressed violence and pleading at the same time.

Tom: Gary, don't go now... please... you got me into this, so...

Gary: Got you into this? Got you into what exactly?

Tom: What did we talk about, Gary...?

Gary: I don't remember...

Tom: Try! Because if they interrogate us, that's exactly where they'll try to get us – the little details!

Gary: I don't remember!

Tom: But I do! Oops! I remembered! We were talking about that new duty officer. I said I thought she was hot and you said that you'd already asked her out for a cup of coffee...

Gary: There's a new duty officer?

Tom: Or maybe we talked about Naomi.

Gary: *(Wants to get the hell out of there)* We didn't talk about Naomi...

Tom: Oh, that's right! We talked about your mother's pussy, Gary!!

Gary tries to release himself from Tom's grasp, but Tom keeps tightening his grip.

Tom: If you don't know how to lie, don't lie! What happened last night?

Gary: *(Alarmed)* What?

Tom: At my house. What happened?

Gary: I don't know what you're talking about.

Tom: You're getting nervous... It makes me nervous that you're getting nervous... because I think something happened and I want you to tell me that I'm wrong. That it didn't happen... So please tell me that it didn't happen.

Gary is silent. He tries to hide his panic.

Tom: Did we kiss? Did you and I kiss?

Gary starts laughing with embarrassment. Tom lets go of his grip.

Tom: Just please tell me it didn't happen!

Gary: It did.

Tom: (*Horried*) We kissed?!

Gary: You asked for it.

Tom: And I got it?

Gary: You asked for it!

Tom: Get outta here!

Gary: On the cheek!

Tom: (*Calms down*) On the cheek.

Gary: On the cheek.

Tom: No... (*Wiggles his tongue*)

Gary: (*With disgust*) No.

Tom: And we weren't in the bathroom together either, me and you.

Gary: Again with the bathroom?

Tom: I'm talking about last night.

Gary: We were.

Tom: What were we doing there?

Gary: I helped you pee.

Tom: you sick pervert!

Gary: You asked me to! You called it...

Tom and Gary together: Little Pisher!

Tom: Oh, man! It's coming back to me...! Shit! Why on earth would I come up with that?

Gary: How should I know?

Tom: (*Suddenly serious*) Did you touch it?

Gary: Come on...

Tom: What "come on"? I Want! To know! If! Some guy! Touched my...

Gary: (*Interrupts him*) Some guy?! It's me! Gary! Your pal of twenty years! Some guy??!!

Tom: Don't tell me I hurt your feelings...

Gary: Sure you did! 'Some guy' he calls me...

Tom: *(Laughing)* We're like a couple of chicks...

Gary: You started it.

Tom: And then what?

Gary: What then what?

Tom: After we didn't kiss and you may or may not have touched my... What happened then?

Gary: You passed out on the bed.

Tom: And you went back to the living room.

Gary: Yes.

Tom: And stayed up with Naomi.

Gary: Yup.

Tom: Talking.

Gary: Yeah.

Tom: What about?

Gary: That's none of your business.

Tom: She's my wife.

Gary: And she's my friend just like you're my friend. I don't run and tell her everything we talk about.

Tom: Why not? You're so close...

Scene 8

Tom and Naomi's house.

Headline: Two Months Before Halloween.

Naomi: The guys at the station keep asking why you don't show up for work.

Tom: Who's asking, Gary?

Naomi: He's asking, too.

Tom: Why won't he ask me himself?

Naomi: Because you're not there! It's been almost two months now.

Tom: He can't pick up the phone, my buddy, my pal...

Naomi: I don't want to talk about Gary right now.

Tom: Doesn't he care about what's going on with me?

Naomi: I don't want to talk about...

Tom: *(Interrupts her)* What do you want to talk about, Naomi?

Naomi: You can ask for a transfer. Even a temporary one.

Tom: Gary told me the exact same thing...

Naomi: *(Interrupts him)* I said I didn't want to talk about Gary!

Tom: *(Interrupts her)* Word for word! Are you two getting your stories straight?!

Naomi: A driver hits someone, gets arrested, tries to make a run for it, falls and gets killed. Call it karma, poetic justice, crime and punishment; call it whatever you want... you've been paying for it every minute since. You don't need IA in order to pay for it.

Tom: I've never heard of a judge sentencing a criminal to a year of guilty conscience.

Naomi: You're not a criminal.

Tom: There were marks on his car... there were witnesses... Even without a confession it would have been an open and shut case... but the ego... Tom Balaban doesn't close a case without a confession from the suspect... He's not gonna let some loser threatening to kill himself spoil his party. You know what? At least he got his punishment. Better – he chose his own punishment.
(Pause) Do you love me?

Naomi: Yes.

Tom: Why?

Naomi: Stop it.

Tom: It won't be easy once everyone finds out.

Naomi: finds out what?

Tom: What happened in there. It'll be rough on you, too.

Naomi: How will they find out?

Tom: I'm gonna tell them.

Naomi: Tell them what? That you lied? Tom, they closed the case... and Gary...

Tom: I thought you said you didn't want to talk about Gary.

Naomi: He signed off on it.

Tom: My signature is on it before his!

Naomi: What are you going to say? I faked an alibi? Punish me? Why?!

Tom: Because my conscience is killing me.

Naomi: *(Laughing)* Who's gonna believe that? Tom, they'll think you've lost your mind.

Tom: Why... What's so funny? I said conscience... I'm talking about morals... You're acting like I told a joke... What's so funny?

Naomi: You just love feeling like a saint... digging your own grave...

Tom: Well, I've earned it. That's what we do. All our lives we dig graves, burying people alive! End their careers, too! Send them to jail! They cry, puke, wet themselves! We show them photos of their children, of their old parents... of an entire world we completely destroyed for them just to get the truth out of them. I lost my right to do that. *(Pause)* How long does it take to say "he's dead"?

Naomi: What do you mean?

Tom: Naomi, how long does it take to say "he's dead"? You walk in the room, you ask Gary to step out for a minute and then he comes back in - alone. Are you with me so far?

Naomi: I just didn't want to be the one to...

Tom: Yeah, yeah... It was hard for you to say that the suspect was dead. It took you over three minutes to tell that to Gary. Why? *(Pause. He's taking time on his watch)* "He's.... dead...." *(Stops the timer)* Five seconds. Barely. *(She's quiet)*.

Naomi: What's your question?

Tom: What were you saying to him while you two were huddling behind the door? *(Naomi's silent)* Come, I'll help you remember. When Gary comes back from your little talk he's distracted... confused... like his mind is somewhere else... Then he suddenly decides that I wasn't in the room when the suspect jumped. *(Naomi is silent)* And then, when *you* come in, your eyes are red from crying. Why were you crying, Naomi? *(Naomi is silent)* Why were you crying?

Naomi: ...Because he wouldn't at first. I had to beg him to get you out of this mess, have him come up with an alibi for you for the moment he jumped... I went down on my knees, I begged, I cried...

Tom: So this was your idea.

Naomi: Is that "I love you" enough for you?

Tom: When were you going to tell me about this?

Naomi: When you've cooled down a bit... when you've snapped out of...

Tom: And you're still lying...

Naomi: I'm not lying, I...

Tom: No, that shock on your face then... when I told you what really happened – that wasn't a lie?!
Neither was your silence when Gary made me sign that sham document.

Naomi: It was all for you...

Tom: You're so... ugly all of a sudden.

Naomi: Don't say that...

Tom: And repulsive... I can see you crying... on all fours... in front of Gary...Selling me out... making me this small, and I'm a few feet away, beyond the door, at a complete loss... the two of you behind my back... *(Pause)* How do I go on with you from here, Naomi?

Long silence.

Naomi: I think I'm pregnant.

Scene 9

Interrogation room

Headline: Halloween.

Tom: Gary!

Gary walks in.

Tom: I want you to hop over to... *(Turns to Ben)* What's your address?

Ben: *(Nervous)* Why?

Tom: *(Dials his phone, then speaks to the person on the other side)* Hello, I'd like the address for Doctor Ben Mahler... in Philadelphia.

Ben: *(Increasingly nervous)* I'll tell you myself, but what...

Tom: Shut up. *(To the phone)* No, not you, sorry... *(To Ben)* Not only are you making me look like an idiot...

Ben: 305 Walnut street...

Tom: *(Listens on the phone)* Yes, I'm writing it down. 305 Walnut street. Thank you. *(Hangs up the phone. To Ben)* ...But you're forcing this department to make unnecessary expenses. *(To Gary)* It's 305 Walnut street in Philadelphia, look for... *(To Ben)* What's your wife's name?

Ben: Why do you...

Tom: *(To Gary)* Mrs. Mahler's good enough. *(To Ben)* Maybe she'll be able to remember whether or not there were drugs at the party. *(To Gary)* Tell her her husband's under arrest and bring her down here.

Gary: How urgent is this?

Tom: Very. And head up there with a police squad and flashing lights. I need this answer fast, and if the neighbours ask, just tell them that...

Ben: *(Trying)* She's not home right now...

Tom: If Mrs. Mahler isn't home, wait outside until she comes back. And be gentle, there are children there. *(To Ben)* Am I doing OK?

Gary starts heading out the door. Ben stops him and turns to Tom.

Ben: There were!

Tom: *(Ignores Ben, to Gary)* You're not there yet?

Ben: I'm telling you there were drugs at the party! She doesn't even know I'm here, she'll get hysterical if a police car shows up our driveway. There were drugs! There were!

Tom: *(To Gary)* Would you go already!

Ben makes one last desperate attempt; he gets up, grabs Gary and physically prevents him from leaving.

Ben: *(To Tom)* Your wife called him! *(To Gary)* You caught me with your cell in my hand! You were angry with me! *(To Tom)* Your wife thought she was talking to him!

Gary: *(Pushes Ben away from him)* Who are you?

Ben: *(To Gary)* We met here earlier! *(To Tom)* I told you... He was the one who came in here before you!

Silence. Tom looks at Gary, then at Ben, then back at Gary.

Gary: *(On his way out)* When do you finish up here?

Tom: Why?

Gary: I need to talk to you.

Tom nods slightly and Gary turns to leave.

Tom: Gary?

Gary stops. Looks at Tom with concern.

Tom: Don't go to his house just yet.

Gary exits.

Tom: What was that about just now?

Ben: I told you... your wife called him, Naomi Balaban! I saw her name on the screen! I answered... she thought it was him and just started talking!

Tom: (*Quietly*) All I asked was whether or not there were drugs at the party - and you go and turn it into a soap opera.

Ben: I told you. There were.

Tom: Twenty Four hours after using a narcotic substance, a person is still legally considered under the influence.

Ben: I didn't smoke any.

Tom: At what time did the girl take a seat in your clinic, Dr. Mahler?

Ben: (*Pause*) Around ten.

Tom: At what time did you and your wife leave the party?

Ben: We left at around five.

Tom: Five AM.

Ben: Yes.

Tom: How long a drive is it from the party to your house...?

Ben: Twenty minutes.

Tom: So I wouldn't be completely wrong if I said that you went to bed at around six AM.

Ben: No.

Tom: No?

Ben: No, you wouldn't be wrong.

Tom: Did you have sex?

Ben: What?!

Tom: You're after a party, booze, drugs... you get in bed... it makes perfect sense that...

Ben: What business is that of yours?

Tom: It's my business to know when you fell asleep.

Ben: I was already asleep by six!

Tom: At what time did you arrive at your clinic this morning, Dr. Mahler?

Ben: ...Nine.

Tom: You had your first patient at nine.

Ben: Nine fifteen.

Tom: So that means you got up at...eight? Eight fifteen? Two hours' sleep? Help me out here, I suck at math.

Ben: There's no law that tells me when to go to sleep before... Do you know what kinds of operations people do at night? In ICU? Doctors who haven't slept a wink in twenty four hours...

Tom: They weren't smoking pot before that.

Ben: How would you know...?

Tom: And if they did, would they admit to it?

Ben: Are you insane?!

Tom laughs. Ben realizes he slipped up.

Tom: You couldn't even wash your hair properly.

Ben: I didn't even really try! I honestly thought that if I had on a little costume, the kids... they'd die laughing.

Tom: And if not die, at least get into a coma.

Pause. Ben starts to realize his miserable situation. He's on the verge of bursting into tears.

Tom: Let's say there were a good cop and a bad cop here. The good cop would tell you: Don't worry about it, Ben, everyone smokes today, it was just a hit, a little one, just confess and we'll get this over with. However, the bad cop would say: maybe it wasn't just pot that you were smoking. Maybe you did some coke as well, maybe popped a little ecstasy... Maybe you're a junkie! But the cop that doesn't lie is telling you that if it's proven that you did drugs a couple of hours before you put that little girl to sleep, you'll be getting out of jail when she graduates from college. That is, of course, if she ever wakes up.

Scene 10

Tom and Naomi's house.

Headline: An hour before the interrogation. Halloween.

Gary walks in.

Naomi: Hi. Tom's at the station.

Gary: I know.

Naomi: He called me. Said he was going to interrogate some doctor, that he's playing that waiting game with him. You know his tricks...

Gary: He told me.

Naomi: What?

Gary: How far along are you? Naomi, the pregnancy, how far along?

Naomi: I'd like you to leave.

Gary: It fits.

Naomi: I didn't invite you here.

Gary: Whose is it?

Naomi: Gary, I'm asking you to leave.

Gary: Naomi, whose baby is it?

Naomi: Mine.

Gary: And...?

Naomi: Go away.

Gary: Do you remember what happened here?

Naomi: I'll forget it and so will you.

Gary: Whose is it?

Naomi: Tom's.

Gary: How do you know that?

Naomi: I just know.

Gary: How?! Did you two have sex since then?

Naomi: That's none of your business.

Gary: Damn right it's my business! *(Pause, and then quietly)* You disappeared on me, Naomi...

Naomi: I had some vacation days, sick days... I preferred to stay home.

Gary: And when you finally came to the station you made sure it wouldn't be during my shifts.
(Pause) How come I lost both of you in this ordeal?

Naomi: You're the one who stopped coming by.

Gary: What happened between us... for me... it didn't start then.

Naomi: But that's when it ended. If it weren't for this baby...Tom and I might not have... I don't know whose baby this is... It could be yours, could be his, I don't know.

Gary: When will you know?

Naomi: Never.

Silence.

Gary: And Tom?

Naomi: In a few months he'll be the happiest man in the world.

Gary: We'll take a test after the baby's born. We'll find out who his father is!

Naomi: His father is Tom!

Gary: End it.

Naomi: End what?

Gary: The pregnancy! These things happen. He won't know a thing. I'll go with you. I'll pay for it, we'll do whatever it takes. Tom would ask you for the same thing if he knew that...

Naomi: Tom will never know! Do you understand that, Gary? Never!

Gary: *(Violently)* You will end this pregnancy! You don't want to live with this lie... raising a child you have no idea who...

Naomi: I do have an idea. It's either you or Tom.

Gary: That's it? No more options?

Naomi spits in his face.

Naomi: Get out of here.

Gary: I'm waiting for him right here and we'll both tell him what happened.

Naomi: You'll go to jail!

Gary: What will I go to jail for?!

Naomi: For forcing me!

Gary: What are you talking about?!

Naomi: I didn't want to sleep with you!

Gary: You wanted it just as much as I did! You initiated it!

Naomi: Sure, I agreed to have sex with you in here while Tom was sleeping in the next room...

Gary: You didn't AGREE! You wanted it! I wanted to go...

Naomi: Yes, I wanted you to stay a while so we could talk, but then you jumped all over me...

Gary: You hugged me... you wouldn't let me move an inch!

Naomi: That's not how I remember it.

Gary: It doesn't matter what you remember!

Naomi: The hell it doesn't!

Gary: And all of a sudden you remember everything!

Naomi: It's all coming back to me now, thanks to you!

Gary: Why didn't you scream for help?! Tom was asleep in the next room!

She cuts in. They start yelling at each other simultaneously.

Naomi: Yeah, totally drunk, passed out, and from out of nowhere you start touching me! Shoving! Undressing me! You said I owed you for what you were doing for Tom! And now... why are you here all of a sudden? What are you even doing here?! Want another go, do you...?

Gary exits.

Scene 11

Interrogation room.

Headline: Halloween – the interrogation.

Tom is holding the ultrasound photo.

Tom: (*Holding the photo*) I'm so scared, Ben... I'm terrified... I'll be a father soon, in a couple of years if he has a problem with his teeth I'm bringing him to you... Please say something to calm me down...

Ben: It's very rare, what happened...

Tom: But you were fine! You did everything by the book, you said you made no mistakes... then... what... how?

Ben: I don't know... I started the sedation and then I noticed that her oxygen level started dropping...

Tom: And by then it was too late.

Ben: It wasn't. There's an antidote.

Tom: A cure.

Ben: Yes. To undo the effect of the syrup.

Tom: Is that what you did?

Ben: That's what I did.

Tom: Who else was in the clinic beside you and the girl?

Ben: My assistant, Debbie. She can confirm the...

Tom: (*Interrupts him*) We'll talk with Debbie the assistant as well. So you give him the antidote...

Ben: You mean 'her'...

Tom: Sorry, I'm all in the... (*motions at the ultrasound*) You give the girl the antidote...

Ben: And she's unresponsive.

Tom: And then?

Ben: I tell Debbie to call an ambulance.

Tom: Tell or yell?

Ben: Tell, I mean...

Tom: Tell or yell?

Ben: I tell her loudly, what's the difference?

Tom: Maybe you panicked, maybe you were hysterical, you weren't at your best. You've been drinking, smoking, had only a couple of hours' sleep...

Ben: I wasn't hysterical.

Tom: You also didn't deny smoking just now.

Ben: I didn't smoke.

Tom: Doesn't this kind of case calls for an emergency medical transport?

Ben: Of course it does, that's what I told Debbie.

Tom: You just said you told her to call an *ambulance*.

Ben: Well, clearly that's an emergency medical transport!

Tom: Clear to who? To Debbie?

Ben: Yes! The fact is that that's what she called for and that's what's arrived!

Tom: Conclusion number one: Debbie did a good job! (*Claps his hands*) Bravo, Debbie! Despite you telling her to call an ambulance, she knew what it meant and called...

Ben: You're twisting my words!

Tom: I'll twist whatever it takes for you to take responsibility over your actions while that little girl is seizing in your chair!

Ben: So I said ambulance... I was stressed and...

Tom: A second ago you said you weren't stressed.

Ben: I said I wasn't hysterical.

Tom: You were neither – you were high!

Ben: No!!!

Pause.

Tom: Why did it happen?

Ben: What?

Tom: The girl's reaction to the syrup.

Ben: May I have some water?

Tom: Give me an answer first.

Ben: There could be a million reasons... innate sensitivity, a medication she's on...

Tom: Why did the babysitter bring her specifically to you?

Ben: Because the babysitter's one of my regular patients.

Tom: If the girl had been one of your regular patients, would you have known about her sensitivity?

Ben: Of course!

Tom: You see her for the first time, don't you bother to ask?

Ben: I did! The babysitter!

Tom: A sixteen year old girl!

Ben: There was no one else there! The little one is twitching in pain! What could I have done? Call her parents in London?!

Tom: You're asking *me*, Dr. Mahler?

Ben is exhausted. Tom walks over to the cooler. The cooler is as annoying and unresponsive as always. Tom pours a glass of water and hands it to Ben.

Tom: Will you be willing to take a test? Easy to spot a hit from a joint in a urine test.

He takes out a plastic cup from the desk drawer, puts it on the desk and turns to the door.

Ben: Don't you want to know what she told him? She was certain it was him... I was here by myself... His phone rang... it was your wife... I answered... she thought it was Gary... Started talking straight away... *(Pause)* Nothing was taped here... you didn't take any notes... *(Crying)* Let's just forget about last night's party... the pot... we never even talked about it... I have two little kids... *(Touches the plastic cup)* Put this back... and I'll tell you what your wife said.

Tom: You've got five minutes.

Scene 12

Inside the men's bathroom at the police station.

Tom walks in the bathroom. Only here, on his own, can he fall apart. He washes his face in the sink. He turns to the paper towel dispenser. It's empty. It's the last straw. He snaps and hits the dispenser again and again, first with his hand, then starts kicking it with rage. Gary walks in and looks at Tom, letting his rage out on the paper towel dispenser... Tom notices Gary looking at him.

Tom: Why aren't there any paper towels in here?

Gary: I want to talk to you about Naomi.

Tom: Did something happen?

Gary: I went over to see her earlier...

Tom: Why?

Gary: That night I was at your place...

Tom: What night?

Gary: That day your suspect killed himself.

Tom: *(Interrupts him)* Killed himself?

Gary: Yeah, killed himself.

Tom: I don't remember a suspect killing himself. I remember a suspect falling to his death trying to escape while I was *here*, in the bathroom.

Gary: You weren't here.

Tom: Yes I was! With you! We were talking.

Gary: Forget about that now...

Tom: There's a report, Gary, you should read it.

Tom starts heading out, Gary stops him.

Gary: Wait a minute.

Tom: I've got that doctor in the room, the one who...

Gary: He can wait.

Tom: He's alone in there!

Gary: He'll wait!

Tom: Wow! Just like then! Me pushing a suspect to the edge, leaving him alone, coming here, we meet...

Gary: We never met here! You were in the room! He jumped right in front of you! And that's why I came over to your place that night...

Tom: Wait a minute... sure, sure... I remember... sure I do! I was drinking, I was totally shitfaced.

Gary: That's right, we all drank. Naomi, too...

Tom: Naomi wasn't there.

Gary: Yes, she was.

Tom: *(After a pause)* That was some night, huh?

Gary: I want to tell you what happened that night...

Tom: Gary, I know. I know everything. *(Pause)* Naomi's the one who came up with the idea that we met here in the bathroom. I know. She begged you... and you've always had a little crush on her...

Gary: That's not what I'm talking about!

Tom: What difference does it make what you're talking about? You'll say something now and tomorrow we'll decide you didn't say it! We'll decide we were never even here!

Tom starts walking out, Gary grabs him.

Gary: Listen to me!!

Tom: He's alone in there... *(Heads out the bathroom, Gary blocks him)* He's finished...

They talk over each other and struggle.

Gary: There are bars there...

Tom: He's on the edge...

Gary: You thought it was strange Naomi fell asleep in the living room... You asked me what time I left...

Tom: *(Tormented, crazed)* Why is there never any paper in here... We give our lives... we literally live here... so how come no one makes sure there are any paper towels in here?! *(He slams the paper towel dispenser)* Paper towels!! Fucking Paper towels!!

Gary: It fits...

Tom: And the urinal... *(Points to a nylon wrapped urinal, on which a hand written sign says: 'Out of Order – Do Not Use!')* How long has it been like this?

Gary: Maybe I....

Tom: How long does it take to fix one fucking urinal?!

Gary: It fits. Naomi's four months preg...

Tom: Shut up!! Shut the fuck up!!

Tom Lets go of Gary and exits.

Scene 13

Interrogation room.

Ben is in the room. Tom walks in. His altercation with Gary in the bathroom is still obviously affecting him. Tom looks at the plastic cup placed on the table. It's full. Tom's exhausted, he plunks to his chair, lights up a cigarette and smokes.

Tom: You're free to go.

Ben hesitates... he gets up and starts heading towards the door.

Tom: Dr. Mahler.

Ben stops. Tom gestures with his head at the plastic cup.

Tom: Take it with you.

Ben: What?

Tom: You heard me.

It takes Ben a long minute to realize that Tom has let him go... He returns to the table and takes the plastic cup.

Ben: Don't you want to know what she told him?

Tom keeps smoking. He doesn't respond.

Scene 14

Epilogue.

Ben talks to the audience.

Ben: Twenty four hours later the girl woke up. A couple of days after that she was released home with a clean bill of health. My actions were deemed proper and the case was closed. I fulfilled the promise I made to my son, to take him trick or treating, exactly one year later. We were standing there, looking at the clowns and the giant balloons when I saw him, commander Balaban. He was there with his wife, carrying a little baby in a carrier. I was thinking whether or not to approach him when our eyes met... I walked up to him and said hello. He replied with a kind of hello that had a question mark at the end of it so I said: "It's me, Ben Mahler, the doctor you interrogated exactly one year ago today..." He nodded his head meaning that he doesn't recognize me... he then said he'd quit the force about a year ago... I showed him the green spray in my hair... "Remember? I put this on at Halloween, for my little patients..." I told him his baby was cute and that he looked a lot like him... that's when his wife intervened, grabbed him by the hand and started walking away from me, as if... as if I never existed.

Curtain.

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