

Elka's Gold

By Yosef Bar Yosef

Translated by Binyamin Shalom

Characters:

Elka Vlad – merchant selling antique furniture, gold, etc.

Orka – her eldest son

Pesach – her younger son

Lilly – Orka's wife

Malia – A young single mother

Buyer

Place:

Jaffa.

The play takes place mainly in Elka's store for antique furniture, and in the street right in front of the shop. The shop is rather roomy and serves as a warehouse as well.

Next to the desk there is a little refrigerator. The back door leads to Elka's apartment, which is attached to the store. Deep inside the store, up high, there is a window that looks out on the stairs, which lead outside up the side of the store to the main entrance to Elka's apartment.

One scene takes place during the night not far from the store, in the street beneath Malia's window.

Act 1

Scene 1:

(Nighttime. The store is closed and the light is low. Elka sits by the desk, making calculations with a little hand-held calculator, until she falls asleep. Orka enters from the back of the store, from the apartment, with a travel bag. It is also possible to have him enter from the street via the stairs that lead to the apartment, where he disappears for a moment before reappearing in the store at the back. He sees Elka and approaches her with some concern, about to reach out to touch her. Then she starts laughing in her sleep and even begins screaming, and he relaxes. He turns from her towards the depths of the store. Pesach enters from the back, and Orka remains in the shadows. Pesach sees Elka and approaches her with the same concern).

Elka: (waking up) What's up? It's no longer allowed to fall asleep for a moment in your chair? I'm not dead yet, it's not gonna happen so quickly.

Pesach: Is it your diabetes...?

Elka: No, something else, no big deal. This doctor, the pills that he's giving me... they take away the pain but they take your strength away too. (Wishes to rise, but has some difficulty doing so) You'll come with me tomorrow to this old aunt, you'll meet this girl, this relative of hers, you hear me?

(Pesach makes no reply).

What, are you going to find a woman on your own? You can't even make an omelet on your own.

(Pesach makes no reply).

You want to have children, don't you? At the mere sight of a baby it's like your face is shining. In order to have a kid, though, you've gotta have a woman. Just like when it comes to a table or a chair – you gotta have a carpenter, no?

(Pesach makes no reply).

And a livelihood... what will you do for a living? I'm not gonna live forever. You're no good for this kind of work, buying and selling. You're too good for it. What'll you do?

(Pesach wishes to make some sort of reply).

Speak.

Pesach: I'll find a job doing what I do, I'll work in carpentry.

Elka: Really? You'll work on the same chair for a month? Somebody's gonna pay you? You think everyone is your mother, huh?

(Pesach wishes to make some sort of reply).

Really? Finally you have something to say and you don't even want to say that?

Pesach: Rachamimov.

Elka: I'm sorry, what did you say?

Pesach: Rachamimov from the antique shop.

Elka: Continue, I'm listening.

Pesach: He wants me to work at his store, with antiques, he said so himself. He knows I work slowly. He saw the cabinet that I refurbished.

Elka: (gets up and makes exaggerated motions as though she was dancing for joy) I'm so happy, so very, very happy, really, really!

Pesach: Stop it.

Elka: Why? My son's doing fine, he found himself some decent work, just like his older brother who went over to America. Great! What, should they stay on in this store selling alte sachen? That's why they have a mother who can stay in alte sachen, she's got enough energy. She has some pain? So what, let her take her pills, what does she need kids for? Maybe I'll take all the pills altogether and fall asleep and never wake up again, that would be the best. You won't even know anything about it, you'll be over in America.

Pesach: I'm not going to America, it's just Rachamimov, right around the corner.

Elka: Really? I'd already forgotten. That's true, Rachamimov is right near by, that's good. My son'll go work for Rachamimov, my biggest competition, that's the best thing.

Pesach: He's not competition for you, he sells antiques, it's something else.

Elka: Me I just sell shmataz, that's what you really want to say. Your beautiful brother is speaking out of your mouth. When are you gonna start working for him? Tomorrow morning? Maybe you already got started yesterday? What are doing going all quiet on me all of a sudden?!

Pesach: You're just talking in the air. It's not a current offer, you know that.

Elka: Not a current offer...? Listen to him going on, just listen to him! He's started working in antiques and now he's all intelligent to boot.

Pesach: I wasn't talking about taking work now, I was talking about what I'd do afterwards, after...

Elka: I get it, after I die, that's what you mean. That's something else, that's actually really nice. Now I know what to look forward to, my own son just waiting for me to die. Everytime I'll forget my impending death I'll just look in my son's face and see it written in his every expression. Yeah, I'll see my own death in his eyes.

(Pesach turns to go).

Wait a second!

(Pesach stops).

He's just messing with your head, Rachamimov, just in order to piss me off, don't you get it?

Pesach: (playing along) Got it.

Elka: Got what? Say what's on your mind, speak.

Pesach: He's just messing with my head in order to piss you off. (Turns to go).

Elka: (sitting down meanwhile) Come over here a second, sit down.

(Pesach sits down reluctantly).

You're your own landlord, your own storeowner, this business here is yours, you don't have to go working for any Rachamimovs. We just have to find you a suitable wife. Not like that widow, you saw what happened to her in the end? That young girl living with her aunt, she's just right for you, just right for the business. I'll teach her the ropes, I'll show her how it's done. She'll be responsible for buying and selling, and you can just work at your own sweet pace on the carpentry that you so love. That way you can live securely, in peace. And so can I. And there'll be gold too. When you really need it. Better that you don't, though. A man always has to have something on the side, tucked away, something he never touches ever.

(Pesach turns to go).

Wait a second. I got a letter from my brother today, your Uncle Yaakov. He's entitled to half the gold, you know. When he comes to Israel he's gonna get his half, remember that!

Pesach: Fine. (Turns to go).

Elka: What are you running away for? Our gold... you're not some beggar from nowhere, you come from a respectable family. Tell your kids about it too. Just like I used to tell the two of you. You used to fall asleep in the middle, with the nightlight on your face. You remember?

Pesach: Yes.

Elka: What do you remember, tell me, speak up.

(He makes no response).

I told you the story so many times, can't you tell me the story for once?

Pesach: (sitting down and beginning to tell the story after a pause). You had some gold in the family before the war. A lot of gold. Then the Germans drew close so the whole family went out to hide the gold. So that everyone in the family would know – whoever survived. You were a good family. So you went to the graveyard, the best hiding place. Your father wanted to bury it under his mother's tombstone, right underneath the head. But your mother said that wasn't a good spot because they would turn all the tombstones over. She had a good head on her shoulders.

Elka: That's true, I take after her. Continue... (nodding until she falls asleep outright).

Pesach: (continuing) So your father found a little tree among the tombstones, a sort of bush. There were a few like that then. He dug underneath the tree and put all the gold in there and covered it up. Look at this tree, he said, remember it. It was dark but you all remembered, and how! And when the war was over there was only you and your brother, our Uncle Yaakov... (checks that she's sleeping and exits).

(Orka steps out of the shadows and approaches her, bumps into something and Elka wakes up from the noise, takes up a stick and approaches him).

Orka: With a stick? Thought it was a thief? And what if it was? You still have the old strength in you?

(Elka makes no reply and puts down the stick).

What did I hear just now? You're suddenly taking some new pills?

Elka: Who told you?

Orka: The cats. They reported it in the news on the radio.

Elka: You stood over there in the dark and heard everything. That's how you always were and that's the way you'll stay. On the sidelines, in the dark.

Orka: (opening the refrigerator) Same thing, ice cream, first aid for you, huh? With the waffle cones...

(Elka closes the fridge).

Don't you want to ask me what I'm doing here? I'm supposed to be in New York right now, in New York. Don't you wanna ask me what I'm doing here, how I got here?

(Elka makes no reply and sits down in her seat by the desk).

What, you don't have a house anymore, a bed? You have to sleep in the warehouse with all the shmataz, and... yeah, there's always been a chair like that with three legs. You've decided to become the night watchman here? What is there to steal anyway?

Elka: You're not going to get a single piece of the gold.

Orka: Finally you speak up. The gold, sure, not gonna get any of it...! And here I was sure that you're gonna give it all to me at a moment's notice, without my having to ask for it altogether, you'd understand on your own that I need it. And you'll give it to me, just like that, the same way you pour salt into the soup. Just like that, real simple, 'cause I need it. I really need it this time, Mom, I need a lot.

Elka: (laughing) Beautiful, he comes back from America to look for money in Jaffa.

Orka: You find that funny... you're laughing...

Elka: Of course I'm laughing. So what? You think I'm like you? How did something like you come out of me altogether? That's the way you were born, not screaming, not laughing, not crying. Even when you began to speak – yeah, you started speaking just fine, thank God – but you said everything with your mouth closed. I had to pry your mouth open with my fingers, just like that, in order to see how many teeth you had.

Orka: Like a horse.

Elka: You think you scare everybody with that closed mouth of yours.

Orka: Sometimes the ladies like it.

Elka: You can fool them all but not me. Gonna be thirty-five soon and you're still just playing mind games.

- Orka: I really need it this time. It's the opportunity of a lifetime. It's a great find, with a Russian engineer from Israel – I met him over there. He's not gonna wait for me for too long.
- Elka: Sure, somebody like you...! Has to go over to America, can't just live in peace in one place, like a drugged rat.
- Orka: It's a guaranteed profit. We'll finally buy you a decent apartment. Who still lives these days in the market, in the ass of his own store? We'll turn this warehouse into an antique store, for Pesach.
- Elka: Ga-ga, ga-ga! Like geese, just muttering, that's all you know how to do.
- Orka: What were you dreaming before? You were laughing in your sleep.
- Elka: What else do you want from me? That's why the night falls, so we can sleep and scream peacefully in a bed, without anyone asking you any questions.
- Orka: I didn't ask what you were screaming about, just why you were laughing.
- Elka: Let my dreams live in peace.
- Orka: I remember you fell asleep in the afternoon once, right here on your chair. I was scared, I thought you had fainted, from your diabetes. Then you started screaming in your sleep and I calmed down. If you're screaming it's a sign that everything is fine and you're just sleeping.
- Elka: Go home. You have a good wife, she'll be there waiting.
- Orka: Sure, watching television.
- Elka: (in sudden anger) You don't like her, huh? What love...! Who told you that you've got to love her? She's your wife – what, do you love your own hand? Where'd you get all these ideas about love?
- Orka: What are you talking about love for all of a sudden? Who said anything about being in love or not? I'm exhausted. (he sits down on some old sofa but the springs pop) What was that? Anywhere you sit down in here, the springs just pop underneath you.
- Elka: (gets up and turns to leave) Come on already, enough.
- Orka: (sitting back down in the same spot) I'm comfortable right here.

Scene 2:

(The next day, early afternoon, in the store. Lilly is sitting facing the television which is on. Orka and Pesach are by the piano, with Orka playing harmony and Pesach playing rhythm).

Orka: (while playing) Same piano, same false notes in the same exact spots.

Lilly: Can't be. They sold that one.

Orka: Same false notes (stops playing).

Pesach: Am I not playing alright?

Orka: You're fine. I just don't feel like playing anymore.

(Pesach keeps playing rhythm).

(approaching an old safety deposit box off on the side) Since when is this safety deposit box here?

Lilly: It's been awhile already, nobody wants it, it's too big.

Orka: (to Pesach) Could be a good spot for her gold. Did you ever look inside?

(Pesach keeps playing rhythm, a little louder now).

You're angry at me already. I'll play with you another time.

(Elka enters from the street, carrying heavy baskets of food, breathing heavily, holding on to something. Pesach and Orka hurry over to help).

Elka: (trying to hide her exhaustion, to Pesach) Playing in the middle of the day...! Your older brother I expect it from – now you're taking lessons from him. Why don't you go finish with that chair instead! (almost falling down).

Orka: What happened? Come on, sit down. (leads her to her seat).

Pesach: Her blood sugar level.

Lilly: I'll get it... (she steps over to the fridge and starts filling a cone with ice cream).

Orka: You still go walking all the way over to the market to buy things cheaply.

(Lilly hands Elka the ice cream cone. Elka licks it hungrily).

On purpose, sure. You go out to the market and you also don't eat properly. Just so you can fall down from your diabetes and faint, so you can eat your ice cream right out of a cone.

(The Buyer approaches meanwhile and stands facing the doorway of the store).

Lilly: (towards The Buyer, directed at Elka) That's the customer from this morning, he wanted a fridge, now he's changed his mind.

Elka: (directed at The Buyer, while licking the ice cream) Just like that? You've come back?

The Buyer: No, sorry, my mistake... (turns to go).

Elka: (rising in his direction, still licking the ice cream) Sure, run away, ` escape, go hide!

Orka: Hold on a second, first relax a little bit.

The Buyer: Yeah, fine, I'll be going... (turns to go).

Elka: (calling after him, still eating the ice cream) Yeah...? You're going...? You're running away...? Nobody gets away from Elka! Ask anyone in Jaffa, they'll tell you. Nobody makes a fool of Elka, sealing a deal and then changing their minds! Rust...? What, did I sell you a new fridge? Why didn't you notice it beforehand? Why did you agree and let me carry it the whole way, just to clean it up? What am I some little girl?

The Buyer: No, I didn't... (disappears, exits).

Elka: (calling after him, still at her ice cream) No...?! I'll show you no! Anyone who starts up with me ends up meeting his maker! You'll atone for all the pansy soldiers in the Israeli army! (now directed at the people who have begun to gather out in the street – directed at the audience in the theater) You too... what are you all looking at?! Sit there and stare until your eyes pop out, all of you! (to Pesach who is following her as if to stop her) Yes? And what do *you* want?

Pesach: What are you screaming about? He's not here anymore, he left.

Elka: Really? Smart man!

Orka: It's all my fault, she's yelling at me. (to Elka) Isn't that right?

Elka: Another wise guy!

Orka: (laughing) Watch it, your ice cream... you're screaming like they're leading you to the slaughter with that ice cream in your hands.

Elka: (licking the ice cream and her fingers) The two of you together... You don't like the scenes I make, huh? I'm embarrassing you, your own mother, huh? Because of the scenes I've made the two of you got to eat chickens at my house while everyone else was just eating egg powder. And with my shmataz. That's the way our lives our, dirty old alta sachen, rusty refrigerators, dressers, beds even, even the three-legged chair. Today they buy and tomorrow they sell at a profit. And with what's left they buy gold. No investments, no great finds that Russians made over in America, just gold!

Lilly: (off to the side, quietly) Nobody said anything bad about gold just now.

Orka: Mom is still busy fighting from yesterday, not today. It's something I said yesterday.

Elka: Gold is clean, yeah. Gold doesn't get embarrassed because of its mother. Gold doesn't make fun of its mother. Gold doesn't suddenly leave its wife and run off to America. (yelling outside once again) Run away, go, run off! I finished off much smarter men than you for breakfast! A Romanian, a Ukrainian, even a German... I crossed swords with all of them! (directed at the people in the street and the audience) I'll finish you all off too! (without missing a beat, handing a piece of paper to Orka) This is the address of some old woman who wants to sell her entire house, she's headed off to an old age home. Go visit her, see what all the fuss is about.

Orka: Already...? I still haven't really adjusted to returning home yet.

Elka: So? You've already started eating like you're adjusted. I've got two boys – one takes a whole year just to fix a single chair, and the other, all in the space of one year, manages to start learning medicine and quit, starts learning architecture and quits, starts learning filmmaking and quits. Does it really take a full year to quit so many things?

Orka: Three years, and that was a while ago, what did you forget? (Turning suddenly to the safety deposit box, walks around it).

Elka: Congratulations, you know how to count to three. (directed at Pesach) At least this one starts working on a chair and finishes it off. May take a year but at least he finishes what he started.

(Malia approaches meanwhile in the street with her baby, stops near the doorway and bends over the child, taking the blankets off him. Pesach approaches her).

Malia: (to Pesach) He's too hot, he's sweating. Let him be free to breathe, isn't that better?

Pesach: Sure.

- Lilly: (directed at Elka, who is staring in that direction) That's the one I told you about, with the baby and no father. This is already the second time that she's starting with Pesach like that.
- Malia: (to Pesach) I can't understand myself. Why did I put all those blankets over him altogether, huh?
- Pesach: I don't know.
- Malia: For no reason, just because that's what you're supposed to do to babies, cover them up in blankets, right?
- Pesach: Maybe... yeah...
- Malia: Oh what a mess things have become for me here. (taking the baby from the stroller) Could you hold him for a second?
- Pesach: Me? You'll let me hold him?
- Malia: What's the matter? Are you gonna kidnap him? Beat him?
- Pesach: (chuckling) No.
- Malia: You have a nice laugh. Here. (handing over the baby) Is he too heavy for you?
- Pesach: No, not at all.
- Malia: He weighs about twelve pounds, you know. Twelve pounds of iron or potatoes would be heavier for you, right?
- Pesach: What...? I think so, yeah.
- Malia: (arranging the stroller) That's how it is with babies, you don't really feel their weight. To say nothing of when he's smiling at you, then it's like you're not even holding him and you're walking on wings. Such sweet faces, just seeing him smiling at you makes you want to smile too. The truth is that there are even men who look at him and say: what a baby, so sweet! But the real truth is that they're eating me up with their eyes. Especially when I'm nursing him, then it's like milk and meat together. (laughing) That's a good one, no?
- Pesach: What...? No... yeah... I don't know.
- Malia: Hey, you're blushing.
- Lilly: What's so surprising? It's not just some baby.
- Malia: What do you mean it's not just some baby?

Lilly: You know, don't you? It's not like you're hiding anything, you yourself tell everyone that you're not married, that the child has no father.

Malia: (having finished arranging the stroller, turns to take the baby from Pesach, kisses the baby, laughs) Did you hear? I don't try to hide you...! What are you, some sort of lice that I should try and hide? And if I have no husband are you any less beautiful because of that fact? Just hearing you muttering in the middle of the night – it's the voice of angels, a honeyed voice, like pineapple. You know what this baby has done for my soul?

Elka: (unable to restrain herself any longer) Enough, Miss, enough! (to Pesach) You've got work to do, come on.

Malia: (only now seeing the inside of the store) Hey, do you guys sell refrigerators? I'm looking for one desperately. Our fridge burned out, all the food inside is getting ruined.

Lilly: (inside the store, to Elka) She'll buy, she'll pay well, a woman like that. I'll take care of her. (leading Malia into the store) Here, have a look...

Malia: All these? I just need a single fridge.

Lilly: Take this one, it's excellent, I almost took it for our house. It's cheap too, only five hundred.

Malia: Can I check it out?

Lilly: Sure.

Malia: (with the child in her hands, turns to Elka, handing him over) Hold the baby for me for a moment, okay?

(Elka stares at her, as though in shock).

What are you all scared of, you never held a baby in your arms?

Lilly: You're asking if she ever held a baby in her arms? She...

Elka: (silencing her) Shh... enough! (to Malia) We don't sell refrigerators. Please leave, go buy from someone else, the flea market is full of them.

Malia: Why? Just a second ago you wanted to sell me one. I want to buy here, nobody can tell me not to. You run a store, you have to make a sale. How much did you say before?

Elka: Seven hundred.

Malia: (taking out her wallet, laughing) Myself I just sold one like this for fifty. Pretty funny, huh?

Lilly: (half-questioning) Funny...?

Malia: Oh the work that I have to do just to earn this seven hundred! And what work it is – my jewelry – it's just expenses. You could even say I pay them so that they'll agree to let me make my pieces.

Pesach: (to Elka) Lilly already quoted her a price of five hundred.

(General shock. They all stare at him. Orka starts to take interest in what's happening, while still checking out the safety deposit box).

Malia: Hey, that's true. (to Lilly) That's what you said.

Lilly: I didn't know the price. It's a special refrigerator. Even seven hundred is a special price, because of the baby.

Pesach: (to Malia) I saw a refrigerator at the neighbor's for three hundred, in good condition too.

(General shock once more. Elka sinks down into her chair).

Malia: (not sensing the shock, turning to everyone) Thanks a lot. It's pretty unusual that one store should send you over to the other.

Lilly: I'm not sure the neighbor carries the same quality.

Elka: The neighbor carries better stuff.

Lilly: Sure, I see.

Malia: (putting the baby down in the stroller, about to leave, then stops and stares at everyone) Who are you?

(General shock once more. Orka forgets about the safety deposit box, walks over to the piano, begins to play).

Lilly: What do you mean? We're family. This is the mother and these are the children...

Malia: Children...?

Lilly: Yes. (to Pesach) This is my brother-in-law. (to Orka) And this is my husband...

Malia: What are you all doing here?

Lilly: What's the question? We're selling things.

- Malia: All of you?
- Lilly: Yes.
- Malia: (towards Orka) Even the one playing music?
- Orka: Even the one playing music.
- Malia: I'm heading home. (makes a mistake and heads deeper into the store).
- Elka: Where...?
- Malia: (spotting the little window overhead) What's this? God, how beautiful the sky is through this little window up there. I didn't notice the sky outside at all. Strange, huh? As if you have to get stuck in some little corner somewhere in order to notice the sky altogether.
- Elka: (taking Malia in her arms) Go someplace else, okay? Go out to the promenade, there people look at the sky all the time.
- Malia: You don't suddenly stop and look at the sky sometimes?
- Elka: Tell me, are you sick or something? All of a sudden you're asking me questions.
- Malia: How did you know? The truth is I am a little bit sick, I woke this morning with a little bit of a cold, even fever, maybe I still have it.
- Elka: If you're sick then go visit your mother. I've got enough to take care of with my own idiot children. I sell refrigerators and ovens, I don't sell pieces of the sky, you follow? I leave the sky alone up in its lofty place there. Sky seems to do just fine without me. (leads her outside).
- Malia: (stopping) I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel like I'm choking. (grabs her neck with her hand) Hey, where is my necklace?
- Lilly: You had a necklace – a gold one?
- Malia: Yes, I don't really care for gold, but this particular piece I really liked. (looks for it for a moment, then stops) The truth is that I have to go lie down.
- Lilly: (softly, in shock) You're just going to leave, you're not going to look for it? A golden necklace...?
- Malia: (to the baby in the stroller) Come on, let's go home. (exits with the stroller).

Lilly: (already searching for the necklace, directed at Elka) I'll find it, I'll give it to you. She lost it in the store, and this is your place. Somebody like her doesn't deserve to have her necklace returned, it's not enough that she loses it, she doesn't even want to go looking for it.

(Pesach also looks around a bit, though without letting anyone notice that he is looking).

Elka: (turning to close the doors to the store) I'm not going to work today. (directed at Orka, who is sitting at the piano) I sent you to go look for merchandise at the old lady's place, what are you doing playing around on the piano! Back and forth, back and forth. If you've already gone away what are you doing back so soon?

Orka: Thanks, Ma, good question.

(The Buyer enters).

Elka: Close the doors, we're not open the rest of the day!

The Buyer: Don't you recognize me?

Elka: I'm not making any more sales today to anyone – doesn't matter whether I recognize you or not!

Lilly: He's the one with the refrigerator...

Elka: (to the Buyer) What do you want? You changed your mind and ran away, didn't you?

The Buyer: (having difficulty saying what he has to say) All your scandals... all your curses... You can curse like that in the Carpathian Mountains, in Siberia! This is Israel here, a modern country.

Elka: That's what you came for?

The Buyer: I'll take the refrigerator, I'll buy it.

Elka: Do it quickly, I'm tired.

The Buyer: You cursed me, you said: you'll have to deal with the angel of death. You said: you'll be atonement for all the soldiers in the Israeli Army. Take it all back, cancel the curse!

(They stare at him).

What are you looking at? A modern man doesn't have to be afraid of curses, sure. But when we get sick then we're not so modern anymore. I had three heart attacks, I've got enough to be afraid of without this.

- Elka: (softly) I'm no witch.
- The Buyer: They say all sorts of things about you. In my condition it's best to take all possible precautions.
- Elka: Leave me in peace.
- The Buyer: I'm begging, here, take the money, take it... (sticks it in her hand) And say exactly what I say: I take back and cancel all the curses that I placed on you.
- Elka: I take back and cancel all the curses that I placed on you.
- The Buyer: (reaching out his hand) Goodbye.
- Elka: (without taking his hand) Goodbye.
- The Buyer: Not like that... (squeezing her hand) You have to say goodbye with a handshake... really... why don't you want to? You didn't really cancel them in your heart, huh? Your heart wasn't in it?
- Elka: (shaking his hand) May you stay healthy.
- (The Buyer sits down).
- Why'd you sit down? Now you're also gonna die on me, huh? Go get a porter.
- The Buyer: (looking around) My mother had furniture like this. Her place had the same smell too. (rising) I'll take the fridge another time. I don't feel all that well, feel a little weak. Like I don't have blood inside, just some weak tea of some sort. (exits).
- Elka: (Sinking down on her rocking chair, then rising in anger) Sell this chair already! You think it's a chair so you sit down and then the springs pop. (sitting down on another chair) My head is spinning. What a mess all of a sudden, it starts with refrigerators and then... Him with his curses, her with her baby and the sky.
- Orka: She asked some pretty good questions. Who are you...? Sellers...? All of you...?
- Lilly: You told her that you're also in the business.
- Orka: When facing the enemy you have to show a united front, no?
- Elka: Ah, a real wise man! (towards Pesach) And you too! Suddenly everyone, even my children and the very refrigerators are all waging war against me. Some days are like that, just rotten. You can throw

out a rotten tomato but a rotten day clings to you. (with The Buyer's cash in her hand) Where did I get this money from?

Lilly: You forgot, it's his money...

Elka: Look at this. Stuck the cash in my hand and disappeared. Now I owe him. I hate owing people. And I hate sick people, they infect you. (to Orka) What are you doing banging around there? What are you opening some gypsy café here? (stands up shakily, rocking back and forth).

(Pesach just then finds the golden necklace and hides it in his hand, and when he gets up he sees Elka rocking back and forth. This scares him).

(holding on to something, directed at Pesach) It's nothing, I'm fine.
(Takes some pill from her pocket) Bring me a glass of water, okay?

(He doesn't move).

What are you just standing there for? You scared? What are fainting on me? I just don't feel all that great and you... don't worry, I'll find you a wife before I die.

(Pesach turns away from her).

(seeing his closed fist) Wait a while, come over here a second.

(He approaches).

Open your fist. My own son doesn't make any fist in my face.

(Pesach opens his fist and the necklace is in his palm).

Her necklace, you're hiding it from me.

Lilly: How, when did he find it?

Elka: That woman!

Orka: What are you so angry about? You were also a mother with babies, without a father, screaming all the time...

Elka: A woman with a baby who lets anyone at all hold the baby is not a mother for me. A woman with a child who throws away her own gold is also not a mother for me. It's like throwing out her last piece of bread, like she's abandoning it in the street so anyone can grab it.

Orka: These days nobody kidnaps kids, and there's no such thing as your last piece of bread, either.

Elka: Idiots, you're all blind.

Lilly: I could tell right off that she wasn't okay in the head. Talking like that, trying to make an impression, but she doesn't even have any nails left. She chews her fingernails down to the flesh. I heard about someone who ate her nails, chewed them right down to the end and then she even started eating the flesh beneath the nails. She couldn't restrain herself. In the end her fingers started rotting and they had to remove half of them.

Orka: Enough, alright?

Elka: I'm not working today, that's it. (closes the doors).

Scene 3

(Nighttime, with the streetlamps lit. Same place. Pesach is standing there with the baby stroller. He is playing with the baby in the stroller, getting down on all fours and barking like a dog, then bellowing like a bear, laughing with the child. Elka enters from outside. He falls silent.)

Elka: What's this?

Pesach: What...?

Elka: (towards the baby) This...

Pesach: A baby.

Elka: Really? You think I can't tell that it's a baby? What's this supposed to mean, that's what I'm asking.

Pesach: The baby.

Elka: That's just it, the baby! Now at least you're telling the truth, the...! You're already acting like it's yours. And if it's yours then it's mine too. This woman... it's not enough that you go round to see her, fixing things for her in her room, but she even has to come to see you here. Just waiting for me to go out for a second, and wham, her baby's here, this hooligan comes into my house like it's part of the street.

(Pesach laughs).

You find it funny, you're laughing.

Pesach: I told her to come in, she was passing by in the street.

Elka: How about me, you think that everyone who offers me to come in gets a visit? And she just leaves the baby behind and goes out dancing.

Pesach: She didn't go dancing.

Elka: Now you even know where she's headed, and what's worse, you believe her.

Pesach: I asked her to leave the baby with me.

Elka: I've got nothing to say, you've certainly learned how to speak. You're even speaking in tongues these days. (towards the baby) With him, I heard. (barks like a dog then makes sounds like a bear, sits down) Sit.

(He remains standing).

You know where I was...

Pesach: Yes.

Elka: How come you're not asking anything?

(He says nothing).

She's a good girl, just what you need. Meet with her a second time, then decide. Just one more meeting...

(He makes no reply).

What don't you like about her – she isn't beautiful enough, huh?

(He makes no reply).

I'm talking to you, I'm still alive, I'm not dead yet. Answer me, she's not beautiful enough?

Pesach: She is.

Elka: She is what? What do you mean 'she is'?

Pesach: She's beautiful.

Elka: Beautiful...?

Pesach: Beautiful – why not?

Elka: Just like that, why not?

Pesach: Just like that, why not.

Elka: So what, then? She's not good enough? Not smart enough? Maybe you don't like her leg, she's a little bit lame. Is that a problem? So what if she's missing a centimeter on one leg. Better to be with a woman who has nothing wrong with her but her entire insides are rotten?

Pesach: It doesn't bother me that she's a little lame.

Elka: So what, the fact that she's an orphan bothers you? On the contrary, that's even better. We'll become her family, she won't have another family to run away to when things get tough.

Pesach: I don't mind that she's an orphan.

Elka: What does bother you?

Pesach: Nothing bothers me.

Elka: Great, so that's it, get married!

(Pesach turns away from her to face the stroller).

You don't love her, huh? That's the thing. You too, you imitate your older brother just like a monkey – monkey see, monkey do. The best thing you can do is take a woman that you don't really love. You have to treat a woman like merchandise in the store. The idiots that come in here and see some rag and get all excited: that's it, beautiful, I love it! Immediately I double the price on them. They love it? Let 'em pay for it. When I want to buy something I spit on it, tfu! That way I only pay half. Love is like a carton of rotten cheese, you give it out to different people and they have to eat it. The more you eat, the more you love, the more you suffer, and she'll even love you less. Let her be the one in love, just live for your own pleasure! Take a woman like taking medication, so you have to, that's it, use your brain.

(Pesach turns to leave with the stroller.

Where are you going?

Pesach: We're finished talking aren't we?

Elka: I haven't finished, come over here.

Pesach: (turning towards the child, despite her) He made cocky. Gotta clean him up.

Elka: The fact that your mother is calling means nothing to you, huh? But some little kid's cocky is calling and you're off and running.

Pesach: What do you want from me?

Elka: This isn't the right woman for you, she's like poison, can't you tell?

Pesach: What are you talking about?

Elka: You think I don't see what's happening? You need a real woman, not some girl who talks all sweet and is worth nothing. It's like butterflies are coming out of her mouth, all color and no intellect. I mean look at the way she let us trick her, she had to run to you for salvation, so you could take care of her. You need someone who's gonna take care of you. And she throws away her gold. She'll throw all your gold away, she'll lose it all.

(Pesach seems like he wants to say something).

You have something to say?

Pesach: No, never mind.

Elka: Maybe you need this baby? The baby's not yours, nobody knows who the father is, even she doesn't know, I'll bet. A used child, that's what you want...?

(Pesach stares at her).

What are you looking at? You're looking at me like you want to kill me.

Pesach: Let me pass.

Elka: You're not bringing a thing like that into my house. Alte sachen from the street get put in the warehouse, not inside, not in my house.

Pesach: It's my house too, isn't it? Maybe it's not my house. Maybe you want me to just leave?

Elka: Leave, that's what you want. Go marry her, go live someplace else with her. You'll also go work somewhere else, with Rachamimov. Is that what you want?!

Pesach: Let me pass. (exits with the stroller in the direction of the house).

(Elka remains alone, sits down with some difficulty, as she is in pain. There's a knock at the door and she opens for the Buyer, who looks very pale.)

The Buyer: You don't recognize me? I was in the hospital. Do I look that bad?

Elka: I'm not the emergency room at the hospital. The store is closed.

The Buyer: There was a light on. There's never any light in any of the stores in the market at night.

Elka: What, am I not allowed to have a light on in my store? What do you want?

The Buyer: I wanted you to know that I didn't die. My refrigerator, I'll take it. Don't sell it to anyone else.

Elka: I won't sell it, now leave.

The Buyer: (About to leave, turns around) Can I see it?

Elka: What's there to see? It's a refrigerator.

The Buyer: I want to see it. (enters) Which one? I don't remember.

Elka: This one.

The Buyer: (inspecting it) Yeah, full of rust.

Elka: Enough, go home.

The Buyer: Home? (turns to go, stops). They gave me a day out at the hospital. (exits).

(There is knock at the door of the store, but Elka does not open up).

Malia: (Enters with a suitcase and a small bunch of flowers). Hello.

Elka: What is this your place that you come on in without permission?

Malia: Excuse me...? Oh, sorry, I knocked three times.

Elka: So I knocked, so what if you knocked – I didn't open for you.

Malia: I'm really sorry. I left my baby here with Pesach, where is he?

(Elka rises to face her, stares at her).

What...?

(Elka turns away clearly disturbed, hesitating)

Do you not feel well? Are you having pains?

Elka: I feel fine. You're the pain, not me.

Malia: What are you talking about? Where are they?

Elka: (turns back to her with a certain sudden decisiveness) Sit!

Malia: Excuse me?

Elka: Sit down, please.

Malia: Thanks, but I'm here for Pesach, I want my baby back. Where is he?

Elka: Inside, in the house, both of them. I want to talk to you.

Malia: To me? What about?

Elka: (changing her mind) Nothing, just take your baby and get lost, do it quick.

Malia: Thanks a lot. (turns to go to the apartment).

Elka: (Stopping her) Wait! I'll tell you what's up. (sitting down) Sit.

Malia: If you don't mind I'll stand. (sitting down) I had a meeting just now in the gallery. For weeks I've been running after them, and in the end she gave me an appointment in the evening, so she could have a good look, in peace and quiet. I came with all my jewelry, and she barely looked at a single earring. She almost fell asleep she was so tired. What's that about? I also want to go to sleep.

(Elka doesn't manage to get a word in edgewise, though perhaps she's not sure what she'll say yet, either).

What haven't I invested in this jewelry? Maybe I put too much into it, and want too much in return. What's the result? I give my soul for every stupid little earring and in the end nothing comes of it, and the baby here... I didn't want one but I had one just like that, just some accident, but look how beautiful he came out.

Elka: (Deciding to speak her mind) How are you doing?

Malia: Fine, thanks, how are you doing?

Elka: (angrily, having difficulty speaking) This thing between you two... you... you and him...

Malia: Me and whom...?

Elka: (still avoiding the issue) You bought flowers...

Malia: Yes, for Pesach, to say thank you. He's been such a big help.

Elka: There aren't any horses or cows here in the house.

Malia: Excuse me?

Elka: Horses and cows eat grass and flowers.

(Malia stares at her without understanding).

You don't get it? Nobody here in the house eats flowers.

Malia: Oh... (laughing) I get it.

Elka: What are you laughing about?

Malia: Just laughing, that's all. Pesach explained how important food is in your house. We used to live on a farm, there was a chicken coop and a vegetable garden, but we never had real meals because my mom was always in some depression. Even the chickens went hungry.

Elka: How much did that cost – the flowers – how much did you pay?

- Malia: I don't know, I didn't ask.
- Elka: You didn't ask, and you don't even know how much you paid?
- Malia: I love flowers. This is my gift to Pesach.
- Elka: Your gifts cost me a lot, like the gold chain that you lost. My house, my whole life has become like a sea, you throw a little worm in and come out with a big fish. You don't just go around throwing away gold. You throw it away and say you don't want it, just in order to get back even more.
- Malia: I'm not following at all.
- Elka: I don't really like you, you know.
- Malia: (laughing a bit, though essentially hurt) Really? (without laughter) You made up your mind so quickly?
- Elka: Your child has no father – I don't like that much. And the things you say, I don't really like them much either. And you go losing your gold chain and buying flowers, and you don't even know how much you paid... everything, I don't really like anything about you all that much.
- Malia: (Again with the same sort of laughter) Really? (without laughter) What did I do to you that you...?
- (Pesach, having heard some noise, enters in the middle of the following speech).
- Elka: (angrily) In his eyes everything you do is great, I don't understand why, but just like that, he likes you!
- Malia: I like him too.
- Elka: And...! Nu...!
- Malia: Excuse me...?
- Elka: You both... you like each other... no?
- Malia: Sorry, but that's a pretty private matter, no? His too...
- Elka: Orka, my oldest son, when his time came – I didn't wait till he was seventeen, sixteen was enough – I paid cash for someone suitable, someone clean, someone good. You understand me...?
- Malia: For money...? I can't believe it.

Elka: When kids need something you buy it for them – just like when they need a woman, no? Is a woman less valuable than bread? Pesach is something else altogether, he needs more...

Malia: Sorry, but... he's not a child, it's his life, no?

Elka: Pesach, his life... if you do anything wrong to him only God will have pity on you, you follow?

(Malia makes no reply and just stares at her in shock).

What are you looking at? (angrily, quickly, as if wanting to be rid of the very words) For three nights already I haven't been able to get any sleep. So you'll get married, let it be! But you're going to live here, in the house, with me, no place else! And you'll watch me the entire time and learn how to run things! You follow...?

(Pesach is on the verge of exploding, stops and remains on the side).

Malia: (shocked) I don't understand, I... who's talking about a wedding altogether? We're just, you know, just getting to know each other, slowly, that's that whole beauty of it...

Elka: You want to get married, don't you? With this son of yours who has nothing, not even...

Malia: Yes, but not... I don't even know if I love him yet. And him... it's all madness. Does he love me, already?

Elka: Love you...?

Malia: Did he say something like that to you?

Elka: Forget about him loving you! Love all you want, just leave him in peace! Don't go looking for any love in this house! And don't go buying flowers! And ask what everything costs first, and buy cheaply! You like expensive things – so sell at a high price! And don't go losing your gold! Here there are no beggars who have nothing, like dead people, they don't care so they go losing things. Here you have everything, nobody loses a thing! Those are my conditions, you follow?

Malia: (laughing, even while talking, but her laughter turns to tears) What permission do you have to go making conditions with me? Did I ask you for anything?

Elka: You're crying...

- Malia: Yes, for you. The way you say: here there's no love! There's no such thing, it just can't be, there's love everywhere. I know, I've burned away my whole life trying to find this love.
- Elka: Nu, and did you find it?
- (Malia makes no reply, just stares at her).
- You never found it.
- Malia: I don't know, that's not what I'm saying.
- Elka: The main thing is to keep talking, huh, and even crying for me.
- Malia: (stopping her crying, quietly) Tell me, did he tell you to talk to me like this?
- Elka: I can't hear you.
- Malia: (with the same quiet tone) Did he tell you to talk to me?
- Elka: He's my son, he...
- Malia: (with the same quiet tone) Answer me! Did he...?
- Elka: You're screaming at me in my own home...?!
- Malia: (with the same quiet tone) I'm not screaming, I'm just...
- Elka: Talking quietly like that, so people can hardly hear, it's even worse than screaming.
- Malia: (with the same quiet tone) I just want to know if he asked you, I have the right.
- Elka: Of course he did, and don't go screaming at me in my own home, get out now!
- Pesach: (approaching Elka, quietly, slowly) That's a lie, you're lying.
- Elka: You...? This woman is screaming at me in my own house, at me, your mother, and you still have the gall to say right in her face that...?
- Pesach: You're lying, lying, lying. I never told you to talk to her at all, not at all.
- Elka: I'm practically begging her, turning myself into a doormat and you...
- Pesach: Don't do anything, don't touch it, don't get it all dirty – nothing!

Elka: You never talked to me like this before.

Pesach: (to Malia, towards the apartment) Come, you can come inside...

Malia: (hesitatingly) It's better if I... some other time maybe...

Pesach: (practically begging) I have my own room, my own place... I have...

(Malia exits with Pesach towards the apartment. Elka gets up after them, all in a fuss facing the apartment, stops, returns. She doesn't feel well, rocks back and forth, takes an ice cream for herself with a cone from the refrigerator, sits and starts licking).

Orka: (enters from outside, his face is beaten, dirty, surprised to see Elka)
You... are you planning to fall asleep in the store today too?

(Elka makes no reply, just licks at her ice cream).

The ice cream... what happened? Did you go to the wholesale market during the night to buy even cheaper?

(Elka stares at him).

(cleaning off his face) It's nothing, just a little mud, the car spritzed me.

(Elka suddenly starts licking angrily, from within).

What's going on? Who are you scandalizing now? You're not licking that thing – you're biting it. Be careful, the ice cream might start bleeding. (sitting down) Don't know if this'll help... but I closed the deal with that old lady. I closed even better than you asked, at a quarter of the price.

(Elka licks away a little less angrily).

A pretty old lady, all white, almost transparent. She'll be ninety years old in a little while and she's quite up on the cinema. We talked for a whole hour. She also likes Keaton better than Charlie Chaplin. Maybe that's why she didn't even sense how I tricked her. My love of cinema... you once said that it was just a bunch of butterflies in my head. Now even the butterflies are busy working for you.

(Elka stares at him, as if she has something to say).

What's up?

(Elka goes back to licking the ice cream).

The truth is – she knew that I was cheating her. She suddenly looked at me as if to say: so be it, here's to your health, if you're so busy

cheating me you must really need it. You get it...? I was busy cheating her and she was laughing at me, taking pity on me. That alone is a good enough reason to cheat her, don't you think?
(suddenly) Why do I do this altogether, huh?

(Elka stops eating, stares at him, as if she has something she wants to say).

I found who to ask. My first business deal I cheated some kid. And you put your hand on my head and said: you've got a good head on your shoulders. There's nothing wrong, is there? The ice cream is dripping.

(Elka stares at him).

(touches his face with his hand and comes away with blood) Is this the problem? It's nothing, just a little blood, I got in a fight. In the market, right before closing time, one of the peddlers started screaming at some fat old lady, cursing her. Look at this – the beautiful old lady, the white one, I go and cheat, but for the honor of some dirty old woman, I'm ready to get in a fight. Who am I? The same person? Once when I was seventeen I had this fantasy of peeling all the skin off of my face, just to see what's underneath.

(Elka goes back to licking her ice cream).

(heatedly, all of a sudden) I'm really in need. I keep trying to get money together wherever I can, but it's not working. I don't have a lot of time. The Russian guy isn't going to wait for me too much longer.

(Elka stops eating, seems on the verge of saying something).

Say something already!

Elka: (finally) Pesach, he concerns me, my heart is breaking.

Orka: Sure, Pesach, your heart. Where is he? I barely get to see him these days.

Elka: Sure, he's with her, even now, in his room.

Orka: Who, the one with the baby...?

Elka: You knew about it...

Orka: No, that's just what came out. (Turns to the apartment).

Elka: Where are you going...?

Orka: To peep. You know how he used to peep in on me once upon a time?

Elka: (stops him, heatedly) It's not a joke, you've got to do something. He's not like you with all your women, he's in there with her and her baby. He... I barely recognize him. There's a woman who's perfect for him, I already took care of everything. Now he doesn't want to hear anything about it anymore.

Orka: That's really pretty scary. He's like a kid, even though he's over thirty, doesn't want to get married to a woman arranged for him by his mother.

Elka: You're kidding around.

Orka: Really? Why, I got married to a woman you arranged for me. You were successful with me, but with him you've got no luck.

(From the apartment they can hear the sound of the accordion in Pesach's hands playing 'Row, row, row your boat...').

Oh, that song... you remember? They made him stay back a year in school but they also pitied him, being a refugee and all. So they gave him a role in some school play, the captain of a ship of immigrants, and he was supposed to play that song. You bought him some accordion back then, the biggest one they had, even bigger than him at the time. Everyone sang along and he was happy, real proud. Now he's playing for her, the one song that he knows how to play. (peeps into the apartment then comes back) He's playing to her but she's fallen asleep.

Elka: He has to get married to this woman that I've arranged for him. It'll be better for you too. She'll take care of me and the business and you'll be free to travel, to do what you want to do. Maybe I'll also give you a little money...

Orka: Just like that? You're not gonna give me any money for this, in order to leave me in the warehouse, but for him you're ready to give – that is, until you find some appropriate woman for him.

Elka: Until that happens I can't die in peace. He's weak, you know how he...

Orka: (at the piano, playing) Maybe he's not really all that weak, not all that weak, maybe... Look at this: he only knows one little melody, and even that he plays slowly, with difficulty, like everything he does, but he's stubborn when it comes to choosing a woman, wants to do it himself, and he doesn't even care if she falls asleep while he's playing.

Elka: (grabs him away from the piano, wildly, almost losing her senses) Leave the piano alone already! You can't leave him in her hands, like a little child, all in her hands! She doesn't really want him, she wants my gold. Do something!

- Orka: What do you want me to do?
- Elka: You're asking me? You know what these women from the street are like, she gives her kid away to anyone who wants to hold him so of course she's also willing to give herself away to anyone who will hold her. You know what to do with that type. You're his older brother, do something. Help him open his eyes, so he can see what she's really worth, she's worthless, he should throw her out!
- Orka: What did you say? Say it again...
- Elka: I don't know what I said. I'm not some tape recorder that you can just rewind.
- Orka: I don't get you, are you recommending that I...?
- Elka: I'm not some Romanian newspaper, I don't need you to understand me. I need you to do what must be done, like you used to. One day you were a boy and the next you were a man, like a fire-breather.
- Orka: (slowly, with a certain threatening tone) You want to drag me through the mud again, huh? I'm thirty-five already, haven't you had enough till now?
- Elka: (retreating before him) No, what...?
- Orka: Why did I trick that old lady, huh, what do you think? Her, the whole lot of them, why? So as not to betray you, sure. Not to leave you behind, I keep clean with everyone and you're back there all dirty as can be, with your shabby business deals. You want more?
- Elka: (as she retreats she half falls, half sits down in the rocking chair) No! I want to get up, help me!
- Orka: (Pushes the chair, rocks it back and forth, laughing) How about instead you finally give me something good, huh? Give me your gold, for example, half is all I need. You promised, didn't you? Since I was a child, it's been all about this gold. Where is it altogether? How I'd like to just see it once!
- Elka: You making fun...?
- Orka: Yeah, I'm making fun of you. (leaves her behind, exits).
- (Elka rocks back and forth for a little bit, stops. Pesach and Malia enter from the direction of the apartment).
- Malia: (stops) I forgot my jewelry, it's still all over the place.
- (Malia and Pesach go back in to the apartment, leaving the stroller behind).

Elka: (Directed at the baby in the stroller) What are you laughing about? Idiot, just like your mother! (She arranges his blankets) Just you wait, wait till you start crying too. So what? Without a father, with a mother like that, leaving you alone, all alone, like a child of God. I've seen what happens to God's children. Cats have it better, even mice. A pretty stroller isn't going to help you. (rocks the stroller back and forth, gradually falling asleep herself). My children never had a stroller, I was their stroller. All day we would walk through the mud, the snow, and at night I would bring them to me. I used to rock back and forth, just like this, and they would rock back and forth with me. They used to fall asleep and sleep quite well. I was their stroller, me myself, like a carriage. (falls asleep).

(Pesach and Malia return and enter from the apartment. Malia is about to pull the stroller away from Elka's sleeping hands. Elka almost wakes up, so Malia lets go, doesn't know what to do. Pesach pulls the stroller away from Elka and they exit outdoors).

Act 2

Scene 1:

(Friday night. Some of the events take place in the store and outdoors, in the street and along the stairs leading up the side of the building, by the upper window of the store. The store itself is closed but we can see what happens inside in the low light. Pesach and Malia are there. He is fixing a cabinet and she is by his side with the stroller and baby. Elka opens the inner door, the one that leads to the apartment, and stands in the doorway).

Pesach: (stops working) Yes?

(Elka leaves, closing the door behind her. Orka enters from the street, and he has had what to drink and it a little tipsy. Lilly enters from the stairs on the side and stops facing him, in the street).

Lilly: There's no Shabbos meal, your mother didn't even make her cutlets. I don't recall this ever happening before.

Orka: Really?

Lilly: We have food at home if you want.

Orka: Yeah?

Lilly: If you want, 'bye (she doesn't leave).

Orka: What's the matter? Something not right?

Lilly: No, why? Everything's fine, just fine (exits).

(Elka enters from behind via the stairs outside. Orka steps aside. She stops in the middle of the stairs by the small window. She gets down on all fours, peeping in through the window to the store. The light in the store gets stronger, and now they can hear Pesach and Malia, who is sitting by the baby stroller).

Malia: (inside, in the store) And how much is thirty-six times... times eight?

Pesach: 288.

Malia: Wow! And 251 times seven?

Pesach: 1757.

Malia: Oh my God!

Pesach: How do you know that's right? Maybe I'm just cheating.

Malia: You...? You're not capable of it. Now a real hard one, let's see you get this one. How much is... 119 times 27?

Pesach: (After a moment) 3213.

Malia: Amazing!

Pesach: Nowadays they have these little calculators can do calculations a thousand times harder in a matter of seconds.

(Orka meanwhile approaches Elka quietly where she is peeping; he gets down behind her and starts peeping too, though she doesn't notice).

Malia: So? There are also airplanes and cars, it still means something if you can run fast. I was worthless in mathematics, but one day... we had a new teacher, a really beautiful woman, I really wanted to make an impression on her, but she'd already given up on me, and me too, truth be told. Then we came to a problem and she asked: how much is 47 times 11? And I suddenly had this feeling, a warm feeling in my head and my entire body, so I raised my hand with all my might and started screaming: 5000, 219, 85, all sorts of numbers, and then I screamed out 517 and I wanted to keep on shouting numbers...

Pesach: No need, that's it.

Malia: That's it exactly. It just came out of me, the right number. I could see it on her face. Everyone saw and it suddenly got real quiet in the class and everyone looked at me, and I understood that that was it, really, 517! That was my best day at public school, maybe the only good one.

Pesach: They held me back a class.

Malia: You were new to Israel, you weren't all that good at Hebrew.

Pesach: Or mathematics.

Malia: How could that be?

Pesach: I knew the answer but I never called it out. Everyone would always start jumping in and shouting, so I stayed quiet.

Malia: And the teacher never called on you?

Pesach: She did, but it took some time until I could get the answer out of my mouth and at that point she had always already called on someone else.

Malia: How about written tests...?

Pesach: The first test we had – she couldn't believe it, she thought I had copied from someone else. After that I would purposely write in mistaken answers.

Malia: Sure, to pay her back.

Pesach: Afterwards I would sit in the class but I never heard a word. When I woke up and got a hold of myself they were already running ahead with fractions and percentages, and I wanted to learn but I was embarrassed to ask.

Malia: I'm getting chills down my spine.

Pesach: I like working with wood.

Malia: What...? Yeah, I understand.

(Elka now senses Orka standing behind her on all fours. The light in the store grows dimmer again and we can't hear them talking anymore).

Orka: (directed at Elka, with both of them on all fours) You remember? Once we hid in the hay in the field, we were sleeping, and suddenly we woke up with all these eyes in the dark and you said: wolves!

(Elka gets up, goes down the stairs to the street, intending to exit in that direction).

(getting up and following her) Why? Come on, keep peeping, it's interesting. We didn't even guess at the things that were happening inside him back then in school, and here he is telling all his secrets to a woman like that from the street. Gives me the chills down my spine too.

Elka: Let me go.

Orka: Where to, at this hour? It's not my fault, why are you punishing me? All day Friday all I do is dream about Friday night meals at your house, your cutles.

(Elka steps around him and exits. Orka goes back to peep in at the window. The light comes back on in the store and we can once again see and hear Pesach and Malia. He is working and she is standing next to him now).

Malia: You don't have to do such good work, you know, after all, it's just some rotten cabinet.

(Pesach chuckles).

What...?

Pesach: This is the only way I know how to work. Even if they would pay me double to do less work on the piece, I just can't.

(Malia takes his hands in hers).

What...?

Malia: Your hands are smooth, not all blistered up. Maybe because you work so slowly, so completely.

Pesach: (suddenly having difficulty) A woman is better off not messing with me, I'll never earn a lot of money.

Malia: Why did you say...? You're blushing. Oh, I get it... (laughing) That's the biggest expression of love I ever heard from you, you know? Why am I laughing? Now I'm blushing too, you know...

(Pesach goes back to his work).

That's my luck, wherever there's no money, that's where I end up, like a cat landing on its feet. But I've still got a chance with the lottery, I believe that. (towards the baby) His father never earned a penny. You're not going to get all religious on me, are you?

Pesach: No, why...?

Malia: His father left me while I was pregnant in order to become all religious – let me twist in the wind! But that's all part of my old life, his dirt, you know?

Pesach: I don't know what to say.

Malia: There's nothing to say. I just said it in order to tell you something about his father, so you should know that there really was such a thing once. (approaching him) I want to be good to you, you know? You're such a big help to me.

Pesach: There's no need.

Malia: It's not my intellect that wants to, it's my body.

Pesach: The glue is drying. (returns to his work).

Malia: (sitting down) I'm glad you're like that. All these men that just fall on me like I'm some sort of falafel, still hot, straight from the oil. And it's even better than all those squares: the first meeting is all platonic at some café, just talk. Then the second time they want the flesh, first a restaurant, then to bed, like you owe them something somehow, like you're just another part of the menu. Sometimes I didn't even understand what they wanted altogether, why they got close, suddenly

putting their hands on you. They've already told me that I kind of set traps for them. They've also called me frigid. The truth is that sometimes my entire body really wakes up and I have these fantasies – God! (suddenly) Do you even like me like that altogether? You know what I mean – as a woman...? Are you attracted to me?

Pesach: What, because I don't immediately...huh? Is that why you're asking...

Malia: What...? Yeah, you're right, I deserve it. I'm glad you said that. And I really like it that you don't just talk for the sake of talking, just to confuse things. I've got a girlfriend who, when she has to choose between two men, one that really loves her but doesn't show it and one that doesn't love her but pretends he does, with gifts, things he says, then she'll always choose the second one. Funny... But all the same, you've got to say something, just to show... no? Otherwise it's like trying to find your way in the dark, and you're headed for perdition.

(Pesach stops working and approaches her).

Yes...?

Pesach: People think that boats are what you see above the water. But that's nothing, just the tip. All the real size is underneath the water. I was down at the port once, I saw a ship up on the dock. It was huge, you couldn't even see the sky, just all that iron. You might think that it's stronger like that. But it's not. With all the iron, with all its size, it's like she's naked without the water, like it's not pleasant for her, for heaven's sake.

Malia: You really don't like to talk, huh? (half-sitting half-lying down) It's been a while since I felt this secure, this warm. Soon I'm gonna fall asleep, like in a hatchery, you'll see, I'll even give birth to little chicks soon. When I was a kid I used to like it when the chicks would crawl all over me, it tickled...

(Elka enters the street, heads straight for the store doors. Lilly is following her and Orka gets up from the window).

Lilly: (to Orka) So we meet in the street.

(Elka opens the doors of the store, and takes a big wide step inside. She enters and stands facing Pesach and Malia with a threatening silence. Orka turns to follow her in then stops absent-mindedly).

Why are you just standing there? Go inside. (she enters the store).

(Orka enters, exits towards the apartment and immediately returns with a bottle. Elka takes another step towards Malia. Malia gets up. Pesach signals to her with a glance that she should sit back down. Malia sits. She and Pesach are both tense, despite the

fact that they're trying to proceed as though nothing has changed. Elka turns from them and sits down).

(to Malia) She's sick right now, that's the only reason you can take such liberties. You don't know her, you don't know what she's capable of...

Orka: (pouring for himself) That's true. For a year and half we wandered around the Carpathians, in the villages, in the forest. Tell her the truth, Ma. Tell her what you're capable of. Tell her about the Ukrainian, how you killed him with a stick...

(Malia grabs hold of the stroller absent-mindedly).

Look, she's already in shock. We're just the opposite, she used to tell us the story and we would fall asleep quietly. It was like a lullaby. Like gold, yeah (drinks).

Lilly: You've had enough to drink.

Orka: (quietly) Move over, okay?

Lilly: I heard of a person who exploded from too much water. He had some sort of disease, was always thirsty. He was thirsty non-stop, no matter how much he drank he was still thirsty. In the end he exploded, his very flesh, you know? His internal organs, everything exploded.

Orka: The same one who ate all his nails off, down to the fingers?

Lilly: That's something else, that was a woman, you're confusing everything.

(Orka stares at her).

What are you staring at, now he's started staring...

Orka: Why'd you tell that story?

Lilly: No reason, but it's true, there's a disease like that, you can explode from too much water. I was once a nurse, you know.

Orka: But I'm not drinking water, can't you see? It's not water. (Suddenly, while staring/ogling at Malia) I have a question I'd like to ask, whom should I ask?

Elka: (suddenly starts telling a story, ostensibly to Lilly, but it's actually directed at Pesach and Malia) I'll tell you a different story. It was after the war already, on the way to Trieste, to get on a boat there that would take us to Israel.

Lilly: Oh, the story on the train.

- Orka: (to Pesach) It's your story. Difficult times we're living in, the stick doesn't work anymore, so you have to try with the carrot.
- Elka: (to Lilly) I'm telling it to you.
- Lilly: I'm glad.
- Elka: We started the trip at the border, from Russia. We traveled in carriages and arrived in Lourdes. We even walked on foot at night when we had to cross borders. Pesach was still just a baby, I was holding him in my arms. Sometimes I would also carry Orka in my arms. Then when the time came we actually got to travel pretty decently, on the train. And we got to some little station and I got down to buy some food.
- Orka: It's stifling in here, isn't it? (restlessly about to drink again).
- Elka: (taking the glass from his hands, putting it aside) Go inside, there's some food there, have something to eat.
- Orka: A man wants to breathe some free air so they stuff his face with food. (keeps moving around).
- Lilly: (to Elka) Continue.
- Elka: It only took a minute. I got down from the train, bought some food, there was some buffet there. I got back and saw that the train was gone, it had traveled on with them, my kids. I ran to the station manager. He was actually pretty bright. He called the station manager at the next station and after a few moments the other manager called back that everything was fine, the train had arrived and he had taken the kids off the train and they were with him in the office. That's all, everything was fine – that's what he said to me – and I should just wait quietly until the next train come, some two hours altogether, and I was to get on it and go get my kids.
- Orka: (Noticing the flowers that Malia brought, directed at Elka) Hey, you bought flowers? I don't believe it.
- Lilly: What are you crazy? (towards Malia) She did.
- Orka: (waving his glass around) To the life of flowers! To the life of the tax authorities!
- Lilly: What do the tax authorities have to do with anything? He's gone completely mad.
- Orka: It starts with flowers – but you end up having to pay taxes.
- Lilly: But your mother didn't...

(Pesach has stopped working meanwhile, without noticing).

Orka: (to Pesach) You've stopped working, just to hear the story, huh?

(Pesach goes back to his work).

Elka: (continuing, smiling to herself) Yes, everything is fine, just wait here in the station – that's what he said to me. For him everything was fine, but for me it wasn't. I left his office quietly so he wouldn't notice...

Orka: Did you ever pay income tax, Ma?

Lilly: He's gone completely mad.

Elka: (Gathering strength, continuing) I left quietly so he wouldn't see and I started...

Orka: I asked you if you ever paid income tax?

Elka: I never asked them for anything and I don't owe them anything. During my most difficult times, when they came to me from social services to help I threw them out of my house. And I paid cash to the best doctors, no public health insurance, in order to heal you and look at the result.

Orka: Sure, of course. But what about my real question?

Lilly: You never asked one.

Orka: That's true. I think I'll get a little sleep now, if you don't mind. (Sits down and closes his eyes, though he keeps opening them now and then in Malia's direction).

Lilly: Continue. You left his office quietly so he wouldn't see...

Elka: (Continuing) I went out quietly so he wouldn't see and I started running to the next station. I'm running and running when suddenly I see – a mountain, with a tunnel and the tracks lead right into the tunnel, and there's a guard standing there who says to me: no passage, it's forbidden! A train was supposed to come any minute from the other direction, and it would run me over! I begged him and pleaded with him, I told him I would pass real quick, just let me go, I take full responsibility, what do you care! But he wouldn't let me.

Malia: (to Orka who is staring at her) Yes?

Orka: Excuse me?

Malia: Nothing, you were staring, like you had something to say.

- Orka: Beautiful, you noticed. You're not listening to my mother's story? You're also interrupting in the middle, you know?
- Lilly: He's just starting up with everyone. He started staring like that at me too, like a blind man – precisely because they can't see anything they sit there staring like that non-stop, without any shame.
- Elka: (continuing her story) What could I do? It was forbidden to pass through the tunnel. Should I go back to the first station? By the time I got back the second train would have already passed and then I would have to wait another two hours. And the children were all alone in some station with some station manager.
- Orka: (to Malia, suddenly) Fine, if you really want to know... I have a pretty difficult question for you, actually.
- Lilly: You're interrupting, your mother is in the middle of the story.
- Orka: Today after lunchtime I found some woman in some bar. She had also had a little to drink but she was silent. I liked her because of that. We went up to her room.
- Lilly: Aw, come on now, you're all bark and no bite.
- Orka: I started up with her and she got annoyed: No! So I told her I was from the industry, in films. Boy did she open up then! She didn't stop. I took her clothes off and she just kept talking. I had already gotten dressed again and walked out, but she was still talking away, she... What did I want to ask you? Oh yeah, you won't believe me but I can't remember if... I'm sure you understand... did we do it or not? On the one hand I was sure that I had undressed her... but on the other hand – the fact that she kept talking – maybe in fact we didn't... can you tell me if we did?
- Malia: No, not me. And I don't think you really need to ask me such a thing.
- Orka: Really? My head hurts. I wanna sleep, just sleep! (Closes his eyes).
- Lilly: (to Elka) He's just making a fool of himself. You can continue. You wanted to go into the mountain, into the tunnel that is, and the guard wouldn't let you.
- Elka: So I started to climb up the mountain. It was a difficult one, real high, full of stones and thorns. It was a real bad one, not just some mountain. But I climbed all the way up, I climbed quickly, so as not to lose any time. I was almost at the top when I fell over some stone, I fell face-first, right into the dirt.

- Orka: (Opening his eyes, directed at Malia) You're right, you know, I shouldn't have asked you such a thing. The truth is that's only half the question, you follow...?
- Lilly: Not now, this is the best part.
- Orka: (continuing in his little world) Last night somebody suddenly knocked on the door. I opened and it was dark but I could see that it was a woman standing there.
- Lilly: How? While I was sleeping?
- Orka: And she says to me: they're beating me. I said to her: who's beating you? So she says to me: touch it, you can see that they beat me. And she took my hands and passed them over her whole body, and I started getting into it and caressing her all over, slowly, and she was laughing, enjoying it. Then I saw: it was her, that old beautiful white woman that I had cheated, she came back to me in a dream.
- Lilly: I bet the other story was also just a dream, same thing.
- Orka: (to Malia) You get it...? That much I know, I'm sure of it, it... it was real, I can even feel her body now on my fingertips... whereas the one in the afternoon that... how can that be? After all, it was just a dream, right?
- Lilly: I'm not following anything. There's nothing to even follow. What's he asking altogether?
- Orka: (to Malia) You follow, right?
- Malia: I don't know.
- Orka: That's good, real good.
- Elka: (continuing loudly now, in order to overcome all the interruptions) I lay there in the dirt, my mouth was full of dirt, and I didn't have the strength to get up. So I said to God, I really begged: You know what I've been through to get my kids out of that war alive, help me so I don't lose them now, after the war! Not now, after everything, not this! That's what I said and then my energy returned. I finished climbing and went down the other side and reached the kids in the station at the same time as the second train. (towards Malia) I don't leave my kids behind so quickly.
- Orka: (clapping) Way to go! Sure, kids like this, thirty-five years old after all, you've gotta watch them, hold on to them with your nails, there's so many dangers out there, it's a real danger zone!
- Lilly: That's a beautiful story.

- Orka: When I think about it... you ran and climbed and fell and spoke to God, begging Him... for what, really? In the end you got to the next station together with the second train. You could have just stayed in the office like the manager told you and make the trip with the second train, no? After all, we weren't in any danger.
- Elka: I've got a son who thinks he's real smart... idiot! That's the most dangerous time, when the danger is not obvious, that's the greatest danger of all. When would they have their pogroms? On Shabbos, during the holidays, no? (directed straight at Malia) Now I'm also not about to leave my kids, you follow...?
- Malia: (absent-mindedly) Excuse me...?
- Lilly: She's talking to you the whole time.
- Malia: I'm sorry, I was thinking about something else... (to Pesach) I want to go now (gets up and turns to leave).
- Pesach: I'll come with you. I just want to change my shirt (exits towards the apartment).
- Orka: (to Malia) Can I ask where to...?
- Lilly: What's it your business? She's waiting for Pesach.
- Orka: Quiet, okay?
- Lilly: You're the one speaking the entire time.
- Orka: Quiet I said!
- Lilly: What did I say?
- Orka: Nothing, just shut up!
- Lilly: My mother talks to the TV.
- Orka: Quiet!
- Lilly: What, I'm not allowed to talk about my mother?
- Orka: (quietly, but with a certain vehemence) Quiet!
- Lilly: I heard about a baby who fell from the third story and nothing happened to him, then he went and drank water with fruit concentrate and choked to death.
- Orka; Why'd you tell that story?

- Lilly: Why not? Just in order to pick up the mood a little bit.
- Orka: Choking on concentrate, exploding from water, eating up the fingers, that's how you pick up the mood? Where do you get all these stories from?
- Lilly: They're not just stories, I heard them.
- Orka: You heard them? Where?
- Lilly: I heard them. You don't think people could make up stories like that, do you?
- Orka: Whatever you heard.
- Lilly: What can I do?
- Orka: (directed mainly at Malia) How can you get away from this, huh? How can you get away?
- Lilly: What do you have to get away from?
- Orka: (to Malia) You know what I'm talking about, right? You also want to... you want more, something different, something beautiful, flowers, love. What are you waiting for?
- Malia: I'm waiting for Pesach.
- Orka: Sure, but with him, you know... he can't give you what you want, this big love, to play the part, to tell you...
- (Malia stares at him as though to say where does he get off)
- How do I know, huh? I heard it on the radio. It was on the news, the main item: Malia wants love... (drinking) you want some?
- Malia: You peeped.
- Orka: You know what... I have an idea. (approaching her, drunk, not stable) Pesach doesn't like to talk much, certainly not about love. He was born during the war. There was no food so mommy fed him. At three years old he already bit her but she kept on... Why am I telling you this? What did I really want? (sinks/sits down).
- Lilly: I don't believe in words. This one guy ran after my sister, what love letters he used to send her, you could die from laughter! In the end he died, at the age of twenty-four. Turns out he was sick even before and he knew it. And he still had the nerve to write her that he loved her.

Orka: (Getting up, directed again at Malia) How could I forget... I'll tell you in his place, huh? Love... yes, how I love you, how he does that is... for me it's nothing, I'm used to it. What do you say?

(Malia makes no reply, busies herself with the baby in the stroller).

You're running away, you know. Hiding in the stroller, behind the baby. (approaching her) Can I help you? I'll hold the baby.

Malia: No.

Orka: Why not? You let Pesach. You even wanted to let my mother hold him.

Malia: Because you're drunk now.

Orka: You know what? Let it be like that, Pesach'll take care of the baby and I'll take care of you... to tell you, that is... How I love you, how he does, that is... what do you say?

Malia: If you don't mind... (moves aside).

Orka: Where you going?

Malia: To breathe some clean air.

Orka: Really? You know where there's some clean air? I've been looking for it also. And love too... it's true, with all my talk, I love...! I'm just gurgling. Why not? Women need it in order to give. It helps them, like unbuttoning a bra. But sometimes... yeah, sometimes I gurgle and I'm also waiting for it to happen, that I'll love for real. Like when some teacher asks how much is 47 times 11 and a little girl starts shouting numbers just like that, a thousand, a million, and suddenly she comes out with 517.

Malia: You're just a dirty peeping tom, you... let me pass! (Tries to pass him).

Orka: No reason to get angry, I'm not forcing you, please... (means to move but falls down, on his knees, facing Malia, laughing) Look at this, it's like the heavens put me on my knees before you, like in the movies... (bows his face down to the ground).

(Malia starts stepping around him but Pesach meanwhile enters from the apartment and she stops, as if waiting for his reaction to what is going on. He takes a step towards Orka then stops).

Lilly: (to Pesach) He's just fooling around, trying to tell her in your name that he loves her. He's drunk, he can't even stand up.

(Elka, who also sees Pesach, smiles, satisfied).

Orka: (rising up, directed at Elka) Is this okay? This what you wanted? Come on, let's get on with it! (To Malia) I love you, I... (having difficulty continuing) I love you, I... you're beautiful, you're special, you're generous and... what a body! And your courage, and... your baby, and... and your sky there in the window, what is it, a dog? You're such a sweet soul, you're... I can't live without you, I... what else? What's happened to me? Why can't I...? So many times I told women whom I didn't love how much I loved them... my head hurts... (bows down to the ground).

Lilly: He's said he's in love a million times, and in the end he says he can't even... what a drunk.

Malia: (to Pesach) I'm leaving.

(Pesach takes a step towards her, stops. Malia exits, but Pesach remains.)

Elka: Come on, I'll make a Friday meal for you, I'll fry up some cutlets now, they'll be hot and fresh.

(Pesach exits outside, not following Malia. Elka is about to exit after him, but fails, and sinks/sits down).

Lilly: Why isn't he following her? She invited him before...

Orka: (getting up already) Quiet, okay?

Lilly: What did I say?

(Orka closes her mouth with the palm of his hand, and she almost chokes, fighting him off. He leaves her alone and exits).

The Buyer: (enters, standing in the doorway) Hello.

Elka: You, even now...? There are no refrigerators now, nothing!

The Buyer: No, I've just come to tell you... the surgery was successful. It was difficult, my whole heart was outside. Three professors worked on me, five hours maybe, they were a hundred percent sure that I was going to die. But now it's okay, you have to make a blessing for surviving – that's what they said to me, you've been born anew. (silence) Yeah, sure, sorry. I just saw the light. The whole market is dark, Friday night, but here at your place there's light. (exits).

Lilly: (still breathing hard) He almost killed me. Let him kill me, what do I care? Men – you can never know what they'll do. My father committed suicide but nobody knew why. He bought us a new refrigerator and killed himself. What could I do? Just watch TV with

my mom. If he didn't care then I don't care either. I have patience. Sometimes it seems to me that I've already lived a thousand years. I've lived a thousand years and nothing has happened, just that my father killed himself. Now I also could have died. What do I care? Even like this nobody is calling me. Lilly is a pretty name I think, isn't it? Sometimes at night I call to myself: Lilly. What do I care? I could live for another thousand years. Does anyone care that my father killed himself? What can I do? I don't care about anything.

Scene 2:

(Later that night, in the street, underneath Malia's apartment. Orka is in the street. Elka enters).

Elka: (to Orka) Look at yourself, just look! At this hour of the night...

(Orka makes no reply, just stares at her).

Look at yourself, don't look at me! Look at yourself, what...?

Orka: I'm looking for the gold Ma, the gold (turns away from her).

(A light is turned on in Malia's window. Orka approaches. Elka remains on the side, in the darkness. Soon Lilly and Pesach enter the street as well, each one separately, standing on the side, in the darkness).

Malia: (in her window, noticing Orka) You...

Orka: You turned on a light.

Malia: The baby can't fall asleep, he has some sort of pain, I don't know what it is.

Orka: I can also fix your faucet, you know. You asked Pesach yesterday to do that for you, I overheard. He won't...

Malia: What are you talking about? You know what time it is?

Orka: Let's meet tomorrow, we'll sit and talk. Give me a chance. There's nothing between the two of you, you haven't even touched each other. He doesn't even want to talk to you.

Malia: I don't want to.

Orka: He won't even know.

Malia: I don't want to (disappears from the window).

Orka: (Turning to go, returns and speaks to the empty window). I've been walking around the empty streets, looking at the houses, the windows, how all the lights get turned off one by one, how everyone needs to get rest. In one window they were arguing and screaming like they were being taken out to slaughter, but there too everything eventually went dark and quiet. Like the night took pity on them, covered them with a blanket and said to them: enough, rest a while, until the morning at least. I never noticed things like that before, never thought about them.

(Malia reappears in the window).

I haven't stopped thinking about you. Something happened to me, I don't know what. Like what happened to you at school, when you suddenly came up with the right number. In the end all I wanted to do was sully you, but then it was like something took me by the nose and turned me right around. I still can't believe it, it's like I...

(Malia stares at him).

What are you staring at?

Malia: I don't know.

Orka: My face, huh?

Malia: Yeah, you say such beautiful things but your face... it doesn't change, like ceramic, like a mask.

Orka: Does that mean I'm not for real? That I'm just talking in the air, just fabricating, without even knowing what...?

Malia: I don't know. Know, it's the real thing. It's just that it's like your speaking and staying silent at the same time.

Orka: You like it when people stay silent, no?

Malia: It's not the same.

Orka: You're pretty smart, you know? The way you looked at us then and asked: who are you? Just like that, real simple, the best possible question of all, who are you? Only you could...

Malia: (struggling internally) No, I don't want to hear any more. (disappears from the window).

Orka: (continuing) I can't understand how this happened to me. As if I've been waiting for you all these years. Maybe it was when you came in to buy a refrigerator, maybe that was when I fell in love with you. I wasn't aware of it, that's for sure, I was afraid. Even now... this morning I thought of you and I suddenly remembered the taste of blood in my mouth when I first got in a fight, I was still just a child. Suddenly my whole mouth was full of blood. That was me, my blood, but it also wasn't me anymore. It was scary and it hurt, but it was also nice, I felt like a man, there was the taste of airplanes in my mouth. You too...

Malia: (again in the window, somewhat roughly) Airplanes...? Me...? Look at me, I have his vomit all over me.

Orka: I love airplanes, they're the strongest and the weakest at the same time. All that technology, all that beauty, but everything is up in the air in

the end, just some little malfunction and the whole thing falls. Like with you, I want to give you a hand...

Malia: (sort of screaming) Enough, enough already!

(Pesach in his place makes a motion, steps into the light, and Elka too, Lilly as well, they are all in the light now).

(Seeing them) All of you... (to Pesach) Even you... finally. Where have you been altogether? That's it, enough, he starts running after me so you disappear, I don't even get to see you anymore. Just at night, in the dark, peeping, silent, hearing how he... huh?

Orka: (to Pesach) Just tell her that you love her, that you want her, just say it – and I'll stop all this, I'll disappear.

(Pesach says nothing).

Malia: (to Pesach) That's it? You have nothing to say?

(Pesach makes an effort to say something, but says nothing).

Orka: (to Malia) Can't you see? You're just torturing him, and torturing yourself. It won't work. You're too much for him, everything is three sizes too big for him. And what if he would manage to say something...? That's what you want, another baby? Is that what you need? Where are you? Somebody also has to take care of you, tend to you, not just your faucet. You'll be mine, I'll work for you, I'll make money, we'll build a house, you can go learn, learn how to make even more beautiful jewelry.

(Malia stares long and hard at him).

You're not hearing anything, just staring... it's my face, like ceramic, like a mask, huh?

Malia: No, not as much...

Orka: It's because of you. I can help you and you can help me. You're capable of it, you know it. The way you spoke about the sky in that little window... You're beautiful, you have a beautiful soul, and a beautiful name, Malia...! It's such a pleasure to say it, Malia...! Malia...!

Malia: I'm not some taxi, you follow? I'm not just some taxi!

Orka: 'Taxi'...?

Malia: Yeah, a taxi – you pay the fee and he travels, whoever pays. Not me. It's not enough that you love me. If it's even love you feel and not

something else. That's not enough. I don't love you, I don't want this, I don't want it.

Orka: 'Taxi'...? A 'taxi'...?

Malia: What are you getting all hung up on the taxi for? You take a taxi and ride. Let it go already!

Orka: You don't have to say something like that, 'taxi' is for the masses, it's dirty, not like you...

Malia: That's my whole point, I'm not a taxi, not me.

Orka: It's the same thing. You say you're not a taxi but the word 'taxi' still hangs in the air, the filth, it's infective. You're doing it on purpose. It doesn't suit you, you're clean...

Malia: (in the window, directed at the baby in her arms) You too, huh, again? What do you want from me? Enough! I want to rest, I'm also a human being, you know? (disappears from the window).

Lilly: (directed at Orka, as a sort of joke) She actually looks pretty good from the window, like some sort of scene on TV.

Elka: (to Orka) I paid with my soul so that we should have a house, to be able to sleep quietly at night in the house... where are we now? Where's our house? (handing him a stone from the ground) Here, just kill her straight up, it'll be better for you.

Orka: You're the one who sent me after her, no? To ruin things, to sully her, no? (exits).

(Pesach exits, as do Lilly and Elka).

The Buyer: (enters, tries to waylay them) Hey, you're also outdoors... I'm glad, I'm not alone. Every night I walk around like this, can't sleep at night. Wait, where are you going? Don't you get it...? The whole time all I'm thinking is: I could have been dead, now I'm alive, though... how can anyone sleep like that? I'm alive, everything is fine, look... (he dances a little caper).

Scene 3:

(A few days later, during the day, in the store. A large bag is off on the side, with work tools in it. Lilly is in the store. Elka enters from outdoors, all flustered).

Elka: Where is he?

Lilly: I don't care, let him go wherever he wants, in the end he'll even stay there.

Elka: Pesach, I'm asking about Pesach? (notices the bag with the work tools) He was here. Why aren't you talking?

Lilly: That's what she told me: go easy, it's not serious. That's what the coffee grounds said to, and the cards, even my palm.

(Orka enters from outside. Lilly turns aside).

Orka: (to Elka) She's not here? Did anyone see which way she went...?

Elka: What else do you want from me? (directed at Pesach's bag) Look!

Orka: What's this?

Elka: His bag, his work tools. He wants to go away. He even packed a suitcase in his room.

Orka: Go away? With her?

Elka: With or without her... I don't know, he just wants to leave.

Orka: He can't be leaving with her. She went looking for him and he disappeared, so as not to run into her. I saw it, just an hour ago. What did he say to you?

Elka: He's not talking to me, I'm dead for him. He said something on the phone, something about Haifa.

Orka: Haifa's the boats... his boats...

Elka: What boats? You're confusing things. (grabbing hold of Orka) Go away, go back to America! Then it'll be quiet here, like it was before. Just me and him, we get along just fine. It's because of you that he's gone crazy, you and her... thirty five years old, soon to be forty – and instead of having kids, grandkids for me... (returning to what really bothers her, as if said to herself) What's this about boats?

Orka: Just like that? Kids, grandkids...

Elka: Yes, kids, in order to teach them, teach them to be human beings...

- Orka: Who did you want me to make them with for you? It's just because of you that I married her.
- Lilly: I don't care, I'm taking it easy.
- Orka: Yeah, she's a fitting woman for you, sits at home, with her you can have as much fun as you want with your woman out there...! That's what you said to me. That's how you taught me to be a human being. You had your reasons. Leaving me to be a big nothing, hiding underneath your skirts. There are other mothers, you know...
- Elka: Other mothers...? (Again to herself) Boats...!
- Orka: Yeah, there's such a thing, other mothers in the world. They send their kids out to fly high, fly far, so they should learn something, live a little, ever heard of something like that?
- Elka: I'm not other mothers. Not me. I don't send my kids out so they should fly high and far away. What are kids some sort of airplane? They should go flying with their noses up in the air and she should follow their shadows on the ground, huh? And with her swollen legs. At night all alone she gets to stare at the certificates from their studies, lawyers or something. What joy! Those aren't mothers for me, that's just twisted logic. I want my kids to live right next door, that they should be decent human beings, certainly not on boats in some sea somewhere. It's your love that makes you into such beasts.
- Orka: My heart has gone soft like butter.
- Elka: Now you love her...! A guy like you, running around the whole world, with New York in your back pocket, now he just has to have the girl that he sees with his brother in my shmatz warehouse. She's not just some woman, she's his, that's why you love her.
- Orka: Really, she's his already? Just like that, for free, without him even having to tell her that he wants her?
- Elka: He doesn't know how to speak, he can't.
- Orka: Sure, now he's a mute, they cut his tongue out. And if so? Do I also have to cut my tongue out?
- Elka: He's weak, you're strong. You have everything, even women, plenty of 'em, like refuse, you'll be fine.
- Orka: Sure, I've done fine, it's a fact. Ever since he was born all I've ever heard is that 'I'm the strong one'. Let's say it's even true, I'm strong, I have everything, so I also want his little nothing, the weak one's nothing. Maybe it's better than my 'I've got everything'?

- Elka: He's your brother.
- Orka: And so what? All our lives have been lived inside, each one inside the other one's kishkaz, and we're all together in one big kishka, isn't that the way it is?
- Lilly: (From the side) So what? I'm not afraid of anything, nothing's gonna come of it, just so you know!
- Orka: (to Elka) You know why I got married to her in the end? Just to show her what a disaster it would be, and to show you too. Everything's inside, same thing. Just that then I wasn't in love, but now I am.
- Elka: (again, returning to what really concerns her) What's this about boats, what's that supposed to mean...?!
- Orka: You're not even listening to me. His dream has been to be on the boats, let him live his dream finally. Let him go and stop getting in my way.
- Elka: How am I getting in your way? He's not getting in your way. She doesn't want you, you think I can't see things? A man, sure, but you're making a fool of yourself.
- Orka: I don't care.
- Elka: No, you're not some great pious person. You're just chasing her in order to ruin what he's got, so he should stand aside, not want her. That's why you're talking all the time, just to prevent him from opening his mouth.
- Orka: What's the big idea? Now you want them to get together? It's her or the boats – so she's already a better choice, is that what's up? Huh? Answer me!
- Elka: Geez, the questions people ask me... what's better, a complete idiot or some show-off? Why are those the only questions anyone ever asks me? I don't know anything, my eyes have gone dark.

(Pesach enters from behind, from the apartment, takes his bag with the work tools, and steps over to wrap up the accordion. Elka stands in his way, grabs his hand, but Pesach frees his hand from her grasp, and steps over to put the accordion in its case).

What did I do to you? Suddenly you're leaving? I don't even get to be told where to? Suddenly I don't know what my own body is doing? My hands shoot out from my sides? My eyes are abandoning me, and they won't even tell me where they're going?

Orka: (to Pesach) To the boats, tell her, what are you afraid of? It's what you always wanted. You're not a child anymore, she can't stop you now.

Elka: (To Pesach) He wants you to go away and leave her to him.

(Malia enters from the street with the baby stroller. Elka retreats to the side, to see what will happen. Orka also remains on the side. Malia approaches Pesach. Pesach absent-mindedly puts on his accordion.)

Malia: (to Pesach) Hello.

(Pesach makes no reply and approaches the baby stroller).

I said hello.

(Pesach plays for the baby, tries to play anyway, picking out the melody of 'Row, row, row...')

Tell me, were you ever even interested in me or was it all about the baby from the start?

(He doesn't answer, just keeps playing for the baby).

(approaching him, as if snooping, laughing) You actually smell like him, you smell like the milk. Sure, the whole time you were busy with him... (pushing the stroller aside) It's the smell of my milk, you know that? It's my smell. You're talking to me now, not to him! I came to say goodbye, I'm leaving. I found a new palace, with a working faucet.

(Pesach keeps playing, and his playing has the sound of a lament in it).

What's the meaning of this? You don't me to get lost, huh? You'll go back to your normal life, you'll just stay silent in your little world, put some glue on and close the whole thing down. What a crazy life, my God!

(Orka takes a step towards her).

You're here too? Silent too... can't be? Two brothers, one infects you and the other is like Teflon. That's my luck, these Teflon guys?

Elka: (exploding in her direction) What kind of way is that to talk about my kids? Have you no shame? Who are you altogether?

(Pesach stops playing, turns towards her. Elka goes silent, retreats. Pesach turns to Malia).

Malia: (to Pesach) Do you have something to say all the same? Funny... that was the most charming thing about you, that you were silent like that. I thought that only the ones who talk too much are cheating you. But

you tricked me ten times as much. Stays silent so nobody knows what he's feeling inside, nobody sees what kind of ship is underneath the water. (turns to go, stops immediately, approaches him) This is your last chance... Don't you want to just touch me once, to embrace me? Simple like that... we could even kiss...

(Orka again takes a step in her direction, as does Elka).

You have some objection? (to Pesach) For the sake of the goodbye, without talking, just to...

Pesach: (comes out choked, in an explosion) You wanted me to talk, right? That I should talk a lot, talk pretty like him, right? You said so, in the night, just like him...

Malia: Not like him, not a lot, doesn't have to be beautiful, just like yourself...

Pesach: (laughing) Like him...! (pushes her once in the shoulders, with both hands, not really pushing her, just making a sign like he's pushing her).

Malia: What are you doing?

(Orka again takes a step towards them, then overcomes himself and remains on the side).

Pesach: (pushing her again) Just like that! Like him, that's what he does with his women, I've seen it. He goes into a room with them and... (pushes) just like that! Straight to bed! He didn't say a word to her, he had nothing to say, his mouth was full of gum. He went in there with the gum in his mouth, and he comes out with her with the gum still in his mouth. (makes like he's pushing her again) Just like that! Like him...!

Malia: So what? That's him, it doesn't mean that everyone has to be like that, you're certainly not like that. Let him talk or not, who cares, that's him, not you!

(Pesach approaches Malia slowly, with the accordion still strapped on).

That's good, just touch me, just embrace me... come on already, God, I'm so tired... (puts out her hands to embrace him but gets caught on the accordion that he's wearing and starts to laugh) Or not, you with your accordion...! (takes the accordion off him, keeps laughing) You're an idiot, you'll never be like him, never... he would never walk over to embrace a woman with an accordion on his stomach, never... only you could, it takes a certain talent... I can't stop laughing... I've got no strength left, and this accordion, how can we get rid of it?

Pesach: You're making fun of me, you're just making fun...

Malia: Making fun of you...? (laughing) You're really an idiot... a sweet idiot, but an idiot all the same. (trying to put down the accordion which makes a sound) Stop squeaking already! (clears the accordion off her and says to Pesach) If you're not going to talk like a man, then at least say something human – I'm leaving!

(Pesach puts the accordion back on).

You, not the accordion! Say something, anything!

Elka: (exploding, starting in) What else? You have no shame! (goes silent).

(Pesach tries to say something to Malia, to speak. He is unable and just plays as if against his will, with difficulty, like the instrument is crying. Orka approaches).

Malia: (to Orka) You're here, sure, like a vulture waiting for a carcass.

(Orka is about to say something, thinks better of it and stays silent).

(sort of joking) You're staying silent, I can't believe it... (to Pesach with the same laughter) He's silent, he got that from you... He does it even better though. Maybe he really... (softly, as if starting to give in to the temptation of Orka) For years I've been roaming around, looking for love, for someone to take care of me, not just letting me take care of him. Flies come buzzing around like it's some sort of open wound... just fat flies, coming to suck the blood, to add a little more fat to their bodies, they leave behind all their dirt, and move on... in the end I come to this hole here, with a loudspeaker blaring: here there is no love! And then suddenly, precisely not from the one that...

Pesach: (throws off the accordion and says to Malia, with difficulty, with all his heart) You... I love you... you... you're my sister, my sister...

Malia: (sort of joking, with tears in her voice, to Pesach) What in the world...? I can't believe it... my brother, sure, maybe that's the problem. I never had a brother, but to be my brother... yes, with you I can laugh, it's good for me, comfortable...

(Pesach meanwhile puts the accordion away, and takes his bag with the work tools too).

Elka: No, what...?

Pesach: (passing before her, directed at Malia) Now I'm leaving for Haifa, I'll be working on a boat.

Malia: Just like that?

Pesach: I have to, it's the first order of business.

Malia: Finally, finally, finally he speaks, says something, but it's just to say that he's leaving, disappearing. (To the baby in the stroller) What are you screaming about? What are you...? You were just born, wait a while! (Takes the baby from the stroller).

(Pesach turns to go, and Orka immediately draws closer, slowly, to Malia).

Elka: (directed at Pesach, standing in his way) You're not going! That's not why I brought you here, bought this house and this business right in front! It's a strong house, the walls are almost two feet thick, deep in the ground like the roots of a tree! Not so that you would go run back off to the boats, floating like skin on the sea! Boats are places for criminals and refugees. You'll get lost there. They'll make fun of you, cheat you. Even fish can cheat you. They'll throw you over into the water in the night, nobody will be any wiser. What will I do then? I'll kill myself. Take a hammer and just kill me outright right now. That'll be better, at least only I'll die.

Pesach: Step aside, okay?

Elka: (holding on to him, breathing hard) You can't be alone, don't you get it? Who will watch over you there? Who will take care of you? Who'll give you a glass of water...? (which becomes her cry) A glass of water...! A glass of water...!

(Pesach stares at her. Elka also seems to understand something that she hadn't understood previously).

(sinks/sits down, taking a pill) Give me a glass of water, okay?

(Pesach doesn't move).

Just a glass of water... can't you give me a glass?

Pesach: Who can't be alone, huh? All the time, who...? (bringing her a glass of water) Get a live-in to bring you a glass of water afterwards, you've got enough money.

(Elka drinks the glass with her pill. Orka stands facing Malia, opens his mouth to say something. Pesach turns to leave and stops).

Malia: (to Orka) Not a word, I don't want to hear a thing. I'm taken, can't you see? I'm taken.

Orka: No, not you...!

Malia: (passing the baby in her arms to Lilly, raising a stick, the leg of some chair, waving it in Orka's face) If you don't leave me alone...! If you don't get lost...!

(General shock, even Elka stands up).

Orka: (retreating, laughing a sort of laugh) I can't believe it... with the leg of a chair... (to Elka) remind you of something, huh? Like the shepherd's stick on the head of that Ukrainian...

(Malia turns to arrange the stroller. Pesach turns to leave).

Elka: (to Pesach) It'd even be better if you'd just go with her already! She'll be a good woman for you, now I see it, she will be. Take an apartment close by, I'll help you. (to Orka) You too, I'll give you money, I'll give you. Just go already, go back to America, don't make any trouble here.

Orka: Just like that huh? Your will, dividing up the property. You give her to him, a woman with a stick like that just like you. Me you give America. (without laughing, quietly) Money's not enough, I want the gold, Ma. Where's the gold?

Elka: You're just confusing things.

(Orka turns over a refrigerator onto the floor. General shock).

No! What...?

Orka: Where is it? (Puts his hand on another refrigerator).

Pesach: Give him the gold, give it to him.

Orka: You hear? He's already giving it to me, it's already his. (turns over another refrigerator, puts his hands on another object, some cabinet or dresser) Where's the gold?

Elka: No! You're gonna break and ruin everything. It's in the cemetery, I told you already, underneath a little tree, we hid it in the night, my father...

Orka: Now you're just confusing things, telling tales. That was during the war when you ran away. Where is it now...? Tell me or else I'll...!

Elka: I'll tell you. After the war, there was only me and my brother, your Uncle Yaakov, we were the only ones left. We went back and at night we went to the cemetery, to find the little tree down there...

Orka: Go ahead, what happens next, I don't remember.

Pesach: Up till that point you told us the story, no more. Afterwards...

Elka: Yes, you used to fall asleep.

Orka: Where's the gold? (threatens to knock something else over).

Elka: No! I'll tell you. We couldn't find the tree. During the war the goyim looked for the gold underneath the tombstones, they'd broken and dug up everything and turned it all over. From all their turning things over bushes grew everywhere, new little trees. It became a forest not a cemetery. We couldn't find our little tree. Everything looked identical.

Orka: I'm not following...

Elka: You were little kids, I didn't want you to stay in that evil land, so I brought you to Israel.

Orka: You mean to say that...?

Elka: The gold is not here, no. Look everywhere in Jaffa, in the entire Land of Israel, it's not here.

Orka: So where *is* it?

Elka: There, in the cemetery. Uncle Yaakov, he stayed on. He's still digging and searching. He's smart about it though, he looks at night, so they won't see him.

Orka: No, that can't be true... what an invention!

Lilly: (with the baby still in her arms) You can't make up a thing like that.

Orka: What...? All these years, all your stories, all our plans...? The gold, the one sure thing we had here... where is it? (starts turning over everything, the cabinet, the dresser, a table, chairs, etc.) I'll take everything apart, I'll open everything, I'll peel back the paint! Along with the skin on my face, I'll peel it all off! Where is it, where's our gold?

Elka: (Rocking after him, trying to stop him) No, enough, that's enough! There's no gold here, it's not here! Turn me upside down too, kill me, peel my skin off – it's not here! It's not here! It's not here!

Orka: (with all his heart) It's not here, not here, but where is it with all this 'not here'? Where is it? (stops, as though realizing his madness, defeated, to Malia) Leave already, okay?

(Malia steps over to Lilly to take her baby from her, but Lilly won't give the baby over, holds on to him).

Malia: What do you think you're doing?

(Lilly makes no reply, just holds on tighter to the baby and retreats).

Orka: (laughing a sort of laugh) I can't believe it... you...? You want... do you want anything altogether? This is really something, you know... yeah, this is really something!

(Lilly gives the baby over to Malia. Malia exits with the baby. Pesach steps over to right some of the things that Orka knocked over).

Forget about it.

(Pesach takes his things and leaves. Elka explodes, trying to stop him).

Sit down quietly, I'll put everything back in order.

(Elka sinks/sits down on the rocking chair, gets frightened by the rocking, tries to get up, rocks back and forth, slowly relaxes).

(pausing, with a sort of joking tenor) This gold... how come I didn't sense it? Yeah, we used to fall asleep in the middle. Or maybe you yourself used to fall asleep. We never asked any questions. The story used to cut off in the middle, but the gold always remained, like something you would never give out, just when there was a real need... oh, a real need! You would never give it but there was no doubt that it existed, that's for sure. Why did you do that? How could you lie like that?

Elka: It's not a lie. The gold exists, over there...

Orka: Where? In the night, sleeping? Waiting for us when we fall asleep?

Elka: Uncle Yaakov, he'll find it in the end. It'll take some time. From all his digging new bushes and trees spring up. But in the end he'll find it. Then he'll come here with all the gold, he'll come. He always loved me, I was the youngest.

Orka: (laughing softly) Just like that, huh? The youngest... say that again.

Elka: He always loved me.

Orka: Really? He loved you, loved...?

Elka: I was the youngest.

Orka: (rising and facing the destruction everywhere) What a mess! Not a bad job, huh? Yeah, I'll rearrange it. Now enough already. There's no gold, so there's also no reason to go back to New York. In the end I'll even end up asking you to let me work with you here in the warehouse. If I'll be a good boy maybe you'll even let me make a few changes around here, fewer shmataz. You're a real bitch, you know that. In the end all you did was change horses – used to be him, now it's me.

Lilly: (directed at the refrigerator on the floor) That's the refrigerator that guy bought, the sick guy from the hospital. Maybe he died in the meanwhile? Good thing he paid in advance.

(Orka stares at her, shocked).

What did I say? It's not my fault, I have a practical head on my shoulders, what can I do?

Orka: (starts to laugh a sort of laugh) That's true, you're not guilty of anything, no, not you... I was mean to you, and you... yes, you're so guiltless that it's enough to drive a person mad...

Lilly: It doesn't matter. I was calm, I knew nothing would come of it. Everyone said so – the coffee grounds, the cards, even the palm of my hand.

(During the following Elka takes another ice cream and sits down on the rocking chair, licking away).

Orka: (continues talking to Lilly, with a sort of joking tenor, with a trace of tears) Yeah, you're really something... Yeah, you can't make up things like this, you're really something... Yeah, only God himself could have made you... so... you're even sort of beautiful like this, a sort of beauty... who knows, maybe...? I really loved her, in the end I finally fell in love, and maybe...? They say that love is something that belongs to you, it's not something that depends... on the object, yeah. Maybe I could even love you now that...? God just grant me the strength... (trips over the accordion, puts it on, tries to play 'Row, row, row your boat' without succeeding, just high-pitched cries, and now he directs himself at Elka) You remember? When we just arrived in Israel on the boat... they took us to some kibbutz in the night, made a whole big reception, we were refugees then, we were still wet from the sea, and the choir sang... (he starts to play correctly and beautifully).

(Together with his playing a big choir strikes up the song, singing 'Row, row, row your boat')

We were always alone. Just you and us, you and us, you and us, the three of us against the world, and here were a thousand people singing to us, like they were embracing us, a thousand people...

(the sound of the choir grows truly strong and overtakes his voice).