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An Ass of Glass

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I owe the present play to my Grandma Chaya, who told me when I was a child of the young boy who suddenly declared that he wasn't able to sit down because he had a rear end made of glass.

Previously, there was the short play "A Trip with Child", which is essentially a monologue, as the elderly couple there, the owners of the restaurant across the way, have barely any lives of their own. At the same time, there was a feeling that I shared with several people in the theater world that the core was solid enough and that it was possible and perhaps even necessary to expand and add to it. This led to "A Winter's Festival", which was performed at "Habima" in 1989, in which version the woman and child were added as actual characters, where previously they had only been referred to in the existing dialogue, and several other characters were added with their own parallel subplots. Looking back, as I read the texts in preparation for the publication of the present collection of my plays, the additions appeared to me to be somewhat forced and seemed to detract from the overall strength of the earlier short play, and I had already decided to forego the later version and limit myself to the inclusion of "A Trip with Child".

It was then that I recalled my Grandma Chaya's story, which was apparently based on "A Mayse mit a indik", or "The Tale of the Turkey", which is attributed to Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, though perhaps both tales are drawn from the same source. At any rate, it suddenly dawned on me – yes, in a moment of inspiration, such things still exist – that the story could help me fill the dynamic between the two elderly characters with life and tension, and this would even extend to their relationship with Sammy, the main character. I found that the tale also had resonance in Sammy's own story, such that it actually bound all three strands of the play together rather nicely.

From there things came together rather quickly, and within two or three weeks, while occupied with the preparations for the present collection, "An Ass of Glass" was born and grew to its full height, as it were. It strikes me as a completely new play, with a life of its own, and it deserves to be included in the present collection and performed onstage when its time comes.

Characters

Sammy Domb – Insurance Agent, Divorced with One Son
Elderly Couple – The Proprietors

Location

A small restaurant in a rundown area of southern Tel Aviv-Jaffa. There are a few tables and a small bar to one side with a little kitchen area behind it. In the entrance to the restaurant, which faces the street, there are wooden doors and a rolling iron grate. There is a ladder inside with its upper edge stuck in the opening in the ceiling that leads to the roof.

Time

All the action takes place in a single evening.

Scene One

(Nighttime. Outside it is windy and raining. The sound of tin can be heard knocking against the roof. The noise suddenly stops. The elderly woman is sitting at the table in the center, counting money in a little iron box. She is tired and her eyes droop from time to time as she nods off. The elderly man comes down from the roof by the ladder, completely drenched. He approaches and stands facing the old woman)

Woman: What're you looking at?

Man: You hear the rain, the wind, hear the tin knocking up on the roof?

Woman: Yeah, I hear it.

(The Man laughs)

Woman: What're you laughing at?

Man: You can't hear it.

Woman: I can't hear it? What, ain't it enough you already made me blind?

Man: You can't hear it because I took care of it. I tied it down, the tin, that is. Up there, in the rain. (Indicates his soaked clothing) Look at it!

Woman: It?

Man: The rain, it's all over my clothes. I'm soaked, soaked through to the bone, right to the core. (He moves closer, smiling)

Woman: What're you smiling at? He's smiling. Like some wicked beast, baring all his teeth. You're opening your pants, that's what you're up to, you ain't smiling, showing me that one tooth you got down there.

(He continues standing there facing her, smiling).

Woman: I'm working right now. You don't like it, go back to where you came from, go work at the butcher's, at Shlomo's place. Get back to the slaughterhouse, who ever told you to leave? Even a slaughterhouse was too elegant for you, too many people.

(The Man approaches the entrance and begins pulling down the iron grate, then turns and stands facing her. The Woman gets up, managing to raise the grate up just a little bit).

Man: You wanna work at night, huh? Look at you, just look at you. Your legs are knocking like a calf as just got born. That's enough, alright? How much more? Ain't even no dog gonna show up now.

Woman: They'll come or they won't but a restaurant's gotta stay open. There are good customers at night, not them workers that come during the day.

Man: (Approaches her, desirously) You're like some wicked queen!

Woman: I ain't got the strength now, you said it yourself.

Man: I'll give you strength. I was just working on the roof, fixing the tin. A man out in the rain, in the wind – he's gotta have his woman, right? (The Woman makes no response, turning aside).

Man: I'm talking to you, ain't I? What, you don't hear me? (She makes no response)

Man: It's like that? Again? Him again? You hear him? Listening for his footsteps. Sure, it's windy, raining – he'll probably be cold, soaked through. C'mon! You ever hear a cow croon after they cut its throat?

Woman: Your head is full of cutthroat stuff. Even your hairs are full of blood.

Man: Watch it, now, just you keep on like that – you'll end up just like last winter, end up in the nuthouse. Each year you go getting older and more infantile at the same time. In the end you're gonna start sucking your thumb, sure! Now, when we're old like this, this is the time we need 'a have our heads on straight, don't you get it? You gonna leave the restaurant open for him, 'cause maybe he might come...?!

Woman: (Avoiding a direct answer) It's 'cause of the liver. There's chopped liver left over. If they don't eat it today we'll have to toss it out tomorrow.

Man: It's 'cause of him.

Woman: Fine, let's shut it down.

Man: (Has difficulty believing his ears) Really?

Woman: Really. (Begins putting the strongbox aside). (The tin can be heard knocking on the roof again).

Woman: (Laughing) You fixed it, huh? Tied down the tin, in the wind and rain! (The Man turns to go up the ladder. She reaches out as if to stop him)

Man: Not a word! (Goes up the ladder, out onto the roof)

Sammy: (Peeks in under the grate) Hello there! (The Woman looks around to see where the voice is coming from).

Sammy: Here, over here, good evening! (The Woman approaches the entrance)

Sammy: You still open? Can I come in?

Woman: Sorry... the grate... we're...

Sammy: That's fine, doesn't bother me a bit. (Crawls in) On the contrary, I rather like it. I never entered a restaurant like that before in my life. Nobody ever enters a restaurant like that. You know something? Even Rockefeller never entered a restaurant like that. I was standing out there, thinking about whether I should try coming in or not. With the grate like it is, closed about three quarters of the way down, it's done, over, even the chairs are probably already turned up on the tables with their legs in the air. So I said to myself, if this place that's already shut down like that is still open then – how can I put it...? Then it's *really* open. (Looks around) Good, the chairs are still on the ground.

Woman: Excuse me?

Sammy: The chairs, on the ground, not just leaning on two legs – all four legs on the ground. (Looks around) Listen, listen! I can't believe it. It's like I'm dreaming. I was looking for a place just like this. (The Woman is still shocked and stares at him from a distance).

Sammy: (Stretches his hand out to her) Samuel Domb, very nice to meet you, though they call him Sammy – me, that is. Once upon a time it was

Shmil but I like Sammy a whole lot better – insurance agent and starving! (Hands her a business card) There you go, my business card. Insurance agent, it's written right there, see? (Laughs) 'Starving' isn't written there but that's the main thing. What's your name, if I may ask?

(The Woman makes no response).

Sammy: (Laughs) That's not the way you get to know someone, huh? It's just a restaurant after all...! If you ask me, a restaurant isn't just any old place, a man eats in a restaurant. It's not a simple thing, eating (about to sit down, stops, takes off his coat) my coat, sorry, it's soaked from the rain, and filthy too, some car sprayed me good. (Sits down at one of the tables).

Woman: (After a moment, hesitatingly, all the while looking up in the direction of the roof). You wanna eat?

Sammy: (Laughs kindly) Do I wanna eat? Oh no, if you only knew... forget it, on the contrary, I mean, just a cup of tea would be fine. The best would be a glass of water, just a glass of water from the tap. I'll pay whatever you want. Would you mind?

(Woman makes no response, shocked by the whole affair).

Sammy: I – how shall I put it...? Something happened to me this evening. I'm having a sort of celebration, I don't need any food, don't need any drink, how shall I put it? I'm drunk but not on wine, and stuffed but not with meat.

Woman: We run a restaurant, we've got some good liver.

Sammy: Liver? Right off the bat like that?

Woman: It's chopped.

Sammy: That's already a step up. While we're at it, is there any fish? As an appetizer?

Woman: Fish for an appetizer?

Sammy: No, not fish.

Woman: Liver? Chopped?

Sammy: That's it, that'd be fine. You know what? Bring the fish. I don't really care for fish – but it's good for the vodka. Fish goes good with vodka. My grandfather used to say, you take a fish from the river, and with the vodka you put it back in the river.

Woman: You want some vodka?

Sammy: I like you, you know that? I order fish in order to drink vodka and there you go asking me if I'd like some vodka.

Woman: (At a loss) You want the vodka?

Sammy: (Laughs good-naturedly) You're right, it's my fault, I'm talking too much. It's confusing, isn't it? Some folks it takes them forever just to get a single word out of their mouths...! Like every word they utter is some sort of pearl. But it's all the same fodder. At least I give you a good portion. Yeah, I'd like some vodka, bring me some vodka, if you would, with the fish.

Woman: (Turns to go, then stops) It'll be some good fish, you'll see. (Continues in the direction of the kitchen).

Sammy: (Laughs kindly) I've already bought it but you're still giving me the hard sell, huh? That's sweet. You're not doing it for the sale, but just in order to say something nice about it. That'll make him real happy,

I'm sure of it. The fish, that is. (Looks around) You can tell that you eat well around here. It's not too clean, that's the sure sign. Even the table wobbles a bit, like it's got a limp, a real table. My wife, she used to, she liked places with flowers and candles. Not me. What do I come to a restaurant for a meal or a funeral?

(The Woman places the fish in front of him with a shot glass of vodka and sneaks in a plate of chopped liver as well).

Sammy: That's it? Already? You're as quick as a girl half your age! Let's go, get to work! (Starts with the fish, then stops) Just a sec. (Drinks off the vodka) Now he can breathe a bit, the fish that is. (Keeps eating)
(The Woman stares at him)

Sammy: You haven't seen a lot of folks eat like I do, right? And with a fork and knife – sure, an insurance agent – and... words can't do it justice! At night, with the wind and rain, gives you the kind of appetite that... like it's winter or something...! Vodka you can get here, borscht, cream of corn, you can even get a beating if you go looking for it, but winter? Fuhgeddaboutit! But all the same, it is something, at least it's the first rain, huh? Makes you hungry, the kind of hunger that, like... God knows what it's all about, huh? That's why I took my son out for a walk today. (Without noticing he starts eating the liver as well).
(The Woman tenses up completely)

Sammy: A walk with your son also helps you work up an appetite. Every afternoon we used to go walking, in the evenings too. Maybe three and a half hours even. At least three. With a kid you don't have to go any place in particular in order to enjoy, you just have to go walking. Robby doesn't like to let you hold his hand, but it doesn't matter, even without holding his hand it's like you still are. The simplest things become... (Still eating the liver) What's this?

Woman: Nothing. You...

Sammy: I'm eating fish, right?

Woman: Right, for the vodka.

Sammy: That's it, for the vodka I'm eating fish – so tell me how come I'm eating liver all of a sudden? My mouth is full of liver.

Woman: Chopped, with fried onions.

Sammy: You know what? So be it! Enjoy! It's just like selling two policies in one, huh?

(The Woman starts writing up the bill, with her tongue dangling).

Sammy: Hey, your tongue is hanging out and kinda wagging.

Woman: Sorry, it happens when I write up the customers, so I don't forget anything.

Sammy: So you don't forget anything? I get it, you're even writing with your tongue, in the air like that, out in the wide world, like some sort of copy. Don't worry, you'll have plenty to write up. (Takes a few bills out of his pocket) You see this cash? It wants to go home.

Woman: The cash...? It wants to go home...?

Sammy: Right there in your box – the main thing is it shouldn't stay with me, that's its home there, not with me. (Goes back to eating)

Woman: You... you want a main dish too?

Sammy: Whaddaya mean a main dish?

Woman: You said something earlier about how the main thing is...

Sammy: I said the main thing is it shouldn't stay with me and you... excellent! That might be the biggest question we're faced with in life, what's the main thing?

Woman: There's a roast, and chicken.

Sammy: If only the philosophers knew you... in Jaffa, the end of the world, just a hole in the wall, raining outside, the grate's already down, and suddenly they bring out the main thing – a main dish, and a double at that. Chicken and a roast!

Woman: There's also... there's also meat stew for a main dish.

Sammy: (Laughs) Really?
(The Woman turns away to the bar, stops, and stares back at him)

Sammy: Yeah? What's up?

Woman: Nothing, I just...

Sammy: Whaddaya mean 'nothing, I just'? You're staring at me, aren't you? Whaddaya see?

Woman: Nothing, I just don't see all that well.

Sammy: Just a second, let me get this straight, you're staring at me and you can't even see me?

Woman: Something like that. I can see a little bit, but I can't see all that well.

Sammy: All the same, whaddaya see?

Woman: Looks like a potato.

Sammy: A potato?

Woman: A potato.

Sammy: Very interesting, whaddaya gotta look so hard at a potato for? On the other hand, what wouldn't they give over there for a single potato.

Woman: (Half questioning) You from over there...?

Sammy: Where else could I be from? You are too, I'm sure of it. That's why you said a potato. You knew right off, huh? Would somebody who isn't from over there ever come crawling into a hole in the wall like this and finish off a plate of liver and fish in an instant?

Woman: You finished?

Sammy: Finished...? Check out how clean the plates are, only took a second, I haven't tore into something like that in a good while. The plates are clean and I... (laughs then stops) I can't really laugh the way you ought to. How much have I eaten already? You gotta eat slowly, that's the thing, can't jump on it like that! Give me more.

Woman: More liver? There's a little left, maybe a half a portion.

Sammy: No, what's the idea? That's the difference between food and drink. Drink might kill you but it ain't gonna stop you up.

Woman: You want another vodka?

Sammy: I said I did, didn't I?

Woman: Not really, kind of, yeah, you did, I'm on it... (Turns to the kitchen, then stops) You don't wanna also have a... a main dish, you said.

Sammy: Hey, I didn't say a thing, you're the one who... we spoke about potatoes, about my face, that is... there's nothing to say, it's a pretty original compliment.

Woman: Potatoes are a side dish.

Sammy: Like that? I get it, you wanted to slip a main dish in on the side, through the side dish. Slip me a roast and some chicken with the potatoes, is that it? C'mon, tell me the truth!

Woman: I don't know. It just came out.
Sammy: Great! That's already, how shall I put it...? It's like a song! Just for that I'll order a main dish.
Woman: The roast? The chicken?
Sammy: That's a tough one. There was a guy named Hamlet...to be or not to be, that is the question!
Woman: Perhaps...
Sammy: How about both, we can live a little and die a little at the same time, huh?
Woman: You want the roast and the chicken?
Sammy: Such wit, way to go! Yes, I'll have both!
(The Woman turns towards the kitchen, stops and stares at him, stealing a glance)
Sammy: What're you looking at? It's just a potato, what's there to look at?
Woman: (Hesitatingly) There's another guy... you look like him.
Sammy: Really? Somebody looks like me? That's why you're staring at me like that each time?
Woman: (Rather taken aback) No, forget it.
Man: (Enters through the opening in the ceiling, and as he comes down the ladder, he says forcefully, joyfully) You hear anything now?! Now you don't hear a thing. Now you ain't gonna hear a thing all winter long! I fixed it, tied it down like that so...! I tied it down like a bull! In the rain, look, I'm full o' rain, everything, full! (Spots Sammy, falls silent).
Sammy: Hello there, good evening! Nice place, I came in from down below, and here you are coming in from up top. Who are you, if I may ask?
Woman: That's my husband, he was fixing the tin on the roof.
Sammy: (Addressing the Man) Really?! On the roof, now?! Way to go! Soaked isn't the word for it. It suits you. You just need a hatchet in your hand now. Why don't you have a drink with me, a nice shot of vodka, huh? On me.
(The Man makes no response, just stares at him. The Woman takes advantage of the moment and prepares two plates, one with the roast and the other with the chicken).
Sammy: You don't like to talk much, do you? That's fine by me. I'm an insurance agent, I'm used to it, people don't say much and I end up doing all the talking.
Man: (Referring to the closed grate, addressing the Woman, without noticing what she is doing) Where'd he come from?
Sammy: Down below, like I said. That's good enough for me.
(The Man takes a step in his direction, stares at him).
Sammy: You recognize me too, huh, I mean you know someone who looks like me?
Man: (Addressing the Woman, exploding) You're already...? Already...?!
Sammy: Whaddaya mean already? Now it's getting interesting, a little hot spice.
Man: (Grunts at him angrily) You!
Sammy: (Laughing) You know what, I like you.
(The Woman places the two plates on Sammy's table – the roast and the chicken).
Man: (Shocked) What's that? How on earth...? Behind my back like that?

Sammy: I can't believe it. I got both.
 Woman: That's what you said earlier.
 Sammy: Not at the same time. What are they, Siamese twins?
 Woman: You want one first, then the other?
 Sammy: Precisely.
 Woman: But you're gonna eat the other too, right?
 Sammy: (Waving his money around) The cash is right here.
 Woman: Which one you want first?
 Sammy: You choose, whatever. You can even do it with your eyes closed.
 Woman: (Closes her eyes, then opens them) Maybe you wanna have the meat stew first.
 Sammy: (Laughs) You're quite a trickster, you know that?
 Woman: I'll take one dish off the table until you finish the other.
 Sammy: You know what? Leave it like it is, both of them. There's nothing to say, something's going on here, something that just... God knows what it is! Why not? It's great, two main dishes at the same time, that way they won't be alone in the world. (Starts to eat) What can I say? When you're married, you have a home, everything's fine – I mean everything, your food, your child, everything's just like your slippers, in their place, right there underneath the bed. And it all tastes the same. But when you're alone – just a little wind, a little rain, and suddenly you're starving... starving like you'll never be able to get full, what a pleasure! So you go running to your kid like the house is on fire. And you grab him by the hand and... off we go! Into the wild blue yonder! In the rain! It's just rain, after all, not the snow we used to get over there, huh? All the same, out there, outside, in the rain, your son suddenly really becomes your son. She – his mother, that is – let her say what she wants! Let her scream her head off! The main thing is he should enjoy himself! So what if he started coughing a little bit? You should see the windbreaker I bought him!
 (The Woman serves him another shot of vodka).
 Sammy: Way to go, you didn't forget. You waited until I had what to eat, the main dish, right?
 Woman: Yeah, that's how it ought to be, first you eat, then... he's the same way.
 Sammy: He who?
 (Woman is about to respond but the Man takes a step in her direction).
 Woman: (Addressing Sammy) Now I'm gonna bring you something else.
 Sammy: Do you guys follow...? The windbreaker that I brought him, that's what pissed her off. It was the most expensive one in the entire store. And I even told her: "This is in addition, it's extra. I'm not gonna deduct anything from the child support, and I'm gonna keep coming on the same day to see him". But she goes: "That's exactly what I don't want, I don't want anything in addition, I don't want any extras!" That's when my blood started to boil. "You're forgetting something, ma'am...!" I said to her. I said it just like that. "Ma'am... You're forgetting that I'm not doing it for you. I bought it for him – not for you. I'm taking him for a walk – not you!"
 Woman: (Serves him a pickle) We've got pickles too, I made 'em myself.
 Sammy: You like your pickles, do you?
 Woman: I'm happy to open a new jar for a good customer.

Sammy: Everything, even marriage, it's all business, all a give and take. If you have any luck then you get a little something free as part of the deal, some little slice of love. With you the love comes in the pickle, is that it?

Woman: On the house.

Sammy: Unconditional love.

Woman: Just the first one.

Sammy: Even that's something. (Bites into it) You can feel it, it's really good.

Woman: You want another? It'll taste the same.

Sammy: Even without any love? Let's give it a shot, later, okay?

Man: (Recovers, addresses the Woman) You told me: Fine, enough, we're closing down! Didn't you?

Woman: (Quietly, as if Sammy can't hear) He'll eat and drink and pay well.

Sammy: (Places his cash on the table) I gotta burn through all this this very day.

Man: She ain't blind enough, huh – you gotta shove money in her face and blind her even more, is that it? (Pushes the cash back in Sammy's direction) Take your money and get lost!

Sammy: I gotta take issue with you when it comes to the cash. True, they're just paper bills, all wrinkled, don't smell all that good either, but look at what they do to her, your wife, that is. Look at her eyes, even behind the glasses, look at how they flash, all lit up like that, they're like shiny little coins themselves, polished up with a piece of silk. Cash doesn't rust, it doesn't get tired, it's always young. Men like cash too, but with women it's a whole 'nother thing altogether. With women – like my wife, for example...
(The Man remains standing, at a loss, and decides on a new tack, sitting down at Sammy's table, facing him).

Sammy: What a surprise, have a seat, please. I'll have some company, how nice.

Woman: (Addressing the Man, in a whisper, trying to get him to stand up) Murderer! Get up!

Sammy: No, why, on the contrary, let him sit down, by all means!

Woman: He ain't here to "make nice and give you company", he's here to get rid of you, send you packin'.

Sammy: I'll be fine.

Woman: We're just a simple establishment but we've got our respect, you don't do that to a customer, sittin' down with your clothes all soaked, your face all covered in filth, and starin' at him like that.

Sammy: Since when do you call that staring? He's banging nails with his eyes right into mine. (To the Man) Ain't that right?

Man: You!

Sammy: (While eating) "I bought it for him – not for you. I'm taking him for a walk – not you!" That's what I told her, my wife, that is, when she attacked me. You think that shut her up? "I get up and go to him at night when he screams in his sleep after your visits." – that's what she said to me – "I scrape by by the skin of my teeth on the sorry child support you give me, making sure he has decent food and can go to groups. I don't spring for any luxuries, and I'm not about to have you go playing the good uncle coming around with a windbreaker like that and taking him out for a trip in the afternoon like Elijah the Prophet

with your extras all of a sudden!" And after this little musical recital of hers – sorry, this dirge, I should say – she had the nerve to start crying, and she even grabbed me by my shirt and... anyway, I grabbed him by the hand and... off we go! Into the wild blue yonder! (Drinks off his glass, eats excitedly and finishes whatever is on the plate).

- Woman: You finished, pretty quick, ate the chicken first.
 Sammy: Sure, wanted to make sure it wouldn't run away, go flying off on me. It's a little harder for a cow to go running. (Laughs and addresses the Man) Good one, huh?
 (The Man makes no response, his head has begun nodding in the meantime, like he's sleeping, though his eyes are partly open).
 Sammy: What happened to him?
 Woman: He's sleeping. That's how he gets sometimes.
 Sammy: He's like that all the time? With his eyes half-open like that?
 Woman: Yeah, half-...
 Sammy: (Waves his hand in front of the Man's eyes) Even nails fall asleep, huh? And here I was talking to him, I... everything that's happening here, you know... if it wasn't for all this food I would try to think for a moment, try to understand just what's going on here.
 Woman: (Stares at the Man from up close, in order to make sure he's sleeping, then quietly says to Sammy, chuckling) He also used to eat quickly like that, finish half a chicken in an instant.
 Sammy: (To the Man) You? (To the Woman) Him?
 Woman: Another man. Once I put an entire half a chicken on the plate and he says to me: turn around, look out the window for a sec. I turn around, look out the window, then turn back and he laughs: See that? No chicken, chicken flew the coop, just like that.
 Sammy: How'd it fly? It was just a half a chicken.
 Woman: It was a whole half a chicken, this big. Nobody saw him die, they just said he was gone.
 Sammy: Who? The chicken? The half a chicken, that is?
 Woman: Him, the other man. (Quietly) My first husband.
 Sammy: Just like that? There's a first husband too, huh, I mean there was.
 Woman: Maybe there still is. They only said he died. There are all sorts of things going on like that these days, after the war.
 Sammy: That's true, there are all sorts of things going on. (Suddenly, returning to what's really on his mind) Did you guys ever go for a walk on the boulevard? Rothschild Boulevard, that is, you guys ever go for a walk there?
 (No response)
 Sammy: Sorry. I forgot. He's sleeping. (Addressing the Woman) You... you ever go for a walk down Rothschild Boulevard?
 Woman: I don't know, I...
 Sammy: Well fine, listen up... both of you, that is, just in case he wakes up in the middle. Today I went walking with him down there. With Robby, that is, my son. And suddenly I spotted this pool, it was beautiful! It had just rained and all the old trees were washed down real good like with soap and water. And there was this nice smell of wet leaves and dirt. And the pool... it was like a fish pond, for goldfish. There might have been fish there maybe twenty years ago. Now it was more like

just an empty barrel of salted fish, something foul-smelling with rotten green water inside it. By myself I wouldn't have even spit into something like that, but with him, you guys follow...? It was like I suddenly saw things through his eyes. The trees were dripping. Circles were forming in the pool, quickly, ring after ring. Then you could suddenly see some light in the water too, the sky that is. It was like the drops up high had brought the very heavens down into the pool. And it was like the water was filthy and clean at the same time, it was water, and it was the sky, and it was motor oil too – how shall I put it...? Suddenly there was something there that just touched your heart, something... I just had to show it to him, had to say something to him. But I'm all the way up here and he's just a kid, down there, right? Without too much thinking I just got down on my knees, so I'd be his height.

- Man: (Awake now, though it's uncertain how long he's been like that. Says suddenly) It ain't enough to say you're on your knees, huh, that ain't enough, huh?!
- Sammy: (Surprised) Aren't you sleeping? What ain't enough?
- Man: He's a kid, right?
- Sammy: Yeah, you were awake, you heard right.
- Man: Kid falls in the water, a kid, in the pool – it ain't enough you stand out there and give him a hand. You gotta go jump in the water. Gotta give him a nice slap too, even if it knocks him out. That's how you save 'em.
- Sammy: Thanks a lot. I'll make a note of it.
- Woman: He once saved a kid in the water. And a lady too, a dresser fell on top of her. He likes saving people. Even me, first he saved me, then he killed me, been killin' me my entire life.
- Sammy: Listen, listen, look what I've fallen into! The thing is Robby didn't fall in. The entire pool was no more than a little puddle, like an old bowl of soup at most. But guess what? Like I told you guys, that was precisely why it suddenly seemed so beautiful, like something special, and there I was showing it to him, and I said to him: Look, Robby, look! And what do you think he said to me, huh?
(The Man has dozed off again)
- Sammy: (Leans over to make sure) You're talking to someone and he goes and falls asleep right in your face, just gone.
- Woman: I'm here. You want another pickle? (Offers it to him) It's a pretty pickle, try it.
- Sammy: Schweppes! That's what he says to me, Schweppes! (Laughs kindly and addresses the Man) You get it? I'm sitting there, on my knees, my heart all aflutter, and he says to me: "I want Schweppes!" I almost screamed out: What?!
- Woman: Schweppes...?
- Sammy: Yeah, "Schweppes!" – that's what he said to me – "Schweppes! I said it to you three times already" – that's what he said to me. You want to show a kid something beautiful, something... and he... what can you do, huh?
- Woman: We've got some. You want?

- Sammy: There are some people who always know what's best for the other person. I once saw a guy like that with his kid. And there was the kid saying: "Look, Dad, falafel, I want a falafel". So the Dad goes: "No, falafel isn't healthy for you, it's no good. I'll get you whatever cake you want, I'll even buy you two pieces, but no falafel!" So the kid says: "I don't want cake, you promised me..." And then the Dad goes... anyway, after another second or two the father was already shouting and he hit the kid and the kid started to scream and cry and... the father had a mouth like a cherry. (Laughs) People like that are the best customers for insurance policies. But you know what? I'm in the business of selling insurance, not buying it. So when he – my son, that is – said to me 'Schweppes' just like that! Well I... what are you waving that pickle around in my face for? Take it away.
- Woman: Forget it. Sorry 'bout that. (Turns to go but tries to leave the pickle on the table).
- Sammy: (Gets up and grabs her by the arm) Trying to sneak it in, huh?
- Woman: No, I'm sorry, I just...
- Sammy: No, I'm the one who ought to be apologizing to you. You're not going to believe it but what just happened to me with you was exactly what almost happened to me with Robby this afternoon. When he turned to me and said: 'Schweppes' just like that – Schweppes! I almost raised my hand to him, I... all the blood rushed to my head, but I immediately took a deep breath, a real deep one, and then I said to him, "I'm gonna get you two cans of Schweppes" that's what I said to him, "and I'm gonna get you a big piece of cake and some falafel too! Eat, drink, whatever you want, however much you want!" Why not? I want to show him some stinking pool, but all he wants is Schweppes, so what, I shouldn't give it to him? I gave him my blood when I gave him my seed, my appetite, my thirst, my hunger, so what, I'm not gonna give him something to eat and drink? With me they're all hungry and thirsty all the time, that's how it is with me, wherever I am it's winter and it's snowing and everyone's starving. Cake! Cookies! Peanuts! Corn! Let him have falafel too! And ice cream even! Oh, he ate, he didn't stop for a second. His mouth didn't even shut for an instant. He finished off a whole store! Sure, he's my son, isn't he? Same style! What's the matter with that? (Realizes that he is still holding the woman by her arm) How did I end up holding your arm?
- Woman: The pickle...
- Sammy: (Lets go of her arm) I don't understand people. Are they that messed up? Don't they get it? Tell me: what could be so bad about eating, huh? Even if he went and ate a little too much? And what could be wrong with a new windbreaker?! Tell me, huh? For four years, all through the war, I wandered hell knows where, and that wasn't any good, that really wasn't any good, but I mean what...? (Falls silent and sits down) What was I trying to say?
(The Woman places the pickle on the table without him noticing).
- Sammy: What?
- Woman: Nothing.
- Sammy: (Gets up and says loudly, with all his heart) It was no good over there, it was really bad, but there was one good thing about it. Over there a

man knew what was good and what wasn't good, he just knew! And a new coat is a good thing! Yes, a new coat is a really good thing! And food is also a good thing! (Bangs the table) Yes, food is a very good thing! (Sits down, eats quickly, finishes it off) That's it, I'm done. Me and food is like a cat and mouse game, only difference being that the mouse usually stands a chance. Check it out, plate is completely clean, done, I killed it! It's been a while since I really ate well like that. I'm full, stuffed, to the gills, what a pleasure!

(The Man wakes up).

Sammy: I'm done eating and you're done sleeping, huh? (Laughs, then stops) I don't feel like laughing. I'm full, stuffed, to the gills. I'm gonna sleep well tonight, that's for sure. The nightmares come to you, they devour little pieces of you when you're hungry, empty. They're like fleas – whose blood do they suck? The poor, the starving. And I was starving, it's been a while since I was that hungry. It's like there's some foul beast inside starving in there, wailing away. It's a hunger that feels like you'll never be able to satisfy it. Never, huh? (Laughs).
(The Man collects the plates from the table).

Woman: (Addressing Sammy) The pickle – you didn't eat the pickle.

Sammy: Really? I felt like I just ate everything – even the table itself. (With the pickle in his hand) Look at it, cute little pickle like that always gets left for last, gets dragged along behind, fat little thing, maybe it's even got glasses, it's an orphan, naked like that, and soaked through, your heart just goes out to it, doesn't it? What do you say?

Woman: It's good, tasty, just like the other, same thing.

Sammy: If that's the case then we'll definitely take pity on it, we'll choke on it and take pity on it and eat it, and send it back home that way to its father and mother, we'll make him good and tasty. (Eats)
(The Man removes the remaining utensils from the table and cleans it off).

Sammy: Nice. A clean table. It's too clean. It's cold all of a sudden, like everything's empty, everyone went and left me all alone.

(The Man starts placing the chairs upside-down on the tables).

Woman: (Addressing the Man) What are you doing? Maybe he still wants to...?! (Takes the chairs down from the tables).

Man: More...?! How much...? How much more?! (Puts back up the chairs she took down).

Woman: Maybe he wants to drink? (Takes down the chairs he put up).

Sammy: It was right after the war. I was all alone. I don't have to tell you what that's like. One day I was wandering around some town. The buildings were still in ruins. And me, I was freezing and my heart was bitter, felt like lead. So I thought to myself: that's it, I'm done with life. You know how it is... you're fighting just to survive, still alive, but suddenly this living feeling just gets stuck in your throat. And then I spotted a museum. I went inside. A museum, you know. Pictures on the wall. Expensive ones, worth a whole lot of money.

Woman: I know, I know.

Man: What you know? You know money.

Woman: Museums, I know all about 'em.

Man: And how's that?

- Woman: He showed me, you know who I mean.
- Man: Sure!
- Sammy: Anyway, I went inside. And it was cold in there just like outdoors, and almost completely dark, but little by little I started to be able to see around me. What pictures! It was like the whole old way of life suddenly emerged from the darkness, came off the walls. The hunters and the animals and the angels from the children's books, even just regular folks, dressed real well, straight out of a family photo album. Then all of a sudden I saw this one picture. It was a couple, a husband and wife, in their fifties, or something like that. They were thin, dressed well, standing by a little table, real pretty, and the man, he had his hand around her back, hugging her a little bit, sort of a half-hug like that.
- (The Man makes as if to say something)
- Sammy: Yes? You want to say something?
- Man: You said: they saved you, right? Where?!
- Sammy: What, you can only save someone when they're drowning at sea? The most beautiful part about it were their smiles, kind of sweet and sour – how can I explain it? And with a secret. So I said to myself: listen, these two, maybe they had even gotten a divorce. And here they are back together again. Like oil and water, but they're together again. And that's the secret, they're smiling, but at the same time they're not. And that's the secret behind his hand, too, like he doesn't really want to embrace her, but he does it all the same, just like that, somehow. And it's beautiful, full of compassion. What can I say? I felt these pangs in my heart, and I became even bitterer than before. God, how I missed them, my mother and father. I wanted to die even more than before. (Laughs softly) Just a moment later I understood it all better. He had pinched her butt, that was the secret.
- (The Man, who had begun turning over a chair, stops, listening)
- Sammy: You like that, huh?
- (The Man turns the chair over but keeps listening)
- Sammy: (Addressing the Man) You get it? This couple there, exhausted as they are, suddenly the husband feels like pinching his wife as they're standing there facing the painter. Partly because he wants her, she got all dressed up and pretty for the painter. And partly because she annoys him, an older woman like that putting on airs and all. It also annoys him that he still wants her altogether and wants to touch her. True, she knows a lot of languages, but she's skinny, no meat on her bones, so he pinches her. And why is she smiling like that? First off – so the painter won't know what's going on back there. Second: she's angry at him: what a boor, coming from a simple family as he does! And third: she's enjoying herself: I'm still worth something, I'm still alive. What fifty-year old husband suddenly pinches his wife's ass? What can I tell you? It was alive. I laughed. I was shivering from the cold and laughing. I forgot all about wanting to die.
- (The Man's face lights up, clearly taking pleasure in the line as he smiles, perhaps even laughs a bit)
- Sammy: You really like that one, huh.
- Woman: You said "ass", that's what he loves, that's how it is in his family.

(The Man turns a chair over on a table with a bang)

Woman: If you don't stop that I'm gonna tell.
(All the chairs are already turned over, so he starts taking them down, then puts them back up)

Sammy: (In amazement) I can't believe it.

Woman: My family, his too, my first husband, everyone's got their own bed, they eat meat every day. *His* family is something else altogether, as simple as it gets, real paupers, living in a basement. They all sleep together on the floor, and all they eat is bread and beans, breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Sammy: Beans are real healthy, what's the problem?

Woman: They're healthy, but there's also a lot of...

Sammy: I get it.

Man: (Addressing the Woman) Tell him, tell him!

Woman: They eat beans, and the entire time... (laughing) the entire time...

Sammy: The big guns, huh? So what, it's natural, isn't it?

Woman: That's nothing, the main thing... (laughing) the main thing is... (laughs really hard)

Sammy: Nu, give me the main course already.

Woman: (Still laughing) They're laughing the whole time, laughing and happy, from morning till night.

Sammy: (In amazement) That's great! I never heard anything like that before. Look, even you're...

Woman: In my family, and many other families... (little by little her laughter turns to tears) his family too, my first husband, it's another thing altogether, they were never happy, they never laughed like that.
(Cries, sobbing)

Sammy: Oy, please, why are you crying?

Woman: I don't know.

Man: (Addressing Sammy) You! Now leave!

Sammy: Already? Just a sec. (Indicating the raised chairs) Where can you find another restaurant like this, with such stories, and all the legs of the chairs surrounding you like that, like you're in the forest?

Man: Go home!

Sammy: Just like my wife. She grabbed me by my shirt and screamed: go home! But after all, I was already at home. It was her house, and Robby's house. But me too... I don't have another home yet. You follow? She screamed: go home! But the truth is she was screaming: come home! She grabbed me by the shirt and pushed me, but the truth is she was pulling me in.

Man: (Grabs him) What do you want from our lives? What do you want?!

Sammy: (Looks at him) Vodka.
(The Man stares at him)

Sammy: I'm thirsty. I'm sure you are too. Drink with me, what do you say? On me! You afraid of drinking a little bit? Man like you, fixing the roof in the rain! What, you can't handle a little shot of vodka?!

(The Man goes to the bar, takes two large coffee mugs and fills them with vodka. Sammy and the Woman do not notice what he has done. The Woman goes up to Sammy to look at him from up close)

Sammy: (Addressing the Woman) What's the matter? You want to see it up close, the old potato? Or perhaps... it's getting a little claustrophobic.

Man: (Places the two cups of vodka on the bar and pulls Sammy over to the bar) You said you're thirsty, you wanna drink.

Sammy: Vodka – not water!

Man: (Waves the bottle of vodka that he poured from in Sammy's face) Vodka! He's all talk, the big man, now we'll see...!

Sammy: (Moved, laughs, softly, slowly) No...?! Vodka in a mug like that?! A big old coffee cup like that?!

Man: Drink it down, every last drop!

Sammy: I don't believe it...! It's just like back there, with the workers in the forest, filled to the brim! (Takes the cup in his hand, stares at it, takes a seat and stretches his hand out with the cup) Let's go!

Man: Not like that! Stand up!

Sammy: Sure, as tough as it gets. You're making it a competition, a real duel! (Gets up) I already had a cup like this once in my life. I was just a kid, really, in the forest. That's when I spotted them. They were standing around the fire, around this pot, big black giants, sure, the workers, woodcutters, and their stench, there aren't words to describe what a sweet stench it was. For a week I hadn't seen a living soul, hadn't eaten a thing. I was so hungry that I had already forgotten my father and mother, there was never was such a thing as a father and mother, they never existed. They were just standing there eating straight out of the pot. What pot? It was a big, black tin drum standing on the fire. Like they were cooking pitch, not soup.

Man: No talking!

Sammy: (Goes right on talking) What soup! It was boiling and bubbling, and they took it straight while it was boiling like that, like they were tearing raw meat off an animal, and they poured it raw like that, burning, right down their throats. And it spilled all over their beards and coats. And then they spotted me... look, look, a little Jew! There's still one little Jew left? What are you looking at? You hungry, wanna eat? Here, eat. But first you gotta drink something, here, take this tin cup. It's good, sweet. What can I tell you?

Man: Drink!

Sammy: A kid opens his mouth to drink something warm and sweet, wants to drink his mother's milk, and here he goes swallowing fire water. It was vodka like gasoline, they poured a whole tin cup down my throat. And I drank it down to the last drop. And they liked that. They started laughing like horses: Ho, ho! And they clapped me on the shoulder, they knew how to show respect to someone who finished off a whole cup! (Picks up the cup of vodka, stares at it from all angles) A coffee mug, full to the brim. (Keeps staring at the cup)

Woman: (Bursts in on Sammy to drag him off to the side) Don't drink it!

Man: You step aside.

Woman: (Drags Sammy off to the side) He ain't givin' it to you so you should drink it – he wants you to get drunk, fall down and break your head!

Man: (Laughing) Just like him, huh? A little teaspoon of vodka and straight away...

Sammy: (Laughing) I get it – him, huh?

Woman: (Addressing the Man) He could eat more than you.
 Man: Every animal knows how to eat. Drinking is another thing altogether.
 Sammy: I drank it off and then they gave me... yeah, they gave me what to eat... (laughs softly, suddenly) Do you have a sole?
 Woman: Of a shoe?
 Sammy: That's it, that's it exactly.
 Woman: What...? We're a restaurant.
 Sammy: That's just it, that's what I want.
 Woman: You want the sole of a shoe?
 Sammy: A rotten one.
 Woman: Ain't got it.
 Man: You...!
 Sammy: I'll drink with you, don't worry, it's just that first...
 Woman: You want to eat something else? There's the meat stew.
 Sammy: I want something else right now! I want a slice of the unicorn, some little leviathan or whatnot!
 Woman: We ain't got it.
 Sammy: Really? But there on the fire... over a low flame...
 Woman: That's the meat stew.
 Sammy: I would eat the very fire. (Laughs, almost to himself) After all, why not? That pot, the meat stew, that is, is that what's left from today?
 Woman: No, it's for tomorrow.
 Sammy: Doesn't seem like a big pot to me.
 Woman: It holds seven portions. Maybe ten, that's all we serve from the meat stew in a day.
 Sammy: Seven portions?
 Woman: Maybe ten.
 Sammy: But your portions aren't all that big.
 Woman: Over at Markovitch's they give you half of what we give.
 Sammy: Fine, we don't have to haggle. (Laughs again, to himself) Why not, after all? There's this guy I know, Amnon Salomon, he's got four kids, and he's been dreaming for years about eating a big can of smoked salmon all by himself. Did I say Amnon Salomon? Amnon Fisher's his name. So I said to him, that's your big dream? Just buy it and eat it! Other people dream of traveling to New Zealand. So once he went and told his wife about it, and she went and bought him a little can of it and they all ate it together, the whole family. Anyway, I ain't Amnon Fisher.
 Woman: I can give you a double portion, with potatoes and cabbage and...
 Sammy: Fine, listen to this! It would really go well with the cup of vodka. I want the pot, and without any potatoes or cabbage.
 Woman: You want to eat? The whole thing? All at once?
 Sammy: That's it, I want the whole thing, all at once.
 Woman: We don't have a big enough plate.
 Sammy: I don't want a plate, I want the pot.
 Woman: You want to eat the pot?
 Sammy: I want to eat the meat, but I want to eat it straight out of the pot. Don't you get it?
 Woman: I can give you the whole thing in a couple of plates.

Sammy: You're so smart, you know that? Like climbing ten little mountains and saying you climbed Everest.
(The Woman begins turning away to the kitchen area)

Man: You're gonna go giving it to him.

Woman: Of course I'm gonna give it to him.

Man: And what are you gonna serve tomorrow? What'll you say tomorrow?

Woman: I'll find what to serve. I'll come up with something.

Man: You ain't giving him a thing!

Woman: Yes I am! I am! I am!

Sammy: (To himself, once more, with a soft laugh) And here I was sure that I was full. A man doesn't know his own strength, doesn't know his own appetite.
(The Woman begins to turn towards the kitchen area)

Man: No you don't! (Stops her, steps around her, and brings the pot over and places it on the table with a bang)

Sammy: I can't believe it. (Lifts the cover) All this meat, what a smell! It's like a scented cloud you can ride off on, just go flying away! Where's the fork and knife?

Woman: You want a fork and knife too?

Sammy: I want a fork and knife too, that's it exactly! Just like in the forest, only not!
(The Woman turns to go get the utensils, but the Man steps in again and brings over a big cooking spoon)

Sammy: I asked for a fork and knife.

Man: This is a fork and knife for a pot.

Sammy: That's it, that's the thing. I want to eat out of the pot, but with a regular fork and knife!
(The Woman's face lights up)

Sammy: What's the matter with you? You fall asleep? Busy dreaming?

Woman: Here, I'll get it. (Brings him a fork and knife)

Sammy: (With the fork and knife in hand) Oy, mamma, I love it! Oy, mamma, mamma, oy! Who knows, maybe I'll find you down at the bottom at the end of the road, when the pot is done, huh? (Eats, excitedly, with the fork and knife)

Woman: (Laughs to herself, softly, silently) He knows how to eat. He'll eat, he'll finish it off.

Man: Just like the ducks. I worked for the farmers. I used to pour the food down their throats. I saw just how they knew how to eat.

Sammy: (Without taking a break from eating) Really? Like ducks on their way to the slaughter?

Man: You ain't like no duck, nobody has to force it down your throat, you do it all by yourself!

Sammy: Really? (Addressing the Woman) Bring me a pickle, would you?

Woman: Sure. Here you go! (Brings one over, at a run)

Sammy: Look at her, running around like a seventeen-year old girl. It's not a pickle, it's a pair of wings.
(The Woman laughs to herself once more, softly and silently)

Man: You're laughing, huh?

Woman: Anyone who eats meat like that out of the pot with a fork and knife ain't like no ducks, and with a pickle what's more. Just like him, in his family they never ate without using a fork and knife.

Man: You and your signs.

Woman: Never, even at breakfast, they used a fork and knife.

Man: Let me tell you something.

Woman: I don't wanna hear it.

Man: You know it already, huh?

Woman: You can tell your story a thousand times, I don't believe a word you say.

Man: Without a fork and knife and without a pickle either. With his two friends. I saw the way they jumped on that American roast beef. They choked on it and kept eating. Their mouths were full, they hadn't even swallowed yet and they were stuffing more in, quickly, sure, so nobody would get any more than the next guy, like little roast beefs eating roast beef. The other guys just vomited, but he died.

Woman: Lies! You lied to me over there too, just to get your hands on me, to take me away from him, just to drive me insane.

Man: I took you in my arms, I carried you like a newborn calf.

Woman: I ain't no calf. I want manners, human beings.

Man: Your legs were dripping blood, I licked your wounds with my tongue...

Woman: You sucked my blood, drank it right up.

Man: He's sucking your blood. (Indicating Sammy) Him...

Sammy: (Still eating) You can turn me into anyone you want, as far as I'm concerned at this point, everyone's dead to me, even I'm dead.

Man: Today it's him, yesterday it was someone else. He wasn't just your one husband, he was a hundred husbands. Every time you gotta go crazy, just break down into little pieces like that. Then I have to gather you up from the floor all over again, like back in the beginning when you were lying on the floor, just a bag of bones, like a piece of iron twine. I spoon-fed you, fed you with my fingers, just like that. I mean I... I gave you life back.

Woman: I'm sick of it. Take my life back then! Every little thing – he tells me I gave you life...! So that's why I gotta go living with you in this grave, can't talk, can't enjoy myself, can't even earn money, nothing, all the time I just gotta...

Man: Don't you dare say it...

Woman: I will! (Begins, addressing Sammy) All the time, he...

Sammy: (Stops eating, takes a break for an instant) Forgive me, I don't feel like hearing it. The secrets between a man and a woman are like an eagle way up in the sky, only God oughtta know 'em. Me, the truth is... this cup of vodka, a full coffee cup filled to the brim with vodka, it just keeps staring at me like that.

Woman: I'm gonna say it! You dirty old man, that's all there is! All the time, every night, on Fridays sometimes even...

Sammy: (In amazement) I can't believe it, no...! I'm sorry... (keeps eating, breathes, with difficulty) I just can't stop, I can't.

Man: (Sort of screaming) You're my wife, aren't you? You're my wife and I'm your husband!

- Sammy: (With difficulty) Sure, with proof like that. And with her? You've got desire made of steel, sure, and what with the first husband playing the role of some sort of aphrodisiac...
- Man: (With the cup of vodka in his hand) Get up, drink, let's see you!
- Woman: (Addressing Sammy) He wants to ruin it all. Wants you to go. He wants to kick 'em all out. Wants to stay here all alone, fixing the roof in the rain again, all soaked through all over again – on purpose!
- Sammy: Soaked on purpose?
- Man: Again...?!
- Woman: (Addressing Sammy) On purpose, so he can take his clothes off, strip down naked, and jump on me.
- Sammy: (Laughing) You wanna jump her...? Really?
- Man: (With the start of a stifled scream, addressing the Woman) What else...?!
- Sammy: (Laughing) What can I tell you? God Himself touched this little hole in the wall with his finger. (Keeps eating)
- Man: (With the same scream) What else are you gonna tell him, what are you gonna spill now? A stranger from the street... you gonna strip us naked like that?!
- Woman: He's not some stranger from the street, you...! (Doesn't manage to finish her thought)
- Man: (Angrily, at his wit's end) Me...?! I'll show you a stranger from the street! A stranger from the street doesn't fix the roof for you, a stranger doesn't... I fixed it, I tied the tin down so it wouldn't move, so it'd stay quiet. But that's enough now, I'm gonna break it now, gonna break it and tie up...! I'll tie it up so it stays broken, so even the slightest breeze'll – it'll shake and knock and scream, it'll knock around kicking and screaming like a bull in the slaughterhouse! (Goes up the ladder to the roof)
(It seems as if the Woman was waiting for the Man to leave, as she fixes her hair a bit, and her apron, and then looks at Sammy)
- Sammy: You got him good and pissed off, huh? (Keeps eating)
- Woman: He's like that all the time, it's enough now, there's just me... just me and you...
- Sammy: You and me, or me and the pot? (At this point he is already taking pauses between bites) I still can't believe it. It's not a pot, it's an ocean, a forest. And to think I ate the sole of a shoe...! That's what they gave me, "You had a drink, now eat something..." So what? Did it hurt me? Where am I and where are they now? (Laughs) The sole, it was black, with the smell of tar, the smell of the dirt, a sort of living smell, ah! So as for my kid, my son, let him eat as much as he wants! And don't let her go bugging me about it! A woman takes the whole world, takes the ocean and the forest, the summer and the winter, she takes the whole thing and turns it into some little stifling room, and whatever you do – nothing is good enough, and it's all your fault, and you're choking to death. (Takes a breath) It's tough to eat meat and talk at the same time. It's like Jacob and Esau all in one go. In the end you get mixed up and start swallowing your very words and speaking meat, and as for having enough air to breathe – forget about it.

Woman: (Suddenly) Maybe you don't even have a wife, don't have no kid, not really... I mean maybe...

Sammy: What makes you think that?

Woman: A man who's got a wife, a man's got a kid, he doesn't eat like that in a restaurant, a whole pot like that. When a man's got a kid – then he's got a house. He sits at home in his house on a night like this.

Sammy: So how come he's sitting here eating like this in a restaurant all the same, eating a whole pot like this, this man you're talking about? Me, that is...

Woman: Maybe he ain't... you, that is, maybe you ain't...

Sammy: What ain't I? Ain't I sitting here, ain't I eating, straight out of this pot here? Who's doing it if I...? You think there ain't nobody sitting here, eating like that straight out of the pot? Maybe the pot ain't even...?

Woman: There is... there is someone, sure, you, but maybe... maybe it ain't you...

Sammy: I get it, you think I'm... I'm him actually, the other guy, the first one, that is. You won't let it go. You're like a hungry dog that gets hold of a dry bone and fights for it, would rather die than let it go. Just like a dog, or like someone completely bursting at the seams with food, but he keeps going, stuffing himself, more and more, huh?
(Woman laughs, chuckling)

Sammy: It's funny, sure.

Woman: He also used to eat like that, a lot, and quickly, too, but with a fork and knife, just like that!

Sammy: You don't really think that I...?

Woman: Why not?

Sammy: That's a good answer, good and firm. Really nothing you can say in response.

Woman: Maybe. You just can't tell these days. There's all sorts of things, after the war. They even write about it in the papers. There's a man who forgets his entire life from before, forgets who he really is, it just seems like he's awake, but he's really sleeping.

Sammy: Just dreaming of eating, huh? If only that was the truth, then my stomach wouldn't hurt me so much.
(They can hear the sound of tin knocking around on the roof, as the wind blows through the restaurant)

Sammy: They've started slaughtering the tin, huh? And with the wind.

Woman: It's him. Later on he'll fix it again. It's like that every time, he breaks stuff then he fixes it.

Sammy: I get it, then he'll also come down here soaked through, and strip down naked and jump you, huh?

Woman: Maybe that's over now. Maybe he'll tell him, that's it, I'm back, I'm here.

Sammy: And then that guy'll jump you, me that is?

Woman: No, he don't jump me, not like that.

Sammy: Sure, he eats with a fork and knife. What can I tell you? Everything's fine, you just forgot that I – he, that is – has got a wife and a kid all the same.

Woman: A man, even if he's got a wife and a kid, if there's someone else who came first – it doesn't matter.

Sammy: A wife and kid don't matter?
 (During the following portion of the conversation, we can hear the sound of the wind and the tin knocking around more forcefully than before. The Man enters from the roof, coming down the ladder, but they don't notice him)

Woman: There was this one woman, her husband took a wife, got married. He thought she stayed back there, thought she had died.

Sammy: How? He married her, didn't he?

Woman: His wife, the first one, the one from before, she was left back there, she died.

Sammy: I get it.

Woman: But she didn't die.

Sammy: What you're trying to say is that he didn't die either, me that is.

Woman: Of course not, look...

Sammy: Yeah he's alive, that's for sure, and with a fork and knife, that's the best proof. Tell me, is that the only sign you got, the way that I'm eating, or him, for that matter?

Woman: I've got other signs. A psychic told me. Said he would come in the winter, when it would be cold and raining real hard. He'll come at night, and the grate'll be partly closed, just like it is now.

Sammy: You need a stronger sign, a real proof, don't you think?

Woman: There's something else.

Sammy: I'm listening.

Woman: I have to ask you. Do you...

Sammy: Go ahead.

Woman: (Getting up the courage) How old are you?

Sammy: Why?

Woman: How old?

Sammy: Forty-seven.
 (The Woman closes her eyes, as her lips keep moving)

Sammy: What are you doing? Closing your eyes like that and whispering to yourself.

Woman: (Her face lights up) That's it, it's exactly right.

Sammy: What's it, what's exactly right?

Woman: Just a sec, let me do the math again, I'm getting confused all of a sudden.

Man: (Addressing the Woman) Let me help you. He was forty-three when the Germans came.

Woman: You sure? That's what I can't really...

Man: Absolutely, he was forty-three, and the war lasted four years, so sure, that's it, it comes out exactly right, he was forty-seven when you met after the war, and then he suddenly went and got lost on you, right?

Woman: (Happily, her face lit up, though still a bit uncertain) Yeah, that's it.

Sammy: (Addressing the Man, in wonderment) You helped her... despite yourself...

Man: Drink! (Takes the cup of vodka in his hand)

Sammy: How could I have forgotten? That's the main thing, right? (Gets up and takes his cup of vodka in his hand) Now I'll drink. I ate a whole pot full of the soles of shoes, now I can drink it off. Afterwards, not before, afterwards!

Sammy: (They each drink off their whole cup, the Man in one sip, while Sammy has a little difficulty getting it down but finally manages)
 (Tottering) I did it, finished the whole cup, right down to the bottom...
 (Addressing the Woman) I did good, huh?
 (The Woman makes no response, as something has disturbed her happiness)

Man: What's the matter? Something wrong? Forty-seven years old, that's it, comes out just right.

Woman: He was forty-three and a half when the Germans they came.

Man: That's the problem? Half a year? Ask him, maybe he's also forty-seven and a half.

Woman: (Addressing Sammy) How old are you exactly?

Sammy: (Goes wobbling between the tables) Exactly? You want me to tell you exactly? I should drink and give it to you exactly? You shoulda asked me before the vodka. Why are you really doing this? You miss him, the first one?

Man: Tell her exactly how old you are. Forty-seven and a half, isn't that right?

Sammy: Whatever you say.

Man: (Addressing the Woman) You hear that? Now the numbers come out just right, he's forty-seven and a half, just like me, you don't need any other signs, that's it! We were the same age, sure, you remember. Look at me! Sure, forty-seven and a half. Like him! What do you say?

Woman: (Looks at him, then looks at Sammy, and it's clear that she no longer believes what she is seeing) So everything's fine, right? The numbers come out right.

Man: Sure. The numbers are right, the numbers

Woman: So what then?

Man: So what...? What about the time frame?

Woman: The time frame...?

Man: The time frame, yes, the time. When the Germans came he was forty-three... and a half... and when the war ended and you met him he was forty-seven and a half.

Woman: That's it, exactly... (but she's not really sure) That's not it, not exactly? What? How?

Man: Nu, why don't you tell me?

Sammy: You're torturing her.

Woman: (Holding the Man's hand) You tell me, you know.

Man: Suddenly I know, huh?

Woman: You'll tell me everything.

Man: When did the war end? What year? It was 1945, right? For him to be his age you'd have to add on another thirty years, right?

Woman: (Beats his chest with her fists) Murderer! You killed him back there, you killed him.

Sammy: You just killed him for her right here, right now. You're evil, you know that, you... (Falls silent) No, it's something else... what was it? I must remember...

(There has to be some movement between the Man and Woman. Perhaps she moves away a bit and he follows her, among the tables and overturned chairs)

Sammy: (Sinks down at one of the tables, in amazement, laughing now and then) That's it, of course... (Laughing here and there) I don't believe it... you did it... just like in my Grandma's story... it's just like in my Grandma's story, I could never get enough of hearing her tell that one, about the young boy, what a story! One Friday, at his parents' house, they were all sitting around the table and he was just standing there... sit down, they said to him... I can't, he said, I have an ass of glass, and it'll break if I sit down... there's no such thing, they all said to him, the rabbi said it, the pharmacist said it, even the doctor... they're all telling him it ain't so but he keeps insisting, says you all don't know, I do, I can feel it... until they finally took him to the beadle... just a beadle after all... so they take him over there, and the guy says to him, take off your clothes, I wanna see it... so he takes off his clothes and the beadle takes a good look at him, looks from afar, looks at him up close, even touches it, and then he says, listen, I can't believe it, I've never seen anything like it! It's true, he's got an ass of glass! Now the kid's parents were completely shocked, so then the beadle says to the kid, bend over please. The kid bends over and the beadle gives him a nice kick in the ass... there you go, I broke it for you, that's what he says to him. And that's it, he was all better... (Laughing) It's a good one, huh? (Stops laughing) I'm suddenly in a shitty mood. You eat and eat, the best meat there is, and then all this good meat suddenly seems like something real sad, kinda bitter. You all follow...?

(They are both standing now, listening to him)

Sammy: You follow? When he asked for ice cream for the third time, after all the other stuff that he had eaten... we were standing in the street, and it was raining, and the lights were shining, and the well-dressed people were passing by with their umbrellas, feeling secure, and there we were... don't know where to go, and there he is, with the ice cream he's asking for, and he's trembling all over, and I suddenly felt this pang, like he's been standing there trembling like that for a hundred years already, and I thought to myself, something's not right here, something, there's some sickness, so I said to him: you really want another ice cream? Really? What stupidity. What's that supposed to mean, "You really want it? Really?" Like you're saying to him, you only think you want it, you really want something else, you want your Grandma. What right do I have? Am I better than him? And it doesn't matter that he's a kid. He's worth more than me, he's still worth something, hasn't been ruined yet, he might yet still be able to... (Laughs, exhaustedly of course) So I gave it to him, what else could I do? And what if he vomited afterwards? The body knows when to eat and when to vomit, doesn't it?

(The Woman takes the pot from the table, and he doesn't even notice)

Sammy: (With a sudden, soft laugh) When I think of that last ice cream of his... when I really give it some thought... that was his glass ass, and he... he broke it himself, without even understanding what... it's something that really makes you think, huh? In order to think you gotta eat. It's

like a locomotive, if you don't throw more coal on the fire it won't move. (Realizes the pot is gone) Where's the pot? What are you doing? You're pouring it out, already cleaning up, but I didn't even finish, I... (Gets up to go over in her direction, bumps into a table and sinks down on it) Maybe me too, huh? I've also got an ass of glass, and I've done broke it too... huh? (Groans/screams over the table) (The Woman washes the pot. The Man sings her a love song in Yiddish, until she finishes)

Man: Okay?

Woman: Not today.

Man: Fine. (Kisses her face, licks her with his tongue)

Woman: (Laughing) What are you doing?

Sammy: (Raises his head and sees) Hey, you're licking her... like ice cream...

Man: Ice cream doesn't laugh.

(Sammy goes back to lying down on the table. They put out the light)

Woman: How's he gonna get out?

Man: If he wants to leave. (Immediately) The same way he came.