

ULYSSES ON BOTTLES

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Translated from the Hebrew by Evan Fallenberg

Cast of Characters:

Saul Izakov

Horesh

Ulysses

Seinfeld

Eden

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1. The Dress, First Time

(Eden, Izakov)

Izakov: You want me to put on a dress? I don't get it.

Eden: It's an evening for disabled children at a hotel. Or maybe they're autistic, I don't remember...it doesn't matter. You know, the usual celebration. An evening of pleasure and entertainment followed by refreshments. They'll get prizes for excellence. There will be some joking around. Good will. Love. Friendship. I promised you'd come, too, and being in such a good mood, I thought you would sing for the children wearing a pink dress, like a doll's.

Izakov: A doll's dress.

Eden: With a bow.

Izakov: Sing for children wearing a dress with a bow.

Eden: A short dress, you know. They'll love it!

Izakov: I'm sure they will.

Eden: The kind where they can see your knees.

Izakov: I'm sure they'll love it.

Eden: Poor disabled children, Sauly! It'll show that I'm contributing something more personal, not just the professional organization.

Izakov: How nice that I'm your personal contribution.

Eden: It'll make you appreciate the work I do more.

Izakov: I appreciate it already.

Eden: Because knowing how to give of oneself, to contribute to society, is a great attribute.

Izakov: Absolutely.

Eden: When I walk into a full hall after we've prepared it, hung curtains, flower arrangements, drinks for everybody, little name tags for the kids...and you see tears in the eyes of the mothers and how they hug us, you just can't help tearing up yourself. I'm proud of myself and I want you to know it.

Izakov: Justifiably.

Eden: Not everybody knows how to give. Do you know how to give? Because that's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm asking of you.

(Enter Horesh.)

Horesh: Innocent! They found him innocent!

Izakov: Congratulations.

Horesh: They pinned it all on Platonov and Shulokhov.

Izakov: Horesh just got a guy suspected of committing three murders off free. He could take your tie off without you feeling a thing.

Horesh: It's already making the papers.

Eden: So that means the guy didn't do it? He didn't kill anybody?

Horesh: What's the connection?

Eden: I thought there was one.

Horesh: Our job, Mrs. Izakov, is not to replace God. Your husband prefers the company of the members of the

ethics committee, or giving legal counsel for whatever we've done or haven't done in that hole, Gaza. He also likes eating lettuce with district judges. I don't. I'd rather drink ouzo at night with murderers. Believe me, it's more interesting. And if those guys did commit murder, how would I know about it?

Izakov: Horesh knows what he's talking about. When he was a kid he played marbles with the Shirazis in the lot behind their tenement building. Sometimes it seems to me that he's still playing with them.

Horesh: Don't forget that the Shirazis put more in our coffers than the Defense Ministry. We need color in our lives!

Izakov: And a little discretion, and caution, too.

Horesh: I think Mrs. Izakov is getting bored in our company. I'm also happy to entertain you. Ouzo. Marbles.

Izakov: He's a brute, this guy. But he has his advantages.

Eden: You haven't answered my request yet. What I want you to do for me.

Izakov: What's that?

Eden: Sing in a dress.

Izakov: Oh come on, Eden. The things people get hung up on!

2. Colorful. Ulysses – Izakov

(Enter Ulysses.)

Ulysses: Have you brought me freedom today, Mr. Defense Lawyer? Release?

Izakov: No. The doctors have found you to be sane and fit to stand trial. They don't see your situation as one in which you can't tell the difference between right and wrong. You may be colorful, they write, but you are able to stand trial.

Ulysses: That's all?

Izakov: That was the question they were asked. That was the answer... Do you think they were wrong?

(Silence)

Izakov: We don't have to accept their diagnosis. I can bring a doctor from our side to check you. Do you think that his diagnosis will be different?

(Silence)

Izakov: Did you hope that the doctors would find you unfit to stand trial?

Ulysses: I agree with them.

Izakov: The indictment brought against you includes an attempt to conspire with the enemy, disregard for an international border, an attempt to smuggle one hundred and seventy empty water bottles, disrupting an investigation...

Ulysses: I was disruptive? How?

Izakov: You tossed papers and books into the sea so you wouldn't be caught with them. In fact, there's no dispute over the facts.

Ulysses: There's always dispute over the facts.

Izakov: I mean there's no disputing that you tried to sail to Gaza on a raft made of bottles, or whatever you want to call it.

Ulysses: An aeronautical cruise. A pillow of dreams...

(Reacting to Izakov's gaze) Sorry.

Izakov: I want you to tell me anything I can use to help you. They're also not sure about the reason for your 'Odyssey.' That's apparently why they're calling you 'Ulysses.'

Ulysses: Let me chew on that for a while. Ulysses.

Izakov: The reason you gave strikes them as absurd. They will put pressure on to find the true reason.

Ulysses: But I've already told them...

Izakov: They're convinced you're lying.

Ulysses: Why? My answer, sir, has not changed. It's been the same all along. I sailed to Gaza in order to teach literature there.

Izakov: To teach. Literature.

Ulysses: I used to be a teacher.

Izakov: You wanted to teach literature.

Ulysses: Russian literature.

Izakov: And why Russian literature, of all things? Did someone ask you to? Did you receive an invitation? You think the citizens of Gaza are particularly in need of Russian literature? You see, this is exactly what has raised suspicions about you...

Ulysses: There's no one who's not in need of Russian literature.

Izakov: I, for example. Me. I am not in need of Russian literature.

Ulysses: You are. I would prescribe an infusion of two books a week for you.

Izakov: Why *Russian* literature? Perhaps Gazans would prefer French literature.

Ulysses: No. No. Russian. French dances. They need something more expansive, which French doesn't offer. Maybe Victor Hugo would suit you, or even Maupassant. But them? They need Russians.

Izakov: All right, I'm no expert...how about American literature? They've got expanses, don't they?

Ulysses: No. The Americans are too preoccupied with themselves. No. Russian. Russian literature. Believe me, the Gazans are dying to study Russian literature. It's a breeze that rises higher than the kites they fly on the shore.

(Silence)

Ulysses: I love Russian literature. You don't believe me.

Izakov: It's irrelevant. I'm your lawyer.

Ulysses: How can you defend me if you don't believe me? ...
Listen, a year ago I already tried to send them books.
I collected lots of them, translations into Arabic and
English and even a few in Hebrew. But I was stopped
at the border, wasn't allowed to transfer them. Go
home, they told me. Border's closed. They don't need
to read. Why not? I asked. So they don't get any ideas,
the officer told me. What ideas? I asked. That their
lives could be better, he said. Go home. Tell me, I said,
do you find meaning in your life? With that he cocked
his gun and aimed it at me.

Izakov: That's not a good question to ask a soldier at a
roadblock.

Ulysses: It is *the* question that needs to be asked, sir... I ask you
to believe me.

(Silence. Ulysses turns to exit and stops.)

Ulysses: I smell hot dogs and tea with honey, don't I? The smell
of break time at the canteen. If you let me sniff the
soles of your shoes I'll tell you where you've been
and who you've visited...Let me guess. Dry grass of
late summer. Is the air still standing hot in the middle
of the intersection? I thought that papers were already
blowing in the wind

3. Izakov and Seinfeld

(Izakov calls offstage.)

Izakov: Go on.

(Seinfeld enters the stage, holding one hundred and fifty doll figures on a plate.)

Seinfeld: At first I requested one thousand five hundred figures so that each one would represent at least a thousand people. A thousand is a more tangible number. But that was unwieldy so we made do with these one hundred and fifty figures. Each one represents ten thousand people, so, in other words, there are one and a half million people in front of you. Welcome to Gaza.

I wanted to distinguish between the sexes by using different colors – women, red; men, yellow – but we didn't have enough pieces in the right colors. So we made do with dividing them up by age. You see, the different heights of the figures connote different ages: children up to the age of eleven, youth to eighteen, adults. I gave up on marking the elderly because that was too confusing. I wanted us to have a visual stimulant when we think about them. Because one and a half million is almost too abstract a concept for most people to grasp. But what can you do – we're responsible for their food, their drink, their sewage, their literature, their security, their iron, their contraceptives, their toys, their pots and pans, their spices, their flowers, their meat, their electricity, their paper, their medications, their engines, absolutely

anything you can bring to mind. Even their anti-diarrheal pills! Everything that leaves or enters the Gaza Strip...it's all in the charts you've received.... What do you think of my dolls?

Izakov: This colorful impression may be harmful. I would recommend not to show it to anyone.

Izakov: No.

Seinfeld: No?

(silence)

Seinfeld: All right. I like it that you're not trying to please me, Izakov. That's good. That's how you'll look after me. After all of us! So that we won't perpetrate crimes that later will keep us from traveling to London. And desperation, as you know, is easier in London...

Izakov: Let's proceed. The food supply.

Seinfeld: The food supply! the number of calories—Jump in whenever you want to. The number of calories a person requires for daily intake varies according to age. A young woman up to fifteen years of age needs twelve hundred calories. A boy up to the age of eight can manage with only a thousand, a thousand fifty.

Izakov: Where do these charts come from?

Seinfeld: The Health Ministry. We used a table from Kosovo, too, and another found its way here from Peru.

Izakov: What's going on in Peru?

Seinfeld: The usual starvation. We're not talking about satiety, just the most basic needs. For viable existence brushing borderline...

Izakov: Go on.

Seinfeld: If there are occasional cases of death by starvation because the supplies can't reach everyone in Gaza, we respond that that is not our problem. We are not the governing body there. If, for example, there's a dramatic upsurge in juvenile rickets or scoliosis I'm still not worried. Are you worried, Mr. Izakov?

Izakov: Legally, I'm not.

Seinfeld: But let's say that they make claims against us that because of the minimum in the charts, all their children are shorter than they should be. As far as I'm concerned, and this is for your ears only, I have no problem if their fitness declines, or if they don't reach their height potential. It's easier to deal with them if they're small. And if their bones crumble when they're old... My mother crumbled too, and she ate a lot of cheese. Old age is painful. Nothing said here has troubled you.

Izakov: Legally, not unduly.

(silence)

Seinfeld: You're too much like my regular lawyers.

Izakov: Pardon me! I am not your regular lawyer.

Seinfeld: If I'm committing crimes, Izakov, I want to know it. I abide by the law! Look, you're representing that guy who sailed to Gaza and I have not and will not interfere with that trial. I have completely disassociated myself!

Izakov: I would expect nothing else.

Seinfeld: Because with those lawyers of mine, for all their wanting to please me, guessing what I want to hear, I just keep seeing my own face. I don't like that. It's not efficient, either.

Izakov: I understand.

Seinfeld: Incidentally, if they're bothering you... **(Referring to the doll figures)** In the legal department our lawyers were in the habit of using them as bowling pins, no harm intended. A few may be missing, got lost...died. Just kidding, Mr. Izakov. Just kidding. If this realism is disturbing your judgment... we'll get it cleared away immediately...

(Seinfeld picks up the plate of doll figures and exits.)

4. A Tempting Offer

(Ulysses enters.)

Izakov: I've made an excellent deal for you.

Ulysses: A deal?

Izakov: I do a lot of pro bono work for the Public Defenders office. I know what kind of deals get made, and this is a good one. Not so simple to obtain from the prosecution.

Ulysses: There's no need. The judge is sure to let me go...it's nothing...is the judge by any chance a woman?

Izakov: No. A man.

Ulysses: He'll see who I am straight away.

Izakov: Who are you?

Ulysses: A teacher. I've told you, a literature teacher. Books. At night I'll bet the judge cracks open a book, at least I hope he does – for his own good. Otherwise, how can he decide his cases? What would he know about people?...Do you like the smell of new books, Mr. Izakov?

Izakov: They could play tough and demand a prison sentence, and they can bring up all kinds of other charges against you. They can be very unpleasant...

Ulysses: But I'm not...

Izakov: But they can! And anyway, why are we even discussing this? You've committed crimes.

Ulysses: But I'm not a criminal.

Izakov: According to the law, you've broken laws and are criminally responsible.

Ulysses: Your language is frightening.

Izakov: I'm sorry. This is the language of facts. It's not as lyrical as yours. It's indifferent, and, I admit – limited. But this is the law. The prosecution has agreed not to put you on trial in exchange for your promise that you won't make another attempt at entering Gaza. You'll sign a binding agreement. And I'll tell you explicitly – if you don't agree, they're liable to bury you.

(Izakov puts a document in front of Ulysses.)

Izakov: As your lawyer I have to recommend that you accept the deal. You will sign that you drop the subject.

(Silence)

Izakov: What do you need this for? Why stand your ground? I've heard that you build models, and that's how you planned your bottle-raft. Nice. You make models.

(Silence)

Ulysses: I can't. How can I agree to such a deal? If I do, I'm just an episode, some inexplicable incident. A whim. But I'm making a serious statement here. You can't keep people from reading. That's as bad as not letting them eat. This is serious business.

(Silence)

Izakov: Good.

Ulysses: Good?

Izakov: You have a position. You have something to say. This can be respected. You are not playing games. The judge can respect it, too.

Ulysses: A minute ago you recommended me to sign this deal...

Izakov: I did so because it was the easy way out, and since you already chose this path once.

Ulysses: I did?

Izakov: You didn't object to your psychological evaluation. Someone who is sure of his convictions would have opposed being described as mentally disturbed... But now you present a sound outlook. You committed an offence and are ready to pay the price. You wish to be judged. This is choice. This is will. It might appear to be whimsy, but it is authentic.

Ulysses: You do appreciate it.

Izakov: Yes.

(Ulysses tries to hug Izakov.)

Izakov: No, no... that's unnecessary!

Ulysses: Sorry.

Izakov: I still don't get it...what's your thing with Gaza?

Ulysses: I'm putting matters into perspective. I am desire's nourishment. I am the wind that flies the kites on the beach.

(Ulysses exits.)

5. Izakov Turns to Horesh

(Horesh enters.)

Horesh: Have you considered...even though it probably sounds...against your will...to agree?

Izakov: Agree to what?

Horesh: Sing in a dress? I mean, what can happen? They'll see your knees? Maybe her honor Judge Carlebach will see them and wet herself. Why not? Why shouldn't you think of this song as a kind of silly amusement that you brush off later?

Izakov: Don't talk nonsense.

Horesh: It's like an appearance in court. A play. Acting. It's not really you. You stay out of it...that's the big enjoyment for us lawyers, don't you agree?

Izakov: What?

Horesh: It's never really us. Sometimes I watch myself playing myself. Raising my voice, running around in a robe. It relaxes me.

Izakov: It really is easier for you. You've got the body for it, the talent. You're truly an actor... Why don't you suggest to her that you'll perform instead of me? You've got energy. It suits you. You'll even enjoy yourself.

(Silence)

Horesh: Sure I can dance, Izakov. With pleasure. But what'll really make me happy is when you make me senior partner. Thirty-five percent.

Izakov: Senior partner...

Horesh: With this Shirazi case I think I've proven myself. In the last quarter I brought in more than half the earnings of the entire firm.

Izakov: There are people in the firm who still aren't sure about your background.

Horesh: I bring in work. I'm professional.

Izakov: They're not sure how much you respect legal ethics when it comes to the people who used to be your friends. Or maybe are still your friends. How independent are you, Horesh?

Horesh: I don't bullshit. I work hard. I'm ambitious. I look out for opportunities, I evaluate risks. I've got style. I'm what's happening now.

(Silence)

Horesh: I'm happening now...Some people even think I'm a real mother fucker.

Izakov: A real mother fucker.

Horesh: Thirty-five percent.

Izakov: Twenty, and even that won't get through without a lot of shouting.

Horesh: Twenty-five. Not a shekel less.

Izakov: You're a good lawyer, Horesh.

Horesh: Thank you.

Izakov: It'd make me happy if you'll talk to her.

Horesh: Who?

Izakov: Eden.

Horesh: About what?

Izakov: The dress. The song. The knees. I'd really appreciate it.

Horesh: If that's what you want...

Izakov: Very much. Very much.

End of part 1

6. Izakov and Ulysses, Third Time

(Izakov, Ulysses, in the dark.)

Izakov: Are you here? Can you hear me?

Ulysses: I am so happy you came.

(Light)

Izakov: Are you sick? You have a problem with your eyes?

Ulysses: Sometimes they turn the lights off here. Right now,
because of your visit, the sun is shining again.

A cornucopia. You know, in the dark, thoughts
expand and wipe out all images until you can't think
anymore...

Izakov: This is insufferable. You're still considered a detainee.
There hasn't even been a hearing to determine your
sentencing. The darkness – that's abusive.

Ulysses: But wanking is easier. Recommended. I do it all
the time, I flood the darkness, forget that the judge
convicted me...I really am glad you came.

Izakov: No, I cannot accept the darkness. I'll speak with the
commander here.

Ulysses: No, these people, my security detail, the heroic
guards, the daily warders...they are law enforcers. The
problem must be with the electrical system.

(Izakov takes out a chocolate bar.)

Izakov: Chocolate.

Ulysses: They'll take it away from me.

Izakov: No. They won't. I'll talk to them and see that they won't. It's my responsibility. Eat... Has anybody visited you? Your wife, perhaps?

Ulysses: We separated years ago.

Izakov: Eat, eat. Was that after you lost your job at the school? I understand that you didn't make it as a teacher in the school system.

Ulysses: (Referring to the chocolate) Good, sweet. Birds' chirping.

(Silence)

Izakov: I've learned that even before that, you and your wife had a son... Omar... Can you tell me about him?

(Silence)

Izakov: Omar was born with a severe mental deficiency and most of his care fell to you because your wife, Amina, couldn't cope. Limbs that were out of control, convulsions. You fed him, cleaned him... I don't have kids myself, but I've seen cases... I can picture him drooling, his eyes rolling around in his head, day after day. That is tough. It must be tough.

(Silence)

Izakov: He choked to death at age six. The pain. The grief over children. I don't know how one can bear such terrible pain... It's clear to me that this is a scar you carry around for life... I think we can use this in our plea for leniency. I want to use it. Because... it's for life.

Ulysses: For life. For life, to life. Life that is life. I, I, Izakov, Izakovitsh What exactly are you trying to do here?

(He rises.)

Ulysses: (Imitating Izakov) Your honor, honorable judge! The psychologists have determined that while this detainee may not be insane, his life history has stricken his heart. And I say (returning to himself), Mr. Izakov, with apologies to my learned counselor for the defense: my psychological record isn't worth shit. It has nothing to do with Gaza. Nothing! And, your honor, if it would please the court I would ask to record in the protocol that I protest the attempt to find psychological reasons for everything. Even in the clogged throat of a child who did not sin and knew nothing. This is what he did, this is what Omar would do. For years. Like this...this!

(He tears a sheet of paper from Izakov's notebook and crumples it between the fingers of both hands while rolling his head from side to side.)

Ulysses: So what does that mean? Nothing. An empty head. Flesh with no mind. Superfluous. Irrelevant.

(He has trouble calming down.)

Izakov: What would your wife, Amina, say?

Ulysses: What about her? What's more important is what Venichka would say. Straight away he would say, Give it up, Ulysses. What are you being so stubborn for? A dead child is a good excuse for one's soul. Why not? The point is to get out of here.

Izakov: Venichka. Is he a friend of yours? Has he visited you here?

Ulysses: He's my literary friend. Venichka Yerofeyev. He would say, Give it up. Drink coriander vodka, drink varnish, drink gasoline, make yourself drunk as a pig. Join me on the train to Petushki and see things you've never seen before. Don't be stubborn. Give it up. Listen to the angels, because life is like that, too – the angels say – not worth much of anything. Eat a sandwich so you don't throw up and get on your way.

Izakov: Has a doctor paid you a visit yet?

Ulysses: Why should he? If it were young doctor Alexei Turbin I'd be interested. Downright eager. One evening with him and you can feel life at its fullest blossoming.

Izakov: I'd still be happier if a doctor were to see you.

(Silence)

Izakov: Why don't you listen to this friend of yours, Venichka? Sounds very cheerful there, in the train, no? Traveling with angels, drinking. Life can be less serious.

(Silence)

Izakov: I think that people are complex enough to have inner contradictions like yours. You haven't betrayed any of your beliefs if you say "this is as far as I go and no further. I did what I had to do and now I will let it go... I'll plead for the court's mercy." This is very human.

Ulysses: You're not helping me. You're not!

(Silence)

Ulysses: It's not that I'm not afraid, Izakov. I've never been in jail before...

(The sound of a buzzer indicates the end of their meeting. He rises and exits. Izakov sits in the side.)

7. Who Will Sing in a Pink Dress?

(Eden, Horesh)

Horesh: If you really want those kids to laugh, let me do it. I'm an actor. I'm always acting. Look how fetching this dress is on me. Imagine my knees. The shoulder. The quick smile to the parents, the guests. The children. They'll screech! Even her honor Judge Samukha presses her knees together when she sees me. And that's without a dress. Let me do it.

Eden: Did you talk to him? Did he tell you that he'd die first, too?

Horesh: He's really shaken up.

Eden: He didn't mean he'd die. That's not even language suited to him.

Horesh: Take me. It won't cause me any grief.

Eden: You do a lot, for a lawyer.

Horesh: I know how to kiss, too...

Eden: I don't think so.

Horesh: Mrs. Izakov, it's clear to everyone that insisting on this nonsense, this passing thought, is irrational. It is a completely different need, and I would suggest giving up on it.

Eden: Does he know that's what you were going to say to me? Are you speaking in his name?

Horesh: I will take Saul Izakov, Esquire's, place on the stage.
There will be laughter, the parents will cry, and
everything will carry on as it was.

Eden: Will you show yourself out of here?

Horesh: Mrs. Izakov, please! We are working folk. While
you're drumming up a contribution for a catheter for
some kid, your husband is shoving an enema right up
into the whole of Gaza. This is real life, ma'am. Give
some respect to real life.

Eden: What are you sticking your nose in for anyway?

Horesh: You're bothering him, you're a nuisance.

Eden: I'm talking about singing in front of a bunch of children!

Horesh: Children, children. You're on about kids all the time.
Children! Izakov has no interest in children. His own
or others'. You two don't even have any.

(Eden slaps his face.)

Horesh: And you shouldn't. I agree: I always say, why bring
children into this world? We're all going to suffocate
anyway. The sea's going to rise ten stories above us.
Fish will swim around our ears. Who needs them?

Eden: You bastard. You piece of shit...

Horesh: Between you and me, if you weren't married to him,
what would you have, Eden? Between the two of us,
what do you have, except of this emptiness that eats
your soul. Let me sing instead of him and I'll treat you
both to a dinner that's out of this world.

Eden: I'll never give in.

(They leave the stage.)

8. The bucket spilled

(Ulysses)

Ulysses: The bucket spilled. I'm informing you that the bucket has spilled. The shit's floating, it poured out with the piss...maybe you people don't even care, but the bucket's spilled! Can you hear me? The stench! It reeks! Maybe you think a person can stand the smells that he made himself. I'm sure you have experience. But no, it's not true, he can't. Time passes and...the stuff becomes... alien... independent... It's hard for me to breathe myself! Please, come on, I'm asking you...anyone, whoever's there. Hello? Hello?! I know you all can hear me. You're probably filming me, too...nearly without light. Maybe infrared? Blue-movie Zeus? Or horny Humbert?... Aren't you interested?! It'll grab you, too, the horniness. Humbert's horniness. Lolita's Humbert...she stank too, didn't wash herself...it'll grab you. Debauched debauchery. Debauchedness – which humanizes all odors. Can you hear? I had to decide if *Lolita*, the book, was suited to Gaza. Lolita, after all. "Visit by feathery crack in Mediterranean beach town"... I didn't know who I'd meet there. Which town I'd reach. A night school with an eager group? How should the hotel fucking be presented? A Russian writer with European sensibilities who became an American lies in bed scheming about *Lolita*. Lo, Lo,

Lo, Lolita, the American virgin. And who do you see in the bed? All of Russian literature waiting to fuck this superficial American girl, this wonderful, complaining, arrogant Lo, Lo Lolita, this chewing-gum Lolita, this Coca-Colita. But just imagine what horny Humbert discovered on the big night. That the girl with the feathery crack wasn't even a virgin! That some American kid, some Charlie from goddamn camp got there first and ran off with the prize. A fiasco. Nothing left to hope for. Russian literature sent the American slut to wash herself.

(Silence)

Ulysses: All right, of course that book is not suitable for Gaza. I didn't bring Lolita with me. Lolitish Lolita. For a moment I lifted off...for a moment everything was possible... for a moment you all listened to me, and now, again, I don't know if you can hear me, if you're even there, or not, maybe you never existed...and now, it just reeks again... Hey! Hello? The bucket's spilled. Hello! I'm informing you that the bucket has spilled.

9. Seinfeld, a Second Time

(Seinfeld, Izakov)

Seinfeld: I still think that we should work with my little doll figures.

Izakov: That would be a mistake.

Seinfeld: I want you to picture how many there are. Otherwise, it's not alive...

Izakov: Forget the dolls. Talk facts. Data!

Seinfeld: You'll miss the point...

Izakov: You people are bringing in one hundred and twenty truckloads of supplies a day. What, in your opinion, is a sufficient quantity for normal existence.

Seinfeld: I'd say not fewer than a thousand trucks a day. But with one hundred and twenty we maintain a bourgeois picture of stability and control. We don't allow cement, for example... The truth is, we let in what suits our farmers and is profitable for them. All kinds of entrepreneurs are making a killing, as usual. Entrepreneurs have always made money from war... But all of that is nonsense. That's what you want me to talk about?

Izakov: It's not nonsense. There is always a question of proportion. Let's continue with the data.

Seinfeld: We've held a lot of discussions about the anticipated level of damage to the average Gazan's body as a result of the blockade. Their height, their malnutrition, their

shortened life expectancy. Loss of muscle mass. Infant mortality rate at birth and afterwards. Graphs that show deaths from chronic illnesses and the likelihood of outbreaks of plagues... I am particularly eager to estimate the effects of hardship and malnourishment on the structure of the brain. On the ability to imagine, for example... which reminds me of that client of yours, what's his name?

Izakov: You people call him Ulysses.

Seinfeld: Ulysses on bottles. I personally think he's a dangerous man. It's not without good reason that in his case we're not backing down...how long did they give him? What was the verdict?

Izakov: Half a year...now back to the data. The paperwork.

Seinfeld: We have estimated that at a certain point in the graph that charts their deterioration we will most certainly be exposed to claims of crimes against humanity.

Izakov: It's all well and good that you people are conducting thorough and organized work, but this is speculation about the future. You certainly don't need to show that.

Seinfeld: We don't? But this is what will happen.

Izakov: The law doesn't deal with what will or will not happen in the future. Go back to the facts.

Seinfeld: You want facts? I'll give you facts. The Gaza Strip is the most densely populated place on earth. In a very small space live one and a half million people – in my opinion even more than that – but who's counting? At the rate at which they reproduce they'll double their

numbers within the next decade. And the pace will only continue to grow faster. If we look ahead thirty years I assume the population will stand at some eight million people, maybe ten, maybe more. Can you picture that, Mr. Izakov?

(Silence)

Seinfeld: You can but you don't want to, is that it? Facts! We close off Gaza from every side and yet it doesn't disappear. It doesn't fall into the sea. Imagine ten million people who can't get out, who can barely move, who are infected and starved and scorched with sweat, dying, copulating, pressed up against one another so that one's skin becomes the next one's skin and they meld together in a single fleshy porridge that has no beginning and no end. Just imagine the rivers of their secretions...you don't want to picture it, do you Mr. Izakov? You don't want to imagine it. You refuse to know. "Proportion"! And you wipe away the crumbs left from your toast on the tablecloth...

Izakov: Tell me, what do you want from me?

Seinfeld: Don't try to get out of this! Stop sitting in the audience, you're not an Observer! Picture how this human porridge overflows its bowl, all the way to the fences, to the border, and rises and floods its way to us. The fear no longer stops anyone. To live or to die – they don't see the difference. And they come and overtake us. And then what, lawyer Izakov? I shoot them at the border and I shoot them as they continue to advance

and rise up; they grow in numbers and I keep shooting.
And maybe my kids are already shooting at my side,
and maybe yours as well, and they continue to come,
and we continue shooting. Picture the numbers, Mr.
Izakov. Hundreds? Thousands? Millions? How many?
Till when? The sun will stand still, God will belch, and
the law what? What has the law to offer in hell?

Izakov: You're not looking for legal counsel.

Seinfeld: I'm not?

Izakov: No. You're looking for God.

End of part 2

10. Proposal for a Pink Dress and a Song

(Eden sits. Izakov enters holding flowers in his hand.)

Izakov: We're not talking?

(Silence)

Eden: They say there's a lot of beta-carotene in carrots.

Health. That's what they say.

Izakov: In carrots.

Eden: In carrot juice. A health bar. Boutique drinks. Catering by The Green Chef. Watermelon flowers. Miri Picard will do the desserts. I've heard that Deutsch the saxophonist plays like he's tasting honey. And you'll perform after him.

Izakov: It's not a good idea, Eden

Eden: You've sent Horesh to talk to me.

Izakov: I'm sorry... It's not a good idea.

Eden: Why? Why not?

Izakov: I don't have time for such nonsense! Cancel those invitations.

Eden: Just once for me. Do it for me.

Izakov: I never sing!

Eden: Once you sang. Once you even used to dance.

Izakov: Nonsense.

Eden: Once you even new how to make me laugh.

Izakov: How can you not understand how stupid it is!

Eden: Okay, you're right. Maybe it's just something meaningless that popped into my head. It has no weight to it, it's just a little squeak born in the air. Something stupid. So what? So what? Five minutes for me!

Izakov: You invited Sheffer as well. A district court judge! I'll sing at the party and he won't be able to listen to a word I'm saying at court. My song in pink dress will plug up his ears. Don't you understand that it's complete idiocy?

Eden: Your sense of humor. That's what you've lost!

Izakov: What I can't stand is exactly this sense of humor. Look how this guy makes a fool of himself, letting himself chase after some idea that was conceived one lazy afternoon...like picking your nose...like...there's not even any 'like' for this, because he himself... is not himself...this idea is... a fried egg. Just a fried egg.

Eden: Your seriousness is so full of importance, because everything has meaning, and there's criticism, and love is one thing and no other, and I know and I am right and it's me because there's no me without me. And I begat I and I ran away from I and I killed I and I slept with I and I filled the heavens and the earth until the flood came and drowned all the 'I's in mud!

(She exits. Izakov calls offstage.)

Izakov: Eden. I love you very much, Edele. Edele, Eden...
Edenka... Edina... Sweetie pie...

11 At Ulysses'. The Cyclops Watches

(Ulysses stands, holding a small suitcase, ready to be on his way.)

Ulysses: Off we go! Onward!

(Silence)

Ulysses: Guards! I'm ready, guards! Let's go!

(Silence)

Ulysses: You just can't pass up that little right of yours to make me wait again, eh? One last time? You won't break me. Six months in jail! And I'm still on my feet. Six months! And I'm in control of myself...my lawyer is waiting outside!

(Silence)

Ulysses: First, I'm planning a visit to Cookie. She is a little expensive but it's convenient with her...I'm burning up, I'm sizzling. Come on! Let's go! We're on our way!

(Enter Izakov.)

Izakov: Let's sit down for a minute.

Ulysses: Outside. We'll talk out there. In the sunshine! The breeze! It would be nice if we could stop at the beach...

Izakov: Sit...sit for a minute...

Ulysses: ...feel the sand...the sand...

Izakov: The judge has signed an administrative detention for another six months. I'm sorry. Sit down. You'd better sit.

(Izakov sits down. Ulysses remains standing.)

Izakov: Administrative detention does not require a trial. Administrative detention is a black hole. It is a place in

which absolute arbitrariness on the part of the country is enacted. These are emergency measures... They wrote that if you were free you would try to make your way into Gaza again. They figure the next time you try, you'll be killed. According to their version of things, detention is the way to keep you safe. Because if you try again, they'll shoot you.

(Silence)

Izakov: They promised not to leave the bucket here for more than a day without emptying it. They are not willing to commit themselves with regard to the lights. They are holding onto their right to be unpredictable. Psychologically, they want to keep the pressure on you. I'll try to follow up and get reports from you about how you're holding up.

(Silence)

Izakov: So how are you holding up?

Ulysses: How am I holding up? Now? How do...This is hard for me. Very hard...I'm falling apart... I'm not here...

(Silence)

Ulysses: I would like someone to hug me. Someone to hug...

(Silence)

Ulysses: I don't have a lot of strength. I was never one of these... How did... I'm not a pretty sight right now. I've got to get it together...

Izakov: Or let it go, because you have a choice... They'll let you go if you sign that you won't try to make it into Gaza again. You can be out of here with me in under an

hour. I have a very nice car. We'll put on some music, stop at the beach. You can have an ice cream...

(Silence)

Ulysses: And I could meet with Cookie...

Izakov: Cookie? Is she your girlfriend?

Ulysses: Not exactly. That's not exactly her profession. Oh, Cookie...mon amour, Cookie. I'll be transported to you just as Mitya Karamazov was when he raced toward Grushenka! Whip the horses! What are you afraid of?

Izakov: Come sign and we'll be done with this.

Ulysses: The horses are sweating, the air is cold and what is going to happen there? At Grushenka's? To die or to love? Or what? We roll on. And what? What, Mitya? What's going to happen? There's no knowing. We roll on. There is internal restlessness, fervor, confusion. But forward, move on, move on. Live now. Now to live. And what? And what?

Izakov: Enough! That's enough! Sign the agreement and that's that! Enough with these words that you're playing with. Enough.

Ulysses: Playing?

Izakov: The words, the words! Enough throwing your life away on something so insubstantial, so completely groundless ...I'm sorry!

Ulysses: You're angry with me.

Izakov: Who even wants to read these days? Who cares about literature? And Russian literature, to boot. And why, of all places, Gaza? Tell me, what planet are you living on?

Ulysses: You're angry with me.

Izakov: Stop being some parody, some extinct species that nobody is interested in or knows anything about. Your anonymity is complete. The theater is empty. There are no protest movements, there's no echo, the square is empty. Go home! Stop torturing yourself and stop wasting my time. Go home!!

(Silence)

Ulysses: I want to go home every day. I have to convince myself every day that I'm not... groundless. And then you come along and tell me I'm groundless...

Izakov: All right...

Ulysses: A minute ago I was finished. The funeral march was already playing. But now I'm feeling a little better. With Mitya, with the Turbins, horses, it doesn't matter...a little better. Groundless?

Izakov: What a waste...

Ulysses: Why stick it out? Why? I don't know why...help me, Izakov. Maybe I should go home? But why shouldn't they be given something to read in Gaza? Tell me, why? Paper is not allowed. They can't write. They do homework on torn posters... To study. Children. To dream. To imagine... When I think about it, it chokes me up... What does it mean, not to read? To penetrate to the brain, digest thought, pin it down, crush it, silence it.

To turn them into dead husks? Millions of people. What a magnificent creation to show off. A factory for making non-people. Brainless worms... And who cares?... It's choking me. I'm a parody? Tell me, Izakov. This should be choking you, too. It should be. Groundless...? Me...?

(Silence)

Ulysses: The square's empty?

(Silence)

Ulysses: Don't be angry with me, Izakov...could you give me a hug?

(Silence. Izakov hugs Ulysses.)

Izakov: The ways people manage to waste their lives...

Ulysses: People like me?

Izakov: How stupid! How insipid! It boils my blood!

Ulysses: I do?

Izakov: Just leaves a bad taste. A pink taste.

Ulysses: Me?

Izakov: Forgive me. Not you. Of course not you... My wife.

Ulysses: Your wife.

Izakov: Something ridiculous. She wants me to wear a pink doll's dress at a kids' party and sing for them. I'm sorry, it just sprang up at me...

Ulysses: So sing for them. That's nice. Before Omar I liked to dance. I used to draw on ping pong balls in fluorescent colors and put them on my head, turn off the lights, and dance for him.

Izakov: She came up with this original idea, too. An idea born from nothing.

Ulysses: Well, it isn't original.

Izakov: What isn't?

Ulysses: That idea. Singing like a doll.

Izakov: No?

Ulysses: *Little Lizzy*.

Izakov: Excuse me?

Ulysses: That's what they called her. *Little Lizzy*.

Izakov: *Little Lizzy*? Where? I don't understand.

Ulysses: You'll have to read it, Mr. Lawyer. It's all already been written.

Izakov: In a book? It's written in a book that I'll sing in a doll's dress?

Ulysses: Yes.

Izakov: It's a story?

Ulysses: Yes. But sing first, then read it. Sing for the kids and maybe that way you'll reach Petushki.

Izakov: It's written that I'll sing wearing a doll's dress at a party?

(The sound of a buzzer indicates that Ulysses must exit. He picks up his suitcase. He looks very weary.)

Ulysses: They're waiting for me inside.

Izakov: Yes.

Ulysses: I'm frightened...they said they'd kill me?

Izakov: It's talk...words...nonsense. They won't kill. Not here, not at all!

(Ulysses has very nearly exited.)

Izakov: Are you making fun of me? What's the author's name?

(Ulysses exits.)

12. Saul Izakov, Esquire, Sings.

(Izakov sings Que Sera Sera.)

Izakov: When I was just a little girl
I asked my mother, what will I be
Will I be pretty, will I be rich
Here's what she said to me.

Que Sera, Sera,
Whatever will be, will be
The future's not ours, to see
Que Sera, Sera
What will be, will be.

When I was young, I fell in love
I asked my sweetheart what lies ahead
Will we have rainbows, day after day
Here's what my sweetheart said.

Que Sera, Sera,
Whatever will be, will be
The future's not ours, to see
Que Sera, Sera
What will be, will be.

Now I have children of my own
They ask their mother, what will I be
Will I be handsome, will I be rich
I tell them tenderly.

Que Sera, Sera,
Whatever will be, will be
The future's not ours, to see
Que Sera, Sera
What will be, will be.

(While he sings, a different music is heard, drowning his voice, but he continues to sing.)

At the same time Ulysses enters the stage and starts to draw a glider framework on the ground. Seinfeld watches Ulysses from the side. Izakov finishes his song and exits.)

13. Ulysses – Stalin – Bulgakov

(Ulysses, Seinfeld. Seinfeld is looking at a drawing made on the floor.)

Seinfeld: Don't tell me – it's a glider, right? Those are the wings, that's the tail. And where do you sit?

(Ulysses stands on the drawing.)

Seinfeld: That's what I thought.

(He places a chair on the spot.)

Seinfeld: Sit...Sit.

(Ulysses sits.)

Seinfeld: And you fly in this thing? Glide? Where to? Gaza? Are you going to build it after you get out? Is this your own plan?

(Silence)

Seinfeld: Talk to me, Ulysses...talk to me. I want to let you go, but what do we find out from the floor? That you're lifting off for Gaza. But if you soar into Gaza I'll have to shoot you. You'll fall. Do you want to fall?...Talk to me, Ulysses...

(Silence)

Seinfeld: I don't want you to fly there. I don't want to kill you. I don't want you to cross over the wall we built there. I want to hear that you understand this. Talk to me. Talk to me.

Ulysses: I understand.

Seinfeld: I didn't hear you.

Ulysses: I understand.

Seinfeld: How can we be sure? How?

(Long silence. Seinfeld stares at Ulysses, who feels increasingly uncomfortable until he cannot stand it anymore.)

Ulysses: It reminds me of the meeting at Patriarch's Ponds.

Seinfeld: What's that?

Ulysses: Two citizens of Moscow are sitting on a bench.

Berlioz, the editor of a newspaper, and Bezdomny, a poet, are talking one hot evening...is it okay if I talk?

Seinfeld: Talk. Talk!

Ulysses: Suddenly a third man joins the conversation and the other two don't understand why they don't feel good about this, something is bothering them, frightening them. And the man, after a conversation with them, merrily announces to Berlioz that his head will be chopped off that very evening...

Seinfeld: And indeed, his head is chopped off that very evening.

But in the meantime, the two of them have no idea that the man sitting with them is the devil himself.

(Silence)

Ulysses: You know the book.

Seinfeld: That bothers you. I mean, it bothers you that I read at all.

Ulysses: I didn't say that.

Seinfeld: Because a person who reads couldn't possibly hold the opinions you assume I do...

Ulysses: I didn't...

Seinfeld: But this devil is funny, wild, sometimes merciful.

Even a philosopher. How will you know there's light if there's no darkness?

(Silence)

Ulysses: Bulgakov wrote it after he'd grown desperate about leaving the country. After Stalin himself called him and laughed: Comrade Bulgakov! Are we annoying you?

Seinfeld: Stalin himself phoned?

Ulysses: Sometimes he himself would phone. Yes.

Seinfeld: So what are you trying to tell me?

Ulysses: Bulgakov wrote a book about the devil in Moscow. He died without seeing it published, but in the book – in the book! – his devil says that books don't burn. They don't vanish. They will come back, even if they sink in the sea, they'll return. They can be read. They should be read...

Seinfeld: You're a romantic type, eh, Ulysses?

Ulysses: No, but a person should read...

Seinfeld: Why? Tell me why. Convince me.

Ulysses: Because it's like...like rabbit hunting. What do we know about hunting rabbits? You don't know anything, but here you go on a hunt two hundred years ago, and the air is gray and cold, and there are drops of water on the leaves and wandering fog, and sounds are far off and muffled, and the breath of the horses steams in the cold air, and even though you have never been there and could never have felt such cold air, you are there... even though you know you aren't there, you breathe it,

you experience the possibilities...you expand...you are not dependent on what's on the outside, you're free...

Seinfeld: Like you're free in this cell?

(Silence)

Seinfeld: Or is that not enough? Not enough... And what would you do with him in Gaza?

Ulysses: Him?

Seinfeld: The devil from Moscow. What would the devil from Moscow do in Gaza? I'm in Gaza now. Tell me.

Ulysses: You're in Gaza?

Seinfeld: Yes, I am. Help me.

(Silence)

Seinfeld: I'm in Gaza. Here I am, reading. I have no patience.

The names are strange. The descriptions are too long. I could be online, I could be watching television. If there's a test I'll read the summary. What else did you take on your bottle-raft? *The Brothers Karamazov*?

Too long. *Moscow-Petushki*? Drunken author, drunken hero. Everyone's drunk. But here in Gaza nobody drinks... Chekhov? Watch the film. Bulgakov? Just a bourgeois anarchist. Babel? He's a fucking Jew...

You are a detached figure, Ulysses. Fictional. I would imagine you see yourself as a hero. A revolutionary. But In the eyes of Gaza realism you are just a stinking collaborator.

(Ulysses tries to interrupt but Seinfeld cuts him off.)

Seinfeld: I am Gaza and I know! Russian literature was Zionism's natural habitat. Natasha Rostova grew up in

the Jezreel Valley, and you're trying to bequeath her to the victims of Zionism?

Ulysses: If what you say is true...why don't you let them read?

(Silence)

Seinfeld: Someone here came up with the idea that you might have choked your son to death and you have guilt feelings, or a feeling of failure that's looking for an outlet. We could open an investigation...I don't need to continue, do I?

(Silence)

Seinfeld: You're free. You can go home. Collect your belongings on the way out, they're waiting for you. I signed your release already this morning.

(Light from the side indicates an open door. Ulysses does not move.)

Seinfeld: You and I are closer to one another than you would care to admit... In the end, we're both readers, right? Those who come after us won't be... You know, my father came from Russia. He despised Stalin. He dug him a little grave in the garden behind our house in order to piss on him. He hated his guts ...Go home. If you try again, I'll kill you. Do you need help?

End of part 3

Epilogue

14. Concluding Conversation

(Izakov, Eden and Horesh, sit eating dinner around a table. Horesh, with rolled-up sleeves, is serving food)

Horesh: When you make Sata you have to maintain the proportions. Be careful with the quantities. You have to know how much peanut butter to add, and garlic, and coconut liqueur, and coriander, onion, chopped peppers... and I almost forgot: cream. Here I've added a little too much, but I don't think you'll find reasons to complain.

Eden: How's yours, Sauly?

Izakov: Edible.

Eden: In the end, it was painless in front of the children. The dress. The song. They laughed, but it was a good laughter. There was applause.

Izakov: It was completely unnecessary.

Eden: But people were moved. Especially me.

Izakov: Completely unnecessary.

(Silence)

Eden: And you should know that that Sheffer...was that his name?

Horesh: You mean the one who was appointed district court judge? Sheffer?

Eden: He farts. I stood next to him and you should just know— he was stinking up the place to high heaven. You'll see, everyone in his court will wind up in jail.

Horesh: Well, he congratulated me on making partner.

Eden: Partner?

Horesh: Senior partner. Twenty-five percent of the firm.

Eden: Is that what we're celebrating? I thought we were here because of your success with the committee, Sauly.

Horesh: It was Izakov who recommended me. This meal is just a small thank you.

Eden: But he's vermin!

Horesh: Hey, hey! Why insult me? Do you know, Mrs. Izakov, that I bring in more than half the profits? With all due respect to Mr. Izakov and what he brings in from the Defense Ministry...

Izakov: You two ever read the story *Little Lizzy*?

Eden: I don't like provocations. You know I don't have time for reading.

Izakov: It's a short story.

Horesh: Is it Russian?

Izakov: German.

Eden: You've started reading Nazis, Sauly?

Horesh: By the way, I understand your client died.

Eden: Who?

Horesh: The Gaza guy. It was in the paper.

Eden: Where? What was in the paper?

Horesh: He tried to get into Gaza again. He built some kind of glider and flew it over the fence. They shot at him and he crashed. He fell on our side. He was shot down by

a remote-pilot plane, I think. Maybe a little soldier girl pressed some automatic button. You know how it is there.

(Silence)

Horesh: So I guess that means they won't be reading Russian literature in Gaza, eh?

Eden: He was just some psychopath, wasn't he?

Horesh: Just plain lunacy. Why would anyone want anything to do with that place? If someone had the guts he would drop a bomb and wipe out the whole shebang. You could build a really nice bay there, and they say the sand is soft. It's just the people that are unnecessary.

Eden: I would build a hotel on the waterfront, the kind where you can jump right into the water. That's my dream. Water and sky.

Horesh: Waitresses with cold drinks.

Eden: Coconut trees.

Horesh: The whisper of the waves. Music.

Eden: Even clouds, fluffy ones. Flying in the blue.

Horesh: Gaza on clouds.

(Izakov starts singing quietly Que Sera Sera.)

Eden: Are you all right, Sauly?

(Izakov continues singing quietly, sadly. He stops after the song starts playing.

He sits, his eyes full of tears. Eden stars at the audience while Horesh continues to eat.)

THE END