

Acts of Contrition

By Hanna Azoulay-Hasfari

Translated from Hebrew by Shir Freibach

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CHARACTERS

Malka – The eldest sister, housewife, married to a garage owner, mother of two, 45 years old

Evelyn – The second sister, religious, married to a Shas (an Israeli orthodox religious political party) activist, mother of eight daughters, 40 years old

Fanny – The third sister, divorced, business woman, 37 years old

Amira – The fourth sister, film student, 25 years old

PLACE AND TIME

The play takes place in the small town of Netivot¹, Israel, in the house where the sisters grew up, during 48 hours – a day before Yom Kippur² and on Yom Kippur itself.

SET

A modest apartment. A simple kitchen with Formica cupboards, a table and two chairs. Downstage, an unfashionable and jaded living-room with a sofa and two armchairs, a cabinet with pictures of the sisters on their wedding days, macram. works and a large photo of Fanny dressed as 'Queen of the Night' on Purim³ day. A TV and a video camera. A few stairs lead from the living-room to a small bedroom, with a double bed and a bedside cabinet. On the cabinet, a few memorial candles, and on the wall a photograph of the Baba Sali⁴.

Above the stage a large projection screen, showing whatever Amira is filming.

1

A small and rather poor town in the south of Israel, originally populated by 1950s immigrants from North Africa. Famous for housing the late home and current burial grounds of the holy Baba Sali

2

The Jewish holiday of the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

Commemorated

with a 25-hour fast and intensive prayer

3

A Jewish holiday commemorating the salvation of Jews of the late Persian empire from genocide, celebrated by dressing up in costumes

4

A Moroccan-born Rabbi, believed by his vast following to possess miraculous blessing and healing powers

ACT ONE

Amira is on the bed in the bedroom, dressed in a short belly shirt and underpants, smoking. Opposite her, a short distance away, is a video camera. She is speaking to the camera.

Amira

Interior. Day. Mother's house in Netivot. Amira, a 25-year-old film student, is lying on the bed, wearing underpants and a belly shirt. Chain-smoking. Close up on an ashtray full of cigarette butts. She is speaking to the camera, saying "This morning my mother has disappeared as if the earth's swallowed her up. I've notified my three sisters and they are on their way here. I have my mother's wish to fulfill – will I succeed?" "Will I succeed"

– Stupid. "Amira is the youngest sister... I am the youngest sister and I'm the only one who's in touch with the others. Barely, but still in touch" –
Shit! One more time.

Interior. Day. Afternoon. A government housing apartment in the south of Israel. Amira, film, underpants, belly, camera, smoking etc., eagerly awaiting her sisters. She's summoned them to the house where they were born to find their mother who's disappeared – do they show up. The house is empty.

Amira is looking at her watch. She has an assignment and she hopes she can carry it out. The phone is silent – does she succeed. A knock on the door. A knock on the door. Shit! – The phone is silent – a knock on the door. (Evelyn knocks on the door. Amira hears her knocking and continues to speak to the camera)

Knocks on the door – she does not hear.

(Evelyn knocks on the door again and tries – unsuccessfully – to enter through the locked kitchen door)

Once again, knocks.
(Shouting to Evelyn) – Just a minute!!!

Evelyn

(Offstage) Amira? Amira open up! Amira!!!

Amira

Her sister Evelyn has arrived. She takes the camera and goes to the door.

(Amira takes the camera and goes to open the door for Evelyn)

Evelyn enters, sweating heavily. She is wearing a long-sleeve, dark dress, nylon stockings, and a wig with a head-dress in the manner of (religious) Shas people. She collapses on the chair, entirely exhausted.

Amira

(To the camera) This is Evelyn. 40 years old, religious. Evelyn, say something to the camera.

Evelyn

Stop it!

Amira

(Stops filming) How are you? (Kisses her)

Evelyn

Praise God. Such heat, turn on, turn on the fan and tell me everything from the beginning to the end.

Amira turns on the fan and directs it at her sister. Evelyn spreads her legs and pulls up her dress a little, to let the air in.

Amira You've come from B'ney Brak5 by bus?
Evelyn No, my husband's helicopter brought me.
Amira Why didn't you come with Fanny?
Evelyn What, Fanny's here?
Amira It's her mother too.
Evelyn Well, at least she remembered. (Blesses the water and drinks) That all is

done in His will... (Takes out a shawl from her bag) Take.

Amira
What is it?

Evelyn
It's for the shoulders but it's useful for many things, there, see... (Covers up

Amira's ass) For me, what do you care, aren't you cold like this?

Amira
Aren't you hot like that?

Evelyn
(Gets up, starts to look for something in the kitchen and then in the living

room – opens cupboards, looks in bowls, and under tablecloths) Well, I'm listening, speak.

Amira
What are you looking for?

Evelyn
I don't know, some sign, a note maybe..

Amira
Who from? Mother doesn't know how to write.

Evelyn
Maybe she asked the neighbors.

Amira
So she wrote us a note and hid it? She would have left it for me somewhere prominent, on the fridge –

Evelyn
You don't know where she is?

Amira
I know and I don't tell, OK? You think it's pleasant for me all this stupid disappearance?

Evelyn
OK, you got up in the morning and what happened –

Amira
For the three hundredth time – this morning the phone rang, woke me up –

Evelyn
What time?

Amira
I don't remember – two, two thirty.

Evelyn
That's afternoon, not morning.

Amira
I sleep till the afternoon – is that your business? Phone – “Amira Ochana?”

5
An Israeli town, populated mainly by religious Jews

It's Swissa." What Swissa? "Swissa from the public housing company." I was surprised. Hi, I said to him, how are you? And then he asks me "So how do I get the key?"... The what?! What key? I didn't understand what he wants. That's it. It took me an hour to figure it out – Mother came to him and gave back the house to the company.

Evelyn

And you took what he said like a word from God.

Amira

I went there, what d'you think? I saw her signature. What more?

Evelyn

You're sure it's her signature?

Amira

Yes, I used to get her to sign the social security forms – enough already.

Evelyn

And did you ask the housing company clerk where she went to?

Amira

No.

Evelyn

Why?

Amira

Because I was ashamed that I don't know where my old mother has disappeared to.

Evelyn

Is this what you care about now? Shame? OK, what's the housing company's number? I'll talk to him.

(Picks up the phone)

Amira

(Takes the receiver from her) Calm down.

Evelyn

(Bursts out) What d'you mean calm down, it's my mother!

Amira

He doesn't know where she's gone to.

Evelyn

How d'you know?

Amira

If he'd known, he would've told me. Enough, Evelyn. (Replaces the receiver) Let's wait for Fanny and Malka and think together what needs to be done. (Silence) You want coffee?

Evelyn

No, I feel sick.

Amira

You're pregnant again?

Evelyn

And if I am pregnant, will you move your ass and come visit me in the hospital, to congratulate me and bring me a flower? No. So what's it to you?

Amira

What month are you?

Evelyn

Third.

Amira

You're crazy, that's what you are.

Evelyn

Your mother is crazy.

Amira What about your diabetes?
Evelyn Mind your own business, alright?
Amira You need to eat, don't you?
Evelyn No.
Amira So you want some tea?
Evelyn I want you to get dressed.

Amira goes to dress in her room, meanwhile talking to Evelyn who continues her search through the drawers.

Evelyn What made you lock the house?
Amira Can't hear you.
Evelyn I asked why did you lock the house?
Amira I got used to doing it 'cause Mother was afraid of the scumbags that hang

around in the neighborhood. A week ago they went into the neighbor's house and stole a gold chain, Rayban sunglasses and 900 shekels she got from social security. I think it's Swissa's kids.

Evelyn
Everyone's a Swissa round here, which Swissa? The one from the housing company?

Amira
No. The Swissa who had the photo shop in the town center.

Evelyn
Swissa who took Fanny's picture on Purim as 'Queen of the Night'?

Amira
Exactly. So Swissa's kids from the photo shop, every two minutes one brother goes to prison and every three minutes a second brother becomes religious. This one returns to prison – that one goes into religion, that one comes out of jail – this one runs to God like hell...

Evelyn
Oh, come on, you starting with me again?

(Amira returns, dressed in short jeans)

Amira OK like this?
Evelyn Yes, top modesty. Well, where are they? It's late –
Amira On the way. Malka said she'd stop to buy food and Fanny should be here

any minute. You OK, Evelyn?

Evelyn
I'll rest a little. Well, I hope Mother will come soon too, with God's help. It's Yom Kippur tomorrow, there's no time for games.

Evelyn opens her bag and takes out a diabetes self-test kit which she then opens, and produces a small knife.

Amira
What is it, who are you going to cut?

Evelyn
It's the sugar test of Natal Diabetes.

Amira
Ah... Let me cut you.

Evelyn
No way.

Amira
I was an officer in the Medical Corps, let me cut you.

Evelyn hands her the knife, hesitant. Amira pricks her.

Evelyn
Ouch...! – Have some mercy.

Amira
That's it. Now we drizzle a drop of blood here and we wait.

Evelyn
That's right.

Amira
If it crosses the line – it's very bad. (Takes the kit and the bag to the
bedroom)

Fanny enters the kitchen. She is dressed in expensive and provocative clothes – a tight shirt which emphasizes her breasts, a sexy skirt and very high-heel shoes. She is heavily made up and her hair is dyed blond. Her entrance is hesitant and full of suspicion. She stands in the doorway and surveys the house.

Amira Hello, sister.

Fanny Hi. Well, she back?

Amira Just a second (Takes the camera) – and this is my sister Fanny, a business

woman and real-estate shark, independent, free and liberated, aged 38.

Fanny
(Correcting) Seven.

Amira
Come in. (Fanny does not come in) Go on, come in, they're not here.

(Fanny looks around. It appears that she has not been here for many years)

Want some water?

Fanny
Is there no fresh juice or something?

Amira

Fresh juice? Sure, an orange tree just sprung up in my room – shall I

squeeze you some?

Fanny

Fuck off! (Moves into the living-room; to herself) God almighty, the stone
age.

Fanny remains by herself, in front of the fan. She undresses and is left with a short black slip. She takes off one shoe and puts it on the floor, then regrets it, and puts the shoe on again. Evelyn enters the living-room, and stands stunned at Fanny's striptease.

Evelyn What d'you all have against clothes? A little modesty, and if not modesty, then a little respect. What is it – am I a ghost? Can't you two be a little considerate?

Fanny Does it hurt you personally?

Evelyn Yes, very personally.

Fanny Is that why you forgot to say hello?

Evelyn What, did you say hello to me?

Fanny Here we go... OK, sorry, I apologize. I didn't know you were here... I'm hot.

(Puts her skirt back on but is left with an exposed upper body)

Besides, there are no men here. Hang on, is your husband here?

(Breaking the ice, yet formal) Hello Evelyn, how are you? (Kisses her)

Evelyn Praise God. This summer will never end.

Fanny It's hot in here, eh? No air conditioning.

The door opens and Malka comes in with bags full of food. She is round and plump, seems older than her years, slightly unkempt and dresses unfashionably in trousers with an elastic band and a flowery buttoned shirt. Hair half-dyed. She puts the bags on the table and stands in front of the fan. She does not notice Fanny, who is standing behind her.

Fanny Hello Malka.

Malka (Surprised) Thank God that Mother is missing – we get to see your face round here. What are you doing here?

Fanny I came to pack up the house. (Amira comes in with the camera) How are

you Malka? Have you missed me?

Malka Couldn't sleep for longing. And you?

Fanny Ditto.

Malka What did you say?

Fanny I said 'Likewise'. How's David and the children?

Malka (To Amira) David called? Stop filming.

Amira No. David didn't call.

Evelyn (Rummaging through the bags) Is that all?

Malka It's not enough? – I bought whatever they had.

Evelyn We are four – you brought food for 400.

Malka And the girl you have in your belly?

Evelyn Why girl?

Malka What, your husband learned how to make boys all of a sudden? (Giggles)

You can see it's a girl.

Evelyn

You've become an ultrasound machine?

Malka

Do I need an ultrasound? – I know from Mother. Your face is ugly. Hang

on... did you feel sick in the beginning of the pregnancy?

Evelyn

I always feel sick in the beginning of pregnancy...

Malka

Well, that's what I said, girls make you feel sick.

Amira

Why didn't you tell me she is pregnant? I wouldn't have called her.

Malka

I no longer interfere with her life. She wants to kill herself, that's fine by

me.

Evelyn

Well, I'm glad you are in a good mood, but I don't like it. How come, Mother disappearing, how come she gives back the house to the housing company – we must find her, we must notify the police, ask her friends, neighbors, relatives – first of all, didn't she say anything to you, didn't she

give a hint?

Fanny

You're asking me?

Evelyn

Malka?

Malka

She didn't say anything to me.

Amira

If she would've wanted us to know, she would've told us. But she didn't –

she wanted to tell the housing company clerk. That's fine by me.

Fanny

I'm surely not going to look for her. (Silence) Let's not waste our time, let's start.

Evelyn

Start what? Are you insane? Does it seem fine to you that a mother would
leave her girls like that?

Amira

Girls? How old are you, Evelyn?

Evelyn

She has disappeared! Maybe something happened to her, maybe she fell,
broke her hip and is now lying in some hole – so she did something silly, so
what? (Picks up the phone and dials)

Malka
She's right.

Amira
What is it, who are you calling?

Evelyn
The police. Hello? Hello. Can I speak with PC Swissa, Yaniv Swissa, oh, hello, how are you? It's Evelyn, your former neighbor. Sa'ada Ochana's daughter. Praise God. No, not alright, my mother is... how can I say this to you... disappeared.

Amira
(Shouts into the receiver) She hasn't disappeared, Yaniv, she went away.

Evelyn
(To the phone) It's Amira. Don't mind her, she's taking nonsense. She has disappeared. No, it hasn't been 48 hours yet, but she never... she always says where she's going to... since this morning. No, she didn't leave any signs.

Amira
A million signed forms are not signs?

Evelyn
(To Amira) Shut up. (Into the phone) Our mother gave back the house to the housing company.

Amira
(Grabs the phone from Evelyn) Hello? Yaniv, it's Amira, how's it going? A little hysterical... since this morning. No, no I don't think so, she'll probably call soon. I'll let you know.

Fanny
(Takes the phone from Amira) Hello, Yaniv, hello there, it's Fanny, a good friend of your brother Shalom, how are you? Tell me, I understand you wait 48 hours before you start searching – do you think it's within your authority to shorten this to 24 hours? Tomorrow is Yom Kippur, an elderly lady, it's not pleasant. I thank you. Oh, really? But you were a boy then. Now I'm blushing. OK, we'll meet up sometime, thank you. (Hangs up. To Evelyn) Are you calmer now?

Evelyn
Shame on you, it's your mother.

Amira
I only asked you to bring milk for the coffee – why did you buy chickens?

Malka
I'll prepare the Yom Kippur dinner here and take it home with me. I won't have time tomorrow. And when mother comes back, she'll have some.
(Malka and Amira take the bags into the kitchen)

Fanny
Listen, Evelyn, in cases such as this we need to work methodically. Do you watch TV?

Evelyn
No.

Fanny
Pity. Because on TV when they want to find someone... Who's missing...
The first step is you ask the neighbors. You act casual and you ask all sorts
of questions... That's it, first thing, we must ask Marcel, the neighbor.

Evelyn

Marcel? It's been ages since she moved to the villas in Be'er Sheva – she's living with her sons.

Fanny

How nice... Soulika, then.

Evelyn

Soulika? Soulika's dead.

Fanny

Dead? When?

Evelyn

Five years ago.

Fanny

Then who are the neighbors now?

Evelyn

Russians on the right, Ethiopians on the left.

Fanny

I see... So there really isn't anyone to question. Step one is finished, we notified the police – we must start packing up the house, liquidate, clean up, I hope we don't have to paint it before giving it back to the housing company. Go on, Evelyn, there's no time – hang on, we need boxes, we have no boxes.

Amira

We do. I got some boxes, meanwhile take out the things. Evelyn, are you helping us?

Evelyn

I'm not packing anything. I came to find my mother, not liquidate and not pack.

Fanny

Whatever you say.

Fanny goes out to the bedroom, where she will open closets and take out clothes. Amira and Malka are in the kitchen, unpacking the shopping bags.

Malka And what if something did happen to Mother, she's not young anymore.

Amira She knows what she's done.

Malka I know Mother – she doesn't do things like that.

Amira Did you ever sit down to talk to her for five minutes? Talk – not tell her

about your husband and your troubles. It's not the mother you knew...

Malka

OK, go help Fanny or we'll never finish.

Amira

Why, are you in a hurry? What are you chasing?

Malka

What do you think, that David can do Yom Kippur on his own? I need to
get back home.

Fanny (From the bedroom) Amira, what's with the boxes?

Malka is sorting out the groceries she brought and putting them in the fridge and in the cupboards, as if life in the house is going on. She places a pot on the stove and goes to chop an onion. A radio-cassette player stands on the work-top in the kitchen. She takes out a cassette from her bag, puts it in the tape and presses Play – an Andrea Bocelli opera. Pleased, she continues to chop the onion and cut the chicken into pieces. Fanny comes into the living-room with a pile of clothes she took out from the closet.

Fanny (Holding an old dress) You want this for your girls?

Evelyn No.

Fanny Good – so we'll just put it in the garbage can.

Amira What is that, whose is all this?

Fanny Ours, she kept them in the closet for, like, 20 years, here – this is a dress I had when I was... It used to be Malka's dress, then Evelyn's, then it was passed on to me...

Amira Look at these cool trousers –

Fanny Very cool... They're my disgusting gabardine trousers –

Amira Disgusting? They're a treasure, Fanny, they're seventies trousers!

Fanny Throw them away. (Amira takes off her jeans and puts on the gabardine trousers) Amira –!

Amira (Holding a shirt) Is this yours too?

Fanny Malka's. It'll be too big on you.

Amira Give it here. (Puts it on) So cool, I'm keeping it –

Fanny You really look like you came straight out of 'Grease'... (Looking at her, amused) By the way, what's with your movie?

Amira Fab. Great. I already have some ideas, it's coming on. Slowly, but coming on. Look! You don't want any of these?

Fanny No. Can't stand old things.

Evelyn What's the movie about?

Amira On the whole, it's about democracy, freedom of speech etc... On the whole.

Fanny And, in particular?

Amira Eh?

Fanny In particular. More specifically.

Amira Ah... it's about the beauty of being stoned, it's kinda full of colors... But you don't speak about a baby that isn't born yet.

Evelyn Gosh, she's right. (Pause) Why did you quit your studies? – I didn't really understand.

Amira No, I didn't quit. I... Right now I'm actually in this stage of my studies that I have to write my script and I have an idea and some drafts, and in Tel Aviv I can't concentrate so I came here. Evelyn, this would really suit your girls..

Fanny So you came to write a script about being stoned, in Netivot?

Amira Yes... Doesn't matter. You won't understand.

Fanny Try me, sunshine.

AmiraThere's noise in Tel Aviv... not from the outside, cars etc..., a noise from the inside... I can't concentrate, I'm scared all the time...

Fanny Of what, sweetheart?

Amira I don't know, look, it's the processes of cinematic creation... How can I explain it to you.... You won't understand.

Fanny Right – how can I understand anything about cinema. They kicked you out.

Amira No, no way! (Pause) I've got one more chance. I have to bring in a good script by next week.

Fanny So bring.

Evelyn What's a good script?

Silence.

Fanny Look at the mini skirt I wore back then – I thought she'd burnt it... Evelyn, you don't want this for your girls?

Evelyn Stop it! Maybe you want for your girls, maybe you want for your girls!

Amira Why are you shouting?

Evelyn My girls wear clothes, not junk.

Fanny Sorry, sorry... I didn't know.

Evelyn If you'd come to visit, you would know.

Fanny Why, did you ever invite me?
Evelyn You're my sister – my door is always open.
Fanny Just so happens that the last time I tried to get in, it was closed.
Evelyn Sweetheart, I'm not the one who closed it.
Fanny True, but you didn't open it either, when I begged you in the middle of the

night I had nowhere to sleep... My saintly sister, the kindest hostess in the world. (Evelyn gets up and goes out. Fanny lights a cigarette)

Amira
Aren't you interested to know where she went?

Fanny
Who?

Amira
Mother.

Fanny
Mother! (Cynical) "Oh sweet Mother hold me tight, never let me go and make everything all right." You know this song?

Amira
Father really threw you out to the street when you were 16?

Fanny
Yes. Would you believe it, looking at me?

Amira
And Mother did nothing.

Fanny
She did, why not? Shut the door, bolted it three times and stuffed cotton wool in her ears. Father threatened Evelyn and Malka that if they'd open up for me, he'd kill them.

Amira
Did he hit you?

Fanny
Father didn't hit. Father would look. He'd give you one look – you'd turn to stone.

Amira
When I went to highschool the teachers still admired you, didn't understand where you disappeared to...

Fanny
I didn't disappear. They just didn't look for me. I lived under the block of flats with the dogs, in bus stations, hallways... Then I moved to luxury housing – in the synagogue, here, behind the house, in the women's section. At night, I used to peek through the window at the house. Where shall we

put this –

Amira

And then?

Fanny

Then came Malka's David and said "Marboona, miskina, hagdad fel6

6

A preposition in Moroccan, meaning on / by / at etc.

rehovot... f'chal kalba" (poor thing, poor thing, living in the streets like this, like a dog?) and took me to their home. Malka took care of the kids, cooked and cleaned, and King David sat down and played backgammon with me. Until that finished too. What's that smell? I know it. You want coffee?

Amira
No.

Fanny wobbles on her high heels towards the kitchen. She enters the kitchen and looks for something in the cupboards. Malka is talking on the phone.

Fanny
Where's the coffee?

Malka
Hello, David, it's me, Malka. I wanted to ask something of you but you're not at home, OK, I'll call the cell phone... (Hangs up and dials again)

Fanny
(Looks in the fridge) Malka, where's the coffee round here?

Malka
(Into the phone) Hello, David, it's me, Malka. I phoned home and you weren't there, the devil knows where you're running around, I wanted to ask you for something, I wanted you to take out the... Well, never mind, I'll call you at work... (Hangs up and dials again) Hello, Shoshi, hi, how are you? ...It's me, Malka... You didn't recognize my voice? Why, who did you think it was? His mistress? (Giggles. Fanny stops searching and looks at her) Listen, where's your boss, where's David? I see... And when will he be back? When did he go out? Two hours ago? You don't say?! Well, tell him to call my cell phone. No, I'm not home, I'm at my mother's house in Netivot. No, everything is fine, thank you, I have some errands here, nothing terrible. Alright then, don't forget, OK? (Hangs up)

Fanny
Tell me, is there someone to change his diaper, your husband's?

Malka
No, I just wanted to ask him to take out the chicken so it'll defrost for tomorrow, when I'm back.

Fanny
So why don't you just leave him a message on the answering machine? Three calls and you still haven't told him.

Malka
I like to tell him myself.

Fanny
You like to screw with his mind, that's what you like. (Opens drawers)

Malka
What are you looking for?

Fanny
Is there coffee in this house?

Malka

There is. In front of your eyes. (Fanny does not find it) Sit down, I'll make it for you. Instant? Sugar?

Fanny

Sweet 'n low. (She puts her feet up on the other chair. Takes out her cell phone, checks it, and places it on the table. From now on she is attached to

it. She takes out of her bag 'Globes' – a financial magazine – and reads it)

I must rest a little.

Malka (Pause) Tell me, why don't you take off those heels?

Fanny Not healthy. (Resumes reading)

Bedroom

Evelyn injects herself with Insulin. Amira enters.

Amira

(Opens a small suitcase she has brought from the bedroom) These are men's clothes. What's it doing here? Whose is it? Father's?

Evelyn

Yes.

Amira

What does she need Father's clothes for?

Evelyn

She must have been waiting for him to come back. Ah... this was his beret. Went without his beret in the middle of the night, the poor man. (Puts the beret back in the suitcase and closes it) You're lucky you were born after he left.

Amira

Yeah, I'm lucky to have grown up without a father.

Evelyn

I didn't say that – but when he left it finally became quiet, at last. May God forgive me for violating the command to respect one's mother, but Mother made his life hell, she was hard on him, she was insolent and cursed him. What did he ever do to her, poor man. Went to work the fields at five in the morning and came back at five in the afternoon... What's that, first you take out the tobacco and then you put it back in?

Amira

None of your business. (Lights up a 'loaded' cigarette) Go on – I've never seen his picture.

Evelyn

He was a handsome man. Good-looking. You look like him. A little. (Coughing) Put out that cigarette.

Amira

In a minute. (Continues smoking) If my husband cheated on me, then, like Mother, I would have thrown him to the winds.

Evelyn

Thrown him, my my... You learned that from feminism? And what about a livelihood? And what about the daughters? And say he went with other women... Not that he did, he didn't, I'm sure, if she had put up with it she wouldn't have been left alone like a dog.

Amira

She wasn't alone, I was with her.

Evelyn

Yes, but a woman needs a man. (Returns to the living-room)

7

This mistake is intentional

Fanny

(Comes into the living-room with plates and cutlery) Don't listen to her, Amira, a woman does not need a man.

Evelyn

You? What would you have done without men?

Fanny

(Wiggles her fingers and sings) "La chi fo, fo, fo, la petite marionette..."
But, it's more fun with a man. It also depends on...

Amira

Stop it, Fanny!

Fanny

Alright, come to eat, I'm hungry. Amira! What a special cigarette you have! Put on some music to make us happy. (While they are laying the table and Malka is bringing the food, Amira puts on a record by Jo Amar8. Malka serves the food, Evelyn and Fanny tear some bread and then begin to eat. Amira eats nothing)

Evelyn

It doesn't mean that if the police are waiting we should wait too – we must call the hospital, maybe she had a brain hemorrhage?

Fanny

Right. She had a brain hemorrhage and on the way to the hospital stopped by at the housing company offices and gave back the house where she lived for 45 years. Bless you, Malka, you cook like Mother.

Malka

Is that good or bad?

Fanny

It's... Authentic.

Evelyn

Esh noo wa hada9 'Authentic'?

Fanny

It's original. It's... Going back to – (To Malka) You should dye the roots.

Malka

What roots?

Fanny

There – (Points at her hair) You look like a zebra crossing, black-white,

black-white, blond.

Malka Yes. I didn't have time.

Fanny Why, what have you got to do now?

Malka (Is quiet for a minute and stands still with the serving plate and a spoon.

Everyone looks at her) Am I short of things to do? There's always something I have to do.

Fanny

(Relentlessly) What have you got to do – let's say you got up in the morning, you've made David his tea, he went to work. Let's say, you washed the two cups and arranged the bed, let's say you swept the floor, though there's no one who'd make it dirty any more, we've reached 11

8

A Moroccan-born Jewish singer and cantor

9

Esh noo wa hada = What does it mean

o'clock tops. You put a pot on the stove, one o'clock, that's it. Nothing more to do. What do you do till five in the evening when David comes for half an hour before he goes to his folk-dancing? Sleep? – You've slept. Dose off? – You've dosed off. Shut your eyes? – You did. Watch 'Celesta'? 'The Young and the Restless'? Chatter with the neighbors? Go to the shopping mall? What do you do? (Chokes from the spiciness of the food and coughs)

Malka Anything else you want to say to me, Fanny?

Fanny (Gets up and goes to the kitchen) Yes – that your food is as tasteless as Mother's food and not everything that's spicy is also tasty. Is there anything sweet?

Malka In the pot.

Fanny (Bends over the pot and smells) I'll be damned... (Shouts from the kitchen towards the living-room) Sferzel!

Amira What is it?

Evelyn Sferzel.

Amira Sferzel?!

Malka Sferzel, Sferzel.

Amira What's Sferzel?

Evelyn Don't tell her.

Fanny (Takes in the smell in long inhalations) I don't believe it, Malka, you're so sweet! (To Amira) You don't know what this is? It's Yom Kippur's quince jam. I haven't smelt this smell in maybe 20 years. Sferzel! You've killed me, Malka – (Comes in to the living-room with the pot, joins in Jo Amar's song but changes the lyrics) "People, sing with all your might / the great Emir is just and right / Malka, she cooked the quinces for sure / made Sferzel jam for Yom Kippur" (Amira and Evelyn join her and dance around their eldest sister, Malka)

Malka You said I cook like shit.

Fanny I said what I said but Sferzel is Sferzel. (Fanny lets Amira taste some and Amira turns to Malka's wedding picture that is on the wall) Careful, it's hot. It's the smell of Yom Kippur.

Amira You did well, David! Your wife Sferzels.

Fanny He did well altogether – look what an exemplary couple, what love in the eyes. She's looking at him... He is looking at the photographer. Film this, Amira, a pair of doves. (Amira is filming. Fanny turns to Malka, as if she

were conducting a TV interview) Malka, would you say that was the happiest day of your life?

Malka Why not?

Fanny Why not? On her way to highschool, pretty as a flower, David the car mechanic came and plucked her. In a minute she would have completed her matriculation exams and gotten a certificate – but no – from the classroom to the Sferzel – like in novels, right, Malka?

Malka What would I have done with a certificate? Can you raise children with a certificate?

Fanny Very true, and that's what Malka was told by her mother who convinced her. Tell me, weren't you in love with someone from your class?

Malka No.

Fanny What was his name...?

Evelyn Kikoosh.

Amira What?

Evelyn Kikoosh. A movie star. Was crazy about her. But Mother said he wasn't serious.

Fanny Yeah, right, not serious – he was already 17 and would not, by any means, agree to marriage.

Malka OK, enough.

Fanny You get married, Malka – how are you finding married life?

Malka It's fun, actually – you travel a lot, have fun, we would go out nearly every night.

Fanny And then came the children and we stopped going out.

Malka Doesn't matter, we enjoyed ourselves at home.

Fanny In front of the TV.

Malka In front of the TV.

Fanny Sitting and keeping quiet...

Malka I keep quiet. David is dancing.

Fanny David is dancing at a folk-dancing class. David became a folk dancer, and

leaves Malka to wait for him on the sofa for 25 years, isn't this a great film, Amira? A soap opera...

Amira Hollywood. This is your life, Malka – pretty crappy.

Malka Not any more. Since we installed cable TV, I don't care. He can go dancing as much as he wishes.

Fanny (Stops interviewing Malka) And there's a happy end, too – today he is a garage owner and you've got lots of L'argent, (Thumbs imaginary money) Right?

Malka Right, God protect us!

Fanny And it's hard for you to take a maid who'll clean for you, because what will you do?

Evelyn Make me some tea, Malka.

Fanny Make her some tea, Malka, go on! She's thirsty. How naturally – make me, make her, make him... Stop filming, the heroine is getting on my nerves.

Malka Why, what do you do all day? Pedicure, manicure, and dye your hair. What huge projects trouble your mind when you get up in the morning – shall I throw away my money on a Dior bra or on Gautier underwear? And where shall I spend it – in the fancy mall or in designer shops?

Fanny Wherever I feel like at the moment, honey, it's my money. Mine. I've made it with my ten fingers. With nail polish, after a manicure. !!!

Malka You or your cunt? Whore!!

Amira + Evelyn Malka!!

Malka

(Screaming) She should live me alone. From the moment she came in she doesn't leave me alone – what do you do, what do you do – what's it to you what I do?!

Fanny

That's what I'm like – a whore who is also interested in those who are not interested in her. So – for 15 years I saw you maybe five times, I spoke to you on the phone maybe ten times, and always the initiative was mine. All that – until I got a divorce. Since I was divorced, five years ago, you didn't even ask where I live, as if you were the ex-husband's sister and not the divorced woman's. Then why am I interested in you? (To Amira) Why does my body sting all over since you told me your mother has disappeared and we must pack up the house? And what am I doing in this dump with these depressing women on the most important day of my life? What is it with me and all of you?

(Quietly) It's been 20 years and I'm still a whore in your eyes, eh? I'm not the whore. You are whores. All of you and whoever made you. A garage

owner's whore and a political activist's whore. (Exits the house)

Malka (Calling after her) Now you understand why no one wants to see your face... Hussy!!

Evelyn What does she mean the most important day of her life? When her mother's missing?

Malka What a husband she had, and she went and got a divorce. Now she's taking out her frustration on me.

Evelyn It's him who divorced her. She didn't give him children – he divorced her. Rightly so.

Amira What?

Malka Why did Father throw her out of the house? Because she used to wander at nights.

Amira What d'you mean wander – what, sleep with everybody?

Malka Wander around outside with them just like she is today, with a miniskirt, a criminal shirt and such heels, till two in the morning. "Your sister is a mattress', they used to say to me.

Evelyn And Father loved her so much. She was the youngest, till you was born. Spoiled her like I-don't-know-what.

Malka Well, she was the prettiest of all of us.

Evelyn You were prettier.

Malka What good did it do me? He used to buy her new dresses and hair ribbons.

Evelyn I didn't want to say anything – a minute ago she moaned to Amira about how poor she was, wearing your dress that was passed on to me and then passed on to her.

Malka "My princess! Come, my dearest, come see what I bought you..."

Chocolate, candies. He would hug her and kiss her, even at night he couldn't let go of her. Yes, don't look at me like that..

Evelyn She would sleep with them in their bed.

Amira What? And what about Mother?

Malka She spoke to her nicely and then shouted at her and then beat her. Nothing worked. You remember how she would cry and scream, as if she was being killed. And Father – "...Can't you see the child isn't falling asleep?" – and bring her back to their bed. A child... she was 14, 15, and would sprawl all

over him like some Persian cat.

Evelyn

Spoiled. For each piece of chewing gum, she made me her servant for a whole week.

Malka

And what do you think – when I took her in from the street, I gave her food, I gave her a home – that she didn't.. with David?

Evelyn

(Shocked) Have you gone crazy, Malka?

Malka

I could have killed her for what she did.

Amira

You're insane, I don't believe you. (Goes to the phone)

Malka

Let it go, you two don't know who Fanny is.

The phone rings. Amira answers immediately. They all stiffen.

Amira

Hello... (To the sisters) It's Yaniv, the policeman. (Into the phone) Yes... Yes.. To Be'er Sheva. What did she joke with him about? And, on which bus? I see. Then let me know. Thank you. (Hangs up) We are so stupid. First thing, he went to the taxi station here in Netivot. His brother-in-law

works there as a controller –

Malka

Amram. Amram Swissa.

Amira

Exactly. In short, Mother took a taxi to the central station in Be'er Sheva.

Joked with the driver in Moroccan all the way.

Evelyn

And he didn't see which bus...

Amira

No. What do we do now?

Evelyn

I called the housing company clerk earlier. To ask him about Mother. If she looked strange or something like that. He also said that she joked with him all the time.

Malka

You see, you've nothing to worry about.

Evelyn

Oh yeah? When did you ever see Mother laugh?

Malka

(Pause) Enough, Evelyn, dearest, for what.

Evelyn

I worry about her, she's my mother. (Cries)

Amira

I'm calling Fanny.

Malka

Hang on – so that's why she gave back the apartment.

Evelyn

What?

Malka That's why she gave back the apartment. She doesn't want to live alone. Who does she have around here? Everyone's dead or left for Be'er Sheva – what does she have here living alone.

Evelyn Then where will she live?

Malka With us. She wants to live with us. She went to me. She's on her way to me. Where's the phone? (Dialing. No answer) Come on, answer, David, answer. Where is he now?

Amira Then call his cell phone.

Malka I'm calling, it's switched off. He's not answering. He switched the phone off. Once again he disconnected the phone, that bastard, once again he disconnected the phone. And now Mother is with a suitcase by the door of the house and he's wandering around with the... I'll kill him.

Amira Calm down, dammit!

Malka What d'you mean calm down, he's cheating on me, don't you understand, he's cheating on me.

Amira Who's cheating on you – David?

Malka Where is he now? He's not at work, not home – I've been calling every five minutes from the moment I left the house...

Evelyn Who with?

Malka ...He has this divorcee in the folk-dancing, on the way back, when she drops him off from the car I peek through the window – they only say Bye, Bye, so I won't feel...

Evelyn And –

Malka But he's not fooling me – I took her phone numbers from his notepad and when he disappears I call and she's always not home or not at work.

Evelyn Always?

Malka Almost always. This morning I call her work – she's not there. Where is she? – Went away. I'm calling her house at one o'clock. Where is she? – Went to Haifa. What has she got to do in Haifa? Just when I'm here in Netivot and he knows I can't come because my mother has disappeared.

And now Mother is standing by the door and his cell phone is off –

Amira They only told you that Mother took a taxi to Be'er Sheva – how'd David's divorcee get to Haifa..

Malka What d'you mean? Common sense!

Evelyn (To Amira) That's exactly what Mother used to do to Father. She hung on his neck until he choked and ran away.

Malka (To Amira. The quarrel now passes through her) Sure. Father didn't let Mother breathe. Only at home, only at home – I taught her to sign her name, Simcha, she came to him and told him “Now I can sign checks too”. As a joke. Suddenly he got this look in his eyes, he took out the checkbook from his pocket, tore it up and said to her “When I'm in the grave, you can sign checks”.

Evelyn Really? (Amira tries to hush them and, not succeeding, she turns on the radio to drown out the fight) “Ya abu el bana'at” – she said to him – “You father of daughters,” she came to humiliate him, “Now I can sign checks too”. That's what she told him, I was in the room too, not just you.

Malka Shame on you – (Turning to Amira) She gave her soul to her.

Evelyn To you, honey, not to me. She didn't even come to the parents' meetings – (Imitating the mother) – “Eh... Wa... What for we will come, Dumblyn? Your school card all F'sara, what for we'll come?”

Amira What's F'sara?

Malka Shite.

Evelyn She used to call me Dumblyn! Gave her soul to me... Took my soul out from me. Threw me into a boarding school in Bney Brak.

Malka (To Amira) What? – She wanted to go!

Evelyn What? – I wanted to be religious? I wanted to be an actress –

Malka Then why didn't you return home –

Amira Enough!

Evelyn Home? Why return home?

Malka Did anyone tell you to stay religious?

Amira Shut up already, you both came here to embarrass us?

Evelyn Why return home? They loved me there, they respected me there, how they accepted me, what warmth, what love. What confidence I got, how I blossomed there. No Dumblyn. Dumblyn's dead – suddenly I became the most diligent of my year, suddenly I became the most popular –

Malka So what do you want from Mother?

Evelyn

To fight for me! – God save us, you're a mother – Don't you know your child? Don't you see I'm not shit? Why throw me out of the house, why? Father, and Fanny, and me... May she be healthy, that mother, may she be healthy...

On the radio, a song ends, and the voice of a broadcaster of the local radio station is heard.

Broadcaster

"And this was the song 'Selichot' by Judith Ravitz. I am Ronen Swissa on Radio South station. As the story goes, she was born here in the South and went to the Be'er Sheva comprehensive highschool. Well done, Judith, a pretty song before Yom Kippur. And if we are talking about good deeds for Yom Kippur, you have an opportunity to do a good deed and help the Ochana family from Netivot with information or knowledge about their mother who was lost or went missing and the sisters, that's four very nice sisters, are now sitting and worrying about their elderly mother; how old is Mother –

Fanny

Nearly 70.

Broadcaster

And her daughter Fanny Ochana, who came especially from Tel Aviv to look for her and her family are helpless before Yom Kippur. Fanny, please describe Mother to us and if any of you saw or heard or knows, let us know.

Fanny

Good evening. Our mother, as I said, is nearly 70, she is a pretty woman, about 165 centimeters, black hair, big brown eyes a little slanted, kind of long lashes, smooth skin –

Broadcaster

Any identifying mark, anything special?

Fanny

Look, my mother on the whole was a special woman, Mother – what can you say about your mother... And we love her very much and if by chance she hears she should know that we are all waiting for her.

Broadcaster

What was she wearing? Glasses, and earrings?

Fanny

The thing is, we don't know, no, no way glasses..

Broadcaster

So that's it, dear listeners, make an effort in honor of Yom Kippur, each of you think about his or her mother, it's the eve of the holy day, maybe she's alone and try to remember if you saw – what's the name?

Fanny

Sa'ada, Sa'ada Ochana.

Broadcaster

Sa'ada Ochana, and you can call Radio South on 07-6533666. (Fade to the

song "Who saw Bunny?")

Amira

It's a song about a dog!

The lights dim on the stunned sisters.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Nearly dawn. Evelyn is sleeping, spread on the sofa in the living-room. Amira is packing box after box and the boxes are filling up the apartment. Malka is standing by a saucepan and stirring, occasionally trying to make a call on her cell phone. From the synagogue near by we hear the voices in prayer of the people who got up early for the Selichot prayer of the day before Yom Kippur. From time to time we hear busy signals from Malka's cell phone. Suddenly the phone rings. Amira answers immediately. Malka tenses in the kitchen. We do not hear what is being said. Amira nods and then hangs up.

Amira Malka.

Malka Who was it, David?

Amira Listen, we need to wake up this crazy woman and take her home to Bney

Brak. It was her husband. She must have an abortion at the end of Yom Kippur because of the diabetes.

Malka It's Natal diabetes, what d'you mean an abortion – he's talking nonsense.

Amira Yes. On the first pregnancy it was Natal diabetes and on the second and on the third – on the ninth it's already severe diabetes for life.

Malka What a disaster... How can we tell her a thing like that?

Amira

We don't need to tell her, she knows. The doctor forewarned her and she didn't tell Haim. She shouldn't have gotten pregnant at all, the stupid woman. He, too, a righteous Yeshiva student, innocent, knows nothing about his life. She left him with eight daughters and, as if, came to look for Mother.

Malka So what did she come for – to escape the abortion?

Amira Well, what do we do with her? Where's Fanny –

Malka Where's Fanny – looking for Bunny, as usual. Took the Mercedes and went

to Tel Aviv. Only on the way, she dropped by the radio.

Amira approaches the sleeping Evelyn.

Amira Evelyn, wake up, get up, you're going home.

Evelyn What?

Amira Get up, drink something, Malka is taking you to the central station, the first

bus is at five.

Malka arrives with a cup of tea.

Evelyn (Sleepy) What do you want?

Amira

Your husband called. Come on, your story is blown. Pick yourself up and get off to Bney Brak, the doctor is waiting for you.

Evelyn

No way, I'm not going.

Malka

You are. It's not up to you anymore.

Evelyn

Malka – God gives you a present – it's not nice to throw it out with the garbage.

Amira

You don't say – God gave you your life as a present – not nice to throw it out with the garbage either. Come on.

Malka

But you told me you had a device! How did you get pregnant with a device?!

Evelyn

God created the world – couldn't He overcome a device?

Malka

What do you need all those daughters for? What for? Like in Morocco – you have no money to feed them, educate them, clothe them, and this diabetes that will now give you hell...

Evelyn

You had money to educate your children, right?

Malka

Right.

Evelyn

So where's your education if on Yom Kippur you sit by yourself like a dog while they're sunbathing on holiday?

Malka

Primitive... (Angrily leaves for the kitchen)

Amira sits by Evelyn.

Amira Evelyn, let's think logically... How many daughters do you have?

Evelyn Eight thousand.

Amira Well, do you at your age have strength for another baby –

Evelyn You make me laugh. You need strength for a baby? A baby gives strength.

I, when I have a baby in my hands I feel like... I don't know... I shout like crazy "Oh God, God, what a righteous baby you've brought me... Thank you!"

Amira

Just a sec, Evelyn – please do it for me one more time – (Switches on her camera) I need this for my movie.

Evelyn

“Oh God, God, what a righteous baby you've brought me... Thank you!”

Amira

Can you say the names of all eight without getting mixed up?

Evelyn

Sure. Tehila, Shifra, Yocheved (Mixes up the order) Hanaleh... wait a minute, wait a minute...

Fanny enters the house.

Evelyn Tehila, Shifra, Yocheved, Saraleh, Le'al'eh, Rivkaleh, Tzipoira, Hannah!
Come eat! Food's getting cold!

Amira Damn, you're a star. But why in Yiddish intonation?

Evelyn I got used to it, from the Ashkenazi boarding school I was in.

Amira Evelyn, do you understand what will happen if you don't have an abortion?

Evelyn Yes. The nightmare of my pregnancies will be the nightmare of my life, all the way to the end...

Fanny Evelyn, it's your life – is it worth it?

Evelyn I don't know yet. I'll decide in the morning.

Fanny OK, get your older sister, I have some things to say to you.

Amira Malka! Come here.

Malka (Appearing) Oh, cutie, what happened that you came back – your engine¹⁰ got stuck on the way?

Fanny Yes, your mechanic husband fixed it for me. OK, I was in Be'er Sheva in the hospital, I was in the morgue, I wandered around all night with the cops – and nothing.

Evelyn Thank God.

Fanny I was at the police station both here and in Be'er Sheva, I spoke with the taxi station.

Amira Yes, we were told.

Fanny And I went to Radio South so they'll ask people to –

Amira Yes, we heard you.

Fanny And I've been to the housing company and that's what I want to talk to you about.

Evelyn Can we do this in the morning? I want to sleep.

10 Engine – here in sexual connotation, meaning sexual organ

Fanny

In a minute. We have the possibility of buying this ruin of a house for 80,000 shekel, which is about 20,000 dollars, which means pennies. (Takes out forms from her bag) Do you want us to buy it together?

Amira

Me? I don't have money for falafel.

Fanny

I know. What do you say?

Evelyn

No, honey, I need to arrange a match for my eldest soon, and that one wants to marry only an Ashkenazi. Ashkenazi costs a lot of money.

Fanny

I see. OK – then I'm buying it on my own. Agreed?

Malka

Is that what you came here for? To be your mother's landlord –

Fanny

Where's my mother – she's here and only I don't see her?

Evelyn

Shame on you, Mother's smell isn't yet gone from the house and already you jump on the inheritance like a black crow. That's it, you've killed Mother?

Fanny

You'd rather have a Russian buy it?

Malka

Yes. A Russian will not contaminate this house. What do you want to do here? What did you ever lose here?

Amira

What's it to you, you want to buy, buy – why are you even asking them?

Malka

She can't buy it. She needs our signature on the forms – otherwise she can't buy it. That's why she came here and tried to be all nice, to make some more money out of us. Here we sit, hearts burning from worry, and that one does business on Mother's back. You haven't changed. You are not buying any house, we will find her and she will yet return.

Fanny

How will you find her, by sitting on your ass and cooking dinners here for your husband in Kfar Saba?

Malka

No, I'll go perform on the radio, "My mother is a special woman, long eye lashes..."

Fanny

(Sharply) What's your problem?

Malka

What's my problem? – “My mother has smooth skin” – stupid, your mother is an old woman with age marks on the skin and glasses “She has no glasses” – she's had glasses for 15 years and she doesn't have black hair – she has white hair. With a headscarf. And she is barely walking and that's why we worry. Since yesterday I don't understand why you came here, it's obvious now – you found yourself a festival, an interest in life – you have no children, you have no family, alone like a dog in rented villas in your

Mercedes – became a Simon Templar, that one: morgues, taxis, pursuits on the radio – the detective squad. Get out of our lives, Fanny, you went away 20 years ago, stay where you are. Who knows you, anyway – who in the hell knows you!!

Suddenly Fanny slaps her.

Fanny Nice to meet you, Fanny Ochana, your little sister.
Amira (Yelling) Enough, enough, I can't take it anymore, enough! (Runs away to her room and immediately comes back) Get the hell out of here. Get the hell out of here, why did you come? Who needs you – are you sisters? Go away – (She bursts into tears and runs back to her room)
Malka What's up with her –

Fanny runs after Amira into her room. Amira is pressed against the wall, panting, covering her face, strange.

Amira Go away.
Fanny Amira! (Tries to get near) What happened to you?
Amira Go away, I said.
Fanny Amira, what's wrong, sweetheart?
Amira Go, I don't want you to see me like this.
Fanny Like how?
Amira (Reveals her face) Like this! You're happy now? My face is twisted enough

for you? Ouch! Mommy! Ouch!! Find me my pills. I don't remember where I've put them. Quickly, Mommy!!

Fanny
Pills? What pills?

Amira
The pills. Look for them.

Fanny starts to look for the pills but Amira is screaming.

Amira
(She tries to bring part of her face back down and straighten it) Mommy!
My cheek is going up. Half of my face is going up. (She is shivering) Help me.

Malka and Evelyn are standing anxiously by the door.

Fanny
(Hugging her) What half? What are you talking about, sweetheart? I don't see anything.

Amira

How can you not see? There. Ouch, Mommy! It's slipping.

Fanny

(Takes her up to the mirror and shows her) What are you talking about? Look, everything is in its place. Nothing moved. You see? (Notices Malka and Evelyn in the mirror, turns around and throws a shoe at them) Get out of here, both of you.

Amira

No. There. It's slipping. No! (She runs away from the mirror and lies on the bed)

Fanny

(Searches the drawers, takes out all sorts of pills) Try to remember, Amira. Is it Nurophen, is it Advil, where are they? What color? Where are the pills? (She notices Amira's bag and pours its contents onto the floor. Among the various things there is a packet of pills. She takes them in her hands and reads their name) Xanax?! You're taking Xanax?!

Amira

(Snatches them from her hands, takes one pill and swallows. She lies back down again) Give me a hand, Mother. Give me a hand. I'll be fine soon. Everything will be fine. I'm not alone. Mother is by my side and I am not alone.

Malka and Evelyn return to the living-room, shocked by what they have seen.

Evelyn

You knew she's like that?

Malka

No. To tell you the truth, I don't get to see her much.

Evelyn

Maybe she's a junkie...?

Malka

And Mother was with her a whole month and didn't say a word.

Evelyn

...You think, maybe that's why Mother... (Pause) What can I say – I just hope it's not hereditary, it's not good for matchmaking.

In the room, Amira's head is on Fanny's knees.

Fanny

When did it start?

Amira

A little after I came to Tel Aviv, my heart got mixed up from that city – the rent, bills, electricity, telephone, studies, guys, bars – Sodom and Gomorrah. I rented a room, fourth floor, and lay on the bed at night – and all sorts of noises started from all around and suddenly, suddenly I realize I'm alone. On a desert island, and I feel I'm twisting from within like scraps of metal... That I'm falling apart... After that everything scared me. Everything was too big for me. I'd look at a person and suddenly his head

would start to grow. Emergency room, anxiety attack – since then I've been on Prozac and Xanax, like everyone else. No need to make a big deal out of it.

Fanny

Why didn't you call me?

Amira You were in New York, I think.
Fanny Then why didn't you call Mother?
Amira Mother?
Fanny You did have boyfriends –
Amira By the truckload.
Fanny And why did you leave them?
Amira I didn't leave them. They left me. One said I was too emotional, one said I'm not... How did the filthy bastard say it... That I'm not enigmatic enough. The last one said I'm not complex enough, thought I was a jigsaw puzzle.
Fanny Yes. I knew them ALL.
Amira Fanny, Malka said you used to sleep with everyone, is that true?
Fanny Very true – but not all together – in pairs.
Amira And why do you sleep with everyone?
Fanny And why not? Is it soap? – It's not used up.
Amira Tell me, didn't you say to me you're a feminist?
Fanny Feminist, you bet ya, feminist.
Amira Then why do you use your sexuality?
Fanny What will I use – your sexuality? (Pushing Amira away from her) Get off, stop being so sticky, go to sleep. (Gets up to leave)
Amira Fanny... (Fanny stops) Why did you say in the morning that this is the most important day of your life – because Mother disappeared from your life?
Fanny (Smiles, and then decides to answer) Look. (Takes out two cell phones from her pocket) This is my regular phone. On the next two days I'll leave it switched off. And this one, I gave its number to only one person in the whole world and when I hear this ring – (She uses the first phone to dial to the other, and it rings) my life is changing forever. No, don't ask. Sleep.

Fanny turns off the light and exits to the living-room. Evelyn sits and says Tehilim (Psalms) prayers. Fanny sits down on the armchair or on one of the boxes, tired, and lights a cigarette. Silence in the room. In the background, we hear the voices of the people praying in the synagogue. It is the time of Selichot. Dawn.

Evelyn

I ask of you to forgive me. (Fanny looks at her) I'm sorry about the things we said to you earlier, Malka and I.

Fanny

It's OK, I'm used to it.

Evelyn

It's Yom Kippur. I thought to do a spiritual accounting, to decide what to do

– and I ended up adding a sin to the crime in the commandments between a man and his fellow being, and you are also my sister. For this, I ask your forgiveness.

Fanny

Look, Evelyn, I can forgive you and everything will be, like, alright, but you're not really asking for forgiveness, you just want to have another good deed registered in your name in the next world, that God will bless you – that you'll be able to sleep peacefully on Yom Kippur – that's all.

Evelyn

That's not true. I always pray for you, that you'll find faith and become religious.

Fanny

But I don't want you to pray for me, I want you to call me and ask how I'm doing and that I'll tell you what my husband the bastard did to me. I want you to ask why we got divorced, ask me why I want to buy this house, why I need your signature – and I don't want to become religious, I want you to accept me as I am.

Evelyn

Like you accept me?

Fanny

Maybe you're right. Maybe we come from two different worlds; so what if we came from the same belly. (Gets up) What did I ask of you today – to keep this house? And if Mother should come back she will live here honorably till 120. But you didn't even listen, you and your sister. The way you spoke to me – I need to make money off your backs – I can buy both you and your houses...

Evelyn

What do you have from this house – only bad memories.

Fanny

I don't have any other home. I need a home. I'm tired. Truth is, I wanted to do this a long time ago, but she wouldn't have agreed. She never forgives. And another thing – I need a grandmother for my child. (Evelyn cannot even react – she is in shock) I'm not pregnant. I'm adopting.

Evelyn

You are doing a great deed. When are you bringing her?

Fanny

(Smiling) And if it's a boy? She's about to go into labor any minute now.

Evelyn

The mother?

Fanny

The mother. In Vietnam. She's Vietnamese. (Takes out a picture) Look what a belly she has.

Evelyn

Nice... Why not.

Fanny

And the minute she gives birth to the baby the middleman will call me and I'll go and get it.

Evelyn

So you'll be a mother too... (Silence) Give me the forms, I'll sign for you...

Just as Fanny passes her the forms and a pen, and Evelyn is about to sign, a noise is heard – the sound of hanging up and moans of rage. Malka storms into the house and then throws all the food she has made into the garbage can.

Evelyn What? What, what, what –?!

Malka Now the cell phone is disconnected – and the phone at home is constantly

busy...

Evelyn

It's six in the morning now, let him sleep...

Malka

All night long he's been cheating on me, I'll never let him sleep ever again.

Never mind, David, never mind. You don't have a woman in the house any more – you have an enemy.

Evelyn

You're making it all up, Malka.

Malka

Evelyn, I called the neighbor and asked her to go in, to get him to feed the cat. She gets back to me – he's not at home and the key is in the plant. Open it and go in. Comes back – it's impossible to open, a key is stuck on the other side. (Amira enters the kitchen and sits down) And the divorcee hasn't come home yet. She's still in Haifa –

Amira

You're still in Haifa? Good morning. Make me coffee, Malka.

Malka

(Getting up to make the coffee) Haifa in my house. He's at home with her, in our bed. I'll kill him, I'm telling you that.. That's it... I'll kill him... I don't want to be like this, I don't want to be like this...

Amira

OK. Come on, drink your coffee and get out of here. Take your troubles home with you, I don't need them. I had enough of your husbands and your

children and your fights. Come on.

Evelyn

You're not going back to your studies?

Amira

No. I'm staying here.

Evelyn

What d'you mean staying here, today is Yom Kippur.

Amira
So –

Evelyn
Malka threw away all the food, there's no food here.

Amira
Food? Hello!! Wake up, Evelyn!! Today is Yom Kippur, you fast.

Malka You're coming to me.

Evelyn No way, she's coming to me. The girls will be very happy, too.

Amira Enough!!

The phone rings. Amira goes to answer.

Evelyn

No! Don't answer!

Amira

And if it's the police?

Evelyn

If it's Haim, I'm not here.

Fanny

Hello? / Oh... hello there, how are you? / No, she's not back yet. / We don't know. / I'm fine, thanks. / Invite me – I'll come. You've been folk-dancing till now? / I see, never mind. / Yes, she's here. Just a moment. (Malka signs NO with her hands) David, she's actually not here. She went with Evelyn to Baba Sali's grave, she'll probably be back soon. / I'll tell her. Good Holiday. (To Amira and Evelyn) When my berater gets back from the Baba Sali with you, tell her her husband says that the receiver was off the hook all night and to his regret he didn't notice it.

Malka

Well, then to his regret I'm also staying. We'll see if he notices now. (All are looking at her) I can't leave Amira on her own.

Evelyn

And David?

Malka

Let him look for me. (Detaches the battery from her cell phone) Come on, Evelyn, I'll take you to the central station –

Evelyn

I'm staying.

All

???

Evelyn

(Makes a show of fainting, speaking with a heavy Moroccan accent) I'm so very weak, me! Only this morning I faint and the doctor say I must not go like this fel bus.

Amira

So you're both staying? Fanny, stay too – what have you got to do in Tel Aviv?

Fanny

No, I had enough. (Gets up) Also, I didn't bring enough underwear. OK, I'll see you sometimes in the next millennium. (Exits. All are confused)

Malka

What does she need underwear for, that one – ?

Evelyn

Well done, Malka – what courage you have, Yom Kippur does not impress you at all. Well, I'm going to Baba Sali's grave, I've got some stuff to sort

out with him. Come, Amira.

Amira What can I find there?

Evelyn Take your camera, make a movie about the primitives.

Amira Oooof!! (Takes the camera and exits)

Malka (Calling after her) Amira, your cell phone, you forgot to take it.

Amira (Offstage) I don't have one.

Malka Hang on, then, I'm coming with you too.

The phone rings and rings and rings. Evelyn comes back and answers it.

Evelyn

Hello – / Yes. / Ah, you heard my sister on the radio? / So, where do you work? / What Home Office – in Be'er Sheva? / So – / Are you sure? An ID or a passport? / But how... / Ah, you live in Netivot and work in Be'er Sheva, I see. / I see. / No, there's no reward, she's not a cat, Mr. Swissa. / Thank you. Good holiday.

She hangs up, looking puzzled. The lights dim.

End of Act Two.

ACT THREE

End of the pre-fast dinner. The three sisters are dressed in dazzling traditional robes (Kaftans). Malka is still eating, Evelyn is clearing the table and Amira is filming.

Malka

Because what could I've said to him? Hello Kikoosh, I'm Malka Ochana, Malka, the one who sat next to you in highschool and dreamed of how she marries you. He wouldn't have recognized me at all, the way I look now. (Evelyn takes away her plate) Just a minute, I'm not finished.

Evelyn

You ate enough – there's no time. Don't stain Mother's robe.

Amira

Alright, he didn't look 18 either.

Malka

Enough already, my heart dropped into my underpants when I saw him. Actually he didn't change much..

Evelyn

Come on, Amira, enough with the dreams now.

Amira

Patience, Evelyn. With all due respect to David as a folk dancer, that Kikoosh, with his mustache and his wife and his children, even today I would have given him a bite. I secretly filmed him, you can watch it at home when David is folk dancing.

Evelyn

You haven't had tea yet, we haven't brushed our teeth, we should light candles; the fast is starting, don't you understand. Take, put them in the candlesticks.

The door opens and Fanny enters quickly.

Evelyn Eh – Fanny?

Fanny Is my cell here?

Malka The 1000 years have gone quickly.

Amira Where did you notice it was missing?

Fanny At the entrance to Tel Aviv. I turned the car round and came back.

Amira How can you forget a thing like that?

Fanny (Stops searching) That's what I've been thinking about all the way – how do

you forget a thing like that.

Evelyn

And now, poor thing, you're stuck with us – you can't drive now, Yom Kippur is about to start¹¹ .

11 Driving is not allowed during Yom Kippur (in Isreal)

Fanny OK, I'm going to have a shower.
Evelyn When will you eat? There's no time.
Fanny Never mind, I'm not hungry. Hey! I want a Kaftan, too. (Goes into the

shower)

Evelyn I'll get you one. What a difficult pregnancy you have, Fanny – a real hardship. Go on, Malka, wash the dishes. Amira, what are you doing now?
Amira Just a sec, I only want to watch what I filmed. There's a few more minutes.
Evelyn May you be healthy.

Amira connects the camera to the TV. Evelyn goes into the kitchen. Malka is washing the last remaining dishes of the pre-fast dinner.

Evelyn Are you coming? (Turns off the light in the kitchen) I've left the light on in the living-room and in the toilets.

Malka Why did you turn off the light?

Evelyn Who needs a light in the kitchen on Yom Kippur?

Malka You. And I've put your food here on a hotplate so it'll be warm for you.

Evelyn It's not enough that I'm eating on Yom Kippur that it has to be warm, too?

Malka Don't play games because I'll check up on you.

Evelyn Alright. (Announces loudly) I'm switching on the Sabbath clock.

Suddenly, Mother's voice can be heard from the living-room.

Evelyn What is this?

Malka Is it Mother's voice?

Evelyn Mama!!?

Fanny Mother!!!? (Rushing out of the shower, wrapped in a towel) Mother's

back...

They run to the living-room and freeze. Amira is handling the camera. Evelyn, Fanny and Malka are looking at the dark TV screen, as Mother's voice comes out of the TV.

Amira Mother left us a message. She filmed herself –

Malka But where's the picture? Fix it.

Amira OK, I'm rewinding it, just a moment –
Fanny But it's dark, fix it.
Amira There's nothing to fix, she didn't take off the lens cover. There's only sound,

no picture.

Fanny
OK, put it from the beginning.

Evelyn
We should light the candles.

Amira
Quiet!

She rewinds the tape and increases the volume. The mother's voice is now heard clearly.

Mother
Amira, Ya Binti, Nimshi Karara Aleik12, even you argue with me a lot in this month, that I worry about you very very much, because of the cigarettes and that you don't do nothing just sleep all day and smoke, then know, I love you very much.
I know your camera that you don't like when people touch, but I don't know to write the note so I say here to your camera what I have to say and you tell to your sisters Malka, Evelyn, and Fanny also. Tell Fanny to come also, that I... (Cries) Ah... Never mind.
By rights of this holy days, by rights of Yom Kippur and by rights of the great holy man the Baba Sali, forgive me that I do what I do like this but I can't any more, because of this I go now. You will not look for me, Amira. I say to housing people I go and not come back, they say you need to give back the house. So you all give back the house to the housing company and all the clothes and the things you give to the poor. That you, my daughters, God bless, you have for everything you need. Now I will tell you Amira...

Suddenly the video stops and the mother's voice is silenced.
Amira What is it? What happened? (She presses the Play button but nothing

happens) For fuck's sake. What happened here?

Evelyn
It's the Sabbath clock I set on. It won't do. The holy day has come.

Amira
I don't believe it. Turn it on –

Evelyn
No.

Amira
Turn on the clock, I tell you.

Evelyn
Not turning on any clock.

Fanny

I feel like killing you. You do it, Amira.

Evelyn

You do it, and I get up and go.

12

Ya Binti, Nimshi Karara Aleik = My daughter, my sweet soul

Malka Now how would we know?

Evelyn When the Sabbath clock turns on at the end of Yom Kippur – you'll know.

If it's so urgent for you. I heard enough as it is. (Taunt nerves in the room)

Malka

Suddenly you don't care.

Evelyn

Why – she cares about me? Gets up on Yom Kippur eve and goes for a

trip? No. Then I don't care about her either. The lighting of the candles.

(Prepares the candles – warms up the wax and attaches the candles to the four pairs of candlesticks) From the moment I went out this door she erased me from the family – well, why don't you invite me and the girls to spend the Sabbath with you? (Imitating the mother) “Eh, Wa, Esh Chibti? What you want? Because you religious, your sisters watch the TV and you don't.” Fanny, will you?

Fanny

Yes.

Evelyn

Well, come then, what are you waiting for? (Lights a pair of candles, covers her eyes and says the blessing) Barooch Ata Adonay, Eloheynoo Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kidshanoo Be'Mitzvotav, Vetzivanoo Lehadlik

Ner Shel Yom Ha'Kippurim¹³.” (Uncovers her eyes)

All

Amen.

Evelyn

Happy holiday.

All

Happy holiday.

Evelyn

As if this TV is word of God from the heavens. Heretics.

Malka

Great, now we're to blame that Mother didn't invite you. (Lights a pair of candles, covers her eyes and says the blessing) “Barooch Ata Adonay, Eloheynoo Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kidshanoo Be'Mitzvotav, Vetzivanoo Lehadlik Ner Shel Shabbat.¹⁴” (Uncovers her eyes)

Evelyn

(Correcting her) “Ner Shel Yom Ha'Kippurim.”

All

Amen.

Malka

Happy holiday.

All
Happy holiday.

Malka
You didn't want to be with us.

13
Blessed be you, God, Lord of the world, who blessed us in his commandments and ordered us to
light a
Yom Kippur candle

14
As above, only – Light a Sabbath candle

Evelyn

No, I didn't. I didn't want to come for a Sabbath dinner and moan about my mother-in-law. I didn't want my child to show aunt Malka the new dress I bought her. I didn't want to come and sit and sing with you on Yom Kippur. Instead of the smell of her cooking bringing us all here, she expels Fanny from the house, marries you off at 17, and sends me to a boarding school at 14, at 14!! Why? What kind of a mother is that?

Fanny

Can I have some quiet? (Lights a pair of candles, covers her eyes and says the blessing) "Barooch Ata Adonay, Eloheynoo Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kidshanoo Be'Mitzvotav, Vetzivanoo Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Ha'Kippurim." (Uncovers her eyes)

All

Amen.

Fanny

Happy holiday.

All

Happy holiday.

Malka

You're always the fucked up one. You wanted to be religious...

Evelyn

What, again? In a minute you'll tell me "Who told you to have so many children".

Malka

Right, who told you to have so many children?

Amira

(Lights a pair of candles, covers her eyes and says the blessing) "Barooch Ata Adonay, Eloheynoo Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kidshanoo Be'Mitzvotav, Vetzivanoo Lehadlik Ner Shel Yom Ha'Kippurim." (Uncovers her eyes)

All

Amen.

Amira does not say 'Happy holiday'.

All

Happy holiday.

Evelyn

One thing's for sure – if my daughters wore jeans and drive on the Sabbath, God forbid, then they would have had an aunt and they would have had a grandmother and the grandmother would not get up and go. She's gone, so she's gone – happy holiday.

The house is nearly completely dark, and only the eight candles light the four sisters, all dressed in their mother's beautiful robes. The sound of voices in prayer increases in the background.

Malka

You're coming to the synagogue?

Fanny

(Noticing Amira sitting on the sofa) In a minute. (Malka and Evelyn exit. The sound of praying increases in volume) The synagogue is so close, practically inside the house. (Pause) Amira, where is Mother?

Amira What do you mean?

Fanny You know where she is.

Amira What?

Fanny Tut. You know where Mother is. I've been studying you since yesterday – you weren't worried for a minute.

Amira Yeah? So why won't I tell?

Fanny You will.

Amira You want to see the rest? I can turn on the video in a second –

Fanny Leave it for now. Did Mother cry when she was talking about me or did I just imagine it?

Amira She did cry. Not for the first time.

Fanny I heard her voice and could suddenly smell the onion and garlic and her dishes mixed up with her sweat and the sentences from the Bible she used to mumble when she'd take me to my bed in the middle of the night...

Amira You're lucky – you're left with mother's smell. What am I left with? – Nothing. A granny – all my childhood I'm wearing torn jeans and she's still with a headscarf on her head. Doesn't know any Hebrew, doesn't know my world, I've nothing to talk to her about. What are you smoking, why do you sleep till late, why don't you marry... Since yesterday, at least I have some peace and quiet.

Fanny Is it a pity that we stayed, then?

Amira I thought I would sit quietly and think about my script.

Fanny We'll be quiet, we'll be quiet. If your sisters don't get on my nerves.

Amira Don't patronize them – they won't upset you.

Fanny Are you talking to me?

Amira Face it, Fanny – there isn't one sentence that comes out of your mouth that doesn't prove to them how fucked up they are, losers, and their lives are wasted.

Fanny But it's the truth.

Amira In your opinion, it's the truth. It's upsetting. It's not nice to feel you're a loser. I love you, sister, but each time you knock them down I feel you're talking about me. I get a lump of tears in my throat.

Fanny

You're not like them, Amira, you're made of different material.

Amira

Yeah? So why can't I write one proper script? Why does everything I do come out ridiculous and hollow? Maybe my teachers are right. "You have nothing to say, Amira. Go home."

Fanny

Is that what your teachers told you?

Amira

Yes.

Fanny

And what do you think?

Amira

What do I think?

Fanny

I think you will have. It takes time. There's no way you grew up in this house and you'll have nothing to write –

Amira

Yes. Sometimes you speak so nicely. Are you sure you're a hussy, sister?

Fanny

One hundred percent.

Amira

Are you fasting?

Fanny

What a question. (Takes off the robe and gets dressed) Hussies always fast.

Amira

Two years ago, I stayed with my boyfriend in Tel Aviv and we didn't fast. At night, I dreamt that Mother came to check my tongue. And I don't agree, because I knew it was pink and not white. And Mother is shouting at me – "Take it out! Take it out!" I started to cry and woke up. I told him about it – he laughed at me. He said we didn't clime down from the trees yet and that we're the only suckers who still fast in this country.

Fanny

(Getting into her elegant clothes) He can fuck off, together with my Jewish-Romanian ex-husband who would fry shrimps and drink wine in front of me in the name of freedom of speech and democracy in the afternoon of the fast when you're dying from hunger. Don't you want to come? I miss it so much, I haven't been there for years.

Amira

I don't feel comfortable. For me, Yom Kippur is about sitting in the livingroom reading newspapers about the war¹⁵ till two in the morning, thinking thoughts, dying of thirst, and sleeping till the afternoon of the following day, when there's only three or four more hours of a headache and a stinking mouth, the sound of the Shofar¹⁶, and it's over.

Fanny

This whole speech only to say you're not coming?

15 The war that broke on Yom Kippur in 1973

16

A Hebrew term for a ram's horn, blown as a musical instrument, particularly at the Jewish New Year

(Rosh Hashanah) and at the close of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Amira Yes.

Fanny How do I look?

Amira A little used, but hot.

Fanny Fine, sister, then at this point I desert you, because for me Yom Kippur is about meeting up with all the horny men who sneaked out of the synagogue. (Turns to leave) And as for what you told me – I'll try. (Exits)

Amira notices that Fanny's cell phone is on the table. She picks it up and calls out:

Amira Fanny!

But Fanny has already gone. Amira opens the bunch of newspapers that is on the table. The sound of praying intensifies. Lights go down.

End of Act Three.

ACT FOUR

Short scenes:

Scene 1.

The house is dark, lit only by memorial candles. Amira is on the sofa. Newspapers are scattered around. The sound of a toilet flushing. The door of the toilet opens, Evelyn comes out and goes towards the bedroom. Amira lifts her head:

Amira You're back?

Evelyn I'm back. They're still there.

Amira What's the time?

Evelyn Late. Eleven.

Scene 2.

Evelyn is sleeping in the bedroom. Amira is on the sofa in the living-room, covered in newspapers. The door opens and Fanny enters.

Amira Malka?

Fanny Fanny.

Amira Where's Malka?

Fanny Malka? What are you saying – she's not back yet?

Amira What's the time?

Fanny One. Fifteen.

Amira You forgot your phone again.

Fanny What – take it to the synagogue? (Pause) Did it ring?

Amira shakes her head to indicate it hasn't, but suddenly the phone rings with the special

tune and they both freeze. Fanny looks at the phone and does not know what to do. She looks at Amira. The phone keeps on ringing. Evelyn arrives from the bedroom.

Evelyn What's that phone?

Amira Fanny! Answer it.

Fanny What? It's Yom Kippur.

Amira What d'you mean Yom Kippur, answer it.

But Fanny is in complete shock. Amira answers the phone.

Amira

Hello? It's him. Talk. (Fanny does not respond) Hello? (Fanny backs away. Amira says:) Yes, it's her sister, yes, she is next to me. No, she doesn't speak on the phone on Yom Kippur day. Yom Kippur, you know, the war.. the soldiers.. Never mind. Yes... And how is the mother? How much? Yes, yes, I will tell her. She'll get back to you in a while. Thank you. Bye. It's a boy! Fanny, you have a son. Three kilos and 150 grams. All is well. You had an easy birth. (Fanny sits down on the armchair) What? – what?

Evelyn

Enjoy.

Amira

You meant 'Congratulations'.

Evelyn

I mean Enjoy. If I'd known, I'd order a child over the phone.

Fanny

You don't have enough money.

Evelyn

What, it costs money?

Fanny

Tons of money. Get real.

Evelyn

So she's selling him to you? What kind of a mother is that?

Fanny

A mother who has five children and no money to feed the sixth – so she's giving away the sixth to raise the five.

Evelyn

Good idea – I'll tell my husband, we'll make lots of money.

Amira

OK, when are you going to get him? Take me with you, I'm dying to be in the East.

Fanny

Wait a little. Let's see if he's healthy first.

Evelyn

And if not?

Fanny

Then no. It's not from the heavens. I can choose. I have no reason to ruin my life with a crippled child or a retard. I don't want to have another problem in my life – I want a child. What's your problem?

Evelyn

You're right, you're right. I've nothing to say. What d'you need with problems.

Fanny

I'm asking you what's your problem.

Evelyn

That you insult me – that you are a mother on condition, on condition that your child won't interfere, on condition he doesn't pee on your suit, on condition he won't throw up in your car, not wet your shirt with his tears – and if he gets a fever and you won't be able to go to your business meeting

– what, you'll give him back? It's a child, for God's sake, it's life, it's a world – a child does not come with an exchange slip. What is this, the houses you buy and sell?

Fanny

Take her away from me.

Amira

Won't you leave her alone – it's night now.

Evelyn

That's why she didn't want to talk to him on the phone – you mustn't hurry. You should wait, check the goods, maybe they're bad, maybe out-of-date. Go on, enjoy.

Scene 3.

Sound of water in the toilet. The door opens and Evelyn comes out. The kitchen door opens and Malka comes in. They look at each other. Amira raises her head.

Evelyn Good morning.

Malka None of your business. It's not morning yet.

Evelyn You've prayed till now, you and Kikoosh?

Malka Go to sleep.

Amira Either let me sleep or let me eat.

Evelyn Sh... Sleep, sleep.

Amira So stop flushing the toilet every five minutes. (Lowers her head and

snuggles down under the newspapers. Evelyn exits. Malka sits down on the sofa) What?

Malka

I spoke to him. Till now.

Amira

Great. So, you're in love and you want to get divorced, let David have the house and run away with Kikoosh to Eilat17, hitchhiking?

Malka

Why not?

Amira

Fine. Tell me tomorrow. I'm interested to see what else will happen tonight.

Amira falls asleep. Malka notices that Fanny has been listening to the conversation. She hesitates, then decides not to tell her anything.

Scene 4.

Evelyn comes out of the toilet without flushing. She is exhausted, walks slowly, and bumps into the wall. Amira wakes up.

17

Israel's southernmost city, a popular holiday resort

Amira (Sleepy, from under a newspaper) You again? You people are not allowed to flush the toilet on Yom Kippur?

Evelyn I didn't want to wake you.

Amira Not that I'm counting, but you peed five times during the night, and ten times more since this morning. Did you drink something?

Evelyn No.

Amira Then according to my calculations there's no more liquid in your body and you're peeing the fetus's water. (Fanny sits up)

Evelyn Shut up. (Remains leaning against the wall)

Amira (Removes the newspaper from her face and sits up, half-fainting) If I take a headache pill, does it count as if I didn't fast?

Evelyn Of course. (Slides down to the floor. Amira does not notice)

Amira This God is so petty. A little mercy, I'm dying. What's the time?

Fanny Three hours to go.

Amira Did you call him?

Fanny No. Later.

Amira Is the toilet finally free? I needed to pee since yesterday and Evelyn hogs it. Did she eat something?

Fanny I don't think so. She'd rather die, and not break the fast.

Amira notices Evelyn on her way to the toilet.

Amira

Evelyn, why are you on the floor – is it forbidden to sleep in a bed on Yom Kippur? (Walks on and then turns around) Evelyn, get into bed. Evelyn, what happened to you, are you alright? Fanny, come here a minute.

Fanny

What happened to her? Evelyn –

Amira

Help me. (Lifts up Evelyn and they both lead her to the sofa) Get me her bag – quickly! Wake up Malka! Evelyn, wake up, Evelyn, talk to me –

Fanny

(Runs to the bedroom and finds the bag) Malka? (Screams) Malka!! She's gone!!

Amira

(Pouring out the contents of the bag that Fanny brings to her) Bring the mango juice from the fridge. We must raise her sugar level, the daft woman

didn't eat anything.

Fanny

Shall I call an ambulance? I'll go get an ambulance.

Evelyn

No, no ambulance. I'm fine.

Amira

Fanny, quickly! (Fanny brings the juice; to Fanny) Make her drink, use force, force her (opens Evelyn's kit and takes out a knife) Help her, Fanny, the fool takes insulin and doesn't eat anything so she's nothing to process. Make her drink – open her mouth and pour, Evelyn, I'll slap you, drink, drink so you won't die on us, drink!! All night long she was peeing and I didn't get it... Give me your hand. (She pricks her finger and drizzles the blood into the test kit. She anxiously waits for a second and then looks)

Fanny

Shall I call an ambulance?

Evelyn

No!!

Amira

Just a sec, it takes a few minutes. Go and make her a big plateful of food.

Where's Malka gone to –

Evelyn

No, no, I'm not eating.

Amira

Who asked you. Where's Malka.. (Breaks a piece of chocolate she found in Evelyn's bag) Open your mouth.

Fanny

Malka is at the synagogue. Praying.

Amira

Yeah, she took you seriously, hasn't stopped praying since yesterday. Open your mouth!! Force her to open her mouth.

Fanny

With pleasure. (Pinches Evelyn, who screams. Amira puts a piece of chocolate on her tongue and closes her mouth. Evelyn is resisting) It's a highly Kosher chocolate, don't worry. She's cold. (Amira covers Evelyn and arranges a pillow for her back) What's with the test –

Amira

(Examines the kit) It's borderline. We'll check after the food. (Evelyn's head drops down) Evelyn, don't sleep, talk to me. (Slaps her face lightly) What's your name?

Evelyn

Brigitte Bardot. (Fanny arrives with a plate full of food) What's this? No.

No way, I'm not eating.

Amira
Feed her, Fanny.

Evelyn
Please don't make me, it's three more hours.

Amira
Look Evelyn – either you start eating or I call the ambulance and they'll
feed you through your veins –

Evelyn But it's a test.
Amira What test?

Evelyn
Don't you understand that it's a test, that God is trying me, that God intentionally gives me girls to test me, that God intentionally gives me diabetes, that God intentionally lets me decide on Yom Kippur, on the day Mother disappeared. So what if it's hard – he's trying me, I cannot fail, it's Judgment day.

Amira
Is it at least a boy?

Evelyn
And if it's a boy?

Fanny
Then after eight girls, a son may be worth all your craziness.

Evelyn
And my girls have no worth? Didn't it hurt me when I gave birth to them, didn't I breastfeed each one, didn't I change diapers, didn't I educate? Fiminists.¹⁸ They tell you a son – it's the Messiah King. They tell you a daughter – have an abortion. Shame on you both.

Amira
So you have a daughter after all –

Evelyn
I don't know. And I don't want to know. But you are hypocrites. Primitive, like your mother. D'you know why they divorced? She was afraid she'll have another daughter – what a disaster.

Fanny
Well done, Evelyn, you've exposed us. You're the cream of the cream. Better than us, better than your mother – better than me, I order children over the phone. You don't have a penny – you don't care. Two hundred girls

– you don't care. All your life insulin injections, diets – you don't care, maybe you'll go blind, maybe you'll lose your arms and legs – you are not deterred – you will give birth. She'll suffer, her husband will suffer, the children will suffer, but Evelyn is the perfect mother – righteous. This isn't righteousness, Evelyn, it's insolence, it's vanity – it's heresy!!! (To Amira) Come on, leave her alone. (To Evelyn) Selfish.

Silence. Amira and Fanny turn away from Evelyn. Evelyn hesitates, then takes the fork, picking at the food and puts some in her mouth. She chews, hardly swallows and then stops. A cry emerges from inside her, a heartbreaking cry. Amira and Fanny quietly watch her from behind. Outside, Malka's singing is heard – 'The Matser of Selichot'. The door opens and Malka comes in, happy and full of energy.

Malka
(Singing) "Cha'atanoo Le'Fanecha, Racchem Aleynoo, Cha'atanoo Le'Fanecha...¹⁹" Bon appetit, my dear.. Tasty? I made it. Why aren't you coming to the synagogue? That's it, you've become a heretic like you sisters? Soon you'll be lighting a cigarette. (To Fanny) Aren't you coming to the Closing prayer? Many people asked about you. Your admirers from the

18

The mistake is intentional

19

“We've sinned before you, have pity on us, we've sinned before you...”

past can't forget you.

Fanny How's Kikoosh? Did you finish breaking up his family?

Malka Not yet. Why, you have some tips for me from your rich experience?

Fanny You're doing just fine on your own, praise God.

Malka What's the matter? I spoke with a person I didn't see in 30 years – did anything happen?

Fanny Until morning?

Malka We had a lot to catch up on.

Fanny He's married, Malka, he's married.

Malka What? Say it again – say one more time what you've just said?

Fanny A hundred more times – he's married and you're married and he's got three children.

Malka And David – he wasn't married? He had a ring on his finger – or didn't you notice? Did he have children, him and your sister – or didn't he –

Evelyn Stop it, Malka, not now.

Malka No, I won't stop. You think I'm scared to say what you did?

Fanny Then say!! What did I do?

Malka What did you do... Seduced my husband... (To Amira and Evelyn) She slept with David. After I did her a favor and pulled her out from the garbage on the street... She slept with David in my own home – and now she, an innocent saint, is preaching morals to me.

Fanny Are you crazy? Did you see me sleep with your husband?

Malka A woman feels – it was a 100 percent clear.

Fanny What was clear?

Malka Your looks, your hints, your smiles, how you'd touch him as if he belongs to you, how his eyes were always on your ass...

Fanny Is it my fault that he looked at my ass?

Malka On purpose she'd wear mini, mini, mini.

Fanny Back then everyone wore mini, mini, mini.

Malka And was everyone bending over in front of my husband's face? – Didn't I catch him with you in the bathroom?

Fanny It was a mistake!!! He opened the door by mistake!

Malka Then why didn't you lock it? You were naked in the shower – why didn't you lock the door!?!

Fanny Because you have no key to the bathroom, stupid.

Malka Well, now I really don't care anymore – you can have him for no money – just as you like it, a bargain.

Evelyn Mother was also a 100 percent sure that Father cheated on her with everything that moved. Poor soul.

Malka Right – and Kikoosh's wife is a 100 percent sure he's faithful to her.

Silence.

Evelyn Fanny, it's Yom Kippur today. In the name of the child born for you, tell the truth now – did David touch you?

Fanny He didn't even try.

Evelyn And that's the truth?

Fanny That's the truth.

Evelyn You heard? Have you calmed down now – can you go back to your husband? Can you stop with your games?

Malka Sure, even if you connect her to an electric chair lie detector – I won't believe her. I was there, I saw, and I'm sure and I'm not stupid.

Fanny Maybe you're not stupid but you are blind. I've just given birth, it was two months after giving birth when David brought me in, who even looked at your husband, who even looked at men, who even looked in the mirror – I wanted to die, instead I had to smile, to be nice to you, to play with your children, to make them scrambled eggs with a salad for dinner and at the same time think of the child they took away from me and not cry so you wouldn't notice.

Amira Fanny, what are you talking about?

Fanny What you're hearing. What do you think this is – a game, when you kick a girl out from home when she's 16, does it seem romantic to you, an adventure...? You're looking for a subject for a movie – come on, make a film about Father's beloved daughter who doesn't understand what was

growing on her all of a sudden (indicates her breasts), what is this thing that makes her mother call her a whore and why Mother hates her and why Mother forgets that I'm her child and thinks I'm stealing her husband from her. And I don't understand what happened, what happened, how did I suddenly become the enemy – a beloved girl, excelling in school, beloved – what happened, what is all this hatred. Did you see Malka just now? That's what it used to be like every day – “When is the whore getting out of here”, she used to hammer at Father all day long.

Amira

Why a whore?

Fanny

Because I was wandering the streets, because I was looking. Men have this sense – they immediately get what you're missing. Come, sweetie, you want ice cream? I don't need ice cream, it was enough if they could smile at me nicely, hug me, touch me... Whoever approached. You threw me out of the bed? – Fine. The whole world would love me. What was I – I was a girl in a woman's body. People used to come to him, to tell him about me, at the synagogue, at work, neighbors – everyone knew. They couldn't understand how Mr Ochana's pretty daughter who used to help kids in the neighborhood with their math homework – became a street kid. I'm your daughter, you love me – why? He would look at me and cry. Became an old man in two years. And when I got pregnant he threw me out to the street and mother relaxed.

Evelyn

Yes, but after that she cried all the time, “Where's my Fanny, where's my daughter...” She moved to sleep on the mattress in the kitchen and didn't speak to him, for years, till they got divorced.

Fanny

Let it go. I'm not angry at her. Ten years with a psychologist and I understood that I probably did compete with her for Father, like every adolescent girl. It's a pity she didn't understand that.

Amira

And you didn't see him, the child – ?

Fanny

No. They took him for adoption. They asked if I had a mother that could raise him and I said no. There isn't. Now there's a soap opera for you. I've waited for him to turn 18 and come and look for me, at the age of 18 you are allowed to open the adoption file, to see who your mother is. I got a house for him, I got him a car – he didn't come. That's it. Three years have passed, he's already 21.

Malka

And David knew about it.

Fanny

Yes, Malka, David knew about it. David looked for me. “Your looks, your smiles” – aren't you ashamed to talk like that about that dear man.

Malka

That dear man is cheating on me.

Fanny

Who is he cheating on her with?

Evelyn

There's this woman who drives him to folk-dancing. So last night, when David didn't answer the phone she called this woman's house and they told her she was in Haifa. So she's sure that they were together at night in her bed.

Malka

It adds up.

Fanny

But the woman really is in Haifa.

Amira

How do you know?

Fanny

Yesterday David told me when he called, that he didn't go to folk-dancing

because the woman who usually drives him went to Haifa for her mother's funeral.

Malka

Then why didn't you tell me?

Fanny

It didn't seem important. I forgot how much you –

Malka

Then why did he switch off his cell phone and why was his line busy all night?

All

(Assailing her) Why, and why, and why.

Fanny

Maybe he had enough of your bullshit?

Evelyn

Look what you are occupied with all the time.

Amira

What do you care what he's doing?

Fanny

Mind your own business, let him miss you a little.

Evelyn

You crazy, you're bored.

Fanny

Go do something with yourself.

Malka

What? What?

The prayer 'Avinoo Malkeynoo' ['Our Father Our King'] rises up from the synagogue.

Evelyn Didn't you want to go to the Closing prayer?

Malka I did. I don't anymore.

Amira How much longer do we need to fast?

Evelyn They'll blow the Shofar soon. Malka, are you coming?

Malka We must lay the table. (Sits down on the sofa) Do you remember Mother,

how before she'd go to the Closing prayer – (Imitating the mother's

intonation) Malka, bring the white tablecloth from the bottom of the cupboard and put cookies and cakes and biscuits on the table, so everything will be ready for the moment we return –

Evelyn

(Imitating the mother's intonation) Evelyn, take out the pot we brought from Morocco, it's at the top of the kitchen cupboard, and put tea and lots of mint and exactly six tablespoons of sugar and some Louisa leaves – and next to them put the Sferzel.

Fanny

(Imitating the mother's intonation) Fanny, take out the glasses and put water in the kettle and put it on the stove without lighting it, then put the Arak on the copper tray and next to it a small glass and a saucer with a little cumin and a hard boiled egg for your father.

Malka

(Imitating the mother's intonation) Malka, where are my slippers – I'm going to the blowing of the Shofar and when I'm back I want everything ready. So we don't have to wait for the food at all, alright?

The sisters are scattered in all the corners of the room, silent. It is twilight and the house is nearly dark. The silence is broken by the sound of the Shofar from the synagogue. The sound of rejoicing Moroccan women is heard. Suddenly all the lights in the house turn on and the video camera and the TV start to work. The voice of the mother is again heard from the dark TV.

Mother

That I never talk with you and not tell you what I had fel Marock before I come to Israel. That you don't know that me I had a family fel Marock and we lived in a small village next to Warzazat. And that I was small, maybe 12, maybe 13 when I marry your father we come to the holy land and my family they don't want to come. Now everybody is dead, God bless them, and just my sister Mas'ooda is left fel Marock, and now I go live with her because she also is alone and her husband dead, and she my little sister and no one to take care of her. So now I get my passport that home office give back to me from when they took from me when I came to Israel, and I go home. That she is my sister and that me I miss her.. very much. Ah, and... Goodbye to my girls. And tell your sisters, Amira, to take care of you, even that you are smart and pretty more than everyone they need to take care of you. Goodbye... Bye.

Silence.

Amira

Well. Now you know where Mother is.

Evelyn

She went back to Morocco?

Amira

Yes. Went back home. She finally doesn't need me to translate for her, to go to the clinic with her, to the city hall, to the home office.

Fanny

You bought her the ticket to Morocco, right?

Amira

Yes. I'm sorry. I couldn't dissuade her. I didn't want to, either. People here

came back from a trip in Morocco and told her that everyone had died and only her sister is alive. She didn't stop crying. I would sit here trying to write my stupid script and she'd come in and tell me and tell and cry and tell and I'd listen to her, the first time anyone listens to her. Until she said that for once in her life she wants to be on Yom Kippur with her sister in her village. For once in her life she really wanted something.

Malka Then why didn't you tell us?

Amira Because she asked me not to tell you, she knew you wouldn't let her. I meant to tell you yesterday before the holiday began which is exactly the time she was supposed to get to the village, that's why I turned on the video but the Sabbath clock stopped it and Yom Kippur started, so...

Fanny But in the video she spoke as if you didn't know either.

Amira Right. She wanted to give you the impression, like she did everything by herself. Like a little girl who discovered her independence. Both decided and executed. So cute. I only directed her and it was my idea not to take off the lens cover, so as to make it authentic –

Evelyn In the frame?

Amira Yes, and I thought of the lenses...

Evelyn Shut up. You talked enough.

Silence.

Fanny OK. (Gets up to get her cell phone)

Malka Fanny.

Fanny Yes?

Malka I ask you to forgive me.

Fanny Now?

Malka When, then?

Fanny Soon, Malka. Soon. First I need to call Vietnam. (Pause) What was his weight at birth, Amira?

Amira Three kilos, hundred and fifty.

Evelyn A fine weight. (Stroking her belly) Mine will probably come out big. I only wish she'd come out, I miss her already.

Malka This is the hour I love most in the year –

Fanny Yes, the most beautiful sunset of the year. The whole year sets.
Evelyn Open a gate for us while a gate is closing, because the day has turned. Two weeks, I give Mother two weeks before she fights with her sister and comes back.
Amira Ahh... There's a breeze. Fall has come.

The lights dim.

The End.

