

## BUTCHIE

A Play by Yosef Bar Yosef

Translated by Binyamin Shalom

### Cast of Characters:

Eliyahu        Elderly ultra-orthodox Jewish man, owner of a small wine press in Jerusalem. Rather ill.

Naomi         His daughter

Nisan         Her husband. Manager of the wine press.

Baruch        Eliyahu's son. Irreligious. Called 'Butchie'.

Leah          A young girl – the neighbors' daughter.

Hirsch        Worker in the wine press

Lunatic

Two ultra-orthodox Jews

### Location:

In Eliyahu's apartment, in the old Beis-Yisroel neighborhood in Jerusalem, in the living room, which includes a door that leads to Eliyahu's bedroom, a front door to the apartment, a door that leads to the living quarters of Naomi and Nisan, as well as a door that leads to the wine press. The room also contains a large window along with a smaller window facing east. The furniture is old and gives off a certain warmth, including a table and chairs, a couch, wardrobe – or coat tree – a bureau with a mirror, and a bookcase. All of the characters – except for Baruch – are dressed in ultra-orthodox Jewish garb, but it is not necessary to 'go all the way' in this regard, it is enough that their affiliation be clear to the audience. For example, there is no need for the male actors to have beards and prominent sidelocks.

The time is the present, or a few years previous.

## Act One

## Scene One

(Early morning. Dim light. Baruch enters from outside, slowly, tottering. He takes a sort of turn around the room, touching the furniture here and there as he goes. He sits down on the couch, then lies down and falls asleep. Eliyahu enters from his bedroom, bursting forth in the direction of the telephone, then stopping midway. He walks back slowly, feeling weak suddenly, with pain in his stomach.)

Naomi: (Enters from her living quarters). Again? What, you don't have enough pain lying in bed, you want more? (Approaches him). You got dressed too. Come, I'll help you get your clothes off.

Eliyahu: (Pushes her away). Nah!

Naomi: I don't have any strength left, Papa. Leave me something for tomorrow evening too.

Eliyahu: (Weak, speaks with difficulty, though with a certain ancient force) Leave me alone! Just like your mother.

Naomi: Didn't you torture her enough while she was alive?

Eliyahu: Where is she?

Naomi: You gave yourself another shot?

Eliyahu: Leave me alone!

Naomi: I need to get some sleep.

Eliyahu: Call her in! Windbag!... Just like your handsome brother!

Naomi: Again? I miss him.

Eliyahu: He's dead to me, I threw him out.

Naomi: What a hero! Once you were pretty smart too. Come on already.

Eliyahu: (Pushing her away). Suddenly you've got what to say, huh, Deborah the prophet!... Why don't you worry some more about your own children.

Naomi: Stay there if you'd like, wait for the Messiah for all I care.

(Eliyahu exits in the direction of his bedroom. Baruch wakes up, rises and sees Naomi).

Baruch: Good morning. (She makes no response. She is shocked. He laughs). You can't believe it, huh? Me – me. Papa called me. That's right, you heard correctly. How are you doing? (Nisan enters). Nisan! I'm waking everyone up: *steht ohff zum slichos!* Top of the morning!

(Nisan makes no response, looking off in the direction of Eliyahu's room).

Don't worry, he won't throw me out. He reached out to me, called me up, at two in the morning. Right away I knew it was him. He didn't talk much, he just said: Butchie! Butchie, and that was it, he hung up. That's his way. It's fine. After everything that happened, all these years, he's not able to just start chatting with me on the phone. I immediately got in my car and came. I was the only car on the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I was afraid I might fall asleep on the way. I told myself: if I get there in one piece... that's it! I didn't even take a toothbrush with me. A hat – sure. And a dirty shirt. It's about time, huh?

(They make no response).

(Laughing, tottering, almost falling over). It's nothing. I barely slept. I had a little something to drink. There was some sit-down, some meeting, a real big investor. I'm about to start a new life, don't ask – big money! (To Naomi): Don't worry, it's not just about money. I'll keep studying, I'll finish up. How are you? (He pinches her cheek). Sweetheart! (He wobbles, almost falling over).

(Nisan props him up).

Good old Nisan'el! How you doing? Still looking at the stars? The Big Dipper, the Bear, Cassiopeia. What conversations we had: how big the world is, how small we are! And the upshot, what was the upshot? (Takes some gum from his pocket). Gum! I completely forgot – I brought some gum for the kids. I had a little bit left from the factory. (To Naomi): I didn't tell you when you came for a visit? After I sold the x-ray center. It's a special gum – fights cavities – it's the future of chewing gum, fun and healthy at the same time. You should see the way you guys are looking at me! Are you asleep or what? (Singing): "Lazy boy blue, lazy boy blue, will you sleep till two in the afternoon?" – that was the tune I used to keep myself up in the car, I just remembered.

(Eliyahu enters from his room).

Papa! Hi!

(Eliyahu makes no response, just stares at him).

You look good, you haven't changed, just like back when.

(Eliyahu makes no response, just stares at him).

It's fine, you don't need to say anything, take it slow, that's it. (Takes out a pack of cigarettes). Your brand, I can't smoke anything else. I even took some with me when I went abroad, whole cartons. You want one? (Tries to light two cigarettes, but his hands are shaking). It's still dark, hard to see, just a second. (Lights them). Here, it's already lit.

(Eliyahu doesn't take the cigarette, and exits to his room).

(Calling after him): You called me, didn't you? (Sinks down on the couch). My old couch, the same hole, same broken spring. I think I'll sleep a little while longer. (Almost lying down): Right, I forgot – if there's a call for me... I'm expecting a call, I left the number with... it's nothing, it's not important, just tell them there's a mistake, I'm not here. Everybody deserves at least one day off, right? (Looks around). Everything's just like it was, you didn't sell off a single thing. It's nice, you don't know how nice it is. Twelve years but it feels like yesterday. Just Mama's missing, huh? (Lies down). Look, lying down with a lit cigarette – two. I lit one for Papa, for both of us, like he's a woman. (He puts out the cigarettes, turns to face the wall, and falls asleep).

(The sun rises. A voice calls people to morning prayers in a pleasant singsong: Shacharis!)

## Scene Two

(It is almost lunchtime. Naomi is standing by the table. Nisan is pacing. Someone is looking in at the window.)

Nisan: Yes? (He closes the curtain). The whole courtyard already knows he's here! Twelve years in exile, an outcast, and now he's here, just like that!

(A car honks outside).

For years this street of ours sat out there in peace and quiet – weddings passed, funerals – the place never felt too tight. He just shows up, with that big car of his and... everything's crowded, *gevalt!* When I think about it – nobody ever honked because of me. I quiet other people down. And even that I do silently, so they don't feel it. Now that I think of it, I never broke a glass in my life. I never thought about it. A real revelation, huh?

(The water can be heard running in the shower).

His morning shower. Morning!... What a life. Drinking all night, sleeping in till noon, almost. If you don't have to daven in the morning why get up? Just like your father – one because he's sick, the other because he couldn't care less, a real treat. I don't ever recall getting up at such an hour. And did I ever have a chewing gum factory? Or an x-ray center? How does a person suddenly come up with the idea of a chewing gum factory? That's what they mean by the outside world, that's freedom, huh?

(Naomi makes no response).

Did you cook anything for lunch?

Naomi: No.

Nisan: I thought you'd cook for him and we'd also get to have some. Nobody's even hungry anymore in our house, they just go eat at my mother's. You only cook for the blind. With you a person's gotta be blind. That's a pretty good line – it's got *pshat* and *drash*.

(Hirsch enters and stands in the doorway that leads to the wine press, holding three bottles).

Again? I told you: I'll call you.

Hirsch: No, I... it's nothing, I just... by chance... (Exits).

Nisan: Even in the wine press nobody's working, a regular holiday! The king has welcomed the crown prince back from exile. And what's worse, everyone's lying now too: 'it's nothing, I just... by chance!'... If we're already talking about the truth – this isn't pleasant for me, but... did you hear your father make a phone call in the middle of the night?

Naomi: You already asked me once.

Nisan: I'm asking again. There have to be two witnesses, right?

Naomi: No, I didn't hear anything.

Nisan: Even your insomnia is worthless. You would at least expect that if somebody's not sleeping they'd be awake, or hear something. I'd really like to have seen that: calling him, after twelve years! The Messiah has arrived! That's how it is, when we're fast asleep that's when the really meaningful things happen. It's like they're waiting for us to fall asleep and then... Bang! Right there, huh?

(Naomi makes no response).

It's like pulling teeth trying to get a word out of you, a smile. Just imagine that the two of you are brother and sister. Like night and day. I work hard in the press, I even help out around the house. I deserve a smile once in a while, don't I? A little light in your face, laughter, joy, a little life, no? If you'd laugh you might know how to fasten the children's buttons.

(Naomi laughs an artificial laugh).

Stop that!

Naomi: What do you want from me? That's how I was born. You make me sick with your laughter, your joy.

Nisan: Funny... it was because of him, among other things, that I wanted you. Like rays of light shining from the heads of the righteous, that's how bright he shone behind you. He took all the light for himself and left you just black bitterness – left it to me, that is.

Naomi: Who's telling you to look at me? Don't look.

Nisan: How can I? That's the difference between a good woman and a bad woman. When it comes to a good woman they say: 'he who found a woman found true wealth'. He found her, that's it, he's done. But what do they say about a bad woman? 'I find the woman bitterer than death'. He finds her anew, every instant, endlessly. Maybe your blind friend Haim can manage not to look at you. I've got eyes, it's a defect, a real shame, I can see.

- Naomi: I want to ask you a favor. I don't plan on telling him about Haim. I don't want you to talk about it to him either.
- Nisan: Why not? On the contrary. He's blind, his mother is sick, you help them out like a real righteous lady alright.
- Naomi: Don't tell him.
- Nisan: You're embarrassed, huh? At the end of the day it's an act of kindness. If you'd done something in a fit of passion, something out of one of those old novels underneath your mattress – that you'd tell him, huh?
- Naomi: Just don't tell him, okay?
- Nisan: You're asking me like someone begging for their life. When you've gotta ask for a thing like that like it's your life... yeah, real *tsar balay chayim*. (Laughs, then stops). I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. I also missed him, and now he's here, but I – it's like some sort of anger inside. All these years I've been saying to myself: he's there, happy, full of life, doing things. Me, on the other hand, I've got a house, a father and mother, brothers and sisters and uncles and cousins – just a little ant, but it's quite a big anthill – and not just any old anthill, but one that's thousands of years old. Now he comes back and he's got his life there and his anthill here, his father has made peace with him. He gets to come back without having to pay a thing – like he's living on earth and in heaven at the same time. Reward and punishment – it's quite a big issue! A little plain old jealousy, huh? (Takes a chess board from a closet and begins to arrange the pieces). I'd be willing to play a game of chess with him. Why not? There's nobody to play against here, they're all complete nincompoops. (Stops arranging the pieces and puts the board back in the closet). I'm completely losing it – chess all of a sudden in the middle of the day!...

(Leah enters from outside).

- Nisan: Here's another one!... (To Leah): Again? I told you...
- Leah: My mother wants an onion.
- Nisan: We don't have any, I told you already.
- Leah: You said there were no potatoes, now she wants an onion.
- Nisan: There are no onions either.
- Leah: (Already stepping inside, standing next to the couch). He woke up. ` Where is he?

Nisan: He left, gone. There are no potatoes, no onions, and he's gone too, there's nothing here at all.

Leah: (Standing by the entrance to the living quarters). Not true – he's showering, I can hear the water.

Nisan: Even water has to prove me wrong.

(Baruch can be heard singing in the shower).

Leah: He's singing.

Nisan: That's what they do out there in the outside world, they sing in the bathtub. Their bodies make them happy. By the way, did you tell him about your father?

Naomi: No.

Nisan: Yeah, it's difficult. Me too... he asked me earlier why he hadn't got up yet. I was trying to figure out how to tell him. You know... not all at once, delicately. Then he came to my rescue, answered his own question: the flu, huh? Let it be the flu for now.

(The singing stops).

Nisan: That's it. He caught himself all the same, he remembered, nobody sings in the bathtub here. That's how it is when you're singing, you've got to stop some time. It's just when you're not singing – you can keep on not singing forever. A real Jerusalem insight.

Leah: I know that song. (Whistles).

Nisan: What are you doing? A Beis-Yaakov girl! Whistling summons demons, it's strictly forbidden, gentile behavior!

Leah: You don't believe that.

Nisan: I'll throw you out!

Leah: (Stops whistling). That's what the rabbis always say. (Turns away from him).

Nisan: (Brief silence. To Naomi): Maybe the whole thing with the phone call... how can I put it... just some *bubba-myse*? The stories he used to make up when we were kids. Once he saw a spotted leopard. A regular leopard wasn't enough for him. Sure, same price. Once he even saw the Messiah, he even dragged us along to go see him. Not there? Must have disappeared. Maybe it's the same thing?... No, it

can't be. The Messiah, a leopard, those are typical Jewish fables, castles in the sky, nobody can deny it. This phone call is something else, your father is still alive, it's too much even for him. And to show up at a time like this!... It's like walking in with an ax. What for? He missed him a little bit? He could have always called, one of his annual phone calls. Or he could have sent a mixer, a refrigerator, a little charity from all his great successes.

(Naomi smiles a sort of smile).

Nisan: What are you smiling about? So smart!

Naomi: You're so afraid!

Nisan: What am I afraid of?

Naomi: You know what.

Nisan: So smart. Let's say that yes, he'll put him in his will despite everything. First of all, he deserves it. Second, what could happen? He'll get half. Of what? The great profits from the wine press? I mean really – a wine press!... Just some sweet wine for Kiddush. There are no profits, you can just get by on it. Truth be told: I... yeah, on the contrary... the last time he called he even asked about the business. I admit it: I made the situation out to be better than it is in order to stir up his *yetzer hara*. Why not, let him come back and take his share. Maybe he'll be willing to invest. The two of us together can expand things, modernize everything. Whatever – we can sit, talk. And play chess, of course.

Baruch: (Enters from the direction of the living quarters). I completely forgot... the refrigerator that I sent – what did he say?

(Nisan is surprised and looks at Naomi).

What's the deal? The refrigerator...

Nisan: He didn't see it.

Baruch: What do you mean he didn't see it? It's a refrigerator!...

Nisan: You know how he is. We didn't make too much of an effort, I'm sure you understand, and he himself...

Baruch: No?! (Laughs, lovingly). Sure, if there's some little thing wrong with your *tsitsis*, or a crumb of bread on the floor, or a yarmulke made out plain cloth instead of satin – that he would notice from a mile away. Great! Some father, huh? Stands there facing a brand new refrigerator and doesn't see a thing! Just doesn't. It's like you've got a father

who... how can I put it? Like something really grand, beautiful, like a sort of elephant.

(To Naomi): Good morning.

Naomi: Good morning.

Baruch: You look great. Even your cheeks are pink.

Nisan: The captive princess – her brother's come to save her.

Baruch: (Laughing). We'll get to talk, you'll see. We'll talk plenty. (Directed at his shirt, with its spot): Maybe you've got a shirt for me, there's this spot, just doesn't come out...

(Leah keeps trying to catch Baruch's eye, without any success. Now she starts to whistle off to the side, as though to herself. Everyone turns to face her).

Leah: (To Baruch): You're from Tel Aviv, right? I know everything about you. I'm Naomi's friend. We talk about you a lot. I was in Tel Aviv a few times. I was at the Galilee too. My whole class – we went to Miron and Tiberias. They all went up to the Ramban's tomb but I went down to the sea. I was embarrassed to go swimming, but it was like my soul took a dip.

Baruch: (Shocked at first, then laughing good-naturedly). Yeah, I think I'm beginning to follow.

Leah: (Whistles again). I don't care. I'm not afraid of people – what can a person do to me? I'm not afraid of God either. There is no God, thank God. You don't believe either, right?

Baruch: (Laughing). Not so fast, I haven't had breakfast yet. (To Nisan and Naomi): This is called coming home?

Leah: You're liberated, you've got to believe that He doesn't exist.

Baruch: If I'm liberated, then I don't have to do anything, right? (Sits her down next to him). Come, sit. Tell me: whose kid are you?

Leah: I'm nobody's. Here everybody asks right off whose kid you are, as if the person themselves is meaningless. I didn't expect something like that from you. If everybody belongs to somebody then it's like they belong to God too, God's servants.

Baruch: I didn't think of that. I've got what to learn on the other side as well.

Leah: God altogether didn't create man, man comes from monkeys, I know.

Baruch: Oh, that too! (To Nisan): You had an answer on the subject, what was it?

Nisan: What do you mean? It's written in the Bible: 'And God created...'

Baruch: You had some answer of your own.

Nisan: Youthful fancies.

Baruch: No, come on.

Nisan: How should I put it?... The idea that man comes from monkeys – there's no real proof for it, no visible proof. Both possibilities are equal from this point of view. As a metaphor, of course. If that's the case, why choose God the Monkey when you could choose God the Father? True, a great, mighty father is more difficult – more money, more problems. But does anyone throw their money away because it's difficult?

Leah: You're just talking all fancy. Truth is truth, that's the main thing. It's not some shoe store where you can choose whatever you want. And it's not true that being religious is being rich and working hard while being liberated is being poor and taking the easy road – it's just the opposite. You think the same thing, don't you?

Baruch: (Tired, nodding). What?...

Leah: God altogether didn't create man, man himself...

Baruch: Strange... I slept well, like a rock. It's been a while since I slept like that but suddenly I want to sleep some more.

(Hirsch enters from the press with bottles, leaping into the room out of impatience).

Nisan: You're here already, already jumping around? (To Baruch): He's been hounding me all morning: when are you gonna wake up? When are you gonna be ready? He's been waiting for you like you're some big Rav. He's got an animal he wants you to take a look at and he wants your ruling as to whether it's kosher or not.

Baruch: Me?...

(Hirsch pours three cups from the three bottles he is holding, and places them before Baruch).

What's going on here?

Leah: God didn't create man anyway...

- Baruch: Just a second. (To Hirsch): What is this, a well?
- Hirsch: We've started making vodka – that is, we're trying. We don't really know anything about it, all we drink is sweet wine, a little Shabbos wine every now and then. We were shooting in the dark, like they say, it might not be worth anything at all. You guys over there, you know how to party, as they say, you guys know about these things, you're real experts. If it wouldn't be too much to ask you to give your opinion...
- Nisan: We want the Rebbe's *psak*, you know?
- Baruch: Sure – I kind of like the idea. *Masechta* Vodka, huh? I've also got a *masechta* of my own. The truth is, yesterday I drank some Polish vodka, it was much better than the Russian. Vodka's really my drink. What do I have to do exactly?
- Hirsch: Here are three bottles. One is ours and two are from large companies, well-known brands. The bottles don't have labels, just numbers, so there won't be any undue influence. You'll taste all three and...
- Baruch: What planning! Great! Let's go!
- Leah: Man evolved from the monkey, I know it...
- Baruch: Shh... Not now, now it's all about vodka, you gotta pay attention. (Drinks from the first cup). Mmm... Not bad, not bad at all. (Drinks from the second cup). No, not this one. This one burns the throat going down.
- Hirsch: (Impatiently, jumping in): Go ahead, drink, taste, taste the third one!...
- Baruch: (Drinks from the third cup). Mmm... This one's also not bad at all. It's good, a little sweet but good, real good. (Indicating the first and third bottles): These two, they're good!
- Nisan: (Indicating Hirsch): He can't stand, can't walk either, a real problem, all he does is jump and run around. The father of fourteen kids.
- Baruch: No?... Really! Guy makes kids and vodka too. This one's yours, huh? Good for you!
- Hirsch: That's not it, you haven't finished. Choose between the remaining two. Someone who starts doing a mitzvah!...
- Baruch: You want to be the best, huh? I can understand that. Let's try. That's going to be a lot harder. (Begins tasting from the two cups).

Hirsch: (To Nisan): He's a real connoisseur, the way he sips the vodka, the way he takes it on his tongue, the way he sucks out all the different flavors!

(Baruch stops in the middle of the tasting. He looks at the cup in his hand).

What happened? Something wrong?

Baruch: My hands aren't shaking.

Hirsch: That's good.

Baruch: You don't know how good!

Hirsch: Go on, finish.

Baruch: (With joy): This is what they mean by coming home, huh?

Leah: You're not even answering me. I said to you that...

(Baruch swoops her up and stands her on the table).

(Screams, then laughs). You're strong!

Baruch: (To Naomi): Papa used to pick us up like that, you remember?

(The door opens slightly, or perhaps somebody rolls up the curtain of the window from outside, peeking in).

There's an audience too, let 'em in! (Opens the door wide).

(Two ultra-orthodox Jews enter. Naomi exits to the living quarters. From outside we hear the voice of Hinda, Leah's mother, calling her: Leah!)

Leah: Let her call me all she wants, that's not me, my name's not Leah, my name is Liat. I've told her a million times.

Hirsch: (Collecting the bottles in the meantime, and directed at the two newcomers): It's nothing, I just... by chance...

(Exits to the wine press).

Baruch: (To the newcomers): *Shalom Aleichem*... (Puts his hand to his head): Sorry, my yarmulke fell off... (The yarmulke is in his hand but he bends down to pick it up, then sees it in his hand). Sorry, I guess I thought... (Puts on the yarmulke). Sit, please.

(They make no response. From outside we hear Hinda's voice, now calling loudly: Leah!)

Leah: What can she do to me? Pinch me? You can't pinch a person's soul out between your fingers. (Turns to go). I'm going home on my own, just 'cause I feel like it.

(Exits).

Baruch: (To the two men): Sit. (To Man #2): Just a second. Aren't you Shaye? We learned together at the *Cheder* of *Der Royter*. You used to draw *lulavim* in blood, pricking your finger and then... sorry...

(The men make no response, as though intentionally ignoring him).

Nisan: (To the men): Butchie, Elya's kid, he just arrived this morning. He was abroad for a while.

Man #1: We know.

Man #2: That's why we came, to tell you that they're going to say *Tehillim* today at the *Shul*. If the situation gets worse, just let us know, we can arrange to have them say *Tehillim* by the bedside too.

Baruch: What's going on? For whom? I don't get it. What do you mean, he doesn't need it, he!...

Man #1: If need be, we'll have the kids say *Tehillim* too, we can get them together.

Baruch: Tell me, I'm allowed to know, aren't I?

Man #1: (To Baruch): You'll never know. You left him all alone! (Takes hold of Baruch). What a man he was, the *gabbai* of our *Shul*, for years he managed our charitable fund, worked night and day, and there was never a penny missing, he put in from his own pocket – from his own pocket!

(The men exit).

Baruch: (To Nisan): What's the idea? What's he talking about? Like some eulogy. What's with the *Tehillim*? Papa isn't...

Nisan: *Tehillim* never hurts.

Baruch: Yeah, but not for every case of the flu...

Nisan: It's not exactly the flu.

Baruch: So it's not the flu, so it's a virus. And why did they connect it to me? "That's why we came!"...

Nisan: You know how it is, people have their interpretations. For twelve years you haven't been here, now he's sick and you suddenly show up...

Baruch: They were just looking for an excuse to come down on me. That old man! Even Shaye, he had a real hard head – you know how many times I saved him from the teacher's ruler? I gave him answers from behind his back, and now here he is coming to see me with the same ruler in his hands. Bunch of stinking black coats.

(Nisan makes a motion towards his own black coat).

What are you comparing? You guys have a business, you're doing something, making wine. These guys are just goofing off, yeshiva *bochur* beggars. What coats, with the torn sleeves and hanging strings, the stench, but they know what's best! What confidence!... Like a cemetery! It's like diseases and cemeteries were invented for them, so they could bark at the entire world: *Tehillim! Tehillim!* (Pours some vodka for himself). We've gotta clean the air: *Le'chaim!*

(Drinks).

Nisan: (Suddenly removes the chess board from the drawer). What do you think?... One little game of chess?

Baruch: Sure, oh, man, our chess board!

(Nisan begins arranging the pieces).

Tell me: which doctors have been to see Papa?

Nisan: Doctors, 'Hadassa'.

Baruch: 'Hadassa'? Why didn't you tell me?

Nisan: We didn't get a chance. You were also...

Baruch: It doesn't matter, it's okay, there are good doctors at 'Hadassa'. I once met a young doctor, they said he was a real big-shot. We partied together, vodka, yeah – no, then it was cognac. Not for nothing. We met some woman, the two of us together, that is... never mind, it was sort of like *davening* in the same *Shul*... his name was Uzi Brown...

Nisan: Sure, Professor Brown, he's a big professor.

Baruch: It's tough to get to see him, huh? I could arrange for him to see Papa, in a second.

Nisan: He saw him.

- Baruch: Really? Uzi Brown? How did you get to him?
- Nisan: We paid. You pay, you get to see the doctor. You pay a lot.
- Baruch: Sure, of course, he loves money, needs it, he's a well-known playboy. (Confusedly, as though running away from something): I wanted to ask something else, I forgot. Yeah, I wanted to know if he saw – forget it, he's a good doctor. I have a headache all of a sudden. Those *Tehillim!* That old man! It's funny, you know... no matter where you go, Brussels, Buenos-Aires, the most modern airports in the world, duty-free shops, these women, Africans, all of a sudden... you always see some Jew dressed in black in the corner, standing there, *shuckling, davening* away. All the airports in the world can just piss off. It's enough to drive you insane, no?
- Nisan: Yeah, like that. (Finishes setting up the pieces). There we go, your move.
- Baruch: (As if searching for what to say, trying to fill the void): Where's Naomi?
- Nisan: She went out. Go.
- Baruch: Who?
- Nisan: You. You're white.
- Baruch: Naomi – where did Naomi go? I asked her to give me a shirt...
- Nisan: She doesn't like celebrations.
- Baruch: What celebration?
- Nisan: Earlier, the vodka, the whole festive air.
- Baruch: (All of a sudden, as if he is finally getting to the question that he has wanted to ask all along): Tell me...
- Nisan: Okay...
- Baruch: (Finding it is not what he wanted to ask he escapes again, with a laugh). What would you say if I told you about a woman who suddenly decides to have your kid?
- Nisan: (Surprised). I don't get it.
- Baruch: A woman – she suddenly decides to have your kid...

- Nisan: What's that supposed to mean? Your wife, Elisheva...
- Baruch: (Here it is possible for the laughter to turn a bit angry, though also as a means of escape). Your wife!... Can't you think of anyone else? No, another woman. And it's not me, either – it's a friend of mine. He's also married, with kids, the whole nine yards. Just like that, some woman, some woman on the side, you know, she wants to have his kid. That's the thing, you get it?... For you it's nothing, you're just like – how can I put it?... Yeah, it's like you forgot your lighter at her place, but she takes this lighter and uses it to get pregnant and wants to have a kid. No, she doesn't want anything from me, she doesn't want me to get divorced for her, doesn't want me to recognize the kid as mine, doesn't even want money. Nothing, on the contrary, she altogether... she just wants to have the kid, wants to bring him up, all by herself. What would you say to that?
- Nisan: Ask me an easier question. (Puts the pieces away and gets up). There's a lot of work.
- Baruch: (Laughs). You're shocked, huh? The truth is, I don't get her. I tried to meet with her, tried to talk to her. She hung up on me. What can I do? Let her have the kid. I'll have a kid somewhere, some little monkey that I'll never even get to see. This elephant over here, that monkey over there – it's enough to drive you mad! You know?... They say God exists, but I don't get that, and then they say God doesn't exist, but I don't get that either! (Finally coming around to his question): What did he say, basically? Uzi Brown...
- Nisan: That they should say *Tehillim*.
- Baruch: Not them, him, Professor Brown.
- Nisan: That's what he said, that they should say *Tehillim*.
- Baruch: Is he in a lot of pain?
- Nisan: He's taking a lot of pills. He gets injections too, of morphine.
- (There is a brief silence, broken when Baruch suddenly laughs a strange sort of laugh. Nisan looks at him).
- Baruch: (Stops laughing). Sorry, I apologize... All this *Tehillim*! Uzi Brown and them too: *Tehillim*! You don't know what a joke that is. (Laughs again, then stops). Sorry, there I go again. I just can't help it when there's a good joke. On the day of Mama's unveiling, in the cemetery, you remember? I started laughing there too. I had to scream the *Kaddish* so those two guys on the other side of the mountain could hear, because we were only eight men, and there had to be a *minyán*!... You remember? I was literally screaming: *Yisgadal ve'yiskadash*!...

Like a peddler in the *Shuk* shouting: Everything's gotta go, the owner's gone nuts, everything's gotta go! And we were on an incline there and I had to make my voice carry up the mountainside – into the wind!... So I started laughing. And I had come with such good intentions. During the funeral I had been abroad so I thought at least for the unveiling... I even thought: here you go, a chance to make peace with him. What was the fight about altogether? Elisheva, yeah, even back then... doesn't matter. But then that *Kaddish*, that laughter, there was nothing left to talk about. You've got your father on the one hand and all this laughter on the other, and the laughter just wins out.

Nisan: Makes sense.

Baruch: Yeah, back then at Mama's grave, now here with his illness, that's how we meet.

Lunatic: (Enters, dancing and singing): 'I fell in love with a sweet young boy, on the shores of Tel Aviv...'

Baruch: Who is that? What the?...

Nisan: (Calling Naomi): Naomi! Your friend! (To Baruch): Moishe, he's sick, just showed up one morning in the neighborhood and never left.

Naomi: (Enters, addresses the guest): Hello, how are you? It's not your day today.

Nisan: He came to pay his respects to Butchie.

Lunatic: (Dancing and singing): 'I fell in love with a sweet young boy, on the shores of Tel Aviv...'

Naomi: Here, the honey cake you like. (Hands him a piece of cake).

(He undoes a cloth bundle with leftover scraps of bread and cake in it, in order to put the cake in there too, as bits of bread and cake scatter on the floor, which he stoops to pick up, as Naomi helps him).

Baruch: They let him sing songs like that around here, and dance like that?

Nisan: You give him a piece of cake and a piece of bread and he stops.

Nisan: Where does he live? Where does he sleep?

Nisan: In the *Shul*, on a bench.

(The Lunatic finishes picking up his scraps and tying up the bundle. He exits and remains standing behind the door. Eliyahu enters from his room, with a pitcher of water in his hands).

Eliyahu: (Calling out): Naomi!

Baruch: (To Nisan, quietly): Look at him! I didn't notice it in the dark earlier.

(Naomi stands facing Eliyahu).

Eliyahu: Naomi! (Sees her). How many times do I have to call you? Bring me some water!

Naomi: You have water, the pitcher is full.

Eliyahu: Pour that out and bring me some new water.

Naomi: This water is perfectly fine, I filled the pitcher up myself.

Eliyahu: Pour it out!

Naomi: All the water's the same. What's the matter with it now?

Eliyahu: There are nightmares inside this water. What's the matter with it!...

Naomi: I don't understand.

Eliyahu: I'm not asking you to understand, I'm asking you to bring me water! How many times do I have to ask you? Water! What are you looking at? Am I a mirror? Women!

(Naomi takes the pitcher from him and exits. Eliyahu sits down at the table).

Baruch: (Sits down facing him). Good morning, Papa. You slept quite a bit, that's good.

(Eliyahu stares at him but makes no response).

You're still sleeping, huh?

Eliyahu: Nightmares!...

Baruch: We already saw each other this morning, real early. You phoned me, you called out to me.

Eliyahu: (Rises in confusion) Naomi! Nisan! Is nobody here?!

(Nisan approaches, as does Naomi, entering with a pitcher of water).

(Indicating Baruch): What's he doing here? I'm still alive, aren't I?

Baruch: Of course, what's that got to do with it? You're just a little under the weather, you'll get better. You look fine.

Eliyahu: (Bangs the table). I'm still alive! Get out! (Nearly falls. Grabs hold of the table).

Baruch: Stop, Papa, enough.

Eliyahu: (Slowly, with difficulty): Enough, sure. Let him run to her!... What does he want from me? Let him leave, let him marry her in Cypress!... His mother, she can go with him if she feels so bad for him!... Let him go to Cypress, with their civil marriages, enough, sure, go register at Town Hall – go register a dog too, while you're at it!... Let him go have kids with her too, *mamzers*, my own grandchildren, I can't even call them my grandchildren, they're living but dead to me. Like it's not enough they're always trying to kill us !... (Turns to exit).

Baruch: (To Naomi and Nisan): The morphine...

(They silently confirm his comment).

Eliyahu: (Stops, comes back, now faces Baruch, without looking at him). To marry her?!... But he already committed adultery with her. *Lo tin'af!* She... she was a married woman! That's his big world out there... fornication, adultery?! Even without the Torah... to go and do a thing like that – and he knew, her husband, right before his eyes, before her daughter's eyes, a regular Jewish family – it's like... (Has difficulty continuing). It's like... like... like!...

Baruch: (Remains where he is and begins quoting his father). 'It's like tearing off a piece of flesh from a living animal and eating it raw with the blood still dripping – right before his eyes!...' That's it, right?

(Eliyahu makes no response. Stands facing him with his head bowed).

You want more?... I can keep going if you want, I remember it all by heart, every last word you said. (Again speaks in Eliyahu's place, as if quoting him): For a whole year you fed me lies. You hung around the house, sure, free food!... You *davened*, said your *brachos*, told me every evening you were going to learn *gemara*... that's your *gemara*?! Go back, go back to where you tell the truth! To them you tell the truth. Your tabloid newspapers, let them be your mother and father, your people, your Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Go to your big love! Love?! 'I love that God should hear my voice,' huh?! (In his own voice): Don't you understand? That's what you said then – then! Where are you living? What year are you in? You're fast asleep, that's what you are!...

Eliyahu: Until you leave her you've got no business in this house here! (Totters, almost falls over).

Nisan: Stop, enough. (Takes him back to his bedroom).

Baruch: I don't get it.

Naomi: You shouldn't take him to heart.

Baruch: I don't understand myself. I can remember it all by heart. For years I haven't thought about it, I forgot, like it never happened, and here it suddenly comes out of my mouth from memory, just like back then, just like him – I'm the same. Living flesh with the blood still dripping!... Living, huh? You don't forget something like that!

Naomi: All he talks about is death and judgment. He doesn't know what kind of life Elisheva had with her husband. Even if he did know, it wouldn't matter to him. The two of you did the most beautiful thing, you did what was right. Love is life. I'm not that brave, I stayed here. But the two of you were my comfort. At least you were living a real, beautiful life.

Baruch: (Impatiently): Enough! Okay?

Naomi: I don't understand.

Baruch: It's funny, it's like a joke, you can't imagine. His old "Until you leave her!..." If you only know how easy it is!

Naomi: I don't follow.

Baruch: (Pinches her cheek). Sweetheart!

Naomi: I'm not some little girl. (Exits).

(The Lunatic re-enters).

Baruch: I'm tired. (Spots the Lunatic). You're still here?

Lunatic: (Dances, sings, though with a tone of defiance now). 'I fell in love with a sweet young boy...' (He stops, turns towards Eliyahu's room, then turns away, puts the cake that he previously received back on the table and exits).

Baruch: He didn't take it, he doesn't want anything from him. That's too much. (Sits down).

Hirsch: (Enters cautiously, with two bottles). Now?... There's no one here, you can finish up in a second. Tell me what you think in peace – take your time.

Baruch: (Takes a cup of vodka, which was left on the table, and drinks). This one, this one is the best!

Hirsch: No, that's the vodka you already eliminated, the one that burns the throat. The cup was left there, from before. (Points at the other two, empty cups). These were the good ones, you finished them. Here, I brought the bottles, you have to choose between these two.

Baruch: (Drinks what's left in one of the cups, and places it on the table upside down). This one!

Hirsch: No, that's a mistake, you changed, you drank too quickly. You have to drink like before, slowly, tasting it, sucking all the flavors out of it!...

Baruch: (Grabs hold of him). Young man!...

Hirsch: I don't understand.

Baruch: Taste it yourself! Suck it all out yourself!

Hirsch: I don't understand.

Baruch: You've got fourteen kids, don't you?

Hirsch: I don't understand. You started the tasting, so finish, it'll just take a second...

Baruch: In the next life, when they raise the dead.

(Hirsch exits, and Baruch takes a sort of turn around the room, touching the furniture. He reaches the coat tree or wardrobe. He takes an old, black coat out and puts it on. He looks in the mirror. Then he goes into Eliyahu's room. The door remains open).

Eliyahu: You're still here! I told you, no! Not until you... (Calls out): Nisan! Naomi! Where is everyone?!

Baruch: No, wait, listen, I came back, I want to talk to you.

Eliyahu: I told you: nothing! Not until you leave her!...

Baruch: Fine, I'll leave her, I left her already, enough.

(Nisan and Naomi enter, and remain off to one side).

Eliyahu: (In a sort of panic): What does he want from me? Tell him to leave me alone!

Baruch: Don't you understand? I left her. I left. I'm not going to marry her, that's it, it's over. That's what you wanted, isn't it? I was blinded, but it passed, I want to come home, come back to the wine press, the whole thing, I'll try to atone, I'll come back. (Indicating the black coat he is wearing): Here, look.

(Eliyahu turns to face the wall).

(Baruch returns to the living room and sees Nisan and Naomi). Hello.

(They make no response).

Did you catch all of that, huh?

(They make no response).

(With a sort of shout): What's up, you didn't hear me? I didn't lie, I'm really not going to marry her. How can I? We got married once, back then, twelve years ago, and we've got kids. And not just any old marriage, we had a whole religious ceremony, we found some sort of rabbi. So where's the lie?

Naomi: You also said you left her.

Baruch: Really?...

Naomi: Yes.

Baruch: That's also true, just about. She doesn't know yet, but that's it, it's done. See, I sweet-talk, and bluff, and say: 'I left her', and then it suddenly turns out that I was telling the truth. I'm really leaving her now.

Naomi: What's that supposed to mean?

Baruch: Which interpretation would you like? You want *Rashi*? *Tosfos*? I'm leaving her. That whole thing, Argentina, it comes with a woman, it's a package deal, like matzo and *maror*. She's a young widow, she's got a huge cattle farm. She's just a little thing, silvery, bopping around all the time. Her heels are always clicking away like *tefillin* boxes. So that's also no bluff. Either I left her already or I'm leaving her now – what's the difference? It certainly doesn't make any difference here. There's no such thing as time here. 'A man must imagine that he himself was just redeemed from Egypt' – that's him! He asked me to do it, didn't he? Asking me to 'leave her' like that, twelve years ago. That's where his head is at. I'm just marching in step. And why not?

He gets his kicks and I'm no worse off. On the contrary, it's a real pleasure. He's made me feel twelve years younger. All the old problems: to marry her, not to marry her. I feel like I'm twenty-four again, I can start everything all over. (Pointing at the black coat he has on) Here, even my old black coat. Doesn't look all that bad, huh? (To Naomi:) What do you think?

(Naomi looks at his face).

Not me, the coat!...

(Naomi laughs, a strange, though not artificial laugh).

What are you laughing at?

Naomi: You've got a moustache. The whole time I've been thinking: what happened to him? It's the moustache!

Baruch: I asked what you think of the coat.

Naomi: So you asked.

Baruch: What do you want from me?

Naomi: (As though quoting him): I love her, I can't live without her, you don't know what love is, I don't give a damn what you say!...

Baruch: What's that supposed to be?

Naomi: That's what you said to Papa, back then. That you don't remember?

Baruch: *Gevalt!* Help me! Him from one side, you on the other, everybody remembers everything here, remember, remember, remember. Enough! It's like I'm twenty-four but the headache I've got is twenty-four and thirty-six together.

Naomi: I lived off your love.

Baruch: Again? Now you've turned into Elisheva's lawyer on me? It's an old story, it's dead, enough!

Naomi: You betrayed your love.

Baruch: A person has to betray something, right? Back then I was betraying Papa, now I'm betraying love. That's how I am, I don't like to put all my eggs in one basket. Love – what a joke! Nothing gets lost here, not even love. You still reading those romance novels of yours, huh?

Underneath the mattress. That's no trick – put your love on top of the mattress, then we'll see what's what.

Naomi: You'll see. Everyone's gonna see. (Exits).

Eliyahu: (Enters). What do you want to get out of me?

Baruch: What?...

Eliyahu: I know you. Coming back!... What do you want to get out of me? You didn't come back for nothing!

Baruch: Really?...

Eliyahu: (Leaps in his direction, pulls at the arm of his coat). You don't do anything for free! You want to take the wine press from me, huh? Your share, huh? The will, is that it? (Sort of laughing) Huh? Huh? Huh?

(Baruch stares at him, in the eye).

What are you looking at? What am I, a mirror?

Baruch: (Tired). Fine, okay, that's why I came back. I want you to put me back in your will, I want my share of the press.

Eliyahu: Like what, you think I don't already know? That's not called coming back, that's not for heaven's sake.

Baruch: You start out doing something for one reason, then end up doing it for heaven's sake, right? (Laughs). I still remember something. (Stops laughing, grabs hold of Eliyahu, forcefully). What do you want from me! I've had it up to here!

Eliyahu: And what if it's a lie, this too? What's one more lie between you and me? I'll change the will and you'll go back to her, to that whole world of yours?

Baruch: What do you want me to say? Don't ask a liar a question like that. If it ends up being a lie – you can change the will back, I'll have what to lose.

(Eliyahu exits, closing the door behind him. Brief silence ensues).

(To Nisan): Pretty interesting, huh? A little free movie. You don't watch movies, it's forbidden – so at least take a look at someone who does.

- Nisan: Did you really mean that? The wine press, the will...
- Baruch: I've got no choice. I need money, badly. I don't have a penny, I invested everything in the business, travel, expenses. I even sold the apartment. Elisheva and the kids are already living with her parents. It was either sell the place or hang myself. It's a long story, it doesn't matter, but I'm completely naked. It's funny, yeah... he knew what he was saying. You follow now?
- Nisan: Sort of. More or less. It's just... I'm missing the main part. You need money. What's the wine press got to do with that? Maybe you don't know...
- Baruch: Mainly what I need is security. Once the business gets off the ground it'll be small change. There's no reason to be afraid, nothing's gonna happen to the press, that's the first thing I'll pay back. I'm so deep in the mud – I've just gotta make it.
- Nisan: Sometimes even the Messiah doesn't show up. Or he comes late. Or he was already there but left with the spotted leopard.
- Baruch: What do you want from me? He's my father, I deserve it. Managing the charity fund, he has time to help everybody – what, he can't help me? He himself put the words in my mouth, saying he knows me!... Let him get what he knows! He violated me, the way he grabbed my coat, with that laugh!... When he called: Butchie! It sounded to me just like when he used to wake me up for *Selichos*. He'd call to me, Butchie, wake me up, and at the same time he would cover me with the blanket. You understand?... I'm supposed to get up, but he wants me to be warm just another second longer. When somebody wakes you up like that... sure, you get up, but the blanket follows you around the entire day. *Selichos*, early in the morning like that, it was a real treat. You remember? (Sings): "Lazy boy blue, lazy boy blue, will you sleep till two in the afternoon? – be swift like a gazelle and strong like a lion – to do the will of *Hashem* up in *Shamayim* – man worries about losing money – but doesn't worry about losing time – yet his money can't buy back – all the days he left behind." (Laughs, softly). Funny, I suddenly feel like taking a nap.
- Eliyahu: (Enters, stands in the doorway. To Nisan): I want you to bring two witnesses, Nisan, I'm going to change the will. I'm going to give him the wine press. Not half – the whole thing, we've got to. To save his soul. Bring them today, I don't want to start having misgivings. You understand?
- Nisan: (With difficulty): Yes.
- Baruch: I don't deserve it – just half, that's enough.

Eliyahu: The whole thing! The whole thing! So you'll have a lot to lose – you like having a lot, right? A whole lot!... (Laughs some sort of laugh).

Baruch: Stop, you're making a joke out of yourself.

(Eliyahu stops laughing, and suddenly grabs hold of Baruch's hand).

What?...

(Eliyahu is about to let go of his hand).

No, it's fine, hold on.

Eliyahu: (With difficulty, but with all his heart): Will you say *Kaddish* for me? You won't skip a single one?

Baruch: No, what are you talking about, you're gonna live to be one-twenty, you're not... I'll say it. I won't skip any.

Eliyahu: When a Jew dies, his son has to say *Kaddish* for him, that way he can rest. Without *Kaddish* there can be no rest, it's like he's in limbo, neither living nor dead. If you don't say it I won't have any peace, and you won't either! And I've got a condition... there was no phone call! Nobody called you from this house. You've told enough lies. In order to say *Kaddish* you have to be pure! You understand?

(Baruch makes no response).

You don't understand?

Baruch: Fine, there was no phone call, you didn't call me. Bring the witnesses.

Eliyahu: (Pinches his cheek with his free hand) *Ketzele!*

Baruch: (Looks at him for a moment, seems about to turn away from him). Give me back my hand! (Pulls his hand away by force).

(Eliyahu stands there trembling all over).

You're still shaking on me?!

(Eliyahu slaps Baruch on the cheek, and exits, closing the door behind him).

Let it be '*Ketzele*' – and he didn't call me! He called alright, now I'm sure of it, for the *Kaddish*. He doesn't know where he's living, but he's knows he's about to die. In order to live with me he would never call, just in order to die with me by his side. Jews live together after they die. Some *Kaddish* alright!... You ever think about that? People die

and we praise God. The Blessed, Almighty Lord, he's clean, I'm the dirty, little liar. Didn't call me!... So be it! On the contrary, it's better this way, if he wants to act the scoundrel I will too. Now we have a deal. He gets his *Kaddish* from me, and the phone call, and I take the press – catch as catch can! He didn't call – so what? Maybe he really didn't. I'd been drinking, I was drunk. Like that's my problem – he did call, he didn't call. I mean really: does God exist or not? I don't need him to call me in order to show up. I haven't told you everything, I've got another debt, not just some debt, you ever hear of the Nechmad brothers? It's already in their hands. Real professional collectors, the best on the market, whack you good, blow things up. With me all they can do is take a whack at me, I've got nothing left to blow up. (Laughs, with a certain tired, though peaceful quality). Strange, I don't get it... it's like I've removed some weight from my heart.

(Nisan exits. The lights dims. Hirsch peeks in, entering with two of his bottles, about to turn to Baruch, but when he hears him talking he stops, in shock).

(Does not see Nisan exit or Hirsch enter, and addresses himself to the dimming light). What's that? Clouds. Summer's about to end, huh? (Sits down on the sofa). This house puts you to sleep. All this furniture, such a bunch of *alte sachen*! You should've seen my furniture. I sold it all, the apartment's empty. It's been a few nights already that I can't fall asleep, my head's filled with all these strange thoughts: what have I done with my life... and when I do fall asleep I wake up with a start, and it's always the same thing – they've caught me in some lie, they've got me by the neck. I'm dead tired. A few days back I dreamt of Mama, it was so nice, but even with her, somebody suddenly grabbed me by the collar and started screaming: Liar! Piece of dirt! Mama, huh? (Laughs, softly). Look what it's come to: he's about to die and I'm making my reckoning. (Adjusts the cushion). That's a cushion? It's a mountain, not a cushion! All soft and stuff. At my place I stuffed a big plastic bag full of chewing gum. I slept with my clothes on, in this filthy shirt. (Lies down, covers himself. Spots Hirsch). What?...

Hirsch: No I... it's nothing, I just... by chance... (Exits).

(Eliyahu enters, looking for Baruch, approaches the sofa).

Baruch: (Opens his eyes halfway, and says, as though in sleep): You've come to wake me up for *Selichos*?

Eliyahu: (Trembling). A cigarette... you have a cigarette, huh? No? They don't even let me smoke a butt. Let's smoke together!...

Baruch: (Laughs, softly, and says, as though still sleeping): You got what you wanted, now you want to smoke with me? First admit that you called me. Give me a call and I'll give ya a cigarette.

(Eliyahu lies down on the sofa, right next to Baruch).

(Laughs, softly). Yeah, I get it. You're still saying you didn't call, huh? All you want's your *Kaddish*, huh? I like it. You've got no idea how much. You're a bluffer just like me. To lie next to me – that you want.

Eliyahu: Yes, yes, just like that... (Moves closer to Baruch and covers himself with his blanket).

Baruch: Yeah, just like that. No will, no wine press, that's not why I came. That was just some excuse, just to come see you, to lie next to you, just like that.

Eliyahu: Yes, yes, just like that...

Baruch: (Continues speaking as though in sleep, softly, with a laugh here and there): And here I was already sure that I had made up the whole thing with the phone call, as though it was just an excuse to get the press. Yeah, an excuse for an excuse, one bluff covering another. If you only knew how many! Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror and I ask: who is that? It's like my body's made of sand, just thin sand. You don't know what it's like, they have it in Tel Aviv, you hold it in your hands and it crumbles, slips away, till you're left with nothing. Today I said the truth, huh? I'd been drinking, I wasn't sure, the whole thing could've been a lie. But you made it real, you called. It's funny... when I picked up I was so sure – here we go, somebody else wants to call in a debt. Just like that, yes, to hold you!... Sometimes I wake up from a dream and I'm holding myself by the neck. It's nice to hold you, it's nice. (Falls asleep).

## ACT TWO

## Scene One

(It is late in the afternoon. Baruch is sleeping on the couch. Naomi is standing by the table. There is a pile of bits of bread and cake on the table. A voice is calling people to come to prayers in a pleasant singsong: *Mincha!* And then repeats the call with a certain urgency: *Mincha!* Bottles can be heard knocking around in the wine press).

Nisan: (Enters from the wine press). Let him break it! Let the whole thing go to ruin. Hirsch doesn't want to go home – his vodka – he's turned into a ball of nerves, can't handle having only half the world in his hands. Even without him, the bottles are knocking themselves over onto the floor. What do I care? There's a new boss. I put all my energy into that press. Yeah, saving his soul. Lies have gotten mixed up with disease, like some bride and groom, and that's your salvation for you.

Baruch: (Waking up, though not entirely). Where is he? I forgot. He fell off the couch. He's like a little kid. You heard him, didn't you? He started telling me stories about the Old City – what stories! He held my hand and talked. He fell asleep still holding my hand. When did he ever tell us stories like that when we were kids? When did he ever hold our hands? I'll be there, I'm gonna take care of him. I'm just getting out of the mud. I'll just open an office in Jerusalem. I'll see him every day, or every other day, at least. (Falls back asleep).

Nisan: For years I envied him, the great success story, and here he is... by right I should take pleasure in it, like a scale: his side drops, so mine has to rise. But here he is falling and I'm falling even further. And I've still got to bring the witnesses!... Do you care at all?

Naomi: No.

Nisan: I might as well go pick a stone up off the floor and try to talk to it. Don't you follow? Everything's going to go to ruin, your family's wine press, five generations.

Naomi: Let it fall apart.

Nisan: What do I care? I've wanted to run away a thousand times. Even my sweat already smells like sweet, vinegary wine. Here, this is my chance. I'm not afraid, I'll find a way to make a living. (Directed at the bits of bread and cake on the table): But why bother? Moishe'll feed us. We'll have bread, and cake too. He brought more, take a look. We'll even go one better, drop everything, change places – let him stay here while we go out into the world out there. Oh, the things we'll do out there! What'll we do, actually? What do they do in those novels you've got lying underneath your mattress?

Naomi: Give me a break.

Nisan: Still.

Naomi: They haven't been under my mattress for a while, they're just in your head.

(Outside an urgent voice calls people to prayers: *Mincha! Mincha!*)

Nisan: What would happen if just once I didn't go to *daven Mincha*? Just one day in my life without its little *Mincha*? Is the world going to collapse? It's so easy, so simple. You don't have to do a thing, on the contrary, you have to not do anything, not go, no, that's all. (Puts on his coat). But I'll go, sure. Why? Because I'll go. And I'll bring the witnesses too. Why? No reason. Because I will. Good solid reasoning, real clever, huh?

Baruch: (Wakes up again, though not entirely. Directed at Naomi): Good morning! Tell me about yourself. I can't understand why I'm sleeping so much. Mama used to always grab a nap in the afternoon. Sleepyhead, you remember? That's what she called herself. She also had her tics. They weren't much but they were tics. When I just think about it! The Nechmad brothers won't find their way here. Nobody knows I have a father here, a house. Your father throws you out twelve years before and that way he sets you up with the best hideout in the world, huh? (Falls back asleep).

Nisan: You wouldn't believe it, but I feel bad for him. As if that's going to help me. For years we thought about how good he had it there, as if we'd sent him all the good that we could have possibly had over here. And now it turns out that he didn't have it all that good over there, but that doesn't help us one bit. What do you say to that?

Naomi: Depends who's asking. (She sits down now with her face towards the little window facing east).

Nisan: Yeah? What pleasure would you get from that?

(She makes no response).

(Turns to go, then stops). If you would just tell me not to go *daven*, I won't go. The Almighty will forgive me, He'll understand, I'm sure of it.

Naomi: That's what matters, as far as you're concerned. You're just like him.

Nisan: What else matters? So be it. (Turns to go, then stops). What are you looking at? What do you see there? (She makes no response, and the light continues to dim). People look at lit windows when it gets dark,

trying to catch a bit of light. You're just the opposite, you sit facing the dark, staring at it. What do you see there in that little window, all dark? I've seen you sitting like that in the evening quite a few times, as it gets dark, and you just sit there. It seems like things are going to go completely dark and you're going to disappear into the darkness, I'll go to turn on the lights, but you won't be there. But there's no such thing, of course, I come back, put on the lights, and you're still sitting there, like a little piece of the dark. Do you really get treated so badly? All I ask for is a little life, a little joy, a smile, that's all. You're not alone in the world. Even *Shabbos* doesn't bring out a smile.

- Naomi: Soon you'll have it good, you'll sit around, laugh, talk nonstop, all gaga, like a bunch of ducks.
- Nisan: What do you mean ducks? Where have you ever seen ducks?
- Naomi: At the zoo.
- Nisan: Really. (Turns to go, then stops). What do you mean soon? What's about to happen?
- Naomi: I'm going. I'm leaving the house.
- Nisan: He comes back so you have to go...
- Naomi: That's it, exactly.
- Nisan: Some coming and going!... How many times have you said that before? Once you even went, walking around all night in the street, and in the morning you came back when everyone in the neighborhood could see you. The kids were embarrassed to go outside for a month after that.
- Naomi: I won't go walking through the streets.
- Nisan: No? Where you gonna go? Up the clock tower? Where else can you go? You can't even go visit your brother, he's already here.
- Naomi: I have where to go.
- Nisan: Really? Tell me, I also need to have a place. (Laughs). Your blind man, you could go stay with him, like in your novels, you could go read some more novels with him. The two of you together, like some sort of romance novel reading romance novels!... (Stops laughing). I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. It's like there's an evil wind in the house all of a sudden. You can go see them as often as you'd like, without you they would never have the good fortune to eat a hot meal. The neighbors can talk all they want, there's no problem of *yichud* – his

mother is there with him. She's a kosher woman. Him too. I don't believe the stories about him. I'm sure it's just *lashon hara*.

(Outside an urgent voice can be heard calling people to prayers: *Mincha!* Then another voice immediately calls out in a singsong: *Maariv!*)

Nisan: Yes, it's late. (Turns to go, then stops). What did you cook for them today?

(Naomi smiles).

Nisan: You started to smile.

Naomi: You're scared, you're afraid.

Nisan: Why should I be afraid?

Naomi: I didn't make anything.

Nisan: (Turns to go, then stops). You know what?... This wine press suddenly means a lot to me. It's sticks and stones, just a business after all. And that barely. When we're in there, giving it our heart and soul, it manages to keep going, somehow, by some miracle. All we have to do is step outside and there won't be a thing left – a real carcass. You follow?... It's like a living thing – if you remove the soul it's dead. Strange, no? Precisely because it's just barely making it along, like some *nebech*, it's all of a sudden so alive, so precious. You're not going over there today? You've never gone over without some hot dish...

Naomi: I'm going.

Nisan: Right. (Turns to go, then stops). You know what?... I suddenly feel bad for the press. Something firm, a tree planted by running water, for example: it's alive, in bloom, sure – does it have a choice with all that water? A tree like that – you might make a mistake and think that it sort of exists on its own. It's such a sure thing there that it's already as if it doesn't exist. On the other hand... yeah, some stone hanging over nothing, some hyssop branch sticking out of the wall, a shabby wine press like that – it's precisely these things that... how should I put it? It's a beautiful thing, it's happy. They testify not only about themselves but about the tree too. As though thanks to them the whole world is standing and can attest to its existence. It's a shame, no? They deserve a hot meal, don't they? If you're going over there anyway...

Naomi: They'll have a hot meal.

Nisan: How? You said you didn't cook anything.

(Naomi makes no response).

I asked you something. If you didn't cook anything, how are they going to have a hot meal?

Naomi: I'll cook for them over there.

Baruch: (Waking up). That's it, I slept enough. Good morning!

Nisan: (To Naomi): What do you mean you'll cook for them over there?

Naomi: I'll cook for them over there, there's a kitchen there too. There's a gas stove, and pots. It's a house.

Baruch: Good morning! Don't you hear me? Nobody?

Nisan: (To Naomi, in an outburst): What do you mean you're going to cook for them over there? Can't you hear what you're saying? You've got your own kitchen, with a gas stove, don't you? Your own pots! What's missing from your own kitchen? You've got a house in the community, your own house, no? You've got kids, right? What's missing?!

(Naomi laughs her strange laugh).

Stop that! And like an idiot I was really already afraid that... With a laugh like that you're not gonna go anywhere. Don't you feel bad for yourself? Back to that other time? Walking around all night, coming back in the morning? With the sun shining bright! You're barely a pale moon yourself.

Baruch: I don't get it, what are you two talking about?

Nisan: (Pinches Baruch's cheek) *Ketzele!* (Exits).

Baruch: I didn't deserve that. All I wanted to know was what was going on between the two of you. It's like you were fighting.

Naomi: That bothers you?

Baruch: A man deserves one intact home, doesn't he?

Naomi: Meaning you, of course, yourself.

Baruch: Yes, one decent, intact home – at least here, at least you guys.

Naomi: Why do you think you deserve that?

- Baruch: Why?... My home over there is ruined, do I need to tell you? I managed to forget and now you... What are you laughing at? That laugh...
- Naomi: You ruined your home over there, you destroyed it yourself. Now you have the nerve to ask me to take care of this home here for your sake, you have the nerve!...
- Baruch: You're my sister, aren't you?
- Naomi: As far as I'm concerned you've wrecked this home too, when you left to go to that other home, you ruined this one for me. I didn't care because I felt like I had that home of yours over there. Now you've gone and ruined that home for me too. You betrayed love.
- Baruch: Again with that love of yours? I betrayed love, and as a result I've got a father.
- Naomi: I hate you, God how I hate you! (Starts cracking her knuckles)
- Baruch: Do me a favor and stop that already! Go ahead! I was sleeping so peacefully before. What do you want from me?
- Naomi: Go ahead, go back to sleep.
- Baruch: Love, huh? Elisheva. Let me tell you something...
- Naomi: You've got nothing to say to me anymore. (Gets up).
- Baruch: (Sits her back down). What do you think love is – Hear O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is One? Where was her love for her husband? Love is like the wind, like freedom – that's what she said to me once. I felt bad for her husband, I felt bad for Mama and Papa. I told her: it'll kill them, I'm their only male child, they waited ten long years for me to be born. You know what she said to me? She bit my nose. She had a thing for my nose. Go ahead, let it be a nose, let it be freedom. If you're free then you're free, right? What, did she think she would be able to keep a former Yeshiva *bochur* with the *yetzer hara* of the entire Yeshiva of Slabodka the night they finished learning *Nida*? Like some private stud bull? Did you know she lied to me about her age? Five years! I'm exaggerating – four. Good one, huh? Five years! That's not just some bluff, that's already... yeah, it's *tsar balay chayim*. No, I don't have anything against her, she's a good woman, she even knows how to cook. A kosher *maydel* after all, *glatt* kosher. Of course, she hates religious people and the rabbinate – they gave her a lot of problems. She sticks with that – like some last glowing coal. She even tried to move me with it – 'remember the kindness of your youth!' It just ended. The meat turned to milk. All that love, all that tumult – a

tempest in a teapot, that's all! It wasn't nothing, either, I loved the tea, a lot. But if it's tea you want, then drink. Why just from her pot?

Naomi: I've had enough. (She turns to go).

Baruch: (Sits her down). There was this woman once, I met her the night before she got married. The next day I was walking through the street and I suddenly saw her, a bride in a white dress, coming out of some wedding hall with the groom. There was noise and joy, *Mazel Tov*, as usual. And the two of them went over to their new Fiat. I saw their eyes, shining with four Fiats, like a little Fiat in each eye. So I went over and said to her: Hey, *Mazel Tov*! She looked at me and it was like somebody had run sandpaper over her eyes. The Fiats disappeared and her eyes went sort of black, yeah, they were suddenly spiritual. Because of me – it's a mitzvah, no? (Laughs). Bring a little spirituality into the world!

Naomi: I don't want to hear any more. Why are you telling me this?

Baruch: Why! That's what I said to myself back then. I went looking for mitzvahs, yeah, even over there. What an idiot! Don't you get it?... You, Nisan, the two of you together, I thought about you a lot, it was like washing myself clean. You don't value your life enough. Look at me, I've already got white hairs. Look at you and look at me.

(Naomi removes her wig from her head, showing her cropped, white hair. She pulls the hairs forward as though to show him).

Enough already! Put it back on! (Immediately) I'm sorry. (Hugs her, kisses her head).

Naomi: (Crying). You don't understand a thing, not a thing!...

Baruch: Yeah, I know. Not a thing, not a thing.

Naomi: You don't know what love is, you had no idea.

Baruch: Yeah, okay, relax.

Naomi: I thought you knew, I thought you knew everything.

Baruch: Okay, it's nothing, it's fine.

Naomi: (Stops crying, and says with an almost exaggerated determinedness): I met a man, Haim, he's blind. He lives not far away, you can see the roof of his house from this little window. He lives with his mother, she's an invalid. He's religious but he doesn't believe in the mitzvahs. He keeps them anyway. He thinks it's a shame to waste your energy on not keeping them. I bring them a hot meal every day. I clean up

over there also. I even read to them from books and newspapers. I'm happy when I'm with him, I even laugh.

Baruch: No?!... You? Here?

Naomi: I love him with all my being. With him... sometimes I just look at him, I just see his back bent over with all those thoughts, and suddenly I feel... (Daringly, heartfelt, quietly): Naked!

Baruch: You're really starting to get carried away.

Naomi: He doesn't have any money, he's not successful, he works part-time, as a phone operator. It's tough for him, he gets headaches and becomes all agitated, and he's overweight, and he makes a mess whenever he eats, and he makes a lot of noise when he chews his food, but I feel completely naked with him.

(Eliyahu enters meanwhile from his bedroom and sits down at the table).

Baruch: Let's just hope he didn't hear! (Sits down next to Eliyahu and takes his hand). It's an awakening.

(Eliyahu's eyes close and his head sinks).

Naomi: (Silently, with all her heart) Completely naked!

Baruch: You're gonna wake him up, he'll hear you!

Naomi: Completely naked! Completely naked! Completely naked!

Baruch: Enough, you only say naked once – it's not like Holy, Holy, Holy!

Naomi: I've never been this naked, it's like I hadn't been alive till now. I wasn't alive at all. Only my clothes were alive.

Baruch: He's still alive, isn't he? He's still alive!

Naomi: I came to a decision today, I'm leaving the house, I'm going to go live with him. Nisan and the kids don't need me. I can't stand to hear one more time: why aren't you happy? Why aren't you laughing? I've been thinking about it for a long time. Because of you I didn't do it. I thought love was only for you, you and Elisheva, beautiful, successful people, and I was embarrassed by him, embarrassed by myself. But now I know better. Now I can do it.

Baruch: Saying things like that with him right here at the table?! When my yarmulke used to fall I was afraid that he might hear it in his bedroom. It's a real *churban*.

Naomi: The *churban* is all yours, not mine. I'm going to succeed. I'm not like you looking for an easy life and following false dreams.

Baruch: No, huh? You think you're pretty modest? Just want a little bit, a tough catch, some blind part-timer. You think that's not much? It's even more, it's the same excess, just from the other side. You're just like me. I needed a married woman, a sin, and you need some filthy blind man. We're both equally crooked!

Naomi: That's not true.

Baruch: You want much more than me. I want what everyone wants. You want something that no one wants, no one can stomach. That's no trick. Let's see you falling in love with somebody who isn't blind, somebody who isn't filthy, who doesn't make noise when he eats, let's see you fall in love nice and simple, clean, in love.

Naomi: I'm not going to let you ruin things for me any more.

Baruch: That's the truth.

Naomi: (Grabs him by the face). With your clean-shaven cheeks, your beautiful face, they're not even clean-shaven now, or beautiful for that matter, they're filthy.

Baruch: Let me go. What's that supposed to be?

Naomi: You don't remember? You called me in to see how you were shaving your beard. With a razor. Yeah. So proud, so full of energy, getting a real kick out of it. I stood there and watched, like Pharaoh's maidservants staring at Joseph, peeling apples with paring knives with the blood running from their hands. He was so beautiful. Afterwards you threw out the razor and I took it, you could even say I embraced it, kissed it, swallowed it whole.

Baruch: You're losing it. What's with this razor all of a sudden?

Naomi: Just like razors, yeah, that's what your vain dreams were like inside my body. I had kids, but it was like I had never given birth. They hate me, and rightfully so. Enough, that's it. Now I'm going to live my life.

Baruch: Even your blind man is mine, even him.

Naomi: You're dead, dead. (Towards Eliyahu): Like him, both of you.

Baruch: Quiet, he's still alive, still alive.

(Eliyahu gets up, stands, half-awake, half-asleep).

- Naomi: (To Eliyahu): You're gonna die in a little bit, I'm not afraid to say so. I'm going to leave when you die. I'm going to go to him when you die. Yes, when you die. (Embraces him, and passes him to Baruch). Take him! The house is yours! (Turns to go).
- Baruch: Wait! Don't go!
- Naomi: You want everything. You want him, and me, and Nisan, and the wine press, and a woman from Argentina, what else?! (Exits).
- Baruch: (To Eliyahu): Look at you! (Sits him down. Eliyahu is sleeping).
- (Leah enters. He sees her and turns away).
- Leah: You're wearing a black coat.
- Baruch: I'm cold.
- Leah: It's not cold now. There's no reason to wear a coat like that.
- Baruch: The soul is the main thing, right? You too...
- Leah: I'm still young, I have no choice. Nobody is forcing you, you can do what you want.
- Baruch: Really?
- Leah: You're not wearing that coat for real, right? It's just like Purim...
- Baruch: Really?
- Leah: God didn't even create man, man evolved from monkeys, I know.
- Baruch: So? Somebody had to create the monkey, right?
- Leah: I don't understand, what are you trying to say?
- Baruch: You're a smart girl, special, you're too serious for me right now.
- Leah: There's no such thing, you can't play the fool now and be serious later. If you're serious then you've got to always be serious. Liberated people definitely have to be serious, otherwise the pious folk will be right when they say that liberated people are just lightheaded and only do it for kicks.
- Baruch: (Laughing). Good God! I came for a little touch-up, nothing much, and suddenly they're coming at me in overalls and everything.

Leah: Seriousness doesn't have to get in the way of anything, I like songs too. Late at night, when we're not out learning in some synagogue somewhere, then I turn on the radio. Yesterday I listened till maybe two in the morning. The soul is the main thing, but not by itself, you have to have the body and soul together. That's why I suntan. On the roof there are some busted tiles, so I just push them aside and get a miniskirt tan. Nobody's got the slightest idea – outside I've got black socks on, but inside I've got a miniskirt tan. That makes the body equal to the soul. Here, look...

Baruch: No, what are you doing?!

Leah: (Rolls down her black socks and pulls up her dress). Look, it's a complete miniskirt.

Baruch: Even here they're taking their clothes off for me? What am I a bathtub?

Leah: You're not looking. Look...

(Baruch approaches her slowly and gets down on his knees in front of her. Naomi walks in at this point, and stands in the doorway).

Leah: What are you doing?...

Baruch: Looking, from close-up. (Slowly caresses her legs, from bottom to top).

Leah: You're not looking, you!...

Baruch: That's how I'm looking, with my hands, they're my eyes. Are you afraid?

Leah: (Very scared). No, not me... I'm not afraid at all, why should I be? There's no... There's no God.

Baruch: There are legs though, that's for sure, huh? (Stops). What's this? Black and blue marks...

Leah: It's nothing, just my mother pinching me.

Baruch: No?!

Leah: I don't care, on the contrary, you can... it's blue just like jeans. Sometimes there are so many that it's really like a full pair of jeans. Nobody wears jeans here, and certainly not pants.

Baruch: Oh, no!... (Laughs a sort of laugh).

Leah: Are you laughing at me?

Baruch: At you?! A girl like you with blue pinch-marks, a pair of jeans, the most jeansy jeans I ever seen, a girl with soul, but without God, a serious, sweet, blue girl!...

Leah: You're not looking anymore, but you can keep looking, like before. I'm not afraid.

Baruch: Really, huh? (No longer laughing. Reaches for her legs, forcefully, rudely). Here, I'm looking!

Leah: What are you doing? Not like that, no!... (Frees herself from him). I want to go home! (Exits).

Baruch: (To Naomi, having spotted her): You saw that. Around here someone's always watching you. Man was created from monkeys but in the end even monkeys just want to go home, a *heim!* Why did I scare her? I ruined it for myself too. Young legs, trembling like that, what a pleasure! This world... there's food, what food! And there's an appetite, what an appetite! But they don't connect. Before you know it I'm going to do *teshuva*, huh? What a joke – I'm losing it. I've got to call that loan shark. How long can I hide out here? You're looking down at me from your high horse, like I'm some vermin. What do you want from me? You with your love, Nisan with his cleverness, and Papa... yeah, even Papa with his decrees. You're all like trees planted by running water, may you be blessed with joy and plenty! You love a blind man, that's enough for you, and they... (Sniffs the air). Yeah, they're eating bread with fried onions – the smell of Jerusalem, ah! That's dinner, bread with fried onions and oil, the same oil all week, and it's enough too, you don't need any outside world, but may they always be blessed with joy and plenty. Indeed! What do you want from me?

(Naomi exits. The Lunatic enters, with his cloth package. He empties out bits of bread and cake from the package onto the table. It gets dark meanwhile. But light comes in through the windows, squares of light, as everything is torn between light and darkness).

You're cleaning the neighborhood. (Towards Eliyahu): Somebody looks like him just makes you want to bring it to him, huh? Like some sort of urge, like wanting to eat chocolate. (Takes a piece of cake and eats it).

(The Lunatic groans something, as though he wants to take the piece of cake from Baruch's hands).

Why? I'm sick too. I'm his son, you know. I haven't eaten all day. (Reaches out to take another piece of cake). Good cake, who made it?

- Lunatic: (Shelters the pile of cake and bread, groans something, as though looking for what to say, and then says sort of threateningly): Churchill!...
- Baruch: What do you mean Churchill?
- Lunatic: (Again) Churchill!...
- Baruch: (Stands up, extends a hand). Nice to meet you, Roosevelt! Stalin! Just a second, why not? There are enough benches in the synagogue, aren't there? I'll sing with you. 'I fell in love with a sweet young boy, on the shores of Tel Aviv ...' I like it. What do you say? I'll go around with you. You can be Churchill, and I'll be Roosevelt and Stalin, both at the same time. Agreed? You don't believe me. You're serious – Churchill, and that's it. I'm not serious, the only serious thing I have is a headache, one big headache – oh, what a headache! All the same. Why not just lose it like you?... It's worth the effort, isn't it? (Approaches him). Ew, no! God how you stink! No, no, that won't do!
- Lunatic: (Wants to say something. Begins): No!...
- Baruch: That's what I'm saying. No. I'm tired, I want to go to sleep. Leave me alone. Leave.
- Lunatic: I'm not Churchill, no!... (Starts, stops, remains standing, wants to finish what he started saying, but stands waiting for an opportunity).
- Baruch: Really?
- Lunatic: Moishe.
- Baruch: Too bad.
- Lunatic: Churchill *iz* Churchill *und* Moishe *iz* Moishe.
- Baruch: (Looks at him for an instant). Leave already, okay? Go, don't you understand? How do you get rid of someone like you?! Right, I forgot, c'mon, let's go *daven!* (Grabs him by the hand) C'mon, let's go *daven!*
- (The Lunatic frees himself and exits).
- (To Eliyahu): I want to talk to you, Papa.
- Eliyahu: (Straightens his head up, opens his eyes, laughs to the extent that he can, a sort of invalid's laugh). The whole way down Yehudim Street,

from top to bottom, you see?... Only on the rooftops, the whole way down, jumping from roof to roof!

Baruch: (Tired): Right, great, when you were a kid in the Old City, you told me before...

Eliyahu: And did I tell you about the donkey?

Baruch: No, go ahead.

Eliyahu: I said to my father: you go to the *mikve*, it's late, I'll take care of things. And we had almost finished, had already transferred almost all the bottles, when suddenly the donkey came to a standstill, Awad's donkey. We hit him, kicked him – he just stood there. People were already going to synagogue, and he just stood there. So I... (Laughs) Yeah, till the blood ran! I dug my teeth into his tail until the blood ran! Then he went, with me biting his tail and him walking along!... (Stops laughing, waiting for a response). Don't you see? (Laughing) Me biting his tail and him walking along!...

Baruch: I want to talk to you, Papa. I haven't told you everything.

Eliyahu: Afterwards Mama said to Papa: Look, he's still sweating, he might still be sick, God forbid. So Papa said to her: he knows what he's doing, you can count on him! (Stops laughing and sits there as though waiting for a response once again). Pretty good, huh? He knows what he's doing, you can count on him!

Baruch: (Softly) My father never said something like that to me.

Eliyahu: What?... Who?...

Baruch: You. You're my father, right?

Eliyahu: Huh?

Baruch: Forget it, I'm being stupid.

(Eliyahu breaks into tears, grabs hold of Baruch's hand).

What?...

Eliyahu: What sort of father am I, I can't even have a drink of water, huh?

Baruch: I don't understand...

Eliyahu: Coffee I'm not allowed to drink because of the coffee, right? That's what they say, the coffee!...

- Baruch: Right, coffee isn't good for you right now.
- Eliyahu: Tea I can't have either, because of the tea, that's what they say – the tea!...
- Baruch: Yeah, could be, tea too...
- Eliyahu: Why can't I drink water, huh? What are they going to say about that? What excuse are they going to give? No tea, no coffee, just pure water, water! Why not?
- Baruch: Where does it hurt you?
- Eliyahu: (Suddenly stops crying, straightens up, pulls his hands from Baruch's hand). Did you *daven Mincha, Maariv*?
- Baruch: (Takes Eliyahu's hand again). No, give me your hand.
- Eliyahu: You didn't *daven*?
- Baruch: I did. Tell me: where does it hurt you?
- Eliyahu: Where did you *daven*?
- Baruch: I'm not a little boy, Papa.
- Eliyahu: Where did you *daven*?
- Baruch: When you called me during the night I was so happy: here you were calling me, my father, not just some other guy I owe money to. You, sick as you are, you're the biggest creditor I've got, you hold my most difficult debt.
- Eliyahu: Where did you *daven*?
- Baruch: (Tired, coldly): In the little *Shul*, the old one.
- (Eliyahu's head sinks. Nisan enters with two ultra-orthodox Jews. They put on the lights).
- What? I forgot. Of course, the witnesses. The will, the wine press, the guarantee...
- (The two Men sit down at the table. Nisan brings a pen, papers, and they start to write something).
- Eliyahu: (Wakes up, to Baruch): Where did you say you *davened*?

Baruch: I told you, didn't I? In the little *Shul*, the old one.

Eliyahu: The little, old *Shul* doesn't exist anymore. They tore it down.

Baruch: Really?

Eliyahu: You couldn't have *davened* there.

Baruch: So I didn't.

(The two Men stand up).

Eliyahu: I didn't hear you.

Baruch: I said: so I didn't *daven*. So I didn't.

(Eliyahu gets up, seems emotional. The two Men support him).

Man #1: (To Eliyahu): We'll be better to you than a son.

Eliyahu: (As though he found some solution): I understand, of course, after all, they built a new *Shul* there. We call it the new old *Shul*, you didn't know, you still call it by its old name. It's the same thing, that's where you *davened*...

Baruch: No, I didn't *daven* there.

Eliyahu: (Immediately hits upon another solution, a little more forced): Maybe... maybe you were in the old *Shul* of the new Beis Yisroel? It's not far, that must be where you *davened*...

Baruch: Right.

Eliyahu: That's it, I knew it.

Baruch: No. I didn't *daven* there. I didn't *daven* in any *Shul*. I don't *daven*, it's a lie you forced me into. Don't you know that? It's not enough that I don't *daven*, you've got to make me lie into the bargain?

Eliyahu: (Trembling all over): No, no, no!...

Man #2: We must say *Tehillim*!

Man #1: The children too.

Baruch: (Continues addressing Eliyahu): I didn't leave her either, it's not what you think. I married her, we've got kids, it's been twelve years

already. I'm not twenty-four anymore, not me. You're not what you used to be either. Even the little old *Shul* has been torn down, right?!

(Eliyahu grabs hold of his stomach, he is in pain, almost keeling over, as Nisan supports him and sits him down).

Men #1 & 2: (Reciting Psalms): "To the Conductor upon the Morning Star, a Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have You forsaken me..." (They continue – Psalm 22).

Baruch: (Continues, directed at Eliyahu): Now I'm leaving her, but if you only knew how and why you would pray that I wouldn't leave her. I'm leaving her for another woman, without any wedding or anything. She's not the first, I coveted, I fornicated, the entire time.

Men #1 & 2: (Continue, louder than before): "Many bulls have surrounded me, mighty bulls of *Bashan* have encircled me. They open their mouths for me, roaring, ravenous lions. I have been poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint..."

Baruch: I did what you asked: Leave her! I left her without any pity, a bad man just like you. I left the children. A week ago my son stood facing me with a bread knife, just like that! You remember? Just like I stood facing you, with a bread knife! Don't you get it?...

Nisan: (To Baruch): Enough, he's sick, he... You're going to kill him like this.

Baruch: No, you listen up, you'll get it, you're not that sick. We've never spoken. You talked to the people that came to your charitable fund. Me all you ever asked was: where did you *daven*? Same thing now. I'm not a little kid anymore. Your father said about you: you can count on him. You never counted on me ever. Even before I'd opened my mouth you already said to me: *Nu*, lie already! So I lied. *Ketzele*, sure. You want *Ketzele* to say *Kaddish* for you? I deserve a father, any old father, don't I? Why me, why is my father only my father along with God and the *Shul*? I don't believe, I'm not able to, I just can't, it's too much for me, you've got to understand that. I don't have any place in the world besides you, not there and not here, you're all I have left.

Men #1 & 2: (Raise their voices even more, as though to silence him): "Save me from the lion's mouth, for you have delivered me from the horns of wild oxen. I will declare your name to my brothers..."

Baruch: (Off to the side already, not directed at Eliyahu, laughing): You're trying to shut me up, huh? 'Save me from the lion's mouth!' Like they say in the Talmud – better a lion's behind than a woman's. Good, that's real *Tehillim*, like it should be, with all your heart! Thanks to me, thanks to my stories about my women. Sure, *Tehillim* goes well with

women. You see women, you shut your eyes and scream *Tehillim*. And the other way around too. The people in the wide world out there... I don't get them. For them a woman is nothing, just a doll, a person, another person. For me – no, it's not tea, that was just a joke – for me a woman is... there are no words for it! When a woman gets undressed with me, she's already completely naked, but me, it's like my entire soul is screaming: go on, take off the rest, give me the second body, the one underneath it all! And the third! And the fourth! There's always something missing, the main thing is missing, the whole time there's always this feeling like... yeah, as if... (Approaches Eliyahu once again) 'My soul thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you!...' (Falls at Eliyahu's feet) My head hurts, Papa, it really hurts. Papa!...

(Eliyahu falls on Baruch).

Baruch: What?... (Stands, embraces him upright). No?!... Yes! Yes! Even so!

(Eliyahu dies, his head sinks down on Baruch's shoulders).

You fell asleep. Sleep, sleep, as much as you want.

(The Jews and Nisan say together: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One! Blessed is the Judge of truth!)

(Singing): "Lazy boy blue, lazy boy blue, will you sleep till two in the afternoon? Be swift like a gazelle and strong like a lion – to do the will of *Hashem* up in *Shamayim* – man worries about losing his money – but doesn't worry about losing time – yet his money can't buy back – all the days he left behind..." (Falls silent, as though only now he understood that Eliyahu has died). When you're dead you embrace me, dead, I can only embrace you when you're dead.

(They take Eliyahu's body from Baruch's hands. Baruch exits).

## Scene Two

(Late at night, with only Naomi standing facing the small window).

Hirsch: (Enters, tipsy). Go know what's better. The more I taste the less I know. I gotta go home. I'm not drunk, no. I remember the names of all the children. (Counts the children, bending a finger for each name): Moshe – not one. Malke'le – not two. Haim – not three. Menashe – not four. Tzirele – not five. Yankel – not six. Reuven – not seven. Perle – not eight. Zissel – not nine. Meyer'ke – not ten. Fishel – not eleven. Noach – not twelve. Yossele – not thirteen. Nachum – not fourteen. Mira'le – not fifteen. Fifteen?... We've got fourteen kids, where'd the other one come from?

Nisan: (Enters, to Naomi): You're still looking out that window at the dark? Why do I say it to you like that? On the contrary, I want to tell you something else completely. The truth is that... especially now, with this whole day with him, and all his happiness... The truth is that I'm already used to your pain. You could even say that... yeah, I love that pain of yours, that darkness of yours.

Hirsch: (To himself, continuing): I don't understand. What's happening to me? This darkness all of a sudden. Is somebody calling me? I gotta go home. I have to see my kids. I'll try one more time. (Counts again): Moshe – not one. Malke'le – not two. Haim – not three. Menashe – not four. Tzirele... (his face lights up) Tzirele died, may she rest in peace! How could I forget? (Kind of happy): Now the list is in order, yes, now everything is in order. I was getting scared. Thank God, He, may His name be blessed, puts everything back in its place, in peace. Everything is in order.

