**The Legs are showing**

**By Anat Zauberman**

**Translated from Hebrew by Inna Eizenberg**

Dad told me you stopped talking.

What happened?

You talked to me at the hospital; it was only a few days ago.

Why can’t you speak now? What is it? Why aren’t you answering me?

I'm sorry I didn't come sooner, I was up north with Gili, my phone didn't have any reception, so I didn't get dad’s calls. We were at this party and Gili flipped, he just went all crazy on me, he's so fucked up. Every time, he gets crazy about things. But today I yelled at him, I did. It was the first time ever. I've never had it out at him before. Today I did. Do you know why? It wasn't because of his drama, if he thinks I give a shit about that. It was because of you. He said he doesn’t get why I'm so stressed and like why do we have to leave the party right now and it's so not a big deal that you can’t speak, that like old people are just like that and he said: "Your gran is going to dirt nap soon anyway, so what's the difference?" and that’s when I flipped and I screamed my lungs out, I did. But you know Gili. He chills real fast. So we got in the car, he drove, said I should get some rest, stopped for a bit, drove again, pulled over to get me coffee, drove again, stopped, said he was sorry for grabbing my arm at the party like that, asked how I was, turned the A/C on, drove again…

He didn’t say anything about you though.

But you can't stand him anyway, can you? Why is that? Why don’t you like Gili? FIY, he's a super sensitive person, you know? He's really hurting when we fight, I can see that. He loves me. Do you know that yesterday was our four year anniversary? I mean, minus when we were broken up. Four years. Fuck, that's like ages.

The party was okay, better than I expected. Gili is usually tripping and then he's his own man, you can’t like even talk to him. This time was different. We danced together. All night. And then the sun came up…

You can’t die before you've been to a rave. Do you know how amazing that is?

Noa was there too. I haven't seen her in like a year. Then there she was, grabbing my arm in the middle of the party, saying she can't believe I'm back with Gili and how fucked up he is and what am I even doing with him. Her mouth reeked of Tequila. She is such a jealous bitch. Had to pull that shit off when we were having such fucking good time together.

When we were in the car, driving here, Extreme were on the radio, "More than words". So Gili sang to me (sings) "...And touch me… Hold me close, don’t ever let me go!”

I mean, people get strokes, but they would at least try and say something, you know? They would manage this maaa or mooo, but they would manage something. What is this? Why do you look dead? Are you dead? You're not dead.

This is some really creepy shit, whatever this is that you’re doing, you know? I don't have anybody else. It's not the same with Gili.

There's no one here but me, so can you try? Can you tell me what happened? Was it me? Was it something that I did? I mean, I have done a lot of things, but why do you have to be like this? What am I supposed to do now? Find a nice song for your funeral? Do you even like any songs?

Do you like being in my room? Are you hot? Should I turn the A/C on? Okay, no. No! You can’t do this to me. There are a million things we need to talk about. I haven’t asked you about all the things I want to know, like how was it to grow up without a father?

How was giving birth before they had epidural? How was it to give birth?

How was life without TV? Why are your hands so…?

How was Tel Aviv in the 60's?

How did it feel not to have a home?

How does it feel to get really hungry?

No, I tried that one. I swear I did. You couldn't really understand what it was that I did.

How someone who has all the food that she can eat,

With burning cheeks, bright eyes, a young heartbeat,

How someone like that girl can choose to leave the food alone and never touch it.

Someone wants to starve, while all you craved was to forget how hunger feels inside.

Cause you survived.

She's a survivor, friends! She is the girl who lived!

She ran, she stole, she fought and crawled

Carrying that dear dry piece of bread close to her skin,

The suffocating train air, all that snow, the cold within.

She would do anything to keep her belly full.

But me, I don't give a shit about surviving.

You used to make me the best salad ever, every day after school. It was the very best, better than anything I ever tasted, because you would peel the cucumbers.

You chopped them, tiny bits, well defined. You knew exactly where to find

the best tomatoes, just the right amount.

Your hands are… thick.

With tiny spoons I ate whatever piece of beauty you were feeding me. I ate.

Then I would go down to the back yard to feed the bones to the cats and throw up in the bushes.

It wasn't your fault though.

At a beach party on MTV, I was introduced to hunger, and hunger - to me,

It is a force, just below the sublime,

Nobody knew it – and now it is mine,

It is a force that absorbs and holds still, I can observe, but the pain - I don't feel,

A force that I draw, a woman is drawn

Missing nothing behind me, I'll never return.

Wash your hands with soap.

Throw some paper in. You're ready to begin.

Start with one finger at a time.

Your toothbrush might come in handy too.

Once you've mastered the finger, you can start using two.

Don’t brush your teeth right after you finish,

It will make you feel weird.

Don’t rush it. We have time.

Wash your hands again. Use soap.

Try eating more liquid food,

It makes everything easier,

So you should go for ice cream, and cream cheese, they're soft.

You should; soft food.

Forget all about eating fruit. That doesn't feel so good.

Pick up the cup. Pour some water.

Wash away whatever is left on the side panels of the toilet bowl.

Then flush. And wait. And look. You might have to flush some more.

If you don’t feel comfortable wherever you are,

If it's a strangers’ place, your parents' friends, in any case,

If the bathroom is poorly located or the walls are too thin,

Take a trip down to the back yard.

Throw up comfortably.

Then you will need to cover it or feed it to the dogs.

Wash your face when you're done.

Fill your mouth with plenty of water and spit.

Wait until the blush is gone, and then get back in there

Like nothing ever happened.

Smile.

Your teeth will have cavities. It sucks, but that's just the acidity.

Don’t panic. You'll just need some fillings.

Never throw up more than twice in one day and remember –

If you don't eat, you don’t throw up, because that would be obsessive.

Do you understand?

Come on, it was only just a week ago that you were lying in that hospital bed. You told me that you were hurting, and I was glad you are in pain, because that meant you could feel something, so it hurts now but it will pass. But then, as if I actually knew what was about to happen, I did something that I’ve never done before. I went to the far end of your bed, away from all the tubes, far from your weeping eyes towards your feet. I massaged them then, one toe after another, the soles, the ankle… Like the thing you used to do for me when I was a kid. I would sit in your living room and ask you to give me some ref..flex…frology. Though I didn’t even know what it meant, only that you will make my feet feel good now. You would sit down, at the end of me, getting through every bit of exposed skin of my little foot, caring for it.

Please, make me some toast. Please, for me? Three beautiful toasts with that salad of yours on the side, peeled cucumbers. I will never turn you down.

You’re happy when I eat.

One time, when I was throwing up everything you made for me, in the bathroom, dad walked in. I was so embarrassed I ran away from home. I came back two hours later. He picked me up from down the street and then we cried, facing the front gate together. There was that Gorillaz’ song playing on the radio: “I ain't happy, I'm feeling glad, I got sunshine in a bag.” You don’t know it.

I wanted to tell dad that at a beach party on MTV, I was introduced to hunger, and hunger - to me, that it is a force, just below the sublime… I didn’t tell him though. Not saying things, must be genetic, right?

I brought you oranges every Friday. Remember how I told you that we picked them at the Cactus Hill? Yeh, right. As if. The Hill was a long walk from home and nobody wanted to climb it. So we would steal oranges from the orchard, across the road from the dairy farm. Do you remember the owner? Crazy Menahem Mokhche? Well, we called it “the Mokhche”.

There were me and Gili, Noa, Rotem and Golan. We would climb the torn green fence and get inside the orchard. We picked beautiful oranges, dropped them into our t-shirts. We stood there, bellybuttons - out, shoes – muddy, feeling like we are breaking into the Pentagon, at the very least.

- There, get that one down, look how big it is!

- Oh come on, hurry up so he doesn’t catch us!

- Shhh, don’t let Mokhche hear us…

Until one time Mokhche heard us. And that was the last time we ever went there.

We were climbing trees, shaking branches, collecting sweet treasures, until suddenly we heard:

-Hey! Who’s there?

Crazy Mokhche with his scary mustache was quickly moving in our direction. We threw the oranges on the ground and ran, everyone accept for Golan, who was always so stubborn. I remember Gili, running back towards the fence. Noa and I were right behind him, running like our lives depended on it. We hurried, like crazy, half terrified and half laughing. Only Golan stayed behind, he couldn’t run fast enough because he still had six oranges in his t-shirt that he wouldn’t give up. Before I jumped over the fence, I yelled:

- Golan! Come on!

But it was too late. Mokhche caught him.

We hid behind the dairy farm fence and waited for Golan to come. We had no idea what was happening back there. Suddenly I got this awful feeling. Why does my heart feel so heavy? And then I realized that this was because we left Golan behind. I was afraid that this guilt will never leave me and I thought to myself that no one here is no one’s true friend. You can’t leave people behind like that, to die at the Mokhche.

I was mad at myself and I was mad at Gili because he was the first to run away, I was mad at everyone. But I didn’t say anything. And we waited.

Golan came out, holding one orange. His cheek was red. He somehow managed to steal this orange, even after Mokhche kicked his ass to get off his property, slapped him, chocked him with his huge hands and told him that if he ever sees him here again, he will kill him, for real.

Golan wasn’t the least bit angry that we left him behind. As if it made no sense for us to wait for him. I thought to myself how we don’t take care of each other at all. Nobody does. But I didn’t say anything.

When I came to see you that evening, you asked me how I hurt my knee and I tried to tell you what happened, but you didn’t get it. You couldn’t see why I needed other people to take care of me when I knew that you were doing just that. Okay, yeh, you really are the only one who cares about me, so what am I going to do without you?!

Let’s play a game. I will tell you a secret about myself and then you tell me something about you.

At a beach party on MTV, I was introduced to hunger, and hunger - to me,

It is a force, just below the sublime,

Nobody knew it – and now it is mine,

It is a force that absorbs and holds still, I can observe, but the pain - I don't feel,

A force that I draw, a woman is drawn

Missing nothing behind me, I'll never return.

After that, I was different.

I am so much stronger on the inside, so much more beautiful on the outside.

You always said that I was the prettiest girl in the village, but that was not enough. I wanted to be perfect. I wanted to be… No, I learned how to be… I turned into someone…

Easygoing - not easy.

Spontaneous - not impulsive.

Smart - not gifted. Funny - not a clown.

Evil - only a little bit.

Cool - not condescending.

I learned how to be important. And that was far from easy.

Because I’m not from a tough neighborhood, I was born pretty,

My hair is not oily, I’m not dumb and I’m witty.

My eyebrows aren’t meeting, I don’t snore,

I’m not poor, I never needed more,

I’ve always had friends. I always got into places easily.

Really, I am the one deciding who gets in.

I’m not minority; I never worked in prostitution,

My knees are fine; there is just nothing notably wrong with me.

And I needed something.

And then I saw them; women in mini-bikinis, men in their underwear, dancing, naked, until someone new comes, sprays their flat bellies with his colour spray and sends them off to a competition on stage. Everything is photographed, documented.

Whoever dances best – wins, on their way to become a star on the boulevard of glory. Beautiful, naked, dancing. I wanted that too. So I became a model. They hired me, just like that. That picture of me in your living room? They paid me 130 dollars an hour for that shoot. Video fucking killed the radio star.

Bruria, my high school headmistress, wouldn’t let me leave school early for the shoot. I went anyway. She never liked me, she envied me. Noa once said that I’m overreacting and that she is just a harmless eighty year old lady. I told Noa that she was no lady, she was a fucking whore.

I don’t care how they analyze me. How they will define me in psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, psychobiology, psychosociology, psychopathology and microbiology and what names they call me – I am the best.

And in this deep, reeking hole of model and myth, beach parties and colored spray on bellies, I will wallow and I will love every moment of it.

Valley of silicon, Botox on electron, a consistent hunger I choose for myself. Mine.

How was it? Did you like it?

I know it’s hard for you to understand. It’s because I never told you. You know, it’s a secret…

I think it all began that year when you and dad weren’t speaking to each other. You didn’t visit and I couldn’t come to you? I didn’t want to sleep anywhere back them. And then Gili offered me something new.

He took me to an outdoor music festival for the first time; a rave. “Give Trance a chance”. How can I explain it? Distant locations, crazy nights… A bunch of people who were… different. I was the youngest and the only girl in the group. I wore really colourful clothes, layers and layers of them. There were ribbons in my hair and dust in my nostrils.

On the second night, there was a full moon, and Gili said: “Let’s take acid.” I was scared, but I didn’t say so.

He put a piece of cardboard on his tongue and said we should kiss so it’s transferred through our saliva. We kissed and we kissed, I waited and waited…

And nothing happened. He asked me if I felt anything, so I said yeh, I think the stream is flowing in both directions, but inside, I didn’t feel anything. I didn’t say though. We’re not the kind of family that says things, right?

At the next party I figured it all out.

When we got back from the party to Gili’s place, he said that he was going to make instant noodles and asked me if I wanted some. I told him that I wasn’t hungry and he got real mad, telling me that I’m a fucked up little girl and that I haven’t eaten all week. I told him to stop it and he said like what can he do if I’m acting like a stupid kid, so I told him to stop calling me names and then he started yelling at me, saying that I’m a cheating whore and that he saw me talking to Yoni at the party and that we seemed real close and he grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me and I hit my head real hard against the wall.

No biggy. It was quiet. And weird. Gili said that he was sorry and kissed the top of my head.

I just wanted some of your salad with the peeled cucumbers.

You asked me once, if I want to marry Gili. I said that I had no idea and you said that it’s fine and I’m still very young and there’s no need to hurry, but you will have to be there for my wedding at any cost. I asked you why it was so important, and you said: “What do you mean “why”? Isn’t it obvious?”

Because I am your youngest and prettiest granddaughter and you want to get me a spectacular gift and you want to be proud when everyone greets you at the entrance. I thought to myself, that if I ever get married, I would be doing it for you, because it’s the least I can do to give something back to you. But now I’m thinking how you would just sit there on this chair and stare. That really pisses me off. And do you know what’s ever worse? Of all the dozens luxurious amazing, incredible dishes that I will lay out on the buffet for you; you will only eat a piece of bread with some cheese or a potato. Because that’s what you do. That’s just how you are, so what do you want me to do?!

Babushka. Vnuchka. Sheine meidaleh. Ich bin din granddater. Babushka! Venushka. Meidale, krasavitsa… Venushka.

Why would you answer me? Why would you tell me anything about yourself?

I’m a terrible granddaughter. The worst there is.

But we are the same, you and I. We both want me good and beautiful, and I know just how to do that. I knew that I had it in my genes, that I could do it.

There was a whole week when I didn’t eat anything! I walked to Ella’s house, by the main road. I was feeling strange, week, but somehow very vital, had this lightweight, levitating sensation. It was supporting me, my force, just below the sublime.

When I got there, we smoked cigarettes and talked about how were not going to show up for the matriculation test on Biblical studies, because we don’t believe in god anyway, so this would be our protest, and how Gili and I will soon go to Australia to start a horse farm. Then my head started to pound and I was cold, although it was real hot outside. The vital sensation I felt before started to fade, but I tried to ignore it. It will be alright soon. I told Ella I might be running a fever. She made me eat grapes. I ate one green grape. I had to. I could have fainted right there if I didn’t.

On the next day, my fever was peaking. Mom took me to see the doctor.

Doctor Eizenberg checked me with her cold stethoscope, gently knocked on my knees and peeked into my ears. She smelled good, sweet.

She said that she doesn’t know exactly what is wrong with me and that she must test my blood. Nurse Rachel pushed a needle into my vein and filled many tubes with my blood. I didn’t feel anything.

Later, Doctor Eizenberg said that we need to come in right now. She spread the results sheet out for us to see. She explained how blood tests results show brackets and asterisks. On normal tests, the asterisk is supposed to be inside the brackets. On my test results, all the asterisks escaped and ran outside the brackets, mostly settling below them, or in other words: “Sweetheart, there is nothing inside you.”

In the middle of the hottest of Septembers, they laid me down on a small bed at the clinic, wearing long sleeves and pants, covered with two brown wool blankets, freezing. They told mom that I have a problem. Noa said her mom says that it’s an actual illness. What are you stupid or something? I’ve only missed two weeks of school; this will all be over real soon.

I know you don’t want to hear this, but now you don’t have a choice, unless you make me stop talking. Stop me. Come on, make me shut up. Well?

Well, as soon as the thermometer came down a bit, mom and dad took me to the centre where they treat the kind of “problem” I have.

- Where are we going?

I didn’t ask. We pulled over. Behind me there were some trees and a narrow dirt road I considered to use for running away. Then I thought that I probably couldn’t run as fast as we ran at the Mokhche, so I just yawned and turned back.

There was a huge white bird on the placard. I held dad’s hand tighter.

Do you remember how I didn’t come to see you for quite some time? Dad told you that I was sick and that they were treating me for it and you said that there was nothing wrong with me and that this is all a bunch of nonsense. Really? Well, that nonsense was actually a very strict work plan:

No drinking before weighing

No eating alone,

Don’t be late,

No going to the toilet on your own.

The toilet doors are cut at the height of our knees,

So that the legs are showing,

In case they turn towards the toilet bowl,

which they have no business facing.

You can’t run.

- Would you rather they hospitalized you and fed you through a tube in your nose?

- No, no, thank you very much. I’m fine with rules. I’m good at doing as I am told and if that’s what you all want – fine. I’m on it. Just let me out, so I can sit with my friends on a Saturday afternoon and talk about Gili.

Nonsense? Ilanit, the psychologist, wouldn’t shut up. She messed with my head, wanted me to draw stupid things while I talk about life. Revital, the nutritionist, wanted me to eat all kinds of gross things she said were good for me.

I nodded my head and promised to do everything they asked. Because everyone is happy when eat, right?

Do you think I don’t know that they are all just jealous? I told them about that time when you and I went shopping and how I tried those red shorts on, and how shocked you were by my bones that were sticking out, and I told them that now I get it. I understand that I really have a problem.

I constantly lied to their faces.

Now you listen to me, and you listen carefully – I am not sorry. For anything. Because while you are all busy dying and calling this a life, I can really feel. Much and fast, exciting, hard, deep and burning. I know a force, just below the sublime. That force is mine.

Yeh, alright, there were rumours about me at school. They said I was in rehab, they said I ran away abroad, that I got into a modelling agency and that my brain is fucked up from all those drugs. I don’t give a damn. All those little school girls are just jealous, because I see more of the world than that pathetic bench at the pathetic public square in our village. I have everything that they don’t. Cowards!

When Gili and I went to Tel Aviv to have our tattoos done together, we were standing at the shakes stall on Shenkin, and Gili said: “Let’s just go back home.” I thought he was joking, but he meant it. He sat me down and told me that tattoos are forever and he bought me a neckless instead, with a heart pendant that you break in two. Made of gold. I didn’t get it, what difference does the tattoo make if you and I are forever anyway?

I asked him if he still loved me. If he still wants to move to Australia with me and grow horses there together and he said yes, of course, and that he loved me more than his dad and more than his own life, but he didn’t want to do “irreversible things”. I looked at that heart, shining at me from its box. My eyes welled up with tears and I told him that he was just like everybody else; a coward. And that I’m going to get that tattoo today. I told him that he can shove his presents and that if he really loved me, he wouldn’t mind having me engraved on his body for life. I got up and told him to go home by himself. He screamed that I was a whore and tore the bushes as he walked away. Everyone was looking.

I turned around and walked up towards Rothschild.

The plastic bed was narrow. The humming stopped for small moments of mercy, but came back every time. I got used to it. After a while, I wasn’t feeling anything at all, completely disconnected from my lower limbs. Like you.

I didn’t know the band he played, but they must have been awesome, because he was such a cool guy. I asked him for planets, distant things. Unidentified objects, stellar circles and four lotus flowers.

I listened to Thom Yorke sing about stuff like that. How there’s an empty space inside his heart. How he wanted the moon on a stick. I want that too. It’s all I want.

So with a thick needle, red blood and many good intentions, we filled that empty space. When you look at me from behind, you know who I am straight away, because I have four flowers that haven’t opened yet, and many shapes and this man, from this painting by Salvador Dali, reaching out to this one tiny orb, far away.

Later that day, I came over to show you my leg. You looked at it just for a moment and you said: “Oh, dear! What is that thing?! What kind of person would do this to himself, it horrible!” and I hated you. How I hated you on that day…

Because it’s fucking permanent!

And there I was, thinking that maybe this way I could finally let someone look at me, that I could remember that it hasn’t been easy. It was damn hard actually. But it’s in the past now.

Look at me.

The journey marked me and those marks are painted on my body. They are engraved on my heart, and now I need to learn to love; to love each and every flower that hasn’t opened yet.

Do you know how the truck quiz goes?

It’s like, what if someone told you that tomorrow, at 08:15 in the morning, you’re going to get run over by a truck and you are going to die. What would you do with what time you’ve got left?

There are usually two main types of people. The first type says that they would just live their lives. Move on, with what they’ve got. Simple. Until it’s 08:15.

The second type will try to do everything – sharp and strong, deep and burning, until…

I don’t know which type I am anymore.

But come what may, I promise you this – I am going to be fine.

At least until 08:15.