

**Two Lines – monodrama**

**By**

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## SCENE 1

### BATHROOM – MORNING

On stage is a toilet, a toilet roll stand, a small trash bin, and a toilet brush.

ENTER: HANNI who seems intent on whomever it is outside not knowing what she's up to. She reveals a HOME PREGNANCY TEST KIT she'd been hiding under her shirt. She inspects the kit thoroughly and then opens it. She takes out the USER INSTRUCTIONS LEAFLET and starts to read.

HANNI: "Remove the test stick from its foil wrapper by tearing it at the designated area."

She takes a few seconds locating said "designated area," tears the wrapper and takes the stick out. She looks at it, attentively, and resumes reading.

"Aim your urine stream at the sample application window... or alternatively, collect a urine sample in a clean, disposable sample cup, then dip the absorbent tip... place the stick horizontally on a clean, flat surface – observe the test window and wait for the appearance of lines; two lines indicate a positive result – pregnancy detected. One line indicates a negative result – no pregnancy detected."

ELKIE (O.S.): Hanni, you in here?

HANNI: Yeah.

ELKIE: I gotta shave.

HANNI: Right... gimme two minutes.

Elkie's dying for a kid. Like, seriously dying for one. The past five years, it's literally been the only thing he could talk about... hell, he's been singing that tune since before the wedding! Every soup I'd make; every dress I would buy, he'd be like...

ELKIE: "My God, you're going to make such an amazing mom..."

HANNI: You see, some men like to picture their wives in a G-string between the sheets and others... well, others apparently like to picture them nine months pregnant between the maternity ward sheets. (She gestures at the stick.) He has no idea. Not a clue. That's like the last thing I need right now. Him fussing over me, all the time. And we're good right now! *We are*. We've finally got the hang of all those fine checks and balances couples have; like 'us time' vs. 'me time;' when to bite your tongue and when to answer back; when to give that hug and when... whatever the opposite of hugging is... when... not to give a hug?

Like in that old photo of my mom and dad where they're both sitting on this riverboat, and my dad's like sitting in the front and mom's at the back. He has his life vest on, as an insurance agent would, while she's wearing one of those mini polka-dot dresses my dad couldn't stand, and a shit-eating grin. And my dad's sitting there, right? Holding onto both sides of the boat for dear life while mom's like this feather blowing in the wind, standing on

her seat, arms outstretched. One false move and they'd both end up in the water. But they didn't, now did they? It's all about the checks and balances. That's coupledness for you.

We were on our second date when his niece was born.

ELKIE (ON HIS MOBILE): Hello? Wait, what?! Seriously?! No way, when?! Oh my God, that's amazing! Congratulations. Yeah, of course we're coming! Right, talk to you later. (He ends the call and turns to Hanni) my sister's just had a baby!

HANNI: Oh wow; congrats. That's great.

ELKIE: It's mind-blowing. Holy shit... are you coming to the hospital to meet the baby?

HANNI: What, like *now*?

ELKIE: Yeah; just a super quick visit. We'd be in and out in 10 minutes.

HANNI: Actually, I'd rather not if that's okay.

ELKIE: What do you mean? Why not? What, you got other plans?

HANNI: No, it's not that... it's just that... I'm just not that big on babies, alright?

(PAUSE)

ELKIE (STUMPED): What do you mean? How can you not be? Kids... they're what life's all about.

(Hanni rereads the pregnancy test kit instructions) "two lines indicate a positive result – pregnancy detected. One line indicates a negative result – no pregnancy detected."

Seriously, who wrote this shit? Like, who actually signed off on this? I bet it's that born-again, "pro-life" bastard who's head of the Human Litter-Dropping Society. Pregnancy detected equals a positive result. I mean, Christ; it's beyond brainwashing! This is vag-washing is what it is! Getting in our heads *and* our cunts with this shit. Pregnancy is good. Kids are bliss. And these lines... of course, two lines equal a baby... why wouldn't they? I mean, obviously it has to be a gain, right? You're this one line and your blissful bundle of joy is the other line and if you're not pregnant then it's just you... this one line; a single, solitary line... pressing its face to the test window like some dog outside a butcher shop... they might as well make it a smiley face for a positive result and a sad one if you're not pregnant. And yes; I *do* realize a sad smiley face is an oxymoron, thank you... but this whole thing's giant, goddamn oxymoron. 'A happy mother' – is *that* not an oxymoron right there? Oh and how about, 'an easy birth,' huh? Or a 'beautiful pregnancy?' and damn it, where the hell am I supposed to find a flat surface in here?

Urgh, why'd he have to make such a big deal out of it?

For the love of God, they're only small humans... and literally everyone was a baby. The pervy old man who's in my face every morning on the no. 5 bus; and that bitch of a secretary at the school who's always assigning me the worst duties. I mean, wasn't she also one of those chubby-cheeked babies? I bet both her and pervy old man had a mother who would tell them they were "such a sweetheart!" and would pick them up in the air and play with them and whatever. And what do we have to show for it, huh? Nasty, awful people, that's what.

We'd be better off if they'd all stayed in their mothers' belly. And those ISIS nutjobs, and that guy who murdered his wife in the south yesterday, and that IT child molester they just arrested... all of them – rosy-cheeked babies at one point.

And then, you have all those random people; these poor bastards out there... the boy in sixth grade who brings spelt bread sandwiches to school and who hasn't gone out to recess ever since some kids threw him in the dumpster; and prostitutes, and the homeless. And our school's security guard; this Russian guy named Stas who, all the kids call Igor. The man was an actual fucking doctor back home; managed to escape the Soviet Union and came to this country only to end up working security jobs for Jewish schools.

Those people also were babies once, and I just know that given half a chance, their tiny little spermy-selves would make a U-turn in a heartbeat and run a mile the other way from that collision course they were on with the egg.

This kid... If they're in there, they don't even get a say, do they? What if they're not up for being born? Huh? They're just not up for it!

And let's face it, it's not as if they'd be missing out on much. "A happy childhood"? When every pacifier that ends up on the floor is the goddamn apocalypse? And school? With all the bullies and mean girls? And Twitter pile-ons, and Instagram boycotts. And all the hormones that make you feel like you could literally explode any minute; and the girls in their fuck-me shorts and the boys who are only too happy to oblige... and film... and share... who needs this shit?!

And then the president starts a war with some country; cue military invasion, tanks, carpet bombings, ground combat, the knock at the door, then the funeral and Shiva... and a Fox News interview where I'd have to mime some platitude like, "he gave his life so that we could have our freedom; and that he died so that we could live safely and that the American people's thoughts and prayers are giving me the strength to get through this."

Like that broken shell of a mother who attended last year's Memorial Day ceremony at the school.

Poor thing... looked worn to the bone.

They were having the ceremony at the school's football field where they do it every year.

Kids sitting cross-legged in the sweltering heat, doing their best to put on their saddest faces, while playing with the gravel that got in their sandals.

The ceremony was almost over. Some seventh grader was playing an off-key rendition of the national anthem on his recorder. Everyone was standing to attention, backs arched, belting out the lyrics as if they were trying to force the original melody on the anthem.

Avree, the new gym teacher stood next to me and was saluting the flag. A minute ago, he was telling our second graders with this false modesty how he used to be a Marine and that anyone who was in the army had to salute the flag whenever they played the national anthem.

The kids were all super impressed. Maybe that's why he got so pissed when he saw Stas, the security guard from across the field, also saluting the flag; as if he was in some kind of contempt of his own sacred salute.

Then, as everyone was singing the anthem, he tried to get Stas' attention – hissing at him and doing these super extra brow gestures. Eventually, he caught Stas' eye and from a distance, mouthed at him: “Put your hand down!”

But Stas just looked away; turned his eyes back to the flag and arched his back as high as he could. Avree's ridiculously large Adam's apple was going up and down his pasty, white neck as he was swallowing his pride. He marched across the field, still saluting, till he made it all the way to Stas.

AVREE: You put your hand down. Only officers get to do that; you never even served your country.

STAS: I'm serving it here; keeping the children safe; and that is also important. I am also proud of my country.

AVREE: Right; you listen, Igor, and you listen good...

STAS: My name is Stas.

AVREE: Whatever... I'm asking you to show some respect to our fallen men. Put your hand down.

STAS: No.

He answered, then pressed his already outstretched fingers to his forehead as hard as he could. And as the children were shrieking their “bombs bursting in air,” Avree grabbed Stas' hand and pulled it down. Stas straight away tried to salute with his other hand but in the rush of the moment, ended up socking Avree's chin.

By the time we'd made it to “Our flag was still there,” they were both already wrestling on the gravel, panting and groaning, hands hitting faces, knees hitting stomachs. The kids were screaming. The teachers were trying to break them up, and only the kid on the recorder kept playing his tone deaf little heart out.

At the end of the day, as I was heading out the school gate, I saw him sitting in his booth, having a cup of tea and listening to his battered, old radio.

Other than his lip that was still looking a bit swollen, he looked fine.

HANNI: I just wanted to say I'm really, really sorry.

It was the first time I'd ever said a word to him. The whole time I'd been with the school. He looked at me with these blue eyes I was only then seeing for the first time and said:

STAS: Thank you. Really. Thank you.

I thought about smuggling him some cookies from the teachers' lounge but the fact is, I'm trying to limit my time there as much as I can.

Every time I go in there, I feel all those eyes they love to say they have at the back of their head on me. (Fellow teachers eyeing her pityingly, whispering among themselves.)

“Poor thing; I wonder what’s wrong with her... they *have* been married an awfully long time.” I hear the gaping silences of conversations about diaper and formula prices suddenly cut short. I see their switched-off phone screens, hiding home screen wallpapers of smiley children with ketchup stains all over their faces.

And I hate it so bad.

The first time I ended up on recess duty, I realized I’d come up with a solution. The kids couldn’t give a shit about the state of my ovaries; they don’t even steal so much as a passing, so-called random look at my stomach and wonder whether it’s looking a bit bigger or if it’s just the dress that’s making me look fat.

These recess duties that are essentially a teacher’s worst nightmare; those become my lifeline. Oh and of course, they had an opinion about that as well.

BUSYBODY TEACHER: Oh, Hanni? No, of course she doesn’t mind being out with the kids at recess. Why would she? When you don’t have any at home, no wonder you have the energy. But just you wait; wait until she has a couple of her own, then we’ll see how much she still loves recess duty... poor thing.

A couple of days after that Memorial Day incident, I was outside sitting on that low stone fence, watching a bunch of girls playing hopscotch... (She is savouring the fresh, spring sunshine) when Stas, the security guard came over and just sat next to me as if we’ve been best friends forever, handing me this murky glass that still had all this yellow-y tea in it.

HANNI (TO STAS): Thanks.

He closed his eyes real tight, only for a moment, and nodded. Stas is a man of few words. Never asks about kids, or if I’m having any treatments; just the occasional weather observation – you know, the boilerplate ‘mild, chilly, hot’ classics but never without disclaiming at the end how this is “not like in Russia. In Russia is cold.”

So a couple of weeks ago, I was at my cousin, Hodaya’s wedding. 19 years old; dated this guy all of two months before they got engaged; those Frumers, right? So after the Chuppah, I go and find her to say my Mazel Tovs (sarcastic) and how delighted I am that at her ripe old age, she finally found the one when next thing I know, she’s got her arms around me and with her eyes closed, comes out with this; “please God, may you be with child already this year.” It took me a second to clock what was happening. I tried to pull away, but she was holding on so tight, like we were these lifelong soul sisters or whatever... what else was I gonna to do? I just said, “amen, amen” with my eyes closed and in my head, I was like, “Yo, God! If you know what’s good for you, don’t you even go there!”

This thing... it consumes your whole life... it becomes the essence of your being.

(Turns into her GRANDMOTHER)

GRANDMOTHER: After we came to this country, we went without so that the children could have food on the table. I remember telling your mother at the dinner table how I wasn't hungry just so she could have another drumstick. Fifty years we never went on vacation just so the kids could have nice clothes on their backs and all the books they needed for school."

HANNI: And I'd be listening to that and inside, I was freaking out. And I felt so bad for her; my grandma; lived through the Holocaust only to end up with this 'living death' sentence so that *her* kids could have it better than she ever did. And what'd she have to show for it in the end? Huh? My mother, the 16-year-old runaway. Two years she spent living on the beach in Sinai without so much as a letter or phone call; everyone thought she was dead until she met this young soldier who had these clenched, furrowed brows, and who managed to convince her she had to go home. So she did. A couple of months later, they tied the knot and ever since, they've been in the same roles – she, inhaling everything life had to offer and he, putting a warm blanket over her at the end of the day so she doesn't catch a cold.

One day at recess, when the weather was so nice not even Stas had anything to say about it, we were out in the schoolyard when he started telling me about his mother.

She left them when he was five.

Just like that; one morning, he and his younger brother woke up and suddenly, there was no one there to fix them any sandwiches to take to kindergarten. Their father sat them down and explained what had happened. That just like they don't always feel like taking a bath or going to bed – mama right now doesn't feel like being a mama, but she'll get over it in a couple of days and come home. She never did get over it.

(Suddenly, there's KNOCKING at the bathroom door. She panics. A man's voice is heard coming from outside.)

MAN (O.S.): Hanni, come on! You've been in there over an hour! I gotta get to work.

HANNI (Short): Alright, Elkie, alright! I'm not getting a tan in here. Gimme a second, I'll be right out.

A couple of months ago we went to the movies for Elkie's birthday. Saw this period drama with all those Brits in wigs and all that. Elkie drove on the way back. I hate driving when it's dark.

HANNI: At least it wasn't too long... seriously, like what was that director even trying to say? What was that crap-fest? Is there anything in the world more important than living? How do we *always* end up choosing these shit films??? Did you like it?

(Elkie is silent. He signals ahead of a turn)

If you need all this time to think about it, then obviously, you didn't either.

(Elkie carries on looking ahead and says quietly)

ELKIE: I don't think this is working anymore.

HANNI (Genuinely clueless): Huh? What isn't?

ELKIE (Gestures at them both): This; all this! This isn't working anymore...

HANNI: Elkie, what's going on?

(He goes silent for a beat and then)

ELKIE: I don't know...

HANNI: What d'you mean, you don't know?

ELKIE: I mean, I don't know! I don't know what to do; don't know what's going on... nothing's going on... everything's goddamned plateaued!

HANNI: What's plateaued? Elkie, where's all this coming from all of a sudden?

ELKIE: All of a sudden? You think this is sudden? Is five years your idea of 'sudden'?! Hanni, we can't go on like this anymore. Do you actually *want* to go on like this? Open our eyes at 80, realize it's the end of the road and that it's just the two of us? Alone?

HANNI: Why does 'just the two of us' have to be the same as being alone?

ELKIE: God damn it, it's all this shit you have going on in your head! I'm telling you, Hanni! It's this... 'dent' you've got... your subconscious is telling your womb you don't want this, so it never takes.

HANNI: Oh my God, are you even listening to yourself?

ELKIE: All the fertility shots in the world aren't going to make the damned bit of difference; if you don't really want this, then it is never going to happen.

HANNI (TO AUDIENCE): He doesn't realize I'm trying to save him... save us. All these balances... these paper-thin balances... it's taken us so long to finally get the hang of them; till we both finally managed to stand on that boat; together; and now he wants to bring another person on board? He doesn't realize the whole thing would capsize.

So *he* wants a kid more than he wants me and I uh... I just don't know anymore...

Maybe I *do* have issues; maybe Galia from work does have a point; "some things, you just can't overthink."

And let's face it, it'll definitely have some upsides: maternity leave, for starters; reconnecting with all my friends who went off the grid the second they had a baby, and who now all live in the 'mommv-verse.'

They have their get-togethers and their park dates.... And it's not as if they don't include me but Christ almighty, you can only sit on a bench for so long swapping poop, pee, teething and crying stories. So, yeah... that's also something... I'll have my own poop to bring to the table.



And, there'll be someone to look after me when I'm old; that's another factor right there you can't overlook. Those live-in carers don't come cheap, you know.

It's not as if I'm having a child to pinch the pennies, am I? On the contrary. Kids cost a fortune! All that rearing and raising... so yeah... at least I'll have *some* return on my investment.

Okay, fine; call it selfish! But c'mon, what pregnancy isn't? No one ever really does it for the child, do they? Coz living is "so much fun," we'd just hate for them to miss out.

Give me a break.

And maybe women are just being good patriots;

Surrendering their wombs, not to mention the rest of their lives, to protect our borders and freedoms.

Maybe I should also take up a cause. As far as I'm concerned, if you're going to have a child, you might as well adopt. Am I right? If you're going to go join the 'woke' brigade, why not go all in? It's not as if we're short on people in the world, are we? You might as well take someone in, give them a shot at a better life; makes a hell of a lot more sense.

This way, you're saving yourself the nine months of 'whalification,' not to mention your inevitable transformation from person to pig.

Oink...

Oink...

It's just so... hideous.

And I'm sorry, but you can have all the world's pregnant supermodels posing nude all over magazine covers, it still doesn't make any of this any less freakish... turning you into some kind of Frankenfemale.

Ballooning out like that in just a matter of months... I mean, what the fuck?!

It's like that fish... what do they call it? The one that puffs up whenever it senses danger...

It's basically the same thing. After all, what gives us all "pregnancy brain" if not this?

We're sensing danger; that our husbands might leave us; that we may not survive the birth; that we won't be like all the other mothers; so we puff up...

That's it! Pufferfish!

Last time I saw those goddamned lines was almost a year ago.

We were staying the weekend at Elkie's parents over on Fossil Rd. which, I gotta to say, is appropriate on so many levels... it's as if the city had named the road especially after them.

And idiot that I am, I somehow managed to leave my birth-control at home.

Back in the house, I hide them in a box of tampons; the one place I know for a fact he stays out of... it's as if he can't stomach the idea that each and every month, something inside of me dies; over and over again.

I keep them in this nondescript bag so that even if he does somehow find them, I could just say they're antidepressants. That should put his mind at ease.

So we went over to see them; the Fossil Rd. fossils; it was one of those wet and miserable Saturdays. And between all the sweaters and the duvet, and all that packing hassle, I managed to leave them behind.

I don't know what happened that Saturday... it could have been his mother's casserole; but for some reason, that night... he was in the mood.

ELKIE: I'm telling you, Hanni, I got a good feeling about this. This one's going to take.

HANNI: But you never want to have sex at your parents'. You've always called it, "ill-fitting."

Elkie, come on... don't...

I actually have a real bad headache...

I'm not even sure I washed properly.

The second we were done I ran into that shower. I couldn't have given a rat's ass that his mother probably guessed what we were doing; I just ran in the shower and tried to rinse myself out from inside.

(The sound of her phone RINGING is heard from outside the bathroom. The ringtone is *Me and My Baby* from the musical, *Chicago*. She calls out)

Elkie! Elkie! Could you get that? Elkie! And change that goddamn ringtone already! It isn't funny!

(The ringing goes on for a couple more seconds until finally stopping.)

He's trying to get me on board and I'm... trying to get on board.

We decided we'd try again; that we'd give it a couple more months.

Two lines, we stay together.

One line... you're on your own, baby.

Elkie insisted we go see a rabbi, and as quite frankly, I was up for anything that would stay this execution; that might give the illusion that a solution was coming. And this Rabbi, according to Elkie was the real ticket... a "revelation," he called him.

They're the ones I hate the most, you know? The young, hip type who is all smiles, or as Elkie's mom always says, "down with the times." I did the talking. He did the listening, as if he'd got it all from the 'down with the times' rabbi rulebook or whatever.

RABBI: Hanni, look; I just want to start by saying, I get it. I get it and I get you. This is anything but an easy decision.

(HANNI TO AUDIENCE) Says the man who's given birth to dozens of babies.

RABBI: But it is important that at the end of the day, we all remember that this is the Torah's numero uno Mitzvah. And for good reason.

(HANNI TO AUDIENCE) And this is his best material... all that smiling, all that profound nodding and the best he's got is, "it's a Mitzvah"?! What do I look like, some teenager at one of his Sunday school lectures?

RABBI: Here you go, Genesis 1, the pilot episode...: And the Lord sayeth to them, "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." It's about as straightforward as it gets.

HANNI: So he does his spiel, right? And then, gives me this look while doing this annoying, little nod; a kind of ongoing nod like that bobblehead dog Elkie has hanging off his rear-view mirror; the type of nod that's basically telling you, "Sorry girl but them's the rules! And you've got no business thinking otherwise coz that's the nod's God's honest truth, so there. "

I wanted to slam his face in that bible... remind him of all those other verses in there, you know?! "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children..." remember those little gems?... it's a form of punishment is what it is! And we've all somehow managed to turn it into this ultimate, greatest goal; *the* 'reason for living...'

(TO THE AUDIENCE): But what am I babbling on about? This week in Torah class, I was teaching the *Vayetze*h portion.

(TO CLASS): Girls, please! Be quiet! Our Mother Rachel weeps!

(She writes on the board while reading out loud)

"Give me children, or else I die."

So can I really blame anyone?

Teaching little girls in third grade that they're better off dead if they don't have kids.

I mean, come on; I dare you to name one woman in the whole bible that didn't want kids. They all did. That was their whole deal; these desperate housewives who'd all give a kidney for the chance to change a diaper.

And that's how they've been running the show... generation to generation, delivery to delivery...

5,000 years of deliveries.

So many deliveries...

Is that why they also call God, "The Deliverer"?

Coz out of all the other deities, he's like the only nagging, overbearing one who's so obsessed with everyone having babies and is always on your back, going, "well? Come on... you ever gonna give me grandchildren or what?"

But who's gonna deliver the actual deliverers?!

(Elkie heard outside the door)

ELKIE: Come on Hanni, what the hell are you doing in there?

HANNI: Building a spaceship! It's a bathroom, Elkie! What do you think I'm doing in here?

ELKIE: I don't know, but whatever it is, you've been at it for over an hour!

HANNI: Well if you'd stopped knocking every two seconds, I'd be done by now.

It's exactly one week today since that rainy Saturday on Fossil Rd. The smoke coming from the Havdalah candle hung in the air of our cozy little apartment when Elkie...

ELKIE: Here's to a good week ahead, eh babe?

And he handed me this white plastic bag.

I took the home pregnancy test kit out of the bag.

ELKIE: Alrighty... Please God, let this be a home run.

He kissed me on the forehead and walked me to the bathroom.

He lasted all of four minutes before I heard him through the door, all excited, going, "Well???" and I called out from the other side in the voice of someone so used to being the bearer of bad news, "Nothing." And he went to bed, and I just stayed there, alone; with this baby that was now growing inside of me.

When my mom found out she was pregnant, she left my dad a note on the fridge saying she needed some time and that he mustn't worry about her. He jumped in his car right away and went looking for her. Drove to all her usual spots; the fountain; the forest; the beach; nothing. She turned up a week later, all tanned and covered in dust; gave him the biggest hug and just like that, melted away all the anger and worry he'd built up inside and told him she was done running. That this baby is the first good thing she's ever done with her life.

Stas told me childbirth really is a miracle.

I mean, he's seen more than his share. The man was an OB-GYN back home. His own wife he delivered but then he told me how after that, for the next year, he couldn't bring himself to have sex with her. That suddenly, when he looked at her, all he saw was this "child-rearing factory," and you can't exactly get down and dirty with a factory, can you?

I wish I could tell Elkie all that. Show him I'm not being crazy; that these things do happen; but he has no idea about Stas; as a rule, he's not too crazy about the idea of me interacting with other men... even if they are the school's security guard.

Not that I would ever... no way. I'm a very faithful, very devoted person. And even if I do have a child, I just know I'd be super devoted to them. I would love them, take care of them... I think.

They say it just happens... that when something's growing inside of you for nine months, you can't not love it... can you?

Or maybe you can.

Just like we don't all fall for the same people or like the same food; who knows, maybe I'll end up the one who doesn't love her kid. Imagine we don't click?

What if he ends up this incredibly annoying kid? Or, he could turn out like that bitch of a secretary or the pervy old man... then what? I'd be stuck.

Like the kids at school say when they're playing: "No takesies backsies!"

You can't just hit Ctrl + Z and undo them, can you? Can't return them for store credit, or even push them back in. You can't, period. It is what it is, and now you're stuck for the rest of your life with this fucking irritating kid you really don't like all that much.

Who knows how many mothers there are out there, just like that?

Ones who look like every other mom. Who are out there pushing the stroller or holding their child's hand at the crosswalk like every other mother, when in fact... they're in character. Playing this "perfect mommy" part where they're all loving on the outside and loathing on the inside.

I can't think of anything worse. It's a prison is what it is. You're basically spending the rest of your life in a prison you're not allowed to tell anyone about... yourself included.

The committee was pretty much a breeze. A three-person panel: fatty, skinny and baldie; all sitting behind their disposable, plastic cups and plates full of pretzels. They barely even looked up from their papers; just read out from them as if they were telling me all about myself.

FATTY: HANNI KEISER, 34 years old.

HANNI: 33.

FATTY: It says 34 here.

HANNI: Not until the end of the month.

FATTY: 33, okay then. And the reason for termination?

HANNI: Don't want the baby.

FATTY: But you *are* married, yes?

HANNI: That's right.

FATTY: A child out of wedlock then...

HANNI: Wait, what?! No way! God no!

FATTY: Is the child at risk for any congenital defects? Did you include a physician's medical opinion?

HANNI: Oh, no... the baby's fine.

FATTY: Then what seems to be the problem?

HANNI: *I* am.

FATTY: Does the pregnancy stand to endanger your life in any way? Did you include a physician's medical opinion?

HANNI: No. I'm fine. Everything's fine. I just don't want the baby

They all looked up from their papers and gave each other this look. Fatty smiled at me through her multiple chins.

HANNI: I'm sorry, my dear, but unfortunately I just can't sign off on what you're saying here.

HANNI: And what *am* I saying here? Huh? That I don't want the baby?

FATTY: That is correct.

HANNI: Isn't that why literally everyone comes here?

(Sniggers this annoying snigger)

FATTY: Well yes, of course; but where some reasons *are* valid grounds for termination, others, well... just aren't.

HANNI: So, if I haven't cheated on my husband and I'm not pregnant with some special needs kid, then it's "no abortion for you!"?

FATTY: Please; we prefer "termination." Sweetheart, I don't make the rules around here. There are procedures we have to follow. You know how it goes.

HANNI: So you can't sign off on letting *me* terminate *my* pregnancy with *my* child that's growing in *my* body?

FATTY: That's right, hun.

She said, while stuffing her face with another fistful of pretzels.

FATTY: I'm terribly sorry but we really have to call in the next case now.

I came home with this tumor that was now metastasizing in my stomach cavity and that I wasn't even allowed to have removed. I tried everything; and then some. Carrying the heaviest groceries; drinking wine; eating raw eggs; I even started eating sushi and I fucking hate sushi.

Turns out, it's all bullshit. Whatever I threw at it, it survived.

I knew it would only be a matter of weeks before I started showing and then; it would be too late.

My mom was already showing at two months. Her stomach literally announced it before *she* did. By the third month, people on the bus were already giving up their seat. And when she would look at herself in the mirror, my dad would be there, trying to cheer her up.

DAD: What are you talking about? Honestly! You can't even tell.

But then, when she went,

MOM: Really? You really can't tell *at all*?

That moment dad realized that his goddess of beauty and freedom here was actually pretty smitten with this little bump that had sprung up there in the middle of her otherwise noodle-like frame.

She couldn't stop stroking it; pushing her way through crowds, making sure they all noticed and if the moment called for it, she'd flat out announce it – "I'm sorry, it's just that I'm pregnant, you see..."

Halfway through Hebrew Lit., I could feel her creeping up the back of my neck.

We were doing Agnon and I was telling the girls how "there once was an old woman in Jerusalem..." and how she was righteous and wise, graceful and modest." And she started growing in my head. "Every man is destined to know whomever they know; whenever they should meet, and whatever the circumstances they meet under." I tried putting the stress on all the right words, but my mouth went dry. When the bell rang, I could see it as clear as day in my head. It was as if there'd never been another option."

(The sound of flicking through radio stations; playing with the antenna once, then with the dial; fractions of Spanish words and letters from Torah class clashing between radio stations and only then followed by dialogue.)

STAS: Ah, Ms. Hannah.

Stas, bless him; hates nicknames and Nixon with equal passion. Which is why the man's never cut corners in his life. You see him patrol every square inch of the school fence twice, every hour; as per protocol; and every day, like clockwork, he goes home at 4 o'clock on the hour; not a minute before.

STAS: How are you today?

HANNI: I'm good, Stas. Thans. How are you doing?

STAS: Praise the Lord, all fine.

His "praise the Lord" cracked me up. Back in Russia, he was actually pretty observant. Even fasted on Yom Kippur; but as far as the school's Orthodox brass are concerned, he ain't kosher... something about his grandma's lineage or whatever. The school makes him wear a yarmulke; heaven forbid he 'taint' the kids...

One morning, this seventh grader came up to him and asked if he could join them at ‘Shacharit’ for ‘Minyan.’ Stas maybe got half the words he was saying, but his booth was freezing, and temple had heating so that was that.

The Gabbai spoke. “Will Stas, son of Alex, be the third to rise?” he called out; and Stas who, by that point, was getting a bit emotional went and stood by the Torah and was just clearing his throat when the school Rabbi walked in.

It took the Rabbi’s learned brain a split second to clock what was happening and for his mouth – that never, ever speaks ill of anyone – to shriek, “stop! He’s a gentile!”

Now the word ‘gentile’, Stas knew a little too well and without so much as a word, he took off the Tallit and left.

He poured boiling-hot, limescale water into my mug and dropped a random teabag inside; heaped a mound of sugar so high on the teaspoon, it looked nine months pregnant and ready to drop; gave it a quick, loud stir and voila.

Thanks.

We sat in his small booth; me on his chair and he, on an overturned produce delivery box in the corner, coz:

STAS: It is not appropriate for teacher to sit like this, on box.

It was a breezy kind of silence that kept being interrupted every so often by his loud tea slurping.

HANNI: I’m pregnant.

(Takes another quiet sip)

And just like that, he became the only other person in the world to know.

He kept on slurping his tea real loud, and just gave me this smile and said, “thank God.”

(She sniggers lightly)

No, buddy; not this time. He gets no thanks for this one.

(She gently puts her tea down on the table and looks at him)

I need a favor.

When he realized what I was asking him to do, he was shaking almost as hard as his beat up old kettle.

The Russian came flooding out of him, as if he was looking for anything familiar to hold onto while this hurricane blew right through his booth.

STAS: (SPEAKING RUSSIAN) No, no, no, I’m sorry... I can’t.

(Back to English) Are you crazy? It’s forbidden! They put me in jail.

HANNI: Stas!



I put my hand over his damp, white hand.

Just like you don't always feel like taking a bath or going to bed; I don't feel like being a mother.

(Silence settles over the booth, followed by the SCHOOL BELL RINGING)

It was exactly these moments that my mother had coined her now-famous, "Even Nietzsche had to fart" saying for. According to my dad, she would say it all the time and it what it meant was that not even the greatest people or the biggest events can escape some everyday mundanity that's always breathing down their necks; like a bladder that needs to empty or some class they have to get to.

Ever since she died, he's taken it on himself to continue her legacy and would stick that saying into literally every conversation, every chance he got; most of the time, completely out of context.

Stas spent the rest of that day ignoring me. And the day after. And the week after that. He made sure he was busy whenever I walked past his booth and rearranged his school patrols entirely around my recess duty schedule.

Then one day, at recess, he came up to me in the schoolyard, sat on the bench next to me; no cup of tea; no eye contact.

HANNI: Kind of warm today, huh?

(He doesn't reply. His hands buried in his coat pockets. His forehead furrowed.)

STAS: 13 Bar Yochai St. Apartment 4. Come at 10.

HANNI: Elkie, I'm going out.

ELKIE: At 10 o'clock at night? Going out where?

HANNI: Mikveh.

I stood there.

(Frozen in place)

They had this sign scotch-taped to the door, written in loud, bold crayons that said. "Welcome home, mommy." Seriously, is it too much to ask that apartment numbers follow some kind of basic, logical order?

(Turns around to the door opposite)

No apartment number; no cheesy door signs; not even a plumber's fridge magnet.

(I knocked; way too softly; the body's way of hinting at you that you can still change your mind.)

Maybe it *was* that happy-clappy door.

(Stas answers it)

He took one quick look at me; not a word; not a smile; just a nod. I went in.

(Hanni is sat on the toilet and turns around while a red light starts flashing and background music plays. It ends at once with her throwing up into the toilet. She flushes, composes herself and washes her face.)

I told the school I was “under the weather.”

Elkie was confused. I mean, I never get sick. But a couple of coughs and just the right amount of groaning convinced him I really should stay at home.

I went back to work the following week.

The other teachers were all super sweet.

TEACHER 1: Hanni! How *are* you? You feeling okay? How about some tea? Lemme make you some tea.

The school principal stuck her head out of her office.

PRINCIPAL: Hanni-bunny, I want you to know that if there’s anything you need; and I mean – anything at all – don’t even give it a second thought. That’s what I’m here for.

(Hanni is speechless at the nickname she was just given)

Hanni-bunny?!

The girls were all waiting for me in class. Sitting there all quiet and excited. Chaos will soon reign supreme again but for now, I let myself soak in the lovefest and how much they’d missed me.

They put up on the walls all these signs they’d made and between all the “Get well soon, Miss Keiser” and “Godspeed” messages, I suddenly noticed a couple of ‘Mazel Tovs’ and a couple pacifier and baby stroller drawings.

HANNI: What’s this?

STUDENT: We heard the news, Miss Keiser! It’s super exciting!

HANNI: What news?

STUDENT: Miss Baum, our Hebrew teacher; she told us you’re on pregnancy bed rest.

I later made sure I “randomly” walked past Stas’ booth

(She sneaks a quick peak inside.)

Some curly-haired millennial was sitting inside, having a Starbucks.

(UPBEAT MUSIC plays)

HANNI: Umm, hi... sorry, do you know where Stas is?

GUY: Stas?

HANNI: Our regular security guard.

GUY: Umm... yeah, no idea. I was just told to come here and step in.

HANNI: Wait, what? What do you mean? Is he sick? Is he okay?

GUY: Dude, I have no idea. They said, come over. I came over.

(Lingers a beat)

HANNI (TO AUDIENCE): I took one more look at that abandoned kettle and the still radio and walked away. I never saw Stas again.

(Takes the pregnancy test)

Two lines indicate a positive result – pregnancy detected; child detected; husband detected; Hanni discarded. It may even be the best thing for everyone involved.

Elkie'll have a kid; kid will have a dad; and I could stop lying.

Mom, what do *you* think, huh?

What was going through *your* head when you saw those two lines? When I'd literally just sprouted inside of you?

Were you happy? Were you scared?

Bet you weren't scared. Not you. You were never the scared kind; a free spirit like yourself.

Who could have imagined it would turn out like this?

That your final push would take me into this world and you, out of it.

That I'd end up taking your place so soon.

Mom, did you even see me? Pick me up? Hold me?

Or did you already figure out by that point that it was your own grim reaper you were giving birth to?

I just know that if only you'd known, you would also have hit 'abort' on the whole thing.

After all, it's a "kill or be killed" world we live in, right?

(Elkie gently KNOCKS at the door)

ELKIE: (WORRIED) Hon, what's going on? Are you okay in there?

HANNI: Everything's fine, Elkie. I'm taking a home pregnancy test.

After all, when you're dead, they only have praise for you, don't they? No one's going to go, "oh yeah, that nutjob who didn't want kids..." hmm.. maybe they could fit that on the headstone.

Personally, I'd go with something a little more like, "Here lies one single, solitary line."

(CUE MUIC. Hanni takes the pregnancy test out of the cup and looks at it. She inspects the result, eyes the audience directly and STAGE GOES DARK.)

- THE END -

