

March 16, 2019

Doing His Will

A play in two acts

By Motti Lerner

An original play based on the novel "Doing His Will" by Esti Weinstein
Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan & Dvir Publishing (2016)

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First produced at Habima National Theatre, Israel
Directed by Aya Kaplan (2017)

English translation by Omer Strass

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Cast of Characters:

Dassi -	A Ger follower (18 in the beginning of the play and 40 in the end)
Yakov -	Her husband, a Ger follower (19, 41)
Rabbi Zilber -	A rabbi in the Ger community (50, 72)
Ahuva -	Dassi's mother (40, 62)
Haim -	Dassi's brother (17, 39)
Hanni (Hannah) -	Dassi's and Yakov's daughter, a Ger follower (21)
Gilli (Gilla) -	Dassi's and Yakov's daughter, left the Ger community (20).
5 Young Daughters -	Dassi and Yakov's daughters (15, 16, 17, 18, 19)

Time and Space:

The play takes place mostly in Jerusalem, in the Ger Hasidic community – an ultra-orthodox religious community in Israel¹. It encompasses three layers of plot:

1. The play's present takes place on the night of Dassi's suicide – 20 June 2016 – and is comprised of a few phone conversations between Dassi and Yakov. She is in her home in Tel Aviv, and he is in his home in Jerusalem. In Yakov's house, Rabbi Zilber and Hanni are present. In Dassi's house Gilli is present, and later also Haim and Ahuva. During that night we see a series of Dassi's flashbacks which form the past plot.
2. The past plot, which is the main plot, is comprised of a series of flashbacks experienced by Dassi. It begins on Dassi's and Yakov's wedding night (1994) and ends with Dassi's total rejection by her husband and daughters (2016).
3. Chorus – during the play's present Dassi's and Yakov's Five Younger Daughters, wearing the Bet Yakov Girls' Seminary uniform, sing in chorus several times. They also take part in some of the scenes of the past.

¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5180977>

Act I

1. Dassi's apartment in Tel Aviv and Yakov's apartment in Jerusalem.

20 June 2016. Night. Light on Dassi's apartment. Dassi dials a number on the phone. Next to her is Gilli. The phone rings in Yakov's apartment. Yakov picks up the phone.

Yakov: Hello?

Dassi: How are you doing?

Yakov: Can't complain. You?

Dassi: I'm alright. Are you with the girls?

Yakov: The little ones are asleep. The older ones are in their own homes.

Dassi: Have you read the book yet?

Yakov: No.

Dassi: Why?

Yakov: I can imagine what's in it.

Gilli: **(To Dassi)** He's read it.

Yakov: Is Gila there?

Dassi: Yes.

Yakov: Has she read it?

Dassi: Yes. I hope you're not going to forbid the older ones to read it.

Yakov: I can't forbid them anything anymore.

Dassi: The book's going to be published in a few weeks, Yakov. Your people will read it, too, you know, and then the girls will be asked about it. They should know what to say.

Yakov: They already know.

Dassi: They know only what you told them.

Yakov: You starting again?

Gilli: Let me. I'll talk to him.

Dassi: No. He is going to hear me out.

Yakov: I can hear you're upset. How many pills did you take today?
I told you this book is going to be bad for your health.

Gilli: Hand me the phone.

Dassi: **(Controls herself)** I've written this book for their sake too, Yakov.

Yakov: For their sake! This book is going to ruin their lives. I will deny every word.

Gilli grabs the phone out of Dassi's hand.

Gilli: Listen to me, Dad. Mom is willing to withhold the publishing, until after the older ones have read it. She'd like to explain to them why she wrote it, before everyone's talking about it.

Yakov: Have you read it? Do you believe it?

Gilli: I believe every word.

Silence. Hanni enters Yakov's apartment, holding a copy of the manuscript in her hand. She's agitated. Immediately after her, Rabbi Zilber enters. He is also holding a copy of the manuscript. Now the characters no longer use the phones, but talk to each other as if they are in the same space.

Hanni: **(To Yakov)** Is it true? I want to know, Dad. Is it all true?

Yakov: I warned you, Hanni, I told you that you shouldn't read it.

Hanni: Is it true or not?

Yakov: It's all lies. I told you. Your mother is sick. Her illness has taken a hold of her. She's been taking too many pills.

Hanni: I want to believe you, I really do.

Zilber: And you can. You know your father.

Yakov: Can you even imagine that I am the man in that book?

Hanni: I can't be sure anymore.

Yakov: Your mother has written this book to justify her leaving home, and the Ger community. To give an excuse for why she's abandoned you. Why she's abandoned the Lord.

Hanni: I really don't know what I had done if I was her.

Gilli: Talk to Mom, Hanni, she can tell you much more.

Dassi: Hanni...

Yakov: Ask Rabbi Zilber. I told him about your mother's difficulties the morning after our wedding.

Zilber: **(To Dassi)** Hadassah, we are not going to permit your daughters to read this book. Hannah shouldn't have read it either. It will make them even more estranged from you than they are now. It might even cause them to be estranged from the Lord. This book has no humility, no piety, no sanctity. If you publish it, you will never see them again.

Gilli: Don't be afraid, Mom. He's threatening you because he's afraid of you.

Dassi: Rabbi, I think once they've read it, they'll actually be more willing to meet with me.

Zilber: And what would you tell them? About your sins? About your husband sins? I want what's best for you, Hadassah, what's best for the girls, for the family. Why wallow in the sins of the past? We are commanded to atone for them.

Dassi: One cannot atone for a sin without confessing to it.

Yakov: **(To Hanni)** Now that you've read the book, are you willing to see her?!

Dassi: I'd like to hear your thoughts about it, Hanni.

Hanni: I think... I think you should never have written it.

Dassi: I will not let you go through what I've gone through!

The five younger daughters appear downstage, singing in chorus.

Daughters: My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field. (Ruth 2,8)

2. A wedding hall in Jerusalem

1994. Jewish wedding music. Dassi in a wedding gown and Yakov in a Hasidic bridegroom suit dance the traditional bride and groom dance, his right hand in her right hand. The other characters are clapping. When the dance ends Dassi hugs Ahuva, her excited mother, and goes on to hug the other women. Yakov shakes hands with Rabbi Zilber and with Haim, Dassi's brother.

3. Dassi and Yakov's bedroom.

When the music fades a pale light reveals the room, a separate single bed on either side of it. Dassi in her wedding gown and Yakov in his bridegroom suit – they both appear very tense and excited.

Yakov: Would you like me to turn the heater on?

Dassi: No, thank you. Are you cold?

Yakov: No. Not at all. Would you like a biscuit?

Dassi: Yes. No. Thank you. I'm tired. I...

Yakov: Yes. Me too. So...

Dassi: Yes. So... So, can you help me unzip?

Yakov: Sure. **(He tries to unzip her dress, unsuccessfully)**

Dassi: Let me. **(She does it herself)**

Yakov: You don't need my help, I see.

Dassi: The bridal tutor told me to ask you to do it.

Yakov: And Rabbi Zilber said you would.

Dassi exits. Light on Rabbi Zilber who is standing in the room corner.

Zilber: It's best not to talk too much.

Yakov: Yes, Rabbi.

Zilber: In a moment she will come and tell you she is ready. You will say that you are also ready. That's all.

Yakov: I know.

Dassi enters wearing a night gown.

Dassi: I'm ready.

Yakov: Me, too.

Dassi: Do you want me to help you unbutton?

Yakov: No.

He undresses and stays only with an undershirt and long underwear.

Yakov: Let me just turn the light off.

Dassi: Leave some light on.

Yakov: It's forbidden. It's forbidden to talk, too. Talking creates familiarity, and familiarity can bring lust.

Dassi: We're allowed to talk about what is necessary. Aren't we?

Yakov: Yes.

Dassi: Then, maybe we can leave some light on?

Yakov: Fine. But just a little.

Zilber: Turn off the light, Yakov.

Yakov: But she asked me to leave some on.

Zilber: Turn it off completely.

Yakov: It must be done in total darkness. Do you hear me? So that our heart doesn't covet that which we see. So that we do it just for the sake of Heaven.

Yakov turns the lights off. There's a total blackout on stage. Yakov feels his way back to the bed.

Yakov: So, are you ready.

Dassi: I'm ready.

Yakov pulls down his long underwear and lies on top of her, but due to all the tension and the fear he fails to achieve an erection.

Dassi: I don't think it's going to work this way... Should I give you a hand?
 Yakov: Shhh...
 Dassi: The tutor said that I can...
 Yakov: Shhh...
 Dassi: Didn't Rabbi Zilber tell you that I'm allowed to help you?
 Yakov: Shhh... **(To Rabbi Zilber)** Is she allowed to help me, Rabbi?
 Zilber: She's allowed.
 Yakov: You're allowed.

Dassi tries.

Dassi: Should I help you some more?
 Yakov: No. **(He turns on the lights)**
 Dassi: That's all right. The tutor said that it happens a lot.
 Yakov: I know.
 Zilber: You can go to sleep now.
 Dassi: We can try again. The tutor said that we can also...
 Yakov: We are not to talk now, remember?
 Dassi: We're talking for the purpose of fulfilling the commandment.
 Yakov: But one must not commit a sin in order to fulfill a commandment. It's forbidden, just like laying stolen tefillin.
 Dassi: All right. Fine. I'll do my best not to talk. I've always had trouble keeping quiet. Sometimes Dad would be so furious he'd slam his fist on the table. The whole neighborhood could hear him.

Light on Ahuva.

Ahuva: Make him a cup of tea!
 Dassi: Why don't I make you a cup of hot tea?
 Yakov: **(To Rabbi Zilber)** May she, Rabbi?
 Zilber: She may.
 Yakov: **(To Dassi)** Do you hear? Yes, you may.

Dassi gets up and start walking towards the kitchen.

Yakov: **(Calling out after her)** Do you hear? No sugar, okay?
 The Rebbe² says that sweet foods can cause lust
 Dassi: I heard you. **(Exits)**
 Yakov: **(To offstage)** Do you hear? You can put some milk in it.

Dassi returns

Dassi: My name is Dassi.
 Yakov: I know that.
 Dassi: I ask you to please call me by my name.
 Yakov: You know it's not allowed.
 Dassi: My dad calls my mom by her name.
 Yakov: On the day we first met, we pledged to each other to abide by all of Ger's rules.
 Dassi: But when you're not calling me by my name, it doesn't feel like you're calling me.
 Yakov: There is no one else here.
 Dassi: I know.
 Yakov: Hopefully Rabbi Zilber will permit it in due time. My parents aren't really strict about that either.
 Zilber: **(Strict)** We follow the rules strictly, Yakov. What does that even mean, she doesn't feel like you calling her? Her bridal tutor taught her that? That one is supposed to "feel"? Tell her that "Thy camp shall be holy", and our rules ensure that it remains holy. Now, go to sleep.
 Dassi: Can't we still try again? In "The Tractate of the Laws of Betrothal and Marriage" it says that "He who avoids the commandment, avoids a positive commandment from the Torah for which the punishment is severe." Even the Rebbe himself wrote in his open letter for Rosh Hashana that there can be no compromise regarding the performance of commandments.
 Yakov: Rabbi, she's asking if we can...
 Zilber: You can.
 Yakov: Even if we can, I'm not sure we should.
 Dassi: Are you not sure we should, or do you not want to?
 Yakov: Rashi³ says "You shall be holy", which means, we don't do everything that is allowed, but only what keeps us holy.

He lies down in his bed and turns to face the wall. Dassi is hurt.

² The head of the community

³ A famous Jewish scholar

Dassi: Fine. You're right. Let's keep ourselves holy.

Yakov: Good night.

Dassi: Good night.

4. Yakov's and Dassi's apartment, living room.

The day after. Dassi is standing and reading verses from the Book of Psalms.

Dassi: "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live..."⁴

Ahuva enters.

Ahuva: You don't have to say anything. I can see. **(Dassi is silent)** Your father saw Yakov at shul. Yakov also didn't have to say anything.

Dassi: Stay out of this, Mom.

Ahuva: You are my flesh and blood, Dassi. I know you. I was just like you. I can imagine what you must have expected.

Dassi: You can't imagine anything.

Ahuva: Anyone who's ever heard you laugh knows more about you than you think. It's hard, but you have to make concessions.

Dassi: Stop it, Mom!

Ahuva: Rabbi Zilber said you two should try again in two weeks time. Right? **(Dassi is silent)** In these two weeks you have to do everything you can to appease Yakov and to please him. If he's pleased, he will believe in himself. And if believes in himself he will succeed.

Dassi: He is pleased, he believes in himself and he will succeed.

Ahuva: Oh, really? Has God Almighty revealed Himself to you and told you that? I hope you're not planning to try again tonight.

Dassi: That's none of your business, Mom.

Ahuva: You know how hard you were to marry off. People saw that glimmer in your eyes. Everyone knows you made your father teach you the Talmud. You must be cautious now. Do not pressure him, do not urge him. If you scare him, you'll push him away. But if you concede, if you are subservient, he'll be able to grow. And when he grows, God willing, God will help him.

⁴ Psalms 116:1-2.

- Dassi: I'll think about it.
- Ahuva: And I advise you not to flaunt your scholarly knowledge too much. You don't want him to be intimidated. I told you a thousand times that all this learning of yours will do more harm than good.
- Dassi: Thank you, Mom. I'm married now, thank God, and now I can finally live my life the way I want to live it.
- Ahuva: You don't *have* to listen to me. I'm only your mother who cares about you. But you should listen to Rabbi Zilber. He was the Rebbe's disciple for many years. He knows what it means to live in holiness.
- Dassi: To live in holiness you first you have to live.
- Ahuva: Desire is an odd creature, Dassi. The more you feed it, the more hungry it will become. Only if you starve it will it be sated.
- Dassi: I've seen what happens to those who starve it.
- Ahuva: And I've seen those who permitted themselves more than the Rebbe permits. Their whole families suffered for that permissiveness. It is precisely because you're so knowledgeable that you have to make sure Yakov doesn't stray from the rules himself. **(Dassi remains silent)** If you don't think you can control yourself tonight, I'll ask Rabbi Zilber to tell Yakov to spend the night in the *kollel*⁵.
- Dassi: You're not going to ask Rabbi Zilber anything. I don't need your advice. God willing, Yakov and I will find our way to live in exalted holiness, and have a good and joyous life together.
- Ahuva: Amen to that.

5. A Jerusalem street.

A month later. Yakov is standing, facing Rabbi Zilber who is questioning him.

- Zilber: Have you and her been avoiding any touch? Have you been avoiding sitting close to each other, at home or in public? Or sharing a plate or a glass? Or handing over any object from one to another?
- Yakov: Yes, Rabbi, we have.
- Zilber: Has she had seven clean days since the end of her period? Did she go to the mikveh tonight? **(Yakov nods)** Does anybody know she went to the mikveh tonight?
- Yakov: Who should know?
- Zilber: No one should. You don't want the whole neighborhood to know you're performing the commandment tonight.

⁵ A religious school for married students

- Yakov: I'll tell her that.
- Zilber: She knows that. But she doesn't always behave according to her knowledge.
- Yakov: Yes. That's true. **(Hesitantly)** I don't know if it's important, but we nearly haven't spoken with each other at all the past month.
- Zilber: That's all right. You don't have to talk to each other too much. In the *Mishna* it says: "Do not prolong converse with the woman." And when you talk, you should talk only of good things. You should not complain to each other, always address each other respectfully. And, God willing, soon enough you'll have children and you'll have plenty to talk about. When you come home, first ask her how she is doing. Then ask her if she's ready. That will do.
- Yakov: What should I tell her about her studies, Rabbi?
- Zilber: I told you. She can study teaching in the Bet Yakov Seminary.
- Yakov: She doesn't want to study teaching, she wants to study psychology.
- Zilber: No, no. In Ger we don't study the wisdom of Gentiles.
- Yakov: I promised her.
- Zilber: You promised her?!
- Yakov: On our first date, before our betrothal, she showed me one of the Rebbe's articles, in which he wrote "Wisdom among the Gentiles – believe it." And if it's needed, you can study it.
- Zilber: All right, fine. She can study educational counseling. That's psychology too.
- Yakov: I'll suggest it to her. **(Hesitantly)** One more thing, Rabbi. Am I already permitted to call her by her name now?
- Zilber: Soon she will be a mother, God willing, and then you can call her "Mama".
- Yakov: I think this prohibition might be the reason we haven't been speaking to each other. I think she's decided not to reply until I call her by her name. And you know how hard it is for her to keep quiet.
- Zilber: Don't worry. She's a smart woman. She will learn to keep quiet.

Yakov enters the apartment. He is holding a shopping basket. A moment later, Dassi enters. She is wearing a nightgown.

- Yakov: How are you?
- Dassi: Good, thank you.
- Yakov: Did you go to the mikveh?
- Dassi: Yes, I did. I took another shower here.
- Yakov: I'd also love to take a shower here, but...

Dassi: But you're forbidden to.

Yakov: But, on the other hand, I spoke to Rabbi Zilber, and he said you can study educational counseling. It's also psychology.

Dassi: Really, I can? When can I begin?

Yakov: I didn't ask and he didn't say. So I guess you can enroll for next year.

Dassi: Thank you so much. Thank you. I hope I'm accepted, God willing. And I'm going to need a computer, too, Yakov. Every student needs one nowadays. And I want a radio, too. There are people in Ger who listen to the radio.

Yakov: Rabbi Zilber will permit it. Eventually. For now, he just wants to be sure we won't put his permissions to ill use.

Dassi: Can he even imagine something like that?! **(Both laugh)** I hope you don't think that you and I talk too much.

Yakov: Us?! **(They laugh)** I hope no one saw you going to the mikveh.

Dassi: I took a shopping bag with me, filled it with papers. **(They laugh again)**

Yakov: Guess what's in my shopping bag

Dassi: **(She looks in the bag and takes out some books)** Maimonides?!

Yakov: I told the man in the store that it was for me, but it's also for you.

Dassi: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Yakov: Next week I'll bring The Shulchan Aruch⁶.

Dassi: You're the most wonderful husband in the world, Yakov.

Yakov: So you're ready?

Dassi: Ready as I'll ever be.

Yakov: I'm ready too.

Dassi: May I kiss you? **(He hesitates)** It can help us in performing the commandment.

Yakov: **(To Rabbi Zilber)** May she kiss me?

Zilber: No.

Yakov: May I kiss her?

Zilber: No.

Yakov: **(To Dassi)** No.

Zilber: Tell her that a kiss may evoke lust, and lust is forbidden.

Dassi: But on the other hand, Baal Shem Tov⁷ said that bodily pleasure is spiritually exalting when it is used as a means for a sacred end.

Zilber: Is that what she says?! Good God!

Yakov: **(To Dassi)** How do you know what Baal Shem Tov had to say about bodily pleasure?!

⁶ The Code of Jewish Law

⁷ A great Hasidic Rabbi

- Dassi: I read it yesterday. In the library. At the seminary.
- Zilber: For what purpose?
- Dassi: I wanted to know if celibacy poses a threat to domestic peace.
The bridal tutor couldn't say.
- Zilber: A wife achieves domestic peace by doing her husband's will, by obeying him. If the husband chooses celibacy, she will do his will.
- Dassi: But "doing her husband's will" doesn't mean she only fulfills his will, "Doing" here means "building". She helps him to build his will.
- Zilber: Not in Ger.
- Yakov: Rabbi Zilber, with your permission, I'd still like to kiss her.
- Zilber: It is forbidden, Yakov.
- Yakov: Rabbi, I didn't find a mention of a prohibition on kissing anywhere. On the contrary. Maimonides says in "The Laws of Sexual Relations", a man's wife is permitted to him, therefore he can do with his wife whatever he wishes, have intercourse with her whenever he wishes, and kiss whatever part of her body he wishes...
- Zilber: Maimonides' laws are intended for the common people, not for us. In Ger, we live in holiness to perfect the world! That's why we follow our rules strictly! **(To both of them)** Good luck.
- Dassi: I'm ready, Yakov. **(Yakov doesn't reply)** I said I'm ready.
- Yakov: I'm not sure I can do it.
- Dassi: I can give you a hand.
- Yakov: We'll try again next month.
- Dassi: No, I don't want to wait another month.
- Yakov: If I only knew what sin I've committed to deserve this torment by God. I fast, I go to mikveh, I pray, I study the Torah fervently, I entreat the Lord day and night, and the moment I come near you I am covered in cold sweat and my knees tremble.
- Dassi: When your heart wills it, it will happen, Yakov. **(He doesn't reply)** Can I lie down by your side? I won't force myself. We'll do it only when you wish. **(He doesn't reply)** My tutor gave me some special oil. She said it helps. The Rabbi never told you about it?

Dassi leaves to an adjacent room to bring the oil. He turns to face the wall and pulls the sheet over his head. She returns, the bottle of oil in her hand, and realizes he's turned down her offer.

6. Living room

Evening. Dassi is standing and reading verses from the Book of Psalms.

Dassi: "...Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling..."⁸

Haim enters. She stops reading.

Haim: Good morning. How are you?

Dassi: Did Mom send you over here? What did she want to know?

Haim: She didn't say. But I saw the glitter in your eyes when you went "shopping" yesterday, and I figured it out. What should I tell her?

Dassi: To mind her own business.

Haim: Dassi, I hear the Yeshiva boys in shul complain about the Rebbe's rules. I know you well enough to know why Mom is worried about you.

Dassi: I will not discuss this with you.

Haim: It's not what I came here for anyway.

Dassi: What is it, then?

Haim: I'm not going back to Yeshiva after break.

Dassi: Why? Giving up on studying again? What will you do? Get a job? Who'd marry you?

Haim: The studies themselves are not the issue.

Dassi: Then what is it?

Haim: It's being woken up by screams at dawn, it's bathing in the cold, filthy water of the mikveh in the morning. It's the supervisors following me around everywhere, telling me to keep my hands out of my pockets, eavesdropping on every word I say. It's those yeshiva "watch dogs" sniffing around our dorms every night, checking what I'm doing under my blanket. **(Angrily)** "Keep the eyes from seeing, the ears from hearing, the thoughts from straying. You are to be holy. You are to be holy..."
(Agonized) On the Shabbat before break, I had a stomach ache. I took a few minutes longer in the toilet. Five minutes later they're screaming at me to get out. If I go on studying there, the same thing that is happening to Yakov now, will happen to me. And don't tell me I don't know what I'm talking about.

⁸ Psalms 116:7-9

Dassi: I didn't say anything. **(Pause)** You have only one year left in the Yeshiva, Haim. You are a good Torah student. A prodigy. You have great inner strength.

Haim: Another year, and then what? The Rebbe will abolish his rules? God Almighty will reveal Himself to me in a burning bush? I can't go on praying, Dassi. There is no one there **(looks up)** who is listening to me.

Dassi: God forbid!

Haim: I close my eyes, I rock back and forth and mumble words, words, words. I can't fall sleep at night. And I'm not the only one. Most of my friends are like that, only pretending.

Dassi: Even the most pious men feel that way sometimes.

Haim: Why do we have to suffer our whole lives? I'm not blind. I can see you've been crying.

Dassi: I cried and I got over it. You will too.

Haim: There are places where you don't have to suffer so much.

Dassi: What places?

Haim: You know exactly what I'm talking about.

Dassi: I don't know and I don't want to know! **(Pause)** Go home, and tell Mom that I'm fine.

7. Dassi and Yakov living room

Yakov enters, carrying a large cardboard box. Dassi opens it and is thrilled to find a computer inside. Rabbi Zilber and Ahuva are standing on both sides of the stage, watching the scene.

Dassi: A computer! How wonderful. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Yakov: **(Smiling)** Yes, I heard you.

Dassi: I'll be the best wife you could ask for, Yakov.

Yakov: I know. I'll set it up right away.

Dassi: **(Hesitantly)** I hope... I hope that it won't take you too long.

Yakov: Only a few hours.

Dassi: Hours?! But we said we're going to try again tonight.

Yakov: Yes. But then I thought about it again. We did try twice already this month.

Dassi: I know, but---

Yakov: And I asked Rabbi Zilber about it as well.

Zilber: **(Opens a small notebook and checks)** She's not in her "right time" tonight. Not tomorrow night as well.

Dassi: And Rabbi Zilber knows when my right time is better than I do? I felt it this morning, in my abdomen. On the side, right here. I went to buy you a shirt at Schwartz's, and my eyes stumbled upon a pile of baby clothes. I just couldn't take my hands off them. His wife said to me "Mazaltov, Dassi." I don't want to waste this month.

Yakov: All right. I'll ask the Rabbi again.

Dassi: We don't really have to ask his permission, you know. My cousin, Esther, she got married after we did, and she's already expecting. She told me they've done it three times in the right time.

Yakov: But we do ask for permission.

Dassi: I don't understand, Yakov. I've seen you slack occasionally, in some pretty major commandments sometimes, but this rule, which doesn't exist anywhere in writing, you follow so strictly, as if it was written in the Torah.

Yakov: I slack? Where exactly?

Dassi: You didn't lay tefillin this morning.

Yakov: I did.

Dassi: Well, I didn't see you.

Yakov: I did it in shul.

Dassi: You're supposed to do it first thing in the morning.

Yakov: I slept in. I didn't have time.

Dassi: That's exactly what I'm talking about. How can you let yourself slack on real commandments, and yet be so afraid to break Ger rules?

Yakov: I do my very best. Always. Sometimes I fail. And then I fast, I go to mikveh, I try to repent.

Dassi: For heaven's sake, I'm not asking you to commit a sin.

Yakov: **(Turns towards his bed)** Good night.

Dassi: I'm coming to your bed.

Ahuva: A decent Jewish wife doesn't even hint at her husband, let alone tries to seduce him.

Dassi: I want to have a baby, Yakov.

Yakov: I know. **(Turns to leave)**

Dassi: Where are you going?

Yakov: I'll spend the night in the Kollel.

Dassi: **(At him, as he leaves)** Good night!

8. Living room

Dassi is lighting the Shabbat candles. Ahuva is standing next to her.

- Dassi: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of the holy Shabbat..." **(Mumbles the blessing)** "...and cause our light to illuminate that it be not extinguished forever, and let Your face shine upon us that we are saved." Amen.
- Ahuva: Amen. He can't keep sleeping in the Kollel, Dassi!
- Dassi: Don't worry. He'll come back.
- Ahuva: Everybody's talking behind your back. I've been asked about it too.
- Dassi: You don't have to answer.
- Ahuva: They know why the Rabbi instructed him to sleep there.
- Dassi: I said I didn't want to talk about it, Mom. **(Dassi turns to leave)**
- Ahuva: Wait. He'll be back from shul any minute. Yakov is the best match we could ask for. All the teachers in the yeshiva said his praise. He comes from a long lineage of scholars. In his family, there are no diseases, no divorces. And your father sold my mother's apartment so we can marry you off to him.
- Dassi: I know.
- Ahuva: If you try to push him to break the rules all the time, eventually he will divorce you.
- Dassi: No, he won't.
- Ahuva: How can you be so sure? Did you read it in Maimonides? In Shulchan Aruch?
- Dassi: I know it.
- Ahuva: Don't you realize you're hurting him? And for what purpose? A truly strong woman can afford to be submissive to her husband. I don't regret for a minute, giving up on education and a career. You can also give up on "this thing". Be patient. Soon enough you'll have children, and you won't be so interested in him anymore. I gave up on this as well. And I'm quite a happy woman, aren't I?
- Dassu: I make concessions all the time. Don't you see that? **(Agonized)** It hurts me so much when he goes to sleep at the Kollel. I can't fall sleep. I cry all night.
- Ahuva: Then take a sleeping pill. Just like I used to do.

9. Rabbi Zilber's office.

Two months later. Dassi and Yakov enter the office.

Zilber: Mazeltov! Congratulations, Hadassah. Well done, Yakov.

Yakov: Amen, Rabbi.

Zilber: **(To Dassi)** How are you feeling?

Dassi: Wonderful. No morning sickness. No anxiety. No stress. I feel a little dizzy from joy.

Zilber: If the mother is happy so will be the baby. Judging by the look on your face I predict that in seven months' time you'll give birth to a baby boy, God willing.

Yakov: Amen. May it be so.

Zilber: Now that you are so fortunate, you will strictly follow the following rules: During the next three months you may not perform the commandment, as it might risk the fetus. The same applies also for the final three months of pregnancy. Only in the two months in the middle you are allowed to perform the commandment, for the purpose of domestic peace, twice a month.

Yakov: Yes, Rabbi.

Zilber: **(To Dassi)** In all those forbidden days you should speak to your husband as little as possible. You should avoid any eye contact lest it evokes lust in him. You are forbidden from looking appealing lest it brings impure thoughts into his mind which may bring him to extracting semen in vain, God forbid.

Yakov: Yes, Rabbi.

Zilber: **(To Yakov)** And following the birth you must stay away from home as much as possible for a whole year. You are to work and study and spend as little time with your wife as possible. And during that year you are forbidden from performing the commandment at all.

Yakov: Yes, Rabbi.

Zilber: And God willing, you will be blessed with more sons and grandsons, who will be observant and do good deeds. Good night.

Rabbi Zilber turns to the documents on his desk, he doesn't notice Dassi's tears.

Yakov: Rabbi...

Zilber: **(Looks up from the desk)** What's the matter, Hadassah?

- Dassi: **(Protesting)** What is the meaning of those rules, Rabbi? For a whole year I am to live alone, and be forbidden from talking with my husband? And he is to treat me as if I was a stranger? Avoid me as if I mean to cause him to sin? And what does it mean exactly that I'm to avoid looking appealing? Am I to wear rags? Cover my head in dirt?
- Zilber: Once you are pregnant, performing the commandment means extracting semen in vain, God forbid.
- Dassi: Chazon Ish⁹ himself says in his commentary on the Pesachim Tractate, that it's allowed to perform the commandment throughout the pregnancy, once a week.
- Zilber: We at Ger forbid it.
- Dassi: All the great rabbis say that during pregnancy the performing of the commandment isn't considered extraction of semen in vain. The Talmud forbids celibacy...
- Zilber: That's enough, Hadassah! **(Strict)** If your lust causes you to have such a distorted view of the Torah, you will not have a share in the Afterlife. That's why the sages have said that he who teaches his daughter Torah teaches her nonsense. **(Furious)** Let the words of the Torah be burnt and not be learned by women. And if you read any more extracurricular books in the library you will be expelled from the seminary.

Dassi leaves the Rabbi's office. Yakov follows her.

- Yakov: Why are you debating with him? We've already seen that whenever you contradict him, he becomes even stricter with us. Why should you provoke him? I'll go tomorrow and argue with him until a voice from heaven judges between us. **(She walks away)** Where are you rushing to? Let's go home and lock the doors and close the shutters.
- Dassi: I'm not a criminal and I will not hide.
- Yakov: I thought you wanted to perform the commandment.
- Dassi: I want to worship the Lord with love, and you don't give me the love I need for Him.

The Five Younger Daughters appear downstage and sing in chorus.

- Daughters: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: (Psalms 42, 2-3)

⁹ A famous ultra-orthodox rabbi

10. Dassi's apartment in Tel Aviv and Yakov's apartment in Jerusalem.

June 20, 2016. Night time. Light on Dassi's apartment. Next to her is Gilli. Dassi dials a number on the phone. Light on Yakov's apartment. The phone rings. Yakov picks up the phone.

Yakov: Hello?

Dassi: I have an offer.

Yakov: I'm listening.

Gilli: You can't do this, Mom.

Dassi: I'm willing to erase some segments of the book so the girls can read it safely.

Yakov: Some segments! The whole book is a big lie. It's a blood libel. None of it happened. You wrote it to get back at me. To depict me as a monster. And why? Because I stayed here to worship the Lord and raise the girls after you'd left? Because I was willing to tear out both my eyes for your sake?

Gilli: Because you were willing to tear out both *her* eyes for your own sake!

Dassi: I'm willing to meet and decide together which segments will be deleted.

Yakov: I will not meet with you before you erase all of it. If I am that man in your book, how come you agreed to leave the girls under my care? To have me bring them up, marry them off? Do you think they don't see you because I won't let them?!

Gilli: Yes.

Yakov: They don't want to because they're afraid of her. Ask Hannah.

Hanni: Dad, I will not have you beg her.

Rabbi Zilber speaks to Dassi

Zilber: Your daughters still need their father, Hadassah. Yakov is the only person they can rely on.

Gilli: You're not worried about Dad. You just don't want any woman in Ger to demand to be happy, like Mom did.

Zilber: I am trying to protect your sisters, Gilla. If you had stayed here, you would see how much they need this protection.

Gilli: They need Mom.

Yakov: **(Enraged)** And now you threaten to publish this abomination? Your shaming us by leaving is not enough, that you must add insult to injury? Do you want everyone to mock and despise us? Who would agree to marry their sons off to our daughters? Do you want them to be desperate

enough to take a bunch of pills trying to end their own lives, like you did?
You want me to do it, too? **(He is on the verge of tears)**

11. Rabbi Zilber's office

Seven years later. Yakov is consulting with Rabbi Zilber

- Yakov: We have four little daughters, Rabbi. I'd like their mother to stay home and take care of them.
- Zilber: The older ones are already in daycare, and her mother is helping with the little one. No?
- Yakov: I don't need her mother's help. I have my bookstores in Bnei Brak and in Ashdod¹⁰ as well. Our income is in abundance, thank God.
- Zilber: She meets in the schools many girls who stutter, wet themselves, have difficulties to concentrate. Some parents of the Talmud Torah boys say she saved their boys' souls.
- Yakov: I don't like her coming home exhausted.
- Zilber: The Rebbe encourages women to work, you know that.
- Yakov: But not at the expense of the family. I need her at home. She hasn't got time for me. And I suspect she doesn't want to make time for me. I must do something to please her. Perhaps I could call her by her name now? Or treat her to a weekend in a hotel?
- Zilber: Absolutely not, Yakov. You were given the privilege of living in holiness and you're going to give it up? I did not expect you of all people to be so weak. The Rebbe's rules are set in stone. She will keep working and the girls will grow into fine young women. And if she is content, you will both be worshipping the Lord more willingly. And we'll say Amen.

Light on Dassi and Yakov's house. Dassi is putting the baby to bed.

- Yakov: You come home, feed the girls, put them to bed, and crash into your bed exhausted.
- Dassi: I don't crash into my bed and I'm not exhausted.
- Yakov: Lately I feel that you've grown weaker.
- Dassi: **(She picks up the hint)** I'm only following the rules. We're not supposed to do it for a year after childbirth.
- Yakov: The little one is one year and two months.
- Dassi: And for the past two months we've been doing it.

¹⁰ Two cities near Tel Aviv.

Yakov: Only twice a month.

Dassi: This is the rule.

Yakov: We can do it more often sometimes. We can do it even tonight.

Dassi: I don't want to break this rule.

Yakov: We've been married for seven years now. You used to beg me to do it more often. And when we did, we weren't struck by lightning, were we? I'm even willing to call you by your name, Dassi.

Dassi: Thank you very much.

Yakov: I know you're not satisfied when we do it. Me neither. But we shouldn't give up.

Dassi: I don't want to fight. If you want to do it so much, let's do it and go to sleep.

Yakov: I want you to want to do it.

Dassi: Oh, now you care what I want, all of a sudden?

Yakov: Yes! **(She's silent)** Why don't we go tomorrow to spend the Shabbat in a hotel?

Dassi: In Ger, we don't go to a hotel before the age of 40.

Yakov: No one needs to know. **(She's silent)** Then let's go and have dinner in a restaurant. That's certainly not against the rules. We'll sit and eat and talk.

Dassi: I'm not hungry.

Yakov: When was the last time you felt joy? When was the last time you laughed? As soon as the girls are asleep you turn to your patient files and your psychology books. Even in Ger we should enjoy ourselves sometimes.

Dassi: I'm really tired, Yakov. I need to get up early for work tomorrow.

Yakov: **(Bitter)** Then go to sleep. **(He takes his hat and turns to leave)**

Dassi: You can go. I hope Rabbi Zilber gave you permission. I hope the prostitute you're going to is not a married woman. That she counted a week from the last day of her period and went to mikveh. After all, we don't want you desecrating the name of Heaven.

Yakov: I'm going to sleep at the Kollel.

Dassi: To the Kollel! And tomorrow you'll say you're going to Tel Aviv to buy books. You go there to buy **meat**. Those women sell you their own flesh because they need the money. That's why they're fine with you just mounting and ejaculating and leaving. I need a little more than that.

Yakov: Yes. I go to prostitutes. I go out of town to avoid desecrating the name of Heaven in public. I go because you're distancing me!

Dassi: If you want to us to be closer, try and come close!

Yakov: I *am* trying!

Dassi: Trying! How?! By not talking to me? By never letting me talk? By hiding inside your undergarments? By turning the light off for fear Rabbi

Zilber is standing at his window, watching us? By quoting the Maggid of Mezritch¹¹, saying “A man shall love his wife in the way he loves his tefillin¹²”?

Yakov: I try to do it in a holy manner. I want you to get closer to me when the Divine Spirit lies in your heart, too.

Dassi: Do the prostitutes you visit come to you with the Divine Spirit in their hearts? When you do come to me, you refuse to see me and what I want.

Yakov: I do see you. I see that you want everything to be done according to your will. **(He leaves)**

Zilber: **(To Dassi)** You are not a newlywed bride anymore, Hadassah. The love you’ve read about in the gentiles’ books, is not the love we cherish in Ger. For us, love is the love of God and His Torah. The love of flesh and blood is idolatry. For us, between man and wife, there are understanding, partnership, respect. We don’t copulate for material pleasure, but for the bringing of holy offspring. If you succeed in taming your desires you will achieve spiritual elation much greater than you can imagine.

The five younger daughters appear downstage, singing in chorus.

Daughters: I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. (Psalms 22, 10)

12. Living room

Night time. Dassi is alone. She rocks a baby carriage back and forth while she studies. Haim enters in haste. He clearly appears to be agitated.

Haim: Is Yakov home?

Dassi: No.

Haim: Is he due back anytime soon?

Dassi: I don’t know. What’s the matter?

Haim: Is he staying in the Kollel again?

Dassi: Why aren’t you at the Yeshiva?

Haim: I left. I’ve left them a letter. I bet they’ve sent people after me already. I’ll shave off my beard and sidelocks tomorrow. I didn’t want to startle you. I have to say goodbye to Mom and Dad.

Dassi: But, why? What happened?!

¹¹ A great Hassidic Rabbi

¹² Phylacteries.

Haim: I'm not going to wait until my Yafa and I go through what you and Yakov are going through. You know he's not really sleeping in the Kollel, don't you?

Dassi: We've got our ups and downs Haim, but...

Haim: I stayed here till now only because I was afraid to leave.

Dassi: Only here you can live in holiness, Haim.

Haim: That holiness is a lie, Dassi. Ever since Yafa became pregnant, we can't stop asking ourselves if we want our child to be born into that lie. Did you hear about the student from my yeshiva that got killed in an accident last week? That was no accident. He just lied down on the railroad track.

Dassi: He killed himself?!

Haim: He couldn't get his wife pregnant because of all these rules.

Dassi: I don't believe it.

Haim: He left me a note. **(He shows it to her)** Do you want to read it?

Dassi: No.

Haim: He was my study partner. We enrolled in university together. To law school. **(Agonized)** Dassi, if I don't leave, I'll die too.

He becomes silent. Ahuva and Rabbi Zilber enter.

Ahuva: You are going back to yeshiva, Haim. Tonight.

Zilber: The head of yeshiva wants to see you. He's arranged a meeting for you, with the Rebbe.

Ahuva: We are not going to give up on you and Yafa. We're family. You'll soon have children, God willing. You cannot condemn them for Hell.

Haim: We can't live here any longer, Mom.

Zilber: You'll pray enough so you can. We will pray for you. The Rebbe will pray for you. The Lord heeds prayer.

Haim: We've thought about it a lot, we've thought about the price we're going to pay, too...

Ahuva: You don't have to stay in Yeshiva, Haim. You can get a job. We will help you.

Zilber: If you stop living by the Torah, you will not be allowed to come here anymore. Nor will your children. We'll tear our clothes and sit shiva¹³ for you. You'll be damned forever.

Haim: We know that.

Ahuva: You can still save yourself, Haim. The day will come, and you will stand before God and he will punish you for all your sins.

¹³ Seven days of mourning

Haim: I can't live this lie anymore, Mom. Nobody cares whether I have faith or not, as long as I stand in shul and rock back and forth when I pray. No one will say anything if I beat my wife, as long I properly spread my arms and legs when I immerse in the mikveh.

Yakov enters.

Haim: Look at Dassi. You know Yakov visits prostitutes in Tel Aviv in the nights.

Dassi: Haim!

Haim: And no one cares because he made a nice donation to the shul.

Ahuva: That's not true, Haim.

Zilber: You say you cannot lie anymore, but everything you say is a lie. You're not leaving us because you find something wrong with us, but because you gave in to your desires. If you wish to live where there is no distinction between sin and commandment, between impurity and purity, then go. Go and never return. Go. Before the evil spirit which possessed you, will possess other as well. Go!

Haim leaves.

Zilber: You are strictly forbidden from talking to him ever again. **(Leaves)**

Ahuva: He will not leave. Over my dead body he will. He will not give up his share in this world and the next, just because of momentary doubts. **(She turns to go after him)**

Dassi: **(Stops her)** Do you want him to do what his study-partner did last week? You want him to kill himself, too?

Ahuva: I will drag him back by his ears.

Yakov: Dassi, I can see what you're thinking. I will not let you follow in his footsteps. I won't even let you consider it. We are husband and wife. We have wonderful daughters. We will stay here, and strengthen our faith here, and live by the law of the Torah here, and learn to live here happily together. Like you wanted.

He holds her hands. Silence.

Yakov: Ever since that dance at our wedding I haven't held your hand even once.

She nods. He hugs her. She gives in to the hug. They kiss.

Dassi: Ever since we got married, I've been wanting to kiss you.
 Yakov: Me, too.
 Dassi: Here I am. **(They kiss again)**
 Yakov: I've never had the courage to tell you how beautiful you are.

They hug again. Dassi starts to takes off her clothes. He stops her.

Yakov: No, Dassi.
 Dassi: We can turn the light off.
 Yakov: Nudity is forbidden. Utterly forbidden.
 Dassi: Nudity can also be holy. The consummation of marriage in intercourse is a holy act.
 Yakov: God forbid.
 Dassi: The rabbis who wrote these rules never knew love.
 Yakov: Beasts do it naked, Dassi. Human beings don't. I will not desecrate your honor, I will not violate you.
 Dassi: You don't desecrate or violate me.
 Yakov: In my mind, I hear the Rebbe scolding and cursing me for the sinful thoughts I just had.
 Dassi: We are human beings, Yakov. If we don't love as human beings, we won't be able to live as human beings. **(She tries to embrace him)**
 Yakov: Let go of me! **(Pushes her away and takes his hat)**
 Dassi: Where are you going?
 Yakov: To the mikveh. To cleanse myself of the lust that filled my heart.
 Dassi: If my love makes you filthy, don't ever come near me again!

He exits.

13. Living room.

Dassi is seated, mumbling Psalms. Yakov and Rabbi Zilber enter. She stops.

Zilber: How are you doing, Hadassah?
 Dassi: Good, thank you.
 Zilber: You seem a little pale.
 Yakov: She hardly talks, Rabbi.
 Zilber: Could you try telling me what is bothering you?

- Yakov: She hardly slept last night. This morning she couldn't get out of bed. She hasn't gone to work all week. She didn't go to meet the eldest one's teacher yesterday. She reads Psalms all day. She hasn't gone to the mikveh for four months now.
- Zilber: You are a woman of valor, Hadassah. You are learned, you are wise. You're having a hard time, I can see that. Can't you tell me what is bothering you though? **(She doesn't reply)** Would you like to write a letter to the Rebbe? **(Still doesn't reply)** It's good that you pray and read Psalms, but you must go to the mikveh as well. Not only for the sake of domestic peace, but also for your own peace of mind. **(She doesn't reply)** Your silence cries out to heaven, Hadassah. Your blaming me can also be heard across the land. But no mortal man holds the cure to your suffering. We can only show you the way of holiness, so you will choose to follow it. **(Dassi doesn't reply. He speaks to Yakov)** Give her "Prisma¹⁴". 20mg. Twice a day. **(Hands him a package of pills)** It's an antidepressant. When you run out, come to me again.
- Yakov: The doctor said physiotherapy or massage can maybe lift her spirits.
- Zilber: Let's wait a few days to see how the medicine is affecting her. **(He mumbles a blessing)** "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." **(Leaves)**
- Dassi: He looks up to the Heaven and speaks of holiness and then condemns me to a life of hell.
- Yakov: That's not true, Dassi. He's only trying to help. He thinks the Prisma can give you some strength. **(He hands her a pill from the package, she doesn't take it)** The girls can see. The older ones have already asked me what's going on.
- Dassi: What is it they see?
- Yakov: They see you haven't been going to shul.
- Dassi: I pray at home, with great intention. I pray with all my might. But I don't feel that there is anybody up there listening.
- Yakov: **(Shocked)** What?!
- Dassi: There's no one listening.
- Yakov: I won't let you give in to despair, Dassi. Come Saturday, we will all go to shul together, the girls will be with you, and you will pray with them loud and clear, and, God willing, on Saturday night you will go to mikveh.
- Dassi: I can't do it, I tell you.
- Yakov: The pills will make it easier. **(Hands her the pill again)** Take it.

¹⁴ Anti-depressant

Dassi: **(She doesn't take it)** I come home from shul exhausted. Aching all over.

Yakov: Then I'll take you to a physiotherapist.

Dassi: I don't want you to take me to a physiotherapist.

Yakov: Why? Are you fed up with me? Are you giving up on me?

Dassi: No.

Yakov: You're lying. I know you can't bear any intimacy with me anymore. **(She doesn't reply)** I'm afraid you've decided the Lord doesn't hear your prayer simply because He didn't bestow you with the pleasure of performing the commandment. **(She doesn't reply)** Our ancestors sacrificed their lives for their faith, and you give it up because of a lack of pleasure?

Dassi: It's not the lack of pleasure. It's that emptiness.

Yakov: What emptiness? Whatever you need, just say and I'll provide it.

Dassi: The Lord has abandoned me, Yakov.

Yakov: The Lord conceals himself from those who sinned, as punishment.

Dassi: What was my sin? My wanting to worship him with love?

Yakov: No, your refusal to fulfill your duties to me. You were given the privilege of living in holiness and you're going to give it up? You were born in Gerr and you'll live the way we live here, without thinking what you feel and what you want all the time. I won't let you avoid me anymore. If you feel that you can't go to the mikveh, we'll find a physiotherapist who will make you stronger. You'll go to her, you'll recover, you'll go to the mikveh, and God will show you His face again. **(He hands her the pill)** You will take this medicine now! **(She swallows the pill)**

14. Living room.

Evening. Dassi is packing a bag, getting ready to go a planned visit to a massage. Ahuva enters.

Ahuva: A male physiotherapist? That is an utter sin! Why not a female physiotherapist?

Dassi: Yakov says that he is the best.

Ahuva: Does Rabbi Zilber know about this?

Dassi: He knows that we need the very best.

Ahuva: I'm not sure what he knows anymore. It doesn't seem like the Prisma that he gave you is doing much. He's not the big healer he thinks he is.

Dassi: It's worse without it.

Ahuva: You're only thirty-four, Dassi. You can still save yourself by yourself.

Dassi: No, Mom. I have seven daughters. I'm not going to have another child.

Ahuva: If you have two or three more, you won't need a physiotherapist.
 Dassi: Of course.
 Ahuva: Yakov thinks so too. If, God willing, you will have a boy, you will be overflowed with joy.
 Dassi: Fine. If the physiotherapy doesn't help, I'll have another child.
 Ahuva: I'm really concerned, Dassi. I've lost Haim. I don't want to lose you as well.
 Dassi: Oh, really? Where was that concern all these years? Since I got married all you did was tell me to make concessions. I've made so many concessions that now I'm left with nothing to live for.
 Ahuva: I will not listen to such accusations from you! From the day you were born you were never willing to give up on anything, you always wanted to have everything. But even everything has never been enough.

Yakov enters.

Yakov: **(To Dassi)** Are you ready?
 Dassi: Yes.
 Ahuva: Don't let anything happen to her, Yakov, God forbid.

Dassi and Yakov leave.

15. Corridor at the massage parlor

Night. Dassi rushes out of a corridor looking upset, holding her shoes and her wig in her hands. Yakov rushes after her.

Yakov: Dassi! Where are you going? The car is that way! Dassi!

She leaves. He leaves after her.

16. Living room.

The same night. Dassi and Yakov enter the house. They both seem agitated.

Yakov: Dassi, I saw you were enjoying yourself. I was convinced you wanted to continue.
 Dassi: Enjoying myself?! I thought I was going to die there.
 Yakov: You knew exactly why we were going to him.
 Dassi: It was not a medical treatment.

Yakov: I asked him to pleasure you. He wasn't going to do anything more than that.

Dassi: You asked him to do what?!

Yakov: I can't seem to pleasure you. I can see how you're losing your mind. I can't bear your depression anymore. I asked around, I checked. I thought he would teach you to have pleasure. I thought I could learn from him. I thought you would thank me.

Dassi: You asked him to teach me how to have pleasure?!

Yakov: I stood there, furious, jealous, ashamed. Trembling with fear. But I was willing to put everything aside in order to get us out of this hell.

Dassi: You saw me crying, sobbing, begging him to stop. I cried out to you to stop him. To pull him away from me. You just stood there and didn't say a word. Although you saw him continue. Although you saw what he was going to do. Although you saw me struggling with him. I'm an adulteress. I am to be put to death. I am forbidden to you forever.

Yakov: He didn't do it, so you're not an adulteress. **(He grabs her arm)**

Dassi: Don't touch me!

Yakov: And you're not forbidden to me.

Dassi: I wanted to live with you in holiness. I trusted you more than I ever trusted anyone. And you violated me. You made me become a whore.

Yakov: No, I did not!

Dassi: How will we live here together now? How will I raise our children? **(She turns to leave)**

Yakov: Where are you going?

Dassi: To my parents. Tomorrow morning I'll go to the rabbinic court.

Yakov: Are you out of your mind?

Dassi: And I'm taking the girls with me. I'm not going to let them spend the rest of their lives in this hell.

Yakov: Calm down, Dassi. You know I only wanted you to be happy. My intention tells about me more than the act itself.

Dassi: **(In tears)** If you don't give me a divorce, I will leave you without the rabbis' approval. I don't believe in those rabbis anymore anyway. I don't believe in God either. The sky is empty. And if there is a god up there after all, he's cruel and merciless. At the time I need him most, he leaves me tortured alone ... **(She starts walking out to the corridor)**

Yakov: **(Holds her hands)** You are not alone, Dassi, I am here with you. We are husband and wife, and together we'll learn how to live as husband and wife. And if we need to go to that man again, we'll go to him again - as

many times as we need, until we learn how to live in holiness. You hear me? We'll try what we learned from him. **(Tries to hug her)**

Dassi: You don't understand anything! Nothing at all. You never did. Because of you we never achieved that holiness. Because of you we'll never achieve it...

She hits his chest with her fists. He tries to hug her. She gets loose from his grip and sits down on the bed. He approaches her.

Yakov: Everything is forbidden, Dassi, everything is forbidden. But we've got to find our own way to live. Do you know the way? If you do, please tell me, because I don't know anything anymore.

Dassi: Can you go to the pharmacy for me? I have a headache, I need some pills.

Yakov: Sure. **(Notices she's crying)** Don't cry, Dassi, don't cry...

She stops crying. He lets go of her and leaves. She opens the drawer of the bedside dresser, takes out a package of pills, swallows all the pills and lies down in her bed. A change of light indicates a passage of time. Yakov enters. He notices the empty package of pills.

Yakov: Dassi? Dassi? Wake up. Dassi... **(He shakes her body)** Dassi...

End of Act I

Act II

17. Hospital yard.

The Five Younger Daughters appear downstage and sing in chorus.

Daughters: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee,
O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: (Psalms 42, 2-3)

**Dassi is sitting on a garden bench. She is about to be released from the hospital.
Haim sits next to her. He is dressed modern non-religious style.**

Haim: You're going back to him?!

Dassi: He was here yesterday. We talked.

Haim: Don't you want to think about it some more? It's a miracle you're even
alive. Why risk your life again, your wellbeing, your sanity?

Dassi: He said he was sorry, that he regretted it.

Haim: And you still believe what he says?

Ahuva enters

Ahuva: I've arranged our spare rooms for you and the girls. We'll go to the school
now, pick them up, and then drop by your house for some clothes.

Tomorrow morning we'll go the rabbinic court and you'll file for divorce.

Haim: She's going home, Mom.

Ahuva: To him?! Are you out of your mind? **(To Haim)** Was he here?

Haim: Yes.

Ahuva: What did he lure you back with? The man hasn't a god-fearing bone in his
body, you saw that. He will continue to abuse you until you do this horrible
thing again.

Dassi: He really is remorseful, Mom. And I am too. I also have a part in what
happened.

Haim: No, you're not. You were sick. You were under the influence of those pills.

Ahuva: No, I am to blame, Dassi. Me. I chose him for you. I forced you to obey
him. I am to blame for everything he's done to you.

Dassi: I also regret what I did. I asked for his forgiveness as well. I think he
forgives me. I think I forgive him too.

Yakov enters.

Yakov: Ready to go?

Dassi: Yes.
 Ahuva: Dassi...
 Yakov: Let me take your bag. **(He picks up her bag)**
 Ahuva: Yakov, what happened to her will never happen again. The day she sheds but a single tear, we will go the Rebbe.
 Haim: You don't have to go with him, Dassi. I'll be your lawyer. I'll go to the police. To court. What he did to you is considered aggravated indecent assault at the very least. **(To Yakov, furious)** I'll get you a restraining order. You won't be able to enter your home, or even go near it. And if the Rebbe doesn't protect her, I'll file a complaint against him too.
 Dassi: Goodbye, Mom. Goodbye, Haim.
 Ahuva: I'll come to help you prepare the Shabbat, Dassi.

Dassi leaves, following Yakov.

Haim: **(To Ahuva)** As soon as he shows up, you step back? Why? Because he's a prodigy? Because he's such a rich man? She's always listened to you. If you had insisted, she would have come with us.
 Dassi: I can't force her.
 Haim: But you could have persuaded her! But in Ger marriage is sacred. People would rather die than get a divorce.
 Ahuva: She's the one who decided to go back to him, and she's the one who will decide to divorce him. When I tried to convince you to stay in Ger, did you listen to me? From the day you were born you do whatever you want, both of you.

18. Living room.

Dassi and Yakov enter. He carries her bag. She sits down on the sofa.

Yakov: The big ones are at school, and the little ones are with my mother. **(She nods)** I told them you didn't drink enough water and got dehydrated. That's why you had to go to the hospital. That's what I told the neighbors too.
 Dassi: I'll make dinner.

Rabbi Zilber enters.

Zilber: Hello, Hadassah, how are you feeling?

- Dassi: Much better. Thank you.
- Zilber: Did they give you a letter of release in the hospital?
- Dassi: Yes. **(She gives it to him)**
- Zilber: **(Reads it)** How's the Ciprallex¹⁵ been affecting you?
- Dassi: Okay.
- Zilber: The medicines may make you feel better, but they're not a solution to the problem. I went to the Rebbe yesterday. He was deeply concerned. **(He takes a letter out of his briefcase)** He demands full remorse from both of you. Immediate repentance.
- Yakov: Certainly, Rabbi.
- Zilber: From you, too.
- Dassi: Yes, Rabbi.
- Zilber: You are both wise and learned in the Torah. From now on you'll follow the rules more strictly than ever before. When we become weaker in taming our desires, we must heighten the walls. **(To Yakov)** You're allowed to keep your book business. You can use your car, for work purposes only. When Hadassah joins you for a drive, she is to ride only in the backseat. Understood?
- Yakov: Understood.
- Zilber: **(To Dassi)** Understood?
- Dassi: Understood.
- Zilber: **(To Dassi)** You will have to stop working as an educational counselor in our schools. However, you may do secretarial work in a non-educational institution. I'll find you a job in a few days.
- Yakov: But she's been doing a wonderful job in education, Rabbi.
- Zilber: A woman who sinned will not educate children. **(Clears his throat)** In addition: From this day on you are forbidden from addressing one another by your first names. Not only you, Yakov, but you as well, Hadassah. Understood?
- Dassi: Yes, Rabbi.
- Zilber: Intimate relations are to be performed strictly twice a month. No more, no less. Fully clothed. In utter silence. In total darkness.
- Yakov: Yes, Rabbi.
- Zilber: Hadassah?
- Dassi: Yes, Rabbi.
- Zilber: You are to satisfy your husband's needs willingly, so he is not forced to vent them elsewhere.
- Dassi: Yes, Rabbi.

¹⁵ Anti-depressant

Zilber: For any deviation from the rules you'll be severely punished. The girls will be expelled from their schools. You will both be banished from shul. And if that won't do, we will boycott your shops. Understood?

Yakov: Understood.

Zilber: Last but not least, Hadassah: the Rebbe has ordered you to perform a commandment each and every day. You will write down those commandments in a notebook. Every Wednesday after evening prayer, you will both report to my office. With the notebook. And God willing you will live in holiness, and the Divine Spirit will reside in your house forever.

Yakov mumble an "Amen". The Rabbi turns to leave

Dassi: Rabbi...

Zilber: I think I was very clear, Hadassah. There is no room for questions.

Dassi: Rabbi. When I was fluttering between life and death, I chose life. I chose a life that is worth living.

Zilber: Our lives belong to God, they're not ours to choose whether we want them or not.

Dassi: I want to live as a decent Jewish woman and worship the Lord according to His laws. I will not follow any rules that have no halachic basis.

Zilber: Excuse me?! Who are you to decide which rule has a halachic basis, and which doesn't?

Dassi: I'm willing to discuss with you each individual rule, Rabbi. And I mean to continue working as an educational counselor, too. If the Ger schools refuse to hire me, I'll get a university degree and find a job elsewhere.

Zilber: I suggest you stop here, Hadassah.

Dassi: And as for my husband's and my intimate relations, from now on they are strictly our business.

Yakov: This is not my opinion about it, Rabbi.

Zilber: As long as you are part of this community, they are absolutely the Rebbe's and my business.

Dassi: I request that this list of my demands be handed over to the Rebbe. **(She takes a document out of her handbag and hands it to him)**

Zilber: **(Tears the paper)** Hadassah, I'm willing to ascribe your demands to your illness and to the side effects of your medication. I suggest you take the next two days to rest and seriously think over the things you've just said. In the meantime, because of the negative influence your rebelliousness might have on the girls, I forbid you from speaking to them

without the supervision of your husband or another adult member of his family. Understood?

Yakov: Rabbi, that's impossible, she's a mother. A mother can't not speak to her daughters. They love her. They will want to talk to her. I request that the rabbi withdraws this sanction!

Zilber: I will not judge a man in his grief, Yakov, and therefore I'll be lenient with you. For now, you will not be called up to read the Torah in shul until the end of the year. **(He turns to leave, stops and takes some books off the shelf)** And your psychology books will be thrown away.

Dassi: Hold on, Rabbi... **(Yakov signals her to keep quiet)**

Zilber: **(To Yakov)** And your halacha books are to be donated to the Kollel. **(Leaves)**

Yakov: I'll buy all these books for you again. We'll live exactly the way you want. We won't follow any rule that we don't accept.

Dassi: We can't go on living here. We have no choice. We've got to move out of the city. To Bnei Brak.

Yakov: To Bnei Brak?

Dassi: You can run the business from your shop there.

Yakov: Next week, all these sanctions will be removed, Dassi. I'll make donations to the yeshiva, to the mikveh, to the shul, and the Rebbe will keep Rabbi Zilber away from us.

Dassi: And assign us another supervisor instead.

Yakov: I can't leave Jerusalem. The shop here is thriving. I have a good seat in the shul. The girls go to school here. How can we uproot them?

Dassi: So I'll have to close myself up in the house? As soon as I step out to the street people will whisper and stare. He already wants to alienate the girls from me.

Yakov: He knows that no one really follow those rules, Dassi. He doesn't expect us to follow them. He only expects us to tell him that we do. Let's go to him tomorrow, tell him we accept all of his demands, and put an end to all of this. **(Hesitantly)** Can we hug?

Dassi: I didn't go to mikveh in the hospital.

Yakov: I didn't think you did.

They hug. The Five Younger Daughters appear downstage and sing in chorus.

Daughters: Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. (Psalms 128, 1-2)

19. Living room.

Friday night. Dassi lights the Shabbat candles. Her seven daughters – Hanni, Gilli, Sarah, Yochi, Rivkele, Hava and Naomi – sit next to her.

Dassi: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of the holy Shabbat...” **(She lights the candles and mumbles the rest of the blessing) ...**“and cause our light to illuminate that it be not extinguished forever, and let Your face shine upon us that we are saved.”

Girls: Amen.

Dassi: My sweet girls. May God make you as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless you and keep you.

Girls: Amen.

Dassi: How are you, girls? How was school today? **(They don’t reply)** Rivke’le? Sarah’le? Hava? Yochi? Hanni? Naomi? **(They don’t reply)** For three months now, you’ve been avoiding me. For three months you haven’t been speaking to me. I’m your mother. **(They don’t reply)**. You are wise and clever daughters. In each of you there is heart. A warm and wise and honest heart. You don’t have to listen Rabbi Zilber, and not to your headmistress either. You should do as your heart tells you.

Hanni: If we listen to you, we’ll be kicked out of school.

Dassi: “Honor thy father and thy mother” is one of the most important of the Ten Commandments. Your refusal to talk to me abolishes all your holiness.

The girls cover their ears with their hands. Dassi is enraged.

Dassi: Take your hands off your ears! By God, you will listen to me, as long as I’m alive. I am your mother, and I’ll be your mother for the rest of my life!
Take your hands off your ears!!

Hanni: Girls, go to your rooms. Mom still isn’t feeling well.

The Five Younger Girls leave in tears. Dassi stops Hanni and Gilli.

Dassi: **(To Hanni and Gilli)** Wait. **(They stop)** Sit down. **(They sit down)** I’m not angry at the little ones. They’ve been threatened with punishment from heaven. But you are older. You can see that someone is misusing you. **(Pause)** This morning your father and I talked. He permits you to talk to me. I was ill. That’s true. But I’m recovered now. If I had any doubts

before, they are gone now. I observe all the commandments. What have I done you wrong?

Hanni: The Rabbi said you're rebellious.

Dassi: That's a lie.

Hanni: We can see how you treat Dad.

Dassi: I treat him with great respect.

Hanni: We can see how you look down on him.

Dassi: That's not true.

Hanni: You're forcing him to leave Ger and move to Bnei Brak.

Dassi: **(Shocked)** Is that what he told you?!

Hanni: Yes. And we don't want to move. We're happy here. We're going to live here all our lives. All of us.

Gilli: I don't know where I'm going to live, Mom.

Hanni: **(To Gilli)** We all know where we're going to live.

Gilli: And I'm not afraid to talk to you either.

Hanni: **(To Gilli)** Do you want me to tell them about you at school?

Gilli: You can tell them whatever you want.

Dassi: I'm willing to stay here, Hanni, but only if you promise to be my daughters again.

Hanni: We'll be your daughters again, if you go back to worshipping the Lord as He wishes.

Dassi: **(Angry)** As He wishes, or as the rabbis wish?

Hanni: The rabbis know what He wishes.

Dassi: You know better than anyone what the Lord wants from you, Hanni.

Gilli: I don't care what everybody says. I know you're a good and wise mother and I love you.

Gilli hugs Dassi. Yakov returns from shul covered in his tallit, humming a Shabbat song.

Hanni: Dad, did you tell Mom that you we're allowed to talk her?

Yakov: No... **(Flustered)**

Hanni: **(To Dassi)** I hope one day I'll be able to believe you. **(Leaves)**

Gilli: **(To Yakov)** If you don't let us talk to Mom, I'll stop talking to you.

Gilli leaves. Dassi turns to Yakov angrily.

Dassi: Don't blame me. For three months you pretend to be on my side while actually the whole time you're obeying Rabbi Zilber.

Yakov: I'm walking a tightrope, Dassi.

Dassi: It was you who told the girls I wanted to move to Bnei Brak. No one knew but you.

Yakov: I wanted to see if it's a possibility.

Dassi: You tried to turn them against me.

Yakov: I'm always on your side, Dassi.

Dassi: If you're on my side, call them here now, and tell them they're allowed to talk to me.

Yakov: Right now?

Dassi: Yes. Right now.

Yakov: I'm not sure that's the right thing to do. I don't think they should be told one thing at school and another thing by me.

Dassi: You will call them now and tell them to talk to me.

Yakov: It will confuse them, Dassi.

Dassi: Please, call them over here!

Yakov: Rabbi Zilber's decided you can't educate the girls. I haven't managed to change his mind yet. I will go to him again when the Shabbat is over. **(He turns to leave)**

Dassi: I won't be here by then.

Yakov: Where will you be?

Dassi: In Tel Aviv.

Yakov: Why?

Dassi: Because I can't trust you anymore. Because I find your blind obedience to Rabbi Zilber repulsing. Because your hypocritical piety makes me sick.

Yakov: Dassi, the girls think that Rabbi Zilber's speaks the word of God. If I were to undermine him, their whole faith would be undermined.

Dassi: Why shouldn't it be? Let it be undermined to the very core.

Yakov: That's enough, Dassi! That's enough!

Dassi: I understand. Tonight, I will stay at Haim's.

Yakov: On the Shabbat eve? Are you out of your mind?! You can't go tonight. The girls can see you.

She starts walking out, headed to her room to pack a suitcase. Yakov follows her and stops in the entrance to the room.

Yakov: All right, fine. I'll go and talk to Rabbi Zilber right now. By tomorrow, the girls will be talking to you.

Dassi: I'm not going to wait until tomorrow.

Yakov: Don't force me to think that you accuse me of conspiring with Rabbi Zilber just so you could run away from me.

Dassi: I came back to you. You're the one driving me away.

Yakov: I'm driving you away?! I'm begging you to stay!

Dassi: I'm nearly dead. In your cowardice, you join hands with those who want my life.

She enters the living room carrying a suitcase. He grabs her forcefully.

Yakov: You are not going. You are not going! I'm warning you, Dassi. If you leave now, you will never return. The girls will never forgive you. If you go, I won't let you talk to them. You won't see them again, for the rest of your life.

She gets loose from his grip and walks out of the house. The Five Younger Daughters appear downstage and sing in chorus.

Daughters: Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we are escaped. (Psalms 124, 7)

20. Dassi's home in Tel aviv

Dassi is in her apartment, wearing non-religious clothes. Ahuva and Haim enter. Haim is also dressed non-religious.

Ahuva: You must go to the rabbinic court, Dassi. Once they hear that he hasn't been letting you see the girls for six months, they'll give you custody right away.

Haim: When has the rabbinical court ever ruled in favor of a woman?

Ahuva: Whenever she was in the right.

Haim: You must go to the civil court, Dassi, or you'll never see the girls again.

Dassi: What can I ask for in the civil court?

Haim: Joint custody. You'll get them for half of the time. You're also entitled to half of your estate. Yakov's shops are worth a fortune.

Ahuva: It won't be so simple, Ger has very good lawyers, Dassi.

Haim: Don't worry, I know them all too well.

Ahuva: Even if the secular judge rules for joint custody, he can't force it on them.

Haim: Of course he can.

- Ahuva: The girls are not leaving their faith, Haim. If you hadn't persuaded her to abandon the Lord and His commandments, they'd have joined her long ago.
- Haim: She's taken all of her decisions by herself, because of what happened to her.
- Ahuva: Because you took advantage of her weakness!
- Haim: She was weak because you did all you could to tie her down to the community. You never thought to loosen the grip, even when you saw her being crushed.
- Haim: You're a young and beautiful woman, Dassi. And you're smart. And soon you're going to be quite wealthy, too. If you go back to religion and get a divorce in the rabbinical court, you'll be able to start a new family in a community which is less strict, Vizhnitz, Sanz, Chabad¹⁶ and the rabbinical judges would give you your daughters back.
- Haim: You're trying to persuade her to give in again? Hasn't she given in enough? She deserves to live with her daughters, and they deserve to live with her, Mom, wherever and however she chooses.
- Ahuva: The girls will remain religious too!
- Dassi: They will live however they choose to live. I'll settle for having the girls with me half of the time.

Ahuva leaves.

- Haim: Tomorrow we are going to file the suit in the civil court.
- Dassi: On my way home from university today I stopped by the beach.
- Haim: How was it?
- Dassi: I rolled up my skirt, dipped my feet in the water. Up to my knees.
- Haim: And...
- Dassi: One day, God willing, I'll get a bathing suit. **(They both laugh)** There was a young guy there who put on music in some kind of a transistor. A song in English. I didn't understand the words, but the melody just swept me. Suddenly I found myself dancing. **(She becomes silent)** The girls have never been to the beach.
- Haim: Soon, Dassi. Soon. You are giving birth to yourself anew now.

¹⁶ Three Hassidic communities

21. Dassi's home in Tel Aviv

Yakov enters. In the time that's passed since Dassi left, he became even more observant. It's apparent also in his clothing.

Yakov: A lovely apartment.

Dassi: Thank you.

Yakov: I see you're not wearing a wig. **(She doesn't reply)** I hope you observe other things more.

Dassi: I observe what I think is important.

Yakov: Aren't you going to offer me a seat? Neither a glass of water?

Dassi: I'd like to hear your answer first.

Yakov: You look very pretty in these clothes. Who did you dress up so nicely for?

Dassi: That's none of your business.

Yakov: Let me remind you that you're still my wife. I suggest that you behave accordingly.

Dassi: **(Interrupts him)** I'd like to hear your answer now.

Yakov: Like I told you, we want an agreement. But you'll have to withdraw the suit you filed with the civil court.

Dassi: I won't withdraw it until I see the girls. It's been six months that you won't let me see them. Won't let them answer my calls. I knocked on the door and you won't let them open. I'm their mother. I'm entitled to see them.

Yakov: We cannot obey the orders of their secular courts. We must follow our own rules.

Dassi: I'm really sorry but I don't accept your rules anymore.

Yakov: The girls follow them just as I do. If you wish to see them, you should take their feelings into consideration.

Dassi: **(She gives up)** What is your offer? **(He hands her a piece of paper. She reads it)** Domestic peace? What do you mean domestic peace?! Your so-called peace nearly cost me my life! I agreed to meet with you to discuss our divorce agreement.

Yakov: And that's what I'm here for. But you are still my wife and I'm willing to give you another chance. I'm willing to forgive you for abandoning the girls and me.

Dassi: Abandoning the girls! I've been trying to get them back every single day since I've left!

Yakov: Fortunately for you, they still haven't given up on you. They're sitting in the rooms waiting for your return. What should I tell them? That you said no?

Dassi: Haim, my brother, he's my lawyer. I'd like him to go over this agreement.

Yakov: We refuse to talk to that man.

Dassi: You don't have to talk to him. I want to hear his opinion.
 Yakov: Rabbi Zilber will not have lawyers involved. If he'll find out that you're receiving consultation, we'll withdraw the offer.
 Dassi: I'm not going to sign anything without consulting a lawyer first.
 Yakov: I'm sorry. My orders were clear. I have no choice.

He turns to leave.

Dassi: I'll withdraw the suit from the civil court. And I'm willing to negotiate the conditions for domestic peace on my own.
 Yakov: Domestic peace means only one thing. You will leave your life of licentiousness here immediately and come home. And from now on we will all live a god-fearing life according to the Ger rules.
 Dassi: And if we fail?
 Yakov: Then we'll divorce according to this agreement.
 Dassi: An agreement that deprives me of my rights. By law, I'm entitled to half of everything we own.
 Dassi: We will not force you to sign it. But you might want to reconsider it, do you hear me? Even if the court does rule for joint custody, it cannot force it on the girls.

She doesn't reply. He takes the agreement from her hand and turns to leave.

Dassi: Wait a minute, hold on! I'll sign it. I'll sign it now. When can I see the girls?
 Yakov: When you provide us with an official confirmation of your withdrawal of the suit.
 Dassi: I'll withdraw it tomorrow morning. **(She signs the paper)**
 Yakov: Congratulations, mazal tov. Praise the Lord. Tomorrow you can move back in with all your things. We can use my car. I'll help you prepare the house for the Shabbat too. **(She's silent)** Now can I have a glass of water? **(She turns her face away)** Why are you crying?
 Dassi: **(Wiping the tears)** I'm not crying.

22. Dassi's home in Tel Aviv

Dassi is wearing her old Ger clothes. Haim enters.

Haim: **(To Dassi)** Why didn't you tell me? I have to hear about it in the court?
 Dassi: Because I knew you wouldn't let me sign the agreement.
 Haim: Of course I wouldn't! The agreement is illegal. You were coerced to sign it.
 Any judge will annul it.

Ahuva enters, carrying plastic bags with presents.

Ahuva: I've brought you everything you asked, Dassi. Just answer me.
 Why? Why did you agree to sign it?!

Dassi: I owe myself, and Yakov, another chance. Just one more chance.

Ahuva: Yakov!? Haven't you given him enough chances already?!

Dassi: I hope that by some miracle, we will succeed.

Haim: A miracle? What miracle? You're not thinking straight, Dassi.
 Your mind is blurred by those drugs. I don't understand why the doctor let
 you take so much of them.

Dassi: Because I can't do without them.

Ahuva: You take Lorazepam too? How many? Answer me. How many?

Dassi: Three times a day.

Haim: It's going to make you completely apathetic.

Dassi: That's what I need.

Ahuva: If you go on like this you'll have to go to the mental ward in a few weeks.

Dassi: I have to be dazed, Mom. I have to be apathetic. You can't imagine what
 I'm capable of doing when I'm sober.

Dassi bursts in tears. Ahuva sits next to her, stroking her back and her hair.

Ahuva: I think you should move in with us, Dassi. I'll take care of you.
 Once you're better, you'll be able to meet the girls at our place.

Haim: When you meet them, they will love you again.

Dassi: Yakov and the girls know how to love only the way they love over there. I
 have to come back and try to love them their way.

23. Dassi and Yakov apartment in Jerusalem

Dassi enters, carrying plastic bags with presents. Yakov welcomes her.

Yakov: Welcome.

Dassi: Hello.

Yakov: Have a seat. Would you like something to drink?

Dassi: Where are they?

Yakov: In the older one's bedroom.

Dassi: I'd love to see them.

Yakov: In a few moments. They're very excited.

Dassi: I've brought them presents, clothes I got them in Bnei Brak. They must have grown so much in the past six months.

Yakov: Yes, they have.

Dassi: I'd like to give them the presents.

Yakov: In a moment. I told you. They're very excited. Very fearful.

Dassi: Of me?!

Yakov: God forbid. They've been looking forward to seeing you. But when the taxi pulled over by the house, they saw you getting off without your stuff.

Dassi: I had to go to the doctor this morning and I didn't have time to pack.

Yakov: They're afraid you might have come without your stuff because you're not really coming back.

Dassi: Of course I'm coming back. I'll finish packing after Shabbat.

Yakov: I can drive you to Tel Aviv now, help you pack and bring everything over in my car.

Dassi: That's fine with me. Let me just see the girls and then we can go.

She turns toward the girls' room. Yakov stops her.

Yakov: They're not going to see you before you bring your things.

Dassi: Is that what they told you?

Yakov: Yes.

Dassi: I'd like to hear it from them.

Yakov: They won't talk to you before they know for sure that you're coming home.

Dassi: I don't believe you. You closed them in their room so I don't see them.

Yakov: You're wrong.

Dassi: *You* want me to bring my things right now. *You* don't want me to see them before I do.

Yakov: We all want to be sure that you are actually coming home.

- Dassi: Of course I am. I'll bring my things after Shabbat. I wasn't feeling well this morning.
- Yakov: I hope that's the only the reason.
- Dassi: I'm also scared, yes. You all are armed with God, and I come to you with empty hands.
- Yakov: Once you repent and go back to living in holiness, you will trust in the Lord and you will not be scared anymore.
- Dassi: Only after I see the girls, I'll be able to live in holiness.
- Yakov: They'll see you only in the evening after you've brought your things here.
- Dassi: I would like to hear them say it.
- Yakov: When you return home and go back to living in holiness. **(She's silent)**
You should know what they've been through all these months. **(He takes out a bundle of letters from a folder and starts reading them out)**
Sarah wrote to you: "We hate you with all our hearts. Everyone mocks and despises us. We don't have any girlfriends because of you." Yochi wrote: "Even if you repent, we won't believe you, we'll never be your daughters again." Rivkele wrote: "If you were our mother, you would behave as a devout, modest, pure woman, so we would follow in your footsteps". Hava wrote: "It's not Dad who turned us against you, you did it yourself by choosing to live a life of licentiousness in Tel Aviv".
- Dassi: They never wrote that! You dictated it to them!
- Yakov: There's more. I didn't send you those letters because I didn't want to break your heart
- Dassi: I want to hear them say it. Let me see them!
- Yakov: You will see them when you come back home.
- Dassi: I'm going to see them now!

She tries to walk to the girls' room. Yakov stands in her way. She hits him on the chest with fists. But he's stronger than her. Rabbi Zilber enters.

- Zilber: Let go of her. **(To Dassi)** We've done all we could to bring you back, and you lead us astray. Now it is as clear as the full moon that you are not going to return to faith. You never meant to. Take your presents now, and leave. The agreement is off. We will never negotiate with you again.
- Dassi: I'm not leaving without my daughters.
- Zilber: **(To Dassi)** I should have banished you on the day you first revealed your rebelliousness, but unfortunately, I was too lenient. You will never see your daughters again. You will not make them question their faith, you will not

arouse in them the desires that have driven you to madness. The day you dare to come near them, we will stone you. Go now!

Yakov: He told you to go, so go, you whore!

Zilber: Go!!

24. Street outside Dassi's and Yakov's house in Jerusalem

Dassi is standing in the street, wearing a headscarf and sunglasses, Holding the bags of presents in her hands, waiting for the girls to leave for school. The first to appear is Sarah.

Dassi: Sarah'le, good morning. How are you? It's me. It's mommy. **(She takes off her sunglasses)** Why are you in such a hurry? Wait, I can't keep up with you anymore. I bought you a new dress...

But Sarah leaves. Yochi enters.

Dassi: Yochi. You're wearing Hanni's dress. I remember the day I bought it for her. You're as tall as her now. Wait, don't be afraid of me. You don't think for a moment that I would hurt you, do you? I'm very glad that you pass your dresses to one another, but every now and then you deserve to get something new of your own. Look. It's blue. With lace. Where are you rushing to? I missed you so much.

But Yochi leaves. Rivkele enters.

Dassi: My sweet Rivkele. My little wild girl. Come here, let me fix up your braids. Hold on. I want to talk to you. The day you were born I could see in your eyes that you were wiser than all of us. You'll know why I left. Wait a minute! I bought you a blouse...

But Rivkele leaves. Hava enters.

Dassi: Hava. I wrote you three different times and you didn't write back. You got me worried. How's school? It's as if you were born only yesterday and you're going to finish seminary this year. A year from now you'll be standing under the canopy at your wedding, and I'll be standing beside you. Wait, Hava...

But Hava spits in her face. Naomi enters.

Dassi: Naomi, my child. You're not going to run away from me, are you? You are my sweet beloved child. I'm not going to give up on you. Let me just hug you for a bit. Let me give you a present. I'll die if you go... **(Crying)** Wait, Naomi'le. I'm your mother for God's sake, what have I done you wrong?!

Naomi leaves. Gilli enters, holding a bag in her hand.

Gilli: Mom, is everything all right?

Dassi: Gilli...

Gilli: I'm coming with you.

Dassi: Are you sure?

Gilli: I'm sure.

Dassi: You're going to give up your sisters? And Dad?

Gilli: I hate this place. I hate the people here. I'll never forgive them for what they did to you. Even more so I hate God for concealing Himself from you. I'll never forgive Him. **(They hug)**

25. Yakov's home in Jerusalem and Dassi's home in Tel Aviv

20 June, 2016. Night. Light on Yakov's house. Yakov, Rabbi Zilber and Hanni are present.

Zilber: We have no choice, Yakov. This book will cause horrible damage, not just to your family but to the entire Ger community. It will hurt the Rebbe.

Yakov: But I don't have the money, Rabbi, I really don't.

Zilber: You have more than enough.

Yakov: If I don't buy apartments for all of my girls no one will marry them. The Rabbi knows all about the rejections Hannah got before I managed to marry her off.

Zilber: The Rebbe helped and he will help again. The community will help too.

Yakov: I need to pay her so she doesn't get back at me?

Zilber: Would you rather she published the book?

Yakov: How much will we give her?

Zilber: A million.

Yakov: It's too much. She doesn't deserve that much.

Zilber: We have no choice.

Yakov: She won't accept it.

Zilber: So we'll raise the offer.

Hanni: Please, Dad, we've got to put an end to this.

Light on Dassi's house. Haim enters. He gives Dassi a tight hug.

Haim: I thought I knew everything, Dassi. Until I've read your book, I knew nothing. How did you manage to pretend all these years? How did you manage to stay silent? How could I not see it? How could Mom not see it? There are thousands of other women there, who keep silent. **(Pause)** And yet, Dassi, you can't publish this book.

Dassi: Why?

Gilli: With this book she can finally win back her honor. In her own eyes as well.

Haim: But for what price? **(To Dassi)** If the girls read it, you'll lose them forever.

Gilli: Exactly the opposite. Maybe they'll understand also why I left.

Haim: They're afraid to understand. It's a good thing you wrote this book, Dassi. I'm sure that writing gave you strength. But you know Ger. If you publish it, the Rabbis will slander you in their newspapers. You'll be stoned. The girls will never see you. Is that what you want? This book has done its part. They're terrified of it. They're willing to pay you a million. Pick up the phone now and tell them you won't publish it.

Dassi: In exchange for money?

Haim: In exchange for visitation arrangements with the girls.

Gilli: If you don't publish this book, we will all continue to live a lie. Is that what you want?

Dassi picks up the phone and dials. The phone rings in Yakov's house. Yakov answers the phone.

Yakov: Hello?

Dassi: I'm willing to cancel the publishing of the book.

Yakov: **(To Rabbi Zilber)** She's willing to cancel the publishing of the book.

Dassi: On the condition that we make visitation arrangements for me with the girls.

Zilber: First we'll need a written statement saying you will bury the book forever.

Haim: **(Whispers to her)** We can do that.

Dassi: Certainly. When will I be able to see them?

Zilber: If you deliver the statement to us, as soon as tomorrow.

Dassi: All right. I'll come tomorrow in the evening. I hope they read the manuscript by then.

Yakov: Absolutely not. They cannot read it.

Dassi: I promise to bury the book, but they must know what's in it.

Zilber: If you insist, Hadassah, we'll have to go to court.

Haim: **(Whispers to her)** Don't worry.

Gilli: **(To Rabbi Zilber)** We'll be very happy to have the truth revealed in court.
(To Hanni) Hanni, you knew Mom better than all of us. You know how much she loves us. And you know she would never abandon us just because of her evil desires. If you were to ask her, you would hear how many times Dad had abandoned her.

Yakov: Don't answer, Hannah.

Dassi: I never abandoned you, Hanni. Even when I was far away...

Zilber: Don't listen to her! She's locked in a prison of her own lies. We tried in vain to save her.

Haim: Leave her alone, Dassi. Let me negotiate an agreement, and you'll get to see the girls. After all, that's what you want. Isn't it?

Dassi: No! I don't want any more agreements! I want to meet with them after they have read the book! **(To Hanni)** You too, Hanni.

Hanni: Don't force me, Mom. Please, don't force me. I don't want to know more than I already know. I don't want to understand more than I already understand. I want to go on with my life...

Dassi: If you'll understand me more, you'll stop being afraid of me. Please give me this one last chance.

Hanni: I have to hold on to what I've got, Mom. My husband. My son. The mercy of the Lord. And yes, Dad, too.

Dassi: And what about me? You'll never be able to banish me from your life, even if you want to. You are my flesh and blood, Hanni. Your soul grew inside my soul. Therefore, I know that you are just like me. You'll never give in, you'll never be satisfied only with what they allow you.

Hanni: I am actually very satisfied with what they allow me.

Dassi: Hanni...

Hanni leaves. The light goes off on Yakov's house. Ahuva is hugging Dassi.

Haim: Don't give up, Dassi.

Dassi: I must have hurt them more than I thought.

Haim: They'll grow older and wiser.

Dassi: I thought they were stronger and braver.

Gilli: One day, they'll understand.

Ahuva: And they'll come to you and ask for your forgiveness.

Haim: They haven't forgotten what a good mother you are.
 Dassi: Maybe we really should wait a little longer before we publish the book.
 Ahuva: I think you'll have to go away for a while, Dassi. Rumors about your book have spread like wildfire.
 Dassi: Good.
 Haim: Mom's right, Dassi.
 Ahuva: They'll make your life a living hell. I know a little hotel in Haifa. No one there knows who we are. I've booked us a room.
 Gilli: I'll come with you.
 Dassi: We'll go tomorrow. I'm tired now. Go to sleep.
 Haim: Are you sure?
 Dassi: I'll take a pill and sleep too. We'll talk tomorrow. Good night, Mom.
 Gilli: Good night. **(Hugs her)**
 Haim: Good night. **(Hugs her)** Haifa has a wonderful beach, Dassi. Seashells. Seagulls. Golden sand. You can get a bathing suit on the way there. There are no supervisors there, no rabbis, no God. And where there is no god, people can try loving each other.

Dassi nods. Ahuva, Haim and Gilli leave. Dassi stays alone. She stops to think and then takes a pen and paper and writes a short letter, puts it on the table, takes her handbag and leaves. The Five Younger Daughters appear downstage. They sing the Kaddish in Aramaic.

Daughters: Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.
 B'alma di v'ra chirutei,
 v'yamlich malchutei, v'ytzamach purkanei
 b'chayeichon uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol beit Yisrael,
 baagala uviz'man kariv.
 V'im'ru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almaya.
 Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar v'yitromam
 V'yitnasei, v'yit'hadar v'yitaleh v'yit'halal
 Sh'mei d'Kud'sha B'rich Hu,
 l'eila min kol birchata, shirata,
 tushb'chata v'nechemata, daamiran b'alma.
 V'imru: Amen.

Gilli enters and speaks to the audience.

Gilli: In the morning, we found the letter she left behind in which she asked that the book be published. We started looking for her. A week later her body was found inside her car by the beach. In her hand there was a note that she wrote in her last moments alive: "I died because I loved too much."

Daughters: Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,
V'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael.
V'imru: Amen.
Oseh shalom bimromav,
Hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,
v'al kol amo Yisrael.
V'imru: Amen.

Blackout.

The End