**ALMA AND RUTH**

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# SCENE 1

**Hanukkah. A Saturday afternoon at Alma’s home.**

(A menorah sits on the table. AMIR, a plain-clothed soldier lights traditional Jewish memorial candle. He stares at an empty jar in front of him and flowers in it. He puts some DISCO MUSIC on and helps himself to some food. He then sits at the table and eats (whilst reading the paper.)

Enter: ALMA (a small suitcase in hand. She’s on her mobile, sounding absolutely fuming.)

ALMA: (ON PHONE) Of course you’ve made a mistake! If you've bothered checking the act then you wouldn't have made one, would you?! No, don’t. It’s not your fault. End of the After all, you *are* a man; one look around and your right on track; never an eye for detail. You saw a grey suitcase like yours; with a red label on it, just like yours so obviously, you figured, “Yeah, I’ll just grab that one! Why not?!” Did you stop and read what was actually written on the label?! No, you just took the suitcase and off you went! If you’d taken all of half a second to check the details, then you might have realized the case was in fact mine – *not* yours. Oh, nowhere near as sorry as I am! Yes, please, as soon as possible! Oh, you need the address, do you? Here’s a thought – check the bloody label!

(He comes down from the office)

AMIR: (IN ENGLISH) Mama! Welcome, home! **(IN HEBREW)** What happened?

ALMA: I spent over an hour waiting for my luggage… everyone else on my flight had already gone home but mine’s the only suitcase that hadn't come out, then it hit me... this other grey suitcase that looks like mine, and has already been round the carousel about 18 times! You know where this is going… you heard me on the phone just now… useless idiot said he’d bring it round tomorrow. Ooh, flowers look nice.

AMIR: Got them for you. So whose suitcase is *this*, then?

ALMA: The halfwit with no eye for detail, clearly… and since he took mine, I thought it only fair to return the favor.

AMIR: Quite right. Now you’re talking!

AMIR: (TO ALMA) Hungry?

ALMA: Desperate for caffeine.

AMIR: Coming right up. (He goes off to make some coffee.) (Alma removes her coat [it’s December] and sits down.)

AMIR: How was Frankfurt?

ALMA: Absolutely glorious. How was graduation?

AMIR: Hasn’t happened yet. The cadets’ ceremony is in three days’ time; then, the guys and I are having the discharge party.

ALMA: (FREAKS OUT) What, you mean here?! In our house? AMIR:Yeah! RSVPs already at 300. Do you want to book the stripper or shall I? ALMA: Alright, that’s enough of that…

AMIR: Come on, you know I’m only kidding … of course we’re having it at the base (He brings some coffee and a slice of cake.)

ALMA: (Eager to help herself to some cake) Ooh, You got cake!

AMIR: No, actually you did. Ten days ago. (She puts the slice back on the plate.)

AMIR: And how many authors ended up falling hopelessly in love with you?

ALMA: 79.

AMIR: Is that all?!

ALMA: There just wasn’t enough time. Amir, I was SO busy; meetings and press conferences round the clock. I was doing press conference for this new book by this up-and-coming Orthodox writer I’ve been working with the last few months. By the time I was finished, I had about 200 publishers come up to me, and! This big-time French publishing house is looking to make an offer on the rights…

AMIR: So, was there… any action?

ALMA: Oh, lots of action.

AMIR: Of the… romantic kind?

ALMA: What romance are you referring to

AMIR: (Lightly scolding her) You were literally surrounded by publishers, authors, editors and amateurs from all over the world and all you did was network?! Surely, at least you could go out for a nice coffee…

ALMA: I am sorry you're disappointed by me….

AMIR: You’ve been on your own five years now…

ALMA: No I haven’t. I’ve got you.

AMIR: Umm, yeah… I’ve been meaning to have a word with you about that…

ALMA: Are you worried I’ll end up decrepit, old woman, all alone in front of the TV? Is that it? …

AMIR: Getting warmer…

ALMA: And that you’ll end up growing old right there beside me…?

AMIR: Super warm! On fire even…

ALMA: (LAUGHING) So basically, you’re worried about yourself.

AMIR: Well, yeah! But Mum, seriously! How did you manage to let all those French men slip away like that? You do know what they say about The French, don’t you? They’re supposed to be amazing lovers….

ALMA: (DISMISSING HAND GESTURE) Darling, have I had any messages?

AMIR: About 400. All waiting upstairs on your desk in the office. By the way, this eh – Frum author who got the French all excited… (Alma meanwhile goes over to check her messages), what’s her novel about?

ALMA: It’s the story of a 12-year-old orthodox girl living in an all-girls boarding school.

AMIR: Is that it?

ALMA: When did you start taking an interest in the books I publish?

AMIR: When did you start getting so coy about the books you publish?

ALMA: What is this? Something’s obviously bothering you so come on, out with it.

AMIR: Why now? Now of all times, why go with a religious story?

ALMA: Because now, of all times, is when it ended up on my desk. And because it's a powerful, subversive, authentic story – that’s why.

AMIR: Right. And obviously, this is a community you’ve always felt this tremendous kinship with... (Grabs the paper) here, they mention this interview you did in Germany. Great photo, by the way. (Reads out): Let’s explore… some of Dr. Alma Segev’s finest quotes, shall we?

“*The ultra-orthodox are a no more than a pack of freeloading parasites… showing nothing but contempt for Zionism whilst dining on its every achievement*…” Did you really have to turn on the Anti-Semitism, *and* in a German newspaper no less?

ALMA: Anti-Semitism?! (Takes the paper from him) I was talking about her book… and about the religious establishment – that simply cannot go hand-in-hand with secular ideology…

AMIR: For God's sake, mum!

ALMA: Seeing as it’s only ever shown nothing but disdain for the values of democracy. (Reads through) they obviously took some things out of context.

AMIR: Well, journalists *are* notorious for taking the best sound bites out of context… God, you do realize we’ll never hear the end of it from Maya.

ALMA: Maya doesn’t even read the papers.

AMIR: Oh, she’ll read this one. Obviously, this is why you didn’t tell me.

ALMA: Excuse me?

AMIR: You’re doing it on purpose, aren’t you?

ALMA: Of course I am. It is genuinely an outstanding book. Written in the most extraordinary language…

AMIR: Answer me this: Is it really worth it, destroying Maya over some

blink-twice and-you’ll-miss-it, dime-a-dozen manuscript?

ALMA: (Alma get angry and defensive) A Dime-a-dozen manuscript?! The girl in this book; she’s as rebellious and brave as they come! She has the guts to run away from boarding school, sneak into bookshops, read in public parks… then, the rabbi headmaster steps in and takes her under his wing; starts giving her all this attention; all this love and affection… of course, she finds a spiritual mentor in him and then, for the next two years, it turns into the most harrowing tale of sexual abuse. You call that a blink-twice-and-you’ll miss-it manuscript?

AMIR: (Sarcastic) Get it Headmaster delivers masterpiece! How does it all end?

ALMA: She files a complaint and the housemother kicks her out of boarding school.

AMIR: Is this a true story?

ALMA: Who knows… could very well be, but what difference does it make? It is a powerful, subversive, and important piece of writing.

ALMA: You just blinked! I saw that. What were you thinking about?

(BRIEF PAUSE)

AMIR: Just that tonight’s the first night of Hanukkah and Maya… may have invited me for a candle-lighting at her place (Alma goes silent). I told her it might be the both of us. It’s also dad’s anniversary…

(Alma takes a sip from her coffee. She does not answer.)

AMIR: Any thoughts?

ALMA: You’re the one she’s invited, not me. And I’m not about to show up uninvited after almost two years of total silence…

AMIR: Actually… I have been in touch with her. We’ve been seeing a bit more of each other lately.

ALMA: (Eyes him quizzically)

AMIR: You do realize there’s no reason for the two of you not to see each other.

ALMA: Or for you to have been keeping secrets from me.

AMIR: No, you’re right. I’m sorry.

ALMA: (OUT OF THE BLUE) Is she happy?

AMIR: What the hell do I know about happiness?

ALMA: Well you have been seeing her, haven’t you? Can’t you tell?

AMIR: She does miss you.

ALMA: Oh really ,she’s managed to hide exceptionally well.

AMIR: Mum, stop it; Let’s just go over there, light some candles and who knows… we may finally have the miracle we’ve been waiting for.

(Alma resumes perusing her post)

AMIR: Why are you being so difficult?!

ALMA: Oh, *I’m* being difficult?! She’s the one who wanted to cut off all ties so she could “find God…” all I’ve been doing is respecting *her* wishes, no matter the pain it’s caused me.

AMIR: That’s exactly the problem. You’re both digging your heels in. Come on, can’t we just give it a go?

ALMA: Stop being such a child. Amir, unless she specifically invites me then I’m sorry, darling, you’re wasting your breath.

AMIR: You’re her mother; you don’t need a bloody invitation!

ALMA: (ON THE OFFENSIVE) Says who?!

AMIR: Whoa! Try taking it down a notch?... Hanukkah always gets to you… it always makes you a bit… (does a gesture suggesting an emotional state)

ALMA: Yes, well… now that every first candle has to have a memorial one next to it… Hanukkah turns me into a bit of a … into this. Every year, I miss him a little bit more.

AMIR: Me too.

(BRIEF PAUSE)

ALMA: Right. It’s still Shabbat so unless you’ve counted at least three stars in the sky, you’re stuck here with me. How about a game?

AMIR: Don't feel like it

ALMA: Dig deeper then. You’ll be so desperate to win you’ll forget that I ever pissed you off

(They begin a spirited game of *Name that Book / Movie / Play*.)

AMIR: (LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW) Right, that’s a star! I’m off.

ALMA: For Christ’s sake; Amir, that’s a plane.

AMIR: I’m running out of patience here. Bloody stars taking their time on purpose.

ALMA: As well they should! It’s half past four. No self-respecting star would ever show up this early.

AMIR: Cool. I think I’ll go to Maya’s via Kiev Can’t have us desecrating the Sabbath, can I?

ALMA: Hang on… I want you to give this to Maya… (She takes a wallet out of her handbag, takes out some banknotes and stuffs them in an envelope.) Hide this in her fridge, or the microwave or whatever… otherwise she’ll never take it. Probably a cardinal sin now, accepting my help… (Hands him the envelope, as well as the manuscript). Oh yeah, that too.

 AMIR: What the hell’s this? Oh my God, is that that Framer's novel?! Mum are you serious?! That is one bad, *bad* idea!

ALMA: Fine. You don’t want to; you don’t have to.

 **(Takes the manuscript away.)**

 AMIR: But why would you even want her to have it?

ALMA: Offer her a different perspective on this new world of hers.

AMIR: And you seriously think *this* is what’ll help you two get closer…

ALMA: If it moves her even an inch closer to reality, it will sooner or later also get us closer to each other.

AMIR: She’ll be very offended. You know she will.

ALMA: Good! Let her show up here, guns blazing – bring it on! She can scream, shout, carry on! I can take it. As long as there’s some kind of talking. It’s not as if I have any other way of getting through to her, do I? (He yields and takes the manuscript)

AMIR: By the way, what’s his name called?

ALMA: Who?

AMIR: You know, poverty poet guy; the one whose poetry book you published? He also sent flowers.

ALMA: (SIZES UP THE FLOWERS) I see… so *he’s* the one who sent these flowers! Got off easy, you… Oh well, it’s the thought that counts.

AMIR: Maybe you could see him socially some time? He could be just the thing you’re looking for.

ALMA: What makes you think I’m even looking?

(Exits the room)

AMIR: (TO A PHOTO OF HIS FATHER IN THE LOUNGE) (SINGING): *Papa, can you hear me*? (SPEAKING) Some “family” you left me. Was this your idea of an inheritance? A manual, at the very least, would not have gone unappreciated! Dad, she needs love… you must get that, right? A mile-long queue of ready and willing men and still, nothing. So now, you need to get into her dreams and slowly start letting her know that it’s okay! That you’re on board. Tell you what, *you* choose! Find her someone you’re okay with… She deserves it. And let’s face it, you were hardly Mr. Perfect yourself. Urgent, whatever. We’ll pick this up another time. Oh yeah… Happy Hanukkah, dad.

# SCENE 2

ALMA’S PLACE – HANUKKAH NIGHT 2 – RUTH AND ALMA

Sunday afternoon. (Ruth is sat at a desk, perusing her manuscript. A glass of water on the desk. Alma comes down from her upstairs office, phone in hand.)

ALMA: (ON PHONE) Print? What are you even talking about? We’re ages away from going to print because if I’m honest, I’m actually not that thrilled with your translation. Of course we’re going talk about it. No, not right now; I’m about to go into another meeting. No, we’ll talk tomorrow. Bye now.

ALMA: Sorry about that Ruth, he’s been hounding me for days. Right, where were we?

RUTH: The heroine’s fiancé…

ALMA: Right, of course. Your protagonist’s about to get engaged…

RUTH: Yes.

ALMA: And *does* she want to get married? *Does* she actually love him? Or is she looking for a way out of this wedding? You need to make a choice here because at the moment, it isn’t very clear where she stands.

RUTH: What if she’s having doubts?

ALMA: Then you write about those doubts. *Why* is she having doubts? Is she repulsed by the guy? Does she find the idea of marriage somehow threatening?

RUTH: I can’t write about doubts. She lives in a world where arranged marriages are a part of life. Everyone wants a good match. They all want to get married.

ALMA: Except she’s not ‘everyone’, is she? She’s different. She defies convention. She doesn’t take everything for granted … (Looks straight at her) Do you see what I’m saying??

RUTH: Yes… but I’m not sure you see what *I’m* saying…

ALMA: I see exactly what you’re saying. Ruth, you’re keeping yourself in your comfort zone. Think back to that chapter when that awful thing happens to her at boarding school and then she gets expelled.

RUTH: I was trying to highlight her loneliness; show how isolated she was.

ALMA: And I felt that. And it was brilliant. But already in this chapter, both the mother and the uncle just disappear from the story.

RUTH: That was intentional. She’s left all alone to face the Lord with all the questions she has.

ALMA: The thing is, Ruth, characters can’t just go “poof!” and fall off the face of the novel… it’s as if the author herself is trying to get rid of them.

RUTH: Maybe she is.

**(They both laugh)**

AMIR: Oh hey. (Flower bouquet in hand), your poet paramour says hi. Just ran into the courier, coming up the stairs.

ALMA: Hi darling. Ruth, this is my son, Amir…. Amir, this is Ruth, the author I was telling you about.

AMIR: (EXTENDS A HAND WHICH SHE DOESN’T SHAKE) Hey… heard you killed it in Frankfurt. Well done.

RUTH: Thanks.

(They laugh)

AMIR: I’m going upstairs… work on my music. If the playing bothers you, then… you’ll get over it.

(Heads up to the office)

ALMA: Right, so coming back to the uncle and her mother… you need to let her confront them. Have it out with them and tell them exactly how she feels…

RUTH: But they’ve both shunned her!!!

ALMA: Well, maybe it’s time for her to pack a bag and move out then!

RUTH: Do you honestly expect an ultra-orthodox girl to just get up and leave? That would be an incredibly difficult thing to do in her world.

ALMA: Difficult is good. It’s interesting. Write about her difficulties. Let her fight and get hurt; let her reach out and touch the pain… don’t just let her run off and think she can fix everything with a quick act of penance.

RUTH: Are you saying I should change her decision to do a ‘Tikkun’[[1]](#footnote-2)?

ALMA: It’s an inexplicable choice! Your girl is a victim! Why Tikkun?! For what?! What in the world does she have to repent for?!

RUTH: She’s been with a man. She feels Impure

ALMA: A 12-year-old girl Impure?

**(The briefest of pauses. They size up each other. Ruth can hear Amir’s playing.)**

ALMA: Ruth, let me ask you something; an orthodox girl who’s been through this kind of trauma; is she offered any therapy or counseling?

RUTH: No one talks about it. But having relations with a man… that’s a sin.

ALMA: Even when there was no consent?

RUTH: As far as Jewish law is concerned, if no one saw or heard her scream… and she didn’t try to get away, then yes; it’s a sin.

ALMA: I’ll be honest with you; I’m having a really hard time processing this.

RUTH: Doing "Tikkun'

… this need to purge yourself; Alma, it’s something that comes from deep inside … it’s something you can’t really explain …

ALMA: But you do have to explain it Ruth, you have to. If I’ve got this right, you go and do "Tikkun" to repent for something you feel guilty about; so far, so good?

RUTH: Yes.

ALMA: Then let your protagonist get to the truth and realize she’s *not* to blame.

RUTH: (SIPS HER WATER) Alma, she’s not a psychologist. It’s how she feels. And because of that, she ends up paying a price.

ALMA: So… no realizations then. None at all…?

RUTH: What kind of realizations?

ALMA: If no other character’s going to step in and tell her *she’s* actually the victim here, then God himself should spell it out for her! She already spends the whole book talking to Him.

RUTH: The Lord doesn’t give advice, Alma… it’s not what He does. She feels this guilt, okay? And I can’t change that. How about we come back to this tomorrow? I could come round in the morning…

ALMA: I thought you had seminary in the mornings.

RUTH: Please God, the plan is to come down with something tomorrow morning, so … no seminary for me. It’s not as if there isn’t enough talk already …. (They laugh) (She gets up, walks over to the bookcase and puts a book back on the shelf) oh, and thanks for the Amos Oz one…

ALMA: So you *have* read it. Help yourself to another one then!

RUTH: I think my mother’s been getting a bit suspicious this week. I really should be careful with these books. (She can hear Amir’s playing – either the piano or trombone) we used to have a local library, you know… and not one book was left intact. None of them. Whole pages got scribbled on; some glued together; sentences redacted with black markers; whole paragraphs Tipp-Exed … that’s how I got into writing. I always tried to continue the stories. Eventually, they burnt the whole place down.

(The music stops)

ALMA: So much for ‘People of the Book,’ eh? (She walks over to her library and hands her another book) here’s one for you. And when you’re finished with this book, you come back and take another, and another. This way, you’re doing it one at a time and off anyone’s radar. As far as I’m concerned, you’re welcome to the whole lot. (She smiles with a hint of irony) and if reading is a sin, then it’ll be my privilege to corrupt you! (They both laugh).

RUTH: Your son… he plays beautifully.

ALMA: He does, doesn’t he? He’s always the funniest one in the room but whenever he plays, I can hear all his pain.

(Enter Amir, holding an unopened can of Red Bull.)

AMIR: I’m not interrupting, am I?

ALMA: No, we've literally just finished. (Walks over to the kitchen

AMIR Has she been cracking the whip?

RUTH: You have no idea.

AMIR: (Asks for the book) May I? *The Lover*, hmm… (reads the back blurb) I wouldn’t get too excited. It’s not what you think…

RUTH: (SMILES) What makes you think you know what gets me excited?

AMIR: Touché. Want one? (Hands her the Red Bull can.)

 RUTH: What’s that?

AMIR: Red Bull. Gives you wings, this. The Glatt Kosher kind!

RUTH: Umm… yeah, I’m good thanks.

RUTH: You play really well.

AMIR: Cheers. Want to stay for the candle-lighting?

RUTH: (CHECKS THE TIME, AT ONCE DARTS TO HER FEET) Thank you but I really can’t. They’re waiting for me at home. I don’t want to worry them.

AMIR: No worries. C’mon. I’ll give you a lift.

RUTH: No, really; it’s fine.

AMIR: What do you mean? You’d be lucky to get home for Passover with public transport.

ALMA: (WALKING PAST) Stop pressuring her.

AMIR: Seriously, come on. You can hop off a couple of blocks away from your place. Everyone does it.

RUTH: Thank you, but I’m fine.

ALMA: (WALKS IN, PUTTING FLOWERS IN THE LOUNGE) For God’s sake, she can’t be alone in a car with you…

AMIR: Why not?

RUTH: Lest there be ‘Yichud’[[2]](#footnote-3)…

AMIR: (SARCASTIC) Right! ‘Yichud,’ of course! How could I forget?

RUTH: (TURNS TO LEAVE) Goodbye.

AMIR: See you later.

RUTH: See you.

AMIR: Bye now.

RUTH: Goodbye. (She exits)

(PAUSE)

ALMA: Have you lost your mind?! Flirting with a Frumer?!

AMIR: She started it. Jesus Christ, those eyes!

(She sits down, he hands her an envelope.)

ALMA: What’s this?

AMIR: Your guess is as good as mine.

ALMA: (Opens it) Oh yeah… so I may have enrolled you at the Music Academy. You’re in, by the way. They only want to hear you play.

AMIR: You’ve enrolled me at the music academy… why would you do that? Have I ever asked you to do that for me?

ALMA: No, but you’re talented and it’s not as if you weren’t going to go to school anyway, sooner or later.

AMIR: Exactly! Sooner or later. I haven’t even started thinking about where I want to apply, let alone when!

ALMA: Alright, alright; I was only trying to make things easier for you. Didn’t want you missing out on this school year.

AMIR:, You’re not making things easier, mum.. You just go and make these decisions for other people. Trust me, if I’d wanted this, I’d have come to you and asked.

ALMA: Can you *please* not pick a fight with me right now? We have a momentous occasion coming up tomorrow. Maya rang.

AMIR: No way!

ALMA:. She and her husband are coming over for the candle-lighting. Do you think you can make it?

AMIR: I’ll turn the whole base upside down if I have to; of course I’ll make it! But mum, you need to promise me… tomorrow’s about burying the hatchet. We need to get back to being a family again… like we used to be. So please, no

'Alma drama… '

ALMA: (INTERRUPTING HIM) Amir, she’s my daughter… two years… wow… I guess Ruth’s book must have hit the nerv ,after all. How about that?

AMIR: (SALUTING) The book’s done its duty, and now it can happily be retired. (Alma shoots him a look and heads into the kitchen.) (To his father’s photo) Dad, please, make sure it goes well.

ALMA: (FROM THE KITCHEN) what was that?

AMIR: Nothing.

FADE OUT.

FADE INTO:

# SCENE 3

AMIR: (IN ENGLISH) Sis! Welcome! (The bell rings. Enter: MAYA.) Wait, is it just you?

MAYA: Yeah… it’s better that way.

AMIR: As long as *you’re* here.

MAYA: Where’s mum?

AMIR: (TOWARDS THE KITCHEN) Mother!!! Miss Menorah 2019 is in the house! (Alma appears)

MAYA: Hi mum…!

ALMA: (THEY LINGER A MOMENT IN FRONT OF EACH OTHER, HESITANT) I’m so happy you’re… I was so scared you’d…

AMIR: (PRETEND-FILMING) Ladies, c’mon. This is a historic occasion and we’re not even sure there’s going to be a sequel, so can I see a token hug at least? (They embrace)

MAYA: (EMOTIONAL, WHISPERING) I’ve missed you *so*… so much…

ALMA: Aww love…

**(They hug)**

ALMA: (EMOTIONAL, SIZING HER UP) Darling, you look amazing… (Whispering) Are you pregnant?

MAYA: No, we’ve not really had too much luck so far… but, please God…

ALMA: Oh yeah, yes, of course… He’s a regular miracle worker on that front (She’s a little flustered) Amir; darling, are the latkes still on the hob or did I switch it off?

AMIR: *I* did. So… sister dearest; how have you been (Eyes her) weren't you wearing a wig yesterday?

MAYA: I was.

AMIR: So, what’s with the bandana? You a religious biker chic ???????????

(They laugh)

MAYA: I got you both a little something. (She hands it to Amir) (He opens it) (To Alma) thanks for having us round at such short notice… Meir asked me to tell you how sorry he was; he had class tonight at the Yeshiva (She puts a box of biscuits on the table.)

AMIR: () A mezuzah?! Erm… pretty sure we’ve already got one. TAKES A MEZUZAH OUT OF THE SMALL BOX

MAYA: Yours isn’t kosher. Remember? I showed you once why it wasn’t. (Smiles) Trust me, this is for your own good.

ALMA: Well clearly… If only we’d had a kosher Mezuzah on our door then trouble wouldn’t even come knocking and instead, just go straight up to the attic. (They all laugh)

MAYA: Am *I* going up to the attic then?

ALMA: I also got you something… (she hands her something gift-wrapped) just a little holiday treat. 100 percent wool.

MAYA: Thanks, mum. So how was Frankfurt? How many authors’ careers did you launch?

ALMA: You’ve no idea how much I missed you there… in the cafes, at the shops… running round the stalls, making lists of all the novels we would like to translated into Hebrew… remember that Italian writer who was all over you? …

 MAYA: Over me?! *It was you*!

ALMA: (LAUGHS) He may have been my age, but he only had eyes for you… I got in the way on purpose… (They laugh) hang on! Got another surprise for you.

(**She heads out into the kitchen. Amir pats his sister and flips her over in a Judo man oeuvre**.)

MAYA: Amir… please don’t touch me. (**She refuses his help and gets up on her own**.)

AMIR: Sorry, force of habit. I forgot. And sorry, but this is ridiculous. I’m your brother!

MAYA: And I love you to bits.

AMIR: Well thank God for that, cos I’m counting on you here. Starting today, you two are going to work on building some bridges, understood? You’re going to have to learn how to deal with each other, directly; no mediators.

MAYA: Sir, yes sir! And stop worrying. She’s not a child.

AMIR: What she is, is a widow? And I’ll stop worrying the second you actually start.

MAYA: You are such a sweetheart,. (**Sends him a kiss from afar. He returns one**.)

AMIR: Maya, I want us to be a family again. Like we used to be.

ALMA: (ENTERS, TRAY IN HAND, EXCITED) Who wants carrot and potato latkes?

MAYA: Mum, you remembered!! But shall we do the candle-lighting first? (She places the menorah on the windowsill.)

ALMA: The latkes are getting cold… these are for *you*… potato and carrot…

MAYA: (EYES ON THE PLATE, THEN THE WATCH) It’s getting late. We have to light the candles.

ALMA: Fine. Let's Light the candles.

MAYA: Do we have any candles?

AMIR: (TEASING) Maybe some waxy leftovers from previous years… those are kosher, aren’t they?

ALMA: Of course we do! I made sure of that! (Alma brings the candles)

AMIR: Go on then, Maya! Take us on the mitzvah train.

MAYA: Mum, do you want to light the candles?

ALMA: No, darling, really… you do it.

MAYA: (LETS AMIR LIGHT THE CANDLES. HE RECITES THE PRAYER. THEY BOTH SING A HANUKKAH CAROL, ‘MAOZ ZUR.’ ALMA HAS HER EYES FIXED ON MAYA THE

.) Mum, why aren’t you singing?

ALMA: I, WHOLE TIME uh… you know me… can’t carry a tune to save my life… (She laughs, masking her inner turmoil)

AMIR: She’s practicing her silent harmonies.

ALMA: I was watching you and for a moment, all of this looked like fancy dress… like it was Purim again when you were little… and I was thinking, any second now you’re going to take off that headscarf, let your hair down and put on a pair of jeans and your old Allstars trainers.

MAYA: Mum, I’m a married woman.

ALMA: (**TRIES TO KEEP IT CASUAL**) Of course you are… I get that… (half-whispering) but no one can see you in here… (walks up to her) would you take it off? Only for a moment… just one moment, for me… so I could stroke that lovely hair of yours one more time… (Maya removes the headscarf. Her hair Is short and mess.)

(Alma is speechless at the sight of her)

ALMA: I can’t believe you would do that to yourself.

MAYA: I had it cut. Don't you like it? (She quickly puts the headscarf back on.)

AMIR: (INSTANTLY) It’s fabulous! Very Britney 2007. Bald is having a comeback you know, and the latkes are getting cold. (They sit at the table)

ALMA: (COMPOSES HERSELF) Yes… the latkes, (she serves the plates, hands Maya one.)

(Maya takes her plate, eyeing the latkes. Silence.)

ALMA: Something wrong? It’s your recipe. The one you came up with… potatoes and carrot…

MAYA: I’m sorry, mum… I can’t…

ALMA: Why not? All the dishes and cutlery are disposable just like you asked. Frying pan’s kosher too; I went and got a new one.

MAYA: Has the pan been immersed?

ALMA: Immersed… in what?

MAYA: The new J.K. Rowling… in water!

ALMA: Oh! Yeah, of course. An hour and a half in the sink, in boiling hot water.

MAYA: Oh. Then you soaked it, you haven’t immersed it. If the pan’s not made in Israel then you have to both soak *and* immerse it. (Alma laughs, followed by Maya.)

MAYA: Mum, I’m sorry. I should have explained all this a lot better.

ALMA: We’ll crack on, somehow.

AMIR: (PICKS UP THE PAN) Made in Israel! Hallelujah! Ladies and gents, the pan is kosher! I repeat, the pan is kosher! (He has a latke)

 ALMA: Oh, thank Christ!

AMIR: Mum, the latkes… they’re divine.

MAYA: Umm… about the vegetables… are they…

 ALMA: What about them?

MAYA: Shemittah… it’s a sabbatical year… I can’t have vegetables that aren’t ‘Otzar Beth Din’ approved…

ALMA: Who the hell is Beth Dean?!

MAYA: Where’d you buy these vegetables?

ALMA: Where I always get them. Mohammed, our greengrocer.

MAYA: Well, Mohammed just sells the vegetables… he doesn’t grow them, does he? Do you have any idea where he gets his vegetables from?

ALMA: I never asked.

MAYA: Would you mind asking him?

ALMA: I certainly would!

MAYA: It’s important, if the owners of the field…

ALMA: I’m sure it’s terribly important, but I’ve been going to Mohammed’s for 10 years and I’m not about to start offending him now.

MAYA: Well, in that case… (Alma’s eyes are fixed on her. Maya gets her mobile out) I need to ask my rabbi… if I can have vegetables that are… (listens), line’s busy.

ALMA: (**GETTING UPSET BY ALL THIS WHICH AMIR NOTICES**)

AMIR: (**RAISES HIS VOICE**) Maya, c’mon, it’s just the one latke! Seriously, God can’t be that petty!

ALMA: (TRIES TO AVOID CONFRONTATION) Don’t worry about it. We can have the latkes and you have the doughnuts you brought.

MAYA: Mum, I know you went to all this trouble for me… if you could just ring up

Mohammed… and ask him where he gets his… (dials again)

ALMA: (WATCHING HER) Is this really how you live your life? On a mobile IV, hooked up to your rabbi, 24/7?

MAYA: Of course! There’s still so much I don’t know – God's constantly testing and trying me…

ALMA: Of course… and the rabbi… is he some kind of life coach? a therapist? Personal trainer? Your multitasking mentor?

MAYA: More like a parent… well, sort of…

ALMA: Oh… well, aren’t you lucky to have found him.

MAYA: (DIALS, LISTENS) Great, now it’s going straight to voicemail. Would you please make the call?

ALMA: I will not.

MAYA: Mum, do this for me. Why are you being so pigheaded?

ALMA: I’m not about to start harassing Mohammed just because you can’t get some rabbi’s bloody permission!

MAYA: I tried so hard.

ALMA: Well, so did I.

ALMA: (FEELS LIKE SHIT, TAKES THE LATKES OFF THE TABLE, ALMOST AGGRESSIVELY.)

MAYA: What’s the matter?! *What is the matter*?!

ALMA: Nothing! Your beautiful hair’s all gone, you never laugh anymore… can’t have the latkes I’ve been making you every year on Hanukkah since you were five

; all because we’ll never know where Mohammed buys his vegetables… and I’m the pigheaded one.

(Alma sits down)

 (SILENCE)

MAYA: It’s no different to what you did, is it? You ran away from home at 15.

ALMA: I ran away from the kibbutz; that cult had me in a vice and I got out; you, on the other hand seem

 perfectly happy to follow the herd like a good little sheep and let it swallow you whole. But that’s business as usual for you,

 isn’t it? When everyone smoked, you went and bought a pack. Everyone else is boozing and next thing you know

, Maya’s doing shots. And now that “Finding God’ is the latest bloody trend then sure enough, here’s Maya! Never your own path

… always going with the flow, isn’t that right? Except it isn’t. It’s dangerous, Maya. There are tides and undercurrents out there and darling, you’re just not the best swimmer, are you?

MAYA: What am I then?

ALMA: An absconder; someone who could never face the real world.

MAYA: In other words, a loser?

ALMA: I never said that.

MAYA: But you sure as hell think that?!!! (Gets up at once) even after dad’s Shiva, you never forgave me for falling apart, did you? Because heaven forbid anyone in this family ever loses it! Your parents lived through the Holocaust; You survived that night mare socialist commune, so who the hell am I to complain, right?!

ALMA: I haven’t seen you in almost two years. I was waiting for you to pick the time and place, and you just…

MAYA: I just what, mum? Let you down again? What do you even know about me, huh?! What do you even know about my world?

ALMA: What could I know??? You were the one who wanted to lose *me* so you could find *Him*!

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*SILENCE. ALMA FREEZES.*

AMIR: I reckon now’s a good time to jump in the shower. Yup… And just to remind you both; our bathroom walls are paper thin. And every word carries.

*He exits.*

MAYA: What were you even thinking? That if you published this book about how awful Orthodox life is, I’d come running back to you?

ALMA: No, but I *was* thinking you’d come home, and we could talk.

MAYA: What about, mum? How you’re only publishing this book to have a go at me?

ALMA: A go at you? How am I having a go at you?!

MAYA: As if having a secular mother wasn’t bad enough, now you have to go smearing the whole community?! Please God, I will have children eventually, and then what?

Do you want them bullied out of every nursery? Turned away from every school?

ALMA: Oh Gosh.. well, a thousand apologies for compromising your delicate position in your upstanding community… but you’re the one who’s had the “career change,” not me! And last time I checked, I was still publishing quality books that speak to me…

MAYA: Quality books… a regular dam masterpiece! Mum, you can’t go publishing this filth just because of me. This girl’s a child; she doesn’t even know what she’s doing.

ALMA: And I take it you’ve read through this “filth,” have you?

MAYA: Oh, I’ve read it. And cried all the way through..

ALMA: (FEELING VINDICATED) Well… then it did hit a nerve, after all.

MAYA: Not the story! This thing she’s done… it’s an abomination!

ALMA: It’s an act of protest. That's what it is.

MAYA: But why do it in a book? Why go public?

ALMA: Because she’s a writer, Maya. And when books are published, they’re published into the public domain. And I’m sorry but orthodox women nowadays are out there writing books, making art, going horse-riding, studying bloody snake-wrangling…

MAYA: (INTERRUPTING HER) Fine, but they don’t go off broadcasting everything in broad daylight for the whole world to see!

ALMA: My God, who are you protecting?! This sanctimonious, hypocritical society that tramples women and children?! And in the name of what, divinity?!

MAYA: Oh, right; as opposed to the house we grew up in? What kind of values did we have, huh? Dad took off to the mountains; you were off chasing books; you both lived and died by your own rules and to hell with everyone else. And after he died, you banished sadness. You were furious with him; called him a traitor!

ALMA: I wanted him to fight; there was hope for him… people have beaten it.

MAYA: But he didn’t feel like fighting it; he wanted to go and climb Mont Blanc.

ALMA: Amazing… put himself out of his own misery and threw the rest of us under the bus!

MAYA: It was his life; and it wasn’t enough for you, controlling him in life; you also had to try and micromanage his death! You’re the reason he ran off in the first place!

ALMA: (REACHING BOILING POINT) Maya, we should end this conversation right now…

MAYA: Shelve the book… it would be the most amazing act of grace you could ever show me.

ALMA: And what amazing act of grace would you be willing to show me, eh? Would you turn your back on religion?

MAYA: Excuse me?

ALMA: If I were to shelve the book, in return, would you come home?

MAYA: You would ask me to give up my faith?

ALMA: Not your faith, darling; religion. Don’t get the two confused. I’m talking about the shaved head; the headscarf; this whole costume you’re parading around in. And yes, that’s right. Give that up. The same way you’re asking me to turn my back on my own values and principles.

MAYA: Kill. That. Book!

ALMA: (CRACKS, REALISING MAYA IS ACTING AS A MESSENGER) So this what you came here for…

MAYA: You damn right it is.

ALMA: Tell me, who sent you here to put on this Academy Award-winning performance, eh? Because, let me tell you, … for a second there, I actually believed you were… that after almost two years, you actually missed me… that you missed me just as much as I… that you…

MAYA: Publish that book and you and I are done! Happy Hanukkah!

AMIR: (RUSHES IN RUNNING FROM THE SHOWER, GRABS MAYA) What are you, an idiot?! What are you doing?! (To Alma) Mum, she didn’t mean it.

MAYA: Oh, I meant it.

(She’s about to head out)

ALMA: (STOPS HER) Wait! This rabbi… this parent figure of yours… tell me, what does he do when you’re sad? When you’re hungry? When you get scared? What does he do for you, this “figure”?!

MAYA: (FEELING EMBOLDENED AND CONFIDENT) The one thing you never did for me; lift me up!!

(*She storms out. A moment of silence follows. Alma paces like a caged lion.*)

ALMA: If I had any doubts about the book until now, then let me tell you; they’re *gone*!

AMIR: You’re not the only parent whose child turned Orthodox.

ALMA: (DEVASTATED OVER MAYA) That’s not my child… that is not the child I had (Pours herself a drink) they found the brightest, funniest child; a girl with fire in her eyes; promised her all of Heaven as if they go up there twice a week, landscaping the bloody place!

AMIR: Mum, you get about a thousand manuscripts a year that end up on your desk. Is this book really worth it?

ALMA: It’s not the book! They’ve ruined her, Amir! I have never heard her talk like that… even her eyes are different… (she spots the grey suitcase) oh, so that idiot’s brought back my suitcase?

AMIR: Oh yes. The big suitcase handover went smoothly and according to plan.

ALMA: Well, praise be to Him! What do you know? The Mezuzah’s already working…

(*They both smile*)

(She exits)

AMIR: (TO HIS FATHER’S PHOTO) Seriously, dad, do you think it was fair, what you did? Going off to the mountains like that and leaving me with these two loons? Just so you know, I only ever signed up for officers’ training and agreed to serve that extra year so I could stick around, cos you’re not here anymore, are you? And now I’ve had Enough! I can’t deal with this anymore. Dad, I want to travel and I just can’t fill your shoes. You were a size 8 and I’m an 11, and Christ, that’s a tight fit! And for the love of God, could you send her a boyfriend already?! I know she’s not looking, and she’s still well, pretty miffed at you… but you lot on the other side… it’s kind of your thing round there, isn’t it? You know, sorting this stuff out…

ALMA: (WALKS IN, POSSIBLY HAVING CHANGED CLOTHES, OVERHEARS THE

LAST BIT) Tell him I said hi.

AMIR: (FLUSTERED) Sorry?

ALMA: Nothing. Only joking.

FADE OUT:

FADE INTO:

# SCENE 4

RUTH’S BNEI BRAK HOME – HANUKKAH NIGHT 4

Five lit menorahs sit on the windowsill (or alternatively, reflecting through another window. REBECCA, brushing a wig, looks out the window, then checks her watch and makes a call.

REBECCA: (ON PHONE) Hello; good evening. Rebecca Averbuch speaking, is Ruth there? She said you would be revising for an exam together. Oh… a week ago? I see. No, not at all; everything’s fine… I obviously got the dates mixed up. Thank you, have a good night.

(THE PHONE RINGS)

REBECCA: (CONT’D) Hello, Ruth??? Oh, Mindy hi! Good evening; is Samuel back yet? Really? The man left at 4, how long’s it take to finalize terms and conditions? When he gets back, could you ask him to pop upstairs for a bit? No, Ruth’s not back yet. Of course I’m worried…how could I not be? It’s been going on for weeks… so, you’ll let me know, will you? Thanks, Mindy.

(ENTER RUTH)

RUTH: Good evening.

REBECCA: I’d say it practically ‘goodnight’.

RUTH: Mum, have you eaten?

REBECCA: The little ones wouldn’t go to sleep because you weren’t there at bedtime to read them their ‘Shema Yisrael.’ You promised them!

RUTH: (PICKING UP GAMES AND NOTEBOOKS OFF THE FLOOR) I’ll make you a salad and some eggs, shall I?

REBECCA: And what ‘piece of literature’ has Alma Segev Publishing sent back with you today? (Ruth lets her have a look) *The Lover*!!! I wouldn’t have expected anything less. (She rips up the book)

RUTH: (TRIES TO PRY IT OUT OF HER HANDS) Stop it! This isn’t mine! I’m only borrowing it!

REBECCA: Ten years ago, Rabbi Yoel promised your father he would take care of you; no strings, no dowry. This was your father’s will and I will not have you running round publishing houses in Tel Aviv, pulling all your stunts, days before your engagement! Ruth, this is a good match and last time I checked, our surname wasn't Rothschild.

(The doorbell rings. Rebecca answers it. ENTER: SAMUEL)

SAMUEL: Good evening, all. Mindy sends her wine, her kugel, and her best wishes! Mazel Tov!

REBECCA: So the terms are all finalized then?

SAMUEL: All finalized. Ruth, you’ll be announcing your engagement on the last night of Hanukkah. We’ll have the engagement dinner at the groom’s father’s home. Nothing too fancy. It’s how Rabbi Yoel wants it; something low key, at their place, surrounded by family.

And the wedding, please God, is set for the 29th of Sivan.

RUTH: I can’t! I need more time!

SAMUEL: You *have* got time. This gives you all the time you need to finish all your academic work. Just like you wanted.

RUTH: Can we not postpone?

REBECCA: What for? So you’d have time to read another one of your books?

(A deflated Ruth heads out)

REBECCA: (INDICATES AT HER WATCH) She *just* walked through the door!

SAMUEL: Becca, it’s only 10 o’clock!

REBECCA: seven minutes past! And four days before her engagement no less, Hashem Yishmor[[3]](#footnote-4)! Claims she does her proofreading at the local publishing houses while Yehuda Zvi tells me he’s seen her several times hanging about secular publishers in Tel Aviv! Samuel, I’m worried.

SAMUEL: (TEASING) If Yehuda Zvi really is the clever a student they’re making him out to be, then how come he’s got time do all this big city spying?

REBECCA: Sam, he’s worried. He’s got both his sister *and* his studies on his mind. It’s not like he’s out there singing at sold-out synagogues concert, is he?

SAMUEL: (MOCKING) Worried, my foot! The only one Yehuda Zvi’s worried about is Yehuda Zvi. That boy doesn’t stop harping on about evil and is making Ruth’s life a living hell. When did he become such a fundamentalist?!

REBECCA: It's hardly surprising though, is it? Not a day goes by that I don’t find another one of those vile ‘Alma Segev’ books in her things and all you do is look the other way. Shall I tell you some of the titles? There was *Enemies, a Love Story*; *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, oh and lest we forget today’s latest entry… *The Lover*!

SAMUEL: Is that all? Becca, they’re books, not boys. When have you ever seen Ruth without her nose in a book?

REBECCA: Could you maybe have a word with her, instead of turning everything into a punchline? You promised your brother you'd watch over her… they named you her legal guardian!

SAMUEL: Becca, come on – brides will be brides. She needs time with her own thoughts… why not let her have that? Let her read all the books she wants. Honestly, who cares?

REBECCA: (ON THE VERGE OF TEARS) I do! Sam, I need her! The whole world and his wife had to pick this month to get married; I’ve got wigs coming out of my ears! And of course, every bride needs hers “yesterday”; I’m at that shop day and night with their mother, grandmother, and thrice-removed auntie! And what about the little ones, eh? I can’t handle them all on my own. I can barely find the time to get them to bed at night. Samuel, please; talk to her. She listens to you.

SAMUEL: I promise I’ll have a word with her… now, have I got a story for you. So, this woman comes up to her rabbi and she’s all, “Rabbi, rabbi, what am I going to do? I have these two suitors – Yosse’le and Moishe – both have declared their undying love for me.

Which one shall I choose, Rabbi? Who will be the lucky man?” So the rabbi tells her, “You shall marry Yosse’le, thereby making Moishe the lucky man. (Rebecca delivers the punchline together with Samuel.) Oh! You’ve heard this one already?

REBECCA: Not today, I haven’t.

SAMUEL: Well now you have. Right, I’m heading back down before Mindy shows up here.

(The doorbell rings. They share a look. Rebecca answers the door. Enter: Maya)

MAYA: Good evening. I’m Maya.

SAMUEL: Samuel, hello.

MAYA: I’m sorry it's so late.

REBECCA: No need to apologize. I’m the one who asked you over … (To Samuel) Rabbi Azriel sent her. Can I get you some kugel?

MAYA: I’m good, thank you.

 REBECCA: A drink then?

MAYA: Nothing for me, thanks.

REBECCA: Unfortunately, we’re fresh out of nothing. A cup of tea it is. (Heads out to put the kettle on.)

SAMUEL: (OFFERS HER A CHAIR) You’re with Rabbi Azriel…

 MAYA: …newly-orthodox group. That’s right.

SAMUEL: Rabbi Azriel… you hear stories about him.

REBECCA: (STERN, IN YIDDISH) Samuel, let the girl talk. (Serves Maya a cup of tea) I’m listening.

MAYA: (SITS) To be honest, I’m not even sure where to begin.

SAMUEL: I’d say the beginning’s as good a place as any.

MAYA: (LAYS THE MANUSCRIPT ON THE TABLE) I got this manuscript from a publishing house where I used to work… for some reason, they keep sending them to me even though I left ages ago. And after reading this one, I went to Rabbi Azriel… he suggested I hand it over to you and to let you to decide how you want to handle this.

REBECCA: And what’s any of this got to do with us?

 MAYA: This book was written by a Ruth Averbuch.

SAMEUL: May I? … (he grabs the manuscript and peruses it) what exactly is in this book ?

MAYA: I think this may be a very personal story. It’d be best if you both read it yourselves… (she gets up)

SAMUEL: (TO REBECCA) If there had been anything… Rabbi Azrael would have come to me by now.

MAYA: (EMPHASISING) Rabbi Azriel hasn't read it. I just gave him the highlights.

REBECCA: (GETS ANGRY) Why would you do that if the story *is* that personal?

MAYA: This book is an affront to the Torah! It’s blasphemy and a ‘Chilul Hashem[[4]](#footnote-5)’!

REBECCA: (GETS UP) Thank you for your time and for all your trouble.

MAYA: (HEADING OUT) You have to save her from this publishing house… I’m sorry, there really was no other way. You had to know.

REBECCA: (CURTLY) You did what you had to do.

SAMUEL: Thank you very much. You've done a great mitzvah. (Exit Maya)

 SAMUEL: (TO REBECCA) Rebecca, go easy! Let *me* talk to her.

Rebecca summons Ruth. She enters. Samuel waves her manuscript at her. She is flabbergasted.

RUTH: How did you get this?

SAMUEL: Ruth, what is this book about?

RUTH: That is a private matter.

REBECCA: If your plan is to get it published then it isn’t really a private matter, is it? Well, come on then. Cat got your tongue? I’m listening.

RUTH: It’s about life in an all girls’ boarding school.

REBECCA: What could you possibly have to write about boarding school life? Eh? The mischief you got up to? That time you showed up in see-through socks? All those nights you’d sneak out to meet up with those Bnei Akiva schoolboys?!

RUTH: It’s a story about ‘Tikun’[[5]](#footnote-6), mum!

SAMUEL: (RELIEVED) That’s sorted then! Penance is good!

REBECCA: Well lying is not! From now on, young lady, you do not leave this house. You go to classes and come straight home; and Yehuda Zvi will be walking you to the seminary and back. Now sit down. We’re going to draw ourselves an agreement. (Ruth starts writing) ‘I, Ruth Averbuch, solemnly pledge not to set foot at that secular publishing house in Tel Aviv ever again. I will not lie to my family, and I will have my wedding at the date that’s been set.’ Now sign it.

RUTH: No way am I signing that.

REBECCA: Then you can also forget about going to seminary. You are grounded until your wedding day. (Glares at her, trying to suss out her reaction) committing blasphemy at secular publishing houses, Gevalt[[6]](#footnote-7)! What kind of living will you and your husband make, huh?! What Yeshiva’s even going to look twice at him?! How will you support yourselves?! That does it. Tomorrow, Yehuda Zvi’s taking you to that Alma Segev woman and you’re letting her know this whole book thing is finished. It’s done!

SAMUEL: Rebecca, go easy!

REBECCA: Now sign it.

RUTH: I’m not signing anything. (Ruth quickly runs off)

REBECCA: Did you hear that?! Did you hear what she just said to me?!

SAMUEL: (CONFESSING) When Ruth was expelled from boarding school, and the rabbi called me in for a chat he, uh… he had some pretty harsh words to say about Ruth. And Rebecca… I may not have told you all of it..

REBECCA: (A TENSE SILENCE)

SAMUEL: He said she’d been spreading all kinds of lies about him… publicly smearing him.

REBECCA: Samuel, what kind of lies are we talking about here?

SAMUEL: I, uh… I couldn’t bring myself to ask.

They stare into each other.

FADE OUT

**SCENE 5**

ALMA’S HOME

Nighttime. Trumpet-playing (harmonica). Ruth comes knocking at the door. She’s catching her breath and has clearly been running.

AMIR: (OPENS THE DOOR AS SHE REMOVES A GINGER WIG) Oh, hey. Wow,

ginger’s definitely your colour… so… what, do you lot also do fancy dress for Hanukkah?

RUTH: Where’s Alma?

AMIR: (Inspects Her ,she seems distraught ) (He realizes her cheek is red-flushed as if she’d been slapped) what the hell is this? Who did this to you?

RUTH: It’s nothing.

AMIR: You want to put something on that. You’re bleeding.

 RUTH: Really, there’s no need.

AMIR: Let me get you an icepack…

RUTH: (ASSERTIVELY) where is she? I need to talk to her!

AMIR: In a meeting. Should be back any minute. You could talk to me until she gets here. (He turns to the door)

RUTH: No, don’t! You can’t shut the door.

AMIR: Why the hell not?

RUTH: ‘Yichud’! He’ll think we’re trying to be alone. (Looks out the window) He’s here.

AMIR: Who?

RUTH: I’m being followed.

AMIR: Wait here. (About to head out)

RUTH: (HYSTERICAL) No, don’t! You can’t go out there!

AMIR: (AT THE DOOR) Don’t worry. I’ll only break a couple of his bones. Back in a sec.

RUTH: He’ll hurt you too.

AMIR: No one’s going to hurt me, Ruth. No one.

RUTH: He’s my brother…

AMIR: Your *brother* hit you?!

RUTH: He’s a child…

AMIR: Packs a hell of a punch for a child; When did he start training, nursery? (Watches her) right, alright. Just for you, I’m going to go against my gut here, okay? Not hitting anyone. You can relax. (Fetches her some ice) keep it pressed against your cheek for a couple of minutes, and you’ll be good as new.

RUTH: Look. (She takes the dirty, ripped copy of *The Lover* out of her rucksack.)

AMIR: Well, well, well… does the “child” outside also get credit for this?

RUTH: I got a new copy but this one has an inscription… could be someone close to her.

AMIR: (LOOKS AT THE BOOK) Very close… it’s from my dad. He was killed in a snowstorm five years ago, climbing Mont Blanc.

RUTH: Lord have mercy!

AMIR: That, I can tell you, is the one thing he definitely didn’t have that day. But I can hardly hold it against Him. (He smiles) my dad… he wouldn’t have had it any other way.

RUTH: I never wanted to cause her any grief.

AMIR: Don’t worry about it. I’ll just cut the inscription out of this copy and stick it onto the new one… that should do the trick.

AMIR: Why’d he hit you?

RUTH: My family… they found out I’ve been writing… Someone came over with the manuscript.

 AMIR: Who was it?

RUTH: I’ve no idea. Of course, they read the contents … and I’m meant to be getting engaged on the last night of Hanukkah… this could ruin everything.

AMIR: Did you just say engaged? Wow, mazel tov. Who’s the guy?

RUTH: It’s an arranged marriage.

AMIR: Oh, right. Well… nothing wrong with a Shidduch[[7]](#footnote-8), I guess.

RUTH: I think I’ll just wait for her in her office. (She starts heading up. He stops her.)

AMIR: So, are you like… into this Shidduch?

RUTH: It’s a good match.

AMIR: Right, okay. So if it’s a good match, *and* you’ve got that nutcase brother of yours stalking you, why are you still so hung up about this book?

RUTH: Why do you play your music?

AMIR: So I wouldn’t have to hear myself think.

RUTH: That’s it.

AMIR: No. That definitely is not it. I haven’t got anyone hunting me down and I’m pretty sure I also haven’t got an arranged marriage coming up either. Anyway… ever since my sister went full-on ultra-orthodox … my mum’s been on this bonkers crusade…

 RUTH: You have an orthodox sister?

AMIR: Wait, you didn’t know? My mum and my sister haven’t spoken in two years and right now, I’m thinking your book’s probably gone from being just another manuscript to the latest assault weapon in this war between them.

(ENTER: Alma)

ALMA: Ruth; hey! Excellent timing! Have I got news for you… *your* book is going to print… *next week*!!! (Clocks the bruise) what’s this?! What happened?!

RUTH: My brother, Yehuda Zevi… Alma…

AMIR: They’re on to your book.

RUTH: Someone gave my mother a copy of the manuscript…

AMIR: (SNIDE) *Someone* gave her mother a copy of the manuscript… (storms out angrily)

RUTH: Alma, I’m so sorry. I was up all night, beating myself up over this… you have to call off the release.

ALMA: Are you insane?! What happened?

RUTH: I’m getting engaged on the last night of Hanukkah.

ALMA: Engaged?

RUTH: The wedding’s this summer. I didn't tell you cos they only finalised the terms yesterday. I’ll get married, then my husband and I can revisit…

ALMA: Do you even know this person? It’s an arranged marriage, isn’t it?

RUTH: We have met up a couple of times.

ALMA: And you say you’ll revisit, will you? Revisit what exactly?! Ruth, you’re deluding yourself if you seriously expect him to get behind a book that is literally an attack on orthodox society!

RUTH: You know, not all Frumers are the same.

ALMA: Oh, I know. You have your female authors, and female journalists and still; a quarter of all orthodox women have experienced some form of sexual harassment and the vast majority never came forward.

RUTH: How many women do come forward?

ALMA: Exactly! Which is why yours isn’t just another book; it’s a calling.

RUTH: Alma, you’re not listening to me!

ALMA: Ruth, what happened to you… these things go on every day in Russia, the US, Africa, Alaska… you will have the attention of thousands of women.

RUTH: Look, I know we signed a contract and that I owe you money… I uh…

ALMA: I’m not about to twist your arm into releasing a book over a bloody contract. I want you to remember why you came to me in the first place. Why for the past few months, you’ve been sneaking out to meetings with a secular publisher… what was it you told me when we first met? You have to write because this is a story you had to tell. You wanted everyone to know. I can help you.

(PAUSE)

 RUTH: No you can’t. No one can. And then there’s Yehuda Zvi at home going on and on about the forces of evil and angels of destruction… and it’s scaring me! (She has a coughing fit and has to use her inhaler. Alma gives her some water.)

 ALMA: How long have you had this?

RUTH: It started in boarding school… after my father died.

ALMA: And after the rabbi started touching you… (Ruth eyes her) which went on two whole years… did you tell anyone? How about your mother? Did you try and tell her? (Ruth nods)

RUTH: She wouldn’t listen!!!

ALMA: When I was 9, back in the kibbutz, I went to my mother and told her how the night watchmen were going into the children’s quarters and that they’ve been touching children… she gave me one look and do you know what she said? “You’re imagining things! We don’t have that kind of people here. Go fun imagine a fun thing.”

 RUTH: And what did you do?

ALMA: I imagined a fun thing and as soon as I turned 15, I got the hell out of there.

RUTH: Alma, are you publishing my book because your daughter’s religious now? Has that got anything to do with it?

(Pauses)

ALMA: It did. At first… I was even using the connection between the two but not anymore. This is an important book Ruth, in its own right– and I want to publish it… you’ve come such a long way; you have! Don’t betray yourself just because you’re getting cold feet.

RUTH: Alma, I’m getting married. I’ve no intention of starting a war. And I can’t come round here anymore. (She gets up, collects her papers, it’s getting late.)

ALMA: You’re like this person living in a cave… you’re allowed to want things; go out; see things; know things; damn it, feel things! It’s *your* life. And if facing up to your family is too much for you to handle then I’ll just have to be there, won’t I? *I’ll* talk to them!

(They spend a moment facing each other. Alma suddenly takes her into her arms and just holds her. Ruth surrenders to the embrace. Ruth quickly shows herself out. Enter: Amir)

ALMA: I thought you’d gone to bed.

AMIR: Umm yeah, no; too busy eavesdropping. What exactly did you mean by, “I’ll talk to them?” who’s “them”? Mum, you’re not seriously thinking about going to the Averbuchs…

ALMA: Her book. It’s a true story. It’s about time they realized that.

AMIR: Jesus Christ, that is not your job! Who the hell do you think you are, social services?

Barging into their home like that… let this book go already. Your little Joan of Arc’s just handed in her notice. She wants to go home and she definitely doesn’t want to end up at the stake! How do you not see that?

ALMA: What are you suggesting then? That we just gag her? Shut her up like *they* did?

AMIR: She asked you to drop the bloody book!

ALMA: She’s terrified!!!

(She downs a handful of vitamins with a glass of wine)

AMIR: Thought you’d taken these already.

ALMA: (SHORT-TEMPERED, SNAPS) These are vitamins, Amir; vitamins. They’re meant to be taken daily. You can have them three times a day. Four times, five times, and if you like, you can even have them six bloody times a day! They’re vitamins, not sleeping pills! (Tops up her wine) Oh and for the record, this doesn’t kill you either! My God, do you even realize it was your sister who gave her family the manuscript?!

AMIR: I warned you this would happen! Mum, you are up against the mindset of a born again bible-thumper! There’s no room in there for anyone! Her whole outlook on life is different now. When are you finally going to accept that?

ALMA: You mean her hardline, evangelical fanaticism? Never!

AMIR: (TAKING HER TO TASK) This is what you do! You’ve rejected all of it. The way she looks, the way she dresses, the way she talks… what’s her husband’s name, eh? (Alma is silent) you can’t even tell me her husband’ name! Mum, it’s a lost cause. She’s not coming home, and she’s never going to be the person she once was. It’s over. It is done! And I just can’t take this war zone mentality anymore… I can’t. You’re heartbroken by night, raging by day, and I got front row seats to all of it… you have two kids, end of. Just… let it go.

ALMA: Let go of what? Huh? (She sits) My little girl? She’s a part of me… she has my eyes… my fingers… and where she goes, I go. It never ends. And she’s taken a wrong turn… ended up down the wrong path and now, she’s lost in the woods… a couple more miles and she’ll realize it’s been a dead-end path all along… and she’ll fall apart. Who’s going to be there to pick her up when that happens, eh?

(Amir goes quiet)

ALMA: (COMING UNDONE) Two years, I have been racking every one of my brain cells, trying to extract some memory of her laughter and I can’t hear it… I can’t…

AMIR: (LOSES IT) Then do something! For your sake, do something to make her feel like you’re reaching out; help her let her guard down, let her know you still love her…because let me tell you, it’s not obvious, mum… it isn’t obvious at all!

ALMA: Well what the hell is then?! You have children and then what; they have you sign an on-the-spot waiver?! I should write myself off just because she went and got herself a membership to God’s own private country club?!

(She heads out)

AMIR: Where are you going?

ALMA: Bnei Brak. It’s time I go see the Averbuchs.

AMIR: Mum, you’ll hurt Ruth!

ALMA: Quite the opposite! (Exit: Alma)

AMIR: (PICKS UP THE PHONE) Maya! Mum’s on the warpath! She’s heading over to Avervuchs’! You want to score some mitzvah points? Well now’s your chance! Stop her before she destroys them too!

AMIR: (TO HIS FATHER’S PHOTO) What? I Thought we had this good thing going on, you and I with our talks… turns out you were never really into them, were you? Well, here’s a newsflash, mate – you’re getting on board! Like it or not; I am done! This is me clocking out. I’m getting my discharge and I am out of here. Do you not have any friends up there? Is heaven that cliquey? Well tough luck– talk to God then! This is a category 5 emergency. He’s going to have to see you.

FADE OUT

FADE IN MUSIC CUT TO:

# ACT 6

RUTH’S HOME IN THE ORTHODOX CITY OF BNEI BRAK.

Candles lit in the menorah.

Alma, Rebecca and Samuel sit in the lounge at Ruth’s home.

ALMA: Look, I haven’t come here to bargain. I’m here to talk to you about the book and I ask that Ruth be present for this conversation.

SAMUEL: It’s a terrible shame we’ve only just found out about this. For the record, I’ve no qualms with you, Miss Alma; none at all. You’re a professional… publishing books is what you do. But the fact is, Ruth *has* failed here. She has offended; and make no mistake, if a book like this were to be published, it would be blasphemous, and heaven help us. It must either be shelved or destroyed. Obviously, I *will* reimburse you in full for any expenses…

ALMA: Mr. Averbuch…

SAMUEL: Samuel, please…

ALMA: Will you please get Ruth?

(Rebecca heads out)

SAMUEL: Miss Alma, we will pay you back down to the last penny. You keep the shell and let me have the soul.

ALMA: A book is both body and soul… you can’t separate the two.

SAMUEL: (TRYING TO SWEET-TALK HER) Such eloquent words from such a fine woman … so *very* fine, if you don’t mind me saying…

ALMA: Mr. Averbuch!

SAMUEL: Samuel…

(Ruth enters, accompanied by Rebecca. Silence. Ruth and Alma share a look.)

SAMUEL: I don’t understand you. We kept the whole thing discreet to protect the honour of the family and yours.

RUTH: (DEFENSIVE) I changed all the names…

SAMUEL: And you think our people wouldn’t see right through that?

ALMA: Let them. Samuel, let them find out! All of them. It’s time. Even your rules say that if a man commits an offence, the Almighty Himself will call him out; publicly!

SAMUEL: (GETTING IRATE, TO RUTH) and now, you’re about to get married; be someone’s wife and please God, someone’s mother … this book… it will ruin us! (To Alma) I’m asking you, please; tear up that contract. To hell with the cost..

ALMA: That contract’s between Ruth and myself. If *she* asks me to tear it up, then I may reconsider. (Looks to Ruth, encouragingly)

REBECCA: ‘Rebono shel Olam’[[8]](#footnote-9), how can you destroy a whole family over a little girl’s whim?!

ALMA: A whim? Excuse me? You have read it, haven’t you? And you think it was written on a whim?!

SAMUEL: Miss Alma, I implore you!

RUTH: Mum, we can’t cancel it. I haven’t had a moment’s peace since it happened; not a moment.

SAMUEL: And you think you’ll have your peace of mind back if this gets published? The whole town isn’t going to know a moment’s peace.

REBECCA: These things are better left forgotten… time heals… Ruthie, sweetheart as long as the candle’s burning, you can still repent.

ALMA: This *is* her penance! It’s her way of purging all that shame and humiliation she’s been carrying around with her.

RUTH: Exactly… For me, penance *is* this book.

REBECCA: No sweetheart, what this book is, is damnation. He whose tongue speaks evil, shall not be worthy of the afterlife… and then there’s your commitment to your family.

ALMA: (WITH WANING PATIENCE). Her one and only commitment is to the truth.

RUTH: (EMBOLDENED, DETERMINED) my commitment is to myself now, mum. To me!

REBECCA: (LOSES IT) And how are you going to live with yourself, huh?! A bad seed in your community; poisoning your own people with this libelous filth you’re spreading…. And don’t think they won’t call off the wedding (SHORT PAUSE) You could shelve this one and a few years from now, if your husband doesn’t turn out to be too strict, he’ll let you write another one. Talent doesn’t just go away like that.

RUTH: Mum, I’m losing myself… I dream about it at nights… I hear voices in my head… my daydreams are nightmares… it’s been going on for seven years… no rest, no peace of mind.

SAMUEL: And if you go public with this, you can expect the next 70 years to be more of the same…. You’ll be doubly damned.

ALMA: What on Earth could you possibly damn a 12-year-old girl for?!

SAMUEL: Oh, they’ll damn her alright! First, she’ll be damned for dishonoring the Rabbi, then they’ll damn her for going public and smearing him like that!

ALMA: *She* dishonored *him*?! It’s bad enough you turned your back on her the first time; practically sacrificed her because you were too scared to do anything, now you’re both going to let it happen again?! (Walks up to Samuel) “*Thou shalt not stand against the blood of thy neighbour!*”

SAMUEL: It’s ‘Lashon Hara[[9]](#footnote-10)!’ And slander is far worse than any bloodshed, foreign labour and incest combined!

RUTH: (SEETHING) I was 12 years old!!!

SAMUEL: And you needed his guidance… you needed his touch;

RUTH: (RAISES HER VOICE) I needed a father’s touch!!! Not a grown man’s, and he…

REBECCA: (HYSTERICAL) For Goodness sake, you *will* let this filth go! No one’s upset with you…

ALMA: But she is! *She’s* upset! She’s a victim of a heinous act of violence that you’ve turned into this deep, dark family secret only because *you* choose not to know the one thing you have to know!

SAMUEL: Miss Alma, please…

RUTH: (UNLEASHES HER RAGE) Daddy had just died, and I… how could you and mummy let them dump me in that place like that, so defenseless? I spent months lying awake at night, calling out to her (*Rebecca*); crying as loud as I could, on purpose, so she could hear me… I wanted to tell you…

REBECCA: Then why didn’t you?! I never heard you.

RUTH: That’s because you never wanted to hear me. And *you* didn’t either. Neither of you were there… or the Almighty for that matter…

(Rebecca slaps her)

SAMUEL: Rebecca, please! Go easy!

(Ruth is unsteady for a moment. Alma is shooting daggers at Rebecca.)

REBECCA: Miss Alma, that’s enough! This is a private matter and we need to talk about this between ourselves. (Alma heads for the door)

RUTH: No, Alma, don’t go!

RUTH: (TO REBECCA, ON THE OFFENCE) You heard me throw up at nights, pacing the house sleepless; not once did you ask me what happened there! Not once!

REBECCA: And I’m not about to start now!

ALMA: You tell them then! Tell them right now what happened at the library when you and the rabbi were sitting there together… and he…

RUTH: At first, he would stroke me and I uh… I just thought it was how parents stroked their children… he’d tell me these stories and the way he’d read them out, it was just so nice… and then his fingers… started running round my body; all over it, like they were possessed…

REBECCA: (STRUGGLING TO LISTEN) Ruthie, that’s enough… Miss Alma, please… I never asked you to come here!

ALMA: (IGNORING HER, TO RUTH) And you asked him to stop, didn’t you, Ruth? You told him to stop…

RUTH: And he wouldn’t… he wouldn’t stop, and I just closed my eyes and I prayed and prayed for someone to open that door and walk into the library… I begged God to send me a miracle and He didn’t!!! (Pause. Ruth turns to her inhaler. Alma watches her with concern.)

REBECCA: (HOLDING HERSELF BACK) You should have run. That’s what you should have done; not closed your eyes.

RUTH: Mum, I was scared to breathe.

REBECCA: (ABOUT TO COME UNDONE) I could feel something terrible was going on with you… I didn’t want to ask… (Unravelling) we were too scared to know… I’m a widow with six kids, what *could* I have done? Go after the rabbi? After he’d agreed to take you into that posh boarding school, free of charge?! (CHANGING HER TUNE) Why, rebono shel olam, can’t you forget?

(Ruth goes into hysterical fits of laughter. Rebecca feels awkward. Her eyes wander over to Samuel. Alma watches Ruth with concern.)

REBECCA: What’s got into you? So help me, the girl’s possessed… you’re as white as a corpse.

RUTH: Enough!!! (FULL MELTDOWN) You knew! Both of you! You knew! You knew!

(To Samuel) You went to see the Rabbi and I told him (at Samuel) that what he told you was a lie!

SAMUEL: They said you were imagining things. That none of it ever happened. How could I have known?

RUTH: Why would you take his word against mine? Why didn’t you believe me?

SAMUEL: Even if it is true and ‘**Hashem Y’rachem’**[[10]](#footnote-11), you *have* been violated, is this how you want to handle it? Go to a secular publisher so they can say, “Well! There’s one of them going around smearing them…” as if there isn’t already enough senseless hate in this world.

ALMA: If anyone will be saying that, it will be your people, not ours!

REBECCA: (IGNORING HER) You’ll get counseling… see one of our women; they'll know how to help you … lift you up… I’ll find you a ‘Rabbanit’[[11]](#footnote-12) who knows her way around these things. And you’ll go talk to her. (Still sat at her side, holding her) and it’ll pass… you’ll forget… forget all about it. (Alma is about to leave)

RUTH: (IGNORING HER MOTHER, TO ALMA) Don’t go. I need to talk to you. (To Rebecca, sternly) Alone! I want to talk to her alone.

(Rebecca and Samuel see themselves out. Ruth speaks quickly and in a hushed tone.)

RUTH: We’re publishing this book. That’s what I want; and If God is out there, then that is exactly what He wants me to do; publish this book.

ALMA: (EYEING HER) Are you sure?

RUTH: Positive. And you were right. She had nothing to repent for at the end of the book. Little girls should not be doing penance, full stop.

(Alma holds Ruth)

RUTH: Alma, thank you for coming.

(Enter: Rebecca. Alma makes her way to the door.)

The bell rings. Rebecca answers the door. Enter: Maya.

(Alma watches. Maya locks eyes with Alma who freezes on the spot.) (Alma and Maya stare right at each other. Rebecca watches them both, intently.)

ALMA: Hi Maya.

REBECCA: You two know each other?

MAYA: Hi mum!

REBECCA: She’s *your* daughter?! (Pause. She gets protective of her. Almost showing her off.) The Lord *does* work in mysterious ways, doesn’t He? She’s a good girl, your daughter.

A bit of a hardliner… and a bit too strict maybe; although she does mean well.

ALMA: No doubt about that.

MAYA: (CHARGES TOWARDS RUTH) you’re Ruth…

 RUTH: That’s right…?

MAYA: I’ve read your book… you can’t publish it.

RUTH: I’m sorry?

MAYA: It’s filth… and you know it.

RUTH: Excuse me?! (Another coughing fit starts)

MAYA: She’s using you. She’s preying on you and she’s leading you astray. You can’t let her send you down a path of sin… she’s doing it on purpose.

RUTH: Maya, is it? How about you focus on your own sins and keep your nose out of mine?!

MAYA: ‘Rebono shel Olam’[[12]](#footnote-13), you need to listen! As far as she’s concerned, I was stolen from her and she will stop at nothing… to get me back. You’re a bargaining chip… at best. She is stealing your soul.

RUTH: What you’re saying is lashon hara! You can’t talk about her like that. What she's done for me in one hour, no one’s ever come close to doing my whole life.

MAYA: What did she do, eh? Trick you into writing some tabloid-y Bnei Brak tell-all!

(Exit: Ruth. Rebecca follows.)

ALMA: (QUIET, FED UP ) You know… the scriptures demand that those who find God keep their head down in the early days of their awakening. Where *the hell* do you get off thinking you’re so much better than everyone else? That your God is somehow better than mine? Who raised you, huh? What values were you taught that you would end up part of this backward mediaeval parade of ignorance?!

MAYA: Mum, it’s not their fault. You can’t go nuclear on the whole world just because of me. Do you know what she has in store for her if she goes through with this? She will be ostracized; excommunicated! Have mercy on her…

ALMA: I love you more than life itself, Maya… but you are so far gone I honestly don’t even see the point of continuing this conversation; Ruth is in a fight for her life and I will do everything I can to save her.

MAYA: Publish this book… and you will never see me again. (Exits)

REBECCA: (APPROACHES ALMA) I know her rabbi. He’s a good man. Knows how to mend fences. (Alma keeps silent)

REBECCA: The newly-orthodox… some of them can be ultra-strict … but if one wants to keep the peace, then one has to be ready to make some concessions… it’s part of “honour thy father and thy mother.”

ALMA: I have a feeling that commandment is one concession she’s already made.

REBECCA: We may have been wrong all along, Miss Alma… and now, we’re both losing our daughters. You should look after yours now and let me take care of mine. Just leave Ruth alone.

ALMA: Ruth is free.

REBECCA: You can’t publish! Not now! I’ll talk to the rabbi; make sure Maya comes home; sees her family; talks to her mother, at least once a week.

ALMA: Thank you, but I really don’t need one of your people playing mediator between me and my daughter.

REBECCA: Look, Miss Alma; there is comfort for some troubles; if you’re ill, you can get better; if you’ve lost money, you can earn it back… but losing someone you love? She’s my eldest… my flesh and blood… don’t push her away from me… please.

ALMA: (GETS UP) Rebecca, the only one doing that is you. You’re the one pushing her away. Goodbye and I do apologize for barging into your home like this, uninvited.

(Exit: Alma. Enter: Samuel)

(Mini pause)

SAMUEL: Becca, I just talked to her.

REBECCA: Lord help us, Sam… what if she’s right? And all this *did* happen to her? What about the other girls? What do I do with my younger ones? Am I supposed to also send them off to that boarding school?!

(Enter: Ruth. Silence)

SAMUEL: Look, Ruth… your father, G-d rest his soul was very close to Rabbi Yoel. If you don’t recant every last word of this book today, I’m going to have to go tell him the truth. And if, heaven forbid, he calls off the wedding then you’re getting on the next flight to the US… first thing tomorrow! We’re getting you out of here. And if anyone asks, we’ll just say the family needed you urgently.

REBECCA: What about the little ones, eh Ruth? Who’s going to want them for a Shidduch? Who?! They’re your brothers and sisters… your own flesh and blood… you are shaming them for life!

RUTH: Mum, I can’t take it back.

REBECCA: You can’t…. well why can’t you? Why in heavens name can’t you?!?! (She’s on the verge of a meltdown) Why can’t you? (Samuel holds her, trying to get her to settle; she pushes him away; holds on to Ruth, shaking her, hugging her) Where will you go, Ruth, without the Lord in your life? Where? How are you going to live a Godless life?! The Lord is testing you.. You have to root out the weeds in your soul and you’ll see; the path back to His grace and glory will show itself to you!

RUTH: I can’t take it back.

REBECCA: Well if you can’t take it back, then you are no longer my daughter.

Exit: Ruth. Samuel follows her. Rebecca slumps onto the armchair.

# SCENE 7

SATURDAY NIGHT – HANUKKAH 8TH AND FINAL NIGHT

Amir at home, packing a large bag. The doorbell rings.

Enter: Ruth, carrying a handbag.

AMIR: Oh hey.

RUTH: Hello. Is Alma here?

AMIR: (NOTING HER CASES) Up in her office. What’s this? Moving in, are we?

RUTH: I came to say goodbye. I’m going away. (Spots his travel bag) Are you also going somewhere?

AMIR: I am indeed.

RUTH: Where to?

AMIR: First stop is France. How about yourself?

RUTH: Off to the States.

AMIR: The US of A! Get you! What, is this some kind of heritage trip?

RUTH: The engagement’s been called off.

AMIR: Oh. Gosh… that sucks.

RUTH: The Shidduch; it was basically my father’s will which I… just went against and you know what? That's actually the thing that hurts the most about all this.

AMIR: So they’ve cut you loose because of the book… And umm… now what?

RUTH: I’m going to stay with family in Brooklyn. Uncle Samuel’s coming to collect me. I just can’t stay in Bnei Brak anymore.

AMIR: New York’s incredible, you know. It’s definitely on my list too… I’m going to make it to every single place on my list, you know. My soul is literally bursting to just… *fly*! It needs to breathe. I haven’t told mum I’m going away yet. I’ve actually never left her on her own before.

RUTH: If you want to go away, then that is what you need to do. Every soul has its part to play.

AMIR: And suppose my soul hasn’t got a clue what its part is? Who’s going to tell it what’s what?

 RUTH: Oh, it knows.

AMIR: Doesn’t it just… look at the pair of us… both lost our dads, neither of us gets on that well with our mums, both going away tonight… what are the odds, eh? You know what? Different time, different place I’d be telling you to come with me… have a timeout, get away from all this insanity… destination anywhere. We could even go off to some remote island for all I care…

RUTH: (SMILES) Remote Island?

AMIR: Hell yeah. White sands, clear blue ocean, seagulls over our heads, delicious coconuts… kosher, obviously … our own Yacht … me knocking back a Red Bull; you, jogging down the beach with your ginger wig blowing in the breeze…

RUTH: Cycling.

AMIR: Sorry?

RUTH: You’ll teach me how to ride a bike…

AMIR: Oh, right, yeah, yeah; cycling. Of course! You’ll write, I’ll play you my music…

RUTH: (STEPS TOWARDS HIM) I would, you know…

AMIR: (STEPS TOWARDS HER) For real? You’d come with me?

RUTH: Yes.

AMIR: I’d look after you.

RUTH: I know you would… (She smiles)

(They share a kiss and immediately step away from each other)

AMIR: Different time, different place, eh?

RUTH: (FLUSTERED) You’re one of the good guys.

AMIR: Who, me? Right… I’m a regular Jewish mother’s wet dream. A hell of a lot of good that does me…

RUTH: (QUIETLY CHUCKLES)

Enter: Alma

ALMA: Ruth, hey! (Spots the suitcases, delighted) Are you moving in?

RUTH: I’m off to Brooklyn… to see my family.

ALMA: Oh, you’re going away…. (Disappointed) how come?

RUTH: Alma, they’ve called off the engagement. If I stay, my family will get excommunicated. My siblings will never find a Shidduch and they’ll boycott mum’s wig salon until they run it to the ground. They already stuck a couple of warning signs on the window yesterday!

ALMA: What are you going to do over there?

RUTH: I’ll write.

ALMA: How?

RUTH: Same way I did here.

ALMA: So, out of one prison and into another… sound about right? And of course, it won’t be long before they pawn you off on some crippled old fossil, or widower, or God knows who…

RUTH: They’re being smeared! I have to protect them.

ALMA: Funny how you didn’t make your protagonist repent in the end… her you set free… how strange is that?

RUTH: I’m not repenting for anything; this is by choice! Remember how you said this was like me coming out of a cave? Well, it is, except I never thought the light would burn my eyes so badly. Alma, if I stay here, I’ll never feel… and neither will you… I can’t be Maya’s understudy.

(Pausette)

ALMA: When do you leave?

RUTH: Tonight. Uncle Samuel is waiting for me. Alma, thank you so much. If it weren’t for you, I never would have finished this book. You really are the most extraordinary woman.

ALMA: (WOUNDED) I don’t do goodbyes.

RUTH: (TO AMIR) You take care of yourself, yeah?

AMIR: Right back at you. Goodbye.

RUTH: Goodbye.

AMIR: So long.

RUTH: So long.

AMIR: Bye now.

(She smiles and exits)

ALMA: (SPOTS THE RUCKSACK) Shit, she forgot her rucksack, come on, run! You can still catch her!

AMIR: (EYEING HER) Mum, that’s not her rucksack. It’s mine.

ALMA: (SURPRISED) Excuse me?

AMIR: I’m going away.

ALMA: When?

AMIR: Tonight.

ALMA: What’s the rush? Why tonight?

AMIR: Because if I don’t go tonight, you *will* find a way of making me stay.

ALMA: Have you got your ticket then?

AMIR: Picking it up at the airport.

ALMA: I’m sorry but have you lost your mind?

AMIR: Don’t make this a thing. I need some time with myself; I have to sort my head out.

ALMA: Go to the desert then! Try the North… go off the grid of a couple of days…

AMIR: Mum, I can’t breathe… I cannot breathe! And I’m sick of watching you going from one war to the next. And the worst of it is how you just gave up on your daughter!

ALMA: She’s the one who gave up on *me* and I don’t regret a thing I’ve said or done.

AMIR: I can’t live with this anymore!

ALMA: So this little trip of yours… it’s a silent protest, is it?

AMIR: It’s not a protest, I just have to go… ever since dad died, I uh… I’ve been walking around feeling like I can’t leave you on your own, which is wrong on so many levels.

ALMA: You can, and it would be absolutely fine. I never expected you to step in for him… what I did expect though, is for you to realize that I did fight for Maya, Amir; tooth and nail… every way I could.

AMIR: Mum, there are no winners at war. We’re all the losers.

ALMA: I am what I am. Every morning I wake up ready for the next battlefront. I know there are thousands of ways a person can live their life and that you can’t expect to control other people or the choices they make but that is the only language I speak… I don’t know any other way of being a mother.

AMIR: It did kind of feel like you were going for a trade-in. Like what happened with your suitcase; they took yours, so why not take theirs? Right? Out with the old daughter, in with the new one.

ALMA: It just never occurred to me I’d also be losing a son. (Turns very fact-of-the-matter) Where are you off to?

AMIR: First stop is Mont Blanc.

ALMA: (EYEING HIM)

AMIR: He and I need to have a chat.

ALMA: You’re not thinking about climbing it…?

AMIR: I’m not climbing anything. I just need to see that mountain… just this once.

ALMA: Then what?

ALMA: Then we’ll see.

(SHORT PAUSE)

ALMA: Who are you going with?

AMIR: Myself.

ALMA: Why go on your own?

AMIR: Just worked out that way.

ALMA: What time’s your flight?

AMIR: Still got a couple of hours.

(Pause. He watches her)

AMIR: Fancy a game?

ALMA: Don’t feel like it.

AMIR: I’ll make it worth your while. You’ll be so desperate to win you’ll forget you were ever pissed off at me. (They play) (After the game)

AMIR: I’ll text you. Every day. Three times; no, four times a day… (He hugs her) I’ll call you when we’ve landed, and I love you…

ALMA: (PULLS AWAY) I detest goodbyes.

AMIR: (AT HIS FATHER’S PHOTO) Bye dad. You two look after each other, yeah? At ease.

Exit: Amir. Cue music. Alma lights the menorah. All eight candles are lit. At the same time, the menorahs at the Orthodox household are awash with light. Children heard singing a traditional Hanukkah song (*Maoz Zur*).

THE END

1. The notion of ‘repenting’ for one’s sins in Judaism. Literally meaning ‘fixing.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. An unwed man and woman left alone together. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Traditional Jewish exclamation in Hebrew meaning “Lord save us.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. An affront to the Lord and His name. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Penance in Judaism. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Yiddish for ‘Good Lord!’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Hebrew/Yiddish for an arranged match. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. An emotional/frustrated ‘God almighty!’ exclamation. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Biblical term for ‘defamation’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Lord have mercy [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Female rabbi [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For the love of God [↑](#footnote-ref-13)