

SOULS

Roy Chen

Translation from Hebrew: Neta Roth

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About the play

Grisha's life story spans over four hundred years. He was born in a 17th century Jewish Shtetl and ever since then he has been living and dying, jumping from body to body, from one century to another. Constantly being reborn. But what is the driving force of these endless reincarnations? Is it atonement for an ancient sin, unfulfilled love, or simply pure coincidence?

Sounds like total bullshit, right? Well, his mother thinks so too! She forces herself into the story with an overwhelming urge to mediate Grisha's so-called memories, converting them into (what she considers) his real biography. There is only one Life, she says, everything else is a metaphor.

The two protagonists of Souls are in constant merciless battle over the reader's heart. Who will prevail? Soul or body, fantasy or reality, the son, the mother or the Holy Spirit? Is life ultimately a gift or punishment?

The play was directed **by Itay Tiran** in Gesher Theater (Tel-Aviv) in 2025.

<https://www.gesher-theatre.co.il/en/repertoire/a/view/?ContentID=2841>

Trailer with Eng. Sub: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtqH-RwZGV8>

About the author, Roy chen

<https://www.roychen.net/eng>

The Souls:

LIFE. *Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The 21st century*

GRISHA, Unemployed, lives with his mother in Jaffa. A lonely little soul.

MARINA, His mother, a museum guard, a lonely old soul.

חַיָּט לֵאָדָּה *Horbitza. Polish Lithuanian Kingdom. 17th Century*

GETZ, A nine-year-old boy

GITL, His seven-year-old sister, a graceful crybaby.

MALKA, Their mother, a Jewish mother

PERETZ, Their father, Tombstone carver.

PAVEL, A Gentile.

LA VITA. *Venice. The 18th century*

GEDALIA, The son of a moneylender

GEYLE, The daughter of a debtor

SALOMONE ELGRANATI, Gedalia's father, a moneylender

GONDOLIER

DVOIRE, A righteous outcast

حياة. *Fes. Morocco. The 19th century*

GIMOL FADIDA, A former prostitute, a lover with a soul.

GABRIEL SIKSO, Translator, married, wears glasses, her soulmate.

SULTANA, Gabriel's wife, damn her.

AN ENGLISH CLIENT, Despicable.

MESSODY, A little girl

FLOHLEBEN. *Dauchau, German. The 20th century*

CAMP PRISONER, The flea trainer

The cast: 3M, 2F, 1Child

The following roles are played by the same actor/actress:

GRISHA – GETZ – GEDALIA – GIMOL

GITL – DVOIRE – MESSODY

MALKA – GEYLE – SULTANA

PERETZ – SALOMONE – AN ENGLISH CLIENT – CAMP PRISONER

PAVEL – GONDOLIER – GABRIEL

ACT I

PROLOGUE.

LIFE. *Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The 21st century*

A fourth-floor apartment in a miserable neighborhood in Jaffa. GRISHA is live streaming for anyone who is willing to watch, on the nudist beach better known as “the internet.”

GRISHA

Hello... Can you see me... Here we go... Dear souls, thank you for joining my live stream. Trigger warning: I plan to kill myself at the end of this stream, but there's no need to call police; it's not gonna be the first time I die. Yes, my soul has been reincarnating for four hundred years, from body to body, from land to land. Dying is nothing; death always stays the same death. Life is what keeps changing.

The problem is that I'm sick of this life. I refuse to go on even a day further without... You. Some people lose a credit card, headphones, a wedding ring; I lost my soulmate. We were together for three incarnations, and suddenly she... Vanished. Just so you'd know: if you're here, I'm canceling this whole thing and coming straight to you. Are you here? Bistu da? Sei qui? ... ?אנת' הונא Ты тут или не тут? Ну... душа моя родная

Maybe you just don't know you're my soulmate; maybe something I say here will remind you of our past lives. If it does, please dm me right away, okay?

Before I'm putting an end to me, I want to start from the beginning. My first incarnation was four hundred years ago, In the Jewish town of Horbitza, in the Polish Lithuanian Kingdom. Every childhood story sounds like a fairytale, but mine also looked like one: between two linden trees stood our rickety wooden hut, but it shielded us from the snowstorm outside... I'm not going to recount my entire childhood, just its last day.

I feel like recreating the light of that winter day. It was a seventeenth century light. When it shone, people scattered like ants; when it darkened, they

stopped, like stones. A primal light that didn't compete with electricity, a good light, a beautiful light like nothing we know nowadays. It's strange that you can miss light.

I was only nine then, and my name was Getz. My little sister's name was Gitl.

GRISHA *suddenly notices an impossible sight. He steps back. From the refrigerator, straight from the 17th century, into the Jaffa apartment, jumps GITL, a bare-foot girl in a torn nightgown.*

GITL

Getz, dance with me!

GRISHA

Gitl, my soulmate, innocence incarnate, her eyes shone in that light of yonder, and her laughter... I would give anything to hear that laugh again. *(She laughs.)*

I **Das Leben**

Horbitsa, Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom, 17th Century

I.I MY FATHER, QUEEN ESTHER

PERETZ, in period clothing, bursts into the Jaffa apartment, followed by MALKA, his wife; they are arguing. Peretz turns the apartment upside down in search for a razor

PERETZ

My God... where is it... dammit... Where's my razor...

MALKA

Peretz... Have you been possessed by a dybbuk? Stop it, I am begging you.

PERETZ

But we only have a few hours until the Purimshpil!

Malka

There won't be any Purim or any Shpil— Look at what's going on out there!

PERETZ

Malka, for the last time— Where is my razor?!

MALKA

Stop it, you're scaring the kids!

PERETZ

Me?! Kinderlach, am I scaring you?

GITL hides under a blanket

PERETZ

Gitl... Getz, get her out of there, I'm shaving, and we leave.

Getz

Gitl...

MALKA

Peretz, It's against the law of the Bible! «Ye shall not mar the corners of thy beard».

PERETZ

You want me to play Queen Esther with a beard? HOT ES A PUNIM?

MALKA

Why not? My father played Queen Esther, and he had a magnificent beard!

PERETZ

I'm not your father, thankfully; I'm your husband, unfortunately.

MALKA

Take off thy shoes from off thy feet when speaking of my father! My father, may his soul rest in peace, was a great man. He was an artist!

PERETZ

A tombstone carver.

MALKA

And each tombstone - a masterpiece. People couldn't wait to die and lie under his stones. But somehow, ever since you inherited the business, everyone seems to live to a hundred and twenty, God forbid.

PERETZ

The dead are dead. They don't care what their tombstone looks like.

MALKA

When they're resurrected, they'll care alright.

PERETZ

The Jews here in Horbitza are so lazy that even if Messiah comes to get them, they won't get up. *(To Getz)* Get up.

MALKA

If Jews manage to get up after Shabbat dinner — they will manage with getting up from their graves.

PERETZ

My God, you say so many words, woman...

A loud thunder sound startles them

MALKA

Zlate! Zlate... We have to go get Zlate.

PERETZ

Into the house? Absolutely not, take her to the barn.

MALKA

Peretz, she's an old cow... She won't survive this cold.

PERETZ

Well, no matter, she hasn't a drop of milk left in her anyway.

MALKA

You're heartless.

MALKA exits

PERETZ

Did you hear that? I'm heartless. I think I do have a heart; you know what I don't have?

thunder, lightning, PERETZ finds the razor and raises it

PERETZ

Found it!

(Singing)

My name is Queen Esther,
a lovely crown I bear,
And know you who's my uncle? why,
The Jewish Mordechai.

Everybody's everybody's crowns caress their hair
For each of us, yes each of us is dressed as queen Esther

GETZ and GITL are alone

GITL

Mama is angry with Tatte.

GETZ

What? No, no... It's cold, so they're fighting to warm themselves up. Want to try it, Gitl? Fight with me. Scream, "You're heartless!"

GITL

You're heartless.

GETZ

Louder!

GITL

You're heartless

GETZ

That won't warm you up. Scream as loud as you can!

GITL

You're heartless! My stomach hurts.

GETZ

Because you're hungry. So am I, but soon we'll eat so much, our stomachs will ache from all the food.

GITL

Really?

GETZ

Of course. After the Purimshpil, they'll hold a feast for the destitute.

GITL

What's "destitute"?

GETZ

Well... We are. You couldn't join us last year because you were too little. Just the smell in there can fill your belly... We all get a fresh challah, (he grabs her braid) soft, sweet... *(He puts her braid in his mouth)* Mmm, delicious...

GITL

(pulling her braid back, but laughing) Stop!

GETZ

And then they'll serve us... *(looks around and finds stones)* Cutlets! Brown, juicy cutlets! careful, they're hot, blow on them first...

He blows on the stone and hands it to GITL. GITL, out of hunger, bites the stone and cries out in pain

GITL

Ouch!

MALKA enters

MALKA

Now what? Getz, what did you do to her?

GETZ

I didn't do anything...

MALKA

How many times do I have to tell you not to play with the stones from Tatte's tombs? Peretz... where is he... where's Tatte? Answer me.

Peretz enters, shaved and wearing a dress

PERETZ

Happy Purim!

MALKA

Oy...

PERETZ

why ‘oy’, Malka, always “oy”... Five thousand years of Jewish women telling their husbands “oy”. Eve to Adam- ‘oy’ Sarah to Abraham —’oy’, in the beginning, there was “oy.” All year I’m stuck with these tombstones, and on the one day I can finally spread my wings like a little bird, you could, instead of telling me “oy”—

MALKA slaps PERETZ

PERETZ

Oy...

Thunder, heavy rain and howling wind outside

MALKA

You know what — go. Get out, LOZ MICH OP, UND GEY AVEK Children, Tatte thinks that on a night like this, someone will leave his house to watch him playing Queen Esther! Go, meet the Angel of Death. Get out, dybbuk. Get out!

1.2 GENTILE

Someone knocks on the door

Pavel (*from outside, in Polish*): Żydzi pomóżcie! [Jews! Help!]

MALKA

Shema Yisrael... A pogrom.

PERETZ

What pogrom? In this weather?

PAVEL

Żydzi, w imię Boga otwórzcie mi drzwi!
[Jews, in the name of God, open the door!]

GETZ

Someone is asking for help.

MALKA

And may God help him.

PERETZ

Hospitality, Malka, it's a holyday.

PERETZ opens the refrigerator, from which bursts in Pavel the gentile, covered in snow, half-dead, collapsing

PAVEL

(in Polish): Koń... koń... mój koń jest na zewnątrz.

[Horse... horse... my horse is outside.]

PERETZ

Don't worry, I'll take care of your horse... I'll bring it into the barn. Getz—fire!
Malka—brandy! Dear God...

MALKA

You can't leave us alone with the Goy!

*PERETZ exits; they are left alone with the gentile, who approaches the fire that
GETZ lights*

PAVEL

Jesus Mary. Dziękuję.

[Thank you.]

MALKA pours him some brandy

MALKA

Proszę pana.

[Here you go.]

PAVEL

Dziękuję.

[Thank you.]

Peretz returns

PERETZ

(to Pavel) I put your horse with our cow, Zlate, match made in heaven. Well, we can bless hagomel. *(Jewish blessing)* Hagomel...

PAVEL

Pavel.

PERETZ

(Blesses. Drinks with him.) Pavel. Peretz. This is Malka, my wife, may she live long. Getz, not that dull for a boy, but not that bright either, and this, is our princess, Gitl. Pavel, when the storm is over, you'll return to your village and them that Jews have saved you.

Pavel laughs

PERETZ

What's funny?

MALKA

(muttering) The dress...

PERETZ

What? Oh... Today we celebrate Purim. Purim, it's a Jewish holiday where everything is turned on its head. I'm Queen Esther... It's an old tale about us, Jews, and the Gentiles in the town of Shushan. *(Lightning, thunder.)*

PAVEL

Jesus Mary

PERETZ

Hold on... Hold on, the Lord in his grace has blessed us with an audience... We can host our own Purimshpil, here at home! Gitl—you'll be Mordechai! The hero who saved our people in Shushan. *(Puts a beard on her.)* Getz - king Ahasuerus, who ruled over 127 provinces! *(Improvises a crown for him.)* Malka, you'll be Vashti

MALKA

I will not!

PERETZ

Don't want to play Vashti? Fine, play Zeresh, Haman's wife, suits you better anyway. And you, Pavel, you're the villain, Haman the iil. Every time I say Haman... you do this (*he rattles the loud Gragger*). Children, ready?

And in the days of Ahasuerus, who reigned from India to...

GETZ

Kush.

PERETZ

He hosted a feast in the town of Shushan for all his advisers and servants, with royal wine in abundance for all to drink, from great and small. And the king commanded to bring Vashti the queen. (*To Getz.*) Command.

GETZ

And the king commanded for Vashti the queen to be brought before him, to show her beauty to his men and servants. And she refused.

MALKA

And she refused! You hear that? If you want a woman to come, don't command, ask.

PERETZ

(to Malka) Oh, you didn't want to play Vashti, did you?

MALKA

I'm just saying you shouldn't have to say amen to everything your husband says...

PERETZ

Hush! And what happened then, who remembers?

GETZ

Ahasuerus banished Vashti from the palace and sought to give her royal estate

to another better than she, and he searched for a beautiful a young virgin, who would be fair to look on, and searched, and searched, and searched, and then found — Esther.

PERETZ

And the king loved Esther above all women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins. And she rejoiced among the handsome servants, the red roses, the peacocks in the garden. Only one person darkened my joy, he who decreed annihilation upon my people, the king's minister, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, none other than Haman the iil."

Everyone rattles their graggers

PERETZ

"I will tell this to my uncle, Mordechai the Jew. Gitl, this Mordechai, was so brave, that when everyone else bowed to Haman... He... Wouldn't bow."

GITL bows to PAVEL

PERETZ

"Wouldn't bow," Gitl, show how you aren't bowing!

GITL simply stands in front of PAVEL

PERETZ

Good, Gitl! "this wicked man, may he rot in hell, took offence, went home and told this to his wife, Zeresh, and she, the shrew, whispered in his ear that all Jews should be annihilated.

MALKA

Not all, just a certain few...

PERETZ

"King Ahasuerus saw my downcast face and told me... remember, Getz, we learned this last year:"

GETZ

'What wilt thou, queen Esther? for whatever thy request, even to the half of the kingdom, it shall be given thee.'

PERETZ

“If you love me, Your Majesty, if you love me from India to Kush, then why don’t you take Haman...”

Everyone rattles their graggers

PERETZ

...And hang him from a tree? Will you? Please? Please? Please?

GETZ

I will...

PERETZ

(Approaching, drunk and excited, towards Pavel-Haman): “A great crowd gathered in the town of Shushan and witnessed how the Jews’ enemy is hanged from a tall tree, along with his wife, and their children, from eldest to youngest...”

MALKA

Peretz...

GETZ

What, the children too?

MALKA

It’s just a story.

PERETZ

(singing) “And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king, in royal apparel, and a great crown of gold...”

Returns to speaking

PERETZ

And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. And they slew seventy-five thousand of their enemies...

GETZ

Mama, Gitl is scared...

MALKA

Peretz, stop it, now...

PERETZ

Why should we stop? In every generation, a new Haman arises to annihilate us. So just this once, we got them first! Every Jew in Shushan passed by Haman's body and threw at him whatever came to hand: dirt, mud, rotten eggs, and shouted: *(throws something at Pavel)* Cursed be Haman!

PAVEL, completely drunk, rattles his gragger and giggles

PERETZ

Getz, your turn. You're a big boy now, come on, shout, show them you're your father's son! Cursed be Haman...

GETZ throws something at PAVEL's feet

GETZ

(mumbling): Cursed be Haman...

PAVEL, again, rattles his Gragger and giggles

PERETZ

Mine Got [my god]... Gitl, show your brother how it's done—"

MALKA

You don't have to.

PERETZ

What do you mean? Of course she has to! We all do! Or should we stay mute before our enemies? Go like cattle to the slaughter? Today, everything is turned on his head! Today, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm!

He hits PAVEL with a pillow

PERETZ

Cursed be Haman!

He hits him harder, clearly wasted

PERETZ

Cursed be Haman!

This no longer amuses PAVEL

PERETZ

Cursed be Haman!

PAVEL

Ty żydowski parchu, zabierz ode mnie swoje brudne łapy, bo połamię ci kości i wyrzucę psom

[Take your dirty hands off me, you filthy Jew, or I'll break your bones and throw them to the dogs!]

PAVEL grabs the pillow and hits Peretz, who falls. For a moment, it seems as though he won't get up, but he does. They fight.

MALKA

Dear god... You have lost your minds. Gitl, are you okay

GITL

I'm okay...

MALKA

Getz, are you okay?

GETZ

I'm okay.

PERETZ

I'm fine too. Pavel, are you... Pavel...

GITL

He has a hole in his head.

PERETZ

What...? Where did this stone come from?

MALKA

From your tombstones...

PERETZ

Why on earth did you hit him with a stone?

MALKA

Because of you, you said, “whatever comes to hand...”

GETZ

He’s dead

GITL

He’s dead?

PERETZ

(mumbling hysterically, barely understandable) He’s dead. We killed him, we killed him, God help us, we killed him...

MALKA

(slapping him) Peretz! *(to the children)*: Children, to bed. Now. Close your eyes and forget about all this.

PERETZ

Shema Israel, Adonai Eloheinu...

MALKA

Listen to me carefully, Peretz. You will do exactly as I say, or we will be in deep trouble. We’re cleaning him up, putting him on his horse; the horse knows the way, it’ll take him home.

PERETZ

The gentiles will find out he was here...

MALKA

How? Will the horse tell them?

PERETZ

They'll burn our village... We're doomed...

MALKA

What do you know? Maybe he's a reincarnation of Haman the iil. Maybe this was his rectification. As far as I'm concerned, we never saw this man; he never stepped foot in this home, and may God have mercy on our souls, amen. Say amen. Say amen!

PERETZ

Amen.

MALKA

And take that dress off; you look like your mother; may she rest in peace.

MALKA and PERETZ drag Pavel outside together. GETZ and GITL are left alone under the blanket, night

1.3 POGROM

Grisha

We all fell into a deep sleep, as if that stone had hit each of us on the head. But we were awakened before sunrise. There were at least five of them. And a dog. To this day, I don't get how they knew to choose our home out of all the cabins? Maybe it was by chance, or maybe the horse really did tell them. They grabbed Mama... Tatte tried to protect her, but one of them, the smallest one, kicked his face with his boot. His nose was smeared with blood. I stupidly thought that if he had a beard, maybe it would have protected him. Gitl huddled in the corner. She sucked on her braid like it was a piece of challah. The dog approached her; it was a black dog, with short ears, peeling skin, and pink gums. It locked its jaws on her wrist. Her little hand. She didn't even have time to scream. It bit her here and here and here... Then dragged her outside like a rag doll. A thick silence filled the air, and then the smoke did... Our small cabin, the wooden cabin where I was born, went up in flames, with me in it.

What marks the end of your childhood? When you watch your mother slap your father? When you lie to your sister to save her? When you stare death straight in the eye, and it stares back at you?

Pavel died, Tatte died, Mama died, Gitl died, everyone in Horbitza have died, I have died, all that lives is longing.

Marina enters

MARINA

Твою мать... Гриша... господи, боже мой... что за бардак... каждый раз что то новое... за что это мне... кошмар какой то... как будто здесь был погром, спалишь всю квартиру к чертовой матери... совсем сдурел

[Son of a... Grisha... My God... Grisha! What is this mess... Every time something new... What did I do to deserve this... Hell, It's like after a slaughter. You will end up burning this whole apartment, have you completely lost your mind?

In russian]

What... What are you looking at? You think it's a zoo? It's people's life here. If you want to peek — peek at neighbors, shame in you!

I'm allowed to look; he's my son. Whenever Grisha has audience, everything with him becomes grandiose. And don't tell me that in art, it's okay to do fantasy! We're an intelligent family; I know what is metaphor, what is allegory. Don't think because my Hebrew is not good, I'm brainless.

You're adults, you're not degenerates; you understand that Grisha isn't four hundred years old. He's forty, even if he acts like he's four. This is not normal child. Twenty-one hours until he was born. They had to force him out of me. To this day, I feel the cord that ties us. They cut it, but they didn't cut it.

He tells you stories about his childhood, about a mother who slaps and father artist. Who is taking care of him alone all these years, the artist?! The artist flew, like a bird, and I didn't marry — and I had cavaliers — but now only family I have is Grisha. Who do you think buys food? Who does laundry? Who pays rent for our apartment here in Jaffa?

Thank you very much to Tel Aviv Museum that I have job. For ten years now, I work as guard in the European Art Hall from the 16th to the 19th century, where Rubens is, where Brueghel the younger is, Maurycy Gottlieb... Those who know — know. They say museum is a place of silence. For me, at home with Grisha, it's more silence. Especially in the last three months that he

stopped talking to me at all. We had a scandal, since then... железный занавес, how do you say, iron curtain. And now he says he'll kill himself! And says so everyone will hear, provocateur. In the end, closest people hurt us the most.

So I'm at museum a lot. When people come to museum, they're in good mood. Some stare deeply, deeply into a picture. Some walk holding hands. There are children from schools. Some come alone. In museum, it's not weird to come alone. I saw a lady once, so pretty, walking, looking, and everyone, instead of looking at paintings, were looking at lady, and she doesn't even notice. At me, no one looks anymore. Sometimes they even bump into the chair where I'm sitting, not on purpose, they don't see I'm there. I also became like a picture hanging on the wall. Maybe it's good, maybe that's why I don't fall.

But I didn't even want to talk; I wanted you to go back to your lives. But if we're talking, you should know what really was Grisha's childhood. Don't think that this is how I raised child.

What did he tell you? That his name is Getz. What is Getz? Does anybody have a name like that? Maybe someone does. I never heard it. My son's name: Grigory Tsirulnik, so he took G and Ts and got Getz.

About the place he calls Horbitza, I don't know what that is; there's no such thing on the globe, I checked with Yandex. Grisha was born in Moscow, but Petya, Grisha's father, always said: Moscow is shtetl, small village, so that's why Grisha says he was born in shtetl.

When Grisha was born, I was in love with him. I thought then, he would grow up and be professor; whatever he wants—he'll have. I was wrong. Well, that was all in Moscow, ages ago. Another lifetime.

Sure, everything dies and is born again; revolves; what, here in Jaffa, isn't that a cycle? What, weren't there Turks and British and Napoleon... Who didn't want Jaffa! Jaffa in Arabic means beautiful, like a beautiful woman; Fadi and Ranin, our neighbors taught me that. They also told me that in our apartment lived an Arab family whose father worked at "Nabil" cinema, on Jerusalem Boulevard, where today there's a theater. And Ranin's grandmother, who was child then, she watched a film there every day, every day! Until they made Israel, and the film was over. That's also a cycle.

Now, what Grisha calls the last day of childhood, it's the day before he came

to Israel. We lived in Bibirevo; those who know, know; those who don't—good for them. We lived in a small apartment, me and Petya and Grisha and also my mother, Zlata, my she rest in please. It's not nice that Grisha tells as if she was old cow. Even in allegory, you need some tact. And don't think I don't have criticism of her. I was with her all day, cleaning, giving medicines, what's wrong, Mama, what can I get you, watching Santa Barbara on TV, she hardly let me go to the bathroom. Her legs didn't work anymore, but her eyes and ears worked very good. Once I dropped a vase with that... well... my dad, that they burned... such hysteria. Even in great Moscow art theater, they didn't make such drama. And nothing happened; Papa didn't spill. I said: Papa was a physicist; he doesn't believe his soul is inside vase. But when she was old, she started with mysticism. I even think maybe she is where Grisha got all his mysticism.

That's how we lived, lived, until suddenly—perestroika, the iron curtain fall, everyone who could—ran away. So Petya said—we're going in Israel, istoricheskaya rodina, land of milk and honey. I said, what did we lose there, why can't we go like Lariska, to Berlin, or Oksanka, who went Australia? And I'm not Jewish.” But he says, “Your husband is Jewish—that's good enough.” He started learning Hebrew, going to synagogue. I told him, “Petya, you're an engineer, what's to an engineer and synagogue?” But he had already gotten all the certificates and documents.

Now, about a sister. Grisha never had and never will. There was a doll I gave him because he was afraid to sleep alone. He still plays with sometimes. I don't even want to know how.

So, on that last day before leaving there really was a lot of snow.

Petya went into the bathroom with beard and came out without beard—his face looked like baby's butt. I said, “Oy,” I didn't say “OY!” And he said, “It's hot in Israel—I don't need beard.” And suddenly, he takes my headscarf, starts dancing, and says, “Today is Purim, a Jewish holiday when everything is turned on its head!”

I think Jews don't need holiday to turn everything on its head. And then—there's a knock on the door. Our neighbor, Pavel. Yes, yes, here Grisha couldn't come up with a name for fantasy. So Petya says, “Welcome, Pavel! Today is Purim, a holiday when people drink until they're out.” And Pavel says, “Oh, then I had Purim yesterday too!” And everyone laughs, drinks, Petya tells the story of

Queen Esther, everyone makes noise with rattles, and suddenly—bang! Pavel falls to the floor. Not because someone threw a stone at his head, but because of vodka. And Grisha yells, “He’s dead, he’s dead!”

I said, “He’s not dead, it’s Vodka, stop, Grishenka, calm down, dushenka.” That means “little soul” in Russian. I kissed him on his face, his nose, his ears. This part he don’t tell in his story.

Petya and I carried Pavel back to his apartment across the hall, and then it was time to go to the airport. We took suitcases, taxi is waiting, and suddenly mama goes, “I don’t want to go, I’m not coming.” Petya says, “Zlata Dmitrievna, don’t cause a scandal! Now we have tickets, Now we go.”

And she was like little girl, saying, “No, I can’t, I don’t want to. I was born here, and here I will die.”

So Petya says, “Grisha and I are leaving for Israel—whoever doesn’t want to—can stay in Russia with Gorbachev!”

What was I supposed to do? Leave the one who gave me life or leave the one I brought to life? I remembered how at school, a boy told Grisha, “You’re a Żyd, disgusting Jew, and bit him here, here, and here. I knew that wouldn’t happen in Israel. I need to give him another life.

Petya didn’t even give me time to think—he yelled, “Marina, we’ll miss the plane, Davay, Karova!”

What do you mean, “come on, you cow”? Is that how you talk to me? I slapped him so hard his brain fell out.

And then he tore Grisha out of my arms, and Grisha said, “Mama...”—and they left.

To this day, I don’t understand why I didn’t run after them. I was like hypnotized.

I don’t know how much time passed—I stood in front of the closed door and spoke to Grisha. I said, “This isn’t forever. I’ll come to you soon. Wait for me...”

Well, enough, I’ve said too much.

Are you happy? Did you get a good peek into someone’s life? What are you, soul pornographers? That’s it, finite la tragedia, enough. Get out.

Grishe, what are you doing in there? Why are you playing music in bathtub? Grigory Tsirulnik, Stop it, stop this instance!

GRISHA sings to Italian music in the bath.

Grisha

Dear souls, no one can imagine what it's like to stay in the womb for nine months with the consciousness of a nine-year-old child! In my second incarnation I was born in the Jewish ghetto — wait, wait, not the one with barbed wire and dogs; that happened much later. I lived in the first Jewish ghetto in the world, in Venice a lively place where Jews were busy with book printing, composing, theatre, fertilizing silkworms in stairwells, and losing fortunes in card games. Three thousand Jews crowded together, but none of them was my soulmate.

2.1 FATHER

SALOMONE

Gedalia...

GRISHA

I didn't get the chance to know the woman who gave birth to me; she died at childbirth. But I had a new father, Salomone Algranti.

SALOMONE

I'm leaving; I need you to keep an eye on the shop.

GRISHA

A moneylender. A despicable man; nothing like Tatte Peretz.

SALOMONE

Are you even listening?

GRISHA

I had a plan. I'll escape and sail to the crime scene of Horbitza, the last place where I saw my soulmate, my accomplice, my sweet Gitl.

SALOMONE

I'm talking to you, you Imbecile. If you wanted to do nothing, you could've stayed in the yeshiva. Bastardo. When I was 17, I was already lending money to Christians, but you? Boiling your balls in the bath. I'm not planning to live forever. It's time you learn the business if you want to become like me.

GEDALIA

I don't want to become like you.

SALOMONE

Oh, really, what will you be then? A cantor?

GEDALIA

There are more important things in life than money.

SALOMONE

There aren't. Nothing is more important than money. It is only thanks to this money that you so despise, that the Christians let us breathe. You think I enjoy being a moneylender? Arguing over pawns that aren't worth pinch? who am I doing this for? Every day I go out in the stupid hat they're making us wear outside the ghetto, licking the asses of Christians who laugh at my nose, just so you can wear a pure silk coat and soak like a princhipessa in baths with lavender petals!

GEDALIA

All these are shells. And you yourself are a shell. This life is just a corridor leading to the magnificent hall of eternity. I'm already on my way there, but you, you'll be stuck a thousand lifetimes in the corridor, along with the rest of the ignoramuses.

SALOMONE

I really am an ignoramus for still supporting a leech like you.

GEDALIA

Don't worry; soon you'll be rid of me. When you return, I won't be here.

SALOMONE

You won't survive an hour without me, you spoiled baby. The last time you threatened to run away, you changed your mind because the cook made calf liver with polenta. Basta, get up and make some money; otherwise, I'll really believe you're not my son. And remember, your mother died so you would live, you ungrateful brat.

GEDALIA

My mother died because you skimmed on a midwife.

SALOMONE

I would have drowned you in this bath if it would have brought her back to life. I'm ashamed you bear the Elgranti name.

Salomone exits

2.2 SOULMATE

GEDALIA

I don't need you or your filthy money; I'll manage on my own...

GEYLE

(from outside) Excuse me, Is anyone here?

GEDALIA

We're closed!

GEYLE

I'm so sorry, I wasn't looking!

GEDALIA

Good heavens...

GEYLE

Are you Salomone Elgranti?

GEDALIA

Hell no, I'm his son. What do you want?

GEYLE

My name is Geyle; I'm the daughter of Meir Bassano. He pawned a ring here. My father is a weak man; he's a gambler. And that ring doesn't belong to him; it's my engagement ring.

GEDALIA

I have no idea what you're talking about. My father handles these things. Come back tomorrow...

GEYLE

I've gathered money! As much as I could... I know it's not enough, but it's all I have. Have mercy, a heart... Please, give me back my ring.

She reaches out to take the bundle; GEDALIA notices a bite mark on her wrist.

GEDALIA

What's that? What happened to your arm? Were you ever bitten by a dog? It looks like dog teeth.

GEYLE

I was never bitten by any dog.

GEDALIA

Gitl...

GEYLE

Geyle.

GEDALIA

Is that you?

GEYLE

Who?

GEDALIA

You don't remember me?

GEYLE

Am I supposed to?

GEDALIA

It's me!

GEYLE

Perhaps I really should speak to your father...

GEDALIA

No need; you don't have to pay. Here, I'm erasing your debt. What's the name...

GEYLE

Geyle. Bassano.

GEDALIA

Ben Azai, Ben Ezra, Benvenisti... Basno! I hereby pronounce your debt to be gone. I'll give you back your ring, but I want something in return.

GEYLE

Yes...

GEDALIA

I want you to give me this night.

GEYLE

If you think that because I'm poor, you can take advantage of me and trample my honor, you're wrong.

GEDALIA

You don't understand; I need to talk to you. It's a matter of life and death. And life. Excuse me. I'm not who you think I am, and you also might not be who you think you are.

GEYLE

I don't understand.

GEDALIA

I'll explain everything. But not here. Let me take you to a place where the soul can open up, outside the ghetto...

GEYLE

I don't even know your name...

GEDALIA

Gedalia, uh, Getz...

GEYLE

Do you not remember?

GEDALIA

Do you want your ring?

2.3 GONDOLA

The gondolier sings. GEDALIA extends his hand to GEYLE; she steps into the gondola.

GEYLE

If you're planning on selling me off to the Turks, then you should know that I'm not as weak as I seem. Yesterday, I carried my father up seven flights of stairs. He was wasted; people were staring. I wanted to bury myself out of shame...

GEDALIA

There's not much honor in being the son of a moneylender either. Don't you sometimes feel like your parents are complete strangers?

GEYLE

Most of the time, yes.

GEDALIA

And that maybe you're not from here, I mean, that you've been in this world before, in another place, another time...

GEYLE

Are you talking about reincarnations?

GEDALIA

Exactly.

GEYLE

Don't tell me you're one of those people who believe that sinners are reborn as a toad or a carp...

GEDALIA

You can laugh, but certain sins do reincarnate a person into an animal's body. As it's written in "Sha'ar HaGilgulim": "He who lies with a married woman will reincarnate as a donkey; he who lies with his mother will reincarnate as a mare; he who lies with a beast—

GEYLE

—will reincarnate as a bat, yeah, yeah... And a righteous person reincarnates up to four times; and a wretched one \up to a thousand generations.

GEDALIA

Up to a thousand generations... How do you know that?

GEYLE

I'm the one who arranged these letters. I work as a typesetter at a printing house outside the ghetto. I've read Rabbi Chaim Vital; I've read "Raza DeYehuda," but also "Ben David" by Yehuda Aryeh of Modena, and I agree with him that reincarnations are inconceivable. If we skip from body to body, in which one will we be resurrected when the Messiah comes? What, will we choose the prettiest one, as if we're choosing a piece of clothing?

GEDALIA

You have the marks of a dog bite on your arm, even though were never bitten. Isn't that mysterious to you? To me, it's miracles.

GEYLE

It's not a miracle; it's lichen planus. Lichen planus, a skin disease. That's what the doctor said. He gave me a herbal ointment, and when that didn't help, they took me to a rabbi who said these are the nail marks of a demon who's pulling me down to hell. It was torture. They drowned me in milk baths, made me drink cat urine, and nothing helped. I go to the mikveh only at night and pray to the Blessed Name to find me a cure or stop my suffering. And a month ago, it happened—they found a match for me, Yechiel Morno, a widower with three children. He's the one who gave me the engagement ring; we even set a wedding date, but then...

GEDALIA

You can tell me everything. Talk to me like I was your brother.

GEYLE

During our last meeting, Yechiel noticed the scar and was horrified. He canceled the wedding and said I'm 'damaged goods.' You see, I need the ring, not because I'm getting married, but because... Yechiel needs it back.

GEDALIA

Scoundrel, he's not worthy of you. May he reincarnate as a rat!

GEYLE

Amen! As a sick rat!

GEDALIA

As a rat sick with lichen planus!

GEYLE bursts into laughter

GEDALIA

I've missed your laughter...

GEYLE

You're very peculiar, Gedalia-Getz.

Gondolier

El Ridoto di Palasso Dandolo a San Moisé. The casino in Palazzo Dandolo, near San Moisé.

GEDALIA

Come on.

GEYLE

Where to?

GEDALIA

I want to introduce you to someone special.

GEYLE

To whom?

Gedalia

Yourself

2.4 CARNIVAL

CARNIVAL DANCER

Bonaséra, bei persone posso giudarve?

[Good evening, beautiful people, how can I help you?

GEDALIA

We've come to see Dvoire.

CARNIVAL DANCER

Dvoire Shchoire? The outcast!

CARNIVAL DANCER

Bevi un giosso... e va coi ansoi. [Drink this... and you'll meet angels.]

He offers them cups

GEYLE

(whispering to Gedalia): What is this? Is it kosher?

GEDALIA

(whispers back) It's hot chocolate.

GEYLE

Chocolate is forbidden! They say it arouses desire...

GEDALIA

Every life arises from desire. Step out of the ghetto. (Murmurs a blessing.)
Blessed are You...

CARNIVAL DANCER

Bravissimi!

They both drink. Music plays.

Carnival atmosphere, music, masks. GEYLE and GEDALIA dance, perhaps the same dance GETZ and GITL once danced. At the end of the dance, both are sweaty, breathless, happy. Dvoire appears.

DVOIRE

Getzinio! It's been a long time

GEDALIA

Dvoire.

DVOIRE

Don't be scared of me. Be afraid of those who wronged me when they expelled me from the ghetto. They called me "Dvoire Shchoire," "the outcast," but all I wanted was to read with the men in the Beit Midrash, the same books you secretly read in the print house.

GEYLE

How... (To Gedalia) Did you tell her?

DVOIRE

Getzinio, you've finally found your Gitl!

GEYLE

This doesn't make any sense...

DVOIRE

Oh, so many doubts and uncertainties leap upon her! Like grasshoppers, hop, hop, hop...

GEDALIA

That's why I brought her here. So you'd help her see who she is.

GEYLE

(to Gedalia, nervously): I know who I am!

DVOIRE

Give me your hand.

Gitl, daughter of Peretz and Malka...

There is kingship, balance, grace,

There is wisdom, but where's the mind?

As long as the mind is hidden,

There will be no remedy of any kind.

Two are sailing in the same boat,

But apart their souls will float,

At dawn, all is done,

The two will never be as one.

GEYLE

What?

DVOIRE

...Morte, morte, morte, morte, morte. [Death, death, death, death, death.]

GEYLE

Why did you bring me to her? So that she'll also tell me there's no remedy for me?

GEDALIA

She always speaks in riddles; we need to try to understand what—

GEYLE

I want to go home.

GEDALIA

Maybe if we try together—

GEYLE

No, stop it, take me home.

GEDALIA

You've promised me this night

GEYLE

Didn't you hear what she said? At dawn, all is done; the two will never be as one. Don't waste your time here; I'm damaged goods.

2.5 WEDDING

GEDALIA

Look, under Venice, there's another Venice. We're there too, upside down, see?

GEYLE vomits.

GEYLE

Morte, morte, morte...

I'd jump into the water and end everything, even if it's a sin. But I'm a coward.

GEDALIA

Death is always the same death; it's life that keeps changing.

GEYLE

My life only changes for the worse. If I don't find a husband, I'll end up like Dvoira Shchoira, an outcast who's secretly reading her books all alone. If there really are

reincarnations, as you say, I demand God next time to bring me here as a man! I don't want to be just a vessel for bearing children; and I will not be anyone's 'goods. Since I was born, I've been taught to be invisible, mute. My brothers studied, played in the yard, and sang in the synagogue, while I was too scared to breathe. Every year, I watch the men perform the Purimspiel and dream that I'm...

GEDALIA

Mordechai the Jew.

GEYLE

How do you know about my dreams...

GEDALIA

Because... I'm trying to explain that...

GEYLE

You're shaking.

GEDALIA

It's nothing. Listen to me, A hundred years ago, we were brother and sister; I was called Getz, and you were Gitl. Don't you remember? Even then, you had the same eyes and a laugh that could melt icebergs. We lived in a small cabin in a town called Horbitza; in the yard were tombstones our father carved, and on them, I taught you the letters of the alphabet—I would hold your finger like this, and we would read— Here lies a man who was honest and just.... Remember? Once, we ate a whole bucket of cranberries and vomited in the yard, remember? Or we hid all day among the wheat stalks in the field, and Mama was angry with us, remember? And when we found a dead hedgehog and buried it, remember? Or when I turned your braid to challah (smelling her hair) It still smells the same... Pine needles... Do you really not remember anything?

GEYLE

You're telling it so beautifully, that I think I... Might.

GEDALIA

All the of bad that's happening to you in this life isn't your fault, it's because of a sin we committed in the previous life.

GEYLE

What did we do?

GEDALIA

We killed a gentile. We paid a high toll for it; our entire village was burned. And that damn dog bit you here (holding her wrist) and here and here and here... (on different parts of her body)

GEYLE

You can't know that...

GEDALIA

When morning comes, I'm leaving Venice. Come with me. We'll visit the grave of the man we've killed, and if the grave has covered itself with earth and grass, we'll ask forgiveness from the grass and from the earth. You've got to understand, if we don't complete our rectification, in the next life, we won't be two spoiled children from Venice, but rats or worse... Turks! I have a fortune; it will get us a private cabin on a ship.

GEYLE

No one's gonna give a private cabin to two unmarried kids...

GEDALIA

So, let's get married then!

GEYLE

What?

GEDALIA

Let's get married. As it's written: "And love covers all transgressions." What do we need? A ring? Here. A witness? Here. (They look at the gondolier.) Geyle-Gitl, will you be my wife?

GEYLE

I knew I shouldn't have drunk that chocolate... (extends her finger)

GEDALIA

Behold, you are sanctified to me with this ring in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel... If I forget you, Gitl, let my right (hand) forget (its power); let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you...

They kiss; the sun rises; seagulls cry.

GRISHA

The rising dawn spread a canopy of sunbeams over our heads. Seagulls cried out congratulations! Then I realized why it's written in the Song of Songs, "My sister, my bride," everything felt so right, so natural; my mouth was filled with the taste of Geyle, salty like the waters of the lagoon. I believed that the God was watching over us, but apparently, He wasn't watching, no, He wasn't watching; otherwise, he would have warned me about the gondolier who, from the very beginning — had his eye on the jewelry... He raised his oar and struck my head with all his might. The taste of blood filled my mouth. I didn't have time to feel pain as I plunged into the vagina of Europe, as someone once called Venice. In yeshiva they taught us to debate about an ox that gored a cow, but they didn't teach us something as simple as... Swimming. What marks the end of your youth? When you stop resisting. And I've stopped. It's written: "Many waters cannot quench love," but in Venice, the waters are just too many.

Marina enters

MARINA

No, I can't believe it... Again? I spoke to you nicely, earlier, opened heart, thought you were human people, but then what? I turn my head, and you go on peeking? Is this a peeping beach here? Don't you understand you're doing **Grisha** harm? For me he's my boy; I don't have choice. But you, what? I'm really asking: don't you have lives? Have time to spare? Go to museum.

I understand my son is virtuoso storyteller, but it's all from the internet. What, it's hard to search 'Jewish ghetto in Venice'? Grisha takes truth and paints it with lies. Like when you add beets to potato salad, and everything turns purple. You understand that there's only one life — all the rest is metaphor.

Grisha's youth is my crime and punishment. First, he said mother is a monster. Here, mother isn't a monster; here, mother is dead. But mother isn't dead.

When Petya took Grisha for Israel, I stayed in Moscow with my sick mother and with longing that burned my heart.

I thought I come for Israel sooner, but all the money I had went to my mother's legs. When mama fell asleep, our neighbor Pavel would come in... We'd drink, and in winter, we even had a bit of a romantic story, but, well... He's also a degenerate. From inside, you don't feel time passing, and, I'm embarrassed to say, but nine years went by. Only when my mother died, may she rest in a peace, I finally come for Israel.

When the plane touched ground, everyone clapped. Like in a theater show. It really was like a show. At Ben Gurion, they asked me— are you Jude? I said, no, I'm Marina. "No, are you Jewish? Oh, no, I am not, but my son is Jewish; he live here. They said, your son isn't Jewish; Jewishness is only according to mother. Finally, I'm in charge something in Grisha's life, and it turns out bad. I waited, waited, thought they'd send me back to Russia; suddenly, someone came and gave me all the papers of new immigrant. What happened? Demographics, that's what happened.

An immigrant is like a baby; needs help with everything, doesn't know the language, doesn't know places. Everything's different, different light, different smell, even the crying is different; in Israel, they cry differently. Hebrew sounded to my ear not like language — but like someone coughing. I looked at a palm tree during winter, like in a dream. There were cats everywhere in the street, fat, beautiful, strong cats. A man stops his car all of a sudden and tells me — what's up, baby.

When a woman comes in new country, she feels beautiful again. Feels free. Also feels a bit stupid because she can't say anything. But she can do all that she never did before in her life. That's how, for the first time, I swam in the sea at night. Naked. It was a little scary and a lot pleasant.

Well, I didn't come to Israel to swim in the sea; I came to find my son. I started talking to everyone who knew Russian. Thank God, many do. I was like KGB. Finally, I found him. (In Russian) Grisha, I bought you pizza from Abulafia, with olives, with mushrooms. Well, of course, why would you answer your mother. Coke or Sprite? Please, enjoy your meal. (Lowers the television volume)

(Switches back to Hebrew) So, when I stood in front of their apartment door in Jerusalem, I didn't know who I would meet. The last time I saw Grisha, he was nine. Now he was seventeen.

I knocked on door, and Petya opened. I barely recognized him. His whole life is Purim, always dresses up; now he had yarmulke on his head, long beard, and these... Like rolls by his ears. I said — Petya... it's me, Marina. He says — I see. What do you want? I say — I came for Grisha; I know he hates me, but I'll explain everything to him. Please, let me in. You have to; I'm his mother! (as Petya) Come in, who's stopping you. With God's help, maybe he'll forgive you.

I enter. Filth, stench, the entire hallway was drowning in sewage water. Get it? Venice... In the middle of the water was Grisha. Watching an Italian film on TV, Romeo and Juliet by Franco Zeffirelli. I say: Grisha... He doesn't answer. And Petya says: Gershon! You have a guest. I say: what's this, they changed his name? And Petya laughs and says, when he came in Israel, they changed something even more important than name — and goes like this: snip snip... circumcision... Savages. To do such thing to a nine-year-old boy? But I had no right

to be angry, it's my fault; I wasn't there to protect him. I didn't know Hebrew then; I said — Gershon... solnyshko, eto ya, mama... posmotri na menya... (my sunshine, it's me, mom... look at me...) He doesn't answer, only his leg starts to jump, and he breathes heavy. Petya says: your son came out an egoist, Marina; no matter what I taught him, I couldn't get your genetics out.

Well, I started drying the water from floor, cleaning plates from sink, opening windows, taking out trash; all night I worked. Petya went to sleep in his bed, and I slept on the sofa next to Grisha, who watched that same Italian film until morning, over and over. In the morning, Petya went to work; he worked at a currency exchange, left and didn't come back. We waited a day, two days, no Petya. I asked at the exchange; they said he went to Thailand. Okay. Thailand is good for him; there's a lot of ocean there; he can drown.

You understand the absurdity? Me, who isn't Jewish, loves being here in this country, and Petya, who has a face like pogrom propaganda poster; doesn't. I'm sorry to say this, but it's so Jewish of him to not like Jewish state. Jews always want to be somewhere else. They can't stay one moment in the same place. Well, I didn't have time to waste on Petya; I had Grisha to save.

But it was impossible to save him in Jerusalem; there, mysticism is like an epidemic. So, we moved to Jaffa, to this apartment. At first, Grisha didn't speak at all; only ate, went in the bathroom, and smoked cigarettes. Only I was talking, but he heard me, I knew he did because sometimes he would suddenly turn his head and look at me very hard.

When he was eighteen, the army didn't want him; they said there was a problem with his psychica. And in university he also didn't go. But that's also not so bad. I went there once; I saw it. That's not university; that's carnival. Everyone's on grass, in cafeteria. Kill me, I don't understand how every month someone here wins Nobel Prize.

No army, no university — where will he find friends? A girlfriend? I have a colleague at the museum, Nadia, and she has a daughter who is also a little... like Grisha — but in girl. So, we said, I will bring Grisha to museum, and she will bring her daughter, we won't tell them anything, and see what happens. Nadia's daughter came, looking like... черт ты что и сбоку бантик, God knows what with a bow on top, dressed like for a wedding; strange she didn't bring a

rabbi and a glass. I'm not religious, but I asked God: Please, Please, let Grisha think she's good and take her to the museum café. We also have an employee discount there.

Grisha came unshaved, and in his shoes only one still had a lace. How can you lose a shoelace?

But Nadia's daughter didn't run away, and that was a good sign. They enter the 16th-19th century art hall, and Grisha goes straight to the Maurycy Gottlieb painting where he painted himself three times: as adult, a young man, and child. From there, he went into painting by Canaletto, where you see Venice. And stayed there for a long time and suddenly tears started dropping. And Nadia's daughter says: "lovely painting, isn't it? This is a very lovely painting, isn't it?" And keeps nagging: "Isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it?" And she touched his shoulder. And that was her mistake. He didn't hit her, thank God, but he screamed so hard that lamps almost shattered, and he fell to the floor and started like this... (Demonstrates how Grisha was shaking). I tell him: "Grishinka, stop, stop..." And he says: "Cigarettes, Cigarettes..." I said, I'll let him have some, so no one will notice, but when I lit it... well, I'm also an idiot... all the water from the ceiling and the alarm (makes alarm sound). Nadia's daughter ran away, and Grisha says: "Help, I can't swim." When Grisha and I laid wet on museum floor, I realized that the only woman in Grisha's life would be is me. Good night, Grisha, spokoynoy nochi (Goodnight). Goodnight, everyone. Enough, go home, I'm begging you, leave us. When I open my eyes, you are not here.

Grisha

There's not gonna be no "Spokoynoy", and no "nochi", nobody moves until we find my soulmate. Worst comes to worst, I'm killing myself live!

The End of the first act

ACT II

3 حياة.

Fes. Morocco. The 19th century

The scene takes place in the Jewish quarters of Fez, Morocco, in the 19th century. MESSODY knocks on her aunt GIMOL's door.

3.I WAITING

MESSODY

Aunt Gimol... it's me, Messody... Aren't you up yet? It's noon! Auntie! Are you there? Open up!

GIMOL

Coming!

MESSODY

Wa-Wa, it's so hot...

GIMOL

What's wrong, Naabibashk... Why are you all red?

MESSODY

I ran here, because I saw the dranslator.

GIMOL

The what?

MESSODY

The dranslator! He's here in our street.

GIMOL

Gabriel?! (She starts hastily getting ready, throwing off her nightgown, dressing, applying makeup)

MESSODY

Yes, he was walking like this... (Demonstrates a limping-hop) as if he stepped in camel dung.

GIMOL

Are you sure it's him?

MESSODY

Yes, he had the dranslator's glasses. What exactly is a dranslator?

GIMOL

I've told you a thousand times.

MESSODY

I forgot!

GIMOL

T- Translator. It's someone who speaks all kinds of languages.

MESSODY

What, is he that smart?

GIMOL

Sometimes he's actually very dumb.

MESSODY

Oh wow, what a beautiful bracelet!

GIMOL

It's called "Shams wa-Qamar," sun and moon.

MESSODY

The gold part is the sun, and the silver is the moon...

GIMOL

That's right, my dear.

MESSODY

See? I'm also as smart as Gabriel.

GIMOL

Much smarter, my girl, much smarter. Yalla, go stall him outside.

MESSODY

But what should I tell him?

GIMOL

I don't know... Ask him to teach you how to say "I love you" in every language he knows. Because I, for one, haven't heard it from him in any language. Kapara alech.

MESSODY exits.

GIMOL

Just when you least expect him, here he comes... Tachmez'alo - may his luck be as bad as he is.

GIMOL examines her face in a tea tray as if it's a mirror.

GIMOL

A hundred years ago, I looked in the mirror and saw Gedalia; two hundred years ago, I saw Getz in the waters of the river. But now I must remove all traces of the two men I used to be. Femininity is the only weapon God left me against my love, he who was a woman once, and had completely forgotten how it feels, damn him.

GABRIEL enters, barefoot, holding one of his leather slippers (bibraz) in his hand, limping on one foot. GIMOL helps GABRIEL remove his buttonless black jacket and round hat.

3.2 THORN

GABRIEL

Ah, ah, ah, ah!

GIMOL

My Lord, what happened, you poor thing?

GABRIEL

I stepped on a fish.

GIMOL

How does a man step on a fish? Were you walking on water?

GABRIEL

Someone threw a fish bone to the street, and I didn't notice; I was deep in thought.

GIMOL

What do you have to think about? Are you Maimonides, may God rest his soul? And why did you take off your shoes in the middle of the street?

GABRIEL

Because I was walking by a mosque.

GIMOL

So much whining! Did you step on a fish or a shark? It takes talent to get pricked like that by a dead fish. Come. Don't move!

She licks his foot

GABRIEL

What are you doing?

GIMOL

Quiet! I'm looking for the thorn. The tongue can tell anything... Would your wife have done this for you?

GABRIEL

Sultana's tongue only knows how to do one thing—complain.

GIMOL

Did you talk to her about us?

GABRIEL

It was a tough week; the little one's teething...

GIMOL

Yes, of course... Our neighbor already took a third wife, and you're still with one.

GABRIEL

You have to understand, Sultana gave me a son after two daughters. If I suddenly tell her I want a second wife, she won't understand what I'm missing. It needs to be done wisely, I have to find the right moment. Otherwise, as they say: "Two pots on the stove—flavors and aromas; two women in bed—Sodom and Gomorrah."

GIMOL

You told me you two haven't slept in the same bed in ages.

GABRIEL

That's true. I sleep with the kids, I tell them a bedtime story and fall asleep before they do. As Scheherazade, they'd have beheaded me on the first night. The right moment will come, my love; I swear on my children.

GIMOL

Aha! The thorn is out.

GABRIEL

This is the little devil?! Oh, Gimol... Let me kiss your hands! I don't have much time. I told Sultana I'm going to a barber.

GIMOL

To the barber? Might as well have said the butcher... (He wants to kiss her; she

stops him.) Hold on... If you told her you're going to the barber, then you need to come back shaven; otherwise, Sultana will start asking questions. Sit, my dear, sit, my prince.

GABRIEL

What, now?

GIMOL

So, when? In the next life?

3.3 SHAVING

She brings a razor, alcohol for sterilization, and a towel.

GABRIEL

You're angry that I haven't talked to Sultana yet?

GIMOL

Not angry, my love. Just as we didn't marry yesterday, we won't marry today either. In the end, you have only one soulmate – me.

GABRIEL

That's true, that's true.

GIMOL

How did it grow back so quickly? Just last week, I shaved you for that meeting you had with... What was his name...The one with dates...

GABRIEL

Mr. Ragshab...

GIMOL

“Mr. Ragshab...” The king of dates! You were as excited as a little kid before your meeting with him. Did he offer you anything or not?

GABRIEL

He was very impressed with all the languages I speak.

GIMOL

Did you explain to him that you've learned them in past lives?

GABRIEL

He's a businessman; he doesn't believe in these kinds of things. He said that maybe in the future, he'd be happy to use my services.

GIMOL

The personal translator of the King of Dates. If I'd known, I'd have made you some ma'amouls.

GABRIEL

I've always wanted to see the world.

GIMOL

Haven't we seen enough?

GABRIEL

To meet different people.

GIMOL

Haven't we met enough?

GABRIEL

Maybe I'll even reach our Venice. Who knows.

GIMOL

And what about Sultana? How will she handle these trips of yours?

GABRIEL

She'll manage; don't you worry about her, she'll manage. She's young, she's strong; she has three kids on her mind.

GIMOL

Gabriel... If this really will happen... How about you take me with you?

GABRIEL

Gimol; as they say in English - don't mix business with pleasure.

GIMOL

I'll come with, and no one needs to know. I'll be as mute as a tombstone. I'll wait in your room, and whenever you feel like it, you'll come and wreak havoc upon me. What do you think? Maybe we'll even end up in Horbitza?

GABRIEL

Horbitz... Do you think Mr. Ragshab holds a branch in Horbitza? Let's leave it, we're talking about something that might not even happen.

3.4 PREGNANCY

GIMOL

If it does, you better make sure to be in Fez in about six months.

GABRIEL

Why?

GIMOL

Because something you won't want to miss will be born here.

GABRIEL

Born?... How... But they told you you were barren, didn't they?

GIMOL

So they did. They also say you only live once. (Gabriel is speechless.) What's wrong? The great translator is out of words? See, it's not enough to speak so many languages; you also need to have something to say.

GABRIEL

Congrats!

GIMOL

Thanks. It's interesting; three times I've sat in someone's womb, and now I'm going to carry a baby myself. I think my breasts are already swollen. Want to feel them? If it's a boy, I'll name him Getz. And if it's a girl—Gitl. No! I'll name him Pavel. That'll be our rectification. In Venice, I believed we had to pay for our sin with our lives; today, I understand that means creating life. Maybe this baby will also help your Sultana accept me as a second wife. We'll raise the children together. I can manage your finances. I was once the son of a moneylender, remember. You'll be with me at birth, right?

GABRIEL

I hope to God.

GIMOL

Because I'm not sure you were there for my funeral.

GABRIEL

What?

GIMOL

In our last life, after I drowned in Venice. Were you there or not?

GABRIEL

Alla isaadek, Gimol; you're asking me about things even God has forgotten...

GIMOL

Was there even a funeral, or did you leave my body with the fish?

GABRIEL

You know I don't remember anything from there, only signs that come to me in dreams like a boat or a ring, and even those things I would have had no way of understanding if it weren't for you.

GIMOL

For two hundred years, I have been carrying you on my back, and you weren't even at my funeral? Go, go home, go eat your dates. Go, you liar.

GABRIEL

'You liar'... I'm a liar, sure... You know what, you're right; I am a liar - because I am lying to my wife for you! Lying to the whole world in order to be with you; you're the one I want! You. I gave you a child; does that mean nothing? You only remember the bad, instead of all the good things I've done for you...

GIMOL

Like what...

GABRIEL

Like what?! Like the day we met when I saved your life.

GIMOL

This again?..

GABRIEL

You were lying in a filthy, miserable, brothel in Casablanca... Don't forget where you came from. If it weren't for me, they would have beheaded you in the square!

3.5 FLASHBACK

A brothel in Casablanca, a British client enters, with Gabriel standing behind.

CLIENT

Good evening! Oh, what a lovely lady...

GIMOL

I don't take two at once.

GABRIEL

No, no, God no, I'm not here for the... He's the client; I'm just the translator.

GIMOL

You're what?

GABRIEL

I am Gabriel Siksu, I'm a translator, I'll translate everything he says. Do you speak English?

GIMOL

No.

GABRIEL

Then you require a translator. This gentleman doesn't speak any language other than English.

GIMOL

There's no need for talking in this business. You put it in, take it out, and leave.

GABRIEL

This gentleman also wants you to talk. He's willing to pay extra.

CLIENT

Extra, yes, certainly

GIMOL

Want to talk, mister? Talk!

GABRIEL

Sir, I believe we can start.

CLIENT

Ask the lady if she can be so kind as to open her mouth.

GABRIEL

He wants you to open your mouth.

GIMOL

He said something about a 'lady,' didn't he?

GABRIEL

He said: 'Ask the lady if she can be so kind as to open her mouth.'

GIMOL

Then why didn't you say that?! that's a whole other thing! Ahhhh... Ask him if this is good: Ahhhh... Do you like it, mister?

CLIENT

Jolly good, jolly good. Now ask the lady to bark for me.

GABRIEL

Pardon me, sir?

CLIENT

I would like her to bark, please.

GABRIEL

Oh, bark, certainly.

GIMOL

What did he say?

GABRIEL

He wants you to... bark.

GIMOL

What?

GABRIEL

To bark, like a dog.

GIMOL

Like a dog?!

GABRIEL

He's the one who asked, I'm only translating...

GIMOL

Tell him I can strangle him like a snake or scratch him like a cat, or spit in his face, like a camel...

CLIENT

Bark! Don't you know how to translate the word "bark"? It's a simple word. Woof! Go like this, lady - woof.

GABRIEL

Bark, woof!

CLIENT

Woof.

GABRIEL

Woof, woof!

GIMOL

Well, this is definitely new. Why are you both barking here like two sick dogs?!

Gimol grabs the client and straddles him; Gabriel sits aside, covering his face, embarrassed. Then she flips the client onto her; he finishes quickly and falls asleep on her.

GIMOL (*whispers*)

Hey, prince...

GABRIEL

Me?

GIMOL

No. Mordechai the Jew. Don't worry about him, he's sleeping. Do you two do this often?

GABRIEL

God no, this is the first and last time for me; I actually live in Fez. As a translator, I help the less fortunate. This is the first time I work with... The gentleman paid well, but I had no idea he was inviting me for... barking...

GIMOL

Why are your eyes all red, have you been crying?

GABRIEL

No, I have trouble sleeping.

GIMOL

Do you have children...

GABRIEL

Two daughters, bless them. But it's not them, I... I have a recurring nightmare.

GIMOL

Really? What about?

GABRIEL

About someone drowning, that I want to save. Someone I don't know. Someone who Actually looks a bit like... You.

GIMOL (*grabbing his hand*)

What's this? Were you ever bitten by a dog?

GABRIEL

I've had it since birth... My mother said it's like a protection wristlet of beauty marks.

GIMOL

God has a very strange sense of humor for bringing us together here. Does your name start with the letter 'G'?

GABRIEL

Yes... I think I should go. Sir... we need to... Mister... what's wrong with him... I think he's not breathing...

GIMOL

What do you mean, not breathing?

GABRIEL

Oh my God... What did you do to him?

GIMOL

Nothing...

GABRIEL

He's dead!

GIMOL

You saw for yourself, I didn't do anything... If they find him here, I'll be beheaded! (To Gabriel) Take me with you to Fez, you're watching me drown every night in your dream, don't let me drown here too!

3.6 FLESH TO FLESH

Returning from the flashback

GABRIEL

See, I've saved you, my love.

GIMOL

You've saved me, right. But what for? To travel the world with the King of Dates and leave me here?

GABRIEL

Who's traveling? Am I traveling?

GIMOL

To give birth to your baby all alone.

GABRIEL

God no.

GIMOL

I'll be fat, you won't want to touch me.

GABRIEL

On the contrary, there will be more to grasp.

GIMOL

Enough, enough, You've exhausted me. Go home... Go, what are you standing like a Shabbat candle for?

GABRIEL

I see. Very well. I'm leaving. I'm leaving, dear. There, I'm opening the door...

He loosens a lace on her dress.

GABRIEL

There, I'm walking down the stairs.

His fingers crawl between her breasts to her belly and lower

GIMOL

I see you're on your way to the synagogue? Out, get out of there, it's closed now.

She pushes his hand away.

GABRIEL

How? The synagogue? Closed? And what if I need to pray...

GIMOL

afternoon prayer has long passed, and evening prayer hasn't started... Go, go home to your wife and children.

GABRIEL

No, no, no, they're perfectly fine. I'm a believer. I'll use this time to drop by the spice merchant...

He buries his nose in her hair and inhales deeply.

GABRIEL

I'll walk through the weavers' street to feel the fabrics...

He caresses her dress.

GIMOL

Sir, this is expensive merchandise; those who touch — need to pay.

GABRIEL

I'll peek at the back entrance of the Sultan's palace...

GIMOL

What a detour, my dear, your feet will end up hurting... You're my rectification, Gabriel.

GABRIEL

You're my sin, my Gimol.

GABRIEL

My brother...

GIMOL

My sister...

GABRIEL

Brother.

GIMOL

Sister.

3.7 SULTANA

There's a knock on the door

GABRIEL

(whispering): Who's that?

GIMOL

(whispering): It's nothing, probably the neighbor's daughter...

SULTANA

(knocking from outside) Is anyone home?

GABRIEL

(pushing Gimol away, whispering in terror): Sultana!

GIMOL finds a place for GABRIEL to hide.

GIMOL

Come in.

SULTANA *(enters)*

Good evening, sorry for coming over so late. Are you Gimol Fadida? I'm Sultana, I'm the wife of Gabriel Sikso, the translator. He isn't here by any chance...

GIMOL

No.

SULTANA

Oh dear God. Where could he be, the poor thing? He left to the barber this morning, and no one saw him since. I'm scared something happened to him... Forgive me for being all... I'm feeling dizzy... Could I have a glass of water?

GIMOL

Of course, of course...

SULTANA

Thank you very much. My mother says it's better to have a husband who's old and sick rather than a young and handsome one like Gabriel. He told me he helps translating complaint letters for the authorities, for this poor woman who was once... Dealing with clients. I'm not judging, God forbid. The neighbors pointed at your door, and I thought maybe he came to see you and... Help a little.

GIMOL

I'm all alone.

SULTANA

We're leaving for Britain tomorrow morning.

GIMOL

Tomorrow?

SULTANA

In a few hours, a carriage is waiting to take us to Casablanca; we need to catch the ship. Have you heard of Mr. Ragshab?

GIMOL

The King of Dates.

SULTANA

Exactly. Well, my husband is going to be his translator. He said that for a talent like Gabriel's, no expense should be spared, and he bought tickets for all of us, for the whole family, to London.

GIMOL

Tomorrow.

SULTANA

Gabriel's already promised our eldest that she would marry a lord... What do you think? Where could he be?

GIMOL

I really don't know. More water?

SULTANA

You're a woman; you understand why I'm like this. I... If anyone were to steal Gabriel away from me, I would simply tell them — don't take him from me; I have nothing in life besides him. May God show you the same kindness you've shown me.

3.8 TEA WITH MINT

Gabriel emerges from his hiding place and embraces Gimol.

GABRIEL

You're an angel, an angel, you're my guardian angel, my soulmate. Only now do I realize how strong our bond is.

GIMOL

You're leaving for Britain with your whole family, tomorrow?

GABRIEL

What? Tomorrow? Wouldn't I have told you if I were leaving tomorrow? And what do I have to do with the British? What do I know about them, what do they know about me? Do you think I'd take Sultana and the kids with me on a business trip, have them run around me and nag all the time?

GIMOL

Why not?

GABRIEL

Whoever heard of such a thing? That Sultana, I tell you, all these births turned her brain into Chrira soup. I told her maybe, perchance, we'll perhaps have a chance, and she made the whole thing into Slada-di-Barbara... You have to take care, make sure this won't happen to you as well; remember, a child sucks the brain out his mother. What, you don't believe me? I'm here, aren't I? If I were sailing to Britain tomorrow, I'd be rushing home, but here I am, sitting, talking to you calmly. I can even stay for some tea with mint. Ah, Rjalla, would you pour us some tea?

GIMOL

The water's boiled.

GABRIEL

Well done. Only you, only a woman who was once a man can understand me. Only a sister, such as you, who cares about me. The Holy Lord will reward you

for this. He sees everything and remembers everything. Lots of mint, Rjalla; tea with no mint is like a sultan with no crown! You know what would go well with this? What were those Venetian doughnuts called...

GIMOL

Fritelle.

GABRIEL

Fritelle! Just the sound of that name takes you to the carnival.

GIMOL

The carnival... You and I got married in the gondola on the last day of the carnival.

GABRIEL

You don't say... How would I have known myself if I hadn't met you? You have plenty a soul, you do, believe me. God bless you, this smells good, Ya Mulaana! You're not drinking?

GIMOL

It's too hot.

GABRIEL

I like it that way, I love it that way! And I love you, my Gimol, d'you hear me? Tomorrow morning, I'm telling Sultana that I'm marrying you; enough, no more hiding. How do we say here? Lmhaba UlhDeba, Ma Fihum Ma itkeBa, Love and a hump—you can't hide either.

GIMOL

In Horbitza, they used to say: "Alte libe zshavert nisht."

GABRIEL

Old love doesn't rust.

GIMOL

Well, I see you still remember something.

GABRIEL

I don't remember; you say it, and I suddenly understand. It's like magic.

GIMOL

It's not magic. It's our life.

GABRIEL

(attempts to kiss her; she pulls away): Won't you give me a kiss?

GIMOL

In the next life, I'll kiss you.

GABRIEL

What's going on... What did you put in the tea...

GIMOL

In the next life, I'll forgive you.

GABRIEL begins to choke, looks at the tea, realizes, collapses, and dies.

GIMOL

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. But sometimes, a single word is worth a thousand pictures. And that one word will be heard over and over from the moment the sun rises: "Poisoned." "Poisoned," says the Muslim doctor who examines Gabriel's body. "Poisoned?" asks Sultana, trembling. "Poisoned," the neighbors whisper from ear to ear. "Poisoned," says the King of Dates. The whole town will taste this bitter word: "Poisoned," "poisoned," "poisoned." Yes, God almighty, you're not mistaken. Now I decide, me, little Gimol. There's free will, isn't there? So, Hak, I've chosen. My whole life I've been waiting to be sanctified with him before you, to bring a child with him who will be our rectification. And you, what do you do? You put him on a ship to Britain with his wife and children? Tomorrow? I'll tell you the truth, I don't think I still understand this rectification because I don't think I still understand our sin. We were children in Horbitza, as innocent as the goats and chickens around us. How can you sentence children with no mercy? Drag us from incarnation to incarnation like a corpse... Punish our parents! Punish drunk Tatte and mama who didn't stop him, punish all the adults who were there — Jews and Gentiles alike! After

all, Pavel died in a celebration where we sought to praise your name! You, who can bring souls back into dead bodies, why not reincarnate us as Gentiles? Let me be a Muslim in the land of Muslims or a Christian in the land of Christians because there is none more humiliated than your exiled chosen people.

And by the way, I'm telling you right now, if you bring him to me again married, deceitful, with foreign children, disappearing on me and sailing far away, I swear to you in your name, my Lord, that I will murder him again. I won't hesitate. I'll stab, poison, drown, burn, freeze, strangle, dismember him piece by piece. For all I care, send me straight to hell. Understood? Very well. Inform whoever needs to know... To life!

(Drinks the poisoned tea)

Marina

Grisha says he wants to die. Well, well... To die, one must to live, and Grisha doesn't live. The simple things in life are absent from Grisha's existence. When he was a child, he laughed and cried; later, as he grew into a young man, he was angry and shouted. But now, when he should be an adult—he hasn't managed. He sits like a flowerless plant.

Forgive me for sharing this thought with you, don't call me a pervert, but a ometimes I wish Grisha would become small again and come back into my womb. That way, I don't worry about him anymore, like when he was baby in my stomach. When I eat, he eats; when he's cold, I'm cold, so I warm both of us together. This way, I don't have to think about where he goes or what happens to him. Inside my body is safest place for him.

Six months ago, to give Grisha a good mood, I took him to see Chekhov's "Three Sisters." At first, he didn't want to, he said, Theater is adults making faces and speaking in someone else's voice. I said: Theater is a place where the soul can open up; you see other people, and they do everything for you—fight for you and die for you and love for you, and you sit, think, feel, and so on... I saw Grisha wasn't listening, so I said: If you come, we'll go to McDonalds after. So he agreed. He really loves the McFlurry with peanuts and strawberry sauce.

Well, we got dressed, went, sat down. I was, as they say in Russia, на седьмом небе, on skies seven... After ten minutes of the play, Grisha whispers to me: The actors are liars; I don't believe them. I said: Quiet, Stanislavski, watch the play. And he; I'm out, I'll wait for you by the fountain. And he left. And I didn't go with him. I continued to sit in the dark. Enough. You can't not live. I saw the decoration, the actresses, the music, and my heart ran like a horse—to Moscow, to Moscow, to Moscow...

When it ended and I went outside, I didn't know where I was. A moment ago, I was in cold air conditioning, feeling I was in Russia; now, again dress sticks to my body, and everything is oriental. I walk around the fountain looking for

Grisha—no Grisha. I shouted, “Grisha,” and someone said, “Shto,” but it was a different Grisha; there are plenty of Grishas in Israel. I went here, went there, wanted to kill myself for sitting three hours in theater. I thought the worst thoughts in my mind, but I found him in the end.

He was sitting in café by the clock, where people smoke hookahs, with someone I never saw before. I say, “Grisha, you’re here; come, we go to McDonalds.” And he say, “No, I’m staying here with Jibril.” And this man, Jibril, stood up and said, “Good evening, Grisha’s mother, nice to meet you.” I didn’t understand what’s so nice. And he asked, “Shall I pour you some mahia?” No, no thank you; I don’t even know what that is. On the table, I saw knafeh, which Grisha loves; our neighbor Ranin always brings it during Ramadan. So I wanted to pay; Grisha doesn’t have a wallet. And Jibril said, “God no, Grisha is my guest.” And Grisha does this look with eyes, like cat. Well, I stood there like an idiot, in the end, I say, “I’ll wait for you at home, Grisha; don’t come late.” And he smiled like that.

I waited for him until five in the morning. When he finally came to home, I did like I was sleeping on the couch. And he was singing songs to himself, going to the bathroom.

In the morning, I go to the museum, and when I come back, I found Grisha wearing my dress. I saw he was looking at me and is afraid. So I said, “It actually nice on you; it’s also less warm this way.” Then I saw on his table my make-up—lipstick, powder, mascara, concealer. I told him, “Come, come, I’ll show you how to put it,” and he was happy. I thought to myself—what’s the problem? It’s not hurting anyone, right?

For two months, he was really happy. But one day, he go into bathroom and started vomiting. I said, “Grishinka, what’s wrong? Are you sick?” And he comes out and say, “I’m pregnant. From Jibril. And he’s married; he has a wife and doesn’t want to be with me.” And starts crying.

I tell him, “Don’t cry, solnyshko.” And he said, “You always said you wanted to be a grandmother, right?” and I wipe his tears, and crying myself, and say, “Yes, yes.” So help me give birth, and you’ll be a grandmother,” he says. “Will you help me? I’m scared.” And I say, “Sure, dushenka, Sure

And we played like Grisha was pregnant. To me it actually helped. For example, I wanted Grisha to eat the chicken liver I make, so I told him: It's good for iron; it's important for the baby. And he ate. I told him: Exercise; otherwise, it will be hard for you to give birth. And he started walking on beach in morning. I read things to him from internet about pregnancy, and he listened. We were together a lot, like two girlfriends. And Grisha quit smoking entirely, just like that. But strangest thing, after a month, he even got fatter. Maybe it's because of the za'atar pitas he buys at Abulafia.

One day, I went to the flea market and saw with all the old stuff tiny baby shoes. Brand new, white, with pompoms. They were something! The seller came and say, "Lady, because of your pretty eyes, it's yours for fifty shekels." I said, "No, no, no, thank you." He say, "Forty-five." I say, "I don't need, really; I have a big boy." He say, "Take for thirty, final price, for the grandkids." And I did.

When I showed the shoes to Grisha, he jumped on me, and we hugged — maybe for the first time since our last day together in Moscow, we had such a good time, and I thought, Nu, Nu, this also doesn't hurt anyone, right? But I felt I was wrong; it does hurt. It hurts me. It's destroying my psyche.

Nadia gave me the phone number of psychiatrist for Grisha. I told him it's gynecologist, and he agreed to come. When we entered, Grisha suddenly said, "Wait, is this psychiatrist? You said gynecologist!" The psychiatrist looked at me and asked, "Mrs. Marina, did you tell your son I'm gynecologist?" I explained: "because he wouldn't have come otherwise, since he's pregnant. The psychiatrist raised his eyebrows, like I'm the crazy one. Grisha said to me in Russian, through teeth: "сука, предательница я тебя прикончу". Bitch, traitor, I'll finish you off, then, does an intelligent voice and starts monologue in complicated Hebrew, says, I have depression, I don't sleep at night, I cry in the kitchen, and maybe I did cry once, but it's not the business of psychiatrist. And he says: "She doesn't do laundry, always goes to the museum in the same clothes, and doesn't know how to cook; she even burns an omelet, and that's why she doesn't have a man." Then he said — my ungrateful son — that because she doesn't have a man, she watches me when I sleep, and once she watched me in the bath—and here I screamed—I watched in the bath to make sure you didn't drown! And he continued: "I came to the country without a mother; for eight years, she didn't

write to me, didn't call, and then she came and didn't let me breathe. She wants grandchildren so much that she says I'm pregnant." I'm saying you're pregnant? "Yes, you. She's nuts; she even bought baby shoes. Tell the doctor the truth, did you or didn't you?! I'm asking, did you or didn't you?! So the psychiatrist say to him, "Leave me alone with mother a bit, okay?" In the end, what happened — I got a prescription, and Grisha - condition fantastic.

We returned home, and Grisha went right back to smoking, and with the smoke of his cigarette, everything was gone — no more Jibril, no more pregnancy, and no more mother. He hasn't spoken to me since. Three months already. Nothing, nothing. It's so hard for me that I really take pills. It doesn't help. What can you do? It's impossible to be a good mother in this world; it's just impossible.

But who will take care of Grisha if not me? Only me. Only me. If there was credits for Grisha's life, like in movie, it would say: Scenario—Mother, Set Design—Mother, Budget—Mother, even Grisha, the hero of the movie — Mother made, not God. Mother. So Mother needs to make sure the movie ends with happy end.

CAMP PRISONER (*flea trainer*)

Let's have a rousing round of applause for Gretchen, our leaping danseuse! Before we turn to our grand finale, we ask that you place in the kerchief a small contribution to our little circus. Poke around your pockets, search your souls, we accept everything, breadcrumbs, potato peels, or warm apple strudel with *schlagsahne*!

And now, the star you've all been waiting for. Unlike our previous performers, he doesn't pull a cart, or walk a tightrope, or run, or play an instrument. No, no, no. He's not strapped to any sort of apparatus, relies on no gimmick. He's a free soul! Yes, he sucks my blood, but he brings me joy. He's able to jump three hundred times his height. But worry not, he always returns. If only I could jump the way he does, I would leap nimbly over every fence, every gate. What am I talking about! Fences and gates? I'd hop over the Reichstag. Like this, hop, hop, hop! *Damen und Herren*, ladies and gentlemen, Jews and Jewesses. Pay close attention! If you blink, you'll miss it all. A round of applause for the greatest flea of all, the great Go-li-ath!

Eins zwei drei ... Hop!

Goliath ... Hop!

I said, Hop!

Nu, *guten morgen ...*

Hoplah!

Hopaleh!

Hopsaleh!

Maybe he's hungry ... This will only take a minute, friends. Come closer. Closer. This is also a sight you don't see every day. Here, I'm seating him here on my hand and he's sucking drops of blood, not that many are left. He's like a baby, no?

Nu, what is this, Goliath, you want to embarrass father? You're not hungry?

Maybe it's tastier here, the flavor of the month... I beg your pardon, dear audience. We'll continue in a moment.

Goliath, hop!

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

You miserable ...!

You're ruining my reputation! You want to see Gretchen again? No?

It's not polite to laugh, my friends, he's not a dog. I'd like to see you train him! Goliath ... I beg of you ... for me ... Okay, that's it. I told you he was only teasing. Are you ready?

H O P !

What a jump! Unbelievable! There he is!

Who's lying? Excuse me?! I've never lied in my life! He jumped!

Then you missed it, sir. You missed it as well, madame! You all blinked. There's no other explanation.

Dead?! What do you mean, dead! I guess you've never seen a dead flea before.

He's alive. Look ...

Hop ...

Where do you think you're going? To competitors? To the theater? To a concert? To a party? You have a train to catch? You left pots on the gas?

Go ...

Go ...

Go ...

You can all go jump in a lake. Go, Hop!

What kind of world is this? Hop!

A flood's raining down on us and there's no ark ... Hop!

No more of this two by two. One by one we're all getting drenched ... Hop!

God in Heaven, make him jump.

Hop!

They've all gone. Just for me, then. Make him jump.

Hop!

If you exist, send me a sign.

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

Hop!

[**Marina** knocks on the door.]

GRISHA takes pills from the drawer with trembling hands, fills a glass of water, and starts swallowing them one by one.

GRISHA

Dear souls, I realize that you're all more interested in my death than in my life. So that's it, our broadcast will soon be over, as promised, I'm putting an end to myself, we've reached the last day of this life... (In Russian) Let's go out singing.

MARINA

Grisha... what are you doing there? Open up. Grisha!

GRISHA

(to the screen): Yes, that's my name in this life... Grisha... I don't feel like Grisha. I don't feel not Grisha. I don't feel a god damn thing!

MARINA

(in Russian): Мы не разговариваем (We haven't spoken) in three months! Я так больше не могу (I can't go on like this.) Ты тоже (You're also) suffering from it, you know. Forgive me, I already forgiven you.

GRISHA

(to the screen): Dear souls, this pleasant voice belongs to **Marina**, the post-Soviet, post-traumatic, poster child of the Russian immigration—she plays my mother in this low-budget production of my current incarnation.

MARINA

Dear souls — tell him to open to mother!

GRISHA

Ignore her, just ignore her! She's not important. That's it, time to die.

MARINA

Как to die? Почему to die? Not to die! Don't they die enough around here? You yourself said—death is always the same death, life is what changes. If you die—I die with you. I heard in Switzerland, if someone wants, they can die in hotel, with view, with robe. But we don't have money for that. It's terribly expensive.

MARINA

(to the screen, in Hebrew): Okay, we've swallowed that... what else do we have here... *(takes pills from another pack)* That's it, soulmate, even if you've kept quiet until now... it's too late... Even if you're here...

MARINA

I'm here! Getz... it's me, Gitl!

GRISHA

(In Russian) Чиво, Чиво, Чиво? *(What, what, what?)*

MARINA

I'm Gitl, I'm Geyle.

GRISHA

Take those names out of your mouth, how do even... Where have you... how... *(realizes)* Wait, what... I can't believe it... what an idiot, you watched my live stream, you criminal...

MARINA

My dear, open up, it's me, Gabriel...

GRISHA

Я тебя убью, сука... *(I'll kill you, bitch)*

MARINA

Kill me, I'm not afraid. You already killed me in Morocco when you made me poisoned in my tea.

GRISHA

“When you made me poisoned,” the great translator Gabriel Siksu has reincarnated into a retarded toad... (breaks into hysterical laughter) Hey, don’t you have anything better to do than spy on your son online? Huh, you sick pervert! You should be in jail for what you did! How dare you bear Gitl’s name in vain... You filth... How dare you? You can’t even lie, because you’re illiterate, otherwise you’d understand that my soulmate and I have always had names starting with the letter G. And your name starts with M... Marina.

MARINA

My mother wanted Galina, but then father’s mother died, and I was named after her — Marina. But what does that matter, who gave you the name Grisha with a G? Me! I’m your soulmate. I waited my whole life for you, and when you were born from me — I knew right away it was you. I didn’t say anything because in past lives, saying didn’t help us. It only made things worse. Those who think too much about life — don’t have time to live.

GRISHA You can’t even reincarnate — you’re not Jewish!

MARINA Excuse me?! There are also reincarnations in Buddhism, and in Druze.

GRISHA

Are you a Buddhist? Are you a Druze? This is the worst life I’ve ever had, and it’s because of you! You’ve screwed me, don’t you understand?! You gave birth to me without me asking, and where? In Russia, the land of the setting sun!

MARINA

But that’s why I sent you as child to Jewish state!

GRISHA

The Jewish state... In every life I’ve dreamed of It, in Horbitza I cried over our exile, in Venice I’ve prayed for the return to Zion, in Morocco I’ve donated to the Jewish National Fund... And here, here... Thank God, it has risen! The Jewish state! It has risen, and we have fallen. Brothers’ tribe, my ass. I wanted this land so much, but it didn’t want me. I’ve learned Hebrew as best as I could, and I don’t understand anything.

MARINA

And I don't speak well — and actually understand everything.

GRISHA

To fly away from here as far as possible, as fast as possible, to the next life!

MARINA

A person who isn't happy with himself — won't be at happy anywhere.

GRISHA

My my... How insightful...

MARINA

Running away all the time doesn't help — you need to stop and fix things. In Venice and Morocco, you've talked to me about rectification, right? So, rectification should be made now, not later.

GRISHA

This can't be... It's not you... It's not... I'm gonna be sick...

MARINA

Throw up then.

GRISHA

I can't... Everything's stuck...

MARINA

Stick your fingers in...

GRISHA

I can't, that's it... I...

MARINA

Grisha! Grisha!

Marina breaks the door and enters the bathroom, she sticks her finger down his throat, he vomits. She flushes the toilet, wipes his mouth with toilet paper. Both are on the bathroom floor, he cries in her arms.

MARINA

That's it, enough, that's enough... it's over...

GRISHA

I'm exhausted... I can't...

MARINA

You can, Grishinka, Dushinka, you can. Imagine now your next life is beginning, and you're not in Horbitza or Morocco, you're in Antarctica. You died, and were born again, and now you're a baby. What's your first word?

Grisha

M... M... Mama... mamush... mamochka...

MARINA

Yes...

GRISHA

I don't know how to live. I'm not alive.

MARINA

You're not alive? You? No one is more alive than you! You've been living for four hundred years. And if you wait a bit longer, a new day will come, and you'll see today is not your last.

The End?