

# **SHURA: The Mission of Identifying Life**

A play

By Roe Joseph

Translated from Hebrew

By Shir Freibach

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## CHARACTERS

ME (30)

YOCHANAN (40-50)

SHEHADE (30)

THE WORLD (5800)

ROSA (23)

BOAZ CHAMAMI (50-55)

A SOLDIER WHO SINGS 'WHITE DAYS' (20-30)

ILAN OR EREZ (34)

MERAV (possibly 45)

AVIAD T-R-O-S-T (25-30)

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM (34)

ITAY. WITH DIMPLES. READ HARRY POTTER IN ENGLISH (25-30)

A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A DIARY (25-30)

TZION, A REEFER<sup>1</sup> LORRY DRIVER (34)

SOLDIER 1 (18-40)

SOLDIER 2 (18-40)

SOLDIER 3 (18-40)

SOLDIER 4 (18-40)

SOLDIER 5 (18-40)

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (30-40)

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE (50+)

A WHITE BUTTERFLY

THE GROOM (30-40)

END-OF-SUMMER CLOUDS

NOTE: The play can be performed by various cast sizes, starting from 1. The first production featured a cast of 9.

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<sup>1</sup> A reefer – short for refrigerated – lorry is designed to carry freight at low temperatures.

The play was premiered in September 2024 as a co-production of Israel Festival, Jerusalem and Tmu-na Theatre.

*A stage whose dimensions are reminiscent of a lane or a stripe, therefore, a stage that is wide but not deep. In the rear horizontal line there's a convoy of 1200 – or as many as possible – eccyclemas, death carts, being pushed by various people. Each eccyclema is made of stainless steel and has wheels; on each one there is a black or white opaque plastic bag, the size of a person who's lying down, a human body. Each bag has a pink sticker on it, on which five black printed digits, which together create a number, for example – 45073. The living in the convoy, and perhaps not only them, are quietly humming the song 'White Days' by Leah Goldberg, God rest her soul, to the melody by Shlomo Ydov<sup>2</sup>. It's possible that every so often, one of the living convoy members will read out the five digits on their eccyclema.*

## **PROLOGUE**

ME. This play should begin with a very big apology to the Army CID reservist commander who has one eye and who, upon seeing me here for the first time, turned to me and said “Don't you dare make a show about what you've seen here. I am half joking but I'm dead serious”. And the heavy feeling that stayed with me for the rest of that day found itself articulated in the following message: “Hi Victor, if you have time later on, I'd like to speak with you a bit more in depth about what you said”. A message which, as of yet, did not receive a reply.

*A convoy member, YOCHANAN, steps out of the convoy and addresses the audience.*

YOCHANAN. Eccyclema. In the ancient Greek theatre, there was a convention whereby death was not to be shown on stage. The Greek tragedies, death-rich, developed a custom: the eccyclema. An eccyclema is a wheeled platform on which a body would be put on display, following the moment of death. Some believe this was to prevent the display of horror. And yet. I am not certain the Greeks were interested in the prevention of horrors. Whereas it is sufficient to read one Greek tragedy of the 32 that survived, to understand the Greeks needed the display of horrors as one needs oxygen in their lungs. And I wish to argue that the sight of an eccyclema is worse, more horrifying, than the moment of death itself. Here, for example...

*The convoy suddenly stops. Its humming is arrested. YOCHANAN points at one of the eccyclemas on which there is a small bag.*

This bag. 45073. All of a sudden, after all the similarly-sized bags. A baby, perhaps? Perhaps only bones? Go figure. Go forth and figure.

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<sup>2</sup> A rendition of this song in Hebrew, as sung by its composer Shlomo Ydov, can be found [here](#).

## SCENE 1

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* Shehade Farage, my fellow reservist, was the one who urged me to write. Told me it's my next TV series. And as I was uncertain whether or not I had the patience to explain the difference between a TV series and a play, I simply began to write. I refused to write until now, until the fifth (or sixth?) day of this mission of sorting the bodies at Camp Shura and then I smoked a cigarette, my second today, and understood how one starts to smoke at the age of 30; just as I understood how one suddenly becomes religious at the age of 30, or secular, or other things. So far, I'm smoking two-a-day, and I've decided not to become religious.

SHEHADE. *(To ME)* I can already see the series. I do have imagination, you know. It starts with an alert. A phone alert. It's one of the catchier things, a phone alert. He looks at his phone and he sees, eh... he sees, eh... 'Suspected invasion on the Gaza border'. Switches his phone off. Then he goes to the kitchen. And this man, who's in the kitchen, he turns on the TV and then hears in the background – you need to find a news story about, like, how it all started – “There are growing fears about a terrorist invasion with an unknown number of casualties”. Challenging stuff like that. “Early reports”, at the bottom, “Early reports: fear about the possible kidnapping of hundreds of civilians, soldiers and security personnel”. How's that for an opening? Eh?! How is that for an opening?!

ME. I love it.

SHEHADE. In turmoil, he leaves everything and then runs to his wife. *(Silence)* By the way, that's how it happened to me, just so that you know. *(Silence)* He runs to his wife, wakes her up and says “Listen, the whole country is in a scary security situation”. After that he says some more things, about going to work, but that first sentence was specifically meant to scare his wife so she'll wake up.

ME. But it's a Saturday.

SHEHADE. No, hang on. I went to work the day after. What did I do that day? What did I do that day? ...Put a space there, it'll come back to me. Create a sense of craziness – that's an opening, that's proper lethal. Here you disconnect from that man. You make a kind of a reverse

shot and go back to where it all started – people are dancing. It’s an opening about what happened, and then you return to the actual party, you describe the actual party. I think it’s gonna to be a blast. People are dancing, happy, security guys are hanging around the different areas. By the way, there are documentations from there that you can use.  
Before that – space –

You move to a female soldier who’s sitting in front of a monitoring screen and sees Hamas men with maps – it’s really what happened, but you’ll need to check the security clearance, oh but it was in the media so it’s ok. And she’s reporting to the commanders “Listen, I can see Hamas men standing by the border”. And then they say to her “It’s just those Hamas fuckers, they don’t have the balls to do anything”. Here you need to continue this, to develop it. The next stage – you move to the party.

THE WORLD.

S i r e n s

ROSA.

Is that a siren? Is there no siren? What is it?

*People are running to take cover in mobile shelters. Missiles are intercepted in the sky. SHEHADE and ME are sitting and looking.*

SHEHADE.

There’s no siren, it’s far away from here, watch when it explodes.

ME.

*(Perhaps to the audience)* The reason I refused to write until now, is that I felt I didn’t have the right of the historian or of the memoirist to do so, because I was preoccupied with seemingly insignificant things, and not in order to survive, but rather because history is something that is so impossible to grasp when you’re in it, that I can do nothing but talk about a woman, who said her name was Abbey, who last night came into the tent through which the bodies pass and handed out one by one milk chocolate with hazelnuts wrapped in silver foil that’s wrapped in a green paper. And I said to her “Where’re you from? You can only get this chocolate in Tel Aviv.” And she said me to “I am from Tel Aviv!” and I told her that I was too and she said it showed, and I was in full uniform, but apparently it’s still that obvious; and maybe it’s because I am the only reservist who wrote a message to Doctor Skin on Instagram saying I’d love to get a donation of eye cream, day cream and night cream and also a vitamin C booster for the face, so that I could look in the mirror in the morning and see that I do

not have bags under my eyes, or maybe to differentiate myself from the bodies passing in front of my eyes. Forgive me, I did ask up front to not write history.

SHEHADE.

What's the time?

ME.

Twenty past seven.

SHEHADE.

We're getting near the end.

ME.

*(In my heart)* That's right. What you said is good, but I'm not writing a series, I'm writing a play. It's a bit different.

SHEHADE.

Shame. Listen to me, write a TV series, you'll make tons of money. There's no money in plays.

ME.

That's right. But I don't know how to write a series.

*SHEHADE gestures "Whatever" with his mouth and shoulders. Goes back to his phone.*

ME.

OK. *(To the audience or something)* Today I saw a soldier who sang while transporting a body. 'Long, white days'. And my cigarette just finished and all I want now, in the face of what I'm seeing, is to carry on smoking: a winding path, marked by faded white stripes at its centre, a large white tent, which is where the bodies pass through, lying on army stretchers on top of stainless-steel carts.

SHEHADE.

*(To ME)* You should write what we're doing here – the line of taking out the bodies, describe it – the home office, us, the police, the health ministry – who won't be talking for the whole series – the ministry of religious affairs. Paint the picture so it will be clear. And write about the media that came in, and about the ZAKA<sup>3</sup> volunteers and about the food, about the searches we made when each of us started to locate different things, how people didn't want army CID around them, the stories of the bodies. About people here – about Boaz Chamami, about the guy from the home office, what's his name...

ME.

Ohad.

SHEHADE.

Yes, that one.

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<sup>3</sup> ZAKA – Acronym of 'Disaster Victim Identification', is a voluntary post-disaster response organisation in Israel. Most of its members are Orthodox jews. See [here](#).

ME. But what's the point in writing about all that, it's only the background.

SHEHADE. Yes, but people need to understand, they won't understand without it. Start with that, and then add things later... you know... like... heavy stuff.

ME. *(To the audience or something)* Truth is, that like most times, Shehade was right. And in order to start, I should probably tell you about the things that for me, right now, are a given. Like, for example, to say that Shehade and I are reserve service personnel of the army Criminal Investigation Division. And that we're at the Shura army camp. And that this is where all the bodies were brought to after the October seventh massacre. And that they are being kept in refrigerated containers at minus 8 degrees Celsius. And that so far, we've been here every day for 12 hours.

SHEHADE. Minus 18, not minus 8.

ME. Minus 18? What are you on about, do you know how frozen that is? It's minus 8, I heard them talking about it.

SHEHADE. Minus 18; it's not my decision.

ME. It can't be, maybe you misheard.

SHEHADE. Ask that guy, what's his name?

ME. Ohad?

SHEHADE. No, not him. The police guy, you know, Boaz.

ME. Boaz –

BOAZ CHAMAMI. Minus 18. Of course.

ME. It's possible Shehade was actually right every time, not most times.

SHEHADE. Know this – Druse are always right.

ME. And I can also tell that the first woman we saw here (perhaps besides the army policewoman at the camp gate, who each morning pretended not to know who we were)...

SHEHADE. It's better you don't mention her, delete that.

ME. So besides her, the first woman we ever saw here was Rosa.

SHEHADE. *(Calls her)* Rosa!

ROSA. What's that? You don't have uniform? I don't know how they sent you here without any uniform. At the end of the day, you'll need to throw everything you're wearing into the bin. I will try to get you some uniform for tomorrow. Which one of you thinks you can handle difficult sights a bit better?

ME. I think we're both OK.

ROSA. So you will be in FCS A, and you in FCS B.

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* The whole time we were walking, one to FCS A and the other to FCS B, I wanted to ask – but which of them is worse?

ROSA. *(To ME and SHEHADE; briefing)* I'll explain to you how it works. FCS – is a Fatalities Collection Station. Inside the white tent is this line, and you sit here, right on the line. You're basically not allowed to move from here... each body that passes you need to cross reference the data and check if it's a soldier, a reservist, an army security coordinator, rapid response unit, Shin Bet, Mossad or any other security entity; if so you should mark it and you're responsible to transfer it to a military burial. No body leaves the line without your confirmation that you verified it and without signing your name and the time and date.

SHEHADE. *(To ME)* That's how it was at the beginning.

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* After a few days when bodies were constantly leaving, we were left with all the unidentified bodies. We had to do all kinds of things to help with their identification. We looked at the photos of all the bodies and wrote down the information we observed, we searched for identifying details. We had to sort the bodies into lists according to data –

SHEHADE. A burnt body, a decaying body, only bones, with a head, headless.

ME. We had to constantly think which data could be important for identification and sorting into groups.

A SOLDIER WHO SINGS 43820.  
‘WHITE DAYS’.

SHEHADE. A man’s round gold ring on the left-hand ring finger, probably a wedding ring. Body seems partial.

YOCHANAN. What’s his name?

A SOLDIER WHO SINGS 42820.  
‘WHITE DAYS’.

ROSA. Black Nike trainers with a white Nike logo, a little tall. A man’s body. Advanced state of decay. Black hair.

YOCHANAN. What’s his name?

A SOLDIER WHO SINGS 43959.  
‘WHITE DAYS’.

ME. Hiking shoes, darkish brown with a red sole. Face is unidentifiable. A body in an advanced state of decay, a complete body.

YOCHANAN. What’s his name?

ME. Why do you keep asking for names? Spiritually or practically?

YOCHANAN. Only spiritually.

*I squint my face as in “Oh, come on”.*

ROSA. Round about the third day we began to understand what is happening here and did an ‘experiment’. Shehade would shoot out a five-digit number that sounded to us like a body number, and we would check if there is a matching body, or a non-matching body, to that number.

SHEHADE. 45786.

ROSA. Yes.

SHEHADE. 46777.

ROSA. Yes.

SHEHADE. 47768.

ROSA. Yes.

ME. We had three yeses.

SHEHADE. 48977.

ROSA. Nope.

ME. On the fourth time there wasn't a body to match the number.  
We held onto that moment as much as we could.

ROSA. There's a number without a body.

ME. These things are interesting, but it's not what I'll be writing about from now on. They will serve as background, for whoever needs it. Shehade – do you approve?

SHEHADE. Approve. You can make it even clearer, but that's enough.

ME. But perhaps what I wanted to do, was to write about the people who were here during those two months.

## SCENE 2

ME. There was this man here, a logistics NCO.

ILAN OR EREZ. *(Clarifying)* On reserve service. He asked that, for the purpose of the play, I will use his alias – either Ilan or Erez. I could also use both of them alternately, or just combine them.

SHEHADE. A logistics NCO – got himself two names. And both aliases.

ME. Ilan or Erez is 34 years old, an accountant and a lawyer. He has the energy to talk to anyone, about anything, even after two months of reserve service. He has two eyes; one of them is a little red. Naturally, I wouldn't have mentioned that he has two eyes if one of them wasn't a little red.

YOCHANAN. In general, whenever you describe other people, they always sound weird, because what is there to say? He's

got two eyes, two ears and a nose? You skip it and move straight on to what's unique, to what identifies them.

ME.

To information that allows you to identify a person. I recently learned that two arms, two legs, a head – are also identifying details that should not be belittled. And now Ilan or Erez is a bit stuck with that description of one eye that's a little red, because after all, we've known each other for two months, and perhaps he had an inflammation or a sty; and perhaps due to field conditions, perhaps it's his lenses, perhaps the state of an eye post-crying, or prior to crying, or between crying. In any case, he had one eye that was a little red, and I thought to ask him about the play I'm writing. Or just about here in general.

ILAN OR EREZ.

I still don't know what I think. I need to think about what I think, I haven't thought about it yet. I am here, I'm functioning. I am this and this and that. I haven't yet sat down with myself to... I know that about myself, that's what I'm like.

My rabbit died after he'd been with us for eight and a half years. I was crazy about him. I found him in the morning when he was already lifeless, kind of lying on his side. Probably passed away in the middle of the night. I closed the door and acted completely normal. Kind of acted. When my wife left with the kids for kindergarten, I suddenly allowed myself to fall apart. And when she came back, at that moment it suddenly stopped. I can't do it next to other people.

There's a kind of relief in saying I'm in logistics. I'm in operation, where you don't need to know someone's profession, you don't need to know the names. Everyone who hears where I'm at tells me, "Wow, that's so horrible, so like this, so like that". So yes, I see the bags. Yes, I know the bags have bodies in them.

I never thought I would ever see stretchers being carried with bodies on them and all that. If I look at it from my role in logistics then yes, I know about picking up equipment, there's an order, there's transportation and so forth. That's the professional zone and maybe it's a defence mechanism.

You guys, it's inherent to your work. I have the privilege of ignoring it – setting up tables, a map, when is that guy coming, repairing the tent, when is the other

guy coming, all kinds of things. I can block my ears and say child, not a child, bag, not a bag.

ME. Ilan or Erez told me a particularly smart thing. He said each person sees the world from his role. A logistics NCO – sees equipment, transportation, electrical connection, repairs, routes. An investigator sees identification details, data lists for cross-referencing...

ILAN OR EREZ. I look at you and I can imagine that in the world of a playwright, many times you look at a certain person's emotional elements, and even if they don't see them in themselves, it shows on them. It's possible that you see this a lot more than others.

In some ways, you are *obliged* to write about what is happening here. That's your role. You have every reason to feel perfectly fine with writing, but when you're representing someone else's perspective, you should approach this with some humility. Ask yourself what kind of background they have.

ME. And what if I want to write about what I see in you. About what you don't know about what you are feeling? Have you thought about what you feel?

ILAN OR EREZ. I thought about it, but not in depth. I did not think about it in depth, do you understand what I'm saying? I came with a mission to not ask, to not find out details, to not know.

On the first day, I sit down. Tzion, the lorry driver, sits himself next to me. Now *I've got my back to him*. "You won't believe what I saw, that arm, that head." *I have my back to him* but he needed someone flesh and blood to just listen to what he had to say. People are talking all the time, but I run away from those conversations, I run away. I get up and leave. I'll tell him to speak to you.

ME. I'll also be here tonight.

*A long silence.*

ILAN OR EREZ. Today I saw a baby iguana here, just walking. What's the time now? Twelve. Twelve on the dot. Here, they brought food. Look at that, like clockwork.

### SCENE 3

MERAV. There was this woman here, her name is Merav, a policewoman, about 45 years old. Very Yemenite. You can tell straight away. Light blue nail varnish and short fingernails. Combined with the light blue uniform, they look like a part of it. When she found out that the bodies of the terrorists are being transported to the Yemen Field army camp, she was offended on behalf of her entire ethnic group. But really truly offended for about 18 hundredths of a second. Offended as in disbelief, as in a sinking heart, as in a breath, as in “But why?”. Later on, we just laughed about it. When she heard I was writing, she said to me – write. Write about what we’re doing here. Us laughing together.

*(To ME)* I was not offended, it was more like a “What??”. First of all, I had no idea such a place even existed, and then I saw on Google that it’s an army camp and not an inhabited place; because before that I said “What’s that, they’re taking all the terrorists and putting them with us?!” And then I realised it was containers inside an army camp and not a place where people live. So I said “Cool”.

ME. I heard you saying that you’re not telling your family about what you do here. Why?

MERAV. Why don’t I tell them? They see enough on the news all day, and to come and tell them that their own daughter is now opening body bags, seeing the bodies, smelling all those smells... it’s, you know, my mother will get anxieties and all that, I don’t need to burden them. My mother, what did she say to me – “Tell the police commissioner that you can’t, that you’re staying at home”. She thinks it’s a menu you can choose what you want from.

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* The last thing that crossed my mind when she said “family”, is that this woman has a mother.

MERAV. And a husband – because I don’t bring the reality of the work home to him and the children. I try not to. We see so much evil that home is a greenhouse, but to come and bring all this evil into the home, is not... home is a sheltered place. Your own place. A place where you can feel the freest, the best. To have a shower, to smell

pleasant smells and not bring all the stench home with you. To safeguard their sanity because ours somehow got damaged.

ME. You feel that our sanity got damaged?

MERAV. Wow. I'll tell you what, what is it with our sanity? We became indifferent. It's like that guy from the Military Rabbinate<sup>4</sup>, that one day there were two bodies here and he just fell asleep in his chair and we laughed at how he could just sleep like that with this so close to him.

*(Suddenly serious)* In the first days I think I was just in shock, then later we turned it into jokes. It's no joke, it is sad, but that's our way of dealing with it. Weren't you messed up by this? I remember you in the beginning. You were in shock; you were very withdrawn. You came here and in the first day or two you did not communicate, maybe with Shehade but not with us. Initially it took you some time to figure it out, I think it took you some time to understand, and then one day I said to you "Wow, you've opened up". You barely had half a smile on your lips before that. What about you, are you telling anyone? Your partner?

ME. There's a difference between seeing the horror and saying it with words. For instance, once I told him about a body I saw and also described it to him, and I told him it's a burnt body, that everything's black, and he got curious and tried to understand. I think I even told him that the tongue was sticking out. But I don't know whether this is shocking information because I'm already used to it and because the words "a burnt body" do not convey the specific burnt body that I saw.

MERAV. The only thing I've said was "Camp Shura", that here is where bodies are approved for burial. They do, after all, know I'm here at the camp. They must have heard stuff on the news. I told my husband a bit more about the black humour we've got going on here. There was this guy, an officer who got stuck inside a container and panicked. D'you know the story?

ME. No. Tell me.

MERAV. So, there's this commander who comes from the Gaza division, he's always between Gaza and here. One day

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<sup>4</sup> The Military Rabbinate is a corps in the Israeli army that provides religious services to soldiers, and makes decisions on issues of religion and military affairs.

he comes here with another soldier and they got stuck not even for three minutes in a container, you know, it's frozen inside a container... anyway somehow someone opened it for him. I see him all sweaty and I say to him "What? You got stuck in a container?". He says to me "Sure, no biggie, I wasn't stressed or anything". And I say to him, "So how come you're so sweaty, it's frozen in a container..." (*She laughs*) He said it was just one minute and everything's fine. Listen, it was hilarious, shame you weren't there to see it. Tell me, how does your partner feel about you being here?

- ME. Funny you should ask. It's not a great time, we're fighting a lot.
- MERAV. I know what to ask. And tell me, do you, like, cook?
- ME. No, that's more him. Cooks, bakes, he actually makes very tasty food.
- MERAV. So maybe today you will make him something, say, a nice dinner?
- ME. No. I can't cook.
- MERAV. Don't cook then, bring something. What does he like? Does he eat meat?
- ME. No. He likes Asian food.
- MERAV. Oh, I have an idea. Come back tonight with a Chinese soup. Bring Chinese soup for dinner. That way he won't have to cook, and he'll see that you care about him.
- ME. (*Perhaps to the audience*) That day I got back home, and told my boyfriend about the Chinese soup that Merav told me to bring him. He appreciated the gesture even without me bringing him any soup, and ever since then we really did not fight so much anymore.
- MERAV. Told you – it's the attention that counts.
- ME. In the following days Ilan or Erez sent people to see me, soldiers from here, to tell me stuff and for me to type what they said, for the play I'm writing. I was here with the laptop the whole time. When we worked, I typed the information about the bodies, and when we weren't working, then I would type what people were saying. They would come to me and say –

#### SCENE 4

AVIAD. Are you the one who's writing a play?

ME. Oh, yes. I'm writing a play.

AVIAD. There was this guy here. Aviad. An education student. Aviad Trost. (*Spelling out, for some reason*) T-R-O-S-T. (*To ME*) Nice to meet you.

ME. (*Smiles*) Nice to meet you too.

AVIAD. This is an abnormal event. In movies and in plays they try to create either something very very human, or something super-human. Do you understand what I mean?

ME. Eh, yes, I think so.

AVIAD. And here it's like a super-human that is human, something that materialises in reality. Do you understand?

ME. (*Trying to understand*) Yes. A super-human that is human.

THE WORLD. R a i n

AVIAD. When I first got here it was full of bodies. You come in and suddenly you see a Yotvata Dairy lorry. (*He laughs*) Now I'll never be able to drink chocolate milk ever again. You just climb onto a lorry and just start to offload bodies. There were loads of open bags here. The thing that messed me up the most was seeing shoes. I don't know why. Maybe because I saw shoes that I have at home. Black Nike with a white Nike logo, a little tall. And also Blundstones, which everyone has. And also hiking shoes I have at home, not Decathlon, the other shoes I had... they could be Decathlon, darkish brown with a red sole. And I am in the lorry and I'm thinking "A minute ago he was walking and now he's dead. He tied his laces and he didn't know it's the last time he's tying his laces".

*Silence.*

So, what will the play you're writing be about?

ME. I don't really know. Our thoughts, I think. Things we say. I was thinking to maybe ask people if they have dreams that they remember. About here.

AVIAD. I don't dream so much.

But I do lose things. I lost a kippah. I lost a charger. I almost lost keys.

ME. I break things. My sunglasses, my watch. My laptop is a bit broken.

AVIAD. The thing is I don't register specific images. Many people say there's a specific face or an image that is etched in their mind, but me – nothing. Nothing gets etched in my mind. I remember a hand with a ring. I got married two months ago.

ME. Mazal tov.

AVIAD. Thank you... how it was, what we'd do – we'd tear the bag, take out the hand, lift it up and then take a fingerprint. On one of the hands, I suddenly saw a ring and that messed me up. A man's round gold ring, like mine.  
*(Silence)*

THE WORLD. R a i n r a i n r a i n

AVIAD. Wow, what rain.

So, you don't know what will be in the play that you're writing?

ME. What do you think should be in the play that I'm writing?

AVIAD. I don't know, but I do know you also need black humour. It's a must. It's the way that many people here offload stuff. I used to be a person with lots of black humour, but I don't get to tell jokes. I find what I'm hearing funny, but I don't tell any myself.

And there should be a sad ending. The show doesn't need a happy end. It doesn't matter, even if everything comes out for burial today, there shouldn't be a happy end. And ideally you need actors who were here. Because you can't explain what happened here. Doesn't matter how much you talk, it's impossible to explain. Impossible to understand what happens here. And you

need the audience to somehow be aware of the fact that they cannot understand what it was like here. Maybe if you get very talented actors.

ME. I wish everyone here could just act in it as well.

AVIAD. I do dream about what is happening here. But not like nightmares. More like the small assignments, more about, let's say... there was one day I remember when I went to FCS A and they opened a bag there and took something out of the bag, maybe a spine or ribs, I don't know. At night I dreamt that I was in my house and it's just there on floor in the living room and in the dream this felt normal.  
*(Silence)*

THE WORLD. R a i n r a i n r a i n

AVIAD. What rain.

THE WORLD. T h e r a i n c o n t i n u e s

T h e r a i n s t o p s

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM. There was this man here, Shlomo Teitelbaum. Orthodox jew. A journalist at the Israeli Economist magazine. In his spare time, he arranged lectures about economic issues for the soldiers in here.

ME. One day he and I had to bring out bodies from the containers together. He came to me with a note.

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM. The absurdity is how you get used to such things. A note that looks like a library note. In the national library, that's how you'd request a book.

ME. 45008, container number 8, shelf 4 on the right.

*The following dialogue is spoken while SHLOMO TEITELBAUM and ME are carrying bodies.*

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM. Someone asked me – is it allowed to look at the faces of the dead? A secular girl once asked me – I have my period, am I allowed to go into a cemetery? I feel a little embarrassed because I'm a religious man and I've never heard that there's a problem with people with a period and then I thought that maybe the difference is because I am Ashkenazy and she is Sephardic. So I immediately wrote to a friend of mine, because that was before the time of being able to look everything up online. I sent

this query to a friend of mine who is the son of Rabbi David and the grandson of Rabbi Ovadia and he reassured her. It turns out there were all kinds of traditions like that and somehow a custom in this case became a prohibition (but isn't originally so).

ME.

48406, container number 10, shelf number 3 on the right.

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM.

Anyway, you meet a policeman in here and he asks you – we get to see dead people's faces here – is that allowed? And then I remembered it says in the Talmud that whomever gazes at the face of the deceased... it's written under "Things that hinder forgetfulness and are good for remembering": (*he reads from memory*) "Ten things that hinder study". And at the end of that list, it says – "One who passes under the foul odour of a carcass or gazes at the face of the deceased".

I found it. Our Rabbi Yedaya HaPenini, an interesting character, he says the concern is, the Talmud is after all a collection of beliefs, but perhaps it is based on a rational fear, and he says that if you see a dead person that you know... here, I'll read it to you: "The reason for the concern is that upon seeing a dead person whom he knew well in life, and now perceives as lifeless as a stone, he will be greatly shaken as he reflects that he too will die like this. Out of fear, his mind will become unsettled, and he will forget his learning".

ME.

Well, what did you tell him then?

SHLOMO TEITELBAUM.

I told him that all the harm is done only if you really look, what do I know.

*They laugh.*

ITAY. WITH DIMPLES.  
READ HARRY POTTER  
IN ENGLISH.

There was this guy here. Itay. With dimples. Read Harry Potter in English.

(*To ME*) On the first day here I was on the side of the reception area where we bring in the fatalities, and on the other side there are the families, for the identification. The distance is, let's say, between the white tent here to about... the trees, on this side. That's the distance, so not much really. And that's the thing that was the toughest for me at the beginning – that you take out a body and then you hear the cries of the families who see them. I'm trying to figure out how to explain this to you in a sentence – you know how there

are those grey movies where it's raining and people walk like robots? That's what it felt like; people with masks, with overalls, cries on one side once every hour, every three hours, every four. And then you realise that what you are taking out, is what the families will be receiving on the other side.

A body is a thing that is distant from you. It's not alive. And we, as people who did that, you have to create a certain detachment. But when you see the families arriving and you hear their pain – that's what kind of penetrated us, the guys who were there. It's really far from you, you don't see it, you don't see the people. You only hear voices. The voice they uttered, there's a very specific depth to a voice and you can hear that it's the voice of a very, very deep pain.

ME. What does it sound like?

ITAY. It's a scream with a sobbing.

*Silence.*

There's a sentence people like to say but I disagree with it.

ME. *(In my heart)* Which one?

ITAY. "I understand..."

ME. *(In my heart)* I understand.

## **SCENE 5**

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* I don't remember as much of what happened during the first days. Mainly that we worked a lot and continuously, and also that soldier who sang while transporting the bodies, but I haven't seen him since. During those days, I had many dreams each night.

SHEHADE. I kind of heard numbers but I mainly saw lots of bodies in front of me and two bodies in particular – one in a black bag and one in a white bag, when I opened the fridge. It's the same opening as the containers, but it

looks smaller, more crowded. That's what it was like in the dream. You open, numbers are ringing in your ears, you see bags – one white, one black.

ME. On one of the first days, Shehade and I took a break for a moment. It was almost evening but not quite yet, and the sky was full with these giant, clear, clouds, grey and pink. End-of-summer clouds.

SHEHADE. We stood in front of the tent.

ME. We stood in front of the tent and looked at the clouds.

SHEHADE. Everyone's probably saying, "These two flipped because of the bodies".

ME. It wasn't for such a short time.

SHEHADE. No.

ME. It was very beautiful.

SHEHADE. Yes.

ME. We hardly knew each other.

SHEHADE. We kind of met 11 years ago.

ME. We're both 30 years old.

SHEHADE. I have a boy and a girl.

ME. And we felt close enough to just stand together and look at the clouds.

SHEHADE. It really was beautiful.

ME. At some point we started to talk about the shapes of the clouds.

SHEHADE. I can't remember what shapes we saw.

ME. No.

SHEHADE. I remember we said that if we're looking for shapes, then all these clouds look like body bags.

ME. I don't remember if we said it out loud, or if we only thought it.

SHEHADE.  
ME.

Maybe you imagined it.  
Perhaps it's something I wrongly invented just now  
when I was trying to remember the first days.

SHEHADE.

If someone sees us, they must be thinking – “These two  
flipped because of the bodies”.

## SCENE 6

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

There was this guy here. A soldier who wrote a diary.  
Long ponytail. A large blue kippah. He had a name.  
Shlomo. At some point he cut his hair short. So the  
maggots on the bodies won't get into his hair.

I've known you for 36 days and we got to nod our heads  
at one another when I passed in front of you with a  
body, but now you're suddenly curious about things that  
didn't interest you before. Do you want me tell you  
about things that are written in the diary?

ME.

Yes.

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

From the start of the war, I wrote a diary that  
documented each day, what went on here at the FCS. In  
between shifts I would sit with soldiers on guard duty  
and some of them told me things.

Something I remember, is that one time we came with  
the battalion commander and he said that we are heroes  
and well done to us and that he wants to “experience it”,  
as they say. So I told him “Sure, come on in”, and he  
just stood at the entrance to the containers and didn't  
dare to enter. When you open the door there isn't any  
light, a freezing wave comes out at you and it's kind of  
paralysing. So I told him, “Come, get in with us”, and  
then he said “I think I'll pass”, and I don't like hearing  
“I'll pass”, so I told him “Look, we need to take two  
bodies out, just hold this”. And he held the stretcher and  
we only just put it into the tent and he said “Someone  
else should take it from here, I've had enough”.

A few days later the deputy battalion commander, Roe, arrived. And he was, you could say, braver. We went in. It was his bad luck that we had to do numbering, which means that you search for a specific number that's

supposed to be in the container, and indeed it was also his bad luck that it was right at the end. I remember, it was on the left side on row four to the right and row four to the left. We went into the container and his bravery stopped for a minute. At the entrance, he said “Wow”. I told him “Wow what?”, “Are all these bodies?”. So I told him “Yes”. We went to the end of the container and I said to him “Roee, you now need to place one leg on the right side and one leg on the left and climb up to the top shelf”. And he said “What, just like that?” And I told him “Yes. Just like that. Put a leg on the right and a leg on the left and go up, there should be a number on the bag, and tell me the number”. Then he told me 45008.

ME. You remember the number.

A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A DIARY. Yes.

ME. You remember numbers?

A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A DIARY. I try to.

ME. Why?

A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A DIARY. I just like numbers.

Then Roee, after he read out the number to me, I told him, “Now just look at the other side and tell me the number that’s there”. Roee came down and said “I think I’ve had enough”.

ME. *(Perhaps to the audience)* I met Shlomo the day he lost the diary he was writing. Thirty-six pages.

A SOLDIER WHO WROTE A DIARY. *(To ME)* My wife always says, and I believe it too, sometimes a person comes to you and tells you a story out of a sense of offloading. Not because they care about what you’ll do with it later on. Whether you’ll write it down, or won’t write it down. They are just telling it to you. And maybe it was God’s wish that only I will hear the stories and also take them with me, and not for someone else to hear them. And he also took them with him.

ME. But what about what I’m doing now? Would you prefer that the story you’re telling me now will stay with me, so others won’t hear it?

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

No. Because I haven't told you something that isn't within me. Also the names I mentioned, you have no idea who they are. And a name can be anonymous, could be just a cover story. Although the names are real, it's possible that you don't know who they are. Can you tell me your name?

ME.

Of course, a name can be just a cover story. I am Roe.

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

*(Laughing)* Nice to meet you, I'm Shlomo.

Tell me, why are you writing this?

ME.

I am now in a reality which is not the reality I am used to being in. The reality I am used to being in, is a reality without any bodies. To return, I need to understand the reality with the bodies better.

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

Why?

ME.

I think that to be able to bury something, you need to know what it is.

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

Didn't you know what you were coming here for?

ME.

I knew.

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

If you knew what you were coming for, didn't you prepare yourself for it?

ME.

How can you prepare?

*(A brief silence)*

Hey, there was a guy here with you who was singing while he was carrying the bodies. Do you happen to know who he was?

A SOLDIER WHO  
WROTE A DIARY.

I actually don't, but I'll ask around for you.

*(A brief silence)*

Listen, one day a psychologist came here and we did our usual group meeting and he said, "Guys, I want us to make the circle bigger". So I went and brought more people, there were 40 of us altogether. And when we started to speak, he said "Hold on, don't talk about that", "Just a minute, please stop that", "Hold on, talk about

something else”. And I said to him, “Hey, are you ok?” And he didn’t respond and just continued the discussion. I’m stubborn. So I went to him afterwards and I asked him, “Hey, are you ok?”. And he said “I’ll tell you the truth, I don’t want to be here. True, I am a psychologist and that is my job, but if I had a choice I would have preferred not to be here”.

I’ll tell you what, either you write, or you shout. Just shout. Just scream.

## SCENE 7

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

*(Screams)*

ILAN OR EREZ.

I’ll tell him to speak to you.

ME.

I’ll also be here tonight.

THE WORLD.

D a r k n e s s

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

I barely ever sleep. Everyone here knows it – Tzion doesn’t sleep. And if I do, it’s two-three hours tops. I’m detached from everything. I’m scared of nothing. I never think about it. I used to drive from here to the cemetery at two, three in the morning, just me alone in the cab with 20 bodies. I’m there with 20 bodies, waiting for the cemetery to open. Just sitting here with the lorry, pitch black, not scared. Yesterday I realised there’s no fear in me anymore. It’s all gone, dead. Last night, at midnight, it was all quiet here. No lights, no nothing. I came over here from the other side to make some coffee. Quiet, not even a cat walking by. And you know the bodies are here. Some of the drivers passed out, some ran off, or they do it and... then they lose it. When I shut my eyes, I feel like the lorry is moving, but it’s not moving. I used to sit in the cab and put my feet up. I can’t do that anymore. Can’t look at my legs. The sheer number of legs I’ve seen. I was cleaning the lorry. The amount of blood and foam pouring out of it was unreal. The last couple of days, I keep thinking “Enough”. That’s it. I’ve done my bit. I’m tired. Can’t do this anymore. But me, my whole life, if I start something, I do it all the way to the end. That’s all I know. You’ve started something,

and you already know how do it in the best possible way  
– go out there and get it done.

THE WORLD.

L i g h t

D a r k n e s s

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

It's like it wasn't me who was doing that. I wasn't me that night. As much as I said I wasn't scared and all that, I wasn't the one who was driving all that night. I was the first one who started to load up the lorries out there. Without bags. From Camp Re'im to Sa'ad Junction – two doors wide open. Drive, stop, drive, stop. We're out there looking with the lights on our phones, searching for bodies. There were no torches, no lighting. From eleven at night to seven thirty in the morning; it felt like I'd been driving a thousand kilometres, but it was just six. It was a never-ending nightmare. I brought 150 bodies over here, piled one on top of the other. When I got here, they started shoving them into bags. I've got pictures. Everything is dripping blood. You see people pushing on, everyone crazy stressed. Do you have any idea what went on here on the first day? There was no table here, there was nothing. This space was empty, clear. Just lorries, lorries, lorries, never-ending lorries. Load, load, load, something mental. It didn't go away; it'll never go away. There's this fear in my body, like vertigo. You can't take it out of a man with a hole inside him. You can't even grab your own leg, because it's shaking so bad. I didn't smoke at all during that whole time. Couldn't even light a fag, I was shitting myself. I lost it. You're standing. You're driving the lorry and then you stop. And they're searching and searching. And they go on. And then they clear the area, lifting everything that's there, whatever's on the sides of the ditch. It wasn't just one or two at a time. There were loads. Loads. And he's shouting, that officer, and you can hear the music that's still playing from the cars, or the phones ringing. No one was talking. Everyone was dead silent. No one wanted to speak. Everyone was detached.

*(Silence)*

THE WORLD.

L i g h t

D a r k n e s s

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

I got to Urim, and I say to the ambulance driver "Point me in the direction of Camp Re'im". He says to me "What? You wanna go where? Are you sure? It's the

hottest spot right now”. I get there, no security, no escort, nothing. I drove, I got into the lorry, I got there, pitch black. I switch on the main beams. I see three pickup trucks, standing there, just standing there, all with like machine guns in them, all just knackered, finished. Ten terrorists. Just under the tree, lined up, everyone’s dead. I turned the lorry around, you saw how big my lorry is, I turned it round like I was driving a car. By the time I managed to turn it around and away from there, by the time I managed to get out of there and drive towards Re’im junction, by that time, no wait, from way earlier, my whole body started shaking. When I saw all these pickups, that’s when it started to sink in. Then I see the police cars, flashing lights, the army jeeps. And I say “Thank god they’re already here”. I’m driving. They are all dead. They’re all on the ground, all spread on the ground and the car engines’ still running. And I hear the two-way radios squawking. As I get to the junction, they’re all on the ground, finished. Now, instead of taking a left towards Camp Re’im, I turn right. And where does that right take you? To Be’eri. I start driving to the right towards the rave. I’m on the road that leads to the rave and then I say to myself, “Hang on, if I’ve reached Be’eri, something’s wrong. Camp Re’im is back the other way; I know this road. The lorry is unstable from gunfire, I’m driving and the lorry is unstable. Never mind the fact that I drove over bodies and motorbikes. The road was a killing field – everything on fire, everything charred, everything open, everything scattered on the ground. Things. Like suddenly you see this tree, a car is stuck on it, on the tree, just stuck on it. Everything is flying up in the air and I’m sitting here on the ground. When I got there, and I saw that road, I did a U-turn. Didn’t take my foot off the gas till I got to Camp Re’im. I get to Camp Re’im, and I see all the soldiers of the camp, all standing at the gate with flipflops, shorts. You see arms, legs, heads. I wanted to turn back, but I thought, “If I go back, I’m dead. God kept me safe so far”. At Camp Urim, honest to God, someone grabs me by the shirt and says “Come with me, I’m with you.” Even the officer was shocked that I got there without an escort, that I got there totally on my own. He got a guy to sit on the fridge of my lorry, a sniper with a weapon. And he says to me “Don’t worry, from now on I am with you.” He saw that I was shaking, pale. I called my wife and started screaming “Now!!! someone get me out of here”. She thought I was out delivering food or something. The whole entrance to Urim was gunfire everywhere. I thought, “Let’s go inside, maybe it’s not

like I think it is”.

*(Silence)*

THE WORLD.

L i g h t

D a r k n e s s

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

It was Saturday night. Nine o’clock, the dispatcher calls me and says, “There’s a run we need you to do to Camp Urim”. I tell him, “Alright, I’ll go”. I’d already spoken to all the drivers so I know that they’re all out. I get to Urim and they say “No, go to Camp Re’im”. I didn’t know everything that had happened, I slept the whole Saturday because I was awake all Friday night till the morning when the sirens began, and then I went to sleep. My wife woke me up at 6:30 pm, and in between I didn’t really have time to look and see and know where I was going to. I got to Urim, and there’s a convoy of army ambulances. There was no satnav, they disconnected the satnav, and the electricity too – there was no electricity. Long story short, I know how to get to Camp Re’im because I work there every day, delivering food to the army camps. I see on the road tons of cars with all their windows blown up, loads of them. My wife said to me “Come and see what you’re waking up to, to what...”

*(Silence)*

THE WORLD.

L i g h t

D a r k n e s s

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

I don’t know if I should feel embarrassed because I cried, but it released a lot out of me. Most days I sit and cry. Tears rolling down. For example, I could just be sitting in a chair and my whole face is wet with tears. My son asks me, “Daddy, where are you? Where are you?” I go to the other side and show him the mess hall, the canteen. He’s 10 years old. He asks me, “What are you doing? What are you doing?” I told him “When you’re older, when you’re 18, I’ll tell you what your Dad did”. Last Saturday he said to me – “Daddy, what happened, why are you so quiet?”

*(Silence)*

THE WORLD.

L i g h t

TZION, A REEFER  
LORRY DRIVER.

Come, come let’s go eat a hot pizza.

## SCENE 8

ME. *(He screams. Silence)*  
Perhaps a sign that the end is near:  
Today I saw soldiers standing and washing the stretchers. I sat down and wrote what I was seeing. It was a very beautiful sight. There were 24 stretchers on the ground, arranged in four rows. It all took place next to the army water trough and the fire hose. I forgot to count the soldiers, but there were about five, or another uneven number. Each one donned blue gloves and held a road-sweeping broom, each broom slightly different. One of the soldiers passed among the stretchers, pouring disinfecting liquid soap while the washing was going on.

SOLDIER 1. Shuki, this one, too?

SOLDIER 2. Only on the top bit.

SOLDIER 3. Looks like no one's ever cleaned these beds before.

SOLDIER 2. That's what wars are for.

SOLDIER 4. Guys, do the crossbars, too.

SOLDIER 1. As much as possible...

SOLDIER 4. Oh, and the handles.

SOLDIER 3. Yes.

SOLDIER 2. We need to dry them as well.

SOLDIER 5. I hope the sun comes out.

SOLDIER 1. Do we need to do the opposite side as well?

SOLDIER 3. I think so... we did pile them up on top of each other.

SOLDIER 5. Well done, guys! You want me to swap with you?

SOLDIER 1. Not yet, it's all good.

SOLDIER 5. Don't work too hard, eh?

SOLDIER 3. What does the second soap do?

*One of the soldiers pretends to be overseeing the work.*

SOLDIER 5. Over here, here, you missed a bit. Clean it again.  
What's this, who did this bit?

*(Perhaps to the audience, perhaps to ME)*

That's how it is, you can't do without humour, it can't be helped...

ME. Throughout the washing I prayed in my heart for the combination of the splashed water and the sun beams to create a rainbow, an unnatural one, that occurs due to human activity. I thought that the emergence of such a rainbow could enrich the washing. For the benefit of the story, and I am making an exception on this occasion, one might claim that such a rainbow did exist. I don't mind saying that.

After some deliberation, they decided to stand the stretchers up for drying around the mobile shelter without blocking its entrance. I see an orange stretcher, all washed.

SOLDIER 3. Tell me, doesn't bleach remove blood stains?

SOLDIER 4. No, the stain didn't come off.

ME. Then they turned the stretcher over, and the stain was less visible.

SOLDIER 5. Guys, this ain't no chill time. Come on work, work. I don't pay you a salary for nothing.

SOLDIER 1. Says the guy who conscripted only for the salary!

SOLDIER 2. But what do we do if there's a body now? Do we just say it should wait?

ME. One of them notices me typing.

SOLDIER 4. What's with the poor conditions, Bro? Shall I get you a desk?

SOLDIER 2. I think you'd better move away; mind the water.

ME. I'm writing a play. About what's happening here.

SOLDIER 4. It's gonna be one cruel play. It'll be hard for people to digest. This is not a simple situation. I'm sure people won't be thinking about what happened on those beds,

but if people do think about what happened on these beds, it's gonna to be tough.

*(He continues to speak, without uttering a sound)*

ME.

*(As SOLDIER 4 is speaking mutedly)*

Here occurred something that happens to those who type while walking. That conversation was typed on the keys but not in reality. That is to say, I was randomly pressing on the keyboard, or maybe not randomly, and perhaps that's the function of those types of conversations – to be recounted, but not too much so. The keyboard went on just as I was asking him – “Tell me, how do we cope with what we are doing?”

SOLDIER 4.

Who said we're coping?

The fact that we're joking and all that, at the end of the day who knows what our soul is going through during that time.

ME.

So what are we doing to protect ourselves?

SOLDIER 4.

Detaching our feelings for now.

ME.

And then?

SOLDIER 4.

And then who knows.

At the end of the day we are stronger than death. Write that down.

## SCENE 9

SHEHADE.

Tell me, why do you have a computer with you all the time?

ME.

It reminds me to think about things I need to think about.

SHEHADE.

It's hard for me, sentences like this.

*ME laughs.*

ME.

Shehade and I kept joking that if we don't write a TV series and get rich, then we'd apply for disability benefits for what we've been doing here.

*(Receives a message)* Shehade, he sent me a message.

SHEHADE.

*(Pulls a “What do we do now?” face)*  
What did he write?

ME.

He wrote “What’s up?”

What do I tell him?

*(Perhaps to the audience)*

It’s the psychologist that was sent here for us. Shehade and I wanted to ensure there would be documentation of us losing our minds while we’re still here.

SHEHADE.

*(Pondering for a moment)*  
Write to him – it’ll be OK.

ME.

That’s genius.

SHEHADE.

Truth is, until that other psychologist came and spoke to me here, I was actually feeling OK. It was her who put in my head the thought that maybe I’m not. I was feeling fine till then.

ME.

Tell me, how do you feel about what we’ve seen here?

SHEHADE.

Is this for the disability benefits?

*They laugh.*

What do you want to hear? A nice answer or the truth?

Truth is, it’s not easy. What do I mean by not easy? You don’t feel it while you’re working, but if you sit down and think about it... when I got back home and I saw the names of those I’ve treated on the news and saw the real story it affected me. I felt pain. And I should mention that I’m not a sensitive man. There are only very few times when I got emotional or moved or felt what a feeling is. I’m like a stone. If I feel something is sad, it must be something critical.

What I do feel, is that you and me both, we’re focused on the mission and you know... we’re burying the emotion. But I’m sure there’s something sad inside us. I am sure.

ME.

How are you so sure?

SHEHADE.

There’s a difference between a procedure and a feeling. What we are doing is a procedure. Because you are talking in numbers.

ME.

Is that really dominant for you? The numbers?

SHEHADE.

Yes. But I hear stories of people and families and it becomes kind of personal, you become a part of it. To the point that I stopped watching the news.

I've only really been moved by something twice in my life. The main time was my father's death. Beyond that I'm not moved by much. That's why I'm a very interesting person in this situation. If I get into the story, there is an emotion, because you realise that he has kids and you compare him with yourself and you think about it.

I think that because we are together on a mission, then we exit this closed circle. If you were on your own, it could have scarred you. Because you sit, you don't know anyone, and you see the body, and you start having nightmare scenarios in your head.

*(Silence)*

By the way, that's what happened to me in the first few hours. I was on my own, and I see bags, and I don't know what they've put in the bags – a child or an adult and it messes with you. And the smell. That sends you deeper into nightmares.

ROSA.

I couldn't look at my clothes. I knew that when I got back home, I would bin my clothes. Everything that entered Shura will be going into the bin. That's why I don't have my watch on. In everyday life you will never see me without a watch.

ME.

That's why you told us on the first day that we'd have to bin our clothes. Wow, you have no idea how stressed you made me by saying that.

SHEHADE.

Yes, I also got stressed because they told me on the phone that, no matter what, in my role I will not have to touch bodies. There is no chance I will ever touch a body.

ROSA.

*(Laughing)* Oh, wow, I didn't think about it like that.

I'll tell you the worst thing I've had. Someone from ZAKA showed me a photo of his boy on his phone, and it took me a minute, but then I realised it was a real boy. Who was born. He told me, "Look how cute he is", and I said to myself, "Rosa, this is someone who's alive, not someone who is dead". I'm crazy about small children, especially babies.

Tell me, why do you have the computer with you all the time? Put it down, you don't need to carry it.

SHEHADE. It reminds him to think about things he needs to think about.

ME. I thought it's hard for you, sentences like this.

SHEHADE. In the end, I understand.

## SCENE 10

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. There was this woman here, Nofar, from the Ministry of Health.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE. There was this woman here, Adira, from the Home Office.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. Hi there (*folded hands emoji*) Any chance you want to donate teabags to reservists? I'm here at Camp Shura sorting fatalities, and all we have is lousy black tea.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE. Hi Roe, sounds terrible : ( We'd love to send you some tea.

ME. This is the correspondence between me and a high-end teabag shop on Dizengoff street in Tel Aviv. It sounds a bit weird to me now.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE. Each person assumes control in a different way. With me, control is knowing. In my case, just because I'm a little familiar with the field, I knew it could catch me one day and I wanted to know the how and the what.

ME. It's good that we received teabags. That's how I got to know Nofar from the Ministry of Health and Adira from the Home Office.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE. I spoke with a good friend of mine, who is a psychologist. She told me 90% recover naturally, and for the 10% who are struggling more – there's something that can be done as well. My poor children; I hug them any chance I get. My eldest boy unfortunately got the brunt of it.

People's ability to watch a play about this story... I think that after the trauma and after all that...

ME.

How long?

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

I don't know. I do not know. Definitely not in the next two years.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

I actually think the opposite. Because it's all happening now and people are very curious *now*.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

I think we are still deep inside, and definitely in the first year we are still deep inside. It still takes you back.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

I'll tell you why it's interesting. Because it's very specific. People were exposed to the event from other aspects of the aftermath, but not through our eyes.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

It could be that it's because we are here, having seen what we've seen, that I'm saying that people wouldn't want to. It'll be interesting to check.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

We are busy with our own things so it seems to us that it doesn't interest anyone else.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

I'm not saying it doesn't interest other people. I was talking about the capacity to accommodate the story about Shura at this moment. There is a certain capacity in a person, and also in a nation, of how much you can accommodate at a certain moment. I think theatre should be open to all, not just for a specific type of person. I think that now, again, as I see it, it could just be me, people will not yet be able or open to listen. I don't know for how long. At least a year in my opinion.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

I think that this event proved to everyone that we can accommodate a lot. You did not think you'd be able to take on so much but here, it is happening.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

But we are individuals who were part of this event. Other people's capacity to accommodate this – that's another thing altogether.

NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

But they heard stories and saw videos about what's happening.

ADIRA FROM THE HOME OFFICE.

Stories are another thing altogether...

NOFAR FROM THE  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH. I think the opposite, that it's harder. I was at a demo for the hostages and I cried for the first time, and it was harder than a whole month here at Shura.

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE. When I think about Shura, I divert my memories to people I know, to the good people I met here. I averted my gaze from the unpleasant things to the pleasant things and then I cried. Because that's what's moving, the good. Crying happens sometimes.

NOFAR FROM THE  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH. It's so funny how he sits and documents our whole conversation.

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE. Delete delete delete. Delete everything.

ME. Why delete everything?

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE. I don't know. I'll come to see the play.

NOFAR FROM THE  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH. You'll go see the play if it happens in 10 months' time?

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE. Yes, I will. Although it'll be hard for me to see it in the summer. If I see it, it'll be out of curiosity because I've been here. How you depict Shura and whether you manage to show it with a certain level of authenticity. Whether what you show in the play will allow me to say, "Wow, that's how I was, that's how I experienced it, that's how things were". Or – "Here there's a little embellishment, or here it's a tad subjective". Or – "A careful or politically correct wording would be more effective."

ME. I keep pondering these things all the time.

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE. And this will spur you to present things in a more authentic way.  
*(Silence)*  
We have this joke, that you can eat anything apart from whatever arrives refrigerated from container number one. It was used for bodies, before it became a food fridge. On my second week here, he *(gestures to SHEHADE)* fetched cold water from that container, but it had that awful smell...

SHEHADE. No, you imagined this.

ADIRA FROM THE  
HOME OFFICE.

I did not!

NOFAR FROM THE  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

When you do your play, remember me from the teabags.

ME.

Of course, that's what I think about whenever I see you.

## SCENE 11

SHEHADE.

What's the time?

ME.

Twenty past seven.

SHEHADE.

We're getting near the end.

ME.

That's right.

In the first few days, when I returned home each day, I had to wash myself with a sponge, literally scrub. So it won't stick to me.

In the first few days, I had nonstop dreams every night, but not dreams with a vision, rather dreams with a strong sense of searching. And all the time there are running numbers, each number five digits, and searching, all the time searching, and the pressure of finding what matches what and where to put what. Later on, there were other dreams.

In the first few days, I saw you saying the name of whoever you were transporting all the time.

YOCHANAN.

That's right.

ME.

And you had to keep asking for the name of the person all the time.

YOCHANAN.

That's right.

ME.

And you asked me while I was working.

YOCHANAN.

That's right.

ME.

And do you remember what I said to you?

YOCHANAN. Yes.

ME. What?

YOCHANAN. You asked me if it was practical or spiritual.

ME. That's right.

YOCHANAN. And do you remember which face you pulled on me?

ME. Yes.

YOCHANAN. Which was it?

ME. A kind of "O, come on" face.

YOCHANAN. That's right.

ME. And now?

YOCHANAN. What about now?

ME. And now I look for the spiritual.

YOCHANAN. Are you finding it?

ME. I don't think so.  
Tell me. There was a guy who sang while transporting  
the bodies.

YOCHANAN. Hmm.

ME. Do you know who that is?

YOCHANAN. No.

ME. Will you tell me if you do?

YOCHANAN. Maybe it was you?

ME. I don't think so.

YOCHANAN. Which song did he sing?

ME. 'White Days'.

YOCHANAN. Don't know it. Was he a good singer?

ME. I can't remember.

SHEHADE.

Maybe you imagined it.

ME.

I didn't.

There was this guy here, 30 years old. He started to smoke here. On his first day, someone – perhaps Merav or perhaps Shehade – said that they don't smell the smell of the bodies because they've been smoking for many years. And I was surprised, I had no idea it was like that, that smoking makes your sense of smell disappear. Someone confirmed that, perhaps Merav or perhaps Shehade. Maybe that is why I started?

There was this guy here, walked everywhere with his laptop, which got so dirty that after two months of reserve service it had to be sent off to be fixed.

SHEHADE.

It reminds him to think about what he needs to think about.

ME.

There was this guy here, it was me, who one day got asked to go and open bags of bodies that were not yet identified, to check if we have missed something, such as text on a garment label, something small in a pocket, anything that could assist with identification.

They gave me a team of soldiers, one of them a German speaker, and I remember that with certainty because upon opening one of the bags, on a shirt that looked odd, there was writing that only he could read. The name of a German brand.

They opened one bag at a time for me, with great patience. I was "the clean one", the one who is not supposed to touch but only to write and tell others what to move and what to clean.

The clothes were frozen at minus 18 degrees, and needed to be softened. Some of the labels had already faded. And I remember how that entire search yielded nothing, and how I could not fathom how it can be that nothing is left apart from a garment with no details, and how it can be that when you completely spread out the garment and realise what colour it is and what its label says, it still means nothing. And I don't know what I used to think beforehand, why I ever thought there would be something there, and this strong sense of nothingness. Of – there are people that what's left of them is nothing, and when their clothing is spread out, still nothing.

A WHITE BUTTERFLY.

There was this butterfly here. A white butterfly. A white fluttering butterfly. I have already seen a white fluttering butterfly many times, but what I saw this time was that the fluttering butterfly has a shadow, which is also fluttering. And all in all, this is very logical, because after all things have shadows. But that fluttering shadow, I never thought about it before. And perhaps all I have to say is that in those bags with the clothes it was as if there was only a shadow. And when evening comes, there isn't even a shadow. And maybe there is, but it has no mark, no mark you can capture. And maybe all I wanted to say is that it, too, should be searched for. That shadow. The shadow of the butterfly in the evening

## SCENE 12

BOAZ CHAMAMI.

There was this guy here, Boaz Chamami. A police officer. A Commander. Married to Daniela and, under her influence, avoids eating rubbish. Although, should a hazelnut cream filled wafer land in his palms, a really tasty one, he will eat it. But not too much. It would be a shame to involve a highly ranking police officer like him in matters such as a play. One can merely write, however, that he had a very broad smile that made his eyes narrow, and, in particular, it should be mentioned that he knew a thing or two about colours.

ME.

And once, in the middle of a morning briefing:

BOAZ CHAMAMI.

A lesson from me to you: simple colours. Primary colours – red, orange, yellow, blue, orange.

This IID<sup>5</sup> police officer is sitting here earlier, a Major General (!). And the soldier who presented the power point shows him this colour-coded chart with the data of the containers. Now you've got these here (*bursting with laughter*) – he drove us crazy about them. He says to him, "What's this? What colour is this?" "This is the colour peach." "The colour peach", he says to him, "Why are you coming to me with peach first thing in the morning??? How am I supposed to write that??? What utter nonsense!" (*bursting with laughter*) Oh my sweet god, bless him. I wept. (*He wipes a tear*)

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<sup>5</sup> IID – Investigations and Intelligence Division.

*(Stops abruptly; continues with the meeting)*  
So that's a lesson. OK look, there are some gaps here...  
*(continues to discuss the morning briefing agenda items)*

- ME. And all this would not have been written, were it not for that evening, where, once again, there was the issue of colours.
- Or'el from Police Logistics got married and we celebrated her Seven Blessings<sup>6</sup> in the camp. There was a singer who did a barbeque. Or a barbeque man who sang. One of the two, or both. All in all, I've noticed that just as people know how to be sad, they also know how to be happy. Suddenly, without any preparation, people knew that now we're all dancing, and in a circle no less, and lift up an arm and smile with all our hearts. And even during conversations they pull other faces than the ones I've seen them pull here. For instance, the face Abraham pulled all of a sudden, something like *(he demonstrates a person who is listening to something being said, is surprised, and opens his mouth wide in a surprised smile)*. I've known him for a month, and suddenly *(demonstrates that facial expression once more)*. And all I did was try hard not to really cry in the face of this happiness. A happiness that is not joking around, or an attempt to be in a good mood, but simply a great big real happiness.
- THE GROOM. The groom was supposed to come but he was detained at the camp gate, by a really strict guard. And Boaz tried to explain when he said –
- BOAZ CHAMAMI. It's because he doesn't have both the black-blue sticker and the white one, he only has the yellow one. Each morning, the guard at the gate says to me – “Where's the green one? Where's the red one? Where's the black one?” I told him, that guy at the gate, “If that's the way you guys are guarding the gate – I can relax.”
- MERAV. And at the end of the day, Nofar from the Ministry of Health wanted to say bye to Merav, so she gave her a hug and said –
- NOFAR FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. “I wish you good health.”
- ME. Turns out Boaz was right.

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<sup>6</sup> The seven blessings are a series of blessings recited during a Jewish wedding ceremony, and at meals following the wedding.

BOAZ CHAMAMI.

Simple colours.

**SCENE 13 (FINAL SCENE)**

ME.

For many days, I have looked for the soldier who sang while transporting the bodies. In my mind, I still see his image. Yet if I was to write it in words, it will be erased. I have no idea what I would say to him when I see him. Perhaps something subtle like –

A SOLDIER WHO SINGS  
'WHITE DAYS'.

“Hey, you’re the soldier who sang ‘White Days’ back when they were taking the bodies out. It’s your fault that that song got stuck in my head for a few days... or maybe it’s to your credit...” And he, in the best-case scenario, would reply, “Yes, that’s right. If we’re doing things like that, we might at least be singing, maintain our sanity somehow.” In the worst-case scenario, he’d say to me, “Honestly, man, I can’t even remember what went on at that time...”.

And yet I feel that I have no choice but to go on looking for him and saying that to him. Perhaps I would have told him that, him singing that song was a kind of salvation for me. A very strange salvation because I did not feel I was in any danger; I was only filling in a form. But at that moment, now I am remembering, I hummed the song very very quietly, with almost no sound at all, and hoped that he would notice my lips moving to the words I know by heart. And maybe he would amplify his singing at the sight of me singing and maybe then I, too, would be able to slightly raise my voice, and maybe the guy from the home office near us, who I usually had zero patience for, would join in, and somehow the rest of the people in the white tent would just sing ‘White Days’ as if there were nothing else in the world, from the beginning of the song through to its end, all while carrying on with their work.

ME.

A strange creature is the imagination. I was able to imagine anything. That the dead will be alive, that we’d go back in time. But all I did imagine is that, for one moment, we would all sing. And that everyone would know the words by heart. Even Shehade.

*The convoy keeps moving on. The living in the convoy, and perhaps not only them, are quietly humming the song 'White Days' by Leah Goldberg, God rest her soul, to the melody by Shlomo Ydov. Slowly slowly, very very slowly, everyone joins in.*

THE WORLD.

*[NOTE: This should be sung in Hebrew, according to the lyrics written phonetically on page 43. Below is the English translation]*

Long, white days, like sunbeams in summer. A vast tranquil solitude spreads over the river. Windows wide open to the silent blue sky. Bridges – straight and high – between yesterday and tomorrow. / So easy to bear your silence, white and empty days. / For my eyes have learned to smile, and long ago ceased, to urge the hands of the clock to hasten the race of the minutes. Straight and high are the bridges between yesterday and tomorrow. / My heart has grown used to itself, and is calmly counting its beats. And to the sweetness of the gentle rhythm, it yields, it softens, it rests. / Like an infant humming his lullaby, before closing his eyes. As the weary mother ceased her singing, and fell asleep. / Long, white days, like sunbeams in summer. A vast tranquil solitude spreads over the river. Windows wide open to the silent blue sky. Bridges – straight and high – between yesterday and tomorrow.

ME.

*(While THE WORLD)*

Another apology that should be extended is to all the people I wished to speak with and didn't manage to, and even to those who wished to tell me things for me to write, that I did not manage to, although I wanted to. And also to those who did not wish to speak, and I wasn't able to imagine what they would have said. There was this guy here, Yosef. Each time he saw me, he said he was so happy to see me and how he would love to meet my boyfriend and I in Tel Aviv. There was this guy here, Eran. He was the manager of the place and he was a very pleasant and calm man. There was a guy here called Avraham, he was evicted from his home in Gush Katif years ago. There was this guy from the police here, Neriya. There was this guy here, Adir; one time I got caught in a loading cable in a moving stretcher and I got annoyed with him just because he was next to me. There was this guy here called Nitzan, Ohad, Yariv, Yoni. And there were also others here. And especially there was Kfir Tze'iri, God rest his soul, who always looked out for us and bought Yemenite falafel for everyone and had lots of stories about things that happened in the past and on the day they closed down the white tent here, he died of a cardiac arrest, and

Rosa and Shehade and I went to his Shiv'ah and could not believe that we are in his house and he isn't here.

END-OF-SUMMER  
CLOUDS.

There were us here, end-of-summer clouds. But only for a few moments, because we scattered, as is the habit of clouds at the end of summer. Two soldiers in uniform stood and gazed at us. We didn't know what to do, so we formed shapes for them. But we didn't know which shapes to make, so we made kind of abstract shapes so they could simply choose. After that we went away, perhaps others came along.

SHEHADE.

Perhaps...

*Now follows a silence. The convoy keeps passing by. Until it doesn't. The stage should remain lit. Empty. There are no more dead. The end. Hopefully, also a beginning.*

**‘White Days’ by Leah Goldberg, as composed by Shlomo Ydov ([here](#))**

Romanization of Hebrew

English

Yamim levanim, arukim,  
kmo bakayitz karnei hachama.  
Shalvat b'didut gdola  
al merchav hanahar.

Long, white days,  
like sunbeams in summer.  
A vast tranquil solitude  
spreads over the river.

Chalonot ptuchim lirvacha,  
el tchelet dmama.  
Gesharim yesharim u'gvohim bein  
etmol u'machar.

Windows wide open,  
to the silent blue sky.  
Bridges – straight and high – between  
yesterday and tomorrow.

Kol kach kal lasset shtikatchem,  
yamim levanim v'reikim.

So easy to bear your silence,  
white and empty days.

Hen einai lamdu lechayech v'chadlu  
mishekvar  
L'zarez al luach sha'on et meirotz  
hadakim.

For my eyes have learned to smile  
and long ago ceased  
To urge the hands of the clock  
to hasten the race of the minutes.

Yesharim u'gvohim hagesharim bein  
etmol u'machar.

Straight and high are the bridges  
between yesterday and tomorrow.

Levavi hitragel el atzmo,  
u'moneh bintinut d'fikatav.  
U'lematek haketzef harach  
mitpayes, mevater, v'nirga.

My heart has grown used to itself,  
and is calmly counting its beats.  
And to the sweetness of the gentle rhythm  
it yields, it softens, it rests.

K'tinok mezamer shir arso  
terem s'gor et einav,  
Et ha'em hale'ah  
paska mizamer, nirdema.

Like an infant humming his lullaby  
before closing his eyes,  
as the weary mother  
ceased her singing, and fell asleep.

Yamim levanim, arukim,  
kmo bakayitz karnei hachama.  
Shalvat b'didut gdola  
al merchav hanahar.

Long, white days,  
like sunbeams in summer.  
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