

Unspoken (Words Said After Death)

By Naftali Moshe

The Baal Shem Tov, the great scholar, was a shochet, a ritual butcher.

Before he sacrificed a cow, he tested the blade's edge with his finger; drew his blood; shed his tear -- for the animal about to die.

Baal Shem Tov, "Owner of A Good Name."

Honing the Knife

The edge I honed. The knife was my bow, my throat its Stradivarius. My ancient violin teacher taught: don't clutch the violin's neck, don't choke it. All these years, I choked. Now I am released.

This you don't know, my son: why I must breathe.

Standing in Mediterranean surf, standing where I make my *Shekhita*, ritual slaughter, memories return in waves. Four or five

sway me, followed by one that almost sweeps me away. The spray, which tastes Ocean, are my tears. The tides' smell; his sweat.

Twelve, my mother sent me, forced me to equestrian camp -- Sephardi Jewish girl -- dark, long hair, brown eyes -- among lithe blond, blue-eyed Litchfield County Shiksas. My mother, my immigrant mother, insisted that I was Olympic material, forced me to spend the summer doing what I hate -- dressage, haute ecole, wicker hurdles.

My body then was like yours, son --- too tall, rangy -- my muscles show clearly; coach uses this body to demonstrate muscle groups to tense for exercises. Riding crop he extends to my legs, articulates the muscles. Clinically, he traces them on this leg, enunciating: *gastrocnemius*, *quadriceps*, *hamstrings* and especially *sartorius*. He likes *sartorius*, the longest muscle in humans, coursing from the hip in front, coursing inwardly around the thigh to the inner tibia. *Sartorius*, named after tailors, who used this muscle to sit, cross-legged to sew. *Sartorius*, he expounds orotundly, rotates the leg outward, releases you from the mount, or the mount from your pressure. He traces his riding crop slowly: along my inner thigh upward; through tightly stretched jodhpurs. I feel thrice: the tracing on my skin; the unwilling twitching muscles within; the shame.

It happens the third day. Up at 5:30, huge breakfast to fuel our practice until one, then lunch to hold us to six. The girls despise me, tease about my accent, resent the coach's adulation, call me "Kikey." Meals, they shun me; evenings they torment.

Assistant coach notices at dinner: his long ponytail, glistening silk; voice velvet. Called to his table, he says he saw what they were doing, puts his arm around my shoulder, patting with each syllable, "Everything will be all right." But something about the day's training he wants to discuss, control my canter, restrain from gallop -- use adductors. I should stop by his room; he will help.

(Son, there is a pattern to the waves. I keep counting to learn it; perhaps every half dozen are followed by a sweeping wave that near-tumbles me as it recedes, sweeping sand from beneath my feet -- first excavating beneath my toes, then arch, then calcaneus -- I struggle to keep footing. So too with memories.)

I lost that night. A night lost from my words, my mind. *What I tell you now (some last words you will hear from me) I remember kaleidoscopic fragments, years later.* Then, all I knew was a lost night: the head coach finds me standing in morning fog, clothed, riding boots missing, knee-deep in the lake, not moving. He screams at me: filthy Jewish slut who hasn't slept in her bed. Where had I been? Demands: "Speak!"

I don't speak. Ponytail's last words were, "Don't speak."

For three decades, I don't speak; I listen, I look.

The coach calls my parents, throws me out.

My mother will prove them wrong; takes me to the gynecologist. An ancient man, European accent, white van Dyke, thickened red fingers (like a butcher's), he yanks a white curtain that runs on a "U"-

rail around the bed. Metal curtain rings screech a peal as he jerks them closed. For privacy. A chilling metal speculum pries open the labia; cold metal (like the butcher's knife before the sacrificial blood warms it). He calls his students to an "amazing sight," an intact hymen. (I still see his wagging van Dyke, elevated, wrinkled chicken neck stretched, Adam's apple bobbing, excited by "amazing sight.") An "amazing sight" relieves my mother. His speculum freezes my heart.

Time froze. My hands stayed small. (From what they touched?) My feet also (because I did not run?).

Years, like waves, reveal fragments. On Caesaria's shore -- I showed you, son, remember -- the waves: the tides peel back centuries of sand to reveal Roman glass, the ruins of the Hippodrome, where chariot races, blood-letting, battles entertained. Preparing for *Shekhita*, honing the blade's edge-- each pass of blade against the whetstone strips back years, sharpens, hones memory -- reveals pictures: the small single bed, the chenille bed cover, mustardy yellow, with tufts that leave impressions on your cheek after a nap; these nubby memories fade from the younger cheek. (More waves, more picture memories.) A plastic-rimmed photo of the *Les Halles* before its destruction; another of an old Litchfield resort, wraparound porch, empty rockers aligned, still, frozen in place.

After thirty years, what I recall seems mundane.

He says, "It is good for a young girl to learn how to love. Dark Jewish girls are good for loving."

He tries to enter below, but can't (The adductors are strong.). I succeed with one thing in my life. The rest is unclear, except my choking, suffocating, breathlessness. Does he enter my mouth? For all my brain struggles, even to the moment of my Shekhita, even after, I don't have the words to say it, only decades of suffocation, now relieved.

What happens two years later, what happens (and doesn't happen) seems less, hurts more. My uncle, wealthy, invites us to his summer home in Sausalito, California, U.S.A. (In my father's French accent, it is Sow-sah-leeto.) His wealth came from scrap metal: twisted car torsos, dismembered organs, sold for parts. At his "graveyard," he made autopsies, squashed remains, made fortunes; organ-donors, he smiled. He invites us -- his poorer brother and family -- to spend the month. We sleep in the nursery, my brother and sisters. At midday, the Frenchman needs his nap, "*faire un petit somme.*" We are ordered: leave the pool, go with the nanny for cookies and then to the nursery. Not hungry, I go alone to the nursery.

He appears; closes the door; says I should come rest with him; I should not be alone.

I am reading Peter Pan; still at fifteen, I read children's books, flying children, abandoned children. I say, "No."

He pronounces, "You are beautiful but stupid (*une becasse!*); you shouldn't speak." I didn't speak, until now. (*Can you hear my voice, my son?*)

I wonder what these men found was so special down there; go with my cousin to the bathroom with my mother's silver, Wiener Werkstatte, filagreed compact mirror to look. What was such a big deal? We see glistening redness inside, perhaps a tiny penis. What did they want with such things?

Older, I learn I am considered beautiful, my dark hair to the waist. Heads turn -- men and women's -- when I entered restaurants. Champagne is sent to my table. For a time to protect myself from eyes, I wander streets, dress "punk," safety-pinned rags, tatters, hair matted; don't protect me enough.

You've seen the photos of my diva days. I abjure equestrian hurdles, gymnastics to sing. I rise quickly to fame by mid-20's; well-regarded by thirty. Opera: I sing, they look, they listen: do not touch.

But, I yearned for you, for a child, for a son. Your sperm-father took lessons in the company, hoped to get in. Young, he looked the model for Hitler youth, worlds away from my dark Sephardi Jewish men. I tried so hard to stay away from the dark haired, heavy Aubergine-lidded dark-eyed, olive skin Sephardim, like my father, my uncle. I command myself "Pick opposite!" I find a young "Nazi."

You will some day read Shaw's *Man and Superman*; how a mother, resigned that she cannot improve her husband, bends herself to create a superman of her son.

I tried with your father. I would help with his career, improve his technique, get him jobs, maybe in the company. My producer (Genevieve, who truly loved me) warns against him; eight years younger, a needle addict (reformed, he insists), missed rehearsals, even performances. Only now, after death, can I see, picture him: blond long-pony-tailed, lithe-bodied man; like the assistant coach. I try to “cure” that coach by curing this sperm-father. I, like an alchemist of men’s souls, would transform the dross of fuck into the gold of love.

Wait. I suffocate; must catch a breath.

You know too much of what happened later. He fucked me. I got you. (I wanted you.) He screamed: you would ruin his career; beat my belly like tympani to beat you out of me. (In hospital, belly-bruised, I said I had fallen down stairs.) Pregnant, I could not partner him, and my colleagues wouldn’t tolerate his slip-ups.

He began to strangle me as he fucked me; strangle-fuck. I was breathless.

I took you to the Holy Land, to raise you alone. You would not suffocate women. I would dedicate my life to raising a man who wouldn’t suffocate. I no longer sang. My throat choked. My career destroyed.

You took on the shape of his face, this man you refused to call father: drawn, like a Modigliani; your eyes, at moments vacant; cheeks hollow; your lips would move as you listened to someone, as

if some golem were speaking through you; your hair, your step. You danced like Nijinsky, a petite fawn.

(Listen son. Listen. I am allotted only so many unspoken words in this dream-ether to send to you. Last words. Listen.)

I serve you breakfast in bed -- *gratinee de pomme du terre*; you like them imbricated, like the Cherokee-red tiles on a Mediterranean roof, but these, translucent white, fringed ochre. From your bed, you order me to the closet to bring you clothes; you demand the blue chemise, fling it angrily, demand the white. You smash your alarm clock; I am to awaken you. "It's your responsibility!" you insist, articulating all six syllables, "re-spon-si-bil-i-ty." You failed your fractions: before your teacher, you turned to me, calmly, quietly announced, "It's your responsibility." Quietly. (It was my responsibility: I chose your father; I fractionated your life.) You demand I remain home while you were at school; you would forget your lunch, phone me: bring it immediately, warmed. When the Deux Cheveux gasped its last breath, I would run to your school, warmed food in insulated bag.

Like your father, you spoke quietly, sweetly, except for moments of cold fury.

After twelve years with only you, I met Chanan. I erred; I loved him. You refused permission. How dare I see another man? We were a couple. You needed no other man. You disdained your friends with fathers, siblings; they lost mother-time.

Suffocation, son, returns in tsunamis. The first when I was 12; next at 15, then a series with your father as he strangle-fucked me. With you, it built gradually, as if I were riding the edge of the wave, which then crested behind, then over, threatening to drown me.

Son, I needed to breathe, once again freely. I needed to feel nothing between the air and my lungs. That is why Shekhita. Open the trachea to breathe freedom. Nothing stuffed in my mouth, throat to suffocate me. I planned and practiced, like some Jewish hari-kari, but without an assistant to complete the coup. I would outdo Mishima.

Months, I prepare. The *Katzav*, the butcher in the *shuk*, saw me frequently. (*Katzav*, the word for butcher also comes from the word for beat, the rhythmic beat as the butcher chops flesh on his wood block. The name of the Israeli President who sexed his staff.)

Remember one afternoon in Jerusalem, two days before Yom Kippur, when we first saw *Shekhita*. (*Remember.*) That day, unknown to you, I began my studies. The *shuk* is mostly distractions – tourists, cameras lofted above their heads, crowding among the stands of the green grocers, the Halvah-hawkers, flower and fish mongers, beggars. Usually, we beeline from stand to stand. This day, my gyroscope leaps off its gimbals. A small breach in the *shuk* wall beckons. It is on Agrippas Street, just past the *rugelach* bakery (misnamed Marzipan) and before the Arab *knupfe* and sweets seller. First we notice the two girl soldiers guarding the opening. The usual bustle gives way to an occasional person or a couple entering or

leaving solemnly. The two steps up is half-ramped with rough cement, the stuff what Romans invented.

Transformed to *flaneurs*, we enter, hesitantly. An open courtyard with three tables form a square not greeting us. Greeting doesn't come to mind. After a few moments, an undertone of pungence, an indistinct rankness, fogs about – comes and goes; thickened fragrance of fowl death. We see a trio of pairs behind each table and perhaps five people milling before them, one young religious couple posed before a Table of Judgment. Matters dawn on me. I see the *kippa'd* man withdraw a live chicken from a coop. He has a deft manner of holding up the flapper for customer inspection: one-handed, he pinions the wings from their base (our shoulder) behind the bird; unflappable these wings are now. We hear peeps, realize that these are *almost* chickens; oversized chicks, pubertal birds. The bird, while white, has a be-smirched breast, as if it has not yet come clean. It soon must. Of the young couple, only the woman, hair-covered, tilts forward -- but a bit, hesitantly, carefully -- to be blessed. The chicken-wielder passes the bird in an elliptical orbit and at an angle near the woman's head, like some off-centered rings of Saturn. His lips move. Then, retrieving this feathered satellite, deftly again, he releases thumb and forefinger from the wings to hold back the chicken's head, swan-necking the bird. His other hand wields a straight razor, like the old types once leather-stropped, but this has replaceable blades, like what Gillette made. He makes a too-gentle slit, much less than should perhaps be for death acts: and does the bird a header into one of eight zinc funnels sticking into the table

before him. (We know the tin-smith, down Agrippas, barely toothed, a laconic Aaron.) Little is seen from these funnels above – we spot chick down ascend heavenward, but these are pulled back by wind and gravity before they get too far. (Even in Jerusalem, the path to heaven is not so light.) I spy legs kicking, but perhaps this is my brain-fever, which is rising. Blood funnels down below. The couple, looking relieved or calmed, perhaps certain that at least the woman's sins temporarily dispelled, leave hand-in-hand. Unseen, money exchanged hands.

The fellow at the back table, furthest from the breach, beckons, beckons to us again. Then, once more. I had thought that we could buy a fresh chicken here rather than from my beefy butcher, but realize that this will not happen: sin-sponged fowl are not edible. Another sinner examines a pinioned chicken carefully, perhaps like the Temple's red heifer, checking for mums, defects that might militate against sin-relief from this bird. Far to the right, well-behind the ritual action, is a young fellow, perhaps 15 (your age, son), Arab-looking, working chicken carcasses against a lathe-like instrument that strips birds of their feathers: they are more naked than the day they were born. He is surrounded by flying feathers. A deft handler. What happens to these sin-soaked birds?

Well beyond to our left, behind a screen, which keeps him from seeing the neck-slitting, we see the back of a thin-haunched fellow, his trousers unevenly hemmed below, hiked just above his ankles. The backs of his shoes are broken-down (from lack of a shoe horn, I wonder). He is hunched over a featherless carcass on its back. His

hands, gloved in purple latex, inspect innards. Like some Hercule Poirot of fowl, he keeps digging, pulling out organs, bending over for a better look. He seems unaware of the tatters he wears, the hand-me-down suit-pants, too costly for him, his socks hunkered-down to his worn shoes. He is checking, I guess, for some possibility of an ailment – a lung diseased, a gizzard damaged – that might disqualify this chicken from being glatt kosher, as it has suffered during its lifetime. I don't know this for sure; it is a brain-imagining, perhaps brought on by my growing awareness of the musty death stink; it thickens the air. I turn to leave; you hesitate at the gate. The two young woman soldiers checked me well for bombs before we entered more carefully than ever before at the main gates of the shuk; this is a death-site.

Then, down the two steps, avoiding the rough ramp, I (unseen by you) gasp air.

Here is how I practiced for Shekhita. First liver, slices, each shimmering, trembling momentarily (as if trying to remain upright after slaughter, a moment longer clinging to its fellow), then collapsing, slapping softly, moistly, onto the previous slice. Then, chicken necks to feel the skin, then the trachea before the bone. (Between the vertebrae, my son; precisely between the front edge of the vertebrae – between cervical six and seven -- to permit air.) Then, cows' necks. The butcher believed that these were for soups, the marrow first scraped out with delicate, long handled, silver espresso spoons, then, bone pressed against pursed lips, sucked. But, before bones enter into soup, I practice with the knife, feel as the knife's edge catches its

edge. Then, feeling cartilage between the bones, through the trachea to release the breath (I imagined), The carotids would spill out rest and warmth. And, I hone, and I hone the bow of death to play against my throat. I choose Wusthoff, good German steel; I would match their metal with my metal to do the deed. Germans are good death engineers.

My last breath, my precious last breath, was the freest breath since I was twelve. I stood in Ulysses' and Aenius' waters. Like the Baal Shem Tov, I test the Wusthoff's edge with a finger; drew draw a drop of blood; shed a tear of joy and sadness. Brief pain as the knife drew across the skin, my throat slipping slightly beneath its edge, until the edge could catch, bite. Then through the trachea for that final, but decades-delayed fresh breath. The carotids bathe my knife, then my hands in last warmth. The Mediterranean took me.

My son, unlike Abraham over Isaac, unlike God over Jesus, I will not sacrifice you. But, through you I, I could breathe again.

And now, I can speak to you, from this dream-ether.

Gargoyles

Listen, my son. I tell you tales on the love and care of a woman. God, the Rambam taught, is defined by what he is not. So too, for woman-loving; I will instruct about what is not to be done. Listen.

(This is how you hear me after death: in your dreams. I am suspended in the limbo of dream-ether until you receive my dreams.

There are no dreams for me after death, for death is a dreaming, a dreaming oneself and being dreamed by others. I have become dream.

When you are prepared, I will enter your dreams in death. But dead dreams defy Freud's dictum of wish-fulfillment. Only when the living is empty of wishes, except for a selfless desire to hear the dead, can we enter your dream space. Buddhists are good at self-emptying of needfulness (except compassion); they receive from the dream-ether well. Buddhists begin their beliefs by assuming misery and suffering in the living world: they receive too many vibrations from us in the dream-ether.

Dream me, son; that I shall be released.)

Many entered me. They left soul-toxins, poisons in my blood that these waves now purify. My blood flows deep red as it leaves, but dissipates, then disappears in Middle waters. This Sea will not be poisoned by what lies within my blood. It receives all in pulsing embraces. The Mediterranean would purify me.

One who entered me, I picked; a gargoyle-faced, hunchbacked beast. I sang Puccini; he, a back stage technician on tour in Paris. I took him; I chose him. I decided I would tame this beast, my lumpy Calaban. But I was more Miranda than Prospero: I failed. My colleagues called us La Belle et Le Bete, to his face. After one performance, as he waited, panting for me at the green door, they captured him, trussed him, burlap-wrapped him, carried him to suspend from Notre Dame. They beat the burlap bag, as if it were filled with cats to be drowned, hung him from the Church, then celebrated with double cone glaces at Bertholli's, poised near the prow of Ilse St. Louis. They laughed that he would not be noticed among the other gargoyles; only a Notre Dame, "our Mother" could hold onto such a beast, they taunted.

The beating energized, enraged the gargoyle to sex me.

He, he enters me in many ways. I feel that he has a prehensile tail; suspended from an imaginary trapeze, he would scamper, clamber over my body, as if I were space to be conquered. (Or, as if I were his cage and he -- frantic, scrambling monkey -- exploring every orifice, thrusting as if to exit into ecstatic freedom, breaking both into and out of me.) This I learn with him: to become paralyzed, loose-muscled, arms flung back, over my dangling head, neck arched, exposed, past the edge of the mattress: his ejaculate curarizes me. Only my eyes move; only my heart feels. My eyes, in terror, my heart, in fear.

But, when he is done, done with me, he lays quieted, tamed. His soul-torturing poisons excreted into me, he is at rest, for a while; at rest with himself. I did tame him -- momentarily.

A producer possesses me (his word, "possessed"). He produced my Tosca. Crowds brought to tears by my putain, my tragic lover-whore. U.S. debut. A wealthy, blue-haired patron invites me to her house after closing weekend; in Chappaqua, edging a preserve. She and her husband greet me, a small dinner, they reassured. Until the producer arrives. We ate. I slept. He enters my bedroom; clasps his hand over my mouth. (Like this -- picture this, son -- the thumb hooked beneath my chin, the fist edge against my nostrils, the arm pressing my right shoulder.) This Scarpia whispers harshly: "Why do you think you were invited? Who do you think would hear your scream? What do you think these patrons will believe? You are fortunate to have me fuck-into you. You think that your voice alone will make you? You will be my woman until I am done with you and I will make you. My fucking will deepen your timbre. When I am done, I will give you to other men who will build your career. You will give yourself to me; I will not force you." (And I, unlike Tosca, had no shiv to slip between his ribs.)

I did. Let him fuck-into me. For six months, I promenaded on his arm; soirees, concerts, openings, closings. (My voice deepened in timbre, the critics wrote. In sobbing sadness, I knew.) When he is done, I am free. I did not go to other men; not like that.

Learn, my son, how poisons enter a woman's soul and make her dumb, unable to speak, unable to breath, curarized upon a table, as men come and go. Listen. After thirty years, I am able to speak, to breathe. You will hear me in waves.

Hear me.

Release me.

Here is what a woman can discover. When I met Chanan, I decide to love him. I had waited twelve years to make love after you left my body, like the Biblical Rachel. Purified my body. Until then, I let no one enter.

Once, as I loved him, he, inside me, stopped; asked why I clasped my right hand to my throat. Like this -- see it in your mind's eye --- like strangulation. As if wakened, I felt my hand. I said, " To learn what it feels like to make love without being strangled." (He looked confused.) The Pirke Avot says that when divorced couple are in bed, there are four heads on the pillow. I could make my body love Chanan, even as my right hand brought the gargoyle (and your father, and the producer, and, and) into bed; for I was strangling myself (lightly, lightly, I told him) as we made love. He was confused, alarmed. Later, with Chanan, I discovered I could make love without being choked. (But there were too many other heads crowding our pillow.)

But, you would have nothing of Chanan. You demanded: no one between us. One night, as you promised, when Chanan. and I were together, you, but 12, left; spent the night in Jerusalem's streets.

You returned quietly the next morning with a cruel, quiet look of warning: You would do this again, and again, I should know.

So, I sent Chanan away. I would redouble my dedication to you. You, most jealous lover, my son.

In *El Sur*, Borges writes of a man, a plain accountant, a man alone, a lonely man, in Buenos Aires. He dreams (as many of Borges men do, uncertain if they are dreaming of living or living in dreams) of his cowboy gaucho Patagonian grandfather, who died, guns blazing. As the man alights his stairs one night, something strikes his head --an edge of a picture frame, a window, perhaps a bat?-- and he awakens in Hospital. He decides to go to Patagonia, to be a gunslinger and --- the reader knows this --- to meet his grandfather in death.

I was struck when Chanan left, that I must remain in Israel, to raise you only, to be dedicated to you, to raise a man who would not choke, to be able to breathe. But, I chose a wilderness, like the Wilderness of Zin, where Jews wandered for forty years to become liberated after Egyptian slavery. We would live among Jewish gauchos, secretive Druze, Bedouin herders, none of whom heard opera, none of whom had heard of me. Perhaps I should have known that choosing this place was choosing the only liberation remaining to me. It was only the beginning of the path. I began to wither there, wither without my music, without my audiences.

But you thrived among the macho Bedouin gauchos, or gun-toting settlers, who dismissed my “culture.” This became my Patagonia.

Mother-gun

Beloved son, listen. Seek. You will find a photo in my wallet. It is folded thrice, creased, feeble, from opening, closing. Open gently. Do not tear. I have owned this since your birth. A mother embraces her child, protects it from inevitability. She is turned one quarter away, looking to her left, into her child, who buries its head in her breast. To her right stands a Nazi, an S.S., erect, poised, beautifully postured, like a ballet master, but left arm extended with Luger, pointed at her head.

She waits.

I waited. In slow motion, the bullet slowing, slowing as it approaches me, I waited. (I can see in my mind's eye, the air, just before the missile, compressed, morphed, torpedo shaped, obeying the arriving bullet. Even before death, the air obeys Bernoulli's principle.) I turned away to protect you. Could my head stop this missile completely, at least enough to protect you? I could not know. But I, like this mother, embrace you. Years it took for this bullet to reach me. I hoped to protect you. Have I?

I told Chanan -- my one love, my love too late. Showed him this photo as we sat on a sun-dappled rise, over the Mediterranean on a summer day, I told him of this. I wore Armani. Its colors were mine: grays, tinged blue, and light mauves, like the sunset on Kinneret's western bluffs; streaks of white, like the seagulls over the Kinneret darting to and fro, shuttlecocks, weaving water's blues into land's mauves. It billowed, Armani's silk (my second skin); I pressed

the ankle-length silk down with my arms. It billowed, protested my restraints. I fought the sensual breezes' urgings. Offshore, over Chanan's shoulder, just slightly offshore, a glider floats over the amphitheater, harvesting Mediterranean breaths to stay aloft. The amphitheater is empty, concentric benches face an empty stage. This silent audience faces a never-fading sea (these receiving waters in which I made *shekhita*). I spoke of death's immanence as I felt hope. The Mediterranean's breeze breathed hope. (But this is also Ulysses' sea, bearing memories of Circe's jealous fury and death; of six-headed, ravenous Scylla and sea-sucking Charybdis; of blinded rageful Cyclops; even as its waves carry the hope of finding haven.)

The hints of gray at my widow's peak, I had colored that morning. He noticed (silently, but I saw his eyes caress my brow) that the gray had disappeared. Chanel #5, my mother's fragrance, I misted before I left. Here is how to mist perfume for a woman: a slight misting before her, like a gentle fog, then she floats through its fragrance, which bathes her. Hope stirred after twelve years.

And I confessed death to him.

Durer engraved a scene of death's time halted; a scene frozen in time, *Melancholia*. Look as you read this. Study the faded photocopy also in my wallet, hidden in the left side among the folds. Now look again; don't glance as you have in the past, mind elsewhere. Concentrate your self on this Durer, for you will see the death inside of me come alive again even as I am dead. A winged maiden sits, eyes downcast, book on lap, one hand inscribing words,

the other holding a weary head -- hers -- haloed by death. Many encrypted symbols lie within; perhaps you will decode some and you will decode me: a sun, its piercing rays over the ocean as a rainbow crowns its setting; the building blocking the sun's light from this winged angel (as I believe I was, before that man's tool entered me); a weary cherub, downcast poses between her and the sun; an hourglass, half-spent next to the bell and secret calendar over her left shoulder. And at her feet, the globe, the broken sword, the sleeping, ravenous hound. Beneath the intricate folds of her gown (as in Michelangelo's practiced folds of fabric) hides her body.

"Melancholia" floats in the horizon, but this one word obscures the portrait, does not fully explain. Durer, who could sculpt praying disembodied hands, engraved this portrait of my soul, frozen in time. Portraiture is biography for the eyes, spoken without words.

I show Chanan this. On the hill's brow, overlooking the Mediterranean, the Sea's life sighing on us, I show him. I try to explain time frozen by death. In hope, the maiden awaits reawakening, against hope. Chanan nods, listens, but does not grasp life-in-death. It is like fog whorls within fog: cloud whorls that roll back upon themselves heavily, even as they float through a lighter fog. I have seen rivers of fog, that somehow crept, labored over the coastal mountains, just barely clamber over the coastal peaks, to course, tumble downwards, almost with relief, bathing the otherwise drought-stricken landscape, enveloping a single cypress, collapsing into Sausalito Bay. I hoped, somehow that in the fog of death, these

pregnant, tear-laden fog clouds would course through to revive my life. As they did, briefly. With you. With him.

There is a lone cypress, like a guardian, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. Just north of this single cypress, the Pacific Coast fog sweeps through statuesque Redwoods. Their branches grasp the fog, tear-laden fog-clouds; these branches weep fog tears onto the forest ground, quenching the thirst of those straining to grow in giants' shadows. I thought that my tears, always falling within -- never from my eyes -- would quench you, son. I once strained fog tears, once overshadowed, but I was not quenched.

How you were got

“Your fault!” you would accuse. “All your fault!” your refrain.
 (“J’accuse!” you would scream.)

You meant -- I chose the man who fucked you into me, into motherhood.

I try to explain (when alive), layers of explanation, each of which you peel back as a veneer of lies.

You were right.

(One veneer, I confess.) I married Henri to find someone as far removed from Jewish Sephardi men as I could. After the producer, the gargoyle, the gapers hanging around the stage, I needed protection. Henri, an officer, was good protection. His wedding band, when he was on missions; my armor against prospective fuckers; and Henri’s presence, often in uniform, always of military bearing, was good protection. A fine, towhead French Catholic, his family disowned him for marrying a Jew. I was his first. His first love. I had had many who had fucked me, whom I thought had made love to me. (But, my son, “made love” is a euphemism for fucking. For most men, a micro-waved, trembling slab of liver, slightly warmed, is enough to rouse them to fuck. Man, like the brontosaurus, has two independent brains; one, diminutive, for the head and another -- -- for the penis. The tail brain runs the more powerful apparatus.)

He was tall, blond, blue eyed, soldier-erect, proper. He worshipped me. Although I was dark, people thought we were

siblings: both, so tall, lithe, always jogging, exercising. He, laconic. Did not talk. Feelings may have been felt. But, he did not talk. (“Do not speak!” the ponytailed mouth-fucker commanded; “Do not speak!” my mother commanded. A fucked mouth does not well speak.)

He was a man/boy: he looked the man, he desired me, but he thought like a boy; he did not scare me; he did not hurt me. He was my brother in spirit.

He ran me a special route, a route of death. When I performed in Washington, D.C., we ran to the Viet Nam Memorial: a polished black granite wall sloping into the ground, engraved with 55,000 names; so polished, that I saw myself reflected in death’s mirror. Perhaps even then, I felt close to death, as if I were among the names inscribed. We would run to my exhaustion, which struck me at this black granite death mirror. (The wall seemed to see the death in me.) I could not breathe, could not stop, yet drove myself further, out of fear. He treated me like one of his troops, to be hardened; and I became physically stronger.

Yet, with Henri, my creativity waned; my soul leaked; I no longer move as I once did. While my muscles strengthened, but my soul no longer flowed into my voice, my movements. Critics noticed what I felt; I had become petrified, a marvel of technique, but not fully of song. A Garance of the voice, they called me, the critics: beautiful and petrified, of Carrera marble. Garance, in the circus of Children of Paradise, stands breasts bare, in a rotating cylinder of water, water up to her areolae, floating her breasts. She is slowly rotated, gazing

as if hypnotized, stonily gazing ahead. Men pay centimes to enter, walk above, like over a surgical suite mezzanine, leer upon her marble breasts.

(My death improves reviews. Le Monde's obituary: "sheer loveliness of timbre, affecting sensitivity, and exquisite, unmannered and deeply communicative singer." The BBC spoke of "her effortlessly projecting her voice, and an openness and naivete along with her creamy voice..." Even the Americans were exuberant: "rare and natural beauty, the schooling impeccable, the artistry first class." Death improves memory and reviews.)

Why? Why when I had found a man (my second love) to protect me, did I begin failing my first love, my music?

I had growing in me a yearning for a third love -- to be a mother. To be your mother.

(Another veneer I peel back.)

My manly Henri could not make babies. I desired you for many barren years. I imagined you, bursting forth like red-haired Peretz from Tamar's womb, like King David, through enemy lines. I listened to stories of Sarah's biblical barrenness for ninety years, or Rachel's, of Tamar's, until I could bear it no longer. I needed you. God's very first commandment to man and animal was "*p'ru ur'vu*," "be fruitful and multiply!"

I remember the sterile moment at Walter Reed Hospital. The famous infertility professor, his dozen students cluster in stark whites, facing Henri and us. Me, he declares fertile, "Juicy, ready for babies." Henri, the goat-faced doctor declaims, while a fine physical specimen, worthy of being etched on a Grecian Urn (he waxes), is, alas, "shooting blanks" (he wanes). Americans, so brutally blunt. "Shooting blanks!" he repeats, "Like an M16: powerful recoil, but loaded with blanks," Colonel-Doctor announces. "Infertile, like thunder without lightening, clouds without rain, as empty as a cap pistol!"

"No problem," (he huffs before these fuzzy-cheeked, white-robed fawners, acolytes of the body). "A plumbing fix, " he puffs to his audience. Henri has a meandering vein, a varicosity that wanders upward alongside the spermatic cords, overheating the sperm, making them languorous, "Like lazy otters floating in backstroke on a hot summer day." A plumbing fix, a ligature on those veins would shut off the radiator, cool-off those sperm, get them lively, swinging again; searching for those eggs in this beautiful wife specimen.

I curse this goateed professor for humiliating Henri. Henri refused to have his "plumbing" improved upon. Henri pronounces (as he was about to be sent on assignment, collaborating with the French C.R.S. for three months -- quelling unrest in New Caledonia), " You want a baby? Take care of it; I will stay with you." "Take care of it," he insists. I beg him to adopt; he refuses. Injecting sperm from an unknown, I would not do: not natural. Take care of it? I do.

I become Tamar. Chosen by Judah, her father-in-law to wed his eldest, who dies after bedding her; paired by Judah to bed his second, Onan, that son who threshed within, but sowed without. For which God struck him dead. Banished by Judah to her father's tent, Tamar is forgotten. But, she desires motherhood. She does not forget Judah, the Lion of Israel. And, years later, when Judah emerges from his tent of mourning, Tamar, disguised as a harlot, beds him, produces twins and begins the line of King David. Judah, not knowing who impregnated her, condemns her to burn. She produces her disguise and his signet ring, reveals him as father. He relents.

I become Tamar, ritual harlot, lusting for motherhood (not for a man), yearning for a princely son, who would be you. For this, for you, I seek a lion.

I choose him. (He thought he won me, but I chose him; he pursued me, but I lured him.) Wolfgang was in the chorus, a third-rate tenor, who if pressed, could sing counter-tenor, castrati. I need someone whom I would not love, who would not threaten Henri's love of me, Henri's pride. Someone with Henri's habitus -- blue eyes, blond, lithe. If he could impregnate me, I would help with his career. It took little: a few fucks at the right period and I am with you. Henri, still away, knows nothing.

The story spins out of control. Wolfgang is furious: my pregnancy will destroy his career! He will wrench you from my womb, later absconds with you to his mother's across the border. And, he

takes on the belief that I love him. Him! He confuses gratitude with love. I learn of his heroin love, later (but my colleagues warned me); of his polymorphous sex perversities, later. As I fall away from him, his lovers -- both peach-faced boys and hysterical ladies -- telephone me, beg me to return him (when he was with someone else altogether) or help find him. He calls again, forlorn, remorseful after beating me, trying to beat you out of my belly; begs me to return; I arrive as he makes the beast of two backs with another, implores me to join them, *menage a trois*.

Yes, he fucks me as he strangles me. He began this, but the strangling only reminds me of the choking I felt at twelve. This felt justified: I was adulterer to Henri.

(But, I did this only for you. My child.)

Also, not such a big deal when you have been once choked with a man's sex cum, the musky fishiness of it.

Henri returns. He takes me and you home. I no longer sleep with him, but he is dedicated to me, to you. Nights, he sits at my bedside (thinking I sleep) gazes with yearning, not touching, desiring. I? I feel nothing, perhaps a sadness for him, my dear friend, my brother.

But I had you. I had motherhood. I wanted only that.

Instead, I am cursed:

Wolfgang knows I love you only. He learns how best to hurt me; beatings do not hurt, become routine. Even once, with some

confederates, they beat Henri. I did not let him beat you out if me.
That was done once before.

Refa'im: Ghost Baby

A street in Jerusalem angles off the road to Bethlehem: *Emek Refa'im*, Ghosts' Valley; choked with traffic, lively with night people, cafes. While you -- my live son -- savored your favorite pizzeria, I wandered its side-paths searching for my lost ghost.

You grew up in his shadow, my other son's. He would now be 26, had I not lost him. (He was wrenched out.) I once saw him in many boys before I bore you; boys of his age. As he grew, I saw him in older boys, first infants, then toddlers, school boys, teens, then the soldiers hitchhiking. That is why I picked up hitchhiking soldiers over your protests: I kept hoping he would be one of them, returning to me.

I imagine him thus: curly hair, coils, that spill over his ears, warm brown eyes, lips in a slight smile, even at rest. I always loved him, looked for him, yearned for him. I named him. You are the first to hear his name other than in my imagination. He is Benjamin.

I picked "Benjamin," after Biblical Rachel's son on her deathbed. (*After his death, I picked "Benjamin." Listen.*) You recall this story, for I told you the biblical story, even as you did not know its meaning for me. I often find myself in Bible, have lived a biblical life. Barren so many years, Rachel's names her first son "Joseph," "God will add another son." God adds another, and as Rachel is dying in second childbirth, she cries aloud her name for him, "Ben-oni," "son of my pain." At that moment -- of death and birth -- his father, Jacob, renames him "Benjamin," "son of my right hand."

But my Benjamin died, his body (ripped out). He became my Ben-oni, my son of pain. I, his mother lived and kept him alive in her imagination. How alive is my imagination; I still searched for him.

I imagined you growing in his shadow, growing into this shadow, filling in his body standing always behind you. You, my special son, had two shadows: yours, which you created, which grew, moved about, disappeared with the night; his, which always remained behind you, full-grown, even in moonless darkness. A special shadow is this ghost's, for it exists in light and darkness, hides among shadows.

I needed Benjamin. I was too alone at 20, men desiring my body. (*Not me -- know this, my son, none desired me*). I wanted someone to enter another orifice, not the one entered when I was 12, that one that did not speak. The orifice below, the one that men desired most, the glistening, silky pink passage way, now hidden by my dark hair. Until now, I could not speak of what has passed within. I have silent orifices.

Now, you know your brother's name, but no one will ever know the name of the man who put Benjamin into me. He did something with dance. He had the eyes my son needed. He was Jew. He entered me once, enough. He never knew what he left behind.

My parents would not leave Benjamin in me. They sent me to get fixed, womb-ripped; another bearded men with cold specula and suction bottles and sickeningly cloying consolations, "Sweetie, Honey, Darling."

He would not show me my son. So, perhaps he still exists. He is “nobody,” he has “no body”; can not be seen; can not be hurt. Yet, I see him in the soldiers roadside, usually when they are a bit distant: I peer through the Subaru’s windshield, sometimes turn on the wipers to clear the glass, to clear the fine powdered desert dust from the windshield, that same dust that *trompe l’oie!*, tricks my eyes into believing it is him. Perhaps this is him, finally. I approach, slow, look.

It could be.

I give them rides anyhow. For even if they are not my son, my Benjamin, they might know him or meet him sometime. I like to think of him as a fine soldier, maybe in Golani brigade, protecting us and the Jewish people. This, my Benjamin would do.

This also you did not know. The password to my accounts, to my computer: his name! He protects all my secrets. (His shadow protected you.) I would write to him, often daily. Occasionally little matters of the day: what we did, what you were doing in school, your soccer practice. I ask what he thought of the new shower curtain in the bath; you remember, the one with the blue fishes and kelp? He too liked it, was happy for you. I ask him how to repair your closet shelves when they collapse. I do not always understand what he says; I try. How powerful certain ghosts are. He sustained me.

(Until the day you erased, in anger, all memory from my computer. And I lost all my talks with my other son. A blank memory you made. You said you were erasing Chanan. You did not know how much else I lost. You would tolerate no one, no one else.)

Why did my parents not let me keep him as they kept me? For, I too was born before my time, before they were wed; because of me they were wed; I united them, even as they had nothing left to give me.

My mother came to France, a first child in tow. From Italy she arrived, a widow, she said, an actress, she said. She found herself in the Marais; her beauty quickly brought attention. The Jewish community aided this widowed young woman. My father more than aided her, loved her, begot me. *(Know this, my son, my father adored, loved her. If only they had love remaining to spill unto their children. This too, son, I will teach you about woman-loving. Listen.)*

But his parents protested; a terrible woman, this actress, for their prominent family, for a young man soon to become a lawyer. They too wanted me sucked out of my mother's womb. (But, so much more difficult to learn that my mother also wanted me swept out -- my father she wanted, not me. Children, all of us, were incidental to her.) Only my grandfather wanted me. He died as I was born.

Why could I not have what she did not want, a child to love, who would love me as I did her?

Benjamin never haunted me; I hunted him.

Release me from this dream-ether, son; I will find him. I will join him. He will no longer be alone.

Shabak

Son, I was never alone. Even when you were not there.

The Shabak watched over me; or the Mossad; maybe also KGB or CIA. Never alone was I.

They were not only persecutors. They watched over me, listened. On the phone, I cautioned Chanan: do not reveal. To Chanan, I would not speak that name of your father; the interlopers -- Shabak-Mossad-KGB-Interpol -- should not hear.

I had it out with them once in the little airport in Kiryat Shemona ("Eighth Village"), up north, enshrouded in fog that settled, rested in the valley after its languorous voyage over the Benjamin Mountains at Lebanon's western border. The fog needed rest.

You, my son, were not with me. I took the older boys from the Yeshiva on a *tiyul*, a two-day hike of the North. From Gaza we caravanned to Tel Aviv's Sde Dov airport; from there to Kiryat Shemona.

Sde Dov is nothing like Ben Gurion Airport. It is a worker's ferry: a few businessmen, open-collared shirts; some kibbutzniks with their rumpled blue shirts, up-rolled sleeves. One small lobby, in which the lady who makes the sandwiches and muddy coffee, knows customers by name and taste: who wants zatar on his egg sandwich; who wants tehina drizzled, extra harissa. A man loses his passport in the restroom; the cleaning man finds it, steps out, passport upraised to find the man recently devoid of identity.

Security police only as you enter the lobby; fewer layers of tension before the tarmac. A small, flimsy paper ticket, the size of a bus ticket, you buy, faded, dusty pink. Then march past the stewardess at the door, onto the tarmac and up the three aluminum steps into the plane; single seats on the left, double on the right.

My Yeshiva *bochers* almost fill the plane, sit like storks, knees on chins, heads bowed, as if praying for a safe flight. No luggage on board, but the business men take their attaches. And I, I take my two plastic bags stuffed with utensils *milkhek* and *fleschig*, and food Kosher *le mahedrin* for the boys. Bags make me trouble on the return.

The boys are surprised on the hike; could not keep up with me. You know how I would do sport with Henri -- "footing" I called it. (*You laughed and corrected me that it was "jogging" -- "Footing" -- I just liked the sound better.*)

I showed them how to rock climb, as we did in the Alps. As youth, we train blindfolded. The trick: bring your body against the mountain, embrace it, like an infant suckling its mother's breast. Then feel with your fingers, grasp, and power from your legs. I can close my eyes, move up the crevices. Pretend the mountain is mother's stony breast to which you cling for life, seek sustenance from her rocky tits.

I rig a safety line for the boys. Most are too gangly, hold themselves away from the rock, like long-legged spiders. They are still learning their bodies. But they cheer me.

I realize only later, that after two days hiking and camping, I look odd. I did cover my hair with a kerchief, partly to be *tznu'ah*, modest; but hair strands, tufts, burst out in disarray. And my clothes showed the mud of the springtime Huleh, once a swamp, now simply muck. And two bags.

But, the two bags make me grief at Kiryat Shemona, the fogport.

Fog rules here: too thick and pilots won't land, takeoff. That day, the fog was in patches, shifting, ambivalent, deciding what it would do: congeal, or dissipate. We arrive with the *sherut* van, go through security, buy tickets, wait. The lobby at Kiryat Shemona is narrow, smaller than Sde Dov. The bags, now empty of food, had only my *milkhek* on the left, *fleschig* on the right. The collected rocks and flowers were on top. I would press the flowers between books, label them; we found all the seven plants from the Bible original to the Land: wheat, barley, grapes, fig, dates, olives, pomegranate. An atlas of life for the Yeshiva.

Bags bulge.

Hair sprouts like matted thatch.

Shoes are muddied.

Cigarette dangles from a lip.

They call security.

And I refuse to speak.

Why should I speak? I have done nothing.

I sit, smoke hand-rolled cigarettes, like I with Wolfgang. My forefinger is tobacco-stained: I spit vagrant tobacco leaves from my lips. Onto the terrazzo floor.

And security cordons off my area, let no one near me, away from my bags.

And they demand, "What's in the bags?"

And I don't speak.

And security calls Shabak. They come with sirens and lights.

The robot for bombs is short, on caterpillar treads, arms extended. It moves my bags into a waiting container on the tarmac. The explosion is muffled. And they find nothing. And my flowers and rocks are destroyed.

The Shabak officer (that's who he said he was, he said) is furious at me. Time I wasted; people I upset, because I would not speak. How could I be so irresponsible, a teacher caring for boys?

Insane, he proclaims me, to all.

I am strong. I still do not speak. My lips opens only for the cigarette. Or to blow smoke.

Sans bags, sans sanity, we embark, fly to Sde Dov, then van hours to the yishuv. And my boys, good boys, they too do not speak, tell no one of what happened. But, they knew: Shabak watched over me.

Behind the Blue Door

My son, we lived in different worlds on the settlement. We were on the border, on borders of borders. The Rabbi sent us there -- away from bus bombings in Jerusalem. For you, I feared. (I have never feared death; rather waited for its release.) To the border between the territories and Israel, between Syria and the territories, between Arabs and Jews, between secular and Orthodox, between sanity and insanity, he sent us. Surrounded by electrified, barbed-wire fences, protected by young soldiers, each of whom I imagined were shadows of my Benjamin. I felt safe guarded by Benjamin-ghosts.

Son, I will teach how a woman can live in a different universe, even as she lives in the same house; a lesson about woman-loving.

These were also inner borders, between sanity and the other. Moments, I could not tell where sanity lay. Inner borders are covered by shadows; lines become befogged.

Immersed in the Orthodox yishuv, we were. Where the residents barely tolerated democracy: "When we have Chumash, a Bible to live by," they argued, "Why democracy?" "Well," they shrugged, "Since the Rav tells us how to vote, let there be democracy." Where woman had eight or ten children, and also a husband, I was alone. In this crowd, I felt alone.

You thrive among the children, become one of them, become Israeli and Orthodox. You are too young to protest the long black pants, black shoes, white shirt. You remember your first haircut, when they left but stubble of your blond hair, except for you peyes, your side locks, which you tucked behind your ears, or twiddled between your fingers when you studied.

My hair, they did not touch. At first.

Later. Later.

They put us in the apartment at the end of the Yishuv, facing the donkeys; beyond these asses were the Syrians. The moshav mamas pronounced, “ We put you there, at the edge of the yishuv, for we do not want you here. You are here only because of the Rav, not us.”

Here is a secret. They did not know that the gray donkeys protect me. In a beloved opera, there is an aria of one who disguises himself in mule’s skin, protected by gray. When alone, I would coax them to cross the path, join me, protect me. Their hoofs would clack on the metal culvert that bridged the path to my door. (Armani knows the protective power of gray.)

The first day, the Rav asks me to meet with several of the women, the important ones. He rules that I was to cover my hair, like a married woman. The women object -- I am not married; why, they insisted, should I have the honor of covering my hair in modesty. The Rav answers, jabbing his finger at one accuser, “For protection from your envy!”

I buy the hats, the hair covers -- head lids; I lengthen my skirts, my sleeves. I abjure slacks. All the Parisian clothes -- dresses made for me for opening nights -- I display on the salon wall, as art. All the custom jewelry -- some gifts of Henri, some gifts to myself, the sapphire pendant from Thailand, the black pearl necklace from Japan, Moby pearl earrings -- become wall art. My books became a library for the moshav. I plant the barren Golan ground with trees, flowers.

And the women accuse me of planting poison bushes to tempt, as bane for their children.

And the women spread rumors that I am a whore.

And the women say that I have AIDS, had come there to die.

And I am hated and despised.

And I feel forsaken. *Lama azavtani?*

And the men, the religious men, some come to the door, downstairs, shouting for coffee. I could not lie. Leaning out the second-floor window, I call, "Just a moment." Then, I spilled the coffee into the trash and called out to Mischa, (or Shmulik, or Putzi) "I have no coffee!"

And the Rav sends unmarried men to meet with.

One, the plumber, says he would "take care of me," "snake my pipes," he calls it; to sleep with me every Friday night -- a mitzvah, he insists, to make love on the eve of Shabbat. A woman, he proclaims

(such proclaimers in this Holy Land) -- forefinger pumping Talmudically above his head -- is like plumbing: she must be flushed by a man, so she does not get plugged up. Lye for the soul, I think. And as corrosive.

The car mechanic offers to fix my car if he could have me on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I recall the stink of benzene on his hand as he reaches around my shoulder (not the shoulder nearest him, around, to the shoulder opposite, dragging me closer to his stained overalls, to his stink). And I say to him that this was not *tznu'ah*, not modest.

The young Russian, the Rav sent to fix the leaky roof. And, he lectures me about *freyers*: whomever doesn't lie, cheat, is a *freyer* -- a castrated rooster -- good only for soup. He wore a kippah, but also a tight black T-shirt, rolled sleeves, the front collar ripped a few centimeters so chest hairs and pecs are revealed and much gold around his neck, wrist. He complains that his girlfriend could not satisfy him; he wants me to pleasure him. He had heard that French woman knew techniques, did things that Russian wives did not know. I say no, left my home to shop, returned to find money missing. But, to tell the Rav would be *lashan ha'rah*, the evil tongue, slander (I had not seen him take money); so I say nothing.

Another sent was the fat rabbi, divorced, from West Rogers Park, Chicago, Illinois. Short. Teeth missing, black gaps in front, drool and foam accumulate at his lip corners, as he speaks rapidly. His left sleeve is streaked of spit-wiping. (Sleeve buttons that Lord

Nelson introduced to keep young midshipmen and cabin-boys from snot-wiping, did not deter this slobbering Chicagoan.) Much of his hair had disappeared, as if the fat on his neck had evicted them. His remaining strands were oiled in place. He kept the black knit kippah on his head with three pins, a touch of Haman. He came to Aretz to find a wife. He would make me pregnant, he promises on our first meeting. (Why didn't the Rav who sent these men, why didn't he also send a woman to meet with us, protect my modesty, at least for the first meeting? This they did only for virgins, the women insisted.)

What could I do, what could I say? I said no to all, but wanted to protect you, my son, wanted to stay in the commune. How could I continue saying no to the Rav's choices? To tell Rav what they wanted, what they said, was gossip, a sin in itself. And who would believe a French woman on the lam, single mother, bastard child?

I paint our door the blue of my childhood house, the house before I was twelve. Blue as a shield of protection. The blue of Chagall's Sarah and Abraham. The deep cielo, as Abraham, behind his love, reaches his left hand to console her shoulder as Sarah looks downcast, and in the distant, out of sight of both barren husband and wife, ride the angels who will bring them hope of their son. All this on the background of swirling blue, like the marbled Florentine paper in my desk. *Techellet* blue of the bible; that dye made of Mediterranean snails and used to adorn the *tzitzit* of prayer shawls. This blue was my door.

And Yentl came and accuses me. This blue, she screams, is the blue of Hamas; I am a Hamas spy, she shrieks; they would watch me now; eyes they would keep on me. I try to tell her of the blue of my childhood home, of Chagall, of the Israeli flag, of *techellet* (let alone the green of Hamas). But she hears nothing. And they watched me. They watched.

When I fall ill, just a few days ill, Yentl threatens, "The Yishuv will take your son. You cannot care for him." This rouses me. With fever, I teach.

And my students torment me out of their desperate yearnings. The teen boys, ejected from their Yeshivas, were placed on this forsaken patch of Golan land, so that they would not escape. Those boys -- while they grew *peyes*, wore black -- were petty thieves, runaways. But I love them; I believe that with enough love, they would live straight lives. Yes, I think of them as my Benjamins gone awry. (My Benjamin would not have strayed, but he would have shadowed, protected this *khevra*.) They know enough Jewish law to know that a man could "marry" a woman by putting a ring on her finger and quickly reciting one sentence, "*Harrei, mikudeshet li...*" One or two would distract me, while another would sneak from behind, a metal washer slipped on my finger and his attempt to rush through the prayer before I could discard the "ring." I try to teach them of different flavors of love --- between teacher and pupil, between parent and child, between man and woman.

And when they escape the Yishuv (somehow they managed), they call me on my cell phone and ask me to pick them up at the forlorn bus stop in the Bikaa, where they wait besotted with stolen ritual wine. And they beg that I not tell the Rav. You remember the late night trips, the gauntlet of Bikaa Arab villages (a treacherous strand of pearls on a necklace of roads, places not to stop, not to be stranded). The rendezvous in the wilderness, the late night returns. I tried to save them.

And as their boys and men began to adore me, the women talk more. That I am a boy-seducer; that I am an AIDS-infecter; that I lure their husbands into sin.

Yentl's prodigal son returned from his disappearance to Nepal, India, Thailand. And he was sick. And he returned home. And he died. And she buried him on the Yishuv. Blood cancer she said he had. But I recognize the wasting. I saw the needle tracks (like those that traveled Wolfgang's arm, between his toes, the top of his feet). One should make tracks in the sands of time, not one's arm. I say nothing, nothing to this heartbroken mother. In my heart, I forgive her for her Hamas rants.

And, after terrorist bombings, these mothers sent their sons to scour the roads, even as far as Gaza, for dead bits of Jewish soldiers' flesh stuck to asphalt, bricks, even as their sons became snipers' targets.

My jewelry began to disappear. My Armani shawl. From the walls of our house they were taken. Remember how we did not lock

our doors on the yishuv? The only danger, they told us, was danger from the terrorists; here we all trust each other. And I ask about the jewelry. And they pronounce “These losses of yours are *kappores*, ritual offerings, for your past sins. God is using people as instruments of his justice to punish you. You should feel cleansed of your past and these reminders of your tawdry life. You and your son will be cleansed.”

All this I bore (*for you my son*).

Until they came for my hair.

The women call to meet with the Rav. It matters not, they insist, that I cover my hair with a straw hat. Hats only inflame their husbands’ imaginations, they argue. I am a temptress, a Lilith with seductive tresses, they cajole the Rav. They -- the women -- had seen my long, elegant hair in the mikvah. The men know what lies beneath. My dresses, they say, are not modest enough, show my shape when I walk. And I do not walk modestly enough, rather like a model or a streetwalker -- a runway model, one foot planted before the other. To entrap their men.

And they demand: hair. Cut the hair! From my waist to my chin, my hair is shorn, publicly. In the yishuv center, the women gawk.

My hair, not touched since I was twelve, is hacked. I could no longer console myself, twist its ends into my mouth to suck; hide my face in its veil.

They “donate” my hair; donate to make wigs for religious women in Monsey, New York, so that they could cover their hair in modesty. There is a crisis in Monsey; they have learned that the wigs they had bought from India were made of hair shorn in Buddhist ceremonies. “Unkosher wigs!” the Rabbis insisted. (*Trefe* wigs; *tref* – the word for animals torn limb from limb in the wild.) In Southern Andhra Pradesh, Buddhist women sacrifice their long tresses at the holy shrine of Tirupati. Shorn, shaven to the pate they are; laid bare (the women; their hair). Long, weighty, black heavy locks are bundled for sale to --- Orthodox married women of Monsey, U.S. of A. and environs. For this, Rav Ovadiah of Jerusalem called women who wore such wigs, “whores.” A bonfire of wigs they made (a different kind of vanity). An emergency wig shortage in Monsey. My hair, from the Holy Land, would protect the modesty of these good women. I should know that my hair would go to good use, the women’s committee insist.

And I am broken. Without my hair, my defense, I am broken.
And I left with you.

And, I met Chanan.

Chanan

I saw her first, one quarter turn away from me, leftwards, just as when I last saw my sister before she died. (My older sister turned away to exhale her cigarette smoke; away from me, to protect me, as she always had.)

But S., I saw across the campus on a blazing August. (This Mediterranean sun that would glint off a knife blade.) Ice water jugs, shaded beneath the tents, perspired heavily, the water – ice floating above -- was tepid at the taps below.

She looked afar, to something or someone unseen, as if searching. Her modest dress could not disguise breathtaking beauty.

I approach.

When she sees me, she is uninterested, suspicious: who had sent me; why was I bothering her? If I insisted, we could go for a coffee, but she would not enter the lobby with me -- too immodest for an unmarried woman to enter with a man --- outside she'd wait. Coffee dark, two sugars: dark as her soul, and, I learned, as bittersweet.

We would be together but two weeks. She would be elusive, she and her towheaded, blue-eyed son.

Her dark hair revealed a speck of gray at the widow's peak; over time it diminished, then vanished.

I could meet her at coffee breaks from classes; later, she would wait, hiding in the recesses of the shed that we called classrooms. Too immodest, she complained, for her to be seen with me. Near the end, I could walk them to the beach, have dinner, take the dog, who retched on the restaurant's patio.

One late evening, I brought a kite for her son; not enough wind to loft, but we sprint, jerk at the string, until it whorls into crepuscule, keep up until it was too dark to see: first dusk swallows the string connecting boy to kite, then swallows the tail and finally the kite, leaving below the night shadow of a running boy looking backwards. Only a tug spoke to your fingers that you were still connected to something that seemed to want to escape, but really just wanted to reach higher. He brought his friend Nissim. (Nissim, "miracle" it means; the Hebrew names they picked, amplifying great hopes for their children.) The restaurant is two patios side-by side: burgers and chips at one; seafood the other. The boys want chips and ketchup, burgers on the side, Sprite; she, only fish. I request a table on the seam of both patios, at sand's edge. The boys eat such: moments of chips and ketchup with intervals of mad-dash sand play, sand that would not stay on the beach, that sprays onto the patio, seasoning the fish, the chips. By ten, Hebrew salsa music blared from speakers above and behind us, to which the children danced, veiled by flying sandstorms. The dog chased sand, children and chips around the patio. Then, dog retching ended our welcome. The moon, as if to console, lit our path back.

On a Shabbat she would see me. In town. Would not tell me her address, but by the Greek amphitheater; also near the Hotel that had been pancaked by a murderous bomber two years before. That slaughter initiated the incursion into Nablus and Ramallah; also the beginning of the fence, that artificial, diminutive “Alps” constructed between Israel and the Palestinians.

I had lost her cell number; went to the school’s secretary, who was in fact the major domo, Helen. She could not give a private number, but this was a lovely woman -- she insists -- very nice, polite, beautiful, smart. Helen would call her, leave my number. I should wait, “Don’t go.”

After leaving a message, Helen wanted to talk more. Perhaps she has some difficulties, Helen wonders. (I don’t tell her about the pale suicidal scars I had seen on her left wrist as she sat on the stoop; slits just below the cuffs of her modestly long sleeves.)

Helen calls. Yes, I could have the number.

Shabbat, after shul and rest, at 3:30, I should meet her.

I could not tell her, this Orthodox woman, that I would be kilometers away, overnighting at another Orthodox friend’s home. I did not want to disrespect him by taking a cab from his religious village; told him my dilemma.

For the possibility of love, he insists, I should go. We would have the cab meet us at the edge of town, by the industrial shed. We would wait beneath the eaves of the corrugated roof to shade us; the

barbed wire fence, pulled aside for egress; egregious egress, I thought.

We go as a party -- he, his wife, father-in-law, a few children -- on our surreptitious exit. The cab, a half hour late, the driver insisting we would be there in time, if only he knew where was this Greek theater.

He is voluble, a tale teller, as many Israelis are. Stories bleed from their souls, like from stigmata, never-healing miracles.

Israeli he is, but root stock from Iraq. Like transplanted viticulture from Bordeaux to Napa, the new sprouts memories of the old land, but soaks up the nutrients, the musty soil of the new.

His daughter, but one of his five, is to go to Hebrew University next fall. She finished army Intelligence.

Hard group to get into. Four languages she knows. Like a sponge in the ocean, whatever language the currents bring, pass through her and are absorbed.

But -- his forefinger stabbing the air, eyes on the rear view mirror to catch mine, demanding my focus -- But, she is a miracle!

Do you now why a miracle? (Locking his rearward gaze, I split my gaze between him and the road ahead.) A double miracle.

Born with a brain problem, my first child, the chosen one, she had a problem of brain plumbing: a plugged pipe between two brain basins, the doctors explained. Her brain would be squished if they

didn't relieve the pressure. The doctors put a tube from her brain, snaking down her neck to her belly. I could see the tube under her skin, next to the muscle that turned her head. I would touch the tube, often on Friday night, when I said the blessing over her that Jacob, our forefather, said over his grandchildren. My other children, I would put my hand on their heads, but with Shoshi, I would touch the tube that relieved her head pressure.

(I listen, yet worry, as we descend from the Judean hills, would we arrive on time.)

A smart one she was. The smartest of all.

But when she is fifteen, she complains of her belly. It hurts. We take her to the Kupat Cholim Hospital to which we were assigned: nothing, they say. A flu maybe, perhaps some bad meal.

But Shoshi never complains, and her belly still hurts. She gets sicker, headaches now, trouble concentrating. The Kupat Cholim doctors give pain pills, for headaches, for such.

You know, I am just a cab driver. I could have done more. In the army, in Lebanon, I was doing early computer work for aiming missiles. But, when I left, I was young and foolish. I said to myself, I will work, make money a few years, then maybe college. But, I married and the money was too good and college never happened. So, I am only a cab driver.

But, because I am a cab driver, I will take my daughter anywhere to any hospital in the country and I will pay private money

to get the best doctors. I demand the best neurosurgeon, and I call him. For a private appointment, I can bring my daughter the next day. I drive four hours. No matter, I am a cab driver and she is my chosen one.

We are late!

How could I listen?

How could I not? This is Israel -- mind divided, trying to sail a tacking life course. between the Scylla of bus bombings, flying limbs, exploding flesh and the Charybdis of the quotidian, of sick children, even the minor love-sick yearnings of a wandering American and a misplaced Parisian. (*An American in Paris*, intrudes salaciously.)

This brain man, this head plumber, studied in the U.S. and in England, is very famous. He looks at her and says that she should not go home; the tube from her brain to her belly, the plumbing that had protected her all her life, might be blocked, infected.

Three months she stays there, in and out of the Intensive Care Unit twice. I thought she would die. But, after all the surgeries, after the infections were cleaned out, she would sit in the bed, her head bandaged like a turban, and, and she would study. A new language she wanted to learn, English. And to study for her bagrut, her high school graduation exams. They unwrap the bandages and the hair grows back and the new plumbing works.

She is recruited to the army, to Intelligence because of all her languages. And now, my double miracle is going to the Hebrew University.

I work on Shabbat, you see, I work to pay for my children's education. But I believe in God and in this country where doctors make miracles.

My youngest is seven. I am already forty, but I am just learning how to be a good father. With the older ones, I worked two jobs, always away when they were awake. But with the youngest, I go to his soccer games, I pick him up from school. On Fridays, we go to the store to buy a little Matchbox car that he is collecting. And we lie on the living room floor and we play with his cars. He pretends to be a cab driver. But, I tell him, he should become like his oldest sister, our miracle.

We are approaching Netanya, but which exit to take? He does not know where is this amphitheater; assures me we will find it. We blunder at exits, at turns, and the clock approaches 235, then 240, then 245. I find the amphitheater, but what to do with my luggage. The Hotel nearest the amphitheater, the Park Hotel that was bombed last Pesach, will not take my luggage. I go to the driver. He insists I go find my woman; he will drive my luggage to my Hotel south of the city. He does not know where it is, but, everything "will be in order," he assures (*"ha'kol yiyeh b'seder,"* "everything will be in order," that Hebrew encomium, without which, it would be difficult to go on with life in this land that eats its inhabitants). This is Israel; this is like

family, so I leave the luggage. In a few minutes, he calls: hotel found, luggage left.

But no S. No woman. An empty theater, except for the ubiquitous tissuey plastic bags blowing, snapping in tornadoes, a ballet of wind around the theater, I the only spectator. People stroll by. French families; strollered children. A statue of two children, one pausing to tie an errant lace, catches me off-guard, looks too real. On the bench nearby sit an elderly, elegant couple, very European, each with a cane resting between legs and each reading a paperback: the man, *On War*; the woman, *On Love*, potboiler and bodice-ripper.

But no S. I wonder, how long would an exquisite French woman wait: I think five or ten minutes, perhaps. Not really fifteen. Yet, it was now 2:50.

But could I telephone on her Shabbat? No address I had.

I feel all is lost; should hoof it the half hour in August's heat to the Hotel.

I will call, she may not answer, but I will leave a message, which she may hear after Shabbat to know that I had been there. I could not tell her the why of my lateness; I could not offend her further.

She answers. "Wait!"

She appears.

A curving lane, slopes towards the amphitheater, guides her. On her right, a concrete, circular skating rink, fenced waist-high, is populated by kids on skates, or bicycles; down the slope, a playground, animated by children. The sagging high-rises behind her blocking the city, are variegated by the sun, the sea weather: some peeling, as if badly sunburned, others with concrete flaking around the wrought iron railings of modest balconies. These buildings have not aged well. Netanya is the Nice of Israel, for it reminds its French-speaking (but Algerian and Tunisian denizens for the most part) of *La Patrie*, that Eden from which they had once been exiled, if only in their fantasies. Even the flowers, the trees, such as the early-blooming almonds, bring Nice to Netanya. The children's voices are between us and, behind, the whipping of the plastic bags, choreographed in the amphitheater by the winds' whims.

She wears no smile. We may walk a bit to find a place to sit, she suggests. Perhaps under shade, she gestures to east of a tree, only to find it taken by others. Then, we may sit here, before a stone wall, she facing the Sea, I facing south and east: I make the pretense of looking at the Mediterranean, while stealing glances of her slightly up the rise. Her legs are extended and she crosses them, tries to imprison some silk to protect her modesty. At moments she lays a hand across the fabric, attempting to tame its untamability. She is beautiful, but removed. She is like Garance of *Children of Paradise*, an elegant sculpture, but one in need of a Barrault, a Galatea yearning to be animated by her Pygmalion. I cannot tell her how beautiful she is. Later, I learn that when I try to say this, she does not

believe me. Her beauty, she insists once existed in her twenties, thirties. In English, she insists, "I am not nice." I sense, when the wind directs it towards me, some perfume and am surprised. I also see that the touch of gray at her widow's peak seems gone. I wonder whether she cares more for me than I can ever gather. (I can speak of her beauty only in the allusive Biblical Hebrew: "You find grace in my eyes." With that she cannot argue.)

She alludes to a troubled life, complexity that make her too difficult. She has decided that she cannot pair a husband; she does not have the capacity. Alone is all that is possible.

She withdraws from her wallet a worn photo, perhaps of newsprint, perhaps 3 X 4 cm. A Nazi officer aims a gun towards a mother on his left, she turned slightly away, cringes a bit, nestles her child in an absurd, futile protectiveness. She explains: she is this woman, waiting for the bullet. She can picture it approaching slow motion, can see the air compressed before it, like some split-second photograph of the Bernoulli flow around the torpedo-shaped missile. She lives only to protect her child as long as she can.

I find myself arguing for the sake of life, for living outside of tragedy. I become life's cheerleader, against my better instincts. For I also hear an echo, an ostenato within chanting, "Stay away; trouble only." Yet, a quiet compassion builds in me. I think of her like the country I am visiting: brilliant, gifted, in the wrong place and wrong time and under siege. She speaks of performing Butterfly, Tosca, as if these were previous lives, never to return.

A character in an odd sky-floating contraption is wending his way north above the beach, then south, wind-weaving. He has a large, linear, multicolored parachute above, and his blimpy body harnessed into a seat, he motors slowly to and fro as the Mediterranean's prevailing eastward wind keeps him aloft. A latter-day, one-man Hindenburg. She is terrified of this flight, even as she knows that her son would adore the experience; and that she does not want him chancing it.

She seems to have an inner clock and after perhaps an hour and a half, she abruptly rises to leave, to retrieve her son. I am permitted to walk her part way, return along the snaking path, beneath the eaves of the crumbling apartment buildings, to the first street, where she dismisses me. Hidden, where she lives, as she is hidden.

I leave, not knowing whether I would see her again. To my left, the buildings face the Sea, paint peeling, porches with concrete crumbling around the wrought iron railings. I steer away from walking beneath them, as if their wrought iron limbs might drop off their corroded bodies.

“10,” Woody Allen, Bo Derek and Me

Here's the beach scene, for she did agree to go to the beach with her son and me before I leave. Imagine, watch. This exquisite woman walks away (flows more than walks) towards the surf, loosens her white robe. It drops to the sand. I sit with her son at the foot of the life guard's perch, to which the dog, white patches on white as beach sand, is tethered. I am short, Jewish, thinning, curly hair -- although still more curls than thin. And, I watch as, just before she enters the water, she briefly, momentarily, tugs downward at the bikini bottom, as if it had enough material to cover more modestly. With forefinger and thumb, she tugs, as if a tic, a muscle-seizing memory of some former Riviera life.

The kid hates the beach; only the pool he will use. She dislikes his swimming in the pool, where too many others have been; doesn't want him in be-pissed pool water. I make a deal. With me, the boy would come to the beach. We would play in the sand, fly kites; she would swim. The dog searches for unfound treasure in the sand. And she swims, her hair floating behind her on the waves, like blond kelp, covering her shoulders as they disappear beneath the foam: Botticelli's Venus in reverse.

The life guard notices. The moment we decamp at the foot of his station, he notices. A robust fellow, a preternatural adolescent, perhaps now forty, bronze skin and dyed thatchy black-rooted white hair in disarray, like Pick-up-sticks; loose porcupine quills, white

shafts, ebony roots. His paunch reflexly retracts as certain women pass. He jokes with the ladies and the children. But, S., he notices. He has enough French for badinage. He, leans over the balustrade -- both his belly and the balustrade strain as he watched her enter the sea. Like some cartoon character, a Roger Rabbit, his bugged-out eyes boing out of their orbits.

But, he doesn't notice her begin to disappear on the far side of the reef, past the waves that flipped children. The lifeguard warns the children and occasional adult to stay ahead of the reef and waves, towards the beach, alee. The undertow works silently, stealing away its victims. Even as you stand, the water rips away the sandy foundation beneath your feet. "Sweeties" (as the guard calls all children), c'mere, c'mere, I want to see you!" his refrain. The waving, leaping kids almost obey, then are lured back, just out of reach of the waves' stealthy embraces; the life guard again calls "Sweeties!" A rhythm to their routine, like the waves. *A pas de deux* with Neptune.

I see her enter the surf, buoyed up, then dip below sight and buoyed again, as I play with him, digging sand channels to the sea, as if to welcome the waves, enclose, tame them. And I turn away, toward the dog, periodically, disentangle it from its leash. And I look again, uncertain if I can see her. And I look again. And I feel cold fear in my belly. Had she found me to care for her child so that she could, like some Euridyce-mermaid, return to the sea? I, like some Jewish Orpheus, find her disappearing from my sight.

Until I can not find her.

I call the life guard, but *sotto voce* so that the boy won't be alarmed. (Is this why he refuses to go to the sea with his mother?) The guard looks, raises his binoculars. We both see the speck of her as she sails west into the afternoon setting sun.

"Mrs.! Mrs.! Tel Aviv is south, to your left," and he points, helpfully, left. Even now, he can't loft a joke to a beautiful, disappearing woman.

She hears. She returns.

Had she been trying to reach Nice, leave me with the kid? How would I have explained that to the world? "Here is my new son, whom I inherited from a woman who floated into Neptune's arms."

Emerging, she looks the Botticelli, her eyes cast slightly aside in modesty, like Venus, as if to fend off the eyes of others.

She loves the sea, she explains. (Does she see the residue of alarm in my face? A need to explain?) She feels boundary-less, unbordered, unencumbered, contiguous with the schools of fish. In the water, her skin loses its boundedness. She feels united with the sea.

I feel relief.

Kid seems to notice nothing amiss; used to it?

Now crepuscule approaches, that time of sunset when the sky and sea lose their membranous separation in the distance. In Hebrew, the difference between the words for water (*mayim*) and sky

(*shmayim*) is but the sibilant “sh”; at crepuscule, this “sh” dissolves and sky and water become one, like two people after a quietly passionate moment of love, one still within the other, the other embracing the one.

On the restaurant’s patio, we finish the St. Denis fish, the kid the chips and nak-nikim, tiny hot dogs, dipping in ketchup. The dog, done digging for chips in the sand, retches from stern to stem, revealing his ribs. He leaves remnants of dinner and sand beneath the neighbor’s table. We leave.

Death in Norway; Dinner in Jerusalem

My last evening in Israel, I am to go to Jerusalem.

She says sternly, “I drive to Jerusalem to drop off the kid by friends.”

She doesn't offer a ride. I ask if she is offering; an ambiguous, brief oblique nod and blink suggests yes. (She blinks agreement with a brief downward nod, as did my father, beneath his Neanderthal brow, one I inherited.)

The trip in her tinny Subaru is a hectoring voyage by some post-biblical prophet, a Jeremiah dressed in soft, rippling cotton. As the road rises to meet Jerusalem, as the heat works itself, as the car strains both to run up hill and to air condition, she turns up the heat on me.

Hadn't I realized – she starts -- that I had fostered the children's misbehavior at the restaurant, even the dog retching? In France, dogs are permitted in restaurants and behaved. This was a shame onto God. In France they are taught behavior, formality in public, Jewish kids especially. She is trying to import that on her son in this country, where his friends run amuck, roil others at restaurants, malls. How could I counteract this, encourage them, feed the dog beneath the patio table?

This continues until she notices -- as we pass the slot of *Shar Hagai*, where skeletal armored trucks of '48 observe us, gape with

empty orbits where headlamps once sat -- the last incline before entering the Holy City -- the car labors. Stuttering, barely moving, hardly budging, like some proof of Einsteinian relativity we seem to stand still, as cars to the left blur by, and cars and trucks behind refuse to pass, honk. In the rearview mirror, I see the drivers make the palm-up, opposed fingers to thumbs, the Israeli gesture that could mean "What's up?" or "Nu?" or "Move it!" Like some religious celebrants entering the Holy city, we were, but, they honking rather than blowing shofars. She is frustrated and upset to hold others back from their ascent into this Holiest of cities.

I reach, punch the AC button "off" and the car lurches forward, as if flung by some unseen godly sling shot into traffic's mainstream, or like Elijah on his chariot, towards the Holy Mount.

Impressed, the prophetess quiets.

We will meet for dinner, in Naholot Shiva, she offers; well, commands. After she delivers her son. At this cramped coven of alleys, the biblical seven wadis once met. So, we would meet.

She re-appears. Distraught. She thought only to get *Le Monde* at the French bookstore on Agron opposite the Moslem cemetery. To catch up in her mother tongue, she intended. Only to read, front page, that a French friend, Marie Troyant, had been murdered by her lover as she was rehearsing in Norway. He, a rock singer of a group, *Las Grimas Sangre*, beat her to death, disfigured her. Splattered with her blood, he was, anguished-faced. (Paparazzi catch this.) Seemed they had argued; a lover's spat, he said.

Apparently, French women, of a certain class, are now catching up with married French men who kept women on the Left Bank. For, this famous singer had a husband and two children, but preferred to travel with her rock star boyfriend, who had pummeled her before. In the past, he had spared her face. S. had begged Marie to leave the boyfriend; they would compare notes -- the women -- about who hit hardest, Wolfgang or rock star. Rock star won. Hands down, so to speak.

Michel got eight years and much play in the French press: after all, this was a crime of passion; he was an artist.

Oh, she? She was dead forever; her children, orphaned forever.

Michel had the last word. As he entered prison, he announced both his eternal love for Marie; also for her children. When he gets out, he said, he would fight their father for visiting rights with the children. Also, he would compose a song for Marie in prison. His love he claimed eternal.

She wasn't, though. Not eternal. Just dead.

(As rehabilitation, the press later reported, he starts a rock band behind bars – a Johnny Cash of the murder-set – La Visage Rouge, he calls them; remorseful felons now banged cymbals, beat drums, flogged horns, rather than faces.)

This I can't believe, even as I see the woman's face, front page. My last night of possibility with S. and she comes up with such a

story. The boyfriend too was front page, a broken nose, like some mini-Belmondo. (Belmondo's son, an aspiring actor, outdid his father's nose: racing on a motorcycle, he amputated his leg. A peg leg bon vivant, he became, she tells me.) She apologizes, as she would be out of sorts. And she is. We sit in the well of the restaurant, the only table outdoors, an ancient grape vine suspended above. She smokes incessantly.

We descend the two hours from Jerusalem, now silently. The Subaru is built for downhill, escaping from the Holy City. We could have been the Israeli bobsled team, two of us, slaloming down the Holy Hill, through the slot of Latrun, the eye-less tank relics catching our backside.

The turn off to my overly modest hotel, more a hostel, is an ill-paved, rutted path, unlit, dark. At the gate, I hesitate. I turn to thank her; while we may not see each other again, I appreciate an adopted family for two weeks: going to the beach with her, her son. And I say good night -- I never touch her, never kiss her.

On the plane, over Greece, I find an SMS message: "I treated you dreadfully. Come back."

So, I do.

Mikvah/Tikvah

Chanan, to purify myself for you, for your return, I immerse myself.

First, in the Syrian pool, abandoned, an old stone quarry, now filled with murky green slime. Alone I am, near the border, I plunge beneath and see hazy, milky-green darkness. And I feel the cold. And I swim feeling no skin, no boundary between myself and the water. I touch the stone sides and felt the living slime; do they protect the hard stone, or do they soften the walls to protect me? I seek the bottom; my breath will not let me. Perhaps there is no bottom, no limits.

Mikvah makes me breathless.

You, my Chanan, my unbelieving beloved, know not of the mikvah. Like Tikvah, it brings hope and purity.

The Temple Cohanim, Priests, entered the mikvah to be purified for rituals. On the holiest of days, Yom Kippur, the only day he could enter the Holy of Holies to pray for that the Jewish people be forgiven, the High Priest needed to purify his body and soul. If not pure, he would be struck dead within. No one else could enter the Holy of Holies. A rope was tied to his leg before he entered; should God strike him dead (should the man be impure of heart), others could drag him out.

(I too am Cohen, but impure.)

And a wine maker enters the mikvah so that his wine be pure.

But a woman, a married woman goes monthly. She is blessed. After her monthly time, she enters the mikvah to purify herself for her husband.

(Son, to enter, she must be pure of heart.)

The mikvah should have at least three steps, water that runs through and be cold. At night, we are immersed. And a woman should go with another woman and immerse herself completely.

How could I enter the mikvah when we had not married? Only I knew that I loved you from the beginning. (Even as I played the Garance -- the restrained French beauty, more Roman statue, more Carrerra marble than flesh -- to your yearning Barrault ---- Did you know of my love behind the frozen veneer?)

(And I must be pure of heart.)

Chaya, I asked. I told her (in a cataract of words): that I love you, had not loved a man for twelve years, wanted to be with you as man and wife. Chaya once protected me, objected to my hair cutting.

Women gather at the mikvah. They know who is entering, the time of your month. And they knew I was not married. (By rabbinical law, they should not speak; but they speak, their tongues dance with evil.)

(Must be pure.)

Here is how I purify myself.

Immersion must occur after dark. But, before I leave to mikvah, I cleanse myself according to Halacha. Nothing must be a barrier against the water ritually cleansing me. Even dirt beneath the nails must be removed. (But, I bite my nails to the quick, so they are clean.) I wash my hair and comb out even the smallest tangles; the ritual water should caress each strand. Contacts removed. My *beit hastarim*, my hidden places, I cleanse all crevices.

(Pure of heart.)

At the mikvah, Chaya enters, but the *balanit*, the guardian attendant, performs the *iyun*, inspection. I remove my clothes, the sapphire ring from Thailand, my *Mobi* earrings. She examines my back, hands, feet to see that there will be no barrier to interfere with purification (for you). As I am Sephardi, I recite the *bracha* while robed, blessing God before acting on the *mitzvah*: one is not permitted to look at the water while reciting. And I pray, "*Baruch ata Adonai, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu al hatevila,*" and I let the robe slip to the cold stone, and I descend the steps into the waist-high waters with Chaya, and crouch as if nursing a baby, and spread my fingers, close eyes and mouth gently, and immerse myself. The whole body, simultaneously I submerge.

(*Be pure.*)

And I arise breathless! I can not breath; can not speak; a fist it feels in my throat. I thrash, and Chaya and the *balanit* hold me and blow into my face, perhaps as God had breathed life-soul into Adam,

or as a doctor helps an infant first breathe as it emerges from its mother-bath. I breathe. But why had I felt breathless?

I needed you, to be with you, Chanan. I wished to be pure for you. There was much to wash away. But the waters could not cleanse unspoken, unbidden memory.

(Pure.)

Love's Enemy

is Time. Time has passed a month before I return, for Rosh Hashana.

We wrote. We spoke. I sent Shakespeare's "Love is not love / which alters when it alteration finds.... not time's fool... bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom." This hangs in my American foyer, on a narrow wall, between kitchen and entrance. And you answered with a play on his sonnet, seeking me.

You had returned to an empty stage, performed to a darkened hall. Your throat opened (with some surprise, you said). It opened and you realized how closed you had been with me as a voice came forth, as you moved from wings to center stage, faced the darkness and sang arias: Romeo and Juliet, Traviatta, and of course, Butterfly. One Sunday morning, my morning, your evening, you are at the piano waiting for my call and sing a little-known aria (from Rigolletto?) of one who hides, finds strength in a grey donkey's skin (Your Armani grey, you said). Most directors shorten the opera, drop this whispered aria. (Barenboim keeps it.) It is your favorite.

This felt like desert flowering after torrential rain: suddenly colors and life awakens on dun landscape. Could I trust this life would endure?

I roll in on the three wheels of El Al. Still, when I land at the old Ben Gurion, step from the aluminum ziggarrret (like Jacob's dream, its head in the sky, feet poised in the ground), I reach to the tarmac, discreetly, kneel slightly, touch the ground, then two fingers to my lips. For my forefathers, I do this, who prayed and waited two millenia

to return here, who lie in foreign soils (some lying on foreign soils, their burnt ashes), who wait, now even more patiently, for the Moshiach to return, and their bones to roll to Jerusalem. The old Ben Gurion Airport has a modest, squat building for a Land with such large reputation. Travellers, unbeknownst to them, can be seen on a large screen above the exit in the lobby before they emerge. (We are giants before we appear.) But you, too anxious, lost en route, arrived after I have entered. Cell phones guided us to each other, in front of Steimatzky's Newstand. (Would I recognize you?) You wear a baseball cap, brim slightly askew, shadowing your left cheek. Because of your hair, you apologize, not to be seen. To the salon you needed to go and could not before I arrived. "I am not nice" you demur.

You had left the Yishuv, moved to Golan, the heights above harp-shaped Kinneret Lake (called "Sea" in Israel), to Qatzrin, an Israeli cowboy town; there were jackals at night; fierce, tusked feral pig hordes in the day. (Your retching dog once saved you from a pack of boars.)

From the airport, four hours to Tiberius, then scaling the face of the Golan, we glimpse where Syrian gun bunkers were once hidden: Syrian gunners sighted the kibbutzim below, picked-off occasional cows in the field. While well-hidden, these emplacements were marked by an Israeli spy -- Eli Kohen, I think (His name should be remembered.) -- who had infiltrated Syrian society as an Egyptian businessman. High Syrian mucky-mucks offered him a tour of the machine-gun nests in the early 60's. Beastly hot in there during the

summer, he offered to donate palm trees to shade the Syrian soldiers. Said and Done. In the '67 war, the Israeli air force used the now-mature palms to locate and bomb the concrete bunkers. Kohen was hung in Damascus Square. And we drove past his palms, their bunkers. The Syrian soldiers, I was told, were issued boots without laces, the harder for them to retreat. Above the now pacific kibbutz, is a plaque, with words for the kibbutzniks by an Israeli general, that could have been Eli Kohen's as he stood on the trap door, rope knotted on the side of his neck: "From here, you look like giants." When the bunkers above the kibbutz were taken by hand-to-hand combat, the kibbutz teen age girls ran up the once-forbidden shear slope to greet the Israelis: the officer waved them back, waved and screamed (at first unheard in the surrounding battle): "Stand still, don't move, the Syrians mined these hills!" Then, he picked his way down the slope, toes first, to take each girl back by hand. There are memories' and heroes' shadows in most corners of Israel: this is a grave land of monuments.

Your son waits for us. We are off to the Kanyon, the mall, get a few necessities, then to Jerusalem for the holidays. I thought this meant you and your boy would stay with your friends, although, we would dine together at the King David. I am too wrong.

At the Kanyon, you doff your cap and reveal a nest, a thatch of hair, a cross between Rastaffarian matted plaits and a 1950's beehive. From the front, it looks as if someone had rear-ended your hair, crumpled it upward, sideward: needed major body work. The boy goes off with a friend and I tour with you, gathering stares and

looks of surprise from small-minded small-towners. I'm not sure: surprised to see you with a man; shocked at your "do," the style one once popular on back-ward state hospitals?

We sleep in your flat before the early morning three and a half hour trip through the Bekaa to Jerusalem.

Your flat. Like on the yishuv, you are on the periphery of the furthest quarter of the town, facing a heath, but one with rolling mud moguls rather than Scottish peat; a 270 degree view, towards the Kinneret. One house both of you are excited for me to see, just being built, a house of your dreams, a house unlike any you had seen: of wood. And it was a new house, clapboard, as one would glimpse in Cairo, Illinois, or Paris, Texas or Pierre, South Dakota.

But, your flat. The second story of a white erstaz stucco townhouse, red-tiled roof. (Tiles, I later learn, that were treacherously slippery for climbing to retrieve your recalcitrant hound.) The top flat of an illegally subdivided townhouse. Downstairs lives an army officer, a colonel, he said, never seen by me, but his voice on the phone, I learned, his car in the single driveway, his air conditioning unit/heater always running.

And the only electric meter was in his flat: when you blew a fuse, he would have to flip the switch. That is, when he was home, not away at service. We later spent many nights, sans juice, sans heat, sans lights (except candles), as the colonel was nowhere to be found, his lights dark, car gone, but his electric heating unit blasting. Also, he would just tell you how much of the electric bill you owed: no

reason for you to look at meter you wouldn't understand (his apartment, you wouldn't enter; lest the neighbors talk). And your bills seemed astronomical.

Their entrance doors were twins, side-by-side, simple light wood. Outside yours, to the left, a cheap, white plastic swinging divan. Next to his door, to the right, detritus in the gutter: a bald doll, one armed, naked; a three-legged plastic lawn chair, a grill, no lid.

Your lock simple, almost medieval -- a flat key with square tip, turned twice to open the flattish deadbolt, little impediment against forced entry. A canvas, painted by you greets us: of Moroccan colors and themes, a woman demurely sits, deformed hands folded in lap, feet amputated at the canvas edge. You -- the seated woman, like Rachel hiding her theft from Jacob and her father -- hid storage: old valises of the kind that needed two belt straps to hold in their bulges like girdles on middle-age women.

Turn left, ascend steep terrazo stairs; curve right upwards into a large room: kitchen, dining, salon (where I was to sleep). To the right of the foyer/kitchen, a door to the porch, whose white-washed walls were scarred by pawmarks from the dog, too social to accept being put out, and too enthusiastic to keep from leaping up on the inner walls, putting paw marks to the height of a good-sized man. Past the refrigerator and to the right a short hall led to a closet-size bathroom, with two rocker switches outside: one to warm water for the laundry, the other for the bath, neither warmed to any significance. There

seemed to be enough electricity to light up the rocker switches red, but not enough to take the chill off the water stored on the roof.

Lime-washed white walls. The cathedral ceiling wafted what little heat was produced below to its rafters; on three sides, windows, with ubiquitous external metal shutters, rolled down from inside by loops of webbed belts, some broken and repeatedly knotted, others balky.

The kitchen is a hot plate, an electric skillet to saute the sliced potatoes each morning for the boy to eat abed. A microwave sits atop the fridge. There is a small electric oven. Plugs hang limply, forlornly, waiting their turns, as there are not enough outlets for these patient servants. These appliances with limp-hanging members are like dejected suitors, waiting to be juiced-up by the too-few female mates.

The two bedrooms are studies of chiaroscuro. The larger on the right, full of light, a raised bed, table at its side, a long desk, the one electric heater for the apartment, a closet groaning with the kid's clothes and walls festooned with posters: Ninja turtles named after Renaissance masters: Donatello, Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo, who are ruled by a transformed sewer rat; Bart Simpson (an acronym for "Brat") lording over his dull father, Homer, and sweet, but not too smart mother, Marge. Americanelia in the wilds of Golan.

Then, in darkness, yours, the mother's monkish chamber: a mattress on the stone floor, abutting the cold, external wall. Above it, an electrical outlet disgorged from the wall, like an enucleated Cyclops, hanging by its vessels; blind, but dangerous. A small desk

with book case, sagging beneath tomes of art -- Vermeer (where later, on page 37, I would leave money for food, money you would refuse, and I would email or call with a message to enjoy Vermeer), and the other Renaissance masters -- Michelangelo, Raphael, Donatello, and Da Vinci's studies of grotesque men and women. In the closet, months later, I saw a wardrobe of memories, a memoir of cloth, a fabricated autobiography -- opening night dresses, remnants of what had not been stolen by the Orthodox moshavniks. (I thought of strange variations on Marx's dictum: "From whom according to her ability, and also from whom according to her sins," or the Yiddish version, "What's mine is mine; what's yours is ... mine too.")

Chiaroscuro: like the Jocanda; light streams from the left, courses through her son's room, casts shadows on the face of S's chamber.

In the salon, I am to sleep on the sofa, poised on wobbling white metal tubed legs. At its foot, the T.V., caddy-corner, that the boy would watch full blast, consuming all auditory space. Next to it, on the wall, a full-length mirror in a Moroccan painted tin frame: he would put on Michael Jackson, and, before the mirror, moonwalk across space, lip synch and dance to "Thriller," "Scream," "Bad," wearing a single silver glove, spangled white socks, pant legs hitched up a bit. A jazz dancer your son aspires to, a pop singer, not the classical do-dahs of his mother's operas or Barishnikovian ballet, for whose lessons his mother had eaked out shekels. No fawny Nijinsky, he. Stevie Wonder he would imitate -- CD spinning -- banging on your upright piano, swaying side-to-side, shades over his eyes, head

tipped lightly back, chin forward, trembling voice in English, “I Just Called To Say I Love You,” “My Cherie Amour,” “For Once in My Life,” “You Are the Sunshine of My Life.” Doesn’t get the words; gets the rhythm, the blindman’s sway, punctuated head jerks at the end of each excursion.

Night arrives. The boy bids you to join him in his bed. I, in the unheated salon, beneath thin chenille, feel time pass.

Time Desired, Time Lost

(First Visit)

My son, a woman needs time. Give her time.

I try to teach this to Chanan after our first time together, a time that felt timeless, then was gone.

You, son, commanded me, "Choose him!" after the August together, the humid days on the Mediterranean beaches, the walks along the tayelet (what Americans call "boardwalk," even when it is more beautiful than boards across sands), stopping to buy your red, translucent, whistle-pops, the Tootsie rolls at the kiosk, and later to sit at a cafe for espresso, while you played with Ani, our sand-licking dog.

You said it in the car -- we alone, he on the phone from America -- you said loudly enough for him to hear, albeit in Hebrew "Ima! Ima! you always make bad choices of men -- Henri, Wolfgang. Now, I will choose. And I choose Abba!" (Yes, you called Chanan, Abba, daddy, a name you had never given any man before.) Then, you rejected him.

You had said "Abba" before he left the first time (the first of too many leavings, always for his business, work, parnassa, so American). We were in the car, you and Nissim in the back, driving the "safari" zoo, that dusty trail through an animal park, our car windows rolled-up against the approaching, unfenced ostriches, emus, gazelles. An ostrich approached your window (you had opened

it a crack) and you reached to Chanan's shoulder, "Abba, Abba, look!" In excitement, you made him your Abba.

And I saw his face -- saw it soften, a soft smile on his lips, a tear you could not see in his eye.

I too came alive.

This woman, your mother, needed a man to bring her soul to life. Throughout my womanhood, I could create if I had a man for whom to create. This began when I was seventeen, after I escaped home, ran from my father. In Paris, I found D. a sculptor, brother of the reknown, M. He was seventy, D, perhaps. A halo of white hair illuminated his shining face. He brought me into his studio, he taught me to create with my hands to paint (add layers to form beauty), to sculpt (remove layers to reveal beauty). I asked ancient D. to teach me to love, to make love to me. He answered, "A young girl should learn to love from a young man," increasing my love for him.

Chanan's skin below his chin was beginning to droop, to wrinkle; he was becoming like D. (But I wanted Chanan to become more like D., older.) I would touch this skin; he self-conscious, I more attracted.

My soul, son, is like an ovum -- alone, it could not create. But, inseminated by a man's love and time and attention, my soul flourishes, divides, creates. Tosca is nothing without Caravodossi; Carmen without Escamillo (and Don Jose, whose blade makes her tragic Carmen); even Cio Cio San needs Pinkerton to transform her life from abject loneliness to motherhood, to the tragedy who is

Butterfly. She is cocooned until she finds her love, then dies the butterfly, too frail to be alone, without man, without son (with her own blade). *(Are you learning how long I have been preparing for my breath-taking release, my Shekhita, son?)*

Time alone is woman's enemy. Time, alone; time alone. The twelve years with you, I adored you. Yet, when I looked in the mirror, I saw what Dorian Gray could hide in his attic closet: flesh deteriorating slowly, creeping from the bone, melting from its architecture, fault lines around my eyes from life's earthquakes; skull revealed. Only my legs, hidden in modesty from men's eyes, remained young.

Time I needed with Chanan.

And he denied me this.

When he first returns, I insist, "Twenty four hours." I did not tell you, son, why I brought you to stay with Nlssim's family for Rosh Hashana: that I would be with Chanan, as a woman with a man. As Eve with Adam, I knew him. I say to him, "I want twenty four hours together, in the suite." And we found pleasures of which I will not speak to you, one pleasure for every year of my barrenness, pleasure I pray for you to find in your life.

Please understand, son, that I was too old to play the coy games of youth with this man who thawed my love. Please understand.

Afterwards, I insist, “Forty eight hours, no more, no less.” No more, I did not explain to him, because I did not know if I could be with him longer; if my jealousy could be curtailed. (I started seeing that women turn to look at him as we pass on the street; waitresses linger too long at the table. Did I imagine these? Could I trust my eyes?)

I later forgot (but in this dream-ether, I remember) how I would strike him -- in his mid chest, on the arm, finding bruises the next day. Until he says softly, yet firmly, “A woman has never struck me and you will not begin now.” And I retort, dismissively, “Strike you? Strike? You do not know what it means to be struck!” And I confess to him. (Yes, confession, for in the dark of the night, between two pillows, a scrim of darkness, I felt as if I were in the confessional, whispering to the priest that my Catholic girl friends in France told me of). I confess to him about Wolfgang, then the others before Henri. And yes, I did confess, although months later, how you, my son, had begun to strike me, kick me below the table; I have to tell Chanan. My long skirts also hid the bruises you made blossom on my shins, my son of Wolfgang.

Time I expanded. From two days, I begged for two weeks (and he returned for a week). From two weeks to two months (and he returned for ten days).

I wanted only time, only with him. I needed time with Chanan, a different flavor of time than I had with you, son. You I had given twelve years, but time with a loved son is a different infusion than the

tea of time with a lover. Yet, by then, by the passing months, you had had enough of him.

Choose, you insisted.

What could I do?

Here, in another dream, my beloved son, I can teach you of the violence of woman-leaving.

Leaving a woman is violence. This, I try to make Chanan understand. He comes and leaves, again and once again for a year. He returns every month, not understanding that however I might know that he left for his work, to support us, his leaving was a wound to me, a makah, a slap, a violence. He thinks of leaving as a necessary act of omission (leaving, emptying, voiding, yearning), but I feel an act of commission -- wounding, taking away, ripping out a part of me. In English is a phrase, "leave taking," that captures the feeling of being left; something is taken. He leaves me only with myself and its jealousy, which was an active being, a creative tormenter. My imagination, once my servant, now enslaves me.

This I teach you about woman-loving. Leaving is hurtful, not simply absence, but violence.

Here is the why, the what a man must learn, what for a woman, is felt.

The woman is a *bayit*, a home, for whom she loves (her man, her infant). The Hebrew letter bet begins the word *bayit*, just as it begins the first two words of the Torah, "*Bereshit barah Elohim...*" "In the beginning, created God..." And the ideograph for bet is like a home, or a bedouin tent, a *bayit*, closed on three sides and welcoming on the fourth. Beckoning, welcoming, receiving, (tempting) can be the woman.

The Rabbis give many explanations for why the first letter of the first word of the first sentence of our Torah begins with bet. Why not begin with the aleph, the first letter of our aleph bet? (And Borges titles one of his stories, the Aleph.) One explained that the aleph is silent and God wanted to start Torah with the plosive Bet. The Aleph, asked by God, was too arrogant. So too, God offered to all the other people of the world the opportunity to be the "chosen people," but each people had conditions unacceptable to God. Only the Jewish people, last asked, agreed without conditions. So too, the bet agreed to begin the Torah, humbly, without conditions.

As love must be without conditions.

But I have a woman's explanation for why the bet begins the Torah. As the bayit represents the home, the tent, so God began the Torah with the symbol of "home," for his "word" was to be a spiritual

home of the Jewish people, a shelter, a place to be entered and to be blessed.

(Chanan, if you dream this, recall how often I begged you to bless me, as I tilted my forehead to you, to kiss, to touch with your fingertips, to bless. Recall, in the kitchen in Golan, when you took me in your arms to dance; in Netanya, overlooking the Mediterranean's waves reaching to us, or when we walked in solitude along the shore of Kinneret, recall how I begged your blessings, as did Jacob from his father, from the Angel. I may have bruised you, but I yearned for you blessings.)

After you emerged from my *bayit*, son, I let no one "know" me, no one enter. Your birth-exit purified me, the place, below that had been entered impurely. I tried to wait the years of Biblical Rachel's waiting.

Then Chanan came. (I believed *Ha'Shem* had finally sent him.) And I decided I wanted him to enter me.

(Son, all the other men entered me, broke into my bayit until Henri. ["Breaking and entering." the Americans call it, when you rob their homes violently. Yes, they shot their soul-toxins into me, but they also robbed me -- of innocence, of romance, of trust, of purity. Listen, my son, this is for you.] Even Wolfgang, whom I chose to plant part of you into me, when he entered me, even at my beckoning, he fucked his thing into me. It was the only way I could get you.)

Chanan did not understand that when I brought him into my bayit, he became a part of me. I would hold him inside, even after he had kissed me within. *(I am embarrassed, son, to tell you this. Even after death, I feel shyness. But I give you my last words, so that I can teach you of woman-love. I know that these words you may hear after my death, I pray that you will. For, I cannot be fully at rest -- I remain in whorls of foggy dream-ether -- until I have spoken to you, and you have received my dreams about woman-loving, about my breathlessness.)*

I would hold him and whisper, "Your *bayit*."

Plato teaches that in the beginning, before mankind, all beings had eight limbs, two heads. They, they were split asunder into male and female beings. Since then, Plato explains, these two beings have tried to unite as they were in the beginning, to become one again, to feel whole. When a man belongs to a woman, a woman to a man, (son), and a man leaves, he tears her asunder, tears something out of her. And he, he loses his home.

When a man gives his juices into a woman to beget a child, he is diminished (shrinks, in fact); he loses a part of himself within her. And a woman becomes filled-up. When a man leaves her, even after the moments of lovemaking, she is both full (with his loving fluids) and empty of him. The emptying is violence, a taking away of future hope. (It is the sundering apart that repeats in the present that of which Plato speaks from our prehistory.)

The death of a child is multiple: the death of who he has been and the death of who he might become; multiple deaths, of past and of future. The leaving of Chanan was the death of futures who might have been born from us.

He left me with the fog of cigarettes, the void of loneliness, the rage of jealousy.

He left momentary hope within me, whom, like Benjamin, I lost. He left someone inside me twice, whom I lost twice: two more Benjamins, who became Ben-oni, sons of my pain, became nobodies.

Spore Life

Dearest son, I dreamt to you how a woman can dwell in two places simultaneously: when we were together on the moshav, behind the blue door, I was with you, yet also elsewhere. I try to teach you about woman loving. Hear how a woman can live in two universes, unknown even to the few who love her. (And how a Chanan to united my universes.)

Spore life I had, some time after your birth. I entered a soul spore gradually, not suddenly. Just as the oyster creates the glistening pearl from an irritant of sand, does so gradually, layer by layer, its pearl-child admired, especially after the oyster is, shelled, disemboweled (attacked from the behind, bisecting the strong muscle),discarded. So too, I entered spore life.

Not at your birth. (Although, now I look back and see that I began the shell to protect my soul when I was carrying you. Woman beatings, especially on the pregnant belly, encourage sporulation.) I began to feel a divide in my soul after your birth, then recognized it when Wolfgang began to hurt you (Yes, I knew about this.). And finally, I decided not to resist the spore world when we came for refuge to Aretz: ironic, to come to a land that was to protect us, yet I felt more impinged upon, more needing to buildup the spore walls when we were here. At first, you did not recognize it. Later, when I would retreat to my cave to rest my soul, tired by the active living I had to perform, you noticed. You would come, try to talk, entertain; would do the dances; would wave your hands before my unseeing

eyes to waken me. I am sorry, my son, I was hibernating, trying to regain energies to do the living stuff ... with you.

But, to teach you about spore life, I will tell you about light in the spore (that you could not see). I could usually do the living outside, the playing, the taking to school, the Shabbat hikes with your friends, the piano lessons for you, the, the doing-things with you -- that most people thought I was alive.

Inside the spore is not complete darkness; inside dwell the grays of crepuscule; the grays of the Scandinavian winters that I once saw. The winter's day-time color in Finland is not simple night. It is affected by the steel-blue-gray of the waters around Helsinki. The snows are lit as if from below with a bluish cast; but the light cannot pierce the snow, cannot light the air, as if the blue is captured within the snow. Look out upon the sea, and waves appear, but the color melds into the air. The Finnish air in winter of the eternal night, is gray, grays. You walk about in shifting grays, as if fogs have descended to envelope. Then the air may stir and the snow that crystallizes at the tips of branches into downy stalagmites, disappear, are blown into the gray air: you see swirls of sparkling, glistening, like the aurora borealis, but only white crystals in the gray light. I rubbed my eyes the first time I saw the silent whorls of snow crystals surrounding my head; I rubbed and they still were there.

I was taken, twice, to cross-country ski in Finland, once was by my professor, in the eve, on a lit trail. Old, gooseneck lamps stand along the hilly trail, the lamp's shade capturing a weak bulb's

glimmering light, gathering what light it can, casting downwards to your skis. This ski trail was where my professor had trained as a young soldier, wearing white, bearing a rifle, attacking imaginary Russians (then, when it came time to switch sides, not-so imaginary Krauts). But the second trip, by a fellow soprano and her fiancé, was during the brief glimpse of daylight (from 11 to 2), in the wilderness, on unlit trails. One must return home before dusk-fall, or the snowy hills and ski become one, the landmarks are enshrouded by gray fog, one is lost in a purgatory of iciness. Irma and Yari had brought for me my own wooden cup, a leather loop on the handle to hang from my belt; wooden this cup must be, for a metal cup would freeze your lips to its rim. On its bottom, primitively engraved, my name. They brought skis for me, waxed them for the snow; quickly rewaxed en route when the brief light began to change the snow's texture. They said we would stop for hot chocolate and I looked for a hut en route; the hut was a bush and the hot chocolate in a thermos Yari tucked beneath his jacket. Yari said that he could smell spring. I, I smelled nothing, saw only crystals of snow softening the landscape. When I saw my first uphill, I asked about a tow rope; they leaped ahead, teaching me to herringbone up. There are many different grays in the Finnish winter air.

As there were in my spore shell. Know this: it is not complete darkness, not black within my spore shell. I saw shades of gray: when you smiled, light entered through the shell; when I took you and Nissim, and the other children on tiyul, discovered the series of shallow lakes, each waterfalling into another, when we crossed the

lakes, finding barely-sub merged flat rocks to walk on water; then, different flashes of light penetrated the spore.

And there are colors in grays. I tried to teach you, tried to show you that gray has within it other colors, hides beauty, or uses the beauty of other colors to enhance itself. Remember, when I washed the Armani shawl in the bathroom sink, washed gently by hand, I called you to look. Look! From the shawl's gray, bled colors into the sink water: a purple, a red, browns, which became taupe as they melded. I withdrew the shawl, cradling it gently, even as it dripped on the tiles, so that you could see the colors emerge, changing with time. And at the same time, the same time as I was showing you the genius of Armani to hide such elegance within cloth, I thought to myself that its beauty was being bled, that I was bleeding some of this beauty from the shawl. Was its beauty being diminished (or only changed) with this washing, as I felt I was being bled of the grace of life?

Two worlds in which I dwelled; moving firmly into my spore world, even as I did the formal dance of living in the outside world. Aretz, this "land that consumes its inhabitants," sent me further within. I could not find my culture; the Jew cowboys laughed at my Frenchified Hebrew, talk of opera, allusions to classics. To the old Russian Jew women at the swimming pool, I talked excitedly in Russian about Pushkin, Lermontov; they asked, "Pushkin? Does he live in town? Is he related to the butcher?" Each time, another layer of spore wall I excreted to protect my soul.

This was the gray of my soul-spore. You cast light; but, I needed also the warm soil of a man, of Chanan.

Milk and Honey:

A Land that Consumes its Inhabitants.

I return to you.

My Garance, when I think of your escape to Israel, I think of how Moses' spy said this Land consumes its inhabitants.

I tell you, how Freud called this an odd place, after Stefan Zweig returned full of his enthusiasm in the '30's from Palestine. Odd, Freud continued: from this sliver of barren hills and plains came no science, little art; yet, it gave birth to three delusions. Deserved more study, Freud concluded. (Bless the scientist).

Here's how I "studied," learned from you.

We drive to your home, west from Zikhron Yakov, the overlook of the Nadiv, the place of the first vineyards, across the Galil, past Armageddon (a "mesa" so modest a squat "tell" not as nefarious as it should (or would) be), past the plains where Deborah directed a reluctant General Barak to pursue the Assyrians' chariots, now mired in mud and vulnerable to defeat -- descend into Tiberius, a more town modest than it need be.

You teach me the vegetation. (I struggle to learn.) The seven original Biblical species: olive and grape, wheat and barely, date, fig and pomegranate. The profiles of trees, most unfamiliar to this America: poetical names -- terebinth and tamarisk, acacia and arbutus, date and doun palms, Judas and Cypress.

The olive, a hardy lover of limey soil, endures. At Kibbutz Ramat Rachel in Jerusalem, you show me the three olive trees placed atop the entrance gate years ago. They yearn for soil; send their roots downwards, descend from their perch to reach earth. (So too, you stretched to find your home here, but hardy you are not, not like the olive.) To be eaten, the ripe olive must be submerged in brine; fresh, it is bitter, stains the fingers.

The Almond, you teach me, gives first flower in spring, virgin white. The olive, a hardy lover of lime, endures. (You consider yourself like the almond; your flowering innocence taken too soon.)

You teach me: the prophet Amos's profession was to grow the cypress straight, unbent to the sky, so that it could be felled, planed for the Temple. For this, he progressively, patiently, piled the earth against the tree's trunk as it grew (like growing white asparagus). You show me this, on what I thought was the monotonous road from Tel Aviv towards Jerusalem; you show me Amos's trees.

I feel a stranger in a strange land, yet at home, both in Israel and with you. You have French, I English and together, our broken Hebrew. Amos Oz proclaimed that modern Hebrew was truly born only when an Ashkenazi Jewish boy met a Sephardi Jewish girl: they needed a common language of love. No longer boy or girl, we found Hebrew, but only to begin. Love's tongue is bodily; we speak fluently.

Ashtanga

And then there is yoga.

I'm not surprised. You, a singer, would do yoga. To sustain yourself, your body. And in this new land, where you could not sing for supper, you teach yoga.

You invite me to your class. This I do not expect -- nor my reactions.

Venue, the community center: dowdy inside, body odors emanate from lime-washed, palm-smudged walls; pungent, sweat-soaked, sour, leavened with mold. One mirrored wall, its mirrors pock-marked with age, like the liver-spotted skin of elderly hands.

The class, mostly Russian emigre ladies yearning to be beautiful; at least to feel so: corpulence, puckered thighs, cellulitic arms, pendulous webs of flesh slung from upper arms, flapping flesh, like vestigial wings. As if these women are preparing to take off, be removed from their bodies. As they once escaped Russian gulags, they now hoped to escape their bodies. Two men also. Had heard that you would be teaching: the new teacher, shapely, elegant, a Frenchie. To cop a look. Also Russian, these are adorned with so many chains and rings and bracelets, they give new meaning to heavy metal. Latex tights the men wore, the better to show a genital bulge, their best endowment.

A dingy room with overworn carpet, thin Rubbermaid mats or personal shmattes rolled before each neophyte's toes, two rows

facing each other, knockkneed. You place me at your left, caution me to be at ease, breathe into each movement, not force the muscles.

Whatever.

Ashtanga yoga, you explain, you teach; pure, no faddish Bikram sauna. As they stand, the women with eyes shut, palms up, fingers touching, they moan “Om,”; the men, eyes peering right, at you, simply moan. You chant the eight limbs of Ashtanga: yama, self-restraint; myama, discipline; asana, posture; pranayama, breath control; pratyana, sense control; dharana, concentration; dhyana, meditation; samadhi, contemplation. I can’t absorb all of this. I mumble the phrases to myself, hope to burn them into my memory along with you. How I recall this Hindu-babble, only because it fell from your lips.

After your death. I murmur the words, memorize them, I resurrect you with each breath, the breaths you had taught me in the class. The breath you kept saying you couldn’t catch.

Sssaa, with each inhalation. Khhaa with each exhalation.

From the back of the throat you tell us to breathe. Empty the belly; breathe in the lungs, into the hollow of your armpits, down the spine, to the tailbone.

(But, now, your soul, n’shama, I no longer can inhale, n’shima.)

The class is at moments funny, at moments intimate.

The bandhas you teach next. The bandhas precede each movement, the asanas.

Begin from the top.

The jalandhara bhand, the neck lock, you teach. Contract the neck and throat, chin resting on collarbone notch, keeping head level. You assure us: the Kundalini yoga kriyas (those involuntary twitches, tremors as tensions are released) generate vast energy, produce psychic heat, pranic nadis channels are opened. If this bhand is not done, pressure may occur in our eyes, ears, heart.

Proceeding downwards, is the uddiyana bhand, the diaphragm lock: create a cavity to massage the heart muscles, stimulate compassion. Apply on exhale.

Later, you insist I need more uddiyana bhand, more compassion. For you.

In the end, you teach the mul bhand, the root lock, the perineum lock. You recite, “Contract the anal sphincter, draw it up -- also the sex organ.” (How quaint.) “Now the naval point drawn in, to invite the the prana, our generative energy, join with the apana, our eliminative energy.”

Only then, do you begin the various positions, contortions, body twists, spine arcs: upward dog, downward dog. Then you pour out words whose meanings I don't recall, but whose sounds flutter in my mouth, murmur across my lips, like a stream over smooth rocks, so

that I can evoke you; purvatasana, navasana, soopta kurmasana, soopta konasana, upavishtakonasana.

I watch even as I perform (or try to perform). You, recite, breathe, move from student to student (as we all are students of our bodies, our souls, you demur). A touch on her; a shift of his upward reaching hand towards his face; your foot presses another's foot. Brief touches, gentle, without eros.

Then you surprise me. As I try to contort into some sort of lotus -- soles to my inner thighs, knees out and down, elbows on knees, palms inward, upward, fingers touching -- you sit. Before me. You shift into me. Like yin into yang, you fit yourself into me, gracefully. How you do this, I don't understand, but the final position is like key into lock, or like Plato's parable of the original beings -- two-headed, eight-limbed. A woman entering a man -- a wonder. Facing me, your legs cradle my right knee, your left shin presses inside my right, downward, opens me, your right hand on my left arm, shoulder, opens me further. And then, you breathe sotto voce, eyes to my eyes, "Open your chest upwards, open your heart." I am entranced: gentle sensuality without eros, a being held by you for a few moments longer.

Later, a Russian woman, whose face is a hunk of flesh with two eyes embedded, tries to lean forward, sitting, legs and arms extended. You aid her wordlessly. From behind, you make a backwards bridge. (Later, you call it Purvatanasana.) Your legs extend, soles to the mat, arms reach backwards, you cradle her. Your palms to the mat, your

back on hers, your face upwards, your head in the nape of her neck and you breathe with her. The two of you breathe as one. As I yearned to do with you; one being, forever.

In yoga, you breathe, outside you could not breathe.

In such manner, I wanted to be held by you, suspended in time.

But, time would not remain suspended for us.

Promo Photos, with a Vengeance

Ending one visit, I want one photo. A way to hold you between visits,.

I ask, implore, plead to take a photograph of you; but one, to carry in my wallet. Of the boy, fine, you permit. Of the kid and you, you standing face averted, or deleted yourself from the digital frame -- too ugly, not nice, wrinkled skin, hair bad, you protest.

And one night, with a vengeance, you show me the promo photos, the promos of you.

In the borrowed apartment overlooking the Mediterranean, in a building of peeling paint, crumbling facade, a tired structure, son abed, I ask once more. Once too often.

You erupt; yank a valise from a high cupboard of your closet-sized bedroom of your parents' place. The old-fashioned valise -- too bulky for today's travel, bulging soft sides, two straps straining to hold its sagging sides, the latches useless -- is a valise of refugees. You drag it down, slam it upon the floor, haul it to the fluorescent-lit kitchen. You insist, "You! You want to see photos, to see pictures? I will show you, show you photos!"

With two flailing hands, your weight back on her heels, refusing help, you jerk the valise atop the marble-blue formica table, edged with fluted extruded aluminum, a splay-legged table of the 60's. The table groans, briefly sags, then recovers its spring. You unbelt the

valise, throw open one side, send photos fluttering out, like trapped bats escaping a cave.

Rapidly, but knowingly, your fingers fling photos, assorted sizes, playbills, posters, still shots from films. Yes, this is you and Placido Domingo -- one of the very few gentlemen on and off stage. Then you alone, skin oiled bronze, glistening tops of your breasts pouring out from a leopard skin, one shoulder-strapped outfit. You draw a bow, a hybrid Diana/Aphrodite at hunt. Profiled, you look to the right and upwards, as if towards some skyward prey. And another and another of the same. Of you and Henri at the wedding; having eloped, you wed, only with friends present; you parade to the restaurant in a beige wedding dress (not white -- white is for purity, virgins, you insist). On cobbled, piss-stained, stone Parisian Rues, your short train dragged.

The gargoyle corps singer, leering from the velvet curtain (at you?), beetle-browed, hunchbacked, knuckles dangling below his right knee, the left fist tearing the curtain aside. Beneath his tights, were lumps, tumors, (Neurofibromatosis, I recognized -- with time, some would transform into cancerous fibrosarcomas; his lumpy body would kill him); these made him more the gargoyle, the troll, the subhuman. You told me of his wild animal sexing, of how the producer called both of you La Belle et Le Bette. And a beast he looked to be, a throwback to some Neanderthal, or an auroch bull, barely bipedal, from the Lascaux Grotto.

And dinner parties after midnight at wonderful restaurants, where owners comped you bill for your beauty, and nearby admirers sent bottles of champagne even after you married. Staccato, you named the circle of sychophants crowded about the table, intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals, as if I might recognize some of these characters. Black and white photos of moppish Beatle-haired men, cigarettes dangling from a lip; long-haired woman, cigarettes poised between talon-nailed fingers, caught in mid-motion, waving away the very smoke they produced.

And the photos of posters done by a street artist whom you championed, even arranging a celebratory outing with friends to paste up his posters around Paris. It was the era of happenings. An era when everyone bared one's crotch.

I concentrate. I try to find an order to these, guess an age, but am confounded by your flurrying hands, the mismatched photo sizes and eras of your life. In your fury, you dismiss these times of your life, disdain your beauty which now had abandoned you ... and defeated you when it was present.

The photographers wanted to disrobe you, strip you. Your operatic voice mattered not. The male leads were not flesh-posed. Every photographer, but one, was a seducer, a voyeur, a flesh beast. For an opera poster, you are posed with your lead. He stands behind you, fully dressed, looking over your shoulder, leering downwards on your breasts, as you are posed one quarter turn away, coyly, your costumed peeled from your shoulders, your decollage deep. "T. and

A.," the producers promoted -- tits and ass. Silent you were; naked you felt.

The torrent of photos fly at my face, like leaves stripped from their limbs by a hurricane of furious memories.

Then, a moment of respite: I saw the photos by the one photographer whom you liked; a sense of rest, a moment of repose. For a moment, I see a smile reach your eyes. He took you to the shore, you in a simple white dress, let you play on the beach, in the shallow waves. Like a child, you remembered, you felt like a child at the beach and he let you be. I ask if I could have but one to keep. You snatch one, one of the beach scenes, tear it into shreds, strew the shreds onto the linoleum floor, shut the valise, restrap, drag back to the bedroom, then, too exhausted to hoist it, you slump to the bed.

You never cry. You once said that the tears leaked inside, never from your eyes.

Even when months later, I try to say how I can not live with your jealousy, accusations, bombardment of malignant fantasies of what I did back in the States, You can only fret about, make something for me to eat, beg me to sit. And when I put my hand on your arm at the same formica table in the kitchen, where you had once disemboweled the valise of memories, and I ask if you understand that I am close to leaving forever, you smoke, look blank, respond from the corner of your lips that no tears would ever come. You had not cried with tears since you had been twelve, since your plaintive, "I am hungry."

How could I leave you?

How could I stay?

I'm Hungry (Or, When to feed a girl)

Son, my first words after my childhood fall, two days after, I cry, "I'm hungry."

It looked like an accident, but I chose it.

After Ponytail did what he did, and the coach screamed "Jewish slut," he phoned my parents.

He would tell them what I had "done," that I was done, off the team. They must take me home the next day. Today, I was to compete as usual, ride aggressively.

Wickets we had that day, hurdles. I knew what I would do. I changed, put on the riding helmet, but loosely placed the strap through the D-ring. I knew my mount, what he was comfortable doing, how he responded to the harness. He had a tender mouth. At the highest hurdle, I jerked the leash, felt the metal cut into his soft mouth. He reared. I fell. Helmet flew.

And I lay there, eyes closed. The coach tries to rouse me, calls the ambulance. At the hospital, the doctor is kind. I look, but do not speak. For two days I will not speak.

Until the night nurse bends over, whispers, "What can I do for you?" Then, I cry for hunger. I cry and have not cried on the outside since (until the tear at my shekhita). And she feeds me. She calls the doctor, who talks with my parents. I think he told them that something had happened to me. A woman thing was done to this girl. And then

my mother took me home and brought me to the ancient doctor with the cold speculum.

I was just hungry.

Chanan (Listen also son), like day following night, I fell in love with you repeatedly not once. But the night you feed me, I fall again, a fall into soft love. After our bodies love, I whisper “I’m hungry.” You slip on your green silk pants, the ones you had sent me and I had worn to bed when you were not there. You slip into the kitchen, are gone for minutes, too many, it felt. And you return. A platter, the silver platter for Shabbat, you decorated with fruit: strawberries cut and fanned; apples in moon crescents like a crown; green grapes, cut in half, like jade ovals, the silver shimmering through the green. I had not been fed like this, even when the nurse brought apple compote to a 12 year old who was crying of hunger.

Later, apple compotes you bring. I asked, you bring. The good memory of horse camp was the apple compote each day. Not apple sauce; compote with chunks of fruit and tinge of cinnamon. You promise to bring from California different apple compotes each visit, to find the one closest to the one a 12 year old enjoyed. Apple names new to me: Gravensteins (a grave name for such a sparkling taste); Macintosh (to be eaten with a raincoat!); red and golden delicious. I learned the taste of English through you. And I am cured of the yearning for apple compote through you.

I try to explain to you that while I was a woman of 40, I had not learned to love, and I had the hands and feet of a 12 year old, perhaps also the heart of one. And a tongue, and lips, and mouth -- full of hunger.

Snow

rarely falls, even in the Golan. It did the winter I visited. It fell not where you lived, but at the Syrian border, where you once lived. It fell on the religious moshav that once treated you like a pariah; where your son still had friends who would sometimes call, sometimes ask to visit, until their parents said “No,” not to the home of a zonah -- whore; and your son would beg to go there, and at times, you couldn’t because it hurt you, and at times you did, and the children would call him mamzer, bastard.

This day they call, the children. “Come for the snow.” You look at me, without words. I say that I would drive you both.

Snow driving I know from growing up in Upstate New York; how to take the turn without fishtailing; how to ease out of a snowbank; how to keep a bag of sand in the trunk on rear-wheel drives, and a shovel, and a wooden board for traction.

No roads cleared in this outpost of outposts, this knife edge of border, barely populated by Jews some 60 km from Damascus. You navigate, point out the direction to the abandoned Syrian army swimming pool into which you plunged into murky green water that seemed bottomless. We drive past the park where boys played along the shallow stream that slowly cascaded into shallow pools that drained via veils of waterfalls into lower pools, even more shallow, flat rocks just beneath their surface; your son and Natti stood on the slick rock plates, asked me to photograph them as if they, Christ-like were walking on water, while you, a few yards back, lay restfully on the

picnic table. Your son said he had never seen you rest like this, nap, in public. You were comfortable, then.

Not now. Now, I do not notice how you become tense, your voice tighter, strained as you tell me how hidden was the entrance to the moshav; first there would be the unmarked back entrance, the one you would use to drive out to the many yeshivot where you taught around the Golan. Then the main entrance, also unmarked. These Jews were unannounced residents; only those who know and are attentive are welcome, and if not welcome, at least able to enter, as we did.

The entrance feels kibbutz. The winding road, met by the back road; the boys, teens, hanging off a truck as it skids through the snow, out to the road; the guard shack; modest looking homes; children in the snow. It feels kibbutz, but it is not. It is a persecutory home, a place that needs to take in new guests, so that some can be extruded, so that these paranoid settlers could strengthen their fears of the outside world, the world they tried to escape by moving here, to the edge of the edge of Israel, to the border of real enemies, when they could not escape the true enemy who lives within themselves. Like radar, they seek incoming missiles, distracting themselves from the missiles within, ready to explode. And when they drove you out, and when they drove out others, they felt cleansed, and safer for a while.

You stay in the car after I edge into a parking place where the still-falling snow would not imprison us. You stay. On the berry-edged path to her friends, on the way, I teach the boy how to make angels, snow angels, lying on my back, waving arms and legs, popping up to see the memory of my body remaining, soon to melt away. And he entered another world, a snow heaven as he lie on his back, arms waving, wings flapping, angels of snow he left. Laughter come from within him that I have never heard, giggles of joy, unrestrained.

At the house, he introduces me as abba to the sheitel-headed woman with the New Jersey accent. She does the Orthodox Jewish geography -- a distant relative to geneology -- to insist that we must know someone in common in the States. Then, quickly to matters at hand, she asks when I would be returning to the States and would I briing a little package, a small gift to her brother, a special medicine for her ailing mother in New Jersey, very close to New York, a cab ride from the airport. I watch her hands in mid-air measure the size of her package, intrigued as her hands, as if propelled apart by magnetic poles, triy to squeeze closer together, then bounce away. The imaginary package changes sizes before my eyes.

Then I tell her the truth. (I am a sorry liar; truth a good ally.) I travel with carry-on only; and only one bag; and when El Al security asks me if anyone has asked me to bring a package, I will tell them "Yes." Then, they take the package and might put it into one of their explode-a-package machines. And, poof, no more package. She, dubious, relents, discards me, the glint gone from her eyes, extinguished, as if to say, "What's he good for anyway?" I notice the

kid scrunched up against his buddy on the couch. We agree I would return before dinner, or when the boy called if earlier, or when she called. (Hedging her bets, I am thinking.)

And I find my way back to the lot alone. And you alone, in your oversized man's suede ankle-length coat, the one from Armani, now child-stained with paints, inky hem, fraying at the sleeves, the sleeves that fall over your hands to the knuckles, that made you look like a child, overclothed.

You stay seated. Until I arrive. You want to show me the house, the apartment, the concrete bunker facing the donkey compound. Snow, swirling, softens the bunker look. When I see the infamous door, the turquoise blue you painted, now faded, but still there, it is so small, from afar, as if to admit only elves. You show me where you had planted the garden with marigolds, flowers between you and the donkeys that the moshav women claimed you had planted to lure, poison their children. A slender weeping willow you had planted, now barren of leaves, but limbs hanging forlorn, still weeping. I ask, or you ask -- I don't recall -- that I photograph you before the door. I must have asked and you agreed, because of what happened next.

The snow a swirling scrim between us, the wind blowing your hair, eddying with the flakes, mini-toronadoes. You stand square before the door, the grey-ecru Armani blowing to the south, the blue door unmoved.

And, I am so startled, I press my finger to the camera and can't release; and the camera shoots rapidly, as if capturing a sports event,

trying to grasp each tear that erupts, even as you twist away. I had never seen you cry. I zoom closer, unbelieving, watching if this were true, watching you spiral away from me, as tears leap from your eyes, your hair obscuring briefly as it tries to catch up with your head; the wind and snow blew southwards and your body, your face turned north. I stare through the cyclops lens until I have the sense to approach you. And you fall into my arms, and I hear sobbing on my shoulder, you facing where the donkeys once lived, those mulish animals who once had guarded you from the meanness of the envious women with worn-out eyes, and worn-out wombs, and wiggly sheitels' askew, who despised you.

All I have left are pictures, snowy shots of you trying to hide tears.

The von Karajan Bird

My truest love, the flower I give you at the restaurant almost destroys us, did erode us.

You chose the restaurant, the boy away for the night. On the shores of Kinneret, you found a place for fish. (You always loved fish, devoured them, even at breakfast, or when I first took you and your son out in Netanya at crepuscule.)

The evening seems wonderful, until the flower.

The kitchen is outside, at the rear entrance: split wood cords piled helter skelter (no Yekke here, with careful piles), the fragrance of the open flames. A short, dark woman works the flames, a small, black ax to split the logs that seared the fish, a female Hephaistus.

Inside the restaurant opens to glass walls on three sides, opens to the Sea. and the pier at the end offers outdoor tables, kerosene torches overhead to soften evening's chill.

But you want to sit inside, sought the right table, facing south, away from the sad, forlorn city. The waitress suggests a wine sold only to this restaurant; grapes from the Golan make it unsalable outside Israel, as these vines grew on "occupied" territories.

The Intifada has thinned the diners. But we watch the Golan's hills trying to grasp the last rays of the sun before it left. The hills show variegated hidden colors (grays that you loved, pinks, the white

gulls weaving the colors, you taught me) as if trying to slow the sun's descent, departure. In Hebrew, there is a special word for sun's setting, sho'ka'aht, a triplet of descent that slows its disappearance.

You notice the birds gathering over the pier on the lamp posts. A Knesset meeting, a political gathering, a consultation, or perhaps their recounting of the day, it appears. They move about, come and go, and returned. One bird perched alone, centered, pole to himself. This one you call the von Karajan bird: the conductor, German, whom no bird would challenge. And then the others become his raucous choir: flitting, chattering, taunting, chorusing and challenging each other for positions closer to the maestro. Von Karajan -- serene -- placid, quiet, sits, watches.

The restaurant plays romantic American songs, mostly from the 60's, 70's: Hootchy-Kootchy Man, One More Kiss Tonight, Teach Me Tonight ("Did you say, I've got a lot to learn?... Teach me, tonight"); Do You Wanna Dance (Beach Boys); Where Did Our Love Go ("Baby, Baby, Baby don't leave me/ Please don't leave me, all by myself/I've got this burning, yearning feeling inside me, deep inside me and it hurts so bad/ You came into my heart"); You can't hurry love ("You've just got to wait/ love won't come easy, it's a game of give and take ... How many heartaches must I stand/ before I find the love that will let me live again."). Lot's of Diana Ross. But, Nat King Cole's Mona Lisa I serenade to you at the table.

You confess that when you first heard me sing at the Ulpan, singing Hebrew prayers, you told to yourself that you could never

make love to a man who sang so badly. Tonight, you laugh, admit that you didn't understand many of the words, beg me not to sing; touch my arm, as if to say that I may sing to you as long as I wish. (And, von Karajan simply stares down on us. I think he approves.)

Then, they put on Al Jarreau's My Foolish Heart. I rise, walk around the table, sweep you up, dance you out the door, unto the pier, my lips at your ear, singing:

"There's a line between love/

and fascination/

'S hard to see on an evening such as this.

For they both give very same sensation/

When you're lost in the magic of a kiss.

Your lips are,

Are much too close to mine/

Beware my foolish heart/

But should,

Should our eager lips combine/

Then, let,

Let the fires start.

For this time/

It isn't fascination/

Or a dream that will fade and fall apart.

It is love,

This time it's love,

My foolish heart."

The birds arise, fly upwards in a spiral circling the pier, then east to the Golan Hills. Von Karajan too.

Then, time to leave.

As you went to freshen yourself, I see the waitresses putt Sweet Marys, joyful flowers on each table. I ask, could I buy a bouquet for you. The two waitresses laugh, insist I simply take one. And that moment, you appear. And a fury envelops you.

"A moment, a minute," you say, "I am gone and you are flirting with young waitresses!" You grab the flowers, I think to toss it; instead shake them at me; I thought they would lose their heads, their stems, slender necks, would snap, a touch of "Madame" Guillotine.

In the car, you continue. "In France," you proclaim, "A woman would throw a plate of food in a man's face for such an insult, to flirt with waitresses." You remember that I asked one waitress the origins of her unusual name; you recall that I left too large a tip for another, an invitation for a tryst in your country. You scream, I drive. You scorn, I steer. You stomp the rusted floorboards; I imagine you would

stomp through to the road, leaving us to paddle home like some modern age Flinstones.

“A woman of my age,” you tirade, “Can not tolerate such flirting.” Yes, perhaps when you were in the 20’s, 30’s. Then you were beautiful; heads would turn as you entered restaurants; restauranters waved your check; champagne sent to your table. But now, now, you insist, that beauty is gone, “I am not nice,” you keep repeating, batting the flowers against the dash. (A hardy species, I think, the slender neck of its stem holding firmly its head.)

I never tell you what I thought of doing. Here is what I say, “You bring pleasure to my eyes.” “You are my La Jocunda.”

Here is what I think: my week visit I will cut short, right now; I will pull to the road side, leave you the car, grab a cab to the airport, devil take my valise. I could not say that.

You say later that I took to heart too much your words, your temper; that you were Latin of temperament; perhaps you needed a Latin man. A Latin man -- perhaps Italian, who knows how to flatter women, French might do -- you would insist dismissively is what you needed. Your hand rigid as an ax, slashed the air between us, severing some invisible artery. Anyhow, your Morrocan Berber grandmother had warned you against Ashkenazi men, for we were not really Jewish. “Vus-vus” men she called us. Find a Sephardi, she warned you. (And you found a French Catholic.)

I said -- once, and that was too much, that once -- “It seemed to me (when uncomfortable, I use such orotund palaverous phrases, “it

seemed to me”) -- that you had had plenty, plenty too many Latin men.” (And I only thought, “between your legs, a regular Holland tunnel for commuters, passing through to reside elsewhere”).) A sedate, Yekke Ashkenazi might do you fine for a change.

But I was singing clean, quiet Bach preludes against your Sturm und Drang, ornate, stentorian Wagnerian geschrei. Blown away. On stage, you refused to sing Wagner -- an anti-Semite, you insisted -- but on the stage of your life, you played the Valkyre.

(But I thought -- reviewing the roster of those with whom you had lain, even the man you married who would run you to a wall of death, would disappear for months to foreign lands to “pacify” people (murder them, he did); impregnators who tried to “undo” the deed by beating on your belly like a tom-tom -- plenty of Latin men.) Maybe these unkind thoughts, never spoken, were still felt by you, the secrets of my heart were read by you.

I loved and adored you. And this seemed never enough.

Did you sense that you were losing me?

Chinese Women Sex,

Or Japanese

Your mad on me lasted three weeks before you told me the why.

I did know before you told me, why you had joined the volunteer police. You hinted that you had a surprise for me, that you were training for something. Not a job; they couldn't afford to pay. But, they would teach you. You hinted, because you feared that I would disapprove.

Then you explained (what I already had known) that you were trying to get closer to Henri, your first husband. You would be in the police force, like Henri. Henri had chided you : he did things, substantive matters of life, fought wars, kept order (he said "peacekeeping," but it was simply French-sanctioned murders). But you -- he said -- you dealt in illusions, illusory matters, pretending to be tragic women -- singing street walkers, spurned lovers, Spaniards, Japanese -- entertaining, but nothing substantive. (And you took this to heart, you believed him, your singing waned beneath Henri.)

Now, you would show him. (Even as he was not there to be shown, as he was now gone, not to be bothered. You telephoned him in Paris, he now remarried, and he begged you, don't speak to him.)

They gave you a gun (neshek, which has the same root as “kiss.”)
They showed you how to shoot, put you in the back seat, the two
men sitting in front.

And the first night, they broke you, shattered you twice.

First, they broke your spirit, spending the night chasing
runaway teens (as you once had been, living on the streets),
harassing the girls, hectoring, lecturing, sending them back to homes.
(And you feared the homes to which they were returned, for you
could remember homes you had escaped.)

But the second, the overt spirit-breaking, brought about your
accusations against me.

You called. It was after your midnight “police” shift, urgently, to
ask whom I had abed. Was she Chinese or Japanese, you
demanded. Was she my secret wife, or just a whore? Was she
pregnant and how far along? Was she “nice” (that word that I learned
meant beautiful to you)? Anyhow, you insisted dismissively, there
were many women in San Francisco. If you were a man, you
proclaimed, you too would have many women; you would have a
woman in every port, not only one. Was I a Captain Pinkerton,
courting you the Jewish Butterfly, only to abandon you? Did I expect
you like Cio Cio San, to slash yourself when I abandoned you? You
know how to do that, you assured, me, having practiced on stage.
And then, then, you told me of the knife you kept in the door of the
car, you kept at the ready.

I begged you, whereof these accusations. I asked, how I could answer you, both believably, truthfully. That I was faithful to you.

For three weeks you continued, until you told me how it started.

That first night, the guards babbled about prostitutes in Tel Aviv, good-looking whores imported from Latvia, Lithuania, former Soviet Union, smuggled across the Egyptian Sinai border by the Russian Jewish Mafia.

And as you became uncomfortable, as you began to speak protectively of these flesh-serfs, the men began to have, so to speak, their way with you.

They teased:

Good Chinese and Japanese whores were to be had in San Francisco too. And, your American lover had such whores, Asian candy.

You protested. And the guard on the passenger side said that some day they would show you videotapes of Chanan having sex with Chinese women, or maybe they were Japanese. They were police, they had videos, they had evidence.

And you caved.

I asked, "Why do you believe the words of such vicious men, redneck strangers over a man who adores you.?"

But, you said, they are policeman.

Your son, you confessed, laughed at the accusations. Sensible boy said, how could they have videotapes.

And you confronted them. (Well, confronted is not what you did with anyone, other than me.)

To which the guard sneered, “ You deserve to be treated this way by men; if you believe we had videos of your lover having sex with Chinese women, you deserve to be teased, for you are a fool and a freyer!”

And, you realized that they were lying.

But it seemed that a scar was left in your soul. You could not fully trust me.

Anyhow, you challenged, why would I be so taken with you? In your mind, you were and old, worn-out single mother without career, without beauty, “not nice.” (You were a Groucho Marx of your own soul -- you would not belong to a man who would have you as a beloved.)

You could not love a woman whom I loved.

I prayed that home day you might love yourself as I loved you.

Which was not to happen.

How He was Picked

Son. Dream this. How he was picked, Wolfgang, the one who put you into me, I mean. Not how I picked him. Then, it felt to me, "How he was picked," as if I sleepwalked into him. No, as if I were driven to him.

But now, in a dream ether, I am more awake to myself. And I can dream more truthfully to you.

Son, you will feel that with each dream -- as you grab these dreams, as you snatch them from the ether, as you are prepared to receive me -- each dream will be more truthful, purer than the previous. For you to dream the core truths in the beginning would be nightmarish. You will dream truth in layers, each peeled to reveal more. And my dreams are to instruct you, in woman-finding, in woman-loving, in being woman-loved.

I have sent early dreams of how you were got. Also true. Now truer.

(Truth in dream-ether comes to me, but it is not so harsh. I am beyond hurt.)

Do not be harsh in your judgments of me. Listen. Watch. Dream.

Zeus transformed himself out of lust, into a swan upon glimpsing and desiring Leda. Spartan King Tyndareus, her mortal

husband, was no impediment to Zeus. The rape of Leda, many call it. And for Zeus-swan, it was rape. But for Leda? Rape is the title by moralistic men. But look at DaVinci's Leda and the Swan; she embraces Zeus whose eyes are trained upon her, even as she gazes lovingly on her hatching children. Or Michelangelo, whose Leda wraps her leg around Zeus, gathering him tightly into her as they gaze into each other. From this, came Helena, the most beautiful of woman.

A barren Leda would understand the desire to be in fruition, to have a god impregnate, a powerful one, who dismisses boundaries of society, who has spawned many demigods, who will spawn her demigod child.

My son.

Dream of Tamar. Empty-wombed Tamar, twice-widowed woman, who disguises herself as harlot to lure Judah. Judah, the lion mounts upon her, sexes her.

I have told you Tamar's story in life. But you did not know that I was telling your story (did you?), my yearning. To the moralists, Judah is a whore monger, a loin leaper, an impulse ridden crouching lion, ready to leap.

But for Tamar, Judah is the lion to pounce, mount her, make her mother of lion cubs. Romulus and Remus (whelped of Mars) sucked of wolf-teats, built Rome. So she would suckle lions to build ... Judea.

This I sought -- only for you -- to create a lion of you.

And to create a lion, I sought a lion. Yes, others saw Wolfgang as beneath me (when I sought to be beneath him); yes, he was an animal who could not be restrained (although when I emptied him, I tamed him); and yes, yes, he was not sweet, as gentle Henri.

But he was fierce. He would dominate. He would burst society's rules. He knew I wanted a Jew? He would feign Jew to lure me.

People pitied me for my bruises, my broken ribs, shattered wrist, gifts of Wolfgang. But each blow showed me, proved me his power, the power I wanted to transfer to you. I felt his power.

Pity me not. I sought a lion. I lured him. He mounted me.

I made you.

I would have a life time with you after Wolfgang would be gone. (For, I knew I would discard him, dismiss him, having gotten what I needed from him, this splash of germ plasm that helped make you.) Then, a lifetime to sculpt your power so you would be a king among men, a David.

The moment before he came into me (Listen hard son, as difficult as this may be. Look at this dream. Hear me.) I cast my arms over my head, over the pillows, head thrown back, throat bared, and hoarsely whispered, "Take me." And he, he became enraged and more powerful, he came volcanic and erupted.

And you I had.

I had you.

In Dreams, Reality;

(Son and my Chanan, dream me into your souls.)

Chanan, even after you left (after I made you leave, when I didn't want you to leave, when I knew that this would be the beginning of my death), I dreamt for you. I dreamt of you. I dreamt with you.

We were on an Island. There is a tempest, a ship approaching, disgorging its passengers, an array of characters. A castrati sings. I find beauty in his voice, which you cannot tolerate. (It is the banshee wail of the castrati singing Gluck's Orfeo, who begins "Orfeo et Euridyce," his back to the audience, bewailing Euridyce's second and final death. I, from the wings, see the audience wince, jerk back into their seats as if scorched by Orfeo's seared soul.) I tell you that I want to go home on the ship, still afloat. You hesitate.

And I awake, yearning for you. I telephone you after the dream. You never knew; I said nothing, waiting only to hear your voice and unable to speak. (I waited for you to say that you would return to me. But I said nothing and you did not know I was there, yearning.)

Chanan, I think you into my mind. I work to understand what you might say my dream tells me, the story I tell myself in my dream. (Even in death, dreams become understanding.)

Yes, I am dreaming that with you I will be saved from my years of isolation. Yes, I dream of being Miranda (and Euridyce), and after years to be awakened, unencapsulated, like a spore, to find your

warm, moist soul within which I can germinate, come life. And you: my Prospero, my Francisco, my Orfeo. And the castrati is the fragment of my own soul (perhaps my Caliban, perhaps his mother) who must be left behind as I emerge from the underground of my making. I do not want you to look back, but to look forward, yet the castrati's scorching voice reminds you of my past, of my "Calibaness." I needed you to remain with me to help repair me.

But it is my dream. And I awaken before being able to take us off that isle. I am left yearning for you and unable to have you; not in dreamness, but in reality.

All this, you might guess from my dream alone, and all that you know of me. But you never knew that this dream alludes to Fellini's *E La Nave Va*, "And The Ship Sailed On," Fellini's last film; in which he appeared, as a narrator, in which he weaves together the threads, the warp and woof, of characters into a fabric of poignance, a voyage after death. (He does not reveal that he filmed his final story in the now-empty pasta factory where his father met his mother and carried her away. That is too personal to say directly.) A diva dies. Her last wish is to have her ashes spread at her birth home island and to have those who adored her voyage the three days with her ashes. An odd lot this is: singers, some competitive divas, some adoring tenors; a muslim sheik, perhaps a former lover; a sexually ambiguous lover, who lives in her stateroom, replaying her last goodbyes, like an artless, but adoring Protas to Martha Graham's genius; a Grand Duke, of uncertain age, of questionable gender and his older blind sister, who "sees" colors associated with chords; the captain and

crew; the furnace keepers in the Dante'esque Inferno-belly, who keep the ship moving; who in turn are moved when the divas come to visit from a mezzanine and oblige them with arias; and Fellini, that master weaver, who speaks both with us and those around him. Of course, there is a love-sick rhinoceros, who is winched from his foul hold, and held aloft the deck as he is hosed by men in slickers. And the second day is when the shipwrecked refugee Serbs (perhaps anarchists, perhaps not) are saved by the captain, against whom some complain, and who populate the deck until an ominous Austro-Hungarian battleship fires across the bow, insisting the "anarchists" be surrendered to the Empire. In the end, a brief reprieve, as the diva's ashes are poured onto a pillow on deck, at the broadside and slowly, silently, the sea's winds are permitted to gather the diva to the sea's heaving breasts.

I perhaps dreamed then the hope that you would sail me into life, a Fellini of life you would be, but feared that I would be swept from a purple velvet pillow to death's breasts.

And I dream again for you.

In a domed morgue, in a hospital, a building for healing, and for death, I stand. On the table is Veronique, my beloved, my beautiful, my dark-haired twin of my soul, Veronique. Veronique who once sang with me, whom I once directed, with whom I sat in Napoli cafes, drinking espressos and comparing the delicious bitterness of different quaffs of different cafes. Veronique, who would call me to come to Napoli from Paris, from London, from New York, so that we could

shop, her cure for soul ailing. Veronique found the Armani shawl of grays and blues that was my Magen David, my defensive shield. She, blue-eyed and dark haired, was yet my sister, born of different parents but of a shared soul. (Aristotle insisted, a friend is two bodies with one soul: when one is happy, so too the other; when one mourns, so too the other.)

Who killed herself. (After the many times I ran to her to save her, this once, only once, I ran too slowly. Henri told me of the final phone call.)

She lay dead. The doctors and nurses stand, motionless, frozen in mid action, faces frozen. Above, at the base of the translucent dome is written "Primum non nocere," first do no harm, Hippocrates' dictum to doctors. And I think, "Too late in the morgue, too late to caution doctors of this. Or is it Hippocrates' posthumous rebuke to failed physicians?" I look again and see that the dome was windowed with black and white stained glass scenes. Scenes from my operas: Carmen being slain by a lover; Cio Cio San caressing her son, just before; Tosca's leap; Mimi's death rattle.

I ask, could I approach, touch her. I feel warmth in one of her limbs, an arm, and sense salt in her urine. Life, I think, life might still be within her.

I take her, carry her, ascend the stairs from the basement morgue. (I see myself holding her, her arms splayed backwards, like the Pieta, or in Bunuel's film -- perhaps "Un Chien Andalú" -- with

barely room on the spiral stone staircase for both of us to ascend. I worry we might stumble backwards.)

Yet, she feels light, as if she has not eaten, as if her muscles had wasted, as if only her taut and translucent skin holds her bones together.

I bring her to the ice rink, a frozen pond, with one patch open to the water, barricaded -- yellow sawhorses -- for protection. I see a man, masked, two masks, one on his face, the other in a hand. (The other for another?) Like your American football masks, he wore, as if to protect his face. I ask him to skate with Veronique, hoping to bring her alive. He says nothing, clenching his teeth around the plastic mouth guard hanging within his mask. I see his jaw muscles, the masseters, clench.

He takes her.

She opens her eyes, moves her lips, begins to speak. (I cannot hear the words, but I know, I know that what she says is righteous. Or, I have forgotten what she says.)

She pulls off his mask, the man's face is revealed, a face of 9/11, of the terrorist pilot as he screams "Allah Akhbar!", and banks right to enter the Twin, to slash it open, to destroy. If the building were a man, he would be slashing into his chest, just below the clavicle as it joined the sternum, to flood the lungs with his own blood, to drown him in his own fluids. (This is where a sniper aims, if not the head.)

I am frightened. I awaken.

I wanted you to tell me, Chanan, tell me, you were not that man. I wanted you to look into my dreaming soul, into the dimness, to tell me who that was, and I feared it was you. I could not ask; I was breathless, silent.

And again, I once dreamt when alive.

I am at the spa in Tiberius where you took me, Chanan; you took us.

Music. Soft, quiet, formless, like Milhaud, but in a minor key. It is behind me. A man leaves a bathroom stall; finished, he washes his hands behind me, leaves the stall door ajar, says, "Help him." Nods his head, a sweep of his brow to his left and behind, towards the stalls. I know that he and someone in the other stall are Concentration Camp survivors. (Yes, once you corrected me: not survivors, but ones who lasted, "lastors")

I look. And look again, uncertain if I see. Beneath the edge of the man's stall, is the mottled back, translucent skin of another man. He is someone, a Moishe Elle Gersh; or perhaps his brother. I enter his stall, reach downwards, beneath his arms, pull the dead weight and my hands slip up to his wrists. A slime or sweat on his skin defeats my grip, or his skin itself slips off, inverts, like a diva's elegant silk gloves. I pull to take him out of there. But, his legs are suddenly in the toilet, his body being sucked down as I strain to pull him out. His body lengths, thins, spirals with the water (always turning clockwise above the Equator, I recall), bones softened or gone, now tissuey flesh, more translucent and bruised, veins (his, mine?) present

themselves to my eyes. I picture objects being sucked into astronomical black holes, themselves but remnants of dead stars. He heads into another dimension. Then, he is out, in my arms. I turn my head only to the left, "Call 911!" And hold him (like the Pieta, draped across my lap and I draped over him.) His brother appears over my left shoulder, and I think he is Moishe Elle Gersh. He bends to caress his brow. I awaken. There is moistness running down my cheeks.

Chanan, when I spoke with you after I sent you away, after, I continued to wait for your calls, feeling both frightened and happy.

I tried to tell you, Chanan. (Listen also son, for I try to teach you about woman-loving.) I tried to explain the violence I felt from you. Not that you had actively done violence to me, but, awakening me (to life), then leaving, was violent. I tried to teach you Chanan, that until you, I had been dormant, like a spore, still alive, albeit encapsulated and dead to the world. (I was secretly alive within the shell.) When I found your soul, I found moist soil, warmth and nurture, within which my spore shell opened and I germinated. But to come alive, is to be open to the elements of life, to be vulnerable. And when you left (when I sent you away, for my son's sake, but, you should have stayed) I was left open to the vagaries of life's elements, I was in danger and violence. You did not understand. You could not understand.

Perhaps you will capture me in your dreams and hear words I could not speak.

On Feeding a Girl

To Become a Woman

Son, I will teach you on how to feed a girl so that she may become woman. Or how to feed a woman with a frozen mouth.

I will teach you hard. A hard dream. A terror.

(A twelve year old girl's terror, not your. I will dream you protection from felt terror. You will not dream the terror.)

It was simple, what happened to my mouth, the hunger that followed days later, the feeding.

Even in the dream-ether (a place of remembrances lost), I recall the ghosts of my mouth. The night the ponytailed man kept me, couldn't enter below, did something on my mouth.

Afterwards was the fall. (I sent you that dream.) Then I did not speak two, perhaps three days. (Time became soft, flocculent, neither sun nor moon light entered my soul.)

Many doctors came to test, prod, look, wondered. White coats, their purity; mine, gone. Why did I not speak, not move, they pondered. Would not feed me. And then the night nurse took my wrist, count my pulse, leaned over me, brushed the hair from my forehead, looked into my emptied eyes, asked, "How can I help you?"

And I cried, "I am hungry."

Tears I cried.

And she fed me.

Apple compote.

What three decades later, Chanan fed me.

This is how to feed a girl.

Or, to feed a woman whose mouth has been frozen in time.

And hands. And feet.

How to Find a Woman

(Who can love daughters)

Son, I dream you how to find a woman. As I dreamt to you in the beginning, much as the Rabbis “define” G-d by what he is not, so I will need to teach you woman-finding by what is not done.

Physicists, to find neutrinos in the universe, must build massive pools deep within earth’s bowels. On the surface, too many things interfere with neutrino-finding. Even below the Earth’s breast, one waits, waits to find the rare neutrino.

So too, a woman must penetrate deep into your breast for you to feel you have found the rare one of the universe.

To find a woman, what not to do, my son?

Probe the nots, by grasping the margins of my father and mother. Do not find a woman who, like the black holes of the universe, dead stars, will suck into herself any matter that approaches. She sucks, distorts and disappears matter in order to feed herself. A vacuum, she can never be filled.

Such a woman gives you an illusion of specialness, when in fact her odd gravity stretches your soul, spirals and twists your soul, so that you forget the rest of the universe, forget yourself, become part of her, never released.

This black hole woman also sucks her children, but differently. Children she bears, emits, then consumes, like Cronus. To energize herself, to remain alive.

Watch as she suckles her infants; infant girls gaze into her eyes, and they see, not themselves, but their mother reflected. As the girls grow, and this woman gazes into her own eyes, she sees what Snow White's stepmother saw in her mirror, her Dorian Grey-ness, her dying star, deterioration. And when her daughters gaze at her, they see her cold fury. Such woman must love herself completely. But, she will attract you and keep you, to sustain her reflexive love.

Such wife/mothers, son, make daughters who are famished, hunger for solace, comfort, some love thing. And girls who are vulnerable to predators.

My sister -- born before me of a dead or mysteriously disappeared father -- this child had a desperate hunger grow in her soul that overcame her. A spot on her brain was mother-famished and began to consume other parts of her brain. A tumor, the doctors said. And they cut it out (the tumor of mother-hunger). And my sister became an emptiness, a void, but no longer yearned for motherness, nor able to become one.

My son, to raise good daughters, daughters who will not be prey to mouth-fuckers (or cunt fuckers, who call themselves lovers before the fucking), do not marry a black hole of a woman.

Dog

Beloved Chanan (who is more loved than you know), you did not grasp Ani, the beautiful Canaanite herding dog, her meaning to us, to my son and to me. You thought her a burden, a chore to me, as indeed she was (an aid to expiate my guilt). But you could not understand why we needed her. And, when she leapt to our roof and remained there three days, refusing my entreaties, and when you saw me scramble up the red slick tiles, slipping, grasping, failing to retrieve her, you entreated me to release her to the wild. I resisted. Until she went into heat and we were surrounded day and especially night, by howling dog packs, dogged Romeos, serenading Juliet to descend from her balcony. Then, I called you in the U. S. of A. to tell you about how I freed her and left part of my heart go with her.

How she entered our lives told you some -- not all from my soul, as I now can, as I am now purely soul.

When we left the Yishuv, my head shorn, we were alone. A boy and a woman in the Heights of Golan, among the Jewish gauchos, cowboys, the cattle-herders, and my downstairs army officer, who “guarded” our electric meter and ,around the corner, the evangelical family of three from Dubuque, Iowa, the U. S. of A., who spent “twenty-four/seven” (as they said) praying for Jews to see their light.

A woman alone, I needed a guardian. And my kid insisted on a dog. From a Bedouin shepherd, we received this puppy, a girl. White spots on white, short-haired, ebullient. He, the herder, insisted she was pure Canaanite dog, protective, would guard us. I did not know

how she would grow in a year, soon greeting me with forepaws astride my shoulders, nuzzle to my face. Like some unintended measure of her growth, she left paw prints increasing in size and ever higher on the white-washed walls.

For me, she was the ghost of my Benjamin, here to shadow his little brother, to guard us.

As she grew, she walked me, not I her. Dragged me lurching behind, until I unleashed her in the humpy fields abutting the house. It was she who protected me from the wild boars in that field. I, frozen in fear, my Armani dun-colored suede coat flapping behind; she circling the boars, barking, nipping at their hind parts, dodging their tusks, until they retreated to the woods.

I do believe she retreated to the roof to protest you. You bemoaned my leathery palms, coarsened by wall-scrubbing each night, erasing Ani's paw prints that climbed ever higher with her growth. One night, as I caressed your face, you flinched, startled at the roughness of my hands. And you saw the bite of her leash into my skin. (I saw the startle in your face from the moonlight through the shutters, slanting onto your pillow.)

The next day, you diverted Ani up the stairs, to the right, onto the balcony. She protested, whined, mounted the screen, pawed. When you closed the glass door, she retreated to the corner, refused food, water. The next day, she mounted the roof.

We saw her as we drove home from taking my boy to school. You began a new ritual; we would drive or, better yet, walk T. to school, then into town for a coffee (always espresso; coffee for me is espresso, like the espressos of the many cafes in Napoli). Perhaps some shopping, then home.

I felt proud to be seen with you in town. (Until the gossip began -- that I was a kept woman, consorting with a visiting American.)

But, that day, I saw with fear and pride, Ani astride the roof, facing south, eyes on horizon, as if waiting for us. She had then the conformation of a mature dog: hind legs splayed back a bit, nose aloft, ears pricked up.

First you tried enticing with food. She stayed aloof, too proud to be fobbed off with provender. Then I implored. When you went inside, I scrambled up the tiles, alarming you and failing to reach her.

So, she remained three days, astride roof, like prow to our ship. Until you left for the U.S of A. That eve, when I climbed the roof, she came to me, as if she knew you were gone, would be gone. My boy alone each night when you and I were together, snuck her back into his bedroom.

I waited weeks to follow your suggestion: that this wild dog be granted her freedom (even as she also loved us), be returned to the wild. I called you after the deed done. I could not tell you directly. I told you I had done something. On her birthday, I took her far, along the Kinneret, near the place I finally brought myself to rest. I brought her to the forest below the Heights. She chased rabbits, pursued

gazelle, discovered other dogs, but frequently came back to me as I sat on the car sill, tearful. Like a toddler, she ran off to play, came back to check, and off again. But she ran further away each time to join the dogs. And further.

And, when I saw she did not look back, as I saw her hindparts flying after her cohort, I slipped the car into gear and drove the snaky path up to the Heights, and I cried. I think now I did right, that you were right.

But, it is not so simple in life, rightness. For this was another loss for me, after Benjamin, and I think of losing you.

(My other son, the living one, protested my time with you). He did not sense that, losing you, I would lose my self. In Hebrew, the word for “suicide” is to lose oneself, to lose one’s way. So it seems to those alive. You tell me to abandon Ani; and my son tells me to abandon you. I lost both, and then myself.

Know that for me, it was a release into freedom, the freedom to breathe.

How I was mounted:

A Father Like a Lion

I promised you my son, that I would dream you layers of truthfulness, each layer, deeper, closer to core truths, albeit, hard to be heard. This is harshest. Like acid on your ears.

Here is how I chose the man to make half of you. But the smaller part.

Before you were flesh, I want you to be strong, powerful, unafraid, invulnerable never hurt. Powerful. I seek a man and test him to be strong. With my body, I test him.

I examine Wolfgang with each blow. When he cracks my ribs, I know his strength and his fearlessness; when he blackens my eyes, I know his power (that would be yours); when he pursues and demands me, not just my body, but insists on my whole self, I know his strength.

In the theaters of 1980's Paris, men boast how much their women love them. An old director, perhaps 60 -- corpulent, sparse-haired, each strand pomaded onto his globe -- vile, a cigarette poised between manicured and polished glistening thumb and forefinger conducts his words, as he brags: dismisses the eighteen-year old actress whom he had been fucking for six months; sends her to live with his mother on the South of France; "to recuperate," he smiles. She is never to be heard from again.

But women have their arias also. They plaintively describe how much they suffer (suffre, a word meaning-laden in French than its simpler English) for their men; compete with each other for levels of martyrdom, each a Joan of Arc as an offering to her lover. Always, my suffering was premier among singers, dancers, actresses.

Until Marie was killed.

Wolfgang, a wolf in name, is a lion among men, those who pass themselves off for men in the opera houses, behind the stages of theaters; he reigns over them. He is a Judah among men, a lion of Judah, from whose loins you would spring.

Even when, seeking me, desiring me, he breaks down Henri's door, attacks, pummels Henri to the floor, defeats my dearest, unafraid of Henri's uniform, unafraid of retribution from Henri's gendarmes --- and this confession pains me as I float in this purgatorial ether -- I know his strength.

I choose him to fuck the half of you into me, only after I know his mettle. I want you to have that power: that the world would never hurt you (as it did me); that you would pursue and take what you would desire.

I need (for you, son, only for you), only Wolfgang's soma, his physical vitality, power, drive. For, I knew I would not stay with him. I knew I would have you from birth, raise you as I desired: that your power be tempered by judgment, even compassion.

So I prayed.

I know now, in this dream ether where all truths become known, that Wolfgang hurt you. But gather this hurt around you, like a farmer reaping his fallen wheat, so that you will never be hurt again, as I was hurt. Like Joseph in his dream, let your sheaf, once felled, stand upright, poised to act.

Now listen. Listen to this, son. Listen to the difficult words I send from here. Listen to unkind truth.

I loved Henri.

He was a good man, but a boy-man, like a brother to me, a sweet stepfather to you. He took us back when I was swollen-bellied with you.

But, son, listen. Taking me back made Henri a bigger cuckold, the fool whose wife beds another man, the husband who wears Shakespeare's coxcomb on his head for the world to see. All Paris knew he had been cuckolded. Not just that he had been sterile, shooting blanks, but that he did not have the manhood, the strength to refuse cuckoldry, not even to destroy the cuckold.

Know this, my boy: had Henri rejected me (as he ultimately did, but, gently, too late), he would have been elevated in my eyes.

Sweet man, my sweet Henri was not man enough to father you, my son, nor raise you to be strong.

The power you feel coursing through your veins every day, each day, is the Wolfgang's throbbing power. Do not hate him; marshall his strength to your manhood. It is the beast in your bones.

What anger you feel towards him, let this anger muscle your fortitude.
Let it break the backs of those who would harm you.

I chose him, no victim I. (My friends, the doctors, nurses
examining my bruised pregnant belly, all Paris pitied me, even as I
knew what I needed to do.)

Only when I had tested him, only then did I permit him to enter
me, to squirt half of you into me. Within me, I made you whole.

I made you whole.

After Such Knowledge

what forgiveness? My son, think now. Chanan spoke these words of T.S. Eliot. These words tumbled from Chanan's lips in the darkness. One night this salve fell onto my ears. The night I spent awake, he listening, I telling. Him I told of when I was twelve, of my non-memory, of the riding instructor, who rode me into a life of greatest darkness, of the chenille bedspread that tattooed my left cheek, of the remembered thrust between my matchstick legs, unsuccessful by him, successful by me. Then of the unremembered choking in my throat, the thing that happened through my mouth-hole that left me breathless a lifetime. The horse man with thick, silken pony tail, who wanted a dark Jewish girl.

After such knowledge.

What forgiveness?

From Chanan these words came, quietly slipping from his lips even as he did not know that in the dark, on this floor-bound mattress we shared, beneath the blinded Cyclops, enucleated electric socket, in this blindness, I touched Chanan's cheeks and felt tears also spilling from his unseeing, but feeling eyes. From this seer, blinded only by the night, I heard. Forgiveness. I heard, but did not understand, I felt. The hoarse, low whispered words I felt and later understood.

What forgiveness? Of myself, Chanan meant. Like the overnight bloom of the patient century plant in the desert, something blossomed inside me. An understanding. Chanan meant my

forgiveness of myself I had never achieved. (Had never realized I needed.)

Righteous. In Hebrew, the phrase, "You are right," also means "You are righteous." A righteous man was Chanan. I did send him off, drove him off, harangued him away. For you my son. Now, in this ether I do not regret; for your life, I sent him packing, scrambled him. But, I kept a depth of love that comes with understanding.

Of love and understanding, my son, I will speak. When Eros went to spy on Psyche, the goddess of the soul, of reason too, Eros was smitten. Mischievous Eros, who let fly arrows of love pangs into the hearts of others, was stricken by love for Psyche. When Eros and Psyche -- passion and understanding -- are united, a deepest love ensues. This transformation you saw in me after Chanan. (You jealous, not knowing that the flavors of love differ among mother-son, wife-husband.) Once, with dearest fortune, once in one's life should come the union of Psyche and Eros. Psyche restrains, deepens, guides Eros into enlightenment; Eros enlivens Psyche into passion.

I bless you with these word-dreams. I bless you that you will one day be united with a woman in love and understanding.

T.S. Eliot, Jew-despiser, also understood that neither youth nor age are we, but a "sleep dreaming of both." Now, in this foyer of forever-sleep, I have youth and age -- passionate love and wisdom -- with which I blanket you.

And Chanan.

Pesach, Last

Pesach is the year's second birth, the Jewish nation's rebirth, its emergence from slavery; our last night together, last I saw you. Alive. You warn me, even as I admire your new dress at Armani.

We are going to Eli's, nee Eddie, who he was before he became religious, a winemaker, before another life, when he and I were in high school. Eli/Eddie has us for Pesach. "Has us," as it does not sit well with Eli our cohabiting in his house without a Kosher marriage. I invite ourselves, and Eddie, contra-Eli, accedes.

You are back/forth about a new dress for Pesach, a time for renewal, when the "force that through the stem," drives the budding flower, drives our return from winter's dying down. Your son, otherwise your penumbra, does not hesitate: new shoes, he wants.

We drive to Central Tel Aviv, to the major square, of course to Armani, where I leave you at your insistence at the glass-fronted door, chrome-framed. You push into the sparse decor, ascend green-tinted glass stairs to the dresses. The boy, impatient, pulls me as I watch you ascend, drift upwards. We're off, to pizza, two blocks down. He, famished, orders all white: ravioli, with white cheese within, butter without and parmesan on top. I watch, listen to the fashionistas of Tel Aviv -- "Tzfon-bonnies" -- picking at salads, discussing what is a la mode, peering into their compact mirrors, refreshing lipstick or make-up after eating, preparing themselves for something, or someone, hoping for renewal, perhaps. The kid, done, wiping the last

butter and parmesan with the last bread before Pesach, leaps for the door, to hunt for shoes.

But, you appear. No bags, just yourself and that stone-faced look, upper lip firmly perched on the lower, narrowed. Nothing. Nothing you want. He takes up his cause: new shoes. Now. We scour children 's stores. He finds them, shiny patent leather black ones that show his reflection in the toe cap, taps on heels. Wears them to the car. And as we enter, you mention that there was but one dress, just one at Armani, for it is not like Armani Paris. When I insist, you agree to show me.

They welcome us, they have seen you in this gown. Salesladies and the men from downstairs ascend, follow you. The gown is still out, as if waiting for your return, as if yearning for you.

You disappear with it and emerge. It is all black, silk, strapless. It embraces you and breathes with you, it needs you to become alive. It clings to your each movement. And I understand its need for you. A second skin, you said it was. Someone brings shoes for you, simple black with narrow ribbon straps, a slight lift. And as I approach you, walk around admiring, tell you of its beauty in your presence, you agree that it is beautiful, and you whisper in French (to yourself, to me?), an elegant gown for your interment, your last breath.

Standing behind you, a bit to your right, some words whisper from me, "I will buy you a gown, not a shroud."

You have a way of shortening the word, "No." It is a shrug in your voice, an abrupt exhale, more through your nose than your

mouth. You pivot, disappointed looks from the sales staff follow you to the dressing room. You emerge in jeans, T-shirt, sneakers and we leave.

The black silk, on hanger, is limp, lifeless, forlorn, yearning for your body and breath to return to life. It is as if the silk harvested from some Far East, spun and dyed, then tailored in Italy, was brought to Israel, searching for you to enliven it from its purgatorial suspension.

In the car, you confess its beauty. Then we shall get it, I insist, maneuvering the Suzuki through Israel's Brownian motion of traffic, turning right at the one-way streets until we are before the Armani, now being locked before Pesach. She sees you, the saleswoman, from the second floor glass-fronted window, runs down, opens the door. Dress bought, wrapped, shoes bought, three salesmen work the phone to the States to get payment approval, look at me with the glow of envy, but an admiring envy. Ladies pry the kid with Perugina Bacci; the boy pops these into mouth like M and M's. or snazzy Hershey's kisses.

I remember the Bacci from a previous life; a first wife. The hazelnut encased first in truffled chocolate studded with crushed hazelnuts, then embraced by glistening, dark chocolate, wrapped in foil. But between foil and chocolate, a poem of kisses. Different poems in each "kiss" written on translucent paper in Italian, French, Spanish, English, of the kiss's ability to irrigate our souls. I collect these slips as they fall from your son's fingers, pocket these slips of love, would place them on your pillow that night, that last night.

The dress that cost thousands, zipped into its protective Armani sleeve, I fold once, lay it across the back window ledge of the car, behind the boy. We stop at Netanya on Nitza Street (Nitza, I say to myself, as the Italians pronounce it, not the French “Nice,” which the French acquired from the Italians for beating off the Austrian army.) Home, you don the dress and just before, slip the breast pads into your bra. I watch, quietly amazed: you are so beautiful, so perfectly formed in my eyes, that I chuckle within at your need to make yourself just that much more sumptuous, a bit more lift to your breasts. As if I could even tolerate your looking more attractive.) Then the low-heeled new thin-strapped sandals (the low heels your gesture to my height; that you not tower over me.) Quickly, like swallows chasing lightening bugs, your fingers dance about your face -- eyeliner, eyelashes, Neroli face oil, lipstick -- Boots #39, no longer found -- painted on with a wand Then the draping Armani coat, an iridescent grey, too warm for today, but just elegant enough.

Like Elijah ascending in his fiery chariot, we are off to Zikhron Yaakov, to Eli/Eddie.

With his Russian wife, you speak Russian and she adores you.

Stately, plump Eli descends the terrazzo stairs, his beard preceding him. In my mind I shave off his beard and transport us back four decades. This happens in the six steps he takes from the landing to the entranceway. Transformed from Eli of Zikhron to Eddie of Rochester New York, I see him, the hulking teen, so broad-shouldered, he torques reflexly to get through doors, bows his head

slightly. He was our incredible Hulk, our “the Thing,” massively built, refusing all sports. Yet, once, as we crossed the Monroe Avenue bridge over the roaring expressway, Eddie, in some burst of enthusiasm, lifts me, barbell-like, jerks and presses me over his head, then extends me over the torrent of traffic below. Retrieving me, he puts me down, hugs me.

Eddie moves through high school in a marijuana haze, the better to temper his rage. At times, I guide him from class to class, and once as I follow, he walks into a wall, rests his lips against it, waits contentedly until someone -- I -- take his elbow, and, as if guiding a blind man, redirect him through the door.

Eddie, for English class, is asked to recite a poem to our easily bored class, ascends a podium, withdraws a Playboy from the leg pocket of his carpenter’s jeans, opens it before us as if it were a score, and, once attention be paid, bellows by heart “The Charge of the Light Brigade.”

Eddie’s grandfather, a Bronx body repair man, when such repairs were done with hammers, sledges, muscle, is held up by gunpoint in his shop near the Willis Avenue Bridge. Unfazed, he lifts his sledge to dent the gunslinger’s skull, and is shot dead.

His father, B.A. from City College, after working the Pacific Seabees in World War II, becomes a fancy researcher at Kodak, outdoing the Ph.D.’s. From the Seabees he learns to build, and builds his weekend house, the swimming pool, and the pool shed by himself. Demanding he was, snaking stereo wiring under floors, up

walls, so that not a wire be seen. I picture him now, Pere Ed, standing in his swimming pool, beer in hand, beer belly floating before him in the shallow end, talking out the corner of his mouth, insisting that the only thing he was taught to build in the Seabees were outhouses. Gestures, beer can aloft, to the three-story weekend home, as if to say, it's but an oversized shit-shack.

Demanding he was of his older son, the one who would go to MIT, get the Ph.D. the father never had, be a research chemist at a great university.

But this Eddie could not live up to this father. At MIT, Eddie, of 180 IQ, of perfect SAT's, flunks out. Too busy tucking a Porsche engine in the rear of an air-cooled Volkswagen, then challenging muscle cars -- Mustangs, Chargers, Barracudas -- at Cambridge red lights to drag race. Or building a one-man powered airplane. Too busy struggling with the father within to master MIT.

Followed the lost years: to the West Coast, Berkeley, San Francisco, where many of the loose flakes blew at the time of Haight-Ashbury's era of love and drugs. He works the Post Office. Buys, repairs a '51 Jaguar XJ, a two-seater with a bench in the back for a midget. I visit, we drive to find buddy, Meyer, in Deep Springs, that college of 20 students, five professors, forty head of cattle in the Nevada desert near the Cottontail Ranch, another place of love, of another kind of love, from which a Madame Bunny became a Nevada congresswoman. From Deep Springs, we drive the one-lane road climbing the Sierras to the High Desert. I, the shortest, sit in the

bench seat, Eddie and Meyer in front. Sit I with legs at one end, rear on the other, and my torso extended over the sloping trunk, holding onto the luggage bars when Eddie takes a turn too quickly. When we meet some rare car on the climb, we back up to the last turnout so one can pass. I, facing rumpward of the Jag, navigate.

All this happens in my memory as solemn Eli, nee Eddie, descends, beard preceding.

His first wife, Berkeley-bred, left him with three children under five, she should find herself. Still looking after some twenty years, apparently; like Heraclitus, searching in the dark with a taper for a good person. Eli, once Eddie, now Orthodox, cannot marry a divorcee, finds a Russian immigrant whose husband suicided before Aliyah. She moves in with a teen son, who ensconces himself for the next decade, chasing off Eli's three children, like some foreign fish species, or striped mussel displaces the local fauna of Lake Michigan. He installs himself aside the bedrooms of Eli's spawn, marks his door with nude magazine photos, leaves open his portal for any passerby to see the stack of wang-bangers he keeps bedside.

And just before Eli, nee Eddie, alights the last step, the thought of his wang-banging step son elicits our meat-beating days. In a circle we would stand in front of Francis Parker school, the front door we were not permitted to enter, as it would be too welcoming. Like Shakespeare's witches, we circle, brewing trouble for the ant hill below, laboriously dug within the lines between cement sidewalk, erupting life, an ant-Aetna, but this living lava periodically returns to

its mouth. Shoulder-to-shoulder, we stand straight, heads bowed, spit-bombing ants, keeping score and speak of genital matters. Fatherless DeWitt Clinton, so named after a Revolutionary Era New York governor, DeWitt of piping voice, announces that he will become a Playboy photographer, a boob-shooter, a connoisseur of four cheeks, a master of tusch-tableaux, a patron of pussies, as a service to the rest of us. Within a year, his staccato soprano will drop basso. But now, he commits himself selflessly, almost, to the solemn service of our jimmies, those fellows between our legs, who like the Brontosaurus's tails, have minds of their own. Eddie and the rest of us cheer and release a unison spit bomb, a Big Boy of our own, wreaking Hiroshima on the ants below, until the bell rings, calling a truce to our heartless spewing and peno-centric palaver.

Just then Eli's solemn final step interrupts my meandering thoughts. He, now of restrained emotion, shakes a hand, other arm extended to my shoulder to examine me.

We stand, await Elsa's recalcitrant, blasphemous family -- brother, nephew, sister-in-law, others -- with Russian-thick accented intolerance of this Pesach falderal. They arrive one hour late -- the traffic, or an engine problem, also the nephew was late, oh, yes, grandma took time preparing her face. They speak of recent trips to the homeland, how much better it is in Moskva, a land of true culture. If only they had waited a bit longer before the impulsive decision (after only some nine decades of systematic anti-Semitism. Their fearsome governments generated a paranoia these denizens; these emigres left with little else, bring this paranoia to the Promised (but

undesired) Land. But, like the son of whom we will read on Pesach, the one who dismisses the story of the Exile from Egypt as unrelated to him, so they dismiss this foolishness. Like the Jews before the Red Sea, spying the pursuing Egyptian chariots, these Russkies complain: “Why did you take us from slavery? At least there we knew what life was.”

Eli sits at the table’s head, dons a solemn voice and proceeds with much detail of the Exile and Redemption. For the eating of the bitter herbs, he lofts his homemade concoction of horseradish; announces that we should each eat an olive’s sized portion, then forks a dessert plateful into his mouth, reddens, coughs, continues to bitter end.

Three scenes, like some opera trio, proceed at the Seder. Eli plodding through slavery, trying to reach freedom; his wife and herd loudly proclaiming in Russian life in the motherland, and a quieter drama of you, I and your son. You cling to me as the Armani clings to you -- gently, yet completely, as if I like your body, will bring you alive.

The boy tires quickly; retreats to the couch nearby, reclines as if to sleep, but asks that I find the afikomen, the hidden piece of matzo at the end of the meal so that he can claim his gift. I see in Eli’s face (what would not have been in Eddie’s) a grimace of disapproval for us -- your affection more offensive than his wife’s bellicose, boozing brood. After 11, food appears. Then, Russian relatives disappear as Eli begins the final stretch of prayers. Past midnight, we are spent. The boy I carry to bed. You and I, after clearing plates, retreat for our

last night, what I would not let myself realize would be our last. You find the Bacci I had secreted on your pillow; these ignite your passion.

Pesach, a time of renewal, was an efflorescence, a brief coming to life for you before devolution. Like some rare desert flower that opens every few decades, releases its deep perfumes, then dies to the ground, so you did. But, you would not die to the ground. You would die forever.

Tu me manque.

Your Seed

Chanan, a dream only for you. The last.

I wanted. Your seed.

A man makes 2,000 sperm with each beat of his heart, I read. Perhaps in your New York Times you read every morning, I read this. Perhaps elsewhere. Your organ is the father of millions.

And I wanted but one seed. Yours.

You did not begrudge me.

A gentleman you were. But not when we were together, alone, at night, desiring each other. Then you were not such a gentleman, to my pleasure.

Twice I held inside me both your seed and mine, together, but too short the time. Twice I lost them.

I pictured our son (for I wanted so, a son for you; for me, I would have anything from you). Girls you had fathered; you were already a girl-maker. I wanted a son to carry your name, your eyes, your brow. I wished to carry your impossibly Ashkenazi family name with more teeth-chipping consonants than vowels. Your spelling carried within it the countries through which centuries your kin had traveled; a name branded with the meanings from some Hunnish region, scrambled with some Slavic consonants, yet, at its core, Jew. A map of generations of wandering Jews, hired to foreign lands to serve as money makers for nobility, or tyrants. And those pharaohs

died, leaving Jews to serve the vagaries of new pharaohs, or mobbish peasants: a pogrom here, a rape there, a disemboweling or two, and if you survived, the good fortune of another exile.

But, transliterated into Hebrew, the tongue-tripping, tongue-tangling consonants are elided. Your name becomes natural, as if it were waiting to return home.

I would look at you sleeping, at your profile to sketch with my eyes the hidden Semitic architecture, I, like some archeologist of exile. Like the historical architects of French churches, who detect the Baroque foundation below a Romanesque edifice. Yet, I also loved your non-Mediterranean blue-green eyes (the color of the Mediterranean, but acquired elsewhere, only the color, a memory of where your ancestors began and to which you returned).

When I captured your seed, implanted, I felt a change, a murmur, a quieting within me, long before I knew I missed my period. (But I did not miss it, I passed over it, into fertility.) Can I tell you how this murmur feels: like a breeze softly rippling silk against the thigh. I remembered this from Tazio (and from Benjamin before him). A calm descends upon me, a blanket of quietude within me, a sense of feeling at rest, finally. My clenched hands, unclenched. My furrowed brow -- the two creases that parenthesized the bridge of my nose -- smoothed. My skin softened as if my very skin anticipated this baby, our baby. The missed period (twice, both times) were rests in the otherwise rhythmicity of my female life since young womanhood -- from the monthly cycle of building hope to loss. Men do not

understand how, with each moon, a woman yearns, then is bled of hope.

I lost them. When you left each time, I lost them. When you returned to the great America, the land of flesh pots, to work, I lost. It was as if the babies could not tolerate your leavings, it was as if they felt the violent wrenching that I felt in my womb, whenever you left, taking a part of me; taking me apart.

Yes, I confessed later the smoking, and I wondered if my furious smoking (like some Etna, I erupted, vomitted smoke clouds, like the volcano before it emits lava, whenever you left) had destroyed our baby, twice. You said nothing (with words). But, your face, hurt, disappointed, held this against me. And, later, you erupted, "Worse than heroin!" you proclaimed with your scientisms, "Worse than heroin is the addiction to cigarettes!" You said you would not marry a woman who desired to kiss death. That is how it feels, but a comforting caress, an inhaling of death's breath. When God made Adam, he breathed life into his nostrils; so, to smoke is to breathe a sigh of death.

My words could not tell you. (perhaps now, now that I am gone, you will dream me into your life and understanding.) The cigarettes I began with Wolfgang: I would try to take him into me in any orifice to become mother. He insisted I smoke (as he, in restaurants, smoked above the table, and shot up beneath). Yes, smoke is my kissing death; is my needing to have something at my lips (not just something, it is like a someone who is evanescent in the ghostly

smoke), who will come to my lips at my beck, at my desire, who will come into my mouth, whom I can inhale, who will course harshly down my throat, yet comforting in my chest. Someone, something who will fill me when I feel emptiness. Yes, it is a dose of death, but a soft death that I took at my bidding. Nothing forced down my throat; rather sucked in. I took in the ghost puffs, but even those would not stay; like ghosts they emitted from my lips and disappeared.

When you were gone, gone for weeks, or months, I felt empty. The cigarette was always with me. (Except when the boy would hide them and I would hunt, now desperately, twice abandoned -- by you and by my breath of death.) In the pocket of the Subaru was one hiding place for my relief, next to the sheathed knife that I kept for my last act.

But, I wanted only you to be inside me. I told you as you were in me, that I was your refuge, your bayit, your place to rest.

Once, I entered when you were in the bathtub. I recall your face, startled, a bit shy. (That shyness foreign to your face when we lay together.) But in this moment -- you drowsy, head resting against the inflatable pillow you had brought for the tub, knees drawn up in the too-small tub -- I saw your manhood floating like an island. And I thought, "the father of millions," like a resting volcanic island that would erupt only in me. And, like lava, fiery, flowing into the sea, as it meets ocean's embrace, it forms new land; so you would erupt into me, form new life. Your manhood's fierceness, I embraced, took in, congealed into a new life.

Dead

You're dead.

Why do I still write you, these letters? Verruckt, meshuga, fous!

I write on scraps, stationary, over the headline banner of the New York Times (I find spaces between columns of opinions, or on the slant.) I write on oversized envelopes. I stuff these into pockets; have bought a new Tilly travel jacket advertised for its many extra pockets, hidden ones inside; accessible ones, outside. I stuff my letters to you in these pockets, leave them on my bedstand, by my desk. I plan to finish some, and do; sent nowhere: others, left undone, like our love, like your life.

Yes, (I explain to myself), I hope to tell you matters of my heart that I could not or did not tell you when you were alive.

But, you are dead. And I don't believe in such afterlife matters. I am no Virgil, sending Aeneas to shuffle among the heroic dead in the underworld, before he can finally find his new home, revealed by his leaf-eating son. Anyhow, my new home, my new shore, was to be on your loins. now, cold bones. I barely believe in life without you.

But (I confess), I conjure up sensations of you. Or I try. Your fragrance, your breath. When you exhaled, I would time my inhale. Like God breathing into Adam to bring him to life, your breath brought me alive, with desire. Into the closet I setp, find your kimono, sepias glyphs on sheer white muslin (mousseline, you would say); I explore it, nose to fabric, seek your smell. Or, I imagine you again on the

beach, exiting the waves, my Venus. I try to regain your touch (this becomes more difficult, fading with time and absence).

Then, I pull out these scraps from an inner pocket; only see black scratchings on white paper.

I write to revive you.

I boil my own heart. That's what this is, this scribble-scrabble.

My mother would buy live chicken at the public market early Thursday mornings. The shochet was there. In a shed he worked. For two-bits, he would first slice the fowl's throat, grab it by the neck stump, wings still flapping, then hold it up to a feather-sucking machine, a horizontal monstrosity that looked like the old shirt pressing rollers at the laundry. Even so, even as this chicken was now dead naked, once home, my mother would still pluck, then singe the chicken over the gas stove. (This wretched smell I imagined was the stench of Auschwitz.) She would mine the innards; for eggs, some in the shell, some yolks only. If shelled, she wiped it clean quickly on her apron, then for good fortune across our eyes, inner canthus, outwards. She would pluck its heart, plunge it into the soup. Snatching it out, still warm, she proffered it to me, or my sister. The heart muscle both firm and tender, just a bite.

I write unsendable missives to you.

I dip my heart in memory soup.

I boil my heart, the better it be eaten.

Provence and Love's Labor Lost

My son. In this dream ether, we are given but so many words to send to living ears. As I approach my allotment, a weakness sets in, a limpness of spirit, a neurasthenia of my soul, lassitude. Soon I will be suspended in repose, waiting for you to receive my dreams, so that I will be released.

Some last words on how to find a woman who can love. As I began these dreams, speaking of how the Rambam described God by what he was not, as I speak of finding a woman of love by telling you what she is not.

Chanan took me to Provence. To visit my parents, whom I had shunned for years. They left Paris for Lorgues -- not in Aix, nor on the coast, but in a no-man's land, but one that still captured Provence's beauty, fields of lavender, vineyards, olive trees.

To the East, the foothills of the Pyrenees creep up behind Cannes, Nice, then these ancient mountains, exhausted, slip into the Mediterranean. Closer, the range of la Murre -- round-shouldered, named after those Moorish invaders, also descend to the Sea.

My father chose this plot, a sloping, bouldered scape. Over years, he would drive from Paris for all of August, even long weekends and move the boulders, made walls of them surrounding his plot, aimed to block out any view of any human.

The patinaed steel gate is electrified; a camera announces your presence. It opens, the two halves, slowly. The graveled drive

sweeps to the right, along the stone wall; the perennial garden, planted by him, blocks your view of the house, stays blocked as you climb counterclockwise to the garage.

He built the house. One story, slate roofed, you enter from behind, through the kitchen. Then, what I never imagined: two bedrooms flanking the salon. They slept separately. As if he were preparing for what was to happen, as if he was beginning to sense the transformation of my mother's love into steel-cold hatred.

Chanan and I stayed in cottage behind. A pebbled path connected the kitchen door to the cottage, a path I walked barefoot.

Before we entered the gates, as we drove from La Provencale to Route des Arcs, I warned Chanan he should not be his polite self to them; if they liked him, I would leave him. But Chanan is but Chanan -- can only be decent, sincere: "Je suis ravi de vu connaitre"; embrace with my mother. But, my father stiff-armed him with a handshake. I can see my father: white-knuckled fist as he crushed Chanan's, fiercely eye-balled him. Embraced me too warmly, too desperately. an embrace from him chest to breast -- too close, too much longing and loneliness.

He stepped Chanan through the salon's real French doors out to the patio, on slate laid by himself, as if preparing his tomb. The steps were broad Carrera marble, descending to the pool. A pool covered with a honeycombed skin to preserve the heat, the only warmth within these stone walls. Later, he showed Chanan the solar

panels hidden behind the pool to heat the water. Pump and piping were hidden among the boulders he had shuttled about the land.

As we descended, I behind them, life appeared: he had fenestrated the faces of the steps, planted pansies that could be seen only from the pool gazing up or on descent.

He joked about these pansies. In French, pensee is both the flower's name and thought. He plucks one with his now gnarled, ruddy calloused fingers. His nailbeds, I saw now, had been thickened; chronically fungus infected from the earth. Holds this dainty flower up to Chanan; shows him the five petals, two above, sitting on three below. Shows how this pensee demonstrates the ending of Cinderella: the Prince and she are above and stepmother and two stepsisters got o hell. Strips the three petals and flings them aside; presents the remains to me.

My mother is preserved. Here hair is still dyed blond, coiffed perfectly. She presents two gifts to me: Neroli face oil; Estee Lauder Microbead Night Intensive Eye Cream. Comments that she thought I would need something for the wrinkles I would have. She smiles with her lips only; her eyes remain dead.

Look at a woman's eyes, my son. Look for life. Look to see if you are captured and reflected by them. If you disappear into the black of her pupils, she has dead eyes, which drink another's soul to remain alive. And they keep sucking.

While they could keep humans at bay, the feral pigs, the boars, defeated my father once. Only once. While still living in Paris, away

for weeks, the boars tunneled beneath the chain link, at the northeast corner, where there were no boulders; burrowed beneath, then uprooted the perennial gardens, destroyed the juniper, upended the young yew.

My father first did this. Left the boar tunnel. Waited all night on the patio, covered with a plaid wool blanket. Overlooking the junipers, he lay in the chaise, a double barrel shotgun resting on his left lap. He demonstrated for Chanan. Slaughtered the pack. Buried them beneath the perennial bed; said he wanted their flesh to give back to the plants what they had stolen.

Then, he sank a concrete trench below and planted the new chain link into cement feet.

The neighbors? Heard the shotgun blasts. Knew never to bother the man.

Within this fence, Chanan thought tempers were low; instead, I said, was a cold hatred.

They had changed. Children gone, Paris abandoned, my father no longer fawned over my mother. And my mother acted the woman scorned, cold-furied. She still looked the same: given to wearing J. Crew pastels and black flats. Still sprayed herself with Chanel Number 5, perhaps to madden him. Still proper, in a removed manner. Still cooked both lunch and dinner for him. Chanan said the first night, that if he were my father, he would have had his wife taste from his dish first.

Then, food in place, my father hoists his knife and fork, stares straight across the table at my mother, and slowly, methodically, meticulously sharpens the knife edge on fork tines.

I saw my father's love, perhaps it was once an infatuation, transformed into cold hate.

My mother reciprocated.

She said -- confiding briefly as she had never before -- "We are two vultures eyeing each other, waiting for the other to fall. I won't give him the satisfaction."

This my son, happens when you love a black hole woman, a woman who draws you into her gravity, sucks you within, distorts stretches and twists your soul. She consumes you. To feed her existence.

On the other side of this black hole, is cold, the absolute freezing of deep space.

We stayed three days. Each day, Chanan swam in the pool.

My parents insisted that they would peel back the pool cover. Together, one at each corner at pool's end, they systematically tore back a segment, folded it carefully on itself, created a cerulean, pleated accordion at pool's edge. Then, they folded the accordion lengthwise into thirds: she first, he topping hers. He brought a wheelbarrow from behind the junipers, hoisted the accorded cover as if it were a corpse into it; wheeled away.

I could not swim there, could not immerse myself in this pool where I once practiced diving, my father coaching. I stood instead on the patio above, watched Chanan, whose body made fractals beneath the surface, like the swimmer in David Hockney's painting. Then, I would descend, wait poolside, wearing the floppy-brimmed fedora Chanan had brought from Barcelino's; waited with a towel to embrace him. As I knew I would not do for long.

My father had the pool built with a small area for diving. Insisted that he could improve Chanan's form. Chanan was perfectly satisfied with the daily swims; saw no sense in this diving in, getting out, diving again. But, my father insisted. Brought the long pole, the extension used to skim the pool's surface, or scrub its side of scum. Held it out parallel to the water, chest high. Told Chanan to dive over, clear it.

I could see with alarm rising in my chest, what Chanan later confessed he only sensed. My father kept moving the pole further away from the diving board, closer to the shallow end, beyond safety. I leaped up; told him enough, time for lunch. I thought my father would lure Chanan to dive too shallow, break his neck. He smiled, my father; turned away. Came to the patio to sharpen his knife.

Kyrellos

Before we left France, I told Chanan that I was ready to return to Beaulieu-sur-Mer, return to where I had been when I was twelve. I needed to do this with Chanan.

We drove through Cannes, along the Boulevard de la Croisette. I pointed to the Ile St. Honorat, where my father would boat his children for swimming, fishing, picnicking. Through Nice, Chanan asked to have lunch seaside. I feared seeing the pony-tailed horse man; perhaps at a restaurant, perhaps among the hundreds buzzing on their Vespas. I feared him, feared seeing him, yet wanted to be seen with Chanan.

I took Chanan to Villa Kerylos in Beaulieu. In camp, before the pony tail entered my mouth, we were taken here on a weekend outing. Only once, but I still can dream my way through this villa. Clinging to these French crags over the Mediterranean, this Villa is a replica of a second-century, pre-Christian Greek villa on Delos. Designed by an Italian-monkered Pontremoli for Theodore Reichard, a German-Jewish Grecophile emigre from Frankfurt. It faces the Jewish Rothschild's Villa, itself built like a ship, its prow perpetually setting sail into the Mediterranean.

I could sleep walk Chanan through. Beyond a small foyer, to its left, the Balneion, that square Greek marble colonnaded bath into which several people could descend, sit on its grey-veined marbled benches, sided with gold-veined marble, its faucets hidden beneath fantastical animal heads. The floor is mosaic, a Greek key circle,

surrounded by fantastical sea beings: snakey forms, Leviathans, kelpy fronds. From the bath, guests emerge into the open central courtyard, frescoed on four sides by Greek myths, gods, goddesses. The dining room furniture within was designed for the master to eat reclining on his right side at his elevated table, facing the guest's tables.

Upstairs, Theodore's bedroom in red, is dedicated to Erotica, labelled below the Doric crown molding as "Les Amours." Separating his bedroom from his wife's, the alabaster-lined bathroom had an opening above for collected rainwater to shower. Her cobalt room was labelled "Les Oiseux," as if the Mediterranean had splashed over the breakwater, onto the walls. Chanan noticed that each of their beds had room for but one.

Three children they had, some of whom were to die in Nazi camps. This assimilated German-Jewish Grecophile emigre to the Cote d'Azur, who read Greek myths to his children, did not survive to see how his children were transformed into simply Jews by Vichy.

Chanan stood before Athena's bust, her battle mask sitting just above her brow, revealing her face a touch of her tightly waved hair, the serene beauty beneath the armor.

This Chanan saw in me, from the beginning: both the armor and what he found beautiful beneath; within, he said.

But, little serenity, only moments with him.

Now, I could leave. We walked the Gardens between house and Sea: olives, pine, cyprus, myrtle (its leaves the shape of a woman's eyes, he said); papyrus, acanthus, iris, rose.

My son, I had never left you alone after our escape from France. I felt, I knew, what I would find when I returned alone; after Chanan made yet another trip to his America.

You were angry; yes, jealous. Why did I need anyone else, you demanded. I knew I would never see Chanan again, could never let him return.

I knew I could not breathe without him. I felt I could not teach you more while on earth. I planned my shekhita. I did not know that I would come to this dream ether, this suspension from which I send you my last words. To teach you, of loving. Dream well, my son. Listen.

I Listen for Your Voice

Mother. After your death, I stand at the same shore we last stood. I try to hear you, your voice. I want to see what you last saw: the far shore's cliffs at sunset -- pink-grey -- meeting the unfaded blue sea (once Christ's floor), seagulls like white shuttlecocks (you once told me), weaving these hues together. Armani colors you called them. you showed me the shawl Henri bought you from Naples, the Armani shawl of silk and wool. I have it over the sofa, let it slip on my shoulders, embrace me with your fragrance.

On the shore, I want to smell the fragrances you last smelled: the Eucalyptus, its feet bathed by the waves. I can see where we would eat, the deck from which the fisherman cast their lines. While you waited at the table, I would fetch pita from our table, toss shreds to lure the fish away from these predatory men, who looked so banal. Even as you ordered St. Denis fish, musht, I watched anxiously, protectively for the prey. I strained over the bannister to glimpse their nibbling, the dimpled surfaces, relieved if I drew some away from the death lurking beneath. I should have watched you more carefully; you would find death in these depths.

You were still beautiful when they found you. The cold, the policeman explained, the frigid, waters had preserved you; but now, more pallid than I had ever seen, your blood gone. Your hair looked darker against your blood-drained skin. a peaceful face such as I would only see when you slept. (For, I would sit, watch you sleep, remove your champagne-pink Cartier glasses, the bridge, taped-over,

broken too often. Many nights, I watched over you. But, one night too few.)

I can hear you. I can hear you when I play your C.D.'s. Your Cio Cio San, who became Butterfly beneath her American captain, your favorite role, I listen to. Your black, thick waist-length hair made you Japanese, I saw in one poster. When you sing *Un bel di vedremo*, yearning for your lover's incoming barc, I hear this when I stand on shore; look for you to return over the horizon. But you don't appear. Sometimes, as I approach the rise in the road to Qatzrin, I hear *Quanto cielo*, Cio Cio San's entrance song: I raise my eyes to greet you. But you are not there.

You told me of your opening night in San Francisco, before you had me. At the Opera House, once built for the United Nations, gilded ceilinged foyer, chandelier once jeopardized by earthquakes, you shook the audience, made them tremble. For your death, turned three-quarters away, you slashed your knife across your throat. The audience gasped. The curtain fell. "Captain Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton" rushed onstage, grasped your hand for the bows, reassured you *sotto voce*, that he would never again abandon you. (But he did, as Puccini scripted, he did every night thereafter.)

Was he one of the men? Before Henri, before Wolfgang, before me, was he one? I look through the valise you left with promotion posters, photos. I see the ugly one, the gargoyle, you called him; *Le Bete*, the singers called him. He is posed at the curtain's edge as it tries to hide him; he leers, hunched, body bronzed, knobby-kneed,

arms dangling to his knees. He leers, I imagine, for you. Tangled, black, matted curls fall over his forehead, as if to hide the hideous. He was one. And we agreed, while we never spoke, we agreed that there would be no others after I emerged from you. We agreed.

I have your Butterfly poster, Tragedia Giapponese. They posed you turned three-quarters away, hair up, nape of neck exposed above the kimono's collar. The nape, geishas do not powder; the Japanese find it sensual. The Obi is tied in the back, as geishas do; not in the front, like "comfort women." Your black hair is up. Three ivory combs hold it. Your right hand reaches out, touches the frame of the shoji's window. You look out on snow-touched branches, barren of cherries. A single sparrow faces you, just out of reach. Perhaps it was I out of reach when you were yearning for the me, that was half of you. Out of reach, as you are now.

Your hair, your waist-length hair, you called your shield, your protection. And then it was gone.

On Yishuv, they called you Zonah, whore. Some said this was beseder, "in order," O.K., in the order of the world; at least you were Jewish. Others said that I was mamzer, bastard, for you were not married to Wolfgang.

You tried to reassure me through Torah stories. That Tamar was a harlot to attract Judah, birthing Peretz, who begot many until King David. (But I did not want to be a Peretz, I did not want to burst forth in to a father of kings. Nor did I want a harlot mother. I just

wanted to be a boy, a boy with mother and father like the others in Yishuv. I just wanted to be a boy.)

You whored me into you. You didn't get it when I said, "Your fault," when I misbehaved, was mischievous, missed a test, erased the memory from your computer (to erase the memory of Chanan!). You didn't get that I meant your whoring with Wolfgang (and the many before Henri, the posters in your valise, the photographs of you in leopard skins, men sidling up to you, leering over your shoulders onto to your breasts, the breasts from which I drank.) (Yes, I heard you whisper that he looked handsome as a Nazi.)

I hated each strand of my blond hair, the tint of my blue eyes, my ivory skin, all of which you caress, which you would admire. I wanted to be dark like you, or the Mottis, Yossis, Nattis of the Yishuv. You hated Wolfgang, yet loved me. I could not separate the two of us so easily. In the mirror, I saw Wolfgang, not me, not you. As I grew, as approached Bar Mitzvah, I would examine my nose profile. I looked at yours -- its upturn, its bobbed look, opening the nostrils a bit towards the world. Then I examined mine, en face, from the side, concerned that it was beginning to lengthen, become aquiline, like Wolfgang's. I imagined I would grow it longer, with a slight lift in the bridge, like an Arabian horse. I did what I could to prevent this; would sit in class, holding my nose upwards, creasing it, hoping to keep it shaped like yours, even as I saw it inevitably, against my will, lengthen. A strong Roman nose, you would say, admiringly. It lengthened even as I tried to hold it back. I wanted none of him. Your fault.

We had a deal. You were done with men. After I came out of you, you would not permit anyone to enter. Until Chanan.

I saw you become alive in his presence, saw your face, saw your hair regain its color, scented your perfume. All these had been for me, not anyone else. A deal!

And he slept with you, while I was alone with the dog, with Ani. And the neighbors again called you Zonah, an American's whore. And I stayed up one night all night to keep you with me. And you didn't learn. And I left the next night.

I am cold, frozen, iced in time. Next to a woman I lie, glassy-eyed like fresh fish on ice -- barely alive.

I seek you.

Women, many I sexed. You taught me the word halil means both flute and the void of outer space. The halil is empty, silent, an emptied vacuum. Only when it is filled with breath, is it alive, does it sing. Without your breath, I am void.

I yearn for heaven, I seek it in women. I insert myself in them seeking your warmth, dedication. they caress, hold grasp, implore. Instead of warmth, I find in women the ice void of space, darkness, no gravity.

And I feel, I feel chilled.

I seek you. I enter them and find the void from the beginning, before God created heaven and earth, there was a void. Even after He created oceans, a void murmured over its face.

Sometimes I hear your voice, and find nothingness.

You created me from a drug addict, a rapist, a pedophile. Then you wanted me to be refined, cultured, good, to love.

I can love only you.

And like you, I will sex many.

They find me cold, unconnected, yet they desire me. I am desired. For, I am beautiful (as they cannot see my soul).

We had a deal, until Chanan, no more men. and I punished you for this. Now you have left. I listen for you.

And you left.

Me alone.
