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Golda

Play in two acts by Motti Lerner

©

Translated by Roy Isacowitz

Director and dramaturg: Moshe Kepten

Everything written in this play is a figment of the playwright's imagination, though most of it was inspired by real events.

The play opened at Habima National Theatre under the name "The First Lady" to avoid confusion with a film called "Golda". This version of the play differs slightly from the stage version due to production requirements.

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Characters

1. Golda Meir (75) – Prime Minister of Israel
2. Moshe Dayan (58) – Minister of Defense
3. Yisrael Galili (62) – Minister without Portfolio
4. David (Dado) Elazar (48) – Chief of Staff
5. Shimon Agranat (67) – Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry into the Yom Kippur War
6. Lou Kadar (60) – Golda's secretary and confidant
7. Hannah Yarkoni¹ (47) – Golda's daughter
8. Motti Ashkenazi (33) – commander of the Budapest stronghold in the Sinai Peninsula, the leader of the protests after the Yom Kippur War
9. Shula Varsano (46) - secretary in Golda's office whose son was seriously wounded in the Golan Heights
10. Avram Aminoff (50) – Golda's driver whose son is missing on the Suez Canal front when the play begins
11. The four members of the Agranat Commission – characters without text

Time

¹ Hannah is an imaginary character and she is not based on Golda's daughter.

The play has two levels of time: the level of the present, which begins with Golda Meir's testimony before the Agranat Commission on February 6, 1974, and ends with her resignation as Prime Minister on April 11, 1974, and the level of the past, both before and during the Yom Kippur War.

Space

The plot takes place in six locations: 1) Golda's office in Tel Aviv, where scenes take place before and during the Yom Kippur War. 2) The Agranat Commission meeting room, where Golda gives her testimony. 3) The living room at the Prime Minister's House in Jerusalem. 4) Golda's bedroom in the Prime Minister's House in Jerusalem. 5) Golda's office in Jerusalem, which includes a secretarial room and her study. 6) Golda's room at Hadassah Hospital.

Notes

1. In several scenes in the play, the recorded voices of demonstrators in front of Golda's home and office can be heard in the background.
2. In the transitions between the scenes, documentary clips from the Yom Kippur War are shown on a back screen.

Act I

1. Agranat Commission Meeting Room in Jerusalem. February 2nd 1974. Day. The Commission members sit at their desk. Chairman Agranat is in the center.

- Golda: I, Golda Meir, solemnly declare that the evidence I shall give will be the truth.
- Agranat: Thank you, Madam.
- Golda: I'm glad you invited me to testify. Clarifying the events of the war is essential for the rehabilitation of the army and society, and we must do everything in our power to ensure it will be comprehensive and...
- Agranat: Thank you very much. First, we would like to hear your testimony regarding the political negotiations that took place with Egypt – under American mediation – before the war.
- Golda: Excuse me? I'm not sure the commission was authorized to discuss those negotiations.
- Agranat: The Commission was authorized to ask questions at its discretion, Madam.
- Golda: Look, I have prepared myself to testify today about the special circumstances under which the war broke out, about the surprise, the deployment of the regular army, the mobilization of the reserves...
- Agranat: We would first like to hear your testimony regarding the political negotiations.
- Golda: I would be happy to testify about those negotiations at another time.
- Agranat: We want to hear your testimony now, Madam.
- Golda: Yes. Of course. I understand. **(clearing her throat)** In 1971, Sadat proposed negotiating a comprehensive

settlement with the Arab states. But he demanded that we commit, in advance – before the talks even began – to withdraw to the 67 borders. Nevertheless, we did not reject the proposal, and informed the Americans that we were ready to discuss it.

Agranat: And why didn't the negotiations begin?

Golda: Because we refused to give Sadat a commitment in advance for such a withdrawal.

Agranat: Why didn't you offer to negotiate the depth of the withdrawal?

Golda: Because the Egyptians demanded a complete withdrawal.

Agranat: But that was their starting position. After the war, they became more flexible. Had you started talks then, perhaps this war could have been prevented.

Golda: **(Angrily)** Your Honor, I am a veteran politician and I lost my naivety a long time ago. Sadat spent three years preparing for this war. He proposed the negotiations as a smokescreen to disguise his plan to destroy us. Even now, I remain concerned that he still hasn't given up on it. This war could not have been prevented.

2. The Prime Minister's House in Jerusalem. Night. Voices of demonstrators can be heard from outside. Lou and Hannah, who is holding her suitcase.

Lou: Five hours from the kibbutz to Jerusalem?! You must drink something...

Hannah: It's okay, Lou. I'm used to buses. Where's Mom?

Lou: I'm not sure you should have come. I told you. She is very busy.

Hannah: I heard her on the radio on the way. She sounded tired.

Lou: She doesn't sleep. The protest is driving her crazy. The radiation treatments make her weaker.

Hannah: I can imagine.

Lou: I'm sorry, Hannah. I don't think your mother needs such surprises now.

Hannah: I'll put my suitcase in the guest room.

Lou: My stuff is there.

H: Do you sleep here every night?!

Lou: She's my family, Hannah. She needs me.

Golda enters, accompanied by Avram, her driver, carrying her bag.

Avram: Hello Hannah'leh.

Hannah: Hello Avram.

Golda: Thank you very much, Avram. **(Takes her bag from him)**

Avram: Tomorrow at 5:30 I'm taking you to the hospital.

Golda: I know.

Avram: You didn't take the six o'clock medications. **(To Lou)** She didn't eat anything either.

Lou: I'll give her something.

Golda: Thank you, Avram. Good night.

Avram: Good night.

Golda hangs her coat in the corner.

Lou: **(To Avram)** She really appreciates your dedication. We don't take it for granted that you show up every morning.

Avram: Of course I come every morning. It's my job.

Lou: I know.

Avram: Can you perhaps remind her to talk to the Red Cross about my son?

Lou: She spoke to them last week.

Avram: His company commander is sure he's still alive. Tell her. Maybe he's with the Egyptians after all.

Lou: The Commission's hearings began this morning. I'm not sure that today is...

Avram: I wouldn't bother you. But every time I try to talk to her about it, I choke up.

Lou: Okay. I'll talk to her.

Avram: Thank you. Good night. Good night, Hannah.

Avram leaves. Lou follows him.

Hannah: Hello, Mom.

Golda: I don't understand why you came. I told you. I've got enough troubles in my head. I don't need you here right

now. You have a husband. Children. Take care of them.

Hannah: How did the testimony go? What did they ask you?

Lou returns.

Golda: Give me a cigarette, Lou. Back there I was lighting them one from the other. **(Swallows the medication and lights a cigarette)** I took one from Avram when I got into the car. Give him one back in the morning.

Lou: He wants you to speak to the Red Cross again.

Golda: I spoke to them last week.

Lou: At least tell him that the army is still searching.

Golda: I don't want to delude him.

Lou: Do you think his son is already...

Golda: I'll know when the army finishes searching.

Hannah: What did they ask you in the commission, Mom?

Golda: Nothing special.

Hannah: I want to know.

Lou: She's tired, Hannah.

Hannah: Mom?

Lou: Let her rest a little.

Hannah: When I know you need me I come, even if you don't me want to. And when I ask you a question, you can answer me.

Lou: She'll tell you in the morning. **(To Golda)** Should I make you something to eat?

Golda: There are some of the meatballs I made on Saturday still in the fridge.

Enters Dayan.

Dayan: I came as soon as I got your message.

Golda: I wanted to talk to you about the commission. I left there stunned. **(To Hannah)** This stuff is confidential, Hannah...

Hannah understands that she shouldn't insist. She takes her suitcase and exits.

Lou: **(To Golda)** Do you want me to take notes?

Dayan: No need.

Lou: I'll make coffee.

Golda: Thank you, Lou.

Lou exits.

Golda: I sat there for six hours like someone accused. They didn't let up. They asked about the negotiations with Sadat before the war, again and again.

Dayan: Their mandate doesn't cover those negotiations.

Golda: That's why I was so surprised.

Dayan: What did you tell them?

Golda: That's what I wrote in the car. **(Hands him a page)** They know too much. I certainly hope you didn't give them political documents.

Dayan: No.

Golda: Maybe someone in your office passed them on to them behind your back?

Dayan: No way.

Golda: Could Kissinger be leaking to them?

Dayan: They received the minutes of the cabinet meetings.

(Hands her back the page) Everything you said is OK. I don't think there's anything to worry about. Now it's clear that we shouldn't have established the commission. The army can investigate itself a lot better.

Golda: It's already been established and is already investigating. I don't want to find out in their report that we could have prevented the war.

Dayan: Don't worry. You're still testifying. I haven't started yet.

(Turning to exit)

Golda: As far as I remember, we didn't have many disagreements about those negotiations.

Dayan: As far as I remember, we didn't have any.

Golda: I hope there won't be, either. Good night.

Dayan: Good night.

Dayan leaves. Lou enters.

Lou: You don't have to worry, Golda. He knows that one word from you will determine his political future.

The voices of the demonstrators can be heard from outside. Hannah returns.

Hanna: May I? Was it a difficult conversation?
Lou: Leave her, Hannah. She's very tired.
Hannah: Do you want to sleep, Mom?
Lou: She *has* to sleep.
Hannah: Should I sleep in the room with you? You always sleep better when I'm next to you.
Golda: You'd better sleep in the guest room.
Hannah: We could talk a bit if you can't fall asleep. **(Pause)**
Mom?
Golda: There's nothing to talk about, I'm tired. That's all.
Lou: Good night, Golda. **(Lou exits)**

Hannah opens the window. The voices of the demonstrators can be heard louder.

Hannah: You won't be able to fall asleep like that. Should I call the police?
Golda: They have just returned from the war. They lost friends. Some of them are wounded.
Hannah: They don't blame you. They want you to fire Dayan.
Golda: Dayan didn't act alone.

Hannah shuts the window.

Hannah: Want a sleeping pill? **(Golda is silent)** Do you want me to help you shower? Wash your hair?
Golda: I don't believe a word Dayan says.

Flashback. The Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. October 5th 1973. Friday. Yom Kippur Eve. 11:30 am. Golda, Dayan, Galili, Dado and Lou are present.

Dayan: As long as there is no clear warning, we can't call up the reserves!

Golda: The Egyptians are deployed on the Suez Canal and the Syrians on the Golan Heights. You yourself have said they can start a war at any moment.

Dado: But there's no sign they're preparing to attack.

Golda: What's the intelligence assessment?

Dayan: The likelihood of war is low. All signs indicate that the Egyptians are conducting a military exercise.

Galili: And if the intelligence is wrong?

Dado: If the Egyptians or Syrians prepare an attack, we'll know about it immediately.

Golda: How?

Dado: When such a big machine moves, its wheels creak.

Golda: Tomorrow is Yom Kippur. For them, this is an ideal time.

Dayan: True, but the regular army is on full alert.

Galili: Even if the likelihood of war is low, we have to try to prevent it. We need to ask the Americans to inform the Egyptians and Syrians that we are prepared for their attack. That way they might not take the risk. Talk to Kissinger.

Golda: Shouldn't we call up the reserves now, just in case? Even if the likelihood of war is low, we need to be prepared.

Dayan: If we mobilize the reserves, the Egyptians and Syrians will be certain we're going to attack them. They'll start a war that they don't want.

Golda: And are you sure that the regular army can stop them?

Dado: Yes, absolutely.

Galili: Both in the north and south at the same time?

Dayan: We practice all the time defending against such an attack.

Golda: I've never been chief of staff or defense minister, so I have to accept your assessments. But common sense tells me that countries don't deploy such large forces on their borders unless they intend to use them. You're convinced it's an exercise, but maybe you're wrong? There are six hundred soldiers in strongholds along the canal. If war breaks out tomorrow, the Egyptians will slaughter them all.

Dayan: There will be no war tomorrow.

Back to Golda's house in the present.

Golda: He's more responsible for this catastrophe than I am. I just don't trust him. He'll serve my head to the commission on a silver platter to save himself...

The sounds of the demonstration outside are louder. Golda goes to the window.

Hannah: Maybe you should go out and talk to them?

Golda: If I were in their place, I would also demonstrate.

Hannah: So maybe I'll sleep with you after all?

- Golda: No need.
- Hannah: Okay. I'll wake you up at five. Avram will come at 5:30.
- Golda: I'm not going to the hospital tomorrow. I have to testify before the commission.
- Hannah: Your cancer doesn't care that you have to testify.
- Golda: It already knows it's not going to kill me.
- Hannah: You're not going to skip any treatment, Mom. And I'm coming with you. I want to see you drink and eat afterwards.
- Golda: Nothing will happen if I postpone it by two days.
- Hanna: The commission members know you. They know how you ran this war.
- Golda: They think I could have prevented it. They said that explicitly.
- Hannah: Then prove them wrong.
- Golda: How? I made all the policy decisions. As far as they're concerned, I'm the natural culprit.
- Hannah: You're a very strong woman, Mom. You've been prime minister for five years. You'll beat every commission. And you'll have the treatment tomorrow morning to beat the cancer as well.

3. Golda's office. Morning. Lou and Shula in the secretarial room. Shula is on the phone. The voices of the demonstrators can be heard in the background.

Shula: She goes to the hospital three times a week to visit a friend of hers who has fallen ill... I suggest you don't write anything else in the newspaper... She's already on her way to the office. **(Ends the conversation)**
What do we do now? This journalist is bound to check up with the hospital.

Lou: Avram lets her in through the morgue.

Shula: And the medical staff?

Lou: They've all signed confidentiality agreements.

Shula: Her enemies won't hesitate to leak that she's undergoing treatment. They'll claim that she's not functioning.

Lou: She's functioning just fine. Did you bring her the shoes she asked for?

Shula: Yes. **(The phone rings. She picks up)** Yes? Did he wake up?... I'll come as soon as I'm done... Make sure they don't leave him alone.

Short pause. Shula can't hold back the tears.

Lou: Is that your son? How is he?

Shula: Came out of the operating room. Just woke up.

Lou: What do the doctors say?

Shula: There was no choice, they amputated his leg.

Lou: They amputated it?

Shula: Above the knee. It was completely crushed.

Meanwhile, Hannah enters.

Hannah: Go to him. Leave everything and go.

Shula: I'll finish here first.

Hannah: If you need help at the hospital, Mom will talk to whoever you want.

Shula: **(choked throat)** Thank you.

Hannah: She'll do anything for him. Talk to her.

Lou: Not today.

Hannah: You can't hide it from her.

Lou: I don't think that today is...

Hannah: Let her decide for herself.

Lou: We'll wait for her to finish her testimony. She loves Moni. It might break her.

Golda enters, accompanied by Avram, who carries her bag.

Golda: Good morning.

Lou: Good morning.

Hannah: Good morning, Mom. Have you eaten anything?

Golda: Avram brought me.

Lou: **(Interferes)** The night's telegrams are already on your desk.

Golda: Thank you, Lou.

Hannah: How did the treatment go? **(Golda doesn't answer)** Avram?

Avram: Nothing special. As usual.

- Hannah: **(Notices that Golda's eyebrows have been trimmed)** When did you trim your eyebrows, Mom?
Have you been to a cosmetician?
- Golda: God forbid.
- Hannah: Did you cancel the treatment and go to her??
- Golda: I fixed the eyebrows in the car, right, Avram?
- Hannah: Unbelievable. I'm making a new appointment for you at the hospital.
- Lou: I'll make it.
- Golda: I'll make it myself.
- Hannah: That's incredibly irresponsible, Mom.
- Golda: I'm testifying before the commission today. There's no way I'm going to face Agranat blurred and confused; all dizzy and nauseous. My whole life is at stake here.
- Shula: I brought you new shoes, Golda. **(Showing her)**
- Golda: Very beautiful. Thank you.
- Lou: **(Interferes)** Would you like us to go through the mail?
- Golda: Later. By the way, Shula, why aren't you with your son in the hospital?
- Shula: My husband's there.
- Golda: I want to visit him tomorrow. Write it down, Lou.
- Shula: He'll be happy.
- Lou: We'll wait a few days. He underwent another surgery.
- Golda: Another surgery? Is he okay?
- Shula: They amputated his leg...
- Golda: I'm so sorry to hear that.
- Shula: We still hope that the doctors will be able to save the other leg... It was crushed too.
- Golda: If there's anything I can do...

Shula: I thought... Maybe you can ask them to consult a doctor from New York. I have the name of a specialist surgeon... Maybe he'll be able to... **(Her throat choked)**

Golda: I'll do it this evening. He's an exceptional boy.

Shula: Thank you.

Shula helps Golda measure the shoes. Galili enters.

Galili: Hannah'le!

Hannah: Good morning, Yisrael.

Galili: Did you come to help Mom?

Hannah: I hope I can.

Galili: She can't trick me. She's very glad you came.

Hannah: Do you think so?

Galili: I know.

Enters Dayan.

Dayan: Good morning.

Hannah: Good morning.

Dayan: Good morning, Galili.

Galili: You don't hear what's going on outside? It could have been a bit better.

Dayan: Are you testifying at the commission today?

Galili: This afternoon.

Lou: Mr. Dayan, I don't remember making an appointment.

Dayan: The last time I checked, I was still the minister of defense. I don't have to make an appointment every time I come to the prime minister.

Dayan and Galili turn to Golda. Hannah leaves.

Golda: It's good that you came.

Dayan: They also questioned me about the negotiations. **(Sits)**

Golda: And what did you say?

Galili: We're not allowed to coordinate testimonies, Golda.

Golda: We're not coordinating testimonies. We're trying to give more accurate answers.

Galili: And yet...

Dayan: They asked about the proposal I made to the Americans in 1970.

Golda: The proposal that you made?

Dayan: That we made. For a limited withdrawal from the canal, which would allow the Egyptians to open it to navigation.

Golda: I hope Agranat didn't get the impression that it was your private proposal.

Dayan: Of course not.

Golda: Did you tell them that I authorized you to propose it?

Dayan: At least three times.

Galili: I'm sorry. I'm testifying this afternoon, and I'm not allowed to...

Dayan: We're not coordinating testimony. It's a strategic discussion.

Galili: We can't act like a gang of criminals.

Golda: Sit down! **(Phone rings)**

Galili sits down. Meanwhile, Lou answers the phone.

Lou: **(On the phone)** Let him in.

Golda: **(To Galili)** Yisrael, I want you to make it clear that I approved the proposal we made to the Americans.

Galili: I'll answer what I'm asked. Also about the disagreements we had.

Dayan: What disagreements? What are you talking about?

Galili: We testify there under oath, Golda.

Golda: It's not a lie. It's the truth.

Galili: I'll tell the whole truth. I hope you will do the same.

Dayan: We always had full agreement.

Galili: The commission was established to understand how we made decisions, even if we made mistakes here and there.

Golda: What mistakes did we make?

Ashkenazi enters.

Golda: Good morning.

Ashkenazi: Good morning, Madam.

Golda: This is Captain Ashkenazi, who started the demonstrations after the war. **(To Ashkenazi)**
Sit. Have a drink. Tea? Coffee?

Ashkenazi: No. Thank you.

Golda: It's cold outside.

Ashkenazi: I already drank.

Golda: I'm glad you agreed to meet with me. We are all glad. It's important for me to hear from you about the reasons for your protest. I have no doubt that it expresses real pain.

Ashkenazi: This is not my protest, Madam. It's of all the thousands out there... We demand that the defense minister resign, or that you fire him.

Golda: Captain Ashkenazi, a commission of inquiry has been appointed to...

Ashkenazi: There is no point in waiting for its conclusions. Your responsibility, sir, cries out to heaven.

Dayan: If the commission finds me responsible, I will, of course...

Ashkenazi: I was there!

Dayan: I know.

Ashkenazi: And saw with my own eyes!

Dayan: Captain Ashkenazi...

Ashkenazi: When I arrived at the stronghold, it was not prepared for war. The fence was broken... The mines...

Dayan: You have to submit these complaints to the army's ombudsman.

Ashkenazi: Of course I submitted them. And I haven't received a response until now.

Dayan: In any case, the prime minister is not the address for...

Golda: **(To Ashkenazi)** Please continue.

Ashkenazi: The fence was broken... the anti-tank mines had been washed away by the sea... The fortifications were sinking... The electricity system was out of order...

- Dayan: The army received orders to be prepared.
Unfortunately, there was an intelligence failure that...
- Ashkenazi: You were also responsible for the intelligence failure. Because of your indifference, there were untrained soldiers in the strongholds... No bulletproof vests... No night vision equipment...
- Galili: I will ask the Ombudsman to give you an answer as soon as possible.
- Dayan: I think I'm responsible for the ombudsman.
- Galili: Yes, but...
- Golda: Gentlemen!
- Dayan: The events of the war itself are currently being investigated by the division. We will not discuss them before it ends.
- Golda: **(To Ashkenazi)** I actually want to hear from you about the events of the war.
- Lou: Golda, you'll be late for the commission.
- Golda: Speak.
- Ashkenazi: Because of his negligence, we went through six days of hell, Madam. Thousands of shells, aircraft, cannons, tanks... The ground shook. The trenches collapsed... All the buildings... Fire in every corner... We begged for reinforcements. But he didn't call up the reserves in time...
- Galili: We mobilized the reserves as soon as the army demanded.
- Golda: I think you should say these things to the Agranat Commission.
- Dayan: Wait a minute, Golda.

Golda: I'll ask them to summon you. It's important that your voice be heard.

Ashkenazi: Thank you, but the members of the commission are his people. We already know what they'll decide.

Dayan: You know? So please, tell us. What will they decide?

Ashkenazi: You should resign immediately.

Dayan: Who authorized you to fire me?

Golda: Look, Mr. Ashkenazi. After the war there were elections. We won by a large majority.

Ashkenazi: You won a majority, because the public still doesn't understand that he is responsible for this disaster. **(To Dayan)** You were God to us... We followed you with closed eyes, and you led us into this inferno...

Golda: Mr. Ashkenazi...

Ashkenazi: We will not stop protesting until you resign.

Ashkenazi approaches Dayan. Galili rushes to stop him.

Galil: Please sit down.

Ashkenazi: **(To Dayan)** Until you resign and stand trial!

Dayan: Get out!! Get out!!

Pause. Ashkenazi turns to leave.

Galili: We want to hear you, Ashkenazi.

Ashkenazi: Who wants?

Galili: Without you, we will not be able to do the soul-searching that you demand.

Ashkenazi: Don't try to smear me.

Galilean: God forbid. I'll invite you to another meeting.

Dayan: **(To Galili)** For what?

Ashkenazi: Tomorrow there will be ten thousand people here.

Golda: Mr. Ashkenazi...

Ashkenazi: And the next day twenty thousand!

Golda: Lou...

Lou: Mr. Ashkenazi, this meeting is over.

Ashkenazi: **(To Dayan)** Until you resign!

Ashkenazi exits. Lou and Hannah follow him. Silence.

Galili: We can't throw him out like that. We have to give them answers. It will be very difficult for us to sit in our offices, when thousands are protesting like this outside. **(Exits)**

Dayan: Do you really want him to testify before the commission?

Golda: Maybe.

Dayan: He will blame us for all the failures of the war.

Golda: And maybe after his testimony they will stop these demonstrations.

Dayan: But he may convince the commission that we were responsible not only for the ministerial decisions, but also for the operational decisions.

Golda: The decision to call up the reserves only on the morning of Yom Kippur was an operational decision, and I should have made it at least the day before.

Dayan: And you think I should resign because of that?

Golda: No. If you resign, there'll be political chaos. Better we begin rebuilding the ruins left by the war.

Dayan: Exactly.

Golda: These shoes are too tight, Lou...

Dayan: I'm glad we see eye to eye on this issue.

Golda: The shoes are squeezing my feet, Lou...

Dayan: In a few days the protest will die down, and we'll be able to begin...

Golda: Lou! These shoes are too tight!

Dayan: By the way, I am afraid of what Galili will say there in his testimony after you.

Golda: Galili is a decent man.

Dayan: Maybe too decent. **(Exits)**

Flashback. Many phones ring. Golda's bedroom. October 6th 1973. Yom Kippur. 4 am. Golda is unable to sleep. Now the phone next to her rings. She hurries to pick it up, and hears the voice of the assistant to the Head of the Mossad

Golda: Hello?

Assistant: Mrs. Meir?

Golda: Yes. Who is speaking?

Assistant: The assistant to the head of the Mossad.

Golda: Speak.

Assistant: The head of Mossad met in London with our man from Cairo.

Golda: Yes?

Assistant: He reports that war will break out this evening.

Golda: This evening?! Is he sure?

Assistant: He's our best source.

Darkness on Golda. Light on Dayan, holding the phone.

Dayan: Do you think this report is reliable?

Assistant: Until now he has been very reliable.

Dayan: Our intelligence people don't trust him.

Assistant: The head of the Mossad sees no reason to doubt him.

Dayan: This man also warned us in May that war would break out. We mobilized reserves, and the war did not break out.

Assistant: Now there's evidence on the ground to support his warning.

Dayan: And is he sure that the Syrians and Egyptians will attack at the same time?

Assistant: He heard it firsthand.

Dayan: Firsthand?

Assistant: Directly from Sadat.

Darkness on Dayan. Light on Dado, holding the phone.

Dado: Before sunset?! What time?

Assistant: We don't have an exact time. He thinks they want the sun to dazzle our pilots.

Dado: Did you get their war plans from him?

Assistant: The head of the Mossad will bring them with him when he lands in Tel Aviv.

Dado: When he lands in Tel Aviv?! I want to see them right away!

The Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. October 6th 1973. Yom Kippur. It's 8:05 a.m. Golda and Lou enter.

Lou: What happened?!

Golda: War will break out this evening.

Lou: This evening?!

Golda: With the Egyptians and Syrians. My heart told me it would happen. Where are Galili and Dayan?!

Lou: They'll be here any moment. You must not show them that you are frightened.

Golda: I never ran a war.

Enter Dayan, Galili and Dado.

Dado: We have to call up the reserves, Madam.

Galili: Yesterday you said exactly the opposite.

Dado: The Mossad's warning is very clear.

Dayan: The Mossad has issued such warnings in the past as well, and nothing happened.

Dado: That man is the best agent we've ever had. His report is very detailed.

Dayan: Our intelligence says that the chance of war is low.

Dado: I'm chief of staff. I'm not gambling. If there is a warning of war, we have to be prepared.

Galil: Golda? **(Golda doesn't answer)** Golda? **(Golda doesn't answer)**

Dado: If we don't immediately mobilize four reserve divisions, we won't be able to stop them.

Dayan: Four divisions? For what?

- Dado: A division in the south, a division in the north, a re-enforcement division and a counterattack division.
- Dayan: If we do it, we'll shut down the entire economy.
- Galili: We'll release them within a day or two if war doesn't break out.
- Dayan: We have three hundred tanks in the south and one hundred seventy in the north.
- Dado: **(To Golda)** Egypt has two thousand tanks. The Syrians have one thousand four hundred.
- Dayan: OK. I approve the mobilization of two divisions. Together with the Air Force, it will be enough.
- Dado: They'll roll over us in a few hours.
- Dayan: Mobilizing the reserves is a decision of the defense minister.
- Dado: The operational responsibility lies with me.
- Galili: Gentlemen!
- Golda: If war really breaks out, Moshe, we need to be in the best possible situation. Not?
- Dayan: If we mobilize the entire army before even a single shot is fired, the Americans and Russians will accuse us of starting a war.
- Galili: Right now, it's more important to defend ourselves.
- Golda: I am inclined to accept the Chief of Staff's demand. **(To Dado)** Mobilize four divisions.
- Dado: Thank you, Madam. **(Exits)**
- Dayan: I'm not going to lie on the road and stop this mobilization. Keep in mind that if war doesn't break out, we'll have to explain why we mobilized so many.

Golda: But if war breaks out, it will be much harder to explain why we didn't mobilize.

Dayan: Golda, look...

Golda: We'll also have to explain why we didn't mobilize them yesterday or the day before.

Back to Golda's office. Shula helps Golda change her shoes.

Golda: Oh, much better. Thank you, Shula.

Lou: You need to go, Golda. I put your speeches in the bag.

Golda: Excellent. I'll go over them in the car.

Hannah: I'm coming with you.

Golda: I'm not sure you can get in there. We haven't received your security clearance.

Hannah: Don't worry. I'll wait outside.

4. Meeting room of Agranat commission. Golda is already in the midst of her testimony.

Agranat: After Sadat's initiative failed in early '71, why didn't you launch your own initiative for settlement?

Golda: Of course I did. I proposed a settlement in stages. First, we'd withdraw thirty kilometers from the Canal, and later we'd negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement.

Agranat: And why did this initiative fail, too?

Golda: Because the Egyptians again demanded that we commit to a full withdrawal.

Agranat: So how did you respond?

Golda: I approached Sadat through Ceaușescu and the Iranians, and offered a secret meeting in which we would discuss a significant withdrawal. Sadat didn't even reply.

Agranat: The protocols indicate that throughout the year '72 there was a deep stalemate in contacts with the Egyptians. Did Madam think that the Egyptians would accept this stalemate?

Golda: No.

Agranat: So you knew that at one point or another they would start a war?

Golda: That was also the assessment of our intelligence.

Agranat: And yet you sat for a whole year doing nothing and didn't try to prevent it.

Golda: Excuse me?

Agranat: Sources have testified to this.

Golda: Are you implying that I was indifferent to the danger of war?

Agranat: These sources claim that it was your rigidity that prevented the starting of negotiations.

Golda: Those sources misled you, sir.

Agranat: These sources are very reliable.

Golda: **(After a pause)** I see that your honor has already judged me.

Agranat: I ask for your response, Madam.

Golda: **(In rage)** The insinuation that we were the reluctant side do us an injustice. I know the Arabs, and I know very well the price of war. How can you imagine that I

was indifferent? Every soldier is as dear to me as my son. If I could, I would be killed in his place and buried in his place, and rot in his place, and... **(Silent)**

Agranat: Madam is not feeling well? Would you like to take a break? I suggest we end this session. Thank you.

Golda takes her bag and leaves. Hannah and Lou are waiting for her.

Hannah: How was it, Mom?

Golda: I need a cigarette.

Lou: First your medicine.

Hannah: You're terribly pale. What did they want from you?

Golda: Nothing. **(swallows the medicine)**

Hannah: **(Stubbornly)** What did they want, Mom?

Golda: Dayan told them that I was responsible for the diplomatic stalemate with the Egyptians.

5. Dayan and Galili outside Golda's office.

Dayan: She avoids me. Yesterday, at the cabinet meeting, she didn't speak to me. She cancelled two meetings. The trust between us is dwindling. That makes our day-to-day work very difficult.

Galili: I'll talk to her.

Dayan: She suspects I told the commission that she was not interested in negotiations with the Egyptians. Kissinger said that. **(Gives him a document)** This is a memo

that he sent to Nixon and he, apparently, also gave it to the commission.

Galil: Please, leave me out of this. **(Turning to go)**

Dayan: Yisrael, I can easily testify that she rejected all the compromise proposals I submitted to her.

Galili: I wouldn't recommend you threaten her.

Dayan: Every time I offered to open negotiations with the Egyptians, she refused.

Galili: It's a strange coincidence. From the moment the commission began to investigate the political failure, suddenly "you proposed and she rejected", "you wanted and she refused..."

Dayan: That's the truth.

Galili: What proposals did she reject?

Dayan: I proposed a withdrawal of fifty kilometers from the canal in order to open negotiations. She disagreed. It's in the transcript of our phone conversation.

Galili: I remember that conversation well. I urged you to insist on your plan, but you gave up.

Dayan: You gave up too.

Galili: **(Angrily)** I didn't give up.

Dayan: You were a full partner in our policy.

Galili: That's right. But...

Dayan: **(Shows two documents)** The archives remember everything. Here you said that Sadat is a new president. We don't know if he's fulfilling agreements. Here you said that during World War II he was a member of the underground that collaborated with the Nazis...

Galili: I see that you have prepared a whole file against us.

Dayan: She's prepared one too. You have a lot of influence over her, Yisrael. Tell her that I am not undermining her.

Transition. Night. Prime Minister's House. Galili and Golda.

Galili: Dayan did not tell the commission that you refused to negotiate.

Golda: Did he send you to talk to me?

Galili: They read it in Kissinger's memo to President Nixon.

Golda: What other stories did he sell you?

Galil: You can trust him.

Golda: He told the commission that my rigidity was the obstacle.

Galili: He didn't say that.

Golda: So who said it? You?

Galili: He's your defense minister, Golda...

Golda: *A sakh un vi* defense²...

Galili: You can't stop working with him.

Golda: I don't trust him. I don't trust anyone, besides you.

Galili: Thank you, but what if...

Golda: What if I had retired from politics in '69, as I wanted?

Galili: What if you listened to me and understood that Dayan...

Golda: Damn Dayan. Damn everyone! I've done my part, now let others do theirs.

Yiddish: We shouldn't know such defense ²

Galili: There's no argument about that. We all know about the National Insurance Law, the Health Insurance Law, the Hours of Work and Rest Law, the money you raised, but now...

Golda: More flattery, please. You forgot about the housing I built for new immigrants.

Galili: But now you have to run a state...

Golda: What if I had continued to work as a high school teacher?

Galili: **(Smiling)** Within a year or two you would have become chairman of the teachers' union and made the life of the Minister of Education miserable.

Golda: But I wouldn't be prime minister, and I wouldn't carry this war on my shoulders. I'd be a pensioner, living next to Hannah on the kibbutz and going to the swimming pool with my grandchildren in the summer. Maybe I would speak occasionally at kibbutz meetings...

Galili: You love politics, Golda.

Golda: Nonsense. I'm a statesman. I was born to work with people, to build a future for them. To identify the weak and protect their rights by law. Politics has never interested me.

Galili: You were born into politics.

Golda: And you drank too much.

Galili: As for Dayan...

Golda: Dayan is not the person we knew. He has changed. He's scared. He's desperate. He cares only for himself. I know he sent you to talk to me. So now go back to

him and tell him I expect full backing from him. Both inside and outside the commission. If not, I will give the commission my private correspondence with him, and it will decide whether my rigidity was the obstacle.

6. Golda's office. In the afternoon, Golda, Avram, Hannah and Lou are present.

Golda: I received this report this morning, Avram. I wanted to show it to you myself.

Avram: Is he alive?

Golda: His tank was hit on its way to the canal. The entire crew is missing. None of them have been found during our searches of the area under our control.

Avram: If you haven't found anyone, then he could still be alive...

Golda: The army has now decided to limit the search.

Avram: Why? He may be hiding in the mountains. Among the Bedouins, perhaps. Such things have happened. Maybe he doesn't even know the war is over.

Golda: We've been searching for five months already, Avram.

Avram: Maybe you can ask the army to continue for only a few more days, a week or two. Maybe the Egyptians will let us search on their side...

Golda: Avram...

Avram: We can't just abandon him...

Golda: We're doing whatever we can, Avram.

Avram: How do I explain this to my wife? Every time the phone rings, every knock on the door... **(His throat chokes)**

Lou: **(holding his arm)** Come. I'll make you some tea. Take a few days off. We'll manage.

Lou and Avram leave. Golda wipes a tear from her eye, and lights a cigarette.

Hanna: You're Prime Minister, Mom. Can't you ask the army to keep searching?

Golda: Because I know Avram?

Hannah: Because ... it's Avram.

Golda: And what do I say to the parents of the other missing soldiers?

Hannah: We have to keep on looking for them, too.

Golda: The army has decided to scale back the search.

Hannah: Stop being a politician for a moment.

Golda: I'm not a politician, I'm prime minister!

Hannah: They are human beings... It's Avram... How will you be able to look him in the eye?

Golda: You're no longer a child, Hannah. It's not just Avram. There are dozens of other parents looking for their sons. And they'll continue looking and find nothing. Those kids are gone! Every one of them! **(The phone on her desk rings, she replies)** Ashkenazi?! I don't remember inviting him...

Hannah: He was waiting at the gate this morning. He wants to tell you about his testimony to the commission.

Golda: I don't want to hear him.

Hannah: I saw you had a few minutes to spare.

Golda: I don't have any.

Hannah: You don't want the demonstrators to hear that you refused to talk to him.

Golda: **(On the phone)** Okay. Let him in. And call Galili, too. **(To Hannah)** This is the last time you interfere in the affairs of this office. Clear?

Enter Ashkenazi. Lou follows him.

Ashkenazi: Thank you for agreeing to see me, Madam. I testified before the commission yesterday. They seemed completely disinterested in what I had to say.

Golda: I'm sorry to hear that.

Ashkenazi: Whenever I dared to criticize the defense minister, they silenced me immediately.

Golda: Look, the commission is independent. I can't influence it.

Ashkenazi: Yes. Of course. But...But when I complained that the defense minister had not ordered the mobilization of reserves before the war, they said that this decision was made together with you.

Golda: That's right.

Ashkenazi: According to them, you also made the decision to mobilize the army only on the morning of Yom Kippur!

Golda: Absolutely.

Galili: Our decisions were based on the recommendations of the Chief-of-Staff.

Ashkenazi: A week before the war, I saw with my own eyes the Egyptian army preparing for war. And I saw how unprepared we were...

Galili: What do you want, Ashkenazi?

Golda: Captain Ashkenazi, the army may not have been adequately prepared for the war, but in the end we won.

Ashkenazi: We won? Two thousand seven hundred and sixty-five soldiers were killed. If I had gone on hunger strike under your window before the war, maybe they would still be alive.

Golda: **(Shocked)** Excuse me?! Are you blaming me for their deaths?

Ashkenazi: You as well, Madam. You played a major part in leading this war. That's why you have to resign. Together with Dayan. **(to Galil)** And with you.

Galili: This meeting is over, Ashkenazi.

Golda: Yes.

Ashkenazi: You must all resign!

Galili: Get out.

Lou: You've been asked to leave!

Ashkenazi: We won't survive here for long unless you do some soul-searching. If you don't acknowledge your responsibility, then the leaders who come after you will repeat the same mistakes!

Galili leads Ashkenazi outside. Silence.

Lou: I'm sorry. I should have asked you. This man will no longer enter this office.

Hannah: This man?! He fought the war for us. Many of his friends have not yet recovered from it. Last night I hung out with them a bit.

Golda: I don't want to hear.

Hannah: You don't have to agree with every word they say, but...

Lou: She doesn't want to hear.

Golda: And I don't want you to go near them anymore.

Hannah: Why not listen?

Golda: Because they have nothing new to tell me!

Hannah: You shut yourself off and don't speak. Even during the war, you hardly spoke. Dayan held a press conference every other day.

Golda: I know what I'm doing.

Hannah: To them, your silence is interpreted as indifference. You know how to talk!

Golda: I don't want to talk!

Hannah: When you speak from the heart, Mom, you're so convincing...

Golda: The only time I spoke during the war, I stuttered. I looked old, weak, frightened...

Lou: Golda...

Golda: I agreed to have you here, to stand by me, but all you do is criticize me. "Mom, do this" and "Mom, don't do that"... I am Prime Minister, Hannah. I...

Lou: I'll bring you a glass of water. **(Exits)**

Hannah: I want to help you. I talked to them to hear what they thought. So you can understand what they want. It's not just Ashkenazi who thinks you should resign.

Golda: So you're also suggesting that I resign?

Hannah: I'm suggesting that you go out and talk to them. I don't understand why you're so angry. You know I want the best for you...

Golda: Thank you very much. **(Golda exits)**

Hannah: Mom...

Galili enters.

Hannah: She just left.

Galili: I actually wanted to talk to you. What did you invite Ashkenazi for? Didn't you see how much he hurts her?

Hannah: She has to hear him. She must address his accusations.

Galili: Hannah'le, she doesn't want to have a public argument with him.

Hannah: Her silence is interpreted as an admission.

Galili: I suggested that she hold a press conference, but...

Hannah: Have you seen today's headlines?

Galili: I saw.

Hannah: Is she "the worst prime minister in the history of the country"?

Galili: Of course not.

Hannah: You're a wise man, Yisrael. She believes in you. She depends on you. You must help her. She's becoming more hated every day.

- Galili: She will find the place and the time to talk. I advise you not to push her too far. I know her well, Hannah.
- Hannah: Yes, I know you know her well. You've spent more time with her than I have. She always preferred to be in the office rather than at home.
- Galili: That's not true, Hannah.
- Hannah: It doesn't matter anymore.
- Galili: You have to forgive her.
- Hannah: I never blamed her. I missed her. Even when she went on a mission to America and left me with a nanny. A six-year-old child with a kidney inflammation.
- Galili: You know how much she regretted it.
- Hannah: And when she came back, she started her affairs with Shazar³, with Remez⁴...
- Galili: I don't think you know what she went through during those years.
- Hanna: I know enough. I saw my father leave the house. I spent hours sitting with him and consoling him after her betrayals.
- Galili: She loved your dad until his last day. She loves you too.
- Hannah: I learned firsthand that she mostly loves herself.
- Galili: Enough, Hannah. Let it go. Don't you see how hard it is for her?
- Hannah: What do you want, Yisrael? Are you scared I'll convince her to resign? I'm doing this for her.
- Galili: Me too.

An Israeli politician. Was the president of Israel 1963-1972 ³
 An Israeli Politician, Chairman of the Union of Workers, Minister of Education ⁴

Hannah: All you think about is yourself and your seat in the government.

Hannah exits angrily.

7. The living room at the Prime Minister's House. Night. Golda and Hannah.

Hannah: You haven't eaten anything all day. Just coffee and cigarettes. **(Golda doesn't answer)** When can I accompany you to the commission hearings?

Golda: I told you. When we get the security clearance.

Hannah: I don't think I'll get it.

Golda: Why?

Hannah: Because you didn't ask for it.

Golda: Of course I asked.

Hannah: I spoke with security this morning. Had you asked, I would have received it long ago.

Golda: I'll talk to them again. It must have fallen between the cracks.

Hannah: You can stop lying to me, Mom.

Golda: Excuse me?!

Hannah: You don't want me to come with you. You don't want me to hear the questions. You don't want me to see you get confused when you answer.

Golda: I said I'll talk to security again.

Hannah: You won't talk to them, because you don't want me to see you weak. Because you always have to be

strong. So strong that everyone around you is constantly reminded how weak he is.

Golda: Not now, Hannah. Dayan did me terrible damage today.

Hannah: I'm not talking about Dayan now. I'm talking about me. About us.

Golda: I have a terrible headache, Hannah. Please, leave me alone.

Hannah: Alone. You've been alone your entire life. Needing someone is weakness, and weakness is a sin. There were so many moments when I needed you. When I wanted "together." But you're always "alone". I've spent my entire life trying to please you, and never succeeded. Because only you matter. You and your wars and your victories and your speeches and your lovers... Why didn't I finish high school? Why did I run away to the kibbutz? Why did Dad run away as well? I've been here for two weeks, trying to help you. Have you even once asked me how I was doing? How my husband is? What about the children? **(Pause)** Do you know that a week ago we celebrated Aviva's twenty-fifth birthday? This year, too, she waited. She refused to blow out the candles and kept asking, "When will Grandma come"... "My Grandma is prime minister"... But Grandma won't come, right? Grandma won't admit that she has a granddaughter like Aviva. No-one should know that Golda Meir has a granddaughter with Down Syndrome.

Golda: Aren't you ashamed?!

- Hannah: Just so you know, Mom. She can read and write, she plays the piano, she sings. She works. She has a partner. And you've never even seen her.
- Golda: I didn't see her, because you threw her into the institution the day she was born.
- Hannah: I visit her every week. She's at my kibbutz every holiday. You can come with me to visit her from time to time. But you don't... **(Pause)** Why? Tell me the truth just once. Only the two of us are here. Why have you never seen my child?
- Golda: Because it scared me. Because I don't know what to do with children... I didn't know how to love her.
- Hannah: And did you know how to love me?
- Golda: I didn't ask for a security clearance for you because I didn't want you to get hurt.
- Hannah: How can I get hurt?
- Golda: From the criticism of me.
- Hannah: I've been dealing with criticism of you since the day I was born.
- Golda: And you accept it and criticize me. Your criticism hurts me. And now that I need you so much...
- Hannah: If you need me, then call security. I want to hear you asking for the clearance. **(Golda doesn't answer)** What do you think? That if I discover that you could have prevented this war, I won't stand by you?

Golda is silent. Avram enters, with an envelope in his hand.

- Avram: It came to the office. I think it's urgent.

Golda: **(Opening the envelope)** Call Lou and Galili. Tell them to come immediately. Dayan has resigned.

8. Golda's house. Dayan, Golda, Galili, Lou and Hannah.

Dayan: We're finished politically, Golda. We've lost the public's trust.

Golda: Most of the public voted for us in the election. Despite the war.

Dayan: If we don't resign, the commission will fire us. **(Gives her a letter)**

Golda: Look, I'm experienced enough to understand that you want to be the first to resign. That's not the solidarity I expected. You have twenty-four hours to reconsider your decision. Don't forget that we've been full partners throughout. If you renounce it, I will fight you to the bitter end.

Handing him the letter. He doesn't take it.

Dayan: **(Angrily)** I won't be threatened by you!

Golda: I'm not threatening you. But don't be surprised if you hear a rumor that, on the morning of Yom Kippur, you opposed the total mobilization of the reserves...

Dayan: I tried until the last minute to prevent the war.

Golda: And three days later you declared that we were facing destruction.

- Dayan: I said what I said to highlight the danger we were facing.
- Golda: You said it because you broke down. Because you collapsed. Because you weren't functioning. **(Hands him the letter again)**
- Dayan: I also have a few cards up my sleeve.
- Golda: Really? What cards?
- Dayan: Your letters to me, in which for three years you rejected all my proposals for a diplomatic initiative. You wouldn't want me to make them public. **(Takes the letter and leaves)**
- Galili: Think again, Golda. He might be right. The three of us are in the same boat. Perhaps we should admit that we could have done more to prevent this war.
- Golda: We won it!
- Galili: We can't allow Dayan to spread dirt...
- Golda: He wants to take me down with him, if he goes.
- Galili: You can always resign before he does. That way, you'll be seen as someone who recognized her responsibility for the policy she led. Not someone who was forced out. That's how you'll be remembered for generations.

Golda doesn't answer. Galili exits.

- Hannah: He's right, Mom.
- Golda: You too, Hannah?
- Hannah: If they both resign, you won't have any choice.

Golda: Why do I have to resign? I did everything I could, to the best of my judgment. I didn't fail, and I will not admit to a failure that never happened.

Flashback. The Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. October 6th 1973. Yom Kippur. 1:45 p.m. Golda, Galili and Lou are present.

Galili: We're getting contradictory assessments, Golda. The head of Military Intelligence has just informed the newspaper editors that war is unlikely to break out. But the head of the Mossad claims that...

Golda: **(Firmly)** Right now we're preparing as if there is a war on both fronts.

Enter Dayan.

Galili: What did they say?

Dayan: Intelligence now estimates that war will break out at six. On both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts.

Galili: The Americans need to be notified immediately.

Golda: I've already notified them. I also asked them to inform the Russians.

Dayan: The chief of staff is making all the necessary preparations. The army will be ready to block the attacks by this evening.

Galili: We also need to brief the opposition as soon as possible.

Golda: We're looking for Begin⁵.

Israeli politician. Head of the opposition in 1973 ⁵

- Lou: He's in shul.
- Golda: Can't he be called out?
- Dayan: There's a decision we need to make right now, Golda. It's possible that only the Egyptians will attack. If that's what happens, I recommend we attack the Syrians to take them out of the game.
- Galili: I suggest we meet again at 5:30. By then we might have new information. Hopefully we won't have to fight on two fronts.
- Golda: Alright, let's meet again at 5:30. **(A siren is suddenly heard)** What's that? **(Dayan and Galili don't answer)** What is it?

Shula enters and hands a note to Lou.

- Lou: It's begun. Syrian planes are already flying over the Golan Heights and the Galilee. The Egyptians have removed the camouflage nets from their cannons.
- Golda: *Nur dos felt, mir ois.* ⁶

Back to the present, to Golda's office. The siren still sounds in the background.

- Hannah: The commission may decide that you are guilty, Mom.
- Golda: I am not guilty, even if the commission decides I am.
- Hannah: It will be very difficult for you to maintain your innocence if that's what they decide.

Yiddish: That what I need now ⁶

Golda: I'll still say it, wherever I am and whenever I can. Now you understand why I didn't want you to come here? If that's what you think, you can go home. If you hurry, you'll get the last bus.

Act II

9. Flashback. The living room at the Prime Minister's House in Jerusalem. October 29th, 1969. Late at night, after election day. Golda's associates hold a surprise party in her honor after her big victory. Dayan, Galili, Hannah, Lou and Shula, and several other employees of her office are present. Everyone is waiting for her arrival. She enters, accompanied by Avram, who carries her bag.

Everyone: **(Applause)** Bravo. Bravo. Well done. **(All sing)** For she's a jolly good woman, For she's a jolly good woman. For she's a jolly good woman, which nobody can deny!

Golda: Did you think you could surprise me? I saw you all leaving when I finished addressing the central committee. You, and then you, and then you and you and you. I understood. I intended celebrating at a discotheque downtown and dancing all night, but I didn't want you to wait for me here until the morning.

Hanna: It's the biggest victory since the founding of the state, Mom.

Shula: Unbelievable, Golda. Fifty-six seats!

Golda: I was actually hoping for sixty-six.

- Galili: Ben-Gurion didn't win like this in any of the elections he stood in. It's testimony to your inexhaustible strength. The harder you work, the stronger you become.
- Golda: I adore flattery, but I'd rather have everyone tell me the truth.
- Galili: **(Laughs)** Even if it costs them their jobs?
- Lou: Golda, say something.
- Golda: I am so grateful for the love you shower on me. As a not particularly attractive woman from a poor Ukrainian family, who fled pogroms, immigrated to Milwaukee, worked at her mother's grocery store to pay for school, and had to prove herself every day – without standing much of a chance... I didn't have many expectations...
- Hannah: We love you, Mom.
- Golda: Thank you, Hannah'le. A lot of this was thanks to you. If you hadn't urged me on, I wouldn't have stood as a candidate in this election. At my age, I thought it would be another bad joke...
- Lou: **(Showing Golda a cake)** This is the cake that Hannah'le baked in your honor.
- Everyone: Cheers. Cheers...
- Golda: **(To Dayan)** I'm surprised to see you. I thought that you and Shimon Peres would be planning for the succession battle already.
- Galili: It will be pretty tough battle after such a victory.
- Dayan: At the end of the day, I always accept the party's decision. You, too, no?
- Golda: Of course.

Galili: You've nothing to worry about. They say you're a pretty good defense minister...

Golda: But that's not enough to be prime minister.

All three of them laugh. Avram enters. Gives a note to Lou. Lou passes the note to Dayan.

Golda: What happened?

Dayan: The Egyptians ambushed some of our soldiers east of the canal.

Golda: How many?

Dayan: Seven dead and eight wounded... They were on a bus to a stronghold in the north. The Egyptians fired their artillery to distract them from the ambush. Our boys didn't see it coming.

Golda: And the families?

Dayan: They'll be informed tomorrow.

Silence. Golda moves to a radio studio. In the background, the voice of the news anchor can be heard.

Anchor: ... We'll now go over to the Prime Minister, who has just responded to the latest Egyptian provocation in the War of Attrition, which has been going on now for more than two years on the southern front.

Golda: **(To the microphone)** War doesn't thrill me. A prime minister who rushes to send his soldiers into battle is not worthy of being prime minister. But we will not ignore this provocation. It once again reveals the bitter truth that cannot be ignored. Not only that the

Egyptians don't want peace, they don't want us here at all. And for our right to live here, we will fight with all our might. We won't let them shed our blood in this war of attrition. We'll grind them to pulp all along the canal and deep into their country, and if they dare to start an all-out war, we'll destroy their army until the last soldier.

Back to the present. Prime Minister's House. Morning. Golda gets dressed.

Lou: **(enters)** Ready?
 Golda: Has Dayan called?
 Lou: Golda, you should have left already.
 Golda: I'll ask again. Did Dayan call?
 Lou: Not yet.
 Golda: The twenty-four hours I gave him have passed.
 Lou: True, but you can't be late for the commission.
 Golda: Cancel and reschedule.
 Lou: You can't cancel it now.
 Golda: I won't stand in front of Agranat until I get an answer from Dayan.
 Lou: I'll call his office. **(Golda doesn't answer)** You have to go. **(Golda doesn't answer)** Is everything okay? **(Golda nods)**

Flashback. The Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. October 7th 1973. Second day of the war. 12:30 pm. Golda, Dayan and Galili are present.

- Dayan: We lost two hundred tanks in the south last night. The Syrians occupied most of the Golan Heights.
- Galili: Are you suggesting we use nuclear weapons?!
- Dayan: They're approaching the Jordan river. Today they could take Tiberias and the villages nearby.
- Galili: The Mossad reckons they won't come down from the Golan.
- Dayan: They've discovered that they can, and they'll try.
- Golda: I won't make such a decision without the chief of staff!
- Dayan: If we don't decide now, it will be the end of the country. Every city, every village, every house... Hundreds of thousands will die, men... women... children...
- Golda: Calm down, Moshe.
- Dayan: Don't fool yourself, Golda.
- Golda: And only nuclear weapons will stop them?
- Dayan: I am not proposing the use of nuclear weapons. Only that we arm the missiles.
- Golda: If we introduce nuclear weapons into the war, the Russians will do it, too. One bomb on Tel Aviv, and we are wiped out forever. Why isn't Dado here?
- Galili: He's on the Golan Heights.
- Golda: We'll wait until he comes back.
- Dayan: The division in Sinai has been crushed! So has the brigade on the Golan Heights!
- Golda: I am not introducing nuclear weapons into this war now!
- Dayan: We can't take any more risks.
- Golda: We can't make any more mistakes either. This is not the time for panic. I am not an expert on security

matters like you, but I am nonetheless sure that the army will stop the Egyptians and the Syrians, even without the threat of nuclear weapons. And I warn you, don't give any other order behind my back.

Back to the present. Prime Minister's House.

Lou: Golda? (**Golda doesn't answer**) Golda? (**Golda doesn't answer**) Avram is waiting downstairs. You should have been there twenty minutes ago.

Golda: Do you think I should resign?

Lou: Why? Because Dayan told you to?

Golda: There are moments when I doubt whether I'm even suitable to be prime minister.

Lou: Who can be prime minister except for you? Peres? Alon? Rabin?

Golda: Those three will undermine me until they overthrow me.

Hannah enters, suitcase in hand. Silence. Lou exits.

Golda: Are you going home?

Hannah: Yes, I'm taking the bus. I hope you'll manage.

Brief silence. Hannah turns to leave.

Golda: Why? Because you think I should resign? I think about it all the time.

Hannah: But you keep on saying the opposite.

Golda: I'm waiting for the right moment. Perhaps before the publication of the commission's report. **(Pause)** I'm not ignoring your criticism.

Hannah: I don't want to fight anymore.

Golda: It may not seem like it, but I'm listening to you. You're my smart girl. Maybe you'll stay a bit longer?

Hannah: You know we're going to have disagreements.

Golda: So we'll talk about them. I really sleep better when you're in the room next to me. By the way, I received the security clearance for you.

Lou enters.

Lou: A letter from Dayan. He retracts. He is not resigning.

Golda: *Nu shuyin, zol zayn Gezunt*⁷. **(Gives Hannah the clearance)** Will you come with me to the commission?

10. Meeting room of Agranat commission. Golda continues her testimony. Hannah sits next to her.

Agranat: This document, Madam, is the minutes of the cabinet meeting on April 18, 1973.

Golda: How did you get it?

Agranat: We get the impression from it, that six months before the war, we missed another real opportunity for negotiations with the Egyptians.

Golda: We didn't miss any opportunity.

Yiddish – I wish him good health ⁷

- Agranat: At this meeting, Madam, you rejected Kissinger's excellent compromise proposal.
- Golda: Because the Egyptians again demanded that we commit to withdrawing to the '67 borders.
- Agranat: So you do admit that this was an opportunity to start negotiations.
- Golda: **(angrily)** I don't admit anything! I approached Sadat through the German Chancellor. I made it clear to him that we were ready for a major withdrawal in Sinai. Unfortunately, Sadat rejected the proposal. Immediately afterwards, I authorized Dayan to travel to Washington in December, after the election, to continue the negotiations through the Americans.
- Agranat: Why only after the election? Had Dayan traveled to Washington before the war, perhaps negotiations would have begun and the war would have been prevented.
- Golda: We didn't know war would break out!
- Agranat: Could it be that you postponed Dayan's trip because of the election?
- Golda: No!
- Agranat: Maybe you were worried that negotiating withdrawal would alienate your voters?
- Golda: Excuse me?
- Agranat: Kissinger also maintains that you postponed the negotiations because of the election.

- Golda: That's a despicable lie. I am a leader. Not a petty politician collecting votes. The election played no role in my decisions. I'm not prepared to even listen to such an accusation.
- Agranat: Thank you very much, Madam. Your testimony is hereby concluded.
- Golda: I tried to act responsibly, sir. I knew that if we failed to defend this country, we would not have another chance, even two thousand years from now.
- Agranat: I understand. Thank you.
- Golda: I hope that one day, under more reasonable circumstances, I'll be able to describe what I did and why. I came here to testify. I didn't think I'd have to stand in front of you as the accused. I acted to the best of my judgment. What motivated me was only concern for our future. I hope you believe me, at least in this.

11. Golda's office. Day. Golda, Dayan and Lou are present.

- Golda: Did I postpone your trip to Washington until December because of the election?
- Dayan: No.
- Golda: So what exactly did you tell the commission?
- Dayan: That we postponed the trip in order to give Kissinger time to soften the Egyptians.
- Golda: But that's not the truth. We postponed it because Kissinger's compromise was unacceptable.
- Dayan: They think it was an excellent compromise.
- Golda: Do you understand that your testimony buried me?

- Dayan: I tried to explain your decision.
- Golda: Ours! Our decision! **(angrily)** Look, I'm continually walking on a very thin tightrope so as not to hurt you, while you allow yourself to hurl baseless accusations at me behind my back...
- Dayan: I suggest you look elsewhere for culprits.
- Golda: The main culprit has already been found: "Two thousand six hundred and fifty-six boys were killed just so that I would get a few more votes in the election". That will be the title of the commission's report.

The phone rings. Lou answers.

- Lou: Yes? **(To Golda)** It's Avram. Should I talk to him?
- Golda: I'll talk to him.
- Lou: **(On the phone)** Let him in.

Avram enters, Shula and Hannah follow.

- Golda: How are you, Avram? **(He doesn't answer)** I invited you today because...
- Avram: They found him?
- Golda: I received a message from the Red Cross tonight.
- Avram: **(Bursts into tears)** No, no... Rafi... My little boy...
- Golda: When he abandoned his tank on way to the canal, he was already badly wounded. His crew tried to rescue him, and then they encountered Egyptians...
- Avram: Only twenty-four years old...
- Golda: I'm sorry, Avram.

Avram: How am I going to tell his mother?

Lou: If there's anything we can do for you...

Avram: Now? What will you do for us now? **(To Golda)**
You knew that many would be killed there, in that battle to cross the canal. Right?

Golda: I didn't know that so many would be killed.

Avram: What did they die for? We withdrew from there after a few weeks. What good did they do in their death?

Lou: They saved us.

Avram: Words, words... Anything to justify their death...

Lou: I think Golda is tired, Avram. She's had a hard day.

Avram: Yes. Of course. **(Turning to exit)**

Golda: Wait a minute. **(gets up and turns to hug him)**

Avram: **(Avoids her)** Tomorrow I'll be standing out there too. With a sign. **(Exits)**

Hannah: Avram adores you, Mom. He doesn't claim that...

Golda: But he will protest.

Hannah: And you won't be angry with him.

Golda: I won't.

Shula: **(Addressing Dayan angrily)** Because of you, Avram's son was killed. They were all killed because of you. You sent my son to stop Syrian tanks in a jeep. A jeep with a bazooka. How did you think he'd return from there? Thank God he's still alive, but all his friends... **(She can't continue. Turns to Golda)** I'm sorry Golda. **(Exits)**

Dayan: I hear these voices wherever I go. Murderer. Soldiers who lost their friends, bereaved families, widows. Murderer. I wake up in the middle of the night.

Murderer. And the voices mingle with the sounds of the war. Burning tanks, the wreckage of planes, the screams, the fear, the blood that has been spilled.

What can I say to them? How can I explain? Murderer.

Golda: Right now you hold your tongue and keep your lips shut, just as I do. The war is over. In a few years we'll retire and write our memoirs. You can write whatever you want about me. And I'll write about you, too.

Dayan leaves. The noise of the demonstrators outside grows louder.

Golda: What got in them today? Have they lost their minds?

Flashback. The Prime Minister's Office in Tel Aviv. April 18th 1973. 8:00 PM. Golda, Dayan, Dado, Galili and Lou are present.

Golda: Kissinger is about to meet with the Egyptians again. He wants an answer to his proposal.

Galili: I suggest that we give a positive answer in principle, and open negotiations.

Dayan: If the Egyptians demand sovereignty over all of Sinai, we should reject his proposal out of hand.

Galili: But Kissinger is proposing that we get control of security zones in return for giving up sovereignty.

Dado: How many years will we have control over those security zones?

Galili: We'll demand at least thirty.

Dado: If it leads to a peace agreement, it also meets our security needs.

- Dayan: Thirty years is the blink of an eye in the life of a nation. We've got to think longer-term.
- Galili: If we reject this proposal, there'll be war.
- Dado: I'm certain of that. The Egyptians are already preparing for it. It could break out any day. Sadat is willing to sacrifice millions to liberate Sinai.
- Dayan: If they start a war, we'll defeat them in ten days.
- Galili: I want to make sure that we're aware of the consequences of this decision. War will be a terrible calamity. We'll have heavy losses...
- Golda: Can I intervene, or am I bothering you? I don't want war. But you're right. Kissinger's compromise means giving up sovereignty over Sinai. We may possibly avoid the war that Sadat is planning now, but not too long after we withdraw, he'll go to war in conditions that are far less favorable for us, and suffer much heavier losses. If we have to fight now to prevent that, then we'll fight now! Can one of you light me a cigarette, please?

Back to the present. Golda's office. The voices of the demonstrators are heard louder.

- Lou: The demonstrators are demanding that you talk to Captain Ashkenazi.
- Golda: Not a chance.
- Lou: They're threatening to break in here.
- Galili: Someone there might lose control, Golda.
- Lou: He's waiting outside.

Galili: OK. Let him in.

Golda: I haven't resigned yet, and you're not running this office.

Galili: Just listen to him for a few minutes.

Golda: **(To Lou)** Let him in.

Lou exits and returns with Ashkenazi.

Golda: Yes, Captain Ashkenazi.

Ashkenazi: I visited bereaved parents yesterday, Madam. They showed me an article published in Haaretz four days before the war.

Golda: What article?

Ashkenazi: A quote from the Times of London. "It would be foolish of the Israeli government to reject Kissinger's plan for a peace settlement with Egypt." Kissinger proposed a peace settlement with Egypt four days before the war?!

Galil: Captain Ashkenazi...

Golda: He didn't offer any settlement. He tried to mediate between us and the Egyptians so that we could open negotiations.

Ashkenazi: But it says here that he proposed! That he made an excellent proposal, and you turned it down!

Golda: We didn't turn it down.

Ashkenazi: If you had only agreed, the war wouldn't have broken out.

Galili: Captain Ashkenazi, you are not familiar with all the details.

Ashkenazi: **(To Golda)** Why does Kissinger blame you and not the Egyptians? Read, Madam. **(Showing her)**

Golda: Captain Ashkenazi, you can't burst in here and demand I give an account of confidential events for which the time is not yet...

Ashkenazi: Our blood was spilled because of those events.

Galili: **(Angrily)** Mr. Ashkenazi, I ask you to leave here immediately!

Lou: **(On the phone)** Please, call security.

Ashkenazi: We demand to see all your correspondence with Kissinger, Madam. All the protocols of all the talks.

Galil: Get out! **(Takes Ashkenazi's arm, and leads him to the exit)**

Ashkenazi: Madam, you're trying to hide the fact that four days before the war, you could still have prevented it. **(Exits)**

Galil: The genie is out of the bottle, Golda. It can't be returned. We have to explain this leak. It makes us look terribly guilty. Ashkenazi will speak. Kissinger might, too. We have to explain why we rejected his proposal. **(Exits)**

Hannah: Mom...

Golda: Not now!

Hannah: If what he says is true, then I think that...

Golda: **(Angrily)** I don't care what you think! **(Exits)**

Lou: Go sleep in my apartment, Hannah. I'll sleep at her place tonight.

Golda's office. Night. Loud voices of protest can be heard in the background. Lou takes her bag and turns to leave. The phone rings. She comes back and answers.

Lou: Yes. Speaking... Are you sure?... I'll tell her. Thank you. **(Slams and dials)** Golda, our friend at the commission called. The report will be published tomorrow morning... Yes. He's sure... Yes. I'll invite them immediately. **(Slams and dials)** Mr. Dayan? Sorry for calling this late. The commission is publishing its report tomorrow... Yes. She'll want to talk to you. Thank you. **(Slams and dials)** Mr. Galili?... The commission will publish its report tomorrow... Yes. Are you on your way to her? Me too. See you soon. **(Slams)**

12. Golda's living room. Night. Galili and Golda.

Golda: Have I ever told you that since I've been prime minister, I haven't been able to finish any dreams? Every dream has been interrupted by the telephone... And then another phone... And another phone... Last night I dreamed that I was a little girl on the streets of Kiev, and suddenly a pogrom started. I couldn't find the entrance to the house. I tried to call my mother, and I couldn't shout, Suddenly I saw Shazar⁸ waving at me...

Galili: And now you need him again.

An Israeli politician. The president of Israel 1963-1973 ⁸

- Golda: Since he was elected president... I'm pretty much alone... **(Pause)** What will happen, Yisrael?
- Galili: If the commission finds us guilty, then...
- Golda: That will be the end. It will erase everything I have done. People will only remember this report. It will kill me.
- Galili: Golda, you'll probably die for a different reason.
- Golda: That's not much comfort.
- Galili: Now all of a sudden you start feeling sorry for yourself? It suits you better to fight. **(Takes out a bottle of whiskey and pours for them both)**
Drink. Everything. **(She drinks)**
- Golda: I have no strength left, Yisrael.
- Galili: There is no such thing as Golda without strength.

He exits. Golda hesitates for a moment and then takes the phone and dials.

- Golda: Hannah'leh... I hope I didn't wake you up... No. Nothing happened... I just wanted to tell you that... That maybe I really could... That maybe I really should... That I can't anymore...

She chokes up and slams the phone down. She hesitates for a moment, then takes a bottle of sleeping pills and prepares to swallow its content. Suddenly, Lou enters, and snatches the bottle from her hands.

- Lou: What are you doing?
- Golda: Give it to me.
- Lou: No way.

Golda: I've brought disaster to so many people...

Lou: Enough, Golda... Enough...

Golda: The commission will accuse me of blindness, of stubbornness... They'll call me a murderer. I won't be able to face it...

Lou: Enough... Don't even think like that now... Come... try to fall asleep. You have a long day tomorrow. I'll sit here next to you.

Lou hugs her until she calms down and falls asleep. A few moments later, Hannah enters.

Lou: She fell asleep.

Hannah: You can go back to your apartment.

Lou: I want to be next to her when she wakes up.

Hanna: She needs me now.

Lou: You're making it difficult for her, Hannah. You're hurting her.

Hannah: She called me because she needed me. She needed my help. I heard it in her voice.

Lou: I can't leave her like this. I've been with her for twenty-five years. She's my family. Whenever she needed you, you were far away.

Hannah: Even if I wasn't always good enough, I was always her daughter. When she wakes up, she'll be happy to see me.

13. Golda's office. Golda sits in her chair. Hannah, Lou, and Shula next to her.

Shula: There are already journalists outside. **(Golda doesn't answer)** Drink. The coffee is getting cold. **(Golda doesn't answer)** Do you want a cigarette?

Lou enters, holding two copies of the Agranat Commission report. She gives one to Golda.

Golda: I want to be left alone.

Hannah: No, Mom.

Golda: Please, go out.

Lou: We're staying with you, Golda.

Golda opens the report and starts reading. Soon she moves on to the chapter of conclusions. She turns another page, reads it and nods her head.

Hannah: Mom?

Golda: **(After a moment she looks up)** I never imagined...

Enters Galili

Galili: What do they say?

He takes the second copy of the report from Lou, and reads it. Dayan enters, a copy of the report in his hands.

Dayan: Congratulations, Golda. **(quotes)** "The prime minister's actions before the war indicate an attitude befitting her responsibilities."

Golda: I read.

- Dayan: The Commission also finds no fault with the defense minister's behavior.
- Golda: I read that too.
- Galili: But they recommend firing the chief of staff, the head of Military Intelligence, the head of Southern Command, and...
- Dayan: I'm amazed they didn't relate to the political process at all.
- Golda: **(Can't believe it)** Not at all?
- Galili: They just mention it in a few lines, without taking a stand.
- Golda: Can't be.
- Galili: Here, take a look. **(Showing her)**
- Golda: Good God...
- Dayan: You can be pleased, Golda.
- Golda: This report changes everything.

A phone rings. Shula answers.

- Shula: Golda, the chief of staff is waiting.
- Golda: Let him in.

Dado enters. Silence.

- Dado: I guess you've already read.
- Golda: I'm so sorry.
- Dado: I imagine you'll ask me to resign.
- Golda: I'm not sure. I can still return the report to the commission.

- Dado: Don't return it because of me.
- Golda: Thanks to you, we won this war.
- Dado: Apparently, the commission didn't think so. It was appointed by the politicians, and therefore ... apparently... gave them a clean bill of health.
- Golda: The commission was wrong. And that's not its only mistake.
- Dado: This mistake can no longer be corrected.
- Golda: I'll demand to testify before it again.
- Dado: The army has been damaged enough, Golda. If the investigation continues, it will be harmed even more.
- Golda: I'm willing to take all the responsibility. I'm too old anyway.
- Dado: I'll take responsibility for what I did.
- Golda: Dado, we will never forget how you carried an entire army on your shoulders.
- Dado: I won't forget that either. **(Giving her an envelope)**
Good luck.
- Golda: Wait. **(gets up and hugs him)**
- Dado: I suggest that you appoint a new chief of staff today.
(Exits)
- Dayan: I have a candidate for a new chief of staff.
- Shula: **(Unable to hold in her anger)** Have you no shame? You shed his blood, and can't even wait until the body is cold. It's not just your eye that you've lost. You've also lost your heart.

**Dayan exits. He is followed by Shula. Golda, Hannah and Galili
Remain in the room.**

- Golda: We'll pay dearly for his resignation. The bereaved parents will see this as an insult to their fallen sons.
- Galili: You're right. This will provoke great anger in the public, which sees us as more guilty than him.
- Golda: The report states that we did everything we could. Resigning now would be desertion.
- Hannah: The commission didn't address the political failure, Mom, but very soon...
- Galili: Leave her alone, Hannah.
- Hannah: Very soon you'll have to explain it.
- Galili: Leave her!
- Hannah: All your life you've taken responsibility for what you did. That's what you've taught me ever since I was born. You can't suddenly betray who you are. The political failure didn't happen all by itself. You know you were responsible for it.
- Golda: I fulfilled my duty with full responsibility.

Hannah, Lou and Galili leave. Golda remains alone.

- Golda: You all cling to the "political failure" to explain why the war broke out. That has to be the answer. Golda is guilty. This war broke out because of her. Not because of the Egyptians and Syrians. Because of her. She was the prime minister. She made the decisions. She rejected all compromise proposals. She is also a woman. An old and sick woman. But you're wrong. I will fight tooth and nail. And if I have to resign to save

my good name, I'll resign. I will not leave the stage of history guilty and hated. And to all those who already smell my blood, I say: I wasn't complacent. I was not indifferent. I didn't take it lightly. But I was also under no illusions. I had no way of preventing this war.

Epilogue. Room at Hadassah Hospital. December 8th 1978. The night of Golda's death.

- Hannah: Sadat sent you a telegram. He wishes you a speedy recovery.
- Golda: Do you believe him? I never believed a word he said.
- Hannah: I actually got the impression that he quite liked you.
- Golda: His affection is a lie. His peace agreement with Begin is also a lie. He didn't deserve a Nobel Prize. He deserved an Academy Award.
- Hannah: In the meantime, the peace agreement is holding.
- Golda: In the meantime. If the party hadn't forced me out, I would have negotiated with Sadat... And I would have reached a better agreement.
- Hannah: I'm sure. **(Pause)** They talked about you today in the news.
- Golda: Yes? They're already saying goodbye to me. Did they say good things?
- Hannah: Not only. They said you were bossy...
- Golda: Patronizing...
- Hannah: Sometimes big and sometimes...
- Golda: Petty?
- Hannah: But they said you didn't miss any historic opportunity.

Golda: I didn't miss an opportunity, because there was no opportunity.

Hannah: Mom... Mom... You know I love you even though I disagree with you.

Golda: I love you too, although I disagree with you.

She falls silent. Hannah approaches her.

Hannah: Are you still sure you didn't miss an opportunity?

Golda: I'm only sure that I'm going to die...

End