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LOVERS

A play by Motti Lerner

Dramaturgy: Gad Kaynar

©

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Characters:

Yoram (60) - Playwright-director. Lives in Tel Aviv and works at one of the major theaters in the city center. Divorced for about twenty years. Father of two adult sons. For the past six years, he has had a deep and steady relationship with Naomi.

Naomi (40) - Actress. Married and the mother of an eight-year-old son. Lives in Tel Aviv. Works at the same theater as Yoram.

Background:

Naomi and Yoram's relationship began while they were working together in the theater, against the backdrop of a prolonged crisis in Naomi's marriage. They managed to keep the relationship completely secret. Until the beginning of the play, it was deeply fulfilling and exciting for both of them. Naomi has acted in many of the plays Yoram has written and directed. During the year preceding the action, Yoram began pressuring Naomi to divorce her husband and move in with him. Naomi hesitated and repeatedly postponed the decision. During the play, Naomi is rehearsing *Anna Karenina*, written and directed by Yoram. It is a two-character play - Anna Karenina and her lover, Alexei Vronsky - based on Tolstoy's famous novel. Naomi, of course, plays Anna.

Space and Time:

The play unfolds on two time levels. The present-day action takes place over three days following Yoram's release from the hospital, where he has spent a week, and consists of three telephone conversations between Naomi and him. The main action takes place over approximately six weeks in the living room of Yoram's apartment in an old neighborhood in central Tel Aviv.

1. Evening. Yoram sits on the couch, withdrawn into himself. His cell phone rings. He gets up, looks at the screen, and sees that Naomi is calling. After a moment's hesitation, he answers but says nothing. Naomi's voice is heard through the speakerphone.

Naomi: Hello, Yoram?... Yoram? It's me... How are you?...
 Yoram?... Why aren't you answering?... I heard you were released yesterday. Are you at your apartment? Are you OK? Do you need anything? Is anyone helping you?... I tried several times to visit you in the hospital. Your sons pushed me out... I assume they know by now. I'm not sure they really understand. What did you tell them?... Do you think I could come over today? Just to see you. Just to know you're all right. I'm so sorry about what happened. If I'd been a few minutes late, I would have died too... Please answer me. I have to hear your voice. Say something. Just a word...
(Yoram almost responds but stops himself) This is hard for you. I understand. I won't pressure you... I'll call again tomorrow morning... I hope we'll be able to talk...

She ends the call. Musical transition.

2. Night. Yoram is alone, drinking a glass of wine. Naomi enters. They embrace.

Naomi: Sorry I'm late.
 Yoram: It's OK. No rush. **(Offering her wine)** Red?
 Naomi: Yes, thanks. Victor came home late. I had to help Jonathan with his homework.
 Yoram: **(Pours a glass)** Cheers.
 Naomi: I hope you're not angry anymore.
 Yoram: When was I angry?
 Naomi: I tried to talk to you after the rehearsal.
 Yoram: I wasn't angry. I just thought it would be better to have the conversation here.
 Naomi: I asked what any actress would ask her director.
 Yoram: You can't ask it in front of Michael.
 Naomi: I need to understand why Anna Karenina falls so completely in love with Alexei Vronsky. It's important for Michael's work on Alexei too.
 Yoram: But the moment you say Alexei is a flat character, you undermine his confidence.

Naomi: I didn't say he was a flat character. I said it isn't enough for me that he's charismatic. Anna doesn't fall in love with him because of his charisma, but because of what Tolstoy conceals behind it.

Yoram: Behind that charisma is his immense love for Anna. He sacrifices his career for her. In the second act, he gives up the good life in St. Petersburg and moves to the country...

Naomi: Those are external sacrifices he makes easily. If I don't feel the intimacy developing between them, it will be difficult for me to surrender to him so completely.

Yoram: I can imagine.

Naomi: What can you imagine?

Yoram: I know firsthand how difficult it is for you to surrender.

Naomi: Excuse me?! What do you mean, firsthand?

Yoram: When we began rehearsing, we spoke about the boundaries you draw at work between you and Michael...

Naomi: We talked about the boundary that Anna draws between herself and Alexei when he follows her on the train to Moscow.

Yoram: You maintain that boundary in the later scenes too. Because of it, no intimacy develops between you and Michael. Incidentally, it's exactly the same boundary you maintain between you and me.

Naomi: You're going back to that again? **(Frustrated)** I don't draw any boundary between us. Every night I tell myself that in the morning I'll tell Victor I'm divorcing him.

Yoram: And every morning you decide to continue living with him.

Naomi: And I continue love you.

Yoram: I can't continue living off the crumbs of your love.

Naomi: We spent a week together in London last summer.

Yoram: I want to live with you, Naomi.

Naomi: I come here every chance I get. Last week, Jonathan was sick.

Yoram: I was sure you were sleeping with Victor on Saturday.

Naomi: You know I can't sleep with him.

Yoram: I couldn't work. I couldn't sleep. I was so angry with myself that I finished off a bottle of whiskey...

Naomi: It will be easier for me when Jonathan gets older.

Yoram: I've been waiting for six years, Naomi.

Naomi: Jonathan is a special child, Yoram. He's very attached to Victor. You know how busy I am in the theater. Sometimes weeks go by without me spending time with him.

Yoram: Anna Karenina left her husband for Alexei within a few months.

Naomi: I'm not Anna Karenina.

Silence.

Yoram: I can't go on like this, Naomi.

Naomi: Let's talk about it after the show opens.

Yoram: We're talking about it now.

Naomi: I can't make that decision right now.

Yoram: So I guess I have to make it myself.

Naomi: What are you talking about?

Yoram: You. Our relationship is undermining your relationship with Victor.

Naomi: Without our relationship, I wouldn't be able to live with him.

Yoram: But when you're with me, you're not really with him.

Naomi: I'm with him just so that Jonathan can have a family.

Yoram: I can give him a family too.

Naomi: We've talked about this dozens of times. I can't take a child like Jonathan away from his father.

Yoram: And that decision has consequences... **(Pauses)** I don't know how else to say this, Naomi... I think we have to separate...

Naomi: What?! What's wrong with you? Are you out of your mind?!

Yoram: For an entire year, I've been begging you to move in here, and an entire year you've been refusing.

Naomi: I'll move in as soon as Jonathan understands he's not losing his father, even if I break up with him.

Yoram: It will take him forever to understand that.

Naomi: He's only eight. Let's give him another year or two.

Yoram: My children survived divorce at that age.

Naomi: Jonathan is not the same as your children.

Yoram: You're right. He needs a family badly. I certainly don't want to hurt him. If we separate, you'll be able to repair your relationship with Victor, and Jonathan will feel more secure.

Naomi: That's out of the question, Yoram.

Yoram: I'm suggesting it so you'll be happy.

Naomi: Are you serious?

Yoram: It's the right thing for both of us.

Naomi looks at him and realizes that he is serious.

Naomi: OK. OK. I understand. I understand you've thought about it. I understand that you've already decided. But it's not the sort

of decision you can make alone. Are you punishing me?
What did I do?

Yoram: Naomi, I wrote this play to understand how a love as great as Anna and Alexei's deteriorates into a nightmare...

Naomi: We are not Anna and Alexei.

Yoram: Living underground creates an unbearable distance between us. I want to live with you while I still can. Work with you. Spend time with you. Sleep with you. The doubt you leave behind whenever you go drives me out of my mind.

Naomi: What doubt are you talking about? I can't imagine my life without you. How can you even consider giving me up? Has any woman ever loved you the way I do? Wanted you the way I do? I want you even now, even though you're hurting me so much.

Yoram: I want you, too.

Naomi: Then let's drop this damn conversation. Suddenly I've got a headache. **(He opens a drawer, takes out a pill, and gives it to her)** I'm about to burst into tears. Hold me. Let's go to bed. I need to feel you for a while.

She hugs him. He evades.

Yoram: No, Naomi. I'm not sure this is what we should be doing now.

Naomi: It's exactly what we should be doing.

Yoram: And we'll go on ignoring what's happening to us?

Naomi: You're ignoring what I'm going through. Victor isn't the love of my life. But we've been married for ten years. He's a generous and supportive husband. We have a child with special needs. Caring for that child forces us to live together even without a great love. You could at least take that into account.

Yoram: I'm trying, but the distance between us...

Naomi: We're working every day now on a play about love. Nothing creates greater intimacy than that.

Yoram: I'm sixty, Naomi.

Naomi: So what? Can't you wait another year or two?

Yoram: I've already waited far too long.

Naomi: So you're giving me up? **(He doesn't answer)** I don't understand anything. What do you want from me? What do you expect to happen now?

Yoram: We will work like any director and actress in a rehearsal room.

Naomi: And we won't make love anymore?
 Yoram: If we continue to make love, we won't be able to start a new life.
 Naomi: What's so bad about the life we already have?
 Yoram: This life isn't enough for me.
 Naomi: It isn't enough for me either.
 Yoram: But it's in your hands. You can move in here within a few weeks.
 Naomi: I can't.
 Yoram: Neither can I.
 Naomi: **(In tears)** So it's over? You're throwing me out?
 Yoram: Naomi...
 Naomi: One day I'll divorce Victor. You know that. In the meantime, most of the time I'm yours. I don't sleep with anyone else.
 Yoram: I don't feel that most of the time you're mine.
 Naomi: I'm only yours. You can decide what you want. I'm not giving up on you.
 Yoram: I don't want you to give up on me. I want you to give up on him!
 Naomi: I'll give him up as soon as I can! **(Long silence)** I can't move in here within a few weeks, Yoram. It's an unfair demand. Can't you see how cruel it is? But I'm willing to talk to Victor. We'll start mediation. I'll move in here at the end of the year.
 Yoram: I've already heard that promise.
 Naomi: Think about it overnight. We'll meet at the theater tomorrow at eight. By then we'll both have calmed down a little.
 Yoram: Naomi...
 Naomi: If you can't wait until the end of the year, then you probably don't really want me. **(Exits)**

3. A week later. Night. It's late. Yoram sits in front of the computer. Naomi enters.

Naomi: Not disturbing you, am I?
 Yoram: No, it's fine. I'm making a few changes in tomorrow's scenes.
 Naomi: I waited all evening for you to call.
 Yoram: There was a production meeting in the afternoon. Then I sat with Michael for a while. All of a sudden, he doesn't understand why Alexei loves Anna.
 Naomi: So for him you had time?

Yoram: Naomi, we agreed that we wouldn't meet after rehearsals.
We also agreed that you wouldn't come here anymore.

Naomi: I can't stick to this agreement.

Yoram: It's hard for me too, but...

Naomi: I asked you to have dinner with me. Why did you ignore me?

Yoram: I wanted to have dinner with you, but on second thought...

Naomi: We agreed that we would continue to meet from time to time.

Yoram: We meet in the theater. If we meet after rehearsals as well, we won't be able to separate.

Naomi: I'm not sure we should separate.

Yoram: Enough, Naomi. Please. I think we've already finished this discussion.

Naomi: Did you notice that when I walked in, we didn't kiss?

They kiss. Naomi wants more. He stops her.

Naomi: I need your kisses like air, and you barely kiss me.

Yoram doesn't answer. She gives up.

Naomi: Word around the theater is that you've already signed up for dating sites. Our bed hasn't even grown cold.

Yoram: I'm trying to build a new life for myself.

Naomi: You already have one.

Yoram: I want to begin that life while I still can.

Naomi: What are you talking about? I've never felt you're too old for me.

Yoram: But in a year or two you'll feel it. That's why you don't move in with me. Jonathan is just an excuse.

Naomi: Are you giving up on me because of this ridiculous anxiety?

Yoram: If you think it's so ridiculous, there's no point in talking about it.

Naomi: And that's why you're already seeing a different woman every night?

Yoram: **(Firmly)** I said I don't want to talk about it.

Naomi: So let's talk about work.

Yoram: We'll talk tomorrow in the theater.

Naomi: We're talking now.

Yoram: **(Gives up)** OK.

Naomi: Maybe we can have a drink?

Yoram: Please.

He pours wine for both of them. They clink glasses.

Naomi: I was very frustrated there today.
Yoram: I saw.
Naomi: So why did you yell at me like that? And in front of Michael? I was so scared I couldn't feel anything.
Yoram: I didn't yell at you. I tried to explain to you that...
Naomi: Your coldness paralyzes me, Yoram.
Yoram: I don't think I was cold.
Naomi: Anna has to love Alexei with all her heart. Otherwise she can't give up her son for him. Your coldness smothers all the love in me.
Yoram: I think I'm actually trying to strengthen the love in you. But you're stuck in self-pity, because you feel abandoned, and you're not cooperating.
Naomi: I think you are suppressing Anna's love for Alexei, because you see it as my love for you.
Yoram: We don't talk about our love anymore, Naomi.
Naomi: You're also afraid of Anna's passion for Alexei, because you're afraid of my passion.
Yoram: On the contrary. I'm trying to help you discover that passion.
Naomi: I don't need help. Anna lived for years without feeling any passion for her husband. That's why her passion for Alexei is so powerful. I know it very well from my life with Victor.
Yoram: Naomi, I have a feeling that you're not fighting for Anna's passion but for yours.
Naomi: Can't you see it's the same passion?
Yoram: I do see that, but we decided that at work we would only talk about Anna and Alexei.
Naomi: How can you separate what's happening to them from what's happening to us?
Yoram: Now you're also teaching me how to direct? Everything you know about acting, you learned from me.
Naomi: I suggest you look at your most successful productions over the past ten years and see who played the leading roles in them.
Yoram: I know. **(Collects himself)** I watched you today rehearsing the scene in which Alexei shoots himself in the chest because he thinks he has lost Anna forever. And suddenly I realized how deeply I understand him.
Naomi: You say you understand him to protect yourself from my love for you.

Yoram: I say it to protect myself from my love for you. If it takes hold of me again, I won't be able to direct.

Naomi: Your love has never hurt our work.

Yoram: Something has changed lately.

Naomi: Nothing has changed. I want us to continue working. I want us to continue loving. I'm prepared to forget this last terrible week.

Yoram: It's impossible, Naomi.

Naomi: Do you prefer someone from a dating site?

Yoram: I'm not going to talk to you about it.

Naomi: Give us another chance.

Yoram: A chance for what? You'll keep coming here. We'll talk, drink, make love, and afterward you'll take a shower and go back to Victor. If you didn't leave him despite all my pleading, you'll never leave him.

Naomi: I'm willing to stay here tonight. I'll tell Victor the rehearsal ended late, and I went to my sister's.

Yoram: And what will you tell him tomorrow and the day after?

Naomi: We can love each other without sleeping together every night.

Yoram: That's not enough for me anymore.

Naomi: Everything or nothing? Why?

Yoram: Because we know what kind of life we could have together.

Naomi: I swear I'll move in here at the end of the year... **(Silence)** Enough, Yoram. Hold me. Don't blame me all the time. Can't you see how angry I am with myself for not having the courage to leave Victor?

Yoram: I see.

Naomi: Even though I live with him, you have all the love I can give. You won't find that on any dating site.

Yoram: I know.

Naomi: Then why do you want me to get divorced? So I'll be yours alone? Otherwise you don't feel secure enough about me?

Yoram: No.

Naomi: You want me to go through hell just so you'll feel more secure? Is that why you're throwing me out like this?

Yoram: **(Angrily)** Can't you see that you're forcing me to? **(Collects himself)** Let's be reasonable, Naomi. Our relationship is over. That's why we agreed not to see each other outside rehearsals anymore. That's why we agreed you wouldn't come here anymore. That's why I'm asking you to leave.

Naomi: I'm not leaving.

Yoram: Fine. So I'm leaving. See you at the rehearsal tomorrow.

Naomi: You're leaving, and you expect me to come to the rehearsal tomorrow?

Yoram: Yes.

Naomi: And do you think I'll be able to work with you?

Yoram: If you can't work with me, I'll find another actress.

Naomi: Over my dead body. That's my part. You wrote it for me.

Yoram: If this part is so important to you, then behave like a professional actress. **(Turning to exit)**

Naomi: Wait. **(Blocks his way)** What's gotten into you, Yoram? Are you threatening me now? Why? Because I love you? Your threats don't frighten me. What frightens me is that I'm losing you. You're far more important to me than the show.

Yoram: Nothing matters to me more than the show right now. And if it doesn't matter enough to you, you won't be in it.

Naomi: Are you threatening me again?!

Yoram: Let me out.

Naomi: First apologize and hold me.

Yoram: We'll talk tomorrow, before the rehearsal.

Naomi: I'm not coming to rehearsal unless you apologize and hold me!

Yoram: And you don't care that the apology would be a lie? That holding you would be a lie? Every night I wake up in a panic that perhaps our great love was also nothing but a lie.

Naomi: Our love was a lie?!

Yoram: When the chips were down, you denied it!

Naomi: **(Shocked)** You kicked me out.

Yoram: I begged you to move in here.

She's so hurt that she can't block him.

Yoram: And lock the door when you leave.

He goes out. She sits down at a loss on the couch. Blackout.

4. A week later. Night. The apartment is empty. Naomi enters, using her key.

Naomi: Yoram?

She sees that he is not in the apartment. She pours herself a glass of wine and sits down thoughtfully. A moment later, he enters. She stands up. They hug and kiss.

Naomi: I was glad to see you didn't change the lock.
Yoram: I guess I'm not so afraid of you anymore.

They both smile and kiss again.

Naomi: The rehearsal today was great. We're really getting somewhere.
Yoram: You were genuinely moving.
Naomi: Of all the directors I've worked with, you're the only one who can inspire me.
Yoram: Of all the actresses I've worked with, you understand me the best.
Naomi: Don't flatter me.
Yoram: We really work well together. And it's having an influence on Michael. I noticed today that he's finally opening up. I think he's falling in love with you.
Naomi: You got it wrong. It's Alexei who's falling in love with Anna.
Yoram: I hope so.

He pours himself a glass of wine.

Naomi: Cheers.
Yoram: How are you? Is everything OK?
Naomi: Yes.
Yoram: Is there anything I can do for you?
Naomi: I came to thank you for your sensitivity.
Yoram: Really?
Naomi: Yes.
Yoram: **(Not believing her)** I'm glad we've been able to deal with what happened. Once we set clear boundaries, we found ourselves in a nice friendship.
Naomi: With much less pain.
Yoram: Absolutely.
Naomi: I'm happy too.
Yoram: I still have a lot of work for tomorrow, Naomi. I...
Naomi: I can imagine.

She gets the hint but stays.

Yoram: I can see there's something else you want.
Naomi: I had a terrible fight with Victor yesterday.

Yoram: What happened?

Naomi: He's known about our relationship the whole time.

Yoram: **(Astonished)** He knew?! He knew and said nothing?!

Naomi: He was waiting for it to end.

Yoram: That's very strange. I can't even imagine what he's been going through. But if he was prepared to wait for you, he must really love you.

Naomi: He stayed with me to punish me.

Yoram: He's not that kind of guy, Naomi.

Naomi: After what he said to me, I can't live with him anymore.

Yoram: What do you mean?

Naomi: I'm getting a divorce.

Yoram: Are you serious? Have you told him?

Naomi: We're arguing over custody of Jonathan. I'm not giving in to him. I'd like to arrange one of the children's rooms here for Jonathan.

Yoram: **(Astonished)** Wait a minute, Naomi. Just a minute... I don't understand...

Naomi: What don't you understand?

Yoram: **(Upset)** For six years I begged you to get divorced, and you said it was impossible. For the past two weeks I've done everything I could to smother my love for you. To make it fade a little. And now that I've finally succeeded, you suddenly tell me it's possible?

Naomi: You only think you've managed to smother your love for me. I tried too, until I realized I was deceiving myself.

Yoram: I really want to believe you, but...

Naomi: I'm meeting with a lawyer tomorrow.

Yoram: I've heard that far too many times already. I'll believe you the moment you move in here.

Naomi: That's why I came. I'm moving in. It may take a few days. Maybe a few weeks. Victor and I need to reach an agreement. I can't leave Jonathan with him.

Yoram: It can take years to reach an agreement!

Naomi: Let me try. If I take Jonathan without an agreement, he'll go to the police.

Yoram: Enough, Naomi. Please. You're deluding yourself that you'll leave Victor, and you're deluding me too. I know exactly how this fight will end. You'll apologize and ask his forgiveness, he'll accept your apology and forgive you, and everything will quietly fall back into place. I release you from everything you promised me. I'm really too old for you. Even if you move in now, you'll leave in a year or two.

Naomi: That old nonsense again?
 Yoram: You felt it too. It isn't the same anymore. The last few times we slept together...
 Naomi: That happened because you thought I didn't want to live with you.
 Yoram: That's not the only reason.
 Naomi: Give us a chance. I don't have to go home tonight. Jonathan is already asleep. I have nothing more to hide from Victor.
 Yoram: That's not fair, Naomi. It's really unfair.
 Naomi: **(Painfully)** Are you fair? Answer me. Are you fair?

He breaks down and hugs her. They kiss. She takes off her shirt. He stops her.

Yoram: It won't work.
 Naomi: Let's try. **(Holding his hands)**
 Yoram: **(Dropping her hands)** I'm telling you, it won't work.
 Naomi: Don't give up so quickly.

He doesn't answer. She puts on her shirt.

Yoram: You're still young. Once you divorce Victor, you'll find someone more suitable than me.
 Naomi: I don't want "someone". I want you.
 Yoram: You can see it's not working.
 Naomi: It's working great.
 Yoram: It isn't working. It won't work. I won't deceive you the way you're deceiving me.
 Naomi: I'm not deceiving you. I'm asking you for a little more patience. If Victor insists, I'll give him one more day a week. When Anna went to live with Alexei, she gave up her son completely.
 Yoram: You're not Anna.
 Naomi: I'm also willing to have a child with you, the way she did with Alexei. When you have a small child, you'll feel much younger.
 Yoram: I'll consider it when you've moved in with me.
 Naomi: I'm moving here in a few weeks.
 Yoram: That's why you just tried to make love with me? So I'd believe you?
 Naomi: **(Amazed)** You don't believe I want to make love with you?!
 Yoram: I don't believe you want to move in here!
 Naomi: I swear I want to.

- Yoram: I can't go on like this, Naomi. I thought we would part as friends and continue working together. I was wrong. I deceived myself. I deceived you, too. Rehearsals have become a nightmare. I think about you all the time. I want you all the time. When Michael touches you, I explode. Instead of directing, I'm trying to stay sane. Sooner or later the rehearsals are going to hit the rocks. I can't let that happen. This play is important to me, even if I'm not directing it. I don't think I have a choice. Tomorrow morning I'll ask the theater to look for another director.
- Naomi: I won't work with another director.
- Yoram: I won't be able to get this show ready like this. You still have four weeks. You won't have to start over.
- Naomi: I can't do Anna without you.
- Yoram: You don't have a choice, either! **(Silence)** Good night. **(Silence)** I said good night!
- Naomi: I heard you. I'm breaking up my family and coming to live with you. I'm willing to have a child with you, and you're throwing me out even though you know I might fall apart. But perhaps that's what you really want. That's why you're leaving me so cruelly. That's why you're refusing to work with me. If this is your love, it must be a lie. That's why you managed to hate me so quickly. Yes. You really do hate me. I have no idea why. Maybe you're trying to punish me for being younger than you. But I'm made of tougher stuff than that. I won't give you the pleasure of watching me fall apart. **(Turns to leave)**
- Yoram: Wait a minute.

He takes her hands, embraces her, and kisses her. She responds. They lie down on the couch and begin making love. After a moment, Yoram stops, tries to continue but cannot. Finally, he pulls away from her.

- Yoram: I told you.
- Naomi: Are you giving up again?
- Yoram: It won't work.
- Naomi: Give me a chance.
- Yoram: It's too complicated with you.
- Naomi: We haven't started yet.
- Yoram: I don't want it anymore.
- Naomi: But I want to.

Yoram: **(Deeply frustrated)** What exactly do you want? Let's put our cards on the table. The only thing I can give you now is roles in my plays. That's why you won't give me up. You aren't willing to live with me for that, but you're willing to keep sleeping with me. Isn't that right?

Naomi freezes, wounded to the core.

Naomi: Son of a bitch. Go fuck yourself. You piece of shit...

She hurriedly straightens her clothes and leaves.

5. Evening. Yoram is sitting at his computer, trying to write. His phone rings. He looks at the screen, sees that Naomi is calling, rejects the call, and returns to the computer. A moment later, it rings again. This time he answers but says nothing. Naomi's voice is heard through the speakerphone.

Naomi: Hi, Yoram. How are you? How did you sleep?... I called you this morning. You didn't answer. I was worried. Are you all right?... Say something... I was at the theater this afternoon. I met some actors who've already visited you. Apparently, you managed to talk to them... That's all right. I understand... They told me you plan to go back to work next season. Is that true? I was so happy for you... By the way, I'm not going back. I'm taking an unpaid leave... Until I finish negotiating with Victor... Until Jonathan gets used to his new situation... Luckily, you can go back to writing. I'd love to read whatever you write... Enough, Yoram. Let's stop playing this game. Please talk to me. I'm worried. I want to help... I still haven't recovered from the shock either. We must talk about it... I'm not willing to feel so guilty. I keep trying to understand how we ended up there. You know I had no choice. I had to protect myself... Maybe we could meet after all?... All right. I understand. I'll try again tomorrow... If you change your mind tonight, then...

She ends the call. He remains sitting. Musical transition.

6. Two weeks later. Night. Yoram is alone. Drinking a glass of wine, waiting for Naomi. A moment later she enters. They hug.

Naomi: How are you?
 Yoram: Thanks. I'm all right. And you?
 Naomi: All right, too. Working. Raising Jonathan. Will you pour me a drink?
 Yoram: Sure. Red?
 Naomi: Thanks. **(He pours a glass)**
 Yoram: Cheers.

They tap their glasses and drink.

Yoram: How are things at home?
 Naomi: Pretty good, actually. It's hard to heal a relationship that has been sick for so long, but Victor's trying. I'm trying.
 Yoram: Sounds great.
 Naomi: Jonathan is doing better too. He has fewer nightmares. He doesn't cry as much.
 Yoram: I suppose you're already planning another child.
 Naomi: We're talking about it.
 Yoram: Who said miracles don't happen?
 Naomi: It's not a miracle. It's hard work. The pain of breaking up with you was terrible. You used a butcher's knife. Victor was there for me.
 Yoram: I told you he loves you.
 Naomi: I hope so.

Long silence.

Naomi: How do you manage here alone? Without work? I think of you a lot.
 Yoram: I'm holding up. Reading a lot. Spending a little more time with my sons.
 Naomi: I heard you're still seeing women from dating sites.
 Yoram: None of them come close to you.
 Naomi: Do you want me to introduce you to someone?
 Yoram: No, thanks.
 Naomi: I want to believe you don't hate me.
 Yoram: Mostly, I'm mourning you. I'm reading Anna Karenina again. Trying to understand you through Tolstoy. I'm also writing a new play.
 Naomi: About our breakup?

Yoram: Yes. It helps me come to terms with it.

Naomi: I hope your characters aren't anything like us. Victor will be very hurt if our relationship is exposed.

Yoram: She's a young lecturer at the university and he's the head of the department.

Naomi: And she sleeps with him to advance her career?

Yoram: I regretted it the moment I said it.

Naomi: I figured. **(Silence)** You probably know why I came.

Yoram: More or less. I heard you've been arguing with Elon during rehearsals. He's consulted me a few times. Give him a chance. He's a good director.

Naomi: Something has happened to him lately. He's become technical. Emotionless. He's afraid even to say the word love. I don't believe he's ever loved anyone.

Yoram: I'm sorry to hear that. I can talk to him again.

Naomi: There's no point now. He resigned.

Yoram: Really? We spoke yesterday morning. He didn't say anything.

Naomi: It happened after the rehearsal. Michael and I want you to come back and direct us.

Yoram: Me? **(Laughs)**

Naomi: Yes. You wrote the play. You also started directing it. We'd love to go back to where you left off.

Yoram: I don't know. I'm not sure it's the right thing to do. I hope you didn't fight with Elon just to bring me back.

Naomi: Of course not.

Yoram: I'm not sure we're ready to work together again. We're both still trying to recover. I still can't fall asleep without a sleeping pill.

Naomi: It's entirely natural. You get terribly distressed when you're not working.

Yoram: I'm not sure that's because I'm not working.

Naomi: You'll be OK. Rehearsals will be much easier now. The last two weeks have given us some breathing space. I won't impose anything on you.

Yoram: I know, but...

Naomi: No one can direct a play of yours better than you. During rehearsals with Elon, I felt your presence all the time. At every moment I asked myself what you would have said to me. No one in the world helps me understand myself the way you do.

Yoram: Naomi, if we go back to working together, we'll find ourselves caught in the same trap again.

Naomi: I want us to open this show, Yoram. It's the only thing keeping me going. I also identify deeply with Anna. This is the best role I've ever played.

Yoram: Aren't you afraid the trap is too dangerous?

Naomi: I am, but I also believe that if I play Anna, I'll learn from her and Alexei's failure and manage to save myself from her fate.

Yoram: I hope so, for your sake, but...

Naomi: It isn't impossible, Yoram. We'll set boundaries. We'll look after each other.

Yoram: Do you trust yourself? Do you trust me?

Naomi: I don't know, but without you, the show will be canceled. Management has already told us.

Yoram: No way.

Naomi: You'll hear from them tomorrow morning.

Yoram: I need some time to think.

Naomi: You worked on this play for two years, Yoram. It was born of our need to understand ourselves. We can't give it up.

Yoram hesitates. They look at each other. After a moment, he decides to accept the offer.

Yoram: All right. I understand. I hope I'm not making a mistake. Perhaps we can do it after all. If they agree to postpone the premiere by a week, we'll have three weeks.

Naomi: They've already agreed.

Yoram: I see you came prepared.

Naomi: This show is the most beautiful gift we can give each other.

She reaches out her arms to him and they hug.

Yoram: You have no idea how much I've missed you.

Naomi: I miss you too.

Yoram: Day and night I've waited for a knock on the door. A phone call. A message.

Naomi: I was waiting for the right moment.

Yoram: When you embraced me just now, I felt that we could work together as colleagues. Love isn't everything. Sometimes we have to compromise on it.

Naomi: I'll always love you.

Yoram: Me too, but differently.

Naomi: Yes. A little differently. We probably won't be able to meet outside work anymore. Victor insists on it.

Yoram: I understand him completely. Our relationship was very unfair to him. To you, as well.
 Naomi: You don't have to feel guilty. I wanted this relationship just as much as you did.
 Yoram: But apparently it isn't as easy to separate as we thought. Especially when the bond is so deep.
 Naomi: Maybe that's why it was so good.

She hugs him. He responds. After a moment she pulls away.

Naomi: I have to go. Victor doesn't know I'm here.
 Yoram: Of course. You're right. Don't give him any reason to suspect.
 Naomi: Tomorrow at ten o'clock in the rehearsal room.

He tries to embrace her again, but she stops him and leaves.

7. A week later. Night. The door opens. Yoram and Naomi enter.

Yoram: Sit for a moment. Drink something.
 Naomi: I only have a few minutes. I have to take Jonathan to the doctor in the morning.
 Yoram: What happened?
 Naomi: His stomach hurts.
 Yoram: It's psychosomatic. My children also had stomach aches before premieres. Red, right?
 Naomi: Just a little. I don't want Victor to smell it.

Yoram pours wine for both. They tap glasses and drink.

Yoram: Sorry I dragged you here, but it's not a conversation for the green room.
 Naomi: What happened?
 Yoram: We've been working for a week, and I feel like we're stuck. At this rate we won't be ready in time.
 Naomi: What do you mean stuck?
 Yoram: A certain distance has developed between you and Michael. You're not connecting. It's very frustrating. For him and for me.
 Naomi: I noticed.
 Yoram: The distance?
 Naomi: Your frustration.

- Yoram: And Michael's. You've built a wall around yourself that he keeps running into. Suddenly you reject his love. You recoil from him. Lower your eyes. Look away. Hide inside yourself.
- Naomi: Because he's too demanding.
- Yoram: He's demanding because he's working from Alexei's love for Anna. Incidentally, I also find it very difficult to work in the face of this distance.
- Naomi: So it's yourself you're worried about.
- Yoram: I'm worried about the show.
- Naomi: I care about it as much as you do.
- Yoram: So why don't you allow yourself to dare?
- Naomi: Dare what?
- Yoram: To love the way Anna does. You don't have to hide that love from me. It's natural that a certain openness should develop between us during rehearsals too. It always has, and it always will. That's why you insisted that I come back and direct you.
- Naomi: Yoram, we committed ourselves to working professionally.
- Yoram: I can't direct without working from my heart.
- Naomi: That openness is a trap. You're onstage for most of the rehearsal. I can feel you watching me. I can feel your thoughts. Instead of concentrating on Alexei, I'm preoccupied with you. That's why Michael feels I'm not responding to him.
- Yoram: I haven't crossed any boundaries so far.
- Naomi: I have this constant feeling that you want to sleep with me. You know how hard it is for me to refuse.
- Yoram: Of course I want to sleep with you. So what? I don't touch you. I don't come near you. I haven't hinted at anything...
- Naomi: Then you have to stop wanting me.
- Yoram: And you don't want me? I can see it in your eyes. For your information, Anna couldn't stay with a husband she didn't love. You won't be able to either. In a month you'll hate Victor and leave him.
- Naomi: That's it, Yoram. I'm not going to listen anymore. **(Turning to exit)**
- Yoram: **(Stops her)** Wait a minute. I keep asking myself why you wanted me to come back to the show. Don't tell me you never considered the possibility that our relationship might begin again.
- Naomi: I asked you because you're an excellent director.

Yoram: Is that all? There are other good directors here, but you wanted me. You hoped that once I came back, my love for you would return and take hold of me. I admit I wanted that too.

Naomi: Do you see why I have to watch out when I'm with you?

Yoram: You don't have to watch out anymore. It's true. You had good reason to think I was too old. But now I'm back to writing. I'm back to directing. The weakness I felt was due to my decision to separate. When I realized I wanted to get back with you, I came back to myself. I don't feel too old anymore.

Naomi: Your age has never been an issue, Yoram.

Yoram: So what happened? Did you fall in love with Victor? His love seems so banal.

Naomi: With love like his I can live.

Yoram: And with mine you can't?

Naomi: With mine, I can't.

Yoram: Of course you can. A great love really is frightening. But there are two of us. We'll look after each other. Read a few scenes from the play I'm writing about that lecturer and the head of her department.

Naomi: I'll read them after the show opens.

Yoram: You're afraid that if you read it, your love will reawaken, and you'll come back to me.

Naomi: I'm afraid to get back together with you because it hurt so badly when you kicked me out.

Yoram: It was a terrible mistake, but now you're repeating it.

Naomi: Now I'm clinging to my banal life with Victor. He gives me room to breathe. We deserve a chance.

Yoram: We deserve one too. **(Takes hold of her)**

Naomi: I can't sleep with you right now.

Yoram: So you'll go home and sleep with him?

Naomi: I have no choice!

Naomi turns to leave, but she can't.

Yoram: You can go. I'm not stopping you.

Naomi: I'm asking you to let go of me, Yoram. Let go of me, and we can still be friends.

Yoram: You'll have to go without me letting go of you.

Naomi: I want us to at least work together.

Yoram: That's not enough for me anymore.

Naomi: This show is important to me.

Yoram: Now you're more important to me.
 Naomi: If I'm important to you, then let go of me.
 Yoram: You can go.
 Naomi: **(Unable to leave)** For the past few weeks, I've tried to get back on my feet without you, and suddenly I've discovered that I can. That I'm no longer dependent on you. That I can survive without sleeping with you. I don't want to give up that freedom.
 Yoram: I won't force you to sleep with me.
 Naomi: Then why won't you let me leave?
 Yoram: Because you want to sleep with me.
 Naomi: I'm trying to explain that I don't.
 Yoram: Really?
 Naomi: You're frightening me, Yoram. Look at yourself. You've never been so compulsive.
 Yoram: I'm not forcing you to do anything.
 Naomi: So let me go without making me feel guilty.
 Yoram: Go.

She turns to leave. As she approaches the door, she stops.

Yoram: Why aren't you going?
 Naomi: I won't go until you calm down.

She comes back and puts her hand on his shoulder. He regains his self-control.

Naomi: Will you be able to manage the rehearsal tomorrow? Maybe you should take a sleeping pill.
 Yoram: You don't have to worry so much. I only lost it for a moment.
 Naomi: Are you sure? I have to go.
 Yoram: Stay a few more minutes. Just so I'll know you're not angry.
 Naomi: I really have to go. Victor is probably certain I'm with you by now. I'll see you tomorrow at ten. Good night. **(Turns to leave, then stops again)** I have to take responsibility for my life, Yoram. I can't afford luxuries like your love. I also have to take care of Jonathan. You once said yourself that love isn't everything. When you said it, I didn't understand how right you were. **(Exits)**

8. A week later. Night. Yoram stands at the table drinking a glass of wine. Naomi enters. He goes to her. They hug.

Naomi: Sorry for bursting in so late. But I had to talk to you. Victor found out I was here last week. He left home. He wants a divorce.

Yoram: I know.

Naomi: You know?!

Yoram: He called me in a rage. Screamed. Swore at me...

Naomi: He saw some messages on my phone that I didn't delete.

Yoram: These messages were completely innocent.

Naomi: He's sure I continued sleeping with you. He's become unbearable lately. He keeps checking where I am. When I get home, he interrogates me. Today he called me a whore. What did he want from you?

Yoram: He said that if I saw you again, he would expose our relationship. Want a drink?

Naomi: Do you have anything for a headache?

Yoram: **(Gives her a pill)** He can't hurt me. But perhaps he'll try to hurt you. Is there anything I can do? Do you want us to cancel tomorrow's rehearsal? I can work with Michael in the morning.

Naomi: **(Swallows the pill)** He took Jonathan.

Yoram: Took him? Where?

Naomi: He took him out of school, packed him a suitcase, and drove to his mother's. He told my lawyer that I'm selfish, that all I care about is my career and the men I screw. That I'm incapable of being a mother...

Yoram: You know you're a great mother. Ask Jonathan.

Naomi: I hope he won't have to testify.

Yoram: I don't think it'll come to that. Victor knows he can't take a child away from his mother.

Naomi: I hope so. I'm so confused. I don't know what I'm doing anymore.

Yoram: You know perfectly well. I'm willing to come with you to the lawyer tomorrow.

Naomi: What if Victor tries to flee the country tonight? Maybe I should ask for an order barring him from leaving the country?

Yoram: He knows that if he runs away, you'll accuse him of kidnapping.

Naomi: Don't you think we should complain to the police?

- Yoram: On the contrary. You need to calm him down, so he'll give you the child back.
- Naomi: You're probably right. I'd be very happy if you'd come with me to the lawyer. I made an appointment with him for tomorrow at eight.
- Yoram: Then we'll cancel the rehearsal. I'll call the theater in the morning.
- Naomi: Thank you. You're the only person in the world I can trust. I need you so much right now.

She hugs him. He feels how much she needs him.

- Yoram: Do you think you'll be able to sleep tonight? Maybe you should stay here?
- Naomi: I'd rather be at home. Maybe he'll bring Jonathan back after all.
- Yoram: At such an hour? Jonathan is already asleep. We'll be calmer in the morning. We'll drive together to the lawyer...
- Naomi: I don't want Victor to know I was here.
- Yoram: If you don't tell him, he won't know.
- Naomi: What if he follows me?
- Yoram: When he realizes you're not afraid, he'll stop threatening you... **(Takes her hands)**
- Naomi: **(Pulls away)** I can't, Yoram.
- Yoram: Why?
- Naomi: Because.
- Yoram: Because of Victor? Do you still think you're going back to him?
- Naomi: No. It's not about him. I really can't.
- Yoram: Are you sure?

She doesn't answer. She pours herself a glass of wine, sips it and puts it down.

- Naomi: I have to go. I'll see you in the morning.
- Yoram: Wait a minute.
- Naomi: I'll call you when I leave the house.
- Yoram: Why?
- Naomi: **(Angrily)** My child was kidnapped, and you insist on sleeping with me.
- Yoram: I'm not insisting on anything. I can see you're tense. You're worried. I want to help you think rationally.

Naomi: If he finds out I slept here, he'll explode and run away with him.

Yoram: You're imagining it.

Naomi: **(Angrily)** Victor is a dangerous man, Yoram. **(Controls herself)** I'm sorry. Don't be angry. It's been a crazy day. I need a moment to breathe. To think about what I'm doing. I have to be honest with myself. **(Turns to leave)**

Yoram: If you want to be honest with yourself, you should stay here. **(Tries to embrace her)**

Naomi: Enough, please. I can't.

Yoram: I won't force you. You can't go out like this. Sit down. Have another glass of wine. Do you want another pill?

Naomi: **(Angrily)** You're still trying to force me.

Yoram: What are you talking about?

Naomi: You are taking advantage of my panic to keep me here.

Yoram: I'm doing it for you.

Naomi: Can't you see it's not right for me now?

Yoram: Of course I see. But...

Naomi: Then why are you forcing yourself on me? Because Victor left, you think you have an opportunity? How can I go on working with you now? You'll take advantage of every moment...

Yoram: Of course you can.

Naomi: Suddenly I understand what's been bothering me so much these past few days. You aren't directing me. You're seducing me.

Yoram: Are you out of your mind? I don't want to seduce you. I want to protect you from Victor. Tomorrow morning he'll suggest that the two of you go to therapy, and in your panic, you'll give him another chance.

Naomi: He can suggest whatever he wants. I'm not going back to him.

Yoram: We know him, Naomi. Until you've actually moved in here, he'll keep trying to get you back.

Naomi: He left only a few hours ago. He won't try anything tomorrow. I also need time to think. I'm not sure I want to move here so soon.

Yoram: Why? Who are you waiting for? We deserve this. We've had such a wonderful week working together...

Naomi: Give me a few more days, Yoram.

Yoram: If Victor sees that you hesitate, he'll hold Jonathan hostage. He won't give him back to you unless you return to him.

Naomi: He knows I won't go back to him.

Yoram: Then why are you hesitating? Stay here tonight. This is our chance. We can't miss it. Move in here tomorrow. We'll live together. Work together. Raise Jonathan together...

Naomi: Enough, please. Enough. **(Silence)** You're frightening me, Yoram. I came to you because I thought I could ask you for help. I was so glad you agreed. But suddenly you're demanding something in return that I can't give you. You aren't even willing to wait a few days and give me time to think. You're taking advantage of my helplessness to force me. It isn't fair. I shouldn't have come here.

Yoram: It's a good thing you came.

Naomi: I need a few days to put my life in some kind of order. I have to think about what I'm doing. Before I lose Jonathan. Before I lose myself. I have to be wary of you too. Suddenly you're threatening me. Tomorrow morning I'll notify the theater.

Yoram: I'm threatening you?

Naomi: I have no choice. I'm not sure a few days will be enough. I don't want to wreck the show.

Yoram: You're not wrecking anything...

Naomi: I'm afraid we're deceiving ourselves again. I think you should find another actress.

Yoram: Another actress? What the hell are you talking about?

Naomi: I can't work with you when you're forcing yourself on me.

Yoram: I wrote this play for you. No one will play Anna better than you.

Naomi: I'm no longer sure. I no longer believe that I...

Yoram: But I believe. I've always believed in you. This show will be your greatest success. Everyone in the theater is already saying so. You can't kill it before it's born. **(Takes her hands)**

Naomi: Enough, Yoram. Please. Jonathan needs me now. He's never needed me like this before.

Yoram: I'm not willing to lose this show.

Naomi: I can't act in it. **(Pulls her hands free and turns to leave)**

Yoram: **(Blocks her way)** You're not going.

He seizes her again, forcefully. She struggles to free herself.

Naomi: Leave me alone!

Yoram: You're moving in tomorrow.

Naomi: I'll move wherever I want.

Yoram: And you are not leaving the show a week before the premiere. **(Pulls her tightly against his body)**

Naomi: **(Struggling against him)** You're forcing me.
 Yoram: I won't let you run away from yourself.
 Naomi: I'm running away to save myself.
 Yoram: And you won't run away from me either.

He tries to force a kiss on her. She slaps his face. Shock. They both regain control of themselves.

Naomi: **(In tears)** It's over, Yoram. Over. This love has become too destructive. It has driven us completely crazy. I can't allow myself to get lost in it. At least for Jonathan's sake.
 Yoram: Please, Naomi...
 Naomi: That's why I can't play Anna. I can't because I'm afraid. Because I know what'll happen to me if I play her suicide every night.
 Yoram: She commits suicide because she has lost Alexei.
 Naomi: She kills herself because she has lost herself. **(Turns to leave)**
 Yoram: Wait. Wait... **(Calling after her)** Open your eyes. Look at what you're doing. If you leave now, you'll destroy everything we had together. You'll destroy everything we might still have. You'll never forgive yourself. We still have a chance. Why waste it? We can still save the show. We can still save our lives. What you're doing now is your suicide...

But she has left. He stands there for a moment, desperate. Then he takes a packet of sleeping pills from the shelf, swallows them, and lies down on the couch. A moment later, he gets up, takes his phone, and calls her. She does not answer. He leaves a message.

Yoram: By the time you hear this message, I won't be here anymore, and you'll be able to go on with your life without the suffering I cause you. I have no choice. I don't want to live without you. That isn't a life worth living. I don't want to live it...

He turns off the phone and drinks the wine left in his glass. A moment later, he feels dizzy and sits down. He picks up the phone again and almost dials, but puts it down and lies on the couch. A moment later, she returns, sees him, and notices the empty packet of sleeping pills.

Naomi: Yoram!! Yoram!!

Yoram: **(Mumbling)** Naomi?
 Naomi: Yes. It's me. Are you OK?
 Yoram: Did you hear the message?
 Naomi: What message?
 Yoram: The one I left you.
 Naomi: I didn't hear anything. Open your eyes, Yoram. Look at me. Did you swallow these pills? Did you swallow them? Say something...
 Yoram: I said everything in that message. You can go now.
 Naomi: I'm not going anywhere. **(She dials 101)** Hello? 101?... A friend of mine swallowed sleeping pills... Yes. Five minutes ago... Nineteen Balfour Street... Yes. He's still talking... Yes, I got it... Thank you...
 Yoram: Go already. Go...

She turns off the phone, kneels beside him, and shakes him.

Naomi: Try to vomit, Yoram. Do you hear me? Try to vomit. Put your fingers in your mouth.
 Yoram: There's no point, Naomi. No point...
 Naomi: Please, Yoram. Please. Open your eyes. Look at me. The ambulance is on its way. Stay with me... When I got into the car, I couldn't drive. I sat there thinking, and suddenly I was terrified. I got out and started running...
 Yoram: No, Naomi. It won't work anymore. It's over. Just as I told you in the message...
 Naomi: Give yourself another chance, Yoram. The ambulance will be here any moment. You'll be released in a day or two. We'll keep working. We'll put the show on together.
 Yoram: It's too late... Too late...

An ambulance siren is heard in the distance. Blackout.

9. Night. Yoram sits at the table. His phone rings. He looks at the screen, sees that Naomi is calling, and answers. Naomi's voice is heard through the speakerphone.

Naomi: Yoram? Did you call? What did you want? I've just put Jonathan to bed...
 Yoram: **(With determination)** Enough, Naomi. Leave me alone. Don't call again. Don't try to see me... You aren't to blame for anything. You don't have to explain anything. You

certainly don't have to apologize... So let go already. There's no other choice. Let go, and let me let go too. I owe you my life, but that's precisely why I have to tear you out of it... Yes... I'll go back to writing. Directing. Maybe that will keep me going... That's why I didn't answer you. That's why I didn't want to see you... Once you tear me out of your life too, you'll be able to find yourself again. You'll be able to keep acting. Build a family... If we don't see each other anymore, even the pain will be a little more bearable... Yes... We'll learn to live apart, and perhaps we'll finally stop bleeding... We'll get used to it. I'm pretty sure. Yes, we'll get used to it... Even though I'll think about you for the rest of my life. Even though for the rest of my life I'll keep... **(Falls silent)**

Naomi: Yoram? Yoram?

He turns off his phone. Blackout.

End