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Pangs of the Messiah

By Motti Lerner

©

Translated from the Hebrew by Anthony Berris

A new version for The Herzliya Ensemble production, directed by Sinai Peter

The play premiered at The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv in the 1987 season, directed by Ilan Ronen. American premiere was produced by Theater J in Washington DC in the 2007 season directed by Sinai Peter

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The place:

The living room of the Berger family home in a Samaria community settlement. In the background is mountain scenery, the houses and mosque of an Arab village, etc. The living room furniture is simple and modest and includes a TV set whose screen is unseen by the audience.

The time:

Summer, sometime in the near future.

The characters:

Rabbi Shmuel Berger: Leader of the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, 55

Amalia: His wife, 50

Menachem: Secretary of the settlement, 50

Avner: Shmuel and Amalia's eldest son, 30

Tirtzah: Avner's wife, 28

Nadav: Shmuel and Amalia's younger son, 22

Chava: Shmuel and Amalia's daughter, 25

Benny: Chava's husband and Menachem's son, 30

Act One

Scene One

A hot summer evening. The Berger family living room. Nadav, in work clothes and shoeless, is sitting in the armchair. Chava, in the advanced stages of pregnancy, is sitting in the rocking chair. Enter Amalia carrying a glass of water.

Amalia: People are talking, Chava.

Chava: I'm not sitting at home knitting yarmulkes. For the last two weeks I've been looking after fourteen children, and four of them have diarrhea.

Amalia: You can still come to the school and teach for a few hours.

Chava: If I wasn't looking after those kids their parents wouldn't be able to run off to demonstrations all over the country.

Amalia: Anyone seeing you will think they can stay at home too.

Chava: That's their problem.

Amalia: Is this the time to insist that boys and girls don't sit together in class?

Chava: Since when haven't I taught boys and girls together? I've no problem at all with mixed classes up to third grade.

Nadav: **(Frustrated)** I've asked them not to throw cigarette butts into the rose beds. I put a pail in the steps. I told them: throw your sandwich wrappers in there too. They argue. They yell. They curse.

Amalia: Drink this. **(Offers him the glass of water)**

Nadav: I've just had one.

Amalia: Have another.

Nadav: I'm not thirsty. I'm hot. Abba's got to talk to them. At least they shouldn't throw plastic bottles and cans onto the lawn.

Amalia: I'm not waiting all day for you.

Nadav: **(Pours the water over his head)** Now I'm cooler.

Amalia: Nadav. **(To Chava)** You should drink too. The heat's no good for the baby. **(Chava does not reply)** I asked you to call Abba again.

Chava: I called a moment ago.

Amalia: Then call again.

Chava: Ima, enough!

Amalia: You know he doesn't like anybody sitting in his chair.

Chava: He gets to all his meetings on time, but when he arranges to see me he forgets. And why doesn't he turn on his phone?

Amalia: He's probably just left the prime minister's bureau. (**Nadav gets up**) Sit down. I'll bring you a pair of slippers. (**Exits**)

Nadav: (**To Chava**) Maybe I won't change my clothes. When the ruckus over there's finished I'll collect the garbage and go and do some tiling in the bathroom. The plumber's supposed to put in the faucets today.

Chava: A sword is hanging over our heads and you're building a house.

Nadav: And you're pregnant.

A dog barking is heard followed by the doorbell ringing.

Chava: That's Abba. (**She moves from the rocker to an armchair**)

Nadav: It's the plumber. Herschel really likes him.

Nadav opens the door. Enter Avner and Tirtzah carrying a suitcase, coats and two bags. They have just arrived from New York.

Avner: Shalom.

Nadav: Ima!

Chava: Avner! (**Hurries to him but addresses Tirtzah**) Tirtzah. (**Hugs her**)

Nadav: Ima! (**Hugs Avner**) I dreamt about you last night, I swear. Ask Abba. (**Towards the passage**) Ima!

Amalia: (**Off**) What are you shouting about? Why don't you put your slippers by the bed? (**Enters with the slippers. Sees Avner and Tirtzah and is stunned**) Avner? What's happened? Tirtzah'leh? What are you doing here? How did you get here out of the blue? Are you all right?

Nadav: (**To outside**) Stop it, Herschel. Quiet, boy.

Avner: We're fine, Ima. We're just fine. Didn't you get our email?

Amalia: What email? Why didn't you call?

Avner: It was nighttime here and we didn't want to wake you, and anyway we didn't have a phone. When we got to Kennedy I went online and sent you a mail.

Amalia: We didn't get anything. (**To Tirtzah**) Tirtzah'leh, how are you?

Tirtzah: I'm fine, thank God.

Amalia: You look wonderful. America's made you even more beautiful.

Chava: You've come at just the right time. When we're all together, we're much stronger.

Amalia: That's what we'd like people to think. Have you eaten? Are you hungry?
(**To Chava**) Go fetch them some of your peaches. (**Chava exits to the kitchen**)

Avner: (**To Amalia**) What a racket by the office. Everyone's yelling. What's going on there?

Nadav: (**Remembering**) All of a sudden there was no water, so we took the guards' pickup and drove through all the settlements, but they didn't have water either. So we drove to Jerusalem.

Avner: What are you talking about?

Nadav: I told you. That's what I dreamt. And Herschel was running after us barking. That's how I remembered. Have you got just the one suitcase?

Tirtzah: Mine's on the plane.

Amalia: What's on the plane?

Tirtzah: My suitcase.

Nadav: The plane?

Avner: (**To Tirtzah**) It won't help now.

Amalia: Who leaves a suitcase on the plane?

Tirtzah: Ask Avner.

Avner: There was a misunderstanding. It'll be here tomorrow. Is Abba at the office as well?

Amalia: He's on his way home. He left the prime minister's bureau half an hour ago. There's a meeting here at seven. (**Hugs Avner again**) Avner. (**To Tirtzah**) Don't worry, it's only a suitcase. What could possibly be in it?

Tirtzah: Everything.

Avner: (**Noticing the rocking chair**) I see Abba's never going to replace that chair.

Nadav: Do you want to see my house, Avner?

Avner: Sure, after the meeting.

Chava: (**Enters carrying a bowl of peaches**) Did you ever see peaches like these in America?

Avner: And how are you?

Chava: Thank God.

Avner: You look good in the headscarf. We thought you'd shaved your head.

Chava: Not yet. **(They laugh)**

Tirtzah: How much longer have you got?

Chava: Six weeks, with God's help, and both of us **(Indicates her belly)** can't wait.

Avner: We couldn't get you anything. We had to sell the car yesterday, the furniture, the kitchen.

Amalia: I'm so happy to see you I forgot to offer you a drink. You can't imagine what we're getting ready for. People are stocking up on oil, rice, batteries, fuel. And no more than that I hope. **(Exits to the kitchen)**

Chava: **(Admiringly)** She runs the school during the day and at night she speaks at public meetings in Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv, in...

Avner: **(Interrupting her)** How's Benny?

Chava: Thank God.

Avner: Working? Studying?

Chava: What happened that you've come home all of a sudden?

Avner: There was nothing left for us to do there. Senators and congressmen weren't prepared to see me. State Department officials say they can't do anything. I've got friend, a Jew, in the White House. He stopped taking my calls. Every columnist in Washington is in favor of the agreement. As if only angels live in the Middle East. The night before last CNN reported that the president had closed a deal with the Russians and Europeans. Yesterday he invited them all to the signing of the agreement on the White House lawn.

Tirtzah: We left Washington in the afternoon. In New York we met someone from El Al who put us on standby.

Avner: In the end we couldn't get seats on El Al, but then a Jewish guy who works for Continental showed up...

Tirtzah: And that's how we lost the suitcase.

Avner: It'll be here tomorrow. **(To Amalia who has come back)** We thought we'd get off the plane, lie on the runway and block the prime minister's flight. He mustn't be allowed to leave the country.

Amalia: That's why Abba's meeting with him.

- Avner: Lying bastard. When he came to our wedding he drank *le'chaim* with us, hugged us and swore there wouldn't be any further withdrawals.
- Amalia: And there won't be.
- Nadav: Say, is it true that they've got six hundred TV channels over there?
- Avner: As many as you want. **(To Amalia)** We saw you on NBC one day. At that demonstration outside the Knesset, with the school choir.
- Tirtzah: They were singing "Pangs of the Messiah".
- Avner: And you said: 'We will break down their hearts with song'.
- Amalia: I hoped we would.
- Avner: **(To Tirtzah)** We'd better get over to the office. I want to see what's happening there.
- Nadav: Did you see *me* on TV? Last week Abba brought the minister of defense so he could see me building the roof. He stood next to me like this, put his hand on my head and said: Well done. **(Laughs)** They showed it here. And we've got two hundred channels already.
- Avner: Really.
- Nadav: **(To Tirtzah)** Do you want to see my house too?
- Amalia: Nadav, I suggest you get those boxes of tiles out of the little room and bring in another bed from the porch.
- Nadav: Sure.
- Avner: How is he doing?
- Amalia: He can't understand why the army refused to take him. But he's not breaking. He's building. At first he had a worker. An Arab. From the village down below. When they started shooting the committee decided he had to fire him.

The dog's barking is heard. Enter Nadav from the porch.

- Nadav: It's Abba.

Enter Shmuel.

- Shmuel: Shalom, Avner. Shalom Tirtzah. Is this how you come to dinner? Without warning?

They are all astonished.

Amalia: Shmuel?

Shmuel: **(Laughs)** The guard saw them in the taxi and told me. Welcome.

Nadav: Do you remember that I dreamt about them last night?

Shmuel: 'A dream is but one sixtieth part prophecy'.

Amalia: Why isn't your phone on?

Shmuel: I talked so much that the battery's dead.

Avner: How are you, Abba?

Shmuel: **(To Tirtzah)** 'Happy shall be the husband who has a beautiful wife'.
But yours looks worried.

Avner: How are you, Abba?

Tirtzah: It wasn't a bed of roses, Shmuel.

Shmuel: Did anyone promise you roses? **(To Chava, who is trying to get up from the rocking chair)** Sit down. **(To Amalia)** I see you haven't offered them any of your cake.

Amalia: Why cake? We're having dinner. **(To Nadav)** Go fix up the room. **(To Shmuel)** Why are you so late? What happened with the prime minister? Is he going to America?

Shmuel: **(To Avner)** What happened that you've come back?

Amalia: Is he going or not?

Shmuel: All in good time.

Chava: Do you think we'll have some time to go over your speech, Abba? I've got to run and pick up the children.

Shmuel: You don't have to run. Pick up the phone slowly and ask the babysitter to look after them for another hour. We don't have guests like these every day. **(Chava goes to the phone. He turns to Avner and Tirtzah)** Can you see how like Ima she is? **(To Avner)** Ima looked just like her when she was carrying you. But without the headscarf.

Amalia: What happened with the prime minister, Shmuel?

Shmuel: First let's hear what happened in America.

- Avner: A catastrophe. Congress and the Senate will follow the president's lead. They're told 'an end to the conflict' and they want us to give up everything.
- Tirtzah: And most of the Jews support him too.
- Avner: Worst of all are the Jewish politicians. They bow before the president as if he were the rich *goy* of the *shtetl*. All of a sudden we're the fundamentalists. All of a sudden we're the zealots. We're the warmongers, and over the border are only pacifists. I tried pressuring them through the synagogues. Through their donors. I threatened them with rabbinic excommunication. Nothing worked.
- Tirtzah: When the stock exchange here started going up, people stopped donating to us. All they wanted to know was what to invest in. **(The phone rings)**
- Shmuel: The Almighty is putting us to a test. We already know that the Land of Israel will be acquired through affliction. **(On the phone)** Yes... We're on the air? I had a very good meeting with the prime minister. I can't go into detail, but he's not going to America... Our position is clear. Three years ago we reached an agreement that there would be no further evacuations. He won't renege on that agreement... Yes. Of course. Our demonstrations will only strengthen him. Thank you. **(Disconnects)**
- Avner: So he's not going?
- Shmuel: How long are you here for?
- Avner: We're here.
- Shmuel: Just like that?
- Avner: That's what I've been trying to tell you. America's a lost cause.
- Shmuel: You had nobody to ask? Nobody to consult? There's an election in America soon. The president needs support. He needs contributors. And so do we.
- Avner: You're not listening to what I'm saying.
- Tirtzah: We can do far more here, Shmuel.
- Shmuel: You heard speeches on TV and got cold feet? What will happen if everybody gives up?
- Amalia: **(To Shmuel)** Why are you getting angry? We've got a demonstration in two days. Every day you complain that no one can organize demonstrations like Avner.

Shmuel: We need a powerful lobby in America now. Stay with us for a few days, strengthen yourselves and go back. **(To Amalia)** My shirt's damp, I've got to change. **(Exits)**

Avner: I don't understand. I've come to help him.

Amalia: He's under stress, Avner. Once he sees you at work he'll be happy you're here.

Silence. The dog barks and the doorbell rings. Nadav comes out of his room.

Nadav: That'll be the plumber. **(He opens the door. Enter Benny in work clothes and boots)** It's Benny. Come on in. Chava's here.

Benny: I thought so.

Avner: Shalom, Benny.

Benny: Avner. When did you get here?

Avner: Just now.

Nadav: I bought you the plugs for the tractor. **(Exits)**

Avner: Its us, Benny. **(Hugs him)** How are you? I was asking about you when we got here. I couldn't call you from America. The FBI tapped our phone. And I wasn't at all sure you'd want to speak to me. You probably don't know this, but the day you were arrested we were sent over there.

Benny: Shalom, Tirtzah.

Tirtzah: Shalom. How are you?

Shmuel reenters wearing a clean shirt.

Benny: **(To Shmuel)** Shalom.

Shmuel: Good to see you. 'They have gathered and come from all corners of the earth'.

Chava: **(To Benny)** You're tracking mud all over the floor.

Amalia: Leave your boots by the door.

Benny: **(To Chava)** I got home and the house was empty.

Chava: The children are with the babysitter.

Shmuel: Stay and eat with us.

Benny: I'm in the middle of irrigating and the tractor's stuck.

Avner: The world's turning upside down and you're irrigating?

Benny: The Land of Israel bears fruit. It has to be watered.

Shmuel: Will you make it to the meeting at seven? It's very important.

Benny: I've got to get the tractor out.

Chava: Where've you been? You said you'd be back at four.

Benny: I told you.

Chava: I can't be running after you with a belly like this.

Benny: What are you shouting for?

Chava: Because you're standing at the door.

Benny: My boots are muddy.

Chava: Why didn't you take your phone? I don't want to have to worry about you all the time.

Benny: You don't have to. There's the Almighty in heaven. **(To all)** I've got to go.

Shmuel: Stay another few minutes. Your father will probably be here soon. I'd be very happy if you'd sit with us for a while and then we'll go to the meeting together. People are very anxious. We have to make some fateful decisions.

Benny: I've got a leaking pipe.

Amalia: I'm serving dinner.

Benny: **(To Chava)** You stay, I'll pick up the children when I've finished.

Avner: We want to talk to you, Benny.

Benny: Come over after the meeting.

Chava: Wait, I've got to wash the children's hair. They've got lice.

Shmuel: Benny, I think it's about time we sat down and talked about some important matters. What are you doing in the morning?

Benny: Spraying.

Shmuel: Then come after *Mincha*. 'A man shall not keep himself aloof from the congregation'.

Amalia: Would you like some jam, Chava'leh?

Chava: I've got enough, thanks. Bye, Abba. **(To Avner and Tirtzah)** See you later.

Benny and Chava leave the house. Once outside, Chava takes Benny's hand.

Amalia: **(Frustrated)** Even my jam's not kosher enough for her.

Shmuel: Of course it is.

Tirtzah: **(To Amalia)** He looks very tired.

Avner: Doesn't he go to meetings?

Shmuel: He's not the Benny we knew. Who knows what happened to him in there. A whole year has gone by and I still have to plead with him to lend a hand.

Amalia: Go wash your hands. **(Avner and Tirtzah go to wash their hands. Shmuel goes towards his room)** Where to now?

Shmuel: To write up the meeting. **(Exits)**

Amalia: Benny's still punishing himself. Those interrogations were no picnic for him. I wouldn't be surprised if those bastards tortured him. There was incitement against him all over the country. Jews called him a murderer. The prime minister sent condolences to the families of the Arabs he killed. In prison he was treated a little better. The guards gave him a lot of respect. After the trial they allowed him to be alone with Chava. And she went through hell too. For three years she raised four small children on her own, *and* went to visit him every week.

Shmuel reenters, his diary in his hand. Avner, Tirtzah and Amalia have finished washing their hands.

Shmuel: What did I go out for?

Amalia: To write up the meeting.

Shmuel: I've done it.

Shmuel washes his hands, sits at the table and is about to start reciting the Grace Before Meals, but the phone rings. Tirtzah, who has momentarily forgotten that it is forbidden to speak between the washing of the hands and the Grace before Meals, goes to answer it. Shmuel motions her not to. He quickly takes a piece of bread and hastily recites the Grace.

Shmuel: *Baruch ata adonai elohainu melech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'artez.*

All: Amen.

He quickly picks up the phone.

Shmuel: **(On the phone)** Hello, Yehoshua... It's out of the question that you study Torah while all the schools are at the rally ... You've got to close the books. Conquering the Land of Israel is more important than the Sabbath... So they should take their books and study at night... Reb Yehoshua, a man whose wisdom is greater than his deeds has no place in the next world... I want you and your six hundred students there on time. **(Disconnects)** Just before the rally, they've become scholars. And Benny's turned into a farmer. **(Reproaching Avner)** And you show up here.

Amalia: Shmuel, what happened with the prime minister?

Shmuel: We had a good talk. Perhaps even too good.

Nadav: **(Enters)** Here are your plugs, Benny. **(Realizes that Benny is not there)** Where is he?

Amalia: He left. **(Nadav turns to go)** Sit down and eat.

Nadav: I've got to clean up the lawn before the meeting.

Nadav turns to leave, passing Menachem who is coming in.

Menachem: Shalom, Nadav. **(Sees Tirtzah and Avner)** Tirtzah? Avner? What in heaven's name are you doing here?

Avner: Shalom, Menachem.

Menachem: You've come back just in time. War is at our gates. **(To Tirtzah)** And that's the smile of a happy woman. May I congratulate you? **(To Amalia)** It's about time you got a little joy from them too.

Amalia: Menachem!

Menachem: What did I say? A blessing brings luck. **(To Shmuel)** We've got to talk, Shmuel. People have been gathering by the office for hours. They want to know what we're doing.

Amalia: We're bringing a million people to the rally the day after tomorrow.

Menachem: And how can I pay for the buses?

Shmuel: There'll be money. I'm dealing with it. Avner will go back to America to fundraise.

Menachem: The Americans are already threatening to prohibit the transfer of contributions to us.

Shmuel: They're just threatening. Even the government can't freeze our allocations.

Menachem: And what if it does?

Shmuel: This time the supreme court will be on our side.

Menachem: The earth is trembling under our feet and you're talking about the supreme court? We're fighting for our lives. Some of our people are demanding that we shut the whole country down. Block the airports. Roads. Trains. Buses. Disconnect traffic lights. Disconnect cellphone antennas. Switch off the electricity supply.

Shmuel: Are they out of their minds? Just now when we need all the public sympathy we can get?

Amalia: People stuck in traffic jams will come and demonstrate for us?

Shmuel: Let's go and talk to them. (To Amalia) Don't be late. We'll need you for the vote. (To Menachem) What's going to happen with Benny, Menachem? It's high time you started speaking to each other. You're his father.

Menachem: On Shabbat I waited for him outside the synagogue. He wouldn't even let me hug his children.

Shmuel: I need him.

Menachem: If I tell him something he'll do exactly the opposite.

Shmuel leaves, followed by Menachem.

Amalia: Don't you want to eat something?

Avner: The meeting starts in a few minutes.

Amalia: Then wait a second. We'll go together. (To Tirtzah) How are you feeling, Tirtzah'leh? Why haven't you told us anything?

Tirtzah: Because there's nothing to tell.

Amalia: I hope you haven't given up.

Tirtzah: Of course we haven't.

Amalia: We've got good doctors here too.

Avner: We went to five hospitals. We saw hundreds of doctors. We did thousands of tests. No one knows why.

Darkness

Scene Two

The same night. 1 a.m. Shmuel is sitting in the armchair holding a closed book. Herschel's joyful barking is heard. Nadav enters carrying two garbage bags.

Nadav: Abba? **(Silence)** Abba, are you asleep?

Shmuel: **(Waking)** No.

Nadav: Neither am I. It's so hot. It can't go on like this. **(Shmuel does not understand)** Look how much garbage I've collected from by the office. Am I bothering you?

Shmuel: No, I'm waiting for a call.

Nadav: I went to look for you at the meeting but you were busy, so I didn't want to bother you.

Shmuel: You're not.

Nadav: Are you angry?

Shmuel: No.

Nadav: Because you were so angry when I went in. **(Shmuel does not understand)** To the meeting. **(Shmuel understands)** If the prime minister's not going to America, then everything's all right and we won't have to leave, right?

Shmuel: Of course not.

Nadav: So when I heard that, I told myself that it was time to come to the meeting and ask them not to send little kids with bags of garbage to the dumpsters, because they can't reach the opening and they leave the bags on the ground. You can't blame them for being small. But then the cats come and tear open the bags and spread the garbage all over. And you can't blame them either. Even Herschel, who's a very good dog, always noses around the garbage. Do you see?

Shmuel: Yes.

Nadav: Then if everything's all right, then maybe you can come with me to Menachem and talk to him.

Shmuel: Now?

Nadav: He's in the office. Am I bothering you?

Shmuel: No. I told you, I'm waiting for a call.

Nadav: When I went in they were talking about government compensation and I could see how angry you were.

Shmuel: Quite rightly.

Nadav: People here love this place so much. They'll never leave, not for any government compensation. But when they saw you so angry they got scared and thought that maybe people in other settlements will leave for compensation.

Shmuel: Is that what you think? That they got scared by my anger?

Nadav: But if the prime minister's not going to America then we carry on living here, and there's no compensation, right? (**Shmuel is thoughtful**) It will end in disaster.

Shmuel: What disaster?

Nadav: The garbage.

Shmuel: What garbage?

Nadav: From all over. The lawns. In the rose beds. By the dumpsters.

Shmuel: Yes.

Nadav: Maybe we have to lower the openings in the dumpsters.

Shmuel: I'll talk to Menachem.

Nadav: What about?

Shmuel: The dumpsters. You're right. We must lower the openings.

Nadav: Then I'll leave the garbage outside so that Menachem will see it in the morning. (**Exits and returns without the garbage bags**) Abba, are you still waiting for a call?

Shmuel: Not any more.

Nadav: Then why don't you go to bed? Can't you fall asleep?

Shmuel: No.

Nadav: Neither can I. When I can't sleep I put on pajamas. If that doesn't help, I go outside. To my house. To do some tiling. Mahmoud, my worker, used to do that. I stick on a tile and then another. And if I manage to do straight lines, I go back to bed and fall asleep. You could try that.

Shmuel: **(Hugs him)** You're a fine boy. Tiling in the middle of the night. You're smarter than all of us. That's what I should have said at the meeting. Build, day and night.

They exit. A dog is heard barking, and then the voices of Avner and Tirtzah.

Avner: Why shouldn't Benny talk about revolution? Zionism wasn't a revolution?

Tirtzah: **(Stumbles)** Couldn't they have left a light on for us?

Avner: Give me your hand.

They enter. He switches on the light.

Avner: By the way, he's not the only one who thinks it's time for a new revolution.

Tirtzah: Your shoes, Avner.

Avner: And every revolution has radical ideas, otherwise it wouldn't be a revolution.

Tirtzah: Take them off. Your mother has a fit when she sees mud on the rug.

Avner: **(Taking off his shoes)** When he talks about building The Temple he doesn't mean that we must lay the cornerstone on Temple Mount tomorrow. Why can't he dream?

Tirtzah: You know he doesn't only dream. Why have you arranged to meet him tomorrow? We went to America so you'd get away from him.

Avner: We're here and we've got to work together. If my father hadn't written all those articles against him while he was in prison, they'd be working together as well, and Benny wouldn't be stuck with his dreams. Where's my toothbrush? In the suitcase on the plane?

Tirtzah: In the red bag.

Avner: And after slandering him in America so much, you should moderate your tone now. To this day they haven't forgiven you here. What else do you want from him? He grows his peaches. He studies. He prays.

Tirtzah: I wanted to understand what was going through his mind. When he laid those roadside bombs he knew that the cars were carrying women and children.

Avner: You're so insensitive sometimes. Chava almost went out of her mind.

Tirtzah: Because she didn't ask herself anything when it happened. Did you see how insulted she was when your mother said I was beautiful? She's raising four children and she's pregnant again. Isn't that enough for her?

Avner: After she's had the baby she'll lose weight and calm down. (**He cannot find his toothbrush**) It's not here.

Tirtzah: You're probably right.

Avner: About what?

Tirtzah: It's in the suitcase on the plane.

Avner: Great.

Tirtzah holds out her hand. They embrace. He tries to go further.

Tirtzah: You've still got the strength?

Avner: Sure.

Tirtzah: What'll we do if we don't find the suitcase? I can't go through those damn tests again.

Avner: We'll call the doctors and ask for a copy of the results.

Tirtzah: If we'd stayed there for a few more months maybe we could have succeeded.

Avner: We can succeed here too. (**He goes on trying**)

Tirtzah: I'll talk to Menachem tomorrow. I should re-open the clinic. I've already seen some of the kids I treated before we left. And there are adults who need treatment too. Did you see how they were yelling at the meeting?

Avner: They're being uprooted from their homes.

Tirtzah: I don't understand your father. Does he think he can prevent people from considering government compensation?

Avner: He thinks they should think about preventing the agreement. (**Slides his hand under her dress**)

Tirtzah: Your mother might come in, Avner.

Avner: We've lost a night because of the flight.

Tirtzah: When I went to help Chava with the coffee I peeped into the children's room and saw the four of them sleeping. The whole room was filled with the smell of their hair after their shower.

Avner: We'll have five.

They embrace. A moment later they exit. Shmuel enters. He drinks a glass of water. After another moment Amalia enters.

Amalia: Why aren't you asleep?

Shmuel: My pulse was racing.

Amalia: Should I take your blood pressure? (**He shakes his head**) You've got to get some sleep.

Shmuel: How can I sleep with all those bureaucrats sitting in the White House haggling over our lives? If he goes to Washington there'll be an agreement.

Amalia: But he told you he isn't going.

Shmuel: Not exactly.

Amalia: What do mean 'not exactly'?

Shmuel: He promised me an answer by this morning.

Amalia: Why didn't you tell us?

Shmuel: What difference would it make? It's enough that I worry about it. I can't understand what's happened to him. When he was chief of staff he helped us behind the defense minister's back. If he hadn't turned a blind eye we wouldn't have been able to build more settlements here. When he was minister of construction he ordered roads to be laid, to connect us to electricity, to water. And now he's stabbing us in the back? (**Sighs**) Maybe I'm too naïve. I'm evidently still living in a world in which a prime minister who signed an agreement with me should honor it.

Amalia: What will you do in the morning when the cat's out of the bag? I knew you were hiding something, Shmuel. And I wasn't the only one. That's why they were yelling about compensation.

- Shmuel: Anyone uttering that word should have his tongue cut out.
- Amalia: We're only human, Shmuel.
- Shmuel: Don't you understand the power of words? 'God created the world with the word'.
- Amalia: We must be prepared for the moment of reckoning. If people are talking about compensation it's a sign that we have become weak. And that's not the only sign. I see the children at school. They're in a terrible panic. Some have hardly seen their parents in the last few months. Some of the seven- and eight-year-olds have started bedwetting.
- Shmuel: We've come through crises like this before, Amalia, there's no need to be scared.
- Amalia: I *am* scared. Look at Nadav. We're running around all day and he withdraws into himself. He understands what's going on. He used to talk with Mahmoud, but now he doesn't talk to anybody. It's no wonder he's so immersed in his house. Maybe we should send him to my sister in the kibbutz.
- Shmuel: We are all staying together in this struggle. **(Pause)** I'm not blind, Amalia, I see the uncertainty of our life here. That's why I'm so concerned. How have we sinned that they're negotiating about us? Jews, for whom we spilled our blood, don't accept our existence here. Why? Just because they think we're preventing an agreement with the Arabs? They know the Arabs won't honor it. I can't believe that Jews will want this agreement just so they can uproot us from here. We're flesh of their flesh. For forty years we've hung onto this land by our fingernails, built houses, settlements, raised children. What more must we do to settle in their hearts?

Darkness.

Scene Three

Next morning. Avner and Tirtzah are sitting eating at the table.

Tirtzah: I'm telling you exactly what they told me. If Continental hasn't found the suitcase, then we've got to go to the airport and fill out some forms at El Al.

Avner: Why don't you go without me?

Tirtzah: We've got to go to my parents afterwards.

Avner: To Tel Aviv? There's a rally tomorrow. I've got to organize three thousand buses.

Tirtzah: We'll go to the airport together, look for the suitcase together, and if we can't find it we'll go look for it in America together.

Enter Shmuel, carrying his briefcase.

Shmuel: There's no reply from his head of bureau either. I've got a feeling he's trying to avoid me. He evidently doesn't realize that these rumors can drive people crazy. Somebody here might do something we'll all regret.

Avner: I just heard him on the news. He said there's been no development in the negotiations.

Shmuel: CNN said exactly the opposite.

Avner: I'll try calling my friend in the White House again.

Shmuel: **(Picks up the phone and dials)** Good morning, this is Rabbi Berger. But you promised he'd call me... I don't care what he said on TV. I want to talk to him... If you don't get him for me right now I'm getting into my car and in half an hour I'm in his office... **(Waits)** Good morning, this is Rabbi Berger... I asked for the prime minister. Don't play games with me!... **(Waits)** Good morning, Prime Minister. Yes. Of course. I heard. I'd like to hear it from you... I see. Yes, of course. You are always a welcome guest. **(Disconnects and turns to Avner and Tirtzah)** He said he's not going. I don't know what to believe. He's also invited himself to the rally.

Enter Menachem.

Menachem: The war's started, Shmuel. The army's dismantling the checkpoint at the junction.

Shmuel: **(Stunned)** Impossible. I've just been speaking to the prime minister. He told me there's no agreement.

Menachem: And you believe him? They brought in cranes during the night. They've loaded the roadblocks, dismantled the guard posts, the crossing points. Technicians are packing up the X-ray machines.

Shmuel: I knew he was a liar, but so much so?

Menachem: From here on in we won't believe a word they say. War is war. I've sent the jeeps to block the road.

Shmuel picks up the phone and dials. He hears the busy tone and disconnects.

Menachem: That's how they bribe the Arabs to sign the agreement. By evening they'll release prisoners. Thousands. You'll see them passing on buses, waving and laughing at us.

Shmuel: I'll talk to him about that as well. **(Dials again)**

Menachem: The time for talking is over. I told our people to get the drivers out and start burning the trucks.

Shmuel: Burn army trucks? **(Disconnects)**

Menachem: Tomorrow they'll evacuate us!

Shmuel: They'll try. I can see what they're up to. But we've still got a trick or two up our sleeve. **(He has a sudden idea)** Today could be the turning point.

Menachem: What turning point?

Shmuel: Leave the drivers alone. We won't burn any trucks. Just the opposite.

Menachem: What are you talking about?

Shmuel: We'll organize all the women and children and march to the checkpoint. We'll face the soldiers with placards. We'll lie down on the road. We'll link arms. Pray. Sing. Dance. The whole nation will see. Thousands will see what's behind this plot and flock here.

Menachem: Will those thousands stop the negotiations? We've fallen into that trap too many times, Shmuel.

- Avner: Menachem's right, Abba. The negotiations will be halted only if they're frightened of us.
- Shmuel: The moment we frighten people, they will distance themselves from us. *That's* the trap we've fallen into too many times. **(To Menachem)** The thousands lying on the road will awaken hundreds of thousands of hearts. **(To Avner)** To work. Call the television. The foreign reporters too. If they haven't backed down by evening, we'll begin a hunger strike. All of us. **(To Menachem)** Let's get down there before some hothead does something stupid.
- Menachem: **(To Avner)** Just to be on the safe side, bring some tires and fuel drums as well.

**Shmuel ignores what he has heard. Avner understands what he wanted.
Exit Shmuel and Menachem.**

- Avner: See? I told you he doesn't understand what's going on here. If we'd called from Washington and told him we were coming back, he would have made us stay there. **(Gets up)** I'm going to the garage. I saw the gardener's tractor there yesterday. I'll load some tires and fuel drums. Then I'll deal with the media. **(Realizes he is wearing light shoes)** I can't run over the hills in these shoes.
- Tirtzah: I didn't hear your father say you should take tires and fuel drums down.
- Avner: I didn't hear him saying not to. What are you waiting for? Find something to wear in my mother's closet. **(Exits to the porch)**
- Tirtzah: I'm going to the airport.
- Avner: **(Returns empty-handed)** He still thinks he can call the prime minister and he'll do anything he says.

Goes into the bedroom. A moment later Nadav enters, his clothes bloodstained.

- Tirtzah: **(Sees the blood)** God in heaven, where's that blood from?
- Nadav: It's Herschel's. The guards' jeep ran him down. I was pruning the roses by the office. He was running around near me and suddenly... My mouth's dry.

Tirtzah: Drink. **(Gives him a glass of water)** What happened to Herschel?

Nadav: If he was howling then he's all right. **(Drinks)** I bandaged him at the clinic. The blood's his. **(Pours the remaining water over his head)**

Then I saw Abba running. And I didn't know whether to carry on pruning the roses. What's going on with the checkpoint? Do you think they'll evacuate us too?

Avner: **(From the bedroom)** Nadav, is that you? Do you know where Ima put my army boots?

Nadav: In her closet.

Tirtzah: Hers?

Nadav: When she's missing him she polishes his boots.

Enter Avner wearing army boots and carrying an M16 rifle.

Tirtzah: Are you crazy? You're not taking that with you. Somebody there might get ideas.

Avner: What are you shouting about? Go change your clothes, find a pair of my mother's shoes and clear the table.

Tirtzah: Avner!

Avner: Sorry. **(To Nadav)** Take this upstairs. **(Gives him the M16)**

Nadav: That's it, I just remembered. **(To Tirtzah)** Abba wants you to stay here and answer the phone. If it's urgent they should call his cellphone.

Avner: Excellent.

Tirtzah: I'm going to the airport, Avner.

Avner: But you're needed here.

Tirtzah: To answer the phone? Clear the table?

Avner: The foreign media will be here. You speak the best English. We've got to make posters too. Nadav, go to the storeroom. **(Sees the bloodstains on his clothes)** What's this? Are you hurt? **(Nadav shakes his head)** Go get her some cardboard and magic markers.

Nadav: Okay.

Tirtzah: It's not okay.

Avner: What's not okay?

Tirtzah: We just got here yesterday and look what's happening to you.

- Avner: Nothing's happening. The suitcase can wait another day. We're not going to the hospital tomorrow anyway. **(She remains silent)** Okay, I'm sorry. I'll talk to Menachem about the clinic. If there are trauma victims we'll send them to the synagogue. Treat them in the rabbi's office. **(She remains silent)**
- Nadav: So what should I do, Avner?
- Avner: Nothing.
- Tirtzah: Go already.

Exit Avner.

- Nadav: I think I'll go and change. This blood's attracting flies like jam. It's probably just as sweet for them.

The telephone rings.

- Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** No, here's not here... He went down to the checkpoint... Thank you.

She disconnects. Enter Chava.

- Chava: Isn't my mother back yet?
- Tirtzah: No.
- Chava: Aren't you going down to the checkpoint?
- Tirtzah: I want to open the clinic today.
- Chava: After your lecture about innocent victims yesterday, I thought you'd be the first there. Once the army's gone they'll murder us.
- Tirtzah: Your father asked me to answer the phone. I hope that by the evening I'll understand what's been happening here, and start work.
- Chava: You really don't understand.
- Tirtzah: What don't I understand?
- Chava: We know what you thought about Benny when it happened. We haven't forgotten. We hoped you'd think it through.
- Tirtzah: Think what through?

Chava: The terrorists have fired on every passing car. They kidnapped children at the bus stop. They blew themselves up in gas stations, slaughtered families in their homes. The army didn't lift a finger.

Tirtzah: I know, but...

Chava: You don't know. A lot of Arabs thanked Benny for what he did.

Tirtzah: Arabs thanked him?

Chava: He wiped out the inciters. It was quiet afterwards.

Tirtzah: He killed ten people in their cars. Women and children too.

Chava: Because those bastards hid behind them. **(Silence)** He's such a good man. He's a wonderful husband. He's a wonderful father. You should hear him teaching the children to pray. **(She chokes up)** Don't start settling old scores with us now. We haven't been able to sleep for weeks. If we're evacuated he'll go crazy...

The phone rings. Tirtzah answers it.

Tirtzah: Yes? Okay. Thank you, I'll let him know...

She writes down a message. Enter Amalia who addresses Chava.

Amalia: Good, you're here. Run to the kindergarten and replace the teacher.

Chava: I'm coming to the checkpoint with the first graders.

Amalia: You'll look after the little ones. The teacher will bring the first graders.

Exit Amalia to the bedroom. Tirtzah puts down the phone.

Tirtzah: You're taking the first graders to the checkpoint?

Chava: These are their homes too.

Tirtzah: They're children. They don't know how to be careful.

Chava: The teachers will look after them.

Tirtzah: Why must they be exposed to such aggression?

Chava: So they know what kind of a world they live in.

Amalia reenters wearing an old dress and a hat. Chava and Tirtzah laugh.

Amalia: What are you laughing at? I'm not going to lie down on the road in a new dress.

Enter Shmuel. He joins in the laughter.

Shmuel: The prime minister should be very concerned. **(To Tirtzah)** She conquered all of Samaria in that dress. **(Sits down in the armchair and addresses Amalia)** Do me a favor, Amalia. I'm going to the Knesset. Get me a clean shirt.

Chava: I'll get it.

Shmuel: Stay here. **(Exit Amalia.)** Where's Benny? I didn't see him at the checkpoint.

Chava: He's in the peach orchard.

Shmuel: At this hour? It's time for him to put an end to his boycott. Everybody must pull their weight, even if we do have disagreements. Until we overcome. He should go to the checkpoint and give us a hand.

Chava: I wish he'd listen to me. I can't even get him to put his cellphone in his pocket.

Amalia: **(Enters and hands Shmuel a shirt)** How long will we have to stay there with the children, Shmuel?

Shmuel: Till noon.

Tirtzah: You've got some messages. **(Gives him a sheet of paper)**

Shmuel: Avner's doing a wonderful job. We'll soon have a thousand people there.

Amalia: It's hot. They're little children.

Shmuel: Menachem will bring them water. Make sure they're wearing hats. **(Turns to Chava)** I need him, Chava. You're his wife. You can influence him. If he's got another rabbi, I want to know who he is. I'll tell that rabbi to order him.

Chava: I don't know, Abba.

Shmuel: You don't know if he's got another rabbi?

Chava: No.

Shmuel: I arranged to meet him after *Mincha*. I'm afraid he doesn't intend to come. I'd like you to find him and bring him.

Chava: I'm going to the kindergarten.

Shmuel: You're not going to the checkpoint?

Amalia: How can she go with a belly like that?

Shmuel: There are other pregnant women there.

Chava: **(To Amalia)** I'm not sick, Ima.

Amalia: Isn't taking care of the little ones more important?

Shmuel: Being there is a great privilege for her. And for the baby she's carrying.

Chava: Tirtzah can look after the little ones.

Tirtzah: Gladly.

Amalia: What will she do if there's fighting? Where can she hide her belly?

Shmuel: There won't be any fighting.

Amalia: There are crazy soldiers there! We've also got people who get carried away.

The phone rings. Tirtzah answers it.

Tirtzah: It's for you. The colonel.

Shmuel: I've nothing to say to him. **(To Amalia)** She can't stay here just because she's my daughter.

Amalia: She's not going! What happened to me when I went to a demonstration pregnant is enough. Isn't it?

Shmuel: **(Angrily)** I'm not prepared to hear that from you!

Amalia: **(To Chava)** Why are you still here? Come to the kindergarten at once.

Exit Amalia and Chava. Silence.

Tirtzah: The colonel's still on the line. **(He shakes his head)** It might save a life, Shmuel. **(He shakes his head again. Despite this she says to the colonel)** Here he is, Colonel.

Shmuel: **(On the phone)** What this game you're playing?... They're using you to make gestures to the Palestinians at our expense. **(Softens his tone)** What's happened to you, Elazar? You're flesh of our flesh. You studied

Torah with me. You prayed with me. We've gotten along well together so far. The government is negotiating with wolves, thirsty for our blood. **(Angrily)** If you leave us to their tender mercy we'll be forced to defend ourselves... No. I'm terribly sorry. We'll lie down on the road. The women and children too. If you insist on moving those trucks you'll have to drive over them... Don't talk to me about conscience. Where was your conscience when you gave that order? You should have disobeyed it... No. I will not meet with you until you bring back those trucks and unload them. Thank you very much. **(Disconnects)** What lies! 'Redeployment to improve security'.

Tirtzah: Is there anything I can do for you, Shmuel? I'm able to do more than just answer the phone. I know you're still angry about what I said about Benny in America, but I don't think we disagreed on what he did.

Shmuel hesitates. Enter Nadav. He has washed, combed his hair and is wearing clean clothes.

Nadav: Abba.

Shmuel: Yes.

Nadav: What's going to happen? Do you think that...

Shmuel: Don't worry. We won't be evacuated.

Nadav: Did you hear what happened to Herschel?

Shmuel: The guard didn't do it on purpose, Nadav. It was an accident. **(To Tirtzah)** I'm not angry. On the contrary. What you said actually strengthened me.

Darkness.

Scene Four

The same day. Afternoon. Amalia is sitting in an armchair, holding the telephone. Her head is heavily bandaged. Enter Tirtzah who gives her a glass of water.

- Amalia: **(On the phone)** The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, please.
- Tirtzah: But why did they have to let the air out of the tires? We want the trucks to return the equipment to the checkpoint, don't we?
- Amalia: Here in an air-conditioned room it sounds crazy. Out there in the sun it seemed the right thing to do.
- Tirtzah: And why did you let the children put sand in their fuel tanks?
- Amalia: I tried to stop them. A soldier pushed me and I fell. I got up and started screaming and he hit me with his rifle.
- Tirtzah: So who's looking after them now?
- Amalia: The kindergarten teacher's assistant.
- Tirtzah: What?
- Amalia: **(On the phone)** Is Rabbi Berger with you by any chance? Could you check, please?... Thank you. **(Disconnects)**
- Tirtzah: You left two hundred children with a teacher's assistant?
- Amalia: It's not the first time we've taken children with us. **(Dials again)** Rabbi Shmuel Berger, please... Thank you. **(Disconnects)**
- Tirtzah: Children shouldn't see soldiers hitting their parents with truncheons. It takes years to rehabilitate them.
- Amalia: When the children know why they're doing it, they become stronger.
- Tirtzah: And then they come to me and it turns out they weren't so strong.
- Amalia: Children are our best weapon. Would you prefer us to shoot at the soldiers?
- Tirtzah: When you were pregnant with Nadav you were already a grown up woman and you were still hurt.
- Amalia: I was too heavy. These children are very quick.
- Tirtzah: If we want to remain here we've got to make sure those children are healthy and happy, and that they grow up to be healthy and happy adults.

Amalia: I very much hope, Tirtzah'leh, that when you have children, with God's help, we won't have any more demonstrations. But if we do, you'll be there too, with your children, and they'll grow up healthy and happy.

Tirtzah: If that's what my children have to look forward too, then perhaps they shouldn't be born here.

She exits. Silence. Amalia picks up the telephone and dials. She does not notice Shmuel coming in.

Amalia: **(On the phone)** Is Rabbi Shmuel Berger with you by any chance?

Shmuel: Speaking.

Amalia disconnects.

Shmuel: Who are you talking to on the phone all the time? I saw you on TV with that bandage on your head. I called you a thousand times.

Amalia: They smashed my cellphone.

Shmuel: And here it was busy.

Amalia: Because we were calling you.

Shmuel: Are you all right? What did the doctor say? You don't need an X-ray? Maybe lie down and rest a while? **(He sees she is crying)** Don't cry. We can't allow ourselves... **(They embrace)** I've got to change my shirt and get back to the council.

He goes into the bedroom. She sits down in the armchair and dries her tears. Enter Chava.

Chava: He's not in the orchard or with the accountant or in the office. He's gone.

Amalia: He's just got back from Jerusalem. He's changing his shirt.

Chava: Who?

Amalia: Abba.

Chava: I've been looking for Benny.

Amalia: Are you starting again? Maybe he's at the garage?

Chava: He's not at the garage.

Amalia: Maybe the metal shop?
 Chava: He's not there either.
 Amalia: You want us to drop everything and look for him?

Enter Shmuel.

Amalia: We should get back to the checkpoint, Shmuel. Menachem can't control the people. The children are still there too. There'll be bloodshed soon.
 Shmuel: I've dealt with it. The checkpoint will not be dismantled. By evening everything will be back in place.
 Amalia: Does Menachem know?
 Shmuel: He's already at the council.
 Amalia: And the children?
 Shmuel: At home.
 Amalia: When did all this happen?
 Shmuel: Just now. **(To Chava)** What do say about your mother? She was very convincing on TV. They called her "a woman of valor". **(Laughs)** You should leave the bandage on your head for another couple of days.
 Amalia: How did you do it?
 Shmuel: The country has finally woken up. Thousands were on their way to the checkpoint. The army had no choice. I went to the Knesset and they almost carried me on their shoulders.
 Amalia: Evidently a realist is someone who believes in miracles.
 Shmuel: I'm not at all sure about that. Who knows what they're planning in Jerusalem. Since when have they softened because of a few pregnant women and some babies? **(To Chava)** Take care of Ima. She's got to rest for twenty-four hours. **(To Amalia)** And you're not leaving the house. **(Picks up his briefcase and turns to leave)**
 Chava: Benny's disappeared.
 Shmuel: Disappeared?
 Chava: You sent me to look for him this morning.
 Amalia: He's probably at the metal shop.
 Chava: He's not there!
 Shmuel: Why are you shouting?

- Chava: When Benny disappears, I shout.
- Amalia: But Chava'leh, you mustn't lose your head every time he leaves his two-acre orchard.
- Shmuel: I'd be very happy if he did leave it and do something a little more important.
- Chava: I don't want to hear from you what's more important.
- Amalia: How can you talk to your father like that?
- Chava: Afterwards it's me that pays for those more important things. Me and my children.
- Amalia: Chava, calm down.
- Chava: Back then you told me 'calm down' too.
- Amalia: Are you starting with that again?
- Chava: I don't want to go through that nightmare again because of you.
- Shmuel: **(Holding back his anger)** Just a moment, Chava'leh. What nightmare? What do mean by 'because of you'?
- Chava: It doesn't matter.
- Shmuel: It matters a great deal. What's because of us?
- Chava: I don't want it to happen again, Abba. I pray three times a day.
- Shmuel: What exactly are you accusing us of?
- Amalia: Enough, Chava'leh.
- Shmuel: If you've got any complaints about me or your mother I want to hear them.
- Amalia: Shmuel.
- Shmuel: We're not blind, Chava'leh. Every time I want to talk to Benny, he disappears. And you cover for him.
- Chava: I've got no complaints.
- Shmuel: A moment ago you spoke differently.
- Chava: Don't you know I can't watch over him by myself?
- Amalia: You're not by yourself, Chava'leh. Go and pick up the children. It's already five. I'll go to the metal shop.
- Chava: I didn't mean anything happened because of you, Abba.
- Shmuel: Then what did you mean?
- Chava: I'm terribly worried.
- Shmuel: Why?

Chava: You don't know?
 Shmuel: What don't I know?
 Chava: It doesn't matter.
 Shmuel: Chava'leh, you're driving me crazy.
 Chava: I'm sorry I brought it up.
 Shmuel: Sit down. We haven't finished.
 Amalia: Come on, let's go. He's probably home by now.
 Shmuel: You're not going anywhere.

The doorbell rings. Amalia opens the door. Benny is standing there holding a box of peaches.

Benny: Shalom.
 Amalia: Benny? Welcome. Chava was looking for you.
 Benny: This is for you. Should I put them in the kitchen?
 Amalia: Thank you.
 Benny: Wash them in soap and water. I sprayed this morning.
 Chava: Where have you been all day?
 Benny: It's five-thirty already. We've got to pick up the children. **(To Shmuel)**
 Shalom.
 Chava: **(Angrily)** You'll put your phone in your pocket. You'll pray with your phone in your pocket. And you'll study Torah with your phone in your pocket. And if it isn't on all the time, I'm going to the rabbi.
 Benny: We'll talk about it at home.
 Chava: Where have you been all day?
 Benny: At the metal shop.
 Amalia: You see?
 Shmuel: Sit down a minute, Benny.
 Chava: Which metal shop?
 Benny: The one here's closed. Nobody's working. I had to weld something on the tractor so I went to the industrial zone.
 Chava: The industrial zone?
 Shmuel: I asked you to sit down a minute.

The doorbell rings. Menachem comes in, sees Benny and hesitates.

Shmuel: (To **Menachem**) Come on in. It's good you've come. (To **Benny**) Did you know that the army tried to dismantle the checkpoint and we stopped them?

Benny: Yes, I saw.

Shmuel: Do you think they'll try and dismantle it again?

Benny: Of course they will.

Shmuel: When?

Benny: Tomorrow.

Shmuel: What do you think we should do?

Benny: You're running this war.

Menachem: I think we should take advantage of the momentum to try and bring down...

Shmuel: (**Interrupts him**) What do you mean, 'You're running this war'? While you were picking these peaches weren't you thinking about what was happening there?

Benny: I thought, you acted.

Shmuel: So let's hear what you thought.

Menachem: We should try and topple the government and...

Benny: You won't topple the government because it pays for your gardens and sewers.

Shmuel: Not now, Benny!

Benny: If we bring the government down it'll be replaced by one that's even worse. We have to strengthen it so it won't bend before every breeze. We've got to strengthen it through the army. The soldiers have always been with us. They killed suspects, demolished houses, imposed curfews.

Shmuel: But now they have different orders.

Benny: The soldiers need to know that we're not their enemy. That's why we shouldn't confront them at the checkpoints. We have to get them on our side against the real enemy.

Shmuel: How?

Benny: It's not important.

- Shmuel: We're fighting here for your home too, Benny. You're flesh of our flesh. If you've got any suggestions, stand up and make them.
- Benny: When I made suggestions you called them 'delusions of grandeur'.
- Shmuel: Just a minute, Benny. Is this the time to settle old scores with me?
- Menachem: And you're settling scores with me, too. After so many years you still think I told the police something about you? Ask Shmuel. They interrogated me like everybody else. I didn't know anything.
- Benny: You couldn't keep your mouth shut.
- Chava: **(To Benny)** Leave him alone. We've got to pick up the children.
- Benny: **(To Shmuel)** When they threw me into prison you said I should examine myself thoroughly. That's what I'm doing.
- Shmuel: We've all examined ourselves thoroughly, and we've all reached conclusions.
- Menachem: If we hadn't fought for you, you'd still be in prison.
- Benny: **(To Shmuel)** We've all reached conclusions?
- Shmuel: Yes. Me as well. Even before you were released we agreed that you'd go back to heading operations. Did we agree or not?
- Chava: Let us go, Abba.
- Shmuel: I want you there right now. There's a council meeting in an hour. Come and present a plan.
- Benny: I'll think about it.
- Shmuel: It's time to rise above these old scores. You studied Torah with me, Benny. We're not competing over who loves the Land of Israel more. **(Pleading)** I need you, Benny.
- Chava: Come on, let's go.
- Benny: Goodbye.
- Menachem: Wait a minute, Benny.

But Benny and Chava turn towards the door. Amalia gives Chava a pot.

- Amalia: Take something with you, Chava'leh. Your fridge is empty.
- Benny: **(Forcefully)** Her fridge isn't empty, thank God.

Menachem: (To Benny) If you insist on settling scores, then I've got something to say too. Ask at the synagogue how I praised you while you were in prison. Ask how I swallowed my pride and wheedled every useless official in the Ministry of Justice so they'd reduce your sentence. You didn't even let me come to your son's *brit*. (**Exit Benny and Chava. Menachem shouts after them**) Did you ever ask yourself why your mother died?

He exits after them. Silence.

Amalia: Benny scares me, Shmuel. (**Shmuel is silent**) Why don't you take Avner for operations?

Shmuel: It's a job that needs imagination. Avner is responsible, but he's not sufficiently creative.

Amalia: I'm not sure that at times like these we need someone as creative as Benny.

Shmuel: Benny's a gifted boy. A born leader. He's got to come back and assume the position he merits.

Amalia: We haven't really talked with Benny about what he did. We don't know what he's really thinking. If he's capable of hurting his own father like that, he won't hesitate to hurt others.

Shmuel: Benny has done his soul searching. He's paid the price. We can't persecute him for his mistakes forever.

Amalia: But why put him to the test? If anything happens again, heaven forbid, we won't be able to say, "we didn't know".

Shmuel: What are you talking about? What did we know back then?

Amalia: We knew enough.

Shmuel: (**Very angrily**) What's wrong with you today? What kind of insinuations are these? Do any of you imagine that I knew about Benny's plans? And if I'd known, would I have kept silent? I hear these whisperings behind my back all the time. I don't understand how you can be part of this conspiracy.

Amalia: There's no conspiracy. There's only concern. Even back then it all began when you put him into operations.

Shmuel: When I put him into operations I didn't know that he...

Amalia: I'm begging you, Shmuel. Our life here is hanging by a thread.

Shmuel: I'm not prepared to hear this from you.

Amalia: We can't make any more mistakes.

Shmuel: What mistakes?

Amalia: Just think about it one more night. Just so we can be calm.

Shmuel: I am calm.

Enter Avner, agitated.

Avner: Aren't you watching TV? Turn it on, quick. They're going to sign the agreement in Washington. They've gone mad. The prime minister's taking off in a few minutes. In a year's time there'll be a Palestinian state. They'll partition Jerusalem. They'll dismantle the security fence. They'll evacuate us. All of us. He's speaking on TV right now.

He picks up the remote control and turns on the TV. The prime minister is heard presenting the main points of the peace agreement at a press conference. As he speaks, Tirtzah followed by Nadav and then Menachem come in.

PM: The final borders have been determined according to the 1967 lines, but mutual exchanges of territory will enable 80% of the settlers in Judea and Samaria to remain in their homes. The Old City of Jerusalem will be partitioned. The neighborhoods with a Jewish majority will remain under Israeli sovereignty, while those with a Palestinian majority will be under Palestinian sovereignty. Temple Mount will be under Palestinian sovereignty, while the Western Wall will remain in our hands. After evacuation of the settlements in Palestinian territory the separation fence will be dismantled. We have agreed to accept partial responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, and absorb forty-three thousand refugees as a humanitarian gesture. On completion of our withdrawal and the establishment of the State of Palestine, we'll announce, simultaneously with the Palestinian government, mutual recognition and an end of the conflict. The agreement will be signed at the White House in twenty-four hours time...

Shmuel picks up the remote control and turns off the TV. Silence. Shock, Despair.

Menachem: We can't sit in mourning now. **(To Shmuel)** You've got to go out to the people and tell them something.

Darkness.

Act Two

Scene Five

Next morning. Nadav, wearing a prayer shawl, is concluding his morning prayers in a corner of the living room. Amalia is talking on her cellphone. Tirtzah is on the landline phone.

Amalia: **(On the phone)** You've got ten thousand girls studying at your colleges. I expect to see all of them today... We'll take care of the buses...

Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** I want to know what's holding you up, Avner. What exactly are you doing there? Don't play games with me. I saw you on TV... Avner, listen to me a moment...

Amalia: **(On the phone)** Those girls will soon be grown women and with God's help they'll have children. They've got to take part in this struggle so they can educate them for future struggles...

Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** Avner? Avner?

Enter Menachem.

Menachem: Good morning. **(To Amalia)** Don't use the phone so much. They're tapping all our calls.

Shmuel comes out of his room with his telephone, concluding an interview.

Shmuel: We call on all Jews to take part in a general strike. The education system. Public transport. Industry. Municipalities. When the country comes to a stop, the prime minister will return... This is the moment of truth for us all. Everyone who holds the Land of Israel dear should take part in the rally that will take place today in Samaria... I have no doubt at all that a million people will prove to this hard-hearted government that the people oppose the agreement... We are not hiding our intentions. A government that betrays the national interests of its people is unworthy of governing. We shall act towards bringing it down in any way possible and call for new elections within thirty days... Thank you very much. **(Disconnects)**

Menachem: **(To Shmuel)** What do you think about organizing a no-confidence vote in the Knesset tomorrow? The prime minister will have to get back tonight.

Shmuel: I've already arranged it. By lunchtime we'll have the signatures of forty Knesset members.

Menachem: Forty?

Shmuel: Perhaps even more.

Menachem: At the end of the rally you must announce the formation of a new party, Shmuel. Everyone opposing the agreement will join us.

Shmuel: Have you talked with Benny?

Menachem: I went over there last night.

Shmuel: What did he say?

Menachem: He wouldn't open the door.

Tirtzah: You've got to call Avner, Shmuel. They were getting people out of their houses and lining them up outside the synagogue.

Menachem: They know very well what they're doing.

Shmuel: I'm sorry, I've got to leave.

Nadav: Menachem, can you tell the district vet to come and see Herschel? I called the department office three times yesterday. He's not moving. He can't even whimper.

Menachem: Nadav, do me a favor.

Enter Chava.

Chava: Benny won't listen to me, Abba. I begged him. I yelled. I cried. I grabbed him. He took his *tallit* and left.

Shmuel: Where to?

Chava: To pray in the hills.

Shmuel: I hope his prayers are answered.

Chava: I want you to speak to him. He took his phone.

Shmuel: I've spoken to him. Yesterday and the day before. We'll have to manage without him.

Chava: Abba, please.

Shmuel: I'm in a hurry, Chava. **(To Tirtzah)** Where's my speech?

Tirtzah: Here. **(Hands it to him)**
 Nadav: So what's happening, Abba? Do you want me to do anything for you?
 Shmuel: Thank you, Nadav. **(To Amalia)** Are you coming?
 Amalia: Yes.

Chava sits down on one of the chairs in despair. Exit Shmuel and Menachem.

Amalia: **(To Nadav)** Herschel's fine. Another day or two and the antibiotics will kick in. Now go and put on your shoes and come to the school. We need to bring more chairs into the gym for the press. **(To Chava)** You can't sit here crying now, Chava'leh. Go wake up the children and give them something to eat. And if Benny does anything behind your back, throw him out of the house.

Amalia and Chava exit. Nadav puts on his shoes. The phone rings.

Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** Hello? **(To Nadav)** It's for you.
 Nadav: **(Quickly)** I'm out.
 Tirtzah: Nadav...
 Nadav: I'm not home!
 Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** What do you want of him?

Nadav grabs the phone.

Nadav: What do you want of me? I haven't spoken to anybody. I haven't asked for anything... It was the vet. I swear... I only talked to him about Herschel...

He is frightened by what he has heard and returns the phone to Tirtzah.

Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** Excuse me? Why should he be careful? What has he done? **(The caller has disconnected. She disconnects and turns to Nadav)** Who was that?
 Nadav: Nobody.

Tirtzah: You know who it was.

Nadav: I don't know and I don't want to know. And don't you say anything to anybody!

Exit Nadav. The phone rings. Tirtzah does not answer it. Avner comes in and lays his rifle on the armchair.

Avner: Good morning. That was quite an operation. Is anyone else home?

Tirtzah: What did you do there, Avner?

Avner: Nothing special. Where is everyone?

Tirtzah: You got people out into the street at four in the morning.

Avner: Not now, Tirtzah. I've got to go to the council. What did they say at El Al?

Tirtzah: They're afraid to send someone out here. If we want the suitcase, we've got to go get it.

Avner: Fine. Come into the bedroom. I'll just wash my face. You can go afterwards.

Tirtzah: After what?

Avner: We can't waste another night.

Tirtzah: I'm not doing it like this. How do you think it will happen with such stress?

Avner: You want to start a fight right now? (**She does not reply**) When have we missed a date because of me? I didn't forget tonight either, but with everything that's going on it was impossible to plan every minute.

Tirtzah: And why did you get those people out into the street? They were in the middle of *Shacharit*. With their *tallitot* and *tefillin*. Why did you take their children outside?

Avner: I've got to be at the council, Tirtzah.

Tirtzah: So go to the council.

Avner: We got them out because we needed to talk to them together. We had twenty-two names. If we'd spoken with each family separately it would have taken all day.

Tirtzah: But your father didn't tell you to talk to them. He told you to just stick up the posters in the street.

Avner: We read them the poster just to be sure they understood it.

Tirtzah: We only suspect them of asking for compensation.

Avner: They're not just suspects. They're a committee. They're inciting everybody against us.

Tirtzah: How are their children to blame?

Avner: Perhaps we can have this discussion another time? We've got something more urgent to do.

Tirtzah: I can't do it now.

Avner: **(Hurt)** We got their children outside so they'd all understand that this time it won't work. Anyone agreeing to leave for 'compensation' will face a rabbinical court. In the poster my father wrote 'Whoever sells the cities of Israel for money, his life is forfeit'. **(He shows her)** What do you think he meant? **(Lays the poster on the table)**

Tirtzah: What's happened to you, Avner? In America you wouldn't go over the speed limit by even one mile an hour, and here you drag people from their beds in the middle of the night, line them up, threaten them.

Avner: These people are stabbing us in the back.

Tirtzah: And tonight you'll stand them against a wall and shoot them?

Avner: Are you insane?

Tirtzah: Don't touch me.

Avner: You know what? Yes, we burst into their homes. We broke down doors. We threw people and their families into the street. We even poured tar onto their beds. Yes, that's what we did and I'm glad I had the privilege of doing it. **(Drops a bunch of keys onto the table)** And if you still want a baby, take the council pickup and go get the suitcase.

Avner picks up his rifle and turns to exit. Tirtzah throws the keys at him. He picks them up and exits. She sits down in despair. A moment later Benny enters.

Benny: Is Shmuel home?

Tirtzah: Were you there too?

Benny: Where?

Tirtzah: With Avner.

Benny: Where was he? **(She is silent)** Is Shmuel home?

- Tirtzah: When I first came here not one of you would have thought about using methods like that. Or maybe you did and I didn't see it.
- Benny: I don't know what you're talking about.
- Tirtzah: **(She holds out the poster that Avner left)** About this.
- Benny: **(Looks at the poster)** You know whose style this is.
- Tirtzah: I know whose style of writing it is, but I also know whose style of action it is.
- Benny: I don't think you understand what I did.
- Tirtzah: Maybe I don't, but I can see what's happened to us because of what you did. The ones who kept quiet when you killed Arabs, are willing to harm Jews today. Even Nadav's been threatened. Perhaps he's also suspected of wanting compensation. Perhaps they'll drag him out of bed in the middle of the night and put a gun to his head.
- Benny: Are you blaming me for that too?

Tirtzah remains silent. Enter Shmuel.

- Shmuel: **(To Benny)** Talk. **(Benny hesitates)** I've got to go back in a few minutes. **(Shmuel realizes that Benny is hesitant because of Tirtzah's presence. He turns to her)** Have you by any chance seen my glasses?
- Tirtzah: **(Takes the hint)** They're probably upstairs. **(Exits)**
- Shmuel: What did you want to talk about?
- Benny: **(Notices the glasses on the table)** Here they are.
- Shmuel: **(Taking them)** Thank you. There's only one thing I'm willing to talk to you about, Benny.
- Benny: I want to go back to working with you, Shmuel. I apologize. These past few days I've been foolish.

They embrace warmly.

- Shmuel: I should apologize too. I imagined what you must have been going through in prison, reading my articles. I want you to know that every word was written in torment.
- Benny: Let's forget it.

- Shmuel: I had no choice, Benny. All my life I've called for bringing redemption by worshipping the Almighty, by building, by settling. I couldn't make you an exception.
- Benny: You should have talked to me before deciding that I was delaying redemption. Everything I did was to remove obstacles from its path.
- Shmuel: You should have talked to me before deciding to remove them.
- Benny: You didn't know?
- Shmuel: How could I know?
- Benny: I didn't think I had to type up a transcript of our conversations.
- Shmuel: What do you mean? Did you ever come to me and tell me about your plans?
- Benny: What do you think we were talking about the whole time? The situation was dangerous, there were lives at stake. We discussed matters just as we are right now. I was always your disciple, Shmuel. You know I wouldn't have done anything without consulting with you first.
- Shmuel: What did we discuss? What do those conversations have to do with what you did? I never had the faintest idea about your plans. I knew you went out at night. I was sure you were seeing another rabbi about Torah matters, or that you were assisting the security services on matters best not talked about. You're making a very serious accusation, Benny.
- Benny: I'm not making any accusations. Everything I did was my own decision. The past is past. I want to return to the struggle. I want to know where we stand.
- Shmuel: But why have you kept quiet? Why did you let these rumors reach me? You should have come, as you have now, and talked. Frankly. I don't expect you to accept my every word. I know we have our differences.

They do not notice Tirtzah standing listening at the top of the stairs.

- Benny: That's why I'm here. But you have to be frank too. We're pinning all our hopes on the rally and the strike. I very much hope, with God's help, we'll abolish the agreement. But what's going to happen if we fail, God forbid?
- Shmuel: We can't even contemplate failure.

Benny: You haven't answered my question. What happens if the prime minister signs it?

Shmuel: I said that we have to succeed.

Benny: And if we don't?

Shmuel: We will.

Benny: We said we'd talk frankly.

Shmuel: Don't press me. In desperate times we'll consider desperate measures.

Benny: I want to know what desperate times are. When they sign the agreement? When the army withdraws? When they come to evacuate us?

Shmuel: Those things will not happen. You know what desperate times are only after you've tried everything.

Benny: The people who gathered to hear you are waiting for clearer answers.

Shmuel: They won't get them.

Benny: I'm waiting too.

Shmuel: You're a clever boy, Benny. Not everything has to be spoken explicitly. When that desperate time comes, we shall do everything we can to shake the heavens in order to avoid disaster.

Now they see Tirtzah at the top of the stairs, listening to them. Darkness.

Scene Six

The same day. Early afternoon. The living room is empty. A dog barking is heard. A moment later Tirtzah enters.

Tirtzah: Anybody home?

Nadav comes in from the passage carrying a tray with a coffee cup and a glass of water.

Nadav: Where's Abba?

Tirtzah: On the way.

Nadav: I switched on the air-conditioner for him. Did you see how he was perspiring?

Tirtzah: Yes.

Nadav: I've run a bath for him too. Want some coffee?

Tirtzah: No, thanks. I see that Herschel's already chasing cats.

Nadav: Sure. When I came to feed him I felt that his leg was out of joint. I put it back, and he started running. Do you think I should tell Abba?

Tirtzah: About Herschel?

Nadav: About those people calling me. They don't say who they are. When I got home I found a note in the mailbox.

He shows her. She reads it.

Tirtzah: You've got to tell him. But not today. You understand, right?

He nods, puts the note into his pocket, takes a glass of water, drinks, and pours the remainder over his head. She feels his loneliness and hugs him. After a moment she hears footsteps and breaks away. Enter Amalia and Shmuel.

Shmuel: (To Amalia) I'm going to change my shirt.

Shmuel goes into the bedroom. Amalia sits down on the couch, despairing and depressed.

Nadav: (To Amalia) I've run his bath. (She remains silent) When he changes his shirt I know that something bad is happening. (She remains silent) Do you want coffee? (She remains silent)

Tirtzah: I heard some council members talking. They didn't know I'm your daughter-in-law. They said some very harsh things about Shmuel.

She sees Shmuel coming in from the passage and falls silent. Enter Chava.

Chava: Do you want me to bring up your old speech, Abba? Maybe all it needs are a few revisions?

Shmuel: You can delete it. I've got to say something completely different. Where's Benny?

Chava: You sent him to see if the army's still blocking the roads.

Shmuel: That was five hours ago.

Tirtzah: I'll try calling him.
 Chava: His phone's off.
 Shmuel: **(To Tirtzah)** Get them to call him on the council radio.
 Chava: What for?
 Shmuel: I need him. I want his opinion.
 Tirtzah: **(On the phone)** Would you tell Benny that Shmuel wants to talk to him? Thank you. **(Disconnects)**
 Amalia: **(To Shmuel)** Why talk to him? What else is there to talk about? Everyone should be told to go home.
 Shmuel: We're not giving up, Amalia.

Chava turns on the computer. He moves over to her.

Chava: Abba, I think you should know that...
 Shmuel: What?
 Chava: I was at the council office looking for Benny and I heard Menachem saying that...
 Shmuel: I don't care what they're saying. Begin. **(He dictates to her, but addresses Amalia)** "Let us go up and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it. Be of good courage for our people and the cities of our God."

Chava types. Enter Menachem and Avner.

Menachem: Shmuel, we've got to talk.
 Shmuel: I'll spare your embarrassment, Menachem. I'm prepared to resign. I've never pursued office. But I want to be sure that my resignation will strengthen the struggle.
 Menachem: We've come to a dead end. The strike failed. We haven't got a majority in the Knesset. The prime minister hasn't returned and only eighty thousand came to the rally. We've got to try other ways.
 Shmuel: First we have to understand why we've reached a dead end.
 Avner: There's no time for it, Abba. Eighty thousand people are waiting for us outside. If we don't go out to them they'll get up and leave.

Shmuel: They won't. They, too, want to understand why the hundreds of thousands that promised to come stayed home.

Avner: Because the police blocked the roads.

Menachem: Because the Arabs laid mines.

Avner: I wouldn't be surprised if the security services laid those mines.

Shmuel: It's all lies, Avner. Those hundreds of thousands didn't come to the rally because we didn't settle in their hearts.

Amalia: We've tried for forty years.

Shmuel: And we'll keep on trying for another forty.

Menachem: If that's what you're going to tell those people outside, they'll get up and leave.

Shmuel: If you've got a better plan, I'm ready to step down. **(Suspiciously)** You've already made a plan. You convened the council behind my back and decided.

Menachem: We haven't made any plans. There are all kinds of ideas.

Shmuel: What ideas? **(Menachem remains silent)** I'm waiting to hear them.

Tirtzah: You can't resign now, Shmuel

Menachem: The council will appoint a deputy.

Tirtzah: **(To Shmuel)** You know exactly who they'll appoint.

Avner: Who will they appoint?

Tirtzah: We need somebody who can bring the hundreds of thousands that didn't turn up.

Avner: Don't worry. The council won't appoint Benny. He doesn't want the appointment. He didn't even come to the meeting.

Chava: What do you want of him? How much longer are you going to persecute him?

Menachem: The council will appoint whoever it appoints.

Chava: If we'd studied Torah like him, and if we'd observed the commandments like him, a million people would have come.

Shmuel: So who did you appoint? **(To Menachem)** You?

Menachem: The name doesn't matter. The council will decide on a way.

Shmuel: I see. You're the man. What is your plan? **(Menachem remains silent)** How will you bring the hundreds of thousands that didn't come today?

- Tirtzah: I came here because we had a dream. Because we believed we could build a new society here.
- Avner: Enough, Tirtzah.
- Tirtzah: It seems that the people who didn't come think it's impossible.
- Menachem: Because they lack faith.
- Amalia: Because they can't fight for anything except another room in their apartment and another wheel on their car and another steak on their plate.
- Shmuel: We don't have another people, Amalia.
- Tirtzah: We evidently couldn't convince them that it's possible. Even in America I was asked at every opportunity how we were going to live here with the Arabs.
- Avner: We've got an excellent answer.
- Tirtzah: Maybe those hundreds of thousands didn't come because your answer isn't good enough for them?
- Shmuel: They didn't come because they're weak. Because they haven't got the willpower for the struggle over this land. Because they don't have the faith to carry out the Almighty's will.
- Tirtzah: Maybe we should have given them an answer that offers more hope.
- Shmuel: We'll know how to live with the Arabs only at the end of the struggle and only in light of its outcome.
- Tirtzah: In their view that's not an answer, Shmuel. They want to know how we intend to put an end to the bloodshed.
- Avner: What are you talking about? What world are you living in?
- Nadav: I want to know what will happen to my house, Abba.
- Amalia: They won't come here, Shmuel, because they don't believe in redemption. Because they don't want it. Because in one more generation they won't even be Jews anymore.
- Shmuel: If we fight for their souls, they will!
- Menachem: If the fight for their souls is so important to you, you can resign from the council and go on with it.
- Nadav: I want to know what will happen to my house, Abba. I've just cast the roof. I've just planted flowers in the garden.
- Chava: Abba won't resign! He's the only one who still has any authority here.

- Nadav: **(Shouting)** I want to know what's going to happen to my house, Abba. I'm not going to leave it!
- Shmuel: Nobody is going to leave any house, Nadav. You'll finish building it. And we'll build many more. **(To Menachem)** That's what we must tell the people outside.
- Menachem: They already know that.
- Avner: I don't understand why you're clinging to your seat, Abba. The council wants you to resign. They don't want to embarrass you by dismissing you. Let them do what they want.
- Shmuel: I won't resign. I'm responsible for everyone living here. 'As a shepherd seeketh out his flock'. I brought them here. I led them. And I won't abandon them to council members who have not made a single fateful decision in their lives. **(Suddenly realizing)** What do you mean, 'Let them do what they want'? Do they already know what they want?
- Menachem: They haven't decided yet.
- Shmuel: They *have* decided! **(Silence)** Am I not to know?
- Menachem: **(Admitting)** They want to put the eighty thousand people onto buses and take them to the government complex in Jerusalem.
- Shmuel: For what?
- Menachem: To put the ministers under siege. Cut their phone lines. The electricity. If the government is paralyzed, the prime minister will come back.
- Shmuel: Are you mad? You'll arouse hatred against us throughout the country. The army and the police will uproot us without a second thought.
- Avner: If we put the government under siege, they'll be forced to abolish the agreement.
- Shmuel: Do we have the power to force it? These are empty words. Who are we? It's because of this arrogance that we're at a dead end today. This is our sin. We said that we are the vanguard, and they're the followers. We called them 'descendants of the beasts', 'the Messiah's donkey'. Why? They love the Land of Israel no less than us. They want it no less than us. They just don't believe it's possible to hold onto it. We have to show them that it *is* possible. Instead of sending those eighty thousand people to the government offices, we must call on them to settle here. Eighty thousand people can establish a hundred settlements. Who can stop us?

Let's roll up our sleeves, hang up the maps, decide on the sites. We'll organize convoys. Let them board the buses and set off. Tonight they'll sleep under the stars. In a few days we'll supply them with tents and blankets. In a few weeks we'll put up huts. After all, most of our settlements started as three huts around a water tank.

Menachem: You're daydreaming, Shmuel. The army will block us. The Arabs will attack us.

Avner: It's out of the question, Abba. That's why we didn't want you at the rally. Anyone not prepared for war should stay home.

Shmuel: What war, Avner? Against who? Ourselves?

Avner: The masses we were waiting for stayed home because we didn't call on them to fight. Instead we called on them to demonstrate. Protest. Why not fight? Why not clash with the army? The army's the enemy, the emissary of an enemy government. You want to come to the rally? By all means. Come and call for a revolt. Openly. Fearlessly. Declare that the prime minister deserves death. Pronounce a rabbinical edict ordering his killing.

Tirtzah: Have you gone mad!

Avner: Come along and remind them that killing a prime minister once stopped the rot for ten years...

Tirtzah: Stop already!

Avner: ...and this time it will halt it for twenty.

Shmuel: I'm not prepared to hear this kind of talk!

Avner: If you won't say it, I will. **(Turns to leave)**

Tirtzah: You won't say anything. I'm not prepared for you to go there. What's happened to you? Wait, I'm talking to you...

But he evades her and leaves. She follows him, followed by Menachem.

Amalia: I can't go on pretending, Shmuel. During the previous withdrawals I already understood that one day we'd have to leave this house too. I didn't say anything so I wouldn't weaken you. What else has got to happen to make you open your eyes? A catastrophe? Let's get out of

here before it shatters our life. We've waited two thousand years for the Messiah. We'll wait another two thousand.

Shmuel digests what she has said. A moment later he gets up.

Shmuel: We won't wait a moment longer. We shall go up and settle, pitch our tents and build houses. We shall plow, sow and reap, have children and raise them. For the Torah, the commandments and good deeds, here on this land, under the wings of the Holy One. 'Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.' **(To Chava)** Go and find Benny. Tell him to come to the rally and stand at my side. **(Exits)**

Darkness.

Scene Seven

That evening. Eight p.m. The living room is empty. The TV is on. The newsreader's voice is heard in the background.

Newsreader: Two powerful explosions destroyed the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosques on Temple Mount in Jerusalem this afternoon. So far two hundred and twenty dead and hundreds of wounded have been extricated from the rubble. Initial investigations show that the bombing was carried out by suicide pilots in two light aircraft carrying large quantities of explosives. The Muslim world has reacted with shock and outrage. The Arab states have declared war on Israel. Egypt, Jordan and Syria have begun massing troops along the borders. The news agencies are reporting on a wave of attacks on Jewish institutions. Three Paris synagogues have been torched. In Chicago two Jewish schools were attacked. In Tehran hundreds of Jews have been arrested and imprisoned in the municipal stadium. The Washington peace talks have been suspended. The prime minister is on his way back to Israel.

Enter Tirtzah carrying a bag. She switches off the TV, and packs her bag with clothes that are on the couch. Enter Avner carrying his M16.

Avner: What's the rush? Couldn't you wait until the meeting ended?

Tirtzah: Talk quietly. (**Gestures towards Amalia and Chava in the bedroom**)
They're putting the children to bed.

Avner: I was just about to speak.

Tirtzah: We must save our own lives now, Avner.

Avner: Where can we go? There's a war going on out there. Tank columns on the roads. The police will stop us at the checkpoint.

Tirtzah: So we'll go around it.

Avner: We'll do whatever the council decides.

Tirtzah: The taxi's waiting at the gate. In an hour we'll be at my parents' house.

Avner: Have you lost your mind?

Tirtzah: This is just the beginning, Avner. We were away for four years. We had no part in what they did here. Every minute that passes makes us their accomplices.

Avner: I'm not running away in the middle of a war.

Tirtzah: Everyone living here is to blame for this war.

Avner: What does it matter? We won't abandon women and children. The Arabs are already shooting at us.

Tirtzah: What about the Arab women and children that were murdered?

Avner: What's that got to do with it? This is our family.

Tirtzah: It's not mine.

Avner: I won't listen to this.

Tirtzah: And what about us? Are we a family?

Avner: (**Puts the rifle down**) What's happening to you?

Tirtzah: Why are we a family? Because we've got this deep understanding? Because we've got children? You're happy this war has broken out.

Avner: You called me here because of that? People there are discussing matters of life and death.

Tirtzah: I called you because I'm leaving. I'm willing to forgive everything, Avner. I'm also willing to forget everything, but if you don't come with me now, you'll never see me again.

Avner: Don't shout. They can hear every word.

Tirtzah: Are you coming or not?

Avner: Where to?

- Tirtzah: You're not coming, are you? From the moment we got back from America you became a different person. Somebody I don't know. Thousands are going to die, and you're pleased with yourself.
- Avner: I'm not. But I'm not complaining. We can't just sit and talk as if nothing's happening outside.
- Tirtzah: Something's happened here too. When you heard they'd murdered women and children you drank *le'chaim*.
- Avner: **(Angrily)** I drank *le'chaim* because the negotiations were suspended. I was very sorry to hear that women and children had been killed.
- Tirtzah: They weren't killed. They were murdered.
- Avner: Nobody wanted them to die.
- Tirtzah: That's what the people who sent those murderers are saying too.
- Avner: What do you want of me? You don't even know who did it and you've decided we're murderers. Where's this hatred coming from? Everybody here was very patient with you, despite everything you said about us. From the moment we got back you haven't stopped spitting venom.
- Tirtzah: I'm spitting venom?
- Avner: And most of all you hate me. In one day I turned into a madman. A murderer. Every time I come near you, you bristle like a porcupine. That's why you can't have children.

Tirtzah slaps him hard. After a moment she picks up her bag and turns to leave.

- Avner: Wait a minute. I don't want you to go. Please don't go. **(He blocks her way)** Wait till morning. You want us to sit and talk? I'm ready to sit and talk. There's still a lot to talk about, isn't there?
- Tirtzah: No. **(Continues toward the door)**
- Avner: Okay. I'll come with you.
- Tirtzah: This whole problem with having a baby is a punishment because I shut my eyes. Because I didn't leave when I saw it beginning. That's why I don't have children. That's why I don't deserve children.

She takes her bag and exits. Avner remains still for a moment. Enter Amalia.

Amalia: Go bring her back.

Avner: I'm going to the council.

Amalia: She should be with us now.

But Avner picks up his rifle and exits. Outside, he sees Nadav, his clothes filthy.

Avner: What happened? (**Nadav does not reply**) What happened, Nadav? Talk already. Did somebody hit you? Stop crying! (**He tries to soothe him**) Stop it, Nadav. Let's get your face washed.

He leads him to the passage. Meanwhile, Shmuel and Menachem enter the house.

Shmuel: Tell them not to send anybody after me. I have no intention of going back.

Menachem: You know I can't run a meeting like this.

Shmuel: First, they should return their weapons to the armories and hand over anyone who had a hand in this catastrophe to the police.

Menachem: We'll only use the weapons for guarding the houses.

Shmuel: The army will guard the houses.

Menachem: The soldiers are all on the borders. Listen to the screams in the Arab villages.

Shmuel: (**To Amalia**) We have brought this war upon ourselves with our own hands. (**To Menachem**) Rivers of blood will flow here. (**To Amalia**) I stood there at the council and said: "Let's put our house in order. Its foundations are shaking. It will soon collapse and bury us". I didn't finish the sentence and the shouting started.

Menachem: Be realistic, Shmuel. We've got to stand guard tonight. In the morning we've got to escort the children to school. We've got to escort people going out to work.

Shmuel: So they won't go to school and they won't work. We need to shut ourselves up in our houses now, lock the doors, close the shutters and pray. Beg the Almighty for forgiveness.

Menachem: Of course we'll pray. We should always pray. But now we need to act as well. **(To Amalia)** Tell him. Thousands of people are calling with questions. Hundreds are taking their families and running away. He can't leave at a time like this.

Amalia: There's nothing to be done now. We should pray in a whisper. Without expecting forgiveness. Just ask for mercy. That the punishment should not be so terrible.

Menachem: Come on, Amalia. We have to go on living. Aren't you opening the school tomorrow?

Amalia: I won't be here tomorrow.

Menachem: What do you mean, you won't be here? Where will you be?

Amalia: Far away.

Shmuel: We're not running away, Amalia.

Amalia: We've got to call on everybody to leave. Before it's too late.

Shmuel: We're not running away!

Enter Avner and Nadav. Nadav is crying.

Amalia: What's happened to him? **(Goes to him)** What's wrong, Nadav?

Nadav: They demolished my house. With tractors. They brought the walls down. The roof.

Shmuel: They demolished your house?

Amalia: **(To Chava who has come in)** Get him a glass of water.

Nadav: They said I talked with some official about compensation.

Shmuel: Who's 'they'?

Nadav shows him the threatening letter.

Shmuel: **(To Menachem)** Who did it?

Menachem: I don't know.

Nadav: When I got there, the place was empty. No one wanted to tell me.

Shmuel: God Almighty, this child was wrongly punished even before he was born. What has he done to you? Because he's a bit different? Are you accusing him in order to smear me?

Menachem: Nobody's trying to smear you.

Amalia: The house isn't important, Nadav. A house is just stones.

Shmuel: **(To Menachem)** How could anyone possibly think he would want compensation?

Menachem: What do you want of me? I didn't see. I didn't hear. I didn't know.

Shmuel: Get out of here. I'm not prepared to speak to anyone from the council until you find out who did this.

Menachem: We'll look into it tomorrow. Right now we've got to make sure the people stay in their settlements.

Shmuel: Get out.

Menachem: Shmuel, we've never needed you so much.

Shmuel: Get out!

Exit Menachem. Chava gives Nadav a glass of water.

Shmuel: They set him up, demolished his house, and nobody knows. Nobody wants to find out who did it. The police will investigate. They'll arrest whoever they need to, and take all the weapons. **(Picks up the phone)**

Avner: Leave it, Abba. We'll deal with it ourselves.

Shmuel: We aren't capable of dealing with it ourselves!

Amalia: The house is destroyed, Shmuel. Even if we find out who did it we won't rebuild it. Go and pack your books. We're leaving in the morning.

Shmuel: Where can we go? Where can all these hundreds of thousands go?

Amalia: They'll all go back to where they came from!

Shmuel dials. He suddenly sees Benny who has come in. He replaces the receiver and looks at him. Chava rushes to Benny and hugs him.

Benny: It's all right, Chava'leh, it's all right.

Chava: I was afraid they'd arrested you.

Benny: You don't have to be afraid.

Nadav: Have you heard what they did to me, Benny?

Benny: I heard.

Nadav: I didn't want compensation.

Benny: I know, Nadav. Fear drove some of us crazy. **(To Chava)** Go and wake the children.

Chava: What's happened?

Shmuel: Shalom, Benny.

Benny: We're going. We'll call you in a few days. **(To Chava)** We should hurry.

Amalia: She's not going anywhere with you. **(To Chava)** We're all going together in the morning and we're staying together.

Shmuel: Just a minute, Benny. The police are looking for you.

Benny: I heard.

Shmuel: Perhaps you should find out what they want.

Benny: I know exactly what they want. Every time something happens they bring me in.

Shmuel: Where are you going to?

Benny: To friends.

Shmuel: First call the police.

Benny: **(To Chava)** Get going.

Chava: All our things are at home.

Benny: Just get the children.

Amalia: She's coming with us. With the children. We'll be with my sister, at the kibbutz. You should come with us.

Chava: **(To Benny)** I can't wake them up now.

Shmuel: I don't think you understand, Benny. The police were here. They wanted to talk to you.

Benny: What have I got to say to them? I don't have the strength to go through more interrogations.

Shmuel: They asked me to let them know when you come back.

Benny: You don't have to. **(To Chava)** Go already. **(She hesitates)** Do you want to stay here without me?

Chava hesitates momentarily and then makes up her mind.

Chava: I'm coming. **(Goes towards the passage)**

Shmuel: Just a minute, Chava.

Avner: What do you want of him? He's got nothing to do with it. He was on the roads all day.

Shmuel: **(To Benny)** Don't you realize that you're forcing me to call them?

Avner: He'll call later.

Shmuel: Why are you hesitating, Benny?

Chava: Let us leave, Abba.

Shmuel: Love will no longer blind us.

Avner: We're not working for the police. Why are you interfering?

Shmuel: Because this investigation is more important to us than it is for the police. Why are you running away, Benny?

Benny does not reply. Shmuel picks up the phone again.

Chava: Don't do this to us, Abba.

Shmuel: Chava'leh, this is important for you too.

Avner: No one will ever enter this house again, Abba. You won't be able to pray in any synagogue. You won't teach in any yeshiva.

Amalia: Now isn't the time for investigations, Shmuel. We've got to save what we can. Let them pack the children's clothes. We'll all leave together in the morning.

Shmuel: I want the police to know that he's not one of those people who committed that terrible act.

Benny: What's so terrible about that act? You'd think that The Holy Temple had been destroyed. What sin was committed? We all wanted it to happen.

Shmuel: What did we want to happen?

Avner: We wanted to stop the negotiations.

Shmuel: In order to go on living here we're committing suicide?

Benny: The people celebrating outside don't think they've committed suicide.
(To Chava) Come on, Chava'leh.

Benny and Chava are moving towards the passage. Shmuel stops them.

Shmuel: Just a minute. Where were you today, Benny? I called you several times. Why didn't you answer? Were you involved? Was it you?

- Chava: No. It wasn't.
- Avner: Leave him alone, Abba.
- Chava: It wasn't him!
- Shmuel: Your word is good enough for me, Benny. Tell me you weren't part of it. That you didn't send those two madmen to blow up the mosques.
- Benny: Why are you so eager to decide they're madmen, Shmuel? Perhaps they're holy men? Perhaps they purified the Temple Mount of the filth that contaminated it? Perhaps they saved the Land of Israel?
- Shmuel: Only the salvation of the Land of Israel exists in the world? Only the purification of the Temple Mount? There are also people who have to live in this country. There are commandments. 'Thou shalt not murder'.
- Avner: Nobody has murdered. This is war.
- Shmuel: Who authorized you to go to war?
- Benny: Perhaps this is a holy war? Maybe it's not just for the salvation of the Land of Israel? Look at how this nation is sinking into decadence. It's already rotting. Who is a Jew here? Who is a believer? Perhaps this war will awaken this nation from the slumber it has sunk into. Perhaps it will stop its degeneration. Perhaps it will bring it back to the Almighty. Since when have we been afraid of war? We have always strengthened ourselves in war.
- Avner: This war will finally prove who this land belongs to.
- Shmuel: This war will bring total destruction. We'll be driven out of the entire country.
- Benny: A holy war will not bring destruction, Shmuel. Because it's the will of the Holy One. And He surely does not seek our destruction. That is why we rose up and did it. Not out of madness, but out of necessity. The necessity to fulfill His will. **(Silence)** Now you can call the police.
- Nadav: **(To Benny)** You did it?
- Chava: No, Abba, don't listen to him. **(Shmuel picks up the phone)** Please, Abba. I begged you to look after him. You shut your eyes and now you're turning him in?
- Amalia: **(To Benny)** Get out! Right now! Before the heavens fall on us!
- Chava: Leave him alone!

Amalia stops. Silence.

Benny: Go and wake the children, Chava'leh.

Chava: And what do I do when they're awake? Where do I take them? You promised to keep away from anything like that. We talked about it every night and every night you deceived me. Didn't you think of the children?

Benny: I thought about them all the time.

Chava: **(To Shmuel)** You want to punish him and you're punishing me. I haven't sinned against the Almighty. I haven't sinned against man. I don't deserve this and neither do the children.

Benny: **(To Chava)** I hope one day you'll understand, Chava.

Amalia: You've ruined her life and you want her to understand? You want her to sacrifice herself and her children because of your madness?

Benny: If this madness is mine, then let him call the police.

Shmuel: So whose madness is it? Mine? How could you dare commit such an atrocity? Are you a human being? Have you got a brain? A heart? There will be no forgiveness for you. Not from me. **(To all)** God in heaven, I swear it. I'll never speak to you again. I'll pursue you wherever you run to. And never come anywhere near my daughter. Don't lay a finger on her. Or her children. No punishment can atone for this.

Shmuel picks up the phone but is unable to dial. Enter Tirtzah carrying her bag. She stands in the doorway, exhausted and despairing.

Benny: You're not calling the police because you know that this is truly a holy war. Because you know it will bring about an awakening on earth that will create an awakening in heaven, and bring redemption. Because you know that we must obey His will and go on fighting, and not allow Him to rest until redemption is complete.

Shmuel: We must carry on fighting in order not to allow the Almighty to rest? To force Him to complete the redemption? Everything is done by His will. Redemption, too, will only be completed by His will.

Benny: This morning you told me that when that when desperate times come, we shall do everything to shake the heavens in order to avoid disaster.

Shmuel: Shake the heavens with dynamite? With prayer. With endeavor. Step by step. Patiently.

Benny: This morning you said 'everything'. **(Gestures towards Tirtzah)** She was standing here and heard it all.

Tirtzah nods. Now Shmuel realizes that he has fallen into Benny's trap.

Benny: **(To Chava)** Come on.

Benny takes her arm and they move towards the passage. Nadav blocks their way.

Nadav: You sent those people to pull down my house. I saw your tractor's tire marks.

Benny: I didn't send them, Nadav.

Nadav: Is this what the Almighty wanted? This?

Benny passes him and exits. Chava follows. Silence.

Shmuel: I think I need to change my shirt.

He surreptitiously picks up Avner's rifle and exits.

Avner: If he thinks he's going to change his shirt and go to the council, he's mistaken. We won't let him say a word. This isn't the time for weakness.

Tirtzah picks up the phone and dials.

Tirtzah: Hello, duty officer please.

Avner: What are you doing?

Tirtzah: Yes. It's urgent. I wanted to inform you that...

Avner: Stop it. **(He tries to snatch the phone from her)**

Tirtzah: I wanted to inform you that the man who bombed the mosques on Temple Mount is...

A shot is heard from the bedroom.

Amalia: Shmuel?

Avner: **(To Amalia)** Hold him.

He rushes into the passage. Benny and Chava come in. Benny runs after Avner.

Amalia: **(Holding Nadav)** We will live, Nadav. We'll leave here and live. Abba will speak on our behalf in heaven and maybe the Almighty will have mercy on us.

Silence. Darkness.

Curtain