

July 2026

THE HEARING

A Play by Motti Lerner

Translated from the Hebrew by Motti Lerner
with assistance from ChatGPT

Edited by Roy Isacowitz

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All characters and events in this play are fictional. Any resemblance to
actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

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CHARACTERS

1. Dr. Ayelet Lieberman (40) - A literature lecturer at a public university in Israel
2. Lior Lieberman (44) - Her husband, a high-tech entrepreneur
3. Dr. Raya Almog (70) - Her mother, a retired lecturer in social psychology
4. Prof. Keren Tavor (45) - Chair of the Department of Literature at the university
5. Prof. Meir Davidi (60) - Rector of the university
6. Noya Nachmani (24) - A literature student at the university
7. Itamar Katzir (25) - A literature student at the university

THE PLOT

The play unfolds over two timelines. The present-day action takes place in December 2025, in Ayelet's apartment in New York, over the course of a single night. Raya has come to persuade Ayelet to return to Israel. The main action takes place during the second half of June 2025 in Tel Aviv in various offices at a public university, in Ayelet and Lior's apartment, in Keren's apartment and in Noya and Itamar's apartment.

NOTE

The quotations from Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* have been adapted for the dialogue, while preserving the spirit of the author's original text.

1. December 2025. Ayelet's apartment in New York. Evening. Raya enters, wearing a coat. She pulls a suitcase with one hand and holds a cane in the other. Ayelet greets her.

Ayelet: Mom... **(They embrace)**

Raya: You look beautiful, Ayelet.

Ayelet: I had my hair cut a little.

Raya: There's so much snow outside. The streets are all white.

Ayelet: It's been like this for three days. How are you?

Raya: I won't last a week in this cold.

Ayelet: Sit down. **(Offers her a chair)** Nine million people live in New York, Mom. Most of them survive the winter. Would you like something to eat? There's soup.

Raya: I ate on the plane.

Ayelet: Would you like some cognac?

Raya: Yes, thank you.

Ayelet: **(Hands her a cognac)** How are your legs?

Raya: Still carrying me.

Ayelet: I don't understand why you insisted on flying here in the middle of a snowstorm.

Raya: I missed you. I wanted to see how you were doing. I wanted to talk to you. **(Pause)** Your lawyer has been trying to call you every day.

Ayelet: I've talked to him enough. I've nothing more to say.

Raya: He wants you to understand why the judge won't give you custody of the children.

Ayelet: I pay him to convince her.

- Raya: She thinks they need their father too.
- Ayelet: Lior comes to New York at least once a month.
- Raya: He wants to see them every day. They're not doing well. You know that. Neri has started stuttering suddenly and Daria cries all night.
- Ayelet: Then Lior should move here. I wrote him that an apartment has become available a few floors above me. I'd be happy if you moved here too.
- Raya: The judge read the report on your mental state, and she...
- Ayelet: **(Interrupting her)** My mental state is perfectly fine. I've stopped treatment. I'm not taking medication. I see friends. I go to the theater. I'm looking for work. I'm writing a book about what happened.
- Raya: You're writing a book?! The university will never forgive you.
- Ayelet: I'm writing it mainly for myself.

2. June 2025. A class at the university. Ayelet reads a passage from Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*.

- Ayelet: After Germany surrendered, Nazi war criminals claimed: We were raised to obey without question. We were bombarded with slogans. Our minds were poisoned in schools, at ceremonies, in speeches delivered in public squares, on the radio, and in the newspapers. We were taught contempt and hatred for other nations. We were taught that the only justice was whatever served the interests of our own people. We were told that the other was subhuman. This brainwashing left us incapable of making independent decisions. Our leaders decided for us what was permitted and what was forbidden, and so we lost the ability to decide for ourselves what was permitted and what was forbidden.

Recorded voices of students responding to the passage are heard in the background.

Student: I'm trying to understand, Ayelet. Until now, we've stayed away from literature that deals with the reality around us.

Student: Are you suggesting that something like this is happening to us too?

Student: This book isn't on the syllabus. We were supposed to be studying Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* now.

Student: I've asked myself similar questions during this war.

Student: But this isn't a theoretical discussion. My brother is in the reserves. My cousin was killed.

Student: I'm not sure we can discuss a reality we're still living through.

Student: Could you explain what kind of discussion you expect us to have? A literary one or a political one?

Ayelet: Of course. In this chapter, Primo Levi examines how the Nazi perpetrators explained their actions after the war. He asks whether they could hold themselves accountable for their crimes...

Student: You didn't answer my question, Ayelet. Is this a literary discussion or a political one?

Ayelet: It's a discussion of human nature through literature.

Student: I have a feeling you're teaching this book because you want to discuss our nature.

3. Ayelet's office at the university. Raya is waiting. Ayelet enters.

Ayelet: Hi, Mom. What are you doing here?

Raya: I've been trying to call you all morning.

Ayelet: You know I teach today. What happened?

Raya: It's about Dad's book. Have you already sent the last chapter to the publisher?

Ayelet: I'm going there now.

Raya: I thought about it all night. Dad is dead. We can't add a chapter to his book that he didn't write.

Ayelet: It's his final speech. He worked on it with what little strength he had left.

Raya: He didn't write it as a chapter for the book.

Ayelet: If he were alive, he would add it himself.

Raya: The university won't publish the book if we include it.

Ayelet: Dad was the most important historian in the country. If he believed that his research on the Yugoslav wars also offered insights into what we're doing in Gaza, then it has to be in the book.

Raya: You can't make that decision for him.

Ayelet: I talked to him about it more than once.

Raya: And is that what he believed, or is it what you believe?

Ayelet: I'm not arguing with you anymore. They're expecting me at the publisher.

Noya and Itamar enter.

Raya: I'll wait for you outside. **(She exits)**

Noya: We're sorry about what happened in class, Ayelet.

Itamar: We weren't prepared for it.

Ayelet: I understand. I was actually glad you asked those questions.

Noya: We've been studying with you for three years. Your classes have always been the most stimulating.

- Itamar: But this is a course on twentieth-century literature. Not on our wars.
- Noya: Today we felt that you were trying to tell us something about Gaza.
- Ayelet: I'm trying to say something much more fundamental. Literature holds up a mirror so that we can see ourselves...
- Noya: Until now, you said that this mirror was meant to help us examine our inner lives.
- Ayelet: That's true. But our inner lives are also revealed through our actions. So we should examine our actions through literature as well.
- Noya: What actions do you mean? What we're doing in Gaza? Are you really comparing us to Nazi war criminals?!
- Ayelet: Of course not. I'm trying to learn from Primo Levi how people adjusted to changes in moral values in Nazi Germany. The conclusions about our own reality are up to you.
- Itamar: I was there for a hundred and seventy days. Three tours. I saw everything. We're not war criminals... The friends I lost there weren't war criminals either... You can't accuse them when they're not here to defend themselves. What happened there was nothing like what Primo Levi wrote about...
- Ayelet: I'm not accusing anyone, Itamar. Not the living and not the dead. Literature can allow us to engage in moral self-examination...
- Noya: But when you demand moral self-examination from us through a book about war crimes, you're assuming that we're committing war crimes.
- Ayelet: I'm not assuming anything. Primo Levi raises questions about what happened in Germany...
- Itamar: We don't want to ask ourselves questions like that right now.

Noya: We're constantly mourning the soldiers who are being killed there.

Ayelet: I'm mourning them too. That's why I'm not discussing them. I'm discussing fundamental questions that have to be asked despite our grief.

4. Ayelet and Lior's home. Evening. Lior enters, wearing the uniform of a major in the reserves.

Lior: Ayelet?

Ayelet enters. They embrace.

Ayelet: They just fell asleep.

Lior: How's Neri?

Ayelet: He started taking antibiotics, but still has a fever.

Lior: I can stay with him for a while in the morning.

Ayelet: Daria wanted you to help her with math. She has a test tomorrow.

Lior: She doesn't need to worry. She knows the material. So you did teach Primo Levi after all today?

Ayelet: If I put it off any longer, I'll lose my mind.

Lior: I'm not sure your students can deal with a book like that right now.

Ayelet: So I should give up?

Lior: I've already given up on these young people. Those serving in my unit also can't hear anything that raises doubt. This is the last time I'm doing reserve duty.

Ayelet: And if they call you up again?

Lior: When we're living in New York, they won't be able to call me up.

- Ayelet: You say that as if we've already decided.
- Lior: I can't go on like this.
- Ayelet: And what about the children? Daria doesn't want to leave her friends. Neri doesn't want to leave his school.
- Lior: Once we get there, they'll see it's not so terrible.
- Ayelet: Neri can't cope with changes. You know that. I'm not sure he'll be able to learn a new language.
- Lior: We'll find a school that's right for him.
- Ayelet: And what will you do with the company?
- Lior: I'll move whatever I can to New York. When I'm serving a hundred and fifty days of reserve duty a year, I can't run anything.
- Ayelet: Let's think about it a little longer.
- Lior: If we want to enroll the children in good schools, we have to decide fairly soon.
- Ayelet: We'll decide after the war is over.
- Lior: And until then I'll keep on doing reserve duty?
- Ayelet: All right. We'll decide by the end of the month.
- Lior: Why is it so hard for you to decide? We can make a fresh start there. We could even have another child... **(She does not respond)** What do you think?
- Ayelet: I'm forty, Lior.
- Lior: A child might make things a little better after what we've been through.
- Ayelet: He hasn't even been born yet, and you're already giving him duties?
- Lior: It's much more urgent than you think. I got to the unit this morning to discover that the officer on night duty had

submitted a target we discussed yesterday to the Air Force. There was an entire family there. Eleven people. Women and children. Two missiles killed them all just to eliminate one suspect.

Ayelet: Now do you understand why I have to teach Primo Levi?

5. The rector's office at the university. Present: Prof. Meir Davidi, Ayelet, and Raya.

Meir: It's a masterpiece, Raya. Avram has succeeded in creating a moral inquiry of the highest order. No historian has examined human evil the way he has. Of course, I saw his final speech at the end of the book. It gives the book enormous contemporary relevance.

Raya: Thank you, Meir.

Ayelet: I told him we would include the speech, but I'm not sure he was still able to hear.

Meir: *A History of Evil* is an excellent title. **(To Raya)** Do you know he wanted to give you credit as co-author?

Raya: The book is entirely his. I merely kept arguing that most of the atrocities in the world are not committed by psychopaths, but by ordinary people. Most social psychologists believe that today.

Meir: I'll send you the introduction next week. I was deeply moved when he asked me to write it. I owe my entire career to him. We'll make a special effort to launch the book at the beginning of next year, before I retire.

Ayelet: You're retiring? When?

Meir: In a year. Didn't he tell you? We talked about it quite a lot. He wanted to see me in the Knesset, where I could have some influence on political life.

Raya: That's a very courageous decision. Good luck.

Meir: Thank you.

The meeting is over. Meir shakes hands with Raya and Ayelet.

Meir: By the way, Ayelet, two students from your “Twentieth-Century Literature” course came to me yesterday to complain that you had changed the syllabus.

Ayelet: Complain? About what exactly? Do you remember who they were?

Meir: Noya and...

Ayelet: Itamar. I met with them. I explained. I thought they understood.

Meir: It’s not generally acceptable to change the syllabus in the middle of a course.

Ayelet: We all do it from time to time.

Meir: Are you sure this is the right time to teach Primo Levi?

Ayelet: Why not?

Meir: They claim you’re using him to preach against what is happening in this war.

Ayelet: The only thing I said was that literature dealing with a historical event can teach us something about the reality we live in.

Meir: No one disputes that. But we are living through a complicated period, and the connection between literature and reality can sometimes be interpreted as a provocation.

Ayelet: I’m trying to discuss what happened in Germany.

Meir: Then why do they feel you’re preaching against the war here?

Ayelet: Apparently, I didn’t explain myself well enough. I’ll talk to them again.

Meir: Over the past year, several students have complained about faculty members. Unfortunately, some of our donors have demanded that we toe the line with the consensus.

- Ayelet: Since when do donors decide what we teach?
- Meir: This war has hardened their positions.
- Raya: Everyone's. Yours too.
- Ayelet: Primo Levi is a Jewish writer, a Holocaust survivor. He's at the very heart of the consensus.
- Raya: I understand why you insist on teaching him, Ayelet. But at a time like this, any discussion of a moral question sounds like a collective accusation.
- Ayelet: Because this war raises moral questions that cannot be ignored.
- Meir: If you teach the book after the war, it won't provoke this kind of opposition.
- Raya: And perhaps then your students will be able to listen.
- Ayelet: I was under the impression that we had academic freedom, Mom.
- Meir: Of course we do. But it isn't unlimited. The Finance Ministry is already threatening to cut our budget.
- Raya: I suggest you think about what Dad would do in your place.
- Ayelet: I know exactly what he would do.
- Meir: Avram was a cautious man. In his final speech, he spoke outside the university so as not to give the government an excuse to come after us. You're a smart woman, Ayelet. I suggest you use good judgment.

6. A corridor at the university. Immediately afterward.

- Raya: I hope you understood what he was implying.
- Ayelet: Of course I did.
- Raya: We need him to publish the book.

- Ayelet: The university needs this book for its reputation.
- Raya: I'm not going to jeopardize Dad's book over some dispute with Meir.
- Ayelet: I know those two students very well. In the next class, they'll understand why we need to study Primo Levi.
- Raya: But you know Meir too. He might interfere in your tenure review.
- Ayelet: He wouldn't dare.
- Raya: Dad can't protect you anymore.
- Ayelet: I'm being considered for tenure because of my research, not because of Dad.
- Raya: I still think you should be careful.
- Ayelet: What are you so afraid of? You were much braver when Dad was alive.
- Raya: But he's dead.
- Ayelet: He died trying to explain what's happening here.
- Raya: He died because I let him go and give that speech. I knew he was going to collapse.
- Ayelet: It wasn't your fault, Mom. He knew how sick he was. He wanted to say something there that was very important for all of us.
- Raya: That doesn't make me feel any better, Ayelet.

7. A student apartment. Noya and Itamar are watching Noya's interview on a television news program.

Noya: I've been studying with her for almost three years. She has always been a wonderful lecturer. Intelligent. Sensitive. Considerate. Her classes on Virginia Woolf changed my life. She never forced her opinions on us. Now, all of a sudden, she's using literature to put me and my friends on trial. Precisely because I respect her, I feel so hurt by what she's doing. Of course it's legitimate to criticize what we're doing in Gaza, but to compare us to Nazi war criminals? The university must protect us...

Noya turns off the television.

Noya: I hope I was clear.

Itamar: You were very clear.

Noya: Maybe you should do an interview tomorrow too.

Itamar: No one invited me.

Noya: I've had calls from several channels. I'll ask them to talk to you.

Itamar: I'm not sure I can do it.

Noya: I'll help you prepare. Take a pill before the interview.

Itamar: I'm seeing the psychologist tomorrow. I'll ask him.

Noya: You're keeping a lot bottled up. There are things you have to say.

Itamar: You find them easier to say.

Noya: When you say them, people can't ignore them.

Itamar: What if I break down and suddenly start crying?

Noya: You don't have to hide anything. It's important that everyone can see how much pain you're in.

- Itamar: I don't want them to pity me. I want them to understand what I've been through.
- Noya: Then say that.
- Itamar: On television?
- Noya: Why not? You're not speaking just for yourself. A lot of other students have been hurt by her too. Someone has to stop her. If she keeps this up, we might actually start thinking she's right.
- Itamar: Are you sure she isn't?
- Noya: Don't even start thinking that way.

8. The office of Prof. Keren Tavor, Chair of the Department of Literature. Ayelet and Keren have watched Noya's interview.

- Ayelet: She's a good student. In her second year, she wrote an excellent paper on the presence of sexual trauma in Virginia Woolf's work. She also wrote about herself in it with remarkable honesty.
- Keren: She was a paramedic in Gaza.
- Ayelet: I know. Her battalion commander nominated her for a citation. I suppose I didn't fully understand what she went through there.
- Keren: Don't worry. You have my full support. The syllabus isn't a binding contract with the students. I change mine almost every year.
- Ayelet: And if the rector summons me to a hearing?
- Keren: I'm your department chair. I'll protect you.
- Ayelet: Even if I continue teaching Primo Levi?
- Keren: Especially if you do.
- Ayelet: He may try to settle the score with you one day.

- Keren: Let him try. **(She takes Ayelet's hands)** Do you have a minute? I called you last night.
- Ayelet: I couldn't answer. Lior was home.
- Keren: Avishai and I signed the divorce papers yesterday. It was a hard day for both of us. But it's over.
- Ayelet: I know how long you've been waiting for this.
- Keren: It's a new situation for us too. I thought maybe we could try again to...
- Ayelet: I'm still not there, Keren. We've talked about this. I can't hurt the children. Or Lior.
- Keren: If you prepare them for it, maybe it will hurt less.
- Ayelet: Lior is still fighting for me. He wants us to have another child.
- Keren: He wants to make sure you stay with him.
- Ayelet: He didn't put it that way.
- Keren: My boys, on the other hand, were very clear. They decided to live with Avishai.
- Ayelet: And you agreed?
- Keren: They refused to leave him. When he has a panic attack, they know how to help him through it.
- Ayelet: They're too young for that.
- Keren: I wasn't much older when he was wounded. Until then, he was a completely different person. **(Pause)** Lior will still be the father of your children even if you move in with me. If you keep pretending, the children will be the ones who get hurt.
- Ayelet: We're trying to be good parents. He understood that I needed to give our relationship a try. He knows it's over.
- Keren: Was it only a try?

Ayelet: If I leave him, Neri will fall apart. It will be hard for Daria too.

Keren: So you'll come to me only when you fall apart?

Ayelet: I want to live with you, Keren. I really do...

Keren: But?

Ayelet: I can't ask the children to pay that kind of price for me.

Keren: When you told me things were good at home, I tried not to interfere. But now I'm not so sure.

Ayelet: I'm still mourning my father. He collapsed in my arms. I can't seem to recover from it.

9. Ayelet and Lior's home. Lior has returned from another day of reserve duty. Ayelet shows him the campaign against her on social media on her phone.

Lior: Fifteen hundred hate messages - that's an organized campaign, Ayelet. This isn't just two students.

Ayelet: You think so?

Lior: It's all over social media. A whole team is behind it.

Ayelet: Maybe someone is using them. I'm still going to talk to them.

Lior: It's too late. It's out of their hands now.

Ayelet: So what am I supposed to do?

Lior: Give in.

Ayelet: I've been giving in ever since the war started. I taught Hemingway, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf. I thought I'd be able to ignore what's happening in Gaza. But every time I see a report on the BBC, I feel I can't keep silent anymore.

- Lior: You only have two classes left. It's not worth risking your tenure over them.
- Ayelet: The faculty has already recommended me for tenure.
- Lior: But the university still hasn't approved it. If the rector blocks it, you'll have a very hard time getting hired at another university.
- Ayelet: I'm not willing to give in to his threats.
- Lior: It isn't only him, Ayelet. It's the students' campaign too. It could also hurt the children. Drop Primo Levi for these last two classes. If you leave the university of your own accord, you'll be able to get a job at an equally good university in New York. The children deserve to live in a country that isn't constantly at war.
- Ayelet: Let's talk about it after the war is over.
- Lior: It won't be over anytime soon. **(Pause)** I asked my secretary to look for schools for them.
- Ayelet: You decided on your own?! Without asking me?! I already told you. I'm not even sure I can leave.
- Lior: Why?
- Ayelet: Because I have students here. Because I owe them something.
- Lior: What do you owe them?
- Ayelet: To talk to them about what's happening here.
- Lior: They're not listening to you.
- Ayelet: Some of them are. At least to some of what I'm saying.
- Lior: And I suppose Keren promised to protect you.
- Ayelet: Are you bringing that up again? It's over. I swear to you. I only see her on department business.

- Lior: I find it hard to believe you're staying here just because of a few students.
- Ayelet: Please, Lior...
- Lior: I see it in your eyes every night when we go to bed.
- Ayelet: That's not true.
- Lior: When you look at me, you feel guilty for not wanting me.
- Ayelet: I'm not guilty of anything.
- Lior: It's easier to blame me for what's happening in the war than to say you don't want me. Don't even try to deny it.
- Ayelet: I'm not blaming you for what's happening there, but you're part of the system that allows...
- Lior: If you don't want me to be part of it, then leave those students who are out for your blood and the university that's giving in to them. It's time for us to start over in New York. Why are you still hesitating?

10. December 2025. Ayelet's apartment in New York. Evening.

- Raya: You have to give him another chance. Dad also believed that the mass killing in Gaza was a terrible crime. But he never stopped talking to Lior. He tried everything to convince him that they had to limit the killing.
- Ayelet: So did I.
- Raya: And he listened to you. That's why he wanted to leave the country.
- Ayelet: But he never stopped doing what he was doing there. Not for a moment.
- Raya: Even the most decent people in the country have already come to terms with it.

- Ayelet: They came to terms with it to justify their silence. You were silent too, even though you knew what he was doing.
- Raya: I wasn't silent. I talked to him about it again and again. He tried as hard as he could.
- Ayelet: And continued to take part in the killing.
- Raya: Lior is a decent man. There aren't many like him. You demand that he act according to a moral standard that is impossible in the world we live in. Because of that demand, you gave up on him. And now the children are paying the price. I don't understand. Don't you care that Neri has started stuttering? That Daria has crying fits every night?
- Ayelet: How dare you say that to me?
- Raya: Because you're staying here even though you already know that the court won't give you custody of them.
- Ayelet: The court will, as soon as Lior gives in.
- Raya: He won't give in.
- Ayelet: He always gives in to me.
- Raya: He's making you a fair offer. He isn't insisting that you live together. He wants you to be neighbors and raise the children together. Pack a suitcase and let's fly home. In twenty-four hours, you could be holding them in your arms...

11. June 2025. A class at the university. Ayelet reads another passage from Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*.

- Ayelet: "The entire brief history of the 'Thousand-Year Reich' can be read as a war against knowledge - a campaign of distortion and denial of reality. The Nazi regime denied its subjects any access to the truth, while poisoning their moral sense and their memory. It constructed a narrative woven out of superstitions - superstitions it had invented, believed, and imposed on them." Primo Levi asks whether a German citizen can be absolved of the responsibility to discover the

truth about the crimes committed in his name, especially when at least part of that truth was within his reach. Almost everyone had a relative, a neighbor, or an acquaintance who served in the army, the police, or the SS in Eastern Europe...

The recorded voices of the students are heard again. This time, they are angrier.

- Student: Why are you hiding behind Primo Levi? You're talking about us.
- Student: What you're really asking is what responsibility we have to find out the truth when our government doesn't want us to know it.
- Student: What you're really saying is that we don't want to know either.
- Student: That it's more convenient for us not to know.
- Student: Do you think everyone who wants to know can actually find out the truth?
- Student: I don't know enough, even though I'm trying.
- Student: How can anyone know what's true and what's propaganda? You don't know either.
- Student: This discussion is making me feel guilty about something I'm not responsible for.
- Student: Has our moral sense been poisoned too, as it was in Nazi Germany?
- Student: You're not asking us to think about it. You're demanding that we admit it.

12. Ayelet, Meir, Keren, Noya, and Itamar in the rector's office.

- Noya: She said explicitly that the Nazi government used its control over information to conceal its crimes from the citizens of the Reich. When I asked whether she was comparing our government to that government, she gave me an evasive answer.
- Ayelet: I wasn't evasive. I presented Primo Levi's arguments about the Nazi regime. I didn't say a single word about our government. You made the comparison.
- Noya: Because that's what you wanted me to do.
- Ayelet: I wanted to raise questions about living through a prolonged war. About people's responsibility for their actions in a war like this.
- Keren: **(To Noya)** All good literature questions people's responsibility for their actions - and for actions carried out in their name.
- Noya: I'm not willing to sit in her class and feel as if I'm being accused.
- Meir: **(To Noya)** The purpose of this conversation is to define the boundaries of the discussion so that no one feels accused.
- Ayelet: I'm teaching Primo Levi to give you the tools to think. I'm not deciding what conclusions you should reach.
- Itamar: I'd like to understand what she wants from us all of a sudden. I took her course to understand myself. To recover. To heal from this war. Instead, I have to apologize. Justify myself. Do penance. We want to go back to studying Thomas Mann.
- Meir: I must admit, I find it difficult to understand your complaints. Last night I reread Primo Levi's book. It was written forty years ago. It deals exclusively with what happened in Nazi Germany.
- Keren: I listened to the recording you sent me. Ayelet didn't accuse any soldier of anything. She suggested that the book might

help you ask how human beings can deteriorate to the point of committing extreme acts.

Ayelet: **(To Noya and Itamar)** I know both of you quite well. I'm sure you can grapple with that question.

Noya: **(To Meir)** I see you're pretending not to understand too. If she had truly wanted to discuss Nazi Germany, this book would have been on the syllabus.

Itamar: **(Angrily)** Comparing what we're doing in Gaza to Nazi crimes is appalling.

Noya: Even if you're horrified by what's happening there.

Ayelet: But I made no such comparison. Primo Levi tries to understand how millions of Germans took part in war crimes. I'm suggesting that we learn something from him...

Itamar: **(His anger mounting)** I was in Gaza for a hundred and seventy days. I saw war. Not war crimes. I saw my friends being killed. Wounded. I saw them shitting their pants under fire. Under rockets. With explosive devices under their feet. How are they supposed to fight there if you accuse them of war crimes? How are they supposed to hold up when they come back here and face accusations like that?

Meir: I understand, Itamar. Thank you. Please calm down...

Itamar: We fought there. We were wounded. We were killed. That's enough. Those of us who came back alive want to return to normal life. Without fear. Without guilt.

Meir: **(Firmly)** I'm asking you again to calm down.

Itamar: Is that what I'm supposed to hear from her? That I'm a criminal? **(Exposes a scar on his chest)** I was shot in the chest. My lung was torn apart. I spent two months in the hospital. I could barely breathe... **(Noya places a hand on his shoulder)**

Keren: No one is accusing you of anything, Itamar. Let's go outside. We'll sit in my office. Have some coffee. Talk quietly...

Keren and Noya escort Itamar out.

Meir: That young man is in very bad shape. I can understand what your class did to him.

Ayelet: I visited him in the hospital. I didn't know he was still suffering so much.

Meir: We have far too many cases like his. We can't ignore them.

Ayelet: Maybe he's calmed down a little by now. I should go talk to him. I'll suggest that he skip the next class.
(She turns to leave)

Meir: Are you sure he's the only student in your class who was hurt like this?

Ayelet: I'll try to find out.

Meir: We don't have time for inquiries now. With all due respect for academic freedom, we have to be careful. We can't make students feel as though they are standing trial. Certainly not while the war is still going on. Even if you didn't intend to draw a comparison between what is happening here and what happened in Germany, that comparison has been made. I'm sure your father would have objected to it as well. I'm asking you to go back to teaching Thomas Mann. I'll send you the decision in writing.

13. Keren's office. Ayelet and Keren have already read the rector's written decision.

Ayelet: I know him well. He's petty, extremely rigid, and a coward. If I teach Primo Levi next week, he'll refer me to the disciplinary committee.

Keren: The disciplinary committee can't interfere with the content of your class.

Ayelet: But it will rule that I violated an order, and he'll use that to veto my tenure.

Keren: The faculty union will back you. I spoke to them.

- Ayelet: So I should teach Primo Levi next week too?
- Keren: Yes. Absolutely. We'll notify the students now that your final class is optional. Anyone who doesn't want to engage with Primo Levi can skip it, and Meir won't be able to claim that you forced anything on them.
- Ayelet: Are you sure?
- Keren: Your fight is a matter of principle. It's important to all of us. Faculty members need to know they're allowed to ask hard questions even if those questions provoke controversy.
- Ayelet: Most of the faculty here oppose that. They prefer to believe that what happened in Germany was unique, so they won't have to ask whether things like that are happening here too.
- Keren: After the war they'll understand that you were fighting for them too.
- Ayelet: Meanwhile, most of them are siding with the students. They're sharing their hate messages on social media. Signing petitions. I'm the enemy of the university. Of the department. Of the students. Even my mother is against me. Lior thinks my fight is doomed from the start. Maybe they're right. Maybe I should keep quiet after all.
- Keren: If you keep quiet now, it will be taken as an admission that you were wrong. That's exactly what everyone wants.
- Ayelet: I can't fight alone.
- Keren: You're not alone. I'm with you. Against the students. Against the university. If I don't defend you, I'll be next.
- Keren takes Ayelet's hands. After a moment, Ayelet pulls her hands away.**
- Keren: What's wrong?
- Ayelet: I'm no longer sure I know what I'm doing. Since this campaign started, I've become so suspicious. I don't know who's with me and who's against me. I don't trust anyone. Most of all, I don't trust myself. How the hell did I get into

this? I don't owe my father anything. We had some pretty serious arguments in the last few months. During the first year of the war, he was silent. He didn't give speeches. He didn't give interviews. He didn't even write a letter to the newspaper. And that was when the worst things were happening. He only spoke out in the last few months. By then, it was already too late...

Keren: He wrote his book.

Ayelet: A man of his stature should have done much more. I'm only a junior lecturer. I can't take on the university. I don't want to put you to the test either. What will you do if Meir threatens to hurt the department because of me?

Keren: If he tries to hurt the department, I'll go to the president. To the board of trustees. I won't teach at a university that violates the academic freedom of its faculty like this.

Ayelet: Don't make promises, Keren.

Keren: I'm not making a promise to you. I'm making one to myself. I'll do everything I can for you.

Ayelet: I want to believe you. I really do. **(They embrace)**

14. The rector's office. Meir and Raya.

Meir: I don't understand what happened to her. She was always such a serious girl. Intelligent. Curious. I was the one who persuaded her to study literature. I gave her Hemingway, Steinbeck, Saul Bellow. Explain to her that she can't drag me into a scandal like this now.

Raya: So far, it's a tempest in a teacup. When an entire society is gripped by anxiety, even a small, vocal group can suddenly sound enormous. Most of the students may actually be interested in the discussion she's offering them.

Meir: I don't care about her students right now. I gave her a clear instruction, and she defied it. She'll pay dearly for that. And

so will her department chair, who's encouraging her. She won't get any development funding from me next year.

Raya: You're the rector, Meir. You can't threaten an entire department because of two students.

Meir: I mean every word I'm saying.

Raya: I hope you won't interfere in her tenure review.

Meir: She needs to understand that she can't ignore my instructions. Tenure isn't a prize for a faculty member. It's an expression of the university's trust. And Ayelet has violated that trust.

Raya: You know her. If she's denied tenure, she'll go to the Supreme Court.

Meir: Even if she wins in court, she'll pay a much higher price. And tell her one more thing. If she doesn't inform me by tomorrow morning that she's returning to the syllabus, I won't publish Avram's book.

Raya: What does Avram have to do with any of this?

Meir: She's his daughter.

Raya: You know that if he were alive, he would support her.

Meir: Avram was a pragmatic man. He knew exactly where to draw the line. He would never have dreamed of making the comparisons she's making.

Raya: The book is important to the university too, Meir. You yourself wrote in the introduction that it was an expression of the university's moral strength.

Meir: The fate of the book now depends entirely on her.

Raya: **(Angrily)** It depends on you. You're punishing her because she showed you that you've abandoned every moral principle you ever had. That you sacrificed them for the sake of your political future. That you're afraid that one day someone may remember that you supported her.

Meir: You too, Raya? Don't you understand what's at stake here? I'm not worried about my future. The government is waiting for a scandal like this so it can take control of the university through the board of trustees. That will not happen while I'm rector. I want a written outline of her next class on my desk tomorrow morning.

15. Ayelet and Lior in their apartment, watching a television interview with Itamar.

Itamar: She hasn't backed down or apologized. She knows that most of the students will come to her final class, because anyone who stays away will be accused of having no moral backbone. But I no longer care what people say. I don't care what she says either. I took her course to understand, through literature, what happened to me in this war. To write about it. To get my head straight... And she wants me to write that I'm a war criminal... That's why she's teaching Primo Levi. Why should I feel guilty?! I risked my life for her and her children too. She should help me understand why I did it. Why I'm willing to do it again in the next war...

Lior turns off the television.

Lior: He looks pretty miserable.

Ayelet: I didn't know he wanted to write about the war.

Lior: I know you didn't mean to hurt him, but he was hurt all the same.

Ayelet: It's very hard for me to see him like this.

Lior: Then maybe you should be more considerate of him. What if you taught someone else who wrote about war in your final class? Hemingway, for example...

Ayelet: Hemingway doesn't ask the questions we need to ask now.

Lior: You've asked those questions in two classes. Your position is clear. You could lose your chance at tenure because of this final class.

- Ayelet: Suddenly my tenure matters so much to you?
- Lior: It isn't only your tenure, Ayelet. The campaign against you keeps growing. There are already posters in the streets. Soon they'll start demonstrating outside our building. With loudspeakers. The children will hear all of it. What will you tell them? I just hope no one follows them to school.
- Ayelet: So what are you suggesting?
- Lior: That you back down. Look at the price you're paying. Suddenly you're the most hated lecturer at the university.
- Ayelet: If I back down, I'll hate myself for the rest of my life.
- Lior: Do you really believe you're having any effect on these students? That your classes are changing anything for them?
- Ayelet: I really want to believe that.
- Lior: If I thought this class would change anything for them, I'd be willing to pay the price. But...
- Ayelet: You're paying a price for what I'm doing?!
- Lior: Believe it or not, officers in the unit are asking me whether I also think we're committing war crimes. They suspect I'm giving you information about the targets and the casualties.
- Ayelet: So that's what worries you? That they suspect you?
- Lior: I'm worried about you. I can see how hard this is for you.
- Ayelet: You're not worried about me. Or the children. You want me to keep quiet. You're afraid that if I talk about what's happening in Gaza, people will start talking about what your unit is doing there.
- Lior: You're accusing me again?
- Ayelet: You complain about the targets your unit sends to the Air Force, and you keep approving those targets.
- Lior: I'm constantly trying to filter them out.

- Ayelet: But you stay in the unit even though you can't filter out enough of them.
- Lior: Is that why you insist on talking about it? Because I'm staying in the unit? If I leave, someone else will take my place and approve targets like these as though they were coming off an assembly line.
- Ayelet: I insist on talking about it because until now I kept silent.
- Lior: You kept silent because you knew I had no choice.
- Ayelet: That's why I have to talk about it now.
- Lior: Then say it. Go on, say it. I want to hear you say it.
- Ayelet: For a year and a half, we've killed tens of thousands of people there. In strikes on targets that you and your unit selected. You knew who was there, and you were afraid to speak up. Don't you think you bear some responsibility for that?
- Lior: You finally said it. I knew this moment would come one day. I've been waiting for it. **(Pause)** I think I'll sleep at the base tonight.
- Ayelet: Yes. I said it. Until now, I was afraid. I was afraid that if I said it, it would become real. I was afraid because I could see that you were afraid too. That's why you close your eyes - so you won't have to see. Even though you're an intelligence officer whose job is to see. But I'm not afraid anymore. Even though I'm only a literature lecturer. Maybe that's precisely why I can see.

Lior exits. She remains alone.

16. Morning. Raya enters Ayelet's apartment.

- Ayelet: What's so urgent, Mom? I have to take the children to school.
- Raya: Isn't Lior supposed to do it today?

- Ayelet: He stayed at the base last night.
- Raya: What happened?
- Ayelet: It's none of your business.
- Raya: I see. I spoke to Meir yesterday.
- Ayelet: I asked you not to interfere.
- Raya: He called me at midnight.
- Ayelet: What for?
- Raya: He saw the interview with your student. He thinks other students may have been hurt too. If you teach Primo Levi, he'll go to the tenure committee and ask them to postpone the decision.
- Ayelet: Tell him he can relax. I saw the interview too. Maybe I wasn't sensitive enough to what that student is going through. I don't want to hurt him after all he's already suffered.
- Raya: So what will you teach in your next class?
- Ayelet: A chapter from Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. It also deals with war and obedience to its machinery. But Heller is American. He's Jewish. No one will suspect him of accusing us of anything.
- Raya: Excellent. That's a good choice. I hope Meir will calm down and this whole affair will be over.
- Ayelet: So do I. I've had enough conflict. I fought with Lior. I screamed at the children for no reason. They don't deserve that.
- Raya: You're absolutely right. One more small thing. Meir wants you to send him a written outline of your next class today.
- Ayelet: Excuse me?! He can't ask me to do that.
- Raya: He wants to make sure you're not preparing another surprise for him.

- Ayelet: That's out of the question, Mom.
- Raya: Why are you making such an issue of it? It's only a few lines in an email.
- Ayelet: I've been teaching at this university for ten years. No rector has ever asked a lecturer to submit an outline of a class in advance.
- Raya: Fine. I'll email him that you're teaching *Catch-22*.
- Ayelet: No, Mom.
- Raya: He's under pressure, Ayelet. He thinks you're putting the university at risk.
- Ayelet: He thinks I'm putting his political future at risk.
- Raya: If you don't cooperate with him, he won't publish Dad's book.
- Ayelet: Is that what he told you? I don't understand. He's the rector of a university, not a mafia boss. He can't use the book to blackmail me. If he insists, I'll cut his introduction and offer the book to another publisher.
- Raya: What's gotten into you, Ayelet? You've already given up Primo Levi. What are you still fighting for?
- Ayelet: The little freedom I still have left.
- Raya: You're willing to destroy your own life over that? Take some responsibility and send him the damn email.
- Ayelet: I'm taking full responsibility. He will not run my class. I'm no longer the little girl who devoured every book he brought me. He may have read those books, but he didn't understand them at all. Do me a favor. Make the children some sandwiches and take them to school. And remind Daria to take her violin. She has a lesson after school.

Ayelet exits.

17. The rector's office. Ayelet and Meir.

- Ayelet: What does my father's book have to do with the dispute between us? You know it deals only with war crimes in Yugoslavia.
- Meir: leaving me no choice, Ayelet.
- Ayelet: You were my father's colleague. You studied with him. You admired him. You delivered his eulogy in tears. And now you're using him to threaten me?
- Meir: I'm not threatening you. But we're living through a more difficult time than you realize.
- Ayelet: My father collapsed because he felt guilty that he'd remained silent during the war. He told you that right here in this office, when I brought him to say goodbye to you. And you're still trying to silence me?
- Meir: Your father remained silent because he understood the limits of a university lecturer. He didn't allow himself to go beyond them until he became very ill.
- Ayelet: And I'll never forgive him for that.
- Meir: He doesn't need forgiveness. He knew that the right way to make an impact was to write his book. It truly is a very important book, but after the scandal you've created here, I won't be able to publish it, even if I want to.
- Ayelet: You don't want to?
- Meir: Don't you see the problem? The book may be about Yugoslavia, but after your father's speech, it will immediately be read as an accusation that we're committing war crimes in Gaza. The university cannot take such a position.
- Ayelet: A university can't take a position on war crimes? Since when?
- Meir: The university takes a position by teaching humanistic values...

- Ayelet: But when we're committing war crimes, it has to take a public stand. Otherwise, its silence will be seen as complicity.
- Meir: Most of the public rejects the claim that we're committing war crimes.
- Ayelet: Exactly. And when there's a dispute like that, we have to take part in it. You're our rector. You have to allow us to do that.
- Meir: I have to protect every scholar's right to take a personal position without fear. But I also have to ensure that the university does not take a position as an institution. If the university publishes your father's book now, it will invite pressure from the government and from our donors. Some of them have already announced that they're withholding donations. We could collapse. That will not happen on my watch.
- Ayelet: But if the university guarantees every scholar the right to take a position, why can't I teach Primo Levi?
- Meir: You can teach him after the war, as long as you don't preach at your students. You're only a lecturer in the literature department. You're not a moral or political authority.
- Ayelet: I'm very proud to be a lecturer in the literature department. If you didn't recognize the moral power of literature, you wouldn't be trying so hard to silence me. But despite what you think of me, I don't want to create a scandal. I don't want to endanger the university, and I certainly don't intend to hurt my students. **(A brief pause)** I'm willing to accept your proposal.
- Meir: What proposal?
- Ayelet: To teach Primo Levi after the war. I hope what I've already said about his work will persuade the students to think a little more about what's happening here. In the next class, I'll teach a chapter from *Catch-22*.

Meir: Fine. I can live with *Catch-22*. It may be an antiwar novel, but it won't provoke the same kind of opposition. We'll begin working on your father's book. We'll publish it once things settle down. In the meantime, you'll apply for a sabbatical. I'll approve it. The hearing will be over. You'll go abroad. You'll teach. You'll write a book. In a year, you'll come back to us.

Ayelet: My sabbatical isn't for another two years.

Meir: I'll let you take it early.

Ayelet: You'll let me take it early? Why? Are you that eager to get me out of the university?

Meir: I want to protect you.

Ayelet: Protect me?! You're buying my silence, so you won't have to forbid me to teach what I want. So no one will see that you've given in to pressure from the government.

Meir: I'm also trying to save this university.

Ayelet: You're not trying to save it. You're trying to score political points. That's why you're willing to trample on every principle you have. That's why you don't hesitate to trample on me too.

Meir: I'm not going to listen to insinuations like that!

Ayelet: I'm not insinuating anything. I'm saying it outright. I'm not making any deal with you, and I'm not going on sabbatical. I'll teach Primo Levi in the next class. The class will be optional. Anyone who doesn't want to come can stay away. If you fire me, I won't keep quiet. Any good university in the world will ask why. It'll be very difficult for you to explain it.

Ayelet exits.

18. Ayelet and Lior's home. Raya and Ayelet are watching Ayelet's television interview.

Ayelet: This university means a great deal to me. My father was one of its leading historians, and it's very difficult for me to confront it. But if I go back into the classroom and teach as if nothing has happened, I'm accepting the university's silence in the face of this war... And literature is supposed to expose our mechanisms of denial... I know I'll pay a heavy price for what I've said. I don't have tenure. The rector can fire me. But I have no choice. Every citizen here has to know what is being done there in their name. They also have to decide whether they're willing to accept what is being done in their name. The students too. Some of them may have felt guilty because of me. But I'm their teacher, and I have to give them the tools to think, to understand, and to take a stand. I'm calling on my colleagues in the humanities not to separate what we teach from the war being fought right now.

Ayelet turns off the television.

Raya: Meir will have your head tomorrow.

Ayelet: Thank you.

Raya: This is appallingly irresponsible. Toward your family too. I don't understand this desire to sacrifice yourself.

Ayelet: I already understand that you don't understand me.

Raya: He won't publish Dad's book.

Ayelet: Then whoever comes after him will. It's late, Mom. Lior is on his way. I need to talk to him.

Raya: I can talk to Meir tomorrow. Explain that you're still grieving Dad's death. That you're still angry about his silence. That your protest was meant to continue what he began in his final months...

Ayelet: **(Impatiently)** Mom, please...

Raya: I'm trying to help you, Ayelet. Tell me how. You know I'd do anything for you.

Ayelet: I'd really appreciate it if you came by in the morning and took the children to school.

Raya: Do you want me to stay while you talk to Lior?

Ayelet: No.

Raya: Are you sure the two of you can behave responsibly, like adults?

Ayelet: **(Angrily)** Good night, Mom.

Raya: Good night.

Raya exits. Lior enters.

Lior: I waited outside until your mother left.

Ayelet: I figured.

Lior: You realize Meir isn't going to like what you said in that interview.

Ayelet: I've already said it.

Lior: Even so, I think we can still limit the damage.

Ayelet: You're suggesting that I run away, and I'm not sure I can.

Lior: I won't force you. I thought a lot about what you said yesterday. It wasn't easy. But I admit it. You're right. I didn't have to be part of the atrocities we committed in this war. And I'm certainly not willing to go on doing it. Let's take the children, go to New York, and try to save what we have left.

Ayelet: What would be different there?

Lior: I wouldn't be in the reserves. Keren would be far away.

Ayelet: And apart from that, everything would be fine?

Lior: It would be easier there to deal with whatever isn't. **(She doesn't answer)** I think you should call Meir in the morning. Tell him you're taking back what you said. In the

next class, you'll teach *Catch-22*, and at the same time you'll apply for a sabbatical. At the end of the month, you'll finish the semester. I'll finish my reserve duty. We'll leave. We'll enroll the children in schools. We'll buy an apartment. Maybe we'll even think about having another child.

Ayelet: I see you're completely on his side.

Lior: I'm on **our** side.

Ayelet: I want you to be on my side for once.

Lior: I've never been?

Ayelet: You're not trying to understand why I can't leave now. Why I insist on teaching Primo Levi. Why I expect other lecturers to do the same.

Lior: Don't you understand that if we stay here, I'll keep serving in my unit?

Ayelet: You don't have to.

Lior: If I'm called up, I won't be able to get out of it. I know myself.

Ayelet: Of course you can.

Lior: My best friends are there. They'll call me. I won't be able to say no.

Ayelet: I owe my students as much as you owe those friends.

Lior: You owe me a little more.

Ayelet: I never forget that.

Lior: So you're staying here? **(She doesn't answer)** I want an answer, Ayelet. Are you staying? **(She doesn't answer)** You must understand that if you stay, you're forcing me to leave without you.

Ayelet: Think about it a little longer. Your reserve duty ends in ten days. They won't call you up again so soon. We still have two or three months to decide.

Lior: And if they do?

Ayelet: Then leave the moment you get your orders.

Lior: Without the children? Until when?

Ayelet: Until the war is over.

Lior: You know I can't leave them.

Ayelet: **(Apprehensively)** Do you want to take them with you?

Lior: If I have no choice.

19. Noya and Itamar's apartment. Itamar enters.

Noya: Are you all right? Where were you? I called you several times.

Itamar: I was at the library.

Noya: Do you want something to eat?

Itamar: Did you see Ayelet's interview?

Noya: If she intends to teach Primo Levi in the next class, we won't allow her into the classroom.

Itamar: Wouldn't it be better to file a complaint with the university disciplinary committee?

Noya: By the time the committee meets, the course will already be over.

Itamar: But maybe it would deter other lecturers.

Noya: I see she's convinced you.

Itamar: Maybe she's right about one thing. Everyone who lives here must know what we're doing in Gaza. Don't you think?

Noya: So you're going to let her into the classroom?

- Itamar: I don't know. That's why I went to read Primo Levi's book. I wanted to understand what she found in it.
- Noya: You should have asked me first.
- Itamar: In the final paragraph, he writes: **(Opens the book and reads)** "The SS men were not monsters. They were ordinary people. Their education had damaged their ability to distinguish between good and evil..."
- Noya: What are you trying to say? That we can't distinguish between good and evil either?
- Itamar: I'm not saying it's the same thing, but...
- Noya: Our soldiers are us. Us and our friends.
- Itamar: You should read it. **(Gives her the book)**
- Noya: I read it a long time ago. Maybe we don't always distinguish between good and evil, but that doesn't mean we deliberately choose evil, as the SS did.
- Itamar: I saw things in Gaza that I couldn't make sense of.
- Noya: **(Furiously)** I know what you saw, but we can't interpret those things the way she does. That's why she's not going to teach us Primo Levi now. And if she tries, we'll stand together and block the entrance to the classroom.
- Itamar: I'm not sure I can...
- Noya: Of course you can. You know exactly what you did there. You know you're not a criminal, and you're not going to let her convince you that you are. She will never convince me that I'm a criminal, even though I was there and did what everyone else did. What all of us did. What we had to do...

20. Keren's apartment. They are partially dressed after having sex.

- Ayelet: It's not an empty threat, Keren. He's moving to New York next month.
- Keren: He'll probably insist on having the children half the time.
- Ayelet: I'm sure no court will agree to that. Neri has special needs. Daria can't be away from me even for a day.
- Keren: And will you manage without him?
- Ayelet: I'm actually a little glad he's leaving. He'll finally be able to break away from his unit. What it did in this war created a terrible distance between us. I can't even remember the last time we slept together. He doesn't even try to understand why I'm still teaching Primo Levi.
- Keren: Are you really that sure you're going to continue?
- Ayelet: Do you think I should stop?
- Keren: I don't know. Of course I support your position, but I also have to think about the department. The rector has frozen all our fellowships for next year.
- Ayelet: **(Stunned)** That can't be true. I don't believe it.
- Keren: He's trying to put pressure on me. We have five young doctoral students whose careers depend on those fellowships.
- Ayelet: What a son of a bitch. He's punishing five young doctoral students just to put pressure on you?!
- Keren: He denies it, of course, but we know the truth.
- Ayelet: He's retiring next year. Whoever replaces him will restore the fellowships.
- Keren: And what if they don't?
- Ayelet: What are you really saying?

- Keren: I'm saying I have a responsibility to these young doctoral students. So do you.
- Ayelet: So you're suggesting that I stop teaching Primo Levi?
- Keren: I want us to consider how necessary it really is. To think together about the price the department has to pay for it. Your moral position is already clear to all the students.
- Ayelet: That's exactly what Lior said to me.
- Keren: I want what's best for you, Ayelet, but I also have to do what's best for the department. I still want you to take over from me next year.
- Ayelet: Now you're trying to bribe me? Just like Meir?
- Keren: I'm trying to help you make the right decision.
- Ayelet: But if I give in, I'm accepting what's happening here now.
- Keren: Think a little further ahead. If you keep teaching here, you'll be able to make a difference in the years to come. If the rector fires you, you won't be able to make a difference here anymore.
- Ayelet: How can I make a difference if I can't teach what I want?
- Keren: You'll still make a difference, even if you don't teach everything you want. **(Moves closer and embraces her)**
I love you, Ayelet. I want us to keep working together.
- Ayelet: I suddenly feel so alone. **(Pulls away and begins to dress)**
- Keren: Can't you see that I'm with you?
- Ayelet: I can see that you're abandoning me. Just when I need you so badly.
- Keren: Wait. I'm not abandoning you. On the contrary. If you decide to go on teaching Primo Levi, I'll give you my full support. I promise. If they fire you, I'll leave the university.
- Ayelet: I don't believe you. **(Exits)**

21. Night. Ayelet and Lior's apartment. Lior enters, still in uniform, and sits down. A moment later, Ayelet enters from the hallway.

Ayelet: The children wrote you a letter before they went to sleep.
(Gives it to him. He puts it on the table) Don't you want to read it?

Lior: Where were you this afternoon?

Ayelet: At the university.

Lior: Are you sure?

Ayelet: Why are you asking?

Lior: Because I knew you wouldn't tell me the truth. **(Shows her a video on his phone)** At 2:15 you went into Keren's apartment with her. You came out at 4:05. I don't need a video to know what the two of you did in there.

Ayelet: So you didn't ask because you wanted to know where I was. You wanted to watch me lie. Who filmed this?

Lior: What difference does it make?

Ayelet: Is that what you learned to do in your unit?

Lior: You left me no choice.

Ayelet: Have you even asked yourself why I went to her?

Lior: **(Mockingly)** Because I drove you straight into her arms.

Ayelet: Yesterday you decided to move to New York without me.

Lior: Now it's perfectly clear why you don't want to come with me.

Ayelet: I went to her because I can't talk to you anymore.

Lior: You went to her so she could get you tenure at the university.

Ayelet: That's very convenient for you to believe.

- Lior: After you slept with her, I'll believe whatever I want.
- Ayelet: I went to her because I wanted to be with her. Because I hoped she would help me understand what to do now. With myself. With the university. With you.
- Lior: You've already decided what you're doing with me.
- Ayelet: You decided. When I came home today, I told myself maybe I was wrong. Maybe I judged you too harshly. Maybe I should leave everything behind and go with you after all. Now I know I wasn't wrong. We've grown so far apart that instead of talking to me, you send someone to follow me and film me.
- Lior: We've grown apart because ever since the war began, you haven't let me come near you.
- Ayelet: Because every time I try to tell you how guilty I feel about what's happening here, you hide behind your loyalty to your friends...
- Lior: **(Shouting)** So you went to her because you wanted to hear you're not guilty?! You're as guilty as everyone who lives here. Everyone who expects me to do the dirty work for them in this war. **(She is silent)** I can't forgive you anymore. I can't trust you anymore. Not even if you apologize. Not even if you regret it. Not even if you swear to me. I suggest you find a lawyer.
- Ayelet: Fine.
- Lior: I'm going to sleep at the base. I'll come by tomorrow to pick up a few things. **(Opens the children's letter and reads it)** I'm not sure we'll be able to go on a trip on Saturday.
- Ayelet: What will you tell them?
- Lior: When they're older, they'll understand. **(Exits)**

22. December 2025. Ayelet's apartment in New York. Evening.

- Ayelet: I talk to the children almost every day. They know what to tell the judge. When she hears that they want to live with me, she'll change her mind.
- Raya: She has to be convinced that you can raise them on your own.
- Ayelet: I'm sure you'll know what to tell her.
- Raya: She'll be listening to Lior too.
- Ayelet: Lior is thinking mainly about himself.
- Raya: You haven't seen them in six months. The judge thinks there may be something wrong with you.
- Ayelet: I explained to her why I can't come back to see them. She understood. I also explained who Lior really is. No child deserves to be raised by a father who played a part in what happened there during the war...
- Raya: Do you hear yourself?! If you say something like that to the judge, she'll be convinced you're using the children to punish him...
- Ayelet: It's the truth, Mom. His unit always comes before the children. Even if he lives here, the moment another war starts, he'll get on the first plane back there.
- Raya: He promised he wouldn't do any more reserve duty.
- Ayelet: I don't believe him.
- Raya: He's even willing to accept that you'll live separately from him in Israel, with a woman.
- Ayelet: **(Mockingly)** Really? He's willing? How generous of him.
- Raya: He decided not to move to New York because he became convinced it was best for the children. He really wants you to be close to them.

- Ayelet: I see the two of you have already made a deal behind my back.
- Raya: Don't you see how angry the children are with you? When you call, they hide in their rooms. In another few months, you'll lose them completely. Is that what you want?
- Ayelet: In another few months, they'll be here.
- Raya: And until then, I'll raise them for you? I'm not sure I can. My legs are swollen. I tire easily. I can barely climb the stairs.
- Ayelet: Then help me bring them here.
- Raya: How will you raise them when you're so absorbed in yourself - in your despair, in your depression? Even the book you're writing won't save you. It's taking you back to the hardest days of your life.
- Ayelet: You finally said it. You really don't believe I can raise the children on my own. Why? Because Lior submitted an assessment of my mental state to the judge? Because he told her I was sick?
- Raya: You're not sick.
- Ayelet: But you're trying to convince me that I am.
- Raya: I'm trying to help you.
- Ayelet: Why, Mom? What did I do to you? Was I such a terrible daughter? Did I shame you? Did I shame Dad?
- Raya: You didn't shame us. Quite the opposite.
- Ayelet: Tell me the truth. What are you telling my children about me?

23. June 2025. A class at the university. Ayelet is holding Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. The students' voices are heard in the background.

Student: We never said Primo Levi shouldn't be taught. We asked you to show some consideration for us at a time like this.

Student: Who are you to accuse us of war crimes?

Student: Who are you to accuse us of being indifferent to those crimes?

Student: We refuse to feel guilty.

Ayelet: I'm asking you to listen to me anyway. I'm willing to address your criticism after you've heard me. Anyone who doesn't want to take part in this discussion can leave.

Ayelet reads a passage from the book. The students react as she reads.

Ayelet: The Germans under Nazi rule clung to the illusion that not seeing meant not knowing, and that not knowing would make them less responsible for the crimes. But did those who claimed they knew nothing never speak to the railway workers who handled the transports? To the workers in the factories where Jews were tortured through forced labor? To the guards in the camps who witnessed the extermination in the gas chambers?

Student: We're not exterminating anyone in gas chambers.

Student: We're not torturing anyone through forced labor.

Ayelet: Many Germans knew a little, and a few knew everything. A great many pretended not to know. But even more chose to close their eyes, cover their ears, and above all, keep their mouths shut.

Student: We're not pretending we don't know.

Ayelet: Husbands didn't tell their wives, and parents didn't tell their sons. The concealment of the truth about the camps is one of the gravest collective charges against the Germans.

- Student: I told anyone who wanted to hear what I saw.
- Student: I demonstrate against the war every week. I've been arrested twice.
- Student: Here, anyone who wants to know can know. Anyone who wants to speak can speak.
- Student: When you compare our soldiers to the Nazis, we can't even listen to you.
- Ayelet: I'm not comparing you to the Nazis. I'm teaching this book so that you'll ask the question Primo Levi asks: What do we choose not to know about what is happening around us? **(Her voice catches)** Good literature doesn't flatter us. It's meant to open our eyes. To make us more empathetic... more capable of solidarity. A little less cruel. A little less certain that we're right...

She falls silent. The students fall silent too. After a moment, she recovers.

- Ayelet: That brings us to the end of the semester. Please prepare a summary of our discussion of Primo Levi and send it to me within two weeks. Thank you.

Ayelet turns to leave. Itamar is waiting for her at the door.

- Itamar: Can I talk to you for a moment? I'm sorry. Until now, I really was afraid to read this book. I read it yesterday. I take back all my accusations against you. I refused to admit that the army had committed war crimes because then I would have had to admit what I had done. I was there for a hundred and seventy days... After a few weeks, I was already shooting at anything that moved... Sometimes just at a man who came out of his house into the street. Once at a woman who went up to the roof to hang laundry... Once, even at children who were gathering firewood... Yes. Out of fear. Out of anger. Out of indifference. Those children still haunt me every night...
- Ayelet: You shot at children? Did anyone ask you about it?
- Itamar: No one.

Ayelet: The students need to hear you, Itamar. I think we should go back into the classroom and...

Itamar: Now?

Ayelet: They have to know this.

Itamar: I need more time. I told you because I trust you. But I don't want to hurt my friends who were there with me...

Ayelet: I understand. But if you remain silent, the students will go on saying they don't know. I'll accept your apology only when you tell them in class. We all have to ask ourselves where we were when all this was happening...

Ayelet exits. A moment later, Noya enters. She has been waiting for Itamar in the hallway.

Noya: You're leaving me to face her alone? Don't you see that she's using her power to brainwash us? On what basis? Did she present facts? Testimonies? Findings from any investigation?

Itamar: No one investigated because no one wants to know what's happening there.

Noya: That's just another rumor.

Itamar: A rumor? Did anyone investigate you? Did anyone investigate me?

Noya: Are we guilty of anything?

Itamar: I know what I did.

Noya: You think you're guilty because she convinced you.

Itamar: Until now, I've let you convince me not to think about what we did. That's why I never tried to understand what I did.

Noya: And now that you've read Primo Levi, you understand?

Itamar: At least I'm not pretending I don't know what we did.

24. Noya is being interviewed on television. Her voice is strained with emotion.

Noya: Ever since she started teaching Primo Levi, I've been looking into what she does outside the university too. A week ago, she signed a petition against the destruction of universities and hospitals in Gaza. Did anyone on our side destroy a hospital or a university just for the sake of destroying it? They were destroyed because armed men were firing at us from inside them. I saw that with my own eyes. Yesterday, she signed a petition on behalf of the children in Gaza and claimed that the army was starving them. Yes, there are hungry children there. I feel just as sorry for them as she does. But I didn't see the army starving them. On the contrary. I saw those armed men taking the food before it reached them. What does that mean? That I only see what I want to see? I can't understand her. If there's something I'm not seeing, then let her show it to me. Let her present the facts. And if she demands that students admit we're committing crimes there without presenting any evidence, then she should resign immediately. And if she won't resign, the university should fire her. And if the university won't do that, then it should be shut down...

25. An auditorium at the university. Meir stands at a microphone, opening the Rector's Honors Ceremony.

Meir: It is difficult to say "good evening" tonight. Usually, this is a joyful ceremony, where we celebrate the achievements of our outstanding students in the academic year just ended. But this year, we are in deep mourning for the twenty-one students we lost in the war, and our hearts go out to their families. At the same time, this ceremony is an opportunity to examine ourselves and the way we are confronting the challenges this war has placed before us. It is an opportunity to ask, again and again, how, despite our profound grief, we continue to think, to research, to study, and to teach. How, despite the deafening noise of political discourse, we insist that freedom of thought is essential to our existence, and that no society can develop without it. As one of the country's leading universities, we have a special responsibility to

foster freedom of thought, freedom of research, and freedom of teaching...

An agitated Ayelet bursts onto the stage, takes hold of the microphone, and addresses the students.

Ayelet: Every word the rector said about freedom of thought is a lie. He doesn't encourage freedom of thought. He punishes anyone who fights for it. This morning, he fired me because I taught a book by Primo Levi about Nazi war crimes.

Meir: That's enough, Ayelet. Stop.

Ayelet: He fired me to deny the students the right to ask whether we, too, might be committing war crimes there.

Meir: I'm asking you to stop, Ayelet. This is neither the time nor the place. Don't force me to call security.

Ayelet: This is the most important question facing us today. We can no longer ignore it.

Meir: It is indeed a very important question. But a lecturer cannot use her position to accuse students of complicity in such crimes.

Ayelet: That's another lie. I didn't accuse anyone. I tried to hold an open discussion. He's afraid that a discussion like that will bring the government's wrath down on him.

Meir: I suggest we discuss this in my office...

Ayelet: He fired me because I dared to ask whether the killing of tens of thousands of people in this war, many of them women and children, is really necessary. The university should be the first to raise that question.

Meir: Please, Ayelet...

Ayelet: He talks about freedom while forbidding us to take a moral stand...

Meir: **(Angrily)** I am not forbidding anyone to take a moral stand. On the contrary, I encourage moral debate. But you cannot use your authority to impose your position on your students.

And despite my warning, you drew a comparison in class between our soldiers and Nazi soldiers. There is no place for such a comparison here.

Keren comes onto the stage and tries to pull Ayelet away from the microphone.

Keren: Calm down, Ayelet. This isn't the way to fight this battle...

Ayelet: She also wants us to keep quiet. She gives in to his threats to cut the department's funding, and she demands that I obey him.

Keren: You're burning every bridge, Ayelet.

Ayelet: She thinks she's only cooperating with the effort to silence us, but she's also cooperating with what that silence is meant to conceal...

Meir: Turn off the microphone...

Keren: I'm not cooperating with anyone. I'm on your side. I've already appealed the decision to fire you. I want you to keep teaching here.

Ayelet: **(To the students)** And you, too. What kind of people are you? How can you go on studying as usual, as if nothing is happening there?

Keren: I'm willing to hold an open discussion in the department tomorrow. You can say anything you want. No one will silence you.

Ayelet: You're adults. Intelligent. Educated. The best of the best. You owe it to yourselves to take a stand.

Meir: Turn those speakers off already... **(The speakers go silent)**

Ayelet: **(With the last of her strength)** Now you've heard me. Now you won't be able to say you remained silent because you didn't know...

Keren manages to lead Ayelet out.

26. Ayelet and Lior's apartment. Night. Ayelet is sitting on the couch, withdrawn into herself. Lior enters.

Lior: I found an apartment. Not far from here.

Ayelet: Fine.

Lior: It's large. Fully furnished. It has two bedrooms for the children. I'll live there until the court decides what happens with them.

Ayelet: Fine.

Lior: Did you find a lawyer?

Ayelet: Yes.

Lior: I hope this takes only a week or two. **(Silence)** Until then, I want the children to stay with me.

Ayelet: Excuse me?!

Lior: You'd better not argue.

Ayelet: You'd better not argue.

Lior: In your condition, you can't take care of them.

Ayelet: I've been taking care of them since they were born.

Lior: You're going through a difficult time. You're emotionally overwhelmed. I hope it passes in a few days.

Ayelet: I'm not giving them to you.

Lior: If you insist, I'll ask the court to order a psychiatric evaluation.

Ayelet: What for?

Lior: To have you examined.

Ayelet: I feel perfectly fine. I'm much saner than you are.

Lior: Everyone who was at the rector's ceremony yesterday thinks you need to be examined.

Ayelet: You're the one who needs to be examined. You, who took part in what happened there during the war.

Lior: I'm not going to argue about that now.

Ayelet: **(Ironically)** And I need to be examined because I protested against what happened?

Lior: I want my children to grow up in a normal home.

Ayelet: You offer them a normal home?!

Lior: I'm offering them a home grounded in the reality we live in. You have no idea what kind of reality I was operating in. You don't understand why I couldn't avoid it. You also don't understand why I have to get away from here now. Instead, you fell for your department chair's promises to protect you, and when the moment came, she threw you to the wolves...

Ayelet: **(Angrily)** I didn't fall for anything. I went to her for comfort. You know exactly why. And I'm not giving you the children. You won't go near them, talk to them, or influence them.

Lior: I suggest you calm down.

Ayelet: Get out of here. Get out. Go to the apartment you found. Before I call the police.

Lior: Please don't drag the children into your battles.

Ayelet: Get out! **(She pulls out her phone)**

Lior: Give me the phone.

Ayelet: Don't touch me.

He snatches the phone from her.

Lior: That's enough, Ayelet. Look at yourself. See how easily you lose control. I'm not leaving you alone with the children tonight.

Ayelet: I'm not losing control. I'm fighting for them...

Lior: **(Grabbing her)** Come to the bedroom. Take a pill. Get into bed. Pull the covers up. Cry as much as you need to. I'll stay with you until you calm down.

Ayelet: Let go of me.

Lior: I'm not going to let you do something you'll regret later.

Ayelet: You're hurting me!

Lior: Do you want me to call an ambulance? Do you want them to hospitalize you?

She struggles with him. He holds her tightly until she stops resisting.

Ayelet: Fine. Fine. You're right. I was wrong. I was naive. I thought someone here would be willing to listen to me. Willing to think about what I'm saying. It was an illusion. No one is willing to listen. No one. I have no choice. I give up. I'll go with you to New York. I'll find a job. We'll raise the children there. I'm even willing to have another child...

Lior: It's a little late for that now. **(He leads her toward the bedroom)**

27. December 2025. Ayelet's apartment in New York.

Raya: You're alone, Ayelet. You have no one here for you. No one to help you. Back home, you'll live with me. You won't be alone for a moment. I'll help you with the children. With Lior... In a few weeks, you'll feel much better. You'll start working. You'll meet writers. Students... We'll get Dad's book published...

Ayelet: I can't, Mom. I can't live in a place where people hate me. Where they see me as an enemy. I'll bring my children here. They'll grow up here. Go to school here... Little by little,

we'll learn to live with what happened to us there... And maybe it will still be easier for us here... easier than it was there... At least, I hope so... **(She bursts into tears)**
I want my children, Mom. I want my children...

Raya embraces her. Ayelet continues to cry. Blackout.

END