

Lola

I was already awake for some time when the phone started singing its delicate morning air, because of many things including the lost invoice. You should get up, Doty murmured, and after two minutes added, she's coming today.

I said nothing and lay still for a while longer. In any case he'll call ten minutes in advance. But after three more minutes I got up and put on the farm shorts and a long T-shirt because it's still a bit cold. As I brushed my teeth the call came.

- Micah? Where are you?
- Ten minutes.
- Excellent. I'll be waiting on the road.

Standing with the shorts and the home slippers on the road's asphalt, all sticky from the rotting ficus fruits, under the huge trees that don't give shadow since there's no sun yet. Stomping ~~with the feet~~ since it is really a bit cold. Here are his lights quivering heavily from the turn of the main road. I wave and start walking, indicating the gravel track he should turn into although **its almost twenty years that he's coming**, spring and fall, to fill the little fertilization tank. Between the old chicken coops he stops and descends from his lofty **cabin**, the everpresent twig stuck between his teeth. Shaking hands, he raises his eyes to the half dead Tipa trees and as always **says**

- Can't pass here.
- So how do you pass every time?

He climbs back to the driver seat and engages reverse. The back projectors turn on and the terrible hootings start. The tanker reverses slowly until it nearly touches the small black plastic tank. He pulls **from the innards of the truck the vulgar helical hose** as I pull off the tank cover and knock it several times on the metal cage to rid it of the leaves and birdshit accumulated since last September. The pump begins fermenting and a stream of oily murky liquid floods the tank.

Sign here, Micah says and hands me from his majestic seat three copies of the invoice. I scan him carefully, from the top of his bald head down to his light blue flip-flops, and say, one minute. I walk to the cooled storeroom and bring him a bottle of wine.

- Here, I say.

I return home ~~from the other side and~~ climb the stairs gingerly, but she's already awake, inspecting the phone.

- Will you make some coffee?
- Mmm.

Sitting with the coffee and the paper and the radio and some granola with yoghurt and banana, she says

- When is she supposed to come?
- She said ten.
- OK so before eleven there'll be nothing.

At ten twenty I go out to throw the garbage bag but the green plastic bin near the main water valve, the one that's supposedly ours, is full – someone coveted it **to throw their own garbage into**, something that's totally unacceptable here. I stand there weighing my next steps while ~~towards me comes~~ Izzy the neighbor, waddling as a **duck**. **Hi neighbor, he said**, and I say, hey Izzy, what do you say about that, about what, says Izzy and I open the bin lid and say, look. Ah, says Izzy, it must be

Bielokomirsky, they had an event last night. Event? What event? Anna aaref¹ what event, he says, maybe his daughter came back from Australia, or his son is out of the army, or his brother in law out of prison, something. Go across and throw it in Kellers' bin. I hobbled across in my home slippers on the asphalt, all gluey from the disgusting mash of the ficus figlets. I threw the plastic bag into Kellers' bin and went back to the valve, standing near a large fan of Quill leaves. Izzy didn't show any signs of hurry. So? Today she's coming, ha? Yes, today, I said. When? He asked. Should have been here already, I said, but... you know... Yeah, sure, said Izzy and twitched his lips. It's hard to believe that this overgrown, meaty man, whose face looks like a porch of an old house, with the huge chin and the nearly shut eyes, the warty forehead with the complexion of old rusty iron, with legs that can barely carry him, hard to believe that once he was the handsomest guy in the region, and that in the folk dances they once had where the community center stands now every eye was on him, including, according to gossip, Lola's.

Would you like me to call you when she arrives? I asked, and Izzy made an unclear motion with his head, shut completely his eyes which were almost totally shut even before and stubbornly shook his massive chin left and right. Okay, I said. I meant to go back home when a gray Volvo stopped next to us. Inside was Malka, the neighbor from the end of the road below who was for many years important in some government institute that no-one wanted to know about. Seeing the two neighbors standing by the dustbin she stopped the car and lowered the driver's window. What, don't you have anything to do? She shrieked. Her voice sounded like a tin hyena in pain. She had a twin sister in the moshav, five farms further to the left, who had the exact same voice. I prepared an appropriate answer but Izzy was faster: Hey Malka, he said simply, and Malka, who took to her heart that perhaps something indeed was happening to which she is not a partner, said in a different voice, what, Izzy, anything happened? Izzy pouted a bit his lips and said, no, nothing, except that... his voice dwindled and I had no choice but to finish: Lola. What Lola, asked Malka, now with panic in her voice, and I had no choice but to continue: maybe she's coming. Lola? Screamed Malka with a voice even more horrible, Lola Priester? We said nothing, what could we say, and she continued, Why, does she want the house back? What did she come for? What house, mumbled Izzy, and I added decisively, what house, we bought it 100% legally, it's ours, and to avoid further talk I added: she's just homesick. Khhhh homesick, shrieked Malka, looking at me as though I'm someone who has reached some limit he'll never be able to cross. She switched her gaze to Izzy and said to him, what, what does she want here, isn't it enough her mother and her father and her sister and all that, now you let her return here, really –

After a minute she switched the engine off and pushed her head and shoulders out through the window. I know you know, she tried with her friendliest voice, now talking to me, you know that....

- Her father was a Nazi and her mother a whore.
- Phooey the way you talk, but you are not much mistaken.
- I know, I said.

For some years after we bought the place people kept arriving at the house, walking around, staring, sometimes even daring to knock on the door and ask, where's Rosina, where's Lola, where's Katrina, Martin... someone once came and said, he had a Mercedes, he had a Mercedes, a black Mercedes, where's the Mercedes? I didn't know where the Mercedes was. At the time we bought the farm the place was a wreck, surrounded by a forest of overgrown Guava trees. Martin was dead, there was no Mercedes, and Katrina was demented, shut away in a geriatric ward. There were rumors about Rosina and Lola was the one we dealt with, but her too we never saw. We only met Shlomo the lawyer once or twice, in his office in Tel Aviv. There were ficus trees there too, but not as huge as these ones.

¹ I don't know (Arabic)

From time to time, started Izzy, he would drink, and then start with his songs.

- Songs? I asked.

Yes, he said, these songs they had from the war, from the army. The German army. And then old **mr.** Weiss, well he wasn't that old then, he would come over and ask him to stop, would sit with him, calm him down, it would give his wife attacks.

Old **mr.** Weiss died before we came, and his wife, **mrs.** Weiss, **is** locked in her house for ten years now. We saw her face only once when she came out to shout at us that our building trucks throw dust.

~~By now~~ our event formalized. Yanki from across hurried to join, holding in his hands a tiny bright-eyed baby, his newest grand-daughter. What's happening, what's happening, he peeped, but no-one answered, and so he just stood and listened. It didn't take him long to figure out. What, she's coming? He asked incredulously, and after getting no response he said, when? and still not getting any response, but after about two minutes of silence, since no-one knew how to continue, Malka turned to him (it wasn't easy since he stood on the other side and so she had no choice but to open the car door, free the safety belt and physically get out of the car) and said, soon, in a minute she's supposed to come.

- Don't hold your breath, I said.
- Yehoshua? From the filling machines? **Said** Yanki.
- Yes, I said, the one who's half... that walks like that... with the dog...
- Exactly. He was miserably in love with her. Almost killed himself.
- Who, Lola?
- Yes, Lola. After a moment he added: they were in parallel classes.

Everyone did yes, yes with the head and Izzy **added**

- I think he still didn't get over her.

Wait, wait, said Yanki, who was determined to make the most out of any given moment. He hurried back home and was immediately back with a photo album in his right hand and the baby in the left, hold her a minute, he said to Izzy and passed him the baby. Izzy held her in one hand and she studied ~~intently~~ his warty face.

Wait, wait, he said again, turning the album pages. A second! A second! **Screeched** Malka who pushed behind him to look over his shoulder. Where is that? It's right here **exactly** where we are standing, he said. Can I see? I asked. In the picture there was a small agency house, standing on pillars, in the middle of nothing. In front of it were a few young plants and a small child about five years old standing next to one of them. The plants were a bit shorter than her. It's Tzilli, cried Malka, Tzilli, I can't believe it.... Indeed it was difficult to imagine. The large weird house we bought a few years ago apparently started out as a small shack standing on flimsy pillars, and the enormous ficus trees we are now standing under were little plants then, smaller than a ~~small~~ child. They may have been planted the same day the picture was taken, or a few weeks before. Wait, wait, said Yanki and continued turning the pages. The years apparently advanced since the photographs that initially were black and white, small, and with fashionably serrated edges, became large, colorful, and straight-edged. Here, he said proudly and showed everyone the picture: a girl, or perhaps a young woman, with a short skirt, her face smiling with something between gaiety and insolence, straight blond hair down ~~to somewhat~~ below the shoulders, a tiny shirt unable to hold the luxurious abundance and exposing a nice piece of tanned tummy. A dark shadow between the tummy and the shirt seemed to invite **you**, come, stick your hand, right here. It was difficult to stop looking at the picture, so attractive was the girl.

- I can understand him, I said.
- Who? **Pretended** Yanki.
- Yehoshua, who else, I said.

From down the road came a rattle and when we turned **we** saw the egg collecting tractor approaching, carrying behind it the big dirty wagon covered with the blue tarpaulin.

- Oh no, said Malka.
- Why? I asked.

No-one said anything, and when I looked around I saw Izzy making a face. I stepped towards him and he whispered in my ear:

- Her mother? Katrina?
- Yes? I said.
- She was a kapo of his mother, there.
- Whose mother?
- Pini's mother.
- Who is Pini?
- The one with the egg tractor.

I tried to internalize this latest piece of information, but it was too much for me.

The tractor moved closer, on the driver seat was a youngish guy, about thirty or a bit less.

- It's Segev, muttered Izzy, the grandchild.

Segev maneuvered around Malka's Volvo but after a minute changed his mind, stopped the tractor and dismounted. Behind the wagon, from within the blue tarpaulin, someone was peeking: the miserable laborer of the central egg depot, holding ~~tightly~~ the railings so as not to fall down from the flimsy wagon when it hops on the countless bumps that were installed in our county's roads, supposedly to encourage safe driving.

- What's happening, said Segev, somebody died?
- No, we're just... said Yanki, waiting...
- Waiting for what?
- Do you know ~~who is~~ Lola? Yanki asked after a while, and Malka said, Yanki, really...
- No, who is she?

No-one answered, and he scanned our faces one by one, trying to understand what's going on. Again I had no choice.

- Lola, she used to live here once, I said, and she sold us the farm, some years ago, **it** was her parents'.
- Ah, said Segev with disinterest, Okay. He climbed back to the tractor and turned the engine on. But after a moment he turned it off again and said, ~~he~~, whatshisname, her father?
- Martin, said Malka. Martin Priester. ~~What about him?~~
- He had all kinds of...
- Yes, said Malka, he had another wife, a Yemenite. She used to live in that moshav in the south, Azrikam² ...
- What Azrikam, said Izzy furiously and gave the baby back to Yanki. Where did you invent this Azrikam from, he said decisively, waving his hand in the air, **Yoshavia³**, that's where she was. **Was like a second home to him, like. But no children, only the woman.**
- Yemenite? **Asked** Segev.
- Yemenite, Yanki and Malka said almost together.

² (literally:) my help (God) gets up

³ (literally:) God will set me down

Now old **mr.** Gruber walked towards us, from the farm opposite Weiss, wearing his brown **suite.**

- Which Yemenite? Asked **mr.** Gruber.
- Nu, that one, of Priester, peeped Yanki with his thin voice.
- Ah, said **mr.** Gruber. After a moment he added, he also had a Mercedes.
- Okay, so what are you waiting for, asked Segev.
- Not waiting, what waiting, Izzy waved his hand dismissively. Why should we wait here, for what?

The laborer from the central egg depot began to point to a watch that he might have had on his hand and Segev finally started walking towards the tractor, when from below appeared an unrecognized red car. Everyone turned their heads in silence, but immediately after the playground it turned to Founders' road.

Segev mounted the tractor and started the engine, and after fifty meters turned into Hochboim's farm.

- Rosina, her other daughter? said Malka after some pondering. She was also a whore.
- They had parties here, contributed **mr.** Gruber. Here, you see? He pointed to a little ditch on the corner of the yard. They had like a schwimmbad, he made, you understand what I'm telling you?
- A swimming pool ~~he made~~, screamed Malka, they would swim here, naked.
- We would come to peek, said Yanki, through the hedge.
- They would barbecue, here on the porch, said Izzy and pointed to where there used to be a weird hole in the roof with rusty grate that we hurried to remove and fix immediately after the deal was signed.

From the main road now turned a white car.

- Who is this, the Zimmerman lady? Asked Malka
- No, she has a Kia, said Yanki.

But after a moment the car turned into the Stoler farm.

We continued standing there a few more minutes. The tractor with the eggs now returned and continued until it disappeared behind the turn, the miserable laborer barely holding on to the wagon's railings.

- Eleven and a quarter, I said.
- Oh no, screamed Malka with a voice more terrible than **ever, went** to her car and drove away.

Everyone went their way. I went back home.

- Nu, what's with that Lola? **Asked** Doty.
- Anna aaref, I said, apparently she's not going to show up.
- Shall I make more coffee?
- Sure, I said. And after a moment I added, Pini? From the egg tractor?
- Yes, what about him?
- Mrs. Priester, Katrina?
- Yes?
- She was a kapo of his mother, there.

After that there really was nothing else to say. Doty went to do some shopping and I went back upstairs, to look for the missing invoice.