

Highway Number Five

By

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Chapter 1: Waking Up

In order to reach the concert hall in time, Uri parked his car in a no-parking zone. He was ready to risk a fine and even, God forbid, having his car towed away—anything to avoid being late for a concert conducted by Bruno Walter. When will he have another opportunity to listen to such a genius? This was indeed a special occasion for which parking illegally was worthwhile.

When Uri reached the entrance to the concert hall, there were no more lines, and only a few stragglers were making their way into the hall, passing expressionless ushers. When he entered the lobby, Uri hastened his steps lest he miss the enchanted moment when the maestro enters the stage, waves his baton, hushes the murmuring audience and lights up within them the fire of heavenly music. But right next to the entrance door, who's standing in his way—but Nathan. Fat Nathan. Nathan from elementary school. Nathan from junior high. Nathan from high school. Nathan from the paratroopers. Fat Nathan. Fatso. Uri immediately identified Nathan, in spite of the fact that he had not seen him for many years. He recognized him by the shirttail that habitually escaped his belly-tightening belt and by the dirty handkerchief with which he compulsively wiped both his nose and sweating forehead. Uri noticed that Nathan has put on even more weight since he last saw him, and Uri tried, in vain, to guess his width. "Hi, Uri," said Nathan, "How are things? Haven't seen you for ages. Where have you been hiding yourself all these years?"

Uri: "Everything is O.K. Excuse me, but I'm in a hurry to make the concert on time."

Nathan: "Me too, me too, but first tell me something about yourself. What are you doing with yourself these days?"

Uri: "During the intermission...I'm in a hurry to the concert."

Nathan: "You are in a hurry? And what about me? Don't you think that I, too, am in a hurry? And everybody else? Doesn't everyone hurry to the concert? Listen to this guy!"

Uri: "But I'm already late..."

Nathan: "O.K., O.K., no need to get all bent out of shape."

Uri: "I'm not...but let me enter the hall."

Nathan: "A minute and I'll let you pass...but first you must tell me where the hell you disappeared to these last years?"

Uri: "Let me go, Nathan...let me enter...The doors are about to close."

Nathan: "One more second and I'll let you enter, but before that you owe me an explanation..."

Suddenly, Fat Nathan's voice acquires a menacing undertone:

Nathan: "Why don't we see you around..."

Uri: "During the intermission...during the intermission...I'll explain everything during the intermission...I'll explain everything during the intermission. Now, do me a favor, in the name of our friendship, let me enter."

Nathan's face is transforming. Nathan the fat one is replaced by a frightening, hateful, and vindictive Nathan. And Uri watches with horror how, in front of his eyes, Fat Nathan gets fatter, and his body expands to cover the whole entrance door, entirely blocking Uri's entrance to the hall.

Nathan: "So it boils down to this! I'm not good enough for you! It's beneath you to talk with me!"

Uri: "Are you mad? I'm simply in a hurry to the concert...to listen to Bruno Walter."

Nathan: "Shruno Shmalter! Big deal! You are too important to have a schmooze with ordinary people like me...I'm not important enough for you...true, I'm not one of your distinguished lawyers...I'm simply Nathan, Fat Nathan...Distinguished lawyers like you spit on people like me...you don't feel like talking to me...what do you know? Uri the Great One! Uri the lawyer! Uri the musicologist wouldn't find the time to speak to Fat Nathan."

Now, Nathan's full weight totally blocks the entrance and prevents Uri from making his way into the hall. Uri helplessly watches the latecomers rushing inside through other doors before these close and Bruno Walter steps up to the podium. Uri, in a last desperate attempt: "Nathan, I simply beg you to let me pass...let me enter...we'll talk during the intermission...please...please...please..."

But Nathan does not relent:

"I spit on you musicologists who are not ready to speak to ordinary people....I spit on you distinguished advocates...I spit on you, Uri, I spit on you!"

And indeed Uri watches how Nathan is ready to carry out his threat. He decides to ditch the battlefield and run away from Spitting Nathan to the faraway door, which is still open; but when he breathlessly reaches the door, it is slowly, but resolutely, being closed in front of him. The concert is about to begin. The door is closed by a young, pretty, tightly uniformed usherette.

Uri: "Do me a favor...let me go in...I came especially from out of town...I was delayed in the lobby...I must go in...I cannot miss Bruno Walter...I'll go mad if I do not hear him."

But the usherette now locks the door and stands erect between it and Uri, mumbling incomprehensibly. When she opens up her mouth, Uri understands why she mumbles: there are no teeth in her mouth. Through her naked gums, she utters her meaningless sounds: "*Mo, mo, mou, mammom, memom.*" Through the locked door, Uri hears the applause: Bruno Walter must have already gone on stage, while Uri is helplessly stuck outside with the toothless usherette... He begins to shout. If they won't let him in, he will raise such hell that nobody inside will be able to listen to the music. He shrieks: "Let me in... I came on time, but they would not me in!" The usherette, too, raises the volume of her mutterings: "*Mo! Mo! Mou mammom memem!*" Uri cries out loudly. Bruno Walter probably hears him. The usherette responds toothlessly, and the meaning of her sounds is clear: "No, no, you cannot enter. You cannot pass here. Go to hell." Her face reddens with anger, and her pupils shrink until they become narrow slits. Uri shouts in front of the locked door. In vain.

From afar, a spiral of small lights moves towards Uri's face, and when it is about to touch him, Uri opens up his eyes. Inside he still shouts, but outside it's daylight. In the hall, the orchestra begins to play the *Rosamunde* overture, but the room is already flooded by the early morning sunlight. His heart still beats angrily—"How dare he! I'll show him! I'll beat Fat Nathan until his bones break!"—but his gaze discovers Ruth's sleeping face beside him. He closes his eyes, but the concert hall, Bruno Walter, Fat Nathan, and the toothless usherette have all vanished. Only their memory is left tam-tamming in his temples. Now that he is completely awake, Uri rubs his eyes. Now he knows for certain: Bruno Walter has never been in Israel. He had died in 1962, a year before Uri was born. Grandpa

Heinrich had heard him before he immigrated to Palestine, but Uri, who was born in Israel, has never heard the maestro. How good it is, ponders Uri, to leave nightmares and enter the real world, but in his waking mind a new realization takes root: he is late—late for an important meeting.

A quick look at his watch confirms this: it's not the habitual 6:15 but nearly seven. Almost seven! And at 8:15 starts the meeting with Shumacher and Partners in the industrial park out of town. Almost seven! So late! And all because of Gershon! All because of last night's scene with his son, which forced him to take, against his doctor's orders, a sleeping pill. The good doctor does not realize that an evening with Gershon induces total sleeplessness, and a sleepless night after a heart-pounding conversation with his son is a disastrous combination. And now, he has to sprint out of bed quietly so that Ruth, his wife, who obviously also had a Gershonized night, will not wake up.

Uri has a routine for a late wake-up morning. He straps on his Rolex, which his wife bought him for his fortieth birthday, and rushes from bed straight to the bathroom. There, he relieves himself while brushing his teeth. While sitting on the toilet, he sprinkles cold water on his face—a substitute for washing up. He will shave with his electric razor in the car, where he will put on his tie. He will button his shirt in the kitchen and zip his fly while waiting for the water in the kettle to boil. In spite of the late hour, he cannot face the day without a cup of coffee. He inserts a slice of bread into the toaster and puts on the laceless shoes which he bought especially to save time. While the kettle is on, he brings in the newspaper from the front door, despite the advancing clock arms—Dear God! It's already seven-fifteen!—he casts a glance at the headlines: five rockets landing again in the northern Negev from the Gaza Strip. No casualties. He will listen to the rest on his car radio. There is no chance that will make the meeting on time. Should he call Edna, his secretary? Should she tell Shumacher and Partners the usual tale about him being late and ask them to start the meeting without him? No, that can't be done. It was Uri who drafted the merger contract and without him, there would be no meeting. And besides, Edna doesn't reach the office before 7:30. No. He will call her from the car. These cell phones. A blessing. What would he have done without them? Without the fax machines? Without the computer? Without the Internet? How did people function without all these gadgets? He

gulps down the coffee, bites unwillingly into the butterless toast ("Butter will not enter this household," decreed Ruth) when the phone rings:

"Hello, good morning, sorry for calling you so early."

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Am I speaking to Uri Manoss?"

"Yes."

"Good morning, Uri. How are you?"

"Who are you? What do you want from me?"

"Uri, you probably need, at this early hour, a newspaper that will bring you good news, news that will make your day, Uri, and not destroy your day. We offer a half-price subscription to *GoodNewsday*—the newspaper that brings you only optimistic news, and in addition to this subscription, Uri, you will get our *Good Comics* magazine, with which your children will rejoice, and, Uri, if you have no children but have a wife, we offer her, for free, the book *How to Look Good in the Morning*, which gives your wife totally free advice on how to look beautiful even in the morning, beautiful for you, Uri, only for you..."

"And what if I have neither children nor wife, and I am a 75-year-old loner who lives alone in a stifling room?"

"For oldies like you, we have another offer: a full-year subscription to the monthly *Young at Heart*, which teaches you to die young at any age."

"Tell me honestly. Is this a joke? A spoof? Are you speaking to me from some damned radio station? And all your listeners are splitting their sides hearing you pulling my leg?"

"No, no, Uri. We have a genuine offer specially tailored for people like you. Instead of reading the daily sickening garbage, we suggest that you start reading *GoodNewsday*, the optimistic daily, the lit half of the sun, the half-full glass, the noble aspect of our life..."

"Are you mad? Tell me, are you totally mad? You phone me at 7 o'clock in the morning, wake me up, wake up my wife and son. For what? To sell me your shitty paper?"

"There's no need to use foul language at this early hour."

"At this early hour, I want to tell you only one thing: Fuck you and fuck your newspaper..."

"Uri, allow me to tell you: your aggressive vulgarity only proves how much you are in need of *GoodNewsday*, Uri."

"Go to hell with your Uri! You and all your phone calls. What gives you the right to intrude on my privacy with all your trash sales talk?"

Uri raises his voice uncustomarily.

"Who are you mad at?" Ruth calls drowsily from the bedroom.

Uri hangs up the phone and hollers in the direction of the bedroom: "It's nothing. Just these morons with their sales talk."

And his wife, still dormant, retorts: "So early in the morning? They must be insane."

Uri gulps down his tepid coffee, asks himself whether this was an authentic moronic sales pitch or whether it was one of the live radio shows *Pull a Leg*, in which innocent citizens are teased and exposed to ridicule to the delight of snickering listeners.

Now he leaves everything—the half-drunk coffee, the half-eaten butterless toast, the newspaper with the half-read headline—he exits without slamming the door, so that Ruth can go back to sleep—Gershon sleeps regardless of noise—and gallops downstairs, still upset by his aggressive reaction to the moronic phone call.

Chapter 2: Starting the Car

Uri walks briskly to his new Volvo, which waits for him across the street, shining in its metallic cream color. The car is his refuge. Inside it, he is protected from life's vagaries. He purchased it less than a year ago, so it still has the new-car smell—its upholstery emitting a leathery whiff of success. Uri is proud of his new car, with its six cylinders, 22 horsepower, and 2,521 CC engine.

In the car, he will be able to relax and have time to call Edna; put on his tie; shave with the electric razor; sprinkle Hermés aftershave, which Ruth bought on their last visit to Paris, and calm down from the moronic phone talk and his aggressive reaction. He inserts the key, and the siren-immobilizer starts. He hits the immobilizer's secret code on its keys: this combination of numbers will neutralize the alarm system and enable him to start the car. He hits 2-4-3-2 and waits for the reassuring buzz signifying that the alarm is off. But for some reason, there is no buzz, and in its stead, an ominous silence descends upon the Volvo. The silence ends in an ear-splitting siren that emanates from the car's entrails. It begins with a short wail but ends with a continuous shriek accompanied by the Volvo's powerful horns. A symphony of decibels.

The street is still numb with early morning lethargy, and the car's shrieks invades the calmness. Uri repeats the magic formula: 2-4-3-4. No use. The siren continues screaming, aiming at the adjacent balconies. A window is opened. A shutter moved. Somebody shouts at him: silence! Suddenly, a respite. No alarm. But Uri knows that this is temporary relief. The siren will resume in a few seconds. He must have punched the wrong numbers. He must have forgotten the true code. He tries again. Another combination. 2-3-2-4. In vain: 2-4-3-4. No reassuring buzz. Last attempt: same combination but backwards: 4-3-2-4. The siren is about to burst his ear drums.

What should he do? He simply forgot the immobilizer's secret code. Uri remembers: the number is written down in his office. He rings them up and gets the digital voicemail system: "Press one for Mr. Manoss," etc. Who needs all these digital playthings? Who needs the voicemail? The digital immobilizer? Life was simpler and more wholesome without all these damned inventions. Finally, he gets Edna on the phone—loyal, efficient Edna. She calms him down: Yes, she will tell Shumacher and Partners about the delay, and he will understand that these things do happen. Especially nowadays with the congested roads. No, no trouble

at all. The secret code? How could he forget it? So simple and easy to remember: 1-2-3-3. That's why she chose it. An unforgettable code.

Uri hastens to punch the code. The secret formula works! The reassuring, approving, redeeming buzz is heard. The alarm is off. He can start his car. He can relax in his leather-upholstered seat, shift into drive and feel the legendary comfort of the Volvo and its quiet journey to the industrial park. While driving, he notices that despite the palpable absence of butter from their fridge and despite the sugar-free jam, the distance between his paunch and the suede-covered steering wheel is constantly becoming shorter. He must go back to the gym and also resume using his training machine, which is gathering dust in the bedroom corner.

Now he is heading for the main road, and despite the fact that he is going to be late for the meeting, a certain peace of mind descends on him. He recalls the moronic conversation. *GoodNewsday*, indeed! Was his foul language broadcast on the radio? Did anybody listen? Did they identify him? They surely did as he confirmed his name to the wretched female voice. If this was truly part of a radio show, his name will be mud tomorrow throughout Tel Aviv. The District Court judge in tomorrow's case will say nothing, but his face will express his disdain. And the girls in the office will stop their giggling only when he enters their room. He phones his loyal secretary:

"Edna, darling...yes, yes, everything is O.K. now. Thanks. What would I do without you? Edna, dear, did you been listen to the radio this morning, fifteen minutes ago? Yes? You did not hear my voice, by any chance? No...no...it was supposed to be a joke...One of those inane shows. You know the trick. They call someone on the phone, drive him into a frenzy, he starts losing his nerve, curses everybody, and then they broadcast it in order to increase their damned ratings. No, I'm not it sure was broadcast, but they really have the nerve to phone me that early in the morning and drive me up the wall. No, don't call all the radio stations. It will antagonize them. If there was a broadcast, I'll definitely hear about it. Did you call Shumacher and partners? Did you apologize on my behalf? I'm on my way there. I won't be too late."

If this was really a radio show, he will sue them for breach of privacy. Since when can they invade his home through the phone without his consent? He will raise the issue at the next meeting of the Bar Association. The law ought to be changed, and the rule against trespassing should be extended to phone calls.

What is the difference between the two kinds of invasions of privacy? One should be permitted to phone someone else only when it's reasonable to assume that the call is welcome. There is no right to harass people on the phone and certainly not to broadcast their reactions to the whole world. And without his permission, too! This is really scandalous! What the media are allowed to do nowadays! This is really beyond the pale. But, on the other hand, this may have been an ordinary sales call. Perhaps there is a *GoodNewsday*. God knows that these telemarketers are legion. Almost every other phone call is a commercial one. And the sweetish voice repeatedly uttering the name Uri is typical of the saccharine tones adopted by these salesgirls. If so, he does not regret his outburst. This, too, ought to be stopped by law. The telephone must remain part of the private domain: "My telephone is my castle."

But what if his curses were broadcast far and wide? What if his friends heard him lose his temper in such a stupid way? No, no, says Uri to himself, I won't think of this anymore. And then another thought creeps in: how could he forget the immobilizer's code? How could he forget such an easy-to-remember number that Edna picked for him? He has been punching this code for over a year, and all of a sudden, it has been removed from his memory. How could he punch a number totally unrelated to the real one? Is something serious going on inside his brain? Is there room for anxiety? Is he undergoing the same thing that happened to his friend David six months ago? He tries to examine himself, attempting to find out whether his loss of memory is a one-off affair or whether he is following in David's footsteps. He checks up his memory: the secret code of his apartment's alarm is 9-6-9-5. Yes, that's clear. His user's name in the computer is uri-m and his password he never knew. He knows by heart the number of his identity card as well as the code number for receiving messages on his voicemail service. He remembers the code for opening up the locker at his gym: 1-3-5-7. He even recalls the code for accessing online the results of his blood and urine tests. On his cell phone, he can access unanswered messages by hitting the numbers 6-6-9-8...wait a minute, he says to himself, I can test my memory right now. He dials the remembered code, and the digital voice tells him he's got two new messages. Hoorah! He dials and hears the messages. He remembers! He remembers! The first message comes in: a metallic voice offers him a personally unique ring tone for his cell phone, which would be his and his alone and would distinguish him from all other ringtones. Uri emits another curse and listens to the second message, in

which Shumacher's secretary announces in her sterilizing voice: "Mr. Manoss, please do not, I repeat, do not forget this morning's meeting at our office. Try and be punctual this time."

Well, his memory is not affected. He is not following in David's footsteps. He remembers all the abbreviated and code numbers. He just forgot the immobilizer's secret code and remembers everything else. And he forgot that damned number only because of last night's conversation with Gershon. The conversation deleted part of his hard disk. No wonder. Or perhaps it was the sleeping pill. Or the nightmare which by now he has totally forgotten? Anyway, his case is not similar to David's.

He cannot forget how David slid into his present state. They were both sitting in a café on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street, sipping their cappuccinos, planning their next skiing vacation in Switzerland. David started phoning his wife to make sure the dates were suitable for her. He started dialing on his cell phone, when after three digits he stopped and looked helplessly at Uri: "You won't believe it, Uri, but I can't remember my wife's office telephone number." Uri took the phone, rang David's wife, and handed over the phone to his friend. "Hello, good morning. David speaking. I'd like to talk to my wife. What do you mean who's my wife? Who are you? Are you new in the office? Don't you know me? You don't recognize my voice? You don't know my wife? Well, I'd like to talk to...talk to...to..." David covered the phone with his hands, stared blankly at Uri and whispered: "Uri, I don't remember my wife's name...I don't remember...don't remember..." Uri took the phone and spoke to David's wife: "Hi, this is Uri Manoss. How're you. Fine. Excellent. Yes, you are right: we ought to meet more often. I'm sitting here with David, and I suggest that you leave the office and go home. I'll bring David home. No, nothing serious. Not to worry. But there is something that may need urgent treatment."

In the emergency ward, they kept transferring David from one place to another until finally the doctor came out and said that David's brain tumor must be operated on urgently. So that's it, thought Uri, from one day to another a man discovers that he has brain cancer. Without any warning. Just like that.

The operation was a success and the tumor fully removed, but David remained a cripple and lost his capacity to speak. In the beginning, the doctors reassured them that this was just a temporary; that the speech will come back and the body, after proper rehabilitation, would function normally. David went

through every conceivable type of therapy, but all these did not restore his speech or capacity to walk. Finally, David was able to utter the consonant G, and sitting in his wheelchair, he would utter a string of meaningless Gs at his bewildered wife and friend. The doctors were optimistic: just as he has learnt one consonant, so he would be able to utter them all. Gradually. Slowly. But time passed and this did not happen. David was stuck with his G-sounds, gaga-ing all day long at despondent visitors. The other consonants failed to appear.

Uri remembers how he sat for long hours facing his friend, with whom all contact was being extinguished. One day he discovered something: the goo-goo sounds were not uniform. There was an intonation. There were vowels. Occasionally, even a question mark was heard: goo-goo? Was there a secret language, a secret content behind these gooings-on? Was there an undeciphered code, which, once discovered, would enable communication with David? Uri noticed that David started his G-tirade not with a simple gaga-ing, but with a specific muttering: *Googie, googi*. And occasionally, he would say: *gego googi*. Uri listened again to this hidden pattern until one sleepless night, he found its meaning: Googi is Uri and "*gego, Googi*" is "hello, Uri"—in the G-language, the only language available to David. The next day, when David welcomed him with a "*gego, Googi*," Uri answered back: "Hello, David." But David's face shrank with anger and disappointment. He sat there in his wheelchair, glassily staring at Uri, a stream of uncontrolled G-sounds pouring from his mouth. Uri figured out that perhaps the same malfunction that prevents David from pronouncing non-G consonants also prevents him from understanding any non-G sounds. The next day, he tried out this theory and responded to David's G-greeting by uttering: "*Gego, Gagig*." After a few seconds of silence, Uri noticed a flash of appreciation behind the glassy eyes. And then came the acknowledgement: "*Gag gou, Googi, gag gou gegy gug*."

Uri, overcome with emotion, hugged his friend and whispered in his ear: *ga gag gou*. Was it only in his imagination that he saw tears in David's eyes? In his throat, too, the tears were climbing upwards. He felt victorious. He, and he alone, established contact with David.

Thus, Uri began googooing with David in his secret language—first by simple phrases about the weather—"Gig gog gogay"—and then, slowly, he moved to more compound sentences. Finally, Uri had full knowledge of the G-language and was even capable of "translating" news items from the

newspapers to David. True, it was not easy. Each G-sound could have so many meanings, but gradually Uri learned though intonation and context to decipher and pronounce an impressive range of words—sufficient to carry out a meaningful conversation.

But if Uri is going to lose his memory now, what would happen to their duets in G? If Uri will have to undergo the same operation as David, who will converse with David? Or with him—with Uri? And what will happen if he, Uri, starts mumbling not in the G-language but, like a lamb, in the moo-moo speech? What a disaster! What a catastrophe! Each one uttering his mono-consonant language without touching base!

But when Uri went through the first intersection, he calmed down and reassured himself once more that the memory loss of the immobilizer's code was only a temporary bug, a temporary bug implanted by the Gershon virus. Yes, yes, Gershon is to blame for everything.

Does Gershon do it on purpose? Is this simply another case of a rebel without a cause? Or is there, behind his outbursts, a layer of frustration for which they, his parents, are responsible? The school advisor told them that this question was unimportant: "Your son has got something that he would like to throw in your faces, and he does not care what happens to him. In this sense, he is like a suicide bomber. Let him talk. Let him run wild. Do not react. Any reaction on your part only ignites and motivates him to become more aggressive. What should you do? Simply wait until it all blows over, and he will take that something with he has inside him to the army—there all will fade away and vanish. There, he will have a natural outlet for his aggressiveness. There's no point in trying to spar with him. Or to go to a shrink. There is nothing that needs treatment. We are dealing with a common and rife phenomenon. And don't worry too much. Everything will be all right soon."

The phenomenon might be common, but the results are monstrous. The conversation last night started calmly enough: something about a movie he saw. "Cool and riveting, but not suitable for you. Too much sex and violence." But soon he reverted to familiar patterns: "And something else. If the principal calls, you should know I have not been to school for two weeks—from the beginning of the school year."

"Two weeks?"

"Yes, two weeks. From the beginning of the school year."

"And what do you do all day long?"

"I go to the beach with Naomi."

"And when, pray tell, do you intend to go back to school?"

"I ain't going back to no damn school."

"And why not, may we ask?"

"It's a fucked-up high school. A shitty school. A filthy school. Full of maniacs. The principal is a pedophile."

"What? Dr. Podhozer is a pedophile? Did he try to molest you?"

"Me? Molest me? If he only tries, I will turn his face into a quarry—a quarry that cannot be rehabilitated. How do I know he is a pedophile? In our high school, everyone's a pedophile: the teachers, the administrative staff, the caretaker, the nurse. And the female teachers seduce pubescent boys in the toilets. The men's toilets."

"And you do not complain?"

"Who should I complain to? The school inspector is the most vicious pedophile of them all. He is known as Dr. Maniac. He sees a child, and he turns into a sex-driven beast. He is also well known as a sexual harasser. He even harassed the nurse. The shemale nurse. Pervert!"

"And you don't go to the police?"

"To the police? The commissioner has been arrested for fingering little girls. The police reek of deviates. When the policemen go on patrol, parents hide their children at home. Pedophiles in uniforms. Maniacs in the name of the law. Sickening."

"Then should you not consider transferring to another school?"

"Another school? Is there a school in Tel Aviv without pedophiles? Without serial sexual harassers? Besides, with a name like that, with Gershon, I cannot go to any school."

Here, Uri already knows, once again begins the tirade about the misery caused by his given name: "Who on earth gives his son such a name? Gershon! Gershon! Could someone ever go to school with a name like that?"

'Gershon, for the hundredth time, I'm telling you, Gershon was the name of your grandfather, my father. He died a short time before you were born and we named you after him..."

"So, it's like this. You prefer your dead one to your live son! You did not give a damn about my feelings!"

"Uri, I simply cannot hear this anymore!"

"Gershon is a pansy name. A queer name. It's a name given to a worm—not to a boy."

"And we thought that it's a nice Hebrew name."

"A nice Hebrew name? It's a name of a corpse that even worms refuse to eat."

"Sorry, Gershon. I suggest once more that you change your name. Your mother and I won't object to it."

"Change my name? This is even worse. What will the guys say? See this paleface. He changed his name. But his original name was Gershon! He can't fool us. We know his real name. And you think I'll be able to live with this?"

"Uri, I'm simply going out of my mind. Close the windows so that the neighbors won't hear."

"And what's worse is that the girls call me Gersh...Gersh, honey, come over here...Gersh, you are Mama's darling, but tell us, where on earth did you scrape up this name of yours? I can't go on any longer! I can't go back to school with this name."

"Gershon, I will repeat it for the last time: your grandpa was a great doctor."

"And I, too, am great—but in another sense."

Uri decided, under the influence of the school advisor's words, not to think about the meaning of these words and not to react to them.

"But, Gershon, if you won't go back to school, you won't be able to graduate."

"I don't want to graduate from a pedophilic high school. Not me."

"And what will you do in the army without a diploma?"

"I'm not going to the army. Not with this name."

"Not going to the army? Do you begin to understand the meaning of this? And what will you live on? We won't live forever, you know."

"I am assured a good livelihood. I have natural qualifications. I'm going to be a movie star."

"A movie star? Do you want to go to an acting school?"

"No need for that. I have natural talents. I am big below the belt."

"Uri, what is he talking about? For heaven's sake, what is he talking about?"

"You better know the truth now: I'm going to be a porn star."

In Uri's mind flash in a rapid succession: Gershon the movie star. Gershon copulates in front of the camera. Gershon, the former Bar Mitzvah boy, flaunts his member for the whole world to see.

"Uri, I do not believe him. He simply decided to kill us both. That's why he's saying all these horrid things."

"And what does your friend Naomi say about this? Does she know about your plans?"

"She will also act in the same movie. She, too, has natural talents. And there's a big demand for Israeli porn. Porn in army uniforms. That's the coolest thing on the Internet now. Hot sex from the Holy Land. It's cool. It's kinky. It's in."

"Uri, say something, do something. Do something before I do something!"

"Gershon, listen to me now. Listen well to what I'm telling you. Up till now, we have suffered your outbursts passively. No more. It's finished. No more rich dad. No more Volvo on the weekends. No more allowances. No more anything. And if you dislike the name Gershon, too bad. That's the name we decided to give you. Do whatever you want with this name. Moreover, there is still police. Still a court. You, in the eyes of the law, are a minor, though I admit that looking at you, I find it hard to believe. You cannot appear in porn films, and any intercourse with Naomi, who is also a minor, is a felony. Did you get that into your head, Gershon?"

"No, Dad, you don't get it. If you go spill the beans to the police about your little son, if your meanness will deprive him of that which is rightly his, I'll go to the press and tell them the whole truth. I'll tell them how the son of that famous lawyer, Uri Manoss, a deputy president of the Bar Association, is really an aspiring porn star—and I'll also demonstrate my endowment to the cameras, there's no law against that—and I'll tell them that the distinguished lawyer prevents his son from fully developing his potential and that he does not allow his son to fully express his personality. That he violates the Rights of Children law. A lawyer who is an offender."

"Uri, do something! This child of ours has simply decided to finish us off. Your father has high blood pressure. One more word from you, and I'll call an ambulance."

"Well, I'm sick and tired of your blabbering. I'm going to my room. To train. You are not allowed to enter my room while I'm in training."

Uri decided not to investigate what this mysterious training was all about. When multi-decibel disco music invaded the living room from behind Gershon's closed door, Ruth burst out crying: "Is this our son? I simply don't recognize him."

And, indeed, Uri felt the same way. From the innocent doe-eyed child grew up a shudder-causing male. His body is hairy, his dimensions frightening, his hair long and unkempt, his pimpled face is full of metal rings—in his ears, nostrils, and eyebrows. Uri tells himself that if his son ever gets lost in the Judean desert, it will be easy to find him with a metal detector. The truth is that recently Uri has stopped looking at Gershon and

Looks in his direction, slightly above his head, so as to avoid a feeling of nausea. It's hard to believe that only three years ago, all three of them celebrated Gershon's Bar Mitzvah by flying to the Salzburg Festival, and he sat there, starry-eyed, captivated by the music, and said: "Mom, Dad, you couldn't have picked a nicer Bar Mitzvah present." Only three years! Three years from paradise to hell. Only two years ago, he was still practicing daily piano pieces by "the heavenly Mozart," and now "Mozart is crap," and he practices God-knows-what.

Now Uri reached the first traffic jam. He realized that, as he woke up late, he would land straight into the morning's heavy rush hour traffic, with its long lines of snail-paced bumper-to-bumper cars. He is stuck in the middle of this rush hour traffic. No way out. He looks at the car clock and shudders: it's seven-forty. No chance that he'll be on time. No chance that he'll be less than half-an-hour late. And with Shumacher's psychotic personality to boot.

"Edna, sweetheart, do me a favor. It's one big traffic jam here. Phone the beast and apologize. Explain. It's tied up everywhere. They are all waiting there to sign the merger contract. And today of all days I had to wake up late."

The traffic lights change from red to green. Now he can start driving to the highway. The industrial park is a mere ten miles to the east, but in this rush hour traffic, you never know how long it'll take.

At this stage, Uri is totally oblivious to his nightmare, except for the name Bruno Walter, which is somehow wedged into his memory, but he ascribes this to remembering Grandpa Heinrich, who heard the renowned conductor in Germany. This was in 1929 at his last concert in Berlin, before he moved to Leipzig to lead the Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Chapter 3: The Second Mile

On his way eastward to Highway No. 6, all traffic stalls. A long wait. Gradually, the day's fledgling heat is felt inside the car, and although there is still no need to turn on the air-conditioning through the climate-control system, he can already feel the wave of dry, oven-like heat, which will soon engulf him. He turns on the radio. News. Already eight! He won't get there before nine! And with Shumacher, already a nervous wreck as he is, forced to merge his plastic works with another firm.

In the news is the usual stuff: more rockets in the South, Israeli sternly warns the Palestinian Authority. Growing crisis in the hospitals. Emergency wards overflowing with helpless patients. Session of the cabinet to deal with this. Imminent strikes in the public sector. He waits for the main thing—the road situation report. Not a word about traffic. All day long, they blabber about congestion here, congestion there; traffic delays because of accidents, suspicious objects on the road being cleared by engineering squads. Roadwork. And just now, when information like that is crucial, when one must know what's going on in the major arteries, they talk about a violin festival in the Galilee. Shit. Shit. Only morons sit there in the radio stations. One can really go nuts. Lose one's mind. It's ten past eight. Everybody crawls, crawls and honks their impatient horns in vain, in the jammed roads. He makes another phone call. He remembers Edna's abbreviated number. "Edna, dear. I simply don't know what to do. No one is moving. At this pace, I won't get there before ten o'clock. The meeting is supposed to begin in five minutes. In five minutes! And the traffic is at a standstill. No, don't phone him. He'll throw a fit. I may phone him and apologize personally."

He edges forward a few yards, then stops, and as time passes, the sun, rising from the east, begins to strike the car with its rays of heat.

Suddenly, in the middle of the road, he sees a familiar sight: the bagel tray and carrying it with one raised hand is good old Moussa. The elderly Arab has been absent for a few weeks, and Uri suspected that he had been arrested for being a terrorist. What? Good old Moussa a suicide bomber? Selling explosive bagels? Never. And yet you never can tell. Or perhaps somebody—a vengeful member of another clan—went to the Mossad and just slandered him. Poor old Moussa wrongfully accused and thrown into the dark cellars where who-knows-what is being done to him. And now here he is. Alive with his tray full of bagels, rushing from one stationary car to the other offering the nervous drivers his life-

restoring bagels. What happened? Did the Mossad hear the truth about him? Did they discover the vengeful lies? When Moussa spots Uri, he rushes towards him, balancing the tray with his one hand and holding plastic bags in his other.

"*Ahlan*, Mr. Cohen."

"*Wasahalan*, Moussa. What's new? Haven't seen you for a long time here."

"Mr. Cohen, may Allah lengthen your years, my name is not Moussa. I'm Abe. Father of Razek. That's why they call me Abu Razek. Father of the boy Razek."

Uri wants to say that his name isn't Cohen but decides not to say anything.

"Mr. Cohen, I haven't been here for a whole month on account of my son, Razek. That fool decided to join the mad ones. Escaped from home at night and infiltrated into Gaza. Wants to be a shahid. A martyr. May Allah have mercy on me."

"What? And he did not tell you anything before he ran away? And you didn't know what his intentions were?"

Whom can you believe? Perhaps Moussa knew it all along, but now, after his investigation by the Mossad tough guys, he is repenting. Who knows?

"I swear on the life of my children and wife. One morning, my wife and I wake up and the boy is gone. My father, may Allah keep him healthy, exchanged documents with a worker from Gaza who had a permit, and he entered Gaza with this man's papers in order to look for the boy. Since then I haven't heard from my father. He, too, disappeared. Now I'm without father and son. Mr. Cohen, this is terrible. Help me. Save me. You must know the people from the Mossad. Ask them to go inside, find them, and bring them home, to the village. I'm not young. I'm not healthy. I don't want to die without them. Do me a favor. Have a word with the Mossad. Tell them. Tell them politely. They'll listen to you. They will bring them back to me."

The stalled convoy moves a few meters forward. Uri moves quickly before the honking from the back begins. The bagel man walks along, and Uri continues the conversation through the open window:

"Moussa, my friend, I'll try and help you. I'll be on my way to the office here, same spot, tomorrow. Write down their names and ID numbers, and I'll see what I can do. It's very dangerous for us to enter Gaza/ But we shall see."

"May Allah safeguard you, Sir Cohen."

But now the convoy moves on. Moussa is left behind, and Uri watches in the rearview mirror how the Arab vendor stands on the pavement, waiting for the next halt in traffic in order to sell his bagels to the impatient and hungry drivers. Uri drives on. He sees on both sides of the road, standing erect, the apartment buildings of North Tel Aviv. He lives in a house like that, but when he sees them rectangularly arranged in wells along the road, they upset him.

Now he is on his way to the crucial junction, where Road No. 5 begins, leading to the industrial park east of Tel Aviv. This is the notorious Big Backup, the mother of all traffic jams. Extreme patience and nerves of steel will be needed here.

From behind the car in front of him, a limping beggar materializes. In his hand, he holds a tin plate with a few coins in it. He rattles the plate. Uri imagines a cloud of bad smell attached to the beggar. That smell threatens to invade his Volvo. He rapidly closes his car windows, puts on an empty, indifferent expression, and stares forward, broadcasting a clear message to the beggar: there's no money for you here; you won't fool me with your fake limping. Your rags won't fool me. You will not get a penny from me. But as the beggar approaches his car, he has a strange feeling that this is not a stranger who stands knocking on his window pane. Somebody familiar is standing there in the morning's glaring sun. Is it at all conceivable that he, the distinguished lawyer, would know this tattered, smelly beggar? No. Impossible. A mere hallucination. A sheer accident. But as the old beggar continues to knock with his filthy finger on the window pane, right next to Uri's indifferent face, so grows in his conviction that he knows the beggar from somewhere. His grimaces and the way he tilts his face to the right side are familiar. And suddenly he knows: he knows that the beggar is Simon—his former teacher in high school. He is the one: same movements, same expressions. Impossible. Simon had always been clean-shaven, neat, and impeccably dressed. The most elegant teacher in school. The one teacher who came to school with a tie, a carnation—always white—in his buttonhole, and a light cloud of aftershave hanging over his head. It cannot be Simon. It's it's not him. But it is.

Uri opens the window halfway, stares straight into the beggar's eyes, and says: "Hi, Simon, how are things with you? No reaction is registered on the beggar's face. Uri insists: "You are Simon the English teacher. I was your student in high school. I loved your lessons. You praised me in front of the whole class when I declaimed a monologue from *Hamlet*. Don't you remember?" The beggar's face

registers no emotion, and he whispers through the half-open window in a hoarse weather-bitten voice: "You are a madman!"

Then something happens that Uri almost anticipated: just as he used to do in school, when excited, Simon passed the tip of his tongue three times over his lower lip and then came the familiar pout. Uri remembers this well, as in the last Purim party at school, he impersonated Simon, to the enjoyment of the laughing students. When he prepared this impersonation, Uri studied Simon's every move and learned all his grimaces and gestures. No, this is no coincidence. No two men can have the same nervous tic. It is inconceivable that out of the mouths of two separate individuals, their tongues would pop out and move from side to side in the same form and speed, like a metronome, and that all this would end with such a pronounced pouting.

Uri cries out about the din of the waiting cars: "Simon! I'm sure it's you. Simon, what happened to you? It's me, Uri. Your student. There, I'm giving you ten shekels on condition that you tell me what happened to you!"

"You are mad. I'm not Simon. Don't know no Simon. Give a donation to the poor beggar and don't thorthure him with your questions."

As soon as the beggar uttered these words, the last doubt was removed. Simon the teacher could not pronounce the *t* consonant, and it would always come out as *th*. That's why he was nicknamed "Simon the Theacher." This, too, was a subject of Uri's impersonation at the Purim party: "Sith and listhen, and don'th utther one word." No doubt. No mistake. This is him. The old-time English teacher has gone astray, went downhill into the gutter. The elegant young man who could recite by heart scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* has become a repulsive beggar whose torn clothes reveal his dirty skin. Simon, the feared and admired teacher. With a tie matching the suit; the tie matching the cuff-links; the slightly sardonic smile on the impeccably shaved face. What happened to you, man?

No chance that the traffic lights would allow the convoy of restless cars to pass through. "Simon, I know it's you. I recognize you. You can't fool me. Tell me what happened to you."

The beggar emits a curse and is ready to spit at Uri, but Uri raises the car window just in time. The spit hits the glass. Uri watches how Simon retreats and moves, shaking his tin plate, to the cars in front.

Simon has disappeared. But not from Uri's consciousness. From the recesses of his memory, rises the image of the young English teacher; he stands erect,

fashionably dressed, in front of the mutinous, noisy class, and his whole being broadcasts self-assurance, a man-of-the-world confidence, as he reads from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

what's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba
that he should weep for her? What would he do
had he the motive and the cue for passion
that I have? He would drown the stage with tears
and cleave the general ear with horrid speech.

And Simon explains: "You must understand what Shakespeare is trying to explain. This is written in Old English, but the truth that he teaches us is relevant even today. Imagine Hamlet. Son of the former king. A prince. His beloved father was assassinated by his knave of an uncle. This knave is not content with this foul deed but also takes Hamlet's mother as his wife. Hamlet has all the valid reasons to avenge his father's murder. But Hamlet hesitates. He dithers. He drives himself, and the whole court, crazy with his rantings. In the part we've just read, Hamlet plans a ruse: he will ask the vagabond players to act in a play in which a murder, very much like his father's, takes place. We may ask: what does he need this play for? He does not doubt for a moment that which his father's ghost told him. But Hamlet is a thinking man. He is not a man of action. He talks a lot: words, words, words. He cannot carry out his murder plans. Nor can he feel the urge to perpetrate it. His emotional world is deficient. And here comes an old actor who bursts out crying when he recalls the fate of Hecuba, Queen of Troy. Hamlet cannot even cry the way the actor does. He can neither kill nor cry. The actor is the more genuine person. Hamlet is envious of the truer man—the one who is full of authentic emotion. Hamlet watches the actor's lament of Hecuba, who went mad with grief when she saw her two dead children, and he realizes that he cannot utter such a lament over his father's death. Thus we begin to understand what lies behind Hamlet's plan. He hopes that the actor's prowess, his inner emotion, will be so overpowering that it would lead his uncle to admit his crime and then, only then, Hamlet would be able to kill him. Conclusion: there is in art more power than in real life. The mirror which Hamlet holds up to nature reflects a reality stronger and more authentic than nature

itself. Imagine how miserable Hamleth is. He, the beloved Prince of Denmark, is jealous of the vagabond actor: jealous of his authentic tears, while Hamleth's tears are blocked by the verbiage he wraps himself with. How pitiful is Prince Hamlet! How completely content is the actor! Hamleth does not experience real life. He lives a life of shadows. He is the real vagabond. The actor is the real person: his tears are his roots in reality. Hamleth knows that his mother sleeps with his father's murderer and still he is not able to cry! But I feel like crying right now, right here."

At this point, something extraordinary took place. Simon erupted, in front of the class, weeping bitterly, tears flowing down his immaculate face. Silence fell upon the class. Even the most unruly students shut up. No slips of paper were thrown across the aisles; no girl's pigtails were pulled. Quietly, the class watched their teacher openly crying. They all were, so remembers Uri, embarrassed by this unexpected show of emotion.

Simon recuperated quickly, took out a snow-white handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his tears, and resumed his lecture about Hecuba and Hamlet as if nothing happened. But Uri was moved and shaken by this onslaught of emotion, and he reached a certain decision regarding his own future. He could not forget his teacher's face being transformed instantaneously from his smooth self-controlled face into a tortuous fountain of tears. Then Uri thought: Simon and the vagabond actor were of the same breed, while Hamlet belonged to another breed—rich with thought, poor of emotion. Simon cried over Hamlet's emotional poverty, over his inability to weep. And what about Uri himself? What breed did he belong to? He knew that he belonged to the first one and felt an instinctive affinity with Simon. That's why he waited for the teacher at the end of class: "Sir, I just wanted to tell you how touched I was by what you said about Hamlet and by your weeping over his fate."

Simon, the very epitome of cold politeness, answered: "You did not think these were real tears, did you? I just wanted to demonstrate the power of actors who can control their weeping, who are able to shed tears at will. I, too, am a vagabond actor. I can cry over Hecuba, or over Hamlet, and I can stop crying over them—at will. It's a talent. Hamlet was wrong. His actor was not overcome with irresistible emotion but showed capacity to emulate sorrow. This is the power of actors. This is my power, too. Don't take this too seriously."

This exchange made Uri even more curious about Simon—his strange and admired teacher. There were all sorts of rumors about Simon. Students whispered that he had been married to an English noblewoman who did not want to immigrate with him to Israel, and so they divorced; that he fell in love with one of his female students, and her parents filed a complaint with the police; that he had been a university lecturer but was kicked out because he molested young boys. All these rumors, plus the impeccable suits, surrounded Simon with an aura of mystery which triggered the teenagers' imaginations. Uri decided to stalk his house to see what he could find out about him. He discovered that his teacher lived in an apartment with his father and that nobody ever came to visit them. Nobody.

One day a new student started a new rumor: Simon was kicked out of another school because, so it was said, his father had been a *kapo*, a collaborator, in a Nazi concentration camp. A few parents, Holocaust survivors, raised hell: "A *kapo* will not teach our children." And consequently, Simon was dismissed and moved to Uri's school. Simon, the English teacher, the son of a *kapo*? Yes, said the rumor, and that's why one of his neighbors emptied a garbage can over Simon's father's head and shouted in Yiddish: "This is what we do to Nazi collaborators." And it was also said that Simon's father became hysterical and screamed, also in Yiddish: "It's not true. It's a lie. I swear. A lie. A fabrication." But his protests were in vain. It was also whispered that one day, an old woman saw him in the street and spat on him. Yes, spat in the stinking traitor's face.

Uri did not know whether all these stories were true. These could have been false just like the story about the English noblewoman. But one day, when Uri was surreptitiously following his teacher, he saw him talking to an old, frail man outside the school, and Simon furiously shouting: "I told you not to come here! I warned you. I told you not to come to the school! Go back home at once!" And the old man, scared and trembling, withdrew and limped away. Why should Simon speak like that to his father? Maybe the rumors were true?

The next day, Simon returned to the class, unflappable, and explained why Lady Macbeth, who incited her husband to murder the king, goes mad with repentance. All this led Uri to one decision: to leave school and become an actor. This would be the real world of drama that Simon spoke of. There was one

thing left to do: tell his parents about his decision and not give into their pressure; to insist on his decision to become an actor, no matter what.

And now, in the rising heat of a late summer's day, this very same Simon, the *kapo's* son, creepily roams the streets, a tattered-clothed beggar, and refuses to admit his identity. Perhaps he lost his sanity and does not know who he is.

No, no, Uri can't accept that. He must know the truth about his old-time English teacher. They are all stuck here in the mother-of-all-traffic-jams, anyway. He leaves his car humming with its soft-sounding engine and discovers Simon and his rattling plate two cars ahead. He grasps the beggar in both hands, shakes his frail body forcefully, and shouts into his ear: "You are Simon, son of the *kapo*, son of the collaborator. They emptied a garbage can on your father's head. I know. Don't deny it!"

Simon intends to spit again in Uri's face, but Uri is aware of the danger. He plasters the beggar's face on the trunk of the car in front of them, stoops over him, and screams in his ears: "You must tell me what happened. You were the only teacher who had such a large impact on my life. I admired you. What went wrong? And what happened to your father, the *kapo*?"

Upon hearing the word *kapo*, the beggar's body starts trembling, and although Uri presses Simon's mouth the trunk, he shouts back in Yiddish: "Not true, not true" and emits such a piercing scream that the driver comes out of the car and hollers: "You maniacs, get off my car! Go fuck somewhere else! Not on my car. Not on my brand new Impala, or I'll dismantle your pervert faces." And to the woman who sat in front, he explains: "Just a pair of maniacs who decide to fuck on the back of our car."

Simon exploits Uri's momentary embarrassment and runs away towards the mound on the roadside. Uri, totally obsessed by now, runs after him and manages to see the Impala's driver wiping the trunk with his sleeve. Simon disappears behind the mound. Uri is late for the meeting with Shumacher. The clock is still ticking. Uri is at a breaking point, but, nevertheless, he must, he simply must, discover the truth about Simon. Now he understands what judges mean when they use the term "irresistible impulse." He returns to his car, parks on the shoulder, and sets out to look for his beggar teacher. Let Shumacher go to hell!

The road side of the mound is manicured: there are flowerbeds surrounded by trees, shrubs, and ornamental rocks. The mound beautifies the highway.

Uri climbs the mound easily. In spite of the paunch, the avoided gym and cross-country machine, he is still agile. He reaches the top, but the old man has vanished. Uri surveys the view from the other side of the mound, the part which is hidden from the drivers, who are desperately waiting. On the other side of the mound, there are no trees, shrubs, or flowers. Before him, at the bottom of the mound, stretch two rows of ramshackle huts made of cardboard, wooden planks, corrugated iron slabs, odds and ends from construction sites. This is a *fevella*, well hidden from the passing cars. There's life in the place: children are playing; a woman in panties and a bra is using a pail to do her wash; two old men are playing chess on a box. In front of some huts, there are shrubs and flowers—no doubt snatched from the other side of the mound—and surrounding one hut, there's even a makeshift wooden fence. Simon must be living in one of these huts. But which one? And how can he be found? He shouts: "Simon, where are you? Simon, it's me, Uri, your student. I have to talk to you."

A half-dressed girl comes out of the hut in front of him: "Mister, there's no Simon here. You shouldn't be here in the first place. Strangers aren't welcome in this village."

At that moment, Uri hears a voice behind him: "Here, they don'th call me Simon. Here I'm know as Zalman. Zalman the Chairman." The old beggar is transformed. Out of his wrinkled face materializes the English teacher with all his self-confident aplomb: 'Of course I remembered you. Immediately. How can I forgeth the studenth who impersonatedh me so successfully at that famous Purim party? I remember all my top studenth, and how can I noth rememberd one of the mosth thalenthed, mosth sensithive ones? Buth I did noth identhify myself, as I've cuth myself loose from my pasth, and I am jealously guarding my new identhithy. Ith was rather nasthy, wasn'th ith? That bruthe. 'Go fuck somewhere else.' Really. There, on the road, people are so vulgar. I never answer them, even when they curse me. I justh say, 'Thank you for your charithy' or 'Thank you for your meanness.' Here, in our village, we never thalk like them."

Simon-Zalman—now his voice reverted to the same authoritative, teachery tones that Uri recalls—explains that in "his village" live all sorts of people. The majority are people who work along the highway; beggars like him; flower vendors at the junction; the boys who wash the windshields for a few shekels; those who stand with posters for or against Sharon; the hookers who work nightshifts; the blowjob girls who work days; the transsexuals who work night and

day; and also—to be honest—those who strip apart broken-down cars and sell their spare parts. And there are those who merely live in the village and work elsewhere: the Arab workers who are employed in the hotels along the beach but cannot find a room to rent among the Jews—they are the ones who bring the wine Friday nights for the Sabbath meals; a few foreign workers who are afraid of the immigration police; and one Russian who plays the accordion and claims he was the first settler in the village. Simon explains that life is good in their village: there's plenty of good water from the pipes irrigating the flowers on the other side of the mound; there's a refreshing sea breeze; the mound protects them from storms and strong winds; there's electricity, which they take from the lit lampposts, and the main thing—the village is absolutely safe. One must be cautious only when entering the Nigerians' quarter—especially on one of their vodka nights. Otherwise, you can walk safely anywhere, anytime. At night, too. And there's an active social life. On Friday nights, they have a Sabbath ceremony, and even the girls and the transgenders do not work that night, and on Saturday nights, they all sing homeland songs—in Romanian, Russian, Arabic, Swahili, Yiddish, and even Hebrew. "And besides," adds Simon-Zalman, "I can walk to work, and that's a big advantage nowadays. I see that you're in a hurry. Don't worry. We are fixing the traffic lights so that the drivers wait here a long, long time. We did this to boost our income. Yes, yes, this is not very nice. And it drives the drivers up the wall. Don't ask. Yesterday, there was nearly a murder. We enlisted Brigitte to separate the two quarreling drivers who drew out knives. Yes, yes, you are right. This is not a very nice thing to do. But what should we do? These are hard days. The recession—you know."

A dark-skinned slender boy comes running: "Zalman, we have troubles with Brigitte. Yes, again. She threatens to wreck and burn down our village." Simon responds authoritatively: "Ibrahim, you go and fetch Brigitte immediately."

Uri has seen many transgenders—shemales, as they are called—there isn't a talk show on television without a drag queen. Despite that, he wasn't ready for the sight unfolding in front of his eyes. The skinny boy called Ibrahim drags a huge lady, all muscles, who staggers her way on high stiletto-heeled shoes and cries out: "Leave me alone, Ibrahim. Let me die. Let me die alone." The hefty woman lets herself be pulled by the smallish Ibrahim until they reach Zalman's presence: "Zalman, I have brought Brigitte to you. She did not want to come. She

tore down her shack. Broke her lamp. She lay on the ground. Kicked the potted plants. Shouted like a madwoman that she wants to die.

Zalman introduces Uri, who's dwarfed by the giantess: "Brigitte, this is Uri, a former student of mine." Brigitte smiles: "I once had a pimp called Uri. I should have done him in. He ruined my plumbing."

Zalman takes her oversized hand, strokes it gently, and asks: "Have you been to your parents' again?" Brigitte nods in consent.

"How many times have I warned you not to visit your parents?"

Brigitte turns to Uri and erupts: "Tell him, Uri. Tell him that I miss my mother! I can't go on without Mom!"

"But, see," says Zalman, "what these visits do to you! In your state, you won't be able to work tonight! These visits break your heart."

"He is cruel, your friend, he is cruel," says Brigitte to Uri, staring in to his eyes. "He is cruel to poor women like me. He tortures Brigitte. He knows I can't live without seeing my mother."

Zalman ignores Brigitte and turns to Uri: "This is a difficult case. Her parents are kibbutzniks. Brigitte, too, was a member of a kibbutz."

"They called me Manu," whimpers Brigitte and takes Uri's hand, which disappears into her manicured paw. "I was one of the gang. Everybody's guy. But I've always felt different. I thought this was because of my extra-large size. But there was something else. I never had a girlfriend, and I was shy in the men's shower. But I got along. I told the gang about all the broads I hooked up with, and I muddled through."

Zalman: "They called her Manu, short for Emanuel, and she was the hero of her kibbutz. She was in the paratroopers and also captain of the kibbutz's basketball team."

Uri remembers the meeting with Shumacher. It should have already begun, but a greater force attracts him to stay in Zalman's village and hear Brigitte's story. He must stay and listen to these people. Irresistible impulse.

Brigitte: "How true. It all began in the paratroopers."

Zalman: "Yes, it all began there. Manu, like all the macho boys of the kibbutz went to a parachuting course, and then..."

Brigitte: "...and then the instructor touched my parachuting gear in order to fasten it. He did not mean any harm. He just wanted to ascertain that everything was in place—including the strap between my legs."

He touched me there and sent a shockwave through my body, I'm telling you, Uri. I can't even begin to describe it to you...and within my body, behind my balls, there lay dormant a black little flower, the flower of the womanhood that was inside me. And the shockwave woke up this tender flower. Even while I was in the air, with pounding heart between heaven and earth, I felt something happening inside me. The black flower came to life, and since that drop, it has not stopped growing, until I realized that inside this male body, lives a woman."

Zalman: "My poor Brigitte. It's because of this that you must not visit your parents."

Brigitte to Uri: "What does this Zalman understand about women...he's basically a good man, your teacher, but he doesn't know anything about women. He doesn't get it that a woman like me needs her mother, to have some girl talk, to find love and empathy...In the beginning, I willfully ignored the black flower, but soon it grew and grew and took over. I began to change: when I shaved, I shaved my chest and armpits as well; I let my hair grow. Wore more and more colorful sweaters; began to use make-up—first mildly and then louder and blunter. When I returned to the kibbutz after being discharged from the army, everybody commented: have you seen how Manu has changed in the paratroopers? But gradually they, and my parents too, understood that something else was going on. Something big and awe-inspiring. Suddenly, everybody realized that I'm a woman. The black flower burst out of my body. I became a woman. From head to toe: a woman! A woman! A woman! I could no longer dress like a man. It began to nauseate me, dressing like a man. It began being deviate. That a tender, delicate woman like me should appear as a man. Never heard of such a thing. Disgusting!"

Uri, somewhat stunned, manages to smile and asks: "And what happened with the paratroopers?"

"I received the annual reserve duty order. I went there. And the sergeant wanted to throw me out: 'Go away, you whore,' he barked at me. But I was stubborn. 'I'm going to remain in my unit,' I said. 'I will not tolerate any discrimination against women.' I threw a tantrum. I threatened to take it to

court. I did not give up. The commanding officer tried to bribe me: 'Manu'—the bastard called me Manu—'I'll transfer you to any unit you want. Just get out of here. Leave us alone. I've got enough trouble without you.' But I insisted on being called Brigitte—my true name—and on staying in the unit. Once a paratrooper, always a paratrooper. I finally won. But this was not the end. The girls did not want me to live in their quarters, and I did not want to live with the male reservists. So I asked and got a special, separate building—'Brigitte's Residence,' they called it. And a separate shower. The girls did not want to share the shower with me. And the idea of showering with vulgar, hairy men didn't even cross my mind. That I should stand naked in front of them? Never. And they might try to have sex with me without paying. My case reached the Chief of Staff. His adjutant begged me: 'Do us a favor, leave the paratroopers. Go work at army radio. Anywhere but the paratroopers.' But I'm stubborn. Tender but stubborn. Like all women. Finally, I won. They put up a special bathroom for me, but some clown wrote graffiti on the door: 'By order—leave your dick behind upon entrance.' Finally, I did take part in the annual drop exercise. I, of course, removed my false eyelashes and put on small, clinging uniform-matching earrings. But I did find myself in midair—floating happily and daintily. The instructor who had touched my black flower had already gone without knowing what he had done. He made me happy. You should have seen me, Uri—how agile I was when hitting the ground, despite my 150 kilos."

Zalman: "And yet they still call you 'Brigitte the bitch.'"

Brigitte: "Yes, there are maniacs everywhere."

Uri: "But think about that: they call you a bitch, not a dog. You won that battle, too."

Brigitte looked at Uri, as if discovering him for the first time, opened her lipsticked mouth, and neighed with laughter, revealing her horse-like teeth: "By God, you're right, Uri. I haven't thought about it that way. Brigitte the bitch. This is really an honorary title. Uri, you're great: good-hearted and with a sense of humor. Be careful that I don't fall in love with you. Zalman, you're lucky to have had such a charming student..." Brigitte gave Uri a crushing slap on his thigh. Uri worries the slap may have broken a bone.

And Brigitte continues: "And so the bitch goes to reserve duty every year...true, she loses clients during that period, but the loss is for the sake of our country, our Israel."

Zalman: "At first, she did not want to become a street-walker."

Brigitte: "I was not born to be a prostitute...I'm a sensitive woman. Pimps and vulgar men disgust me. This meat market is not for me. But the special treatments, the hormones, and, finally, the operation costs a fortune! My dear Uri, do you know how much these thieves charge for one epilation session? And only for the face I need twenty sessions! Do you know how hard it is to find size 15 stilettos, or to custom order dresses? There are no ready-to-wear dresses in my size. And Brigitte—no, not Manuella, as they suggested—has no money to finance all this. How's a girl supposed to raise cash? From toiling the land in the kibbutz? No. Brigitte had no money, so she was literally forced to work here below, on the road," and she points to beyond the mound to the place where Uri has parked his car, which is waiting for him to come back from this prolonged visit in Zalman's village. "So I finance everything. Now I am cut down there—a perfect woman."

Zalman: "Except for the visit to the kibbutz."

Brigitte: "Uri, you must understand this. I had to go through two transformations—from male to female, and from the kibbutz to Tel Aviv. I grew up on the kibbutz, and I miss its rural ambiance: the songs we all sang on the lawn in front of the communal dining room; the cowshed; the fresh scent of tilled soil; the sight of the wheat seeds sprouting; the whispers of the poplar trees; the smell of the first rain in autumn; the morning coolness of the dew in summer. I detest my fellow working girls. They know nothing about all this. For them the seasons mean one thing: change the air-conditioner's mode from heat to cool."

A silence descends on all three.

Brigitte breaks it: "This summer is tough for us, Uri. With light summer dresses, we can hardly conceal our muscles. That's why I long for the first rain, for autumnal weather so that I can finally put on my Chanel suit and not suffer from

the heat—like we have today. The world of prostitution is hateful; I was, and remain, a kibbutznik."

Zalman: "Both these visits ruin you..."

Brigitte: "I'm not talking to you, Zalman. I'm talking to Uri. He understands me."

Uri: "So when do you visit your parents in the kibbutz?"

Brigitte: "I go to see Mother once a month at night, when the guys can't see me. Dad does not want to see me. I'd rather be dead, he says. Shameful! Shameful, the way he talks about me. My mother is ready to see me, but calls me Manu. And cries. Did I say cry? She cries me a river and is mad at me for not crying with her. But I've got nothing to cry about. I'm happy. I am content. Only when I come back to our village, I let go, and Zalman is angry at me. But without seeing my poor mother, I just can't go on. Uri, you seem to be a kind-hearted man. You won't be as cruel to me as Zalman is...you will understand that a loyal daughter like me can't forsake her mother..."

And she stares at Uri sadly and sends him a cow-like loving message through her false eyelashes, takes his hand, and clasps it so strongly that it hurts Uri. Uri declares: "Of course you must visit your mother. It's every daughter's duty."

"You see," Brigitte triumphantly declares to Zalman, "your friend understands me...he understands a woman's soul..." And on this victorious note, she rises out of the low chair on which she had been sitting, glides easily on her high heels, clasping her tiny bag, swaying her hips, shaking her flowing blond hair, and makes her exit.

Zalman: "Uri, thank you for being so sweet to her. She is really a very good girl. Both the kibbutz visit simply devastates her. She goes into crisis mode and can become very violent... Life is not always easy...not even in our village."

Simon-Zalman invites Uri to stay and move to the village's public garden: "Don't worry about your car. I'll see to it. Ibrahim!" Out of nowhere materializes the skinny boy. "Ibrahim, please go down to the road and keep watch over our friend's car. Make sure it's not stripped or stolen."

Uri sits down on a bench among the few shrubs that constitute the village's "public garden" and listens eagerly to Simon-Zalman's story.

Chapter 4: Simon-Zalman's Story

Simon-Zalman indeed lived with his father, up to his death a few years ago. His mother died shortly after he was born, and he grew up as an only son to his widowed father. "You must have heard the rumor," says Simon-Zalman to Uri, "that my father was a *kapo* in a concentration camp and that I was dismissed because of that from my job before I moved to the school where you were a student."

Uri nods, all ears, eager to finally hear the truth. Simon-Zalman says that he was indeed dismissed because of that rumor but that the rumor was entirely false, a fabrication, a lie. His father survived the Holocaust in a Catholic convent, where his mother had placed him to be hidden from the Nazis. His father grew up knowing he was Jewish. He was fourteen when he was handed over to the mother-superior. Although Jewish, he grew to love the sisters and especially the mother-superior, who became his substitute parent. Through her, he began getting closer to the two images that accompanied his adolescence: Jesus and the Virgin Mary. To honor them, he memorized the prayers and hymns. His newly-acquired Christian faith became a source of strength. He did not forget that he was a circumcised Jew and knew he was constantly in danger because of the periodical searches carried out by the Nazis. But he did not see a discrepancy between his Christian devotion and his Jewish memories, as, he convinced himself, Christ and his Mother were in a similar situation: Jewish in origin, Christian in faith. Christ on the cross—and the kneeling Mother next to him—was a symbol that should truly belong to both Christians and Jews, and he surreptitiously drew a Star of David and in it a cross and saw in this drawing his personal emblem.

When the war ended, and while he was planning to join a seminary and to be ordained as a priest, a representative of the Jewish Agency appeared one day out of nowhere and offered to transfer him to a refugee camp from which he would immigrate to Palestine. Initially he refused the offer: what has he got to do with Palestine? But the mother-superior convinced him that, given the prevalent anti-Semitism—which, alas, had not disappeared with the defeat of the Nazis—he could not be ordained. And thus, despite the fact that she loved him as if he were her own son, he should join his people.

Simon-Zalman continues his tale: his father reached the Displaced Persons Center, and there he met his future wife, Simon-Zalman's mother. A few habits from the convent days remained, which he could not, or would not, shed. One

was his tendency to cross himself whenever he became emotional. And thus the rumors began: he was a secret "crosser," a convert, and who knows what else.

These rumors followed him to Israel and were soon blown into accusations that he was a collaborator with the Nazis—without any basis in reality, a ridiculous lie.

Simon-Zalman, remembers a happy childhood with his father—until an old lady, a slightly unhinged neighbor, emptied a garbage can on his head, screaming for all to hear: "You murdered my children! Murderer! Get out of here!" His father tried, in vain, to argue with her. The hysteria spread. Two other women came out to the balconies and shouted: "Murderer. *Kapo*. You can't stay here." Both father and son were forced to move to the center of Tel Aviv, but the rumors followed them. Simon moved to another school, and his father became a recluse in their small apartment. Simon lived with his hermit father—his sole companion. He disguised his loneliness with expensive suits, knowing full well that this would cause ridicule among his colleagues and students. Throughout the years of utter isolation, he learnt how to become a father figure to his father, who slowly lost his mind due to the wickedness of the rumor-spreaders. Even worse: in Simon-Zalman's nightmares, his father belonged to the Jewish Police in the ghetto, an obedient servant of the Nazis, who sent his own people to their deaths. In his nightmares, his father pushed his own family members into the death train and shoved them into the gas chambers. Simon used to wake up from his nightmares screaming. His father interrogated him about this, but naturally he would not tell him why he screamed at night.

The nightmares got worse as his father's health deteriorated. In the last days before his father's death, Simon dreamt that his father pushed him, his very own son, onto the death train, while SS officers stood around and laughed. Simon-Zalman pleaded: "Dad, please let me stay with you," but his father kept on pushing him into the cattle wagon. Simon vehemently protested and fought back, but his father was stronger and shoved him into the dark wagon, where sardined Jews were screaming, "No, no." One night, Simon-Zalman woke up, his screams mixing with the coughing sounds of his dying father. At his father's funeral—it was not easy to find the customary ten men to accompany the coffin—Simon hoped that the nightmares would come to an end, but these returned to haunt him every night in his fatherless apartment. He tried all sorts of tricks: he would repeat to himself, aloud, before going to bed: Father was neither

in the ghetto nor in the camps. I, Simon, was born after the war. All in vain. In his dreams, Simon resurrected his father as a Catholic priest, crossing himself before Christ and his Mother, but this, too, did not drive away the recurring nightmares. His father kept forcing him into the wagon. Simon was shouting: "No, Dad, anything but the dark wagon." And his father would answer: "I have to fill my quota." After such a night, Simon would go to school to analyze William Shakespeare's plays to his restless students.

One night, he reached a breaking point: the groans in the wagon threatened to tear his eardrums: he found himself in the dark, surrounded by old men, women, and children, all dying for bread, water, air; all turning the wagon into a blood-curling hell. He jumped out of this apparition with a neighbor-wakening shout. Then and there, he decided to give up sleeping at home. No more nightmares. No more of this wicked injustice towards his dead father. He got dressed and started walking the streets of Tel Aviv. Thus began his nightly walks on the city's streets. These started with going round the block but eventually extended to the whole town. In the beginning, Simon opted for the areas that were alive all night long—the promenade along the seashore and the lit streets full of young people looking for clubs—but he gradually moved to the darker, sleeping quarters—the lightless residential areas, the boulevards with their dark trees.

Simon did not say a word to anyone while on his nocturnal sojourns. The main thing was to let the night pass without having to sleep. He would walk until dawn, and when he returned to his apartment, he would take his briefcase and go to school. "You cannot imagine, Uri, the energy I needed to stand up and speak after such a sleepless night." Thus the nights slowly proceeded: beginning with the overcrowded sidewalks and the streets full of honking cars to the dawn's deserted city, inhabited only by the city's garbage men. He studied shop windows and knew their contents by heart; he would go down to the seashore to watch silently the few lonely souls strolling near the water's edge; he would walk alone among celebrating groups of young men and women; follow the last of the habitués leaving the closing bars; observe the tottering drunks; wait for dawn to redeem him from the self-enforced sleeplessness. Sleep consisted of dozing off in the teachers' common room and of afternoon naps which were devoid of nightmares.

One night, while on one of his aimless post-midnight walks, an old, smelly weirdo approached him, looked straight into his eyes, and muttered: "I see that you have lost the hidden light." And then: "You have lost the hidden light because you still inhabit the world of debts and objects." Initially, Simon did not respond, thinking that this must be one of the odd characters who come out at night to stalk the streets. But the old man was stubborn: "I know the nightmares from which you are escaping. Only with the help of the hidden light will you be able to rid yourself of these nightmares." Simon started conversing with the old man.

Through this chance meeting, Simon's internship with the old man started. He began to cut himself loose from the world of debts and objects. It was not simple. The old man explained to Simon that the world of debts and objects swallows up all the hidden light with which a human being is born and robs him of true happiness. The old man began to instruct Simon in this art of ridding himself of this material world. He told Simon to wait until the months of July and August, and only then, when it's pleasant to sleep on the pavement, did he take him for the first three-night training program. Simon started his homelessness by sleeping on cartons on Allenby Road, close to his apartment—his comfortable, fatherless apartment, with its warm bed, the night lamp, the half-read books, the television set, the bathroom. The first night was not easy: tough to fall asleep on the cardboard; tough to sleep while passersby look at you but don't really see you; tough to go to bed with stars above and no teacup by your side. But when he did finally fall asleep, his sleep was calm, and when he got up at dawn, before the arrival of the garbage trucks, he felt, despite his aching bones, that for the first time after many tortuous sleepless nights, that there were no *kapo* nightmares; yes, without the morning's coffee but also without the wagon and the post-nightmare trembling. The next training period consisted of changing his gear—from suits to rags. And thus, gradually, he trained to become a beggar, shunning the world of debts and objects and seeking the hidden light. It was not easy to acquire the begging gestures: the limp, the downcast eyes, the rattling of the tin plate, the blunt refusals of strangers to give him money. Finally, he became a full-fledged homeless beggar; he felt that he accomplished the transition when his former school principal gave him a few pennies without recognizing him. Simon began to believe his old instructor: light penetrated his inner bring, driving away the sight of his father pushing his mother into the cattle train: now he could sleep the sleep of the righteous—a sweet, undisturbed, full sleep. Shakespeare was not

forgotten. "Can you imagine me, Uri, without the Bard from Stratford-upon-Avon?" And between one red light and another, he still repeats by heart whole sections of the plays and sonnets. He sold his apartment and gave the proceeds to his friends, who sought to go back, despite his advice, to the world of debts and objects. He keeps the bound copy of Shakespeare's works—a sole remnant from his past. Every night he reads a sonnet. He goes through a play every two weeks. That way, it takes him a year to complete the volume, and then he starts over. "It's very much like religious Jews, who read the Torah every year from beginning to the end."

On the sidewalk, he met the Russian accordion player, who at the time knew only a few words in Hebrew but managed to convince Simon to follow him and move into his village by the wayside of the main Tel Aviv-Haifa highway. The others followed suit. There, in the village, he changed his name to Zalman. Simon was gone. His old life was gone forever.

"Today," he proclaims proudly, "I'm the chairman of the village council. I won't tell you that I've found the hidden light in its entirety, but I've driven away the darkness, and I'm doing O.K."

Ibrahim appears, breathless: "Mister, I did not let anyone touch the car. No one. What a car! A Volvo! The best!" And he turns to Uri: "Can you give me a lift? My shift on Highway No. 5 starts in a few minutes, and I might be late." Uri takes leave of Zalman. They hug, although Zalman's stench repels Uri. They promise to meet again. "I'm always here on the road or in the village."

Uri and Ibrahim go down the mound—Uri is moving somewhat heavily, while Ibrahim is running and jumping over the shrubs and rocks—towards the waiting car. Uri enters the car and remembers that he should immobilize the alarm system. Will he remember the secret code? Yes, he remembers! He remembers! The buzz is heard. Victory! His personal hard disk is not affected. He tries to merge into the convoy of cars moving in the right lane. Every time he tries that, the car in the back, honking constantly, rushes forward to close the gap and prevent him from entering the lane. Uri begins to curse and honk, but Ibrahim saves the day: he jumps out of the car, stands in the middle of the lane as if he were an experienced traffic cop, halts with his hand the oncoming cars, and signals to Uri that he can proceed and merge into the traffic. Ibrahim gets back into the car and comments: "These are rude drivers. They lack basic road etiquette." Ibrahim tells Uri that in the general assembly he voted against

tampering with traffic lights, but he must admit that since then, the income of the villagers has increased dramatically. But there are violent daily fights between those drivers who want to run the red light, "as the traffic lights must be out of order," and those who, despite the excessively long red lights, refuse to break the law. "You can't imagine, Uri, what goes on here everyday. I won't be surprised if someone will get killed in one of the fights we see here."

With Ibrahim inside the car, Uri drives onward and turns left to Highway No. 5.

Chapter 5: The Third Mile: Ibrahim

Ibrahim wears a shirt bearing the slogan: "Uprooting the settlements tears apart the nation." His body is lean and his skin dark. His eyes ooze boundless energy.

Uri asks what is the meaning is of the name Ibrahim.

Ibrahim explains. He was born in Haifa to a Jewish mother and a Moslem father. They brought him into this world as a demonstrative step, as a symbol of their belief in equality and brotherhood between Arabs and Jews. They also gave him a name representing a bi-national fraternity: the name of the father of both nations, half in Arabic, half in Hebrew—a combined name of Ibrahim and Abraham—Ibrahim. Life in Haifa was good until he started kindergarten. His parents decided to send him to a Jewish kindergarten, "so as to ensure an education that will lead me to university." But there, in the Jewish kindergarten, the problems began. His name aroused suspicion. "What's Ibrahim? Why not Abraham? Why not Avi? Ibrahim is an Arab name. A name of a filthy Arab. Of an Arab assassin." Consequently, Ibrahim stayed at home and never went to school. His parents educated him in both languages—Arabic and Hebrew—and did not celebrate any holidays—neither religious nor national. But his grandparents on his mother's side took him to synagogue on Yom Kippur to hear "Kol Nidrei." And his grandfather on his father's side took him once to a Friday prayer in a mosque. Life in Haifa was pleasant and interesting. Many activities of the local Communist party took place at their home. The guests pampered the small boy, saying: "You are the future of both Jews and Arabs in their common land." At one of the party meetings, the leader pointed to the boy, saying: "When Ibrahim will be our age, the two tribes of Abraham will stop feuding, and thousands of workers, Jews and Arabs alike, will stand together, shoulder-to-shoulder, against their exploiters—Jews and Arabs alike." Ibrahim felt important even though he was still a boy.

But the end was not happy. His parents divorced. His father left for America. His mother went back to live with her Jewish parents in Tel Aviv and later died after a long illness. Ibrahim ran away from their home. He did not want to stay in a place where they listen only to classical music and never to an Arab song; where there are no Arabs and no Arabic word is heard. Ibrahim roamed the streets of Tel Aviv, slept on benches, and made his living by washing cars—feeling neither Jewish nor Arab. One day he met Zalman, who took him to the village, treated him like a son, and found him a more lucrative place of

employment: standing at the junction of Highway No. 5 with posters and signs for different political parties. Easy work, and it paid well. Just basking in the sun, holding posters, handing out bumper stickers to the drivers.

Ibrahim works two shifts: one for the Right-wing parties and the other for the Left. He needs plenty of money to get out of Israel, where they won't ask him whether he is an Arab or a Jew.

Traffic along Highway No. 5 is tough, and the drivers are on the verge of losing their tempers. They have been waiting at the junction for over ten tortuous minutes, cursing the malfunctioning lights—not knowing what's the matter. Now they are fighting each other for every patch of road, not allowing any car to overtake them or change lanes.

Ibrahim says: "Uri, it's like this everyday. Even worse. That's why I voted against the motion." He explains that in the first shift, he works for the settlers, carrying signs that say "The Gaza settlements are part of our flesh" and "Sharon tears apart our people"; in the second shift, he holds signs that say "Go, Sharon—the people are with you; "The settlements are a disaster" and "Peace Now."

Ibrahim explains: "I'm saving money to go abroad, where I can be neither Jew nor Arab. I can't stay here. The army categorizes me as a Jew and wants to draft me. But how can I fight against my own flesh and blood, my cousins? How can I? I must get out of this country. *Inshallah*. But it will be break my heart to leave Zalman. He is like a father to all of us. He is more of a father to me than my own dad, who fled to America and left me stuck here with my Jewish grandparents. But what can I do? I can't stay here and let them draft me into their army."

Uri is touched by Ibrahim's story and expresses his identification with his plight. Ibrahim will remember these words.

In the meantime, they are slowly progressing on Highway No. 5. Beneath the flyover, endless streams of cars flow both ways. Concrete above, concrete below. Concrete everywhere. At the junction, one banner is already visible: "Sharon, go to a referendum." Ibrahim: "Stop here. This is where I work. I love your Volvo but am less impressed by its acceleration. Expected more from a Volvo. Thanks for the kind words you said about me. You are a good man, Uri. May Allah lengthen your years. Have a safe journey."

Ibrahim gets out of the car, and Uri still manages to see him holding a placard: 'No withdrawal to Auschwitz frontiers.' Even before Uri manages to resume his driving, the telephone rings:

Edna: "Uri, what's wrong? I've been trying to call for half-an-hour and got no answer. I was worried. I almost called an ambulance, the police. Where on earth did you disappear to?"

Uri lies: "Edna, honey. I never heard the phone ring. Reception must be bad. I'm on my way. But the traffic jams, I'm telling you..."

He looks at the clock, and his heart starts pounding. A quarter to nine! The meeting was supposed to begin half-an-hour ago! And the traffic becomes heavier and slower. He was mad to have wasted all that time on idle talk with Simon-Zalman and with that Brigitte creature. It really was an irresistible impulse bordering on insanity. Edna reports that all participants have arrived at Shumacher and Partners, and she calmed them down by saying that he's due any minute: "That Shumacher type is really nasty. 'So what if the roads are congested,' he tells me."

Uri: "Yes, he is really a repulsive character. A borderline psychopath. But what can I do? He's an important client. Not any worse than others. That's life."

Edna: "I've asked his gothic secretary to calm him down. But she refused, saying not-so-nice things about you. Don't ask. Says she called you and insisted that you be punctual. Don't ask. Told her that you will not be too late."

Uri: "I hope so. I'm just beginning to drive along Highway No. 5. Still a long road ahead. Today of all days, I had to wake up late and get stuck in these endless bottlenecks. What a fucked-up system. Third-world roads. What do they spend the taxpayers' money on? On settlements and on the Orthodox! Maniacs! Jerks! All of them."

Edna: "I'll call Shumacher and Partners. Count on me. Don't get too excited. Remember what happened to David. I'll take care of everything."

The September sun rises from the east, and the heat becomes impossible to bear. The car absorbs the heat, and Uri begins to feel the hot dry air entering his throat. He escapes this by closing all the windows and by putting on the

climate control: within a short time, the Volvo's inside cools down to 21° Centigrade, while outside, the sensor tells him it's already 35°. An oven.

With cool air, the outside world withdraws. The heat of the end of summer, the constant noise of the honking cars, the polluted air—all these retreat, and the soft sound of the air-conditioning system plus the purr of the powerful engine take over.

Another stop. Another standstill. What's going on here? There's no traffic report on any radio stations. They report obstructions and slowdowns all over the country: a suspicious object here, a multiple accident there. Nothing, Godammit, about Highway No. 5. Uri starts cursing the radio stations. Instead of giving drivers information about the traffic, they broadcast inane commercials. At whom can this commercial be aimed: "At our bank, we extend credit without asking you too many questions." Uri wouldn't put his money in that bank. Or this one, stating that size does matter—the size of the freezer in the new three-dimensional fridge (Uri tries to imagine what a two-dimensional fridge looks like), and, of course, a number of "we pull their leg" moronic spoof shows.

Now he is driving through a tunnel. He sees the graffiti: "End the occupation!"; "Jerusalem's eternal capital"; "Acid parties on the beach—every Friday night"; "God, we are mad about you"; "We are proud lesbians."

Traffic is crawling, but at least it's moving. He is moving forward to meet Shumacher and Partners at the industrial park, along Highway No. 5.

Chapter 6: The Fourth Mile: Barbara from Moldova

Another stop. But now in the air-conditioned car, Uri does not get excited. Let it be. Let the traffic in the whole country come to a standstill. Let it become absurd: nobody moves, anywhere. Until doomsday. Maybe a total paralysis will show the Minister of Transportation what's going on. Perhaps this is what's needed for this moronic government to do something.

A knock on the window. What the hell do they want from him now? He intends to drive the intruders away with his hand, when he sees through the glass a transcendental sight: a stunning girl looking straight into his face, her hand signaling him to lower the window. She is exceptionally beautiful: her blond hair slides smoothly down her shoulders; her evergreen eyes; her tiny spoiled mouth; small snooty nose; everything about her—a combination of Madonna-like saintliness and the young Bardot's sex appeal. Could such a beauty be hitchhiking? No way. Uri rolls down the window, and immediately the Madonna-Bardot figure addresses him with a heavily accented voice:

"Mister. Today is 'appy hour. Promotion. 'Appy hour between nine and twelve o'clock."

"What happy hour? What promotion?"

"Today Barbara gives you 'appy hour blowjob. Only till twelve. Instead of 180 shekels, only ninety. Fifty percent discount. Only until twelve. After that, full price."

Such a young girl with an angelic face uttering such filthy words? What have we come to? The Orthodox are right! This is beyond the pale! He is about to raise his window by way of a disdainful refusal and to refer her to the honking car behind him, when the perfume of her raw body swirls his head.

"I am Barbara. Barbara from Moldova. I go inside car. I lie on floor. No see me. No see nothing. You drive like normal, and I give you 'appy hour blowjob. But only with condom. No kisses."

Uri assumes that Barbara is one of the residents of Simon-Zalman's village. One of those who, on Saturday nights, sings homeland songs.

"I'll pay you the full price, the unhappy price, if you tell me something about yourself and about the place you live in."

She sits beside him, and with her also enter into the cool enclave of the car, her intoxicating perfume and the whiteness of her skin. Barbara does not waste any time. She lies expertly on the car's floor, so as to be invisible to other

drivers. Her hand glides over Uri's trousers—the Armani trousers that Ruth bought him on their last visit to Florence—and touches his dormant member. Uri thinks: sex on such a hot morning? What else will they think of? The Ultra-Orthodox are absolutely right.

Uri: "Before you begin, I want to ask you, how did you get from Moldova to this place, to Highway No. 5?"

It is clear from Barbara's grimaces that she'd rather go on with her job than talk about herself. Uri reminds her that he will pay her the full price of 180 shekels if she answers his questions. Thus, unwillingly, Barbara begins to tell him about the Moldovan village in which she was born to her peasant parents—one of six brothers and sisters. When the Communists were in power, life was tough, but when democracy came, everything disappeared: Father's pension, free schools, open health clinic. There was no money to buy food for the children – not even for her baby. One day an agent arrived in the village looking for girls to work as croupiers in a Cairo casino. "All you have to do is roll the roulette and say out loud 2 sentences in French: *rien va plus* and *faites vos jeux*. That's all. Any of you who can say these 2 sentences properly will get a return ticket to Egypt and a fat salary. You'll be able to send lots of money back home."

Barbara, who had studied French when studying was still free, passed the test and got the job. The agent told her: "You have a bright future as a croupier at the casino in Cairo. You will be successful. You will be able to help your little baby and poor family." Her mother was suspicious from the beginning, saying that "it's all lies," but Barbara flew to Cairo with the agent and with the other girls. In Cairo, the agent handed them over to a local man, who housed them in what seemed to be a hotel. But it was neither a hotel nor a casino. They went through a period of abuse and mistreatment that Barbara does not want to remember. All sorts of evil men raped them. "Many were old men. Disgusting. Young boys, too. Sadists." They would rape then beat them up, "so that you get used to your new job." Barbara insisted on getting her passport back, and the Boss put out a burning cigarette on her hand. "Look, Mister. Here. Look. Burns on my hand." Barbara and girls from Moldova tried to rebel, but they were beaten savagely into submission. After ten days of this, they put them on a bus, which crossed Sinai for hours. Finally, the girls came out, and "they" told them, "From here you walk to your work in Tel Aviv." The girls walked in the desert. Initially with their high-heeled shoes and then barefoot in the sand. At night. At the other side of the frontier, "the Egyptian

bad guys gave us to the Israeli bad guys." They put her in a taxi. When the taxi stopped in Tel Aviv at a red light, Barbara jumped out. The "bad guy" stopped the cab and ran after her, but she hid in an entrance to a shop. She heard the "bad guy" shout in a language she did not understand, and he disappeared with the taxi into the night. She did not know what to do in this foreign country, but in the shop entrance, there lay an old beggar who spoke to her in French "and had light in his eyes."

"Is his name by any chance Zalman?"

"How did you know?"

"We are old friends. As a matter of fact, I am just returning from a visit to his village."

"I live in village. But is secret."

"It's O.K. I can keep a secret."

"Zalman gave me money to buy shoes. And dresses. Everything I had went with taxi."

"And then?"

"And then he took me to village, gave me place with water and lights."

Uri: "And you make a living—working here on Highway No. 5?"

Barbara: "Thank to Lord, I'm not complaining."

Uri: "And how are the people treating you here?"

Barbara: "I'll tell you honest. There are good. There are bad. And there is Zalman with big heart. And there are bad guys who do not pay Barbara. You must pay me now and not after blowjob."

The phone is ringing. Barbara signals that she will hush up, a ringed finger on her pouting mouth.

Edna is on the phone: "This Shumacher is really something. Now he's threatening to leave the office. He doesn't want to wait for you. Says he is due at the doctor's."

Uri: "To hell with Shumacher and to hell with his partners. To hell with the merger."

Edna: "You should phone him and apologize personally. I'd better not talk to him anymore."

Uri: "O.K. I'll call him later. In the meantime, we are beginning to move."

And, really, the road is unclogged and the cars begin to move. Uri resorts to cruise control, and the Volvo proceeds at the regular speed of thirty miles per

hour. Uri can remove his foot from the accelerator and devote his attention to Barbara, who ended the story of her life by praising "Chairman Zalman," who is "more than father." Thanks to him, she is staying here and not returning to Moldova to see her two-year-old baby son. "My mother takes care of him because his father is bad guy. Ran away. Nobody knows where is he." Barbara starts going down on Uri. Uri lets her do it. He is beginning to like the idea that while driving to a business meeting with a client, he does not waste his time. He deserves this pleasure, he says to himself, especially after such an evening with Gershon, and in addition, he helps this poor girl financially. If he only could, he would have killed with his own hands the pimps who trafficked her out of her family and mistreated her so brutally. These characters deserve the death penalty, in spite of what the Supreme Court says. While Barbara slowly works Uri to an orgasm, a Chevrolet pulls up on his left, right next to him. A bald character, equipped with huge sunglasses, stares at him, and while driving, signals to him to lower the window:

"Hi, Uri. What's new?"

"Hi." Who on earth can this be? "Everything is O.K. I'm surviving."

"Where the hell have you disappeared to? We haven't seen you for ages."

"You know. Family. Making a living. Not easy."

"Tell me about it. How are Ruth and Gershon? Haven't seen them for a long time. You're heading where?"

"To a business meeting. Driving on this road is sheer hell. All this traffic."

"Terrible. I could kill the Minister of Transportation with my bare hands. Say...shall we see you one of these days...or do you intend to go on hiding from us?"

"No, we must meet."

"Sure. You give us a ring."

In the meantime, faithful Barbara goes on with her job, and Uri emits a series of "ughs."

"Tell me, are you sick or something?"

"No, I'm perfectly—ugh—well."

"You don't look all right to me. At our age, you know."

"Yes. Age. Ugh!"

"And we'll see you. Promise? And love to Ruth."

"Yes. I promise."

"You don't look well at all. Take care. Remember: age. The main thing is your health."

Does this strange bald character with his sunglasses suspect something? Did he spot Barbara? If so, will he tell all of Tel Aviv about it? Impossible. He can't see Barbara from his Chevy. So why is he looking at Uri like that? Or is he staring at him because he heard his stupid outburst over the radio? And he wonders what even happened to such a distinguished lawyer that he falls into the trap of the pranksters? "How to die young at any age." Really. He should have hung up on them. Or is this all his wild imagination? It is possible that the mysterious bald character is really worried about Uri looking so bad. He really is haggard. He is tired of everything: tired of Gershon; tired of his work; tired of the two women in his life; tired of routine; tired of driving on this clogged, stop-and-go road; tired of types like Shumacher. Anyway, he waves goodbye to the anonymous bald guy and slows down to rid himself of the Chevy.

Who the hell is he? His face is totally unfamiliar, but the voice rings a bell. Is he losing his memory again? Is he following in David's footsteps, and will he soon find himself strapped to a wheelchair uttering a string of accursed G-sounds? Barbara—a true, beautiful, innocent professional—does not let go of him until he comes with a series of loud groans. Will another driver pull up beside him to inquire what's wrong? The telephone rings. To hell with these cell phones! The guy who invented them ought to be shot for creating such a nuisance. This time it's Shumacher's secretary, that viper, with her bitter and sour voice, with her "Mister Manoss" sounding like a death warrant:

"Mister Manoss, has something happened?"

"I'm stuck here...in one big jam."

"No, I don't mean that, Mr. Manoss. You simply sound sick."

The bitch detected in his voice the post-climax fatigue.

"No, I'm perfectly all right. I apologize for being late, but these traffic jams...you know...Please tell Shumacher that nowadays, with the roads...one never knows when one will get to a meeting..."

"Mister Manoss, one must realize what goes on nowadays on the roads, so one must get up early, and then one arrives on time."

"One will make every effort to arrive as soon as possible."

This is too much: Moussa, Simon-Zalman, Ibrahim, Brigitte, and Barbara—all in one morning, and Shumacher's deadly secretary to boot... It's too much. Now

that Barbara has finished her job, she fixes her mouth with a lipstick and asks Uri to let her out.

"And how will you get back to the village?"

"No problem, sir. I work my way back home—all in the 'appy hour. And thank you for paying Barbara full fare."

"Don't mention it. It was a pleasure. And give my regards to Zalman."

"Zalman is father. Is saint."

Barbara ploughs her way through the dense traffic to the other side of Highway No. 5—her tongue sneaks out of her mouth as she waits for the next customer going back towards the village.

Uri (on the phone): "Edna, sweetheart. Please remind me to kill Shumacher's secretary. Yes. Today. In cold blood. Edna, don't forget to remind me. Yes. Today. Cannot be postponed. You won't believe this, Edna, but suddenly the road is clear, and I can take off to Shumacher. But his secretary must be killed nevertheless.

Uri drives now, full speed ahead, eastward, on Highway No. 5.

Chapter 7: The Fifth Mile: A Dead Foot

Now he can relax. The car is under double control—cruise and climate. It's cool and leathery inside, while outside it begins to sizzle with the late morning heat. While the Volvo's engine hums monotonously, he can think more clearly: the strange unfamiliar face in the Chevy is surely an old acquaintance; of that he is certain. The stranger knew his wife's and his son's names, and Uri also identified his tone of voice and pace of speech—the accelerating staccato and the pianissimo with which he ended each sentence. Yes, he must be an old friend. But who? Who the hell is he? This is not necessarily a loss of memory or a defective hard disk. He meets so many people—in the courts, in the Bar Association, in the circle of friends from the Philharmonic, at Friday night parties, in his activities for various charities—that he simply cannot remember them all. This has nothing to do with forgetting the immobilizer's code. He did remember it, after the visit to Simon-Zalman's village. No, no, there is no danger whatsoever that he is sliding down David's G-sounds path. And what if they did broadcast his outburst on the radio? He does not care. And he will sue them. To deter them. To protect others. But it's not the end of the world. Let them laugh at him behind his back. Yes, yes. Let them. And another thing: there was a grain of truth in what that female voice told him: one should learn how to die young at every age. And a portion of optimistic news wouldn't hurt.

And suddenly, for no reason, it came to him: he knows who the bald, sunglassed stranger is: Nathan from the paratroopers. He has not seen him for ages. And Fat Nathan has lost so much weight, and also become totally bald, so it's not surprising that Uri could not recognize him. But now he remembers. He recalls everything about not-fat-anymore Nathan. What a strange coincidence that he should meet this old-time acquaintance while driving along Highway No. 5.

He sees the stalled convoys ahead of him. Another stop. There aren't even any traffic lights to at which to direct his curses. No apparent reason for this stop. Road repairs? Yes, that's possible. The idiots always do them in daytime. Never at night. Or was there a bomb on the road? What are they honking at in the back? Can't the fools see that nobody can move? Madmen. But the car behind him does not stop honking—not the regular "get-a-move-on" honk, not even the "go-to-hell" one, no not the normal nervous noise, but a honk of despair and rage. While Uri is prepared to give the driver the finger, while he mentally curses the

"ugly Israeli," he suddenly discovers that the car in front of him is a hearse. Uri understands that he unwittingly got stuck in a funeral procession making its way to the central cemetery of Tel Aviv, lying on Highway No. 5. The hearse in front of him, his Volvo, and the honking car in the back—all are stationary. Nobody moves. From the back car emerge a man and a woman. Both are dressed in black, but the woman stands out in her mourning gear: on a hot day, so early in the day, she is decked in black from shoes to her large-rimmed hat. The woman seems to belong to another place—to an old Ingmar Bergman film—and she combines a noble grief with exceptional elegance. She is accompanied by a stiff black-shirted male companion. Both go to the back door of the hearse. They pass him without even casting a glance at him. The man opens up the van's door, and its black interior is visible to Uri. Against this blackness, the whiteness of the shrouded body stands out. The woman covers her face with her hands. Somehow, the dead body's foot protrudes out of the shroud, and its pale whiteness contrasts with the surrounding blackness. The woman tears off her hat, kneels in front of the pale foot, and buries her face in it. Hatless, she kisses the foot and bursts out crying. Uri, in the sealed Volvo, hears her cries. He can only watch her—a scene taken from a silent movie. She refuses to heed her companion and does not get up, burrowing her face into the foot's surface. Uri rolls down the window. Immediately, heat waves penetrate his cool haven and bring with them the woman's wailings. Uri is moved. Who is this woman? And to whom does the foot belong? Is it her husband, who passed away after a long illness? Her lover, who died suddenly? Her daughter, who put an end to her life? Her son, killed in the recent terror attack and left her lonely in her widowhood? And who is the man beside her? Her husband? Her lover? Her son's father? Her daughter's partner? The one responsible for her suicide? Or her brother, who comforts her after the death of their father? Finally, they return to the car in the back. She passes next to Uri without so much as glancing at him. Now she looks entirely different. Her wide-brimmed hat is about to fall off her head. Her face is criss-crossed with post-weeping grimaces; the dust from her kneeling position stains with gray the blackness of her dress; she is faltering and frail. She can hardly walk and it seems that without her companion's support, she would collapse on his car; her former erect elegance is gone and her back is bent. Uri recalls Niobe, Queen of Thebes, whose children were killed by Apollo's mad revenge and whose inconsolable grief turned her into stone. The stiff man in black approached Uri,

bends to speak to him, and asks, in an Anglo-Saxon-accent, to move over to the road's margin so that the funeral procession would not be separated from the van in front. Uri intends to do as requested, but then recalls that once he leaves the lane, it will be hard to rejoin the dense traffic. He has no Ibrahim to stop the traffic and allow him to merge into it. He tries to explain this politely to the man in black and promises to make way once they start moving. Not now. He is already late for a very important meeting. The man in black stares at him blankly and quietly retorts: "I hope that at your own funeral, the procession will not be disrupted by somebody like you." And he disappears into the car waiting behind.

The man was polite. He did not threaten Uri. He did not call him names. But Uri shivers at his words. This is a curse. A malediction. Or is it his sick imagination and tardiness. Today, he's been uncharacteristically overreacting to everything. And yet when he remembers the man's words, a fear overtakes him. The convoy, whose engines purr quietly with pent-up impatience, begins to surge forward. The road inexplicably unclogs. The engines roar, and the cars charge on the hot asphalt and stream eastward. Finally, the Volvo can show its real performance. Uri accelerates and fights his way into the left lane in order to make room for the funeral procession and to enable it to reunite with the van. This is not easy. The drivers honk and accelerate to prevent him from merging into their lane. But he, too, honks violently, accelerates, and pushes his way into the left lane's traffic. He nearly causes an accident—only inches separated him from the blue Peugeot trying to prevent him from changing lanes—but finally he is successful. The funeral convoy can follow the white foot's car. Its mourners can be rejoined. Uri hopes that the man in black appreciates his courageous lane-crossing and that he regrets his unjust malediction.

Uri does not think about his death or funeral. At forty-plus, he's got many years ahead. But if he is really about to lose his memory, let death take him right here and now. Better dead than veg, he says to himself. Indeed, death can be redeeming. Last week, in court, the opposing lawyer asked for a short recess, as he did not feel well. He went out to the cafeteria, and there, on a chair, he passed away with a peaceful look in his eyes. Thus ended a life full of illnesses and pain. He died just like that. Here one second, gone the next. The heart stopped pumping. Just like that. There was no doctor in the house, so Uri, a son of a doctor, with some knowledge in first aid, tried to resuscitate him...in vain. In the bar Association, they had a special mourning session. The congregating lawyers

shushed and whispered: "So young, and already dead," but added, "At least he had an easy end, unlike his life." And someone added: "A heart failure is good for the dead one but cruel to his family."

Perhaps Uri's troubles stem from his heart? His father, Gustav-Gershon, died of a heart attack. Perhaps his heart does not pump enough blood to the brain? But does it make any difference? The fact is that his memory—his past phenomenal total recall—is not what it used to be. He did not recognize Nathan, a friend of so many years. How could he not identify him immediately? It's all Gershon's fault. His son implants in him not merely a virus but a digital worm. For a second, he imagines this digital worm gnawing on his memory cells, digging deep inside his brain, digging and gnawing, gnawing and digging inside—gradually destroying his hard disk. He recovers from these thoughts, looks at the clock. It's already nine. Let it be nine, what does he care! Even if he loses Shumacher and Partners as a client, it's not the end of the world. And what's Shumacher to him, when he has to face the choice between death and loss of memory.

Franz Schubert, the beloved genius worshipped by his family, lost his memory before he died. He was not aware of what was happening around him. And he did not even know where he was dying. His life's journey ended without him recognizing the people gathered around his bed. Poor Schubert, dying at the age of 31! Unbelievable, how many marvelous works he left behind! By the age of 15, he had written, in one year, four quartets, an octet, a symphony, a piano sonata for four hands, many lieder, and four kyries. All this before he reached Gershon's age. Schubert died at his brother's Viennese home, where he went over the score of the second part of his masterpiece: *Winterreise* (A Winter's Journey). After that, he became so weak that he couldn't leave his bed. He kept asking his brother: "Who are all these people? What do they intend to do to me?" He pleaded with his brother to be put in his room. He wept: "Don't leave me here in this corner of a hole in the ground. Don't I deserve a place above ground where I could die peacefully? The brain that conceived and composed the Great Symphony and the Unfinished one, did not know, did not remember a thing. He had this delirium that he was buried alive. The doctor tried to comfort him, but Schubert's weak hand tapped the wall, and he whispered: "Here. Here is my end. Here. Underground." The next day, Schubert died without recovering from his delirium. Now, Uri sees the sign: "For Tel Aviv's Central Cemetery, take the next right turn."

As long as his mother was alive, they used to go every year, on the anniversary of his father's death, to visit the grave. Uri saw to it that his father's grave be well kept and the engraving on the tombstone be legible: "Here lies my husband, our son, and my father, our beloved Doctor Gershon, son of Heinrich-Hiram Nussbaum. A devoted Zionist, a distinguished physician." But after his mother passed away, he—pangs of remorse cross his consciousness and quickly face away—he stopped making this annual pilgrimage. No, it's not only because he is swamped by routine work—letters, telephone calls, e-mails, court appearances, meetings with clients. It's also because in his secular-rational philosophy, there is no room for tombstones and memorial services. All ends with Death. After the dying of the light, everything is gone. Forever. What remains is bones and maggots. The rest is silence and darkness. Only remembering the dead is significant. When he remembers his parents, his father Gustav-Gershon and his mother Hannah, he thinks of them in terms of Jean Paul Sartre's play *Closed Doors*, in which the dead sit huddled together in a closed room opposite a screen, which lights up only when someone living remembers them. That's how he thinks of his grandparents. He thinks of them so that the screen in their closed room would light up. No need to visit graves for that.

Yes, this, too, is a superstition. This, too, is not rational. But this belief has a humanistic message. No talk of Judgment Day. Of the dead rising from their graves: no religious rites. Hamlet does not have to visit his father's grave. His father comes to haunt him, and he, Hamlet, dithers and fails to honor his father's command. This, and not neglecting the tomb, is the real contempt of the dead.

When Hamlet finally visits a cemetery, it is not to mourn Ophelia's death but, on the contrary, he quarrels with her brother and challenges him: 'I'll rant as well as thou.' Even at the sight of Ophelia's dead body, he cannot let go and recites his cerebral homilies. But Uri does not want to be like Hamlet. He would like to cry out like Hecuba, Queen of Troy, like Niobe, Queen of Thebes, who turned into a rock spewing a river of tears. He would like to be like the vagabond actor—to shout, to weep, to raise heaven and earth, wailing about and protesting human tragedies. But as a lawyer, and as one who got a German-Jewish, a *Yekish*, education—yes, even though he is second-generation Israeli, his father Gustav-Gershon having been born here—he cannot act like that, he cannot let go. He must plead his cases rationally, logically. As a lawyer, he cannot vent primary feelings: love, revenge, loss. As a lawyer, he must not only be self-

controlled but also direct his clients to control themselves—not to scream at lying witnesses, not to curse their cheating adversaries, and, in divorce and marital cases, not to tear each other apart.

The fact that he is a rational, self-controlled person—"With us German Jews, Yekes, one must never weep"—has been of great assistance to him. Due to his Yekish, quiet rationality—Ruth calls it his "insane rationality"—he has acquired fame and success as an advocate, and the Chief Justice even explored the idea of appointing him to the bench. ("In a few years—yes. But not just now," was his reply.)

But if he is so rational, why does he make it a point to attend funerals? He's got a rational answer: he does so for the sake of the living mourners and not for the dead person, who turns into dust even before he is buried.

And what about all these testimonies of near-death, people who tell of their soul exiting the body and looking at it from outside? He is ready to believe in the authenticity of these testimonials. He is also ready to believe, as Hamlet said to Horatio, that there are more things "in heaven and earth than are dreamt in your philosophy." He is not fanatic in his belief in rationality. There are always islands of inexplicable irrationality and mystery. But this does not mean that he can share the religious beliefs in heaven, hell, and resurrection. Had Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram been alive, he would have probably expanded on the subject by quoting Goethe.

A car pulls up and drives right next to him. Upon the driver's signal, Uri rolls down his window. The driver, shouting: "How much?"

"How much what?"

"How much do you want to sell it for?"

"Sell what?"

"The Volvo."

"Who says I'm selling my car?"

"What, are you crazy or something? Go to hell."

"You go to hell."

And now, the car, as if unleashed, surges forward to the industrial park to meet Shumacher and Partners.

Chapter 8: The Seventh Mile: Winter Journey

Uri turns on the radio and begins surfing between the different stations. What drivell! What inane commercials. This one promises in a tempting and sexy voice, an old age home for the "mentally exhausted," with a personal plasma TV for each patient. What will the "mentally exhausted" do with the plasma screens? And what will come next: home cinema for the dying? Surround-sound for the terminally ill? And this one, a macho male voice this time, promises to cure impotence with five easy exercises? Uri wrecks his mind to imagine what sorts of exercise they have in mind. Who invents all this crap? Probably the queers. Those feeble, flippant, fickle creatures who sit behind him at the Philharmonic. They control the media. It's true. They decide what to broadcast when—including moronic prank shows. He reaches the classical music station, but here, too, there is no repose. Something dissonant and atonal which Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram would call "cacophonic-pseudo-music." He turns on the CD changer. Winter's Journey—*Winterreise*. By Schubert. Silence. Beauty. Pain. Snow. Melancholy. Ravens. Treacherous love. How sad. How romantic. How wonderful. Songs in German—the language he has not mastered but which he knows rather well. The German which is a memento from the days in which Father Gustav-Gershon spoke it with Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram—that grandfather who would insist on calling him Ulrich. Sometimes Ouli. Uri-Ouli-Ulrich. He recalls his fear as a boy that the kids in school would hear him being called by a German name. This would have been a cause for much mockery. He is equipped with all the required German terms, all ending in *ich*: *natürlich, unglaublich, wirklich, eigentlich, glücklich, gemütlich*. When he participated in the international convention of lawyers in Munich, his dormant German returned to him almost overnight. He knows by heart the words of *Winterreise*. Inside his cool bubble of a car, he listens in surround-sound quality to Fischer-Diskan's baritone:

*Gefrorne Tropfen fallen
Von meinen Wangen ab:
Ob es mir denn entgangen,
Dass ich geweinet hab?*

(Frozen teardrops fell
from my cheeks:
had I noticed them

that I had been weeping?)

Schubert lived a life of poverty and deprivation. Without a wife. Without children. He carried a torch at Beethoven's funeral and asked to be buried next to him. This wondrous genius, from whose soul this marvelous *Winterreise* music emanates.

Tears begin to cover Uri's eyes. Does he weep because of Schubert's misery? He recalls that only two years ago, he gave Gershon, his son, a CD of the *Winterreise* cycle. They both listened to its songs. And then Gershon said to him: "One should not pity Schubert for dying so young. After composing this, the only thing left is death."

And today? Today, he does not dare mention the name Schubert for fear that Gershon would attach him to one of his favorite adjectives: dense, dead-from-the-waist-up, pedophile.

What actually happened to Gershon? What happened to him over the last two years that transformed him from the talented, musical, and docile child to a young, vulgar man whose presence Uri wants to shun? Is all this predetermined, embedded into his genes from birth? Or from conception? Or perhaps this metamorphosis is ascribable to the psychological greenhouse in which he grew up? Perhaps he and Ruth erred in raising the boy on classical music: the journey to Salzburg, the visits to the Philharmonic, his participation in classical music quizzes. Perhaps Gershon rebels now against the classical music bubble into which he was put and which isolated him from his disco-loving friends? Perhaps this repulsive porn star business is a rebellion against that diverse cultural atmosphere in which he grew up? That something which Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram called "*bildung*"? And perhaps all this is irrelevant. Perhaps he was led astray by his girlfriend, by Naomi. He and Ruth never met Naomi, but from what Gershon tells them about her and her home, it is obvious that she does not even know who Schubert was or that he existed. He, Uri, is not a snob, but Gershon deserves a more sophisticated girlfriend, a girl with a good *kinderstube*. Ruth goes further: she thinks Naomi is a good-for-nothing bimbo who will lead Gershon astray and who is the cause of the ruination of her only son. And this Naomi is really ready to be his co-star in the sex-in-army-uniforms porn? A child of fifteen! How low can they go? And nobody to stop them. No, he refuses to believe this. The school advisor told them that Gershon is trying to provoke his parents: "Like all adolescents he is cruel and seeks to measure the limits of your

patience and tolerance." But for what purpose? For the love of God, what for? But if the advisor is right, then all this talk about porno on the net is merely an attempt to terrorize him. But he, Uri, is not easily terrorized into submission. No, no. Nobody can frighten Uri Manoss. He's been through a lot in his life: served in the paratroopers; saw action in war; commands a crack unit in the reserves. Even his own flesh and blood will not frighten him. Gershon wants to be a porn star? By all means, let him do what he wants. Let him flaunt his member, the Manoss member, for all to see. At least that way, he'll try on an army uniform. And let them see that bimbo Naomi with him. He, Uri, is not responsible for his son's deeds? Who, these days, is responsible for his children? Most of them are dysfunctional. The parents are responsible? Nonsense. The education system is responsible! The advisors are to blame! The faggots who control the media are guilty! Not the parents. And besides, he'd rather have a porn star for a son than the Bar Association president's son, who cannot face the day without a shot of heroin. And what if all the secretaries will giggle behind his back? Who tells them to roam the porn sites on the Internet? The rabbis are one hundred percent right. The Internet is the root of all evil. It mainly serves the perverts, the smooth operators of the porn sites. Don't blame Gershon—blame these slick, sick, smooth Sodomites. The smooth operators. The smooth operators are to blame for all this mess. Were it not for all these smooth operators, Gershon would not dream of leaving school. The Internet destroyed his son. A curse on the man who invented the thing. Accursed are all those who invented all these digital gizmos. The new G3 cell phones that take your picture. You talk on the telephone and—whoosh!—you've been photographed. He never talks now on one of these things without combing his hair first. You sit in the bathroom, minding your business, talking to your friends on the phone, and discover that your phone takes shots of you doing your thing. Immediately, your photo turns into a file and is sent via group e-mails to the whole world, and within two minutes, you receive, on that very same phone, an e-mail from Singapore offering you the latest pills against constipation. What's this? A man cannot even shit alone? A curse on them. A curse on those who invented the Palm and the BlackBerry, which follow you round with their constant barrage of e-mails. A curse on those who invented the coded immobilizers that stop functioning if you forget the secret number for one second. Yes. Life was better before all these contraptions became a part of his routine. In the old Internet-less times, Gershon would have stayed home, and both of them

would play Schubert's *Fantasia* for four hands on the piano, which Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram brought from Germany. Without the Internet, Gershon would not have opted for the porn trade, and he would not appear with three other men—all in uniform and wearing the paratroopers' red berets—and with three hefty women—one of them black—in a shameless orgy.

Another stop. No movement. They all stand motionless on Highway No. 5. With climate control and the quadraphonic system playing Schubert's *Winterreise*, this is not too bad.

Uri: "Edna, honey, so what's new? No, I can't believe it. An accident on Highway No. 5. Two cars caught on fire? A whole family dead. Good God. When will I ever make it, if I ever make it, to the industrial park? This is certainly not my day."

He shuts off the baritone and switches to the radio to hear about the accident. And indeed they talk about a car that, for no apparent reason, crossed over the highway divider and crashed head-on into a car coming from the opposite direction. Both cars are burnt out. And at this hour, the rescue services are trying to extricate the bodies from the charred cars: four bodies are already out: a man, a woman, and two children—probably the same family. As a result of this huge bottleneck, cars have piled up on both sides of the highway.

Uri, on the phone with Shumacher's secretary: "Did you hear on the radio? A terrible, terrible accident...a whole family gone...So please tell Shumacher that I simply cannot move here. The highway is clogged. Bottlenecks."

"Mr. Manoss, you know full well that Shumacher hates excuses."

Kill her. No other way.

Suddenly, out of the Volvo's entrails rises a cranking metallic noise. Uri has never heard it before. What's this? That's all I need—the car breaking down in the middle of this stationary convoy. What will I do? Edna would know. She would send a mechanic and a tow-truck to fix the car. But the idea of leaving this cool enclave and venturing out into the scorching heat outside fills him with despair. What happened to the trustworthy Volvo? His nerves are shot, but the car should be immune to the vagaries of driving along Highway No. 5. Perhaps this creature of the North cannot stand the end-of-summer heat? Perhaps it is used to Swedish emptiness and cannot digest the noisy congestion of Israel? Suddenly, the noise ceases, as it began, with no apparent cause. Now the air-conditioned Volvo has

resumed its cruise eastward to the industrial park, to a very late meeting with Shumacher.

Chapter 9: The Eighth Mile

Inside his cool bubble, Uri listens to Schubert's songs. The car is moving—slowly, but at least it's not stationary. And now comes the turn of his favorite song of the sign post:

*Einen Weiser seh' ich stehen
Unverrückt vor meinem Blick;
Eine Strasse muss ich gehen,
Die noch keiner ging zurück.*

(I see one signpost standing
fixed before my gaze,
there is a road that I must travel
from which none has returned.)

The baritone transforms the word *keener* (none) to a desperate cry after which, almost whispering, he sings the words *ging zurück* (has returned). A shiver runs down Uri's spine.

Schubert died young, but his memory will remain forever. But when Uri dies, nothing will be left of him for future generations. As long as his wife and son are alive, he will be remembered and it will light the screen in his no-exit room. With their deaths, nothing will be left of him. Neither a memento nor a memory. Within a generation, he will have become a non-person, as if there was never an Uri Manoss. But does it make any difference? Schubert and all the immortals are not remembered as individual human beings, but as icons. There is no difference between Schubert and the St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, between Plato and the Akropolis, Virgil and the Pantheon. All of these are monuments in varying degrees of preservation. That's the only difference. His parents and grandparents will deteriorate and eventually disintegrate, while the *Trout Quintet* will live as long as there are human beings. Yes, there are people whose tombstones turn to dust while they are still alive. Uri hopes he is not one of these. He's still got plenty to say, plenty to contribute.

Another slowdown grinding to a standstill. Uri switches to radio to hear the news about the accident. A popular song blares:

Baby, baby, ba-bee
Why did you leave me?
Why did you ditch me?
Come back to my arms
And never leave me, never ditch me

Dear God, Uri prays, do something. Get me out of here. Get me to Shumacher already. I'm still far away from the industrial park. If I won't make it soon, Shumacher will ditch me. What a day! What a morning!

Had Uri not decided to look for Simon-Zalman, had he not stayed awhile in his village, he could have been in the burnt car. He could have been a charred body, in his almost-new Volvo. What can a man do if into his safest of cars another car comes crashing?

What's the meaning of all this? The religious folk would insist that this is the hand of God. The hand of God intervened, delayed him at the village, and saved him from catastrophe. But God's hand did not save a whole family, including two children, from being burnt alive. And God's hand does not save the devout and righteous. If not, what is it? What saved him from death? Fate? No, not fate. Fate is a preordained, predestined order. This is the Biblical fate of the woman: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." This is the Jewish fate: to be a rejected minority. But not to be in your car in a given place at a given time is not fate. You can rebel against fate. His father's father, for instance, rebelled against fate. Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram was destined to stay in Germany until it was too late to escape. He was an assistant conductor of the Mannheim Chamber Orchestra and was almost elected to the city council. He believed in Germany and its *Kultur*, dismissed the Nazis as "temporary madness," and used to say to his family that there is no culture outside *Kultur*. His fate was to remain in his homeland. Uri's grandfather defied fate. When one evening in Mannheim, a local thug shouted an anti-Semitic slogan at him, he decided, then and there, to leave Germany and immigrate to Palestine, in 1934, when getting out was still easy. He decided that in spite of the pleas of his wife Gertrude, who saw in any country outside Germany a wasteland, and even more so when it came to Palestine—a virtual wasteland. The assistant conductor arrived in Tel Aviv only to discover that the last thing that was needed was another conductor. Again, Heinrich-Hiram thwarted fate and started selling German-type sausages in Tel Aviv's main square.

He donned a chef's hat bearing the words Herr Doctor Sausage and stood there, he, the nearly elected city councilor, selling sizzling sausages with sauerkraut. Very soon, he became well known in the small town that Tel Aviv then was, and a satirical theater had a skit about him. Grandpa Heinrich added the Hebrew Hiram to his name, called his son Gustav-Gershon, thus continuing to defy his German fate. But all this has nothing to do with Uri not being in the burnt-out car. There was no fate that ordained the stop at Simon-Zalman's. It was a coincidence. And there's no effective weapon against coincidence. You cannot defy coincidence. You cannot rise up in protest against an accident. God has nothing to do with it, and neither has fate. No act of personal courage—no taking up "arms against a sea of troubles"—will be of any help. Accidents will happen regardless. Regardless of what you do, as with his friend David-Gagig. Like the heart failure of the lawyer in the court's cafeteria; like Ibrahim's unfortunate birth to a mixed couple; like the black flower Manu-Brigitte was born with.

What a morning! One of those accursed days when everything turns out to be bad. One of those mornings when it's better to give up, go back to bed, and wait for a better morning. But he cannot afford to go back. A few miles from here, two businesspeople—one of them his client—are waiting for him to close the merger deal. He is not a free agent. He cannot go, like Gershon, to the beach, instead of school. He is a *paterfamilias*, a head of a family. He has to be the breadwinner. He has to listen to the ravings of his pierced face son. Enough! Enough! Let Gershon and his slutty girlfriend do as they please! Why should he care? Gershon wants to screw the African girl? Let him. The girl asks for more? O.K. He'll give it to her. Two other men join the fray? Perfect. Let them enjoy this. Let all the maniacs who surf the net looking for my son doing it to three Chinese women enjoy themselves. Let them have a good time watching Gershon in action. And if they'll snicker at him, he'll retort: Did you see my son? A spitting image of his father. That will shut them up once and for all. And if they'll use cell phones to photograph him constipated in the bathroom, let them! So what, don't these smooth operators suffer from constipation occasionally? Let the smooth operators buy the laxative from Singapore! Please, buy it, swallow it, but do me one favor—shut up!

But behind this mental tirade, there looms something else. Something that he can't put his finger on. There was something unbelievable in Gershon's horror show last night. Something strange, a sense of incompatibility. Throughout his son's

verbal onslaught, Uri swayed between two contradictory feelings: outrage and suspicion. Outrage at Gershon's brutal egotism and a hazy suspicion that all that was a put-on, a show, a charade of a rebel son. Now Uri recalls the ambivalent words of the school advisor: "Mr. Manoss, don't be worried about your son. One day you'll discover the whole truth!" What did he mean by that? And something else bothers him: Gershon never brought Naomi home. "You're not good enough for a free spirit like her," he said. But not only did they not meet her. They never spoke to her over the telephone. They never saw a photo of her. Is she real? A mirage? Or, as Uri vaguely begins to suspect, a figment of Gershon's imagination? The suspicion thickens as Uri waits for the traffic to resume. Gershon, with his high IQ, talks like an idiot about the pedophiles in school. This is not him. This is a text he recites. Something he acts out. It is conceivable, Uri reasons, that last night was part of a show. Has Gershon invented Naomi and the porn business as a cover for something else? Have all these Gershonite evenings been a ruse to conceal the fact that he, Gershon, is not one of the macho crowd, that he hasn't got a girlfriend, that he still loves classical music, that he is—unbelievably—still a virgin? The porno is a veil behind which he hides his sexual underdevelopment? And it is conceivable, considering the advisor's strange words, that this charade has been concocted by both of them—Gershon and his advisor. That is the whole truth which one day he will discover: Gershon will come up to his parents and confess that he plotted all this in order to extricate himself from the crisis of adolescence, in order to stop being a boy and become a man. This is plausible.

Anyway, tonight, Uri will put an end to all this. If Gershon's threats are for real, he'll go to the police. If it's a charade, Uri will expose it. Tonight, Gershon must grow up. He must remember who he is. He is the great-grandson of Heinrich-Hiram, the man who almost became a member of the city council of Mannheim and nearly a minister in Israel's first government.

When Heinrich immigrated to Palestine, he had to face the problem of his ambivalent attitude towards Germany in a simple way: he could not cut himself loose from the language and the *kultur*—until the end of his life, his Hebrew was forced and heavily-accented—but he could not forgive Germany and the Germans. His solution was to turn the figure of Marlene Dietrich, the German singer-actress who defected to Hollywood, a subject of endless adoration and adulation. She became a true icon of "authentic Germany." Dietrich was a true anti-Nazi German. She immigrated to America, became an American citizen,

and refused Hitler's offer to go back to the motherland. Instead, she led an anti-Nazi campaign and entertained American forces in North Africa and Europe during 1944-5. Towards the end of the war, she entered Germany with one of the first American units—a rare case in which the person belonging to the occupied people identified with the invader. For Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram, she symbolized a Germany one could identify with, the Germany of Mannheim, where he grew up, the country of good-hearted, humanistic people. You could identify with Dietrich without forsaking the *heimat*, the motherland. Photos of Dietrich were all over the apartment of Gertrude and Heinrich-Hiram: Marlene in the famous scene from *The Blue Angel*; in a tuxedo and top hat in Morocco; on the cover of a 1937 screen book with the caption: "An actress must lead a dangerous life." Her manly, hoarse voice came over from croaking records played on the gramophone they brought over from Mannheim. Grandma Gertrude thought she was "too masculine" and that her husband was "too much" in love with her.

Uri grew up on these songs heard on the old 78 rpm vinyl records. From the small apartment in Tel Aviv, arose the smoke-filled voice from *The Blue Angel*:

*Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss
Auf Liebe eingestellt,
Denn das ist meine Welt.
Und sonst gar nichts.*

(From head to toe
I am built for love,
yes, this is my world
and nothing else.)

When Grandpa listened to this song, his face was aglow with happiness, and he would repeat the words and nod in consent, as if he were himself Professor Unrath, who falls in love with the lascivious Lola, whom von Sternberg created from Heinrich Mann's book. These words—*und sonst gar nicht*, and nothing else—were deeply embedded in Uri's conscience. He remembers Grandpa's tales about Dietrich. Grandpa was lucky to have seen the first screening of *The Blue Angel* at Gloria Palast Cinema on his last visit to Berlin. He described to Uri the sensation created by the scene in which Marlene sings this

song, sitting-riding on a chair, showing off her stunning legs, a cigarette in a holder in one hand and touching her top hat with the other—declaring that she is built for love.

Grandpa explained that Dietrich was not a mere actress "with the most beautiful pair of legs in the whole world." The phrase "Marlene would say" preceded Grandpa's quotes. On Saturday afternoons, when they would sit down on the balcony to have their *Kafé und Strudel*, these quotes figured permanently. Father Gustav-Gershon used to mock his father for reciting the *bon mots* of the "great philosopher from Hollywood," but these quotes were part and parcel of Uri's education, and he still remembers them by heart.

In America sex is an obsession, in other parts of the world it is a fact.

It's the friends you can call up at four a.m. that matter.

Without tenderness, a man is uninteresting.

Grandpa would declaim these quotes with great emphasis, expecting expressions of admiration for the wisdom of the great German actress, and when these did not come, he would scold his listeners: "You simply fail to grasp the intelligence of this unique woman." And Grandma Gertrude would quietly comment: "Ah, Heinrich, but you are exaggerating again."

Grandpa did not return to Germany after the war—"What will I do in Mannheim? In order to see my city, I must strike out my memory"—but as member of the party of the Yekes—"new immigration"—he objected to boycotting the German language—Herzl's language.

Uri remembers Heinrich-Hiram arguing fiercely with his father Gustav-Gershon, who insisted that "all Germans are the same." "What are you blabbering about? Were there not anti-Nazis in Germany? Weren't there people like our Marlene? She could voice her views freely, as she did in America. But the Marlenes who stayed behind in Germany thought exactly like her." In 1960, when Marlene Dietrich visited Israel, this was, for Grandpa, almost like a religious omen. He saw this visit as proof that his two homelands—the Zionist and the cultural—merge into one meaningful experience. When she landed, she was interviewed on the radio and was asked whether she will sing a song in German at her appearances in Israel. This was a short time after the Israel Philharmonic decided

to cancel a concert at which Mahler's "Song of the Earth" was going to be sung in German. Dietrich responded: "I won't sing a song in German. I'll sing five songs in German." And added: "Germany existed before Hitler and will exist after him. What was good enough for Heinrich Heine is good enough for all of us." Grandpa exploded with consent: "Marvelous! German is the expression of the highest form of culture known to man. One of the reporters asked her how old she was, and she shot back: "Gentlemen don't ask such questions"—to which Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram roared his approval: "She teaches these Asians proper manners! Oh, how wonderful is this frau."

Dietrich's visit culminated in a one-woman show she gave in Tel Aviv. Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram and Grandma Gertrude took out of the huge suitcase they brought with them from Germany their Mannheim eveningwear—a tuxedo for him and a long chiffon dress for her—untouched since their immigration to frugal Tel Aviv. They came to the concert, like two remnants from a 1920s film, with the pomp of opening-night invites to the *Staatsoper*. They waited for the star at the stage door and were given the autographed photo:

To my best and most authentic German friends,
who live in Tel Aviv.

With
admiration,
Marlene

Grandpa used to show Uri this framed autograph and with sparkling eyes would say: "Marlene is not a singer. In truth, she does not sing. She half whispers, half recites her songs in a baritone voice. But this husky voice is the true expression of pre-disaster Berlin. Berlin of Brecht, Weill, Döblin, Reinhardt, Gropius, Lieberman, and Freuchtwanger. Unforgettable Berlin. Modern Athens. Periclean Berlin. Berlin which renewed Europe's culture—the city of Irwin Piscator, of Otto Dix, and of Erich Maria Remarque. Dietrich transmits to us this Berlin more than any book or documentary. And how beautifully she sang 'Lilly Marlene.'" Grandpa told his grandson that Dietrich's career started by accident. The director von Sternberg was looking for a young, sexy actress to play the secondary role of Lola, with whom Professor Unrath falls in love in *The Blue Angel*. Marlene had already

appeared in a few silent movies, but she was relatively unknown in Bebelberg, Berlin's Hollywood. Von Sternberg also auditioned another young unknown actress, Leni Riefenstahl, who was destined to become a Nazi film director and a devoted admirer of Adolf Hitler. Heinrich-Hiram used to say: "Germany swayed between those two—Leni and Marlene—between evil and good." And he added: "Von Sternberg chose Marlene because of her sexual provocativeness, her husky voice, and her fabulous legs—then still plump—and it did not dawn on him that by this choice, he brought to the fore one of the great German heroines of our time, who would courageously stand up against her own country and her own people, when they fell in with the Nazis." His father, Gustav-Gershon, objected to all this: "Dad, you don't understand Germany. Leni, as well as Marlene, are Germany. Inside the Germany of *Kultur*, is imprisoned Leni, the Teutonic monster, threatening to break out, when the opportunity arises, into another *furor teutonicus*—the Teutonic rage. Hitler continues this tradition."

Thus went on the debates between Uri's father and grandfather—starting in Hebrew and quickly sliding into German.

Heinrich-Hiram was more than a grandfather to Uri. Their apartment in the fashionable part of Tel Aviv was, for Uri, a shelter, a place where they talk and think differently, a site of the monthly Saturday night Schubert concert. Each Schubertiade—the name was taken from the composer's home—had a fixed order. First came all the Yeke friends from the neighborhood—the men wearing jackets, the women—hats—sipping cold lemonade and complimenting the *hausfrau*. Punctually, at five, the concert would begin. It would start with Grandma Gertrude singing—with much emotion but not always accurately—a Schubert song, accompanying herself on the piano brought from Mannheim. The Yekes would nod in consent. Then the quartet sat down and began to play: Heinrich-Hiram—first violin; Gertrude—viola; the same-floor neighbor—who had been a conductor in Ulm—cello; and the relative from the kibbutz, whom Gertrude accused of constantly playing off key—second violin. Uri's parents did not participate in the Schubertiade. Father, so told him Grandpa, had always been busy with his medicine—first studying then practicing it—and his mother Hannah came from a family who resolutely opposed these "German rites" and the "nostalgia industry" of the Nussbaums.

Uri, the child, would sit among the Yeke old-timers, riveted by the event and by Schubert's music. During the hot days of July-August, the Yekes would

finally agree to take off their jackets, and Grandpa would open the windows—he never believed in fans, and later—in air conditioners, as both gave you "cancer instantly." The quartet would sweat and play in the humid heat. Grandfather and the two players would sit in short-sleeved shirts, and Gertrude would wear a light, almost transparent, cotton summer dress. Uri remembers these summer Schubertiades as a mixture of heavenly music and old folks' sweat. Even now, on his way to Shumacher and Partners, he can hum whole parts of these Schubert quartets. At the end of the first quartet, there was a twenty-minute intermission. Gertrude served *Kafé und Mandelbrot*, which she baked herself ("the local cookies smell of Poland"). When the windows were open, the noises—street sounds, neighbors hollering, vociferous crowds on the sidewalk below—mingled with the sound of the music, and Grandfather would mutter audibly: "These Orientals! These Asians!"

Each Schubertiade would end without fail in exactly the same way: Grandpa would repeat the same story, without altering a word—how young Franz Schubert sent Johann Wolfgang von Goethe songs that Goethe wrote and Schubert set to music. The great poet sent back the packages without even bothering to open them. "And what is the conclusion?" asked Heinrich-Hiram. And the guests would answer in unison: "Great men make great mistakes." And Grandfather would end triumphantly: "Goethe could not even imagine that a day would come when these songs would be known to the world only because of Schubert's music—that very same young man, whose notes remained unread." The Yekes would indicate their agreement, and the wife of the conductor from Ulm would utter her habitual "*unglaublich*." On this word, the monthly Schubertiade ended.

Grandma Gertrude, who sang in every Shubertiade, was not really a singer. In Germany, she was a dancer, a member of the famous Mary Wigman troupe—the modern ballet that revolutionized the dancing world of the early twentieth century.

Grandma was Wigman's favorite dancer, and every time Gertrude would mention her name, she would sigh and groan: "At the time, she was a trailblazer, an icon, a guru." Wigman was everything Gertrude ever aspired to be: an independent person and a great artist. She defied her parents and went to study modern dance. She was a true pioneering choreographer. When she would go on stage, even before she started moving, audiences would be electrified by her

appearance. Indeed, Gertrude told Uri, her ballets expressed the deepest human sentiments, the existential anxieties, the fears with which human beings are born, the crushed hopes, the fraternity of human suffering, the love of man. Because of that, Gertrude was crushed that this very same hallowed Wigman sided with Hitler and stopped answering her letters from Tel Aviv. Other artists left Germany, while she, the great Wigman, who could have had a career anywhere, remained in Germany under the aegis of Hitler, Goebbels, and Streicher. Mary Wigman stayed behind! Gertrude could not fathom this. How was it possible that the woman who mentioned her, knowing that she was half-Jewish, could do that: "How could she stay with them, knowing that her art was, in Nazi terms, *entartete kunst*—degenerate art! Gertrude herself—she told the eagerly listening Uri—met Heinrich through the Wigman troupe. His grandfather loved repeating the story time and time again—how he fell in love with Gertrude: "I saw your grandmother for the first time on stage. Mary Wigman came to Mannheim in 1930, just before their American tour. I was simply curious to see what everyone was talking about—this "free and unbridled" ballet.

"The curtain goes up and no music is heard. On the stage stands a lone figure swaddled from head to toe in a white scarf—half a dress, half a shroud. It is a woman, and she lifts upwards her white hands with her fingers outstretched toward the sky. The crowd is riveted even before the dance begins. A lonely drum begins to tam-tam. Mary Wigman, no longer young, unwinds her white scarf, and from below emerges an Ariel-type thin dancer. The embodiment of frailty. This was your grandmother. Between the two a dance-dialogue develops: Gertrude tries to get away from Mary, but she is tied to her by the white scarf, as if held by a leash. Gertrude tries to distance herself, is stopped by the scarf-leash, and withdraws back to her. Mary stands immovable, like a rock. Gertrude wraps the scarf around her, and Mary, old and decrepit, almost naked without the scarf, crawls trying to get away from Gertrude, but she, too, is stopped by the scarf-leash. She can walk away to the stage rim but cannot cut herself loose from Gertrude. And then, the tam-tam stops, there is no music, and out of the back a male dancer, dressed and masked in black, and with swift, menacing movements tears apart the white scarf. Gertrude and Mary are free to escape and run away from each other. But, despite that, despite the fact that nothing holds them together, they cannot separate, and they move towards each other, in spite of themselves, as if directed by a higher power. Finally—and now the

drum resumes its beat—they approach each other. Gertrude winds herself with the scarf, as it were, into Mary body, and the ballet starts as it started with a silhouette sending its outstretched hands skyward—only this time there are four hands and not two."

Heinrich-Hiram wipes his glasses, takes a sip from a glass of wine, and sighs: "What can I say, Ulrich, I was totally hypnotized. I've never seen anything like that. And your grandmother looked to me like an unearthly nymph, a delicate girl charming in her expressive movements. I waited for her at the stage door, and within a short period of time, we fell in love. I discovered that she was half-Jewish. We got married, and she left the troupe to stay with me in Mannheim. Wigman's modern ballet was our matchmaker."

Grandfather Heinrich sighs again: "Ach, Ulrich. These were different days. I have asked your grandmother what was the meaning of that hypnotizing dance, but she explained that Mary Wigman never analyzed her choreography—saying that they appeal to the heart, not the brain, to the sub-conscious, not the intellect. She thought it all had to do with a mother and daughter, who are tied together and cannot cut themselves loose; the dancer in black is the lover-husband who cuts the umbilical cord, but, in spite of this, they are linked to each other by an invisible link. But I have a different explanation, Ulrich. The two women tied together symbolize Germany and Judaism: when they stand together, they are like a tree sprouting its leaves upwards. They try, in vain, to escape each other. The scarf-shroud-leash ties them together. The forces of darkness cut them apart, forcefully, violently. Finally—and this may happen one day—they are reunited as in the beginning, and they form one tree, a tree of life."

Gertrude remained in Mannheim, frequently receiving letters from her adored teacher who was successfully touring the world, and put up with becoming a *hausfrau*, a housewife. She told her grandson: "One night, Heinrich came back all in a state—and everything because of one anti-Semitic outburst—and decided to leave Germany and immigrate to Palestine. I pleaded with him: this is exactly what the Nazis want—this is their slogan: *Jüden nach Palestina*, Jews to Palestine. But you know us Yekes. Stubborn as hell. Once we make up our minds, that's it. So we got up and left everything. Thank the good Lord that my Jewish father and Lutheran mother died before all this began. But, nevertheless, it's not easy for me here, and according to Jewish religion, I'm not even Jewish."

She sighed again: "Here I am in the Orient, thinking a lot about Mannheim and about what happened to us Germans."

Grandma loved to tell and Uri loved to listen—unlike his parents—to the tales of the beloved-hated country. How beautiful is Germany! How wonderful is German poetry! How stunning is Dresden! How charming the Rhine! How splendid the *schwarzwald*! Uri ate up these descriptions and the tales of their lives in Mannheim, and now when he recalls them while driving along Highway No. 5, he understands how important his grandparents were and how much he misses them. With them he could complain about his parents, about everything—and whine shamelessly, and even once, when unjustly punished in school, have a good non-Yeke cry. He could talk his heart out, tell them his troubles, lean on their experience and advice. This is what he misses now when he himself is a father and with nobody above him to look up to. On the contrary, others are dependent on him: his wife Ruth, the clients, his office workers; Rina—his lover in an intermittent tryst; his son, Gershon, who makes a fool of himself—whether for real or as a show, Uri does not know; and, this morning, Brigitte, who looked at him, through her false eyelashes, with her desperate calf's eyes.

Heinrich-Hiram was healthy, outlived his son and the other members of his Yeke clan. "It's the fresh air—no air-conditioning—and swimming in the sea in winter which do the trick," he claimed.

Gertrude arrived at his funeral in a wheelchair, half blind, almost bald. After the religious ceremony ended, she asked for the microphone, and into it she began singing, hardly audible, so hoarse that the words were hardly heard, Schubert's "Wayfarer Night Song." Nobody joined her in this semi-singing, as all those who knew Goethe's words were no longer among the living:

*Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch.*

(Over all the peaks
there is peace.
On all the treetops

you feel scarcely a breath of air.)

Here, Gertrude lost the following words. She started stuttering, attempting to reconstruct the words that escaped from her shrinking memory. Uri, who knew Goethe's words by heart, took the microphone from Gertrude and continued her song, while his grandmother hummed the tone in the background.

Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.

Warte nur, balde

Ruhest du auch.

(The little birds in the forest are silent.

Wait, soon you, too,

will be at rest.)

(Translated by Richard Wigmore ©)

Uri shudders as, driving on Highway No. 5, he recalls the words "you, too, will be at rest." As Uri remembers all this, he understands that the deaths of his grandparents were more of a loss to him than the loss of his parents. This is perhaps the real meaning of death: not a grave, nor a tomb, but the absence of someone to lean on. Death is the loneliness of those who are left behind. This is a good maxim. He must memorize it. But Heinrich-Hiram is dead and buried, and Uri cannot tell him anything about Gershon, about Brigitte, Ibrahim, Simon-Zalman, and Barbara from Moldova—no, he would not have mentioned Barbara to his grandfather. Without Heinrich-Hiram, he is left alone. *Und sonst gar nicht*. And so nothing else.

Uri's parents did not get along with the Nussbaums. This is the truth that Uri refused to internalize. His father spoke German unwillingly with Heinrich-Hiram and Gertrude. He objected to the "*Kultur* and nostalgia mania," as he called it. Uri remembers the ongoing arguments in their household. His father, Gustav-Gershon, was not surprised to hear that Gertrude's teacher and mentor, the great Mary Wigman, continued to dance under Hitler and became friendly with a rich German industrialist. "What did you think, Mother? That Wigman was different? They are all the same."

His mother protested: "All the same? Including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe? Do you consider him, too, a Nazi sympathizer?"

Gustav-Gershon: "Certainly not. He is the spokesman for all humanity. I'm one of his most ardent admirers. But I don't know how he would have acted had he lived in the thirties. SO many decent Germans cheered Hitler or were indifferent to the persecuted Jews. But all this is not important. What matters is that Goethe's writings, which were in almost every home, did not stop the Nazis. It's a fact that the Germans could sing Schiller's "Ode to Joy"—"all men are brothers"—and the next day, join the *einsatzgruppen* and shoot thousands of Jewish families. And all the rest is mere nostalgia. Except, of course, for Marlene Dietrich, the saint from Hollywood."

For Gustav-Gershon, the whole German-Yeke thing was marginal. He was an Israeli, went through the routine from youth movement through army service to medical school. Here on Highway No. 5, Uri's recollection of his grandparents resurrects this old debate.

Now a siren slices through the heated air and penetrates Uri's cool, insulated bubble. An ambulance bypasses wildly all other cars, sounding its emergency siren. It pulls over to the shoulder, climbs on the traffic islands, pushing its way relentlessly with the help of its insistent siren. Uri read somewhere about an accident involving such a shrieking ambulance, but when the police arrived, they found out that there was no patient inside. The driver operated the siren to cut through the slow traffic. Uri is sure that this is the case with this ambulance. This is really scandalous! Maniacs driving ambulances. If that's the way they drive ambulances, it's no wonder that hundreds are killed on the roads.

Chapter 10: Respite

The convoy is now stationary, whimpering quietly with its engines eager to move forward. Uri consoles himself with the coolness and with Schubert. But, all of a sudden, the dashboard indicates that he's running out of gas. Out of gas? Already? It must be the air-conditioning which has guzzled up his gas. Now, he has to face the danger of being stuck in a car that would not be able to move even if the highway opens up. He is stuck here on a highway without gas stations. There are a zillion gas stations everywhere but not here, where they are most needed. Not on this damned road! They plan it so stupidly. The fools. The maniacs. He could kill these planners. But now, anyway, he's got to keep the small amount of gas left in his tank. He turns off the air-conditioner and rolls down the windows. Immediately, gusts of hot, arid air engulf him, fill his nostrils, throat, and lungs. He will not survive this:

"Edna, honey, this certainly isn't my day. Yes, a terrible accident. All traffic stopped. We can't move. Anyway, I'm leaving the car and will rest awhile on the roadside. The car is hell. I ran out of gas and had to cut the air-conditioning. I'm going crazy. Scorching inside. It will be less so outside. Don't call me until I call you. I'll rest awhile. Nobody is moving, anyway. They have to tow the two burnt-up cars. The bodies, too. Yes, a whole family gone. Worse than the terror. Massacre on the highway. But they up there in the government don't care. They are interested in only one thing: retaining their power, and let the rest go to hell. Let the traffic stand still. Let people die on the highways. What do they care? Have you heard from Schumacher? Nothing? Is this good? Is this bad? I can't do anything. I'm stuck here. Without gas. Without air-conditioning."

Uri comes out of his *Winterreise* bubble. The roadside is full of end-of-summer dried-up thorns and thistles. It's hot here but less stifling than the hothouse car. Summer had already managed to dry up all of winter's greenery. All is monotonously yellow. Brown soil has given way to water-starved grayish dust. The sky above is steel-gray. He spreads the Scottish mohair plaid blanket, which Ruth bought on their last trip to London, on the arid ground and lies down. Uri watches the steel-hued sky, the dryness surrounding him, the waves of hot air rising from the road's asphalt. Suddenly, out of nowhere, materializes a stunningly handsome bird: its back is electric turquoise; its belly chestnut-brown, and its black beak contrasts with a snow-white neck. In this hot wilderness, this bird must be a messenger from another continent. The bird looks to and fro, up and down,

inspecting the surroundings. Uri realizes that this is a kingfisher. What is a kingfisher doing in this waterless plateau? What does this beauty have to do with this parched land on the edge of Highway No. 5? Uri stares into the glazed eyes of the restless kingfisher and says to himself: if I lie totally motionless, the kingfisher will come close to me, and this will be a propitious sign—like the one he remembers from childhood: if I skip every other pavement-stone, Grandma Gertrude will recover from her pneumonia. He decides that if the bird approaches him, everything will be all right: He will come back him, and Gershon will hug him and say, "Dad, I'm sorry for last night. It was merely an adolescent tantrum. Of course I'll go back to school and, after graduation, will go to the army." He will reach Shumacher, and they'll sign the merger contract, and they will all praise Uri's legal work. But the splendid bird casts a cold, contemptuous look at Uri, emits an abrupt shriek, repeats this a number of times, and flaps its wings and flies away—away from Uri, away from his abandoned Volvo and the helpless convoy of silent cars, away from the smoldering asphalt.

What an awe-inspiring bird! And here in this end-of-summer semi-desert. The bird is gone. All is quiet. Hardly a breath of air. Even the convoy, in its collective despair, is noiseless. And then, in the middle of this silence, he hears the formerly inaudible sounds: first, the soft hum of a cloud of midges hanging over him in midair; then the chirp-chirp of obsessive crickets; the rustling sounds of spiders out for their prey; the distant hissing of snakes; the buzzing of invisible wasps; the muffled marching of swarms of ants going to and fro; the droning of the wild bumble-bees; the nervous hops of the hyperactive grasshoppers; the steady crawling of beetles; the echoes of field mice running away; the whole cacophonous noise made by the creepy-crawlies. After listening to these voices, and after he lets various jumping insects land on his mohair blanket and welcomes those that otherwise he would have crushed under his Italian shoes, he hears other, deeper voices. Subterranean voices of the underground dwellers, the slugs, the worms, the root parasites, the bulb-munchers, and the blind moles burrowing their way deep in the earth. These hardly audible, creepy sounds lull Uri to sleep. Then Shumacher appears strapped to his wheelchair. His body is boneless, and he slithers from his chair and winds himself around Uri's feet, wiggling like a powerful worm. Helpless, Uri panics and emits desperate cries for help. In vain. He sees a narrow opening in the ground. If he could slide into this hole, he could wiggle himself free of the human worm. He contorts his body and writhes

into the hole free of Shumacher and proceeds into the deep earth. He finds himself in a pitch black burrow. Not a speck of light. The tunnel is not wider than his body, and he does not know where it's leading to. He only knows he must not stay there, as any second it might collapse and bury him alive. He claws forward, holding onto the soil with his nails. He advances step by step, inch by inch. The air is thin, and if he does not quickly extricate himself, he'll run out of oxygen. That's why he has to move onwards, despite the fact that the tunnel becomes even narrower as he progresses. He feels he is being stifled by the airless darkness surrounding him. After a long stretch of strenuous crawlings and clawings, when he feels his energy running out, he reaches a junction: the tunnel splits into two offshoots—right and left. Which one will he choose? He has no idea which one leads outside, to the world above ground, to the free air. He hasn't got a clue and decides to continue crawling in the right offshoot. After a few minutes of exhausting crawling, he understands his mistake, as his hands hit upon a wall blocking his progress. He decides to go backwards to the junction and try the left offshoot. But in the meantime, the tunnel has collapsed behind him, blocking his way back. Now he cannot move either forward or backward. He cries out loudly, "Grandpa! Save me, please save me." A stream of blinding light hits him and floods the tunnel with unmitigated brightness. Through this stream, Uri sees two secret police agents, probably messengers from the other side, dressed in black, wearing glistening metal helmets and black masks concealing the upper part of their faces. This, perhaps, is the end—redeeming end. But the two policemen hold him tightly and say: "Man, you fell asleep, man. Wake up." In the blinding light, which does not eliminate the memory of the dark tunnel, Uri watches the two raise their masks, thus divulging two pairs of smiling eyes: "Man, you fell asleep here while all the cars have already moved on. Only yours stands alone waiting for you." Uri is still under the impact of his nightmare. He can neither answer the pair nor get up on his feet. The two remove their helmets and Uri finds out that they are not secret police, not emissaries from hell but two young motorcyclists: the girl's hair, dyed deep orange, reaches her shoulders, and she shakes it so as to release it from the pile encased by the helmet; her boyfriend's hair is platinum and covers his forehead. Both their faces are pierced: mouth, nose, eyebrows—rings everywhere. Their four eyes broadcast human kindness: "Man, you should go back to your car, man. Your car, man, is blocking the road." Uri tries in vain to rise from the mohair plaid: "I don't feel too well. I had a terrible nightmare."

"Yes," says the girl with the orange hair, "you do look pale."

They both help him to get up, but Uri wobbles unsteadily. The memory of his clawing and crawling clings to him. He cannot stand erect. The boy and the girl hold him tight.

"I'm sorry. Awfully sorry."

"Don't be sorry," says the platinum boy, "we all have our days. The Maharishi tells us how to get over them."

"No, no, it's not just an off day. It was not just a bad nightmare. It's worse. It's terrible. After such a nightmare, you simply cannot get up. Where are you U

"We are on our way north to celebrate our coupling."

"And you were not stuck in the traffic jams?"

"Motorbikes have no problem."

Uri feels that his knees could collapse at any moment. "I can't go on any longer. No more."

The couple hold him, and their heads touch his. Thus they form a human tripod. Uri cries out: "No more. I can't take it anymore."

And the girl responds:

"You can't go on without love. Without love, there's no life. So says the Maharishi."

And Uri: "No more. I am a lawyer. I cannot represent others anymore. I don't want to plead. I don't want to talk. I cannot. I want to cry out. Not to appear in court. Wanted to be something else. I almost did. But others did not want. Now I am stuck with being a lawyer. Cross-examining. Summing up. No more. I want to stay here with you. Just like now. Hold me tightly. I won't move."

And the boy: "You are beginning to feel the love flowing from us to you, man. Our love is so plentiful that it overflows and spills over to you, man. This is our wavelength—love. Don't listen to other wavelengths—the wavelengths of hatred, jealousy, greed, power."

And Uri: "Yes, yes, please give me some of your love. Please."

And the boy: "We won't pity you but will grant you love."

Uri now notices that it's a boy—not more than 16—who is talking to him.

The boy: "We will transmit to you the vibes from our love wavelength."

And the girl, who is perhaps even younger than her partner, adds:

"The Maharishi says that only love brings love. Only love gives you strength. If you give love, you'll also get love. Do you begin to sense the vibes that we transmit to you?"

Uri: "Yes, yes. Just don't leave me. Please don't leave me alone here."

The boy: ""We have no choice. We must leave. But the vibes will sustain you. We will stoke up the batteries of your internal energy. But eventually you'll have to fend for yourself and grant love to people around you, then you'll get love back."

And Uri: "Please take me to my car. I won't make it on my own."

The couple caress his face and take him slowly to his car. And the girl says: "We shall give you strength—the strength of love. Don't ever give it up."

And Uri: "Take me with you."

And the boy: "No, this will only weaken the vibes. Love will dwindle and disappear. Become one with our vibes, and you will not suffer again."

And Uri: "Please remember me when you are there up north."

And both of them:

"Man, we will remember you. Man. With love."

The tears break out from Uri's eyes and descend on his cheeks. He weeps shamelessly in front of the boy and girl. The pair wipe off his tears first with their fingers, but when the tears flow, they begin kissing him, wiping off the tears with their adolescent lips. This makes him cry even more, and the two kiss him feverishly.

From a passing car, someone sticks out his neck: "Maniacs. Get a room! Aren't you ashamed? In broad daylight. And in front of the children!"

The pair don the helmets, mount their motorcycles, and are off. Uri sniffs in a post-weeping reflex. The pair are already on their way up north. Were they a part of a dream? Are they human? A product of his hallucination? Did he really get their vibes, or did he dream up their Maharishi mumbo-jumbo? No, no, they were real. The taste of their raw kisses still lingers on his face. The passing "maniacs" shout still hangs in the motionless air. No, no, these children exist. And what power they exuded! They were right! They did fill up the batteries of his internal energy—and all because of their self-confident love! Happy is the man who had a chance to meet this angelic pair and benefit from their vibes. He envies them. At their age, he was a moral weakling, who could not stand up to his parents.

Uri remembers that evening which determined his future. He came back from school all excited. It was after the English teacher, Simon, broke out weeping in the classroom in front of the students, when he spoke about Hecuba, the actor, and Hamlet. That was it. His mind was made up. That every evening, he faced his parents and declared that he had decided to leave school and start training as an actor. Perhaps a director. Anyway, the theater would be his future, and nothing else. And he would not study any of the "practical professions" which his parents had planned for him. Only the theater attracts him! Only the holding of the mirror up to nature, to show life its own feature. Only the true emotion which can move an actor to tears. This is destiny, and he is not going to compromise.

His parents enlisted the help of Grandpa Heinrich: "O.K., Ulrich, O.K. If this is what you want, who am I to stand in your way? All I expect is that you listen to me. I'm not going to preach, and I will not tell you which profession is suitable for you. One thing, though, I have learnt. A Jew must acquire a profession with which he can travel. I came here in the thirties when there was no need for an orchestra conductor, and I donned a chef's cap and sold sausages in the main square of little old Tel Aviv, but after the Nazi pogrom called Crystal Night, when many Yekes started arriving, the demand for classical music increased, and I found an opening with a new chamber orchestra made up entirely of Yekes. But I shall never forget the harsh years when I had to stand outside, call myself Herr Doctor Sausage, and be the subject of much ridicule. My brother was a well-known actor in Max Reinhardt's theater, known to every Berliner. After Hitler, he escaped to England, but nobody there wanted an actor with a heavy German accent. He immigrated to Palestine and appeared a few times in a satirical theater as a comic figure, a heavily accented Yeke. But these roles were limited. When he tried to play ordinary roles, the crowds roared with laughter. He remained unemployed, without access to the theater. Eventually, he gave up and committed suicide. He did not have a profession that could be practiced anywhere. Sad. True, our state of affairs is different. We have our homeland and a state of our own. But, Ulrich, who knows what the future holds? Who can assure us that we shall always be victorious? You saw how close we were to defeat and perdition during the Yom Kippur War. You must remember those horrid days. A Jew must always be prepared to start wandering again. We are truly a wandering people. A Jew must be prepared to pack his suitcases, including his professional ones. An Israeli, Hebrew-speaking actor is a profession fit for one

place—Israel. But you must acquire a profession that you can pack and take anywhere.; A wandering profession. Certainly not an acting career."

This, as well as further talks, convinced Uri to relinquish his plan and to go through the routine of high school-army-law school-the bar, a routine that leads him this morning to Shumacher and Partners.

Now, in the east, he can see the old sights of pre-industrial Israel: the rows of cypresses; a solitary orange grove; acacia trees; a few local cacti beneath the huge spider-like pylon. In the east, the Judean hills draw a gray skyline. There, small cubes of houses clustered on an anonymous hill form an Arab village. Beyond these hills is the frontier. Beyond the hills, lie the villages from which suicide bombers emerge. There the enemy lies in ambush; there the very landscape is an enemy.

Not far from there, not far from the frontier, lies the industrial zone, with its post-modern architecture. There Shumacher awaits him. Onwards.

Chapter 11: The Hitchhiker

On the road's shoulder stands a short-sized soldier, holding an extra-large-sized automatic rifle. He signals with a raised thumb that he is waiting for a lift. Uri hesitates. These days you cannot distinguish between authentic soldiers and terrorists masquerading as soldiers, who get into cars and then butcher its occupants.

Uri passes the little soldier with his outstretched thumb and does not stop. But after having glimpsed his desperate face, he is certain that the soldier is not an Arab terrorist. Such a small soldier with such a big rifle cannot be a terrorist. Had he been one, he would have already used his weapon to kill passengers in passing cars. Uri slows down and stops. He will waste a few seconds on this hitchhiker. What difference would it make? He is unbearably late, anyway. It's half-past-nine. The meeting should have begun an hour and fifteen minutes ago. The little soldier comes running up to the car. He is huffing and puffing: "Thank you, Mister, for stopping... I was nearly erased in this heat." Now it's clear from his accent that he is not an Arab.

Uri: "Where are you going to?"

Soldier: "Up to the next junction. I'm going north, and there our unit's bus is waiting to collect us. I've got a weekend off. Thank you, Mister, for stopping for me.

The soldier sits in the back, and the smell of musty military blankets, perspiring youth, and cigarette smoke enters the car with him. He puts his rifle on the floor.

Uri: "Is the safety latch on?"

Soldier: "One hundred percent latched. Don't worry, Mister. I may be a young man, but I'm a veteran soldier. Saw plenty of action. Know how to handle weapons." And after a few seconds: "Your car is paradise...so cool...such a treat."

Uri: "But do me one favor: don't smoke in the car. What's your name?"

Soldier: "Saul is my name, Mister. Sure, no smoking in cars. Sure thing."

Saul tells Uri that his unit has served in the Gaza Strip: "More than two months down there. Hell on earth. One more day, and I would have gone mad." Now he's going home for the weekend. Home is up north on a kibbutz.

Uri: "Are you a kibbutznik?"

Saul: "No, I just rent a room there."

Uri: "And you haven't got a family?"

Saul: "On the contrary. I have plenty of family in Haifa. But my parents drove me nuts. This is O.K. This is not O.K. Why don't you get a haircut? Why did you dye your hair blue? So I decided to press delete, quit family, hit escape, and ditch home. I rented a room in Kibbutz Ramat Emek."

Uri: "In Kibbutz Ramat Emek? Have you heard, by chance, of a girl named Brigitte?"

Saul: "No, there are no more Swedish volunteers on the kibbutz. Ever since the Intifada, they stopped coming. There ain't no Brigitte. I know all the females there. I spend lots of time in the Disco-emek?"

Uri: "She is a transgender."

Saul: "A transgender? A shemale? In a kibbutz? It can't be true! It ain't true!"

Uri notices a suspicious glance cast at him from the backseat.

Saul: "Shemales in a kibbutz? This is the end of the world! But never on our kibbutz. Never in Ramat Emek."

Uri: "And a guy named Manu? Did you know him?"

Saul: "Manu the Monster?"

Uri: "The very man."

Saul: "He had left the kibbutz before I arrived there. But I have heard lots about him. King of the basketball team."

Uri: "And where is he now?"

Saul: "How come you know him?"

Uri: "We both know the same lady."

Saul: "They say he immigrated to New York. He's a trainer in a health club. Plenty of females there... Mister, what's this music?"

Uri: "These are old German songs."

Saul: "And what is this guy singing about?"

Uri: "About deceptive love. His lover betrayed him, and now he's leaving the town where she lives. And he is desperate. Very sad. Tragically sad on his winter journey."

Saul: "You don't say! That sad? And all because one broad stood him up!"

Uri: "Yes, these are old songs...and in those days, young men even committed suicide because of unrequited love..."

Saul: "If any broad would have ditched me, I would have told her to go and burn her undies..."

Uri: "Have you got a girlfriend?"

Saul: "What do you mean a girlfriend? I've got two. One in the unit and one on the kibbutz."

Uri: "And whom will you choose?"

Saul: "Not one of these two. A girl who's ready to jump into my bed and is loose with her thighs isn't going to be the mother of my children."

Uri: "And you're already planning a family?"

Saul: "At least three children. But the first one—only after I have an apartment with two bedrooms. Minimum. And in North Tel Aviv."

Uri: "And what will you do if one of your girlfriends finds out about the other?"

Saul: "What do you mean 'if'? They both know, Mister. What am I? A liar? Me a cheat? Sure they know. My system is simple. If you want it—it's O.K. with me. If you don't want it—it's also O.K. with me. Mister, that's my system."

Uri: "Do me a favor, Saul, don't call me Mister. I'm Uri, not Mister."

Saul: "Hi, Uri. Uri, tell me the truth. Am I disturbing you listening to this German fool? If so, I'll shut my big mouth."

Uri: "Not at all. I enjoy talking to you. So that's your motto..."

Saul: "What's a motto?"

Uri: "I meant your system..."

Saul: "If they want it—good, and if they don't want it—it's also good."

Uri: "And you are happy with this?"

Saul: "I'm O.K....but I have to plan my future...three children...it ain't easy..." And after a few seconds' pause: "This is not a car. This is a palace on wheels."

Uri: "Say, Saul, did you perhaps hear about these porno movies on the Internet in which they do their thing in army uniforms?"

Saul: "In army uniforms? In combat fatigues? On the Internet? This is too much! This is the end of the world! It ain't true!"

Another suspicious glance from the backseat. And:

"Tell me, Uri, are you from hi-tech?"

Uri: "No, why do you ask?"

Saul: "I thought...with this Volvo, you're sure to be in hi-tech..."

Uri: "As a matter of fact, I'm a lawyer."

Saul: "Wow! A lawyer! Mister Uri, you sure are one of the big shots who make piles of money every hour...Wow...I also want to study to be a lawyer...You're tops, Uri...your car is tops...I take off my hat to you, Mis...Uri."

Uri: "You want to study law?"

Saul: "You bet. But I have to go through that damn scholastic attitude test. But I'm working on it. On my vacations—between jobs."

Uri: "Scholastic aptitude tests? That's tough. And you work, too?"

Saul: "Yes, on vacation leaves. Security guard in night clubs. Cleaning windows by snapping on high-rise buildings. Construction jobs. I need plenty of money for the three kids."

Uri: "And the parents aren't helping out?"

Saul: "Told you. I deleted them..." And after a few seconds: "Uri, may I ask you something personal? Will I be able to clerk for you after I graduate? I mean, I want to clerk for someone big, big like you..."

Uri: "Yes, by all means. When the day comes, why not? You get in touch with me then. If there's a vacancy, I'll take you. Willingly. Here, take this. This is my visiting card."

Saul: "Mister Uri, I don't know how to thank you. My dream is to become a big-time lawyer like you...I'll pass the attitude tests. After the discharge. Uri, can I ask you another personal question? How much did you pay for this Volvo?"

Uri: "Lots of money."

Saul: "How much is lots? More than a hundred thousand?"

Uri: "You mean shekels or dollars?"

Saul: "Dollars? US dollars? It ain't true! Wow! I take my hat off to you, Uri...Uri, please let me off here. This is the junction. The bus will pick me up here. To Ramat Emek."

Uri: "Go ahead, and have a safe journey."

Saul: "Uri, tell me honestly. Have the shemales already reached the kibbutzim?"

Uri: "So they tell me. I really don't know."

Saul: "You really have a cool car. With a dashboard like a stealth fighter plane. One day I'll buy a car like that."

Uri: "Take care, Saul."

Saul: "You, too, Uri. You take care. And expect me in your office. In a few years. Don't forget my face. Now I'm leaving your paradise-car to go out to the hell outside."

Uri waves goodbye to Saul, who seems to cower under the weight of his extra-large rifle.

The Saul-less car is desolate. Only the smells remain. Uri raises the volume of the *Winterreise*. Again: the snow; the ravens; the treacherous but still loved one; the lover making his tortuous journey in wintertime.

In the meantime, he crosses new housing estates. Dear God, thinks Uri, this is where we used to go to pick cyclamen and wild flowers. Soon there won't be a single green patch of land left.

Now, again, a slowdown, leading to total immobility. No movement. The highway has become a big parking lot. His patience is wearing thin. When will they ever start moving eastward on this awful highway?

First Last Chapters

First Last Chapter –part 1: (not translated) – The Last Mile

First Last Chapter -part2: News Flash

The death of Uri Manoss, one of the country's top lawyers, in a shocking accident on Highway No. 5 stunned his family and acquaintances.

The accident took place when the lawyer was on his way to a business meeting in an industrial zone outside of Tel Aviv. Manoss was driving when, suddenly—for no apparent reason—his car veered to the right and collided head-on with the divider, then caught on fire. Our correspondent reported from the site of the accident that only the charred frame remained and beside it two silent mementos: a cell phone and the Volvo emblem. A couple of CDs that escaped the fire also lay strewn on the road—witnesses to the tragedy.

The traffic police superintendent, with whom our correspondent spoke, had no explanation for this terrible crash. There was no obstacle on the road which could have caused the sudden veering and the head-on crash into the divider, and, in an examination of the remains of the car, no mechanical fault was discovered.

The president of the Bar Association told our correspondent that the death of Manoss, dearly beloved by all who knew him, was a great loss to the legal profession. Manoss was a brilliant lawyer, a good citizen, and a proud Jew. His coffin will be placed in the District Court building, where the public can pay their respects.

The funeral procession will pass through the Philharmonic Hall—Manoss was chairman of the Friends' Association—where he will be eulogized by the resident conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra.

Uri Manoss died at the age of 44 and left a wife, Ruth, and a son, Gershon—a high school student.

First Last Chapter - part3: Farewell

An impressive group of mourners has gathered to pay their respects to Uri Manoss at the Yarkon Cemetery. The firm's partners and staff, clients, colleagues, judges and courthouse clerks have all arrived; the manager of the Philharmonic Orchestra and the players' representative have arrived. Edna, of course, has arrived, crying and telling everyone about her last conversations with the deceased, "really just a minute before the accident"; Mr. Shumacher from Shumacher & partners has arrived, seated in a wheelchair, pushed by a Filipino

caretaker, telling how he'd waited for Uri, who was his attorney, until he'd given up, and then he'd been informed that... he knew that Uri was not a stickler for punctuality, but such a delay! He'd understood at once that something had happened. His secretary called Manos, but there was no answer. A great calamity, for him personally as well. For the legal profession, too. The Filipino helper nods his head in approval and agreement. True, Uri's tardiness was indeed out of the ordinary. Yes, the calamity truly is great.

Whispers abound within the circle of mourners: it's hard to understand what happened to Uri. Was it really a suicide, as the rumors claim? Such a cruel suicide? Intentionally crashing into the concrete divider wall? No, it can't be. Almost certainly he just fell asleep at the wheel and ran, with all the force of his big Volvo, right into the concrete. Uri was on his way to an important meeting. The people who talked to him on the phone had not heard any tone of dread in his voice. On the contrary. He had spoken with great self-assurance. And why should a successful lawyer kill himself? Married to a charming woman, father of such a talented son. A member of the board of the Bar Association. A lawyer in high demand – four hundred dollars an hour, at least. Subscription to the Philharmonic, and chairman of the Friends' Circle. Honorary Chairman of the Association for the Habilitation of the Mentally Handicapped. Flies every year to go skiing in Italy. An elegant apartment in Tel - Aviv. Bought a luxury car not long ago. No, no, those are just vicious rumors. There was an accident. A tragic accident. That's all.

David too has come, helped by his wife, who holds him up so he won't fall. He is gagaing as usual at the perplexed mourners. A hushed clucking starts up: poor David. No, his poor wife! Better to be dead than to live a life like that. Poor David, not forty-five years old and already a vegetable. Uri is happier in death than David in life. David's wife is a heroine, truly a heroine. To hear that googooing all day. I would have had a heart attack after one day.

Shumacher's secretary has arrived, too, stern of countenance and deep of gaze, who has earned a special standing among the crowd of mourners: she was the last to have spoken with the late Uri by phone. No, she didn't notice anything special except that that same morning there was heavy traffic on the roads – it's always like that right before holidays – and Uri complained about the traffic jams. But that's a daily matter which one must take into account, and for that reason, she always sets out before six-fifteen in the morning. But as she

recounts all this to the knowledge-thirsty mourners, she drapes across her face a superior smile which hints that she knows something of which she does not speak, and that they, the mourners, will never know what it is.

And Rina has arrived, too with her short and spiky hair, her pale face and sunglasses which hide her eyes. Rina has arrived, limping heavily. When Ruth saw her friend limping again, she hissed venomously into her ear, after they had embraced and kissed, "I understand that your limp has gotten worse. It will only go away when you find a new lover to replace Uri." Rina was silent for one moment, but afterwards she shot at the newly-made widow, "You know, and I know that you know, that Uri killed himself because of you and because of your fucked-up son." Ruth sprang her fists into place. No. She will not slap Rina here in front of everyone. She will not violate the ceremoniousness of the funeral. Instead, she turned her back on Rina, and found solace in the fact that Gershon, her son, allowed her to take his hand.

Ruth is in a rage. She has cast off the burden of her loathing for the erstwhile Poor-Rina. Ruth found out about the affair between Uri and Rina only a week earlier. Good souls told her about the trysts in the love-nest in southern Tel Aviv. Before that, during all the years that the love-birds had carried on, Rina had made a habit of giggling along with her, and the two of them would arouse Uri's curiosity. They would giggle at his innocence. Rina would claim and claim again that Uri suffered from serious vision problems: "He just doesn't see any other woman besides you, and because of that he can't cheat on you. It's a type of disability," she'd say, that snake, on mornings after her nights of whoring with her husband in her pleasure-pen in the south of the city. What a liar! What a treasonous hypocrite!

When Ruth heard the truth, her love for Uri was in no way lessened, and for that reason she didn't hurl the truth in his face. Had she done that, a titanic fight would undoubtedly have broken out between them which would have cast a pall over his death and over her mourning. In her eyes, she saw her husband as a boy, who because of his childish appetite fell into the net of the man-hunting Poor-Rina. The terrible betrayal was not that of her husband but that of her good friend, her confidante still from their days in the youth movement. She had stuck to them like a shadow on account of the goodness of Ruth's own heart, and the whole time she had been spinning, behind the feigned limp, the gossamer net into which, in the end, Uri, innocent and clueless Uri, would fall. Good that she

hurled the truth in the face of that she-viper. But now, after her emotional load has been lifted, she is bent under the burden of sadness from her double loneliness: the loss of her partner and the loss of her childhood friend. What will she do without the two of them?

Rina is desperate, and not just because of Ruth's aggression and crudeness. She can't forget her last conversation with Uri, and the fact that she hung up on him. He drove off to his death with the memory of that hanging-up. That was the last memory he took of her to his grave. What a dark and cruel character she has, that she responded like that to the person who had taken her out from darkness into light, healed her of her disability and transformed her from a passing shadow into a real woman. True, she was furious when he told her that he would not be coming to their regular meeting because of Ruth – the meetings which filled the batteries of her life. His surrender to Ruth is what made her angry. That tendency to surrender is what had led to Gershon remaining an only child and, as such, abusing Uri. Gershon had threatened to be a porn star. Big deal. She, Rina, would have told him: "Please, do whatever you want, just get off my back." Rina senses that this surrendering was what led to Uri's suicide. She hasn't a shadow of a doubt that it was suicide. Uri spoke with a sadness not typical of him when they talked. His voice broadcast existential distress. And she, instead of hugging and kissing him by telephone, had hung up on him!

What was the distress from which Uri suffered? Rina doesn't know for sure, but she'd always had a sense that within Uri – within that handsome Nordic type, within that successful and grumbling, established and whining lawyer – another man was trapped. Rina didn't know this other person as well as she should have, but she saw him at times in stolen glimpses. The other person was impulsive, creative, artistic, sensitive and excitable. More than once, after they had slept together, he would stand in the middle of the room and sing songs in German, a language which she did not understand and which she hated, and once that singing actually made him break down. Tears blocked his throat but did not burst out. Uri, who had been born in Israel, explained to her that as a child he was raised on the knees of the saying that "yokes don't cry."

Rina even remembers an event which seems surreal to her today. One night, while they were bathing on a summer's night on the beach in Jaffa – where they didn't have to worry that someone they knew from the north of the city would spy them out – Uri had told her, just like that, about a dance he had once

seen which had left a great mark on him, and added that he wished to repeat that simple dance for her. From out of the silence of a summer night, as from far away broken phrases of discotheque music rode in, Uri had removed his bathing suit and stood in his full nudity before Rina, his erect Nordic body showing the beginning of a tumescent potbelly, and his light skin glowing on the black backdrop of the sea.

Uri lay on the sand folded like a fetus, and only after some time began to straighten out, to stretch and sit up and finally, after a few failed attempts, rose up on his feet. He straightened up to the fullness of his impressive height, and began to cast his hands upwards. One hand was clenched into a fist, and he raised it amidst punches aimed at some unseen target, and left it in the end clenched and raised upwards; afterwards, his other hand, too, moved up just as slowly, but this one was not clenched. On the contrary, its fingers moved as though praying, as though asking for mercy, and when it was up, the fingers remained spread wide, pointing skyward. Thus Uri stood with his two hands pointed towards the heavens and began to move, naked, from side to side, like a tree moving in the wind, and all without a word, in a silence interrupted only by the sounds of the waves and the shards of the disco. After a few minutes of swaying from side to side, Uri began to lower his hands, one after the other, cast down his glance, knelt on the sand and lay on it, supine, contemplating the sky. This entire dance, which frightened Rina a little, lasted only a few minutes.

She hadn't talked to him about the meaning of the dance, except that she had asked, to make sure, that the two hands expressed two different things – rebellion and prayer – but Uri had refused to answer her, and had only said impatiently that if she doesn't understand the meaning of that dance, which he did not invent but only recreates, there is no point in explaining anything to her. He had put on his bathing suit and entered the warm water of the August sea, bearing Rina in his arms into the waves. Rina, that same night, was both a happy and an intrigued woman: she had glanced for a brief moment into the soul of Uri and seen the glimmer of the other person within him.

Now, at the funeral, after the blow of Ruth's sharp tongue – a blow which will be impossible to forget, which will destroy forever a brave friendship that has accompanied her from her youth – she finds a certain solace in the fact that of all the mourners, including Ruth and Gershon, only she has had the privilege of peeking into Uri's spirit. But this very feeling breaks her heart, and even though she

has prepared for the funeral and planned how to avoid breaking down, she now feels that her weak legs will not bear her and that she will collapse, here, in front of everyone.

She will never have Uri, nor a replacement for Uri. Never. She will never be able to get rid of her accursed limp. She will limp forever. She will remember forever the moments of grace which Uri granted her, Uri, who knew how to uncover her hidden beauty and to discover the sexuality which blazed in her darkness. All that has gone off to the underworld, never to return. Ever. What is she to do? Where will she turn? She has been left without Uri and without Ruth. Alone in the shadows. Alone in the darkness. A passing shadow. A limping shadow. .

Suddenly, as though from out of nowhere, a group of unofficial mourners emerges to join the congregation of official mourners: at the group's head marches an old beggar, bearded and dressed in rags; at his side is a beautiful young blonde woman in whorish clothes. After them strides an enormous transgender – her muscular hands grasping a lace-trimmed handkerchief, with which she wipes her tears; she wears a miniscule black hat which almost disappears in the expanses of her enormous head. She is escorted by a boy with an eastern countenance dressed in an undershirt bearing the slogan “Jews Don't Expel Jews.” The party stands at the edge of the group of official mourners and does not join it.

“Excuse me, are you at the right funeral? This is the funeral of Mr. Manos, the lawyer.”

“Yes, yes, we came to Uri's funeral. We are friends of his.”

The whispers gain momentum: what are these people doing at this funeral? What is that stinking beggar doing here? And the whore with her breasts all out? And that monstrous shemale with the painted face? And the settler boy? What is that group doing at the funeral of our Mr. Manos? Who invited them? What is their connection to a man like Uri? The official mourners continue to cluck with their tongues: who knows? Who knows the nature of the relationship which Uri had with these types? Who knows anything about the real Uri Manos? Who knows anything about his other side? Who knows what happened before the accident? The soul of man, who can fathom?

Now they bring forward Uri's body. In spite of the custom, it is laid in a wooden coffin. The body was shattered and burned so terribly that it was not possible to bury it in shrouds alone.

When the coffin is laid down before them, the mourners fall silent.

Gershon stands beside his mother, silent and overwhelmed. He was swayed by Ruth's pleas, and removed all his earrings and piercings and even wore a skullcap in honor of his father's funeral. Gershon is not sure what's really going on inside him – he is in shock from the unexpected news and terrified of the idea of remaining alone with his mother. Death, and not just any death but his father's death, is not included in his world's spectrum of emotions and expectations. And so he stands, silent and still, holding on to his mother as though to an anchor, not responding to the handshakes and to the mumbles of the official mourners. His mother talked to him this morning and told him that they must turn over a new page because of the death of his father, but he's not sure what she meant. He is too confused to decide what to do. First of all, let this burial be over and let the prayers be done withover and then he'll decide.

Suddenly Moussa arrives – Moussa, who is in fact Abed, also known as Abu Razek – and joins the circle of the official mourners. He is wearing a skullcap and is dressed in a black jacket.

The clucking begins again: what is this Arab doing here? What does he have to do with Uri? Did they check him at the gate? With them you can never be sure. Maybe he's a suicide bomber? Maybe under the jacket he has an explosive belt? You can believe anything of them. Yes, in a cemetery too. If in a kindergarten and a hospital it's ok, then why not in a cemetery? If you're going up to paradise then what's more natural than suicide at the main entrance?

Moussa comes up to the edges of the group and intones elegiacally: "Allah have mercy on him... Allah have mercy on him... Half an hour before the accident I talked to him... Half an hour... He looked so bleased with life. Bromised to bring my son back from Gaza. Now everything's lost. What a disaster. Allah will guard him in baradise..." He comes up to Ruth and Gershon and says-whispers words of comfort in Arabic: "*Salaamat raskum... Elawd besalaamatkum...*"

The cantor reads a passage from the Psalms: "He who sits in the hidden place of the Highest, in the shadow of the Almighty shall abide; I will say of the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, 'My God, I will trust in Him.' For he shall rescue you from the snare of the hunter, from the raging pestilence... A thousand will fall

from your side and ten thousand from on your right hand, but you it will not reach. Only look with your eyes, and the wicked's reward you will see."

Shumacher's Philippine helper joins the cantor and says: "Because you, the Lord, my shelter, have made your abode on high."

The Filipino worker has been through his share of funerals – both ones at which he escorted his charges to their friends' burials and ones at which the charges themselves were brought to their eternal rest. He knows all the prayers – the Kaddish, the verses from the Psalms, the Lord full of Mercy. He also knows the eulogizing words which repeat themselves: "Proud Jew," "Devoted father," "Dear person," "Loyal husband," "Beloved of all creation," "A regrettable loss."

The man from the burial society recites three times: "And he, who is merciful, will expiate the sin, and will not lay waste, and he has repeatedly cast off his scowl and will not kindle his ire."

The cantor asks those present to take part in the covering of the grave and adds that this is an important commandment. Uri's friends from the Bar Association volunteer. They grasp the shovels amateurishly and begin filling the grave with clods of dirt, but their labor is interrupted by hostile action. Brigitte pushes the official mourners aside with the full force of her powerful elbows and bursts upon the grave. She falls into it, lies down on the coffin and begins shouting: "Uri, Uri, you are the best-hearted man I ever met."

Zalman whispers to Ibrahim: "I think Brigitte's losing it."

Brigitte stretches out on the coffin, rolls about in the dirt of the grave, loses one earring, strikes off her little black hat, and her cries redouble: "Uri, take me with you... please... I don't want to live anymore... Uri, don't leave me here..."

The cantor is astounded. He is used to the strange funerals of the secular. He has already seen an orchestra play at the graveside, heard choirs sing before the Lord Full of Mercy. But a spectacle of abomination like this one has not been seen by Jewish eye: an abominated monster, half-man half-woman, defiling a Jewish grave, violating the sanctity of the house of rest and the honor of the dead and no one opens his mouth and says a peep. How shall he address the abominated creature? In the masculine or feminine form? He finds a solution: "I ask that all who are present inside the gravesite vacate immediately. We wish to continue with the ceremony."

But Brigitte won't obey the order. On the contrary, her cries grow louder. The drops of sweat and the bounty of tears wash away her mascara and the

layer of make-up; their place is taken by clods of soil which glue themselves to her face. "Lord, take me with Uri... God, God, look upon me! Look upon your maidservant and have mercy upon her! Spare me. Spare me. Spare my mother. Spare my father. Do me a favor – take me to you."

Brigitte's cries grow louder again. She is glued to the coffin, which had been only partly covered with dirt, raising her mighty hatless head and bellowing at the heavens: "Uri, take me with you. There is no point to my life. I want to die and I don't have the courage to kill myself."

Someone from within the crowd of official mourners yells: "Get that shemale out of the grave!"

Brigitte stops bellowing. She turns her dirty face towards the official mourners and responds with a lion's roar: "I am not a shemale . I am transgendered. And whoever doesn't know the difference can kiss my pussy!"

A cry of astonishment rises from the crowd of official mourners. The cantor covers his face with his booklet of Psalms and yells-cries: "Master of the universe, master of the universe... the abominations of Egypt upon the soil of the holy land... violation of the Name in a house of rest... Out, monster, out, out, out..."

Zalman says to Ibrahim: "Geth that Bitch outh of the grave and bring her tho me. Immediathely. Thell her ith's an order."

Ruth is not crying. She is gazing at the spectacle but decides not to draw conclusions. She will not let a thing, not even this horror taking place before her eyes, distract her from the triple emotional storm: the shock of her husband's sudden death, the hope for a new chapter with her son Gershon and the new hatred for her former friend. For this reason she is not available emotionally to the spectacle of the transgender in the grave. She would not have been able to imagine that Uri would have had an appetite for these dark wildside pleasures, but better an affair with the monster-sized shemale than a hidden love for Makes-Herself-Out-To-Be-Oh-So-Poor-Rina. An affair with the giant shemale is a disgusting irritation, something utterly unpleasant, but the theft of her husband by her childhood friend is a monstrous and terrible act which knows no atonement and suffers no forgiveness. Ruth has nothing to turn to except her hope-prayer-dream that at least her only son, Gershon, will return to her bosom, will break up with Naomi the slut and return to the good old straight and narrow path. Praise be to God that that Naomi did not find it right to come to the funeral.

The Filipino helper is upset. He has never witnessed such a serious deviation from the accepted order of the funeral service. A most serious case.

Barbara from Moldova is attending a Jewish burial for the first time, and crosses herself three times.

What's happening here? The clucking revives and gathers into a sustained whisper: a sickening shemale, an Arab and a Christian whore? How far will we get? Who would have believed? And as though to give occasion to all the whispering and make it swell further, out of nowhere appear two punks, a boy and a girl with dyed hair – hers a loud carrot-orange and his platinum-white – their faces adorned with piercings and earrings, each grasping the other and kissing shamelessly, incessantly next to the fresh grave! The whispers rise an octave and condense into a cloudlet of buzzing which hangs over the circle of mourners. What's going on at this funeral? Who is this mob? Maybe they're Gershon's friends? But they're not exchanging a word with him! And what else awaits us? Will the Hare Krishna arrive, playing cymbals and singing around the grave? Will there be a striptease on the coffin?

Gershon observes the scene at the grave and cannot believe it. And I thought Dad was a totally square nerd, he tells himself. If I'd only known he was having an affair with a lady-boy, all the misunderstanding between us would have vanished. Only now do I appreciate his complex and contradictory personality. Only now do I understand what I have lost. Only now, after I see my father's transgendered mistress, I know how great my loss is. How terrible the grief is. And he bursts out wailing: "Dad, don't leave me! What will I do without you? I didn't mean what I said... I didn't mean it." He grasps Gila and his whimpers grow louder.

Rina is not shaken by the vision of the creature in the grave. The fact that Uri had, in addition to her and Ruth, a transgendered mistress, too, only increases and fortifies her love: at his funeral, it becomes clear that Uri's personality was even more multi-layered containing darker cellars, than even she, his true love, had guessed.

The wife of the president of the Bar Association whispers to her husband: "Look at what's happening here! I always told you that behind that sheep's face of Uri's there's something mysterious and frightening. Uri the innocent lamb! Angel-faced Uri! Butter would not melt in his mouth. By day a sweet little boy! By

night? By night a sex animal! I don't know what you're thinking of doing, but I'm not staying here even one moment longer."

And true to her word, she leaves the circle of official mourners and marches, stiff and upright, towards the exit. But her husband, the president, does not join her; he remains standing, helpless, next to the grave. He must eulogize the deceased. The rest of the official mourners remain in their places, too, under the cloudlet of scandal: it is clear now that we're talking about a suicide. Who would have imagined that our Uri would have had a double life? Who would have believed who he was involved with?

Ibrahim enters the grave and pulls Brigitte after him. In spite of her height – almost two meters – Ibrahim is able to pull her, and she drags after him like a stubborn cow towards the circle of the unofficial mourners. Brigitte sobs bitterly: "What did I do to you, Zalman? Why did you take me out of the grave? Why did you send Ibrahim to take me out? You know that there's no point to my life. I was miserable as a man who had a woman inside him. Now I'm miserable as a woman who can't get rid of her manliness. Things were bad for me before. They're bad for me now, too. I have a fabulous, delicate feminine interior, but it's located inside a hard, muscular masculine exterior. Zalman, it's bad, it's bad, Zalman. And good-hearted Uri, the only man who understood me, has gone and is no more."

Zalman: "Yes, it's truly terrible. But you're strong and you'll overcome. You'll go out and work. You'll make money. You'll buy another nice dress and you'll look great in it. The crisis is going to pass and you'll come out of it stronger."

But Brigitte does not look great. After the make-up and the mascara wash off her face, she rises from the grave with patches of earth stuck to her face, Manu's peasant face. She doesn't look like a transgendered woman but like a *kibbutz* climber coming out from digging foundations, and her square and vigorous chin lends her the appearance of a pioneer, a toiler of the land, in the manner of the Jewish National Fund posters of the early years of the state.

Ibrahim hugs her thick hips and says: "Brigitte, don't cry, I promise it'll be alright."

But Brigitte says to him: "No, Ibrahim, it will not be fine for me. Two days ago my mother told me not to come visit her anymore at the *kibbutz*. What shall I do? What shall I do! Have you heard of such a thing before? A mother who doesn't want to see her daughter?!"

Ibrahim cannot reach Brigitte's face, and he kisses her hand, stained with the dirt of the freshly-dug grave.

Brigitte's sobbing turns gradually into a quiet, prayerful whimper, interrupted only by occasional cries of "God, Lord, God." The ceremony resumes without further interruption, and the two crowds of mourners stand in separate circles, waiting for the burial to continue.

The time has come now to say farewell. Gershon hugs his mother and reads the Kaddish. The Filipino helper helps him with the Aramaic words. Gershon says "*tushb-... tushbecha-...*" and the Filipino adds, loudly, "*-ta,*" and "*nechemata.*" Gershon completes the Kaddish with tear-jerking cries: "Dad, Daddy, forgive me. It was all a mistake. Don't leave me."

Barbara is reminded suddenly of the son she has left behind in Moldova without a father, without a mother, with only a grandmother. She gets pictures of the baby, who is growing up without her, and talks by phone with her mother. What is she doing here among these Jews? She should never have left home. Her mother was right. Tears choke her throat. Not because of Uri, whom she knew only during the "'appy hour" but because of herself, because of her son who is so far away from her. And now she is here with all the prayers which she does not understand. When the congregation answers "Amen" she joins in a loud voice for the one familiar word, kneels down, presses the palms of her hands together and glances heavenwards. She extends her hands upwards, fingers spread, and prays in her language: "Mother of God, merciful Virgin, full of grace and lover of humanity. Forgive your maidservant as your son forgave the Magdalene. I am a sinner. I sin with these Jews. Forgive me." And she bursts into bitter tears. Zalman comforts her: "Soon you'll have enough money in the bank and you'll be able to go back to Moldova, to buy a small house and to support your baby." But Barbara finds relief in her weeping and will not give up on her praying.

The official mourners see this and the rustling rises to a higher tone: what's happening here? Hard to believe what we're seeing! What happened to Uri?

Throughout the Kaddish, Rina answers "Amen" dutifully. She knows that he, Uri, had he been asked, would have wanted a religious burial. True, Uri was all given over to the influence of Heinrich-Hiram and Gertrude's German culture, but he was also nurtured by his mother's nationalist influence, and his attitude to religion and to the Jewish tradition was one of respect and pride. In his travels abroad he would show off his Jewishness alongside his general culture. In his first

visit to Germany, at the jurists' conference in München, he had gone to the opera to finally see, and not only hear, Wagner, but he had also worn a skullcap demonstratively on his head during the festive dinner in honor of the Israeli delegation. "Especially here, on German soil," he had said.

For Ibrahim, this is the third funeral in his life. At the first one he escorted his grandfather, his father's father, to a Muslim burial at his village in the Galilee – the funeral which created a rift between him and his family in the village; at the second one he escorted his mother; and now, at the third one, he escorts his acquaintance of an hour, the lawyer Uri Manos.

Ibrahim remembers unwittingly the funeral of his grandfather, his father's father – the funeral after which he never went back to visit his grandfather's village. Ibrahim traveled to the funeral in the Galilean village after his father had already fled the country. He arrived at his grandfather's house a short time before the men of the village carried the body to the mosque. Ibrahim had a spiritual connection to the dead man, since his grandfather had spoiled him with sweets and cakes which his mother wouldn't let him have at home, played him the latest songs he had received from Beirut and Cairo, and told him fabulous tales about the life of the Prophet, about the Caliphs and about the heroic Salah a-Din. Grandfather would take him to the balcony and show him the enormous expanse, stretching to the horizon, which had belonged to him and to his family "until the *Yahud* came and took everything." Ibrahim loved visiting his grandfather for all these reasons, and for the rural quiet filled with chirps and neighs, and for the smells – the smells of the flowers, the smell of the fig trees and the smell of the goats in the yard. Ibrahim loved his Aunt Amal – Grandfather's youngest daughter, who never married. He heard from his father a sad story about her secret beloved who was rejected by the family because he had a limp. Amal looked after her father with dedication and persistence. Ibrahim remembers that his mother had told him that all her love for her limping sweetheart, rejected and nameless, Amal turned towards her father, and that when he fell sick, she served him with the dedication of wife, sister and daughter. Mother also told Ibrahim that Amal was shut in in her father's house, and only on rare occasions went out to wedding feasts in the family or to visit bereaved neighbors or relatives. In the flower of her days Amal was imprisoned in her house, overseeing the work of her household and watching through closed shutters the

goings-on in the street: she had not set foot outside the confines of the village, and a visit to Haifa – to her apostate brother who had married a Jewess who did not convert to Islam – did not cross her mind. At weddings she would whoop; at funerals, weep. And so she lived.

Ibrahim knew all this and loved his poor aunt. When the cousins and the men of the family came to carry the body to the mosque, to hear the Aljanza prayer, Amal came up to Ibrahim and whispered in his ear: "Ibrahim, don't tell anyone, but after the prayer in the mosque I'm coming to the grave to bid my father farewell." Ibrahim was troubled: "But, Amal, the imam won't allow it. There'll be a great stir." When they got to the grave, Ibrahim looked around and did not see his aunt. The imam launched into the *Hisab Alkaber*, the "judgment of the tomb," and began making his way through the *Talkin* – the story of the angels who guide the soul of the dead on its way to paradise. All the men sat around the grave, and listened to the stories of the angels who greet the soul of the deceased upon its departure and during its wanderings. Suddenly Amal appeared by the grave and began yelling: "*Ya Baba, ya habibi*, why did you leave me here alone? Take me with you." The crowd of mourners was astounded: a woman was violating the honor of the dead, her father's honor! The imam called out to her: "Amal, you know that you are not allowed to be here... If you love your father, get out of here and go sit with the women in the room. After we leave you will be able to come to the grave. Tomorrow, too, you will be able to come here, to break the loneliness of the deceased. Not today." But Amal answered: "where does it say in the Quran *al-karim* that I am not allowed to escort my father on his last journey? Where does the Prophet say that women may not be present at burials? There is not a single word in the Quran that says that women are not permitted to participate in burials. In the *sura* 'Women' it is written: 'Your Lord has created you from a single soul, and from it created a mate, and propagated from the two of them men and women in multitudes.'" The Imam raised his voice: "Don't be insolent with me, woman. Go and study the Hadith of the Prophet which forbids women from coming to a grave. This is our sacred tradition." Amal insisted: "No, no! I heard a lecturer from the University on the radio who explained that that Hadith is not reliable, that it is a distorted tradition that was forced upon us, the women, by you, the men, not by Allah and not by *rasul*-Allah." The men muttered and grumbled in agreement with the imam: "Amal, go home, don't mock your father's burial." Ibrahim did not scold

and he did not utter. He stood up from his place, seated by the grave, and said: "Amal is right. All her life has been dedicated to Grandfather. She has a special right to escort him." The imam whispered to the crowd: "It's the accursed Jewish blood that runs in his veins. It's all from his mother." Amal would not be drawn away, and Ibrahim went up to her, seized her hand and began yelling: "If Amal goes, I'm going too." There was a riot, and in the end both of them got out of there and went to Grandfather's house in the middle of the stories of the Talkin – Amal lamenting and wailing and Ibrahim biting his lips and not shedding a tear. That same moment he decided: I will not visit the village again, I will sever all ties to the family. Then, too, he decided to run away to a place where he could be himself – Ibrahim. Only yesterday he had told all this to Uri, who is about to be buried here. Only yesterday he had invited him to watch him belly-dance in the night-club.

At the second funeral, his mother's, his grandfather and grandmother demanded that he say Kaddish: "You are a Jew, the son of a Jewish mother, and you must say the Mourner's Kaddish at your mother's grave." Ibrahim did not really want to say Kaddish, but in the end he gave in, put on a skullcap and recited his Kaddish, stumbling over the Aramaic words. After he finished saying "Upon us, and upon all Israel, and let us say 'Amen,'" he added the words "*Elawd besalaamtak*," and then added the saying "*Alhay afdal min almayi* – the dead are better off than the living."

Grandfather was angry and said to Grandmother in Yiddish – but Ibrahim understood – "It's his father's bad blood that speaks from his throat." The next day Ibrahim left his grandfather's house and went to wash cars on the roads and to sleep on the streets. A short time later he moved into Zalman's settlement.

Ibrahim remembers the things that Uri told him before letting him off highway number five, after he, Ibrahim, had told him about his intention to run away from Israel and travel abroad. Words that he will not forget: "If I were in your place, Ibrahim, I would leave the country, too. To me you really do represent the hope of all of us – Jews and Arabs alike. But apparently there is no hope. There is no choice left for a person like you. I'm willing to help you get a visa and work in America. I know the U.S. ambassador to Israel personally. I'm willing to help you financially, too. Here's my business card. Call me tomorrow and we'll schedule a meeting. Alright, Ibrahim?"

And now this man, who had understood his soul and wanted to help him, is buried under the earth. But as the imam explained, Uri is now on his way to Bab Al-Samaa, the Gate of Heaven, and the angels are explaining to the guardians of the threshold why he should be accepted into paradise: "He was a sad man, but also a very good man who wanted to help the Jewish-Arab prince, Ibrahim, who is named for the father of the two peoples." The angel Gabriel himself asks Allah-God to accept Uri as he rises in the heavenly heights straight to paradise, and choirs of angels escort his soul.

The cantor sings weepingly the prayer of the justification of the judgment: "The Creator, his actions are perfect. For all his ways are justice; a god of faith, without iniquity. Righteous and fair is he: The Creator is perfect in all his work; who will say to him 'What have you done?' The ruler of things below and above gives death and life, sends down to hell and damnation and raises up; the Creator is perfect in every deed. Who will say to him: 'What have you done?,' to he who says and does... The soul of every living thing is in your hand. Justice fills your right hand; have mercy on the remnant of the sheep of your hand, and say to the angel 'Stay your hand!' Great of counsel and abundant in deeds. Your eyes are open to all the deeds of the sons of man, to give each man according to his ways and to the fruit of his deeds. To say that God is fair, my Creator, and there is no iniquity in him. God has given, and God has taken away. Blessed be God's name. And He is merciful and will atone iniquity and will not lay waste. And he has many times turned back from his anger and will not kindle his ire."

Now the eulogies begin. The first to speak is the president of the Bar Association: "It is difficult to eulogize a young person who was supposed to inherit me as the Bar president... The community of lawyers has laid to rest one of its finest sons... A terrible loss for the legal world... A warm-hearted Jew... A loyal husband... A devoted father... A regrettable loss."

After him goes the manager of the Philharmonic orchestra: "...Came from a family of lovers of classical music... Followed the orchestra loyally... Gave of his time and of his energy, voluntarily and with no compensation, to the Friends' Circle... A warm-hearted Jew... A loss too great to bear... A loyal husband... A devoted father... A regrettable loss."

The Filipino helper makes a face. For some reason the two speakers have neglected "Beloved of all creatures." Without "Beloved of all creatures" it is not a eulogy worthy of the name.

These two eulogies are accompanied by Brigitte with groans of "True... Very true... A person like Uri you just don't find," as she ignores the silencing cries of the official mourners.

Simon-Zalman recalls his father's uneulogized burial. They barely found a quorum for the burial service. The people from the burial society were in no rush to fill up the quorum, because someone had spread the rumor that the deceased was an apostate. True, apostates deserve a burial, too, but that does not mean that one is required to go out of one's way in fulfilling the commandment. In the end, volunteers were found among the passers-by. And so his father was buried, lonely and dejected.

Something troubles Simon-Zalman. In the hospital, on his final day, just before he exhaled his final breath, his father had whispered in his ear in Yiddish: "*Nicht emes, nicht emes,*" and Simon-Zalman had responded: "I know." Simon-Zalman thought up to this day that his father's farewell words were meant for the wicked neighbor women who had slandered him as a *kapo*, but now, next to the grave of his former student, a different thought penetrates his consciousness. His father had heard his son's nightmare-ridden screams, the cries of "No, Father, not into the box car," which had pierced the walls of their shared apartment, and he was directing his denial at him, at Simon-Zalman. Before his death he wished to exorcise the *kapo*-apparition haunting his son's sleep. Simon-Zalman knows that it will be his lot to live with this suspicion to the end of his days. Nightmares will stalk him in his sleep from this night on.

Even as this suspicion is finding purchase in his heart, a different suspicion, which had laid hidden there for a long time, awakens underneath it, spreads its wings and takes flight: not in vain do dreams speak. His father really was a *kapo*. The whole story about the convent, about the mother-superior, about the Jewish Agency representative, about his future as a priest – all this, even his father crossing himself in secret, was nothing but a cover-story meant to hide the bitter truth: his father had helped the Nazis exterminate Jews. The neighbor who emptied the trash can on his father's head really was a death-camp survivor – she even called him "Yezhy," and not "Yitzhak." Now he remembers that once,

as they were walking down the street, he had heard a passer-by call his father "Yezhy." And his father's denials, too – "*nicht emes, nicht emes*" – seem to him today too insistent. Too exaggerated. There was no one to corroborate the story about the convent. It was based on one source only: the story, perhaps the cover-story, told by his father.

Ibrahim sees a pallor descend on Zalman's face. He abandons the whimpering Brigitte, goes up to Zalman and asks: "What's up, Zalman?"

Zalman: "I feel thath my legs are shaking. Help me."

Ibrahim supports-embraces Zalman with both his hands, and the two stand outside the circle of the official mourners, embraced and silent. The official mourners no longer cluck. After the apparition of the horrific shemale in the grave, they are immune to shock.

Now comes the hour of the final farewell. The cantor bursts into the tear-jerking song of lamentation: "Lord full of mercy, who dwells on high, find a proper rest under the wings of the *shechinah*, in the heights of the holy and pure ones who shine like the shining of the firmament, for the soul of..."

The cantor stops and waits: he repeats "for the soul of," he has forgotten the first name of the deceased, and he cannot find the slip on which he wrote it down. Gershon cannot talk on account of his distorting sobs. Ruth refuses to say the name. The whole religious ceremony does not seem to her appropriate for Uri. She agreed to a religious burial only because she had no energy to deviate from the routine of funerals.

Uri's death, such a short time after she had asked him to come home early, struck Ruth with such violent suddenness that she had barely been able to get to the cemetery, and if not for the help of her son Gershon, she certainly could not have withstood all the demands of the ceremony. Had she had the strength to, she would have protested in the name of her deceased husband over this burial. What would Uri have wanted in all this? Uri was secular, he did not keep a single commandment – except for the prayer for the commemoration of the souls of his parents and grandparents on the High Holidays. If someone had asked Uri what funeral he would want, he certainly would not have asked for an anonymous cantor and some incomprehensible Aramaic to accompany him on his final way. Uri would have asked that they listen to classical music at his grave. Chamber music by his beloved and much-admired Schubert. He would certainly have

asked that they play the Adagio from the string quintet he loved listening to so much. Uri called that Adagio "a preparation for death," and believed that in that passage Schubert foresaw his own death. Uri had explained to Ruth that the bowings in the first part of the Adagio are the song of the soul which is preparing to depart the body and to rise heavenwards, while the pluckings, the pizzicato, are the final weak beatings of the heart. The middle part is the rebellion against the end, against the waning of the light, the soul seeking a return to the vital days of youth. The third part of the Adagio returns to the song of the soul which requests a final rest for itself. The Adagio ends when the sound of the pizzicato disappears, the heart is still, and only the echo of the song of the soul which is departing the body remains. That Adagio would be fit to be played at her husband's graveside, and instead of it stands a cantor who cannot remember Uri's name, mumbling in Aramaic, and a Filipino helping her son pronounce the words of the Kaddish. But in fact what does all this matter? She, Ruth, has been left without Uri. How will she deal without him? How will she survive? And what will be with Gershon, who is standing next to her, bellowing in unexpected weeping? Without Uri there's no point to her life. She is incapable of listening to classical music without his instruction. Without Uri she has no interest left in anything, not in the "Lord Full of Mercy" which the hired cantor sings in an emotional cry, mercenarily, without even knowing the name of the deceased.

No, she will not tell him the name of the dead man who is laid before him. The cantor is waiting to complete "for the soul of" when suddenly David, held in his wife's arms, cries out: "Gugil!" And he repeats again: "Gugi." The cantor hesitates: "Gugi" is not the name of a respectable deceased. But Ruth shakes herself out of her refusal and confirms, "Yes, yes, Gugi... Gugi." The cantor is astounded. He is used to the non-Jewish names of the apostates, the mark of the out-of-control secularism, so fond of all things foreign, which is sickening their souls. But a name like this he has never encountered before. Well, let it be so, let it be Gugi. And he adds: "son of..."

Now both Ruth and David answer together: "Gegog."

The cantor is shocked: "Gegog." Gugi son of Gegog? Soon we'll get to Gog son of Magog. In all his life he had never come across a pair of names like that. Gugi son of Gegog. He has already prayed for the proper rest of all sorts of secular people: he has lamented the deaths of Georg, Gustav, Günther, Gerhardt, Gerde, Gertrude, Gretchen, Gita, Gania, Gilgi, and even once, God

forgive him, Adolf. Names of idolaters. But a combination of names like this he had not encountered. Do Jews no longer have names from their fathers' house that they need these garbled gabblings of the names of the children of Esau? Since he had received his pay and he must perform the commandment, the cantor continues in a wailing voice: "Gugi son of Gegog, of the house of Manos."

The name Manos he knows. Who doesn't know Manos, the lawyer? A respected lawyer. A regrettable loss.

The cantor thinks to himself: true that all Israel are friends, and a son of Israel, though he may sin, is still a son of Israel, but in spite of that, are all of these, the dead and the living, Jews? They are not even Israelites, observers of the laws of Moses! What ties them to the tradition of Israel? Only shaky points of contact: circumcision, bar mitzvah, the Jewish grave. Two of these points of contact are done without the person's consciousness, since we are speaking of a seven-day-old baby and of a person who has passed on. Two touch only men: circumcision and the bar mitzvah. And the bar mitzvah ceremony serves mostly as pretense for a party. If so, what makes these people Jews? Once at least they used to have Hebrew names. Today that too is gone. Gugi son of Gegog. Who would have believed. Of course, he, as a cantor, is glad that these secular and apostate Jews still want to be buried with a Jewish burial, but the whole matter is artificial with regard to people who are not even followers of the faith of Moses. Their world is not our world – aside from the ceremony – their names are not our names, their paths are not our paths. Go out and see: with these people, a Jew can change the sex which the Holy One Blessed Be He gave him. The Book of Deuteronomy forbids even the wearing of a woman's clothes by a man: "a man's gear shall not be upon a woman and a man shall not wear a woman's dress, for all who do this are an abomination to the Lord your God." And half the women here are wearing pants-suits! And this abomination of Egypt is not satisfied with women's clothes, but has turned himself from a man into a woman. He, the cantor, doesn't even want to think about it. He doesn't even want to imagine what this monster has down there. Is it true what they write in the newspapers about these creatures? Do they cut off the organ on which was sealed the covenant of Abraham, the eternal covenant between the Holy One Blessed Be He and his people? And this abominated creature, this unclean intermixture of sexes, they allow it to participate in a Jewish funeral? This hybrid is allowed to enter into a Jewish grave? And when it dies, will it be permitted to be buried in a Jewish

cemetery? Master-of-the-universe, sighs the cantor, make a proper rest not only for the dead but for the living too: "Pardon and have mercy upon us and save us, for to you our eyes are raised, for you are a merciful and forgiving God and King."

The cantor concludes: "And He shall bind his soul in the bond of life. God is his portion. And he shall rest in peace upon his resting-place. And let us say 'Amen.'"

The two punks approach the grave and stand beside it. They send out their hands towards the mound of earth under which Uri is buried, their fingers spread, their eyes closed and they mumble something unclear. At least now they've stopped hugging and kissing by the grave.

The ceremony has ended. But David does not want to leave Uri's grave and begins to yell as he is held in the arms of his wife: "Gugi, Gugi, guy gug gou."

Moussa thinks that this is a part of the strange ceremony of the *Yahud*, and he too joins in with his trilling, ululating voice: "Gugi, ya Gugi."

Ruth too begins to cry: "Gugi, Gugi," and after her almost without a sound, once-again-poor- Rina joins the cry..

Slowly, slowly, the others join, too.

The workers of the burial society who are straightening out the mound of dirt on the grave say to one another: "Maniacs."

Gugi joins Gugi. One after another. Uri's friends from high school and from the Scouts, who have aged and grown stout, shout "Gugi"; the guys from the airborne infantry, from the Bar Association, from the Philharmonic Orchestra, from the Association for the Habilitation of the Mentally Handicapped, everyone cries "Gugi"; the neighbors from the street yell "Gugi"; even Crazy Sonia – who Gila did not speak to, not even today – is screaming "Gugi."

Zalman, the beggar in rags, hesitated at first, but in the end he joined the choir as well and began crying in a cracked voice, "Gugi, Gugi," and when Barbara and Brigitte saw Zalman yelling "Gugi," they joined in and grieve in a loud voice: "Gugi, Gugi," – Brigitte in the baritone voice of a member of V Company of the Paratroopers Brigade and Barbara in a Moldovan soprano. Ibrahim, still embracing Zalman, begins wailing, too: "Gugi, Gugi."

Even Shumacher mutters "Gugi" from his seat in the wheelchair, in a quiet voice which can barely be heard, but the Filipino helper does not join him. This cry of "Gugi" is not included in the funeral text which he knows by heart, and he

gazes disapprovingly at the Gugi-criers: he is opposed to the breaking of tradition and will not lend his voice to a departure from the familiar ceremonies.

Shumacher's secretary, too, mutters "Gugi," through the knowing smile which hides her secret, which will never be revealed to others.

In the end the two punks also join the cry of "Gugi," which they accompany with outstretched hands towards on high. Thus rose the cry of "Gugi" both from the group of official mourners and from the group of unofficial mourners, and began rising above them, rising up and up.

And the cry of "Gugi" rose skywards, Gugi to paradise, Gugi to hell, Gugi rising up as a great glorious bird spreading her wings in the act of ascent.

But the cry did not reach the sky, for it encountered on its way the cloud of pollution which hangs always over Tel Aviv, and thus dissipated and disappeared.

Second Last Chapter: In Reverse Gear

The instructions given by Shumacher's secretary were precise, and Uri reached the industrial park in less than fifteen minutes. The alternate road was in a bad state of disrepair, but is surely led to the back of Shumacher's office building, bypassing Highway No. 5.

Uri arrived at ten-past-ten—nearly two hours late—and was met by Shumacher's verbal onslaught. Final misunderstandings, however, were cleared up after Shumacher accepted Uri's sound advice. The merger contract was signed and the deal closed

Uri is now driving back to his office in his gas-filled Volvo. He must phone Edna and tell her the good news. He discovers that his memory is fully resurrected, as if someone pressed "restore" on his restarted computer. The lost files are back—right there in his brain. He presses Edna's pre-programmed number and self-confidently tells his secretary the good news and that he will soon be in the office. Now, at noontime, going back to Tel Aviv, Highway No. 5 is almost empty and the Volvo is easily cruising along it, full speed ahead, the six-lane highway; the bridges and tunnels; the suburbs and their rectangular homes and gardens. Uri sees these signs of prosperity and senses the energy flowing into the highway and from it and says to himself: the country has really changed. He passes the spot where the crash took place. There is no remnant or reminder of this death on the highway. The highway is clean. Everything's been cleaned up. The drivers pass the spot without realizing what took place here only a few hours ago. The Volvo gulps up the distance to Tel Aviv in less than twenty minutes. The junction linking Highway No. 5 and the road leading to Tel Aviv is empty: gone are Simon-Zalman and his tin plate; Barbara and her tight 'appy hour mouth; Brigitte and her huge feet tucked into stiletto shoes; Ibrahim and his slogan-bearing t-shirts. All gone. Zalman's village is hidden, out of sight behind the decorative mound. Uri is in a hurry to return to his office and doesn't bother to think about the miscreants he met that morning.

Before entering Tel Aviv's center, the traffic slows down, but now after the signing of the contract and after Uri's memory disk has been restored to its former self, he does not care. True, he will be late to the scheduled meetings in his office. But this is the inevitable price his clients must pay for his talents. Even that psychopath Shumacher was forced to admit that and forgave Uri for his late arrival.

This morning's journey along Highway No. 5 exhausted him. He was willing to have the meeting at Shumacher's place and not in his office, because of his client's handicap. No more. Anyone who wants his services must come to him. Driving along the bottlenecked highway was a devastating experience. And the miscreants he encountered en route! Did he really meet them, or were they all part of his hallucinations? The daydreaming improbabilities he had as a boy? No, no, these were really flesh-and-blood human beings. Will he visit these real yet hallucinatory characters again? He doubts it.

Anyway, he is spent, and he waits eagerly to finish the day's workload and come home to Ruth.

At home, Ruth waits for him wearing a semi-transparent robe. Ruth smiles: "Uri, I appreciate your coming home early, especially tonight." Does he hear an sarcastic undertone in her voice? Does she know about his once-in-two-weeks-trysts with Rina? Did her friend tell his wife that Uri canceled their meeting tonight? He does not know.

The very thought that Ruth and Rina are accomplices to his illicit affair, that Ruth knows it all, drives him to the bathroom. Uri looks at his pale face in the mirror. He sees in the mirror the clear signs of old age, which is about to break out and to transform him into the spitting image of Grandpa Heinrich-Hiram.

While looking in the mirror, fragments of last night's nightmare land in his consciousness: he is trying to enter a hall in which Bruno Walter is standing at the podium. But Walter is not conducting an orchestra but rather auditioning young actors. His entrance into the hall is blocked by Fat Nathan—what a coincidence that he met him today on the highway. Nathan prevents him from getting into the hall and from meeting Bruno Walter by shouting in his staccato voice: "Only real actors are allowed in here."

Uri goes back to the bedroom and hugs his wife. It really doesn't matter whether she knows about his affair with Rina. The Rina fling is over. Closed for good. The price he had to pay was too high. Ruth is his wife. The only one. Forever.

Uri then hears Gershon stomping into the house in his heavy boots. He will enter the apartment as usual, without saying hello, and forcefully slam the door behind him. But this time, Uri won't let him go. He must decipher the conundrum of his son's behavior.

Last Chapter: A Visiting Card

In his rented room, in Kibbutz Ramat Emek, Saul runs through, for the n^{th} time, the preparatory questionnaires for the scholastic aptitude tests. He reads, answers the sample questions, curses, smokes incessantly, and does his best to answer correctly. Inane questions, he says to himself, but I must succeed and become a lawyer like that old man who gave me the lift this morning.

He looks at the visiting card given to him by that distinguished lawyer. The card is lavishly printed on expensive paper. It oozes wealth and prestige. Only a few words appear on it:

Manoss and Partners
Platinum Towers

as well as telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. No word about a profession. No address. Anyone who needs Manoss knows all about him and is familiar with the Platinum Towers.

Upon graduation Saul will go to these towers to meet the Boss and to remind him of the promise he made when driving along Highway No. 5. Saul will do his internship with Manoss and Partners. In the Platinum Towers.

Saul does not remember the old lawyer's face. All old men look alike. But he will remember the car: the glistening dashboard; the two temperature sensors—one for outside, one for inside; the climate control; the cruise control; the suede-covered steering wheel; the polished wood of the glove compartment; the soft feel of luxurious leather; the state-of-the-art disc changer; the quadraphonic sound; the unbelievable coolness; the luxury of it all.

One day he will have a car like the one in which he hitchhiked on Highway No. 5.