

**Boaz GAON**

Extract from the play *Return To Haifa*

**Act One****Scene One**

**The sound of the sea.**

**Sa'id's voice reads the opening lines of *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani:**

*“When Said reached the edge of Haifa, where he had arrived in his car by way of Jerusalem, he felt grief well up inside him. For one minute he was tempted to turn back, and without even looking he knew his wife had begun to cry silently. Then suddenly came the sound of the sea, exactly the way it used to be.”*

**Lights. It is 1967. Sa'id and Safiyya are making their way to Haifa.**

Safiyya           The sun is almost setting. The soldiers will be here soon. Hurry up, Sa'id!  
Sa'id               They won't come. We're allowed to be here. To look at Haifa's sea. There's time.

Safiyya           Says who?

Sa'id               On the radio. Their general, Moussa Dayan. The border is open until further notice.

Safiyya           Great. So in an hour your friend Dayan will come on the radio again and give another announcement: the border is closed, and we'll be left inside.

Sa'id               He won't.

Safiyya           You've spoken to him?

Sa'id               I know how he thinks. Nothing like this has ever happened before. I'm telling you. Not in any war throughout history. In six days they took Jerusalem from the Jordanians, humiliated Nasser, and suddenly – the border is open. Why are they doing that, do you know? Not because of our pretty faces. To flaunt it in our faces. They already took our heart out twenty years ago, in 1948 –

Safiyya           You've come here to look for a heart, Sa'id?

Sa'id               No.

Safiyya           Do you have plans to retake Haifa?

Sa'id               Ah, Haifa... Remember how the wind used to come up, slowly climb up Mount Carmel... We'd sit outside on the steps in the yard drinking coffee. Remember the carob tree in the garden, the feathers in the vase in the living room, seven of them...

Safiyya           I don't remember anything, not the wind on the Carmel, not the carob tree, not the feathers in the vase in the living room, and not the picture of Jerusalem that your father hung in the living room... Come. When we left Ramallah this morning I promised the children we'd be back before nightfall.

Sa'id               Sit down. I said sit, Safiyya. The car is old and needs to rest. It's a Fiat.

**Pause.**

**Safiyya sits down.**

Safiyya           The house might have been destroyed. A synagogue built on its place, or a fish restaurant, with chairs outside... We've come for nothing.

Sa'id               We haven't come for nothing. We've come because you wanted to.

Safiyya           ...I was wrong.

Sa'id               You weren't. For almost twenty years you haven't wanted to hear about Haifa. Until last night when you said: Let's go back. Tell me, Safiyya.

Safiyya           What do you want to hear?

**Pause.**

Said ...Why did you leave him?

**Safiyya sheds a tear then becomes determined.**

Safiyya Your Fiat has rested long enough. If it rests any longer it'll never get up again. Come, let's get into Haifa before it gets dark. We'll see the house and leave.

**Haifa, 1948. An overturned living room. A Jewish Agency official carrying a file filled with documents, throws a curtain over the items scattered on the floor.**

Ephraim **(Enters)** I'm Gushinsky, Ephraim.

Official **(Writing)** Congratulations. April twenty-fifth, 1948. You have been reborn. From today you are Goshen.

Ephraim: "Goshen"?

Official **(Joking pleasantly, trying to endear himself)** You went to Egypt, didn't you? To work the land in the "Land of Goshen". Gushinsky – Goshen. How long have you been in Israel?

Ephraim Ah, seven months.

Official Seven. Seven months waiting for a house?

Ephraim For a house like this in Haifa, yes.

Official Did you make enquiries at the Kibbutz Movement? If there are any places there?

Ephraim Kibbutz, no.

Official Why not?

Ephraim We're too old. Collective not for Miriam... We need a house from Jewish Agency here. In city.

Official Age?

Ephraim Me?

Official You, you. How old?

Ephraim Fifty-seven. Miriam forty-four.

Official Nu, and that's old?

Ephraim Old not because of age. Because of what happened. Over there.

Official Profession?

Ephraim *Buchhalter*.

Official *Veys mir...* another accountant.

Ephraim *Drayst Yiddish?*

Official *Nein*. Listen, this isn't a suitable house for you. I have a place in Kurdania.

Ephraim Kurdania no good.

Official That's all there is, Goshen. No good, call in the people standing outside.

Ephraim I come tomorrow. Maybe Haganah take more houses in Haifa, yes?

Official They won't. In Haifa the story's finished. We're stuck with what we've got.

Ephraim So what I do?

Official Nothing to do.

Ephraim What nothing to do? Every day on way to market... I see whole houses like this. Sometimes I see pots on stove... plates on table... but no one live in them! Why not me?

Official Someone lives there, Goshen. What are you talking about? Everyone who's entitled – gets.

Ephraim No. Only hooligans get. *Shlimazels* stay in tent. **(Continues to urge the official)** Listen, my wife... in Poland she was big Zionist. She was in *HaShomer HaTzair*, did I tell you this yet? ...Well, I tell you now. My wife, Miriam, write for newspapers in Hebrew, even before they know how to read. Even her husband she teach Hebrew, like you teach horse to dance. I *buchhalter*, not dancer. I see only numbers.

Official This isn't Warsaw here, Goshen. If you want a villa in Haifa, with a lawn and a dinner service...

Ephraim It not me, it Miriam...

Official *Nu*, so tell Miriam. Kurdania is all we have. There are no more villas in Haifa. People are fighting over storage rooms. You shouldn't be staying in a tent.

Ephraim **(Laughing to himself)** I join the Party, yes? Whatever you want... You write Party and I sign my name at the bottom, yes?

Official This is not about parties, Goshen.

Ephraim So what it about? My wife is waiting in door of tent and asking, "*Nu*, we have house?" What will I say to her? You want to go back to Poland? **(The official is about to leave)** Give me the house, sir. We don't have very long to live. We left our life over there. **(Brief pause)** We have not money! Money? Money for what?

Official **(Embarrassed about the hint he has made)** ...Sorry. I didn't say nothing. Try to understand. Others have. Only we haven't. Tell me what the secret is...

Official Children?

Ephraim Excuse me?

Official Do you have any children?

Ephraim Had. Over there. Why?

**Ephraim suddenly comprehends what he is being told.**

Ephraim No children, no house?

Official A house like this – only for families.

Ephraim **(Pause)** You, sir, have children?

Official I do.

Ephraim **(Glance at Miriam and Sa'id)** Sir, take good care of them. Keep them close to your heart. So they won't be taken... **(About to leave)**

Official Wait.

**Goes back inside, finds a note.**

Official Yesterday I was brought a baby that was left here. A baby that hasn't even learnt to walk yet. Where should I send him? To the street? I'm human, too. **(Hands it to him)** It's yours. The house? Do you want it? **(Ephraim takes the note, slowly)** Call Miriam. **(Exits. Ephraim remains alone, stunned)**

**In the meantime, Safiyya and Sa'id continue on their journey. They arrive at the house in 1967. They observe it from a distance.**

**The stage opens up. We are in Safiyya and Sa'id's house, now Ephraim and Miriam's, 1948.**

**Scene Two  
Haifa, 1948.**

**Safiyya and Sa'id's old house. Miriam and Froike's new one.  
Ephraim is at home, with the baby (apparently)  
Enter Miriam, laden with suitcases. Emotional... Ephraim is already there.  
Confused and emotional.**

Miriam Froike!

Ephraim What's the matter? Why are you yelling?

Miriam Soldiers outside... coming to take back the house...

Ephraim What are you talking about?

Miriam This is what I'm talking about! Look... standing outside and pointing at the house and whispering God-knows-what to each other... Go out there. Go and tell them the house is ours!

Ephraim That's not what they're here for.

Miriam What then? With guns in their hands?

Ephraim To guard the houses. So squatters don't go into them.

**Miriam goes out to the balcony.**

Miriam They've gone. (**Turns around. Sees the house for the first time**) This is the house?

Ephraim This is the house.

**Pause. Miriam looks around the house with a critical eye.**

Miriam Have you been to the Jewish Agency?

Ephraim I have.

Miriam Did they give you the documents, the ones we need?

Ephraim They did.

Miriam They asked for money. Jewelry we don't have. How much did they want?

Ephraim What jewelry, God Almighty. Everything is all right. The house is ours!

Miriam And the bad news?

Ephraim What bad news?

Miriam The bad news, Mr. Gushinsky.

Ephraim Not Gushinsky.

Miriam I can see it on your face. Like a child who's dropped a vase on the floor and doesn't know how to glue it together.

Ephraim Not Gushinsky. Goshen.

Miriam What Goshen?

Ephraim That's my name. Yours too. They gave it to me at the Agency, a new name. Get used to it. (**Picks up a form he has received, shows it to her**) Here are the documents. There's even a stamp, with a Jewish menorah.

Miriam Ephraim Goshen. *Veyz mir* (**Yiddish**) Good thing it's not Farouk. Well, let me see... (**As she reads, Miriam's face becomes awash with contentment**)

Ephraim The house is ours! It says so here, right?

Miriam How do you know what it says? You can't read Hebrew.

Ephraim I can read your face.

**She smiles, almost grudgingly. They share a moment of closeness.**

Miriam A thank you is called for.

Ephraim That's all right.

Miriam Not you. The man who helped you. Your friend who signed the form. Artzi.

Ephraim Used to be Artzilevich.

Miriam Poland?

Ephraim Bessarabia. He has no one left. Came here on his own, poor man. He told me everything.

Miriam We'll pick some flowers for your Artzilevich. They're so beautiful here... As if all the colors of heaven have been spilled. What isn't there here? Lemon. Carob. Even parsley...

Ephraim What a miracle, eh, Miriam?

Miriam Don't exaggerate.

**Miriam walks around the house, taking it all in. Accompanied by music.**

Miriam We'll take the pictures down. With all due respect to the Orient, even Miriam Gushinsky has limits. Yes?

Ephraim Goshen, Miriam.

Miriam You won't take your wife back to Warsaw – so be it. But at least let's not live in a bazaar. Yes?

Ephraim Miriam.

Miriam The vase with the feathers – we'll keep, for a bit of color.  
 Ephraim Miriam, there's...  
 Miriam What is it?  
**Pause.**  
 Ephraim Nothing. Everything's good.  
 Miriam Everything really is good. The rugs we'll keep. So our feet won't get cold. And in the summer we'll roll them up and put them in the cupboard. We'll close the windows so the sun won't get into our eyes. Less breeze as well. So you won't catch cold. The walls we'll paint white. Upstairs and downstairs.

Ephraim Not there, you can't.  
 Miriam Can't what?  
 Ephraim You can't paint the walls upstairs. No. There's wallpaper up there, in the children's room.  
 Miriam So we'll take the wallpaper off, Ephraim. We'll scrape the walls until we reach the bones of the house. We'll make an office for you there.  
 Ephraim That's no good.  
 Miriam What's no good? This wall we have to break. To make room for a piano. And around it as well, for the vibrations of the notes. A house needs a piano.  
 Ephraim Putting an office upstairs is no good. A pity. There are toys there, almost brand new. A wooden boat over there. Newly painted. And bedding with pictures... We can't throw it all away.  
 Miriam I didn't say I'd throw it away. I said, sell it. If no one buys any of it, we'll put it all into bags and store it until after the war.  
 Ephraim I actually thought... of leaving it as it is. We can break walls, there'll be plenty of room. The children's room will be upstairs...  
 Miriam Froike, are you pregnant?  
 Ephraim No...  
 Miriam Because it sounds like you're pregnant... or that you're planning to make a little *ingele*...  
 Ephraim I'm not planning to make any *ingele* with you...  
 Miriam Good, so as I was saying. We'll pack away everything from the children's room (**Turns to go upstairs**)  
 Ephraim No. Wait... Miriam!  
**Pause.**  
 Miriam I knew it. Bandits... what did they take? Jewelry? What have they taken from a couple of Poles who've got nothing? What did you give them?  
 Ephraim You don't understand. You don't get a house for free.  
 Miriam I understand very well. *Machers* are the same everywhere, only instead of speaking Yiddish they speak Hebrew.  
 Ephraim Look, these houses weren't built for us.  
 Miriam *Nu?* I know that. So what? Everybody knows...  
 Ephraim There's history here, Miriam. You can't just throw it away, you can't just paint everything white.  
 Miriam What can't we throw away?  
 Ephraim The memories of the people who lived here.  
 Miriam What's this nonsense you're talking?  
 Ephraim You don't understand...  
 Miriam So explain it to me!  
**Pause.**  
 Ephraim We have a responsibility. To preserve the memory of the people who lived here, in this house. So that it doesn't die. Doesn't stop breathing. So that if it

wakes up in the night, there'll be someone to stroke it... to sing it a lullaby and drive away bad dreams.

Miriam ...What did you give for the house, Froike?

Ephraim I didn't give. I was given.

Miriam What did they give?

**A baby's cry is heard. Miriam goes up to the bedroom on the second floor... Sai'd and Safiyya are seen again. Sa'id is about to enter the yard. Safiyya grabs his arm.**

Safiyya **(As Sa'id is about to enter the yard)** What was in this house will never return. What they took from us, they won't be giving back. Promise me, Sa'id.

**Enters the yard. Music. This is the first time they are seeing the house.**

Safiyya They've changed the bell.

Sa'id They've changed the name as well.

Safiyya They've put in a new gate.

Sa'id Iron.

**Pause.**

Said Look at the pushchair, Safiyya! It's his.

Safiyya No. That's impossible.

Sa'id Yes. I went to the market and bought it.

Safiyya There are many like that in the market. In the market in Ramallah as well.

Sa'id I did that. With my own hands. And I put in a few screws – just to be on the safe side... so that Khaldun wouldn't fall out, remember?

Safiyya It's not ours.

Sa'id It's only ours. Put your hands here, Safiyya. This is where you used to put them. Me too. Hand in hand, we used to walk **(Starts strolling with the pushchair)** and your head would rest on my shoulder. And Khaldun would be sleeping so deeply. And when he cried, when he cried you'd put a mother's hand on him, and he'd calm down.

Safiyya Take it away from me. Put it back.

**Sa'id sings a lullaby and exits with the pushchair.**

**Shift to 1967.**

Ephraim Soldiers found him, up there... handed him over to the Jewish Agency. Artzilevich said, "You want the house? Only with the baby..." That's why we got the house! We can't tell anyone!

**Enter Miriam with the baby.**

Miriam Shhh... Be quiet! What's wrong with you? You'll scare him.

Ephraim That's why he was crying. He wanted a mother's arms.

**Looks at her in suspense. What is she going to say?**

Miriam Get me a towel.

**Froike brings a towel.**

Miriam We need milk.

Ephraim There isn't any... I didn't buy any...

Miriam Go to the market and get some. And get hold of some hot water.

Ephraim So I'll go...

Miriam Be quiet! The baby's tired... He wants to sleep... look at his eyes... as if he's afraid to wake up.

**Ephraim is about to leave.**

Miriam Do it quickly, before the parents come back. So they don't think I've kidnapped him.

**Pause.**

Ephraim There are no parents.

Miriam ...I don't want to hear it.  
 Ephraim You have to hear it. You have no choice.  
 Miriam Yes I do. We can keep quiet. Sleep one night without knowing.  
 Ephraim The baby belongs to the house.  
 Miriam Take him.  
 Ephraim Smell him. So clean and new. The filth of the world hasn't touched him yet.  
 Miriam I don't want to hold him... I can't... Take the baby from me! I don't want to feel... his warmth. I can't, Ephraim!

**Ephraim takes the baby roughly.**

Miriam Not like that... gently! You don't do it like that! (**Protectively**) Sleep well, little one. Have a long sleep, as long as you need...

**Goes upstairs. Downstairs Ephraim is upset. Miriam returns without the baby.**

Miriam That's why we got a house. You told them that we lost a child and a house, and they gave you a house with a child, yes? Geniuses!  
 Ephraim His parents are dead. And we're alive. And the child is alive too.  
 Miriam Who said the parents are dead?  
 Ephraim They said so at the Jewish Agency. Artzilevich.  
 Miriam "Artzilevich".  
 Ephraim Yes! And people in the neighborhood, even the Arabs. I asked.  
 Miriam Arabs are just as afraid of you as they are of a ghost, Froike, because you're white, like the soldiers. A *geist*!  
 Ephraim You don't want to hear it, the parents are dead!  
 Miriam You want the parents to be dead! And Artzilevich wants that too because it's more convenient that way! But no one knows!  
 Ephraim I know.  
 Miriam You know.  
 Ephraim Yes, I know, Miriam. They're dead. If they weren't dead... would they have left a child?

**Pause.**

Ephraim Where should he go? Tell me.  
 Miriam I don't know.  
 Ephraim To the Red Cross? The border? (**Miriam doesn't answer**) We'll make good parents...  
 Miriam No!  
 Ephraim We'll raise a child. We'll stop being on our own. Look at us – parents without a child, without a family; only all the dead who sleep with us in our bed and scream and cry and beg us to bring them back to life. They took everything from us. Family... home... a child... We're allowed to take as well.  
 Miriam No, we aren't.  
 Ephraim God is begging for forgiveness. He's down on his knees, because of what he's done, stretching out his arms and saying to us, "Take". Are we going to deny God the possibility of asking for forgiveness?  
 Miriam God didn't send a child.  
 Ephraim Yes he did. Something like this doesn't happen by coincidence. A child without parents, parents without a child.  
 Miriam Your God killed us. He sat on his big throne smoking a cigarette while the Nazis snatched children out of our arms!  
 Ephraim I can't be alone any longer.  
 Miriam You're not alone.  
 Ephraim I want a family. I want to hear a child laughing. Everything we had...  
 Miriam ...My beloved husband, my man who has obtained a house for me... I can't raise a child... that isn't mine.  
 Ephraim ...Why?

Miriam Why?

Ephraim Yes, why?

**Pause.**

Miriam Because he has a mother. And one day she'll come back. And he'll leave me. And I will die a second time.

**Ephraim goes upstairs to the child's room.**

Miriam Where...

Ephraim To take the child for a walk. **(Disappears)**

**They go downstairs. Ephraim carries the pushchair with the baby.**

Miriam What walk? What are you talking about?

Ephraim Look. I found a pushchair. Almost new, there in the room. We'll go for a walk so everybody will see that we have a child. So they won't ask any questions later.

Miriam The child is asleep.

Ephraim It's time he woke up.

Miriam You've woken him up. I told you! You and your shouting! Get out of here!

Ephraim He's looking at me.

Miriam No.

Ephraim He's opening his eyes, Miriam. He can see us. Hello baby. I'm Ephraim Goshen. That's Miriam. We're your parents.

Miriam Stop your nonsense. **(Speaks to the baby)** You've got a mother and you've got a father, and they'll be coming back very soon. Do you hear, sweet one? Good. Oho, there's a draught here. Fetch a blanket, Froike. There's one upstairs in his room. I said, fetch a blanket! **(Ephraim goes upstairs)** There, there, little one... the man didn't mean to frighten you. He's a good man, but the war has made him crazy. There... you're laughing... of course you're laughing... of course you are... because of the funny man... Do you know what his name is? The funny man? Goshen. A funny name, isn't it? Go-shen! Here he comes... boom-boom-boom... pam-pam-pam... **(Ephraim returns with the blanket)** Sweet baby. You're such a sweet baby. Where are your parents, sweet baby? **(Sings in Yiddish)**

Ephraim The blanket.

Miriam Put it here. We'll wrap him up.

**They spread the blanket and wrap the baby up in it.**

Ephraim What are we going to do, Miriam? We have to decide...

Miriam Go to the market. Buy a few things. For the baby. Not much. Some milk. Cloth for diapers. **(Ephraim is excited)** Froike! Don't buy a lot. Just for one night. In the morning, we'll see.

**Exit Froike.**

**Miriam stays with the baby. Sings a beautiful lullaby in Polish. As she sings, she suddenly bursts into uncontrolled weeping. She calms down. Becomes practical.**

### Scene Three

**Haifa, 1967.**

**Sa'id and Safiyya are standing in front of the entrance to their old home, in which Miriam Goshen had been living for the past twenty years. They are very excited at the sight of their home... Sa'id comforts Safiyya.**

Sa'id Weeds have grown on the walls. Like gray hair. But apart from that, it's the same house. Don't you agree, Safiyya?

Safiyya No.



Sa'id Yes. There's the carob tree, *in'al dino*. Remember when I put in the swing? Another nail and another nail and another... One day you shouted to me from the window: is that a carob tree, or a nail tree?

Safiyya I don't remember.

Sa'id Of course you do. **(Safiyya doesn't respond)** There's the window... You used to wave to me from there, with Khaldun in your arms. Take away the ugly shutters the Jews have put on the balcony, and it's ours. As if we left only this morning.

Safiyya We didn't leave this morning.

Sa'id Move over a minute.

Safiyya Stop it. What are you doing? People are looking!

Sa'id Look back at them. Here, come and see. **(Digs)**

Safiyya What is it?

Sa'id Where I fell, on the day Khaldun was born. I was running to get to the market before it closed, to buy milk and blankets. I tripped on the broken step and slipped on the parsley. Come and look, Safiyya.

Safiyya Get up. They'll think we're thieves.

Sa'id Thieves? Us?

Safiyya ...They took down the swing. They took everything down, Sa'id. No children have grown up here. Not babies either. A house of unfortunates. An iron gate... balconies like cages... that's not how people who are raising a child live.

Sa'id There's a line.

Safiyya What line?

Sa'id A clothesline. Look. **(They look at the clothesline)** An old woman's blouse. A man's underpants.

Safiyya I want to leave.

Sa'id We can't.

Safiyya We've seen the house. What else is there for us to do here?

Sa'id We haven't seen the inside of the house.

Safiyya The house is empty.

Sa'id It's not.

Safiyya If it wasn't, they would have come out.

Sa'id It's different with the Jews. First they check who's standing outside. **(Pause)** Wait here.

Safiyya Where are you going? Sa'id!

Sa'id To the car to get some coffee. We'll sit on the steps, like we used to, until they come out.

Safiyya And if they don't come out?

Sa'id Then the moon will come out and sing "*Ahalan wa-Sahalan*" to us... **(Sings as he exits)**

Safiyya Don't go... Sa'id!

**She remains alone. She and the house. She slowly draws closer and closer to the door. Strokes the walls.**

**Sings a beautiful lullaby to the house, reminiscent of the lullaby Miriam sang to the baby Khaldun at the end of the previous scene.**

**The door suddenly opens. Miriam Goshen, an apron tied around her waist, comes out into the yard. She is some twenty years older than in previous scenes. She is holding a plant pot.**

Miriam Hello. Try not to step in the mud if you don't mind. It leaves marks on the steps. **(Pause)** English?

**Safiyya remains silent.**

Miriam Yiddish?

Safiyya We speak Hebrew.

Miriam We?  
 Safiyya My husband and I. He'll be here in a minute.  
 Miriam Nu, that's good. We can talk.  
 Safiyya My husband used to work in the port. I worked at the city council. Many Jews used to come to us to ask for help. Before the *Nakba*.

Miriam The what?  
 Safiyya 1948.  
 Miriam I've always said so, a talent for languages is a gift from heaven. My husband had such a hard time with Hebrew, poor thing. Died with broken teeth. Nu, what can you do. **(In the meantime, she places the plant pot in the baby carriage standing at the gate to the yard, wipes her hands on her skirt and goes back inside – the baby carriage serves as an ornamental stand for plant pots)** Are you looking for someone? Something?

Safiyya My husband will explain.  
 Miriam Where is he, if I might ask?  
 Safiyya He went to the car to bring some coffee.  
 Miriam What for?

**Sa'id returns with the coffee. An awkward pause.**

Sa'id Oho! So the door opened! You see, Safiyya? I told you. The Jews are nice people. Thanks be to Allah they came instead of the Jordanians. Hello... My name is Sa'id. This is Safiyya, Umm Khaldun. **(Pause)** I've brought coffee, for us to drink together. To our common future.

Miriam Do you have any tea?  
 Sa'id I'll bring tea, too, why not? We've brought everything. Safiyya said, what for, we can drink at home. I told her, it's nicer with the Jews. Outside. In the rain.

Miriam I apologize. I'd invite you in, welcome you into my home, in accordance with your custom. But it's the middle of the week and the house is a mess.

Sa'id Never mind. Some other time perhaps.  
 Miriam Nu, with pleasure. Let me know in advance so that I can prepare.  
 Sa'id A week, two weeks, a year. What's convenient for you? You're the mistress of the house. We're merely guests.

Safiyya We've come a long way. From a village near Ramallah. We left very early this morning, because of the soldiers and the broken roads and the mud. Sa'id was afraid we'd get stuck on the way and wouldn't be able to get back.

Miriam That's yours? That pile of junk up there made all that noise?  
 Sa'id It's not a pile of junk. It's a Fiat. Fits into your drive beautifully. As if it was built specially for my car. Coffee?

Miriam No.  
**Pause.**  
 Miriam I know why you've come. I knew right away. I saw how you stroked the soil. Ephraim used to do exactly the same. I just wanted to be sure. All sorts come around these days, and you never can tell.

Safiyya Ephraim... is he your son?  
 Miriam No, no. He's my husband.  
 Sa'id Is he home?  
 Miriam He passed away. The sun killed him. That's what happens when you take a Polish accountant and turn him into a parsley agronomist.

Safiyya Why didn't you invite us to come in?  
 Miriam I'm sorry, I don't understand.  
 Safiyya If you heard the noise of our *sayyara*... you saw us coming into the yard...  
 Miriam I thought you'd want to be alone. With the house. With your memories and the time that's passed... We didn't change very much, as you can see. It was

important to Froike to preserve the... the... (in Yiddish: “how do you say”) *viazoy zugt a mann*... the original.

**Awkward pause.**

Miriam Are you thirsty? I made some juice. We've got excellent lemons this year.  
 Sa'id Who lives here besides you?  
 Miriam Besides me, no one else.  
 Sa'id The clothes on the line. Whose are they?  
 Miriam On the line? Mine, of course.  
 Sa'id You wear men's underpants?  
 Miriam **(Laughing)** Ah, you're right. I completely forgot. Those belong to one of the Arabs who work in my yard. His name is Mahmud. A very nice young man. His parents live in one of the nearby villages. He told me that in '48 they held onto the land by the skin of their teeth.

**Pause.**

Miriam I'm sorry. Please try to understand, this situation is awkward for me too. The war is barely over. The newspapers are still full of war stories and victory parades. Perhaps we should wait a while before we release the peace doves, as they say. Yes?

Sa'id Where's Khaldun?

Miriam Who?

Safiyya Sa'id!

Sa'id Where's our son?

Miriam Son? I don't understand...

Sa'id You understand very well. I can see him, in your eyes. Filled with fear, looking for him behind our backs, in case he comes back and we're still here. Where is he?

Miriam **(With pursed lips)** ...Close the gate on your way out. Dogs are always wandering in.

Safiyya We haven't come to quarrel. Or apportion blame. We were talking last night...

Sa'id Enough!

Safiyya ...about all the people who are coming back to see their homes, find their way with red eyes and sand and stones and pictures, and I said to Sa'id, why not us? We, who left not only a house, but a baby as well, who has never seen us, who was too young, still blind...

Sa'id Safiyya.

Safiyya Let him see who his parents were just once. That's why we've returned. Let me see my son.

Miriam I have no idea what you're talking about.

Sa'id They're thieves. That's all. Thieves have no hearts. Only knives and roadblocks and iron gates. To protect what they stole. Never mind. One day we'll be strong enough. We'll take everything back.

Miriam I have to go inside.

Sa'id There were things. Pictures, furniture, plates. Can we take those?

**Pause.**

Miriam Froike wanted to get rid of it all. But I packed everything away in bags. Wait here, I'll bring them out to...

Sa'id There are toys out back. A little boy's toys. A wooden boat, near the stump of the tree you chopped down. Does that belong to your friend Mahmud as well?

**Pause.**

Miriam I don't have to answer you.

Sa'id No, you don't.

Miriam No. I can go inside and lock the door.

Sa'id Yes, you can.

Miriam Yes. Like all the neighbors do. Miriam Goshen doesn't have to be any holier than anyone else. With blood I paid for this house. I raised a child and buried a husband. That's more than enough!

**Pause.**

Safiyya Does he look like you?

Miriam Enough.

Safiyya Your boy, is he white or dark? Does he look like he's from Poland or from Palestine, with black eyes like Sa'id's?

Miriam Please leave. The neighbors will be asking questions.

Safiyya ...Where's our boy, madam? Tell us, and we'll leave. We'll watch from a distance. We won't talk. Just so that we can tell his brothers that he's alive. Please madam...

Miriam All right... if there's no other way...

**Sa'id and Safiyya are stunned.**

Miriam Go back and sit in your pile of junk... turn around at the top of the road... turn left on Ma'apilim Street... at Mahane David turn right. You'll see a big gate there... manned by an Arab guard. From the entrance count three headstones... until you reach the big pine tree. That's where my son is. Covered in pine needles. Even though I always clear them away. And they always prick my fingers. And my heart.

Safiyya Dead?

Miriam Murdered by Arabs. In the battle to liberate the Western Wall. **(Pause)** He was raised as a Jew. It was only natural that he'd join the IDF. Froike wanted him to stay home. But he wouldn't. All his friends went... I tried to spare you. But you... don't want to be pitied. No, no. You want to dig, with knives, into the open wound until the blood covers us all! So there you are! Now, please excuse me...

**Waits a moment. They don't move.**

Miriam I said, excuse me.

**They move aside. Miriam goes into the house, slamming the door behind her.**

*Translated from the Hebrew by Margalit Rodgers and Anthony Berris*

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