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Company / A Woman in Space (excerpt)

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE Have you ever thought when will someone truly love you? All of you? Have you ever stayed seated in your chair till lunchtime, and although you drink lots of water your body took the shape of a chair? A woman in workspace, the space changes, the work changes, companies rise and fall. Now, for example. You can close the door behind you but you will still hear the three-dimensional machine working, it assists in the manufacturing of single models, it saves time, and the cost is low. I remember, I once had a job interview, they designed and built three dimensional-machines like this one there, I didn't remember they made so much noise. The interviewer looked at my resume and, after asking me a few professional questions, said to me, so, have you ever shot a gun? I told him that I had but only at cardboard targets. He was asking the questions and I was giving the answers, and that was the right answer. A woman in workspace, have you ever loved? Truly loved, and all of you? You no longer hear the sound of the three-dimensional machine, it's the kind of sound you get used to after a few months, the walls are all made of plaster so you can hear everything, everything you say, and the others, you can hear them sigh when they do that. A woman in workspace, you can hear the gate beeping, the gate for entrance of suppliers, customers, clients, workers, and DHL delivery men. Some lose their patience and honk their horns, complementing the rhythmic beeping of the gate, at some point one of us goes and opens it for them. A woman in workspace, sometimes I think I should better begin the story here: a woman in workspace with the shape of a chair who most of the time doesn't get up until lunch, who has ADHD, and of all the beeping and talking and noise she is especially bothered by people. A woman in workspace, have you ever been in a state of love and not absence? The space changes the people change the workload is heavier or ends. Sometimes they refurbish the office, not your office necessarily, bring potted plants from IKEA, the kind you don't have to water. Launch a new software to control the inventory, the processes, to control the files, to control everything really –

Company 1

The CEO jumped on the table and hollered at us. He said: You are not working hard enough. He jumped on the table and stabilized his legs on the receptionist's desk. A long white desk. He said: We are losing time and you are not meeting the group's goals. Said: You must retain your focus. He emphasized: Our success is dependent on you and on you solely. Also: You must increase your speed. Then he said: The time is crucial, and I won't let us enter stoppage time. We stood and looked at him silently. Then he added, over my dead body. Some of us exchanged looks with some of the others. He stood very stable on the desk, with his legs straddled. He talked for half an hour, maybe more. The majority of the things he said was addressed to us, the technology department team. He repeatedly warned us of last minute smugness. His eyes were shining. Then he said, we are one step away from realizing the dream, there is no time to rest. You'll sleep when you're dead. He repeated the same sentences over and over again. And all the time he stood on the receptionist's desk, his legs firm, his hands moving at the speed of his speech, which grew faster and faster. We scattered as soon as he was done. It was eleven in the morning, about one hour and a half before lunch and an hour past the first coffee break. I went back to my cubicle. I passed my manager's cubicle on the way. He was busy on a conference call. He spoke loudly into a microphone and his ears were covered by large headphones.

We must push the delivery time, he yelled, his face glued to his computer screen. I continued to walk toward my cubicle. The open space was very noisy, keyboards and conversations. The coffee corner was empty. When I got to my place and sat in front of the computer, my inbox filled with a lot of new emails. I remembered that I should never start with the emails. I once read a newspaper article about it. Ten Rules to Increase Productivity at Work. Rule number one, never start your day with answering emails. I opened the notebook and flipped through the pages until I got to the last page I wrote in, the one with the to do list. It had a long list of topics for the weekly meeting. I started to prepare for the meeting. I opened the relevant computer files. One of the neighbors in a nearby cubicle relentlessly pressed his keyboard keys. He was hitting it hard. I was still able to focus, ignoring all disturbances. I hit the keys quickly myself, and at the background his fingers were hitting his harder and harder, almost breathlessly.

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE You must breathe between the tasks, all those lists are going to eventually nail you to the office floor, blue linoleum flooring from the eighties, like the one you had at elementary school, in the gym, I remember how much I liked to high jump, breaking a new record every week. At least this office has outside windows, the air comes out of the AC but the light is natural. A woman in workspace who since winter began can't get up in the mornings, not because of the cold, it's no excuse, and not because anything like it or anything similar, you know very well it's because of the absence. How do they find time for love in this mess, the morning traffic jams in the oncoming lane make you have vertigo. A woman in workspace. Do you bleed? I think you're bleeding and that it's out of your ordinary dates. Everything always comes on time with you, even though with the years things turn stickier, filled with more life, you don't excrete it out of your womb, for a while now it's been coming out of your irises, and every time you look at something it drips off you, you're shedding salty tears of blood in front of the double screens of the work station. A woman in workspace do you remember how once, not so long ago, you liked meetings and long processes, and to see how they are validated, the things, and your projects, become alive –

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE I tried to take the woman out of the workspace and talk to her when I am in a space that isn't work. I couldn't.

Company 2

Around midnight my head hit the pillow and I remembered the fish. I couldn't remember whether I fed it or not. I got out of bed and took it out of the aquarium. I immediately put it inside a deep plastic box. I went to wash the aquarium, which was very dirty. The fish might have been sick. When I washed the aquarium the bowl slipped through my fingers and broke inside the sink. I left it like that in the sink. I added some food to the plastic box, the fish's new abode, and it swam. It seemed content, that was always the kind of impression it made. I manage it like I manage all other things. I made a habit to feed it Mondays and Thursdays. The problem is, sometimes it gets difficult to remember when is Monday and when is Thursday. When is the time of the fish. I always confuse dates and schedules. Like with my period. It has always been very regular and I knew how to identify it when it came. Atomic nervous breakdowns, no pain. At some point I downloaded some sort of an application which tells me when it's due. I write in it what kind of symptoms appear before, during, and after my period. And when I have sex, if I had it, and with whom. The company gave me my cellphone. It also covers my monthly phone bills. Sometimes they switch my phone for me. Not only me, for everyone. The reason is almost always an upgrade. Some other times, when the phone is stolen or broken, they also agree to get another. With some employer's participation, of course, which is deducted from my wage. A lot of numbers were lost or deleted because of the upgradings. Or the opposite, were doubled or tripled. Mostly I don't notice it in real time. The main problem remains the dates. The period application synchronizes the last update but sometimes it's not close enough. In these cases I lose track of it completely.

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE Do you get bored? What are you thinking now. I noticed you have 37 unread emails in your inbox. There are also tasks on the whiteboard, it's your handwriting, and you tried to write clearly, because you type everything your handwriting turned fuzzy, the poems too, you no longer know how to write in a notebook, or on paper, only typing. Someone enters your room I think, he's talking to you now, have you noticed? He puts his hand on your table, reclines, now he's getting close to your computer screen, he looks at the screen, you talk about a file or a sketch which is opened on your screen, It's difficult for me to understand what you are talking about exactly, now his finger touches your screen, it leaves a trace, you are not the kind of person to be much bothered by that, now he asks something from you, he asks about something which is under your sole responsibility, he's asking a very simple question, your lips should have already delivered the answer, it's time to speak now because he has stopped talking, a woman in workspace, now he's been quiet for at least five seconds, I know, because it's approximately the time it takes to say: A woman in workspace –

Company 3

After the CEO gave his speech, the talking began, more so than usual. Whispering at the coffee corner. There was talking in the meeting rooms too. The kind of talking just before a meeting begins or just after it ends. Blabbering. No one knows how much time it can last, there were a lot of speculations, the last one suggested six months before bankruptcy. Some suspect each other, secretly, not out loud. People are looking for other options, for jobs. In the meantime, the vast majority stays. Conversations like the one with the CEO or other senior managers left matters tense and the people focused, or, more accurately, stressed. The initiative managed to raise venture capital from local and foreign investors even in its early stage, the concept stage. The money is now being slowly eaten, by work and investments. The initiative was also successful at gaining vast public attention which works in its favor, in our favor. There is a lot of interest outside. There has been since the very first moment, but it's never enough for the big break. In the meantime, one by one the investors begin to turn their backs, shut the funds. What's certain, we're now almost 180 degrees from where we started. The CEO got the Israeli tycoon and main investor's confirmation in the elevator on the way out of their first meeting. Today too the Israeli tycoon is one of the biggest investors in the initiative. At the beginning he met the CEO in his offices. But the meeting was cut in the middle. The tycoon had to leave early and his car was already waiting down at the parking lot. In order to take advantage of the meeting's last minutes, the CEO took the elevator down with the tycoon. When the elevator doors opened in the parking lot, the tycoon told him he'll invest in the initiative. It was a considerable amount, something like 100 million dollars.

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE, you think of who? you again and again. I see that you're staring. I recognize the look. Two months passed. Someone might pass here and immediately see that you just are. You're not moving. At least do some click click click with the mouse, organize your email folders, and the computer's, my documents folder, organize everything in sub-folders, it'll cover half your day, maybe more. At the very least you won't be sitting here, dwelling in fictitious thoughts. It's time to gain control over the lost task, the one you always leave for the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of the end. The one you avoid reporting about in the weekly meeting, or the monthly meeting, surely in the yearly worker's assessment meeting, the same task they avoid too, all the managers you've had, in every working place. When will you already lose this habit of yours, to always satisfy. You chew time until everything is pulverized between your teeth. It's afternoon, can you hear the beeping? They are being called to the shuttle back. Now you remember to start working, in this silence, no one will answer any emails now, the AC is turned off and only the breathing –

Company 4

In the afternoon of the day before the visit of the big delegation, the demo for the CEO, the foreign partners and the board of directors, the small engine died. It shut the machine and put the demo in danger. An enormous tension ensued. Eventually, after hours of check-ups and running scenarios, the source of the problem was found. A small worn-down pin inside the engine assembly. We even managed to find a spare part. But until we did, it took a long time to deduce options, get to the bottom of it, and identify the source of the problem. The project is still in its experimental stage, and not all the sensors, designed to give real time warnings and automatically report problems, worked. We disconnect some intentionally in order to circumvent the complication of restarting the system with every run. Some were even designed upside down in order to reduce working speeds. Three team workers, 16 hours inside the machine. An infinite number of coffee cups. It is a large, complex system worth two point five million dollars. The system includes engines, sensors, oil and air pistons. Also, water and cooling systems, electricity units, discovery system, shutting down system, and fire and smoke alarms. That day before the visit the system was completely down. At some point we took off all the covers and the caps shielding the inner systems in an attempt to identify the source of the problem. The stress increased with sunset. At some point our manager joined us, he came after they gave him an update on the status of things. There was no chance of canceling the demo at that time. His phone didn't stop ringing between seven and eight in the evening. It was some of the senior managers, they

wanted to make sure everything was ready for the demo. I didn't hear what he told them, when he answered the phone he went away. After two or three calls he said that until we find the source of the problem and solve the problem we won't be able to leave the place. Then he said: I'm staying with you, forget everything, cancel everything you planned for tonight, I'm ordering pizza. The cleaning lady was supposed to come the following morning at seven. I scheduled her earlier than usual especially, about two hours before the delegation was supposed to arrive for the demo. A woman of forty, maybe less. In the morning she works as a cleaning lady for us, but not just us, she does rounds in several nearby places. Like other workers, she belongs to some kind of contractor. The same contractor who also provides us with basic products, toilet paper, cleaning products, milk and cookies.

A WOMAN IN WORKSPACE, I understand, I see how everything converges towards one point in time. And time is stretched on the office desks. See, for example, the head of marketing's desk, he has gifts he received from potential costumers all around the world, there is no connection between the things, the objects lie there, collecting dust. The cleaning lady has been working here for 25 years, I am not sure about seniority, she doesn't clean the gifts but concentrates on the windows and linoleum flooring, washes it every day before anyone arrives, the smell is good. Where at all could I begin? How to explain to the people now sitting in this meeting room that the meeting, which began at nine, severed the pace of life completely? Stopped the pulse. You hear but you don't listen, you just exist. Yesterday night he told you again, for the fifth time, that he can't, he just can't, but meanwhile he hasn't stopped. He didn't stop calling you and talking to you every possible time. He can't. You tried to explain to him, woman in workspace, that you can't work like that. But he continues like a well-oiled mechanism, the design is top notch, works like clockwork, straight to the same spot and brings you back like in a whirlwind and you spin into the drainage, the net is rusty of dirt everything is eaten down there –

Company 5

I remember walking home but I don't know when I fell asleep. Apparently, it happened immediately. Because I undressed and got into bed right after I got home. I didn't have the energy to take a shower. Not even a quick one. I don't know what happened after I threw myself on the bed. The legs were still in mid-air. What about the door, I locked the door. I didn't lock the door. Perhaps I just slammed it. It happens to me sometimes. At the end the door is always locked. The recurring dream returned. I fall from a great height. I always wake up from the dream at the same point. It's when I hit the bottom of the pit. At this stage I usually wake up terrified to discover, a moment later, that there was no fall. My organs intact, on the bed, I look at the ceiling, lift one leg up, sometimes the two of them, to make sure. Then I go back to sleep. Almost always I fell asleep instantly. I wake up every time another scenario ends, another round, another mechanical failure. The pin of the small engine broke again and again, like in instant replay. The demo was still in danger. One of the investors, whose face, for some reason, I remembered, laughed loudly and I was almost swallowed up in his mouth, like in cartoons. For a moment I imagined him as a big fish. It made me noxious. This loop went on, a recurring loop where the pin is broken and the investor laughs incessantly. Inside the dream I waited for the morning when I can go to work –

A WOMAN IN THE WORKSPACE why won't you bring some potted plants to this office?

Company 6

There were less participants than usual in the technical meeting. Still it lasted a lot longer than the time scheduled for it in the calendars. The head engineer didn't stop talking. I had a headache, I massaged my temples. I decided to take a painkiller, there's always one in the drawer. When there isn't, you can find one at the secretaries' in the entrance to the offices. The head engineer came prepared to the meeting. He didn't stop talking from the moment in started, even if someone wanted or tried to say something, it was impossible to stop him. He blocked every interference, comment or question. At first, he lied the sketches on the big table in the meeting room and everyone bent over them, then he counted the three main problems in the current

structure of the system. Then he explicated the minute details of each, writing on the whiteboard, then moving to the glass walls. It made our manager anxious, writing on the meeting room's glass walls, especially since the marker was half dry and the walls squeaked. It gave him goosebumps. After the head engineer finished drawing on all the room, he moved to the topic of budget. Most of the time he talked to the project manager and the product manager, and them only. At some point he opened the Excel file, pointed at one of the tables and said he was raising a flag. No one said a word. Even then he looked at the project manager and him only. When the head engineer looked at the project manager, the bulging vein in his forehead could be seen, the one which also goes down his neck, the contours of anger. He stopped himself in the course of all the overall talking, asking who was taking notes of the meeting. He looked at me, I didn't respond, continuing to look at him unflinchingly. Then he moved on, saying that we are already pregnant, that the project has begun, we are late and must move fast. Then he looked at the project manager again and told him we must remember the case of the demo very well, he laughed, at the end we did manage to force ourselves on the machine, he said, we were lucky that the demo ran like a Swiss watch. Everyone laughed because the engine was really Swiss. Worked like a muthafucka. Then he said that catastrophic errors can be handled in real time. Within the limits of the current budget no system is going to be perfect. To remind you, I already told you all this in the preliminary meetings two years ago, he said. Then while hitting the table with his open palm he said, what we are going to do is simply compensate with professional technical teams, technical sharks, technical SWAT team, like with the demo, we kicked its ass and the problem was eventually solved.

At night you dreamed you meet on the street. In the morning you got up, a woman in space, took a shower and lied down on your couch, and the two opposite windows were open. You lied like this a woman in space, on the towel naked, outside the windows the clouds only, skies and some cranes, but you could feel in them the memory of the sea. You are a woman in space lying spread with no desire to move or resume the regular order of motions. On the Friday before, the therapist said you have an absence. Something with the Chi and some other words I could not remember, and one meeting before that she said that you are sad in your metal, you don't know how accurate that is. This time she said, the absence, we shall try to find where is the absence. The sea stood in the chimneys. She moved from one organ to the other, pressing deeply, where does it hurt, she asked repeatedly, where do you feel a flow, where do you feel warmth, where do you feel change, her questions came out in a slow pace and so was her touch. You continued to lie there a woman in space in this sort of idleness, absence of feeling, in absence, I lay there in absence.

Translated from the Hebrew by Maayan Eitan